

Blood banking and philately

John W. King, M.D., Ph.D.

Department of Blood Banking

Philately is often considered to be no more than an interesting hobby but it can be a powerful public relations tool. A well designed stamp not only attracts the eye of the collector but is also seen by millions of people receiving and sending mail. Blood banking is a specialty that can benefit particularly from this exposure because of the continuing need for blood donors. A review of Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue¹ shows that postal services around the world have issued a considerable number of stamps depicting blood transfusion activities or bearing designs related to this field. Stimulated by an early interest in stamp collecting and by an article by Kyle and Wolman,² I have collected these stamps for my own pleasure, for use in blood donor recruitment, and to decorate the blood bank donor room. Reproduction of stamps is now permitted and photographs make excellent visual aids and attractive wall decorations.

Because of the large number of stamps issued annually, many philatelists have given up trying to collect every stamp issued by every country but instead have limited their collections to a particular country or topic. Favorite subjects for topical collections are animals, sports, aerospace, religion, science, and particularly medicine. From

the philatelist's point of view, a collection limited to blood banking has many advantages. Because of the subject, no stamps in this category were issued before 1940; therefore the expense of obtaining old or rare items is not a deterrent. Most of the stamps are attractive, since they have been designed for their advertising value as well as for their primary function as an indication of postage paid.

In 1968, 39 stamps related to promoting interest in blood donations or to honor blood donors were listed by Kyle and Wolman.² These stamps were issued by 22 postal administrations. I have chosen to include commemorative stamps issued in honor of scientists whose works have contributed to progress in blood banking, such as William Harvey and Karl Landsteiner. Others such as Pasteur could be included, but the collection would be increased by hundreds of issues. There have been a number of

blood bank stamps issued since 1968, so that the list now numbers 60 stamps issued by 33 postal administrations. Most numerous in the collection are stamps issued to honor donors or to publicize donor recruitment. Frequently, they are part of a series issued to show Red Cross activities; transfusion activities appear on one or two stamps of the series. Those Red Cross series which fail to show blood transfusion activity are excluded. The oldest stamp in the list is the Hungarian stamp of 1942; it depicts a transfusion scene and is one of a series of four issued to honor and to raise money for the Red Cross. Other designs on the stamps in this series are wounded soldiers, war orphans and widows, and, somewhat inexplicably, carrier pigeons.

The pelican stamp issued in 1957 by the Netherlands is part of a series which depicts Red Cross activities. The ancients believed the pelican fed its young on its own blood, and hence it was used to symbolize blood donors. These stamps were issued to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the Netherlands Red Cross. They were issued with a surtax designated for Red Cross activities. Belgium had also used the pelican motif previously on a single stamp issued in 1956 (*Fig. 1*) to commemorate the centenary of the International Red Cross.

The only stamp issued by the United States which pertains to blood donors or blood banking is the handsome blue and red blood donor stamp of 1971 (*Fig. 2*). The six-cent stamp "commemorating blood donors and to urge increased participation in this vital program" was issued on March 12 in New York at the opening day of the Interpex Stamp and Coin Show. The



Fig. 1. Belgium, 442; pelican feeding her young.

horizontal design was created by Howard Munce of Westport, Connecticut. The print order for this stamp was 130 million.³ It was issued as a consequence of the interest and consider-

able effort of the American Association of Blood Banks and others.^{2, 4} The United States Postal Service attempts to limit its new issues to a reasonable number and is under considerable

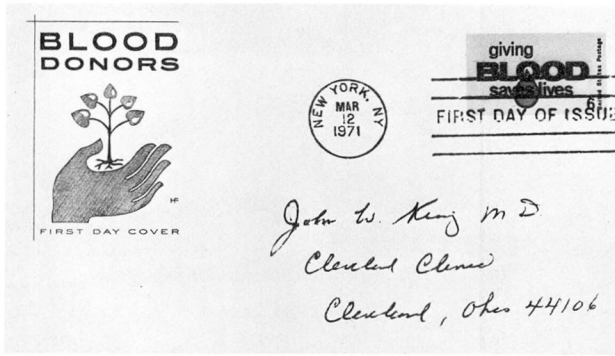


Fig. 2. United States, 1417; commemorative blood donor stamp, first day cover.



Fig. 3. Left, Argentina, 682; right, Russia, 1947; commemorative, William Harvey.

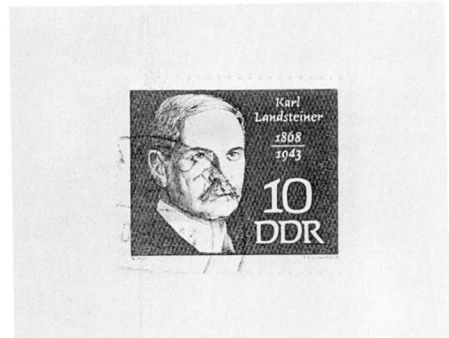
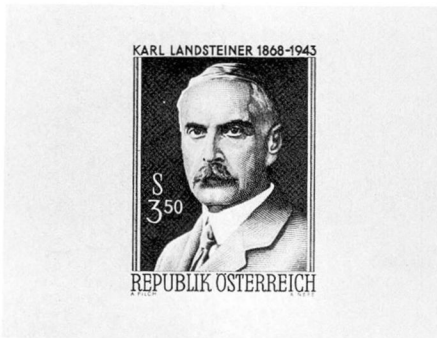


Fig. 4. Left, Austria, 813; right, German Democratic Republic, 1025; commemorative, Karl Landsteiner.

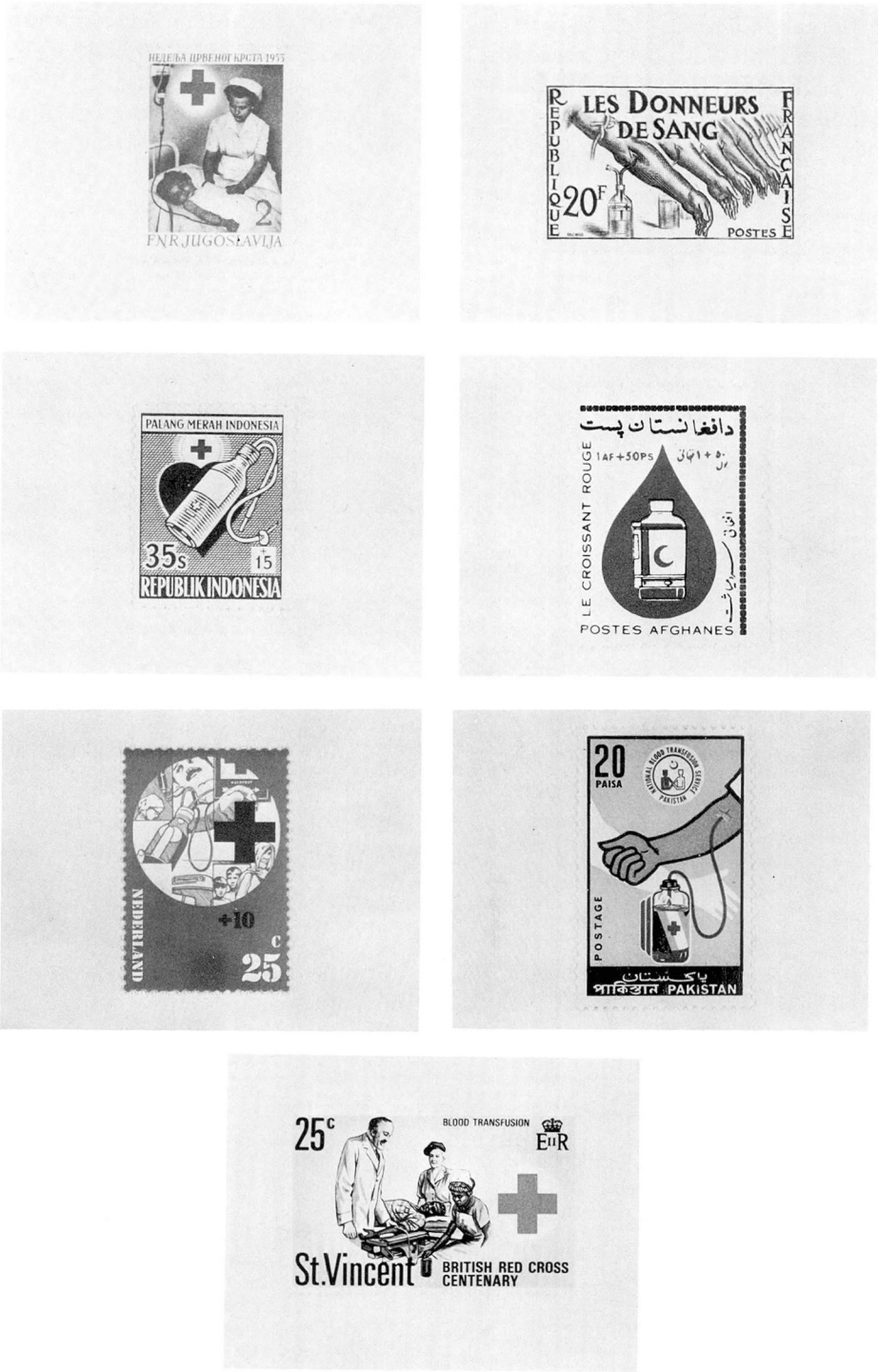


Fig. 5. *Top left*, Yugoslavia, RA11; *top right*, France, 931; *left*, Indonesia, 94; *right*, Afghanistan, B72; *left*, Netherlands, B486; *right*, Pakistan, 331; *bottom*, St. Vincent, 302.

pressure to include specific interests of many individuals or groups. The United States issued 24 stamps that year beginning with the American wool industry and ending with the two Christmas stamps. In view of the present need for volunteer donors, it would seem that stamps related to this subject are more appropriate than much of the trivia that is selected. Al-

though the blood bank community is grateful for the 1971 issue, the time has probably arrived to consider a new issue.

The inclusion of selected scientists (Fig. 3) gave us two stamps honoring William Harvey (1578–1657) who propounded the theory of the circulation of blood. In 1959 he was honored in a series of three stamps from Argentina

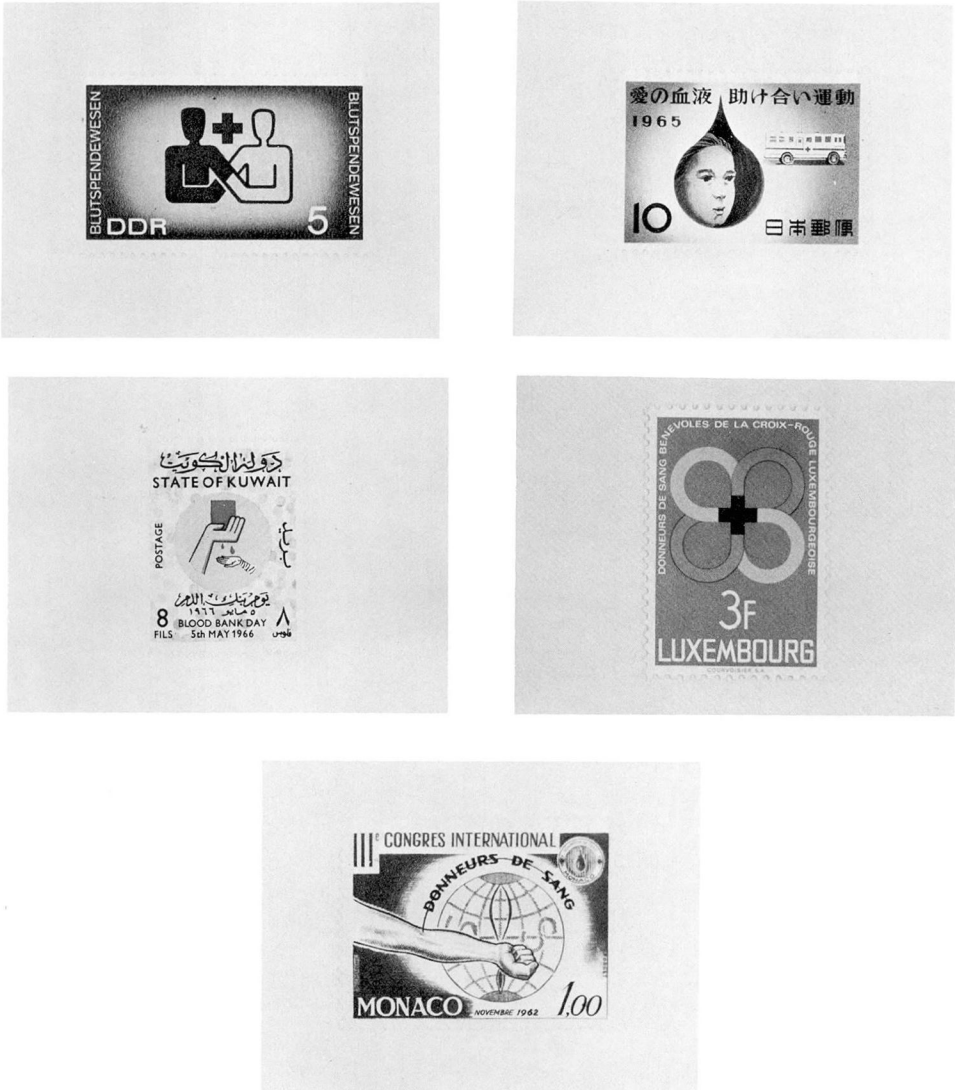


Fig. 6. Top left, German Democratic Republic, 854; top right, Japan, 847; left, Kuwait, 327; right, Luxembourg, 472; bottom, Monaco, 510.

Table. Stamps collected or to be included in the blood banking stamp collection

Country and date of issue	Scott cat. no.	Type	Face value	Description
Afghanistan 1964	B72	Semipostal	1af + 50p	Transfusion kit, series for Red Cross and Red Crescent Soc. week
Albania 1967	B36	Semipostal	65 + 25q	Symbolic transfusion, series for 6th Congress of Albania Red Cross
Argentina 1959	682-4	Commemorative	50¢, 1p & 1.50p	21st International Congress of Physiology, honoring William Harvey
Argentina 1950	B18	Semipostal	1 + 0.50p	Child receiving blood, issued for antileukemia fund
Austria 1966	813	Commemorative	3.50S	Karl Landsteiner, centenary of his birth
Belgium 1956	442	Commemorative	2f	Pelican feeding her young, honoring the blood donor service of the Belgium Red Cross
Belgium 1959	B641-5	Semipostal	40 + 10c, 1fr + 50c, 1.50fr + 50c, 2.50f + 1 fr, 3 + 1.50fr	Allegory of blood, centenary of the International Red Cross
Brazil 1968	1108	Commemorative	5¢	Symbolic transfusion, voluntary blood donor day
Burundi 1967	B37	Semipostal	17 + 1fr	Nurses in blood bank, to commemorate League of Red Cross Societies
Egypt (U.A.R.) 1971	877	Commemorative	20m	Symbolic bleeding donor, blood saves lives
Dahomey 1967	237-8	Commemorative	30fr, 45fr	European and African blood intermingled
Finland 1951	B105-6	Semipostal	7 + 2m, 12 + 3m, 20 + 5m	Giving blood and donor medal, part of a series for the Red Cross
Finland 1973	B194-196	Semipostal	25 + dp, 30 + dp, 50 + dp	Blood donors and nurse, surtax for the Red Cross
France 1959	931	Commemorative	20f	Blood donors, to stimulate volunteer blood donations
Gabon 1967	C54-55	Airpost	50f, 100f	Human heart and transfusion apparatus, to honor the Red Cross

	854-5	Commemorative	5pf, 40pf	Symbolic blood transfusion, to publicize the donor program and health education
German Democratic Republic 1966				
German Democratic Republic 1968	1025	Commemorative	10 DDR	Karl Landsteiner, one of a series devoted to various scientists
Hungary 1942	B144	Semipostal	3 + 18f	Blood donor, series for Red Cross activities
Indonesia 1956	B94-5	Semipostal	35 + 15s, 50 + 15s	Blood bottles, part of a series for the Indonesian Red Cross
Japan 1965	847	Commemorative	10y	Drop of blood and a child, blood donor week
Kuwait 1966	327-328	Commemorative	4fil, 8fil	Symbolic units of blood, to publicize blood donor day
Lebanon 1963	C376-9	Airpost	5p, 20p, 35p, 40p	Blood transfusion, centenary of the International Red Cross
Luxembourg 1968	472	Commemorative	3f	Red Cross and symbolic transfusion, honoring blood donors
Monaco 1962	510	Commemorative	1f	Donor arm superimposed upon the world, 3rd International Congress of Blood Donors
Mongolia 1973	323, 325	Commemorative	30m	Blood banking activities
Netherlands 1953	B257	Semipostal	10 + 5c	Nurse giving transfusion, part of a series for the Red Cross
Netherlands 1957	B311	Semipostal	4 + 3c	Pelican feeding its young, part of a series for the Netherlands Red Cross
Netherlands 1972	B486	Semipostal	25 + 10c	Blood donor, series for the Red Cross
Nicaragua 1965	C560	Airpost	25c	Transfusion, part of a series for the centenary of the International Red Cross (which was in 1963)
Nigeria 1963	148	Commemorative	6p	Blood donor, series for centenary of the International Red Cross
Pakistan 1972	331	Commemorative	20p	Blood donor, for the Pakistan National Blood Transfusion Service

Table.—Continued

Country and date of issue	Scott cat. no.	Type	Face value	Description
Russia 1947	1947	Commemorative	40K	William Harvey, 300th anniversary of Harvey's death
Russia 1965	2996, 2997	Commemorative	4K, 4K	Donors and donor emblem, issued to honor blood donors
Saint Vincent 1970	302	Commemorative	25¢	Blood transfusion, series for centenary of the British Red Cross
Switzerland 1963	B327	Semipostal	30 + 10c	Blood bottles, part of a series issued for the Red Cross
Togo 1959	B14	Semipostal	50fr + 10fr	Surtax for Red Cross
Togo 1966	554, 555	Commemorative	10fr, 30fr	7th anniversary of the Togalese Red Cross
Turkey 1957	RA218-20	Postal tax	25K, 75K, 150K	Symbolic blood donor and recipient
United States 1971	1417	Commemorative	6¢	Blood donors
Uruguay 1973	868	Commemorative	50p	Blood donors
Yugoslavia 1953	RA11 RAJ8	Postal tax Postage due	2d	Child receiving blood transfusion, tax for the Red Cross
Yugoslavia 1961	RA25 RAJ22	Postal tax Postage due	2d 2d	Symbolic blood transfusion, tax for the Red Cross

issued to commemorate the 21st International Congress of Physiology in Buenos Aires. Russia's offering was a single stamp in 1957 to commemorate the tercentenary of Harvey's death. Karl Landsteiner (1868–1943) appears on stamps of Austria and East Germany (*Fig. 4*); both stamps were issued in 1968, the centenary of his birth. An Austrian-born Jew, Landsteiner came to the United States where he did most of the work which earned him the Nobel prize. He has not been honored on the stamps of his adoptive country.

Figure 5 shows a group of stamps that are much more interesting than those with stylized designs since they feature actual blood banking activities. The beautiful Yugoslavian stamp of 1953 shows a child receiving a blood transfusion. The tubing used appears to be rubber rather than plastic, although the size of the picture makes this identification difficult. The French donor stamp shows blood being drawn from a series of donor arms. The arms are bound with a tourniquet tied with what looks like an unrealistic knot, but this may be just artistic license. This commemorative stamp was issued in 1959 to honor blood donors; it is credited with tripling the volunteer donations that year. All of the stamps which depict blood transfusions or transfusion equipment show blood bottles rather than bags. The Indonesian series of 1956 shows a bottle

with a screw-on type cap. The bottle is apparently the nonvacuum type, because a tube for an air vent is shown. The Afghanistan stamp of 1964 shows a modern bottle marked with a red crescent, and in addition depicts a pilot tube firmly attached to the bottle.

The recent Dutch, Pakistan, and St. Vincent stamps continue to show bottles rather than bags, even though these stamps are only a little more than a year old.

Figure 6 shows stamps which rely on symbolism or design to convey their message. These are attractive and apparently serve their purpose but have less scientific interest than the more illustrative examples shown in *Figure 5*.

The *Table* is a checklist of the stamps we have collected or plan to include in this collection. The catalogue numbers used are Scott's.¹

References

1. Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue, 130th edition. New York, Scott's Publication Co., 1974.
2. Kyle RA, Wolman IJ: Blood transfusion and philately; encouraging the Post Office to honor blood donors. *Clin Pediatr* 7: 636–638, 1968.
3. Official Poster Advertising. 6-cent Blood Donor Commemorative Postage Stamp. GPO: OF-415-176, 1971.
4. American Association of Blood Banks: Blood bank issuance looks promising. *News Briefs*, March-April 1969, pp 1–2.