

PROVENANCE IS A GUARANTEE OF AUTHENTICITY. TRUE OR FALSE?



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He is keenly interested in the work of Expert Committees at National and International exhibitions particularly as the work of the experts affects exhibitors.

Many collectors are in awe of the string of names that are attached to several important pieces of any country's philately. The fact that a stamp or a piece of postal history has been amongst the prize possessions of many of the great collectors of a particular country does not necessarily guarantee that it is a genuine item.

Take for example the double rated 12 pence cover in Figure 1. It shows two genuine single six pence on laid paper issued in 1851. They are described in the Lubke sale² as being deep black violet. Prior to the Lubke collection the cover had been in the Bertram, Fox, Harris and Nickle collections. It was shown at CAPEX '96 in "The Lindemann Collection", a candidate for the Grand Prix National. In addition to all these prestigious owners, the cover is illustrated on page 129 in Robson Lowe's *Encyclopaedia of British Empire Stamps*, Vol. 5.

The cover originated in the "Kennedy" correspondence – a horde of several hundred covers addressed to D. S. Kennedy, a lawyer and the agent for the Canadian Post Office in New York. As its agent, he was the link with the printers of Canada's first postage stamps: Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson. When the horde was found, at the turn of the Century, many of the covers had stamps removed because of moisture. The finder put some of the loose stamps back on to covers to which they did not belong; however, it was always felt that the cover in Figure 1 was a genuine double rated cover to the United States (2 x 6d. per 1/2 oz.).

With the introduction of Article 41.1 of the GREX on fakes and forgeries and the more pro-active role taken by expert committees at World Philatelic Exhibitions since 1995 it is becoming more and more important that key stamps and postal history



1. Purported double weight cover with right stamp not belonging.

¹ All the illustrations in this article are courtesy of "The Brigham Collection"

² Maresch & Son, October 8, 1992, lot 339.

items shown in a world class exhibit meet the standards of probity required. It is with this in mind that, when the cover was purchased from "The Lindemann Collection" after the death of its owner, the new owner, Ron R. Brigham, requested that the *Vincent Graves Greene Expert Committee* review the cover and issue a certificate of genuineness. Although Mr. Brigham had some doubts as to the authenticity of the cover, because of the vast difference in the cancellation tying the two stamps, he believed that, in view of the cover's long provenance list, a positive certificate would be forthcoming. It came as a shock to many Canadian specialists, when the *Vincent Graves Greene Expert Committee* issued certificate #2253, dated December 15, 1997 stating that the cover bore "Canada Scott No. 2 (2 copies on cover). The right hand stamp does not belong to cover." With its long list of pre-eminent owners, it was inevitable that a second opinion be sought. Mr. Brigham submitted it to The Royal Philatelic Society, London which issued certificate #170,725, dated January 21, 1998 that states "Canada 1851, S.G. 2, Scott # 2i, 6d Slate Violet - Imperf - Two stamps used on lettersheet, the right stamp did not originate on lettersheet."

A similar unfavourable certificate could have been issued to the cover in Figure 2. This cover is the largest franking known for the Pence issues of Canada. Since it was first offered for sale in 1938³ the cover has been described as the unique block of 12 six pence greenish grey on medium wove paper (Scott #5) with additional value paying 26 times the internal rate. It is claimed to have been posted in Cobourg, February 2, 1855, to Toronto. This cover was in the "*Jephcott*", "*Peterkin*" and "*Foxbridge*" collections. In the latter, it was part of the Grand Prix winning exhibit put together by John du Pont.

The problem with this cover is that if it was posted on February 2, 1855 the stamps could not be six pence on wove paper but had to be six pence on laid paper. There had only been one printing of the six pence prior to mid-February, 1855 and it was on laid paper. The order for the second printing, on wove paper, was not sent to Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson until February 14, 1855 and the stamps

were not delivered until March 14, 1855. Again because the cover was to be exhibited in a world class collection, Mr. Brigham decided to submit it to certification. The *Vincent Graves Greene Foundation* certificate #8170 indicates that the cover does indeed bear six pence on wove paper. But that was impossible in light of the dates above.

So what was the problem? After a review of all the information available the solution came from a number of clues on the cover including the stamps. First, if we take for granted that the stamps were indeed on wove paper then the date of use had to be wrong. The Cobourg datestamp was missing the first two digits, the third was very faint and the fourth a distinct '5'. That last digit, the '5', was the reason why the cover had always been identified as being used in 1855. By closely looking at the faint digit preceding the '5' it could be read an '8'. One can conclude that the digits of the Cobourg datestamp had been reversed and should have read 1858. However, this information in itself was not enough. More proof was needed. The second clue was the backstamp. It was a common large Toronto single circle (Fig. 3). The problem with the handstamp was that there was no year date in it; however, it is recorded used only from 1856 on and was used in 1858. The third clue comes from the stamps themselves. The stamps are defined as being greenish gray in colour and printed on medium wove paper. This colour and paper combination first started to appear after the December 4, 1857 printing order was delivered. It is highly likely that these stamps would have been distributed to Toronto by early February 1858 because the Post Office had a last in first out policy when it came to filling orders for stamps from postmasters. As a result of the evidence above, the cover can safely be identified as being used on February 2, 1858. Individually, each piece of evidence above could be considered circumstantial; however, combined, they provide strong support for this date. In conclusion, important postal history items, even with a long pedigree of provenance, are not necessarily what they seem to be at first glance. Information believed to be correct at the outset and unquestioned for decades is not information that is necessarily accurate today. Much new research may

³ H.R. Harmer, May 30-31, 1938, lot 183.

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2. The highest franked cover of the Pence Era in Canada. Believed to have been mailed in February 1855 it has only recently been proven to have been mailed in February 1858.



2

have been done since the first appearance of the piece and each new owner/collector should ensure that the information about the cover is still valid when they exhibit it. If not, somebody with that new knowledge may one day question it and it might mean a difference in the level of award received for

lack of philatelic knowledge. It is best for collectors to have a questioning mind and be safe rather than sorry by making sure that a suspect cover is accompanied by a certificate from a recognized authority rather than wait for an expert team to request it.

3. Backstamp found on cover in Figure 2.

