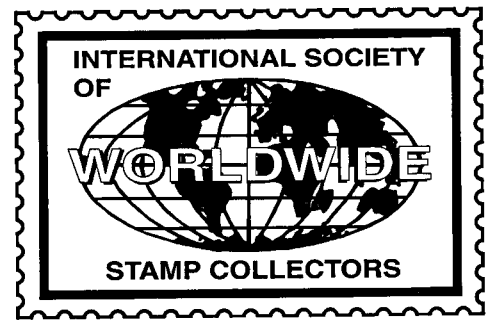


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The Circuit



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The Official Journal of the International Society of Worldwide Stamp Collectors

The Masking Stranger

by Napoleon
Part 1 of 5 in a Series

Several years ago, I borrowed a stamp club's copy of the *Yvert et Tellier French* catalog to check my collection and duplicates.

I was looking for varieties, including plate flaws, those fly specks that result when a printing plate has a defect that marks the stamps produced. On used stamps, the cancellation often covered just the spot where the plate flaw would be. The cancellations didn't come in just one shape or size; they varied as needed to cover all evidence of the flaw. This led to the question of why there were so many different cancellations, what they meant, and if they could be helpful. Thus, à la "The Lone Ranger," the masking stranger on the stamp became useful rather than threatening.

After several months of checking literature, Internet sites, and thousands of stamps in dealer stock and local auction lots, I knew enough to be dangerous. This article shares the knowledge, so you too will be able to endanger your wallet and dealer stock. My thanks go to all who contributed knowledge, material, or images to use in these articles.

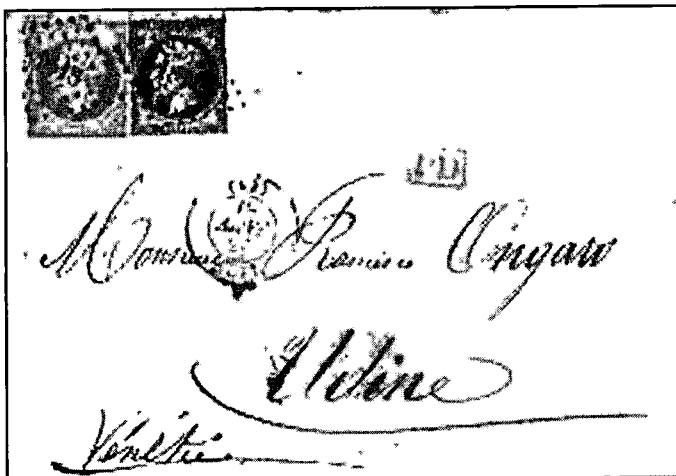


Fig. 1

Postal markings had been applied to stampless covers for many years before France issued its first adhesive stamps. When stamps came into use, the postal service needed to "cancel" the stamps on the cover so they could not be reused. France already used circular date stamps to mark the origin of the mail,



Fig. 2

as well as its intermediate and final stops. Post office officials wanted another mark to cancel the stamps.

This gave rise to the typical cover shown in **Figure 1**. The circular date stamp marked the letter as mailed in Lyon. The PD-in-rectangle denoted payment of postage through to a foreign destination (Udine, Italy). The 1818 in a diamond-of-dots canceled the stamps.

The earliest common cancellation was a diamond-shaped grill of six rows of six smaller diamonds. This grill (**Figure 2**) came into use with the Ceres issue in 1849. Starting in 1851, if there were multiple stamps to cancel (or even if there were not!) an "endless" grill could be used. This grill was made up of small parallelograms, five rows deep and "endless."

Figure 3 shows an endless grille *au rouleau* on a cover, canceling a single stamp. Sometimes the difference between six rows of diamonds (normal grill) and five rows of parallelograms (*grille au rouleau*) is the easiest way to tell which cancellation is on a particular stamp. **Figure 4** shows a late-usage example of the normal grill, more than doubling the value of this item.

There was a second imperforate Ceres issue. This

Continued on page 4

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President's Column

by Tony Zollo (#856) – President and Executive Director, ISWSC

The state of your society needs improvement and it can only come from **YOU!!**

In my last column I announced the call for candidates for all the officers of the ISWSC. This included the President, Secretary, Vice President for Charitable Services and Vice President for Public Relations. As I write this (7/22/01), two of the four officer positions await candidates. This is despite several email messages calling for candidates, my newsletter column and many personal appeals to prominent members.

Our newsletter editor has told me she is running short of articles submitted for publication. Our Regional Secretary positions in Western Europe and Australasia are vacant and our British Isles Regional Secretary is going to step down at the end of the year.

Continued on next page

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Phone or send your questions to the appropriate volunteer.
Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope or IRC for a reply.

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Please remember that the Editor does not mail out The Circuit. If you have any questions about your Circuit mail service, please contact Tom Fortunato or Tony Zollo. Thank you!

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:
SEPTEMBER 20, 2001

Cast Your Ballot!

Don't miss your opportunity to vote in this year's ISWSC elections. As we all learned several months ago, every vote counts!

You will find a list of candidates on pages 6-7 followed by a brief biography of each. Please take a few minutes right now to read through the list and decide who you would like to see as the next set of officers for the ISWSC. Be sure to read through the voting procedures (page 7) for information about how the ISWSC elections work. Then vote!

Remember, you need to have your ballot to the Elections Chairman by November 15, 2001. We look forward to counting your ballot!



President's Column

Continued from page 2

All of this does not bode well for the future of our society. The ISWSC is a society of members. The work of the society, indeed its very survival, depends on volunteers. We have no paid positions. In the past, volunteerism has been very strong amongst a small group of members, but they cannot do it all alone, forever.

The largest single employment category of our members is "retired" so many of you must have a few minutes a week to help the society.

And so, if I may paraphrase, it is time for me to say *ask not what the ISWSC can do for you, ask what you can do for the ISWSC!!* If the ISWSC is to survive and flourish we simply must have more members willing to devote a small amount of their time to conduct its business and plan for its future.

I have served as President and Executive Director for almost four years and it has been a pleasure to serve with the many fine individuals who have contributed their time and efforts on behalf of our society and its programs. I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them. I can assure all of you that if you decide to volunteer in some fashion, you will be rewarded by the opportunity just as I have. I strongly urge each of you to consider what you can do on behalf of the ISWSC. You can no longer afford not to step up and help! Please contact me (see the listing of contact information on page 2) as soon as possible.

Till next time...



Dues/Advertising Policy

Dues Information:

Single/Dealer/Club membership: \$12.00*

Youth membership (under 18): \$10.00*

Family membership (up to 4 persons in one residence): \$19.00*

*Plus 250 large commemoratives for the Youth Program or equiv. donation in US\$. Dues above are for one year and include six newsletters per year. You may sign up for three years at a time. For an application or further information send SASE or IRC to: ISWSC, P.O. Box 150407, Lufkin TX 75915-0407, USA. *There will be a \$2 per year discount if the renewal is received at least one month prior to the current expiration date.*

Advertising Policy:

For reasons of accountability, only members of the ISWSC, APS or ASDA may place ads. All ads dealing with philatelic concerns are acceptable. We reserve the right to edit out objectionable language. Advertisers are expected to respond to all inquiries, so be sure you can handle the responses before you offer to trade, buy or sell. If you have a bad result from answering an ad, contact the Editor. We will try to resolve the conflict.

Display Rates (Camera Ready*) per insertion:

Full page: \$75.00**

Half page: \$40.00**

Quarter page: \$20.00**

Per column inch: \$5.00

Six repeat insertions of the same ad for the cost of five ads (one free). We will also offer a two-sided insertion for \$125 per issue.

*Camera Ready means ready to paste up or scan and print. Reductions and typesetting extra.

** Discounts for three or more insertions of same ad. Yearly display rates available. Write to ISWSC past president Tom Fortunato (see p. 2) for special rates.

Classified Rates per insertion:

First 30 words, including name, address, and ZIP code are \$3. Additional words are 20 for \$1.

NOTE: State abbreviations = one word; "P.O. Box 1234" = two words; ZIP code = one word.

Make all checks payable to ISWSC in U.S. funds. Send text and payment for ads to the Editor. All addresses can be found on page 2.

The Masking Stranger

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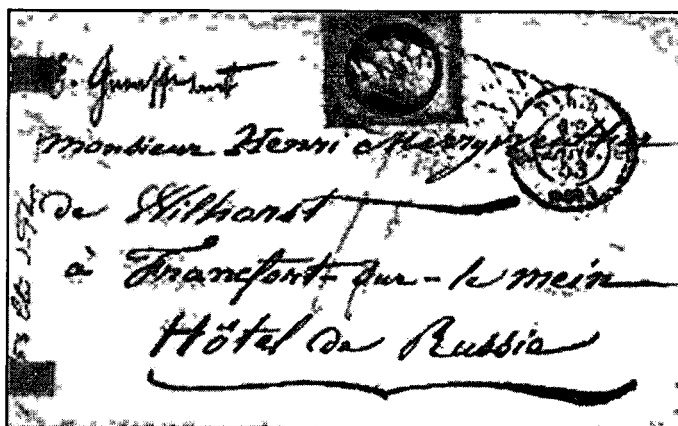


Fig. 3

second set (called the "Bordeaux" issue) was printed during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Both Ceres issues had lines of shading under the eye. On the first issue, the shading lines curve clockwise from the upper left to the lower right. On the second imperforate issue, the lines are horizontal or run from lower left to upper right. By the time the second imperforate Ceres issue was produced, France



Fig. 4

had issued two perforated sets of stamps, so some of the Bordeaux issue stamps were "privately" perforated, mostly 13x13, although some were 15x15 or 16x16.

By the time of the second imperforate Ceres issue, one of the most common cancellations was the numerals-in-diamond-of-dots. The numerals came in two sizes—early small *petits chiffres* and later large *gros chiffres*. Each number represented a unique French post office. In Figure 1, 1818 is the *petits chiffres* cancel for Lyon.

Detective Case

Figure 5 is a perforated Head of Ceres stamp. The stamps of the perforated Ceres issue are perforated 14x13. But this stamp is perforated 16x16. How can the cancel help identify the stamp?

The 15x15 and 16x16 stamps come from the departments (provinces) of le Cher and Lot-et-Garonne, and from the Marseille central post office. The *gros chiffres* 3485 cancellation is from St. Armand-en-Puisaye, which is in the department of Nièvre. Nièvre is adjacent to le Cher!

The stamp probably is a privately perforated copy of the Bordeaux issue. The lines of shading under the eye buttress this conclusion as they run southwest to northeast, as in the Bordeaux issue.



Fig. 5



Losange

by Napoleon

Part 2 of 5 in a Series

In France, from the time of the imperforate Emperor Louis Napoleon stamps (1853) through the perforated Head of Ceres issue (ending in 1875), the most common cancellation was an 8x8 diamond-of-dots (*losange* in French). In the center, it had short numerals or letters called *petits chiffres* (PC), or

tall numerals called *gros chiffres* (GC). PC numerals were about 4 mm high and GC numerals about 6 mm high. Figure 1 shows the arrangement of dots for the PC cancellation for Alexandria, Egypt. Figure 2 is the GC cancel for the same city.

PC cancels were used from 1852-1863. Thus they

were common on the imperforate and perforated emperor stamps. The initial PC cancels were assigned to individual French cities and towns in alphabetical order; PC 1 was for Abbeville, and PC 3703 for Yvré-l'Évêque. PC 3704 (Alexandria) through PC 3709 (Smyrne) were for foreign cities, and PC 3740 began a sequence for newly created post offices anywhere.

GC cancels came into use at the time of the emperor-with-laurel-wreath issue of 1863. Like PC cancels, GC cancels were assigned alphabetically. GC 1-4361 were original assignments, and GC 4362-4999

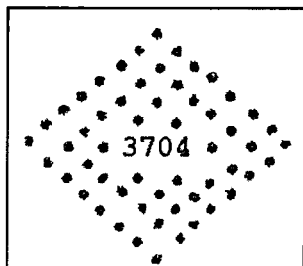


Figure 1, Arrangement of dots in PC cancel

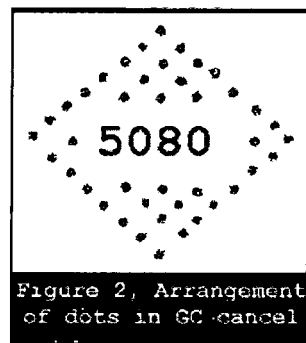


Figure 2, Arrangement of dots in GC cancel

Continued on next page

Losange

Continued from page 4

were later metropolitan post offices. GC cancels 5000-5078 were for Algeria, 5079-5103 for offices abroad, and 5104-5172 were later Algerian and foreign cities and towns. GC 6000-6449 were for even later metropolitan post offices.

Generally one cannot determine the cancel number when it contains only 6s and/or 9s, unless it has an associated date stamp to reveal the city. For example "66" could be "99." But for some of the GC 99 cancels, the "99" is underlined.

While there had been limited movement of PC cancels from one city to another, the

Franco-Prussian War of 1870 severely upset the GC numbering system. When France lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany as part of the peace treaty, the French postal authorities took the GC cancels from the lost cities and towns and reissued them to new post offices. The only way to determine the origin of a GC number that is known to have been used twice is by an associated circular date stamp with either the town or date legible, or by its presence on one of the perforated Ceres stamps issued after the war.

Both PC and GC cancels exist in red or blue, but not for all locations. With some of the smaller numbers in GC cancels, the space at each end was filled with a horizontal line, a stylistic variation. The GC cancels also exist with smaller capital letters under the number. These represent branch post offices in major cities. For example, GC 2145A was the Les Terreaux branch post office at Lyon (GC 2145). If the smaller letters are "BG" they represent mail from the postal branch at a train station. BG stands for *boîte gare* or station (post)box.

For GC cancels, a sub-category is those remade because the earlier cancel was lost, too worn to use; or damaged. The new cancel was often different enough to be distinguishable from its predecessor. GC 99 is a remade GC cancel.

When GC cancels came into use, the obsolete PC cancels were sent to the city now using the number. Thus PC 1002 for Courtenay was sent to Cherbourg, GC 1002. Occasionally the PC cancel was used again, creating PC of GC usage. It is reported that postal officials in Ain Béida (PC 4116), Nice (PC 2656), and

Sétif (PC 3735) retained their PC cancels and continued to use them. In general, the old PC cancels were used for registered mail, for the GC cancel if it were misplaced, or during periods of high mail volume. Figure 3 shows a PC of GC cancel.

How does one recognize PC of GC usage? If a PC cancel is on any stamp from the emperor-with-laurel-wreath or a later issue, it is PC of GC usage. There are some situations when the PC cancel is more valuable in its original location and others when its value increases in PC of GC usage.

When the *losange* went into use, Paris post offices used letters and numerals with serifs. Later, branch post offices in Paris used letters and numerals without serifs. Near the end of the *losange* period, the star-and-number cancel came into use at the Paris branch post offices. All three of these are shown in Figure 4. Any cancel that appears to be a GC cancel with a one or two digit number usually is a Paris six-pointed star cancel.

France used sans serifs letters in the *losange* for rail route cancels. For example, "TB" in a *losange* was for the Toulouse-to-Bordeaux rail route. Figure 5 shows another rail post *losange*, the "(P)GSO" cancel from a Paris train station, the *Gare du Sud-Ouest*. How does one know the letters in Figure 5 are PGSO? In a *losange*, the characters are centered. "SO" is right of the centerline (from top center dot down), so there also must be two characters to the left of the centerline. The only four-character combination ending in "GSO" is "PGSO" for Paris *Gare du Sud-Ouest*. In Figure 5, the right tip of the loop of the "P" just exists, looking like a missing perforation.

France also used sans serif letters for special post offices. Examples included the *Exposition Universelle* (EU) of 1867 and the 1860 *Corps Expeditionnaires de Chine, Bureau A* (CECA).

The *losange* existed with an anchor in the center for use on ships, as shown in Figure 6. *Losanges* also came with nothing in the center (*losange évidé*), and with dots filling the center (*losange plein*). A *losange plein* on an imperforate copy of the emperor-with-laurel-wreath or last Head of Ceres issue strongly suggests that the stamp is a French Colonies general issue imperforate. Many colonial cancels had dots filling the



Fig. 3. Left: PC of GC cancel; right: form variation, GC --40--



Fig. 4, Paris branch post offices. Left: Roman D; center: sans serif J; right: 6-pointed star 28



Figure 5, rail post
Left: mail car
Right: Paris station

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