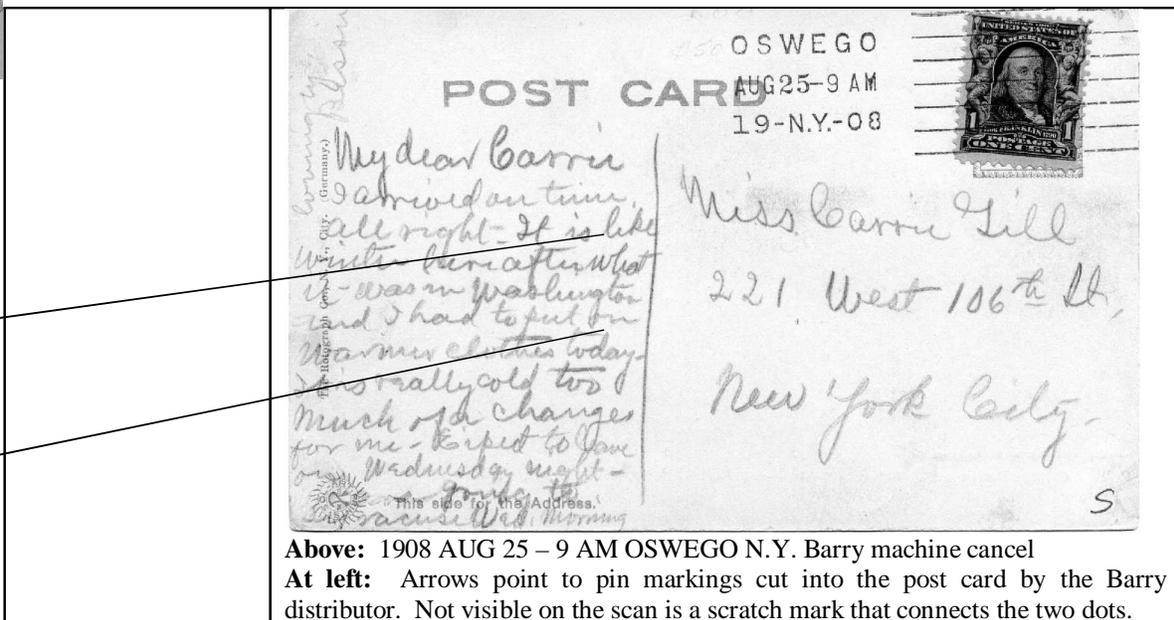


The Facer-Canceller Revolution

From 1857 to 1957, the first century of machine cancels, it still took a human body to sort the mail prior to cancelling. Someone had to stack the mail in order to feed the envelopes and cards into the machine, with the stamps all facing the correct direction, so that the machine could cancel that particular corner with the cancellation and postmark.

It is interesting to note that once the mail was manually faced, other machines were conceived that could sort the mail. Many of these earlier distributor machines were tried prior to 1957. Unfortunately, few left marks for study by marco-philatelists. Some noteworthy pre-1957 distributors that did leave postal markings are as follows:

Barry: While working on a cancelling machine, William Barry had an epiphany that once the mail had been faced and cancelled, it would be an ideal time to sort them. He sketched some ideas in 1891 and 1892. Belts, gates, and receptacles were controlled by keys and levers on an operator's box. It has been suggested that this distributor machine was used at various cities, but the only verified use was at Oswego, New York, from June 20 to September 2, 1908.



Above: 1908 AUG 25 – 9 AM OSWEGO N.Y. Barry machine cancel
At left: Arrows point to pin markings cut into the post card by the Barry distributor. Not visible on the scan is a scratch mark that connects the two dots.

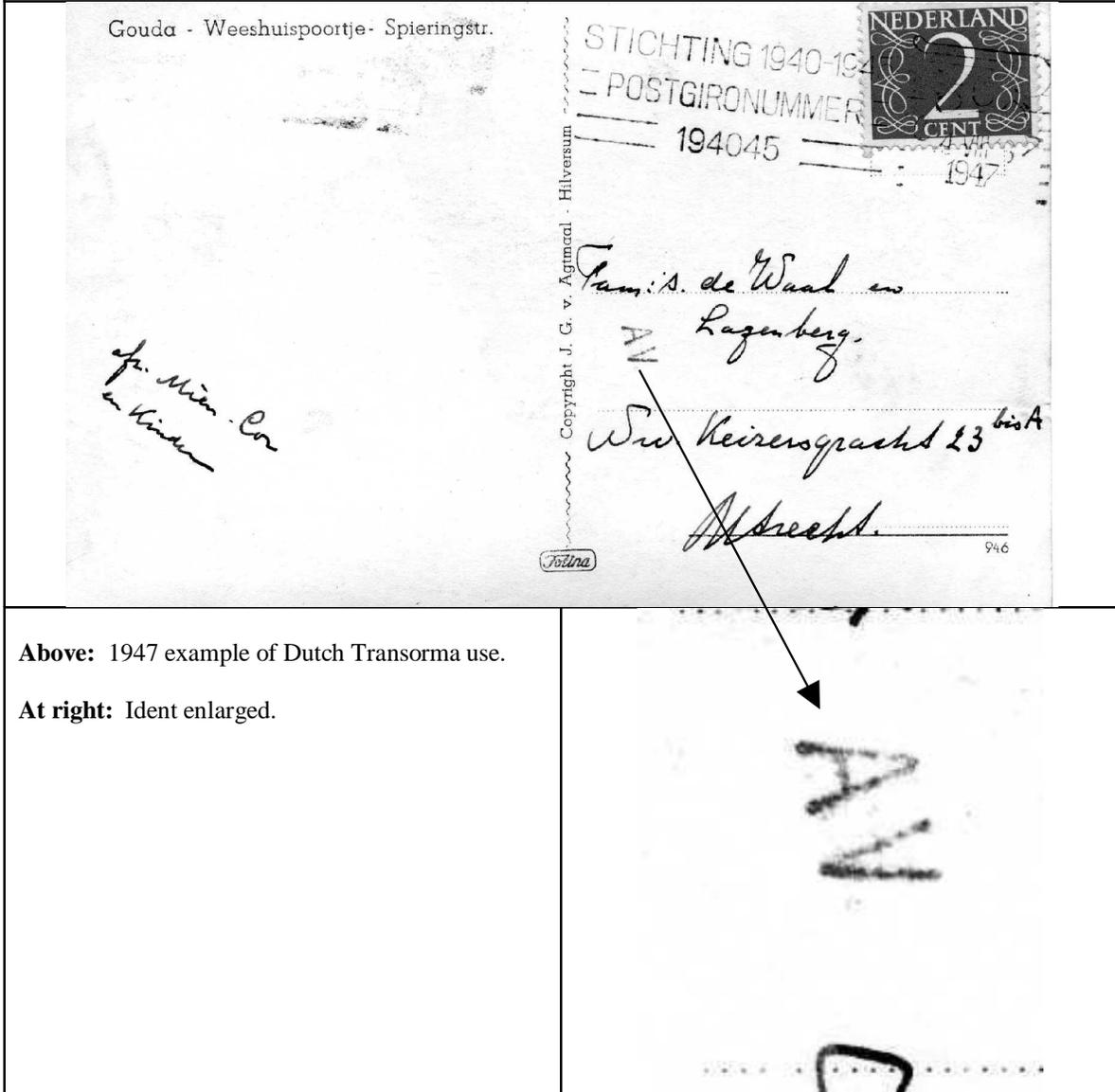
Transorma: The Dutch created and marketed a mail processing machine in the early 1930's. The very first was operational in Holland in the early 1930's, and a second was tested successfully in Brighton, England in 1935. The Brighton machine was used for over thirty years! The Brighton machine could sort 24,000 pieces of mail using human operators into 250 compartments for later mail dispatch. A Canadian trial lasted from 1955 until 1963. Other recorded uses include Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Philippines, Sweden, and eventually the United States in 1957.¹³

“Letters sorted by the Transorma method [at Silver Spring, Maryland] show on the face of the letter a twin, alpha character similar to those found on Canadian mail processed by the Peterborough [Canada] machine. The Dutch and British machines show a wide variety of single characters.

¹³ Reg Morris and Sally Tunnicliff, The Silver Spring Transorma Letter Sorting Machine, Machine Cancel Forum #118 (February 1984), at page 1764..

“Each operator had his own particular identifier, thus 5 combinations or idents were in use simultaneously by the 5 operators on duty. All the operators had to work at the rate of 30-50 letters/minute and all operators had to memorize the 220 or so locations actually used!!!! Some feat.”¹⁴

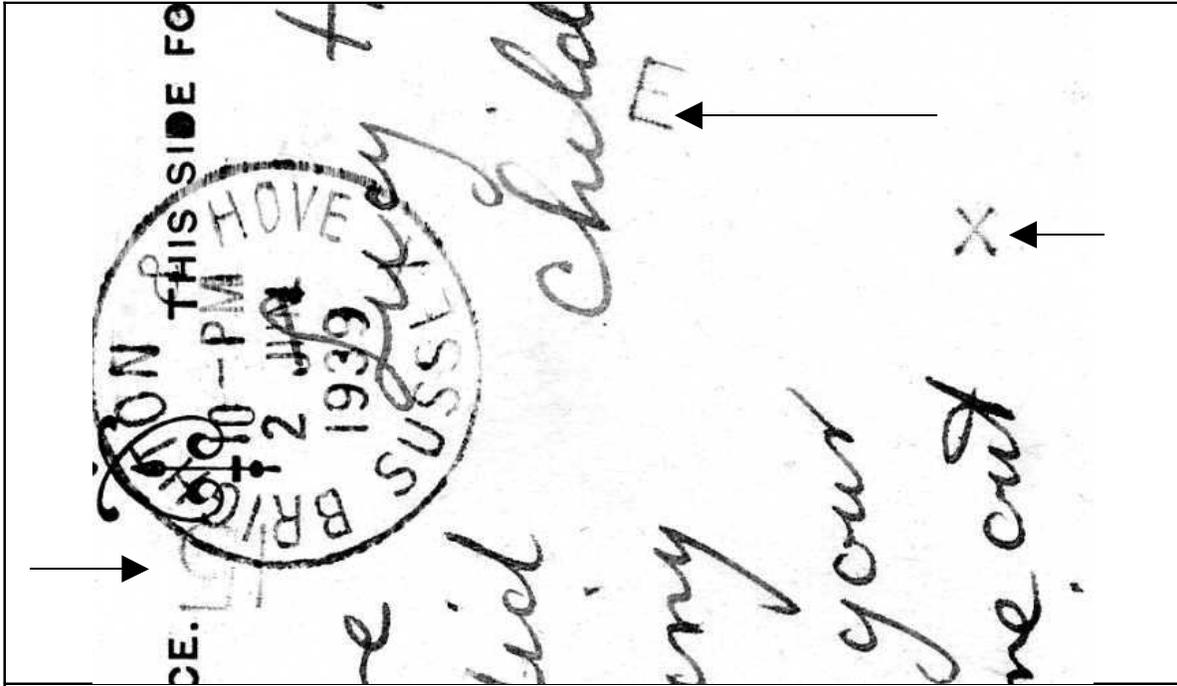
Examples of Transorma sorted mail and the idents follow:



Above: 1947 example of Dutch Transorma use.

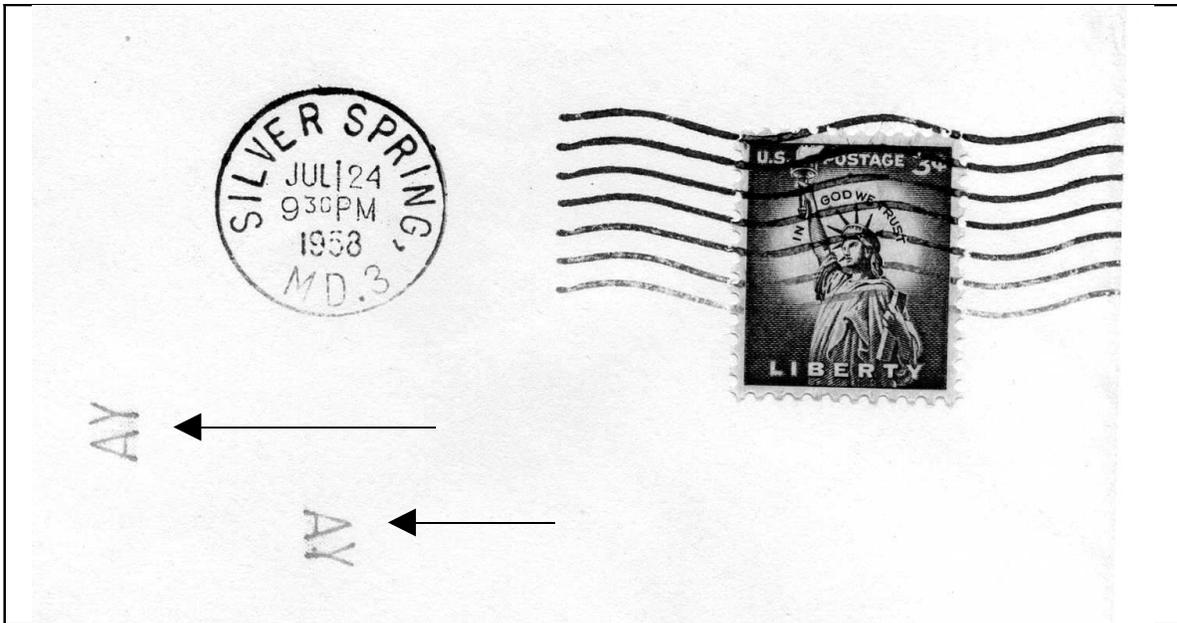
At right: Ident enlarged.

¹⁴ Id at page 1766.



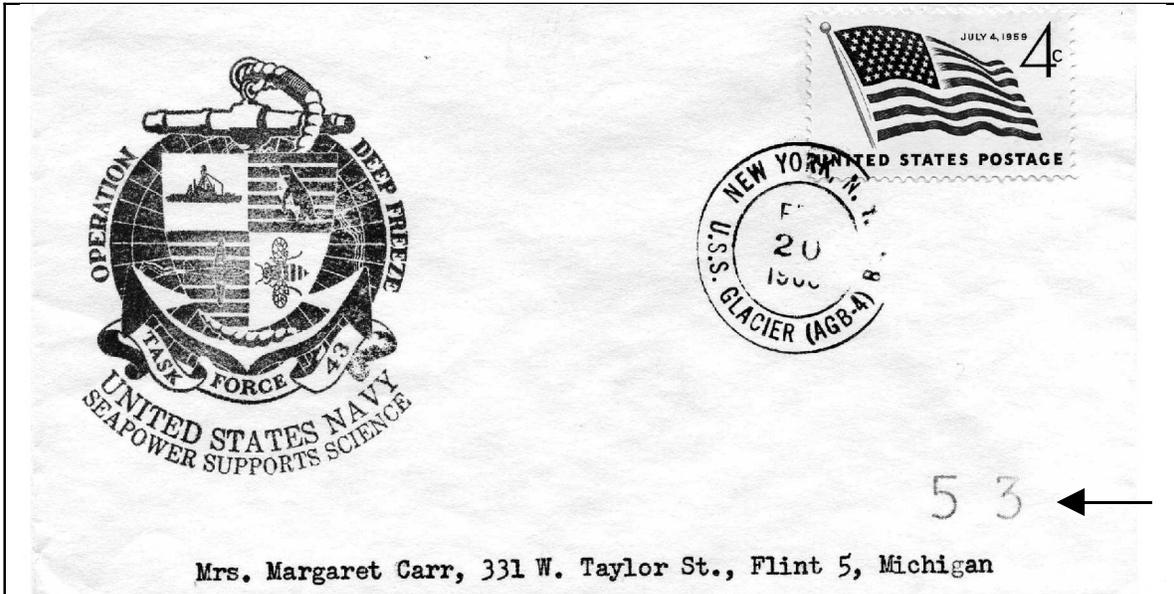
Above: Enlargement of center portion of Brighton machine markings showing the rich variety of Transorma markings. Arrows mark an upside down 15, as well as an E and an X.

The Transorma was used at Brighton, Sussex, England for over thirty years. Mostly vacation mail from the beach area was processed at this facility.



Above: An International (electric) machine cancelled this mail at SILVER SPRING MD 3 on July 24, 1958. Also at Silver Spring, the mail was sorted by the newly installed Transorma. The idents are marked with arrows.

Transorma markings from Silver Spring, Maryland, are not the only idents that can be found during this period. They can be found going to and from various cities in the United States, and not necessarily at the place appearing on the postmark.



Above: An Antarctic cover posted on board U.S.S. Glacier (hand cancel), a New York branch, and sent to Flint, Michigan. Note the idents in the lower right corner. *Where were they applied? Was this by a mail sorter?* Flint had a Burroughs Letter Sorter. On the east coast, Pitney-Bowes was experimenting with a “Boxer” sorter. Terence Hines in the August 14, 1997, issue of *Linn’s* pictured a Westport, Connecticut, card showing a “3” ident, very similar to the above “3”. The “Boxer” was tested in Washington in 1960, and returned to Pitney-Bowes that same year. Could it have been tested in Flint? Or perhaps New York? Or where this cover was taken from the ship? The “5” and the “3” are likely from two passes through the sorting machine.

As a reminder, these idents indicate sorting, not cancelling. They are proof of mail processing, either at the place of posting, in transit, or at the destination.

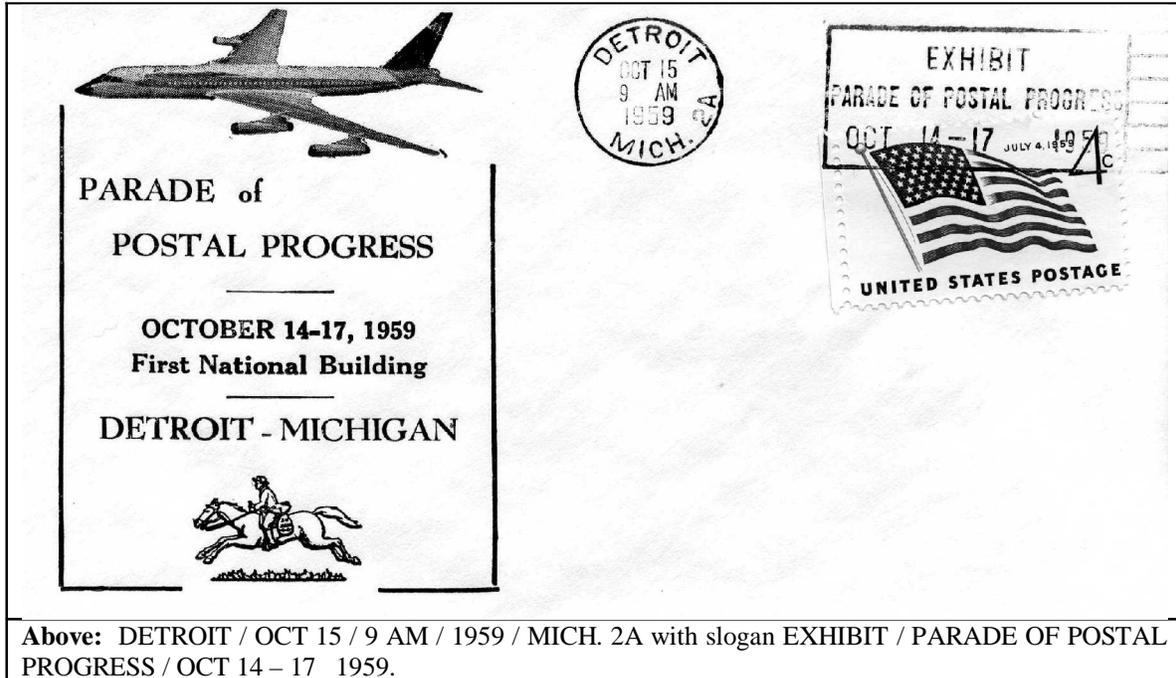
The fast processing of mail . . . facing, cancelling, sorting, dispatching . . . was a significant advancement for the United States Post Office. Machine cancellers had been developing since 1857. Mail sorters were developing since Barry in the 1890’s. A mail facer was needed.

Postmaster Summeffield in 1953 made the decision to improve all facets of mail processing, including the development and use of facer-cancellers. The post office solicited bids for this work, and prototypes tested.¹⁵

¹⁵ Bart Billings, Robert Payne, and Reg Morris, *A Primer – U.S. Machine Postal Markings* (privately printed 2005) at page 145. The prototype period is interesting, and well documented. Interested readers are invited to review the material in *A Primer*, Id at pages 145-152, as well as Section 3 of the book on the development of the Mark II Facer/Canceller: Robert Payne & Bart Billings, *A History of Pitney-Bowes with Special Attention to Development of the Mark II Facer/Canceller* (Machine Cancel Society 1999) at

By October 1957, when Sputnik was launched, the U.S. Post Office was making decisions to install these devices in into a single, operational facility.

The public was introduced to these new facer-canceller machines and mail distribution machines as the October 1959 Detroit Parade of Postal Progress.



Above: DETROIT / OCT 15 / 9 AM / 1959 / MICH. 2A with slogan EXHIBIT / PARADE OF POSTAL PROGRESS / OCT 14 – 17 1959.

The Facer-Cancellers were able to identify the location of the postage stamp, and would send the mail to a properly positioned cancelling device to cancel the stamp.

These early regularly installed Facer-Cancellers had a traditional Universal postmark dial. The number and letter “2A” identified the cancelling head that applied the cancel.

Exhaustive studies on the early uses of these Facer-Cancellers at particular cities can be found at:

- Edward T. Harvey, Pitney-Bowes Mark II Facer-Canceller Use in Philadelphia, Machine Cancel Forum Special Issue (September 1991) at pages 12-29.
- Edward T. Harvey, The Providence RI Turnkey Post Office, Machine Cancel Forum (April 1991), at pages 682-700.

Over time, the dials for the Facer-Cancellers will change in design and size. But is the early similarity in design between the early Pitney-Bowes Universal dials, Model G, and the Facer-Canceller coincidence? Are the dials interchangeable? This has been a difficult question, and not answered until 1991 when a Quincy, Illinois Facer-Canceller was found being used with a Canadian Facer-Canceller slogan and a Universal Model G postmark dial. Could a Universal Model G machine postmark dial be used in a Pitney-Bowes Mark II Facer-Canceller? The surprising answer was, “Yes.”¹⁶

pages 69-107.

¹⁶ Bart Billings, Editor’s Corner: Quincy, Illinois – The Rest of the Story, Machine Cancel Forum (April 1991), at pages 680-681, 701-703.

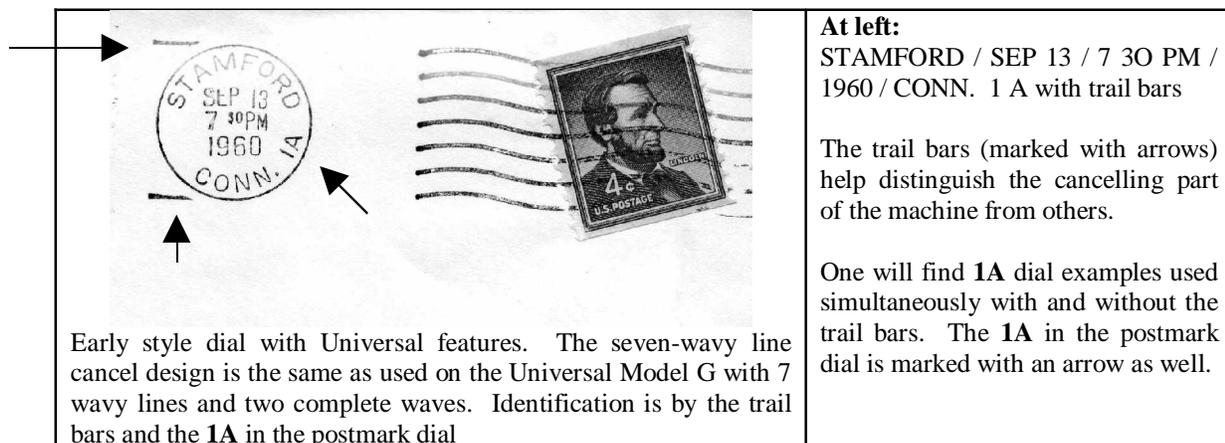
The need for interchangeable cancelling dies and postmarks was initiated by the USPS, but the exact date of the requirement to manufacturers and suppliers remains illusive.¹⁷

As postal historians, mechano-marco-philatelists study more than the postmark. They study the machine. As noted by Bob McCurdy, several early 19th Century machines are not identified as to manufacturer because no one bothered to go look to see what was being used.¹⁸ The call to 21st Century marco-philatelists is to go look when possible, and to seek out records when available. As the dies can be interchanged, the date and place of use becomes just as relevant as to what the cancel looks like.

This becomes very relevant to astrophilatelists because of the questions being raised,

- Is the machine cancel actually applied at the location in the postmark, or somewhere else?
- Is someone removing the postmark dial from a small post office or ship, and applying the cancel with the removed postmark dial in a high speed machine somewhere else?

Various Facer-Canceller postmarks dials and cancels are pictured below. Postal records have verified these uses:¹⁹



¹⁷ Reg Morris, Robert J Payne, and Timothy B. Holmes in THE COLUMBIA STORY (Machine Cancel Society 2000) Volume 5 at page 98.

¹⁸ Supra note 16 at pages 701-102.

¹⁹ The Machine Cancel Society has published several resources to help identify machines from records. The first deals with the development of the Facer/Canceller: Robert Payne & Bart Billings, A History of Pitney-Bowes with Special Attention to Development of the Mark II Facer/Canceller (Machine Cancel Society 1999) at pages 69-107. The second includes an inventory of machines in the year 2000: Reg Morris, A Century of Cancelling Machine Usage by the US Post Office 1900-2000 (Machine Cancel Society 2002).

		<p>At left: PORTLAND, OREG 1A / 11 00 AM / 3 MAY / 1961</p> <p>A typical early Facer-Canceller with the year at the bottom of the dial and a number-letter, in this case 1A, to distinguish the cancelling part of the machine from other cancelling parts. Note the trail bars.</p>
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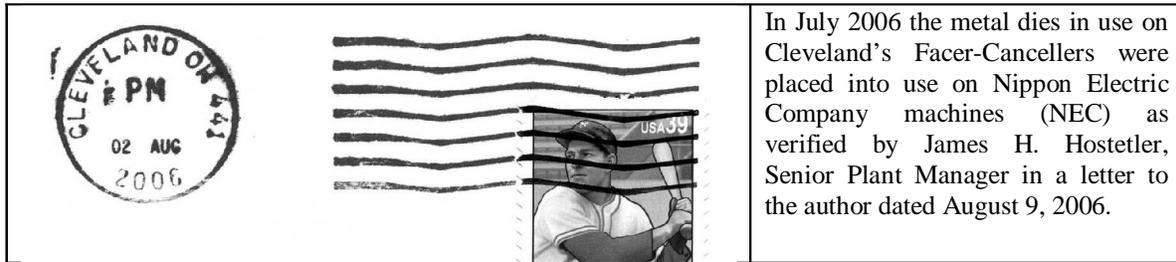
 <p>Facer-Canceller Dial PHILADELPHIA, PA / 17 APR / 1962 with no trail bars and no number or letter in dial (probably used for replacement/repair purposes).</p>	 <p>Facer-Canceller Dial LOS ANGELES, CALIF 3A / PM / 21 FEB / 1967. There are no trail bars to the left of the postmark dial.</p>	 <p>Facer-Canceller Dial CLEVELAND / OH 441 / PM / 01 DEC / 1998</p> <p>At some offices, the number-letter designation is completely absent, such as Cleveland.</p>
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The Pitney-Bowes postmark dials for the post-1960 Facer-Cancellers have a year at the bottom of the dial like the International electrics, but the Pitney-Bowes postmark dials are larger (23+ mm v 22 mm in diameter). Also, the post-1960 Facer-Cancellers post the date as day-month whereas the Internationals post the date a month-day. From cancellation hubs purchased by the writer, the trail bars are engraved on the hub.

With knowledge of interchangeability, we can observe early examples of mixtures of Universal machine and Facer-Canceller features in the same cancel dies, engraved either by accident or design:

	<p>A Universal postmark dial and slogan, but there are trail bars to the lower left of the postmark dial.</p> <p>What caused this? Was a trail bar engraved on the hub?</p>
	<p>A Universal postmark dial, and a 7-wavy line cancel design that can be either used on a Universal OR Facer-canceller. Again, there are trail bars.</p> <p>Why trail bars? Is this a Facer-Canceller used with the old KENT, OH postmark dial? Or is this an engraving error on the Universal hub? Or is this a facer-canceller hub used in a Model G Universal machine?</p>

With the replacement of metal dies on Advanced Facer Canceller Systems with inkjet cancels, the old metal dies are being used on smaller machines. Consider:

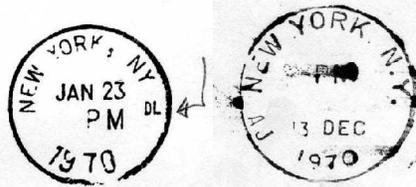


In July 2006 the metal dies in use on Cleveland's Facer-Cancellers were placed into use on Nippon Electric Company machines (NEC) as verified by James H. Hostetler, Senior Plant Manager in a letter to the author dated August 9, 2006.

With the cancelling parts being interchangeable, parts could not only be used by different manufacturers, but also parts could be made by companies that do not produce the machines. Take a very close look at the wavy-lines on the KENT, OH example on page 4061 and the CLEVELAND OH 441 example directly below it. The Cleveland example has very sharp or stiff lines. The KENT, OH example has a gentle slope to it. Different companies engraved these wavy lines.

Some final machines worth noting:

- (1) **Nippon Electric Company (NEC)** produces a table size machine, that requires mail to be faced before being fed into it. It can use anyone's cancelling hubs and postmark dials. To the writer's knowledge, NEC does not provide either.
- (2) **The National Cash Register (NCR)** machine used a dial with double letters in the dial, and could face and cancel mail. An example is featured below:



The NCR machines ceased in the 1970's. The NCR dial on the left has DL in the postmark dial, and uses a style remarkably similar to the International's. The NCR dial on the right has AJ in the dial, and uses a style remarkably similar to the Pitney-Bowes Facer-Canceller. Is it possible that NCR ordered dials from those companies?²⁰

- (3) **Chamberlain MRC** marketed a small cancelling device in the 1980's and 1990's. Most of its machines could be identified by the Facer-Canceller dial used at a very small city or town. The 1993 example below is used at WILLOUGHBY, OH 44094. By coincidence or plan, most of the Chamberlains documented from records or letters to postmasters use five digit zip codes in their dials. Large population cities also display five digit zip codes in their postmarks, so the discovery of a five-digit zip code dial should instigate a population check and record check.



²⁰ Bob Payne relates purple ink tests in 1973, using both NCR and Pitney-Bowes machines. They dials were interchanged between them. Bart Billings, Robert Payne, and Reg Morris, A Primer – U.S. Machine Postal Markings (privately printed 2005) at page 131.

It should be noted that besides being able to use the Facer-Canceller parts for cancelling, at least one example has been found that uses Universal parts.²¹

If this article has excited you to study further the advances in machine cancels over the past fifty years, perhaps it also caused you to seek out the references in the footnotes, and to searchpost office records for installation/use information. If so, then it has accomplished its purpose. No article or handbook can cover all of the machine cancel information that is relevant and important on identifying machines. You are encouraged to continue your study of machine cancels in the 'Space Age.'

²¹ Dr James E Williamson & Bart Billings, Chamberlain Advanced Small Canceller, Machine Cancel Forum (October 1992), at page 965. This is the first full article on the subject, from pages 951-965, and includes an installation list.