

# The Reading Room

## Postage Stamp Art

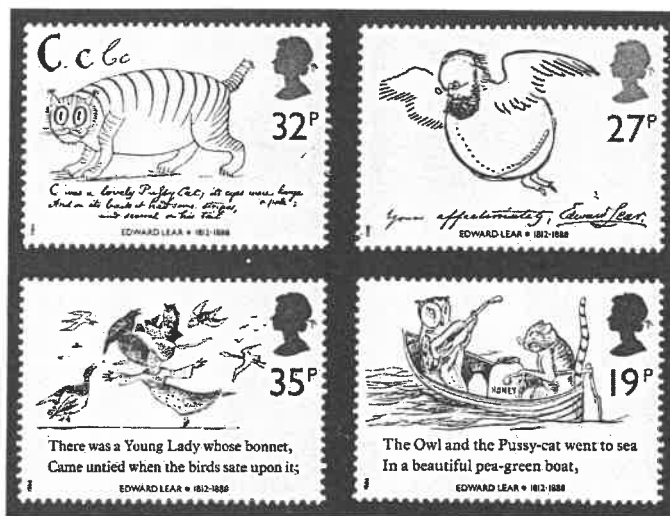
*Collecting stamps related to children's books can be a pleasurable pastime.*

by Bette J. Peltola

As a stamp collector and a teacher of children's literature, it was probably only a matter of time until I started collecting stamps related to children's books. I began by admiring the stamps Great Britain issued in 1979 to honor four children's books, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit*, and *The Wind in the Willows*. These are beautifully designed stamps that reflect the stories and even the original illustrations very well.

I was aware that the United States had seldom honored its children's books or the writers of books children read. In the Famous Americans series, stamps were issued to recognize Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, James Whitcomb Riley, and Joel Chandler Harris. Offhand, I can think of only a few additional examples, including a Tom Sawyer stamp with a Norman Rockwell illustration issued in 1972 and a Horatio Alger stamp issued in 1982. I wondered whether other countries were more like Great Britain, with an assortment of stamps relating to children's books, or like the United States, with a scarcity. I found that there are some of each and that the number of stamps available worldwide is surprisingly large. Some stamps are well-designed, and some are unattractive; some convey the essence of a story or writer, and others are less successful at doing so. The variety is remarkable.

It is possible to build a collection of stamps solely about specific children's books. In addition to the British set already mentioned, many other countries have honored children's books. Australia issued a set including *Blinky Bill*, *The Magic Pudding*, and three other Australian classics. Switzerland honored *Heidi*, *Pippi Longstocking*, *Pinocchio*, and *Max and Moritz* in a set of semi-postals. Sweden issued a set of four stamps including stamps for *Pippi Longstocking* and *Pelle's New Suit*. Israel issued a set of stamps about three of their children's books. *Pinocchio* has been the subject



of stamps from Italy, Uruguay, and other countries. Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* appears on a Canadian stamp. My collection contains many more examples.

It is also possible to collect stamps honoring children's book authors. In 1987, Sweden issued a booklet of ten stamps, all of which are about Astrid Lindgren's stories. Over the years, Sweden has issued several stamps

honoring Selma Lagerlof for her book, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. Hans Christian Andersen has appeared on several stamps from his native Denmark, including the lovely set from 1935. The stamps of many other countries also show Andersen or his stories. Robert Louis Stevenson is the subject of several stamps from Samoa, where he spent his last years, as well as from the British Virgin Islands, the Marshall Islands, and elsewhere. Recently Great Britain issued a set of four stamps with drawings and writings of Edward Lear. Johanna Spyri is on a Swiss stamp, Jean de la Fontaine is on a stamp from France, and some of Janucz.Korzak's stories are on a set of stamps from Poland. Anne Frank has been pictured on stamps from the Netherlands, Germany, and Israel. Japan has issued an extensive set of stamps based on the haiku of Basho.

Sometimes the work of illustrators is the subject of stamps. For example, the biennial international exhibition of children's books held in Bratislava (BIB) is the subject of sets of Czechoslovakian stamps for several of the exhibitions, and the stamps honor the prize-winning illustrators. Included over the years have been such familiar illustrators as Lisbeth Zwerger, Svend Otto S., Gennady Spirin, and Erick Ingraham. Susan Jeffers's work is on the souvenir sheet for the 1983 set.

Children's book illustrators occasionally are stamp designers. In the United States, Leonard Everett Fisher designed the *Legend of Sleep Hollow* stamp and the Colonial American Craftsmen set of stamps, released during the time of the United States' bicentennial celebrations, as were Fisher's books about colonial craftsmen. Jerry Pinkney designed the first nine of the Black Heritage series of stamps. Michael Foreman designed the 1987

Christmas stamps for Great Britain, Adrienne Kennaway is a stamp designer for Kenya, and Celestino Piatti designed a 1990 Swiss stamp.

Folk literature offers great possibilities for stamp collecting. Although most of the countries of the world have, at some time, issued stamps related to their folklore, I collect primarily stamps about stories that are available to our children. Several countries, including Greece, have issued stamps featuring their myths and mythological characters. Fables of Aesop and of LaFontaine have appeared on the stamps of Greece, France, Niger, and other countries. The brothers Grimm and their stories have appeared on several sets of stamps of both Germanies, and in the late 1980s, many countries issued stamps commemorating the bicentennial of the Grimms. Japan has issued several sets of folk tale stamps including the stories of Urashima Taro and of the Crane Wife. Mother Goose rhymes are illustrated on a sheetlet of stamps from Tristan de Cunha and on a Disney set from Sierra Leone; the figure of Mother Goose is on a stamp from Palau. Perrault's work appears not only on a French stamp with an illustration by Gustave Doré, but also on a set of stamps from Monaco, which shows all of the stories. Great Britain issued a set of stamps about the King Arthur stories.

Part of the enjoyment of collecting stamps for any topic is finding stamps that are not issued as the topic under consideration but are appropriate. For example, France and French West Africa have issued stamps honoring Antoine de St. Exupéry, but as pilot rather than as the author of *The Little Prince*. A set of Jersey stamps of paintings by John Andrew Gilfillan includes a painting of Robinson Crusoe.

Sometimes a story is on stamps because of a film made of the book. The 1990 United States stamp for the movie *The Wizard of Oz* is one such example; others are the 1988

Russian stamp set for Soviet animated films including *Winnie the Pooh*, and the 1989 set of stamps from Montserrat showing characters from the film *The Wizard of Oz*. If film is the tie-in, then a collector might include Disney stamps. Among the hundreds of Disney stamps are those about films based on children's books or traditional stories such as *Winnie the Pooh* (Anguilla), *Alice in Wonderland* (Maldives), and *The Jungle Book* (Bhutan). Sometimes the stamp for a Disney film is the only way in which a book or author has been recognized on a stamp. An example is the 1989 Disney set from Grenada for the film *Ben and Me*, based on Robert Lawson's book of the same title.

As a special interest this past year, I have been collecting stamps related to the Newbery and Caldecott medal and

honor books. Although no stamps honor the awards or the books themselves, I've found numerous tie-ins to the books. Stamps from the Vatican, Tonga, and St. Vincent feature the story of Noah's Ark (Peter Spier's *Noah's Ark* was a 1978 Caldecott Medal winner). In the 1980s, many countries issued stamps for Audubon's centennial (Constance Rourke's *Audubon* was a 1937 Newbery Honor Book). St. George, with or without a dragon, appears on the stamps of many countries (Trina Schart Hyman won the Caldecott in 1985 for her illustrations in *St. George and the Dragon* by Margaret Hodges). Louis Bleriot and his airplanes have been the subject of several stamps and of Martin and Alice Provensen's 1984 Caldecott Medal winner, *The Glorious Flight Across the Channel with Louis Bleriot*. Stamps abound, from the U.S. and elsewhere, honoring Abraham Lincoln, the subject of Russell Freedman's 1988 Newbery Medal book and of the d'Aulaires 1940 Caldecott Medal winner. France issued a stamp with a Modigliani pen-and-ink drawing of Blaise Cendrars, whose poem Marcia Brown translated and illustrated for the book *Shadow*, which was awarded the Caldecott Medal in 1983.

The decision to expand my stamp collection to include stamps related to children's award books was a purely subjective choice, and one of the pleasures of stamp collecting is being able to make such choices. One can be eclectic, as I am, or focus on an author, a book, an illustrator, or a culture's stories. Some people collect stamps about literacy, for which there are many new stamps in 1990, this international literary year. Libraries, children reading, adults reading to children, the history of printing, the history of bookmaking, and comics and cartoons are other topics.

Whatever the topic, the greatest fun, at least for me, is in the search. To learn about the stamps and find them, I read such publications as the weekly *Linn's Stamp News*, and I consult catalogs such as Scott's annual four-volume listing of the stamps of the world. When possible, I also attend shows and sales, browse in stamp stores, and talk with other collectors. A new set of stamps with unfamiliar stories often sends me to the library to seek out the stories or information on the country, the author, or the illustrator—or to a bookstore to buy a book to match the stamps in my collection.

*Bette J. Pettola is a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. She has been collecting stamps for eight years. The stamps on these two pages are from her collection.*

