

Brazilian Bulls Eye Stamps

Among the earliest postage stamps ever issued were the first stamps of Brazil, more commonly known as the Bulls Eye stamps (Portuguese: ocho-de-boi). Great Britain was the first country to issue stamps with the Penny Black and Brazil was the second. Although the New York Dispatch Post released stamps in 1842, and the famous Zurich numerals were issued on March of 1843, Brazil was the second country in which the stamps were valid for the entire country, not for local use. The stamps were issued in three values: 30 reis, 60 reis, and 90 reis with the later reserved for international use.

The history of the Brazilian Bulls Eye stamps dates to November 30, 1841, in which the Brazilian government authorized Law #43 to create stamps. The law was created in part by JD Sturtz, a German who served as a Brazilian consul to Prussia. Inspired by the Penny Black in Great Britain, Sturtz urged the Brazilian postal system to adopt a prepayment system via stamps to improve mail delivery. The name Bulls Eye originated from the appearance of the stamps. Mailers and philatelists alike felt the value figures in the oval design as well as the arrangement of the stamps on a sheet, which permitted se-tenant pairs, resembled that of a pair of bulls eyes.

The naming of early Brazilian stamps continued with smaller and rectangular designs resembling the Bulls Eyes and were nicknamed Snake Eyes, Goat Eyes and Cat Eyes. Design wise, Brazil followed Great Britain's lead by not featuring the country name on the stamps. It wasn't until 1856, in which Brazil featured people on stamps, starting with a portrait of Emperor Dom Pedro. One plausible theory for the delay in featuring people is that no one in the Treasury at the time was skilled enough to engrave a portrait in a short period of time. It has also been suggested that many found images of leaders obliterated by postmarks unappealing and offensive.

Unfortunately, little is known about the philatelic history of the Bulls Eye stamps. It is known Bulls Eye stamps were printed in Rio de Janeiro and a limited but unknown number exists today. Among the most recent collections to be sold was that of Hugo Goeggel in 2013. It is estimated the following quantities were printed: 1,148,994 (30 reis), 1,502,142 (60 reis) and 349,182 (90 reis). Additionally, the subject of engraving and printing has been one of much debate. Many believe the designs were inspired by a banknote printed in London by Perkins, Bacon & Company and used by the Imperial Bank of Brazil prior to 1842. Since the designs were similar, it was assumed Brazil lacked a printing press and the stamps were also printed in London. However, in his book, Bullseyes, Dr. Jose Loke suggested Brazilian customs had seized an engraving press in 1841 and stamp production took place in Rio.

Today, the Bulls Eye stamps are considered scarce due to the actions by the Brazilian government and everyday mailers. Printing of the Bulls Eye stamps ceased in 1843 and the remaining stock was allowed to be sold until depleted. At the time, it was a common practice to place stamps on flaps as a seal and thus, many stamps were destroyed when correspondence was opened. Also, on March 30, 1846, the remaining Bulls Eye stamps (approximately 466,711 copies) were destroyed in a fire held in the courtyard of the Brazilian Mint to make room for new stamps. Today for philatelists and postal history collectors, the Bulls Eye stamps can be interesting with post 1850 use elusive.

