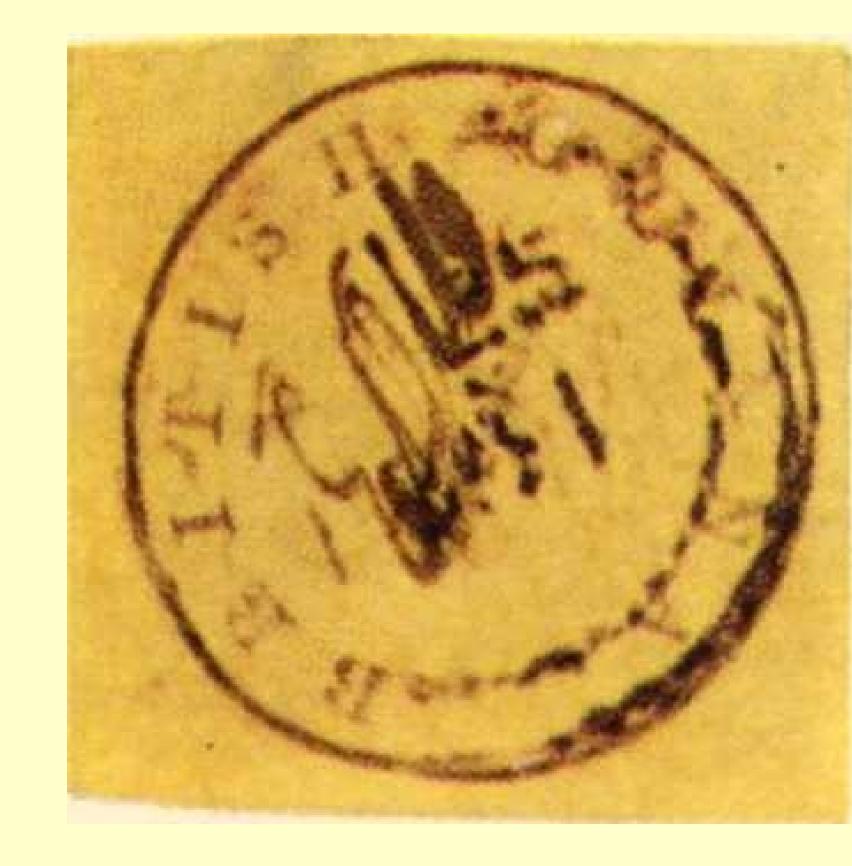
Our First Postage Stamps: The "Cottonreels"

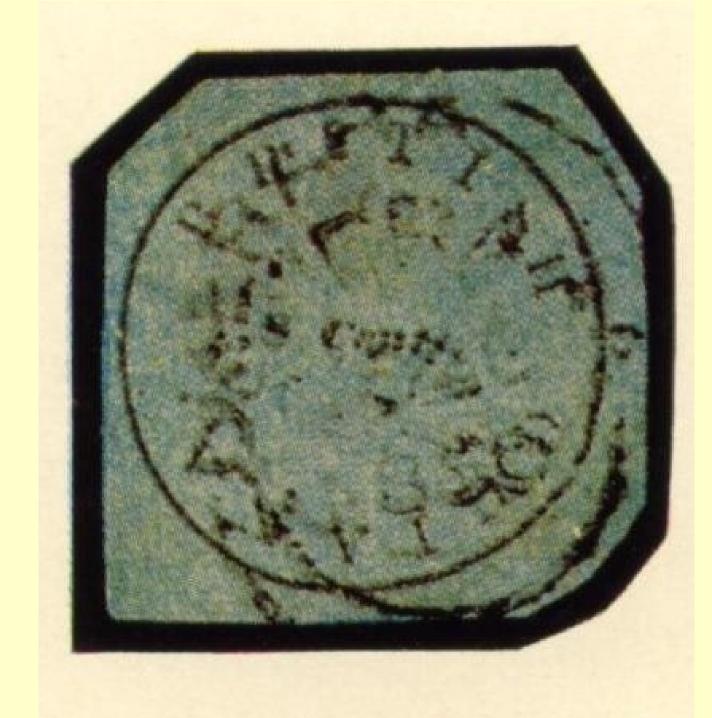
first Denominations July 1, 1850

4 cents, yellow



8 cents, green

12 cents, blue



8 cents green



The first stamps issued by British Guiana are known to stamp collectors as "Cottonreels" because of their circular shape and close resemblance to the circular labels found on spools of cotton. They were a completely local effort, printed by typeset by the office of the Royal Gazette of British Guiana. The stamps have been described as being of "the utmost simplicity" consisting of the denomination in the centre, around which was 'British Guiana' in Roman capitals, all endorsed in a rough circle of about 25.4 mm in diameter. Being so simple, these early stamps had to be initialed by an official of the Post Office in Georgetown before being issued, so as to prevent forgery.

The Cottonreels have a colourful history, especially the 2 cents (1851) denomination, which was unknown to European stamp collectors until 1877. The 1851 2 cents Cottonreel is more valuable than the 1850 ones. There are only 10 known copies of the 2 cents in existence. The colour of this 1851 2 cent stamp is described as "pale rose", since it was printed on rose paper. It is listed in the top 48 World's Rarest Postage Stamps.

The printing on the stamps was black, the various values being printed on different coloured paper. The 4 cents were printed on yellow; the 8 cents, green and the 12 cents, blue. However, there are variations of the original colours of the 4 and 12 cents denominations in existence - 4 cents, orange; 12 cents, pale blue and 12 cents, indigo. The 4 cents denomination has another variation, that of the paper itself - some stamps of this denomination being printed on a tissue-like paper called pelure.



1851. Pair of 2 cents 'Cotton-reels'. Cancelled DEMERARA No. 26. 1851

Pair of 2 cents Cottonreel on cover: the most rare and valuable among the Cottonreels Stamps



1851. 12 cents, with '1' of '12' omitted. Cancelled DEMERARA MR. 7. 1851

12 cents Cotton-reel on cover