

Did You Know

The 1-cent British Guiana

By: Alex Gill



Issued in 1856 with a single stamp known in existence, the 1-cent British Guiana is widely regarded by collectors as one of the world's most famous stamps. The stamp was produced in the British Guiana (now Guyana) city of Georgetown as part of a set of three definitive stamps intended for mailing both newspapers and letters. The stamp is iconic for its rarity, notability, alluring color, octagonal cut shape, left hand signature and heavy postmark. While the famous 1-cent stamp was intended for newspapers, the other two stamps in the set, the 4-cent magenta and 4-cent blue were intended solely for letters. Interestingly, the stamps were created at last minute. At the time, local Guyana postmaster E.T.E. Dalton anticipated a delivery of stamps, but a shipment did not arrive on time and he asked the publishers of the local Georgetown Gazette Newspaper, Joseph Baum and William Dallas to print an emergency quantity of stamps for immediate use. While Dalton did give some printing guidelines for the stamps, the printers chose to add the image of a ship. After printing, Dalton was not pleased with the ship addition, and in response, he ordered all stamp usages be autographed by a local post office clerk as a means of deferring forgeries.

The famous 1-cent magenta stamp was initialed by E.D.W. by clerk, E.D. Wright, with a heavy postmark from the town of Demerara.

It wasn't until 1873 when the stamp gained notoriety among philatelists. At the time, 12-year-old Louis Vernon, living in the Guyanese country of Demerara, sorted through his uncle's collection of letters and found the 1-cent stamp. Unable to locate the stamp in his catalogs, Vernon sold the stamp to local collector Neil Ross McKinnon for six shillings. In 1878, the stamp was then sold to stamp dealer Thomas Ridpath for 120 pounds, who in turn sold the stamp to famous collector Philipp Von Ferrary for 150 pounds the same year. After Ferrary passed in 1917, his collection along with the stamp was given to a museum in Berlin, but the museum was forced to forfeit the collection to France as part of war reparations following the conclusion of World War I.

Following WWI, the stamp would appear in a series of auctions with the stamp passing through the hands of several notable owners. The stamp surfaced in a series of 14 auctions in 1922 when collector Arthur Hind bought the stamp for \$36,000 reportedly outbidding three kings including King George V in a heated auction. The stamp was then offered in a Harmer Rooke sale in 1935 where a bid of 7,500 pounds was offered by



Percival Loines Pemberton, but the lot was later withdrawn and returned to Mrs. Scala (formerly Mrs. Hind). Mrs. Hind would hold the stamp until 1940 when it was offered in a private sale through the Philately Department of Macy's Department Store in New York City. The stamp was sold for \$40,000 to Australian-born engineer Fred "Poss" Small from Florida who dreamed of owning the stamp and was able to complete the set of three stamps. In 1970, Small auctioned his collection estimated at \$750,000 and the stamp was sold to Irwin Weinberg of Pennsylvania for \$280,000. The 1-cent stamp spent the rest of the decade making a worldwide tour.

In 1980, the stamp smashed the world sales record for a single stamp when it was sold to the infamous John E. DuPont for \$935,000. While DuPont was incarcerated, many believe the stamp was kept safe in a bank vault until his death in 2010. When DuPont passed on December 9, 2010, Dupont's estate including the stamp was willed to retired Bulgarian wrestler Valentin Yordanov. On June 17, 2014, the 1-cent magenta stamp was sold in a Sotheby's New York Auction for an astonishing \$9,480,000 including a buyer's premium. According to reports, it took 2 minutes for an anonymous bidder to break the world's sale record for a single stamp bid for the 4th time. The anonymous bidder would later reveal himself as shoe designer Stuart Weitzman, a long-time philatelist. The stamp has made appearances at notable stamp shows and museums throughout its history including most recently the Smithsonian National Postal Museum in Washington D.C. in an exhibit held between 2015 and 2018 and appeared in the Court of Honor at the World Stamp Show - NY 2016 in New York City.

