

This Stamp Collector Chases Christmas Seals

His Albums Contain Many Rarities

Christmas seals issued by the National Tuberculosis Association are not only a good medium for raising funds to assist tuberculosis sufferers, but are being sought by an increasing number of stamp collectors.

The one man in the country who is an undisputed authority on the Christmas seal from a philatelic viewpoint is Charles Lorenz of Springfield Gardens, director of the collector's service of the National Tuberculosis Association.

And of all the Christmas seal collectors in the country, Lorenz is himself probably the most avid. His seal collection—the fruit of 20 years labor—bulges from a series of several large albums and scrapbooks and overflows into specially designed display cases which Lorenz uses to exhibit the choice items of his collection at various stamp shows.

Lorenz had for many years collected stamps, specializing in issues of the British Empire. Shortly after the World War, Lorenz decided he was spending too much money on his stamp hobby.

"The most stamp collectors," he says, "I had reached a point where I was spending more money every time I filled a blank space in the album. In order to make my British collection complete, I had to dispose of other parts of the collection, and then it was that I got disgusted with stamps.

Looked for A New Hobby

"I had spent quite a bit on the collection and yet it would bring only a fraction of its value if I sold it. So then I decided to turn my interest to another hobby that would give me something constructive to do with my spare time and at the same time would not cost too much money.

"So I took up the collection of Christmas Seals. And what a mistake I made when I thought it would be an economical hobby! I've been collecting seals for more than 20 years now and I've spent more money on the collection than I could spend on stamps."

At first Lorenz collected only single seals, then he began to secure blocks and finally, sheets of seals.

"From the very beginning, seal collecting offered an interest that I could not find in the collection of stamps," Lorenz explains. "You see, the Christmas seal has been issued annually in this country since 1907, but each year when the sale is completed, the surplus stamps are supposed to be destroyed.

"When a man tries to secure the original sheet of the first United States Christmas seal you can imagine the difficult job he faces. And the same is true of singles and blocks of some of the later issues. Securing a complete sheet of an early Christmas seal is no mean accomplishment."

The collection of Christmas seals became a recognized branch of philately several years ago when



CHARLES LORENZ
He wouldn't sell a sheet of stamps for \$500

get a supply of early seals?" Lorenz says. "When I first started the collection, I had the current issue of seals and discovered a few of previous years in my home.

Stamp Dealers Didn't Know

"Then I hit a stone wall. Stamp dealers did not know where to secure copies of the seals. There were few fellow collectors to trade information and duplicates so I went to the one obvious source—the National Tuberculosis Association.

"The association was very cooperative and supplied me with a list of 500 affiliated organizations. So I started my Christmas seal collection by writing 500 begging letters to each of these affiliated organizations.

"That was the start of my domestic collection. This will give you an idea of how little I knew about Christmas seals—I thought they were issued only here in this country. When I got wise to the fact that practically every foreign country had seals too, then I started corresponding with people abroad."

His foreign seal collection now includes sheets of seals from all the European countries and many South American and Asiatic nations as well.

Here again, he does not have a superficial collection of singles, but complete sheets, booklets, stickers and literature used in the seal sale campaign—and this is where the money went.

philately several years ago when

the various seal issues were listed in Scott's Specialized Catalogue, the stamp collector's Bible.

"Still the interested collector had

"Writing innumerable letters abroad and finally sending the cash for the sheets of seals called for quite an outlay," Lorenz recalls, "but it was worth it, I think."

Lorenz now has many foreign items that are difficult to secure even in the country in which they were issued.

Collectors Form A Seal Society

"During the past few years collectors have begun to show real interest in the collection of Christmas seals," he says. "Six years ago I joined a group of 14 men and we formed an organization known as the 'Christmas Seal and Charity Stamp Society.' Now a national organization, we have more than 500 members.

"I have also been able to trace the growth of collectors' interest in my job as director of the collector's department of the National Tuberculosis Association. When the department was created two years ago, there were only about 75 or 100 letters from collectors during the seal sale campaign.

"The number slowly increased as the department began to operate and so I began to keep a card index to trace this growth of collector interest. There are now more than 2,000 cards in that index—many of them from foreign countries."

What effect is the war having on

War Does Not Stop Issue, Either

the Christmas seal sale in foreign countries?

"Well," says Lorenz, "I can't talk about the sale, but I can tell you what effect the war is having on the issue of Christmas seals.

"Seals have already been issued by Great Britain, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Italy, the Union of South Africa, Korea, Japan and Switzerland. I have not heard from Iceland, France and Czechoslovakia yet, but I feel sure that they will issue their seals as usual."

In addition to the sheets of seals, proofs and progressive color plates, Lorenz includes in his collections buttons, badges, milk bottle caps and collars and related advertising articles which were used to promote the sale of seals in both this country and abroad.

"In 1919, the seal sale association in this country began to issue health bonds," Lorenz says. "They were for sale to corporations or individuals who were interested in contributing substantial sums to the fight against tuberculosis but who did not want large quantities of the seals.

"With a little difficulty and much letter writing I finally secured a complete collection of these health bonds in all denominations. This collection is complete from 1919 right up to this year."

The collection of Christmas seals was first exhibited at the National Philatelic Congress in 1934. Since that time they have been exhibited in Cincinnati, Saranac Lake and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manhattan.

What does the collection of seals offer a philatelist?

"Of course, this is a personal opinion," Lorenz remarks, "but the Christmas seal collection offers the opportunity to make many friends and to meet many interesting people.

"When I was collecting stamps I bought them from a dealer and that's all there was to it. Now, before I add an item to my collection, I have to correspond with someone and add a friend to my growing number of correspondents."

Lorenz lives with his wife, Lillian, at 178-27 137th avenue, Springfield Gardens. He has lived in that community 12 years and lived in Ridgewood 30 years. The couple have no children.

"It might be a good idea to give a little history of the Christmas seal," Lorenz suggests. "The first seal was issued by Denmark in 1904 and was the idea of Elnar Holboell, a Danish postal clerk who, in sorting Christmas mail, saw what a large amount of money could be raised for charity if a special stamp in addition to the postage were affixed to each letter.

"Sweden immediately took up the idea and in 1907, Emily P. Bissel, who was struggling to build a tuberculosis hospital in Wilmington, Del., borrowed the idea from Holboell and launched the first Christmas seal sale in the United States.

"That first United States seal campaign brought \$3,000. Last year the seal sale realized \$5,550,930. From that first Delaware seal, the idea spread throughout the country and into Alaska, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippine Islands.

"Forty-five countries now issue Christmas seals. In some foreign countries, semi-postal stamps are sold at a premium above face value, the surtax being donated to the organizations which maintain hospitals for tuberculosis victims."