PROPERTY FROM THE ESTATE OF JOHN E. DU PONT
THE BRITISH GUIANA ONE-CENT BLACK ON MAGENTA
The Unique British Guiana 1856 One-Cent, Black on Magenta Surface-Colored Paper
(Stanley Gibbons no.23, Scott no.13).
Initialled EDW, cut octagonally clear of design, April 4 1856 DEMERARA circular datestamp.
The Certificate issued by the Royal Philatelic Society in March 2014 records that the stamp is genuine and notes “surface rubbing reduced by over-painting at some time in the past – possibly while the stamp resided in the Ferrari collection.”
For completeness, the Certificate issued by the RPS is set out in full on page 57 in the catalogue for the Lot.
The unique example, unpriced in Gibbons and Scott.
29 x 26 mm (1 5/32 x 1 1/32 in.)
The stamp was also examined by Thomas Lera, the Winton S. Blount Research Chair of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, on 17 April 2014, and several photographs taken by Mr. Lera are reproduced in the catalogue.
provenance: Andrew Hunter (1856–1873), original recipient of the mailed stamp; Louis Vernon Vaughan (1873); Neil Ross McKinnon (1873–1878); Thomas Ridpath (1878); Philipp de la Rénotière von Ferrary (1878–1920; purple trefoil on reverse); Government of France (1920–1922); Arthur M. Hind (1922–1933; manuscript “H” on reverse; cloverleaf "AH" handstamp on reverse); Ann Hind Scala (1933–1940; perhaps a seventeen-point star handstamp on reverse used to obscure the cloverleaf of her husband); Frederick Trouton Small (1940–1970; comet handstamp on reverse; also initialed in pencil “FK” by his agent Finbar Kenny); Irwin Weinberg and Associates (1970–1980; pencil “IW” on reverse); John E. du Pont (1980–2014; pencil “JEdP” on reverse)
Switzerland, France, India, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Spain, and Canada

1986 Chicago Ameripex International Stamp Exhibition May 22–June 1 (Part of the British Guiana exhibit by “Rae Mader,” which won the Grand Prix) 1987 Perth, Australia, CUP-PEX National Philatelic Exhibition January 31–February 8

The One-Cent Black on Magenta is unique—the sole surviving One-Cent of the entire 1856 issue produced in Georgetown, British Guiana. The survival, rediscovery, and subsequent chain of ownership of the unique example of the One-Cent Magenta is just as serendipitous and captivating as the story of its creation. The significance of the stamp was first recognized by the great philatelist Edward Loines Pemberton, who declared as early as 1878 that the “ONE cent, red, 1856!!! [is] as genuine as anything ever was.” And just thirteen years later, The Philatelic Record formally acknowledged that the British Guiana was unique: “This is without doubt, in our opinion, the rarest stamp in the world, in its solitary grandeur.”

More than a century and a half after its creation, this stamp remains the ne plus ultra of the world's most popular collecting pursuit.

ESTIMATE 10,000,000-20,000,000 USD
Lot Sold: 9,480,000 USD

CATALOGUE NOTE
THE STORY OF THE WORLD'S RAREST AND MOST FAMOUS STAMP
El Dorado
Had Christopher Columbus heard of El Dorado when he sailed along the northeast shoulder of South America during his third voyage to the New World, he might have made landfall at Guyana rather than at the Paria Peninsula. And for three centuries after Columbus’s 1498 close encounter, explorers and adventurers from many nations did search for this fabled “Lost City of Gold,” which they also called Manõa.

Spanish conquistadores were the first to mount expeditions to find El Dorado, but the English, Portuguese, Dutch, and French also coveted the Guyana region. English interests were advanced by Sir Walter Raleigh, who hoped not only to discover the legendary City of Gold, but to challenge Spanish influence in the area. Raleigh believed that El Dorado was on the shores of Lake Parime in the Guyanese highlands. He made the first of two voyages to Guyana in 1595, sailing far into the interior on the Oronoco River. The report of this venture published the following year excited so much interest that three editions were called for, and the account was later included in the standard collections of voyages compiled by Hakluyt, de Bry, and Hulsius.

Despite the hopeful title of his narrative—in full, The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana, with a Relation of the Great and Golden Citie of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) and the Provinces of Emeria, Arromaia, Amapaia and other Countries, with their rivers adjoyning—neither Raleigh nor any other seeker found El Dorado (and Lake Parime turned out to be as mythical as the city). But fortunes in natural resources were discovered in the greater Guyana territory during the search. The place name Guyana derives from an Amerindian word meaning “land of many waters,” and explorers used the many interior waterways, as Raleigh had done, to travel inland in the areas that became Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, and Surinam.

Guyana itself proved a somewhat challenging proposition. The heat, oppressive humidity, and heavy rainfall limited inland development, and even today 80% of the country remains forested, including one of the largest undisturbed rainforests in South America. Despite Raleigh’s pioneering efforts, Guyana was initially colonized by the Chartered
West India Company of the Netherlands. The Dutch established three separate colonies in what would become Guyana: Essequibo (1616), Berbice (1627), and Demerara (1752). At first the Dutch West India Company acted essentially as a corporate privateer, preying on Spanish shipping. But the fertile land eventually encouraged the cultivation of sugar, coffee, and cotton—crops that brought with them slaves to work the plantations.

Near the end of the American Revolution, Holland declared war against Great Britain, which, recognizing that it was about to lose its North American colonies, retaliated by invading Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice. The French forced the British out in short order, and in 1783, the colonies were returned to Dutch control. But the English never fully forsook a presence in Guyana, and in 1796, British troops dispatched from Barbados again captured the Guayanese colonies. The English remained in control until 1802, when the Treaty of Amiens returned the three colonies to the Batavian Republic (as the Netherlands was briefly styled during its enforced alliance with France). The Napoleonic Wars ensured that the peace was short-lived. The very next year Admiral Samuel Hood’s squadron carried a small expeditionary force, commanded by General William Grinfield, to Stabroek, the colonial capital of Demerara. Demerara and Essequibo were surrendered almost immediately, with Berbice similarly capitulating when the British landed there a few days later. This time the British occupation lasted until 1814, when the three colonies were officially ceded to Great Britain. The British had begun prior to that to centralize the administration of the colonies, and in 1831 the three were combined as the Crown Colony of British Guiana, with the capital situated at the former Stabroek, now rechristened Georgetown.

For the next 135 years, British Guiana played its part in ensuring that the sun never set on the British Empire, but daily life there was not greatly changed from the earlier period of Dutch rule. Sugar plantations remained the mainstay of the economy, with the plantations worked by free—albeit indentured—laborers after England abolished slavery in its colonies in 1834. But although El Dorado was never found, a treasure far more valuable than gold was produced in British Guiana—a philatelic pearl of great price that would inflame the imaginations of the conquistadores of the collecting world.

The Early Postal History of British Guiana
The first organized mails from the South American colonies of the Dutch West Indies Company began in 1796 when a private packet-boat service was employed to ship letters to Barbados to be forwarded across the Atlantic Ocean to the Netherlands, Great Britain, and beyond. These were regularly scheduled sailings on ships carrying passengers, trade goods, and communications in what was known as the Packet Trade. Conflicts, including the Napoleonic Wars, and changes of governance were a source of constant disruption. It was expensive, the captains of the private ships were not all entirely honest, and the sailing ships were slow. Steamships first picked up mail in Georgetown in 1840, the same year that Great Britain introduced postage stamps. By 1842, when the Royal Mail Service was inaugurated, the Guianese postal system had become faster, more reliable, and more frequent. But while mails arrived at the port, there was still not any efficient mechanism for delivering the letters and parcels onward.

A main Post Office had been operated at Georgetown since the eighteenth century, when the city was still named Stabroek. In 1813 a sub-Post Office was opened in New Amsterdam, Berbice. Postmasters, appointed by the Dutch and British respectively, had come and gone with great frequency and had met with little success and even less respect. The few attempts that had been made to implement inland mail delivery were irregular, expensive, and short-lived. The only real purpose of the Postmaster and his office was to collect, sort, and dispatch the transatlantic mail. As this was the era before postage stamps and the prepayment of letters, the citizenry would have to go to the Post Office and pay for their mail, which in turn paid the salary of the Postmaster. This system inevitably encouraged abuses. Postmasters often charged their captive clients more than was officially owed, and an inspection of the Georgetown Packet Office in 1820 revealed that Postmaster Williams, in office since 1804, had “let out the Office to Farm to different persons,” having “only personally discharged his Duties for the space of two years.” The Admiralty Service assumed control of the Packet Service in 1823, but problems persisted.

E. T. E. Dalton, Colonial Postmaster
Edward Thomas Evans Dalton was one of Williams’s successors as Postmaster at Georgetown, but his career was notably more successful. Even so, Dalton frequently faced discipline from the Colonial Office, which had little understanding of the exigencies of running a British Post Office in a remote colony. Between his appointment as Deputy Postmaster General in March 1837 and his retirement as Postmaster of the colony in 1874, Dalton was removed from—and reinstated to—office at least three times; received—and ignored—numerous official reprimands from London about the irregularities plaguing his performance; and kept himself and the Post Office at Demerara constantly in arrears. (It should be noted that the jumble of currencies in circulation in the West Indies may have contributed to his financial mismanagement.) Still, he greatly impressed and won praise from the novelist Anthony Trollope, who toured British Guiana in his role as a British Postal Inspector in 1859.

The Georgetown Post Office was evidently something of a family sinecure. E. T. E. Dalton succeeded his father, Edward Henry Dalton, who had formerly been a sugar planter, and he was followed in turn by his own son, Edward Henry Goring Dalton. But it was Edward Thomas Dalton who achieved greatness in the postal realm: he introduced regular inland mail delivery to British Guiana and he provided the colony with some of the earliest postage stamps in the world.

On Saturday, 15 June 1850, an announcement appeared in the biweekly Royal Gazette, heralding a new daily inland service (Sundays excepted), which was coordinated with local train timetables, railways having been established in the colony in 1848. The notice provided a schedule of towns to be served, receiving offices, and postal rates, which varied according to distance: the minimum rate was 4 cents an ounce and the maximum rate was 12 cents an ounce, with an intermediate rate of 8 cents an ounce. Stamps, which were already being printed as of the date of Dalton’s announcement, were expected to be ready for sale by 24 June at the Post Offices in Georgetown and New Amsterdam, as well as at the twenty various receiving stations—a combination of police stations and general stores. In January 1846, Dalton had actually started an earlier inland post between Georgetown and Essequibo, but at the end of February the British Colonial Office informed Dalton that his arrangement was illegal and ordered that it “be immediately discontinued.” In 1850, British Guiana sought official permission to launch a local post, and approval was granted by London—but in true Demerara fashion, Dalton started the service three months before it was formally authorized.

British Guiana’s First Postage Stamps

i. the cottonreels
(Stanley Gibbons nos. 2–8, Scott nos. 2–5)

In the decade immediately following the introduction of postage stamps by Great Britain on 1 May 1840, fewer than twenty countries, territories, and cities had stamp issues of their own. In the Americas only Brazil and the United States preceded British Guiana into production, and a complete collection of world stamps would have numbered less than one hundred examples. During the next decade that number would grow into the thousands, as virtually every country in the world issued its own stamps—and a few people started to collect them.

The stamps that Dalton commissioned in 1850 were of a rudimentary design created using the limited resources of the offices of Joseph Baum and William Dallas, printers and publishers of the Royal Gazette of British Guiana, a small-format newspaper issued every Wednesday and Saturday in Georgetown. The Postmaster turned to local printers because the inland service was to begin before stamps could possibly be supplied from Great Britain.

The little that is known about the printers comes from a memoir by the American humorist Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber, who relates how he came to be indentured as a compositor to the Royal Gazette for twenty months in 1835. In the first part of Experience during Many Years, serialized in The New England Magazine in 1893, Shillaber relates that “Mr. Baum … was a Pennsylvanian, and Mr. Dallas a light mulatto; and a more perfect gentleman and a better printer I had never met with. He was educated in Scotland and acquired the art of printing there, in all branches of which he was a perfect master. He was affable in the highest degree and always treated me with a kindness which rendered our relations very pleasant.”

The stamps produced in Baum and Dallas’s shop in 1850 were printed by an employee named Henry Mackay,
according to Edward Chauncy Luard, the first prominent philatelist in British Guiana. They were circular, and in size and design so reminiscent of the labels found on the ends of spools of thread that they subsequently became known among collectors as “cottonreels.” According to The Postage Stamps and Postal History of British Guiana by W. A. Townsend and F. G. Howe, the cottonreels were printed on a Columbian handpress from individual settings of type. The simple frames were formed by pieces of printer’s brass rule, beveled at one edge and blunt at the other edge, bent into a circular shape and so soldered. Type from the regular case of the Gazette was then set within the circular frame: BRITISH around the top, GUIANA around the bottom, and 4 (8 or 12) Cents in the middle. The type pieces were secured in place with quads and other furniture (or perhaps with chewed paper), imposed and locked in a chase, inked, and printed.

It is not known how many stamps were printed on a single sheet, but as Townsend has identified four distinct frames (based on thickness, shape, and flaws in the circular rules and by distinctive positions of the letter sorts), it is thought the stamps were printed in a horizontal row of four. The same basic setting of type was used to print stamps of different denominations: to change from one duty to another, the chase would be unlocked, the numeral sort carefully extracted, the new value sort inserted, the chase relocked, and the forme re-inked and printed. To easily differentiate between the values, the stamps were printed in black ink on different colored papers: the four-cent on orange (with a later printing on lemon-yellow); the eight-cent on green; and the twelve-cent on blue shades ranging from pale to indigo.

All examples of the 1850 cottonreels are initialed by Dalton or by one of his subordinates: James Belton Smith, a clerk in the Imperial Branch; H. A. Killikelly, a letter carrier; W. H. Lorimer, likely a railway clerk; and Edmond Dalzell Wight, a clerk in the Colonial Post Office, whose E.D.W. appears on the 1856 One-Cent. The initialing is thought to have been done to thwart counterfeiters, since anyone with a job press and a handful of type could have produced a reasonable facsimile of the Royal Gazette stamps.

While there is no record of how many cottonreels were eventually printed, it is known, based on a Royal Gazette invoice attached to a report Dalton submitted to the colonial legislature on 11 March 1851, how many were printed during the final six months of 1850: 656 12-cent blues, 1,200 8-cent greens, and 1,752 4-cent yellows. The charge for printing the stamps was 50 cents per one hundred regardless of denomination. Curiously, the three stamps survive in almost equal numbers, despite the disparity in the numbers printed, at least through the first half year of production.

ii. the two-cent cottonreel
(Stanley Gibbons no. 1, Scott no. 1)

Early in 1851, a fourth value was added to the issue of cottonreel stamps. A 2-cent denomination was printed to cover postal delivery within Georgetown. Postmaster Dalton again used a notice in the Royal Gazette, 22 February 1851, to introduce the new service:

By Order of His Excellency the Governor and upon the request of several of the merchants of Georgetown, it is proposed to establish a Delivery of Letters twice a day through the principal streets of this city, viz., Water-Street, Main-Street, their intermediate streets, and the Brick Dam, as far as the Roman Catholic Chapel. … Each letter must bear a stamp, for which Two Cents will be charged or it will not be delivered, and when called for will be subject to the usual postage of Eight Cents.

Deliveries began on 1 March and were set for 10:00 in the morning and 2:00 in the afternoon. The new stamps were available at the Georgetown Post Office as well as at five stores that were designated as receiving stations. The 2-cent stamps were printed by Baum and Dallas on rose-colored paper using the same typographic frames as the three earlier values. All ten surviving examples are initialed—two by Dalton, two by Wight, and six by Smith. Despite the encouragement of “several of the merchants of Georgetown,” this service was discontinued after a short period due to lack of support and the remaining stamps were retained, with some being used as multiples to pay the regular postage of four cents or higher. The 2-cent cottonreel was alluded to in articles over the years but it wasn’t until 1877 that a single specimen appeared in England from a collector in British Guiana. Two more copies appeared in quick succession from the same source and within a year an entire collection of British Guiana stamps arrived in
Britain for sale. This collection, which contained the fourth and last single copy of this rarity found to date, was sent to E. L. Pemberton, who was very familiar with the colony's stamps. Pemberton examined the 2-cent stamp and satisfied himself that it was a genuine copy. But that same collection also included a stamp that Pemberton had never before seen: a small octagonal 1-cent magenta stamp.

iii. the 1852 second issue
(Stanley Gibbons nos. 9 and 10, Scott nos. 6 and 7)
The new inland mail service of British Guiana was greeted with enthusiasm, but it ultimately proved to be unpopular because of the system of charging by distance. In particular, the 12-cent fee for delivery to New Amsterdam, Spring Garden, Zorg, Williamstown, and Henrietta was considered disproportionate. On 27 December 1851, Postmaster Dalton announced that in the New Year the colony’s Post Office was converting to a weight-based fee structure.

Regardless of the distance of their delivery, letters weighing less than half an ounce would require four cents postage; those weighing half an ounce or more but less than an ounce would need eight cents; one ounce or more but less than two ounces, twelve cents; two ounces or more but less than three, sixteen cents; with every additional ounce requiring an additional four cents in postage. Perhaps the only people in the colony displeased with the new scheme were newspaper subscribers. Papers had previously been delivered at no charge, but they now required one cent in postage. (In April, the postage charge was briefly rescinded for newspapers mailed within a week of their publication.)

New stamps were also issued for 1852—the first to be supplied to the colony from the English mainland. They were produced by a firm of legal document printers, Waterlow and Sons Limited. The firm had been in business since 1810 and would go on to become one of the premier printers of stamps and banknotes in the British Empire. But the 1852 British Guiana issue comprised some of the very first stamps they manufactured. The large upright rectangular stamps came in two values and were printed by lithography: two copper dies were engraved for each value and impressions of these were made on paper and then transferred to a lithographic stone. The stamps were probably printed in sheets of one hundred. The 1-cent was printed in black on magenta surface-colored paper, the 4-cent in black on deep blue. The design featured a vignette of a ship in a shield framed at the left by BRITISH reading upward and at the right by GUIANA reading downward, with the value at top and the curiously misspelled two-line Latin motto damus petimus que vicissim in small capitals at the bottom. The whole design was bordered by a single-rule frame. The typographical error petimus for patimus in the colony’s motto (“we give and seek in return”) was the fault of the engraver in England.

The stamps, although somewhat crudely printed, were far superior to the issues they replaced. They would stay in circulation for less than two years, however, when they were superseded by the finely engraved Waterlow colored issue of 1853. Concerns over forgery and fragility (the surface of the stamps rubbed very easily) must have resulted in this change as a large stock of these stamps was withdrawn when the new stamps arrived. Edward Chauncy Luard reported that a later Government Secretary, A. G. Young, became so agitated by the constant application of collectors for examples of the 1852 issue that he had the remaining stockpile destroyed.

iv. the 1853 third issue
(Stanley Gibbons nos. 12–20, Scott nos. 8–11)
There was no official announcement for the new 1-cent and 4-cent stamps of 1853. As there was no change in the postage rate it seems likely that the new stamps—again printed by Waterlow—just replaced the old as they arrived in the colony. For the first time both values were printed in color on white paper: the 1-cent in shades between vermilion and brown red, the 4-cent in light to deep blue. The design again featured a ship motif with the correct damus petimus que vicissim inscribed in an oval border around it. The whole was contained within a rectangular frame with BRITISH and GUIANA at left and right, POSTAGE above, and the value fully spelled out below. The four corners showed the issue date: 1 and 8 at the top, 5 and 3 at the bottom. This would remain the standard type for the years 1853 to 1859—except for an extended period of 1856 when the Colony would be forced to produce its own stamps once again.
The 1856 Provisional Issue and the One-Cent Magenta  
(Stanley Gibbons nos. 23–27, Scott nos. 13–16)

In early 1856 the Post Office in British Guiana was about to run out of stamps due to a delay in supply. On 25 November 1854, 100,000 stamps—50,000 1-cent and 50,000 4-cent—were ordered from Waterlow and Sons. In September 1855 the order arrived, but it contained only 5,000 stamps of each value. An immediate request was dispatched for the full order to make up for what can only have been a significant clerical error. A full year would be needed to reset the presses in England and print and ship the shortfall to British Guiana. As a result, by January 1856 supplies were running low.

Postmaster Edward Dalton had to look to a local supplier in order to avoid calamity, and, as in 1850, he approached the firm of Baum and Dallas. The publishers had in the interim changed the name of their newspaper to the Official Gazette, which more accurately reflected the periodical’s position as the authorized organ of the colonial government. For this contingency supply of stamps, the Gazette office abandoned the simple circular cotton reel design and attempted to mimic the appearance of the first, 1852, Waterlow stamps. The printer, most likely Archibald Devonshire in this instance, took a stock wood- or metal-cut vignette of a ship and set it with the colony motto Damus Petimus, above, Que Vicissum, below, all within a frame of four thin rules. At the upper and lower borders, outside the rules, he set the words BRITISH and GUIANA; at the left border, the word POSTAGE, and at the right, one of two duties: ONE CENT or FOUR CENTS.

The stamps were set and printed in pairs, one above the other. The top setting is known as Type one and the bottom as Type two. The small size of the form was almost certainly due to the small number of ship cuts available. (It has often been asserted that the ship illustration used on the 1856 stamps was the one used by the paper to illustrate its regular shipping reports—but the Gazette, Royal or Official, did not print shipping news. The ships must have just been among the odd assortment of cuts that would accumulate in any nineteenth-century printing office.) The 4-cent stamps were printed in black on four basic papers: first surface-colored magenta; next surface-colored rose-carmine; then surface-colored blue; and finally full blue. Throughout the year the printing was repeated as the papers changed, and several states are known. The single surviving One-Cent known is a Type two, the lower of the pair, and falls between State I and II of the earliest printed 4-cent values on magenta surface paper. Judging by the earliest known cancellations, the One-Cent is almost certainly from late January 1856.

The reason the two 1856 denominations were initially printed on the same color paper remains a puzzle. Because of the celebrity of the One-Cent, the question has usually been phrased as to why the One-Cent was printed on the same color as the 4-cent. But the more pertinent question is why the 1856 4-cent was printed on red, since the 4-cent was consistently on blue for all other issues from 1852 through 1860. The answer probably lies in the supplies available to the printers. It does appear that when a blue ink or a blue paper became available later in the year it was adopted for use. British Guiana always had several indigenous red dyes such as annatto or chicha on hand.

The stamps were prepared at the Gazette offices in the Cumingsburg District, No. 23 High Street and Church Street. They were reputedly printed on a Columbian “Eagle” press manufactured by Thomas Long & Co., Engineers, Edinburgh, now housed at the National Museum of Guyana, not far from the site of the printing office. The stamps were then delivered to the Post Office located in the Public Buildings, several blocks south on Brickdam Street. As with the previous locally produced issues of 1850, Postmaster Dalton had each stamp initialed by either himself or one of his clerks for extra security. The unique One-Cent was initialed by E(dmund) D(alzell) W(ight). Like Government Secretary A. G. Young, Wight had little tolerance for the philatelic celebrity achieved by British Guiana’s early stamps. In 1889, Edward Denny Bacon, one of the first philatelists to write about the stamps of the colony, reported that E. C. Luard had told him that “Mr. Wight is still alive and living in the colony but he is in his dotage and either cannot or will not remember anything about these old stamps except that he initialed them. He has been so pestered on the subject that the mention of old stamps to him is like a red rag to a bull.”

The whereabouts of the One-Cent Magenta for the last 141 years can be known positively. But the first seventeen years of its existence are shrouded in impenetrable obscurity. The stamp was purchased on or before 4 April 1856,
the date it was postmarked, and affixed to an envelope or newspaper wrapper, most likely addressed to a Mr. Andrew Hunter. And sometime in 1873, the stamp was discovered—or recovered—by a nephew of Hunter, a budding stamp collector. For the years between those events, the stamp resided unrecognized and unappreciated on its cover in the tropical heat and humidity of British Guiana.

1873–1878: From Georgetown to Paris
In 1873 Louis Vernon Vaughan, a twelve-year-old schoolboy of Welsh Scottish descent whose family had immigrated to British Guiana, came upon the correspondence of his uncle Andrew Hunter while clearing out his relative’s home. Hunter had recently left the colony after forty-two years and moved to Barbados, where he died on 12 October the following year. Vaughan had recently caught the philately bug, and he began soaking the stamps from their covers and placing them into his collection. The correspondence dated from the earliest issues of the colony, and even though the quality and appearance of the early issues paled in comparison to the new brightly colored and sharply engraved stamps now appearing throughout the world, Vaughan was happy to add them to his album. He could not have known that the One-Cent was unique, but he likely did recognize it as being from the scarce emergency issue of 1856—and he certainly knew that he did not have an example.

It is worth noting that The Official Gazette of British Guiana, which usually published on Wednesday and Saturday only, issued a one-page “Extraordinary” number on Friday, 4 April—the date the One-Cent was cancelled. This special issue, with a blank verso, could very easily have been folded, sealed, addressed, and stamped with the proper One-Cent postage. And the fact that the “Extraordinary” issue contained two proclamations by Philip Edmund Wodehouse, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of British Guiana, could help explain why Andrew Hunter retained it among his papers. Shortly afterwards, Vaughan received a packet of unused foreign stamps on approval from Albert Smith and Company. Smith, located in Bath, England, had been in business since the 1860s and was one of the world’s first stamp dealers. The firm’s advertisements in all the major magazines for boys throughout the English-speaking world created a lucrative business during the first decades of the hobby. Smith was also the publisher of The Stamp-Collector’s Magazine, 1863–1874, one of the best regarded of the early periodicals devoted to stamps. In the 1 July 1865 issue of the magazine Mr. (later Judge) Frederick Adolphus Philbrick, writing under the pseudonym Damus Petimusque Vicissim, had attempted to clarify the issues of the colony of British Guiana. He listed the 1850 4-cent, 8-cent, and 12-cent cottonreels and mentioned the possible existence of a 2-cent value on pink paper, although he thought it unlikely (Philbrick’s “First Issue”). He described the 1-cent and 4-cent from 1852 as from 1850 and 1851, respectively (“Second Issue”), but the 1853 issue was catalogued correctly (“Fourth Issue”). As his “Third Issue” Philbrick described and illustrated what is now recognized as the 1856 issue: oblong rectangles printed in black on surface-colored paper. He described two 4-cent values only, one on deep magenta, the other on deep azure blue: These stamps are engraved on wood, and printed in the colony; a sheet or so only was printed on blue, to replace the old blue 4 c. upright rectangle, but the supply of blue paper failing, they were also printed on pink paper, the shape sufficiently guarding against confusion with the former issue. The circulation of these stamps was of the most limited duration, both kinds are of the highest degree of rarity; few indeed are the happy possessors of either, while those who have the blue may be reckoned twice over on the fingers of one hand, and may be congratulated on having probably the very rarest stamp known to collectors. Two English collections, it is believed, and two only, boast of this matchless blue; while on the continent a specimen is not known to exist. The pink is also of but one less degree of rarity, scarcely known even among the élite of collections. All stamps of this issue, which the writer has ever seen, bear an initialed signature, in addition to the usual postmark. In their perfect state these stamps have a margin of considerable width.

This is almost certainly the reference that the young Vernon Vaughan had when perusing his find. His newfound stamps contained cottonreels and quite likely at least two of Philbrick’s “Third Issue” stamps. (In 1906 L. V. Vaughan displayed his collection for the British Guiana Philatelic Society at Georgetown; it still contained a 12-cent cottonreel and an 1856 4-cent Black on Blue.) The fact that one of his 1856 oblongs was a One-Cent and not listed should have
been exciting, but as it was a poor copy with cut corners he decided to sell it in order to buy some of the newer and more attractive issues that he had been sent on approval from Mr. Smith of Bath. He might have expected to eventually turn up a better example among his uncle’s papers.

Vaughan removed the stamp from his album and offered it to a local collector, Neil Ross McKinnon of Berbice. McKinnon, a young Scots gentleman in his early twenties, at first declined. He thought it a bad specimen and objected to it being cut octagonally rather than square. When he understood that Vaughan only wished to sell in order to buy other stamps, McKinnon relented. After Vaughan accepted his offer of six shillings ($1.44), McKinnon is supposed to have given him this observation with the money, “Now look here, my lad, I am taking a great risk in paying so much for this stamp and I hope you will appreciate my generosity.”

McKinnon kept the One-Cent in his collection for about five years, during which period there was an explosion of interest in British Guiana from the fledgling stamp-collecting world. Philatelists were particularly intrigued by the circular cottonreels of 1850, and the few examples that had made their way into the English and European trade had sold for large sums.

From the perspective of 1921, A. D. Ferguson, Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society, London, described the early “stamp rush” during those years in The British Guiana Philatelic Journal:

Evidently these comparatively large sums obtained, together with the advertisements of English dealers in local newspapers, acted as an incentive to searchers for stamps. The result was that many searches were made from 1876 on, among private letters, in banks, merchants’ offices, Government offices, etc., as opportunity offered, with the result that hundreds of the early issues were found. In some cases these searches were made without permission by clerks, office-boys, etc., and were promptly sold on the spot.

L. Vernon Vaughan later recalled selling cottonreels as a teenager for a pound ($5.00) each, regardless of denomination.

The most successful buyers turned out to be local collectors, many of whom ran their own standing advertisements offering cash for the early issues. These men, all still in their twenties, included, in addition to Neil Ross McKinnon in New Amsterdam, Edward Chauncy Luard, Charles Guy Austin Wyatt, and Mewburn Garnett in Georgetown. Of these, only Luard would go on to become a prominent philatelist. These young men became, in turn, the source of supply for the English dealers who started receiving large troves of these issues during 1876 and 1877. One consignment sent to Stanley Gibbons in London numbered well over three hundred specimens.

Oddly, it seems that the Demerara collectors were not aware of the activities of McKinnon in Berbice. E. C. Luard, writing in 1882, appeared to have no knowledge of the series of events that had played out during 1877 and 1878. Up to 1876 there were supposedly two complete collections of British Guiana. One belonged to the famous dealer J. B. Moens of Belgium, the second to the equally celebrated Baron Arthur de Rothschild. These collections were valued at one hundred and fifty pounds each at the time. Now it is known that both were short by two issues: the fabled 1850 2-cent cottonreel on rose-colored paper alluded to by Philbrick and the 1856 One-Cent Black on Magenta, the existence of which was not even yet a rumor. Today there are four known single used copies of the former and just one of the latter. In 1876, Neil Ross McKinnon owned all five.

Edward Bacon, writing in The London Philatelist in February 1900, describes the first appearance of the 2-cent cottonreel. According to Bacon, a Mr. Kirton sold the stamp to the twenty-six-year-old Liverpool dealer Thomas Ridpath in late 1877. A. D. Ferguson, writing years later, suggested that the seller must have been Neil McKinnon since he was the seller of the only other known single copies of this rarity. But Bacon’s version of events is almost certainly accurate. He received his information directly from Ridpath, albeit twenty years after the transaction. And Ridpath purchased the entire McKinnon collection some thirteen months after acquiring the 2-cent and would presumably have remembered his name when speaking to Bacon.

McKinnon was the original owner of this stamp but not Ridpath’s vendor. He must have exchanged or sold the stamp to Mr. Kirton, who was probably another local enthusiast. There was a Kirton plantation in British Guiana and a fairly prominent Kirton family that had interests in Barbados and throughout the West Indies. But regardless of how Ridpath acquired the stamp, he quickly sold it on to the twenty-seven-year-old Philipp La Rénotière von Ferrary of Paris. For a
short period between late 1877 and March 1878 this was the only known copy and the rarest stamp of British Guiana. This particular example, one of the two known single examples in private hands, is presently part of the John du Pont Collection.

McKinnon sold two further copies of the 2-cent on rose paper in March and July of 1878, both to Alfred Smith of Bath, whose appealing offerings had enticed young Vernon Vaughan to part with his One-Cent Magenta. Smith paid something in the range of fifteen pounds each for the cottonreels. Very little information has survived regarding private-transaction prices from that period, but it is recorded that Judge Philbrick purchased the first of these specimens from Smith in March for twenty pounds.

By late summer 1878, whether encouraged by his recent windfall or sensing the peak of the market, Neil McKinnon decided to sell his entire collection. With the knowledge that his duplicate copies of the 2-cent cottonreel had fetched very good money, his attention probably turned to the strange little red octagonal One-Cent he had purchased five years earlier. The stamp was not pretty, but neither were the earlier circular issues and they were selling well. The problem was that there was no mention in any publication anywhere of any value of this issue apart from the 4-cent. What McKinnon needed was an expert opinion.

Edward Loines Pemberton was the leading philatelic expert of the day, certainly at least in the English-speaking world. He had published the great Stamp Collectors Handbook (1874), his monthly Philatelic Journal was widely circulated and uniformly praised, and his pioneering works on forgeries, Album Weeds, remains a required reference to this day.

McKinnon dispatched his entire collection to his old friend Robert Wylie Hill in Glasgow. Wylie Hill was the grandson of the successful hair and feather merchant Robert Wylie, and beginning about 1875, he spent several years in South America collecting birds, sometimes traveling far up the Amazon River to obtain exotic specimens. It was during this time that Hill would have met McKinnon; two educated young Scotsmen of the same age and living in the same colony could hardly have failed to know each other. McKinnon’s instructions to Hill were simple. The collection was to be sent to Edward Pemberton for his examination, and if he so chose he would then have first refusal at a price of one hundred and ten pounds. (Perhaps the ten pounds represented a commission to Hill.)

Pemberton examined the collection sometime in late September 1878 and pronounced the One-Cent Magenta to be absolutely genuine. For some reason, possibly illness, he did not purchase the collection immediately. He may well have sent the stamps back to Wylie Hill in Scotland with a counteroffer. But what Pemberton did not realize was that McKinnon had stipulated that if he turned down the collection, Hill was to then send letters offering the collection to the major dealers in the country. These would have almost certainly included Stanley Gibbons in London, Alfred Smith of Bath, and Thomas Ridpath of Liverpool.

Ridpath acted first. He later wrote to Bacon that he received Hill’s letter at 4:45 p.m. on 2 October 1878, “and by 8 p.m. I was on my way to Glasgow. I saw Mr. Hill before 9 a.m. next morning, concluded the business and was back in Liverpool all within twenty-four hours.” Ridpath paid £120, and legend has it that Pemberton’s check for £110 arrived shortly afterwards. In order to come up with the purchase price so quickly, Ridpath may have sought a loan from his friend and sometime backer James Botteley, a coal merchant from Birmingham and an avid stamp collector. Botteley’s fee in such arrangements was not monetary, but rather the right of first choice from the new acquisition.

It is not known if Botteley passed on the One-Cent because of its appearance or if, as L. N. Williams maintained, because “he was asked by Ridpath, as a special favour, not to take the 1 cent stamp as the dealer could obtain a far greater price from Paris than he would dream of asking Botteley." Within days Ridpath visited Ferrary in Paris, and sold him the One-Cent Black on Magenta, which both parties recognized as a rarity, although neither could have known it was unique. The price is not known, but it is unlikely to have been more than £40. At the same time, Ridpath exchanged the 2-cent cottonreel for the example he had supplied the previous year as he believed it a slightly superior copy. Both stamps would remain in the Ferrary collection for over forty years. (Five years later, the 2-cent cottonreel Ferrary traded back to Ridpath would end up in the collection of James Botteley at a cost of thirty pounds.)

1878–1891: Establishing Authenticity

Almost as soon as the One-Cent Black on Magenta had arrived in Britain, it disappeared into the fabled cabinets
belonging to Philipp von Ferrary at 57 rue de Varenne in Paris. During its brief stay in late 1878 it had been seen by a total of four people: Robert Wylie Hill, Thomas Ridpath, James Botteley, and Edward Pemberton. Following Pemberton’s death on 12 December 1878 at the age of 34, only three witnesses remained. Fortunately, Pemberton left a written record of his impression of the stamp in a letter sent the previous month to his friend Frederick Philbrick. He had had the opportunity to examine the McKinnon collection, Pemberton related, and it included a “ONE cent, red, 1856!!! as genuine as anything ever was.”

In British Guiana Neil McKinnon was pursuing his law career and apparently never returned to philately. He may have spoken to Vernon Vaughan at some point about the sale of his stamps to Ridpath because Vaughan’s later recollection of the 1856 One-Cent accounting for twenty-five pounds of the total sum paid for the McKinnon collection is probably the most accurate of the many and varied estimates. The continuing lack of information regarding the stamp was underlined in 1882 when Edward Luard wrote “Valuable Curiosities from the British Guiana Post Office.” The article mentioned the 2-cent “Pink” cottonreel, to which Luard assigned a value of thirty pounds, while noting a decline in the price of the other values in 1879 due to the many discoveries during the previous three years. On the subject of the 1856 issue he makes no reference at all to the One-Cent. He does describe a 4-cent yellow, but this is obviously a confusion with the earlier cottonreel of the same color and denomination.

Back in England, a largely accurate description of the One-Cent did appear in The Philatelic Record for January 1882: The old issues of this colony [British Guiana] form a mine from which unexpected treasures are yet to be unearthed. Comparatively few of our readers have ever heard of the existence of a One cent, brown of the same design, and probably issued at the same time, as the large, oblong, magenta and blue Four cents stamps of 1856. And yet we have excellent reasons for chronicling the existence of this stamp, a specimen of which is, we understand, in the collection of M. de. Ferrari. We shall be glad if this gentlemen will give some account of this rarity for the benefit of the many collectors who are as enthusiastic, but in many respects less highly favoured than he is.

Seven years later, on 3 May 1889, a paper was read before the Philatelic Society, London. The title was “Some New Facts connected with the History of the Postage Stamps of British Guiana.” The author was a twenty-eight-year-old philatelist named Edward Denny Bacon. In his May paper, Bacon does not cite the One-Cent, and there is only a brief synopsis of the 1856 issue as a whole. But it is almost impossible to overstate the importance of the ensuing contributions of this one man to the story of the One-Cent Black on Magenta. By gathering all the available information he was able, for the first time, to provide a concise history of the stamps of the colony. In many ways he completed the last work of E. L. Pemberton, whose untimely death ten years previously had left so much information unrecorded. The “New Facts” paper is notable because, for the first time, it correctly listed all the issues prior to 1856, complete with Post Office records, dates of issue, and the printers of the various issues. It also corrected several errors in F. A. Philbrick’s 1865 article in The Stamp-Collector’s Magazine. Philbrick, at this point president of the Philatelic Society, issued a response to Bacon, published in The Philatelic Record for June 1889, which included additional commentary about the One-Cent:

Mr. Pemberton, to whom this stamp was originally offered by Mr. Wyatt, accidentally omitted to close with the offer till too late, but believed firmly in it. He wrote me in November 1878, he was to have given £110 for this, and four circulars of 1850 — five stamps in all. He says the lot included a “ONE cent, red, 1856!!! as genuine as anything ever was.” Later on, in the same letter, he adds, “I can learn nothing of that 4 c, ‘56, yellow. This one cent, ’56, red, is queer; no doubt went with the 4 c, blue—nothing unlikely in that; it was a dreadfully poor copy.”

Having examined it myself, I regret I must agree with him that the copy is very poor. The shade of colour is neither full nor bright; the appearance is as if it had been washed out; while the value is not clearly legible. But the people at the Royal Gazette office left this value standing in the list, and they ought to know. Mr. Pemberton’s remark that a 1 cent value is not unlikely to have been called for is plausible, and I think we must agree that, so far as our present knowledge goes, there is no impossibility in such a stamp having been created. The absence of another copy, too, notwithstanding the later “finds,” is in its favour; but I do not feel in a position, until Gazette notices are traced out, or other official documents supplied, to pronounce definitely on the subject. If admitted to the list, it should be catalogued under, “All reserve.”
The reference to the 4-cent yellow pertained to the stamp mentioned previously by Edward Luard in 1882 (and now known to be a chimera). “Mr. Wyatt” is a reference to Charles Wyatt, who sent a large find of the 1850 cottonreels to Stanley Gibbons in 1877; here Philbrick seems to confuse him with Wylie Hill. The amount of £110 is believed to be correct, although it is likely, but not certain, that this price was for the entire McKinnon collection and not just for the One-Cent and four circulars. As early as 1881 Philbrick claimed that he had viewed the One-Cent “before it went overseas” and believed it to be an altered 4-cent; this article indicates that, eight years later, he remained unconvinced that the One-Cent was genuine.

The period from 1889 to 1891 saw two events critical to the standing of the One-Cent. Edward Bacon began expanding his paper on the stamps of British Guiana for the Philatelic Society’s monograph The Postage Stamps, Envelopes, Wrappers, Post Cards, and Telegraph Stamps of the British Colonies in the West Indies together with British Honduras and the Colonies in South America. He was also invited to view the fabulous stamp collection of Philipp von Ferrary. Bacon’s verdict on the stamp was unambiguous: “While in Paris, I had a long-wished-for opportunity of examining the only known copy of the one cent of this issue, of which Herr P. von Ferrary is the fortunate possessor. Doubts have more than once been expressed about the ‘face’ value of this stamp, but after a most careful inspection I have no hesitation whatever in pronouncing it a thoroughly genuine one cent specimen. The copy is a poor one, dark magenta in colour, but somewhat rubbed. It is initialed E. D. W., and dated April Ist, the year not being distinct enough to read.”

Bacon’s comment regarding the doubts expressed about the “face” value of the stamp seems to be aimed directly at Philbrick. This was the genesis of a controversy that would resurface periodically over the next eighty years. On one point, Pemberton, Bacon, and Philbrick were agreed: the One-Cent was a poor specimen. This was a fact conceded by every owner since Vaughan. Pemberton described it as “red” and “queer”; Bacon as “dark magenta” and “rubbed”: both terms which approximate the current condition of the stamp. Philbrick noted that “the shade of colour is neither full nor bright” and that “the value is not clearly legible.”

In all likelihood, however, Philbrick probably never actually saw the One-Cent and later confused it in his memory with a 4-cent black on magenta of the same issue. This supposition is supported by circumstantial evidence. First, Philbrick was not made aware of the possible existence of the stamp, via Pemberton’s letter, until November 1878, weeks after Ridpath had sold the stamp to Ferrary in Paris. Second, just prior to Philbrick’s claim that he examined the stamp “before it went overseas,” a hoard of between eighty and one hundred copies of the 1856 4-cent magenta had appeared.

The publication of The Stamps of the West Indies in 1891 was met with universal acclaim. The opening editorial of the October issue of The Philatelic Record claimed that “However noteworthy and important the previously-issued productions of the Society have been, we are doubtless correct in stating that in the magnitude of the work undertaken, the importance of the subject, and the successful outcome of their labours, the Stamps of the West Indies transcends all its predecessors.” In particular, the editorial praised the wealth of new information and facsimile reproductions regarding “that Philatelic Parnassus—a complete set of the early issues of Guiana”: “The very scarcest stamps of the mainland colony—British Guiana—are and must remain ‘a dream’ to the vast majority of collectors; … the announcement of the undoubted existence of the oblong 1 c. magenta of the 1856 issue will come as a surprise to thousands of collectors who have, of course, not been fortunate enough to inspect this famous stamp, the possession of which Herr von Ferrary need well be proud.” And in a review proper of the book later in the same issue, the One-Cent was first formally recognized, thirty-five years after it was printed, as unique: “This is without doubt, in our opinion, the rarest stamp in the world, in its solitary grandeur.”

In a coda to the now-settled controversy, on 23 October 1891 Edward Bacon proposed Philipp von Ferrary for membership in the Philatelic Society, and in June 1892 Frederick Philbrick QC resigned as President.

1892–1922: Ferrary and France

Philipp La Rénotière von Ferrary was an Austrian of noble birth living in France. He devoted his life to philately and amassed the greatest and most comprehensive collection of stamps ever assembled. He had a particular fondness for
legendary rarities and counted among his acquisitions seven 1847 “Post Office” Mauritius stamps, an unused 1851 two-cent Hawaiian Missionary, and the 1855 Swedish Treskilling yellow error.

Ferrary’s acquisition of the One-Cent Black on Magenta greatly enhanced the reputation and recognizability of the stamp, but in the three decades following the publication of Bacon’s work on the stamps of British Guiana little new was published on it. By 1893 the stamp—now accurately described and, in L. N. Williams’s phrase, “almost a legend”—began appearing in catalogues. C. H. Mekeels listed the stamp at $500 used and, amusingly, $750 unused. In the same publication the 2-cent cottonreel on rose paper was valued at $1,010.

In 1899 Harmsworth’s Monthly Pictorial Magazine printed an article, “Postage Stamps Worth Fortunes,” that included an interview with Charles J. Phillips, owner of Stanley Gibbons, Ltd., of London. This article speciously described the One-Cent as an “error,” an inaccuracy that would periodically be revived:

Most people imagine the Mauritius to be the rarest and most valuable of stamps. In this they are wrong. Mr. Phillips credits the 1856 British Guiana, black on magenta, with this honour.

By an error, which was quickly rectified, certain of these stamps were lettered “one” instead of “four.” If you can obtain a copy in which this error is apparent it will readily bring £1,000 ($5,000).

At present only one copy is known to be in existence and that is in Paris. It holds an honoured place in the magnificent collection belonging to Mons. Ferrary, son of the late Duchess Galliera.

February 1900 would see the publication of Bacon’s article on the discovery of the 2-cent cottonreels of 1851 in The London Philatelist. This is perhaps the last great work on the early years of the One-Cent as it includes the story of the original sale of the McKinnon collection as recounted by Thomas Ridpath himself. Bacon spoke to him just in time: Ridpath died on 28 October, at age forty-nine. Save for Andrew Hunter, who originally received the stamp in the mail, he would be the first owner of the stamp to die.

In Stamp Collecting as a Pastime by Edward Nankivell, published by Stanley Gibbons in 1902, a short well-researched biography of the stamp appeared. Nankivell was unequivocal about the status of the One-Cent: “This stamp may safely be placed at the head of great rarities. Of its value it is impossible to form any opinion. If a dealer had the disposal of the copy in question, he would probably want between £1,000 and £2,000 for it, with a decided preference for the larger sum.”

The reclusive Ferrary never exhibited his stamps and it was long believed the stamp never left his rooms at the Hôtel Matignon; however, a story purportedly from 1905 and published in the San Francisco Sunday Call in 1906 disagrees: Ferrary was inspecting an art collection on one occasion when a large and handsome canvas that occupied a great portion of wall space was pointed out to him as the most valuable picture in the salon. "It is worth all of £1,800," said his Informant. "Then it is not the most valuable picture here," replied Ferrary, and he produced from the depths of a pocket, a card case, inside was a tiny piece of paper, which he carefully held up for his friend. "This," he continued, "is far more costly than your beautiful painting." "And pray, what is its value?" exclaimed his incredulous auditor. "I prize it so highly," answered Ferrary, "that if you were this instant to offer me £3000 for it, I would not take it." And the bit of paper that the speaker delicately poised on his finger was merely a postage stamp, not one of the elaborately engraved and beautifully colored contrivances with which the patrons of the mails are familiar, but a crude affair whose typographical appearance would not be endorsed by the humblest printer in all Christendom. The stamp that Ferrary valued so highly is the most precious of all the gems in the realm of philately. It is a British Guiana 1 cent Issue of 1856, and only one genuine specimen of this stamp is known to exist.

During the One-Cent’s golden jubilee year of 1906 the British Guiana Philatelic Society held a stamp exhibition in Georgetown. One display of the stamps of the colony in the Class II general collections category contained a 12-cent cottonreel and an 1856 4-cent black on magenta. This was deemed “without a doubt the finest mounted general collection in the Exhibition,” but, it was reported, “the collection arrived after the judging had been finished, and thus failed to secure a medal, which it richly deserved.” The exhibitor was a Mr. L. V. Vaughan. Two years later, the London Philatelist published an article by the President of the British Guiana Philatelic Society, Mr. Arthur D. Ferguson. The piece recounted the story of the find of the One-Cent and subsequent sale to Neil McKinnon as told to the author by Vaughan. This appears to be the first published account given by the finder and is the basis of all
And yet, at the time, the philatelic world might have been possessed of more facts about Vernon Vaughan than about the enigmatic Philipp von Ferrary. As a boy, Ferrary had been encouraged to collect by his mother, supposedly to provide a diversion from his obsession with the Franco-Austrian War. Ferrary’s parents were both fantastically wealthy, but he refused to accept either his father’s inheritance or his title, Duke of Galliera. When his mother left Paris, she gave the magnificent Hôtel Matignon to be used as the Austro-Hungarian embassy, with the proviso that her son could keep an extensive apartment there for the remainder of his life. (The Hôtel Matignon is now the official residence of the Prime Minister of France.)

On 2 February 1913, Ferrary’s stamp curator, Pierre Marie Mahé, died. Mahé had been in the stamp business since the earliest days of the hobby and had been one of the first to open a shop in Paris in the 1860s. It is said that he charged a small commission on purchases made on behalf of Ferrary as a dowry for his daughter, and in the course of many years, this dowry must have reached a very considerable total. Mahé was eighty years of age when he died. A little over two weeks later, 17 February, the world lost E. Stanley Gibbons, founder of the eponymous, and still very active, stamp business.

But Ferrary was soon to face more serious changes than those. When the Great War broke out in July 1914, Ferrary was in Holland. As an Austrian citizen he was technically an enemy of France and so, unable to return to France, he took up residence in Lausanne, Switzerland. In January 1915 he rewrote his will, leaving his entire collection to the Berlin Postal Museum. Records show he may well have been able to return to Paris during 1916, and if this is true, it would have marked the last time he saw his collection.

Philipp de la Rénotière von Ferrary died at age 67 on 20 May 1917 in Switzerland. He suffered a fatal heart attack in a taxicab, reportedly returning from a visit with a local stamp dealer. He had been in ill health for some time. Ferrary’s will was made public late in 1917. In it he stated his desire that “The philatelic legacy, to which I have dedicated my whole life with the utmost commitment, I leave with pride and joy to my German fatherland.” But with Ferrary’s stamps secure in Paris, France had no intention of releasing the collection.

Initially the French sequestered the collection, demanding five million francs in inheritance tax plus a further million in related charges from the cash-strapped Berlin Postal Museum. They then seized the collection as enemy property under provisions of the Treaty of Versailles that came into effect in January 1920. The French government then announced that the collection would be sold at auction, with the proceeds from the sale being deducted from the war reparations owed by Germany to France. At some point following this announcement two bids were rumored to have been received for the collection as a whole. One from an unknown American collector, possibly Arthur Hind or Alfred Lichtenstein, for approximately 11.5 million francs, and one from Stanley Gibbons, Ltd., for 14 million. Both were declined.

After nearly forty years, the One-Cent Black on Magenta was about to leave the Ferrary collection. The stamp was to be offered as lot 295 at the third sale on 6 April 1922 and was expected to sell for an unprecedented sum for a single used stamp.

1922: The Ferrary Sale

Fourteen auctions, under the supervision of Monsieur Gerard Gilbert and spanning from 23 June 1921 to 26 November 1925 were needed to disperse the confiscated stamps from the estate of Philipp von Ferrary. The greatest stamp collection the world has ever known was divided up into over 8,000 lots, some of which contained more than 10,000 stamps. Descriptions were meager, no guarantees as to authenticity or condition were offered, viewing was limited, and complaints were ignored. Still, nearly 200,000 stamps went under the hammer at the famous Hôtel Drouot, including almost every rarity then known, achieving a total of over 27 million French francs.

The 1856 One-Cent Black on Magenta appeared as lot 295 in the second session of the third sale on the afternoon of Thursday, 6 April 1922. Private viewing of the sale had been available at the offices of Monsieur Gilbert at 51 Rue Le Pelletier on the previous Monday. The stamp’s first ever public viewing took place on the afternoon of Tuesday, 4 April, exactly sixty-six years after its cancellation in British Guiana.
Speculation was rife as to the possible selling price of the stamp. A general consensus appeared to be between 165,000 and 220,000 francs ($15,000–20,000). The previous two Ferrary sales had already set records; however, the franc had strengthened considerably against the dollar in the intervening months, thereby diminishing the spending power of the Americans. On the afternoon of the sale, room seven of the Hôtel Drouot was packed. The world’s greatest collectors, mostly represented by agents, mixed with major dealers, the press, and the simply curious to witness the sale of “the world’s rarest stamp.”

The Alsatian tobacco magnate and collector Maurice Burrus attended in person. Hugo Griebert, a German-born London dealer, represented the industrialist Arthur Hind; Theodore Champion, the great French dealer, was bidding on behalf of Alfred Lichtenstein; and both Alfred H. Caspary and Henry G. Lapham entrusted their bids to Warren H. Colson of Boston. The two most notable European collectors, King George V of England and King Carol II of Romania, also had agents at the sale. (The British Guiana One-Cent remains the only British Colonial stamp lacking from the otherwise complete collection of George’s granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II.) Security was handled by the gendarmerie and even the Prefect of the Paris Police, Robert Leullier, attended.

Lot 295 was described simply in French. “GUYANE ANGLAISE. 1856. 1 c. noir sur carmin, catalogué chez Yvert et Tellier sous le no. 12 et sous le no. 23 dans le catalogue de Stanley Gibbons. C’est le seul exemplaire connu, obl.” Gilbert, although the expert in charge of the sale, was not the auctioneer. As this was a government auction a French official stood at the podium and called the bids. He opened the lot at 50,000 francs. At first progress was slow as various hands raised the bidding to 100,000. Three contenders, Griebert, Burrus, and Champion, continued to 200,000 in 5,000 franc increments, after which it was left to Griebert and Burrus to battle it out. At 295,000 francs the bid was with Griebert, Burrus advanced a further thousand before Griebert signaled a bid of 300,000 francs. The auctioneer raised his gavel and then paused, confusion in the room had arisen as to who had made the final bid and all eyes fell on Burrus. With a wave of his hand he conceded the lot, the gavel fell, and the room erupted into applause. The following day newspapers around the world carried the news. With the 17½ % French sales tax, the total came to 352,500 francs, £7,343, or $32,500—the world record for a postage stamp and the single most expensive lot in the Ferrary sale.

Arthur Hind had never intended to even bid on the British Guiana. He recounted later that he went for an early morning walk with Hugo Griebert to discuss the sale and during their conversation Griebert talked glowingly about the One-Cent. Such was his enthusiasm that the walk ended with Hind leaving him a bid of $60,000.

Maurice Burrus also claimed that he had no interest in the stamp. In an odd story, he professed to have overheard a conversation between Hugo Griebert and an associate in a café just prior to the auction. Griebert mentioned that he had received a virtual “buy” bid from an American, and armed with this information, Burrus decided to run Griebert up during the sale. This is a little implausible for several reasons. Firstly, Griebert would have known Burrus very well and would have been unlikely to miss the rather large gentleman in a café. Secondly, Burrus was one of the biggest buyers in the first two Ferrary sales, paying $19,000 for a British Guiana 1851 2-cent cottonreel pair on cover, so the One-Cent was bound to appeal to him. Finally, when an experienced auction agent has a bid of three times the world record for a single item, it is unlikely that he would discuss it in public.

Following Hind’s death in 1933, Burrus, perhaps inspired by Judge Philbrick’s contention in 1882, privately asserted that he thought that the One-Cent was an altered 4-cent. In 1935 the Royal Philatelic Society, London, conclusively disproved this with detailed photography, and issued the stamp a “genuine” certificate. Nearly twenty years later he made a final public attack, in Balasse Magazine, on the authenticity of the stamp that he claimed to have “no interest” in. Burrus’s article was refuted by Sir John Wilson in The London Philatelist, 1952. Maurice Burrus died in 1959.

1922–1940: Arthur Hind … and Ann Hind Scala
Although he was sometimes called the Ferrary of America, in terms of personality Arthur Hind could not have been more different than the earlier collector. Hind was born in Bradford, England, but became a textile magnate in upstate New York, making his fortune manufacturing upholstery for the burgeoning automobile industry. He relished the notoriety of owning the world’s most valuable stamp, freely gave interviews, and frequently loaned the stamp for
exhibitions.

One of the first things he did when he had the stamp was commission a postcard of it. The card, which was octagonal, also features a facsimile of Hind’s signature and was widely distributed in both America and Europe. Many of the recipients were stamp dealers and they placed the card in their shops and businesses. For the first time the number of people who had seen the stamp went from dozens to thousands. It was during Hind’s custody that the One-Cent Black on Magenta irrefutably became the world’s best-known stamp, as well as the most expensive.

No sooner had the stamp arrived in the United States than it was returned to Britain for the first time since 1878. It was shown at the London International Stamp Exhibition from 14–28 May 1923 at the Horticultural Halls in Westminster. This is probably the first and only time the stamp was seen by King George V, who opened the event. It is said that Hind offered the stamp to the King, who politely declined. Hind later recalled His Majesty congratulated him on his purchase. Three years later it appeared at the International Philatelic Exhibition at the Grand Central Palace, New York City, from 16–23 October 1926. The Palace, demolished in 1953, was located on Lexington Avenue between 46th and 47th Streets just north of Grand Central Terminal. In late May 1929, Hind sent the stamp overseas again, for the Exposition Philatélique Internationale held in the French port city of Le Havre. This would be the first public exhibition of the stamp in the country where it had resided for forty-four of its seventy-three years.

The good-natured and self-effacing Hind even wrote a brief article titled “The World’s Rarest Stamp” for the Catalogue of the International Philatelic Exhibition, held at Melbourne in 1928. In it he wrote that the 1856 One-Cent “has changed me, philatelically, from an almost unknown modest collector to an almost best known prominent collector.” He also admitted that this particular stamp had caused him to be ridiculed: a New Hampshire pastor stated that Hind’s ownership would virtually guarantee St. Peter barring him from the Pearly Gates, while a London journalist described the 1856 British Guiana as “cut square and magenta in colour” and himself as “cut round and rather paler magenta.”

One story long associated with Hind’s ownership of the stamp has never been authenticated—probably because it is untrue—and yet it is rather too good to debunk. In 1938, a collector wrote an anonymous letter to Stamp and Cover Collector’s Review claiming that he too had owned a One-Cent Magenta, which he had purchased, unrecognized, many years before when the merchant vessel he was working on made port in Georgetown. After the publicity surrounding the Ferrary auction, this unnamed collector realized that he had a treasure that should be worth more to Hind than to anyone else. He arranged a meeting at Hind’s Utica, New York, home. Hind examined the second stamp, accepted its authenticity, and agreed on a price for it. After cash and the stamp had changed hands, Hind lit a cigar and then held his newly acquired stamp to the match. When the stamp was ash, Hind looked at the seller and declared, “There’s only one magenta One Cent Guiana.”

Over Thanksgiving of 1928, Hind married for the first time. His bride was from nearby Constantia and had been married once previously. When she became Ann Leeta Hind, she was more than thirty years younger than her 72-year-old husband. Perhaps coincidentally, Hind began to lose interest in his stamps after the wedding. He may simply have thought there were no further treasures for him to acquire. Just before the collapse of the stock market in the crash of 1929 he supposedly put the collection up for sale and received an offer of $480,000—but he wanted more. Soon afterwards his health, as well as his marriage, began to decline. Arthur Hind died of pneumonia in Palm Beach, Florida, on 1 March 1933.

In his will, Arthur Hind left the bulk of his still very considerable fortune to his family in England. Ann Hind, his estranged wife, was bequeathed very little: the “dwelling, furniture, paintings but not my stamp collection.” In the summer of 1933 Mrs. Hind, claimed one-third of the estate, as provided to widows by recent New York State Law, as well as the British Guiana, which she insisted had been a gift to her from her husband.

Although Ann Hind’s case for ownership of the stamp was based on her assertion that Hind had presented it to her before his death, an unforeseen—and unrelated—development bolstered her position. After he lost interest in his stamps, Hind had moved his philatelic collection from his personal study into a bank vault, but when the stamps were inventoried the British Guiana was nowhere to be found. Frantic searches failed to locate it, and not until the safe in Hind’s study on Maple Street was examined was the One-Cent uncovered, still in the registered envelope in which it
had been returned from its last exhibition. As it was in the couple’s “dwelling,” the contents of which had also been left to Mrs. Hind, a reasonable argument could be made that the British Guiana did belong to her. Mrs. Hind did not wear her widow’s weeds for long; on 8 November 1933 she secretly wed Pascal Costa Scala, a “widely known young Utican.” In early May 1934, by which time the marriage had been disclosed, the suit was settled out of court for an undisclosed amount. Mrs. Hind Scala deemed the settlement “satisfactory.” The one detail that was publicly confirmed was that the ownership of the One-Cent Black on Magenta had been established: it was Mrs. Scala’s.

Arthur Hind’s collection was variously dispersed through auction and private sale in the United States and England. His British and foreign stamps were consigned to a series of auctions at H. R. Harmer in London, and the British Guiana collection was sold on 7 May 1934. Perhaps to take advantage of the generally strong results of that auction—and perhaps motivated as well by the illness of George V (he would die on 20 January 1936)—Mrs. Scala consigned the One-Cent with the London firm of Harmer, Rooke for an auction on 30 October 1935. The sale was titled “Rare Postage Stamps, including the World-Famous British Guiana 1856, 1c. magenta, offered by order of Mrs. Arthur Hind.” Prior to the sale the One-Cent Black on Magenta was submitted, for the first time, to the Expert Committee of The Royal Philatelic Society, London. Among those who would have viewed it was the 75-year-old Sir Edward Denny Bacon. The stamp was certified as genuine by the Royal on 17 October 1935. The Harmer, Rooke catalogue trumpeted the news of the certification and succinctly described the One-Cent as “unquestionably the world’s rarest and most valuable stamp.”

The London Daily Mail tracked down Louis Vernon Vaughan, still living in British Guiana, to ask how he felt about the prospect of the stamp selling for twenty-five thousand times the six shillings he had received more than sixty years previously. He appeared more bemused than regretful: “[I]t is apparently coming into the market again—and the world’s greatest stamp dealers and philatelists are ready to outbid each other and pay ridiculous sums of money for that little scrap of paper that I once owned. Really, it does seem remarkable! People ask me what I think about it. … As a matter of fact, I hardly ever think of it at all now and never with disappointment or chagrin. What is the use?”

At the sale, the bidding opened at £3,500 and was steadily advanced to £7,500 ($37,500), which was, however, still below the reserve set by Mrs. Scala (said to have been $42,500), and so the stamp was withdrawn, unsold, and returned to the United States. The final bid had been placed by Percy Loines Pemberton, son of Edward Loines Pemberton, who nearly purchased the One-Cent as part of the McKinnon collection in 1878.

Mrs. Scala continued to promote and offer the stamp, and it next appeared for private sale in September 1938 with Ernest G. Jarvis of the Kenwood Stamp Company, Buffalo, New York. With the death of King George V the previous year, Mrs. Scala had obviously reconsidered her price and it was now available for $37,500, but there were no takers. The same year, on 5 June, the great philatelist Edward Denny Bacon, who had done so much to enhance the recognition and reputation of the British Guiana, died in London.

In 1940 the British Post Office planned to celebrate the centenary of the Postage Stamp with a display during the second season of the New York World’s Fair. But the outbreak of the Second World War forced this proposal to be scrapped. Nevertheless, the organizers instead contacted collectors throughout the United States to provide material for a philatelic exhibition. Mrs. Hind Scala was asked and agreed to display the British Guiana. She arrived in Flushing, Queens, in a limousine, the stamp travelling separately in an armored car, a condition imposed by the underwriters who were now insuring the stamp for $50,000. The next owner of the One-Cent Magenta may well have seen the stamp at the New York World’s Fair; if he did not, he still could hardly have been unaware of the publicity surrounding its exhibition.

1940–1970: Frederick T. Small, the Unknown Owner

The next owner of the British Guiana One-Cent was very much the opposite of Arthur Hind. While, like Hind, he had the resources to indulge in stamp collecting at a very high level, the new owner’s interest in stamps was financial, not philatelic.
Frederick “Poss” Trouton Small was born on 20 May 1888 in Capricornia, Queensland. Trained as an engineer at the University of Queensland before the First World War, Small enlisted on 4 September 1914 and served on the Gallipoli peninsula, where the French forces recommended him for the Croix de Guerre. After serving as a chief tunnel engineer, he was discharged from the Australian Imperial Force in 1916 due to illness and recurring difficulties with his knee, where he had been wounded in action.

After marrying in Australia, Small moved to Great Britain, where he was a pioneer in Rayon production. In 1924 the Smalls moved to the United States. They first lived in Cumberland, Maryland, where he worked as an engineer for the Celanese Corporation, rising to Vice President in 1940. The Celanese Corporation, coincidentally in association with DuPont, was involved with the New York World’s Fair, and so it is possible that Small actually saw the stamp at this time.

Before his death, and after his identity as an owner of the British Guiana was known, Small was quoted in The Philatelist as saying “I didn't consider my stamp collection as a hobby, but as an investment, just like shares of stock.” He evidently considered the 1856 One-Cent a blue chip, because he discreetly approached Finbar Kenny, Manager of the Stamp Department at Macy’s, to see if the stamp could be purchased. Kenny, in turn, contacted Mrs. Scala, and the stamp was sold for $45,000. The sale was announced on 8 August 1940, but it was shrouded in such secrecy that even Ann Hind Scala did not know the identity of the ultimate buyer. Frederick Small would remain a mystery for nearly thirty years; supposedly his own wife was unaware that he had purchased the stamp.

For the next three decades, Finbar Kenny became the public face of the British Guiana and he was often mistakenly described at its owner. He later recalled that “When I bought it there were two other dealers (including Emil Bruechig) who had clients for it in the $50,000 range but did not want to work on a narrow margin. An offer from Canada of $60,000 (with check enclosed) was mailed to me within a month after I had bought the stamp and sold it.”

Through Kenny’s auspices, Small did make the One-Cent available for exhibition. It was featured at the 1947 United States Stamp Centenary in New York, at MIPEX in Melbourne in 1963, and, most famously, as the cornerstone of the Stanley Gibbons Catalogue Centenary in 1965—the first time the stamp had been shown in Great Britain since 1923.

Richard Ashton, Sotheby's stamp consultant, was at that time working for the Harmer Rooke–Stanley Gibbons Auction company, whose stand at the exhibition was close to the display of the British Guiana. Although the One-Cent had a 24-hour security guard, “Mick” Michael, the Chairman of Stanley Gibbons, asked Richard to keep an eye on the treasure. Mick's encouragement was “Look after it—your career depends on that.” Richard recalls Kenny arriving with the stamp, which he retrieved from his wallet.

While in Small’s possession the British Guiana was also highlighted in a 1954 Life magazine article called “Stamp Album Worth $1,000,000.” Evidently for the first time, the back of the stamp was illustrated in this article, revealing the ownership marks of Ferrary, Hind, and “the present owner [whose] name … is one of the world's best-kept secrets.” But perhaps the best evidence of the popular fame achieved by the One-Cent Black on Magenta during Small’s ownership was its prominent role in the Walt Disney comic book, Donald Duck and the Gilded Man, in which Donald and his three nephews travel to British Guiana in search of “one old, old stamp … that's worth more than fifty thousand dollars!”

Small retired to Fort Lauderdale in 1956, where he continued his longtime support of American and Australian tennis. Small’s identity was only revealed when, having been advised not to leave stamps in his estate, he consigned them for auction. The balance of his collection of stamps from British Guiana sold at Robson Lowe in London on 26 March 1970, under the humorously ironic title “The ‘Great’ Collection.” Two days earlier, the One-Cent Magenta came under the hammer with Robert Siegel of New York.

Small would not be disappointed with his decision. The reappearance of this most famous of stamps after thirty years ignited a firestorm of publicity. The evening sale took place before a packed audience of philatelists, the media, and the merely curious. When the stamp again set a record—selling for $280,000 to an investment consortium headed by Irwin Weinberg of Miner Stamp Co.—the resulting press coverage included front-page, above-the-fold stories
everywhere from The New York Times to the Wilkes-Barre Record and an article in Life magazine titled “A One-Cent Treasure.” The Life article featured a photograph of auctioneer Andrew Levitt displaying the One-Cent Black on Magenta behind the bars of a bank vault.

Irwin Weinberg, who still regularly issues a mimeographed price list of stamps for sale, had been a dealer for nearly thirty years already when the One-Cent came up at auction in 1970, and he remembered seeing the stamp at the New York City World’s Fair. He went to the sale as the front man and general partner of a syndicate of eight businessmen from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, who were looking for a hedge against inflation.

In promoting the British Guiana, Weinberg outdid Arthur Hind, as he made every effort to publicize the purchase and find a new buyer. Trailed by bodyguards, Weinberg carried the stamp around the world in a briefcase ostentatiously handcuffed to his wrist. In a decade of globe-trotting, he took the stamp to Zurich, Tokyo, Prague, Hamburg, Berlin, Madrid, Paris, London, Sydney, New Delhi, Toronto, New York, and Philadelphia.

At this point, Weinberg admitted that he had begun to feel that the stamp owned him, rather than the other way around, and he and his stakeholders decided that it was time to test the effectiveness of their investment strategy.

1980–2014: John du Pont

After just a decade’s absence from the sales room, the One-Cent Magenta again appeared at a Siegel auction, 5 April 1980. As an investment, the stamp proved successful: it was sold to an anonymous bidder for $935,000. The buyer was in the room, but had left bidding instructions with the auctioneer prior to the sale, so he was able to watch the auction without drawing attention to himself.

In 1986, the new owner displayed the 1856 One-Cent as part of an exhibition of classic stamps of British Guiana at the Ameripex ’86 International Stamp Show in Chicago and was awarded the Grand Prix International. Although the owner of the stamp was there identified by the pseudonym Rae Mader (an anagram of Demerara), it was shortly revealed, and had earlier been suspected, that the owner was actually John du Pont, heir to the eponymous chemical company fortune, eccentric amateur sportsman, and omnivorous collector.

Du Pont exhibited the stamp for the last time at CUP-PEX 87 in Perth, in conjunction with the 1987 America’s Cup. The One-Cent was returned from Australia on a Sunday, when there was no access to the bank vault that usually housed the stamp. And on that night—but only that one night—it is true that du Pont slept with the stamp under his pillow.

17 June 2014: The Next Chapter

The British Guiana One-Cent Black on Magenta is returning to the marketplace after its longest absence since it was in the Ferrary collection. A new generation of philatelists will have the opportunity to see this iconic talisman and witness its sale, while a few, like Irwin Weinberg, will watch the gavel fall on it for the third time. The nationality of the new owner is not yet known, nor is his or her motivation: connoisseurship or investment. All that can be known until the auctioneer gives fair warning is that the winning bidder will own the world’s most famous and valuable stamp.
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