SPECIAL FEATURE

JOHN FOX: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

This special feature combines two articles dealing with long-time stamp dealer (and cover faker) John Fox, who died in June 1988, just 20 years ago. The first part of this package is a brief biography of Fox, written by the late Varro Tyler. The second part is an exploration of the Fox fake markings that are now in the possession of the Philatelic Foundation, including illustrations of the markings and an exploration of some related Fox covers in the SCRAP archive of the United States Philatelic Classics Society.

The author of our Fox biography, Varro Tyler, is one of few individuals to have achieved world recognition in two separate fields. In Tyler's case, the fields were pharmacognosy and philatelic forgery. Pharmacognosy is the study of drugs that come from plants. Tyler was professor emeritus in this field at Purdue University; he wrote hundreds of books and papers on herbal medicine and nutritional supplements.

He was almost as prolific on the subject of fake stamps and the men who created them. His crowning achievement in this category was Philatelic Forgers: Their Lives and Works*, first published by Robson Lowe in London in 1976. Well-documented and a model of scholarly concision, this book consists of brief biographies of most of the world's stamp fakers—at least, those whose names and works were known.*

Tyler's biography of John Fox, presented below, was originally written for the Robson Lowe book. The fact-based, non-judgmental approach was necessary because Fox was still alive at the time. Despite Tyler's circumspection, the Fox biography was deemed too hot to handle. It did not appear in the London original, which was subsequently reprinted by Linn's Stamp News*. Tyler updated the Fox material for publication in a series of sketches published in* Linn's *in 2000 and 2001. The biography below was awaiting publication when Tyler died, in 2001, at age 74. This is its first appearance in print.*

BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN A. FOX

VARRO TYLER

Born on August 17, 1911, in New Jersey, John A. Fox became interested in stamp dealing at age 12 and went on to become one of New York's most colorful and most successful dealers during the 1950s and early 1960s. Although he denied, in a 1986 interview,[1] ever having personally manufactured or produced fraudulent covers, a considerable number of such items were certainly included in his stock.

This fact first came to public attention as a result of a sheriff's sale of Fox's stock held on behalf of his creditors on January 3, 1974. A legendary ladies' man, Fox had been named as a correspondent in a divorce proceeding, and another suit had been brought against him by the Internal Revenue Service. The divorce suit, which also involved the purchase of a stamp collection, resulted in a judgment against Fox of $1,600,000. This forced him into receivership and necessitated the sale.

[1] Bierman, S.M., *Philatelic Literature Review* 37: pp. 181-192 (1988).

Creighton C. Hart, a specialist in stamps of the United States 1847 issue, attended that sale, and recorded specific details of nine of the very attractive 1847 covers offered in the sale.[2] The stamps on all of them had four margins, and the postmarks and cancellations were clearly struck. All of the covers were clean, and none showed evidence of the year of use. One of the covers bearing an unusual black herringbone cancellation was purchased by Hart ("as a souvenir") and submitted to the Philatelic Foundation. It was returned with the opinion that "the stamp did not originate on this cover and all the postal markings are counterfeit." This cover is shown here as Figure 1.

Figure 1. Binghampton herringbone grid tying a 5¢ 1847 stamp. The stamp is genuine, but the markings and the address are John Fox fakes.

At the beginning of the sale, the auctioneer warned that no warranty of genuineness was offered, and accompanying descriptions of the covers should be ignored. Each of the covers was originally valued in the $1,500-$2,000 range, but, in spite of good attendance by both collectors and dealers, the covers sold at prices ranging from $45 to $160.

Many other apparently choice U.S. covers were offered in the sale. They all carried desirable postmarks, cancellations, stamps, or a combination of these. In spite of their excellent appearance, Pony Express covers sold for $10 to $25 and scarce Civil War Magnus patriotic covers for $5 to $15. A truly scarce 30¢ 1869 cover to France sold for $100. It was obvious that the dealers and collectors present did not value highly these works of art. Hart concluded his article with the warning that collectors purchasing any of the many lots of 19th century U.S. or Confederate covers with apparently desirable postal markings should submit them to a suitable authority for expertization.

Fox had already been censured in 1966 by the American Stamp Dealers Association. Now he was dropped from membership in that group, of which he had been president in 1952-53. He had also been expelled from membership in the American Philatelic Society on November 28, 1966. An appeal in his case was denied by the full board of the Society at a meeting in New Orleans on March 31, 1967. However, as is the custom, no details were specified. The stated grounds for the expulsion were simply "unethical conduct and conduct unbecoming a member."[3] In spite of this significant damage to his reputation, Fox continued to hold auctions of philatelic material until December, 1987. He died at his home in Floral Park, New York, on June 16, 1988.■

[2] Hart, C.C., *Chronicle* 82, pp. 69-75 (1974).
[3] DeVoss, J.T., *The American Philatelist*, Vol. 80, pg. 614 (1967).

JOHN FOX MARKING DEVICES AND FAKE COVERS

MICHAEL LAURENCE

Introduction: John Fox Postal Markers

The cover in Figure 2 was featured in the Cover Corner section of *Chronicle* 159. This was back in 1993. In his accompanying write-up, editor Scott Gallagher asked: "What is noteworthy about this cover?" He published his answer in *Chronicle* 160, expressing disappointment that of many responses, only two got it right. Most writers said the cover was a

Figure 2. Fox fake of a scarce and lovely Confederate cover. The stamps and the address are genuine, but the Alexandria, Louisiana, postmarks are fake.

splendid and rare example of a trans-Mississippi use from 1863. The two who got it right, Jack Molesworth and Charles Kilbourne, both legendary Confederate gurus, said the cover was a John Fox fake.

Gallagher continued with a tantalizing revelation: "Your Editor had the advantage of having the cover in hand, and being at the Philatelic Foundation in 1992 with John R. Hill, Jr., where we examined a box of ostensible postal markings which had been found in the basement of the Floral Park, New York office/home of John A. Fox shortly after his death. An Alexandria, La., marking device dated Sep. 8 was in that box, and it was clearly the origin of the markings on this cover."

"The device was identical in zinc alloy, resembling pot metal, to dozens of other markers in the box. A wide variety of town marks, fancy cancels and ancillary markings was represented. The surmise is that all had been made from photographs of genuine markings. The resulting devices do not have sharp, regular lines. The edges of letters, numbers and lines are slightly lumpy, rather like a muddy path."

About the cover in Figure 2, Gallagher and his expert group concluded that the envelope, address and stamps were all genuine. The cover had traveled out of the mails, with no stamps on it, to be preserved as part of a large family correspondence. A century later, genuine stamps were added to the cover and tied by the fake markings to create a stunning and most persuasive forgery.

The existence of the Fox devices had been talked about for years before Gallagher outed them in the *Chronicle*, but proof images were never published. I had a vague recollection of Gallagher's remarks when I joined the Philatelic Foundation as Executive Direc-

tor in mid 2006. After not too much searching, with help from long-time PF expert staffer David Petruzelli, the Fox box was located. It sat in my office for months; I was too busy to examine its contents.

The provenance of the Fox marking devices is said to be as follows: Carl Mainberger, a New York collector who was a fan of the PF and upon his death proved to be a PF benefactor (the Foundation received half his estate) had a connection to the woman (not Fox's wife) who cleaned up Fox's office/residence after he died. She would feed material to Mainberger as she came across it. Thus these fake markers came to the PF through Mainberger. This may be as much folklore as fact, but it's a plausible explanation. There's no question the markings came from Fox: ample cover evidence proves that.

On January 15, 2008, a few weeks after my retirement, I returned to the PF offices and made proof impressions of all the markings, housed in a small cardboard box in the PF vault marked "Fox fakes." The markings are engravings on zinc slabs about 1/8" thick. The slabs are mounted on hardwood blocks cut to fit. Each block is a square or rectangle about ¾" thick. From the similarity of the wood backing and the cuts themselves, it's clear these markings all emanated from the same source. Indeed, similarities in the grain of the wood backing suggest they might all have been created at the same time.

Using a black ink-pad purchased from a Staples store across Sixth Avenue, I made proof impressions of each marking on three pieces of white card. There were 67 markers in total. I'm not particularly gifted at imprinting postmarks, fake or real, and in many instances I had to create multiple impressions before obtaining an adequate strike. Had I been faking covers, I'd have ruined a lot of material. But I did improve as the job progressed.

Figure 3. Proof impression of the Alexandria marking on the Figure 2 cover, taken from a holding of Fox fake markings in the archive of the Philatelic Foundation.

Figure 3 shows the imprint I made from the Alexandria marking in the PF holding. Just as Gallagher observed, this is obviously the source of the markings on the Figure 2 cover. Proof impressions of all 67 markings are presented in the three marking plates that accompany this article. The markings themselves are discussed further below.

The USPCS SCRAP Program

Gallagher was an important figure in the early days of the United States Philatelic Classics Society (USPCS). In addition to creating the Cover Corner, he was a director for many years, served as president for a while, and rendered many other important services to our Society. One of his enduring legacies is SCRAP, the archive of fake covers maintained by USPCS. SCRAP was Gallagher's brain-child. In the 1960s, when knowledge of Fox's handiwork was first coming to light, Gallagher conceived a plan to remove fake covers from the marketplace while at the same time preserving them for future study. In an early description of the genesis of the SCRAP program (*Chronicle* 105, page 71), Gallagher tells how a disappointed British collector burned 12 "foxy fakes" in his fireplace after learning what they were. SCRAP was set up to sequester such items without destroying them.

SCRAP stands for "Stamp and Cover Repository and Analysis Program." The original name, Cover Repository and Analysis Program, reflected the intensity of collector distaste for Fox's activities. The name was subsequently modified to yield an acronym more

appropriate to a family association such as ours. The legal structure Gallagher established enabled collectors to donate bad covers and deduct their cost as a tax write-off. For more information about the development of SCRAP, see Richard Winter's history of USPCS in *Chronicle* 177, page 29.

The SCRAP archive, which currently includes 273 covers reliably characterized as John Fox fakes, was an important research resource for this article. The great majority of the Fox fakes in the SCRAP archive are viewable on-line in the Members Domain section of the Society website. While protected by a password, the Members Domain is accessible to all USPCS members. Almost all the Fox fake covers in the SCRAP holding, bearing U.S. stamps, have been scanned and posted on the website. Confederate covers, which comprise about 25 percent of the Fox SCRAP archive, haven't yet been scanned for on-line viewing.

In February I spent several days browsing through the Fox fake cover images on the SCRAP website and comparing them against the proof impressions of the Fox fake markings at the PF. I probably missed some matches, but I did find 10 covers showing strikes of the Fox markings presented here. Of the 67 markings in the PF holding, only nine appear on the SCRAP Fox covers that I viewed.

This lack of overlap suggests two observations, neither of them very comforting. First, there must be many more Fox fake covers than have so far been quarantined in the SCRAP repository. Second, there are (or must have been) many more Fox fake marking devices than now repose in the PF vault. Viewed together in this manner, the PF devices and the SCRAP archive outline the tip of a very large iceberg. They also help define the range of Fox's output, and can serve as a useful precaution to help collectors protect themselves from fraud. There's much more work to be done involving the Fox fakes. This article makes no pretense at being definitive; it is just a beginning.

How the Fox Fake Markers Were Made

Comparing the Fox fake markings from the PF holding against the Fox fake covers on the SCRAP website leads to some interesting conclusions, and enables us to make some informed guesses about how Fox created his fakes. It's clear from cursory examination that the Fox marking devices were made by photo-engraving, a photo-mechanical process that goes back to the days of Louis Daguerre. The photoengraving process produces a printing surface in relief. It is well suited to the task of copying monochrome continuous-tone images (such as postal markings) onto metal.

Making a fake handstamp marking device via photo-engraving would first require a clear, unobstructed example of the original marking. Fox's position as a cover dealer and cover auctioneer brought him an abundance of candidates from which to select design originals. Once an appropriate subject was at hand, a negative image could be created from the marking, either via camera or (more likely) directly—using a copy stand, masks, and light-sensitive papers. The negative image is then transferred by photographic exposure onto a soft metal plate that has been coated with light-sensitive material. Exposure creates a hardened image from which the unprotected negative portion can be acid-etched below the printing surface. The result is a relief image in soft metal that duplicates the original postmark and, when properly inked, can be used directly as a handstamper. For efficiency's sake, multiple images were probably ganged in the manufacturing process, then etched simultaneously on a plate perhaps half the size of an ordinary letter sheet. This etched plate would then be glued to a wooden backing. After the bond was secure, the plate could be cut into individual units on a bandsaw.

Up into the 1960s, before phototypesetting transformed the printing business, every newspaper in the land, and most every printshop, had an engraving facility that could easily

do such work. As a youthful newspaper reporter in the 1950s, I witnessed the process many times, though I never saw postal markers being engraved. One veteran philatelist who knew Fox well says that the Fox markings were created by the print shop that produced his auction catalogs. Conveniently, this firm was just down the hall from Fox's office at 110 West 42nd Street in midtown Manhattan.

Stamp writers in Fox's day were reluctant to reveal anything about how Fox made his fake markings, for fear that other fakers would pick up the technique. This may have happened anyway. In reviewing an earlier version of this article, Richard Graham, dean of U.S. postal historians, said he thought there might have been more fakers than Fox using his method. This could account for the apparent ubiquity of "Fox fakes." A lifetime in journalism has taught me that covering up information, rather than revealing it, while almost always well intentioned, is invariably mistaken. Understanding how Fox fakes were made makes it easier for collectors to detect them. And nowadays, zinc-etching facilities are few and far between. The technique is used today only in a few highly specialized applications, most notably the manufacture of Braille nameplates for elevators and other public accommodations.

Fox Fake Covers Created by Markers Now in PF Archive

To explain in more detail how Fox actually created his fakes, we will now illustrate and discuss a few Fox fakes from the SCRAP archive covers that use the Fox postal markers now sequestered at the PF. Figure 4 shows a most appealing cover. This is item 9610711

Figure 4 (above): "PLACERVILLE, CAL 9 JAN" tying a 10¢ green 1857 stamp. This cover is item 9610711 in the USPCS SCRAP archive, where it is designated a John Fox fake. The envelope and the stamp are genuine, but the marking and the address are forgeries. Figure 5 (left): Proof impression of the "PLACERVILLE, CAL 9 JAN" marking on the Figure 4 cover, taken from the holding of Fox fake postmarking devices currently in the archive of the Philatelic Foundation.

in the SCRAP archive, where it is specifically designated a John Fox fake. An illustrated Noisy Carrier envelope from San Francisco, with a charming letter-mail theme no less, the cover bears a fat 10¢ 1857 green Washington stamp, apparently Type V. The perforation setting is so wide at left that it fully captures the adjacent Toppan, Carpenter imprint. Off the cover, this would be a very desirable stamp. It is well tied by a full strike of a 32-millimeter single-circle "PLACERVILLE, CAL" postmark dated "9 JAN".

Figure 5 shows a proof impression from one of the Fox devices in the PF holding. Note that it is the same marking with the same date, "9 JAN". Close inspection confirms beyond question that the marking on the Figure 4 cover was created from the device that made the proof impression in Figure 5. Both strikes show two dots, like a tiny umlaut, hovering over the stem-cap of the last "L" in "PLACERVILLE." A black spot beneath the "PL" shows both in the Figure 5 proof and on the stamp on the Figure 4 cover (on the bridge of George Washington's nose). Other shared flaws are also evident. The photographic process that created the fake marker picked up ink spots and other imperfections and duplicated them in ways that would never occur in real life. Note also the addressee and the handwriting. We'll have more to say about both.

Figure 6 shows a 1¢ 1861 stamp and a 2¢ Blackjack on a cover from Philadelphia to Virginia. The Philadelphia circular datestamp reads APR 17, 1862 and the cover also bears an oval handstamped MAILS SUSPENDED. This cover is item 9610829 in the SCRAP archive, attributed to John Fox. The 1862 year-date would raise a caution flag today, because we know the Blackjack stamp was not issued until mid-1863. But this wasn't common knowledge 50 years ago.

Figure 6 (above): 1¢ 1861 stamp and a 2¢ Blackjack on a cover from Philadelphia to Virginia. The Philadelphia datestamp reads APR 17, 1862 and the cover also bears an oval handstamped MAILS SUSPENDED. This cover is item 9610829 in the SCRAP archive, attributed to John Fox. The stamps are genuine, but both postmarks are forgeries. Figure 7 (right): Proof impression of the Philadelphia marking on the Figure 6 cover, from the PF archive of Fox fake markers. The MAILS SUSPENDED marker is not present in the PF holding.

Figure 7 shows a proof impression of one of two Philadelphia circular datestamps in the PF holding. The date reads APR 17, 1862. Close examination confirms that this marking is the source of the Philadelphia strike on the cover in Figure 6. The dot between the legs of the left "A" in PHILADELPHIA is just one of many distinguishing characteristics. The MAILS SUSPENDED oval on the cover in Figure 6 must also be a Fox fake, but this marking is not present in the PF holding.

Specifically dated postmarks such as Figures 3, 5 and 7 couldn't be used by a faker too often without raising suspicions. The appearance of half a dozen 9 JAN covers from Placerville would surely prompt collector questions. I wondered about the economics of creating fake marking devices that could only be used a few times, until, while pulling proofs from these devices, I realized how easy it would be to make an impression that didn't contain all the information. The faker could use a Q-Tip and some solvent to remove the ink from the date portion. Alternative masking procedures also suggest themselves. Whatever the technique, it would fairly easy to make a strike from a dated marking that contained all the elements except the date, which then could be added from another device.

I believe Fox employed this technique repeatedly. Certainly that's what was done on the Fox fake cover in Figure 8. This is item 9610811 in the Scrap archive, an attractive Confederate patriotic envelope on which a 3¢ 1857 stamp is well tied by a 34-millimeter "MC MINNVILLE Ten. JUN 14" postmark. The McMinnville marking in the PF holding, from which a strike is shown in Figure 9, says "MAR 14," but otherwise the two markings are identical. The oddly-shaped negative spacing within the legs of the first "M" in "MC MINNVILLE" is similar on both strikes and there are identical flaws in the "T" and the "n"

Figure 8 (above): Confederate patriotic envelope on which a 3¢ 1857 stamp is well tied by a 34-millimeter "MC MINNVILLE Ten. JUN 14" circular datestamp. This is item 9610811 in the SCRAP archive, attributed to John Fox. The stamp and the envelope are genuine, but the address and the postmark are forgeries. Figure 9 (left): The McMinnville marking from the PF Fox holding says "MAR 14," but is otherwise identical to the marking on the cover above. The marking on the cover was struck from this device with the "MAR" indicator masked out. Then "JUN" was added using another device.

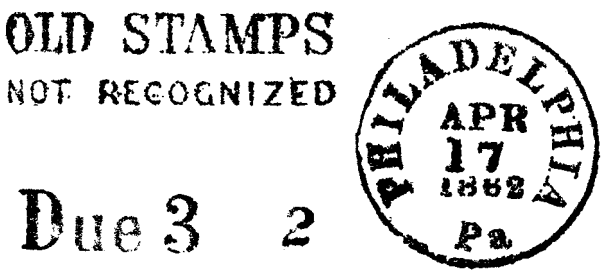
of "Ten." Note also how the two numerals in "14" are out of alignment in both markings. The "1" sits half a millimeter higher than the "4."

The McMinnville marking on the cover in Figure 8 was struck from the Figure 9 device with the "MAR" indicator masked out. Then "JUN" was added using another device, which is not present in the PF holding. Like the cover in Figure 6, the Figure 8 cover contains an anachronism known today that wasn't known 50 years ago. This stars-and-bars patriotic envelope is a post-war knock-off, created in the late 1860s or later, to appeal to collectors of Civil War patriotic envelopes. The survival of large quantities of unused patriotic envelopes provided Fox with much of his raw material.

Fox's handiwork reached something of an apotheosis in the cover in Figure 10, another eye-popping patriotic. This is item 9610608 in the SCRAP archive, specifically attributed to Fox. The combination of the current 1¢ 1861 stamp with the obsolete 3¢ 1857 stamp is a nice touch. This cover was created using four fake markings, all of which survive in the PF archive. Proofs from the four markings are grouped together in Figure 11.

No question, the "OLD STAMPS NOT RECOGNIZED" and the "Due 3" on the cover are identical matches to the PF fake devices, again proved by shared distinctive characteristics (dots between the letters in "RECO" and flaws in the ball of "3"). The Philadelphia marking is more problematic. Two Philadelphia circular datestamps survive in the PF holding, one dated "AUG 29 1861" and the other dated "APR 17 1862." (See Plate 1.) On the cover in Figure 10, I believe Fox used the "APR 17 1862" device with the "17" masked out. Distinctive similarities between the PF marking in Figure 11 and the marking on the cover in Figure 10 are less dramatic than what we've seen previously, but still persuasive. On both there's a definite flattening of the outer circle above "HIL" and there's a highly

Figure 10 (above): A spectacular but fake OLD STAMPS NOT RECOGNIZED cover. Figure 11 (right): Proofs from fake markers, now in the PF archive, that Fox used to create the Figure 10 cover. He masked out the "17" in the Philadelphia date and imprinted the "2" in its place.



distinctive flaw within the negative area of the "P" in "Pa".

In the space where the "17" was masked out of the marking, Fox handstamped the odd, almost italic-looking "2," also shown among the proofs in Figure 11. This is poorly struck in the postmark on the Figure 10 cover, but the impression is clear enough to see that it's not at all parallel with the month above it and the year below. That would be uncharacteristic of a date slug inserted into its slot in a fabricated marker, but quite predictable if the number were hand-struck by a faker using a separate device.

My suspicion is that Fox used this masking technique frequently. With his Johnson Ranch double-circle marking, for instance, the technique had to be used every time. The marking itself (see Plate 2) contains a manuscript "29" that, if imprinted in the ink of the handstamp, would be a dead giveaway of the fakery. So every time this marking was used, at least the manuscript portion had to be masked out and something else (perhaps another manuscript date applied in pen) substituted in its place. This insight about date-masking might help locate Fox fakes that have heretofore gone unrecognized.

Fox Markings in Philatelic Foundation Archive

Proofs of the Fox markings in the PF archive are presented in the Plates 1-3. I've tried to arrange the markings in logical groupings, dictated in part by the limitations of our *Chronicle* page size.

Plate 1 shows fancy townmarks, Civil War era circular datestamps both from north and the south, and steamboat handstamps. Steamboat handstamps are technically not postal markings, but they are colorful and highly collectible. They were very popular in the 1960s when Fox was creating his covers. The fancy townmarks include the well-known West Meriden devil and pitchfork and an eagle and shield from Corry, Pennsylvania. Two markings from Shabbona Grove, Illinois, are represented. There's also a negative Little Rock shield from way back in the pre-stamp era, dated May 5, 1831.

Plate 2 shows California markings, along with rating markings and date slugs. A large mix of California towns is represented: Benicia, Dutch Flat, Johnsons Ranch, Mission San Jose, Petaluma (two different markers), Placerville, Sacramento and San Francisco (also two devices). At the bottom of Plate 2 we show stand-alone date slugs. As discussed and illustrated above, these date slugs could be imprinted separately onto examples of the various circular datestamps that had been struck without dates. Fox probably had a large number of these; they are small and easily overlooked. I'm surprised this many have survived. Date slugs in the PF holding are 8 FEB, 15 JUL, 15 AUG, SEP 6 1860, SEP 13, SEP 14 and DEC 27. There's also the lonely italic "2" illustrated in Figure 11.

Plate 3 shows fancy killers followed by a grouping of miscellaneous markings that don't fit into the previous categories. These include route agent markings from railroads and steamboats, sanitary fair markings and others, including a fake of a personal marker used by 1847 collector J. Waldo Sampson. Railroads include an undated Long Island Rail Road integral 6 CTS, Northern Railroad (SEP 19) and the Troy and Whitehall Railroad (AUG 16). The two Sanitary Fair markings are the small Great Central Fair (dated June 23, 1864) and the larger Springfield Soldiers Fair, dated Dec 20, 1864. There's also a large circular Colonial Express Mail marking from St. John, New Brunswick, dated AUG 8; a large oval New Orleans marking ("Sam Ricker Jr., Agent of the Texian Post Office Dt."); and the large Louisville and Cincinnati Mail Line marking, here dated JUN 30. Dr. James Milgram commenced in *Chronicle* 217 a series of articles on the route agent markings of the Louisville and Cincinnati Mail Line. Milgram told me the Fox Louisville and Cincinnati Mail Line marking is not a very persuasive fake, and said that he has never seen an example on a fake cover. So it may be that this marking device was never used. The same might be said of many of the other markings shown in Plates 1-3.

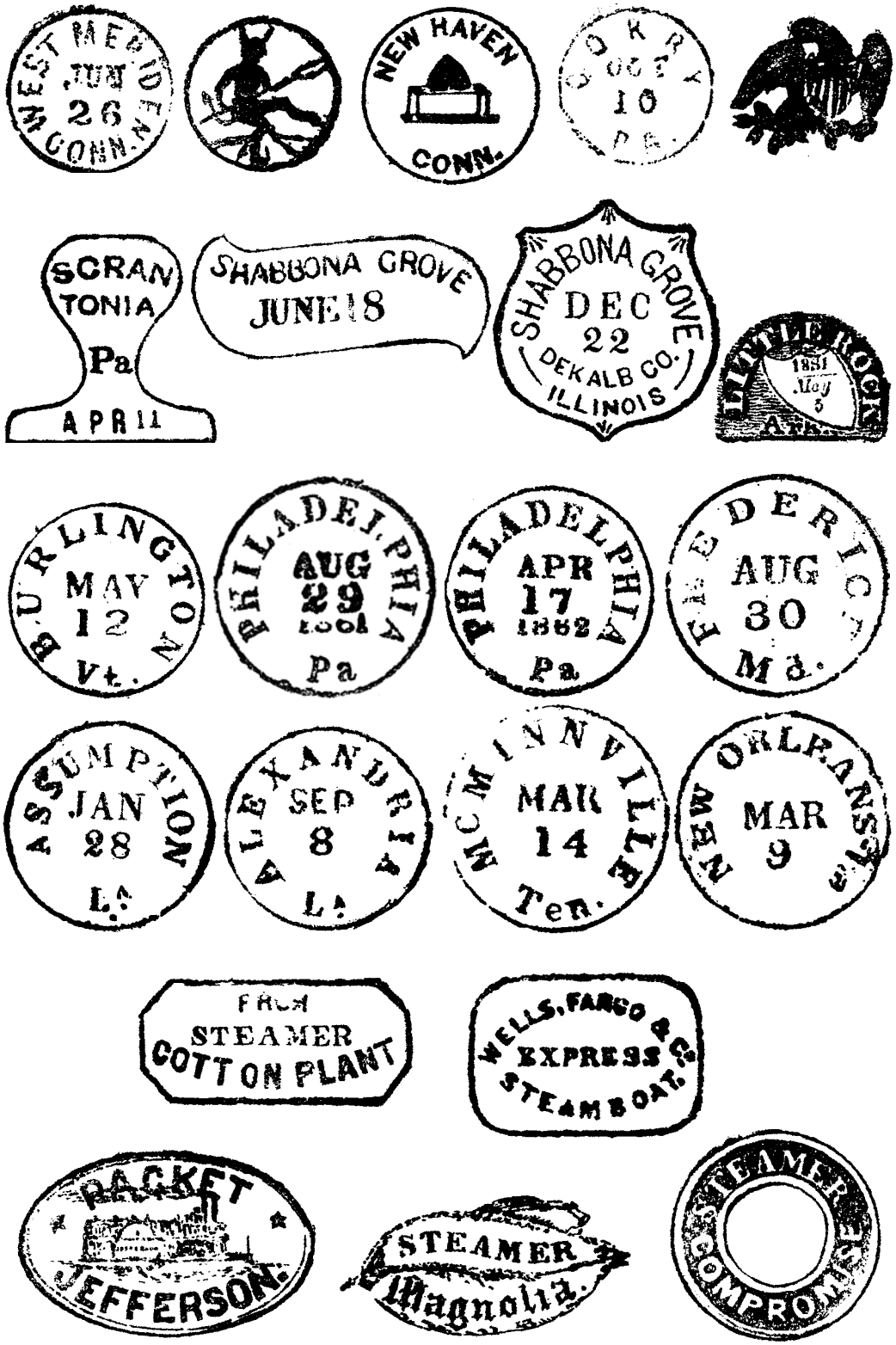


Plate 1. Fancy townmarks, circular datestamps and steamboat handstamps.

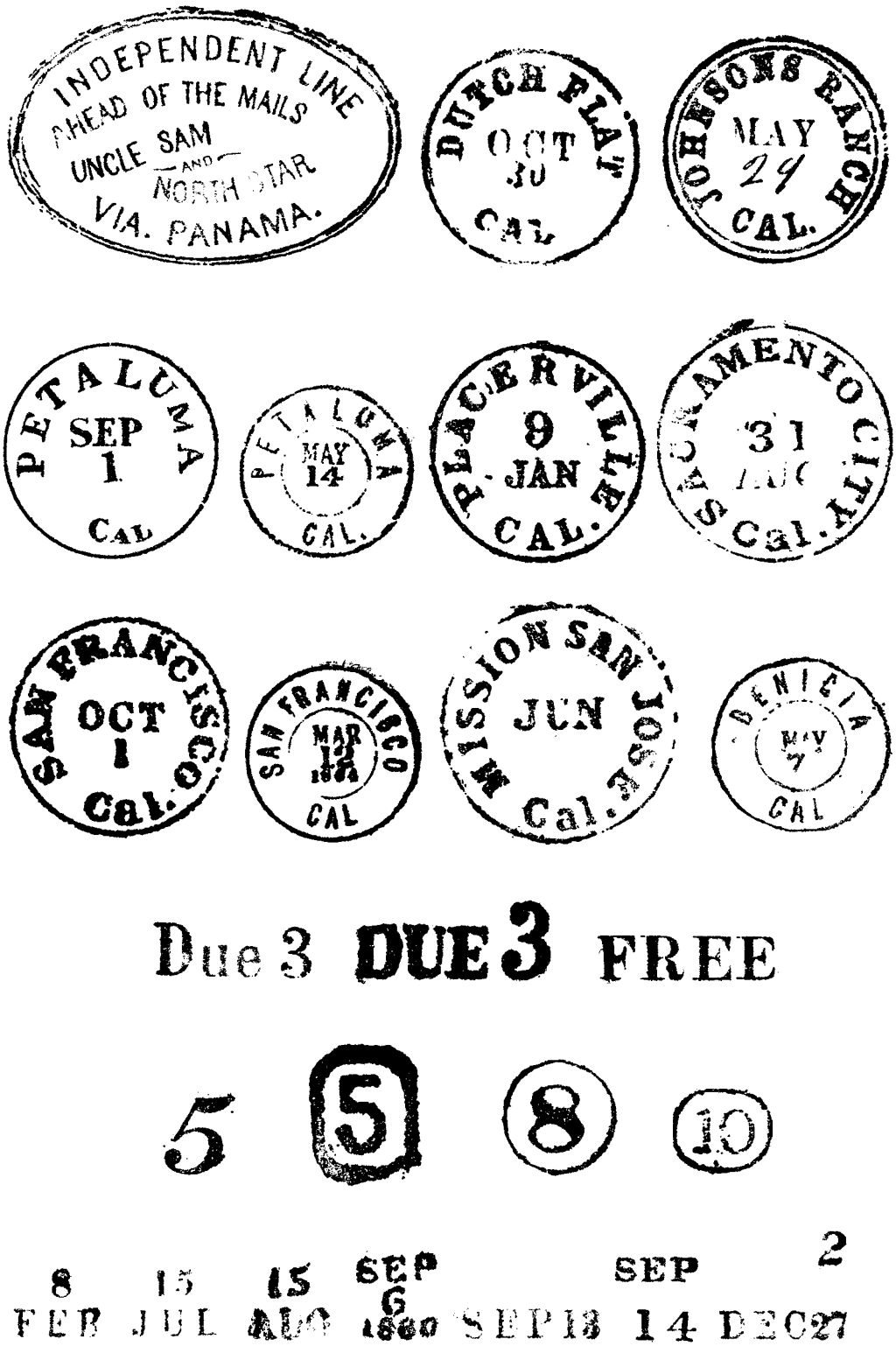


Plate 2. California markings, rating markings and date slugs.

Plate 3. Fancy killers, route agent markings, sanitary fair markings and others.

Figure 12. This stunning Huntsville cover was one of the stars of the sheriff's auction of Fox fake covers. The pair of 5¢ 1847 stamps is genuine (probably with pen cancels removed). The markings and the address are forgeries.

The Scope of Fox's Work

An examination of these markings and reference to the SCRAP covers provides a good insight into the scope of Fox's work. Like any successful faker, Fox made what collectors wanted.[4] He created stunning 1847 covers, favoring the Huntsville and Binghamton fancy killers, and Princeton (N.J.) because of its desirable green. The boxed "5" in plate 2 is an imitation of a Princeton rater used by Fox on several 1847 covers. A Binghamton fake was illustrated in Figure 1. Shown as Figures 12 and 13 are a fantastic matched pair of Huntsville covers addressed to the ubiquitous Frederick Cornell. Note that he's also the addressee of the Figure 1 cover. The two Huntsville covers were among the stars of the sheriff's sale that Tyler wrote about in his biography of Fox. Except for the problematical handwriting, they represent the pinnacle of Fox's art. The blue ink is excellent.

The problem with faking 1847 covers is that the requisite stamps aren't cheap, especially in unused condition. Fox sometimes employed 1847 stamps from which pen cancels had been removed, and then placed his postmarks to conceal the evidence. That's the case with the 10¢ 1847 stamp in Figure 13 and possibly with the pair of 5¢ 1847s in Figure 12.

Fox made many more patriotic covers than 1847s, because here the raw materials (unused patriotic envelopes and unused 3¢ 1857 and 1861 stamps) were more readily available. Confederate patriotics were a special favorite. Envelopes and unused stamps were easily obtained, but genuine covers were scarce and sought-after. For a useful analysis of

[4] Paul Rohloff, a knowledgeable collector a generation ago, told a story that reveals a key to Fox's success. Rohloff was recovering from a heart attack when Fox visited him in hospital to cheer him up with some stunning covers, $80,000 worth, so the tale goes. Rohloff bought them eagerly. But in the cold light of day, they all proved to be bad. No fool, Rohloff was one of the most experienced and knowledgeable cover collectors of his generation. When a friend asked how he could have been duped by these Fox fakes, Rohloff replied: "He made beautiful covers that I needed in my collection. *He knew I would want them to be good*." This insight suggests that the willing suspension of disbelief is as important in philatelic fakery as in other areas of artistic endeavor. Rohloff's story had a happy ending. Through the forceful intervention of a friend, he extracted a full refund from Fox.

Figure 13. A mate to the cover in Figure 12, also part of the sheriff's auction of Fox fake covers. A pen cancel was removed from the otherwise genuine 10¢ 1847 stamp. The postmarks and the address are forgeries.

a Fox fake Confederate stars-and-bars Flag cover (on a postwar envelope), see *Chronicle* 179, page 193. Fox is named as the creator of this cover. The anonymous authors of the write-up tell us that "John Fox was thought to have used, or caused to be used, a particular duplicative process, purposely unnamed here, to manufacture the handstamp devices used in his fakes."

Western and Pony Express covers were another Fox specialty, for similar reasons. Mint Wells-Fargo and low-value government entire envelopes (and certain of the stamps) were widely available. As always, collector interest was keen. For an analysis of three Fox fake Pony covers, see *Chronicle* 173, page 38. Fox is not named here, but the covers are his creations. Fox must have possessed a number of fake Pony Express markings. Other than the California townmarks shown in Plate 2, none of these are present in the PF holding. As we have observed, the marking devices that survive at the PF are just the tip of the Fox iceberg.

It was not the postmarks but the handwriting on Fox's covers that first brought them under suspicion. Fox was never able to replicate persuasive 19th century handwriting. The covers in Figures 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 13 all seem to show hesitance, a lack of boldness that suggests the writer (or writers) were trying to imitate the penman's flourishes that modern viewers of 19th century covers find so striking. There's no clear agreement about whether Fox employed one or several penmen to create his addresses. Whatever their number, none did the job well. The most persuasive Fox fakes, such as Figure 2, were created on genuine addressed envelopes that were carried outside the mails and thus survived with no postal markings. For Fox, these were blank canvasses awaiting his artistry.

Also, in some cases the ink color in the address was wrong: bright 20th century blue rather than 19th century brown or black. Figure 1 is an example. Once collector attention focused on the addresses, other oddities came into focus. The addressee on the cover in Figures 1, 12 and 13, "Revd. Fredrk Cornell," appeared to have had correspondents, all of them very weak penmen, in many of the U.S. cities that applied fancy cancels to 1847 stamps. And the recipient of the Noisy Carrier envelope in Figure 4, "Miss Sarah Lewis,

Figure 14. Enlargements of portions of a known Fox fake marking (at top, electronically clipped from the Figure 1 cover) and two known genuine postmarks from the same era. Note the relative crispness and boldness of the genuine strikes, compared with the lightness and sponginess of the Fox marking. This "mottling" in the Fox fake postmarks is their major defining characteristic.

1014 Green Street, Philadelphia," along with a gaggle of sisters at the same address, received voluminous correspondence, mostly in patriotic or other illustrated envelopes, from cities on both coasts and from correspondents on both sides of the Civil War.

Letters in the files of the Philatelic Foundation, going back to the early 1960s, show that Ethel Harper, the formidable assistant to the Chairman during that era, was consulting with outside experts, handwriting analysts and others, to confirm that the addresses on certain Fox covers were not written in the 1860s, and that the address inks were wrong for that period.

The inked impressions of the Fox fake postmarks are themselves a major indicator of their fraudulence. Observers have frequently mentioned the "mottled" appearance of the markings, "rather like a muddy path," as Gallagher put it. We show in Figure 14 enlargements of portions of a known Fox fake marking and two known genuine postmarks from the same general era. The Binghampton marking at top was electronically clipped from the cover in Figure 1. The two markings at bottom (applied by different markers in different cities) come from a known genuine cover that I happened to have at hand. Compare the relative crispness and boldness of the two genuine strikes against the lightness and sponginess of the Fox fake. This sponginess is the "mottling" so frequently cited. I believe it derives from imperfections in the porous surface of the soft zinc plates from which the Fox marking devices were fabricated. It may also reflect inadequacies of the marking inks Fox used. While Fox is said to have possessed cakes of certain 19th century inks, at least blue

and possibly black and red, he did not mix his inks with oil, as postal regulations specified. Perhaps as a consequence, the ink didn't spread uniformly over the raised surface of his devices.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this article has been to bring to broader attention the Fox fake markings at the PF and the USPCS SCRAP archive of Fox covers. Collectors now and in future should be aware of these resources, individually and collectively. It's clear from a comparison of the PF markings and the Fox SCRAP covers that there were many more Fox fake marking devices than currently survive at the PF. It's equally clear that there are (or were) many more Fox fake covers than now repose in the SCRAP archive. Exploring the full scope of Fox's work would be a huge undertaking, but these two resources provide an excellent starting point. A useful next step would be to compile a listing of all the fake markings in the Fox *oeuvre*. Any volunteers?

In viewing the fake markings presented in Plates 1-3, collectors should keep in mind that Fox's technique was to make a photographic negative from a genuine strike. Every marking in these three plates must have begun with a genuine example—probably a clear, unobstructed strike applied crisply to a cover. So if you find one of the illustrated markings on a cover in your collection, don't lose heart prematurely. Yours might be the genuine strike that started it all. Or it might be yet another genuine strike from the same original device. Nonetheless, you would be well advised to get the item expertized, just to be certain. I would strongly recommend the Philatelic Foundation.

If your cover turns out to be bad, consider donating it to SCRAP. The usefulness of the SCRAP archive has been shown. It can only improve as the population of SCRAP covers increases. Removing bad covers permanently from the marketplace while maintaining them accessibly for future study (rather than burning them in the fireplace) is without question the right way to dispose of fake covers.

As a final note, it's something of an urban myth within the trade that Fox never signed his fake covers. That's not entirely true. There's at least one Fox fake cover that bears his signature line: "In my opinion, this cover is genuine in every respect, John A. Fox." However, almost all the known Fox fake covers do *not* bear Fox's warranty, and there are many genuine covers that do. So if you have a cover that bears Fox's signature, it's almost certainly a genuine cover. But again, it wouldn't hurt to get it expertized.

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