

Czechoslovak Perfins by J. J. Verner, article from the Czechoslovak Specialist, February 1973

Have you ever wondered what those funny holes are in some stamps? And why they seem to appear so often on used, and so seldom on mint stamps? Obviously, the answers are that the holes in the stamps are perforated initials (perfins to the initiated) and are applied to stamps to keep them from being stolen or used by unauthorized individuals. Perfins are generally applied to stamps by institutions and commercial firms. Since perfins appear on stamps, collectors collect them.

There is also an organization of perfins collectors in United States called Perfins club(what else?). Collectors of perfins are rather realistic, it seems to me, and that most of them recognized that there it is a hobby of love and not profit. Perfin collecting seems to be still a somewhat esoteric branch of philately, and hence the demand for stamps bearing perfins has not yet driven the prices up. Further, both perfins are found on used stamps because institutions and companies have not, by and large, made their perforated stamps available to collectors in mint condition. The stamps are intended for use on what is generally called commercial mail -- and commercial mail tends to consume large numbers of mint stamps.

Now, what, you ask, does all this have to do with Czechoslovak philately? Everything, since perfins are also known on stamps of Czechoslovakia. I have had perfins in my stock books for many years and, quite frankly, I have not known what to do with them. My collection is fairly specialized so I did not want to omit these stamps or just identify them as perfins, but at the same time I do not have the necessary information needed to classify them with more precision. So in the stock books they stayed. Over the years new ones are added from time to time. But what do with them? There is little in either Czech or English literature on Czechoslovak philately known to me that deals with the perfins. Of course, Czech catalogs do list the 10f "reapers", white number with the perfin "G. St". which had been overprinted "Posta Ceskoslovenska 1919". But what about all the perfins on other stamps?

Now, glad to report, our plight has been alleviated. The Perfins Club (copyright 1972) has just published a catalog entitled "Perfins from the Territory of Czechoslovakia", compiled by the Prague collector, Vojtech Maxa. Mr. Maxa was introduced to Czechoslovak perfins quite recently, his primary philatelic interest being pre-World War II Poland, largely through an interest in Polish perfins. As he tells the story, "When I visited him (a friend) in Warsaw in 1969, he told me to have a look how the situation is with the Czechoslovak perfins. I had a look and this catalog of mine is the result." Mr. Maxa has now launched on a project to catalog the perfins of Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. While Mr. Maxa does not consider himself an advanced collector of Czechoslovak stamps, he has made a major contribution by his pilot work in this unexplored, it somewhat esoteric, area of Czechoslovak philately.

Mr. Maxa's approach to cataloging the perfins is the height of simplicity. He lists the perfins alphabetically by their first initials. Perfins made up of symbols rather than letters are listed at the end of the catalog in a section of their own. The catalog is loose leaf so additions can be made to it as research continues. As one opens the catalog he sees a listing of the initials, coded period of use, city in which used, and the using organization on the left page of a double page spread. On the right hand page the same perfins are drawn to actual scale permitting the collector to compare his perfins directly against the catalog. Several blank spaces are left after each letter to allow for future additions. The only text is the introduction.

The catalog contains about 750 dies and covers perfins used in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia from the introduction of perfins in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1870 down to the present day. Mr. Maxa estimates that the catalog in its current form contains between 85 and 90% of the perfins used in Czechoslovakia. The perfins are used today in Czechoslovakia by only one company, namely Orbis; otherwise, they have been replaced by the use of company postal meters. How accurate his estimates is only time will tell.

There is obviously more work to be done in this field. Not only is it highly probable that more perfins will be found (several perfins not included in the catalog have been recorded in the short time since the catalog was published), but also there are blanks in the information about their use. Many firms using

perfins have yet to be identified and even some cities in which given perfins were used need pin pointing. Collectors can help by checking any covers bearing perfins. Most of those covers should be commercial with the names of the firms on them as well as post marks identifying the city in which used.

But for this one needs a copy of the catalog. It can be obtained postpaid for a small consideration (\$3.00 for members of the Perfins Club, 5.00 for non-members) from Richard L. Mewhinney, Secretary, of the Perfins, 4 John Glenn Road, Morristown, New Jersey 07960. Incidentally, for those interested, membership in the Perfins Club is \$3 for one year, \$5 for two.