

TIPS, TECHNIQUES, AND TOOLS

Going Beyond “The ABC’s of Precancels”

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INTRODUCTION

Tips, Techniques, and Tools is a brief encyclopedia of precancel and Precancel Stamp Society information. The contents have been collected and compiled into a single reference pamphlet to help newer precancel collectors understand some of the terms used in this unique section of philately and to provide information that is beyond the scope of most precancel catalogs.

Most of the topics presented below need only a few sentences for an explanation. However, those which required more detail are in the Appendix.

There were several reasons that I felt the need to compile precancel information for this publication:

When I was asked by the Board of Governors of the Precancel Stamp Society to be the Editor of *The Precancel Forum*, my first response was that I was not an expert. There was no way that I would be able to answer many of the questions that I had seen asked in previous issues of the magazine. I was told to not worry; just ask and one of the experts will be glad to provide the information.

Sometime after taking on the role of Editor, I realized that there is a tremendous amount of information about precancels that, even if recorded, is not in a single location. Although *The ABC’s of Precancel Collecting* contains basic information that will help a new collector get started, it falls short of providing helpful information beyond the basics.

For whatever the reason, many precancel **impressions** do not match perfectly to an illustration in the **PSS Style Chart** or to one of the local impressions that appear at the end of each state’s listing in the *Town and Type Catalog* (from this point forward shortened to *T&T Catalog*). Therefore, there is a tendency for novice collectors to think they have found an unlisted type, when, in fact, they have not.

What follows is an attempt to assimilate into a single location a means to help with the identification of seemingly “unlisted” items. I learned some of this information as answers to my own questions and from answers to other members’ questions that were asked and answered in articles in *The Precancel Forum* or *Forum*. When available, the information is credited to the person who provided it. A sincere “Thank You” is extended to all the members who, over the years, provided the information and corrected my misconceptions. I hope that access to this information will increase your enjoyment of this entertaining and challenging area of philately.

I frequently encounter some of the topics presented here. However, I don’t collect “everything” and rarely encounter some of these topics. Even some advanced collectors may only infrequently encounter some of these topics.

The topics are presented in alphabetical order. When one topic includes a term that is explained elsewhere, that term appears in **bold-face type**. When there is a suggestion to learn about an additional, related topic, a hyperlink is provided for jumping to that topic. At the end of that article there is another hyperlink to return or jump to another article.

A few respected precancel personalities and some out-of-print material are mentioned in the following pages. There has been no attempt to include a complete list of either. Current PSS publications and databases are included in each issue of the *Forum*. Out-of-print material may be available, at times, from some dealers and/or various outlets on the Internet.

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Larry Patterson, PSS 5007, Editor, *The Precancel Forum*, July 2017

The ABC’s of Precancel Collecting: *The ABC’s of Precancel Collecting* is accessible on the Precancel Stamp Society’s web site (www.precancels.com). Click on the “Getting Started” tab in the “General Information” section. *The ABC’s* provide an excellent overview of precancels. However, the overview does not include all the topics and corresponding illustrations found in this publication.

Album Pages: Prior to the tremendous expansion of, and easy access to, information on the internet, several clubs and individuals designed, printed, and sold album pages for mounting specific precancel collections. Some of these contained spaces for the towns and types of specific states, such as California and Ohio. Others were printed for specific collecting specialties, such as **Bureaus**. Members of PSS, who purchase the PSS software, can, with a few clicks of a mouse, design and print album pages to fit many collecting specialties. Free album pages are also available on the PSS website. Today, few members spend time designing album pages for sale to other collectors.

See also [Mounting Precancels](#). See also [Organizing Precancels](#).

Apple Greens: The apple green ink color of the 13-cent denomination of the 1917 issue led to the name of this precancel collecting specialty. The stamp was issued to pay for the 3-cent domestic postage rate, plus either the 10-cent registry rate or the 10-cent special delivery rate. About 7 months after the stamp was issued, the domestic postage rate was lowered to 2 cents. Due to the short-life span of its need, it is somewhat difficult to find a 13-cent apple green used alone to pay the proper rate. (Information taken from the introduction to Michael S. Gutman’s *13 Cent 1917 Apple Green Catalog of Precancels*, 2006.) As a rule of thumb, Apple Green precancels are priced higher than their **Type** value in the *T&T Catalog*. The example to the right is a Type 207 precancel from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Apple greens are a [Specialty Collection](#).



Bars and Lines: Most precancels have a town and state name appearing between a set of parallel bars or lines. Bars, regardless of their thickness, have gaps between each **position** in every row of the **device**. Lines, regardless of their thickness, extend, unbroken, all the way across a row on a device.



The slightly **off-center** precancel of Type 205 from Greensboro, NC, makes it easy to see the breaks in the bars between positions on the device. On the other hand, the lines on Type 701 from Peru, IL, extend through the perforations, all the way across the stamp.

[Return to Double Line Electros.](#)

BEP: See [Bureau of Engraving and Printing](#).

Bicentennial Precancels: See [Washington Bicentennials](#).

Black Book: See [Hoover Black Book](#).

Black Harding: The 2-cent Harding Memorial Issue commemorated the death of Warren G. Harding, the 29th President of the United States. From the time, they



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were first issued, precancels on this stamp have been sought for a Black Harding **specialty collection**, for which there is a **checklist**. These precancels sell for more than their **Type** value listed in the *T&T Catalog*. The example on the previous page has an impression of Type 458 from Jersey City, NJ. Some of these stamps were precanceled with red ink. (The use of black ink for most impressions and the black background of the stamp prevents some collectors from seeking items for a Black Harding collection.)

Blurred Impression: See [Identifying a Blurred or Distorted Impression](#) in the Appendix.

Booklet Panes: Generally, booklet panes were not precanceled. However, **mail order** houses could precancel stamps received in lieu of or in conjunction with a partial monetary payment and then use the stamps to pay the postage to mail goods to their customers.

See the end of the article about [Dated Controls](#) in the Appendix.

Booster Bucks: These are donations that help defray the costs of a precancel borsch, especially that of the annual PSS Convention.

Box or Roller Cancellers: *Parallel lines are not a guarantee that an impression is a precancel.*

A box canceller is a single- or multiple-**impression** hand-stamp **device**. Four lines, joined at the corners, form a box or rectangle. The box usually contains at least a town and state name. Many box and roller cancellers were available for window clerks to cancel stamps on envelopes and packages as they were handed to the clerk for processing.

In a roller canceller, a series of **positions** are joined, usually side-by-side, and mounted on device that can be rolled, like a wheel, across a set of stamps. Often the town and state names, in each position, are enclosed in a box.

There are at least three clues for detecting a box or roller cancel:

1. Precancel impressions were designed to fit within the borders of a single stamp. Box and roller impressions tend to be larger than a single stamp and often tie, or extend, the cancel onto the cover. Some of these impressions fit across more than one stamp. See [Parallel Lines](#).
2. Although all four sides and corners of a box may not appear on the stamp, some corners are usually on the stamp.
3. Town and state name are usually oriented with the stamp’s design.
4. A fourth possible clue is not an absolute. Because sheet stamps, rather than coil stamps, were usually more readily available to window clerks, box and roller impressions are more apt to be found on sheet stamps than on coil stamps.

Illustrations of box and roller cancels appear on the next page.

In the left and middle examples on the next page, it appears that the impressions were made from two side-by-side boxes with two different roller devices. Although the horizontal line and vertical line (under the arrow) in the device from Newkirk, Okla. do not meet and join, the presence of both lines is an indication that this was not a precancel device. In the device used in Chicago, Ill., the horizontal and vertical lines join and form a corner.

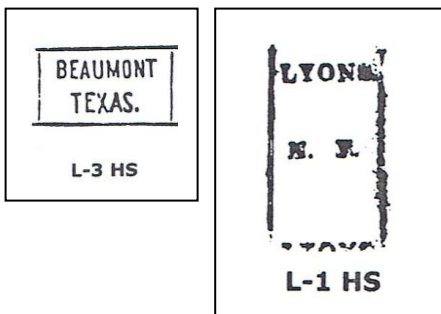
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The box cancel from “Strasburg, VA 22657” has vertical and horizontal lines that join; the impression is too large to fit on one stamp. The impression extends onto (is tied to) the cover. Only few precancel devices contain a Zip Code.



Below are two examples of **local devices** that form boxes or have the town and state names perpendicular to the parallel lines. At first glance, the latter example might be confused with a box formation. All valid devices that form a box are illustrated in *The T and T Catalog*.



Some devices, such as the L-3 HS from Beaumont, Texas, have boxes. Some locally-obtained devices, such as the L-1 HS from Lyons, NY, have a vertical, rather than a horizontal, orientation. It is best to compare the impression about which you have a question, with the illustrations in the *PSS Style Chart* as well as to the reproductions of the locally-obtained devices that follow each state listing in the *Town and Type Catalog*.

See [Fancy or Design Precancels](#). See also [City-type coils](#).

Brown or Black Ink that should be Orange: See [Sulfurization](#).

Bureau of Engraving and Printing: Under contract to the Post Office Department, and later the United States Postal Service, the Bureau of Printing and Engraving (BEP) printed most of the precancels known as **Bureaus** or Buros. Other than the Experimental types, which were used in only three cities (New Orleans, LA; Augusta, ME; and Springfield, MA), BEP required a post office to order, per denomination, at least 500,000 sheet stamps or 250,000 coil stamps. U.S. postage stamps are no longer printed at BEP, but by private contractors. [Return to the BEP heading](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

Bureaus: The Postal Service contracted with the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) to print the precancels known as Bureaus. Over time, BEP used 24 different **types** or **styles** which are described and illustrated in the *PSS Style Chart* and the *PSS Bureau Catalog*. Due to extensive quality control, only a few Bureaus have errors. None were released with the precancel reading upside down in relation to the stamp’s design or with multiple impressions. Bureaus were *not* used to precancel **commemoratives**.

Private contractors, rather than BEP, now print all U.S. postage stamps, including those that pay the fees that are less than the first-class, one-ounce rate. Some collectors continue to call these stamps Bureaus; other collectors use the term [National](#) Precancels. These stamps, which do not have a town and state name printed between parallel lines, can be found in “Part Three” of *PSS’s Catalog of Bureau Precancels*. National precancels that have been released since publication of the current *Bureau Catalog* are available from the PSS member who compiles the Burometer.

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Bureaus change from wide to narrow spacing between the lines. See [Dated Controls](#) in the Appendix.

Catalogs and Checklists Catalogs and checklists contain information about a precancel collecting specialty. In general, catalogs contain more detailed information about a specialty than do checklists. Checklists may include (1) a list of stamps that have a specific precancel(s) or (2) a list of precancels on a specific issue(s). PSS Catalogs are listed on the inside back cover of each *Forum*. Other precancel catalogs and checklists are available from some dealers and the individuals or local clubs that compiled them. Older, out-of-print catalogs and check lists, when available, may be obtained from some dealers and from internet auction sites.

Catalog Value: The catalog value of a precancel has been established as the least expensive (most common) precancel of the designated **Type** where the imprint is readable with the unaided eye. Some catalogs, such as the *PSS Bureau Catalog* and the *PSS Double Line Electro Catalog*, provide individual values for each denomination of each stamp issue. It is beyond the scope of other catalogs, such as the *PSS Town and Type Catalog*, to provide values for different denominations or issues. *Usually, precancel catalog values are based on the scarcity of the precancel rather than on the scarcity of the stamp.*

See also [Pricing Precancels](#) in the Appendix.

Centering: The location, both horizontally and vertically within the margins or borders of a stamp’s design and a precancel **impression** is referred to as centering. Clear and distinct copies of well-centered precancels sell at higher prices than those whose design touches (dt) or cuts into (dc) the perforations.



Bureau Type 61 from Pittsburgh, PA, is relatively well-centered. Type 529 from Owatonna, MN, is a **split cancel**. Types 734 from Farmersville, OH, and 704 from Coldwater, OH, are **off-center**.

[See also split cancel.](#) [See also Line Off.](#)

Chrono Number: The chronological or sequential number assigned to newly printed Bureau precancels as they were known to be used.

A specific U.S. Post Office had to order a denomination before the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) could precancel the stamps.

Usually, a list of the precancels printed during a month was provided to interested individuals, including new issues dealers. These dealers attempted to obtain the new precancels so they could supply to their customers.

When a dealer received a previously unreported Bureau precancel, the dealer sent a copy to the Listing Editor of *The Bureau Catalog*. The listing editor assigned a receiving number, known as a "Chrono (chronological) Number." The assignment of a Chrono Number indicated a precancel had been used on a specific denomination of an issue from a specific town.

The assignment usually followed closely after release of BEP’s monthly lists. However, new precancels were not always immediately used on mail. Some post offices stored new precancels until a customer requested a certain denomination. Sometimes rates changed and a specific denomination was no longer needed. Some denominations were retained for years before being used because the demand for them

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changed or older stocks had to be used before newer material. Some denominations never appeared on mailings and, thus, were never reported to the listing editor.

The term “chrono number” is rarely used today. In the past, the term was important to collectors who wanted to keep their Bureau collections up to date. The number provided a means for collectors to know the number of Bureaus that had been used for a mailing and the number remaining on a want list.

(Information provided by Dilmond D. Postlewait, PSS 184-3544)

See also [Bureau of Printing and Engraving](#). See also **Lyons List** in [Contracted Local Device](#).

City-type Coils: Coil stamps have two perforated sides and two imperforate straight edges. PSS divides city-type coils into two sections:

Devices 101 through 136 were designed to place one image, aligned with the stamp’s design, on a coil stamp as the roll passed through a precancel imprinting device. The **impressions** made by devices 101 through 136 are **normal** when the impression and the stamp design have the same orientation. The impressions are **inverted** when they are upside down in relation to the stamp’s design. Because these devices do not have sides that connect the top and bottom parallel lines, they are rarely confused with box or roller cancels.

Devices 141 through 183 were designed to place at least two images on a stamp. The impressions made with these devices are much smaller than most **box** or **roller** impressions. Usually, each stamp has parts of at least two sets of the name of a town and state. However, if there was incorrect tension on the roll as the stamps passed through the precanceling device, the incorrect tension could spread or compact the size, and possibly number, of impressions on a stamp.

On horizontal coils made with devices 141 through 183, the **normal impression** of town and state names read from the bottom to the top of a stamp’s design; an **inverted** impression reads from the top to the bottom of a stamp’s design. On vertical coils, the normal impression of town and stamp names are in the same direction as a stamp’s design; an inverted impression is upside down in relation to a stamp’s design. Due to the presence of two impressions in two rectangular boxes on each coil stamp, some collectors call these **ladder** precancels.



To the left, the top example is PSS Type 101 on a horizontal coil with a single impression of “Rochester, NY.” The first stamp in the second row is another horizontal coil from Rochester NY. That one is precanceled with Type 162 and has parts of three sets of the town and state names. The right-side example in the second row is a vertical coil precanceled with Type 163; it has two complete sets of the town and state names of “Washington, D.C.” Because the right-side lines of the impression did not print on the stamp, this is a **line-off** impression.

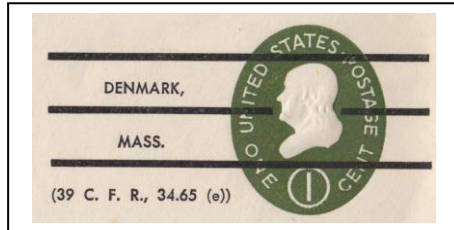
[Return to Box or Roller Cancellers](#). See also [Coil Stamps](#).

Classic precancels: Some people consider classic precancels to be those made before 1908; others include stamps precanceled as late as 1920. Regardless, both the precancel device and the stamp must have been available during those time periods. [See also Hoover Black Book](#).

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Code of Federal Regulations (CFR): The unified body of laws and regulations of all federal government agencies is known as the Code of Federal Regulations. Title 39 of the C.F.R covers the Postal Service. Prior to the late 1930’s, individual federal government agencies published their own rules and regulations. The “Postal Laws and Regulations (P. L. & R.) covered the Post Office Department. At one time covers that contained precancel stamps were required to include a preprinted or handstamped citation of the P.L.&R. that allowed the use of the precancel.



To the left, is a scan of a stamped, precanceled envelope from Denmark, Mass. with “39 C.F.R.” included in the die. (Note, on page 57 of the February 2014 issue of *The Precancel Forum*, the author stated that there is no Denmark, Mass. The corner card on the envelope illustrated in the article had a Dedham, Mass. address.)

[See P.L.&R.](#)

Coil Stamps: Coil stamps have straight edges on two opposite sides and perforations on the other pair of opposite sides. Coil stamps were produced with the designs side-by-side (horizontal coils) or end-to-end (vertical coils). Most coil stamps, intended for valid use as precancels, were precanceled by machine.

To meet collector-driven demand, some coils were precanceled with hand stamp devices, especially during the **walk-in/write-in era**. The 2¢ Liberty coil with a Type 841 from Erath, LA, shown to the right is an example from that time period.



Some users of coil stamps affixed the stamps to the cover with a machine. Due to misaligned rolls or machines, it is not unusual to find precanceled coil stamps with a third straight edge instead of perforations. Neither is it unusual to find **sheet** stamps, with clipped perforations that seem at first glance to be a coil. When there is a doubt about a stamp being produced as a sheet and/or coil stamp, refer to a *Scotts*, the *PSS DLE Catalog*, or any other catalog that contains the desired level of detail.



There is no doubt that the 2¢ Liberty coil with a Type 841 from Erath, LA, shown above, has perforations on two sides. The **National Bureau** (no town or state name) coil of the “Wheel Chair of the 1920’s” from the Transportation Coils Issue was cut from the roll in such a manner that there are hardly any perforations visible on the right side.

See also [City Type Coils](#). See also [Walk-ins/Write-ins](#).
See also the [Dated Controls](#) article in The Appendix.

Coil Waste: In 1919 the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) attempted to salvage waste from the unused lead or tail end of paper used for rotary press printings. The paper was too small for either rolling into coil rolls, or for perforating for 400-subject sheets. The stamps have perforations on all four sides because BEP cut the sheets into panes that were put through the flat-plate perforating machine, in use at the time.



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The best-known precanceled stamp that was printed from coil waste is the Kansas City, Missouri 596-43, perf. 11 (Scott 596). Of the 14 known copies, most are precanceled; but a few are not. Because the item is desired by all collectors of U.S. stamps, all known copies demand a premium price (\$100,000 in the 2005 edition of the *PSS Bureau Catalog*, but \$125,00 for a precanceled copy and \$175.00 for a non-precanceled copy in *Scott’s 2012 U.S. Specialized Catalog*.). (The image on previous page scanned from *Scott Specialized Catalog of U.S. Stamps*, 1996.)

Collector-driven devices:

See [Walk-ins and Write-ins](#). See [Souvenir](#). See [Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors](#).

Commemorative Stamps, Precanceled: Through the mid-1930’s many commemorative stamps were the same size as definitive stamps. Precancel devices could be used to imprint a sheet, or block, of commemoratives in the same manner that they could be used to imprint the same number of definitives. Many of the early commemoratives were precanceled and became collecting specialties in their own right. Sometime after the size of commemoratives increased, the Post Office Department determined that there was no need for commemorative stamps to be precanceled. Perhaps the reason for the ruling was because there were 100 stamps on a sheet of definitive stamps and, usually, only half that number on a typical sheet of commemorative stamps.

Some large early commemoratives, including the Pan Pacific, Huguenot-Walloons, Lexington-Concord Issues and the 2¢ **Liberty Bell** of the Sesquicentennial Exposition, were precanceled legitimately. Other large stamps intended for a specific purpose, such as Special Delivery and Special Handling stamps also received legitimate precancels. Other devices that were made to fit the larger stamps include San Francisco, California’s L-5 TS, shown below on the left, the impression reads down on a 1-cent



denomination of the 1934 National Parks Issue, and the 2-cent Parcel Post, precanceled with the L-2 E device from Claremont, N.H. that appears on Page 10. **Note:** The impression from Oakland, Calif.’s 701 device, which also appears on a 1-cent denomination from the 1934 National Parks Issue but reading up, was designed to fit a definitive

stamp. So even though two impression appear on the stamp, these are not considered **double impressions**.

See also [Double Impression](#). See also [Dated Controls](#) in the Appendix.

Compound Device: A device that is manufactured with two different types is known as a compound device. More than one type can be found on both government-contracted devices and locally-obtained-non-standard devices. The government-contracted devices are listed in the *T&T Catalog* using the format: Any State, Any Town, Type 1/Type 2. The **types** are listed in numerical order. One specific example is Victoria, MN, 745/747. The different impressions made by locally-obtained-non-government compound device are known as **varieties**. The Pueblo, CO, L-6 MG device has six different varieties All varieties are illustrated in each state’s “L” section of the *T&T Catalog*.

Some collectors want only one type or variety from a device. Some collectors want both (or all) and try to collect them *se tenant*.

Note: The various Town and Type counts printed six times a year in *The Precancel Forum* are enumerations of devices, so only one impression from a **compound device** may be included in those counts.

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Shown to the right is another “non-double” impression. Even though there are two impressions of the L-1 HS from Whitefield, NH on the 2¢ denomination of the Huguenot-Walloon Issue, they were made with a single application by a device whose positions were made to fit within the dimensions of a typical definitive stamp.



See also [Repaired Device](#). See also [Dual Printing](#). See also [Double Impression](#). See also [Variety](#).

Contracted Local Device: The U.S. Post Office Department, and later the U.S. Postal Service, contracted with private-sector companies to supply standardized precanceling devices to post offices throughout the United States. The devices were used by post offices that could not meet BEP’s minimum order for a denomination, as well as by some post offices that could meet BEP’s minimum order criteria.

The contracted local devices are identified and illustrated as Types 101 through 906 in the *PSS Official Style Chart*, as well as in several precancel catalogs. In a few instances, contract devices did not match standard styles; these are identified with a “G” prefix to indicate they were obtained through a government contract. Both “G” and “L” devices, used by a specific town in a specific state are illustrated at the end of the appropriate state’s section of *The PSS T&T Catalog*.

Over time several members of PSS kept detailed records of the contracts for local devices made between the Postal Service and manufacturers of devices. One person who compiled this information was Rolston Lyon. Thus, the information is referred to as the “**Lyons List**.” In subsequent years, Jim Callis maintained the information. The list was started prior to the development of the PSS Style Chart and contained abbreviations for a limited number of broad identifiers. These included: WHE, NHE, V, H, Env, E. In order these mean, Wide Hand Electro, Narrow Hand Electro, Vinyl, Handstamp, Envelope, and Electro. The list also contains an indication of whether a precancel made with the device has ever been seen. Even after all these years, there are still a few entries on the list for which no one has seen and reported to PSS a precancel made from the device.

See also [Local Precancel Device](#) See also [PSS Official Style Chart](#).

See also [Is This An Unlisted Type?](#) in the Appendix. Return to [Lyons List](#) in the alphabetical Listings.

Counterfeits: See [Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors](#). See also [Souvenir](#). See also [Pseudos](#).

Dated Controls: A detailed article about [Dated Controls](#) is provided in the Appendix.

Device: A device is an implement, such as a handstamp, printing plate, arrangement of movable type, mimeograph stencil, or other implement designed to imprint information, usually the town and state name, on each stamp before it is separated from adjacent stamps on a sheet or roll of coil stamps.

The Stickney Rotary Intaglio presses used at BEP used plates with 400 definitive-sized subjects which were separated by margins between the sheets of 100 stamps that would eventually be sent to post offices. (See the “Introduction” of the *PSS Bureau Catalog* for detailed information about the various printing processes that have been used by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.)

Plates with 100 subjects could be mounted on a press and precancel a pane of 100 stamps at one time. Early hand stamp devices were designed to precancel five rows of five stamps (5 x 5) or a quarter of a pane of 100 stamps. (Users were advised to use a rocking motion to obtain a good impression on each of

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the 25 stamps.) Later hand stamp devices, which did not require a rocking motion, were designed to precancel two rows of five stamps (2 x 5).

Some plates were designed to precancel the 50 subjects in a pane of larger stamps, such as Special Delivery and Parcel Post stamps, whose widths are greater than their height. (Claremont, NH’s, L-2 E on a 2¢ Parcel Post shown to the right is an example of a precancel made with one of those devices.) Each section of the *PSS T&T Catalog* contains footnotes, denoting among other specifics, the arrangement of the positions on a device and the number of stamps which could be precanceled at one time.



There are a few valid one- and two-subject devices. However, because cutting costs was one of the reasons for the advent of precancels, a small number of subjects on a device did not allow for much of a savings in the cost of labor involved in producing precancels. Regardless of the number of positions on it, to be accepted as a valid precancel device, it must be shown that the device was not used for any purpose other than precanceling.

See also [Impression](#). See also [Type](#). See also [PSS Style Chart](#). See also [Position](#).

Distorted Impression: See [Identifying a Blurred or Distorted Impression](#) in the Appendix.

Down, Impression Reading: See [Normal Impression](#).

Double Line Electros: Double Line Electros (DLE’s) are electros with a double set of parallel lines. There are twelve PSS DLE Types: 241 through 252. DLE’s are a collecting specialty for which there is a catalog. By tradition, this collecting specialty includes four non-PSS types: New York, NY, G-1 E and G-2 E; Rochester, NY, L-6 E; and San Antonio, TX, L-5 TS. The 3¢ NATO shown above to the right was precanceled with a Type 243 from Oakland, CA.



DLE’s should not be confused with fiver rubber hand stamp devices, which have a double set of parallel bars. In PSS types, 631 through 635, the thickness and height of the letters in the town and state names are not identical. Further, there is considerable difference in the thickness of the letters of the fonts used in DLE’s and the fonts in the five devices with parallel bars. The example to the right is of a Type 631 that was used to precancel a 2¢ Presidential in Chester, VT.

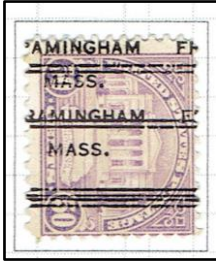


There are also quite a few locally-procured types which have more than one set of parallel lines or bars. These are illustrated and described at the end of a specific State’s section in the *T&T Catalog* with the other “L” devices from that State. [See Bars and Lines](#).

Double Impression or Double: Two impressions, made by two individual applications, on a single stamp are known as a double or double impression. The impressions may or may not be aligned in the same direction. Note: Every collector does not use the same criteria regarding the amount of a second impression that must be visible before declaring that an impression is a double. Unless you specifically collect doubles, or refuse to collect them, the differences may not be important to you.

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Shown to the left is a double impression of DLE Type 247 on a 50¢ compound perf from the 1926-1932 issue.

Shown to the right is a Type 703 from Mahomet, IL, on a 1¢ Defense. The second “ET” and limited portions of the top and bottom bars do not qualify this as a double impression.



Return to [Multiple Impressions](#). See also [Dual Printing](#).

See also [Compound Device](#). See also [Repaired Device](#).

Double or Triple Paper: During the manufacturing process, the joining of two or three webs or rolls of paper, intended for use on a rotary printing press, created double or triple layers of paper. These are not repairs that used something, such as cellophane tape, to connect separated edges of paper. **BEP** used double or triple paper in the production of some precancels; the few are noted in *The PSS Bureau Catalog*.

Dual Printing: Some devices, especially Double Line Electros became so worn, especially around the edge of the device that all the stamps to be precanceled did not receive a satisfactory impression. When this occurred, another device may have been used to complete the precanceling operation. The appearance of both a faint or partial DLE impression and an impression from another device is known as a dual printing rather than a **double impression**. (I do not have an example of a dual printing to include here.)

Return to [Multiple Impressions](#). See [Double Impression](#).

See [Compound Device](#). See [Repaired Device](#).

Errors: There are many kinds of errors. Some are accidental; some are intentional on the part of the press operator or person using a hand-stamp device. Some errors occur when sheets of stamps are fed through a printing press so that the town and state name are printed upside down, on a diagonal, or more than once on the design of the stamp. Other errors contain misspelled town or state names or miss-positioned names or names in a different type face within the device. Some errors are well-known and documented in various precancel catalogs. Usually an error must be found multiple times before it is documented and recognized as something other than an isolated anomaly. A complete list of all the different kinds of errors is too large for inclusion here.

Every “Precancel” Has a Story: At one time CBS evening news reporter, Steve Hartman, had a weekly series in which he reported that everyone has a story. To paraphrase the title of his series, “Every precancel has a story.” In addition to the information that was known early on, the internet has provided a tool for researchers to discover additional stories or details. Many of these stories are interesting; some tend to be “ho hum.” Quite a few stories have been lost and will remain unknown.

Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors: Fakes, counterfeits, and favors look like real precancels, but are not. Some of these items have existed from “Day 1.” When there is a concern about a specific **impression**, it usually takes a knowledgeable, experienced collector to determine whether an item is a genuine precancel. William Cummings’ *Things That Look Like A Precancel But Are Not* is a work-in-progress to illustrate and describe known fakes, counterfeits, and favors. It is available electronically from the author during the interim.

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Going Beyond “The ABC’s of Precancels”

In the *Town and Type Catalog*, a precancel is defined as follows:

A **precancel**, or precanceled stamp, is an adhesive postage (or revenue) stamp that has been cancelled, under proper authority, with a device designed solely for this purpose, before being affixed to mail (or taxable) matter. Postage stamps that have been cancelled with parts of discarded precancel devices relegated to post cancelling service are not precancels.

Fakes are imprints for which there was no official authority for their issuance or use.

Counterfeits were made to look like real precancels. Often, but not always, they were made to resemble rarer, higher valued, or highly desired precancels.

Favors are stamps precanceled by a representative of the post office or by a collector, but for which there was no need.

Return to [Counterfeits](#). Return to [Favors](#).

See also [Pseudos](#). See also [Souvenirs](#). See also [Walk-ins and Write-ins](#).

Fancy Precancels or Precancels with a Design: Sometimes a precancel permit holder, who wanted to advertise or express some individuality, did not use the POD contractor and obtained a device locally. Some examples of fancy precancels are shown below.



The Lansing, MI L-1 E represents Lansing’s one-time status as a railroad hub. A coffin manufacturer in Northampton, MA used the L-5 E from that town. Cincinnati, OH, has several fancy designs, including the L-4 E, often referred to as the Cincinnati horseshoe.

Return to [Box or Roller Cancellor](#). Go to [Parallel Lines](#). Go to [Local Precancels](#).

Favors: See **Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors**.

Return to [Counterfeits](#). Go to [Fakes](#). See also [Souvenir](#).

Federalsburg, MD: At one time Federalsburg, MD was a prolific user of precancels. During that time, many New York City stamp dealers had catalogs and pricelists printed and mailed to their customers from facilities in Federalsburg. The dealers furnished some stamps for postage – probably overstocks, seconds, and poorly centered items. This practice continued until the Post Office Department required that precancels be made from the then-current government issued device. (Information taken from a *Forum* article written by Jim Callis. For the December 2016 issue of *The Forum* Ralph Kimball provided an extensive article about J.W. Stowell and his work as a printer and user of precancels.)

Foreign precancels: Over the years several countries have used precancels. In some countries, specific imprints that resemble a precancel were applied to stamps. Even though those applications had a specific use, they do not meet the PSS definition of precancels.

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PSS has printed a catalog of foreign precancels. It is available from many dealers as well as through PSS Catalogs, which is a section in the back pages of each issue of *The Precancel Forum*. Unitrade Associates of Canada publishes a catalog of Canadian precancels.

Four-corner collection: A four-corner collection contains stamps, such as the one shown to the right, that were miss-cut in such a manner that the corners of four stamps occupy the space that should contain a single stamp. See **Mini** and **Specialty Collections**.



Return to [Third Bureau Issue](#).

Fourth Bureau Issue: Although some collectors identify the various issues printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing by their printing sequence number, the practice is not widespread within the realm of precancels. The two issues most apt to be identified in this manner are the 3rd (the Washington and Franklins of 1908) and the unnamed 4th which ran from 1922 through 1932. Within the precancel world, Stamps in that issue are usually identified by their year of issue, such as *1922, 1923, or 1926*.

Gunesch, Adolph: The Gunesch Precancel House, Inc. was owned and operated by Adolph Gunesch, one of the early precancel dealers and experts. He wrote several precancel reference books, including *Guide to Precancel Collecting* and *Handbook on Bureau and Local Precancels*, which went through many editions. In addition, he edited and published the *Windy City Precancel News* and *The Precancel Optimist*. In later years, he wrote a precancel column for *Stamps Magazine*.

Help: PSS members are well-known for their willingness to answer questions and provide help to less experienced collectors. “The only dumb question is the one not asked.” However, please use the information provided as a basis to expand your knowledge rather than to continue asking the same question. When you are request help via the postal service, please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your answer.

Historical Survey of Precancels, 1979: This book was written by R. Malcolm Hooper and published by the Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum. It contains full-sized examples of covers and precancels. However, it is printed in black and white; there are no color illustrations.

(The) History of Precancels: See **Hoover, Norman R.**

Hoover Black Book: The 1940 *Hoover Catalog* had a black binding. For many years that catalog was the standard for information about precancels that were produced from the classic era up to the 1940’s.

Hoover relied on many subordinate editors, who had *widely* varying degrees of knowledge, as well as varying degrees of attention to detail. A few of them may have even listed things they had personally made. Thus, the accuracy of that catalog varied quite a bit from one state to another. There may have been no general editor who standardized the listing requirements. A listing in the *Hoover Black Book* did not guarantee that an item was genuine. Neither did it guarantee that the item had ever existed.

To correct these longstanding errors, PSS experts conducted extensive research; the results of which were published, between 2011 and 2015, in a series of *Classic Catalogs* that are available from PSS Catalogs. One of the appendices in the *Catalog of Classic Precancels* matches valid Hoover types to modern PSS types. Another appendix lists items which were included in *Hoover*, but which have been determined to be invalid.

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At times, older Hoover catalogs are available from some dealers and over the internet. William Cummings’ *Things That Look Like A Precancel But Are Not*, a work-in-progress, is available electronically from the author. That reference contains a considerable amount of information that explains how specific non-precancel material can easily mislead an uninformed collector. (Information taken from *Forum* articles written by Phil Cayford and Bill Cummings.)

See also [Classic Precancels](#). See also [Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors](#).

Hoover, Noble, and Universal Systems: Prior to the development of the **PSS Style Chart**, several systems were used to classify precancel devices. The *PSS Bureau Catalog* continues to include Noble’s identifiers, as well as Scott’s and PSS’s in Parts One and Two. The Universal System used “U” numbers to classify impressions made with similar devices. The PSS website contains tables that link current PSS numbers with Noble’s and “U” numbers. However, unless a collector is trying to interpret precancel material written years ago, a knowledge of the older structures is not usually necessary for current collectors.

Hoover, Norman R.: N.R. Hoover was one of the pioneers of precanceldom. His columns appeared in many of the early precancel periodicals. Dilmond Postlewait combined many of Hoover’s columns in *The History of Precancels*, July 1989. This contains information about some of early precancel organizations. In general, the material appears in the order in which appeared; the book does not have a subject index. If you are looking for specific information, it is best to have an idea of the time frame in which it was written.

Impression: An impression is the imprint made by one **subject** of a **device** on a stamp. The original intent for making a precancel was to place a single impression on a stamp and for the precancel to be aligned with the design of the stamp. However, for various reasons stamps exist with more than one impression and/or with impressions which are not aligned with the design of the stamp. Some collectors look for variations in and multiple impressions of devices, regardless of the type of device used to make the impression. However, some collectors consider that it was too easy for a person using a hand-applied device to make additional and/or misaligned impressions. Therefore, there is a body of collectors who exclude, from their collections, multiple and/or misaligned impressions made with a hand stamp.

See also [Device](#). See also [Type](#). See also [Subject](#). See also [PSS Style Chart](#).

Inverted Impression: See Impression above. See [Normal Impression](#).

Issue collecting: Some collectors specialize in one or more specific stamp issues. Often these collections consist of (1) types from an “early” era when precancel production was tightly controlled and (2) the devices were manufactured and the stamps printed during the same period of time. The tight controls were removed when the Postal Service permitted precancels to be made for **walk-ins** and **write-ins**.

Because all post offices did not abide by the regulation that **walk-ins** and **write-ins** were to be made from stock on hand, many stamps which should not have been precanceled received a precancel impression. Therefore, it is possible to find “older” issues precanceled with “newer” devices. For some collectors that is not a problem; others will not include anachronistic items in their collections.

Ladder precancels: Due to their unique shape, some collectors refer to **City-type Coils** as “ladder precancels.” See [City-type Coils](#). See [Box or Roller Precancels](#).

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Letter Alignments: In some locally obtained devices, the alignment of the letters of a town name, in relation to those in the state name may not be identical in each position of a device. Such a shift does not require the assignment of an additional **type** or **variety**.



The letters in many of these devices were set by hand; perfect alignment may not have been goal. Impressions from two different positions of the L-4 TS device from Tiffin, OH, show “Tiffin” in different alignments over the “O” of “Ohio.”

See also [Variety](#).

Letter Off: A letter(s) is off, when one or more letters of the town or state names are not included on the stamp. When the letters are present, but are from two different positions on the device, there is a split cancel. See an example of **letter off** below under **Line Off**. [See also Split Cancel](#).

Liberty Bell Collection: At least two different U.S. stamp issues are known as Liberty Bells.



When someone refers to a Liberty Bell Collection, they usually mean one of the 2¢ Sesquicentennial Exposition of 1926, such as the one shown to the left rather than one of the 6.3¢ Liberty Bell coils from the 1970’s, such as the example on the right.



Line Off: A precancel impression may be so far off center vertically that one of the parallel lines is not on the intended stamp. Sometimes the parallel line is not visible at all; sometimes it may be detectible in the perforations at the top or bottom of the stamp. Sometimes an additional line on the stamp maybe a line from the next-above or next-below position in the device.



In the examples to the right, the top line is completely off the stamp with the **inverted** Type 203 impression from Camden, NJ. On the 9-cent **Bicentennial** with a Type 577 impression from Union City, NJ, the bottom line of the impression is just above the perforations at the bottom of the stamp, while the bottom line from the previous row is in the margin at the top of the design. There is also a **letter off** detractor with this impression. The right-side branch of the “Y” of “CITY” is barely detectible in the perforations on the right side of the stamp. The right-side branch of the “Y” from the position to the left in the device is slightly noticeable on the left side of the stamp.

[Return to Centering](#). [See also Split Cancel](#). [See also Letter Off](#). [See also Off Center](#).

Local Precancel Device: Prior to 1913, individual post offices contracted with manufacturers to make precancel devices. After 1913 for various reasons, some postmasters bypassed the Postal Service’s contract process and had a local company make a device. For any given town, these devices are identified with an “L” and then as many sequential numbers that are needed to provide each device a unique number for that town.

The “L” devices from the towns in a specific state are listed alphabetically by town after the devices obtained through POD or USPS contract procedures. Within each town the devices tend to be numbered

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sequentially as they were obtained. Any resemblance between the impression given a specific “L” number from one town and the same number from another town is purely coincidental.

There are exceptions to the sequential numbering procedure and a reason for missing numbers:

1. All the Hand Stamps (HS) are listed together, followed by Typesets (TS) and so on.
2. To retain the original numbers assigned in the first edition of *The PSS Town and Type Catalog*, any device obtained after publication of the first edition was assigned the next available number at the end of the town’s entire sequence of “L” numbers. Had the new device been inserted with similar types of devices, there would have been a domino-effect leading to renumbering existing devices and massive confusion on the part of collectors trying to get their collections back in line with the *Catalog*.
3. At times and for various reasons, the catalog experts determined that some local devices were not unique and delisted them. When this occurred, the delisted number was not reassigned. Therefore, some numbers are missing from some “L” sequences. For example, there is no Pueblo, CO L-2 HS between the listings for Pueblo’s L-1 HS and L-3 HS.

Return to [Contracted Local Device](#).

Lyons List: See [Contracted Local Device](#).

Mail Order Stamps: Mail order stamps usually refer to **dated controls** used to pay the postage of retailers that shipped merchandise to their customers through the U.S. mail. Although there were others, the major mail order houses were Montgomery Ward (MW), Sears Roebuck (SRC); Aldens (AI); and Spiegel, Inc. (SPE). Most of these companies had distribution centers in more than one city.

It possible to order U.S. postage stamps from the United States Postal Service’s Stamp Fulfillment Services. However, unless they are retained in the sealed sleeve in which they were mailed, there is no way to distinguish those “mail ordered” stamps from ones purchased “over the counter.”

[See an in-depth article about Dated Controls in the Appendix.](#)

Measuring Distances Between Lines: Except for a minute difference between the parallel lines, some **Types** are very similar. Your eyes may get tired while using a gauge to sort a large batch of precancels into different piles with identical distances. One way to make the sorting faster and, hopefully, more accurate is to find one of each stamp with different distances. Then lay stamps with an unknown distance partially over those with the known distance. Align one of the two sets of lines. If there is a difference between the distances of the second sets, it should be easier to detect with less eye strain than using a gauge time after time on each precancel. If there is a doubt, you can always verify measurements with a gauge.



Illustrated to the left are two 4¢ Liberties with San Antonio, TX’s Type L-5 TS. The L-5 TS plate has three different distances between the double sets of parallel lines: 15.6 mm, 15.1 mm, and 14.3 mm. With the upper set of lines aligned, it is noticeable that the lower set of parallel lines on the stamp on top (or to the right) are closer together than those of the stamp on the bottom (or to the left).

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This technique works well with lines or bars. However, unless you are willing to cut, donate, and designate a duplicate type as a “standard,” it is not a reliable technique for comparing distances, such as those between town and state names or between the top of a town name and the upper line, when the names do not extend to the edge of a stamp.

An in-depth article [Tips for Determining Perforations and Measurements](#) is in The Appendix.

Meetings of the local clubs and the PSS Annual Convention are excellent places to meet other precancel collectors, to buy and trade precancels and reference material, and to learn more about the hobby. The “Calendar of Events,” near the end of each issue of *The Precancel Forum*, contains information about future club meetings.

Mini Collections: A mini collection contains a group of stamps that have common theme. These collections are usually limited to a relatively small number of stamps, one or two hundred at most. The “Getting Started” tab on the PSS website (www.precancels.com) contains lists of, and items included in, some mini collections that have been developed over the years. Some of these collections include: town names that include a fruit, a color, a tree, or boys, girls, or Saints’ names; three-letter town names; towns in which the letters appear in alphabetical order; towns named in the Old Testament, or towns along U.S. Route 66.

See also [Specialty Collections](#).

Mounting precancels: Mount precancels on stock or blank pages or on free album pages that may be downloaded from the PSS website. Use hinges or mounts. Do not use glue, staples, tape of any kind, or attempt to reuse hinges. When using hinges, ensure that they do not encroach into the perforations; the perforations are apt to be torn off when you remove the hinge after deciding to rearrange your collection or a future owner mounts the precancel in a different collection.

Decide whether you want to showcase the stamp or the precancel. If you opt for stamps, then mount them so the designs have a consistent orientation. (Unless you are fortunate enough to find only normal precancel impressions, all your precancels will not be oriented in the same direction.) If you opt for showcasing precancels, consider mounting them so the impression is normal. This will result with the design of some stamps to be inverted or sideways on the page.

In the past, several dealers and local clubs produced albums either for a specific issue or for a specific geographic area. Sometimes these older albums appear on the market. Most, but not all, will have been used.

See also [Organizing Precancels](#). Return to [Album Pages](#).

Multiple Impressions: A multiple impression consists of more than one impression on a stamp. Double impressions are the most common multiple impression. However, there are some triple, quadruple, and quintuple impressions. (For an example of a quintuple impression, see the listing for Washington, D.C.’s Type 251 on the 7-cent denomination of the Presidential Issue in the *DLE Catalog*.) Stamps also exist with impressions from two different **devices**. For an explanation of some of these occurrences, see the information about [dated controls in short supply](#) in the Appendix article about dated controls.

See [Double Impressions](#). See [Dual Printing](#).

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Nail heads: A complete electrotype plate consists of two parts: a thin metal plate which is mounted with nails to a supporting wooden block. The nails are driven through the metal into the wood. In the finished plate the nail heads are below the printing surface and do not take any ink when the ink-roller passes over the plate. With continued use of the plate, there is a tendency for the nails to loosen from and back out of the wooden block, pick up ink, and be imprinted along with the parallel lines and town and state names. (Summarized from an article by H. Preston Hoskins in the June 1937 issue of *The Precancel Optimist*.)

Nail heads may appear anywhere in the impression. As can be seen in the two examples to the right, they look like errant blobs of ink on the stamp. Some nail heads are perfectly round; many are not. They are usually seen in impressions made with an electrotype device.



National Precancels: National Precancels are listed in Part Three of the *Bureau Catalog*. These stamps



were overprinted with “lines only,” “service indicators between lines,” or have lines and/or service indicators, such as the two examples to the left, printed as an integral part of the design. Many of these stamps were not printed at the **Bureau of Engraving and Printing**. Because they do not have town and state names and were not printed at BEP, some collectors do not consider them to meet the criteria of a Bureau or Buro precancel.

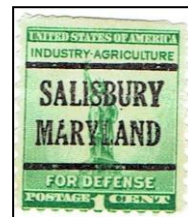
Return to [Bureaus](#).

Newspaper Precancels: Shown to the left is an item identified in an eBay lot as a “newspaper precancel.” Prior to publishing the June 2010 issue of *The Forum*, I asked several PSS experts about the term. Some acknowledged seeing similar items; most did not know the term or its usage. Dave Smith replied that at one time large denomination stamps were cancelled to pay for shipments of bundles of newspapers. He also noted that punch cancels were used from several towns to precancel the 1879 Postage Dues.



Noble: Gilbert Noble developed a system for classifying precancel devices. Although his system was replaced with the PSS Style chart, it has been retained, and continues to be used in conjunction with the PSS system, in the *PSS Catalog of Bureau Precancels*.

Normal Impression: A normal impression reads in the same direction as a stamp’s design. To the right, Type 225 on the 1¢ Defense from Salisbury, MD is normal in relation to the design.



An **Inverted** impression is upside down in relation to the design of a stamp. To the left, the Type 203 impression from Camden, NJ, is inverted in relation to the design on the 1¢ Defense.

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On definitive stamps, whose width is greater than its length, such as the 3¢ 1919 Victory, with a Type 205 precancel from Louisville, KY, shown to the right, a normal impression reads **Up** in relation to the stamp’s design.



On definitive stamps whose width is greater than its length, an inverted impression reads **Down** in relation to the stamp’s design. On the left, the Type 243 from Oakland, CA, is an example of a precancel reading down in relation to the design on the 50¢ denomination of the 1926 Issue.

[Return to Impression](#) [Return to Impression Reads Down.](#)

[Return to Impression Reads Up.](#) [Return to Device.](#)

Off-center: An off-center precancel **impression** could be skewed to the left or right side of the stamp or towards the top or bottom or to both one side and the top or bottom.

See also [Centering](#). See also [Line Off](#).

Orange Background turned Dark: See [Sulfurization](#).

Organizing Precancels: Most precancel catalogs are arranged by state, town, and then type. Some catalogs, such as the *Bureau*, the *Washington Bicentennial*, and the *Double Line Electro* extend their sublevels through issues and denominations. Some catalogs of dated control precancels also include issues and denominations and the year and month the precancel was scheduled for use; some just include the user’s initials and name, when known. Most collectors organize their collections in the same sequence as a specific reference catalog.

Organize your collection in a manner that is best for you. However, unless you collect only one denomination, it is recommended that you **NOT** organize your precancels by denomination, such as all 1-cent Presidentials on several pages and then all 2-cent Presidentials on the next set of pages, and so on through the entire series of denominations for that issue. At some time, you or your estate may want to dispose of your collection. One that is organized by denomination is very tedious to review. Potential buyers must continually flip back and forth through their inventory as they try to determine whether they need each successive 1-cent Presidential. Due to the additional time required to review such a collection, the sale price may be much lower than one that follows the organization of a catalog.

See also [Mounting Precancels](#): See also [Album Pages](#).

Oxidation: See [Sulfurization](#).

Parallel lines: Most precancel devices have a town and state name between parallel lines. Precancel devices that have parallel lines were designed so that the town and state names *will fit within the design of the stamp*.



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In two examples on the previous page, the Type 203 precanceled in Athol, Mass. on the 13-cent Apple Green, was designed to fit on a definitive stamp. In the middle example, New York’s L-11 E was designed to fit the extended width of a Special Handling stamp.

PSS Types 401 through 424 were designed to fit vertically on definitive stamps. (However, I have seen many impressions from these devices placed horizontally on the stamp. Such incorrect placement, often prevents all the letters from fitting in the intended space on the stamp.) The right-side example at the bottom of the previous page with correct impression placement, was precanceled in Monticello, Iowa, with a 419 device on a 1½¢ perf 10 of the 1923 issue.

Return to Box or [Roller Cancellers](#). See also [Fancy or Design Precancels](#). See also [Letter Off](#).

Pedigree: (author’s term) In the past, some collectors, such as KM and VDP, imprinted their initials on the back of a stamp to identify items in their collections. Some collectors wrote a town’s and/or state’s name, such as “Mountain Home, PA,” on the back of a stamp whose precancel was not distinct. Other collectors identified such information as the perforations, the PSS Type, or the Scott number. Regardless of the reason, some collectors consider any such marking to detract from the value of the precancel. If practiced today, such markings should only be done in pencil, and never with a ball-point or felt-tip pen whose ink will soak through, and destroy, the face of a stamp.



Return to [“Manuscript”](#) in Dated Controls.

Perfins: Perfins is short for **PERFORated INitialS**. To prevent internal theft of company-purchased postage, companies purchased a device with pins to puncture initials, numbers, or a unique design through layers of stamps. In the United States and many other countries, postal regulations controlled the size of pins used to puncture the holes as well as the overall size of the pattern allowed in postage stamps. Collecting perfins is separate area of philately. Some precanceled stamps were also punched with a perfin device.



Stamps that have both are known as preperfs (**PRE**anceled **PERF**in**S**). Above, a Type 232 precanceled for use in Auburn, NY received a perfin D&M. In the *Perfin Catalog*, this is assigned D148 for Dunn & McCarthy, Incorporated, a company located in Auburn, NY.

Return to [Preperf](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

Permit Holders: Until **walk-ins** and **write-ins** were allowed, a company or organization was required to obtain a permit to use precancels as valid postage on items to be mailed.

Photographing or scanning stamps:

See the in-depth article about [photographing or scanning](#) precancels in the Appendix.

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Playing Card Precancels: At one time decks of playing cards were sealed with a precanceled revenue stamp. Some of the stamps, such as the example on the right, were printed and precanceled at the **Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP)**.



Other stamps, such as the example to the left, were printed by BEP, but precanceled locally.



Those precanceled by BEP are identified in Part Two of the *PSS Bureau Catalog*. Locals are identified in “Manufacturer’s Precancels on Playing Card Revenue Stamps.” The latter publication is available at times from some dealers.

Postage Dues: There were several uses of precanceled Postage Due stamps.

At times Postage Dues were precanceled during slack times for later use as needed.

Among others uses was the need to keep track of the amount of postage a sender needed to pay for the “free” postage offered to a client or customer through business reply envelopes.

The [Precanceled Postage Due](#) article in the Appendix contains an example of a form used to track the amount owed by a business customer that needed to pay for return postage.

In September 1934, the Post Office Department ordered all postmasters to cease precanceling Postage Due stamps. Although they were precanceled as the result of **walk-in** and **write-in** requests, there was no valid postal usage of the Postage Due Issue of 1959.

Position: Each position or **subject** on a **device** will make one precancel impression.

The Stickney Rotary Intaglio press at **BEP** could print four sheets of 400 stamps in a single rotation of the printing cylinder. (Refer to the “Introduction” of the *PSS Bureau Catalog* for additional information about the capabilities and processes used by BEP to print and precancel Bureaus.)

There are at least three different sizes of devices for which the postal service contracted. A 10x10 device has 100 positions in format of 10 across by 10 down. These were used, on a press, to precancel a pane of 100 stamps in one operation. Using a 5x5 device, which had 25 positions in a format of 5 across by 5 down, a person could manually precancel one-fourth of a pane of 100 stamps in one application. (Instructions provided with these devices told the operator to use a rocking motion to make an appropriate impressions). Later the postal service contracted for 2x5 devices with which a person could precancel 10 stamps at a time. These were in a format of 2 across by 5 down. Some locally-procured devices had less than 10 positions.

Rolls of coils were precanceled by BEP. Hand held devices were not intended to be used for precanceling rolls of coil stamps. However, coil stamps often received a precancel impression during the **walk-in/write-in** era.

See also [Device](#). See also [Coil stamps](#). Return to [Subject](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

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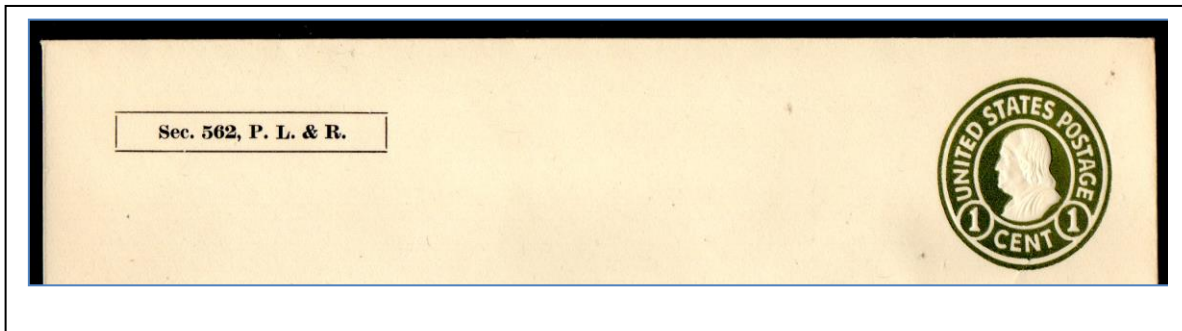
Going Beyond “The ABC’s of Precancels”

Postal History and Usage of 1907 and Earlier Precancels, 1989: This reference was written by Charles C. Souder. He acknowledged the input and assistance of many experts in PSS.

Postal Laws and Regulations: You may see “P.L.&R.” followed by some numbers printed or handstamped on a cover. These are the initials of Postal Laws and Regulations. For a while, precancel users were required to print or stamp “P.L.&R.” with an appropriate section number, on covers using precanceled stamps. The letters were preprinted on some envelopes and handstamped on others. Sometimes, part of the handstamp impression encroached onto the precanceled stamp. Because the regulations changed over time all items were not precanceled under the same section number; thus, the section numbers are not identical on every cover.

During the late 1930’s, the federal government consolidated the laws and regulations of all departments into a single body known as the Code of Federal Regulations. Section 39 contains regulations which governs the Postal Service. So, it is also possible to find covers with precanceled stamps and “C. F. R. 39” and an appropriate section number stamped or printed on them. (Note: some collectors have confused a “PL&R” or “CFR” imprint with a partial imprint of a **dated control**.)

Shown on below is a portion of an envelope which has a P. L. & R. impression.



Shown to the left is a Type 703 precancel from Richwood, Ohio. The handstamped “P. L. & R.” which encroached onto the precancel at the top is not part of a dated control. (Only the bottom portion of the “P” of “P.L.&R.” is on the stamp.

[See C.F.R.](#)

Precanceled After Being Affixed (PAA): Some stamps have an impression that has characteristics of a precancel. However, extensive research of similar impressions has shown that they were applied after the stamp was placed on the mailing piece. PAA’s are listed in “Appendix II” of the *T&T Catalog*.

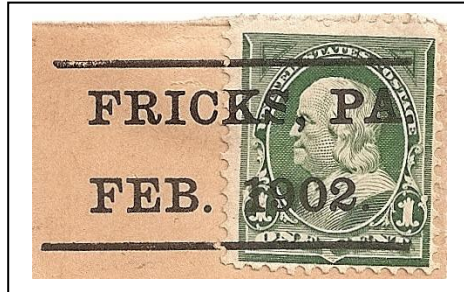
The following information was supplied by Dave Smith and several other members for an article published in the September 2015 issue of *The Forum*.

PAA imprints of “ICKS, PA” “CKS, PA” or “KS, PA” with or without a year date of 1901 or 1922 are relatively common. When stamps with these imprints are found off cover, collectors may try to find a

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Pennsylvania town ending with the letters “ICKS,” “CKS,” or “KS” that used a device which contained the font used by Fricks, a poultry producer in Bucks County, PA. However, they will not find a suitable town in the Pennsylvania section of the *T&T Catalog*. When a collector has an impression that is still on a cover, it should be obvious with the impression extending onto or **tied to the cover**, the impression is not a precancel.



There are three styles of a Fricks PAA. PAA 1 was used in December 1901 with the state spelled “Pa.” PAA 2 was used in January and February 1902 with the state spelled “PA.” There is no date with PAA 3.

See also [Tied To The Cover](#).

Precancel stamps are cancelled, under proper authority, with a device designed solely for the purpose, before the stamp is affixed to the mail, or taxable matter.

Precancels 101: Over time, several members of PSS provided *The Forum*, a series of articles, under the headings of “Precancels 101” and “Precancel Primer.” The articles contained information about specific aspects of precancel collecting. Material from those articles has been included in this publication.

Precancel Primer: See **Precancels 101** above.

Precancel Devices containing a design: See [Fancy Precancels](#).

Preperf: See the explanation in the section about [Perfins](#).

A **Provisional** is a stamp precanceled with a device that was not authorized for precancel use. The device may have been used in an emergency to meet an immediate need for precancels. Because the device was intended for and had other uses, it is difficult for anyone other than an expert with extensive knowledge in the use of specific devices, to determine that an **impression** is a provisional precancel. If a suspected provisional is still on the envelope or wrapper, leave it “as-is” and ask an expert for an opinion.

PSS Membership Numbers: Current PSS Membership numbers have four digits. When someone becomes a Life Member, an additional set of three digits are placed in front of the original number. The three-digit Life Membership sequence and the four-digit membership numbers has, at times, been confused with a seven-digit telephone number.

PSS Style Chart: The PSS Style Chart, or Style Chart, is a system of classifying the precancel overprints applied to US stamps under authority of the U.S. Post Office with devices designed, authorized, and manufactured for this purpose. The Style Chart replaced several previous systems such as **Universal Numbers** and **Noble Numbers**.

There are seven sections in the Style Chart; each section contains devices with similar characteristics. In general, within each section the numbers assigned to types progress from the oldest device manufactured to the newest.

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The numerical order of the sections, themselves, also tend to progress from the earliest kinds of devices to the last kinds of devices made. However, all the devices in a section, such as electroplates, were not made before any device in another section, such as vinyl handstamps.

There is a basic presentation of information in the Style Chart. Pages are paired with illustrations on the left page and descriptions on the right page. The bottom portion of most right-side pages contains footnotes that apply to many of the Types illustrated and described on the pair of pages.

Rubber Handstamps With Bars					Style Descriptions
RIPON, WIS.	ITHACA, N. Y.	GALESBURG, ILL.	Saint Meinrad INDIANA.	Wailuku, Maui Hawaii.	
501	502	503	504	505	501 Slightly serifed extended caps 3.2 mm high between 1.3 mm bars 11 mm apart.
TROY, PA.	V. ALE, OREG.	WAYNE, PA.	Moorhead, Minn.	WINDOM MINN.	502 Highly serifed 3.4 mm caps between 1.3 mm bars 10 mm apart.
507	508	509	510	511	503 Serifed condensed 3 mm caps between 1 mm bars 10 to 11 mm apart.
CROSBY MINN.	VAN BUREN ARK.	FALLS CITY NEBR.	SOUTH MANCHESTER CONN.	TITUSVILLE PA.	504 Like 503, but town lower-case.
511.5	512	513	515	516	505 Like 503, but lower-case.
CORNERVILLE IND.	Saint Columban NEBR.	SPRING VALLEY ILL.	WHITE RIVER JCT. VT.	ALTON ILL.	507 Spaced block caps 3 mm high between 1 mm bars 11 mm apart.
517	517.5	518	519	521	508 Town like 507; state like 511.
WACO TEX.	T I R O OHIO	GASTON IND.	Marietta, GA.	IONIA, Mich.	509 Block caps 2.5 mm high between 1 mm bars 11 mm apart.
521.3	521.5	522	523	524	510 Like 509, but lower-case.
Honolulu Hawaii.	PARADISE PA.	GRINNELL, IOWA.	Magnolia, ILL.	Wakefield Mass.	511 Light-faced squarish caps 3 mm high between 1 mm bars 10 mm apart.
525	526	527	528	529	511.5 Like 511, but town and state first letter 3.8 mm high.
PURCELL OKLA.					512 Town like 513; state like 511.
530					513 Condensed 3 mm caps between 1 mm bars 10 to 11 mm apart.

Note 1: These are rubber handstamps and are subject to variation due to application pressure and age. Dimensions stated are approximate and some variation is to be expected.

Note 2: These styles generally have a period after the state but a comma after the town is optional.

Note 3: These styles are in 25 subject (5 X 5) configuration.

When the catalog editors determine that a specific type no longer meets listing criteria, that style number is removed from the Style Chart. For example, there is no longer an electroplate number 214. That number has not, and will not, be reused. It would cause too much confusion to reuse the number or to reduce, by one, the number of every subsequent device in the section.

In a similar manner, there has been a need to provide a specific number to a type with some similarity to previously identified types, but which was not identified until after the Style Chart had been developed. These types have been assigned a decimal after the whole number to place them with other similar types.

Most of the time, there has been a need for only one insertion; the new designation is a whole number followed by the decimal .5. The rubber hand stamp with bars identified as 517.5 is one example. However, for the few times that more than one insertion has been needed, additional decimal numbers were used. One such example are the devices 521.3 and 521.5 which were inserted between the existing devices numbered 521 and 522.

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(The) **PSS Town and Type Catalog** is a catalog of **devices**. It is NOT a catalog of **impressions**. All the **subjects** in the overwhelming majority of devices have the same style. For various reasons, a few government contracted devices contain subjects with two styles. When this occurs, the styles are listed in numerical order, such as the device for New Philadelphia OH, 474/478. Further, a few non-government-contracted-locally-obtained devices also have more than one style. In these devices, the differences are known as **Varieties**. Varieties are illustrated in each state’s “L” section of the *T&T Catalog*. Some of these devices have more than two varieties, such as the Edella, PA L-4 TS device which has four.

Note: The various Town and Type counts printed six times a year in *The Precancel Forum* are enumerations of devices, so only one impression from a **compound device** may be included in those counts.

See also [Variety](#). See also [Impressions](#). See also [Position](#).

Pseudo Precancel: A pseudo precancel is an impression made from a device that contains a fictional or tongue-in-cheek town name. Some also include imaginary state names. The devices were made or ordered by collectors who wanted to have some “fun” with the hobby. Some people might consider a few of the “town” names to be risqué. These impressions were not valid for postage. Pennsylvania is the frequent “home” state for many of these impressions. However, it is not the only one.



See also [Fakes and Counterfeits](#). See also [Souvenirs](#).

Quadruple and Quintuple Impressions. See [multiple impressions](#).

Reference Material: Reference material other than that advertised in *The Forum* is available, at times, from dealers or the individuals or local clubs that compiled it. A complete list of known material is available on the PSS web site under the heading “General Precancel Information.” Many of the older references are out of print and only become available when someone decides to sell one.

Reinstated to PSS membership: This occurs when a previous member, after a long period, usually years, reapplies for membership and has his or her original membership number reinstated.

See also [Restored to Membership](#).

Removing Hinge and/or Cover Remnants, Tips For:

1. **Electros, and other precancels, with insoluble ink on porous paper:** Place as many as desired in a shallow dish; add water; some people recommend adding a drop of soap to reduce surface tension. Use tongs on individual stamps; swish stamp in water to remove remnant; check that the remnant has been removed; place stamp vertically on edge of dish so excess water will drain. Quarter-fold clean paper towels which do not have printed designs or water-soluble dye; arrange wet stamps on bottom double layer; cover stamps with top double layer. Allow to dry about 24 hours. Replace paper towels after they are stained with ink or residual adhesive.
2. **Smooth paper and/or water-soluble ink:** During the walk-in/write-in era, some impressions were not made with ink designated for precancels. Some people even used water soluble ink. At

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about the same time, USPS changed stamp production from the more porous paper, in use for years, to a heavier, slicker variety that does not accept ink as well. (I have inadvertently washed, most or all of, an impression because I was not aware of the presence of water soluble ink and/or because the ink had not adhered as thoroughly to the smoother paper.)

Now, I place flat sponges in the bottom of a dish and add water to just below the top surface of the sponge. Then I place the stamps face-up on the top surface of the sponge. From the onset, I monitor the precancel; if the ink begins to bleed, I remove the stamp immediately. If there is no bleeding, I use tongs to check whether the remnants are no longer attached to the back of the stamp. After the stamps are remnant-free, I remove them from the sponge and follow the draining and drying steps mentioned above.

Removing self-adhesive stamps from a cover: There are two options.

1. Don’t attempt to remove stamps attached to a cover with a self-adhesive compound. Leave stamps on the original cover. More stamps are damaged than saved during many attempts to separate self-adhesive stamps from covers. The cover can be trimmed as close to the stamp’s perforations as meet your mounting requirements.
2. If you must remove a stamp, such as one that has a National precancel, from its cover, see the article in The Appendix for a successful, tested method of [Removing Self-adhesive Glue](#).

Repaired device: At times a device broke and needed repairing. It was not always possible to restore the position(s) with the same **style**. The 243-device used in Grand Rapids MI, is one example of a device that was repaired with a different **style**. In addition to collecting an impression of a stamp precanceled with Type 243 from Grand Rapids, some collectors try to collect a vertical pair that has both impressions. An example of such a pair is shown to the right on the 4-cent of the 1926 issue.



In the *T&T Catalog*, the 243-device for Grand Rapids has two footnotes. Footnote 7 states, “Repair exists which differs in font, spacing, or punctuation from the rest of the device.” Because Footnote 7 is generic, it does not identify the repair. However, the *DLE Catalog*, contains that specific information, “The bottom row of this plate became worn or damaged and was replaced with a row of subjects from an earlier plate, P.S.S. Style 205. The items listed as ‘pair-205’ are vertical pairs having 247 on the upper stamp and 205 on the lower.

See [Compound Device](#). [See Dual Printing](#). [See Double Impression](#).

Restored to membership refers to a member, in good standing, who was dropped from membership, usually for non-payment of dues, but then makes a dues payment to cover missed time. When this happens, a person is not required to apply for reinstatement.

See also [Reinstated to Membership](#).

Roller canceller: [See Box or roller canceller](#).

Rotary Offset Flat Plate: See the article about [Perforations and Measurements](#) in The Appendix.

Scanning or Photographing Stamps: See the article about [photographing or scanning](#) in The Appendix.

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Selling Precancels: Before trying to sell items, it might be helpful to see how dealers at precancel shows price their material. In my opinion, reviewing the *asking* prices on eBay lots is not the most realistic learning tool. However, a review of the actual amounts *realized* might be helpful. Because selling precancels is the opposite of buying precancels, it would be helpful to review the in-depth article about [Pricing Precancels](#) that appears in The Appendix.

Sheet Stamps: Sheet stamps tend to have perforations on all four sides. In general, **BEP** printed stamps from rolls of paper on presses that were wide enough to accommodate two sheets, side-by-side, of 400 stamps each. The sheets were later cut into panes of 100 stamps that were sent to individual post offices. On some issues, the stamps on the side of the sheet have straight edges rather than perforations. These are known as **strait edge** (SE). Individual collectors have different acceptance levels of precancels with strait edges. Therefore, reputable dealers will identify when an item is SE. For a detailed explanation of BEP’s printing processes, see the “Introduction” to *The PSS Bureau Catalog*.

Silent Precancels do not contain the name of a town or state. Many silent precancels were made with a pen stroke or unique design. Some of the designs, such as stars, were used in many different towns. An envelope or wrapper is usually needed to identify the user of a silent precancel. PSS’s *Silent Precancel Catalog* is available to help a collector interested in this **specialty**. The example to the right, one of several versions of a “Glen Allen Star,” was made by Cussons, May, and Sheppard, which later became Cussons, May & Co, during the 1870’s and 1880’s, in Glen Allen, Virginia.



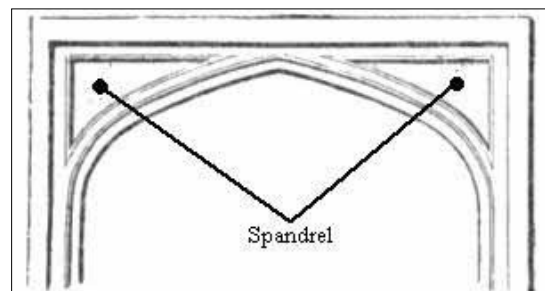
Single-subject Device: A few single-subject devices were obtained outside the official postal contracting procedures and were used legitimately to precancel stamps. However, many of these smaller devices were used to make impressions that are not accepted as valid precancels.

Souvenir: A souvenir is an item made to commemorate an event. There are many non-precancel philatelic souvenirs that look like precancels because they have a set of parallel lines. Some devices that were made to commemorate a precancel event were used to send items through the mail to advertise the event and are listed in the appropriate state’s Local section of the *T&T Catalog*. The example shown to the right is a souvenir of the 2012 PSS annual convention which was held in Albuquerque, NM.



See [Fakes](#). See [Pseudos](#). See [Walk-ins/Write-ins](#). See [Collector-Driven Devices](#).

Spandrel: A spandrel, also spelled “spandrel” and “splaundrel” is the space between two arches or between an arch and a rectangular enclosure. (This term was used in an article about minute differences of some precanceled Canadian stamps.)



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Specialty Collections: Specialty Collections have a theme, such as one or a group of **Types** (Double Line Electros), an **issue** (Presidentials) or a denomination within an issue (1¼¢ Gallatin of the Prominent Americans Issue), or the printer (Bureaus). The collections can be quite large, running to thousands of stamps.

See [Mini Collections](#). [Return to Apple Greens](#). [Return to Bicentennial Precancels](#).

Split Precancel: A stamp with a split precancel has parts of two different impressions, neither of which is entirely on the stamp. For example, the final letters of the town and state name could appear on the left side of the stamp while the initial letters appear on the right side.



Most split precancels involve stamps from the same row, such as the one to the left, precanceled with a Type 704 on the ½¢ Presidential from Lambertville, NJ. A few split precancels can be found misaligned from a row above or row below, such as the example to the right precanceled with a Type 839 on the 3¢ Francis Parkmans precanceled in Malvern, PA. “Malvern” is on the top stamp of the pair and “PA” is on the bottom stamp.



In my experience, it is more common to find a **line-off** the top or bottom of a stamp than it is to find a cancel split over two rows. Split precancels usually sell for less than Catalog Value, and are listed as either “split” or “line-off” by most dealers.

[Return to Centering](#). [Return to Line-Off](#). [See also Letter Off](#).

Straight Edge with A Colored Guide Line: The panes of some stamps with straight edges were printed so that a guide line, the same color as the stamp’s design, appears in the margin between the edges of the stamp and its design. On the right is an 8¢ perf. 11 from the 1922 issue; it was precanceled with Montvale, NJ’s L-1 HS.

See also [Sheet Stamps](#).



colored guide line ↑

Style Chart See [PSS Style Chart](#).

Style: Style and **Type** are sometimes used interchangeably, but each has its own meaning. Style is usually the description of an impression in the **PSS Style Chart**, while Type is the impression or imprint itself.

See [Type](#). See [PSS Style Chart](#). See [Impression](#).

Subject: See [Position](#).

Sulfurization: Sulfur pollutants in the atmosphere convert white lead and lead carbonates used in some stamp inks to black sulphides. This causes the background of the stamp to undergo a darkening color change. Several specific stamps are often found with this discoloration, including the 6¢ Washington Bicentennial, the 6¢ denominations of the 1922 and 1926 issues, as well as the first 6¢ airmail. The example to the left experienced sulfurization; the one on the right has a normal color. Both were precanceled in New York, New York, with a Double Line Electro Type 247. The term oxidation has been misused for this discoloration process. (Information provided by Jim Callis and Arnold Selengut.)



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Return to [Oxidation](#).

Return to [Brown or Black Ink](#) that should be Orange. Return to [Orange Background](#) turned dark.

Synoptic Collection: The following was taken from an article Adolph Gunesch wrote for the May 16, 1964 issue of *Stamps*.

Precancel collectors use the term to designate a collection consisting of every variety of a U.S. stamp that can be secured in precancel condition.

Although a few earlier varieties are obtainable in precanceled condition, ordinarily this would be started with the 1890 issue. Such a collection will lead you a merry chase as some of the high-value Columbians, etc., are distressingly difficult to find. The Mercury Special Delivery is not easy. Most of the collectors making a collection of this kind get a Scott U.S. album and endeavor to fill the spaces with precanceled stamps instead of with post-canceled or unused stamps.

We believe that such a collection will hold your interest for a long time, because many commemoratives which are common as mint or used are hard to locate in precanceled condition.

Telephone Number: See [PSS Membership Number](#).

“There Are Few Absolutes in Precancels” A statement made by precancel guru, Phil Cayford. In his explanation of the statement, he noted that some self-proclaimed “experts” make all-inclusive statements using such words as “never” or “all” or claim to “know” all the facts relating to an impression made long ago.

During our initial collective excursions into the precancel world, many of us may have assumed that “absolutes” were there to guide us through this challenging hobby. Others may have expected that the walls of a fortress (a term or an imprint) could not be breached or blurred. As we gain more experience, we learn that it is very difficult to isolate a specific precancel topic in such a manner that there are no gray areas on the periphery. Even the experts don’t know everything and have not encountered every precancel or its use or misuse. There are many things that we have yet to learn. There are many impressions that may fit one collector’s concept of an acceptable precancel, but not meet every collector’s criteria.

Third Bureau Issue: See [Fourth Bureau Issue](#).

Tied to the cover: A cancel that covers part of the stamp AND extends onto the cover ties the stamp to the cover. Because the cancel was applied after the stamp was attached to the cover, this should be an obvious case of a post cancel.

Appendix II of the T&T Catalog contains examples of stamps that were **Precanceled After Being Affixed** (PAA) to a cover. Due to having some of the same characteristics as a precancel, after a PAA has been removed from the mailing piece, it can be difficult to determine whether it is a PAA or a valid precancel.

Return to [Precanceled After Being Affixed](#).

Town and Type Catalog and its Numbering System: See [PSS Town and Type Catalog](#).

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Town and Type Counts: Only one impression from a **compound device** may be included in the various counts in which members participate and which are scheduled and published in *The Forum* during the year.

Town and Type numbering system. Tend to be sequential by type but all E’s (200 series) were not issued before the 400 series. For example, Type 257 was released relatively late and is usually found on a more “modern” issue, such as one of the Prominent Americans.

Triple Impression or Triple: See [Multiple Impressions](#).

Triple paper: See [Double Paper](#).

Two Styles On A Device: See [Compound Device](#).

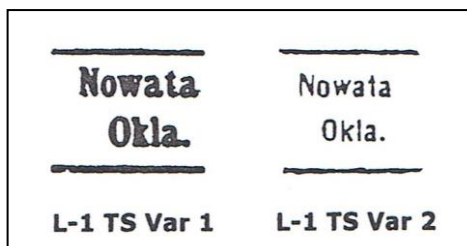
Type: A precancel Type is an imprint that is clearly distinguishable from other imprints. Some of the distinguishing features include the distance between the lines, the distance between the town and state names, different fonts, size of font, and use of capital and lower case letters. These and other features are listed with each Type in the **Style Chart**. Information that is common to all the Types described and illustrated on the accompanying pages is provided in footnotes at the bottom of the right-side page.

Also see [Device](#). Also see [Impression](#). Also see [Style](#). Also see [PSS Style Chart](#).

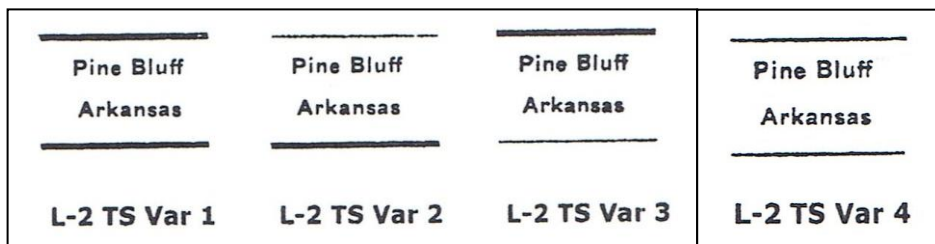
Universal Classification System: The Universal classification system had a “U” in front of each identifying number. “U” numbers are frequently seen in older reference material. The **PSS Style Chart** replaced the Universal Classification System.

Up, Impression reading: See [Normal Impression](#).

Variety: *The PSS Town and Type Catalog* is a catalog of **devices**. In a few cases, a device obtained locally contains two different styles. When this occurs, they listed in the Catalog with Footnote 31, “This type has varieties shown in the picture section.”



In some devices, the varieties, such as Var 1 and Var 2 shown to the left for Nowata, OK’s L-1 TS are vastly different. In other devices, such as the four in Pine Bluff, AR’s L-2 TS, the differences are not as obvious at first glance. Additional information is provided for some examples, such as the L-1 M (not shown here) for Salem, MA.



See also
[Letter Alignments](#).

See also
[PSS Style Chart](#).

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Note: The various Town and Type counts printed six times a year in *The Precancel Forum* are enumerations of devices, so only one impression from a **compound device** may be included in those counts.

Victory Issue of 1919: The 3-cent Victory was issued in 1919 to commemorate the Allies victory in World War I. Some people have a **specialty** collection of these precancels. Impressions on these stamps tend to sell at more than the amount listed in the *T&T Catalog* for the specific **type**. The example to the left has a Type 205 precancel from Louisville, Kentucky. The impression **reads up** in relation to the stamp’s design.



Walk-ins and Write-ins were obtained by collectors who walked into or wrote to a specific post office and requested precancels from that office. At least three conditions were *supposed* to be met: (1) the office needed to have a precanceling device that could be found; (2) the postmaster and/or postal clerks needed to be willing to cooperate (either to perform the precanceling process, preferred, or allow the collector to precancel, not legal, the stamps); (3) the collector was to purchase the stamps in that office. (Often the latter condition was ignored. Collectors arrived with stamps printed many years prior to the current visit. The failure to require collectors to buy stamps from the office’s stock-on-hand caused many “older” stamps to be precanceled with “newer” devices so specific “precancels” would be available for collections.)

During the time in which it was legal to obtain precancels via the walk-in/write-in process, some collectors looked for post offices that did not have newer devices or had never been issued a device. They then encouraged the postmaster to order a device for that office. These devices were obtained through collectors’ desires to have precancels from every town with a post office rather than for precancels which met a valid need for a local company or organization.

The creation of walk-ins and write-ins was outlawed in 2007 when USPS banned the imprinting of precancels in individual post offices and required the destruction of all devices.

See [Collector-driven Devices](#). See [Fakes, Counterfeits, and Favors](#).

See [Souvenir](#). [Return to Coil Stamps](#).

Want Lists: Collectors compile lists of items they would like to purchase. Because no single seller has an inventory of every possible precancel, and the demand for some precancels greatly exceeds the supply, some items may remain on an individual’s want list for a long time.

Washington Bicentennials: The 12 stamps in the Washington Bicentennial Issue were released in 1932 to commemorate the anniversary of the 200th birth of George Washington. There are thousands of these precancels for inclusion in a Bicentennial **specialty collection**. Many of the items in this issue can also find a place in a specialty collection of **Double Line Electros**.

[Return to Bicentennial Precancels](#). [Go to Specialty Collection](#).

Web Page: The address of the Precancel Stamp Society is www.precancels.com

Write-ins: See [Walk-ins](#).

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APPENDIX

DATED CONTROLS

In 1938 the Postal Service ordered precancel **permit holders** to print their initials, together with the abbreviations of the month and year in which the stamps were to be used, on each stamp. This information was to be applied above the upper of the two parallel back lines as part of the precancel indicia. Permit holders were to use their supplies within the month imprinted in the control. If the supplies were not exhausted during the month, the stamps could be used for the first 10 days of the next month. If they were still not used during the 10-day grace period, an additional date was to be applied.

There are three common types of dated controls: printed, hand stamp, and integrals. Companies, such as Montgomery Ward, which needed a large volume of dated controls, used a printing press or mimeograph to apply the control on sheets of stamps that already had a precancel impression. Other companies applied the control with a hand stamp. Some companies needed a large volume of dated controls every month. Other companies only needed them a few months during the year.

As a result of the 1938 order and to provide sufficient space for the dated control, **BEP** reduced the distance between the parallel lines of Bureaus. This caused the distance (13 mm) between the lines of wide Bureau Types (61 to 63) to be reduced to 10.5 mm for the corresponding narrow Types (71 to 73).



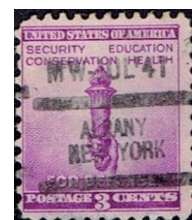
Shown to the above right is a wide Type 63 Bureau on a 6-cent denomination and a narrow Type 71 Bureau on a 1½-cent denomination. Both stamps are from the Presidential Issue. Both have dated controls from Lane Bryant, one for use in April 1941 and the other for use in July 1941.

Sometimes personnel who applied printed or hand-stamped dated controls were not meticulous with the placement of the hand-stamp or the direction in which a sheet of stamps was fed through a printer. Both of the Lane Bryant controls above are below, rather than above, the top parallel line.



The hand-stamp control on the left was misapplied in such a manner that it is inverted in relation to the stamp’s design and did not include the first part of “Co’s” initials. The 6-cent Presidential with a Type 71 Bureau was slated for use in Baltimore, MD., during May 1946. Montgomery Ward’s controls were often printed so that the control reads **up** or **down** in relation to the design of the stamp. The example to the right above, which was to be used during July 1940 in Albany, NY, is on a 12-cent denomination of the 1926 Issue.

Most dated controls have only a single date. In the Baltimore and Albany examples above, there was a two-step process. The stamps were first precanceled at BEP. For the second step of the unknown company, the control was applied with a hand stamp. Montgomery Ward’s control was added by passing a sheet of stamps through a printing press. In a third process, the dated control was an



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Integral part of the precanceling device. Both were applied in a single step, either with a hand stamp or with a printing press.

The example on the previous page is a Type L-13 IHS for use by Montgomery Ward in Albany, NY, during July 1941.

There are two characteristics related to the identification of Integral dated controls. The PSS number of the control, in this case the Albany, NY, L-13 IHS is restricted to Montgomery Ward. Montgomery Ward used several different Integral devices in Albany, but none of the PSS numbers assigned to Montgomery Ward could be assigned to another company. (There were no other companies in Albany that used an Integral device. However, by looking at the companies that used Integral devices in Chicago, you will see that each company has its own **Local** device numbers.

Although the space between one of the parallel lines and the dated control will vary from Integral device to Integral device, the space is consistent for a unique device. This characteristic is helpful when trying to identify which Integral device was used to make the **impression**. Compare this consistency to controls that were added as a second step: they may appear anywhere in relation to the parallel lines, i.e. there is no consistency.

There are a few manuscript (applied by hand) dated controls. It would seem that this type of control would be put on a stencil and then added to a group of stamps as opposed to writing on each stamp. The user “S.R.” is unknown. The control was added to the 3-cent denomination of the Defense Issue, for use in Gary, IN, during October 1941. See also [“pedigree.”](#)



When a specific denomination was in short supply during a specific month, the local user could add an integral control to a stamp that had already been precanceled. Therefore, some stamps exist with imprints from more than one precancel device. Shown to the right is a 3-cent denomination from the Defense Issue that was first precanceled by BEP for use in Baltimore, MD. During January 1947, Montgomery Ward apparently used all the 3-cent denominations previously available, so the company added an L-37 IHS to cover the shortfall.



When a company’s supply of dated controls was not used during the 10-day extension into the next month, a second date was to be applied. Therefore, it is possible to find dated controls with two different, usually consecutive, months. The Chicago branch of Aldens Inc. (AI) must not have used all of the 1-cent denominations scheduled for use in May 1961, so an additional control was added to cover usage during June of that year. (This illustration taken from Eugene Byers’ CD of *Printed Dated Checklists*, July 2005.)



(Return to [multiple impressions.](#))

The most prolific users of dated controls, especially on higher denomination stamps, were the **mail order** houses of Sears, Roebuck & Co. (SRC), Aldens Inc. (AI), Montgomery Ward (MW), Spiegel (SPE), Commerce Clearing House (CCH), National Bellas Hess, (NBH), and W. F. Hall (WFH). Most of these companies had several distribution centers spread across the country. The examples to the right have dated controls used by Burgess Seed & Plant Company in Galesburg, MI, and Sears Roebuck & Company in Minneapolis, MN.



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During the hay day of purchasing goods from mail order houses, customers could pay with unused postage stamps. The mail order houses then used the stamps to pay the postage for items they shipped. Therefore, it is possible to find dated controls on definitive and **commemorative stamps**, as well as **booklet panes**, which had not been precanceled.

Shown to the right is a stamp commemorating the 300th anniversary of New York City. Sears Roebuck precanceled it with a dated control for use in December 1953.



In general, outside the precancel world, collectors desire and place a higher value on stamps that have not been precanceled. Within the precancel world, most collectors desire and place a higher value on precancels that do not have a dated control. For example, in the “Pricing” section of the “Introduction” to the *PSS Bureau Catalog*, it is noted that dated precancels are usually valued at 20% less than the catalog value. However, there are extreme differences for several Buro precancels, when most were dated and very few have been found undated.

Return to [Mail Order Stamps](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

[Return to Commemorative Stamps, Precanceled in the main body of the pamphlet.](#)

[Go to Bureaus change from wide to narrow spacing.](#) [Go to Dated Controls in the Main Document.](#)

IDENTIFYING A BLURRED OR DISTORTED IMPRESSION

A blurred or distorted precancel is one in which all or some of the letters in the town and/or state names are not clear enough to identify at a glance without the use of a magnifying glass, bright lighting, any of the tips mentioned below, or others as yet unknown to me.

The Precancel Stamp Society’s Town and Type Catalog of the United States and Territories, preferably the current edition, is a vital tool for identifying a precancel. If a *Catalog* is not available, it is possible to make a stab at identifying the type or style using only the *Style Chart Of U.S. Contracted Precancel Devices*. A *Style Chart* is included, in whole or in part, in many PSS catalogs; it may also be purchased separately from PSS Catalogs.

Some collectors might try to attempt to identify town and state names using a non-PSS reference, such as an atlas or the town index on a road map. However, there are at least two problems with that option. (1) More than one town may seem to match the blurred impression on the stamp. (2) The town selected as the match may not have issued any precancels or may not have used the specific device that seems to be the one on the mystery item.

Regretfully, because identification efforts will not always be successful, there will always be some precancels that get tossed on the “unknown” pile. Sometimes, I return to an item in that pile and make a second or third attempt at identifying its precancel. Sometimes these attempts are successful; many times they are not. However, second and third efforts became more successful after I became more familiar with the names of precancel-using towns in a state, the **Types** used in those towns, and the expected shapes of the letters in the names of those towns.

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There is no priority in the sequence of the techniques presented below. I started with one that seems to have clues that will provide the fastest and most correct identification of the state, town, and type.

1. Over the years, I have found that the most fruitful, and possibly quickest identification technique, is the use of good lighting and a magnifying glass. My preference is a glass with a self-contained battery-operated light.
2. Are there any frequently-found identifiable letter or word combinations? The following list is not intended to include all possibilities: “East,” “West,” “North,” “South,” “New,” “Cape,” “Fort,” “Port,” “Lake,” “ville,” “ton,” “town,” “Hill,” “dale,” “burgh” “boro,” “Gap,” “land,” “Springs,” “water,” “wood,” “Saint,” or “St.”

Sometimes these letter combinations require additional research. “Fort” and “Port” differ by the specific letter that might be the problem one. A town, with more than one device, may have used a complete word, such as “Saint” on some devices and the abbreviation “St.” on others.

3. Are the letters in all caps, in both upper and lower case, or some other combination? Access to a PSS Style Chart should help with the distinctions in the specific Types mentioned below.

In some devices, such as 255, all letters are capitalized. In some devices, such as 525, only the first letter of a word is capitalized. In a few devices, such as 513, all the letters in the state name are capitalized, while only the first letter of the town name is. On the other hand, capitalization is just the opposite in some devices. In Style 513.5, the town name is in all capital letters, but only the first letter of the state name is capitalized.

4. When lower case letters are present, the position of specific letters in a word can help eliminate some towns, while keeping others in contention.

Do some letters have vertical strokes that are as high as the capital letters? Lower case b’s, d’s, f’s, h’s, k’s, l’s, and t’s “stand up above the crowd.” While letters that have tails, such as g, j, p, q, and y, “fall below the line.”

A name ending in “ville” has high letters near its end, while the final letters in a name, such as “boro” are not as near the end of the word.

5. In several Styles, such as 749, the town name is hyphenated and extends onto a second line.
6. Are the letters in a “fancy” font with serifs, such as in the Type 479 used in Wilson, N.C.? Or are they plainer and unadorned like those in Type 255 used in Rockford, ILL.?



7. There are many factors that can make it difficult to identify a specific type. Heavy usage, improper inking, improper pressure, improper or a lack of cleaning were only a few of many reasons. The examples shown on the next page were all precanceled with a Type 703 device from four different Nebraska towns.

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The first two impressions on the left are clear and sharp. Possibly, they were made early in the life of their respective devices. The three on the right can easily mislead a beginner. Improper pressure probably distorted the impression on the 2¢ Defense Issue from Ashland. Improper inking made the impression from Gresham somewhat difficult to identify. The missing and partial letters caused the impression from Hasting to be a challenge.

8. Very few devices have a slanted, italic-like font. An impression that appears to be in italics may have been applied so heavily that the letters were “squished.” To the right are two examples of a Type 721 impression made in JEFFERSON, WIS. Although the example on the left may not be ideal, the device was not applied so heavily that the force distorted the letters to make them appear to be in italics, as are those in the example on the right.



9. At times during the application of impressions with a hand stamp, the device slipped and may have caused the letters to appear wider or longer.



The two examples to the left were precanceled with a Type 490 device for use in Sparta, MO. Although the “S” is off the 1¢ of the War Issue, the other letters are legible. All the letters are present on the 2¢ War, but the heavy inking and force used to apply the imprint makes the letters in “Sparta” difficult to distinguish.

10. Are the letters in the town and state names the same height? In the sequence of Styles from 622 through 635, the height of the letters in the town names is taller than those in the state names.
11. Relatively speaking, are the parallel bars or lines far apart, as in Styles 492 and 703 or closer together as in Styles 728 and 748?

How thick are the bars and lines? Although Styles with “thicker” lines or bars are scattered throughout the *Style Chart*, the majority of the Styles tend to have lines or bars on the thin side. Many, but not all of the 500 series of Styles have thicker bars than Styles shown in other sections of the *Style Chart*.

Specific dimensions in mm are provided for some impressions. For example, Style 255 is defined as having 0.8 mm lines. Some dimensions are given, using relative terminology. For example, Style 748 is defined as having “hair lines.”

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In addition, quite a few devices, procured locally, rather than through a Post Office or Postal Service contractor, have thick lines or bars. Examples of locally procured devices appear at the end of each state listing in the *Catalog*.

12. In most devices, the town and state names are centered over each other. A poor impression in which the names do not appear to be centered may be very difficult to identify because all the letters are not present on the stamp.



In the top example to the left, the 716 device used to precancel the stamp in Lawler, Iowa, is slightly **off-center** to the right. However, the words “LAWLER” and “IOWA” are aligned through their centers.



On the other hand, it seems that there is at least a two-word town name on the stamp in the lower left illustration. If the town and state names are centered in the device, the center of the town name may be in the space between the words. With no reliable clues, other than what appear to be the use of upper and lower case letters and “Pr” in the portion of the town name that is legible, this stamp will probably remain a lonely, permanent resident of the “unknown” pile and not find a welcomed home in a labeled space in an album.

13. Before USPS adopted two-letter state abbreviations, many states were abbreviated with three- or four-letter combinations. Often the use or non-use of abbreviations and the abbreviations used within a state or even within a town are not consistent.

The “S’s” near the end of the four-letter abbreviations of “KANS.” “MISS.” And “MASS.” can help place an item in one of these states, but not be the sole identifier. A blurry or distorted “C” in “WISC” might lead you to think it is also an “S.”

In the same vein, poor impressions from MINN. and MICH. can make it difficult to determine which state is represented. Further, blurred or missing initials letters in MINN., CONN., or TENN. can mean additional research will be required prior to making the proper identification.

The advent of the two-letter state abbreviations did not eliminate the problem of identifying the correct state. Several two-letter abbreviations end with the letter “A.” At the same time several states’ abbreviations begin with the letter “M.” For example, a poor imprint of the “D” in MD could be confused with the “O” in MO, or vice versa.

When USPS adopted the two letter state abbreviations (without periods), they were also letting contracts for vinyl devices. Although some pre-vinyl devices did not use periods, if there are no periods in the abbreviated state name, you may have a device that is numbered Type 827 or higher. The 2¢ Liberty on the left was precanceled in Spring Lake, N. C. with a 748 device. The one on the right came from Reidsville, NC. it was precanceled with a 841 device.



These examples do not include all the possible letter combinations that make for a difficult identification of the correct **Type**. Regardless, when you encounter this kind of problem, you will need to review all the potential states to determine whether there is a town with that name and, further, whether that town used the specific device.

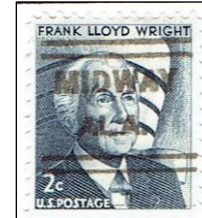
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14. Are there two sets of parallel lines? There are 12 electro devices **Styles** 241 through 252 that have double lines. (These are known as DLE’s which is short for **Double Line Electros**. DLE’s are another **specialty** collection for which there is a catalog.) There are also five rubber hand stamps, which have double bars. These are Styles 631 through 635. In addition, quite a few locally-procured devices have a set of double, and even triple, parallel lines or bars.

Shown to the left above is electro-Type 243; it was precanceled in Bristol, Tenn. on a perf. 11 from the 1922 issue. Below that is a rubber hand-stamp Type 631 which was precanceled in Midway, Ala. on the 2¢ of the Prominent Americans Issue. The third example is a Type L-2 TS from Greer, S.C.

The similarity between the Greer, SC, L-2 HS and several DLE Types cause some newer collectors to assume that it is a DLE. This is just another reason to compare a precancel to the examples in the **Style Chart** and the examples at the end of each state listing in the *Town and Type Catalog*.



Corning, NY, had 3 different devices with 3 sets of parallel lines. In the example on the left, the L-5 TS precanceled a 10-cent Monroe of the 1926 Issue.

15. After narrowing the candidates for a possible match, review the selected town listings in the *Catalog*. Did one use a device that resembles the impression to be identified? If one did, then there may be a match. If one did not, try again.
16. A final word of caution: When an item to be identified seems to match two different Styles, one of which has a relatively low catalog value and one with a much higher catalog value, be extremely conservative and assume that you have the more common one with the lower value.

Prior to computerizing the *Catalog*, I used to “eyeball” the lists of towns to find a match to something that I was trying to identify. Now, I let my computer’s search engine do most of that searching. It is much faster, more accurate, and does not overlook a potential match that the human eye may miss. However, the eyeball search has not been completely relegated to a tool of the past. I continue to utilize it at times.

[Return to Blurred Impression in the main body of this pamphlet.](#)

[Return to Distorted Impression in the main body of this pamphlet.](#)

IS THIS AN UNLISTED TYPE?

Identifying an impression as a type that is not listed in the *Town and Type Catalog* involves more than not finding a matching impression in the *Style Chart* and a corresponding lack of that type associated with a specific town.

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For many years, Rolston Lyon maintained a list of all the devices which the Post Office Department, and later the United States Postal Service, ordered to be manufactured by a private sector contractor. Jim Callis assumed the responsibility for maintaining that list after Ralston Lyons’ death. The maintenance of that list has been essential in the process of determining whether a contracted device may have been issued and for which an impression has never been seen or reported to the Precancel Stamp Society.

After it has been determined that a device is on the Lyon List, a second criterion is to determine whether the candidate impression appears on a stamp that would have been in use during the period when the device could have seen service. An impression that appears to have been made from a “lost” 843 on a Washington-Franklin or a 101 on a sheet stamp from the Americana Issue would more likely be considered a favor than a valid precancel.

Identifying a previously unseen impression made from a locally-obtained device would be even more problematic. There is no Lyon’s list of local devices. It would be helpful for a candidate to be an off-center impression that does not extend onto the cover, or at least onto some of the remaining paper. Regardless, it would take a considerable amount of deliberation on the part of several precancel experts to determine whether a previously unseen impression was made with a valid device for use in a suitable manner.

Even though we can all hope to find a “lost” gem, we should not hold our collective breaths. It is more likely that the item we find is merely a poor impression from a known device or illustrated and described in Bill Cummings’ handbook of *Things That Look Like A Precancel But Are Not*.

Thanks to Jim Callis for making several corrections to the draft of this article.

Return to [Contracted Local Device](#)

TIPS FOR DETERMINING PERFORATIONS AND MEASUREMENTS

Peter Newton and Ralph Kimball

Peter Newton’s original article was published in the August 2008 issue of *The Precancel Forum*. His article did not include any illustrations. Ralph Kimball supplied some which were published the next month in the September 2008 issue.

Before doing away with your perf gauge, I would like to share two tips that I have found to be helpful.

1. Turn the stamp face down and measure the perfs on the backside of the stamp without the distraction of the design and precancel impression.
2. Long-term, continual use of a perf gauge will lead to eyestrain and result in mistakes. When the perfs start to blur, stop and perform another task for a while. Any shortcut that reduces eyestrain is worthwhile. As Peter notes in his article, when in doubt, you can always whip out the gauge and make a final check.

THROW AWAY YOUR PERF GAUGE

Peter Newton

This article is written for the benefit of those general collectors faced constantly with having to distinguish among the various perfs of the 1922-1932 4th Bureau issue. Normally, we sit there with a pile

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of 4th Bureaus of the same town and type, checking the long side one at a time on a perf gauge and dividing the pile into sub-piles of perf 11’s, 10’s and compounds until our eyes glaze over and we move on to something else -- usually having made an error or two along the way.

1. The Problem, Defined.

As most of us have discovered, any reliance on perf notations made in pencil (and sometimes rubber stamped) on the backs of 4th Bureaus by former owners is downright dangerous, fraught with error as such notations turn out to be. Regarding attempts to use a gauge to analyze perfs on mounted stamps in picker albums found at roundups and conventions, forget about it. Yet there is another way.

The following methodology is not unique with this writer. He was informed of it a few years ago by veteran collectors, who, in turn, learned the techniques from the veterans of long ago, much of the methodology having been published in bygone issues of various precancel publications in the 1930’s and 1940’s. It is the purpose of this article to summarize all of the alternative means for distinguishing among the variously perfed issues of the 4th Bureaus into one place for future reference.

The key lies in the fact that all of the 1922 perf 11’s were printed by the flat plate process, whereas the 1926 compound perf issues were printed on rotary presses. As the plate for a rotary press is literally bent around the roller on the press, the resulting stamp is approximately half a millimeter longer on the long side than a similar 1922 stamp printed by the flat plate process. Prove it to yourself.



(The following are some scans Ralph Kimball provided to illustrate Peter Newton’s article.)

I used a flat plate stamp as a template for identifying flat plate, rotary, and offset stamps. In my case, I taped the template stamp onto my perf gauge. In all three scans, which appear later in Peter’s article, the flat plate template is on the right.

2. Making Your Own Measuring Device.

In your dupes, find a damaged 1922 flat plate, hence perf 11, 4th Bureau in a vertically-oriented denomination, making sure to select one where the perfs, as well as the precancel bars or lines, are well clear of the top and bottom edges of the design. Now take a pair of scissors and carefully bisect the stamp vertically, so you end up with two vertical halves.

Next, take one of the halves and lay it on top of a known 1926 compound perf 4th Bureau with the cut edge of the bisected half laid vertically down the center of the 1926 stamp. See how the 1926 issue is noticeably taller? Therein lays the key. The 1926 issues will always be taller, and once you are accustomed to this system for distinguishing between the flat plate and rotary issues, you’ll find it ever so much faster and more reliable than running the same stamps over your perf gauge.



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True, there will be stamps where the perfs cut into the design so far that one cannot be sure of the long-side measurement, and the perf gauge must be used as a fallback device. Likewise, precancel lines or bars will obscure the edge of the design, making reliance on the perf gauge necessary. Yet in the main, the use of a vertical bisect flat plate stamp will work in most situations.

The collector may wish to make a few more vertical bisect “gauges” of 1922 flat plates, putting each in a #1 glassine and storing them in various places, including one’s wallet, so there will always be one available. Particularly at roundups and conventions, this device speeds the process immeasurably when going through picker collections to locate needed denoms in particular perf varieties; dismantling and re-hinging is never necessary.

3. Related Methodologies:

When sorting out a pile of 4th Bureaus of a particular town and type into the three different perforation categories, I begin by turning the pile face down on a dark surface, usually a desk blotter segment. At the top of my work area, I have three 2 x 2 cards, imprinted 11, 10 and 11 x 10½, respectively, with the 11 at the left, the 10 in the center and the compound at the right.

3a. Pulling Out Perf 10’s: When face down, certain aspects which aid in sorting become readily apparent. First, the “holes” of perf 10’s jump out, as larger when compared with the others, so they go face down onto the “10” card. Notwithstanding the title of this article, keep your perf gauge alongside your work area for checking any items about which you may be uncertain.

3b. Pulling Out Spotted Denoms: If a stamp has colored ink stamp impressions on the back side, it goes onto the 11 pile. This is because sheets of stamps printed by the flat plate process are stacked one on top of the other while the ink is still wet, so a “kiss” or transfer of some of the ink to the back of the next sheet placed on top of the wet sheet occurs. In contrast, such does not occur in the rotary press printing process.

3c. Pulling Out Straight Edges: Any stamp with a natural straight edge is a flat plate stamp, as rotary press stamps all have selvage. When encountering a straight edge in the face down pile, turn it over to double check whether it is a natural straight edge, which oftentimes has a printed line on it in the same color as the stamp, or whether you are holding a stamp that had been cut, hence damaged.

3d. Gum Sorting: For those stamps encountered with full or substantial part gum, flat plate 11’s and compound rotaries can be distinguished on this basis as well. The gum on flat plate stamps is flat and uniform. The gum on rotary press stamps is wavy, and has what are known as “gum breakers” in it, otherwise the gummed rotary press printed (and rotary gummed) stamp sheets would curl unmercifully. Rotary gum, complete with gum breakers, appears to be in “rows” about one quarter inch wide.

4. Sorting Techniques:

As you go through the pile, each stamp which cannot be categorized immediately by any of the above processes should be turned face up in your work area below the pile, with the long side running vertically, arranging all such “unknowns” into a row or two. When you’ve made a row or two of “unknowns,” grab your newfound vertical bisect “gauge” and start measuring. All stamps that are the same height as your bisect gauge go into the “11” pile on your top left, face up, and all that are taller by half a millimeter (give or take) go into the “11 x 10½” pile on your top right face up. As you go through the rows, always be on the lookout for perf 10’s which may have escaped earlier detection, and turn them face down onto the “10” pile.

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Run the few “uncertains” you encounter across your perf gauge, and there you’ll have it. In no time at all, what used to be a tedious task full of eyestrain becomes a simpler and much more reliable process. As for keeping the perf 10’s in the middle pile face down, it helps to keep the piles organized in terms of accidental overlap as the piles grow, so that the need to re-identify in the case of accidental pile-merging is eliminated.

5. Use of the Method with Washington-Franklins:

5a. On 1919 Rotaries: This same methodology can be utilized to distinguish between 1919 rotaries and their 1914 perf 10 counterparts. Among your dupes, find a known flat plate Washington-Franklin, again with the perfs and the precancel lines or bars well clear of the border of the design, and bisect it vertically. As in the case of the 4th Bureaus, all of the 1919 Rotaries will be taller than their flat plate counterparts. Simple.



5b. On 1918 Offsets: For another treat, use this same “measuring stamp” to determine 1918 offset issues from their 1917 perf 11 flat plate counterparts. True, the one-cent offsets stand out because of their gray-green color. Yet, while the experts can eyeball similar color distinctions of the two- and three-cent offsets at twenty yards, those of us who are merely mortal have some degree of uncertainty regarding such distinctions. Again, the vertical bisect comes to our rescue, because nearly all offsets are about half a millimeter shorter than their flat plate counterparts. To convince yourself, use your measuring stamp on a known and obvious one-cent offset, and you’ll be sold on the concept.

6. Conclusion:

It is hoped that fellow collectors might find something of use in the foregoing ramblings. Much of the credit for passing on most of the above technology to this writer goes to longtime member Arnold Selengut. As for the methodology itself, like the kid in the cereal commercial once said, “Try it, you’ll like it.”

Irv Bayer

Here is another tip for checking perfs that I have been using for many years. I’m sure it is not original with me. It goes like this:

The top and bottom sides of all stamps in the 1922 - 1926 issues are perf 11. Turn the vertical side of a stamp to be checked 90° and place it over the top or bottom of any stamp from those two issues. If the perfs align, the item is another perf 11 from the 1922 issue. If the perfs do not align, then you have a compound perf from the 1926 issue.

Return to [Measuring Distances Between Lines](#). See also [Sorting Bulk Stamps](#) at the end of the Appendix.

PHOTOGRAPHING OR SCANNING PRECANCELS

What catches your attention to cause you to peruse an article or discover whether a sales lot might have some interesting goodies? Is it a catchy title? Or maybe is it because there are some accompanying illustrations?

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I, for one, always appreciate receiving illustrations that accompany articles submitted to *The Forum*. When there are none and it is practical, I try to find an example from my own collection, or from a Google search, to enhance the unaccompanied article.

The trite expression, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” is the most important reason for including illustrations. They help explain the topic and provide a break while reading a lengthy article. However, a poor illustration may be more harmful than informative.

The suggestions presented below can be helpful in preparing an article for publication as well as providing potential buyers a clear view of something you are trying to sell on the internet. I have found that scanning an item usually provides the best and clearest results. It doesn’t matter whether items are placed directly on the bed of a scanner or placed in vario pages or a similar shiny folder. The bright light of the scanner does not reflect off the shiny pages; the rows on a vario page help keep the items aligned neatly; and, because the camera is directly over the items, there is no distortion in the resulting image.

The precancels to the right, as well as all the illustrations in this pamphlet were scanned. The details are relatively easy to see. There is no glare that obscures any of the stamps. Because top, bottom, and side margins of the vario page were not needed for the illustration, they were cropped.



If you don’t have access to a scanner and must use a camera, then remove the items from any holder that has a shiny surface! The picture to the right was taken with a camera. The same precancels in the scan above were left in the vario page. The flash from the camera reflected off the shiny surface and destroyed the presentation of four items.



To eliminate vertical distortion, stand directly over the items to be photographed and shoot straight down. Ensure that there is no light behind you that will cause your shadow to appear in the picture, and possibly hide some of the details you are trying to show. Finally, crop the picture. Potential buyers do not need to see your desktop, a table cloth, or extensive margins of background material.

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The illustration to the left is of a sheet of Christmas Toys. In 1970, USPS issued these stamps both with and without precancels. (There are wavy parallel lines, but no town and state names; therefore these are **National** precancels.) Because the photographer did not position the camera directly over the sheet of stamps, there is extensive vertical distortion. A wary buyer is unable to determine the condition of the stamps at the top of the sheet.

The desk top does nothing to enhance the image of the stamp in the illustration to the left. Increasing the image to an approximation of the actual size of the stamp caused so much distortion that it is almost impossible to tell that stamp is a 3¢ Stuart. The precancel is completely illegible.



Shown to the right are two more examples of how not to take a picture. Although the seller was directly over the items in the left side example, the reflection of the flash shows his hands holding the camera.



In the example to the right, the photographer is not directly over the items which were left in the vario page. Further, a lit table lamp behind the photographer cast his shadow on the vario page. Finally, the unneeded wide, black margins should have been removed from the presentation.

Return to the [Photographing](#) heading in the main body of the pamphlet.

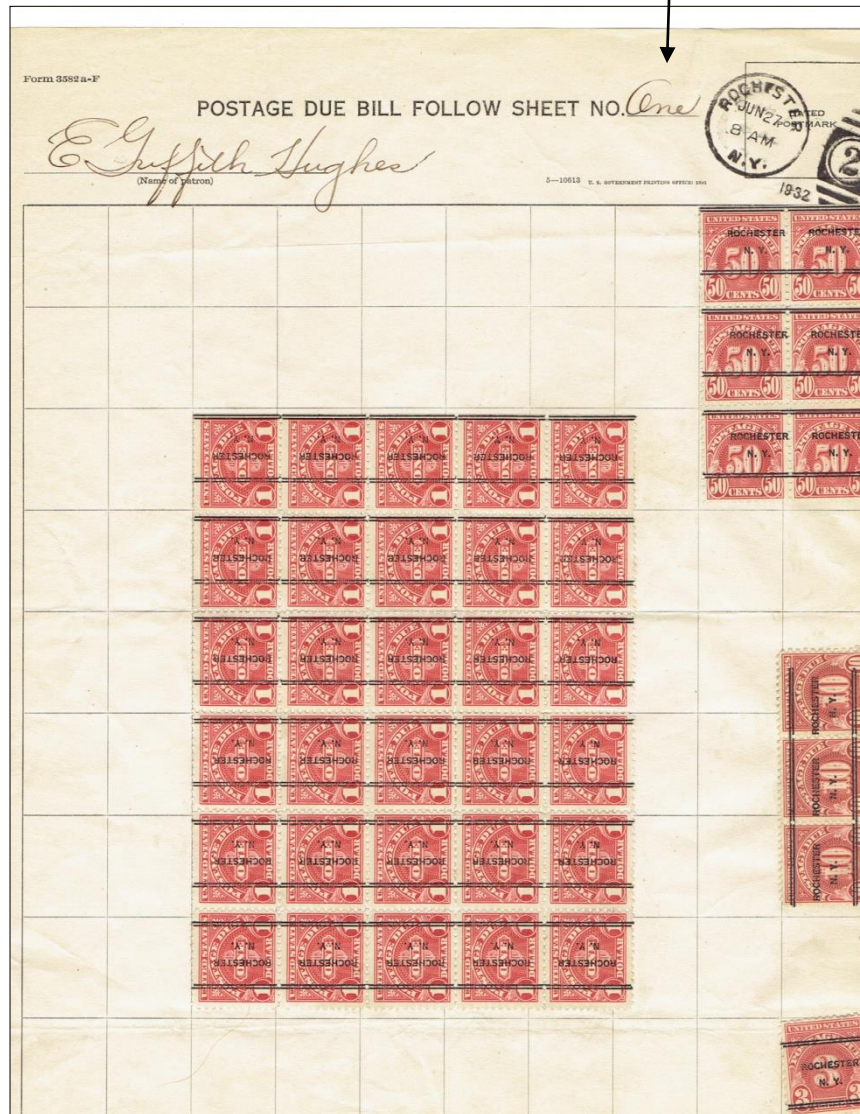
Return to the [Scanning](#) heading in the main body of the pamphlet.

PRECANCELED POSTAGE DUES

The example on the next page contains precanceled postage dues on Form 3582 a-F.

On June 27, 1932, an unidentified company owed the Post Office in Rochester, New York \$33.33. Note, this is Sheet Number One. (I do not know whether additional sheets were needed for this transaction on this date.) The sheet contains a total of 39 postage due stamps in the following denominations: \$1.00 (30 stamps), \$.50 (6 stamps), \$.10 (3 stamps), and \$.03 (1 stamp).

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The scan of the original page has been reduced so the example could will fit on the page.

Return to [Postage Dues](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

PRICING PRECANCELS

Charlie Adrion, PSS 6146

The Precancel Forum

March and April 2016

A new member brought up some interesting and important questions in a recent edition of *The Forum* ---- How are prices determined and how much is a fair price for a precancel? It is a complex and complicated question worthy of a doctoral thesis, or maybe even the Nobel Prize in Economics. In its most brief formulation, the question is **how to price a very scarce commodity when both the information about**

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its real scarcity and the size of the buying demand is incomplete. Supply and Demand should set prices, but both sides of this equation are slippery here. Beginners may not realize how scarce even some low-priced precancels are. If we had more collectors in the hunt, pricing would be even stronger and more unpredictable.

I’ve been collecting stamps for 60 years and involved in precancels for 30. I’ve bought a lot of precancels, from many sources, and sold some too. In that time, I’ve seen the precancel marketplace evolve mostly to the benefit of buyers **and** sellers. This article outlines how pricing works in most of the current precancel marketplaces.

Look at the 7-cent Alaska airmail from College, AK, precanceled with Type 729, which sold on eBay for \$7.00. A member asked why, when we know the PSS value for the type is listed at \$.50 in the *PSS Town & Type Catalog*; is its worth \$7.00? Paraphrasing the *T&T*, the *T&T* price is for the most common underlying denomination normally found on this type. Is the airmail common? I suspect not, but lacking better data, who can tell? Perhaps it is the only denomination on which this precancel comes. Definitely the information is incomplete! Some specialists of Alaska might have an opinion, but the average collector does not, and even most Alaska general collectors do not, know.



However, from being around precancel roundups for 30 years, and having a semi-good recollection of what I have seen, I would say the precancel on this stamp is very uncommon. In fact, I suspect you could go to PSS roundups for 5 years, or shop eBay for 10 years, or attend “regular” stamp shows for 100 years and never see another one. Supply is impossibly tight, demand is not high, but it does exist - erratic and unpredictable. In an auction market, it only takes two eager/aggressive buyers with plenty of money to set the price almost anywhere.

Here are some ways I think the precancel marketplace has changed in the last 30 years. I’ve seen four types of precancel selling models which I will call: Hoover method, Smith method, eBay, and the Good Old Boy (GOB) network.

The Hoover Brothers published catalogs that they used as a price list for what they were selling, as well as a reference book. Their 1940 *Catalog of Classic Precancels* is the one we know best today. For 75 years it was the go-to source of information about pre-1922 precancels. The *Bureau Catalog*, by Noble, was a similar effort to price bureau issues for sale. Hoover and Noble provided prices for all denominations, a monumental production effort in pre-computer days.

I have always wondered how many of Hoover's individually priced precancels were actually sold or available in stock. For many items in the 1940 *Hoover Black Book*, the list prices seem impossibly high for 1940 dollars. Conversely, I suspect many of the items that we now know as scarce, but listed in Hoover for modest prices, were never really available for buyers. The Hoover method appeared to be the norm in the old days. I wonder if any current PSS members are old enough to have bought stamps from the Hoovers. They were before my time, so I may be off-base with my speculations. The basic advantage of the Hoover method was fixed pricing. You knew what the “fair” price was; it was in the “bible” for everybody to see.

Concurrently with the Hoover/Noble outlets, dealers would advertise in *The Forum* with long lists of denominations at fixed prices. Those kinds of advertisements are long gone - a victim of costs and the better selling methods to come. There were also disadvantages to the Hoover process. There were many

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arbitrarily high prices that were unsupported by the face-to-face marketplace (aka GOB). They also listed prices for stamps that we now know are rare and that Hoover never had available for sale. The pricing data was held by a small group; today pricing is more like a crowd-sourcing activity, and is more accurate.

The current *PSS Bureau Catalog* is similar to the Hoover method. Collectors will accept the list prices as basically fair for every denomination. (In fact, the editors try hard to make them so.) Bureau dealers have most Bureau-listed denominations for sale at list prices or at a slight discount.

The advent of the *PSS Town and Type Catalog* contained rational, realistic pricing. Dave Smith and a few other dealers sell almost any denomination for the *T&T* price. This was the prevalent model when I first started collecting. This model made sense when most collectors wanted to fill in spaces for their town and types.

Odd denominations, commemoratives, airmails, and the like, sold faster. They commanded only a modest premium, if any. The benefits of this method are it is the most fun and most economical for a searcher who goes to roundups. The disadvantage is that eventually the stock gets cherry picked of cool denominations. It requires in-person searching through the massive stock, which is fun, but mail and internet sales are almost impossible.

EBay has been in business about 20 years and has made a significant impact on selling precancels. It is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Collectors can have the fun of searching at any time from any place in the world. As general state and denomination collecting have become more popular, competition has driven prices to levels considered unreal and unfair to "old-line" collectors. Because it is an auction, when there is demand, prices can be optimal for sellers and costly for buyers. Another advantage of this method is transparent pricing. Everybody can see what is available, what sells and doesn't sell, and the prices at which items sell. It is actually a very educational resource.

EBay also promotes precancel collecting, and indirectly the PSS, by exposing non-members to great looking precancels. EBay has spawned a cottage industry of sellers accumulating stocks of “hot” material (examples include DLE's, exotic modern denominations, and Alaskan airmails) for selling to hungry and sometimes irrational buyers. I consider EBay sellers, and the reaction to them, to be indirectly responsible for the USPS decision to eliminate precancels. There are other online auction sites, but EBay does 99% of the stamp business. The disadvantage to electronic sales is you are shut out if you are not on the Internet.

The Good Old Boy (GOB) model has been around longer than all of the others and is still going strong. Dealers and collectors bring their wares to roundups, show things off, and find buyers. Sometimes deals are made by mail or email, but it is mostly a face-to-face phenomenon. GOB, as a model, may not optimize the sales price like an auction. Sellers might make more with a different buyer, and buyers have to guess whether they will be able to find other sources at better prices.

GOB emphasizes the collegiality of our hobby. Deals are made by reputation, friendship, and even affection. Collectors help their peers improve their collections. Often there is a sense of future considerations. If we make this deal, I will have something good for you later. Trust is important. There is a sense that "this is for the good of the hobby," rather than the transaction being solely about money. There are several disadvantages: You need to attend roundups to participate. Newcomers may get the feeling of being frozen out; it is not an open, public market. Sellers may play favorites when offering material. There is no transparency. Except for the principals in the deal, it can be hard to learn what material is available and the amount for which it sells.

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In addition to the above, two other buying options are worth mentioning. Mike Gutman runs a weekly email-auction that contains 400 individual items and precancel groups. Everything is at a fixed-price that is a mixture of *T&T* and denomination-influenced prices. Dave Smith runs a periodic public auction of moderate-to-rare precancels. I recommend that any buyer take advantage of these sources.

Some comments on precancel catalog prices: Most importantly we have to recognize that there are so many precancel denominations that making an accurately-priced catalog for everything is truly impossible. If it were possible, the scope of the effort would not be economically feasible. Some precancel specialties, where the microscope can zoom in with more precision, offer realistic opportunities for denomination pricing. The *Bureau* and *DLE Catalogs* are good examples. Even these two examples are slippery in the tight-supply marketplace. Basically, most Bureaus are a loose supply. (Right now, there are more available for purchase than there are buyers who want them.) On the other hand the supply of DLE's is tight. (There are fewer items available to meet the current demand.) Even with the best efforts of catalog editors, bureau market prices are weak; DLE's are very strong.

The prices in the new *PSS Classic Catalogs* are interesting. The pre-1908 *Part I Catalog* looks like Hoover pricing, and I suspect the listings accurately represent the relative scarcity. It is a well-studied specialty, and the listed prices appear to reflect the current market. This is a triumph for Hoover-style-pricing. The *Part II Catalogs* look the same, but I think there is a difference. Because there are so many listings, not as much is known about the scarcity of individual items. For example, a 10-cent 1917 might vary from “one-known” in one city to “common” in another. At the same time, prices in the *Classic Catalog* might not vary much from straight *T&T* prices. I have the greatest respect for all of our catalog editors, and I think what we have is the best practical solution for a difficult pricing issue.

Is there any hope for precise price predicting? Probably not one that is any better than what we have today. You can learn a lot by monitoring eBay and attending roundups. One useful resource for state general collectors is what Bill Cummings provides in his Delaware list. He knows enough about the state to individually price denominations and flag some as especially elusive. Unfortunately, that is just one small state. I would be totally unprepared to suggest denomination prices for the Alabama and Montana state catalogs I have authored. The scope of precancels is just too big; that's one reason we love them.

A few collectors commented on my previous article on the price of an Alaska airmail precancel. I have also been working on a new Vermont general catalog and found the following opinion about prices from 34 years ago.

Crandall R. Wallenstein in *Vermont Precancels 1982*:

No one knows enough about the value of individual denominations to price them for any state. Sometimes we can identify a few common denominations in some particular types, but the existing local catalogs were always based partly on guesswork and partly on the stock of one individual dealer. As Manley Behrens [one of the giants of precancel collecting and research] says, "What I have is common, and what I need is rare" That is true for all of us.

When no one can agree on the type prices in any state, pricing individual items is ridiculous as well as impossible.

A current catalog editor noted:

The law of supply and demand holds pretty true, even with widely varying demand from one category to another and one decade to another, and with very little knowledge of the supply in

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many areas. It is amazing the number of people who think that a stamp catalog price is the same as a *Sears Catalog* price, which doesn’t vary much with supply and demand. If there’s no demand or no supply, items disappear from the *Sears Catalog*, but we keep precancels and keep tweaking the prices.

A lightly paraphrased comment from the buyer, of the 7-cent Alaska Statehood stamp with a Type 729 precancel from College, Alaska, whose questions initiated the series of pricing of articles in *The Forum*:

I have one of the most complete AK general collections. Years ago I bought the collection on which Bruce Brunell based his AK catalog. From time to time, I see one or two denominations on eBay which I don’t have and try to buy. Sometimes I am successful and sometimes I lose even after bidding ridiculous prices.

Return to [Catalog Value](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

REMOVING SELF-ADHESIVE STAMPS FROM COVERS

Pages 910 through 913 of the October 2010 issue of *American Philatelist* contained an article written by Peter Butler, a Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada and a frequent instructor and longtime-student at the APS Summer Seminar.

The first product to be tried to remove self-adhesive stamps from an envelope was Bestine. The best place to find Bestine is in art supply stores or craft supply stores. Building supply stores or hardware stores do not carry it. It also is available online. Bestine is a solvent, a hydrocarbon that contains a chemical called heptane. Bestine has been used for years in the graphic arts business, basically to separate papers, art pieces, photographs, and documents. It evaporates quickly, leaves no residue, and has no side effects when used properly. The solvent was originally formulated for thinning rubber cement but has since been reformulated to remove inks, decals, and labels from all kinds of surfaces.

While looking for, and unable to find, Bestine in a home improvement store, a helpful clerk suggested Pure Citrus, a non-aerosol, air-freshener that the clerks used to remove outdated sale stickers. The active ingredient in the air-freshener is a natural product, d-limonene. Because the propellant is compressed air, there are no fluorocarbons. ZEP is the brand name of a similar product available in Canada. (Several web sites contain information about the ever expanding use of d-limonene to replace other cleaners and solvents.)

Removing Self-Adhesive from Modern U.S. Postage Stamps My Personal Endorsement of Pure Citrus and Citrus Magic

The following information has been condensed from several articles that appeared in *American Philatelist*. The author was Canadian and used a Canadian product, Bestine. One of his American colleagues found and tested a similar U.S. product, Pure Citrus.

For several years, I have been using Pure Citrus, and Citrus Magic when I could not find Pure Citrus, and have been extremely satisfied with the results of both products. The products are non-aerosol air fresheners dispensed using a manual pump. They are available at some, but not every, large grocery and home improvement store. However, they may not be stocked at every store in the same chain.

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I have one personal limitation to their use. Because I tend to remove the self-adhesive from many stamps during a work session, even though these are air fresheners, the lingering aroma is more than I care to endure while it dissipates over an extended period of time. So, I now use them in my garage.

I spray the Pure Citrus on the back of the envelope. The paper of an envelope tends to be more porous than the harder paper from which most current stamps are made. Pure Citrus does not pass through the hard paper of a stamp as readily as it passes through the more porous envelope. It will also take longer to pass through thick paper, such as that used for post cards. (Because foil is not porous, this procedure will not work with foil that is often included with some Christmas and other special event envelopes. If possible, remove the foil from the envelope, then spray.)

(I have not used Bestine. According to the original article, if you are able to find it, use an eye dropper to apply a few drops to the back of the envelope. Then follow the steps below, as if you were using Pure Citrus.)

Almost as soon as the Bestine or Pure Citrus is applied, the paper will become translucent. Turn the piece over, roll it slightly, a corner of the stamp should start to come away from the paper. Proceed to peel off the stamp slowly. The process takes only a few seconds. You may need to spray an additional short burst on the paper. If you wait too long to try to remove the stamps, or try to work with too many stamps at one time, the air freshener will evaporate and you will need to respray.

The loosened adhesive will become gel-like. Use a scraper, such as an old credit card to scrape the adhesive slowly and gently from the back of the stamp onto a paper towel or a used, unwanted envelope. Frequently remove the accumulated adhesive from the scraper. Make sure that you don’t accidentally put a stamp in the glob of adhesive removed from a previous stamp. Otherwise, you will only move the adhesive from one stamp to another and need to restart the process.

I gently rub a finger on the back of the stamp to check for any residual, sticky adhesive. Sometimes, it will take more than one application of Pure Citrus. If needed, it can be reapplied immediately, especially when you are “cleaning” several stamps during the same session.

To prevent any residual glue from adhering to an album page or mount, the author dusted talcum powder on the back of cleaned stamps. However, one of his colleagues continued using the solvent until all the self-adhesive was removed so talcum powder would not be needed. I don’t use the talcum powder step. The main reason that I tested, and continue to use, this process was because I did not want talcum powder, corn starch, or any similar product in my albums.

Return to [Removing Self-Adhesive Stamps from Cover](#) in the main body of the pamphlet.

SORTING BULK STAMPS

The process of sorting a few stamps in a relatively small batch is not usually a logistical issue. However, when confronted with a large number to sort, large piles may start to bleed into each other. The task may be so large that it, and subsequent tasks, cannot be completed at one sitting.

It helps to have some means of keeping sorted items separate from one another. Depending upon the number and variety of stamps to be sorted, the sorting process may need to go through several levels. For example, states, then towns within a state, then types used by a town, and possibly issues within a type.

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Some collectors use a large piece of paper or a board on which they draw large boxes. Then they place identified items in one of the boxes. Some collectors purchase containers intended for other hobbies, such as bead work. Some collectors purchase or make a sorting tray.

The top item in the illustration below is a bead storage box. It has a lid that closes tightly so that the sorted items can be kept separate until it is time for the next step, such as mounting items onto an album page.

The two items in the bottom of the illustration are sorting trays. Because they do not have lids, they are susceptible to air currents and accidental bumps. If the sorted items are not going to be mounted immediately, they need to be stored in envelopes or something similar, so there will be no need to repeat the sorting process.

The one on the left is home-made from corner rounds intended to protect sheetrock where two walls meet at a corner. To make it easier to see stamps on the back row, the tray is on a slight incline with the front lower than the back.

The one on the right was made from a light-weight metal that had an accordion shape or was shaped using a break. That one can be used from either side. The side visible in the illustration has alphabetized labels for identifying the first letter of the items being sorted. The tray is not on an incline which tends to cause some slight neck strain as one cranes over the tray to see the back rows.

