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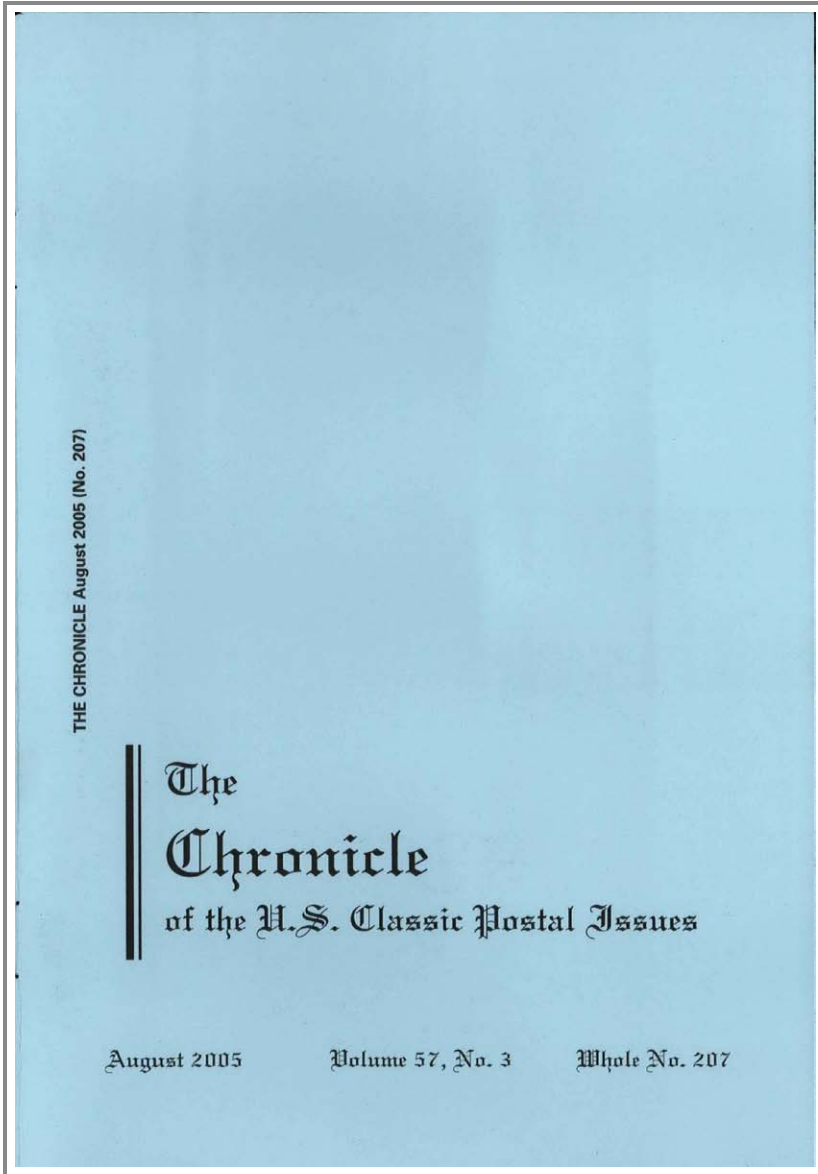


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PRECANCELS ON THE 1869 PICTORIAL ISSUE
JEFFREY M. FORSTER

Recently I had the pleasure of viewing an exhibit of precancels featuring stamps and covers from the stampless era to the 20th century. The exhibitor is Arnold Selengut, a stamp dealer and the President of the Precancels Society. In viewing the exhibit, I found that there are basically two major categories of precancels: Bureaus, which were essentially manufactured by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, as part of stamp production, and supplied to the post offices already precanceled; and Locals, which were prepared under the supervision of postmasters using stamps and equipment on hand at the post offices. Bureaus did not come into use until 1916, but Locals have been used since the 1840s.

Locals are further subdivided into four groups:

1. Pioneer
2. Classic
3. Contract
4. Non-contract

Obviously, usages of precancels on 1869 stamps would fall into the locals category.

Pioneer precancels consist of three basic sub-types:

1. cancellations on adhesives using lines and bars
2. cancellations on adhesives using geometrics
3. cancellations on postal stationery

Pioneer precancels were made to save time; there was no other benefit or rate reduction incentive. They also were made for the convenience of the user, the postmaster at the local post office. No special devices were used—just standard office supplies, including pen, ink, ruler, stencil, brush and, if the user was a printer, general moveable type.

There are precious few precancels reported on the 1869 issue. David W. Smith, in his book, *Silent Precancels, A Catalog of Lines, Bars and Designs on 19th and 20th Century Stamps Used Postally in the United States* (1995),¹ lists only five items. Two of these, the Glastonbury "G" 3¢ 1869 (Scott 114) and the Chicago brown ruled line on a 2¢ 1869 (Scott 113), are listed based on reports, the sources of which are unknown to Selengut, and have been seen neither by Smith nor Selengut. One of them, the Waterbury, Kansas "X" on a 3¢ 1869 (114) is listed without a disclaimer or questioned by Smith, so apparently he must have seen it. Selengut indicated to me that he had not seen it so he would not comment on it. The fourth item listed by Smith is the Philadelphia "Square" on a 2¢ 1869 (113). Selengut presently owns the cover on which this listing is based, but believes, however, that it is not a precancel, but simply a duplex with a square killer which, due to the thickness of the stamp, does not tie the adhesive. Although it was previously in his exhibit, he told me that he has removed it because of its doubtful status as a precancel. Smith has told Selengut that he will probably delete that item from the next edition of his book.

The fifth and final item is the Jefferson, Ohio precancel, printed on a 2¢ 1869 (113) after affixing and used by the J.A. Howells & Company. The cancellation consists of the two-lined town name, JEFFERSON, / OHIO. There is an L-shaped border at left and bottom. Presumably the border was intended to simulate a frame or box for the stamp.

¹David W. Smith, *Silent Precancels : A Catalog of Lines, Bars, and Designs on 19th and 20th Century Stamps Used Postally in the United States* (Rochester? IN: Precancel Stamp Society, 1995).

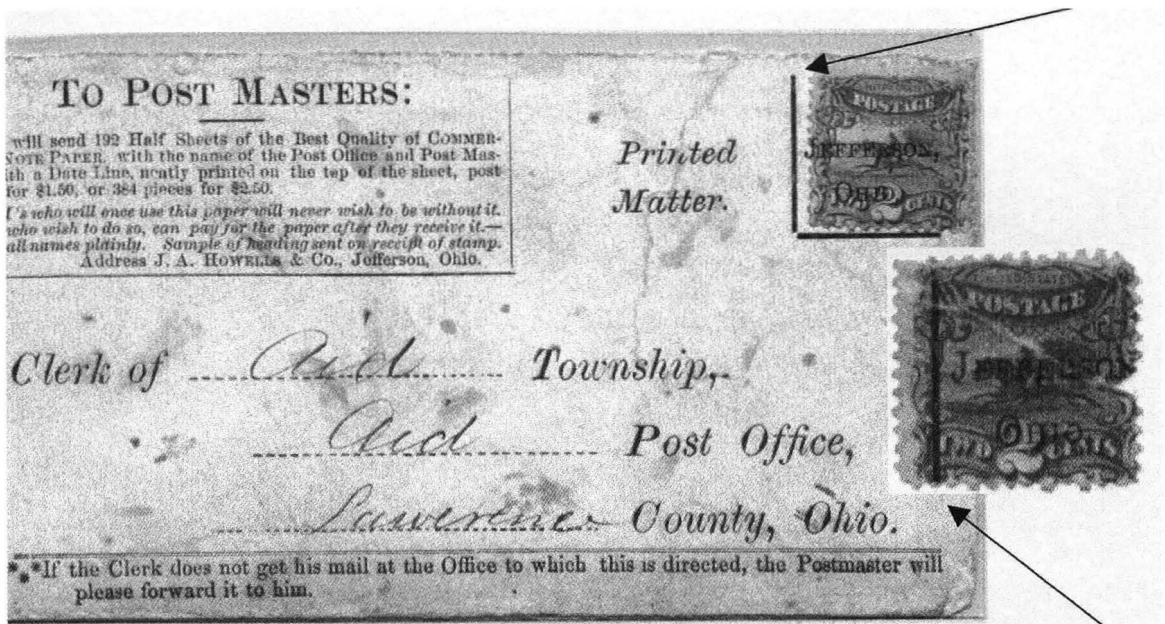


Figure 1. Jefferson, Ohio precancel on 2¢ 1869 stamp, copy on cover and single stamp (courtesy of Arnold Selengut)

Selengut owns two of the three reported copies (see Figure 1). He does not know the whereabouts of the third copy but has a photocopy of it. The cover in Figure 1 is the only known cover and is shown in his exhibit. He purchased it from John Boker. Selengut also has an off-cover single 2¢ 1869 (113) (see Figure 1). In looking at Figure 1, showing the 2¢ 1869 cover and stamp from Jefferson, Ohio, one can see the significance of the vertical frame line of the cancellation falling on the stamp. This proves that the stamp was placed on the cover before the cover was printed. The other off-cover copy has a line on the left perforation tips. A close examination of the stamp on the cover shows that it is tied to the cover only by the hook of the "J" and perhaps by two or three perforation tips at the bottom where the stamp is tangent to the horizontal line.

The apparent sequence of operations for the mailing of this envelope was: (1) affix the stamp to the blank envelope; (2) print the entire face, including the cancel; (3) complete the address.

The inset scan of the 2¢ in Figure 1 shows the other copy with the left vertical tine printed on the stamp, which must have been pre-applied, but not quite in the intended place.

According to Selengut, J.A. Howells was a printer, and thus had ready access to moveable type to create the partially pre-addressed circular envelopes he used for advertisements to town officials and postmasters. He was selling printing services, stationery and pre-printed forms. He had a history of using the "printed after affixing" technique of precanceling stamps. A 2¢ Black Jack cover in Selengut's exhibit is an earlier example of this same technique. Figure 2 shows the 2¢ Black Jack cover where the town name is not parallel to the edges of the stamp, which is cocked with respect to the envelope, but is parallel to the edge of the envelope. Note that in this example, the name is

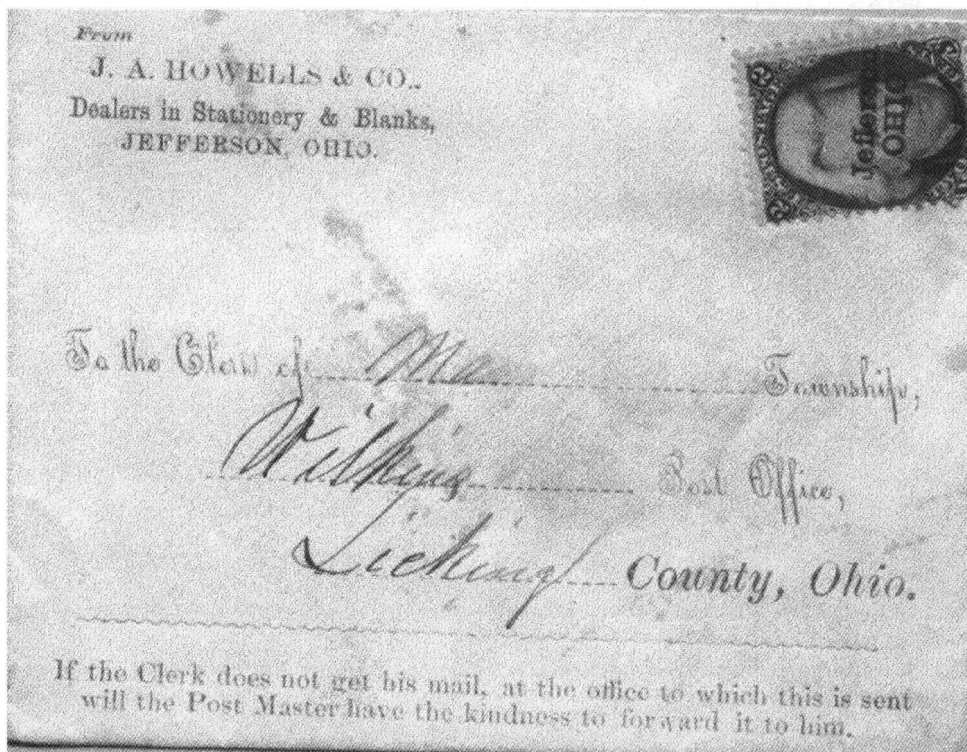


Figure 2. Jefferson, Ohio precancel on cover, only known printed precancel on the 2¢ Black Jack (Scott No. 73)(courtesy of Arnold Selengut)

printed “Jefferson / OHIO” (town in capital and lowercase letters, state in small capitals) whereas the examples in Figure 1 show both town and state in small capitals.

Both Selengut and myself find it somewhat odd that there are no precancels reported on the 1¢ (Scott 112) 1869 stamp. The majority of documented precancel usages, both before and after the 1869s, were on unsealed circulars, which since 1852 were sent at the 1¢ rate, independent of distance. It was natural that this type of "bulk" mailing would have been franked with precancel stamps, as this would save the most time for the mailer and the postmaster. What conditions may have precluded this type of mailing during the period when the 1869s were in use, no one can say.

Finally, in *Chronicle* No. 204 (November 2004),² at page 269, I reported on the auction results of the Miller H. Mack collection of 1869 Pictorial Issue covers.² One item in that holding was lot 24, described as a 3¢ (114) with a "3-line manuscript precancel" affixed to a Cobb White & Case, Rockland, Maine, illustrated corner card cover to Deer Island, Maine

²Jeffrey Forster, “Dale-Lichtenstein Auctions of British Columbia and Vancouver Island and Western Expresses and the Millard H. Mack Collection of 1869 Pictorial Issue Covers,” *Chronicle*, Whole No. 204 (November 2004), p. 269.

(see Figure 3). When I first began to research the known precancels on 1869 stamps, I made a note of this lot and would have included it as another precancel usage. However, the purchaser (telephone bidder 16 at the Mack sale), who paid \$575 (plus 10% auctioneer's commission) submitted it to the Philatelic Foundation. Earlier this year, I visited the Foundation and was told that it was not a precancel, and in fact, it was determined that the stamp had been added to the cover, and thus was not a genuine precancel.



Figure 3. 3¢ 1869 on Cobb White & Case illustrated corner card cover addressed to Deer Island, Maine, from Miller H. Mack collection, unfavorable determination by Philatelic Foundation (not a precancel, and stamp added to cover)

If any readers have any precancels, or what they believe to be precancels, in their 1869 collections, I would be most appreciative of hearing from them and will include them in a follow-up article in the *Chronicle* updating the listing of 1869 precancel usages. □