The Massachusetts Spy

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JOIN OR DIE

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Brief Notes on the Boston Negatives *by Bob Grosch*

The fancy cancels known as the Boston Negatives first appeared in Boston in 1875. These early "small" negatives, measuring 15-20 mm are found in both circles and squares using the letters A-H. The killers appear hand made and it is thought they were intended to make it possible to trace a cancelled cover back to a specific postal clerk. (fig. 1)

In 1878 there appeared a few intermediate size killers measuring approximately 22mm square or round. These appeared with both numbers and letters, but are not frequently found. Soon the design was changed to a slightly larger size of approximately 26 mm. (fig. 2)



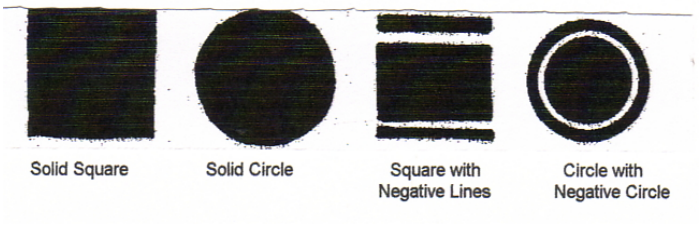
(Fig. 1) - Early small negative cancels.



(Fig. 2) - Slightly Larger @26mm

The last known use of a small Boston negative was on May 4, 1878. The earliest reported large negative cancel was used on May 7 of the same year.
It appears that the small cancels were taken out of use when the larger ones were introduced between May 5-7, 1878.

(Continued on page 2)



(Fig. 3) - Types of Cancels

The large negative killers come in four basic types: solid square, solid circle, square with negative lines and circle with negative circle.
Each type is found with both letters and numbers, making for eight total types. (fig.3)

Probably the early negative killers were made of wood. The later killers were made of rubber. Evidence of this is found from time to time in cancels that have characteristics that could not appear in killers made of wood. An example of this is the wavy lines in fig. 4, most probably from a rubber cancel device that for some reason deteriorated.



(Fig. 4)

When the Boston post office needed more unique killers than it had on hand the standard killers were

(Continued on page 3)

Massachusetts Postal Research Society Annual Meeting
Annual meeting – Boxboro, May 1, 2011

Meeting called to order 11:05AM

Attendees: Shawn Pease, Bob Trachimowicz, Dennis Bollea, Hugh Daugherty, Douglas Clark, and Nancy Clark in attendance.

President and Editor Doug Clark apologized for minimal publications of *Mass Spy* and asked for articles. An article on a Salem "ship" cover has been promised by Mark Schwartz, but it is all that is in the hopper at present.

Nancy announced that the Northeastern State Postal History Competition is being hosted by the Empire State Postal History Society at ROPEX this year. Massachusetts has only one exhibit entered. Douglas Clark will head the jury and Nancy Clark will be a member of the jury. Hopefully another time the MPRS will have a stronger involvement. (In 2009 the MPRS won the Northeastern State Postal History Competition.)

It was noted that Mark Schwartz won the Grand at Philatelic Show for the second time in a row, with two different Massachusetts postal history exhibits. Congratulations to Mark!
Dennis Bollea reported the results thus far on the survey of towns with a scarcity rating of 5 or greater. He reported making five trips to the Kelleher Auction firm, one with the Clarks and Hugh Daugherty. As a result of surveying Arthur Beane's extensive holdings, over 1700 new covers were added to the survey. Joel Coveney was supplied with guidance on the shifts in ratings as a quid pro quo for access to the Beane material.
Dennis has compiled a packet of suggested shifts in ratings which could be used to reflect in a pricing guide or as a "weighting" system. This could be added as a supplement to Hugh's supply of the Merolla and Crowther books. The post office closing information needs to be checked with current information sources, especially for the more commonly

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 2)

sometimes altered so that they were unique, even if two postal clerks were using the same number or letter (see fig. 5).

In the series of letters within a square with negative lines it is quite unusual to find a Boston cancel with the letters E, W, N, or S, as these killers were most often reserved for use on Boston area R.P.O.s. (Fig. 6)

Some of Boston's sub stations also used these special negative cancels. These stations included Chelsea Station, Somerville Station. and possibly others.



(Fig. 5) - Standard killers, made Unique



(Fig. 6) - R.P.O. Cancels

In 1883 the era of the Boston negative cancels came to an end and the ellipse cancel became the most frequently encountered cancel.
Although Boston city post offices ceased using the negative cancels in 1883, some of the R.P.O.s continued to use their negative N, S, E. W. cancels for up to 10 years thereafter.

**The author's single frame exhibit telling the story of the Boston Negatives will be on display at the APS Stamp Show in Columbus, Ohio, August 11-14.*

Want Ads:

Wanted: Taunton postmaster free franks and Taunton cancelled covers between 01 July 1803 and 01 January 1804.
Maryan Novak, 1 Alcott Circle, Taunton, MA 02780

Wanted: Commercial (non-philatelic) covers with H.P.O. postmarks.
Nancy B. Clark, Box 427, Marston Mills, MA 02648

Want Ads Policy: *Wanted advertisements are available to members for $1 per 3 line post in each issue of the Spy. Authors get one free ad per article published. Non-members please email for information!*

available offices. A discussion ensued over whether this should be published as a separate book or including the updated information with the currently available stock. Hugh estimated he has about 50 of the Society's books remaining. There was a round of applause in appreciation of Dennis' work.

Shawn Pease offered to help with MPRS publications. His offer was gratefully received and he was given responsibility for the Mass Spy. It was determined that ideally the *Spy* should be a quarterly journal. Hugh will continue to maintain the membership list and will provide Shawn with a copy of the membership. Nancy will get Shawn a copy of the membership application as it was used for the Northeastern State Competition table at NOJEX in 2010. Doug will send the information request form for the last county to be surveyed for enclosure in the *Spy*. New editor's email, where articles will be appreciatively received, is riphilatelic@comcast.net

Officers were reconfirmed by the membership: Douglas Clark, Chair, Hugh Daugherty as Treasurer, Nancy Clark as Secretary. It was decided to have a program as well as a business meeting at the next meeting of the MPRS at Boxboro in 2012.

Meeting adjourned 11:55

Massachusetts Town Rarity Survey Update:

The Society continues it's efforts to update the rarity ratings for posts offices ranking 5 or higher in "The Post Offices of Massachusetts" by Crowther and Merolla. This is the seventh issue to include installments of the survey for members to complete. The survey is being done by county. Previously completed surveys were; Norfolk, Barnstable, Franklin, Hampshire, Dukes, Essex, Nantucket, Suffolk, Hampden, Middlesex, Berkshire, Worcester, and Bristol.

Included with this mailing is the rarity survey for Plymouth County. Please respond by sending this back to:

Dennis Bollea,
PO Box 450, Fairhaven,
MA 02719-0450
(or via email at: popebeach@comcast.net)

Survey forms for other counties are available for use on the web site (see bottom of page).

About the Massachusetts Postal Research Society

Dedicated to the study of Massachusetts postal history from colonial times to modern mail delivery techniques. The Society was founded in 1975 as the Massachusetts Postal Research League.

The first issue of *The Massachusetts Spy* came out in May of that year as the *Massachusetts Postal Research League Bulletin*. The current name is from the famous colonial newspaper. It is published 4 times per year.

Please join our ranks. Dues are a modest $8 per year (or every four issues of the *Spy*).

Application for Membership: $8 Per Year

Name: _____
Address: _____
Town, State: _____
Zip Code: _____

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