

France & Colonies Philatelist



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The 1906 Sower With Ground: A New Approach to this Issue.

By Raoul Lesgor



Fig. 1
Hourriez 1935
Sower
Essay



Fig. 2
Master Die
of Sower
Type



A



B



C



D



E

Fig. 3
Development of the Solid Background
Sower Type from the 1903 Lined Type.



Fig. 4
Mouchon's
"Landscape"
Essay



Plate 1



Plate 2

Fig. 5: The Ground Under Feet Sowers.

Of all 20th Century issues of France, the 1906 10c stamp known as the "Sower with Ground under Feet" is the one that has been most taken for granted, accepted, and collected without any further study. Nobody has investigated its origins. All the writers and catalog editors have uncritically accepted the few facts which were known 50 years ago, without bringing more information into the matter.

(Continuation on next page)

As I have done research on the Sower issue, have read all that the various authors have put down on the matter, and have facts whose relationships to each other are not yet given due weight, I now offer an explanation of the 1906 Sower with Ground, which will account for all the facts. If this contradicts the accepted story, the reader can judge which account is correct.

The Sower with Ground 10c, issued in 1906 is, in my judgment, a rejected project, which saw the light of day as a stamp only because of the chain of circumstances which I am about to relate.

As we know, the Sower with lined background, issued in 1903, was never popular. The reason for this is primarily the lack of clearness and relief. The complaint that it shows the figure sowing against the wind and "shaded on the wrong side," was only a minor additional excuse used by a few loud critics. These persons had little or no actual farming experience; hence didn't know that sowing against the wind is sometimes purposely done. Furthermore, the different and later version, engraved by Hourriez, which we show as Fig. 1, almost was adopted in place of the Iris design in 1935--with these same points unchanged.

We know, definitely, that Mr. Mouchon the engraver took one or several negative impressions of the Master Die of the Sower with Lined Background, on metal blocks. This master die, a proof of which is shown as Fig. 2, is the ancestor of all the sower type stamps. Mr. Mouchon, working on these negative dies, proceeded to transform them. At various stages, positive dies or transfers were taken, and from these we have the several stages shown in Fig. 3. The method of alteration was to file the lines of the background, the sun and the horizon out of the design.

The five pictures in Fig. 3 show the various stages of this transformation.

A. The Sower as issued in 1903.

B. Background shading below the horizon made heavier.

C. Background below the horizon line in solid color.

D. Background of lines, but without sun or horizon line.

E. Finally, background of solid color.

This was accepted but with the proviso that the numerals would be made more prominent.

In none of these cases do we see any suggestion of ground under the feet. The Kohl Handbook states that the lines forming the ground had been kept, while the other lines of the background had been removed. But a simple comparison of the two designs, the Lined Sower and that with Ground, shows this is not the case. In the second, the Ground under Feet design, the lines below the figure are not the same as in the lined design.

Moreover, on the Ground under Feet design, the Sower figure is nearly a full mm. shorter than on any of the other designs. Likewise, the stamp itself is 1/4 mm. shorter.

Yvert & Tellier's 1939 specialized catalog gives, as reason for shortening the stamp, a desire to widen the horizontal margins. Other writers since then have copied this explanation. Now, if this was the case, why would such an improvement have been limited to this one stamp? The full length of stamp was restored on all later Sower issues. If we look at the pictures in Fig. 3, we cannot detect any shortening of figure or of stamps in any of the transformations of the type.

Furthermore, though the outline of the figure of the Sower is almost the same, and the lines of its shading follow the same general pattern, there are discrepancies-----as in the profile, the bonnet, the shoulder straps, the hair and, most significant, in the shading lines themselves. This fact leads me to conclude that this die, the Sower with Ground, was an entirely different one, prepared as an essay, or, in French, a "projet."

Why, then, was it issued as a stamp?

Here are the facts.

The law lowering the rate for ordinary domestic letters from 15 to 10 centimes was passed on March 6, 1906, effective April 13 of that year. This was a favorable time to introduce a new design. Unfortunately, there was just one month in which to make new plates and to produce a supply of stamps. The new die, not fully ready for plate production, was not available.

The design with Ground under Feet was deemed close enough to what was wanted, to be accepted for an emergency. Faced with a deadline they could not otherwise meet, the postal authorities pressed the plate of this into service, to print enough stamps for the immediate needs.

This Ground under Feet design was one of two essays submitted by Mr. Mouchon but which had been rejected. These two, of which the other is the white background type with landscape, shown in Fig. 4, had both been carried to the stage of making plates of 50 subjects in two panes of 25 stamps each. No millesimes had been inserted in the gutter between panes.

These two designs, as essays, were printed in a peculiar way on the same sheet: thus. In the space that would be occupied by 6 panes of stamps as normally produced, a double pane of the Ground under Feet type occupied the top, and a double pane of the Landscape Type occupied the middle portion. The lower third of the sheet was left blank. Apparently, normal margin markings, just as on printing stamps, were printed with these. The sheets were imperforate, and bore the four panes without millesimes. Quite a few of these sheets had been printed. In my opinion, all the imperforate Sower with Ground items nowadays offered, come from these sheets --- and thus are merely essays.

Not only were these proof sheets imperforate, but they also were ungummed.

One of these sheets, one of the very few still left intact, was offered to me early in 1955 by a Paris dealer. This supplied me with the clinching facts. According to the description by my correspondent, this sheet bears on bottom margin the inscription N 704 13. This, on the basis of our knowledge of such markings, indicates that the sheet was printed by operator N, on 7th day of 4th month, on press 13. Since there is not a millesime, year of printing cannot be surely ascertained. But---it has to be 1905 or earlier. Its is clear that by April 7, 1906, this plate for a double pane of 50, the only one then available, had been put into service and was being employed in printing the stamps which were delivered at the Place de la Bourse post office on probably April 12, for sale April 13th.

The die from which this plate was prepared would have been available to make more plates, and with plenty of time in which to do so, if it had been an accepted design. But quite clearly it had been rejected. The cause, in my opinion, was that, because of the shortening of the figure, the Sower appeared lumpy, and the mound of earth detracted from an otherwise attractive

design. The other project printed on the same sheet was rejected for obvious reasons.

The plate from the rejected die was thus in use pending completion of the design as wanted. According to available information, in this printing, sheets of paper of the regulation size for 300 stamps were used, taking one impression on the lower right corner of the sheet and then by turning the sheet, another on the diagonally opposite corner. (The usual "work-and-turn" mode of procedure). The sheets were perforated normally. Then the two printed panes were separated from the blank portions of the sheets, pasted end to end in groups of three, and thus delivered in made-up sheets of 150 to the post office.

These are the stamps listed in the French catalogs as from Plate 1. According to several writers, only two million stamps were printed from this plate. This fact explains their relative scarcity.

Several retouches had meanwhile been made on the die to render the design clearer and finer. From the retouched die, electros to print a full sheet of 150 stamps, in three double panes of 50, with millésime 6, were made. This second plate of the Sower with Ground served until the plates of the adopted design replaced it.

Figure 5 shows stamps from the two plates. The differences in the ground, the shading of the dress, etc., are quite easy to see.

On July 28, 1906, the Sower with Ground was replaced by stamps of the adopted design, without the ground, but with thin numerals and letters. Its short life was a foregone conclusion, even before its birth. It is a provisional or maybe actually an "emergency" stamp, issued against the best judgment of those in command in the postal service. It is a transitional issue with a fine philatelic background. One is regretful that the second plate was made and used, since otherwise the Sower with Ground would now be a fair rarity.

MEMBERS' APPEALS

Want and exchange notices only; members only; one or two insertions only; no charge. Those who reply will please offer only what is asked.

Chandernagore (French India). Good price paid for clear circle date-stamp cancellation, DEC. 1882 or near. A. Broadbent, 5 Oakley St., Shrewsbury, England. (Member 579)

Wanted: Precancelled Paris Impr. rollers, 4 and 5 lines. Submit on approval to B.C. Alder, 747 16th St., N.E., Massillon, Ohio (Member 422)

Correspondence with anyone collecting the states of Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam. Write Mrs. Myrtle I. Watt, 214 Union St., Johnstown, Penn. (Member 581).

Wanted: Certain stamps of the 1913-14 long sets of the French African colonies. Submit list of what you have with prices. Jack Revare, R.D. 2, Richmond, Mo. (Member 583)

Wanted: Used stamps of Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam for study. Submit with price to Mrs. Myrtle I. Watt, 214 Union St., Johnstown, Pa. (Member 581).

Would like to exchange about 2000 of my France & Colonies duplicates with another member. Dr. Lev Braun, 50 Central Park West, New York 23, N.Y. (Member 581)

For study purposes I am buying copies in bad condition of the France 5 Francs Empire, paying appropriate prices. Tears, thin spots and other defects do no harm for this purpose but prices need fit condition when you offer. S. G. Rich, Verona, N.J., (Member 2)

AUCTION --- DINNER

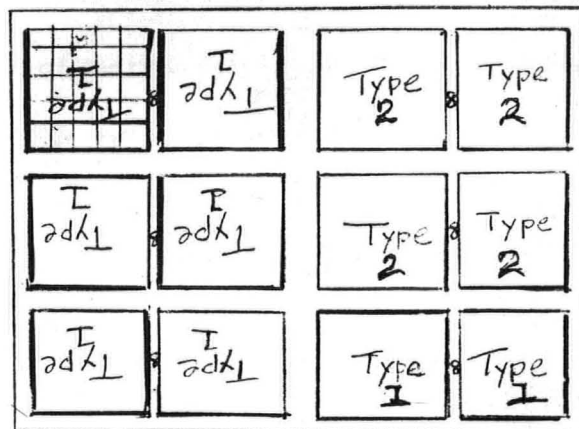


To be held May 14, 1955
(Saturday evening)



See the full final announcements on rear page.

More about the
"Aile de Moulin" or "Windmill Sail" Plate Form,
used for French Stamps 1876 to 1924
and Two Types in one "Sail" or Pane.



One side
or half
all of
same type.

Wide gutter for
cutting sheets
into halves.

One side
or half
with the
2 types
in it.

The halves are upside down in relation to each other.

Adding to what we had in No. 78 from Mr. R. Schellens, we first correct an omission on our part. We failed to show millésimes in each pane on the sheet, and to state that they are present thus. It was a misreading of what Mr. Schellens had sent us. "Regrets and all that" and thanks to Fred Hieber for calling it to notice.

The diagram, which we present again with the millésimes all included, is that of just one of the combination-type sheets. These combination make-ups vary, and it seems in order to give a list of them: in so doing we purposely avoid the terms "right half" and "left half" as used by French writers because it is clearly a wholly arbitrary naming, according to which side is to be considered top, on the printed sheet of two panes tête beche to each other.

Year	Milliseme and Stamp	One half	Other half
1898	8 10c	Top T-1 Middle T-1 Bottom T-1	Top T-2 Middle T-2 Bottom T-1
(This is what we illustrate)			
1899	9 10c	Top T-1 Middle T-2 Bottom T-2	Top T-1 Middle T-2 Bottom T-2
1898	8 5c	Top T-2 Middle T-2 Bottom T-1	Top T-2 Middle T-2 Bottom T-1
1899	9 5c	Top T-2 Middle T-1 Bottom T-1	Top T-1 Middle T-1 Bottom T-1

(Yvert 1939 Specialized Catalog says this comes 1898, millésime 8, late in year, also)

Information compiled from Kohl Handbook, the 1939 Yvert Specialized Catalog, and other sources. If your editor made an error this time, he doesn't know of it!

For some values, says Yvert 1939 catalog as cited, printing of the sheet of 300 was done in one operation, with the 50-subject electros all looked up in one form to produce the tete-beche of Windmill Sail pane relation at one operation --but for stamps used in smaller amounts, each half was printed separately by "work and Turn" procedure as printers call it.

Cancellations of the British Offices in French India.

By Wm. D. Billington

Reprinted from "Stamp Collecting", Dec. 31, 1954



Type A



Type B



Type C



Type D and E duplex.



Type F



Type G



Type H (left), Type I (above)



So the remaining French Settlements in India have suffered the same fate as that suffered by Chandernagore in 1952, and the four of them—Mahé, Karikal, Pondicherry and Yanam—have been handed over to the Government of the Republic of India, thus bringing to a close the French Empire in India after about 200 years.

British Indian Post Offices have been in operation in these French Settlements since the very early days and handstruck marks are known for Karikal and Pondicherry. Possibly, then, this is as good a time as any to go over our notes and cuttings about the cancellations coming from this interesting and compact little group of Post Offices.

The first cancellations found on stamps coming from French India are in the form of a rhombus made up of a number of smaller rhombi (type A). This can only be identified as coming from a French town if a town name mark accompanies the rhombus. Pondicherry and Mahé, both used this postmark.

The next type of postmark (type B) is an adaptation of type A and has the letter C and the numerals 89 (Mahé), 111 (Pondicherry or 147 (Karikal) set in the rhombus. These are easy to distinguish, but are not often come across and all three marks are scarce to uncommon.

Some time in the 1870's Pondicherry adopted the type common to most Indian P.O.s at this time (type C). This was a duplex mark where the left-hand duplex carries the town name. The right-hand duplex carries the numeral 111 in a diamond and the whole enclosed in a circle. Jal Cooper warns that this mark must only be bought as used in Pondicherry with caution, as the same numeral was used by Jeypore, Kalian R.S., and Rutnagherry. This last town, of course, is the most dangerous, as the last five letters of the town are the same in both cases. In this case it is only safe to buy as "used in Pondicherry" stamps which show the whole town name in the left-hand duplex.

Later still comes type D, which is found as M-19 for Pondicherry. This, like the preceding type, was also used for another town—Ootacamund—and so again postmark hunters have to be careful to get the duplex town marks. Type E is a development of type D and M-21/6 (Karikal), M-20/6 (Pondicherry) and M-4/5 or M-5/4 (Yanam) can be found.

Later town name marks as those from type F to type I are also found with varying degrees of scarcity, though cancellations from Yanam are always good and those from Mahé are scarce. Karikal is a little commoner, and Pondicherry (late capital of the settlements) is definitely the one most usually seen. These later marks can be found on all the later Indian Empire stamps, and I have found marks of Pondicherry on Republic stamps quite frequently.



The Annual F. & C.G. Dinner and our Donation Auction



Date: Saturday evening May 14, 1955

Time: 7 p.m.

Place: Au Gaulois Restaurant, 351 West 57th St.
New York, N.Y.

Cost: Not to exceed \$5.00 per person,
including cocktail and one glass of wine.

If you are coming, please notify

Alan R. Fernald,

71 Washington Sq. South, New York 12,
N.Y.

You can pay at the door.

Instead of speeches, the feature will be the
AUCTION

If you didn't donate a lot, it is still time--if you are an out of town member, just send your lot now to Alan R. Fernald.

The lots will be shown at the Group's meeting on May 3, 1955--- but any lots coming in after that will also be shown, with those already in hand, at the time of the Dinner.

Notice of the Annual Meeting with Election of the Officers for 1955-56.

The Annual Business Meeting of the Group is to be held on Tuesday, May 3, 1955, starting at 8 p.m., at the Collectors Club, 22 East 35 St., New York, N.Y., in connection with the meeting of the Parent Chapter. All members, resident or not, who may care to attend, have voice and vote in the election.

* SECRETARY'S REPORT *

As it was our intention to have this number appear within four weeks after the delayed last one, no report is now given for the period from Feb. 15 on. The Editor was ill in March, thus delaying this number unintentionally.

Please note new box address.

Charles Bretagne, Secretary
P.O. Box 30, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

(End of article on French India British Offices)

These Post Offices (at least two of them) had Sub-P.O.s, and these are listed by Robson Lowe as follows:—

KARIKAL: Tirumalrayapatnam (1875), Tirumilur (1898), Puraivar Road (1901), Nedungam (1903), Ambagarattur (1904), Suttur (1905), Kottucheri (1901).

PONDICHERY: Vallinur (1875), Bahlor (1885), Muthalpet (1885), Pondicherry Railway Station (1895), Mudialarpet (1895), Pondicherry Bazaar (1902), Arjankuppam (1904) and Olugarai (1907).

Jal Cooper says that all these Sub-P.O.s are seldom come across and are very scarce.

In addition to the above P.O.s I would remind readers of a short article by "C.G." in STAMP COLLECTING of October 3rd, 1952, where he mentions two "little known loges in Masulpatam and Calicut, tiny enclaves in the middle of these towns". These, he says, were French territory, but the French Government had no authority there. He goes on to say that there are no "loge" cancellations recorded as yet. I live in hope!

In closing I must mention my indebtedness to the works of Jal Cooper ("India Used Abroad") and Robson Lowe (Encyclopaedia, Vol. III), without which no collector of India, and its many philatelic by-paths, can hope to go very far.