

A Short Introduction to Netherlands Point Cancels

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1. Background

From the time that postage stamps were first used to pay for mail, the stamps were required to be cancelled with a so-called obliteration cancel. Beginning in 1861, the postmark used for that purpose in the Netherlands was the framed **FRANCO**.



2-letter postmark



small-round postmark

As that mark gave no indication of the place, date, or time of mailing, the **FRANCO** cancel was used in conjunction with a circular dated postmark showing where the mail originated and the date and time when it was posted. The 2-letter postmark was in use after 1866/67. It was replaced by the small-round postmark in 1877.

On 16 March 1869, the Dutch postal service directed that, effective 1 April 1869, a new cancellation would replace the framed **FRANCO** cancel for obliterating stamps on mail. Known formally as numeral cancels (*nommerstempels*), they are now referred to as point cancels (*puntstempels*) by virtually everyone.

(Circulaire n°. 747.)

EXTRACT FROM THE REGISTER OF RESOLUTIONS OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

's Gravenhage, the 16th of March 1869

Art. 1.

For the obliteration of postage stamps on *letters*, a new cancel will be introduced which will be sent to the Directors of the *Main Post Offices* [*Postkantoren*] in due course. That cancel consists of a number surrounded by points in the shape of a hexagon. The number is different for each office.

Art. 2.

The *Main Post Offices* no longer shall use the "*Franco*" cancel but, according to the terms of art. 1, only the numeral cancel as an *obliteration cancel* [*vernietigingsstempel*].

Art. 5.

This resolution becomes effective on the 1st of April next.

Condensed English translation of excerpts by author

Great Britain, with its 1843 London Maltese Cross, was the first country to use a numeral cancel. Following their lead, many countries began using numeral or point cancels. While the Dutch thus had many prototypes to choose from when

designing their point cancel, correspondence between the respective ministers shows that the Dutch modeled theirs after the one in use in Belgium.



London
Maltese Cross



Bavaria



Belgium



France

2. Purposes

The purposes of the point cancel were two-fold. First, the number could assist in confirming the town from which the mail originated, in instances in which the circular dated mark was indistinct or absent. Second, the points would drive impressions into the paper, thoroughly obliterating the stamp, making it difficult for the stamp to be re-used after removing the ink from the stamp by chemical means.

3. Production and Design

The cancelling devices were handstamps with wooden handles and iron alloy tips into which the points and numerals were engraved.

A design sketch prepared by the Dutch Royal Mint shows a numeral 1 surrounded by a field of 26 points in the shape of a hexagon. The flag at the top of the numeral 1 is thinner than the stem of the numeral and there is a serif foot. In practice, the serif foot was dropped and the flag, though still thinner than the stem, is not as much so. In addition, the Mint decided to add an extra point to the left and to the right of single-digit numerals to fill in the empty space. Cancels with double- and triple-digit numerals did not require these extra points.



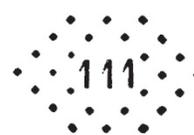
Design sketch



#1 Alkmaar



#11 Beverwijk

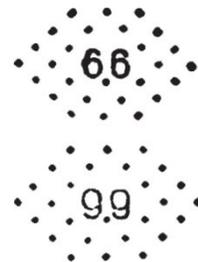


#111 Veghel

Extra points also were added beneath the 6 of Apeldoorn and the 9 of Assen to distinguish one from the other, but later these towns were issued cancels without those extra points. According to postal records, in 1890 Assen was issued a cancel #9 with a point after the numeral but no examples of that have been found.



As with Apeldoorn and Assen, in order to distinguish one town from the other extra points were added between the numerals 66 of Leerdam and 99 of Sneek. Postal records contain no indication that these towns were later issued cancels without those extra points. With Leerdam, there is no extrinsic evidence to contradict the postal records, so examples without the extra point must have been caused by that point breaking off. However, the latest known cover from Sneek with the extra point is dated 3 July 1876, while covers without that extra point are known



from as much as three years earlier. This suggests that the postal service did issue a cancel 99 for Sneek without the extra point but neglected to record it.



In 1890 the postal service issued a cancel to Sneek with a point after the second numeral 9. Examples are known on the following issues: 1872 King Willem III; 1876 Ciphers; 1891 Princess Wilhelmina; and 1881 Postage Dues.

4. Design Variations

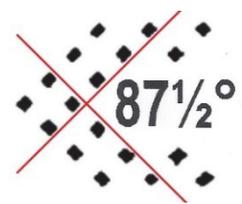
The most significant design variation – that the cancels exist in two distinctly different shapes – was not discovered until noticed by a collector in 1986. This variation came about because the postal service awarded the job of producing the handstamps to two different engravers, V.J. Hinsbergh and J.B. Loran. Hinsbergh used a form that was nearly square (*haaks*) while Loran used a form that was more oblique (*scheef*, which can be translated literally as “out of square.”) The two engravers worked simultaneously. Thus, from the outset, examples of each type were issued in no particular numerical order.



191 Scheemda (oblique)



77 Monnikendam (square)



While most offices received either square or oblique cancels, 20 numbers are known to have been issued in both types (21 if you count 191 Scheemda, but see note to table). In this table, the date given is the date on which that variety was first issued to that town. Many towns received more than one of the same type.

Town	Oblique	Square	Town	Oblique	Square
10 Bergen op Zoom	24/3/69	1/2/83	68 Leiden	24/3/69	10/12/90
16 Breda	24/3/69	25/7/77	90 Roermond	31/12/72	24/3/69
33 Eindhoven	24/3/69	5/9/87	91 Rotterdam	24/3/69	16/5/74
35 Enkhuizen	24/3/69	6/2/93	106 Tilburg †	24/3/69	31/3/92
41 Gorinchem	14/4/82	24/3/69	107 Utrecht	17/12/84	24/3/69
42 Gouda	24/3/69	17/6/82	116 Vlissingen	23/10/82	24/3/69
44 'sGravenhage	24/3/69	7/2/78	137 Arnhem-Oldenzaal	24/3/69	26/7/78
45 Groningen	24/3/69	17/12/84	152 Scheveningen ‡	11/6/75	15/6/69
47 Haarlemmermeer	24/3/69	31/8/83	159 Kamp bij Milligen	16/8/72	-
51 Herenveen	24/3/69	10/4/78	159 Kamp bij Rijen	-	24/8/92
67 Leeuwarden *	N/A	24/3/69	191 Scheemda §	N/A	1/1/79

* Oblique examples of #67 exist but that cancel was not recorded by the postal service.

† The oblique cancel #106 was issued to the branch office Tilburg-Goirke.

‡ The oblique cancel #152 was issued to the branch office at the spa, Scheveningen-Badhuis.

§ The square cancel #191 is shown in postal service records but no examples have been found.

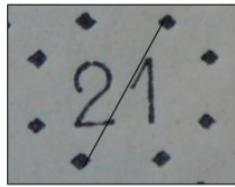
The oblique cancel #191 is not recorded, but they are the only examples that exist.

In instances in which a number was issued more than once, variations caused by imperfections in hand engraving are too numerous to list. There are, however, two examples which are worth noting because of the substantial differences in value between stamps with the original cancel and stamps with the later cancel, namely, the numbers 21 and 25.

Number 21 was given out twice, first to Delfshaven in 1869 (which had its number 21 withdrawn when it became a branch office of Rotterdam on 1 May 1886) and a second time to Emmen when that town was promoted to a main office on 1 April 1891. Several subtle differences exist between the earlier and later numerals, but



Delfshaven



Emmen

the simplest way to distinguish them is to observe the angle of the flag on the numeral 1. With Delfshaven, that flag points in a direction clear of the foot of the 2 while with Emmen it points to a spot just inside the foot of the 2.

Number 25 was also furnished twice, in 1869 to Dirksland (which closed on 15 December 1890), and again to 'sGraveland when it was promoted to a main post office on 1 April 1891. Distinguishing between the numbers is a bit trickier than distinguishing the two types of number 21, but there are a few differences worth noting. With 25 'sGraveland, the numerals tend to be a bit thinner and clearer than with Dirksland, the point to the right of the base of the numeral 5 sits slightly farther from the 5 than the corresponding point of Dirksland, and the place where the curl of the 2 joins the foot comes to a sharper point.



Dirksland



'sGraveland

Other variations in the form of the cancels occurred due to damage. These are the best-known of those:

4 Amersfoort



Left-hand extra point missing

64 Kampen



Both extra points missing

67 Leeuwarden



Small cipher variety



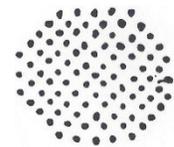
6 without curl



7 with short leg

Three mute cancels exist (point cancels without number designations) that were created unofficially.

- A cancel of very fine points that was used at the sub-office Nieuwe Niedorp during the period 1874/76.
- A cancel of 4 x 5 heavy points. This was originally believed to be from Herveld, which is the dated postmark on the only known cover, but research has traced it to the town of Zetten, just north of Herveld.
- A hexagonal cancel very much like a real point cancel but without a number. It is known only on stamps from the 1881 postage due issue and on two stamps from the 1891 Princess Wilhelmina issue. There is no evidence to show where this was used.



5. Introduction and Period of Use

Starting with 138 cancels distributed for use beginning 1 April 1869, and ending with number 259 given to Waddingsveen on 1 June 1893, point cancels were used at 254 towns, 4 railway lines, and 6 temporary military camps. They were given only to main offices (*postkantoren*) and their branch offices (*bijkantoren*).

Smaller sub-offices (*hulpkantoren*) were used for delivering mail to and from rural areas. At first, these sub-offices received name cancels (*naamstempels* or *langstempels*) which showed where their mail originated, but they were not given dated or obliteration postmarks. For the stamps on their mail to be cancelled and the mail “time-stamped,” the mail was routed through main offices to which each sub-office was assigned. There, the mail received a circular-dated postmark showing the date, time, and name of the main office, and stamps on the mail were cancelled with the main office point cancel.

Initially, cancels were distributed to 135 main post offices in alphabetical order, from 1 Alkmaar to 135 Zwolle, and to three railway lines: 136 Amsterdam-Emmerik; 137 Arnhem-Oldenzaal; and 138 Moerdijk-Antwerpen. The numbers 139 to 150 were set aside for distribution to future railway lines. Therefore, distribution of point cancels to smaller offices, once they were promoted to main offices, began with 151 to Oisterwijk on 1 May 1869. Following number 257, which Middelharnis began using on 1 December 1890, the postal service reissued two numbers that had been withdrawn and also gave out the numbers that had been set aside for future use on railway lines. They then distributed the last two cancels, number 258 to Soest and number 259 to Waddingsveen.

This chart shows the distribution of all of the numbers.

1 April 1869	1 thru 135, plus 136 thru 138 to railway lines	139 thru 150 set aside for future use at railways
1869 thru 1890	151 thru 257 Includes 155 to Kamp bij de Bildt in 1870 and then to Kamp Wiesselsche Veld in 1872	plus 141 to the railway line Utrecht-Zwolle in 1872 21 withdrawn 1886 25 withdrawn 1890
1891 to 1892	21 and 25 reissued 139 thru 149 155 to Kamp bij Zeist in 1891	Excluding 141 which had been distributed previously 147 to Kamp bij Laren in 1892 159 to Kamp bij Rijen in 1892 206 withdrawn in 1892 and never reissued
1893	150, 258, 259	

The last authorized use of point cancels was on 14 June 1893. They were replaced the next day by the small-round cancels which had been used on mail as departure and receiving marks, and in certain situations as cancellations.

6. Stamps and Documents on Which Point Cancels Can Be Found

1852 Willem III

Point cancels on this issue are scarce. They represent very late uses of the stamps, as the issue had been superseded by the 1864 and 1867 issues by the time point cancels were first released. From among all of the towns, only 6 covers and 237 examples of stamps off cover are known.

1864 Willem III

Point cancels on this issue are uncommon. Only 15 examples are known on cover, of which three are mixed frankings in combination with stamps from the 1867 issue, and 698 examples are known on stamps off cover. Uses on the 15-cent orange of this issue are relatively the most common.

1867 Willem III

This was the issue in use when point cancels were introduced, so lower-numbered cancels are relatively common. The issue was replaced in 1872, so cancels beginning with number 160, Sliedrecht, issued 1 October 1872, are scarce. The last possible number to be used legitimately is 196, Gennepe, issued 1 July 1879, after which stamps from this issue were demonetized.

1869 Coat of Arms

The low denominations of this issue were designed especially for use on newspapers or other printed matter which could be sent at a lower rate than letters. Point cancels were not used to cancel stamps on printed matter, but these stamps also were valid for use on ordinary mail. Like the stamps of the 1867 issue, these stamps were demonetized after 31 October 1879. Few examples exist with cancels issued during or after August 1876 (beginning with 173 Gorredijk); by then this issue had been replaced by the 1876 cipher issue. The highest known number on this issue is 193, Venraaij, issued 1 May 1879.

1872 Willem III

This issue overlapped with the use of point cancels for 21 years. During most of this time it was the primary issue being used. Therefore, point cancels are generally far more common on this issue than on any other. However, for cancels distributed during and after 1891, following the release of the Princess Wilhelmina issue, examples on the 1872 issue tend to be scarcer than on the Princess issue.

1876 Cipher Issue

Like the 1869 issue, stamps on this issue were designed especially for use on printed matter but were also valid for use on ordinary mail. Examples of point cancels on this issue are known from every office except for some of the temporary military camps.

1891 Princess Wilhelmina Issue

Stamps from this issue did not begin to replace the 1872 issue until October 1891, just 20½ months before point cancels were discontinued. Therefore, point cancels on it are relatively scarce. This is particularly true of the 3-cent denomination, which was not released until 1 April 1892. The 1-guilder gray-violet was not released until after point cancels had been discontinued, yet three examples are known, all with cancel #93 from Sas van Gend.

1870 and 1881 Postage Due Issues

Postage due stamps with 5-cent and 10-cent denominations were first introduced in the Netherlands on 15 May 1870. The second issue, with many more denominations, was introduced in 1881 to meet a new requirement that postage due stamps, rather than manuscript markings, would be required on all underfranked mail. Apart from cancels distributed to the railways, some military camps, and the sequence held back for later use (numbers 139 thru 150), postage due stamps cancelled with point cancels are readily accessible to collectors.

Telegram Envelopes and Stamps

Stamps affixed to telegram envelopes were cancelled with point cancels, though not many examples are known. Using point cancels on telegram stamps was prohibited, but ten examples are known with cancels with recognizable numbers as well as at least one with an unrecognizable point cancel fragment. Forgeries abound.

Postal Money Order Forms and Stamps

When postal money order forms (*postwissels*) were introduced in 1870, point cancels were used to cancel the stamps with which they were franked. A new money order form was introduced on 1 December 1884 which used stamps (*postbewijszegels*) to show the amount of the order. At first, the forms themselves were to be cancelled with point cancels but the money order stamps were to be cancelled with the small-round cancel. From 1 April 1892 the money order stamps could also be cancelled with point cancels. There are no recorded examples of money order stamps on a money order form cancelled with a point cancel.

Fiscal Stamps

Fiscal stamps were not valid for postage, and even when properly used as revenue stamps, they would not have been cancelled with point cancels. Yet two examples exist on which a fiscal stamp, improperly used to frank a letter, was cancelled with a point cancel.

Foreign Stamps

Dutch cancellations obviously have no business appearing on foreign stamps, but there are 77 known examples on stamps from 28 different foreign countries. Four of these are on cover.

Postal Stationery

When pre-franked envelopes were introduced starting in 1876, postal regulations specified that they were to be cancelled with point cancels. Letter sheets, introduced in 1888, also were cancelled with point cancels, as were stamps affixed to formula cards (unfranked postcards) which had been introduced in 1870. Pre-franked postcards were required to be franked with the circular-dated cancels, but there are many examples of postmasters ignoring this regulation and cancelling them with point cancels.

Receipts and Other Documents

On 1 January 1871, the postal service introduced what was in effect a check-cashing service making it possible to settle accounts with receipts (*kwitanties*) sent via the postal service. These took many forms including, in addition to straightforward receipts, Warrant of Payment forms, legal documents, and cards reflecting membership in an association which could serve as receipts for dues paid. Stamps affixed to these documents were cancelled with the point cancel.

Proof of Delivery

In 1870 the postal service began offering proof of delivery service for registered letters (*Berigt van Ontvang*). The 5-cent fee was paid by affixing a postage stamp which was required to be cancelled with a point cancel.

7. Railroad Lines

As mentioned earlier, point cancels were issued to four railway lines.

136 Amsterdam-Emmerik	1 April 1869
137 Arnhem-Oldenzaal	1 April 1869
138 Moerdijk-Antwerpen	1 April 1869
141 Utrecht-Zwolle	1 March 1872

Apart from number 141, the numbers 139 thru 150 that had been set aside originally for use on other railway lines were never utilized for that purpose and, after 1890, were given out to newly opened main post offices.

The reason more of these numbers were not given to railway lines is most likely because, in the years from 1876 to 1879, mail handling at the railroads was gradually given to centralized locations at which time the idea of post offices on individual railway lines was abandoned. Instead, four regional railway offices were established. Each of these offices controlled postal traffic on a number of lines that, together, covered the entire country.

Railroad post office	Opening date	Location
No. 1	1 January 1876	Utrecht/Amsterdam
No. 2	1 January 1876	Rotterdam/Breda
No. 3	1 June 1887	Zwolle
No. 4	1 March 1889	Arnhem

After completion of this reorganization in 1889, the point cancels that had been issued to railway lines fell into disuse. By the time of the 1891 Princess Wilhelmina issue, they no longer appear.

8. Branch Offices, Spas, and Temporary Military Camps

A. Branch Offices

Branch offices were established in large cities to handle the volume of mail those cities processed. They received the same number cancel as the main post office which they served. However, each had a distinctive circular dated cancel with its full name so they are easy to recognize on cover. The first of these, 'sGravenhage Parkstraat, opened on 20 December 1872.

B. Spas

Scheveningen, a seaside resort town near The Hague, received cancel number 152 on 15 June 1869. At first this post office was only open during the bathing season, roughly June to October, but from 1871 it was open all year. In 1875, a branch office was opened at the bathhouse, Scheveningen Badhuis. It received its own cancel number 152, but the one issued to the branch office was oblique while the one used at the main office was square, so they are easily distinguished even if not on a cover.

Zandvoort, a seaside resort in North Holland, received cancel number 209 on 15 June 1881. Like Scheveningen, at first it was only open during the bathing season, but from 1885 it was open all year.

C. Temporary Military Camps

Point cancels were distributed to six temporary military camps, small tent cities that were open for only about a month during years when they were in operation. The first of these was Kamp bij de Bildt, which began using number 155 on 26 August 1870. This is the rarest of all point cancels, known on only one cover and on three stamps off cover.

Number 155 was reissued to Kamp Wiesselsche Veld on 8 June 1872. Unlike other reissued numbers, Kamp Wiesselsche Veld received the very same cancelling device that had been used at Kamp bij de Bildt. To distinguish one of these camps from the other on stamps from the 1867 issue, Kamp bij de Bildt is found only on printing C, comb perf. 13½ x 13½ while Kamp Wiesselsche Veld is found only on printing D, line perf. 14. Number 155 from Kamp Wiesselsche Veld is known only on the 5-cent stamp from the 1867 issue and on the 5-cent stamp from the 1872 issue. There are four known covers.

Number 159 was first issued to Kamp bij Milligen on 16 August 1872. It is by far the most common of the camp cancellations, having been used during the summers of 1872, 1873, 1874, 1880, 1881, and 1882. Ten covers are known cancelled with number 159 from this camp.



A new cancel number 155 was engraved for Kamp bij Zeist. It was first used there on 25 August 1891 and then again in the summer of 1892. This cancel is easily distinguished from the cancel used at Kamp Wiesselsche Veld by the longer flag of the 1, which extends further from the stalk, and by the flag of the right-hand 5, which runs further to the right with the cancel from Zeist. No covers are known with cancel 155 from this camp.



Wiesselsche Veld



Zeist

Number 147 was issued to Kamp bij Laren on 24 August 1892. It is known on stamps from the 1872, 1876, and 1891 issues and on one pair from the 1881 postage due issue. There are no known covers.

A new cancel number 159 was engraved for Kamp bij Rijen and was used there beginning on 24 August 1892. It is known on stamps from the 1891 issue, on one stamp from the 1870 postage due issue, and on two covers. The cancel on the postage due stamp is not likely a legitimate postal use because this issue was no longer being used by then. The Kamp bij Rijen cancel was square and so is easily distinguished from the one used at Kamp bij Milligen, which was oblique. This table shows the periods during which point cancels were used at the six temporary military camps.

Camp	Opened
155 Kamp bij de Bildt	26 August to 28 September 1870
155 Kamp Wiesselsche Veld	8 June to 9 July 1872 Possibly 11 June to 11 July 1873 18 June to 18 July 1874
159 Kamp bij Milligen	16 August to 14 September 1872 12 August to 10 September 1873 10 August to 18 September 1874 2 August to 31 August 1880 9 August to 8 September 1881 1 September to 30 September 1882
155 Kamp bij Zeist	25 August to 3 September 1891 24 August to 28 September 1892
147 Kamp bij Laren	24 August to 19 September 1892
159 Kamp bij Rijen	24 August to 22 September 1892

9. Uses Contrary to Regulation

A. Use of Colored Ink

Circular 747 introducing point cancels in 1869 explicitly stated that the cancels must be struck with black ink. Nevertheless, examples are known in red, violet, and various shades of blue-green. Of particular note, there is a well-documented example of the 10-cent denomination of the 1864 Willem III issue cancelled with both red and black ink.



Red and black



Red



Violet



Blue-green

10. Reference Sources

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