

## This Day in History... January 8, 1993

# America's Most Popular Stamp

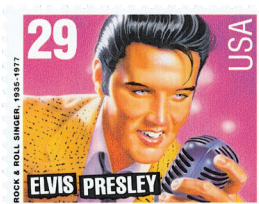
After a yearlong campaign, the USPS held a special midnight first-day ceremony on January 8, 1993, for the long-awaited Elvis Presley stamp. The popular issue was also the first in the extensive Legends of American Music series.

Ever since Presley's death in 1977, fans around the country had clamored for a stamp honoring the King of Rock 'n' Roll. Ten years later, he was eligible to appear on a US stamp, and requests increased dramatically.

Around 1988, Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank began suggesting that he might someday issue a stamp to honor Presley and other major figures in American music. The USPS discussed the Elvis stamp and music series in the coming years. They also held focus groups to gauge interest in such stamps. While many people liked the idea of an Elvis stamp, he was also a controversial figure due to his history of drug use.



*The first Elvis stamp issued on this day in 1993.*



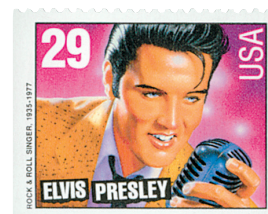
*Elvis Legends of American Music sheet stamp*

However, after long debate, the USPS announced on January 7, 1992, that Elvis would appear on the first stamp in a new series honoring famous American musicians. That same day, Postmaster General Frank also announced that the design of the Elvis stamp would be left up to the American people. This move actually surprised many at the USPS, who didn't know that was going to be the plan. One stamp depicted a younger Elvis as a 1950s heartthrob, while the other showed him in a jumpsuit that became the signature style of his 1970s stage shows.

The balloting period was short – from April 4 to 26, 1992. The USPS printed 5 million ballot cards to be placed in post offices, while *People* magazine included 4.5 million ballots in one of its issues. People from all walks of life weighed in, including presidential candidate Bill Clinton, who opted for the young Elvis. Some 1.228 million ballots were cast and in the end, young Elvis won out three to one.

Initially, the USPS printed 300 million of the Presley stamps. But when advance demand proved even greater than expected, they printed another 200 million in the December before the stamp's issue.

The big day came on January 8, 1993, which would have been Elvis' 58th birthday. The first day ceremony was held at midnight at Elvis' Graceland home with his former wife Priscilla, and daughter, Lisa Marie, in attendance. Despite the cold, rainy weather, hundreds of fans waited hours in line to claim the 800 seats available for the ceremony. The festivities had begun hours earlier as bands performed and a few dignitaries gave short speeches. They all then sang "Happy Birthday" to Elvis before a fireworks show inaugurated the first sales of the new Elvis stamp.



*Elvis Legends of American Music booklet stamp*

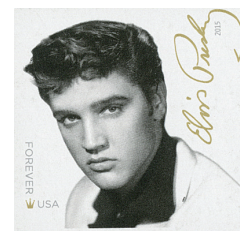
Graceland produced 35,000 envelopes with a special gold inscription "I was there – January 8, 1993." These all sold out by 10 in the morning. The USPS also set up two trailers in Tupelo, Mississippi, where they provided special "Birthplace Station" cancels.

In all, the USPS printed 517 million Elvis stamps, three times the usual print run for a commemorative. The Elvis stamp is the most widely publicized and best-selling US commemorative in history. The Legends of American Music series would run until 1999 and honor more than 70 artists from all styles of music.



*2015 Music Icons stamp issued for Elvis's 80th birthday*

Twenty-two years later, the USPS honored Elvis on a second stamp marking his 80th birthday. Part of the Music Icons Series, the stamp features a 1955 photo of Elvis taken by William Speer. It includes a crown, honoring Elvis' nickname, "The King of Rock 'n' Roll," as well as his signature. The stamp and full pane were designed to resemble a 45rpm record sleeve, with the pane picturing part of a record peeking through the top.



*2015 Elvis imperforate Stamp*

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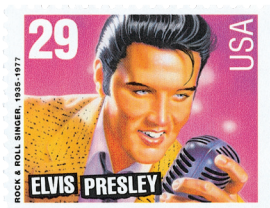
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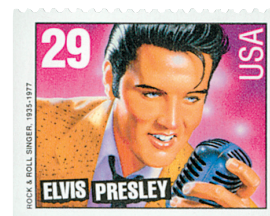
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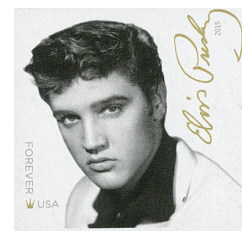
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