

Hemingray Pony Embossing Variations

No. 9 and No. 12

By Kim Borgman

It was in the 1896 catalogue #2 of Fred M. Locke that the first appearance of the new Hemingray No.9 was seen. Trade catalogue drawings often lag behind actual production of insulators, and many times stay in catalogues well after the insulator is no longer in production. The 1897 catalogue depicts Hemingray insulators in CD 120, CD 133.1, CD 114, but still no CD 106. Being an 1892/1893 introduction, early No.9's carry the Script style lettering. The earliest of these predate the May 2 1893 drip point patent and are found with smooth base and no patent on the rear skirt. These first examples have no underline under the "o" in "No 9". The second generation of the No 9 came after Hemingray was issued the drip patent and the molds were modified to have drip points in the base plate and the rear skirt plate was engraved to carry the new patent date. These will also have no underline. Script lettered No 9's would get an underline on the next series of mold sets and continue to have them through many embossing style changes. Also during this mold change, one set is missing the bar in the "H". It must also be noted that while most early No 9's have fairly ordinary looking sharp drip points, it appears Hemingray did not have a particular design on these "teats" and many times are found with what look like round drips. Research collectors refer to these as round drips, but most agree the design was most likely not intentionally machined one way or the other in the early years. Rather it was done that way by the machinist doing that particular mold part.

During the Script years, it also appears Hemingray did not have a set idea on exactly what a No 9 was supposed to look like. There is a considerable variation in profile amongst these insulators, ranging from square and blocky to small, skinny, or concave skirted, looking much like the unique W.G.M. CO. CD 106 design.

It would be easier to show photos of Script lettering than to describe it. It varied and evolved within itself over time, but several characteristics remain throughout the Script era. Script is not bold like the later Prismic style. It is lightly engraved and has a light and airy look to it. It is also very freeform in appearance, looking a lot like a handwritten note rather than being more precisely engraved. Some Script variant types are more this way than others. "Block Type" Script would be a good example of one that does not appear so freeform, however it bears all the marks of the Script style. Most variants are very freeform. The best examples of Script style lettering that can be easily accessed by collectors would be a CD 112.4 Hemingray No.8 or the CD 114 Hemingray No.11, as these come with no other embossing style.

Prismic Lettering

As mentioned earlier, researchers believe Prismic lettering came to be the standardized style of engraving in 1895. Prismic is the most easily identified of the early lettering styles for its BOLD and concisely cut letters that are very prism-like in appearance. Like Script, Prismic has its own variants within the style, and can vary in size from 1/8" tall to over 3/8", but always bears the signature boldness and concisely cut letters. It should be noted that there appears to have been no standard for location of the embossing and No.9's can be found with the lettering very low by the base or quite high. From the swapping of interchangeable mold parts, some specimens are found with the front embossing high,

while the rear embossing is low, or vice versa. No.9's continued to have notable variation in profile during the Prismic years, although perhaps not quite as much as before.

Prismic lettering would continue as Hemingray's standard lettering until being replaced by lettering that used individual stamps or punches for each letter, replacing the labor intensive employment of skilled engravers. This changeover occurred around 1901. By the time this changeover occurred, the No.9 and 12 were an industry-accepted design for each use and the greatest period of new phone line construction occurred between 1900 and 1910. Stamps were produced in numbers that vastly exceeded all other lettering types that came before.

Somewhere In the Middle

The transition from Script to Prismic was not a sudden change, but was rather something more of a stepped evolution. Script embossing, by definition, is lightly embossed and somewhat freeform in lettering style, while Prismic is bold and very concise. A third style began to emerge as being a distinctly different type that seemed to fall in between the two. In looking back over thousands of specimens to confirm this third style that yet a fourth style was discovered.

The third style looks to be a bold Script. The lettering is freeform, but is bold like Prismic. The "9" in "No.9" is notably loose and open unlike the other styles. Lettering is quite crude, sometimes found with backwards letters, numbers, and lettering that can go from small to much larger within the same line or word.

The fourth style is something reverse of this, being lightly engraved like Script, but quite uniform and concise like Prismic. However, being lightly engraved, it lacks the depth of cut to have the definitive prism-like appearance of Prismic.

To avoid conflict and confusion with the study done on like-era Hemingray signals done by Gary Kline and published in Crown Jewels previously, it was believed the third style discovered was earlier than the fourth; it was named Evolution 1. The fourth style found was then referred to as Evolution 2.

Having these two new styles sandwiched into the known timeline presents some problems as to exactly when which styles were made, but it appears that the 1895 date for the introduction of Prismic is fairly well based on firm research, suggesting the production time as it relates to nines and twelve's was even shorter than previously thought, allowing time for these two interim styles to see production.

Stamped embossing

Starting in the 1901 time frame Hemingray went to the stamped embossing. These have a uniform look to the letters and numbers. Around 1912, Hemingray moved the "NO 9" embossing to back side and left 'HEMINGRAY' on the front side, probably shortly after their drip point patent expired. In 1920 time frame, Hemingray changed over from 'HEMINGRAY // NO 9' embossing to 'HEMINGRAY - 9'. In the same time frame, the "made in USA" was added to the back side. It is assumed that putting the embossing on one line instead of two was done as a cost savings. It is during this last time frame from 1920 on that a wide variety of greens was made with the 7ups and numerous shades in between. Between the 1901/1920 time frame is when the purple and grey colored examples found were made. It is during this time frame also that you find embossing variations that have backwards "N". Remember as they made the mold, the letters had to be backwards to make it readable when made. In the 1930/1

time frame, ice blue became the only color of all Hemingray insulators. By 1936, clear was the only color made.

Finally in 1934, Hemingray went to a 'dot' code embossing where 'dots' were added to the mold each year to identify when made, a very bland, but cost effective move to compete against the onslaught of porcelain insulators being made. Production of the CD 106 ceased in 1955.

Probably this is one of the longest running production of any insulator made by any company.

Credits: a good portion of this article was taken from info provided by Brent Burger. Bob Stahr was also helpful in providing dates and info.