

Wild Cats on United States Private Die Proprietary Stamps

By Greg Balagian

Recently, I had to help the family of my good philatelist friend to go over his collection of classic United States stamps after he passed away. The family didn't have any philatelic knowledge whatsoever and they asked me to assist them in evaluation and possible sale of the collection.

Unfortunately, being a topical stamp collector all my life, I wasn't familiar with all the material, especially revenue stamps of the United States. In the process of working on this project, I purchased the latest edition of *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers* that includes revenues. While looking through it, I discovered three private die proprietary stamps with wild cats previously unknown to me.

The extraordinary demand of the Civil War upon the Federal Treasury resulted in Congress devising and passing the Revenue Act of 1862. The Government provided revenue stamps to be affixed to boxes or packages of matches, proprietary medicines, perfumery, playing cards, as well as to documents.

My first two revenues are private die medicine stamps that feature a lion and an eagle on either side of a mortar and pestle. Both of them are from Mansfield & Higbee Company of Memphis, Tennessee. Scott RS173 [Fig. 1.] is inscribed "Mansfield & Higbee, Memphis, Tenn.," while Scott RS174 [Fig. 2] is inscribed, "S. Mansfield & Co." Each stamp is denominated 1 cent, the tax for each 25 cents of value to \$1.

Samuel Mansfield began as an apothecary in Memphis in 1840. Around 1870, he entered into partnership with Hugh H. Higbee to act as agents for and to manufacture proprietary medicines. These included Mansfield's Hungarian Balsam for the Lungs, Mansfield's Eclectic Pile Salve and Mansfield's Mississippi Diarrhoea Cordial, among others. The company ordered a private die stamp, and instructed Joseph

R. Carpenter to perforate some in sets of four and some in pairs in addition to regular full perforation.

Issued from September of 1871 until April of 1875, the total number of stamps was 1,354,100, all on silk paper. How that number is split between each format is not known. Single stamps and pairs are seen with one straight edge. These were cut from larger multiples, and are considered to be defective copies.

The third revenue, Scott RU16 [Fig. 3], was issued in 1881 and is a private die playing card stamp from Russell, Morgan & Company picturing a growling tiger. The black stamp is a 5-cent denomination, the tax for a deck of 52 playing cards.

In January 1867, A. O. Russell, Robert J. Morgan, James M. Armstrong, and John F. Robinson Jr. had formed a partnership and purchased from the proprietors of the Cincinnati Enquirer what was then known as the Enquirer Job Printing Rooms, which occupied the first and second stories of the building at 20 College Street in Cincinnati, Ohio. The firm commenced business as Russell, Morgan & Co.

Early in 1880, Mr. Russell proposed to his partners that they embark upon the manufacture of playing cards, an industry monopolized by several East Coast companies. The partners agreed and arrangements were made to add two additional stories to the building and to commission the design of new machines.

About 20 employees manufactured 1600 packs per day. The first deck of playing cards was completed on June 28, 1881. More detailed information about the company can be found on www.bicyclecards.com.

The stamp tax was finally repealed in 1883.

What started out as helping the family of an old friend, ended up enabling me to discover a new philatelic cat element. 🐾



Figure 1. Scott RS173, 1c blue, private die medicine stamp depicts a lion & eagle.



Figure 2. Scott RS174 S. Mansfield & Co, 1c blue, private die medicine stamp also has a lion & eagle.



Figure 3. Scott RU16 Russell, Morgan & Co., 5c black with a tiger, a private die playing card stamp.