

Confederation

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Two Key Positions on the Six Cents "A" Plate

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A few months back I wrote about the 6 cent Small Queen issue, and provided several correlations between the early printings from what has been called the "1871" plate, and the late printings from the "A" plate. These correlations strongly suggest that the original plate from 1871 went through several states of repair and was actually in use over a span of 25 years! During the initial entry of the plate, a first guide dot appeared in the lower left corner of the stamp design to its right. During the first repair, a second guide dot appeared to the left of the first. During the second major repair, a third guide dot appeared to the right of the first. During the final repair, a faint fourth dot appeared in a few positions. The lack of a third guide dot in the second column of the sheet suggests that the first column was not re-entered during the second repair.

The guide dots are valuable for determining the plate position of stamps. Ralph Trimble's web site shows blow-up images for each stamp from a full sheet in the final state of the "A" plate. From the same scan of the sheet, I produced a 10x10 "map" (see figure 1 below) showing the bottom left corner of each stamp including the guide dots on a single page. It also shows the guide dots in the right selvedge with the sheet imprint. You may send me an email to request a higher resolution copy suitable for printing. I must give credit to Jim Watt for producing a similar "map" decades ago from actual photographs. I recreated his work, but used a high quality scan (courtesy of Mr. Trimble) and the photo editing technology of today to produce a higher resolution image.

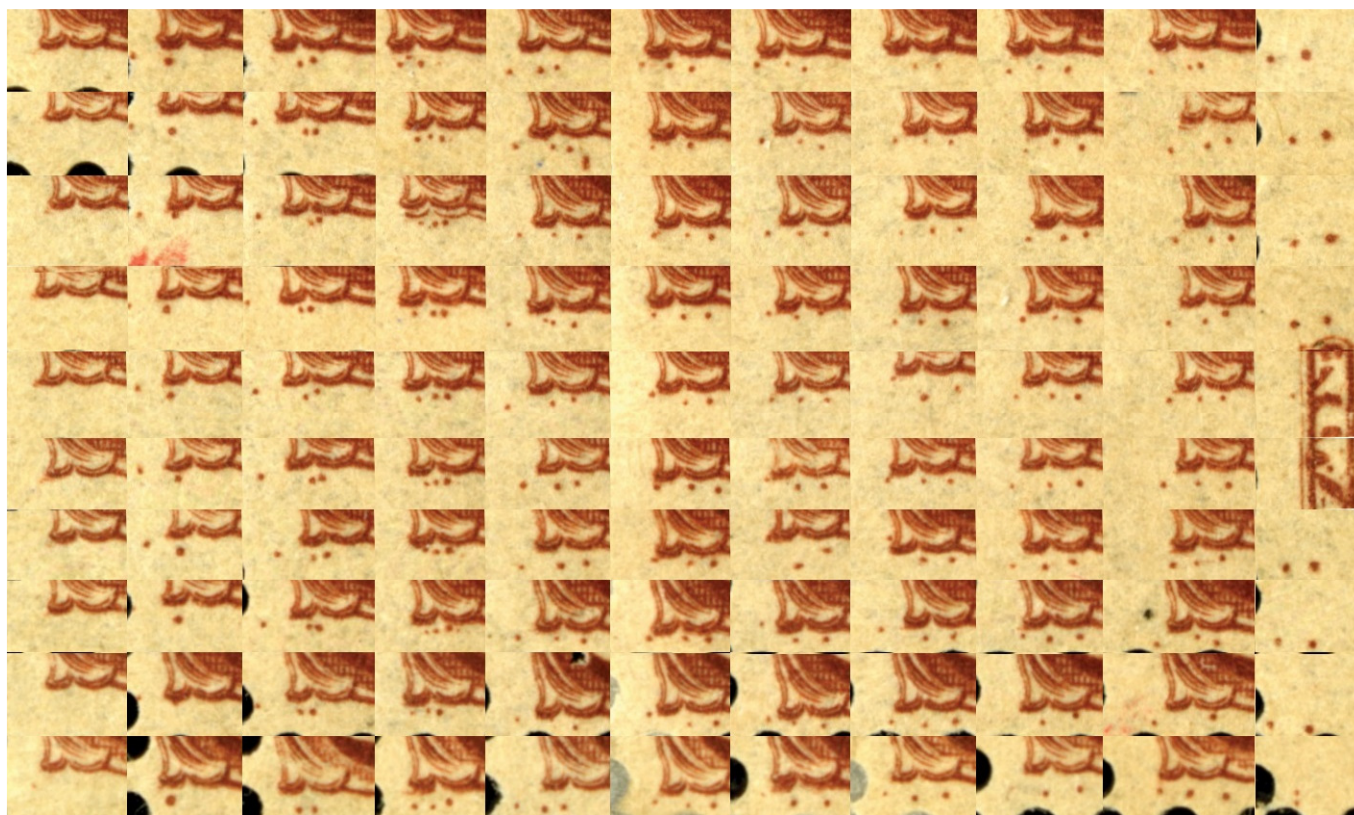


Figure 1: guide dot map

The different plate states and observed date range can be summarized as follows:

- 1-dot state (the middle of the three) between 1872 and early-1874 (yellow brown).
- 2-dot state (the left dot appeared) between mid-1874 and 1884 (yellow brown).
- 3-dot state (the right dot appeared) between mid-1884 and early 1892 (yellow brown).
- repaired 3-dot state from mid-1894 through to the end of printing (red brown).

During the major repairs, the stamp designs sometimes shifted upwards. This was most evident during the third major repair in 1884, when most stamps shifted up significantly and a little to the right. When comparing stamps from known plate positions but different plate states, it gives the false impression that the guide dots travelled downwards, while rather the guide dots remained fixed and the stamp design travelled upwards. How did the guide dots remain while the stamp designs moved? The best theory we have is the “deep hole” theory where guide dots made a deeper impression in the plate than the stamp designs.

Progression of Plate Position 10 – A Strong Re-entry

Plate position 10 shows a re-entry into the top part of the stamp design in all four states. Each attempt at repair improved upon the previous, but left traces of the previous entries behind.

Brigham Auctions was kind to provide a blow-up scan of lot 342 from their April 16, 2016 auction. This upper right corner margin block of 10 is from the 1-dot state and is the key to proving the plate position of the re-entry in its early state.

Figure 2 displays this block of 10 above the same plate positions from the repaired 3-dot state. The “A” was added in the top margin during one of the repairs, although it is unclear exactly if it was present in the 2-dot state. Using the images, the guide dots from the 1-dot state for all positions were simultaneously transposed just below the middle of the three guide dots from the repaired 3-dot state. Zoom in on the picture to see how the middle dots on the bottom image match perfectly with the transposed yellow-brown dots.

Figure 3 shows examples of position 10 from all plate states. The top and bottom of each stamp has been blown up to show the re-entry and the guide dots. Descriptions are as follows:

1-dot state:

- Single guide dot is close to the bottom frame line
- Strong twisted re-entry showing doubling at top left and right frame lines, and through “DA POST”

2-dot state:

- Second guide dot added to the left of the first.
- Stamp design shifted up giving the impression that the first guide dot shifted down.
- Remnants of re-entry still appear in “D PO T” and new marking in “G”
- Left / right frame line doubling has been repaired

3-dot state:

- Third guide dot added close to the right of the first guide dot.
- Stamp design shifted up slightly again, leaving remnants of the previous stamp's bottom frame line
- Remnants of the re-entry still appear in “D P O T G”

repaired 3-dot state:

- Three guide dots remain the same as the previous state
- Stamp design shifted up and to the left.
- Remnant of the previous state position is visible in the bottom right corner
- Remnants of the re-entry in are barely visible in “PO T”
- Over-rocking of the transfer roll created the “minor 5c on 6c” entry in position 20



Figure 2: Comparison of pp 6-10/16-20 between 1-dot and repaired 3-dot states



Figure 3 - Position 10 re-entry in each of the four plate states

Progression of Plate Position 2 – “Dot in P” variety

Plate position 2 is another important one showing the “dot in P” variety through all four states. Guillaume Vadeboncoeur allowed me to scan his 1-dot state top left margin block of 6. This block is key for confirming that the “Dot in P” variety exists in plate position 2 from the early 1-dot state.

The theory is that the “Dot in P” is related to the SIX CENTS counter in the top left margin of the sheet.

Figure 5 on the next page shows a comparison of Guillaume's special block to the same plate positions from the late repaired 3-dot state. I suggest zooming in on the image to see the subtle markings on the image.

There are several markings that are constant across the plate states:

- The SIX CENTS counter is visible in both the 1-dot and repaired 3-dot states. Only a small hint of the shading remains in the late printing due to plate wear.
- A faint dot is present near the lower left corner of the SIX CENTS counter. That dot appears in both the 1-dot and the repaired 3-dot states.
- The “Dot in P”, although it shifts upwards suggesting the SIX CENTS counter may have been re-entered.
- The guide dots in the lower left corner of the stamp design.
- There is a dot in the margin above the “O” from “POSTAGE” that appears in all states. This dot is often removed by perforations.

The letter “R” was added at some point to indicate that the plate was repaired. It is present in the yellow brown 3-dot state (see figure 4). It remains unknown if the “R” was present in the 2-dot state. If a top margin block showing counter in the 2-dot state exists, someone please bring it forth!



Figure 4 - Position 2, Dot in P, in 3-dot state block/6



Figure 5: Comparison of pp 1-3/11-13 between 1-dot and repaired 3-dot states

“Dot in P” variety (continued)

Figure 6 shows examples of position 2 from five different states of the plate. This includes two from the 2-dot state (the later of the two with a significant re-entry). The top and bottom of each stamp has been blown up to show the transition between each state. Descriptions are as follows:

1-dot state:

- Large single guide dot is close to the bottom frame line.
- Strong dot in the P.
- Dot in margin above the O (partially obscured by perforation).

2-dot state (initial):

- Second guide dot added to the left of the first.
- Dot in the P is still strong, but shrinks a little in size giving the appearance that it moved upwards slightly.
- Dot in margin above the O remains (partially obscured by perforation).
- Stamp perforations measure 11.5x12 (only the 1-dot and 2-dot states exist with this perforation).

2-dot state (re-entered):

- Position is re-entered slightly higher, leaving doubling of the complete lower frame line.
- Dot in the P weakens and travels upwards slightly. Possibly the SIX CENTS counter was re-entered at the same time resulting in the upwards shift of this dot.
- Dot in margin above the O is completely hidden by perforation.
- Stamp perforations measure 11.5x12.

3-dot state:

- The two guide dots and position of stamp design remain unchanged (column 2 does not gain a 3rd dot).
- The horizontal perforations measure 12.1, which exists from the late 1880's printing (3-dot). Should anyone doubt this one, then the 3-dot state block/6 displayed in figure 4 can be examined.
- Doubling in lower left frame line has become weak.
- Dot in P remains as before in the 2-dot re-entered state.
- Dot in margin above the O remains.

Repaired 3-dot state:

- The two guide dots remain unchanged
- Stamp design shifted up slightly (typical for most positions in this plate state)
- Dot in P shifts up slightly, possibly due to re-entry of the SIX CENTS counter again (although that does not explain the worn shading around the counter)
- Dot in margin above the O remains.



Figure 6 - Position 2 progression through 5 states

Addendum – 25 years for the A Plate - Myth or Fact?

After completing my draft article, I read with interest John Hillson's recent write-up "The Small Queens Six Cents – The Enduring Myth" in the 8th edition of Dots And Scratches. So the debate continues on whether or not a single plate was responsible for the majority of the 6 cent printings. I will address here several points of contention raised by his article.

To start, there were remarks about plate positions 2 and 10, which I have already addressed by showing the movement of the stamp designs (with fixed guide dots) with each major plate repair.

There was concern that a single plate of 100 could produce more than 25 million stamps between 1872 and 1890, and then more during the 2nd Ottawa printing. The numbers in the table below demonstrate that each of the 1 cent and 3 cent plates were just as heavily used.

Denomination	Total number of stamps printed	# plates with 100 impressions	# plates with 200 impressions	Total number of design impressions	Number of stamps produced per design impression (e.g., 701.7 million divided by 2600)
1 cent	701.7 million	4	11	2,600	270,000
3 cent	1.35 billion	7	17	4,100	329,000
6 cent "A" plate	27 million (estimated)	1	0	100	270,000
6 cent "B/C" plate	1.5 million (estimated)	0	1	200	7,500

The question was raised about the true plate position for the early printing "major re-entry". Position 67 can be confirmed from lot 154 in the Daniel Cantor Small Queens sale by Sparks Auctions in November 2015. The strip/4 displayed in Figure 7 shows the bottom tip of the imprint in the margin, identifying the piece belonging to positions 67-70, unequivocally proving that the major re-entry belongs to position 67. The sharp upwards shift in the stamp design relative to its neighbors exists in both the first Ottawa printings (1-dot state) and the final repaired 3-dot state.



Figure 7: Major re-entry position 67 identified by imprint in margin

The point was made that re-entries tend to survive through the life a plate, with references to the 5 cent Beaver and the Penny Black. However it is clear that the 6 cent major re-entry was repaired, as described on Ralph Trimble's site www.re-entries.com. It shows a cover bearing positions 66-67 dated March 1874 showing very fine remnants of the major re-entry. Certainly all traces would be gone after additional plate wear and repair.

The claim was made that a new plate in 1872 or 1873 was created with the check letter "A" added to distinguish it from two earlier plates. Is there evidence of the "A" check letter being present on any piece in the 2-dot state? If so, then please bring it forth. Without evidence, the claim is speculation. I will speculate that the "A" check letter was added to the plate in the 1880's at the time when the B/C plate of 200 subjects was created.

A beautiful early six cent strip of 3 was displayed clearly dated HAMILTON JY 8 75, with the claim that it is from the "A" plate and showing a third guide dot in the right most stamp. I suggest to the readers to zoom in on the blow-up image with three arrows pointing to dots. The middle of the three is a black dot, part of the cancellation! There are only two dots on that stamp as should be expected given the third dot state did not appear until 1884. Using the guide dot map, I am reasonably certain that the three are from positions 61-63. The guide dot map also shows the different place where the third dot would be if it were from a much later printing.

A reference was made to my article "More on Plating the 6 cent Small Queen" in Dots and Scratches #7, which compares two blocks of 10 from the early and late printings. It was noted that on the late printing, the stamp impressions are further from the bottom imprint than on the early printing. Excellent point! Upon creation of the 3-dot state, most of the stamp impressions moved up and a little to the right. But the guide dots remain fixed in position, and show equal distance to the imprint when comparing early and late printings.

A nice 2-dot state strip of 4 was displayed with cork cancels. The second stamp from the left displays a single guide dot, and an upwards shift in the stamp design. It was stated that this is the late state of the 1871 plate. But rather, let's use the guide dot map to plate it. The two dots on each stamp align perfectly with positions 47-50 on the guide dot map. Position 48 shows only one guide dot because the second is hidden right in the bottom left corner of the stamp design. That second guide dot is revealed in the 3-dot state when the stamp design shifts upwards (and slightly to the right).

Wrap-up

Credit goes to Dr. Jim Watt and Glenn Archer for first documenting the relationship between the single guide dot from the early printings and the middle of the three guide dots from later printings. We now have a technique for plating large multiples of the 1-dot and 2-dot states.

My gratitude goes to Guillaume Vadeboncoeur for his thoughts and for allowing me to scan many important multiples of his early printing 6 cent material.

Enjoy the guide dot map and feel free to send me scans of large 6 cent blocks, especially from the 2-dot state. I will enjoy them, and help you plate them.

References:

- Ralph Trimble's <http://www.re-entries.com> site
- Brigham Auctions Ltd. Sale 8 - Small Queens Issue, April 16, 2016
- Sparks Auctions, The Daniel Cantor Collection of Canada Small Queens, November 24, 2015
- Canada's Postage Stamps of the Small Queen Era, 1870-1897, John Hillson and J. Edward Nixon, 2008
- More on Plating the Six Cent Small Queen, Jim McCormick, "Dots and Scratches" newsletter #7, January 2016
- The Small Queens Six Cents – The Enduring Myth, John Hillson, BNAPS "Dots and Scratches" newsletter #8, April 2016

Early uses of the 1¢ Small Queen

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Recently, a small group of early uses of the 1¢ Small Queen was offered on eBay. They provided me with the inspiration to prepare the following listing of early uses of the 1¢ Small Queen as I am not aware of such a list having previously being published.

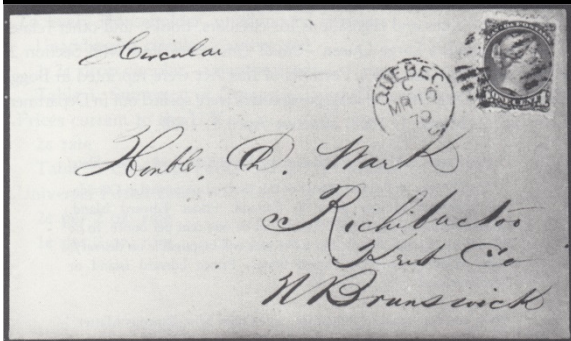
In terms of early uses of the 1¢ Small Queen, Hillson and Nixon noted that “*the earliest-recorded date on a cover, at the time of this writing, is February 18, 1870, from Brantford, Ontario. A single off-cover is dated February 10, 1870. Copies used on dated covers before July, 1870 are still quite scarce*”¹.

Included in the following list are nine (9) items I was able identify used prior to May 1870, plus an additional item which appears to be an early use, but is not. I find this number to be exceptionally low, but not overly surprising given that the 1¢ value was mostly used on printed matters, circulars and prices current – junk mail. There must be others out there, and I welcome you to submit additions to the list.

Printed matters, circulars and prices current were treated differently from first class letters by the Post Office and were generally not cancelled while in transit or upon arriving at their destination. Such items typically do not have any dated postmarks or other specific indication of the specific date of their use. Luckily, the three items which recently appeared on eBay can be dated, as they are circulars or prices current with dates noted in the actual documents. Given the time-sensitive nature of the information included (price for consumer staples and securities published on a weekly basis), it can be safely assumed that they were mailed at the earliest possible time.



- 1870-02-18** Brantford, Ont.
1¢ paying drop letter rate on envelope without content, clearly date. No backstamp as customary for drop letters.
Illustration: Hillson & Nixon, p.89.
Provenance: Ted Nixon collection, Eastern Auctions Ltd., March 10th, 2012, lot 60.
Image courtesy of Eastern Auctions Ltd.

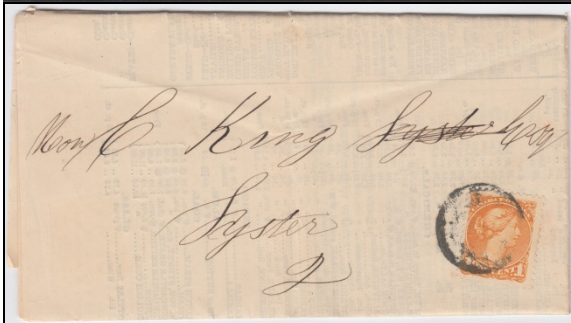


- 1870-03-10** Quebec, Que. to Richibucto, N.B.
1¢ envelope paying the printed matter rate, endorsed “Circular”.
Illustration: Canada’s Small Queen Era, George B. Arfken, p.156.
Provenance: Bill Simpson collection, Stanley Gibbons Auction Galleries, Inc., November 18, 1980, lot 256; George B. Arfken collection, J.N. Sissons Inc., October 3, 1990, lot 576.
Image courtesy of Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation.

¹Canada’s Postage Stamps of the Small Queen Era, 1870-1897, John Hillson and J. Edward Nixon, Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation, p.89.



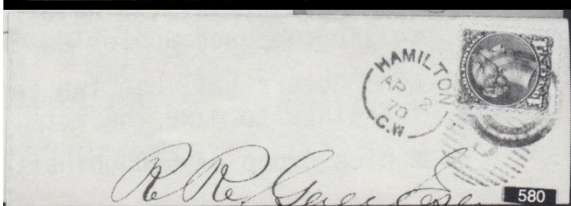
1870-03-10 Merriton, Ont. to Petrolia, Ont.
 Illustration: Hillson & Nixon, p.92.
 Image courtesy of Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation.



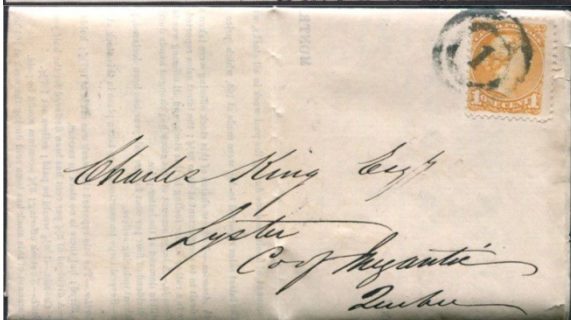
1870-03-11 Montreal, Que. to Lyster, Que.
 Weekly Prices Current in Montreal, Corn Exchange, No. 358, Friday 11th March, 1870 with same day handstamp from John Chamard, Commission Merchant & Warehouseman, No. 13, Common St., Montreal.
 Stamp cancelled by illegible #1 2-ring numeral cancel. No dated postmarks.
 Provenance: eBay, May 2016.



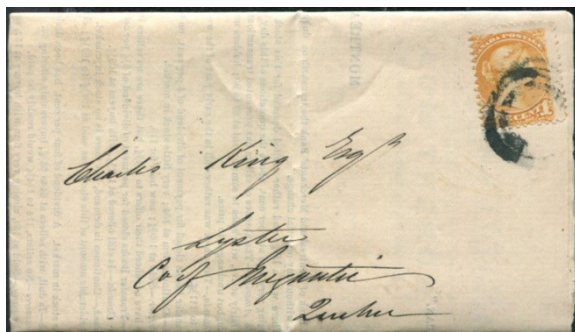
1870-03-21 London, Ont. to Teeswater, Ont.
 3¢ domestic letter rate, paid in combination with 2¢ Large Queen. Stamp cancelled by #6 2-ring numeral cancel. March 22nd Teeswater backstamp.
 Illustration: Hillson & Nixon, p.89.
 Provenance: Ted Nixon collection, Eastern Auctions Ltd., March 10th, 2012, lot 61.
 Image courtesy of Eastern Auctions Ltd.



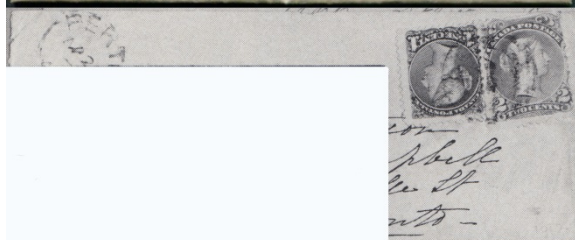
1870-04-02 Hamilton, Ont.
 1¢ paying drop letter rate.
 Provenance: George B. Arfken collection, J.N. Sissons Inc., October 3, 1990, lot 580.



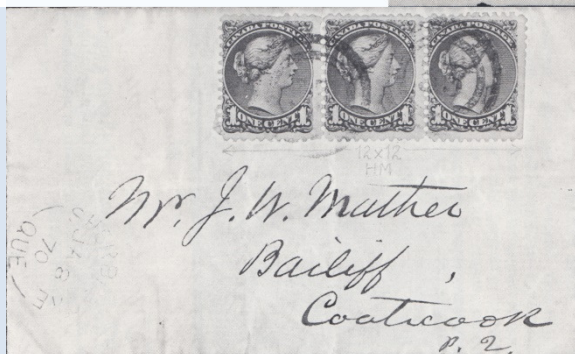
1870-04-08 Montreal, Que. to Lyster, Que.
 Pricelist of Canadian Securities from Robert Moat, Montreal, April 8th, 1870.
 Stamp cancelled by #1 2-ring numeral cancel. No dated postmarks.
 Provenance: eBay, May 2016.



1870-04-22 Montreal, Que. to Lyster, Que.
 Pricelist of Canadian Securities from Robert Moat, Montreal, April 22nd, 1870.
 Stamp cancelled by illegible #1 2-ring numeral cancel. No dated postmarks.
 Provenance: eBay, May 2016.



1870-04-23 Perth, Ont. to Toronto, Ont.
 3¢ domestic letter rate, paid in combination with 2¢ Large Queen. Stamp cancelled by #45 2-ring numeral cancel.
 Provenance: Ed Richardson collection, R. Maresch & Son, October 27th, 1983, lot 1017.
Image courtesy of R. Maresch & Son.



1870-01-08 Sherbrooke, Que. to Coaticook, Que.
1871-01-08 This is a front only. This item would almost certainly have been applied with a Coaticook receiver on the reverse. Discussed by Hillson & Nixon, p.89:
"A cover front exists with a strip of three, dated at Sherbrooke, Quebec, January 8, 1870. However, the shade of the stamps is not characteristic of the first printings, and this item is now accepted as having been used a year later, the year date slug not yet changed to 1871".
 Provenance: Bill Simpson collection, Stanley Gibbons Auction Galleries, Inc., November 18, 1980, lot 253.

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