

This Day in History... April 20, 1987

Special Occasions Stamps

On April 20, 1987, the USPS issued the set of eight Special Occasions stamps, the first “special” stamp booklet.

For several years, the USPS had received requests for stamps for special occasions such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, weddings, graduations, birthdays, and more. In the mid-1980s, the USPS began addressing these requests.

The Special Occasions booklet began with a single stamp. In 1985, the USPS announced it would issue a stamp to mark the 50th anniversary of American Mothers, Inc. in 1986. However, as they discussed the stamp and the public requests further, the idea grew into what they called the Messages booklet, and later the Special Occasions booklet.

As the USPS moved forward with the project, they did something they hadn’t done before. They started working with florists and the greeting card industry, trying to see if they would be interested in seeing these new stamps in their stores. The USPS encouraged them to poll their respective associations. They wanted to know if there would be interest in selling these stamps in their stores. If successful, the Special Occasions stamps could be sold in stationery stores, card shops, large supermarkets, and other non-postal outlets. And if the stamps were popular enough, they could be as big for the USPS as Love and Christmas stamps.

In September 1986, the final eight stamp designs were revealed at a meeting of the Greeting Card Association. It was announced that the booklets would have 10 stamps, with two of the designs (Congratulations and Happy Birthday) being repeated, selling for a total of \$2.20. This was also the first US booklet to have the UPC (Universal Product Code) bar code on the cover.

During the planning process for these stamps, the USPS talked extensively about issuing them in May 1987 at the New York City trade show of a stationers’ group. However, as the date drew nearer, they realized that the trade show would take place after Mother’s Day, and with one of the stamps ideal for that holiday, they wanted to issue the booklet beforehand. So instead, they moved the ceremony to Atlanta, Georgia on April 20, 1987. Among those present for the ceremony was Martha Burke, National American Mother of the Year.

When the stamps were released, the USPS said that they “classified them as special stamps because they would remain on sale longer than commemorative stamps.” The stamps were to remain on sale for the remainder of the year, making them the USPS’s first “special” stamp booklet. They were the first US stamps to be specifically created for a specialized retail market, the first to be sold through card stores and florists, and the first US booklet to have stamps in three different configurations.



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