

# This Day in History... November 13, 1989

## 20th Universal Postal Union Congress

On November 13, 1989, the 20th Universal Postal Union Congress opened in Washington, DC. It was the first time the Congress convened in the US since 1897.

The UPU was formed on November 9, 1874, when 22 countries formed the General Postal Union. In 1878, the name Universal Postal Union was adopted. The UPU follows the provisions of the 1874 Universal Postal Convention, which specifies the types of correspondence that can be sent internationally. The UPU is the organization that sets the rules for the free flow of mail between countries. In 1948, the UPU became a specialized agency of the United Nations.

The UPU's first Congress was held in Bern, Switzerland in 1874. The US hosted the Congress for the first time in 1897, in Washington, DC. The Congress has generally convened every five years since the end of World War II. The 20th UPU Congress opened in Washington, DC, on November 13, 1989, and ran until December 14.

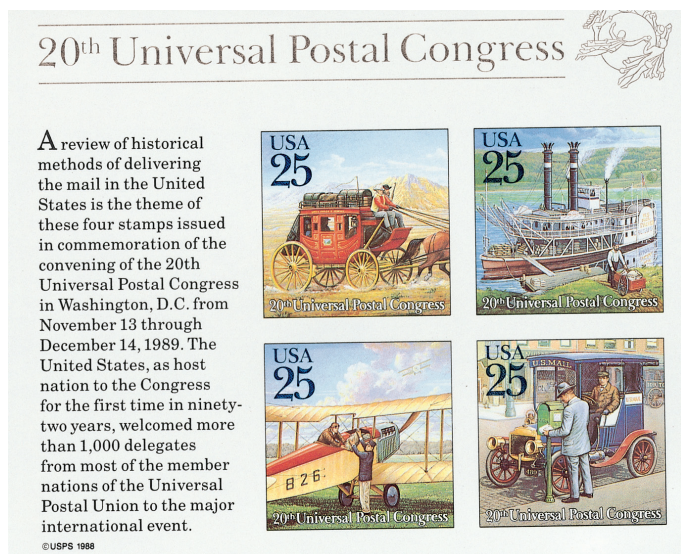
During that meeting, the Congress made several important decisions. They converted basic letter-post charges into guideline charges. They also established a Framework Agreement for the international Express Mail Service (EMS), improving it while leaving it flexible to adjust for evolving customer needs. The Congress also standardized the use of bar codes and identification methods for tracking and tracing mail. They also introduced an optional international business reply service and international recorded delivery service.

The Congress's topic of general debate was "Caring for the customer – commercial and operation strategies of the post." This discussion led to the adoption of the Washington General Action Plan, which guided postal policies for the ensuing five years. The Congress also created the Postal Security Group to develop and implement security standards to ensure worldwide postal security. It also encouraged each country to create its own postal security services.

The Congress coincided with World Stamp Expo '89, which was also held in Washington, DC, from November 17 to December 3. Stamps were issued to commemorate the show as well as the Congress.



*This stamp was issued in 1999 for the 125th anniversary of the UPU.*



*This souvenir sheet pictures historical methods of mail transportation.*

The Traditional Mail Delivery souvenir sheet pictures vehicles that helped deliver America's mail from Colonial times to the early 1900s. The stamps show the most used mail transports. An Airmail souvenir sheet was also issued picturing Future Mail Transportation. These stamps gave postal patrons a glimpse at several potential mail delivery methods of the future. These Space Age designs include a hypersonic airliner soaring through space, a mail delivery hovercraft riding along on a cushion of air, a shuttle involved in a mid-space mail transfer, and a land rover craft delivering mail to a space colony. Although these vehicles didn't exist, they are based on the industry's estimation of what future mail delivery transportation could look like.

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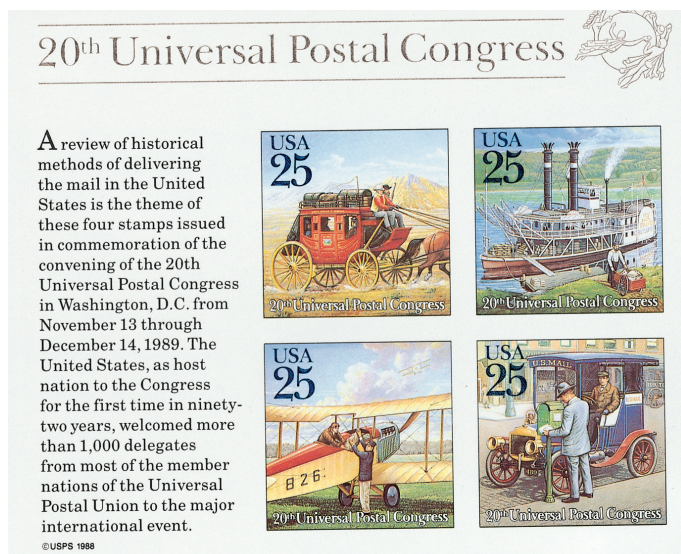
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