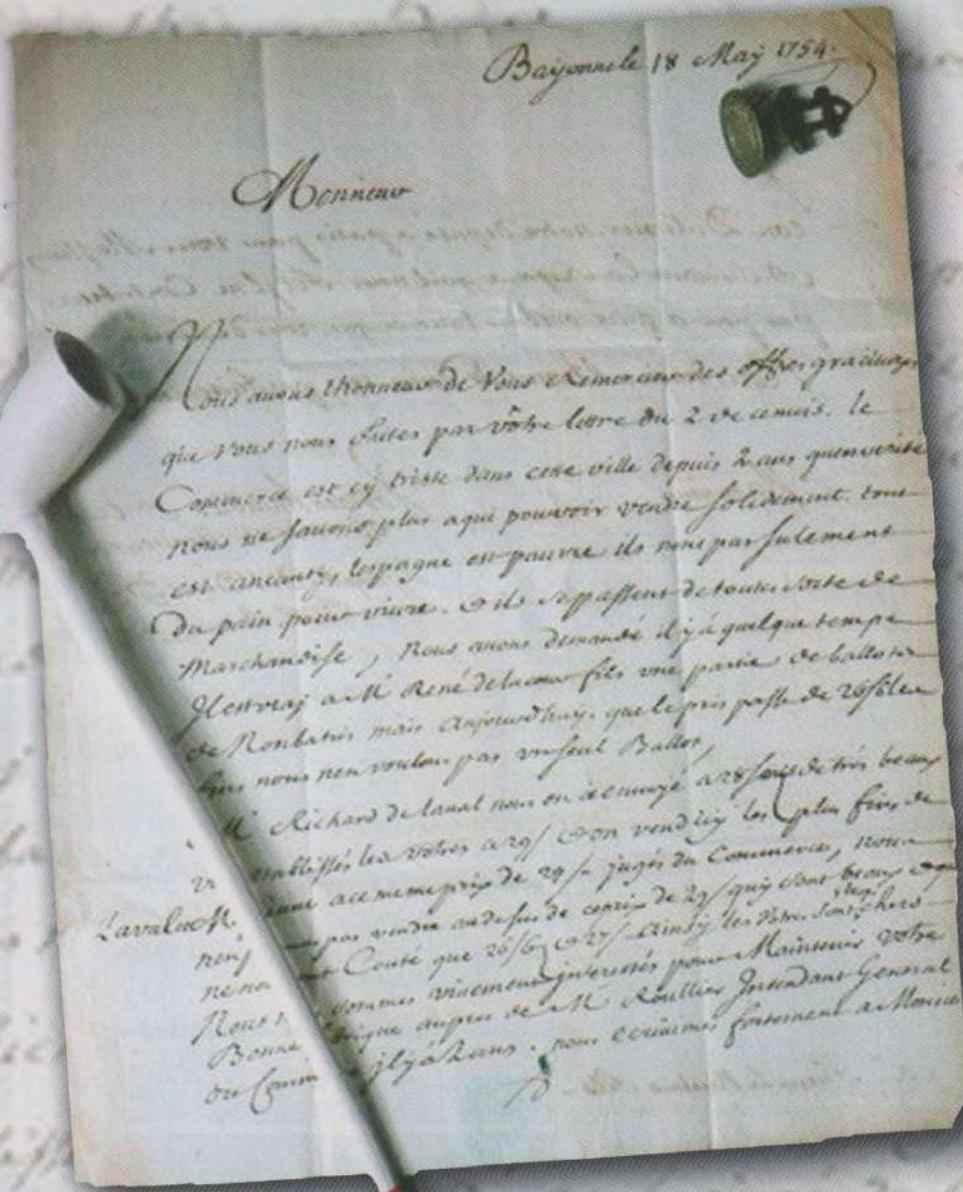


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AN EXCEPTIONAL DISCOVERY

Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Unreported 'Five' Overprint of the 19th Century

By Jean-Jacques Tillard, FRPSC, RPSL

I have carefully studied the 19th century issues of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon for over 30 years. Among other fields, I have specialized in manual overprints from 1885 and have acquired many different examples in order to analyze the smallest details.

All collectors of classics from St-Pierre et Miquelon know about the five over four cent lilac-brown on grey from 1885 (Yvert/Maury #4 - Scott #10, figure 1). This stamp was issued in March 1885, with two overprints in black printed separately - the 'Five' and the 'SPM.'



Figure 1. Normal.

Toward the end of the 1990s, I found an example with the inverted overprints 'Five' and 'SPM'. It had a different number 'Five,' figure 2. Other 'Fives' are known to exist, but are often crude imitations by forgers. Moreover, this overprint is one of the most widely imitated in the philately of Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

When I looked more closely, in order to evaluate this stamp, I realized that it was authentic. This was an incredible discovery for me, especially as this major rarity only appeared over a century after the stamp was first issued! It has a narrower curve at the end and measures 10.3 mm in height instead of nine mm for the normal stamp.

In 1998, I found another new example at an auction, which also had an inverted 'Five,' but with the 'SPM' triple overprinted, which was also inverted, figure 3. This item was sold as a variety of the number four and is another exceptional find. The only slight disappointment is that it is thin in areas and a tooth is missing from the upper left-hand corner.

Figure 2. Inverted overprint. Mint. Only known example.

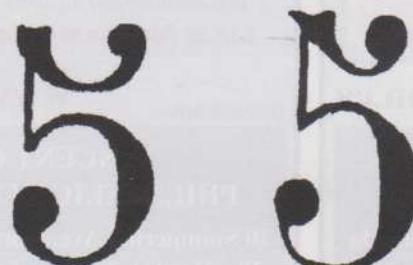


It seemed sensible to wait before having this discovery officially recognized. I wanted to know more about this oddity. In 2005, as I was preparing to make my debut in philatelic competitions, I searched all the continents of the world for SPM overprints on the first issues. One



Figure 3. Triple inverted 'SPM' overprint. Mint. Only known example.

Normal 'Five'
of nine mm in height.



Unreported 'Five'
of 10.3 mm in height
with narrower curve at the end.

cent lilac-brown on grey, which are rarely found on covers. It became apparent that these stamps (three examples on two covers from 1889 and 1891, figures 4 a, b, and figure 5) are also franked with this unreported 'Five,' but upright. My efforts were therefore rewarded when I found cancelled pieces and, even better, stamps on mail. One interesting envelope bears the letterhead of the Governor's House.

Over 10 years have passed and no stamp had been discovered... until New York, 2016. In fact, while browsing the dealers' stalls at this fine international philatelic event, I stumbled on another example, which was cancelled but isolated. This example, which is heavily inked and misses two teeth, is dated 1888, figure 6.



Figure 4a. 1889 COVER SENT TO VIENNA, CAPITAL OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY DURING THIS PERIOD.

Three things make this cover interesting - its destination, mixed postage 'colonie générale - SPM' and the presence of two stamps with this unreported 'Five' overprint. Probably the finest cover of the 'SPM' classics.

After looking at hundreds of overprinted five on four cent lilac-brown on grey stamps, only six pieces have so far been found, all of which are included in my 128-page study of 19th century overprints.

No text in the available archives mentions a different 'Five' stamp. A fire



Figure 4b.
Enlarged copy of
the 1891 cover
showing the two
stamps.



Figure 5. 1891 COVER SENT TO PARIS BY THE GOVERNMENT. This letterhead is even better evidence of the official issue of this unreported overprint. There was a delay before it came into use. On this example, the letter 'P' in 'SPM' is not printed. Exceptional cover of major interest.

wiped out the archive department and many documents were damaged or destroyed. It is therefore not possible to confirm whether it was also issued in 1885. It should be noted that several issues and reprints were made in December, 1885. It is also highly likely that this stamp came into being at the end of the year.



Figure 6. Cancelled in 1888. The number 'Five' is heavily inked. Only known detached stamp.

Further mystery surrounds the 'SPM' overprints on examples cancelled with the local overprint, which are closer together than the inverted overprints on the mint stamps. This leads us to believe that there were two different print runs. On one of these stamps, the letter 'P' is missing from 'SPM.' This variety adds additional interest. This unreported overprint, as it is known, is therefore a major rarity from the French colonies.

Another Saint-Pierre et Miquelon stamp, the 1891 15 cent/35 cent black/yellow-orange, was made at the request of a collector (Yvert #15 - Maury #16A - Scott #17). This overprint with the thin '15' is a comparable example. The only difference is that it has been listed since it was issued. ☐