

This Day in History... March 25, 1911

Birth of Bradbury Thompson

Award-winning graphic designer J. Bradbury Thompson was born on March 25, 1911, in Topeka, Kansas. Thompson designed more than 100 US postage stamps and influenced countless others, making him one of the most prolific US stamp designers in history.



The first postage stamp Thompson designed for the US Post Office.

Thompson spent his childhood in Topeka before attending Washburn College where he edited and designed the school yearbook. He graduated in 1934 with a degree in economics and a minor in art and later designed the school's mascot, The Ichabod.



Thompson designed most of the Madonna and Child stamps between the 1970s and 90s.

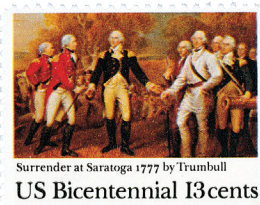
After graduating, Thompson worked as a designer at Capper Publications, where he learned everything he could about print production. He then moved to New York City in 1938 and designed the 1939 World's Fair Catalog.

During his first year in New York, Thompson began a decades-long working relationship with *Westvaco Inspiration for Printers*, the arts journal of West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company. The journal was produced to display the company's papers. Soon Thompson took the journal to another level, experimenting with typography, photo reproduction, color, and combining old printing plates from museums with modern items from magazines and advertisements. Thompson's inventive work transformed the journal into a popular publication with 35,000 readers. Between 1938 and 1962, he designed 61 issues.



One of Thompson's most celebrated stamps.

Thompson worked with a total of 35 magazines during his life, including *Business Week*, *the Harvard Business Review*, and *Smithsonian* magazine. He was also the art director for *Mademoiselle* magazine for 15 years. And during World War II, he produced magazines such as *U.S.A.* for the Office of War Information. He also produced war stamps for the Office of War Information.



Thompson designed several Bicentennial stamps.

Throughout his career, Thompson was known for his typographic work. In 1958, he developed Alphabet 26, or the "monoalphabet." He intended to simplify the alphabet to make it easier to learn and use. The upper and lowercase

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letters all used the same forms, but only differed in size. For example, the capital “A” was a large lowercase “a.”

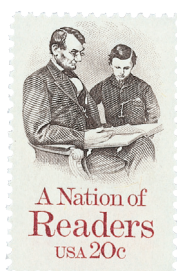
In 1979, Thompson redesigned the King James Bible as the Washburn College Bible. He spent 10 years on the project, arranging the type so that the lines broke similar to how people speak, to make it more accessible to readers.

Thompson taught at Yale University from 1956 to 1995, won the AIGA Gold Medal in 1975, was inducted into the Art Directors Club Hall of Fame, and won the Type Director’s Club Medal. His autobiography won an award for best art book in 1988.



Thompson oversaw the Love series since its start and designed this stamp for it in 1984.

Long-Time Stamp Designer



Another popular stamp designed by Thompson.

Thompson was a stamp collector throughout his life and jumped at the opportunity to contribute his own designs and artistic eye to more than 100 US stamps. He served on the Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee between 1969 and 1978, helping the USPS consider topics and designs for new stamps. In that role, he often suggested a US logo on stamps to show a sense of national unity. Thompson also served as the CSAC’s design coordinator for many years after.

Thompson designed his first US stamp in 1958, the Brussels Exhibition issue. As in his other work, Thompson put great care into the type, and blended artwork, both old and new to capture American history, heritage, and culture. He oversaw the long-running Love series from its beginning and designed many of the early Madonna and Child stamps, staples of the USPS holiday season for years.



One of the last stamps Thompson designed.



The Official stamps issued between 1983 and 2009 were designed by (or based on the design by) Thompson.

Over time, Thompson served as designer, art director, and typographer for the USPS, guiding the direction of US stamp design for over 30 years. With more than 100 postage stamp designs to his credit (he was the typographer on many others), Thompson is considered one of America’s most prolific stamp designers. And while he was teaching at Yale, he encouraged his students to submit stamp designs – and some were actually selected and produced!

Thompson retired in 1992 and died on November 1, 1995, in Greenwich, Connecticut.

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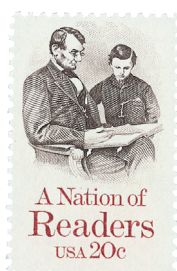
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