

# The “H” Rate-Change Stamps of 1998 Depicting “Uncle Sam’s Hat”

SYNOPSIS For AmeriStamp Expo 2018

**PURPOSE & SCOPE:** This is a Traditional 1-frame exhibit showing the production and use of the “H” non-denominated (33¢) stamps depicting “Uncle Sam’s Hat” issued in 1998 for the rate change from 32¢ (for First Class mail up to one ounce), that went into effect on January 10, 1999. Shown are all formats of the “H” stamp: Sheet, booklet and coil. The “H” (1¢) make-up stamp is not within the scope of this exhibit.

**TREATMENT:** Each of the three formats of the stamp will be shown separately, with each section following the traditional format. Unfortunately, there are no known essays, proofs or other pre-production items in collectors’ hands. For each section, the plate/cylinder data will be followed by plate blocks and other items showing plate marginal markings and plate varieties, if available. Errors, freaks and varieties are then shown to illustrate the production process, and what could go wrong. This is followed by examples of use; domestic uses followed by uses to foreign destinations. The exhibit concludes with the unissued postcard rate stamp.

Key and important items are highlighted with a double-line red border.

**IMPORTANCE:** The United States Postal Service introduced non-denominated stamps as a stop-gap measure to address the problem of producing enough stamps to satisfy consumer demand when rates changed. Shortly after the United States Post Office Department was converted into a self-supporting, semi-official, government organization in 1971, the process for approving rate changes dramatically changed. The time between the approval of a rate change and the effective date became unpredictable, making it difficult for the new USPS to produce enough stamps for any new rate.

Following the two rapid rate changes in 1975 due to high rates of inflation, the USPS devised the solution of printing large quantities of non-denominated stamps, which would be assigned a value when the new rate was determined. The first non-denominated rate-change stamp was designated by the letter “A”. With each subsequent non-denominated rate-change stamp to be assigned a letter in sequence, the USPS was assured of providing enough stamps for 26 rate changes, a simple, but elegant solution.

The “H” stamps were the last in the series of “alphabet” non-denominated rate-change stamps. The USPS changed its strategy and for the next rate change in 2000, non-denominated “First Class” stamps were issued. Rumor has it that the USPS adopted this strategy because it wanted to avoid an “I”-rate stamp.

**KNOWLEDGE, STUDY & RESEARCH:** Aside from the basic production information provided in the 1998 Linn’s *U.S. Stamp Yearbook*, I have gleaned information from searching the *Postal Bulletin*, USPS press releases, articles in *Linn’s Stamp News* the ARAGO website of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, the U.S. rate books by Tony Wawrukiewicz and other articles and sources. See the section on References.

**RARITY & CONDITION:** All but one of the listed major errors of these stamps are included in this exhibit, as well as a variety of significant freaks and oddities. The missing error, the self-adhesive coil with blue missing is known as a strip of 46 stamps, still intact (but not owned by this exhibitor).

Given that this is a “modern” issue, I have striven to go “above and beyond” in collecting material for the collection/exhibit. The water-activated coil imperforate error is represented by the unique transition

strip of 6 with plate number 1111. Only 4 imperforate plate strips are reported (Datz). For the self-adhesive coil imperforate plate strips of 5/6 are shown for all recorded plate number combinations. A plate number (111) of the self-adhesive coil imperforate with red color omitted, one of just 4/5 reported by Datz, is shown.

A single with black omitted (35 reported) and an imperforate pair with black omitted (20 stamps reported) are included. Note that a pair is the largest known multiple for the latter error.

The unissued postcard rate (yellow background) "H" stamp is shown as a mint single, a used block on piece and a single used on cover. Ten or less covers are known.

Covers shown are contemporary uses. A number of covers are either over-paid or under-paid demonstrating the confusion that the non-denominated stamps caused among the public, as well as postal personnel. The covers shown are representative of the intended use, as well as how they were used, and misused, by the public.

As expected of a modern issue, all items are of the best condition possible.

#### **REFERENCES:**

*Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook 1998* edited by George Amick, published by Amos Press Inc. in 1999 (ISBN 0748-996X). The "H" stamps are covered on pages 377 through 395.

*Scott Catalogue of Errors on U.S. Postage Stamps (16th edition)* by Stephen R. Datz; published 2014 by Scott Publishing Co, Sidney, OH. See pages 94-95, 174-175. Definitions of rarity factors, and other information about how to interpret the listings can be found in the Introduction, pp. v through xii.