The Nine Transfer Positions of the Large Price's City Express Stamp

By
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Price's City Express Post was located in New York. An extensively researched article in *The Penny Post* by William Sammis concluded that this post most likely was established by Henry B. Price, who had a bookseller and publishing business on Union Square from about 1855-1865.[1] Very few covers are recorded in the Sammis survey with a year date, but they suggest that this post may only have operated in 1858.

Price issued three 2¢ stamps in two designs. The genuine stamps and counterfeits are described in the Sammis article as well as Larry Lyons' *Identifier*.[2] Two Price's stamps are smaller (17mm x 20.5mm) and have the same design, a bust that Sammis believes resembles the English poet John Keats. (**Figure 1**). These are found in black on vermillion glazed paper (Scott 119Ll) and black on green glazed paper (Scott 119L2).

The third is a larger 2¢ stamp (22.5mm x 25.5mm) with the head of a gentleman who Sammis speculates might be Price himself. **Figure 2** is a scarce used example of this stamp (Scott 119L3) from the Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries Inc. Power Search data base tied to a piece of an envelope.

There is only one reported surviving full sheet of the stamp. It has twelve columns of nine stamps of the large 2¢ stamp that previously was in the Richard Schwartz and Larry Lyons collections. (**Figure 3**). The sheet is 12 inches wide and 9⅞ inches tall. The printing and arrangement indicate that it was printed using the lithography method. This article describes the process used to print the stamps and the nine transfer positions found in each of the twelve columns.

Stamp Printing Methods in the Nineteenth Century

There were three principal processes utilized for printing stamps in the middle of the nineteenth century. One was typography, which utilizes the relief method in which a reverse image is raised on a block of metal or wood. Only the raised portion of the block is inked for transferring the image to paper by a press. Examples of stamps printed utilizing this process are the letter carrier stamps issued in Philadelphia.

The second method used to print stamps was intaglio, or engraving, where a reverse image is incised on a metal plate using sharp tools. After ink is spread on the plate to fill the grooves, it is wiped off the smooth surface of the plate. The ink remaining in the grooves is transferred by a press under great pressure to paper.

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1 William W. Sammis, "Price's City Express Putting a Name to The Face," *The Penny Post*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (July 2014) pages 13 to 26.

2 Larry Lyons, *The Identifier for Carriers, Locals, Fakes, Forgeries and Bogus Posts*, Vol. II (1998), pages 886-893.

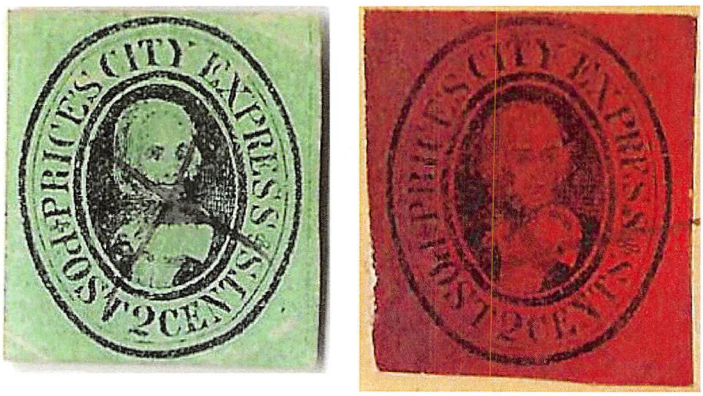

Figure 1. Genuine small 2c Price's City Express Post stamps (119L1 and 1).

Figure 2. Genuine large 2c Price's City Express Post (119L3) on piece. Source: Siegel Power Search database.

Two examples of stamps printed using this process are the Franklin (LOl) and Eagle (L02) carrier stamps issued by the U.S. government.

The third printing method was lithography. It was invented in 1796 by a German, Alois Senefelder, seeking an easier method of publishing theatrical works. It became popular in the mid-1850s for producing postage stamps. The stamp issued by Price's City Express Post is a good example of this printing process.

An excellent description of how this method was utilized in the stamp business was written in 1929 by August Dietz. Dietz himself owned a printing company in Richmond, Virginia. He also interviewed a number of the employees

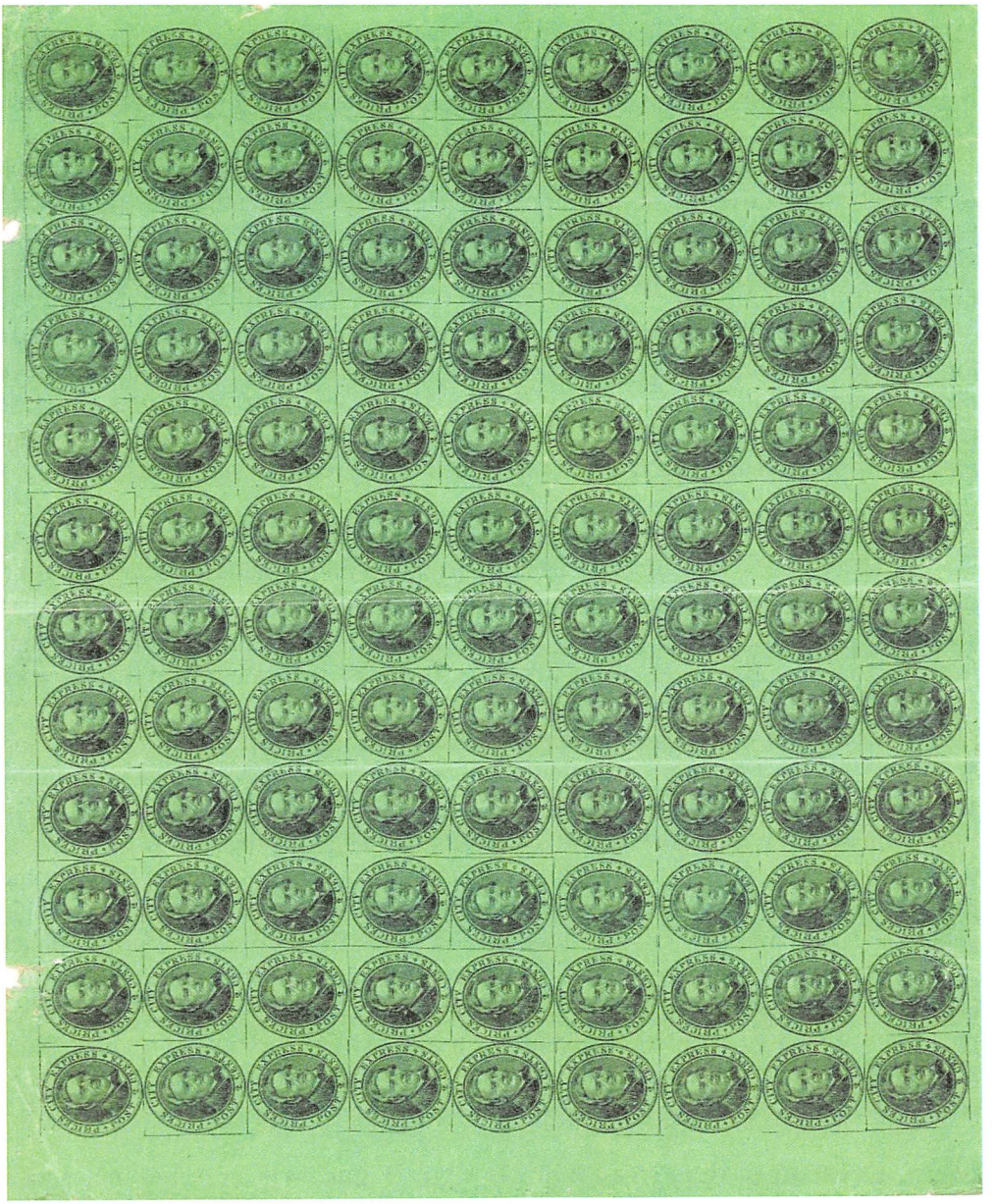

Figure 3. Only recorded full sheet of 2c Price's City Express Post stamps.

of the company responsible for printing Confederate stamps during the Civil War.[3] According to Dietz, the printer coated a block of polished limestone with a thick, black gum-based substance and etched a reverse image of the design in the gum. A fatty linseed oil was rubbed into the lines drawn through the gum and soaked into the porous surface of the limestone. Turpentine was used to wash off the black coating leaving the oil embedded in the pores of the stone.

The lithographic process works because grease and water do not mix; each repels the other. After a printing stone is made, water is spread across the surface but only adheres to portions of the stone without any grease. Printing ink is then rolled on to the stone and it only adheres to the lines of the design formed by the linseed oil.

A lithographic printing stone could be used for hundreds of prints before the surface deteriorated and the imbedded ink could no longer produce adequate quality prints. The stones typically were 1-1½ to 3½ inches thick and could be reused. However, the surface had to be ground down to remove the old design and repolished before a new design was embedded in the pores of the stone.

Printing the Price's Stamp

If a printing had a single design, prints could be made directly from the original design on the stone. When multiple identical small designs–such as stamps–were printed on one sheet, printers followed a number of additional steps to make sure that the design was uniform and reduced the time required to prepare a printing stone for a complete sheet.

The process followed to print the Price's stamp is explained in more detail below. It involved eight steps that were typical for printing sheets of stamps in the 1850s using the lithography process: (1) creation of a reverse image of the stamp to be printed on a limestone block; (2) printing images of the stamp on separate pieces of lithographic paper; (3) taping a column of nine small pieces of lithographic paper to a sheet of hard backing paper; (4) transfer of the ink on the lithographic paper to an intermediate transfer stone; (5) using the transfer stone to print images of the column of nine stamps on narrow transfer sheets of lithographic paper; (6) taping twelve transfer sheets to a large sheet of hard backing paper; (7) transfer of the ink on the large sheet of lithographic paper of 108 subjects to another final printing stone; and (8) printing full sheets of Price's stamps off of the final printing stone.

Creation of the Price Stamp Design. Figure 4 is a reverse image of a Price's stamp illustrating what the initial design on the first limestone block must have looked like. It is clear that the printer only created one image of the Price stamp on a stone to start the process. First, it is unlikely that the printer would have ignored standard practice in the printing business at the time and created multiple initial designs when a quicker and better method was available.

Second, there would be some design differences in stamps if more than one version of the design was etched into the gum on the first stone.

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3 August Dietz, *The Postal Service of the Confederate States of America* (Dietz Printing Company 1929).

Transfer Lithographic Paper. As noted above, a design can be drawn directly on a printing stone without the use of lithographic paper. This process is not practical where multiple small examples of the same design are to be printed. To create a sheet of 100 stamps without any intermediate steps would require 100 images to be etched into the gum on a printing stone. In such a case, there would be slight design differences in stamps.

To expedite the process for creating a printing stone for stamps, it was more efficient to add additional steps, including creation of a transfer stone with multiple reverse images. To do this, the printer used the first stone to transfer oil to a number of small pieces of transfer paper. The printer of the Price's stamp most likely made a number of examples and selected the best nine. The printer cut the nine best copies to approximately 23mm by 26mm, slightly larger than the design, and taped them in a column on a heavy piece of backing paper. **Figure 4** includes a black and white version of the first column from the full sheet of stamps, illustrating what the transfer sheet of nine stamps looked like.

Creation of the Transfer Stone. The printer next placed the inked sheet with a column of nine stamps over the original or a second stone and pressed the ink into its pores. The ink on the pieces of lithographic paper with nine stamp images was then embedded in the transfer stone. **Figure 4** also includes a white on black reverse image illustrating what the transfer stone looked like.

Creation of a Large Lithographic Paper Transfer Sheet. For the Price's stamp, the printer used the transfer stone with a column of nine images to make twelve transfer sheets with columns of nine stamps. He then taped them to a large heavy sheet of paper at least twelve inches long and ten inches wide.

Creation of the Printing Stone. The final step was creation of a printing stone of 108 stamps. The large sheet with twelve columns of nine stamps was placed on top of a printing stone and pressure applied to transfer the greasy linseed oil into the pores of the stone.

The printer could now begin printing sheets 108 stamps on green surface colored paper from the printing stone utilizing the water and ink process described above. The lines between the stamps are not guide lines. The edges of the nine small pieces of lithographic paper that were taped together retained some oil that adhered to the transfer stone and ultimately appeared on the printing stone. Although the lines formed by the edges of the small pieces of transfer paper are nearly the same, there are some differences resulting from the use of the transfer stone to print twelve narrow intermediate transfer sheets.

The Nine Transfer Types

As noted above, an intermediate design with a column of nine stamps was created on a stone. This was used to transfer ink mixed with linseed oil to twelve narrow sheets of paper that were taped together on hard backing paper in order to create the final printing stone. Because the twelve sheets were made off the same

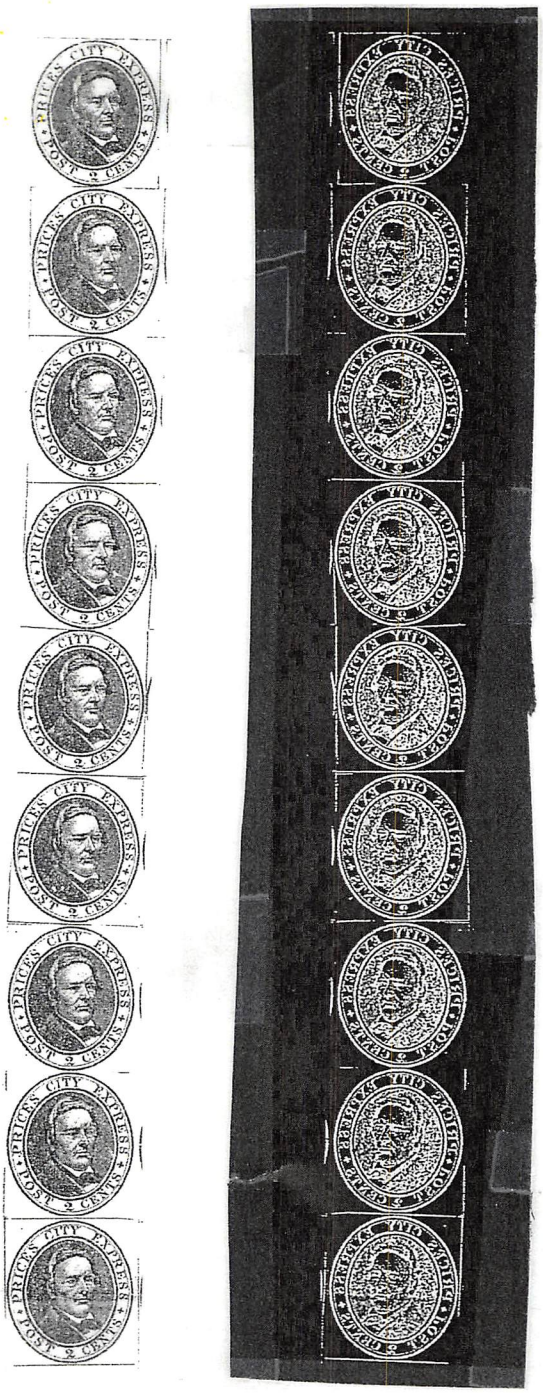


Figure 4. First column of the large 2c Price's City Express Post stamps illustrating what the transfer sheet looks like; and reversed black and white version illustrating what the transfer stone looked like.

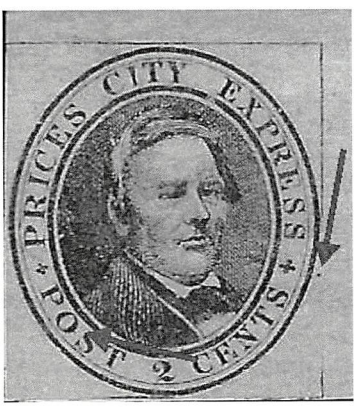
stone, every stamp in a row will have a number of common characteristics that can be used to identify the nine transfer positions of a sheet.

This process resulted in variations for a number of reasons. The single image on the first stone sometimes developed imperfections when it was inked and applied to small pieces of lithography paper. Imperfections could occur when the images on the intermediate sheet of lithography paper with a column of nine stamps was pressed on the transfer stone. The transfer stone may have had imperfections that affected the image when the transfer paper was pressed on it. When the ink on the large lithography paper was applied to the large limestone printing stone, imperfections again could arise due to the inking process or any faults in the final printing stone.

As a result, it is relatively easy to identify the principal characteristics of each of the nine transfer types. Because of variations in designs and differences in lines created by the edges of dies, it also is possible to plate each of the 108 stamps on a sheet. But that is a more difficult job and possibly a project for some other time.

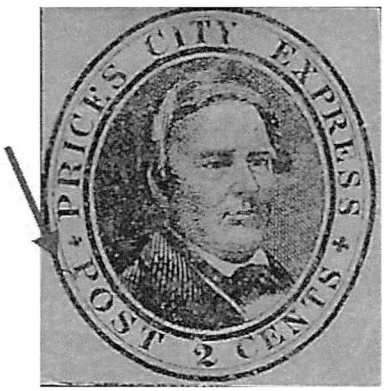
As noted above, the transfer stone had a column of nine stamps. I have designated the top stamp Type 1, the second Type 2, and so on to Type 9 at the bottom row. The following are the principal characteristics of each transfer position. Some of the characteristics listed above exist on all stamps of a Type. But in some cases, the characteristics have changed over numerous printings or are difficult to see due to poor printings. The most significant characteristics that appear to exist in all or nearly all examples are in bold.

Type 1



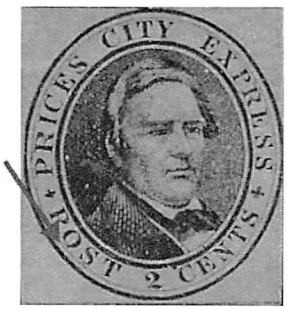
1. **There is a dot just outside the circle even with the right cross.**
2. **There is often a small line protruding on the "o" in "POST" at 3 o'clock.**
3. This is the top row, and there sometimes is a large margin above the top frame line.
4. The bottom frame line has 1mm break from the "P" to the "T" in "POST", and a second from the "2" to the "E" in "CENTS."
5. There is a vertical line between the two outer circles above the space between "PRICE'S" and "CITY."
6. There is a faint dot between the two outer circles above the "C" in "CITY."

Type 2



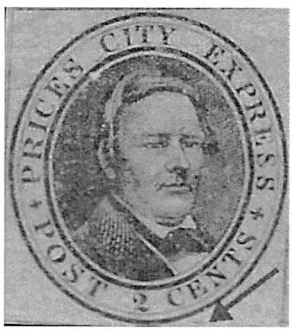
1. **There is a 2mm curved line in the outer circle to just below the "P" in "POST."**
2. There is a faint dot between the two outside circles to the right of the curve in the "$" of "EXPRESS."
3. The bottom frame line is complete except for a 6-7mm break below the "CEN" of "CENTS."

Type 3



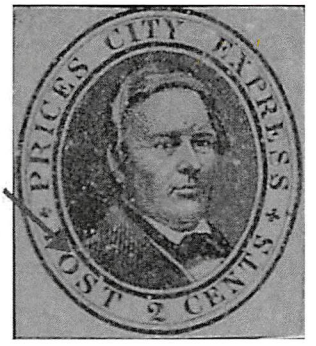
1. **The "O" in "POST" has a dot protruding from the bottom right.**
2. The top frame line barely touches the top of the outer circle.
3. There is a faint dot inside the top loop of the "S" in "PRICE'S."
4. The top frame line has a 6-7mm break above the space and "EXP" of "EXPRESS."
5. One position has a line from the bottom right side of the "S" in "POST" to the outer circle.

Type 4



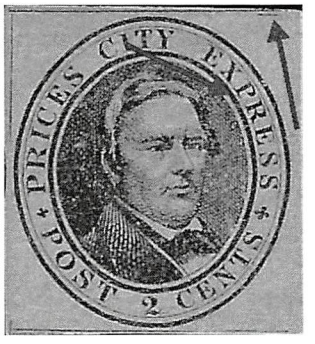
1. **There is a 2mm horizontal line below the "E" of "CENTS" parallel to the bottom of the outer circle.**
2. There is a larger dot just below the edge of the figure's right nostril.
3. The top right of the "T" in "CITY" is missing and there are one or two dots instead.

Type 5



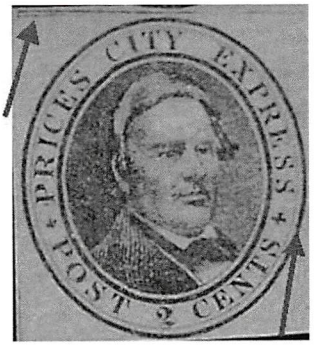
1. **There is a faint semi-circle from the tail of the "S" in "POST" to the inner circle.**
2. **The top frame line intersects on the left the middle of the top of the outer circle and is missing on the right.**
3. There is an extra 5mm horizontal line just below the bottom right corner."

Type 6



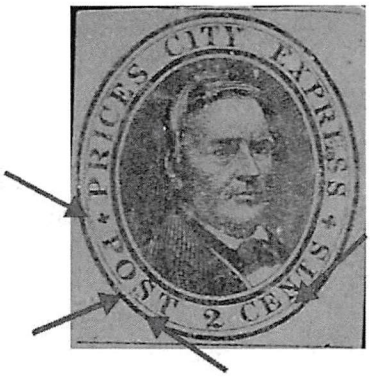
1. **There is a very small clear dot just below the bottom serifs of the "P" and "R" in "EXPRESS."**
2. **There is an extra 5mm horizontal line just below the top right corner.**
3. There is an extra 7mm horizontal line just below frame line at the bottom left corner.
4. Some have a dot 3mm SE of the "N" of "CENTS."

Type 7



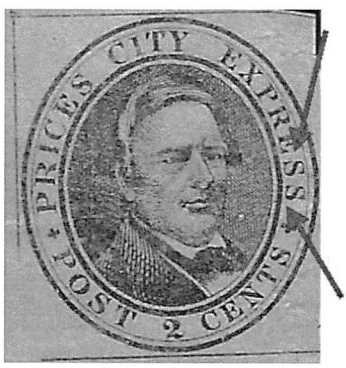
1. **There is an extra 7mm horizontal line just below the top frame line at the top left corner.**
2. **There is a small dot across from the right ornament nearly touching the inside of the outer circle.**
3. There is an extra dot above the figure's right eye 1mm below his hairline.
4. The bottom left serif of the "P" of "POST" is broken and looks like a period.

Type 8



1. **There is a faint dot just above the tail of the "S" in "POST;" and another faint dot just below the "S" between the two outer circles. (These are sometimes difficult to see on poor copies.)**
2. **A faint dot exists just below the "E" of "CENTS" that touches the inner circle.**
3. **There is a faint line extending from the top of the right circle on the left ornament.**
4. There is a 1mm line extending from the bottom of the right circle on the left ornament.
5. The top right frame line is missing except for a 5mm line above the "RES" of "EXPRESS."
6. There sometimes is an 1-1.5mm horizontal line the bottom left comer.
7. There sometimes is a small break at the bottom of the left frame line.
8. There is a small semi-circle below the "S in "PRICE'S" inside the inner circle.
9. There is a curved line below the "S" in "PRICE'S" inside the lower circle.

Type 9



1. This is the bottom row, and there sometimes is a large margin below the bottom frame line.
2. **There is generally a dot just left of the bottom serif by the tail of the first "S".**
3. **There is a dot just inside the inner circle left of and slightly below the last "S" in "EXPRESS."**
4. There sometimes is an 1-1.5mm horizontal line just above the top left comer of the top frame line.
5. There sometimes is a small break in the left frame line just above the top frame.
6. There sometimes is an extra vertical line beside the right frame line that extends from the top frame line to the second "S" in "EXPRESS."
7. There sometimes is a dot at the left below the bottom frame line.

Possible Order of Questions for Identifying Stamps

The author has found it easier to identify the nine transfer positions by following a protocol that focuses on certain significant differences in the following order of obviousness:

1. Is there a 2mm curved line in the outer circle just below the "P" in "POST" (Type 2)?
2. Is there a dot in the "O" of "POST" at 3:00 o'clock (Type 1)?
3. Is there a dot at the bottom of the "O" in "POST" at 5:30 o'clock (Type 3)?
4. Is there a faint semicircle line between the "O" and "S" of "POST" (Type 5)?
5. Is there an extra 5mm horizontal line below the top right comer (Type 6)?
6. Is there a 2mm line just outside the design below the "E" of "CENTS" (Type 4)?
7. Is there an extra 7mm horizontal line just below the top frame line at the left corner (Type 7)?
8. Is there a dot beside the tail of the first "S" in "EXPRESS" or just inside the bold inner circle at 3:00 o'clock (Type 9)?
9. Is there a faint dot on the thin second circle below the "E" in "CENTS" (Type 8)?

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