

Signatures on Stamps

FIRST DAY COVERS (FDCs) ARE delightful postal mementos commemorating the official first day of issue of a new postage stamp. The stamp is placed on a letter-sized, privately printed envelope that commemorates the subject of the stamp being issued, and then the stamp and cover receive a special *FIRST DAY OF ISSUE* cancellation.

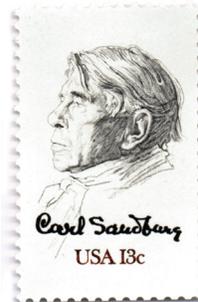
Signed FDCs are a fascinating subcategory of autograph collecting. Enterprising collectors purchase FDCs and then get the signatures of one or more people relevant to the new stamp. Thus, Hispanic labor leader Cesar Chavez signing a FDC bearing the 1984 stamp that honors Hispanic Americans is appropriate, as are the signatures of World War II generals on a FDC bearing the 1945 “Little White House” Franklin D. Roosevelt stamp. (Signatures on FDCs not directly relevant to the stamp are a pet peeve among experienced FDC collectors—Mother Teresa signing a FDC honoring Indiana statehood, for instance—but that’s another article.) Unsigned FDCs are cheap and can often be purchased in large quantities. The possibilities for collection themes are as endless as the collector’s imagination.

In 1977 renowned antiquarian bookseller Leona Rostenberg coined the term “bibliately” to describe the collecting of postage stamps featuring not only anything relating to books, printing and libraries, but also manuscripts, calligraphy, alphabets, authors and more—an eclectic hodgepodge that blurred the term she’d just devised. In 1982 George Eberhart coined the more pronounceable “bibliophilately” and defined it as the study of books and libraries on postage stamps.

But let’s consider a sub-subcategory of signed First Day Cover collecting—one that no clever term can describe: collecting signed FDCs bearing stamps featuring signatures or handwriting as an integral part of their design. The autograph collector who handles



Stamps bearing the imprint of the featured subject’s signature make a great subcategory to collecting stamps. Try getting them signed to create another collection.



enough stamps or rifles through pictorial literature on postage stamps quickly notices that a tiny percentage of stamps depict signatures. This sub-subcategory could logically be enlarged to include stamps depicting famous documents (the Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, etc.) or persons in the act of writing and writing implements (quill pens and inkwells, etc.). Sometimes it’s the cachet (the privately printed engravings that elaborate the stamp’s topic) that shows a signature, and not the new stamp.

One prime example is the 1978 Carl Sandburg centennial 13-cent stamp, featuring artist William Smith’s dramatic profile portrait of Sandburg, beneath which appears the poet’s distinctive script. It would be the perfect item for the sole surviving Sandburg daughter, Helga, or any poet to sign.

Scouring reference works such as *The World in Stamps* will suggest themes too

numerous to exploit within this sub-subcategory. Categories might range from the obvious (getting a composer to pen a bar of music and sign a FDC bearing a stamp featuring a composer’s signature), to the more creative (getting actors who’ve portrayed Abraham Lincoln such as Martin Sheen, Hal Holbrook, F. Murray Abraham, Sam Waterston and Kris Kristofferson to sign a FDC showing Lincoln’s signature).

Picture the imaginative impact such a gathering of signed FDCs would have to the first-time viewer. It’s all about finding and showing the connectedness between the stamp and its design and the original autograph element. Such is the wonderful versatility of our hobby. 

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