

The Pitney-Bowes Experimental Handstamps of 1948

by Robert C. Smith

While looking through a file (PAC, RG3, vol. 2397, file 76-2-2) in the Public Archives of Canada for material on Canada's barrel postmarks of 1955-62, I happened to find a correspondence dealing with a type of handstamp I had never seen on Canadian mail. The file comprises letters between the Post Office Department and Pitney-Bowes of Canada as well as internal Post Office memoranda; it began in mid-1947, and except for two final letters in September, 1950, ended in September, 1948. I am not aware of any report on these handstamps in the philatelic literature, so thought it would be worthwhile to present a concise account of them.

The correspondence deals with prototype handstamps which were manufactured by the Pitney-Bowes Company upon the commission of the Canadian Post Office Department. A letter of July 4, 1947, from K.C. Dalglish, Vice-President and General Manager of Pitney-Bowes of Canada, Limited, to Robert Hill, Superintendent, Buildings and Equipment Division, Operations Branch of the Post Office Department, acknowledged receipt of a sample postmarking hammer, apparently a duplex model, and requested another sample without the obliterator bars, saying that these would be returned to the Department

later, and that they would help their Engineering Department in designing the new canceller. Hill replied on the 18th, enclosing the sample requested, but stating that what the Department really wanted was "an efficient rotary cancellor with date," referring to a concept which eventually led to the barrel handstamps, on which the date is mounted on a rotatable barrel assembly in the head of the hammer.

Dalglish wrote to Ludovic Germain, Director of Postal Operations, on May 18, 1948, noting that "we have forwarded to your office ten new style hammer cancellers which as previously arranged are to be placed in service in Post Offices at Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal." He pointed out three advantages of this new device over the standard Post Office dater: first, the die was attached to the hammer by a flexible neoprene tube, giving it a knee action, so that it did not have to be struck absolutely squarely; second, a goose neck served as a counterbalance to the die, much like the claws of a carpenter's hammer; third, the handle was larger in diameter and oval in shape, allowing a better grip. The five undated proof strikes shown in Fig. 1 were made by these cancellers, and appear in green ink on a page contained in the file. It could be that two identical cancellers of

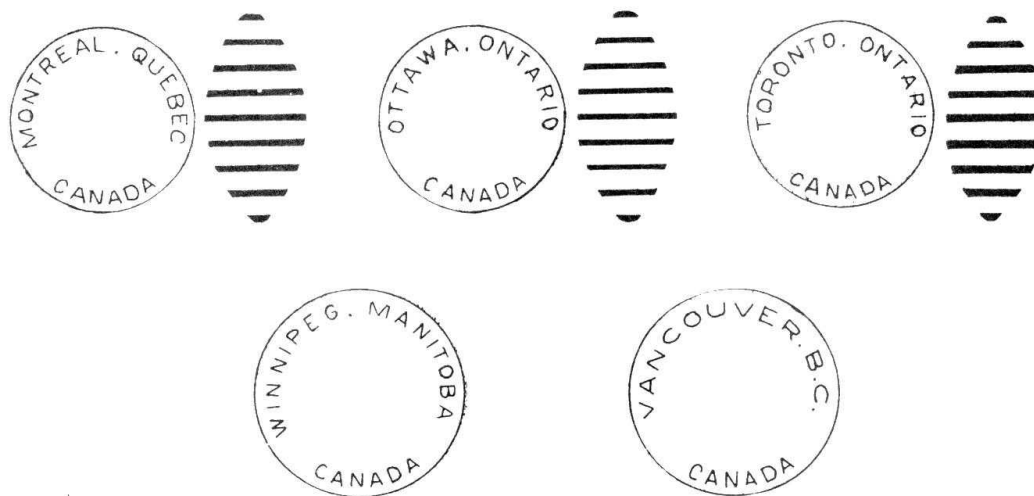


Fig. 1 - Undated proof strikes of the Pitney-Bowes experimental cancellers (strengthened).

each design were made for each office, or possibly one duplex and one c.d.s. In any event, the three Eastern offices were given duplex devices with American-style obliterated, while the two Western offices were given larger circular datestamps (see Table below). A dated strike of the Vancouver device, again taken from the file, is shown in Fig. 2; the arrangement of the indicia there is typical of all five designs.



Fig. 2 - A dated strike of the VANCOUVER B.C. / CANADA canceller.

On June 11, Germain wrote to the postmasters of the five offices concerned, sending each of them one sample Pitney-Bowes canceller and one box of type for it. He asked that "this experimental hammer canceller be subjected to a thorough test under operating conditions." He pointed out the advantages listed above, and requested a report after the tests had been completed.

Ottawa Postmaster E. Duguay acknowledged receipt of the hammer on June 15; he stated that it would be tested in the Forward Letter Branch, and that he would submit a report after about two weeks. Montreal Postmaster J.R. Crochetiere replied on June 15 that his tests had begun, and that a report would be submitted on June 22. Winnipeg Postmaster C.W. Heisler replied on the 16th that he would report in about two weeks. Vancouver Postmaster C.C. Storey acknowledged receipt of the device on the 19th, saying that he had transferred it to the Mail Despatch Branch, and that he had requested a report by June 30. There is no letter of acknowledgement from the Toronto Postmaster in the file. The stage was thus set for the trial, lasting only a few weeks, of these devices.

At this point, a question was apparently raised in the House of Commons by a member from Montreal about these tests of American-made cancellers. A Montreal postal

clerk, P.E. Morin, had complained to his member of Parliament that the cancelling device that he had invented was being ignored. He had shown it to U.S. Post Office Department officials as well. This would lead the Canadian Post Office Department to pursue the "Morin handstamp" further into the early 1950s, and this in turn would lead to the introduction of the Pitney-Bowes barrel handstamps in 1955. In 1948, however, it led only to a flurry of correspondence.

In July, 1948, the reports from the postmasters of the five cities in which the devices had been tested came to Headquarters. The Ottawa report was dated July 6, and stated that the hammer had been put into use on June 15 for a period of three weeks. It was found to be satisfactory by the Ottawa postal clerks, and "definitely superior to the type now in use." Several modifications were suggested to improve it mechanically. The datestamp and box of type were returned with the report. The cover shown in Fig. 3 confirms that these tests were in fact performed under actual operating conditions.

The Montreal Postmaster reported on July 7 that the device had been used in the Letter Despatch Section, Registration Section, and Letter Section B. & F. (British and Foreign) at Place d'Armes Postal Station. The consensus in Montreal was that the existing equipment was superior to the new, which gave too large an impression for registered letters, and was not as easy to use. The hammer was also returned.

The Toronto Postmaster, who also returned the canceller, stated that it had been tested from June 15 to July 8 in the Registration, Forward Despatch, Special Delivery, and Air Mail Sections of his office. It was generally satisfactory except for backstamping registered mail, where the duplex bars tended to obliterate other postmarks.

The Winnipeg and Vancouver Postmasters both expressed their satisfaction with the new postmarking device, and Mr. Heisler went so far as to say that he hoped it would be placed in use as standard equipment. At that time, neither returned the experimental hammers assigned to them.

On August 3 Germain wrote to the Winnipeg and Vancouver postmasters, instructing them to return their test hammers and boxes



Cover courtesy C.R. McGuire

Fig. 3 - The OTTAWA, ONTARIO / CANADA experimental duplex used on a local special delivery cover on July 1, 1948 (the vertical line making it appear as July 11 was caused by the sharp edge of the type, and had been the subject of adverse comment). Note the time mark 12 M (midday).

of type. This led Mr. Heisler to write that further tests had since been carried out on the new canceller, and that the Winnipeg clerks were now "loath to part with it as it is efficient and easy to handle," and tended to damage the mail less than existing equipment. He did return it, however, as did the Vancouver postmaster.

On August 11 Germain sent a sample of the non-duplex type of device to the Toronto postmaster, suggesting that it be tested on registered mail. He also sent a Vancouver-type device to the Montreal postmaster, with the suggestion that it be tested without

actually placing the canceller in service. The Toronto report was dated August 13, and stated that the clerks were "very much in favour of this type of canceller"; the c.d.s. type was more suitable for backstamping registered mail. The Montreal report of August 30 was again very critical of the new device, and various disadvantages were cited. It concluded that there was nothing to be gained by changing to this type of hammer.

A summary of the data for each of these cancellers that were actually put into service is presented in the Table:

CITY	TYPE	DIAM.	PERIOD OF USE
MONTREAL . QUEBEC / CANADA	9-bar duplex	27 mm	June 15 - June 22?
OTTAWA . ONTARIO / CANADA	9-bar duplex	27 mm	June 15 - July 6
TORONTO . ONTARIO / CANADA	9-bar duplex	27 mm	June 15 - July 8
(Toronto - design unknown)	c.d.s.	?	Aug. 12?
WINNIPEG . MANITOBA / CANADA	c.d.s.	30 mm	June 16 - Aug. ?
VANCOUVER . B.C. / CANADA	c.d.s.	30 mm	June 19 - Aug. 3?

Late in 1948 a number of letters and memoranda were exchanged concerning the advantages and disadvantages of this type of handstamp. An objection that the neoprene brace or neck would deteriorate upon exposure to cancelling ink was brought forward by an official of the Equipment and Supplies Branch. Tests were carried out which eventually confirmed this deterioration after long-term exposure.

It appears that the matter was not pursued further. Two years later, a letter dated September 12, 1950, from the Director of Operations, Post Office Department, to Pitney-Bowes of Canada Limited, accompanied the return of five of the hammers (the fate of the other five is not mentioned). The letter stated that the devices had been

found to be mostly satisfactory, but there did "not appear to be a necessity or justification for replacing present equipment." The effect of cancelling ink on the neoprene brace was also mentioned. The file closes with a letter from Pitney-Bowes of Canada acknowledging receipt of the five hammers.

Collectors are thus faced with the pleasure of finding covers from the five cities involved during the two-to-three-week period of the test in mid-1948. A complete collection of pieces illustrating these experimental cancelling devices would not be large, but would nevertheless be a real challenge to assemble. The author would appreciate receiving a note from any collector who turns up one of these postmarks, giving the date of use. Happy hunting!

★ In January last a Postal convention was entered into with the United States ... for the reduction of postal charges and general simplification and the improvement of the postal intercourse between Canada and the United States.

Under the arrangements of this Convention each country gives conveyance over its post routes to the closed domestic mails of the other, free of charge, when passing in transit through its territory; and letters, newspapers and other ordinary mail matter,

posted and prepaid in either country the ordinary domestic rates of that country, will be delivered at destination in the other without further charge for postage.

The effect of the reduction of postal charges on the large correspondence between Canada and the United States, will no doubt be felt for a time in the Post Office revenue, but the increase of business which may be expected to follow will soon, it is anticipated, cover any immediate loss.
(PMG-1875)

PHSC STUDY GROUPS

Arctic Circle Study Group:

D. J. Piercey, 318 - 5925 - 63rd St., Red Deer, AB T4N 6K7

Barrel Rollers Study Group (Canada's Barrel Postmarks):

R. C. Smith, Box 9383, Alta Vista Term., Ottawa, ON K1G 3V1

Canadian Meter Study Group (Canadian metered mail):

C. Rubec, 488 Athlone Ave., Ottawa, ON K1Z 5M8

Saskatchewan Study Group:

W. G. Robinson, 5830 Cartier St., Vancouver, BC V6M 3A7

B. A. Towe, General Delivery, Warman, SK S0K 4S0

Klussendorf Cancellations:

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