

This Day in History... July 17, 1987

First U.S.-Morocco Joint Issue

On July 17, 1987, the USPS issued its first joint issue with Morocco, commemorating 200 years of diplomatic relations.

On December 20, 1777, Morocco was the first country to give a naval salute to the US, even before it was an independent nation. Formal relations began with the ratification of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship on July 18, 1787. The treaty was renegotiated in 1836 and remains in force today.

The 1987 joint issue was a bit of surprise. It wasn't included in the initial 1987 stamp program, but then it was introduced during a surprise announcement at the AMERIPEX international stamp show in Chicago in May 1986. The new stamp would be America's 18th joint issue with its 11th nation.



The Morocco friendship stamp features an arabesque design.



The stamp issued by Morocco

The driving force behind this joint issue was the Department of State, which was attempting to improve relations with Morocco. Relations grew uneasy in 1984 when Morocco's King Hassan II shocked American diplomats and signed a Treaty of Union with Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Several designs were considered for the stamps. One design included the American Legation Building in Tangier, a US historic landmark. The final design on both stamps is an *arabesque*, an ornate design found on Moorish and Arabian buildings. The arabesque on the stamp is a 12-pointed star created with one continuous, unbroken line.

The stamp designs were unveiled on March 17, 1987. However, the Morocco stamp underwent small changes between then and the first day of issue. The background color was changed from white to blue and the denomination changed from 2 dirhams to 1 dirham. The location of the type also changed. The final design includes "Kingdom of Morocco" and "Morocco and the United States – Uninterrupted Friendship – 1787-1987" in Arabic as well as "Kingdom of Morocco" and "Two Centuries of Friendship with the United States" in French.

The First Day of Issue was supposed to be July 18, the exact 200th anniversary of the treaty. However, Morocco's officials requested it be changed to a day earlier. The first day ceremonies in the US were held at the Anderson House in Washington, DC. The change in date was so late there wasn't time to alert collectors. US and Moroccan dignitaries were present for the ceremony.

After the stamps were issued, it was discovered that some of the Morocco stamps were issued with just the black intaglio printing.

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