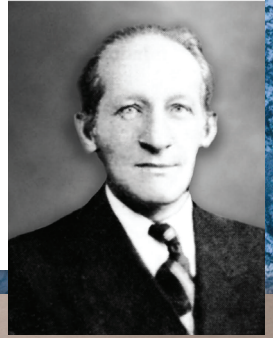


# FIRST DAYS

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021 — NO. 461



*Liberty for all,  
Peace on Earth, and  
Good Will to all Men!*



## THE 41ST COURT OF HONOR

*Celebrating the work of Ludwig W. Staehle*

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Meet Contemporary Cachetmaker  
& Master Artist Tom Mueller  
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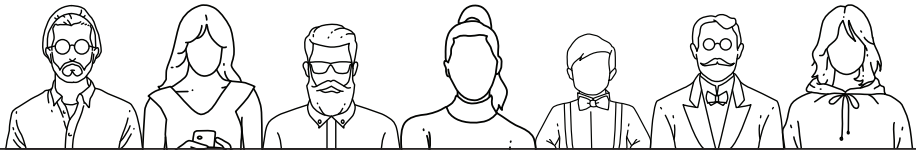


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Explore Kolor Kover's Colorful  
Canadian Cachets  
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the journal of the



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## PROFILES IN FIRST DAY PHILATELY

CACHETMAKER

# Tom Mueller

by Patrick J. Morgan

Cachet artists follow one of two paths to become cachetmakers: those that love stamps and philately and want to put that love into the hobby; and, those that have tons of artistic talent and find that philatelists appreciate their artistry when it is placed on a cover. Tom Mueller is a fine artist and oil painter. Tom, along with only a handful of other cachetmakers, has chosen to apply oil paints to philatelic covers.



Figure 1. Tom Mueller.

Thomas Oscar Mueller was born on November 17, 1935 in Tipton, Iowa. He was the third child of Herbert V. Mueller and Pauline H. (Seivert) Mueller. His father was a 26-year-old farmer, born in Oakpoint, Washington and his mother was a 24-year-old housewife born in Almont, North Dakota. Tom had one sister and seven brothers. Don and Mary are his older siblings and Glenn, Dale, John and Jerry (twins), Ray and Roy are younger.

The family moved from Iowa to the area around Gerald, Missouri where Herbert continued to farm. As a young man, Tom discovered that he was red/green color blind when he and his brothers, Don and Glenn, were out milking cows. His brothers saw a rainbow and Tom told them he only saw the blue with yellow. He also told me that he had to have the girls in school help him with the Crayola colors when coloring. I think this might have just been his way to get the girls' attention. As an adult, the fact that he is color blind doesn't seem to impede his ability to paint. He explained that this leads him to paint more colorfully with more dramatic contrast as shown with the cover in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Legends of the West, Jim Beckwourth.



As a teenager, Tom worked with his father and brothers on the family farm. During his time on the farm, Tom's awareness and appreciation of nature flourished. As he was not attending school, he decided to serve in the US Army. After leaving the Army, Tom attended classes and obtained his GED in St. Louis, Missouri. He was hired by Emerson Electric as an illustrator, drawing schematics and graphics for proposals. At lunchtime in the cafeteria, Tom would make quick sketches and watercolor paintings for other employees for \$5. Tom worked for Comprehensive Designers, Inc. for a short period after his 6 years at Emerson and before getting his position as an illustrator at McDonnell Aircraft Company, where he worked until 1990.

In 1959, Tom rented a room in Wellston, Missouri. Then 24 years old, Tom's eye was caught by a lovely young lady living across the street, Linda Lee Palmer — Linda was 16 years old. Tom was a reserved young man (maybe a bit shy), so it took him some time to muster the nerve to ask Linda out on a date. Tom was raised Catholic and Linda was raised in the Church of Christ, so as the romance progressed, the families were not comfortable with the differences in the faiths. In spite of this, Tom and Linda married and continued strong faith-based lives as members of the Church of Christ, and with a deep passion for each other. As I can personally attest, Linda was a fabulous apple pie baker and loved serving others in the community. Sadly, Linda lost her life in an accident while she was delivering food in 1993. Tom and Linda raised 3 wonderful children (Dawn, Sarah and Land) after moving to Elsberry, Missouri in May 1971. Tom still resides there today. Tom is blessed with 9 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. He is very proud of all of them.

Tom has always been fascinated with the old West and Indians. His hobbies all reflect that fascination as they consist of long bow archery and hunting, tracking, black powder riflery and hunting, and flint knapping. He has, on several occasions, offered for me to put an apple on my head so he can shoot it off with his bow and arrow. Thus far, I have refused his frequent offers. Tom has often told me of his admiration for Howard Hill, who was an expert bowman from the early 1930s into the 1950s and who was often introduced as "The World's Greatest Archer."



Figure 3. *Mueller's First Oil Painting.*

While working at McDonnell Douglas as a technical illustrator, where this author met and worked with Tom, he started honing his oil painting skills outside of work. As a self-taught artist, his primary influences have been Norman Rockwell, Frederic Remington, Rembrandt and Frank Tenney Johnson. These artists have influenced both his technique as well as his subject matter. His first oil painting was completed in 1966 (Figure 3). He loves and has created many western-related oil paintings over the years. After retiring in 1990, he continued

to paint, show, and sell paintings and lithographs. While oil paintings are his true passion, they are time-consuming to sell and require a lot of time attending shows.

At McDonnell Douglas, Tom used to entertain us with his excellent impression of Walter Brennan, so when I saw this FDC (Figure 4), it reminded me of him and I had to purchase it. Tom was kind enough to do his impression for me during one of our recent conversations.



Figure 4. Tom's impression of Walter Brennan is legendary.

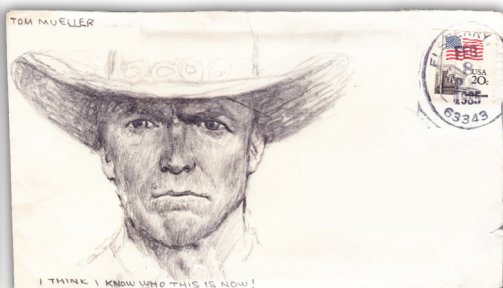


Figure 5. Clint Eastwood in pencil on cover.

In the mid-1980s when Tom's daughter, Sarah, went away to college, they began to write to each other, adding drawings to the envelopes (Figure 5). Sarah is a very talented artist in her own right. This practice continued between them for the years after college as well.

In 1989, Tom met a Lutheran pastor in the St. Louis area who shared with Tom the process of servicing covers and creating cachets. Tom was interested in these as a better and more predictable source of income versus oil paintings which took more time to produce and longer to sell. Tom was not at all sure how to market his work as he started out.

In late 1990, Tom connected with Gil Celli, owner of The Gold Mine in Massapequa, New York. Gil became the dealer for Tom's line, Silverwing Cachets. He provided direction, material and marketing for Tom's charcoal and oil-painted cachets. The first Gold Mine ad featuring Silverwing Cachets was placed in *First Days*, April 15, 1991 (Figure 6). Gil's desire to work with Tom was primarily due to the quality of Tom's work. In speaking with Gil, it's clear he feels that Tom's work is under appreciated and undervalued, "[It's] really nice stuff." After 30 years, Tom and Gil continue to work

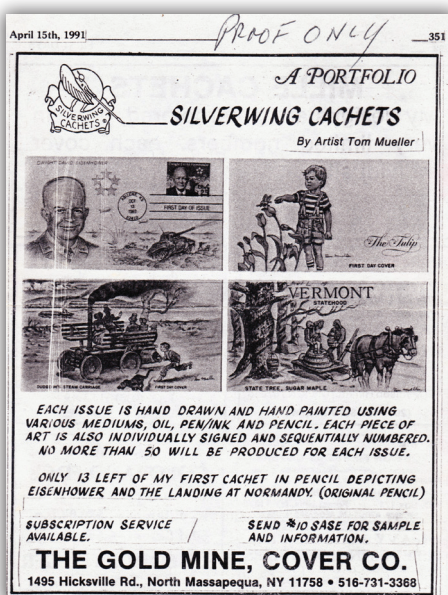


Figure 6. A proof of the first Silverwing Cachets ad for First Days.

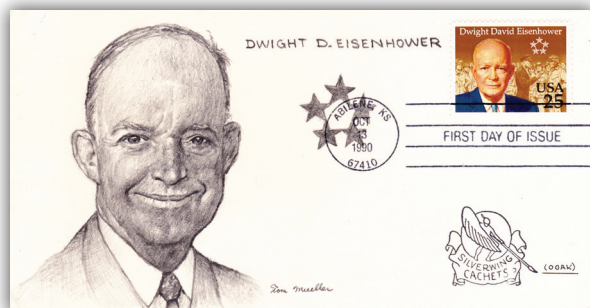


Figure 7. One of Tom's first commercial covers was this Dwight D. Eisenhower FDC (Scott #2513).

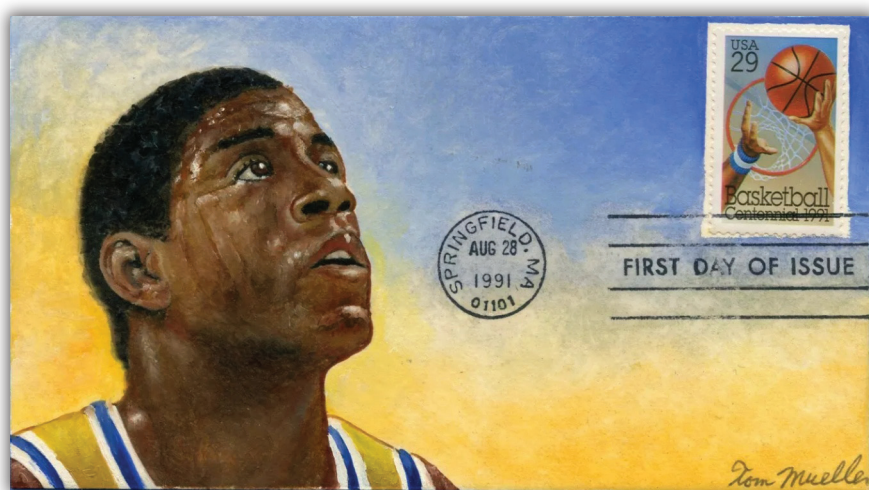
together, although not at the same pace of the 1990s. One of Tom's first covers was the Dwight D. Eisenhower FDC shown in Figure 7. He did several versions of these covers - in some Eisenhower was in a suit, while others showing him in uniform with the Normandy invasion in the background. Tom has drawn and painted well over





*Figure 8. The Silverwing Cachets logo which Tom designed.*

1,500 FDCs, event and add-on covers. These span more than 30 years of work and range from one-of-a-kind covers to some with as many as 50 examples. Although Tom created numerous copies of some FDCs, it is Tom's opinion that every cover he has created is a "1 of 1," as every cover is truly a one of a kind. The Silverwing Cachets brand was created for Tom's cachets to distinguish it from his oil paintings. Tom designed the Silverwing Cachets logo himself (Figure 8) and it has been stamped on nearly all Tom Mueller-created covers. Over the years, Tom has had an internal debate over signing his covers. He has printed, written and changed between "Tom Mueller" and "Thomas O. Mueller" many times.



*Figure 9. Tom's "Magic" Johnson design met success in the 1991 AFDCS Cachetmakers Contest.*

In 1992, unbeknown to Tom, Gil Celli entered him into the 1991 AFDCS Cachetmakers Competition. Tom said, "[The] first time I heard about it was when they called to tell me I had won." Gil had submitted the Scott #2560, Basketball 100th Anniversary FDC with an Irvin "Magic" Johnson oil-painted cachet (Figure 9). This cover was the 1991 Top Cachet winner and the co-winner of Category 1: Best hand drawn/hand painted cover. Additionally, Tom was selected as the winner of Category 9: Best 1991 Rookie Cachetmaker.

Tom's interest in the Old West inspired him to participate in the Great American Cattle Drive of 1995. This cattle drive was organized to re-enact and commemorate the great cattle drives of the 1870s and 1880s. The drive left Fort Worth, Texas on March 5, 1995 and arrived in Miles City, Montana on September 1, 1995, with 24 cowboys driving 300 head of cattle. Tom joined the drive several times over its six month period. The pen and ink drawing in Figure 10 is from the drive. Being the character he is, Tom jokingly tried to ride a longhorn steer with his son, Land, looking on (Figure 11), but the wranglers wisely told him that was not a good idea. His participation on this cattle drive provided Tom with great inspiration which can be seen in many of his FDCs (Figure 12), as well as many of his oil paintings.

Tom is without doubt an artist and not a stamp collector, as I suspect many cachet artists are at heart. His approach to the artwork he paints is to “let the stamps tell me what to paint.” He says that he can almost instantly know what he wants to paint on each cover at first sight. He then will research pictures and other references he needs to be sure he is accurately depicting what he wants to convey. Tom says, “Unlike other cachet artists, I want the art to stand on its own and the stamp enhance the art, rather than the art enhance the stamp.”

Tom is one of a very small group of cachet artists that have used oil paint as the primary medium for a significant number of cachets. He uses oils mostly because oils are where he feels most comfortable. Every Silverwing cover is meticulously painted while it is cradled in Tom’s hand. Oil paint is a difficult medium with which to work, but it creates a beautiful result and one that resists fading and provides longevity for the art. Tom does not have any particular brand loyalty for his paints, but he does insist on high-quality oil paint in order to create the “longevity” he wants and expects from his cov-

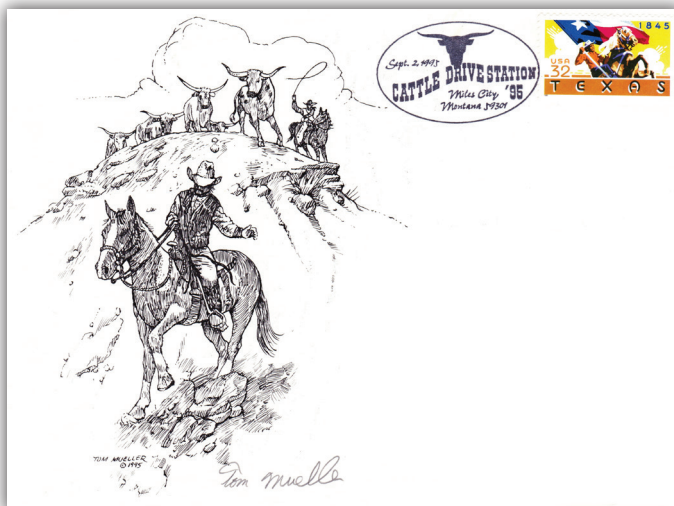


Figure 10. This pen and ink illustrated cover was inspired by Tom’s experience on the 1995 re-enactment of the Great American Cattle Drive.



Figure 11. During his time on the Great American Cattle Drive, Tom (shown with his son, Land) jokingly attempted to ride a longhorn steer before being warned off by the real cowboys.



Figure 12. Tom’s time on the Great American Cattle Drive has provided an ongoing muse for his work.



ers. While this may not be an exhaustive list, the other known cachet artists to have used oils are Lois Hamilton, Clara Herold Walker, Art Kober and Julian Pugh. Lois Hamilton and Julian Pugh used canvas versus painting directly on the envelope as Tom does.

I asked Tom if he had a favorite cover and he told me that it was the recent Scott #929 add-ons he had been finishing. These

add-ons are a depiction of the Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima. Tom uses the flap on the envelope to extend the cachet to the back of the envelope which adds a very interesting dynamic to the cover. The cover shown in Figure 13 is not Tom's specific favorite, but one which is similar. Since every cover is unique, as an artist, Tom finds that he prefers specific ones even when several are similar. His favorite category of covers to paint is western themes, where his passion truly lies.



Figure 13. Tom points to recent Scott #929 add-ons as some of his favorite cover work.

Tom has only intentionally drawn or painted a few covers with family members as the subject. His first such cover is a Scott #2517 FDC where his oldest grandson, Andrew, is shown pointing at a butterfly sitting on tulips (Figure 14). The second cover is a Scott #2618 FDC where his son, Land, is shown with their family's German Shepherd (Figure 15). Tom also created a very special add-on cover (Figure 16) that he framed and displays in his home. This cover has a pencil sketch of his father and mother that he presented to them on their 60th wedding anniversary in 1991. The cover's Love stamp (Scott #2535) was canceled on their anniversary in Iowa Falls, Iowa where his parents grew up together. The last cover (Figure 17) that has any specific relation to a person in his life is a FDC with both the #2869e and #2970e, showing an Indian flint knapping (one of Tom's hobbies) a spear head. The hands in the picture are those of Tom's father. This is a small portion of Tom's painting depicting an adult Indian with a young boy. The boy is waiting on the spear-head for the spear he has in his hand. In looking at many of Tom's covers, I have wondered if a few others were based on people he knew. Specifically, is the man in the cover shown in Figure 18 Tom himself? Does the FDC in Figure 19 depict his wife, Linda? When I asked Tom, he said they were not intended to be anyone specific, "but maybe subconsciously."



Figure 14. Tom's grandson, Andrew, on a FDC for Scott #2517.

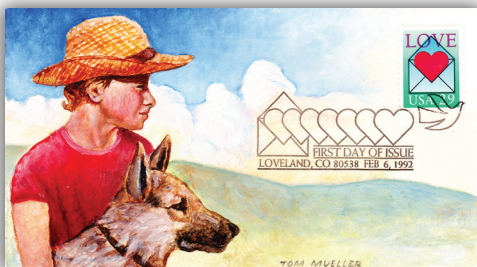


Figure 15. Tom's son, Land, and the family German Shepherd on a FDC for Scott #2618.



Figure 16. An add-on to a FDC for Scott #2535 honors the 60th wedding anniversary of Tom's parents.



Figure 17. Tom painted his father's hands on a FDC for Scott #2869e/#2870e.

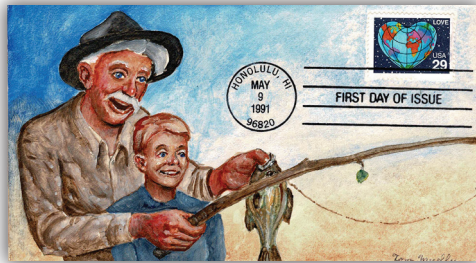


Figure 18. Tom admits the older man in this painting for a Scott #2535 FDC may subconsciously be based on himself.



Figure 19. Similar to the man in Figure 18, this lovely woman may be unintentionally based on Tom's wife, Linda.

One of Tom's most interesting cover stories comes from 1994. Tom had finished painting an entire set of 20 covers featuring Legends of the West (Scott #2869 and #2870), which included the Bill Pickett error (Figure 20). He mailed them from the post office to Gil Celli at The Goldmine Cover Co., but they never arrived. Their disappearance remains an unsolved mystery. Were they simply lost? Were they stolen in transit by the USPS? Did someone buy them and are they in a collection? It would be an interesting addition to this story if someone has or knows about this missing set of rare covers. Please be on the lookout for these so that the mystery can be solved.



Figure 20. Tom's set of 20 covers with the 1994 Bill Pickett error went missing in transit.



On October 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New York. A large body of Tom's cover work was in Gil Celli's store which was flooded. The water destroyed a large number of Tom's covers, as well as many other artists' work. Gil reflected that his favorite of Tom's covers, Scott #U626 with John Wayne (Figure 21), was framed and hanging on the wall. It, along with some John Wayne autographs on his business cards, was one of the few things that survived the hurricane and resulting storm surge.



Figure 21. This FDC for Scott #U626 survived Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

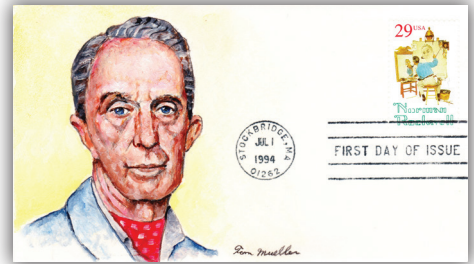
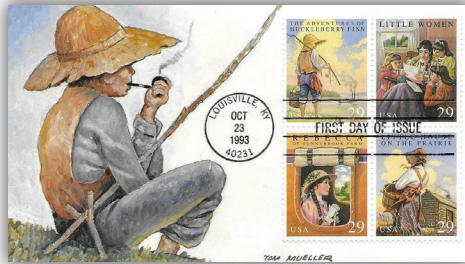
In recent years, Tom took some time off from painting covers but has now begun painting a limited number of new pieces. He is no longer painting FDCs but continues to draw and paint add-ons. Tom completes about 2 covers a week, or 10 covers a month at most. Much of his output is still determined by the covers he receives from Gil Celli. While there are far fewer covers being completed, the quality and artistry of the work continue to be outstanding. Tom says if someone would like to have a 1/1 cachet, he would entertain drawing or painting a very limited number of those. As an artist, Tom would want to have creative control of the cachet subject. Gil Celli at the Gold Mine would be the contact for acquiring one of Tom's incredible cachets for your cover collection. A one-of-a-kind cover will likely not come cheap.

There is no doubt in the incredible talent that Tom Mueller possesses as an artist. Personally, I am very blessed to know Tom as a good man and great friend. As a philatelist, I am glad that he has shared his talent with all of us through his hand-drawn and hand-painted cachets. Knowing us collectors, I am sure that his work will be enjoyed by others for a very long time. I hope that I have provided you with an enjoyable story that you can recall when next you encounter a Tom Mueller cover. 🐾

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## A Selection of Tom Mueller's First Day Covers



## A Selection of Tom Mueller's Add-On Covers

