

U.S., Japan, Share Gifts of Friendship Stamps



On April 10, in a joint issue, the United States and Japan once again share Gifts of Friendship, in this case with colorful stamps that incorporate their own designs as well as the designs of the other country. The United States sheet will be released in Washington, D.C. The official first day of issue site for the Japan sheet was not available at press time.

In a ceremony at the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C., on March 27, 1912, First Lady Helen Herron Taft and Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese ambassador, planted the first two of 3,020 flowering cherry trees gifted to the nation's capital from the city of Tokyo.

As a show of gratitude for this, former President William Howard Taft arranged for the United States to send 50 flowering dogwood trees to Japan in 1915.

These gestures of goodwill fostered a rich tradition of exchanging cherry and dogwood trees that continues to this day—and which are the basis for this joint stamp issue.

In both the United States and Japan, the dogwood and cherry trees exchanged over the years bring renewed life each spring after the long winter months and showcase the natural splendor of our two countries. They are celebrated on both sides of the Pacific Ocean with annual festivals that echo the spirit of friendship.

The two sheets are similar...but different. Shown above left is the U.S. sheet of ten stamps. The left side of the features four stamp designs: two created by the Postal Service and two created by Japan Post (the Japan stamps being denominated as U.S. Forever rate stamps). It also includes two Japanese characters meaning “friendship,” the “Gifts of Friendship” title of the issue and four lines of selvaque text. On the right side of the sheet are eight additional stamps (four each of the two U.S. designs).

The two U.S. designs picture the beautiful flowering cherry and dogwood trees in Washington, D.C. The first stamp depicts the Lincoln Memorial with cherry trees in the foreground, while the second stamp depicts the U.S. Capitol Building surrounded by white and pink dogwood trees.

The Japan Post sheet has two stamps with the U.S. designs, two stamps with similar designs—showing the Houses of Parliament (left) and the Kensei Kinenkan Clock Tower (right)—but where the right half of the U.S. sheet repeats the same two U.S. stamp designs (denominated as 82 yen stamps), the Japan sheet presents two each of three different blossoms.

The Japanese-designed stamps feature two prominent buildings in Tokyo, Japan's capital city: the National Diet Building framed by cherry blossoms, and the clock tower outside the Diet Building rising

behind a foreground of white dogwood flowers.

The Memorial Hall of Constitutional Politics Clock Tower is seen here in a recent photo as well as on a 1960 Japanese stamp, Sc. 686, picturing Yukio Ozaki. The stamp was issued to celebrate the completion of Ozaki Memorial Hall.



Yukio Ozaki, described as the “Father of Japanese Democracy,” was a statesmen who spoke out against Japanese militarism leading up to World War II and was part of the healing process between the U.S. and Japan following the war. In 1950 he was part of a delegation that went to the United States and spoke before both Houses of Congress, as well as making other public appearances in an effort to lay the foundations for amicable relations between the U.S. and Japan.

The Clock Tower stands outside the Japanese Diet, which is pictured on the other Japan stamp, and is shown here in a recent photo.

The National Diet is Japan's legislature, composed of a lower house that is called the House of Representatives, and an upper house, called the House of Councillors. In addition to passing laws, the Diet is formally responsible for selecting the Prime Minister. The Diet took its current form in 1947 upon the adoption of the postwar constitution.

Stamp artist Paul Rogers worked with art director and designer William J. Gicker to create the stamps. Gicker and Greg Breeding designed the stamp sheet. Junko Kaifuchi illustrated the stamps from Japan Post.

