

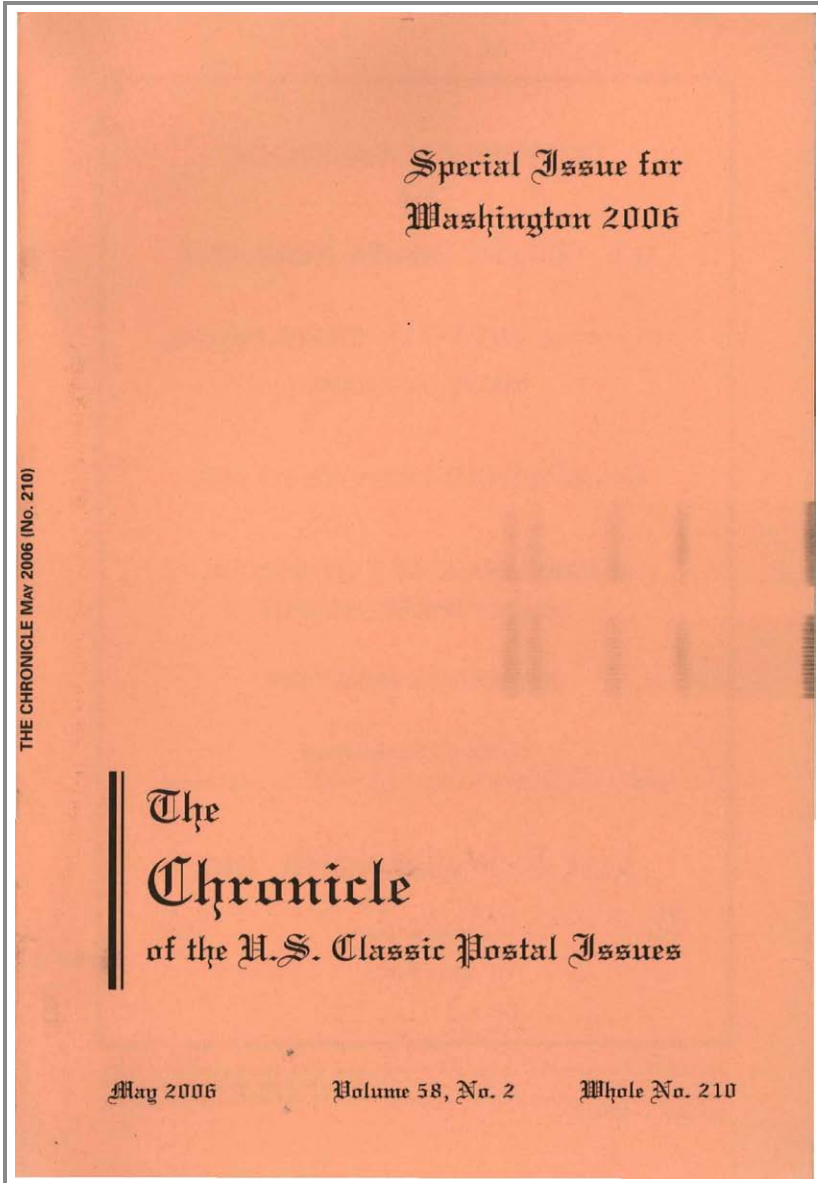


# U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

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Article: E.S. Zevely Makes Postmasters' Handstamps

Author(s): James W. Milgram M.D.



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## PRESTAMP & STAMPLESS PERIOD

JAMES W. MILGRAM, Editor

### E.S. ZEVELY MAKES POSTMASTERS' HANDSTAMPS

JAMES W. MILGRAM, M.D.

I have written in this journal about the circulars of Charles M. Willard (who may be a relative of mine).<sup>1</sup> This individual first sold Post Office Stamps "ENGRAVED ON WOOD BY E.S. ZEVEVERLY P.M." (misspelled) and later claimed to manufacture handstamps for postmasters. Willard's all-black "JAN 9" dated circular, which he sent out in the early part of 1852, offered Zevely handstamps and quoted a Dec. 31, 1851 letter of authorization "to receive orders and money for Stamps made by me" from Zevely.

Willard is best known for the two-color Ludlow, Massachusetts, circular that bears a red printed postmark and shows red markings intended for the period after July 1, 1851, when rates differed for paid and unpaid mail. The 1852 Willard circular offers the handstamps at half the price quoted in the Zevely circulars.

Willard also distributed a one-page printed circular headed "Ludlow, Hampden County, Massachusetts, October 1, 1850" offering "A COMPLETE POST OFFICE MANUAL" prepared by him "from the Records in the P.O. Department." He offered this publication for 25¢ and "whenever the money is lost or stolen I will send a copy gratis." The cover for this earlier circular is a plain buff envelope with red "LUDLOW Mass." circular datestamp and "PAID." The example I have seen is addressed to the postmaster of Newry, Pennsylvania.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the varied productions of Edmond Samuel Zevely, who created many interesting postmarks and illustrated items while he was postmaster at Pleasant Grove, Maryland, where he resided for more than 20 years. One of the great collectors of U.S. stampless covers, Edwin Mayer, took a special interest in Zevely and wrote three articles about him in various issues of the *Postal History Journal*.<sup>2</sup>

Zevely was appointed postmaster of Pleasant Grove, on December 19, 1849. This was a tiny town in Allegheny County, in the Maryland panhandle. Today it's located off Interstate 68 (exit 43) about 2½ hours west of the District of Columbia. The Pleasant Grove office was five miles from the larger town of Cumberland, which assumed the post office function after the Pleasant Grove office was discontinued. The Pleasant Grove post office was discontinued May 2, 1854, reestablished January 10, 1855, and discontinued a second time on April 1, 1856. Most of the surviving letters and covers from Pleasant Grove seem to have been mailed by Zevely himself.

Born in North Carolina, Zevely married Charlotte Hill Hinkle on January 30, 1845. She came from Cumberland and they had five children (including Sophia Malvina, who was named after his sister). He was a mason and listed his occupation as engraver. He also made many other types of wooden items including children's toys. He was 52 years old in 1870.

In later life he became a newspaper publisher. His weekly paper in Oakland, *The Glade Star*, helped to solidify public opinion to create a new county out of Cumberland County. An election in 1872 produced a 4 to 1 vote for the new county, which was called Garrett County with Oakland as the seat of government. Zevely preferred to be called by his initials and used this form for his name in all of his postal publications and advertise-

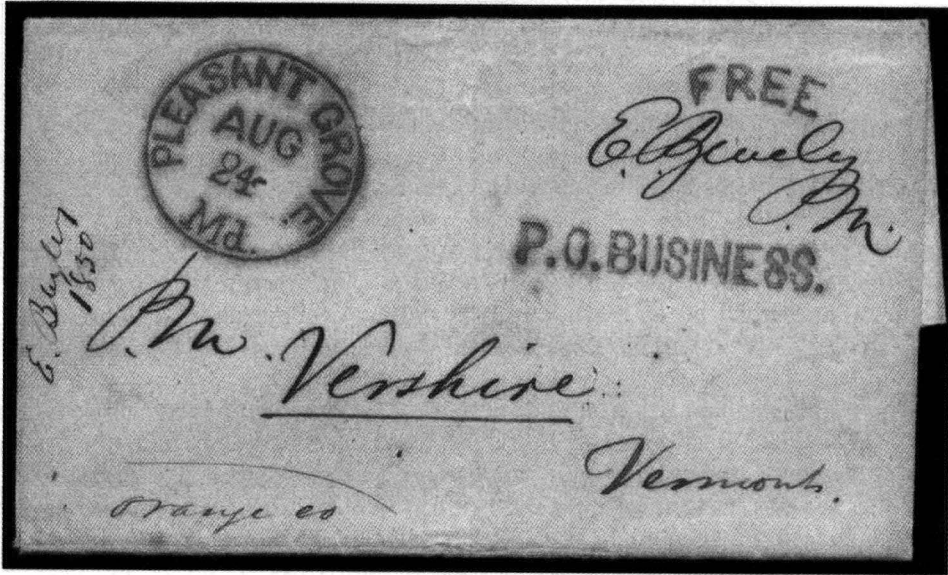
<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle of the U.S. Classic Postal Issues*, #155, August 1992, pp. 159-163.

<sup>2</sup> *Postal History Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1957, pp. 45-54; Vol. 2, No. 1, 1958, pp. 25-31; Vol. 4, No. 1, 1960, pp. 48-52.

ments.

The population of Pleasant Grove was between 80 and 100 individuals at the time Zevely was postally active. Net proceeds from the post office in 1855 were \$4.23. Of course, much more mail than that went out of the Pleasant Grove post office, because Zevely as postmaster sent his own mail free. More information about Zevely's later life can be found in the detailed study of his markings by Frank Mandel in *Congress Book #53*.<sup>3</sup>

According to *Maryland Postal History* by D. Homer Kendall,<sup>4</sup> the earliest postmark of Pleasant Grove was a red rimless oval, followed by a red rimless circle and then a standard date-stamped circle in use by the summer of 1850. Edwin Mayer in a later article<sup>5</sup> illustrated a cover with the rimless circle dated August 6 and the rimmed circle August 8, so this may date the change of postmarks. Examples of these markings are shown in Mayer's first article.



**Figure 1. Address panel for 1850 stampless cover franked by "E.S. Zevely P.M." with "P.O. BUSINESS," curved "FREE" and Pleasant Grove, Md., August 24 circular date-stamp all in red, addressed to the postmaster in Vershire, Vermont.**

Figures 1 and 2 show the cover and top of the first page of a letter promoting Zevely's hand stamps. The cover shows an unusual curved "FREE" and separate "P. O. BUSINESS"-- both in red. The August, 1850, letter shows a marking for Vershire, Vermont, with auxiliary markings at the top of the page. Zevely acknowledged receipt of \$1 for the office stamp and included dates. He offered five auxiliary markings for \$1 more. The dates, 23 pieces and a screw, usually cost another dollar. Ink was vermillion mixed with linseed oil applied with a buckskin ball (a saturated cushion on the table). There's a 30-millimeter circular handstamp known from Vershire in 1851-2; I assume it is this one.

Figure 3 shows a series of Zevely's original handstamps that were in the possession of Edwin Mayer. The illustration shows a side view of a handstamping device and end-on

<sup>3</sup> *Fifty-Third American Philatelic Congress Book*, 1987, pp. 119-160.

<sup>4</sup> David G. Phillips Co., North Miami, Florida, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> "Zevely Family Was Active in United States Postal Service," *Postal History Journal*, Vol. 13, No.3, 1969, pp. 2-40.

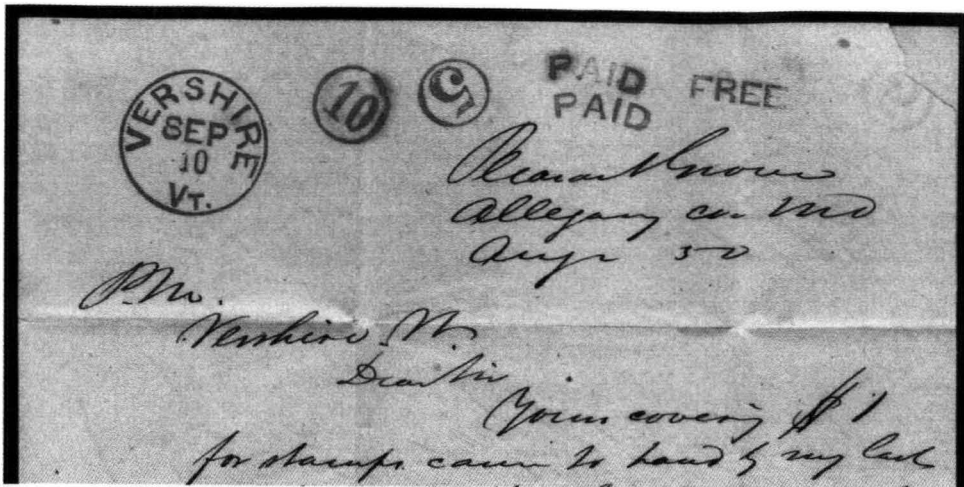


Figure 2. Upper third of the Figure 1 letter, showing that Zevely had made a postmark for Vershire. At top he struck the four auxiliary markings he had made for Vershire, also in red.



Figure 3. Reproduction of Zevely handstamps once owned by Edwin Mayer. The handstamp devices were cut out of single blocks of wood.

views of five auxiliary markings along with modern impressions. The advertisements describe the handstamps as being carved from boxwood. A tiny "E.S.Z. Pleasant Grove, Md." is impressed into the wood.

In his *Congress Book* article, Mandel showed an envelope sent by Zevely ("Free P.O.B." in manuscript with black "PLEASANT GROVE Md. ALLEGANY CO." postmark) on which the receiving postmaster (Silas L. Sprague at Weybridge Falls, Vermont) stamped his various new auxiliary markings in red ink (5 in circle, 10 in circle, PAID 3 in

circle, PAID 6 in circle, FREE and PAID). Mandel used this cover in comparisons with postmarks from various other towns demonstrating that they were most probably made by Zevely.

Certainly the most spectacular postmark produced by Zevely, shown in Figure 4, was his advertising postmark with the extra circle reading "POST OFFICE STAMPS MADE HERE". One of the two examples of the "ALLEG'Y CO" form of this marking shown by Mayer was purportedly dated in 1850, while the other example was the 1851 cover in the Jarrett collection (Christie's Robson Lowe, October 9, 1990, lot 556). Kendall lists the marking as being used in 1851, and I think that is probably correct. A rare form of the postmark does not contain the county name; only one example of this is known, dated JAN 18 (1851). It seems possible that there was only one such handstamp, the county name being added after very limited usage without the county name.

Drawings of all of the Pleasant Grove handstamped markings are shown in Delf Norona's 1969 article in the *Postal History Journal*. This contains an excellent discussion of



**Figure 4. This 40-millimeter red double circle marking, a county postmark surrounded by an advertisement for post office handstamps, is certainly Zevely's most spectacular postmark. This cover was sent by Zevely to his unmarried sister.**

handstamps made by others too, as well as describing Zevely's relatives who were also involved in postal affairs.

Zevely also created a wood-engraved corner card for himself. This doubled as a postmark and can thus be considered as one of the few printed postmarks of the stampless period. For the most part this envelope is found printed in red ink. An example with a black dated circle postmark is shown in Figure 5. The example of this marking in the Jarrett sale bears a red "FREE JAN 17 1852" postmark with manuscript frank. Both these covers were sent to Zevely's unmarried sister, Sophia, in Salem, North Carolina. One of his daughters was named after Sophia.

The listing of this corner card/postmark in Kendall's book shows an April 10, 1852 dated postmark, listed in black. The Sept. 23, 1852, postmark on the cover in Figure 5 also shows the FREE postmark in black. This is the only dated FREE postmark known in American postal history. An example without postmarks, but franked by Zevely, bears

manuscript "Nov 23" dating, maybe by the recipient, his sister. Zevely seems to have converted from red to black ink in the spring of 1852.

His next production appears to be his first illustrated circular showing his handstamps. See Figures 6 and 7. The address panel (the fourth page) bears a black, printed postmark



Figure 5. Corner card/postmark used by Zevely in 1852, here in red. The circular date stamp, "FREE SEPT 23 1852" is struck in black. This is the only dated "FREE" postmark in U.S. postal history. Also from Zevely to his sister.

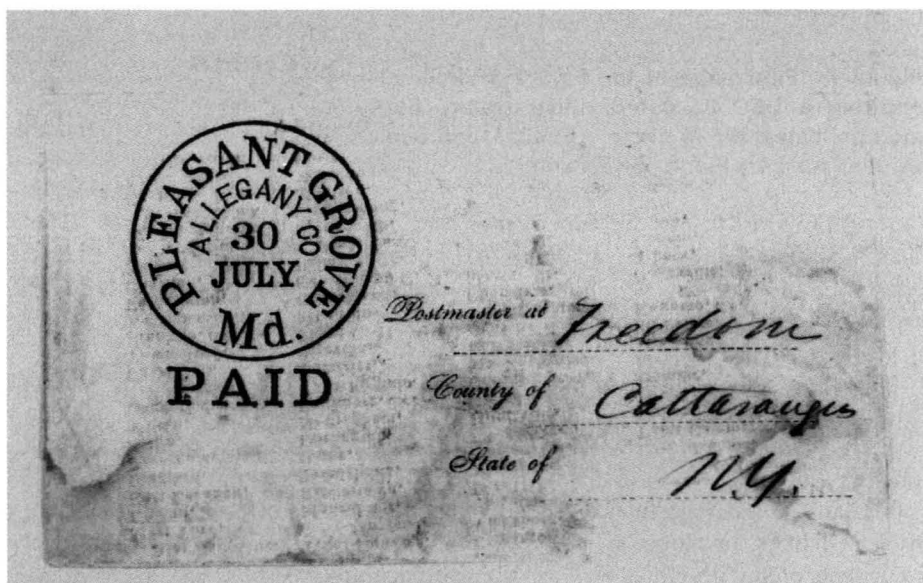


Figure 6. Address panel of folded stampless circular with printed county postmark for Pleasant Grove and matching printed PAID. This circular was not sent out under Zevely's frank, but it is addressed to a postmaster.



# SUPERIOR POST OFFICE STAMPS,

WITH THE NAME OF THE POST-MASTER, &c.

**AT GREATLY REDUCED PRICES.**

And lower than they can be had elsewhere.

Engraved on the best wood in the best style by E. S. ZEVELY, P. M. Pleasant Grove, Allegany county, Maryland:—the original wood stamp maker in the U. States.

JAN  
FEB  
MAR  
APR  
MAY  
JUNE  
JULY  
AUG  
NOV  
DEC  
12 1234567890

PAID 3

FREE PAID

SEPT OCT

DEC 25

5

A base and slender attack having been made upon me by a former agent, with a view to injure me in my business, I deem it necessary in self defence, as de from what I say in my Monthly Bulletin, (of which I have just issued a large number of extra copies,) and in various advertisements in leading journals,—to issue this circular, in order that Postmasters and others may not be deceived by the plausible assertions of envious imitators, and be fully apprised where to find stamps that shall give satisfaction, and be as represented.

First, as to the durability of wood stamps, I have years ago published the fullest evidence of that, and the fact that thousands of my stamps are now in use in all parts of the United States and that the Post Office Department approves and is constantly ordering more of them, is I judge sufficient to satisfy all on that score.

Second, my long experience and facilities in this line, enable me to afford stamps at the very lowest possible prices. In proof of which, I now offer to send a full and satisfactory set of SEVEN Stamps, including the large Office stamp and changes for dates, directions, and "Our Paper," for the low price of only One Dollar. All orders promptly attended to, and Post Office stamps sent by mail free, by special authority. Whilst offering this much for one dollar, candor compels me to say, that although these stamps thus offered, are undoubtedly as good (if not better) as any others that can be had any where for the same or even a greater price,—and will do good service—yet they are not the best I can furnish. The best will cost something more.

Figure 7. First page of the Figure 6 circular, showing a DEC 25 dated office stamp, the months, dates, a 5 in circle, a PAID 3, and two worded auxiliary marks, FREE and PAID.

it is shown in Figure 10. It's the same corner card design, but printed in black. The postmarks are a straight-line FREE and NOV 23 in circle, both struck in black. Because the addressee was a postmaster, Zevely did not have to frank the envelope. That the black and red envelopes are the same design can be verified by a detailed examination of any two examples. Note the broken "O" in "Grove" in the text under the banners.

The reverse side of the envelope (Figure 11) is Zevely's way of showing off; he presents three woodcut designs of his manufacture. The circular itself is a four-page document with the first page illustrated by three cuts at the top and postmarks in the center. This is illustrated in Figure 12. Observe that he reverted to his old prices, \$2 for a set with 25¢ for most of the smaller auxiliary markings. It is interesting that he offered a "PAID 6" in circle, postmaster's names, or names of post offices in straight lines. He also offered private stamps or seals of any design as well as "philosophical toys".

The third and final circular has been shown in a variety of reference books. It has a black printed corner card with the addition of printed "CIRCULAR" and "PAID". See Figure 13. Again it is the same cut with the faulty "O". Note how the imprint is centered on the envelope. These envelopes are always addressed to a postmaster but the printed

with integral PAID dated July 30, 1852. The first page of the circular shows all the common stamps needed by most postmasters. Zevely offered these for \$1 in competition to Charles Willard, who was offering his stamps at the same time. Much of the text of the circular discusses Zevely's experience in comparison to Willard's. This is a very rare circular.

It should be noted that the postmark shown in print on the circular matches the design of the next 36mm handstamp used as the Pleasant Grove postmark. Shown in Figure 8 is the matching letter and cover illustrated by Mayer bearing this postmark in black. The letter shows no date, but it must be 1853 or 1854. Zevely also made a variety of this, with a "5" attached to the postmark, for unpaid, unfranked letters. See Figure 9. This usage must also be from 1853 or later. This cover must have been the one used to draw this example for Kendall's book.

This brings us to the second and fancier circular. Mayer featured this in his second article. The face of the cover that carried



Figure 8. Cover overlying blue letter, both showing strikes of the same March 5 dated county postmark. Sent free under Zevely's frank to his sister.

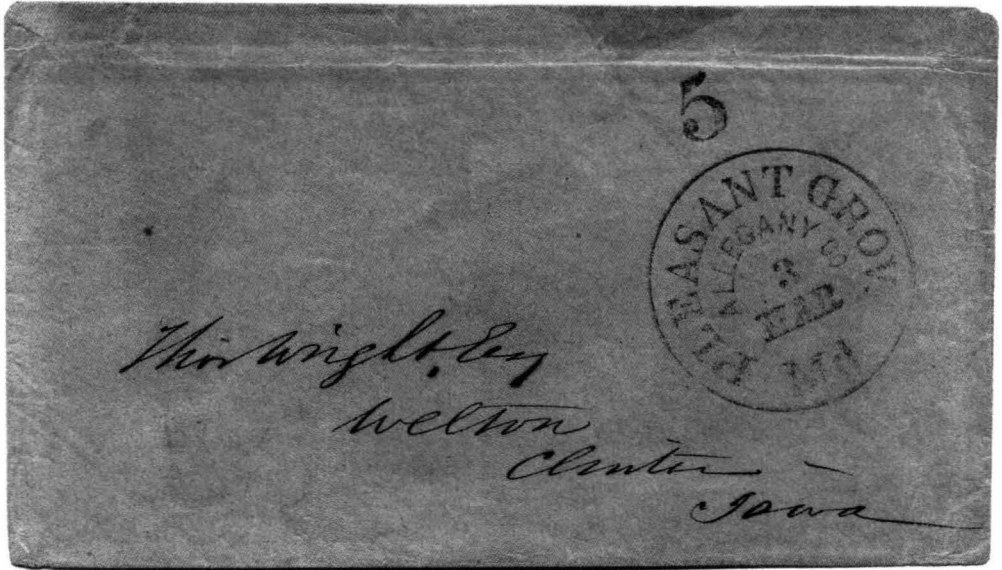


Figure 9. Unpaid commercial letter, Pleasant Grove to Clinton, Iowa, with integral 5 attached to the county postmark.

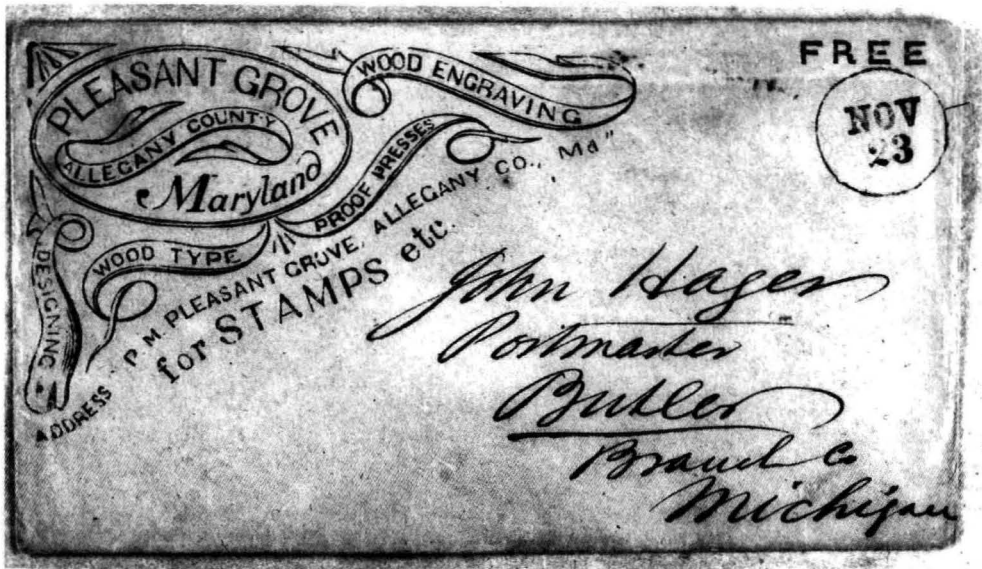


Figure 10. This is one of two known examples of the corner card/postmark design in black. A late use from 1852, it bears a separate FREE and NOV 23 in circle. The addressee was a postmaster, so Zevely could send it free, even though it contained a personal advertising circular.



Figure 11. Reverse of the Figure 10 envelope, with intricate woodcuts and text testifying to Zevely's abilities. Note the initials E.S.Z. at the feet of the cartoon characters at right.

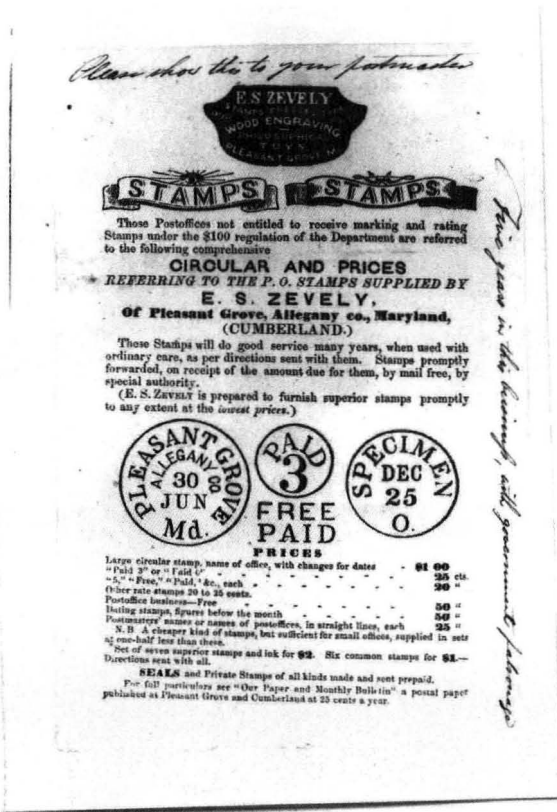


Figure 12. The circular from the envelope in Figures 10 and 11 contained four pages, with illustrations only on the first page. There are several decorative woodcuts, but fewer handstamps are shown. This circular presents the revised price list for the handstamps.

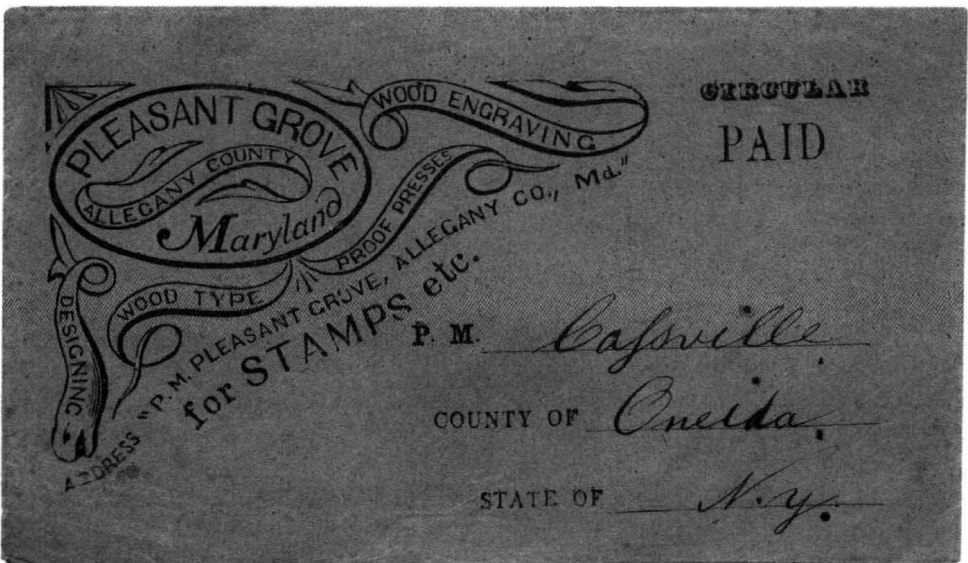
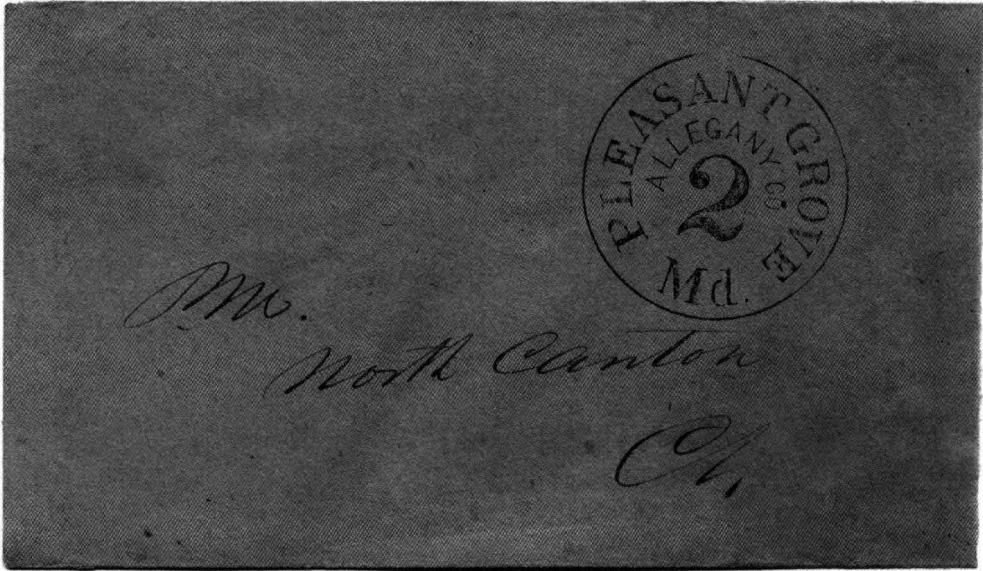


Figure 13. Black corner card/postmark envelope showing two additional printed markings, CIRCULAR and PAID, as well as printing for the address. It contained the third Zevely circular, a sheet of paper about the size of the envelope, comparing metal and wood stamps and discussing the government allotment for each.

endorsement is "PAID" not "FREE".

The small printed sheet carried by this mailing was to draw attention to the fact that the Post Office Department would pay for wooden stamps for a post office with over \$200 in annual returns. It would pay for metal stamps only if the post office had returns over \$300. This topic is covered in more detail in Mandel's article already cited. Zevely includes a sentence "I have no agent for whose acts I am responsible" between two pointing hands. This refers no doubt to his fight with Willard. There is no date on this item, but I am guessing early 1853 from the content. This would be the latest known use of the corner card/postmark.

The final early postmark is one intended to be used on envelopes containing printed circulars. Figure 14 shows a 36 mm. black circle with no date but a large "2". The text and the size is the same as the black postmarks shown in Figures 8 and 9. The example shown



**Figure 14. Repaired cover showing the special large 2 marking. This is a county postmark intended for circulars.**

has an unpaid 2 rate, but the addressee is again a postmaster. I would guess the usage was in 1853, similar to the other black postmarks. Only this example is known.

Figure 15 shows two corner cards with 3¢ 1851 stamps. Since both of these envelopes are addressed to his sister, they must have been handy for Zevely to use. Both covers have Cumberland postmarks and addresses, so they were posted after he was postmaster and before the post office was discontinued in 1854. Note that one corner card gives the names of both towns in the address. I do not believe he moved physically from Pleasant Grove to Cumberland.

Zevely recognized the value of advertising and spent considerable effort to keep his name in front of postmasters. He advertised regularly in James Holbrook's *United States Mail and Post Office Assistant*. A five-line ad began in the November, 1860, issue and ran through March, 1862. Zevely then began to run the four-inch display ad shown in Figure 16. His prices were still the same, one dollar for the circular office stamp with dates and 25¢ for the auxiliary stamps. He was now offering ADVERTISED, REGISTERED, FORWARDED and MISSENT handstamps too. He also had "Due 3" for soldier's letters during the Civil War years.



Figure 15. Two Zevely corner cards from the transitional period when Pleasant Grove was being absorbed into Cumberland. Both bear imperforate three cent stamps so the period is 1854-55.

**Post-Office Marking Stamps!**  
*Delivered by Mail at the following prices.* **63**  
 CIRCULAR OFFICE STAMP, with changes for dates and screw complete,..... ONE DOLLAR.  
 (County or Year, fifty cents extra.)  
 Post-office Business, Free, Dating Stamps, and names of postmasters and post offices in straight lines, each..... 50 CENTS.  
 Paid, Free, Advertised, Registered, Forwarded, Misset, Due 3, and all kinds of rating stamps, canceling, black ink, or pad, each..... 25 CENTS.  
 Full directions for use sent with all stamps, including how to make the ink or pad.  
**64** Every and any style of stamp made to order, warranted to do good service for many years, if used with ordinary care per directions sent with them.  
 STAMPS for Books, Clothes, Business Cards, Envelopes, Fac-simile Signatures, Merchants, Railroads, Banks, everybody, at from 25 cents to \$5. Also, SEALS for Private Initials, Notaries, Commissioners, Societies, Corporations, &c., sent by mail, at from 25 cents to \$5. WOOD CUTS or WOOD ENGRAVING or all sorts of things and all sorts of uses.

**PRINTING AND COPYING PRESSES!**  
 A GOOD COPYING PRESS, with Portfolio, containing Copying Book, a Bottle of Ink, and Pen, will be sent by mail on receipt of One Dollar and Twenty-five Cents; being the cheapest and best Copying Press to be had.  
 PRINTING PRESSES OF ALL SIZES.—A Press with Chase complete, to print 3 by 4 inches, for \$5; Press to print 6 by 8 inches for \$15; Press to print 12 by 18 inches, for \$30; to print 18 by 26, \$75; to print 26 by 30, \$150.  
 These Presses are simple and easily worked, very durable, and are just what is wanted for all who may wish to do their own printing, or for use in printing offices.  
 For anything above mentioned, address  
 E. S. ZEVELY,  
 Washington City, D. C., or  
 JOHN H. ZEVELY,  
 Cumberland, Maryland.

Holbrook gave him a free promotion in the January, 1863 issue: "Wooden Stamps—We have always considered wood the best material for stamps used in post-marking and canceling, especially for service in a large majority of post offices. The impression is clearer, and the use of such stamps more satisfactory, than when made from brass or steel. They are also much cheaper. The advertisement of E.S. Zevely, Esq. in this paper, will tell the reader how to obtain not only post office, but other wooden stamps, copying presses, &c."

Zevely's *U.S. Mail* advertisement ran until 1864 when he reduced it to just a few lines. Then he enlarged it slightly and ran the new ad through the May, 1869, issue with address at Cumberland, Maryland.

Figure 16. Zevely advertisement that appeared in many issues of *The United States Mail and Post Office Assistant*.

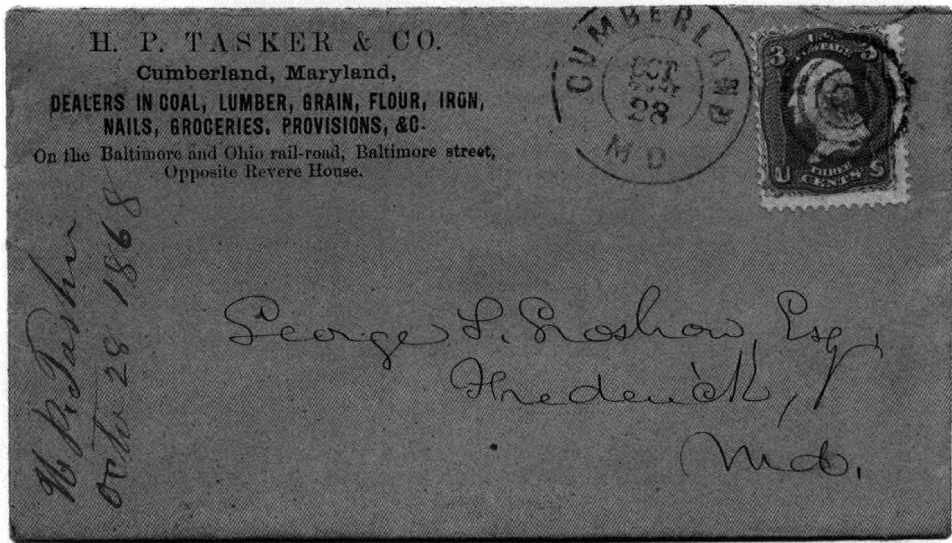


Figure 17. This 1868 cover bears a 3¢ 1861 stamp canceled at Cumberland and a corner card of a Cumberland merchant.

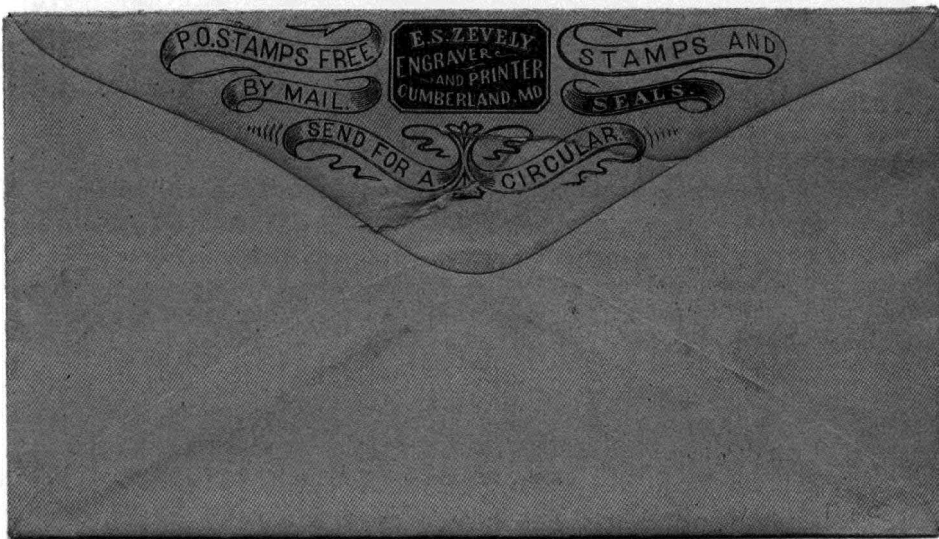


Figure 18. The back of the Figure 17 envelope shows a surprise: a different ad, this one for Zevely and his stamps. Presumably Tasker & Co. received some consideration to induce them to allow their outgoing mail to promote Zevely's business.

This article was sparked by the discovery of the envelope shown in Figures 17 and 18. The 1868 dating was so long after the time of the classic postmarks that I did not realize that Zevely was still in the same business. He probably printed this envelope. He may have offered special rates for printing when the buyer used his advertisement on the backflap of the envelope, as in Figure 18. At least one other example of this envelope is known. At this time Zevely had not started his newspaper.

The author would like to thank Frank Mandel, Robert Metcalf and Schuyler Rumsey for assistance. The late Andrew Levitt assisted in obtaining one of the illustrations. ■