

This Day in History... November 17, 1967

Redrawn Washington

Following heavy criticism, the US Post Office issued a new “clean shaven” George Washington stamp on November 17, 1967. The stamp replaced a Prominent Americans stamp issued in 1966.

The Prominent Americans Series was introduced in 1965 to replace the Liberty Issue. It was a dramatic departure from previous US stamp series that focused largely on political figures. Instead, the Prominent Americans Series honored people from all walks of life. As the Post Office stated, “The men and women honored by the Prominent Americans Series of United States postage stamps are as diverse as their contributions to the growth and development of America.”



Redrawn “clean-shaven” Washington issued on this day in 1967



Original “unshaven” Washington issued on February 22, 1966

However, the series continued the long-standing tradition of honoring America’s first president, with the issue of a 5¢ George Washington stamp on February 22, 1966. The stamp, printed in panes of 100 and perforated 11 x 10.5, featured a portrait of Washington based on a painting by Rembrandt Peale that resides in the National Gallery of Art. The stamp was designed by Bill Hyde, with the vignette engraved by Charles A. Brooks and the type engraved by William R. Burnell.

While Brooks’ engraving of Washington was an accurate depiction of the painting, the overly detailed stamp portrait was unflattering. It was described by some as a “dirty faced” or “unshaven” Washington. The stamp was widely criticized, which eventually led the Post Office to create a new stamp. Engraved by Joseph S. Creamer Jr., the new sheet stamp was issued on November 17, 1967, in New York City at the American Stamp Dealers National Postage Stamp Show. This new stamp satisfied critics.



“Unshaven” coil issued on September 8, 1966



Redrawn Washington coil issued in 1981

However, the first class letter rate changed from 5¢ to 6¢ in January 1968, which left little need for the 5¢ Washington stamp. A decade later, when the rate increased to 15¢ in May 1978, there were still a large number of the “unshaven” Washington coil stamps still available. Yet, in early 1981, the USPS issued a 5¢ coil stamp with the redrawn Washington with little notice.

The new stamp may have been produced in anticipation of an increase from 15¢ to 20¢ for first-class letters. However, in March 1981, the rate was only increased by 3¢. Some have suggested the 5¢ redrawn Washington coil had been issued at the request of the Disabled American Veterans, who used the stamps for their charitable reply envelopes. When the rate was eventually increased to 20¢ in November 1981, new 5¢ coils were printed with the redrawn design.

The Prominent Americans Series lasted for about 15 years and was eventually gradually replaced with the Great Americans Series.



“Unshaven” imperforate error pair

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