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North America's "Most Masonic" Postage Stamps

The Blue Friar Lecture of 1995

by Christopher L. Murphy

Masonic Philately, or the collecting of postage stamps that may be associated with the Masonic Order, goes back to the early 1930's. Since that time, hundreds of United States and Canadian stamps have been identified as having Masonic connections.

For convenience, these Masonic stamps, as it were, are classified as follows:

- CLASS 1. Stamps issued for a Masonic purpose
- CLASS 2. Stamps showing a person who was (or is) a Freemason
- CLASS 3. Stamps showing objects directly connected with a Freemason
- CLASS 4. Stamps commemorating events in which a Freemason played a major role
- CLASS 5. Stamps designed by a Freemason
- CLASS 6. Stamps inadvertently showing Masonic symbols

Unfortunately, neither the United States nor Canada has



issued a Class 1 Masonic stamp. Many other countries, however, have issued them, as shown by the adjacent Philippine example. And these stamps are highly prized by Masonic collectors.

Masonic collectors in North America, therefore, who wish to specialize on their own countries' stamps, must be content with stamps that fall into Classes 2 to 6. Nevertheless, this condition makes one look harder for applicable stamps and some highly

unusual Masonic connections have surfaced. From my studies, there are nine stamps that top the list.

1. A Newfoundland stamp issued in 1857 is designed after a Royal Arch Masonic apron. The apron belonged to Brother Thomas Dundas, the second Earl of Zetland, who was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England from 1844 to 1870.



are the King James version so every North American lodge has this brother's name within its walls.

3. A United States stamp issued in 1939 shows the inauguration of Brother George Washington as first president of the United States. Brother



Washington is taking his oath on a Masonic Bible which belongs to St. John's Lodge No. 1, New York City. How this Bible found its way to the inauguration has become a matter for romantic speculation. There is no question, however, that it was the Bible used. The stamp itself, was petitioned by the Masonic Stamp Club of New York in 1938. At that time Brother Franklin D. Roosevelt was president of the United States and also a Masonic Stamp Club member.



4. A United States stamp issued in 1928 shows Brother George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. The Masonic association with this act is very strong as all Freemasons realize. The stamp design was



selected by Brother Roger S. Regar who was with the post office at that time and who later served as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia.

5. Canada's first postage stamp issued in 1851 was designed by



Sandford Fleming. The stamp shows a rising sun in the background which has a sun face, a well known Masonic symbol.

6. A United States stamp issued in 1932 showing Brother George Washington was designed from a pastel portrait of Washington wearing Masonic Royal Arch regalia. The portrait, which belongs to Alexandria Lodge in



Virginia, was created from life by W. Williams. The stamp designers omitted the regalia in the stamp design. Nevertheless, the United States Post Office acknowledges the source of the design.

7. A United States stamp issued in 1985 shows Brother Frederick Auguste Bartholdi with his creation, the Statue of Liberty, in the background. This stamp is unusual because it cuts across two Masonic stamp classifications.

8. A United States stamp issued in 1974 shows Brother Harry S. Truman, 33rd president of the United States. Brother Truman is the only Mason shown on a North American stamp who was a Knight Templar, 33rd Degree A.A.S.R. Mason and a past grand master.



9. The United States first postage stamp, issued in 1847 shows Brother Benjamin Franklin who did more for Freemasonry in America than any other individual. It is unlikely the brethren who started Masonic philately realized

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just how many famous Freemasons there were in North America, let alone how



deeply Masonic tradition and ideals are etched into our history. Masonic philatelist in both the United States and Canada continue to uncover little "stamp secrets," which I

am certain will soon swell the list of the "Most Masonic" and provide us with yet further insights into our past.

ON THE COVER

The collage of colorful postage stamps on our cover is a sampling of the many United States and Canadian postage stamps which may be connected with the Masonic Order. Among those stamps illustrated are what many Masonic philatelists would consider the "most Masonic" stamps issued by these countries. These particular stamps are discussed in an article by Christopher L. Murphy featured in this month's issue. The hobby of collecting postage stamps which may be related to Freemasonry is called *Masonic Philately*.



Chris Murphy (center) with Bro. Allen E. Roberts (left) and Bro. Dr. Wallace McLeod (right) at the Society of Blue Friars Consistory in Washington, DC, February 1995. The Society's website is at <<http://www.societyofbluefriars.org/>>.

Aside: Later research revealed that the Newfoundland apron stamp (No. 1) was not designed after a Masonic apron, but definitely from Masonic regalia. The symbols shown on the stamp are not strictly Masonic symbols, but were used for Masonic ornamentation. Also, Canada's first stamp (No. 5) was designed by Sir Sandford Fleming before he became a Freemason. Nevertheless, it does appear that there was considerable Masonic involvement in the stamp design, and thus the sun face.

Reference: *The Philalethes* magazine, April 1995.