

## Off-Cover Usage of Official Stamps in Washington, D. C., 1873-1874

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In an earlier article on this general topic, I did not include stamps on piece and off-cover stamps with legible postmarks or datable killers because I doubted that I could develop a significant data base on which to base conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Official stamps on piece are uncommon. Even though the non-year-dated Washington, D. C. postmarks of this period can be dated based on their different diameters, off-cover stamps with legible datestamps are rare, because clerks at the main post office there typically canceled stamps according to regulations only with the killer. In Figure 1, courtesy of Robert L. Markovits, we illustrate a remarkable bit of a Department of State parcel label dated October 13, 1873 and franked with a 1¢, 3¢, 24¢, and two 30¢ official stamps. This easily qualifies as the earliest known use of the 1¢ and 24¢ State stamps, since no covers of either value are known from the 1873-1874 period. Four value frankings of official stamps are quite rare, the only other two examples I know of being from the Treasury Department: a 1¢, 2¢, 3¢, 6¢ combination on a registered penalty envelope from the Internal Revenue Service at Reading, Pennsylvania to the U S. Gauger (the registry fee overpaid 2¢, as no supplemental postage was required on field office correspondence to government officials),<sup>2</sup> and the 2¢, 6¢, 10¢, 30¢ combination from Boston recently illustrated here, now in the collection of Robert L. Markovits.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Markovits also has in his collection a copy of the 3¢ Justice with a legible blue postmark from Dakota Territory dated July 28, 1873, an astonishing discovery considering how few postmarks at this time actually contained the year date. Lester C. Lanphear III reports a similar item: a 3¢ Post Office stamp postmarked July 6, 1873.

In my earlier article, I traced the development of postmarks in Washington, D. C. by illustrating the upper right corners of covers in my collection, showing the postmark alongside various distinctive duplexed killers. Off-cover official stamps showing clear strikes of these characteristic killers should also qualify as earliest known usages. Since for most official stamps only a handful of covers survive, documenting off-cover EKU's has increased relevance. For example, the high value Agriculture stamps - 15¢, 24¢, 30¢ - were first used primarily to mail seedlings from the department's experimental nursery to farmers. But for all three values, only one 24¢ parcel label has survived. In 1875, a new regulation made such mailings free of postage, rendering these three values obsolete. In fact, no value higher than the 6¢ was requisitioned after the fiscal year 1875. So in this case, a 30¢ Agriculture stamp off-cover with a killer attributable to Washington, D. C. from August, 1873 represents a significant piece of postal history.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan C. Campbell, "Usage of Official Stamps in Washington, D. C., 1873-1874", *Chronicle* 187, August 2000, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 205-215.

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Siegel, Sale #728, September 14, 1990, lot 154.

<sup>3</sup> Alan C. Campbell, "High Value Official Stamps on Cover", *Chronicle* 188, November 2000, Vol. 52, No. 4, Figure 7, page 294. Sold as lot 709 in the Matthew Bennett, Inc. auction on January 20, 2001.

In Figure 2, we illustrate strikes of a large incised star killer used on the 3¢, 6¢, and 10¢ Executive, the 12¢ Interior, a 3¢ Post Office pair, and the 1¢ War. This obliterator, with a duplexed 26 mm. CDS, is known to have been used in Washington, D. C. in late July, 1873.<sup>4</sup> In Figure 3, we illustrate strikes of the "negative captain's wheel" on the 12¢ Navy and \$2 State stamps, and in Figure 4, we show strikes of the "lobed sand dollar" on the 10¢ and 30¢ Agriculture stamps. Both of these obl iterators were used in Washington, D. C. in early August, 1873.<sup>5</sup> In Figure 5, we illustrate a strike of a waffle gridiron killer on a 6¢ Navy (my proving cover is a 3¢ Interior from the U. S. Patent Office dated mid-October, 1873), and in Figure 6, a Maltese cross killer on a 2¢ Executive, known to have been used in Washington, D. C. during November, 1873.<sup>6</sup>

In Figure 7, we illustrate a very clean 3¢ Executive cover postmarked March 29, (1874), addressed in the hand of President Grant to Adolf E. Borie in Philadelphia.<sup>7</sup> Borie, a wealthy Philadelphian who made his fortune in the East India trade, had served for three months in 1869 as Grant's Secretary of the Navy, and would later accompany him on a world tour in 1877-1878. The "Executive Mansion" corner card in the upper right in an ornate Gothic typeface and the pre-frank of one of Grant's private secretaries, Levi P. Luckey, are characteristic of obsolete free frank envelopes, and this cover is believed to be the second earliest Executive franking in private hands. In Figure 8, we illustrate off-cover 30¢ Treasury and 90¢ Interior stamps with a similar diagonal lattice grid, which I had not been able to confirm as Washington, D. C. cancellations until I purchased this cover. A detailed time-line for Washington, D. C. killers of this era can only be established by reference to regular Banknote issue covers. While I have found a photocopy of Tuck Taylor's exhibit collection, "Washington, D. C. Postal Markings: Killers for 25 Years, 1860-1885", to be a useful reference, I still eagerly await the study being undertaken by the Washington Philatelic Society based on the George Turner material.

By this point, the careful reader will have noticed a potential flaw in the method of attribution being used. Killers similar to some of those depicted - including the incised star, the waffle gridiron, and the diagonal lattice grid - are known to have been carved (or could easily have been carved) and used by postal clerks in other cities and towns. A preponderance of the official stamps were used and canceled in Washington, D. C., (especially the higher values), yet it is entirely possible that strikes of so-called "look-alike" cancellations could have been applied elsewhere and survived to confuse us (although not on Executive or State official stamps, which had a very limited distribution). Furthermore, in the specific case of the incised star killer, this obliterator is known to have been recarved and used at other times at the main Washington, D. C. post office in the 1870's. Also, although most killers were discarded after they wore out, it is conceivable

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<sup>4</sup> Alan C. Campbell, "Usage of Official Stamps in Washington, D. C., 1873-1874", op. cit., page 209, where the proving cover is illustrated in Figure 3.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Figure 1, page 207, where the corners of the proving covers are illustrated.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Figure 2, page 208, where the corner of the proving cover is illustrated.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Bennett, Inc., 230th Public Auction, January 20, 2001, lot #685.

that a few might have been tossed in a drawer and pressed into service later. Therefore, some of the "earliest known usages" being put forth here clearly depend on conjecture. My principal defense is that a start must be made, no matter how tentative. Due to the high attrition rate for official covers, the lack of a substantial mass of postal history to analyze has forced us to turn elsewhere, to the study of regular Banknote issue covers and off-cover used official stamps. Also, any claims being made here for EKU's of off-cover official stamps do not carry with them any automatic increase in value. Among cancellation specialists, official stamps such as those illustrated here do command a small intrinsic premium, simply because it is so difficult to find decent strikes of anything artistic (forget NYFM geometrics or Waterbury fancies!) on all but the most common low value official stamps. At this point, the prevailing taste for postal history (i.e. EKU's on cover) has gained so much momentum, it is doubtful whether any off-cover official stamp purported to be an EKU will ever command a premium in my lifetime.

Continuing on, in Figure 9, we illustrate a diplomatic pouch mail cover from the Consulate for the Grand Duchy of Baden, addressed to Mrs. Ex. President Taylor.<sup>8</sup> The 3¢ State was added in Washington, D. C. and when the cover entered the regular mail, it was postmarked April 3 (1874), the stamp being tied by a fancy double crossroads killer. Once again, although I had good strikes of this particular killer on off-cover Agriculture, Interior, Navy, and War Department official stamps, I was not able to attribute these cancellations to Washington, D. C. until this cover surfaced. In Figure 10, we illustrate strikes of this killer on the 6¢ Agriculture and 15¢ Interior. In Figure 11, we depict various strikes of the most familiar of all the classic Washington, D. C. geometric killers, a circle of eight V's with an incised circle, on six different official stamps: 3¢ Agriculture, 10¢ Interior, 12¢ State, 24¢ Treasury, 10¢ and 12¢ War. This style of killer was recarved several times and used from late March throughout April, 1874, with proving covers surviving from at least five different departments.<sup>9</sup> In Figure 12, we illustrate strikes of "circle of 8 V's" killers on the 1¢ and 15¢ Navy and the 24¢ War. I have 3¢ Interior and 6¢ Navy covers to confirm that V-8 killers were being used at the main Washington, D. C. post office in mid-April, 1874.

In Figure 13, we illustrate a 3¢ Navy cover from the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting mailed to New York City.<sup>10</sup> The poorly struck postmark contains the hour of the day, a troublesome type used from late 1874 through 1877 and then again in early 1879. Covers with postmarks like this are hard to date. This one is notable for bearing a good strike of a "pine tree" fancy killer. Once again, I had strikes of this killer on off-cover 3¢ Agriculture and 3¢ Interior stamps, but had not been able to attribute them to Washington, D. C. until this cover turned up. Remembering the pine tree shillings in my father's collection of colonial coinage, I had previously believed that such a cancellation would most likely have originated in Massachusetts. As with this cover, both my off-cover strikes are upside

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Siegel, Sale #834, March 6, 2001, lot #627.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell, op. cit., Figure 2, page 208.

<sup>10</sup> Robert A. Siegel, Sale #834, March 6, 2001, lot #625.

down on the stamp, suggesting either that the obliterator slug was accidentally inverted relative to the postmark, or that this isn't a pine tree at all but a finely detailed leaf instead.

So far I have only illustrated strikes of these various Washington, D. C. killers on official stamps where the off-cover strike predates the earliest known usage on cover as listed in my previous census, having assumed that early off-cover strikes postdating the EKU's on cover have little academic interest. At this point, I have researched only in my own collection, and will wait to see if this angle of inquiry excites other collectors to inspect and report their own findings.

### **Preliminary Census of Earliest Known Usage of Off-Cover Official Stamps from Washington, D. C.**

<b>Official Stamp</b>	<b>Earliest Use Off Cover</b>	<b>Cancellation Type</b>	<b>Earliest Use On Cover</b>
3¢ Agriculture	April, 1874	V-8, incised circle	April 19, 1875
10¢ Agriculture	August, 1873	Lobed sand dollar	January 25, 1875
30¢ Agriculture	August, 1873	Lobed sand dollar	No cover known
2¢ Executive	November, 1874	Maltese cross	February 16, 1875
3¢ Executive	July, 1873	Incised star	December 24, 1873
6¢ Executive	July, 1873	Incised star	?
10¢ Executive	July, 1873	Incised star	Dec.20, 1876 Unique
10¢ Interior	April, 1874	V-8, incised circle	?
12¢ Interior	July, 1873	Incised Star	March 22, 1874
15¢ Interior	April, 1874	Double crossroads	?
90¢ Interior	January, 1874	Diagonal lattice grid	? Unique
1¢ Navy	April, 1874	Circle of 8 V's	?
6¢ Navy	October, 1873	Waffle gridiron	November, 1873
12¢ Navy	August, 1873	Negative captain's wheel	?
15¢ Navy	April, 1874	Circle of 8 V's	No cover known
3¢ Post Office	July, 1873	Incised star	August 4, 1873
1¢ State	October 13, 1873	on piece (RLM)	?
12¢ State	April, 1874	V-8, incised circle	July 6, 1874
24¢ State	October 13, 1873	on piece (RLM)	?
\$2 State	August, 1873	Negative captain's wheel	Oct. 25, 1882 Unique
24¢ Treasury	April, 1874	V-8, incised circle	No cover known
30¢ Treasury	January, 1874	Diagonal lattice	? Unique
1¢ War	July, 1873	Incised star	March 7, 1874
3¢ War	August, 1873	Negative captain's wheel	December 6, 1873
12¢ War	April, 1874	V-8, incised star	?
24¢ War	April, 1874	Circle of 8 V's	?

In the above table, question marks for the EKU's on cover indicate that no covers from Washington, D. C. were reported for the fifteen month time span (July, 1873 - September, 1874) in my previous article. Covers from the subsequent 1875-1877 period are much harder to date.

My earlier article elicited a note from route agent David S. Lever Jr., who reported a 3¢ War cover postmarked November 10, 1873, which now becomes the EKU for a solo usage of that stamp not on official stationery. Robert L. Markovits reports a very large printed matter Post Office envelope used locally within Washington, D. C. and franked with a pair of 2¢ stamps, not postmarked but advertised on March 31, 1874. This becomes the earliest recorded on-cover usage of the 2¢ Post Office stamp. In my earlier article, I was openly skeptical that my census results would affect the value of such covers. As it turns out, I could not have been more wrong. In the census, I recorded the earliest known cover for the 6¢ Treasury as July 10, 1873. This listing was based on a cover I saw at Anaheim in the summer of 2000. I could have bought it for \$100 but passed because the killer didn't interest me. Moments later, it was snapped up by a veteran bird dog of EKU covers. In January of 2001, the Matthew Bennett postal history auction included an important consignment of official covers from George Lehto, along with almost 200 lots of first day, earliest known, and early usage covers of the regular issues. I had seen photocopies of the Lehto covers and had included them in two of my articles before the sale was finally scheduled. However, I was not aware that another 6¢ Treasury cover, postmarked in Washington, D. C. on July 10, 1873 had been consigned later. It was not the same cover I had seen in Anaheim. This new cover, lot #707, was described as the earliest known usage and estimated to realize \$500-\$750. Thinking this estimate optimistic, I was surprised to learn that the cover had been hammered down for \$1000. (Prices realized do not include the 10% buyer's commission.) At first, I assumed that it must have been sold to a demented Lincoln collector, but I am told that this was not the case. Since the Washington, D. C. postmarks of this era did not contain the hour of the day, it is impossible to determine which of the two July 10 6¢ Treasury covers was mailed earlier. So both, in a photo-finish tie, qualify as the earliest known usage of this stamp (just as two blocks of 16 would each qualify as the largest known multiple of a particular stamp). In rare instances, a superlative adjective like "earliest" or "largest" can legitimately be shared, while "unique" must always be singular. I am reminded of the catalogue for a mail bid auction where an item was described as "unique", while the very next lot was described "as above".

Spending serious money on EKU covers is not for the faint of heart. For no matter how well-researched the auction catalogue descriptions, it is impossible to know whether an earlier cover might soon turn up. Indeed, an earlier cover may already have been discovered, and the knowledge of its existence not widely disseminated. A disingenuous consignor might submit for auction the earliest *recorded* usage, while retaining in his collection a recently acquired even earlier unreported cover. Especially risky, from my point of view, would be commerce in EKU's for the Continental soft paper and

experimental paper printings, in light of the recent revision of the Scott catalogue and the closely-reasoned arguments exchanged by Eliot A. Landau and James E. Kloetzel in this journal.<sup>11</sup>

As a postscript to my article on high value official stamps on cover, since I was kindly allowed to illustrate three covers from the Lehto consignment, I would like to take this opportunity to report on how these covers fared in the aforementioned Bennett auction. The 24¢ Navy used to forward a U164 entire to Uruguay, lot #697, was estimated at \$7,500-\$10,000, and after spirited bidding was finally hammered down for \$18,000. This is a record price for an official cover at auction, exceeding the \$15,000 paid by Theodore O. Lockyear for the legendary 30¢ (4), 90¢ (3) Justice cover.<sup>12</sup> Incredibly, although the underbidder was a well-known collector of official covers, I am told the final buyer collects ship mail. The 12¢, 30¢ State combination on a parcel label, lot #705, estimated at \$1,000-\$1,500, brought \$3500. As I had previously noted here, this is the earliest known usage of the 12¢ State stamp, and the realization confirms that among collectors of official covers, usage on a parcel label instead of a cover per se carries no stigma. The 2¢, 6¢, 10¢, 30¢ Treasury cover to Boston (badly foxed but perhaps the only surviving usage of the 30¢), lot #709, estimated at \$750-\$1,000, was hammered down to Robert L. Markovits for \$2600. A disproportionate amount of official mail was sent out in oversized envelopes, a format more susceptible to the ravages of time and mishandling. Collectors of official mail learn from experience not to reject covers in less than pristine condition.

These realizations were encouragingly strong, while other results were mixed. The only recorded solo usage of the 2¢ Executive, lot #684, addressed in the hand of President Grant to A. E. Borie, sold for only \$1100 to Robert L. Markovits, perhaps because it was short paid 1¢. Had it been on a local rate cover within Washington, D. C., the price would surely have been higher. Mr. Markovits plausibly theorizes that the envelope was not marked postage due because it would be unseemly to point out such a shortcoming on mail from the Executive Mansion. The earliest known usage of the 2¢ Navy, lot #692, with the appropriate red cancellation on a small ratty local rate cover, sold for \$210 to Ralph Ebner. Lester C. Lanphear paid \$525 for lot #686, a small 3¢ Executive cover postmarked in indigo January 23, 1880, the latest known on-cover usage of an Executive stamp. He also bought lot #711, a small penalty envelope from the U. S. Engineer Office posted at Urbana, Virginia and franked with a 1¢, 2¢ War combination, for \$400. Mr. Lanphear, having the premier exhibit collection of early penalty mail, recognized the special significance of this unassuming cover, the first reported use of supplemental War stamps on a penalty envelope posted outside of the nation's capital and addressed to a private citizen.

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<sup>11</sup> Eliot A. Landau, "Continental vs. American Papers: the EKU of King Scott's New Clothes", James E. Kloetzel, "The Scott Catalogue Editor Responds to Eliot A. Landau", *Chronicle* 188, November 2000, Vol. 52, No. 4, p. 269-283.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, "High Value Official Stamps on Cover", op. cit., Figure 5, page 293.

## Figure Captions

1. Four value franking on Department of State piece, October 13, 1873, courtesy of Robert L. Markovits.
2. Incised star killers, July, 1873.
3. "Negative captain's wheel" killers, August, 1873.
4. "Lobed sand dollar" killers, August, 1873.
5. Waffle gridiron killer, October, 1873.
6. Maltese cross killer, November, 1873.
7. 3¢ Executive cover to Philadelphia, March 29, 1874, with diagonal lattice killer.
8. Diagonal lattice killers, March, 1874.
9. 3¢ State on diplomatic pouch mail from the Consulate for the Grand Duchy of Baden, April 3, 1874, with double crossroads killer.
10. Double crossroads killers, April, 1874.
11. Circle of 8 V's with incised circle killers, April, 1874.
12. Circle of 8 V's killers, April, 1874.
13. 3¢ Navy cover from the Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting with pine tree killer.