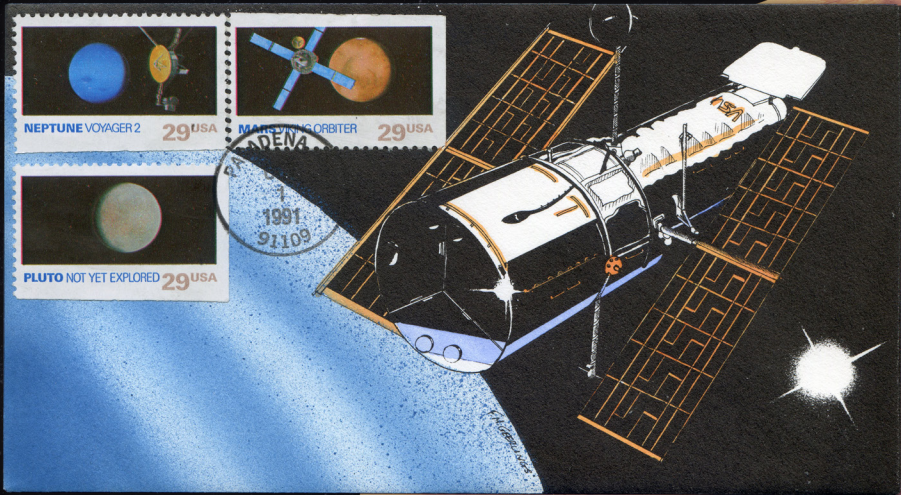


FIRST DAYS

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2024 — NO. 474

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the Red Planet page 48



This Phizzog: Sandburg on Cachets page 30

the journal of the



American First Day Cover Society



Figure 1. 1978 Viking Mars Plate Block.

US Exploration of Mars, the Red Planet

by *Ralph H. Nafziger*

Introduction

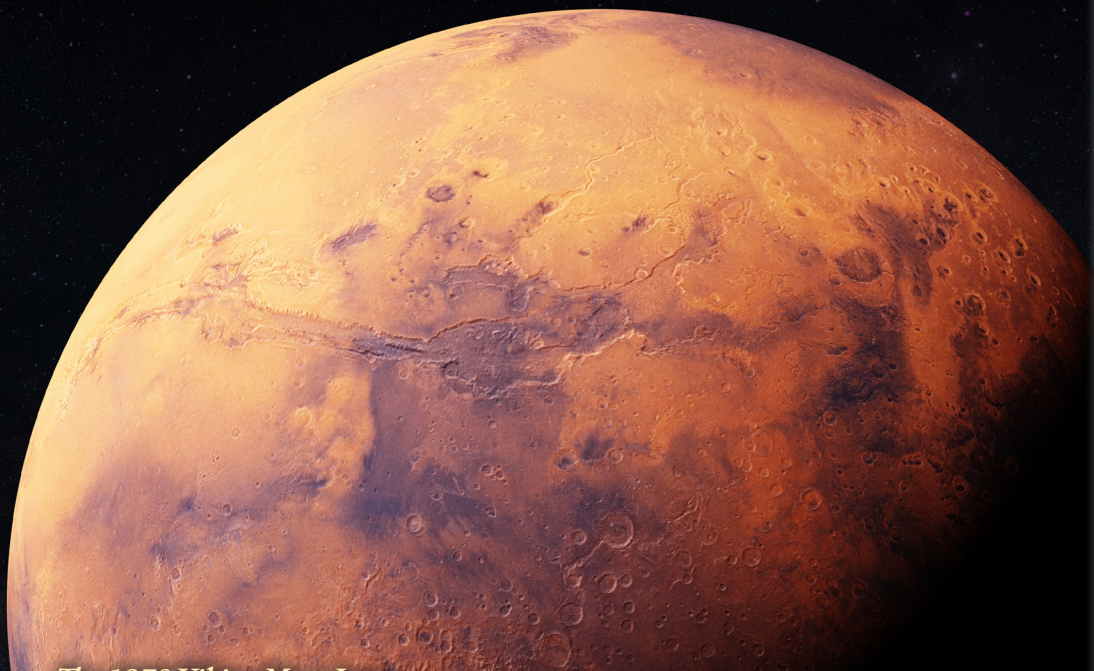
The United States has issued four stamps featuring the planet Mars. This article discusses three of those stamps in detail. The fourth stamp has been discussed in detail previously (Nafziger, 2015). This stamp was the first of the four stamps to be issued.

Where available, the stamp pre-production and production activities are discussed first. This includes the design, production data, plate data, freaks, and the first day ceremony. Official and unofficial cancels, as well as first FDC (first day cover) cachets, follow. Issue-specific cachets are then addressed, followed by general-purpose cachets, combination, dual, uncacheted, and autographed FDCs. Finally, examples of usages of the stamps are illustrated. Many foreign stamps were issued to commemorate spacecraft on Mars. These are beyond the scope of this article.

The Planet and Its Exploration

The fourth planet from the Sun, Mars is named after the Roman god of War. It is the second smallest planet in the solar system. Mars has an atmosphere that is less than 1% that of Earth's. Mars' crust is similar in composition to that of Earth. Mars' core is composed of iron and nickel. It has valleys, dunes, polar ice caps, impact craters, and volcanoes. Phobos and Deimos are its two small satellites. Mars' tilt to the ecliptic and rotational period is similar to Earth's. However, seasons are twice as long as those of the Earth.

Beginning in 1964, the United States has sent 23 spacecraft so far to Mars. Of these, ten have landed on the planet successfully. Only two have been commemorated on three United States issues. These are the two Viking missions (1975-1976) and Mars *Pathfinder/Sojourner* (1996-1997).



The 1978 Viking Mars Issue

The Viking program consisted of two landings. These were the first spacecraft to land on another planet. *Viking I* (also designated A) was launched on August 20, 1975, and landed on Mars on July 20, 1976. *Viking II* (also designated B) was launched on September 9, 1975, and landed on the planet on September 3, 1976.

One year later, the United States Postal Service (USPS) selected a “fitting commemorative” to honor the two spacecraft. The pre-production details of the stamp have been published previously (Nafziger, 2015). The stamp was announced publicly on September 20, 1977. Details of the stamp design process are given in the reference above. The stamp (Figure 1) was issued on July 20, 1978, in Hampton, Virginia, to commemorate the successful completion of the Viking program. In addition to three official FDC cancels, there were at least 48 unofficial first-day-of-issue cancels. Twelve first FDC cachets were produced for the stamp.

Approximately 325 different FDC cachets are known for this issue (Nafziger, 1981, Tan, 1985). Thirty-seven are listed in a 1970s FDC cachet catalog (Steenerson, 2010). On July 30, 1979, the stamp was withdrawn from sale at the Philatelic Sales Agency in Washington, DC.

The 1991 Space Exploration Booklet

Thirteen years later, the Viking program was commemorated again by a stamp depicting the Viking orbiter over Mars. This stamp was one of ten issued in a booklet depicting the eight planets, one dwarf planet (Pluto), and the Moon, with appropriate spacecraft. It honored the United States’ exploration of space (Figure 2).



Figure 2. 1991 *Space Exploration Booklet*.

In late 1988, Howard Paine, a design co-ordinator for the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC), told the committee that the *Voyager 2* space probe would pass Neptune and leave the Solar System after a 12-year trip from Earth in the following August. Paine suggested that the USPS issue a booklet of commemorative stamps featuring nine planets and Earth's moon. Paine was given approval to have the artwork prepared. Lack of time and technical problems resulted in the stamps not being issued in August 1989.

Paine commissioned Ron Miller of Fredericksburg, Virginia to develop artwork for the stamps. Miller was a freelance artist, illustrator, and science fiction writer. This booklet was his first stamp design assignment. Miller then painted a set of 10 pictures showing each planet as viewed from various positions in space. Miller painted the planets against the black of outer space. He used dropout white for the typography. These designs were deemed too dark for the taggant to activate the post office facer-cancellers. Therefore, Paine cropped the paintings to show more white. He also added descriptive material, which was rejected by the CSAC and the USPS because the lettering was too small to be effective.

The Postmaster General (PMG) then asked that a US spacecraft be added to each painting to make the issue a salute to US technical achievement. This required Miller to create entirely new artwork. CSAC did not want other heavenly bodies in the revised paintings so there would be no confusion. Miller painted the pictures in acrylic on illustration board. It was finally decided to place the vignette in a rectangle and the type across the bottom with the planet's name, the corresponding spacecraft, the denomination (29¢), and "USA." After some experimentation, Paine decided to use all capital letters in a type called Univers. Since Pluto had not been explored when the booklet was issued, the phrase "not yet explored" in capital letters was added to balance this stamp with the others in the pane.

Project manager Jack Williams took the finished artwork to John Mankins, Manager of the Exploration Technology Program for the Office of Aeronautics and Space Technology at NASA. He confirmed the authenticity of the design elements. PMG Anthony M. Frank approved the designs on January 4, 1991.

In 1990, Paramount Studios had proposed a joint campaign with the USPS. On July 3, 1991, PMG Frank unveiled the stamp designs at Paramount Studios on the bridge of the Starship *Enterprise* (the starship on *Star Trek*). Paramount's president, Mel Harris, and Leonard Nimoy (Mr. Spock) were also present. The joint venture between Paramount and

the USPS was endorsed by Keith Wagner, Executive Director of the American Philatelic Society (APS), and Joseph B. Sevarese, Executive Officer of the American Stamp Dealers' Association (ASDA).

The Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) printed the stamps on its Andreotti seven-colored gravure press. The stamps were issued on October 1, 1991 (October was designated as National Stamp Collecting Month). A special machine cancel die was authorized for use from September 1 through October 31 at 151 post offices across the country.

The stamps were issued at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, CA. PMG Frank was the dedicating officer. Speakers were Edward C. Stone, JPL Director, and Fred W. Bowen, Manager of the JPL NASA Resident Office. The NASA network televised the proceedings. It was sent to all USPS divisions. Release of the booklets was delayed until noon.

There were 1,465,111 FDCs canceled. Only one plate number (11111) was used on the FDCs. Gravure printing cylinders of 200 subjects were used, and the stamps were perforated 11.2 on two or three sides using a Eureka off-line perforator. Overall tagging was applied. There were 701,000,000 stamps ordered (33,750,000 booklets; 2,600,000 unfolded panes). The actual distribution was 333,948,000 stamps (15,392,400 booklets; 2,610,000 unfolded panes) (Amick, 1992).



Figure 3. Use of Space Exploration stamps.

The stamps often were used on space-related covers (Figure 3).

One error has been discovered. The perforations are missing between the upper five stamps and the lower five stamps on the pane. There are three recorded examples of this error, one of which is shown in Figure 4.

Tan (1993) lists seven different first day cancellations for the issue. All were cancelled Pasadena, CA. The above reference also gives the size of each cancellation. Tan (1993) also lists 19 unofficial first day cancellations (Figure 5).

The booklet on FDCs was the first cachet for Spaced-Out Covers (five designs) and SRL (Stacey R. Lamont) (Monty et al., 2005).



Figure 4. Error on Space Exploration Booklet.

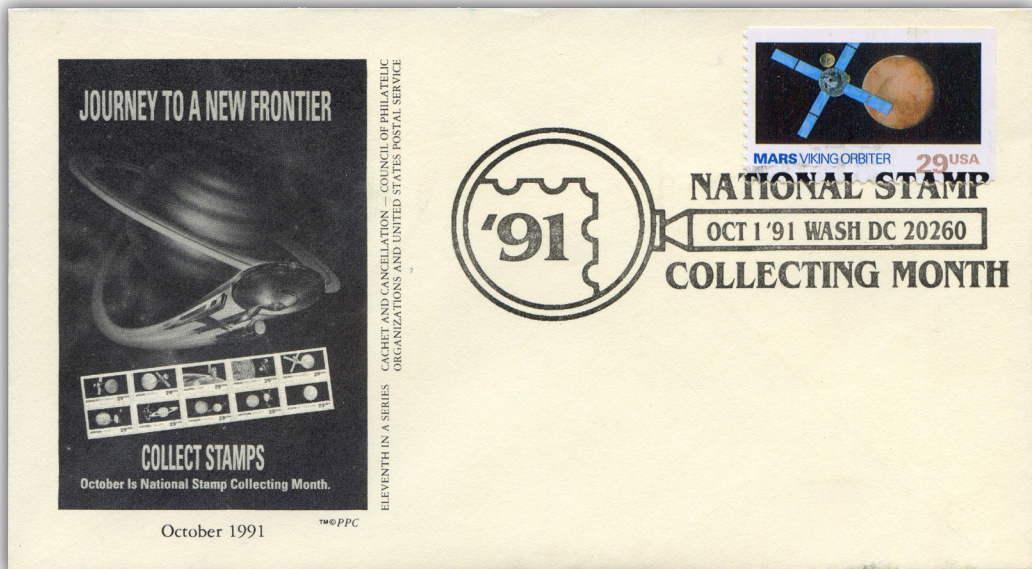


Figure 5. Unofficial FDC Cancel on Space Exploration Stamp, COPOS Cachet.

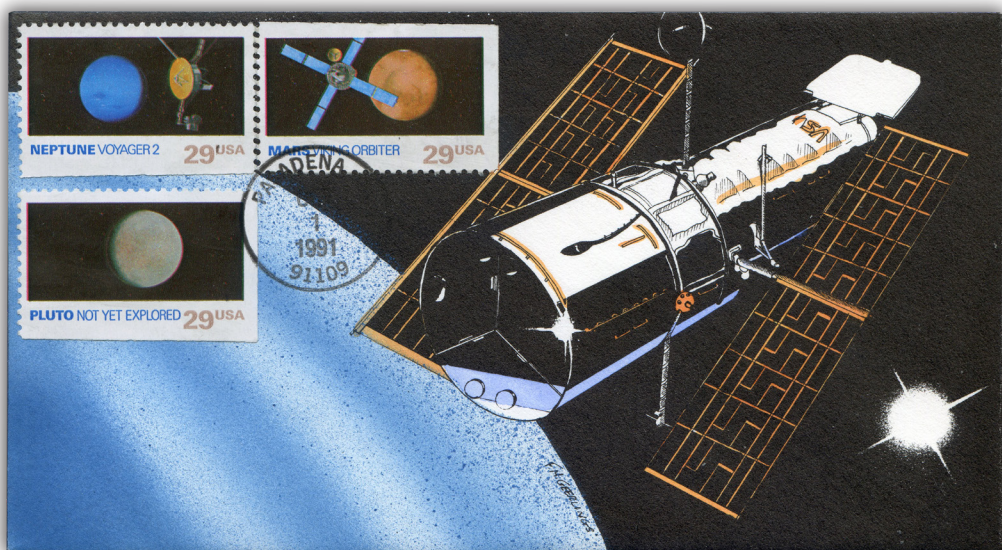


Figure 6. Official Bullseye Cancel, Geerlings Cachet.

According to Tan (1993), there were 105 issue-specific cachets used on FDCs for this issue. An example is shown in Figure 6. At least 16 “recycled” cachets were used, as well as ten panels, post cards, and proof cards. Five commercial business envelopes are known.

The booklet was withdrawn from sale at the Philatelic Sales Agency in Washington, DC, on August 15, 1994.

The 1997 Mars Pathfinder Sojourner Souvenir Sheet

The Mars *Pathfinder* and the *Sojourner* were launched on December 4, 1996. They landed on Mars on July 4, 1997. The portion that landed on the Martian surface consisted of a stationery lander and a remote-controlled vehicle named *Sojourner*. *Sojourner* traveled at 0.4 inches per second. It performed 15 chemical analyses of the rocks and produced a wealth of data.

Six days after the *Pathfinder* landed, the CSAC met and discussed the mission. Numerous (16,550) photographs of the Martian surface were taken, which stimulated much excitement. This caused the Committee to recommend that a stamp be designed and issued before the end of the year. PMG Marvin T. Runyon approved a stamp. The USPS made a last-minute decision to produce a souvenir sheet in commemoration. In mid-October, Linn’s Stamp News reported that a stamp was being prepared.

The design shows the drab reds and browns of the Martian surface as viewed from the *Pathfinder*’s camera. The Ares Vallis region of Mars is shown. Terrence McCaffrey, Stamp Design Supervisor, was in charge. McCaffery experimented with various images and finally settled on the first photograph taken. John Boyd, a computer graphics specialist and typographer who worked on a contract basis with the USPS, was asked to assemble the design elements and make preparations for printing. Carl Burcham, the Stamp Services Marketing Manager, requested that pertinent facts be printed on the sheet’s reverse side. To save time, the printer overprinted the gummed paper of the selvage with an approved ink. PhotoAssist provided a series of pertinent mission facts, and the final text was sent to NASA for approval. Since the press run was only 15,000,000, the souvenir sheet was produced within a four-month period.

On November 12, the USPS made the official announcement and released the design. The souvenir sheet was printed by Stamp Ventures using the gravure process. Donald H. Woo of Stamp Ventures was the modeler. The face value was \$3.00, which met the priority mail requirements, but it was not intended to replace the \$3.00 Challenger stamp for that service. It was the largest issue ever to be produced for regular postage. Hidden scrambled images were incorporated into its design (Amick, 1998). The sheet was perforated 11 x 11.1.

The souvenir sheet was issued on December 10, 1997. The first day ceremony was held at the JPL at Caltech in Pasadena, CA. Tirso del Junco, Chairman of the USPS Board of Governors, was the dedicating officer. The ceremony was open to the public, but the guest list was limited to 100, with reservations required. Robert A. Parker, Director of the NASA Management Office at JPL, was the principal speaker. Larry M. Dumas, JPL Deputy Director, gave a welcome, and Pasadena postmaster Robert M. Mysel presided.

Honored guests included Norman R. Haynes and Donna L. Shirley, Director and Manager, respectively, of the Mars Exploration Directorate, and other Mars *Pathfinder* officials,

including Brian K. Muirhead, Project manager; Richard A. Cook, Mission Manager; Robert M. Manning, Flight System Chief Engineer, Jennifer A. Harris, Flight Director, and Dr. Matthew P. Golemluk, Project Scientist. USPS honored guests were Azeezaly S. Jaffer, Executive Director of Stamp Services, McCaffrey, Michael Brock of CSAC, and Richard Ordong, USPS Customer Service and Sales District Manager.

The souvenir sheet was placed on sale a day early at a postal store in Richardson, Texas, where a collector obtained a December 9 postmark.

The lander operated nearly three times its life expectancy of 30 days, with image transmission ending on September 27, 1997. The *Sojourner* operated for 12 times its life expectancy of seven days.

The USPS sold unsevered press sheets of 18 Mars *Pathfinder* panes for the face value of \$54.00. A total of 10,500 uncut sheets were made available. There were 11,199 first day cancellations (incomplete total). The souvenir sheet was primarily used on packages for a few years (Figure 7). A folder also was issued (Figure 8). This contained a mint souvenir sheet.

Predates have been recorded for this issue. Tan (2001) reported four official FDC cancellations: (1) Pasadena, CA machine cancel with 4.95 cm killer bars, (2) Pasadena imprinter cancel with 5.90 cm long killer bars, (3) Pasadena, CA hand cancel with 5.70-5.80 cm long killer bars (Figure 9), and (4) Pasadena, CA hand cancel bullseye. Tan also listed six unofficial first-day-of-issue cancellations, including three from Pasadena and one each from Los Angeles, CA, Kennedy Space Center, FL (Figure 10), and Titusville, FL.

There are no listed first cachets for this issue (Monty, et al 2005). Tan (2001) identifies 113 FDC cachets, four cards, pages, panels, and three USPS items. A ceremony program, last day of sale program (Figure 11), and a souvenir page exist for this issue.

There is a last day of sale cancellation, which was available during the ASDA Postage-Stamp Mega Event Show in Anaheim, California on June 20, 1998. Only a few cacheted covers received this cancellation (Figure 11).

The souvenir sheet was withdrawn from sale at the Philatelic Sales Agency in Washington, DC, on June 20, 1998.

The 2016 Views of Our Planets (Mars) Issue

Antonio Acala, Alexandria, Virginia, was the art director, designer, and topographer of the “Views of our Planets” set of stamps, of which Mars was one stamp. Greg Breeding also worked on the design with photographer Richard Frasier. The modeler was Joseph Sheeran.

The forever (47¢) stamps were issued in post office panes of 16 containing two sets of the eight planets at the World Stamp Exposition in New York on May 31, 2016. The first day ceremony lasted from 11:00 a.m. until noon. Texts on the reverse of the stamps gave additional information on the images and identified the spacecraft and telescopes used to obtain them. USPS Chief Operating Vice President David E. Williams was the dedicating official at the ceremony. An estimated 500 attended the ceremony. Participants were NASA Chief Scientist Ellen Stofan, NASA Director of Planetary Science Jim Green, Oceanographer Norman Kuring, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, who created the Earth stamp image, and Alan Stern, New Horizons Principal Investigator. Honored guests



Figure 7. Use of Sojourner souvenir sheet on a piece.

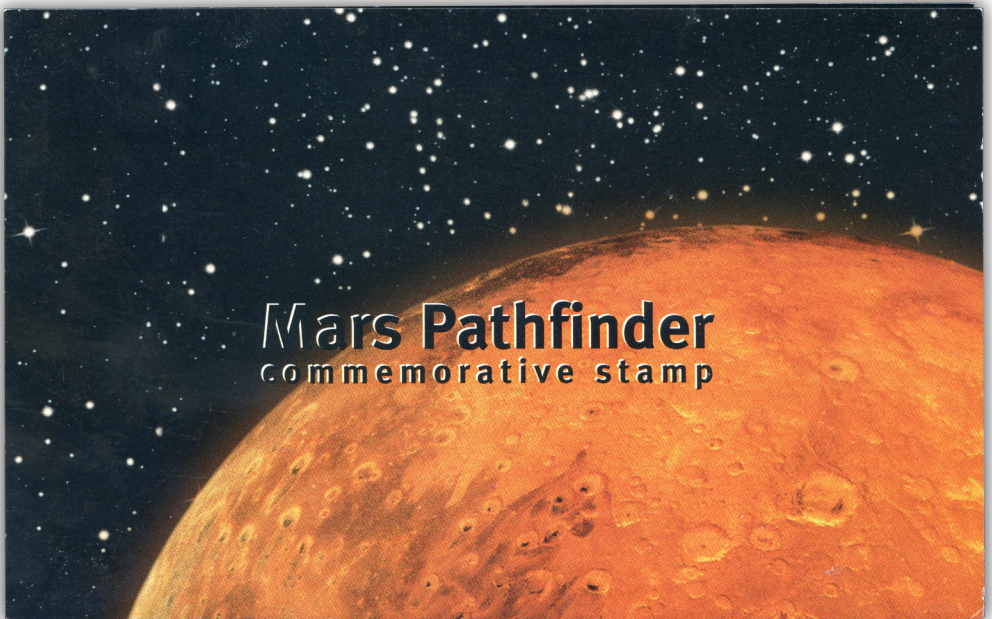


Figure 8. Folder for Sojourner souvenir sheet.



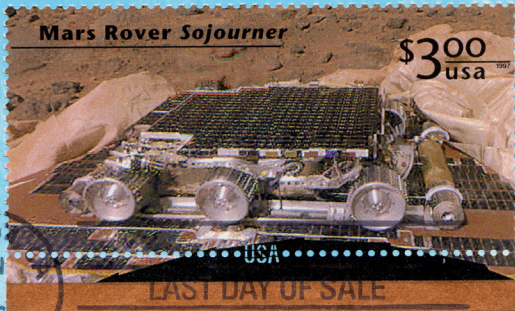
Figure 9. Official FDC hand cancel for Sojourner souvenir sheet, Bob Bugden Cachet.



Figure 10. Unofficial first day cancel for Sojourner souvenir sheet, GAMM Cachet.

included astronaut John Grunsfeld and New Horizons Mission Operations Manager Alice Bowman. The ceremony was followed by an autograph session, during which speakers and VIPs signed first day programs.

The stamps were lithographed offset printed by Ashton Potter USA of Williamsville, New York. A Muller A76 press was used to print the stamps. The USPS produced 3,000 press sheets with die cuts. Each sheet contains eight 16-stamp panes (Figure 12). The stamps (serpentine die cut 10 1/2) are self-adhesive, and 40,000,000 were issued. There were no plate numbers.



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Last Day JUNE 20, 1998 ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA OFFSALE

Figure 11. Last Day of Sale program for Sojourner souvenir sheet.

Views of Our Planets

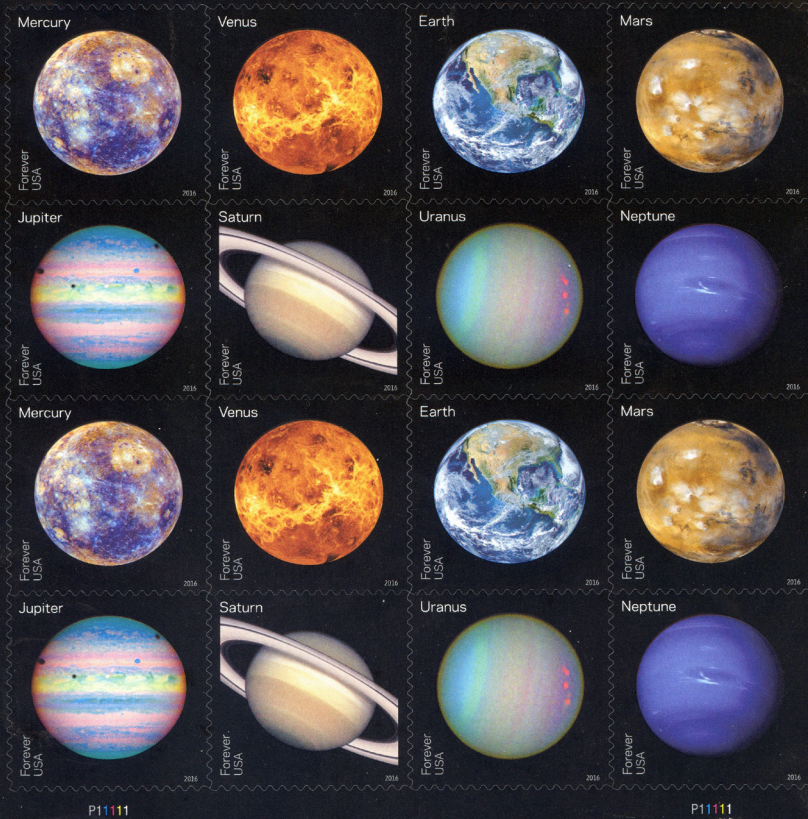


Figure 12. Sheet of Views of Our Planets Issue.



Figure 13. Hobby Link FDC Cachet for Mars Stamp in Views of Our Planets issue.

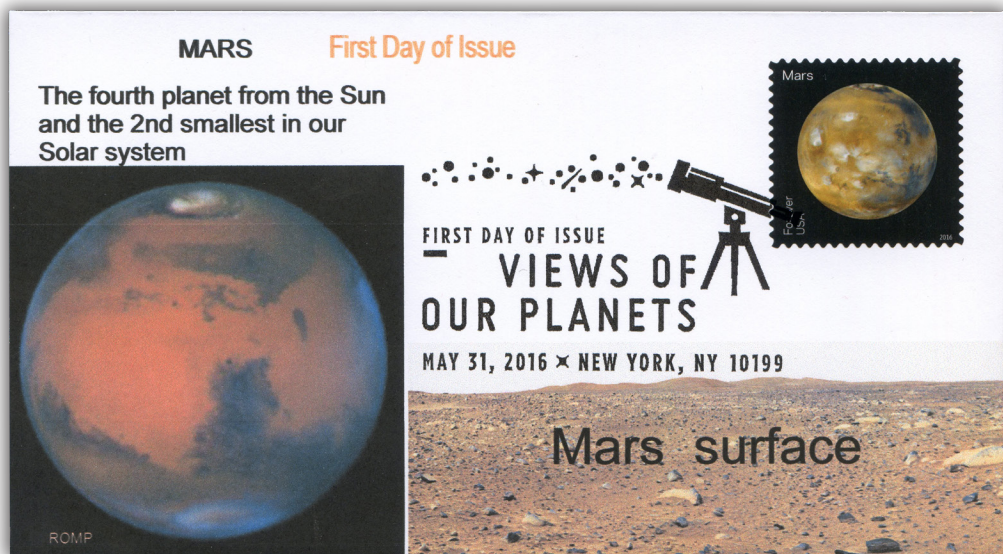


Figure 14. Official pictorial First Day Cancel for Views of Our Planets Issue, Romp Cachet.

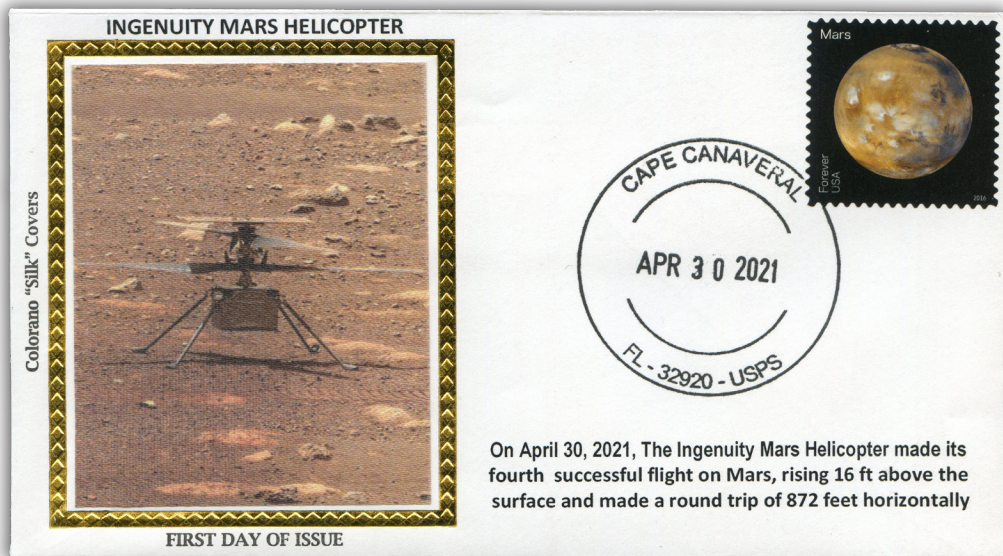


Figure 15. Usage of the Mars Views of Our Planets stamp.

Two official first day of issue hand cancels depicted Saturn (DCP) (Figure 13) and a telescope (pictorial) (Figure 14). The DCP cancel measures 2.76" x 1.57" and the pictorial cancel measures 2.42" x 1.45". Only panes of 16 stamps were sold.

In the annual *Linn's Stamp News* popularity poll, these stamps were voted the best designed commemoratives of 2016. The stamps were used on a variety of covers, including those commemorating events on the planet (Figure 15).

Thirteen different FDC cachets are known for the Mars stamp.

No errors, predates, first cachets, or unofficial FDCs have been reported for this stamp.

The stamps were sold out by April 28, 2021. ☺

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