

## HUNGARICA AROUND THE WORLD

by Dr. William Sólyom-Fekete

### GYULA L. VÁSÁRHELYI: DESIGNER OF STAMPS FOR 75 COUNTRIES

For a collector of Hungarica it is always a problem to obtain the verification that certain stamps indeed belong in his collection because they have some connection with Hungary or Hungarians. This is even more so if one faces the problem of stamps designed by artists whose Hungarian origin may only be assumed from their name.

I had the same problem when I read in one of the philatelic magazines in 1969 that Lesotho will issue a pair of stamps honoring King Moshoeshoe which were designed by G. L. Vasarhelyi. Seeing the name I had no doubt that these stamps must be in my collection. But how to get the necessary data to write up the page? How to verify that the artist is really a Hungarian? Writing to the Post Office Department in Maseru, the Capital of Lesotho, brought no answer.

In the following months I read about more and more stamps designed by the mysterious G. L. Vasarhelyi for several different and distant countries, but I still was missing the data on him for the verification and write-up. Then came the rescue in the person of the representative of the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau at the NAPEX exhibition in 1970 to whom I confided my problem. He promised to write to the main office of the Bureau and shortly thereafter I received a letter from Sutton which included the address of Mr. Vasarhelyi.

The rest was easy. I wrote to him explaining my collecting interest and how the stamps designed by him would fit into my collection if he is indeed a Hungarian, of which I never had any doubt. I also asked him to send a short biography and if possible, a list of the stamps designed by him.

Very soon I got his reply which exceeded all my expectations. Not only did I receive Mr. Gyula László Vászárhelyi's biography which verified that he was born in Hungary in 1929, and left the country in 1956, but also gave a short description of his general and artistic education, as well as of his travels in different parts of the world in pursuit of his art work. But the real surprise came in the second half of his letter which started with the following sentence:

"I have designed so many stamps and first day covers that probably you would be bankrupt if you bought them all -- some have not yet been issued, etc..

so I will give you a selection of them by name of country."

Mr. Vászárhelyi's statement, as far as the bankruptcy was concerned, came very close to the truth. The fact that a number of his designs were issued by some sheikdoms and other "countries" whose stamps are black-blotted and banned from national and international exhibitions, offered some relief.

Since then I continued to follow carefully the news on new issues and rarely does a month go by in which I do not find some stamps designed by G. L. Vászárhelyi.

It is easily understandable that I wished to meet the man whose artistic work gives me such a great pleasure when I leaf through the pages of my albums. The opportunity came when in May of this year I went to London and arranged a meeting with the artist who was willing to travel to London from his home in Darlington, Durham County, to see me and give some information on himself and his work for the readers of this journal.

I was really surprised when we met in my hotel seeing a tall, slender man with a Franz Liszt type hairdo, whose youthful appearance belied his age.

From our conversation unfolded a remarkable career of a Hungarian artist living abroad who achieved recognition in several fields of the fine arts, but whose life now is filled with the tedious, but interesting work of designing beautiful postage stamps.

Gyula László Vászárhelyi was born in Gyula, Bekés County, in south-east Hungary, where his parents still live. After finishing his general education he was admitted to the Art Lyceum, a specialized high school for gifted children in Budapest. As a graduate of this school he was able to continue his studies at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest. He was in the final years of his studies in 1956 when the October Revolution of the Hungarian nation broke out. After the defeat of the uprising, Mr. Vászárhelyi left Hungary and went to London, England where he was accepted by the highest ranking artistic educational institution, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. He finished his studies there in 18 months.

In 1958 he won a scholarship from the Paderewsky Foundation in New York which enable him to spend one year in Baroda, India and two years in Indonesia studying oriental art, and painting portraits and other works depicting the local life. The year 1963 finds Mr. Vászárhelyi in Cuzco, Peru, the ancient capital of

the Incas, where he was teaching for two and a half years at the Academy of Fine Arts. During all these years his paintings were shown at several exhibitions and won unanimous recognition for him.

Mr. Vászárhelyi returned to England in 1965 and began his career as a free lance artist occupied almost exclusively with stamp designing. Up to date he designed several hundred stamps for 75 different countries.

He is married and has four children: Andrew (11 years old), twin daughters Rosemary and Ann (9 years) and the youngest is Teri who is four.

Our lengthy conversation turned to his present work. He showed me some of his original designs, like the Napoleon set of Grenada (Scott #413-6) and I was really amazed seeing the beauty and fine details of his art. A week later I had the opportunity to see M. David's original paintings in Paris, France, and my admiration for Mr. Vászárhelyi grew even more if possible. He also showed some of the designs for stamps to be released in the near future, but he requested that no details should be divulged about these because of the official secrecy imposed on him by the postal administration ordering the stamps. So, I can only say that these also will be beautiful original designs.

We discussed the difficulties of Hungarica collectors of compiling a complete list of the stamps designed by him. He explained that in the beginning of his career many of his designs were attributed to Victor Whiteley for whom Mr. Vászárhelyi used to work. At the present some of the postal administrations do not release the name of the designers, while others name only the agency or enterprise which produces the stamps, but not the identity of the designing artists. Examples of the latter situation are the stamps produced by Format International Co., most of which were and are designed by Mr. Vászárhelyi. In addition to Format Co., he receives most of his assignments from the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau and the International Philatelic Agency in New York.

I asked him whether he has a complete list of his designs. "Unfortunately," he replied, "in the first years I did not list them, but now I keep records and I also try to obtain at least one set of the stamps I designed." Seeing my surprise, he further explained that the producing companies must deliver the entire stock to the ordering postal administration under very strict accounting and security. These administrations very seldom honor the designer artists with a set, or a sheet of the final product. Thus, he continued, "most of the time I

have to buy my stamps from stamp dealers." Neither does the designing artist receive any of the proof sets, or, with a few exceptions, the original designs.

To alleviate the problems of the Hungarica collectors, Mr. Vászárhelyi promised to send to the Society for Hungarian Philately from time to time a list of his latest designs which would greatly assist us in completing our collections.

At the end of our conversation I expressed my gratitude for his willingness to meet me and supply all this very useful information for the members of our Society.

Mr. Vászárhelyi asked me to relate his best regards and good wishes for success in the endeavours of the Society and its members.

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#### A NEW FIND??? A LETTER FROM A MEMBER

Dear Mr. Berecz,

I'm enclosing two pictures of a pair of the 1959 Letter Writing Week stamps for illustration purposes. On one stamp there is a blue dot above the triangular portion of the Czechoslovak flag. Normally, such a spot should not stir up too much interest on a lithographed stamp; however, this spot appears with regularity in the same place. I have now seen four of these stamps which would prompt me to conclude that this minor variety occurs regularly in a full sheet of these stamps.

Sincerely,  
Csaba L. Kohalmi

Dear Mr. Kohalmi and SHP Members,

Unfortunately the greatly magnified photo that Mr. Kohalmi sent would not reproduce well. Let me describe as best I can the location of the "spot". On the back of the "hand" passing a letter is pictured the Czech flag. The spot, which is about 15% as wide as the flag is in the white portion, near the upper left corner, just above the triangle. From the photo it appears very distinct and should be noticable even without magnification.

The appearance of such a spot in the same location indicates a distinct possibility of a collectable constant variety. Collectors having further information on this matter, particularly the location in the sheet if the spot is constant, are asked to report their finding to me. I will pass on the information to Mr. Kohalmi and the rest of the SHP members via the NEWS.

Thanks, Vic Berecz