

Spotlight on Group 104 Date Stamps (Fingerhutstempel)

by Bernard Lachat

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Introduction

Collectors of Group 104 Swiss cancels (Fingerhut) have long had many questions about these date stamps: What shapes do they have? How did the numeral mechanism work? Who made them? And so on.

As far as we know, there are no publications showing what these stamps look like or how the moving parts are used. Nor is there any trace of them in Güller's books. The recent classification and collection of date stamps and other stamps at the Museum for Communication in Berne has finally answered some of these questions.



Figure 1: A small part of the canceler collection at the Museum of Communication, Bern.

The Collection of the Museum of Communication in Bern

The collection comprises several thousand cancelers from all periods, labelled and stored in drawers (Figure 1). Unfortunately, there are very few Group 104 date stamps - around twenty at most, out of the 700 or so different localities listed in our database to date. Clearly, not all the letter carriers of the time returned their cancelers, or the district administrations did not forward these items in return. No one knows.

Description

Group 104 date stamps are shown in Figures 2 and 3.

A metal sleeve is inserted into a wooden handle. Its free end bears:

- a fixed crown, with the name of the locality (top) and one of the usual marks of the sub-groups of group 104 (Figure 4).
- The fixed crown and metal parts are made of brass (Figure 5); - a



Figure 2. General view of a Group 104 date stamp, with its Museum label number.

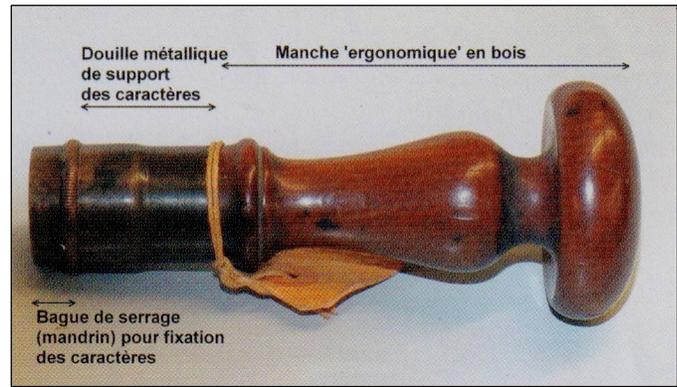


Figure 3. Main components of the date stamp. Metal type holder, Ergonomic wooden handle Clamping ring (mandrel) for character attachment

cavity (Figure 4) into which the lettering is inserted (Figures 6 and 7). These are made from a lead-based alloy and feature a geometry adapted to the positioning: two segments of a circle for the top (day in figures) and bottom (year in figures) and a median part with long parallel edges and rounded ends (month in letters);

- a threaded chuck-type clamping ring with grooves for better finger grip (Figure 8). Once the moving parts have been inserted into the cavity, the ring is screwed on and the parts are clamped and locked in the sleeve.

Moving Parts

The end result of this operation is the ready-to-cancel device we know from postage stamps or postal documents (Figure 9).

The diameter of group 104 date stamps, taken from the outer crown, is 18-20 mm. The width of the fixed crown ribbon is approximately 4 mm, i.e. - 8 mm on the total diameter. The 3 moving parts in the center together measure -11 mm in diameter. Each

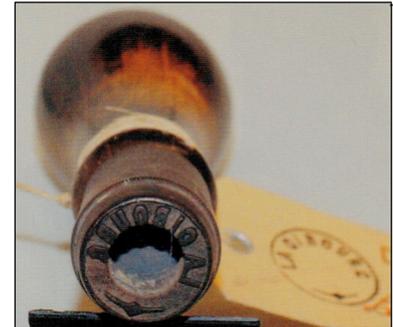


Figure 4. La Cibourg, fixed crown and font cavity.

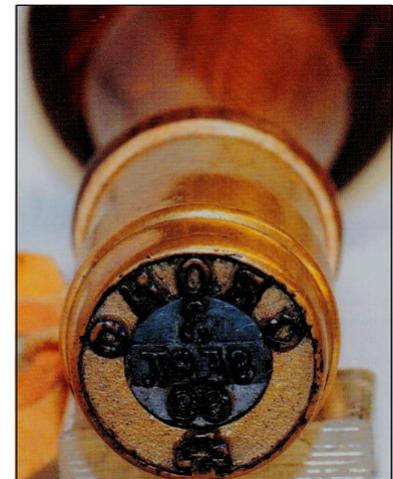


Figure 5. Grono, fixed crown, cleaned, showing brass construction.

of the 3 parts is therefore very small and difficult to operate, especially at a time when electric light had not yet been installed.

Figures 10 and 11 show that the moving parts are not always aligned with the fixed crown. Indeed, these small moving parts are not easy to handle. It is also possible that, with the wear and tear of



Figure 6. Loose lead alloy elements used to compose the date on group 104 stamps. Originally, these elements were stored in boxes to facilitate organization of the various parts, unfortunately no longer available.



Figure 7. Example of assembly of the 3 date components, before insertion into the sleeve. Note the extra width at the base of the characters, a stop, allowing adjustment and preventing the moving parts from slipping out of the stamp.

the clamping mechanism, which is used every day (!), only certain eccentric positions could hold the printing elements firmly in place.

Because of the shape of the moving elements, only the central part could be inverted, giving an inverted month (Figure 10). The semi-circular "day" and "year" elements could not be confused. In fact, these date stamps, which appeared from late 1852 to the 1890s, could only bear blocks with 2 digits between 52 and 90 in the lower part, quite different from the day digits from 1 to 31. However, when a stamp presented a problem, either mechanical or due to the loss of a date, the clerk could demonstrate his ingenuity by using the same group of elements for both parts (figure 12). It's therefore easy to understand why certain somewhat bizarre set-ups may have existed, as shown in figures 10, 11 and 12.

Quite apart from the possible odd positioning of the moving part, there are also very dirty, badly cleaned stamps, which have produced almost illegible cancellations on postal documents (Figure 13).



Figure 8. Detail of the grooved clamping ring for clamping the date elements.

Discoveries

Despite the small number of date stamps from Swiss cancellation group 104 in the Musée de la Communication's collections, they are well preserved. And, in this small batch, two stamps caught our attention.

The first is GRANDFONTAINE (Figure 14), the only Jura stamp discovered in the drawers. This is one of the most interesting and curious stamps. It does, however, pose a number of problems. If we rely on the elements of the movable part, we read: 4 APR. 64 corresponds to a cachet from group 104, sub-group I, type 2. However, for the Jura cancels of those years, there are only months in French. Secondly, there are no known GRANDFONTAINE cancellations of this type between 1860 and 1875. The only known cancellations for this locality begin in February 1876 and continue until 1879, and are of a different type.

The last special case is ANGLIKON. According to the publication "Poststellenchronik Schweiz" (Gebert & Vogt, 2022), an ANGLIKON linear post-mark existed from 01.01.1853, followed by a circular

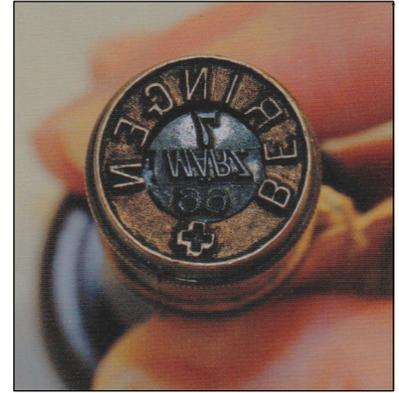


Figure 9. Once the movable elements have been inserted into the cavity and secured with the clamping ring, the date stamp is ready for use.



Figure 10: Image of figure 9, computer-inverted, to show what the cancellation would have produced. It can be seen that it wasn't always easy to insert the characters in the right direction, which produced many group 104 cancellations with defects and inversions.

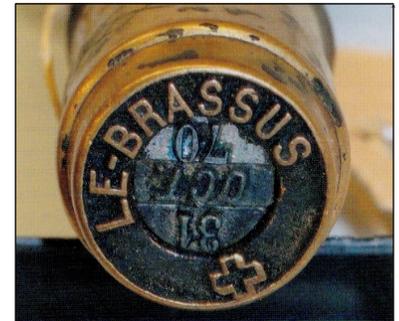


Figure 11. Computer-inverted image of a postmark, showing a date without axial alignment within the crown.



Figure 12. Obliterations where the postmaster has used the same character group for the upper and lower parts.



Figure 13. Example of a date stamp where the date is totally illegible due to soiling of the characters (EPTINGEN - DEC -).

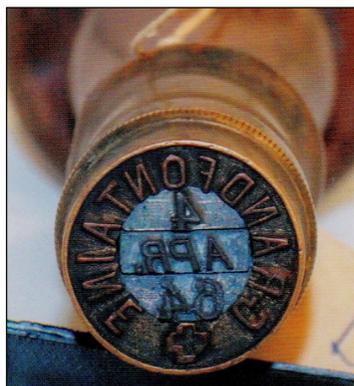


Figure 14. Stamp from GRAND-FONTAINE, Jura, known used on only 7 documents.



Figure 15. Cachet from ANGLIKON, not known on any document to date.

postmark from 01.01.1876. However, it would appear that a group 104 date stamp existed for this locality (Figure 15) and, if the movable elements installed on the stamp are original, the period of use would be in the 1860s. However, as no philatelic document cancelled with the Group 104 ANGLIKON device is known to exist, it is possible that this canceler was never delivered, or that moving parts of some kind were mounted on this stamp for demonstration purposes.

Finally, what answer can we give to the question: who made the Group 104 stamps? For the moment, we don't know. No records have been found. On the metal or wooden parts of these date stamps, no hallmarks or manufacturing marks are visible.

In any case, the author would be very interested to know if any philatelists know of documents with Group 104 cancellations bearing the localities of GRANDFONTAINE and ANGLIKON. +

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Postage Stamps and Postal System in the Principality of Liechtenstein in the 20th Century

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Postage stamps and postal services have had an eventful history in our eastern neighboring country, the Principality of Liechtenstein, in the 20th century. In the following, I would like to briefly discuss the most important six periods.

Introduction

Since ancient times, the area of today's Principality of Liechtenstein has been a transit area for north-south traffic. A popular route led from Milan over the Splügen Pass to Augsburg. Since 1921 Liechtenstein has been a constitutional hereditary monarchy on a democratic parliamentary basis.



Fig. 1 Card with MiNr. 144 from Schaan FL to Lucerne. Postage 10 Heller (Switzerland was a foreign country).

Use of Austrian stamps Until 31.1.1912.

On 1 June 1850 the first stamps were issued in the territory of the Royal Imperial Austrian Postal Administration. Based on an agreement of 1817, they were also used in the Principality of Liechtenstein. (Fig. 1)

Liechtenstein stamps in Austrian currency 1.2.1912 to 1919.

In 1907, the Liechtenstein postmasters submitted a proposal to the government to issue their own stamps in order to create the basis for fair remuneration of postal employees from the proceeds. In the same year, the Diet requested the High Princely Government to enter into talks for a new state treaty with the aim of issuing Liechtenstein's own stamps.



Fig. 2 Left: Master copy of the first draft. Right: definitive 5-Heller stamp of the 1st issue BKL. No. lx.