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ASTRO SPACE STAMP SOCIETY

The Most Famous Space Stamp—Ever ? Umberto Cavallaro with Jeff Dugdale



The above stamp designed by Paul Calle is arguably the best known space commemorative stamp ever.

The stamp is unique in many ways.

Firstly it was one of the last to be issued by the old U.S. Post Office Department before it was replaced by the U.S. Postal Service, an independent government agency.

Secondly, it was at the time the largest postage stamp ever issued by the United States, 50 percent larger than conventional U.S. commemoratives stamps. As Paul recalled in his book, the post office wanted “A truly spectacular commemorative issue” and this “jumbo” format was the result.

But mainly it is unique because “The master die, from which all subsequent plates were made and stamps printed, was carried to the surface of the Moon by the Apollo 11 crew, and the “Moon Letter” with its die proof was cancelled by the astronauts on their way back to Earth after the landing on the Moon”. (The Apollo 11 moon walkers, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin forgot to do that whilst in their spacecraft on the Moon’s surface, having higher priorities, it seems!)

After obtaining the approval of President Nixon, production of the design and die were carried out in secrecy by officials of the Post Office, and the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, just as had been done with the Project Mercury commemorative of 1962 (as shown).



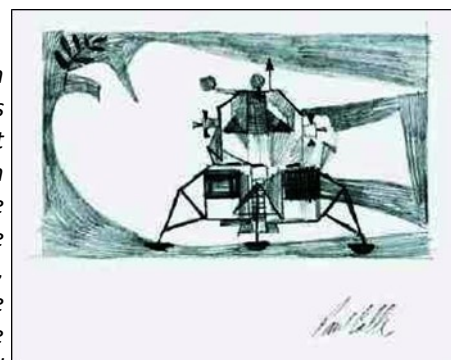
“The assignment” – recalled Paul – “came as an outgrowth of a series of assignments executed for the NASA Fine Art Program. Proceeding in complete secrecy, the Postmaster General Mr Winton M. Blount advised Stevan Dohanos chairman of the Postmaster’s General Citizens Stamp



Advisory Committee, of the plan to issue a commemorative stamp, and I was recommended for the assignment on the basis of my previously assigned Twin Space stamps of 1967. (Shown below left)

The fact that I was also working for a NASA project in connection with Apollo 11 mission afforded me easy access to material and key personnel at NASA who could help with technical problems”.

As he had already done with the Gemini twin stamps. Paul started by drawing a series of pencil sketches attempting different solutions.



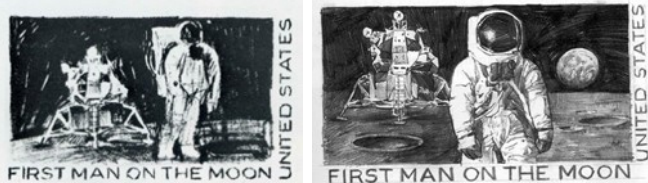
“My initial rough thinking sketches explored the concept of a design incorporating the Moon, Earth and the lunar landing module, and a Peace Dove representing the mission objectives and the concept of “We came in Peace for all Mankind”.

The more realistic representation of the astronaut on the Moon was soon preferred and the idea of the Dove was left aside.

The idea developed then in a set of vertical sketches representing the Lunar Module (LM): see below.

At the beginning the entirety of the LM was represented but this was progressively reduced to the ladder from which the figure was descending. Following the suggestion of the Citizens’ Committee, the attention focused on the astronaut, leaving the technology in the background.





The "First Man on the Moon" stamp artistically recreates the moment that Neil Armstrong placed his foot onto the surface of the Moon for the first time. To recall the home of the human visitor the Earth, rising over the Lunar surface – taken from a photograph made during the Apollo 8 missions and furnished by NASA – is put in the stamp with considerable artistic license : the Earth could not have been seen in that configuration at that landing site, at that time .

The initial idea was to issue a 6¢ stamp, covering the basic postal rate required at the time for the "first class", i.e. for shipping of a normal letter within US. It was only at the last minute that it was decided to issue it as a 10 ¢ airmail stamp. As federal law forbids the use of a living person's picture on U.S. postage, Post Office was careful to describe the subject simply as "a spaceman" in its press releases, and the individual on the stamp is completely hidden by a space suit, claiming that the picture was symbolic, not literal: it wasn't a tribute to a person, but rather to the concept of the "First Man on the Moon".

The painting was delivered to the *Bureau of Engraving and Printing* for the preparation of the master die. Robert J. Jones was the modeller and the engraving was done by Edward R. Felver (vignette) and Albert Saavedra (lettering) .

To preserve secrecy there was no "paperwork" involved. Rather than using messengers to carry materials between the Post Office Department and the Bureau, official staff workers served as couriers. Those who didn't need to know about the stamp weren't brought into the loop.

It wasn't until a week before the scheduled launch of Apollo 11 that the plan was officially disclosed, by announcing "Apollo 11 will mark America's first mail run to the Moon".

The master die was then sent to Cape Kennedy (as Cape Canaveral was known for a few years) and started its long trip to the Moon, together with the "Moon Letter" franked with the imperforated black & white die proof of the stamp.

After its return from the Moon, the die was especially



The cover above, one of a kind, has been signed by Paul Calle designer of the "First Man on the Moon" stamp , and by the employees of the US Bureau of Engraving who secretly worked at the implementation of the project: the modeller Robert Jones, the letter engraver Albert Saavedra and the picture engraver Edward R. Felver. The "Fleetwood" cover is known in two versions: the one below (the rarest) refers a different version of the historical statement of Armstrong "One Small step for a Man". By scrutinising the recording of Armstrong's words, it was definitely decided that the accurate version of what he actually said is "One Small step for Man" (as represented in the cover above)



processed for accelerated decontamination, and sent in a special plane to Washington, where it was hurried to the office of Postmaster General Blount.

On July 31, Blount provided press photographers with a quick look at the die, then sent it to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, where the process of preparing the plates for stamp production began promptly.

The stamp was printed by a combination of offset photolithography and recess engraving.

Colours – yellow and light blue, and then red and dark blue – were applied in two passes through the two-colour Harris offset press. Then in a single pass through a Giori press were added black for the picture, blue for the bottom inscription "FIRST MAN ON THE MOON," and red for the vertical "UNITED STATES" inscription at the right.

Due to its size, the stamp was produced in sheets of 32 instead of the usual 50 items.

A total of 152,264,000 stamps were printed and distributed altogether .



Astronauts (l-r) Collins, Armstrong and Aldrin with Postmaster General Blount at the unveiling ceremony. Showing on Antigua & Barbuda 1994 using © NASA 69HC1119 photograph.

The stamp was issued in Washington on September 9, 1969, in conjunction with the National Postal Forum participated by business executives and Post Office officials, with the three Apollo 11 astronauts attending the event.

The special postmark had the "September 9 Washington, D.C". date stamp and also a replica of the July 20 "MOON LANDING USA" date stamp that the astronauts had applied to the Moon letter.

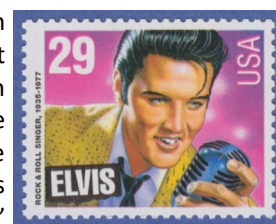
Foreseeing a great interest among First Day Cover collectors, U.S. Post Office Department ordered in advance 25 postmarking devices, in order to proceed in parallel.

But the success of this stamp exceeded every expectation and triggered off an unprecedentedly high demand.

On August 25, in its press-release, U.S, Post Office Department declared that the 10¢ stamp was inspiring great interest worldwide. During the three weeks after the issue, Post Office received 500 thousand requests for FDCs which continued growing by 60-80 thousand per day, which represented an unprecedented high demand for a U.S. stamp. The requests were especially heavy from Australia, Great Britain, France

and Belgium, but altogether they arrived from more than 100 countries.

8,743,070 FDCs were postmarked. An "astronomical" figure (in the Post Office's word). By comparison, even the Elvis Presley commemorative stamp of January 8, 1993, one of the most phenomenally popular stamps ever printed, received "only" 4,451,718 fdc requests.



The first-day processing crew of 40 was quickly expanded to 100 employees but, even so, it took five months to complete the task.

Due to the new technology used, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing had some problems with registration on the stamps, and numerous copies have been found with noticeable shifts in the offset colours. Not all were identified and destroyed in time. Some escaped and reached the market.



One major error variety of the stamp was first found in the El Paso, Texas in October 1969, where, one month after the release, a sheet arrived with some specimens missing the offset red colour, which

consists of the flag stripes on the astronaut's shoulder patch, and the series of light red dots over the yellow portions of the lunar module and the astronaut's face plate. Because of this extraordinary technical error, no American flag appears on the shoulder of the astronaut. This variety was immediately welcomed as the "Unknown astronaut", the symbol for mankind conquering the space without flags.

The Apollo 11 mission has been covered and exploited by philatelic agencies with each significant anniversary producing vast tranches of new stamps. After Jesus Christ

"In the evolution of the design, it quickly became obvious that the first step on the Moon was the most dramatic moment, and with that final sketch we knew we had our design!"

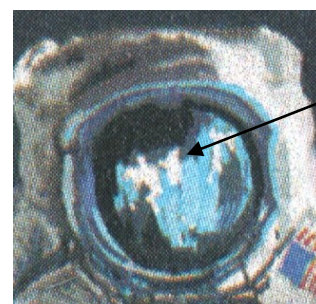
At the end it was decided to come back to the horizontal format and the colour painting we all know was finalised.



and Yuri Gagarin, but before this year's issues for the 50th anniversary, Neil Armstrong is the third most philatelically celebrated human in history with to date roughly 540 individual stamps referencing him. By the end of the year he will certainly have moved up to number two position!

(Astonishingly because there was only one still camera built into the chest of Armstrong's space suit, there are no formal pictures of him on the Moon. He can be seen reflected in Aldrin's visor, - as in Mongolia 1994— but that's all there is).

Umberto Cavallaro is editor of the quarterly Italian astrophilatelic journal *AdAstra* and author of several books including most recently "The Race to the Moon" (Springer/Praxis 2018



A version of this article by Umberto and your Editor will appear in a Summer edition of *STAMP Magazine*

Apollo 11 Recovery by Nik Steggall

Upon recovery from the Apollo Command Module, the astronauts were put in biological isolation garments—blue flight suits which were worn from the recovery helicopter when they stepped onboard the recovery ship the *U.S.S. Hornet* on their way to the Mobile Quarantine Facility (MQF). Interestingly when they stepped out of the helicopter they were not wearing the patches, as illustrated. Buzz Aldrin later said that the crew gave these patches to the helicopter's crew as a way of saying thank you.



Onboard the recovery ship, the astronauts were greeted by US President Nixon. With the astronauts inside the MQF and the President outside they spoke through a window in view of the cameras. The astronauts were also able to talk to their wives through the window.



The journey back onboard ship took two days and in all the crew spent 21 days inside the MQF. After the Apollo 14 mission this quarantine period was dropped when it was decided that there was no further danger from the Moon.



NASA's preventative medicine division had quarantine officers that looked after the crew and also at the lunar receiving laboratory. These officers carried the lunar rocks from Apollo 11 in their containment boxes into the Lunar Lab quarantine section and sported the patch left.



The astronauts to talk to the President and to their wives on Yemen Kingdom 1969

