Demystifying the So-Called Stone Y Flaw

By Kevin P. Andersen

Of all the Confederate general issues, it's not particularly pretty to look at. The impressions are rather poor and the detail is mostly absent. Found examples are almost always in used condition.[1]

What is this creature that seems to command a premium purchase price over its cousins? It is listed in catalogs as CSA Scott 2e and CSA Catalog 2-Y, but you probably know it by its more common name: "Stone Y."

It is, perhaps out of all the general issues, the one that is mostly shrouded by mystery. We know very little about this stamp and as such it has been for many years, and continues to be, a source of much discussion, study and intrigue.

I have been fascinated with Stone Y stamps in general and its characteristic so-called stone flaw (hereinafter "Flaw") in particular. The Flaw used to be one of the key identifying characteristics of Stone Y stamps, and is found on the left side of Jefferson's head (his right), about where his ear should be found (Figure 1).

It is a characteristic I saw as a mystery that needed to be solved. I wondered about its origins. Unlike other stone flaws found on some CSA stamps, why does this one appear on so many examples? And finally, is the Flaw really a flaw or is it an intentional part of the stamp's design?

While this article may be an oversimplification of what is known about Stone Y, the basic accepted facts are that it was printed using a different stone than that of the Hoyer & Ludwig or Paterson, but shares some characteristics of both printings.

The current school of thought is that Hoyer & Ludwig did not print from Stone Y. Instead, it is believed to have been used by Paterson.

The bulk of this article is based upon theory, conjecture and statistical comparison, primarily because of the lack of first hand, or primary source information regarding Stone Y.

I have put forth theories that I believe provide clues to unraveling the mysterious so-called Flaw of Stone Y.

There are a number of characteristics that differentiate Stone Y from the other two printings and have been well covered in other articles and catalogs.[2] One of the most glaring but largely misunderstood, characteristics that appears on most examples of Stone Y is the well-known Flaw. This characteristic has been referred to by many names, but all have the term "flaw" in common.

There is a saying in the legal community that "hard cases make for bad law," and such is the case with Stone Y stamps. Its quality of printing is usually so poor as to make any study and suppositions difficult at best (Figure 2.)

It becomes even more difficult to differentiate between that which is a stone characteristic versus a printing characteristic. In order to accurately study this stone, I had to locate good quality prints, if they even existed.

Several years ago I found one such print in a bulk lot of stamps (Figure 1). While the stamp has its condition problems, the quality of printing is excellent. In addition, several examples of printing proofs are known and show not only a high-quality printing, but also a clearly defined Flaw (Figure 3).[3]

The Flaw can be attributed to a characteristic that appeared on a transfer stone, which would explain the reason why so many stamps bear this characteristic. If a Flaw is created because of the printing stone, as opposed to the transfer stone, it will appear on only the stamp(s) directly affected. If the Flaw, however, is replicated on a transfer stone, then the characteristic will be duplicated throughout a series of larger transfer stones until it is ultimately transferred to the printing stone.

The result is that many, or possibly all, stamps will bear the characteristic Flaw.

Unfortunately, we don't have the printing stones to examine because they were reused, recycled, destroyed or otherwise lost to time. Therefore, any study must necessarily be accomplished by examining the finished products—the stamps.

To try to understand the possible origins of Stone Y, I attempted to locate the source of the image, or portrait of Thomas Jefferson, and make comparisons to the stamp.

My working hypothesis was that the design for CSA 2-H (and subsequently CSA 2-P and CSA 2-Y) was not entirely original, but that it was based upon a previously known design. To this end I had to locate images of Jefferson that would have been available to printers of that period and also one with a strong resemblance to that of the CSA stamp.

An Internet search produced several examples of early paintings and engravings of Jefferson, but only two looked promising. The two candidates, while appearing to have all the features and characteristics of the CSA stamp, had one big problem—they were both facing opposite of the CSA stamp.

I used a computer image program to "mirror" the images such that the two images and the stamp were now facing in the same direction. The likenesses were all strikingly similar. The painting was by the famous artist Gilbert Stuart (Figure 4)[4] and the engraving was by Henry Bryan Hall (Figure 5).[5]

Both images would have been available to printers during the Civil War. The engraving was likely taken from Stuart painting.

I next used another computer program to take detailed measurements between predefined points on each of the images (painting, engraving and stamp). I selected the points for measurement by identifying as many readily identifiable reference points from which detailed measurements were made.

A total of 13 lines of measurements (see Figure 6) were made that not only compared the distances between certain features, such as distance between eyes, width of mouth, distance between hairline and other facial points, but also measurements of Jefferson's ear and distance to other facial points, as well as that of the Flaw to the same predefined points.

You see, my other hypothesis, which I now reveal, is that the Flaw is not a flaw, but rather Jefferson's ear.

Once all the measurements were taken from each of the images, the data sets were entered into another computer program used for statistical analysis.

By comparing the relationship between the pairs of measurements in each data set, a linear regression analysis will identify whether there is a relationship, either positive or negative, or that there is no relationship at all.

Positive means that there is a direct relationship between the numbers, e.g., if you double one number, the other also doubles; negative meaning there is an inverse proportionality, e.g., if you double one number, the other number divides in half.

The "r" value, or regression, describes the relationship between the pairs of measurements between the two images being compared. The closer one gets to an r-value of "1," the greater the direct relationship (or similarity); the closer to "0" the less of a relationship; and the closer to "-1" the greater the inverse relationship.

The results of this test revealed the following:

Hall engraving compared to the Stone Y stamp: r = 0.982

Stuart painting compared to the Stone Y stamp: r = 0.985

The regression value for both the painting and the engraving, as compared to stamp, is extremely close to the value of "1." In fact, it is so close as to make the relationship nearly a perfect match. Given artistic license between each of the artists, a value of "1" is not only unlikely, but also unrealistic.

These values tell us that these images all share a common thread. Gilbert Stuart made his portrait from Thomas Jefferson, personally. The Hall engraving, no doubt from Stuart's painting, and the CSA stamp undoubtedly are from either of those sources or a source derived from one of them.

Several measurements were taken of the Flaw and its relative position to other features on the painting and engraving. Again, for purposes of this examination, the Flaw is treated as if it is Jefferson's ear in the design, thus the top and bottom of the Flaw is compared to the measurements of the top and bottom of the ear in the painting and engraving.

Likewise, the distance of specific points on the Flaw are compared to the relative points of the ear in the painting and engraving.

The detail of the ear is more pronounced, or distinct, in the engraving, lending to my belief

Figure 1: A rare good impression of Stone Y. Note that the so-called Flaw is clearly visible, as is the crosshatching around Jefferson's bust.

Figure 2: Stone Y as more typically encountered. The Flaw is, however, barely visible, as are most other details.

Figure 3: A Stone Y proof (CSA 2-Y-TCP)

Figure 4: A detail taken from Jefferson's portrait by Gilbert Stuart.

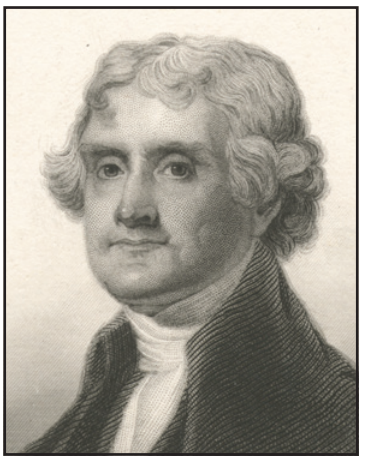

Figure 5: A detail taken from the engraving by Henry Bryan Hall.

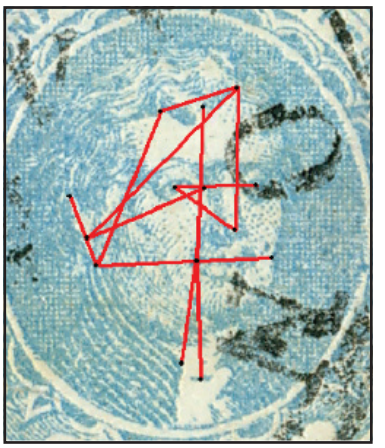

Figure 6: A close-up view of the Stone Y portrait and the 13 lines of measurements. These same points of measurements were also made on the Stuart painting and Hall engraving and compared with the Stone Y stamp.

that the engraving was more likely the source of the stamp's design.

Further tests, which cannot be easily depicted in this article, involved taking the stamp image and making it the base image. I converted the Hall engraving into a second layer that could be manipulated to be more or less translucent. I superimposed the engraving image over top of the stamp image and used Jefferson's eyes and mouth as the line-up points. I then adjusted the translucency such that I could see through the engraving image to the stamp image.

The facial features lined up so accurately that I had little doubt that the engraving, or other image taken directly from the engraving, was the source of the CSA stamp design. Most interestingly, the Flaw on the stamp and Jefferson's ear on the engraving were also in excellent alignment.

What Are the Odds?

The law of probability is a sometimes complex and not-so-exact science. However, there is great value in using the law of probability in the understanding of events and their likelihood of random occurrence.

In this case, I explored the probability that

a flaw of the approximate size as described for Stone Y would occur in any one place at a particular angle with respect to the stamp's design.

I measured the Flaw's area by boxing it into the smallest rectangle within which it would fit, and then measured the overall area occupied by the stamp's design. I then divided the stamp's image into a grid made up of identically sized rectangles and calculated the approximate probability that the Flaw would occur in any one of the positions in the grid. The result was an approximate probability of 1 in 238.

Figure 7: CSA Scott 2-H

Figure 8: U.S. Scott 28

To increase the accuracy, I also took into account that the Flaw might also be found shifted to one of the half-positions, either vertically or horizontally. For the purpose of my analysis, I only calculated the probability of occurrence in each of the grid positions and at each of the half-shifted positions.

Obviously, the Flaw could occur shifted by minute degrees creating a nearly infinite number of possible positions on the stamp, but I was only looking for a rough estimate in these calculations. By accounting for the possible shift between the grid positions and the half-shifted positions (or "in between" positions), the probability decreased to approximately 1 in 714.

To further increase the accuracy of the probability of the Flaw to not only occur in one given point on the stamp, but also calculate that the Flaw will appear at a particular angle, or slant. To account for the Flaw in one particular location, and angled at any one of the 360 possible degrees of angle, I multiplied the probability that the Flaw would occur at any one of the 714 points on the stamp by 360 degrees.

Now we find that the likelihood that the Flaw will occur in one particular point on the stamp and at a particular angle is 1 in 257,040.

This calculation accounts for a flaw that is rectangular in shape. It does not attempt to calculate the probability that the Flaw will take on any other particular irregular shape. Such a calculation would have produced a substantially higher improbability of occurrence.

The bottom line is that the probability that the so-called Flaw would occur precisely where it did on the stamp by random occurrence is less than one chance in a quarter-million!

My theory is that the Flaw did not occur where it did merely by chance, but rather was an intentional part of the design, and more specifically, it is Jefferson's ear.

If the Flaw is not a flaw, but an intentional part of the design, why doesn't it appear on the Hoyer & Ludwig or Paterson stamps?

Perhaps it is found on these other stamps, but it just not as distinct. I examined the CSA H (Hoyer & Ludwig, Figure 7)[6] and found that the artist did, in fact, include Jefferson's ear in the design.

Good impressions clearly show Jefferson's ear precisely where the Flaw appears on Stone Y examples. The problem was that these stamps were printed by stone lithograph and while the detail of such stamps is actually quite remarkable, it doesn't compare with other printing methods such as steel plate printing (Figure 8),[7] which now introduces the next comparison: the United States version of the Jefferson portrait stamp.

Figure 8 depicts U.S. Scott 28, which is strikingly similar to the CSA 2-H. Notice the distinct ear within the engraved issue, and how it compares not only in size and shape, but also position with the CSA 2-H, CSA 2 Stone 2-Y-TCP (proof), the Gilbert Stuart painting and the CSA 2-Y production printing (See Figure 9)!

Figure 9 graphically depicts the height, width and position of Jefferson's ear in relation to the Gilbert Stuart painting, other stamps and the Stone Y stamp.

The red lines depicted are in approximate alignment with height and width of Jefferson's ear. Notice how the Flaw of Stone Y aligns perfectly with Jefferson's ear in all the other examples!

It became abundantly clear to me that I had

Figure 9: Comparison of:
Top row (left to right): CSA 2-H (Hoyer & Ludwig), U.S. Scott 28, CSA 2-H plate proof;
Middle row (left to right): U.S. Scott 28 , CSA 2-H, Gilbert Stuart's painting of Thomas Jefferson;
Bottom row (left to right): CSA 2-H plate proof, Gilbert Stuart's painting of Thomas Jefferson, CSA 2-H (Hoyer & Ludwig).

Notice how the Flaw in Stone Y (center stamp) compares with Jefferson's ear in all the other examples in both size (height and width) and shape.

proven my hypothesis, that the so-called Flaw is not a flaw after all, but rather an intentional part of the design —Jefferson's right ear.

I can hear the question now: "Well, if it is part of the design, why doesn't it appear on all Stone Y examples?"

The answer is simple, and introduces yet another hypothesis of mine: I believe that the ear does appear, or should appear in all positions of Stone Y, but the extremely poor printing quality of the stamps is such that many details are obliterated in many of the printings.

Take note that if a Stone Y stamp does not display Jefferson's ear, or does not display it clearly, the rest of the printing is also lacking (recall Figure 2).

My theory, which is a subject left for future study, is that there was some component of the ink that not only gives the majority of Stone Y stamps their milky appearance, but also did not "agree" with the printing process, potentially causing the printing stone to decay or degrade rapidly.

But, as is often said of long yarns that introduce another subject, that's a story for another day.

Acknowledgement

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Endnotes

1 Oddly enough, and without explanation, unused examples are extremely rare.

2 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of American Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012 (General Issues, Lithographed, Leonard Hartmann).

3 Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries.

4 *https://www.flickr.com/photos/nostri-imago/3463600024/sizes/o/in/photostream/* (Last accessed 2/6/2015)

5 "Thomas Jefferson." The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. The New York Public Library Digital Collections. *http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-9e68-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99* (last accessed Feb. 6, 2015).

6 Courtesy Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries.

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