MACHINE CANCELS AND THE GREAT UNKNOWN

Xenia, Ohio's Three Different Flag Dies and the Columbia Interregnum

By A J Savakis, The Editor

At the stamp clubs that I belong, I am at times asked to speak on the machine cancel hobby. My listeners, who are used to Scott catalogs giving them all the information they need on a particular stamp, are flabbergasted when I tell them there are no post office records available today to tell us what machines were used at a particular post office. Hence both identification of what manufacturer's machine applied a particular cancel, and its dates of use, are left to knowledgeable cover collectors and their willingness to report their finds.

The best known exception to the lack of records is exemplified by the study of Flag Cancels. Because of an early researcher by the name of Frederick Langford, who had access to post office records before they were lost, destroyed, or misplaced, we have a 99% accurate listing of years of use, and the years of the assignment of replacement flag machines. [1] New finds, new towns, and new dates of uses are not impossible, but they are major news in the hobby because of the completeness of his work.

Another surprise to my audience when I speak about machine cancels is that the machine cancel dies, both flag die and postmark die, were hand-cut dies. The workmanship of the American Postal Machines Company was excellent, and it was not until the 1920's when the Post Office used other contractors to furnish dies for the Flag Cancel machines that the hand cutting became evident.

Despite the high degree of workmanship by the American Postal Machines Company, each of their Flag Cancels has a unique arrangement of the star field, the size of the union, and the location of the halyard.

As a convention explained by Frederick Langford, the thirteen stars in a Flag Cancel die are numbered depending on whether the stars are in a 3-2-3-2-3 pattern or in an ovate pattern (with a star in the center) as follows:

Figure 1	**Figure 2**
1 6 11 4 9 2 7 12 5 10 3 8 13	12 11 1 10 2 9 13 3 8 4 7 5 6
Numbering Stars in a Spread Field of Stars	Numbering Stars in an Ovate Field of Stars

[1] Langford's study is now in its Fourth Edition, and is ONLY available from the MCS. Please contact the Secretary to order. Address and email are listed elsewhere in this document..

Langford also explains that the flag cancel die stayed with the machine as it moved from city to city. Hence the star field becomes a finger print for identifying Flag Cancel machines as they are moved from city to city, as well as to distinguish new machines that have been installed.

But even with this information available in book form, there are unknowns and surprises.

To illustrate this, consider the Flag Cancel machines used at Xenia, Ohio. The Flag Cancel Encyclopedia gives the reader this information about the dates of use of three different Flag Cancel machines:

1.	Xenia	B 14		1901	1913
2.	Xenia	B 14	dd	1913	1917
3.	Xenia	A 14		1917	1921

The cancels for Xenia are described as either a type B14 or a type A14. The letter distinguishes the style of the postmark dial in accordance with a chart. The B dial has the four digits of the year separated at the bottom of the dial. For example, a B dial with a year of 1901 would appear in the dial with a “19” in the lower left corner, and the “01” in the opposite lower right corner. The number describes the flag style and the arrangement of the stars. The number “14” has a 3-2-3-2-3 arrangement of stars, and the stars are numbered for discussion purposes in **Figure 1**.

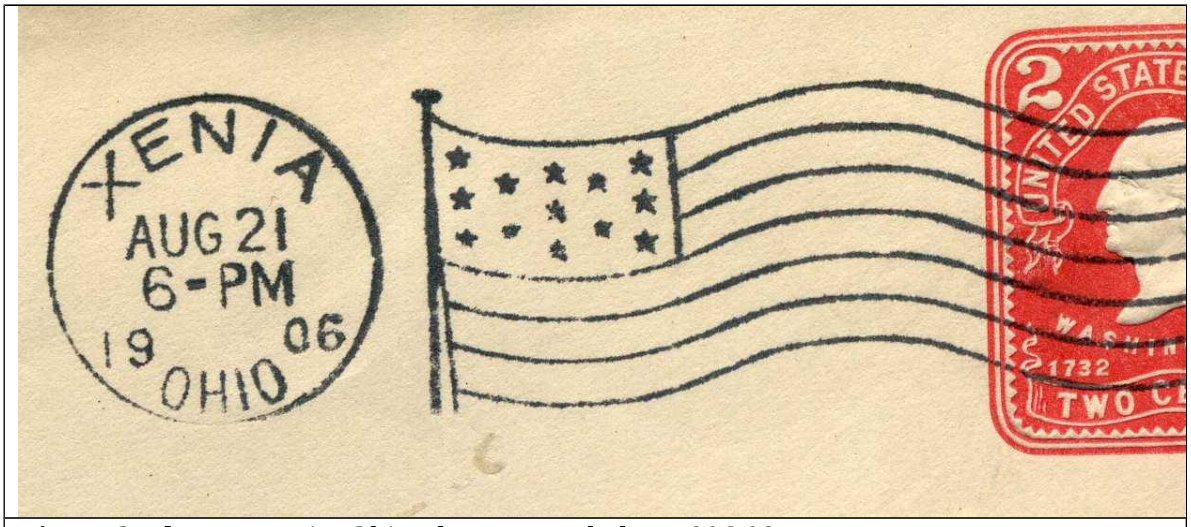

Figure 3, above: Xenia, Ohio Flag postmark date 1906 0821.
Die #1 used 1901-1913. This is Type B14.

In comparing this Flag with the others used in Xenia, compare the location of stars 11, 12 and 13 in all the examples. In Flag #1, the stars #11 and #13 at the far right are on top of each other, with star #12 slightly to the right of them. Also note where the halyard (the rope that ties the flag) attaches to the staff in relation to the stars and union. For Flag #1, the halyard attaches at the lower left corner of the union.

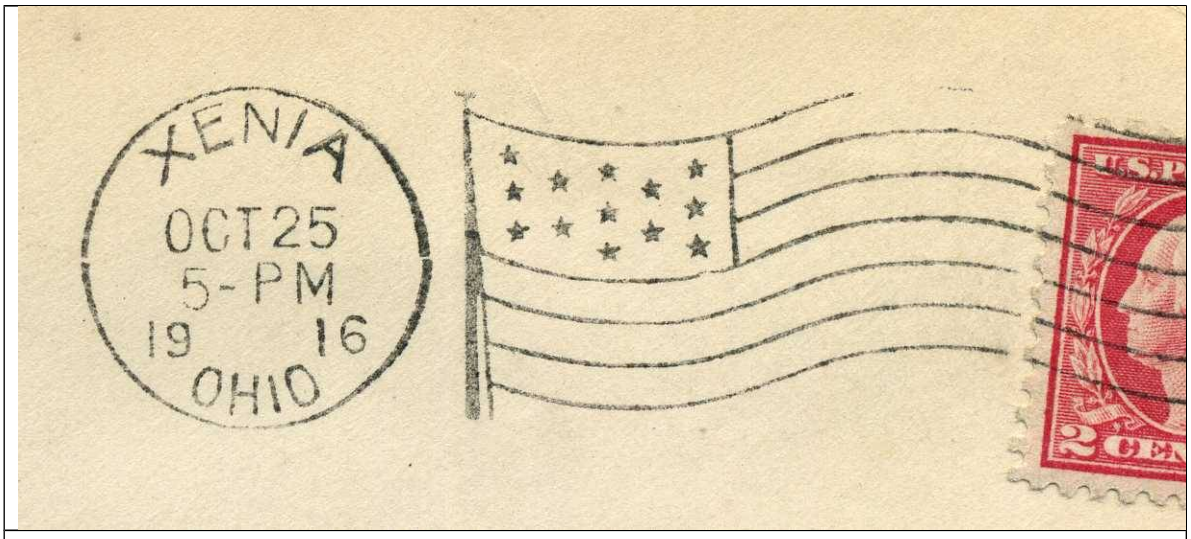

Figure 4, above: Xenia, Ohio Flag postmark date 1916 1025
Flag Die #2 used 1913-1917. This is also a Type B14, but the Flag die shows a different pattern in the stars and where the halyard attaches to the staff. This is a different die (abbreviated "dd") and represents a new machine replacing the older machine which was in use from 1901.

To distinguish the Flag cancellations, compare stars 11, 12, and 13 with the example featured in Figure 3. For this Flag Die #2, star #12 is not in line with stars #11 and #13. Instead, star #12 is to the left of both. *Also, the halyard in Flag Die #2 attaches with a great deal more ink.*

Both Flag Die #1 and Flag Die #2 has postmark dials with the digits of the year split. For Flag Die #3, not only are the digits together, but again the machine is changed as can be shown by observing the Flag Cancel die itself.

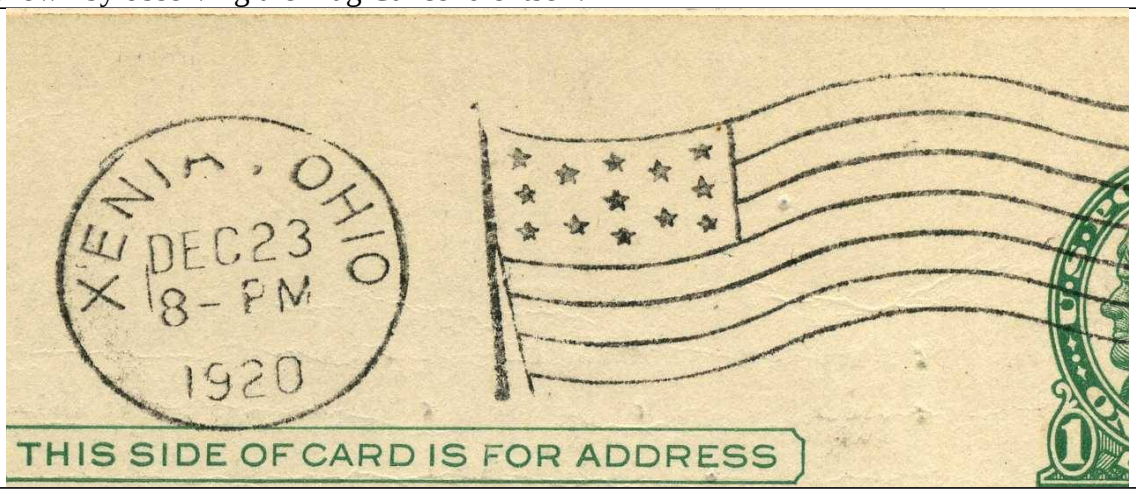

Figure 5, above: Xenia, Ohio Flag postmark date 1920 1223
Flag Die #3 used 1917-1921. The digits of the year are together in the lower middle of the postmark dial. This is a style A dial. This is the easiest way to

distinguish Flag Die #2 and #3. *Besides being a different arrangement of stars, note how much farther the halyard is from the staff in comparison with the earlier dies.*

One could easily conclude the record of machines used in Xenia from 1901-1921 is complete. But there is a surprise. What is not disclosed from the record is that between the Flag Cancel machine that applied Flag Die #1 and Flag Die #2, there was a Columbia machine used for a brief period of time.

Machine Cancel collectors know about the 'interregnum' use of a Columbia machine at the Xenia post office from two reports of actual examples.[2] It is assumed, but not proven, that the Columbia machine was a temporary use after the older American Flag Cancel machine ceased to operate, and the replacement Flag Cancel machine was not yet available.

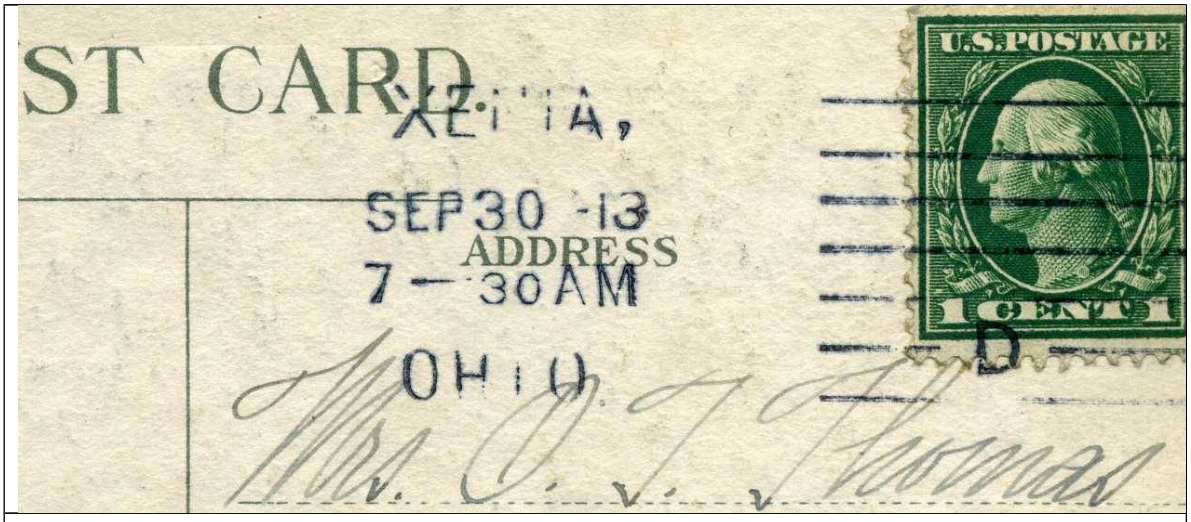

Figure 6, above: *Columbia machine cancel Type K-7 (D)*
Postmark date of 1913 0930

This is only the second reported example of a Columbia machine cancel at Xenia. Additional examples if known are asked to be reported to the Editor.

The D in the cancellation indicates the post card was Deposited for mail delivery at the Xenia Post Office.

The Columbia machine cancel's dates of use is unknown; and can be for a week, a month, or longer. While it is assumed it was a short term replacement, it is possible that either Flag machine #1 or Flag machine #2 was used simultaneously with the Columbia.

Hence dates of use of not only the Columbia, but Flag Cancel uses in the summer and fall of 1913 are needed to be reported.

[2] The initial report was of a 1913 0925 use in the multi-volume study by Bob Payne, Reg Morris, and Tim Holmes. Mike Ellingson reported and sold on E*Bay a 1913 0930 example.

Figure 7, above: Xenia, Ohio Flag postmark date 1913 0726 of a Parcel Post stamp. Die #1 used 1901-1913. This is Type B14.

For being a last year use of Flag machine #1, the device is still applying a good impression of its Flag Die. Indeed, it can be argued that this late use is a better example than the earlier ones! *It begs the question as to why it was replaced. Perhaps it was something sudden, without time for an orderly replacement of the Flag Cancel machine by another of the same manufacturer, and hence something quick was sent.*

The mystery of the Columbia interregnum is compounded by the observation that the Columbia machine sent to Xenia had a cancellation die not used on any other Columbia! If you will notice in **Figure 6**, the cancellation die included the letter "D".

To the Editor's information and belief, this was the ONLY Columbia bar cancel of this 7-bar style to have a die space for insertion of a letter (C for Collection from mailboxes; D for Deposited at the Post Office; R for Received at destination Post Office; and T for Transit).

August 1913 through December 1913 Flag Cancels are requested to be reported to the Editor (*Please! Iinclude a scan of the cancel for verification purposes*) as well as any other Columbia uses at Xenia.

Information can be emailed to the Editor at mcsforum @ embarqmail.com.

Thank you!