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Bucks for Ducks

Page 728



VAMPing — The Use of Truly Private Perfs

A back-of-the-book chapter of the *Scott Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps* titled "Vending and Affixing Machine Perforations" lists and prices coil stamps that have proprietary perforations applied by private firms.

An earlier generation of specialized coil stamp collectors called themselves VAMPs, taking that title as their playful acronym and sharing it with Scott. These days, coil stamps have quite a different image. Nevertheless, as beginning collectors meander into more complex byways of U.S. philately, privately perforated coil stamps of the 1906 to 1926 era usually help them along, because a typical puzzler for nearly every novice is his or her first encounter with a common Schermack Type III slot perforation.

The *Specialized* not only pictures and explains the Schermacks, showing most of them to be disappointingly cheap, but also tantalizes and bewilders the first-time browser with an array of other odd separation styles that occur on early coils.



Figure 1. A typical used 1-cent Franklin coil stamp with Attleboro perforations, Scott 343V, is tied to the piece with a double oval cancel of Attleboro, Massachusetts.

were listed alphabetically by firm, but the most recent addition, in the 1991 edition, disturbed that system — Attleboro Stamp Company listings come at the end.

A head note to the Scott chapter states, "Many varieties are suspected or known to have been perforated for philatelic purposes and not actually used in machines. These are indicated by an asterisk before the number." This convention too is applied inconsistently. Other weaknesses of that section include listings for several nonexistent stamps of the International Vending Machine Company, a subject this column addressed in October 1993 and March 1994.

I hope that the editors will overhaul this section of the catalogue some time soon. The popularity of privately perforated U.S. coil stamps is growing, yet neither the listings nor the prices have kept pace with the current state of specialized knowledge and today's retail market. When the time comes to reVAMP the listings, I also would like to see new entries for privately perforated coil stamps of firms that have not been listed up to now.

One way to streamline the VAMP chapter would be to divide it into two broad categories. The first would comprise most of the current listings — stamps perforated by equipment manufacturers for resale to users of their equipment, such as the ubiquitous Schermacks. The second would comprise stamps coiled and perforated for the sole use of the firms that made them.

At present, the latter category includes only two such firms — the John V. Farwell Company, a wholesale dry goods firm in Chicago, Illinois, and the Attleboro Stamp Company, a philatelic enterprise in Attleboro, Massachusetts. I suggest adding the Covell Manufacturing Company of Benton Harbor, Michigan, and the executive council of Boy Scouts of America.



The Attleboro Stamp Company

The lead article in the September 1909 issue of *The Attleboro Philatelist*, titled "New Machine Perforation," explained that the Attleboro Stamp Company had ordered a custom-designed stamp affixing machine in July and it had been used in August to mail the firm's monthly bargain sheet and then to mail that issue of the magazine.

The machine was designed by its owner, F. Percy Collingwood, to accept



Figure 2. This pair of unused 2-cent George Washington coil stamps with Attleboro perfs, Scott 344V, caused a sensation when it surfaced in 1994.

vertical imperforate 1-cent green Benjamin Franklin coil stamps with double-line watermarks, Scott 343V, in rolls of 500. "This machine, unlike some others in affixing the stamp, does not moisten the stamp, but instead, gives the portion of the envelope, on which the stamp is to be placed, a positive wetting, which insures the stamp becoming more surely fixed."

Ironically, this idea echoed the method patented by George Snow of Massachusetts in 1858, a half century earlier. Perhaps something in the Bay State's air prompts inventors to think that one should fasten stamps by licking the envelopes instead of the stamps directly. Snow's stamp affixing device has been featured many times in this column — in November 1993, March and September 1994, April 1995, May 1996, and March 1997.

Figure 1 is a single Attleboro coil stamp on piece, as this stamp usually is found, canceled by a black double-oval Attleboro, Massachusetts, handstamp. George Howard described this separation's distinctive traits in the July 1946 *Bureau Specialist*: "the Attleboro 'perf.' slants downhill to the right; the two connecting bits of paper are off center to the left; the small v-shaped notch is at the bottom of the stamp and centered between the two 'legs'." On many examples, including the one shown here, the slant and centering are reversed from Howard's description.

Collingwood discovered that his 1-cent private coils in used condition were worth a premium to his customers, so he published this notice in the November issue of his magazine: "RETURN to us the canceled stamps on this package and you will receive 25 printed envelopes FREE, PPD." A few years later, he recalled these events in a letter to *The Philatelic Gazette*, excerpted in the May 15, 1912, issue.

The 1c current at that time and the Alaska-Yukon 2c were all the values that were used, and since mailing the first few numbers of the A.P. (second class rates were secured), have not made any use whatever of the machine for perforating or affixing. The machine was first built to perforate and affix the stamps, but owing to

repeated requests for copies in mint condition I had a change made whereby unused copies in strips might be perforated.

Taking Collingwood's statement at face value, Howard concluded his *Bureau Specialist* article:

In closing I should like to point out that the Attleboro Stamp Company must have had in their stock the twelve different imperforates which were current during the 1907-09 period. They perforated only the two which they used in mailing. This is more than can be said for any one of the more legitimate 'private' perf. companies.

In his 1940 book *The Stamp Machines and Coiled Stamps*, Howard wrote that the earliest use of the 1-cent Attleboro coil was August 2, 1909, "probably a First Day Cover as August 1st was a Sunday that year...and the earliest known cancellation [of the 2-cent Alaska-Yukon-Pacific commemorative with Attleboro perforations, Scott 371] on cover is of September 23, 1909."

For eighty-five years, the VAMP community believed that only those two stamps existed with genuine Attleboro perforations, until the Figure 2 unused pair of 2-cent carmine George Washington vertical coil stamps, Scott 344V, appeared in full color on the



Figure 3. This 2-cent Washington stamp has Farwell Group 4, Type B private affixing-machine perforations.

cover of the January 15, 1994, Weiss Philatelics auction catalogue. It caused a sensation among private-perf specialists. The pair realized \$40,000 plus ten percent buyer's premium, and today has a catalogue value of \$45,000.

Part of the surprise was undoubtedly caused by the absence of Attleboro coils from the Scott Catalogue until 1991. Before then most collectors would not have recognized an Attleboro rarity if they had seen it. But besides that point, I think Howard and others misinterpreted what Collingwood had written. He meant that he had used only the two stamps — the 1-cent Franklin and the 2-cent Alaska-

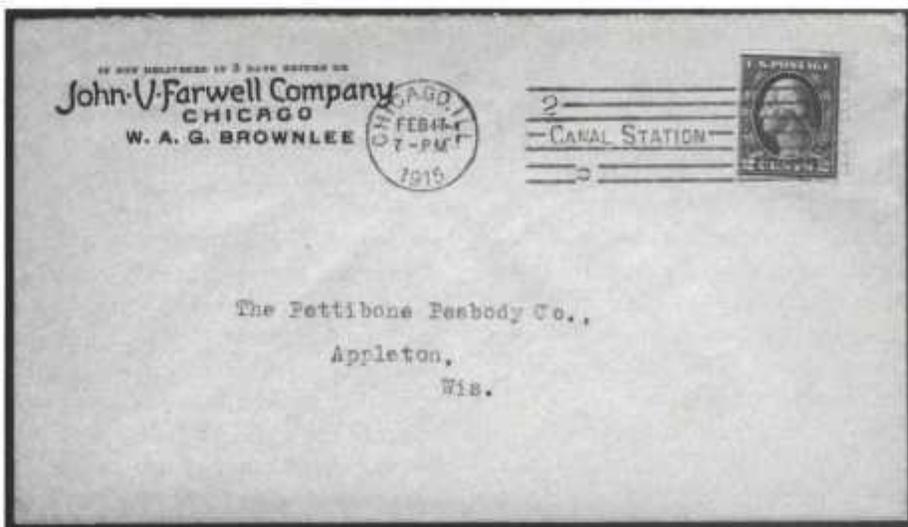


Figure 4. The stamp on this cover is similar to the Figure 3 example, but the perforation is Farwell Group 4, Type A, with a smaller space separating the perforations at the center.



Figure 5. A pair of 1-cent Franklin coil stamps, Scott 314, with Covell private perforations, mailed from the firm's headquarters city, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

Yukon — on his firm's mail. After he tore apart the machine to create favor pairs, he may have perforated whatever his customers wished.

In this case, it is easy to see that the pair is a favor, because it lacks a V cut at the bottom. No one should be surprised if other previously unreported favor Attleboro coils turn up, perhaps on 2-cent carmine Abraham Lincoln Memorial vertical coils, Scott 368V; on 1-cent and 2-cent coils of the 1902-3 series, Scott 314V and 315V; on higher Washington-Franklin denominations, Scott 346V and 347V; and even on the 2-cent carmine Hudson-Fulton imperforate, Scott 373.

However, Scott should correct these listings, renumbering the two Washington-Franklin values as imperforate coils (numbered 343V and 344V), instead of their imperforate sheet stamp designations (343 and 344), and adding an asterisk to the 2-cent Washington philatelic favor.

In his book, Howard wrote, "If the Attleboro machine was made to handle the 1c stamp, it is very doubtful that it could be adjusted to handle either that stamp or the much longer Alaska-Yukon stamp. This stamp received Schermack, Mailometer, and U.S. Auto-Vending perforations, none of which were used in the machines as they could not be adjusted to take odd-sized stamps." I agree. To be consistent with those other listings, the catalogue editors also ought to add an asterisk to the Scott 371 Attleboro coil listing.

The John V. Farwell Company

Stamps with Farwell perforations stand a pole apart from Attleboro coils. They were used for many years by one of the country's largest commercial mailers. The Farwell Company had been among the first Chicago firms to acquire Schermack (later Mail-ometer, and later still, Mail-O-Meter) high-speed mailing machines in 1908. Its daily volume of mail was so large, however, that the coiling fee added by Mail-O-Meter to the basic cost of postage (fifty cents per 3,000 stamps) added up to significant dollars.

The obvious answer was to make up the coils in-house, just as Mail-O-Meter did. But to avoid infringing Mail-O-Meter's patent on the Schermack Type III slot perforation, a new perforation style had to be invented that would work on Mail-O-Meter equipment. That task fell to one of Farwell's salesmen, Tom Chambers. Several styles of perforation were attempted, all employing rows of holes 1.5 millimeters in diameter, spaced at 0.5-millimeter intervals. Some of the scarcer experimental Farwell perforations are elusive and expensive, but the ones that worked best employed two adjacent rows of four holes, separated by the equivalent distance of one or two skipped holes, listed under the Farwell category "Group 4, four and four holes," in the Scott Catalogue.

Those with just one hole skipped are called Type A, and with two holes

skipped, Type B. A used single 2-cent carmine George Washington stamp with single-line watermark, Scott 409, with Farwell Type B spacing between the four-hole sets is shown in Figure 3. Another 2-cent Washington stamp, but with Farwell Type A spacing, is shown on cover in Figure 4.

Users of the *Specialized* may wonder why any of the Farwell listings have asterisks beside the catalogue numbers, since these stamps were created by a large firm for its own mail. The answer is that Chambers was an agreeable, outgoing man who enjoyed correspondence with stamp collectors and dealers. He favored them in his spare time by adding the company's proprietary perforations to stamps that had gone off sale by 1911, when his perforator began operation, and by providing perforated blocks and marginal inscription multiples that had not been processed into coils.

Many first-generation VAMPs labeled these "Chambers perforations," in honor of the inventor rather than the firm that used them. Some references further corrupted that to "Chalmers," perhaps confusing Tom Chambers with James Chalmers, Rowland Hill's rival claimant to having invented the first British adhesive stamp in 1834.

The Farwell Company abandoned its unique form of stamp separation before World War I postal rate increases went into effect, so Farwell proprietary perforations are known only on 1-cent and 2-cent stamps of the pre-war Washington-Franklin era. Nevertheless, this grouping is the flagship of any collection focused on single-firm private perfs.

The Covell Manufacturing Company

I have retold the basic story of Covell private perforations in earlier columns of December 1993, March and September 1994, and May 1996, based mainly on published articles by Frederick Kozub of the Bureau Issues Association. Kozub's articles appeared in the July 1987 and August 1988 issues of *The United States Specialist*, and in the COMPLEX 89 exhibition directory. The BIA's George Wagner has done further research, verifying Kozub's essential point that these are legitimately manu-

factured and commercially used coil stamps. Stressing the single-company usage, Kozub called these "private-private perfs."

Before 1987, coil stamps with gauge 12 Covell perforations applied by a Rosback stroke perforator had been thought by Philatelic Foundation experts to be fakes of 1902-3 Series 1-cent Benjamin Franklin and 2-cent George Washington perf 12 government coils, Scott 318 and 322, even though Herman Herst Jr., the dealer who brought most of them to market several years before, had signed them as genuine.

Figure 5 shows a cover with a horizontal pair of 1-cent green Benjamin Franklin coil stamps, courtesy of Massachusetts postal history dealer Don Tocher, certified by the American Philatelic Expertizing Service as follows: "United States, Scott No. 314, pair with private Covell/Rosback perforations used on cover, genuine in all respects." APEX has certified several Covell coils, unused and used, in both 1902-3 and Washington-Franklin Series.

The Covell Manufacturing Company, maker of industrial abrasive grinding machines, was headquartered at Benton Harbor, Michigan, with offices in Seattle, Washington, and Chicago, Illinois. The firm's secretary was Alvin W. Filstrup, a well-known Michigan stamp collector, who had joined the APS in 1911. Filstrup arranged to have his coils perforated on a device manufactured by the F.P. Rosback Company, also of Benton Harbor. This is the same company that built the rotary perforator later used on one U.S. stamp issue, the subject of my September 1995 column.

Kozub was uncertain how the Covell coils were finished:

I speculated that perhaps the Schermack Co. might have been involved in the stripping and paste-up process. I based that speculation in part on the close proximity of the Covell Co. and the Schermack Co., i.e., the buildings were within a short walk of each other in the industrial/manufacturing area of Chicago....Other scenarios are possible (e.g., scis-

sor/knife cutting, paste-up by Filstrup), but I wonder whether Filstrup might not have taken advantage of the proximity of the two businesses and had them prepared "as a favor"? There is no hard evidence to support this scenario, and I would speculate that none will be forthcoming.

Kozub's survey revealed that 1-cent Franklin and 2-cent carmine George Washington and Shield (Scott 320) coil stamps with horizontal perforations were known on Covell covers, as well as the more common vertically perforated 1-cent coils shown here.

Surviving covers show that Covell coils typically were used on business envelopes returned to the firm by its clients and suppliers, by traveling representatives of the firm while away from home, and on intra-company mail from one of the Covell offices to another. These might legitimately be regarded as forerunners of business reply mail.

The stamps also were used by Filstrup and members of his family, both at home and as they traveled. The backflap of the illustrated cover has the initials "G.D.F." as the sender, at Filstrup's home address. Because Filstrup was a stamp collector, many of these covers were saved and are available to collectors today. But there is no evidence that Filstrup considered his coils to be collectibles. (In fact, they may have been his way of using up scrap postage, after removing plate number and guide line premium positions from imperforate sheets.) Unused examples of Covell coils are rare.

Covell coil stamps were used from



Figure 6. This precanceled 1-cent Washington coil stamp with gauge 14 perforation was used by the executive council of Boy Scouts of America in 1922. It is a legendary stamp to precancel specialists, but is virtually unknown among private-perf collectors.

1915 to 1920. Thus in both commercial significance and longevity, they are more noteworthy than Attleboro coils, although the latter are catalogued by Scott and the former are not.

Gauge 12 Rosback perforations on Covell coils are similar to government perforations. They can be differentiated by careful expert examination (rotary government gauge 12 perforations are elongated in one dimension with leading and trailing edges evident; Rosback stroke perforations are clean and round), and by measurement with a Kiusalas U.S. Specialist Gauge (genuine government perforations measure gauge 12-66; Covell/Rosback perforations measure gauge 12-67).



Figure 7. Legg perforations performed a purely decorative function; they served no practical purpose.

Just as the Scott Catalogue warns readers not to confuse government perforations with private perforations of the International Vending Machine Company, a similar warning could be added about Covel perfs.

Boy Scouts of America

The Figure 6 precanceled coil stamp of 1922 should be listed in the Scott Catalogue. It is an unwatermarked 1-cent green George Washington stamp, Scott 481, with gauge 14 vertical perforations, precanceled "NEW YORK, N.Y.," used by the Boy Scouts of America executive council in 1922.

As privately perforated coils go, this is an elusive variety. Precancel specialists have honored it for seventy years, but it has been largely neglected by VAMPs. The earliest listing I could discover is in the Adolf Gunesh *Catalog of City Type Precanceled Stamps*, first edition, published in January 1928, which priced it at \$10, a very steep price at the time.

The stamp has been known to Scott's editors for a long time. The Question of the Month in the March 1935 issue of *Scott's Monthly Journal* asked for details, "how produced, approximate number used, and whether used by any other concern than the Boy Scout Council in N.Y. Were all known copies issued precanceled, and how long in use, etc."

The editor consulted W.B. Hoover, co-editor and publisher of the *Official*

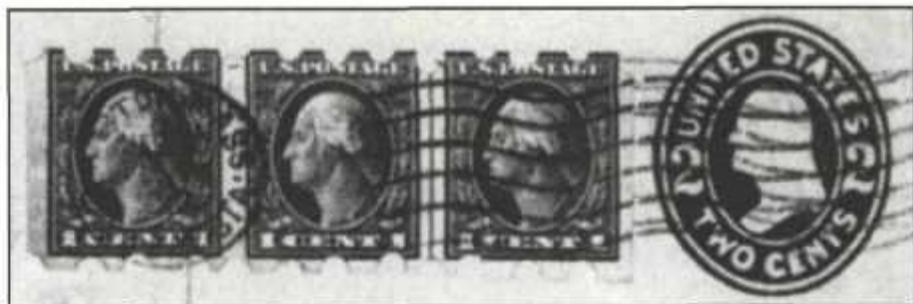


Figure 8. Stamp dealer A.W. Dunning added large holes at the top and bottom of imperforate stamps, adding an exotic touch to his mailings.

Precancel Catalog, for answers. Hoover replied:

A factor which contributes to the theory that this Perf. 14 coil was originally in sheet form, is the style of precancellation which appears on it. It is what is known in the "Official Precancel Catalog" as New York's Type 26 which is a rubber handstamp. It is very unlikely that such a handstamp presumably of 25 subjects (5 x 5) would, or could, be used accurately on a "string" of stamps as coil stamps would appear. It is recognized that the stamp is Scott's No. 481 (and by coincidence is also Hoover's No. 481). The precanceling was very likely done in sheet form and then cut into strips and rolled for the machine which applied them to the envelopes.

To my knowledge, the make of the machine in which they were used, is not known and likely one of obscure make because of the lack of that size of perforation (No. 14) existing on any other U.S. coil stamps.

The identification and location of such conditions is dependent entirely on the existence of covers showing the return address which is the condition in this case.

William Cummings, associate editor of the Scott Catalogue, revisited the subject in the *Scott Stamp Monthly Catalogue Column* for June 1994, titled "Really Private Perfs." "Not every 'private perf' is listed in the Scott Vending and Affixing Machine Perforations section of the *United States Specialized*," he wrote. After illustrating some phantom perforations, private products of creative fakers, Cummings described the coil with gauge 14 perforations, "This one is genuine. It is a private coil that was used by the Boy Scouts of America Executive Council in 1922.... Does anyone have any information as to why this stamp should not be listed in the *United States Specialized*? It is a commercial item that seems to have better credentials than some of the stamps currently listed."

Unlike Hoover, Cummings thinks the Boy Scout coils were affixed by hand, and he may be right. The illustrated example has no evidence of a cut separation that most affixing devices would have made. However, as I pointed out when I first wrote about the Covel perforations in 1993, these easily might have been coiled for use in a "Natural Method Stamp Affixer" patented by the Schermack Company

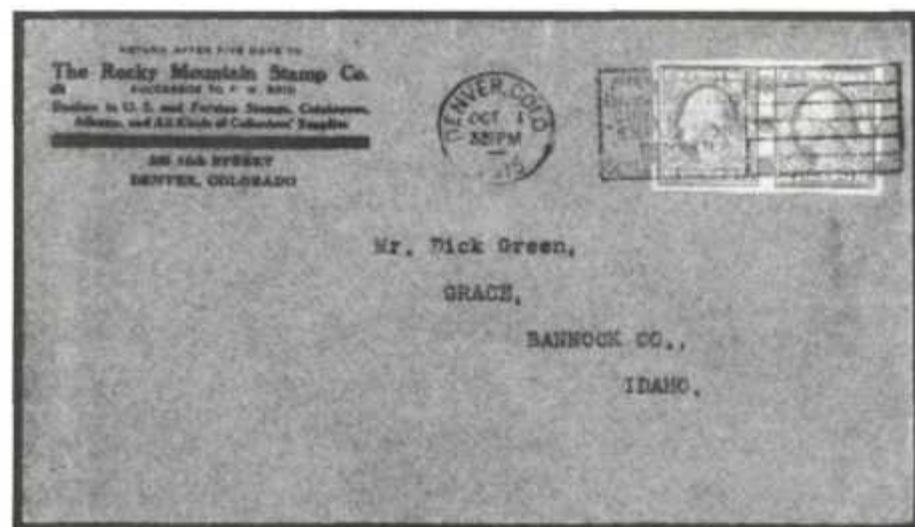


Figure 9. F.W. Reid dressed up his imperforates with large holes at the left and right.

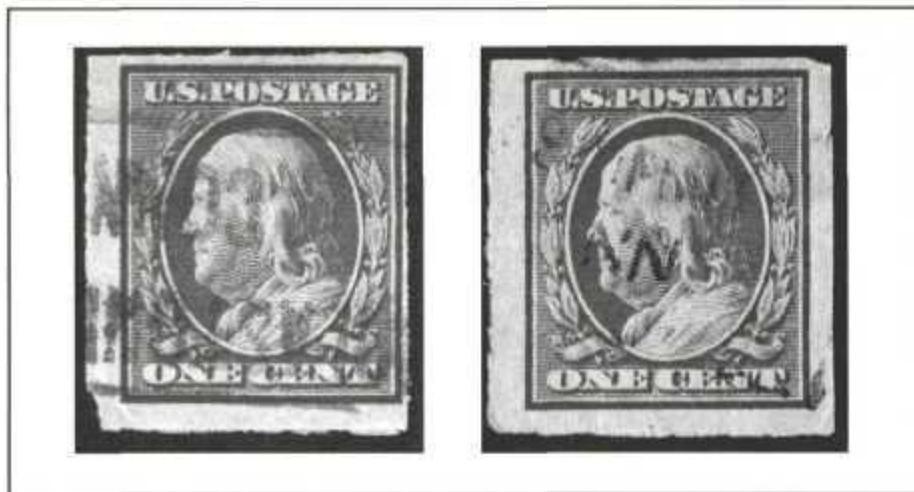


Figure 10. Perhaps these two, canceled in Glastonbury, Connecticut, should be called Glastonbury roulettes. Can a reader explain who used them and why?

in 1909, which dispensed coil stamps but required the user to separate each moistened stamp at the adjacent perforation row. The obvious point is that the Boy Scout stamps were coiled to facilitate their use on quantities of mail being franked at one time.

Strictly applying his opinion that precanceled perf 14 Boy Scout coils were not machine-affixed, Cummings wrote, "This made them private perfs, outside the scope of that section of the Specialized Catalogue. In any case, this would make a knockout item for a Boy Scout topical collection." In other contexts, Cummings has written that definitions need to be flexible, and subject to change. Why must this catalogue chapter be limited to VAMPs, a term chosen originally by specialized collectors to give their subject a catchy name? Surely no serious collector today draws that dividing line between what's in and what's out of a private perf collection.

Incidentally, self-described VAMP collectors did not limit their interests to private perforations. They properly included government coils in their specialty. Scott doesn't include those in the VAMP chapter because they are listed up front. I would suggest a different set of criteria for listings, which I'll demon-

strate with a few other privately applied perforations.

Other Stamp Dealer Perforations

In describing the so-called Legg perforation illustrated in Figure 7, George Howard wrote, "This is one of the many dealers' or brokers' perforations, roulettes, or what have you, which are not to be found listed in the Catalogue, and rightly so I believe. I illustrate this one because it looks like a poor fake of the Schermack Type III perf. and often has been so classed." The citation and photo are taken from the September 1946 *Bureau Specialist*.

This marginal pair inscribed by its maker, H. Wesley Legg, appeared again in the same 1994 Weiss auction at which the Figure 2 Attleboro coil pair was sold.

In his 1940 book, Howard wrote:

It is a well-known fact that collectors, dealers, and stamp brokers have used many types of perforations and roulettes on imperforate stamps. Some, such as the Legg perforation, are striking in appearance and are saved as oddities or 'what-is-its'. With a pair of scissors you or I could produce mar-

velous patterns around the edge of a stamp. Such items are not even worthy of the name "philatelic" and certainly do not deserve listing in any catalogue...

LEGG PERFORATION:
— two slots like Schermack Type III but much larger. Made by H. Wesley Legg, a dealer of Pepperell, Mass. The perforator was made from a notary-public seal, with the seal replaced by two brass lugs which punched the slots. Imperforate stamps were cut in horizontal strips and the perforations applied one at a time. This perforation will be found on the 2c Lincoln, 3c 1909, and probably other stamps of that period. These stamps were used on philatelic mail and were **not** applied by any machine.

Two other stamp dealer perforations that serve a purely decorative function are Dunning perforations, created by Massachusetts stamp dealer A.W. Dunning (Figure 8), and Reid perforations, used on mail of Colorado dealer F.W. Reid's Rocky Mountain Stamp Company (Figure 9). Like the Legg perforations, and others of unknown origin that turn up from time to time, the slots and holes added to these imperforate stamps served no practical function, and thus do not merit listings as privately perforated coil stamps.

Mystery Separations

Finally, here is a challenge to readers. Figure 10 shows two used single 1-cent green Franklin stamps of 1908 with double-line watermark, Scott 343, that were separated roughly by scoring or coarse rouletting. Both are canceled Glastonbury, Connecticut. Can anyone tell me the origin of these, who used them, and for what purpose? Members who are online may send me e-mail at apsken@aol.com