

A Brief History of

STAMPS



“A stamp album is a miraculous brain-restorer.”
– Ayn Rand

America's Leading Stamp Dealer

Mystic Stamp Company was established in 1923 in Camden, New York. Purchase of the company by the Sundman family in 1974 set the stage for the evolution of Mystic into America's leading stamp dealer. With its *U.S. Stamp Catalog* and other publications, Mystic offers its customers a full line of US stamps, supplies, and albums, as well as a wide variety of collecting opportunities.

Known for its high grading standards, stamp expertise, and great customer service, Mystic focuses on bringing the joy of stamp collecting to as many people as possible. The 130 stamp colleagues at Mystic take great pride in treating their customers the way they like to be treated – with honesty, fairness, and courtesy.



Right to left: Don Sundman with Maynard and David Sundman of Littleton Coin Company

Mystic is active in promoting stamp collecting and is the top recruiter of APS members. Year after year Mystic reaches hundreds of thousands of collectors who show an interest in the world's greatest hobby. To better serve the collecting needs of those customers and accommodate its growing staff, Mystic expanded its facility in 2002 to a total area of 48,000 square feet. The company is also one of the largest buyers of stamps and collections, spending tens of millions of dollars each year.



Put Mystic's team of professionals to work for you!

Mystic is proud of its service to stamp collectors and the stamp world. The company's honest, hometown values are fundamental to the way both loyal customers and devoted colleagues are treated. Mystic president Don Sundman's dream is that the Mystic legacy will be a true force for good in the world of stamp collecting.

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It All Started in 1840...

1840

The Penny Black

On May 6, 1840, the world's first postage stamp went on sale in Great Britain – the classic Penny Black. The 1840 Penny Black cost one British Penny and would send a one-ounce letter anywhere within postal limits. The new system became known as “the penny post.” For the first time, mail service became affordable to virtually every British citizen.

The Penny Black instantly became a popular collectible. People were fascinated by this miniature work of art. In fact, there were stories of girls wall-papering their rooms with the stamps. The Penny Black is the one stamp every stamp collector wants to own.



World's First Postage Stamp

1847 America's First Postage Stamp – Issued in 1847



America's First Postage Stamp

First placed on sale July 1, 1847, this 5¢ Franklin stamp could mail a letter weighing up to 1/2 ounce anywhere in the United States. The effect on communications in America as a growing, mostly rural nation, would be dramatic. However, it wasn't until January 1, 1856, that the use of stamps on US mail became mandatory.

It's interesting the first US postage stamp honors Benjamin Franklin, who has been called the “Father of America's Postal Service.” Ben Franklin served as America's first postmaster general under the Continental Congress and was instrumental in organizing the early postal system.

1860

Pony Express Captures Our Imagination

The Pony Express was very short-lived, operating for just 19 months. Service began on April 3, 1860. Young men on fast ponies and horses raced along a hazardous route between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, to deliver the mail. Then on October 24, 1861, the transcontinental telegraph became operational. The Pony Express closed just two days later, having fulfilled its mission.



1862 Pony Express Local Stamp



2¢ 1869 Pictorial – Pony Express

1861 Civil War Leads to Demonetized U.S. Stamps

When the American Civil War began in 1861, all US stamps in print were demonetized (declared invalid). This was done so reserves of US stamps in the South could not be used to send mail, including propaganda, to the North. A reasonable amount of time was given to Unionists to exchange their old stamps. Then a new series was printed quickly and issued on August 17, 1861.



Civil War-Era Stamp



Encased Postage



Demonetized US Stamp



Civil War-Era Stamp



1861 Postage Currency

Currency hoarding during the Civil War created a coin shortage. As a result, postage stamps were used for money. John Gault patented “encased postage” – a stamp sealed in a small case with a transparent front. This enabled stamps to be passed like coins, without destroying them. Postage currency, issued by the US Treasury, featured postage stamp designs on Treasury paper. Postage currency was not technically money, but a way to make stamps negotiable.

1862

Confederate Stamps Printed in London & Richmond

With the start of the Civil War, the Confederacy needed a postal system. However, the South lacked resources. Hoyer & Ludwig, a lithography firm from Richmond, Virginia, produced stamps from engravings done in limestone (as opposed to steel).

Some Confederate stamps were produced in London, England, by De La Rue & Co. These stamps were brought to the Confederacy by daring blockade runners.

Eventually, printing plates were also imported from England where they were used by American printers, such as the firm of Archer & Daly, of Richmond, Virginia. In the images above, notice the clearer impression of the stamp printed in London.



*Printed
London, England*



*Printed
Richmond, VA*

1863

Civil War Prisoner-of-War Mail

Prisoners of war faced rough conditions during the Civil War. For many prisoners, the mail provided their only contact with the outside world. These covers were brought across enemy lines under a “Flag of Truce.” The exchange of mail continued even during the bloodiest conflict in American



Confederate Prisoner-of-War Cover

history. This envelope was sent by a wounded Confederate soldier, healing at Gettysburg hospital, to North Carolina. It carries both Union and Confederate stamps.

1869

Trans-Continental Railroad Completed

With the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, the US government charged two companies with connecting east to west by rail. The Central Pacific Railroad began laying track eastward from Sacramento in 1863. The Union Pacific Railroad began building track westward from an area near Omaha in 1865. On May 10, 1869, the last spike was driven – a golden spike – to connect the railroads at Promontory, Utah. North America became the first continent to have coast-to-coast rail travel, which meant letters could cross the nation in just days.

This 1869 3¢ Locomotive stamp was America’s first “pictorial” stamp. All previous US stamps had featured the head or bust of a famous leader. Issued shortly after the completion of the Trans-Continental Railroad, some experts consider it America’s first commemorative stamp.



1869 3¢ Pictorial

1891

Queen Liliuokalani and the Kingdom of Hawaii

Queen Liliuokalani took the throne at a turbulent time in Hawaii’s history. The US McKinley tariff made Hawaiian sugar uncompetitive with American-grown sugar. Sugar growers were very often prominent foreign businessmen who held key positions in the government and effectively controlled Hawaii. Most of these businessmen favored annexation by the US. Liliuokalani attempted to create a new constitution to strengthen her rule and change the balance of power. Hawaiian stamps were engraved and printed by the American Bank Note Company.



*Hawaiian Queen
Liliuokalani*

1894

The Republic of Hawaii

In 1893, a group of white businessmen deposed Queen Liliuokalani. Sanford B. Dole, a prominent Hawaiian judge who had formerly served in Queen Liliuokalani's cabinet, became leader of the provisional government. When the US refused to annex Hawaii, this group formed the Republic of Hawaii in 1894 with Dole as its president. After the US annexed Hawaii in 1898, Dole served as territorial governor from 1900 to 1903. Sanford Dole's cousin, James Dole, became the "Pineapple King" who formed the Dole fruit company.



*Sanford B. Dole –
First Hawaiian
President*

1898

World's First Christmas Stamp

This stamp's "XMAS 1898" inscription gives it the distinction of being the world's first Christmas postage stamp. However, it was not initially intended to honor Christmas, but the November 9th birthday of the Prince of Wales.

At the time, Queen Victoria reviewed all postage stamps and was perturbed the stamp wasn't honoring her. When the obviously angered Queen asked "Which prince?" the stamp would honor, a court official cleverly replied "Why, ma'am, the Prince of Peace." The stamp's issue was delayed until December 7th. The British Empire at the time of issue is shown in red on the stamp's world map. It was commonly said, "The sun never sets on the British Empire."



1898 Canada Stamp – First Christmas Stamp

The stamp's issue was delayed until December 7th. The British Empire at the time of issue is shown in red on the stamp's world map. It was commonly said, "The sun never sets on the British Empire."

1903

Wright Brothers' Historic First Flight

On December 17, 1903, Wilbur and Orville Wright made the world's first flight in a powered, heavier-than-air machine near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Their historic flight lasted just 12 seconds – yet it marked a turning point in world history. This 1928 US stamp pictures the brothers' innovative airplane, the *Wright Flyer*.

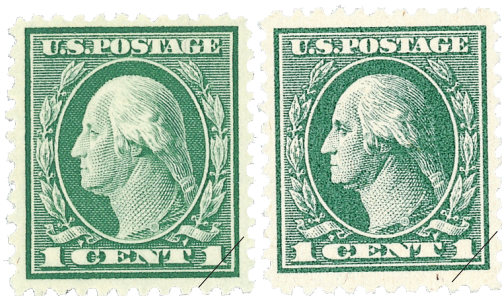


1903 Wright Airplane

1917

World War I Changes U.S. Stamps

As the US entered World War I, the first-class postage rate was raised from 2¢ to 3¢. The 50% increase raised funds need by the government to prosecute the war. German goods were embargoed, which included inks used to print US postage stamps. Domestic ink contained grit that quickly wore out printing plates. As a result, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing temporarily switched to cheaper, lower-quality offset printing plates. The emergency rates were restored in July of 1919 to pre-war levels.



1917 1¢ Flat Plate

1918 1¢ Offset

1918 First U.S. Airmail Stamps Launch New Service

In 1918, the first regularly scheduled US Airmail flights began. Special airmail stamps were issued for the new service. On the second day after America's first airmail stamps were issued, a 100-stamp sheet was sold with the airplane upside down. Nicknamed the Jenny Invert, which refers to the stamp's Curtiss-Jenny airplane, it's the world's most famous stamp. The postal clerk who sold the Jenny Invert sheet to the fortunate William Robey later commented, "How was I to know the thing was upside down? I never saw a plane before."



The World-Famous Jenny Invert

1920s Stamps Show Germany's Dramatic Inflation

During the 1920s, inflation ran wild in Germany. Between 1922 and 1923, inflation rose so quickly German money became nearly worthless. Some people actually burned the money for fuel! Many German workmen were paid twice a day so they could shop – their money wouldn't buy as much at the end of the day. Hyperinflation resulted in stamps with extremely high denominations.

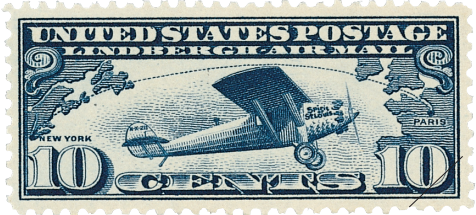


In 1921, this 50-mark stamp was the highest denomination issued. The highest denomination in 1923 was 50 billion marks!

1927

Lindbergh's Solo Atlantic Flight

On May 20-21, 1927, Charles Lindbergh made the first solo nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean. "Lucky Lindy" became an instant legend in the United States and Europe. This 1927 US Airmail stamp honors his historic flight. When issued, this was the first US stamp to honor a living American.

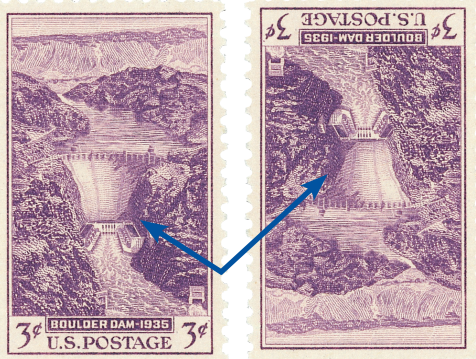


Spirit of St. Louis, background map showing Lindbergh's route

1931

Hoover/Boulder Dam and the Liberty Bell

In 1931, five years before it was completed, the massive Hoover Dam in the Black Canyon of the Colorado River, was named after Republican President Herbert Hoover. When Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, the Department of the Interior began calling the dam, Boulder Dam. That's why the 1935 US stamp is inscribed "Boulder Dam." In 1947, Congress officially named it Hoover Dam.



"Boulder" Dam stamp looks like Liberty Bell upside down.

The Boulder Dam (now Hoover Dam) stamp looks like the Liberty Bell when viewed upside down. Collectors have debated whether this was done intentionally or whether it was just a coincidence. President Roosevelt suggested this particular view of the dam.

1932

America Elects Stamp-Collecting President

President Franklin D. Roosevelt served in office from 1933 to 1945 – 12 years marked by the Great Depression and World War II. Yet, even during the darkest days of the war, President Roosevelt made time to enjoy stamp collecting. Roosevelt said "I owe my life to my hobbies, especially stamp collecting." He personally approved the more than 200 stamps issued during his time in office. Foreign leaders were often impressed by Roosevelt's knowledge of geography, which he had gained through his love of stamps.

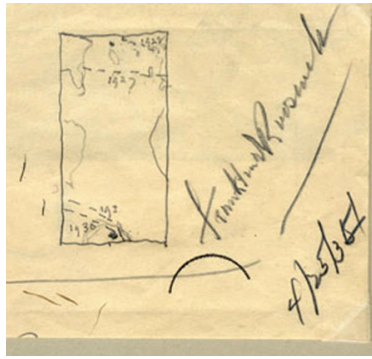


"I owe my life to my hobbies, especially stamp collecting."

1933

FDR Sketches Stamp Designs

President Roosevelt personally sketched the layouts for several US stamps. This includes the 1933 3¢ Little America stamp, which raised money for Admiral Richard E. Byrd's exploration of Antarctica. FDR also made preliminary sketches for the Mother's Day, Susan B. Anthony, and Virginia Dare stamps.



FDR's signed sketch for the 1933 "Little America" stamp and the US postage stamp as it was issued

1935 Trans-Pacific Air Service Conquers Vast Ocean



In 1935, Pan-American Airlines began contract mail flights from San Francisco to Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines, creating the first transpacific Airmail service. It had taken three weeks for mail to cross the Pacific. These revolutionary flights, made before the use of radar, cut that time to less than a week! In October 1936, Pan-American began carrying passengers. In 1937, China was added to the route. The stamps were given the same nickname as the Martin M-130 aircraft, *China Clippers*.

1930s

Adolf Hitler's Rise to Power

In 1933, Adolf Hitler, backed by the Nazi Party, had made himself dictator of Germany.

During World War II, Hitler put his image on German stamps. Some German-occupied nations were also forced to use Hitler stamps. Many other vain dictators have used postage stamps to strengthen their hold on a nation.



Adolf Hitler put his image on stamps from Germany, Bohemia and Moravia (Czechoslovakia), and Poland.

1940

America Prepares to Fight World War II

In 1940, most Americans wanted to avoid the growing conflict in Europe. But President Roosevelt knew this would be impossible. To remind the nation of the need for defense, he sketched three stamps. FDR's defense stamps were a success.



#899

Statue of Liberty



#900

Anti-aircraft Gun



#901

Torch of Freedom

1941-44

America's Patriotic World War II Stamps



Flag of Norway



Win the War



Four Freedoms

During World War II, US stamps focused on patriotic themes. President Roosevelt suggested stamps featuring the flags of the Overrun Countries of Europe as a sign of hope.

Roosevelt's 1941 State of the Union address outlined "Four Freedoms" – from want, fear, of religion, and speech – which every person deserved. In 1943, a "Four Freedoms" stamp was issued to remind Americans what they were fighting for.

1945

U.S. Marines Raise Flag at Iwo Jima

In February and March of 1945, more than 6,000 men, mostly US Marines, died capturing the Pacific island of Iwo Jima from the Japanese. Located in the northwestern Pacific Ocean, Iwo Jima is just eight square miles of land, but it was of great strategic importance as an air base. The Japanese fiercely defended Iwo Jima from extensive underground fortifications. The fighting was often at very close range.

"Flag raising on Iwo Jima" is one of the most famous photos of World War II. This powerful image showed the Marines' tenacity, teamwork, and will to win. The US commemorative design is based on the Pulitzer-winning photograph by Joe Rosenthal.



Iwo Jima

1945 United Nations Formed After World War II

U.N. stamps represent hope for the future...

Urged on by the horrors of World War II, 50 determined nations met in San Francisco in the summer of 1945. On June 26, 1945, these nations signed the United Nations charter. Today the UN has grown to include 191 members.

UN stamps are the only postally valid stamps issued by a non-governmental organization. Created by worldwide artists, they capture our dreams for a better world.

UN stamps are very beautiful and widely collected. Today, three UN locations issue stamps. UN offices in New York issue English-language stamps denominated in the US dollar. Geneva, Switzerland stamps are in French in Swiss Francs. Vienna, Austria stamps are in German and in Euros.



U.N. stamp pictures New York headquarters and the U.N. emblem.

1948 The Modern State of Israel

During World War II, about 6 million Jews died at the hands of Nazi Germany. The horrors of the Holocaust galvanized the resolve to form a Jewish state. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations agreed to divide Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state. The modern state of Israel came into existence on May 14, 1948.

On May 15, 1948, armies from the Arab nations of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan attacked Israel. By early 1949, Israel had defeated the Arab armies. In the process, Israel gained control of about half the land that would have formed the new Arab state. The Arab-Israeli conflict continues to this day.



1949 Israel stamp shows nation's flag.

1949 First Non-Stop Flight Around the World

In 1949, *Lucky Lady II*, a Boeing B-50A bomber, made history as the first aircraft to fly around the world without stopping. "Lucky Lady II" had been modified for refueling while in the air. The historic flight took just 94 hours and one minute to complete, lasting from February 26 to March 2, 1949. As the Cold War began, this flight proved the US Air Force could send its forces anywhere.



Boeing Stratocruiser and Globe

Although it features a different Boeing aircraft, collectors see this 1949 US stamp as a celebration of the historic flight.

1952

Queen Elizabeth II Succeeds to Throne

On February 6, 1952, King George VI died, and his 26-year-old daughter became Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen's coronation was held June 2, 1953, in Westminster Abbey, London. As a constitutional monarch, Queen Elizabeth has no direct power over the British government. However, the Queen is an important advisor and symbolic representative of the British Commonwealth.

Queen Elizabeth II has enjoyed one of the longest reigns of any British monarch. The Queen celebrated her Golden Jubilee – 50th anniversary – in 2003. To become the longest-serving British monarch, Elizabeth will have to reign 64 years and reach the age of 90.



*Coronation of
Queen Elizabeth II*

1957

Sputnik – the First Artificial Satellite

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union shocked America and the world by launching the world's first artificial satellite, *Sputnik*. This historic event led to the "Space Race," in which the US and the USSR vied to demonstrate superior technology through space accomplishments. Over the years, many stamps have honored great achievements in space exploration.

Sputnik was the size of a basketball and weighed only 183 pounds. It took just 98 minutes to orbit the Earth. *Sputnik II*, launched November 3, 1957, carried a heavier payload, including the first space traveler, a dog named Laika. Eight more *Sputnik* satellites were launched before March 1961.



*Soviet stamp
honoring *Sputnik**

1958

U.S. Launches *Explorer I* Satellite

Not to be outdone by the Soviets, the United States launched its first satellite, *Explorer I*, on January 31, 1958. It carried instruments that provided evidence of the Van Allen radiation belt – energy-charged particles trapped by Earth's magnetic field. This finding is considered the first major scientific discovery of the space age. The "Space Race" was in full swing.



Echo I – launched 1960

1959 Alaska and Hawaii Admitted to the Union

In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th US states. It had been nearly 47 years since the US last admitted a new state to the Union (Arizona in 1912). US airmail stamps were issued to celebrate these events, as airmail stamps were commonly used to send mail from the continental US to Alaska and Hawaii.

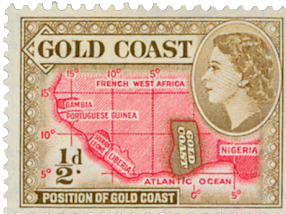


Alaska – 49th state



Hawaii – 50th state

1962 Former Colonies Demand Independence

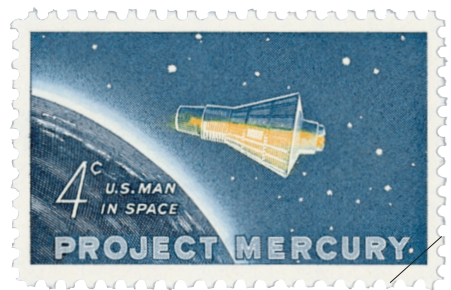


Stamps document transition from Britain's Gold Coast colony to the independent nation of Ghana

After World War II, many of the colonies controlled by Great Britain, France, and other European nations began to demand their independence. As this process took place, stamps issued by the independent nations replaced those of the former colonies. Postage stamps document dates, name changes, and unique elements of each nation's culture. This makes stamps a fun way to learn more about world history.

1962 John Glenn – First American in Space

On February 20, 1962, John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth. (Two Soviet cosmonauts made the first orbital flights in 1961.) Glenn circled the Earth three times in less than five hours. Due to problems with the *Friendship 7* spacecraft's automatic pilot, Glenn also became the first person to truly "fly" a spacecraft. In 1998, at the age of 77, Glenn returned to space aboard the space shuttle *Discovery*.



Friendship 7 Capsule

These stamps were printed and distributed in total secrecy and sold within a few hours of Glenn's successful return to Earth. At the time, the US space program was so perilous the government didn't want the stamp's existence known until Glenn had safely returned from the mission.

1963 President John F. Kennedy Assassinated

On November 22, 1963, US President John F. Kennedy was shot to death by an assassin. The President had been traveling in a motorcade through the streets of Dallas, Texas. Americans joined Kennedy's wife, Jacqueline, and his children in mourning the loss of the young president. This memorial stamp was issued in President Kennedy's honor.



Eternal Flame & JFK

1965 First American Space Walk

On March 18, 1965, a Soviet cosmonaut became the first person to "walk" in space. (Actually, he floated!) Edward White became the first US astronaut to "space walk" on June 4, 1965, during the Gemini 4



Accomplishments in Space

mission. On January 27, 1967, White died in a fire while training for the Apollo I mission, along with fellow astronauts Virgil "Gus" Grissom and Roger Chaffee.

1966 Walt Disney Changes U.S. Stamp Policy

The American public demanded a US postage stamp honoring Walt Disney following his death on December 15, 1966. The stamp, designed by Disney's animators, was released just two years later. The resulting demand for new stamps to honor other individuals led the US Postal Service to change the guidelines on new stamps. Now, a person must be dead for 10 years before he or she can be considered as a subject for a US stamp. The exceptions are US presidents, who are honored on the first birthday following their deaths.



Walt Disney & Children

1969 Peak of U.S. War in Vietnam

From 1957 to 1975, war raged in Vietnam. American forces were involved in the fighting from 1965 to 1973, making the Vietnam War the longest armed conflict in US history. The peak of the war came in 1969, when 543,000 US troops were committed to the war effort. About 58,000 Americans died in the war.

This stamp was issued specifically for sending parcels by airmail to servicemen overseas. When the stamp was announced, the Postal Service stated, "... the \$1 stamp will also be valid for paying regular rates for other types of mail...." However, later information said the stamp was meant only for Airmail.



Airlift for Servicemen

1969

First Man On the Moon

On July 20, 1969, millions of Americans watched as US astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first person to set foot on the moon. While leaving the safety of his Apollo 11 lunar module *Eagle*, Armstrong said, “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” “Buzz” Aldrin soon joined Armstrong to explore the lunar surface. Nations around the world celebrated this historic occasion by issuing postage stamps.



This 1969 US airmail stamp's engraved master die went to the moon with the astronauts!

1973

OPEC Embargoes Oil to United States

In October 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an oil embargo on the United States. The embargo was meant as a punishment for continued US support of Israel. Oil prices skyrocketed, causing an energy crisis. Gasoline was rationed in the US, and the 55-mile-per-hour speed limit was introduced.

This 1974 US stamp was issued to raise awareness of energy conservation.



Energy Conservation

1976

America Celebrates Bicentennial

On July 4, 1776, the Second Continental Congress officially declared its independence, forming the United States of America. Our Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson. This important document stated “all men are created equal” and endowed with rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Two hundred

years later, America celebrated its Bicentennial. Many US commemorative stamps were issued between 1971 and 1977 to honor the Bicentennial era.

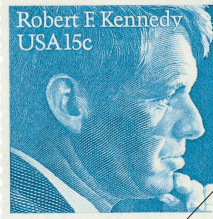


The Spirit of '76

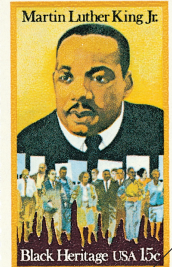
1979

U.S. Stamps Honor Fallen Leaders

Following the US Postal Service's 10-year rule, stamps were issued to honor Robert F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1979. Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, and Bobby Kennedy shortly after, on June 5, 1968. The stamps honor the memory of these important leaders who gave so much in service to their country.



Robert Kennedy



Martin Luther King Jr.

1980

Olympics Triumph and Disappointment

The 1980 Winter Olympics produced one of the greatest US sports moments in history when a young, amateur US hockey team defeated the experienced players of the Soviet Union and went on to win the gold medal. This victory was followed by disappointment when President Jimmy Carter boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow, due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.



1979 US stamps celebrating the 1980 Summer Olympics were withdrawn from sale after a boycott. Winter Games stamps were not affected.

1981

Prince Charles Weds Lady Diana

Over a billion people watched the fairy-tale wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer on July 29, 1981. Princess Diana would become the most photographed woman in the world. Charles and Diana had two children, William and Harry, before divorcing in 1996.

On August 31, 1997, Diana was killed in an automobile accident. Initially known for her glamour and style, Diana is best remembered for her charitable efforts, especially for the benefit of children.



Princess Diana and Charles

1986

Challenger Space Shuttle Tragedy

On January 28, 1986, the world watched in horror as the Space Shuttle *Challenger* exploded shortly after launch. All seven crew members were lost in this tragic accident, including teacher Christa McAuliffe. Tragedy struck again on February 1, 2003, when the Space Shuttle *Columbia* and its crew were lost.



Challenger Space Shuttle

1989

The Fall of the Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall was one of the most dramatic symbols of the Cold War. Between 1961 and 1989, nearly 80 East Berliners died trying to cross this barrier to gain freedom in West Berlin. The fall of the Berlin Wall was a joyous occasion which has been celebrated on stamps.



*1st issue of
Unified Germany*



The "Trabant" automobile featured on the stamp above became a symbol of East Germany's economic oppression.

1990

South Africa Frees Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela served as president of the African National Congress, a group opposing South Africa's apartheid policies, which strongly discriminated against blacks. Imprisoned from 1962 to 1990, he became a powerful symbol of the struggle of black South Africans.

Once freed, Mandela worked to peacefully end apartheid. Mandela and South African President F.W. de Klerk were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. In 1994, Mandela was elected South Africa's president in the first multiracial elections. He served until 1999.



Nelson Mandela

1991

Collapse of the Soviet Union

On December 25, 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ceased to exist. The Communists had controlled Russia since 1917, and had formed the Soviet Union in 1922. It became the largest country in the world, with the world's third-largest population. The demise of the USSR brought a surprise ending to the Cold War. Today, the independent former republics of the Soviet Union are issuing their own postage stamps.



*Last stamp of
the USSR*

1992

The Rebirth of Russia

In 1992, Russia emerged as one of the 15 independent republics after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The nation was faced with replacing decades of Communism with a democratic political system and market-based economy. This transition has proven quite difficult. Russian stamps reflect the great changes taking place. And freed from promoting Communist agenda, Russia stamps now provide a more complete picture of the nation's history and culture.



*First Stamp of
Independent Russia*

1997 Hong Kong Returns to China After 150 Years

Great Britain took Hong Kong from China in 1842, under the Treaty of Nanking. Over 150 years later, in 1997, its lease expired, and the United Kingdom returned Hong Kong to China. It is now governed as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. China has promised that Hong Kong will retain a great deal of autonomy for the next 50 years.



The last U.K.-controlled Hong Kong stamp, left, and the first Hong Kong/China stamp, right.

1997 Mars Pathfinder Explores Red Planet

NASA launched Pathfinder on December 4, 1996. Seven months later, a stationary lander and remote-controlled vehicle, *Sojourner*, the size of a microwave oven, landed on the surface of Mars. Moving at just .4 inch per second, *Sojourner* explored the surface of Mars while sending TV images to Earth via the lander. The Pathfinder mission was a stunning success.



Mars Pathfinder Souvenir Sheet – carries largest US stamp (3" x 1.5")

2000-01 Liberia Issues “President” Gore Stamps

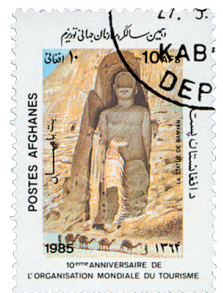
The Republic of Liberia had prepared postage stamps for both of the presidential candidates of 2000, in hopes of being the first country to honor the new US president. Following premature and conflicting US news reports and election results, with first Gore and then Bush projected as winner, Liberia erroneously released both stamps after the election. The Gore stamps were later destroyed.



Premature issue honored Gore as winner of 2000 election

2001 Taliban Destroys Ancient Buddha Statues

In March 2001, the Islamic Taliban government of Afghanistan began destroying ancient Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley. Taliban leaders considered the statues idols. The massive Buddha statues were carved into a sandstone cliff. Experts say they were at least 1,500 years old. One of the statues stood 175 feet tall, and may have been the tallest in the world. The Taliban government was removed from power in 2001 by US forces as part of the War on Terror. This Afghanistan stamp from 1985 honored one of the ancient Bamiyan Buddhist statues, a vivid example of the dramatic change in the nation's politics under the Taliban.



Ancient
Buddhist Statue

2001

September 11th – America Turns to Flag

A wave of patriotism swept across the United States following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Americans flew the flag to show their support for families who lost loved ones, to support US troops, and to demonstrate their resolve to preserve freedom. A US Semipostal stamp, which collects a non-postal surtax, was issued to raise money to assist families of emergency personnel killed or disabled during the attacks. It features a photo of firefighters raising the flag amidst the wreckage of the World Trade Center. This famous photo reminds many of the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima, during World War II, which is also honored with a US stamp (shown on page 10).



Firefighters Raising Flag at Ground Zero

2002

Statehood Celebrations with Quarters and Stamps

In 1999, the US Mint began producing Statehood Quarters featuring special designs that capture a historic event or characteristic for each of the 50 states. By 2002, 100 million Americans were collecting the Statehood Quarters. The US Postal Service issued “Greetings from America” stamps designed to look like picture postcards popular with tourists during the 1930s and ’40s. The New York stamp’s design was altered after September 11th to remove the image of the World Trade Center.



NY Statehood Quarter and Greetings from America Stamp

2002

The Euro Coins and Banknotes Enter Circulation

The Euro was officially introduced January 1, 1999, however, it was only used for accounting and electronic payments at first. Finally, on January 1, 2002, new euro coins and banknotes entered circulation in 12 European Union (EU) countries. These were Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. This event is known as the biggest currency change in history, with over 300 million people having been affected. Lithuania joined the EU in 2004, but didn’t adopt the euro as currency right away. This Lithuania stamp was issued in 2015, the same year the country finally decided to make the switch to the euro.



Introduction of Euro Stamp

2007 Cell Phones Change Communication Forever

The first cellular phone was released in 1979 by Nippon Telegraph and Telephone, but it was bulky and expensive. It wasn't until 1983 that the DynaTAC 8000x became available to the general public. As companies made improvements, more and more people began buying cell phones. Perhaps the biggest upsurge in sales began when Apple released the first iPhone on June 29, 2007. It was the first smartphone to be completely touchscreen – that is, it had no built-in keyboard. Popularity of the iPhone reached staggering heights as new models were released over the years, and is one of the most popular cell phones today. This stamp shows how far we've come since the first cell phones.



Popularity of cell phones & invention of the iPhone.

2008 Election of Our First African American President

In a defining moment of American history, Barack Hussein Obama was sworn into office as president of the United States on January 20, 2009. During a long presidential campaign, Obama offered hope and change to a nation in crisis. Election day 2008 saw the largest percentage of American voters in 100 years, and Obama took the win. As the first African American president of the United States, Obama's victory was made possible by hundreds of years of activism by various civil rights movements. This stamp commemorates his first inauguration in 2009. He was later elected to a second term and committed himself to improving the quality of life for all American citizens during his eight years in office.



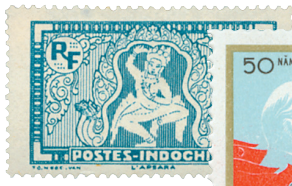
Barack Obama becomes the 44th president of the United States

2008 China Hosts Summer Olympics for the First Time

From August 8 to 24, 2008, Beijing, China, played host to the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. This was the very first time China was the host of the Summer Olympics, and only the third time an Olympics was held in Asia. Athletes from 204 National Olympic Committees competed in the 2008 Summer Olympics, with a total of 10,942 athletes participating. The government of the People's Republic of China built a number of new facilities for the Games and it was the most expensive Summer Olympics in history up to that point. It also featured the longest distance traveled by the Olympic Torch. Athletes from China won the most gold medals during the Games, with a total of 48. The United States came in second, followed by Russia. These stamps picture the official logo of the 2008 Summer Games.



The 2008 Summer Olympics were held in Beijing, China



*French Indochina
1931-41
Celestial Dancer*



*Democratic Republic
of North Vietnam, 1967
Lenin and Soldiers*



*Republic of
South Vietnam,
1968 – Flags of
Vietnam’s Allies*



*Socialist Republic of
Vietnam 1976 – 1st Elections
to Unified National Assembly*

Stamps Chronicle Vietnam’s Evolution

The Vietnam stamps shown above are a great example of how postage stamps are history you hold in your hands. France controlled Vietnam as part of French Indochina. After World War II, when Vietnam was occupied by the Japanese, Vietnamese Communists began fighting for independence – but many Vietnamese opposed the Communists. This resulted in 30 years of conflict between the North and South and their allies. Vietnam was unified in 1976.



Vietnam Veterans Memorial USA20c

The name of every American who died or is still listed as missing is inscribed on the walls of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, DC.



*1899
Cuba Overprint
Issued by US
military government*



*Cuba 1955
Havana, 19th Century
Centennial of Cuba –
1st postage stamps*



*Cuba 2001
Che Guevara –
One of Cuba’s
great revolutionary heroes*

Stamps Bring Cuba’s History to Life...

Examine Cuba stamps and you’ll discover the US controlled Cuba after the Spanish-American War of 1898. You’ll also learn about subsequent governments and cultural changes. Fidel Castro’s revolution led to a 40-year ban of Cuban goods in the US, including stamps. The ban on canceled Cuba stamps was lifted in 2001.

Learn what makes stamps valuable...

Supply and Demand

The most basic law of economics – supply and demand – applies to stamp collecting. Usually, the scarcer a stamp is, the higher its value. In the case of extremely rare stamps like the US 1¢ Z Grill, stamps can be valued into the millions. However, scarcity is not the only factor to consider.

If a stamp is very popular, it becomes more valuable. Two modern US stamp rarities issued during the 1990s are perfect examples. There are 150,183 Legends of the West Error sheets, but just 118,000 Bugs Bunny special panes with 10th stamp imperforate. The special Bugs Bunny pane is scarcer, yet the Legends of the West stamp sheet regularly sells for more than twice as much!



Special Bugs Bunny Pane with 10th Stamp Imperforate

Condition

A stamp's condition can affect its value. This is especially true of older stamps. These \$2 stamps from the 1893 Columbian Series – the first US commemorative stamps – are prime examples.

The \$2 Columbian stamp on the left has good centering for this issue and is worth \$1,800. The \$2 Columbian stamp on the right has very-fine centering and full intact gum. In 2004 it was sold at Siegel Auction Galleries for \$30,000.



1893 \$2 Columbian – Very Good Centering \$1,800



1893 \$2 Columbian – Very Fine Centering and Never-Hinged Gum \$30,000

You Might Be Surprised...

Many people assume that older stamps are worth more money – and in some cases they are. However, the 2¢ 1893 Columbian

– from the same issue as the \$30,000 stamp mentioned above – sells for just 40¢ in typical condition. In comparison, the 1994 Legends of the West Error sheet sells for \$295, as it's much more scarce and in demand.



1893 2¢ Columbian – Just 40¢ in typical condition



1994 Legends of the West Error Sheet – \$295

Rare and Valuable Stamps

America's Rarest Stamp – The 1¢ Z Grill #85A



America's Rarest Stamp

The scarce 1868 1¢ Z Grill (Scott #85A) pictured to the left is the rarest US stamp. Only two are known. For seven years, Mystic Stamp Company owned the finest example, which is the only 1¢ Z Grill available to collectors.

Grills were a security device used on US postage stamps from 1867-75. They were made by embossing the stamp – that is, breaking the paper's fibers. This allowed cancellation ink to thoroughly penetrate the stamp's paper, making it more difficult to bleach out or remove a cancel and reuse the stamp a second time.

The "Z" grill is just one of eleven grill patterns that were used on US stamps. Experts currently value this stamp rarity at around \$3 million.

The Legendary British Guiana 1¢ Magenta

The British Guiana 1¢ magenta is the rarest postage stamp in the world. It was created in 1856, when a newspaper printed an emergency supply of 4¢ stamps. In 1875, school boy Vernon Vaughan found a stamp inscribed "ONE CENT" instead of "FOUR CENTS." Unaware of the stamp's potential value, the boy sold the stamp for just six shillings. It was soon sold again for a great deal more.

The stamp has had many famous owners. In 1980, John Du Pont acquired the British Guiana 1¢ Magenta for \$935,000. Although there have been stories of other copies, none have ever been proven, and the British Guiana 1¢ magenta is still considered unique.



British Guiana 1¢ Magenta had its corners clipped by an owner unaware of its rarity and value.

The Airmail Stamp that Survived a German Blitz



*World-Famous
"Jenny Invert"*

100 of the first US airmail stamps were printed with an inverted center. So the Curtiss Jenny airplane featured in the design was upside down! These stamps, affectionately dubbed "The Jenny Inverts," are among the greatest treasures in stamp collecting.

One Jenny Invert has a particularly fascinating story. It survived the fierce bombing of the London Blitz during World War II. On September 24, 1940, London suffered the heaviest aerial bombing of the war. London was ablaze. The underground vault where the Jenny Invert was stored was flooded with water from firemen fighting the blaze. The stamp lost its gum, but survived.



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Michael Laurence
Former Editorial Director
Amos Hobby Publishing

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- Stamp Albums and Collecting Kits

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 In 1879, Chief Standing Bear won a landmark case in federal court and convinced the Supreme Court to declare that Native Americans are "persons" under federal law for the first time in history. In 2003, USPS issued a stamp honoring Chief Standing Bear and his relentless fight for his people. Browse this catalog to see more US history brought to life.
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 \$65 1923 14c American Indian, Deep Blue, Mint, U.S.9.00

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