

Confederate Provisional Stamps of New Orleans

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When the Confederate States Post Office Department (CSPOD) began operations on June 1, 1861, United States stamps were very abruptly no longer valid for postage within the Confederacy. New Confederate postal rates went into effect on that date. The US standard letter rate was 3c while the new Confederate standard letter rate was 5c per ½ ounce under 500 miles and 10c over 500 miles. A Confederate 2c drop letter rate also went into effect at the same time. “Drop Letter” refers to a letter that was brought to the post office and “dropped” for the addressee to pick up at the same post office. The CSPOD began operations with no government general issue stamps available to prepay the postage. Local Confederate postmasters were left entirely to their own devices as to how to service the mail until postage stamps could be made available. Most postmasters chose to use handstamp devices or simple manuscript markings to show that the postage had been paid during this period. However, a number of enterprising postmasters, some from small towns and some from the larger cities, chose to print and issue their own postage stamps intended only for local use. Thus the use of “Provisional Stamps” (sometimes referred to simply as “Locals”) has become a major part of Confederate philately. The postmasters who produced their own stamps did so with the full approval of the CSPOD in Richmond with two limitations –

1. The provisional stamps could only be used at the location where they were issued. For example, New Orleans provisional stamps could only be used and postmarked in New Orleans and not in any other city or town. As long as the letter originated in the city or town compatible with the provisional stamp used, it could be delivered and accepted anywhere within the Confederacy. New Orleans provisional covers are seen originating from New Orleans and delivered to Virginia and to other locations within the Confederacy.
2. The use of the provisional stamps was to cease when the general issue stamps were available. The first general issue stamp (5c Green Lithograph) was available in mid-October 1861, and the second general issue stamp (10c Blue Hoyer & Ludwig Lithograph) was available in early November 1861. It took a little time before adequate supplies of the general issue stamps were universally available. Therefore, Confederate provisional stamp use is seen at least through 1861 in many locations and often into early 1862. By the spring of 1862, there was generally no further need for these stamps, and their use faded from the scene.

Due to the demands of business and commerce, most of the provisional stamps are seen from the larger cities such as New Orleans (Louisiana), Memphis (Tennessee), Mobile (Alabama), Nashville (Tennessee), and Charleston (South Carolina). Somewhat surprising is that the Richmond (Virginia) Confederate postmaster did not issue any provisional stamps even though Richmond, as the capital of the Confederacy, had a large volume of mail. This article will only focus on the provisional stamps issued and used in New Orleans from June 1861 into early 1862.

New Orleans, Louisiana, is one of the great cities of America with a rich multicultural heritage. Established as a French colony in 1718 and named after the Duke of Orleans, the French regent at the time, New Orleans rapidly grew in size and importance. The city came under Spanish

control in 1763 until the French, under Napoleon, reclaimed the colony in 1801. In 1803, Napoleon sold all the French Louisiana territory in North America to the fledgling United States in a transaction known as the “Louisiana Purchase.” This territorial purchase doubled the size of the United States. Ultimately all or part of 15 states would be carved out from the Louisiana Purchase. Louisiana became the 18th state in the Union in 1812. By 1860, New Orleans, a seaport on the terminus of the Mississippi River trade, was the third largest city in the United States and by far the wealthiest city in the Union. When Louisiana seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy in early 1861, New Orleans became the Confederacy’s largest city and most important trade center.



New Orleans Levee with Steamboats – Harper’s Weekly February 1863



John Leonard Riddell (1807-1865) (photo at left c1855 from Tulane University) was appointed as the US postmaster of New Orleans in August 1860. He continued as the postmaster into the Confederate period until the fall of the city to the Union in April 1862. Postmaster Riddell saw an immediate need for postage stamps in New Orleans and issued his own provisional stamps beginning in June 1861 in 2c and 5c denominations. Postmaster Riddell’s provisional stamps were woodcuts and went through a number of printings as they were in use from June 1861 until February 1862. Indeed, the 5c New Orleans provisional stamp is the most common Confederate provisional stamp seen by today’s collectors. However, there are many fakes of the New Orleans stamps most of which were produced in the late 19th century.



Genuine Confederate New Orleans 2c Provisional Stamps

The 2c New Orleans provisional stamp, intended for the drop letter and circular rates, was first printed in red. However, the red 2c stamp was not immediately issued. Another printing using the same printing blocks was undertaken in blue. The blue 2c stamps made their appearance in mid-July 1861. In January 1862, the red 2c stamps were released for use after supplies of the 2c blue stamp were exhausted. The 2c red stamp saw limited postal use as New Orleans fell to the Union in late April 1862. Both of the 2c New Orleans provisional stamps are found more readily today in unused condition and are scarce used and extremely scarce postally used on cover.

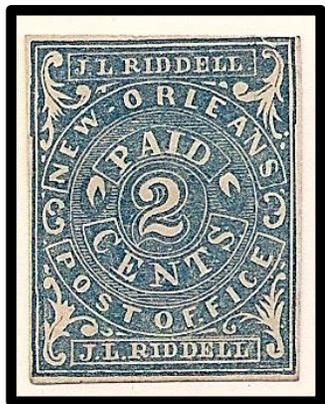
The 2c Red and the 2c Blue were printed in panes of 40 (8x5). The postmaster's name, "J. L. Riddell," appears in both the top and bottom tablets. At the top of the pane of the blue (second) printing was a one-line imprint reading "USABLE EXCLUSIVELY IN THE NEW ORLEANS POST OFFICE" which confirms the valid but local nature of the stamps. At the bottom of the pane was a three-line imprint explaining the use of the 2c stamp for drop letters, circulars, newspapers, and pamphlets not exceeding 3oz. The full exact wording of the lower imprint is not known as no intact full panes have been identified. The red printing apparently had no imprints which may have been the reason the 2c Red was not immediately issued.



Genuine New Orleans 2c Blue Provisional with Part of the Top Imprint (left) and Part of the Bottom Imprint (right).



Two very excellent fakes of the 2c stamp in both red and blue are very commonly seen – one by Upham and one by Taylor. Samuel Curtis Upham was a Civil War contemporary printer in Philadelphia who designed and printed a number of reproductions of the Confederate stamps. His version of the 2c New Orleans provisional stamp appeared in 1862 and was sold as a rebel souvenir. None of the Upham created stamps, even though they were contemporary with the war, were ever used in the Confederacy in place of the genuine stamps. S. Allan Taylor of New York City created his reproductions later in the 19th century so collectors of the time would have something available to fill the rare spaces in their stamp albums.



Upham Fake



Taylor Fake



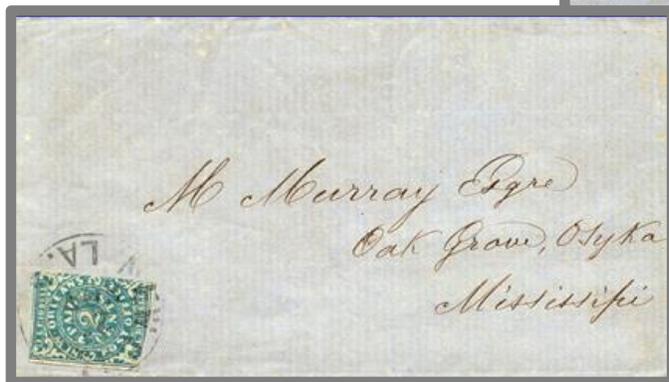
**Fake
Complete Circular Frame**



**Genuine
Broken Circular Frame**

The Upham and Taylor fakes are very deceptive. There is a difference in printing quality and some design differences between the fakes and the genuine. Also, the Taylor fake is a darker color. The key to identifying the fakes from the genuine 2c New Orleans provisional stamps is to look at the position of the central "2" in relation to the circular frame around the "2." The lower left point of the "2" on the genuine stamp breaks the circular frame line. Whereas on the fakes, the circular frame line is entirely intact with no break. This intact frame around the "2" is common to all the known fakes. The printing characteristics of the 2c Red fakes are exactly the same as the 2c Blue fakes. All the 2c Red fakes have a complete frame around the central "2" while the genuine stamps have the same break in the frame as the 2c Blue.

**New Orleans 2c Red Provisional
Local Drop Letter**



**New Orleans 2c Blue Provisional
Printed Circular to Mississippi**

The 5c Brown New Orleans provisional was the most extensively used of all the Confederate provisional stamps. There are three major varieties representing three distinct printings:

1. Brown on White Paper (first printing June 1861).
2. Red-Brown on Bluish Paper (second printing August 1861).
3. Yellow-Brown on Off-White paper (third printing December 1861).

In addition, there are a number of sub-varieties the most distinctive being a rare other color on white paper. The genuine stamps were engraved on wood, and the printing was done using wood blocks. The printing quality varies from one printing to the next. The first printing is quite clear and sharp. The second printing is still fairly sharp but distinguished from the first printing by the very apparent bluish paper. The third printing is blurred often with elements of the design blurred out. There are numerous fakes and reproductions.



**Genuine Brown
White Paper**



**Genuine Red-Brown
Bluish Paper**

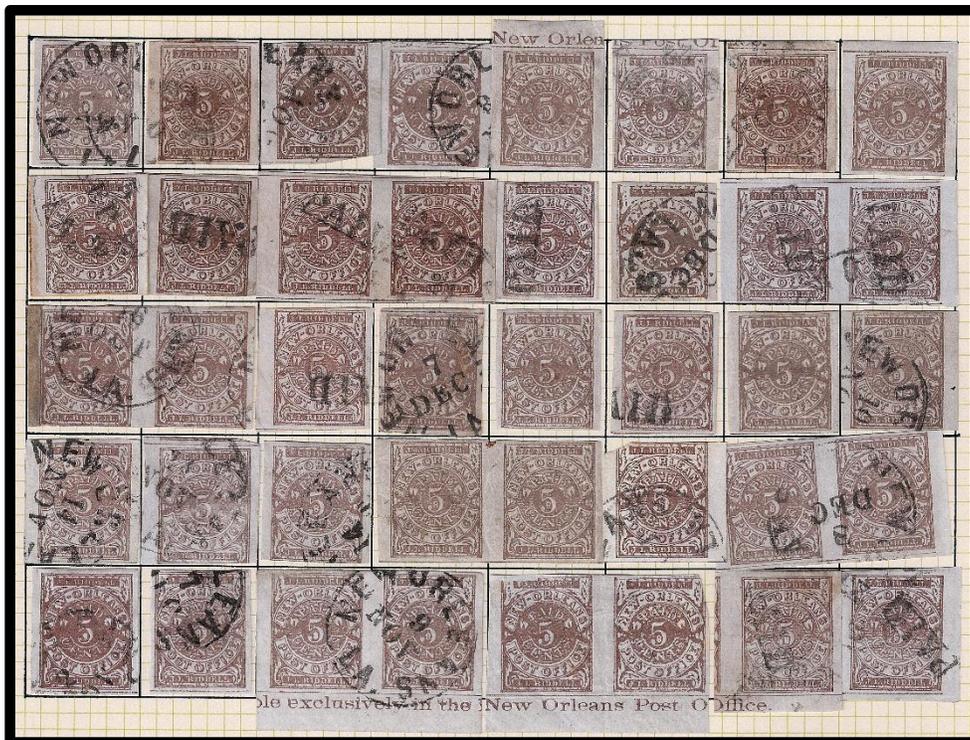


**Genuine Yellow-Brown
Off-White Paper**

The 5c stamp was printed in a similar format as the 2c stamp – panes of 40 (8x5). The same one-line imprint appears at both the top and the bottom of the pane in all three printings – “Usable exclusively in the New Orleans Post Office.” The design also has Riddell’s name in the upper and lower tablets. The stamp has been plated, and there are a number of reconstructed panes from the plating. The only surviving full intact pane currently known is from the third printing.



Yellow-Brown (Third Printing) Part Imprint

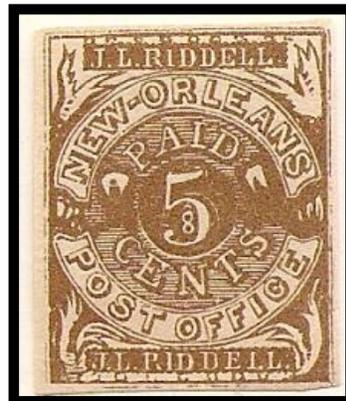


5c Red-Brown (Second Printing) Reconstructed Pane of 40

The two most commonly seen fakes of the 5c Brown New Orleans provisional stamp are again by Upham and Taylor.



Fake Upham

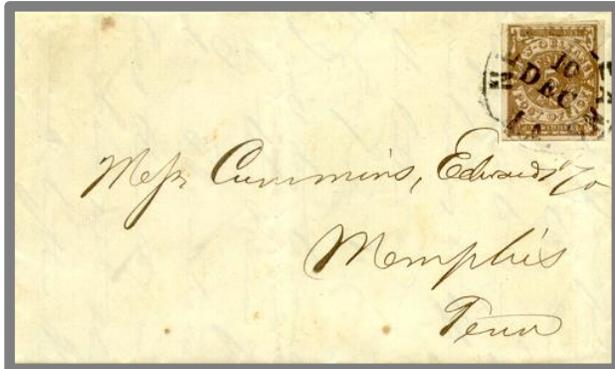


Fake Taylor

The Taylor fake can be very deceptive. When seen against the original, the differences in printing quality, the off-color appearance, and the differences in the designs of the corner ornaments become obvious. The Upham fake is seen very commonly. It is the notorious "Waving Hand" fake so named because of the appearance of the ornament at the lower left corner. If the left lower corner ornament looks like a hand waving at you, it is unquestionably a fake. There are also fakes in various colors particularly red and green. Any 5c New Orleans provisional stamp not in the listed brown color shades is a fake. The catalogs do list a 5c Red

New Orleans provisional stamp. These genuine red stamps are incredibly rare with only one unused stamp and four used stamps known to exist. It is believed that these rare red stamps were caused by a one-time mistake in the mixing of the printing inks.

Pair 5c Brown on White Paper (First Printing) Standard Letter Rate Over 500 Miles to Charleston, South Carolina June 21, 1861.



Single 5c Yellow-Brown on Off-White Paper (Third Printing) Standard Letter Rate Under 500 Miles to Memphis, Tennessee December 10, 1861.

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Dr. Kimbrough, a previous contributor to this magazine and author of numerous Confederate philatelic articles, is the co-author along with Conrad L. Bush of the award winning book *Collector's Guide to Confederate Philately Second Edition*. Dr. Kimbrough is currently serving as a Trustee of the Confederate Stamp Alliance, the major philatelic organization for Confederate collectors. For the first time in its 80 year history, the Confederate Stamp Alliance will be meeting in convention outside the United States at London 2015 Europhilex. To learn more about the Confederate Stamp Alliance, please visit their website at www.csalliance.org. To learn more about Confederate stamps and postal history, please visit Dr. Kimbrough's website at www.csastamps.com.

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