The Souvenir Sheet of My Youth
by Dr. Alexander Krugljakow

As long as I can remember, I've always had a passion for stamps. My uncle used to glue them into a notebook, whose cover had a "Worker with Star" stamp attached. That was the design showing a statue that stood atop the Soviet national pavilion at the 1939-1940 New York World’s Fair (Michel 693A). It excited my childish imagination. I was always eager to touch it and was immensely happy when I could do so. Later I received that little album as a gift (Figure 1).

I made my first independent purchase of stamps in August 1957. It was a set issued to mark the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, which took place in Moscow in July and August of that year. I consider that to be the day when I began building my collection (Figure 2).

At that time collecting stamps from earlier periods was difficult because of their high cost and the limited supply of mint and unhinged stamps, as well as because of my own age-related deficiencies: the lack of an income and a wise, knowledgeable mentor. So I collected everything that I could lay my hands on: Soviet postage stamps, foreign stamps, colonials, in both mint and used condition.

During the post-war years many Soviet specialists were working in the newly established Socialist countries, helping them build factories and develop industries. My friend Sergei Bodnev was living in China at the time because his parents were engineers who worked with Chinese colleagues to construct a metallurgical plant. He brought back many Chinese stamps featuring portraits of Mao Tse Tung, for which I traded my Soviet stamps. Our trading principle was simple: a picture stamp for a picture stamp. We had no idea about the existence of sets or varieties. We were free in our choice and for that reason happy. Sadly, Seryozha died young -- he drowned in the Dnieper River when he was only 13. May he rest in peace, my first philatelic partner.

It took a long time to learn how to collect stamps, and that education is ongoing. I studied the differences to be found between seemingly identical stamps, learned about the wide range of variations, and read a lot, but most importantly I associated with knowledgeable philatelists and learned much from them. During my long life as a collector I was fortunate to meet many interesting, unusual, erudite, well disposed, amazing individuals. I would group them all into a special caste -- the community of collectors. Our conversations may seem endless, but they are always educational. These are the joyous times when one can suddenly feel young again, realize that there is so much to learn yet, and strive to understand and memorize it all.

Early on, such meetings helped me find my own special niche in philately. The topic was called "New Face Values." It consisted of mint postal stamps that were issued after the USSR monetary reform of 1961, known as "Khrushchev's reform," a ten-to-one revaluation when the old ten rubles were equated to one new ruble. I remember Khrushchev's statement at the time: "Now every person will bend down to pick up a kopek."

I gave all of my foreign stamps to my younger brother and kept only the mint Soviet stamps.

Figure 1. My first album

Figure 2. My first stamps
Among all the stamps denominated in the new currency there were only three items that were difficult to find: a souvenir sheet with a red overprint commemorating the 25th anniversary of the first manned Soviet drifting station in the Arctic sea, North Pole 1 (Michel 2605 Bl. 30); a set of full sheets with margin tabs of the "Mushrooms" stamps (Mi. 2983y-7y); and the first numbered Soviet souvenir sheet issued to mark the XVIII Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo (Mi. 2938 Bl. 33), held October 10-24, 1964, in Japan.

The Olympics souvenir sheet became a rarity the day that it was issued. It was sold at Moscow's main post office for just one day, July 31, 1964. (Earlier versions of this article were published in [1, 2]). Its printing run was miniscule: 35,000 sheets, versus the millions of copies of other stamps that were regularly produced. The sheet was not provided to philatelic society members as part of the stamp subscription program. It was extremely difficult to purchase, and its selling price was exceedingly high. I was 14 at the time, and it was offered to me at a price of 25 rubles. To put that into perspective, my grandmother's pension was 40 rubles per month. Obviously, for many years obtaining this souvenir sheet remained an unfulfilled dream.

In 1974 I was a graduate student at the Leningrad Shipbuilding Institute, with a monthly stipend of 93 rubles. My wife and I had recently become parents of our first daughter. That is when I received an offer to buy this souvenir sheet for 180 rubles. I agreed to meet with the seller. Then I arrived at the appointed location clutching those 180 rubles in my shaking hand, my acquaintance told me apologetically that he had already sold that sheet to someone else for 220 rubles.

I was finally able to purchase this souvenir sheet (Figure 3) for 750 rubles on October 12, 1989. My 15-year-old daughter Olya was with me at the time, and as I handed over the money I looked at her, and her eyes were as big as saucers. She asked me, 'Papa, you paid that much money for that little piece of paper?!” Yes, at the time it was an awful lot of money (the average monthly salary in the USSR then was 120-150 rubles). However, considering my financial situation then, it was easier to pay 750 rubles than it would have been to part with 25 rubles in 1964.

The Tokyo Olympics souvenir sheet was the first sports philately design created by the well-known Soviet stamp artist Evgeniy Dmitriyevich Aniskin. In later years he took part in creating other stamps commemorating the Olympic Games. This sheet features a gymnast performing a floor exercise against the background of a stadium, and the Olympic emblem of the USSR team at the 1964 Games. The inspiration for the gymnast artwork was Tamara Alekseevna Lyuhina-Zamotaylova, a two-time Olympic team champion (1960, 1964), the absolute champion of the USSR in floor exercises (1961), a Merited Master of Sports of the USSR in gymnastics (1971), an international level judge (1975), and a Merited Trainer of Russia (1992).

The artwork design was based on a photograph of Lyuhina-Zamotaylova taken during her finals performance at the 7th All-Union Soviet Trade Union Summer Spartakiad in Moscow. The photograph was printed on page 19 in issue #10 of the "Fizkultura i Sport" magazine published in 1961 (Figure 4).
A souvenir medal of the USSR Olympic Committee showing the team’s emblem was minted at the time as well (Figure 5).

This first Soviet souvenir sheet to honor the Olympic Games was printed in a gold-tinged greenish color with red serial numbers. It was issued by "Goznak" printing shop number 21 under order number 12334 in July 1964. The sheet was gummed and imperforate, and executed by halftone printing on chalky paper. The sheet's dimensions are 90x70 mm. During the block's design process, the original emblem of the Tokyo Olympics in the upper left corner was replaced with the emblem of the USSR Olympic team. This change was ordered by N.D. Psurtsev, the USSR Minister of Communications. On June 23, 1964, she wrote a note in the lower left side of the proposed design board, "Place the emblem of the Soviet delegation" (Figure 6).

By tracing the path of this sheet from its initial draft through a series of iterations to the finished design, we can see how its appearance changed, with the various parts of the design and the serial numbers being moved around. It's quite possible that originally there were no plans to number all the souvenir sheets. Later a number was added below the Olympic emblem (Figure 7) and then moved down to the edge of the sheet (Figures 8a-b). During the preliminary work on this sheet, the color of the design was altered as well.

![Figure 5. USSR Olympic Committee medal](image5)

![Figure 6. The Olympic games souvenir sheet in the process of being created](image6)

![Figure 7. One of the early draft versions of the souvenir sheet](image7)

![Figures 8a-b. Later drafts showing the placement of the serial numbers (images and information provided by Valery Zagorsky)](image8ab)

I’m not sure how I came up with the idea — perhaps it was the latent resentment from childhood about an unfulfilled dream — but when my financial situation improved sufficiently, I decided to put together a collection of these souvenir sheets based on their serial numbers: I would obtain one sheet from every thousand (a total of 35 sheets), in the first range of one thousand numbers obtaining one sheet from every hundred (10 sheets), as well as multiple sheets from the first one hundred numbers (Figure 9).

During the last 25 years I have amassed a relatively large number of these souvenir sheets. My collection contains approximately 0.3% of the total number printed. Among them I found all of the known varieties and made some new discoveries.

The foremost and well-described variety [3-10] is the distorted star (Figure 10) in the team’s emblem. This regular variety is the result of a defect
in the printing die during letterpress printing of the full press sheets. It is assumed that the full press sheet held six souvenir sheets (2x3). The sheet with the distorted star was in the third position, as shown in the schematic drawing, Figure 11, and in Figure 12. The remaining sheets have normally shaped stars. Knowing this, we can easily calculate that the distorted-star variety sheets constitute one-sixth of the full press run, or approximately 5,800 sheets.

By studying the uncut printed sheet in Figure 12, we notice another interesting fact. The serial numbers were applied to the full uncut sheets before they were cut to be stacked and packaged for shipping. The numerical step between the numbers in the full sheet's vertical columns is 334. (For example, #034986 - #034652 = 334.) If we took 334 consecutive sheets and cut them apart, we would be able to make two stacks containing 1,002 souvenir sheets each. This means that sheets with distorted stars would not be present in every stack, and considering their position they would have to bear the last three numbers that were assigned to their position in the sheet, from 335 to 668.

All this reasoning would be true if the uncut sheets really did consist of only six souvenir sheets each. I have sheets with distorted stars, however, that bear the following numbers: 019911, 020862, 021247, 022019, 022716, 023227, and 023946. These fall outside the expected numerical range. This suggests that the actual full printed sheets were larger than the sheet shown in Figure 12. That would explain how distorted-star sheets can be found with serial numbers in every one of the 35 groups of thousands that comprised the full issue. Additionally, we may propose that not every part of the large press sheet, whose dimensions we still don't know, contained souvenir sheets with distorted stars. It is an open question why such sheet varieties are most frequently found in a numerical range between 019000 to 024000, although the distorted-star sheets can also be found with other lower or higher serial numbers, including 000659, 032368, and 034482.
According to the first version explored here, each of the stacks of 1,002 had two extra souvenir sheets whose numbers could have been 000000. One of them would have been glued to the stack’s packaging as a label showing the contents, with the second one remaining unused. There is just such a souvenir sheet (Figure 13) gummed and in perfect condition in Edward Lurye’s collection. If this supposition is true, there should have been a total of 70 souvenir sheets printed with the number 000000. But there is another possibility: that all-zero numbered sheets (no fewer than 35) could have been printed during the printing die’s set-up process or during the adjustment of the numerators.

Some catalogs [6] provide information about the No. 000000 souvenir sheet and price it very high. As noted earlier, such sheets certainly do exist, but they were never placed into circulation nor intended to be used as postage. They were tentatively numbered using six consecutive zeros at the Goznak printing facility in the process of developing and printing various essays of the final Olympics souvenir sheet. Later they were used as identification labels on wrapped packages of numbered souvenir sheets. Each package contained 1,000 sheets total. Consequently, since the printing run was 35,000 sheets, there should be 35 individual souvenir sheets with the number 000000. An image of one such sheet removed from the packaging was kindly provided by Valery Zagorsky from his personal collection (Figure 14a).

Lately a large number of fake souvenir sheets with this number has appeared on the philatelic market (Figures 14b-15). As a rule, their quality of printing is relatively poor, and they have been produced by using various printing methods. For example, Dmitri Dubovik has in his collection a fake souvenir sheet (Figure 14b) that was typographically printed on thick paper.

I have a postally used envelope in my collection that is franked with a fake zero-numbered sheet that was also typographically printed on chalky paper. The sheet’s dimensions are 88x66 mm.
A book titled "Philately Under Five Rings," examining Olympics-related topical stamp collecting, was published in 1966 [11]. It had a full-color insert that reproduced almost full-sized copies of both the green and pale red Tokyo Olympics souvenir sheets (Figure 16). The green one was zero numbered. The images shown in the book differ in many small ways from the actual souvenir sheets, but in general they look quite genuine. Considering that at the time the green souvenir sheet was a great rarity and many collectors had never seen it, dishonest dealers could sell images cut out of the books as the genuine article, which is exactly what they did. They cut out the image, glued it to an envelope, and mailed it by post or used it on fake letters. The buyers, thrilled by the prospect of owning a rare souvenir sheet, did not notice that the sheet was a smaller size and that the image was not nearly as sharp as it should have been, etc.

Occasionally one finds interesting or curious number combinations such as 00-4-000, 00-4-00-5, 0-05-5-05, 0-10-0-9-0 (Figure 17).

I do have one unique sheet in my collection (Figure 18). It is missing a period after the "USSR post" [ПОЧТА СССР]. Very few collectors, experts, catalog authors, and auction house representatives are aware of this variety's existence. If any one of my readers has a similar sheet in their possession, I would be enormously grateful to hear from you.

Speaking of periods, the period that precedes "Tokyo" exists in a number of varieties. It can be round (Figure 19), round with a light-colored band around the circumference (Figure 20), tear-shaped (Figure 21), or tear-shaped with a light-colored circumference band. Two additional, less obvious variations have also been noted [4], thus making a total of six types of periods in that position.
The shape of letters in "Tokyo" and "USSR post" can vary as well. In Figure 23 the second "O" in "Tokyo" resembles a polygon, and the letter "P" in "CCCP" has a drop-like shape at the bottom of its foot.

![Image of Tokyo and USSR post]

Figure 23. Polygon "O" and a drop-like bottom of "P"

There are souvenir sheets with smudged digits in the serial number, which appears at an angle or has moved up closer to the text (Figures 24-25).

![Image of angled and smudged number]

Figure 24. Angled and smudged number

![Image of smudged number shifted toward the text]

Figure 25. Smudged number shifted toward the text

Some catalogs [3] mention a variety that has a dot-like splotch under the "руб. 1"; however, they don't provide an illustration. I have not seen that variety, but I do have a sheet in my collection that has a dark dot with a light-colored area around it located to the right of the "руб. 1" (Figure 26).

![Image of dot to the right of руб. 1]

Figure 26. Dot to the right of "руб. 1"

An almost colorless synthetic layer was applied to the paper to serve as a base for the gold ink, so that the gold would not flake off or darken. But on some souvenir sheets, a shift in location of this layer can be seen (Figures 27-28). Sometimes this displacement is assumed to be a double impression, but I do not believe that to be the case. Applying the synthetic underlayment was a technical operation during which a shift was possible. Actually, there are examples of a double impression of the synthetic layer, but in those cases we see two outlines of the underlayment (Figure 29).

![Image of an upward shift of the synthetic layer]

Figure 27. An upward shift of the synthetic layer

![Image of a shift of the synthetic layer in the team's emblem upward (a) and to the left (b)]

Figure 28a-b. A shift of the synthetic layer in the team's emblem upward (a) and to the left (b)

![Image of a double impression of the synthetic layer (image provided by Alexander Zverev)]

Figure 29. A double impression of the synthetic layer (image provided by Alexander Zverev)

Among other variations encountered are a vertical displacement of the hammer and sickle inside the frame of the Soviet Olympic team (Figure 30). This also shows that the red color was applied after the gold.

![Image of a shift of the hammer and sickle downward (a) and upward (b)]

Figure 30. A shift of the hammer and sickle downward (a) and upward (b)

The white numerals of the year "1964" are occasionally dusted with gold specks (Figure 31 below).
The gymnast’s outline is sometimes thin (Figure 32), and occasionally the gold ink is slightly runny, creating thicker lines and a tousled crown-like hair effect (Figure 33).

The golden-greenish artwork of the souvenir sheet was printed atop a yellowish-greenish background. As a result, one finds many shifts of those colors relative to each other. I have two rare varieties in my collection. In one case the green color has shifted left relative to the background, creating a "thin leg" (Figure 34). In the second case the gold color has shifted right, creating a white chest outline (Figure 35).

There are small variations in the background rays in the lower left corner of the sheet (Figures 36-38).

The souvenir sheet's original gum has a very specific vertical column-like structure. This can be seen well on a darkened and enhanced image (Figure 39). It differs considerably from the gum on many other Soviet-issue stamps and souvenir sheets, which is why it is always easy to distinguish the original gum from regummed stamps.

As a rule, the gum color is white (Figure 40), but occasionally one finds souvenir sheets with a light yellowish gum tint (Figure 41).

Some souvenir sheets display a significant displacement of the artwork, which occurred when the large printed sheets were being cut apart (Figure 42). Misalignment of the sheet's center on the cutting machine caused the shift. This can easily be seen by comparing souvenir sheet images (Figure 43).
In addition to the fake souvenir sheets with the number 000000 that were discussed earlier (Figures 14-16), one finds fake sheets with regular numbers (Figure 44). They are not difficult to produce using gummed paper and modern copying machines. However, on the genuine sheets the red and gold colors lie flat and even, and the green color is somewhat flaky. The fake sheets are quite different, showing a screen pattern. Additionally, their colors, gum, and paper differ from the genuine sheets.

There exist some genuine souvenir sheets with fake postmarks (Figure 45). In this case it seems difficult to explain why anyone would cancel a genuine sheet with a fake cancellation, "21.12.1977, Moscow-1-272", and write the Canadian address in Russian.

For the first day of issue, July 31, 1964, two official first day covers were produced. Both had the same design, a javelin thrower against the background of a stadium, but some designs were blue and others were burgundy. Only the blue envelopes were cancelled at Moscow's international mail post office, using a red postmark. (Figure 46 shows one such FDC franked with a rare distorted-star souvenir sheet.)
Two years after the numbered souvenir sheets were issued, an important meeting of philatelists was held at Moscow’s hotel Yunost [Youth] on March 10-11, 1966, in order to establish the All-Union Society of Philatelists (VOF). Convening members were the Moscow City Collectors’ Society and a number of similar groups from other parts of the USSR. This first VOF convention chose Ernst T. Krenkel, a famous polar explorer and awarded Hero of the Soviet Union, as the society’s first chairman (Figure 49). During the first year of its existence the VOF numbered approximately 20,000 members.

The Soviet post issued a special overprinted stamp (Michel 3192) to mark the opening of the conference. The overprint reads, "Founding conference of the All-Union Society of Philatelists. 1966". A matching first day cover cachet was designed by artist V.V. Zavyalov (Figure 50).

![Figure 49. Hero of the Soviet Union Ernst T. Krenkel, first chairman of the All-Union Society of Philatelists](image)

Each delegate from the 170 local philatelic clubs and societies at the first VOF conference received a special convening conference souvenir envelope with a cachet designed by artist E.D. Aniskin. It was franked with a numbered Tokyo Olympics souvenir sheet and cancelled with the special VOF conference postmark (Figure 51).

![Figure 50. FDC postmarked "VOF founding conference"](image)

There is one more known special use of the Olympics souvenir sheet, on a USSR Ministry of Communications presentation folder (Figure 52). The booklet is marked with an "Exposition philatélique Paris-Moscou-Leningrad • (Paris 19–20–21– XI 1966) •" handstamp and has an embossed seal of the USSR on its cover.

![Figure 52. A presentation folder from the USSR Ministry of Communications issued for the "Paris-Moscow-Leningrad philatelic exposition" (image provided by Alexander Zverev)](image)

Ordinary letters franked with numbered Olympics souvenir sheets that have been carried by post are extremely rare, but they do exist. I have never seen any of these souvenir sheets used on mail sent on the first day of issue. I do have one cover, however, that bears the distorted-star variety of the sheet, mailed on March 15, 1983, from Almaty to Edwecht in East Germany (Figure 53).

![Figure 53. The distorted-star variety souvenir sheet mailed from Almaty on March 15, 1983](image)
On rare occasions, it is possible to find covers bearing this souvenir sheet that were sent from the international mail post office in Moscow on October 10, 1964, which was the opening day of the Tokyo Olympics (Figure 54), as well as on the day the games closed, October 24, 1964.

On September 28, 1964, one month after issuing the numbered souvenir sheets, the government printing office Goznak began selling the unnumbered version — a gold, red, and pale red souvenir sheet (Michel 2960, Block 35). Three hundred thousand sheets were produced under printing order number 12453 (Figure 55).

The artist, E.D. Aniskin, removed the numbering and changed some colors of the design (Figure 56). The same printing plates were used to print the pale red sheets as were used in the production of the numbered sheets (Figure 57). We know that even the printers were the same women, because each printer had her own identification number: Smirnova (2540), Katyushkina (2543), and Vinogradova (2578). The printing technique remained the same as well, and the sheets were printed on chalky gummed paper. The size of the pale red sheets is 90x70 mm. As a result, one can find the same varieties among these souvenir sheets as we have seen with the green ones.

Let us look at an example of the best known variety, with the distorted star (Figure 58) in the team’s emblem. Regardless of whether the sheets were printed in groups of six or more, as discussed earlier,
we can calculate that approximately 50,000 distorted-star pale red souvenir sheets were produced. That is not a very large number, and I think that currently the pale red distorted-star souvenir sheets are undervalued.

**Figure 58. A gold, red, and pale red souvenir sheet with a distorted star**

I have in my collection one unnumbered souvenir sheet that is quite unusual. I describe it as a "diffusion of copper in gold ink." Depending on how the sheet was preserved, or as a result of some changes that occurred in the composition of the gold during printing, there is a possibility that atoms of copper were activated. Copper can interact with some gasses to create copper sulfate crystals (CuSO₄) that have a greenish-bluish cast. This can be seen in Figure 59.

**Figures 59a-b. Diffusion of copper in gold ink**

Similar results of a chemical reaction can be seen in the case of a green numbered souvenir sheet as well (Figure 59). At high magnification we can clearly see (Figure 60) how flakes of greenish-blue color separated out of the gold ink, creating an uneven background. These flakes cover the team's emblem and the face and body of the gymnast, where they resemble a rash. On such sheets the gold color is not shining as it should, but looks bronze.

**Figures 60a-b. Diffusion of copper in gold ink (scan provided by Vitaliy Malov)**

While the diffusion of copper in gold ink occurs naturally, chemical treatment of the printed colors with substances such as chlorine can artificially create fake rarities. One such augmentation intended to defraud collectors is shown in Figure 61, where the red-colored ink of the hammer and sickle has been removed.

**Figure 61. Red color of the hammer and sickle removed by application of chemicals**

There were no new cachet envelopes produced for first day cancellations of the pale red souvenir sheets when they went on sale on September 28, 1964 (Figure 62). Instead, cachets featuring the spear thrower in red that were made for the numbered block were reused for the pale red versions. It is not known whether blue cachets were used as well. For that reason, FDCs of the pale red sheets (Figures 63-64) are found less often than FDCs of the earlier numbered sheets (Figures 46-48). We should also note that many
"Extracted from a Mailbox" Markings and Clandestine Soviet Censorship

by David Skipton, Alexander Kolchinsky and Steve Volis

"Extracted from a mailbox"

Summary

For the first time in philatelic literature, this article argues that some "Extracted from a mailbox" (Vynuto iz pochtovogo yashchika) markings, both before and after World War II, were:

1) clandestine censorship-related, employed for over 15 years during the OGPU to the USSR MGB (Ministry of State Security) period, stretching from 1931 to 1947 and probably longer than that;

2) used to inform secret police operational officers about where an item of mail was found;

3) not censor marks per se but auxiliary markings; and were

4) employed in direct support of physical surveillance operations.

Background

"Extracted from a mailbox" markings, or simply "from a box" handstamps, were nothing new in the Soviet era. They extended back to tsarist times and were inextricably linked with registered (zakaznoye) mail. These markings appear to have been introduced around 1880 or so, perhaps a bit earlier, but no more than eight years after the advent of registered mail on January 1, 1872, when the 1871 Provisional Decrees Concerning the Postal Department entered into force. Manuscript “extracted” entries were applied well before 1880. [1]