

Fancy Cancel & Miscellaneous Markings Study Group Newsletter

April 2026
No. 100

Inside this issue

Message from your editor - Ron's Ramblings	1
Message from the Chairman – Mike's Musings	2
What is a Fancy Cancel? – Ron and Mike	3 - 5
Watson's Corners – Mike Halhed	6 - 9
Fancy Cancels of the Quebec Tercentenary Issue – Lane Robson	10 - 13
Some of My Favourite Fancy Cancels – Guillaume Vadeboncoeur	14 - 15
1851-1868 Fancy Cancels – Jim McCormick	16 - 21
History of the Fancy Cancel and Miscellaneous Markings Study	22

Message from your Editor – Ron's Ramblings

Welcome to the 100th Fancy Cancel Study Group Newsletter. It is hard to believe how quickly time (38 years) flies. While I was not one of the founding members of this study group, I checked my records and the first newsletter I received as a member was no. 11. Any of you readers one of the original members?

There is a short article on the early history of our Study Group interesting (see page #.

We are working to develop regular sections for the newsletter. Do you have any suggestions for an article or a regular feature you would like to see?

Please continue to send contributions to Mike or Ron:

Mike Halhed, Chairman
mikehalhed@gmail.com
fancy.cancels@gmail.com

Ron Smith, Editor
varfor@gmail.com

Newsletter 100

This newsletter, the first in 2026, represents the 100th newsletter for the Study Group. Thanks to everyone who sent in material. We hope you find it an interesting read.

Mike and Ron

Message from your chairman – Mike’s Musings

Well, it happened again! I was recently sent several scans from a late 19th century family correspondence from the town Bishop’s Crossings, Quebec. To my surprise, one of the cancels turned out to be the confirming strike for L1635, which had been previously unidentified. Imagine, 130 years later, we make yet another fancy cancel discovery. In Newsletter 99, there was a cover presented confirming the origin of L1290 as Fort Garry. Look for a Bishop’s Crossings article in the 101st Newsletter.

I’ve often wondered if we’re getting close to identifying 100% of Canadian fancy cancels. Given that stamp collecting started about 150 years ago and fancy cancels have been studied since the 1920’s, shouldn’t we be close?

Based on the first paragraph, it seems new discoveries continue to be made on a regular basis. And even in this NL (number 100!!) we’ve assigned a new “Lacelle” number to a fancy cancel on a #15 5¢ Beaver.

Clearly, there’s still lots of new information to be gathered and studied. One missing consideration is the earliest and latest dates of use. Typically, only the month and year have been recorded but a cork cancel from let’s say, March 1st can be dramatically different by March 30th, especially if it was used in a busy city or town. If you think you have an early or late date, please send it to us!

So, what’s next? With the advent of AI, we will soon see tools that allow Canadian fancy cancel collectors to instantly search all identified and listed fancy cancels. Today, we can search for terms like “Kingston,” “Arrow Head,” or “Segmented Cork.” In the near future, we’ll be able to paste in a scan of any fancy cancel and have an AI tool return the town name, type and related information. I did just this last month and got fairly good, though not perfect, results with the help of Darin Cherniwchan, Chair of the Digital Philately Study Group. The future looks promising as we move beyond this 100th NL.

ORAPEX 2026

ORAPEX is just around the corner. The Fancy Cancel and Miscellaneous Markings Study Group will be holding our session on Saturday, May at 4 pm in Hall C.

BNAPEX2026

Mark down September 18 to 20, 2026 in your paper or virtual calendars. This years BNAPEX will be held in Valleyfield, Quebec.

The Fancy Cancel and Miscellaneous Markings Study Group will be holding our session on Saturday September 19th at 1:00 pm in Room A (Maresch Room). We do not have a speaker or a main topic confirmed. **Suggestions welcome!**

What is a fancy cancel? – Ron and Mike

As promised in the last newsletter, here is an article on “our” perspective on what constitutes a fancy cancel. Even Mike and I differ slightly in our opinion of what qualifies as a fancy cancel. For fancy cancel purists, many of the cancels illustrated in this article may not ‘qualify’ as true fancy cancels. However, we both agree that in our hobby you should never restrict your collecting based on someone else’s opinion. Therefore, this article is intended to be a discussion piece that triggers YOU, our readers to provide feedback.

For students of postal history, the use of different cancels over time are an important part of the story. This includes studies on the postal history of specific towns, stamp issues, or denomination(s) of a specific issue. Examples of all three are included in this Newsletter.

Fancy Cancels

There are different definitions for what is a fancy cancel. Our mentor Dave Lacelle used the following taken from Lacelle’s Handbook (1): “a postage obliterating mark which expresses some degree of personal creativity on the part of the user.” In the Book “Cancellations and Killers of the Banknote Era 1870 – 1894” by J.M. Cole(2), he quotes Dr, Hubert Skinner :

“I collect what strikes my fancy. That being the case, then I do collect fancy cancels”.

Another interesting perspective from Dr. Skinner: He notes that government-furnished 4-ring target killers used in the mid-19th century, probably would be considered a fancy cancel if there weren’t so many of them.

A key take-home message from Cole’s book and other publications, is that the line separating fancy cancels from ‘other’ cancels can be hard to distinguish. This is a large part of the focus for this article. How does one use objective criteria to identify and categorize a cancel as fancy or not?

Some of the criteria that have been used to place a cancel into the fancy category (or not) include:

- Must be locally or hand-made
- Should be unique to a single post office
- Cancel shows “some” artistic or creativity on the part of the postmaster (or designer/manufacturer).
- NOT metal or machine made (i.e. multiple rings/bullseyes).
- NOT government manufactured (usually contract-manufactured) and distributed to multiple post offices (e.g. 2-ring or 4-ring numeral cancels).

There are many exceptions to the reasons for NOT putting a specific cancel into the fancy class, e.g. fancy duplex cancels (stars, letters, geometrics). But, if it’s in your fancy collection, is it not fancy? Can we (or should we) revisit the idea of what qualifies as fancy cancel?

Here are some thoughts for future discussions

1. Should we revisit the idea of cancels versus killers? Often these two terms get used interchangeably. Is a handmade leaf cancel a killer or a cancel? Why not include five six and eight ring 'metal ' killers? When a suite of these killers are assembled that show off a variety of sizes, secondary markings, and colours, they can make a very attractive display (at least to this author they do).



2. What about 'plain' segmented corks? Many post offices produced quartered or eight-segment corks. It is virtually impossible to identify the post office of a quartered cork on a stamp alone. However, a series of quartered corks on cover over time from a single post office can be an important part of the story of the history of that post office. As for the concentric ring example above, an assembly of quartered or eight-segmented corks can make for an attractive display.

3. Does it matter what the killer was made of? Really...

4. Pritchard and Andrews produced two cancels featuring stars in circles (L976 and L983). They were distributed to multiple post offices (this author has several of each from different post offices). Should they be removed from a listing of fancy cancels because they were government distributed and used in multiple post offices?

I (Ron) prefer to be inclusive rather than restrictive. If you like the cancel then it can and should be part of your philatelic collection (or in some cases exhibit). Not every cancel has to be a Rembrandt or fit any particular criteria.

Please take a few minutes and provide us your thoughts on this subject.

References

1. Lacelle, D. M. 2018. Fancy Cancels on Canadian Stamps 1855 to 1950. Third ed. British North America Philatelic Society Ltd. 241p.
2. Cole, J.M. 1995. Cancellations and Killers of the Banknote Era 1870 – 1894. U.S. Classics Society Inc. Columbus, Ohio 345p.

Watson's Corners, by Mike Halhed

There are two recorded fancy cancels from Watson's Corners. L886 is listed in the 3rd Edition as "Unconfirmed place and date". Town initial type. P.M. was W. Gavin. Usually in blue ink. Sometimes with faint other cancels and also noted on printings from before '87." By "Unconfirmed", Dave Lacelle means that he hasn't personally seen it on piece or cover. D&S clearly lists the "W" as Watson's Corners in their 1981 Second Edition of Canadian Fancy Cancellations as D&S 746a.



The more interesting Watson's Corners fancy is in regards to the locally made 2-Ring 4 obliterator. The rings from this town are considerably larger than the typical Berri 2-Ring Numeral cancel. Bill Radcliffe sent in this cover recently purchased via Garden City Auctions.

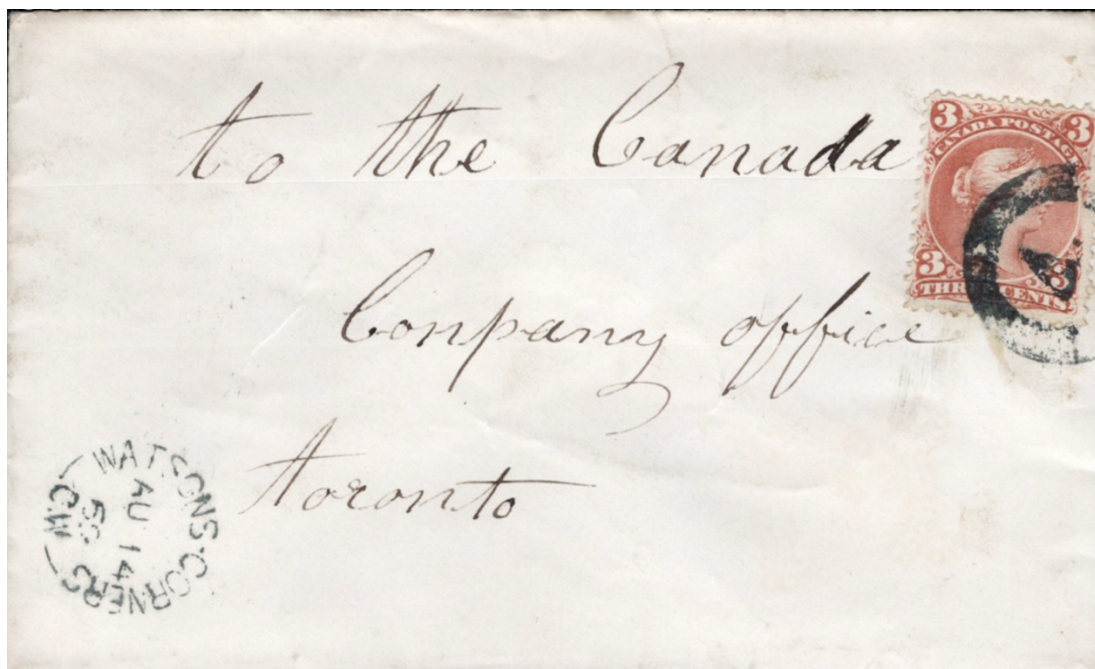


Figure 1: August 14th, 1869 Watson's Corners Cover.

This is the new early date (ERD) for Watson's Corners and only the second example known on a Large Queen. As I mentioned above in "Mike's Musings", this is yet another brand-new find for modern philately. ERD's and LRD's seem to still change on occasion. But there's more to this story.

Stephane Cloutier shared the following regarding provenance of the previous owner:

“This cover is from the W.H. Brouse find, consisting of postal history belonging to the famous Toronto collector William Henry Brouse (1859-1925), whose main Canada stamp collection was sold decades ago, but one chest remained with his family, revealing hundreds of (mostly) 1860s Canadian covers, which will be offered publicly for the first time. Many of these covers have new ERD or LRD postmarks, and none have been studied for stamp re-entries, flaws, etc. These covers have only been discovered by his family a few years ago. Many of the covers are addressed to “The Canada Company”.

Perhaps Mr. Brouse acquired their complete corporate correspondence similar to the Rennie Seed or Henry Morgan hoards?

The next two examples are from John Sheffield’s 2-Ring Numeral Collection. John’s first cover shows an excellent example of the Watson’s Corners 2-Ring 4 struck on a 6c Large Queen, paying the correct rate for a letter to the United States. Until the Brouse find, this was the only example on Large Queen and the Earliest Recorded Date.

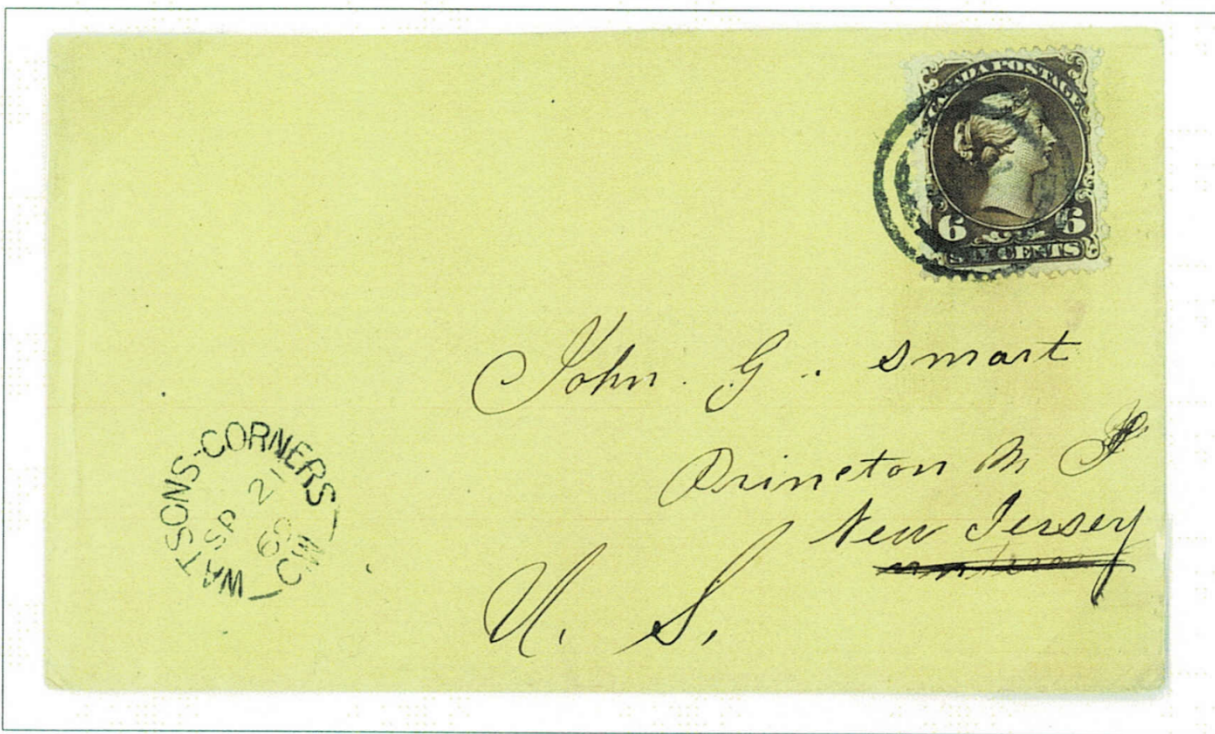


Figure 2. 6c LQ on Cover

When compared to Bill’s example, it’s easy to see the two rings and the centre of the four is open. Bill’s copy looks like a solid “one-ring” but this is likely over-inking or perhaps the PM wasn’t finished carving the obliterator.

John has two examples in his exhibit. Here's the second:



3¢ dull red Small Queen issue paying the domestic rate from
Watsons Corners September 3, 1874 to Toronto

I do not know the owner or original source of the 1¢ plus 2¢ Small Queen franked cover shown below. The fancy is certainly not made of cork or it would have worn out years beforehand. Perhaps it was nicely carved piece of wood. The strike is surprisingly good after 7 years of use. Now, why did the PM choose a #4?



Watsons Corners C.W. / MR 30 / 76
Lanark U.C. / MR 30 / 76; Toronto, Ont. / AP 1 / 76 (bs)

Figure 3. Mixed one and two cent small queen franking with the Watson's Corner '4'.

Regarding this fancy, Dave Lacelle, 3rd Edition, states “There has been considerable confusion with this one, it has been wrongly described as a smeared ‘four ring’, or a distorted ‘two ring’ cancel (see D29, D30). The hammer may have been made in the United States, compare with D22.”

It just happens that I have a sizeable 4-Ring numeral collection. Bowmanville, with no relation to Watson’s Corners, was assigned the “4” numeral. The last known recorded date for Bowmanville is 1869-02-10 per Smith. This means that some of the 4-Ring 4’s on Large Queen could actually be Watson’s Corner strikes since the periods of use overlap. The 4-Ring 4 became quite clogged in it’s later state and could easily get mixed up. How to tell the difference? The inner circles of the 4-Ring 4 have a 15mm diameter. Watson’s Corners is 17.5mm.



Figure 4. Based on using the measurements of the inner circle, the top stamps are actually Watson Corners “4’s” while the bottom row are Bowmanville four-ring numerals.

Notice on the 1865 cover below how the 4-Ring 4 became clogged, making identification a challenge in it’s later states, especially during the Large Queen era.



Figure 5. An 1865 Bowmanville 4-Ring 4 cover with the rings clogged, making off cover identification a challenge. Source: Halhed Collection

Fancy Cancels of the Quebec Tercentenary Issue – Lane Robson

This article was contributed by Lane Robson. He is writing a book on the Tercentenary Issue due out by the end of 2026.

Fancy cancels feature recognizable, unconventional shapes.^{1,2} David Lacelle, the Canadian authority on these stamps, defines a fancy cancel as “a postage obliterating mark which expresses some degree of personal creativity on the part of the user.”²

Lacelle’s book features 1,750 illustrations of fancy cancels.² In 1900, Canada had about 10,000 post offices,² suggesting that fancy cancels are known from only about 2% of these offices. More remain to be discovered. Common types included numerals, letters, names, stars, crosses, leaves, flowers, and crowns. These were most popular during the Large and Small Queen periods through the 1870s.²

Officially approved obliterators were available but were expensive and were managed by the local post office. Approved devices were made of machined brass for durability.

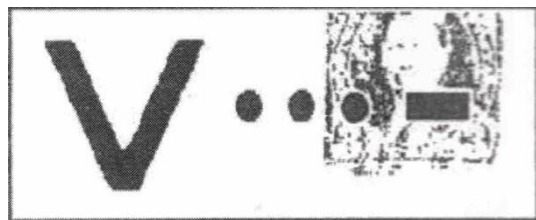
It is easy to imagine times when an approved device was not immediately accessible or was in use by another employee. During busy periods, a convenient alternative device made good sense. A shortage of approved devices led to creative solutions. Creative cancels were crafted from wood, rubber, and especially cork. The end of a cork was cut with a razor to form shapes that could serve as an obliterator. The post office supplied corks for this purpose.²

Many thanks to Mike Halhed, Chairman of the BNAPS Fancy Cancel study group, who helped prepare this section. The study group has more than 90 members who receive three newsletters each year. All newsletters are available on the BNAPS website.

Lacelle #864. Used in 20 different towns during WWII.

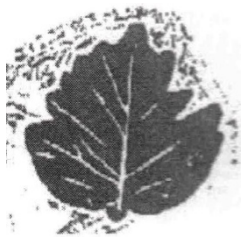
“V” for Victory (Morse Code “...-” for 'V') - World War II patriotic cancel.

Late usage of 2c Tercentenary.



Lacelle #976: Star Fancy Cancel.

Device manufactured by Pritchard and Andrews of Ottawa, likely of machined brass. This cancel is known from Acton, Ont., in Apr. of 1904, so this is a later usage.



Lacelle #1195: Leaf Fancy Cancel.

Souris East, PE, January 1900 to May 1909.

Lacelle #1291

Crown Fancy Cancel.

Esquimalt, BC, February 1903 to July 1914.



: Brass hammer device used in Victoria, BC, Oct. 1880 to Nov. 1893, then passed to Esquimalt.



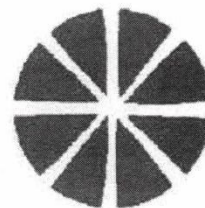
Fakes are known. (see below at LR).



Fake on left legitimate on right (from RFS collection)

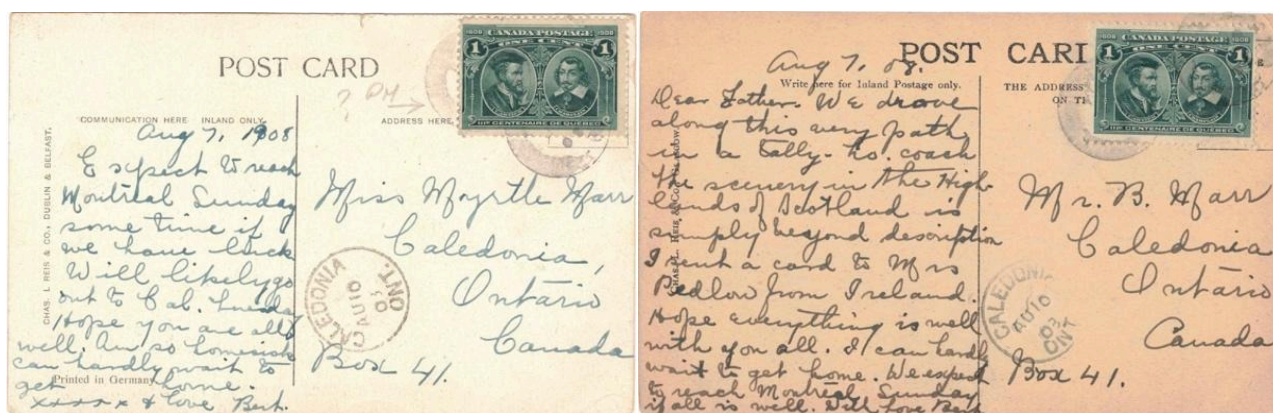
Editors Note

Recent research by Ken Pugh yet to be published provides compelling evidence that in fact two different hammers of this cancel were produced. Stay tuned for a future article showing the differences between the hammers. It is therefore possible that a different hammer was used in ESQUIMAULT from the one used in Victoria.



Lacelle 1536. Circular Wedge Fancy Cancel.

An eight-segmented cork cancel was easy to make and many varieties exist.



Two examples of a fancy cancel from Caldeonia, Ont. Both are dated Aug 10, 1908.



'Way Letter' Fancy Cancel



Single Ring Fancy Cancel



Cork Fancy Cancels

The third stamp is a double strike of two different cork cancels. The clerk in the receiving post office likely thought the first strike was too light and decided to apply another cancel.

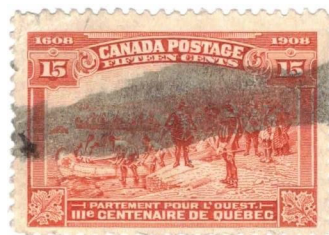


Cork Fancy Cancel

Morpeth, Ont. Split Ring CDS, Aug 3, 1908.



Pencil
Scribble



Smudge cancel

References

1. Cancellations and Postmarks. <https://bnaps.org/ore/Burnett-CanadianPhilatelyOutline/enacpao12.pdf>.
2. Lacelle, David M. Fancy Cancels on Canadian Stamps 1855 to 1950. BNAPS, August 2018.

Moving Forward; a Fourth edition of the Fancy Cancel Handbook?

The 'fourth' edition of the Fancy Cancel Handbook is most likely going to be digital. In the third edition, there are many listings of cancels where you can find the phrase: "Similar cancels were used in (post offices)". It was not practicable to show examples of ALL of the similar cancels in a printed handbook. However, with current technology (and your help), we hope to compile scans of covers with as many of these 'similar' cancels as possible. This should, over the long term, make the job of identifying the post office for some of the thousands of cancels on stamps more of a possibility.

Some of My Favourite Fancy Cancels – Guillaume Vadeboncoeur

My interest in fancy cancels started at a young age, 12 or 13 years old, the result of being the successful bidder on a fancy star cancel on a 3c Small Queen in a Frank Vogel auction (see below!). The interest hasn't waned. Even though fancies are not the core of my collection, I have kept adding items when good strikes, on or off cover, are on offer. This group is on a favourite stamp of mine, the 10¢ Small Queen.



L990



L240



L334



L392 (?)



L596



L697



L691



L781



L804



L896



L1027



L1284

L1698
Ott-530L1699
Ott-605L1660a
Ott-710Unlisted
Ott-830

Unlisted



Unlisted

Guillaume also sent in three cover examples. Editors Note: Fancy cancels on the ten cent value on cover are especially difficult to find.

L512
15c triple UPU +
5c registration to France



L926
10c UPU surtax
to Java, Dutch East Indies

Ott-625
10c pre-
UPU
to Belgium



1851-1868 Fancy Cancels – Jim McCormick

Early Hamilton Segmented Cork

These corks, see Figure 1 & 2 may be the earliest of the Canadian fancy cancels. Three Hamilton covers from October, November, and December 1856 have been observed with this 4x4 Rectangular Segmented Grid cork cancel. (Garden City Auctions sale #3 lot 1011, Eastern Highlands Part III June 2019 sale lot 186, and the source of the Dec cover is forgotten.)



Figure 1. Hamilton Cork
0.0022" Very Thin Paper. with a 4x4
Rectangular Segmented Cork



Figure 2. Hamilton Cork
0.0032" paper with a 4x4 Rectangular
Segmented Cork

Number Cancels

The Montreal #21 roller cancel was used as a cancelling device between 1855 through 1868, and again later between 1880 and 1897 as an early pre-cancel. The 1855 date is said to be derived from its use on a 3d beaver on a paper known from that paper, so its initial use may actually have been later.



Figure 3. Examples of L147, Montreal 21 roller cancels.

4-ring cancels are also well known on Pence and Decimal issue stamps, but are not displayed here.

The fancy “2” and “9” cancels are known to be used in September/October 1869, are rare and normally found on the Large Queen issue indicating a late usage on Decimal issue stamps.

L25 – RF6
Toronto “2” in leaf
October 1869



L25 – RF6
Kingston 9



Figure 4. Numeral cancels. These two stamps have been enlarged to better show the cancels.

Rock Island – Unlisted!

Rock Island was a Canadian / US border town in Quebec, which in 1995 was merged with Stanstead and Beebe Plain into the unified town of Stanstead. The fancy below appears to have been a brass or wooden device rather than a cork, considering how fine and resilient the design is. The cover on display indicates its use in November 1865. The cancel has not been acknowledged by D&S or by Lacelle, despite being one of the early fancy cancels. (Ed. Rock Island has now been added to the Fancy Cancel Handbook 3rd Edition Addendum as L1529a)



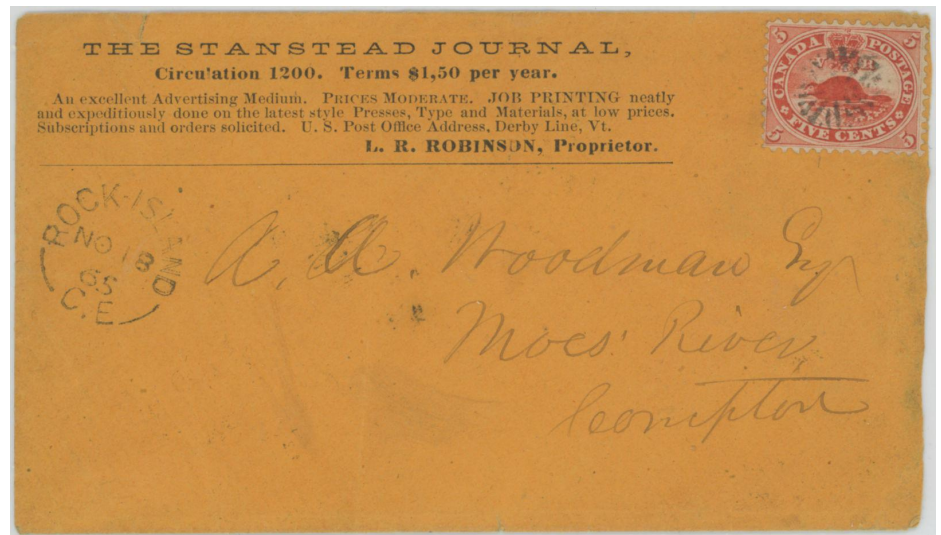
Clear but not full cancel



Complete cancel with full cross

Figure 5. Examples of the Rock Island cancel on five cent beavers.

Figure 6. Discovery cover.



Segmented corks

Two types of squared corks are displayed here, both divided into eight segments: small and large. Their origins are unknown.



Figure 7. Small segment cork cancels on the 5c, 10c 12.5c and 2c stamps.



Figure 8 Large segment cork cancels on the 5c, 10c 12.5c and 2c stamps.

Figure 9. Examples of radial and crossroads cancels.



These radial cancels are listed in Lacelle as L1233, a flower. Similar cancels were used in multiple post offices. In blue and black – Consort shades 1866.



L1165. This design was used in multiple post offices and can be found in different sizes.



Possibly L1529. Kincardine. “Seen in blue. Jarrett’s use in ‘68 is unconfirmed”
In blue and black – Consort shades 1866



Cork w/ 12 segments (L1540)
Victoria orders 17B/17D – Early 1866

Figure 10. Starbursts, crosses, and leaves

Editor note: The ‘closest’ Lacelle cancel numbers for many of these cancels were provided by Jim or added by the editor. Many of them were reported in Jarrett but the post office(s) of use on decimal issues have not been confirmed



L1546



L1497



L1492

“Starbursts” that are hollow in the centre may have been designed to not deface the Queen.



L1063



L1028



L1129



L1536



L1176



L1074

Many of these were used in multiple post offices and they vary in size and colour.



Unknown



Unknown



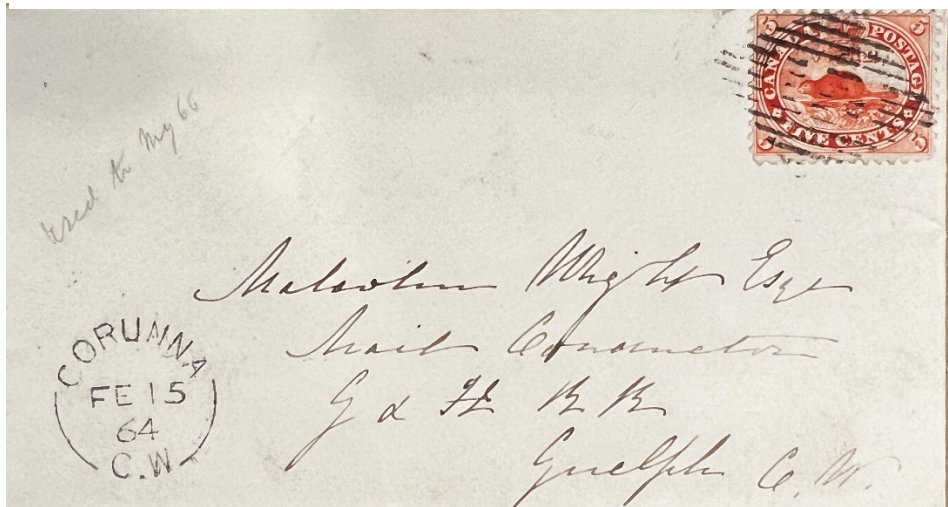
L1197



L1211 Either a very early use or a late use on a decimal stamp.

Some early cancels on cover – Bill Radcliffe

Bill Radcliffe sent in some nice early covers. These follow a similar theme as Jim McCormick’s article.



Not listed in Lacelle’s 3rd Edition but is illustrated in Jarrett. Now added to the 3rd Edition Addendum as L142a. Can you see the “15” in the bars?

Concentric ring cancel with a ‘3’ rate marking also applied.



Nice blue bullseye cancel with matching CDS in clue. This cover has the added bonus of the ‘miscarried’ manuscript marking.

History of the Fancy Cancel and Miscellaneous Markings Study Group – Ron Smith

Dave Lacelle started the BNAPS Fancy Cancel Study Group 38 years ago. Here is a brief summary of some of his introduction from Newsletter #1.

The first Fancy Cancel Group was active in the 1960's and 1970's. This original research resulted in the production of the Day and Smythies handbook on fancy cancels in 1962, as well as an expanded version of the same in 1974. Dave asked Mr. Norman Brassler to join this group as a "charter" member. He was the only remaining member of the original group of nine in 1961 to still be involved in this field. Our BNAPS Fancy Cancel Study Group was thus launched with twelve members. Norman Brassler died in 2008 at the age of 96.

Collecting Fancy Cancels or, as Dave called it his "magnificent obsession" started in 1975. His research built upon the earlier work and resulted in his producing the first edition of the of the BNAPS Fancy Cancel Handbook in 1990. Dave reviewed ALL the issues of BNA topics, Maple Leaves, the Canadian Philatelist, the PHSC Journal, as well as a considerable number of other publications. He acknowledged the help of the staff of the National Postal Museum Library, perused the original Day and Smythies collections before they were dispersed in the "Cohen Sales" as well as 'other' fancy cancel collections.

In 2000, Clint Phillips formed the Miscellaneous Cancels and Markings Study Group. After publishing three newsletters, the Group merged with the Fancy Cancel Study Group in 2002, and the Group's name was changed to the Fancy Cancel and Miscellaneous Markings Study Group.

Over the past 38 years, Dave, with the contributions of countless collectors and dealers, produced 98 newsletters and two more editions of the handbook. It is important to note that Dave started this work at a time when technology was not as well developed as it is now, hence much of his work was 'manual'. In the earlier days, Dave recognized that the original D & S listings were hand-drawn and so in some cases inaccuracies were introduced. He typically would ask collectors to 'mail' him the actual items before 'new' cancels were listed. His approach was that he wanted to see the item(s) and hopefully 'two' examples. In many instances this helped to authenticate the original D&S listings. This painstaking work has provided us a strong foundation to build upon.

There are now close to 2000 different fancy cancels referenced. Many of these are not yet illustrated. Stay tuned for an article on digitizing images of these cancels!

Good collecting!