

## This Day in History... May 8, 1971

### BEP's First Photogravure Stamp

On May 8, 1971, the USPS issued the first stamp printed by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) on its new Andreotti photogravure press. The press enabled the BEP to print stamps with more colors more affordably.

For decades before that, the BEP printed its stamps by intaglio. With intaglio printing, the stamp's design was engraved onto a printing plate and then ink was filled into these areas. The plates were then pressed up against the paper with immense pressure, transferring the ink. The resulting stamps were beautifully intricate. However, the process of making the plates was time consuming and required knowledgeable craftsmen. Additionally, intaglio printing could only use up to three colors – and those colors had to be separate from each other.



*This was the first photogravure stamp, but it was printed by an outside firm.*

results in a full-color, photo-quality image. The dots usually can't be seen without the use of a magnifier.

The USPS wanted to test the quality of photogravure stamps before the BEP purchased a press. So, they hired the outside firm of Photogravure & Co. to produce the first US stamp printed by photogravure – the 1967 Thomas Eakins stamp, issued on November 1, 1967. The following year, they enlisted the Achrovue Division of Union-Camp Corp. to print another photogravure stamp, the Walt Disney stamp issued on September 11, 1968.



*This was the second BEP stamp printed on the Andreotti press.*

Statehood stamp, issued on May 8, 1971. They used the press for the USPS emblem stamp and the Prevent Drug Abuse stamp that year as well. The BEP soon began printing all its commemoratives on the Andreotti press, with only definitives being printed by intaglio. The Transportation coils were the last definitives printed



*An early definitive printed by photogravure.*

by intaglio. The BEP began printing them by photogravure starting in 1985, though some stamps would occasionally be printed by intaglio.

In the 1970s and 80s, the BEP acquired a series of new presses that combined gravure and intaglio. Then in the 1980s, the USPS began contracting stamp printing out to private firms, with the BEP drastically reducing their production. The last BEP stamp was a 2005 flag issue printed on an older four-color Andreotti press.



*This was the first stamp printed on the BEP's Andreotti press.*



*This was the second photogravure stamp, also printed by an outside firm.*



*The third BEP stamp on the Andreotti press.*

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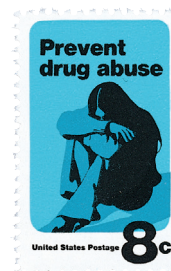
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