

The 1854 Lithograph Block on Cover



Lot 119

History of The 1854 Lithograph Block on Cover

The most famous item in Chilean philately is the cover bearing the block of fourteen 5-centavos Lithograph stamps. Indeed, this item is so remarkable and rare that it has been shown in the Aristocrats of Philately displays on three separate occasions (Anphilex 1971, Interphil 1976 and Ameripex 1986) and has been described by Gerhard Blank, the preeminent expert on Chile, as “the most outstanding ‘Colon’ cover of them all.”

Unlike other famous and valuable stamps, the Lithograph cover has not earned its acclaim by trading in the marketplace at record prices. In fact, it has *never* been offered at public auction, nor has it changed owners during the past forty years. The Lithograph cover’s prominence on the stage of worldwide philately has been earned exclusively on its philatelic merits, which are extraordinary. To appreciate the cover’s special qualities, it is best to begin with the remarkable story of the Lithograph issue.

THE LITHOGRAPHS PRINTED BY GILLET

Chile’s postal reform law authorizing the first postage stamps went into effect on July 1, 1853, and the first issue was engraved and printed by the British firm of Perkins, Bacon & Company. Stamps were not actually distributed through post offices, but were sold by *estancos*, local agents who were in charge of government monopolies on products such as salt, tobacco and playing cards (Blank, p. 10).

The demand for stamps was greater than expected, and supplies from Perkins Bacon were running low by the end of 1853. The government, unable to arrange its own printing operation in time, turned to two local printers, N. Desmadryl and H. Gillet of Santiago. Desmadryl was a renowned engraver and printer, and his prints from the steel plates furnished by Perkins Bacon were so skillfully executed, the impressions are arguably superior to the London prints. However, because Desmadryl was too busy with his regular business to meet the government’s demands for more stamps, the next order was given to Gillet, whose skills and experience were in lithography, not recess-printing.

Gillet tried to print from the engraved plates, but his inks and technique were ill-suited for the task. Consequently, Gillet’s recess-printed stamps were of poor quality, but the watermarked paper provided by the government was so carefully controlled, Gillet eventually had to turn over the unsatisfactory recess-printed stamps. Faced with his own failure to produce quality impressions from engraved plates, Gillet decided to switch to lithography, a printing method that was generally not favored by the government, and certainly was never authorized.

Using transfer paper, Gillet made a lithographic stone plate of 240 subjects, the number required to fill up the sheet of tightly-controlled watermarked security paper. Based on research by Gerhard Blank, we know that at least two stones were made; one from a single transfer of 240 subjects, which resulted in numerous transfer flaws, and another built up from multiple transfers, which allowed for greater control in transferring the designs. The rarity of examples of the transfer flaws indicates that the stone made from the single 240-subject transfer was not used to print many sheets.

Gillet’s Lithographs were so finely printed that they were considered to be engraved for almost fifty years. In 1898 the first report of the Lithographs was published by John N. Luff. The “squeeze” varieties were brought to Perkins Bacon in England for analysis, and it was confirmed that such flaws could only occur in stamps printed by lithography. Thus, Gillet’s “switch” finally came to light, and a major new classic imperforate issue was born.

Experts have determined that only 500 sheets of Lithograph stamps were printed. Multiples in strip form are rare, and only three blocks are known. All three are presented in this sale, including the block of fourteen on cover.

CHILE

THE 1854 LITHOGRAPH BLOCK ON COVER



119

119°⊠ **1854, 5c Red Brown, Lithograph (7a).** Horizontal block of fourteen, large even margins on three sides, touched to slightly in at left, beautiful rich color and proof-like impression, tied by multiple strikes of four-ring cancel, red "Santiago 10 Agto 54" circular datestamp on blue folded cover to Valparaiso, from the Jagerschmidt & Jullian correspondence, slight toning along horizontal fold well clear of block, which is perfect

EXTREMELY FINE. THE LARGEST AND FINEST OF THE THREE RECORDED 5-CENTAVOS LITHOGRAPH BLOCKS AND THE ONLY ONE KNOWN ON COVER. THIS ASTOUNDING COVER IS APTLY DESCRIBED BY GERHARD BLANK AS "THE MOST OUTSTANDING 'COLON' COVER OF THEM ALL" IN HIS DEFINITIVE BOOK ON THE 1853-1867 ISSUES OF CHILE. OFFERED AT PUBLIC AUCTION FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE ITS DISCOVERY IN A PARIS FLEA MARKET SHORTLY AFTER WORLD WAR II.

The 1854 Lithograph stamps are extremely rare in multiples. Only one unused pair is recorded, and strips of three or larger are rare on or off cover. As for blocks, there are just three: 1) the block of fourteen on the cover to Valparaiso offered here; 2) block of six, ex Caspary and Galvez, offered in this sale as lot 120; and 3) block of six, ex Walters and Galvez, offered in this sale as lot 121.

This remarkable cover, bearing a block of fourteen in perfect condition and well-tied by the four-ring cancellation, was completely unknown to philatelists until shortly after World War II when it was discovered in a flea market in Paris. It was acquired by John F. Rider and then sold to Helen Novy, a collector and the daughter of another famous collector, B. D. Forster, whose pencil signature is on the back of this cover. Islander acquired it in 1967 as part of the entire Novy collection of Chile.

Exhibited in the Aristocrats of Philately displays at Anphilex 1971, Interphil 1976 and Ameripex 1986. Illustrated in Gerhard Blank's *Chile: First Issues of Postage Stamps 1853-1867*, where described as "The most outstanding 'Colon' cover of them all." ... E. 400,000-500,000