

STUDY ON UN #31-32

by Albert Pelsser

The idea of the United Nations (UN) issuing its own stamps was first proposed in 1947 by the Delegation of Argentina to the UN. Further to that, Resolution 454(V) was adopted unanimously on 16 November 1950 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, which requested the Secretary General to proceed with the necessary arrangements for the establishment of the United Nations Postal Administration (UNPA) as at 1 January 1951.

The postal agreement between the UN and the Post Office Department of the United States, where the UN Headquarters were located, was signed on 28 March 1951, so that the UN could start issuing postage stamps for its own use. The UN postal service was inaugurated on 24 October 1951, i.e. on United Nations Day; the first UN stamps went on sale on that day. It is recalled that the UN officially came into existence on 24 October 1945, upon ratification of the Charter by China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, and by a majority of signatories.

With the founding of the UNPA, a truly unique institution was born because the UN was, and still is, the only organization in the world which, although neither a country nor a territory, is permitted to issue postage stamps. The UNPA also became the only postal authority that issues stamps in three different currencies, namely United States dollars, Swiss francs and Austrian schillings. Since its inception, the UNPA has always operated with a dual mandate: first, to disseminate information on the activities and achievements of the UN and its specialized agencies through the medium of postage stamps, and second, to generate revenue for the UN.

As the UN anticipated issuing postage stamps with designs illustrating or symbolizing the aims or activities of the various Specialized Agencies, Member States of the UN were requested to submit names of outstanding stamp designers and artists who would be willing to participate in a competition for designs. Hence, 185 artists were invited on 10 July 1952 to an international design competition. Among the 67 suggestions received from 32 countries, the

design at Figure 1, submitted by Hubert Woyty-Wimmer of the printer Thomas de la Rue, United Kingdom, was selected and found suitable to depict the International Civil Aviation Organization's activities through a stamp.

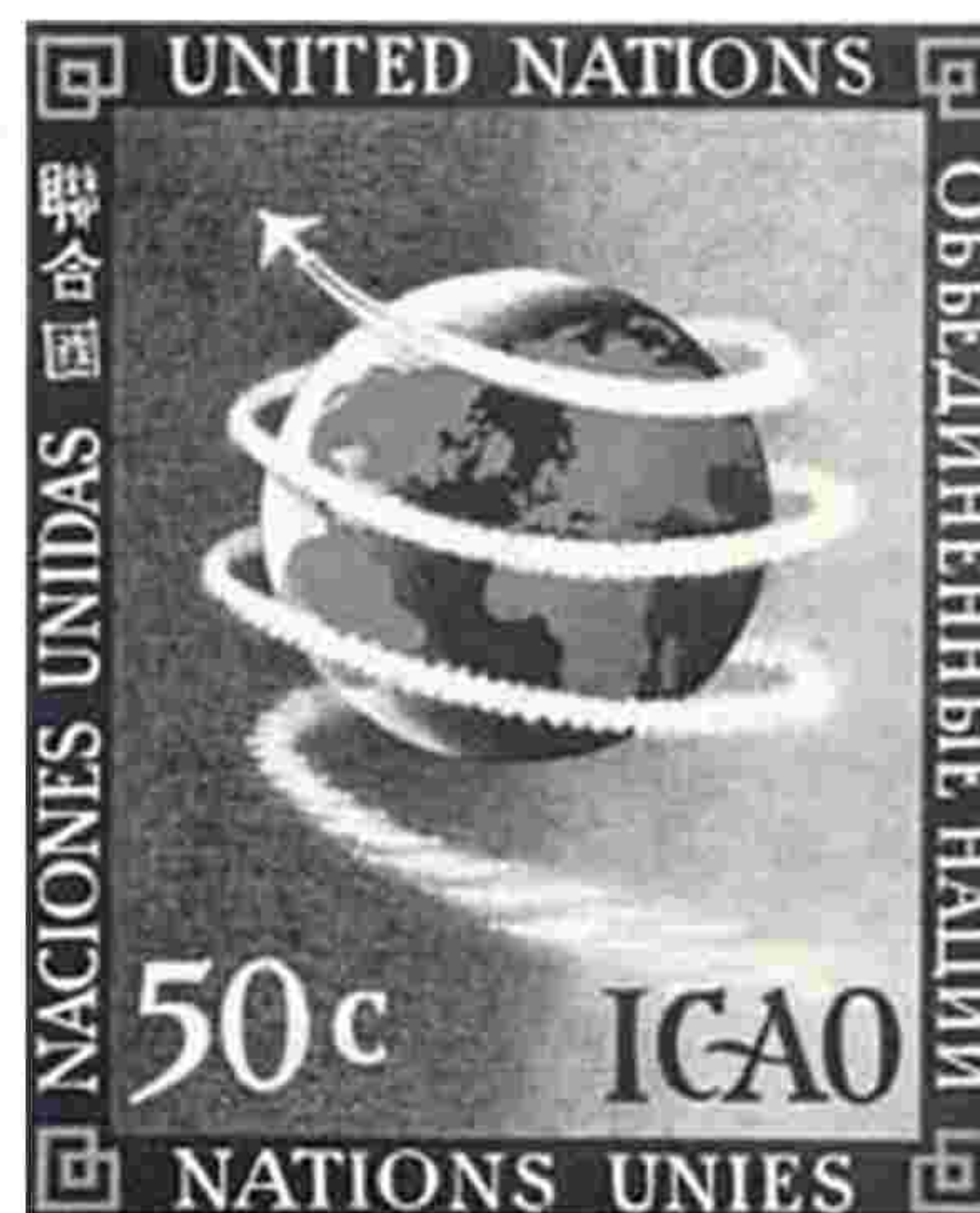


Figure 1

On 10 February 1953, ICAO was requested to provide comments before the UN would give final approval of the above design. Reservations were expressed by ICAO about the initials of the Organization, which should be displayed in the two forms ICAO/OACI (the latter acronym applying both to French and Spanish, while the first applies in English only); about the condensation trails surrounding the globe; and about the military or rocket-like profile of the aircraft, more suited to illustrate science fiction than portraying civil aviation. At that time, alternative sketches, as the sample shown at Figure 2, were suggested by ICAO staff member Karl Lohse, Chief, Aeronautical Charts Section.

When the UN stamp programme for 1955 was established, it was found necessary once again to solicit the artists who had responded to the 1952 invitation. The issuance of stamps honouring the 10th anniversary of

ICAO's activities was suggested by the UNPA for February 1955, as their stamp programme already comprised two issues on fixed dates in the second part of year, i.e. on UN Day (24 October) and Human Rights Day (10 December, which is the anniversary day of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948).



Figure 2



Figure 3

On 9 July 1954, ten designs were submitted to ICAO for a recommendation on the order of preference; among these was a design (in black, grey and cream), as shown at Figure 3, submitted by the eminent stamp artist James Berry, New Zealand. Although ranked third by ICAO, the design submitted by Angel Medina, Uruguay, was eventually selected by the UN Interdepartmental Policy Committee as the most suitable for the ICAO commemorative stamp issue in two denominations, i.e. three and eight cents, to be issued on 9 February 1955.



Figure 4



Figure 5

In its early days, the United Nations Postal Administration awarded stamp printing contracts for an entire year. For the year 1955, Waterlow & Sons, United Kingdom, was awarded the contract. When the company withdrew from the stamp-printing business in the 1960s, it started selling its archives.

Specimens of the eight-cent ICAO issue (see Figure 4) appeared on the market; these specimens (approximately 400 pairs) are in green (whereas the regular issue was deep carmine), have a small punch hole and are overprinted in

black *WATERLOW & SONS LIMITED SPECIMEN*. Because of their rarity, the retail price of these specimens rose quickly.

The two commemorative stamps Scott #31-32 issued on 9 February 1955 by the United Nations to honour the activities of ICAO became classic stamps for further featuring on stamps of other countries (stamp-on-stamp), which hence became part of the Canadiana collection as listed in the checklist below. Figure 5 shows a maximum card featuring the blue-grey UN Scott #31.

CHECKLIST

Burundi	C264d	1977 Oct 10	Stamp-on-stamp UN #32
Comoro Islands	219	1976 Nov 25	Stamp-on-stamp UN #32
Comoro Islands	Michel BL49	1976 Nov 25	Stamp-on-stamp UN #32
Comoro Islands	282-284	1977 Nov 22	Stamp-on-stamp UN #32
Comoro Islands	Michel BL114a-c	1977 Nov 22	Stamp-on-stamp UN #32
United Nations New York	31-32	1955 Feb 9	International Civil Aviation Organization
United Nations New York	Souvenir card 11	1977 Mar 11	Reproduction of UN #31
United Nations New York	Souvenir card 14	1978 Jun 12	Reproduction of UN #31-32

REFERENCES

United Nations Postage Stamps. Department of Public Information, United Nations New York, 1956.
 "Waterlow specimens, plate inspection sheets." *Linn's Stamp News*, 7 October 1996, p.38-39.

