

Busted! Forged Control Handstamps on Bill of Lading and Large Insurance Stamps



Orange-vermilion



Brick red



Carmine-lake



Vermilion on white paper



According to Kenyon (1920), on red stamps, whether Exchange, Bill of Lading or large Insurance, the “GWW” controls are found **only** on stamps in the distinct shade he called **orange-vermilion**. (To this I would add Passenger stamps.)

“ARM” plain also comes **only** on **orange-vermilion**.

“ARM” fancy comes **only** on **brick red**.

“SHB” comes on **brick red**, **carmine-lake** and **vermilion on white**.

This is **confirmed** by my exhaustive analysis of the deliveries and daily sales, and the on-document evidence (**California Bill of Lading and Large Insurance Revenue Stamps of 1858–1861. I. Identifying and Dating the Four Printings. II. Pricing the Four Printings.** (<http://www.revenuer.org/articles.html>)).



Sorry, anything else is a priori phony!



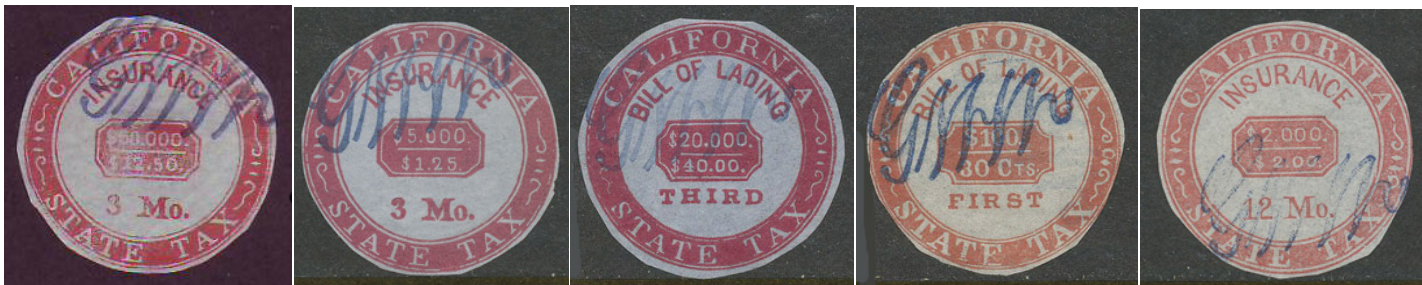
Therefore these “GWW” stamps in **carmine-lake** or something like it (but certainly not orange-vermilion) are a **a priori phony!** No stamps in this shade were ever delivered to G. W. Whitman!! If the stamps are good, the **handstamps** must be **forged**.



That means I must also suspect the similar handstamps here on the orange-vermilion here, where the color is at least correct.

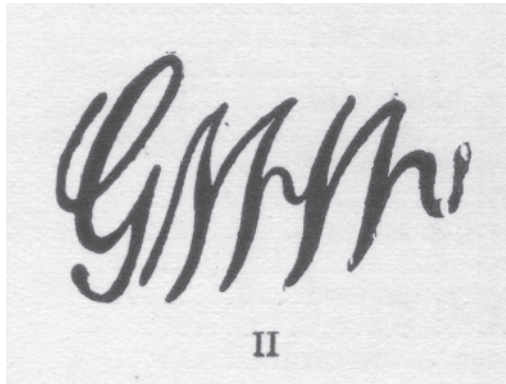


I have on hand about 35 “GWW” stamps **on document** (and one off, the blue Passenger!), on attorney, b/l, exchange, insurance and passenger documents. Here a representative array. To my eye none have the “fat” look of the five below.

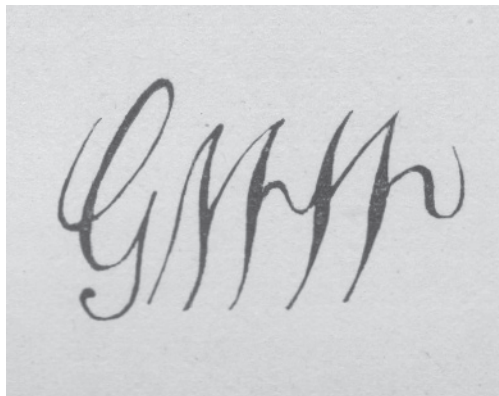


My working hypothesis was that this is a skillfully made forgery. Of course I am not an impartial observer; if these three stamps and controls are genuine, all my analysis (and Kenyon’s observations) are wrong! But I didn’t think I was wrong.

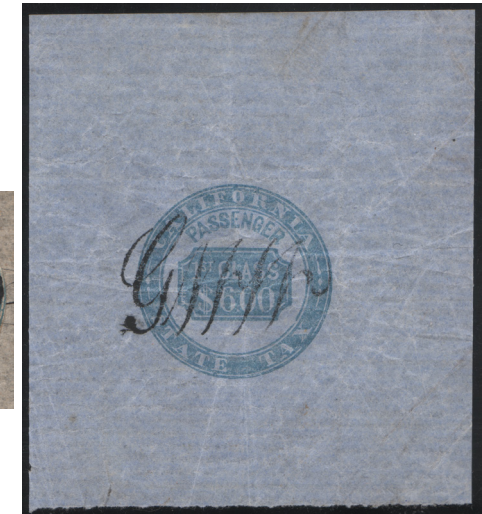
The “Aha!” moment was the realization that the **illustrations** of the “GWW” Type II handstamp in **Kenyon (1920)** and **Cabot (1940)** are **markedly different**, and that **Cabot’s** bears an **uncanny resemblance to the suspect handstamps!**



GWW Cabot



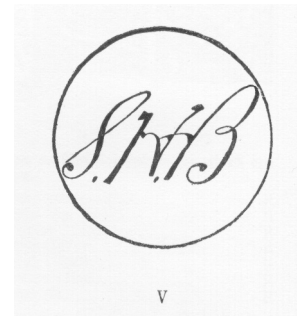
GWW Kenyon



Whereas Kenyon’s illustration, if not perfectly accurate, does have the sharper “spidery” look of the examples on document.

My tentative conclusion is that Cabot had a handstamp made to illustrate his book, and that the **suspect items** are **genuine stamps**, from the find of **unstamped remainders** that surfaced in the 1930s, with **forged handstamped controls** made with Cabot’s handstamp, then **cut to shape** to resemble used stamps.

It gets worse. Consider now the following **star-cut** Insurance stamps:



They look perfect. The stamps are undoubtedly genuine, the surcharges, now not “GWW” but “SHB”, look good, matching those illustrated in Cabot. **Too perfect for my liking,** though: too fresh, too pristine; a used stamp, especially star cut, on this fragile paper, would likely have acquired a few small faults. I was suspicious.

Moreover, the denominations, **6Mo./\$5** and **6Mo./\$10**, raise **red flags**. On **Insurance stamps, star cuts** were listed by Adenaw et al. (1921) and Cabot only on **four stamps: 3Mo./\$1.25, 3Mo./\$2.50** and **6Mo./25¢** on **thin bluish**, and **6Mo./\$2.50** on **white paper**, all “SHB” control. So the “SHB” controls on these two are consistent with past observations, but the chance that **two new genuine denominations** would crop up now seems small.

Even more suspicious, the **6Mo./\$10** is **exceedingly rare**, listed but unpriced in Cabot; my extensive research on the 1858–61 issues shows that only 44 were ever sold, and of the “SHB” in **brick red**, as here, **only 20 were sold** (<http://www.revenuer.org/research/mahler/CA1858-61IIPricing.pdf>).

Another Forged Handstamp!

On a hunch, I checked my **on-document “SHB”** stamps. Here are most of them. For the cognoscenti, two in **brick red** at left; four in **carmine-lake**, all on thin bluish paper; and four in **vermilion on white paper**.

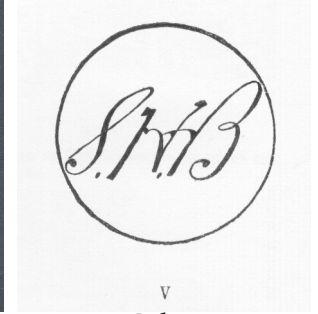


The salient point is that **all have a period after the “B”** of the handstamp; readers can no doubt verify on their own examples.

Yet on the **two star-cut stamps** shown here, and in the **illustration in Cabot**, there is **no period after the “B”!**

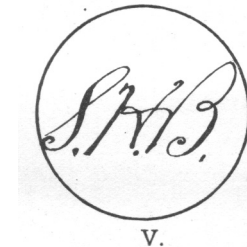
Again the **conclusion is inescapable** that the **handstamp used to make the illustrations in Cabot (1940)** has been **struck on unstamped remainders!**

An **unfortunate corollary** is that the **star cut is also forged!**

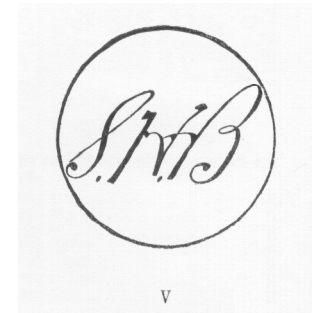


v
Cabot

Parenthetically, both Kenyon (1920, at right) and Adenaw et al. (1921ca) got the illustration right (or at least more right!). On closer inspection, **Cabot got another easily detected detail wrong: the small loop in the horizontal cross-section of the “H”, present in the genuine handstamp and in Kenyon’s reproduction, is missing in Cabot’s, and in the forgeries.**



v.
Kenyon



v
Cabot

The forger was a busy boy. Here are **more “SHB” forgeries**, five culled from the internet.



3Mo./\$12.50



9Mo./37½¢



9Mo./37½¢



9Mo./37½¢



9Mo./75¢



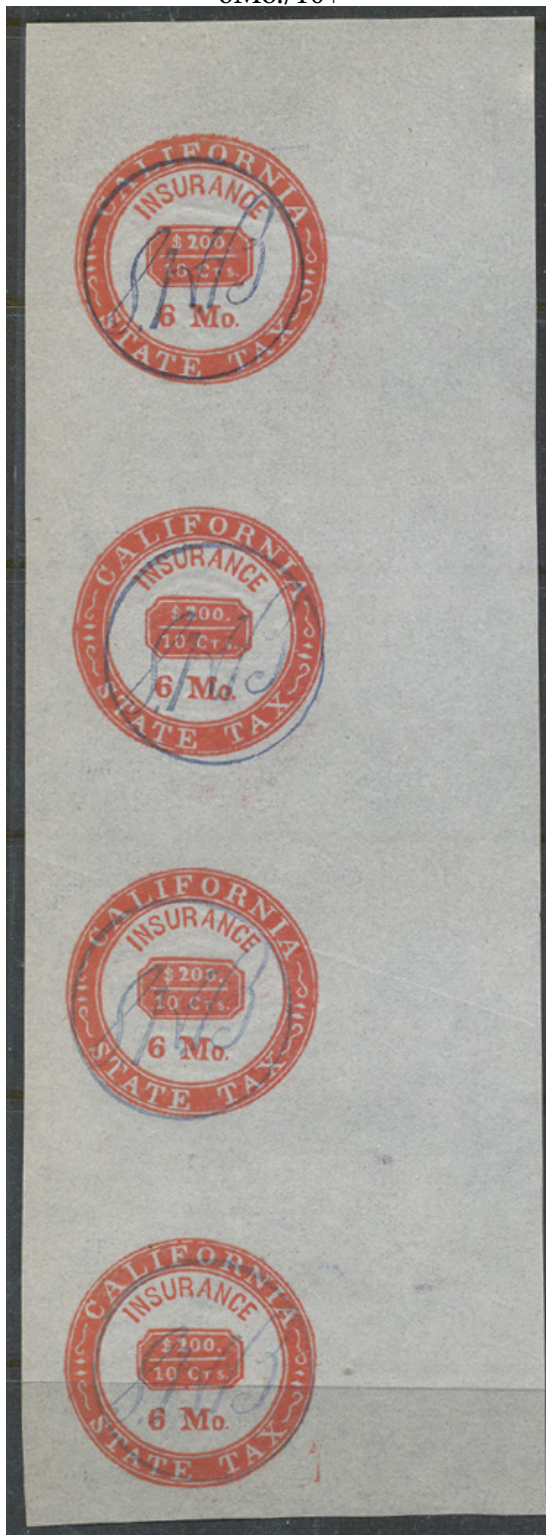
9Mo./75¢

Even absent the dispositive evidence of the forged handstamp, the task of identifying these as forgeries is made easier by the forger’s choice of denominations. **No 3Mo./\$12.50 or 9Mo./37½¢ were ever sold !** (See p. 9 on <http://www.revenuer.org/research/mahler/CA1858-61IIPricing.pdf>). Unstamped **remainders in brick red**, the color of these forgeries, were in fact found, **even examples with genuine “SHB” control**. The best one could have hoped for is that this was another remainder with genuine handstamp. Note though, that **unlike the unsullied remainders**, which are either in **strips or singles with huge margins**, this one was **trimmed by the forger to mimic a used stamp!**

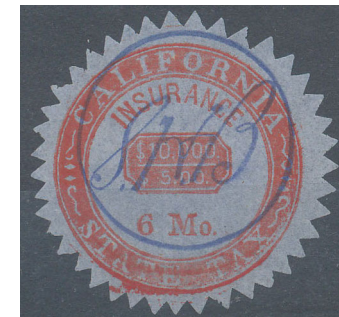
The following page shows **still more “SHB” forgeries** on intact **strips of four**.

3Mo./25¢

6Mo./10¢



The 3Mo./25¢ **denomination is again** suspicious in its own right: of the “SHB” in brick red **only 12 were ever sold**. Let’s reprise. The forger, perhaps aware that his creations will be perceived “only” as rare handstamped remainders, cuts them to shape to mimic stamps actually issued/used. Not content with this second level of deception, he creates a punch to mimic the rare star cuts!

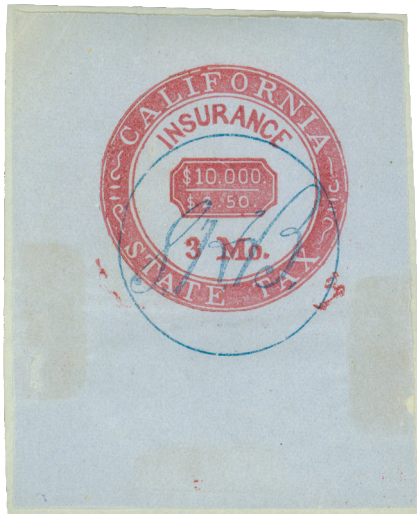


Close examination will probably reveal differences between genuine and forged star punches.

Here is a **critical sidebar**. The **handstamped remainders** in the “Grinnell find” described by Vanderhoof (1941) were **genuine**. I have seen scans of nearly all of these (albeit not the 3Mo./\$12.50 or 9Mo./37½¢), see the examples on this and the following page. The **forgeries** were **concocted from the unstamped remainders**.



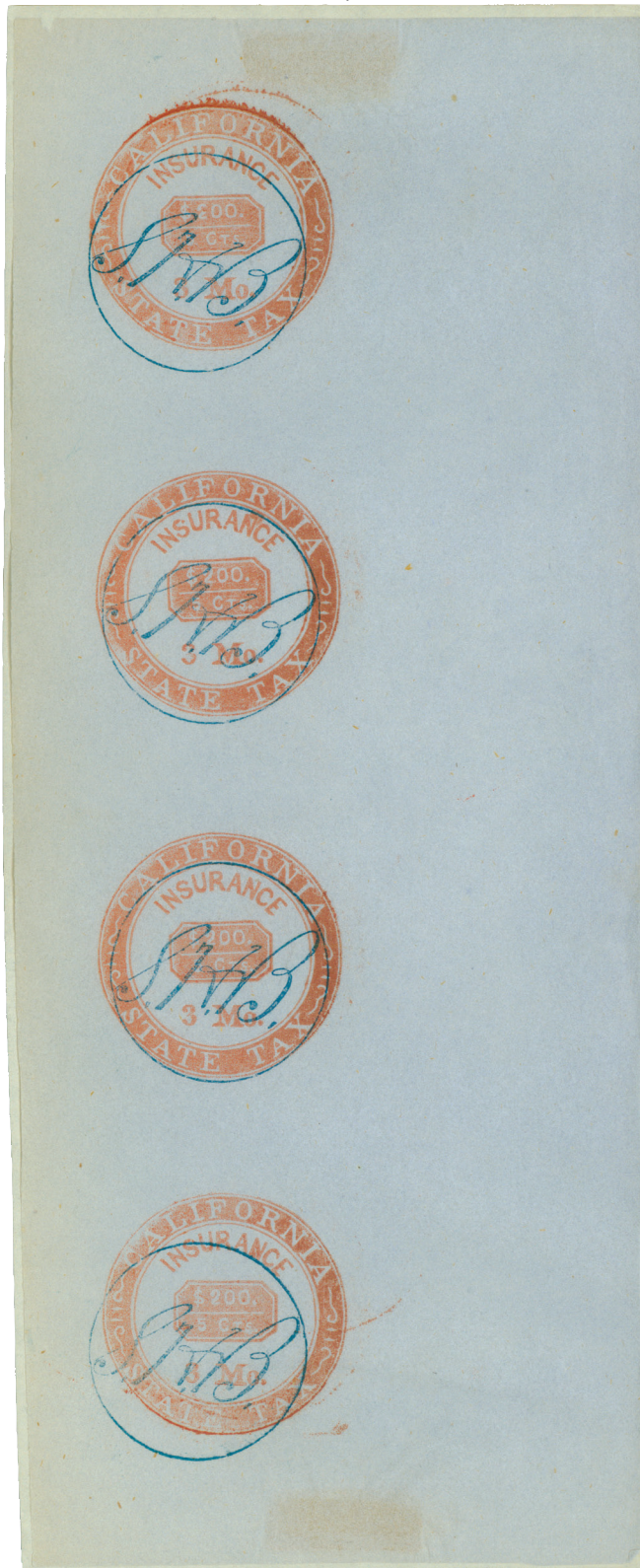
3Mo./5¢



3Mo./\$2.50

Genuine “SHB” handstamped remainders from the “Grinnell find” described by Vanderhoof (1941), showing **period after “B”**.

3Mo./5¢



3Mo./50¢

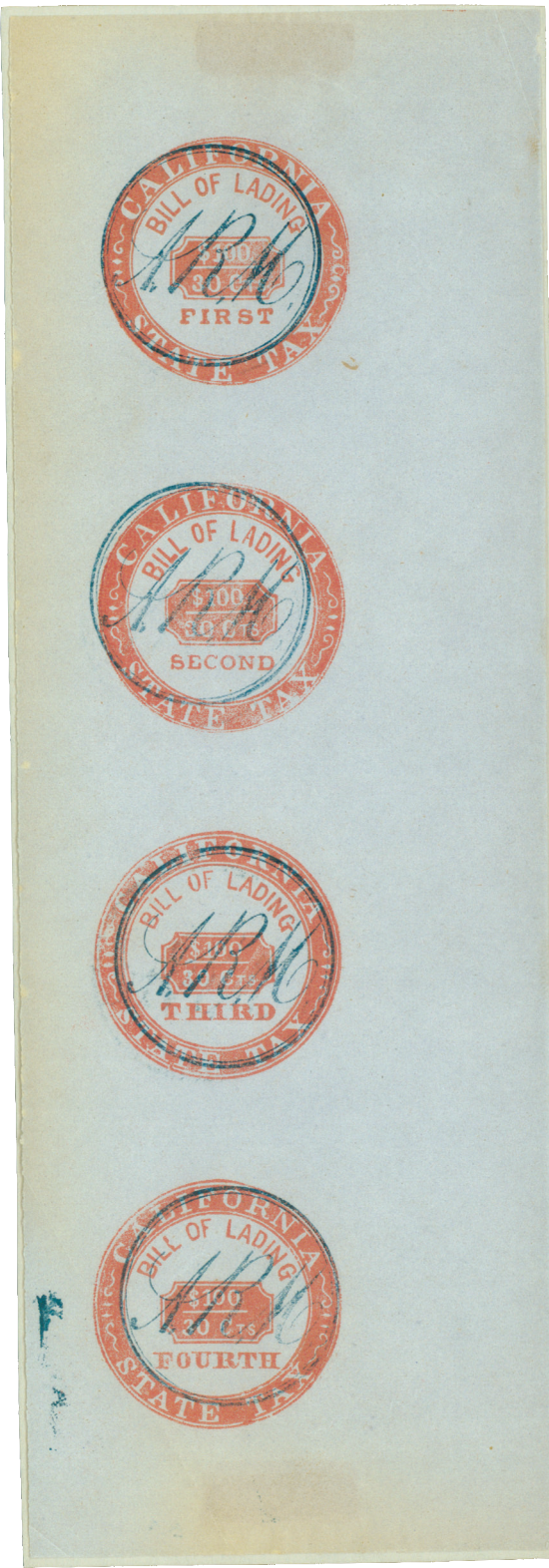


30¢

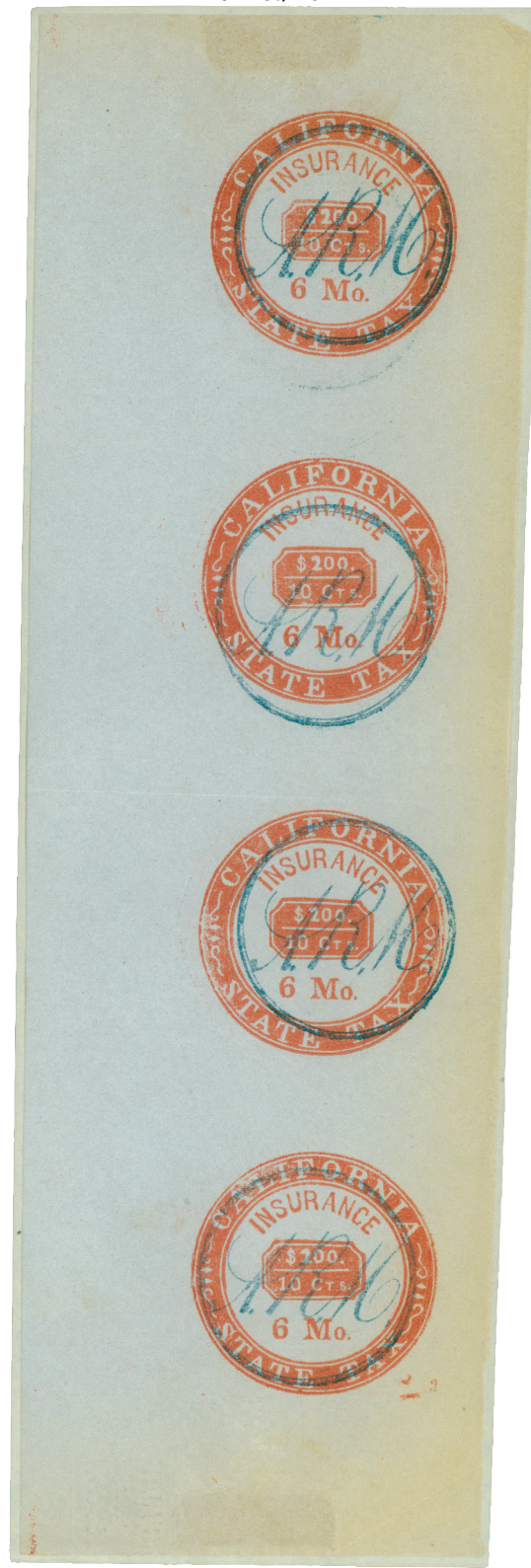
Genuine fancy "ARM" handstamped remainders from the "Grinnell find" described by Vanderhoof (1941), showing period after "R".



6Mo./10¢

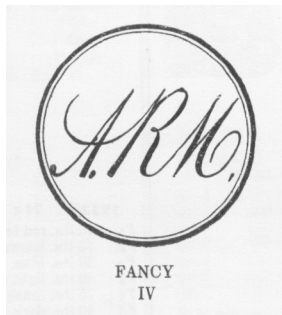


6Mo./10¢



Forged “ARM” Fancy!

Now that the **forger’s method** has been discovered, **detecting more examples** becomes **easier**. The key is to look for **differences** between **genuine control handstamps** and those **illustrated in Cabot**. On examination, another obvious **potential forgery** emerges: on the “ARM” fancy control, the **genuine** has a **period after “R”**, which is **missing in Cabot!** Below an on-document example, and one from the Grinnell find, clearly showing this period.



Cabot



3Mo./25¢



6Mo./10¢



IV.
Kenyon

Again, Kenyon and Adenaw et al. got the illustration more correct, at least in showing the period. When well struck, the **actual period is long and thin, resembling a comma**.

Did the creator of the devices used for the Cabot catalog include “secret marks,” such as missing periods, to enable detection of skullduggery?

Let us now go **searching for forgeries** of the “ARM” fancy control. Where, dear reader, would you start? Call me cynical, but I headed straight for the catalog of the **1991 Superior Stamp & Coin auction of Bert Hubbard’s California holdings**.^{*} In the process of publishing his 1960 state revenue catalog, **Hubbard had acquired the rights to Cabot’s 1940 work**, and a natural presumption is that he also acquired the devices used to create the illustrations therein. Given Bert’s well established reputation for shady dealings, he is certainly a **“person of interest”** in the search for the identity of the forger.

The catalog did not disappoint. Despite the small size and low resolution of the illustrations, I see no fewer than **ten clear examples of forged “ARM” fancy controls**, usually replete with high-flying descriptions and estimates, as well as several more possibles.

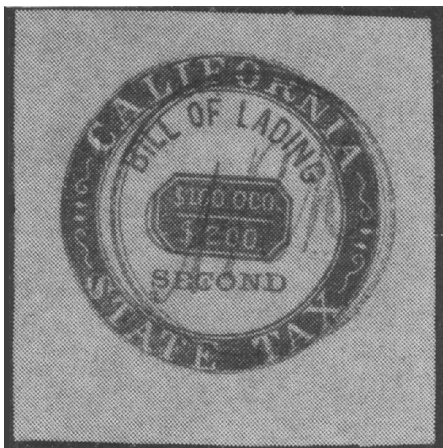


1233

1233. “... the three high values ... **listed but unpriced and of superb quality**.”

[**Only ten sets (of First, Second, Third, Fourth) \$400 “ARM” fancy were ever sold!** These clearly **lack the period after “R”**. Forgeries!]

^{*} Veterans will remember that the fast-talking Bert convinced the staff at Superior, who knew very little about state revenues, to let him provide all the descriptions and estimates; those estimates were roughly five to ten times what the market might bear, in an area in which there was little interest to begin with, as Bert had amassed nearly everything available; virtually no bids came in; Superior realized they had been bamboozled, and aborted the auction.



1244

1244. "\$200 on \$100,000, ... Type IV "BLACK SURCHARGE" ... scarce elusive issue, superb. \$1000"

[Only 31 "ARM" fancy sets were ever sold. No period, forgery!]



1245

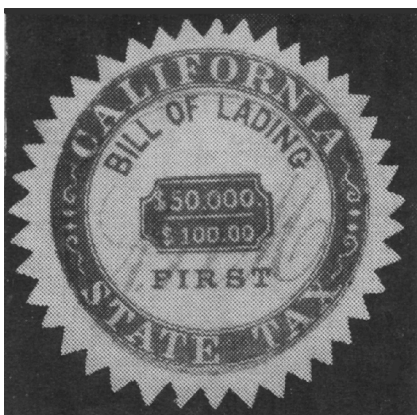
1245. "\$400 on \$200,000, ... Type IV "BLACK SURCHARGE" ... *unlisted and extremely rare*, superb. \$1750"

[Again, **only ten sets of \$400 "ARM" fancy were ever sold!** (Hmm, Adenaw et al. [1921ca] did list it with both blue and black controls, amazing; this was long before the discovery of the remainders.) I see no period here, but one may be present; examination of the actual stamp would settle the issue instantly. Call it a **possible forgery.**]

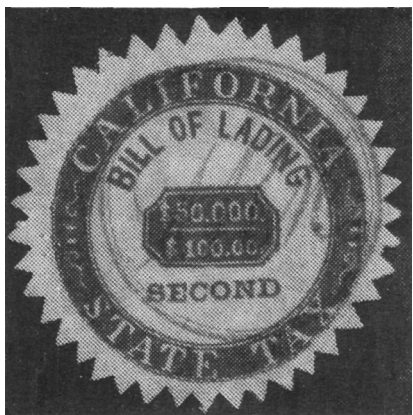
1237. "\$100 on \$50,000, 40 point star cut with Type IV blue surcharge ... extremely fine to superb. \$600"

1243. "\$100 on \$50,000, 40 point star cut with Type IV blue surcharge ... extremely fine. \$700"

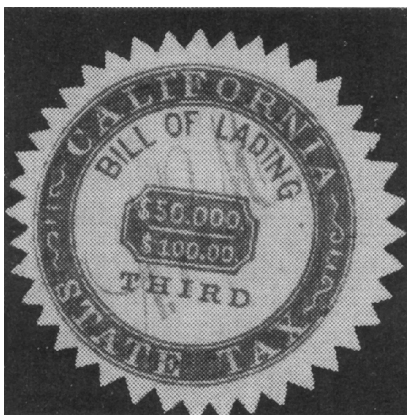
1248. "\$100 on \$50,000, 40 point star cut with Type IV blue surcharge ... very fine. \$600"



1237

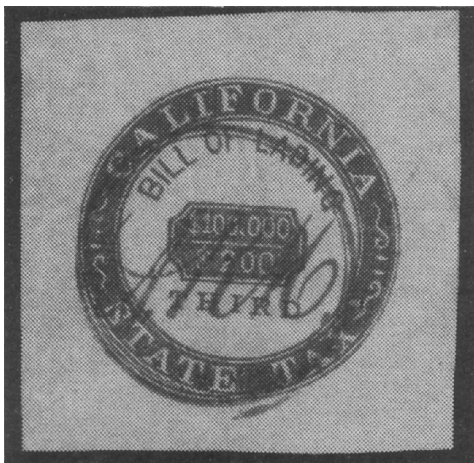


1243



1248

[First (1237) has **no period, forgery!** On 1243 (Second) and 1248 (Third) I see **no period**, but cannot say with certainty one is not present; again, examination of the actual stamps would quickly settle the issue. I conservatively class these as **probable forgeries!** Probably all made from the same strip. **Only 66 "ARM" fancy sets were ever sold**, and the **probability that "perfect" genuine star cuts exist is a priori very small.**]



1249

1249. "\$200 on \$100,000, ... Type IV "Black surcharge" ... extremely rare and unpriced in catalog, superb. \$1200"

[Only 31 "ARM" fancy sets were ever sold. No period, forgery!]



1250

1250. "\$400 on \$200,000, ... Type IV "Black surcharge" ... exceedingly scarce and unpriced in catalog, superb. \$2200"

[Once again, **only ten "ARM" fancy sets were sold.** Wow, in lot 1233 he has it in blue, in 1245 in black, now another in black! **No period, forgery!**]



1452

1452. "\$12.50 tax on \$50,000, ... unlisted value, beautiful fresh copy, *possibly unique*, superb. ECV \$1000-1250"

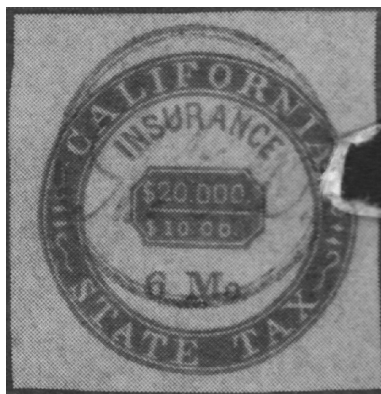
[Unlisted because **no 3Mo./\$12.50 were ever sold! No period, forgery!**]



1474

1474. “50¢ dull orange 40 point star cut with *unlisted Type IV surcharge* ... exceedingly rare and possibly the only existing copy, extremely fine. ECV \$350-500”

[Let’s hope it’s the only one! **No period, forgery! (and another forged star punch)**]



1480

1480. “\$10 orange square cut with Type IV surcharge ... unpriced in catalog, rare high value, extremely fine to superb [defect is in my page, not the stamp]. ECV \$750-1000”

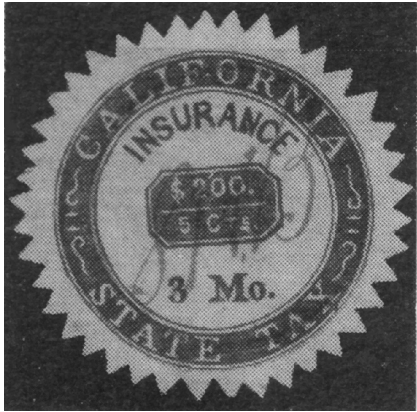
[Not unpriced but **unlisted**, not surprising as **only ten 6Mo./\$10 were sold**. Yet here is one of those ten! Bit hard to make out, but **no period, forgery!**]



1526

1526. “\$20 dark orange ... outstanding copy, unpriced in catalog, superb. CV \$600-800”

[Again, not “unpriced” but **unrecorded**, not surprising as **only 20 12Mo./\$20 “ARM” fancy were sold**. No problem, here’s one! **No period, forgery!**]



1453

Some of the **now-familiar “SHB” forgeries with no period after “B”** were also present:

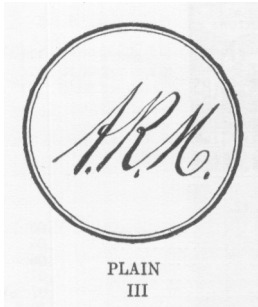
1453. “5¢ deep rose 40 point star cut with Type V surcharge ... an outstanding rarity, only a few known, superb. \$900”

[The 3Mo./5¢ is actually known in some numbers (240 “SHB” were sold in brick red, and 320 in carmine-lake, this “deep rose” is probably the latter), but **no star cuts were known** to Adenaw et al. or Cabot. Want one? No problem, here’s one. Oops, **no period, forgery!**

More to Come?

Since the forger used the devices created to illustrate in Cabot the “GWW” Type II, “ARM” fancy, and “SHB” controls, it is possible that he also availed himself of those for the other two controls found on Bill of Lading and large Insurance stamps, namely the “GWW” Type I and “ARM” plain. For these, forgeries will be harder to detect, as Cabot’s illustrations do not have immediately obvious “red flag” errors as in the other three.

The “ARM” plain, however, does show **small differences** which we can hopefully exploit. In genuine controls (and the illustration in Kenyon), the **upstroke on the “A” has a small curlicue at the start**; in Cabot the **upstroke is shorter** and the **curlicue is missing**. (In other small details Cabot’s illustration is actually more accurate.)



PLAIN
III
Cabot



III.
Kenyon



Let's see how these differences work as a **practical detection tool**, understanding that even on a genuine strike, the longer upstroke and curlicue may be faint or obscured, especially in grayscale.



1223

1223. "\$40 on \$20,000 ... 40 point star cut with Type III black surcharge, tiny tear not affecting this exceedingly rare stamp, *possibly the only known existing copy*, [little heavy on the adjectives!] superb. \$750"

[No \$40 "ARM" plain star cuts were listed by Adenaw et al. or Cabot, let alone with the scarcer black surcharge. At first glance there is a short upstroke, but the tip of a curlicue may be present at edge of the outer band. Too close to call?]



1225

1225. "\$40 on \$20,000 ... 40 point square cut with Type III black surcharge ... very desirable rarity, extremely fine. \$400"

[Again at first glance there is a short upstroke, but even on the genuine strikes the line is very thin here. Hard to make a decision. Not a likely candidate for a forgery; the \$40 is not a rare stamp, even with black surcharge; also it has a fault at top. Probably good?]



1230

1230. "\$40 on \$20,000 ... 40 point square cut with Type III black surcharge ... exceptional quality, superb. \$350"

[Same comments as above; questionable, but probably OK?]

For all of these it would **help greatly** to see the **actual stamps**, not only to better discern the controls, but to see the stamp colors. The **genuine "ARM" plain** was issued or sold **only in orange-vermilion!**

For the present, though, the **existence** of "ARM" plain forgeries remains an open question.

All illustrated “**GW**” controls in the auction, both Types I and II, appear to be **genuine**.

Apart from the forgeries, there is a troubling aspect to many of the descriptions furnished here by Hubbard. There are many **handstamped remainders** offered, **never identified as such!** Hubbard must have—or certainly should have—known what these were. Innocent mistake or willful deception?

As to the forgeries, if Hubbard did not create them, how did he come into possession of so many?

Hopefully this presentation will not be the last word on this sensational topic. A well publicized **reference collection, real or virtual**, of these dangerous and troubling forgeries would be desirable.

I welcome **comments** at **mikemahler1@verizon.net**.