

# Something to Die For?

By Stan Cronwall

Looking for a collecting niche that will last you until the very end? How about a non-traditional topical that has no dead end. Okay, enough already with the bad puns.

Let's get serious about a possible new venture in collecting. Ever considered looking into the philatelic symbols of someone's passing? Yes, the covers, cards and stamps that have been used going back to the very earliest years in the history of letters, cards and notifications when communicating with others regarding an individual's death.

The first use of mourning covers dates to the mid-1700's used almost exclusively by royalty and the upper classes. The idea originated in Europe, but by the mid-1800's with reduced postal rates, and machines that could mass produce cheap envelopes, their use expanded both in Europe and the U.S.

The idea then spread to many parts of the world. In fact, there are examples of mourning covers from about 265 countries (some of which no longer exist).

The covers are usually and most often readily identified by black edged envelopes. Some borders are thin while others are quite thick. Many times, the contents consist of black edged cards of condolence or black edged stationery. The covers come in a wide range of sizes and styles.

Popularity of mourning covers declined abruptly in the 1930's, although they remain somewhat in vogue in parts of Europe.



Above is an image of a U.S. mourning cover from the end of the World War I time frame.



Above is an image of a Spanish military censored cover dating from the time <sup>4</sup> Spanish Civil War in the late 1930'... obviously is from a pro-Franco supporter.

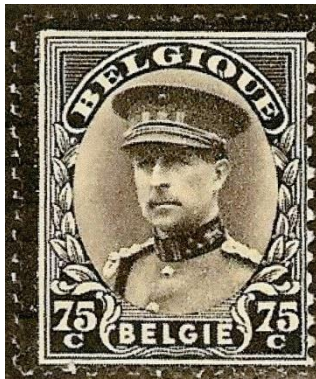


Another, or at least a related collecting possibility, is the area of mourning stamps. Being a German collector, I immediately think of the six stamps issued to mark the passing of World War I hero and then German President Paul von Hindenburg on August 2, 1934. On the left is the set of six stamps issued September 4, 1934 which were carried forward from the longer series issued in 1933 with the difference being the black border overprint to mark Hindenburg's death.



Greece issued two different sets of memorial stamps within about a year and a half time period. The first set was released on December 21, 1945 to mark the death of U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who passed April 12, 1945. Note the overprinted stamps with the black border.

The second release was three of the four stamps in the Greek King George II definitive issue of January 24, 1937 (Scott 391-393) surcharged. The stamp images show these were re-issued with black borders and the surcharge amount shown in the upper left-hand corner (Scott 498-500).



Another two black bordered memorial stamps are from Belgium. The first was to mark the passing of King Albert I who ruled for 34 years guiding his country through WW I and its recovery. He died on February 19, 1934. The original issue with his likeness (Scott 228) was issued June 1932. The memorial issue with the black border overprint (Scott 256) was released March 10, 1934.

The second is a set of eight Belgian stamps (Scott B 170-177) which memorialize their beloved Queen Astrid, first wife of King Leopold III and mother of three including two future Kings of the Belgians. She died tragically in a car accident in Switzerland on August 29, 1935. She was only 29 years old. On the right is shown a B 174 pair.

Several other nations have issued mourning stamps to honor those who have gone before. Among these are Austria, the Philippines, Hungary and Finland.



If this subject holds any interest for you, there are collector groups devoted just to this discipline. Keep in mind there are about 265 countries with mourning covers out there. Spread your wings. Get on the web and fly a little.

**Stan Cronwall** passed away in October 2019. His collecting interests included Germany: Third Reich 1933-45 and the areas it occupied (stamps, covers & cards).