

Presented here for your enjoyment, the October 2020 issue of the LSCC . . .

ALPHONSE MUCHA
Czech artist and stamp designer
By Dick Colberg



Scott #1636 issued in 1969

Way back in 1998, seems like ages ago, Nancy and I spent two weeks in Europe with a group of fellow appraisers under the guidance of the Executive Director. These trips had been going on for several years, but it was our first with this group. We spent time in Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, and Munich. Of the four cities, we both enjoyed Prague the best. The people were great, food was wonderful, good museums, and a wide variety of churches, all of which, it seems, boasted that Mozart had played there.

On one of our free days, we wandered into the Alphonse Mucha Museum. We'd not heard of him, but he was billed as an Art Nouveau artist. We liked art nouveau but did not collect it. While in the museum I spotted in a display case several sheets of stamps. That *would* catch my eye! Upon closer examination I said, "Hey, I recognize these!"



This is a newspaper stamp with a face value of 10 halerus, part of an 8-stamp set issued in 1918, imperforate. (Scott P1 – P8) I also have the 2 haleru value.



This is a part of a 3-stamp special delivery stamp set, issued in 1919. (Scott E1 – E3)



This is part of a 14-stamp set of postage dues issued in 1918. (Scott J1 – J14)



The Republic of Czechoslovakia was founded on October 28, 1918. This first issue, Scott #1 – 10, released in 1918, was designed by Alphonse Mucha and issued imperforate. A slightly redesigned stamp was issued in 1919, also imperforate. (Scott #23 – 40) Except for the airmails and semi-postals, Mucha designed all of Czechoslovakia's first issues.

Who was Alphonse Mucha? He was born on July 24, 1860 in Moravia in Austria, now part of the Czech Republic, as Alfons Maria Mucha. He is known internationally as Alphonse Mucha. He lived in Paris during the Art Nouveau period. He died on July 14, 1939 in Prague. His style of work is very distinctive, in my opinion, and after you've seen some of his work, you'll recognize his other works. Shown below are a couple of examples.



The top piece is a poster advertising an evening of theater honoring Sarah Bernhardt in 1896. The bottom piece is a label from a bottle of Moët & Chandon Crémant Impérial from 1899. While attending and exhibiting at Marcophilex in 2012 in Epernay, France I toured the famous Moët et Chandon champagne facility. Yes, a tasting was an enjoyable part of the tour! The show's banquet was held at another champagne facility, Georges Cartier, and each of us was given a bottle of their champagne with a special Marcophilex label on it. I showed my Lititz Postal History exhibit at that show.

I'll round this out with more of the trip to Prague. Our tour group went from Prague to Vienna and then Salzburg. I knew while in Prague that an International stamp exhibit was scheduled for a couple of days *after* we were to leave Prague. That was really eating at me; so near and yet so far! At dinner, our last evening in Salzburg, I wondered out loud if there was a way to get back to Prague. The next day was to be a travel-only day. Nothing to see. We were about a block from the main train station and we went there to explore! I found I could take an overnight train to Prague, arriving there at about 8:00 a.m. The price was very fair, and I bought a ticket. My return the next evening would end in Munich, the next stop for our group.

Sometime during the night, as I slept on and off, I was awakened by the compartment door banging open and being confronted by border guards. Czechoslovakia was then still under communist control and when we crossed the border into Czechoslovakia, they were checking tickets and passports.

Upon arrival back in Prague, I made my way to the tram that would get me to the exhibition. Once there I was disappointed to find that at that space were only the dealers. The exhibits were at another venue. I got directions, but never found it. At the space I was directed to, some sort of trade show was being set up, but no stamp exhibits. Disappointed, and with time running out, I went back to the first venue, found the post office booth, and bought a show souvenir sheet for each of my 40 tour-mates.



Praga 1998 souvenir sheet, Scott 2023a.

My return to Munich went off without a hitch, sort of. I needed to take a subway from the main train station to where the group was staying. However, as it was about 10 p.m., I was unable to get any German marks, which were required for the subway I need to take. What to do? About then a group of teenagers appeared, and all jumped the turnstile on their way to their train. So, when in Rome....

At the farewell dinner, the following evening I gave each person one of the souvenir sheets, packaged in a Hilton Hotel envelope that I talked the desk clerk out of. All were duly impressed (1) because of the gift and (2) because I'd even try the trip back to Prague. To use the golfing adage, never up, never in.

Editor's note: Coincidentally, there's currently an Alphonse Mucha exhibit open at the Reading Public Museum; this is the info from their website . . .

Alphonse Mucha: Master of Art Nouveau

From September 26, 2020 – January 3, 2021 the Reading Public Museum will present, *Alphonse Mucha: Master of Art Nouveau* that includes more than 70 original works by the artist many consider the creator of the Art Nouveau style. From 1895 to 1910 Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939) was one of the most significant artists in all of Europe. His work became synonymous with the international Art Nouveau style, popularly called "le style Mucha" in Paris at the turn of the century. With a focus on the works created during the 1890s, this exhibition shows a creative man exploring possibilities when the emphasis was on defining a new art, fit for the new century. Mucha's designs for posters, calendars, books and advertising labels circulated widely throughout Europe and America, and his Art Nouveau style dominated visual culture and graphic design for years. Highlights of the exhibition include four versions of a monumental poster Mucha created in 1894 for actress Sarah Bernhardt's play "Gismonda" and two posters advertising Job cigarette papers (1896 and 1898).

Alphonse Mucha: Master of Art Nouveau includes vintage lithographs, original drawings, paintings, books, advertising ephemera, and more. Works and objects in this exhibition are drawn from the holdings of the Dhawan Collection, Los Angeles, one of the largest and finest collections of Alphonse Mucha's work in the United States.

Alphonse Mucha: Master of Art Nouveau is organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California and has been presented at the Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio; The Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, NY, and the Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, New York, among

others. The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Marlin and Ginger Miller Exhibition Endowment.

The wisdom of dodging questions

Excerpted from David Von Drehle in the Washington Post, October 16, 2020

With his genius eye for the telling detail, historian Rick Atkinson – the Homer of World War II – puts us in the room with Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt in May 1943. The vast armies they command have driven the Axis from North Africa. Now they are turning to the liberation of Europe. But the question gnawing at Churchill is whether he can get his hands on enough of America’s industrial output to make Britain an equal partner in the war.

Atkinson writes in “The Day of Battle”: “The president sat by a window with his beloved stamp collection; when Churchill’s pleas grew too insistent for more tanks or more planes, more this or more that, Roosevelt would cut him short by holding a stamp specimen to the light and murmuring, ‘Isn’t this a beauty from Newfoundland?’”

Few political arts are more valuable than that of dodging questions. The wise leader understands that tomorrow is an enigma, next week a mystery and the next month an unknowable country . . .

Zooming through the fall

The Philatelic Society of Lancaster County continues to hold bi-monthly meetings virtually via Zoom, and will do so for the foreseeable future. You don’t need to be a member of the PSLC to attend! If you’re hesitant to check one out because you don’t know many people (I can be like this in social situations where there are a lot of people I don’t know), I think you’ll find that everyone is very friendly, and that you don’t need to say a whole lot if you don’t want to. A typical meeting consists of a feature presentation (the first meeting of this month was all about 18th century stamped envelopes of Britain, and the last meeting of September featured a presentation from a member of the American Topical Society about collecting stamps related to a specific state), and after the presentation members are free to show and tell and chat about interesting or special items from their collections. Please do check it out while we await our next opportunity to meet together in person at the Lebanon Community Library.

And, we can always use your newsletter submissions . . .

This is *our* newsletter, and I’d love to publish your work. As you can see, we have another big feature from Dick this month, but very little from your editor. You can definitely say I had a case writer’s block this month! Next month we’ll feature some more stamps from Dick’s uncle Fritz’s collection. What can you share with us? *Scott Ney*