

U.S. Cancellation Club **NEWS**

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Exceptions Prove the Rule

by Nicholas Kirke

It is unwise to be pedantic about the procedures we observe in the Foreign Mail Department of the main New York City Post Office 1870-76. However, after examining over 1,250 covers in my own collection and reviewing a wide range of covers in specialist publications and auction catalogues, certain trends in postal markings applied in the Foreign Department can be detected as follows:

- mails to Europe, Asia, and Africa bear **unduplexed** cancellations with **25mm diameter red** Exchange Office datestamps,
- mails to Central America (Mexico, Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua and Guatemala) bear **duplexed** cancellations with **25mm diameter black** Exchange Office datestamps, and
- mails to South America (Chile, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Columbia) bear **unduplexed** cancellations with larger **30mm diameter red** Exchange Office datestamps (unless routed through England).

It is logical to assume these categories were processed on three separate desks fed directly by their own drop mail boxes accessible to the public.

These trends, however, were not set in concrete as this article will demonstrate. Seemingly, clerks were interchangeable

To Europe – Standard Processing



Figure 1 11/28/1874 to France (cancel VW C6/Weiss GE-EN3 worn)

desk to desk, on occasion carrying their own canceling devices. Such occurrences, together with possible ignorance of the correct markings applicable to a particular desk, resulted in anomalies. And occasionally mails would be dealt with expediently even if arriving on the wrong desk.

The killer in Figure 1 is unduplexed. The Exchange Office datestamp is in red (with PAID TO ENGLAND) and measures 25mm. (Crayon '12' denotes 12 centimes due on receipt to pay postage from England to France – cover was prepaid to England.)

To Europe – Non Standard Processing



Figure 2 11/17/1874 to France (cancel VW C6/Weiss GE-EN3)

Although the killer in Figure 2 is unduplexed, the Exchange Office datestamp is in black, a color more associated with mails to Central America. (This was a double rate cover sent during the 2nd Franco-American Treaty period. The 'INSUFFICIENTLY PREPAID' arose thus; postage due was 25 cents or 125 centimes – the 16 cents prepaid equated to 80 centimes leaving a balance due of 45 centimes on arrival.)

Again, as might be expected, the killer in Figure 3 is unduplexed and the Exchange Office datestamp is in red; however, rather than measuring 25mm diameter it measures 30mm, a larger type normally reserved for mails to South America. (This is a first month use of the 6 cent Continental Banknote stamp).

To Europe – Non Standard Processing

Figure 3 7/24/1873 to France (cancel VW unlisted/Weiss RE-S5)

To Central America – Standard Processing

Figure 4 3/30/1875 to Mexico (cancel VW C2/Weiss RE-E4)

The killer and datestamp in Figure 4 are duplexed and the Exchange Office datestamp is in black as was normal to Central America. (As an aside, this well known and intricate 'Fouled Anchor' fancy is seen on covers to Europe unduplexed. It begs the question: were there two copies of this cancel in use – one held in a duplex device on the Central America desk and another as a simplex on the European desk? I have another cover with four strikes of this cancel, all incontrovertibly duplexed, to Cuba. The cancel had a reasonable life span of nine months so conceivably more than one was produced because it was viewed as a cancel prone to break-up.)

To Central America – Non Standard Processing

Figure 5 4/10/18(73) to Mexico (cancel VW A23/Weiss ST-8P2)

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The killer and datestamp in Figure 5 are not duplexed although the datestamp is in black and is the standard 25mm diameter.

To Central America – Non Standard Processing



Figure 6 10/30/1877 to Mexico (cancel VW unlisted/Weiss TR-M10)

Figure 6 is an extraordinary example - unduplexed AND with the Exchange Office datestamp in red, exactly the sort of processing that was more normal to Europe. I think it is reasonable to speculate this cover was dealt with on the European desk. William Weiss reports one other example of a red Exchange Office datestamp to Mexico. (The other reported example of this 'blob' cancel is to India used in the same month. It is unduplexed.)

To South America – Standard Processing



Figure 7 9/5/1870 to Peru (cancel VW F5a/Weiss TR-W12)

The killers in Figure 7 are unduplexed and the Exchange Office datestamp is in red and the larger size 30mm diameter.

This cover in Figure 8 opens another chapter in mails to South America. It was routed via England and so apparently was dealt with on the European desk, receiving two unduplexed 25mm diameter Exchange Office datestamps, identical, except that one has a 'D' at bottom and the other the more common 'star'. It is not so uncommon to see two types of Exchange Office datestamps on the same cover but one can only speculate as to why that happened. (Routing was on White Star's Line 'Britannic' to Liverpool via London onto Pacific Steam Navigation's 'John Elder' directly to

To South America – Standard Processing



Figure 8 10/7/1876 to Brazil (cancel VW F6/Weiss TR-W17)

Brazil – receiving postmark on the back reads 'BAHIA 7 Nov 76' – so it took precisely one month to make the trip.)

To South America – Non Standard Processing

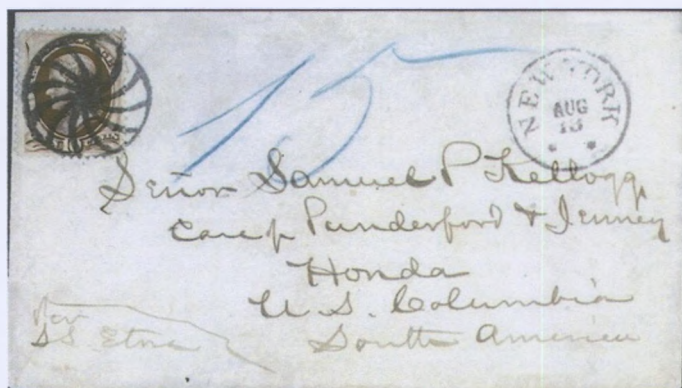


Figure 9 8/13/1875 to Columbia (cancel VW W5/Weiss GE-C4)

The killer in Figure 9 is unduplexed as was normal to South America but in black and the smaller size 25mm more usually seen on mails to Europe and Central America (the sole reported NYFM use to Columbia).

To South America – Non Standard Processing



Figure 10 3/15/1872 to Chile (cancel VW 13a/Weiss TR-G36)

The Exchange Office datestamp in Figure 10 is the larger 30mm diameter and is in red as was normal – but the cancels are both duplexed with the smaller black 25mm datestamp normally

To summarize, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the exceptions prove the rule. If it were possible to accumulate a far greater amount of material, better conclusions could be drawn. But some of the destinations are rare and the number of new covers awaiting discovery appears limited. We are left to use our imaginations as best we can.

Dear Reader,

It is time to reiterate a call made periodically in these pages for articles from Club members. They are always sought and welcomed. This issue happens to contain contributions from several authors, on a range of subjects, that I'm confident will have wide appeal. Remember, what interests you will likely be of interest to others. And the exchange of information that often results can move the state of our knowledge ahead considerably.

Since moving to color for the *NEWS* we have added a section referred to as the Cancellation Gallery where stamps and covers are presented in a way that relies primarily on their visual appeal rather than being a part of an article that is largely text-oriented. These may be items of high aesthetic value, that comprise a certain type of cancel, or emanate from a particular post office. Readers are urged to submit images of individual stamps or covers or pages of such material. And the best way to do this is by emailing scans made at 300 dpi. If that is not feasible, high quality color copies such as can be made at Staples or other office supply store, on glossy photograph paper, usually work satisfactorily. So please, look through your collection for items to submit for this popular feature of our journal. Our readers will appreciate it.

Roger Curran

Exploring the Mystery of the Mittineague 7s

by John Valenti

Cancellation collectors have for years admired the many fine and interesting killers that have graced covers originating from the town of Mittineague, Mass. Perhaps the most famous of all these killers is the ornate "all seeing eye" from the 1860s. An article showing an immaculate example of this and other beautiful on-cover examples of Mittineague killers was published in the Fall 2000 *NEWS*.¹ Included in these cover examples were two bearing different killers incorporating a large numeral 7 in the design.

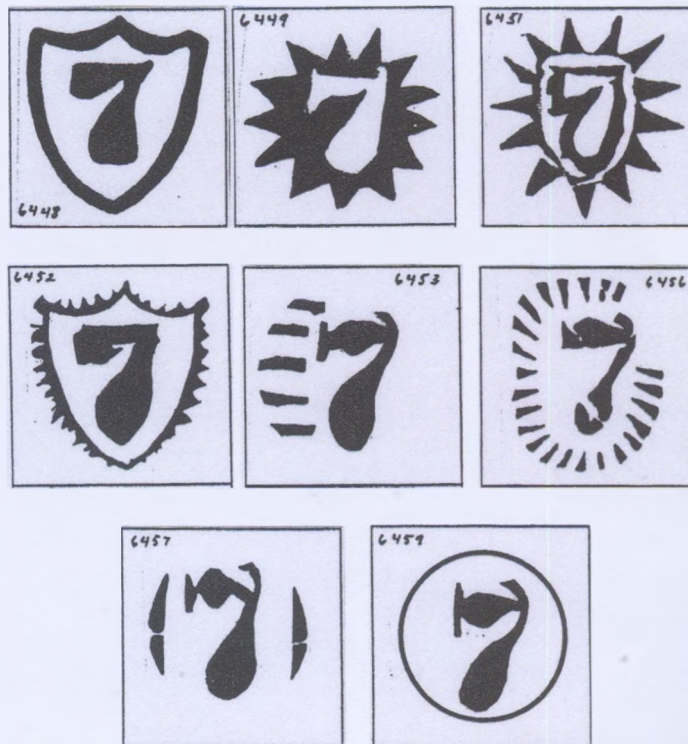
I have always been intrigued by the numeral 7 killers of Mittineague. Several are quite ornately carved. Why this particular number? In the above mentioned article, Roger Curran mused that this might be the postmaster's lucky number.² Just how many varieties of numeral 7 killers exist is not certain. Whitfield³ illustrates several numeral 7 killers. Five, as of the latest updates, are attributed to Mittineague. Three additional unattributed killers are illustrated that bear striking stylistic similarity to those proven on cover. Off-cover examples of two of these are pictured in Figure 1.



Figure 1

I illustrate all eight Whitfield tracings with this article. The table provides information for each regarding attribution and period of use (stamp issue) on which example strikes have been identified.

Whitfield Number	Attribution	Stamp Issue
6448	Mittineague	1870
6449	Mittineague	1870
6451	Mittineague ⁴	1870
6452	None ⁵	1870
6453	Mittineague ⁶	1883
6456	None	1883
6457	None	1883
6459	Mittineague ⁴	1883



There is a notable stylistic progression to these killers. All eight show a thick vertical stem, fat at the bottom and narrowing toward the top. The stem in 6448 is essentially flat at the bottom, while other 7s show distinct roundness there. There are essential differences between early (1870) 7s and later (1883) ones. The early 7s have a somewhat flat top bar, while the later 7s have a curved top bar that bulges in the middle. In addition,

the top of the vertical bar tails above the top bar on latter 7s.

A possible explanation of the Mittineague post office's fondness for the numeral 7 recently appeared in the form of the cover pictured in Figure 2. This cover is postmarked July 9, 1877 (as verified by the enclosed letter). The killer is a large, bold negative 77, clearly representing the year of the cancellation. This year-date killer is unattributed tracing number 4831 in Whitfield.⁷ It measures 27 mm across and 20 mm vertically. The right and left sides are rounded while the top and bottom are flattened. There is a distinct separating notch cut between the two 7s at the bottom half of the killer. Each of the 7s has a shape quite similar to the 7 of killer 6448.



Figure 2

I consider this 77 killer to be the original "7". Although I do not have complete records for recorded dates of use for the attributed killers, I believe that all post-date this 1877 usage. (For example, the 6451 cover pictured in the Fall 2000 NEWS article is struck on a Scott #207, issued in July 1881.) I believe that the Figure 2 killer saw use for only a short time and is rather scarce. I infer this from the lack of previous on-cover reports of this year-date killer. Moreover, this example and the Whitfield tracing suggest no deterioration from use. Perhaps the Mittineague post office created this 77 to celebrate a special event.

I find this 77 esthetically pleasing. It would not surprise me to discover a single negative 7 like these used alone as a killer. Maybe the Mittineague 7s are symbols of luck as has been suggested. But the power and the beauty of this symbol started with the simple intent to celebrate the year of its birth.

The author would appreciate reports of any covers bearing Mittineague 7 killers, indicating Scott number of the stamp on which struck and, especially, full date of use, if available. Please contact the NEWS editor with this information.

¹ Curran, Roger, "Cancellations from Mittineague, Massachusetts" *U.S. Cancellation Club NEWS*, Fall 2000, pp. 54-8.

² Ibid., p. 58.

³ Whitfield, Kenneth A., *Cancellations Found on 19th Century U.S. Stamps*, U.S. Cancellation Club, 2002, pp. 217-8.

⁴ Pictured on cover in Curran, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵ The design of 6452 differs from 6448 principally in the addition of serrations to the framing outer shield. Almost assuredly this 7, too, is from Mittineague and is but a modified later instance of the original 6448 killer.

⁶ UX8 dated December 22, 1885, reported by the author and illustrated in *U.S. Cancellation Club NEWS*, November 2001, p. 118. The strike on this card demonstrates that the grid drawn in the Whitfield tracing only to the left of the 7 is actually on both sides.

⁷ Whitfield, op. cit., p. 163.

More on Garfields

The February 2009 NEWS contained an article about cancels found on the Garfield stamps, Sc 205 and 216. It was noted that fancy cancels are hard to find on these stamps, especially Sc 216. The May 2009 NEWS illustrated several cancels from the collection of Walt Demmerle. Figure 1 shows additional stars



Figure 1

submitted by Greg DiBlasi (left) and Dan Haskett. If we were to take a fairly strict definition of "fancy," the only fancy cancels thus far reported on Sc 216 are stars. Can any reader show another fancy design on Sc 216, either hand carved or manufactured?

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Cancellation Gallery Double Ovals

Double oval cancelers, designed for use on non-first class mail, became popular in big city post offices in the 1880s. They also found use on registered mail. The handstamps that applied the cancels were rubber-faced.





Project Update

Wendell Triplett, who compiled the 2007 update to the Kenneth Whitfield book, *Cancellations Found on 19th Century U.S. Stamps*, reports that he is now working on a second update and has already assembled several hundred pieces of new information. Readers are urged to submit to Wendell new data encountered on cancels that are presently listed in the book including post office of origin, ink colors used, dates of use, etc. Wendell can be contacted at triplettusa@yahoo.com or 3606 New Colony Drive, Wilmington, NC 28412-2075.

Reports of cancels that are *not* listed in the standard reference books (Skinner-Eno, Cole and Whitfield) will be welcomed by your editor. We may feature some of these in the *NEWS* as they are received but will otherwise assemble a file of unlisted cancels for future presentation.

Thanks in advance for your help.

Binghamton Cancel Design

by Roger D. Curran

Binghamton, NY postmaster J.H. Park made very early cancellation history even though he didn't receive a supply of 1847 issue stamps when they were first made available. Apparently unsure whether the public would take to the idea of using postage stamps, he ordered a \$20 supply – 300 5¢ stamps and 50 10¢ – from New York postmaster Robert Morris. This order was acknowledged and sent by Morris on August 10, 1847.¹ Binghamton residents must have liked the convenience of postage stamps because the Binghamton post office received from the Post Office Department 1900 fives and 100 tens in December 1847.

It was, of course, not necessary to use postage stamps during the currency (1847-51) of the 1847 issue. Indeed, it has been estimated that only 1.3% of all letters sent between 1847-1852 were stamped.² When distributing 1847 issue stamps, the Post Office Department supplied circular grid cancelers to the larger post offices. The smaller post offices were advised to use manuscript cancels. Some of the smaller post offices, however, made or obtained their own handstamps. These usually took the form of grids but there were other designs such as groups of dots. But virtually none could be considered "fancy" as that term applies to cancels of later periods. Nonetheless, each one is of interest and the distinctive ones have become very much sought after.

And so it happened that postmaster Park procured, or perhaps made himself, a canceler with bars in a zigzag pattern (Figure 1) that has become widely known as the Binghamton "herringbone." The earliest reported Binghamton 1847 issue cover is dated 10/23/47 and bears a herringbone cancel. (The enclosure to this cover, incidentally, is a letter written and signed by Abner Doubleday, who is generally credited with inventing the game of baseball in 1839 at Cooperstown, NY.) Binghamton herringbones have been



Figure 1

recorded used as late as 12/29/49. By March 1850 Binghamton was using the standard circular grid cancel supplied by the POD. All reported dates in this article come from Alexander unless otherwise noted.³

The herringbone cancel was largely applied in red ink although there are exceptions. Three examples are reported in blue: 12/28/47, 2/24/48 (with a "not genuine" PF certificate and a later "genuine" PF certificate), and a non-year dated February 17 example (with "genuine" PF certificate) which most likely is 1848. Two green examples are reported: 7/26/48 and a second July 26 example on a non-year dated cover to a different addressee with a "genuine" PF certificate.

We now come to examples in black ink. Unfortunately, this cancel has been faked. The fakes were largely, perhaps exclusively, done in black ink. At least eleven fakes in black ink have been seen. However, there are two non-year dated covers, bearing black herringbones, with "genuine" PF certificates: June 15 and July 19. (The June 15 example, however, has an advisory by Alexander that the cover has been questioned.) There is a third example, dated 6/6/49, and a fourth dated 5/9/49 which years ago received a "decline opinion" PF certificate. The faked Binghamton herringbones have been attributed to John Fox, a dealer who was very prominent in the mid-20th century.

It is interesting to note that Binghamton used a pair of rate markers ("V" and "X") with a motif similar to that of the herringbone cancel – composition of thin parallel lines or "stripes." These rate marks are decidedly scarce and reported in the *American Stampless Cover Catalog* as used only in 1847.

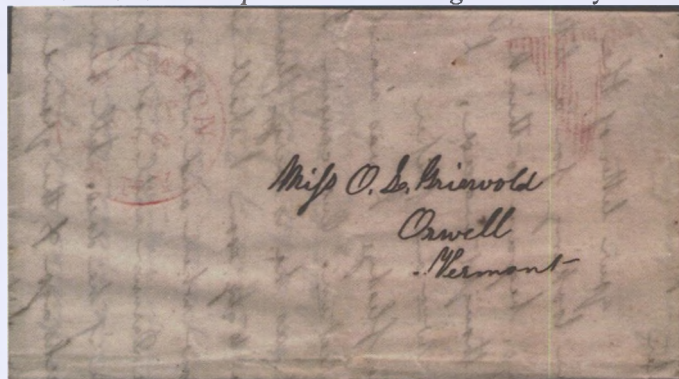


Figure 2

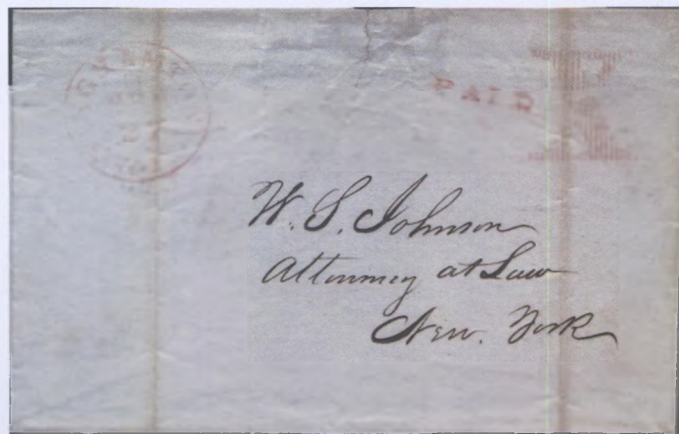


Figure 3

Calvet Hahn reported the "V" recorded from August to October 1847.⁴ David Williams has studied these and other Binghamton markings and advises that the specific dates of use he has seen reported are 9/11/47-10/8/47 for the "V" and 9/27/47 for the "X." The covers in Figures 2 and 3 are from David's collection and we thank him for permission to show them.

The dates of the striped rate marks correlate nicely with the appearance of the herringbone cancels and one wonders if they were procured (or made by the postmaster) at the same time. The rate markers were apparently rather primitive, perhaps with the face having been carved out of a solid striped block. We'll probably never know whether there is some connection between the rate markers and the herringbone grid but I like to think that Mr. Park got the idea of striped rate markers upon seeing or at least envisioning his new canceler.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Hart, Creighton C. "1847 Covers from New York—Binghamton" *Chronicle* (August 1977), page 156.
- 2 Scott 2006 *Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps and Covers* (2005), page 28A.
- 3 Alexander, Thomas J. *The United States 1847 Issue: A Cover Census* USPCS (2001), pp. 344-8.
- 4 Hahn, Calvet "Authenticating the Binghamton Herringbone Killers," *Chronicle* (November 1999), page 258.

Identifying Patent Cancels

by Roger D. Curran

The stamp in Figure 1 is a Sc 148 bearing a NYFM cancel, Weiss type TR-S3. It was submitted to the APS expertising service (APES) in 2008 with the question as to whether it was a patent cancel. This question was asked because, on the back of the stamp, just behind the dot in the center of cancel on the front, the paper is pushed out above the back surface of the stamp. There is no question but what the cancel dot was caused by something hard that was raised above the surface of



Figure 1

the canceler. In discussing this cancel type, Bill Weiss noted on page 269 in his book, *The Foreign Mail Cancellations of New York City 1870-1878*, that individual strikes sometimes show more than one dot and he considered any and all dots to be caused by "pieces of dirt on the cancel device and nothing more" Perhaps he had not seen an example with an indentation like the one in Figure 1. It is certainly conceivable that a piece of dirt in the form of a small chunk of some hard substance was sitting on the canceler face, but to me it seems unlikely. If the cancel on the Figure 1 stamp was determined to be a patent cancel, this would be quite noteworthy because no NYFM has yet been identified as a patent cancel.

The stamp was examined by three experts for the APS and they were unanimous in stating that the cancel, which the certificate confirms is TR-S3, is not a patent cancel. This is all presented here because it raises the basic issue of how does one determine what is a patent cancel.

Let's begin with a little history. The seminal article on patent cancels, "Patent Cancellations (1847 to 1887)," was written by Fred R. Schmalzriedt and it appeared in the 1933 book entitled *Cyclopedia of United States Postmarks and Postal History*, edited by Delf Norona. This 27 page article has remained for more than 75 years the principal reference on the subject. The defining characteristic of patent cancels is that they in some way destroy a portion of the stamp paper. This is done by punching a hole in the stamp, slicing or cutting the stamp with a blade, or scraping the surface. This act by itself defaces the stamp and may also allow canceling ink to more easily penetrate the fibers of the stamp paper. The challenge to identification, I believe, is not whether the cancel destroys stamp paper but rather whether the cancel design, regardless of whether it was successful in a particular application, was meant to do so. Schmalzriedt went right to the heart of the matter at the beginning of his article:

"The difficulty of determining whether certain cancellations were intended to perform the service of a patent canceler or produced such an effect without premeditation by the maker is fairly obvious. If some material sufficiently hard is cut away so as to leave a number of small squares, dots or points and then used as a canceler, whenever struck with sufficient force the small areas on its surface would penetrate the postage stamp just as did the patented cancellers made intentionally in a similar way."

Yes, unless there is sufficient reason to believe that the intention was there, the mere fact that a bit or more paper was destroyed or almost destroyed (indented, for example) should not automatically lead to a determination that a patent cancel was involved. Obviously, this becomes very much a judgment call. Since patent cancels constitute one of the more popular and interesting types of cancels and since they are not especially common, there is a likely inclination, generally speaking, to rule ambiguous examples in rather than rule them out.

The focus of this article is on punch cancels, probably the most ambiguous of the three categories. Figure 2 is from Schmalzriedt and he identifies it as being from New York City on a 6¢ 1871 issue stamp and canceled by a "round punch." He judged it a patent cancel and I think it is undoubtedly a TR-S3. So, here we have it. The pioneering student, whose published study would be acknowledged by most if not all current students as an outstanding piece of work, says "yes" and three present-day experts say "no." To say "yes" I believe there should be some supporting or corroborating evidence such as a statement in an annual NYPO report about testing punches during the period in question. I know of no such evidence. In the case of Figure 1, who is to say that the indentation wasn't caused by, for example, a nail hammered into the center of the cancel to help affix it to the handstamp? I agree with the APS experts.



Figure 2

Another New York example from Schmalzriedt is

shown in Figure 3. He reports five examples on 1¢ and 3¢ 1871 issue stamps with this notation: "Circular punch does not cut through stamp." He also lists a 6/3/72 date. An example is shown in Figure 4 with somewhat similar examples in Figure 5. The

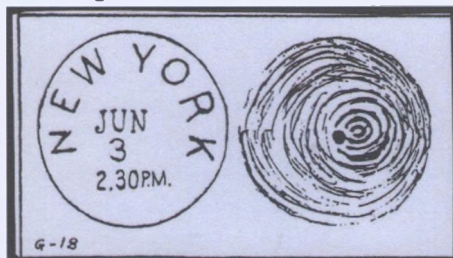


Figure 3

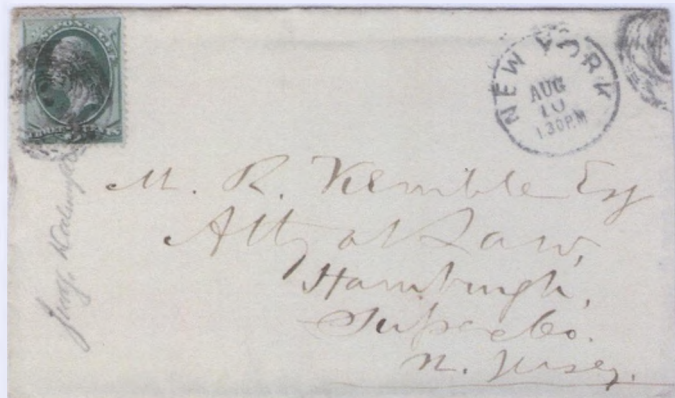


Figure 4



Figure 5

central dots on such cancels do typically indent the paper. In the absence of additional and supporting evidence, I think this cancel also fails to meet the test of being a patent cancel, at least on the basis of present information.

Let's now consider Figure 6 (from Schmalzriedt) with a small dot in the center. We have here what we might call a "context" issue. New York is well known to have experimented with patent cancels during the late 1862 period and this supports the inference that the dot in Figure 6 was associated with a punch

in the canceler. Just by way of illustrating the context, Figure 7 is a cover dated October 24 (with docketing "Oct 24/62" on the back) wherein the stamp is completely bisected by one of the horizontal bars which was clearly applied by a blade.



Figure 6

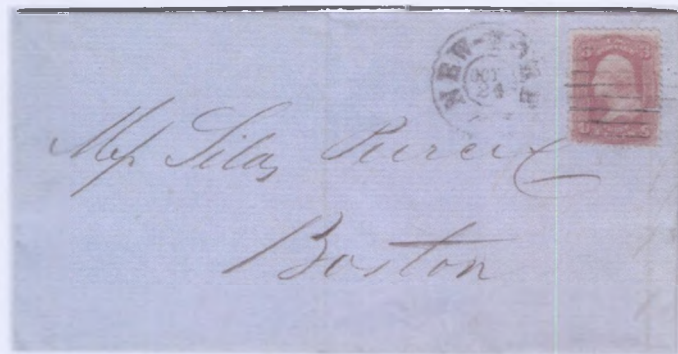


Figure 7

The cancel in Figure 8 creates somewhat of an outer boundary in terms of how late in the 19th century patents have been thought to be commonly used. Schmalzriedt lists it on 1882 through 1887 issue stamps. Willard illustrates it but doesn't refer to it as a patent cancel. Cole lists it as a patent cancel. There is no doubt but what, in at least some cases, the dots indent the underlying surface as in Figure 9. Are

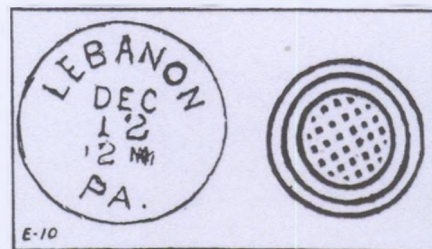


Figure 8

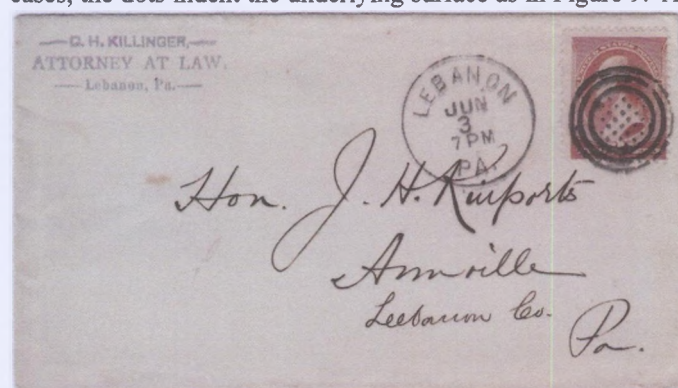


Figure 9

the dots just part of the design or are they punches? If the dots were tiny and deposited very little ink, this would definitely be suggestive of a patent cancel but these dots deposited considerable ink. In terms of context, there is the undated cover (Figure 10) with an 1881 issue stamp that presumably was sent before the Figure 8 cancel came into use. It shows a cancel design similar to Figure 8 except for the solid rather than dotted circle in the center. This suggests to me that the Figure 8 cancel may well just be a design variation of an earlier cancel rather than a patent

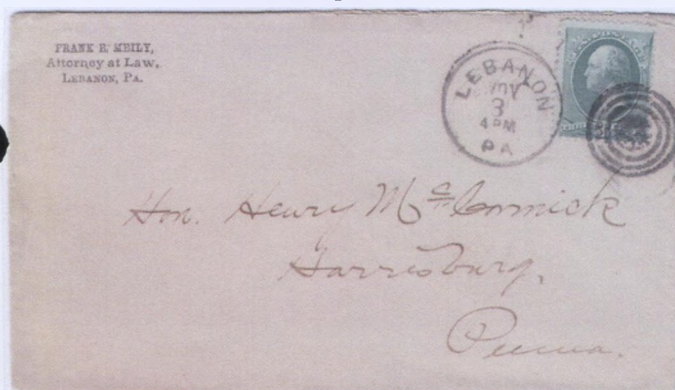


Figure 10

cancel.

It is probably well known by all readers that the term “patent” cancel is a bit of a misnomer in that finding a relevant patent for these cancels is in no way a requisite for concluding that a cancel is a patent cancel. There were numerous patents secured for such cancelers and Schmalzriedt discusses some of them. But he summarizes the situation thusly:

“Many of these devices were patented and have become known to philately as Patent Cancellations, although it is practically certain many were never patented at all and were possibly the product of local postmasters.”

The *NEWS* would very much welcome the opinion of readers on the views stated above and on what guidance is appropriate in this area.

The Meaning of a Term

by Roger D. Curran

At the bottom of page 89 of the May 2009 *NEWS* I referred a New York ellipse cancel with vertical bars as a “NYFM” cancel. This prompted the following comment from Bill Weiss:

“... I noted with interest that you are calling the Figure 5 cancels NYFMs and I wonder if you are expanding the definition in your writing of what you are going to call a “NYFM”? Don’t get me wrong. There is considerable support for calling all cancels used only in the NYFD on outgoing mail originating in NYC “NYFMs”. Hubert Skinner was the primary advocate for that definition, feeling (as I’m sure you know) that NYFMs extended from the 1850s period through the 1880s period. There is really no harm in some students feeling that way and other students still considering NYFMs to be based on the “traditional” definitions used by all writers from Bartels through me, including Milliken, Van Vlissingen-Waud and others. I did note that you called it “not hand-carved” which I suppose separates it well enough from traditional NYFMs so as not to cause confusion. It is not necessarily that I still strongly disagree

with the 1850s-1880s definition so much as I would prefer it if authors (such as yourself) would be clear about how they personally define the NYFM period so that their readers will understand both their personal viewpoint as well as the broader disagreement between the two schools of thought.”

Bill raises a valid point. In the case he mentioned, I used “NYFM” without much thought, really just as a shorthand way of indicating that it was a cancel used by the NYPO on foreign mail. However, within the philatelic community, “NYFM” certainly does have a more specific meaning that I would describe as follows: hand carved cancels used by the NYPO on stamps affixed to foreign mail (other than to Canada) originating at the NYPO during the 1870-78 period. The term “New York Foreign Mail”, when used without qualification, is very broad. The much more restrictive philatelic definition is arbitrary. However, I think the fact that “New York Foreign Mail” and “NYFM” always appear with caps implies that these references have a particular meaning. Upon reflection, I believe the philatelic meaning and tradition should be respected. In the future, your editor will not stretch the term to cover a broader period of NYPO foreign mail cancels. Comment is invited.

Cancellation Gallery

Ted Wassam submits the appealing cancels shown in Figure 1. The “R” is seen with some frequency on both 1879 and 1881 1¢ issues. Widely regarded as a precancel, it has in



the past been erroneously attributed to Bridgeport, CT. (One on-cover usage has been reported – a wrapper with no indication of origin.) Rochester, NY is suspected as the origin.¹ The large shaded star is remarkable, especially since it appears on a postage

due stamp. A low proportion of due stamps bear fancy cancels. The 3¢ Justice stamp shows a beautiful strike of what Alan Campbell, an expert on official stamps and their postal history, refers to as the Washington, D.C., "snowflake" cancel. Alan has noted this cancel used only during the month of April 1879.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Smith, David W. *Silent Precancels*, The Precancel Stamp Society (2004), p. 12.

Boston Duplexes, Finally

by Roger D. Curran

We have discussed the introduction of handstamps that duplexed a townmark to a canceler on many occasions in the *NEWS*. This occurred after use of the townmark was precluded by postal regulation as a canceler of stamps in 1860. For the largest post offices in particular, the use of duplex handstamps was a great time-saver as it permitted postmarking the cover and canceling the stamp in one operation. New York began adopting duplex handstamps by August 8, less than three weeks after the regulation was issued, and other large post offices soon followed suit. Some, however, did not. Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and especially Boston are cases in point.

The 8/03 *NEWS* illustrated a Boston cover that is apparently dated December 1864 with a red townmark and a black cross-roads cancel. I was reminded of this cover when coming across the cover in Figure 1 dated March 27 with a pencil date on the back "3/27/65." I have seen a considerable number of covers addressed to William Pierce of Syracuse, NY dated in the 1850s and 1860s. Invariably, there is a pencil note on the back giving the date. (As an aside, the majority also show rough opening at the top.) I am confident that Figure 1 is, in fact, an

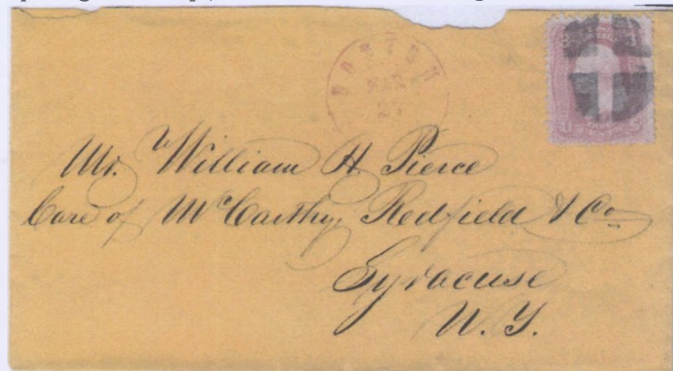


Figure 1

1865 cover. Why a post office, with the heavy workload Boston no doubt faced, would still be using two handstamps and two ink pads on routine letters in 1865 is hard to understand. Perhaps the use of red ink for postmarks, which goes back long before the introduction of postage stamps, was a tradition the Boston post office didn't want to give up. To keep this practice and employ black ink for stamp cancellation would, of course, require two handstamps.

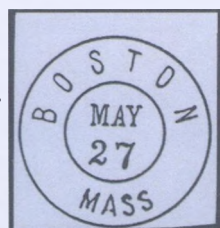


Figure 2

The unduplexed Boston postmarks from late 1860 onward are in the general

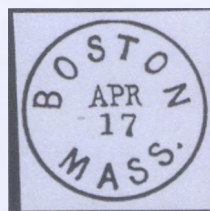


Figure 3

style of Figure 2. Blake and Davis report uses as late as 7/6/65 in red ink.¹ These townmarks were replaced by duplexed single circle postmarks in the general style of Figure 3. Blake and Davis only report such postmarks in black ink with 2/27/65 being the earliest date.² The introduction of duplex handstamps in the Boston post office apparently involved a transition period where the old and new were used concurrently.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Maurice C. Blake and Wilbur W. Davis *Boston Postmarks to 1890* (1949) Wylie-Jewett Co., pp. 200-1.
2 Ibid., pp 206-7.

Odd Monogram

by Roger D. Curran

A very distinctive cancel is shown in Figure 1. The two strikes on the stamps appear to be in black ink. I assume



Figure 1

the letters "A.P." represent the initials of the postmaster. What would produce such a marking since it was obviously designed (letters formed in reverse) to produce the desired image when struck on paper or some other surface. There are no indentations on the stamps to suggest embossing. I'm grasping at straws here but could it be a handstamp to create something on the order of a bookplate, although not a label, that would be applied to a page to identify the book's owner?

The Figure 1 cancel is decidedly scarce but a recent Nutmeg sale included a similar cancel that is more difficult to find. To my knowledge it has not been reported in the literature and I would classify it as rare, possibly very rare. As with Figure 1, I assume the letters ("FHB") represent postmaster initials. It has been my assumption that the Figure 1 cancel was struck with a metal canceler into which the design had been engraved. But the Figure 2 cancel is not symmetrical which suggests a pliable composition susceptible to spreading out under pressure. Perhaps the handstamps were rubber-faced.



Figure 2

Readers who can provide information on this type of "cancel" or submit additional

examples, on or off cover, are invited to so.

Skull and Bones

The C.A. Klinkner & Co. of San Francisco has a place in U.S. cancellation history because it sold the famous "kicking mule" canceler (Figure 1) that was used by five western post offices. It also sold other cancelers including one that produced a skull and cross-bones design that is sometimes referred to as the "laughing skull." (See May 2004 NEWS and the 2001 50th anniversary issue.) A Whitfield tracing is shown

in Figure 2 and the 2007 Whitfield Update provides the following additional listings: Coleville, PA (1881, purple), Fruitland, MD (1883, black), Ocean City, NJ (1882, black), Stoneville, Montana (1884), and Thornton, IN (1881, black).

Jim Doolin recently submitted a 4/24/84 example from Columbus, NJ (Figure 3) and reports that he has also

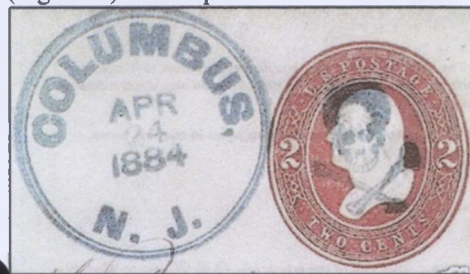


Figure 3

on any additional post offices that used the laughing skull. Who can help?

What's in a Name?

Cole lists the pair of similar cancels shown here as Figure 1. Actually, I suspect they are the same cancel. Willard illustrates on page 397 of his book a cover bearing the "ALV" cancel but it is struck near the right edge of the cover and is

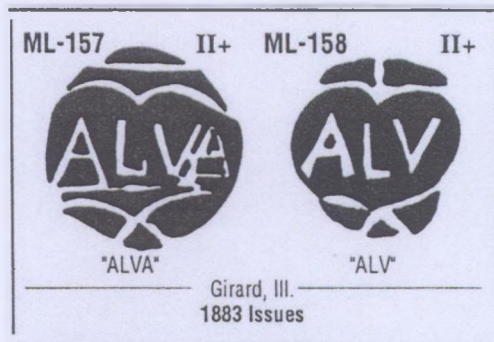


Figure 1



Figure 2

I. Plant.

Figure 3 is a different Girard cancel, this with a very clear "AW." Figure 4 shows cancel #676, attributed to Girard

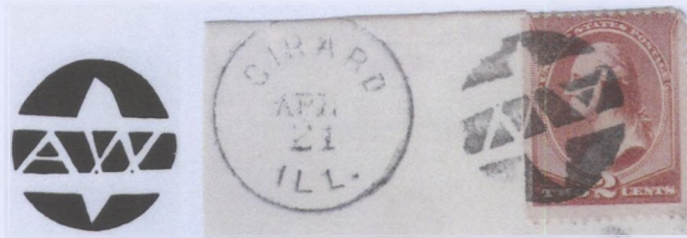


Figure 3

on Sc 210, from Richard Russell's compilation *Illinois 19th Century Cancels*. Are Figures 3 and 4 the same cancel with dried ink filling shallow grooves for the "AW" in Figure 4?

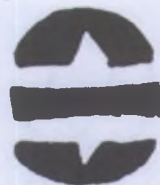


Figure 4

"ALVA" as in Thomas Alva Edison. Indeed, his family referred to him as "Alva" or "Al" when he was young. I believe it usually appears as a last name but I did come across it as a first name as well, perhaps Swedish in derivation. There are several U.S. towns names Alva. Perhaps the Girard postmaster's first name was Alva and last name began with a "W." Readers who can add to the story by reporting additional pertinent cancels or more background information are urged to do so.

Whitfield Book Available Again

Additional copies of the book *Cancellations Found on 19th Century U.S. Stamps* by Kenneth A. Whitfield are now available. The book contains more than 6,000 tracings and is a valuable supplement to the Skinner-Eno and Cole books. This printing incorporates the new Whitfield update that has been offered recently. The cost is \$52 postpaid. Checks should be made payable to U.S.C.C. and orders sent to U.S.C.C., 20 University Avenue, Lewisburg, PA 17837.

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Boston Negative RPOs

by Robert Grosch

Negative letter killers in RPO cancels are not unusual. Most often the letters N, S, W, or E were used to indicate the direction the train was traveling when the letter was canceled. When it comes to RPOs associated with Boston, it appears that the RPOs may well have employed the same style of killers being used in the city post office.

Figure 1 shows an example from the Boston, Springfield and New York RPO dated 6/26/79. The "E" in a square is identical to the "E" killer in use in the city post office from 7/78-4/81.

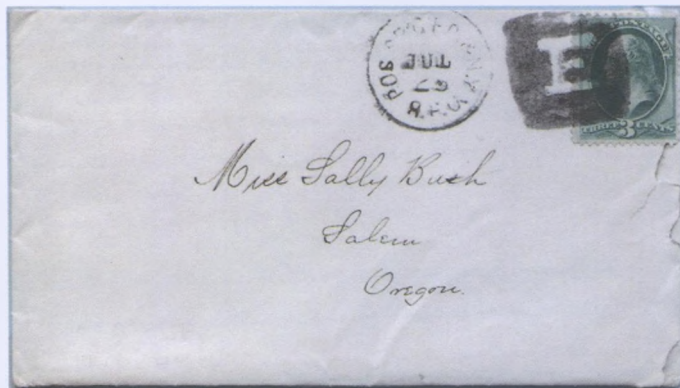


Figure 1

Figure 2 shows a negative "W" on a Boston, Springfield and New York RPO cover dated 9/15/89, well past the time of usage of negative cancels in the Boston post office. However, this "W" is also of a different and more primitive style than that previously in use at the city post office.



Figure 2

Figure 3, a postal card mailed at the Boston, Springfield and New York RPO on April 18, 1881, has a remarkably clear strike of "13" in a solid circle. This is the only reported cover utilizing a Boston negative number with an RPO cancel. One might suspect this postal card was a philatelic creation, except for the authentic business correspondence on the message side of the card. The earliest known date for "13" in solid circle in

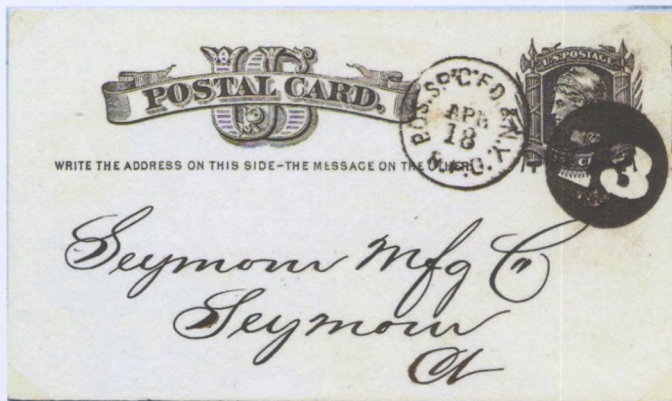


Figure 3

Boston is less than six weeks before this postal card was mailed, so a clear strike from a fresh and undamaged killer should not be surprising.

Figure 4 illustrates a cover with a Boston & Albany RPO duplex. The "W" in square between negative lines was struck on 5/5/86, almost five years after the only recorded date for this killer's use in the Boston post office. Ted Wassam has reported the cover in Figure 4a, a Boston & Albany "E" in square between negative lines, dated 7/16/86.



Figure 4

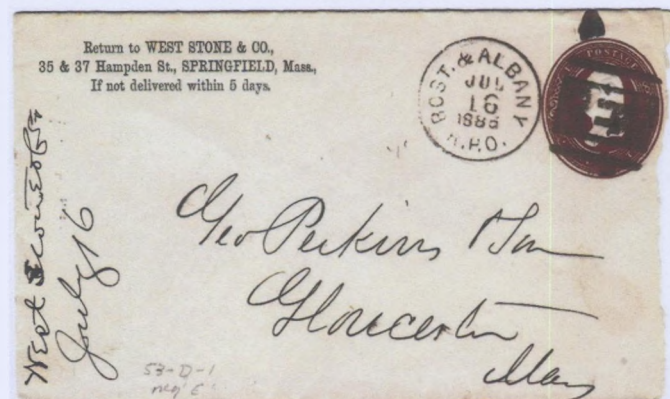


Figure 4a

Figure 5 displays an RPO cancel from St. Albans & Boston RPO. Like the killer in Figure 4, this "N" in square between negative lines is apparently quite scarce. Only one Boston city cover has been reported, dated 8/12/82. The RPO cover is one of two reported RPO covers utilizing this killer. The one that is illustrated is dated October 7, year unknown. The other cover resides in the collection of Ted Wassam and is dated

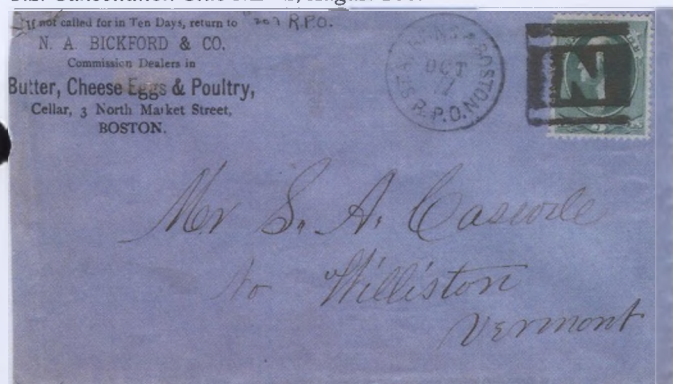


Figure 5

8/12/92, a full ten years after the only known date for this cancel in the city of Boston.

The Boston & Troy RPO used a negative "W" (Figure 6) in September 1882. This is in the more primitive style of Figure 2. We also note that the city post office's use of letters in solid circle have only been reported for letters between "A" and "O."

We can conclude that some RPOs apparently received

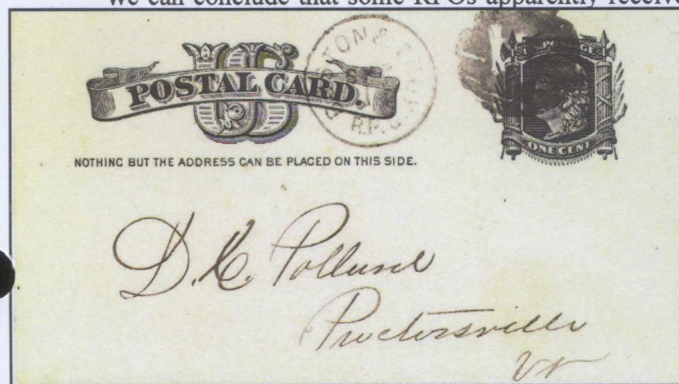


Figure 6

their cancels directly from the Boston Post Office, or at least from the same supplier because of the identical nature of the killers. Some RPOs used a different style of negative letters, perhaps fashioned by the staff on the trains. However, since the custom of using letters to designate the direction of travel persisted, using these old killers long after they had been discontinued by the Boston Post Office persisted as well.

September Has Been Found

The May 2009 *NEWS* contained a summary, prepared by Wendell Triplett, of three-letter month cancels reported from Mexico, NY. They have been noted basically from 1891-1893. For some of the months, no cancels were listed. September was one such month, but that has all changed now with two reports of "SEP." The piece in Figure 1 was submitted by Charles Collins and the off-cover stamp by Joe Crosby. We can be quite confident that the off-cover cancel is from Mexico as the two strikes in Figure 1 show a key similarity involving what we might call an abbreviated loop at the bottom of the "S." Now, who will report a Mexico cancel for April or July?

Wendell noted that the Mexico postmaster responsible for the month cancels was Wilfred A. Robbins who served



Figure 1

from 5/28/91 to 5/23/95 and again later from 7/13/12-8/24/13. Postmaster Jerome E. Baker followed Robbins and served from 5/24/95 to 7/6/99. There is one report of a Mexico "JUN" cancel dated 6/27/95. Was this an old Robbins cancel that

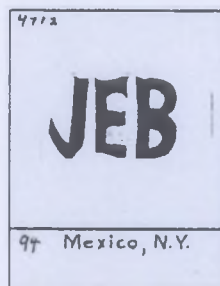


Figure 2

7/8/95. A tracing of this cancel from Whitfield is shown here as Figure 2.



Baker pressed into service or did Baker carve his own "JUN"? The question is raised because a May 2002 *NEWS* article on Mexico months cancels illustrated a Mexico "JEB" cancel, obviously the initials of the new postmaster, dated

Mystery Cancellation

There are many unanswered questions in the field of cancellations. One example involves a cancel that is apparently found on the 1893 Columbian issue. Figure 1 illustrates several strikes. It is thought to be a precancel used by Chicago Mail Order House, a company along the lines of Sears and Montgomery Ward. Only thing is, no one apparently can produce an example on cover. There was a report years ago that forms the basis for the current listing in David Smith's 2004 book *Silent Precancels*, published by the Precancel Stamp Society. Smith describes the cancel thusly:

"3 vertical lines 1-2 mm wide, 1.5 mm between #1 and #2, 3 mm between #2 and 3. 9mm overall. Gray ink."

He reports the cancel found on the following Columbian denominations: 1¢, 3¢, 4¢, 6¢, 8¢, 15¢, 30¢ and \$1.00. Overall, stamps are most often seen canceled with one set of these vertical bars but are sometimes found canceled with two sets. In a couple of cases - 1¢ and 4¢ - stamps have only been reported with two sets. I spoke with David Smith and he said the 50¢ denomination is the stamp most often seen with the cancel and he also mentioned that he has not seen the cancel on the \$1.00. (The \$1.00 listing



Figure 1

is based on an earlier report in the literature). Incidentally, the 50¢ denomination has been canceled by a combination of vertical and diagonal sets of lines.

I was drawn to this cancel because it is very unusual to see high denomination stamps, apart from postage dues, with precancels. If the Chicago Mail Order House attribution is correct, presumably these stamps were affixed to package wrappings enclosing fairly heavy objects. If so, it is quite understandable that "on cover" examples would be very hard to find. What reason would there have been to save such wrappings? These cancels are not rare and I think they have traveled "under the radar" because they are easily mistaken for machine cancels that were becoming popular at the time. They are also interesting because they have only been seen on Columbians.

There is another report in Smith of a Chicago precancel that involves even higher denomination stamps. Sc 278 (the \$5 dark green of 1895), the \$2, \$3 and \$4 Columbian and the \$2 Trans-Miss are all reported canceled by four ruled lines (4-6 mm apart) in red ink. These are described as cancels applied by the Chicago Post Office:

"as record of payment for bulk mailings of newspapers. *A control.*"

Who can report examples of these?

New Early Date for Townmark

Carroll Chase, the great student of the U.S. 3¢ 1851 and 1857 issue stamps, estimated that, apart from manuscript cancels, two-thirds of these stamps were canceled by the town postmark. (This practice abruptly came to an end with the July 23, 1860 regulation precluding use of the townmark as a canceler.) Townmarks thus represent a very important part of the cancellation story on early U.S. stamps.

One of the significant developments in the evolution of 1850s postal markings was the issuance, by the Post Office Department, of handstamps that applied rather small double circle townmarks that measure about an inch in outer diameter. An example is shown in Figure 1. Dick Graham discussed



Figure 1



Figure 2

these townmarks in the February 1986 *Chronicle* and stated the following:

"A new style . . . townmark had been introduced in 1859 . . . The late Henry A. Meyer believed this style of marking was first used at Mobile, Alabama in 1859, but was never able to establish the earliest date."

The August 2004 *NEWS* illustrated a 11/3/59 strike from Mobile, but reported two earlier examples from New Orleans dated 9/16/59 and 10/21/59. It was also mentioned that the "9" slug in the New Orleans "1859" year date tends to be unclear and may appear to be an "8." We have now received a report from Van Koppersmith (Figure 2) of a 7/15/59 usage from New Orleans. As Van suggested, given that the year date is inverted, possibly this is a first day of use that was quickly corrected.

The May 2005 *NEWS* identified two further post offices that began using the small double circle townmark in 1859: Troy, NY (11/23/59) and Milwaukee WI (9/17/59). Who can report additional examples?

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