

Eastham turns 400 with special postmark

DENISE COFFEY | CAPE COD TIMES
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EASTHAM — Standing outside the post office Tuesday afternoon, Leslie Harrigan pulled out a postcard that showed her black Lab, Daisy, dressed in holiday attire. On the back of the postcard was a postmark 2 inches square.

A circle inside a square read: Eastham; The First Encounter. The years 1620 and 2020 were above and below the circle. Above the top it read "400th Anniversary Station."

The postmark, made available through a collaboration between the Eastham 400 Commemoration Committee and the U.S. Postal Service, commemorates the 400th anniversary of the first encounter between Indigenous people and Pilgrims. It was available for one day only on Tuesday to customers who visited the post office.

Harrigan initially arrived at the post office at 9 a.m. Tuesday with hundreds of the Christmas postcards she hoped to mail for the holidays. When she found that the addresses on some of the postcards would be too close to the large postmark, she went home and readdressed them so they could accommodate the commemorative stamp before returning to the post office later that afternoon.

She waited patiently outside for her turn to step inside the lobby. COVID-19 protocols meant only so many people could fit inside the tiny lobby, but Harrigan was undeterred.

"I figure you can only get this today," she said.

The special postmark was just one of several events scheduled by the Eastham 400 Commemoration Committee to commemorate the first encounter between Indigenous people and Pilgrims. The committee also has hosted educational programs, activities and events all year, in addition to selling merchandise.



Sylvia Sullivan, a member of the Eastham 400 Commemoration Committee, holds a thank-you card with a special postmark the committee helped design with the U.S. Postal Service. Sullivan was mailing cards to those who helped with the committee's 400th anniversary celebration.

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Committee member Sylvia Sullivan brought more than 50 thank-you cards to the post office Tuesday morning to have them stamped. They were being mailed out to people who had helped work on the programs for the celebration.

“This is a small thing we wanted to do,” she said.

The committee has been planning the celebration for two years. When COVID-19 hit, they carried on with Zoom meetings and virtual events.

“These people have really done a wonderful job,” she said.

Getting the postmark required some back and forth between the committee and the Postal Service. The whole process took a few weeks, according to Stephen Doherty, a communications specialist with the Postal Service, Northeast Area.

A pictorial postmark had to be submitted to headquarters for approval, Doherty said. The committee had to tweak their logo to make it simpler. The ship and beach scene had to go. The design was refined, and some words were deleted.

Eastham Postmaster Amando Domora was very helpful, Sullivan said.

Doherty said COVID-19 has led to a decline in special postmarks. He estimated that there were about 30 pictorial postmarks a year in New England prior to the pandemic. But with social distancing and the cancellation of fairs, festivals and other events, that number has dropped significantly.



A special postmark commemorating the 400th anniversary of the first encounter was available for one day only at the Eastham post office, but customers can also apply to get the postmark by mail.

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Realtor Cindy Blum didn't know about the special postmark when she brought in 50 large envelopes with face masks and holiday cards to mail to her customers Tuesday. But she did know about the other 400th anniversary events that were scheduled.

"COVID took the oomph out of it," she said.

Domoro kept the steady stream of customers moving through the lobby. A fair number were asking for the postmark, he said.

Those who couldn't make it to the post office Tuesday but wish to obtain the postmark can submit a mail-order request. Pictorial postmarks are available only with the dates

indicated, and requests must be postmarked no later than 30 days following the pictorial postmark date.

Customers wishing to obtain a postmark should affix first class postage to any envelope or postcard, address the envelope or postcard and tuck in the flap. Place the envelope or postcard in a larger envelope and address it to Postmaster, Eastham post office, 2365 State Highway Eastham, MA 02642.

After applying the pictorial postmark, the Postal Service returns the items (with or without addresses) under a addressed protective cover.

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