

Confederate Collectanea



Figure 1: The fraudulent Twin Crescent variety as listed in four different Dietz catalogs for 50 years.

The Discredited Twin Crescents Variety

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

Often the back story of why something is delisted from a philatelic catalog is never known. But, sometimes the reason comes to light. When it does, it also provides a good lesson in why one should never use only one source for research, particularly a very old one, no matter how trusted the author(s) may be.

New material, new research, new techniques, and new information may be revealed with the passage of time. Such is the case with the Twin Crescents variety. (Figure 1)

The so-called Twin Crescents variety was first listed in the 1937 Dietz catalog.¹ Unfortunately, Dietz did not provide plate positions, so there was no way for a Confederate student to verify whether this was a constant variety or a transient variety. Presumably, only constant varieties should have been listed, unless noted as transient.

For those not versed in the fascinating topic of “fly-speck” philately, plating refers to the reconstruction of a pane or sheet of postage

stamps from a single plate by using individual overlapping strips and blocks of stamps.

For plating to be possible, there must be constant variants in details of the stamps printed from a single plate or—in this case—a lithographic printing stone so that one can identify the exact position of each stamp.

Evidence that may be used in plating includes defects or flaws that occur in the transfer of images, individual touch-ups by the engravers, recutting of the plates, accidental injuries to the plates and so forth.

Stamps also may have been laid out in an irregular fashion resulting in differences in spacing and orientation of the stamps, which may be used to determine their plate positions.

The Confederate lithographed issues are a treasure trove of varieties, narrow printing gutters, wide gutters, misplaced transfers and more.

Some collectors, such as lithograph student Leonard H. Hartmann, have literally spent a

lifetime studying these varieties and educating fellow enthusiasts about them.

While the Twin Crescents, as best I can determine, first made an appearance in the 1937 catalog, it was subsequently carried forward for 50 years to the 1945 Dietz,² the 1959 Dietz,³ and the 1986 New Dietz⁴ catalogs.

By the time the 2012 CSA Catalog⁵ finally made an appearance, that erroneous listing had been removed.

I scanned the Byne index and bibliography⁶ to see if I could find an announcement by Dietz of a new variety in one of his early magazines, but did not turn up any reference to it, although it is quite likely he may have publicized such a new discovery. Many of his columns are referenced in Byne simply with the name of the magazine column and not the discussed topics.

A couple of years ago, I found the illustrated Twin Crescents variety in a large lot I bought at auction. I quickly turned to Hartmann who said that he had never seen an example as it appeared in the old catalogs but that he always thought the distinct crescents appeared to have been drawn in, either on the stamp or for the illustration.⁷

He went on to say that in positions 1–10, there are a number of positions that show some rounding in the same area and the opposite for some in positions 41–50. Some of the “wings” are real.

Not surprisingly, Hartmann was right on the money. The green ink is an extraordinarily good match that is very difficult to see even with a high resolution scan. But under high magnification, it is clear that the semi-circles are drawn in, as are the numerous small embellishments below the half-moon in place of the proper design.

The small vertical lines that serve as background shading have been drawn in with a slightly more bluish green shade than the original ink color and show clearly between the A and G of “POSTAGE” at the top.

In addition to the inked-in curves, paper has been added to both the full left side and across the top. The left margin has been carefully excised and replaced with a symmetrical margin and restored design to enhance the appearance (Figure 2).

Plating the stamp is difficult to impossible due to the significant portions of the design that were removed and the addition of other design elements that did not belong. The perimeter of the lithographed issues is critical to proper plating.



Figure 2: Left margin of a Twin Crescent stamp has been completely added and portions inked-in.



Figure 3 (Below): Enlargements of the upper right crescent from a bogus creation (left) compared to the unaltered upper right corner of genuine CSA 1.

There also appears to be a faint pencil arc above the right crescent, probably a test line. When compared with a genuine design, it is obvious that the flourishes below the drawn-in arc were added with no real attempt to copy the proper corner design of the genuine stamp.

I have focused on the upper right crescent for this article, as the differences are easier to see due to the partially obscuring postmark.

Figure 3 shows the comparison at left of the upper right crescent compared to an unaltered CSA 1 design at right. The differences are very apparent under strong magnification, although the crescent initially serves to obfuscate that alteration.

In recent years, more than one collection of inked-over stamps and cancellations has come to light. It appears that this was a somewhat popular, if misguided, alteration done in the early and mid-20th century in order to enhance the stamp appearance. From five feet away, these collections were magnificent.

Sometimes the motives appear to have been innocent and done simply for the pleasure of private collectors to their own material. Other times, the motive from the onset was clearly to deceive—to improve a damaged stamp to creative a superb appearing four-margin copy to sell to others. Drawn-in characteristics often are accompanied by added paper and rebacking. Either way, when the “innocent” collector has gone to his great reward, the stamps go on to potentially fool new owners. That “find” in a large lot may not be such a great find after all. This proclivity does not extend only to Confederate stamps; there were U.S. collectors guilty of the same thing.

You may wonder why anyone would want to take the time to alter a stamp in this way. Consider when it was likely done—the early 20th century; we know it was at least before 1937. There was no Internet, no FaceBook, and no television. RCA began experimental television broadcasts in 1939. Stamp collecting was in its heyday in the darkest days of the Depression. Both presidents during the 1930s, Roosevelt and Hoover, were serious collectors.

Your best protection from pretenders such as the Twin Crescents variety is your own knowledge derived from study, which is one of the great joys of collecting.

I have a very large reference collection of fakes and forgeries that I find utterly fascinating. It contains stamps such as the Twin Crescents variety and covers such as the dazzling productions of the late John A. Fox.

I was happy to add this example to my reference collection, as it helped to solve the mystery of this now debunked variety.

Acknowledgement

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Endnotes

- 1 August Dietz, *Dietz Catalog & Hand-Book (Specialized) of the Postage Stamps and Envelopes of the Confederate States of America*, Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1937, pg. 110.
- 2 August Dietz, *Dietz Catalog & Hand-Book (Specialized) of the Postage Stamps and Envelopes of the Confederate States of America*, Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1945, pg. 126.
- 3 August Dietz, *Dietz Catalog & Hand-Book of the Postage Stamps and Envelopes of the Confederate States of America*, Richmond, Virginia: The Dietz Press, 1959, pg. 134.



Figure 4: A portion of page 128 from the 1986 *New Dietz Catalog* showing the Crescents variety.

- 4 Hubert C. Skinner, Erin R. Gunter, Warren H. Sanders, *The New Dietz Confederate States Catalog and Handbook*, Miami, Florida: Bogg & Laurence Publishing Company Inc., 1986, pg. 128.
- 5 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr, and Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012.
- 6 Richard H. Byne, *Confederate States of America Philatelic Subject Index and Bibliography 1862-1984*, Leonard H. Hartmann Philatelic Bibliopole, 1986.
- 7 Leonard H. Hartmann, personal e-mail exchange, July 7-8, 2013.

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