

Cigarettes and Cryptography

FOR MANY YEARS Canadian cigarette manufacturers have used dated cancellations on the excise stamps on their product for their own protection, mainly to enable salesmen to ascertain, when going over a retailer's stock, that his cigarettes are not being allowed to become stale; the seller is urged to get rid of his older stock before breaking into the newer.

At first, these cancellations were open dates which anyone could read, but there were apparently disadvantages in using these, for they were abandoned long ago. Perhaps they made it difficult to move any but the freshest stock. Whatever the reason, open dated cancellations have been supplanted by some system of coded dates, which naturally varies from company to company.

The simplest codes are the numerical ones. At the beginning, the manufacturer arbitrarily chooses some number as a starting point, then increases it by one unit for each period of as many days as he elects, say a week. This system does not give a date directly; one has to do a certain amount of mental arithmetic to arrive at that, but it is simple and must be satisfactory, for in 1951 the Imperial Tobacco Co., Canada's largest maker of cigarettes, dropped the code they had been using for 21 years in favor of the numerical code they now use.

The three codes which we shall describe here give dates directly when one has the

keys. They look somewhat baffling at first, but the application of a little amateur cryptography has broken them all, though the solutions required the accumulation of many stamps and a knowledge of when the cigarettes on which they were used were bought.

The first code (Fig. 1) was used by the Imperial Tobacco Co., and by its subsidiary, the Tuckett Tobacco Co. In the figure, the left-hand cut is Imperial's type, the right-hand one, Tuckett's. 6-10D and 1-18-E are the excise numbers of the respective factories and have nothing to do with the code; the three letters give the date. The central letter, M, gives the year, according to the following table; the third letter, D, indicates the quarter of that year. Thus BMD means November, 1952. Year letters are:

| | |
|------------------|------------|
| A—1930 & 1948 | J—1939 |
| B—1931 & 1949 | K—1940 |
| C—1932 & 1950 | L—1941 |
| D—1933 & 1951 to | M—1942 |
| June | N & O—1943 |
| E—1934 | P—1944 |
| F—1935 | S—1945 |
| G—1936 | T—1946 |
| H—1937 | V—1947 |
| I—1938 | |

Q, R, U, W, X, Y and Z were not used and N was used only for January, 1943; O was used for the rest of that year. It will be noted that in 1948 the code began to repeat itself. In June, 1951, it was supplanted by Imperial's numerical code, beginning with 124.

From January, 1930, through March, 1933, a figure—1, 2, 3 or 4—instead of a letter, was used to designate the quarter of the year; e.g., one of these early cancellations might read CB2, i.e., June, 1932. We have not seen this type of cancellation on cigarette stamps, though it should exist; it is common on excise stamps used on cigarette papers.

Tuckett's code was the same as Imperial's, differing only in the arrangement of the cancellation and in the style of type used.

The second code is that used by the Imperial Tobacco Co. (Newfoundland) from



FIG. 1—Imperial and Tuckett's letter code cancellations. The black and red ink used for the overprint and cancellations was almost impossible to separate from the black color of the stamp in photographing. Inscriptions on the stamps are as follows: BMD/6-100; 1-18-E/CKB; overprint on stamp at left (in red), "2c EXCISE TAX".



FIG. 2—Imperial (Newfoundland) code cancellations.

sometime in 1944 to March, 1949, when the island became Canada's tenth province. These cancellations (Fig. 2) appear only on Newfoundland cigarette stamps, never on those of Canada.

The figure is the last digit of the year, the letter gives the month, according to its position in the key word, QUESTIONABLY. Double letters indicate a second printing of the cancellation in the same month. In the figure, B5 means October, 1945. There were three styles of type used, as shown in the figure. Note that the double letters for 1946 and 1948 are alike, except that the latter have no periods.

Mr. E. H. Hiscock (No. 234) supplied the information on this code.

The third cryptographic dating code is now in use by Carreras, Ltd., on Black Cat and Sportsman cigarettes. To decipher it required many hours of labor on the part of Mr. C. C. Sonne, to whom we are indebted for this explanation. As will be seen from Fig. 3, the code consists of three letters, with V always the middle one; this

has its Roman numeral equivalent, i.e., 5. The numerical values of the letters are:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| Z | Y | X | W | V | U | T | S | R | Q | P | O |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |

Thus, ZVW can be decoded to 154, i.e., January, 1954.

This cancellation is mimeographed; the others mentioned were printed. The first known cancellations of this type occur in typewriter capitals without serifs, like those used by telegraphers, but beginning with XVX the larger letters with serifs, shown in the figure, have been used. OVY, ZVX and YVX only appear in the small letters. These were used in December, 1952, and in January and February, 1953.

There are some puzzles to which as yet we have no positive answers. What do NCFD, AXB and DAD mean? It is suggested that the X cancellations were used on stock given away, e.g., for banquets. DAD does not fit into the code; the first D would indicate the fourth month of a quarter. We have no suggestions for NCFD.

These dating codes were broken with no



December 1952;
January and February 1953



March 1953
to date.

FIG. 3—Carreras Ltd. letter code cancellations.

help from the companies; perhaps they would have given it, but it was not requested. Possibly and understandably they might not have cared to help. In a sense, then, all that is written here is merely theory, but it is theory which has withstood all the tests to which it has so far been subjected.

Collecting these cancellations is a fasci-

inating side-line. Current ones can be picked up easily, but the older ones come hard. There may be 600 or so in all—in 20 years the writer has managed to accumulate only about 375. Proportionately, cigarette stamps are scarcer than postage stamps. Few bother to save them and most are destroyed when the packages bearing them are opened. ★ ★

The Editor's MAILBAG

SHOEMAKER SELLS SMALL QUEENS

Probably a bit of news for the Society and for the Small Queens Group will be the sale of my 3c Small Queens collection, complete with all details, to Mr. Prescott of St. Petersburg, Florida. This, as you know, was acquired over a period of many years and includes the rare Truro Registry cover showing the combination of the 2c Large Queens and the 12½ perf. Small Queens as pictured in Bogg's book on page 278; also extremely nice H. and P.R. 12½ perf. cover as pictured on the previous page, and three copies of the rare thick soft paper. Mr. Prescott is adding this to his already large collection of Small Queens, which includes probably the earliest dated copy of the 12½ perf., which is February 1, 1870.

My collection interests during the past year have turned to Bermuda and the Bahamas, as I expect my permanent residence to be in Sarasota, Florida.

L. D. Shoemaker (No. 204)

EXHIBITION COVERS

I was pleased to find in TOPICS for June an article by Mr. J. S. Gordon on Exhibition Covers, as I am interested in them and have never seen a check-list before. This most useful "commodity" has supplied me with the information that I have most of the items on the list except the earlier Calgary covers. It is, of course, much more difficult to get such covers over here in the United Kingdom.

I have just a few observations to make on the list, which may be of some interest to Mr. Gordon and other collectors:

(1) The Saskatoon Industrial Exhibition cachet of 1950 comes in a dark purple shade as well as black.

(2) The Pacific National Exhibition cachet of 1951 comes in purple as well as black, and my date stamp shows 22nd August, which is a day earlier than the listed date.

(3) The Regina Provincial Exhibition cover of 1953 is also found with the cachet but the date stamp is the ordinary hammer of Regina instead of the slogan.

(4) I have a very fine cover of the Lethbridge

Exhibition of 1924 with slogan postmark reading "Lethbridge Exhibition, July 16-17-18 & 19" and having a printed "cachet" in orange-vermilion with a picture of a trotting pony racing, and the legend "Lethbridge Exhibition and Race Meet, It's Your Fair and Our Fair, Let's All be There, July 16-17-18-19".

This last item may not come quite in the category covered by Mr. Gordon, but it makes a nice addition to any showing of these covers, as also do the various slogans advertising exhibitions, such as the flag cancellations of Saskatoon for the exhibitions of 1918 and 1919, and many others too numerous to mention in this letter.

What about starting your album with a cover bearing the flag cancellation for the Provincial Exhibition at Victoria of October 1 to 5, 1901? Thanks to Mr. Langford, of Pasadena, California, I have a photostat of his copy of this rare cancellation, of which only seven are now known on cover and none of them in a Canadian collection!

J. Millar Allen (No. 996)

MISSING DOTS ON O.H.M.S.

I have just discovered I have three unlisted varieties of the missing dot on the O.H.M.S. overprint. On O1, 1c War Issue, I have a full sheet Plate 31, lower left pane, with the dot missing on position No. 39.

On O15A, 5c value, I have full sheets of 100 of Plate 1 and Plate 2, both upper left panes, showing the missing dot on position No. 78. The only position listed in the Plate Block Catalogue is No. 52 on the lower left panes of Plates 1 and 2.

K. Bileski, of Winnipeg, tells me these O15A's of position 78 are very rare, as he has only had two blocks of 16 which showed the position but not the plate number of the pane.

I have written to Major White, hoping that these will be listed in the next catalogue.

I thought perhaps you could enter these positions so that members could be on the lookout for them in case they had large enough blocks to place them correctly.

Dudley W. Atwood (No. 998)