

Multicultural Postage Librariansiana

Part I: A Survey of Noted Librarians on Stamps Around the World



By Vladimir F. Wertsman

All countries around the globe—large or small—take pride in their cultural heritages, with libraries and archives as important pillars of culture and heritage preservation. But as we well know, libraries and archives cannot exist without librarians. In December 1999, *American Libraries*, the official publication of the American Library Association, reminded us that the library profession began at least 4,000 years ago; library catalogs with listings of religious texts in Sumerian cuneiform have been traced to the year 2000 B.C. To collect, preserve, organize, and share human knowledge and achievement for over four millennia is an important feat. As the writer Archibald MacLeish wrote in 1941 in *A Time to Speak*: “Librarians are not only keepers of books, of print and paper on the shelves, but also keepers of the records of the human spirit—the records of men’s watch upon the world and on themselves.”

Despite the merits and achievements of librarians, libraries, and archives over so many millennia, as well as the role of stamps in displaying each nation’s unique geography, history, and culture, it is very surprising to discover a lack of noted librarians and libraries on postage stamps. They are a kind of *rara avis* in the philatelic world, which is supersaturated by millions of stamps depicting hundreds of topics—royalty, other government leaders, well-known personalities, ships and aviation, national symbols, flora and fauna, and sports, to name a few. Out of 191 countries that are members of the United Nations, only two dozen have issued stamps with noted librarians. Libraries and archives are found more often and in stamps of more countries, but still not with the same frequency of other topics; dozens of countries included neither librarians nor libraries/archives in their philatelic repertoire.

Below are librarians, archivists, and major library benefactors who have appeared on postage stamps, with the issuing country and date where they appeared for the first time. Besides indicating where librarians have found some modicum of appreciation in the country’s cultural narrative, this list also reveals that some very well known literary and historical figures began their careers as or at one time worked as librarians. The stamp identifications marked with an (S) and a number were culled from the 2004 edition of *Scott’s Standard Postage Stamp Catalog*, 5 volumes.

The United States of America

1847: The first stamp in the world that portrayed a librarian or archivist was one of **Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790), founder of the first subscription library in America, predecessor of the public library system. (S/1) Other Franklin stamps were released in the 1850s and later.

1856: Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the country’s third president, was also a great book lover and collector. He catalogued and classified materials for the University of Virginia. His personal collection of over 10,000 books became the nucleus of the Library of Congress. (S/12) Other stamps were issued in the 1860s and later.

1940: Henry W. Longfellow (1807–1882), a poet and professor of modern languages, worked as a librarian at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, from 1829 to 1835. (S/864)

1960: Andrew Carnegie (1807–1882), a Scottish-born industrialist considered “patron saint of the libraries,” donated \$56,162,662 to establish 2,509 libraries in English-speaking countries and 1,679 libraries in the United States. (S/1171)

1986: John Harvard (1607–1638) was a teacher and an assistant pastor. A great book lover, he collected a sizable personal collection in his short life and donated over 300 books to establish a college and college library, later named after the benefactor. (S/2190)

2002: The noted poet **Ogden Nash** (1891–1982) served as Librarian of Congress during the Second World War. (S/3569)

Antigua & Barbuda

1995: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918–), Russian Nobel Prize winner in Literature and a prominent dissident against Soviet Communist rule, was prison librarian while confined to a gulag (labor camp) starting in 1947. (S/1943–1944)

Austria

1931: Franz Grillparzer (1791–1872), a poet and dramatist, worked for a brief time at the Imperial Court Library, then in the Archives of the Ministry of Finance beginning in 1815. In 1832 he became the director of the Archives and served until 1856. (S/B494)

Belarus

1998: Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), claimed as a national by both Belarus and Poland, appeared on stamps issued by both countries. See annotation under Poland. (S/241)

Chile

1953: Publisher, diplomat, and bibliographer **José Toribio Medina** (1852–1932) built a personal library and donated it to Chile's National Library. (S/273–274)

China

1950: The Communist leader **Mao Zedong** (1893–1979) worked as an assistant in the periodicals section of Beijing University in 1918. His personality cult later generated millions of stamps of various sizes and colors, issued by China and several other countries. (S/11)

Cuba

1957: Figarola Caneda (1852–1926) was the first director of the country's National Library. (S/C167)

Ecuador

1942: Alfred Baquerizo Moreno (1859–1951), the country's two-time president, served as director of the Guayaquil Public Library in 1890. (S/406)

France

1944: Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683), chief minister under King Louis XIV, took an active role in the development of the Royal Library, now the Bibliothèque Nationale, and served as the library's supervisor. (S/B183)

1953: Historian **Jules Michelet** (1798–1874) was chief of the Historical Section of the National Archives in Paris between 1831 and 1852. (S/B280)

1957: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). See annotation under Germany. (S/863)

Germany

1926: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), German poet, dramatist, statesman, and scientist, supervised the Weimar Ducal Library between 1797 and 1832 and the Jena University Library between 1817 and 1832. (S/351) Several issues were released in later years in both East Germany (DDR) and West Germany.

1926: The noted philosopher **Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804) served as library assistant in the Königsberg Castle Library, Prussia, between 1766 and 1772. (S/356) Several issues were released in both East Germany (DDR) and West Germany in later years.

1926: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), dramatist and theater critic, served as librarian of the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel from 1770 until his death. (S/359) Several issues were released in both East Germany (DDR) and West Germany in later years.

1926: Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646–1716), noted philosopher, mathematician, and scientist, served as librarian of the Hanover Ducal Library between 1676 and 1690, and of the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel from 1690 until his death. (S/360) Several issues were released in both East Germany (DDR) and West Germany in later years.

1947: Johann Christian Friedrich Holderin (1770–1843) served as court librarian of the Count of Hessen-Homburg Library between 1804 and 1806. (S/8N2) The stamp was issued in both East Germany (DDR) and West Germany.

1975: Author **Jacob Grimm** (1785–1863) served as librarian at Jerome Bonaparte Electoral Library in Kassel between 1816 and 1829 and at Göttingen University from 1830 to 1837. (S/1661-1662, DDR)

1975: Wilhelm Grimm (1786–1859), brother of Jacob and his co-author, worked at the same university and appeared on the same stamp, issued in East Germany, described above. (S/1661-1662, DDR)

Hungary

1964: Ervin Szabo (1835–1919) was a Marxist activist and the first director of the Budapest Municipal Library, established in 1904. He introduced a slight modification of the Dewey Decimal System in his country. (S/1586)

India

1992: Dr. Shiri Shihali Ramarit Ranganathan

(1892–1972), internationally known librarian, library educator, and author, formulated the Five Laws of Librarianship. (S/1430)

Italy

1950: The historian **Lodovico Antonio Muratori** (1672–1750) was librarian of the Ambrosiana Library in Milan between 1694 and 1700, and from 1700 until his death served as the private librarian of the Duke of Modena. (S/540)

Netherlands

1950: Statesman **Jan van der Does**, known as Janus Dousa (1545–1604), was the first librarian of Leyden University between 1587 and 1591 and also the university's curator from 1575 until his death. (S/328)

Norway

1985: Carl Deichman (1705–1780) founded the country's library system in the eighteenth century. (S/867)

Peru

1951: Ricardo Palma (1833–1919) was a poet who served as director of the National Library in Lima from 1884 until 1912. (S/C326)

Philippines

1949: Professor of law **Teodoro Kalaw** (1884–1940) served twice as director of the National Library and Museum in Manila, from 1916 to 1917 and from 1929 until his death. (S/B1)

1949: Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera (1857–1925), anthropologist, physician, and author, served as director of the National Library and Museum from 1923 until his death two years later. (S/B2)

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1949: Cristobal Epifanio de los Santos (1871–1928), historian, public servant, and editor, served as director of the National Library and Museum from 1925 until his death in 1928. (S/B3)

All three of these are semi-postage stamps issued to help rebuild libraries damaged in the Second World War.

Poland

1944: Konrad Celtis (Celtis) (1459–1508) was a humanist, teacher, and author who organized the court library in Vienna between 1497 and 1508. (S/NB36)

1949: Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) was a poet, professor, and patriot who fought for his country's independence. Exiled to France, he worked as a librarian at the Bibliotheque d'Arsenal from 1845 to 1848. (S/415)

Romania

1975: Mihail Eminescu (1850–1889), the country's most important national poet, served as librarian and later director of the University of Yassy Library from 1884 until 1886. (S/2548)

Russia (including the former Soviet Union)

1944: Ivan Krylov (1769–1844) was an author, journalist, playwright, and poet and translated fables into Russian. He worked as an assistant librarian at the Imperial Library in St. Petersburg between 1812 and 1841. (S/957-958)

1956: Noted mathematician and university professor **Ivan N. Lobachevsky** (1793–1856) reorganized the Kazan University Library. He bought new books and served as director of the library from 1825 until 1835. (S/1822)

1956: Nadezhda K. Krupskaya (1869–1939), Lenin's wife and a Communist activist in her own right, organized the Soviet library network and developed the libraries of the Soviet republics. (S/1831)

1989: Li Dazhao (Li-Tachao) (1889–1927) was a Chinese Communist leader, university professor, and director of the Peking (Beijing) University Library during the First World War. He helped Mao Zedong to become an assistant in the periodicals section. (S/5816) See also China.

Spain

1991: Maria Moliner (1900–1981) was a noted linguist and archivist. (S/2643)

Switzerland

1933: Jean-Baptiste Girard, known as Pere Gregoire (1765–1850), was a Franciscan priest and educator. He served as archivist of the Ministry for Church and Science, Bern, from 1799 to 1803. (S/B68)

1934: Albrecht von Haller (1708–1777), anatomist, physician, botanist, and poet, worked as the chief librarian of the Zurich Municipal Library from 1735 to 1736. (S/B72)

Uruguay

1942: Francisco Acuna de Figueroa (1790–1862), poet and author of both the Uruguayan and Paraguayan national anthems, served as director of the Montevideo Library and Museum during the 1840s. (S/512-517)

Vatican

1946: Pope Marcellus II (1501–1555), formerly Cardinal Marcello Cervini degli Spannochi, served as Vatican's librarian from 1548 to 1555. Elected Pope in 1555, he reigned for 22 calendar days before succumbing to illness. (S/118)

1955: Pope Nicholas V (1398–1455), formerly Cardinal Tommaso Parentucelli, was a great book lover and a collector of Latin and Greek manuscripts. He organized the Medici Library of the Monastery of San Marco, Florence, and the Vatican Library. (S/197-199)

1975: Bartolomeo Sacchi (1421–1481), also known under the name Platina, was Vatican's first librarian, appointed by Pope Sixtus IV. He was depicted on a stamp on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Vatican Library. (S/582)

1981: Pope Pius XI (1857–1939), formerly Cardinal Ambrogio Damiano Ratti, served as a librarian at the Ambrosiana Library between 1888 and 1911 and as librarian at the Vatican Library from 1911 to 1918. (S/1681-1684)

Conclusion

Even though we are very proud of the librarians mentioned in this article, the subject of noted librarians on postage stamps has been completely neglected for a very long time by the vast majority of United Nations members as well as by UNESCO, the UN's educational and cultural organization. Regrettably, almost all librarians who figure on stamps are from past centuries and, except for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (featured on a stamp issued by the Caribbean nation Antigua & Barbuda), deceased.

It is time to draw the attention of the postal admin-

istrations of all countries, including our own, on all continents to focus on valuable librarians, archivists, and library founders and honor them—regularly and fairly—on attractive postage stamps. For instance, the United States has not yet issued a stamp portraying Melvil Dewey, whose Decimal System of Classification has been adopted by so many libraries in so many countries. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the American Library Association (ALA), and UNESCO should establish special task forces or committees to deal with the subject of librarians (and libraries) on stamps. (Those who are concerned about this problem in the United States can contact the Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee, c/o Stamp Management, U.S. Postal Service, Room 4474EB, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC 20260-6756.

As a philatelist since my early school days in Romania and an ALA member for over 35 years, I consider the issue of librarians and libraries on postage stamps not just a philatelic concern, and not even a subjective librarian concern, as it may seem from a distance. It is a matter of cultural pride for any country—of interest to politicians, educators, cultural activists, artists, and others who understand that libraries and librarians are intrinsic to each country's cultural patrimony and heritage and therefore deserve to be represented on stamps on an equal footing with other cultural components.

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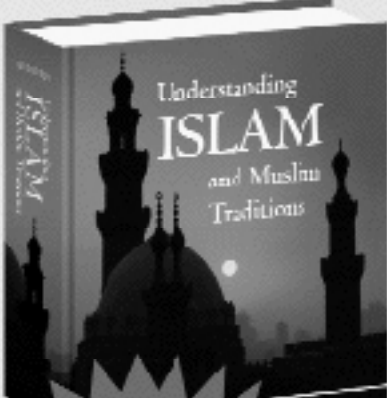
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