

Precancel Stamps Primer

Presentation to the
Poway Stamp Club
By Bob Schappelle
February 25, 2026

What is a Precancel Stamp?

A precancel stamp is one that was cancelled before being attached to a piece of mail matter to save the post office time and labor.

Companies mailing ads attach precanceled stamps to their mail and receive a discount in postage.

Brief History of Precancels

- 1844 – 1880 Pioneer period
- 1880 – 1903 Transitional period
- 1903 – 1922 Classic period
- 1922 – 2007 Bureau period
- 1978 Bureau precancels became lines only, usable at any post office.
- 2007 USPS discontinued use of local precancels and ordered destruction of all devices.

Stamps of the Pioneer Period: Mid 1800s



Stamps of the Transitional Period: Late 1800s

Trends in overprint designs started with bars and
geometric figures.



Stamps of the Classic Period: Early 1900s

Overprints were required to have city and state names.
Contracted devices for overprints were provided by the
government.



Contracted Precancel Devices

Electroplates



Rubber
Hand Stamps



Stereotype
Hand Stamps



Vinyl Hand Stamps



Mimeograph



Local Devices



The First Precancel Stamps Printed by the BEP

- The Post Office department contracted the Bureau of Engraving and Printing to print experimental precancel stamps for use in three states (1916):
 - Augusta, Maine,
 - New Orleans, Louisiana,
 - Springfield, Massachusetts.
- The stamps to be overprinted were the 1-cent Washington stamps of the day.

Font Examples of Bureau Precancels

**Experimental
Bureau Precancels
1916-1917**

NEW
ORLEANS
LA.



AUGUSTA
MAINE

SPRINGFIELD
MASS.



Experimental Bureau Prints

**First Bureau
Precancel (1923)**



**Bureau Precancel Types
1923-1938**



1954-1975



First Regular Bureau Precancel

Page 1

CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES



First Regular Bureau Precancels

Page 2

CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES



1938 Bureau Presidential Issue

Page 1, Wide Bars

CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES



1938 Bureau Presidential Issue

Page 2, Narrow Bars

CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES



Precancel Stamp Society

- Publishes precancel stamp catalogs
 - ◆ Town and Type with hundreds of thousands
 - ◆ Bureau precancels with 9500 entries
- Website *precancels.com*
- Provides lessons on precancels
- Provides free, downloadable albums
- Provides spread sheet for dated precancels with 11,921 entries

Town and Type Catalog Page

| | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Aguila | <input type="checkbox"/> 80725 | Green Valley | Mesa |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84620 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70820 |
| Ajo | Dateland* | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS25 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 745 1.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84125 | Greer | <input type="checkbox"/> G-1 HS .. 10.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 801 3.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85325 | <input type="checkbox"/> 87250 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 83720 | Douglas | Hayden | Miami |
| Apache Junction | <input type="checkbox"/> 455 2.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 861(4)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 574 3.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84620 | <input type="checkbox"/> 492(34) -A- | Hereford | <input type="checkbox"/> 70120 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84825 | <input type="checkbox"/> 559 3.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> G-1 HS* ... -A- | Nogales |
| Avondale* | <input type="checkbox"/> 602 3.00 | Higley | <input type="checkbox"/> 466 7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84125 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70320 | <input type="checkbox"/> 835.5(4)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 548(c17) 1.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 89520 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS 1.50 | Holbrook | <input type="checkbox"/> 70320 |
| Bagdad | Duncan | <input type="checkbox"/> 466 7.50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 72920 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 841(t.5)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 835.525 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70320 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84150 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 841(t1,4) .. .20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 89550 | Hotevilla | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS 175.00 |
| Benson | Ehrenberg | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-2 HS(c15.5) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 80120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | Houck* | 3.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 729 4.00 | Oracle |
| Bisbee | El Mirage | <input type="checkbox"/> 840(4)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 835.520 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 71220 | <input type="checkbox"/> 73425 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS ... 10.00 | Oraibi* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 834.5(4,6) .. .20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85320 | Huachuca City | <input type="checkbox"/> 729 50.00 |
| Buckeye | Eloy | <input type="checkbox"/> 848.550 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84125 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 70320 | <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 | Humboldt | Page |
| Bullhead City | <input type="checkbox"/> 80125 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 818 1.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84320 | Flagstaff | Inspiration* | <input type="checkbox"/> 85220 |
| Cameron | <input type="checkbox"/> 87 1.50 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84150 | Parker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 62225 | Jokake* | <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 |
| Camp Verde | <input type="checkbox"/> 80425 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS(2) .. -A- | Payson |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS20 | Joseph City | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(4)25 |
| Casa Grande | Florence | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 | Peach Springs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 73425 | <input type="checkbox"/> 72125 | Kayenta | <input type="checkbox"/> 84320 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 80720 | <input type="checkbox"/> 83920 | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 | Peoria |
| <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS 1.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | Keams Canyon | <input type="checkbox"/> 556(3)50 |
| Cashion | Fort Defiance | <input type="checkbox"/> 84320 | <input type="checkbox"/> 72820 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 74825 | Kearny | Phoenix |
| <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS20 | Fort Huachuca* | <input type="checkbox"/> 80120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7115 |
| Cave Creek | <input type="checkbox"/> 84625 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8115 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3,4)20 | Fredonia | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(NEY,4) | <input type="checkbox"/> 85 4.00 |
| Chandler | <input type="checkbox"/> 81925 | 100.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 203(1)15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 | Ganado | <input type="checkbox"/> 89520 | <input type="checkbox"/> 26315 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 82125 | <input type="checkbox"/> 74550 | Kingman | <input type="checkbox"/> 83920 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | Gila Bend | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 90620 |
| Chinle | <input type="checkbox"/> 73125 | Kirkland | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 IHS(13) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 835.520 | Gilbert | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 | 2.00 |
| Chino Valley | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | Lake Havasu City | Pima |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | Glendale | <input type="checkbox"/> 84820 | <input type="checkbox"/> 81820 |
| Clarkdale | <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 | Lakeside | Pinetop |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 73420 | <input type="checkbox"/> 73425 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3)20 |
| Claypool | <input type="checkbox"/> 80225 | Leupp* | Prescott |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 841(4)20 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84125 | <input type="checkbox"/> 416(2) .. 75.00 |
| Clemenceau* | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS50 | Litchfield Park | <input type="checkbox"/> 466 4.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 734 1.50 | Globe | <input type="checkbox"/> 74925 | <input type="checkbox"/> 56350 |
| Clifton | <input type="checkbox"/> 71620 | Lupton* | <input type="checkbox"/> 70320 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> 89520 | <input type="checkbox"/> 834.520 | Mammoth | <input type="checkbox"/> 80725 |
| Colorado City | <input type="checkbox"/> L-1 HS 2.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> 80220 | Ray* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 843(g1,3) .. .20 | <input type="checkbox"/> L-2 HS 2.00 | Marana | <input type="checkbox"/> 818 1.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 843(g1.5,3) .20 | Goodyear* | <input type="checkbox"/> 835.5(3)20 | Safford |
| Coolidge | <input type="checkbox"/> 74525 | Mayer | <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 72925 | <input type="checkbox"/> 89520 | <input type="checkbox"/> 835.520 | Sahuarita |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 89520 | Grand Canyon | McNary | <input type="checkbox"/> 84120 |
| Cottonwood | <input type="checkbox"/> 80725 | <input type="checkbox"/> 72825 | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(SAL) 7.50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 73450 | <input type="checkbox"/> 84325 | <input type="checkbox"/> 83920 | <input type="checkbox"/> 841(3,4)20 |

Typical Town and Type Catalog Page: Fonts

| ELECTROPLATES | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| QUINCY ILLINOIS | PEORIA ILL. | COLORADO SPRINGS COLO. | SALEM OHIO | JACKSON MISSISSIPPI |
| 201 | 202 | 202.5 | 203 | 203.5 |
| HONOLULU HAWAII | Charlottesville Va | BLOOMINGTON ILL. | WILLIAMSPORT PA. | JEFFERSON CITY MO. |
| 204 | 204.5 | 205 | 206 | 207 |
| FITCHBURG MASS. | ROCK ISLAND ILL. | So. Manchester Conn. | HOBOKEN N. J. | LANCASTER PA. |
| 208 | 209 | 210 | 211 | 212 |
| NORTH CHICAGO ILL. | PARKERSBURG W. VA. | YANKTON South Dakota | East Pittsburgh Pa. | BALTIMORE MD. |
| 213 | 214 | 215 | 216 | 217 |
| KEARNEY NEBRASKA | LEWISTON ILL. | Mount Clemens Mich. | RIVERTON N. J. | COLUMBIA Mo. |
| 218 | 219 | 220 | 221 | 222 |
| Council Bluffs Iowa | HOLTON KANSAS | ATASCADERO CALIF. | LINCOLN NEBR. | SAINT JOSEPH MO. |
| 223 | 224 | 224.5 | 225 | 226 |
| SALISBURY North Carolina | Pleasant Hill MO. | Manitowac WIS. | Waterbury Conn. | Fergus Falls Minn. |
| 227 | 228 | 229 | 230 | 231 |
| DULUTH MINN. | STAMFORD CONN. | MILWAUKEE WIS. | SOUTH BEND IND. | MANHATTAN KANS. |
| 232 | 233 | 234 | 235 | 236 |
| LONG ISLAND CITY N. Y. | LOS ANGELES CALIF. | NORTH PLATTE NEBR. | SPRINGFIELD MO. | HUNTINGTON PARK CALIF. |
| 236.5 | 237 | 238 | 239 | 240 |

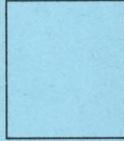
Arizona



AGUILA 841



AJO 745



AJO 801



AJO 837



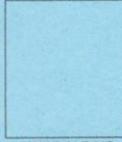
APACHE JUNCTION 846



APACHE JUNCTION 848



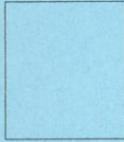
AVONDALE 841



AVONDALE 895



BAGDAD 841 L5



BAGDAD 841 t1,4



BENSON 801



BENSON 841



BISBEE 712



BISBEE 834.5



BUCKEYE 703



BULLHEAD CITY 843



CAMERON 841



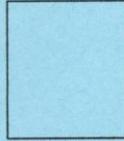
CAMP VERDE 841



CASA GRANDE 734



CASA GRANDE 807



CASA GRANDE L-1 HS



CASHION 841



CASHION L-1 HS



CAVE CREEK 841



CHANDLER 729



CHANDLER 821



CHANDLER 841

Free Downloaded Album Page

For free album pages like this one and others, go to precancels.com and select "Free precancel albums, files, and software for download."

Precancel Stamp Varieties A Synoptic Collection

Pen Precancel



Star precancel
Glen Allen, NY



Single Line Name



Two Line Name



Three Line Name



Four line name



Normal and
Inverted Pairs



Vertical Up



Vertical Down





Double Line



Line



Triple Line



Compound Lines



Bar Precancel



Precancelled Using Slashes



Diagonal



Silent precancel
Also called lines and bars



No line
Dated



Double strike
precancel



Fancy Local
Precancels



Serifs



No Serifs



Perfin Precancel



**Precancels with birth certificates
Early dated precancels**



**Pairs of
"Wides and Narrows"**



**Dated Precancels
Company Initials and Year
Started in 1938**



**Precancel and date
applied simultaneously
(Integral Precancels)**



**Box
Cancel**



Letter Size Variations



Fugitive Ink (water based)



FUGITIVE INKS USED ON HPS
PRECANCELS

Members of the HPS have reported that fugitive inks were used on the Honolulu, Hawaii precancels that were used on the August mailings of the Newsletter. Do not attempt to soak off the stamps from the envelopes if you want to keep the precancelled stamps. This situation was reported to the postmaster and he said that steps will be taken to prevent their washing off.

**Types of stamps on which
precancels are found**

Coil Precancels



Schermack Coils



Mailometer Coils



City Coil Types



Definitive



Commemorative



Special Delivery



Parcel Post



Special Handling



Playing Card



Revenue



Revenue Box
Precancel



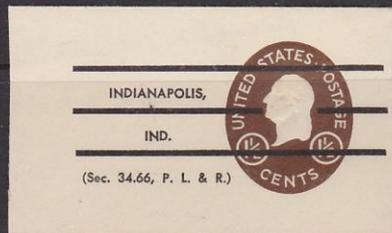
Postage Due



Airmails



**Precancel
Stationary**



**Small Sample of
Dated Precancels**

**LPC Lion Petroleum Corp.
Lemont, IL**



**MW Montgomery Ward
Various**



**OCC O'Ceder Corp
Chicago, IL**



**SRC Sears Roebuck Co.
Various**



**VMG Victor Mfg & Gasket Co
Chicago, IL**



**Album for 635 different
Spread sheet with 11921 entries**

Inverted
Precancels





**Example of
Mixed Use**

Set of Chicago
Dated precancels



Chicago Set



San Francisco Set



Christmas Set



Precancels from the town where you grew up

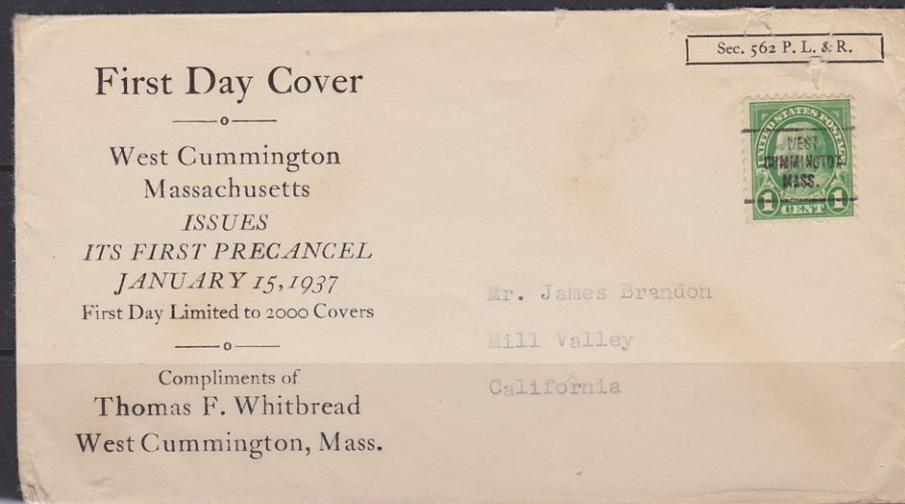


Album Page From a California Precancel Album



First-Day Covers

First Day Covers



Post Office Department
FIRST ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL
DIVISION OF DEAD LETTERS
AND DEAD PARCEL POST

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
BOSTON, MASS.
DEAD LETTER BRANCH

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE TO AVOID
PAYMENT OF POSTAGE, \$300



Jessie B. Platt
610 Webster Ave.,
Scranton, Pa.



COLLECT THREE CENTS
ON DELIVERY

A letter without the sender's
card address on the envelope is
charged with this fee for return

**Precancel Postage Due
On Cover**



SEC. 562, P. L. & R.



Mr. Thomas Carroll
3601 Telegraph Ave.
Oakland, Calif.

**Precancel Use On
Cachet Cover**

Cancelled Precancelled Cover

TH. I. THOMSEN
1311 CALIFORNIA STATE LIFE BUILDING
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA



Mr. C. A. Ricks

709 Ferry St.

Mountain
Calif.

In Conclusion

Precancel stamp collecting is an inexpensive endeavor with lots of room for innovation.

References

- Ralph Heymsfeld. *History of Precancels on the Internet*.
- Gunesch Precancel House, Inc. *Guide to Precancel Collecting and Price List*; 30 Washington St, Chicago 2 Ill. 1950.
- Precancel Stamp Society. *Precancels.com*.