

This Day in History... July 27, 1789

Department of State Established

On July 27, 1789, the Department of Foreign Affairs was created, which was later renamed the Department of State.

When the US Constitution was ratified in 1788, it specified that the president would be responsible for the country's foreign relations. President George Washington soon realized he'd need help and requested the creation of a new executive department to help handle foreign affairs.

The House of Representatives and Senate agreed and approved legislation creating such a department on July 21, 1789. President Washington then signed the legislation on July 27, 1789, officially creating the Department of Foreign Affairs. It was the first department established under the US Constitution. As the office's responsibilities expanded to cover domestic duties as well as foreign, the agency's name was changed to the Department of State.



*Department of State
Official Mail stamp*

The department was soon responsible for taking the census, managing the US Mint, and keeping the Great Seal, in addition to representing America to other countries. Washington appointed the first secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, on September 29, 1789. Jefferson was serving as the minister to France at the time. John Jay, who had been secretary of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation, continued in the post until Jefferson returned.



*Jay stamp from the
Liberty Series*

Jefferson returned to America and assumed his new duties in 1790. He supported France in its war with England, laid the foundation for the protection of American territory from Great Britain and Spain, established navigational rights on the Mississippi River, and created commerce treaties with Spain and England.

Over time, many of the secretary of State's domestic responsibilities were turned over to other departments as they were developed, though the secretary of State is still the keeper of the Great Seal. Another duty the secretary has is receiving the written document if a president or vice president decides to resign.



*This stamp was often
used as currency
during the Civil War.*

The primary role of the department is to help the president develop and carry out a foreign policy. It employs over 50,000 people and has diplomats in more than 270 locations around the world. The State Department also serves foreigners trying to visit or immigrate to the US and citizens who are living or traveling abroad. It's involved in aid programs, fighting international crime, and training foreign militaries as well. The agency also promotes our businesses abroad, opening up new markets. This department issues passports and travel warnings as well.



*The Great Seal has been largely
unchanged since 1885 and used by
the secretary of State to authenticate
government documents.*

Official Mail

Official Mail stamps are genuine postage stamps, although they were never available at any post office. These unique stamps are called Officials because their use was strictly limited to government mail. Before 1873, government agencies had "franking" privileges. This meant that government mail could be sent free of postage as long as it bore an authorized signature on the envelope. As of July 1, 1873, "franking" privileges were discontinued and special official stamps were put into circulation for use on government mail.

Each department was issued its own set of stamps. Many of the designs were taken from the current series of regular postage stamps being printed at that time – the so-called "Bank Note Issues." The department names were inscribed on the stamps instead of the usual "US Postage" and each set was printed in its own distinct color. Only the Post Office Department had its own unique design – a numeral in an oval frame.

In 1884, the Officials were declared obsolete and were replaced with the "penalty" envelope. These envelopes were imprinted with an official emblem and carried a warning against unauthorized use by private individuals.



*Issued for the Alaska-
Yukon Pacific Expo, this
stamp pictures the man who
negotiated the purchase of
Alaska, Secretary of State
William H. Seward.*

This Day in History... July 27, 1789

Department of State Established

On July 27, 1789, the Department of Foreign Affairs was created, which was later renamed the Department of State.

When the US Constitution was ratified in 1788, it specified that the president would be responsible for the country's foreign relations. President George Washington soon realized he'd need help and requested the creation of a new executive department to help handle foreign affairs.

The House of Representatives and Senate agreed and approved legislation creating such a department on July 21, 1789. President Washington then signed the legislation on July 27, 1789, officially creating the Department of Foreign Affairs. It was the first department established under the US Constitution. As the office's responsibilities expanded to cover domestic duties as well as foreign, the agency's name was changed to the Department of State.



*Department of State
Official Mail stamp*

The department was soon responsible for taking the census, managing the US Mint, and keeping the Great Seal, in addition to representing America to other countries. Washington appointed the first secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, on September 29, 1789. Jefferson was serving as the minister to France at the time. John Jay, who had been secretary of Foreign Affairs under the Articles of Confederation, continued in the post until Jefferson returned.



*Jay stamp from the
Liberty Series*

Jefferson returned to America and assumed his new duties in 1790. He supported France in its war with England, laid the foundation for the protection of American territory from Great Britain and Spain, established navigational rights on the Mississippi River, and created commerce treaties with Spain and England.

Over time, many of the secretary of State's domestic responsibilities were turned over to other departments as they were developed, though the secretary of State is still the keeper of the Great Seal. Another duty the secretary has is receiving the written document if a president or vice president decides to resign.



*This stamp was often
used as currency
during the Civil War.*

The primary role of the department is to help the president develop and carry out a foreign policy. It employs over 50,000 people and has diplomats in more than 270 locations around the world. The State Department also serves foreigners trying to visit or immigrate to the US and citizens who are living or traveling abroad. It's involved in aid programs, fighting international crime, and training foreign militaries as well. The agency also promotes our businesses abroad, opening up new markets. This department issues passports and travel warnings as well.



*The Great Seal has been largely
unchanged since 1885 and used by
the secretary of State to authenticate
government documents.*

Official Mail

Official Mail stamps are genuine postage stamps, although they were never available at any post office. These unique stamps are called Officials because their use was strictly limited to government mail. Before 1873, government agencies had "franking" privileges. This meant that government mail could be sent free of postage as long as it bore an authorized signature on the envelope. As of July 1, 1873, "franking" privileges were discontinued and special official stamps were put into circulation for use on government mail.

Each department was issued its own set of stamps. Many of the designs were taken from the current series of regular postage stamps being printed at that time – the so-called "Bank Note Issues." The department names were inscribed on the stamps instead of the usual "US Postage" and each set was printed in its own distinct color. Only the Post Office Department had its own unique design – a numeral in an oval frame.

In 1884, the Officials were declared obsolete and were replaced with the "penalty" envelope. These envelopes were imprinted with an official emblem and carried a warning against unauthorized use by private individuals.



*Issued for the Alaska-
Yukon Pacific Expo, this
stamp pictures the man who
negotiated the purchase of
Alaska, Secretary of State
William H. Seward.*