

LINEAR POSTCANCEL FAMILIES, of devices in this study

On issues from the 1870s to the present, *linear* (town, state) impressions from single-subject rubber handstamp devices *with no lines*, can be found. An advertisement in the 1888 Post Office Guide, in addition to First Class “daters”, offered “City, State” handstamps for sale to postmasters. The Manufacturer was Ward & Adams of Aurora,



Illinois. Perhaps they were meant for other office uses, like filling in forms, return addresses, or money orders, but evidence exists that on some occasions they were used as a *postal* canceling device. They cannot qualify as “postmarks”, but they can be called postcancels. They were pressed into service for canceling parcels and registered mail, as well as regular mail envelopes. Sometimes, they were used for precanceling stamps in modest quantities before affixing. These are loosely described as *provisional* uses of a single subject handstamp or “post office namestamp”.

1. The text of these single subject devices can be in tiny to quite large fonts, on one or two lines. These handstamp are the earliest and longest-used post office devices having *linear* text, so these are designated, for no other reason, as the **first family** of devices to be included in this study.



At about the turn of the century, a new *rectangular* single-subject rubber handstamp comes into use in a good many post offices. The *box* replaced the single oval around straight-line town and state text of earlier parcel post devices. To distinguish these from the circular or oval parcel post cancels, we will call them *linear* parcel post cancels. Linear Postcancels, as thus simplistically defined, with all their subsequent variations, are the central subject of this study. This catalog lists cancels on U.S. postage of 1908 and later. There is a separate general listing of earlier issues, with the same type numbering system, which will be added when ready.



It is on the 1898 issue that we first find these handstamp box cancels from a relatively few cities. On the 1902 issue, more cities and towns are found. In the Washington Franklin era, use became widespread. Without a date, with the town over state inside a box line, the device was clearly not intended for first class mail. Primarily, we say, they were for Parcel Post use.



It is inferred that the box handstamp devices were intended as parcel or package cancellers, though they were used on envelopes. One such use was for registered mail. There was a rule that registered mail postage was *not* to be cancelled with a dated canceler, on the face of the envelope; so the box cancels were legitimately used for this purpose, as shown above. There was a similar rule that postage dues weren't required to receive dated cancels, so box cancels were used, usually after affixing, at the destination post office.

Another use of undated cancelling devices was for precancelled mail "returned to sender". The precancelled postage was "killed" to prevent reuse. Again, no date required, so this was a legitimate use.

2. Therefore, the **second family** of devices in this study is the single-subject rubber handstamp *with a box line* encompassing the linear-format text. The box handstamp has proliferated into many inherently similar types, right up into the late 20th century.



On a soaked definitive stamp, a partial box-postcancel impression, with a line above and below the town and state, is generally understood to be "different" from a precancel because the length of a town name does not fit. Or it is not centered entirely on one stamp, with no second subject showing. It was not *intended* to cancel adjacent stamps equally. Examples of short names aligned on definitive stamps exist, for a precancel-similar effect, but this is not common. Some suggest the box handstamps were designed to fit the "new" rectangular commemorative format stamps, but they weren't only used on them. There was no need, in the design of the device, or in the act of

canceling, to make impressions relating to the size or position of the stamp or stamps cancelled. There are nice semi-intentional “favor cancels” on commemorative stamps or pairs of definitives, which have served to preserved full impressions.

3. The **third family** in this study is a box cancel variety which has, *in addition*, the name of a particular postal station, or branch office. These format-different cancels are from cities with more than one post office linked to them. They form a special subset for each city that used them. Some, but not all, of these have three lines of text in the box.



4. The Post Office Department issued the 1913 red Parcel Post issue, and green Parcel Post Postage Dues, at the advent of restructured Parcel Post Service. To expedite parcel canceling, the first multiple subject post-cancelling devices were introduced. These were hand-operated “roller-cancelers”, with a wheel to print continuous, repetitive impressions, between parallel single lines, with a vertical “box” line between subjects. These are designated as the **fourth family** of cancels in this study. They are commonly called “box-rollers”.



There were also roller-cancelers provided *without* vertical “box” lines between repetitive subjects. One is illustrated below, but this different format is treated as the *seventh* family of devices, which follows.

However, the preponderance of parcel post roller-cancelers *did* have the vertical lines that printed between subject impressions; so that usually is what you look for. Naturally, often they are off the stamp. The horizontal length of the box varies with the number of subjects around the roller on each device. If one assumes the roller wheels were of a uniform normal circumference, which they weren't, perhaps the rollers could be distinguished as being three-subject (long) or (short) five-subject class, for instance. There were earlier devices of rubber, and later devices using metal subjects. More research may allow use of these potentially distinguishable characteristics.



box roller



single line roller

As shown, above, sometimes it is evident a postcancel device was used to infill missing or weak precancels from a multi-subject device of the same town. That doesn't make them precancel devices, but it is essentially a provisional precancel use.

5. The **fifth family** is a variety of box-roller cancels, which includes the town and state names *separately*, in *alternate* boxes. This clearly different format is called an Alternate Box Roller. It was used in relatively few cities. So keep an eye out for boxes with just a town name, or just a state abbreviation. Illustrated, at right, is the only Western States example found so far. [KLAMATH / FALLS,] [OREG.]

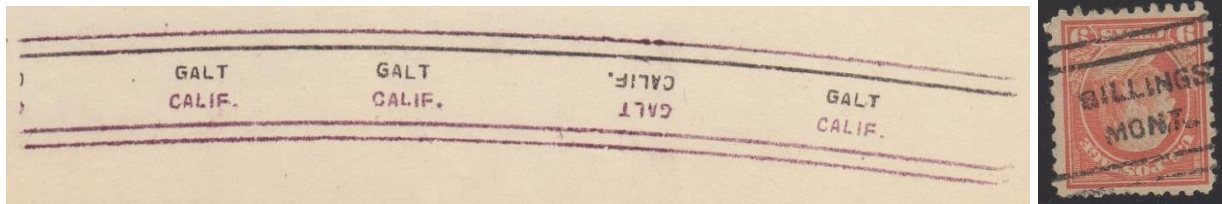


6. The **sixth family** is a second variety of the box-roller cancel, which includes a Postal Station or Branch Post Office name, this time, in *alternate* boxes around the wheel. The other box has otherwise normal Town / State names. Boston Mass has the distinction of being the only city to have used these, as above right. Boston is a specialty unto itself, leading the way, early, introducing varied postcancel devices for its many Branches, and many Stations. Not known from a Western State.

7. As mentioned, in 4 above, the **seventh family** in this study is multi-subject roller cancelers, with lines, but *no* vertical box-lines, commonly called Line-Rollers. They exist with single lines, above and below, which are logically Single-Line Rollers (SLRs). Verifiable examples of these less-common cancels are elusive, usually requiring split impressions on single stamps, or impressions on multiples, or on-piece, showing two subjects. They evidently became available in the same timeframe as the box rollers.

Without the vertical box-line, straight impressions of this format are *mostly* recognized precancels. But, those that aren't listed by the PSS, because the devices were for postcancel use, will belong here.

Rollers with *pairs* of lines, above and below town-over-state subjects are commonly called Double Line-Rollers, or “DLRs” for short. Distinctively, most are *standardized*, though there are some font varieties. These have been found from sporadic towns all across the country.



8. In the mid-1920s a clearly new variety of the above parcel post roller-canceller was introduced, commonly known as a “wavy-line roller.” It has multiple, linear town-state “single-line” subjects inserted in a variety of continuous fields of parallel wavy lines, with no vertical box lines. There were earlier and later styles, some in service into the current day. These are not yet listed, but could be the eighth family, or a separate list.



There are doubtless many cancel impressions which will come forward, which will be a challenge to classify. Cooperative study may find mates from other towns to suggest they might be products of a common company. Or, some may be unique to a town. Multiple similar copies may confirm necessary details in order to list such a device accurately. This study will be made of *likely* linear postcancels. If you have cancel impressions which look like precancels, they won't be listed here, unless they have been relegated to being postcancels by the PSS. Those impressions which seem spurious can be forwarded to the collectors studying fakes and counterfeits, to see what can be learned from their experience. Likewise, it is hoped that suspected postcancels can be referred to this study for cross-checks with our listings.

Thanks for your interest, The Postcancel Study Group bchisholm@hawaii.rr.com