

**NEW DISCOVERY:  
A LOEWENBERG-STYLE DECAL USED ON A COVER**

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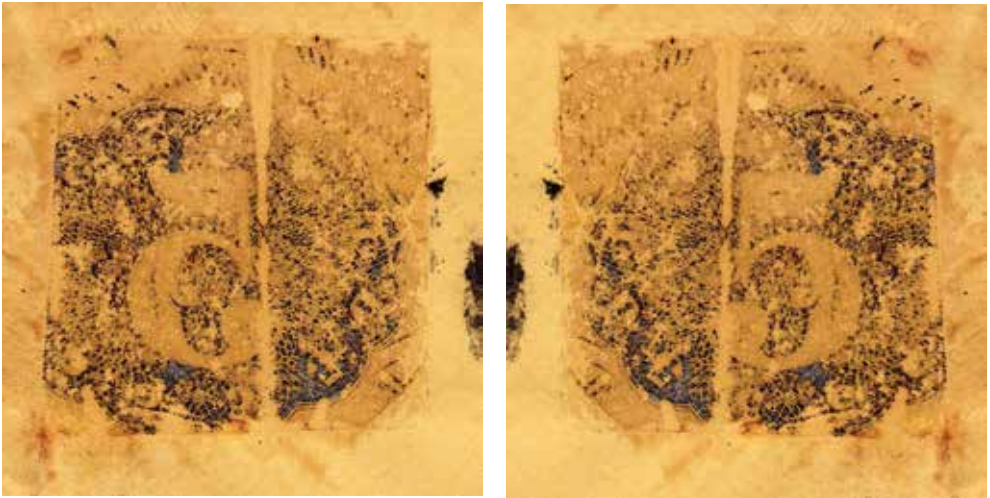
Illustrated in Figure 1 is a reversed “5” decal affixed to a cover. This envelope, bearing a manuscript “Due 6” rating notation and addressed to Belleville, Pennsylvania, apparently passed through the mails with no postal indication of origin. As will be shown below, the numeral of the decal and the field that surrounds it employs a portion of an American Bank Note Company (ABNC) design from the reverse of a United States Postage Currency note. And the construction of the decal seems based on methodology described in a patent issued to Henry Loewenberg in 1863. Loewenberg was an entrepreneur and an inventor who worked with New York’s Bank Note printers in the mid-1860s in attempt to create postage stamps that could not be reused.

I found this intriguing cover while examining an unpicked lot of Mifflin County (Pennsylvania) correspondence acquired from a longtime dealer of central Pennsylvania postal history. The thick yellow paper envelope, roughly sliced open at right, measures around 3 by 5½ inches and has no postal markings to determine where it might have entered the mails. There are no markings on the reverse either. The envelope is addressed to “Mrs. A.E. McDonald, Belleville, Mifflin Co., Pa” and lacks any content. The black manuscript “Due 6” marking appears to be in a different hand (and in darker ink) than the address.

The decal affixed at upper left is printed in black ink and cut to shape (26 x 26 mm) with a central reversed numeral 5 (12 x 8 mm) surrounded by 12 smaller 5’s (2.2 mm high), all within a scallop-edged engraved lathe-worked field. The enlargements in Figure 2 show these features more clearly. The left image in Figure 2 is a blow-up of the decal. At right in Figure 2 is a mirror-image of the same scan, which shows the decal in reverse. The black-



**Figure 1. Stampless cover to Belleville, Pennsylvania, with no postal markings other than the manuscript Due 6. Affixed at upper left is a Loewenberg-style decal showing a reverse numeral 5.**



**Figure 2. Enlargements of the decal from the Figure 1 cover. The decal is shown at left. The image at right is a digitally-created mirror image, showing the numeral and its surrounding elements more accessibly. The design was printed on the gummed side of a transparent, film-like paper. Removing the film leaves the design on the cover.**

inked design of the cut-to-shape decal is affixed to the envelope by a gum-like substance, with remnants on the envelope (along with what appear to be fingerprints).

### **Henry Loewenberg**

A thorough description of Loewenberg and the stamp essays he created was published by Jan Hofmeyr in *Chronicle* 261.<sup>1</sup> Hofmeyr told how Loewenberg was issued patent 40,489 on 3 November 1863, for a “Process for transferring prints &c.” The decal in Figures 1 and 2 closely resembles the device described in Loewenberg’s patent, which Hofmeyr described as follows:

**The main features of patent 40,489 are a method to render paper or linen transparent by the application of resinous gum, camphor, beeswax, benzene, turpentine or other similar substances; printing of a “non-reversed” design on the back of the transparent paper/linen substrate; and then gumming over the printed design. The idea was that the rendering material would soak into the paper or linen, making it transparent and relatively impenetrable by ink. Printing a design onto the back and gumming over the print would sandwich the design between the surface and the gum. When separated, the design would be inclined to stay with the gum. This would transfer the print to the surface to which the decal had been applied.**

Close inspection of the discovery item in Figure 1 shows that it matches the process described in Patent 40,489, whereby a printed design (the decal) is transferred to a surface (the cover), affixed with a gum-like substance. In fact, in his patent, Loewenberg even argued that it could be used for bank notes. Bank notes need to be tamper-proof. A currency decal stuck to treasury paper would be the denomination visible through the paper and the paper would protect the design from tampering.

This new discovery resembles the earliest known Loewenberg decal, which was found stuck to the back of 23 March 1863 letter that James MacDonough of the National Bank Note Company (NBNC) sent to Anthony Zevely, Third Assistant Postmaster General of the U.S. Post Office Department, in charge of stamp acquisition. Figure 3 illustrates this vertical block of 8, which was illustrated and discussed in Hofmeyr’s article and is reproduced here with his permission. In the letter to which it was affixed, MacDonough told Zevely that NBNC had a new idea for creating stamps that could not be cleaned and reused.



**Figure 3.** The earliest known Loewenberg decal. This vertical block of eight was originally stuck to the back of a 23 March 1863 letter from James MacDonough of the National Bank Note Company to Third Assistant Postmaster General Andrew Zevely, mentioning that NBNC was experimenting with a new idea for creating stamps that could not be cleaned and reused. At lower left, the film-like surface on which these trial designs were printed has been pulled off the paper to which it was affixed, showing how the stamp design adheres to the paper after the surface on which it was printed is removed.

MacDonough wrote that they are experimenting with printing the stamps “on a transparent paper, chemically prepared, gum[med] on the printed side, [so that] when they are fastened upon an envelope the paper may be removed but the ink leaves the paper...”

I then began to seek the source of the large central 5 surrounded by twelve smaller 5’s within a scallop-edged design. I employed a three-pronged approach: searching my philatelic library, using Google’s Image Search for matching designs, and corresponding with postal history colleagues. To my delight, I was able to find the source of the decal design in the “Postage Currency” section of the Scott specialized catalog. Figure 4 illustrates both sides of the note that Scott catalogs as PC1.

The background here is: On July 17, 1862 Congress authorized the issue of Postage Currency. This was not quite currency, but a means of making stamps negotiable during an era (1861-62) when small coins had disappeared from circulation due to hoarding. Postage currency was redeemable in stamps at post offices and for U.S. greenbacks in quantities of \$5 or more. The catalog and the notes themselves indicate that NBNC engraved and printed the fronts and ABNC the backs. How that was achieved is a question that need not concern us here, but the joint venture indicates how closely these two competitors collaborated to meet wartime needs.



**Figure 4.** Both sides of the Postage Currency note that Scott catalogs as PC1. The front shows the then-current 5¢ Jefferson postage stamp. The reverse, printed by the American Bank Note Company (note their ornamental logo at lower right) shows a large numeral 5, surrounded by twelve smaller 5’s within a scallop-edged ornamental lathework design.



Figure 5 shows the digitally flipped decal from cover and the central numeral from the ABNC-created reverse of the Postage Currency scrip shown in Figure 4. They are an exact match, from the scallop-edged engraved backdrop to the surrounding words. Green circles highlight the most distinctive matches outside of the engraved numeral: the word “for”; the “Trea” from “Treasurer”; and “ble” from “Receivable.”

In his *Chronicle* article Hofmeyr pointed out another MacDonough-Zevely letter from the Brazer-Finkleburg archive. This one is dated 28 November 1863, and it revealed a lot. Multiple NBNC experiments with Loewenberg’s concepts had not gone well. Loewenberg abandoned the results half-finished from lack of progress and support by the NBNC, and he began shopping his process to NBNC competitors. It is likely he first approached the Continental Bank Note Company but no resultant essays have surfaced. Subsequently, he approached ABNC. How do we know this? In 2016, Hofmeyr discovered an engraved Loewenberg decal created from the same ABNC die as an uncatalogued variety of Scott 65-E7A.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 5. At left: enlarged mirror image of the cover decal (see Figures 1 and 2) with salient design elements encircled in green. At right, a close-up of the comparable portion of the Postage Currency note engraved and printed by ABNC (see Figure 4). The designs are identical. The green circles highlight duplicated elements, confirming the match: the word “for”; “Trea” from Treasurer; and “ble” from Receivable.**

MacDonough argued in the November 28 letter to Zevely that Loewenberg’s stamps would not survive normal postal handling (due to hard transparent paper to which plate ink would not adhere) and that sheets of the stamps would stick together in warm weather. It is at least conceivable that while Loewenberg’s method was being tested at ABNC, the experimenters sought to send a test decal through the mails. The Figure 1 cover lends support to this theory, but it raises more questions. Why is there no circular datestamp or other indication of origin? Where was it posted? Who mailed the cover? Was it sent as a favor? If the letter held contents, were there instructions telling the recipient what to do with the cover upon receipt? Was it returned to the sender to examine how the test decal fared in the mail stream? And just when was the decal applied?

We may never have satisfactory answers to all these questions. However, as far as “When it was applied?” an argument can be made that the cover and “test decal” shows the marks of something that was put on the letter a very long time ago (the rough manner in which it was applied; with what appears to be the original gum; and the staining). Additionally, the Due 6 manuscript marking is informative. Domestic U.S. postal rates became 3¢ per ½ ounce on 1 July 1863. If a cover was sent unpaid, the fee (penalty rate) was 6¢ per ½ ounce. By regulation, postage stamps were to be positioned in the upper right corner of an envelope, so that they could

be easily canceled. Placing this test decal in the upper left corner suggests forethought and an intention to avoid a canceling device. The sender may have only wanted to establish how the decal would fare under routine postal handling in the mail stream. The sender would also have known that the recipient would be required to pay the penalty rate (6¢) to obtain the cover from the Belleville post office. It would be helpful to locate another contemporary cover arriving in Belleville that exhibits a Due 6 marking in a similar hand.

Rigorous attempts to locate information about the addressee, Ann Eliza Addams Beaver McDonald (1812-1890) that might connect her to personnel at the bank note printers or at the Post Office Department, were unsuccessful. Additional research might uncover a connection.

After an initial false start, in 2023 I submitted the cover for examination by the Philatelic Foundation. The PF reviewed my hypothesis and assessed the cover, the residual adhesive and several Loewenberg decals available to them, using various analytical techniques and devices at their disposal. This included the Video Spectral Comparator 6000 (VSC6000), a non-destructive analytical device that provides great magnification under a variety of light sources (oblique side lighting, ultraviolet and fluorescence) to analyze the cover, residual adhesive and ink. X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XFR), another non-destructive analytical technique, was used to determine the elemental composition of paper and gum materials. In December 2023, the PF issued its certificate 557,941, inscribed as follows: “Loewenberg ‘test’ decalomania essay on cover to Belleville, Pa., ms. ‘Due 6’ at upper right. We are of the opinion that it is genuine, the image is the design from the reverse of PC1, the gum is scientifically matched to the Loewenberg decal. It was not recognized as postage and was charged 6¢ postage due.”

Assigning a specific date to the Figure 1 cover is difficult, but we can make a plausible estimate, based on surrounding events. The ABNC-engraved design on the reverse of the PC1 note ceased being used on postage currency in late May 1863. The Due 6 marking suggests the cover entered the mailstream sometime after July 1, 1863. Loewenberg’s “gum printed over a design” patent was issued on 3 November 1863 and the MacDonough to Zev-ely letter suggests Loewenberg began shopping his process to NBNC competitors around November 28. Thus, it is most plausible that the letter with the decal affixed was mailed in late 1863 or early 1864—around the time that Loewenberg was contracting with the U.S. Treasury to produce one million 2¢ Bank Check stamps.<sup>3</sup>

### Conclusion and acknowledgements

This article has described the discovery of a Loewenberg-style decal affixed to a cover sent through the mails on a Due 6 unpaid envelope. This new decal utilizes a portion of the ABNCs engraved design found on the reverse of the Scott PC1 postage currency note and physically matches the process described in Patent 40,489, whereby a printed design (the decal) is transferred to a surface (the cover), adhering with the gum-like substance. Significantly, this resembles the earliest known Loewenberg decal. The probable period of use is late 1863 or early 1864.

I urge readers to check their holdings for a similar items, and I would welcome input from others on this subject. Thanks to Jannie Hofmeyr and James E. Lee for their critical review of the manuscript and insights on Henry Loewenberg, his patents, processes and decal production. Any errors or omissions are my responsibility. I can be contacted at charlesdicomo@gmail.com.

### Endnotes

1. Jan Hofmeyr, “What the Brazer-Finkelburg Archive Tells Us About the Loewenberg Essays,” *Chronicle* 261 (February 2019), pp. 60-69.

2. *Ibid.*, pg. 63.

3. *Ibid.*, pg. 66. ■