# CALGARY PHILATELIST

IN THIS ISSUE ...

Dinu Matei introduces the
postal history of Romania.
Shown here on the cover
(clockwise from top right)
are a Romanian stamp
overprinted for use in
Constantinople,   an
inverted centre error of
the 1956 Census issue, the
first airmail stamp of
Romania issued in 1928, and
an occupation stamp of 1919.

# ROMANIA: A SHORT POSTAL HISTORY
by Dinu Matei

From a philatelic point of view Romania is best known for its first issue of July 1858, the famous "Bull's Head". In fact, those stamps were issued by The Principality of Moldova which, one year later, was united with The Principality of Wallachia to form Romania. At that time Transylvania was still under Austro-Hungarian occupation. The Bull's Head issue, with four values of 27, 54, 81, and 108 parale, is inscribed in Cyrillic letters but in the Romanian language. The Bull Head (actually a bison) is the emblem of Moldova. From the approximately 24,000 stamps issued, only 724 survived, with only 89 on cover. They are considered among the world's rarities. The original clichés were discovered in 1940 and hopefully will be put on display when the Romanian Postal Museum will be open. The Bull's Head issue was re-issued twice last century, easily recognizable because printed on different papers than the originals. Also, these stamps were reproduced on other Romanian stamps on several occasions.

The first Romanian stamps were issued in 1862. They have a similar design; along with the Bull Head, an eagle being depicted also, the emblem of Wallachia. The first Principe of Romania, Alexandru Ioan Cuza was depicted on the following issues. He was forced to abdicate, and Carol I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen was elected Prince in 1866. Romania stamps from 1864 to 1879 are scarce, especially on covers. The first Romanian postal card was issued in 1873. In 1881, Romania became a Kingdom. When King Carol I celebrated 25 years since he was on the throne, Romania issued the first commemorative postal card in the world. It was valid for postage for only three days. In 1913, after the Balkan War, Romania acquired Dobrogea, and a set of 10 commemorative stamps was issued. Those stamps were banned by the Communists and were erased from Romanian catalogues until 1990. Before World War One started, the Romanian Postal Administration commissioned a St. Petersburg printing house to realize a new set of definitive stamps. However, the Bolshevists seized all the stamps, and also the entire Romanian treasury consisting of several tons of gold, paintings, archives, etcetera. Several of these stamps appeared on the market; they are scarce.

King Carol I died in 1914. His nephew King Ferdinand, also a German, followed him on the throne. Despite his origin, he was more concerned with the future of Romania, and in 1916 he declared war against Germany and Austro-Hungary. After the war, Transylvania and Bucovina, both with more than 70% Romanian inhabitants, became part of the so-called Great Romania. Several stamps were overprinted with the royal ciphers and "1918". All the Hungarian stamps found at post offices in Transylvania were overprinted with Romanian currency and were valid for postage in the whole of Romania until 1922. The overprinting was done in Cluj and Oradea in 1919, the Cluj issue having the currencu inscribes in "BANI" and "LEI", and the Oradea one in "Bani" and "Lei". The employees of the post offices received a complete set as salary. The quantity of the overprinted stamps varies between 100 and 1,700,000 depending on how many complete sheets were found. On cover, these stamps demand prices as high as $100, if genuine.

The following Romanian issues are relatively easy to be found in mint condition but difficult on covers. Despite the fact that the first airmail service was inaugurated in 1920, the first Romanian airmail stamps were issued only in 1928. However, for the first 1920 flight several private overprints are known to exist. During the reign of King Carol II (a keen collector who constantly purchased stamps from auctions) most of the stamps from the 1930s were issued also imperforate in quantities varying from 200 to 1000 sets. Those are scarce and listed by the Michel catalogue.

In the summer of 1940, Romania was forced to cede part of Bucovina to Russia and part of Transylvania to Hungary. Carol II abdicated and was followed by his son King Mihai in September 1940. However, the chief of state was in fact Marshall Antonescu. In 1941 Romania entered the war along Germany and re-occupied that part of Bucovina from Russia. Between 1941 and 1943 several sets of stamps were issued, depicting scenes from the "saint war against bolshevism", and the province re-united with Romania. From 1948 until 1990, the Communists banned all those stamps, and it was forbidden to collect or exhibit them. On top of that, they had to be declared to authorities, who confiscated and destroyed them. Despite this, few collectors declared the forbidden stamps, so most of them still exist today. Until 1990, all the imported stamp catalogues listing those stamps were heavily cancelled with black ink on the pages containing those stamps, or those pages were torn out.

In 1946, the Red Army imposed a "democratic" government on Romanians. King Michael was forced to abdicate in 1947 and the Communists took power. the beautiful set of definitive stamps issued in 1947 was overprinted with the initials "RPR" (Republica Populara Romana). Both issues were valid for postage and interesting combinations on covers resulted. In the following years, mainly propaganda stamps were issued. The inflation that resulted after the end of WW2 forced the postal administration to issue stamps with very high face values. The postal rates were changed so often that this period is an extremely interesting field of research for postal historians. These covers are not very expensive. A first monetary reform was done in 1947, followed by a second one in 1952. For the first one the postal administration was well prepared and issued new stamps in time, but for the second one there were no proper stamps available to the public. Several issues from 1948 to 1951 were overprinted with the new values. This is probably one of the most interesting chapters in Romanian modern postal history. Covers that survived are really scarce and surprisingly relatively cheap.

In the following years, thematic stamps were issued having nice designs and in decent quantities. Due to the Cold War, covers sent to the western countries are not common. Starting in 1971 Romania issued more stamps than were needed for postal purposes, and, unfortunately, imperforate miniature sheets. The latter were issued in very limited editions, were for export only, and a small quantity offered to high-ranking members of the Romanian Communist Party. Ordinary collectors could not buy those imperforate miniature sheets that were never offic-ially sold in Romania. Most catalogues do not list them.

The avalanche of pure philatelic issues and imperforate miniature
sheets led to a drastic depreciation of Romanian stamps among
collectors worldwide.  Starting in 1991 no more imperforate miniature
sheets were issued, and the number of stamps issued annually began to
decrease.  Hopefully, soon, Romanian stamps will be in demand as they
used to be in the past and not considered among the ones issued in the
Gulf States.

There are several chapters in Romanian postal history that are very
interesting and less known.  Before the Romanian postal administration
was established (and a short period of time after that), Austrian,
Russian, Greek, and French post offices existed in Romania.  Austrian
and French post offices used their own stamps.  The last foreign post
office in Romania was officially closed in 1869.  Along the Danube
River, the Austrian DDSG Company operated its own postal service, mostly
for parcels rather than letters, and several stamps were issued.  The
railway between Constanta and Cernavoda was operated for a short period
of time by a British company, which also issued stamps.  Genuine covers
bearing those stamps are scarce.  During WW1, part of Romania was
occupied by German, Austrian, Bulgarian, and Turkish troops.  Several
sets of stamps were issued or overprinted.  Genuine covers bearing these
stamps are rare.

Between 1896 and 1919, a Romanian post office was open in Constantinopol
and Romanian stamps were used.  For a short period of time at the end of
WW1, Romanian troops adminstered Galitia (now in Ukraine) and several
Austrian stamps were overprinted.  The exact number of overprinted stamp
is still unknown and only a few genuine covers bearing stamps from this
issue are known to exist.  In 1919, Romanian troops entered Hungary to
fight against the bolshevists.  For several months Romanian soldiers
helped the Hungarian people with food and clothes.  Several Hungarian
stamps were overprinted with the text "Zona de ocupatie romana", and new
stamps also issued.  However, it seems this was done only for philatelic
purposes and most of these stamps known today are in mint condition.
Forgeries are known to exist as well as several private issues.

In 1919, the Romanian city of Timisoara was under Serb and Romanian
occupation, and Arad under French.  Each administration issued its own
stamps, the French ones being the rarest.  Commercial covers bearing
those issues are rare and seldom offered at auction.  During 194-44 in
Transylvania, Hungarian stamps and postal stationery were used.  Less
known to collectors worldwide is the fact that after Transylvania was
liberated and Romanian administration re-established, several local
stamps were issued in the Salaj and Nasaud counties, as well as in the
cities of Sighet, Tirgu-Mures, and Oradea.  Covers bearing these issues
are extremely rare.  Few studies regarding these stamps were published
in Romanian philatelic magazines.

Less known to collectors are the back-of-the-book stamps.  In 1871,
Romania issued its only set of telegraph stamps.  The used examples that
exist today are cancelled by a rectangular postmark and bear also pencil
marks.  Until 1928, parcel stamps were used.  This is a very little
researched field and could offer amazing opportunities for postal
historians.

Romania was among the first countries to issue charity stamps, the best known ones being the four 1906 issues. These were issued also in booklets, rarities nowadays. Several other charity issues followed. "Social assistance" stamps were issued after the end of WW1, and were mandatory for all correspondence sent by mail. Only small values are known on commercial covers, the higher values being used for fiscal purposes only. At the beginnings of the 1930s, another mandatory stamp was issued. Inscribed "Pentru Cultura" (For Culture), it was designated to collect money to build up schools and libraries in rural areas. To modernize the Romanian Royal Air Force, King Carol II decided to issue mandatory stamps inscribed "Fondul Aviatiei" or "Timbrul Aviatiei". For several years all these mandatory stamps were found on covers and postcards along with the postal ones, making all these items very attractive.

On August 23, 1944, Romania declared war against Germany and its allies. Despite the Russians demanding all the POWs captured by Romanians, a few of them escaped the fate of being deported into Siberia, and were interned in Romanian camps. For their correspondence, several stamps were overprinted and issued. Those stamps are common in mint condition but extremely scarce on covers. No correspondence from American, British, or Canadian POWs interned in Romanian camps (until August 23, 1944) is known today. Most of them were pilots who bombarded the refineries in the Ploiesti area and were shot down by the German and Romanian artillery and aircraft fighters.

The Romanian postal administration issued stamps for the exclusive use of some organizations on several occasions. The first such stamp was issued in 1913 for the use of the Organizing Committee of Celebration of the Reunification of Dobrogea with Romania. The second one was issued in 1932 and used only for franking the large envelopes containing the book issued on the 75th anniversary of the first Romanian stamps. And finally, several such stamps were issued for the King Mihai Foundation in 1947. All these stamps have no face value, instead being inscribed "Gratuit" (Free) or "Scutit de taxa postala" (Free of postal taxes).

Since 1858 until today only a few major errors are known on Romanian stamps. Among them are the 10 bani error of colour from the 1879 issue and the spectacular inverted centre of the 1956 Census issue, both heavily underpriced in stamp catalogues. Trials, proofs, and essays of the Romanian stamps are not common.

For those interested in booklets, Romania offers only scarce items. First, the 1906 charity issues, as mentioned above. In the 1930s, several booklets were also issued and remained unknown to collectors until the 1990s when they first appeared at auction in Germany. Those booklets are indeed rare. The Romanian postal administration issued a booklet in 1990. Unfortunately it was destined for stamp collectors and was not sold at post offices.
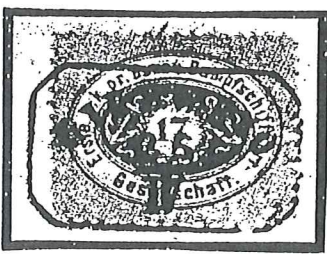
Stamp collecting is an extremely popular hobby in Romania, and the philatelic life is under the patronage of the Romanian Philatelic Society. Several philatelic magazines are issued regularly, and exhibitions often held, including international ones. Romanian stamp collectors are always interested in finding new and constant partners worldwide. Their favourite magazine is CURIERUL FILATELIC (The philatelic Courier). For those interested in finding a partner in Romania, here is the address where you can place an ad for a small fee (IRCs are accepted): Nicolae Salade, Curierul Filatelic, str. Octavian Goga no. 47, RO-2400 SIBIU, Romania. Telephone is 0040/69/421041. You won't be disappointed!

Hopefully these words will open your appetite for the fascinating world of Romanian stamps and postal history.



This stamp-on-a-stamp shows Romania's first stamp, the 1858 Bull's Head.

This stamp was issued on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Romanian stamps. It was used only to frank the large envelopes containing a book published on the subject.





The Austrian DDSG Company operated a postal service on the Danube River, using these stamps.