

Multiples of the United States Private Die Proprietary Revenue Stamps: Their Purpose, Use, and Variety

This exhibit shows examples of the private die proprietary revenue stamps of the United States in multiple format: pairs, strips, and blocks.

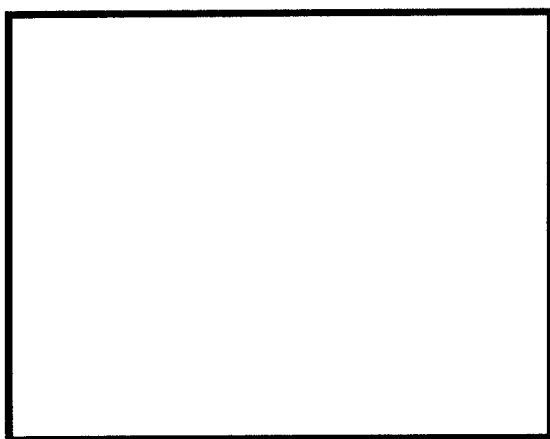
To help defray the costs of the Civil War, Congress levied an array of taxes affecting nearly every aspect of everyday life. The taxes imposed in 1862 on patent medicines, perfumery, cosmetics, and playing cards, and in 1864 on friction matches, remained in effect until 1883.

The patent medicine, perfumery and cosmetics tax was revived in 1898 to help finance the Spanish-American War.

The law allowed the makers of these proprietary articles to purchase their own private dies, resulting in specially-designed revenue stamps, a fabulous field of philately familiarly known as the "match and medicines."

The tax was based on the retail price of the product (or, in the case of matches, on quantity). The firms often chose to use multiples of their stamps to pay the tax on their full line of products. A two cent stamp, for instance, used on a fifty cent product, could be affixed as a pair to a one dollar product.

Many of these revenues were printed in small quantities, saw only local use, or were used for a short period of time. Fully one third of the M&Ms are unknown as multiples, either lost to oblivion or never used as such. This still leaves over 500 separate issues known in multiple format.



Radway & Co. silk paper pair on a carton of Radway's Renovating Resolvent, priced at one dollar. The right panel of the upper stamp has a 17 mm plate gouge.

Only five patent medicine revenue stamp multiples are recorded on the original containers.

Many surviving examples display obvious signs of use, such as creases, tears, or pieces missing. The law specified that stamps were to be affixed to the containers in such a manner that the stamps would be destroyed upon opening.

Stamp collectors of old removed the stamps from unopened boxes, bottles, and wrappers, often scouring small town drug stores in search of the elusive. Other multiples made it into the hands of collectors directly from the firms themselves. Some of the examples herein displayed are such remainders, but most show signs of actual usage.

These used multiples show how the firms actually stamped their products. Large remainders can help determine the plate positions of double transfers and other varieties.

Twelve of the multiples shown herein are the only recorded examples. Another 21 are one of two recorded, and 27 others are the largest recorded examples. The more important items are framed in **dark** borders.

A photograph of the carton which held this pair, with typical language of the patent medicine era extolling this "extraordinary, rare, and wonderful remedy for srofulous, syphilitic bladder and kidney compaints, consumption, bronchitis, and diseases of the skin."