

The Náchod Discovery: Unique Hradčany Gutters Marked for Provisional Postage-Due Use

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Introduction

One of the great pleasures of philately derives from the fact that while only true experts may judge a stamp false or genuine, any collector may undertake the basic steps required to initially eliminate gross forgeries from consideration. One must begin by assuming one has a forged stamp in hand, and then go on to ferret out supporting physical or logical evidence confirming the forgery. While failure to discover any fabrication does not authenticate an item, it does heighten the possibility of the stamp's eventual exoneration.

Four Hradčany gutters appeared as part of an EBay lot in September 2002; *The Czechoslovak Specialist* earlier reported the story of their discovery.¹ This paper records an investigation into the more interesting items from that lot, a mint and cancelled set of Hradčany 5h gutters² marked for provisional postage-due use. Similarly marked sets of 10h *tête-bêche* gutters and 20h ordinary pairs, as well as a small and quite common piece of printer's waste, made up the full lot (*Figs. 1, 2*).



Fig. 1: The Náchod Gutters.



Fig. 2: The ordinary pairs and waste.

An amateur dealer reportedly assembled the lot out of remainders from a deceased collector's general world collection. The dealer obviously valued the lot's "rare" piece of printer's waste far more than any of the "common" Hradčany stamps.³ The auction's verbal and graphic descriptions ignored these very unusual gutters and focused almost

¹ Mark Wilson, "Forgery or an Amazing Find?". *The Czechoslovak Specialist*, November/December 2002, p.3.

² Czech philately classifies gutter pairs into two types. The more common, *protisměrné meziarší* (opposite-direction gutters), are in this paper called *tête-bêche gutters*. The stamps are upside-down with respect to each other. The scarcer *stejnsměrné meziarší* (same-direction gutters) appear to have no specific English descriptive technical term, although other translators have used the terms *unidirectional* and *'pair'* gutters. Their stamps are upright with respect to one another and are indicated in this paper by the unadorned term *gutters*, which is, unfortunately, a term that must also be used in English as the collective for different types of gutters. Finally, pairs of stamps without gutters are simply called *ordinary pairs*.

³ EBay auctions sometimes falsely list printer's waste from the production process as though it were a genuine double-printed error of an issued stamp.

entirely upon the worthless printer's waste. Since the 5h gutter ranks high among the great Czech rarities,⁴ he obviously misplaced his sales-pitch.

He delivered the stamps mounted on the collector's original homemade page. An astoundingly inaccurate description, printed at the top of the page in a low-resolution dot-matrix font, made clear the collector believed invading Austrian troops overprinted these stamps for military field-post use.⁵

Apparently the initial and only gum disturbance occurred while mounting the stamps with hinges to the computer-produced page. We cannot know exactly when this happened, but the use of a low-resolution dot-matrix printer limits the time frame to around the early 1980's.

All four gutters are unfolded;⁶ all have endured some abuse. They are slightly soiled, perhaps even a bit dirty. On the mint **3Ms**,⁷ a deep crease crosses from the top left corner of the margin to the center of the upper stamp and a small, tadpole-shaped stain discolors the lower left margin. The cancelled **3Ms** and the mint **5Mp** each have one curled and creased edge.

Every stamp in the set bears a provisional postage-due marking: a large, in places nearly transparent, light-black impression of the word PORTO⁸ flanked at either end by a star. As for the postmark, one can read the year, month, and hour numerals with little difficulty, but the digits for the day – although clearly in the teens – lack distinction. The postage-due and cancellation ink smears in places.

An owner of a certified **3Ms** provided his gutter for comparison.⁹ The Náchod gutters' color is a darker green, but within normal shading differences, and the paper has a slightly different tone. The gum on the certified gutter seemed less shiny and somewhat smoother than that of the Náchods'.

The need to determine three issues of fact complicates investigation of the Náchod gutters: Are the gutters themselves forgeries? Are the postmarks authentic? Is the provisional postage-due marking a fabrication?

Part I: Physical Examination

Let us start with the stamps themselves. Visual inspection reveals no evidence of constructive fabrication or tampering, such as the joining of separate selvages from two different sheets, to create the gutters. Their unfolded state simplified the determination that the paper and gum remain uncut and completely continuous.

Next, we turn to the printing flaws found within each stamp. Every stamp from an Hradčany sheet may appear superficially identical, but into each individual stamp the

⁴ Georg Wilhelms, J. Verner, "5h light green Hradčany 'pair' gutters". *Czechoslovak Specialist*, September/October 1994, p4-5.

⁵ The collector's description is nonsense: no part of it could be true. Austrian troops occupied no part of Czechoslovakia in 1919, the markings represent provisional postage-due not military field-post stamps, and local Czech post offices, not the Austrian Army, put such markings on their regular issue stamps because of a pressing need for postage-due stamps.

⁶ Unfolded gutters are quite uncommon; in this instance, the two 5h gutters in this condition are unique.

⁷ František Beneš, *Československo: 1918-1939*, Prague, POFIS, 2002. The numbers are from this specialized Czech catalogue. The 5h, 10h, and 20h Hradčany stamps are numbered 3, 5, and 8; the Ms means *stejnsměrné meziarší* and Mp *protisměrné meziarší*. See footnote 2 for translation.

⁸ PORTO indicates a postage-due stamp.

⁹ The owner prefers to remain anonymous.

letterpress printing technique introduced unique topographical features. More than half a century of diligent plating makes it a facile matter to verify documented flaws within any specific stamp. To employ this technique, one must first determine the plate used to print the pane, then locate the stamp's specific position on that pane. Such an investigation, available to even an amateur, may expose simple forgeries but does not in itself establish an item as genuine.

Control Numbers

By simply examining the control numbers¹⁰ one may determine for any Hradčany gutter pair its position on the parent double pane and thus exactly identify the site of the two stamps (*Fig. 3*). Candidates for a gutter's upper stamp must always derive from the last row of the upper pane [ZP 91 – ZP 100],¹¹ while the lower stamp must always come from the first row of the lower pane [ZP 1 – ZP 10]. Since the control numbers found in the gutter determine the source position and coupling of any specific pair within a double pane, the most casual inspection reveals that in this instance the mint pair consists of stamps from ZP 91 over ZP 1, while the cancelled pair represents ZP 98 over ZP 8.¹²

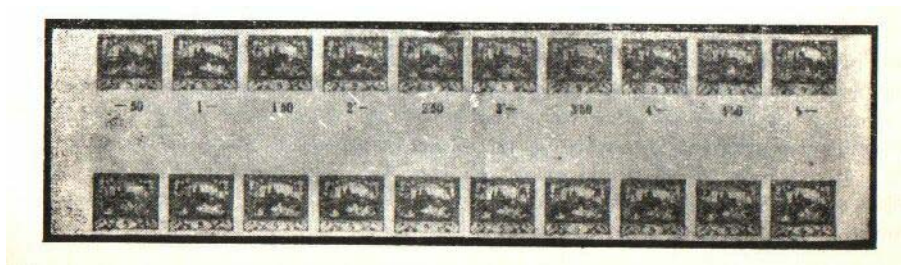


Fig. 3: Exemplar source of 5h gutter pairs with control numbers. Novotný, p.35.

Printing Form (Plate Matrix)

To determine which plates were used to produce the double pane, one must

Plate II 5h 1 st Design	Plate III 5h 1 st Design	Plate II 5h 5 th Design [<i>sic</i> : 1 st]	Plate I 400h 5 th Design [<i>sic</i> : 1 st]
[35 mm gutter]		[36.5 mm gutter]	
Plate I 5h 1 st Design	Plate IV 5h 1 st Design	Plate I 5h 5 th Design [<i>sic</i> : 1 st]	Plate II 400h 5 th Design [<i>sic</i> : 1 st]

Fig 4: Printing form plate arrangement. *Monografie*, p.103, modified.

¹⁰ Numbers printed at the base of each column in a pane as an accounting aid.

¹¹ Czech philately uses ZP (známkové pole – pane position) numbers assigned horizontally in rows from top to bottom to indicate specific pane positions. In a 10x10 pane, the top row starts with 1, the bottom row with 91. Control numbers are found below the bottom row.

¹² That is, the control number –50 represents the first column, and 4.— the eighth column.

examine the plate matrices of Hradčany printing forms. At first glance, the *Monografie* seems to report that only a single printing form produced double panes bearing **3Ms** gutters.¹³ For that form, the printers arranged the plates in sequence by starting at the lower left-hand corner then proceeding clockwise around the form utilizing plates I through IV (*Fig. 4*).

Although the labels on the adjacent printing form in the illustration show two plates from the 5th design,¹⁴ the *Monografie*'s text attributes that particular form to the production of 1st design 5h stamps.¹⁵ Because the illustration's caption¹⁶ describes this second form as a later modification of the first form, and since the 5h plates represent the only commonality shared between the two forms, the second form in the diagram must also be considered another possible source of **3Ms** gutters.¹⁷

In point of fact, mention of the 5th design 5h in this instance seems out of place since those stamps would not be printed until July 1919, some months into the future. In any event, both printing forms described in the *Monografie* arrange their common 5h plates identically. All **3Ms** gutters must combine stamps from either plate II above plate I, or from plate III above plate IV.

The size of the vertical gutter was only datum available to determine which of the two possible printing forms produced the stamps. The *Monografie* reports a vertical gutter of 35 mm for the first form and 36.5 mm for the second. The gutter of the mint pair in hand measures 34 mm, while the size of the cancelled pair's gutter seems slightly larger: perhaps 34.5 mm. Thus, neither gutter's size matched either of the specifications given in the *Monografie*.

The literature at hand provided no other direct information about vertical gutter sizes, but an M&T auction catalog displayed on its back cover a full-size reproduction of a **3Ms** with a gutter that measured exactly 34 mm.¹⁸ In support of this size, the certified **3Ms** mentioned above also measured 34 mm. An European owner of another certified pair reports his gutter size is 34.5 mm.¹⁹ This evidence contradicts the gutter sizes reported by the *Monografie* and provides some vindication of the difference in gutter size found in the mint and postmarked pairs. Although the information in the *Monografie* appears incorrect and thus insufficient to establish the source printing form, the plate combinations outlined above remain the only two possibilities.

Plates

Hradčany panes do not use plate numbers for identification purposes. Instead, some unique characteristic on a specific control number, or a landmark found within a certain stamp, must suffice to identify any plate. Most sources agree – almost – on the

¹³ *Monografie Československých známek, Díl I.* Prague, 1968, p.103. Obr. 140 A1.

¹⁴ Czech philately recognizes five major and one minor Hradčany designs. The subject stamps are all from the 1st design.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.103; Obr. 140 A2 and p. 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.341.

¹⁷ Stanislav Komberec, in *Hradčany 5 h I. Studie I. A II. Desky, Studijní Filatelistické Příručky*, 28, 1996 has what appears to be a confused representation of this same printing form.

¹⁸ Majer & Thraumb, *18 Veřejná aukce poštovních známek*. September 2001.

¹⁹ Reported in personal email to the authors.

identifying features for every 1st design 5h plate: the *Monografie*,²⁰ Bradford,²¹ Hamr & Škaloud,²² Komberec,²³ and Beneš.²⁴

Luckily, the mint gutter pair's control number (-50) lacks a decimal point, signaling the distinguishing mark for plate II. Thus, for the mint pair, the upper stamp must be compared to ZP 91 on plate II and the lower to ZP 1 on plate I, no matter which of the two possible printing forms reported in the *Monografie* produced the pair. Since the source plates for the postmarked gutter could not be as readily identified as those for the mint pair, and as no copies of plates III or IV were at hand, that gutter could only be compared to stamps on panes produced by plates II and I. It would strain the imagination to believe that yet another double pane, also unknown and unfolded, produced the postmarked pair. In all probability no harm was done by not examining plates III and IV.

Plating Indications For The Mint Pair

For plate II, ZP 91, the center of the **O** in **POŠTA** looks somewhat like an eclipse of the sun with a small, crescent-shaped bite missing from its upper right hand side (*Fig. 5*). On plate I, ZP1, a somewhat elongated dot appears just after the tail of the numeral **5** (*Fig. 6*). Investigation confirmed the presence of these landmarks on the mint pair and on the plate II sheets examined.



Fig 5: ZP 91/II.



Fig 6: ZP 1/I

Komberec describes the significant marks for ZP 91/II as “*A dot above the projecting upper-right corner, a dot at the lower-left corner and a small mark under the HA of MUCHA; /a break in the upper frame above the third spiral and on the right-hand edge between the O and V in SLOV; marks under the lower frame.*”²⁵ Komberec does not mention the misshaped O, and the break above the third spiral does not appear to be present on upper stamp. However, the description itself appears problematic in that it contains irregular punctuation,²⁶ and the break mentioned appears on only one of the two sheets examined. All of the other marks are present.

Komberec describes ZP 1/I as “*Has a faint main ray; a bent line extends from the lower left corner and passes under the M in MUCHA; a dot to the left of the 5, a few dots in the lower right part of the value tablet. /There is a break in the left frame between the O in ČESKO and the third spiral, and in the right frame between the sixth spiral and the S in SLOV.*”²⁷ All of the initial description matches the lower stamp in the mint gutter

²⁰ *Monografie, Dil I*, p. 114.

²¹ Robert Bradford, *The Hradčany Issue: 1918-1920*. CPSGB Monograph 13, p.6.

²² Hamr & Škaloud, *Rukověť pro sběratele Hradčan*. Brno, 1998. p.6.

²³ Komberec, p. 3.

²⁴ Beneš, p. 20.

²⁵ Komberec, p. 54.

²⁶ Komberec seems to use ‘/’ to mark off descriptions only pertinent to some printings. In this instance, the final ‘/’ is missing. If this is true, it explains why ZP 91/II and ZP 1/I lack the features enclosed by ‘/’.

²⁷ Komberec, p. 9.

pair, but none of the description enclosed in ‘/’ matches either that stamp or the two sheets in hand.

Plating Indications For The Cancelled Pair

Komberec describes ZP 98/II: “*A break in the left frame above the second spiral, /and in the upper frame in front of the P in POŠTA/, a thickened lower part on main ray, weakened or missing initial dots on sun. Lower left corner joined to base of M in MUCHA, gap in the trough between the sixth and seventh waves, /projection on lower frame under fourth heart/.*”²⁸ All of the landmarks save the projection beneath the fourth heart are present on the cancelled upper stamp and the plate II sheets examined.

He describes ZP 8/I as “*Dots in the value tablet, pointed upper and lower left corners, blotches and dashes under MUCHA, and a ‘dash’ under the lower frame.*” Here the dots in the value tablet offer the most positive identification as they line up completely. Both sheets resemble the cancelled lower stamp, but the ‘dash’ under the frame is absent from the sheets and the stamp.

The ZP 98 and ZP 1 pair’s landmarks are regrettably too minute to be reproduced accurately in this paper, but all of these landmarks were matched as described above on the postmarked gutter as well as the plate II and plate I panes inspected. The same positions in plates III and IV have quite different flaws, not present on the gutter pairs.²⁹ Both **3Ms** gutters were taken from plate II over plate I – from the left side of either of the two possible printing forms.

Plate Alignment

Gutter pairs display another measurable anomaly: a misalignment to the right or left between the upper and lower stamps. For the mint pair, the lower stamp protruded about 1.5 mm to the left. On the cancelled pair, the lower stamp protruded a similar but smaller distance to the left, perhaps about 1 mm.

All of the illustrations and actual gutters examined display similar offsets. The M&T catalog illustration mentioned above, a gutter from the right hand side of the double pane, shows a misalignment of about 1 mm to the right. A second M&T auction illustration of a pair positioned halfway between the left edge of the pane and the Náchod postmarked pair has a small misalignment to the left.³⁰ A *POFIS 2002* photo, reduced in size, shows the gutter from the left hand side of the double pane protruding to the left.³¹ Finally, another picture, again reduced in size but containing all ten pairs, shows an offset to the left on the leftmost pair, and a small offset to the right on the rightmost pair.³²

The misalignment of upper and lower stamps, at least for those from plates II and I, together with the drift from a larger left hand protrusion to a smaller right hand protrusion, are consistent with the physical data. The top plate – plate II – measures 301.5 mm while the lower plate – plate I – measures 304 mm. The difference in plate sizes exactly accounts for both the misalignment itself and the slow drift from left to right.

²⁸ Komberec, p. 57.

²⁹ Stanislav Komberec, *Hradčany 5h I Studie III. a IV. tiskové desky, Studijní Filatelistické Příručky*, 32, 1991, p8 & p.53.

³⁰ Majer & Thraumb, March 1998.

³¹ Beneš, p. 16.

³² Ladislav Novotný, *Speciální příručka pro sběratele Československých známek*. Prana, 1970, p.35. The text leaves the source of the photo un-attributed.

Part II: Logical Examination

Although the above physical examination could not completely authenticate the gutters, nothing found demonstrated outright forgery. Attention must now be directed toward the gutters' other features: the cancellation and provisional postage-due marking. In doing so, the line between physical and logical investigation blurs.

Cancellations

The cancelled Náchod stamps have five copies of a CTO postmark – CTO because the stamps still retain their original gum – and so are philatelic items. As such, anything beyond the raw stamp itself must be viewed with renewed suspicion.

The *Monografie* lists the Náchod postmarks in *Díl 17* and reports the post office already operational on October 28, 1918 – the day the republic was declared. The gutters' type M.41 postmark includes the serial number **4b** with the initials **Č.S.P.** and has the posting time on its 8 mm wide date-bridge. Note also the extended lower serif on the **P** (*Fig. 7b*).

The Náchod office used a type M13z (*Similar to Fig. 7a*) cancel with serial number **4b** between 1918 and 1919,³³ and postmark similar to the postmark in hand but without a serial number, type M.40 (*Fig. 7c*) from 1919 to 1920. The M.41 with serial **4b** cancellation began use in 1920 and ended service with the assignment of the series of **Náchod** post offices to **Náchod 1** in 1925.³⁴ Of the twelve serial numbers used by Náchod post offices, the *Monografie* is vague only about the termination date for serial numbers **4b** and **5b**. We therefore may only guess at the last possible active service date for the serial **4b** canceling device.



Fig. 7a: Type M13.



Fig. 7b: The Náchod Type M.41.



Fig. 7c: Type M40.

It would appear from the evidence that the postmark, although dated February 1919, was actually applied by a device not available until 1920. Unless the device fell into private hands, the application of the postmark had to occur sometime between 1920 and the device's retirement from service, certainly not much later than 1925. The remotest possibility exists that for some reason between January 1920 and April 1921, a

³³ *Monografie*, *Díl 16 První svazek*, p. 345. The z indicates, unlike the illustration, removal of the German form of the name.

³⁴ *Monografie*, *Díl 17 První svazek*, p. 394. Some doubt as to the ending date exists.

clerk accidentally set the canceling device's date to the year 1919, creating an authentic but anachronistic cancellation. These two dates represent the only legitimate window of opportunity: an authentic cancellation could be performed only after the device was placed in service and before the Hradčany issues were withdrawn.

Putting that possibility aside, two reasons for backdating the postmark come to mind. Either the cancel was deliberately set to an era of probable provisional postage-due usage, or someone applied the cancel after the withdrawal of Hradčany stamps in April 1921, after which any cancel would have been illegitimate. Of course, the possibility exists that the cancel attempts to accomplish both ends, or that the postmark itself is a poorly conceived forgery.

Whatever the circumstances behind setting its date, the postmark presents a great difficulty because it twice contradicts *Monografie* documentation. First, because the *Monografie* indicates the postmark is anachronistic, and second, because the *Monografie* reports the first printing of 5h gutters took place on May 10, 1919,³⁵ three months after the February 1919 date in the cancel. The *Monografie* is likely correct in both of these assertions. If the cancels are authentic but inaccurate, they may well represent a backdating favor done for a privileged collector or dealer.

In a yet more provocative vein, the double postmark on the upper stamp implies the canceling of an adjacent stamp to its left, indicating the postal worker may have had access to other uncut stamps on the upper sheet. The slight drift to the right in the cancel on the lower stamp lends the same impression but in the other direction. This could mean that whoever postmarked these stamps had even more gutters available at the time the stamps were cancelled, or that he wished to create such an impression.

Provisional Marks

The stamps' most arresting characteristic is the strange provisional postage-due mark, the word **PORTO** in large, almost transparent light black letters flanked at either end by a star resembling those framing the letters **Č.S.P** in the cancels. Novotný reports that 5h provisional postage-due stamps were produced with black markings in Náchod during February 1919, the date implied by the cancel, but describes the mark as a large black **T**.³⁶

The application of the postage-due marks in different patterns on all of the stamps found together implies a focus upon variation more in line with a collector's interest than what might casually result during postal clerk's normal work flow. The 20h stamps especially seem to have been marked to excite a collector. The one detail that makes the provisional marking at least tentatively believable is the fact that the three values so marked were values commonly marked for provisional postage-due purposes.

Finding the inks in the postmark and provisional marking the same would be the only possibility that could link the gutters to a post office. If the ink used for the provisional postage-due marking is the same as the ink as used for the postmark, and the postmark is found to be backdated but still authentic, then it may be that a postal clerk actually applied the provisional postage-due markings. This theory of innocence must be considered, just as we must consider the possibility that the cancel was accidentally backdated, but both theories are tenuous at best.

³⁵ *Monografie, Dil I*, p. 341.

³⁶ Novotný, p 451



Fig. 8: The Náchod marking.



Fig 9: Other “starry” provisional postage-due markings.

There is no evidence at hand that the very distinctive markings on these stamps ever saw provisional use in Náchod. Similar provisional postage-due markings with stars are of unknown provenance and come nowhere near being a close match (*Figs. 8, 9*).³⁷ Note the difference in the points on the stars, for instance. Aid in locating examples identical to the Náchod **PORTO** markings among the readers’ collections or citations in the literature would be most helpful, but for the moment it is very doubtful that they represent authentic provisional postage-due usage.

The Other Náchod Stamps

Four other pairs were acquired with the **3Ms** pairs. Of specific interest is the set of red 10h *tête-bêche* **5Mp** gutters. These stamps apparently come from positions identical to those of the 5h pairs: ZP 91 for the mint pair and ZP 98 for the cancelled pair.

Of course, with *tête-bêche* gutters, position is all a matter of orientation. The fact that the upper and lower stamps in *tête-bêche* gutters must come from the last row in both panes [ZP 91 – ZP 100] means that such a coincidence is twice as likely to occur with them as for normal gutter pairs. But that the mint and used sets from both values would match up as they do, perfectly and only by accident, seems very unlikely: the collector seems to have selected all four gutters carefully. Just as the upper cancelled 5h stamp

³⁷ Scans of figure 9 provided by Tom Morovics of Prague.

hints at the presence of a left-hand neighbor, so does the upper stamp of the cancelled 10h pair.

There is one final shared commonality. Both cancelled gutter pairs display the same trimming fault: a shallow indentation cut from the bottom left to just above the lower stamp. When placed one over the other, the 5h and 10h trimming faults nearly align.

The curious pattern of its postage-due markings represents the only remarkable aspect of the 20h pairs. The bit of printer's waste, although the centerpiece of the auction, is of no interest whatsoever.

Evidence for an Unreported Double Pane

Rumor has it that only one double pane of these rarities ever left the printing plant intact, perhaps – to put it kindly – by private treaty. The literature reports control numbers for five of the six known gutters out of the possible ten from that double pane: .50, 1.50, 4, 4.50, and 5.³⁸ The sixth, and final control number for that set, 2, is illustrated in an M&T auction catalog.³⁹ As an aside, the missing numbers are 1, 2.50, 3, and 3.50. All but the first missing number is in sequence.

Several pieces of evidence point to a second double pane as the source of the Náchod gutters. First, all of the known gutters are folded; the Náchod gutters are unfolded. Next, in addition to their sharing control numbers identified in the list above, illustrations in the examined literature show examples of stamps occupying exactly the same positions on the double pane as those in hand. The *POFIS 2002* catalog picture represents the same position as the Náchod mint pair,⁴⁰ while a photograph in a Karásek book matches the Náchod postmarked pair.⁴¹ The Novotný book shows ten uncut gutters – another duplication of the Náchod positions – but the illustration is too small to determine which plates it represents. This illustration does suggest a missing decimal point in the -50 control number under the top left stamp, implying the gutters came from plates II and I. The noticeable horizontal shift between the top and bottom rows supports this assertion.

Finally, the known gutters are described as light green; the Náchod gutters are green. Two shades of ink could not occur on the same vertical double pane.⁴² Despite the fact that tradition, Wilhelms, and the M&T catalog assert the circulation of only a single double pane,⁴³ the evidence presented here indicates that more than one double pane reached the hands of collectors.

Part III: Conclusions

Post offices supposedly never distributed the 5h gutter pairs; catalogues list them as un-issued types. The discovery of the Náchod stamps, which have the hallmarks of having at least visited a post office, puts this un-issued status into question.

³⁸ Wilhelms, p.5.

³⁹ Majer & Thraumb, March 1998.

⁴⁰ Beneš, p.16.

⁴¹ Jan Karásek, *Vzácnosti a zajímavosti Československých známek*. Brno 2000, p.20.

⁴² Mark Wilson, "A naïve translation of Tiscová forma". *Czechoslovak Specialist*, July/August 2002, p.8.

Ink was applied to each half of the printing sheet by its own roller; only one shade of color could be applied to the stamps on any specific vertical double pane.

⁴³ Majer & Thraumb, September 2001; Wilhelms, p.5.

Unfortunately, the indications of postal use appear deliberately fabricated. No one reports any other instance of these unusual provisional postage-due markings and the postmark predates both the reputed first printing of the **3Ms** and the first use of the canceling device.

Although the dubious cancel might be shrugged off, since by definition mint stamps bear no postmark, two very hard problems remain. First, there is the improbability that such an unusual provisional postage-due marking could remain unreported for more than eighty years. Second, the fact that the gutters clearly derive from an unfolded double pane all but refutes any notion of actual provisional postage-due use. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, no rational person could believe that a double pane reached Náchod through official channels, was somehow selected for provisional postage-due use, and never in all that time underwent folding. That the unfolded nature of the gutters can be used in evidence against them is the most ironic aspect of this investigation.

The more probable story is that an influential collector or dealer obtained an unfolded double pane from the printer, applied the provisional postage-due markings himself, then took the stamps to the Náchod post office for favor cancellations. In hindsight, one is hard-pressed to imagine why anyone in possession of several rare Hradčany gutter pairs would want to deface them with odd postage-due markings and disputable cancels. The one plausible explanation is that the stamps represent a deliberate if ill-advised attempt to forge indications of official use.

If so, that attempt has to be one of the clumsiest in history. It is so at odds with its goal that one is inclined to believe that these unfolded, oddly marked and inappropriately canceled gutters should somehow be exonerated. One wants to believe that anyone clever enough to obtain two of these rarities would not abuse them so harshly, that some dull postal clerk must have performed this outrage upon them, and that they represent a real if farfetched usage. Unfortunately, no amount of rationalization can support such a thesis without far better supporting evidence.

Unanswered Questions

The *Monografie's* gutter measurements appear incorrect; can the correct sizes be ascertained to identify the source printing form? Or is the *Monografie* correct and were other unmentioned printing forms used to produce **3Ms** gutters?

Who was influential enough to obtain at least two, perhaps even more, **3Ms** gutters? Who placed the markings on these stamps? Why do they so patently appear a fabrication? How and when did these stamps reach North America?

Which double pane does the Novotný illustration represent? Is it the source of the six previously known gutters, the source of the Náchod pairs, or does it represent yet a third **3Ms** double pane? Are there more unfolded **3Ms** gutters awaiting discovery?

Is it possible to examine impressions of the Náchod **4b** canceling device made over its entire service period (1920-1925?) to determine if any indentifying nicks or other visible damage occurred, and thus more precisely determine the actual cancellation date?

Postscript

This paper started with the premise that a collector with limited resources and minimal skills could successfully begin an authentication examination. The report above demonstrates that the superficial physical evidence – at least from a novice's point of

view – did not support an assumption of forgery, but that the historical and logical facts appear to dispute any possible official postal use. Although the investigation did not prove the stamps false, neither can they be further authenticated at this level. If the stamps prove genuine, then a determination must be made as to whether the cancellations represent an accidental error or deliberate backdating, and whether the provisional postage-due markings are real or fanciful.

From this point forward, the investigation must rely upon the special skills and tools of the professional examiner. In late November 2002, the Náchod gutters were taken to the Czech Republic to undergo expert examination. Here are the results of that investigation:

“The Nachod gutters come from different double sheets, one known and one previously unknown. While the gutters themselves are genuine, the provisional postage-due overprint appears completely spurious. The cancellations require further examination as they appear to have been applied at different times. Altogether, much more investigation is required to solve all of the problems related to the Nachod gutters.”

Ing. Pavel Pittermann,

Ing. Jiří Skaloud

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