

The "AHA" Phenomenon or "What's in a Club Raffle"

By Stan Cronwall

For many of us who "ante" up a buck or two to participate in the twice monthly club Raffle it's almost a ritual to part with those "white wigs" to buy a few tickets.

But then, when the time comes for the actual Raffle, we are like the door-to-door salesman on the old Fibber McGee and Molly radio show who rang the doorbell or knocked all the while saying, "Nobody's home, I hope, I hope, I hope!" – in other words please don't call my ticket numbers.

You buy the Raffle tickets to support the organization, and at the same time hope your numbers aren't called except for the drawing at the end for half the cash raised by the ticket sales that meeting.

As the ten tickets are drawn, there are some audible groans or a few remarks as the dubious "winners" step up to pick their pile of discards donated by members. These donations usually consist of such items as U.S. and sometimes worldwide stamps torn from letters and packages, postcards both used and new from trips or places long forgotten, FDC's or commemorative event covers, and other assorted "no-wants" perhaps re-cycled from earlier Raffles.

Once in a while, there are sets of stamps from some packet producing stamp dealer outfit long since faded away, or some other oddities that our member donor couldn't or didn't want to deal with.

A few meetings ago, my winning stack-o-stuff included a glassine with 11 stamps from one country. On judgment, all appeared to be old, and all were rouletted. Three were used, and the rest mint and hinged. It appeared that there were two stamps that had dups of the same face value and roughly the same color. The main illustration on each was the likeness of a man breaking a chain. To me, this suggested a country breaking away from something.



The biggest stumbling block was that there was no country name that I could read. The "hen scratchings" at the top and bottom offered no clue other than they seemed not to be from a Far East country, or Arabic. The alphabet used seemed to be like something that might be from an eastern European country and resembled what we see on Russian /USSR stamps. Yes . . . the Cyrillic alphabet.

I took this as a challenge. The first thing I consulted was the 14 page Illustrated Identifier toward the back of the Scott Catalogs. Rats! Some Cyrillic references but not what I needed to see. No luck.

Was I going to have to try to come up with a list of countries who do now or formerly used the Cyrillic alphabet?

Then, armed with my trusty multiple magnifying glasses, I decided to try looking at the three stamps with cancellations. One was so faint it was barely identified as being cancelled. Another was a partial cancel, and what was shown on the stamp was unreadable other than the "N 9". On the third, the cancel had left the letters "ZAGRE" but nothing else was readable or understandable.



"ZAGRE . . . ZAGRE . . . ZAGRE" Back in the dark ages when I was in college I had been a history major with a specialization in the history of the Balkans and Near East. Then, in the Army, I worked in military intelligence. Ya Ya Ya – I know the old George Carlin line about oxymoron(s) - military intelligence belongs with such other incongruities as Jumbo Shrimp.

Remember I was also a stamp collector and was working on the early stages of my collections which included Germany from 1933-45 and the areas it occupied. This included many of the Balkan countries. So I began going through my mental Rolodex searching for anything with a "ZAGRE"

"AHA" maybe it was ZAGREB. Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The Scott Catalog section on Croatia begins with 1941 when it broke away from Yugoslavia becoming an independent state closely allied with Nazi Germany. No luck there. Now what else?

Croatia had been a part of Yugoslavia since 1918 when the victorious allies from World War I cobbled together some parts (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Dalmatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire to form the new state.

Over the years, Scott has named the country either Jugoslavia or Yugoslavia. Currently they favor the latter spelling. What might we find under Yugoslavia . . . There they are.

These are stamps issued in 1919 and 1920 for Slovenia within Yugoslavia.

Wow, what a slog. This little journey goes a long way toward demonstrating that being a philatelic detective requires some creative thinking in order to come up with an answer. Along the way, be sure not to lose sight of the original question.

Stan Cronwall's collecting interests include Germany: Third Reich 1933-45 and the areas it occupied (stamps covers & cards). He also collects U.S. World War II Patriotic Covers and Cards; Civil War Patriotic Covers (both U.S. and CSA); U.S Naval Covers; DDR stamps; and, Post WW II Soviet Zone Hitler Head Obliteration stamps, covers & cards.