

37Pc versus 45P4

Every so often, one is offered altered proofs of the 1875 Continental Bank Note Company reprints as either issued stamps or the very expensive unissued imperforate “stamps” (now 37Pc, 38Pa and 39Pa, but formerly known as 37c, 38a and 39a) printed by Toppan, Carpenter and Company.

Recently I had on my desk a genuine 37Pc and a skillfully shaved and fraudulently gummed 45P4 card plate proof. In the 2006 Scott Specialized Catalogue, a genuine 37Pc catalogs \$1,500.00, while 45P4 catalogs \$50.00, and needless to say, an altered 45P4 is virtually without retail value.

This article deals specifically with the 24¢ 1860 design, but the lessons to be learned can also be applied to altered proofs masquerading as rare and expensive items.



Figure A: 37Pc proof on stamp paper is on left and 45P4 is on right.

The original scans were taken at 1200 x 1200 dpi on a scanner with an actual resolution of 600 x 600 dpi. I've had to alter the sizes and resolutions for this article. The figures here are all 600 x 600 dpi, so you may want to print out these pages on a high-quality inkjet printer. If you want to view the pictures better on your screen, maximize the Adobe Reader window and then magnify to 300%.

The first giveaway that the item on the right is a proof of the 1875 reprint is the color. It's blackish violet, a color that wasn't in Toppan, Carpenter's 1860 palette. Yes, there is an 1860 trial color proof listed as violet black, but it just isn't the same color: the violet black is black with a hint of violet in it.

The second distinguishing point is that the 1860 Toppan, Carpenter proofs on stamp paper show "feathering" of the ink, as with the issued stamps. The 1875 Continental proofs are much more clearly printed. Here is one example:



Figure B: The face. 37Pc proof on stamp paper is on left and 45P4 is on right.

Notice the hair detail in particular and see how much clearer the thicker lines are. Next, look at the shading of the collar: the 1875 proof shows much more regular white spots. Finally, look at the cross-hatched background. On the 37Pc, the lines are about as fuzzy as one sees on most Scott 75 (5¢ red brown 1862), while on the 45P4 they're almost as regular as what you see on Scott 76 (5¢ brown 1863).



Figure B: Lettering and lathe-work.
37Pc proof on stamp paper is on left and 45P4 is on right.

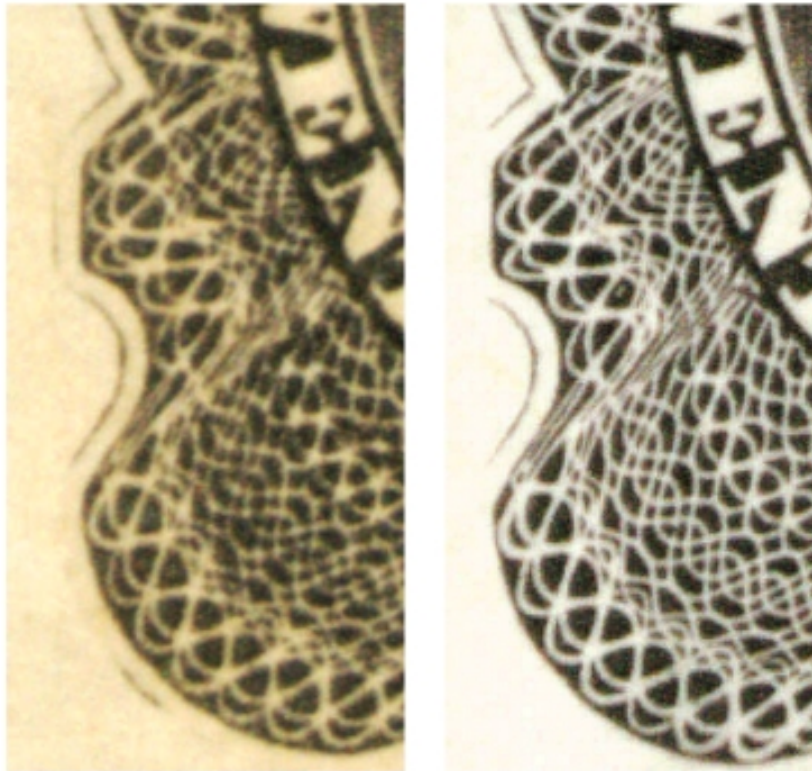
The lack of clarity of 37Pc is quite apparent in the lathe-work around the letter encircled vignette. In particular, notice how even the white lines are in the 45P4, while how irregular they are in the 37Pc.

The serifs in the lettering are all quite sharp and clear in the 45P4, but they're somewhat mushy in the 37Pc.

Notice how the periods look just a bit larger in the 45P4 and smaller in the 37Pc. This is due to the ink "feathering" into the colorless space of the periods. Also, look at the box with the colorless rectangle in the middle. That central colorless rectangle appears slightly larger on the 45P4 and seems to have more square corners. Again, this is due to the "feathering" effect.

Once again, you can see how much sharper and more regular the cross-hatched lines are in the vignette background.

Finally, note how sharp the demarcation line between the lettering and the lathe-work is on the 45P4. Especially, look at how mushy the edge between the "G" and "E" appears on the 37Pc, while how sharp and regular it appears on the 45P4.



**Figure C: Lower left corner.
37Pc proof on stamp paper is on left and 45P4 is on right.**

Here's another interesting phenomenon I've noticed. Unfortunately, it's not diagnostic, but rather can hint to you that you're looking at an altered proof.

All the 37Pc's apparently were printed *before* the 1860 stamps. Thus, it was a brand-new plate showing no trace of wear. The fine line encircling the whole design didn't transfer very well and it seems to have worn rapidly. The 45P4's were printed from the original plate, but obviously *after* the plate had produced the full run of the 1860 issue. Lester Brookman, in *The United States Postage Stamps of the 19th Century*, estimates that 750,000 of the 1860 24¢ stamps were issued. This translates to 3,750 impressions. Thus, the plate was somewhat worn.

Notice how relatively more complete that thin, encircling line is on the 37Pc, while much more of it is gone on the 45P4. In particular, the line around the lower left lobe is nearly completely gone on the 45P4.

As luck would have it, the alterations on the 45P4 I used for this article were extremely skillful. Usually, a skinned proof shows "thicks" and "thins" in watermark fluid, due to uneven skinning. Whoever skinned this particular proof was a master, as it shows as almost perfectly even in watermark fluid. Also, the gum posthumously added was done skillfully. It almost looks like the original gum one encounters on the 1851 Eagle Carrier stamps (Scott LO2). But by the time the 1860 stamps were printed, the gum used was somewhat more yellow.