

PHILATELIC LAXITY

by Albert Pelsser

ICAO AND HANS ERNI

The topical collection related to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), with its headquarters in Montreal since 1945, consists of a limited number of items (386 stamps and souvenir sheets), but for a great variety of countries, that is 98 different ones. Organizing such a collection may lead the collector towards finding design errors. While most of the errors in this collection are related to inaccurate representations of aeroplanes and errors in ICAO's anniversary dates and years, spelling errors may also arouse the curiosity; the lapse on Hans Erni's last name (spelled Herni), described in this article, suggests forgetfulness and inattention.

Born in 1909 in Luzern, Switzerland, Hans Erni attended various art schools in Western Europe and continued to develop his skills in contact with several well-known artists; among his exceptional and countless works are paintings, frescos, lithographs, mosaics, tapestries, etchings, sculptures, ceramics.

In 1949, Hans Erni designed his first stamp series for the Swiss PTT. Since then, he has contributed over 170 sketches to the postal administrations of mainly Switzerland, Liechtenstein and the United Nations.

Commissioned in 1975 by Switzerland for the then new ICAO Headquarters Building located on Sherbrooke Street in downtown Montreal, Hans Erni's mural called "Man in Flight" was built around the symbolism of famous winged Greek mythological figures to represent man's greatest aspiration. In 1997, the mural was restored and relocated in the lobby of the new Headquarters Building at 999 University Street, Montreal.

The main panel of the mural shows Daedalus, who designed and built the Labyrinth for King Minos of Crete. The Labyrinth was a vast palace of rooms and corridors wherein Minos locked up the hideous monster named Minotaur. Later, Minos imprisoned Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in the Labyrinth. In an effort to escape, Daedalus contrived two pairs of wings made of wax for both himself

and his son. Icarus, intoxicated by the power of flight, soared higher into the air; the rays of the sun melted the wax and the wings fell off, plunging the unfortunate young man into the sea which has since borne his name.

In 1981, the central figure of the mural was slightly modified by Hans Erni to take the form of Icarus. Along with two other designs, ICAO recommended the Icarus motif to all postal administrations for the issuance of stamps to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the 1944 signing of the Convention on International Civil Aviation in Chicago. The design of Icarus, suggested by ICAO, clearly bore the name of the artist, i.e. Hans Erni.



Figure 1

In 1984 and 1985, seven countries issued stamps bearing the figure of Icarus for the 40th anniversary of



Figure 2

ICAO. Among those countries, two made a spelling error and inadvertently printed the name of "Herni," i.e. Cameroon (Scott #768, see Figure 1) and Gabon. For both countries, the original artwork had been reworked by Lavergne and printed by offset by Cartor S.A. in France.

It is interesting to note that Uruguay issued a souvenir sheet (Scott #1526, see Figure 2) in 1994 to commemorate four medal winners at the Lillehammer Winter Olympic games. On that sheet, Scott #1175 from Uruguay was reproduced for the 85th anniversary of Hans Erni. A demonetized and imperforate version of the above souvenir sheet was sold with matching serial number with Scott #1526.

Icarus' misadventure has remained the symbol of

delusions of grandeur. Hans Erni's depiction of the figure of Icarus has been an exceptional work and has been undeniably successful, as it has been reproduced many times since 1984 to symbolize the dream of flight, which would bring men to cavort among the clouds. The portrayal of the ill-fated Icarus in ICAO philately is certainly in contrast with ICAO's goals to promote safety in flight.

[Editor's Note: Readers are invited to submit their own candidates for this column. Any Canadiana errors not previously published in *The Canadian Connection* are welcome. Each story selected for publication will earn a Canadiana prize for the reader making the contribution.

As a thank you, M. Pelsser receives as his prize the souvenir sheet shown on page one of this issue.

CHECKLIST

Anguilla	609	1984 Dec 3	40th Anniversary of ICAO
Cameroun	768	1984 Dec 20	40th Anniversary of ICAO, "Herni" error
Gabon	572	1984 Dec 1	40th Anniversary of ICAO, "Herni" error
Tanzania	246	1984 Nov 15	40th Anniversary of ICAO
Turkey	2299	1994 Dec 7	40th Anniversary of ICAO
Togo	1283	1984 Oct 15	40th Anniversary of ICAO
Uruguay	1175	1985 Jul 5	40th Anniversary of ICAO
Uruguay	1526	1994 May 6	Lillehammer 17 th Winter Olympics and 85 th anniversary of Hans Erni

REFERENCE

Kunst im Kleinen, Ghidelli/Erni, Multi-Press Verlag AG, 1995.