

COLLECTING PERFINs IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

By Vojtech Maxa

There has been a Group of perfin collectors in Czechoslovakia since June 1974. By the end of 1975 it had over 120 members and was publishing its own bulletin called, 'Zaprovdej Perfiny' (Perfins Bulletin). The following is a brief outline of the Group's origin and its activities.

I alone have to accept responsibility for introducing perfin collecting into my country and for organising the Group. It all started 10 years ago.....

One of my philatelic interests is Poland - a deeply specialised study of two stamps, namely the 50 gr. Pilsudski and the 1z1. Moscieki, issued in 1928-35, I subscribed to a Polish stamp journal and once, when I worked as a Correspondent of the Czechoslovak News Agency CETERA in Lagos, Nigeria, I came across an article written by Mr. Alexander Sekowski from Warsaw. He described Polish perfins - some fifty different types -, giving the catalogue numbers of stamps on which he found particular dies. I saw that perfins appeared also on "my" two Polish stamps and decided to include them in my collection. I entered into correspondence with Mr. Sekowski and received from him two Polish perfins on the 50 gr. Pilsudski stamp.

In early 1969, after I had returned home, I visited Mr. Sekowski in Warsaw where I saw his splendid collection and discussed perfin collecting with him. When we took leave, he handed me a small envelope containing some stamps and said, "Look Mr. Maxa, here are thirteen Czechoslovakian perfins for a start, why don't you try to study the perfins of your own country?"

Not having the slightest idea of what faced me, I accepted. Later on, when I was back in Prague, I came across a copy of Linn's Stamp Weekly with many articles on perfins. There I learned that some 500 Danish perfins were known and reasoned (how naively!) that if there are less than 100 in Poland and 500 in Denmark, my country's score would be somewhere in between - a mere couple of hundred. I also learned that Mr. John S. Nelson had published a booklet dealing with the history of British perfins, I wrote to him, and he not only kindly sent me a copy of his book, but also a listing of his Czechoslovakian perfins,

And so, step by step, I was able to assemble information about some 75 different Czech perfins. Soon I realised that it is very important to know who was using them. I enquired at the Postal Museum hoping that the use of perfins was authorised individually as are meter-mail patterns. I even tried the Patent Office only to find out that perfins were not regarded as Trade Marks and no record was kept of them.

All this made it clear to me that the study of Czechoslovakian perfins would require original and difficult research. In spite of this difficulty, I made a decision to compile a catalogue of them,

I entered into correspondence with officers and members of the U.S. Perfins Club and later became a member of it. They were very helpful and kindly sent me lots of valuable information on Czechoslovakian perfins.

Cz.1

In June 1970 the Czechoslovak stamp journal "Filatelie" published my article "Uninteresting & Valueless?", in which I wrote about perfins generally and about Czechoslovakian perfins in particular, giving a list of the 75 I already knew.

That started it. In the space of three months I was flooded with letters from stamp collectors from all parts of the country. Some writers sent me a few perfins, others hundreds and more. Many of them admitted that although they knew very well (all the philatelic authorities kept telling them) that perforated stamps (or stamps with holes as they used to call them) should be discarded as valueless and unfit for collecting, they long ago put them aside for a rainy day. In the twelve months following the publication of the first article I was able to record about 500 perfins from Czechoslovakian territory.

A slight digression should be allowed here. I use the term "perfins from the Czechoslovakian territory" and not "Czechoslovakian perfins" with good reason. My country was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for three hundred years, and only as recently as October 28th 1918 did we become independent. Firms doing their business in the Czech lands from 1880 to 1918 used Austrian stamps, while those in Slovakia (eastern part of the Republic) used Hungarian stamps. In October 1938 parts of our territory were incorporated into the German Reich, other parts went to Hungary and Poland. Of the remaining land, two separate political units were formed in March 1939 - the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia and the Slovak state.

So, many of the old perfin patterns, originating before 1918, appeared on the stamps of different postal authorities according to the complicated and dramatic development of our history.

Incidentally, this fact makes the study of our perfins very fascinating.

Great help also came to me from abroad, not only British and American perfin collectors helped me, but also those from the Netherlands, Canada and Western Germany.

Following this initial success, I published more articles on our perfins in the philatelic press. Among them was one with the text of the original document authorising the use of perfins in Austria, which I discovered. It is dated April 4th 1877 and was published in the Austrian Post-Office Gazette. This decree was taken over, with many others, by the Czechoslovakian Authorities in 1918. Surprisingly, it was never recalled and, therefore, it is still legal to use perfins in Czechoslovakia.

With the generous help of so many collectors from home and abroad (their total number must be well over fifty!) my work on the catalogue progressed quite swiftly. I negotiated its publication with the U.S. Perfins Club, and thanks to the friendly help and encouragement of its officers, the catalogue was published in June 1972.

This catalogue contains some 700 perfins (all fully illustrated) with slightly over 40% of the perfin users identified. Another point here; when identifying a perfin owner I always add the sort of business he is engaged in. I think that it enhances the interest of a perfin collection and helps those philatelists who collect perfins thematically.

To be continued.

Cz.2