

Did You Know?

The Elusive 1-cent Z. Grill Stamp By: Alex Gill

With only two examples in existence, one of the rarest stamps is the famous 1-cent “Z” Grill stamp issued in 1868 (U.S. Scott #85A). During the 1860s, Charles F. Steele introduced the concept of impressing grids in different sizes into stamps (known as grills). This was in response to the common practice of removing ink from used stamps and reusing stamps. With a grill, it was believed that ink would be better absorbed into the stamp paper. While using grills, many different types were used and later named alphabetically. Thus, it can be easy to misidentify a common grill versus a less common grill, especially if a grill’s impression is weak making it harder to measure or locate.

While each type of grill has a unique measurement, there are two key characteristics used to identify a Z Grill. First, the Grill must measure 11 millimeters by 14 millimeters or (13-14x18 grill points). In addition to the 1-cent denomination, a “Z” Grill can be found on 15-, 10-, 2-, 3-, 5-, and 12-cent stamps. While the 1-cent Z Grill stamp shares the same design as U.S. Scott 63, the Z Grill is unique from other grilled stamps. While other grilled stamps have points that have vertical ridges giving a pyramid or “X” like appearance under closer examination, only the Z Grill has point projections that are oriented horizontally, giving the appearance of a roof outline. This is a key characteristic as “E” Grilled stamps share the same size but lack a horizontal ridge on each grill point. Thus, it is not uncommon to misidentify an E Grill for a Z Grill.

Unfortunately for philatelists, little is known about the 1-cent Z-Grill stamp as no grill production logs or records exist making it difficult to determine beginning and ending production dates for each grill variety. However, it is believed that Z Grills were likely an early creation as they are found on paper that was also used for essays and experimental papers. Additionally, no philatelist can determine the exact application process that was used to apply grills to each stamp or whether each grill type was used interchangeably. However, philatelists believe one grill was used on one machine at a time, but no one knows why grill types were taken out of production. Today, grilled stamps from the 19th century continue to serve as a field of further study even for the advanced collector.

Today, only two “Z” Grilled copies of the 1-cent denomination exist, both in used condition. The first copy is owned by the New York Public Library (NYPL) as part of the Benjamin Miller Collection. The second copy is the only known copy in private hands and has made several high-profile appearances. In 1998, Robert Siegel Auctions sold the stamp for a record \$935,000 at the time to Mystic Stamp Company of Camden, NY. In October of 2005, Mystic Stamp Company traded their Z Grill stamp to renowned financier Bill Gross in exchange for a block of four Inverted Jenny Stamps. By completing this transaction, Bill Gross became the only collector to have the unique honor of having the only complete collection of United States early 19th-century stamps. For the public, both copies appeared at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum between 2006 and 2007. To this day, philatelists marvel at the uniqueness of grilled stamps and the possibility of finding additional 1-cent Z Grill stamps.



*The Z Grill Stamp owned
by prominent financier Bill Gross.*



*The 1-cent “Z” Grill from the
Benjamin Miller Collection owned
by the New York Public Library.*