

The 'Roosevelt' Stamps

By FRANKLIN R. BRUNS, JR.

Curator, Division of Philately and Postal History
Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D. C.

During the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a total of one hundred and thirty-four stamps were released by the Post Office Department.

The Presidents interest in stamps was widely publicised before his election, and stamp collectors looked forward to a friendly, interested, regime. They were not disappointed.

From the very first adhesive President Roosevelt was advised of all plans and shown proposed designs and models. In all instances his opinions were received and generally followed.

There were certain stamps which went beyond mere consultation and "briefing." These, known as "Roosevelt's stamps" were his special pets and in most cases were designed by him.

The first of these was the "Little America" stamp of 1933, honoring the Byrd Antarctic Expedition of that year, and indirectly the contributions to aviation made by Admiral Byrd in 1926 (North Pole flight), 1927 (trans-Atlantic flight) and 1929 (South Pole flight).

President Roosevelt sketched an upright stamp design showing a map and these flights, though some of the dates had to be revised. This was the most general sketch made by the President and left quite some latitude to the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, but the main theme was carefully followed out. The original sketch, preserved by then Postmaster General James A. Farley was signed by the President and dated "4/25/35." The last "5" was then revised to a "4." In any event, the autograph was an afterthought, since the stamps went on sale October 9, 1933. This sketch has been placed with the Smithsonian Institution by former Postmaster General James A. Farley on a loan basis and is now on exhibit there.

On January 24, 1934, President Roosevelt forwarded a memorandum to Postmaster General Farley, "I am inclined to think that this Maryland Tercentenary is worthy of a special stamp." Such a commemorative was rushed into production and appeared March 23, 1934.

The second "Special" Roosevelt stamp was the 3-cent Mothers Day stamp of 1934. His sketch was subjected to some revision, but the designers were careful to accept his word-

ing "In Memory and in honor of the Mothers of America." and the horizontal format. In the lower right corner he inscribed "For Jim Farley—The "Original Design" of the Mothers Day Stamp by Franklin D. Roosevelt." In the lower left were the date "2/16/34" and "F.D.R." This design thus was created (and dated) prior to the May 2, 1934 issuance date.

Another indication of Roosevelt's awareness of stamp doings was experienced in 1935 when he approved the photographic model of the Connecticut Tercentary stamp (O.K. F.D. R.) and appended "How about a rich lilac." The official announcement by the Post Office stated of this stamp: "It is printed in rich lilac."

Even earlier, when asked his opinion as to the subject for the Connecticut stamp, he sent a memorandum (March 20, 1935) to Postmaster General Farley: "In regards to this Connecticut stamp design why not put it up to the two Senators and to the Congressmen? My thought is in favor of the Charter Oak."



His next direct interest, of record, came in 1936 when he sketched out his thoughts as to the design for a Susan B. Anthony commemorative. This sketch was very carefully followed in size, layout and wording. He proposed an oval border in solid color, and "Suffrage for Women" which appear on the stamp. This pencil sketch, on lined paper, bears the identifying "Drawn by 7/9/36 FDR" in the lower left.

A year later, on White House paper he suggested that the Virginia Dare commemorative be a square stamp, with a 5-cents value, printed in baby blue. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing utilized a center vignette differing from Roosevelt's crude sketch, but this undoubtedly had his approval. The Bureau also compromised a bit

by placing the value "5 cents" down the right side only, but it carefully included the wording "In Memory of Virginia Dare, Born Roanoke 1587." Printing was in a light blue which could be termed baby blue.

Next came the "Eagle" airmail (6 cents) of 1938. The Roosevelt sketch, again on lined paper, included an eagle, "U. S. Postage," "Airmail" and the value "6¢" in the lower corners. The accepted design followed all of these points, and also the colors, in accordance with the President's notation to the right "red border, blue eagle, white background." To the lower right he wrote "Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fecit."

The last "original sketch" loaned by James A. Farley to the Smithsonian Institution concerned the 50th Anniversary of Statehood stamp of 1939. President Roosevelt proposed a vertical row showing the four States (Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota), with the names of the states directly beneath, and under state names the dates of admission to the Union. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing took a map and highlighted the four states involved. This sketch was initiated "FDR fecit 1939" at the right, and someone else added the notation "5/4/39 Design Drawn by FDR."

It is noted that the late President Roosevelt presented three original drawings for the 1, 2 and 3-cent Defense stamps of 1940 to "a representative of the Post Office Department." This official's identity is not a matter of public record, but it obviously was not James A. Farley.

It is of more than passing interest to note that no instances of "original" sketches were included in sales of the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harold L. Ickes (Secretary of Interior under President Roosevelt) collections.

Instances of the former President's interest in stamps are too manifold to permit recounting. Briefly, though, records indicate that he insisted on adding the Finns to the "Landing of the Swedes and Finns" commemorative of 1938; that he suggested the use of Botticelli's allegorical painting on the Pan American Union commemorative of 1940, and that he made several changes in that group of stamps released the same year.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A President's Hobby by Lena Shawen (1949) H. L. Lindquist Publications.

Postage Stamps of the United States, 1847-1955. U. S. Post Office Department.



Sketch created by President Franklin Roosevelt for the stamp shown.

Aside: Bro. Roosevelt approved this stamp after a committee of some thirty ladies virtually demanded the stamp in a meeting with Clinton B. Eilenberger, Third Assistant Postmaster General. Roosevelt's exact words to Eilenberger were: "By all means authorize the stamp immediately before those ardent ladies reach the White House." With this win under their belts, the ladies pushed harder for philatelic females, and certainly got their way. The pressure, however, eventually exasperated the President. In a reply to Molly Dewson, a stern womens' right advo-



A great photograph of Bro. Roosevelt from our Club archives. He was a Freemason and a member of our Club. While President he received our petition for a George Washington inauguration stamp. The stamp was approved and designed by Alvin R. Meissner. It is shown on the right. We believe Meissner was also a Freemason.

cate, Roosevelt stated: “You girls have got to realize that this chiseling business on your part must stop somewhere. I have put more girls’ faces on postage stamps in he last seven years than all my thirty-one predecessors put together.” Ed.

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Little tribute on the next page.





Bro. Franklin Delano Roosevelt

