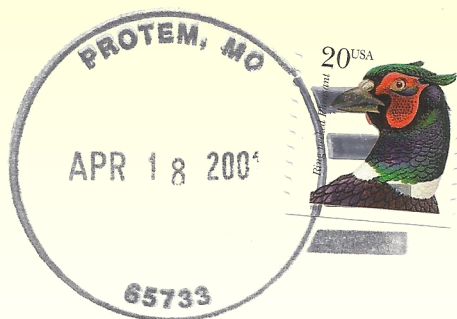


The 4-Bar Postmark of the USPS

By Christine Sanders



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The 4-Bar Postmark of the USPS (Part I)

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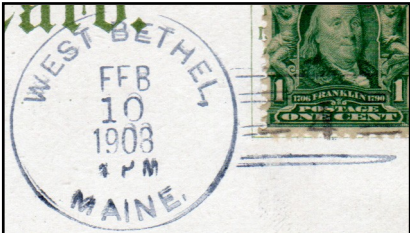
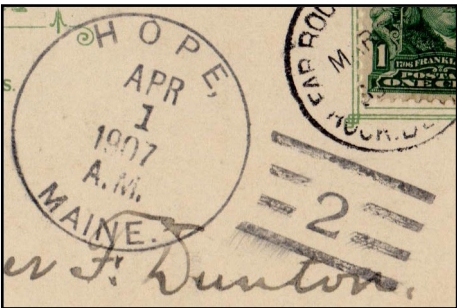
Introduction

From 1903 until 1906, the Post Office Department, predecessor of today's United States Postal Service, provided small post offices with Doane hand-stamps for postmarking their mail (Table 1). These hand-stamps were issued for only a relatively short time and are considered the forerunner of the 4-bar hand-stamp. The type 1 Doane postmark had a circular date stamp and five killer bars. This was followed by the type 2 Doane postmark that had four hollow killer bars. The last, the type 3 Doane postmark, had four solid killer bars. In the middle of the killer bars of each of the Doane postmarks, there was a numeral representing the postmaster's compensation level; *i.e.* the numeral 1 appeared for compensation less than \$100; the numeral 2 appeared for compensation between \$100 and \$200, and so forth. Thus, the number reflected

the size (activity) of the post office. The type 3 Doane postmark was the immediate predecessor of the 4-bar postmark, which was introduced between August and September 1906 and is still in use today.

Over the 106 years that the 4-bar postmark has been used, it has undergone a number of changes in its appearance. These changes have been used in the past to categorize the various postmarks as they were issued by the POD or USPS. Richard W. Helbock, Doug DeRoest, and Randy Stehle developed a classification scheme in which the postmarks were placed into different lettered types based upon when they were issued, and various physical parameters of the postmarks themselves. This scheme was well developed for postmarks used up until the introduction of the ZIP code in 1963. However, the scheme has not been extended beyond this time. Thus, the purpose of this article is to review the 4-bar postmark: its development over time; the classification of the different types that have appeared from 1906 to 2012 including several new provisional types; and its use primarily by small post offices of the USPS.

Table 1. Doane Postmarks

 <p>#1</p>	<p>Issued 1903 Aug-Sept; 5 bars with numeral in center.</p>
 <p>#2</p>	<p>Issued Sept 1903 to July 1905; 4 hollow bars.</p>
 <p>#3</p>	<p>Issued July 1905 to Aug/Sept 1906; 4 solid bars.</p>

Physical Parameters

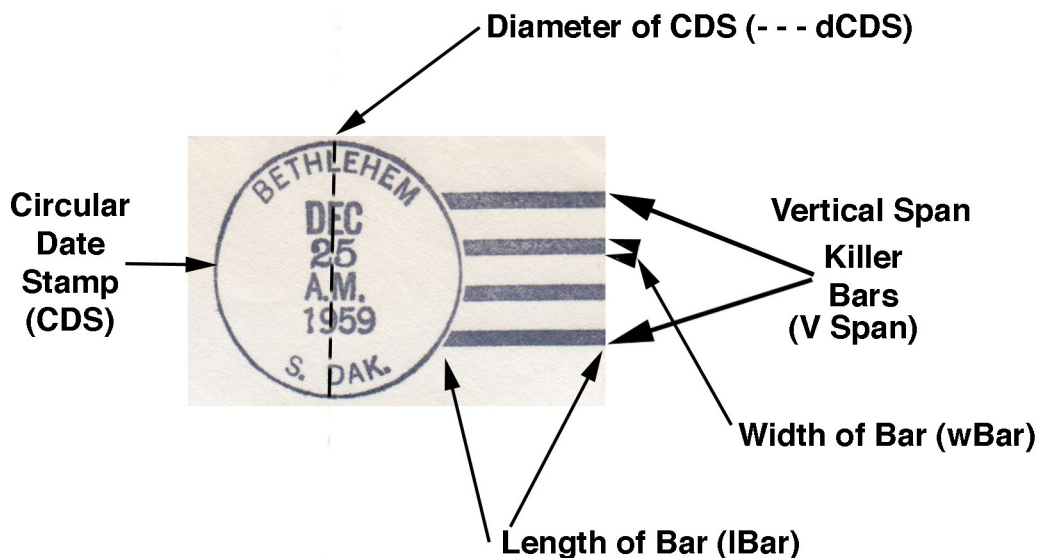
The general make-up of the 4-bar postmark is a circular date stamp (CDS) with 4 solid killer bars (Figure 1). There are six major parameters that can be used to differentiate the major types of 4-bar postmarks. (1) The diameter of the CDS (**dCDS**) in millimeters (mm) is one characteristic used to classify the postmarks although it is not as useful as other parameters. The dCDS has varied only from 30mm to 36mm although the larger diameters are seen on some of the more recent 4-bar postmarks. (2) The vertical span (V Span) of the four killer bars (in

mm) is measured from the outer edge of the top bar to the lower edge of the bottom bar. This parameter is very useful in separating major types of 4-bar postmarks as some of the earliest types were narrow span (14mm) while later types were medium (16mm to 20mm) or large (>20mm) span. (3) The width of the killer bars (**wBar**) has tended to increase with time from 1mm to 3mm. However, its use as a distinguishing feature is especially reduced if the postmark is poorly struck. (4) The length of the killer bars (**lBar**), measured either along the upper edge of the top bar or along the lower edge of the bottom bar,

was not used to classify 4-bar postmarks encountered before 1963. However, it has become very important with the recently introduced short bar postmarks. (5) The style of the killer bars (**sBar**) is based upon the shape of the ends of the bars closest to the CDS. This can vary from curved in a shape that compliments the CDS, to block (squared ends). Although most 4-bar postmarks have curved bars, certain types are

characteristically block. Then too, some postmarks have the middle two bars indented away from the CDS. (6) The **style of type** can also be a useful tool in distinguishing 4-bar postmarks. Most 4-bar postmarks have block (san-serif) lettering (figure 2b). However, a few characteristically have serif lettering (figure 2a). In some 4-bar postmarks, the style of the numerals are distinguishing parameters.

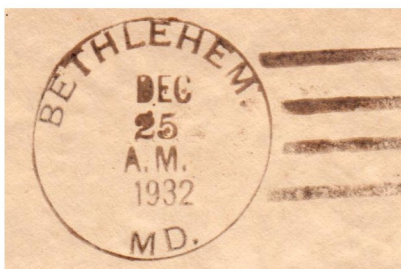
Figure 1. Anatomy of the 4-Bar Postmark



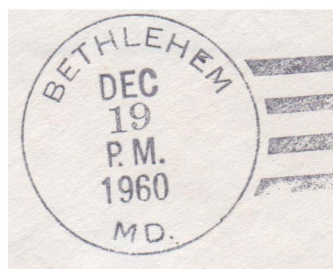
Postmark shown has curved style of killer bars and san serif type

Figure 2. Style of Type

A. Serif



B. San Serif or Block



These parameters can be used to distinguish eight major types of 4-bar postmarks indicated by the letters A through H. Subtypes within some of these major types can also be delineated and are designated, for example for major type F, F/1 and F/2. Appropriate classification depends not only upon the quality of the strike, but also attention to the date of the postmark. Some of the earlier 4-bar postmarks are very similar and can only be distinguished by the date of use. Finally, classification of postmarks for a single post office is best if done chronologically from oldest to most recent dates. This makes it easier to detect subtle changes in postmarks over time for the same post office. It also more accurately reflects the chronological order in which they were issued. It is unlikely that any single post office will have used each of the different types and subtypes of 4-bar postmarks as many were issued for only a short period of time. The small post offices for which this postmark was intended did not need replacements often. It should be noted, however, that some post offices kept older hand-stamps after they had been replaced with newer issues. These could be "reactivated" in cases of emergency resultant from breakage of hand-stamps in use or an unusually high volume of mail. In the following sections when examples of postmarks are shown, a single post office is used wherever possible to illustrate the different postmarks so as to highlight differences between the major types and subtypes.

Four-Bar Postmarks from 1906 to 1936

Helbock, DeRoest and Stehle delineated six major types of postmarks used from 1906 to 1965. The first five are shown in Table 2 in the chronological order in which they were issued. The type A postmark was distinguished by a narrow V Span (14mm). The A/1 subtype could be distinguished from A/2 by the style of text. The former had a thin block lettering with an oval "O" and pointed "A" while the latter had a thicker block lettering with a round "O" and flat-top "A." This parameter can be difficult to assess in postmarks from post offices without one of these two letters in its name. However, since the A/1 usually had block style bars and the A/2 usually had curved bars, this

can help to differentiate the subtypes. The date of the postmark can also help since the A/2 did not appear until 1908.

The type B 4-bar postmark was issued in 1910 and differed from the type A in its larger V Span (Table 2). The style of the lettering was the same as the A/2 subtype. This was followed in 1920 by the type C 4-bar postmark, which retained the larger V span, but changed to serif lettering (Table 2). There were two periods during which this type was issued: 1920-22 and 1925-30. Perhaps the authors of the classification scheme realized that the three years between these two periods was too short to enable one to differentiate those issued in the first from those issued in the second period. Thus, the same subtype, C/1 was ascribed to them all.

Between 1922 and 1925, two other types of 4-bar postmarks were issued. First, the subtype A/3 4-bar postmark appeared which was identical to the subtype A/2 except for its period of use. It should be noted that in contrast to the C/1 subtype discussed above, there were 13 years between the two periods of issue for the A/2 subtype. It was highly unlikely that even a small post office would not have been issued one of the two types of 4-bar postmarks (B or C/1) available during this interval. Thus, they ascribed the A/3 subtype to the second period of use for the A/2 postmark. The type D 4-bar postmark appeared next, which was similar to the A/1 in style of text, but had a larger V Span, wBar, and a curved style to its killer bars (Table 2).

In 1925, the type C/1 postmark was issued once again until 1930. The type E postmark, the most unusual of the early 4-bars, was issued 1930-31. Unlike all the other early 4-bars, the type E had the city and state at the top of the CDS. It also had block style killer bars and appeared with either serif or sans serif lettering. In 1931, the type C/2 4-bar postmark appeared, which could be distinguished from the type C/1 by the location of the lettering around the CDS. In the type C/1, the lettering touched the edge of the dial while in the type C/2, the lettering was moved inward away from the dial. The C/2 4-bar postmark has been found on mail as late as 1948, 12 years after its last date of issue. This was the last major type until 1936 when the immediate parent of today's 4-bar postmark appeared.

Table 2. 4-Bar Postmarks 1906-1936

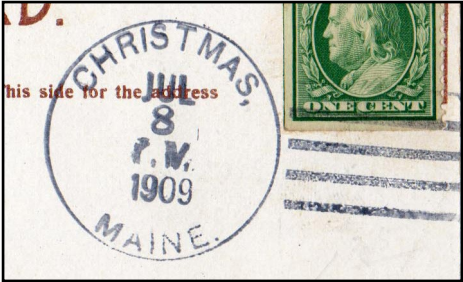
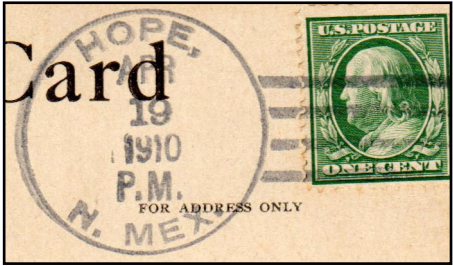
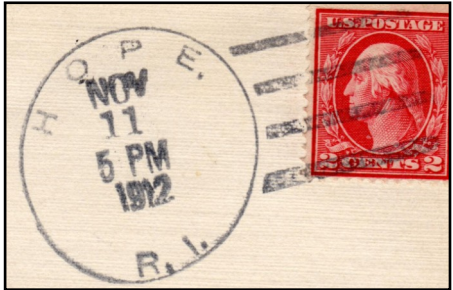
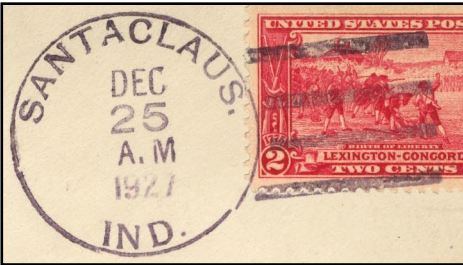

Photo	Type	dCDS	V Span	wBar	lBar	sBar	Text	Dates
	A/1	31	14	1	>20	Block primary, but any style	Thin sans serif; oval O, pointed A	1906-1908
	A/2	31	14	1.5	>20	Curved primary, but any style	Heavy sans serif; round O, flat-top A **	1908-1910
	B	31-32	20**	1.5	>20	Curved	Like A/2	1910-1920
	C/1	31-33	20	1.5	>20	Curved	Serif; letters touch dial **	1920-1922 and 1925-1930
	A/3	31	14**	1.5	>20	Curved primary, but any style	Like A/2; date distinguishes A/3 from A/2. **	1923-1924

Table 2. 4-Bar Postmarks 1906-1936 (continued)


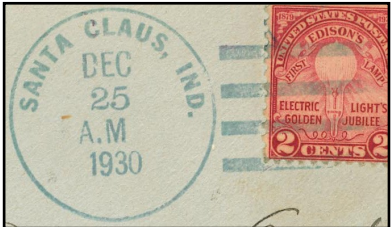
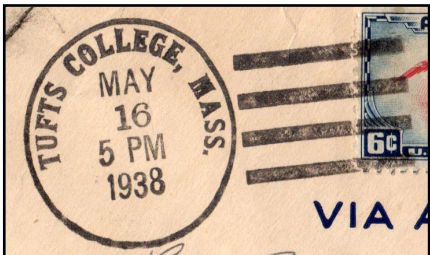
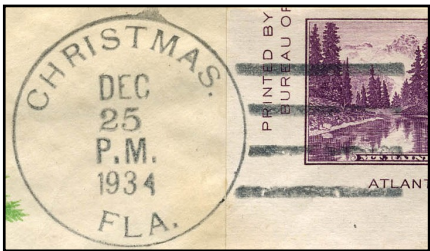
Photo	Type	dCDS	V Span	wBar	lBar	sBar	Text	Dates
	D	31-32	18**	2**	>20	Curved	Like A/1; san serif; oval O, pointed A. **	1924-1925
	E	30-31	18-19	2 - 2.5**	>20	Block**	Serif or san serif; town and state at top. **	1930-1931
	E						Example of serif	
	C/2	32-33	20	1.5**	>20	Curved	Serif; letters away from dial. **	1931-1936

Table Legend.

Type: as assigned by R.W. Helbock, D. DeRoest, and R. Stehle.

dCDS: diameter of circular date stamp in mm.

V Span: vertical span in mm measured from upper edge of top bar to lower edge of bottom bar.

wBar: width of bar in mm.

lBar: length of bar in mm.

sBar: style of bars: curved = ends near CDS curve around edge of CDS; block = ends near CDS are straight.

Text: type and location of text in CDS.

Dates: years this type of postmark was issued by the POD.

**: denotes distinguishing feature(s) of the type.

The 4-Bar Postmark of the USPS (Part II)

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Editor's Note: In June's PMCC Bulletin Christine featured the 4-bar postmark prior to the ZIP code era. Here she proposes classifications for 4-bars in the ZIP code era. Please respond to her request for more data, which is published at the end of the article.

Four-Bar Postmarks from 1936 to 2012

The type F 4-bar postmark appeared in 1936 and was similar to the earlier types B or D postmarks (Table 3). It had the larger V Span (19-20mm), a somewhat larger wBar (2-2.5mm) and the style of the killer bars was usually curved although block bars were also used. The type F 4-bar postmarks could be easily differentiated from the earlier types by their

the proposal of several subtypes or variants, while others are sufficiently novel to warrant the proposal of new types. Thus, an expansion and extension of the classification of 4-bar postmarks is proposed.

This proposal is based upon items in personal collections totaling over 8,000 postmarks. Many of the postmarks in the collections are from small post offices and/or special dates; *i.e.* Christmas Day. Thus, a large proportion of the postmarks were made using 4-bar hand-stamps. New subtypes of the F/2 postmark are proposed when (1) they represented a consistent variation in a minor aspect of the F/2 postmark; *i.e.* style of type and (2) they were found on mail from many diverse areas of the country. Any rarely encountered, "non-standard" postmark was not considered to be a new subtype. New types are proposed when there was a major change in one or more of the parameters of the F/2 postmark; *i.e.* style of date, style of killer bars.

Although the ZIP code was introduced in 1963, no hand-stamp, machine stamp, or First Day of Issue postmarks were found on items from 1963 or 1964 in the collections. The ZIP code appeared in all three groups of postmarks in 1965 although some post offices used both the F/1 and F/2 4-bar postmarks in this year (Figure 3). The first variant of the F/2 4-bar postmark appeared on mail in 1967 and could be found as late as 1995. This variant, designated F/2a

Figure 3. Appearance of Both F/1 and F/2 Postmarks in the Same Year

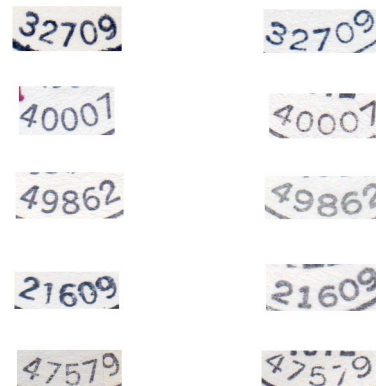


date and use of san serif type. The authors of the classification scheme identified two subtypes: the F/1 which had the city name at the top of the CDS and the state abbreviation at the bottom, and the F/2 in which both the city and state were at the top of the CDS and the new ZIP code, introduced in 1963, at the bottom. The two-letter abbreviation for states was used in the subtype F/2 postmarks. The F/1 4-bar postmark has been found on mail as late as 1980, 17 years after its last date of issue. There were no further types or subtypes identified by these authors.

The F/2 4-bar postmark can still be found on mail today. The current Postal Operations Manual shows the F/2 4-bar postmark as its standard postmark with killer bars in exhibit 231.5 hand-stamped postmarks. However, over the 46 years since its introduction, significant changes have occurred in its parameters. Some of these warrant

Figure 4. Comparison of Numerals Between F/2 and F/2a Postmarks

F/2 Postmark F/2a Postmark



(Table 3), in contrast to F/2 had squared lettering and numerals in the ZIP code (Figure 4). It was found on mail postmarked from post offices in many different states across the United States. A second variant, designated F/2b had a smaller V Span and a number of changes to the date lettering and numerals (Table 3). Most readily seen is the use of a block type for the numerals for the day in the date, in contrast to other type F 4-bar postmarks, which used a “script serif” type. This can be seen in Table 3 when one compares the “25” in the date of the F/2b postmark to that in the date of the other type F postmarks shown in the table. This F/2b variant was found on mail postmarked between 1986 and 1998 from post offices in many different states. Perhaps these two variants of the F/2 4-bar postmarks represent different suppliers of the postmark.

A chronological study of type F postmarks from the same post office from 1937 to 2011 revealed that for some post offices, the F/1 subtype was followed by the F/2, then followed by the F/2a subtype, then followed by the F/2b subtype. Other post offices showed this same pattern but the appearance of the F/2b subtype was then followed by a return to the F/2 subtype. Even other post offices had the F/1 subtype followed by the F/2a subtype when the appearance of the ZIP code on postmarks was delayed until 1967.

In the latter half of the 1990s, major changes in the 4-bar postmark appeared (Table 3). The date was presented in single linear form, rather than in three or four lines and the killer bars became shortened. Prior to this change, killer bars had been 20mm or longer. Thus these new linear-date short bar postmarks were designated type G (Table 3). They have been found on mail postmarked from 1997 to date and comprise three subtypes. Subtype G/1 has a very large V Span (22-25mm) with very short bars (11-14mm). Subtype G/2 also has a very large V Span (22-25mm) but its bars are longer (15-16mm). Within this subtype, two variants have been found: G/2c with curved bars; and G/2ib where the middle two killer bars are block style and indented. Subtype G/3 has a much more narrow V Span (16mm) and very short bars (11-12mm).

A final type H 4-bar postmark has been designated for those with a linear-date but with killer bars as long as the earlier postmarks (20mm). These have been found on mail postmarked 2004 to date (Table 3). A chronological study of type G and H postmarks from the same post office from the 1990s

to 2011 revealed that the G/1 was usually the first short bar postmark to appear. For these, the type H postmark followed the type G postmark.

Request for More Data

Compared to the type F and earlier 4-bar postmarks, there are relatively few type G and H 4-bar postmarks in the collections used to propose these additions to the classification scheme. Therefore, I would like to request the assistance of others in the PMCC to add any information they have on this subject so that we can verify and modify this extension of the classification of the 4-bar postmark. To this end, I would like to request interested members to search their collections for type G and H 4-bar postmarks and determine (1) how many of each type and subtype they have, (2) the range of dates for each type and subtype, and where possible (3) conduct a chronological study of the G and H 4-bar postmarks from the same post office to determine the apparent order of issue of the postmarks. Verification of the ranges of sizes for the parameters listed in Table 3 would also be appreciated. For example, with subtype G/1 postmarks, are all in your collection within each parameter shown in Table 3; *e.g.* are all the V Spans within 22 to 25mm and the lBars 11-14mm? Any additional information on variants of the F/2 4-bar postmark would be welcome as well. This information can be forwarded to me by email (ecsanders@mac.com) or regular mail (P. O. Box 483, Ocean City, MD 21843).

After receiving this additional information, I will incorporate it into the classification scheme and issue a final, revised scheme. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you in advance for your willingness to participate in this project. All participants will be formally acknowledged in the final document.

Resources

- Helbock, RW and Anderson, G (ed). *United States Doanes. A Catalog of Doane Cancellations*. Revised, Second Edition. 2002. La Posta Publications, Scappoose, Oregon. 336pp.
- Helbock, RW. *Postmarks on Postcards. An Illustrated Guide to Early 20th Century U.S. Postmarks*. Revised, Second Edition. 2002. La Posta Publications, Scappoose, Oregon. 291pp.
- Stehle, R and DeRoest, D with Helbock, RW (ed). *A Catalog of Non-standard US Postmarks 1900-1971*. Available at <http://content.yudu.com/Library>. 337 pp.
- USPS. *Postal Operations Manual*. 2011 Revisions for Special Philatelic Postmarks. Available at http://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2011/pb22312/html/updt_007.htm.

Table 3. 4-Bar Postmarks 1936-2011

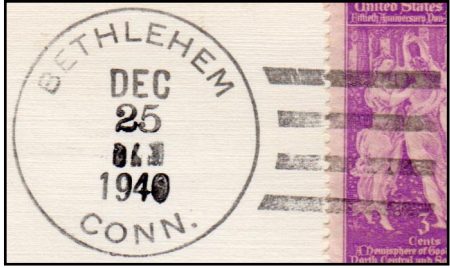

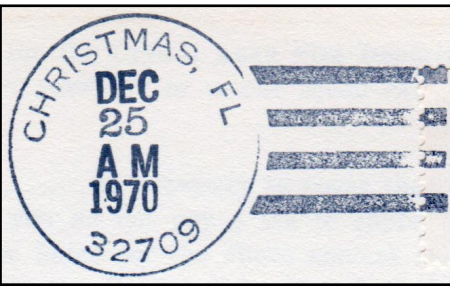


Photo	Type	dCDS	V Span	wBar	lBar	sBar	Text	Dates
	F/1	31-34	19-20	2-2.5	>20	Curved	San serif; no ZIP code. **	1936-1963
	F/2	30-35	18-22	2-3	>20	Curved	Elongated san serif, oval zero; ZIP code. **	1965-2011
	F/2a	31-33	18-20	2	>20	Curved	San serif; letters and numerals squared; round zero; ZIP code. **	1967-1995
	F/2b	30-34	16 - 17**	2	>20	Curved	San serif; thicker condensed type except month and year; block day. **	1986-1998
	G/1	32-36	22 - 25**	3	11-14 **	Curved	San serif; linear date. **	1997-2011

Table 3. 4-Bar Postmarks 1936-2011 (continued)

Photo	Type	dCDS	V Span	wBar	lBar	sBar	Text	Dates
	G/2c	31-35	22-25	3	15 - 16**	Curved	San serif; linear date. **	1999-2010
	G/2ib	33-34	22-23	3	16**	Middle two bars indented block. **	San serif; linear date. **	2010-2011
	G/3	31	16**	2-3	11 - 12**	Curved	San serif; linear date. **	2009-2011
	H	30	15-19	2-3	>20**	Curved	San serif; linear date. **	2004-2011

Table Legend

Type: F/1 and F/2 as assigned by R.W. Helbock, D. DeRoest, and R. Stehle; other types provisional.

dCDS: diameter of circular date stamp in mm.

V Span: vertical span in mm measured from upper edge of top bar to lower edge of bottom bar.

wBar: width of bar in mm.

lBar: length of bar in mm.

sBar: style of bars: curved = ends near CDS curve around edge of CDS; block = ends near CDS are straight.

Text: type and location of text in CDS.

Dates: For F/1, the years this type of postmark was issued by the POD. For other types, the years this type has been found on covers.

** : denotes distinguishing feature(s) of the type.

Four Bar Database Update

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Just thought that I would give an update on the 4-bar project (See June and July/August 2012 *PMCC Bulletin*). To date, I have received information from Bob McCurdy (who has done a huge amount of work measuring his collection), Bill German, Max Cohen, Frank Sutera, Robert Quintero and Bob Calhoun. I have used this to revise the parameters for each of the new types (see “parameters” below).

I am also making new groups of 4-bar postmarks that do not fall into any of these 5 new types (e.g. double circle, oval, 5-bar, 8-bar, etc). This will help us to propose even more new groups as we collect more data.

To stimulate more participation, I have designed some worksheets (see “worksheets” on next page) that can be used to send me information. The

first one is to be used for those postmarks that fall into the parameters listed on the new revised table. The second is to be used for those postmarks that have one or more parameters outside of the range listed on the new revised table. I am happy to email or mail full sheets of these worksheets to anyone that wants to use them (I just made short examples of the worksheets for illustration).

For those that do not wish to do a lot of measurements, I would be happy to do this work on scans or copies they send me as long as they check that the method used to reproduce the postmarks does not alter the size of the original. Of course, if anyone wants to send originals, I’ll be happy to measure them and return them.

One final important note, my mailing address is now 1901 Pennsylvania Ave., Englewood, FL 34224. Mail is being forwarded from my previous address if someone uses it by mistake.

Parameters

Type	EKU – LKU	dCDS	VS	wBar	lBar
G/1	1994 – 2011	32 – 36	22 – 25	3	11 – 14
G/2c	1999 – 2012	31 – 35	22 – 25	3	15 – 16
G/2ib	2004 – 2012	33 – 35	22 – 23	3	16 – 17
G/3	2004 – 2012	30 – 34	16 – 17	2 – 3	11 – 14
H	2002 – 2011	30 – 34	15 – 19	2 – 3	≥ 19

Summary of parameters for proposed types of 4-bar postmarks from database as of 9/21/12. EKU – LKU: year of earliest known use – latest known use; dCDS: diameter (mm) of circular date stamp; VS: vertical span (mm between top and bottom bars); wBar: width (mm) of bars; lBar: length of bar (mm measured top of top bar or bottom of bottom bar).

Worksheet

Type	Number of Postmarks	Range of Dates (MM/DD/YY)	States Represented (2 letter abbreviations)
G/1			
G/2c			
G/2ib			
G/3			
H			

Worksheet for 4-bar postmarks that are within ranges for dCDS, VS, wBar, and lBar of summary table for each type. Determine how many of each of the 5 different types you have and enter number in second column. Give the range of dates represented by the postmarks in the third column. List the 2 letter abbreviation for each state represented by the postmarks in the fourth column.

Date	City, State	dCDS	VS	wBar	lBar

Example of worksheet for 4-bar postmarks that are **not** within ranges for dCDS, VS, wBar and lBar of summary table for each type. For postmarks that have one or more parameters outside of those listed in the summary table, enter information for each postmark in a worksheet that like listed below. Sizes are to be entered in mm. Scans or copies of the postmarks may be submitted instead of filling out a worksheet as long as you check that the method you use to reproduce the postmark does not alter the size of the postmark.