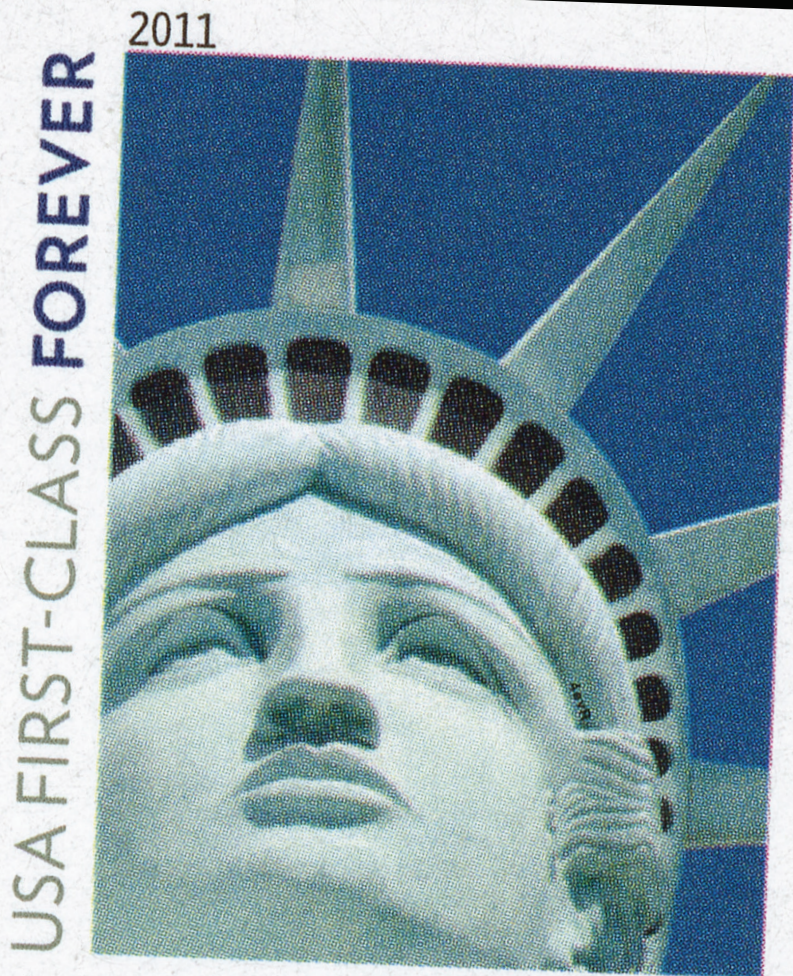


12 FASCINATING STAMP STORIES

by Don Sundman



U.S. #4486 – 2010 Lady Liberty

DELIVERING HOPE TO WAR-TORN NATIONS

POSTAGE STAMPS SO POWERFUL THEY CAN GIVE A NATION HOPE

U.S. #909-21



I can't think of a better example of stamps with a powerful message than the Overrun Countries Series of 1943-44 (US #909-21). These 5¢ stamps were created for international mail to encourage citizens of countries invaded by the Axis Powers during World War II. On each stamp, common design elements are the legendary phoenix rising from the flames and a woman freed from the chains that have

bound her. At the center of each is the flag and name of an occupied nation – a beacon of light in the dark despair of war. I'd love to know how many people this message of hope touched, wouldn't you?

These key US commemorative stamps are close to 80 years old and are still inspiring us today. Hard to believe the complete mint-fresh set of 13 can be had for only \$7.25!

LITTLE STAMP, BIG AGENDA

A STAMP MEANT TO SWAY THE PUBLIC

U.S. #732



This little stamp – #732 – was issued with a very big political agenda. It is spotlighted in the *Encyclopedia of United States Stamps* by Rodney A. Juell and Stephen J. Rod. The National Recovery Act stamp was quickly issued in 1933, at the request of President Franklin Roosevelt. With it, he hoped to gain Americans' support

for a new law. The law was passed after the Great Depression as part of FDR's "New Deal" and was meant to stimulate the economy by raising prices and lessening competition.

The stamp, issued just two months after the enactment of the law, featured Roosevelt in disguise. Can you find him?

RAISING FUNDS

STAMPS RAISE MONEY FOR GREAT CAUSES

U.S. #B1-7



Semipostals are a whole category of US stamps whose function isn't just to pay current postal rates. Their additional agenda is to raise awareness and funds for worthy charitable and social causes. Since the first Semipostals was issued in 1998, many millions of dollars have been raised for breast cancer and Alzheimer's

research. Also for Ground Zero families, stopping family violence, and saving vanishing species. And in the seven months after the issue of the PTSD Semipostals, over \$700,000 was raised to help victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These neat stamps benefit us all. Makes me proud to be a stamp collector!

THE RECALLED LEGENDS OF THE WEST

THE STAMP ERROR THAT LED TO A LOTTERY AND A LAWSUIT!

U.S. #2870



Famous Wild West rodeo star Bill Pickett was chosen as a subject for the 1994 Legends of the West se-tenant sheet of 20. But US Postal Service authorities didn't know the image they chose would embroil them in one of history's biggest stamp controversies.

After being informed the image on stamp sheet #2870 was actually Bill Pickett's brother Ben, the USPS recalled the stamps and reprinted the sheets with the correct illustration... but not before 186 error sheets were mistakenly sold to the public. With that, a prized modern rarity had been created. The Postal Service decided to sell just 150,000 error sheets by lottery in order to recover some of its production costs. (Not nearly enough

to satisfy collector demand!)

Now you may have already heard this story. But what you may not know is that *Mystic Stamp Company sued the US Postal Service!* As a life-long collector and stamp dealer, I believed every collector should have the opportunity to own these great stamps. I wanted the USPS to release all the error sheets. But we didn't win our suit, and sadly, the remaining sheets were destroyed. Still, I knew standing up for stamp collectors everywhere had been the right thing to do.

Over the years, we've been lucky to acquire a small number of this scarce modern stamp error to offer our collector-friends. It's like a treasure hunt—we never know if we'll find more!

THE ENGRAVER'S SECRET

OR THE MYSTERY OF THE FORBIDDEN MARK

U.S. #2193



In 1986, a Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) master engraver defied postal regulations of creating US stamps. While engraving the design of the 1986 \$1 Bernard Revel stamp, he added a secret mark. While secret marks are permitted by some countries, it's against US postal regulations to etch signatures or other unauthorized marks into a stamp die. The secret mark went undetected by BEP officials until an anonymous phone caller tipped them off after the stamps were printed and many sold.

The engraver had added a Star

of David, nearly invisible without a magnifying glass. This secret mark is located, as you look at the stamp, on the right side of Revel's mouth, near where his beard and mustache meet.

The Bernard Revel stamp was issued on the 100th anniversary of New York City's Yeshiva University. Revel, a longtime Hebrew educator, was the university's first president.

In the 1870s, secret marks were added to engraving plates of banknote stamps, making it possible to identify which company had printed the stamps once plates were passed on.

WOLFMEN AND MUMMIES AND BATS... OH MY!

THE STORY BEHIND SCRAMBLED INDICIAS AND HIDDEN IMAGES

U.S. #3168-72



Enlarged hidden bat
with decoder.

For me, some of the most fascinating and fun modern US stamps are those with embedded scrambled indicias and hidden images. These additions to the pre-printing stage of stamp production were introduced to make counterfeiting impossible with modern technology. Images are scrambled in such a way as to make them uncopyable by counterfeiters and unreadable without a special decoder.

The first stamp to carry hidden images was the 1997 Air Force stamp. My favorite, also issued that year, is the 1997 set of five Classic Movie Monsters. To me, the Classic Movie Monsters stamps have the coolest and most unusual hidden images. Beneath the

chilling faces of Dracula, Frankenstein, Wolfman, Phantom of the Opera, and the Mummy, lurk the neat hidden images. There are vampire bats, lightning bolts, wolves, theater masks, plus what looks like Anubis, Egyptian god of the dead!

In person, these neat hidden images can only be seen with the help of a special stamp decoder. The decoder has thousands of tiny lenses making the images viewable. Sadly, it's no longer being manufactured and is extremely hard to find. Mystic has managed to snag a small quantity. I don't know when, or if, we'll ever be able to find more. For more information, type "stamp decoder" on our website search bar.

WILL THE REAL STATUE OF LIBERTY PLEASE STAND UP?

U.S. #4486



Did you know a misstep by the US Postal Service cost it \$3.55 million? This story is a bizarre one, involving the 2010 Statue of Liberty definitive stamp, #4486. The Forever stamp honoring one of our most beloved national landmarks became the subject of a lawsuit. The image on the stamp shows a close-up of the head of Lady Liberty we all know and love. At least that's what the public thought until someone spotted something odd. Liberty looked a little more feminine, a little softer, and not quite like herself.

Turns out she wasn't. The image is actually a photo of a statue created by modern-day sculptor Robert S. Davidson, for the New York-New York Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. Despite learning of its error, the USPS continued to sell the stamp and issue others with the same design. But his gentler interpretation of Lady Liberty (based on his mother-in-law) was deemed an original work of art by the judge, winning Davidson his suit against the US Postal Service for copyright infringement.

YOUNG ELVIS TRIUMPHS

THE MOST POPULAR STAMP OF ALL TIME

U.S. #2721



Next is the blockbuster Elvis stamp of 1993. This first stamp in the Legends of American Music Series stamp was fun and historic. However, Elvis had been a truly a controversial choice, generating a long debate. Due to his abuse of prescription drugs, many felt he wasn't a good role model and shouldn't be memorialized on a stamp. (There was also the lingering, but goofy, question of whether Elvis had really and truly "left the building"!) But the pull of the King of Rock and Rock finally proved irresistible. The public was even

invited to vote on which portrait of Elvis would appear on the stamp – young or old. An overwhelming majority of the over 1.2 million voters chose the young Elvis Presley.

More than 500 million Elvis stamps were produced. The US Postal service estimates 124.1 million of the stamps purchased were saved, making it the most popular stamp of all time. Even with his very human failings, we still loved Elvis best. Elvis also appeared on Legends of America sheet and booklet se-tenants with Buddy Holly and Otis Redding.

RICHARD M. NIXON

37TH U.S. PRESIDENT

HIS STAMP WAS A HARD SELL AT THE POST OFFICE

U.S. #2955



You may remember how unpopular this stamp was due to Nixon's fall from grace and resignation during the Watergate affair. While it's the custom to honor every deceased US president on a postage stamp, this one didn't fly off

the shelves. Some post offices were unable to sell any at all. The stamp was the target of critics and late-night comedians alike.

All but three US presidents have appeared on a US postage stamp at least twice. Can you name the three?

CIVIL WAR ARMY GENERALS

US POST OFFICE ACCIDENTALLY DEMOTES GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE

U.S. #787 & #788



U.S. #787



U.S. #788

Sixty-plus years after the end of the Civil War, the US Post Office honored great military leaders with the Army-Navy Series (#785-794). Many Southerners were displeased with stamp #787 featuring Ulysses Grant, Philip Sheridan, and especially William Tecumseh Sherman. Sherman had not only fought Confederate soldiers, but also to destroy the morale of those supporting the Confederacy. To make citizens feel the pain of war and the futility of helping their leaders, Sherman's 62,000-man "March to the Sea" wreaked havoc on everything in

its path.

The Post Office Department hoped the next stamp in the series, #788, would make amends for the earlier issue. The new stamp commemorated Confederate war heroes Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson. But as luck would have it, a design mistake had been overlooked. Lee's portrait showed only two stars on his collar instead of the three he had been awarded. Though unintentional, Southern collectors felt this suggested Lee had been demoted, leaving them disappointed in this stamp as well.

DROPPING OF THE ATOMIC BOMB

THE STORY BEHIND THE STAMP THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN

Proposed design for U.S. #2981h



The last planned entry for the final stamp sheet of the World War II 50th anniversary series never made it to the finish line. “Atomic Bomb Dropped”, topic of the proposed stamp, pictured a mushroom cloud produced by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Many people, including the governments of Japan, and survivors of the horrific explosions, were deeply offended. So were citizens and peace groups in the US. On the

other side of the issue were people who felt the stamp needed to appear as part of the set to complete the accurate depiction of the war’s history. Finally, President Bill Clinton stepped in and requested the design be replaced. A nudge from the president was all it took. Issued in its place was “Truman announces Japan’s surrender, Aug. 14, 1945”. This stamp series captures 50 historic snapshots of the pivotal events of World War II.

LATVIAN MAP STAMPS

WINNER OF MY "MOST FASCINATING FOREIGN" STAMPS AWARD

Latvia #1



German WWI map on reverse!

Though today, Latvia is an independent republic, its history has been a turbulent one, alternately dominated by Germany and Russia. But at the end of World War I, Latvia declared independence from Russia, ousting its German occupiers and fighting off the Bolsheviks. Naturally, the brand new nation needed to print its own postage stamps. Due to the war, paper was in short supply, so that was a big problem. Finding a modest quantity of military maps left behind by the Germans, those ingenious Latvians

had an idea... Print the stamps on the reverse side of the maps! After all, the map paper was high quality and the backs were blank. So each of the less than 12,000 sheets of stamps printed had a map showing a portion of Latvia.

In my book, these rare 100-year-old stamps are one of the most unusual and fascinating foreign stamp issues of all time. They're definitely among my favorites. Whenever I hold a Latvia map stamp sheet or even a single, I know I'm holding history in my hands. And that's what collecting is all about.

A FEW CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM... DON SUNDMAN PRESIDENT MYSTIC STAMP COMPANY



You've heard it before – every stamp has a story! It's true... These stories show the fun and the power of stamps, too. I hope you've enjoyed the small sampling I've shared with you in this booklet. They're just a snapshot of what makes our hobby the greatest in the world. (I couldn't resist adding a few more below.) With thousands of stamps full of history and mystery to choose from, I bet you have your own favorites. I'd love to know what they are, so drop me a line and declare your number one pick.

Don

THE FIRST “THERMOCHROMIC” STAMP

The Total Solar Eclipse stamp is one of the most unique and fascinating creations in the history of philately. I couldn't believe it when I saw the eclipse image melting under my thumb into a dazzling image of our Moon. Placing a finger on the heat-sensitive image of the eclipsed sun causes the black circle of the eclipse to vanish. In its place is a second image – of the Earth's only natural satellite. When it cools, the rare eclipse of 2017 returns. Amazing! And there's even a map on the back of the stamp showing the path of the eclipse across the continent...



US #5211



US #2425

DINOSAUR STAMP RECALLS “BONE WARS” OF THE LATE 1800S

Many stamps with a great story have some kind of mistake attached, making for many juicy stamp tales. Did you know stamp #2425 in the lower right of the 1989 Dinosaur se-tenant has a big error? I grew up fascinated with dinosaurs, but only after this story broke did I learn the difference between a Brontosaurus and an Apatosaurus.

Turns out, the dinosaur labeled “Brontosaurus” on the stamp is not that daintier creature, but instead the more massive, thick-necked “Apatosaurus.” Paleontologists weren't happy when they saw the error, especially after years of historic rivalry in their field to track down the difference. From 1877 to 1892 it was called the “Bone Wars”!



US #2096

WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR WORLD WITH THE HELP OF STAMPS!

As a collector, it's satisfying to know stamps can call attention to important social and environmental issues. Whether it's urging Americans to vote, prevent forest fires, or "take a bite out of crime" with McGruff the Crime Dog, stamps get the word out: we can all make a difference. And we get to enjoy and preserve them in our stamp albums. How lucky are we!

FIRST CONTROVERSIAL CHRISTMAS ISSUE PAVED THE WAY FOR TODAY'S MANY HOLIDAY STAMPS

Christmas stamps have a history of controversy, making me want discover more about them. Since the first one in 1962 (#1205), these stamps have been criticized as crossing the line between church and state. They've been charged with intruding into Christian faith and ignoring others. And, like #1205, called unattractive. Yet the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had to work around the clock to print enough of that stamp to keep up with demand – topping one billion stamps! Think of all the festive holiday stamps we've enjoyed since then. And how the US Postal Service has expanded them to include Lunar New Year, Kwanzaa, Eid, Hanukkah, and Hindu traditions. I love holiday stamps!



US #1205

Donald Sundman is president of Mystic Stamp Company in Camden, New York. He is chairman of the Smithsonian National Postal Museum's Council of Philatelists. He is a fellow at the Royal Philatelic Society London, and a member of the Club de Monte Carlo in Monaco.

Don is an active supporter of the American Philatelic Society (APS) and has sponsored more than 7,600 collectors for membership, a record for the APS. The APS awarded him the Luff Award in 2010 and named him Stamp Dealer of the Year in 2018. Don co-sponsors the Maynard Sundman Philatelic Lecture at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum with his brother David. The lecture honors their father, a stamp pioneer and founder of Littleton Stamp Company.



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