



**A Fiscal History "Perfect Storm": the U.S. \$15 Mortgage Stamp, 1862-1872**

**Purpose.** This exhibit illustrates and explains the range of on-document usages of the U.S. \$15 Mortgage revenue stamp.

Apart from the bicolored \$200, the large size and color variations of the \$15 Mortgage make it the most distinctive of the U.S. First Issues. At the same time it was one of the least used. Only 18,358 were sold over the decade of broad Civil War era stamp taxes, 1862-1872, and \$15 was the only First Issue denomination not included in the Second Issues. Today only about twenty have been recorded on document.

Remarkably, these few exhibit a diversity unique among the high-denomination First Issues, as detailed below and in the Epilog:

**Exhibit Plan**

- |                             |                                 |                                 |                            |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>1. Imperforate</b>       | <b>2. Perforated, Dark Blue</b> | <b>3. \$15 Milky Blue</b>       | <b>4. \$15 Ultramarine</b> |
| 1.1 1862 Mortgage \$15 rate | 2.1 \$15 Plate Number           | 3.1 Combination with Dark Blue! | 4.1 Philippines deed       |
| 1.2 With Nevada \$5         | 2.2 Alabama use                 | 3.2 Milky Blue subshade         | 4.2 \$400,000 note         |
| 1.3 Oregon use              | 2.3 With Nevada \$10, \$20      |                                 | 4.3 Ultramarine pair       |

Red borders or print signify items or attributes of special significance.

**1.1 Unique \$15 EMU**

1859 mortgage for \$17,006, recorded February 1863, when it was stamped with matching \$15 Mortgage imperforate

**Sole recorded \$15 EMU (Early Matching Usage); sole recorded example of \$15 Mortgage rate**

The \$15 Mortgage tax was rescinded just ten weeks after the matching \$15 stamp was first delivered!

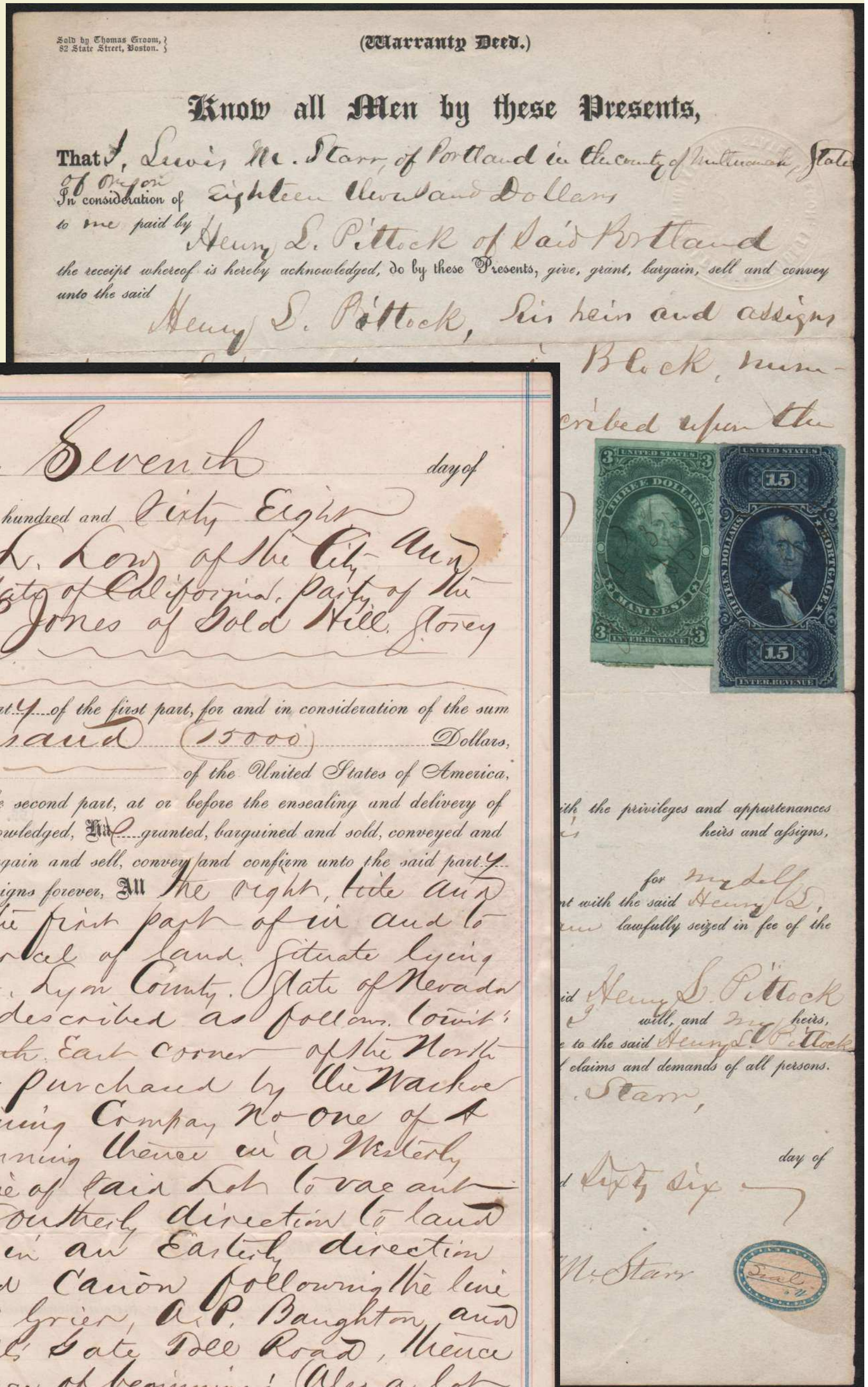
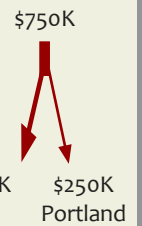
**Imperforates Sent West: 1863 Shipment to San Francisco and Portland**

In January 1863 the Treasury Dept. made its first shipment of revenue stamps to the West, sending \$750,000 in stamps to San Francisco, of which \$250,000 were transhipped to Portland, Oregon.

Just a month earlier, on December 25, 1862, the government had rescinded the requirement for mandatory matching usage of revenue stamps — Agreement stamps on agreements, Bank Check stamps on checks, and so on. Delays in stamp production had caused the system to collapse under its own weight. As an emergency measure stamps had been delivered with perforation "unfinished," but to no avail.

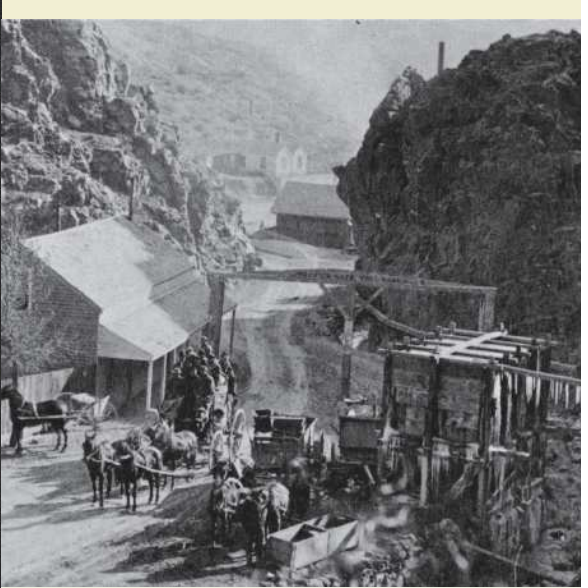
Now the detritus of that failed experiment was sent West, a treasure trove of imperforates and part perforates in a dazzling variety and quantity. Dollar-value imperforates were used on Western deeds well into the mid-1860s.

Shown below are \$15 Mortgage imperforates from both San Francisco and Portland branches of this shipment.



**1.2 \$15 Imperforate plus Nevada \$5**  
 1868 deed to Pioneer Quartz Mill, Devil's Gate Toll Road, Silver City, Nevada amount \$15,000, taxed by both U.S. and Nevada at \$15 paid by \$15 Mortgage imperforate plus Nevada \$5 (x3)  
**\$15 Mortgage imperforate recorded on only five documents**  
 Nevada \$5 recorded on twelve documents  
 Seven Silver City documents recorded bearing Nevada stamps  
 The \$15 was from the huge initial shipment sent to San Francisco in 1863  
 The buyer, John P. Jones, became five-time U.S. Senator from Nevada, prominent authority on mining in the Senate; instrumental in development of Panamint mining region in Southern California, which spurred growth of Los Angeles; founded city of Santa Monica. Ex- "Newlands Find."

**1.3 \$15 Imperforate, Oregon Use**  
 1866 deed to property in Portland, Oregon, amount \$18,000, tax \$18, stamped with \$15 Mortgage and \$3 Manifest imperforates  
**Each recorded on only five documents**  
 Both stamps from the huge initial shipment sent to Portland in 1863



The unforgettable Devil's Gate in Gold Canyon enroute to Virginia City, with strategically placed toll gate

**This Indenture** Made the Seventh day of December one thousand eight hundred and Sixty Eight BETWEEN Charles L. Low of the City and County of San Francisco State of California, Party of the first part, and John P. Jones of Gold Hill, Storey County, State of Nevada, of the second part. Witnesseth, That the said part 1<sup>st</sup> of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Fifteen Thousand (15000) Dollars, in gold coin of the United States of America, to him in hand paid by the said part 2<sup>d</sup> of the second part, at or before the enacting and delivery of these presents, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, Do grant, bargain and sold, conveyed and confirmed, and by these presents Do grant, bargain and sell, convey and confirm unto the said part 2<sup>d</sup> of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns forever, All the right, title and interest of said party of the first part of in and to that certain piece or parcel of land, situate lying and being in Silver City, Lyon County, State of Nevada and bounded and described as follows: to wit: Commencing at the North East corner of the North East corner of a lot purchased by the Washoe Gold and Silver Mining Company No one of A. L. Johnson, and running thence in a Westerly direction along the line of said lot to vacant land, thence in a southerly direction to land of J. W. Grier, thence in an Easterly direction to and across Gold Canyon following the line of lot owned by J. W. Grier, A. P. Baughton, and one James, to Devil's Gate Toll Road, thence along said road to place of beginning; (Also a lot purchased by Pioneer Quartz Company of one R. E. Green) Together with the Pioneer Quartz Mill situate upon said lot of land, and the Boarding House and Stable thereon, and belonging with said Mill the whole being known as the property of the so called Pioneer Quartz Company Together with all and singular the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereunto belonging, or in any wise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof.

And also all the estate, right, title, interest, possession, claim and demand whatsoever, as well in law as in equity, of the said part 1<sup>st</sup> of the first part, of, in or to the above described premises, and every part and parcel thereof, with the appurtenances.

To Have and to Hold, all and singular the above mentioned and described premises, together with the appurtenances, unto the said part 2<sup>d</sup> of the second part, his heirs and assigns forever.

In Witness Whereof, the said part 1<sup>st</sup> of the first part has hereunto set his hand and seal the day and year first above written.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in the Presence of  
Isaac S. Millikin

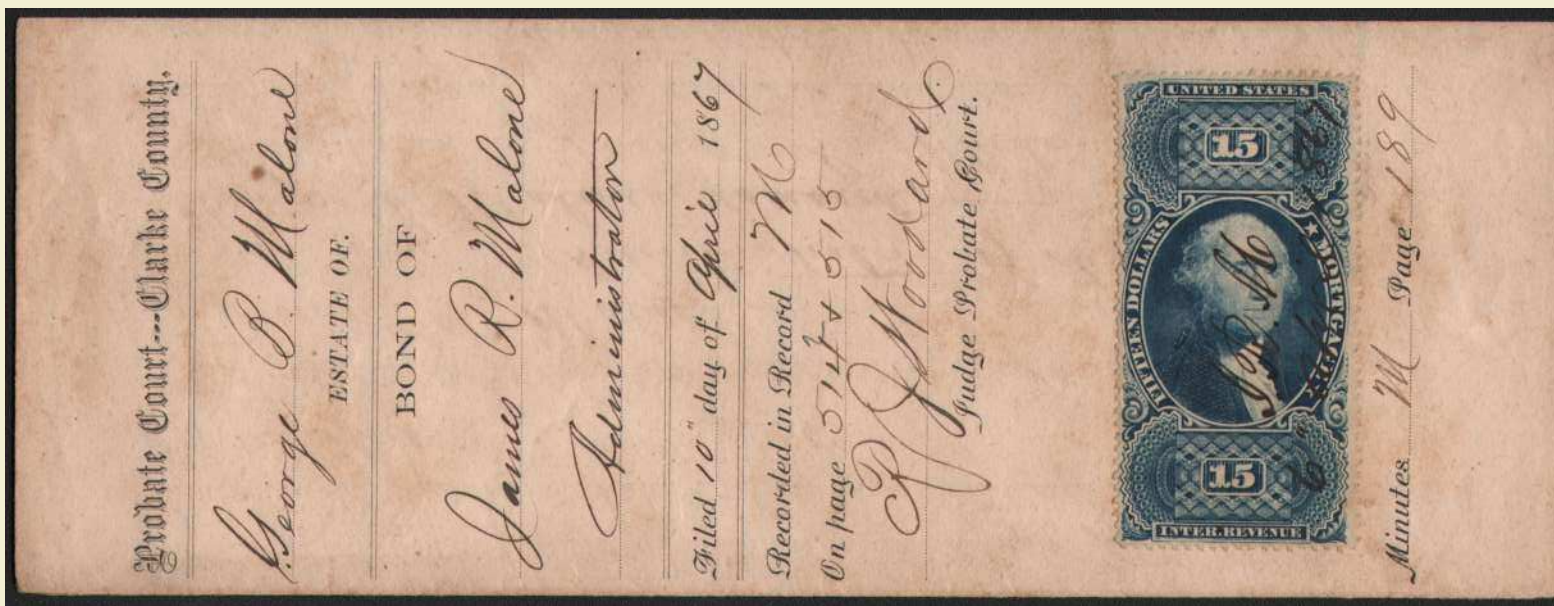
Charles L. Low

**2. Perforated \$15 Mortgage, Dark Blue**

**2.1 The \$15 Plate Number**

1867 deed to property in New York City, amount \$20,000, tax \$20, paid by \$15 Mortgage & \$5 Conveyance  
 \$15 with selva showing partial imprint of printers Butler and Carpenter of Philadelphia plus "Plate No. 150"]

Only a handful of First Issue plate numbers have been recorded on document, the others all small denominations, making this a spectacular exception.



**2.2 Used in Alabama**

1867 estate administrator's bond, Clarke County, Alabama, amount \$30,000, implying an estate value of \$15,000, Probate of Will \$15 tax paid by \$15 Mortgage

One of three First Issues of denomination above \$10 recorded on any Southern document

In the ravaged postwar South, revenue stamp users could not afford the expense of stocking high values. Denominations above \$1 are seldom seen, and of \$5 or higher only rarely. Multiple or "wallpaper" use of lower values are typical.



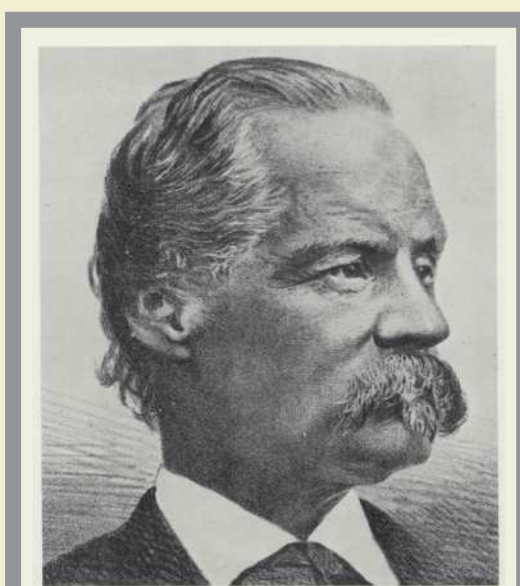
**2.3 \$15 plus Nevada \$10 & \$20**

1871 deed to Mexican Mill, Carson River, Nevada, amount \$130,000 bearing \$50 USIR (x2), \$15 Mortgage (x2), plus Nevada \$20 (x6) & \$10

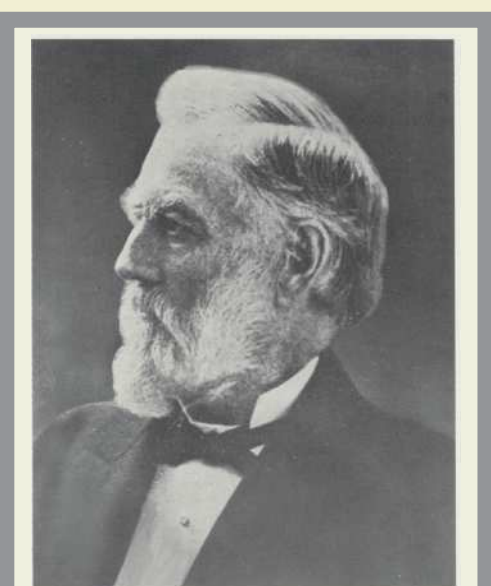
Six documents recorded with the Nevada \$20, six with the \$10; no other bears more than two of the \$20.

From the Union Mill and Mining Co., notorious holding company of the Bank of California, to financial titan Alvinza Hayward (namesake of Hayward, California). From the mid-1860s to the early 1870s the "Bank Ring," masterminded by William Sharon, its Agent in Virginia City, had maintained a virtual stranglehold on mining, milling, and shipping of the fabled Comstock Lode. This deed illustrates the first relaxation of that stranglehold. John P. Jones, trusted superintendent of the Bank-controlled Crown Point mine, discerned that it was verging on bonanza, and enlisted Hayward to finance a quiet, treacherous takeover. When the Crown Point produced some \$30 million, the Jones-Hayward combine, the Nevada Mill and Mining Co., became a Comstock power. With this deed, the Bank sold them the Mexican Mill to crush Crown Point ore, albeit at a whopping price.

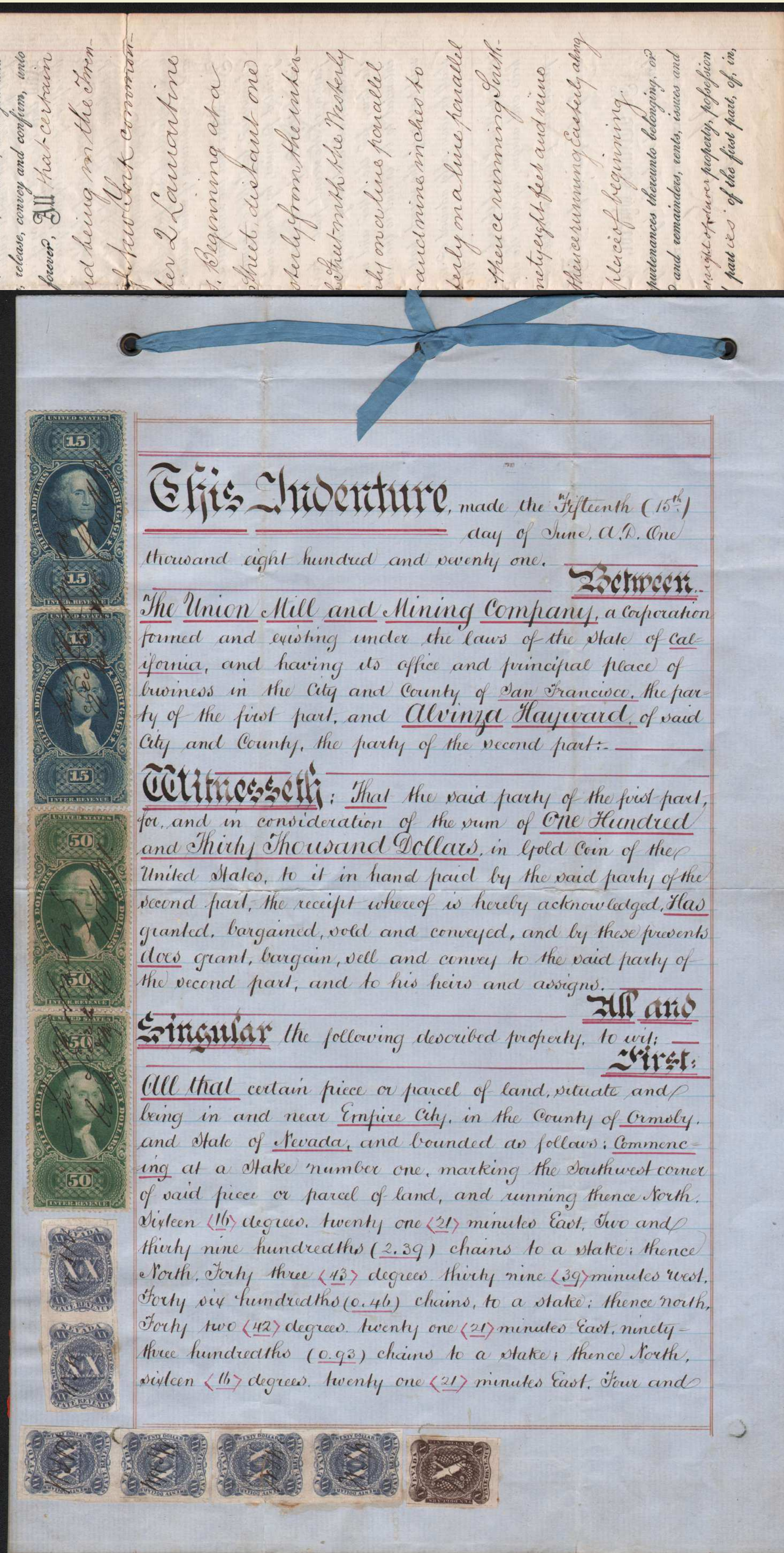
The "heart piece" of the "Newlands find," the personal archive of Nevada senator Francis Newlands, which reached philatelic hands in the 1980s. Newlands had been Sharon's son in law and estate executor. Sharon's papers included numerous insider transactions involving important Comstock mills, of which this is the most historically and philatellically important, and visually spectacular.



William Sharon



Alvinza Hayward



**3. \$15 Milky Blue**

The \$15 Mortgage milky blue is the only Scott-listed shade of any First Issue. Its size and rarity make the \$15 an attention-grabber even in its usual color; the striking difference of the milky blue from the normal dark blue makes it extraordinarily distinctive and memorable.

**3.2 \$15 Milky Blue Subshade**

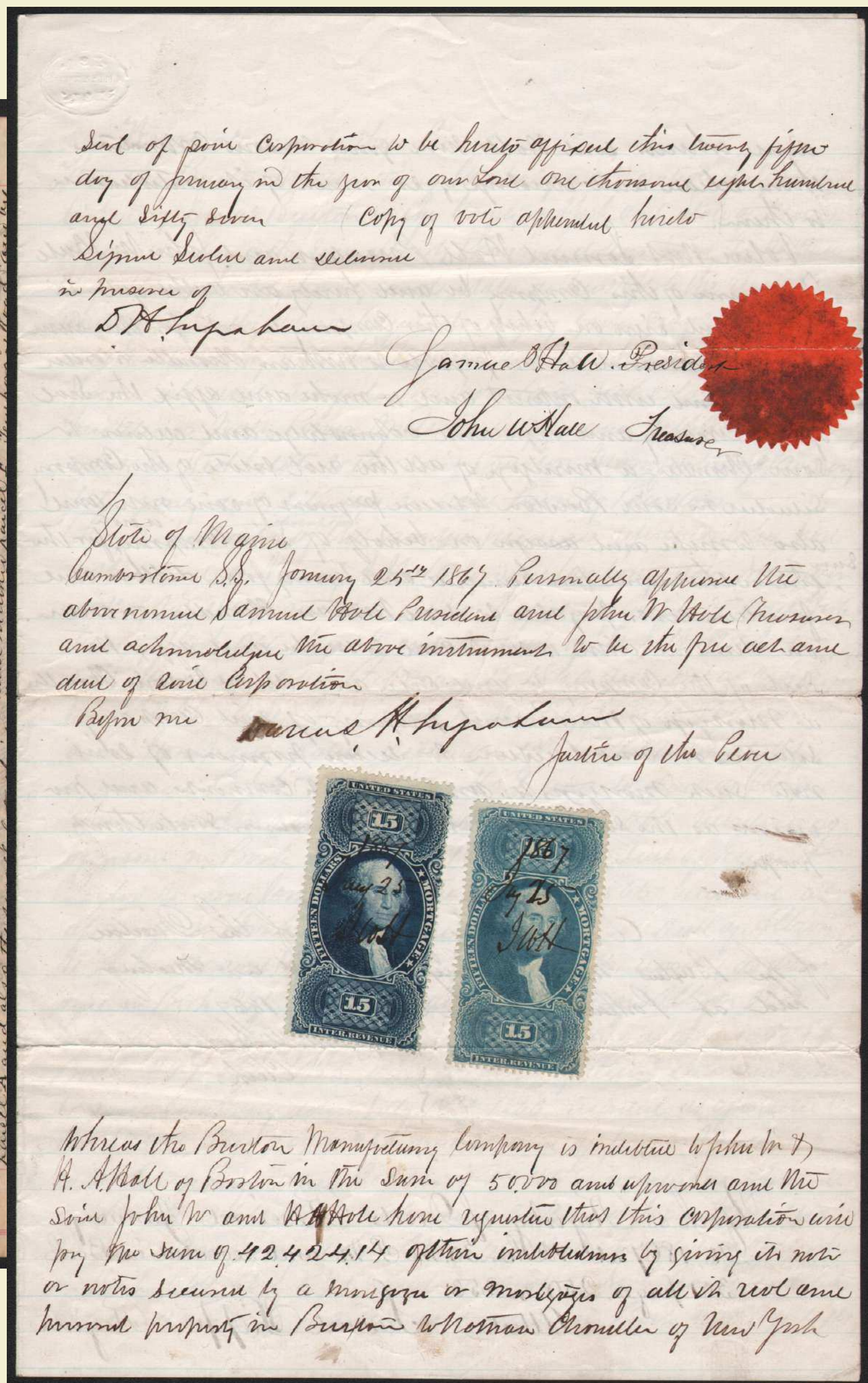
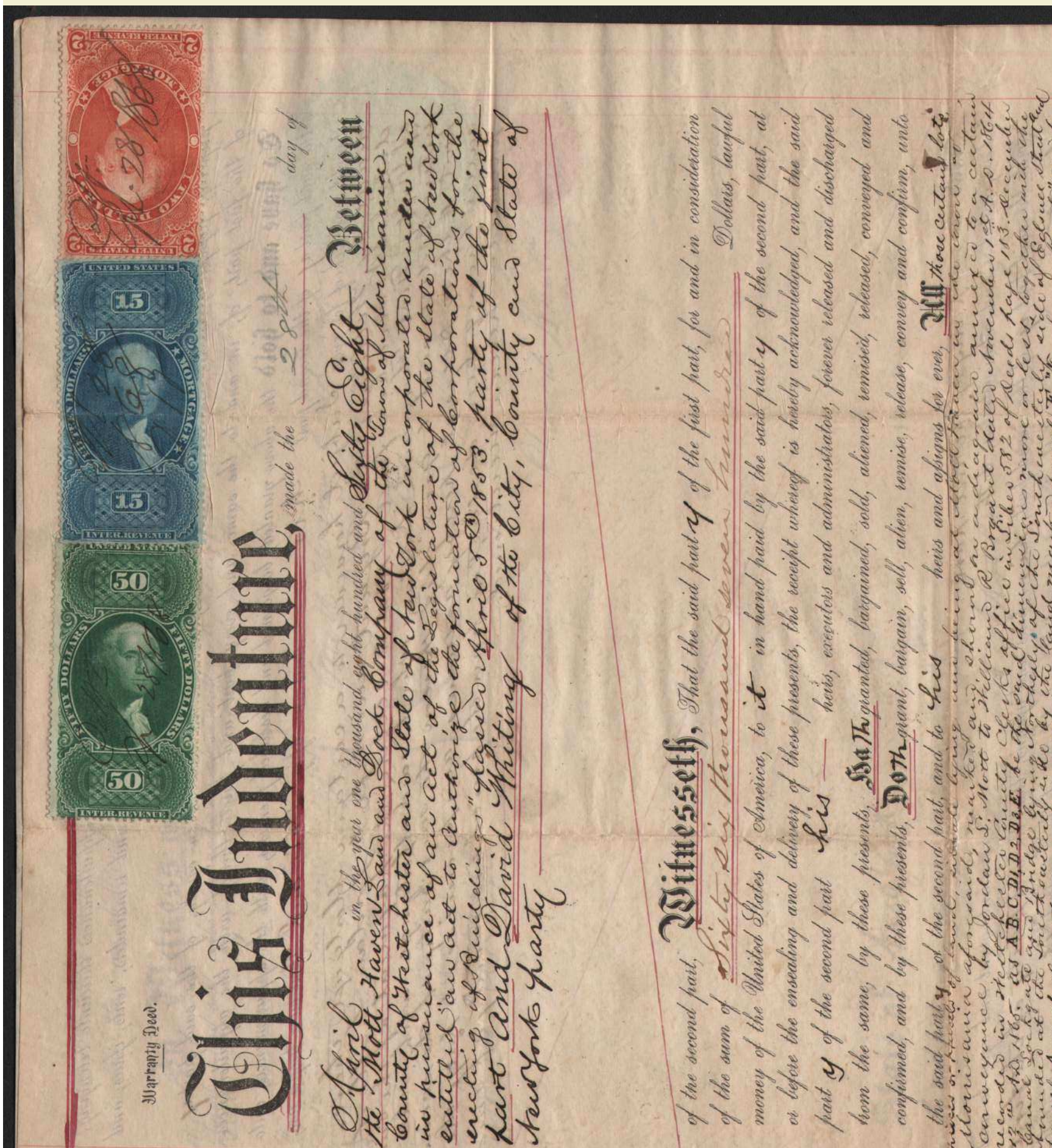
Below, April 1868 deed, amount \$66,700, tax \$67, bearing \$15 Mortgage milky blue in a darker subshade  
**\$15 Mortgage milky blue recorded on two documents**

**3.1 "The Blue Boys": \$15 Dark Blue and Milky Blue!**

1867 deed stamped with two \$15 Mortgage, in dark blue and milky blue!

**\$15 Mortgage milky blue recorded on two documents**

The milky blue is typically seen dated from late 1866 to early 1868. Its combination here with the \$15 in a normal shade, especially with no other stamps to distract, is nothing less than a statistical miracle.



**4.1 \$15 Ultramarine; \$200 tax**

Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Co., \$400,000 promissory note, tax \$200 paid by all four \$15 through \$50 First Issue denominations: \$15, \$20 (x3), \$25 & \$50 (x2)! highlighted by the \$15 Mortgage ultramarine

**\$15 Mortgage ultramarine recorded on five documents**

Notes or drafts with stamps of \$25 or higher are very seldom seen.

**4.2 \$15 Ultramarine; Executed in the Philippines**

Deed for property in Boston, sold for \$64,518.32, tax \$65, paid by \$15 Mortgage Ultramarine & \$25 Mortgage (x2)

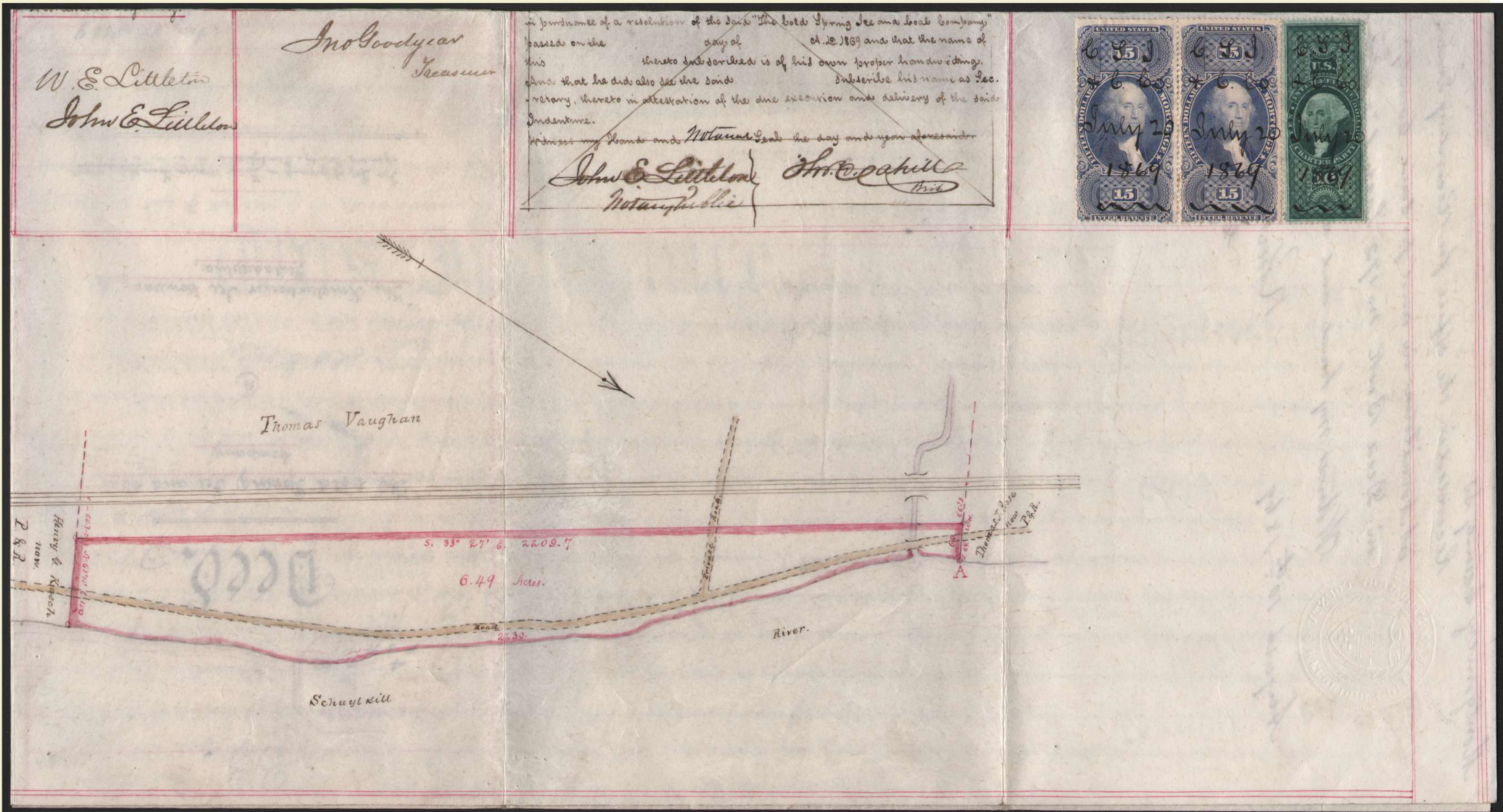
Executed in Manila, the Philippines, by Jonathan Russell, whose residence is listed as Milton, Massachusetts, but for many years a partner in the well known Yankee trading firm Russell and Sturgis in Manila. The place of execution is proved by a statement of the U.S. Consul in Manila, with his handstamped seal.

Executed October 3, 1868, the stamps with manuscript cancels "J. R. Oct. 3 1868," although the hand differs from Russell's and the \$15 ultramarine was not issued until late 1869. The stamps were probably affixed when the deed was recorded in Massachusetts on August 18, 1869.

#### 4. The "Ultramarine Experiment"

For a brief period in late 1869 and early 1870 the printer of U.S. revenue stamps, Joseph Carpenter of Philadelphia, **changed the color of six First Issue stamps** including the \$15 Mortgage, from blue to ultramarine. The underlying rationale is clear. The Commissioner of Internal Revenue, in his Annual Reports and elsewhere, had expressed concerns about **loss of revenue through washing and reuse of stamps**. Not only were **cancel marks much more visible on ultramarine stamps than on blue**, but the **new ink was fugitive**; according to Carpenter "it cannot be washed without defacing the stamp."

Astonishingly, **Carpenter made this change of his own accord**. On October 30, 1869, he wrote new Commissioner Columbus Delano, "Some months ago we commenced the use of inks of a more fugitive nature than those formerly used, desiring to aid the Bureau in the attempts to arrest the re-washing of stamps. ... I am aware the new colors did not produce as full and clear an impression; but as they could not be readily washed, I directed their use. ... if you direct a return to the more indelible tint, I will of course follow your instructions." The observed disappearance of the ultramarines after mid-1870 tells us that such a directive must have been received, bringing the brief "ultramarine experiment" to an end.



#### 4.3 \$15 Ultramarine Pair

Deed from Cold Spring Ice and Coal Co. to Knickerbocker Ice Co., Philadelphia, amount \$40,000, \$40 tax paid by \$15 Mortgage ultramarine pair & \$10 Charter Party

**Only five multiples of this stamp are known, this the only one on document.**

(The Curtis census lists one block of four and four pairs.) Illustrated deeds are very seldom seen. The companies were evidently cutting ice from the Schuylkill River.

#### Summary: a Fiscal History "Perfect Storm"

The material shown here — documents showing early matching usage, imperforates used East and West, perforated stamps used East, West and South, the plate number, a Scott-listed shade, and one of the unauthorized printings in ultramarine — constitute a "perfect storm" of fiscal history.

Of the six spectacular high-denomination large format \$15 through \$200 First Issue revenues — \$15 Mortgage, \$20 Conveyance, \$20 Probate of Will, \$25 Mortgage, \$50 USIR and \$200 USIR — as tabulated below, **only for the \$15 Mortgage** have the stars aligned to allow the survival of documents in all of these desirable fiscal history categories.

All six stamps have been recorded both imperforate and perforated on document. And all imperfs but the \$25 have been seen used in the West; even here though, only for the \$15 have usages survived from both branches of the huge 1863 shipment to San Francisco and Portland. For the remaining six categories, except for the \$15 the table is nearly empty.

**The diverse range of usages of the \$15 Mortgage shown here could not be duplicated for any of the other spectacular large format First Issues.**

|                                | \$15 Mortgage          | \$20 Conveyance | \$20 Probate of Will | \$25 Mortgage | \$50 USIR      | \$200 USIR     |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| Early Matching Usage           | x                      | x               |                      |               |                |                |
| Imperf on document             | x                      | x               | x                    | x             | x              | x              |
| Western Use                    | x (California, Oregon) | x (Nevada)      | x (California)       |               | x (California) | x (California) |
| U.S.-Nevada combination        | x                      | x               |                      |               | x              | x              |
| Perf on document               | x                      | x               | x                    | x             | x              | x              |
| Scott-listed shade on document | x (Milky Blue)         |                 |                      |               |                |                |
| Ultramarine printing           | x                      |                 |                      |               |                |                |
| Plate Number on document       | x                      |                 |                      |               |                |                |
| Western Use                    | x (California)         | x (California)  |                      |               | x (California) |                |
| U.S.-Nevada combination        | x                      | x               |                      |               | x              |                |
| Southern Use                   | x (Alabama)            | x (S. Carolina) |                      |               |                |                |