

Following the introduction of the Penny Black in 1840, countries around the world began issuing their own stamps to pre-pay postage. In some countries the need for stamps came years before official examples could be produced. This resulted in the introduction of provisional stamps, often produced by local postmasters, to fill the growing need for postage stamps. One such postmaster was William Bennett Perot who produced what is now one of Bermuda's rarest stamps.



W B Perot was responsible for producing Bermuda's first stamps

The First Stamps of Bermuda

By Paul Brittain

The Postmaster of Bermuda's capital, Hamilton, from 1818 to 1862 was William Bennett Perot (appointed on 5 November 1818 when he was 27 years old). As part of his duties he was required to deliver all internal mail, whether received from passing ships or sent internally, being entitled to retain the charges levied. Apparently, he would walk around Hamilton carrying in his top hat the letters to be delivered, which he had carefully pre-arranged so that at each place he called he would doff his hat, and there was the appropriate letter to be handed over. A local Act of 1842 set the charges at 1d. for every ounce, following a public outcry since only 1d. was being charged in Great Britain. From the following year Perot started to receive an annual salary (initially £50) in addition to any postage money received, which in 1843 amounted to £25 14s 3d. Clearly reasonable use was made of the postal system: the records for 1843 show that over 9000 items were sent from Hamilton to Bermuda's second largest town of St George, which was the original capital.

The principle was fairly straightforward: anyone wishing to send an item would take it to the post office, and hand over the required charge. The post office was in a house owned by Perot, and it is said he preferred to spend most of the day pottering in his garden. When the office was not open, there was a box in which the mail, together with the cost of postage, could be left. However, Perot often found that insufficient money was in the box, but he was still obliged to handle all the mail deposited.

DIY stamps?

It was apparently the idea of James Bell Heyl that Perot should produce his own 'stamps': Heyl owned a chemist shop as part of the post office, and was possibly aware of stamps that had already been produced by other countries. The public could buy these stamps in advance, and affix them to any mail left in the box; Heyl would call Perot from his garden when customers arrived, or could sell the 'stamps' if Perot was not around. If a letter were posted without one of the 'stamps' it would be regarded as unpaid.

Perot adapted one of the circular handstamps he had been sent from London, with 'HAMILTON' across the top, 'BERMUDA' around the base, and the year, then 1848, across the centre; he removed the remaining date plugs. He now made impressions in black ink on a sheet of paper. It is believed, but not proved, that there



Above: Perot stamps of 1848 and 1856

Left: The second type of 1861



were 12 impressions to each sheet, arranged in two columns of six. It is also not certain whether the sheets were gummed. On each impression, he wrote 'One Penny' above the year, and his signature below. It seems that Perot produced further quantities as demand necessitated. He did not provide any form of cancellation—the fact that one of the 'stamps' had been affixed to a letter was sufficient. During the following year, 1849, the colour of the ink used was changed to red.

The philatelic world was unaware of these 'stamps' until 1897 when a collector from Bermuda discovered three examples. One, in red dated 1854, was on a cover which he sent to a firm of stamp dealers in Bath. The item was treated with suspicion and returned to its owner. Subsequently the cover was bought by Baron Philipp de la Rénouillère de Ferrary. The next find was an example in black dated 1849: an Englishman discovered it on a letter while working in Bermuda.

Of the other examples that have come to light, only one other is still on a piece of the original letter: the rest are off cover and have mainly been cut to the circular shape of the 'stamp', often encroaching on some of the letters.

So far, examples have been recorded as follows: three in black on bluish grey paper, dated 1848, including an example still on

its letter, and one in the Royal Philatelic Collection; two in black on bluish grey paper, dated 1849, including the example from the second 'find', still on a piece of the original letter; three in red on thick white paper, dated 1853, including one in The Royal Philatelic Collection; two in red on bluish wove paper, dated 1854, including the first example discovered that was on cover and one in The Royal Philatelic Collection and one in red on bluish wove paper dated 1856.

Perot's second type

Even more surprising is the fact that it was not until 1946 that a second type of Perot 'stamp' was discovered. This time the handstamp that Perot used was a crowned double-circle inscribed 'PAID AT HAMILTON BERMUDA' applied in red on blue laid paper. The examples known were all used in March 1861, but have no written denomination or signature, although it is assumed the value was 1d. There is a form of cancellation, a cross produced by a pen, but as the cross appears entirely on the 'stamp' and is not tied to the known covers, there is no way of telling whether it was applied before or after the 'stamp' was affixed.

Of the five examples known of this second type, two are on cover, two are single items

It was not until 1946 that a second type of 'Perot' stamp was discovered

but with the 'cross', while the fifth is without the 'cross': it is assumed that this fifth example is unused.

After Perot

Perot took some leave in 1852 and during the time his duties were undertaken by his assistant, Robert Ward, who later, in June 1862, took over from Perot as Postmaster.

Two 'stamps' have been found, identical to Perot's second type, but on cream paper with a 'cross' in blue pencil. It is known that Ward used blue pencil to cancel items, and as both examples have pieces of blue paper, from an envelope or letter, affixed to the back, it is thought these might be provisionals produced by Ward. However, in the opinion of some, it still remains conjecture.

Meanwhile, at St George

While the capital of Bermuda was now Hamilton and no longer St George (or sometimes referred to as St George's), when a postmaster was appointed for St George in 1818 he was given the title of Deputy Postmaster General at St Georges, regarded as a deputy to the Postmaster General in London, and thus of higher status and with a greater salary than the postmaster in Hamilton.

The Postmaster of St George until his death in 1853 was James Taylor. He was helped by his two nephews, Thomas Thies and James Henry Thies. Thomas was

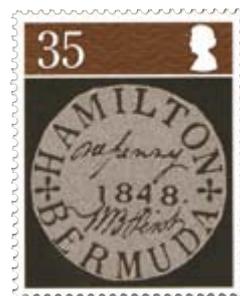
appointed to succeed his uncle, and from September 1859 became officially known as Postmaster-General of Bermuda. Sadly he died on August 31, 1860, aged just 30, and was succeeded by his younger brother James.

It was James who created the provisionals for St George. It is said he took more care over the production than had Perot, drawing rules on a sheet of buff paper before striking in each rectangle in red an impression of his handstamp reading 'PAID/AT/ST GEORGE'S BERMUDA'. The first record of the Thies 'stamp' appeared in 1899, although at first its authenticity was doubted.

Five examples of this 'stamp' are known, used between 4 July 1860 and January 1863, two on cover.

Visitors to Bermuda can still see the building used by William Perot for the post office at Par-la-Ville which houses the Bermuda Natural History Museum. Perot's post office was featured on the 6d. definitive issued on in 1962, while the first Perot provisional has been shown on the three stamps issued in 1949 to mark the centenary, on the 1d. and 4d. definitive of 1953, and on the set issued in 1980 to mark the centenary of the death of Sir Rowland Hill. In 2008 a set of four stamps showing the Perot provisionals was issued to celebrate the 160th anniversary of their introduction.

Definitives printed by De La Rue with the portrait of Queen Victoria were first issued in Bermuda on 25 September 1865.



Right: Stamps of 1949, 1980 and 2008 depicting Perot's stamp of 1848

Below and bottom right: Perot's post office

