

Poster Stamps Come of Age

By Arthur H. Groten, M.D.



“What are those beautiful stamps?” is a question I’m often asked by people who have never seen them. They are poster stamps, miniature posters often created by the best graphic designers of their time, used to advertise products, promote exhibitions, encourage good works, and propagandize viewers. The striking examples accompanying this article give some idea of their power.

With the advent of APS classes for display and cinderella exhibits, these little gems are finally coming into their own again, being placed into their proper context by collectors and exhibitors.

The first poster stamps were issued in the mid 19th century but it was the production of some 5,000 different for the Paris Exposition of 1900 which started the world-wide craze. They rapidly became the single most important form of advertising in Wilhelmine Germany before WWI. So much so, that in 1913 it is estimated that at least 50,000 face different stamps were produced in Germany alone.

By the turn of the last century, poster stamps were as popular as postage stamps and the two were offered, by subscription, side by side, by the leading dealers of the day. Rather than disdaining them, the major dealers issued their own poster stamps to advertise their wares. There were thousands of poster stamp clubs around the world, with more than 1000 in the U.S. alone.

Hundreds of thousands of poster stamps were produced, in all themes, topics and countries, between 1895 and 1940, enough to satisfy the most jaded collector; new ones are being discovered every day. Various cataloguing efforts are underway. Opportunities for original research abound.

As a member of the ASDA, in my 10 years of dealing in poster stamps I can safely say that it is easier to find a \$10,000 postage stamp than a \$50 poster stamp. There is no ready source for them. My stock is as close as one can get to such a repository.

Time constraints preclude me from fully pursuing all possible avenues of expansion. The mechanisms are all in place for rapid growth utilizing the website, email, eBay, mail order and so forth. It awaits the imaginative entrepreneur.

Poster Stamps Holdings At Auction

The Cinderella holdings of Dr. Groten’s firm, The Printer’s Stone, Ltd. are among the largest in the world, consisting principally of poster stamps. This formidable stock will be offered intact by Greg Manning Auctions during their WASHINGTON 2006 Collections of the World sale on May 29. See the Manning ad on page 7.

