

Most Destructive on Local Scale

Philatelic Tornadoes

Don Hillger and Garry Toth

Rotating columns of air exist in different forms in the atmosphere. The most violent is the tornado, a strongly rotating column which extends downward from a cumulonimbus cloud and touches the ground. Waterspouts are similar to tornadoes, but are generally weaker and touch a water surface. The dustdevil, on the other hand, bears only a superficial resemblance to its two larger cousins. It is a small rotating column of air that develops without clouds, over land, on hot, dry and unstable summer days.

Tornadoes are most common over the United States whose unique geography allows for a frequent clash of cold dry continental air with warm moist tropical air from the Gulf of Mexico, forming the cumulonimbus thunderstorms which can spawn tornadoes. Roughly 1,000 tornadoes per year are reported over the U.S. of which ten to twenty are violent and cause substantial damage. However, tornadoes do occur in all parts of the world, except Antarctica. Waterspouts can occur over lakes or oceans in most of the world, while dustdevils are limited to hot, dry continental areas.

Tornadoes exist on small atmospheric scales with damaging winds generally on the order of 100 meters wide. Waterspouts tend to be smaller, and dustdevils much smaller. This can be contrasted with hurricanes which are very much larger with a typical horizontal scale of a few hundreds of kilometers.

The first tornado or waterspout to appear on a postage stamp was issued by



Rimbaud Described Waterspouts
France (Scott 668)



Dark Cloud and Waterspout
Nicaragua (Scott C561)

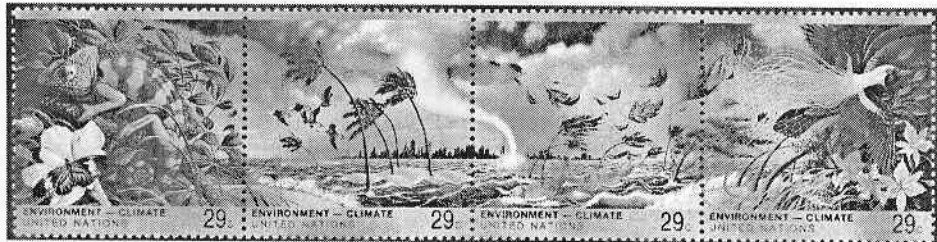
France in 1951 (Scott 668). This stamp is one of a set of three commemorating French poets. The waterspout is shown on the stamp commemorating Arthur Rimbaud's (1854-1891) work *Le Ivre Bateau* (The Drunken Boat). Rimbaud invoked the waterspout in at least two of his writings: *The Drunken Boat* from 1871, and one poem from *Illuminations*, a series of over 40 writings from 1872.

Another waterspout stamp was issued by Nicaragua in 1965 (Scott C561). It shows a dark cloud connected to the water surface below it via a waterspout. The stamp was issued in celebration of the centennial of the International Red Cross.

In 1968 Belgium issued a postage stamp (Scott B831) showing a tornado, from art work titled *Tornado* by Flemish



Flemish Artist Depicts Tornado
Belgium (Scott B831)



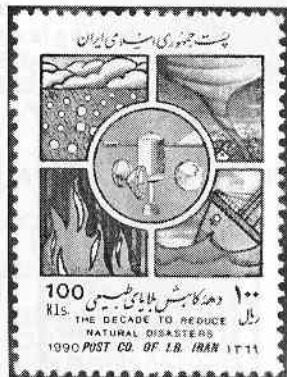
Waterspout Featured In Center of This Se-tenant Strip
United Nations, New York (Scott 634-635)

painter Poll Mara (1920-1998). This stamp was one of a set of three sold with a surtax for victims of different types of disasters. Unfortunately, the form of the tornado is not entirely clear in this colorful but abstract painting.

The next tornado to appear on a stamp was issued by Iran in 1991 (Scott 2454) for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). This was a United Nations program of the 1990s to raise public awareness of natural disasters and their effects. The stamp shows a three-cup anemometer in the center surrounded by four panels showing different types of natural disasters with a tornado in the upper-right panel.

In 1993 the United Nations (New York) issued a strip of four stamps (Scott 634-635) on a theme of the environment and climate. The middle two stamps clearly show a waterspout split by the perforation between the two stamps.

A questionable tornado is shown on a souvenir sheet issued by Kyrgyzstan in 1995 (Scott B10). According to the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalog*, this



Tornado Shown In Upper Right
Iran (Scott 2454)

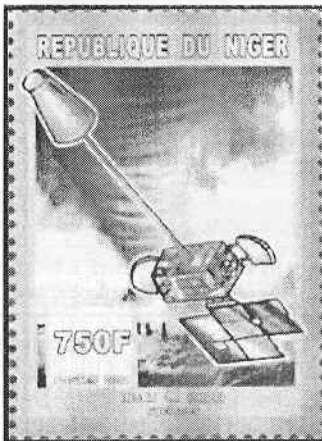
sheet shows a tornadic storm behind a man in black robes seated in the desert. However the lower part of the cloud and the tornado are not visible in the image. The top portion of the cloud appears more like a detached thunderstorm anvil, a feature that is common in arid climates. It occurs when the lower part of the storm evaporates quickly leaving only the anvil. Such clouds are not good candidates for tornado formation.

A tornado is also featured on a souvenir sheet containing a single stamp issued by Grenada in 1998 (Scott 2757). The item has a Disney theme and shows Hercules wrestling a tornado. In 2000 Bolivia issued a stamp (Scott 1111) with an AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) theme showing a symbolic tornado. The red tornado symbolizes the extensive damage being done to lives and cultures because of the AIDS epidemic.

Niger issued a nice set of six stamps in 2001 showing the geostationary weather satellite systems in current use in the world. The stamp showing the *Insat-1A* weather satellite also shows a large tornado in the background (Scott 1075d). Other stamps in the set show different weather or disaster scenes in the background behind each featured satellite.



A Questionable Tornado
Kyrgyzstan (Scott B10)



Satellite Encounters Tornado Niger (Scott 1075d)

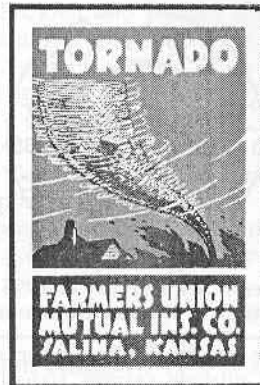
In 2002 the Central Africa Republic issued a set of single-stamp souvenir sheets (Non-Scott), one of which shows two tornados; one of them is on the perforated stamp and the other in the margin around the stamp. The text on the stamp mentions "Canada," and also includes the date July 4, 2001. From this information, one can conclude that it is referring to a tornado that occurred over Ontario on that day.

Finally, a beautiful set of 15 "Cloudscape" stamps was issued by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) in October 2004, one of which nicely depicts a cumulonimbus cloud and a tornado. A set of postal cards issued at the same time shows the same group of images including the tornado on one of the postal cards.

The authors are also aware of two cinderellas (non-postal stamp-like items), possibly from the 1960s or 1970s, that



Tornado From Cumulonimbus Cloud U.S.A. (Scott 3870c)

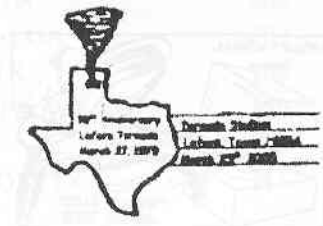


Tornado Sweeps Away Building Salina, Kansas, Cinderella

show tornados. Such nonofficial and non-denominated "stamps" are usually issued to promote a specific theme or event. In one case, World Vision, Inc. of Pasadena, California, issued a cinderella to encourage support for their mission to "help stricken areas around the world." On another cinderella, Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Company of Salina, Kansas, featured a tornado carrying away a building. This is one of a set of three cinderellas, the others show the dangers of hail and lightning.

Postal Cancels and Cachets

Tornadoes and waterspouts have also appeared on a number of postal cancels. One of these is found on the FDC (First Day Cover) of the United Nations (New York) environment and climate stamps previously mentioned. In addition to the cancel, a cachet showing the waterspout is also seen on the envelope. Cachets are used to enhance postal covers by adding to the theme of the stamp or stamps on the cover and so create an item that is appealing to stamp collectors. The same tornado cancel and cachet also appeared at the



Lefors, Texas, Observes Tornado 30th Anniversary

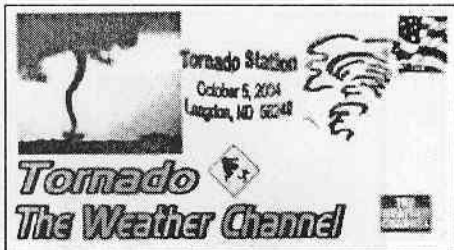


**Tenth Anniversary of 1995
Twister in Wakita, Oklahoma**

same time on the FDCs of the environment and climate stamps issued by the UN offices in Geneva and Vienna.

The United States has produced a large number of tornado cancels and references to tornadoes in cachets dating back to at least 1934. In that year the word "tornado" appeared in the text of a cachet on an advertising cover for an insurance association in Iowa. In another variation, "multi-twisters" are mentioned in the text of a cachet on the FDC of a stamp issued in 1981 for the centennial of the American Red Cross.

At least six cancels appeared in the year 2000 on various postal covers commemorating local events or festivals at the following U.S. locations: Coffeyville, Kansas; Tampico, Illinois; Hodington, Kansas; and Harlan, Iowa. Many of these tornado cancels are found on postal covers issued for special events that do not appear to be directly associated with the weather or tornadoes. The tornado cancel may have been inspired by a tornadic event some time in the history of the town hosting the event. These types of covers are more common from "tornado alley" states. An example not associated with the weather is the tornado cancel from Lamesa, Texas, which appears on a cover featuring the Lamesa Golden Tornadoes, the name of the local basketball team.



**North Dakota Weather Channel
Is Known As "Tornado Station"**

On October 5, 2004, a special cancel and cachet were produced by The Weather Channel for Langdon, North Dakota, as "Tornado Station," commemorating the Cloudscapes tornado stamp that was officially issued the previous day. The special cancellation was used because the photograph of the tornado on the Cloudscapes stamp was taken by a local resident, Edi Ann Otto from Osabrook, North Dakota, a town about 16 miles from Langdon. This was just one of several photos she took of the tornado as it passed by her farm. In addition to Langdon, the towns of Osabrook and Edmore issued similar special tornado cancellations. Similarly, a tornado cancel and cachet from Battery Park, Virginia, as "Cloudscape Station" were issued for use with the 2004 U.S. Cloudscape tornado stamp.

Some tornado cancels were issued following specific tornadic events. For example, a cancel was issued in 2005 for the 30th anniversary of the 1975 tornado that swirled through Lefors, Texas, killing two people and damaging many homes and businesses.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a couple of tornado postal items were issued in connection with the 2005 stamp honoring Academy Award winning songwriter Yip Harburg for his "Somewhere



Some Tornado Cancels Are Not Associated With Weather.



Dustdevils Are "Willy-Willies"
Australia (Scott 1609)

Over the Rainbow" theme music for the *Wizard of Oz* movie. Although the stamp shows a rainbow, the well-known tornado of the story appears in the First Day of Issue cancel of the stamp. In addition, the cancel was used by Morristown, Pennsylvania, as part of its sesquicentennial celebrations.

Dustdevils

The weaker cousin of the tornado, the dustdevil, has also appeared on a couple of postal items. One of these is a stamp issued by Australia in 1997 which shows two dustdevils (Scott 1609). In Australia, they are termed "willy-willies," but the "Two Willy-Willies" of the stamp also refer to a story which is part of Australian aboriginal dreamtime mythology. The other postal dustdevil known to the authors appears in a cachet from the FDC of the set of four weather stamps issued by Great Britain in 2001.

A checklist and images of the postal items (stamps, souvenir sheets, postal stationery, cancels, and cachets on postal covers) mentioned in this article can be found on the authors; Website: <<http://www.cira.colostate.edu/ramm/hillger/tornado.htm>>. If readers know of other postal items showing tornadoes, waterspouts, or dustdevils, the authors would greatly appreciate learning about them. •

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Worst U.S. Tornadoes Since 1925

Date	Location	Deaths
March 18, 1925	IL, IN, MO	689
April 5, 1936	GA, MS	455
April 3-4, 1974	AL, GA, KY, OH, TN	315
April 11, 1965	IN, IL, MI, OH, WI	271
January 3, 1949	AR, MO, TN	208
April 6, 1936	Gainesville, GA	203
April 9, 1947	KS, OK, TX	169
June 23, 1944	MD, OH, PA, WV	150
June 8, 1942	MI, OH	142
May 20, 1957	KS, MO, OK, TX	115

Source: *World Almanac* (New York Times, 2005)