

## OKLAHOMA'S TWO COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

*By George H. Shirk*

Although 1948 saw the Post Office Department issue more than the usual number of special commemorative stamps, Oklahoma was especially favored in that of the 29 special issues two were in honor of Oklahoma subjects. In addition, an Oklahoma city was designated in each instance as the point where the stamp would be first placed on sale.<sup>1</sup>

It is customary in philatelic circles that a special ceremony be held in connection with the first day of use of a new commemorative stamp. One or more post offices, usually post offices related to the event being commemorated or the subject matter of the stamp, are designated as the office where the issue will first be placed on sale.

Only once before had Oklahoma been so honored. In 1922 the Post Office Department issued a new set of regular stamps to replace the issue that had been current, with modifications, since 1908. The 14¢ denomination in this series featured an Indian as its center design. This stamp was first placed on sale at Muskogee on May 1, 1923. Twenty-five years later Oklahoma was again in the philatelic spotlight with its two commemorative issues, the Indian Centennial Commemorative, and the stamp honoring the late Will Rogers.

### INDIAN CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATIVE

Muskogee had been selected as the location for the 16th annual convention of the Oklahoma Philatelic Society; and the committee in charge, working with Muskogee citizens, was anxious to have the Society's annual convention meet in conjunction with a proposed Indian celebration to be held in October. The dates for the Philatelic Society's convention were announced as October 15th to 17th, intended to follow by one day the Indian celebration.

The committees in charge of the two events worked in close conjunction, and it was at once realized that the period of history intended to be honored by the Indian Centennial celebration could be best commemorated on a nation wide basis by a special stamp. The Oklahoma Philatelic Society was enthusiastic, and a joint committee

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headed by Mr. C. N. A. DeBajligethy was appointed to develop the project.<sup>2</sup>

Plans were laid before the Honorable Elmer Thomas, U. S. Senator from Oklahoma, and the Honorable W. G. Stigler, Representative from the Second Congressional District. Representative Stigler first made an effort to interest the Post Office Department in issuing on its own volition a stamp honoring the event. He was advised that the commemorative stamp program for the year was such that further issues could not be considered.

Representative Stigler then introduced, on February 19, House Joint Resolution 329. This was followed by a similar resolution, S.J.R. 189, introduced in the Senate by Senator Thomas. This resolution read:

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, to commemorate the centennial celebration of the Trail of Tears, the Postmaster General is hereby authorized and directed to issue a special postage stamp bearing the likeness of the great seals of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians in Oklahoma: Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole. Such stamp shall be issued in the denomination of 3 cents and for such a period, beginning October 15, 1948, as he may determine. Such special stamp shall be placed on sale in Muskogee, Oklahoma, one day before it is made available to the public elsewhere."

The Senate Resolution received action prior to the one introduced by Mr. Stigler and passed the Senate on March 15, 1948. In view of the favorable action by the Senate on S.J.R. 189 Mr. Stigler, in order to expedite matters, asked the House to substitute the Senate measure for that of his own, which was done.

The resolution was approved by the President on May 4, 1948, and became *Public Law 515* of the 80th Congress.

On May 5, 1948, the Post Office Department announced, along with other matters, that the stamp would be issued as instructed by the legislation. A further announcement on September 13th described the stamp and made known the place and date of its first day sale.

R. L. Miller, designer for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, prepared four models. These were submitted informally to Senator Thomas, who in turn passed them on to the Muskogee Centennial Committee with the request that a selection be made. The chosen design was submitted to the Post Office Department on July 14, 1948, and on July 15 it was approved by V. C. Burke, Acting Postmaster General.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to Mr. DeBajligethy, General Centennial Chairman, the Indian Centennial Board was composed of the following members: Harry Ogden, President; S. F. Ditmore, Vice-President; Marie Hayes, Secretary; Ross Susman, Treasurer; L. W. Duncan, E. B. Maytubby, Dr. N. K. Leathers, Tom Tarpley, Carl Krepper, Earl Boyd Pierce, and Charlie Cobb, Directors.

The central design of the stamp is an outline map of the State of Oklahoma on which, in white Gothic, are the words: "Indian Centennial Cherokee Chickasaw Choctaw Muscogee Seminole". To the left arranged from top to bottom are the seals of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Tribes, and on the right in the same order are the seals of the Muskogee and Seminole. Between these two groups of seals and below the State border is the wording "The Five Civilized Indian Tribes of Oklahoma, 1848-1948". Just below is a ribbon on which appears "United States Postage" in white Gothic. In the lower right corner, in white modified Roman, is the denomination "3¢".

Photographs of the five seals were taken from available documents bearing original impressions and were submitted to the Bureau by the Post Office Department.<sup>3</sup> The map of Oklahoma was taken from the March, 1941, issue of the National Geographic Magazine. The sash appearing as a background was taken from a photograph of a typical Indian sash submitted by the National Museum.

Engraving was done by two members of the staff of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The vignette and seals were executed by C. A. Brooks, and Axel W. Christensen did the numerals and lettering. The proof drawn from the completed die was approved September 9 by Jesse M. Donaldson, Postmaster General.

On September 14, 1948, a printing order for 50,000,000 copies was placed with the Bureau. A total of four printing plates of 200 subjects each (divided into 4 post office panes of 50 stamps each) were prepared for use on the rotary presses. The first pair of plates, numbers 23920 and 23921 were sent to press September 27 and the remaining pair, plates numbered 23922 and 23923, were first

<sup>3</sup>The old die of the Cherokee Seal from which the impression for the commemorative stamp was taken shows two discrepancies when compared with the description of the Seal given in the text of the original law approved on December 11, 1869, by Lewis Downing, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. The original manuscript of this law is now on exhibit in the Museum of the Oklahoma Historical Society, a crude drawing of the Seal on a separate slip of paper having been attached to the original manuscript page after the law was written. This law giving the legal description of the Seal is also found in *Laws of the Cherokee Nation* (Tahlequah; Cherokee Nation. National Press.—Edwin Archer, Printer, 1870), "An Act to Procure a National Seal," pp. 83-84. The two discrepancies are: (1) the letters "Sep." for the abbreviation "Sept."; (2) in the Sequoyah type for the two words signifying "Cherokee Nation," the fourth character is "yi" instead of the character "hi" given in the original law. The syllable "yi" used as a suffix indicates the locative designating simply "a place." The syllable "hi" appearing as a suffix also indicates the locative but in the sense of a collective plural, in this instance apparently referring to the Cherokee people as a whole or as a nation. The Sequoyah characters on the old die when rendered in their corresponding English syllables are "Tsa-la-gi-yi A-ye-li." The Sequoyah characters given for the Seal in the original law when rendered in their corresponding English syllables are "Tsa-la-gi-hi A-ye-li." For further reference to the history of the Cherokee Seal, see Muriel H. Wright, "Official Seals of the Five Civilized Tribes," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (December, 1940), pp. 363-66.—Ed.

used on October 4, 1948. The first delivery of the new stamps to the Muskogee postmaster was made October 4.

In honor of the first day of issue ceremonies were held on the steps of the Muskogee postoffice. Harold Cartwright, postmaster, presented souvenir albums containing a sheet of the Centennial stamps to each of the Five Tribes.

J. M. Bell, Philatelic Agent, Washington, D. C. represented the Postmaster General, and was in charge of the first day sale of the stamp and cancellation of outgoing mail with the special "First Day of Issue" cancellation. Stamp collectors and others interested in the new stamp were invited to send in to the Muskogee postmaster self addressed envelopes in quantities not to exceed ten, for the affixing of the stamp and cancelling with the first day cancellation. Requests were received from all over the United States, and on the day of issue a number of philatelic specialists and out of state dealers arrived with thousands of specially designed envelopes for use in mailing. A total of 1,120,000 stamps were sold at Muskogee on the first day of issue, and 459,528 pieces of mail were dispatched bearing the first day cancellation.

#### WILL ROGERS COMMEMORATIVE

Shortly after his death on August 15, 1935, requests began to pour into the Postmaster General for a special commemorative stamp honoring Will Rogers. The Oklahoma Philatelic Society, along with local stamp clubs in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and other groups, adopted formal resolutions petitioning the Post Office Department for such an issue. On June 28, 1941, a special cachet sponsored by the Oklahoma City Stamp Club in honor of the dedication of Will Rogers Field was applied to outgoing Oklahoma City air mail.

Passage of time only increased the demand, and on July 10, 1947, Honorable W. G. Stigler, Representative from the Second District, introduced in the House of Representatives Joint Resolution 235, directing the Postmaster General to issue on 4 November 1947, the 68th anniversary of Will Roger's birth, a special stamp honoring the great American.

The resolution did not reach final action, but it served its purpose in again impressing upon the Post Office Department the need for this commemorative. The Postmaster General, on February 10, 1948, announced the program for the 1948 commemoratives, and the Will Rogers stamp was included. On March 16, 1948, Postmaster General Jesse M. Donaldson announced that the stamp would be issued on Will Rogers' birthday, November 4, 1848, at Claremore.

Charles R. Chickering, designer for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, prepared three models. The center portrait was from a photograph furnished the Post Office Department by the Washing-

ton Star. J. Waldo Fawcett, in his Washington Star philatelic column of January 31, 1949, states that "the portrait of Will Rogers used in producing his commemorative was made by an unknown Hollywood photographer, it showed the famous cowboy philosopher with a stray lock of hair hanging over his forehead—a detail eliminated by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing artist."

The three designs were submitted on May 26 to the Post Office Department, and on the same day selection was made and the selected model was approved for the design of the stamp by Joseph J. Lawler, Acting Postmaster General.

The central design of the stamp is a portrait of Will Rogers, above the wording "I Never Met A Man I Didn't Like"—Will Rogers, in dark Gothic. Above the portrait is the denomination "3 cents" in white Gothic. The central design is framed on the left and right by narrow draperies. Lettering in shaded Gothic "United States Postage" on a dark background panel completes the lower border.

Engraving was done by two members of the staff of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. Matthew D. Fenton did the portrait and side draperies, and Axel W. Christensen did the outline frame, lettering, and numerals. The die proof was approved by the Postmaster General on October 1, 1948.

A printing order for 60,000,000 copies was placed October 11, 1948, and four plates, each with 280 subjects (4 post office panes of 70 stamps each), were prepared for use on the rotary presses of the Bureau. The first pair of plates, numbers 23943 and 23944, went to press October 20, 1948; and the remaining pair, 23945 and 23946, were placed in use on the press run of October 25. The first delivery of the new stamps was made to the Claremore postmaster on October 25.

The Claremore ceremonies incident to the first day of the sale of the new stamp opened at 10:30 A.M. on November 4, 1948, with a memorial service at the Tomb of Will Rogers. This was followed by a parade and addresses by Governor Roy J. Turner and the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, Walter J. Meyers. In a special ceremony Third Street in Claremore was renamed Will Rogers Boulevard. The celebration closed with a dance at the Armory sponsored by the Will Rogers Round-up Club.

On behalf of the Postmaster General, Mr. Meyers presented souvenir albums, each containing a sheet of the stamps autographed by the Postmaster General, to Governor Turner, the Will Rogers Memorial and the Claremore Chamber of Commerce. Like albums have been presented to the two sons and the daughter of Will Rogers, who were not present at the ceremony.

Herbert S. Chamberlin, Assistant Superintendent, Division of Stamps, Post Office Department, was in Claremore to supervise the first day cancellation. Philatelists and others interested were given the privilege of sending to the Claremore postmaster prepared envelopes, not to exceed ten in number, so as to have the special stamp affixed and postmarked on the first day of sale. Envelopes and requests for "first day covers" poured in from all over the United States, and on the first day of sale 1,012,460 stamps were sold at Claremore. A total of 450,350 envelopes bearing the special "First Day of Issue" cancellation were dispatched. In addition to the official first day cancellation, a number of collectors, after purchasing the stamps in Claremore, drove to Oologah, the birthplace of Will Rogers, and secured unofficial first day postmarks from there.