

To punch or not to punch....

For a perforator collector, *that's* a serious question

Former *Bulletin* editor John Lyding just can't resist the hardware!

Years ago, when I became the *Bulletin* editor, I thought it would be neat to have my own perforator. If you have ever had that idea, you will recognize my frustration when I was unable to walk into the local stationery store to order one. This was prior to Office Depot or Staples when we still had local stationery stores.

I was not deterred by this initial failure, and started looking for perforators in antique stores. Once again: abject failure.

The solution was obvious. In the Navy it was called "enlarge the search area or add additional searchers." I received several reports, but when I checked them out, either the machine was gone or not what I was looking for.

The next step was to empower trusted agents (*i.e.*, friends) to either purchase a machine or place a down payment on a device if it was expensive.

My modified strategy paid off. I found a "checkwriter," produced by the Wesley Manufacturing Company of New York (Figure 1). Originally patented in 1890, mine dates from about the turn of the century. Overall, it is approximately 5 inches high and 5 inches wide. There is a ribbed

wheel on the front which, in theory, will advance the item being punched one space (On my device this is hopelessly rusted in place!). The knob on the top permits the operator to select the number wanted (1 to 10, \$ and *) and when the knob is pressed the paper is punched.



At this point, I started to punch stamps with the number 1. I didn't let anyone in on my secret, but made sure that every letter to a Perfin's Club member had "perforated" stamps. Great, but no one noticed!

Frustrated, I called the Club president, Dick Mewhinney, who set me straight. My device is known as a "needle punch." No paper is removed when the paper is punched: the pins simply push their way through the holes. The "holes" are not noticeable after the stamp is affixed to an envelope, run through a canceling machine, and compressed on the way to the addressee.

My next attempt to acquire a perforator was to buy a machine manufactured, not in the United States, but in the United King-

dom. This machine (Figure 2), built by Chainstream Ltd., punches an anchor design (Figure 3) approximately 0.75 inch on a side.

Unfortunately, I did not consider the USPS design limitation of a half square inch in ordering my perfin and as a result, the design is classified as an "illegal." However, the

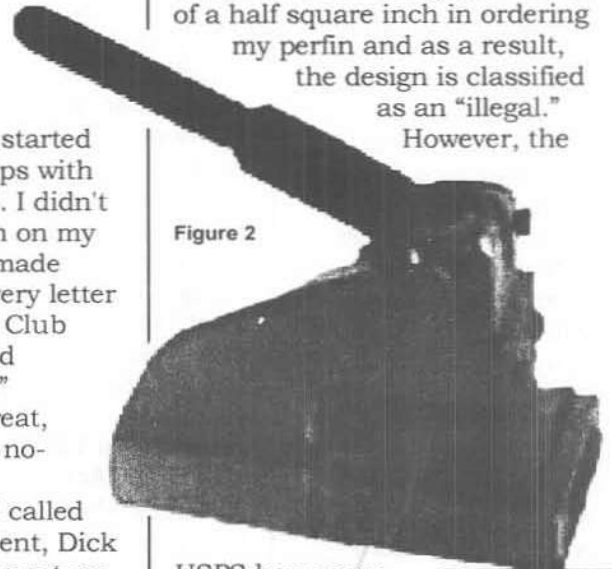


Figure 2

USPS has never rejected any stamps punched with this device and it is listed in the U.S. perfins catalog as Des611P.

The device is lever actuated, has a single die, and has a drawer to collect the frep*. I owe a word of thanks to Perfin's Club member Chris Carr who found the Chainstream and helped handle details.



Figure 3

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Perforators can be like peanuts; you can't have just one!

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Now I had a "real" perforator, my punched stamps went through the mail, and it was listed in the catalog.

But, I still was not satisfied.

I went through antique shop after antique shop without luck until I chanced upon three check writers in the shops at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas. The first machine cut out the numbers like a stencil. With a price well over \$1,000, I wasn't interested. The

next machine was the largest of the three. It



Figure 4 was very attractive; however, with a price tag near \$800 it, too, stayed on the shelf.

The smallest machine (Figure 4) had a lower price tag which I managed to bargain down to an almost reasonable amount. I took home a well restored "S. & P." checkwriter. There is no other identification on the machine and my research efforts have been fruitless. The resulting perfin is shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 This device, unlike the Wesley machine, actually removed pieces of paper (i.e., *frep*) and therefore qualified as a perforator. It has a numbered ring with slots, a handle to operate the punch, and a feed wheel. Unfortunately, while the feed wheel operates, it is erratic.

The numbers are about 3/8 inch high and the widest, the number 8, is about 1/4 inch wide. The holes are less than 1/32 inch; hence, this punch makes "legal" perfins.

I used this device for several years on most of my outgoing mail, including numerous letters to the catalog editor. I used the zero for one year, the number 2 for the next year, and so forth. None of the perfins are listed in the U.S. catalog and to the best of my knowledge, former foreign catalog editor Bob Schwerdt has the only complete set and these are on U.S. postal cards.

At that point, a normal human being would have stopped, but I had become a *perforator collector!*

Browsing eBay one day, I typed in *perforator*. Several listings

popped up, including an Indian artifact and a medical device. In addition, a Cummins model 384 perforator (Figure 6) was listed.

Without much thought, I entered a bid. At the end of the auction, I found that I not only had won, but that the shipping cost

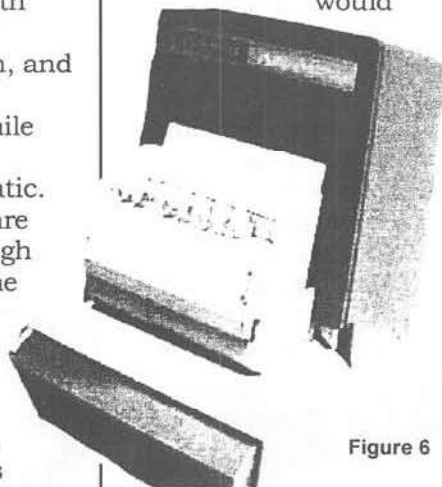


Figure 6

be substantial.

My initial thought was that I might somehow modify this device to produce a unique perfin. What I did not consider was how well this Cummins' product would be constructed.

Perhaps someone with more mechanical capability than I could alter the perforator, but it would be futile for me to even attempt to tackle the project. There are 15 changeable dies on the machine which is actuated by inserting a sheet of paper.

Individual letters/numbers are about 3/4 inch high. The

widest is 3/8 inch and the holes are less than 1/32 inch which means the individual letters meet the USPS requirements. The variable dies are changed by depressing a lever and rotating the die head.

I have not used this perforator to punch stamps; however, I have provided several individuals with samples.

The next machine to enter the growing assortment was Cummins Model 300-03, which is very similar to the Model 384. In this instance, I suspect that the -03 refers to the fact that the device has three die heads (Figure 7) Two of these have fixed lines of text and one has six changeable dies. The letters/numbers in each row differ in dimensions. Letters in *PAID* are 3/4 inch high and the base of the letter *A* is 3/4 inch wide. The numbers in the center row are 7/8 inch high and 1/2 inch wide. The bottom row is 5/8 inch by 3/4 inch. The holes are



Figure 7

greater than 1/32 inch.

The device was obviously used to date and mark bills by AZINT. I have turned up only four possible users.

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Collecting perforators is fun, but finding albums for them is tough!

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They are AzInt(ernet) located in Baku, Azerbaijan; Azint SA in Buenos Aires; Ar(izona) Int(ernet) College; and AZ Int(ernational Travel), Westlake, OH. The first three seem unlikely and the latter has not responded to my letters.

I have not made any perforated stamps with this device.

Not content to let well enough alone, I acquired another antique Cummins Check Perforator (Figure 8). While the actual date of the device is unknown, the label plate lists three patent dates, 1889, 1890, and 1892. There is a bit of

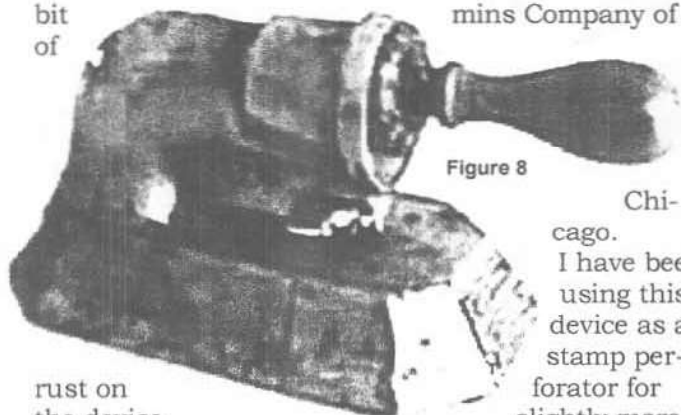


Figure 8

rust on the device.

This one seems to fit all the requirements of a stamp perforator with regard to legal size and workability. In addition, it sits comfortably

on my desk and therefore it is always handy. The device is operated by turning the wooden handle to the period, dollar sign, or number wanted, and then depressing the handle. The paper advance works rather well, but as noted in the illustration (Figure 9), it tends to curve and is not the proper spacing for postage stamps. The numbers measure 3/4 by 3/8 inch and the holes are slightly less than 1/16 inch. While the nameplate does not provide a model number, it does list the manufacturer as the B. F. Cummins Company of

Chicago. I have been using this device as a stamp perforator for slightly more than a year. In 1999 and 2000, I used the zero on outgoing mail. This year, I shifted to a 1. In the future, I expect to shift



Figure 9

up one number on New Year's Day. There are two minor exceptions. I made a limited number of perfins with 2000 which were used on mail. In addition, the former foreign catalog editor has a complete

set on postal cards.

With the urging of my wife, I have decided to stop collecting perforators. On the other hand, should a real deal come along...!

If you are interested in obtaining a perforator similar to the one with the anchor design, you can write to Chainstream, Ltd., 69-71 William St., Charshalton, Surrey SM5 2RB, United Kingdom. Be prepared to spend at least £100.00 (about \$170) to have the machine made and shipped.