

## This Day in History... January 1, 1893

### Famed Columbian Stamps Issued



The 1¢ deep blue stamp pictures a painting by George William Henry Powell. The left panel shows an Indian squaw and the right panel illustrates an Indian brave in a feather headdress.



The 3¢ green stamp is believed to be based on an old English Spanish engraving or a painting by Alfred HARRISSE.



The 5¢ chocolate stamp is from a detail of an 1884 painting by Czech artist Vaclav Brozik called Columbus at the Court of Ferdinand and Isabella.



The 8¢ magenta stamp was based on a painting by Francisco Jover y Casanova.

comparable to paying about \$500 in today's wages. Adding to the high cost is the fact that the nation was experiencing a depression at this time. As a result, few could afford the higher value stamps – the series included

On January 1, 1893, the majority the Columbian stamps were first placed on sale in large cities. The Columbians are some of America's most famous and sought-after stamps, and are considered the first US commemorative stamps.

The Columbian stamps were produced to promote the World's Columbian Exposition, which was to be held in Chicago, Illinois, from May 1 to October 30, 1893. The exposition was a world's fair celebrating the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World. The Columbians were the first US stamps ever issued to promote a commercial event and the first American commemoratives.

At the time of the planning for these stamps, the American Bank Note Company held the US postage stamp contract. A special contract had to be negotiated for the Columbians because of their larger size. The contract allowed the printer to charge 17¢ per thousand stamps, significantly more than the 7.45¢ per thousand they charged for the 1890 definitives. The series was originally planned to contain 15 stamps, but the 8¢ stamp was issued in March because of a change in registration fees.

Fifteen stamps were placed on sale on January 1, 1893, in New York City and Boston. Most post offices across the country were closed that day, so they began their sales on January 2. In March, an 8¢ stamp was issued to meet a new registration fee.

Unlike any other stamps before them, the Columbians created a worldwide phenomenon. As popular as they were, the Columbian stamps were also controversial. Collectors eagerly awaited the series, forming long lines to purchase the stamps. Yet many were frustrated by the price of owning the complete series. The total value of the stamps was \$16.34, which is

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316



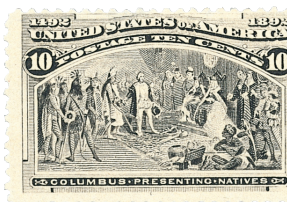
The 2¢ brown violet stamp is based on a painting credited to John Vanderlyn that hangs in the Rotunda of the US Capitol Building.



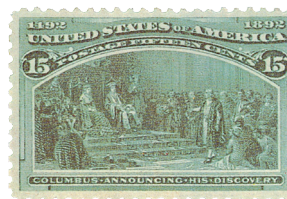
The 4¢ ultramarine is also based on an unconfirmed source.



The 6¢ stamp was taken from the bronze doors in the Rotunda of the Capitol, designed by Randolph Rogers.



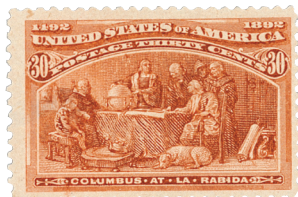
The 10¢ black-brown stamp shows a detail from an 1882 mural by Italian artist Luigi Gregori.



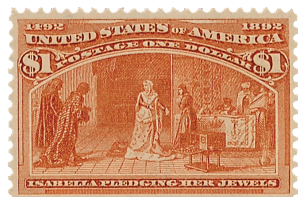
The 15¢ dark green stamp is reportedly based on a painting by Ricardo Baloca y Cancico.



# This Day in History... January 1, 1893 continued



The 30¢ orange-brown stamp was adapted from Felipe Maso's painting Columbus before the Franciscans at La Rábida.



The \$1 salmon design was taken from a painting by Antonio Munoz Degrain.



The \$3 yellow-green stamp is based on a painting by Francisco Jover Casanova. There is also color variety of this stamp in olive green.



The \$5 black stamp was engraved by Alfred Jones and was almost the same design featured on the Columbian Exposition half dollar. Columbus is flanked by Liberty on the left and America on the right.



The orange Special Delivery stamp that's considered part of the Columbians.

the first US postage stamps with face values over 90¢. Some postal clerks refused to sell Columbian stamps because demand far exceeded supply.

As a consequence, used Columbian stamps were selling for close to face value in 1893 – even as mint stamps were officially on sale. The craze for Columbian stamps was even more pronounced in Europe, where collectors hounded American tourists and begged for stamps from their mail. A corner of Hamburg's stock exchange was devoted to trafficking Columbian stamps. On August 11, 1893, The New York Times reported these transactions were conducted "as carefully as they handled the highest gilt-edged securities."

The Columbians were on sale at post offices until April 1894. These stamps were the final issue printed by a private firm before the Bureau of Engraving and Printing took over stamp production for decades.

The Columbians were America's first commemorative stamps, making them an important part of philatelic history. So important that stamp author Max Johl said that the series' degree of completion is often the "yardstick by which a US collection is measured." The series also included the first US stamps to picture a woman – Queen Isabella, who sponsored Columbus' expeditions. The Columbians are among the most sought-after of all US stamps.

## The Columbian Special Delivery Stamp

The US #E3 Special Delivery stamp was not issued for the expo, but is still considered part of the Columbian Series. When the Columbian stamps were issued in January 1893, the 1¢ stamp (#230) was printed in the same blue shade as the 10¢ Special Delivery stamp of the time. To avoid confusion, the Special Delivery stamp was printed in orange using the same design – creating #E3.

This stamp was printed from January 24, 1893, to January 5, 1894. After that, the stamp was once again produced with blue ink, though stocks of the orange stamp were used up before the reissue of another blue one.



The 50¢ slate blue stamp image was taken from A.G. Heaton's famous painting The Recall of Columbus.



The \$2 brown-red stamp design was taken from a painting by Emanuel Leutze and is one of just two stamps in the series picturing Columbus in the New World.



The \$4 crimson lake stamp features a portrait of Columbus by the Italian artist Lorenzo Lotto.



This "Broken Hat" variety occurred during printing when a break developed in the printing press's transfer roll. The flaw caused a piece to be missing from the hat of the figure to the left of Columbus.



Rare color error – only about 100 known to exist!



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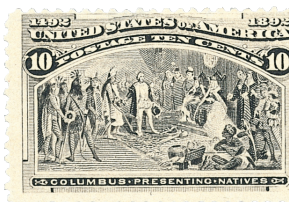
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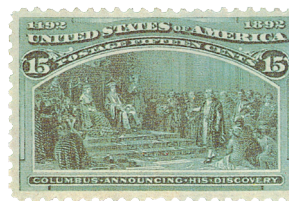
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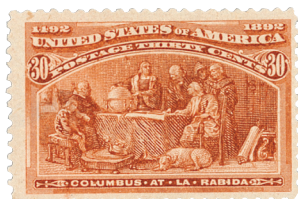
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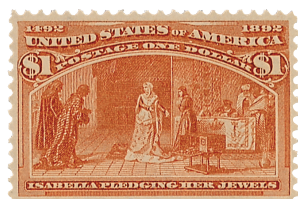
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