

## This Day in History... July 1, 1847

# First U.S. Postage Stamp Goes on Sale

On July 1, 1847, America's first postage stamps were issued.

In the 1840s, United States postal authorities were carefully watching the world's reaction to Great Britain's Penny Black – the first adhesive postage stamp. An adhesive stamp was being considered for use in the US and when Robert H. Morris, postmaster of New York, proposed issuing a provisional stamp, there were no objections.

Morris assumed the printing cost, and in 1845, the first US postmaster's provisional was issued. Other postmasters followed suit, providing their own distinct stamps for pre-payment of mail.



1845 New York  
Postmaster Provisional

Two years later, the US Post Office Department decided to create its own government-issued stamps. A contract was awarded to a firm of bank note engravers for the printing of 5¢ and 10¢ stamps picturing two major American figures, though the 5¢ issue almost pictured another president.

Early plans for US #1 called for it to picture War of 1812 hero and former president Andrew Jackson. However, America was on the brink of division and Civil War, so Benjamin Franklin was selected as a unifying figure for his role in America's independence. Franklin is also credited with organizing America's postal service back in the 1700s.

On July 26, 1775, he was appointed by the Continental Congress as the first postmaster general of the Confederation – which was of great importance to communications during the Revolutionary War. The 10¢ issue of 1847 (Scott #2) pictures George Washington, Revolutionary War hero and the first US president.

The stamps were to be available in major post offices on July 1, 1847. Due to delays in production, only one office, New York City, received the stamps on that date. The stamps were produced until 1851.

Rates were determined by the weight and distance the letter was being mailed. Letters mailed a distance of 300 miles or less were 5¢ per half ounce; while those mailed over 300 miles were 10¢ per half ounce. Postage could be paid by the sender at the time the letter was mailed, or

by the addressee upon receipt.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of America's first postage stamp pictures the portraits from both stamps as well as different ways the mail has been carried since then.

When the sender paid postage, the letter was marked "paid" by pen and ink or hand stamped. If no such cancel was evident, the person receiving the letter paid the postage. Inspections for accuracy and records of postal revenues were virtually impossible. With pre-printed stamps, accurate records could be kept of how many were issued and sold. It wasn't until 1856 that the use of postage stamps became mandatory.

These stamps changed our postal service forever – the newest step in making it easier and more efficient to send, receive and deliver the mail. This in turn vastly improved communications across our rapidly expanding country.



First US stamp featuring an engraving by John B Longacre based on a portrait by Joseph Siffred Duplessis.



Washington's portrait is based on the famed Gilbert Stuart painting known as The Athenaeum.



Stamp Collecting commemorative picturing US #1

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