

A Noteworthy Precancel on Lancaster Watch Company's Advertising Covers

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The Lancaster Watch Company operated in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on Columbia Turnpike from 1877 to 1884, producing approximately 200,000 timepieces before being reorganized in 1886 as the *Keystone Standard Watch Company*. Eventually, *Keystone's* assets were acquired by the *Columbian Hamilton Watch Co.* in 1892. *Hamilton* operated for over 77 years, manufacturing its last watch in the U.S. in 1969, before moving to Switzerland. This article reviews the history of the *Lancaster Watch Company* and how it promoted and marketed its wares via trade cards, newsprint and city directories and, fortunately for postal historians and philatelists, elegantly lithographed advertising covers with uncommon precanceled stamps.

Lancaster Watch started life as the *Adams & Perry Watch Manufacturing Co.*, which incorporated in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, on September 26, 1874, with a capital stock of \$78,000 [Note 1]. Immediately, construction commenced on a new brick factory designed by Chicago-architect Clarence Luther Stiles in the Second Empire style. In 1875, the company was pressed for funds and bonds were issued in the amount of \$25,000. That same year, founder John C. Adams (Figure 1a), who had helped to found the *Elgin* and *Cornell Watch* companies, resigned from *Adams & Perry*. He had a dispute with his patent-holding partner E.H. Perry involving the manufacturing of escapements. Escapements are the mechanical linkages in mechanical watches and clocks that give impulses to the timekeeping element and periodically release the gear train to move forward, advancing the clock's hands. Adams thought it best to import the escapements, whereas Perry was convinced the entire movement should be manufactured at their factory. By July of 1875, construction of the new factory was completed (Figure 1b).



The nearly two-year delay in the start of manufacturing and the limited production of only a few hundred watches doomed the company and it ceased operations in May of 1876. Following reorganization and after being forced to pay creditors, the Company was assigned to C.A. Bitner, who had donated the original tract of land for the factory. He then sold the company to Dr. Carpenter for \$47,000.

In August of 1877, the *Lancaster Watch Company* (LWC) was formed with new advanced capital of \$21,000 and the next month manufacturing began with the design and production of a 3/4-plate, fully-jeweled movement. By the end of 1879, the LWC had manufactured 334 movements. Over the next few years, the LWC raised capital in excess of \$500K for manufacturing and day-to-day operations and went through two reorganizations, but alas after six years of modest success ceased operations in 1884. In 1886, assets of the LWC were purchased for \$500,000 by a new group named *Keystone Standard Watch Company*. In 1892, *Keystone* went bankrupt and the business, inventory and factory were sold once again to another new group, *The Columbian Hamilton Watch Company*.

Figure 2 illustrates a very fine example of a timepiece manufactured by LWC, circa 1883. This New Era Railroad Pocket Watch had a 7-jewel movement and was stem set and stem wound. The fine porcelain dial was highlighted with a steam locomotive and heat-treated blued steel hands. This truly scientific instrument of its day was manufactured prior to the introduction of the railroad standard at the request of the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1895. As the rail industry grew in the U.S., the timekeeping accuracy of conductors' watches was crucial if two trains were moving in opposite directions. If one of the two conductors' watches was poor at keeping time, there was a strong likelihood of a collision. Railroad watches were known as "standard" watches because they met the railroad's standards of timekeeping. Timepieces were an important aspect of ensuring safety for all.

During its years in operation, LWC, just as many other timepiece manufacturers, promoted its wares. Survivors of this era are the trade cards, circa 1880, depicted in Figure 3. They feature a macabre image of Father Time as a skeleton with scythe and the watch as a unicycle. Father Time has one hand on an hourglass, while the other holds a pocket watch on a chain. The metallic silver cycle wheel is represented by a detailed rendering of an *Adams & Perry* jeweled-movement that LWC sold. The card on the right is preprinted with "M. Roth, 405 Eighth Ave., New York," a watchmaker listed in an 1880 NYC Directory, who repaired and distributed LWC timepieces.

For those researching specific information on businesses or persons from this era, many libraries, historical societies and museums have

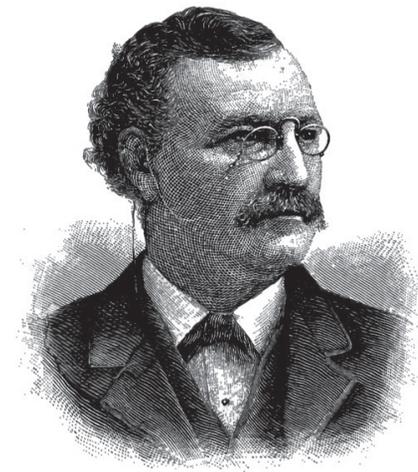


Figure 1a. John C. Adams, co-founder of the Adams & Perry Watch Manufacturing Co. in Lancaster, PA. Courtesy of pocketwatchdatabase.com.

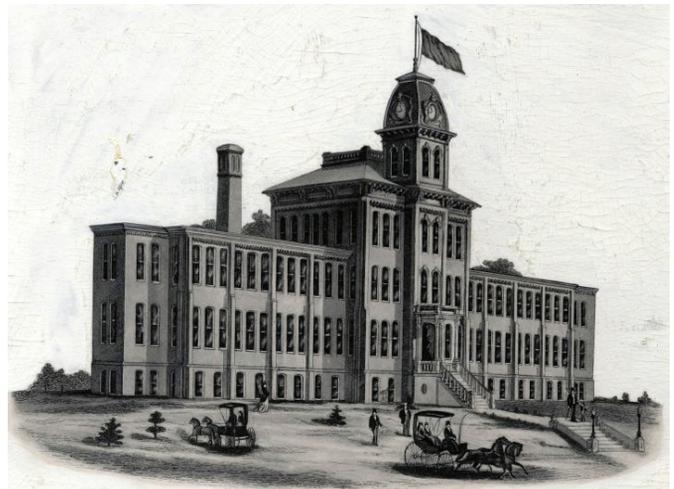


Figure 1b. The original Factory, circa 1877, on Columbia Turnpike (now Columbia Avenue), later home to Lancaster, Keystone and Hamilton Watch Companies. Courtesy of www.railswest.com.



Figure 2. LWC New Era Railroad, 7-jewel movement Pocket Watch, ca. 1883. Courtesy of Jeff Brook, www.thepocketwatchguy.com.

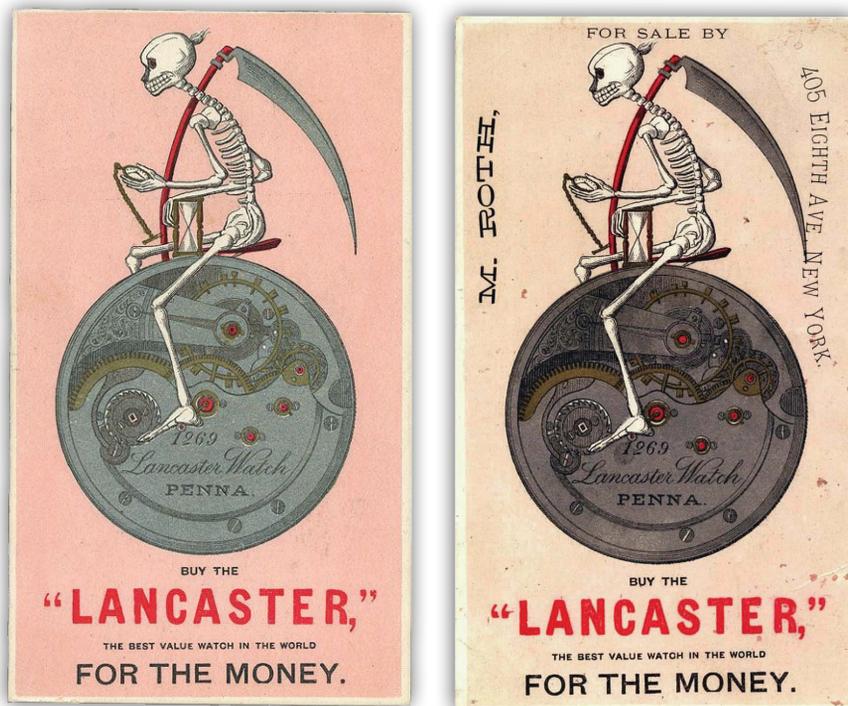


Figure 3. Trade cards with macabre image of a skeletal Father Time with scythe, holding an hourglass and pocket watch and atop a watch as a unicycle. Courtesy of Richard Sheaff, sheaff-ephemera.com, and René Rondeau, hamiltonwristwatch.com, respectively.

begun to digitize City and Town Directories. These are often free to the public online, and can be an invaluable source of information, often giving the company's physical address, the proprietor and line of business. Many of these directories, issued annually, are already available online for the larger cities, such as Baltimore, Boston, New York and Philadelphia, with more coming online almost monthly. They were also a source of marketing for companies, thus advertisements within these directories are plentiful. A useful hint while searching for a specific business is to narrow your search by using quotation marks around phrases - this asks the search engine or database to look for the words next to each other in that order.

Additionally, one can find numerous advertisements in local Lancaster newspapers, as well as Lancaster city business directories. Fortunately for postal historians and philatelists, *LWC* produced distinctive advertising covers, one of which is depicted in Figure 4. The front exhibits a fancy typeface "Lancaster" cachet, a jeweled movement similar to that on the Figure 3 trade cards, and a partial address ("Dealers in Watches, Jewelry, Etc.," P.O.," "Co.") with lines for address completion.

The cover is addressed to Mr. E.L. Grueby, a fancy goods and jewelry store proprietor operating at 97 Meridian St. (in pencil above address) in Boston, Massachusetts [Note 2]. This cover, plus the other known advertising covers in the census (shown on page 148-9), confirm that *LWC* broadly promoted its wares, with covers 2 and 3 sent to Lincoln (Ephrata Township) and Reading, respectively, and cover

4 to W. (William) Baehr & Co., well-known jewelers in San Francisco, California.

Examining the covers also reveals that more than one style of envelope was printed by the Inquirer Company, lithographers located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The first style (Type A examples in census) had no printed state in address line three, but a dashed line to be filled in later. This is the example shown in Figure 4 where "Mass" was handwritten in, along with the other addressee details. The second style (Type B) has the state printed in address line three. This is the case for covers 2, 3 and 4. For covers 2 and 3, "Penna." was lithographed, whereas for cover 4, "California." I would be most interested to see what other states were printed on any future advertising cover discoveries - so please share.

To cover the fee for mailing an unsealed circular, a 1¢ dark ultramarine Benjamin Franklin stamp from the 1879 Banknote series (Scott 182) was adhered at upper right. What is noteworthy about the stamp on each of these advertising covers is that it is canceled by three pairs of double-ruled hair lines in red violet ink running from edge to edge (Figure 5).

This precancel, or precanceled stamp, is an adhesive postage stamp that has been canceled under the proper authority of the U.S. Post Office (P.O.) with a device designed solely for this purpose. The process is performed before the stamp is affixed to the envelope. This type of precancel, using lines or bars without a city and/or state designation is referred to as a "silent" precancel. This silent

precancel (Smith Type A, Note 3) was most likely applied by LWC to the stamps while still part of the unused, intact pane. Each stamp was then separated from the pane of 100 and adhered to the cover prior to the circular datestamp (CDS) being added to the envelope.

Notably, adjacent to the stamp is a black 26.5 mm double-circled LANCASTER | FEB. 25, 1879. | PENNSYLVANIA circular datestamp, which appears to be type-set and not the typical handstamp struck by the Lancaster post offices from this era (Figure 6). This was most likely added in-house at LWC using a small hand-fed press. The pressman probably set his guides so that each envelope was always in the same position on the press. Measuring the location of the CDS from top edge and right edge of the known covers in the census suggests this was the case.

While placement of the stamp on the advertising cover was important in this process, the examples depicted in Figure 7 (census examples 5 and 7) demonstrate that this was not always done with care. Significantly, both examples support the theory that the precanceled stamp was adhered to the advertising cover before pressman applied the type-set CDS. This is similar to the Glen Allen star process,



Figure 4. Advertising cover obverse from the Lancaster Watch Company franked with a 1¢ dark ultramarine Benjamin Franklin stamp from 1879 Banknote series with the Smith Type A precancel. The 1879-dated black CDS appears to be type-set on the envelope.

Figure 5. 1¢ dark ultramarine Benjamin Franklin stamp with precancel Smith Type A. The features are 3 pairs of double-ruled hair lines in red violet ink: 1 pair vertical, 2 pair horizontal, where the pairs are 8 mm apart, and within a pair, 1 mm apart.



Figure 6. An example of the Lancaster Post Office's typical CDS, 1880. The design is notably different than the type found on the LWC examples.

Census of Lancaster Watch Company Precancels and Advertising Covers



1.

Address Type A: No printed state, dashed line. Notes: Pencil notation at top center: "97 Meridian," Mr. Grueby's street address.



3.

Address Type B: printed state, "Penna."

Adhesive

Each example is the 1¢ Benjamin Franklin, 1879 Banknote Issue.



5.

Notes: Partial strike of type-set CDS.



7.

Notes: Partial strike of type-set CDS.

Circular Datestamp

The on-piece examples use the same type-set 26.5 mm CDS. Characterized by the black double-circle. The examples in this census all read "Lancaster | FEB. 25, 1879. | Pennsylvania."

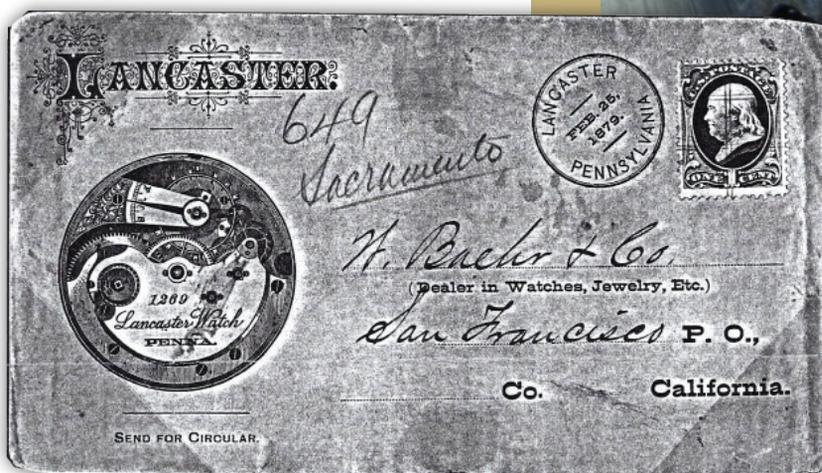
2.

Address Type B: printed state, "Penna." Notes: Lincoln P.O. is in Ephrata Township, Lancaster County.



4.

Address Type B: printed state, "California". Notes: Pencil notation at top center: "649 Sacramento," the Baehr & Co. street address.



6.

Notes: On piece.



Precancel (Smith Type A)

Each has the same unique precancel. Characterized by 3 pairs of double-ruled hair lines, in red violet ink. One pair vertical, two pairs horizontal. Horizontal pairs are 8 mm apart, with 1mm between the hair lines in each pair.

8.

Notes: Left margin copy from 1st column of pane.





Figure 7. Two off-cover examples (census examples 5 and 7) with CDS in the left margin, proving the stamp was adhered to the cover before the type-set CDS' were applied by the pressman.



Figure 8. Advertising cover reverse depicting LWC Factory showing horse-drawn carriages in foreground, a billowing smokestack behind, all flanked by two rectangular tablets. Below each tablet is the name of the printer, "INQUIRER CO PRINT" and "LANCASTER PENNA."

whereby in the 1870s and 1880s the *Druggists' Printers of Cussons, May & Co.* from Glen Allen, Virginia, applied for and received permission from the U.S.P.O. to use a precanceled method for its multiple mailings. The firm purchased regular postage stamps from the local P.O., affixed them to the upper right hand corner of envelopes, and then simultaneously printed a five point star with parallel lines on the stamp and its own corner card (name of the firm, address, etc.) in the upper left hand corner [Note 4].

This method of using a precanceled stamp with a type-set CDS was employed to save time, labor and expense. With the amount of advertising mail LWC was almost certainly distributing to promote its timepieces, the Lancaster Post Office would have been fully supportive of such an approach to save in postal processing. LWC would have addressed the envelopes, bagged them, and delivered the bagged (and perhaps pre-sorted) envelopes to the P.O. for same or next day circulation.

To complete the assessment of the cover, the reverse has yet more advertising depicting the LWC Factory, showing horse-drawn carriages in the foreground, a billowing smokestack behind, flanked by two rectangular tablets

(Figure 8). At left is a testimonial whereby "Switzerland Endorses Pennsylvania, Producing the Lancaster Watch" as "The Best Watch Made in America." At right is no doubt an LWC self-promotion; affirming that it manufactures timepieces with "Twenty Extra-fine Ruby Jewels."

Below each tablet is the printer's marking "INQUIRER CO PRINT" and "LANCASTER PENNA." Figure 9 highlights this marking, along with two listings in various Annual Lancaster County Directories of the period [Note 5]. A J. Harold Wickersham was the manager, with offices located at 53 and 55 North Queen Street in downtown Lancaster city. They were also publishers.

Examination of both the cover front and reverse suggest that the images were likely printed using a lithograph stone or metal plate with a smooth surface. The process involves drawing an image with oil, fat, or wax onto the surface of a smooth, level lithographic limestone plate [Note 6]. The stone is then treated with a mixture of gum Arabic and acid. This etches the portions of the stone that were not protected by the grease-based image. When the stone is subsequently moistened, the etched areas retain water. Then an oil-based ink can then be applied, which is repelled by the water, only

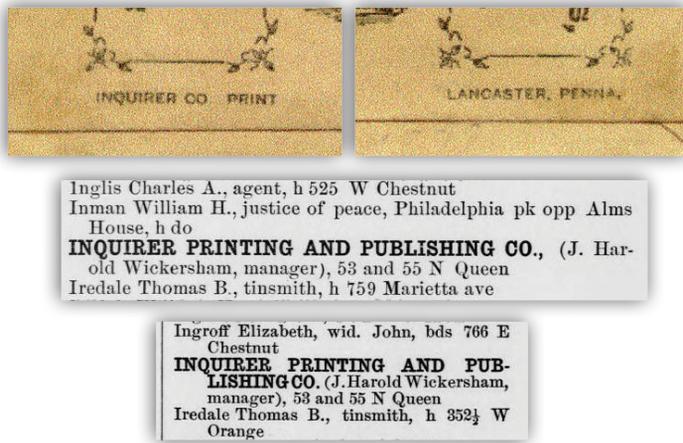


Figure 9. Enlargement of the Figure 8 cover highlighting the printer's marking and two listings for Inquirer Printing and Publishing Co. from two Annual Lancaster Directories.

sticking to the original drawing. The ink would finally be transferred to a blank paper sheet (in this case an envelope), producing the finished product. Lithography can be used to print text or artwork onto paper or other suitable material rather inexpensively [Note 7]. This long-established technique is still in use today in several fine art printmaking applications.

The stamp depicted in Figure 10 was discovered recently, which motivated my research for this article. When I begin any research project, I often start out by contacting my fellow stamp and postal history colleagues. It is amazing how willing folks are to share and assist when you reach out with an inquiry or conundrum. I then turn to my personal philatelic library, which has grown over the decades. But as is the case for many of us, one cannot own each and every reference covering each and every subject. This is where the American Philatelic Society, the Smithsonian National Postal Museum and the New York Collectors Club, to name a few, are invaluable resources. Their libraries cover the gamut of subjects and their staffs are more than willing to locate that book, catalog, pamphlet, or article for you, make a PDF copy for a nominal fee and email or mail to you. Moreover, there are many online databases and philatelic auction catalogs easily and freely available at the click of a mouse. Finally, I should mention the use of digital manipulation image analysis tools, such as retroReveal.org, which allow the user to upload any image and have the web-based image processing algorithms help discover/reveal hidden content on your stamp, cover or document. Persistence pays off, so try the approaches above on your next research project.

Figure 10 shows the front and back of a 1¢ dark ultramarine Benjamin Franklin stamp from the 1879 Banknote series with the distinctive features of the LWC precancel Smith Type A: 3 pairs of double-ruled hair lines in red violet ink with 1 pair vertical, the other 2 pairs horizontal.

What distinguishes this stamp from the other on- and



Figure 10. 1¢ dark ultramarine Benjamin Franklin stamp from 1879 Banknote series, no gum, soft porous paper, printed by American Banknote Company, Smith Type A precancel.

off-cover examples in the census? It is not the vertical double-ruled hair lines – they start from both the top and bottom edges as on all other copies. Interestingly, both the upper and lower horizontal double-ruled hairlines start from the right edge of stamp (as expected), yet abruptly end before the left edge. This confirms that this stamp is from the left margin (or first column in the pane) to which the lines were first ruled onto the intact pane. So how were these lines ruled on the stamps? Did the LWC produce a 10 x 10 printing plate to cover the pane of 100? From the examples shown in this census, this is the best conclusion, but could be disproved or confirmed if a stamp from the 10th (or right) column, or 1st or 10th horizontal row were found.

In just six years, *Lancaster Watch Company* produced nearly 200,000 timepieces, marketing them across the country with trade cards, newsprint, and city directories. Aren't we fortunate as postal historians and philatelists that LWC also chose to produce elegant, lithographed advertising covers with delicately red violet-ruled precanceled stamps? The author looks forward to hearing from those that wish to share their covers and stamps to add to the census.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express gratitude to Bill Coates for bringing this new discovery to his attention and collection. Additionally, thanks are given to Arnold Selengut, David W. Smith, and Robert Noble for sharing their knowledge of these distinctive precanceled advertising covers, as well as their covers and stamps for the census. Finally, a well-deserved "Thank You" is extended to Hal Klein and Paul Petersen for their critical review of the manuscript. Any error and/or omission is the author's responsibility. The author can be reached at charlesdicomo@gmail.com.

Notes

1. Brief histories of the *Adams & Perry Watch Manufacturing Co.*, *Lancaster Watch Co.*, *Keystone Standard Watch Co.*, and *Hamilton Watch Company*

- provided by <https://pocketwatchdatabase.com>. (Accessed Dec. 29, 2020).
- Mr. Grueby, Fancy Goods and Jewelry Store Proprietor, 97 Meridian Street, Boston, Massachusetts. Located in *Documents of the City of Boston, for the Year 1874*, Volume 1, pg. 6.
 - David Smith's catalog of silent precancels was of much use to identify the one used on LWC material. *Silent Precancels, A Catalog of Lines, Bars, and Designs on 19th and 20th Century Stamps Used Postally in the United States* (2016). See "Lancaster, 1¢ Banknote," pg. iv & 166.
 - More information about the Glen Allen star process can be found in the following: Brown, Allan R. "Glen Allen, Virginia," *Postal Markings* 12, no. 4 (July 1944). Jennings, Clyde. "A 'Yankee' Glen Allen," *S.P.A. Journal* 42, no. 6 (February 1980). Baird, James G., and Behrens, Manley L. *Mute Precancels—Showing only Bars, Designs, Lines & Slugs: Circa 1850-1919* (Riverside, CT & Hyde Park, NY: self-published).
 - The newspaper advertisements for LWC shown here can be found, respectively: Inquirer Printing and Publishing Co. listing, Williams' Lancaster City and County Directory, 1890, pg. 132. (Accessed Dec. 29, 2020) <http://digitalcollections.powerlibrary.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/slchs-cd01/id/8196>; Inquirer Printing and Publishing Co. listing, Williams' Annual Lancaster City Directory, 1888, pg. 162. (Accessed Dec. 29, 2020) <http://digitalcollections.powerlibrary.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/slchs-cd01/id/9080>

- To learn more about the lithography process, see: Brooks, Frederick Vincent. "Lithography". In Chisholm, Hugh (ed.). *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 16, 11th ed. (Cambridge University Press; 1911).
- Pennel, E. R., ed. *Lithography and Lithographers*. (London: T. Fisher Unwin Publisher; 1915).

The Author

Charles J. DiComo, PhD is a lifelong philatelist, postal historian and award-winning author. He enjoys researching, restoring, writing, publishing, and presenting on a broad array of philatelic and postal history topics. He is President of the Philatelic Society of Lancaster County, President of the Empire State Postal History Society, Editor-in-Chief of the USPCS *Chairman's Chatter*, life member of the United States Philatelic Classics Society, and on the Board of the PA Postal History Society. A native New Yorker, he currently resides in Lancaster, Pennsylvania with his wife of 25 years, Kathleen, and their daughters McKenna and Mia.

FOR FURTHER READING

Recommendations from the APRL research staff:

The History of Precancels. Hoover, Norman R. (Framingham, MA: Precancel Stamp Society, Inc., 1989.) G3701 .P923 H789h 1989

The A.B.C. of Precancel Collecting. Hoover, W. Berton;

Van Voorhis, Hiram N.; Howe, James O. (New York: Precancel Stamp Society, 1992. G3701 .P923 P923a Location: APRL

The Precancel Forum. Precancel Stamp Society. (Missoula, MT: Precancel Stamp Society, 1940-Present). JOURNAL Precancel Forum Location: APRL



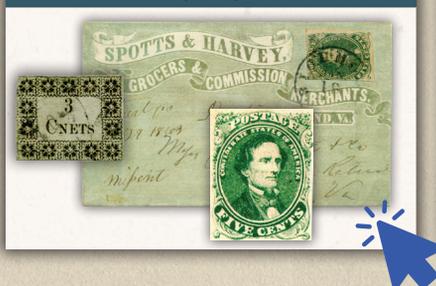
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