

BOUSTED AND COMPANY

By J.W. Bosley

Collectors of the earlier issues of Straits Settlements stamps will inevitably discover stamps with a manuscript "B&Co". The letter "C" is made with a grand flourish. It seems that hundreds of stamps were penned by the same busy person and for the same purpose - a security endorsement for the firm - to protect the stamps from being removed and re-used. This was due to the very low wages then being paid "coolies, wallas, and clerks". The artistic penman (or penwoman) was an employee of Boustead and Company, with offices in Singapore and Penang. This trading firm was serving as a forwarding agent as early as 1843. At that time the firm was known as Boustead, Schwabe & Company.

By the time printed postage stamps arrived on the scene (1867), the firm was simply known as Boustead & Company and was one of the larger, if not the largest, user of postage stamps in its business of importing and exporting and insurance.

Around 1870 the manuscript "B&Co" was replaced with a rubber stamp bearing the same initials. On the stamp issues of 1870-72 the "B&Co" was usually stamped in blue but examples in purple and black exist.

An interesting sidelight concerning the use of the manuscript "B&Co" is the appearance of these initials on the Straits Settlements stamps overprinted "B" for use in Bangkok. After the Kingdom of Siam joined the UPU and began to issue its own postage stamps, the British Post Office in Bangkok was closed in 1885. The stamp stock of Straits Settlements stamps overprinted with "B" was then returned to the Singapore General Post Office, where these remainders were sold to local patrons. At this time the volume postage stamp buyer was Boustead & Company so it is not uncommon to find Boustead & Company initials superimposed on the Bangkok "B" overprints.

Progress came to Boustead & Company about 1895, and the rubber stamp "B&Co" was replaced by a machine, perforated initials "B&Co" were introduced. The perforated initials "B&Co" exist on the stamps of all reigns until World War 11, with four different types of perfins identified.

In the post-World War II era the grand old firm of Boustead & Company still exists and thrives in modern Malaysia. The perforating machine was probably sent to Japan as scrap during the second World War and has now been replaced by a Pitney-Bowes postage meter.

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