

Sometimes, Less is More

Variety is the Spice of a Philatelists Life

by Mike Smith

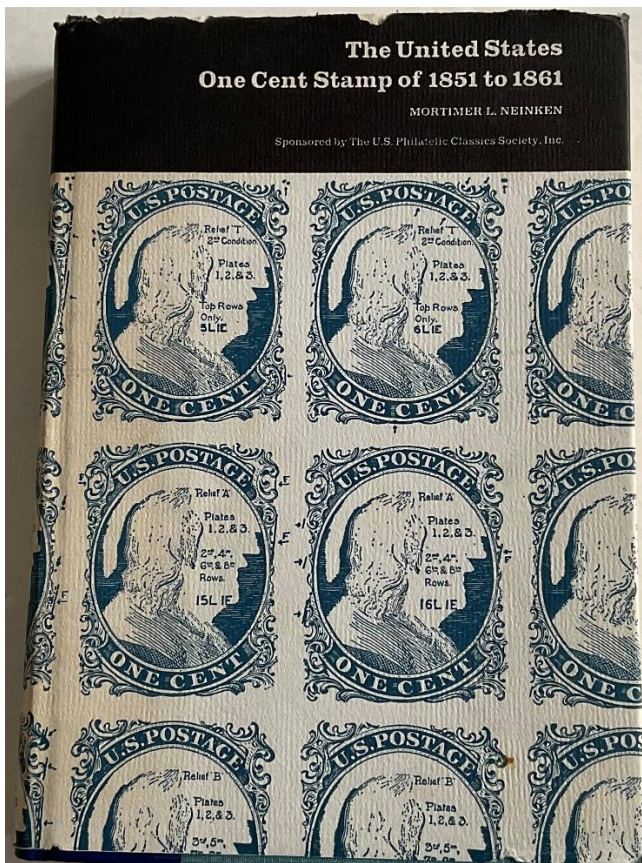
You are probably wondering what in the heck is Mike talking about this time! Sometimes in the world of collecting, there are instances where a possession or object can be more valuable when it contains something less. One example that comes to mind are certain classic cars where the AM radio delete or heater delete factory options can actually increase the car's value. Yes, you read that correctly, a car that came without the radio and/or heater from the factory can be more valuable than one that contains these items. There are many examples of this in the collector car market which primarily center around higher performance classic cars from the 1960s and 70s. The 1967 – 1969 Chevrolet Corvette with the coveted L88 engine is a popular example.

So, how does this apply to philatelic collecting? If you are a student of classic stamps, particularly U.S., you know that the early issues were crafted on engraved plates, of which many nuances resulted. These variations were well documented resulting in several “types” to be identified and published in the Scott catalogues. For this article, I would like to introduce an incredibly special and popular example.

I am referring to the 1-cent blue imperforate Franklin issue of 1851 – 1857 (Scott numbers 5 through 9). There are many types of this issue listed in the Scott Specialized catalogue, eight to be exact. The types are I, Ia, Ib, Ic, II, III, IIIa, and IV. Within each of these, there are dozens of variations due to recutting of the design on the plates, plate cracks, etc. My intent is not to recreate the Scott identifier portion of the catalogue in this article, but to enlighten the readers regarding the major variations inadvertently created from older, “hand-made” craftsmanship, and to share one special variation in particular.

That variation is from Type III, a U.S. Scott# 8. Type III is identified as having significant breaks in both the top and bottom curved lines of the oval design and are visible as broken in the middle. Scott states the breaks must be at least 2mm. The most valuable examples are for those stamps with wider breaks.

For reference, all 1-cent Franklin stamps come from various plates and each plate consisted of a left pane of 100 subjects and a right pane of 100 subjects. However, there is a special example that only comes from one position on the entire 200 subject plate. That special stamp is from the right pane, position 99 from Plate 2, or “99R2”. If you are knowledgeable about Scott# 8, you know that only Plate 4 produced the Type III variety, with this one exception. So, you ask, how did this singular variation from Plate 2 come about? Good question, and one that baffled me for quite a while. A well-respected philatelist and student of classic U.S. stamps, Mortimer L. Neinken (1896 – 1984) from New York City published a book in 1972 entitled “The United States One Cent Stamp of 1851-1861”. According to the Neinken book, “The 99R2 stamp is a fresh entry (on Plate 2), that was short transferred (not fully pressed into the plate) both at top and bottom, over an original entry that had been erased... The reason that 99R2 is the finest example of Type III is because of its very short transfer at top and at bottom, giving us the wide breaks in these lines.” (page 184).



The Neinken book on the 1-cent Franklin issue. Hard to find and fairly expensive. One of several books he published on classic U.S. Stamps, many in conjunction with famed philatelist and researcher, Stanley B. Ashbrook.

Below is the listing for Scott 8 from the 2026 Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers. You will note on the following page that position “99R2” has its own breakout listing for Scott 8 in parentheses “(8)”, something that does not occur very often. That is how special this stamp is!

Type III — The top and bottom curved lines outside the labels are broken in the middle. The side ornaments are substantially complete.

The most desirable examples of type III are those showing the widest breaks in the top and bottom framelines.

A special example is 99R2. All other stamps come from plate 4 and almost all show the breaks in the lines less clearly defined. Some of these breaks, especially of the bottom line, are very small.

Type IIIa — Similar to III with the outer line broken at top or, rarely, at bottom but not both. The side ornaments are substantially complete.

| | | | |
|----------|--|----------------|---------------|
| 8 | A8 1c blue, type III (Plate 4) see below for 99R2 | 22,500. | 1,650. |
| | No gum | 6,500. | |
| | On cover | | 1,900. |
| | Pair | 50,000. | 3,500. |
| | Pair, types III, IIIa | 32,500. | 3,000. |
| | Pair, types III, II | — | — |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Strip of 3 | | 8,250. |
| Block of 4, types II, III | — | |
| Block of 4, types III, IIIa | — | — |

Earliest documented use: July 7, 1857 (on off-cover stamp);
May 1, 1857 (on cover).

Cancellations

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| Blue | +75. |
| Red | +200. |
| Red Carrier | +250. |
| Black Carrier | +250. |
| Pen Cancel | 900. |

Values for type III are for at least a 2mm break in each outer line. Examples of type III with wider breaks in outer lines command higher prices; those with smaller breaks sell for much less.

| | | |
|--|---------|---------|
| (8) A8 1c blue, type III (99R2) | 35,000. | 5,500. |
| No gum | 10,000. | |
| On cover (99R2) | | 15,000. |
| Pair, types III (99R2), II | — | 10,500. |
| Pair, types III (99R2), IIIa | 42,500. | — |
| Block of 4, type III (99R2), 3 type II | 42,500. | |
| Block of 9, one type III (99R2), others type II | 47,500. | |

Cancellations

| | |
|-------------|---------|
| Blue | +150.00 |
| Green | — |
| "Paid" | — |
| Red Carrier | +500.00 |

So why all the hoopla? Like the yellow colored cancel I longed for over a 25-year span of searching and finally achieved in acquiring in December 2020, I also coveted this philatelic treasure. As I delved deeper into my IRA and forever in philatelic debt, I was very fortunate to find a superb sound copy in a Rumsey auction in December 2025. I bid with the intent of not losing (within reason) and was pleasantly surprised to have won the lot at a very, very reasonable price. I say with confidence, I will not lose money on this one for sure!

As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words" or in this case, a photo. The stamp is a genuine, certified U.S. Scott 8, position 99R2 with two strikes of blue Petersburg, VA town cancels. The stamp has excellent provenance as well, having graced the collections of Saul Newberry, John C. Chapin and Dr. Armando Grassi. It was described in the 1961 Newberry sale as a "superb rarity".

That brings me full circle back to the title of my article. In this case, the less is the significant missing portions of the design at the top and bottom. The more is the prized value to collectors for this feature, just as it came "from the factory". As you can see from the Scott catalogue value, a typical Type III Scott# 8 is \$1,650 in used condition. However, the same issue but position "99R2" is valued at \$5,500. That is well over 3 times as much for less ink and design!



Note the extreme short transfer, or erasure of the scrolls along the top plus the very large breaks in the outer line of the oval at the top.

**Type III
Position 99R2.
These are the
defining
characteristics
of this position.**

Note the extreme short transfer, or erasure of the scrolls along the bottom plus the very large breaks in the outer line of the oval at the bottom.

In closing, many of the same varieties of the 1-cent blue Franklin carried over to the perforated 15.5 stamps (Scott numbers 18 through 24) as many of the same plates were used from the imperforate printings. The perforated cousin to the Type III position “99R2” is Scott# 21 and is even more rare and elusive than the imperforate issue.

I know many of you are not excited by this aspect of philately, but I hope it provides you with some entertainment and knowledge. We all have different collecting interests, goals and ambitions in this hobby, but it is important that we all share our treasures with each other. That is what makes stamp collecting fun and keeps the club together. With that, I urge every member to write a little something about your stamp collecting interests so others can share in the joy of what you enjoy.

[Editor’s note: I could not agree more.]