

The Cover Story

Gee Whiz! [Part 1] by Josh Furman



Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Ever since the rate change of 1978 the United States Postal Service (USPS) has been printing stamps without denomination in preparation for the next increase, whenever and whatever it might be. Letters of the alphabet were used for these non-denominational stamps. There was an "A" stamp in 1978, and five more letters followed in preparation for the next hikes in rates [Figures 1-6 on front cover]. After the postage rate increase of February 3, 1991, the USPS began immediately to prepare for the next increase. The design was kept secret, but the USPS stocked up on the new stamps under tight security, again not knowing what the increased rate might turn out to be.

Already six letters into the series of non-denominated stamp issues, the "G" stamp would be next. And the number of different "G" stamps would challenge the imagination. There were a bunch of different sheet stamps for first class mail, some booklet stamps, some coil stamps, stamps for postcards, stamps for pre-sorted first class mail, a stamp for Nonprofit Presort, and a stamp for official mail. All except the Nonprofit Presort stamp were available on December 13, 1994. They were designed by Ronald Sharpe, of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, who had previously designed the Windmill booklet stamps of 1980.

This "G" series was produced by more printers and in more formats than any previous rate-change stamps. Here is a guide to sorting out the varieties, somewhat lengthy by necessity. An illustration of each stamp variety accompanies the description.¹

There were two different stamps available in sheets (post office panes of 100), one printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP), and one by a private company called Stamp Venturers (SV).

The BEP sheet stamps were printed in red, blue, gray and black on a 7-color Andreotti gravure web-fed press, using prephosphored paper², and perforated 11.2 by 11.1, using a Eureka off-line perforator [Figure 7]. Quantity ordered and distributed: 198,000,000. Since there were four colors to be printed there were four cylinders in use, each numbered 1. So the plate number for this printing is 1111, which appears in the selvage adjacent to a corner stamp. The Scott Catalog number for this stamp is 2881.

The SV sheet stamps used the same colors, but were printed at J. W. Fergusson and Sons, Richmond, Virginia on a Champlain webfed gravure press³. They were perforated 10.9 by Stamp Venturers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin using a sheetfed stroke perforator [Figure 8]. The plate number for this printing is S1111, and the quantity produced was 1,500,000,000. This one was given a Scott Catalog number of 2882.

The booklet "G" stamps are more confusing since there were three printers making booklets for this stamp for the USPS. These were the BEP, the American Bank Note Company (ABNC) and KCS Industries (KCS).

The BEP booklet stamps were printed on the same press and paper as the sheet stamps but booklets were made in two ways. One, numbered 2883 by Scott [Figure 9], was made on a Goebel machine.⁴ The other was made on a proprietary off-line book-binding machine. The perforations are different. Those on the Goebel machine measure 10 by 9.8; the other measures 11.2 by 11.1, same as the sheet stamp. The latter can be differentiated by seeing one or two straight edges on the booklet stamp. Quantity: 2,112,750,000 stamps.

¹ Detail in this piece comes from several *Postal Bulletins*, issued by the U. S. Postal Service, and from Linn's *U. S. Stamp Yearbook--1994*, which contains much more information.

² This was the press and this was the paper that ABNC used for most of its stamp printing, unless specified otherwise in a stamp's manufacturing description.

³ This was the printing location and press for SV issues, again, unless specified otherwise.

⁴ The Goebel Company is a manufacturer of high-tech, high security printers for stamps, banknotes and various similar applications. Goebel machines are employed at many postage stamp manufacturers.

The ABNC booklet stamp is numbered 2884 by Scott [Figure 10]. It was printed by Multi Color Corporation, Scottsburg, Indiana, on a Schiavi⁵ 10-color webfed gravure press. The booklets were perforated (10.9 on the L perforator) and formed at ABNC in Bedford Park, Illinois. 2,029,500,000 stamps ordered and distributed. A "G" stamp from an ABNC booklet is easily distinguished from a stamp from a BEP or a KCS booklet by its blue "G".

The KCS booklet stamp is numbered 2885 by Scott. It was printed for KCS Industries, Inc. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by J. W. Fergusson and Sons, Richmond, Virginia on a Champlain web-fed gravure press⁶, and formed into booklets by KCS. This stamp is also perforated 10.9, but can be differentiated from the previous stamp by the color of the "G" [Figure 11]. The KCS stamp has a red "G"; on the ABNC stamp the "G" is black. Quantity ordered and distributed: 1,636,000,000.

Now for the self-adhesive "G" stamp. Avery Denison supplied two versions--one for over-the-counter and vending machine sales, and another for dispensing by automated teller machines (ATMs). In both versions the "G" is somewhat larger than that in other printers' designs [Figure 12 & 13]. One version, Scott catalog number 2886, was printed by Avery Denison Security Printing Division, Clinton, South Carolina. The press used was a DNK 8-color webfed gravure press. Five colors were used: red, dark blue, light blue, gray and black. Booklet panes and coils were both issued using the same stamp. Quantity ordered and distributed: 1,080,000,000.

The second version, Scott number 2887, was printed by Avery Dennison Research Center, Pasadena, California, on a 6 color Chesnut webfed gravure press. Stamps were lacquer-coated, front and back, die cut, processed and shipped by Avery Denison, Pasadena. Only three colors were used: red, blue and black. Ordered and distributed: 36,000,000. Aside from the number of colors used, there are other differences between the two versions. On the over-the counter stamps, the paper is whiter; the red stripes are more solid red; the white stripes immediately below the blue field of stars have very few shading dots, and the shadow area in the blue field is made up of both blue and black dots. On the ATM stamps, the white stripes below the field have noticeable blue shading, and the shadow area in the field contains only blue dots. Some of these differences can be seen in the images to the right.

Two postcard rate stamps were issued, one supplied by BEP and one by SV. Both have a yellow background and the words "Postcard Rate" inscribed under the "G". The BEP stamp [Figure 14] was assigned Scott number 2879 and printed in red, blue, gray, yellow and black and perforated 11.2 by 11.1 on a Eureka off-line perforator. Quantity ordered and distributed: 354,000,000. Only one set of cylinders was used, so the plate number 11111 appears adjacent to a corner stamp on the sheet.

The SV version of the postcard rate stamp uses the same colors and looks very much the same as the BEP version. Stamps were perforated, processed and shipped by Stamp Venturers, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The sheet-fed stroke perforator used a gauge of 10.9. This stamp is Scott number 2880. Quantity ordered and shipped at SV was 200,000,000. Again, there are some apparent differences between the two postcard rate stamps. The SV stamp background color is somewhat lighter in shade than the BEP stamp, and has more shading in the white stripes of the flag [Figure 15].

Like the booklet stamps, the "G" coil stamps were produced by three different manufacturers. The BEP made coils with a black "G" in the design; ABNC made coils with a blue "G", and SV used a red "G".

The BEP coils were printed in red, blue, gray and black, with the "G" in black. Scott numbered this stamp 2889. Two cylinder combinations are reported, so plate numbers 1111 and 2222 can be found. The Goebel stroke perforator used a gauge of 9.8. The quantity ordered and distributed was 1,500,000,000.

[Part 2 will appear in the May issue of the *Philatelic Missive*.]



⁵ Schiavi is an Italian company formed in 1958. The only current references are to its used equipment sold by brokers, so I am assuming it is no longer in business.

⁶ This is the press used by KCS unless specified otherwise in the description.