

Newfoundland's "Missing Three" Provisional – a Mirage?

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The purpose of this article is to describe the varieties of the 1920 **THREE CENT** on 35¢ red Cabot provisional, and challenge the existence of the so-called "missing" **THREE** variety listed in several references and catalogues.

PART 1: BACKGROUND ON THE 1920 POSTAL SHORTAGE

In September of 1920, the war had been over for almost two years, but the 1¢ postal war tax was still in effect. Town letters were at the 2¢ rate, and inland letters and those to Canada and the U.S. were 3¢ cents. The supply of low values from the 1919 Caribou set was not adequate to meet the demand. For example, a monthly minimum of about 300,000 3¢ stamps was needed. "Irregular" direct steamer communications, and the inability of Whitehead, Morris & Co., Ltd. to keep up with requisitions for the Caribou issues, had led to the need for alternatives.

The use of rubber stamps for mail within Newfoundland commenced on September 4, 1920, and the first provisional adhesives became available on the 13th. Ultimately four different stamps would be needed until sufficient quantities of low values of the Caribou series finally arrived from England the last part of the month.

PART 2: THE 3¢ ON 35¢ PROVISIONAL AND COMMON VARIETIES

The 3¢ on 35¢ Cabot was the third of four provisionals, and became available on September 15th. It was used until the 28th. Sheets of the 35¢ Cabot were split into four blocks of 25, on a five-by-five format. A letterpress was used for surcharging with the words **THREE CENTS** in two lines of Roman caps, with horizontal bars above and below to cover the 35¢ values. Figure 1 shows a typical block of four. Figure 2 shows first day usage covering the 3¢ rate to the U.S.

Figure 1: Typical block of four of 3¢ on 35¢ provisional.



Figure 2: First day of usage with proper rate to U.S.

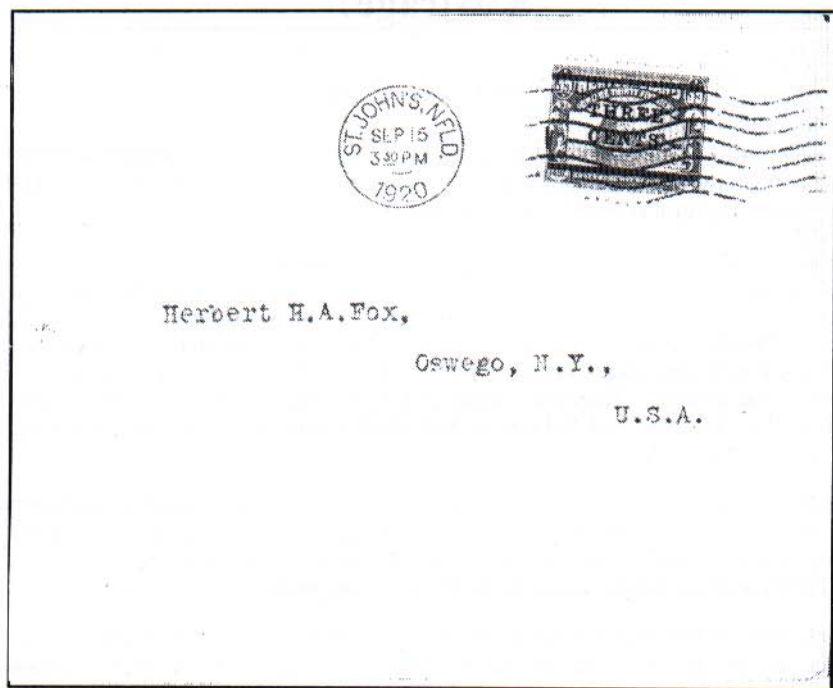


Figure 3: Raised "E" variety on St. Anthony winter flight.



Fifty thousand of the 3¢ on 35¢ provisional were produced, consisting of two thousand blocks. There is only one constant variety of interest on all blocks. It is the raised **E** in **THREE** in position #24. Several authors have incorrectly described the raised **E** as being in the word **CENTS**. Figure 3 shows an example on a cover intended for the February 26, 1921 winter flight from St. John's to St. Anthony, a flight that never got off the ground.

At some point in the course of the printing, the lower horizontal bar became depressed. This is at position #15. On position #14, the bar is partially gone. The depression was gradual, as there are transitional versions where only part of the bar on #15 shows. Figure 4 shows a pair with the bar completely missing on #15. Fred Jarrett [1] in his 1929 "Stamps of British North America" stated that 1,000 of this variety were created. This is a relatively common variety, often seen in stamp auctions, so Jarrett's estimate is probably a good guess. Because the process was gradual, I assume the missing bar occurred during the last half of the surcharging.

Figure 4: Missing bar, from position #15 on some settings.



PART 3; THE SCARCE VARIETIES AND THE "MISSING THREE"

In his June 1992 price list, Ed Wener of Indigo sold a very rare block of 25 of the 3¢ on 35¢ provisional (Figure 5). This is the template for all the broken word/"missing" **THREE** varieties of this stamp, in my opinion. Wener sold the item for \$1500, and described it as follows:

"130c - Three Omitted on two stamps in a complete sheet of 25 (also **CENTS** partly missing). Both 130c VF-one is NH- First such sheet I have seen. Rare!"

Let's examine the varieties on the fourth row:

- Position #16: Upper bar bisected diagonally. I have not seen other examples;
- Position #18: Only very bottom of **THREE** remains as coarse line. I have seen two other examples in past two years;
- Position #19: Only very top of **THREE** remains as coarse line. I have seen two other examples, one used and the other which I now own (Figure 6);
- Position #20: Top of **NTS** in **CENTS** slashed at top. I have seen one other example, also shown in Figure 6.

In their price list of this May (1966), the Saskatoon Stamp Centre sold a block of four of positions 19-20/24-25. After examining a photo of the block it was clear that the Wener pane had been broken up, for the block was from that pane. Saskatoon told me the pane had

had a Greene Foundation certificate before its "demise." This may mean no complete pane with these varieties still exists.

Figure 5: Setting with varieties in fourth horizontal row.

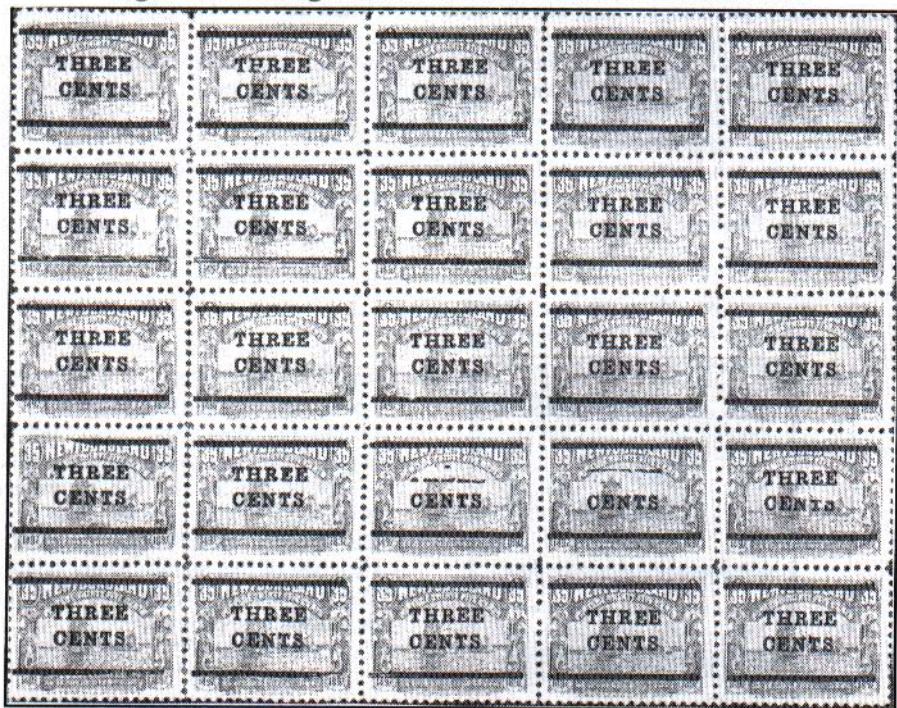
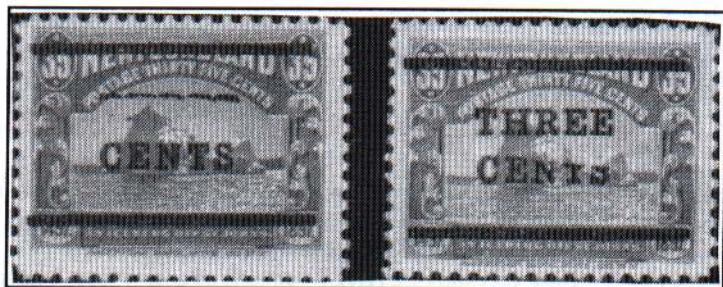


Figure 6: Additional examples of positions #19 and #20.

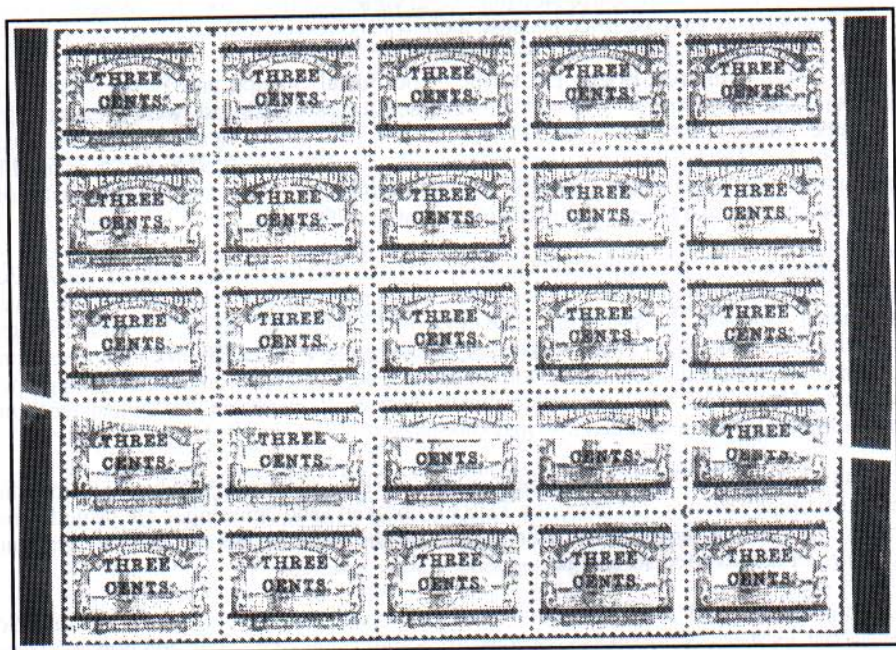


The **THREE's** in Positions #18-19 are not completely missing but standard catalogues give little choice. Scott [2] and Unitrade [3] provide only for the "missing Three" - SCOTT 130c. The position #19 I bought from Eaton & Sons in their June 16, 1995 auction was also described as the "missing" THREE variety. Both examples of Position #18 I have seen have been described as 130c - in the R. Maresch and Son auction of April 13, 1994 auction and

an Eastern Auction 1995 price list. The thinking here has been – if it looks like a dog and barks like a dog (but has a mustache), it is probably still a dog! More kindly, as mentioned above, standard catalogues offer no alternative listing. Only Saskatoon refrained from the “130c” reference.

What caused these faults? Ed Wener feels a foreign object came between the letterpress and the blocks of 25. I posit that a strip of non-absorbing paper interfered. My design for such for a problem can be seen in Figure 7. This happened earlier in the printing (before the depressed bar in position #15), and was noted after a few blocks were affected (15? 20?), and corrected.

Figure 7: Possible cause of damage to fourth horizontal row.



I have never seen an example of a completely missing **THREE**. Neither has Ed Wener, nor Gary Lyon of Eastern Auctions. Wener, in fact, calls the description a “misnomer.” Other (earlier), experts claim it does exist so further examination is called for.

In the 1922 book, “Postage Stamps of Newfoundland” [4, 5], Harry E. Huber described the then recent 3¢ on 35¢ provisional, stating “A copy of the 3¢ on 35¢ has been seen with **THREE** omitted.” Some time thereafter, in the Stamp Herald (1925) [6], he stated “**THREE** is omitted on stamps 13 and 14 of a few panes.” Note, he did not say positions 18-19, and did not mention the broken **THREE** varieties shown on the Wener sheet. The purported missing **THREE**'s were at positions #13-14, the row above the established varieties - could someone have been describing the broken **THREE**'s, and miscounted their location in the block of 25?

In his 1929 book, Jarrett [1] spent a page on the 1920 provisionals, including a paragraph on a purported block of 25 of this provisional with inverted surcharge. He discounted that rumor, as had Huber earlier. Although Jarrett mentioned the missing bar in his narrative, he didn't write about the missing **THREE**. Curiously, in the pricing section, he listed the 3¢ on 35¢ varieties as follows:

"a. Lower bar omitted (1000)	25.00
b. THREE omitted (stamps 13 and 14 of a few panes)	-----
c. Lower portion only THREE showing	100.00
d. Top of NTS of CENTS missing	----- "

For his **THREE** omitted, he may have simply been picking up on Huber's earlier description. Jarrett's "c" and "d" describe positions #18 and 20 that I characterized earlier. He provided prices for most scarce Newfoundland varieties but not for "b". Was "b" really position #19? Was there no price because there was no record of a sale?

In 1942, Winthrop Boggs [5] in the "The Postal Stamps and Postal History of Newfoundland", used similar wording to Huber's and Jarrett's of almost twenty years earlier - "Three" omitted (stamps #13 and #14 on a few panes)." Boggs went on to list the lower portion of the **THREE** showing, the problem with the NTS of **CENTS**, and the raised **E** (incorrectly attributed to the **CENTS**, not the **THREE**, by the way). In the most part, therefore, it looks like Boggs was parroting previous authors.

Looking at the 1931 edition of "Gibbons" [7], we find the "Three omitted" as #147c. The #147a is assigned to the now discounted "surcharge inverted" and #147b is the lower bar omitted. Only #147b has a price. The modern "Gibbons" [8] shows the same listings, but with a price of \$1900 (1991, U.S. version) for the missing **THREE** and a comment that "... stamps showing either the top or bottom of the letters 'THREE' are scarce, though not as rare as No. 147c." Gibbons, unfortunately destroys its credibility by its insistence on continuing to list the discounted inverted surcharge.

Robson Lowe [9] also dealt with the missing **THREE** in Volume V of his encyclopedia on British Empire stamps. He listed the **THREE** "broken" and "missing." He provided no pricing information, however. To his credit, he did state he has not seen a "genuine example" of the inverted surcharge.

John Walsh and John Butt have been examining their listing of the 3¢ on 35¢ provisional, for their "Newfoundland Specialized Stamp Catalogue" [10], and now plan that their next version will not list the completely missing **THREE**, although the 1995 edition had. This is based upon this research. However, they will list positions #18-#20 of the Wener sheet.

Looking back on my model for the mayhem done on positions 16-20, it is possible that the interfering paper could have shifted a few degrees before being removed, resulting in a completely missing **THREE** in either position 18 or 19. The result would have changed the neighboring stamp, but I have seen no transitional variation (e.g., half of the **THREE** showing). That does not seem to be an answer for Huber's missing **THREE** on position 13 or 14.

If the missing **THREE**, absent any lingering residuals, does exist, it is the scarcest of all 20th century Newfoundland varieties. For my sake, I continue to look for a position #18 specimen of the broken **THREE** for my collection. Position #16 may be even a greater

challenge, since no one has ever mentioned it before. If someone can prove me wrong, and has a seen a missing **THREE**, please let me know. Until then, I contend that Huber had his facts wrong, and that everyone has followed his lead since the early 1920's.

References

- [1] Jarrett, F., "Stamps of British North America", reprint of the 1929 edition, Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Mass., 1975.
- [2] Scott Postage Stamp Catalog, 1997 edition.
- [3] Unitrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps (1994).
- [4] Poole, B.W.H. and Huber, H.E., "Postage Stamps of Newfoundland", reprint, Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Mass., 1975, as contained in reference [5].
- [5] Boggs, W., "The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Newfoundland", reprint, Quarterman Publications, Inc., Lawrence, Mass., 1975.
- [6] Huber, H.E., "Newfoundland Provisionals, 1920", The Stamp Herald, Vol. 10, #12, p. 237 (1925).
- [7] Gibbons Postage Stamp Catalogue, 1931.
- [8] Gibbons Postage Stamp Catalogue, U.S. edition, 1991.
- [9] Lowe, R., "The Encyclopedia of British Empire Postage Stamps 1639-1952, Volume V. The Empire in North America", Robson Lowe Ltd., 1973.
- [10] Walsh, J. and Butt, J., "Newfoundland Specialized Stamp Catalogue" third edition, 1995.

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