

The Space City Cover Society has been producing space covers for collectors since January of 1967. This is our 15th year! With our NASA Local Post issues, we hold the record of being the Local Post (space oriented) with the longest, continuous period of operation. And we will have our commemorative covers ready for the up-coming Columbia Shuttle mission. Here are details on several recent issue plus what we will have for the mission itself.

SHUTTLE MOVED TO LAUNCH PAD...December 29, 1980 was a red-letter day for the Space Shuttle Columbia. After a five-week checkout in the cavernous Vehicle Assembly Building, the entire shuttle assembly was rolled to the launch pad. This assembly consisted of the orbiter, external tank and twin rocket boosters and was carried by the mobile launching platform.

The shuttle's 3½-mile trip to launch pad 39A took about eight hours, with the transporter crawling along a rock-covered road at 1 mph or less. There were frequent inspections along the way to make sure that the shuttle was level. Once there, a snag developed in transferring the mobile launching platform, to which the shuttle is attached, onto the pad. A NASA spokesman said a small steel access tower on the pad's surface had to be cut away. The entire operation of moving the Columbia was completed by nightfall of December 29.

Bolted nose-up across the huge crawler-transporter, the 10-million pound load had made the trip that was watched by several thousand spectators. There was a ceremony upon the completion of the trip. Young and Crippen, Columbia's crew, were dressed in blue flight suits. They were on the wind-blown platform with NASA officials and other dignitaries. NASA Administrator Robert Frosch told the shivering crowd, "We are now at the threshold of a new capability to investigate the universe."

The Space City Cover Society prepared covers for this event, postmarked Cape Canaveral on the 29th of December. These covers are appropriately cacheted.

FLIGHT READINESS FIRING...With the successful firing of Columbia's three powerful engines on February 20, 1981, and after an official evaluation of the test, NASA officials have given the okay for launch no earlier than the week of April 5. On hand to watch the test were Young and Crippen.

Friday's flawless, scheduled 20-second engine firing was at 6:45 a.m. EST, and it was a big boost to the nearly \$10-billion Space Shuttle project. In the practice firing at Cape Canaveral, the craft's power plant generated 1.1-million pounds of thrust, just as planned, while the 122 foot tall Columbia, its two solid-fuel boosters, and a giant fuel tank, remained locked firmly on the pad by bolts. On an actual launch, explosive charges will sever the bolts to release the spacecraft, and the solid-fuel boosters would ignite to help it into orbit.

This test marked the first time in the U. S. manned space program that engines have been fired on the launch pad during a countdown practice. In the earlier Mercury, Gemini and Apollo projects, NASA gained that experience by launching the capsules unmanned before committing astronauts to fly them.

For this historic space event, the Space City Cover Society was represented by our servicer and our commemorative covers were cancelled at the Cape Canaveral post office on that day.

COVERS FOR THE MISSION ITSELF...This first Space Shuttle mission (STS-1) will be 54 hours, 30 minutes in duration with launch from the Kennedy Space Center. Mission operations will be controlled by the Johnson Space Center. The Dryden Flight Research Center is the primary landing site, but provisions exist for a return-to-launch-site abort landing at the Kennedy Space Center and an abort landing after less than a single orbit (abort-once-around) at the Northrop Strip, White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

The Space City Cover Society will have four major sets of covers, two covers per set. The first set will be for the launch date and landing date, with both machine cancelled at either Cape Canaveral or Kennedy Space Center, Florida (whichever post office is open on both days). The second set of two will be machine cancelled at Houston (Mission Control Center) on both the launch date and landing date. The third set will be cancelled at Houston on both launch date and landing date with the Mailer's Permit Postmark (the Space City Cover Society has permit #1). The fourth set will be cancelled on both launch date and landing date at Edwards, Calif., where the scheduled landing of Columbia will take place.

Should there be an abort of the mission at any time after launch, we will go ahead and cancel the covers, which will have an appropriate launch and landing cachet, and then overprint with any abort details. This is what we did on the aborted Apollo 13 mission and it was the covers produced by the Space City Cover Society that gave the collector the entire information on the cover, including the abort details.

We will have our familiar NASA Local Post commemorative issue for this event. There will be a single stamp printed in bi-colors, featuring the logo of the Columbia mission. Each cover of the Houston set (both the machine cancelled and Mailer's Permit Postmark sets) will have, in addition to the U.S. stamp and cancel, a single of this new NASA Local Post. Each of the Local Post singles on cover will be cancelled with the NASA Local Post commemorative cancel. This new Local Post issue will be available to collectors in sheets of six, perforated, and size 3½ X 5½ inches.

A bit of information about the U. S. stamps that will be used on our covers. We assume that the rate will be 18¢ and we will use whatever first class stamp is available at the time we prepare our covers. There will be a set of eight U. S. space stamps issued later but it is our understanding that they will not be issued until after the shuttle mission.

We hope all of this information will be helpful to you, the collector, and that it will help in your planning of your needs in regards to the Space Shuttle program. If it has been awhile since you collected space covers, NOW is the time to start once more. And if this is coming to a new collector, why not begin your space cover collection with the Space Shuttle. This is an entirely new concept in space travel and transportation and you will be getting in on the start.