

HARRISBURG(H) PENNSYLVANIA PRECANCELS

For at least nine years from 1861-1869, members of the Pennsylvania state departments in Harrisburg had their outgoing letters franked with precanceled stamps. For many years collectors thought that only the legislature used these stamps. Recently these precancels have been discovered on letters from the Inspector General, Attorney General and the State Library. The legislative letters almost always contain signatures of the legislators and are on printed envelopes bearing the seal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Precancels in this period were used for labor-savings, accounting purposes and theft prevention from reuse and misuse. Since they were used by several different departments it is likely the use was for accounting purposes and the stamps were kept at, and applied by, the post office. The post office periodically presented bills to the legislature for payment and these bills included postage stamp expenditures. The precancel definition used here is “an adhesive postage stamp that has been canceled, under proper authority, before being affixed to the mail matter”. Further evidence is that the cancel goes to the edge of the stamp but does not appear on the letter.

From 1861 to 1864 the Harrisburg post office applied a circular date stamp to the letters but not to the stamps. From 1865 through 1869 an undated circular handstamp was in use. The dates attributed to these different precancels come from handstamp dates and contents. The legislature was in session the first four months of the year and therefore most of the letters bear dates in this period. A database of **112** letters has been created that was used to define **twelve** different precancels that are presented here in approximate chronological order. There are certainly many more letters to be discovered that will help refine this study.

Exhibit Directory

Position 1:	Title page and exhibit directory
Position 2:	1861 Eight Bar circular grid
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Position 4-5:	1861-1865 Thick pen stroke cross
Position 6-7:	1863-1865 (Ruled) straight line pen cross
Position 8-9:	1864-1866 Four ring target
Position 10:	1867 Wavy pen stroke cross
Position 11:	1867: Single way pen stroke
Position 12:	1867 Straight line pen stroke
Position 13:	1867: Eight millimeter textured roller
Position 14:	1867-1869 Two to four millimeter textured roller
Position 15-16:	1868-1869 Single and multiple brush strokes

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1861: Eight Bar Circular Grid



The earliest of the Pennsylvania precancels is an eight bar circular grid, eighteen millimeters in diameter and in black ink. **Four** letters have been found dated from March 1861 to April 1, 1861. The letter shown above is dated March 26, 1861 and was written by House of Representative member Vincent, whose signature appears on the letter.

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1862-1863: "1" in Circular Handstamp



Four of this style of precancel have been found dated from October 30, 1862 to March 3, 1863. This style does not conform to the previously stated precancel definition but has been included because of its legislative use. This letter is dated February 11, 1863, bears the seal of the House of Representatives and the manuscript notation "State Department".

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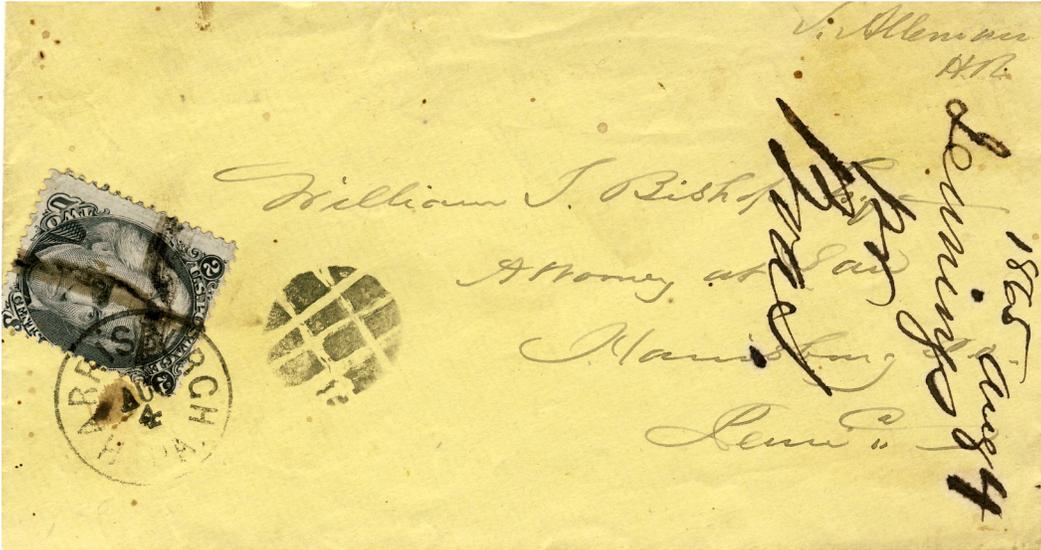
1861-1865: Thick Pen Stoke Cross



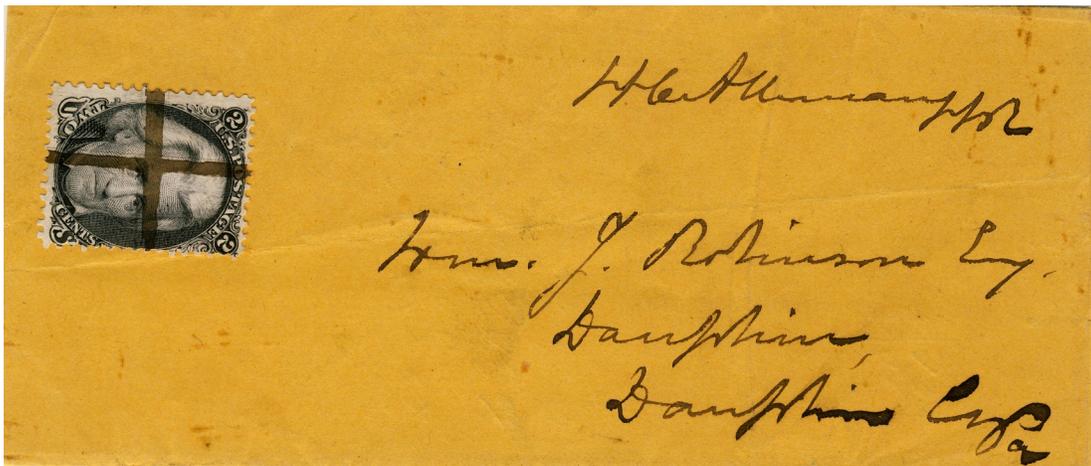
Seven thick pen stroke precancels have been found dated from approximately April 1, 1861 to August 4, 1865. The above wrapper is not dated, but the enclosure is the Daily Legislative Record for the April 1, 1861 session. The 1c 1857 was demonetized in Harrisburg on August 26, 1861, making it likely that this wrapper saw use some time during these two dates. The scant literature credits this wrapper as the earliest Harrisburg precancel but that may not be correct.

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1863-1865: Thick Pen Stoke Cross



These two letters with 2c Andrew Jackson stamps do not show a year date handstamp as this is the period when the Harrisburg post office switched to an undated circular handstamp. Both letters bear the signature of House of Representative member Allenman. The letter above bears an 1865 manuscript notation used to date the two letters. The cross was made by either a wide nibbed pen or a brush.



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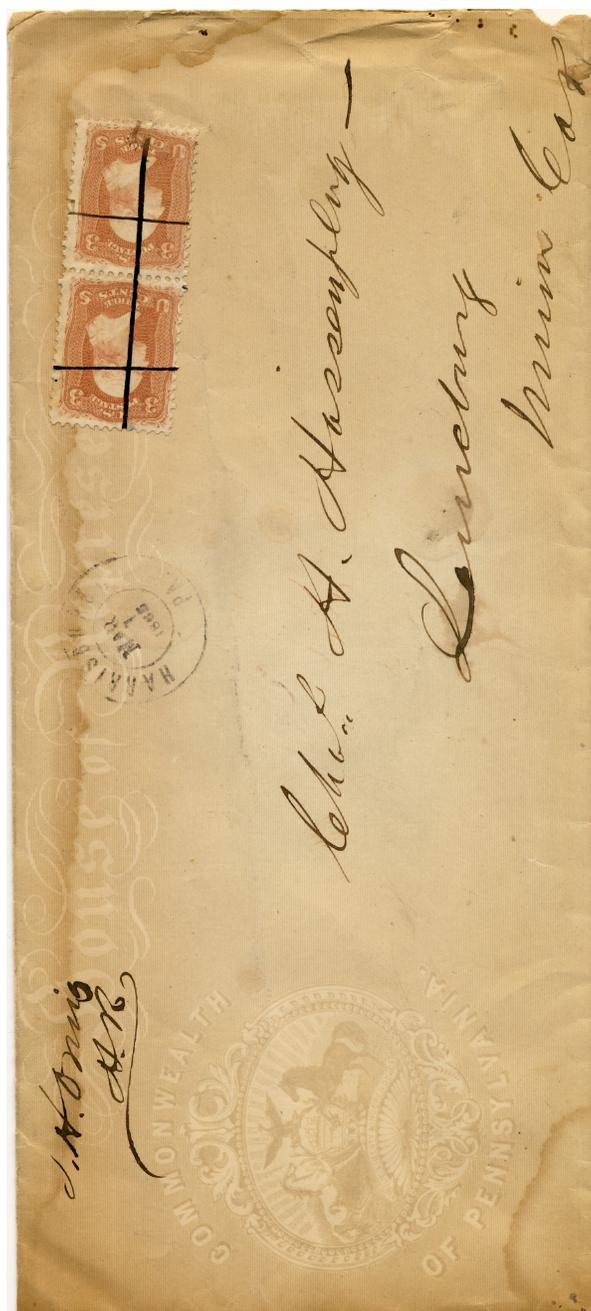
1863-1865: (Ruled?) Straight Line Pen Cross



The second most common of the Harrisburg precancel is the straight line pen cross. **Twenty-two** are known dated from February 17, 1863 to March 1, 1865. Shown above is the February 17, 1863 letter signed by Senator Charles McCannetless.

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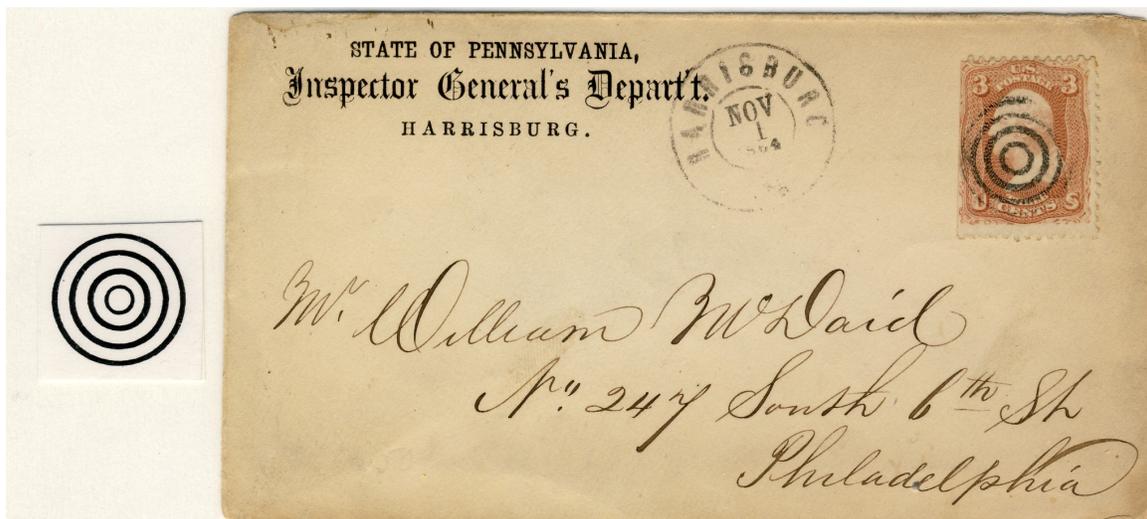
1863-1865: (Ruled?) Straight Line Pen Cross



This letter is dated March 1, 1865 and is one of only two known of this size, 4 inches by 9 inches. The second is dated May 4, 1864 and bears a strip of three stamps. This letter is signed by House of Representative member Homig(?).

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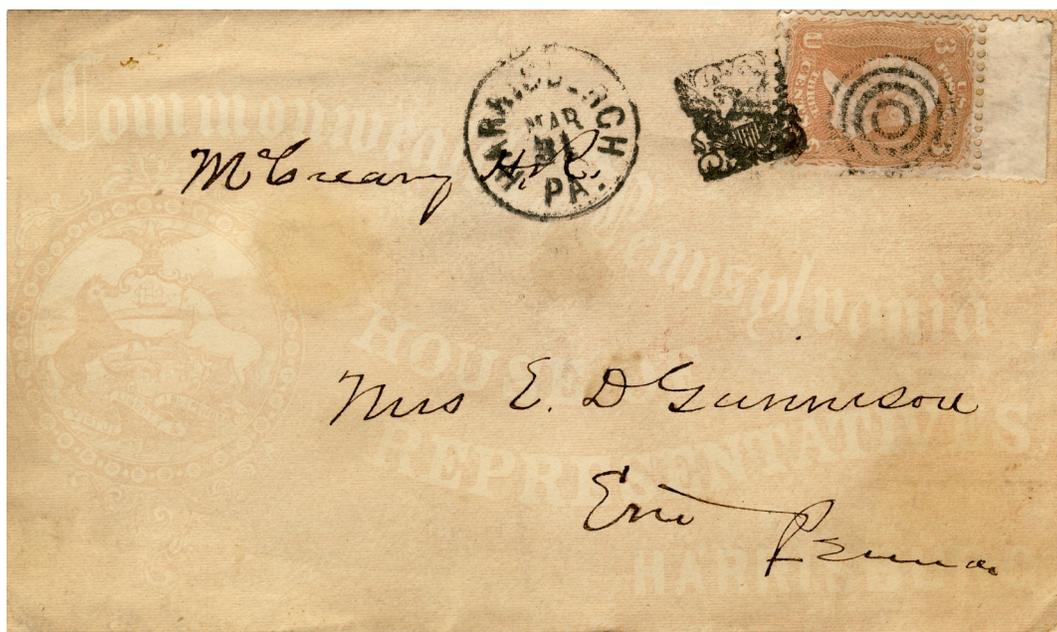
1863-1866: Four Ring Target



This precancel is the most common of the twelve precancel types. It is an eight millimeter diameter four ring circular target cancel. **Twenty-four** letters bearing this precancel are known, dated from August 31, 1863 to April 10, 1866. The above letter is dated November 1, 1864 and is the **only known** precancel example used by the **Inspector General's Department**. Since the Inspector General's office was probably open all year round the November date is not surprising.

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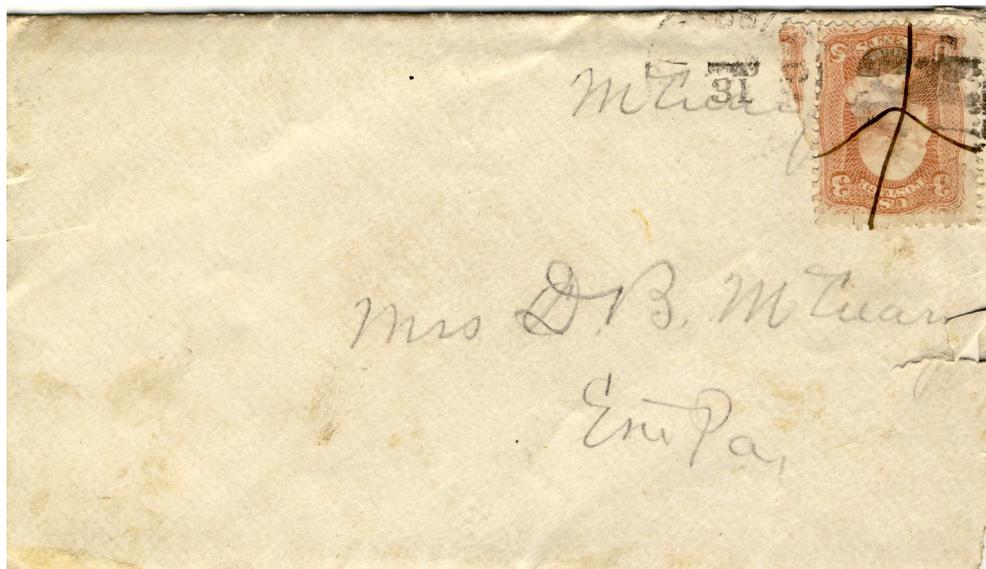
1864-1866: Four Ring Target



This letter is another example of the ring target precancel and is dated March 31. It is unusual as it bears the Harrisburg Eagle cancel, of which less than a half dozen are known.

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1866: Wavy Pen Stroke Cross



The above letter shows the wavy pen stroke cross precancel. It is dated by contents to December 31, 1866, just prior to the beginning of the 1867 legislative session. **Four** letters are known with this precancel, all from the McCreary family correspondence. Two are dated December 28, one dated December 31 and one undated. This precancel seems to have enjoyed only a four day life.

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1867: Single Wavy Pen Stroke



The above letter shows the single wavy line pen stroke precancel and is dated by contents to January 21, 1867. **Five** precancels of this type are known dated in a seven day period from January 15, 1867 to January 21, 1867.

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1867: Single Straight Line Pen Stroke



The above letter shows the single straight line pen stroke precancel. It is undated, but a total of **six** letters are known with dates between December 31, 1866 and April 8, 1867. Both horizontal and vertical cancels exist. This is the **only known** precancel used by the Office of the **Attorney General** and is signed by Attorney General (Benjamin Harris) Brewster. Brewster later became the thirty-seventh United States Attorney General.

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1867: Eight Millimeter Textured Roller



The letter above is dated by contents as January 24, 1867. Six letters are known with this precancel, dated from January 24, 1867 to April 2, 1867. The letter below is dated March 27 and is the **only known** Harrisburgh precancel used by the **State Library**.



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1867-1869: Two to Four Millimeter Textured Roller

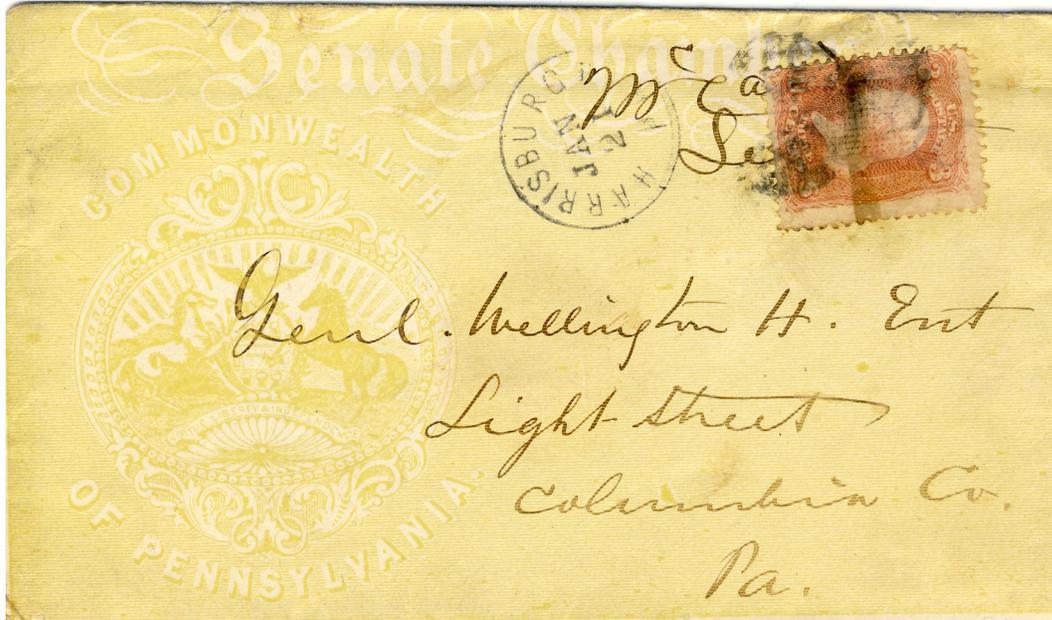


The two letters bear blue, two to three millimeter wide textured roller precancels, applied either vertically or horizontally. Several examples in black are also known. The use of this precancel is dated by contents to February 27, 1867 to January 12, 1869 and **twenty** are known. The letter above is signed by Senator F. H. Braggins and the letter below is signed by House of Representative member T. Chase.

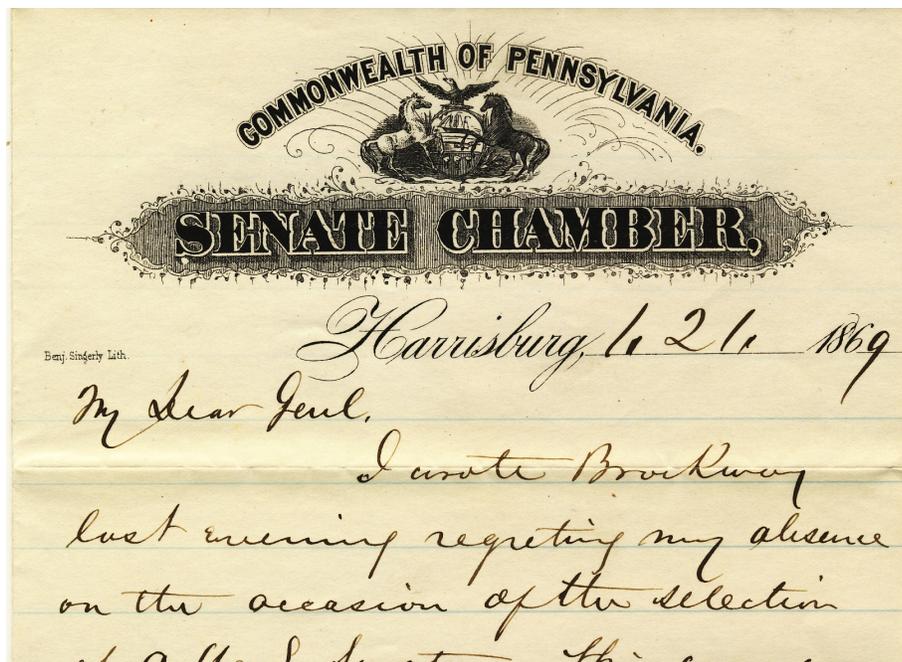


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1868-1869: Single Brush Stroke



The letter shown above, with contents below, is one of **ten** known single brush stroke precancels and is dated by contents to January 21, 1869. The ten letters are all dated by contents from February 11, 1868 to February 26, 1869.



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1869(?): Multiple Brush Stroke



The above letter illustrates the multiple brush stroke precancel, dated January 21. It was likely applied using ink and various width brushes. Only two letters are known to exist, dated January 21 and January 23, with the year date unknown, but likely 1869. This letter is signed by House of Representatives member Houseman. The letter below shows both a single and double brush stroke precancel and is dated January 23, also signed by Houseman.

