

SAN MARINO

A CENTENARY OF POSTAGE STAMPS

1877 — 1977

By NICK A. CUTAJAR

On August 1st, 1977, San Marino celebrates the centenary of the issue of its first postage stamp. Up to the 31st July, 1877, the stamps of Italy and Sardinia were used, and on the 1st August, a postal convention between Italy and the Republic of San Marino came into force, whereby correspondence from and to San Marino to and from any destination was to be franked appropriately.

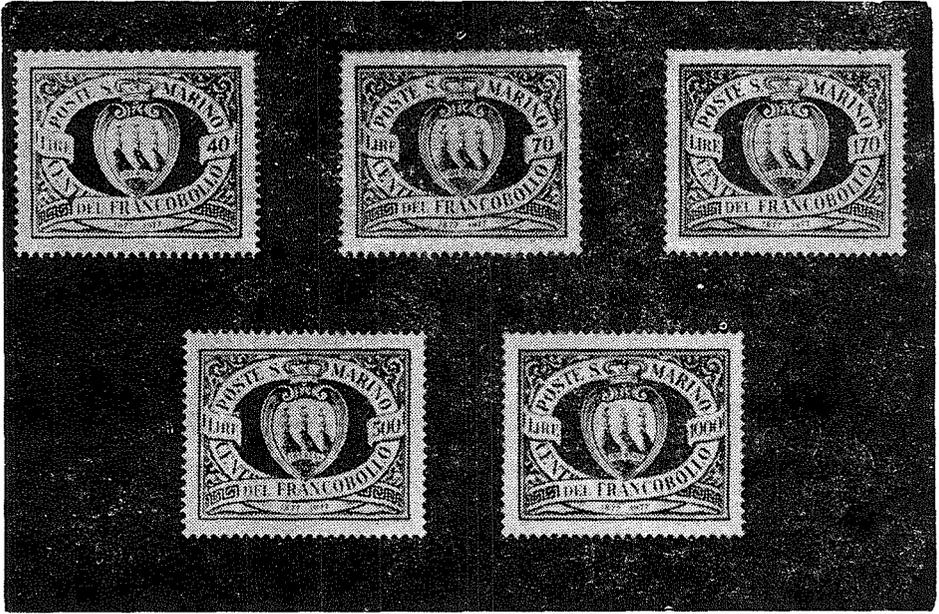
The world's oldest republic, claiming foundation and unbroken history from the Dalmatian Saint Marinus in the fourth century, San Marino is situated on Mount Titano's three fortified peaks, offering panoramic view in every direction.

On August 1st, 1877, the first stamps were issued, five values, 2c green, 10c ultramarine, 20c red, 30c brown and 40c lilac. The 2c value showed the figure "2", while the rest of the set depicted the Republic's emblem, naturally incorporating the three peaks of the Titano. These stamps were followed by three other values, 5c yellow, 10c deep blue, and 25c lilac-brown, on the 1st April 1890. All seven values are known with shades, and Proofs exist and are even catalogued by Sassone in Vol. 1, giving also the printing figures for each value.

In 1892, following revised postal rates, the local postal authorities decided to overprint some of the first stamps using the modest printing works of a local firm, which had a limited number of characters and types at their disposal. The overprint consisted of the letters "Cmi" on the left and the value on the right. The letter "C" was in capital form, while the letters "mi" in lower case and elevated with a dash underneath. The overprints were issued between June and September 1892.

There were two 5c overprints, one on the 10c deep blue, and another on the 30c brown. Two 10c overprints are also known, both on the 20c red, one of which had the figures "10" on each side and no "Cmi." Another 5c overprint ultramarine is known and is very highly catalogued in view of the fact that very few of this colour were overprinted.

As a result of the very primitive methods of printing and the different characters and types available to the printers, these overprints provide one of the most fascinating studies in the stamps of the Republic. Inverted, double, double with one inverted, and missing overprints are known and catalogued. Further evidence of the lack of types and characters at the printer's disposal is provided by the wording of the overprint itself. Some stamps show the figure "5" in thick character. The lack of full-stop after the letters "mi." seems to have been overcome by either omitting it altogether or substituting it by a comma. The list of varieties is quite extensive: "i" inverted, "G" instead of "C"; "mi" lower than "C"; "C" some distance away from "mi"; thin lines instead of one thick: eight points instead of one thick line. Over and above, all these varieties are known to exist with the overprint in the inverted and double positions.



The set of five stamps issued on June 15, 1977 to commemorate San Marino's Stamp Centenary. Designed by Franco Filanci, and engraved by Alfred Fischer, the stamps reproduce the Republic's first set of stamps in colours resembling the originals (attributed to the burin of the engraver Repettati) on the printing proofs, with a more marked and likely tone:- L.40 - green (2c but with the "three peaks" design); L 70 - light-blue (10c); L.170 - red (20c); L.500 - ochre-brown (30c); and L.1,000 - violet (40c).

The designs of these first stamps were used over a number of years to produce various other values in different colours. But the first pictorial stamps of San Marino were issued on 30th September 1894. These formed a threesome (25c, 50c, and L.1) to commemorate the Inauguration of the Governor's Palace. The first two values showed an outside view of the Palace from within a "flower-window" and the L.1, in a horizontal format, depicted the porch of the Palace.

The "Statue of Liberty" in Liberty Square was featured on two stamps issued on the 5th February 1899 to meet local rates only. Other similar stamps were issued in 1922 with the same design. The same statue was the subject of several other stamps. In 1918 a set of nine values was released on 10th June, inscribed "Pro Combatenti", the first six values showing the statue. Six values

were issued in December of the same year, overprinted with the date "3 November 1918" to commemorate the end of World War I. It might be added at this stage that there are several overprints on the middle issues, for various reasons, some to offset the shortage of appropriate values to correspond to revised postal rates, others to commemorate or honour particular events.

San Marino and Italy have enjoyed a common heritage and no wonder Italy and its people feature prominently on the Republic's stamps. In 1923 the Italian commune of Arbe entrusted its flag to San Marino and this was commemorated by the issue of a single stamp.

The following year, on 25th September 1924, a set of five stamps commemorated the 75th Anniversary of the Retreat of Garibaldi to San Marino, who is seen on two of the stamps. Giuseppe Garibaldi, the great soldier and his wife Anita, (who both visited Malta) took refuge in the Republic, disbanding the red-shirts. The 50th Death Anniversary of Garibaldi was honoured by San Marino with a set of eight values released on 30th July 1932.

The VII Centenary of the Death of St. Francis was honoured with a four-some set on January 1928. This issue is very significant for collectors, as it saw the end of the 'crown' watermark. The following year a new watermark was introduced, consisting of three feathers in ascending order of size. This was used up to 1942. Between 1943 and 1960, the then current Italian type of watermark was used, and from 1961 onwards a revised design of the "Three Feathers" was again introduced.

The San Marino Post and Telegraph building was officially inaugurated in 1932 and a set of five stamps showing the building itself was released on February 4. The following year, two of this set were overprinted to honour the Philatelic Meeting of San Marino on the occasion of the Italian Philatelic Congress. San Marino participated in the Philatelic Pavillion of the Milan Fair and once again the stamps showing the "Palazetto delle Poste" were overprinted appropriately.

San Marino, knowing fully well its importance in world philately has been responsible for several stamp shows and international philatelic meetings, all appropriately commemorated up to this day. A way back as 1942, on August 3, the "Philately Day, Rimini-San Marino" was held and marked with a special overprint. Rimini lies on the outskirts of the Republic, home of the dynamic "Circolo Filatelico Numismatico d' Rimini" which is the only Philatelic Society in Italy that produces an offset-printed philatelic newspaper in colour with hardly any adverts.

San Marino didn't escape the tide of fascism and stamps commemorating the 20th anniversary of the San Marinense Fascists were prepared in 1943. The stamps were never issued following the downfall of the fascists, but mint copies are known to exist and catalogued reasonably. However the stamps after obliterating the words "Ventennale/Dei Fasci/1922-1924" were issued on August 27, 1943 to commemorate the downfall of fascists; a splendid counter-action, maybe unique in the history of stamps. Stamps of the same issue were later on during the year issued for the "Provisional Government".

The Republic ranks high in the affections of Italian and European philatelists. With the ever-growing trend for thematic collections, San Marino will not find any difficulty in marketing its beautifully designed stamps. Stamps, after tourism is a major source of income, and through both, the tiny enclave prospers.

Post-war issues of San Marino are particularly interesting and sought after by thematic collectors, for whom San Marino is undoubtedly a collectors' paradise, with every thinkable subject having been stamped at one time or other, from the less popular themes, such as the press and statesmen, to the more popular themes of sport, art and transport.

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