

A "Grill" by any other name...

In the economic wake of the Civil War, people were looking for ways to save money. One thrifty method feared by the Post Office Department was to clean cancels off stamps and reuse them for postage. Thus, the P.O.D. pursued ways to stop people from cleaning stamps such as applying grills to stamps. These grills can be found on the 1861 Series, the 1869 series and the 1870 series which were printed by the National Bank Note Company.



The famous 1¢ Z Grill
(2 surviving copies exist).

A grill is an embossed pattern of small indentations intended to discourage postage stamp reuse. The idea was conceived by Charles F. Steel (1832-1904) who believed grilled stamps were impossible to reuse because the grill would break paper fibers allowing the cancelled ink to sink deep into the stamp which would be difficult to remove. The original plan called for stamp paper to be gummed, then embossed, flattened, and then printed. However, experiments found this method to be unsuccessful and grilled stamps were printed, gummed, pressed, embossed, perforated, and pressed again. Today, many grilled stamps are known and while some are common, the scarcer varieties are some of the greatest rarities known to philately.

The first type of grill, the "A" grill was applied to the entire stamp. The first grilled stamps were disseminated to post offices in August 1867 as an experiment and were found to be satisfactory as the National Bank Note Company received a contract allowing grilling.

However, grilling on a large scale failed at first because it was not well thought out and the large grills resulted in weakened sheets and perforations. As a result, future grill printing comprised of smaller, different sized rectangular indentation patterns.

National's contract failed to specify which types of grills they were to use, and details changed as grill experiments were made. Unfortunately, many of these details have been lost to history. In 1910, philatelist William L. Stevenson attempted to clear the confusion surrounding grills by introducing an alphabetical system to measure grills. No G, H, I or J grills were used on the 1861 issue as this series went

out of production before they were introduced. The G grill can be found on the 1869 issue while the H and I grills can be found on the 1870 issue. By 1870, fears of reuse had subsided, and the process of grilling stamps had quietly disappeared from stamp production. However, some stamps of the Continental Bank Note Company who took over from National have been known to have been impressed with the J grill as late as 1875.

GRILL LIST:

- "A" Grill – Overall (First Experimental Grill)
- "B" Grill – Points Up, "X" Ridges, 22x18 points
- "C" Grill – Points Up, 16-17 x 18-21 points (Second Experimental)
- "D" Grill – Points Down, Vertical Ridges, 15x17-18 points
- "E" Grill – Points Down, Vertical or "X" Ridges, 14x15-17 points
- "F" Grill – Points Down, Vertical or "X" Ridges, 11-12x15-17 points
- "G" Grill – Points Down, Vertical Ridges, 12x11-11.5 points
- "H" Grill – Points Down, Vertical Ridges, 11-13x14-16 points
- "I" Grill – Points Down, Vertical Ridges, 10-11x10-13 points
- "J" Grill – Points Down, Vertical Ridges, 9-10x12 points
- "Z" Grill – Points Down, Points with Horizontal Ridges, 13-14x17-18 points

RAREST GRILLED US STAMPS:

- 1¢ "I" Grill (1 copy)
- 1¢ "Z" Grill (2 copies)
- 3¢ "B" Grill (4 copies)
- 5¢ "A" Grill (4 surviving copies)
- 10¢ "Z" Grill (6 copies)
- 12¢ "I" Grill (2 copies)
- 15¢ "Z" Grill (2 copies)
- 30¢ "A" Grill (8 copies)
- 30¢ "I" Grill (1 copy)
- 90¢ "I" Grill (1 copy)



The reverse of a "G" Grill stamp.