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Essay

PRECANCELS AS A SIDELINE COLLECTION

Ed Kane & Charles Neyhart

Over time and after focusing on building a collection, collectors may experience an urge to do “something different.” This urge can be related to staleness with the main collection or a forced inactivity due to prohibitive cost. Perhaps the collection is constructively complete. Collectors can go in other directions at this point. One possibility for a small “side collection” is to explore **precancels**. Precancels are widely available and most are inexpensive. You may even have a glassine full of them lying lonely somewhere in your stamp room.

What we are suggesting here is but one example of a precancels side collection. There are many ways to collect precancels and we suggest some of these at the end of the essay. We do spend time here sorting out some of the challenges and complexities inherent in precancels and provide useful references, all of which are available in NPL.

PRECANCEL RECAP

United States precancels have been around since the mid-1800s. The U.S. Post Office Department formally authorized their use in 1887 and in 1903 stipulated a standard imprint with the city and state names printed between two parallel lines.¹ Until 1923, all precancels overprints were applied locally by post office personnel or printers. Then in 1923, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing also began regularly printing precancels.²

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Precancels were popular with both mailers and the Post Office. A “precancel” is a stamp legitimately canceled prior to being affixed to

¹ In 1978, the USPS introduced a national “lines only” imprint which superseded the well-known city/state imprint.

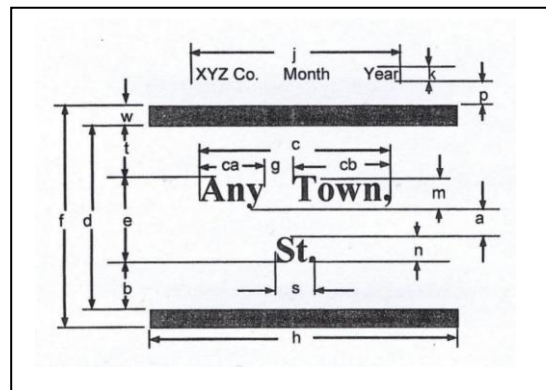
² The Bureau conducted an “experiment” in 1916 in which the Bureau won the bid for flat plate-printed precancels for Augusta, Maine; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Springfield, Massachusetts. The experiment was judged by the Bureau to be a financial failure.

the mailpiece. Demand for precanceled stamps originated from high-volume business mailers to achieve mailing efficiencies.³ Since precanceled items bypass the canceling process, the use of precancels speeds up introduction into the mailstream.⁴

Printing plates and handstamps, with varieties of each, are the tools used to apply the inked city/state precancel overprint to postage stamps; the choice typically being a function of the number of precanceled stamps required. Making a printing base, however, creates potential variation in the size of the overprint, the spacing within the overprint, and the overall alignment of the overprint design. In addition, variations in font, upper/lower case letters, and the use of abbreviations and punctuation are prevalent. All these sources of variation combine to create different [and collectible] precancel imprint styles. Thus, the biggest challenge of collecting precancels is the complexity introduced by the different imprint styles.

The Precancel Stamp Society [PSS] has formulated standard nomenclature, classification rules, and a numbering system for identifying precancel styles.⁵ To convey this information, the PSS publishes two catalogs: *Precancel Stamp Society Catalog of United States Bureau Precancels* and *Precancel Stamp Society's Town and Type Catalog of United States and Territories*. These catalogs describe each precancel imprint style. They are indispensable and we have used them in discussing our model precancel collection.

Sources of potential measurement variation in the "standard" city/state precancel imprint.



THE MODEL PRECANCEL COLLECTION – PORTLAND, OREGON

We have chosen to focus on a side collection of stamps precanceled Portland/Oregon. Portland is our home base and, over time, there have been enough precancel mailers in

³ Mailers must have a post office-issued permit to use precancels. A minimum single-mailing quantity is necessary for use.

⁴ There may be a misconception that precancels represented discounted postage. Precancel mailers paid face value for stamps. It was not until later that the USPS implemented reduced-rate presort postage for precancel mailers.

⁵ Over time, various numbering systems have been used, most notably those used in the Hoover and Noble catalogs.

Portland to produce a fairly wide record of different precancel styles. We easily could have chosen a different approach; precancels are amenable to many different collecting formats. Precancels sometimes present difficulties and might first intimidate collectors. We try to provide useful insights with this model collection by addressing the central difficulties. Perhaps this will awaken some enthusiasm for forming a precancel side collection.

Portland has 23 different city/state precancel imprints. Of the 23: Six were printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing; five were printed locally using USPOD-contracted devices; and 12 were printed with locally made devices.⁶ A review of the PSS catalogs reveals that most of these have a catalog value of less than 75-cents; only four “locals” exceed \$1.00, ranging from \$3 to \$15.

BUREAU PRECANCELS

By adding a separate precancel overprinting station to the web-fed Stickney rotary press, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing found it viable to take on precanceling jobs. From a production standpoint, Bureau precancels offered certain efficiencies; however, due to economies of scale, the Bureau could be financially competitive only in those cities with a large demand for precanceled stamps, in this case, not less than 500,000 sheet stamps or 250,000 coil stamps for each denomination.⁷

The Bureau precancel overprint was applied by printing plates, usually made of metal but later changed to rubber and then vinyl. The plates had the same number of subjects as the plates used to print the stamps.

The style of the Bureau precancel imprint changed over time, due mostly to changes in USPOD policy and technology improvements, but also from necessity. From 1923 to 1978, the Bureau used 21 different precancel styles, all called “Bureaus,” broken into four style varieties. These imprints differed in font, size, and differences in distances between the parts of the imprint. Portland’s six Bureau precancels represent three of these styles and are shown on the next page [the PSS style numbers are given below the imprint image⁸]

The PSS *Bureau* catalog reveals that 96 different postage stamps, listed sequentially by Scott catalog number, were precanceled by the Bureau for Portland, Oregon. These comprised 74 sheet stamps and 22 coils.

⁶ Technically, six of these local imprints are called “dated” precancels, whereby a date of use was added to the standard precancel imprint. More on this matter later in the essay.

⁷ This rule is often confused with another USPOD rule regarding the ordering of a minimum number of stamps of a certain high denomination for local precanceling.

⁸ A given PSS precancel style number, for example #43 above, was not confined to Portland, Oregon; rather, it was a precancel style used in various cities during the period of roughly 1923-1926.

The costs of precanceling stamps did not affect the price of those stamps to mailers; rather, they paid face value. The cost of precanceling was ultimately absorbed by the USPOD as a cost center.



USPOD CONTRACTED DEVICE PRECANCELS

If a city's demand for precancels was insufficient to permit the use of Bureau-printed precancels, the local post office had the option of requisitioning its own contracted precanceling device. Beginning in 1915, the USPOD contracted with private third-party manufacturers to provide local post offices with precanceling devices made to USPOD specifications. These contracted devices were either printing plates⁹ or handstamps. Printing plates were suitable for larger precancel orders; handstamps were supplied when local demand for precancels was smaller.

Electroplates came with different city/state imprint styles but all are included within the PSS-numbered 200-series. Electroplates were typically composed of 100-subjects to match the size of a regular post office pane of sheet stamps as received from the USPOD. Plates were procured from contractor and shipped to the requesting post office, which would then be

⁹ These were electroplates, called "electros" since they were made by an electro-chemical disposition process.

turned over to a local printer who would apply the precancel overprint to stamps provided by the local post office.¹⁰

Portland used three different electroplates, numbered 204, 232 and 243. The PSS *Town and Type* catalog describes these as:

- 204** – Bold-faced block caps 3.5 to 4mm high between 1mm bars 122.5mm apart.
- 232** – Block caps 2.5mm high between 1.1mm lines 12 to 13.5mm apart.
- 243** – Caps 2mm high between double lines 14mm apart [“double-line electro”]

The *Town and Type* catalog does provide images of each imprint, but they are generic and do not include the Portland overprint.



204



232



243

Post offices requiring small quantities of precancels usually could not justify the cost of having precancels printed using an electroplate. Handstamps could be used in-house and were more easily managed. Contract-provided handstamps changed over time, first being fitted with a rubber printing base, then changed to metal with a slightly curved stereoscopic base to allow the overprint to be rocked across the stamp for better registration,¹¹ and finally to a vinyl base.

Designed to be applied by hand, handstamps were usually made up of only 10 or 25 subjects, arranged in a 2 x 5 or 5 x 5 format for ease of handling. Post office personnel did the precanceling. Rubber handstamps are listed in the 400 to 600 number range; metal handstamps within the 700 range; and vinyl handstamps within the 800 number range.

Portland used two contracted handstamps, both vinyls, numbered 841 and 895. The PSS *Town and Type* catalog describes these imprints as:

- 841** – 2.5mm block caps
- 895** – 2.5 block caps of varying widths depending on the length of the town name; letter “I” with serifs

¹⁰ Because contracted devices were shipped to and used by local post offices, they are technically a form of “local” precancel, although we use that term here for the local precancels described in the next section.

¹¹ These are referred to as “hand-held electros.”

Again, the *Town and Type* catalog present generic images of these imprints. It is a matter of matching the Portland overprints against the features in the images.

If you look carefully, these two handstamped precancels below look very much alike, but the one on the right has tighter spacing and the ‘OR’ almost touches the bottom parallel line, both distinguishing characteristics of 895.



841



895

Unlike the PSS *Bureau* catalog, the *Town and Type* catalog does not list the individual stamps that were precanceled Portland/Oregon using contracted devices. Over time though, a census has been compiled by Northwest precancel collectors and is now available in the NPL Precancel section.¹²

LOCAL PRECANCELS

“Locals” represent a mixed bag of city/state precancel imprint styles. The only link among them is that the devices used to apply the precancels were made and used locally. All Portland locals were either handstamps for smaller quantities or typesets for larger quantities of precancels. Handstamps were typically molded from typesets and used a variety of materials for the printing base, including rubber, metal and vinyl. Typesets are used to print in a flatbed press from set type or linotype slugs making up the precancel imprint.

Locals are an interesting bunch, and sometimes difficult to interpret. Because the devices were procured locally, there is little standardization, both within and between precancel overprints. Printer errors are not uncommon. Some local printers tried to mimic the Bureau imprint, often achieving remarkably similar looking results and causing collector difficulties.

Locals also include what are referred to generally as “dated” precancels. In 1938, the USPOD decreed that precanceled stamps above the 6-cent denomination include the month and year of intended use and the mailer’s initials. This information was to be printed above the top line of the precancel imprint. The objective of this was to avoid revenue loss from the reuse of precanceled stamps inasmuch as they were not canceled as a regular part of mail processing.

Many mailers complied with this requirement for all denominations of precanceled stamps. After all, it was a free form of advertising. Some mailers used a device that added the requisite additional information to already precanceled stamps. Other mailers used a single

¹² See, *Oregon Local Precancel Denomination List* [1995].

device to include the initials, date and precancel imprint.¹³ The latter are called “integral” precancels.

Portland’s 12 locals can be divided into nine handstamps and three typesets. Of the 12, seven are dated precancels.¹⁴ At least two Portland locals are derivatives of Portland’s Bureau precancels. Shown below are examples:



Several points, typically encountered with local precancels in general, can be made about those shown here. Note that three of the overprints are not square to the stamp design and vertical centering the overprint was problematic. Two of the overprints are inverted. The handstamped overprints [designated HS] are less distinct than the typeset [TS] and most of

¹³ These are called “integral” precancels.

¹⁴ Montgomery Ward [MW] was the most prolific user of dated precancels in Portland, almost continually from 1938 – 1970, using five different imprints. Others were Commerce Clearing House [CCC], United Airlines [UA], Walker Drug Company [WDC] and two unidentified companies with the initials WAHCo [March 1953] and WFH [October 1941].

the handstamped examples here show wear, which is not uncommon for rubber-based handstamps.

L-2 is a handstamp used by Montgomery Ward personnel to precancel individual stamps received from patrons, when customer remittances often included unused postage stamps in lieu of coins. [That usually explains their poor alignment.] L-4 has an interesting background: First, the Portland Post Office ordered Bureau precanceled stamps in various denominations which were then shipped to Montgomery Ward's Chicago office; the dated portion of the overprint was added and the stamps affixed to Montgomery Ward advertising mailpieces; the mailpieces were bundled and returned to Portland for individual mailing. L-8 is an example of an integral handstamp, including both the precancel and the date and company initials above the top parallel line of the precancel. Given the orientation of the overprints on the two stamps, you can tell it is a multi-subject handstamp. In this case, it was a 2-subject handstamp that had to be renewed each month with a brand new handstamp with the new month of use indicia. The old device was supposed to be destroyed.

Two commemoratives are included in the local array above. Precanceling commemorative stamps was generally frowned upon by the USPOD. However, as a practical manner, this was considered a reasonable way to deplete remainders of commemorative stamps at the local post office.

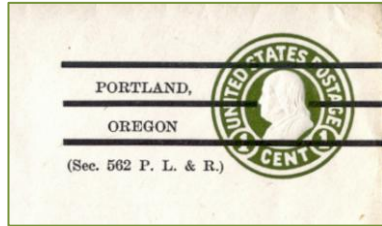
COLLECTING NOTES

If you might be thinking about forming a side collection of precancels, many formats are available. Again, you decide what to collect. Ed collects precancels of all stripes, but his background made it possible to focus on the Pacific Northwest. Charles, on the other hand, collects only Bureau precancels and limits those to examples that compliment his main U.S. collection. Both of us, though, seem to have accumulated some of the classic precancels with artistically creative imprint designs from around 1900 when the rules for the appearance of the city/state overprint were more relaxed.

A precancel side collection can be as broad or as narrow as you want, although it is most prudent to restrict your scope initially. Here are some ideas to start forming a collection:

- Focus on a particular precancel style, e.g., the double-line electro [PSS 243], an attractive design.
- Collect cities with U.S. Presidents' names, e.g., Madison/Florida.
- Collect cities that have state names, e.g., Delaware/Iowa.
- Collect by U.S. issue, e.g., 1938 Presidential series.
- Collect U.S. territories [there are 11 of them].
- Collect precancel errors, e.g., 'OIHO.'
- Collect precanceled commemorative stamps.
- Collect precanceled postal stationery.
- Collect the "lines only" or "service indicator" [e.g., Nonprofit Org.] precancels introduced by the USPS in 1978 and 1980, respectively.





Once you have selected a general collecting “key,” like those in the list above, then you may want to expand on this key by adding detail. For example, if you choose to focus on the 1938 Presidential series, one natural extension is to collect one of every denomination regardless of city/state of origin or style. An extension would be to collect every denomination for every state. Another path would be to collect every denomination by precancel style and then extend that to every state. Your choices, while ultimately finite, are still robust and limited only by your interest and commitment.

The **Northwest Philatelic Library** Collection includes many precancel references, including a full range of PSS catalogs. Check out the monthly periodical, *Precancel Forum*, for collecting ideas and sources of precanceled stamps. The Library also has the periodicals, *Precancel Bee* and the *Precancel Optimist* and older catalogs for historical context.

Ed Kane began collecting precancels “around 1955.” He was well-placed to observe and understand the use of precancels. Ed started a 38-year career in the Portland Post Office in 1946 working in distribution at the main office, located in the Federal Building directly across Hoyt Street from the current main office. He then moved to parcel post operations at a converted bus repair depot at NW 10th and Glisan. He moved back to the main office, working first in the registry section and then in accountable paper [the Portland Post Office at the time was the Northwest Regional Office supplying stamps and other postal paper to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, parts of Montana, and Alaska]. He moved to Pioneer Station in Pioneer Court House and then was assigned to the special delivery section at the main post office, now at NW Broadway and Hoyt. He worked at Brooklyn Station on Division Street and was promoted to Postal Systems Examiner which rated a move back to the main post office from where he later retired.

Charles Neyhart is president of Northwest Philatelic Library and editor of *Book Reports*. He collects U.S. precancels as a side collection.

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THE FIRST DAY COVER COLLECTING SCENE

Ralph H. Nafziger

Serious U.S. first day cover [FDC] collecting began in the 1920s with the first issue-specific cachet produced by George Linn [Figure 1]. Prior to that, only a few people such as Henry Hammelman, Philip Ward, H.F. Colman, and Edward C. Worden paid any attention to the first day of issue of new stamps. After Linn's FDCs for the 1923 Harding Memorial issue were introduced into the market, FDC collecting became more popular. In 1925, A.C. Roessler began to popularize cachets on FDCs [Figure 2]. By the early 1930s, FDC cachets were expected. During that decade, FDC cachets became more prolific and of higher quality, which led to a growing number of collectors. This is reflected in the number of FDCs canceled over the years. For example, the average number of commemorative FDCs canceled increased about 530 percent during the 1930s. Lesser increases were noted for each decade through the 1980s. However, the 1990s saw a decline of about 40 percent, and another decrease of about 75 percent during the 2000s.



Figure 1. First commercial FDC cachet by George W. Linn

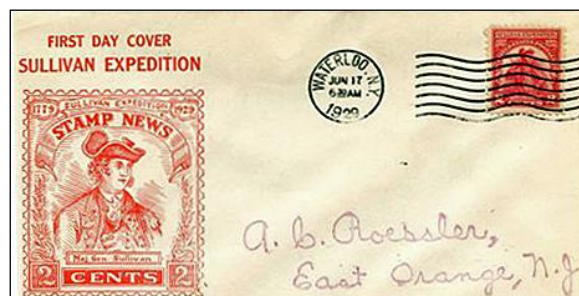


Figure 2. A typical A.C. Roessler FDC cachet

Other evidence that the FDC market has softened can be gleaned from auction results. In a recent auction, only 58 percent of the FDC lots sold. In the past six months, an average of 42 percent of the lots was sold in mail auctions consisting only of FDCs. This market weakness can be attributed to factors such as: [1] FDC collectors are aging, unable to collect, or no longer living; [2] the current economic situation; or [3] distractions such as family responsibilities, other outside activities, and the lure of computers and the internet, especially for younger people.

My exposure to FDCs began when I received four FDCs of the 1948 Wisconsin statehood issue from my grandmother, who lived in Madison [Figure 3]. I was intrigued by the cachets and cancel. A few years later, I began servicing my own FDCs and also subscribed to a commercial service. FDCs were purchased primarily from dealers in their stores, although some were bought via the mail.



Figure 3. Cachetcraft FDC for the 1948 Wisconsin Statehood issue

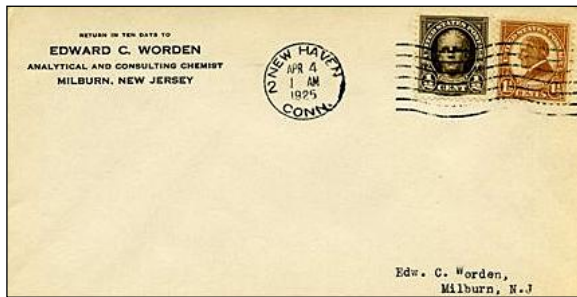
FDC collecting has changed significantly since those days. Most purchases now are made on the internet, at shows, or from specialized auctions. Some items are obtained by mail from advertisements in the philatelic press. The scarcer FDCs, such as those with unusual cachets [Figure 4], those with auxiliary markings [Figure 5], “classic” FDCs [Figure 6], and earliest documented usages [Figure 7] have become more difficult to acquire. These FDCs probably reside in collections and are not readily for sale. When these items do appear in the market, there is great demand, competition, and high prices. Currently, there are very few stores in which collectors can browse and purchase selected FDCs. It also has become more difficult to dispose of FDC collections. There are fewer outlets than in the past, there is less demand, and buy prices have dropped. Two major philatelic dealers have ceased buying large accumulations of FDCs. The American Philatelic Society has requested that sellers no longer include FDCs in their sales circuit books. In response, FDC collectors have donated FDCs to worthy organizations such as youth groups, which has the added potential of stimulating FDC collecting among younger people. Other FDC collectors simply include their collections in their wills. Since there now are fewer FDC collectors, there are fewer people with whom to interact, or from whom to obtain or exchange information. The FDC collector may feel more isolated than in the past.



Figure 4. An unusual Doc's Local Post FDC



Figure 5. Forwarded FDC with numerous auxiliary markings



Both the ½-cent Hale [Scott 551] and the 1½-cent Harding [Scott 576] were issued April 4, 1925 in New Haven, CT.

Figure 6. A “classic” FDC serviced by Edward C. Worden



Figure 7. An earliest documented use cover

Because there are so many FDCs to collect [a recent estimate is nearly three million different cachets and issues], most FDC collectors specialize in specific issues and/or specific cachetmakers. Others collect first cachets. Collecting topical FDCs is popular, as are autographed FDCs [Figure 8], combination FDCs [Figure 9], unofficial FDCs [Figure 10], maximum cards [Figure 11], first day ceremony programs [Figure 12], USPS souvenir programs [Figure 13], and predates [Figure 14].

Since the USPS began issuing new stamps nationwide on January 1, 2007, it has become far less of a challenge to obtain unofficial first day cancellations, although limited stamp distribution to post offices does present a challenge. It also is more difficult to find auxiliary

markings on contemporary FDCs because so few actually pass through the mailstream. Errors, freaks, and oddities are far fewer on modern FDCs owing to improved production quality controls and in cancels.



Figure 8. An FDC autographed by the stamp designer and engravers



Figure 9. A combination FDC



Official first day city was Philadelphia

Figure 10. An unofficial FDC

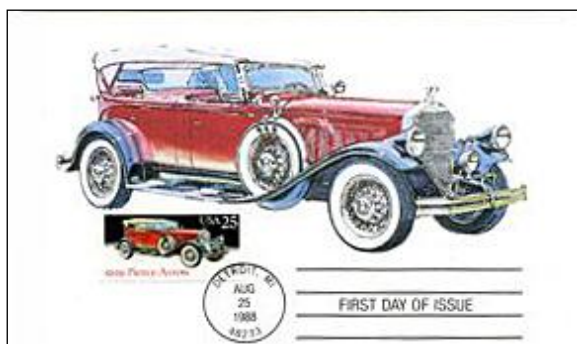


Figure 11. A maximum card FDC

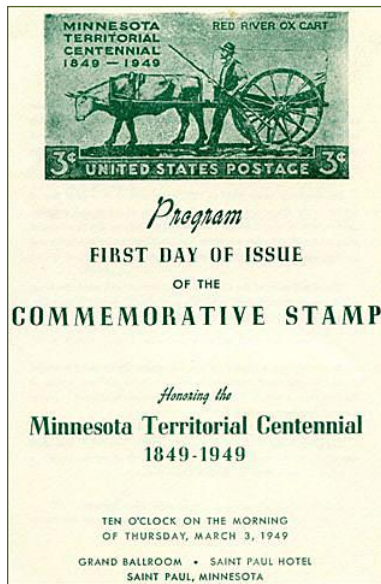


Figure 12. An FDC ceremony program

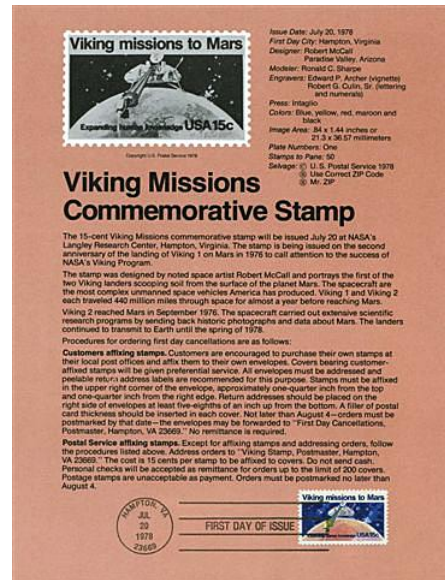


Figure 13. A USPS souvenir page

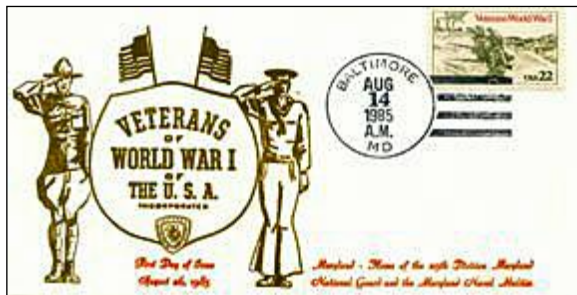


Figure 14. A predated FDC. The official first day was August 26, 1985

Some FDC collectors eventually produce cachets. With the advent of the computer and appropriate software, this is relatively easy to accomplish [Figure 15]. Making one's own cachets for every U.S. issue is a daunting task, with about 120 new U.S. issues per year. Some collectors make cachets only for their collections, while others produce them to sell. Producing cachets stimulates research on each issue. But, cachet production and self-servicing FDCs is not always easy. Post office clerks vary widely in their interest, knowledge, and co-operation in canceling FDCs. Sometimes official first day of issue cancels are too large to fit conveniently with a cachet on a standard-size envelope. Local first day of sale events often are not publicized in advance, making it difficult to timely prepare covers to service and to attend the event. All of these represent challenges to present-day FDC collectors who service their own covers.

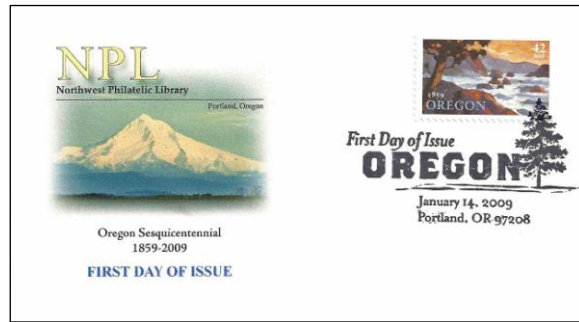


Figure 15. A computer-produced FDC cachet

Despite the foregoing issues, many collectors are attracted to FDC collecting. The reasons can be difficult to define, but they often are deeply ingrained in a person. The FDC “bug” has “bitten.” Perhaps it is the uniqueness of a new issue canceled on its first day of issue in contrast to the stamp being canceled on any other day. Many FDC collectors are attracted to the cachets, which contribute to the lure of the cover and from which one can learn more about the subject of the stamp. At present, there is a core of FDC collectors who are enthralled with hand-drawn/hand-painted cachets, which often are truly miniature works of art [Figure 16]. These collectors avidly follow the careers of cachetmakers and collect all of their work. The thrill of acquisition of an FDC for a collection often is a stimulus. If one collects earliest known usages, there is a thrill associated with discovering an earliest dated cover, especially if it is found in family correspondence.



Figure 16. A hand drawn/ hand painted cachet on an FDC

The aforementioned challenges to collecting FDCs present new opportunities to strengthen the collecting community. Since younger people are well connected to the internet, a method of reaching out to them is through this medium. Collectors who sell FDCs either by mail or on the internet could insert an application for membership in the American First Day Cover Society [AFDCS] with the merchandise. This at least provides the purchaser with an opportunity to become familiar with the Society and perhaps an incentive to join. The AFDCS has redesigned its website to make it more user-friendly and to offer more opportunities for interaction. For example, the Society sponsors FDC auctions where all lots are illustrated in color and bidding can be accomplished on the website.

Once the FDC “bug” has “bitten,” the new collector should be encouraged to join the AFDCS. Its award-winning journal is published eight times per year, and is filled with informative articles and regular features. The society also offers a number of FDC publications, including cachet catalogs, indices, and other publications on a wide variety of FDC subjects.

Many FDCs have the potential for stimulating youth because the stamp subjects often are of interest to them. Many young people will need a mentor to act as a catalyst to interest them in FDC collecting, such as my grandmother. Such a mentor could take these potential collectors to stamp shows and encourage them to interact with the dealers and view the exhibits if the show includes them. Potential new collectors should be encouraged to attend as many shows as possible. They also should be instructed on how to interact with online markets such as eBay, Delcampe, bidStart. These activities also can be directed towards retirees and people whose children are grown, who presumably have more time to devote to outside interests.

Most important is to demonstrate that FDC collecting is fun. This is exemplified in the annual AFDCS convention known as AMERICOVER. This is a national World Series of Philately show that differs from most of the others in the U.S. each year. The convention is held in a different city each year. One day prior to the convention, participants can visit local attractions on an organized tour. Features of the convention include: a first day ceremony or stamp dedication; seminars; craft sessions for spouses; auctions; a banquet at which winners of the annual cachetmakers contest are announced and a raffle is conducted; and a hospitality suite with its own silent auction and at which delightful camaraderie prevails. The convention also includes FDC exhibits, presentations by USPS officials, and a large cachetmakers bourse in addition to the dealers’ bourse. On the final evening, a dinner excursion and program is offered. Another interesting and informative activity is to attend nearby first day ceremonies. One can learn considerable history and meet fascinating people at these events.

I am confident that FDC collecting will thrive in the future. To achieve this, it will require hard work on the part of all FDC collectors.

[Ed. Note. Images were provided by the author. These images were purposely reduced in size to better blend with the commentary.]

Ralph Nafziger, a retired research chemist/supervisor, began collecting stamps at age seven. He now specializes in U.S. postal history [Oregon, World War I North Russia, Iowa, and Wisconsin], U.S. first day covers [especially Oregon, Wisconsin, Palomar, Viking-Mars issues, predates, unofficials, auxiliary markings, and Oregon cachetmakers], Rattlesnake Island Local Post, Hawaii, and used U.S., as well as Buick and French Horn topicals.

He is a member of the Oregon Stamp Society, Northwest Philatelic Library, APS, American First Day Cover Society [AFDCS], U.S. Stamp Society, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors, and the Auxiliary Markings Club [AMC]. He has published numerous articles in national philatelic journals and authored a chapter in the *Encyclopedia of U.S. Stamps and Stamp Collecting*. He is a recipient of the AFDCS Ward Award. He is an

award-winning national exhibitor, having recently won the Grand Award at AMERICOVER-2010. He is president of the AMC and serves as an associate editor of *First Days*. He is a member of the AFDCS Board of Directors and serves on the AFDCS expertizing committee.

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COLLECTING PHILATELIC “FAKES”

Philatelic fakes, forgeries and the like have always fascinated collectors. Forgeries seem to garner all the glory, but there are those collectors who find fakes to be fertile ground for research and useful reference additions to their collections. Fakes bedevil us and, deservedly, much has been written about them, mostly about how to detect them. So who “collects” fakes? And, why? We thought that we would ask one of our members, **Wayne Holmes** about this because we knew he had known fakes in his collection.

Wayne has followed a now conventional stamp collecting arc. He started collecting when he was eight years old and then took a long break after high school, resuming his collecting in the early 1990s specializing in U.S. He mentors other collectors and is a productive source of information. In 1998 he became what he refers to as an “accidental” dealer. We put this together as a Q&A session.

1. Do you carefully distinguish “fakes” and “forgeries?”

I suppose some use the terms together, but probably only as a conversational short-cut. I use a conventional distinction: a “fake” is a valid stamp, modified to be something else primarily to enhance its value; a ‘forgery’ is a fabricated stamp from start to finish, that is, in no way genuine - instead it is a copy of an original, and an “original” in its own right.

2. Since we’re talking about fakes, why do you think fakers ply their craft?

Probably a couple of reasons explain the desire to defraud collectors. First is the obvious financial motive; but, I also think there is a “creative” challenge in play here. I wouldn’t be surprised that some fakers do this because of the artistic challenge of fooling stamp collectors. I think there is less fear of immediate discovery for a good fake because they may be tucked away in a collection for a long period before anyone has cause to question it.

3. Books have been written about fakers and forgers. Why do they seem to be such appealing subjects?

I’ve seen those books - master forgers as heroes. I think they make appealing subjects because of the mystique: masterminds living on the edge while secretly expressing their manipulative artistic talents. They are appealing to me in only a dark sort of way.

4. **How many significant fakes do you own?**

I have five significant fakes of which I am aware. All are pairs or line pairs from the Washington-Franklin series. Most of my coils in this series were submitted for expertization either before I acquired them or after purchase.



5. **When you acquired them, did you know or suspect they were fakes?** I purchased all five at the same time at a local stamp show. These are relatively scarce items, have high catalog values, and are obvious candidates for expertization. In this case, there were no accompanying certificates. I knew the dealer, his stock and reputation, and had purchased from him previously. The asking price for the five items was dramatically lower than catalog and I bought them “as is.” So, yes, I was a wary buyer! I “knew,” just by looking, that two of the items were fakes; but, I thought the other three could be legitimate.

6. **At the time you discovered a stamp was fake you had several options of action available. Why did you decide to keep the fakes?**

I submitted all five items for expertization and all five came back with bad certificates. This was not a total surprise and not totally disappointing. The certificates did clarify their status. I decided then to keep them. There is great demand for Washington-Franklin material, especially the coils - they’re hard to find and often difficult to interpret. I was drawn to them as fakes and as a collector and student of Washington-Franklin material. I consider each of my fakes to be a piece of philatelic history and valuable ancillary material. These are genuine stamps, but they purport to represent others. I think that the process to get from one to the other is intriguing.



An imperforate pair, Scott 347, with subsequently added perforations of the wrong shape and size in an attempt to create the more valuable coil, Scott 355.

7. **So you have you integrated these fakes into your collection? How?**

Yes. Each coil pair is mounted, along with an accompanying typed description of its status as a fake on a separate album page placed directly behind the genuine coils in the Washington-Franklin section. I never keep any of my certificates with the stamps. If the stamps should ever be stolen, at least the thief won’t get the certificates.

8. Have you ever used your fakes as a teaching device?

Again, yes. I loaned these to a colleague to use in an article on the various signs to look for when expertizing flat plate coils. [Ed. - Charles Neyhart, "U.S. Flat Plate Coil Fakery," *Book Reports*, August & September, 2008.] He used one of my fakes as the exemplar to compare to a genuine coil subject.

9. Reverend R.B. Earée, in his *Album Weeds*, was evangelical about removing "weeds" from circulation. Do you agree with his motivation in this regard to fakes?

In regard to fakes and forgeries - a resounding "no," although there must be proper labeling. I don't think it necessary to remove them from sight by destroying them. These items can serve an educational purpose. The "Orangeburg coil" is a good example. When the Philatelic Foundation reference collection was illustrated [Ed. - Richard Debney, "The Philatelic Foundation's Photographic Collection and Its Use in Making a Census of Scott No. 389," *Opinions VII*, 2006], I found both the good and bad subjects to be equally interesting and useful.

Ed. The October 2010 issue of *The United States Specialist* reported that the Philatelic Foundation has created a searchable internet database of PF certificates with images of the opinions. This can be accessed at www.philatelicfoundation.org.

10. When your collection enters the marketplace, what will likely happen to the fakes?

I'm beginning to acknowledge this situation and what you might be getting at here. I realize that despite my best intentions and trust in my executor, a buyer may simply discard the bad certificates and label the fakes as good for nefarious reasons. I suppose I could destroy the stamps, but then they no longer provide historical perspective and lose educational value. I have given some thought to imprinting the fakes with a distinctive mark, much like we used to see on purposely created fakes. This mark would be enduring, but would not obscure the things that make the stamp identifiable as a fake. I would probably place this mark on the back of the stamps so as not to detract from their appearance. But, no, I haven't done that yet with my fakes.

11. Have you considered donating these to an expertizing reference collection?

I probably wouldn't do this. While I think I understand why others do it, I'm concerned that the educational value of the fake would be lost, except to a tiny group of specialists. "Out of sight, out of mind." Plus, it doesn't make much sense that a collector has to pay \$25 or more to get only one-time indirect access to the fakes. I might consider donating the fakes to a reference collection in which some form of directed educational access would be openly granted. Northwest Philatelic Library, with its impending research lab, could be a possibility here.

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LIT ADDITIONS

The following titles have been added, through donation or purchase, to the NPL Collection.

Dr. Frank Bottomley, **The Franking System in the Post Office 1652 – 1840**, Society of Postal Historians, 1988. [Michael Dixon]

Wei-Liang Chow, **Shanghai Large Dragons, The First Issue of the Shanghai Local Post**, Margot Chow, 1996. [Vance Terrall]



Marshall Cushing, **The Story of Our Post Office, The Greatest Government Department in All its Phases**, A.M. Thayer & Co., 1892. [Robert C. Campbell]

J.A. Daynes, ed., **World War Two Censor Marks**, Forces Postal History Society, 1984. [Michael Dixon]

Nicholas Follansbee, **Catalogue of the Stamps of Mexico, 1856-1900**, Author, 1998. [Vance Terrall]

Michael Goldsmith & Charles W. Goodwyn, **The Crown Colony of Wei Hai Wei**, Royal Philatelic Society, London, 1985. [Michael Dixon]

H.M. Postmaster General, **Post Office Guide, July 1949**, Post Office, London. [Charles Neyhart]

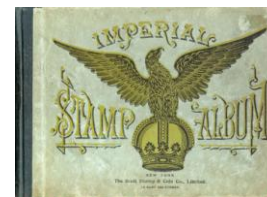
E.B. Jones, **Jones's Check List of Philatelic Journals, Great Britain and Colonies**, Author, 1907. [Tom Current]

Malcolm G. Lowe, **The Mulready Advertisements**, Mulready Research Foundation, 1983. [Michael Dixon]

Larry Lyons, ed., **Opinions VIII: Philatelic Expertizing – An Inside View**, Philatelic Foundation, 2010.

Ron Mitchell, **Mexico's Denver Printing of 1914, Postage and Revenue Stamps for the Provisional Constitutionalist Government**, Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library, 2010. [RMPL]

Scott Stamp & Coin, **Imperial Stamp Album**, 1899.



Gebruder Senf, **Senf's Illustrierter Briefmarken-Katalog, Worldwide 1931**. [Charles Neyhart]

Gebruder Senf, **Senf's Illustrierter Briefmarken-Katalog, Europa 1941**. [Charles Neyhart]

Colin Tabcart, **Steam Conquers the World**, Society of Postal Historians, 1999. [Michael Dixon]



David Tett, **A Postal History of the Prisoner of War and Civilian Internees in East Asia During the Second World War, Volume 5: Philippines and Taiwan 1942-1945**, BFA, 2009. [CHICAGOPEX 2009]

Richard F. Winter, **The Richard F. Winter Collection of U.S. – France Mails by Steamship: 1838 to General Postal Union**, Society of Postal Historians, 1998. [Michael Dixon]

1893 World's Fair Columbian Exposition; 1901 Pan-American Exposition; St. Louis World's Fair, DVDs [Digitized compendia of books, reports, art and world's fair ephemera], Quantum-Quantum, 2009. [Greg Alexander].

Journals

Confederate Philatelist, Vol. 54, 2009; **South Atlantic Chronicle**, Vol. 34, 2009; and **Civil Censorship Study Group Bulletin**, vol. 36, 2009 [CHICAGOPEX 2009]. **Stamp Collector's Magazine**, Vol. 2, No. 12, Jan. 1, 1864 [Tom Current]. **London Philatelist**, CD, 1892-2007 [Michael Dixon]. **Canal Zone Philatelist**, **SOSI Journal** [Ron Sumner].

Jack Darkins and **Phyllis Redman** provided financial consideration in support of NPL's literature acquisition program.

WIN IBERT LITERATURE DONATION

NPL member and proprietor of Panorama Stamps of Portland, Oregon, **Win Ibert** has added the following titles to the NPL Collection.

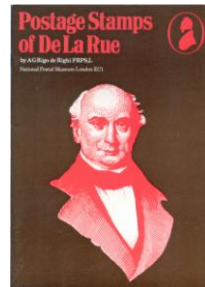
Charles Hornal Aberdeen, **Notes on Postmarks on First Issue India**, Author, n.d.

F. Marcus Arman, **The Art Nouveau of King George V**, National Postal Museum London, n.d.

Austrian Post Office, **Airmail Transport**, Ministry of Posts, 1951.

A.G. Rigo de Righi, **350 Years of Anglo-American Postal Relations**, National Postal Museum, London, 1970.

A.G. Rigo de Righi, **Postage Stamps of De La Rue**, National Postal Museum London, n.d.



Jean Farrugia, **The Life and Work of Sir Rowland Hill, 1795-1879**, National Postal Museum London, 1973.



Hans E. Gaudard, **Designs for Swiss Postage Stamps; Issue 1936 to 1941**, Director General of Posts, 1945.

H.R. Harmer, **The Louise Boyd Dale and Alfred F. Lichtenstein Collections**; Sale 10 – Canada, Auction Catalog, December 1970.

H.E. Harris & Co., **How to Sell Stamps to H.E. Harris & Co.**, 1956.

Major M. Haubourdin, **Catalogue des Timbres 10%**, Vols. 1 and 2, Echo Philatelique, 1958.

W.J. Hoffman, **The Catalogue of Marian Stamps**, Marian Philatelic Study Group, 1966.

Max G. Johl, **United States Postage Stamps of the Twentieth Century**, Vol. III: 1922-35, Parcel Post, Airmail, H.L. Lindquist, 1935.

R. William Larsen, ed., **Philatelic Sidelines No. 3**, n.d.

John N. Luff, **What Philately Teaches**, Scott Stamp & Coin Co., 1915.

Dr. Herbert Munk, **Kohl Briefmarken Handbuch**, 11th ed., Parts 1, 2, 4, 1926, 1933, 1933.



Philipps Fine Art, **The R.E. Phillips Collection of British Telegraph Stamps**, Auction Catalog, March 1987.

Major Hans v. Rudolphi, **Handbuch der Briefmarkunde**, Band 1, 1925.

Jean Silombra, **Catalogue de la Poste Aerienne**, 7th, 1952.

Unknown author, **The Postal Stationery of Australia**; Part IV, Registered Envelopes, B.C. Darke, 1978.



Takeshi Watanabe, **Magpie Moth: Illustrated Varieties for Sheet Reconstruction**, Peter Oldham, 1977.

N.C. Yang, **The Postage Stamp Catalogue of the People's Republic of China** (Before and After Liberation of China), Wah Nan Stamp Service, 1955.

Robert A. Siegel Auction Catalogs:

Clifford C. Cole, Jr. Collection of United States Postage Issue [February 1988]; British North America [March 1988]; United States Back of the Book and Confederate States Issues [May 1988]; British Commonwealth [May 1988]; Worldwide Postage Stamps [October 1988]; United States Stamps and Covers [November 1988].

Isleham Collection of Classic Japan [May 1986]; United States Stamps [May 1986].

Gordon N. John Collection of Classic Argentina – The Rivadavia Issues, July 1985; Classic Brazil – The ‘Bulls Eye’ Issue of 1843, May 1986.



Kapiloff Collection of United States 1847 Issue, June 1992.

Wunsch Collection of United States Postal Stationery, December 1989.

In addition, NPL received selected issues of the following philatelic journals: **Aero Field, Czechoslovak Specialist, GB Journal, Monthly Air Mail, Pat Paragraphs, and Postal Markings.**

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IN APPRECIATION

To those generous individuals listed below who have made recent donations of literature and other consideration to NPL.

<i>Greg Alexander</i>	<i>John Blakemore</i>	<i>Robert Campbell</i>
<i>Tom Current</i>	<i>Jack Darkins</i>	<i>Robert Delker</i>
<i>Michael Dixon</i>	<i>Charles Neyhart</i>	<i>Chris Pollock</i>
<i>Michael Prendergast</i>	<i>Phil Quarterman</i>	<i>Phyllis Redman</i>
<i>Ron Sumner</i>	<i>Vance Terrall</i>	<i>Janice Weinstock</i>

We THANK YOU All for your Support!

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RESEARCH STUMPER ... VII

Every now and then, we are faced with interesting questions. So, we thought we would bring them to you in the form of a **CONTEST**. Here is our sixth “Stumper.”

The item in question is a non-denominated item with the caption “Viet Nam” with the printed dates “1944-1979.” The banner across the bottom may be explanatory. The “stumper” is to identify the item and explain its usage.



If you have a plausible **SOLUTION**, submit it to NPL. We will write it up in a future issue of *Book Reports* and give **you** full attribution.

Submissions should be written. Document your solution to the extent practicable. The “best” solution will be determined by NPL. [Wayne Holmes provided the item for this “Stumper.”]

...

Should you wish to comment on this issue of *Book Reports*, or have questions to bring to the attention of our readers, please send those to us.

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