

Introducing...

SPACE CITY COVER SOCIETY

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THE APOLLO TRAGEDY OF JANUARY 27, 1967

The date was Friday, January 27, 1967. The place was Cape Kennedy, Florida. At Launch Pad 34 an Apollo spacecraft had been installed on top of a Saturn 1-B rocket. Three astronauts had climbed into the spacecraft about 1:00 p.m., a couple of hours late because of some check-out problems. The three

astronauts were Lt. Col. Virgil I. Grissom, Lt. Col. Edward H. White, and Lt. Cmdr. Roger B. Chaffee.

This day was another preparation for the three in getting ready for America's first manned flight of Apollo. A new launch day of February 21, 1967 had been set.

Soon after settling in the craft, Grissom sniffed a strange odor in his space suit system. The countdown stopped. After finding no impurities, the practice countdown was resumed. At 5:40 p.m. a communications bug caused a new interruption in the countdown, which had reached the point when the spacecraft would switch from external to internal power. The countdown was stopped again. It was hoped that the problem could be quickly found and if it could, the practice was to take only about ten minutes more to complete.

The countdown was never resumed.

At 6:30 p.m. the crew was still inside the craft. Cabin pressure, cabin temperature and oxygen-supply temperature were all normal. In a few seconds there was a brief surge of current. At three seconds after 6:31 some listeners on the ground heard Chaffee report through the communications system, "I smell fire." Monitoring devices on the ground indicated movement inside the spacecraft. Then from inside came the words, "We've got a fire in the cockpit."

At 6:31:17, the cabin ruptured. It took launch pad workmen about five minutes to work their way through flames and acrid smoke to get the hatch open. It was too late. White was lying in his couch with his arms over his head. Grissom had an arm outstretched. Chaffee was slumped in his couch.

Doctors arrived on the scene about 6:45 p.m. The three astronauts were pronounced dead. Later, investigators would determine that the three had lost consciousness about 15 to 20 seconds after the fire was first noticed. Asphyxiation due to smoke inhalation would be listed as the official cause of death of Grissom, White and Chaffee.

SCCS COVERS OF THE PRE-APOLLO ERA...THE "SCCS CLASSIC ERA"

With the launch of Apollo 7 on October 11, 1968, space cover collecting really took a leap forward. After the Space City Cover Society produced its first cover on January 27, 1967 and up until the launch of Apollo 7, twelve additional covers were produced. Some have even named this the "SCCS classic period." Each of these 13 covers was produced in quantities of just a few hundred, except for #SCCS-1. It had a quantity of only 98. Over the past 20 years, most of these 13 have probably been put away or lost, and destined never to see the light of day again.

Prices in this list are what we feel are fair retail prices as of the date of this publication (September 1986). Each is based on the quantities produced, what we feel are still around today, and the number that have shown up in the years since their issue.

These 13 covers are listed starting on page 2. Following that listing, additional details of the covers will be given.

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
SCCS-1	Memorial cover for death of Grissom, White and Chaffee. Machine cancelled Houston January 27, 1967 p.m. just hours after their death. Initial cachet printed with generic NASA design. Additional border and wording printed in black.	\$400.00
SCCS-2	Fifth anniversary Glenn's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel Feb 20, 1967. Cachet rubber stamped. Cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in blue and black and cancelled with NASA Local Post commemorative cancel in green ink. This is the first day of issue of the first NASA Local Post issue.	45.00
SCCS-3	Fifth anniversary Carpenter's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel May 24, 1967. Cachet rubber stamped in orange ink. Cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in wine and black ink cancelled with NASA Local Post commemorative cancel in blue ink.	20.00
SCCS-4	Maj. Edward G. Givens killed near Pearland TX close to what is now the Johnson Space Center. Pearland machine cancel June 6, 1967, date of his death. Cachet rubber stamped in black ink.	75.00
SCCS-5	NASA named 11 as Scientist Astronauts in Houston Aug 4, 1967. Houston machine cancel. The cachet printed in blue ink. (Typo error as the cachet reads Dr. Karl G. Henize's name as "Nenize.")	20.00
SCCS-6	First day of issue of Scott #1331-32. This se-tenant pair honored the Gemini space program. First day of issue at the Kennedy Space Center FL on Sep 29, 1967. This was the first first day cover produced by SCCS. Most of the SCCS covers have a single of the NASA Local Post issue honoring Ed White tied in with the first day of issue cancel.	40.00
SCCS-7	"Unofficial" first day city for #1331-32. About 200 pairs of the se-tenant stamps were flown from Florida to Houston. The Houston covers have a rubber stamped cachet in green ink. The pair of stamps cancelled with Houston hand cancel date of Sep 29, 1967 p.m. Each cover also has a single of the Ed White NASA Local Post commemorative printed in blue-grey and black and cancelled with the NLP hand cancel in purple ink.	65.00
SCCS-8	Fifth anniversary of Schirra's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel of October 3, 1967. The cachet rubber stamped in red ink. Cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in salmon and black ink and cancelled with the NLP hand cancel in purple ink.	20.00
SCCS-9	First anniversary of death of Grissom, White and Chaffee. Houston machine cancel of Jan 27, 1968. Cachet rubber stamped in black ink. Each cover has NASA Local Post commemorative printed bicolor in blue and black ink and cancelled with NLP hand cancel in blue ink.	30.00

NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
SCCS-10	Seventh anniversary of Shepard's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel of May 5, 1968. Cachet rubber stamped in purple ink. Each cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in light green and black and cancelled with NLP hand cancel in red ink.	20.00
SCCS-11	Tenth anniversary of Cooper's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel of May 15, 1968. Cachet rubber stamped in red ink. Each cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in red and black and cancelled with NLP hand cancel in purple ink.	20.00
SCCS-12	First helicopter mail delivery from NASA MSC to Houston General Post Office. The event also honored the 50th anniversary of U.S. Air Mail service. Houston machine cancel of May 15, 1968. Cachet rubber stamped in blue ink. Each cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative rubber stamped on the cover in red ink and cancelled with NLP hand cancel in green ink, just to the right.	25.00
SCCS-13	Seventh anniversary of Grissom's Mercury flight. Houston machine cancel of July 21, 1968. Cachet rubber stamped in brown ink. Each cover has a NASA Local Post commemorative printed bi-color in orange and black and cancelled with NLP hand cancel in black.	20.00

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MORE DETAILS OF SOME OF THE COVERS ISSUED BY SCCS

SCCS-1.....This cover sold for just under \$400 in 1983 through the SCCS, and it went to a collector that knew this was the first cover produced by SCCS. A space cover specialist tells us that he has sold several of these covers over the years at \$200+ and that he felt that when this booklet you are now reading gets into the hands of collectors, that price would probably double. Since this is our first cover and due to the event it commemorates, we have put a catalog price on it of \$400.

Also, as of this date no other philatelic covers cancelled Houston on January 27, 1967 p.m. have been reported. The superintendent in charge of the cancelling that night in the main Houston post office advised Allen Banks, then SCCS vice-president, that no other covers (besides the approximately 100 covers done by SCCS) were presented at Houston for cancelling. If any do exist, they would have had to be dropped in one of the main depositories and have gone through the regular mail channels. Again, as of this date, no such item has shown up. If any do exist, we hope this catalog will bring them to light.

HOW THIS FIRST SCCS COVER WAS PRODUCED

Before the details of the cover production is begun, it is best to tell how the Space City Cover Society came into being. Just a few months before the untimely deaths of Grissom, White and Chaffee, several Houston area collectors got together in discussions for putting an old idea into action. Allen Banks, who had been president of the Houston Philatelic Society in the early 1960s, had long felt that collectors in the Houston area should get together in finding a permanent meeting place.

This would mean buying a "run-down" building and fixing it up or starting one from scratch. Both alternatives soon met a dead end due to high costs. (Today, those estimates seem small in comparison.). As had happened over the previous six or seven

years in Houston, enough collectors could not be motivated to even get the project out of the planning stage. As a result, in January 1967, the new group had dwindled down to three or four collectors, and seemed to be on its way out of existence.

A HOUSTON COVER FOR JANUARY 27, 1967?...TO BE OR NOT TO BE

As soon as NASA released the news of the tragic deaths of Grissom, White and Chaffee, Houston radio and television stations interrupted their regular programming to let the public know of the sketchy details. On hearing the news reports, thousands of Houstonians began calling friends to ask if they had heard about the tragedy.

One of the telephone calls was from Allen Banks to Harry Anderson asking whether it would be appropriate to produce a memorial cover cancelled in Houston that evening. Allen Banks had experience as a cover producer as he was founder of TREYCO, a Houston firm that had produced first day covers and event covers.

Banks told Anderson that he had a partial box of a NASA generic cachet on rag bond envelopes and that those could be used. He added that he had some sheets of the 3¢ Fort Bliss and the 4¢ Project Mercury stamps and that these space-related stamps would be appropriate for the covers. After about five minutes of planning on the telephone, the two agreed to service such a cover.

Then came the stumbling block. Banks telephoned several numbers at the main Houston post office but none were answered that late at night. Being a friend of Granville Elder, the postmaster of Houston, Banks was able to contact him and told him what we wanted to do. Elder had long been cordial to Houston collectors and it was he and Allen Banks who had detailed all of the events for the first day of issue ceremony of the Sam Houston 5¢ commemorative issued just three years earlier in Houston.

Elder advised Banks which door to knock on when we got to the post office lobby and said that by that time he would have telephoned the night superintendent to let him know what we wanted to have done.

Allen Banks lived in southeast Houston and Harry Anderson lived in southwest Houston but by 9:30 p.m., both were in the lobby of the main Houston post office, where all area cancelling was done. While Anderson began separating the sheets of stamps, Banks knocked on the proper door in order to contact the night superintendent. Banks gave him one of the blank envelopes and asked if we could get a sample of how the machine cancel would look. In about five minutes, the one cancelled blank was brought back to the lobby.

Along with the 3¢ Fort Bliss stamps and 4¢ Project Mercury stamps, Banks had brought some 2¢ stamps. So the two began licking and sticking the 3¢ Fort Bliss and 2¢ regular issue first. When about 25 covers were ready, Banks knocked on the door again and in a few minutes, those 25 were back nicely cancelled.

As Banks finished up the Fort Bliss stamps, Anderson began "playing" the lobby stamp machine for the 1¢ coil stamps. Another 25 covers were soon ready and handed in for cancelling. By about 10:15 about 100 covers were completed as that was all of the stamps available. It was not until then that it was noticed that two different machine cancels had been used.

The superintendent said that the batches of 25 or so were given to the nearest clerk who had a lull in the workload. And in those days, collectors did not pay that much attention to such details. As a result no record was kept as to how many of each of the two types of cancels were produced.

As Banks and Anderson finished up with the covers, they decided that this could be a good beginning for not the Space City Philatelic Society, but for the Space City Cover Society. And a new beginning it was.

The next morning Banks visited the printer who had printed the earlier TREYCO covers. During the day the printer designed and set the type and border to go around the previously printed NASA generic cachet. But he did not have time to print them that day. However, by Monday afternoon, the new SCCS covers were printed and ready to go.

Allen Banks, who years earlier had been a reporter for the Brooklyn Eagle and press aide to Mayor LaGuardia in New York knew that the best way to let the public know of our covers was by way of news releases to Linn's, Western Stamp Collector (now Stamp Collector) and STAMPS magazine.

Banks had already contacted about 30 collectors in the Houston area telling them of the cover, but only about six were even interested in buying one at 50¢ each! Another truth had been sharply brought out. In 1967, in Space City, as Houston was then being called, space collectors were few and far between. As Banks and Anderson mailed out the news releases, both agreed that if just 40 of the covers were sold, it would at least pay for the stamps, envelopes and printing.

COVER COLLECTORS WANTED THE COVERS

In a couple of weeks after mailing the news releases, the orders began to arrive. The first day, about six or seven; the second day, 12 or so; the third day about 25. Some of those were for more than one cover. The fourth day the small post office box could not hold all of the mail. Several bundles, about 300 orders in all, left Banks and Anderson speechless. Not only that, they were left coverless!

For the next 50 orders of those 300 or so, if more than one cover was requested, only one was given and a refund made for any others. A note was sent along explaining the situation. Over the next two weeks the total number of orders received for the event came to about 1000. About 910 collectors were disappointed. Most of those understood; several were not understanding at all.

Of 98 good covers resulting from the cachet printing (a few were lost), 90 were sold to collectors in the first few days. Eight were kept for presentation (one for each of the four members still left making up the new SCCS and the other four presented to others who had helped make the cover possible.)

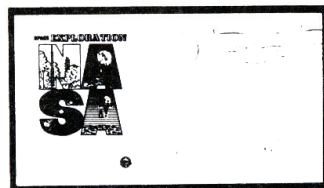
A few years later, after visiting with Don and Blanche Chaffee, the parents of Roger Chaffee, in their home in Wyoming, Michigan, Harry Anderson was able to present one of these covers to them.

In February 1967 one thing was clear...Maybe there were few space cover collectors in Houston, but there were a lot of them in the rest of the United States!

DESCRIPTION OF THIS SCCS-1 COVER

Illustration "A" shows the type of primary cachet used, along with a sample of one of the two machine cancels of Houston, January 27, 1967 p.m. This primary cachet is known in single colors of green, orange-red, or blue. Illustrations "B-1" and "B-2" show the two different types of machine cancels used on the approximately 100 covers. Illustration "C" shows the proof of the over-print design which was printed three days later in black ink.

"A"



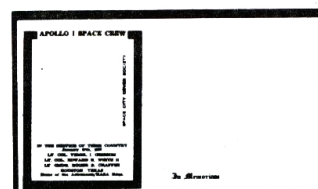
"B-1"



"B-2"



"C"



DETAILS OF OTHER COVERS DURING THIS "SCCS CLASSIC PERIOD"

SCCS-2 After getting the SCCS-1 covers cancelled and printed, Allen Banks and Harry Anderson had a session with Postmaster Elder. The SCCS had hopes of servicing space covers for collectors with a cancel from the NASA area. Elder informed them that all first class mail for all of the Houston branch post offices was brought to the General Post Office for cancelling. The only cancel any Houston branch post office was supposed to have was the circular money order cancel. The Houston regulations stated that this circular cancel was not to be used on first class mail. (In some isolated instance, branch offices did violate this rule.)

With this information, Banks and Anderson felt that some way should be made to publicize Houston and the space activity coming from NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center. Thus was born the NASA Local Post and the commemorative "stamps" issued by it.

February 20, 1967 would be the fifth anniversary of John Glenn's Mercury flight and this seemed like the perfect event to be commemorated by the first issue of the NASA Local Post. Another session with Postmaster Elder confirmed that such an issue was permissible as long as the regular U.S. first class postage was paid on each and every cover.

To all of those that had requested one of the SCCS-1 covers, a letter was sent telling them of what we planned to do in the way of a NASA Local Post. The letter stated that the aim of the Space City Cover Society would be to service covers for collectors (both collectors' covers and our SCCS covers), to keep collectors informed of space events, especially from Houston's MSC, to issue "The Space Log" free to all having notification envelopes on file with the SCCS, and to answer any questions any collector might have about Houston and space activity from MSC. It was agreed that no dues would be charged and that the only requirement to participate in the activities would be to have collectors send in four, addressed stamped envelopes in which the SCCS could send out information on future events and for sending out the free issues of The Space Log.

The response was immediate and far-reaching. And up through the Apollo 11 mission, the SCCS would receive bags of mail at a time from collectors around the world. When the Houston post office and the MSC received such mail, most of it was sent on to the SCCS for getting the collectors' covers cancelled on correct dates and for answering their many questions. A lot of the letters were written in German and French and this created a problem but one the SCCS solved with time.

There was no charge made for servicing any covers sent in by collectors but the SCCS did offer covers for sale to the collectors that wanted such a service. Most of those were sold at 50¢ each and most all included a NASA Local Post commemorative and cancel.

Our SCCS-2 cover had started a trend that would continue on through many years.

SCCS-6 Bill and Leba Salomon serviced the 1331-32 SCCS first day covers from the Kennedy Space Center. Bill had asked that the SCCS send along some of the Ed White NLP souvenir sheets, issued for the Houston 1331-32 covers. We had no idea he would put a single of that Ed White NLP just under each pair of the KSC cancelled 1331-32 covers. As a result most all of the SCCS-6 covers have the NLP single along with the 1331-32 se-tenant pair.

SCCS-7 This cover has become known as the Houston "unofficial" first day city cover of 1331-32. Early in the morning of September 29, 1967, Bill Salomon purchased several sheets of 1331-32 from the first day cover unit at the Orlando Florida post office. He carefully packaged those up, then took them to the Orlando airport for the earliest flight to Houston. Allen Banks was waiting at the Houston airport and as soon as the stamps arrived, he brought them to the Houston General Post Office. Several Houston collectors were on hand and all pitched in to help put pairs and singles on the cacheted covers that were waiting.

About 200 pairs were serviced and about 50 sets of two singles were serviced with the Houston cancel of September 29. The machine cancel did not show up well on the dark ink of the se-tenant pair. This was a problem that had not been thought of beforehand. The only thing to do was to use the only hand cancel available at that time in the first class cancelling section. This was a metal hand stamp used for large envelopes and small first class parcels. Even though this cancel left a lot to be desired, there was no other choice. But due to this being our initial first day cover and our first "unofficial city" first day cancel, the lesser-quality of the cancel was overlooked by collectors.

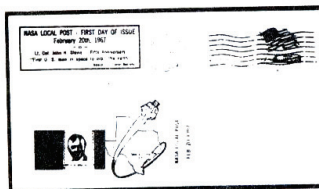
SCCS-12 FIRST HELICOPTER MAIL DELIVERY FROM NASA's MSC TO THE HOUSTON GENERAL POST OFFICE

May 15, 1968 was the 50th anniversary of U.S. Air Mail Service and Houston was looking for "something different" in the way of a celebration. The groundwork was done for this "something different" by Houston Postmaster Granville Elder, along with M. Allen Banks and Harry Anderson of the Space City Cover Society. Advance publicity was given to the public letting all know that they could take part by having their mail flown on this first helicopter flight from the Manned Spacecraft Center to the main Houston Post Office. Those that requested it could have their mail "stamped" with the triangular NASA Local Post rubber stamp. The bags of mail were carried to the helicopter site near the Manned Spacecraft Center early in the morning of May 15. The flight departed on time and arrived at the Houston post office near noon.

The post office parking lot had been cleared of cars and in their place were hundreds of spectators and some Houston dignitaries waiting for the helicopter and the mail to arrive. Among the crowd were TV camera crews and newspaper reporters.

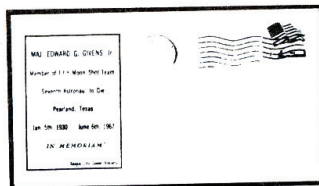
When the helicopter arrived, after its 30-mile flight from MSC, Elder, Anderson and Banks accepted the bags of mail. The mail was then taken to the cancelling equipment, postmarked May 15, 1968 p.m. and then put into the mail stream to be delivered.

Special commemorative covers were prepared by the SCCS. These covers were franked with the 10¢ airmail stamp, had a rubber stamp cachet in blue ink, along with NLP pictorial cancel in green ink. These covers sold at the time for 50¢ each and the entire supply of about 750 covers were gone within a few weeks of the event.

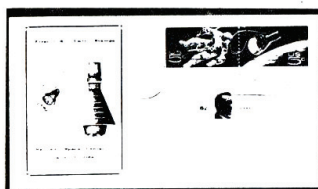


SCCS-2 This layout style used also on #'s 3, 8, 10, 11, and 13.

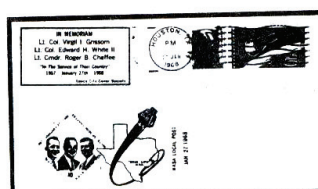
SCCS-4



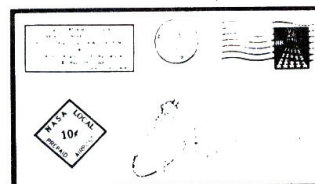
SCCS-5



SCCS-6



SCCS-9



SCCS-12