

**DEVICES AND DATES:  
a  
Consolidated Listing  
of  
Precancel Types  
and  
Authorization/Shipping/Order Dates  
for Precancel Devices**

Combining the Precancel Stamp Society  
Town and Type Catalog  
of the  
United States and Territories  
8th edition

with

List of Post Offices Authorized to Use Precanceled Stamps  
and Government Precanceled Envelopes  
(The "Lyon List")

and

Precancel Devices Issued by the U. S. Postal Service  
Between July 1, 1971 and March 31, 1997

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Updated to include precancel  
devices ordered between  
April 1997 and June 2007

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Compiled by  
James G. Baird and James R. Callis, Jr.

## **Dedication**

More than seventy-five years ago the late Rolston Lyon began work on a listing of post offices authorized to sell precanceled stamps. Over time his effort grew into a comprehensive listing of dates when post offices were provided with precancel devices. By the early 1970s he had started upon a project which would have related the device dates to the catalog listings of the town and type catalog. His death in 1976 prevented the completion of that work.

For his work preserving information that would have otherwise been lost to future precancel collectors, this compilation is dedicated to Rolston Lyon.

## **Acknowledgment**

The degree of accuracy present in this compilation would not have been possible without the efforts of the late James Wehle in reviewing it line-by-line. His knowledge and willingness to share it were instrumental in completing this project. For this, the compilers are most appreciative.

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## Introduction

This compilation marries two important precancel references. The first is *The Precancel Stamp Society's Town and Type Catalog of the United States and Territories*, which lists and prices all recognized precancel types. The second is the *List of Post Offices Authorized to Use PRECANCELED STAMPS and GOVERNMENT PRECANCELED ENVELOPES*, the so-called Lyon List. The information it contains for the post offices listed consists largely of the dates on which the post offices were authorized to use precancels or the dates that devices were ordered for or furnished to the offices.

The Town and Type catalog was first published in 1973; the eighth edition was released in 2019. It lists and prices all recognized precancel types, and has achieved wide circulation and use.

The Lyon list was first compiled by Rolston Lyon in the early 1940s from information maintained by the Post Office Department in Washington, DC. From the time that the department began providing precancel devices to postmasters, approval of precancel permits was granted in Washington, and records were kept which contained dates corresponding to the precancel devices furnished. The last version of the Lyon List contained information on precancel devices ordered through June 30, 1971. Information on devices ordered after that date is also included in this compilation. The last devices were ordered during June 2007.

Beginning July 1, 1913 the Post Office Department adopted the policy of supplying precanceling devices to postmasters. Prior to that time, the policy had been that precanceling be accomplished "at no expense to the Department." If a postmaster thought there was an advantage to precanceling, the expense was a matter for him to deal with. Obviously, many postmasters found it advantageous.

The date information the Lyon List contained came from a central file created and maintained in Washington, DC, in the office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General. The information this file contained related almost entirely to precancel activity after the Department started providing precanceling devices. The files contained a few dates of earlier authorization to use precancels – no information is available as to why these early dates were included. One might speculate that there was a period of transition that preceded the adoption of the new policy under which the Department furnished devices. Some of the early dates can even be related to government style devices – another indication that there was some experimentation before the new policy was adopted. These early dates are included in this compilation.

The Lyon List never achieved wide use, but has nonetheless been a valuable reference over the years. Collectors familiar with the list used it to determine whether or when devices might have been furnished to specific post offices. However, the list is a guide, rather than a tool of absolute determination. While it is useful to be able to link a date to a device, collectors have learned that there are many legitimate devices for which no date

exists (see page 10). There are also dates recorded for devices where examples have not been discovered by collectors – possible “missing types” to seek out.

The Lyon List incorporated authorization dates for the use of government precanceled envelopes. This compilation does not; they are included in a separate appendix.

The usefulness of this combined reference is that it places catalog listings side-by-side the device date data. Moreover, it is in a digital format, which hopefully makes it accessible to more collectors, and better preserves it for the future.

A list of contractors making the precancel devices since the Post Office Department started supplying them in fiscal year 1914 is in the appendix, “Device Contractors and Contract Periods”.

# Understanding the listings

Users of both the Town and Type catalog and the Lyon List will recognize the column headings – the state, town, type, DPO status and PSS notes from the Town and Type catalog appear in columns 2 through 6. Data from the Lyon list, and later device date data, appear in columns 8 through 10. Column 1 is used to indicate pending catalog changes.

An explanation of each column follows.

## **CCP**

An asterisk in this column indicates that a catalog change is pending. In most cases it is a new type that has not yet appeared in the current catalog or an official update to the current catalog. It also includes newly identified errors, spacing and font variations, or other things that would result in a change or addition to the catalog.

## **State**

Unlike the Town and Type catalog, each listing also identifies the state, which is needed when data was sorted.

## **Town**

The town name as listed in the Town and Type catalog.

## **Type**

The type as listed in the Town and Type

## **DPO**

The word “Yes” in this column indicates that the post office had been discontinued, or had its name or status changed.

## **PSS Notes**

This column contains notes as they appear in the Town and Type catalog.

Concerning the use of PSS note 11 – “Two or more devices of the type exist, but the differences, if any, do not justify separate listing under catalog guidelines.” Since there are very often dates for devices that are not listable under T&T catalog guidelines, this compilation adds another listing so that the available date may be assigned to a device.

See the PSS Town and Type catalog for a complete listing and discussion of PSS notes.

## **Lyon Notes**

This column contains the notes as originally used in the Lyon List, as well as several additions.

- X      The original authorization for the use of precancels was, at the date given, restricted to Christmas (Xmas) use at parcel post mailing windows, and where there were then no precancel permit holders.
  
- @      Co-Ed Dressmakers of New York city applied for, and received, a great number of permits for a direct-mail advertising campaign. In many cases this was the first permit for a given town, and new precanceling devices were authorized and supplied. All permits were dated January 12, 1929, and instances of this “first” use are marked for easy identification. See “Important Precancel Dates”.
  
- #      During January and February 1929 the Post Office Department made a questionnaire check of all post offices to determine which were using precancels. It was found that many smaller offices had merely ordered devices without the formality of prior approval. Many of the erring postmasters received belated authorization to use precancel devices already in use. This “legalization” covered some devices going back to 1917 and earlier. Most of these legalizations are dated between February 1 and February 11, 1929. They are marked for easy identification. See “Important Precancel Dates”.
  
- N      Some devices made during the narrow hand electro period actually have wide spaced lines, because longer town names required two lines of type in addition to a third line for the state. These are identified as “WHE” device types even though they were produced after July 1, 1938. They include all three style 706 devices, and ten of style 707. All of these devices have 12 mm spacing between the lines. 707s made during fiscal year 1935 have 12-3/4 mm line spacing; those made during fiscal year 1937 have 13-1/4mm line spacing.

10-subj. and 25-subj.

Some wide handelectro styles come as both 10 and 25 subject devices. These notes are used where appropriate to differentiate between similar devices. The styles that exist in both 10 and 25 subject configurations are 701, 703 and 704.

## **Date**

This is the date associated with the authorization or ordering of the device. Over the years, the dates were characterized as authorizing dates, ordering dates or dates that

devices were furnished to post offices. The dates are certainly never the dates the devices were made. See the appendix “Nature of the Information Made Available by the POD and USPS” for a discussion of devices “authorized”, “ordered” and “furnished” and what these terms might mean for the dates associated with devices.

For devices supplied during the replacement program of 1932, the date is shown as “AR Sum 32”. See “Important Precancel Dates.”

If a device was furnished after an office had “blanket” authority (see below under “Device Type”), “Blanket” appears instead of a date. After mid-1953, when all devices should have appeared on lists, “No Date” is used even for blanket cities when no date is available. A list of post offices with blanket authorization appears as an appendix.

When no date was available, “No Date” appears in this column. For a discussion of why dates may not be available, see “The nature of available dates and why some dates are missing”.

### **Device Type**

The Lyon List identified the category of the devices. These designations are used only for government furnished devices. While this is unnecessary for types listed in the T&T catalog, it is very useful information in identifying the kind of device when there is a date listed for a device that has not been seen by collectors, the so-called “missing types”.

The device categories are:

CM	Coil machine
H	Handstamp
Electro	Electro
WHE	Wide spaced handelectros
NHE	Narrow spaced handelectros
V	Vinyl
Printed	Generally applies to special pre-1913 authority; see Longmont, CO
B	Blanket – in 1923 and later, 146 post offices were given authority to approve, locally, applications to use precanceled stamps. The date given is that of the “blanket” authorization; prior precancel usage at that office had been authorized but dated records were destroyed as of no interest in Washington.

### **Not seen**

In almost 2200 instances a date is available for a device that has not been seen and identified for listing in the Town and Type catalog. These constitute “missing types”. They are identified by a “+” in this column. In the case of “missing” vinyl types, the date is often sufficient to speculate as to the style of the “missing” type. In these cases, the suspected style also appears with a question mark. In a very few cases, the style is

known (usually from a proof) but has not been seen on stamps to qualify it for listing – in these cases the style is shown without the question mark.

## **The nature of available dates and why some dates are missing**

The original precancel device date information was obtained by Rolston Lyon in the early 1940s from Post Office Department records. This information was as complete as a headquarters clerical operation could make it – but it certainly had gaps due to unrecorded transactions, and probably not all entries in the files were accurate. This, and the need for Lyon to transcribe the information – both in obtaining and later reporting it – make it clear that there was room for some errors in the data. This was demonstrated by comparing data in the 1971 Lyon list to two earlier versions that were available. A number of transcription errors were identified and corrected.

In addition to the possibility of errors in the data available, there are many devices for which no date exists. For years this has troubled precancel collectors, as it suggested that devices without dates were suspect. While this may be true in some cases, it is not for the majority of “no date” devices. As the work on this compilation progressed, it became apparent that perhaps we did not have a good understanding of the nature of the information available from the Post Office Department, and later the Postal Service, on devices authorized, ordered or furnished. This prompted a review of the source documents available.

As already mentioned, the initial information was obtained by Lyon from Department files. Subsequent to this, lists were furnished by the Department of post offices authorized to sell precancels and of devices ordered (see appendix, “Nature of the Information made available by the Post Office Department and U. S. Postal Service”). A fresh look at these lists and their content yielded some new conclusions about the nature of the data we were working with. The appendix explains in detail the basis for the findings which follow.

### **“No date” electroplates**

While the original Lyon work included dates for many electroplates, dates were generally lacking for electroplates made after the early 1940s. The reason to this proved to be fairly simple. While Lyon was able to obtain dates for electroplates from the records he searched, the subsequent Post Office Department lists did not include electroplates until the release of the list for February 1962. Thus, no electroplate issued for a period of about 20 years had a date associated with it. This accounts for the majority of “no date” electroplates in the Lyon list.

### **“No date” narrow handelectros**

There is a surprising number of narrow handelectros with no date for the device; roughly 700. This presented a different sort of question, as the Post Office device lists were of handstamps. Closer examination of the lists revealed that until mid-1953 the lists only included offices that were receiving precanceling devices for the *first time*. This meant that from the introduction of the narrow handelectros in 1938 until mid-1953,

offices getting narrow handelectros as replacement devices would not be listed. This explains most of the “no date” narrow handelectros.

### **“Missing” Automatic Replacement devices**

The Lyon List included devices purported to have been furnished as “Automatic Replacements” in the summer of 1932 which have not been reported – “missing types”. There are over 800 of them. Automatic replacement devices were the result of concern about the cost to replace worn or damaged rubber precanceling handstamps. The post office decided to change from rubber handstamps to metal handelectros. Offices with rubber handstamps, and which presumably still had a need for precancels, were given the opportunity to obtain one of the new metal handelectros. We know that over four thousand offices were supplied with new devices because they belong to a small group of styles, and there is no specific date in the post office records for these devices. To account for these, Lyon assigned a date of “AR Sum 32” – meaning an automatic replacement in the summer of 1932. So far, so good – while the Post Office Department had not provided a list of offices getting these replacements, the existence of precancels was evidence of the device. But, Lyon went a step further and also assigned an AR Sum 32 date to many offices that previously had a rubber handstamp even though no examples were known from these devices. In the Lyon list he used a “+”, indicating that these were missing types. Upon current reconsideration, and in the absence of a post office list of automatic replacements, this seemed questionable.

At the 2004 Bedford PSS convention a discussion was held with several collectors who make regular use of the Lyon list. After considering the use of the AR Sum 32 dates, we agreed that the assignment of AR Sum 32 dates to unreported types was not warranted. In fact, it created a missing type list of devices that likely never existed in the first place. The solution is to drop all of the “missing” AR Sum 32 listings on the basis that most of them probably never existed. Should a previously unreported type turn up in the future that does indeed meet the characteristics of the AR devices, it can then be identified as such. The deleted “missing” “AR Sum 32” listings are contained in an appendix.

### **Precanceled envelopes**

Envelopes are beyond the scope of this compilation, but a list of envelope authorization dates is included as an appendix. It will be noted that there are no envelope dates after early 1941. This is easily explained. The only dates ever available for precanceled envelope use were obtained by Lyon in his original search of Post Office records. No information on envelopes was ever included in the monthly lists.

## Important precancel dates

The 1971 Lyon List contained a section entitled “Important Precancel Dates” in which a summary of events, largely the promulgation of post office regulations, was summarized. It is lengthy, but contains much that should be of interest to today’s collectors in understanding the evolution of the use of precancels. It has been updated, primarily to cover events since 1971, and primarily from notes Lyon himself had prepared to use in an update.

- 1911 December 5: Postmaster General Frank N. Hitchcock authorized the general use of precancels on Christmas parcels for the first time.
- 1912 The Act of Congress approved August 24 created the Parcel Post Service. This resulted in a tremendous increase in demand for postage stamps and a more efficient system for canceling these stamps.
- 1913 July 1: Regular postage stamps were made valid for parcel post. Parcel post stamps were made valid for ANY postal duty. The Department instituted the policy of supplying precanceling equipment and cash allowances to cover the cost of precanceling to “authorized” postmasters. Bids were called for and supply contracts signed for both electrotypes (used for precanceling large quantities of stamps) and rubber handstamps, used where the demand for precancels was not great enough during a year to require printing. Prior to this precanceling was to have been accomplished “at no expense to the Department.”
- 1916 In an effort to reduce the costs of printing precancels, the Post Office Department invited the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to bid on certain contracts. The Bureau was low or equal bidder in only three instances; the result was the Experimental Bureau Prints used at three offices.
- 1923 May 3: The first of the “regular” Bureau Print precancels was issued – the 1c sheet stamp made for New York, N. Y.
- 1924 April 26: The Third Assistant Postmaster General issued the first of a long series of notices prohibiting the precancelation of commemorative stamps, and the sale of precanceled stamps for collection purposes.
- 1924 August 7: The Third Assistant Postmaster General authorized the use of precanceled stamps on first-class matter, under special conditions.
- 1925 February 28: Postmaster General Harry S. New authorized the private precancelation (with mailer’s postmark) of Government stamped envelopes under Section 452 ½, P. L. & R. (Act of February 20, 1925).
- 1925 March 9: The Third Assistant Postmaster General issued an order prohibiting the use precanceled stamps on motion picture film cans, laundry cases, egg crates,

- etc., or other containers specially designed to be reused for mailing purposes. The result of the order was to curtail use of high-denominated (\$2 and \$5) precancels.
- 1928 May 29: Section 435 , P. L. & R. is promulgated.
- 1928 August 7: The Third Assistant Postmaster General advised postmasters that the Department would supply precanceled 1c stamped envelopes, either with or without printed return card, to meet the requirements of mailers under section 435 ½ P. L. & R.
- 1929 January 12: Co-Ed Dressmakers, New York, N. Y. applied for, and received, a great number of permits for a direct-mail advertising campaign. In many cases this was the first permit for a given town, and new precanceling devices were authorized and supplied. All permits were dated January 12, 1929, and instances of this “first” are listed under the states with the symbol “@” for ready identification.
- 1929 January 18: The Third Assistant Postmaster General called the attention of postmasters to the fact that Bureau-printed precancels were available under certain conditions.
- 1929 During the last week of January, but especially during the first two weeks of February the Post Office Department made a questionnaire check of all post offices to determine which were using precancels. It was found that many smaller offices had merely ordered their handstamps from the Division of Equipment and Supplies without the formality of first obtaining authorization from the Division of Classification. In every justifiable case the erring postmasters were “legalized” by a belated authorization to use precanceling devices already in use. This “legalization” covered some devices going back to 1917 or earlier. Most of these “legalizations” are dated between February 1 and February 11, 1929, although there were the customary number of “tail-end Charlies”, and have been marked with the symbol “#” in state listings, for ready identification.
- 1930 January 21: The Third Assistant Postmaster General advised that Government precanceled stamped envelopes furnished thereafter would be issued without gum on the flaps.
- 1930 May 29: Postmaster General Walter F. Brown announced the amendment of section 435 ½ P. L. & R. (Act of May 9, 1930) to include government postal cards
- 1932 Summer: Alarmed by the steadily increasing costs of replacing worn and damaged 25-subject rubber handstamps, which were susceptible to warping and damage from many causes, the Department decided to change from rubber to 25-subject hand-applied electroplates. More than 4000 offices, then using precancels, were supplied on an automatic-reissue basis with the new metal devices. These are carried in the state listings as “AR Sum 32” because it is

obvious that the great number involved could not have been produced in a single day, and because the Department kept no records of shipments to individual postmasters.

- 1934 July 1: Complaints of “having to ink up the bathmat” in order to use the 25-subject hand electros, poor impressions, and rising costs of devices led the Department to reduce the size of hand-applied electroplates to a 10-subject device. The “four impressions to a pane of 100 stamps” concept perished.
- 1934 September 25: The Third Assistant Postmaster General ordered all postmasters to cease precanceling postage-due stamps.
- 1937 March 1: The Acting Third Assistant Postmaster General ordered postmasters not to issue precancel permits to collectors, stamp clubs, stamp dealers, etc., unless they were actually bona fide patrons of the post offices involved.
- 1938 March 9: The Third Assistant Postmaster general ordered that thereafter no postage stamps over the 6-cent denomination be precanceled.
- 1938 March 18: The same man canceled the order of March 9, 1938!
- 1938 June 4: Following this back-down in the face of tremendous pressure from a nationwide group of this country’s largest mailers, Third Assistant Postmaster General Ramsey S. Black announced the “dating order”. This order was so important to collectors that a lengthy quotation is in order.

“Referring to the order of March 9, as amended by the order of March 18, pertaining to precanceled stamps, notice is hereby given that while it is desired that the use of precanceled stamps over the 6-cent denomination be curtailed as much as possible their use on mail of the second, third and fourth classes, and where specially authorized in each case, on matter of the first class, will be permissible after July 1, 1938, provided the permit holders will print on each stamp above the upper of the two parallel black lines forming a part of the precancel indicia, their initials, together with the abbreviations of the month and year, .....

“The printing of these additional indicia on precanceled stamps shall be from type of the same size as that used for the name of the post office and State, must be clear and bold, and shall be done by the permit holders at their expense. Indelible ink which cannot be washed off must be used.

“While it is preferred that not more than one stamp be used on the same piece of mail, matter bearing more than one stamp will not be refused, but this is not intended to permit patrons to use undated precancels for pieces or articles requiring more than 6 cents postage. There will be no objection to permit holders

printing their initials and date on precanceled stamps below the 6-cent denomination.

“Where a mailer has daily mailings consisting of a comparatively small number of parcels, there is no real advantage to the mailer or the postal service in using precanceled stamps and under such circumstances postmasters should discourage their use and endeavor in a tactful way to have mailers use ordinary uncanceled stamps on such mailings.”

- 1938 June 24: The Third Assistant Postmaster General advised postmasters that that permit holders may use rubber stamps for printing their initials and date on precanceled stamps, provided that type is of the same size as that used for the name of the post office and State, and that the printing is clear and bold. Indelible black ink was required.
- 1938 July 1: Changes were made immediately in the specifications for the manufacture of precancel plates and handstamps, and all devices ordered and shipped to postmasters after July 1 were of the new narrow-spaced style -- with the exception of Bureau-printed precancels.
- 1940 August 12: After two years of dated precancels the Third Assistant Postmaster General found “gross negligence” in dating precancels. He complained of such specific irregularities as: Overprinting is illegible: Other than black indelible ink is used; No initials are shown, only the month and year; Overprinting was placed in a “hit-or-miss” manner diagonally across the stamp.
- 1940 October 15: The Bureau of Engraving and Printing announced that in the future the line spacing of all bureau-printed precancels would be cut approximately 3 millimeters, as requested by the Post Office Department.
- 1941 March 1: The first narrow-spaced bureau-printed precancels were shipped.
- To quote Lyon – “Things settled down for a number of years, with the bathtubbers playing tag with the highly-trained Inspection Service, which was hyper-suspicious and totally ignorant where precancel matters were concerned.”
- 1953 Circa August: Precancel permit approval procedures are changed – postmasters will now approve permits without forwarding applications to Washington.
- 1953 September: No list of newly authorized offices was provided, as this function now took place in the field.
- 1953 October: A list of devices ordered was furnished for October 1953, the first list to intentionally include replacement devices. This effectively ended the appearance of most “No Date” devices.

- 1957 June: The first rubber plate bureau precancels are produced
- 1958 June: In a continuing effort to cut costs, the Department accepted a low bid from a vinyl-rubber handstamp manufacturer, for 10-subject devices. Even while the contract for 10-subject hand electrotypes was still in force orders were being issued for delivery of the new devices on or after July 1.
- 1959 June through July 1961: The Big Blackout. No lists of devices were issued by the Post Office Department for over two years, causing considerable consternation among precancel collectors.
- 1962 February: This was the first month that electroplates appeared on the device list – the first time since the early 1940s that information on electroplates was made available, effectively ending the appearance of “No Date” electroplates.
- 1962 August: First month for vinyl devices without commas.
- 1963 July 1: ZIP code was introduced, but did not apply to precanceling devices.
- 1964 October through January 1965: The Small Blackout, due to a misunderstanding between Headquarters and the area postal supply centers about supplying lists of devices ordered to central authority in Washington. Dates for devices shipped during this period are shown as “Winter 1964”
- 1965 Late April: Two-letter, unpunctuated State abbreviations were introduced.
- 1967 July 27: Part 142 of the Postal Manual (“Precanceled Stamps”) was revised to permit the sale of precancels to collectors by postmasters, under certain conditions.
- 1968 July and August: No approved contracts for the manufacture of electroplates or vinyl rubber devices were available for these two months. Orders, shipments and lists were resumed in September 1968.
- 1971 July 1: The United States Postal Service, a government corporation rather than an executive department, took over the operations of the United States Post Office Department.
- 1978 September 21: The Postal Bulletin announces the switch to “Lines Only” bureau precancels. This is probably also the effective date for the end of electroplates as a supply item. Generic, lines only bureaus could meet the need in any town. The Postal Bulletin mentions handstamps as a source of small quantities; no mention is made of electroplates.
- 1997 April through July 1998: Another Blackout. Due to a change in contractors, no information is made available on new devices.

2007 July 5: Use of precanceling handstamps and electroplates discontinued. Local destruction of devices ordered. To quote Postal Bulletin 22210, dated July 5, 2007:

“Effective July 5, 2007, we are discontinuing use of the few remaining Postal Service precancelation handstamps and precancelation electroplates. Once used to precancel limited quantities of postage stamps, these devices no longer have a functional purpose in the Postal Service. Post Offices, stations, and branches must discontinue the use of these devices and destroy them locally to ensure that they are no longer usable.”