

Linn's

U. S. Stamp Yearbook

1991



**29¢ WILLIAM SAROYAN (JOINT ISSUE)
LITERARY ARTS SERIES**



Date of Issue: May 22, 1991

Catalog Number: Scott 2538

Colors: line red, magenta, yellow, cyan, black

First-Day Cancel: Fresno, California, and Yerevan, Armenia, USSR

FDCs Canceled: 326,483. Combination joint issue FDCs, 7,890

Format: Panes of 50, horizontal, 5 across, 10 down. Gravure printing cylinders of 200 subjects (10 across, 20 down) manufactured by Armotek Industries Inc., Palmyra, New Jersey.

Perf: 10.9 (L perforator)

Selvage Inscription: "William Saroyan was/an Armenian-American/playwright & novelist." "His 1939 play 'The/Time of Your Life' won/him a Pulitzer Prize." "This is the third joint/stamp issue by the U.S./and the Soviet Union."

Selvage Markings: "©/United States/Postal Service/1991." "Use Correct/ZIP Code/®/36 USC 380." USPS Olympic logo.

Designer: Ren Wicks of Los Angeles, California

Art Director and Project Manager: Jack Williams (USPS)

Typographer: Bradbury Thompson (CSAC)

Modeler: Richard Sennett, Sennett Enterprises, for American Bank Note Company

Printing: Stamps printed for American Bank Note Company on a leased Champlain gravure press at J.W. Fergusson and Sons, Richmond, Virginia, under the supervision of Sennett Enterprises, Fairfax, Virginia. Stamps perforated, processed and shipped by ABNC, Bedford Park, Illinois.

Quantity Ordered: 161,000,000

Quantity Distributed: 161,498,000

Cylinder Number Detail: 1 group of 5 gravure cylinder numbers preceded by the letter A alongside corner stamp

Tagging: overall

The Stamp

William Saroyan, Armenian-American novelist, playwright and short-story writer, was honored on a 29¢ commemorative stamp issued May 22. The stamp, a part of the USPS Literary Arts series, was also part of a joint issue with the Soviet Union, of which Armenia — at the time the stamps were issued — was still a component republic.

The Soviets issued a 1-ruble stamp with the same basic design. The two stamps were jointly dedicated in ceremonies in Fresno, California, Saroyan's birthplace and hometown, and in Yerevan, Armenia's capital.

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee had received numerous proposals for a Saroyan stamp after the writer's death in 1981. A special CSAC subcommittee assigned to the Literary Arts series had endorsed him as an appropriate stamp subject once the required 10-year waiting period had elapsed. When CSAC finally decided to issue the stamp, one of those who reacted with enthusiasm was Robert Setrakian of San Francisco, chairman of the USPS Board of Governors and an Armenian-American himself, who was also president and chairman of the William Saroyan Foundation. Setrakian later participated with Postmaster General Anthony M. Frank in the unveiling of the stamp design in Fresno February 21, 1991.

In the meantime, Soviet delegates to a Universal Postal Union meeting in Bern, Switzerland, had notified representatives of the USPS International Postal Affairs Department of their interest in cooperating with the United States on a joint stamp issue. Out of this contact came an agreement, formalized at the UPU Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1989, for three such joint issues in consecutive years.

"Not all of our past joint issues have been seen as having equal significance in both the participating countries," said Donald M. McDowell, director of the USPS Office of Stamp and Philatelic Marketing. "In this case, we reached an understanding with the Soviets that we



The Soviet Union's William Saroyan stamp.

would look for subjects that had the potential to be quite popular in both their country and ours. They were very interested in the environment and ecological themes, and they were also interested in anything that had to do with a cultural tie or association with the United States. We looked at what we had pending in our stamp program, and shared the information with them." The first subject chosen for a joint issue was *Creatures of the Sea*, which was featured on a se-tenant block of four stamps in 1990. The second was Saroyan — a choice that was probably influenced by the fact that the director of the Stamp Issuing and Marketing Bureau of the USSR Ministry of Communications, L.K. Manukian, was Armenian.

The U.S. stamp, like many previous U.S. commemoratives, was printed by the American Bank Note Company on a Champlain gravure press at the J.W. Fergusson and Sons plant in Richmond, Virginia, and was perforated and finished at ABNC's plant in Chicago. This time, however, the manufacturer encountered a major problem.

The perforations were ragged, leaving many hanging and blind perfs, which made the stamps not only unattractive but also difficult to separate. Because the product failed to meet USPS specifications, ABNC was forced to destroy the entire lot of some 160 million stamps and print them again on a paper that would perforate properly. There was no financial loss to the Postal Service, but the mistake cost ABNC some \$360,000, which ABNC announced it would try to recover from the paper supplier.

The original paper, USPS told *Linn's Stamp News*, was a DuPont product furnished by Paper Corporation of America, and was too fibrous and soft for the job. The paper used for the second printing was described as a Glatfelter converted IVEX hardwood. Because the paper had fewer fibers, it perforated and separated more cleanly than the DuPont paper.

The Soviet stamp was available for sale through the USPS Philatelic Sales Division for 65¢. Many U.S. collectors bought it for use on combination first-day covers. One who did so was Lloyd A. DeVries, a columnist for *Stamp Collector*, who provided this insight from his experience: "I can state definitively (or perhaps commemoratively) that the U.S. produces better-tasting stamps than the Soviets."

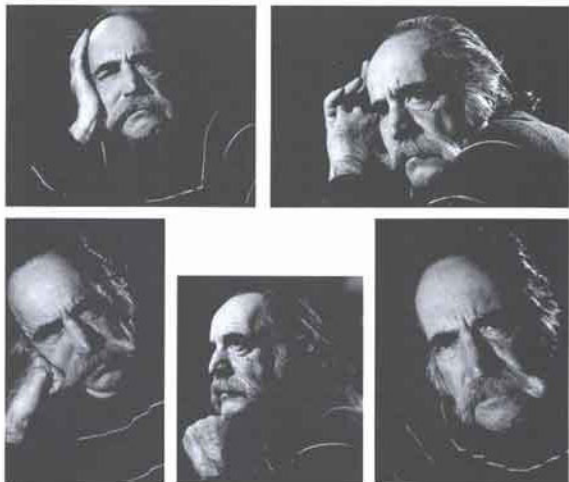
William Saroyan was born August 31, 1908, to immigrants from Armenia. Drawn to writing from boyhood, he sold his first story to a magazine when he was 20 and working at a San Francisco telegraph office. In 1934 his story "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" appeared in *Story* magazine and captured national attention. The story's "boyish ebullience," in the words of *Current Biography*, "buoyed up the spirits of American readers." It was followed by hundreds of short stories, essays, novels, plays, autobiographical sketches and miscellaneous items in well over 40 books. "A literary nonconformist, (Saroyan) writes in an original, freewheeling style directly from experience, but turns personal incidents into allegorical events in which his readers are induced to find themselves," *Current Biography* continued. "... Saroyan holds a probably secure place in American literature on the strength of several

masterpieces, such as his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *The Time of Your Life*, which express his exuberant personality, his wonder and innocence, his insight into human nature and his love and sympathy for mankind.”

In 1959 Saroyan moved to France to seek tax-exemption relief while working to pay off a substantial indebtedness to the Internal Revenue Service. Thereafter he divided his time between a Paris apartment and a Fresno house. He died in Fresno May 18, 1981.

One person who could testify to the robust and mercurial nature of Saroyan’s personality was Paul Kalinian, the man who took the photographs used in designing the stamp. Kalinian was a Fresno portrait photographer of Armenian heritage who was born in Lebanon. For years he had been fascinated by Saroyan — not only by his writing ability, but also by his patriarchal appearance: his broad forehead, shaggy gray hair and flamboyant walrus mustache. “As a photographer,” Kalinian said, “I wanted to capture his greatness, his natural feelings, and to portray his special genius.” One day — March 26, 1976 — the opportunity came.

Kalinian learned from a mutual friend, sculptor Varaz Samuelian, that the writer was in Fresno and was expected to visit Samuelian that afternoon. Samuelian invited Kalinian to set up his lights and cameras in



Some of Kalinian's photos of Saroyan that Ren Wicks used in creating his alternative stamp designs, including the one that was used on the stamp.

the sculptor's studio and try his luck.

Sure enough, Saroyan eventually arrived, pedaling his bicycle. Kalinian nervously introduced himself and asked Saroyan if he would be willing to pose. "He told me to get lost!" the photographer recalled.

Fortunately, Kalinian persisted, and as they talked — in English and Armenian — Saroyan softened. Eventually Saroyan asked Kalinian to sing an old folk song, *Tzangam Desnem Zim Giligia* ("I Wish to See My Armenia"), a sentimental favorite of the writer. "We sang this together," Kalinian said. "It was difficult for him to hold back the tears . . . He wasn't the same man I had met earlier. He said, 'I like you, Paul. Take all the pictures you want.'"

The photographer shot one exposure after another with his Mamiya R.B. 67 camera, using 2¼- by 2¾-inch Kodak color film. To his relief and joy, the pictures turned out well. Saroyan himself would later characterize one of them as the best photo that had ever been taken of him.

Several years later Kalinian formed a non-profit corporation, raised \$175,000 from his own funds plus contributions from other Saroyan admirers, and made a one-hour documentary film titled: *William Saroyan: The Man, The Writer*. The film, narrated by actor Mike Connors, premiered at the William Saroyan Theater in Fresno April 13, 1991.

The Design

When the time came to design the stamp, Jack Williams of USPS wrote to Paul Kalinian asking for a selection of photographs for use by the artist whom USPS had commissioned, Ren Wicks of Los Angeles.

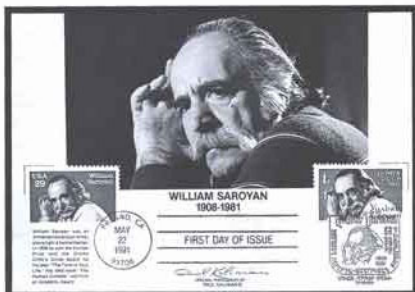
Working from the photos Kalinian supplied, Wicks made several concept sketches in color. Of this group, the committee chose a horizontal treatment of a portrait in which Saroyan was leaning his face against his clasped hands. The pose itself was taken from a specific Kalinian photograph, but Wicks borrowed from other pictures to create a face that bore a slight smile, rather than the solemn expression of the original. The



Artist Ren Wicks submitted to USPS these three alternative color sketches of Saroyan, all of them based on Paul Kalinian photographs.

M.S. Ter-gulanian, chief editor of *Garun* magazine, who spoke in Armenian. Other speakers included Haig Mardikian, vice chairman of the board of trustees of the William Saroyan Foundation, and Karen Humphrey, mayor of Fresno. A number of Soviet postal and philatelic officials were honored guests. Although Paul Kalinian wasn't included in the ceremony, USPS used one of his color photographs of Saroyan on the cover of the first-day program.

Collectors were given 60 days to obtain the first-day postmark by mail. Those wishing to obtain Soviet stamps and postmarks were encouraged



Paul Kalinian created this special cacheted cover from his photo portrait on which the stamp was based. The cover is shown here with first-day cancellations on both the U.S. and Soviet Saroyan stamps.

to buy the stamps by mail from the Philatelic Sales Division at a cost of 65¢ apiece, affix them to addressed envelopes and send them to the postmaster in Fresno along with a larger addressed stamped envelope for the return of the covers. Combination covers, bearing both countries' stamps and their respective postmarks, could also be obtained, but collectors were cautioned that the stamps must be spaced far enough apart so that neither country's cancellation would touch the other's stamp. USPS prepared combination covers on request at a cost of 94¢ per cover.

WHAT'S INSIDE . . .

The year 1991 saw more new U.S. postal issues than any previous year in history. You'll find complete facts and figures on every one of them in the pages of this, the biggest-ever *Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook*.

In addition, this unique one-source reference work tells the story of each stamp, stamped envelope, postal card and souvenir card: why it was issued, how its design was developed, what problems or controversies surrounded it, and how it related to previous issues.

Here in unprecedented abundance are the artists' sketches and essays that the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee considered and debated before arriving at its final design decisions. These illustrations, unavailable in any other published work, are essential to the collector who wants the full picture of the 1991 U.S. stamp program.

Yearbook readers will discover for the first time:

■ Where the "Ninas" are hidden in the drawings for the Comedians stamp booklet, as revealed by caricaturist Al Hirschfeld himself.

■ How the designers of the much-criticized Makeup Rate stamp tried dozens of approaches, incorporating decorative plus signs and ampersands, before finally settling on a words-only design.

■ How years of planning by top military and diplomatic historians went into the World War II souvenir sheet series, as USPS sought to head off pressure by veterans for an excessive number of stamps honoring specific services, units, weapons, engagements and heroes.

■ How a persistent photographer got temperamental author William Saroyan to pose for the portrait on which 1991's Saroyan stamp design was based.

■ How the booklet of Santa Claus stamps came to include an extra design variety unintended by the Postal Service.

■ How the wrong ship almost ended up in the design of the Antarctic Treaty airmail commemorative.

■ How the Cole Porter stamp inadvertently reproduced a non-existent musical marking in the score behind the composer.

These stories, and many more, are told in words and pictures in the 1991 *Linn's U.S. Stamp Yearbook*.