

THE forever STAMP

Since 2007, the U.S. Postal Service has sold Forever Stamps, which remain usable for First-Class postage no matter how the price of stamps changes. However, these stamps aren't the only ones designed to last forever. In the past few years, a growing number of postage stamp images, featuring anything from fruit to birds to close family members, have been set in permanent ink on arms, backs, legs and other body parts by tattooists around the world.

Dario Garcia Teruel, a tattooist from San Diego, CA, told *The Postal Record* that over the last year, he has noticed that young people, especially members of Generation Z, have frequently been asking him to give them stamp tattoos.

Axiom Tattoo, where Garcia Teruel works, posted a viral TikTok video in early March that has received more than 13 million views and 1.5 million likes. In the video, each tattooist was asked, "What is a common Gen Z tattoo trend right now?" Garcia Teruel responded, "post stamps."

Stamps are one of the shop's "flash tattoos"—popular and simple designs put out on display. Garcia Teruel often takes walk-ins, and the shop is close to multiple college campuses and beaches, so he often gets clients looking for flash tattoos that they can get whenever they feel like it.

"Because it's a popular thing, when people do walk-ins, that's the thing that they gravitate toward," he said.

David C. Lane is an associate professor for the Department of Criminal Justice Sciences at Illinois State University. He has authored one book on tattooing, *The Other End of the Needle: Continuity and Change among Tattoo Workers*, and has written chapters in two other books about tattooing. In addition, he has taught courses on the culture of tattooing.

As Lane sees it, postage stamp tattoos are a fad.

"There's always an immediate enthusiasm for fads, but that enthusiasm often wears off, and as I look back at the history of tattooing, this stamping is probably one of those," he said in an interview with *The Postal Record*.

Lane said the difference between tattooing fads and other types of fads is that this type of fad stays, as tattoos are permanent.

"They're staying with people, so even when the enthusiasm wears off, it's going to be a distinct marker of a particular generation's body over time," he said.

Similar fads have occurred with other generations, Lane said, as with members of Generation X getting nautical star tattoos in the late '90s and early 2000s.



Joe Jonas (l) has a tattoo to honor his grandfather (above).



Ronan Bridges's blue jay stamp tattoo



Some of the stamp tattoos that Garcia Teruel has created



“We look back now, and you can clearly date that everyone who has them is now in their 40s,” Lane said.

However, unlike in the '90s, Gen Z has access to more information, and it has that access more quickly, with social media sites at their fingertips. Garcia Teruel said he often gets clients who walk in and show him things from social media, especially from Pinterest.

“The tattoo scene, in terms of consuming tattoos, has really changed with the internet, and it’s both good and bad,” Lane said. “It’s good that people have more information, but it seems like these fads are quicker to take form and shape in the sense that somebody finds an image on Pinterest and then it gets shared a bunch of times, and all of a sudden a bunch of people are getting very similar tattoos.”

Garcia Teruel’s typical tattoo is known as “ignorant style,” meaning black simplistic lines and shapes, like a doodle. This style has become popular over recent years, a phenomenon that Lane attributes to the availability and increased popularity of at-home tattooing kits. Most amateur tattooists have not undergone the extensive training and apprenticeship that professional tattooists do, so it is easier for amateurs to create simplistic designs, like stamp tattoos.

For example, Ronan Bridges, a government contractor from Fairfax, VA, has been tattooing himself for four years. He has 32 tattoos, almost all of which he has given himself. “I always drew on myself as a kid and I figured, ‘Why not?’” Bridges said. One of his tattoos is a black ink postage stamp containing a blue jay with “JAY” underneath it, a tribute to his father, James, whose nicknames are “bird” and “jay.”

“With my tattoos, I try and make my body into a scrapbook of things that are special to me,” he said. “I have a very soft spot for my dad, so I thought of getting some sort of blue jay to think of him.”

Bridges added that he doesn’t talk to his dad much anymore and, “if we did, it would really only be through letters and stuff like that.”

He chose to add the stamp specifically because “I’ve always really liked postage stamps; like, when I was a kid, I thought they were just fun stickers that you bought at the post office.”

Stamp tattoos’ popularity has been exhibited on celebrities’ bodies, as well. For example, Emma Chamberlain—a YouTube content creator, coffee business owner and podcaster—has a postage stamp tattoo on her left arm. The tattoo features simple depictions of a pine tree and a horseshoe inside a stamp shape with perforated edges.

Although Chamberlain has not said anything publicly about the stamp tattoo specifically, she has given a bit of insight on why she has her 11 tattoos. On her left arm are tattoos mainly in honor of her mother and on her right arm are tattoos mainly in honor of her father.

“They represent impactful moments in my life, mainly in regards to my parents,” she said in an episode of her “Anything Goes” podcast.

Another celebrity is Joe Jonas, one of the members of pop band the Jonas Brothers. He got a stamp tattoo of his grandfather, PaPa Miller, which he posted on Instagram with the simple caption, “For PaPa Miller. Thank you @mr.k_tattoo.” The stamp depicts a young photo of his grandfather in a frame with a horse crest and a box

Emma Chamberlain (l) has a stamp tattoo of a tree and a horseshoe.



Olivia Alonso (r) with her father (l) and grandfather in his garden in Florida. To celebrate her family, she got the tattoo below.



underneath with the word “PaPa” in cursive and a date.

The Jonas brother’s tattoo incorporates many elements within one tattoo—another reason that Garcia Teruel says postage stamp tattoos pique clients’ interest. Stamps can have multiple elements—such as a subject, text, a price, a country, perforated edges, and a date or a year. This allows for a lot of freedom and personalization in a single tattoo.

Garcia Teruel has noticed that many people get stamp tattoos of places where they have lived or visited. Lane recognized this trend, too.

“People would go places and get a tattoo and come back and they’d always remember like, ‘Oh yeah, I had that trip,’” he said.

He also said that “people send mail and collect stamps historically as a way to sort of document their life journey.”

Olivia Alonso, an Architectural Design and Construction Technology student in Fort Myers, FL, got just such a tattoo last year after visiting Paris. As she walked through the city, she saw many postcards in the shops, and the idea of getting a stamp tattoo started to appeal to her.

Her tattoo depicts an orange slice, a branch, a leaf and a price of 20 cents.

“I chose to get the postage stamp because it signifies the beauty in travel,” she said. “Outside of our day-to-day, there are new places waiting to be explored and new opportunities.”

But the subject of her stamp hits much closer to home. Alonso is from Florida, where oranges are among the most common fruit, and she grew up partaking of fresh fruit and vegetables from her grandparents’ garden.

Her grandparents made many sacrifices so that their family could

immigrate to the United States, so it was important for her to include an orange in her tattoo to honor them. Alonso also included the number 20 because she got the tattoo the spring she turned 20 years old.

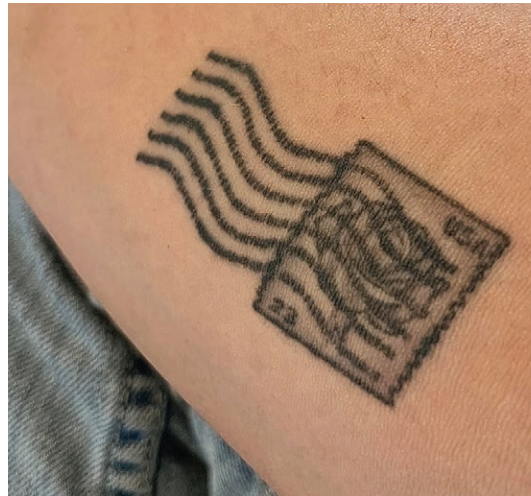
Katy Jo Turner, a St. Paul, MN, resident who works in social services, got a postage stamp tattoo in honor of a loved one. She brought the tattooist a letter that she had received from her friend to model it after.

She had met that friend, Hailey Rose, during their college days. After they graduated and moved to separate states, they corresponded with each other by mail.

“Our letter writing brought us so much closer,” Turner said. “There’s something about writing and sending and receiving letters that is just so much more intimate, and you ask and answer different questions that you never typically ask friends.”

Upon Hailey Rose’s death in 2023, Turner got a stamp tattoo depicting a rose on her arm, so every day she is reminded of her dear friend. When she was alive, her friend would get a tattoo on all her milestone birthdays, so Turner said it was the perfect thing to do to honor her friend’s memory.

“On her birthday, after she passed away, I got this tattoo in honor of her,” Turner said. “The number on the stamp is 23 in my tattoo because her birthday was Nov. 23.” **PR**



Katy Jo Turner’s stamp tattoo in remembrance of her friend Hailey Rose