

RADIO STAMPS — On the Cover

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Stamps are those little, stickum-backed, colored, and often colorful, perforated squares and rectangles of paper that entitle us to send letters when appropriately applied, for which we prepay in return for the stamps. Some people collect stamps with the fanaticism of radio collectors. (I know that is hard to believe but it is true). Some stamps, say, with upside-down airplanes on them, cost as much as catalans. Other stamps, little purple ones from long ago and far away, cost more than Marconi gear. De gustibus non est disputandum, as Petronius Arbiter used to say: There is no accounting for tastes. If you like to collect stamps, you know all of this already. What you may not know is that there are radio-related stamps of all kinds, readily available. One nice thing about collecting radio stamps is that they take up a lot less room than radios. An even nicer thing is that they tell us about some little-known radio history.

The earliest radio stamps were issued by the wireless telegraphy companies. On the cover appear these "franks" of the Marconi company, the United Wireless Company, and the United Fruit Company wireless telegraphy division. These franks entitled the bearer to send a wireless message. They were often made available as complimentary perquisites to good customers, sought after customers, and company officials. The Marconi stamps issued to stockholders in 1913 for complimentary messages. They were printed on sheets, and issued in booklets of several pages of four stamps each. Most were perforated. The landline telegraph companies had long issued such franks, and the wireless companies merely followed suit. The Marconi frank is a near copy of the Western Union frank of the period. (Recently, Italy honored Marconi with an appearance on its 2000 Lira bill. Few other depictions on monetary instruments relate to radio. The collection of money is a whole

'nother subject; so, too, is the collection of stock certificates, many of which issued from radio companies).

The United Fruit Company had one of the earliest wireless networks to coordinate its Latin American operations, put together around 1908. It put its surplus capacity to work transmitting radio-grams, as a competitor to Marconi for maritime work, and perhaps also the cables. It supplied wireless telegraph franks as early as 1910, through 1913, to plantation owners to alert ships for crop pick-up and other purposes. It should be remembered that in those early days, competing wireless companies would not carry each others' traffic. As late as 1926 a Tropical Radio Telegraph Company (whose motto was "The Voice of the Americas") at least essayed radio-telegraph franks.

The United Wireless franks tell a story in themselves. The earliest, from 1908 on, are signed by its General Manager, C.C. Galbraith or its President C.C. Wilson. In 1912, the last year of issue, the signature is foregone

Radio Stamps Make Rare Collection

Postal authorities throughout the world have marked the rise of radio in rare stamp issues

STAMP collecting has come a long way from the old-fashioned system of assembling stamps according to country and issue. "Topical collecting," a new trend in this ancient hobby, picks out stamps on a

specific theme, such as flowers, horses, medicine, or what have you.

Herbert Rosen, whose business is radio and whose hobby is stamps, combines the two in a unique collection of stamps picturing nearly every aspect of electronic communications. Starting with the scientists whose discoveries cleared the way for modern electronics, his collection takes us right through the current spread of TV to various countries of the world.

Part of this collection has been published in a book titled *Radio Philately* (reviewed in our April, 1956, issue). Mr. Rosen kindly gave us permission to reproduce some of his rare stamps.



First transatlantic radiosignal broadcast from Cornwall, was received by Marconi at this tower overlooking the Newfoundland coast. Now a historic landmark, the tower was pictured in this memorial stamp issued in 1928. Spanning ocean by "wireless" gave rise to marine radio, ending ages of dreaded isolation for ships at sea.

The hundredth anniversary of electric communications in Turkey, from the first use of wire telegraphy (1855) to modern radio, is celebrated in this 1955 stamp (left, below). The French stamp at its right illustrates early military radio, showing the antennae of the desert fort Sebha in the African colonies.



Paris rooftops sprouted antennas when TV came to France. The Eiffel Tower, like the Empire State Building in New York, makes an ideal antenna mast for the city and its surroundings. With more than 800 lines, French TV boasts the world's best picture quality. The 1955 postage stamp (above, right) symbolizes TV signals radiating over Paris skyline. Guatemalan stamp (above, left) marks introduction of radio-telegraphy in South America.

Argentina's mail offers "spoken letters" recorded on discs. Social "Fonopostal" stamp is issued for this unique service.

for authorization of the "Trustees in Bankruptcy." Shortly before, the United management had all been indicted for stock fraud. They certainly sold a lot a stock, and transmitted all too few messages. Yet in the present era when a start-up biotech company can sell for rising share prices before any products are even approved, let alone sold, or 110 times earnings with products, one has to wonder if the United Wireless management was as crooked as the prosecutors claimed, or merely prescient pioneers for what became the booming telecommunications industry. Lee deForest was also indicted in this period, and the Federal Judge thought he was a crook for sure, because deForest had claimed that someday radio would carry the human voice across the Atlantic.

In the 1920s, broadcasting caught on nationwide. It was, however, a relatively quiet ether into which these signals reverberated. Listeners were thus able to, and did, go after long distance reception — DX. To real DXers (as opposed to mere BCLs), the programming was often but tedium between station identifications. Dedicated DXers wanted written verifications from each station heard.

The stations were flattered to have been heard so far away, and they were mostly happy to comply with verification requests. Letters were followed by QSL cards, and in the mid twenties, the EKKO stamp company came along. Its name is an obvious play on "echo" and the return of a QSL. It provided each station with a postage-like stamp with an eagle on it and the call letters. The station could send the stamps with or as verifications. Canadian stations got stamps with beavers on them, but the Cubans, close as they were, got no cigar — the stamps also had eagles. Other stations did up their own stamps. Fervid DXers could hear many stations around the country, and accumulate most of the EKKO stamps. EKKO sold a stamp album and kit for these DXers. Radio News in February, 1925 made EKKO stamps its cover subject with an article: The New Radio Stamp Fad.

Stamps of this sort, that are not really postage stamps, but seem to want to be, are called "cinderellas" by stamp collectors. There are other radio cinderellas as well. RCA in particular issued stamps in relation to its product line. The Quarter Century Wireless Association has

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, military radio suddenly burst into prominence. This special set of German stamps features pictorial motifs of ground-based army signal service. Note schematic of tuned circuit at lower right. Primitive antennas on stamps are a far cry from the highly advanced but then-secret designs actually used.



Of all the Oriental countries, Japan was the first to take a serious interest in Western science. Having introduced broadcasting as early as 1925, Japan celebrated the 25th anniversary of its radio service in 1950 by a special stamp issue contrasting an old-fashioned microphone with a recent model patterned after American designs. Japan's radio is noted for high-quality transmissions as well as excellent programs.



Hungarian stamp (above, left) pictures the unsung heroine of all electronics: the patient, unknown worker who assembles the equipment. Spanish stamp (above, right) marks 25th year of Radio Barcelona.

Italians took to television (right) with typical gusto when their network finally reached all the main regions. Transmitters were designed with special radiation patterns to jibe with heavy population areas. Stamp at far right shows Monaco, whose powerful radio station perches atop a mountain overlooking Monte Carlo and the sea. One of Europe's few commercial stations, it can be heard throughout the Mediterranean area and recently formed the hub of broadcasting activities connected with the wedding of Grace Kelly and the Prince of Monaco. TV service has now been added.



issued stamps to its members. There are also tax stamps relating to radio, at least in England and maybe Canada. The BBC was financed by a user fee or tax on radios. Payment of the tax was shown by display of the BBC Radio Tax stamp on the receiver. Canadians also taxed such things, and there may be Canadian Radio Tax stamps. I have seen neither, but Paul Bourbin says he has seen the BBC stamp.

Various nations have been issuing postage stamps relating to radio for many years. In 1956, a small book came out by Herbert Rosen called Radio Philatelia. It was reviewed in Popular Electronics in April, 1956 and some of the stamps in it illustrated in the July, 1956 issue. That article is reproduced nearby. Many nations have commemorated Marconi over the years, and France has commemorated Eduard Branley, inventor of the coherer that made Marconi's work possible. The Russians put Marconi's contemporary Alexander Popov on a series of stamps, along with his receiver circuits, with which he first detected lightning storms. Nikola Tesla appears on the stamps of the former Yugoslavia. The U.S. did a series on pioneering electronics including deForest Audions, as well as an International Telecommunication Union commemorative and one for Amateur Radio. The U.S. also honored inventors Edwin Howard Armstrong, Philo T. Farnsworth, Nikola Tesla and Charles Proteus Steinmetz. Radio has also appeared on stamps relating to space exploration and satellites. The

U.K. honored Marconi with four stamps issued for the 75th anniversary of the Marconi — Kemp experiments, in 1972. Both Newfoundland and Canada honored Marconi as well, for his 1901 transatlantic tests performed in Newfoundland. China and Japan have honored radio communications and facilities, as well as electronics, on recent stamps.

Stamp collecting is known as philately or philatelics, and there is certainly a radio philatelics. Collections of stamps about just one subject are known as topical. There is an association of topical stamp collectors. As far as I have been able to determine, there is (as yet) no special interest group among the topical collectors for radio stamps. The American Topical Association would be happy to sponsor one, no doubt.

Stamps like the telegraph franks are known as "back of the book" because of where they are covered in the Scott master stamp catalog. I found out about the Marconi stamps from such a mention (without illustration) in the back of a 1989 Scott. Later I found other, old catalog pages illustrating the wireless franks among the telegraph stamps. Larry Nutting has been very helpful in this regard, particularly in supplying excerpts from George Jay Kramer's book, UNITED STATES TELEGRAPH STAMPS AND FRANKS (The Collectors Club, NY, 1992) and from Joseph S. and Stephen G. Rich, UNITED STATES TELEGRAPH ISSUES (Society of Philatelic Americans, 1947), both of which I have relied upon for some of the information in this note. Larry's 1992 Pricing Guide shows United Wireless franks selling for between \$10 and \$100.

There is a specialized dealer, Dr. Robert Freeman (7800 North 37th Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85051 (602 973 4021)) who has helped me get the wireless stamps on the cover, and who has access to more. The radio-related postal stamps are in the general parts of the catalogs for each country, and more easily available. I have been very pleased with the help I have had from stamp dealer Richard Hoffman (Philatelic Enterprises, P.O. Box 4569, Vallejo, CA 94590 (707 642 8650)) as well. Also, the U.S. Stamp Company (368 Bush Street, San Francisco, CA 94104 (415 421 7398)) can fulfill want-lists. Littlewood's Stamps is an excellent source for postals relating to radio and matters electrical: Bill Littlewood, P.O. Box 681, Brookfield, WI, 53008. I recommend all of these sources if you are interested in Radio Philatelia.

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