

This Day in History... August 20, 1992

Computer Vended Postage Stamps

On August 20, 1992, Computer Vended Postage stamps were first made available for sale in five test cities.

Prior to these, there were tests of computer vended postage on an even smaller scale. Between November 13, and December 14, 1989, self-service machines were available at the 20th Universal Postal Congress at the Washington, DC. But they weren't available to the general public.



Stamp issued on this day in 1992.

Not long after, similar machines were available at the Martin Luther King Jr. Station of the Washington, DC, Post Office and the White Flint Mall in Kensington, Maryland. Those machines were only in operation until May 7, 1990.

Then in 1992, the USPS decided to launch a test program to try the idea of variable-rate postage stamps on a larger scale. On August 20, they introduced computer-vended postage at 15 post offices in the Southern Maryland, Miami, Oklahoma City, Detroit, and Santa Ana, CA, divisions.



Stamp issued on February 19, 1994.

These Postage and Mailing Center machines could print any denomination from 1¢ to \$99.99 on the stamp. Customers used the built-in scale to determine the necessary postage. There were many mechanical problems, and when the machines were working properly, collectors quickly emptied them.

Questions soon arose over what constituted a complete variable rate stamp collection. Obtaining one stamp with each denomination would have cost \$499.95. The denomination printed on these stamps, dispensed by ECA GARD machines, had an asterisk instead of a dollar sign.

Phosphorous tagging is added to stamps for use by the automatic canceling machines used by the post office. These variable-rate stamps sometimes passed through the machines, even if the stamps had only a 1¢ denomination.

The design of CVP32 design is similar to CVP31 but is in vertical format, which is how the artist originally intended it to be. A dollar sign is used in place of an asterisk. The third variable-rate coil stamps (CVP33) featured the same design as the previous two issues. This stamp has perforations along the sides like CVP32, printed by American Bank Note Company. The BEP version has a small "1996" printed in the lower left corner.



Stamp issued on January 26, 1996.

Computer vended postage is still in use today, though the look has changed over the years.

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