

## The New York Postmaster Provisional – By: Alex Gill

On July 14th, 1845, the nation's first provisional stamp to be issued by a local postmaster was placed on sale in New York City. This stamp was created two weeks after national mail rates were standardized, and stamps were authorized as a means of prepayment. Produced between 1845 and 1847, the New York Postmaster Provisional stamp is widely regarded among philatelists as the most elegantly designed of postmaster provisional stamps.

Before efforts were made to standardize postal rates, sending, and delivering mail was unpredictable and unreliable with different jurisdictions and confusing rates. It was not uncommon for mail recipients to pay the postage for mail delivery. Frustrated with inconsistencies in sending and delivering mail, then New York City Postmaster Robert H. Morris took office on May 21st, 1845 after serving as mayor. To create a stamp, he contracted with renowned security printing firm Rawdon, Wright & Hatch who primarily specialized in printing banknotes. The printing firm created a design based on Gilbert Stuart's iconic painting of President George Washington in sheets of 40 stamps. As New York was the central location for many security printing firms, it was inevitable that New York's provisional stamp would exhibit high design and printing standards compared to other city's provisional stamps.

Impressed with the design, Postmaster Morris paid \$55.01 for the first printing on July 12, 1845 and sent copies of the stamps to postmasters in Boston, Philadelphia, Albany, and Washington. In response, other cities created their own provisional stamps in several denominations. For example, the famous St. Louis Bear stamps were issued in 5, 10, and 20-cent denominations and provisional stamps from Providence were issued in both 5 and 10-cents. Although other cities created several denominations, Morris believed a single denomination of five cents was sufficient to cover the distance between New York and other coastal cities. At the time, five cents covered distances up to 300 miles and he believed little of New York's mail exceeded that distance.

When issued, the stamps were only available at the New York City post office and were easily accepted by New Yorkers who were already familiar with a wide range of local stamps depicting George Washington and as a result, some used copies have been found dated July 15th. To ensure the authenticity of the stamps, Morris had the stamps initialed in red ink by either himself or the two brothers in law he had hired at the time. Few used stamps are initialed by Morris ("RHM") whereas 23-year old Alonzo Castle Monson ("ACM") are more frequent. In total, Printer Rawdon, Wright, and Hatch printed 143,600 copies in a total of 18 shipments, the last of which was delivered on January 1, 1847.

Impressed with the stamps' impressive design and high production quality, the post office skipped the traditional bidding process amongst printers by selecting the renamed Rawdon, Wright, Hatch, and Edson when they first started issuing stamps of their own. The appearance of the first national postage stamps on July 1, 1847 effectively put an end to provisional stamps. The role of provisional stamps helped familiarize the public with the use of stamps as postage prepayment.



US Scott 9X1, signed "RHM" (Image Courtesy of The Philatelic Foundation)



Genuine usage of Scott 9X1 on cover to Plattsburgh, NY (Image Courtesy of The Philatelic Foundation)



US Scott 9X1, signed "ACM" (Image Courtesy of The Philatelic Foundation)