

## United States 'Fancy' Cancellation

Steven A. Wilson, January 2020

The term 'going postal' may have started earlier than the disgruntled post office employees of the 1980s in their ill placed aggression towards co-workers and the never-ending supply of letters, magazines, and packages arriving daily at the post office for sorting and distribution. This story of violence towards postage stamps starts early, with the need to ensure that a postage stamp was visually obliterated to ensure that the inks would not be removed, and the stamp reused.

Ending in lessor tragedy than a postmaster or mistress with a shiv and fit of rage, postal clerks used rubber stoppers or bottle corks as 'killer' devices to cancel the stamp. These home-grown stamp terrorists hand carved their own personal design on the cork to apply the 'kill' to the postage stamp with their ink branding while placing the circular town cancel elsewhere on the envelope.



Figure 1. Cover showing town cancel and cork kill. Hudson, New York, 1865.

After the 1870's with the volume of mail increasing, it became harder and harder for the postal worker to keep up and automated

postmarking equipment was developed and used in the larger cities where large volumes were processed.

These hand struck cancels that now are

better known as cork or fancy cancels provide a stamp collector with an endless combination of stamps and unique cancellations spanning from San Francisco to New



Figure 2. Grid Varieties are common from New York and the spoked cogwheel from San Francisco is highly desired and adds a premium to the stamps value.

York City. These personalized cancelling marks in the United States were very popular between 1860 and 1890, with variations on bullseyes, numbers, flowers, flies, geometric symbols, masonic symbols, stars, cogwheels, and more.

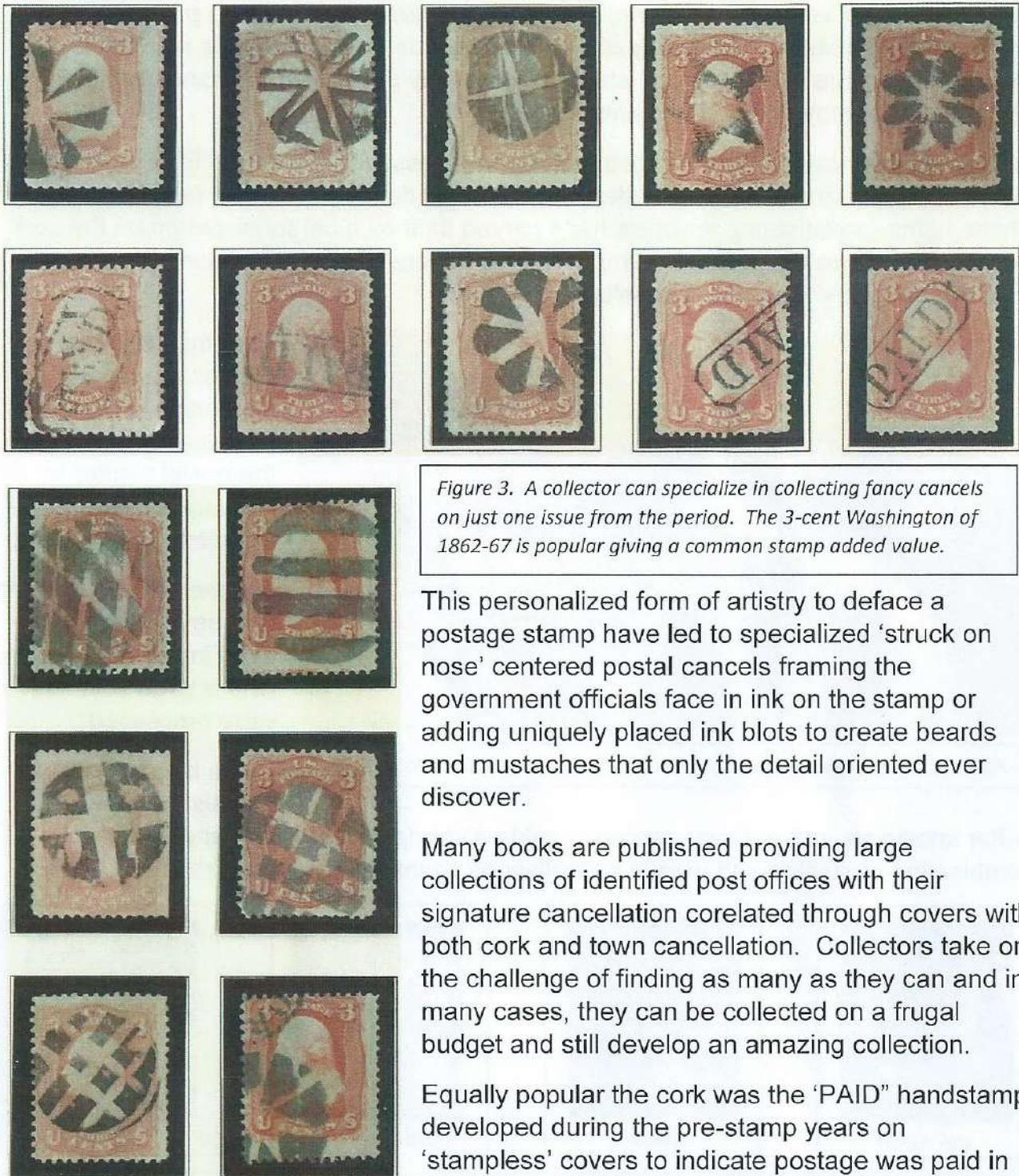


Figure 3. A collector can specialize in collecting fancy cancels on just one issue from the period. The 3-cent Washington of 1862-67 is popular giving a common stamp added value.

This personalized form of artistry to deface a postage stamp have led to specialized 'struck on nose' centered postal cancels framing the government officials face in ink on the stamp or adding uniquely placed ink blots to create beards and mustaches that only the detail oriented ever discover.

Many books are published providing large collections of identified post offices with their signature cancellation correlated through covers with both cork and town cancellation. Collectors take on the challenge of finding as many as they can and in many cases, they can be collected on a frugal budget and still develop an amazing collection.

Equally popular the cork was the 'PAID' handstamp developed during the pre-stamp years on 'stampless' covers to indicate postage was paid in full at the post office of delivery. First day covers with special issued silhouettes for cancellation are from the tradition of this artistic fancy cancellation of personalization.

Figure 4. The more centered the postmark, the better.



Figure 5. More varieties on the 3-cent Washington 1861-1865

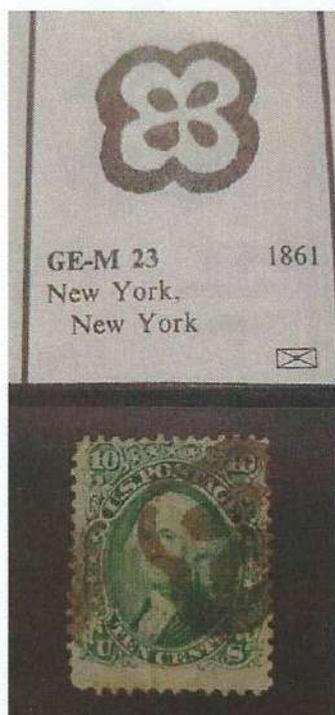


Figure 7. Geometric postmark on an 1862 10-cent Washington. Skinner identified post-mark GE-M 23 from New York, NY.

Figure 6. There are several books published on fancy cancels organized by general shape, theme such as shields, flowers, PAID, etc. The most commonly used for identification is the text by Skinner & Eno (1980), published through the American Philatelic Society.

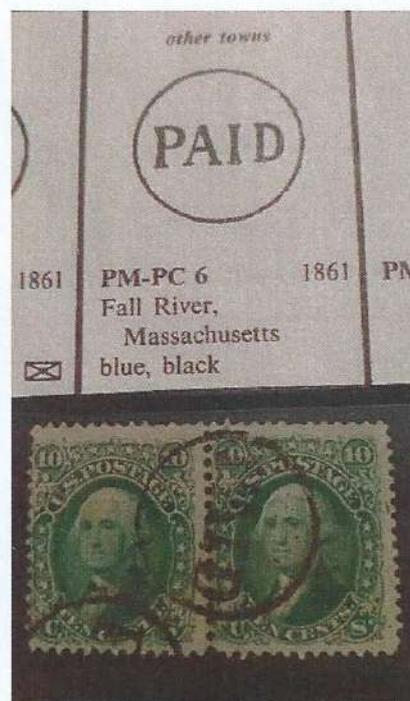
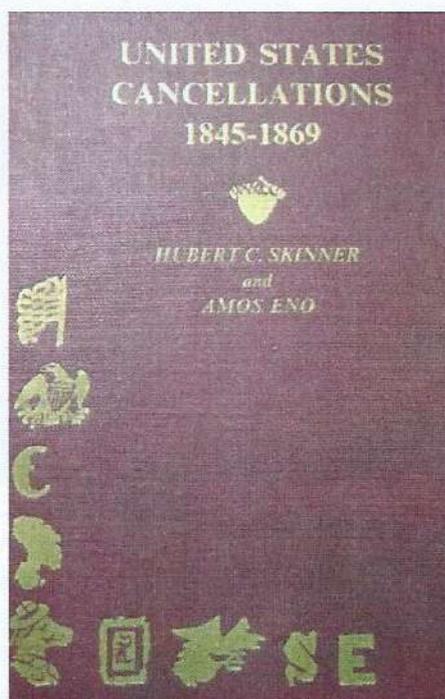


Figure 8. PAID postmark on an 1862 10-cent Washington. Skinner identified postmark PM-PC-6, from Fall River, MA. Four other locations are identified using similar markings



Figure 9. Creative placement of the postal kill created the notorious George Washington Bandit.



Figure 10. A subset of fancy cancels in the 'PAID' Cancellation. Boston produced the most common PAID cancellation that included PAID centered in a round grill (shown on the 1862, 24-cent Washington) to more rare varieties of the word PAID in a circle with a large '3' under it from the Nevada Territory.

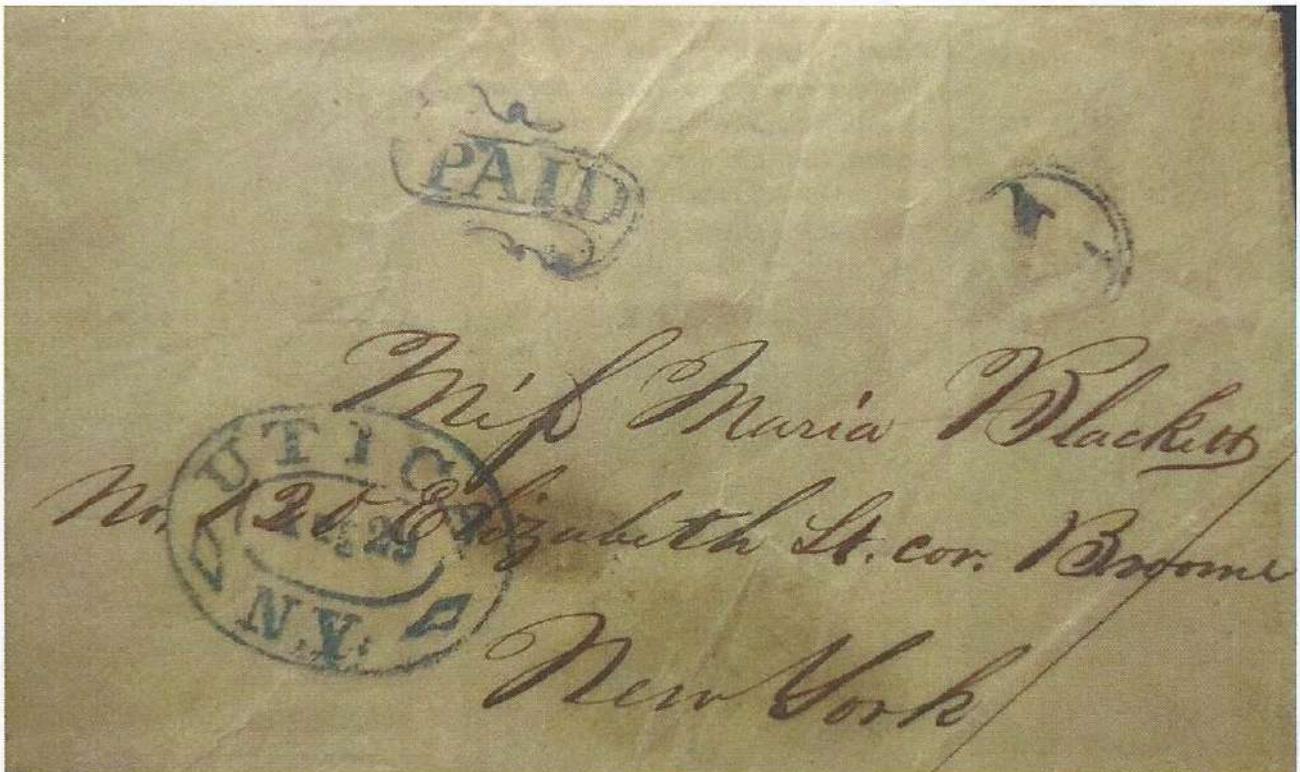


Figure 11. Stampless Cover from 1845, Utica, New York Fancy PAID cancel. The Roman numeral '5' represents the cost of mailing, 5-cents.

Wilson, Steve A. (February 2020). Stamp shown are part of the author's private collection. Steve is a member of American Philatelic Society and the Central Oregon Postal Collective.