

# Solving the Dilemma of Expertizing Postal Markings on Off-Cover Adhesives



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# Birth of Traditional Philatelic Expertization in Context

- Initially, filling album spaces exceeded desire for authenticity or lack of repairs
- Wholesale destruction of folded letters and covers, loss of provenance
- Forgeries were mass produced, damaged examples commonly “restored”, “improved”
- Experienced stamp dealers became recognized “experts”
- Opinions based upon an individual’s prior experience
- Third-party opinions sought after in the late 19th century
- Expert signatures & reputations enhanced value



# Birth of Traditional Philatelic Expertization: In Context

- In the days of “philomania”, stamp collecting began with peeling & pinning specimens to felt boards at stationers & booksellers, use of muscilage



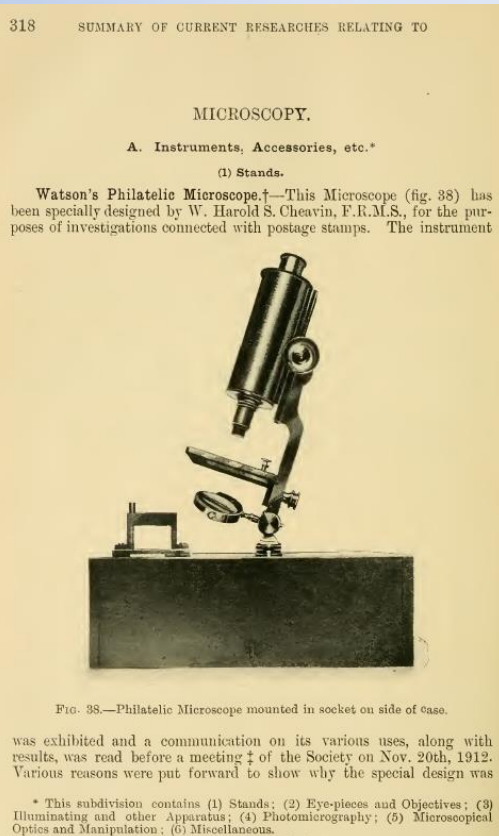
- Preservation of off-cover adhesives began with scissors & soaking, conservation in the absence of damaging the specimens

- Our first tools included tongs, benzene, black glass tray, perf gauge, magnification

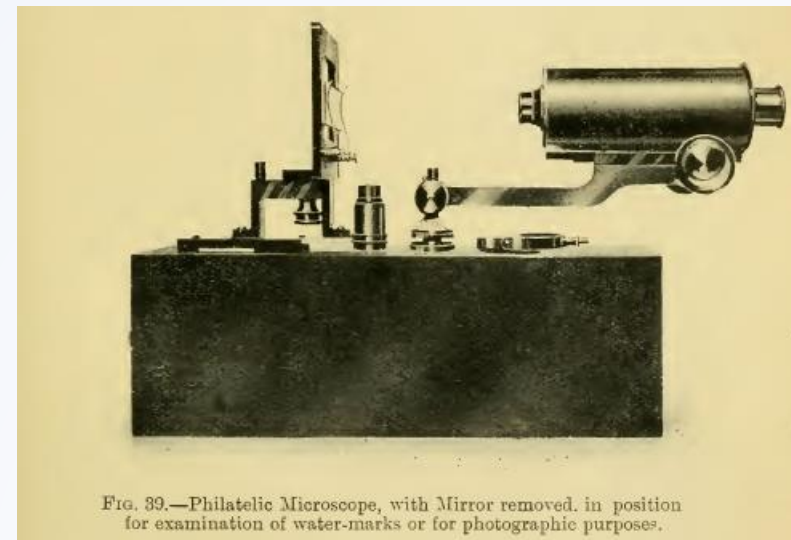
- An early development, Watson's Philatelic Microscope (1912)

- First commercially available UV lamps developed, patented by Westhouse (1930s)

- Commercially available X-ray spectrometer for elemental analysis first produced (1948)



Credit: Robert Odenweller, IAP Symposium, 2015



Watson's Philatelic Microscope with mirror removed, in position for examination of watermarks for photographic purposes

# United States 90 Cent Postage Stamp of 1860

- 90c issue of 1860, Scott #39, was a new denomination of the 1857-61 issue
- Engraved after a portrait by John Trumbull (1756-1843)
- Earliest Known Use: August 13, 1860
- Printed in blue from a single plate by Toppan, Carpenter & Co.
- Perforation 15.5 consistent with balance of the 1857-61 issue
- Estimates of quantities issued range from 25,000 to 29,000
- Satisfied makeup treaty rates to foreign countries and packages



# United States 90 Cent Postage Stamp of 1860

- U.S. #39 was issued in late 1860. Upon secession of several Southern states, the 1857-61 issue was rendered invalid. Unsold inventories in Union hands were returned to the Post Office Department and destroyed
- Inventories in Southern post offices are believed to be the source of most unused examples available today
- Genuine covers bearing this stamp are exceedingly rare as the result of collector demand to fill spaces in stamp albums
- The collective provenance of postal uses is now limited to the paucity of on-cover examples. Accordingly, most of our experience with postal markings on this stamp is limited to that presented off-cover



# The Patient

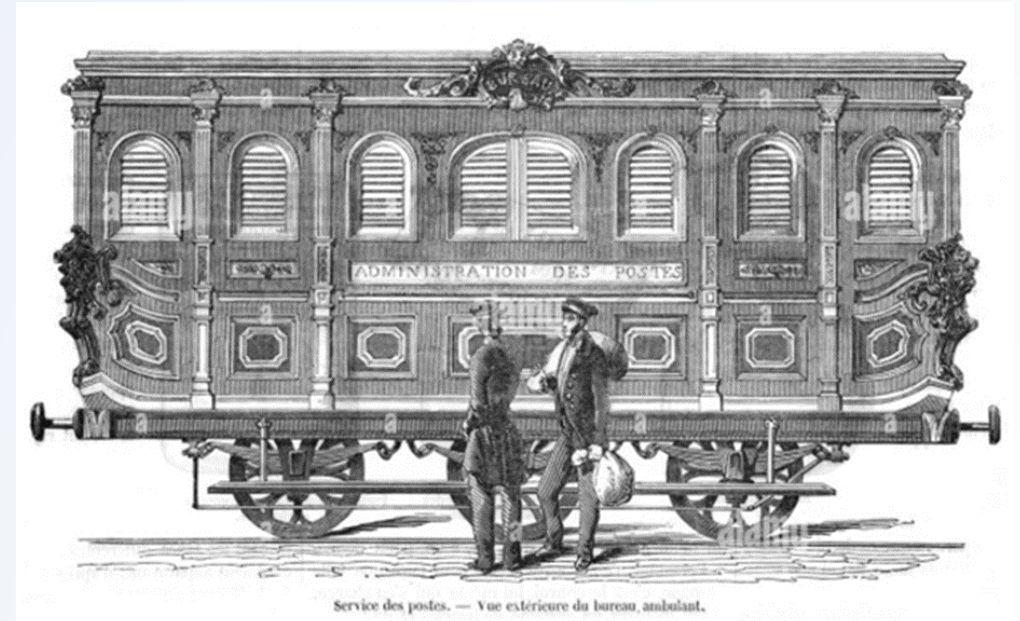
- At acquisition, red initially characterized as a New York grid
- The black boxed P.D. denoting, in French, “payé à destination” (paid to destination) was attributed to the 13 x 20.5 mm marking applied in the ambulatory post office formerly operating between the port of Calais and the Paris sorting office (1860-1861)



Obverse view of the Patient showing postal markings



Reverse view of the Patient expert sig. Maria Brettl BPP



A French “metre-gauge” railway post office operating in the 1850s and 1860s

# What Makes The Patient Important?

- Limited quantity issued, 25,000 to 29,000
- Limited period of use, about one year
- Usage limited to international mail, parcels
- Market availability speaks to scarcity:
  - Destruction of stamps returned, may have been 50%, or more?
  - Survival rate of genuinely used stamps, may have been 10%, or less?
- Accordingly, genuinely used stamps are comparatively rare
- Patient is the only known example of the 90 cent stamp of 1860 bearing boxed P.D.
- Accurate determination of genuine postal usage is critical

# Expertization History, Post Maria Brettl

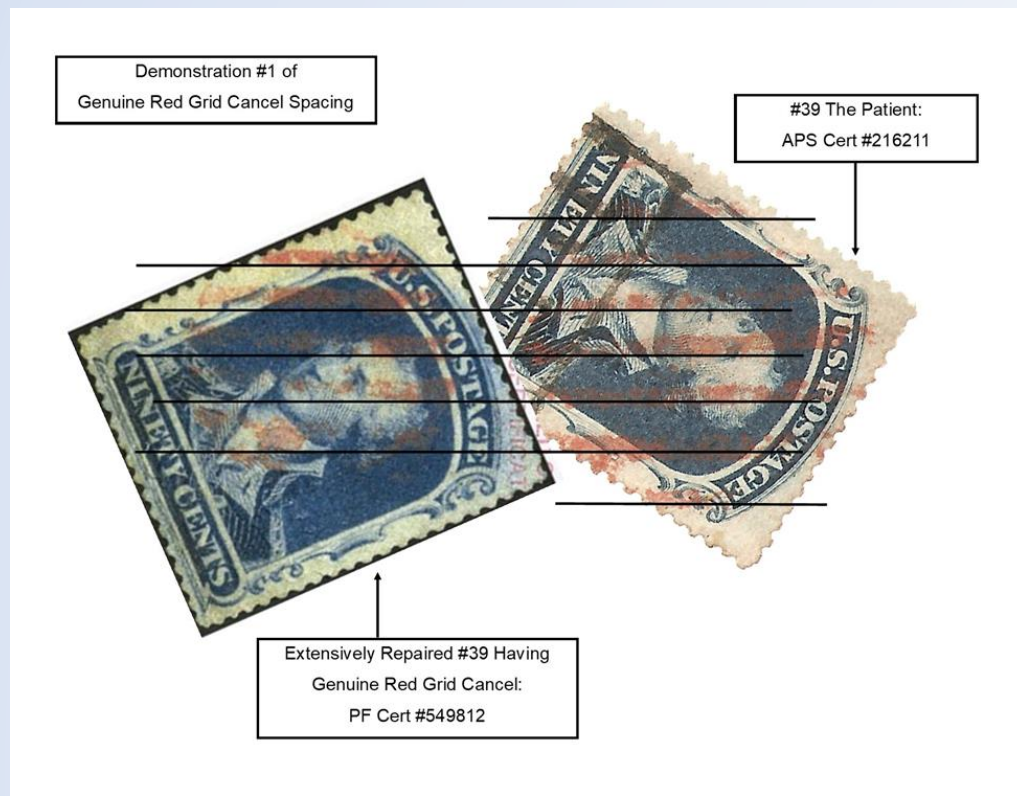
- Two submittals, with first submittal resulted in a certificate stating:  
“United States, Scott No. 39, genuine, but a fake  
cancellation and postal marking added, filled thins”
- First opinion rendered by a one person “committee”. Quoting the examiner’s notes,  
“Red grid is too narrow” and the boxed P.D. marking “doesn’t  
look right”
- First opinion seems to lack a foundation in science
- Method used = comparative visual analysis





# Expertization History, Post Maria Brettl: Addressing the “Red grid is too narrow” opinion

- The author compared the width of the red grid on the patient with other red grids applied in unidentified post offices.



# Expertization History, Post Maria Brettl: Addressing Boxed P.D. Marking “doesn’t look right”

- The author located images of numerous covers and two stamps bearing the boxed P.D. marking
- Only one image of a genuine cover bearing #39 was found (shown below)



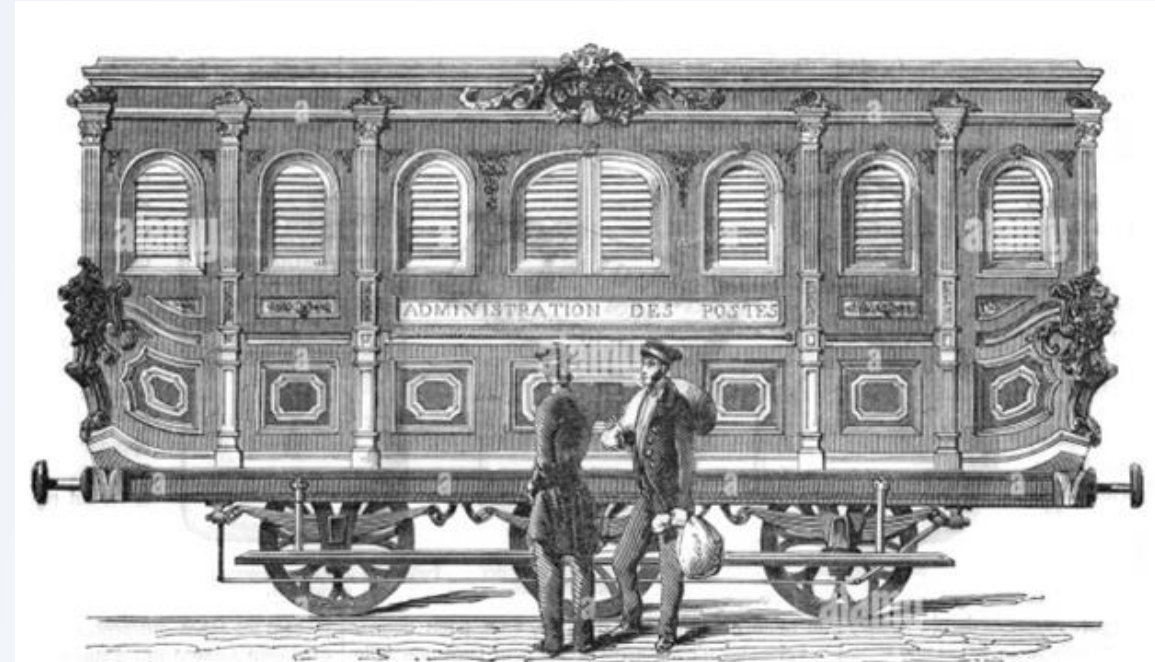
# Expertization History, Post Maria Brettl

- Despite the additional evidence, a second submittal with supporting information resulted in no change to the original opinion
- The lead examiner verbally commented, “The red grid is plausible, but existing covers bear the P.D. marking away from the stamps”
- Method used = comparative visual analysis



# Questions:

1. If I am a postal clerk working in a narrow-gauge railcar wobbling unpredictably back and forth on the tracks, would I have the ability, or care enough, to always apply my P. D. marking away from the stamps?
2. Was there more than one postal clerk in the mail car, each having his own way of complying with postal marking rules?
3. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, might stamp collectors have removed most of the scarcest stamps from their covers, especially those with the most interesting postal markings?
4. Given the wholesale destruction of covers, true “representativeness” of existing cover populations is unlikely.



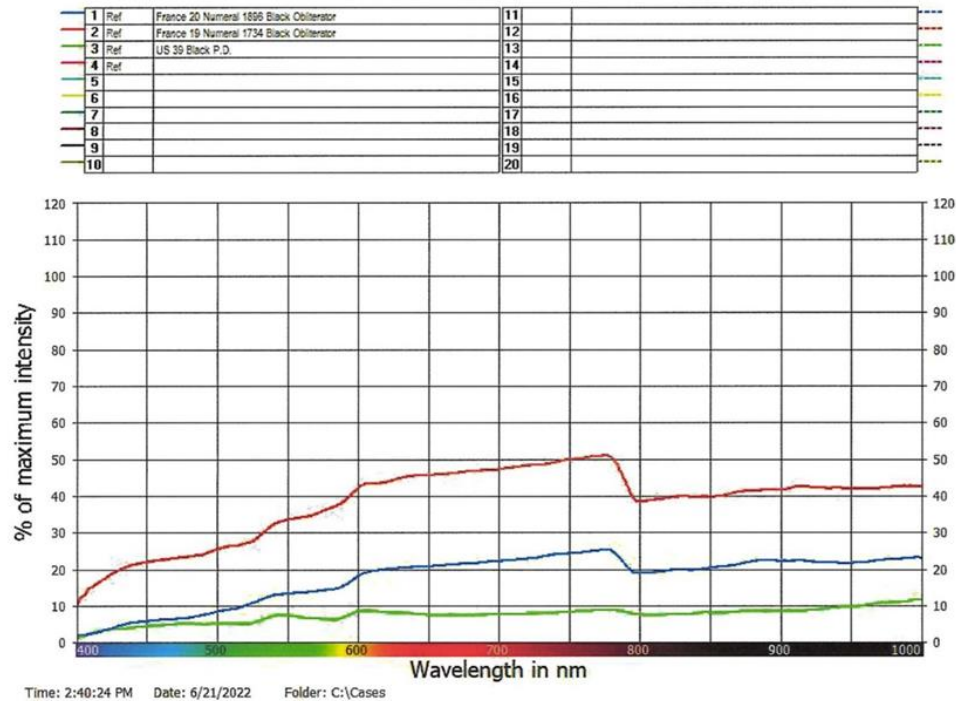
Service des postes. — Vue extérieure du bureau ambulante.

# Limitations on Value of Comparative Visual Analysis in the Absence of Forensic Analysis

- Comparative visual analysis relies on the population of existing material available for inspection
- Context is limited to experience, published literature, and depth of memory
- Objectivity is a matter of personality
- Humans may do their best, but perceptions can differ
- No standardized expertization protocol

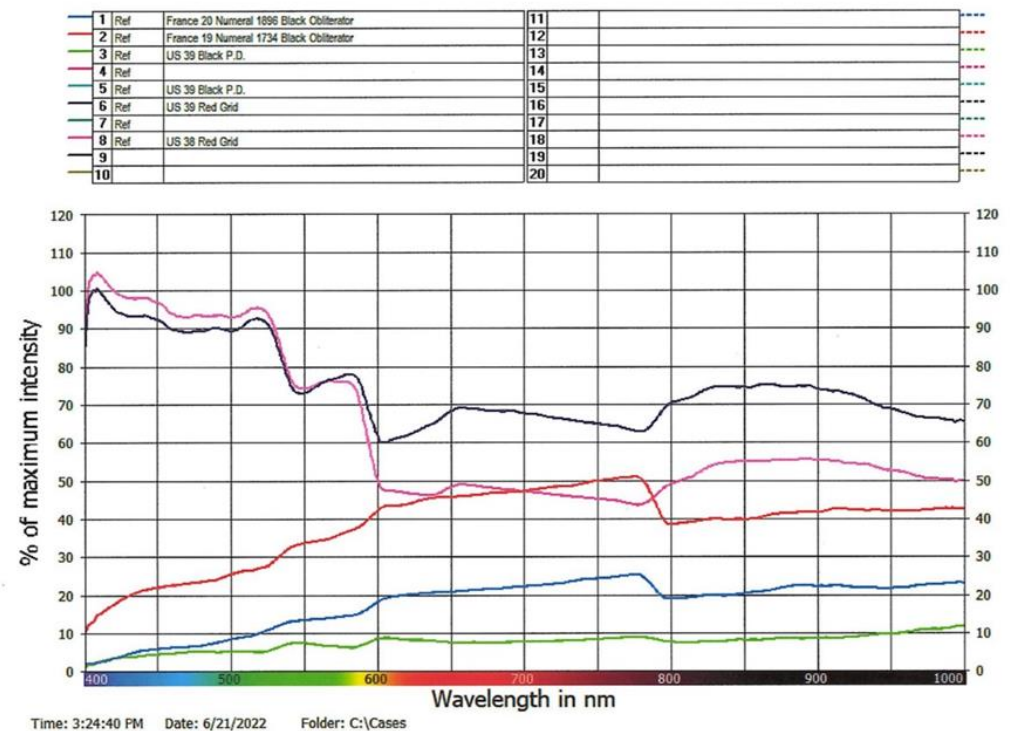


# Results of Analytical Philately: VSC 6000



Consistency in black ink raw spectrum reflectance intensities at 570 nm and from 600 to 780 nm wavelengths:

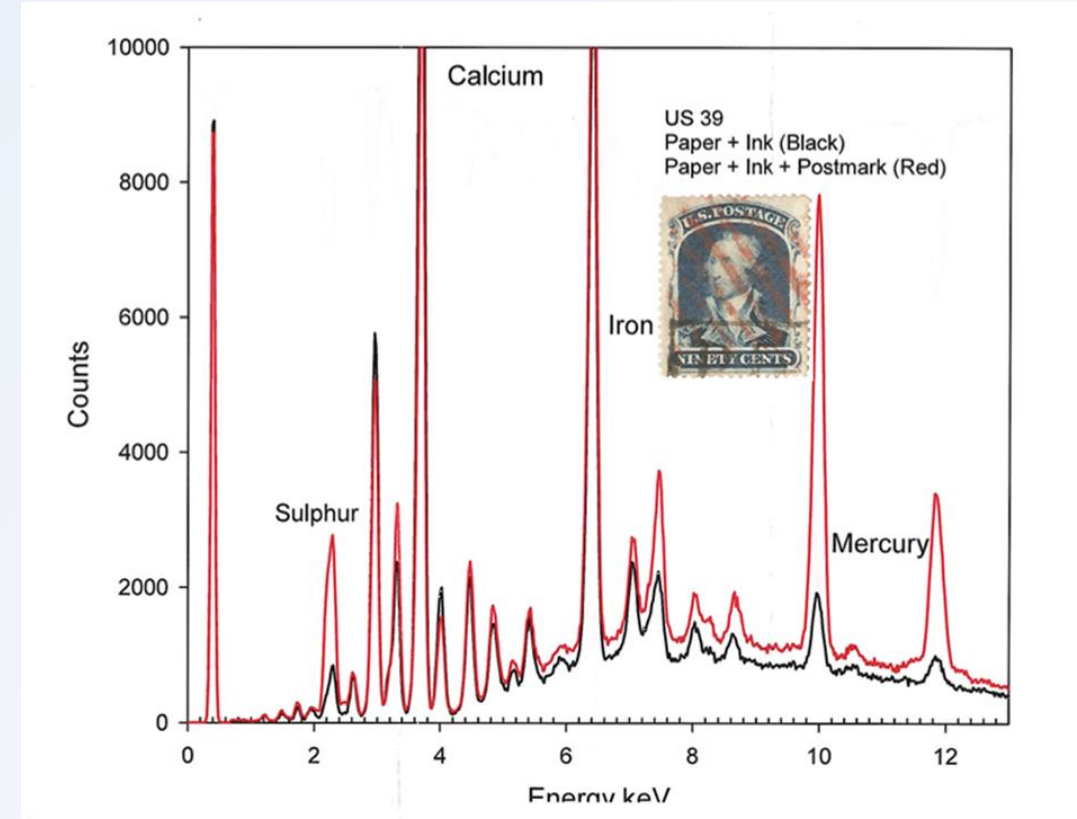
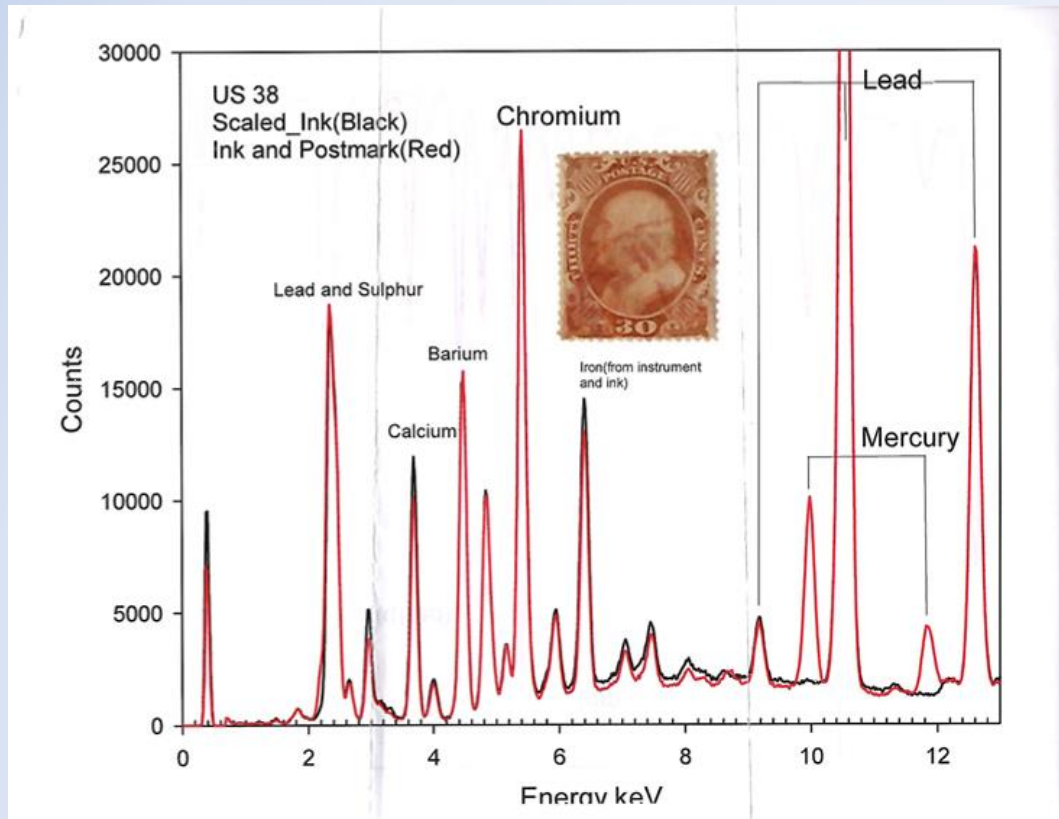
Black markings on France Scott #19 and #20 issued in 1860 (red, blue) and P.D. on the Patient (green profile)



Consistency in red ink raw spectrum reflectance intensities at 520 and 590 nm wavelengths, with reflectance minimums from 600 to 780 nm wavelengths:

Red New York CDS marking on U.S. Scott #38 (magenta) and red grid on the Patient (dark purple/black profile)

# Results of Analytical Philately: X-Ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy (XRF)



Comparing red inks of the New York CDS on Scott #38 and the Patient, #39. The presence of mercury is indicative of vermilion red (mercury sulfide ( $\alpha$ -HgS)), common in 19th century ink formulations, largely replaced by synthetic cadmium red in the 20th century.

# Conclusions

- The results of comparative visual analysis versus forensic analysis are inconsistent
- The results of forensic analysis are consistent with genuine markings on the Patient.
- Based on these findings, expertization of off-cover stamps via comparative visual analysis alone may not result in a reliable opinion
- **Expertization protocol in practice, as it may exist, warrants re-examination to assure that opinions are rendered on an adequate basis of fact**
- Just because something “doesn’t look right” to a single expert should never result in an opinion expressed on a certificate of authenticity





# References

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