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Mulready facsimile envelopes were widely used by U.S. stamp dealers in the 19th century. This cover, created by Boston dealer E. A. Holton, was sent registered in 1883 to Modena, Italy. The addressee, Charles (Carlos) Dena, was a brother of the more famous Emilio Dena, who founded the Italian stamp dynasty that still endures. From Steven Belasco's continuing series exploring the postal history of U.S. stamp collecting in the 19th century, page 155.

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CANCELLATIONS SHOWING REVERSED STOPPER SIZE NUMBERS

RICHARD D. SHEAFF

Here is a little something we can all look to spot while browsing through covers at stamp shows large and small: rubber-stopper size numbers in Banknote-era cancellations.

Tapered corks and vulcanized rubber stoppers (also called bungs) were and still are sold in a great number of different sizes. Rubber stoppers commonly had their size numbers molded into the top (widest) end, standing up in relief. Although Post Office Department regulations prohibited the use of rubber cancellation devices in 1883 (1883 *U.S. Postal Guide*, pages 764-65) and specified that cancellation devices be made of metal, hundreds—probably thousands—of postmasters, particularly in smaller towns, used corks, vulcanized rubber stoppers or pieces of wood to create their own cancellers. They simply inked up an appropriately sized cork as-is, or carved a wide variety of geometric or figurative designs, some quite elaborate. When postmasters used rubber stoppers, they often left the molded size number in the center, even when carving a design into the surface. These vestigial numbers (generally reversed) are sometimes clear on stamps and covers. Illustrated in Figure 1 are 1¢, 3¢ and 6¢ Bank Note stamps cancelled by size 3 bottle stoppers. The first two are uncarved, while the 6¢ is carved into a grid design. A tracing is also shown.

Alan Campbell includes several examples in his award-winning exhibit “United States Official Stamps, 1873-1884.” Some of these are shown in Figure 2. The wide range of carved designs is quite interesting to find on Official (departmental) stamps. Campbell notes that the reversed number “3” is the number most commonly found. Presumably this



Figure 1. 1¢, 3¢ and 6¢ Bank Note stamps cancelled by size 3 bottle stoppers, with a surface image of the device shown in the tracing at left. The strikes on the 1¢ and 3¢ stamps are uncarved, while the marking on the 6¢ is carved into a grid design.



Figure 2. Examples of bottle stoppers used as cancellations on U.S. Official stamps, from the collection of Alan C. Campbell. Note the intricately carved cross and star designs.

was a size widely used in bottles of the era, as well as an appropriate size for cancelling a postage stamp. Figure 3 illustrates a mirrored image of an “Eagle” brand bottle stopper in the shape of a hexagon on a 3¢ War Department stamp.



Figure 3. A mirrored image of an “EAGLE” brand bottle stopper on a 3¢ War official stamp.

James Cole shows a dozen or so stopper-number examples in his *Cancellations and Killers of the Banknote Era, 1870-1894* (USPCS 1995, page 188), and includes a “2½” example from Plainfield, New Jersey, in a photograph on the book’s dust jacket.

Examples of additional half sizes are shown in Figure 4 with a tracing of a “5½”. Several other examples in Cole’s book list towns of origin. It would be an interesting challenge to identify towns associated with various size-number cancellations, as the bulk of examples found today are on loose stamps and thus offer few clues. Campbell assigns several of his examples on Official stamps to Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. The cover from Bloomington, Illinois, shown in Figure 5, bears a

1¢ Bank Note stamp cancelled by a “2” bottle stopper. It lacks a circular datestamp because third-class mail regulations forbade dated postmarks.



Figure 4. Examples of additional half sizes of “2½” and “4½” on 6¢ Bank Note stamps, with a tracing of a size “5½” bottle stopper shown at left.

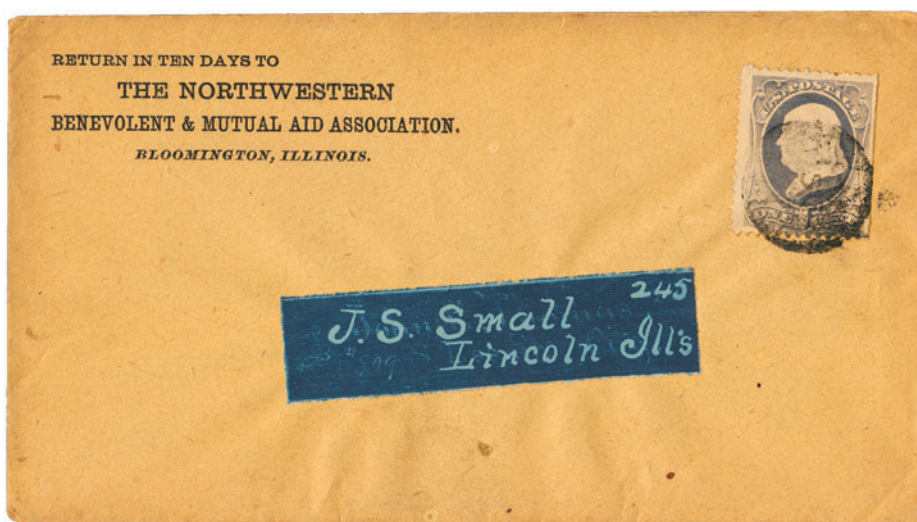


Figure 5. Bottle stopper “2” ties a 1¢ Bank Note stamp to this cover from Bloomington, Illinois, to Lincoln, Illinois, paying the 1¢ circular mail rate.

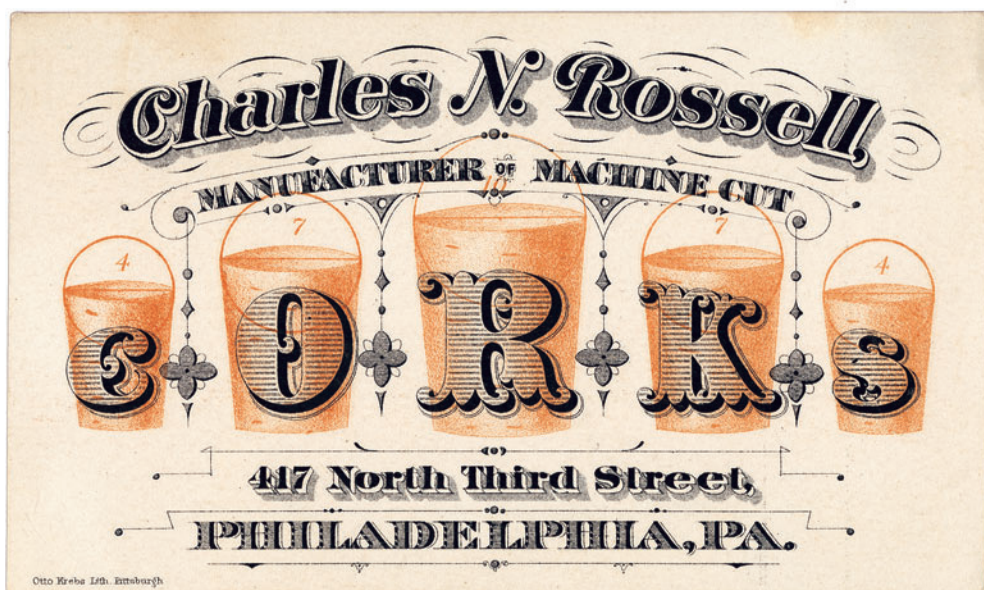


Figure 6. Front and reverse of a Bank-Note-era trade card for a Philadelphia supplier of natural cork stoppers, offering 13 sizes. Printed by the Pittsburgh firm of Otto Krebs.

Figure 6 illustrates the front and reverse of a Bank-Note-era trade card for a Philadelphia supplier of natural cork stoppers, printed by the Pittsburgh firm of Otto Krebs, offering 13 different sizes. Nineteenth century standard cork sizes differed from more modern sizes. Some rubber stopper sizes differed from natural cork sizes, and U.S. standards have not always matched overseas standards. The full range of stopper sizes—cork or rubber—exceeds 600.

A group of patent medicines are illustrated in Figure 7. Note that the “Hardy’s Internal Anodyne” bottle has a rubber stopper with the number “5”.



Figure 7. A group of various patent medicines, including a large bottle of “Hardy’s Internal Anodyne,” sealed with a rubber stopper bearing the number “5”.

Rubber stoppers for laboratory use often have one or two holes bored through them, for glass tubing to pass through. Though I have not seen one, I anticipate that somewhere out there may be found Bank-Note-era cancellations with one or two small white circles. As this article shows, there are always interesting subjects to seek out while browsing stamp bourses.■