

This Day in History... March 13, 1997

First U.S. Triangle Stamps

On March 13, 1997, the USPS issued its first triangle-shaped stamps to promote the upcoming Pacific '97 Stamp Show.

The world's first triangle-shaped stamps came 144 years earlier. Issued in 1853, the British colony Cape of Good Hope's very first stamps were triangle-shaped. They were reportedly created in that shape to help illiterate postal clerks easily identify the difference in letters that were mailed from within the colony from those that were mailed from other places.

Over the course of a decade, Cape of Good Hope would produce several more triangle stamps, totaling 12 by 1863. The next triangle stamps from another postal administration came from Newfoundland, then a British colony in 1857. These and many other early triangle stamps were imperforate. The first independent country to issue perforated triangle stamps was Ecuador in 1908. Over the next several decades, more countries would join in the fun and issue over 1,600 triangle stamps.

In 1997, the US joined as well with a special pair of stamps promoting the upcoming Pacific '97 Stamp Show. The two stamps were issued on March 13, 1997, at the New York Coliseum as part of the March MEGA Stamp Event. According to the postmaster general, "These innovative stamps represent our commitment to provide the philatelic community and the American public with exciting new designs and formats... Since 1847, when the first US postage stamps were issued, stamps have been rectangular in shape. We want the American public to know stamps aren't square."

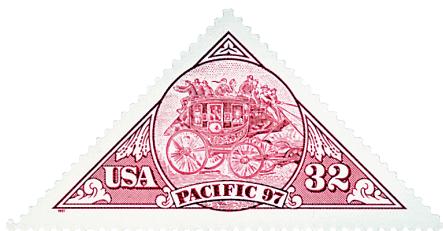
Stamp pictures a stagecoach, one of the main 19th-century forms of transportation associated with the San Francisco area

The two stamps honored the settlers who opened the American West by land and sea. They picture a mid-19th-century clipper ship and a US mail stagecoach - both of which are historically associated with mail delivery in California. The ship design is based on an advertising card for the clipper ship *Richard S. Ely*. These small cards were handed out in eastern cities to encourage people to travel to California by ship. The stagecoach design is based on a drawing by Harrison Eastman (1823-1886), who worked as a postal clerk in San Francisco until his art career took off.

A decade later, the USPS produced its second triangle issue, honoring the settlement of Jamestown. That stamp pictured the three ships, *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery*, that brought English colonists to America in 1607. Calling their settlement Jamestown, after England's King James I, the colonists founded the first permanent settlement in the new world. The stamp commemorated Jamestown's 400th anniversary and honors the colony's first triangular-shaped fort.



Pictures a clipper ship centered within an ornamented frame reminiscent of classic engraved stamps.



Issued for the 400th anniversary of the settlement of Jamestown.

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