

This Day in History... April 30, 1957

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee

On April 30, 1957, the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee opened its first meeting. The committee receives tens of thousands of stamp proposals every year and passes on their recommendations to the US postmaster general who makes the final decision.

As early as the 1930s, some began suggesting that the US Post Office have an advisory committee to improve stamp designs. At the time, other nations were issuing colorful stamps with modern, graphic designs. In 1941, New York advertising art director Paul Berdanier created a Committee of Volunteer Artists to help improve stamp art. In 1942, the committee held an informal competition to design two new stamps. Leon Helguera's sketch was selected for the Nations United for Victory stamp and Paul Manship's plaster cast was chosen for the Four Freedoms stamp, though both designs were changed significantly by the Post Office.



This stamp was based on a design submitted by the Committee of Volunteer Artists.

There was little progress in the years to come, with most stamps designed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Among the critics of the stamps of this period was George Linn, founder of *Linn's Stamp News*, who remarked that "poor taste for design and color has been shown by the 'deciders' [who] govern such things in the capital."

After Dwight Eisenhower was elected, his postmaster general, Arthur E. Summerfield, sought to improve the quality of stamp designs and take some of the pressure off the government. He worked out an arrangement with the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design to create a committee of artists that could offer insight on stamp designs. However, no formal meeting was ever held, and the artists were only briefly consulted a couple times.

Then in 1957, Summerfield's special assistant for public information, L. Rohe Walter, stepped in. He realized that a more popular stamp program could improve public relations and pushed for the creation of the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC). It was officially established on March 21, 1957. According to an announcement a few days later, "The Stamp Advisory Committee shall advise the Post Office Department on any matters pertaining to the subject matter, design, production and issuance of postage stamps."

CSAC held its first meeting on April 30, 1957. The seven-member committee included three stamp collectors, three artists and a person from the US Information Agency. While the committee struggled to convince the Post Office to expand color printing, they were credited with improving stamp designs and were later awarded the Post Office Department's Benjamin Franklin Service Award.

In the years since, CSAC has expanded to include anywhere from 10 to 15 members at a time. The committee generally meets four times per year to discuss possible stamp subjects. They receive an average of 40,000 stamp suggestions every year and consider every single one of them, even if just briefly. If they approve a subject, it is then passed on to the postmaster general who makes the final decision. CSAC also works closely with artists to develop the final stamp designs.

Anyone who wishes to submit a topic for consideration must submit it in writing, at least three years before it would be issued, to allow ample time for research and approval. CSAC doesn't accept proposals in person, by telephone, or email. They also set strict criteria for subjects to be considered. The subjects must be American or American-related. Historical events and statehood anniversaries will be considered for commemoration in multiples of 50 years. Subjects should have widespread national appeal and honor "positive contributions to American life, history, culture and environment." The committee strives to include stamps that reflect all areas of American culture including individuals, history, culture, sports, science, and technology.

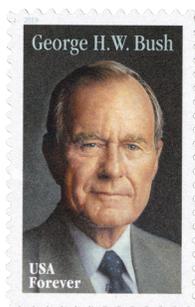


CSAC was created to bring more modern artistry to US stamps.

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Michener served on the committee from 1979 to 1986.



CSAC approves issuing presidential memorial stamps after their death.



CSAC supports the issue of stamps honoring the major military branches and academies on 50 year anniversaries. They don't generally approve of stamps honoring individual units because there are so many across all the branches.

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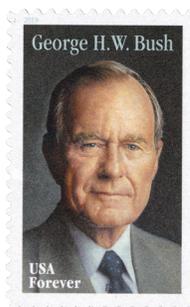
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