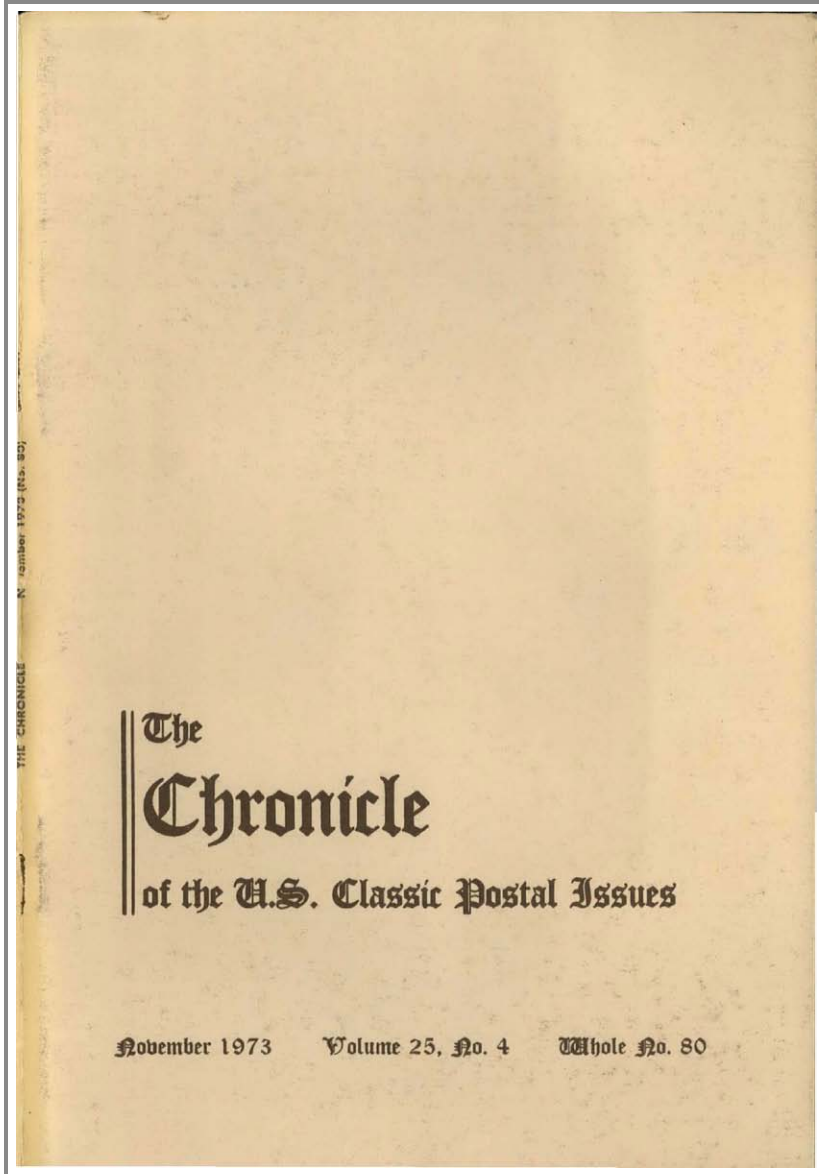




# U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 25 Number: 4 Year: 1973 Chronicle: 80

Article: Kicking Mule Cancellations



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## THE BANK NOTE PERIOD

MORRISON WAUD, Editor

### KICKING MULE CANCELLATIONS

What possible connection could there be between philately and a beast of burden that regularly pulled an eccentric business man's delivery cart up and down the hilly streets of San Francisco almost a century ago?

If you know the answer to that silly-sounding question you are almost surely a collector of the American Bank Note Company soft paper issues. Also you evidently have a keen interest in the Kicking Mule cancellations used in the 1880s and later by five small town Pacific Coast post offices: Port Townsend and Neah Bay in Washington; Forbestown, Goleta, and Susanville in California. Only a Kicking Mule aficionado is likely to know this off-beat canceller was a direct descendant of the delivery cart's flesh and blood mule.

The cart and mule were owned by C. A. Klinkner, an individualist who manufactured and sold, among other metal and rubber marking devices, a line of post office handstamps. Klinkner was locally noted for spectacular oddball schemes to attract attention to his wares. Most of his oddball efforts involved using his delivery cart as a moving signboard. As an extra eye-catcher, he frequently topped it off with a real live monkey, parrot, or dog bedecked with additional advertising signs.

Always the cart was drawn by a mule, usually white. Occasionally, however, the animal was literally dyed to match the season: green for St. Patrick's Day, red-white-and-blue for Independence Day, and so forth. Whenever a downtown San Franciscan sighted the mule-drawn outfit, he was presumably reminded to buy rubber stamps, notarial seals, metal signs, or whatever. Apparently this unorthodox publicity was effective. Klinkner was always prosperous.

The sole known surviving copy of a Klinkner catalog is the 1890 edition, which illustrates the Kicking Mule handstamp. Previous editions doubtless listed the same device, for Port Townsend owned and used his Kicking Mule canceller as early as mid-1880.

His 1890 catalog shows not only a reproduction of the Kicking Mule, but also a duplex handstamp simulation that combines the Mule with the townmark of a non-existent post office which he—typically—named Klinknerville, California. This touch was a left-handed attempt to reinforce his persistent but uniformly unsuccessful campaign to foist his name upon Emeryville, an Oakland suburb where he lived and dabbled in real estate. He never quit trying!



Figure 1  
Klinknerville cover.

A cover recently came to light with the identical Klinknerville postmark, date and killer, (Figure 1). Its origin must remain highly suspect since it pre-

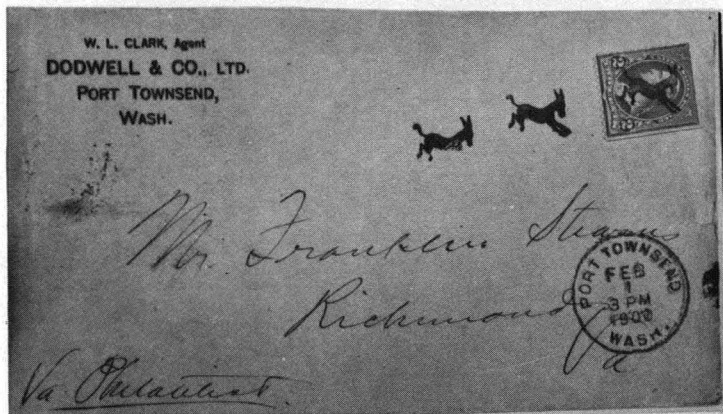
cisely duplicates the 1890 catalog illustration as shown in a 1960 stamp magazine. That Klinknerville cover became known some while after 1960. At best it may have been made either as a genuine commercial sample or, even less probably, as a favor for a philatelic friend. At worst. . .? ?

William Henry Harrison Learned, postmaster at Port Townsend in 1880, was the first to use the Kicking Mule canceller probably in July of that year. It is therefore remarkable that the first published record of this cancellation apparently did not come until twenty years later. In March 1900 the *Virginia Philatelist*, edited by the eminent philatelic student, August Dietz, printed an excellent tracing of the Mule along with the following item:

**A Unique Cancellation**

From Port Townsend, Wash., comes the most unique postal cancellation we have ever seen. It consists of three stampeding mules, and the envelope bearing these novel postmarks is a veritable little curio. Probably the State of Washington is thus immortalizing the American mules that stampeded at Ladysmith.

Dietz thus refers to the siege of Ladysmith in the Boer War, where the British Army suffered a disastrous defeat when the mules pulling the heavy guns stampeded at the first sound of battle. The British had purchased many of their mules in the United States, and Port Townsend was one point from which they were shipped to South Africa. The cover that inspired the Dietz news item is shown as *Figure 2*. The cancelling device struck on that cover is not the original Mule as used during the Bank Note period from 1880 to 1890. Instead it is identified as the Second Series Mule, a canceller not attached to a postmark.



**Figure 2**  
Dietz cover.

A. F. Learned, postmaster of Port Townsend from 1900 to 1914, used this newly acquired killer to cancel postage due stamps and the postage on registered letters. He also cancelled, apparently as philatelic favors, numerous covers and some off-cover stamps with the Kicking Mule. *Figure 3* shows four different American Bank Note stamps on piece, all issued between 1881 and 1888 but cancelled with the Second Series Mule not earlier than 1900. This item would clearly seem to be philatelically inspired.

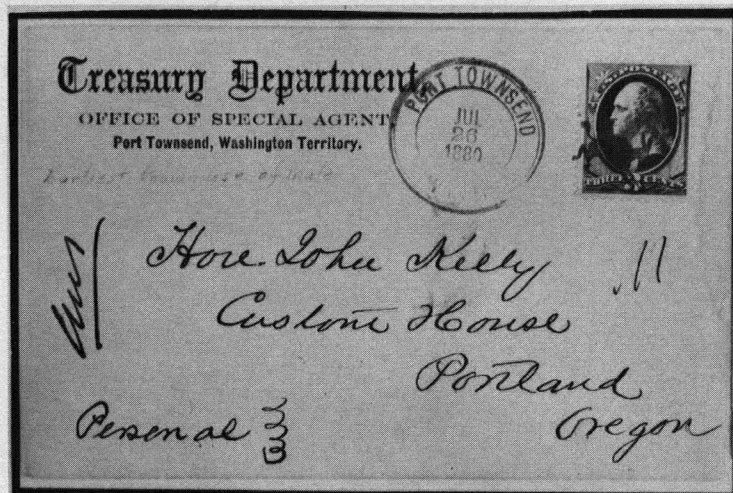


**Figure 3**  
Second Series Mule on Banknote Issues.

Collection and study of the American Bank Note Company soft paper issues and their postal markings have been less popular and so have produced less research literature than the National and Continental hard paper stamps and their markings. This is largely because in the 1880s standardized markings were steadily displacing such interesting fancy cancellations as the New York Foreign Mails and the Waterbury series of the 1870s, hence there seemed to be less to study and write about.

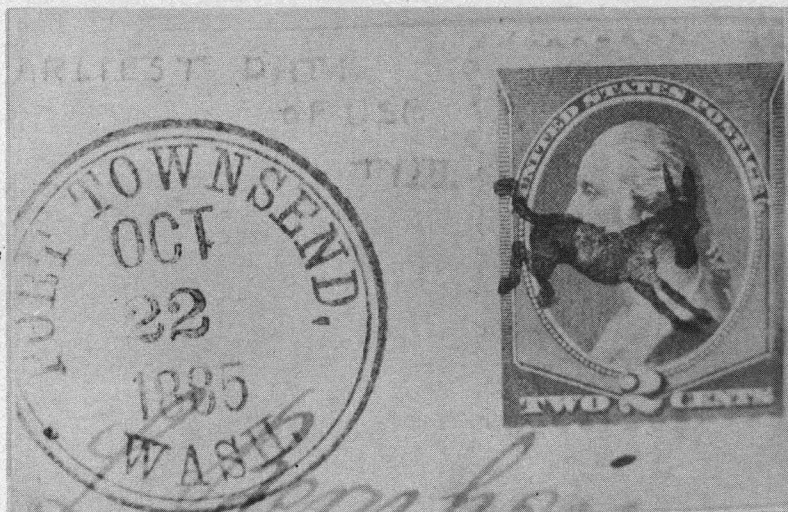
The Kicking Mule cancellations are spectacular exceptions to that trend toward the commonplace. Because they are so unusual, they were intensively collected and meticulously studied by Lee H. Cornell, a distinguished philatelist of Wichita, Kansas. In 1949 he published *The Tale of the Kicking Mule*, a well written, fascinating handbook that documents his numerous discoveries and summarizes all other significant facts then available.

**Figure 4**  
Earliest recorded use of  
Kicking Mule.



The earliest use recorded in Cornell's handbook was July 26, 1880, from Port Townsend. A cover of that date franked by a 3c Green of 1879 is shown as *Figure 4*. An official cover exists carrying the same date and the same Port Townsend postmark but without a stamp and without the Mule. This was long taken to indicate that the Mule device was attached to the postmark on July 26, 1880. Recently, however, a Xerox picture of a Port Townsend Kicking Mule cover of July 19, 1880, has been seen. When the cover itself can be examined, it seems likely that it will prove genuinely used on that earlier date.

**Figure 5**  
Earliest recorded use of  
Port Townsend Type III  
Mule.



Port Townsend produced by far the greatest number of Kicking Mule items. Also it created three distinct types of this cancellation. The Mule is identical in the three types, but each type was used only when attached to its own particular circular townmark. These are known as Types I, II and III in order of dates when used. *Figure 4* is a Type I Mule. *Figure 5* illustrates the earliest known date of use of a Type III Mule. Each of the other four Mule post offices used just its own single type of town circle. Examples of the Forbestown and Goleta Mules are illustrated in *Figures 6* and *7* respectively.

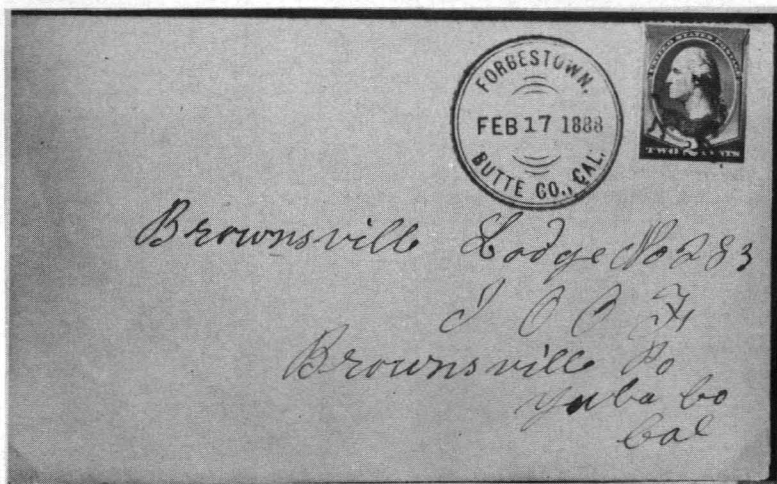


Figure 6  
Forbestown Mule.

Although all of the Mule cancelling devices apparently were made from Klinkner's single original die, an off-cover strike can be assigned with certainty to its proper type designation if even a small part of the postmark circle shows. In each instance the tell-tale characteristic is the distance from the Mule's hind hoof to the closest point on the postmark, which differs for each of the seven types of Mules, except Port Townsend Type II and Neah Bay. That measurement can also be important as one method for identifying fake Mules; some dangerous forgeries exist. Table I shows the critical distance of each genuine type of First Series Mule cancellations, and its known period of use.

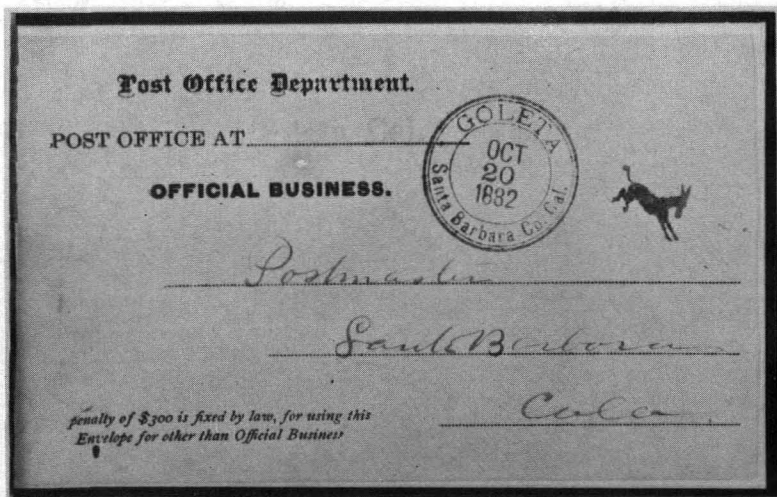


Figure 7  
Goleta Mule.

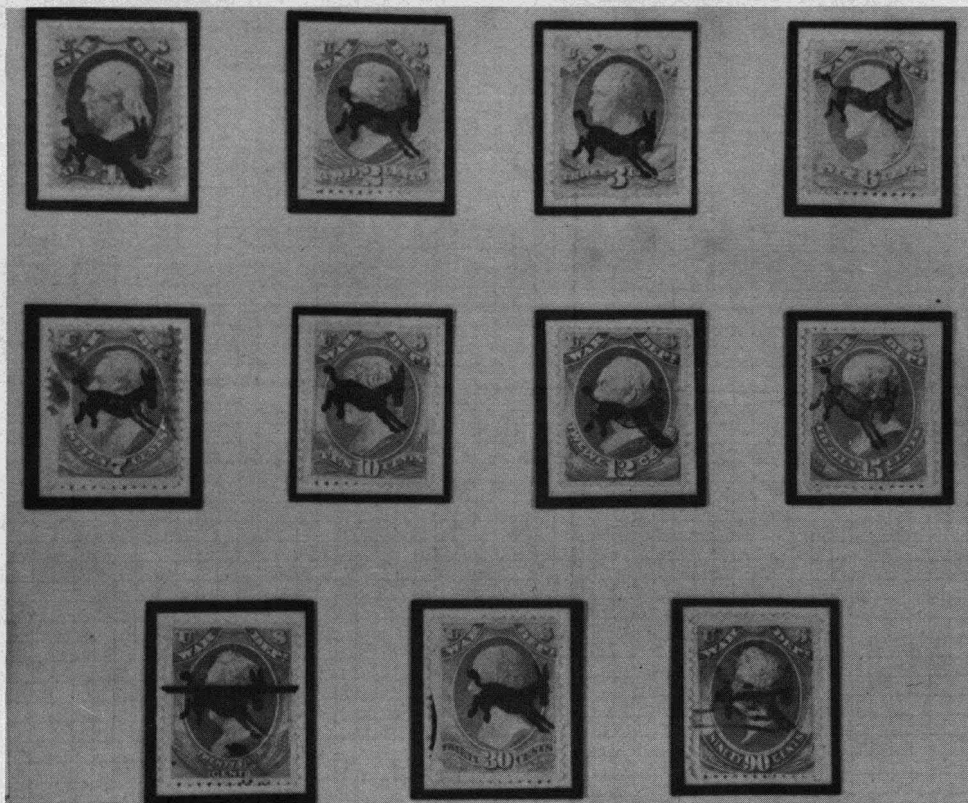
**Table 1. Distance Indicia and Dates of Use**

	Type	Hoof to Circle, Millimeters	Dates of Use	
			Early	Late
Port Townsend	I	5½	7-19-80	3-3-81
	II	6	5-11-81	9-8-85
	III	8	10-22-85	2-7-87
Neah Bay		6	6-12-83	5-31-86
Susanville		4	7-6-81	8-10-82
Forbestown		4½	3-21-82	9-8-92
Goleta		7	11-11-80	2-10-85

Series I Kicking Mule cancellations are known on most of the lower denominations of the soft paper Bank Note stamps then current. They are also found on numerous denominations of the Department stamps and on two denominations of the First Issue Postage Due stamps, which also were printed by American Bank Note Company. The Mules are also found on a number of different envelope stamps of the period. A complete set of the War Department stamps with Kicking Mules is shown as *Figure 8*. Table 2 summarizes the stamps on which the First Series Mule has been reported.

**Table 2. Incidence of First Series Mule Cancellations on Current Stamp Issues**

Issue	Denominations, Cents
1879	1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15
1882	5
1881-82	1, 3, 6, 10
1883	2, 4
1887	1, 2
POSTAGE DUE	1, 3
WAR	All denominations
AGRICULTURE	2, 3, 6
INTERIOR	3, 6, 10, 15, 30
Envelopes	Eleven varieties



**Figure 8**  
Complete set of Kicking Mules on War Department stamps.



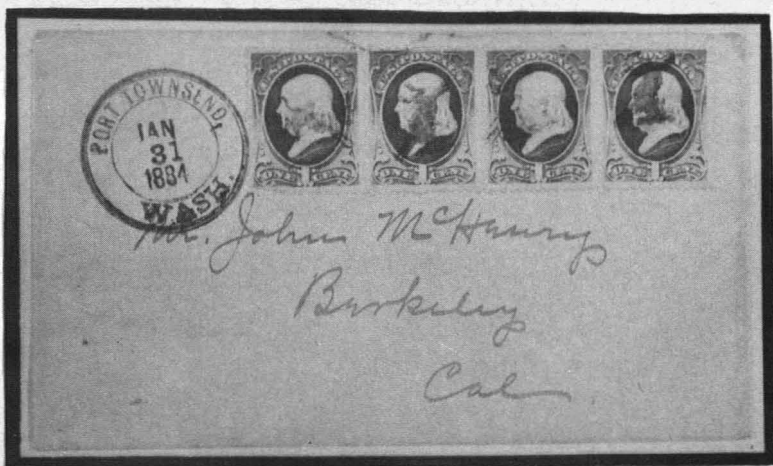


**Figure 9**  
Kicking Mule on Canadian "Small Queen" issue.



**Figure 10**  
One of two examples on a postage due stamp.

Kicking Mule cancellations are most frequently found on the 3c Greens of 1879 and 1881, and the 2c Brown of 1883. The duplex handstamps including the Kicking Mule were used also as receiving and transit marks on domestic mail and mail from Canada. Two Canadian stamps are known canceled with Mules, which probably were applied at Port Townsend as transit marks. An example is shown as *Figure 9*. The Mule cancellations have been found on two soft paper Postage Due stamps of the 1879 American Bank Note issue. Cornell's handbook illustrates the 1c used for postage on a Goleta cover. Also known is the 3c off cover cancelled with a Port Townsend Mule, shown as *Figure 10*. On 5c and higher postage denominations the Mule is rare. Since all of the five post offices using this cancellation were in small towns which typically produce mail of very limited scope, unusual uses with the Kicking Mule are seldom seen and are proportionately sought after by collectors.



**Figure 11**  
Multiple cancellations of the Mule.

Postmaster W. H. H. Learned of Port Townsend had a pleasant custom when handstamping covers which were franked with multiple stamps. He regularly made his first strike in conventional manner, so that the town circle showed in full on the envelope itself and the Mule on the left hand stamp did his kicking from a normal horizontal stance. To cancel the other stamps on the

envelope Learned invariably turned his handstamp 90 degrees clockwise so that their Mules stood on their heads. Only a tiny arc of the town circle's outer ring either barely struck above the stamps or did not strike at all. *Figure 11* is an excellent example of this cancelling technique.

If space permitted, it would be possible to write an article about Kicking Mules several times as long, without repeating. But the present article is intended to be only an introduction to the fascinating subject of Klinkner's Kicking Mule as used in the Bank Note period. For comprehensive treatment of the topic as well as for genuinely interesting reading, Cornell's handbook is highly recommended.

In the quarter century since Cornell compiled his handbook, a considerable amount of additional information has turned up. This includes at least six earlier or later dates than he recorded and much miscellaneous data. The total is enough to justify a supplement to his volume, or perhaps even a new publication on the Kicking Mule.

Such a project is now under consideration. The editor of the Bank Note Period of the *Chronicle* would appreciate hearing from those Route Agents who are interested in the Kicking Mule cancellations. He is particularly eager for new information on dates of use and on heretofore unrecorded stamps and/or covers carrying Mule cancellations. Also requested is word from those who have good examples of the Mule on or off cover.

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