

Synopsis

Official First Days of The Czechoslovak Judaica Issue of 1967

A Representative Examination of Czechoslovakia's Policy Regarding "Official" First Day Material

Purpose: To explain and illustrate Czechoslovakia's somewhat unique First Day program by focusing on a representative stamp issue released to commemorate 1000 years of Jewish culture in the Czech lands. The exhibit showcases the cancellations, First Day Sheets, government printed cacheted First Day Covers, and the policy granting temporary postal validity to even the First Day canceled stamps on those covers.

Consistent with the freedom provided exhibitors by the Manual of Judging and Exhibiting (7th Ed.), the exhibit focuses primarily on the First Day aspects of the Judaica Issue rather than the production and subsequent non-First Day uses of the stamps one would expect in a more traditional style of first day cover exhibit.

Background of the Stamps:

Czechoslovakia's relationship with its small Jewish population was always mixed at best. Although it was one of Israel's strongest supporters at independence in 1948, the Communist coup and subsequent anti-Semitic purges in the 1950s and early 1960s in Czechoslovakia and throughout the Warsaw Pact made the 1967 Judaica issue a surprise to many.

Policy on Postal Validity of First Day Canceled Stamps on Official FDCs:

Čekoslovenská Pošta, the Czechoslovak postal authority, began printing and servicing "Official" first day covers as early as 1947. Beginning no later than 1951, and likely earlier, postal authorities implemented a policy maintaining full postal validity at face value of the first day cancelled stamps on these FDCs for 15 days

from the issue date. Accordingly, a patron could purchase an Official FDC from the post office and, within 15 days of the issue date, mail it to anywhere in the world, while only having to add stamps making up the difference between the value of first day cancelled stamps and the total postage required for the mailing. Certain requirements, discussed and illustrated in the exhibit, accompanied this policy.

Treatment/Development: As noted, this exhibit focuses on the cancellations, First Day Sheets, and government printed (i.e., "Official") cacheted envelopes of the Judaica issue. Accordingly, while the exhibit will briefly discuss the stamps and their subject matter, you will not see either discussion or materials regarding stamp production or uses not involving official first day covers.

Rather, after a brief discussion of the stamps, the exhibit identifies and explains the two varieties of official First Day cancellations, followed by the First Day Sheets, and the government-produced, i.e., "Official," cacheted envelopes produced for the Judaica issue. The exhibit illustrates and explains both the cachets themselves and the somewhat unique policy allowing the use of Official covers with their canceled stamps to be nonetheless used for postage at full face value for a period of 15 days from the issue date. In this case, the stamps were issued on May 22, 1967, so the Official First Day Covers remained valid at face value for postal use, both domestic and international, through June 5, 1967. The exhibit shows both covers illustrating the applicable rules for such use and covers reflecting common postal services, as well as a variety of domestic and international destinations.

Official First Day Covers: While privately produced and incidental first day covers exist for Czechoslovak stamps, the focus of this exhibit is on the covers produced and serviced by the the postal service. It is only those “Official” First Day Covers that are entitled to the special first day cancels and maintained postal value policy.

“Official” First Day Covers generally are identifiable by the following:

- 1) A standard envelope, provided by the postal service, was used for the cover.
- 2) The stamps were arranged neatly in a specific order in the top right corner of the envelope.
- 3) The cancellation was a unique design that was only used on the first day. This was usually placed at the left edge for a single stamp, or beneath with multiple stamps. Care was given that besides cancelling the stamps it did not intrude too much on the surface of the stamp itself.
- 4) A specially designed cachet was displayed on the left-hand side of the envelope. Usually this was designed by the stamp designer or engraver.
- 5) The cachet includes the attribution: “Čzekoslovenská Pošta.”

Although many Official Czechoslovak first day cachets and cancellations expressly identified as “den vydání” (*i.e.*, Day of Issue), neither was required to do so.

Importance: A single commemorative series out of hundreds produced by an Eastern Bloc nation generally would be worthy of little special attention. But even setting aside what is special about the timing, context, and history of the Czech Judaica issue and Jews in the Czech Lands, the focus of this exhibit is on something else. Instead the exhibit uses the Judaica issue as representative to illustrate and explain the apparently unique aspects of the Czechoslovak postal authorities’ handling of

Official First Day items from at least the early 1950s through the separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in December, 1992.

Knowledge/Study/Research: The exhibit demonstrates secondary research from published sources regarding the subject matter of the stamps and Czechoslovakia’s policy regarding official first day covers. The exhibit also demonstrates primary research regarding both the subject matter and printing method of the official first day cachets, previously unpublished information regarding domestic and foreign Czechoslovak airmail rates of the time, and calculation of the appropriate postal rates on the covers shown.

Challenge/Difficulty: The exhibit is the result of more than 25 years of collecting and researching this material. Contrary to popular belief, locating more modern material such as this can be far more difficult because (1) it has not previously been subject to decades of accumulation and organization by prior specialists, and (2) modern postal history is often viewed as less worthy of being saved. While unmailed Czechoslovak First Day Covers are quite common, properly mailed FDCs, and especially those from or to unusual locations, are not. Again, the covers in this exhibit have taken 25 years to locate and obtain.

Condition: For the most part, the material is in excellent condition, as one generally would expect with modern material. However, several of the items did pass through the mails, such that the occasional nicks and small tears are to be expected.

PDFs of this Synopsis and basic background sources available at
<http://www.henak.net/HenakHome/JudaicaFDC.pdf>



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On May 22, 1967, Czechoslovakia issued a set of six stamps marking 1000 years of Jewish culture in that area, along with a thematically related First Day cancel, First Day Sheets, and government-created cacheted first day covers.

Stamp Design: Common design elements include a small, nine-branch Menorah or ritual candlestick,



and Československo spelled out in a font reminiscent of Hebrew lettering.

ČESKOSLOVENSKO

Stamp values are in either heller (h) or the Czechoslovak crown or Kronen (Kčs).

1 Kčs = 100 h

EXHIBIT PLAN

1. The Stamps
2. First Days
 - 2.1 First Day Cancels
 - 2.2 First Day Sheets
 - 2.3 Official First Day Covers
 - 2.3.1 Cachet Designs
 - 2.3.2 Policy for Postal Uses
 - 2.3.3 Destinations & Services

For the exhibit synopsis
& additional information:
www.henak.net/HenakHome/JudaicaFDC.pdf

