

This Day in History... September 9, 1969

First Man on the Moon Stamp

On September 9, 1969, the US Post Office issued its first ever jumbo-sized commemorative stamp.

Plans for a commemorative stamp honoring the 1969 moon landing were extremely secretive. Few people were involved in the process and there was virtually no paperwork. The stamp wasn't even announced to the public until July 9, 1969, a week before the launch of Apollo 11.

As the postmaster general announced that day, "Apollo 11 will mark America's first mail run to the Moon."



Issued on this day in 1969.

This dramatic statement aroused great public interest in the stamp. The engraved die for the stamp would be taken to the moon, as well as a special "Moon letter" with a die proof of the stamp. While on the moon, the astronauts would personally postmark the letter.

Among the few people who knew about the stamp was artist Paul Calle. A member of NASA's Fine Art Program, Calle had documented several NASA missions and provided the artwork for the 1967 Accomplishments in Space stamps. Calle's greatest obstacle was that he had to illustrate the moon-landing scene a month before it would happen. To help him create an accurate image, NASA gave him photos of the equipment and invited him to come and view some of it in person. He also got to watch Neil Armstrong practice his exit of the lunar module so he could accurately portray how he placed his foot on the ground.

Many collectors at the time quickly stated that the stamp would violate the federal law that forbids picturing a living person on a stamp. However, the Post Office insisted it was simply a "spaceman."

The launch and landing were a success. Unfortunately, Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were too busy with science experiments to postmark the letter while they were on the moon's surface. Instead, they did it on the return journey. The "Moon letter" and the printing die were later sent on a traveling exhibit across the country and to foreign nations.

The stamp was finally issued on September 9, 1969 at the National Postal Forum's third annual meeting in Washington, DC. Armstrong, Aldrin, and Michael Collins were all present for the ceremony. The stamp was America's largest postage stamp up to that time measuring 1.953 inches by 1.234 inches, about 50 percent larger than most US commemoratives. The First Day Cover for this stamp was one of the most popular in US history. It included both the First Day of Issue cancel as well as a replica of the Moon Landing cancel.

The Post Office produced over 8.7 million First Day Covers for this issue. By comparison, they only produced 4.4 million covers for the 1993 Elvis Presley stamp, one of the most popular in US history. The first-day processing crew had to be increased from 40 to 100 people, and it took five months to cancel all of those covers.

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