

This Day in History... May 22, 1986

Opening of AMERIPEX '86

America's eighth International Philatelic Exhibition opened to the public on May 22, 1986, in Chicago, Illinois. It was also the first to be held in the Mid-West.

Plans for AMERIPEX began a decade earlier, shortly after INTERPHIL '76 in Philadelphia. A group of seven Chicago collectors met up to start planning what they hoped would be the best international exhibition ever held in the United States.

To mark the exhibition, the USPS began work on several new stamps. Among them was a single stamp issued a year before the show's start. It's stamp-on-stamp design pictured a portion of a 1¢ Benjamin Franklin from a century earlier.

The USPS then issued a booklet of eight stamps honoring stamp collecting in January 1986. The stamps marked the 100th anniversary of the American Philatelic Society. These stamps were also the first commemoratives issued in booklet form and the first to picture another stamp that had not yet been issued (one of the Presidents sheets shown below). This booklet's cover also included a free pass to get into the show. After the stamps were issued, collectors discovered a significant error. The black ink was missing from two of the stamps!



This stamp was issued a year before the show.

AMERIPEX '86 was held at the O'Hare Convention Center, just outside of O'Hare Airport. The show included 350,000 square feet of exhibition space and 25,000 square feet of meeting and special program rooms. The exhibition opened to the public on May 22, 1986. In her opening day speech, Deputy Postmaster General Jackie A. Strange announced, "You'll see the 4,000 year-old clay tablets that served as letters for the Incas of Peru. You'll see the five-cent "Alexandria Blue Boy" sold at a 1981 auction for \$1 million. You'll see the gold leafed-illuminated pages from the incredible Cardinal Spellman Collection... and in the Hall of Fame you'll see our pride and joy – the largest display and sales area ever created by the US Postal Service."

The show included 854 exhibits from more than 50 countries and more than 80 sales booths from member nations of the Universal Postal Union. Keeping with the tradition started in 1976, AMERIPEX produced a passport for visitors. Collectors could take their passport to the booths of all the different countries and receive a stamp and special cancel.

Prince Ranier of Monaco displayed a special exhibit, and the US Postal Service contributed a 90,000-square-foot display, as well. The queen of England contributed a special exhibition from the Royal Philatelic Collection of Britain. Nearly 200 dealers attended the show, making AMERIPEX '86 a phenomenal stamp marketplace.

Among the show's popular attractions was the Aristocrats of Philately, which had first been displayed at AMPHILEX '71. The display included 21 of the greatest philatelic items from 20 different collections around the world. The 21st item was new for AMERIPEX – in fact it was only discovered a month before the show. It was titled "United States One-Dollar Stamp Invert of Americana Issue, partial pane of 84." However, it's better known as the CIA Invert Pane. It was a major attraction that many compared to Jenny Inverts from 1918. Speaking of which, one booth had 21 Jenny Inverts on display.

The show's planners also invited thousands of children, part of "Benjamin Franklin Stamp Clubs," to attend the show. AMERIPEX organizers helped them arrange field trips to the show and donated \$50 to each club to help them get there.

On May 22, the USPS issued a set of four souvenir sheets picturing 35 former presidents with their signatures and dates in office. A 36th stamp pictured the White House. Not since 1938 had a series of US stamps been devoted entirely to past presidents. With this series, another postal "first" occurred – these were the first "mini sheets" produced by the USPS.

Over the course of the 11-day show, which ran until June 1, some 153,000 people were in attendance, making it the largest and most successful US stamp show up to that time. Of those about 40,000 got in for free using the passfree passes from the Stamp Collecting booklet.



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