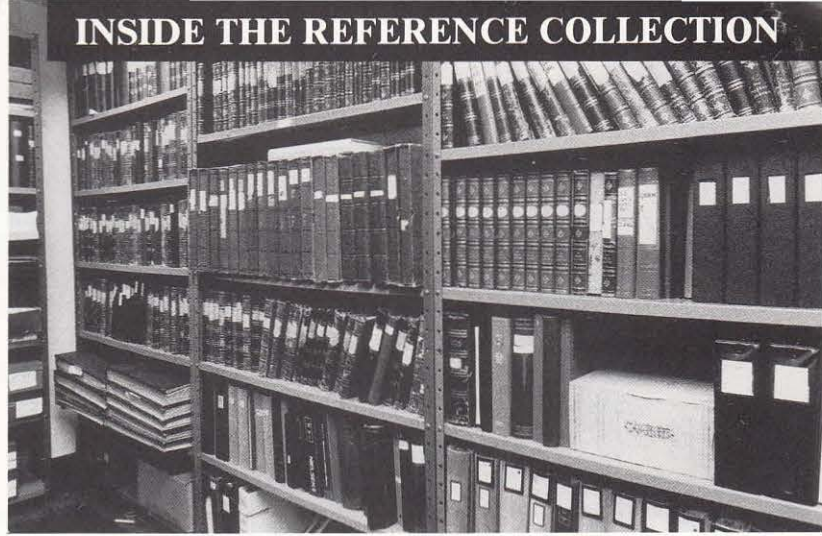


## “The Sperati Forgeries”

by Peter A. Robertson



*[Editor's Note: One of the most exciting albums in The Philatelic Foundation's 250 volume Reference Collection is the blue Elbe binder that houses the PF's collection of Sperati forgeries. Next to the British Philatelic Association, who bought out Sperati's entire stock in the 1950's, The Philatelic Foundation holds one of the larger reference collections of the Sperati forgeries in existence. Of the 566 different items he is known to have produced, the Foundation's Reference Collection contains at least one copy of most of them. The Philatelic Foundation's Reference Library also contains all available information from the B. P.A. on the Sperati forgeries. Some of the Sperati forgeries exist in only one or two copies. For others, as many as 500 may exist. His total output of copies in his almost five decades of activity is estimated at between 50,000 and 70,000 items. Philatelic Foundation Curator Peter Robertson opens the doors of the PF's vault for a look "Inside the Reference Collection."]*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Sperati forgeries is that he imitated not only great rarities but what were in his day very inexpensive stamps. That also made him more dangerous than most forgers. He truly had some sort of genuine love for what he was doing and considered himself an artist. He made a living by his forgeries but he spent more care on his individual "philatelic imitations" than probably any other forger before or since. In his younger days, he was cheated by some stamp dealers, and he spent the rest of his life getting his revenge on dealers. Certainly we are talking about an obsessive personality here, but he really looked upon himself not as a faker but as an artist. In fact, when he was finally caught and prosecuted he successfully defended himself by claiming his fakes were actually works of art which he signed. This may or may not be true as any number of his works exist today in an unsigned state. He continued to insist that his signature was erased by dishonest individuals. This is a matter of speculation but, luckily, due to the printing methods he employed, certain constant flaws exist in his designs aiding specialists in identifying his counterfeits. This was handsomely covered by the monumental two volume work produced by The British Philatelic Association (now Federation).

The most dangerous thing about Sperati was his revolutionary technique in approaching forgery. Before him, most forgers tried to completely forge a stamp starting from scratch. Thus, they had not only the design to deal with, but also paper, watermark, perforations, gum or cancellation. Sperati greatly simplified the process by usually beginning with something genuine. For a long time, his British area counterfeits were very dangerous because the watermarks and paper seemed so real. That's because they were real. He would take a real stamp, a more common value in a set, and bleach out or chemically remove the design. He then would print his stamp on the bleached-out paper. Thus he had a genuine watermark, genuine paper and perforations, and sometimes a genuine cancellation or overprint as these often were in black and would remain after the harsh bleaching agents did their work. These items astounded people for a good many years because they thought he was producing forged watermarks and paper which was so good, it could not be told from the real thing. He was insidious in that he went against logical approaches to stamp expertization. If he were creating an inverted center error, he would bleach out the frame, rather than the central design. For anyone examining this type of stamp, the natural tendency is to closely scan the inverted center area rather than the outer frame area. Most other counterfeiters add a counterfeit or substituted design to the center but Sperati did it backwards, and very effectively, I might add.

One quickly learns to respect the work of a forger like Sperati. Some of his forgeries were “guaranteed” by a half dozen different experts or dealers. But when he started his work he was much more dangerous than he is today. We must remember that at the turn of the century most collectors were still general collectors. There were very few specialists around. The early catalogue illustrations were not always that accurate, and there were no great Reference Collections or Philatelic Libraries available to most collectors. They had to rely on collector friends or the dealers from whom they got their stamps. Dealers would certify stamps by initialing or signing them. As any collector is aware, some dealers are very knowledgeable, some not so. As a matter of fact, these were some of the major reasons behind the establishment of The Philatelic Foundation in 1945.

The technology of Expertization was also virtually nonexistent some 80 years ago. Aviation was in its infancy and television had yet to be dreamed of. Even radio was a thing of the future. The tools available to a stamp expert were the magnifying glass, the human eye, examples for comparison, and a broad general knowledge. Good philatelic literature would only be developed by the trial and error methods of these old-time professionals and the passage of time.

Today, the expertizer has it far easier. He has access to paper micrometers enabling the measurement of paper thickness. The ultraviolet lamp enables today’s expertizer to examine stamps under a part of the light spectrum not available to the naked eye. This is very helpful in detecting removed stains and cancellations, and in finding repairs and drawn-in portions of the design or cancellation. Tests can be performed to determine the elemental components of inks and more sophisticated comparison microscopes allow minute detailed examination and comparison against known genuine or faked examples. Much literature now exists which either points out known counterfeits or presents in-depth plate studies which highlight the tiny design differences between stamps printed together from the same plate, allowing the examiners to “plate” a stamp being examined.

Sperati had his own peculiar preferences. He was very knowledgeable about stamps and studied them carefully. When he created a copy of a stamp, he would often forge several different plate positions. He had his own reference collection, and added to it by picking up damaged copies at low prices. Like most collectors of his time, he preferred used stamps to mint, and he was actually rather poor at producing fake gum. For a used stamp, he often started with a used stamp on the right type of paper and chemically removed the ink of the stamp without removing the cancel. When one sees a genuine cancel, he is less likely to suspect the stamp. He didn’t care much about perforations, and most of the stamps he reproduced were classic imperforates.

No knowledgeable collector need be afraid of such forgeries today. For some stamps the Sperati forgeries are actually worth more than the original stamps. Sperati forged only a handful of U.S. stamps, and the experienced specialist should be able to tell the real from the fake. Furthermore, since major philatelic institutions like The Philatelic Foundation now exist, expertization is much quicker and more convenient than it ever has been. Needless to say, the safest course is to buy from knowledgeable and reputable dealers and to insist that any better or high priced item has a Certificate of Genuineness from an internationally recognized institution like The Philatelic Foundation’s Expert Committee.

UNITED STATES



Also with  
penancel  
cross

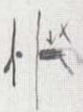
971. Pos. 29.



10x1 1/2 on sheet

DOT in oval

HAS A  
DOT



2



6 LBI

CONFEDERATE STATES

HAWAII



15 Pl. VII. Pos. 5

4-A 5



20 Pl. XI. Pos. 6



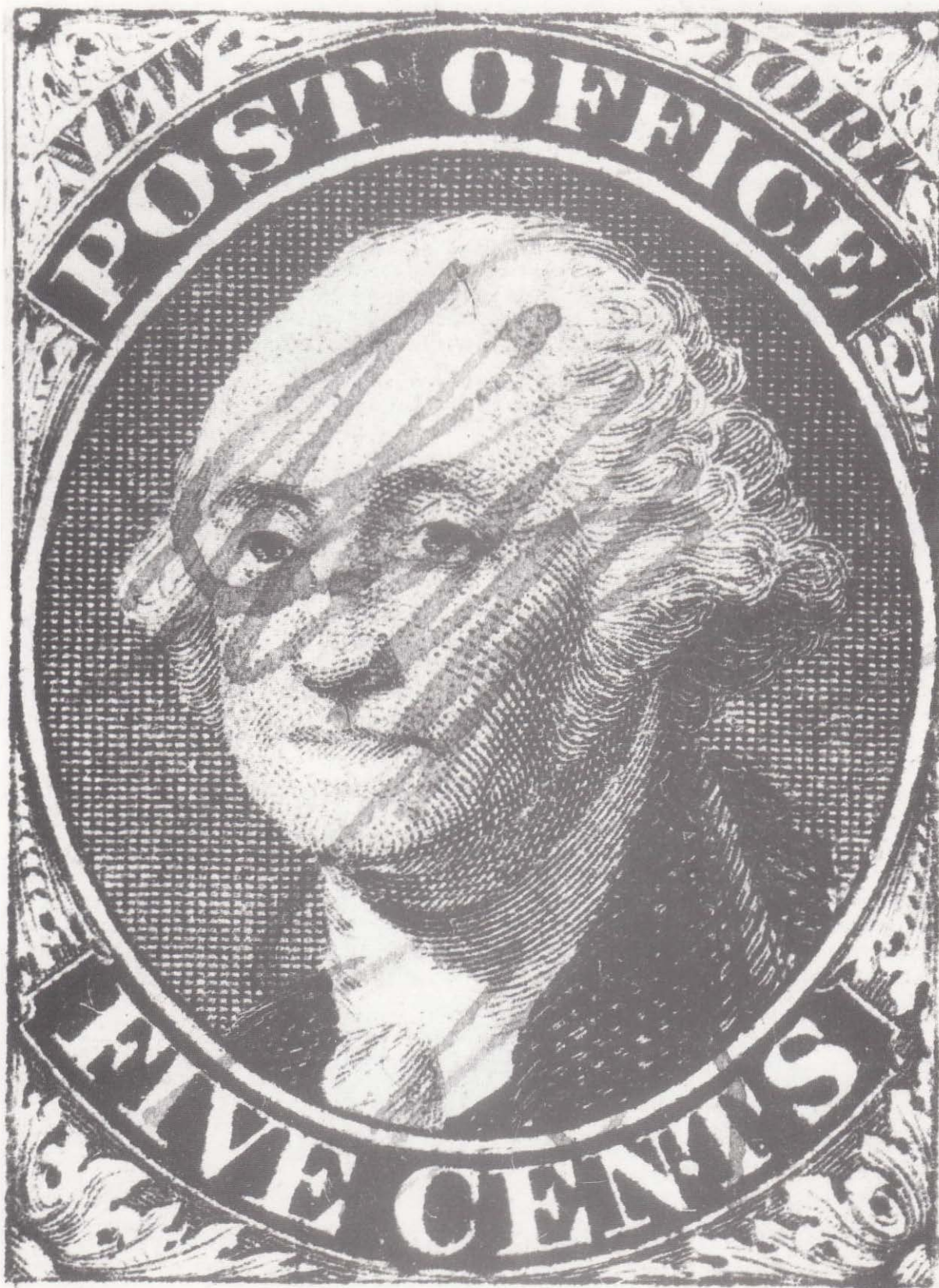
5



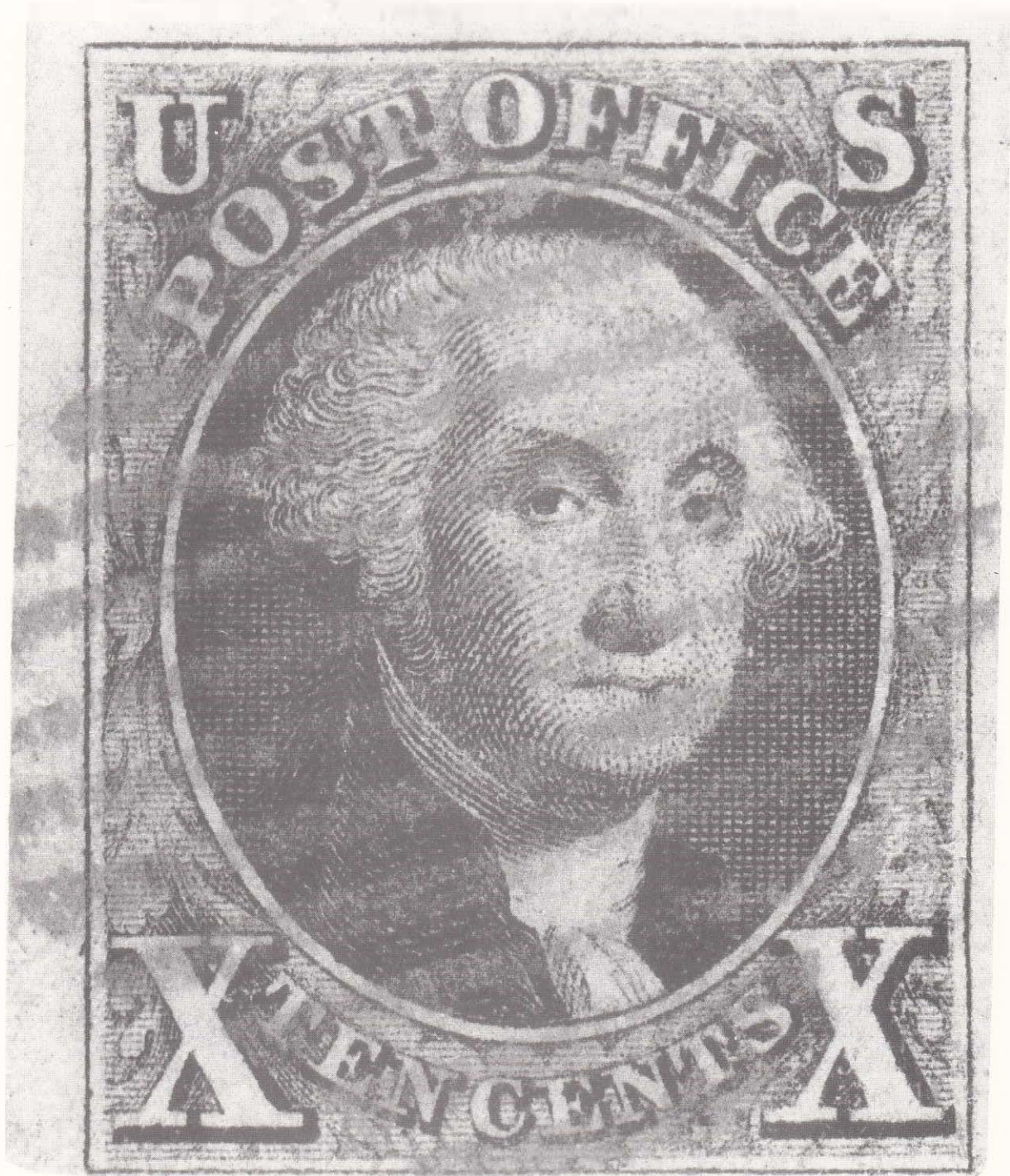
9

A, B, C = REPR SERIES

Sperati's U.S. and Area forgeries.



Sperati forgery of New York Postmaster Provisional (Scott #9X1). Note that the serifs of the "T" in "POST" are detached from the upright; also, notice the large white spot between the "N" and "T" of "CENTS."



Sperati's forgery of U.S. 10c 1847 (Scott #2). The original stamp is engraved, whereas Sperati used a contact photo-lithographic process. Also, note the small curved line outside the left frame level with the top of the left "X."

BRITISH EMPIRE

GREAT BRITAIN

Also "47" in France & "440" no frame



56



56

Also "317" in France



56

AUSTRALIA

CAPE



38

CYPRUS

GIBRALTAR

15 GOLD COAST

HONG KONG



59



7



20



24



23

LAGOS

MALTA

MAURITIUS



33



35



37



1



62

MONTERRAT

NEWFOUNDLAND



9



4



4



7 Also black grid



9



12



13 Also Black Grid



15

SIERRA LEONE

VANCOUVER IS



1859 IMPERA 2a



3 Also NUMERAL "35"



4

Some of Sperati's British Commonwealth forgeries. All watermarks and paper are genuine — this baffled the experts for many years.

FRANCE



1 1 16 TÊTE-BÊCHE



2 2 2 3 3c TÊTE BÊCHE



7 7 7 8 8a



9c "VERVELLE" 9 N150 3477 9a TÊTE-BÊCHE 9a TÊTE-BÊCHE



9b 10 10 10

A, B, C: KEPP SERIES

Sperati French forgeries; including rare tete-beche varieties.

FRANCE





  
 21 Also Paris Stan Cancel      21      21      21





  
 21      21a. FÊTE-BOÛME  
 Also with small dot cancel      21c. Pos. 5  
 L.L.      21b. Pos. 8  
 2nd Rep.      21d. Pos. 10  
 L.L.






  
 40      40      46. Pos. 11      46. Pos. 5      39 2nd Rep.






  
 48. Pos. 11      48. Pos. ?      41      40      43 1st. Rep.  
 Pos. 11      43 blue. Pos. 14.






  
 J8a Ultramarine      J8b Prussian      J9. Pos. 5.      Unlisted. Pos. 5      Telegraph  
 Pos. 14.      Pos. 14.

A, B, C - REPR. - FIDES

More Sperati French forgeries, including back-of-the-book material.



GERMAN STATES

BADEN



Also #19

24

BAVARIA



1



1a



1a

Also cancelled



1b. TETE-BECHE

BREMEN



1 Also "BREMEN" 7.5 x 6.7 in black rectangle



2 Also \*



3. Pos. #2



4. Pos. 21, 22, 30, 31.



4a chalky paper Also with boxed "BREMEN" 9 x 5-6 in black

BRUNSWICK



2. Also with 412 in place



3

A, B, C = REPR. SERIES

Sperati German States forgeries, including the very rare Bavaria #1b, tete-beche pair.

GERMAN STATES

OLDENBURG continued:-



13 Also \*



14 Also blue circular  
"OLDENBURG"  
"9-8"  
"4-EN"



14 Also black boxed  
"BRE 262"



14. Also blue  
"E-APEN"  
"3-9"



15

SAXONY



1



1. Also cancel  
"DRESDEN"



1a.



14 Also with  
cancel

WURTEMBERG



6. Also with  
circular  
"HEILBRON"



69 Also with  
"TETT NEU" (?)  
7. AUG. 77

A, B, C = REPR. SERIES

Sperati German States forgeries.

GERMAN STATES

HANNOVER



17. Also "EMDEN"



18a. Also blue straight line - TZEBU -



24 Also boxed - LEHE -



24 Also blue circular HANNOVER 3-12-12-

LUBECK



3a. "ZWEI EIN HALB"

MECKLENBURG - SCHWERIN



3 Also with blue "ROSTOCK"

OLDENBURG



4 Also \*



4



5 Also boxed blue "NBURG" - 2"



5



7



8



9. Also \*



10 Also \*



12 Also blue rectangular "NBURG" - 4-7"



12

A, B, C = REPR. SERIES

More Sperati German States forgeries.

SWITZERLAND

FEDERAL

WITH FRAME ROUND CROSS



6. Pos. 11



6. Pos. 12



6. Pos. 30

31

32

NO FRAME ROUND CROSS



7. Pos. 6

WITH FRAME ROUND CROSS



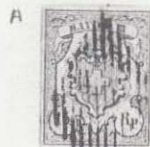
9. Pos. 4.



9. Pos. 14



11. Pos. 9



11. Pos. 14



13. Pos. 1



13. Pos. 3

Sperati Switzerland forgeries.