

FIVE CENT 1856 STAMP ON COVERS FROM NEW JERSEY

By Robert G. Rose

Have you ever fantasized, as have I, of forming a collection of United States classic stamps used on covers from New Jersey? If so, the task to put such a collection together would be a real challenge. For unlike its neighboring states with cities such as Boston, New York and Philadelphia, where substantial commercial correspondences were preserved to the later benefit of collectors, there have been no major “finds” of covers from New Jersey bearing postage stamps from the first issue in 1847 and the second issue of 1851-56.¹ Were it not for the fact that a young bride living in Trenton was a regular writer to her husband, a naval officer on patrol in China in 1856, there would have been a total absence of covers from New Jersey showing use of the five cent 1856 stamp.

In 1856, Lieutenant Earl English was stationed aboard the U.S.S. Sloop *Levant* off the coast of China. On May 12, 1856 the *Levant* joined the East India Squadron, having set sail from the New York Naval Yard in Brooklyn on November 13, 1855 and arriving by way of Rio de Janeiro, the Cape of Good Hope and Hong Kong.² English was born in Crosswicks, New Jersey, Burlington County, on February 18, 1824.³ He entered the naval service in 1840 at age 16 and was graduated from the Naval Academy in Annapolis in 1846. He was commissioned a lieutenant in September 1855.

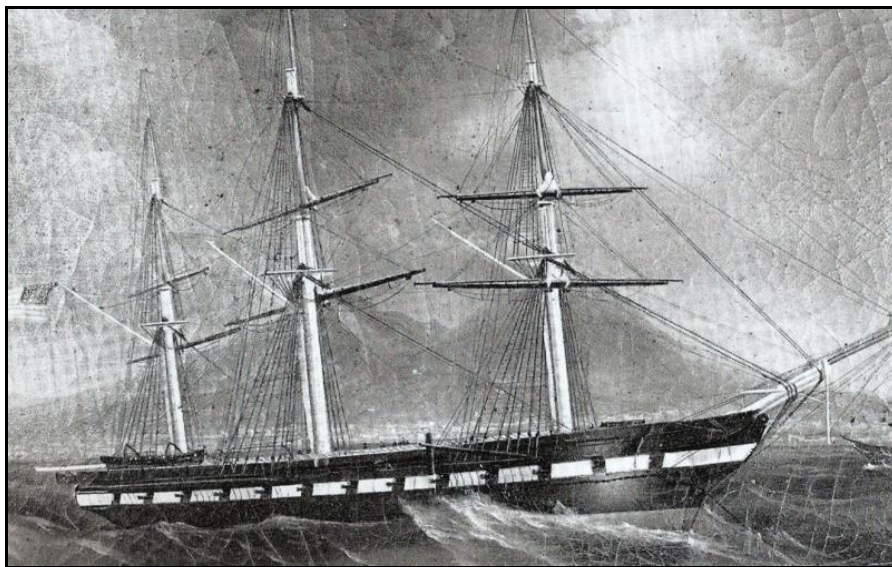


Fig. 1: The U.S.S. Sloop Levant, built in 1837 in the New York Naval Shipyard, served in the West Indies, the Mediterranean, during the Mexican war, and with the East India Squadron, and the Pacific Squadron.

Following the *Levant's* arrival in Chinese waters, she carried the U.S. Commissioner to Shanghai, arriving there on July 1, 1856.⁴ With news of the breakout of the Second Opium War, the *Levant* and her sister ship, the U.S.S. Sloop *Portsmouth*, landed a detachment of 150 marines and sailors in Canton. While withdrawing from that city on November 15, 1856, a Chinese garrison on the Pearl River opened fire on the American ships.⁵ The next day, the two sloops, accompanied by a steam frigate, retaliated, engaging the Chinese Pearl River forts. Over the next

FIVE CENT 1856 ON COVER FROM NJ ~ Robert G. Rose

several days, both sides fired on each other.⁶ The fighting ceased on November 24, 1856 following the capture of several of the Chinese forts by the American forces. During the engagement, the *Levant* took 22 cannon ball shots into her sails, rigging and hull, and suffered one killed and six wounded sailors.⁷ A year later, English took part in the Battle of Canton at which he was wounded.⁸ He was a career officer, having later been commissioned a Captain in 1871, a Commodore in 1880 and a Rear Admiral in 1884. He retired from the Navy in 1886 and died in 1893.⁹ He is buried next to his wife, Elizabeth, at Arlington National Cemetery.¹⁰

Elizabeth was apparently a regular letter writer to her husband at the time the *Levant* joined the East India Squadron in China. Three of her letters were postmarked at Trenton, her home during this period, and are among the most sought after covers from the classics period because she attempted to prepay each of her precious letters in an attempt to insure their delivery with a *strip of four* of the five cent 1856 stamp, Scott No. 12.

Two of the three covers, shown in *Figures 2* and *3*, are postmarked from Trenton on August 19, 1856. The third cover in *Figure 4* is postmarked on September 5, 1856. The two covers in *Figures 2* and *4* were once part of the collection of the five cent stamp of 1856 owned by Frederick R. Mayer that was sold at public auction in 2005.¹¹

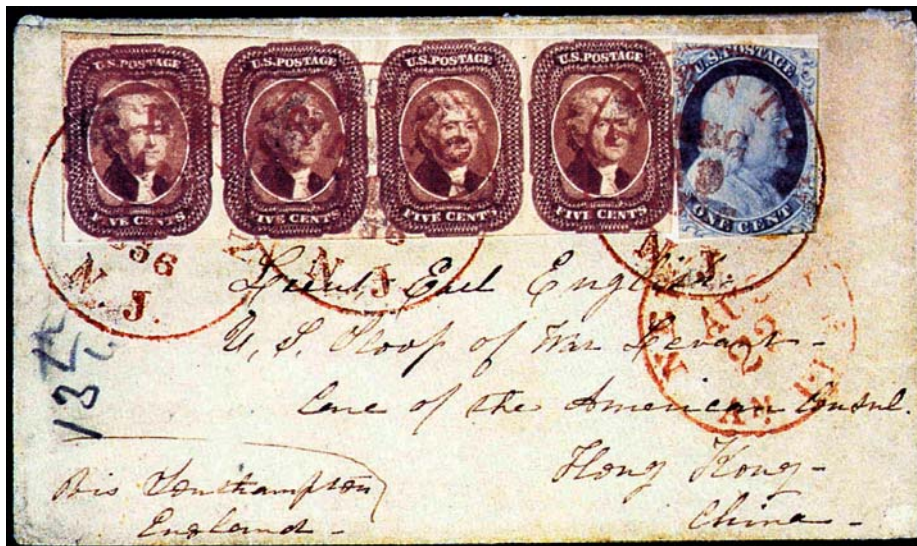


Fig. 2. Strip of four with red Trenton August 19, 1856 postmark and red New York Am Pkt. August 22 exchange marking to China via Southampton.

The first cover was prepaid with a strip of four of the five cent stamp and a single one cent stamp (Scott No. 9) to prepay the 21 cent British open mail rate carried by American packet to Southampton. The balance of the postage, amounting to 6 pence for its carriage to Hong Kong, was supposed to have been collected upon arrival and the cover should have been so marked with collect postage due on receipt, but was not.¹² The cover was backstamped upon its arrival in Hong Kong on December 1, 1856, after nearly four months in transit.¹³



Fig. 3. Strip of four with red Trenton August 19, 1856 postmark and red New York Am. Pkt. August 23 exchange marking to China via Southampton.

The second cover was postmarked in Trenton on August 19, 1856, the same date as was the cover in *Figure 2*. However, the New York exchange marking is dated one day later, August 23. Like the previous cover, the stamped postage prepaid the 21 cent rate to Southampton but the cover should have been marked with six pence collect postage due in Hong Kong.¹⁴



Fig. 4. Strip of four with red Trenton September 5, 1856 postmark and red New York Br. Pkt. September 9 exchange marking to China via Southampton.

The third cover of the trio was postmarked in Trenton on September 5, 1856, some three weeks later than the first two. Like those two covers, the stamped postage was intended to prepay the 21 cent rate to Southampton. According to the description of its routing in the *Frajola & Mayer* book,¹⁵ the letter missed the sailing of the American packet and was carried as an overpaid five cent British open mail letter to Southampton. There, presumably because of the

weight of the one or two letters that were enclosed, the cover was rated at 2 shillings due upon receipt. The ship that carried this cover on the last leg of its trip from Galle, Ceylon to Hong Kong, was the P&O steamer *Norma*, which arrived in Hong Kong on December 1, 1856 with a Hong Kong backstamp of the same date. Thus, all three letters addressed to Lt. English arrived on the same ship. One can only imagine Lt. English's joy in receiving his wife's letters while so far from his Trenton home!

ENDNOTES:

¹ Only four genuine usages of the 10 cent 1847 Issue from New Jersey have been reported. See Robert G. Rose, "10c 1847 Usage in New Jersey," *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 84, No. 2 (March-April 2005), p.79. A census of both 5 cent and 10 cent 1847 covers used from New Jersey can be found in the monumental work by Thomas J. Alexander, *The United States 1847 Issue: A Cover Census*, pp. 319-28 (The U.S. Philatelic Society, Inc. 2001). The late Brad Arch assembled the finest collection of the 1847 Issue (Scott Nos. 1 & 2) used from New Jersey. Following his passing, his collection was sold by Robert A. Siegel Auctions, Inc., Sale 825, June 27-29, 2000. A number of 10 cent 1851 Issue (Scott Nos. 13-16) covers from the English correspondence have been sold at public auction; see Robert G. Rose, "New Jersey Classics Featured in Recent Auction Sales," *NJPH*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (August 2003), pp. 95-97; "The 10 Cent 1855 Issue on Cover," *NJPH*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (May 2003), pp. 52-53. Only a single usage of the 12 Cent 1851 Issue (Scott No. 17), has been reported from New Jersey, a bisect postmarked from Trenton; see Robert G. Rose, "Twelve Cent 1851 Usage in New Jersey," *NJPH*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 2008), p. 91.

² USS Levant (1837), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Levant (4/30/2012)

³ <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/eenglish.htm> (4/30/2012).

⁴ USS Levant (1837), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Levant (4/30/2012)

⁵ The Battle of the Pearl River Forts, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Pearl_River_Forts (4/30/2012)

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/eenglish.htm>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The Levant was lost at sea with all aboard after leaving Hawaii on September 18, 1860 while on route to Panama. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Levant (1837)

¹¹ R. Frajola & F. Mayer, *The United States Five Cent Stamp of 1856*, pp. 125-27, Figures 11-1 & 11-2 (The Collectors Club 2005). All three covers have distinguished provenances:

Figure 2: August 19, 1856 Trenton postmark in red with red "New York Am. Pkt. Aug. 22" exchange marking with British and Hong Kong transit marking backstamps. With original letter enclosed and Lt. English's pencil notation indicating the letter is the "13th" received.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., *Paul C. Rohloff Collection*, Sale 512, May 18-19, 1977, lot no. 279;

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., *The Kapiloff Collection*, Sale 744, October 3, 1992, lot no. 46;

Matthew Bennett International, *The Frederick R. Mayer Collection: The United States 1856 Five Cent Issue*, Sale No. 294, October 21, 2005, lot no. 163.

Figure 3: August 19, 1856 Trenton postmark in red with red "New York Am. Pkt. Aug. 23" exchange marking with British and Hong Kong transit marking backstamps. With two original letters enclosed and Lt. English's pencil notation indicating the letter is the "10 and 11" received.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., Rare Covers from the *Dr. W.F. Amonette Collection*, Sale 784, October 29, 1996, lot no. 2063. Where stated that Dr. Amonette was offered this cover from the original find. Illustrated on catalog cover.

Offered for Sale by Andrew Levitt Philatelic Consultant, *Collection Builders Net Price Catalog & Handbook*, Vol. II, No. 2, 1997, p. 53 at \$50,000.

Figure 4: September 5, 1856 Trenton postmark in red with red "New-York Br. Pkt. Sep. 9" exchange marking with British and Hong Kong backstamps.

Christies' Robson Lowe New York, *The Louis Grunin Collection of United States 1851-57 Stamps and Covers*, Part Three, March 16, 1988, lot no.106.

Matthew Bennett International, *The Frederick R. Mayer Collection: The United States 1856 Five Cent Issue*,

Sale No. 294, October 21, 2005, lot no. 164

- ¹² R. Frajola & F. Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-26, Figure 11-1. The description of the routing of this cover between Southampton and Hong Kong differs slightly from what appears to be its correct routing as described in its sale at auction of the Mayer Collection. In addition, the book's reference to the pencil notation "13th" (November 13) as its docketed date of receipt is incorrect, given the Hong Kong backstamp date of December 1, 1856. Rather, as seen on additional covers from this correspondence, Lt. English numbered the sequence of letters received from this wife with a pencil notation on the face of most covers.
- ¹³ Matthew Bennett International, *The Frederick R. Mayer Collection: The United States 1856 Five Cent Issue*, Sale No. 294, October 21, 2005, lot no. 163. The auction lot description provides an accurate account of the routing and time sequence for each of the ships that carried this letter.
- ¹⁴ Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., *Rare Covers from the Dr. W.F. Amonette Collection*, Sale 784, October 29, 1996, lot no. 2063.
- ¹⁵ R. Frajola & F. Mayer, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-27, Figure 11-2.
- ¹⁶ Illustrations below: <http://www.ibiblio.org/chineseart/contents/arti/c02s01.html> & <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/opium-war-1839.html> (First Opium War)

