

A North Dakota Patent Cancel

Recently, while perusing the online version of the US patent database for a research project, I found a most interesting entry in the database. Letters Patent No. 641,616 was awarded to Henry A Thexton, of St. Thomas, North Dakota, and dated January 16, 1900. (The application was filed on March 6, 1899.) The patent was for a 'Self-Inking Stamp'.

What intrigued me most about this patent was the hometown of Mr. Thexton, which was listed as St. Thomas, North Dakota. It triggered a memory that I had many years ago found an unusual marking from St. Thomas, and that at first glance the postmark appeared to be a machine cancel mimic, or 'pseudo-machine' cancel.

After digging through more boxes than I care to admit to, I finally found the marking that had been tucked away many years earlier. I had originally picked it up because it nicely crossed two of my collecting interests at the time, North Dakota postal history and machine cancels. Figure 1 shows the government postal card with the St. Thomas marking.



Figure 1. Saint Thomas North Dakota 'mystery cancel', dated May 24, 1899.

The patent application reads in part:

"My invention relates in general to devices for printing or stamping inscriptions or characters upon various articles; and it relates in particular to devices especially adapted for printing or stamping envelopes or like mail-matter in a way to cancel the stamps thereon and to indicate the places where the matter is mailed or received and the time of its receipt or delivery..."

No. 641,616.

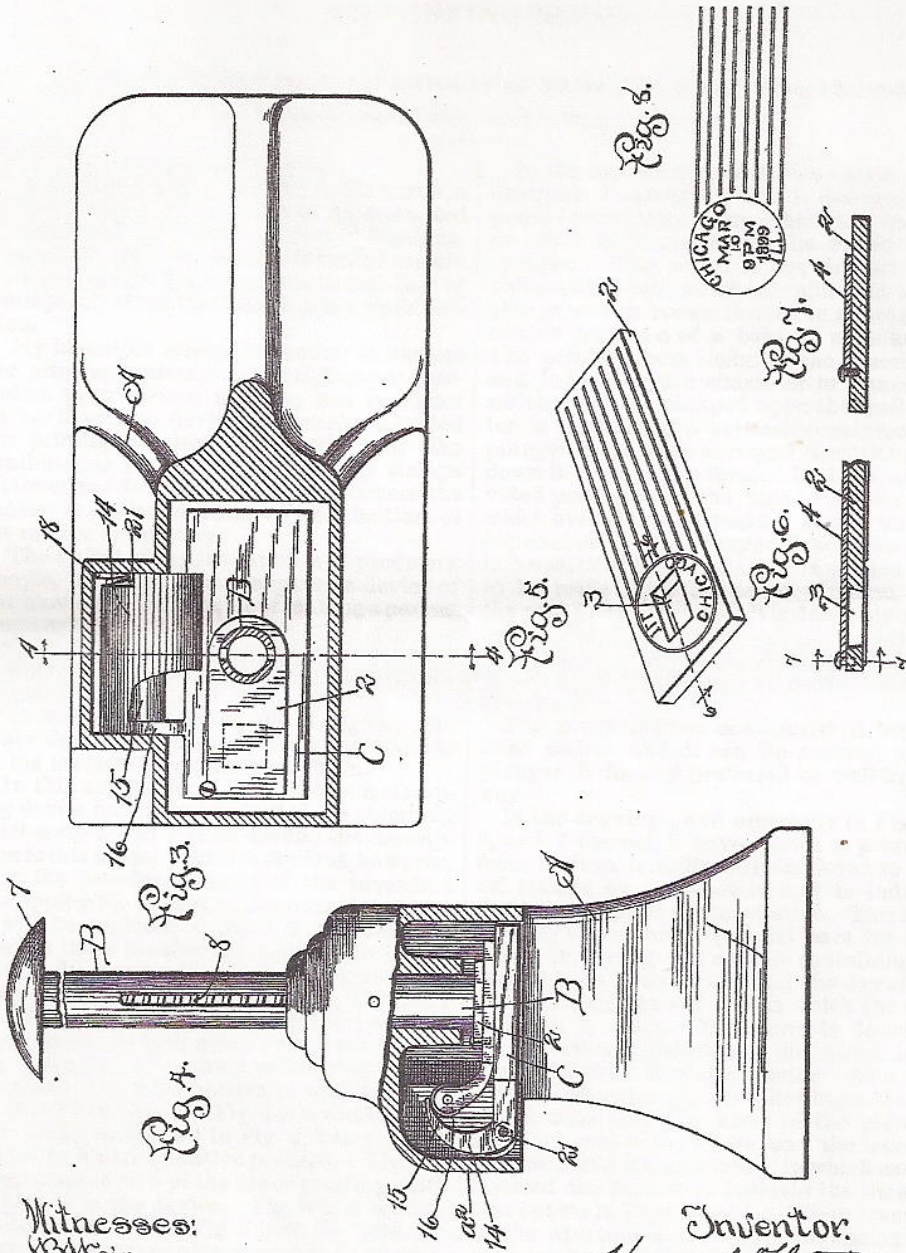
Patented Jan. 16, 1900.

H. A. THEXTON.
SELF INKING STAMP.

(Application filed Mar. 6, 1899.)

(No Model.)

2 Sheets—Sheet 2.



Witnesses:
J. B. Weir
Oliver Plumtree

Inventor:
Henry A. Thexton
by A. Miller Beffield,
Att'y

Figure 2. Sheet 2 of the patent drawings for Henry Thexton Patent 641,616

Figure 2 on the previous page shows a top and side view of the 'plunger' type self-inking device as illustrated in the actual patent.

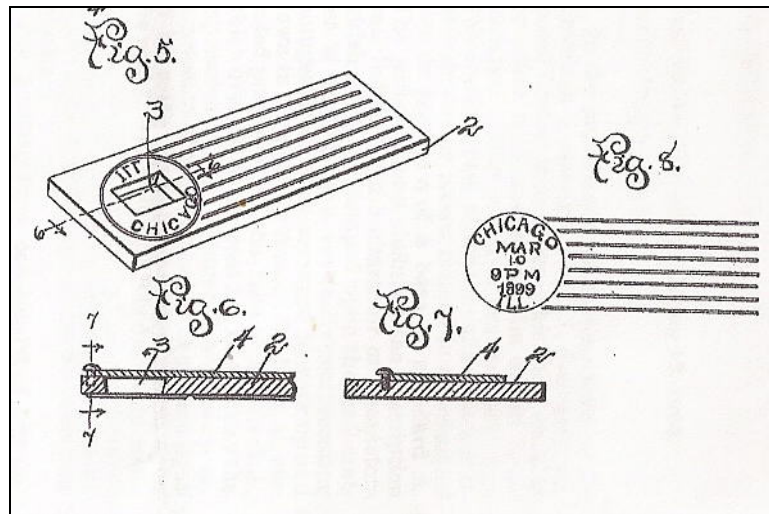


Figure 3. Cropped view of the simulated postmark from Thexton's Self Inking Stamp

Notice the similarity between the postmark shown in Figure 3 and the actual Saint Thomas marking shown in Figure 1.

There seems little doubt that the marking shown in Figure 1 is from a Henry Thexton device very similar to the one shown in his patent application. It is likely that Henry Thexton was able to test his device at the local post office in St. Thomas.

Another quick look at the patent database revealed that Henry Thexton had several other patents awarded to him. Who was Henry Thexton, and what else did he do? A little internet search turned up some interesting biographical information.

“He completed his education in the schools of North Dakota and for some time was engaged in farming. For four years he was engaged in various enterprises in Chicago and in 1902 came to Minneapolis, where he has since resided. In 1907 the Thexton Manufacturing Company was started as a private enterprise, under the name of the Thexton Stamp Vending Machine Company.... Mr. Thexton is an inventor of note, having invented the first and original envelope sealer, which he had patented and later sold. He also invented the first stamp vending machine and it was the first on the market...”

Source:

<http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/mn/hennepin/bios/1923/thextoha.txt>

Do you have any Saint Thomas markings similar to the one shown in Figure 1? To date, I am only aware of this single example and would be interested in hearing about this or any other interesting markings from St. Thomas during this period. I can be reached at mikeellingson@comcast.net.

