

Scott #64 with “INLAND” obliterated

Manfred Beier (beier@philib.org)

Some time ago I purchased a mixed lot on Ebay which eventually turned out to contain only one interesting stamp, but this stamp has left me wondering ever since: a used Scott #64 with the word “INLAND” obliterated by hand (figure 1).

I have no proof that this is the work of a Liberian official. Clearly, anyone could have done this, but the way the bar is executed, a brush stroke of thick dark ink, and the fact that the postmark *seems* to be on top of the bar immediately made me believe it is genuine. I just couldn't figure out why anyone would find it necessary to do this. Liberia never cared much about the intended purpose of her stamps. Regular, official, postage due and revenue stamps can all be found together happily coexisting on the same covers.

Recently, I found a second copy of this stamp, and this one might hold the key to solve the mystery. This stamp is unused, but already affixed to a picture postcard (figure 3).

The front shows the waterside of Cape Palmas and the German steamship “Lothar Bohlen” three days after stranding on the beach on May 28, 1898 (figure 2). Pre-stamped Liberian postcards of the closing years of the 19th century and the early 20th century are quite common in “mint” condition, I now have a dozen or so of them. Most of them are franked with a 1c and a 2c stamp, pasted in the opposite upper corners, and sometimes a regular stamp is combined with an official stamp, perhaps to make the postcard more attractive. Around 1910 the postcard rate was lowered from three to two cents, so this particular postcard must have been prepared between ~1898 and ~1910.

But why the bar? A customer buying stamps for his letter usually can expect the postmaster to hand him over adequate stamps. Also, the people living in Liberia certainly knew they could use any stamp for franking. All the different INLAND stamp issues found on international mail are proof that this didn't cause any problems. So, for the stamp alone the obliteration would not have been necessary.

With pre-stamped postcards the situation might have been a bit different. Picture postcards are usually aimed at tourists, and the postcards are often displayed in racks to allow the customer to search for a motif he likes. I assume it was no different back then, which means that for selecting a postcard no immediate interaction with a postal clerk was required. A tourist not familiar with the Liberian habit of ignoring everything on a stamp but its face value might have been reluctant to grab a postcard possibly being valid for domestic mail only. Whether the postcards franked with INLAND stamps didn't sell, or whether the clerks simply had enough of customers asking the same question again and again regarding its validity –



Figure 1: Scott #64 with INLAND obliterated.

obliterating the word "INLAND" may have helped in this situation.

If I am correct, this variety of Scott #64 should only exist used or unused on postcards, or used off piece. Furthermore, judging from the little material I have this might even have been a local issue confined to the southern most location of Liberia: it is not unlikely that the picture postcard featuring a view of Cape Palmas was also sold there, just like the used one shown in figures 4 and 5, and also like my first stamp that was canceled at Harper.

Does anyone have another example of this interesting stamp – perhaps even a mint one (with gum) or used on a normal envelope, to crush my theory?

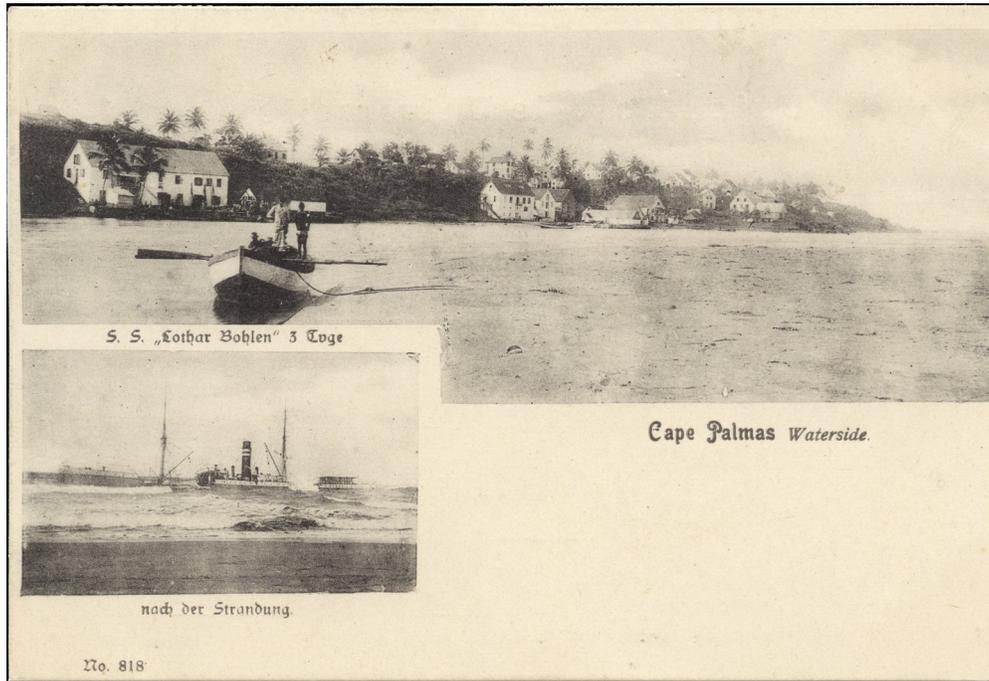


Figure 2: Unused PPC with view of Cape Palmas.

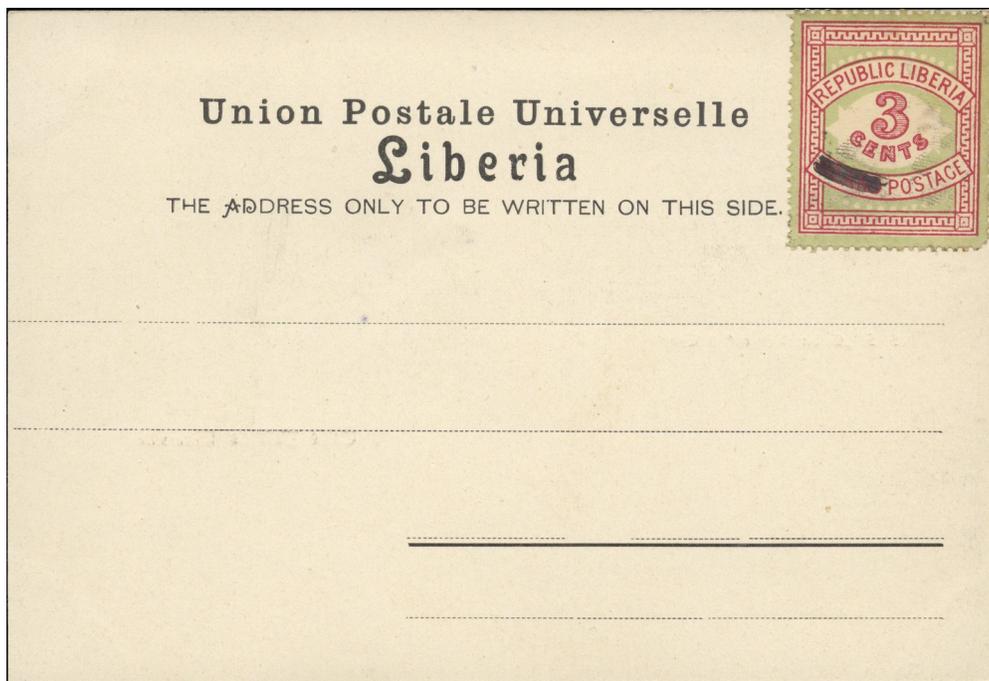


Figure 3: Back of PPC in figure 2, pre-stamped.



Figure 4: Same PPC as in figure 2, sent from Harper to Berlin.

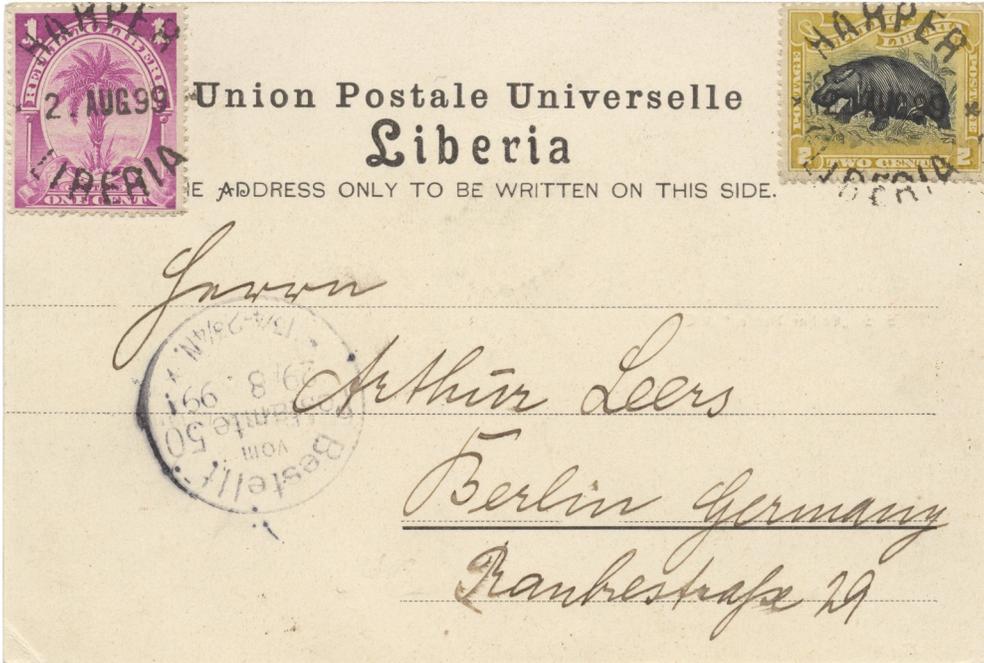


Figure 5: Back of PPC shown in figure 4.