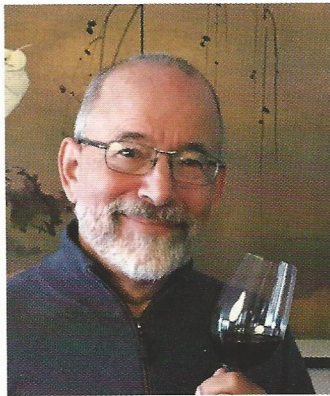


U.S.A. Postal Card Column

Editor: Lewis E. Bussey

lebarch@aol.com



S17x & S17e - Analysis of Scrapes & Dents

Postal card plates suffer all sorts of minor damage and occasional reworking. During its 4-year contract life, scratches, punctures, dents, burnishing, etc., can alter a plate's intended image. Lack of plate damage is also a factor of how conscientious or not the printer is viewed in caring for his work.

The 1898 Jefferson 1¢ postal card is a case in point. The printer, Albert Daggett, already had a questionable reputation when he regained the 1897 postal card printing contract from Calvin Woolworth. Daggett apparently believed that if his cards could go through the mail, then there wasn't a problem that couldn't be overlooked. Multitudes of scratches, damaged design details, and mangled or burnished-off lettering abounded, and any review of S17 production led to the conclusion that the issue represented the poorest printed U.S. card in history.

Daggett's Presses

As we now know, the machinery Daggett used in Luke, Maryland was two leased Whitlock, single cylinder, and sheet-fed, flat-bed presses similar to this Cottrell graphic, Figure 1.

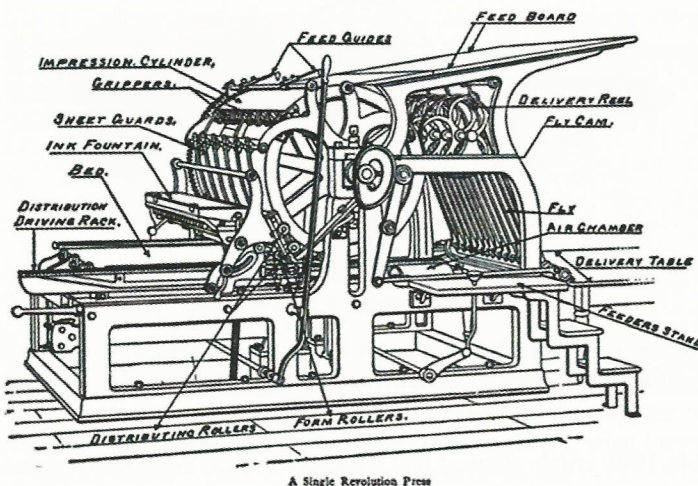


Figure 1 – Single Cylinder Press Graphic

(from "Cylinder Printing Presses" by Herbert L. Baker, 1918. Typographic Technical Series for Apprentices – Part 1, No. 7)

S17 was printed in sheets of 90 cards (9 across x 10 down), on press sheets measuring 49-7/8" x 32-7/8". The manufactory was on-site at the paper supplier, West Virginia Pulp & Paper Co.

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) supplied Daggett with 180 plates, plus two spares, costing \$5 each. 90 individual plates were locked into a 'form' which was set into a 'bed' that travelled horizontally back and forth under the large rotating 'impression cylinder' drum. The plates were inked ('ink fountain') during this process. As sheets of paper were inserted from the 'feed board', a cylinder-wide set of 'grippers' (repositionable mechanical fingers) would spring from the drum interior to hold the paper's edge and the sheet was thus impressed.

The grippers retracted as the paper was lifted off onto the 'fly' that lowered the sheet to the 'delivery table'. While we don't have a film of the Whitlock in operation, a fascinating two-minute video of a similar press can be found on 'YouTube' (search "Babcock Press at Printer's Hall").

UPSS S17x Listings - Inscription Damage

In 2005, new catalog listings were started to address values of miscellaneous card varieties. To examine varieties affecting S17's inscription, here are a series of print details from what I've identified as nine completely different plates, Figures 2-10.



Figure 2 - Left End

Figure 3 - 'E' of United

Figure 4 - 'R' of Card 1



Figure 5 - 'R' of Card 2

Figure 6 - 'E' of States

Figure 7 - 'S' of States



Figure 8 - 'F' of OF

Figure 9 - 'M' of America

Figure 10 - 'E' of Cent

Each plate suffered vertical scraping completely through the entire inscription lettering (Charles Fricke thought the damage in Figure 2 may have been a re-cut error, *PS* Jul/Sep 1994). Plate impressions varied only slightly over time.

Plates With Scrapes - What Happened?

Daggett printed nearly 2.6 billion S17 cards, a majority produced in Luke, MD. Production (equaling the Babcock press) was 20 sheets (of 90 cards) per minute. The bed of each press travelled back and forth nearly 10,000 times per eight hour day, translating to over *14 million times* over four plus years. This gave ample opportunity for something in the machinery to go wrong - and we have ample evidence that it did.

As a result of the constant forward and backward movement of the press bed, there were only a few instances where the flatbed plates came in contact with the machinery. First is an inking roller (close to the cylinder), second is where the bed+form traveled under the cylinder, and third is after the printed sheet was released and the bed+form returned.

The ink roller (probably hard rubber) was not firm enough to damage a metal plate. However, a problem may have occurred if the bed-to-cylinder drum distance was improperly set. The form (with plates) was actually cushioned on top of the bed with an intermediate material, like cardboard. Plates sitting too low gave a poor print, and sitting too high squeezed them up against the drum. If the press was run without paper, then a metal-to-metal contact was possible.

An analysis of the printing seems to indicate that scraping was caused both from the bottom of the inscription upward and from the top down. I believe the bed+form got trapped under the grippers and was then pulled back out, scraping several plates. I also believe this damaged all nine of the leading row of plate positions. Did this happen on only one press, or are there others?

Used examples, as well as finding used 'pre-damaged' printed cards, will help determine when such damage occurred. My ERP (similar to Figure 4) of August 22, 1898 sets an early mark. Other uses range from January 14, 1899 (Figure 2), September 4, 1899 (Figure 3), October 31, 1898 (Figure 5), July 2, 1899 (Figure 6), and November 11, 1899 (Figure 9). Scrape damaged S17 cards can be seen through the life of the issue, and while none seem to have been re-cut, results from wear and tear can be seen over time.

Daggett printed the other 1898 issues (i.e. Library card S19, an international card S20 and a message-reply card MR5), where there is damage similar to the above on an early run of MR5 (see *PS Mar/Apr 2018*). Daggett also provided cards for use in Spanish-American War possessions, and I have one overprinted Cuba card (S1) showing the same scrape damage as Figure 7.

Plate Replacements

With replacement steel plates being charged by BEP at \$3 each, I'm sure Daggett still miserly squeaked in changing plates out, despite a relatively lucrative economic return. For S17, Daggett's contract (1 December 1897 – 30 November 1901) provided him payment of 23.95¢ per 1000 cards. This printing alone garnered over \$600,000. With print quality likely called into question, the inevitable was due. A U.S. Treasury Department letter states that 25 new plates were furnished to Daggett in February 21, 1899, probably replacing the most heavily damaged ones.

Plates also don't last forever. Either due to 'wear' or 'tear', Daggett had 160 additional S17 plates delivered by July 1900. Life must have been hard, as another 65 plates were delivered by July 1901.

UPSS S17e Listing – Large Dent

The most intriguing, if not the cleanest variety, on S17 is the 'large dent in portrait frame'. The UPSS 2020 U.S. postal card catalog currently lists only two recorded full mint cards (unpriced), but a recent find brings the total to three (albeit with a slight stain at top edge), Figure 11.



Figure 11 – S17e Mint Card

Years ago, I wrote about a used S17e I had purchased and found it not only the earliest reported posting, but also an overseas use (*PS Sep/Oct 1991*). My ERP was eclipsed by the current listing of October 22, 1901, although the earliest overseas use (to Manila, Philippines) of October 31, 1901 still stands. I did not, however, connect the usage with the Spanish-American War time period, which allowed the card to be sent to a U.S. possession for only a single penny. A follow-up article (*PS Mar/Apr 1992*) compiled a survey of no more than two-dozen examples of S17e.

Another nice overseas S17e example is known to have been mailed to London, England, posted from New York on January 25, 1902. Rather than the international card rate of 2¢, an added 4¢ stamp overpaid the letter rate, Figure 12.

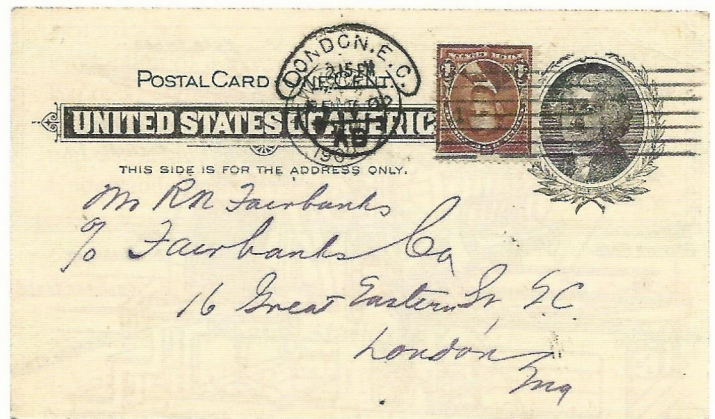


Figure 12 – S17e Overseas Use

My 1991 article showed that whatever caused the large dent had not merely pushed around a design element, but impacted the plate so hard as to push material *into* the plate surface. The card's reverse has a slight bump mirroring the dent, attesting to plate deformation and resulting paper crush.

An attempt at a microscope 'stereo pair' didn't quite work, so I'll try it again (this time in color!). Just relax your eyes, focus behind the page and the two images will merge into a 3-D view with dented depth, Figure 13.

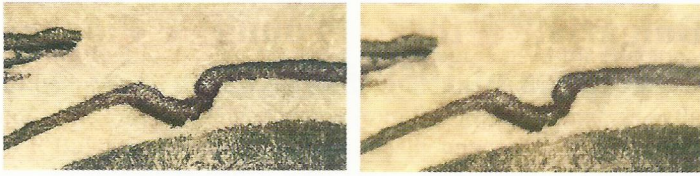


Figure 13 – S17e Stereo Pair Detail

One thought for why so few S17e cards reached the public was that the plate was so heavily damaged it was set aside. But this type of damage wasn't an isolated incident.

The S17e variety has a very singular signature. Over the intervening years, I've spotted similar damage on the top line of the inscription's outer border. The closest to S17e I've found to date, with a December 1901 printed formwork, was posted Pittsburg, PA on January 23, 1902. Under the microscope, this has the same S17e attributes: an oblique, downward strike and crescent shaped result, Figure 14.

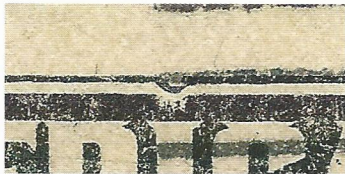


Figure 14 – Inscription Line Dent at "I" Detail

Another card, unused, has two small dents spaced 45mm apart, one above the "T" in 'STATES' and a small version above the "C" in 'AMERICA', Figure 15.



Figure 15 – Inscription Line Dent at "T" Detail

Recently, Jan Williams alerted me to a vignette frame dent (more like a 'micro-dent') appearing on a card from North New Portland, ME, posted March 12, 1902. It too has the same visuals as S17e in Figures 13 and 14, but not the depth, Figure 16.

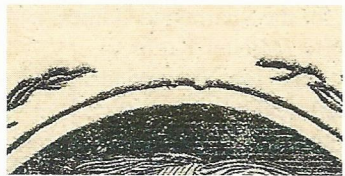


Figure 16 – S17 'Micro-Dent' Detail

Still other printed cards show that plates suffered other micro-dents, on either the inscription's top outline or the bottom outline. Some cards have vignette top outline damage, but they appear to have die material pushed around rather than impacted, what I term 'glancing dents'. This example was posted January 19, 1902, Figure 17.

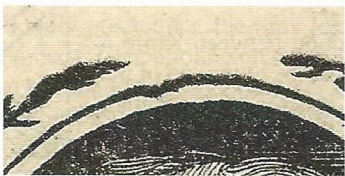


Figure 17 – Typical 'Glancing Dent' Detail

The 'glancing dent' plates are different from the 'impact' dented plates, so none could be considered a precursor or a re-cut. There are other printed cards (from different plates) that are missing a lot of the vignette's top line altogether, perhaps just from poor printing or wear, rather than die material removal.

Plates With Dents - What Happened?

I opined in 1991 that the S17e plate may have been dropped or hit while being installed (or something falling into the works). There are now too many similar and smaller dents found to support this view.

The causes of S17e, and other small dent varieties, were likely within the Whitlock press itself. In the Babcock video mentioned above, it shows paper being 'gripped' as the cylinder turns. Due to set-up or ongoing production, I believe the grippers came down early (or didn't retract in time), causing leading edge plate position to be impacted.

While 'dented' cards could have been printed anytime during Daggett's contract, most cards were shipped as soon as printed. Enough tiny dents point to them happening mostly after mid-1900. Again, only by tracking used examples can we narrow the date when damage occurred.

Move to Rumford Falls, Maine

Daggett's new printing contract (1 December 1901 – 31 December 1905) was contingent on a move that would save him money. His proposal was made public August 26th, 1901. It provided that any new S17 cards printed would pay him only 21.5¢ / 1000, but he realized a savings in paper cost, potentially lowered lease rates and labor. As the *New England Stationery and Printer* noted in January 1902, the move left citizens of Piedmont "... considerably agitated over the removal of the plant ..."

But things became complicated. President McKinley was assassinated on September 6, 1901, and a new card design was soon in the works. Plus, there was no paper yet being produced at Oxford Paper Company's Rumford Falls facility, and wouldn't be until February 1902. Additionally, the POD was zeroing in on who was counterfeiting their Jefferson cards in Chicago.

In order to deal with the problem of supply, the POD extended Daggett's contract at Luke for the month of December 1901. This allowed an additional 50 million cards to be surplus (on top of the 60 million that he was required to continually have on hand). As no cards were manufactured from December 30th to March 6th "... because of the inability of the contractor to start the manufacture of cards at the new factory ..." (POD), post office requisitions were somewhat reduced.

The Piedmont Agency moved on January 23rd, 1902. The *Paper Mill and Wood Pulp News* dated February 22, 1902 noted:

Two heavy Whitlock presses have been put in the postal card factory, at Rumford Falls, for Mr. Daggett, the government contractor. These presses have a capacity of printing 3,000,000 postal cards per day, delivering sheets of 120 postal cards at each impression.

His presses were probably disassembled for shipping in January (along with the slitters and cutters), re-assembled at the Rumford Falls manufactory, powered and then adjusted for proper operation. Full locked forms of 90 plates were small enough to be

cased as a group, but some plates may have been affected further during the move to Maine. By the time of the move, his 1901 'replacement' S17 plates were already dented.

For the new McKinley printing, Oxford Paper was supplying larger single press sheets (55.5" x 39.5") for 10x12 impressions. As the McKinley card saga played out, being delayed into spring 1902, the printing of S21 (less than a week's work) was deemed unsatisfactory and destroyed. Daggett was required to restart printing S17 cards in April, May and June.

Records show that by early April 1902 Daggett received three sets of 120 new electrotype plates, ostensibly for 'one press'. The plates were cheap, only setting him back 70¢/each, but were also quick wearing. It is likely both presses were used, one with the original plates. Potentially, S17 was printed on the large press sheets that Oxford had stockpiled in forms of 120 plates.

Other S17x Damage

Most other damage is seen in outlying edges of the inscription's upper and lower lettering, and the vignette's delicately designed wreath. The word 'POSTAL' took a lot of hits. One's eyes can glaze over looking for flyspecks. Jefferson's portrait received hardly any disfiguration except for a few thin scratches, yet one plate's vignette has what I call a 'grand gouge', Figure 18.

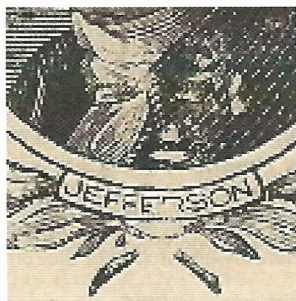


Figure 18 – The 'Grand Gouge' Detail

Whatever caused the damage appears to have come from the bottom up, skipping (impacts?) or rolling (loose metal?) from wreath into his coat. My ERP for this gouge is September 14, 1900.

Closing

Scrape damage is recorded on cards from the original 1898-1899 output, while dent damage appears clustered after the 1901 replacement plates (autumn 1901 into 1902). Perhaps we can eventually identify the Rumford Falls cards printed from the 1902 electrotype plates, or by the Oxford paper that was used.

Some other S17x damage is difficult to discern due to heavy or obscuring cancels. Due to slight printing changes of pressure, ink or paper, multiple cards with similar damage must be compared to verify any particular plate characteristics. My 2500-card search turned up a full gamut of easy to find minor plate varieties, as well as several scraped and dent varieties, but no S17e examples. The use of more than 800 separate plates makes the ability to catalog the issue's individual plates a remote, purely academic exercise.

Mini-dents, micro-dents and scrapes are plentiful enough to value S17x examples somewhat higher than normal cards. The catalog values of S17e remain warranted, as the large dent is a noticeable, truly scarce, variety in any state. Good hunting and let me know what else you find.

Bulgaria, the Young Pioneer Envelopes of 1958-59

By Dick Stevens

The Young Pioneers indicium (Figure 1) was used for a number of Bulgarian stamped envelopes, issued during 1958 and 1959. Each issue had landscape or event views at lower left which define each issue. Within each issue, there are varieties of color, envelope size and knife shape. They do not appear to be listed in Higgins and Gage. They may be intended to be under the umbrella of H&G B20, for which it states "three different views. Many colors of stamps and paper". But those envelopes with indicium H&G Figure B-8 exist in only one color, and are scarce, and therefore do not match the listing for B20.



Figure 1. The Young Pioneers Indicum

The envelopes with the Young Pioneers indicia are listed as U30 to U44 in the Michel *Ganzsachen Katalog*¹, and as PL95-142 in the Monev *Catalog*². Both catalogs correctly describe the earlier issues as existing with what Michel calls Knife 5. For the last two issues, (U42-U43 for the Spartakiad Games, and U44 with scenic views), a new knife (Michel Knife 6) was introduced. That for Spartakiad Games, with 7 different views of the sporting event, was printed using both knives, and the last set of five scenic views (Mi U44) only with Knife 6. For the next issue, for the Post Office Anniversary, a new post coach indicium was used, and also another new knife (Michel Knife 7). I have recently discovered that the Young Pioneers Spartakiad Games envelopes also exist with Knife 7.

The major distinction between Knife 6 and Knife 7 is the shape of the top of the lower back flap: in Knife 6 it is round; in Knife 7 it is flat. Unfortunately, the knife illustrations in the Monev *Catalog* are at best, confusing, and actually

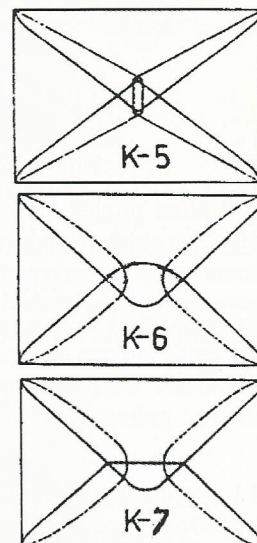


Figure 2. Knives.