

ERASMO ONEGLIA: CSA 2¢ ANDREW JACKSON STAMP FORGER

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Erasmus Oneglia (1853-1934), of Turin, Italy, was a major producer and vendor of worldwide forged postage stamps from the mid-1890s through the early 1900s. He sold them as what they were, with no attempt to deceive. Nevertheless, he was arrested in England in 1897 for trying to sell his correctly identified imitations to Stanley Gibbons, Ltd. The result was a fine of 20 shillings, and having his stock confiscated.

Oneglia published catalogs between 1896 and 1907, offering a broad array of issues from all parts of the globe. He listed self-fabricated engraved forgeries, and some items, such as Bahamas, were made by the photogravure process. In the supplement to his 1900-01 catalog, Oneglia asserted, "My imitations are copied from genuine postage stamps by the best artists and with a rare perfection without equal."

Oneglia's first forgeries are believed to have been of the early stamps of Newfoundland. They were included in the second edition of Rev. R. B. Earée's *Album Weeds* in 1892. Oneglia offered fake overprints and surcharges on both genuine and forged stamps, lithographed forgeries and a large number of engraved forgeries. When Oneglia applied a watermark on his forgeries, they were impressed, rather than being actual watermarks.

According to the late "Tip" Tyler (Dr. Varro E. Tyler), "Oneglia was the first link in a long chain of Italian forgers." Angelo Panelli was a forger often linked to Oneglia, as well as A. Venturini (Pisa, Turin and Florence, Italy), Nino Imperato (Genoa, Italy), and Edoardo Spiotti (Genoa, Italy). Panelli was a mass distributor of his own fakes, as well as those created by Oneglia. Panelli operated out of San Remo, Italy, and purchased Oneglia's stock of forgeries in the 1920s when Oneglia retired.

According to Robson Lowe and Carl Walske in their book, *The Oneglia Engraved Forgeries Commonly Attributed to Angelo Panelli* (1997), Oneglia made 788 forgeries from 30 countries. Some of the Oneglia forgeries were erroneously attributed to Angelo Panelli. The price lists published by Oneglia in the late 19th and early 20th century detailed engraved forgeries that can be matched exactly to many known forgeries. Thus it appears certain that most of the engraved forgeries traditionally attributed to Angelo Panelli were in fact made by – or for – Erasmo Oneglia. Panelli denied having made any himself.

Per Tip Tyler, it was reported in 1896 that Spiotti was sending out the Oneglia's price list under his own name and that he merely operated a branch office for Oneglia. Tyler cited H. Feltmann as his source. Stamp forger François Fournier (1846-1917), born in Switzerland but for much of his life a French citizen, was another Oneglia connection. Panelli also sold Fournier products.

The most widely known forger associated with Oneglia was another Italian, Giovanni de Sperati, better known as Jean, who often worked with his older brothers Mariano and Massimo – photographer and printer/stamp dealer, respectively. Some mistakenly think Sperati was French because, as a Francophile, he adopted the name Jean. Sperati lived a great deal of his life in France,

although he retained his Italian passport throughout his life and considered himself Italian. Jean Sperati and his brothers worked in Turin for a time, probably with Oneglia. Some believe Sperati did his first forging for Oneglia. While there is no concrete evidence to link Oneglia and the Sperati brothers, there is enough circumstantial detail to suggest a relationship. Sperati is regarded as the most technically proficient forger of his day, if not of all time.

The Oneglia Confederate Forgery

Most collectors are unaware of the sole Confederate stamp produced by Erasmo Oneglia, the engraved 2¢ brown-red Andrew Jackson (CSA 8). It is coveted by collectors of fakes and forgeries. Some attribute this forgery to Panelli or to Oneglia and Panelli jointly, but prevailing wisdom is that it was solely Oneglia.

To experienced students, this creation is easily recognized as a fraud. Nonetheless, it is often offered as genuine by less well-versed collectors or dealers. As an Italian product made more than a century ago, it is seldom seen in the United States. But with the advent of the internet, this has changed, as the market has widened through eBay and other online sources.

A number of years ago, I bought a large lot of fakes at auction that I had viewed at a show prior to the sale. I wanted the lot mainly because, at that time, I did not own an Oneglia. I won the lot, but when I received it, the Oneglia was not there. I was not happy. I told the auctioneer who, to my great surprise, gave me a partial refund. I had told him – not to get a refund – but so he could check his records of those who viewed the large lot, in case he could put two and two together to take precautions against a light-fingered individual in the future. As a former auctioneer, I have been on the other side. Trying to keep the bad characters at bay during lot viewing is not easy. I do know of some ne'er-do-wells who have been caught at that game, but not often.

Figure 1 shows this well-executed engraved forgery. It is most easily detected by the faulty treatment of Andrew Jackson's eyes and lips, as well as from differences in the ornaments and scrolls.

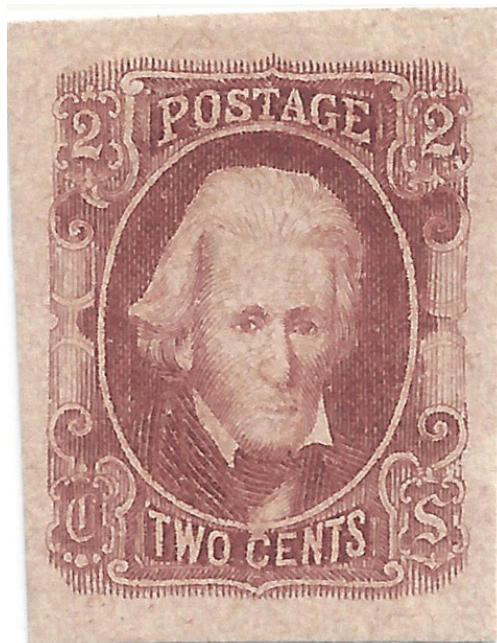


Figure 1. An Oneglia engraved reproduction of 2¢ brown-red Andrew Jackson, uncanceled.

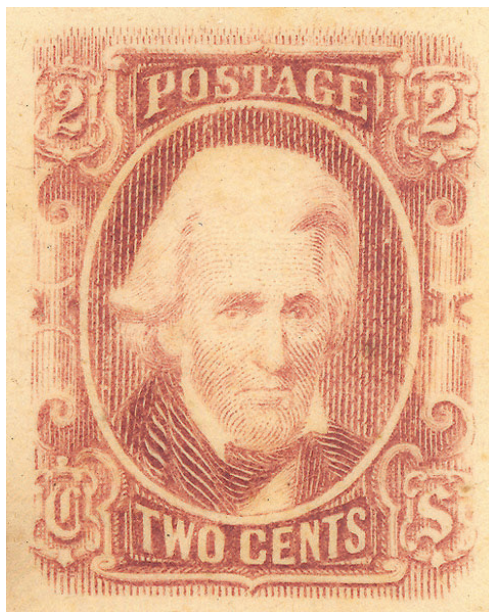


Figure 2. Genuine 2¢ brown-red Andrew Jackson, CSA 8-v6, second printing, with double transfer in left "2" and vertical lines at top.



Figure 3. Genuine 2¢ pale red Andrew Jackson (CSA 8a, First Printing).



Figure 4. Oneglia 2¢ Andrew Jackson, canceled with a circle of wedges or “flower” cancel.

Figure 2 shows the genuine CSA 8 for comparison. Figure 3 shows a genuine CSA 8a, the first printing in pale red, most easily distinguished by its chalky appearance and less-sharp impression.

Some of the noticeable differences between the genuine and the forgery are as follows:

Oneglia’s treatment of Jackson’s eyes is strikingly different from the genuine. On the genuine, Jackson’s eyes appear to be looking directly at the viewer. On the forgery, Jackson appears to be looking into the distance. The eyebrows are also substantially different.



Figure 5. Oneglia forgery of a U.S. 24¢ 1869 pictorial issue (Scott 130) with the same circle of wedges cancel used on the 2¢ Andrew Jackson shown in Figure 4.



Figure 6. Oneglia 2¢ Andrew Jackson canceled with a bar cancel.

Oneglia's lips curve slightly up or straight across instead of slightly down, as on the genuine.

On the genuine stamp, the ornamentation in the lower-left corner has one pearl on the bottom of the genuine stamp, but three pearls on the forgery.

Most of the letters and numbers on Oneglia's reproduction are thinner, such as the "2" at the top corners, and the "C" and "S" at the bottom corners.

The Oneglia red ink is a noticeably darker shade than on the genuine.

The Oneglia impression is sharper in virtually all aspects than on most genuine stamps, particularly the genuine 2¢ pale red, which often has a washed-out appearance.

Oneglia products usually have very large margins not often seen on the more tightly spaced genuine printings. Some speculate this may be an indication they were printed one at a time.

Oneglia produced both canceled and uncanceled versions of the 2¢ Jackson. Figure 4 shows a 2¢ Jackson canceled with a circle of wedges or "flower" cancel. This same cancel is seen on numerous Oneglia forgeries, as shown in Figure 5 on a forgery of the U.S. 24¢ 1869 pictorial issue (Scott 130). It is also found on forgeries of stamps from Turks Island, Swaziland, St. Vincent, Faridkot State (Punjab, India) and many more. This is not the only cancel used on these forgeries. The most often encountered seem to be simple bar cancels, such as seen in Figure 6. Sometimes the bar cancels have numerals or letters incorporated; this cancel was used on Oneglia forgeries of many countries. The Figure 6 example is a browner shade than most and with smaller margins than often seen, but otherwise has all the classic characteristics of the forgery.

Lest you think that such forgeries seem very early, note that by 1863 – at the height of the American Civil War – forgeries and fantasies were so common that Thornton Lewes and Edward Pemberton published the book *Forged Stamps: How to Detect Them*. S. Allan Taylor, the most

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notorious member of what came to be known as the “Boston Gang,” is said to have first offered his products as early as 1862. Taylor is far more well known to Confederate collectors than Oneglia.

Oneglia forgeries appear to be relatively rare, much scarcer than the products of others such as Philip Spiro (Hamburg, Germany) who literally swamped the stamp trade with millions of forgeries, all lithographed, beginning around 1864. Pushback from the legitimate market came in the form of *Album Weeds: How to Detect Forged Stamps*, published in 1882 by Rev. R.B. Earée. This helped to stem the tide of forgeries. Spiro’s production ceased in the 1880s, as opinions against the selling of forged stamps strengthened.

Fakes and forgeries can be very popular as a collecting interest. It is one of mine. Truly scarce forgeries can sell for more than the stamps imitated. Most recognize Sperati reproductions as examples of that reality. Oneglia’s work is another.

In 2010, Schuyler Rumsey offered an Oneglia lot from the Carl Walske Collection of Fakes and Forgeries in his Sale 36 as Lot 70. It was described, in brief, as “*Worldwide Erasmo Oneglia Lithographed and Engraved Forgery Collection. Well over 600 items arranged by country on stock pages in two albums... a remarkable holding of these truly scarce forgeries.*” Including the 15% buyer premium, it sold for \$7,762.50.

References:

Peter W. W. Powell, John L. Kimbrough, *Confederate States of America, Philatelic Fakes, Forgeries and Fantasies of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, 2015. The current gold-standard reference on fraudulent Confederate philatelic material. Full color, with quality oversized side-by-side comparisons.

Varro E. Tyler, *Philatelic Forgers: Their Lives and Works*, First printed in 1975, then revised and published by *Linn’s Stamp News* in 1991. This comprehensive reference work, still important, comprises short biographies and description of forgeries. Tyler wrote a column for *Linn’s* under the title “Focus on Forgeries,” which was also published later by *Linn’s* as a book. Dr. “Tip” Tyler (1926-2001) was chair of the American Philatelic Society Committee on Fakes and Forgeries from 1992-98.

W. Dudley Atlee, Edward Loines Pemberton and Robert Brisco Earée, “The Spud Papers or Notes on Philatelic Weeds,” was a series of articles in various publications between 1871-81.

R.B. Earée, *Album Weeds: How to Detect Forged Stamps*. One of the best world guides to stamp forgeries ever written, although many more bogus stamps have been since identified. First published in 1882, a second edition was printed in 1892, and the last and most complete edition in 1906. An eight-volume reprint was produced in 1950, as it is in the public domain in the United States and has been reprinted numerous times since.

Robson Lowe and Carl Walske, *The Work of Jean de Sperati II Including Previously Unlisted Forgeries*. Royal Philatelic Society London (2001).

Robson Lowe and Carl Walske, *The Oneglia Engraved Forgeries, Commonly Attributed to Angelo Panelli* (1996).

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