

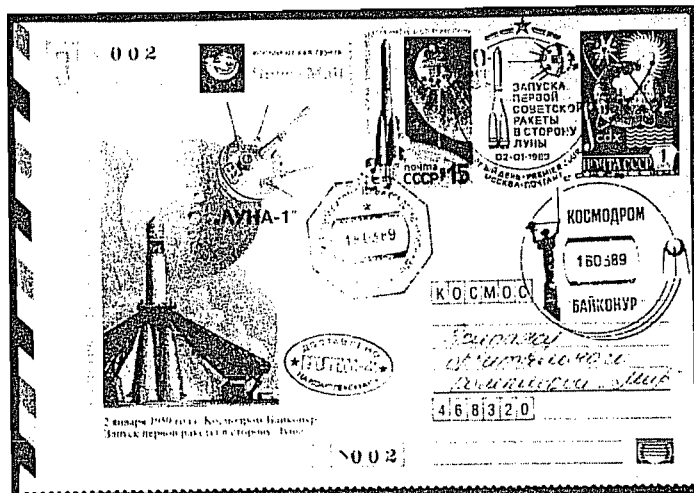
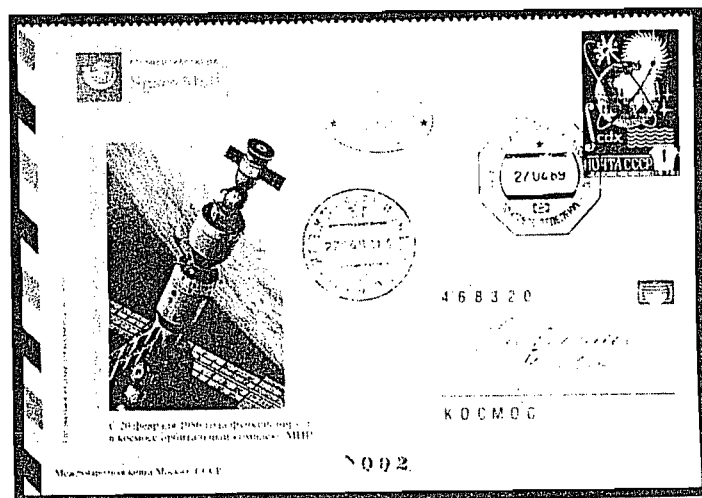
Taking Up Space

by Les Winick

When I learned of the flight of Sputnik I on October 4, 1957, I was thrilled at the thought of an artificial earth satellite orbiting the Earth. Somehow I wanted to take part in this great adventure, but I had no scientific background and felt I could not be a true space buff. I saved all the newspaper and magazine space activity reports, but that still did not give me the satisfaction that I needed.

However, I had collected stamps as a child, and somehow that background came back to me as the answer to my space interest. I checked with the local library and found a Scott Catalogue, where I looked at the illustrations to see what stamps with a space theme had been issued by the U.S. Post Office in previous years, and I found several that would satisfy my craving. I also discovered many other nations had issued stamps on rocketry, astronomy, and related themes. I felt that I would save anything related to the space theme on stamps and covers.

This was the beginning of a glorious hobby that has led me down many roads. On that road, I discovered space philately is not just modern commemorative covers from the current space shuttle flights but can be traced back for many years.



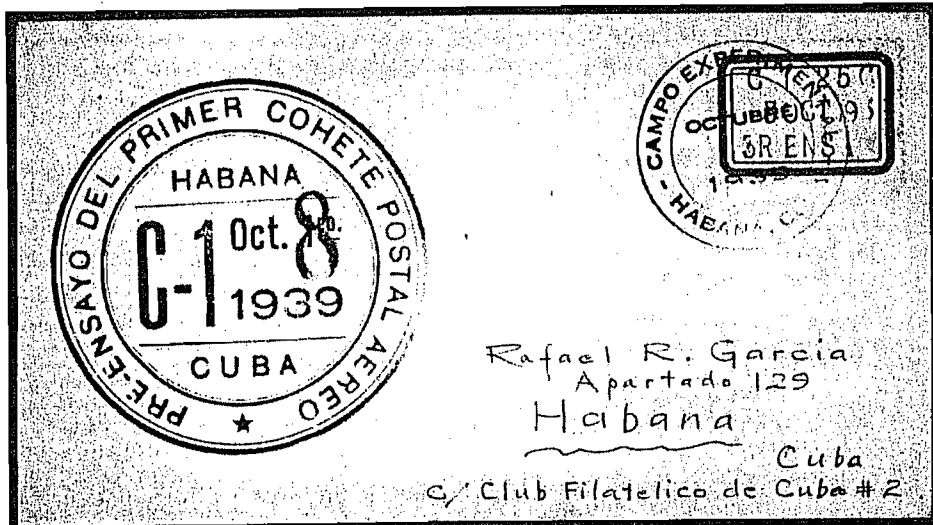
Two post cards canceled in 1989 on board the Space Station MIR with "Space Post Office" overprint on the postage stamps.

History of Space Philately

The story of space philately is the history of man's conquest of space. Stamps and covers illustrate the early ventures into the unknown, and the trials and tribulations of the early U.S. pioneers are all documented on philatelic material. For example, during the Civil War, President Lincoln appointed Thaddeus Lowe "Chief Aeronaut in the U.S. Army" with the task of going up in a balloon, viewing the movements of the Southern troops, and sending reports back to the Union army.

In 1904, C.C. Phelps attached a gun to his balloon for a local fair in McConnellsville, New York, and called his vehicle a "Rocket Ship." Post cards exist with the inscription "News from the Rocket Ship." The 1930s saw the blossoming of many private rocket flights, with several different experimenters launching their rockets, with covers inside, from sites in New York and New Jersey. On July 2, 1936, a rocket achieved international recognition when it was flown from McAllen, Texas, to Reynosa, Mexico, and back again for a distance of about 1,000 feet.

The first official postal recognition of rocket mail took place on October 15, 1939, when the Cuban postal administration issued the world's first rocket mail stamp. A rocket was fired on that date in the sports stadium with many postal and other government officials watching. Three pre-flight tests took place on October 1, 3, and 8, with a limited number



Cuba was the first nation to issue a postage stamp for rocket mail. The postal authorities held three pre-trial flights on October 1, 3, and 8, 1939, which carried a limited number of covers.

of covers for the event.

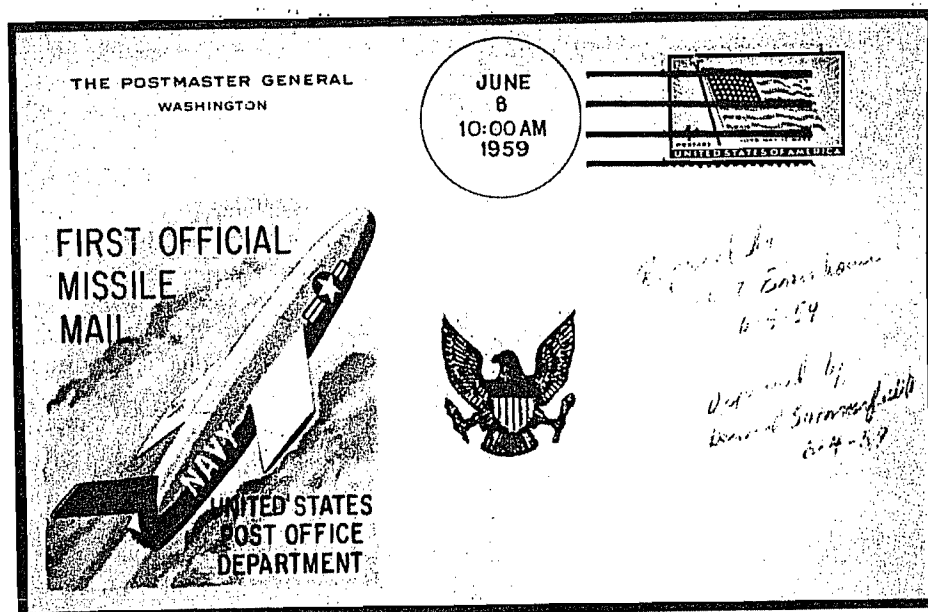
The experimental rockets used to carry mail were crude and small compared with today's monsters that carry thousands of pounds into space. Governments thought that these rocketeers were insane and completely ignored them. So the experimenters went to stamp collectors and sold them rocket stamps and covers in order to recoup some of their investment. Many actually were flown in the rockets, while others commemorate the events.

Dr. Robert Goddard tried bringing his propulsion theories to the attention of U.S. military officials. *The New York Times*, in an editorial dated January 18, 1920, stated that Dr. Goddard does "not know the rela-

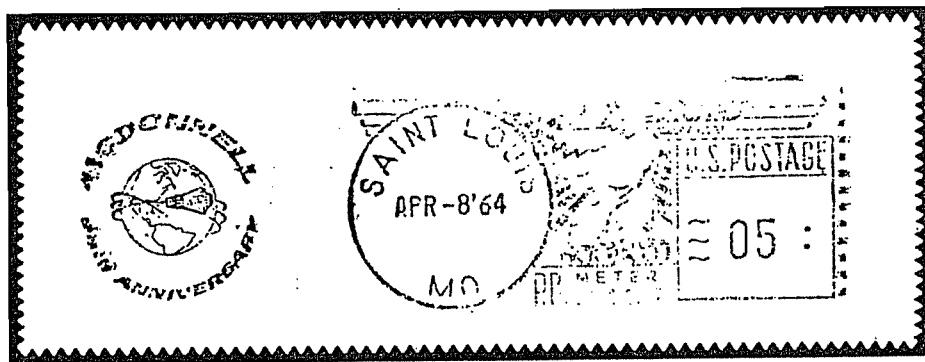
tion of action to reaction." Twenty years later, Dr. Goddard met with U.S. brass, but the generals thought he was crazy and dismissed the idea of rockets going into space as foolish. On September 26, 1940, Brigadier General George Brett wrote Dr. Goddard, "The Air Corps does not feel justified in obligating funds for basic jet propulsion research and experimentation" (from *Papers of Robert Goddard* edited by Esther Goddard). Fortunately for space collectors, some covers exist from Goddard's test sites.

The same situation took place in Germany from the development of the wingless flying bomb at Rechlin Air Force Headquarters and the Kummersdorf Proving Ground to the tests at Peenemunde. For many years, Hitler did not have the foresight to see the military applications of rockets, and Werner von Braun had trouble getting funds for the V-weapon operations. The German troops were trained and set up launching sites for the firing of the V-weapon. When the production of the flying bombs was moved to the Harz Mountains after the raid on Peenemunde in 1943, concentration camp labor was used. Covers exist for all of these stages in the V-weapon program, including mail to and from commanding officers and letters written by soldiers, concentration camp workers, and guards.

During the 1940s, the captured V-rockets were taken to White Sands Missile Range and flown. Covers exist for these firings, canceled at Las Cruces, New Mexico, Proving Grounds. Events moved rapidly after that. The 1950s saw the start



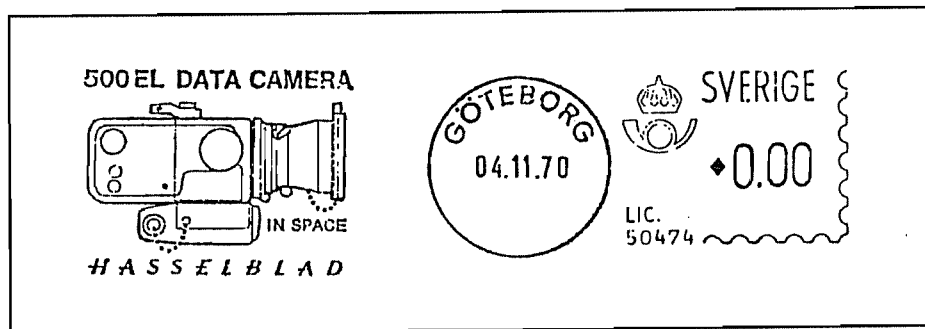
The artist's proof of the USS *Barbero* cover which was approved by President Eisenhower and Postmaster General Summerfield.



The McDonnell Douglas meter from its St. Louis headquarters is postmarked April 8, 1964 — the day of the first orbit of the *Gemini* capsule.

of a series of tests preceding man's first step into space from the use of dummies to capsule tests. Launches from heavy

pilots at Edwards Air Force Base in California. Covers from this phase include mail from a Major Chuck Yeager at Muroc

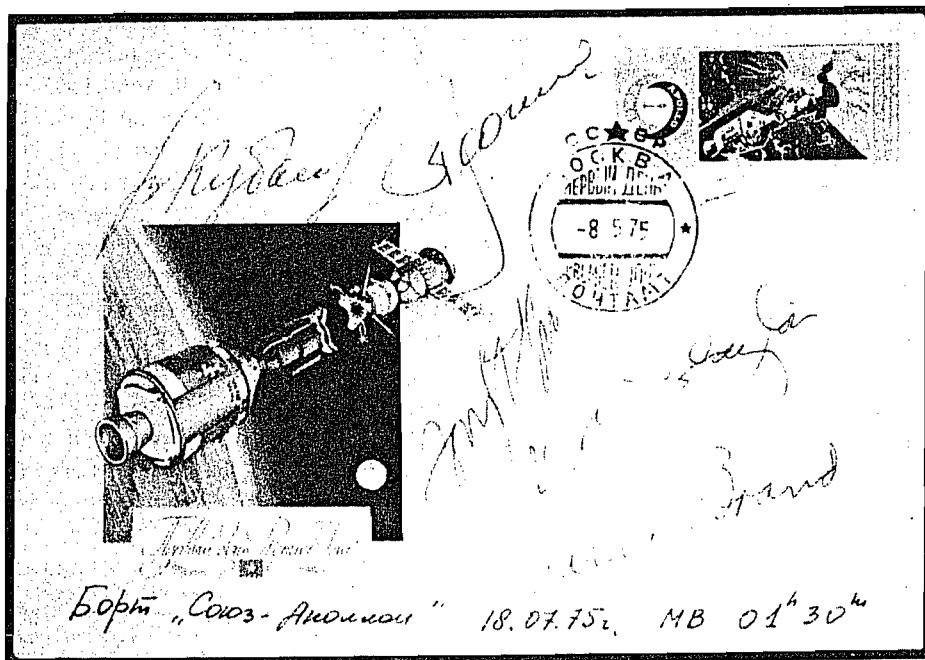


A Hasselblad of Sweden meter promotes its camera — the one that took pictures on the moon.

bombers took place to simulate landing in the earth's atmosphere. It was during this period that the X-15 plane became the forerunner of the rockets flown by test

Field (forerunner of Edwards Air Force Base) and the only post office cancel with the word "rocket" in it.

On June 8, 1959, the U.S. Post Office



A Russian space cover was autographed by three American astronauts and two Soviet cosmonauts.

Department conducted a novel experiment — it sent mail from a submerged submarine, the USS *Barbero*, via a *Regulus I* guided missile to the naval facility at Mayport, Florida. The covers then were canceled and forwarded to members of Congress and some philatelists as a "significant philatelic souvenir."

In the 1960s, the number of space covers increased, as the level of experimentation reached a fever pitch. The U.S. Navy, Air Force, and Army all conducted their own test flights, with each branch of service hoping to be the winner of the unified space program. A group of seven astronauts trained for its flight into space. Covers exist with the autographs of the astronauts, and autograph collecting on space-related covers has become a very important part of the hobby. When Alan Shepard became the first American to go into space on May 5, 1961, the space collector had a field day getting covers from all space-related sites. (See Charles A. Fricke's "Mercury First Day Covers," February 1992 *AP*, page 146.)

The world was shocked to learn that the *Apollo 15* astronauts carried covers into space and had arranged to sell them to a German stamp dealer. The men had agreed to carry 300 covers for the dealer in their Personal Preference Kits. NASA had confiscated the covers but eventually returned them to the three astronauts. I had the honor of authenticating the flown covers for the German stamp dealer. The covers originally sold for \$1,500 and have brought prices ranging from the original selling price to \$6,000.

The story of Russian space philately is just as exciting as that of the United States. Many flown covers were carried on the Interkosmos Program and autographed by the cosmonauts. My pride and joy cover is one that was carried on the ASTP mission, autographed by the three American astronauts and the two Russian cosmonauts along with the date and location in space at the time. This is the only cover in public hands that was carried on this joint flight. There are many other Soviet covers with authenticating documents from Glavkosmos and Kniga, along with several covers that were mailed from the cosmonauts' home in Leninsk to their friends.

Space philately has been good to me in the number of friends that I have met throughout the world and in the chance it has given me to share the triumphs and failures of the space program by having a

cover or stamp in my home. Here is how you can get started.

Collecting Space Covers

The materials needed are simple — size 6¾-inch envelopes, peelable labels, envelope stuffers, and relevant postage stamps (which can include Flag stamps). Of course, it is much nicer to use space stamps for your covers, but these may not always be available exactly when you are ready to make a mailing. Write your address in pencil. It seems that Americans like their covers unaddressed and in pristine condition, while the rest of the world wants their covers addressed to show that they have seen postal service. By using pencil, you can satisfy both criteria.

The covers can be sent to a variety of locations, depending on your interests. At first, I sent my covers to every NASA facility, every tracking station located around the world, and every stamp show that had a space theme in its cancel. I found that this became very time consuming and expensive, and I cut back my specific space-related collecting interests. You quickly will find out which cachets and which cancels you prefer.

The covers will receive space-related postmarks from launching facilities, tracking stations in the United States and abroad, stamp shows with a space theme postmark, and many corporations who manufacture space hardware, technology support, and so forth. In order to make your life easier, maintain an inventory of stamped, self-addressed covers ready for mailing to a launch site. Depending on personality, some collectors keep records of how many covers were sent to each location and when. Others make notations on the back of each cover in pencil of when and where the cover was mailed.

These covers also can be used for obtaining autographs from space-related personalities. Requests for signatures should be polite and short. Always include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or international reply coupons for overseas requests. Keep your request to one or two covers only. Patience is a virtue; the response time may vary greatly since many of these people are on job assignments away from their offices. They have business mail to look at, and your autograph request is usually on the bottom of the pile. I have waited for as long as four years for some of my Russian cosmonaut autographed covers to

be returned.

Many of my "best buys" have been from dealer stocks. I will never forget walking into a very well-known dealer's retail store and asking for space covers. After looking through many boxes and selecting several items, I noticed a box marked "Ship Covers." It was loaded with space-related ships, including a personal cover from the *Lake Champlain* dated May 5, 1961, Alan Shepard's flight date. The typical price of the various covers was \$2. I was tired and asked how much for the box. The price I paid averaged fifty cents per cover. I have been offered \$2,000 for the Champlain cover alone.

Several other sources for space covers

include trading at stamp clubs, dealer boxes, dealer ads in *Topical Time* and other publications, space auctions, and the Space Unit of the APS/ATA (P.O. Box 522579, Marathon Shores, Florida 33052). The Space Unit publishes a bimonthly magazine, *The Astrophile*, which is loaded with information on space philately.

The Author

Les Winick is an accredited aero/astrophilatic APS and FIP judge, author of several handbooks, and columnist for several philatelic publications. Formerly a manufacturer's representative, he is doing public relations for an industrial sewing machine firm.



The Adventures of Tintin, illustrated on this post card, is the subject of a popular children's storybook series in France. Such cards are an interesting addition to a topical space collection.