STAMP COLLECTING – THE HOBBY OF KINGS AND THE KING OF HOBBIES

THE MOST FAMOUS OF ALL



THE BLUE MAURITIUS

“ONLY PHILATELY CAN SHOW HOW SOMETHING CAN BE UNATTAINABLE ...”

Pierre Maria Mahé (1833–1913), curator of the collection of Duke Philip of Ferrara, one of the “Fathers of Philately”



The Coat of Arms of Mauritius

A TIMELESS STORY

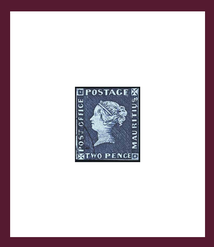
At the time of the discovery of the first stamps from the island of Mauritius – namely those bearing the inscription “Post Office” – for philatelic market in the 1860s, many philatelic enthusiasts had in their collections virtually every stamp in the world at that time, which amounted to roughly a thousand items, in most cases cheap and easily obtainable. Mauritian stamps were the first in philately to demonstrate what ***“vintage”*** means.

People knew of them, but there were so few that almost no one could own them, let alone even catch a glimpse of them. In the world of otherwise available philatelic items, it was unsettling, even fascinating. For the self-confidence and mindset of the 19th century, when it seemed that almost anything was possible, it was downright shocking that one could not buy ***“anything”***. The Blue and Red Mauritius stamps made the front pages of the world’s press and quickly became a veritable legend, attracting the wealthiest buyers and the interest of the elite of their time. Their prestige and price soared. Yet money was often of no use; the lucky owners of these legendary stamps almost never put them up for sale. Awareness of them extended beyond the world of philately, and in the world’s cultural heritage, the Blue Mauritius is today as powerful a phenomenon as the Mona Lisa or the Holy Grail.

The Blue and Red Mauritius have always been in the possession of only a select few; they attracted, and continue to attract, ever-increasing demand and interest from the media and the public. They have become symbols of wealth, prestige, mystery and the romance of the good old days, understandable to everyone. The story of ***the Mauritius Post Office stamps*** has permeated the history of not only philately for more than a century and a half and has lost none its power. Building on this story, the eventual acquisition of the Blue Mauritius and the associated entry into the elite club of its owners, and adding one’s name to the most famous names, will therefore hold ever greater appeal and value in the future.

FORGOTTEN – AND REDISCOVERED

In the early days of our hobby, philatelists failed to notice the existence of the Post Office Maurices for almost two decades, unlike the later issue bearing the inscription “Post Paid” from 1848. As late as 1865, when the first mentions of the existence of stamps bearing the inscription “Post Office” appeared, the famous stamp dealer and publicist Jean Baptiste Moens did not believe in their existence. But by the end of that same year, the existence of both Mauritian Post Office stamps – the blue and the red – was confirmed by the collector from Bordeaux, Albert Coutures, who acquired them in exchange for two ordinary Uruguayan stamps from Mrs Jeanne Borchard. She also lived in Bordeaux and had found them in her husband’s correspondence; he had maintained business relations with the distant island of Mauritius. And it was not just this pair – between 1864 and 1869, Mrs Borchard gradually discovered thirteen of the twenty-seven known copies of this first Mauritian issue in her husband’s archives.



BLUE MAURITIUS

The Blue Mauritius, face value 2 pence, issued on 21 September 1847. This denomination was intended for postage on letters sent within the island. Of the original print run of 500 copies, only 12 have survived to this day. The history of the exhibited specimen is documented as far back as 1867, when it was found by one of the world’s first female philatelists, Mrs Borchard from Bordeaux on a letter in her husband’s business correspondence. However, she did not pay it much attention and exchanged it for another stamp with another Bordeaux philatelist, Mr Martineau. He soon passed it on to the local stationer and stamp dealer, Mrs Debois, who in turn sold it for 100 francs to the Belgian stamp dealer J. B. Moens. The Mauritius then passed through the collections of the greatest legends of world philately – Rothschild 1872, Ferrary 1893, Burrus 1923, Cripps 1972. Since 2016, it has been in the collection of a Czech philatelist and investor. ***The stamp is considered the finest postally used specimen of all those preserved.***



King George V



The Harbour at Port Louis 1846 / G. V. Nash

DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS

After the discovery of the first examples of Mauritius stamps bearing the inscription ***“Post Office”***, they were initially thought to be misprints of the later ***“Post Paid”*** issue. This view was overturned in 1870, when the eminent collector and researcher J. A. Legrand reconstructed all twelve positions of the Post Paid printing plate and demonstrated that these stamps had been printed from a different plate, thus constituting a distinct issue. Examination of the surviving examples further showed that all reds share an identical design, as do the blues, leading to the conclusion that they were trial prints from a single plate that had entered circulation. Although some authors accepted them as stamps, they dated them as late as 1858. The recognition of their status as the first, and significantly earlier, regular postage stamps of Mauritius emerged only gradually. A decisive breakthrough came in 1876, when Major E. B. Evans, during his investigations on Mauritius, discovered in the governor’s archives a key document – an 1847 estimate for the production of stamps bearing this inscription, issued by their engraver, J. O. Barnard – confirming them as the island’s first postage stamps and ***the world’s first colonial issues***.

INCREASE IN VALUE

Initially sceptical, J. B. Moens purchased further examples of the Mauritius stamps – red and blue – from the collection of A. Coutures in the 1860s for around 200 francs, which, in terms of gold twenty-franc coins, was equivalent to roughly 60 grams of pure gold. By way of comparison, a Czech investor who acquired another pair of these famous stamps eight years ago paid the equivalent of around ***100 kilograms of pure gold*** for them! Such is the potential for price growth held by these global rarities!

THE STAMP OF KINGS

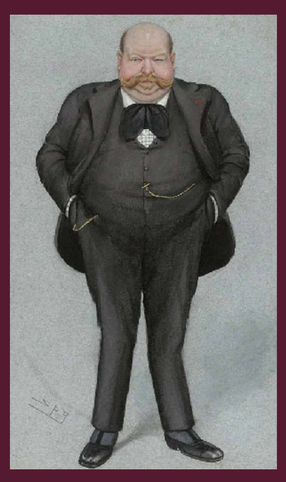
The definitive rise of the Mauritius Post Office stamps to the very pinnacle of their value occurred in 1903, when a single copy of the Blue Mauritius was auctioned in London. This took place amid enormous public attention, and an unknown buyer paid the then-unprecedented sum of 1,450 pounds for the stamp. Shortly afterwards, in conversation with the Prince of Wales (who was, among other things, a keen philatelist), one of the courtiers remarked: ***“Has Your Majesty heard that some utter madman paid 1,450 pounds for a single postage stamp £1,450?”*** The future King George V replied: ***“Yes, I know. That complete madman was me.”*** And when the British king wanted and bought this stamp for his collection, newspapers all over the world wrote about it, and all the wealthy people of the time wanted one too. Those 1,450 pounds of the time, in gold coins, amounted to more than 10.5 kilograms of pure gold, and as a result of the ongoing hunt for the Blue Mauritius, that figure is now ten times greater!



Mme J. Borchard (1827–?)



J. B. Moens (1833–1908)



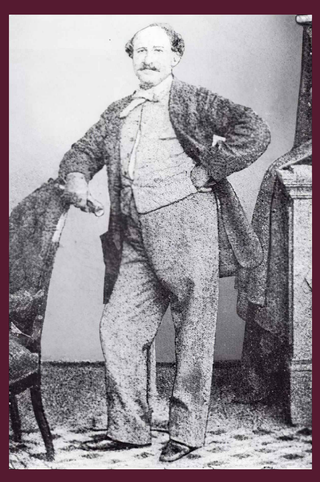
Baron Arthur de Rothschild (1851–1903)



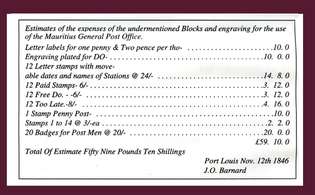
Vévoda Filip Ferrary (1850–1917)



Maurice Jean Marie Burrus (1882–1959)



Joseph Osmond Barnard (1816–1865)



Estimates of the expenses of the undermentioned Blocks and engraving for the use of the Mauritius General Post Office.

Letter labels for one penny & Two pence per tho-	*10. 0*
Engraving plated for DO-	*10. 0. 0*
12 Letter stamps with move-	
able dates and names of Stations @ 24/-	*14. 8. 0*
12 Paid Stamps -6/-	*3. 12. 0*
12 Free Do. - -6/-	*3. 12. 0*
12 Too Late.-8/-	*4. 16. 0*
1 Stamp Penny Post-	*10. 0*
Stamps 1 to 14 @ 3/-ea	*2. 2. 0*
20 Badges for Post Men @ 20/-	*20. 0. 0*
	£59. 10. 0

Total Of Estimate Fifty Nine Pounds Ten Shillings

Port Louis Nov. 12th 1846
J.O. Barnard

Order and invoice for the production of the first edition of the Mauritius stamp, i.e. the Post Office issue. From the archives of the Governor of Mauritius.

from the collection of a Czech collector and investor