

## PHILATELIC CLASSES PART VI: ASTROPHILATELY

NIALL MURPHY (SÓCIO Nº 67)



According to [Wikipedia](#), the definition of “Astrophilately” is: “a branch of philately which deals with the collection of stamps and postmarked envelopes related to spaceflight. It is the intersection of space and postal history. Covers cancelled on the date and at a post office near the controlling agency are used in postal exhibits to share the development and conquest of the cosmos”. As with the field of Aerophilately, from which Astrophilately spawned, it is very

important to distinguish this field from the various related topics found in Thematic Philately, such as; spacecraft, artificial satellites, astronauts, astronomy, the cosmos, planets etc., where the focus is on the theme of the postage stamps. In Astrophilately, the focus is on all the material related to spaceflight and the exploration of outer space. This includes; postage stamps, covers, cancellations and postmarks.

While there are some philatelists who consider the experimental “rocket mail” from the 1920s and 1930s to be a valid aspect of Astrophilately, generally this field concerns itself with more recent projects, since the late 1950s, where flights with Earth orbital destinations are involved. In general, Astrophilately concerns itself more with philatelic materials directly connected to specific space projects, rather than pictorial material depicting those projects. Of particular interest to Astrophilatelists, is material that has actually travelled in space, which are referred to as “flown covers”. Such material is known for both American and Soviet missions but can be exceedingly rare. Astrophilately is certainly not restricted to such material. Basically, any kind of space-related material is of interest, including covers cancelled at:

- Launch sites
- Tracking stations
- Mission control facilities
- Tracking stations
- Research laboratories
- Space vehicle recovery ships

The term “Astrophilately” is a simple conjunction of the Latin “astro”, meaning star, and philately. The field was born during the so called “space race” between the USA and the USSR, beginning in the late 1950s with the launch of the first artificial satellite “Sputnik” by the Soviet Union. Each country raced to be the dominant world power in space exploration generally, and most especially to be the first power to put a man on the Moon. Even today, there is a general sub-division of Astrophilately between American and Soviet/Russian missions. The popularity of Astrophilately reached its peak during the years between 1969 and 1972, when the American “Apollo” missions were active.



Above is one of the most sought after “flown covers” in Astrophilately. This is one of the approximately 400 so called “Apollo 15 Sieger” covers, flown to the Moon on the Apollo 15 mission in July 1971 and signed by the three astronauts, David Scott, Alfred Worden and James Irwin (without official NASA approval). The German stamp dealer, Hermann Sieger acquired a quantity of these covers and famously sold them in 2014 for as much as US\$50,000 each.



Another highly impressive Astrophilately cover is illustrated on the left. This cover was signed by the crew of Apollo 11, Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins. The cover features the Apollo 11 mission insignia and postmark from the Kennedy Space Center dated 16 July 1969, the day of the launch. A good example of this cover can be worth as much as US\$8,000.

In formal philatelic exhibitions conducted under the auspices of the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (FIP), the evaluation rules for judging are precisely codified by the [Astrophilately Commission](#) in the document “[Special Regulations for the Evaluation \(SERV\) of Astrophilately Exhibits at FIP Exhibitions](#)”. Astrophilatelists will need to study this document very carefully to ensure they receive the highest results at competitions.

There exists a large number of extremely useful online resources for Astrophilatelists. These include; [Russian Astrophilately Society](#), [The Astro Space Stamp Society](#), [American Astrophilately](#), and the [Space Topic Study Unit](#).