Those Calgary Obliterators of 1883 - 1890

Rick Parama

Target obliterators, were apparently made of rubber (manufactured by Canada Rubber of Montreal, using a master steel mould) and the handles of wood, by J. E. Ménard of Quebec, in 1880 and 1881. Later but undefined orders were made in 1888 and 1889 (*Sessional Papers*), which suggests that the POD was ordering these obliterators from 1880 to 1889; or they were made in large enough batches and held in stock and issued when an appropriate post office was opened. Target obliterators began to be used in Alberta in October 1883 (issued to Calgary and Fort McLeod for their opening on October 1st 1883); but were no longer issued to new post offices in Alberta from about 1887. The Calgary target obliterators wore out rather rapidly.

When the Calgary post office opened October 1st 1883, there was possibly only one clerk assigned to postal cancelling duties. The first postmaster, William B. Bannerman, may have been the 'postal clerk', but this does not seem likely. The post office was located in Bannerman's Flour and Feed Store which by 1885, also had a book and stationery section. It was likely a clerk of the store was assigned to do postal duty.

By August 1884, Calgary was issued a second date stamp. The first and second date stamps were used concurrently. The second dater shows that Calgary was becoming a busy office and also that probably there was sufficient postal volume to employ two clerks for postal duty. Both date stamps were recorded as re-cut by Pritchard & Andrews in 1888; there were two states of each date stamp.

On May 15th 1885 G. C. King took over the Calgary post office. King was also a merchant and the post office was in his General Merchant store. It seems probable that King assigned postal duties to at least two clerks. Through the years the volume of mail continued to increase. The recorded yearly postal revenue for 1884 was $1200 and by 1892 had increased to nearly $10,000 yearly. The use of separate dumb obliterators at Calgary ended by mid-December 1890 however.

'Corks' are sometimes described as unofficial stamp obliterators not issued from the POD head office. In some sources the name 'cork' comes from the premise that some unofficial obliterators were made locally from the corks of bottles. Jarrett once said, the corks were taken from bottles of spirits "from which the spirits had fled". Whether or not this is true may never be proven, nor do we know for if the 'corks' were made from corks. As will be seen those found on mail from Calgary, the designs can take on many different forms, but generally are of grids of squares, pies or intaglio crosses, circles and horizontal lined grids. Some show evidence of being pliable; that is the impression varied from strike from strike, perhaps from the angle or force of the blow. I will just call them corks. Belanger has shown some "corks" were ordered by the POD, but it is not known if these POD ordered 'corks' were attributed to, or used at, Calgary.

The first Calgary 'corks' (non-targets) appeared by April 1884, so the 'event' apparently is not related to the changes in postmasters or clerks. There is evidence that there was more than one clerk in the 'cork' record. One 'cork' dated on March 28th 1888 is a sharp fresh strike. A completely different 'cork' in known used on the next day, on registered mail.

Why unofficial corks were needed at Calgary is a bit of a mystery. Their appearance seems to be related to the status of official obliterators which were certainly available but it would have taken several days to get a replacement from POD headquarters. Indeed it appears that the standard obliterators simply wore out necessitating the need for temporary measures. Perhaps the POD did not believe the requests for replacement, if there were such, as the standard issue seems to have lasted months whereas years were probably expected. Unlike a few other fancy cancels from other post offices, there did not appear to be an effort to make something unique to the post office or postmaster. The 'corks' were utilitarian, in that they did not 'advertise' the name of the post office or clerk, by means of letters or initials. None are fancy enough to be recognized as such.

The obliterators of Calgary are notorious for wear and lack of clarity. Their sometimes unattractiveness is perhaps a reason they are only collected by a few. By nature they are general identifiable by being on cover and by date. This monogram is an attempt to put some order to the identification of the obliterators; this first attempt is by date. This methodology is flawed however, in that it is apparent that two postal clerks were cancelling mail concurrently. The saving grace seems to be that each clerk may have proceeded independently from one another, in that they seem not to have used the others assigned obliterators. It is hoped that by date the range of usage or even new 'cork' will be reported by others.

Another study of the date stamps may help prove a relationship. This may prove difficult in itself as some believe that three broken circle date stamps were at play in the obliterator period (I conjecture only two stamps were issued, each re-cut at least once). The number of date stamp issues needs to be resolved too.

The numbering is tentative, but in the future a Type number might be assigned.

Post Office Instruments: Dumb Obliterators: Summary 1883 – 1890 - Study

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
1. Target 2 rings plus centre dot.	15OCT1883 – ~10JAN1884	Apparently standard POD issue, and made of rubber.

OC15/83
(close to original state)

JA10/84
(showing wear)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
2. 'Cork' Grid of Squares.	~01APR1884 – 11JUL1884	Small sized rectangles in grid, spacing somewhat irregular.

AP19/84
(early state, possibly double struck)

AP24/84
(early state)

MY24?/84
(early state)

MY29/84
(worn state)

JU11/84
(worn state)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
3. 'Cork', Grid of Squares	? – 16JUN1884	Large size rectangles in grid, spacing somewhat irregular. Overlaps usage of item 2, but different, larger squares.

JU16/84
(early state)

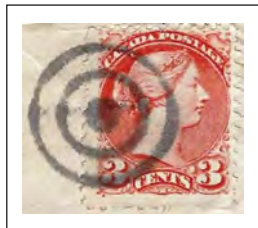| 4. Target (2nd); 2 rings plus centre dot.	04AUG1884 – 15JUL1885?	Standard POD issue, gradual wear. Progression of wear shown in dated examples.

AU4/84
(BNAPS website; scan from cover)
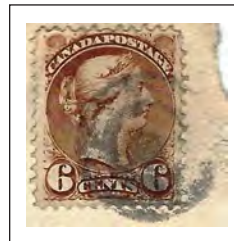
AU12/84

AU21/84
(BNAPS website; scan from cover, RDP)

AU30/84

SP4/84

SP6/84

SP23/84
(some wear)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4. Target (2nd); 2 rings plus centre dot. (cont.)	04AUG1884 – 15JUL1885?	Standard POD issue, gradual wear. Progression of wear shown in dated examples.

OC4/84
(scan from cover)

OC9/84
(BNAPS website; scan from cover)

NO25/84
(well worn and weakly struck)

DE20/84
(well worn / rings barely show)

DE27/84
(well worn / rings barely show; Ex-Kenyon)

JA9/85
(well worn / rings still show)

MR13/85
(well worn / smudge)

AP11/85
(well worn / only part of edge of outer ring shows)

Also have AU14/84, an indiscernible blob.

AP16/85
(indiscernible blob)
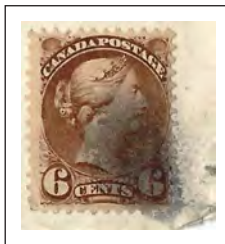
AP24/85
(indiscernible blob)

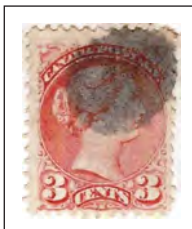| Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4.1 'Cork'; Notched Pie or Arrows.	05MAY1885 – ?	Smudge. Possibly worn target. Not clear if notched pie is the same device.

MY5/85
(notched pie)
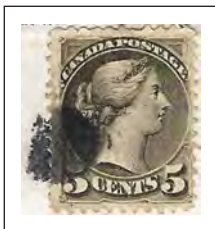
JY11/85
(indiscernible blob / perhaps rings discernable)

MY5/85
(notched pie)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4.2 'Cork'; Solid oval	25JUL1885 – ?	Appears to be end of a dowel?

JY25/85

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4.3 'Cork'; Solid oval?	25JUL1885 – ?	Appears to be smaller than 4.1

JY25/85

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4.3 'Cork'; Solid circle	19SEP1885 – ?	Appears to be smaller than 4.1; but circular.

SP19/85

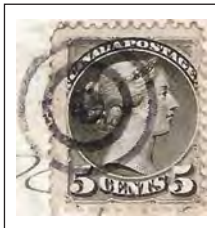| Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
4.4 'Cork?'; Solid circle?	25JUL1885 – ?	Possibly one of the obliterators used from July – Sep. 1885. (4.1 – 4.3)

OC9/85
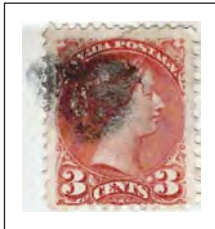
Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
5 Target (3rd); 2 ring plus centre dot	12FEB1886 – 18JUN1886	Standard issue, 3rd target

AP4/86
(appears sharp)

AP24/86
(still sharp; another cover 5¢ SQ to England)

AP28/86

JU18/86
(some wear)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
5.5 'Cork?' Single ring?	20JUL1886 – ?	Improvised? From what? From Edmonton?

JY20/86

6. Cork; Intaglio Cross - Large	14AUG1886 – 22NOV1886	
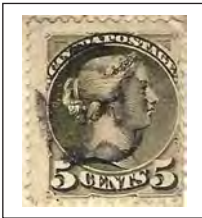
AU14/86
(some wear)

SP13/86
(clear strike, possibly different 'cork')

OC19/86
(some wear)

NO22/86
(clear break in large quadrant)

7. Cork; Intaglio Cross – Small	21MAR1887 – 29MAR1887	

MR21/87

MR29/87

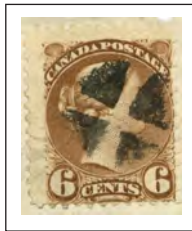| Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
8. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie'	17MAY1887 – ?	Spacing irregular, possibly segment cork #7; probably double struck. (segments appears to overlap).

MY17/87
(double struck?)

9. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie'	30MAY1887 – 04JUL1887	Small pie, spacing irregular
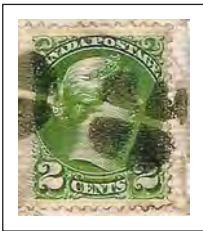
MY30/87
(Bowen '10' Sale, lot 2191)

JU6/87
(Probably new 'cork')

JY4/87

10. Cork? Circular grid	7JUL1887	Improvised?

JY7/87

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
11. 'Cork'; Intaglio Cross	17AUG1887	Irregular bars cutting through, possibly a resurrection of cork of July 4th 1887 (#9).

AU17/87
(double ring is from Edmonton)

12 'Cork'; Intaglio Star?	27AUG1887	Irregular star or cross.

AU27/87
(ex-Bowen '10' Sale; lot 2190)

13. 'Cork'; Intaglio Cross?	14SEP1887	Irregular cross.

SP14/87

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
14. 'Cork'; Maltese Cross?	20DEC1887	Differs from SP14/87 (#13).

DE20/87

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
15. 'Cork'; Pointed Cross?	28FEB1888	Differs from #14.

FE28/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
16. 'Cork'; Intaglio Maltese Cross?	29FEB1888	Differs from #15.

FE29/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
17. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie'	09APR1888 – 21APR1888	Pie, ~22mm diameter, spacing irregular, apparent ring structure in at least one quadrant. One dated 21APR1888 possibly a different 'cork'.

AP9/88

AP21/88
(rings apparent)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
17A. Target? Resurrection of a target?	18APR1888 – ?	Well worn, possibly 1886 target. Note between the dates of two corks in #17.

AP18/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
17.5 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie' or intaglio cross	07MAY1888	Very similar if not the same as 'cork' of 29-FEB-1888 (#16).

AP18/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
18. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie' or Maltese cross	30MAY1888	Sharp strike.

MY30/88
[BNAPS website /possibly new cork?]

[Same Cover!]

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
19. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie'	23JUN1888	Large, same as 09APR1888 (see #17(?). Different clerk?

JU23/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
20. 'Cork'; 4 Segment 'pie'	05JUL1888	Small pie, same as 05-JUL-1888?

JY5/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
21. 'Cork' 4 Segment 'pie'	30JUL1888	Small pie, ~17mm diameter, spacing irregular

AP9/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
22. Official Grid; 9-bar grid circular	10OCT1888	9 regular bars, already worn.

AP18/88

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
23. Official Grid; 9-bar grid circular	8NOV1888 – 22DEC1888	9 regular bars, new grid, sharp. Strike by early November 1888, some wear by December 1888.

NO8/88

DE22/88 - wear
(from BNAPS website)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
24. Unofficial Grid? 6-bar grid circular	8AUG1889	6 regular bars, new grid, early strike?

AU9/(89)
(from BNAPS website, noted
to be error for 1889)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
24A. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular	19JUN1890 – ?	9 irregular bars?

JU19/89

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
25. Unofficial Grid, or 6-bar grid circular	16SEP1889	6 irregular bars. Possibly same grid as 08-AUG-1889

SP16/89

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
26. Official Grid; 9-bar grid circular	02DEC1889 – 04DEC1889	9 regular bars, possibly used into 1890.

DE2/89   DE4/89
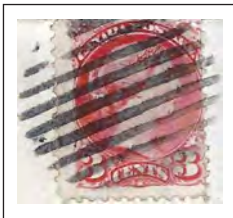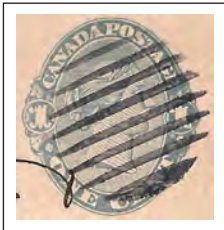
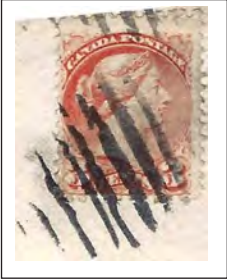| Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
27. Official Grid? 9-bar grid oval, or square?	07JUN1890 – ?	9 irregular bars, possible worn example of a circular grid.
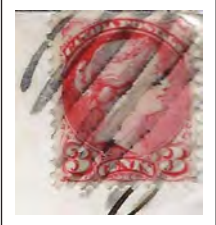
FE13/90
(possibly two different grids)

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
28. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular	02APR1890 – ?	9 bars.

AP2/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
29. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular, squiggle centre.	13MAY1890 – ?	9 irregular bars. Possibly a worn version of April 2nd example.

MY13/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
30. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular, squiggle centre?	0JUN1890 – ?	9 irregular bars. Possibly a worn version of April 2nd example.

JU7/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
30. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular, squiggle centre?	0JUN1890 – ?	9 irregular bars. Possibly a worn version of April 2nd example.

JU7/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
31. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular, squiggle centre	04JUL1890 (2 examples) – ?	9 bars, centre bar with squiggles, but other bars appear somewhat irregular. Not verified if official.

JY4/90   JY4/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
32. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular	28JUL1890 – ?	9? irregular bars.

JY28/90

Type / Description	Period of Use	Remarks Scan
33. Official Grid? 9-bar grid circular	30SEP1890 – ?	9? irregular bars.

SP30/90