

Precancels are postage stamps that have been canceled before being affixed to letters and packages. Mass mailers save the post offices time and effort by delivering the stamped mail ready for sorting.

Usually stamps are cancelled with two lines and the names of the city and state from where they were mailed; different fonts are used. The Post Office Department first authorized the precanceling of stamps in 1887.

Recently I discovered this new and interesting area in "feline" postal history. After doing detailed research on U.S. post offices which had precanceled stamps issued either by the Bureau of Printing and Engraving in Washington D.C. or so-called local precancels, I was able to identify 104 different feline related precancels — with eight of them definitely related to felines, and 96 others with words resembling names of either domestic cat breeds or connected to felines some other way.

The eight truly "feline" precancels are as follows: 1) **Cat Spring, Texas** was named by German immigrants from Oldenburg and Westphalia in 1834 for a nearby spring where a mountain lion was killed by one of them.

2) **Catskill, New York** was originally named *Kaatskill* or *Kaaterskill* ("Cat Creek" in Dutch) by early Dutch settlers in 17th century because of abundant mountain lions or catamounts in the area.

3) **Lionville, Pennsylvania** was named after the local Red Lion Inn which was named after a lion.

4) **Los Gatos, California** was originally named *La Ricordata* de Los Gatos which in Spanish means "Cats' Corner" because of many cougars and bobcats in the area.

5) **Port Lions, Alaska** was built with help from the U.S. government and the local Lions Club, and named to honor the club.

6) **Red Lion, Pennsylvania** was named after the Red Lion Tavern, one of the first pubs in town which was named after a lion.

7) **Tigerton, Wisconsin** was named after Tiger Creek, said to have fast-running waters that "roar like a tiger."

8) **Tigerville, South Carolina** was named by early settlers who came to the area shortly after the American Revolution. They originally called bobcats that they saw there "tygers" and named the nearby Tyger River.

Ten domestic cat breeds can be found on precancels: Calico Rock, Arkansas; (Maine) Coon Rapids, Iowa; Coon Valley, Wisconsin; Havana, Arizona, Florida, Illinois and Kansas; Napoleon, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, North Dakota and Ohio; Napoleontown, Louisiana; Oriental, North Carolina; Rex, Georgia; Rexburg, Idaho; Rexford, Kansas; Rexville, New York; Savannah, Georgia, Missouri, New York, Tennessee; Savannah Beach, Georgia; Selkirk, New York, Snow Shoe, Pennsylvania and Van, Texas.

Some precancels with fictional cat names are Alex, Oklahoma; Cheshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts; West Cheshire, Connecticut; Garfield, Arkansas, Minnesota, Kansas, New Jersey and Washington; and Sylvester, Georgia.

Morris, the Nine Lives brand cat food icon, is found in numerous places, though the towns were not named in his honor: Morris, Alabama, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New York and Oklahoma; Morris Plains, New Jersey; Morrisdale, Pennsylvania; Morristown, Indiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, South Dakota and Tennessee; Morrisville, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Vermont; Mount Morris, Illinois, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania.

Elsa, Texas has the same name as the famous lioness that was the inspiration for the books and film, *Born Free*. Elsa (1956-61) was raised by George and Joy Adamson in Kenya after she was orphaned. Joy trained her to live in the wild and following her release, brought back her cubs to show Joy.

Two precancels are related to Latin scientific names for the lynx: Canadensis, Pennsylvania (*Lynx canadensis*) and Rufus, Oregon (*Lynx rufus*).

One precancel is related to a creature, part feline and part eagle: Griffin, Georgia.

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Some precancels are from towns named after the Spanish explorer, Juan Ponce De Leon (Lion): De Leon, Texas; De Leon Springs, Florida and Ponce De Leon, Florida.

Numerous precancels are from towns which were named after the city of Lyon (Lion) in France: Lyon, Mississippi; Lyons, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Oregon and Wisconsin; Lyons Falls, New York; and South Lyon, Michigan.

Two precancels are from Glen Lyon and Glenlyon, Pennsylvania which originated from the last name of the major landowner.

Two precancels are from towns possibly named after Leon, Spain: Leon, Iowa and Kansas; another one is Saint Leo, Florida. Leona is female variation of Leo and there is a precancel from Leona, Kansas. The name

of Leonidas, Kansas comes from the Greek name for "lion."

Leonard is common in English, German, Irish and Dutch masculine names meaning "Lion Strong" or "Lion Brave." Precancels with "Leonard" are from Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota and Texas. Variations are Leonardo in New Jersey, Leonardsville in Kansas and Leonardtown in Maryland.

Pride's Crossing in Massachusetts, which definitely has nothing to do with a pride of African lions, sounds like this New England town was invaded by them.

Oran in Iowa was possibly named for the city of Oran in Algeria, which means "Two Lions" in Berber (*Wahrán*).

The appeal of collecting precancels is the unlimited scope. You can collect by states or regions and most importantly, by topics. 🐾

POSTAL HISTORY

U. S. Precancels with Feline Names From the Collection of GREG BALAGIAN

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Cheshire, Connecticut; (Maine) Coon Rapids, Iowa; Garfield, Arkansas; Havana, Kansas and Savannah, Georgia.



Rex, Georgia; Selkirk, New York; Napoleon, Ohio; Van, Texas and Griffin, Georgia.



Lionville, Pennsylvania; Red Lion, Pennsylvania; De Leon, Texas; Leon, Iowa; Leon Kansas; Ponce De Leon, Florida and Port Lions, Alaska.



Prides Crossing, Massachusetts; Saint Leo, Florida; Tigerton, Wisconsin; Tigerville, South Carolina; Rufus, Oregon; Cat Springs, TX and Los Gatos, California.