

ELIZABETHTOWN STAMPLESS POSTMARK ALTERED TO READ “ELIZABETH”

By Robert G. Rose

On May 23, 1855, the name of the post office in what was then Elizabethtown, was shortened to “Elizabeth.” Prior to that date, and throughout the stampless period, the Elizabethtown post office used a variety of handstamped postmarks, including a large circle with the shortened “Elizabeth” town name which the *Coles Book* records with an 1853-55 period of use.¹

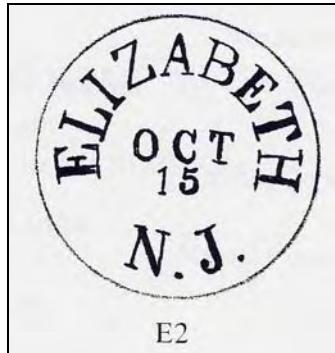


Fig. 1: Elizabeth postmark with reported uses in 1853-55, Coles type E2

Whether this handstamp was available for use at the time of the official name change on May 23, 1855 is not known. The author has not seen any covers with the type E2 postmark after the May 23 date. However, following the official date of the name change it appears that a new postmark was needed. It may be further surmised that the postmaster did not have sufficient time or perhaps the inclination to order a new handstamp. Instead, an existing Elizabethtown postmark was altered to read “Elizabeth” as shown in *Figure 2*. This is the discovery copy of this postmark. It is not listed in *The Coles Book*.²

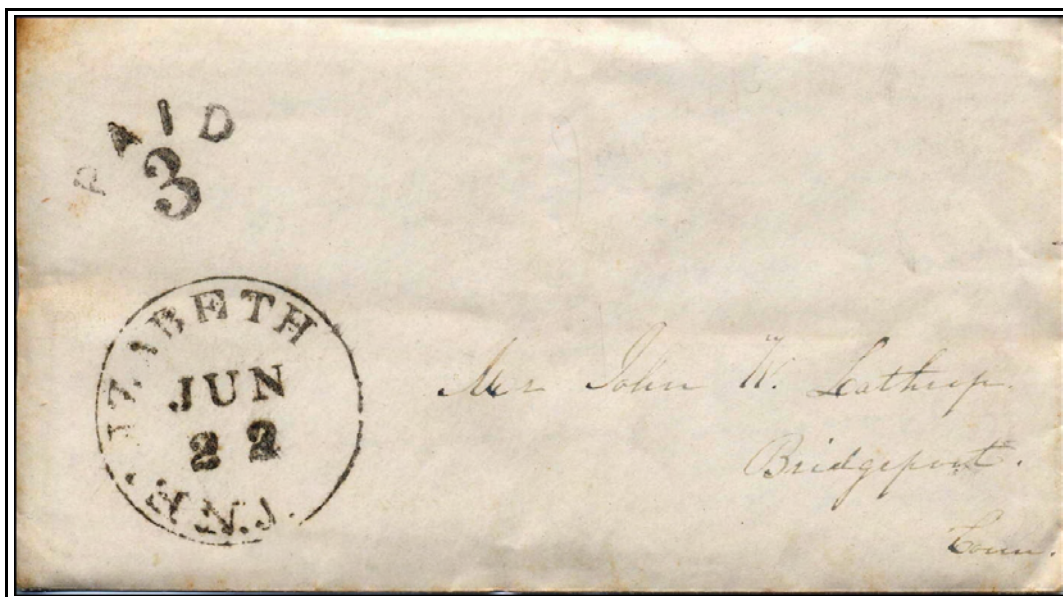


Fig. 2: Altered postmark in black with matching “PAID 3” to Bridgeport, Ct., datelined June 22, 1855.

ELIZABETH, NJ ~ ALTERED ELIZABETHTOWN CANCEL ~ Robert G. Rose

This altered postmark is dated June 22 and its 1855 usage is confirmed by the dateline on the enclosed letter, just a month after the post office’s renaming. As of April 1, 1855, the law required, for the first time, the compulsory prepayment of all domestic mail, with three cents paying the half ounce rate under 3,000 miles, as reflected in the handstamped rate marking.

The question then arises: which of the existing Elizabethtown handstamps was altered to read “Elizabeth?” The *Coles Book* includes two possibilities. The first is a 29 millimeter circle in blue (E10) with reported uses from 1840 to 1857, as shown in Figure 3.³ Five cents paid the half ounce rate under 300 miles, effective on July 1, 1845, on this 1846 cover.



Fig. 3: Elizabethtown postmark in blue with matching “PAID” and “5” on 1846 cover to Madison, New Jersey, Coles type E10.

The second Elizabethtown postmark is a 31 millimeter circle in black (E11) with reported uses from 1853 to 1855 as shown in *Figure 4*⁴ on the following page. Three cents paid the compulsory prepaid rate for one-half ounce domestic mail under 3,000 miles that became effective on April 4, 1855, just four days before the posting of this cover.



*Elizabethtown
E10 – Coles 1840-57*



*Elizabeth
Unlisted postmark - 1855*



*Elizabethtown
E11 – Coles 1853-55*



Fig. 4: Elizabethtown postmark in black with matching "PAID 3" on 1855 cover to Princeton, Coles type E11

The altered postmark shown in *Figure 2* measures 29 millimeter and the spacing of the letters also matches up with those in *Figure 3*, Coles type E10. It appears then, that the type E10 handstamp was altered with the removal of the letters "town" to read as "Elizabeth." The "PAID 3" rate marking is identical to that shown on the 1855 cover in *Figure 4* and is the proper rating effective on April 1, 1855.

ENDNOTES:

¹ William C. Coles, Jr., *The Postal Markings of New Jersey Stampless Covers* (The Collectors Club of Chicago, 1983), p. 168, with Coles type E2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 170. Coles also reports this postmark in green from 1845 to 1857 and in black without a year date. Coles type E10.

⁴ *Ibid.* Coles type E11.