

The Nachod Gutters Redux!!

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Readers may remember my three earlier articles in *The Specialist* concerning two green unidirectional 5h Hradčany – gutters I called “The Nachod Gutters” because of the cancel on one gutter (fig. 2). The first, in the 2002 Nov/Dec issue, announced the discovery in September 2002 of the remarkable items shown in fig. 1 and fig. 2. A later article, co-authored with Johan Sevenhuijsen, in the 2003 May/June issue presented a careful analysis of these gutters. A Czech translation of that article appeared in *Zpravodaj*, no. 59, 2004. Finally, the 2004 Mar/Apr issue of *The Specialist* sadly reported their theft from the mail in September 2003 while they were on their way to Prague for final examination.

Unlike the other Hradčany unidirectional gutters, the 3h and 10h, the Czechoslovak Post Office never officially released any unidirectional 5h gutters. At the time of the Nachod gutter discovery, most experts believed that only one set of ten 5h unidirectional gutters existed, surreptitiously taken by someone from the Czech Graphics Union. By consulting with expert collectors here and abroad, I learned that the whereabouts of six of those ten gutters was known, but no one could account for the other four. The Nachod gutters duplicated positions in that known set of six gutters. Thus, had the Nachod gutters proven genuine, they would have demonstrated that a second set of ten gutters had been taken from the printing house.

As an aside, a third set of ten gutters surfaced this year. An illustration appears on the front and rear covers of the February 2008 issue of the *Merkur Review*. A European friend says he has examined this uncut set of ten mint gutters and they appear to be those illustrated in Novotný’s catalog and handbook.

To return to the Nachod gutters: early on, examination demonstrated that the provisional postage-due markings (*PORTO*) were spurious. No sensible person could believe that these gutters, having never been folded (surely, shipping a double pane of stamps to a post office would have required their being folded!) and with their original gum in place, ever saw the inside of a post office or were legitimately marked for provisional postage-due use. Also, the Nachod cancellation on the second gutter (19 II 19) predated the printing of the gutters in May of 1919 and the manufacture of the M.41 4b cancelling device in 1920. As Czech collector Jindřich Látal explained to me, “This is not the first time mischief has been done with this device.”

But the stamps under these patently forged markings appeared to many as genuine. Twice they had been hand-carried to Prague, twice they had been examined – they were stolen on their way to their third and final examination – and twice they had not been proven forgeries. One expert even reported informally that their gum and ink had passed spectroscopic tests. My friend and mentor, the late Henry Hahn, remarked that he had no doubt that the stamps had been printed from the original plates but theorized that the plates might have been used privately years later, long after the original Hradčany issue. However, because of the theft, no final evidence in support of their being genuine or forgeries was ever assembled.

A year after their loss, at the October 2004 Philadelphia National Stamp Exhibition in Valley Forge, old-time Society member Charlie Chesloe mentioned in a conversation that sometime in the 1990s not only had he seen a photograph of some

similar gutters belonging to Dr. E. D. Mueller of Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, but that he had agreed to buy them. Before that transaction took place, Dr. Mueller died and Charlie said he lost track of the gutters.

Oddly enough, at the same exhibition in Valley Forge, a collector recently turned stamp dealer was about to enter the complex story of the Nachod gutters. That dealer told me the Valley Forge show was his first as a dealer. He leased a corner booth and remarked that he was pleased to have made a profit. He also said that while attending this exhibition he met many of the Czechoslovak Society's members.

Sometime earlier he bought a large box of stamps from a Dr. Friedman in Chicago (the dealer thinks it was in the spring of 2004). He sold bits and pieces from this lot over the next few years.

In June of 2008, several pieces of Czech material from that lot remained unsold. This dealer, not at all familiar with Czechoslovak material, considered simply discarding the items in the trash, but reconsidered and offered them for sale on the internet.

Society member Phil Melamed noticed the sale. More specifically, he noticed two astounding items in the dealer's lots. The first was a block of four unidirectional 5h gutters hand-stamped for provisional postage-due use (see fig. 3). The second was a block of two unidirectional green 5h gutters, also marked for provisional postage-due use, and bearing a NACHOD cancel (see fig. 4).

Phil, knowing of my loss, attempted to notify me immediately of this impending sale. Unfortunately, I had moved from Virginia to Arizona after retirement and my email address and phone number had changed. Phil persisted in his search and eventually located me through my website. Phil: A VERY BIG THANK-YOU!!!!

I immediately contacted the dealer. I explained about my loss of the first Nachod gutters and sent him a copy of the long 2003 *Specialist* article that explained what the items he had likely were. He looked at the article, agreed immediately to sell me the items, and we arranged for payment.

In part, the cover letter sent with the stamps stated:

Enclosed are the Czechoslovakia gutter pairs we discussed. These items were on sheets with Dr. E. D. Mueller's Englewood Cliffs, N.J. address on them. I believe that I picked them up with a box lot that I purchased from Dr. Friedman in Chicago in the spring of 2004.

It appears that these gutter blocks are those seen in the photograph by Society member Charlie Chesloe back in the 1990s. In a recent telephone call, Charlie confirmed that he had seen blocks of gutters rather than singles.

Be that as it may, this new find of six gutters helps shed light on the mystery of the Nachod gutters. My belief is that this new find demonstrates two things. First, that the Nachod gutters all came from a single strip of ten gutters, and second, that the cancels – and perhaps the hand-stamped provisional postage-due markings – were applied while the ten gutters were still attached to one another.



Fig. 1: Position 1 Fig. 2: Position 8
(The two stolen gutters)



Fig. 3: Positions 2, 3, 4, and 5
(The new un-cancelled gutters)



**Fig. 4: Positions 9 and 10
(The new cancelled gutters)**



Fig. 5 **Fig. 6**
(Purchased with the stolen gutters)

The original position of unidirectional gutters can be established by examining the control numbers printed below the upper stamps. The stolen gutters represented positions 1 (fig. 1) and 8 (fig. 2). The un-cancelled block of four gutters represent positions 2, 3, 4,

and 5 (fig. 3). The cancelled block of two gutters represent positions 9 and 10 (fig. 4). Thus, positions 6 and 7 still remain as yet unseen.



Fig. 7
(Part of the new purchase)



Fig. 8



Fig. 9
(Part of the new purchase)

Let us continue our demonstration that these gutters all came from the same strip of ten gutters. Clearly, I cannot align the two stolen gutters with their newly found brothers, but the scans (and cancellations discussed in a later paragraph) strongly suggest their edges represent the two sides of the same cut.

The slanted right edge of position 1, which cuts close to the upper stamp and is much further from the lower stamp, appears to match exactly with position 2 on the block of four gutters. The indentation in the mid-upper right side of position 8 is matched by a bulge on the left side of position 9. Also note that the top and bottom margins seem to be the same respective width. The physical evidence is overwhelming that these stamps came from the same strip of ten original gutters.

The stolen gutters had a grimy, uncared for appearance and had been mounted with hinges, disturbing their gum. The new gutter blocks, while not pristine, have never been hinged and are somewhat cleaner. If memory serves, their gum appears less – for want of a better word – stressed than on the stolen gutters, their color similar. Like the stolen gutters, the new gutters are unfolded in the horizontal direction. However, there are vertical creases – one between position 2 and position 3, and another between position 10 and the right-hand selvage.

Note that the leftmost five positions carry only the provisional postage-due marking PORTO (fig. 1 and fig. 3), while the rightmost three positions are canceled NACHOD (fig. 2, and fig. 4). Note also that the cancels in fig. 2 (position 8) at the right edge of the stamp are continued on the adjoining stamp (position 9) in fig. 4.

On the left edge of position 8 (fig. 2) is a tiny bit of a cancel. Thus, should position 7 ever be found, it too will have a Nachod cancel. Since the cancels on one position carry over to adjoining positions, the gutters appear to have been cancelled while they were still tied together. In fact, my conjecture is that while all ten gutters were still in a single piece, they were hand-stamped PORTO and the rightmost five positions cancelled with the M.41 4b cancel. It makes sense, in a perverted way, for half of the gutters from the strip to be cancelled while the remaining gutters were not.

The gutters exhibit a consistent oddity. On all of the cancelled gutters, the provisional postage-due hand stamp is inverted, while on all of the un-cancelled gutters it is upright.

When the stamps are examined closely, it is clear that these stamps match Stanislav Komberec's *5h Plate I and Plate II Plating Guide*. The upper row matches his descriptions of ZP 92—95 and ZP 99—100 on Plate II, while the lower row matches his descriptions for ZP 2—5 and 9—10 for Plate I, exactly what one would expect.

Much of this story has yet to be told. What fool marred these beautiful stamps? Did Dr. Mueller once own the entire strip of ten, or did someone else cut away positions 1, 6, 7, and 8? Since 2002, eight of the original ten gutters have appeared for sale by people who do not normally deal with Czechoslovak stamps. I have been fortunate in being in the right place at the right time (with the help of my friends).

Are gutter positions 6 and 7 waiting to surface somewhere strange? So far, all of the gutters have been tied to long-time centers of Czechoslovak philately (near New York City and Chicago). The dealer who sold me the original Nachod gutters told me they came from Oregon, but much of what he said turned out not to be true, so perhaps they too came from the same region as these new gutters. My advice: if you live in North

America, keep an eye out for two 5h unidirectional Hradčany gutters, positions 6 and 7, cancelled Nachod.

Just as was true with the first Nachod gutter purchase, gutters from another denomination accompanied these new 5h unidirectional gutters. A “mint” (fig. 5) and a “cancelled” (fig. 6) 10h red reciprocal gutter were purchased along with the stolen Nachod gutters. A block of four “mint” 10h red gutters (fig. 7) and a single “cancelled” 10h gutter (fig. 8) were delivered along with the new Nachod gutters. The 10h-gutters from both purchases fit together quite well; that is, the original gutters were cut from the new gutters, just as with the 5h unidirectional gutters.

In addition, another block, two reciprocal green 5h gutters without gum, was part of the new group (fig. 9). The most interesting aspect of this last block is that it was not cancelled with the same Nachod M.41 4b device as were the unidirectional gutters, but with what appears to be a Nachod M.13z 5b device. Unlike the unidirectional gutters, it appears that the PORTO hand-stamp might have been applied after the 18 IV 19 postmark. Thus, whoever did this must have thought gutters with provisional postage-due markings more valuable than cancelled gutters.

Finally, anyone with information about these gutters, or the stolen gutters, is invited to contact me, mark@knihtisk.org. Full color scans of all of the gutters, including the stolen ones, are available on my website, www.knihtisk.org.