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Articles by ERB-APA Author
JOHN MARTIN

TARZAN AND THE CENTENNIAL STAMP



Fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs had tried for more than half a century to persuade the U.S. Postal Service to honor their favorite author with a commemorative postage stamp.

But finally, it was Tarzan himself who came to the rescue.

Denny Miller, who had one outing as the jungle hero in the 1959 remake of “Tarzan the Ape-Man,” saw an opportunity and, like the Tarzan of two dozen books and many more films, seized the moment.

Edgar Rice Burroughs fulfilled the American dream of rags to riches in his own unique way—he invented a product that people wanted badly enough to pay him to produce it.

Having experienced frustration, boredom and little success in a variety of occupations, he finally decided to attempt to write a fantastic story to see if he could sell it to one of the popular pulp magazines of his day. Burroughs didn't consider the writing in such magazines to be very well done, and figured he could do just as well or, in his words, "write stories just as rotten."

So Burroughs gave up his job selling pencil sharpeners, and the public soon found out that, though he was untrained as a writer, he had a knack for telling a story that was anything but rotten—a story that would draw the reader in from the first sentence and maintain a page-turning zeal throughout.

One of those readers was George T. McWhorter, who grew up to found and become the curator of the Edgar Rice Burroughs Memorial Collection at the University of Louisville's Ekstrom Library.

And ever since Edgar Rice Burroughs died in 1950, McWhorter—along with other fans—has been petitioning the Postal Service's Stamp Advisory Committee to honor Edgar Rice Burroughs with a first class stamp.

But as the years went by, significant dates faded into history.

- There was the 100th anniversary of ERB's birth in 1975.
- There was the 50th anniversary of the publication of his first stories—*Under the Moons of Mars* and *Tarzan of the Apes*—in 1962.
- There was the 50th anniversary of Burroughs' death in the year 2000.

The Postal Service doesn't actually need a "significant date" in order to approve a stamp, but it likes them, and it helps to validate the reason for issuing a stamp.

If nothing happened in 2012—the 100th anniversary of those first two ground-breaking stories—then there would

be no other “significant dates” on the horizon for the lifetime of most of the fans of today.

Then, enter Denny Miller.

The year was 2006 and Denny and other veteran TV cowboys, including Ty Hardin, Bob Fuller, Johnny Western, and “Western Clippings” publisher Boyd Magers, were invited to a “Happy Trails” weekend at the Clinton Presidential Library in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Bill Clinton had wanted to be a cowboy when he grew up, and the exhibit paid tribute to the 42nd President’s first love. “The first thing you saw,” said Denny, interviewed at the August 2012 Dum-Dum in Woodland Hills, Calif., “was a large photo of Clinton with his chaps, toy guns, cowboy hat, and badge, sitting on a pony at the age of 8.”



THE PARTY

Denny Miller (Scene from "The Party", 1968, Mirisch Corporation) wearing the costume which made all this possible. Appearing in 97 titles (and a few hundred TV episodes) the veteran actor, and one time Tarzan, was in the right place at the right time.

Another exhibit at the library was “the outrageous cowboy suit I had worn in the movie ‘The Party’ with Peter

Sellers,” said Denny. The outfit had been loaned to the library by Denny himself.

It so happened that a man named Ron Robinson, a lifelong friend of Bill Clinton, was also involved with the exhibit. Robinson is currently chairman emeritus of Cranford, Johnson, Robinson and Woods, a communications company that represents the Clinton Library and Clinton Foundation. That weekend he invited Denny, the other cowboy stars and nearly 100 other people to a dinner at his house near the library.

In the course of the evening, Denny learned that Robinson was a great collector of movie posters, and he gave Denny a tour of his home, where he has many movie posters, most in quality frames.

As they talked, Denny learned that Robinson was, at that time, the chairman of the U.S. Postal Service’s Stamp Advisory Committee.

Denny could simply have nodded his head at that news and said, “That’s nice.”

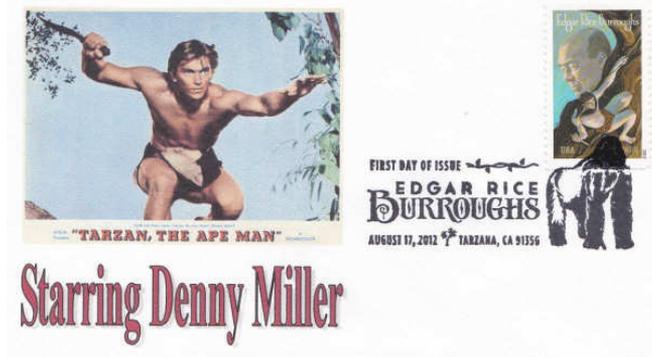
Instead, he immediately took the opportunity to suggest to Robinson that Edgar Rice Burroughs would be a great person to honor on the 100th anniversary of the first publication of his stories.

“I’ll never forget,” said Robinson in a telephone interview. “We were standing in my living room. Denny said, I really hope you’ll help us get an Edgar Rice Burroughs stamp. I asked him some questions about Burroughs and he told me that 2012 would be the year to do it, since that was the year that Tarzan had first appeared.”

Denny was pleased by Robinson’s interest and his next step was to ask his friend, George McWhorter at Louisville, to write a letter to Ron Robinson as well.

George’s letter said, in part, “I’ve been trying for nearly fifty years to get a stamp named for him, or Tarzan, but always ran into a wall of indifference. One year, the Stamp

Committee secretary wrote me that Burroughs' name had been turned down at a previous voting session, and their policy was not to resurrect a name in the future, once it had been voted down. (The Elvis stamp appeared shortly afterwards, ironically enough.)



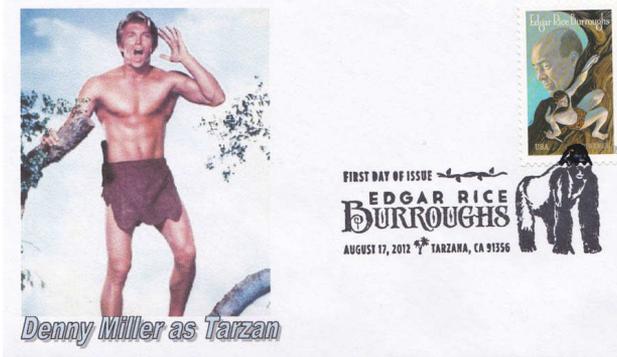
One of three First Day Covers created by John Martin (see below).
Note the ERB/Tarzan stamp and official U. S. Post Office
cancellation from Tarzana, California, dated August 17, 2012.

"In one letter to the committee, when Karl Malden was the chairman, I mentioned that Paul F. Berdanier, one of the founders of the Commemorative Stamp Committee, was also the artist for a first edition of a book by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I also pointed out that ERB was a prime example of a patriotic American who had been present when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and immediately enlisted, becoming the oldest War Correspondent in WWII.¹ Besides this, his Tarzan and Mars stories inspired

¹ In his article, "Came the War," he (Burroughs) first described how Hulbert had come to Hawaii "to enjoy the peace and quiet of The Paradise of the Pacific." Hulbert had also come to care for Ed when he was ill. At 7:55 Sunday morning, December 7, they heard distant sounds of firing, but believed these to result from practice exercises listed in the newspapers. They proceeded with their customary activity, paddle tennis, playing on the hotel court which provided a clear view of the coast from Diamond Head to beyond Pearl Harbor and Barbers Point. {continued...}

several generations of prominent trailblazers, including Ronald Reagan, Carl Sagan, Ray Bradbury, Jane Goodall and many more, so I hope you are able to help get the Burroughs stamp beyond the pipe dream into reality.”

A few months after Denny’s initial meeting with Robinson, “I heard back from Ron that the stamp committee had voted unanimously to approve the stamp,” said Denny. “The hardest part was keeping quiet about it.”²



“The Edgar Rice Burroughs stamp met two main criteria,” said Robinson. “First, we are always interested in saluting American icons. Second, we are interested in

From the court they noticed the bomb bursts over Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field, and saw the "dense, black smoke" billowing up. They thought this was a practice smoke screen, and when anti-aircraft shells exploded in the sky and the ships at sea began firing, they were "thrilled by the realistic maneuvers the navy was staging." A man hurried over to tell them that the Japanese were attacking. But they didn't believe him; they thought it was "just another rumor." However, when a bomb fell near a supply ship standing off-shore near the hotel, Ed and Hulbert were startled into belief. The radio announcement followed: "Then we commenced to appreciate the gravity of the situation. It was about this time that Hulbert and I lost interest in tennis." Porges, Irwin, *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Man Who Created Tarzan*, Ballantine, 1975

² The advisory committee plans stamps several years ahead of their announcement and prefers to make the announcements themselves!

recognizing distinguished American authors.” Denny had reminded Robinson that Burroughs was already a member of The Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame.

Robinson wrote Denny and his wife Nancy again in 2011, at the time the news of the Burroughs stamp was officially released by the Postal Service. He recalled how Denny “...lobbied me for a 2012 stamp for Edgar Rice Burroughs and Tarzan on his 100th. Congrats—we did it!

“Thanks to you, this commemorative will be a part of U.S. history forever. Bravo!” wrote Robinson.

The stamp was formally issued Aug. 17, 2012, in Tarzana, California, in connection with The Burroughs Bibliophiles convention, the Dum Dum, and Denny and Nancy were there for the occasion.

As he looks back on it, Denny said, “There was only six degrees of difference between this happening and not happening.”

Yet, the humble Denny does not hasten to take credit for the stamp. He sees his role as a matter of being in the right place at the right time.

Someone else might have let the moment pass. But Denny, who has been a friend of Burroughs fans for years, took full advantage of the opportunity and put in the good word for Edgar Rice Burroughs.

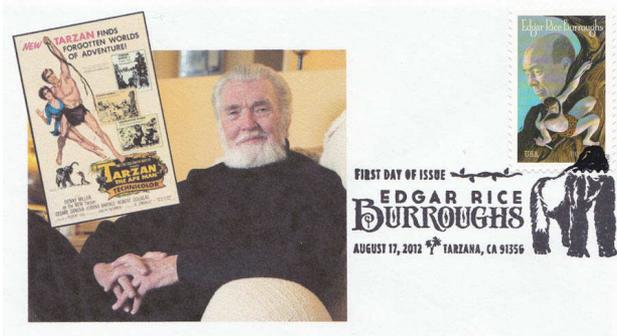
He said he finally began to appreciate how significant the stamp actually was. “When I realized they would issue the stamp in the millions,”³ he said, “I realized this was not just a ‘little thing’.”

Nor is getting a stamp approved in the first place a “little thing.” Robinson said. “We receive 50,000 suggestions a year and the committee meets four times a year to review

³ The ERB stamp is also a Forever Stamp, meaning it will always be First Class, no matter the current First Class Rate.

them. So the chances of something becoming a stamp are about one in 500.”

Denny was more humble: “I’ve been thankful for Edgar Rice Burroughs. I’m just the opposite of that myth that is alive that if you play Tarzan your career is through,” said Denny, who has played hundreds of roles in films and television shows regularly for 53 years, after having played the role of Tarzan.



Denny noted that another Tarzan actor, Bruce Bennett, had his biography, written by Mike Chapman, titled “Please Don’t Call Me Tarzan.”

Unlike that, Denny said, “*Please call me Tarzan!*” He is proud to proclaim his association with the fictional jungle hero, with a license plate that reads XTARZAN and an answering machine that greets callers with the Tarzan yell.⁴ He uses Tarzan as a role model for his physical training advice to others. (He has a new book that should be out by Christmas: “Me Tarzan, You Train.”)⁵

⁴ Denny Miller has attended numerous Edgar Rice Burroughs events, Dum Dums or ECOF, with a generosity of time and interest which has made him one of the most popular and available of all Tarzan actors. This gregarious and sincere nature obviously went a long way toward making the ERB/Tarzan stamp happen.

⁵ Miller is so approachable you can find him on the web. <http://dennymillertarzan.blogspot.com/> or <http://www.denny-miller.com>

“I don’t have to sell Tarzan as being physically fit,” said Denny. “More than 200 million readers already know that, on top of TV and movie viewers.

“I look at having played the role of Tarzan in only very positive light. It has opened doors for me to tell people the advantages of being physically fit all of our lives, into our old age.”

Denny earned a degree in physical education from UCLA, where he also played basketball under legendary coach John Wooden (“He deserves a stamp, too,” said Denny). His father, Dr. Ben Miller, Ph.D., served on the national Physical Fitness Committees for Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy.

Of his role as Tarzan, Denny said, “Being in that unique fraternity of now 22 men—filled with Olympics Gold Medal winners and athletes who are the best in the world—is a delight.

“I thank Edgar Rice Burroughs for stopping sharpening pencils,” said Denny, “and instead sharpening millions of minds for the rest of his life.”

A version of this article appeared in the Burroughs Bulletin Number 87, July 2013. This version contains images and footnotes which did not appear in the magazine publication.