

This Day in History... June 8, 1997

Pacific '97 Stamp Show Ends

On June 8, 1997, the ninth US stamp show came to an end. Following the traditional 10-year format, the ninth U.S. stamp show should have been held in 1996. However, similar to the 1940s show, planners opted to wait a year so that the show could coincide with the 150 anniversary of the issue of America's first postage stamps.

Pacific 97 would be the first IPEX (International Philatelic Exhibition) held on the West Coast. The Moscone Center in San Francisco, California (the fourth largest convention center in the country) was selected as the site for the show.

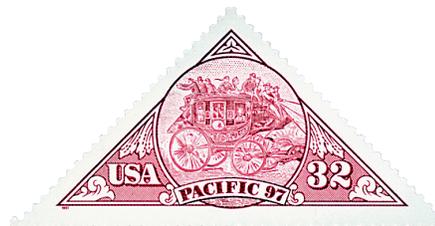
About two months before the show, the USPS issued a pair of promotional stamps. The stamps created a lot of excitement because they were America's first triangle stamps. They pictured a mid-19th century clipper ship and a US mail stagecoach – both of which are historically associated with mail delivery in California. The ship design was based on an advertising card for the clipper ship, by American Harrison Eastman (1823-1886), who was also the probable source for the US mail stagecoach design.

To mark the 150 anniversary of America's first postage stamps, the USPS also planned to issue two souvenir sheets reproducing the designs of US #1 and #2 at the show. In fact, they announced early in the year that the stamps would only be available for sale at the 11-day stamp show – the shortest sale period in history.

After the announcement, collectors were outraged that these beautiful sheets would only be available to those who were able to attend the show. Many people in the philatelic community spoke out against the decision and USPS eventually agreed to make them available for mail order for a short time. Even still, of the four million sheets produced, only about 600,000 were sold and the rest were destroyed.

Pacific 97 opened the public on May 29. The 400,000-square-foot show floor included 600 exhibitors from 48 countries as well as 202 dealers, 67 of which had come from 22 different countries outside the US. The show's court of honor was large – consisting of 100 frames from 20 exhibitors and featured stamps from several Pacific Rim Countries.

Pacific 97 also had a large youth area, encouraging youngsters to join in the fun of collecting. There were several cartoon characters present, including Bugs Bunny, who had just recently been featured on a popular US stamp.



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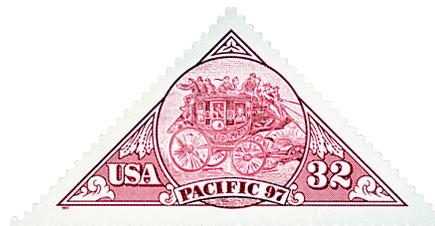
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