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The Art of the Polish Postage Stamp

by Dr. Irena Piotrowska

Adhesive postage stamps were first introduced in 1840 by Sir Rowland Hill, Postmaster General in Great Britain. Switzerland and Brazil adopted stamps in 1843, while the first stamp in the United States was issued by a private post-office in New York in 1842. This example was soon followed by postmasters of various American cities, until the United States Government issued its first official postage stamp in 1847. The next three years witnessed a general extension of the stamp system in Europe and elsewhere. However, new countries and colonies adopting the postage stamp were added to the list up to 1909.

During all these years Poland, divided between Russia, Germany and Austria, had no national stamps of her own. But whoever may be interested in the earliest stamps bearing the post marks of Polish towns will find valuable information in the beautifully illustrated article, "Poland, the Period of Stamps, to 1870," written by Vincent Domanski, Jr. and Stephen G. Rich, for the "Stamp Specialist—Blue Book," published by H. L. Linquist, New York, 1941. These same two authors also wrote an article, "Poland—The Stampless Period," for "The Stamp Specialist—Orange Book" in the same year.

Both from a technical and artistic point of view the stamps issued in partitioned Poland by the three foreign governments reflect the style and usage of



Drawing for stamp by
Zygmunt Kaminski (1919)

the respective countries. Mr. J. Adamson, in an article on "Polish Philately," published in the December number of "The Voice of Poland" appearing in England, describes in detail various attempts by the Poles to have stamps of their own. But the first distinctive issue of Polish stamps, overprinted with the words "Poczta Polska" meaning "Polish Post," did not appear in print before February 1919.

This set is of importance not only from the historical and political point of view, but no less so from the artistic one. The subjects of these stamps represent either emblems or symbols of Poland, views of Polish towns and monuments, appropriate allegorical figures, and last but not least, figures of outstanding Polish personalities. These subjects were selected out of numerous drawings sent in by Polish painters and graphic artists from all over the country in response to a competition opened in Warsaw as far back as 1917, the realization of which had to be postponed until Poland was liberated. Poland had no experienced stamp designers. No wonder, then, that the projects submitted by Polish artists reflected the character of contemporary Polish painting, woodcut or lithography, or even more often that of early 20th century Polish book illustration.

In June 1919, a set of Polish stamps was issued to commemorate the opening of the first Polish National Assembly, called "Sejm" in Polish. Among these is a beautiful stamp bearing the head of Paderewski, overprinted with the words "Sejm 1919 Roku."

All these earlier Polish stamps were impressed either in private or governmental printing establishments, which were not properly equipped to reproduce the difficult miniature pictures of the stamps. They were printed from blocks or lithographed, following the example of some other European countries. As soon, however, as the Polish Works for Printing Securities were established, in 1926, furnished with the most modern printing equipment, the technical quality of the Polish stamps immediately reached the level of the best stamps produced abroad.

Of high technical quality for instance are the stamps printed from copper plates, issued in commemoration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Polish Insurrection in 1830. We reproduce here with an original drawing, submitted by Tadeusz Gronowski in the competition for this set of stamps. It received second prize. At the time Tadeusz Gronowski was the leading Polish poster artist, so it is not surprising that his drawing is conceived as a poster in miniature. Many other Polish stamps designed around 1930 also show the influence of the



In honor of Paderewski (1919)



Centennial of Polish Insurrection of 1830
Drawing for stamp by Tadeusz Gronowski (1930)



Kosciuszko — Washington — Pulaski
Drawing for stamp issued by Poland to commemorate
George Washington Bicentennial (1932)

Polish poster art then flourishing. It was not until a few years later that the poster style of the Polish stamp was superseded by a stamp style proper. From that time on poster artists, no matter how distinguished, were no longer employed to design stamps, this task being taken over by specialized artists.

Why did the stamp come into its own proper style later than the poster? Was it because the development of the Polish poster had started twenty years before that of the stamp? Or because the production of stamps is more difficult than that of posters, for purely technical reasons? Probably both these factors were responsible, but whatever the reason, the perfection of Polish stamps during the last five years of Poland's independence is astounding.

The Polish Works for Printing Securities—in Polish: "Polska Wytownia Papierow Wartosciowych," thus marked PWPW on the stamps—in a constant effort to improve Polish stamps from the technical point of view, finally intro-



250th Anniversary of Sobieski raising the siege of Vienna
After a painting by Jan Matejko, drawn
by R. Kleczewski (1933)



Showing Clothier's Hall in Cracow
Drawn by R. Kleczewski, engraved by W. Vacek (1935)

duced steel engraving as a permanent means of production, a method adopted by both Great Britain and the United States. Steel engraving is the most difficult technique of all used in stamp making, as the craftsman, to whom the engraving of the miniature picture in the hard steel is entrusted, incises the lines into the metal plate with a burin or graver, that is, a sharp chisel-like tool, without the use of any chemical action. Such a hand-engraved line has a particular beauty and a character more exacting than that which any etched line possesses.

The first Polish Highly trained steel-engraver was W. Vacek. It was he who engraved in steel the world-admired stamp issued in 1932 on the 200th Anniversary of Washington's Birth and showing Washington between Kosciuszko and Pulaski, the two great Polish-American heroes, with the national flags of Poland and the United States. The chief attraction of this stamp is due to no intricacy of composition—designed by R. Kleczewski—but to the subtlety with which the engraver rendered the portraits. This stamp was followed by a number of others, no less beautiful, executed jointly by Vacek and Kleczewski, the two artists.

Then in 1933 a stamp was issued reproducing a detail of the famous painting now in the Vatican Gallery, made exactly half a century earlier by Jan Matejko and representing the Polish King Sobieski after his famous cavalry charge before Vienna in 1683 that saved Europe from the domination of Islam. Another stamp of this same series, represents a fragment of the great sculptured triptych on which Wit Stwosz worked from 1477 to 1439 and that adorned St. Mary's Church in Cracow until the Germans stole it.

In 1935 and 1936 a series of stamps representing Polish architectural and landscape motifs was issued. We reproduce here with an enlarged stamp representing the Clothiers' Hall, 14th to 16th century, in the Market Place of Cracow. As in the case of the above series, the drawing was executed by R. Kleczewski, the engraving, done with remarkable accuracy, by Vacek.

However, the most beautiful Polish stamps both from the technical and the purely artistic point of view, were still to be created. To these belongs the



Grain trade flourished in 16th century
in Danzig

Stamp drawn by W. Boratynski, engraved
by M. Dutczyński (1938)



Centennial of Polish Insurrection of 1830
Drawing for stamp by Tadeusz Gronowski (1930)



Kosciuszko — Washington — Pulaski
Drawing for stamp issued by Poland to commemorate
George Washington Bicentennial (1932)

the days when Danzig, as part of Poland, reached the zenith of its wealth and culture. This stamp is not inferior in beauty of composition and perfection of technique to that described above, nor at either of them in any way exceptional in the historical and Danzig series. They were followed by a new issue in 1938, equalling them in perfection, and finally, in 1941 by a set of eight stamps issued by the Polish Government in London.

This latest issue of Polish stamps, impressed from steel plates, is technically perfect. Four of them represent the different branches of the Polish fighting forces, three the ruins of Warsaw, and one the destruction of the statue of the poet Adam Mickiewicz in Cracow by the Germans. They all bear the inscription "Poczta Polska," having been printed for the use of the Polish fighting forces and Polish seamen. A detailed description of this series with reproductions will be found in the "Polish Review," Vol. II, No. 18.

The Polish stamps, both the earliest and the latest, are well known to American philatelists. A number of American stamp collectors own complete collections of Polish stamps. The stamps used for making the enlarged reproductions illustrating this article came from the valuable collection of Mr. W. Komorowski, of Brooklyn, N. Y., which includes many stamps issued during the years of partitioned Poland by foreign governments. Many articles have been devoted to Polish stamps by the American press and the American philatelic publications. Noteworthy also is "Polonus—a Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Stamps of Poland," published from November 1940 to April 1942 by the Hawthorne Press in Cicero, Ill.

Polish stamps express the love Poles have for their own country, and for other countries as well. How deep Polish-American friendship has always been is evidenced not only by the 1932 issue honoring Washington, but also by a 1937 stamp commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Constitution of the United States. This stamp shows Washington, Paine and Kosciuszko, united in the struggle for American independence. On the other hand, the United States issued two stamps in honor of two great Poles, the Pulaski stamp in 1931, and the Kosciuszko stamp in 1933.

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Bombed ruins of United States Embassy
in Warsaw

Polish stamp printed in England (1941)

FROM THE PRESIDENT

I submit herewith a list of Committees which will carry the burden of the many activities of the Society. I earnestly urge your wholehearted co-operation to the end that Polonus may continue its splendid record of accomplishment.

LIST OF COMMITTEES

Membership J. J. Domar
Sales and Auction .. Chester Mikucki
Program and Entertainment
..... Ben Reeves
Interclub Activities and Exhibitions
..... Ben Reeves
Experts Frank Wolosewick, Chm.,
John Gapinski, Dr. L. P. Kozakiewicz,
Vincent Domanski, Jr., Dr.
M. E. Uznanski
Art Lee Sobanski
Junior Activities .. Adam Kloskowski
Publicity Bert Powell,
Dr. S. M. Mioduszewski
Director of Polpex 1944
..... Roman Reinowski
Constitution and By-Laws Rux,
Bobo, Wengelewski, R. Wojcicki,
A. Nowinski
Publications Lester Jankowski
Central Federation Delegates
Chester Mikucki, Casimir Wojcicki,
Thaddeus L. Stanczak
Editor of Polonus Bulletin
..... Lester Jankowski
Reception Thaddeus L. Stanczak
Legal Advisor Lester Jankowski
—Myron E. Steczynski, President

MEET THE NEW MEMBERS

Member No. 179—Stanley Frank Kunicki, 1372 Fourth Ave., New Kensington, Pa. (E. P. P. & U. S.)
Member No. 180—Francis V. Bielski, M. D., 527 E. 9th St., Chester, Pa. (Poland, U. S. & Canada.)
Member No. 181—Norbert Joseph Zielinski, 1626 N. Artesian Ave., Chicago, Ill. (E. P. P.)
Member No. 182—Edward Leonard Stepnowski, 1449 N. Cleaver St., Chicago, Ill. (E. P. P. & U. S.)

APPLICATIONS PENDING

Miss Regina Barbara Serowiecki, 3568 East 117th St., Cleveland, Ohio.
Marion Zygmunt Ploski, M. D. % Emory and Henry College, Emory, Virginia.
Rev. Marion Weron, Mission House, Franciscan Fathers, Ellicott City, Md.

This 'n' That

2nd Lt. Julia C. Pach, A. N. C. was recently transferred to a Hospital in Texas where she is hard at work ministering to the wounded soldiers and sailors of Uncle Sam.

[Member Adam Nowinski's son Stanley is an Aviation Cadet in San Antonio, Texas. Good luck, Stas!]

Pres. Steczynski appointed the Committees, a list of which is given elsewhere. Nice job, Pres. Now, all the Committees have to do is work.

It's Sgt. Felix A. Walat, now! Congratulations.

From across the Sea—
dated 2-27-43

"Although I had known for some time that POLPEX will be held in March, the exact dates were unknown to me until recently.

"Knowing what the occasion means to the Society, I think this meager means will express my thought.

"From the bottom of my heart I extend my best wishes to Polonus on the occasion of the annual POLPEX and congratulate the efforts of the Committee, the Officers, the members and the exhibitors.

"This will no doubt be the greatest show Polonus has put on and in these times enough praise cannot be sent for the endeavors of the Society.

"It pleases me to know that a uniform on me can help preserve just such ventures as the POLPEX. Wishing I could be there, I am, Very Sincerely, Felix."

Felix Pientka is serving Uncle Sam in Northern Africa.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS

Rev. Blaise Szymaszek, 1651 Grand Trunk St., Montreal, Canada.

Sgt. Felix A. Walat, 10th General Hospital—E3260, Camp Carson, Colo.

Mrs. Regina Bain, 2239 Walton St., Chicago, Ill.

W. V. Kenworthy, President of Austin Philatelic Club will be guest speaker at the April 23, 1943 meeting. His topic will be "Siberia."

Mr. Kenworthy spent considerable time in Siberia during World War No. 1.