

# My May Mistake

by John Letter

Earlier this month we marked the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the issuance of the worlds' first adhesive postage stamp – THE PENNY BLACK.

Even the May 2020 edition of the American Philatelist, had their cover adorned with images of both the Penny Black and its sister stamp – the Two Pence Blue along with the slogan 'Many Happy Returns'.

I had always thought that these two legendary stamps shared the same birthday – May 6, 1840. I even wrote this in my 2014 article IN THE BEGINNING. Did you know that their issue dates are different?



While the Penny Black was issued on May 6<sup>th</sup>, the Two Penny Blue was issued on May 8<sup>th</sup>. In fact, in the last article I ridiculed the notion that the Penny Black was indeed 'the first stamp'. Sorry for the 'fake news' in the 2014 article.

During the research I resolved another mystery. When the stamps were used, many a villain tried to cheat the Post Office by removing the post mark and reuse the stamp on a second letter. To counter this, the PO not only changed the color to red, but also had the printers create a migratory ink so that any attempt to wash off the postmark would affect the stamp image. The mystery was that I could not understand why so many used penny reds appeared fuzzy or blurred, and thus very unattractive.

If you wish to remove such stamps from paper, the better practice is to 'float' the stamp face-up on the top of the water, rather than pushing the stamp under the water. Even so do NOT leave the stamp in the water too long so that the entire paper becomes saturated.

Like the Gunnery Sargent used to say, "Keep your powder" (in this case stamp surface) dry.

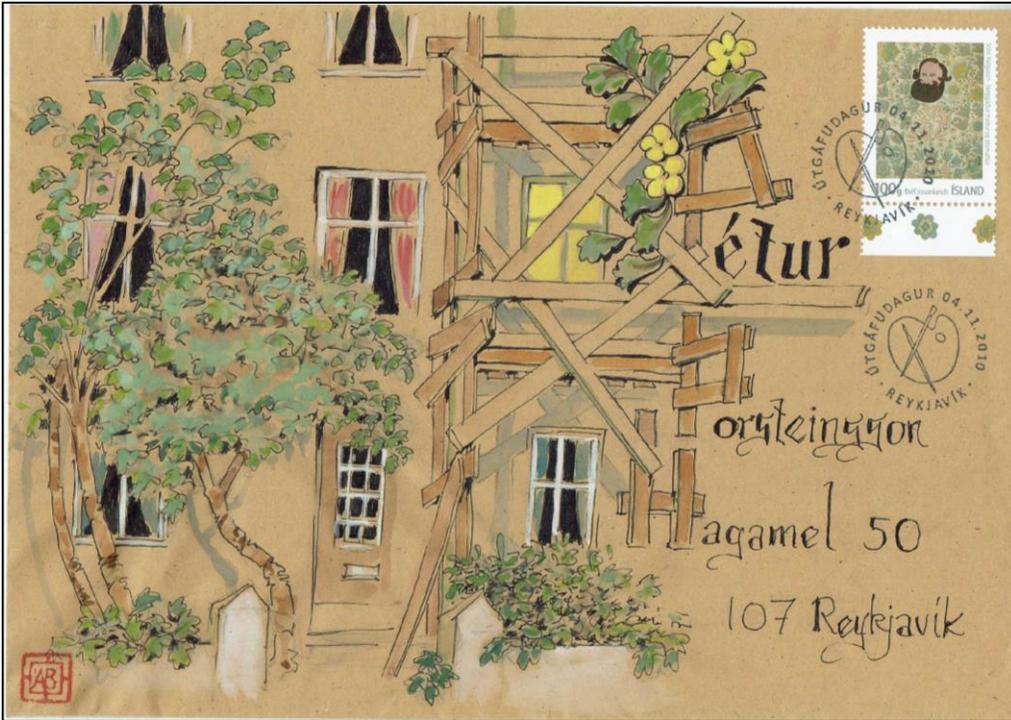
**[Editor's note: For those that are not aware Great Britain issued the world's first postage stamps in 1840. The United States was pretty slow to join the first issue club and waited until July 1 of 1847.]**

# Oh, The Things You Can Learn Stamp Collecting!

## Artistic Stamp & Cover

by Mike Schumacher

Sometimes as we travel in our philatelic endeavors, a stamp or cover catches our eye, because the Editor of this newsletter likes to say: “it’s pretty”. This article is about one of those “pretty” covers [Figure below].



It is undoubtedly the most artistically intricate Icelandic cachet cover that I have in my collection. It measures 6 ½ by 9 inches and it contains a hand drawn cachet that incorporates the name and address of the recipient in the drawing. It certainly is a “pretty” cover and one of a kind. It is drawn by Artist Agust Bjarnson from Reykjavik Iceland - who is also the sender (information on reverse side of envelope) of this First Day Cover for the attached 2010 Icelandic Visual Arts Stamp. Mr. Bjarnson is a graphic artist and has drawn numerous other artworks.

Art is certainly the theme of this first day cover. The 2010 Icelandic Visual Arts Stamp contained on the cover depicts a work of art by Solvi Helgason. Solvi lived and wandered around Iceland most of his life (August 16, 1820 – November 27, 1895) just getting by. His parents died when he was very young, and he bounced around living at various farms. He had no formal schooling, but at one time lived with a reverend who had quite a library and it is believed that is where he taught himself to read and write. Indications are that he suffered from mental illness and paranoia. He often referred to himself by various made-up names and managed to get himself arrested a few times for theft, false papers and vagrancy. But he was always known to be painting and writing, even though paper and paint supplies were hard to come by. He would wander about Iceland trading art pieces for food and lodging. His works are rich, creative and colorful compositions often using the same floral pattern as either the subject of the piece or as background for the portraits. Paintings of people that he had disputes with, he would embellish them to have horns and other demonic characteristics. He also wrote numerous scholarly texts, poetry and reflections on life. Many of these writings are on the backs of the paintings that he did. Despite the challenging and less than ideal conditions in which he worked as a destitute wanderer, his writings and paintings are truly laudable and contain quality and artistic value. Solvi Helgason the rover, scholar, artist and capricious eccentric is indisputably one of Iceland's most fascinating folk artists. More than 100 of his works are part of the National Icelandic Museum and National Library. He is also honored and remembered by one of his paintings being placed on an Icelandic stamp. So now when you fill the space for this stamp in your album you will know what it is about.

Oh, the things you can learn stamp collecting!