



CHARCOT IN THE ANTARCTIC

Synopsis

Purpose

Comprehensively document the preparation, conduct and progress of the two Heroic Age French Antarctic expeditions led by Jean-Baptiste Charcot in 1903-05 and 1908-10, using a full range of polar philatelically acknowledged communications instruments.

Methodology - Use only material that:

- 1 - Is contemporaneously prepared or posted.
 - a - Much of the material will be personal and official communications from and to a large number of actual expedition members and participants.
 - b - Fully document each point in the expeditions' diverse itinerary.
 - c - Document all expeditions' phases, including pre-departure, departure, voyaging to and from the Antarctic, actions during in-transit protracted layovers, post-expedition return, closure and aftermath.
- 2 - Rely mostly on postcards that were the primary "travel" communications at this time, to include:
 - a - Subscription mail (set of official expedition event and subject related authorized photo-postcards sold for fundraising).
 - b - Coincident, locally produced commercial photo-postcards prepared by local entrepreneurs to mark the expeditions' arrival and duration, produced simultaneously with each expeditions' appearance. Generally produced and sold to event attendees and participants while the event still was occurring (e.g., arrival and departure ceremonies, subsequent honorific feting). Photographers quickly would take their pictures and, after having them speedily developed and produced into photo-cards, would have them for sale (often within an hour) back at the site of the event that probably still was in progress.
 - c - Though showing examples posted by non-expedition related interested locals, many pieces demonstrate usage by those directly associated with the expeditions they help document.
 - d - Primarily use contemporaneously posted items, although a few unposted cards are included because of their nature that makes them highly significant, even in that form.
- 3 - Follow chronological approach, rather than organizational by type of material, markings or sub-studies, so that expedition progress emphasis can be more easily perceived.
- 4 - Although virtually all the shown material is rare, no extraordinary display means will be used to showcase or overly highlight the even rarer gems, so as not to disturb continuity of the expeditions' progress and itinerary story line.
- 5 - This exhibit justifiably includes more than posted envelopes and cards. Polar philately, especially for certain types of polar activities, admits a wider range of communication instruments than might be authorized for other types of philately. This recognizes some major differences and difficulties involving communications from and to polar expeditions, especially those in certain polar realms and periods. Polar expeditions to the uninhabited Antarctic, especially during the Heroic Age of polar exploration (pre-flight period), often relied for their communications, especially their most important, upon telegrams, courier-delivered messages, left-behind cairn notes, etc., than on post office received letters and cards. Often this was by necessity. Their route and activities frequently were outside a realm served by any postal service.
 - a - Some letters are included that significantly support essential aspects of this exhibit's story line that cannot be replaced or replicated by any other means of communication. They are critical to the flow and comprehensive nature of this exhibit because of from or to whom they are directed, what they say and/or their time of dispatch.

Importance

- a - The Charcot Antarctic expeditions are among the most significant in Antarctic exploration history.
- b - Jean-Baptiste Charcot is the most important and respected of the pre-WWII French polar explorers.
- c - Philatelic material from any of Charcot's polar expeditions are among the most valued of all material in polar philately. That from his two Antarctic experiences (he also had numerous Arctic exposures) are considered to be among the jewels of Antarctic philately.
- d - Though well acknowledged as a vaunted achievement to be able to philatelically document the full range of both Charcot Antarctic expeditions, it nonetheless generally is regarded by the polar philatelic community as being something virtually impossible to accomplish.

Highlights

- a - Only known philatelic exhibit ever to have documented so comprehensively either or both "Charcot" Antarctic expeditions.
- b - Most polar philatelists would welcome just one piece from either of Charcot's Antarctic expeditions. Many must be content with something non-contemporaneous that usually is a commemorative cover or honorific postage stamp. Those fortunate to have more, normally do not have mail from or to an expedition participant. Even the most fortunate rarely have more than 2-3 pieces to represent Charcot's Antarctic expeditions. This exhibit has scores of different pieces, uniquely representing the largest assemblage by far of any such philatelic holding.
- c - The enormity of this range of material is even more extraordinary because it consists largely of participant mail, even among the showing of commercial postcards.
- d - As impossible as the range seems to be, it even is more incredible when seeing unique documentations, such as cairn mail, the only known La Coruna stop's recording, documentation of de Gerlache's short association with the first expedition and Antarctic whalers mail.
- e - Rarely is actual Antarctic Heroic Age expedition material, especially personal or official items, seen in such superb condition.
- f - Never are so many Charcot expedition members and other participants seen represented in shown material.
- g - Material even includes items from when expedition members left the expedition vessel and were travelling home aboard other means of conveyance.
- h - For completion, similarly elusive classic material from a concurrent Antarctic expedition (searching for it was one reason for first Charcot Antarctic expedition) is included.
- i - Though the emphasis is on documenting the many facets involving preparation and conduct of both Charcot Antarctic expeditions, there also is included some material that is philatelically extraordinary in itself (e.g., Dayné personal cachet, pneumatic expedition-associated mail on "Mission Charcot" stationery, several examples of *Pourquoi-Pas?* onboard stationery, expedition seldom seen vignette, expedition postally used vignette...)

Research

Exhibitor's contributions to research on this subject: 20-25 articles and four books, the last of which published in 2020, titled *Jean-Baptiste Charcot in the Antarctic - Whose Mail Documents Its History* was awarded two gold medals in international competition.

Exhibit History

This exhibit was first shown in the USA in 1997 (Aripex). Since then, it has been constantly improved with new findings and redesigned to obtain three Grand Awards (PNSE 2008, Milcopex 2014 and Saint Louis Stamp Expo 2023) and a Large Gold at Rocky Mountain Stamp Show 2017 and StampShow 2018. This exhibit in its current layout, including the postal rate tables for each port of call, is being shown for the second time in the USA.

March 2025

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BACKGROUND

After searching for the southern continent from the 16th to the 18th century and its discovery in the 19th century, expeditions are organizing in the early 20th century for the exploration of the Antarctic continent. It is the Heroic Age of the exploration of the Antarctic.

During this period, the French explorer Jean-Baptiste Charcot leads two expeditions between 1903 and 1910.

Western side of the Antarctic Peninsula surveyed and mapped by Charcot during these two expeditions.

PURPOSE

The exhibit material relates the story of these two expeditions, in chronological order, using only material contemporary with these expeditions.

TREATMENT

I will cover all the aspects of these two polar expeditions with the following displayed items, accepted in international polar philately: mail (covers and postcards), telegrams, autographed letters mainly from or to expedition members.



At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, one of the markers of historic change of communication is undoubtedly the mailing of picture postcards. This new, very popular way to communicate has its golden age between 1895 and 1920. It becomes an important means for members and supporters to postally document the two Charcot expeditions.

IMPORTANCE

As expeditions:

- They opened the way of having France be the major Antarctic participant that it is today.
- They helped all subsequent Antarctic participants by revealing geographic knowledge that previously was unknown.

As Polar Philately:

- The most complete postal documentation ever presented.
- Revelation of some postal documentation never seen before.



Jean-Baptiste Charcot (1867-1936) on the deck of his ship in 1903, before the departure of the first expedition.

HIGHLIGHTS

As challenging as this material is, some especially notable items are indicated with explanatory **red text**.

Where in the itinerary is identified in highlight (**underlined red**) at very bottom of each page.

EXHIBIT PLAN

- First Expedition 1903-05**
- Second Expedition 1908-10**

Postal information is indicated in tables and bold brown italic text.