

Philately and the Seventh-day Adventists

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Many countries have featured aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) on their postage stamps. These aspects include humanitarian efforts, church buildings, significant church gatherings, and notable individuals.

First Featured

The Malagasy Republic (now Madagascar) was the first country to depict the SDA Church on a postage stamp. The twin-towered façade and entrance to the church at Tamatave (now Taomasina) was featured as an example of attractive architecture. It was the three franc denomination in a set of three stamps, issued on February 20, 1967, the others depicting a mosque and a Roman Catholic cathedral. The SDA church itself seated up to three hundred worshipers and was dedicated in 1958.¹

Norfolk Island Stamps

In 1891 the schooner "Pitcairn" made its first visit to Norfolk Island, bringing fellow Pitcairners to serve as missionaries. A community of SDA believers was established and has continued as a significant faith group on the island. In 1968 the postal service issued a 20cent stamp depicting the "Pitcairn." Later, in 1981, a twenty-four cent Christmas stamp was issued, showing the island's SDA church. The words "Seventh Day Adventist Church" were included in the design, a practice rarely followed by Pacific Island nations.²

Western Samoan Stamps

From 1896 through 1906 the SDA Church conducted a mission sanatorium in Apia. This institution was featured on a two cent stamp in 1970, one of four stamps to highlight early Christian missions in Western Samoa.³

In 1979 Western Samoa issued a Christmas miniature sheet depicting four churches. In the monotone surround of the sheet more churches were featured, including an SDA church. Later, in 2007, a pane of twelve stamps was

issued that depicted various church buildings in Western Samoa, one of them showing the SDA Church at Saoluaafata on Upolu Island.⁴

Pitcairn Island Stamps

Postal services on Pitcairn Island were conducted by SDA church members. Many different aspects of SDA activities appear on the stamp designs. In 1958 a four pence stamp showed the elementary church school and teacher's home. The same school appeared on an 18-cent stamp in 1972.⁵

In 1970 the Loma Linda University Stamp Club organized the production of two special envelopes to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the maiden voyage of the "Pitcairn."⁶

The ship appeared in 1975 on a 10-cent stamp in a set of four, the designs duplicated in a miniature sheet issued at the same time.⁷

The SDA Church on the island was featured in 1977 on a 35-cent stamp and a one-cent stamp in the same set depicting the free-standing island bell used to herald church services.

Four stamps were issued in 1986 to commemorate the centenary of the SDA mission on Pitcairn Island. The top portion of the designs showed four successive SDA church buildings on the island. The lower portions depicted John Tay, the first SDA missionary to arrive on the island, the "Pitcairn," a baptism conducted in the bay, and church members singing hymns from their longboat as they farewelled a passing ship.

Prominent Pitcairners appeared on a set of four stamps in 1994, among them church leader James Russell McCoy. He was featured again in 2002. The first amateur radio station operator, Andrew Young, was depicted on a 1996 stamp. In 1997 a set of four stamps honored the Island Health Center conducted by SDAs. In the same year the Christmas set of four stamps once again carried the church bell and members walking to the church services.

In 2002 a pane of five stamps showed SDA women weaving traditional artefacts. Parkin Christian was honored in 2011 on a set of four stamps showing him as a navigator, an ambassador, a magistrate, and a church elder. Roy Clark, island postmaster, school teacher, church elder, and historian was featured with his wife in 2012 on a set of four stamps. Lily Warren, awarded the British Empire Medal, was depicted on a set of five stamps in 2013. Another awarded the BEM, Ben Christian, appeared on a set of five stamps in 2015. The SDA Church and the church bell appeared once again in 2016 on a two dollar stamp.⁸

Other Countries

Malawi issued a series of four Christmas stamps in 1978, one of which featured the SDA church on the renowned Malamulo Mission Station, a campus that included educational, hospital, and leprosarium facilities.⁹

Tonga, in 1979, included the Nuku'alofa SDA Church on a 22 seneti stamp and two years later featured an SDA camp meeting on a 47 seneti Christmas stamp.¹⁰

The SDA church in Papua New Guinea is a vibrant faith community. The mountainous nature of the country prompted all mission groups to invest in aviation in order to reach remote villages. The SDA mission obtained their first aircraft in 1964. In 1981 Papua New Guinea issued five stamps depicting mission aircraft, recognizing the vital role they played in spreading the gospel message. One of those stamps featured an SDA aircraft. A brochure that was issued in conjunction with the stamps explained that the SDA planes carried the insignia of the Three Angels of Revelation 14.¹¹

Brazil recognized the fiftieth anniversary of the launching of the SDA medical mission boat, Luzeiro , that plied villages along the Amazon River. The Brazilian Postal and Telegraph Service manufactured a special postmark and applied it to letters during the week of July 23 through 29, 1981.¹²

In 1982 the Bahamas issued a set of six Christmas stamps depicting churches. The 12-cent stamp showed the Centreville SDA Church in Nassau. It was the first SDA church on the archipelago, organized in 1911. Later, in 2009, another postage stamp featured Grant's Town SDA Church on New Providence Island.¹³

The United States Postal Service honored Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Bomfree) in February 1986 with a stamp in the Black History series. She was a devout Christian who often united in the temperance cause with SDA speakers at public gatherings. She was also a strong advocate for women's rights and the abolition of slavery. Her last years were spent among SDAs in Battle Creek, Michigan.¹⁴

On November 11, 2013, the United States Postal Service issued a pane of stamps commemorating the 464 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients. On the back were listed the names of the men, among them the SDA conscientious objector and army medic, Desmond Doss. He had previously been awarded the Bronze Star for his heroism in the Battle for Guam and another Bronze Star for the Battle for Leyte, Philippine Islands.¹⁵

The Cook Islands issued a block of four stamps in 1990, each depicting the major religious faiths in the nation, the Independent Cook Islands Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dr. Joseph Caldwell, pioneer of SDA medical mission work in the Cook Islands, was featured on the \$1.60 stamp in the set.

One of the most attractive stamps issued in connection with the SDA Church was a \$3.50 stamp of Uruguay to commemorate the centenary of the church in that country, 1896-1996. The design incorporated a church window, a cross, and the Three Angels of Revelation 14 with trumpets standing over a globe of the world.

In 1996 Vanuatu issued a Christmas set of four stamps, one of which depicted the Port Vila SDA Church in the upper left of the design. Another Christmas set of four stamps, issued by the British Virgin Islands in 1999, showed the SDA Church at Fat Hogs Bay on the 35-cent stamp.¹⁶

A milestone in SDA philately occurred in 2000 when Canada Post released a 46-cent commemorative stamp marking the General Conference Session in Toronto. At the start of the meetings, Thursday, June 29, the CEO of Canada Post, Andre Ouellette, spoke of the

significant contribution of the SDA Church in Canadian society and handed a presentation copy of the stamp to Elder Jan Paulsen.¹⁷

In July 2001 Russia issued a stamp portraying the impressive SDA Church in Ryazan, southeast of Moscow on the Oka River. It was part of a series of fourteen stamps showing the architecture of different faiths that enjoyed government permission to function in Russia.¹⁸

Fiji issued a set of stamps in 2002 to commemorate Operation Open Heart, an initiative of Sydney Adventist Hospital and ADRA Australia. From 1986 onwards teams of volunteer medical personnel performed complex heart and orthopaedic reconstruction surgeries in Fiji and other Pacific Islands. Team members provided photographs of their activities to the stamp designers who, unfortunately, did not include the SDA name in the stamps.¹⁹

Kiribati, in the Pacific Ocean, issued a set of seven Christmas stamps in 2003, the 40-cent value depicting the SDA Church at London on Kiritimati Atoll.

In February 2005 the Philippines issued a six peso domestic letter rate stamp to commemorate the centenary of the SDA mission in the country. An SDA post office employee, Alfonso Divina, designed the stamp, using a painting titled "God Watches Over Manila." The painting was on display in the Manila Adventist Medical Center. He also incorporated the church logo and an example of a Philippines SDA church.

Brazil overprinted some stamps in 2005 to mark an SDA Pathfinder Camporee in the nation. Later, in 2009, postal authorities issued a stamp showing the innovative architecture inside the Central Adventist Church in Curitiba, southern Brazil, a church designed to seat 2,200 people.

In 2006 Chile issued a set of three stamps to mark the centenary of Universidad Adventista de Chile (Adventist University of Chile), located in Chillán, high in the mountains of central Chile. The stamps depicted three historical stages of the main buildings on campus.

Cayman Islands issued a set of six Christmas stamps in 2007, featuring stained glass windows found in denominational island churches. The 80-cent stamp in the set displayed the window of the East End SDA Church on Grand Cayman Island.

Montserrat issued a set of four Christmas stamps in 2011. The \$5 value featured the two-storied New Ebenezer SDA Church that was rebuilt after destruction during the 1997 volcanic eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano.

In 2020 Iraq issued a minisheet of eight stamps depicting various Christian church buildings in Baghdad. One of the 250 dinars stamps featured the façade and entrance to the Baghdad SDA Church.²⁰

Stamps for Missions

For many years church members have engaged in gathering stamps to sell in order to raise funds for their local churches and overseas missions. The stamps were soaked from the envelopes and sold in bulk lots known as kiloware. One member in Grand Rapids, Michigan, A.T. Benjamin, volunteered to receive and parcel used stamps and forward the proceeds to the General Conference for mission projects.²¹ Another was Jack Skelton of Aberdare, New South Wales, who raised hundreds of dollars to support church building funds, the radio ministry, and Pacific-Island missions. His catch-cry was "Gather up the fragments that nothing be lost."²² From the viewpoint of a specialist collector, these endeavors could have been improved by leaving the stamps on the envelopes. Mature philatelists like to collect what they call entires, the whole envelope that usually bears transit postmarks and other clues telling of its passage through the postal channels by air, sea, or land. Envelopes posted from remote mission stations, wartime envelopes, and letters posted during civil unrest all have a postal history context and attract premium prices. By removing the stamps from the envelopes a quick cash return was accomplished, but all the postal history was lost.

Stamp collecting was popular among young people. A column dedicated to philately appeared during the 1930s in the *Youth's Instructor*.²³ To encourage those who wished to learn more about the hobby, the Youth Department wrote a short instruction manual and offered a Pathfinder honor badge to those who completed the philatelic requirements.²⁴

The founder and president of the University Stamp Club at Loma Linda, California, Robert Roach, proposed in 1974 an entrepreneurial enterprise for church members and entities. He advocated the use of envelopes bearing artistic designs of denominational hospitals and colleges, overseas mission themes, and elements from SDA church history. His club had led the way by printing some covers with a Pitcairn Island theme. Among collectors these designs on the left face of the envelope are called cachets. Such an investment, however, did not attract whole-hearted enthusiasm from others.²⁵

Conclusion

The popularity of philately as a hobby has arguably reached its peak. Broadly speaking, it was a phenomenon of the twentieth century. During the last half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, many countries issued postage stamps having a Seventh-day Adventist theme. It was an honor to be recognized as a significant religious influence in the various societies. In turn, the stamps served to advertise the nature of the SDA Church and its message.

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NOTES

1. Hans Salzmann, "Malagasy Stamp Shows Adventist Church," *ARH*, April 6, 1967, 32.
2. Robert Roach, "Adventists on Postage Stamps," *ARH*, December 3, 1981, 1, 7-8.
3. Ibid.
4. For these and other world stamps see "Stanley Gibbons 2023 Stamps of the World," <https://stanleygibbons.com.au/shop/stanley-gibbons-2023-stamps-of-the-world-simplified-catalogues-volume-1-6-copy/>.
5. Ibid.
6. Roach, "Adventists on Postage Stamps," 1, 7-8.
7. "Stanley Gibbons 2023 Stamps of the World."
8. Ibid.
9. Roach, "Adventists on Postage Stamps," 1, 7-8.
10. "Stanley Gibbons 2023 Stamps of the World."

11. Roach, "Adventists on Postage Stamps," 1, 7-8.
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13. "Stanley Gibbons 2023 Stamps of the World."
14. Ibid.
15. Mark A. Kellner, "Adventist Doss Honored on Back of U.S. Stamp Issue," *ARH*, November 28, 2013, 11.
16. "Stanley Gibbons 2023 Stamps of the World."
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