

Whatever Happened to the 1940 Summer & Winter Olympic Games?

By Stan Cronwall

If you are looking for a new philatelic area to collect this is not it. Outside of a few “cinderellas” produced to raise funds for training and sending athletes to the planned 1940 Games, there were no true postage stamps produced by any country.

I penned this piece as the result of doing my “research” on a German postcard purchased recently. There are several “official” posters which were designed and produced by the proposed host nations, as well as designs for such items as participant badges, luggage stickers, and souvenir pins. Certainly, collectible, but not philatelic.

If you are still with me, recall that on April 26, 1931, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided that for the first time in modern Olympic history, a single nation would host both the Winter and Summer Games in 1936. The country selected was Germany. At that time, the nation was a democracy – the Weimar Republic. By tradition, not rule, the IOC generally announces the site of future Games about seven to eight years in advance.

Come forward a bit in decision making to 1932. The IOC was petitioned to select from Barcelona, Rome, Helsinki or Tokyo to host the 1940 Summer Olympic Games. In what some would say was a surprise move, the Committee in July 1936 selected Tokyo to host the XII Summer Games from September 21 to October 6, 1940. This would be the first time a non-Western country hosted the event.

On the **right** is a photocopy of the poster to advertise/merchandise the Tokyo Summer Games.



However, there were some stomach rumbles about the decisions. Japan was in the process of creating what they termed The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. In 1932 Japan began a war with China and occupied a portion of that nation including the province known as Manchuria.

That area was set up as a Japanese puppet state with the country name Manchukuo under the leadership of Emperor Kang Teh (the ex-China Emperor Henry Pu Yi).

This aggressive behavior bothered both individual athletes, as well as entire nations. However, the IOC decided on June 9, 1937 that host city for the V Winter Games would be Sapporo, Japan. Once again, the same nation would host both the Winter and Summer Games.

On the **left** is a photocopy of the official poster for the 1940 Sapporo Winter Games.

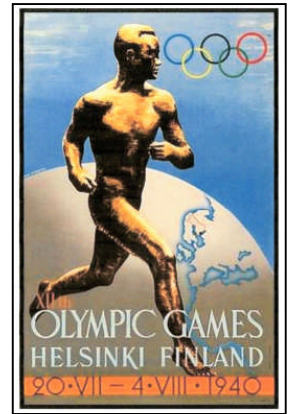
Then the 2nd Sino (China) – Japanese War broke out on July 7, 1937. There was some talk in both the U. S. and Great Britain about boycotting the Japanese Games.

Historically there has been an effort on the part of the IOC to keep political issues and the Games separate. So it was in the late 1930's, as the IOC and some members of the Japanese Olympic organizing group continued to support the host cities of Tokyo and Sapporo for the 1940 Games.

In Japan, there was hope initially that the 2nd Sino-Japanese War would end in a short time and that the Games could be staged as planned. Instead, the war intensified requiring more men and materials. Financial allocations for the events were gradually curtailed, and the military demanded that the venues be built of wood because metals were needed for the war.

In March 1938 the Japanese assured the IOC that Tokyo would still be able to serve as the host city. The Japanese Diet (legislature) met in July to decide on the matters of the Winter and Summer Games and the planned 1940 World's Fair. The Fair was "postponed" but the Olympics could not be moved and were canceled. On July 16, 1938, Japan announced the forfeiture of the 1940 Games.

The IOC then awarded the Summer Games of 1940 to the runner-up city, Helsinki to be held July 20 – August 4. On the **right** is an image of the "official" Helsinki Summer Games poster.



To further complicate matters, the IOC then awarded the Winter Games to St. Moritz, Switzerland which had hosted the 1928 event. However there was a dispute between the IOC and the Swiss organizing committee over the participation of ski instructors.



There is no official poster for the aborted 1940 St. Moritz Winter Games.

The "cinderellas" shown on the **left** were produced as part of a fund raising campaign by the American Olympic Committee. NOTE: that these stamps were printed for both Helsinki and St. Moritz as the 1940 Games sites.

When the choice of St. Moritz could not be finalized, the IOC turned back to Germany and Garmisch-Partenkirchen which had hosted the 1936 Winter Games. This late IOC choice was made in the spring of 1939 for the Winter Games to be held February 2-11, 1940

Shown **below** is a fairly rare used German produced post card, shows Garmisch-Partenkirchen and Helsinki as the 1940 Olympiade sites.

Three months later, Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 igniting what became World War II.

On November 18, 1939, the IOC canceled both the Winter and Summer Games for 1940.

Just as well. On November 30, 1939 the Soviet Union invaded Finland.

Stan Cronwall is a member and his 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.

