

# BRASS RULES REVISITED

## PLUS, A BONUS SCRATCHED-PLATE VARIETY

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Brass rules are an interesting variety of 5¢ typographed (letterpress) Confederate States stamps that appear as thin parallel lines, or sometimes a single line, printed in the sheet margins of some examples. This variety was brought back to light when Leonard Hartmann published an article<sup>1</sup> on the subject in the *Confederate Philatelist* in 2009. Ever since reading that article on the “Brass Rules” variety, we both have been interested in locating other examples, specifically left, right and bottom-margin stamps, as well as examples on Richmond paper, and used examples.

So, what is a brass rule? British printer and engraver William Savage (1770-1843) described brass rules in his work *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing*, published in 1841.

*Pieces of brass of different thicknesses made letter high, to print with. — M. They are made in lengths of fourteen inches, but of late years lengths half as long again have been made; one of*



*the edges is bevilled (sic) so as to print a fine line, and when a thicker line is required the bottom edge is placed uppermost, which is the full thickness of the brass; by this means lines of different thicknesses are obtained, and also double lines, a thick one and a fine one when required. They are used for column lines in table work; to separate matter that requires to be distinct; and to be placed round pages.<sup>2</sup>*

Figure 1 depicts examples of brass rules similar to those that were used by Confederate printers. Note the variety of thicknesses available.

Figure 1. Brass rules in a variety of thicknesses.

August Dietz described and depicted a top-margin block of the 5¢ typographed stamps exhibiting the brass rule lines in his 1929 edition of *The Postal Service of Confederate States of America*.<sup>3</sup>

Dietz explained that the technique of attaching brass rules along the outside of the printing plates to relieve pressure at the edge of the printing plate was a method well known to printers of the day. He described the technique as having the brass rules applied along not only the top margin, but also the bottom, left and right margins but only a top-margin example was depicted.

Since there was clearly a degree of depth to any brass rule, it is logical to assume they would be placed on all four sides of the plate – if used at all. The electrotype printing plate was of 400 subjects, thus the chances of finding brass rule lines at the top and bottom edges are reduced by half. He did not mention the use of brass rules in the gutters.



Figure 2. Top sheet margin block with brass rules.

Eighty years after Dietz's Confederate postal service book, Hartmann's article tells us that the lines, described as the lower and upper lines, were found to be consistently 1mm and 6mm from the stamp's design frame, respectively, and printed in Richmond, Va., on London paper with London ink. He also noted that he had only found the brass rules present at the top margins and requested readers to report any examples of brass rules in any of the other margins, as well as paper other than London paper and printed with local ink.

Always loving a good mystery, we individually set out to try to locate evidence of brass rules on margins other than the top, as well as examples of the brass rules on Richmond paper with local ink. The results of our separate searches were exciting, especially when combined.

For purposes of this article, we will describe the lines as "inner" – the one closest to the stamp's design (1mm), and "outer" – the line farthest from the stamp's design (6mm).

In the decade since Hartmann's *CP* article, we both diligently searched for any examples of CSA 7<sup>4</sup> showing brass rules. Eventually, we realized we had both been on the same quest and joined forces. New examples were few and far between but, as shown in the following figures, sev-

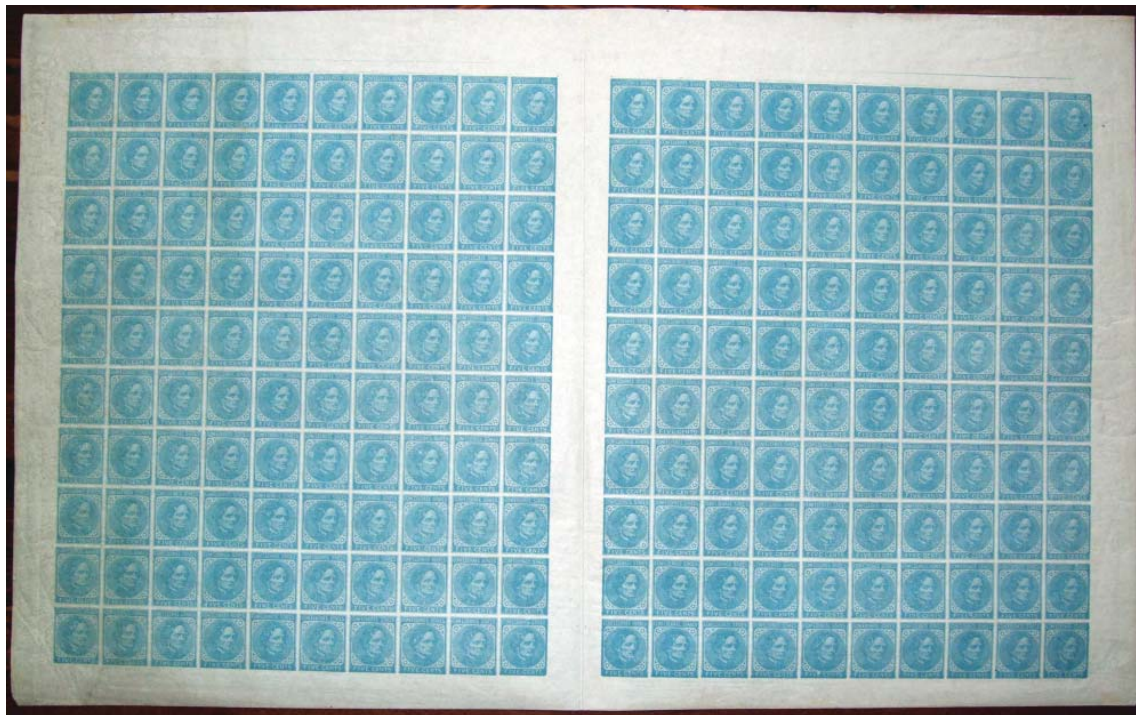


Figure 3. Half-sheet of CSA 7-L with brass rules.



eral interesting examples were located and add to our current knowledge of this fascinating variety.

Figure 2 depicts a top sheet-margin block of 20 with the brass rules extending nearly across the entire top margin. In this example, the outer line, which measures 6mm from the stamp's design, is most pronounced at every position except positions 1 and 10 on the pane, while the inner line, which measures 1mm from the stamp design, is sketchy along the entire length. Top sheet-margin lines, though rarely found, were previously the only recorded



Figure 4. Upper right corner detail of Figure 3.

occurrences in any catalog. The 2012 CSA catalog is the first listing of a brass rules variety of any kind, to our knowledge.

Figure 3 shows a half-sheet of CSA 7-L with top and bottom brass rules across the entire top of the panes. Figure 4 shows the upper-right corner of 10 in more detail.

One of Trish's passions is the study of Confederate fakes, forgeries and fantasies. That subject collided with the topic of brass rules in Figure 5, which is a genuine upper-right block of 15 (5 by 3) of CSA 7-L, mutilated with fake cork cancels. The block shows the characteristic filled-in frame lines at the right edge of the sheet as well as the brass rules across the top, which show as a characteristic somewhat wavy line. As with the example in



Figure 5 (left). Genuine upper-right block of CSA 7-L mutilated with fake cork cancels.



Figure 6 (above). Close-up of Figure 5 block showing brass rule line.

Figure 7 (right). Reverse of the Figure 5 block with fake cancels seeping through.







Figure 8. Two sheet-margin stamps that exhibit an outer line.

Figure 2, the last position in the top row (position 10) shows little evidence of brass rules. A close-up is shown in Figure 6, while Figure 7 shows the back of the block with ink from the cancels seeping through the paper.

Figure 8 depicts two sheet-margin stamps that exhibit what appears to be an outer line; the pair is from a bottom right-margin block of four. In this example, the line measures 6.4mm from the stamp's design, a measurement close enough to the 6mm typically found for the outer line and well beyond that one would expect for the edge of the printing plate.

Figure 9 is another right sheet-margin example that depicts the outer line and measures 6mm from the stamp's design. This example is a detail from a partial upper-right pane, yet in this example only two of the stamp positions (positions 60 and 70) show the partial brass rule line at right.

This partial sheet also has the White Tie variety (upper right pane, position 30), as well as numerous transient printing varieties. We have not yet located an example of a right sheet-margin depicting both the inner and outer brass rules together.

Figure 10 is a similar right sheet-margin example that depicts the outer line and measures 6mm from the stamp's design. This example is a detail from a partial upper right pane yet, again, only two of the stamp positions (positions 60 and 70) show the partial brass rule line at right. It also shows the White Tie variety (upper right pane, position UR30).

Figure 11 depicts a left sheet-margin stamp that exhibits an approximately 2mm-long line that is 6mm from the stamp's design. The margin stamp also shows a scratched plate variety, which begins at the "E" of "STATES" and extends the entire length of the stamp, trailing off the design to the right of "CENTS" (position L31).

The scratched plate appears to be a constant variety that had not been cataloged until the 2019 edition of the Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers*<sup>5</sup>. It is not listed in the CSA catalog. We feel it is one of the most important varieties on this issue and has been neglected in the past.

Figure 12 depicts an irregular block of



Figure 9. Another right sheet margin example depicting an outer line.



Figure 10. Right sheet-margin block depicts an outer line. The block also features a "White Tie" variety (UR stamp).



Figure 11. Left sheet margin pair that exhibits a brass rule at left, as well as a scratched plate variety (left stamp).



Figure 12. Irregular block of 19 that shows part of the brass rule at left and top (insets right and below right), but also a scratched plate variety at positions L31 and L41 (inset below).



19 that shows not only part of the inner brass rule in the left margin, but also both rules above the single stamp in the upper margin. But that's not all, note that positions L31 and L41 depict the scratched plate variety. Position 31 is most dramatic because the scratch extends the length

of the stamp and more into the design, while the position 41 scratch is somewhat hidden in the right stamp edge.

While it is clear these two positions are from the left side of the sheet, Dietz did not mention the use of brass rules in the gutters (CSA typographed issues were printed in sheets of 400 / panes of 100). Dietz specifically mentioned brass rules were used along the outside of the printing plates to relieve pressure at the edge of the printing plate, which seems to indicate they were not used in the gutters.

Figure 12 shows both the brass rules and the scratch positions on the same block. If we assume there were no brass rules used in the gutters, the scratches must be from an upper-left block. But there are upper half sheets extant that show the White Tie variety at position UR 30 but no trace of these scratches on the left pane.

This leaves us with one of two scenarios: 1) The scratches are simply transient varieties, or 2) The scratch damage was done after the White Tie damage and thus panes could appear either way—with or without both varieties on the same pane. In our experience, and that of other experienced students consulted<sup>6</sup>, this is a constant variety if only due to the number of identical examples we have seen over the years.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 13 shows a CSA 7-L single with an inner line extending the full length of the left margin – a strong and dramatic example. Unfortunately, we'll never know whether there was an outer line on this stamp as well, as the rest of the margin was trimmed away.



Figure 13. CSA 7-L with a strong inner line extending the full length of the left margin.





Figure 14. The first of only two recorded examples of inner and outer brass rules in two margins.

evidence of the top-margin and left-margin brass rules having been used concurrently.

Figure 16 illustrates the elusive bottom brass rules that show as the tiniest lines in the inner position and measuring only 1mm wide. In this bottom-margin strip of four are five such tiny lines across the bottom, which we believe represent the inner lines. While very small, they are consistent with other inner examples. They show best at the bottom edges near the white margin space between stamps.



Figure 16. Elusive bottom rules show as the tiniest lines in the inner position and measure only 1mm wide.

Figure 17 shows a close-up of an example in the strip.



Figure 17. Close-up of an example from the strip shown in Figure 16.

Figure 18. Another example of bottom inner brass rules on the right-most block of a block of 20 (see inset).



Figure 18 illustrates another example of bottom inner brass rules found on a block of 20; this illustrates the right-most block. As with the Figure 16 example, it shows as two minute slivers found at the inner position.

Based upon the evidence we have collected over the past few years, it is our opinion that brass rules were used not only along the top of the printing plate, but along all margins, which would only make sense. The lines we found on the examples depicted in this article measure favorably with the known distances from the stamp's design and do not measure what one would expect for the printing-plate edges.



Figure 15. The second of two recorded examples of inner and outer brass rules in both margins. The top rules are more difficult to see than the left ones.

(clearly visible), as well as at the top. These are



The upper-left corner block in Figure 14 clearly shows unmistakable inner and outer brass rules in both margins. The top margin lines in Figure 15 are short, very light and do not show well in the scan, but are visible under magnification.

Figures 14 and 15 are currently the only known two examples of a top-left sheet-margin example depicting both the inner and outer brass rules lines in the left margin



Figure 16. Elusive bottom rules show as the tiniest lines in the inner position and measure only 1mm wide.



Figure 19. Richmond printing on local paper shows small fragment of a line in lower right margin.



Figure 20. Enlargement detail of Figure 19.

from the stamp's design, the proper distance of known inner brass rules. This horizontal strip of three is a Richmond printing on local paper (CSA catalog 7-R).

Figure 21 shows a much more dramatic example of brass rules on a pair of CSA 7-R. To the trained eye, it is clear – even from a scan – that these are classic Richmond prints on local paper.



Figure 21. Classic Richmond print on local paper with dramatic example of brass rules at top right – one of only two recorded.

The fact that brass rules are found primarily on the earliest examples of CSA 7-L would suggest that this technique was applied by Frank Baptist, whose skills and knowledge as a printer helped save the contract between John Archer and Confed-

erate Post Office Department in the printing of these stamps.<sup>9</sup>

The question remains, however: Why is there a lack of evidence of the brass rules on the later printed stamps? Were the brass rules eliminated with the later printings? Or have Confederate students just not been taking notice?

Two used on-cover examples were located (Figures 22 and 23), each bearing



Figure 22. The first of two on-cover examples with brass rules; this one from Bremono Bluff, Va. The rules are clearly visible along the top.

a horizontal pair of stamps from the top sheet margin and both exhibiting what appears to be the inner brass rules line (measures 1mm from the stamp's design). They are, in our opinion, examples of brass rules lines found on used examples. Unfortunately, the top margin had been trimmed prior to posting thus, if there was an outer brass rules line present, it was trimmed away.

Figure 22 is from a cover bearing a manuscript "Bremono Bluff, Va" postal marking, while Figure 23 is used with a Powell Type 5g<sup>10</sup> "RICHMOND // MAR / 14" [likely 1864] black circular datestamp.



Figure 23. The second of two on-cover examples with brass rules; this one from Richmond.

To date, the brass rules had only been found on local printings on London paper and in London ink (CSA catalog 7-L<sup>8</sup>), however, recent discoveries have changed that.

Figure 19, and the enlargement of the lower-right margin in Figure 20, show a small fragment of a line that measures 1mm



The brass rules variety is listed in the CSA catalog as CSA 7-L-v2 (local printing on London paper) with none recorded on cover. Under the CSA 7-R listings (local printing on Richmond paper), the brass rules variety is shown as “NR” – “None Recorded.” Furthermore, the catalog listing is only for the top brass rules with no note of side or bottom rules.

## IN SUMMARY

For some researchers, a catalog listing of “none recorded” is an open invitation to search out examples. It has been both fun and very productive to work as a team. When you enjoy the same sorts of research projects, it is amazing the cross-over that exists. We often found that the other had the all-important piece of the puzzle that was needed.

Several varieties have been revealed by our research during the past few years.

Evidence in this article clearly demonstrates that the brass rules variety – although scarce – exists on all sides of the plate, as asserted by August Dietz in 1929.

Brass rules were used on Richmond prints printed from local paper and ink, as well as those printed on London paper with De La Rue ink.

Brass rules are now recorded used on cover.

A scratched plate variety exists at positions L31 and L41 on the printing plate, likely on the upper-left pane position.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Leonard H. Hartmann, “The 5¢ Typographed Stamps with Brass rules,” *Confederate Philatelist*, Vol. 54, No.2, pp. 14-15.

<sup>2</sup> William Savage, *A Dictionary of the Art of Printing*, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, London, England, 1841. [www.oldbookillustrations.com/dictionary/b/brass-rules](http://www.oldbookillustrations.com/dictionary/b/brass-rules). Accessed Sept. 19, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> August Dietz, *Postal Service of The Confederate States of America*, Richmond Va. (1929), Page 180.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr, Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012, pp. 335-337.

<sup>5</sup> 2019 Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*.

<sup>6</sup> John L. Kimbrough, MD, emails Nov. 18, 2017, with Patricia A. Kaufmann.

<sup>7</sup> John L. Kimbrough, MD and Conrad L. Bush, *Collector’s Guide to Confederate Philately*, Revised Second Edition, self-published, 2011, Page 30.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia A. Kaufmann, et al, pp. 336-337.

<sup>9</sup> Dietz (1929) p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Peter W. W. Powell, *Confederate States of America, Markings and Postal History of Richmond, Virginia*, Leonard H. Hartmann, Philatelic Bibliopole, Louisville, Ky., 1987.