

# Georgia Postmaster and County Postmarks

By Michael Wing

While early nineteenth century United States creatively designed postmarks of different shapes, borders, sizes, and fonts exist, they are not common. Typically, the early examples show variations in shape and font, and usually include only the town, state, and date of posting in the design.

Starting about 1870 and for the next twenty years, there was an explosion of creativity in postmarks, as well as the use of fancy cancels. Postmarks became more varied in design and content, frequently showing not only the post office name but also the county and/or postmaster's name.

A few such postmarks from Georgia show not only interesting and representative examples, but also allow a window into Georgia postal history during the period of the greatest growth in the number of United States post offices.

## An Understudied Area

Over the years, there have been few efforts to catalog county and postmaster postmarks. Howard K. Thompson published a "comprehensive" listing of county and postmaster postmarks in 1949. He was assisted in the effort by Edith R. Doane who, in 1973, published her own longer listing that included examples that had surfaced in the intervening years.

Those two works formed the basis of the *Doane-Thompson Catalog of County and Postmaster Postmarks*, published in 1990 and compiled by Kenneth L Gilman.<sup>1</sup> That catalog, being the most complete one, forms the basis for reference in this study.

The Gilman-published Doane-Thompson, catalog, lists 4,526 county and postmaster postmarks in the United States, of which fifty-four were from Georgia. The listing significantly understates the number of different such postmarks actually in existence.

In online marketplaces, it is common to encounter unlisted postmarks. In fairness to the scholars who compiled the 1990 listing, they acknowledged that their listing was not complete.<sup>2</sup>

With the Internet as it exists today, it would be possible to compile a far more complete list. Since there was never a centralized authority to keep track of these devices as they were produced and sold, new ones will continue to surface.

## A Bureaucratic Decision Opens the Door

In the late nineteenth century, the Post Office Department required a minimum amount of postage collection from a post office before furnishing handstamps. Only post offices with collections of

Figure 1: The manufacturers of postal marking devices presented an attractive array of options that many postmasters could not resist. The Ward and Hammond Company was one of several that advertised heavily in the *Postal Guides*.

greater than two hundred dollars were furnished with such devices. The remainder, fourth class post offices, were forced to use the tedious method of pen and ink cancelling or purchase handstamps using their own funds.<sup>3</sup>

After a stagnant period of growth during the 1860s, the United States experienced its greatest expansion in the number of post offices from 1870 to 1900.

The number of post offices increased from 28,492 to 42,989 between 1870, and 1880. By 1890, the number had increased to 62,401.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of these new post offices were in small, developing locations with revenues too low to receive Post Office Department issued devices. The need for privately produced hand postmark devices and cancellers was at an all-time high in the late 1800s.

During this same period, the suppliers of postmarking and canceling handstamps were producing ever more creative versions of their devices and advertising them in the pages of *Postal Guides*, the periodicals that kept postmasters up to date on changes in postal law and policies. The Figure 1 ad from one of the large suppliers shows examples of the attractive options available.

On September 14, 1878, in response to an inquiry as to whether it would supply such new handstamps, the Post Office Department expressed the opinion that it was “not practicable” to supply such devices. This hands-off stance was taken as permission to use new and creative postmark handstamps and cancelers, as long as the Post Office Department did not have to foot the bill. Thousands of fourth-class postmasters began ordering the new devices, beginning a twelve-year period of the wide use of county and postmaster postmarks as well as fancy cancels. The Post Office Department took control over the design of such devices in 1890.<sup>5</sup>

### Georgia Examples

As mentioned, the Doane-Thompson listing of Georgia postmarks (Figure 2) shows fewer examples than are currently known to exist. For example, of the eight covers discussed in this study, a majority of five are unlisted in the catalog.

Figure 3 shows examples of the variety in shapes and sizes of Georgia county and postmaster postmarks. It should be mentioned again that during this period from 1878 to 1890 the use of numerous fancy cancels and different postmark designs existed apart from, or in addition to, the county and postmaster postmarks.<sup>6</sup>

In this study, the Doane-Thompson catalog number will be cited if the postmark has been listed.

### What’s in a Name

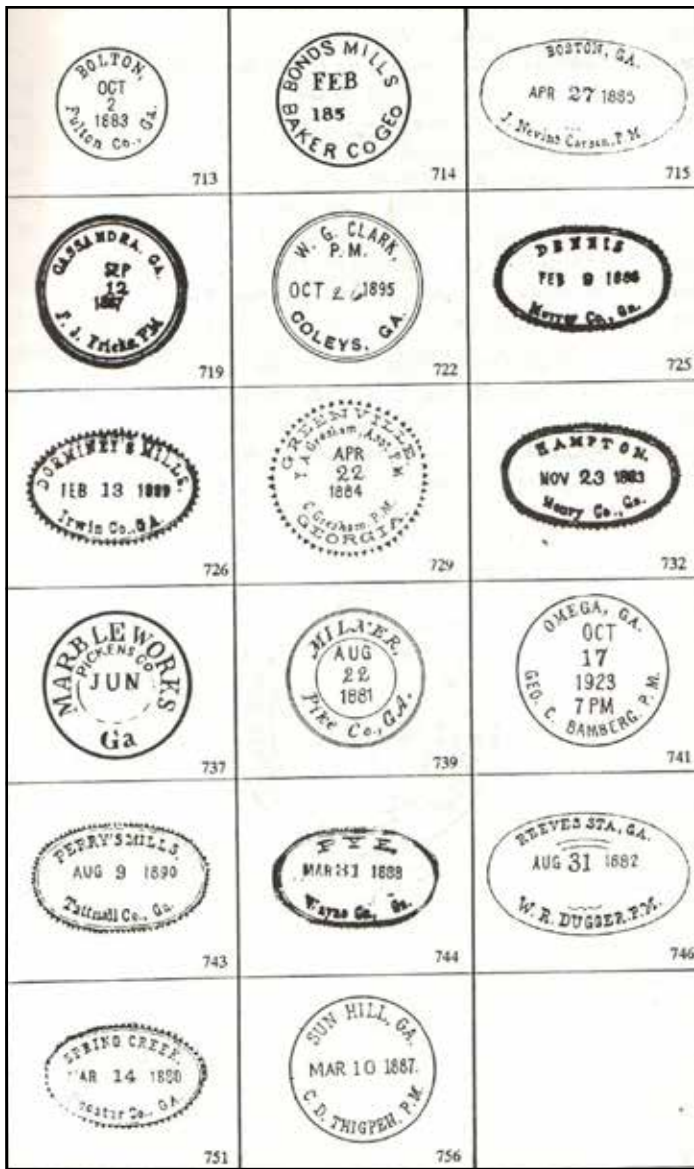
In reviewing official applications for the establishment of post offices, it is common to see changes and indecision in the process of name selection. The Post Office Department would reject applications with names that were similar in sound or spelling to other locations. In a time of rapid expansion, this called for the use of judgement by the applicants.

The November 30, 1883, cover from Paschal, Georgia, (Figure 4) bears a double line circular postmark (Doane-Thompson 742) with the name of postmaster I.K. (Ichabod Kofworth) Roberts. In the 1880 Census, Roberts’ occupation was listed as, “learning carpenter.” At the time of his appointment as postmaster, he was 30 years old, and he served 10 years in that capacity. After his term as a postmaster, Roberts remained in the carpentry and woodworking business and died at Columbus in 1947, aged 95.

GEORGIA	
711	BARTOW/ Jefferson Co. Ga. (1880; DLC)
712	BELTON/ J.N.COGGINS, P.M./ GEORGIA. (1887; fancy cds)
713	BOLTON/ Fulton Co., Ga. (1883; cds)
714	BOND'S MILLS/ BAKER CO GEO (1860; cds)
715	BOSTON, GA/ J.Nevins Carson, P.M. (1884-85; oval)
716	BOX SPRING, GA/ Wm.Green, P.M. (1883; DLC)
717	CAINS/ Gwinnett Co., Ga. (1885; fancy DLO)
718	CANTON, GA/ R.F.Daniel, P.M. (1879; DLC)
719	CASSANDRA, GA/ F.J.Fricke, P.M. (1887; DLC)
720	CHESTNUT GAP/ Pannin Co Jas.R.McKinney, P.M. (1885; fancy cds)
721	COHUTTA/ Whitfield Co. Ga. (1883; fancy DLO)
722	W.G.CLARK/ P.M./ COLEYS, GA. (1895; DLC)
723	COMMISSIONER, GA/ A.CHAMBERS, P.M. (1872; fancy DLC)
724	CONYERS/ Rockdale Co., Ga. (1882; fancy DLO)
725	DENNIS/ Murray Co., Ga. (1886; fancy DLO)
726	DORMINEY'S MILLS/ Irwin Co., GA. (1889; fancy DLO)
727	FASHION/ Murray Co., Ga. (-; cds)
728	GIN TOWN, Worth Co., Ga/ W.H.Braswell, P.M. Ga. (1881; fancy cds)
729	GREENVILLE/ Y.A.Gresham, Asst. P.M./ C.Gresham, P.M./ GEORGIA. (1884; fancy cds)
730	GRESHAMVILLE/ Green Co., Ga. (1885; fancy DLO)
731	HAMILTON/ Henry Co., Ga. (1883; DLO)
732	HAMPTON/ Henry Co., Ga. (1883; fancy DLO)
733	HARALSON COWETA CO GA (1883; -)
734	HILTON, BIBB CO GA (1893; -)
735	LOVEJOYS/ Clayton Co., Ga. (1885; fancy DLO)
736	MANITOU/ Henry Co. GA (1883; oval)
737	MARBLEWORKS/ PICKENS CO/ Ga (1864; cds)
738	MILFORD/ Baker Co., Ga. (1885; fancy DLO)
739	MILNER/ Pike Co., GA (1881; DLDC)
740	OCONEE, GA/ Asst.P.M. (1884; cds)
741	OMEGA, GA/ GEO.C.BAMBERG, P.M. (1923; cds)
742	PASCHAL, GA/ LK.ROBERTS, P.M. (-; -)
743	PERRY'S MILLS/ Tatnall Co., Ga. (1882-90; fancy DLO)
744	PYE/ Wayne Co., Ga. (1888; fancy DLO)
745	REEDY SPRINGS, GA/ Thos.S.Rogers, Asst. P.M. (1888; DLO)
746	REEVES STA. GA/ W.R.DUGGER, P.M. (1882; oval)
747	REEVES STA. GA/ W.E.INGRAHAM, P.M. (1883; DLO)
748	ROGERS, GEORGIA, L.T.Wadley, P.M. (1881; DC)
749	ST.MARY'S/ Camden Co., Ga. (1882; fancy DLO)
750	SARDIS/ Burke Co., Ga. (1885; DLO)
751	SPRING CREEK/ Decatur Co., GA. (1888-89; fancy DLO)
752	STONE MOUNTAIN DEKALB CO. GA (-; -)
753	STREAM MILL/ Decatur Co., Ga. (-; fancy DLO)
754	SULPHUR SPRINGS/ Hall Co. Ga. (1883; oval)
755	SUMMERVILLE, CHATTOOGA COUNTY, GEORGIA (1881; DC)
756	SUN HILL, GA/ C.D.THIGPAN, P.M. (1887; cds)
757	SYLVESTER/ Worth Co., Ga. (1884; fancy DLO)
758	THOMASTON, GA/ J.C.Williams, P.M. (1882; DLC)
759	TURNERVILLE/ Habersham Co. Ga. (1883; fancy DLO)
760	WATSON'S STORE/ COLUMBIA CO. GA. (1823-24; fancy rectangle)
761	FRANKLIN & WAYNMAN COTTON YARN AND OSNABURG FACTORIES; WAYNMANVILLE/ UPSON CO., GEO. (1860; DC)
762	WEST CHESHIRE, GA/ E.P.DUNHAM, P.M. (1884; cds)
763	WILLACOOCHEE, GA/ D.E.GASKIN, P.M. (1886; DLC)
764	WILLIAMSBURG, GA/ W.H.PRICE, P.M. (1886; DLC)

Figure 2: The Georgia listing from the *Doane-Thompson Catalog of County and Postmaster Postmarks*.

The Paschal Post Office, in Talbot County, existed from 1881 to 1922, when it was absorbed into the nearby Junction City Post Office. The application for a post office, dated September 3, 1881, (Figure 5) initially proposed the name of Bostick. It was determined that the name was too similar to the town



**Figure 3: Examples of Georgia postmarks from the Doane-Thompson catalog.**

of Bostwick, Georgia, in Morgan County. Even though the Morgan County location was not granted a post office until 1890, the applicants in Talbot County selected the new name of Paschal. This did not involve filling out a new application. Rather, in an example of low-tech efficiency, the name of Bostick was struck through and the name of Paschal was inserted on the application.

No authoritative written account could be found as to the origins of the name Paschal. However, the nearby town of Geneva, in Talbot County, had a large general store owned by the Paschal family and Robert Paschal had served as postmaster of Geneva. It is assumed that the post office was named for him or a family member.

### Lumber Boom Towns

Before the Civil War, Georgia's sea of longleaf pine surrounded the basin of the Altamaha, Ocmulgee, and



**Figure 4: A Paschal, Georgia, postmaster postmark (Doane-Thompson 742) dated November 30, 1883.**

Oconee rivers. This waterway provided a highway to the coast down which vast quantities of trees and barges were floated to the port of Darien and the worldwide market. In the decades after the Civil War, sawmills sprouted in this southeast Georgia area allowing for the trees to be turned into lumber on sight.

At the same time, railroads such as the Macon and Brunswick Railroad were constructed, providing for the more efficient and rapid movement of lumber and naval stores to the coast. In the 1870s and 1880s, there was an average of one sawmill for every two miles along that 187-mile railway. Applications for new post offices kept pace with the growth of population.<sup>7</sup>

The next three covers are from new towns along the Macon and Brunswick Railroad in that era.

The cancel on the postal card from Dempsey, Dodge County, Georgia, dated August 29, 1884, (Figure 6) bears a fancy double-line circle, county postmark (unlisted) and a grid cancel.

The Dempsey Post Office opened in 1878 and had six postmasters in the eighteen years before its functions were absorbed into the Eastman Post Office, five miles to the southeast on the railroad. Perhaps it was just too close to the thriving center of Eastman. Neither the town, nor the post office, took hold.

On May 16, 1870, about twenty-five miles southeast of Dempsey, a post office was established at McVile, Georgia. The Figure 7 postal card mailed on January 11, 1882, shows a fancy double-line oval Telfair County postmark (unlisted). The early residents and applicants for the post office were Scottish immigrants and descendants. Thus the "Mc" found in many Scottish surnames, but there is more.

The two postmasters of McVile were, respectively, Alexander McArthur and Alexander G. McLennan. It should come as no surprise that when residents decided to change the name in 1888, to avoid confusion with nearby McRea, the name Scotland was chosen. Although smaller than in earlier days, the incorporated city of Scotland, Georgia, and the post office still exist.





**Figure 8: The old post office building in Scotland, Georgia, fell to the wrecking ball in 2012. (Brian Brown Photography/Vanishing Media USA 2008-2023)**

tenures as small facilities. An example from such a post office is the Figure 10 postal card from Wood Lawn in Murray County. The double-line circle county postmark (unlisted) is dated April 29, 1882.

Wood Lawn lies about seven miles north of Spring Place, Georgia. It was also known as Summerhours, as shown on a military map from 1865 (Figure 11). Woodlawn operated under that name from 1848 to 1894. For unknown reasons, in 1894 the name was changed to Fashion, Georgia, and in 1907 the post office closed. Rural Free Delivery had made small fourth-class post offices largely obsolete.

### Fancy by Choice

All of the postmaster and county postmarks studied thus far are from post offices with annual revenues of under \$200, at least at the time the cancelling devices were purchased. These postmasters were obliged to purchase their own postmark and cancelling devices.

The permissive attitude that existed from 1879 until 1890, intentional or not, meant that at little or no extra personal expenditure, such postmasters could engage artistic and design flourishes, as well as indulging local and personal pride.

All this was abetted by manufactures who were eager to indulge such whims. Even postmasters from larger long-existing post offices could not resist this lure. Three Georgia examples make that point.

The post office at Tennille, located in the east Georgia county of Washington dates from 1841 to the present. Tennille was also known as Station Number 13 in its early years and was located at the highest point on the Central of Georgia Railroad between Macon and Savannah. The depot, warehouses, cotton, and the



**Figure 9: A Towns, Georgia, postmaster postmark. J.C. Towns, the first postmaster, started on November 28, 1882, initiating an unbroken chain of Towns family postmasters up to 1953, when the post office was discontinued.**



**Figure 10: A Woodlawn, Murray County, postmark dated April 29, 1882. From its opening in 1848, until its closing, Woodlawn remained a small rural post office.**



**Figure 11: This U.S. Army map from the Civil War shows the location of Woodlawn, Georgia, north of Spring Place. Woodlawn was in the general area of the battles at Chattanooga and Chickamauga but was not the scene of fighting.**

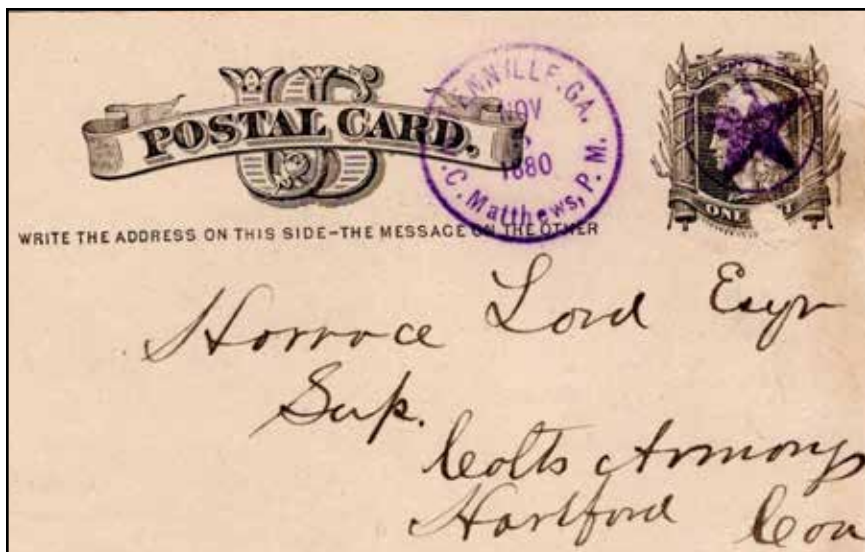


Figure 12: A Tennille, Georgia, postmaster postmark dated November 5, 1880. The eye-catching flamboyant purple ink was a clear violation of postal policy.

railroad itself were destroyed by Sherman's left flank on their march to the sea in November 1864.<sup>8</sup>

Although Tennille was founded as a railroad town, as were Dempsy, McVille, and Towns, it is some forty years older and the post office was posting revenues far in excess of the \$200 required for government purchased devices.

The Figure 12 postal card from Tennille was posted on November 5, 1880, and bears a single-line circular postmark (unlisted) and the name of postmaster W.C. Matthews, who had been named postmaster two months earlier. In addition to the personalized postmark, a fancy star cancellation is used. Having taken advantage of the permissive regulations of the day, Matthews went a step beyond when he used vivid purple ink for the postmark and cancellation.

A postal regulation issued in 1879, was clear in mandating that only black ink was to be used for postmarks. It was widely ignored, causing it to be reiterated as General Order No. 39, on October 25, 1880<sup>9</sup> (Figure 13). The continued existence of so many colorful postal markings in the era suggests that these orders were less than effectual. The postal card from Tennille received its flamboyant cancel a mere ten days after Order No. 39 was published.

While the next two examples are pieces addressed to Alexander Stephens, former vice president of the Confederate States and by 1882 a member of Congress, his prominence is coincidental to the fact that they are good examples of county and postmaster postmarks. Specifically, they are postmarks from long established post offices that were entitled to receive free devices provided by the government.

To give due deference to the prominence of Stephens, it should be noted that, on November 4,

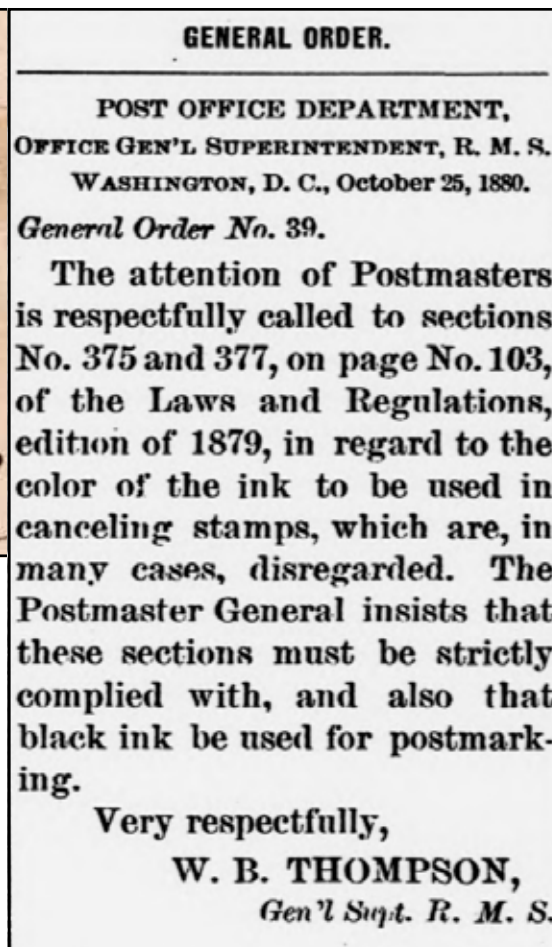


Figure 13: USPOD General Order No. 39 reiterated existing regulations that only black ink was to be used for postmarks and cancels. It was issued on October 25, 1880, only ten days before the purple Tennille postmark and cancel was posted. The Tennille postmaster was in good company as the prohibition against colored ink was routinely ignored at the time.

1882, a few months after these covers were posted, he was elected governor of Georgia and died in office on March 4, 1883.

St. Marys, Georgia, is one of the oldest towns in Georgia and the post office dates to 1794. The Figure 14 cover posted on May 20, 1882, has a fancy double-line oval Camden County postmark (Doane-Thompson 749). It bears Scott 189 and a light target cancellation.

Thomaston was also an old post office having been established in 1830. On August 31, 1882, the Figure 15 postal card was posted bearing a double-line circle postmark bearing the name of postmaster J.C. (Julius) Williams (Doane-Thompson 758).

### Why They Existed

In the preface to her 1973 listing, Edith Doane pointed out that there was some duplication in post office names and that the listing of the county in the postmark may have been an attempt to avoid confusion between post offices with similar names.

As to the inclusion of the postmasters' name, she

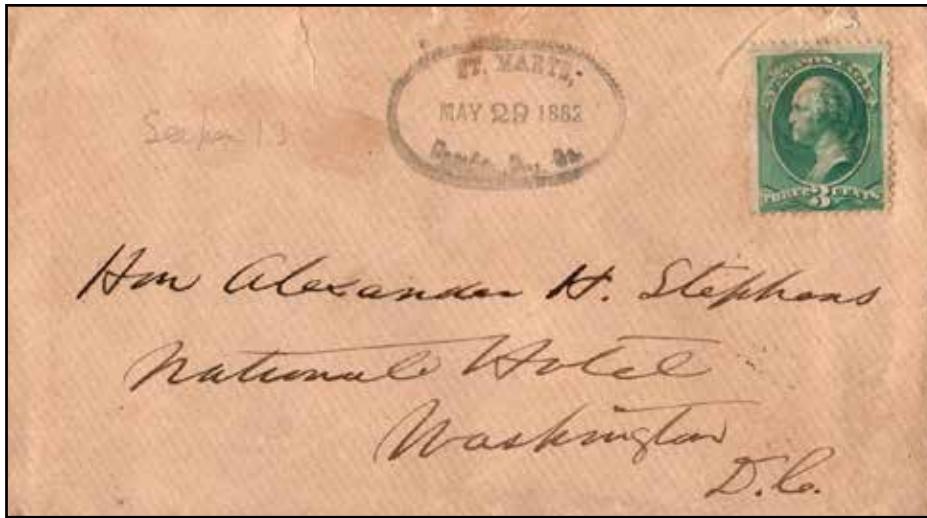


Figure 14: A St. Marys, Camden County, Georgia postmark dated May 29, 1882 (Doane-Thompson 749). The addressee is Alexander Stephens, a member of Congress and a former vice president of the Confederacy.

Figure 15: A Thomaston, Georgia, postmaster postmark dated August 31, 1882 (Doane-Thompson 758). Stephens was elected governor of Georgia on November 4, 1882, and died in office four months later.



stated, "... the postmasters' pride in their jobs led them to take advantage of the advertised opportunities to publicize their own names."<sup>10</sup> These factors, as well as the commercial interests, of postmaster/merchants played a part.

More basically, the motivation behind the use of county and postmaster postmarks, fancy cancels, and other artistic flourishes on devices between 1879 and 1890 was just human nature. For an eleven-year span the Post Office Department permitted the use of these devices. Postmasters, given the choice between the bland uniformity of official postal markings or markings that were varied, personal, and distinctive to their post offices, chose the latter.

American industry and advertising produced an attractive array of options and postmasters bought them. While this freedom of expression was not acceptable to the bureaucracy in the long run, it is an interesting and still open field of study for postal historians.

#### Endnotes

1 Kenneth L. Gilman, editor, *Doane-Thompson Catalog of U.S. and County and Postmaster Postmarks*, (North Miami, Florida: David G. Phillips Publishing Co., 1990).

2 Gilman, op cit., p. 10.

3 Ibid.

4 USPS Historian, "Pieces of Mail Handled, Number of Post Offices, Income, and Expenses Since 1789," March 2023.

5 Ibid.

6 Gilman, op cit., p. 9.

7 Mark V. Wetherington, *The New South Comes to Wiregrass Georgia, 1860-1910* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1994) p. 12-16.

8 Tennille, Georgia

<https://www.tennille-ga.gov/>

9 *Daily Bulletins of Orders Affecting the US Postal Service*, October 25, 1882.

<http://www.uspostalbulletins.com/>

10 Gilman, op cit., p. 8.

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