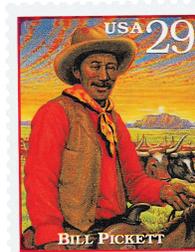


This Day in History... October 18, 1994

Legends of the West Controversy

On October 18, 1994, the USPS issued this corrected Legends of the West stamp sheet after it was discovered they had made an error in their original design.

In January 1994 the Postal Service announced it was creating a set of 20 stamps titled “Legends of the West,” featuring “broadly defined, American-themed subjects.” Sixteen of the 20 stamps honored people associated with the exploration, settlement, and development of the American West.

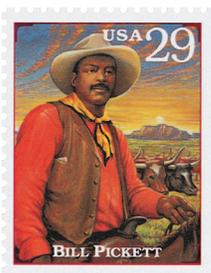


Corrected Bill Pickett stamp

One of the people to be featured was black rodeo star Bill Pickett. The remaining four stamps, located at the corners of the sheet, featured conceptual designs: Home on the Range, Native American Culture, Western Wildlife, and Overland Mail.

After the stamps were announced, but not officially issued, a radio reporter phoned Frank Phillips Jr., great-grandson of Bill Pickett, and asked him about the stamp. This was the first Phillips had heard of the stamp, which was ironic – for the last 14 years Phillips had written to the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee suggesting that Bill Pickett should be honored on a stamp. Each year he had been politely turned down.

Pleasantly surprised, Phillips went to his local post office, looked at the design and recognized it as Ben Pickett – Bill’s brother and business associate. The stamp pictured the wrong man! That was the first mistake.



Bill Pickett error stamp picturing his brother Ben

Phillips complained to the Postal Service, and Postmaster General Marvin Runyon issued an order to recall and destroy the error stamps. Runyon also ordered new revised stamps be created – these are the corrected Legends of the West stamps (#2869).

But before the recall, 186 error sheets were sold by postal workers – before the official “first day of issue.” This was the second mistake. These error sheets were being resold for sums ranging from \$3,000 to \$15,000 each!

Several weeks later the US Postal Service announced that 150,000 error sheets would be sold at face value by means of a mail order lottery. This unprecedented move was made with the permission of Frank Phillips Jr. so the USPS could recover its printing cost and not lose money. Sales were limited to one per household. The remaining stamps were destroyed.

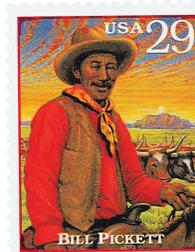
The Legends of the West error was one of the biggest stamp stories in years. Overshadowed by the error story, the Legends of the West sheet was also the first installment in a series known as the Classic Collection. The Classic Collection sheets included the same unique 20-stamp format as the Legends of the West stamps. Other sheets in the series honored the Civil War, Comic Strip Classics, the 1996 Olympics, Classic American Aircraft, American Art, Insects and Spiders, Stars and Stripes, and Legends of Baseball.

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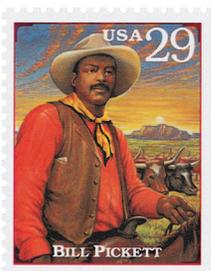
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