



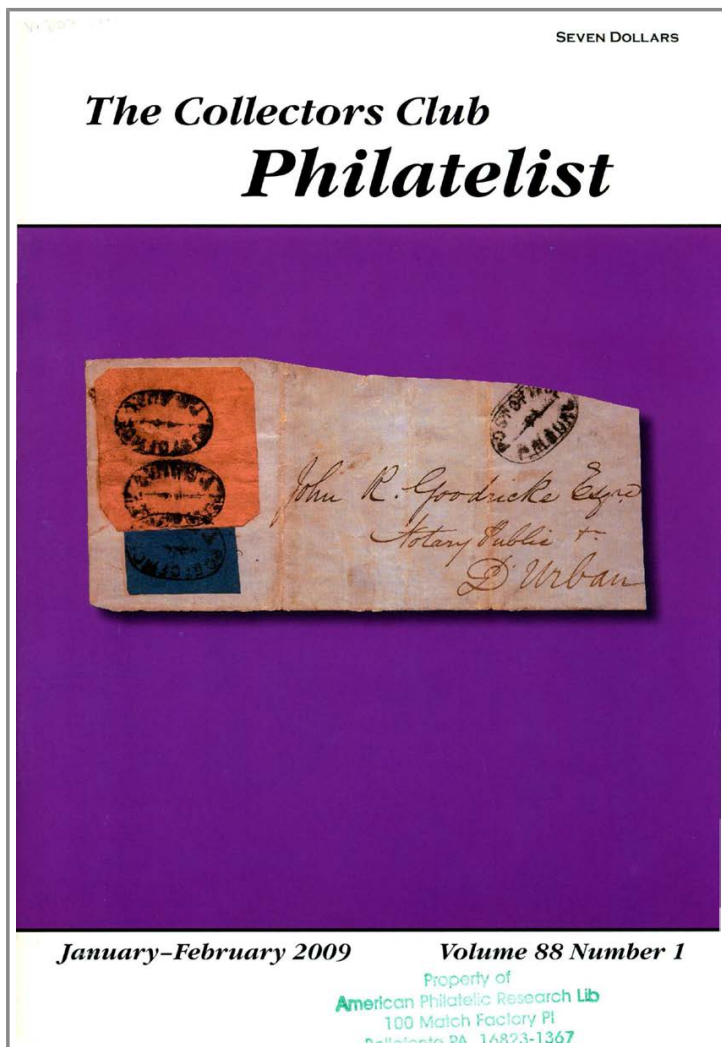
# THE COLLECTORS CLUB

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# *The Public Herald “Seals”*

by Jim Kotanchik

In 1987, I encountered the first of a number of covers and single seals with the design shown in Figure 1. Whether these are “seals” or “labels” is not immediately obvious, but at least to begin I will call them “seals.”

Ignoring for the moment the printed black text, the common characteristic is the red label (38 x 15½ mm) that reads “Public Herald” in two lines with “Philadelphia” in rather small letters between the two lines. The seals are imperforate with generous margins (about 3-4 mm) and have a fairly thick yellowish gum.

All of the examples seen have text in black as shown. “POSTMASTER” is always the top line in a compressed sans-serif font. The second line is a town name in a roman font. In some cases the town name is centered and in others it is left-justified as in Figure 1. The third line is the county and state. The bottom line is a series of numbers and symbols. Even with seven different seals known, there is no apparent pattern to the text in the fourth line. No multiples have been seen.

Covers from five different towns have been found: Berkeley, Golden Gate, and Pomona, all in California; and from Yantley Creek, Alabama, and Pine Grove, Arkansas. Off-cover seals are known from Hamburg and You Bet,<sup>1</sup> both in California.

The earliest cover is the Pomona and is dated November 25, 1891; the latest is the Pine Grove cover dated June 8, 1894. The known period of use thus spans about 2½ years.

The most recent discovery is the Yantley Creek cover in Figure 2. Although there are no markings, it has all of the appearances of a letter received open in the post office and closed in the typical fashion with post office seals.

Figure 3 shows the Berkeley cover. This time the seal is folded over the right edge of the envelope, which has been roughly opened, and there is a manuscript “Opened by M. Bradley” reading vertically at the left. This again is typical of an official seal usage reclosing a letter opened in error.



Figure 1. The Public Herald seal.



Figure 2. The Yantley Creek cover.



Figure 3. The Berkeley cover.



Two of the other three usages show similar characteristics. The Pomona cover was opened in error and returned to the sender, and the Golden Gate example was received unsealed. These again are the most typical uses of official seals.

The Pine Grove cover<sup>2</sup> (Figure 4) is very different. In this case, the label was used as the return address for the postmaster of Pine Grove. Perhaps this represents the intended use of the seals, rather than as post office seals.



Figure 4. Pine Grove, Arkansas, usage.

However, the preponderance of evidence supports the latter hypothesis.

Other than the Pomona example, all the seals were used in fourth-class post offices.<sup>3</sup> At this time these smallest post offices had to pay for their own supplies and were not able to requisition government-produced seals from the Division of Post Office Supplies. Private

printers, such as the Morrill Brothers of Fulton, NY, and Lemoyne Press of Lemoyne, PA, prepared seals that were targeted for sale to fourth-class post offices.<sup>4</sup> Their products are known used in a large number of post offices around the United States during the same period as the "Public Herald" seals.

The Public Herald seals are unlike the typeset seals in a number of respects. Most obviously they do not have the "Officially Sealed..." text that is found on all of the typeset seals. This suggests that the Public Herald seals were originally intended for some other (not apparent) purpose.

The obvious question is: "What are these seals/labels and where did they originate?"

With a name such as "The Public Herald," one's first thought is of a newspaper. However a search of holdings of the Philadelphia Free Library turned up no periodical with that name. Searches of Philadelphia business directories for the period 1880 through 1900 also yielded no publisher (or any other business) with the name. This was a surprise (and disappointment) to say the least.

There is however one scrap of evidence for the existence of a publisher with this name in Philadelphia about 1890 or so. The cover in Figure 5 is from the author's exhibit of U.S. official seals. The advertisement in the corner indi-



Figure 5. Public Herald ad cover.





Figure 6. Banner bar for *The Agents' Herald*.

cates that the sender, S. R. Harrison, of Monroe, Kansas, was in 1887, an agent for "Lum Smith's Philadelphia Public Herald."

Now armed with the name "Lum Smith," my search for *The Public Herald* widened. A trip to the Houghton Library at Harvard University finally put the pieces together. In their collection, I found a single (mostly incomplete) copy of *The Public Herald* masquerading under the name *The Agents' Herald* (Figure 6).<sup>5</sup> On the editorial page of this tabloid-sized paper, where the size of print runs and subscription information is found, a paragraph explains the confusion in the names:

"N.B. - PUBLIC HERALD and AGENTS' HERALD - two editions are published each month, 25,000 for agents and 25,000 for families. There is no difference whatever in the two HERALDS except the heading on first page. You can subscribe for either the PUBLIC or AGENTS' HERALD."

The target market for Smith's publications was "agents." After the Civil War, the selling of many products was through what we today would call traveling salesmen. This was because much of America at this time lived in small rural communities. Statistics for the period show that over 65 percent of Americans lived in towns or villages with 2,500 or fewer inhabitants. This huge market was difficult to reach, and newspapers of the period are often found with advertisements headed by "Agents Wanted." Figure 7 is a typical example.<sup>6</sup>

*The Agents' Herald* and *The Public Herald* were directed specifically at agents and agent wannabes. Published on South Eighth Street in Philadelphia from 1877 to the late 1890s by Lum Smith, it advertised a range of items to be canvassed, from books and magazines to pant stretchers and electric belts.

Smith's ethics may not have been entirely pure. In order to gain advertising from businesses with products needing agent representation, he threatened manufacturers and publishers unwilling to advertise in his publications with negative descriptions of their products. He was frequently in court fighting libel suits for his editorial comments on such products. He was the target of several assassination attempts for his public denunciation of these recalcitrant advertisers (Figure 8).<sup>7</sup>

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**MALES.**

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**AGENTS WANTED.—COMPETENT AND RELIABLE** men to sell our patent novelty to retail furnishings trade in the larger cities.

It is no spurious article, but one of real value and a necessity for gentlemen's use; exclusive territory given. Those acquainted with the gentleman's furnishing trade preferred. For particulars address, with reference, R. E. PILCHER, President, Louisville, Ky.

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Figure 7. "Agents wanted."



Despite his somewhat unsavory business practices, Smith was a champion for the agents who were routinely defrauded by suppliers and customers alike. He often published news of legal decisions that aided the ability of agents to recover their losses due to suppliers' failure to meet the terms of their contracts.

So why would Lum Smith prepare these seals?

#### A CLUMSY INFERNAL MACHINE.

PHILADELPHIA, June 29.—An "infernal" machine of a rather clumsy pattern was sent by mail to-day to L. Lum Smith, publisher of a weekly paper. It was a wooden box about 5 inches square and 3 inches high. The word "Private" on the lid of the box aroused Mr. Smith's suspicions. He opened the box cautiously, and found a 44-calibre breech loading derringer inside. It was loaded and cocked. A piece of copper wire was attached to the trigger and fastened to the lid of the box, but in such a way that the opening of the box could not possibly have discharged the pistol. The postal authorities are investigating the matter.

Figure 8. Lum Smith assassination attempt.

publishers, such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Lippincott's*, and *Harper's Magazine*, all offered such discounts. In the journal *The United States Mail*,<sup>8</sup> targeted at postmasters of fourth-class post offices, is a partial list of periodicals offering such discounts. Among them is *The Public Herald* (Figure 9).<sup>9</sup>

The list price for a year's subscription (published monthly) to *The Public Herald* was 50¢ to an individual subscriber. The discounted price to postmasters was 40¢. Thus the postmaster could make 25 percent on his investment.

It is likely that Lum Smith prepared mailing labels for the shipments of the bulk mailings that went to postmasters for redistribution. This marketing tool that built Smith's subscriber list also resulted in considerable savings to

him in postage costs. In 1894, bulk mail of newspapers to a single address cost 1¢ per pound.<sup>10</sup> My small stack of six issues of the *Agents' Herald* weighs a bit more than ten ounces. A single copy could not have weighed more than two ounces, and thus a shipment to a postmaster with ten customers would cost 1¢ or at most 2¢. Direct mailing to individual subscribers would have cost 1¢ each or a total of 10¢ for the group.

If Smith prepared labels for the bulk shipments to postmasters and subsequent distribution among local subscribers, the obvious address would be "POSTMASTER" and the city and state, just as found on the seals. But why would postmasters have multiple unused copies of the seals if they were merely mailing labels prepared by Smith for this distribution mechanism?

One of the marketing strategies for publishers at this time was to give fourth-class postmasters a fairly substantial discount on multiple subscription orders for their publications. If the postmaster could then find local subscribers at the "list" price, he could pocket the difference between his discounted cost and the published price as he placed individual copies in the subscriber's boxes. This practice was not limited to second-tier periodicals. Many national

| THE UNITED STATES MAIL.  |                |                |                 | 19            |
|--|----------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| <i>To Postmasters:</i>   |                |                |                 |               |
| <i>You are authorized to act as agents of the following publications for procuring subscriptions.</i>                                  |                |                |                 |               |
| <i>The Publishers of the following leading magazines and papers will fill subscriptions from Postmasters at the price named below.</i> |                |                |                 |               |
|  | REGULAR PRICE. | PRICE TO P. M. | PROFIT TO P. M. |               |
| <b>MAGAZINES.</b>  |                |                |                 |               |
| North American Review.....   | \$5 00         | \$4 00         | \$1 00          |               |
| The Forum, a review of living subjects by the foremost writers.....  | 5 00           | 4 00           | 1 00            | New York      |
| The Atlantic Monthly, first of American Literary Magazines.....  | 4 00           | 3 30           | 80              | Boston        |
| Lippincott's.....  | 3 00           | 2 25           | 75              | Philadelphia  |
| Peterson's Magazine.....   | 2 00           | 1 45           | 55              | Philadelphia  |
| New England Magazine.....  | 3 00           | 2 65           | 35              | Boston        |
| Overland Monthly.....  | 4 00           | 3 25           | 75              | San Francisco |

Figure 9. Subscription solicitation for postmasters.



The period of use of the Public Herald “seals” is in the middle of the peak use period of the typeset (Scott LOX numbered) seals. All of the seals seen so far (except for the Pomona) are from fourth-class post offices at the time.

From this point on, the discussion is merely conjecture on my part. Smith was no dummy! In my mind I can visualize him sitting at his desk and noticing one of the advertisements from the Morrill Brothers or the Lemoyne Supply Company for their typeset seals. Also on his desk would be the

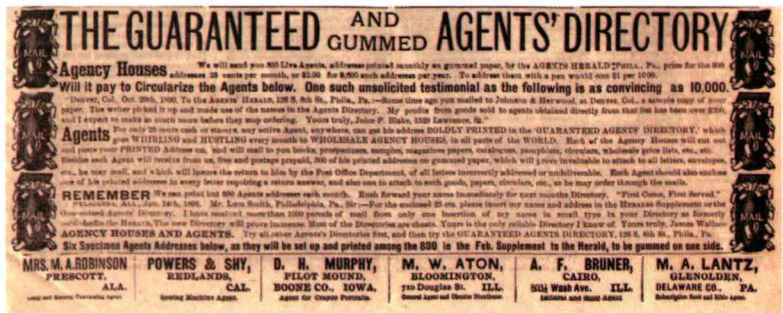


Figure 10. Lum Smith ad for labels.

pile of mailing labels for his postmaster customers. In a moment of insight he decided that these would make perfectly acceptable seals and, at the same time, provide a bit of free advertising in the process.

Supporting this hypothesis, there is a slightly smoking gun found in the January 1891 issue of *The Agents' Herald* (Figure 10). The ad is for gummed labels. The example seals shown at the bottom of the advertisement are quite like those used on mail five years later.

The above advertisement is a strong statement that Smith was moving towards some sort of official seal for fourth-class post offices based on the mailing labels. The final story on the Public Herald seals is still filled with conjecture, waiting for conclusive evidence that Smith offered them to postmasters. Can you help?

## Endnotes

1. Who can believe a town named “You Bet”? But it is for real, and there must be a great story behind the name. The Nevada County, California, post office was open from 1868 to 1903.
2. From the Bruce Mosher collection.
3. The exception to this is the usage in the Pomona post office, but that is another story that I will tell at some point—the Pomona provisional seal.
4. Kotanchik, J., “Morrill Brothers Printers,” *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. 87, No. 4, July-August 2008.
5. Since that visit, I have located six more or less complete issues of the *Public Herald* and *Agents' Herald*. Unfortunately, none of them is from the period spanned by the seal usages. I continue to search for additional issues.
6. *New York Times*, September 12, 1885: p. 3.
7. *New York Times*, June 30, 1885: p. 1.
8. *The United States Mail* 7, no. 6 (1891): 19. Why target the fourth-class postmasters? In 1899 there were over 70,000 (!) fourth-class post offices.
9. Unfortunately the listing for *The Agents' Herald* was far down on the full-page advertisement and is not visible in Figure 9.
10. Beecher, Henry W., and Anthony Wawrukiewicz, *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1999* (Portland, Oregon: Cama Publishing Company): p. 97.