

A Retrospective on Bob Morgan

This article appeared in the MABEOSZ publication Belyegvilag in September and October of 2015 and was graciously provided to us by Dr. Pal Lippai for translation to English and for reproduction in our own News. Please enjoy the article.

55 YEARS OF MEMORIES: BOB MORGAN

by Dr. Pál Lippai

Stamp collectors who build material for exhibit like to show on the last page something out of the ordinary for a “really big impact”. I am the same way. I have written in the past about Hungarian collectors whom received the highest awards in international exhibitions and about collectors who reside worldwide. To conclude this series, I would like to present someone – as if someone did not already know him – who is a really knowledgeable, prolific writer and collector.

As a collector, I did not follow the postal history of Hungary’s second inflation. I became exposed to it only later in 1997, when I met Bob Morgan at the San Francisco FIP World Exhibition. It was the first time that I was a member of an international jury, and that is where I encountered his exceptional hyperinflation collection. We quickly struck up a personal acquaintance at the hospitality table of the Society for Hungarian Philately (SHP). Our conversation flowed freely through dinner and we parted as good friends.

As fate would have it, in the next 15 years he and his wife Edith frequently hosted me in their home located in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood. I’ve learned a lot about his adventurous life and its many twists-and-turns.

As a young man in Budapest, Bob worked in the furrier trade. During the war, he was called up for forced labor. He twice escaped from forced labor camps, but both times was captured and sentenced to death. Miraculously, he managed to escape the sentence and survived the war. On one occasion, as he and his fellow collaborators were being marched for execution, they encountered another ragged group being marched by the Nazis. Thinking “My situation cannot be any worse than this” and in a sudden decision stepped over to the other detachment heading in the other direction. As it turned out, that group was being marched only to a worksite.

After the war, he went to the USA where he worked hard for a living. During this time, he also met a Hungarian refugee family with two daughters and married one of them. Edith became his companion for life and mother of their two sons Gary and Ron. Edith always accompanied Bob to stamp shows. She would sit at the SHP table, greet visitors and pass out information material. She was responsible for recruiting many new members. Upon her death one and a half years ago, she was remembered with deep feelings in the SHP newsletter.

For twenty years Bob was in the fur manufacturing business and the following twenty years in a wholesale import-export venture for gift items. I have admired many of the souvenirs brought home from their Far-East business travels.

In their feelings and in their language Bob and Edith were Hungarians, so – as soon as he could afford it – Bob started collecting Hungarian stamps again. At first, he assembled a nice country collection, but then turned his attention to imperforate stamps and achieved an exceptional, complete collection. In the early 1980s, by chance, he stumbled on the 1945/46 hyperinflation as a postal history theme. During his travels to Hungary, he met László Pákozdi and other important collectors, as well as several highly regarded stamp dealers. Through diligent research, he familiarized himself with the relevant literature and discovered that he had not only stumbled across

an exceptionally interesting and diverse area of postal history, but also realized that the so-called 'second inflation' also includes a number of extraordinary rare items.

Before I go any further, I would like to present two such rarities from his collection:



Due to the absence of postage stamps, the postmaster of Szikszó used Juridical-Court-fee stamps for the provisional payment of 7 pengő (2.20 pengő on the front, and 4.80 pengő on the back) for a registered, local letter. The cover on the left is illustrated in the 'Monograph of Hungarian Stamps' Vol. V., p.239.

On July 11, 1946, the Budakeszi postmaster created his own 'stamps' to frank this double-weight letter on the right addressed to the New York City suburb of Flushing. The correct rate should have been 650,000 billió pengő, but he was satisfied with a franking of the two self-created 200 and 400 thousand billió pengő provisional 'stamps'.

Bob has been an active member of the Society for Hungarian Philately (SHP) since 1974, later filled several officer positions. Currently, along with several former presidents, he is a Directorat-large and

was elected an 'Honorary Patron' at the organization's general meeting in February of last year. Over the years, he has authored many articles on interesting subjects and about Hungary's hyperinflation on the pages of The News of Hungarian Philately, the Society's newsletter. At the same time, he has continuously worked on improving his collection; he has bought extraordinary pieces from collectors and in auctions. He felt that a cover was not worth exhibiting until he was able to solve all of its convoluted mysteries.

I'm presenting two such 'not so easy' covers below:



On the left, stamp dealer Sándor Székely mailed this correctly franked registered letter to the British Colony of Sarawak.

The other letter went to 'nearby' Linz, and then it was forwarded to Passau with an added Austrian stamp for postage within Austria, creating a unique mixed-postage cover between two countries during the hyperinflation.

Slowly, very slowly, FIP judges acquiesced in awarding Gold medals for 'modern' postal history exhibits when – among other things – completeness, knowledge and personal research justifies it. So, Bob received his well deserved Gold medal in 'Washington 2006'; then in 2008, with two more

Golds, one in Israel and other in Bucharest. Following this, at the incredibly strong 'London 2010' competition, he scored 92 points to gain the Gold award.

But Bob has not rested on his laurels and has constantly worked on improving his knowledge and his exhibit material. Between 1999 and 2009, he earned 10+ gold awards at US National level exhibitions and thus was eligible for and received the elusive American Association of Philatelic Exhibitor's 'Diamond Award'. In addition, in 2010, he put together a 'single-frame' exhibit filled with extremely rare hyperinflation air mails that received a Gold medal at 'Filatelic Fiesta'. Celebrating his 90th birthday in 2014, at the National level ARIPEX show, he exhibited his eight frame hyperinflation collection, received a Gold medal and the top Grand award. In the USA, this was the first time that any Hungarian themed exhibit ever received the Grand award.

He is also very proud of his literary achievements: the 'Gervay Mihály Award' Budapest, 2000; followed with the 'Gróf László Trophy' from the Hungarian Philatelic Society of Great Britain. In 2003, he authored the book "The Hungarian Hyperinflation 1945-1946", which was published by the prestigious Collector's Club of Chicago. It is the comprehensive study on the subject. Although in the book's foreword, he states that the information is not complete, in reality it includes everything known about the subject. The book was exhibited at COLOPEX 2004, receiving a Gold medal and the Grand award. At APS 'StampShow 2004', the book earned a Gold medal and the Reserve Grand award, plus the 'Diane D. Boehret Award' for the 'best of the best' philatelic handbook published in the preceding year. The book is an indispensable reference for everyone collecting this topic.

Finally, I would like to present my friend Bob's two favorite air mail covers from among his many interesting items.



The air mail letter on the right was mailed to New Zealand on May 20, 1946, on the First Day of the 16th rate period. The rate for a foreign letter was 160 milpengő (millió pengő), plus the highest air mail surcharge: 2 Gold Francs (GF) for each 5 grams. On this day the pengő/Gold Franc conversion rate was 1,000,000,000 pengő = 1 GF. Total rate paid 2,160,000,000 pengő.

The air mail letter on the left is the only recorded air mail with Prague-New York FDC cachet – was mailed on June 14, 1946, in the 19th rate period. First, it went by train from Budapest to Prague, and from there by Pan-American Airline's first flight to New York. The rate for a foreign letter was 16,000 milpengő, plus the air mail surcharge 1 Gold Franc/5 grams. This letter's weight was 16 grams and therefore had to be paid for up to 20 grams, which equaled 4 Gold Francs. On this day the pengő/Gold Franc conversion rate was 500,000 milpengő per 1 Gold Franc. The total rate paid was 2,016,000 milpengő or 2,016,000,000,000 pengő.

In conclusion, I wish him good health and continued success.

Dr. Pál Lippai

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