

Jamaica Single Ring and Squared-Circle Postmarks

Thanks to the likes of Foster, Potter and many others, there is a large volume of information available to the collector of early Jamaican postmarks. The collector of the obliterator marks is particularly well served, due largely to the efforts of Robert Topaz and his often quoted work on their relative scarcity.

The obliterator postmarks were in use from 1859 as a means of canceling stamps, to avoid re-use, at the post office of dispatch. Concurrently, each office had a circular date-stamp to be used either as a dispatch, transit or arrival mark as required. Some obl iterators were still in use in the early years of the Twentieth century, but most fell out of use during the 1880's and 1890's.

As the obliterator postmarks declined, it became accepted practice to cancel stamps at the point of dispatch using one of the several types of date-stamp available to the Jamaican post offices. Many of the well established offices brought their old single ring circular date-stamps into use for such purposes. Other offices, particularly the many new offices that opened during this period, used either short-lived temporary rubber date-stamps or the combined obliterator/date-stamp squared-circle type postmarks that became fashionable from 1882. From about 1890, the double ring type circular date-stamp became the new permanent standard instrument for most offices, new and old, such that by the early 1900's the obliterator, single ring and squared-circle postmarks were only sporadically used for canceling purposes.

Foster records some 83 post towns issued with single ring circular date-stamps (his Types P11 and P12, excluding the rare P13) and gives each instrument a rarity rating. What is not clear is how many of these date-stamps were used legitimately for the canceling of postage stamps once the accompanying obliterator fell out of use or whether the Foster rarity ratings still apply to such use. Similarly, while it is well known that a total of 40 (excluding Kingston) post-offices were issued with the squared-circle type postmark, no attempt (that the author is aware of) has been made to measure relative scarcity of each *covering their entire lifespans* (which stretched well into the 20th century in many cases).

The closest that I have been able to find is a work by Delf Norona titled "Relative rarity of 19th Century Jamaican Cancellations" that appeared in the September, 1928 issue of *The American Philatelist*. While this work contains much very interesting information, some of which is included herein, it relies to a very large extent upon analysis of 15,000 copies of the 1d key-plate of 1889. It can, therefore, only be relied upon to demonstrate the relative rarity of the single ring and squared-circle postmarks during a period of use of about 10 years and upon a single stamp.

A thorough re-examination and census of the single ring and squared-circle date-stamps would seem, therefore, somewhat overdue and a first attempt of such forms the basis of this article. When conducting a census of any description, the sample size is all important. Only if the sample is large enough and random can any firm conclusions be drawn from the results. Finding a large, random sample of early used Jamaican stamps would be many collectors' idea of heaven, one would suspect, but the likelihood of locating such a hoard today is slim and another approach is called for.

During the 1994-5 period I laboriously noted the details of every single fully dated circular or squared-circle datestamp I came upon whilst browsing at stamp fairs, examining auction lots etc. This information formed the basis of the census presented in the following pages. This base information has since been supplemented by information received from two collectors (Ray Stanton, Bill Witschard and Keith Moh) whose collections of these postmarks are not of the one-of-each variety and therefore contain at least a semblance of randomness.

Taking all this into account, therefore, the census of the Jamaica circular and squared-circle postmarks that follows should not be considered definitive. However, the information from the four sources used was largely consistent, so I think it can safely be considered a reasonable first approximation. Only as more collectors volunteer additional information will the reliability of the study be improved.

Part 1 - Jamaica Single Ring Postmarks - Census and Rarity

See Classic Single Ring Section

Part 2 - Jamaica Squared-Circle Postmarks - Census and Rarity

Post Town	Type	E.K.D.	L.K.D.	Codes	No. Seen	Rarity	No. on Id Key	Rarity
Anchovy	Sml	JU 21 1882	OC 31 1918	A, C, None	14	N	?	?
Annotto Bay	Sml	MR 30 1885	DE 18 1897	<i>C facing down</i> , None	14	N	?	?
Bath	Sml	FE 25 1890	AU ?? 1923	None	14	N	?	?
Black River	Sml	AU 13 1882	OC 1 1913	A, B, C, <i>C reversed</i> , None	97	C	78	C
Brown's Town	Sml	MR 2 1883	SP 14 1912	A	85	C	147	VC
Cave Valley	Sml	JU 24 1882	SP 14 1935	A, C, None	19	N	10	S
Chapelton	Sml	FE 17 1890	OC 21 1926	None	20	N	87	C
Christiana	Sml	FE 19 1890	NO 11 1917	None	30	N	14	N
Crofts Hill	Sml	JY 26 1887	DE 4 1929	None	13	N	4	R
Cross Keys	Sml	AP 4 1882	AP 3 1916	A, C, <i>C facing down</i> , D, <i>D reversed</i>	13	N	13	N
Darliston	Sml	JU 28 1887	JY 29 1935	None	15	N	2	R
Devon	Sml	FE 27 1882	AP 26 1919	A, B, C, <i>C reversed</i> , None	15	N	4	R
Falmouth	Sml	AP 20 1881	JU 1 1909	A, <i>A sideways (right)</i> , B, <i>B reversed</i> , <i>B facing down</i>	100	VC	131	VC
Fellowship	Lge	SP 26 1900	DE ?? 1935	None	4	R	-	-
Frankfield	Sml	JU 25 1890	SP 9 1926	None	11	N	8	S
Glengoffe	Sml	AP 7 1882	JY 10 1927	A, B, C, None	21	N	6	S
Hagly Gap	Sml	JA 26 1885	SP ?? 1927	None	23	N	9	S
Hampstead	Sml	JU 30 1890	DE 24 1925	None	17	N	1	R
Jamaica Exhibn P.O.	Sml	FE 9 1891	MY 16 1891	None	5	R	-	-
Laughlands	Sml	MY 21 1885	AU 22 1911	None	15	N	27	N
Lluidas Vale	Sml	AP 26 1882	MR 23 1936	A, B, C, None	26	N	7	S
Manchioneal	Sml	AP 2 1890	SP 18 1901	None	13	N	3	R
Mandeville	Sml	AP 18 1885	JA 5 1920	<i>M, M sideways</i>	94	C	136	VC
Mavis Bank	Lge	NO 21 1900	MR 8 1919	None	4	R	-	-
Mile Gully	Sml	MR 17 1886	NO 12 1894	A, C, <i>C reversed</i> , None	17	N	17	N
Montego Bay	Sml	DE 16 1884	JU 25 1902	<i>C, C facing up</i> , None	21	N	36	N
Old Harbour	Sml	MR 10 1883	DE 2 1908	A, C	42	C	108	VC
Oracabessa	Sml	FE 2 1882	MY 29 1911	A, B, <i>B reversed</i> , C, None	18	N	12	N
Port Antonio	Sml	JA 25 1889	JU 13 1902	None	22	N	47	C
Port Morant	Sml	FE 25 1890	NO 18 1904	None	10	S	6	S
Riverside	Lge	JA 2 1901	MY 3 1935	None	22	N	-	-
Salt River	Sml	MR 2 1890	NO 11 1938	None	6	S	1	R
Spanish Town	Lge	MY 6 1900	DE 14 1923	None	16	N	2	R
Spur Tree	Lge	AU 31 1900	FE 27 1918	None	2	R	-	-
St. Margaret's Bay	Sml	FE 17 1890	FE 24 1902	None	8	S	11	N
Stewart Town	Sml	AP 22 1890	MY 30 1925	None	26	N	12	N
Ulster Spring	Sml	FE 3 1882	NO 13 1918	A, B, C, None	33	N	26	N
Up Park Camp	Sml	FE 23 1885	AU 8 1910	None	39	N	13	N
Whitehouse	Sml	JU 20 1892	AU 28 1927	None	9	S	5	R
York Castle	Sml	MY 8 1883	OC 19 1899	A, B, C	12	N	3	R

Table 2

Total Sample = 985

986

The results of the analysis of 985 reasonably random, fully dated Jamaican stamps cancelled with Squared-Circle instruments are shown in Table 2.

The EKD, LKD and Code Letter information is taken from Potter, updated, as required by the author. Author's updates are in bold italics.

Also included, for comparative purposes, are the results of the 1928 census carried out by Delf Norona (see introduction), based upon analysis of a large quantity of the 1889 1d key-plate. [Note – my copy of this work is incomplete, missing the relevant information for Anchovy, Annotto Bay and Bath. If anyone can provide the missing figures, I'd be very grateful!]

In both cases, the quantity of each date-stamp within the respective total samples is used to calculate a relative scarcity. Any mechanism of calculating rarity is obviously arbitrary, but that employed here is as follows:

Rarity Rating	Occurrence
R (rare)	< 1 per 200
S (scarce)	1 per 100
N (normal)	2-4 per 100
C (common)	5-10 per 100
VC (very common)	> 10 per 100

Part 3 - Endnote

In addition to the 1928 study by Delf Norona, another key-plate based work appeared in the Jamaica Philatelic Society's Quarterly Bulletin of March 1942. In an article titled "An Adventure In Postmarks", Arthur Pierce gave the results of his examination of 25,000 1d key-plates, all used between 1892 and 1896. Unfortunately, Pierce thought fit to publish only some aspects of his findings, but, even though incomplete, they are well worth summarizing.

After putting to one side the numerous Kingston postmarks and those with such poor or partial marks to defy accurate identification, Pierce was left with the following specimens for closer examination:

Obliterator postmarks - 313 (just over 1%)
Single Ring postmarks - 1240 (about 5%)
Squared Circle postmarks - 1264 (about 5%)
Temporary Rubber Datestamps - 15 (0.06%)

Of the Single Ring postmarks, Pierce comments that they "were about evenly distributed, or at least with all the listed towns in fair quantity. I have not tabulated them". Annoyingly, he doesn't qualify what he means by "listed towns" either! The one surprise is that he only found 2 copies (in a sample of 25,000!) of the Half Way Tree CDS (whereas Norona recorded 23)

Of the Squared-Circles, Pierce reports finding a full set of 35 (of the small type), all but ten being "relatively plentiful". The ten are:

York Castle - 6 copies
St. Margaret's Bay - 5 copies
Croft's Hill - 4 copies
Hagly Gap, Anchovy - 3 copies
Salt River, Christiana - 2 copies
Hampstead, Darliston, Jamaica Exhibition P.O. - 1 copy

On the basis that he also found one stamp "used in Caymans", he concludes that the Hampstead, Darliston and Jamaica Exhibition P.O. postmarks are as rare as Cayman SG Z2 (catalogue £400) on the 1d Keyplate "at least during the period in question". As shown in the previous section, both the Hampstead and Darliston squared-circle postmarks lived long lives, but it is interesting to note their apparent rarity early in their life spans. The "R" rating bestowed upon the Jamaica Exhibition P.O. postmark seems completely vindicated!

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