

# Introduction

These materials have been prepared to help you learn more about the Olympics through philately—the hobby of stamp collecting. Though not widely known, the Olympic Games owe a special debt to philately, which helped make the revival of the Olympic Games possible in 1896. When it appeared that lack of money might prevent the Games from being held, two Greek philatelists proposed that their country issue a series of 12 commemorative stamps. A portion of the revenue from the sale of these stamps was dedicated to the building of an Olympic stadium and other facilities. Olympic philately was born.

Despite the success of Greece, Olympic commemorative stamps were slow to catch on. Although Greece issued 14 stamps in 1906 to mark the 10th anniversary of the revival of the Games, no country—including Greece—issued stamps for the 1900, 1904, 1908, or 1912 Olympic Games. This changed in 1920 when Belgium hosted the Games, releasing three Olympic stamps. From this point, the tradition continued of host nations issuing commemorative Olympic stamps.

In 1932, the U.S. hosted its first Olympic Games. The first Olympic stamps issued by the United States were released in 1932, with one stamp for the Lake Placid Winter Games and two for the Summer Games. After that, no U.S. Olympic stamps were issued until the 1960 Winter Olympic Games in Squaw Valley, California. After a 12-year absence, the U.S. issued 2 stamps each for the 1972 Summer and Winter Games. Since then, the U.S. has marked every Olympiad with a set of commemorative stamps—and on occasion Olympic postal stationery.

The growing number of collectors of worldwide Olympic stamps led to the creation of OLYMPHILEX. Every non-Olympic year, a three-day Olympic Collectors World Fair in Lausanne, Switzerland, brings together hundreds of people from all over the world to exchange their treasures. The next Fair will be held in spring 1997.

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