United States Patent [19]

Malavazos, deceased et al.

[11] **3,892,355**

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[54] **LOCK FOR SELECTION MECHANISM FOR A POSTAGE METER**

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[21] Appl. No.: **457,591**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **235/101**

[51] **Int. Cl.**[2] **G07G 1/00**

[58] **Field of Search** 235/101

[56] **References Cited**

UNITED STATES PATENTS

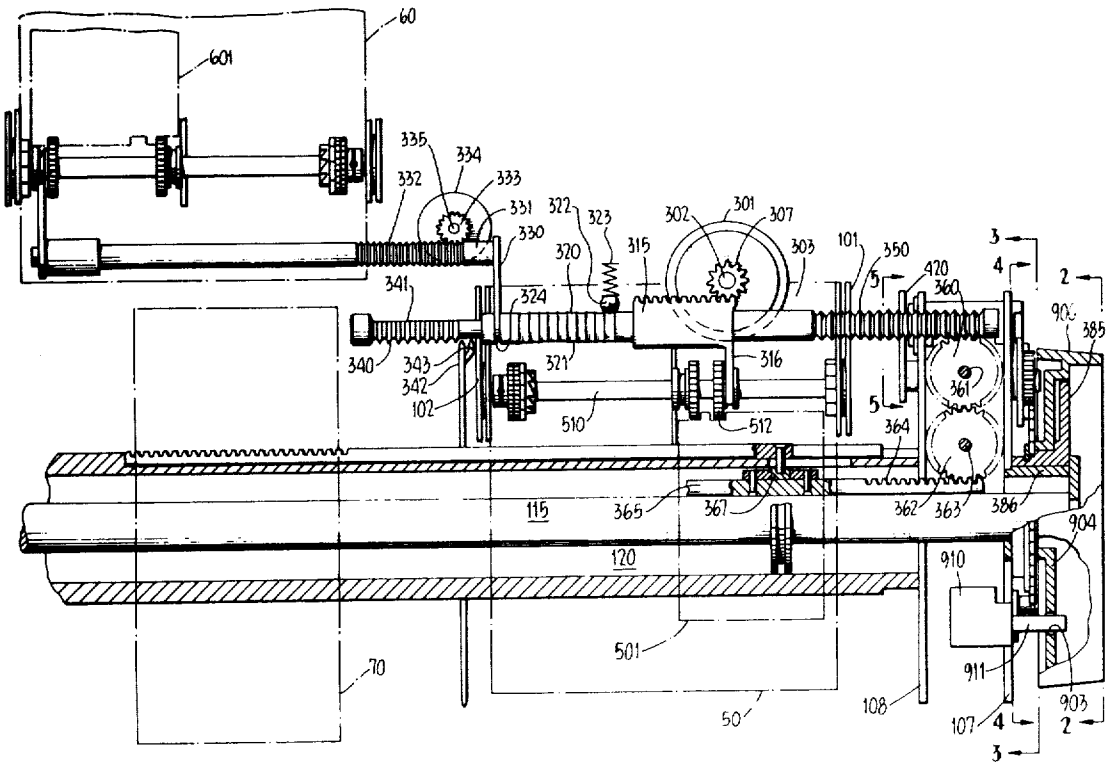
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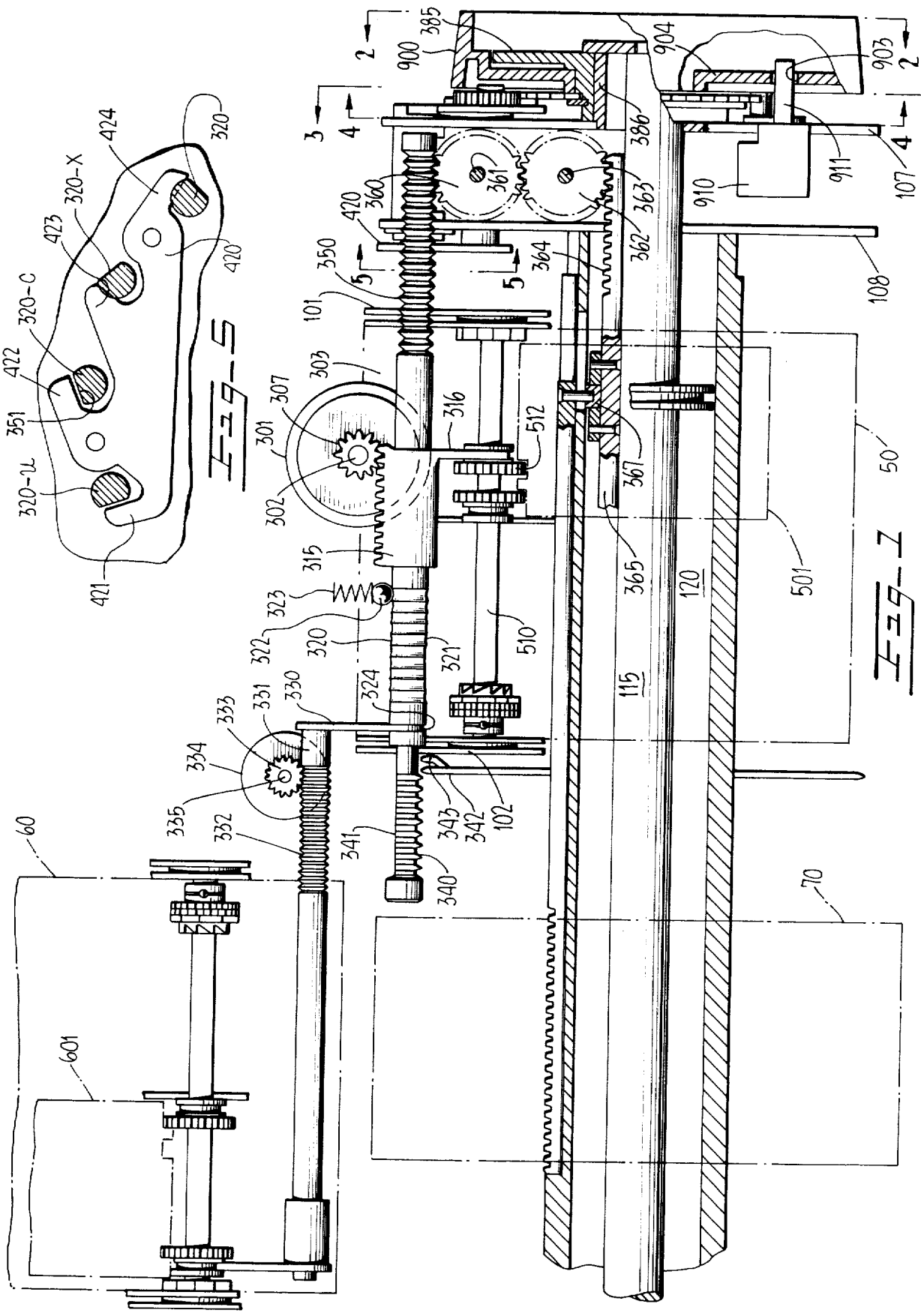
Primary Examiner—Stephen J. Tomsky
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Robyn Wilcox

[57] **ABSTRACT**

This invention relates to a locking device for locking all or any higher order of the selection mechanism of a postage meter, so that only a person having a suitable key can unlock it and change the value to be printed and registered. The device is particularly adapted for use in a postage meter utilizing a Thomas-type mutilated drum actuator, a selection gear moved longitudinally along the periphery of said mutilated drum and adapted to set the value to be entered into the registers of the meter, a selection member manually set to position said selection gear, a postage printing mechanism set by said selection member, means for automatically restoring the selection member to a zero position at the end of each cycle of operation, and the specific device includes means for disabling said automatic restore mechanism and means for locking said last mentioned means in any adjusted position and enabling said disabling means.

9 Claims, 5 Drawing Figures




320
424
320-X
423
320-C
422
351
320-L
421
420
FIG-5
2
3
4
5
385
900
904
903
386
911
910
107
108
361
360
420
363
362
364
350
101
303
307
301
302
316
512
315
323
322
320
321
510
324
330
331
333
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341
340
343
342
102
367
365
120
115
501
50
FIG-7
60
601
70

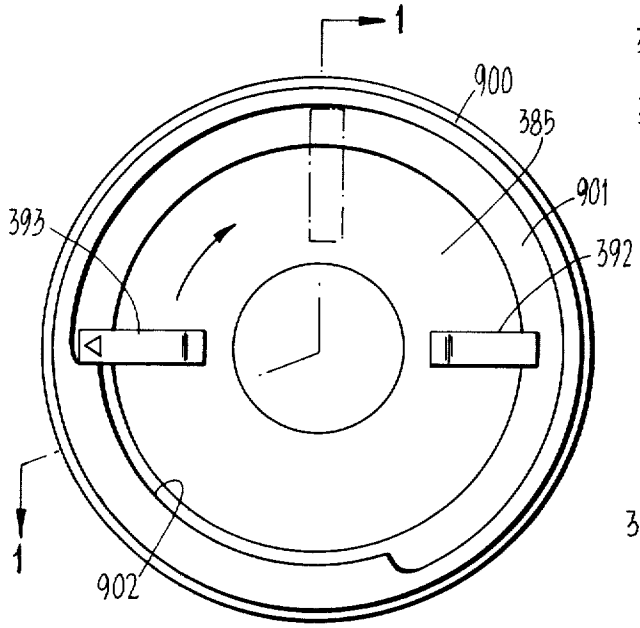


Fig_2

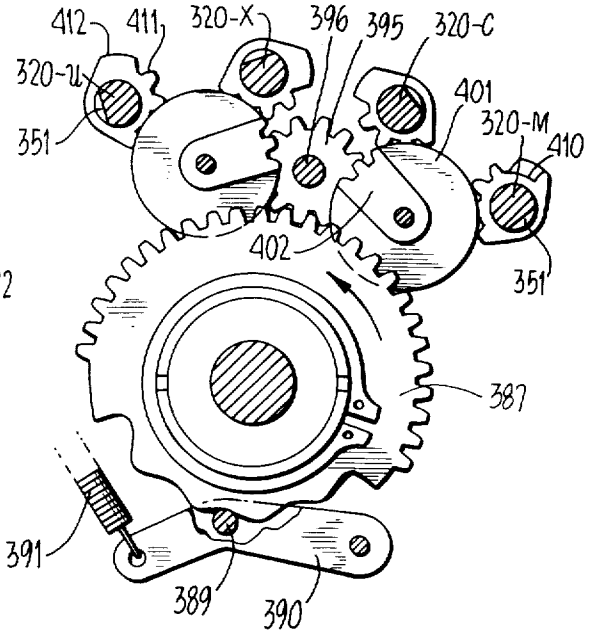


Fig_4

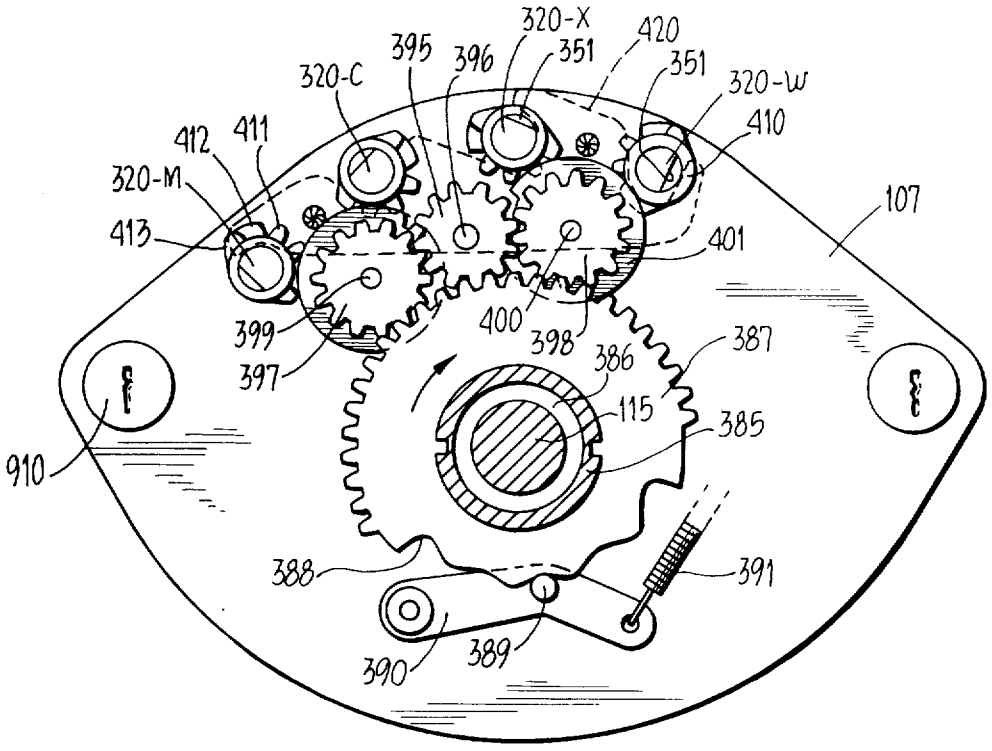


Fig_3

LOCK FOR SELECTION MECHANISM FOR A POSTAGE METER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention can be considered as actually, if not legally, a division of my copending application entitled "Arithmetic Unit for a Postage Meter," filed on even date herewith, Ser. No. 457,592; and as such, is adapted to be complementary to the mechanisms described in my copending applications entitled "Register for a Postage Meter," filed on even date herewith, Ser. No. 457,593; "Print Head for a Postage Meter", filed on even date herewith, Ser. No. 457,595; and "Selection Mechanism for a Postage Meter," filed on even date herewith, Ser. No. 457,594.

Postage meters are made under strict regulations prescribed by the United States Post Office which require, among other things, that a value selected for the meter must be accurately set in the value printing stamp of the meter and accurately set into each of two registers: one in which the values are accumulated, known as the "ascending register," and one in which a value of the stamp is subtracted from the value set by the Post Office at the time of payment for postage, known as the "descending register," and a mechanism which locks the meter against operation when the value in the descending register falls below that which could be set into the meter by the operator. The particular mechanism described and claimed herein relates to the selection mechanism for such a postage meter and specifically to a mechanism which locks the selection mechanism in any adjusted position, order-by-order, from the highest to the lowest order and unlocked from the lowest to the highest. This locking mechanism can be used to lock any higher order and leave the lower orders free for adjustment. Also, the mechanism can be locked by a key controlled by a supervisor, so that the operators cannot change the setting of all or any of the higher orders. For purposes of exemplification only, one order of the selection mechanism will be described, although it will be understood, as explained hereafter in the specification, that there will be a plurality of such mechanisms, one for each order of the registers and the print head into which values may be set.

It is well-known in the art that the Post Office with which a meter is registered will, upon the payment of an amount to cover postage desired by the user, reset the descending register from time to time, but the values accumulated in the ascending register are never changed except by machine operation.

Other requirements of the Post Office are that the meter must be accurate in all aspects of its operation. It should be ruggedly constructed to withstand long and hard usage and it must be relatively trouble-free. It is well-known that a meter is so encased in its cover that it cannot even be repaired and the mechanism cannot be changed in any way except to change what are known as "slogan" dies on the print head, and except that the descending register can have its setting changed at the Post Office when a Post Office official unlocks access to that register — any other repair or change in the meter requires that the meter be officially taken out of service by the distributor and repaired in a facility that is subject to Post Office inspection. Hence, it is essential for a satisfactory postage meter to be rugged and trouble-free in its operation.

Objects

It is a primary object of the present invention to provide a keyed locking means for locking a preselected value into the mechanism, whereby the meter will be operative to print the set value stamp on mail matter, and to enter the same value into the two registers and which value can be changed only by one having possession of the proper key.

It is another primary object of the present invention to provide a locking mechanism for the selection device which is operative order-by-order — from higher to lower when locking and from lower to higher when unlocking.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a locking device for a postage meter which is controlled by a key to effectively disable an ordinally arranged selection mechanism from operation, beginning with the highest order and terminating with the lowest.

Another object of the invention is to provide a mechanism which selectively will restore the selection mechanism of a postal meter to a zero setting with each cycle of operation, or selectively to set it to reuse the same value for a prolonged period or selectively to set some lower orders for automatic restore while locking the higher orders against restoring.

Still a further object of the invention is to provide a locking mechanism for a postal meter whereby a mail room supervisor can lock a preselected value into the selection mechanism by a key lock so as to prevent use of the machine by operators for printing of other postal values.

These and other objects of the invention will be apparent from the description of the locking mechanism in the following specification when construed in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. **1** is a longitudinal cross-sectional view of the forward part of the main drive shaft, including the selection mechanism and the locking means of this invention.

FIG. **2** is a front view of the device shown in FIG. **1**, such as taken along the transverse vertical plane indicated by the lines **2—2** of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** is a cross-sectional view taken on a vertical plane immediately in front of the front frame plate and shows the mechanism lying immediately behind that shown in FIG. **2**, such as taken on the plane indicated by the line **3—3** of FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** is a vertical cross-sectional view taken on a transverse plane immediately adjacent the front frame plate, looking toward the front, and is therefore a rear view of the mechanism shown in FIG. **3**, such as taken on the plane indicated by the line **4—4** of FIG. **1**; and

FIG. **5** is a detail view of the selection locking plate of the present invention taken on a forward looking vertical plane immediately behind the second frame plate, such as along the plane indicated by the line **5—5** of FIG. **1**.

The mechanism of the present invention is mounted in a frame structure which includes, among other things, a front frame plate **101**, a rear frame plate **102**, an end plate **107**, and an auxiliary plate **108**, all shown in FIG. **1**. A fixed round shaft, or axle, is rigidly supported at its front end in the front end plates **107, 108** and at its rear in a frame member not shown in these drawings. The main drive shaft **120** is a hollow cylinder surrounding the bar **115** and maintained in accurate

spaced relationship thereto by a plurality of grooved disks **367** which serve to control the setting of the print head (not pertinent to this invention). The various devices which are controlled by the selection mechanism are shown in dotted lines in FIG. **1** and include the Thomas-type mutilated gear actuator **501**, the descending register **50** described in the copending application entitled "Register for a Postage Meter" above mentioned; an identical Thomas-type mutilated gear actuator **601**; an ascending register **60**; and a print head **70**.

The selection mechanism of the present invention is set by setting wheel **301** which is rotatably mounted on a stud **302** affixed to a plate **303** rigidly mounted on the front frame plate **101** and the rear plate **102**.

Each wheel **301** carries a gear **307** that meshes with a rack **315** which is rigidly affixed to a selection bar **320** mounted in suitable bearings carried by the frame plates **101, 102** and **107** for both longitudinal and rotating movement for purposes to be hereinafter described. Each rack **315** carries a yoke **316** that embraces a slot in a 9-tooth gear **512** mounted on a square shaft **510**, whereby the gear **512** will be differentially set opposite a selected value tooth on the mutilated drum **501**, as more fully described in the application entitled "Register for a Postage Meter" above referred to. The selection bar **320** is provided with a series of circular detent grooves **321** with which is associated a spring ball detent **322** that is resiliently pressed against the bar **320** by a compression spring **323**, the ball and spring being held in a suitable cylindrical holder, not shown, carried by the frame of the device. Thus, the bar **320** can be longitudinally adjusted by rotation of the wheel **301** against the force of spring **323**, and once adjusted, will be resiliently held in that position by the force of that spring.

It will be understood that there is a setting wheel **301** and an associated selection bar **320** for each order of the selection mechanism. In the preferred form of this invention there are four such setting mechanisms so that a value of $99.99 may be printed and set into the register (or a value of $9.99-½ in those few instances in which a uses desires a ½ cent mechanism). The bars **320** and setting wheels **301** are angularly placed around the actuator **514** as shown in FIG. **3**. Since the mechanisms of all of these selection setting devices are identical, it is believed that only one need be described.

Rearwardly of the detent grooves **321** on bar **320** is an annular notch **324**. The groove **324** is embraced by an ascending register yoke **330** which is rigidly secured to an ascending register setting bar **331**. The forward end of the register bar is provided with a series of circumferential teeth **332**. These teeth mesh with a gear **333** which is rigidly secured to a check dial **334** mounted on a shaft **335**. The check dial **334** is provided with indicia showing the values from "0" to "9," inclusive, and is visible through a suitable window in the cover, not shown. The operator can thus determine the value set in the register by looking at the check dials **334** which at all times will correctly register the value set in the mechanism.

Adjacent the rear end of the main setting bar **320** is a series of nine circumferential rack teeth **340**. As shown in FIG. **1**, this section of the bar has a flattened surface **341**. In the drawing it would appear that this flattened surface **341** lies at the very top of the bar in the normal position of the bar. However, in actual construction, it is preferred that this flattened surface be slightly off to the side, being placed 107° from the bottom of the rack key when the bar **320** is in its normal position. Associated with the rack **340** is a restore cam **342**, having a series of nine projecting cam faces **343** so angled as to restore the selection bar **320** one tooth, or step, forwardly as a cam face engages one of the teeth **340**. These nine restore cam faces **343** are so angularly positioned that they trail all of the teeth on the mutilated drum actuator **501**. Hence, after digitation is completed, the cam **342, 343** can restore the bar **320** to its "0" position, one step at a time, before the completion of the cycle of operation. On the other hand, if the selection bar **320** is rocked through an angle of 107°, the flat **341** will lie opposite the restore cam disk **342** and its nine camming teeth **343** and the bar will not be restored automatically.

Adjacent the forward end of the main selection bar **320** is a second series of circumferential rack teeth **350**. While the setting bar can only be moved nine steps to enter a maximum value of nine in any order, it is preferred to provide about double that number of teeth in order to lock the bar in a non-restore position by the means hereinafter described. At this point it can be noted that at least the central portion of this series of rack teeth is flattened, as at **351** (FIGS. **3** and **4**), which permit the bar to be moved past a locking plate **420**. In the normal position shown in FIG. **1** and in orders **320-*u*** and **320-*x*** in FIG. **5**, in which the flat **351** is facing the plate **420** the two do not engage but when the bar **320** is rocked through an angle of 107°, the space between adjacent teeth **350** will engage the edge of the plate **420**, as shown in orders **320-*c*** and **320-*m*** in FIG. **5**, thereby locking the bar **320** in its adjusted position.

Whether or not the shaft **320** is in the automatic restore position shown in FIG. **1**, or in the fixed position just mentioned, the gear teeth **350** of each setting or selection bar **320** meshes with a first idler gear **360** rotatably mounted on a pivot stud **361** and that, in turn, meshes with a second idler **362** rotatably mounted on a stud **363**. The two gears **360** and **362** are mounted radially of the fixed bar **115** and drive shaft **120**, as shown in FIG. **1**. The second idler **362** meshes with a rack portion **364** of a setting bar **365** which runs lengthwise in grooves in the fixed bar, or axle, **115** and inside the rotating cylindrical drive shaft **120**. These bars **365** are utilized to set the value print wheels of the print head of the meter, as described in the above identified applications entitled "Print Head for a Postal Meter" and "Selection Mechanism for a Postal Meter."

The means for rotating the main selection bar **320** to set it for either automatic restore or fixed selection will now be described. It is seen in FIGS. **1, 2** and **3** that an interior hand wheel **385** is rotatably mounted on a collar **386** affixed to the forward end plate **107**. Rotation of this hand wheel **385** in a clockwise direction from the "unlocked" postion shown in FIG. **2** serves to lock the ordinal selection bars **320** into which values can be set, order-by-order, from the highest to the lowest, and rotation in a counter-clockwise direction from a clockwise position is effective, order-by-order from the lowest to the highest, to unlock them. Adjacent the inner end of the hub of hand wheel **385** is a partial gear **387** (FIG. **3**). This partial gear **387** can be resiliently detented in any adjusted position by means of five detent notches **388** which can be engaged by a pin **389** carried by a pivoted arm **390** that is resiliently biased into engagement with the partial gear **387** by means of a ten-

sion spring **391.** The partial gear meshes with an idler gear **395** (FIGS. **3** and **4**) that is pivotally mounted on the plate **107** by any suitable means, such as stud **396.** The idler **395** meshes with a pair of locking gears **397** and **398,** which are identical in construction, but since they are not similarly set, are given distinguishing reference characters. These gears are respectively mounted on studs **399** and **400** carried by the frame plate **107.**

Each of the gears **397** and **398** carry a Geneva disk **401** and a 3-tooth gear segment **402** (see FIG. **4**). The three elements of gear **397** or **398** and its associated Geneva disk **401** and 3-tooth gear segment **402** are affixed together to form an integral structure. The gear **397** and its assembly are effective to lock the thousands order selection bar **320-***m* and the hundreds order selection bar **320-***c* while the gear **398** and its assembly are effective to lock the tens order selection bar **320-***x* and the units order selection bar **320-***u*. (Where it is necessary to distinguish between orders of the selection mechanism, the suffix "*u*" is used to indicate the units order of the selection bar **320,** the suffix "*x*" to indicate the tens order, the suffix "*c*" to indicate the hundreds order, and the suffix "*m*" to indicate the thousands order selection bars.)

Associated with the wheels **397** and **398** and their integral Geneva wheels **401** and 3-tooth gear segments **402** are a set of mutilated gear sleeves **410** mounted on the four selection orders of the selection bars **320** into which values can be selected. These gears sleeves are rotatably mounted in the frame plate and are slidably but not rotatably mounted on the respective selection bars **320,** as by suitable keys or forming their interior aperture with a chordal face complementary to the flat **351** on the front end of the selection bar **320.** These mutilated gears comprise a pair of central gear teeth **411** (FIGS. **3** and **4**). These gears have a width, or thickness, equal to the thickness of the Geneva disk **401** and the 3-tooth gear segment **402.** Adjacent the two central teeth **411** and lying on either side thereof is a long half-thickness web **412** having the radius of a gear tooth and extending angularly for a distance equivalent to two gear teeth, but the trailing edge of this section **412** is a full width tooth **413.** In either adjusted position of the locking means, the Geneva disk **401** will lie between one of the extreme gear teeth **413** or the other and the first adjacent central tooth **411,** thereby preventing rotation of the mutilated gear **410.** When the integral 3-tooth gear **402** and Geneva disk **401** is rotated toward its other position, the first gear tooth of gear segment **402** will engage the forward full tooth **413** and then drive the mutilated gear **410** through an angular distance of the two central gear teeth **411,** or about 107° in the preferred form, whereupon the Geneva wheel **401** again comes between the trailing full width tooth **413** and the adjacent central tooth **410.** Thus, the gear **410** and consequently its selection bar **320** can be rotated between two angular positions 107° apart and will be locked in the respective positions until again rotated by manipulation of the hand wheel **385.**

Whenever a selection bar **320** is rotated from the position shown in FIG. **1** (or from the position shown in the units or tens orders of the bars in FIGS. **3** and **4**) by the means just described, the flat **341** on the back end of the selection bar is rotated through an angle of 107° and consequently the restore cam **342** will lie opposite the flat **341** and can have no restorative effect upon the bar **320.** A similar flat **351** on the forward portion of the gear teeth **350** on the forward end of the selection bar **320** normally (non-locking position) faces a locking plate **420** that is rigidly mounted on the frame plate **108.** The locking plate **420** is shown in dotted lines in FIG. **3** and in full lines in FIG. **5.** In FIG. **3** the selection bars **320-***u* and **320-***x* are shown in the position indicated in FIG. **1** in which the flats **351** on those selection bars lie opposed to the locking bar **420,** while the flats **351** on the hundreds and thousands order have been rotated to lie angularly from said plate **420** and the plate accordingly lies between two adjacent teeth **350,** as shown in FIG. **5.** As shown in this figure, the plate **420** has four arms **421, 422, 423** and **424,** respectively, which lie opposite the selection shafts **320-***u*, 320-*x*, 320-*c* and **320-***m*. When a selection bar **320** is so rocked, the associated arm of the locking plate **424** will engage between two adjacent teeth **350** on the bar **320** and hence it cannot be moved in either direction. By the means just described, the selection mechanism of the present invention can be set order-by-order from the highest to the lowest from an automatic restore position into one in which automatic restoring is impossible and the selection mechanism is locked in its adjusted position; and can be unlocked from the lowest order to the highest.

The hand wheel **385** is surrounded by a locking disk **900** (FIGS. **1** and **2**). The locking wheel **900** is rotatably mounted on a shoulder carried by the setting wheel **385** as shown in FIG. **1.** The locking wheel **900** has a flattened inner web **901** extending almost through three-quarters of the inner part of the wheel, in which the diametrically opposed knobs **392** and **393** on the setting wheel **385** can rotate freely. It will be noted that the left-hand handle **393** shown in FIG. **2** carries a pointer which is used to indicate which one of the selection orders is in locked position, which handle is longer than its opposite member **392.** The balance of the web portion of locking wheel **900** is provided with an upraised shoulder **902** of a radial width sufficient to block counter-clockwise rotation of the longer knob **393.** In the position shown in FIG. **2,** which is the extreme counter-clockwise position of the setting wheel **385** and the outer disk **900,** the knob **393** abuts the end of the blocking section **902,** and all of the orders are free to be set by an operator. The inner wheel **385** can be rotated to lock values in preselected orders of the register setting mechanism beginning with the highest and proceeding toward the lowest, as hereinbefore mentioned by rotating the inner wheel **385** in a clockwise direction. In fact, the mechanism shown in FIGS. **3** and **4** is in the half-way position in which the two highest orders are locked against change in setting while the two lowest orders are free to be set. In that situation, the pointer knob **393** of the inner wheel **385** would be in the position shown by the dotted lines of FIG. **2.** In that position of the two wheels **385** and **900,** the outer wheel remaining in the position shown in FIG. **2,** the operator of the machine can return the inner wheel **385** to its extreme counter-clockwise position and all of the selection mechanisms would then be free to receive manual settings. In most instances an operator would normally set the inner wheel **385** to the dotted line position shown in FIG. **2** as he would desire to lock the two highest orders in a value of "0" while he could freely set values in units and tens orders of the device but could not accidentally set any value in the

dollar or tens-of-dollars orders without deliberately desiring to do so.

However, in large mail rooms, the user has been subjected to loss because an employee might deliberately or accidentally run off stamps of higher values than ncessary. When such change was deliberate, it normally was for purposes of theft as the stamps so printed could be redeemed at the Post Office as unused stamps. If desired, the supervisor of a mail room can lock the various ordinal mechanisms beginning with the highest and even including the lowest to a preset value in a manner to prevent the operator of the machine from changing the selection mechanism so set. This is accomplished by rotating the hand-set wheel **385** to lock any or all orders in the selection desired, and then rotating the outer wheel **900** clockwise until the shoulder **902** abuts the setting knob **393.** The supervisor would then lock the outer wheel **900** in its adjusted position by means of a key lock. Thus, the inner wheel **385** cannot be rotated counter-clockwise to release any of the selection mechanisms so locked, as the outer wheel **900** is locked in its set position and the inner wheel cannot be rotated counter-clockwise because the setting knob **393** is abutting the shoulder **902.**

The mechanism for locking the outer wheel **900** in its adjusted position will now be described. The front frame plate **107** is provided with a key lock **910,** as shown in FIG. **3.** This lock **910** is set flush with the outer face of the front frame plate **107.** This lock is controlled by a suitable key, not shown. When the lock is in an unlocked position, a pin **911** (FIG. 1), which is controlled by the lock, is retracted. When the lock is locked by means of the key, the pin **911** is projected so that it penetrates one of a plurality of precisely set apertures **903** formed in the web **904** of the wheel **900.** Thus, the outer wheel **900** is locked in the position set and an operator of the postage meter is unable to change the settings of the supervisor in any of the orders which have been locked by him. The operator, however, can enter adjusted values in any unlocked lower orders. Thus, the supervisor of the mailing equipment, including the postage meter, can lock the higher orders, or all of them, so that it is impossible for the setting of the meter to be changed by an operator. Locking the meter in this way prevents accidental change of values when stamping a run of mail matter in which identical postage will be required. It has been found that in the use of the postage meters, accidental changes of the setting often occur, with considerable loss to the user. If the postage is changed to a lower value than it should be, the mail is not acceptable by the Post Office. In that event, the mailing must be rerun, or if found by the user before taken to the Post Office, will involve the affixing of regular postage stamps by hand to bring the postage to the proper value. It is impossible to add postage by re-running them through the postage meter, as that would only superimpose one stamp upon another. If the setting of the meter is accidentally changed to a larger value than required, the Post Office will offer no objection, but the user is paying greater postage than is necessary.

It is believed obvious that many modifications can be made in the present invention. For example, the locking mechanism does not necessarily have to rotate the selection bars through an angle of 107°, for the angle could be greater or less than that. Neither does the lock have to be in the front face of the machine. In fact, other means than those shown could be used to disable the automatic restoring mechanism and to lock the selection mechanism in an adjusted position. These and other such changes are believed within the scope of the present invention and accordingly, an interpretation of the claims should be commensurate with the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. In a postage meter, the combination which comprises:

1. manually set and ordinally arranged value selection members for determining the value to be stamped upon mail matter and to be registered in suitable registers; and
2. selectively operable means for locking selected ones of said value selection members in a differentially set position.

2. The apparatus of claim **1** wherein said locking means comprises a keyed lock.

3. The apparatus of claim **1** comprising also:

1. means for automatically restoring said value selection members to zero in the latter part of each cycle of operation;
2. means for latching said value selection members in a differentially set position;
3. selectively operable means for disabling selected ones of said automatic restoring means and simultaneously enabling the latching means for the same member; and
4. wherein the selectively operable locking means is operable to lock said last mentioned means in an adjusted position.

4. The apparatus of claim **1** comprising also:

1. means for automatically restoring said value selection members to zero in the latter part of each cycle of operation;
2. means for latching said selection members in a differentially set position;
3. a first manually adjusted means for enabling said latching means and disabling said restoring means order-by-order or alternately enabling said restoring means and disabling said latching means;
4. a second manually adjusted means for preventing operation of said first manually operated means in selected higher orders; and
5. means for locking said second manually operated means in an adjusted position.

5. In a postage meter having a manually operated value selection mechanism for determining the value to be stamped upon mail matter and to register that value in suitable registers, means for automatically restoring said value selection mechanism to zero in the latter part of each cycle of operation, and means for disabling said automatic restore means, a locking mechanism comprising:

1. selectively operable means for latching said value selection mechanism in a differentially set position and simultaneously operating said disabling means; and
2. means for locking said latching means in an adjusted position.

6. The apparatus of claim **5** wherein said locking means in a keyed lock.

7. In a postage meter having ordinally arranged value selection members for selectively determining the value to be stamped on mail matter and for registering that value in the proper registers, the combination which comprises:

1. means for restoring said selection members to a zero value in the latter part of a cycle of operation;
2. means for latching said selection members in a selected value position;
3. means selectively operable to disable said automatic restore means and to enable said latching means or alternately to enable said automatic restore means and disable said latching means;
4. a first manually operated setting member operable to set said last mentioned means into either operating position; and
5. a second manually operable setting member effective to limit the setting of said first manual setting member against setting in the position in which said automatic restore means is effective and said latching means is ineffective.

8. The apparatus of claim **7** including also a key-operated lock and means controlled by said lock for locking said second manually operated setting member in an adjusted position.

9. The apparatus of claim **7** wherein the second manually operated means is operable order-by-order from the highest to the lowest to limit operation of said frist manually operated means to disable said latching means and enable said automatic restore means.

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