

This Day in History... September 28, 1990

Marshall Islands and Micronesia Joint Issue

On September 28, 1990, the US Postal Service issued two stamps commemorating the Compacts of Free Association with the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. The stamps marked a relationship that recognized the two Pacific territories as self-governing and sovereign while maintaining close ties with the United States.

The story began after World War II. Japan had controlled many islands in the western Pacific under a League of Nations mandate before the war. After Japan's defeat, the United Nations created the Trust



These US joint-issue stamps were issued on this day in 1990.



Joint-Issue from the Marshall Islands

Territory of the Pacific Islands in 1947. The United States administered this strategic trusteeship. It included the Marshall Islands, the Caroline Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Over time, the Caroline Islands developed into the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau.

The Trust Territory was not a single future country. Its island districts had different languages, histories, political goals, and relationships with the United States. During the 1970s and 1980s, local leaders and US officials negotiated separate political arrangements.

The Northern Mariana Islands chose a commonwealth relationship in political union with the United States. Its covenant took effect in 1978. Palau negotiated a Compact of Free Association but did not become independent until 1994, when its compact entered into force. The Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic

of the Marshall Islands chose free association.

A Compact of Free Association did not make Micronesia or the Marshall Islands US territories. Each adopted its own constitution and government, controlled its internal affairs, and became sovereign.

The agreements also provided US financial assistance and gave the United States responsibility for defense and security. In return, the United States retained certain strategic rights in the region.

The Compact with the Marshall Islands entered into force on October 21, 1986. The Compact with the Federated States of Micronesia followed on November 3. The United States formally recognized both countries as independent that year. The agreements ended their former status as United Nations trust territories, although the United Nations did not formally terminate the trusteeship for all of the former territory until later.



1996 Micronesia reissue marking the 10th anniversary of the compact.



Strip of Three Micronesia Joint-Issue Stamps

The 1990 stamp issue was a coordinated release involving the United States, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. The Postal Service issued a se-tenant pair of 25-cent stamps, meaning the two designs were printed attached to one another. Micronesia issued a strip of three stamps, while the Marshall Islands issued one stamp, bringing the total to six related designs.

The US stamp for Micronesia paired the Micronesian flag with the US flag and the USS *Constitution*. The Marshall Islands stamp showed that country's flag, a traditional canoe, and a stick chart. Marshallese navigators made stick charts from thin coconut ribs and shells. The charts helped teach how ocean swells, currents, and islands related to one another across long distances.

All six stamps were dedicated on September 28, 1990, at the Dean Acheson Auditorium in the US Department of State in Washington, DC. Additional ceremonies took place in Palikir, Pohnpei, and in Majuro, the capital of the

Marshall Islands. The joint issue used postage stamps to recognize a diplomatic arrangement while also highlighting Pacific navigation traditions and national symbols.

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