

This Day in History... October 22, 1996

Holiday Celebrations Series

On October 22, 1996, the USPS issued its first Hanukkah stamp. The joint issue with Israel also launched the Holiday Celebrations Series, which broadened the Postal Service's holiday stamp program beyond Christmas.

The United States had issued Christmas stamps since 1962. By 1970, the Postal Service was issuing both contemporary designs, often with secular holiday images, and traditional designs featuring religious art, including the Madonna and Child, the Holy Family, and angels.

For many years, postal customers called for a Hanukkah stamp. Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem after the Maccabean revolt against the rule of Antiochus

IV. The traditional account of the holiday tells how a small supply of purified oil, enough for one day, lasted for eight. Hanukkah is observed for eight days and is also known as the Festival of Lights.

After years of requests, the USPS issued its first stamp honoring a Jewish holiday on October 22, 1996. The joint issue with Israel featured the same menorah design on both stamps. The US stamp used the English spelling "Hanukkah," while Israel's also included the Hebrew spelling. Israel's stamp was its first self-adhesive issue.

The Hanukkah stamp was also the start of the USPS's new Holiday Celebrations Series, which sought to honor a different cultural or ethnic holiday every year. The second stamp in the series came exactly a year after the first. It honored Kwanzaa, the seven-day African American holiday that takes place from December 26 through January 1. Its name comes from the Swahili phrase *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning "first fruits."

The third stamp in the series was a joint issue with Mexico in 1998. It celebrates the Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo, which means "May 5th." This holiday is held on the anniversary of the victory of the Battle of Puebla, fought between Mexican and French troops over war debts on May 5, 1862.

In 2001, the USPS issued its first Eid stamp. Eid is a joyous festival for Muslims, followers of Islam. "Eid al-Fitr" is the celebration that ends the month-long fast of Ramadan. The stamp has the appearance of a holiday greeting card, with "Eid Mubarak," or "blessed festival," written in elegant Arabic calligraphy. There are six million Muslims in the United States and over one billion worldwide.

Also in 2001, the USPS issued its first stamp to honor Thanksgiving. The stamp recalled both historic stories of America's "First Thanksgiving" and more recent memories of traditional family gatherings. A quilted cornucopia pattern on the stamp symbolizes an abundant harvest and the promise of future prosperity. A set of four Thanksgiving stamps was also issued in 2009.

In 2016, stamps honoring two more holidays were added to the series. One featured Diwali, a traditional Hindu festival representing the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and hope over despair. The festival lasts for five days between mid-October and November with the third day of the festival falling on the darkest night of the lunar calendar – the night of the new moon. A decade later, the USPS issued a second Diwali stamp.

The other 2016 issue added to the series featured Jack-o-Lanterns, for Halloween. In the years since, additional stamps have celebrated Halloween and the Day of the Dead, though they weren't designated as part of the series. They're the 2019 Spooky Silhouettes and the 2021 Day of the Dead.



The first US Hanukkah stamp, issued on this day in 1996.



The first Kwanzaa stamp, issued in 1997.



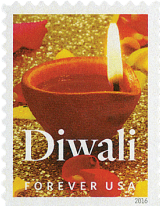
The first Eid stamp, issued in 2001.



The 1998 Cinco de Mayo stamp.



The 2001 Thanksgiving stamp.



Stamp issued for Diwali in 2016.

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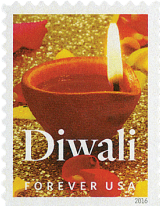
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