



Did You Know?

The Grinnell Missionaries Stamps
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The first stamps issued by the Kingdom of Hawaii were printed between 1851 and 1852 and are known as the Missionary stamps as they were printed for and used by the missionaries living on the islands. These stamps were printed in three denominations and rates: 2-cents (newspaper rate), 5-cents (regular mail to the United States), 13-cents (rate to US East Coast). Today, they are among the scarcest and controversial stamps among philatelists.

One of the key characteristics of the missionary stamps is their crude printing as they were made by handset types on small printing presses brought by the missionaries. Additionally, the stamps were printed with metallic blue ink on thin, fragile paper. The crude printing is key to the issue as it means the stamps lack the security features, strict production controls and record keeping on which philatelists rely on when authenticating stamps. Thus, authenticated copies are difficult to locate. Of the three issued, the rarest is the 2-cent newspaper rate as it was common for stamps to be destroyed and disposed of when newspaper wrappers were opened. The following quantities are known among philatelists: 15 2-cent copies, 61 5-cent copies, and 121 13-cent copies.



The 5-cent Missionary stamp (Source: Smithsonian National Postal Museum).



The 13-cent Missionary stamp (Source: Smithsonian National Postal Museum).



The famous Dawson Cover (discovered in an abandoned Factory Furnace) bearing the only known usage of the 2-cent and 5-cent stamps (Source: Hawaiianstamps.com).

On December 1, 1919, George Grinnell a high school teacher and philatelist created controversy when he sold 43 Missionary stamps to stamp dealer John Klemann for \$65,000. However, Kelemann later claimed the stamps were fake and sued Grinnell. The case went to trial in 1922 and the court ruled the stamps were fake. To this day, the case remains one of philately's longest running controversies and Grinnell spent the rest of his life trying to prove the stamps were genuine. According to Grinnell, the stamps were obtained from Charles Shattuck who informed him they came from his mother. Although Grinnell did not know Shattuck, the two met at a Masonic lodge after exchanging contact information through a mutual acquaintance. As a lifelong philatelist, Grinnell was in the habit of asking others if they had any stamps that they were willing to part with and naturally he asked Shattuck.

Shattuck was unable to corroborate Grinnell's story at trial as he was elderly and died shortly before the case went to trial. Shattuck's widow and children testified at trial, but their testimony went against Grinnell. Although Mrs. Shattuck recalled Grinnell's visit, she denied knowledge of stamps. Additionally, both the children claimed their grandmother's possessions were destroyed in a fire and later recanted by claiming the stamps had likely come from their grandmother.

To this day, the Grinnell Missionary stamps remain one of the most studied stamps in philately. Notable philatelists including George Linn, Harry Lindquist and Varro E. Tyler have opined on the subject with varying opinions. Moreover, The Royal Philatelic Society of London has also examined the Grinnell stamps twice, subjecting them to laboratory testing and ruled on both occasions as the stamps as forgeries. Although the story of the Grinnell missionaries is incomplete, the Missionary stamps remain one of the most interesting stories in philately.