

NEWFOUNDLAND POSTAL STATIONERY

Some Additions and Corrections to the Pratt Articles

by William C. Walton

Part II



Figure 2. P4 postmarked AP 30/81 (St. John's), with red London transit MY 8/81 and local German receiver 20/5.

P4 (The 2¢ Card of 1880) (Sept-Oct 1984, 41, 5, 403)

Pratt's issue date of 1882 for this card is unquestionably in error. An ERP of April 30, 1881 (to Germany) has already been recorded. At least two other usages predating the cited one of November 1883 are also known (see Fig. 2). The card was certainly issued by early 1881, and in all probability was actually released a year before (early 1880). This can be seen very readily by checking some of the major philatelic references of the period.

The leading philatelic societies at that time kept rather close track of new postal issues, including postal stationery; many dealers, and the philatelic press, also kept tabs on the subject. The Philatelic Society, London, in its seminal 1889 catalogue of BNA, ascribed a tentative date of issue for this card as January 1880, which (though it appears somewhat

early) is highly unlikely to be in error by more than a few months. Many other sources support this (e.g. the continuing series of catalogues and supplements by the Belgian dealer Moens, the 1884 *Post Cards* by Fry, etc.), but the simplest is probably North America's preeminent post card dealer at the time, Philadelphia's L.W. Durbin. His *Catalogue of Postal Cards* (Fifth Edition, 1882) also lists P4 and P3 as 1880 issues.

Pratt hypothesizes that P4 was engraved and printed prior to the 1¢ card (P3), and in his subsequent comments on P3 incorrectly concludes as well that P3 was not issued until 1883. All of the reasoning that led Pratt to the tentative conclusion that P4 was issued first is fallacious - yet curiously, his conclusion may coincidentally be correct: The Philatelic Society, London, dated P3 as a July 1880 issue - six months later than its tentative assignment of January for P4.

Pratt's first reason for dating P4 prior to P3 appears to be the die proof numbering of the two (122 for P4, 123 for P3) in what he calls "the files of the British American Bank Note Company." (His other reasons are discussed in the next section, dealing with P3.) This die proof numbering sequence, he suggests, "probably (indicates) the order of engraving and printing." This is very questionable for several reasons, and has the potential to mislead the reader or future researcher to a serious degree.

1. In any die proof record, including those consistently well maintained, the die proof numbering of two consecutive proofs, from what could be a simultaneous issue, is not a sound basis for assuming a sequence of die engraving. Both could easily have been entered in the 'file' together, without much attention paid to which was first completed and used for a proof pull. Pratt, of course, assumed they were *not* simultaneous - implying that a year or more elapsed between the issue of P4 and P3. But this raises another contradiction: was this prolific printer really doing no original die production for any postal, revenue, or tax paid issue - federal or provincial - for a year or more, until the order for a 1¢ card from Newfoundland arrived? Why do no other die proofs intervene between 122 and 123? The answer, of course, is that 122 and 123 were entered into the record at the same time.

2. Even if the die proof number sequence *could* be used to determine the order in which the dies were engraved, this would hardly be a basis for extrapolating the sequence of *plate* manufacture, or of *printing* (let alone shipping and dis-

tribution). These represent progressively more tenuous assumptions.

3. Pratt has either not had an opportunity to inspect the die proof source document he cites, or has only examined it selectively. The 'files' to which he refers are British American Bank Note's 'reference book' of die proofs. *This book was not kept contemporaneously before the turn of the century, and in fact appears to have been reconstructed - based on this writer's research - on a sort of 'best guess' basis, around 1909.* The 'best guesses' were often not too accurate. For example, the Newfoundland proofs for the 1880 postal adhesives are numbered and entered just *prior* to the Canadian Bill Stamps of 1868. Again, Pratt either was told the die proof numbers (without questioning the provenance of the document), or examined it only in a narrow sense (looking just at the line information for Newfoundland entries). Until a continuing effort to sort out the 'reference book' is completed, and the results made available, collectors should be wary of citations from it. Items are missing, and the sequence is frequently meaningless.

Pratt lists one printing shade for P4 (orange vermilion) on two stock shades (white and light buff). Collectors should be aware that this is a drastic oversimplification. Marked printing shades occur, and there are many stocks. The most easily differentiated stock is probably the 'thin cream card' which is surfaced on the address side; it appears to have come into distribution in 1897, and was the major (though not exclusive) type of stock used for the balance of the issue.

Again, for the record, P4 was printed from recessed plates ('engraved').

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