



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 50 Number: 4 Year: 1998 Chronicle: 180

Article: Color Cancellation on U.S. Official Stamps, 1873- 1874

Author(s): Alan C. Campbell

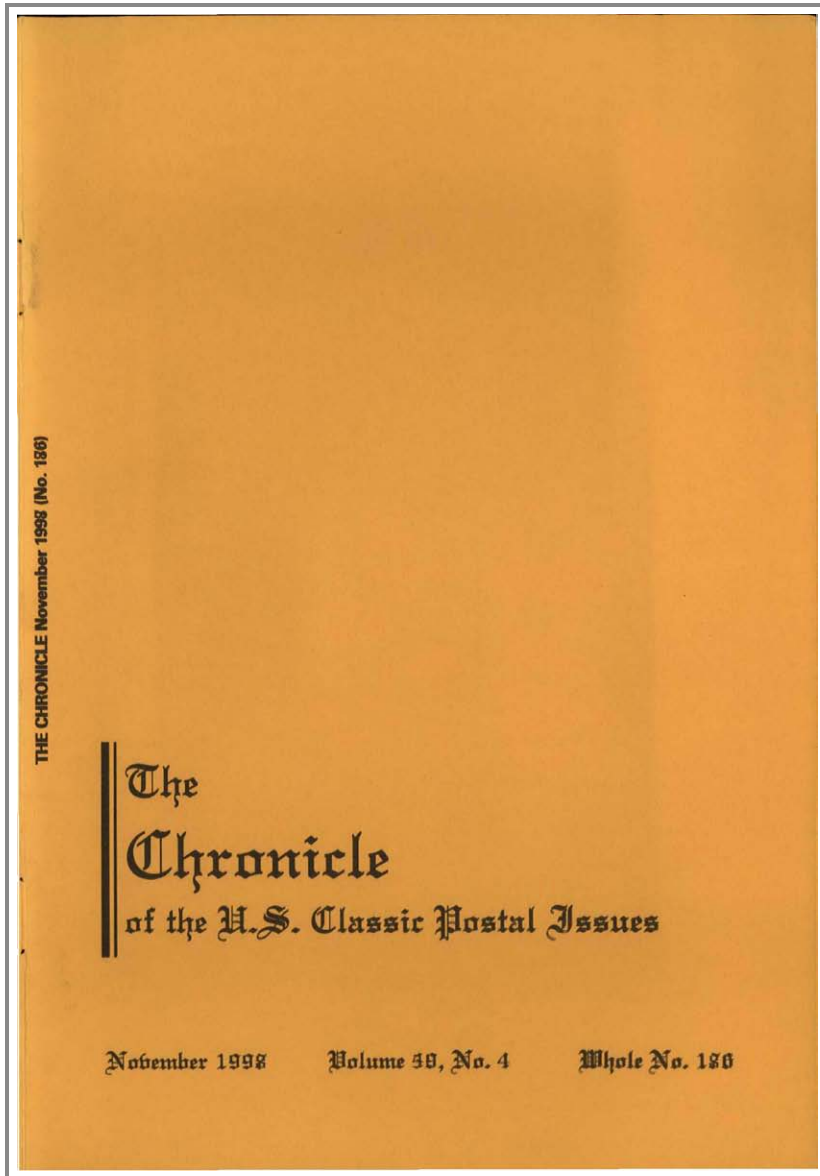


Table Of Contents

items marked with * cannot be viewed as an individual PDF document

[Click here to view the entire Volume: 50 No: 4 Chronicle: 180](#)

Starting Page

Front Cover (1 page)	Front Cover
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Jack E. Molesworth, Inc.	Inside Front Cover
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Shreves Philatelic Galleries, Inc.	241
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Spink	242
Masthead (1 page)	243
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Victor B. Krievins	244
Table of Contents (1 page)	245
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.	246
Prestamp and Stampless Period	
The Express Mail of 1803-1804 (8 pages) <i>Van Koppersmith</i>	247
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Matthew Bennett Inc.	255
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Ivy & Mader Philatelic Auctions, Inc.	256
Carriers and Independent Mails	
Are There Really Bogus Locals? (5 pages) <i>Calvet M. Hahn</i>	257
S.C.R.A.P.	
10 Cent 1845 Baltimore Postmaster's Provisional (S.C.R.A.P. Number 81-022-00) (2 pages) <i>Michael J. Brown</i>	262
1851-61 Period	
The United State s-British North America Cross-Border Mails: Their Unique Aspects, Peculiarities and Markings. Including Cancels Designed to Kill Postmarks (5 pages) <i>Hubert C. Skinner</i>	264
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: U.S. Philatelic Classic Society	268
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Guido Craveri	269
The Lithographed General Issues of the Confederate States of America. Stone 2. Fill-ups (10 pages) <i>Leonard H. Hartmann</i>	270
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Andrew Levitt, Inc.	280
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Charles G. Firby	281
1869 Period	
The Two Cent Line Office Rate between U.S. and Canada (4 pages) <i>Jeffrey M. Forster</i>	282
Bank Note Period	
The Relief Breaks of the Two Cent Washingtons: the American Bank Note Company Issue of 1890. Scott #219D and 220 (4 pages) <i>Richard M. Morris</i>	286
The Ultimate Destination (3 pages) <i>Eliot A. Landau</i>	290
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Taylor Made Company	292
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Leonard H. Hartmann	292
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: Brad Sheff	293
Officials	
Color Cancellation on U.S. Official Stamps. 1873- 1874 (13 pages) <i>Alan C. Campbell</i>	294
Display Advertisement (1 page) Advertiser: U.S. Philatelic Classic Society	306
Foreign Mails	
The Chicago Exchange Office and Pre-U.P.U. Mail to Canada (6 pages) <i>Leonard Piskiewicz</i>	307
The Cover Corner	
Additional Answer to Problem Cover in Issue 177 (1 page) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	313
Answer to Problem Cover in Issue 178 (3 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	313
Answer to Problem Cover in Issue 179 (2 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	315
Problem Covers For Issue 180 (3 pages) <i>Ray W. Carlin</i>	317

The Editor's Page

[Postscript to Volume 50](#) (1 page)

Charles J. Peterson

319

[Index to Advertisers](#) (1 page)

320

[Classified](#) (1 page)

320

[Display Advertisement](#) (1 page) Advertiser: Steven Hines

320

[Display Advertisement](#) (1 page) Advertiser: James E. Lee

Inside Back
Cover

[Display Advertisement](#) (1 page) Advertiser: Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.

Back Cover

COLOR CANCELLATION ON U. S. OFFICIAL STAMPS, 1873-1874
ALAN C. CAMPBELL

Introduction

Since the second edition of 1924, the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of U. S. Stamps* has listed premiums for color cancellations on the departmental stamps O1-O120 (originally #1500-1634). In the beginning, there were 224 listings, and by the twelfth edition of 1937, there were 334, but since then, only four items have been added, making a grand total of 338 entries in the 1998 edition. Over the years, the pace of new discoveries was bound to slow down, but the dearth of new listings in the past sixty years is truly pathetic, symptomatic of the disfavor and apathy which has plagued these issues. Some years back, I set myself the daunting task of assembling complete sets of each department in all the listed colors. I then found that other advanced collectors, including those who specialize in single departments, had independently accepted the same challenge. By now, we have all come to the same bittersweet conclusion, that in this pursuit completion is only a relative term. Unless we resort to cheating (unused stamps, whittled corks, bottles of multi-hued inks) to furtively fill in the missing values, we will all still be hunting patiently until the day our albums are finally closed. Given the state of friendly cooperation that now exists in our speciality, I decided to conduct a census to establish how far we as a group had gotten in our quest. In reporting the results of this survey, my intention is not just to expand and clarify the catalogue listings, but also to explain whenever possible why we find what we do. In collecting color cancellations, it is the aesthetic impulse which first attracts us: who can resist a boldly struck red cancel on a deep green Department of State adhesive? In an era when the postal regulations repeatedly insisted that only black printer's ink should be used to obliterate stamps, we are indebted to all the defiant postmasters who proudly and happily poured colored ink on their stamp pads. But as we shall see, in many cases the use of colored inks was not just a matter of caprice or whimsy, but depended on the evolving technology of postmarking devices, or perhaps on a system for coding mail requiring special handling.

Since official mail bearing departmental stamps was handled by the post offices in exactly the same manner as private mail, the same postmarks and obliterations struck in the same inks will be found on the official stamps as on the large Bank Note regular issues. Two factors, though, severely restrict the range of cancellations to be found on official stamps: narrow distribution, and the introduction of stampless penalty envelopes in 1877. Some departments used their stamps almost exclusively in Washington, D.C. Outside of the nation's capital, Executive stamps were affixed only at President Grant's summer home in Long Branch, New Jersey, and Department of State stamps were added only by the dispatch agent in New York, N. Y. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Post Office Department official stamps were furnished in the fiscal year 1874 (July 1, 1873 to June 30, 1874) to 33,780 postmasters across the country. Penalty envelopes were immediately popular, and when their authorized usage was extended to the field offices outside of Washington, D.C. in 1879, it had a chilling effect on the use of official stamps, with rapidly dwindling requisitions for all departments except War, which stubbornly persisted in using official adhesives and stamped envelopes until they were declared obsolete in 1884. But limitations on the use of penalty envelopes—not accepted by foreign governments, invalid for field office correspondence with private citizens, supplemental postage required for registry—meant that for all departments except the Executive Office itself (which ordered no stamps after fiscal year 1877), official stamps to a lesser extent were still in use

until 1884. Thus many of them can be found with the different colors of canceling inks utilized with the commercial duplex rubber handstamps which came into widespread use in 1877. Due to the lack of available covers, all marcophily studies on the official stamps must be extrapolated from research on the concurrent large Bank Note regular issues. Therefore, a brief summary of the evolution of canceling devices during this period is in order.¹

Evolution of Canceling Devices during the Bank Note Era

From 1851 on, the postal guidelines stipulated the use of black printer's ink for handstamps and black writing ink for pen cancellations. The purpose was twofold: to obliterate the stamp indelibly so as to prevent its reuse, and to produce a clear, legible postmark. "Legible postmarking is of the greatest importance to the public as evidence before the courts, in business transactions conducted through the mails, and in fixing the responsibility where mail has been improperly handled by postal officials."² Fortunately, this requirement was widely ignored. Long before 1883, when the Post Office Department officially prohibited vulcanized rubber handstamps because they could not be used with black printer's ink, some of the largest post offices in the country had routinely been using colored canceling ink.

The 1860 prohibition against using the postmark to cancel the stamp was soon followed by the introduction of "duplex" handstamps, with the town datestamp and obliterator combined in one device. According to its 1866 regulations, the Post Office Department furnished cancelers to all the larger post offices: Class I (annual revenue exceeding \$1,000) received steel duplex devices, Class II (annual revenue between \$500 and \$1,000) received iron postmarks, and Class III (annual revenue between \$100 and \$500) received wooden postmarks. The postmasters at the small fourth class post offices were left to their own own devices, so to speak, and had to purchase their datestamps and cancelers out of pocket. E.S. Zevely, the brother of the Third Assistant Postmaster General, capitalized on this connection and became the leading supplier of boxwood cancelers, furnishing them under government contract to third class post offices and selling them to fourth class post offices. In 1877, vulcanized rubber duplex handstamps became widely popular among small town postmasters, and several suppliers continued to advertise them in the *U. S. Postal Guide* even after 1883, when the regulations first expressly forbade their use. In 1882, the F.P. Hammond Company of Chicago and Aurora, Illinois was offering steel, brass, ribbon, and vulcanized rubber handstamps.

The ribbon daters, incorporating a dry carbon ribbon like a typewriter instead of a wet ink pad, are seldom found struck on official stamps. Mandel states: "Close examination of such markings reveals that they are composed of numerous small dots, reflecting the texture of carbonized ribbon. This is usually not a feature of normal handstamps, except that one may occasionally notice some texture from the grain of wooden handstamps."³ Strikes of the commercially made cancelers—be they cast metal, molded rubber,

¹Much of the information in the following section is derived from the following sources: Arthur H. Bond, "19th Century Development of Postal Markings," in J. David Baker, *The Postal History of Indiana* (Louisville, Kentucky: Leonard H. Hartmann, 1976), pp. 361-90; Richard B. Graham, "Postmarks and Postmarking Devices of the Bank Note Era," in James M. Cole, *Cancellations and Killers of the Bank Note Era, 1870-1894* (Columbus, OH: U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., 1995), pp. 1-17; Frank Mandel, "The Development of Handstamped Markings in the United States to 1900," in *U.S. Postmarks and Cancellations* (New York: The Philatelic Foundation, 1992), pp. 11-44.

²1897 *Report of the Postmaster General*, cited by Stephen J. Shebetich, "Inks Used for Cancellation and Postmarks at the Turn of the Century," *The United States Specialist*, November 1989, p. 599.

or machine-engraved wood—are readily distinguished from hand-carved devices strictly on a stylistic basis, the former being more regular, sharper, and better detailed. The steel devices especially were more durable and could last for years, whereas the soft corks began wearing down after a few days, with the struck image gradually degrading. As for identifying on canceled stamps the exact substrate material used in a given device, it is often impossible to confidently distinguish cork from hardwood or softwood, and vulcanized rubber from steel, iron or copper.

After the grilling of stamps was discontinued, concerns over the reuse of lightly canceled stamps persisted, and many experimental canceling devices were patented that scraped or punctured the stamp. Strikes of these are seldom encountered on official stamps, the patent cancelers used in Louisville, Kentucky being the most commonly found. Machine cancels have been reported as early as 1871, and may go back at least to 1863. A Palmer and Clark device was utilized in Washington, D.C. in 1876, but has never been recorded on an official stamp. The more popular Leavitt canceling machines did not adjust well to the varying thickness of letters, so their use was primarily restricted to postal cards. None of the early precancels have been found on official stamps. About 95% of the 33,780 post offices across the country did too little business to entitle them to receive government-issue cancelers, and it has been estimated that 20% of these handled so little mail that they were still using manuscript postmarks in 1870. Since mail franked with official stamps was seldom posted at the tiniest post offices, pen cancellations are not common, and as one would expect, are most often found on the 3¢ Post Office stamp.

For the large post offices, the term “government-issue canceler” implies a degree of standardization and uniformity which does not really obtain. The steel circular datestamps vary widely from city to city in their diameter, font and typeface, and the interchangeable type for the hour and year date was incorporated at different times in different places. Not all postmarks were duplexed with the obliterator, the most notable example being the famous foreign mail cancellations of New York City. In Chicago and Washington, D.C., duplex devices were utilized, but when multiple frankings required more than one strike of the obliterator, the postmark portion was carefully masked off on the second strike. This meticulous concern to comply with postal regulations is confirmed by the occasional cover showing a trace of the rim of a second circular datestamp (CDS) adjacent to the second strike of the obliterator. However, the postal clerks in Cincinnati were less meticulous and more expedient, wielding steel duplex devices with blue ink so as to cancel two adjoining stamps in a single stroke whenever possible, judging from the large number of socked-on-the-nose postmarks which have survived. These are most commonly found on Justice and Treasury stamps.

Cincinnati’s characteristic steel obl iterators, descended from the typical targets and circular barred grids of the previous decade, were an exception. On most of the government-issue cancelers, the obliterator was not a permanent fixed casting but a slug of some carvable material, held in a socket by a set screw and easily replaced. It had been found in the 1860s that softer materials like cork, even though they wore out much more quickly, did a far better job of obliterating the stamp, absorbing and delivering the ink best when scored in relief. Since most cancellation collectors prefer the variety and artistry of the carved obl iterators, it is a blessing that the monotonous barred ellipse steel cancelers did not become popular in the larger cities until the late 1870s. The system of assigning a specific numeral to a postal clerk, first developed in New York in 1874 and adapted by Boston with letters in 1878, was initially accomplished using carved devices. The second series in Boston, with large negative serif letters and numerals, was made of machined wood. When this system was adopted in Cincinnati in 1877, Philadelphia in 1879, Washington, D.C. in 1880, and Louisville, Kentucky in 1882, crisp numerals in circular targets were achieved

by ordering matching sets of steel cast cancelers.⁴ Legibility was critical for the obliterator too, now that it carried important information like the postmark. John Goldsborough's barred ellipse steel duplex cancelers were first utilized in New York in 1876, with a letter in the ellipse identifying a clerk at the main post office, or a numeral identifying one of the branch stations. At their height, the barred ellipse cancelers were used in all large cities and many smaller cities and towns as well.

The first practical mold and vulcanizing equipment for making rubber handstamps was developed by J.F.W. Dorman of Baltimore in 1870, but their use was not widespread until 1877. Ordered from the advertisements of various manufacturers and distributors in the *U.S. Postal Guide*, these duplex devices had a customized postmark and a choice of standard obliterators. The more popular designs were sold to small town postmasters all across the country, who utilized them with a variety of colored inks. Strikes of the same obliterator can be found in black, blue, purple, violet, magenta and rarely in red. Rubber handstamps of the smaller manufacturers might have a limited regional distribution and be utilized with only a single color of ink—*e.g.*, black for in-period strikes of C.A. Klinker's famous "Kicking Mule." Out in the hinterlands, far from the watchful eye of the main Post Office Department in Washington, D.C., small town postmasters did not take such scrupulous care to avoid canceling stamps with the duplexed postmark. This resulted in the surprising circumstance that on official stamps, socked-on-the-nose postmarks from tiny territorial and fort post offices are often easier to find than those from much larger eastern cities.

Canceling Inks

The Post Office Department paid for the canceling ink used at first and second class post offices but did not provide it. Since they were being reimbursed for it, it was assumed that responsible postmasters would procure a good quality of ink from local suppliers. But at the smaller post offices, ink of various colors and grades was purchased at the postmaster's own expense, often from the commercial handstamp vendors.

Those postmasters who deviated from the use of black printer's ink must have done so for a variety of reasons. They might have wanted their postmarks to assert a distinctive identity for their town; black printer's may not have been available locally, or a supplier might have had a more workable product to offer; cancelers made of new materials might have required experimentation; or there could have been a perceived need to code different types of outgoing mail, in the way registry markings were typically struck in blue, and pre-paid letters were once struck in red to distinguish them from unpaid letters struck in black. Evidence to document a specific reason for using colored canceling ink is hard to come by, though, and the authors of several recent definitive monographs have been loathe to speculate. In *The New York Foreign Mail Cancellation of 1870-1878*, William R. Weiss Jr. records the relative scarcity of strikes in red and claret, but does not advance a theory on why different colors of canceling ink were used simultaneously. He is skeptical of so-called "brown" NYFM cancellations, and believes that claret is not a true ink color, but a combination of red and black.⁵ These large geometric obliterators, non-duplexed, were carved from boxwood.

In *Chicago Blue Cancellations, 1870-1877*, Berg is silent on why this distinctive canceling ink was used exclusively during 1873-1877, before the steel barred ellipse cancelers were adopted. Barbara Wallace implies that the artistry of these carved corks

³Mandel, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴Roger D. Curran, "Circular Killers with a Number or Letter," *USCC News*, Winter 1991, pp. 79-82.

⁵William R. Weiss, Jr., *The Foreign Mail Cancellation of New York 1870-1878* (Bethlehem, Pa.: The Author, 1990), pp. 28, 56.

reflected a new civic pride, the city just having been rebuilt after the disastrous fire of 1871.⁶ The notion that an emblematic color of canceling ink might have been introduced just as a point of distinction, does not seem totally implausible. It also seems reasonable that postmasters in other growing Midwestern cities, after seeing and admiring this blue ink, might have decided to copy it, purchasing it from the same supplier perhaps, to bolster a distinctive Midwestern style of postmarking. The blue ink worked equally well with steel cancelers (Cincinnati) and cut corks (Chicago), the clarity of the strikes one finds approaching the sharpness of the New Orleans geometric corks, carved on an almost daily basis and usually struck in black (sometimes in blue). Judging from the consistently bold strikes we find, the postal clerks in New Orleans must have been especially conscientious about keeping their pads well-primed and their ink well-mixed, never allowing the pigment to settle into a murky sediment at the bottom of the pot. Compared to black printer's ink, virtually opaque on good strikes of the New Orleans geometrics, even the boldest strikes of the Chicago blues are more transparent, suggesting that the ink was a more dilute, less viscous emulsion. Perhaps postmasters in the Midwest had through trial and error come to find that blue ink was simply easier to work with, less prone to thicken and gum up the inking pads and cancelers.

What is certain, though, is that black printer's ink did not work well with the vulcanized rubber mold-cast cancelers which became so popular with small town postmasters in 1877. The Post Office Department's eventual prohibition of these devices in 1883, based on their incompatibility with black printer's ink, had less to do with the ink's color than its permanence. The Post Office Department (POD) had discovered that some of the inks developed and sold by the rubber handstamp manufacturers were fugitive by conducting tests involving solvents such as oxalic acid, ammonia soaps, chloroform and various oils. In 1877, at the request of Madison Davis, the Chief of the Stamp Division at the Post Office Department, a chemist in the Surgeon General's Office conducted tests on stamps treated with a colorless liquid that would supposedly become visible when the stamps were immersed in any of these solvents. He reported that the latent lines did become visible when treated with water soluble agents, but not when subjected to the oil-based "better solvents for the canceling inks now used by the Post Office Department."⁷ Certainly examples of handstamps struck with soluble canceling inks—soaked off covers but never subjected to the harsher chemicals used to wash canceled stamps for reuse—must reside in our collections, but have not been recognized as such. Arthur Bond stated that the distinctive purple canceling ink used in Washington, D.C. in 1878, and the indigo canceling ink used in 1879-1880 represent experimental trials by the POD to develop an indelible ink that would work with rubber handstamps. Heartened by the success of these trials, the *U.S. Postal Guide* for July 1878 lifted the restriction against colored canceling ink for the first time: ". . . colors other than black may be used, but the quality therefore must not be inferior to that mentioned in the regulations."⁸ Yet Bond also cited evidence in the POD library in Washington, D.C. that a satisfactory formulation for indelible colored inks for rubber handstamps was not perfected until 1883, after which the POD issued many rubber stamps for special service markings.⁹ In that same year, the POD prohibited the use of rubber handstamps by small town postmasters, presumably because it was not yet in a position to regulate and prevent the use of fugitive canceling inks obtained from rogue sources.

A thorough scientific study of these canceling inks is beyond the scope of this article. However, my guess is that the new inks formulated to work with rubber handstamps

⁶Paul K. Berg, *Chicago Blue Postal Markings* (Newport Beach, Ca.: P.K. Berg, 1992), p. vii.

⁷Letter from E. Ward of the Surgeon General's Office dated July 30, 1877, archival research courtesy of Dr. Dennis Schmidt.

⁸Bond, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 376.

were of a smoother consistency, with the coloring agent being a dye or lake dissolved into the oil medium instead of the iron oxide pigment dispersed through typical printer's inks. In the 1882 *U.S. Postal Guide*, two companies—T. H. Woodward of Cincinnati and H.W. Hubbard of New York—boasted that there was no aniline in their black canceling ink. Clearly, aniline dyes had been a problematic component of earlier experimental inks. As a collector of antique Oriental carpets, I am quite familiar with this first generation of synthetic dyes—noxiously bright in color relative to vegetal dyes, and notoriously fugitive. Some of the first dyes developed to pigment inks were discovered in experiments to develop deliberately fugitive printing inks that would dissolve and alter the stamp color if an attempt was made to wash off the cancellation.¹⁰ Synthetic dyes come in a range of colors, including aniline blues (developed in 1861) and black. Philatelists tend to associate aniline dyes with unnaturally bright colors that fluoresce under black light and bleed through to the back of the stamp. Since some canceling inks of the late nineteenth century did contain aniline dyes, legitimate period strikes in these inks may have been unjustly condemned as the work of fakers. Specialists familiar with the distinctive Washington, D.C. purple cancels of 1878 will have noticed that unusually juicy strikes in this ink do sometimes bleed through to the back of the stamp.

Through the mid-1880s, appropriations were sought so that a government-issue standard black printer's ink could be furnished to all the fourth class post offices. By the time this was finally accomplished in the 1890s, the results were about what one would expect from high-handed bureaucratic meddling: very disappointing. The First Assistant Postmaster General did not mince words:

The canceling ink furnished by the Department was generally reprobated by postmasters as being gummy and unfit for use, making it difficult to keep stamps and pads in proper order. An examination of the ink itself convinced me that it was of inferior quality, the coloring matter being so badly mixed with oil that they would separate when allowed to stand. It could not be used without a thorough stirring, and when not so handled by postmasters the oily portion was soon used off from the tops of the cans, leaving the balance unfit for use.¹¹

It sounds as if this government-issue ink had the consistency and workability of old-fashioned peanut butter. Despite the drawbacks in working with this oil-based product, during the period of usage for the official stamps, 1873-1884, most postmasters *did* utilize it in compliance with postal regulations. Years ago, an unpicked mixed lot of 10,000 National and Continental 3¢ green large Bank Notes yielded the following percentages of color cancellations: blue 8%, purple .04%, red .08% and pen 2%, with all the rest being conventional black printer's ink.¹²

Canceling Inks Utilized in Washington, D.C.

For official stamps, any marcophily study must begin with the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., for it was here that a majority of mail bearing official stamps was posted, emanating from the mail rooms of the great departmental headquarters. By the census of 1880, the twenty largest cities in the country according to population were:

1. New York, New York	1,206,299
2. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	847,170
3. Brooklyn, New York	566,663
4. Chicago, Illinois	503,185

¹⁰R.H. White, *Color in Philately* (New York: The Philatelic Foundation, 1979), p. 14.

¹¹1897 *Report of the Postmaster General*, cited by Stephen J. Shebetich, "Inks Used for Cancellation and Postmarks at the Turn of the Century," *The United States Specialist*, November 1989, p. 601.

¹²H.L. Wiley, *U. S. 3¢ Green, 1870-1887*, reprint ed. (Weston, Mass.: Triad Publications, 1979), p. 3.

5. Boston, Massachusetts	362,839
6. St. Louis, Missouri	350,518
7. Baltimore, Maryland	332,313
8. Cincinnati, Ohio	255,139
9. San Francisco, California	233,959
10. New Orleans, Louisiana	216,090
11. Washington, D.C.	177,624
12. Cleveland, Ohio	160,146
13. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	156,389
14. Buffalo, New York	155,134
15. Newark, New Jersey	136,508
16. Louisville, Kentucky	123,758
17. Jersey City, New Jersey	120,722
18. Detroit, Michigan	116,340
19. Milwaukee, Wisconsin	115,587
20. Providence, Rhode Island	104,857

Although Washington, D.C. was at the time only the eleventh largest city in the country, it can be stated with some certainty that well over half the official mail originated there. In a survey of the four omnibus collections of official stamps currently being exhibited, 270 of 463 covers, or 58%, originated in Washington, D. C., whereas New York, by far the largest city, accounted for only 19 of 463, or 4%. If anything, this survey understates the importance of Washington, D.C., since collectors actively seek out and prefer covers from other towns.

When the official stamps were first introduced in 1873, Washington, D.C. like most other first class post offices was using government-issue steel duplex cancelers, with the obliterations being replaceable carved devices (cork or wood) held in the steel socket by a set screw. Black printer's ink worked well with these type of cancelers. And yet, between 1873 and 1875, a red canceling ink was also used. I know of eight official covers from Washington, D.C. with red cancellations and all of these are local delivery usages except for a 3¢ Treasury to Baltimore which was missorted and received a red "Washington, D.C. Local" postmark. Extrapolating from this admittedly small survey, I would argue that red canceling ink was used there exclusively on local delivery mail, both official business and regular mail. On off-cover used official stamps, for all departments the value most commonly found with a Washington, D.C. red cancellation is the 2¢, the correct postage for a single weight "drop letter," which was mailed and delivered within Washington, D.C. without being transmitted to another post office. Yet many other values up to the 90¢ can be found with red cancellations, so these probably originated on Washington, D.C. local delivery heavy letters or parcels.

Since most of the surviving local rate covers with red cancellations also have carrier backstamps struck in red, this correlation suggests that a special ink was reserved to indicate mail handled by the carrier department. When free carrier service by the Post Office Department was instituted on July 1, 1863, the nation's capital was naturally included among the 49 cities where this service was provided. By 1874, 84 cities had carrier service, and by 1880, 101, with 48 carriers working out of the main Washington, D.C. post office and the Georgetown Station.¹³ Prior to 1879, when the Post Office Department began requiring receiving backstamps on all out-of-town mail, most cities with carrier service employed carrier backstamps which indicated the hour of the day and in some cases even the number of the delivery, since the largest cities then had up to seven deliveries a day in the business district and three in residential areas. The purpose of such markings

¹³*U.S. Official Postal Guide*, January 1880, p. 623.

was presumably to indicate that the mail was being handled expeditiously under the new free delivery system.¹⁴

Now at this time, it was possible for a letter to be handled only by the carrier department and not pass through the post office, if it were picked up by the carrier from a collection box and delivered further along his route, in much the same way RFD mail was later picked up at a private mail box, canceled by an indelible pencil, and delivered on down the line. But in Washington, D.C., with many carrier routes and a huge volume of official business mail, only the tiniest fraction of it (if any at all) could have been delivered in this way. Certainly the neat red postmarks and backstamps encountered do not look like the handiwork of a carrier who has just fumbled through the letters posted in a lamppost box.

In the 1873-75 time period, most but by no means all Washington, D.C. local letters were postmarked in red, and not all bear carrier backstamps. The carrier backstamps would not have been useful in documenting speedy delivery, since the postmarks used there prior to 1875 did not contain the hour of the day. Red carrier backstamps were used on out-of-town incoming mail, and also on local letters that had been postmarked in black, so the appearance of red postmarks and carrier backstamps on the same cover is largely coincidence. In trying to justify the use of red canceling ink, Roger Curran speculated that this might have been a trial of an experimental ink which by being confined to Washington, D.C. on local letters would not confuse other postmasters about the postal regulation requiring the use of black printer's ink.¹⁵ Clearly, the Post Office Department did use the Washington, D.C. post office as a test site for experimenting with cancelers and inks, yet I believe the use of red canceling ink also had a practical purpose. I have not been able to find any detailed contemporary accounts of how outgoing mail was collected, sorted, and postmarked at the main Washington, D.C. post office, or what postal markings were routinely applied in the carrier department there. But surely there must have been a mail slot in the lobby designated for local delivery letters and parcels. If all the mail deposited there were postmarked in red to distinguish it from out-of-town mail postmarked in black, then at any point further along in the sorting process, the color of the postmark would serve as a visual clue to prevent misroutings. Such a system must have been reasonably effective, for before the color-coding of local mail was phased out in 1875, special postmarks incorporating the word "Local" had been introduced.

In a large post office such as the main one in Washington, D.C., it was clearly quite inefficient to have fresh cork obliterators being repeatedly carved for or by the postal clerks. So early in 1878, a new type of canceling device was introduced there with a more durable oblierator. Rollin C. Huggins, Jr. and Dr. Dennis Schmidt have done extensive research on these distinctive cancelers, which for most of the year were utilized with a special purple canceling ink. They were kind enough to make their census of covers available to me, and I understand that it has also been provided to the Washington Philatelic Society, which is in the process of preparing a book on the postal history of the District of Columbia based on a vast study collection assembled by the late George Turner.¹⁶ The first model (Type I), consisting of a 28mm diameter postmark with all serif letters duplexed to a quartered circle killer with a negative circle at the junction, was used from January 7 to September 14. The second model (Type II), consisting of a 27mm diameter postmark with the date plugs sans serif and a quartered circle killer, was used from September 20 to December 5. See Figure 1. After this date, the devices continued in use for a short time,

¹⁴Roger R. Rhoads, "Free Delivery Carrier Markings," *U. S. Cancellation Club News*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Whole No. 214)(Fall 1993), p. 3.

¹⁵Roger D. Curran, "Washington Colors," *U. S. Cancellation Club News*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Whole No. 217)(Fall 1997), p. 22.

¹⁶William A. Sandrik, "Independent Post Offices in the District of Columbia," *La Posta*, January 1994, p. 31.

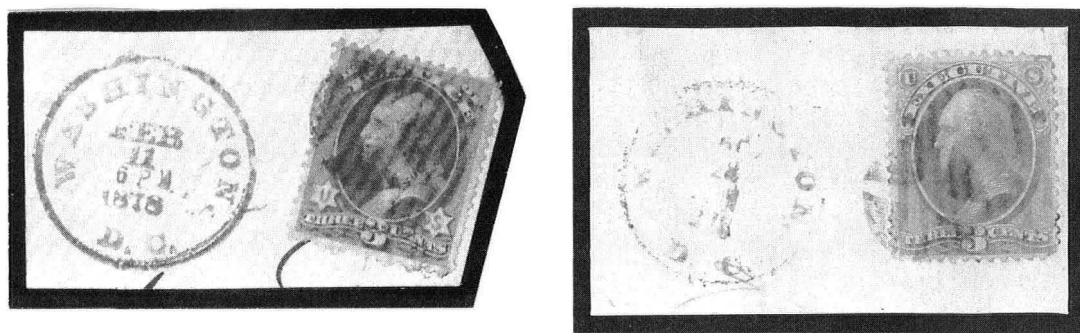


Figure 1. Washington, D.C. 1878 duplex cancelers struck in purple.



Figure 2. Washington, D.C. 1878 duplex cancelers struck in black and indigo.

but the purple canceling ink was replaced by black and later by indigo. In Figure 2 we illustrate four examples of these rare late uses of the Type I model, the 1¢ Executive being struck in black, the 1¢ Navy, 10¢ Post Office, and 30¢ State struck in indigo.

There are two schools of thought on these cancelers. Rollin Huggins believes that the durability of these devices indicates that they were cast from steel, while Roger Curran follows Bond in arguing that the unusual purple canceling ink would have been formulated and utilized only with experimental rubber handstamps. Curran also believes that the form of the serif lettering in the postmarks is characteristic of rubber.¹⁷ It has also been noted that the orientation of the crossroads cuts in the obliterator varies from one strike to another. Now, if a set of identical duplex devices were ordered for the clerks and either cast from steel or molded from rubber, the orientation of these cuts would remain constant. Therefore, I believe that these were actually steel duplex devices, not dissimilar from what had been used previously, except that the removable obliterator plugs were molded in rubber, not carved from cork. Rubber postmarks do not seem practical for the heavy usage they would receive at the main D.C. post office, but the radical introduction of purple canceling ink clearly points to rubber elsewhere in the device. Also, the form of the killer—basically solid except for the incisions—is not typical at all of steel devices, which from the 1860s on had essentially been open designs—targets or barred circles, since ink cannot be carried over a large non-absorbent surface (*cf.* all the different techniques of cross-hatching used to engrave the large numerals on the Post Office stamps). The hollow circle at the center of the Type I device could indicate a recessed screw used to hold the rubber plug in place, while its absence on the Type II device might show a return to the more conventional lateral set screw.

¹⁷Curran, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Postmarking at the main Washington, D.C. post office during the early months of 1879 was fairly chaotic. As mentioned above, the experimental 1878 devices were utilized with black and then indigo canceling inks. Cooper patent cancels were given a brief trial during February, utilizing the 1878 purple canceling ink.¹⁸ The obsolete steel and cork devices, with the sans serif postmark lacking a year date, were also revived. In May, a new series of duplex devices was introduced, struck always with the same indigo canceling ink first used in December 1878. The obliterator on these devices always consists of a large horizontally barred ellipse. Variations include a narrow ellipse line drawn around the basic figure, or a circle in the center with the numerals 1 or 2 or “L” for local delivery. The basic types are shown in Figure 3. Again, Huggins believes these to be steel devices, while Curran opts for rubber.¹⁹ Personally, I incline towards steel, and consider these cancelers to be a first cousin to the Goldsborough patented ellipses. The use of a colored canceling ink

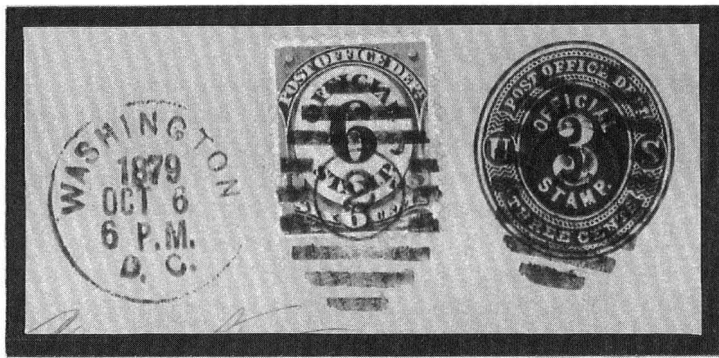


Figure 3. Washington, D.C. 1879-80 duplex cancelers struck in indigo.

is a bit puzzling if not mandated by rubber, but due to the relaxed regulations at this time, not illegal. Some collectors have dismissed this indigo canceling ink as nothing more than an accidental polluted mixture of blue and black inks, but this is definitely not the case. It is a discrete but subtle color, and in the case of the official stamps, worthy of separate catalogue listings, if for no other reason than it is as close as you can come to blue cancellations on the Executive and State stamps. When a new series of steel duplex cancelers with numeral-in-target killers was introduced in mid-1880, the Washington, D.C. post office went back to using black canceling ink exclusively.

¹⁸Alfred E. Staubus, “Stamps for Use on Official Correspondence to Foreign Destinations under GPU and UPU Treaties,” *Chronicle*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Whole No. 147)(August 1990), p. 189.

¹⁹Curran, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

During the period 1873-1884, true blue canceling ink was never used at the main Washington, D.C. post office. The independent Georgetown post office, prior to becoming Station A of the main PO in 1877, did occasionally use blue canceling ink, but little if any official mail was posted there. I have never heard of an official cover postmarked there, and the only off-cover stamp I own has a red CDS. The only official cover out of Washington, D.C. I have ever seen with a blue cancellation was a fluke registered Treasury cover, in which the blue ink pad for the registry numbers was accidentally used to cancel the stamps. Some official mail was posted at a tiny post office in the basement of the Capitol, but black canceling ink was used there exclusively. This post office was closed when the new East Capitol Station (or Station B of the main PO) was established in September 1881.²⁰ The catalogue listings for blue cancellations and blue town cancellations on Executive and State official stamps are extremely misleading. These entries must refer to the lovely double circle received markings which were sometimes used to favor cancel presentation copies. They are also occasionally seen on Justice stamps, but rarely on stamps from the more common departments, probably because these were sufficiently available through normal channels (chiefly mailroom clerks at the great departmental headquarters in Washington, D.C.) that stamp-gatherers did not need to write and petition the departments directly. These markings are aesthetically far superior to the ruled pen lines or tiny "X's" which were also used to demonetize official stamps before they were handed over to private individuals, but they have no greater postal validity. Blue hand-stamped favor cancellations, as handsome as they are, do command a premium in the marketplace, but the catalogue should at least identify them for what they are. As it now stands, we have fakers creating blue "cancellations" to the specification of the catalogue on stamps that shouldn't come that way, and presumably a gullible buyer or two has been taken already, because the catalogue lends credence to these spurious products.

Red Cancellations

The vast majority of red cancellations found on official stamps derive from the Washington, D.C. main post office's use of red canceling ink on local mail from 1873 to 1875. The corks used with this ink were never very imaginatively carved—a circle of wedges is about as "fancy" as they come—and many strikes are just shapeless blobs. Also, the ink employed was more dilute than the arresting red paint cancellations found on earlier issues. Some strikes have remained quite vivid, while others have faded or oxidized to a washed-out claret shade. In theory, red cancellations could have occurred on all values of the Continental printing except for the State dollar values, which were meant to be used on overseas parcels. In actuality, they are quite seldom found on values above the 6¢. Based on what has been recorded to date, completion is possible for only two departments: Navy and Treasury. The significant premiums the catalogue assigns for red cancellations reflects both their rarity and their intrinsic beauty.

Red canceling ink was also used in New York City during this period, most notably on foreign mail. Yet as plentiful as strikes of the large NYFM geometric cancellations are on the Bank Note regular issues, they are astonishingly rare on official stamps. Approximately thirty off-cover stamps are known (and one cover), but only a few of these are struck in red. More commonly found are stamps canceled in black at Washington, D.C. bearing a partial strike of an orange-red "New York Paid All" transit marking. A 3¢ State is recorded with a red socked-on-the-nose "San Francisco Paid All" transit mark. Red canceling ink was also used sporadically in a number of small towns, although so far, Hartland, N. Y. is the only town which has been confirmed by an official cover.

²⁰Rollin C. Huggins, Jr., "Congress Postmarks", *U.S. Cancellation Club News*, Spring 1990, p. 19-27.

Blue Cancellations

In the period of usage of the official stamps, 1873-1884, the principal alternative to black printer's ink was various shades of blue. Blue canceling inks were used with government-issue duplexed steel devices in large cities, and with rubber handstamps in small towns. These inks, dark enough to obliterate the stamps well, were equally effective with metal, wood, cork, and rubber handstamps, and even the ribbon daters. The most important cities to use them exclusively for a period of years were Chicago and Cincinnati, while in other towns they were used intermittently as a temporary or experimental substitute for black printer's ink. Blue ink was extensively used for the numbers on registered mail, and sometimes for the accompanying postmarks. Just on the evidence from official mail (covers, off-cover socked on the nose postmarks, and attributable obliterations), we know that blue canceling inks were used all across the country: in the east, at Providence, R. I., Rochester, N. Y., Concord, N. H., Frankfort and Covington, Ky. and Pittsburgh, Pa.; in the south, at Montgomery and Abbeville, Al., Savannah, Ga. and New Orleans, La.; in the Midwest, at Evansville, In., Milo, Iowa, Wichita, Ka., Chicago, Parland, and Streator, Ill., Kalamazoo, Mi., St. Joseph, Mo., Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Elyria, Ohio; and in the far west, at Denver, Co. and numerous small fort and territorial post offices. Of course, if evidence from the large Bank Note regular issues were also considered, this list could be greatly expanded.

By far the easiest sets of color cancellations to complete on the departmentals would be blue on either Treasury (7¢ and 24¢ being the key values) or Post Office (10¢ key value), and they are sometimes offered by dealers preassembled. Completion is also possible for Interior, Justice, and War, although certain humble stamps like the 30¢ Interior are surprisingly tough. The 90¢ Navy is not recorded with a blue cancellation, but all other values have been found. I have not been able to pinpoint the town of origin for these from a proving cover, but since these stamps were mostly used by paymasters at naval stations along the Eastern seaboard (Washington, D.C., Annapolis, Portsmouth, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Norfolk, League Island, Mound City, New London, New Orleans, San Francisco) the possibilities are limited.²¹ Archival research uncovering the original requisitions could help us narrow down the possible towns of origin for the cancellations we find on official stamps, especially for departments with a narrow distribution such as Justice. Blue cancellations are very scarce on the high value Agriculture stamps, which saw little usage outside of Washington, D.C. Genuine blue cancellations, as opposed to favor handstamps, are not to be found on any stamps of the Executive and State stamps, since blue canceling ink was never used in Washington, D.C., New York, or Long Branch, N. J.

Ultramarine and Indigo

There are many shades of blue canceling ink, which vary in hue (greenish blue, violet blue), value (light blue, dark blue), and chroma (gray blue, bright blue). There have never been separate catalogue listings for these shades, with the exception of ultramarine. Technically, ultramarine is a pigment derived from powdered lapis lazuli, but in philately this term is commonly used to describe a deeper, more cobalt shade of blue. Ultramarine cancellations on official stamps are quite rare, but no great premium attaches to them, due to the difficulty in reaching a consensus on what specifically constitutes this shade. To a trained eye, though, the indigo or blue-black cancellations of Washington, D.C., 1879-1880 are quite distinctive and easily recognized. Especially on the departmental stamps, where usages out of Washington, D.C. predominate, this color of canceling ink, utilized

²¹Rae D. Ehrenberg, "Authorized Use of the U. S. Official Stamps by the Various Departments," *33rd American Philatelic Congress Book*, p. 46.

with a limited number of devices, warrants special catalog listings. Relative to the Washington, D.C. purples of 1878, the indigo cancellations are a good deal scarcer and are recorded on far fewer departmental values. There are two explanations for this: the old style of metal handstamps, lacking year dates, were also revived during 1879, and the increasing popularity of the newly authorized penalty envelopes was causing a severe drop-off in the use of official stamps by the main departmental headquarters in Washington, D.C.

(to be continued)

STUCK?

Have you been **STUCK with faked**, fraudulent, forged, or otherwise counterfeit U.S. related **philatelic material**? Let us help you turn a disappointing situation into something positive, for yourself and the welfare of your hobby.

DONATE YOUR SPURIOUS PHILATELIC MATERIAL TO THE

U.S. Philatelic Classics Society
Stamp & Cover Repository & Analysis Program

(S.C.R.A.P.)

To arrange a potentially tax deductible donation, contact:

Michael J. Brown

S.C.R.A.P. Administrator

U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

P.O. Box 300

Lightfoot, VA 23090

Telephone: (757) 565-4414