

## Philatelic Travelogue: A Year-and-a-Half in Aix-en-Provence

By Chris Dorn (*Beryllium Guy*)

In 1989, a British expatriate named Peter Mayle wrote a book titled *A Year in Provence*, describing his and his wife's first year of living in the Provence region of France. Despite its being heralded as an excellent and entertaining work, I never read it until I finally came to live in Provence myself, nearly 30 years later. From April 2018 through September 2019, my wife and I lived in Aix-en-Provence, a town of more than 140,000 people, located in southeastern France, about a 30-minute drive north of Marseille, the second largest city in the country.

Now that our time in Provence has come to an end, it seemed fitting to write a bit about our experience, and a little bit about the town we called home for 18 months, Aix-en-Provence.

### Brief History of Aix-en-Provence

A Roman Consul named Sextius Calvinus founded what we know today as Aix-en-Provence ("Aix" for short) in the year 123 B.C. In Latin, the city name was *Aquae Sextiae*, which means "Waters of Sextius", as the site of the city was known for its natural hot springs. There is still at least one fountain of naturally warm spring water today, and in more recent eras, Aix is sometimes referred to as the City of a Thousand Fountains. Even on a short walk around Aix these days, you can easily see many water fountains of all sizes, types, and designs, and from different eras in the city's history. After some reflection, considering that Aix has a history spanning more than 2,100 years, I have concluded that a thousand fountains seems like quite a reasonable number!

Unlike other Provence towns, such as Arles and Nîmes, aside from some of the street and place names, Aix has lost most of its vestiges of the Roman era. One exception to that is a site of some Roman architectural ruins that were recently discovered during renovations to the square in front of the Palais de Justice (the local courthouse). The discovery dramatically slowed down the project to renovate the square, but in the end, city officials found an elegant solution. The ruins were revealed so that they could be seen and appreciated by passers-by. Durable glass-like transparent panels were installed above them, on the same level of the paving stones in the square, so that the space was also functional for pedestrians.

### Stamps are the Inspiration

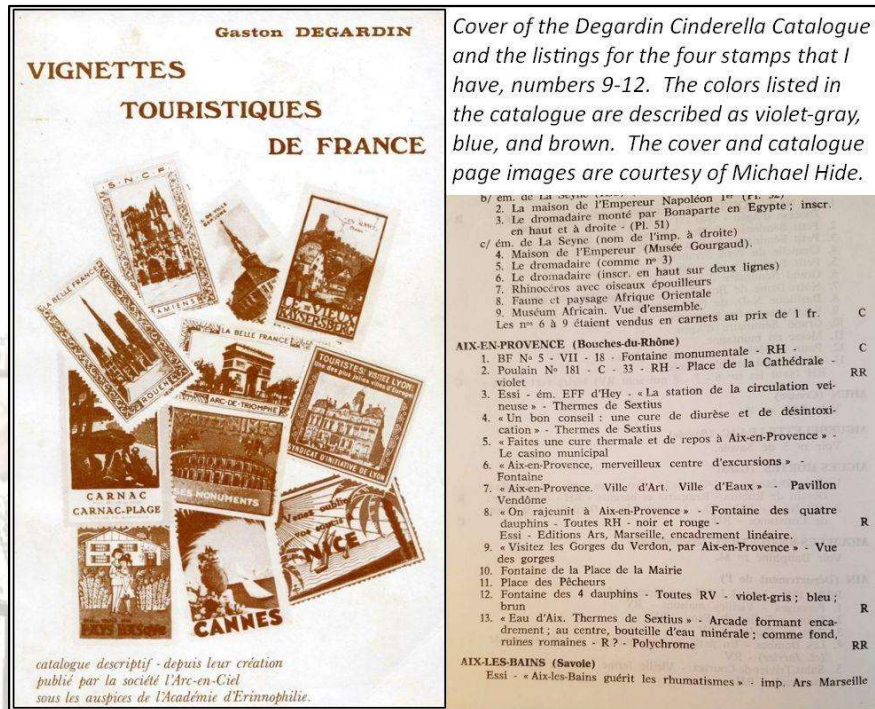
Amy's and my move to Aix was prompted by a work opportunity for me. Since my stamp collecting ways follow me wherever I go, I took them with me this time also. My first source of stamps in Aix was the dealer Pascal who appeared at the local street market. Later I met Xavier (@hrdoktorx) at work, and he and I have exchanged quite a few stamps since then. But there was also an unexpected source of stamps.... my wife Amy!

In the spring of 2019, Amy surprised me for my birthday with the gift of an old cookie tin filled with stamps that she bought at a second-hand shop in Aix. Thanks to her resourcefulness, I was able to go back to the same shop and buy a second tin full of stamps after my birthday. Most of what was found in those tins was old stamps on piece, torn from envelopes. There were the occasional unused stamps as well, mostly





from France, often in the form of blocks of four or other small multiples. But there were also some unexpected finds, including two sets of Cinderella poster stamps depicting scenes in and around Aix, printed by Editions ARS Marseille, probably in the 1930s.



Cover of the Degardin Cinderella Catalogue and the listings for the four stamps that I have, numbers 9-12. The colors listed in the catalogue are described as violet-gray, blue, and brown. The cover and catalogue page images are courtesy of Michael Hide.

With some help from Michael Hide (@Londonbus1), I learned that the original printer, Editions ARS Marseille, was bought out in 1996 and became part of a larger firm, known today as Editions ARS Magna. It seems that these days, ARS Magna is a specialty publishing house with a focus on “revolutionary nationalist” works, and their current list comprises more than 100 titles. It would seem that the printing of poster stamps is no longer part of the program.

Through his Cinderella connections (Fairy Godmother, perhaps!?) Michael was also able to track down the Aix poster stamps in an old catalogue titled *Les Vignettes Touristiques Françaises de l'Imprimerie de Vaugirard* (“French Tourist Cinderellas of the Vaugirard Printing House”), in English, by Gaston Degardin and Louis Granger. Brief research on the Vaugirard Printing House reveals that it operated in Paris from about 1890-1939. Vaugirard seems to have been known for art poster printing. Based on that sort of expertise, one could imagine that it would have been a good choice for printing a stamp catalogue with illustrations.

Vaugirard’s time of operations suggests that our earlier guess of 1930s as the era when the stamps were printed is entirely possible. The catalogue indicates that there were four different stamp designs, which were printed in three colors: blue, violet, and sepia. These four designs appear as numbers 9-12 in the Degardin catalogue. We know that there were at least 12 stamps in the complete set, but I understand that the catalogue may not be comprehensive, and it may be that there were additional designs and/or colors, who knows?

After taking a look at these stamps, I decided that it would be fun to go to the sites depicted on each stamp and try to get a current photo to see how much or how little each scene had changed. Here is a tour of some sites around Aix, as depicted on art-deco style Cinderella poster stamps shown right alongside modern-day photos of the same places.

### La Fontaine de la Place de la Mairie

As a point of information, nowadays, this same square is called “Place de l’Hôtel de Ville”. When René (@renden) and his wife Denise visited us in Aix, we went to a café in this square for a drink one



afternoon, and our view of the square from the terrace of the café was not unlike the scene on the stamp. I was curious about the name change for the square, and a little research provided the answer. According to the Larousse Dictionary, the terms “Mairie” and “Hôtel de Ville” are synonyms for what we would call a City Hall in the U.S.

In practice, there is a difference in usage between the two terms, which has to do with the size and importance of the town in question. The term Mairie is normally used when referring to smaller villages, while the term Hôtel de Ville is used to describe the City Hall for a larger, more important town. It seems that Aix’s status has changed from being considered more as a town to an important city in the 80 years or so since these stamps were issued. In any case, this is still a beautiful square today, and it is the site of many markets, celebrations, and other local activities.



Cinderella poster stamp depicting and labelled as the “Fontaine de la Place de la Mairie” which translates to Fountain of City Hall Square, with similar view from a recent photo.

**La Place des Prêcheurs**

Unfortunately, for most of the time that we lived in Aix, this square was a major construction site. Much



Cinderella poster stamp printed in sepia depicting and labelled as the “Place des Prêcheurs” which translates to Preachers’ Square, with a similar view from a recent photo.

of the work on the square itself was completed by the time the photo was taken, but as you can see, the façade of the Church of the Madeleine, on the right side of the photo, is blocked by scaffolding, which in turn, is covered by a huge tarp with an image of the church on it. Hopefully by now, nearly a year later, the work will have been completed.

This square is also the site of the open-air food market, which features fresh fish, cheeses, sausage, fruits, and vegetables, as well as stalls selling hot food. The market takes place on three mornings each week. During the construction period, when the square was torn up, the food market was held in one of the main streets in town, which was blocked off from traffic for a few hours on those days.



**La Fontaine des 4 Dauphins**

As mentioned near the beginning of this article, Aix is famous for having lots of fountains of all sizes and descriptions, and this one with the 4 dolphins is one of the best-known. It was built in 1667 by a sculptor named Jean-Claude Rambot. The Baroque-style dolphins are supporting an obelisk, which has a pineapple on top. It is my understanding that back in those days, pineapples were very rare in Europe, and were, therefore, a symbol of wealth and prosperity that could only be afforded by the rich.

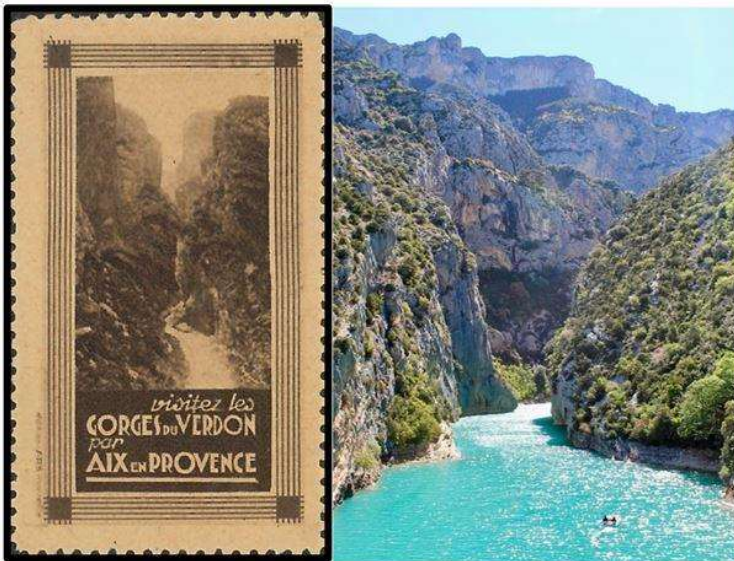
It is perhaps no coincidence then, that this fountain stands in the heart of the Mazarin Quarter of Aix, which was long home to the city's nobility. Even today, the Mazarin is one of the nicest and most expensive parts of Aix and is also home to many upscale shops and restaurants.



*Cinderella poster stamp printed in violet depicting and labelled as the "Fontaine des 4 Dauphins" which translates to Fountain of the 4 Dolphins, with a similar view from a recent photograph. This is the one stamp of the four that I am missing in sepia.*

**Les Gorges du Verdon**

Of the four places depicted in these beautiful poster stamps, the Verdon Gorge is the one we did not visit during our time in Aix. Much like the Grand Canyon in the U.S., the gorge is a canyon carved into the landscape by a river, in this case the Verdon River, which gets its name from the distinctive greenish-turquoise color of its waters. The gorge is about 25km (15.5 mi) long and up to 700 meters (0.4 mi) deep. At the end of the canyon, the Verdon River flows into a man-made lake, named Lac de Sainte-Croix.



*Cinderella poster stamp depicting and labeled as "visitez les Gorges du Verdon par Aix-en-Provence" which translates to Visit the Verdon Gorge near Aix-en-Provence. I was unable to get a recent photo of the same view of the gorge in the stamp, but I found one that gives the same general idea and a similar sort of perspective.*

The Gorge is still a popular tourist destination, owing in part to its proximity to the French Riviera. It is possible to drive around the rim, hike along trails, rock-climb on the limestone canyon walls, or rent kayaks to navigate on the river itself. All of these activities afford spectacular views, albeit from different perspectives. The Verdon Gorge is described by some as the world's second biggest canyon, after the Grand Canyon. It is clearly a place that I still hope to visit one of these days.



## La Fontaine de la Rotonde

Despite the fact that our “tour” of Aix from the poster stamps has now reached its end, I cannot finish without including an image of the most famous landmark of all, the Grand Fountain in the center of the city. In thinking about this, I wondered why the designer(s) of the stamps had not done one for this most famous of Aix places, but I think I can guess why.

I think that it is a simple question of compatibility of the image with the format of the stamps. The Grand Fountain is 12m (39 ft) high and 32m (105 ft) in diameter, nearly three times as wide as it is tall. Images of the complete fountain are normally “landscape” rather “portrait” in style, so it would have been challenging to make a nice-looking stamp in the portrait style. But that’s just my opinion. If any member can suggest another plausible reason, I would be delighted to hear it.

A quick overview on some relevant history: the Place de la Rotonde was built from 1840-1850, just as the image of Queen Victoria was gracing the world’s first postage stamps. The Grand Fountain was built in the center of the site in 1860, designed by a civil engineer named Théophile de Tournadre, who specialized in bridges and roadways.

The Grand Fountain is also sometimes referred to as the Fountain of the Three Graces, as it is topped by the sculptures of three allegorical female figures representing Justice, which faces towards the Cours Mirabeau, Aix’s most prominent street; Agriculture, which faces towards Marseille; and the Fine Arts, which faces towards Avignon. The other ornamental figures surrounding the fountain include twelve lions, accompanied by sirens, swans, and angels on the backs of dolphins.

In my opinion, it is a Grand Fountain indeed, in every sense of the word, and it is a fitting place to conclude our tour. Aix-en-Provence is a beautiful, classic French city. I had the good fortune to live there for 18 months, and I hope to return again sometime in the future. I can unreservedly recommend it as a fine place to visit for any who are inclined to travel.

### Acknowledgements

*I received a lot of help with producing this article. I want to begin by thanking my beautiful wife Amy for helping me by taking the photos of the Aix monuments on the less-crowded weekdays, while I was at work. Amy also proofread and critiqued my draft article. I also want to thank Michael Hide (@Londonbus1), without whose help, I never would have been able to track down the information on the printer of the original stamps or the listing in a catalogue that I had never even heard of at that point, coupled with some perfect images to illustrate the philatelic aspects of this article.*



*(Top) Vintage picture postcard showing the Fountain of the Rotonde in Aix, franked with a France, Sc 138, 10-centime rose definitive stamp depicting “The Sower”, drawn in the lined style (La Semeuse Lignée in French), issued in 1903. The card was postmarked in Aix on 13 December 1904. (Bottom) Just below the postcard image is a photo of the Grand Fountain from 2019, shortly after completion of extensive renovations that lasted more than a year.*



## Rarity vs. Scarcity: Collecting Definitions

By Vince Chermishnok (stanley64)

It has been said that “rarity is not synonymous with valuable.” In fact, it is scarcity, with its heightened demand, that equates to the value of an item. All too often, these two terms or words are used interchangeably within philatelic or collecting circles despite their distinct and different meanings. Let us take one example and look at the two terms individually.



Maryland forgery

First let's consider rarity – the state or quality of being rare. This is a term that refers to how many of something exists and is a fixed number. In the case of the Maryland forgery depicted here, there are less than 100 copies of the stamp in existence. The original printing is thought to be of 4 x A4 sheets, each containing 24 stamps for the Falkland Islands iconic 5 shilling King Penguin. With less than one hundred stamps produced of this forgery, the total number available to collectors is less than that of the 1918 US 24¢ Inverted Jenny rarity, with its printing of a full sheet containing one hundred stamps. In terms of value though, there is no match between the two, for even as the Falkland Island forgery challenges the Inverted Jenny for rarity in terms of absolute number, its minimal retail value is far behind its competition despite its scarcity and is a direct result of the limited demand from either forgery, topical, or other collectors alike.

This brings us to the second term, scarcity – the state of being scarce or in short supply. Continuing with the example of the Falkland Islands 5 shilling King Penguin, one of twelve stamps issued as part of the Falkland Island 1933 Centenary set with face values ranging from ½d to £1, the stamp had a relatively high value and as a result, the production was relatively small as only 6,600 of the King Penguin issue were printed in total; 1<sup>st</sup> printing black and yellow (5,280 printed), 2<sup>nd</sup> printing - black and yellow-orange. (1,320).

By no means rare, given the quantity produced, the issue is only scarce given the demand from both the Falkland Island country and topical collectors. The stamp does command a respectable catalog value or auction realization when they do appear. Just as with the 24 cent inverted Jenny error, with an estimated value of approximately US \$1.5 million, the Falkland Island issue demands a consistent price due to its scarcity, given there are fewer examples available, or there is a shortage in number to meet the demands of collectors.



Falkland Islands Issue  
(Genuine stamp)

Depending on one's collecting interests, there are plenty of other examples available and it is the informed collector who is aware of the terms 'rarity' & 'scarcity,' along with the difference between the meanings of the two. Happy collecting!

### References:

Congrove, J., Hamman, D. and Miller, M. ed., 2020. *Topical Adventures*, ATA Handbook #168. American Topical Association.  
 Falkland Islands – Stamps, Proofs and Varieties 1878-1937. Available at: <http://www.novastamps.com/W&P+1933+1935.pdf>



## With or Without Stamps: Developing Philatelic Expertise in the Digital Age

By Chris Dorn (*Beryllium Guy*)

Human existence is full of irony. As an example, when I was young, I aspired to do great things in my life and become known as an expert in some field. As I gained in age, knowledge, and experience (and hopefully in wisdom and understanding too!), I realized that expertise takes time. But I decided early on that I was willing to pay my dues, and to put in the time and effort over the long haul to achieve objectively recognizable expertise in some area.

So, I went out and got myself an education, and I eventually parlayed that into getting a position in industry. Once I got into the job I wanted, I learned even more. I studied books, attended specialized courses, and learned everything I could from those with more experience than me. I made it my vocation, and I continued at it until, almost imperceptibly, I became the one who was helping others to do the same thing.

OK, so here's finally the ironic part: even after 30 years of working in the same field and progressing into the position of training others and developing their knowledge and skill sets, I still didn't feel comfortable being called an expert. I have long felt that the proverb "learning never ends" is absolutely true, and as a result, despite developing substantial knowledge in a very specific field, I have still considered myself more student than teacher.

While I think that this is generally a healthy approach to take to life, with the idea that it helps to keep one's perspective and not get too full of oneself, the truth is that it's probably not entirely correct. The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that we all have expertise for which we don't give ourselves enough credit, and maybe it's time for me to start changing how I look at it.

### Stamping & Expertise

By now, you are probably asking yourself, what's all of this got to do with stamps? If you are wondering that, it's a fair observation, so I will get to the point. What I have described above in my preamble (it may be that I love preambles more than I should) applies to philately as well as it does to engineering and business.

Just as I aspired to expertise in some career field, I have also wanted to attain expertise in the hobby that I love. When I joined TSF in November 2016, despite the fact that I had been a stamp collector for almost 50 years at that point, it pretty quickly became apparent that there were many areas of philately that I never even knew existed, let alone had any expertise in them.

At first, I started to explore all sorts of previously untried areas, and I started to look for things in my accumulations that would allow me to participate in trending areas on the Forum. This was a good and probably necessary step for me, but after a while, I started to feel a bit overwhelmed by the sheer vastness of all the areas of the hobby. I began to think that if I had wanted to specialize and become an expert or an authority in some aspect of philately, the time to do that had long since passed. I should have started on something years ago.

But what would I have chosen? I didn't even know where to begin. An adaptation of a quote from a famous British comedian named Tommy Cooper goes like this: "I used to be indecisive, but now I'm not so sure." For me, that about sums up my relationship with our hobby. I have been plagued by



indecision and false starts in my collecting. So, if I can't even make up my mind about what I want to focus on, how can I ever become expert at anything?

### Fate & Inspiration

Have you ever seen the 1998 feature film *Sliding Doors*? It is one of my personal favorites, as it illustrates the point that small, seemingly insignificant incidents in daily life, can sometimes result in major changes to the course of our lives. For me, agreeing to become a member of the TSF Moderator Team in 2020 has turned out to be a more important decision than I had imagined at the time.

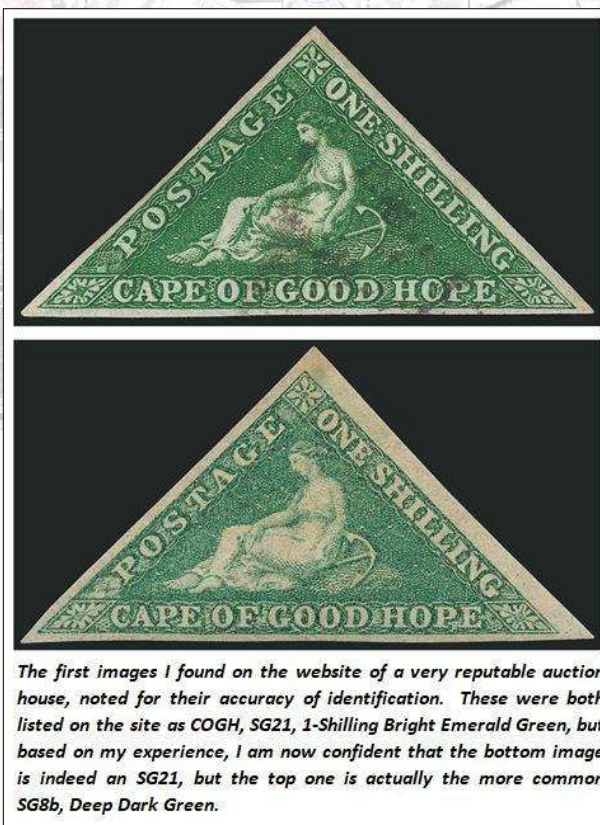
After becoming a moderator, I decided to take on the task of replacing images on TSF that had been deleted by members who had quit the Forum. As things have turned out, there have been more such deletions than I would have imagined, but I decided to begin with one of the areas that meant something to me: triangular stamps of the Cape of Good Hope (COGH).

Although I had only a couple of stamps myself and not much experience in this area when I was regularly following the main COGH thread on the Forum in the spring of 2020, the design of the early triangles really captured my interest, and I was fascinated by the in-depth knowledge and excellent images posted by one of the members at that time. While I really loved what I was seeing, I was intimidated by it, too.

The COGH triangles really looked great, but catalogue values for individual stamps are very high, mainly in the hundreds and thousands of dollars. And even if I wanted to start spending serious money to improve my collection, like so many of the high-value classics, the COGH triangles were extensively forged. As I am cautious by nature, acquisition seemed like a pretty risky undertaking to me, so I sat on the sidelines and tried to figure out how to move forward without squandering my precious stamp money on a bunch of worthless material.

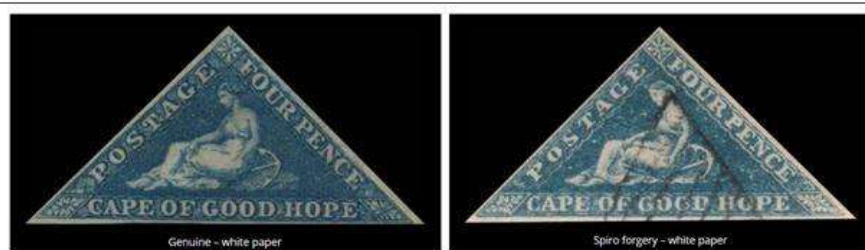
In the end, I learned by doing. When the reference images were deleted from the thread, if I wanted to replace them, I needed to find new ones myself, but where to look? In addition to his own images, the erstwhile member had mentioned the name of an auction house that he thought reliably identified Cape triangles, so I started there. I went to their website and found a couple of images that I could use.

Then I began to look at other stamp dealer and auction sites, including not only major philatelic houses, but also eBay, Hip Stamp, and Delcampe. I also found that there were other sites set up by private individuals, but with varying degrees of reliability, as I would later discover.





One of the best sites for forgery identification of classic-era stamps is [Stamp Forgeries of the World](#), authored and run by TSF member, Morten Munck ([classicalstamps](#)). As I got deeper into my search for suitable images, I talked with Morten, and I learned that in order to establish his website, he began by first collecting high-resolution images and now has his own huge reference library.



*On Morten's Stamp Forgeries website, high-quality images of genuine COGH triangles are shown on the same page with examples of forgeries, enabling the collector who is researching his/her own holdings or items on offer, to determine what they are seeing.*

So, Lady Hope inspired my initial interest in the Cape triangles, then fate necessitated the image replacement project and put me in a position to take it on. Then, inspiration came again in the form of some excellent advice from my friend Morten, just when I needed it. I was on my way.

### Becoming Your Own Expert

At this writing, I have now been studying the Cape triangles for about 9 months. During that time, I have looked at many thousands of images of stamps, and I have created a reference library of several hundred mostly high-resolution images.

Just as I have spent more than 30 years in my chosen profession, and I have achieved a certain level of expertise there, due in part to my long tenure, I certainly respect philatelists who have done the same thing. In my Cape triangle endeavors, I have come across one man who is considered an expert in the area, having begun his specialization in 1969, only a couple of years after I started collecting.

But I have learned over the past 9 months that decades of hands-on experience with stamps are not the only way to develop expertise. That is certainly the traditional path, but it takes a long time, and in some cases, can require a substantial financial investment in reference books and stamps. Years ago, it was really the only option, but thanks to the Internet, we now have a world full of resources available to us, many of which can be accessed at very little cost.

I would argue that by taking advantage of information available on the Internet, and with the application of regular research (i.e. daily or on some other frequent basis), it is now possible to compress the amount of time it takes to become really competent in a given area. I won't pretend that I know as much as someone who has spent 50 years in a specialized field, but I have surprised even myself at how much I have been able to learn in less than a year.

### It's Never Too Late

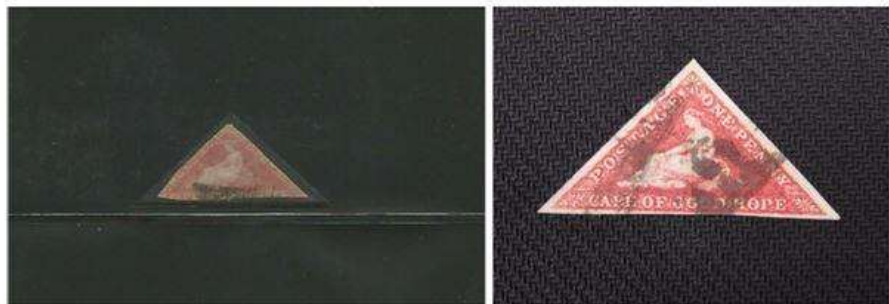
In direct contradiction to my own earlier thinking, I have learned that it's not too late to start something new after all, even at my stage in life and in collecting. All it takes is a real interest in the subject (the stronger, the better), and the willingness to commit some time and effort to learning about it. If you want to pursue a new philatelic area, here's a way to do it:

- If you already have some stamps from the area, begin with those. Scan some high-resolution images (at least 600dpi) and organize them using an established catalogue or other relevant reference book.



- Seek out images for stamps from the area that you don't already have, but also for those that you do. In the latter case, compare identification from authoritative sources with your own, and look for differences. Explore further as needed.
- For image sources, I suggest beginning with more widely known and recognized sites, such as those from major auction houses or large philatelic organizations, like the American Philatelic Society (APS), Royal Philatelic Society, etc. If there is a study group or society specialized in your area, consider joining it, but at the very least look into the reference materials they offer. You may also be able to find the names of established specialists in the field, and even ways to contact them.
- Spend some time reviewing published literature and refer back to it when looking at your stamps or at your reference images. I suggest updating image info as you learn. Don't be afraid to change your mind about an identification as you move forward, but document how you figured it out. That could be a very useful refresher at some point down the line, and it may pave the way for others if you choose to share it.
- Look for images of stamps that include expertizing certificates whenever possible. In my experience, these don't come up that often, so I make a point of taking a copy whenever I find one. As an APS member, I learned that I could access their database of expertizing certificates, which was a great find. Unfortunately, image quality in the database is inconsistent, so this is not as useful of a resource as it might have been.
- Branch out to more general sources for images, such as buying sites like eBay, Hip Stamp, Delcampe, etc. Image quality on these sites will be highly variable and seller identifications much less accurate, so you will get to start applying your knowledge. Look for sellers who seem to offer high-quality images, as well as those who identify their offerings accurately. Register your areas of interest so that you will be notified when new items are being offered.

- Once you feel comfortable in what you have learned, you could consider buying a couple of lots to see how that works out. Then again, you could just decide to keep a virtual collection of the images, and not bother with buying the actual stamps. That's totally up to you!



*Image quality on general sales/auction sites can be highly variable, and some sellers post photos rather than scans, which have their own drawbacks. Above are a couple of images for similar items recently found on eBay. Left: what I imagine to be a really poorly executed scan with no cropping or effort to enhance the image. Right: I think this is a photo rather than a scan, but at least the focus and resolution are good enough to justify keeping for reference, if desired. I generally prefer scans, as photos tend to have issues with lighting and colors.*



### Summary & Conclusion

For me, this whole experience of learning about Cape triangles came about unexpectedly, due to circumstances that I neither planned nor foresaw. It's taught me some important lessons, and for that, I am truly grateful:

- It is really never too late to start learning a new area.
- Internet resources can accelerate learning compared to traditional methods.
- There is a wealth of opportunities for philatelic learning.

When it comes to stamp collecting, I think that indecision is neither fatal, nor even necessarily bad. What's important is to be open-minded enough to try something new on occasion, and then see where it may lead you. And if you're anything like me, it may just lead you to your next great collecting passion, as it has done for me, or into uncharted waters, where you could be the one to lead the way for the rest of us as you explore new areas.

I have now gotten to where I wanted to go with Cape triangles. I can reliably tell forgeries from genuine examples, as well as differentiate between the early and late printings which was something that totally confused me before I started this process. I will continue to work with my Cape triangles and try to round out my collection with another issue or two, but the main effort is now finished.



*In the category of strange-but-true discoveries made along the way, I present this example. Left: this stamp has been expertized as a genuine example of COGH Sc3 (SG5a) on Certificate No. 228223, found in the APS database. Right: Spiro forgery image found on Morten's website. In my opinion, the APS Certificate is incorrect, as this example is surely a forgery. While I am not afraid to tell all of you about this, I haven't had the courage to try to tackle this one with the APS, but I am convinced that I have it right.*

So now the question is, what next? I am still undecided about my next area of research (some things never change), but I am actively considering some possibilities, while trying to remain open to opportunities which may come my way. So, how about you? Has my story given you any food for thought? I hope so!

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank those who played key roles in making this article possible: To Steve Tomisek ([tomiseksj](#)) for inviting me to join the TSF Moderator Team this past year and to Michael Hide ([Londonbus1](#)) for your friendship and encouragement along the way. I have appreciated your confidence in me very much—it was clearly more than I had in myself.

I also want to thank Vince Chermishnok ([stanley64](#)) for setting up the TSF Zoom Meeting program last October, which led to my discussion with Morten ([classicalstamps](#)) and enabled me to get into personal contact with a noted expert in the field of Cape triangles.

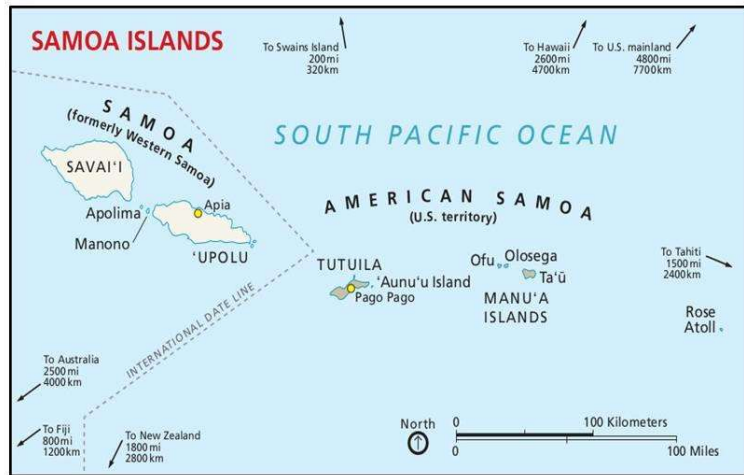
And I want to thank Morten for your great website and for allowing me to use images from that site for my article. I also sincerely appreciate the resources and guidance you have given me, which have been indispensable to my progress in this field.



## SAMOA, 1840-2000: Transition from Chiefly Fiefdoms to Nationhood

By Alex Walker (vikingeck)

Settled by migrating Polynesian peoples some 3000 years ago, the governance of the Archipelago was controlled by the elected holders of High Chief (Matai) titles. Possession of the 4 highest titles was not always peaceful, with occasional bloody civil wars. Only once, according to oral history, were all 4 titles in the possession of one individual, Queen Salamasina. Titles are not inherited—they are elective by groupings of minor title holders, and disputes arise.

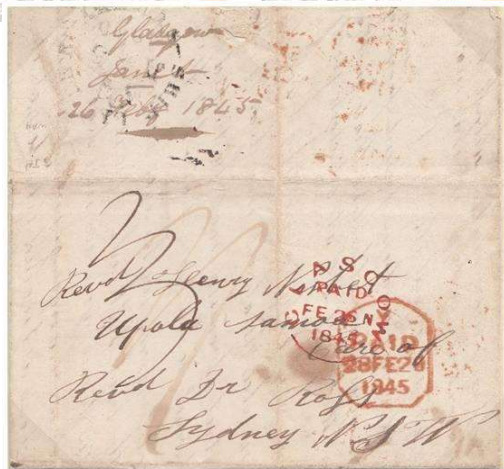


The first Europeans, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, were searching for whale oil in the Southern Ocean (also known as the Antarctic Ocean or the Austral Ocean) and copra from coconut plantations. Missionaries arrived in the 1830s coincident with yet another civil war. Their arrival provided the need for the first mail service to and from the islands.

A South Pacific Archipelago of 9 inhabited islands stretching 300 miles. Since 2011 Samoa straddles the International Date Line.

### The First Stamps (1877)

A newspaper launched by W. Griffiths of Fiji produced the first Samoan stamps, primarily to promote his newspaper, but also to convey mail to New South Wales, Hawaii and San Francisco. It was not a success as the European population was fewer than 200. With short production runs, the issues exist in 4 scarce successive states. They have had a bad press due to a flood of worthless philatelic reprints released when the service folded.



Ship letter from Glasgow to Sydney, then privately carried to Samoa. Addressed to "Rev. Henry Nisbet, Upolu Samoa, Care of Revd Dr Ross NSW"



Scarce 1878 State 1



Worthless 1890 Reprint



**German Agency Mail (1885)**

The largest European group was the employees and managers of the *Deutsche Handels und Plantagens Gesellschaft der Südsee-Inseln zu Hamburg*, mockingly referred to by the English speakers as “the Long-Handled Company.” As mail was haphazard and depended on visiting ships and traders, a German-Australian shipping line operated a service for about 15 months, from 1885, before an Imperial postal agency (**KAISERLICH DEUTSCHE POST AGENTUR**) opened in the German Consulate in 1887. German stamps referred as “**Vorlaufer**,” or forerunners, were used under UPU rules.



German Vorlaufers (forerunners)

**The Samoan “Kingdom” Post Office (1886)**

Samoan culture never had a “King” as such. Decisions were by consensus, but Europeans, especially the German Company, wanted to deal with a single Head of State, rather than a committee. Opinions were divided among three titled candidates and one **Malietoa Laupepa** was made “King,” with German support. In 1886, John Davis, a local photographer, got a mandate to run a Samoan Post office and issue stamps featuring palm trees & Malietoa.



Palm trees (3 perf & 3 wmk combinations)/King Malietoa

Without UPU recognition, those stamps only paid mail to Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii & San Francisco. Onward transmission over America required extra U.S. postage.



Extra U.S. postage was required to pay the rate from San Francisco



**Gunboat Diplomacy (1889 and 1899)**

The 1880s was a decade of minor civil war, with three rival factions, the Tamaseses, Mata'afas and Malietoas disputing the role of "Tupu Samoa" or High Chief. Heads were taken and shots exchanged, provoking military intervention in 1889 by Germany, Britain and the U.S., who all had cruisers in Apia harbor when a hurricane hit. 155 U.S. and German sailors drowned when their ships were wrecked.



*Hurricane damages ships in Apia Harbor*

With the death of Malietoa in 1898, Mata'afa, who had been exiled, was brought back, but civil war broke out again. This time, more Naval intervention, threatening and occasionally shelling the rival sides in the war, involved first European casualties. A diplomatic settlement by the Great powers in Berlin, in 1899, without Samoan input, abolished the title of King, appointed a Provisional Government, and partitioned the Islands between the USA and Germany.



*Provisional Government*



*U.S. Territory/Eastern Samoa*



*German Colony/The Western Islands*

**German Colony (1900-1914)**

A uniform key type, the "Kaiser's Yacht," for all ten newly acquired German colonies was adopted in 1901. The larger size stamps were supposed to be cancelled twice to prevent "cut and shut" fraudulent halves being used. Post offices in other villages were opened as a German Governor administered the Western Island group with a Samoan "sub King under the Kaiser," Mata'afa.



*Yacht Hohenzollern*

**Military Occupation (1914-1920)**

The outbreak of WWI brought another change in status. Unable to defend the islands, the German population surrendered to a military occupation by New Zealand. O.A.S. (on active service) mail, never officially sanctioned, was allowed for a month or two. German stamps were overprinted G.R.I., and surcharged in sterling, but supplies were limited. Shilling values are very scarce and frequently forged. Minor and major errors exist, some created by the printer!



*On Active Service (O.A.S.)*



*G.R. I.*

Within a few weeks, New Zealand stamps, overprinted "SAMOA," were delivered to Apia with a new date stamp, and all mail was censored by the Military.



**League of Nations Mandate (1920-1939)**

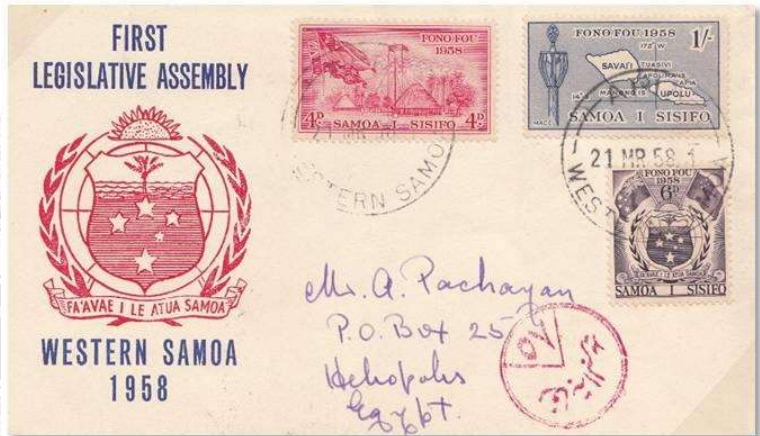
Under the Versailles Treaty of 1920, Germany was stripped of its colonies, and a mandate was granted to New Zealand to administer Samoa in the name of the League of Nations. Samoa was never a British Colony, so the Monarch’s head was not appropriate, reflecting the new status of the Islands. The George V stamps of the Military Administration were replaced in 1921 by the first Samoa stamps showing a flag (incorporating a Union Flag in one quarter), a native hut or “fale” and inscribed **SAMOA**. An attractive set of pictorials for **WESTERN SAMOA** was issued in 1935.



**United Nations Trusteeship (1946-1962)**

The League of Nations failed as WW2 broke out. The peace of 1946 replaced it with the new United Nations. New Zealand was entrusted with continued responsibility for Samoa with a view to eventual independence.

In 1958, a Samoan Assembly, or “Fono,” was elected with limited legislative powers and a new Parliament House opened at what had been the historic seat of Government until German times, Mulinu’u. The name on the stamps changed to **SAMOA I SISIFO**, the local version of Western Samoa, and a new coat of arms and flag were adopted.



**Independence (1962-2000)**

Independence was granted in 1962 and, for a time, stamps were inscribed Samoa I Sisifo, but date stamps still bore the old “WESTERN SAMOA” name. In the 1980s, the government in Apia decided, not without loud protests from the U.S. and American Samoa, the adjective “WESTERN” would be dropped and the official name would revert simply to “SAMOA.” The final change came in December 2011, when Apia elected to align itself to Asia Pacific time and moved west of the date line. Thus, Samoa changed from the last place to see the Millennium to the first country on Earth to welcome the sunrise.

