

# The 1963 Gettysburg Centennial Commemorative

## 1<sup>ST</sup> OPEN DESIGN COMPETITION HELD BY THE U.S. POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

In January 1961, newly appointed Postmaster General, J. Edward Day, took office and revisited the proposed Civil War commemorative stamp program. In conjunction with the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee the program was reduced to five stamps — one for each of the five centennial Civil War years. Postmaster General Day announced the competition for the design of the third stamp in the series, Battle of Gettysburg, in May 1962. Open to artists and art students in the United States a press release was sent to all newspapers, the philatelic press, as well as specialized society journals. Over 900 entries were received and public and media interest in the competition was high. Eleven designs from ten artists were chosen as finalists with Roy Gjertson's entry being selected as the winner.

Gjertson's final stamp design, along with 299 other designs, traveled to shows as well as postal lobbies throughout the country.

Release of the stamp was an important portion of the three-day centennial celebration at Gettysburg in July. Dignitaries present at the stamp dedication included the Postmaster General, the Governor of Pennsylvania, as well as many civic leaders. Over 600,000 first day covers were serviced — many by non-collectors, fueled by the interest that the design competition generated.

Presented is a study of the Gettysburg Centennial Commemorative first day covers. Production methods as well as domestic and foreign usages are shown. A study of cachets and their producers follows throughout the exhibit.

### 1. The Design Competition

The exhibit begins with the May 1962 Post Office Department press release announcing the design competition, how it was published in a specialty journal and the rules booklet sent to interested designers who requested it from the P.O.D.

Of the 958 entries received about 200



The Feb. 10, 1963 cover of *This Week Magazine* depicting six of the finalists in the design competition.

were selected as semi-finalists and eleven then selected as finalists. Photographs of these were displayed at stamp shows and post offices around the country. A selection of 30 of these entries as well as all the finalists are shown in this exhibit (see sidebar on page 2 to see how to see them all online). All the essays shown in the exhibit were from the display arranged by CSAC member Dr. James J. Matejka of Chicago and a color photograph taken by an amateur

(Continued on page 2)

## EXHIBIT PLAN

1. The Design Competition
2. Production and Issuance
3. First Day Use
4. Usage
5. Postscript

## EXHIBIT HIGHLIGHTS

- POD Photographs of Semi-Finalists and Finalists Artwork From the CSAC Design Competition.
- Original Cachet Artwork by Artcraft, Artmaster and Ralph Dyer.
- First Cachets by ten different cachetmakers.
- Handpainted cachets by Dorothy Knapp, Ralph Dyer, Herman Maul & Frank Ulrich.
- First Day Uses to Peru, Israel, Egypt, Iceland, Colombia, Argentina and the Philippines.
- Plate Blocks Signed by the Designer, Modeler, and Both Engravers.
- Use on a Certificate of Mailing and "Educational Matter".



(Continued from page 1)

photographer shows the display as it was shown at COMPEX in May 1963.

Public interest in the contest was high and this section of the exhibit ends with various items from the flurry of media activity announcing the winner, Roy Gjerston of San Pedro, California.

## 2. Production and Issuance

Two plate-blocks signed by the stamp's two engravers, the designer, and the modeler open the production section of the chapter. A discussion of the printing plates used and the resulting marginal marking comes next, as well as displaying a number of perforation errors. *No known constant*

*plate flaws exist for the stamp* and nor has the exhibitor seen any color mis-registrations or paper-folds in over 15 years of preparing the Exhibit.

From there, the issuance of the stamp is examined, starting with a publicity brochure for the Gettysburg Centennial celebration. Aimed at the general public, it included a mention of the dedication of the stamp. The release of the stamp on July 1, 1963 was a important part of the celebrations and was attended by the Postmaster General, the Governor of Pennsylvania and many other dignitaries involved in the Centennial celebrations. Items related to the press coverage of the event are displayed in the exhibit. The chapter concludes with publicity items for the stamp as well ordering forms from the P.O.D. Stamp Division.

## 3. First Day Use

This chapter is the heart of the exhibit — use of the stamp on its' first day. Ten cachetmakers produced their first cachet for the Gettysburg stamp with 16 documented designs. Nine of them are represented in the Exhibit, with 17 different designs (some designs had not been documented).

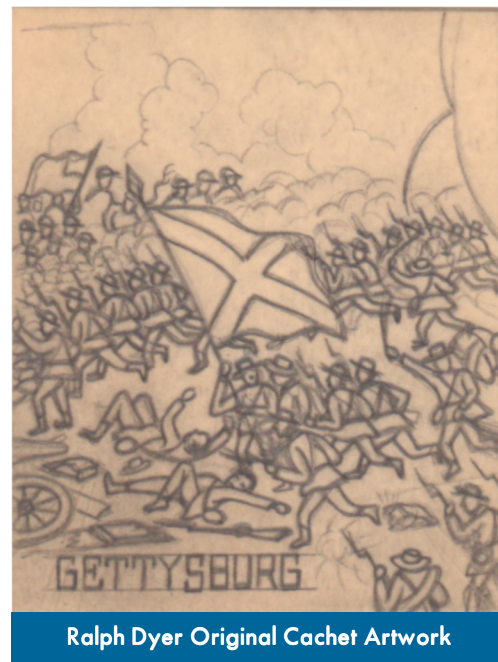
The largest section of this chapter addresses Issue Specific Cachets —cachets that were produced specifically for the Gettysburg commemorative. This section occupies almost four frames of the Exhibit and is organized by the cachet's production method. One of the highlights of the Exhibit is the unique cachet by Dorothy Knapp. While the Exhibitor usually does not include add-on cachets that were not added contemporarily, an exception has been made here for this cachet that was likely added in the early 1980s. Additional cachets by Herman Maul and Ralph Dyer (including Dyer's original artwork used in production) are also part of this section.

Following this section are engraved cachets which includes commercial heavyweights Artcraft and Artmaster — both of which have the original cachet artwork displayed. From there other production types are examined and the sheer volume of different cachets produced by some cachetmakers, such as Fidaldo and Boerger, becomes apparent. The popularity and interest in the Gettysburg stamp attests to the number of cachets produced and sold.

In addition to making cachets specifically for the Gettysburg issue, many cachets were produced for the Civil War Centennial starting in 1961. These cachets, while popular, tended to be used more for celebration events than for the Gettysburg stamp — but they were used and were popular.

Frank Raciti, a well-known cachetmaker and philatelist acquired the corner cards from the Civil War Centennial Commissions from each state that had established one, and serviced first days with them. Again a small, representative sample of the collection is shown in the Exhibit.

The next section on Civil War patriotics applies mostly to the Civil War centennial issues of 1961-65. Several collectors serviced



(Continued on page 4)



# THE DESIGN CONTEST

*"The Postmaster General Invites Professional American Artists to Submit Designs for the Battle of Gettysburg Stamp"* is how the invitational poster began. Although the Bureau of Engraving and Printing held a competition in 1937 to design the 1¢ stamp in the Presidential Series, this contest would be a first for the Post Office Department (P.O.D.).



Postmaster General Edward Day announced the contest on May 18, 1962 and that it would be open to artists and art students in the United States. A press release was sent to all newspapers, the philatelic press, and specialty professional journals. A promotional poster was placed in all post office lobbies and in many art schools. In addition, a notice was mailed to those on the P.O.D.'s philatelic mailing list. Potential entrants were directed to write to the P.O.D. to request the official rules for submitting an entry. These included the size, number of colors, and the required text. Entries had to be received by October 1, 1962 and were to be identified only by a sealed envelope containing the entrant's name affixed to the back of the entry.

*The Postmaster General Invites Professional American Artists to Submit Designs for the Battle of Gettysburg Stamp.*

958 entries were received by the deadline. The judges met in November 1962 in the PMG's offices and selected approximately 200 designs for further consideration. From these, eleven Finalists were nominated, and the winner was selected, but not announced. The announcement was scheduled for February 17, 1963.

On February 10, 1963, an article ran in *This Week Magazine*, a Sunday newspaper color supplement, asking the American public to vote on their favorite design. The public preferred a design of a solitary hat left on a battlefield, and while the design selected by the judges was second, it had only half as many votes.

News of Roy Gjerston's design being selected as the winning entry leaked three days earlier than planned. There was immediate criticism in the press about the misspelling of "centennial" on the entry — so much so that the P.O.D. was forced to issue a statement — *"the design was chosen for the artistic merit, and not for the correctness of the inscription."* There was additional public criticism regarding the design depicting two soldiers locked in combat not being suitable for a stamp.

Approximately 3,000 brochures with the contest rules were distributed and 958 entries were submitted. The ten finalists were asked to compete in a closed competition for the fourth design in the Civil War series, entitled *The Wilderness*, planned for 1964.



## HOW TO SEE MORE...

All essays shown in this exhibit are from James Matejka's 1963 display. The Exhibitor has possession of 186 out of the 200 semi-finalist essays (as well as all 11 finalists), but only a representative sample are shown in this exhibit due to space restrictions. This is the largest known assemblage of Gettysburg essays outside of the files of the Postmaster General. To see all the essays go to [gettysburg.beaconairmail.com/gettysburgessays.pdf](http://gettysburg.beaconairmail.com/gettysburgessays.pdf) or scan the QR Code with your phone.

*The exhibitor understands and expects that anything seen online is outside the competitive scope of the exhibit.* It is unfortunate that all the essays can not be shown in the frames, but in the opinion of the Exhibitor they should not be hidden away — they should be seen by as many people interested in them as possible and placing them online is a way to make this happen. Taken as a group they show the changing design aesthetics in *all* aspects — not just philatelic — and how art as a whole was changing in the United States in the early 1960s.



## WHAT'S NOT HERE...

### Proofs

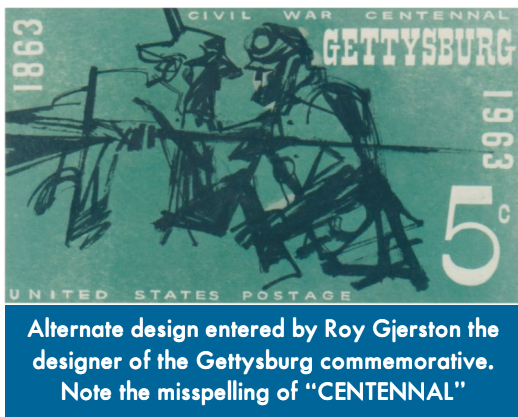
No proofs have been documented in public hands.

### Plate Verities

There have been no reported plate verities for any of the 6 plates.

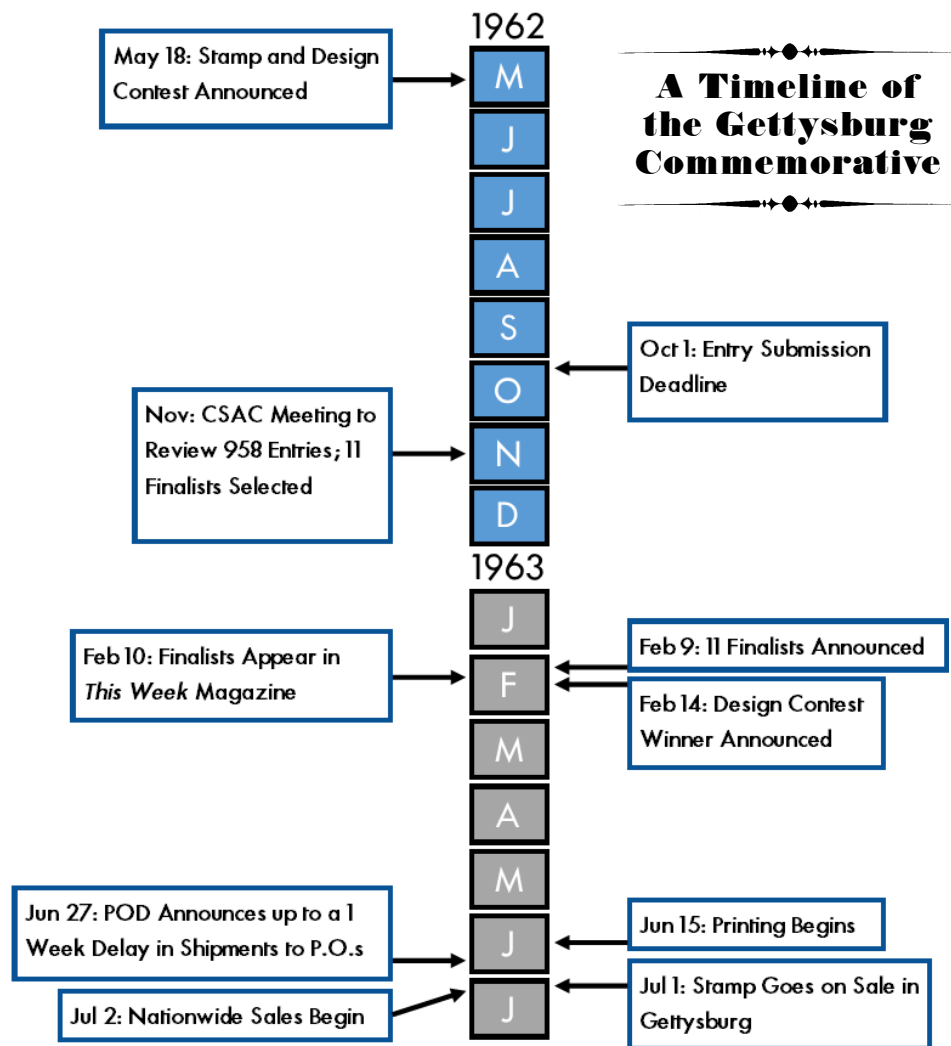
### P.O.D. Design Contest Poster

Thousands were printed and few, if any, survived. Working on finding one. ■



Alternate design entered by Roy Gjerston the designer of the Gettysburg commemorative. Note the misspelling of "CENTENNIAL"

## A Timeline of the Gettysburg Commemorative



(Continued from page 2)

first day uses of the Gettysburg issue on unused Civil War patriotics — including those produced by Union printer Charles Magnus. A representative sample has been included in the Exhibit. While many traditional philatelists have frowned on this practice, they did happen and they are a part of the Gettysburg Centennial story — so in the Exhibitor's

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Matejka, James J.; *The Gettysburg Design Contest: Combined Philatelic Exhibition of Chicagoland (COMPEX) 1963 Show Program*; May 1963, pgs. 99-104.

Simon, Louis M.; *Gettysburg 1963: An Account of the Centennial Commemoration*; 1963.

Shumway, Annette; *Battle of Gettysburg Design Entry*; Smithsonian National Postal Museum Website; 2012; <https://postalmuseum.si.edu/collections/object-spotlight/battle-of-gettysburg.html>

view they belong in the Exhibit. Of course some cachetmakers also used reproductions of these patriotics to produce first days — and some are included in the Exhibit.

With Gettysburg being a tourist destination, it is not hard to imagine that some souvenir items would be used for first day cancellations. Some examples that are shown include picture postcards, facsimiles of the Gettysburg Address and tourist maps and guides.

The chapter ends with a look at how first day covers were used by companies as part of their advertising strategy.

## 4. Usage

The penultimate chapter of the exhibit examines how the Gettysburg commemorative was used after the first day. Starting

with domestic use, examples of the expected services are displayed. Two of the more unusual items are a use on a Certificate of Mailing and on an Educational Matter package. Uses to foreign destinations follow.

*This chapter represents over 15 years of searching by the Exhibitor.*

## 5. Postscript

The exhibit ends with Gettysburg Centennial first day covers being "repurposed" 50 years later when the Sesquicentennial celebration stamp was released in 2013.

Repurposed FDCs are shown used again on the first day of the new Sesquicentennial stamp and also on July 1<sup>st</sup>, the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. ■