

The process that led to the 'grill' stamps of the United States: 1865 - 1868

Purpose

This exhibit shows how the embossed (or 'grill') stamps of the USA were developed – from Charles Steel's first experiments in 1865, to the earliest used Z-grill stamps, issued in January, 1868.

Scope

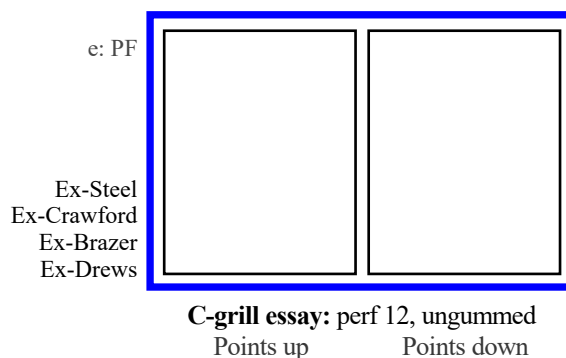
The story begins in 1865 when Steel wrote to the USPO about his idea for an embossed stamp to prevent reuse. The exhibit then shows Steel's many experiments and records his struggle to get his idea accepted. The exhibit is complete, that is, there are examples of every experiment. Also shown, are the NBNC's attempts to sidestep Steel's patent with it's own forms of punctured paper.

The story ends in January 1868 when the 2c and 3c stamps became the earliest Z-grills known to be used.

Exhibit Plan

Chapter 1: Early experiments – the flat square grills	2
Chapter 2: The first experiment for postal use – the A-grill	5
Chapter 3: The second experiment for postal use – the C-grill	7
Chapter 4: Steel's design for a surface-printed 'grill' stamp	10
Chapter 5: The NBNC's attempts to side-step Steel's patent	13
Chapter 6: Epilogue – the first officially issued stamp	15

One set recorded



Importance

Charles Steel's idea for an embossed stamp, was the only patent adopted by the USPO to prevent reuse. The earliest experimental stamps for postage were issued in 1867. Official issues followed in 1868. 'Grill' stamp production continued into 1871 and resulted in the most sought after and expensive stamps in USA philately.

Research

The exhibit has been built around personal research (highlighted in cyan) based on the Brazer archive. The archive records the correspondence between Steel, the USPO and the NBNC. It enables a precisely dated analysis of the trial and error that led to the form of 'grill' that was eventually adopted.

Magnified scans show how the 'grill' evolved*

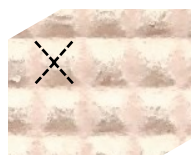
Late 1865

Flat square, points down
First experiments



Early 1867

Pyramid-shaped 'biscuit grill'
'A' and 'C' grill



Late 1867

Flattened pyramid
Steel's patent design



Early 1868

Horizontal 'rooftop' grill
'Z' grill

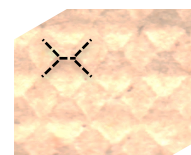


Exhibit highlights

Unique items are boxed in **blue**. Census numbers are noted in **bold blue** script. Highlights include:

- Steel's 'first experiments' of 1865 **2**
- The **earliest known use** of the experimental A-grill for postage (August 13, 1867) **6**
- A full, unprinted but gummed sheet of the **experimental C-grill** (ex-Earl of Crawford) **7**
- The **signed essay** of late 1867 which acknowledges **Steel as the inventor** of the grill **10**
- The die produced by the NBNC to test **Steel's design** for a **surface-printed grill** **11**
- The NBNC's 'scratch pattern' alternatives to Steel's grill (ex-Earl of Crawford) **13**

* See: **Hofmeyr, J.H.** (2018), 'An Archival History of the Embossed Stamps of 1867-68,' The Chronicle, 70:4.