

## This Day in History... October 10, 1934

### Trans-Mississippi Philatelic Expo Issue

On October 10, 1934, eager stamp collectors crowded the mezzanine of Omaha's Hotel Fontenelle, waiting in line for the chance to buy a brand-new souvenir sheet featuring the majestic granite cliffs of Yosemite National Park. Released to commemorate the Trans-Mississippi Philatelic Exposition, the sheets sold out in less than an hour, leaving many empty-handed but cementing the issue's place in stamp-collecting history.

The exposition took place in Omaha from October 8 to 14, 1934, and was organized by the Omaha Philatelic Society. It was a grand event for collectors, dealers, and enthusiasts who came from around the country to exhibit, trade, and celebrate stamps. The souvenir sheet became the centerpiece of the week. It consisted of six imperforate 1¢ stamps, each depicting El Capitan, the towering granite wall in California's Yosemite Valley. The design came from the recently launched National Parks Stamp Series, an idea promoted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to highlight America's natural treasures through postage stamps.

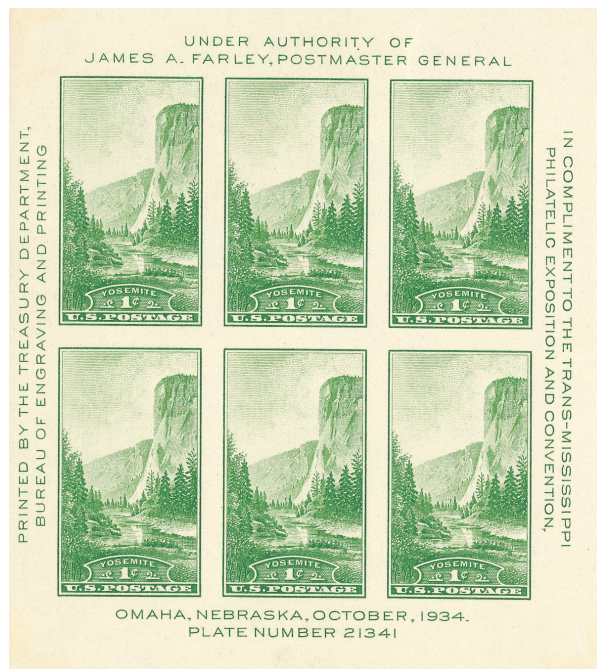
The story of how the Yosemite souvenir sheet came to be is nearly as interesting as the design itself. In September 1934, Postmaster General James A. Farley visited Omaha, and local collectors from the Omaha Philatelic Society took the opportunity to ask for a special stamp issue to mark their upcoming exhibition. The idea appealed to Farley, who was already experimenting with limited-run souvenir issues. On September 29, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing received orders to produce the new sheet, and just over a week later, on October 7, a shipment of 42,000 sheets arrived in Omaha—barely in time for the start of the exposition.

When sales began on the morning of October 10, collectors were more than ready. Some had camped out overnight to be among the first in line, and by 8:30 a.m., the crowd stretched 200 feet from the post office counter. The entire shipment sold out in about an hour. Although the Post Office Department had promised as many as 150,000 sheets, delays meant that only a fraction arrived for the first day ceremony. More were printed later—eventually totaling 793,551 panes—but the excitement surrounding that first sale in Omaha became part of postal legend.

The imperforate souvenir sheets were printed on flat plates by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The issue also became tied to a wider controversy among collectors known as "Farley's Follies." During this period, Farley authorized special uncut press sheets of certain commemorative issues—sometimes signed by himself and President Roosevelt—for friends, dignitaries, and officials. These gifts frustrated collectors who could not access the same items, prompting the Post Office to later reprint the sheets for public sale in 1935 to even the playing field.

The Trans-Mississippi Philatelic Exposition itself was a lively event that combined stamp exhibits, lectures, and a dealer's bourse where collectors traded and purchased material. The displays were housed in the Joslyn Memorial, now known as the Joslyn Art Museum, and featured collections from across the United States. The Omaha Philatelic Society went to great lengths to draw attention to the show, even sending President Roosevelt an enormous invitation measuring 20 by 50 inches—the largest piece of first-class mail permitted at the time—franked with some 200 stamps totaling six dollars' worth of postage. Although Roosevelt declined the invitation, he remained a supporter of both the event and the growing movement to celebrate philately through public exhibitions.

Today, the 1¢ Yosemite souvenir sheet remains one of the most sought-after items from the National Parks Series. Its story—a blend of artistic beauty, limited availability, and Depression-era enthusiasm—captures a moment in time.



*The souvenir sheet issued on this day in 1934 is inscribed in the selvage "In compliment to the Trans-Mississippi Philatelic Exposition and Convention."*

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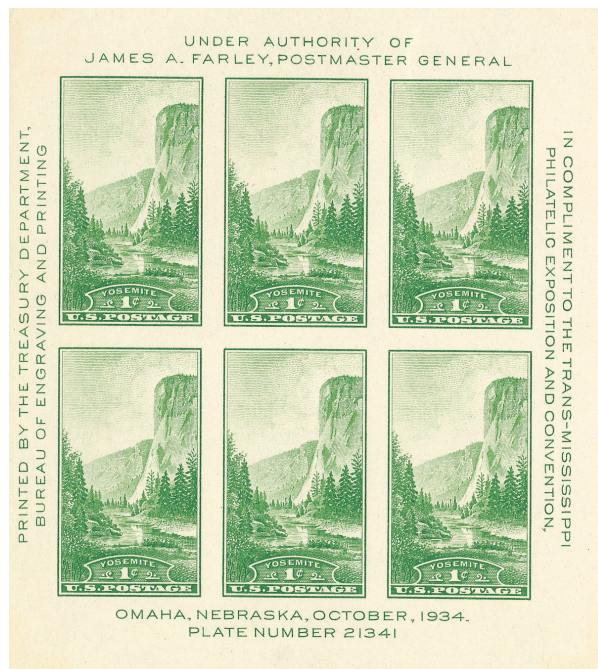
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