

# Book Reports

July - August 2014 Volume 11, Issue 3



## STAMPS DELIVER KNOWLEDGE

### An Overprint Overview

Greg Alexander

I recently joined an online stamp forum, which offers a wide variety of topics for discussion among fellow collectors. This is an excellent research tool as well, as many of the members are experts in their specialty areas and can provide knowledgeable answers to specific queries.

In the Topicals section I came across a discussion thread titled “Post your favorite overprints.” I found the images and write-ups very informative, so I thought I’d post a few from my own collection. Paging through my stamp album, I realized there were probably dozens of interesting examples, each notable for varied reasons. I also came across several errors, which I hadn’t noticed until now. These seemed like good seeds for an article and an opportunity to educate myself using some of the library’s catalogs and books.

Typically, overprints seem fairly mundane. Most frequently they are used to quickly change denominations or postal usage, as a stopgap until there is time to design and print new stamps. Or an overprint might indicate use in a different country or territory, usually a colony or occupied area. However, there are many other uses. Let’s start with one that should be worth a smile.

### Overprint Oddballs

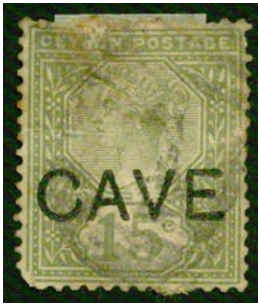
My collection would be probably be considered “classic” – it stops at 1940, the advent of WWII. Still, there is one overprint past this date that I keep purely for its ironic humor. It’s a double overprint from the Philippines; the later one, added in 1973, was to reduce the denomination from 6 to 5 sentimos (centavos). The earlier overprint was part of an anti-smuggling campaign from 1966. But when President Ferdinand Marcos was deposed in 1986 and gold bricks and jewels were found in the presidential

palace, the slogan “HELP ME STOP SMUGGLING” began to look more like a personal cry for help than a national edict.



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What's this – a stamp for spelunkers? No, in fact it's not even officially sanctioned. The Cave Company in Ceylon applied these overprints to numerous postage stamps to prevent theft by their employees. Based in Colombo, Cave sold books and stationery, sheet music and instruments, and imported billiard tables and accessories. Much of the company's business was done by mail and as a result a large number of stamps were kept on the premises. Runners were employed to carry company correspondence to the post office, a common practice in many Asian countries at the time. If the stamps were not somehow marked before being sent to the mailing authorities, unscrupulous runners (whose daily wage might be less than the postage) were likely to remove the stamps, pitch the envelope and its contents, and sell the uncanceled stamps. Examples exist on stamps from Straits Settlements and India. The CAVE overprints were applied between 1884 and 1908, after which the company switched to the use of perfins. Since printing was also part of their business, it's likely that the company ran off these overprints on their own press.

I've seen overprints in a variety of ink colors – black, blue, red, and purple. But this Consular overprint on a revenue from Bolivia is the only one I've come across in metallic silver ink. It has the appearance of foil and gives the stamp a distinguished quality. One wonders what the Bolivians would find to tax in their own embassy.



While engraved stamps were long considered the norm, the cost of creating and printing an engraved overprint was usually deemed too expensive and time-consuming. Mexico's Provisional Government issue (GPdM) of 1916 offers a rare instance of the use intaglio engraving for an overprint. This overprint was so popular with collectors it gained a nickname: the "Barril" for its barrel shape. Employing a rainbow of ink colors (there is thought to have been some philatelic influence here), these beautiful overprints were printed from plates created with a geometric lathe, the same type used in the production of banknotes. The new government was apparently willing to bear the added expense to bolster their appearance of authority.



### Obliterate and Obscure



Overprints frequently block out all or part of the original design of a stamp, sometimes for utility, sometimes to make a pointed political statement.

Several of the 1895 Salvadoran UPU series were never actually issued without an overprint. The stamp originally portrayed Gen. Antonio Ezeta, who also happened to be the brother of the President Carlos Ezeta. However, shortly after the stamps were printed President Ezeta was overthrown. Rather than scrap the issue, postal authorities decided to simply overprint the portrait with a finely detailed national crest and release it anyway. Like the Mexican “Barril,” this is one of a few other steel-engraved overprints.

“Resellada” (“resealed”) was overprinted on a series of Venezuelan stamps in 1900 as a way to restrict unauthorized use. When Gen. Cipriano Castro assumed power that year large quantities of postage remained in the hands of officials from the previous government. Castro demonetized these and authorized only those with a special overprint. The ornate overprint features the signed initials RTM – Ramon Tellos Mendoza, Minister on the Interior; Castro also issued an overprint with his own signature. Both effectively obscured the original face of the stamp, though it was done artfully, using scrollwork and an ornate leafy design.



As the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved in 1918, the Balkan states came together as the kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS or CXC in Cyrillic), later known as Yugoslavia. Appropriated Austrian stamps were overprinted with new denominations and country name. The stamp featuring Emperor Franz Josef was the only one of the series to also receive an undignified block over his face. In 1919, at the close of the war, Western Ukraine also gained independence from Austria for a short time before becoming part of Poland. Austrian stamps in the new country were also quickly (and heavily) overprinted with the Ukrainian trident – and the imperial crown on this stamp suffered much the same fate as emperor’s face.



In Hungary, following a short-lived republic, the Soviets briefly took control in 1918 and stamps were overprinted in red “Magyar Tanácsköztársaság” or “Hungarian Soviet Republic.” But the Hungarians thought better of that idea and successfully fought to regain self-government at the end of 1919. In January 1920, Hungary cleverly used an overprint of wheat sheaves to obliterate the



previous Soviet overprint and reissued the stamps again.



In the 1922, several years after the Russian Revolution, the Soviets reluctantly decided to make use of the large supply of czarist postage stamps they had inherited – all depicting the imperial crest. These were repurposed with heavy overprints covering the crest with the hammer and sickle emblem inside a star, and the old denomination with a new one. Other artful obscurations, though it's unclear why such ornate designs were necessary, include Cuba's 20 centavo surcharge of 1873 and the 1920 postage due (Porto) of Yugoslavia. The last also has an unexplained 45 degree tilt to the left, though the design would have fit upright.



The final example on the obliteration theme is from the Netherlands, a postage due from 1924. Initially it was hard to understand the necessity of such a heavy overprint, blocking out nearly the entire stamp design. Then I realized that the vertical overprint was placed on a *horizontal* stamp! Why this “mask” was used to change the stamp's original orientation is a mystery.

### Typographical Elegance

While most overprints use utilitarian block type for their text, once in a while the stamp issuing entities gave in to the designer's whim of using type with some elegance. The German occupational overprints from WWI use a distinctively Teutonic font for the name of the controlled territory (below: Poland, Belgium and Bavaria), making them seem a natural part of the empire. They also used this typestyle for office abroad, such as China and Morocco, giving an oddly “Germanized” look to these country names.



Carinthia, a former Austrian duchy, became a contested region at the end of WWI occupied by the Yugoslav army. The region was divided into Zone A (primarily Slovene-speakers) and Zone B (mostly German speakers). In 1920, a referendum was held for residents in Zone A to vote on whether to join Yugoslavia or rejoin Austria. A massive propaganda campaign ensued. To help Carinthians living outside the area to travel and vote, Yugoslavia created special stamps to raise funds. Newspaper stamps were overprinted with KGCA – “Carinthian Governmental Commission, [Zone] A.” These were fancifully designed with Art Nouveau lettering, printed with three different denominations on a single sheet, and sold at three times their face value in neighboring Slovenian post offices. Despite these efforts, the majority voted to side with Austria, where Carinthia is now a state.



From 1908 through the '30s, Luxembourg added a touch of elegance to their official stamps by overprinting them using a script font with flair. During the hyperinflation of 1922, Poland beautifully redenominated their 25 mark stamp to 10 thousand (tysiechy) marks, perhaps hoping the graceful numerals would soften the blow. In 1923, the Netherlands created 2 cent and 10 cent overprints, using calligraphy type that looked almost hand-lettered. And when Lourenco Marcos changed the values of postage in 1902 they combined dimensional shaded numerals with a lovely script typestyle, underscored with a flourish.





## Picto-overprints

Some topical collectors specialize in overprints that depict *things*, rather than numbers or letters. Overprints exist of flags, crowns, and even winged wheels, such as this one found on postage from the 1920s designated for official correspondence of the Belgian National Railway.



But easily the most common pictorial overprints are of airplanes. As airmail became a feasible way to move the mail, dozens of countries repurposed postage for the new mode of transport with overprints of planes of all types. Danzig's first two airmail stamps of 1920 feature somewhat cartoonish biplanes. In contrast, the Philippines commemorated the first commercial flight to the U.S. in 1935 with a very detailed depiction of a Martin 130 – the China Clipper.



Certainly the most unusual pictorial overprint in my collection is from Costa Rica – it's a bag of coffee beans! This was not an official overprint, however. In 1922, the year after the centenary of the country's first coffee plantation, promoters overprinted several postage stamps as a way to advertise Costa Rican coffee. Unofficial perhaps, but definitely eye-catching.

## Room for Errors

Printing standards for overprints tended to be less stringent than they were for the stamps themselves. Often they were applied in haste by small printing firms – occasionally even using a rubber stamp. So it's not surprising that errors frequently turn up.

Nicaragua repurposed many of their postage stamps as telegraph stamps and not much care was taken during their overprinting. This particular example is my nomination for worst-centered overprint ever. It takes skill to land one directly along the perforations.



The Philippines overprinted a tremendous amount of postage for Official Business (O.B.) while under U.S. administration. Inverted overprints like this one are not uncommon. The cancellation and light inking made it difficult to see at first glance. In fact, if the period in the overprint hadn't given Gen. Lawton a bindi dot I might have missed it.



Here's another example from Nicaragua – a double imprint of an official overprint. These particular overprints were pretty sloppy in general, not a very positive reflection on the government they represented. But perhaps the printing contract went to the lowest bidder.

The mother of all overprints in my collection is from Cilicia, now part of Turkey near the Syrian border, which was occupied for a short time by French forces at end of WWI. I didn't even notice the error at first because of everything else going on. There are overprints in three different colors here: the black “TEO Cilicie” occupational overprint (Territoires Ennemis Occupes); a changed denomination (5) in blue at bottom; and a red “tughra” monogram of the Ottoman sultan. But if that weren't enough, the Cilicia overprint is *doubled* – so four overprints on one stamp! If any reader can top that, I welcome your submission.



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## Summer Stumper

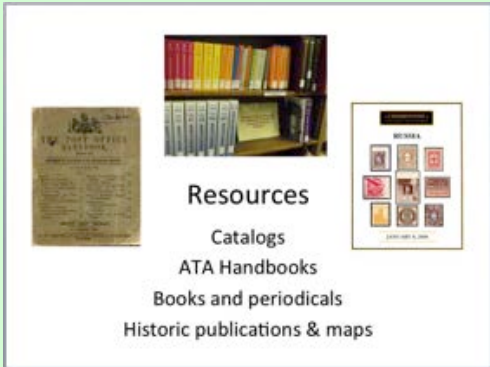
In light of our recent article on stamps as money, here are three example of something similar. However, these are local – from Multnomah County. They are not postage stamps, in fact they are a bit smaller, only about 1/2 x 7/8 inches. Circling the numeral is the text “City and County Self-Liquidating Scrip.” They are rouletted and gummed on the back. Each value is sequentially “coded” – A-W, A-X, and A-Y, so one might logically assume there was an A-Z denomination in the series.

The stumper questions: What were these stamps used for and when were they produced? Were they pasted into a booklet, like savings stamps? And were there other denominations?

Please submit your answer by email to [nwpl@qwestoffice.net](mailto:nwpl@qwestoffice.net).



###



**Resources**

- Catalogs
- ATA Handbooks
- Books and periodicals
- Historic publications & maps

### Would your organization like a presentation?

Members of the Northwest Philatelic Library regularly travel to locations throughout the region for shows and other activities. The library has created a PowerPoint presentation that explains how members and non-members can benefit from our literature and resources. If you would like someone to bring this short presentation to your philatelic group or other association, please contact Orle Trier at 503-867-4764.



## New on our Shelves

*The following resources have been added to our collection:*

### Catalogs

Snee, Charles, **Scott 2015 Postage Stamp Catalog, Vol. 2**, Amos Press, Sidney, Ohio, 2014

### Books

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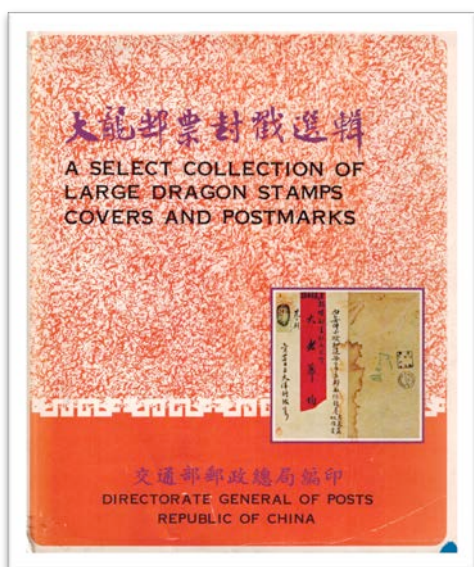
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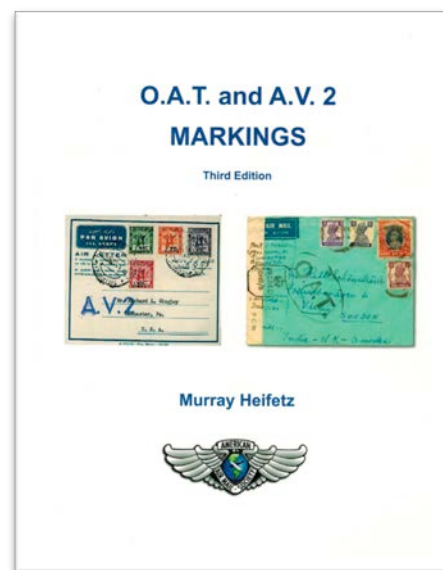


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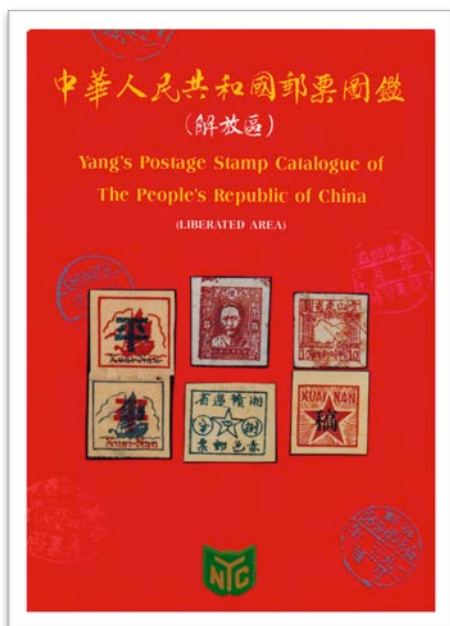
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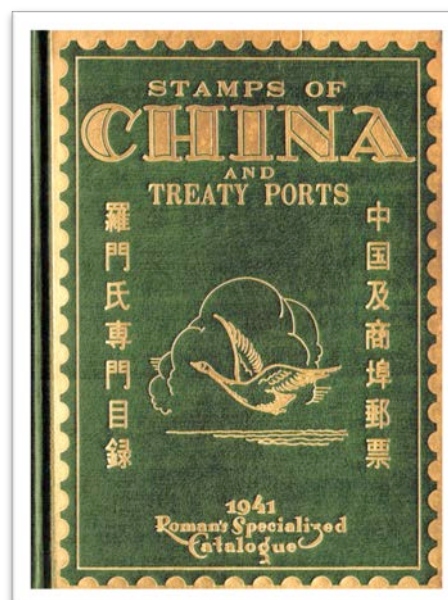
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## **Library Notes**

**Orlie Trier, NPL President**

### **Chinese literature added to collection**

You may have noticed the large selection of Chinese literature in “New on our Shelves.” We thank Steven Frumkin for this donation and making these resources available to our philatelic community. These resources remind me of our need for people with special abilities to assist us. In this case we need someone who can translate the Chinese into English. Much of many of these books are written in Chinese. You would not need to be present in Portland [although that would be helpful] as we can send scans. Thanks in advance for your assistance.

### **Donations**

Just a quick reminder that we are a 501c(3) and accept donations. If we do not have the resources on our shelves we add them. We are more selective in adding periodicals due to shelf space. Stamps that we are unable to sell we donate to our children’s program. Nothing is wasted. Thanks for considering donating.

### **Surplus Books**

We recently updated the NPL website with an updated list of duplicate books we have for sale. The listed prices are negotiable. Take a look at [www.nwpl.org/DupeList8\\_20.htm](http://www.nwpl.org/DupeList8_20.htm).

## **In Appreciation**

To the individuals listed below who have made recent donations of literature and other considerations to NPL, we thank you for your generosity. We want to assure you that we will make good use of these resources for our fellow philatelist and collectors.

<b>John Blakemore</b>	<b>National Postal Museum</b>
<b>Steven Frumkin</b>	<b>San Jose Stamp Club</b>
<b>David Taylor</b>	<b>P.T. Loud, Jr.</b>
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