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Quarterly Newsletter of The International Society of Worldwide Stamp Collectors

MEMEL  
AND  
SURROUNDING  
COUNTRIES



## Memel: The View From a Northeast Window

By The Rev. James E. Furman

Stamps from "dead countries" can be valuable windows with a view that includes social and political developments. This is particularly true of the various stamp-issuing regions, states, and plebiscite districts that emerged in northeastern Europe immediately after World War I.

Out of this abundance, one entity seems less discussed than it should be. It is Memel (Lithuanian Klaipeda), a Baltic port-city with philatelic history evidencing French opportunism, Lithuanian nationalism, and German revenge.

Memel and it's region form "the Memelland". Throughout the inter-war years, both were the center of "the Memel problem," an issue that well illustrates the strongly transitional quality of the borders and decisions of that era. Largely forgotten today, Memel was "news" enough to generate years of headlines such as "Europe's Perennial Problem"<sup>1</sup> and "Europe's Acute Danger Spot".<sup>2</sup>

Article 99 of the Treaty of Versailles detached the Memelland from Germany and placed it under Allied administration (France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom). When the German government of Chancellor Friedrich Ebert protested this action, it was told that, "...the region in question has always been Lithuanian: the majority of the people are Lithuanian in origin and language; the fact that the town itself is in great part German would not justify the maintenance of the region under German sovereignty, particularly in view of the fact that the port of Memel is the sole maritime outlet for Lithuania."<sup>3</sup>

Memel was governed by the Allied Mixed High Commission for Memel (AMHCM). The work of this quadripartite board was soon complicated by French foreign policy considerations.

In 1919 Poland occupied a large territory centering on  
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the historic Lithuanian city of Vilnius. This aggression went well with French support of a large, strong Poland. At the same time, France was not eager to see Lithuania driven closer to Germany, Lithuania's most probable source of military aid. Memel thus seemed a useful pawn, a territory that could be traded to Lithuania in exchange for its traditional capital. However, to be available for exchange, Memel could be neither independent nor already ceded. This period of French dominance is seen in the stamps listed as Scott # 1 - 99 and C1 - C29.

On July 13, 1922, the Conference of Ambassadors as the coordinating link between the Allied foreign offices proposed recognition of Lithuania and its seating in the League of Nations. This was the Western equivalent of the Treaty of Moscow (July 12, 1920) in which the newly established USSR renounced jurisdiction over Lithuania. Allied recognition was conditional: Lithuania must accept the Treaty of Versailles as it touched on navigation of the Nieman River. Less than a month later (August 4, 1922), Lithuania assented to the proposal with the stipulation that Poland would have to withdraw from Vilnius before Polish trade would be permitted to pass through Memel. The Conference recognized Lithuania (December 20, 1922) without accepting this reservation.

With the diplomatic situation unresolved, Lithuania imitated the Polish procedure of 1919. Troops and guerilla reinforcements were sent into Memel from Lithuania. The French garrison was pushed aside and the Memelland became Lithuanian. The Allies protested but did not attempt to restore their occupation by force.

Lithuania noted its Memelland victory with an exuberant commemorative issue (Scott # 176-188; July 12, 1923). The distinctive rhomboid shapes of the stamp series signal national enthusiasm. Nonetheless, Polish claims were not silenced and Memel continued to require a "legal" settlement.

Memel was referred to the Council of the League of Nations. An investigating committee of neutrals was appointed (the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States). This Special Committee of Memel (SCM) was headed by Norman Davis, a State Department official who had been an aide to President Wilson.

Davis and the SCM persuaded Lithuania to grant Poland use of Memel's port facilities. Further, the SCM established a Harbor Board for Memel to be headed by a neutral appointee of the International Labor Office's Transit Committee. The SCM report was accepted and signed into international law on May 8, 1924. Even so, "no diplomatic relations were maintained with Poland and there was no interstate traffic, not even postal, across 'the demarcation line' which Poland considered to be its frontier".<sup>4</sup>

The SCM-sponsored Memel Statute defined the relationship of Memel to Lithuania. Its method embodies belief that only compromise could produce a workable solution to a multi-faceted puzzle. Memel is defined as "under the sovereignty of Lithuania" but "enjoying legislative, judicial, administrative, and financial autonomy with the limits prescribed by the Statute". The mood of this legislation was anticipated in Lithuanian-designed stamps produced in Memel and Kaunas. The April 12, 1923 issue (# N31 - N43) is striking, balancing local symbols against bilingual inscriptions that emphasize the fact of

Lithuanian conquest.

In effect, Memel was "almost" part of Lithuania. This ambiguity encouraged new disputes. Much of the public controversy centered on the governmental structure provided by the Memel Statute: a Lithuanian-appointed Governor; a legislative Chamber of Representatives elected by the Memellanders; and an executive Directorate of five whose president would be appointed by the Governor.

Article XVII of the Statute provided that "the President shall hold office as long as he holds the confidence of the Chamber. The President shall appoint the other members of the Directorate". But what if the President were to lose the confidence of the Governor? This question was answered during "the Bottcher incident," the climax of years of confrontation between "back to the Reich" Germans and "we are in charge now" Lithuanians.

On December 17, 1931, Otto Bottcher, President of the Directorate, went to Berlin and met with members of the German government. He was accompanied by two members of the Chamber. Bottcher acted without the approval or knowledge of either the Governor of Memel or the Lithuanian government. In fact, his visit was detected by accident: a Lithuanian border guard stopped Bottcher on his return trip and discovered him to be without a passport. However, Bottcher did have a secret *laissez passer* issued by the German Consul General in Memel, a document that stated that the bearer was to negotiate with "the authorities of the Reich" about "an important German interest".

Acting on this evidence, the Governor of Memel (Colonel Merkys) dismissed Bottcher from office on December 27, 1931. Bottcher refused to resign and the Chamber voted fifteen to four in his support. Merkys declared the action of the Chamber invalid and placed Bottcher and his travelling partners under house arrest on February 6, 1932.

Two days later, the German government submitted a memorandum on Memel to the Council of the League of Nations. The Council appointed a Commission headed by the Norwegian delegate (O. Colban) to deal with the German motion.

The Colban Commission reported promptly on February 20, 1932, and asked the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) to resolve the issue. A ten to five ruling of the PCIJ was issued on August 11, 1932. The Lithuanian position was upheld: a territory under national sovereignty does not have the right to conduct independent foreign policy.

Lithuania responded to the ruling by applying for an end to Memel's special status. Strong German opposition followed and the League denied Lithuania's petition.

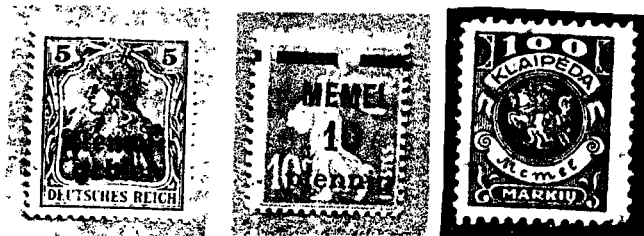
From 1932 to 1938 Memel was a National Socialist issue. German public opinion was encouraged to see the status of Memel as an example of international injustice. A March 1932 issue of the Nazi *Racial Observer* is typical: "The German people were betrayed to the Jews and the French at Versailles ..... never may we reconcile ourselves to contentment while our fellow Germans suffer unspeakable horrors and barbarities in a Franco-Jewish creation foisted on a world duped by Zionist-Rothschild lies".<sup>5</sup>

The hate campaign was eventually augmented by military threats. On March 6, 1938, Lithuania withdrew from the (Continued on Page 3)

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Memelland. This departure was celebrated on March 23, 1939, by German overprinting of two Lithuanian stamps listed in the Michel Catalogue under "Memelgebiet: Lokal-Ausgabe" (I - IV). Ironically or spitefully, the stamps used for this purpose honored the twentieth anniversary of Lithuanian independence (Scott # 308 - 309).

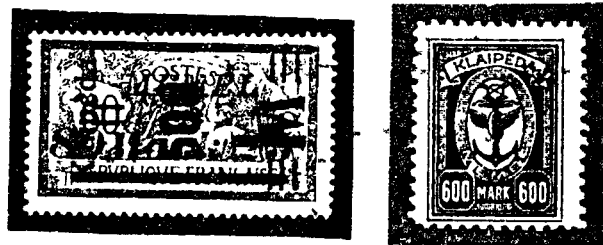
The Nazi slogan "Memelland ist frei!" was not to be the last word on the subject. In 1949 the territory was restored to a Lithuania incorporated into the USSR.



### Bibliography:

- 1 Contemporary Review: 142: 628 - 633 (November, 1932).
- 2 Literary Digest: 119: 16 (April 13, 1935).
- 3 George Glasgow, "The Memel Situation: Europe's Perennial Problem," Contemporary Review, November, 1932, p. 628.
- 4 C. R. Jurgela in Postage Stamps of Lithuania (New York: 1978), p. 3.
- 5 quoted in Current History ("Foreign Comment"), April, 1932, p. 122.

Map prepared by C. Shaughnessey (1986)



### Memel's Stamps Reflect Various Political Changes:

The overprinted German stamp (#1) illustrates the stamps issued during the period (1920) that Memel was a League of Nations plebiscite. French stamps were overprinted (# 19) when Memel was under French control (1920 - 1922). When Memel was placed under Lithuanian sovereignty, stamps reflecting the Lithuanian nation were issued in 1923 (# N23). The overprinted French stamps were also used during the transition period, being overprinted a second time by Lithuania (# N30). Local symbols were depicted on other stamps issued in 1923 (# N 39). The two examples from the 1923 Lithuanian series commemorating the Lithuanian military victory in Memel depict the Memel Harbor (# 179) and the Memel lighthouse (# 182).

## LETTERS: Opinion on Ameripex

Thank you for your letter concerning the mix-up about Ameripex. It's over and fortunately, only one member from one of the northshore clubs called me. What with my age and illness, my memory isn't the best, but I think it was #42, Tom Allison of Wilmette, Illinois. He and another member were going to spend a couple days before the show opened to work on their club exhibit frames. He wanted to know if I was going to the show.

Although I'm still not feeling very well, I did manage to get to the show for an hour or so one day. My brother-in-law drove me there and stayed with me. I was very much disappointed with the layout of the show. To me, it was like walking into a large factory stockroom. The booths were assembled like a stockroom - high, no chairs or stools for customers to sit down and examine their products. It was stand at a booth and ask the person in the booth for what you wanted. It was in no way what I had expected. I expected everything to open so you could see from one end of the hall to the other end.... so you could get an

overview glance of the whole place from any place you would look from. I am writing a letter to *Stamp Collector* letting them know how I feel about the show. And I may write to the person in charge of the exhibit, Les Wesnick.

Also, have you gotten the Presidential Souvenir Sheets yet? There again I was very much disappointed with the design and the color. Can't the United States come up with something better in color and design?

I hope you can read my scribbling. Since I got home from the hospital I have been having a hard time writing a fair hand. Keep up the good work. I like the new club name.

\*\*\*\*\*Adolph Kubon (#8)

Do you have a collector friend who might enjoy ISWSC and its benefits? Send the name and address to  
Herb Holland (#31)  
825 E. Torrey  
New Braunfels, Texas 78240

## President Shares Childhood Pleasures of Stamp Collecting

Well, summer's back again (pardon me, Australia, South America, and all points south of the equator) ....I spent most of the day in the garden wondering if the blooming agapanthus cared as much for me. Now that the sun has set and some of the weeds have escaped my wrath for another day, my thoughts "wax nostalgic" rather than to organizational things. Perhaps it is just as well.

As a child did you ever receive a "Golden Galleon"? It was a stamp mixture for beginners packaged by, I believe, the MysticStamp Co. As a fifth grader I received one for Christmas and spent most of the day rummaging with delight through the packets to find what was hidden there. This joy was topped only by my "big" gift the following Christmas. Under the tree was as "Penny Black." What a thrill to be the owner of a copy of the world's oldest stamp. The stamp was less expensive back then, but that bore no relationship to my excitement. (No, it didn't cost one penny.) I also vividly remember my first set of Mozambique Company (I pronounced it: Mo zam' billie cue!) ....the bi-colored set with the giraffe and zebra. Remember? We may not feel quite the same thrill when we see that set now, but I'll bet it still excites young collectors.

One of our organizational aims is to promote general collecting, particularly to the youth. Put a good deed on your list of things to do this summer and help promote our hobby. "How?" you ask. I'm certain you've heard of Johnny-Appleseed, but have you heard of Sam and Susie Stamper? In actuality, they don't exist ....YET! Sam and Susie leave packets of stamps at grocery store counters, skating rinks, McDonald's, and wherever else they go, because no one throws away a packet of stamps especially if they're marked, "FOR THE FINDER." Insane? Perhaps, but they did issue a commemorative stamp for Johnny Appleseed. Surely we have a couple Sam and Susie Stampers in the ISWSC!

If that approach is a bit far out for you, I'm certain that most of you know an elementary school teacher, cub scout leader, or Sunday school teacher who would be more than willing to distribute a stamp packet or two to wide-eyed children. If only 10% of our membership would do this, and half of those were to receive a response, and half of those were to write up their experiences and mail them to me, we just might have some interesting stories for publication. Have a great summer (or winter, in some cases). \*\*\*Aubrey Dunne (# 1), President

## SPECIAL NOTICE:

There have been several mail "ads" offering stamps, supplies, etc. in pyramid or chain letters from members to members. The International Society of Worldwide Stamp Collectors does not endorse any promotions of this type by individual members. Members should be aware of the fact that chain letters and pyramid-type schemes are illegal. The wisest action, upon receipt of such letters (or ads), is to promptly throw them in the trash.

## Vice President Reports on New Society Benefits

Here we are in the summer doldrums again as far as stamp collecting is concerned. Many people just put away their albums for the summer and pursue more outdoor activities. Those of us fortunate enough to live in areas where outdoor activities are popular all year round just sort of slow down a little for the summer. At any rate, I think the summer season started early for the kids and their sponsors at the clubs. I have sent out only one package of stamps since last report. Maybe they gave away so many stamps at Ameripex that the clubs have enough at present. The input of stamps from members is continuing at a very good clip and I have a good supply ready for whenever the young collectors get back in the mood.

Speaking of Ameripex, I hope some member that attended will give us a report on the activities and any meetings of ISWSC members there. We were sorry to hear of Adolph Kubon's (#8) heart attack and inability to coordinate the meetings. I hope he wasn't caused any inconvenience, but the news got to us too late to do anything about it. Adolph, I hope you are feeling better and that you were able to attend the show at least one day!

Tom Ginsberg (#70) several months ago offered to provide computer printouts of the membership rosters at cost for members; they come alphabetical, numerical or geographical. These are quite handy. I use the geographical list when I am traveling to attempt to contact members in the area I am visiting. My wife and I are currently planning a swing through a number of western and middle western states for later this summer, so don't be surprised if you get a phone call. A glass of iced tea or a cold beer with a couple hours of stamp talk or swapping is a welcome diversion anytime, anywhere.

Roger Bergeson (# 132) is our new sales circuit manager and will have some information on it in this issue of the newsletter, so I will not have a lot to say on that except drop him a line and participate. It will help you get rid of those duplicates and will fill spaces in your albums. I think it is fantastic that we have volunteers in our organization that are willing to give of themselves for the benefit of the group. We have had a swap circuit going now for nearly two years and Hal Clarke (# 47) and Tom Allison (# 42) have been doing a fine job with that. If all goes okay, we shall also have an auction a couple times a year. The swap circuit is operated at no expense to the club and the sales circuit and auction are expected to provide some revenue to supplement the club's treasury. In case any of the new members are wondering, all of the services provided to members are done by volunteers, and none of your elected officers receive any compensation for their time or services either. \*\*\* Ken Jenkins (# 15), Vice President



**Roster Update:**

|     |  |           |             |                        |  |            |                            |
|-----|--|-----------|-------------|------------------------|--|------------|----------------------------|
| 219 | Mary Megnin<br>P.O. Box 389230<br>Cincinnati, Ohio 45238                           | 26 Mar 86 | WTB         | 234                    | Barry A. Bankes<br>14 E. Plaza<br>Greenville, South Carolina 29605                             | 11 Jun 86  | WTB                        |
| 220 | Jack H. McNee<br>3648 Marymont Drive NW<br>Huntsville, Alabama 35810               | 7 Apr 86  | WTB         | 235                    | Ronald C. Hackler<br>5803 Beecham Drive<br>Dayton, Ohio 45424                                  | 13 Jun 86  | WTB                        |
| 221 | Sven E. Svensen<br>25-60 123rd Street<br>Flushing, New York 11354                  | 10 Apr 86 | WTB         | 236                    | William J. Fragaszy<br>75 Park Terrace E., Apt. #D-71<br>New York, New York 10034              | 20 Jun 86  | WTB                        |
| 222 | Jack Nemeth<br>1784 Countrywood Court<br>Walnut Creek, California 94598            | 16 Apr 86 | B           | 237                    | Ted Oefinger<br>5930 Windhaven<br>San Antonio, Texas 78239                                     | 20 Jun 86  | WTB<br>Part-time<br>Dealer |
| 223 | James B. Moorman<br>2495 South High<br>Denver, Colorado 80210                      | 18 Apr 86 | WTB         | 238                    | Mohamed Mahdoui<br>14 Rue Sidi Abdallah<br>3100 Kairouan, TUNISIE                              | 20 Jun 86  | WTB                        |
| 224 | Alfred D. Glading<br>56 Marlton Road<br>Woodstown, New Jersey 08098                | 19 Apr 86 | WTU         | 239                    | Ted I. Jones<br>664 Rozelle<br>Memphis, Tennessee 38104  | 28 Jun 86  | WTB                        |
| 225 | Simon Weiner<br>Brittany 0-692<br>Delray Beach, Florida 33446                      | 24 Apr 86 | WTB         | 240                    | Sister Leo Marie, S.C.<br>St. Mary Hall<br>Mount St. Joseph, Ohio 45051                        | 3 Jul 86   | WTB                        |
| 226 | Mary Lou Trent<br>7501 Republic Court, Apt #303<br>Alexandria, Virginia 22306      | 22 Apr 86 | WTB         | 241                    | George Land<br>4024 Fairlands Drive<br>Pleasanton, California 94566                            | 5 Jul 86   | WTB                        |
| 227 | Lloyd Drury<br>185 Brock Street<br>Brantford, Ontario N3S 5W5, CANADA              | 3 May 86  | WTB         | 242                    | John E. Hogan<br>P. O. Box 58700<br>St. Louis, Missouri 63158                                  | 7 Jul 86   | B<br>Dealer                |
| 228 | Monroe G. Schwartz<br>182 Arrowood Road<br>Englishtown, New Jersey 07726           | 9 May 86  | WTB         | 243                    | William H. Rawlings<br>835 Wildwood Place<br>West Vancouver, B.C. V7S1P2, CANADA               | 11 July 86 | WTB                        |
| 229 | Harry Matasar<br>P. O. Box 3022<br>Munster, Indiana 46321                          | 12 May 86 | Dealer      | <hr/>                  |  |            |                            |
| 230 | N. C. Lou<br>9 Sze Mou Tian Chien<br>Soochow, Kiangsu<br>PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA | 22 May 86 | WTU         | <b>Roster Changes:</b> |  |            |                            |
| 231 | Robert S. Brighman<br>29 Church Street<br>Mystic, Connecticut 06355                | 3 Jun 86  | WTB         | 16                     | Jim Streitwiesser: Change to 2727 Austin Court, Los Osos, California 93402                     |            |                            |
| 232 | James Prescott<br>P. O. Box 94368<br>Schaumburg, Illinois 60194                    | 9 Jun 86  | Dealer      | 19                     | Jim Bailey: Change to 97th General Hospital, Box 22, Dept. of Pathology, APO New York 09757    |            |                            |
| 233 | William Gerlach<br>P. O. Box 6637<br>Lake Worth, Florida 33466                     | 9 Jun 86  | U<br>Dealer | 26                     | Rita Kallal, Editor: Change to 611 Northwood Drive, West Monroe, Louisiana 71291               |            |                            |
|     |  |           |             | 39                     | Ken Martin: Change to P.O. Box 8028, State College, PA 16803                                   |            |                            |
|     |  |           |             | 171                    | Dave Duncan: Change to 12921 Mathews, Carleton, Michigan 48117                                 |            |                            |
|     |  |           |             | 181                    | Jim Sandholdt: Change to Takatsuki Baptist Church, 2-37-15 Himuro-cho, Takatsukishi, 569 Japan |            |                            |