

This Day in History... December 16, 1912

First Stamp to Picture an Airplane

On December 16, 1912, the United States issued the world's first stamp to picture an airplane – a 20¢ Parcel Post issue.



Issued on this date in 1912

The US Postal Department had introduced Parcel Post service that year for items that weighed 16 ounces or more. Rural Americans used the new mail class to access goods and merchandise they could not have gotten before, giving rise to mail order giants like Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Montgomery Ward and Co.



The first US airmail stamp issued in 1918.

Twelve stamps with various denominations were issued in 1912-13 to prepay the fourth-class rate. The four Parcel Post stamps with denominations of 5¢ through 20¢ feature transportation of the mail. Although different vignette designs were featured, all twelve stamps used the same border and color, which caused a great deal of confusion for postal workers.

The airplane pictured on this 20¢ stamp is from a photo taken at College Park, near Washington. The landscape that forms the background was drawn in later. Interestingly, the stamp pictures an “Aeroplane carrying mail.” While experiments to deliver mail by air had been staged as early as 1911, regular airmail service would not begin until 1918. This was the first stamp in the world that pictured an airplane. It was issued on December 16, 1912, and over 17 million were printed.

Less than a year later, the Postmaster General authorized ordinary postage for use on parcel post. Parcel post stamps were then made valid for all classes of mail and were used as regular postage until the supply was depleted.



Issued in 2018 to honor the 100th anniversary of US airmail service.

The next US stamps to picture airplanes would be the 1918 airmails. Most of the airmail stamps issued over the next 94 years would picture airplanes, aviators, or space exploration.

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