

CZESLAW SŁANIA

Master Engraver

- by Ray Petersen



Słania with self-portrait poster stamp, created for his 60th birthday in 1981.

Many stamp collectors are familiar with the name **Czesław Słania** (pronounced chess-waw swan-ya), because of the more than 1,000 stamps that he engraved. But, in addition to his prodigious output of postage stamps, issued in over 30 countries, Słania also engraved many self designed poster stamps.

According to Wikipedia:

Czesław Słania (1921-2005) was born in Czeladź, Poland, and was the son of a miner. During the German invasion of Poland and outbreak of World War II in 1939, he was a student of a gymnasium in Lublin. During the subsequent German occupation he forged German money and documents for the Polish resistance, and in the later part of the war he became a soldier of the Second Polish Army. After the war, as a demobilized lieutenant, he settled in 1945 in Pisarzowice. Unwilling to become a farmer, he entered the Kraków School of Fine Arts, a renowned graphics arts centre, that same year. While still a student, Słania was employed by the Polish Stamp Printing Works in Łódź and Warsaw, where he learned to engrave in steel. His first stamp was issued in Poland on 24 March 1951.

In 1956, Słania moved to Sweden, where he began employment with the Swedish postal authorities in 1959. He produced stamps for Sweden and 30 other countries. His work was of such recognized quality and detail that he is one of the very few “household names” among philatelists, and some specialize in collecting his work.

He was the Royal Court Engraver of Sweden since 1972.

In 2000, his 1000th stamp was issued in Sweden, and his 1001st stamp was issued in Poland.

His last work was a stamp in 2005 to commemorate the 60th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

He was also very productive in designing and engraving banknotes for numerous countries in six out of seven continents.

This article will focus on Słania’s Poster Stamp production, including his well-known set of 23 World Heavyweight Boxing Champions.

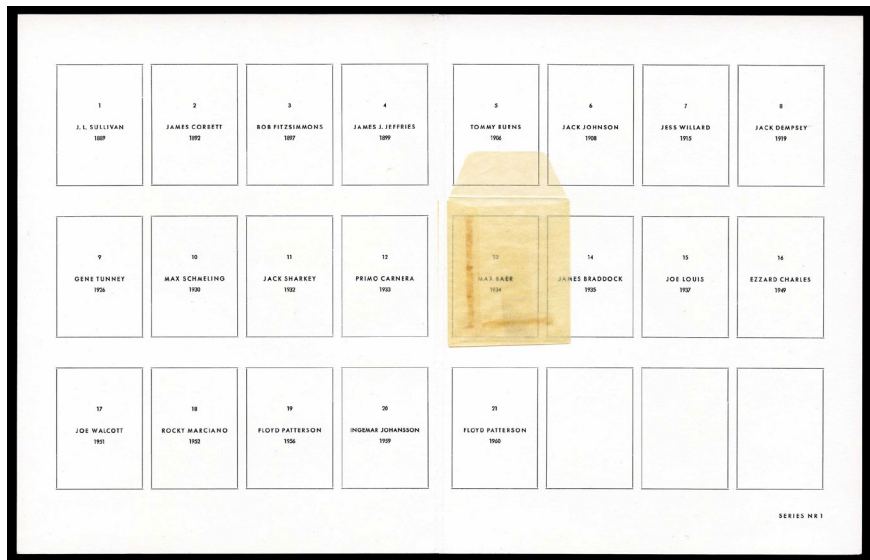
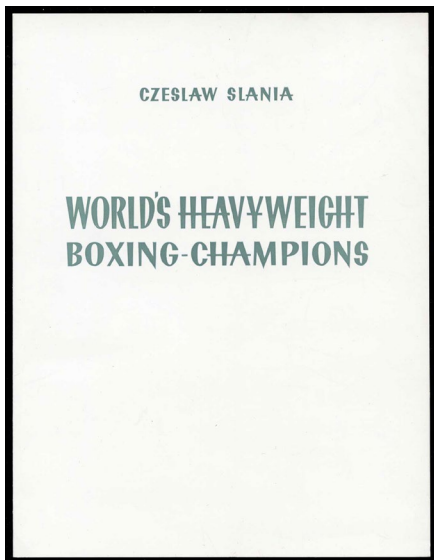
The Boxers set was initially produced as a set of 21 stamps, probably in 1960 or 1961, along with a presentation folder which included spaces for 24 stamps. Only the first 21 spaces in the folder had numbers, names, and dates printed. The final two stamps, for Sonny Liston and Cassius Clay, were produced a few years later.

The Boxers set was probably printed in several different print runs, because there are varying sheet layouts in existence. The first 21 stamps were printed in 6 different sheets (one each for the 6 different colors) and there are various combinations of multiples known, some with the same image and some se-tenant with other images of the same color. The final two stamps were each printed in sheets by themselves, each with just one design per sheet.

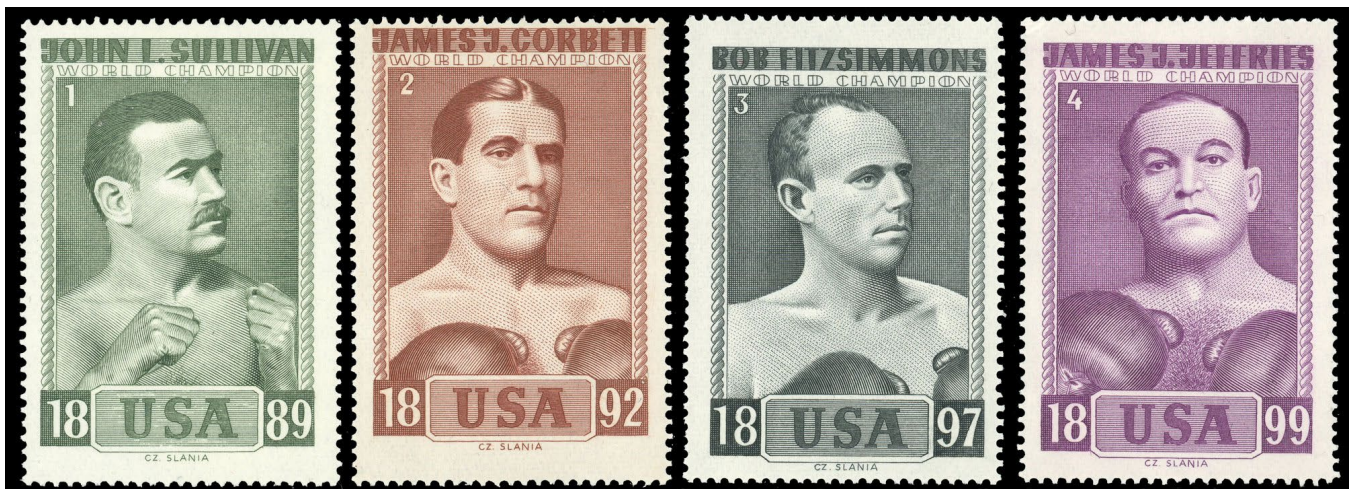
There are lithographic forgeries of this set, with all 23 stamps in a single sheet (5x5) with two blank spaces at the left of the bottom row. These forgeries exist in several different colors.

Image at right is the full set of engraved stamps in their original colors.





Images above show the cover and inside of the presentation folder for the Boxers series. This was produced before stamps numbered 22 and 23 were created. The attached glassine envelope originally held the individual stamps. Folders are also seen with the stamps hinged into their proper spaces, with some folders having Slania's autograph on them.

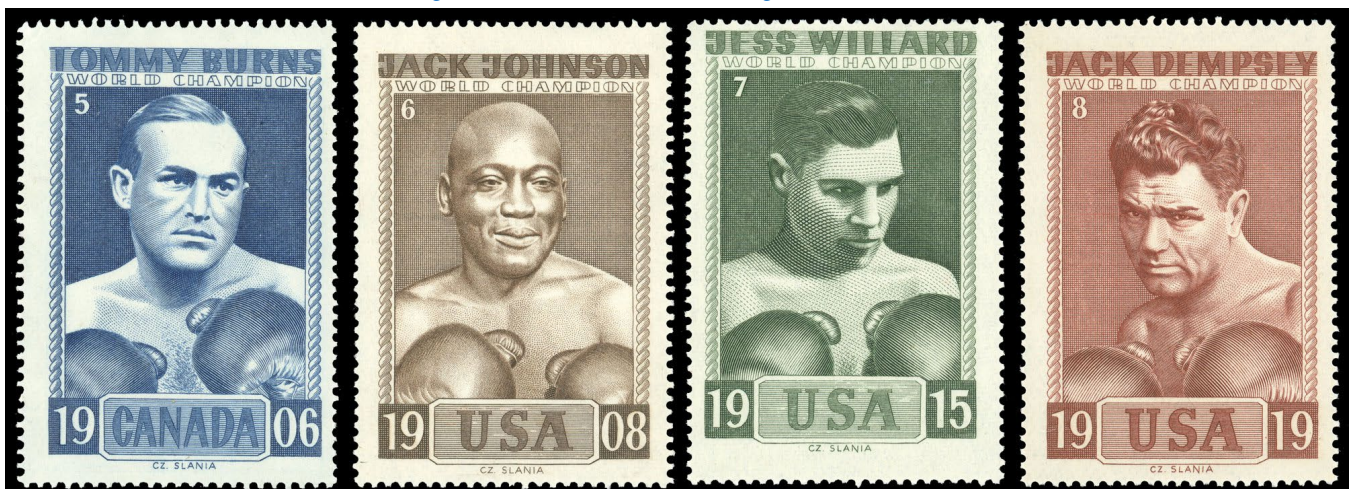


John L. Sullivan - First champion of the gloved era, last to fight bare-knuckled. Reigned 1882 - 1892.

James J. "Gentleman Jim" Corbett - The only man to ever beat John L. Sullivan. Reigned 1892 - 1897.

Bob Fitzsimmons Born in England, boxed for USA. Reigned 1897 - 1899.

James J. Jeffries Reigned 1899 - 1905.

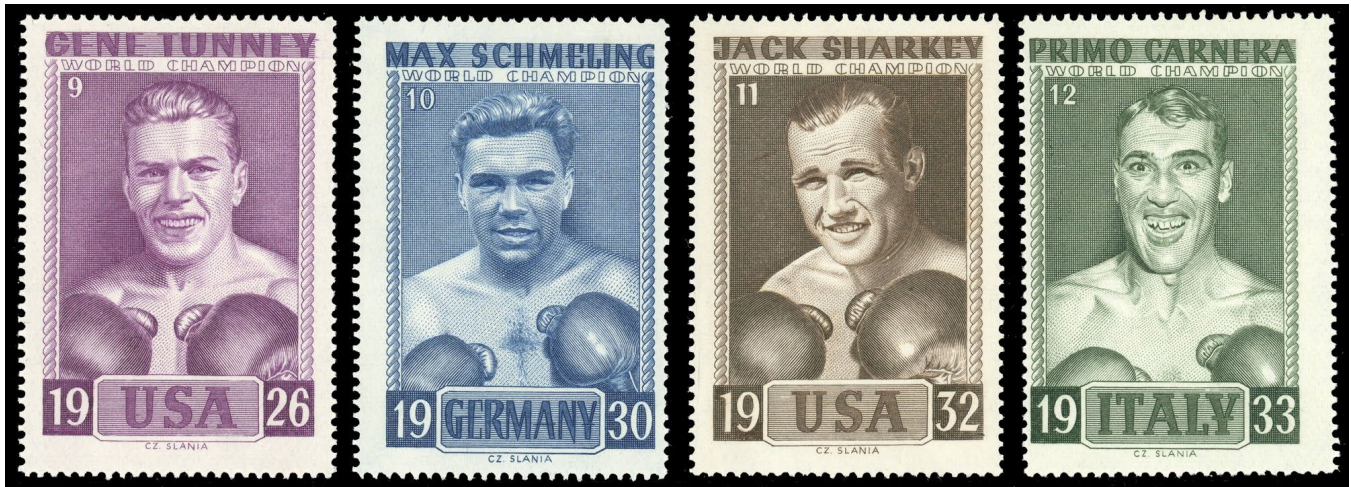


Tommy Burns Canada Reigned 1906 - 1908.

Jack Johnson - First black heavyweight champion. Reigned 1908 - 1915.

Jess Willard "The Pottawatomie Giant" Reigned 1915 - 1919.

Jack Dempsey "The Manassa Mauler" Reigned 1919 - 1926.

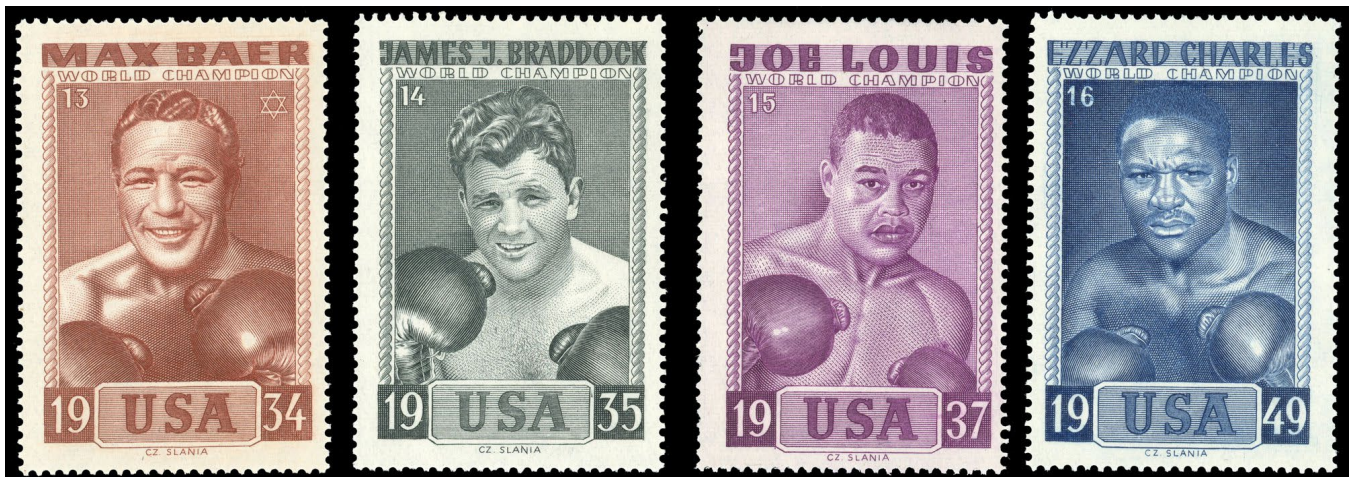


James Joseph "Gene" Tunney
Reigned 1926 - 1928.

Max Schmeling
Germany
Reigned 1930 - 1932.

Jack Sharkey
Reigned 1932 - 1933.

Primo Carnera
Italy
Reigned 1899 - 1905.

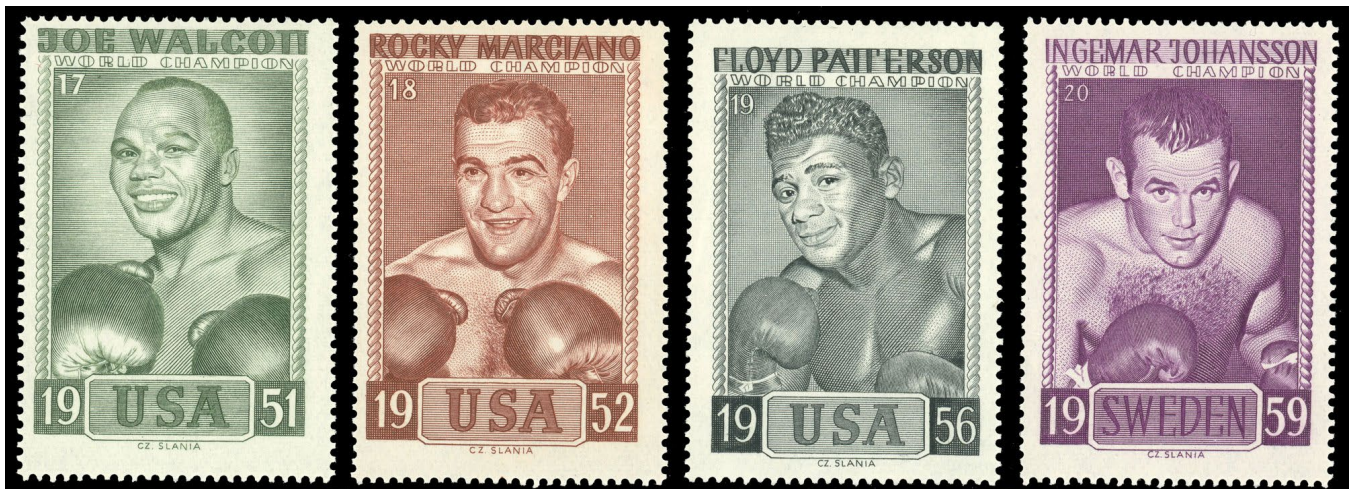


Max Baer
Note Star of David in corner.
Reigned 1934 - 1935.

James J. Braddock
Reigned 1935 - 1937.

Joe Louis
"The Brown Bomber"
Reigned 1937 - 1949.

Ezzard Charles
"The Cincinnati Cobra"
Reigned 1949 - 1951.

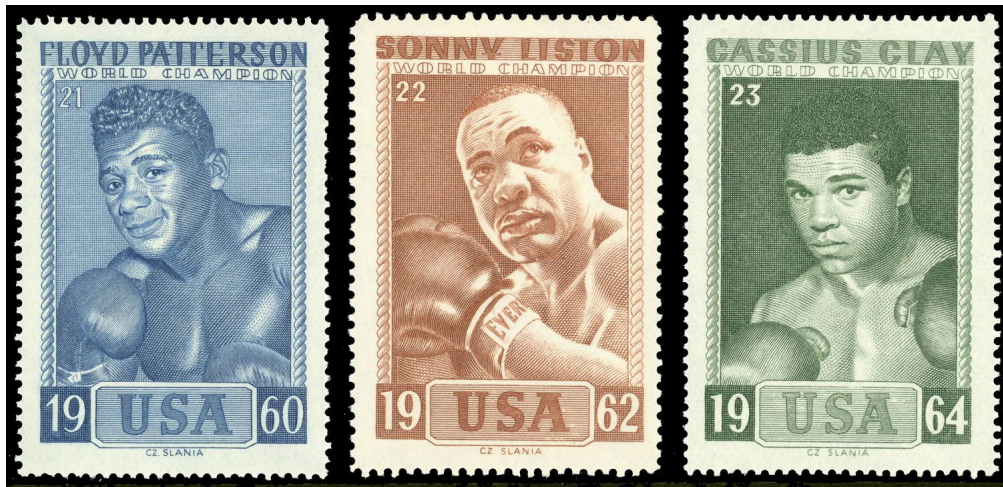


"Jersey" Joe Walcott
Born Arnold Raymond Cream
Reigned 1951 - 1952.

Rocky Marciano
Rocco Francis Marchegiano
Reigned 1952 - 1956.

Floyd Patterson
Reigned 1956 - 1959.

Jens Ingemar Johansson
Sweden
Reigned 1959 - 1960.



Floyd Patterson
Reigned 1960 - 1962.
(Second reign)

Sonny Liston
"The Big Bear"
Reigned 1962 - 1964.

Muhammad Ali
"The Greatest"
Born Cassius Clay
Reigned 1964 - 1967,
1974-1978, 1978-1979.



At left: Lithographic forgery sheet of 23 stamps, plus two blanks. These sheets are obvious fakes due to the poor print quality. Also, the 23 stamps were never originally printed in this sheet arrangement. These faked sheets are known in several different colors.

In addition to his Heavyweight Boxing Champions set, Slania designed and engraved many other poster stamps, covering a variety of subjects - but mostly portraits. His portraits included world leaders, royalty, actors, and family and friends.

Some of his privately produced poster stamps and souvenir sheets are depicted below and on the following page.

The images shown on the following pages come from several sources, both online and printed. I have tried to adjust the images for clarity as much as possible, and some stamps are shown in different colors, as produced.

The stamps are not shown in actual size.

The Portrait Gallery

Some of the images, and much of the biographical information on this page is from the website created by Ann Mette Heindorff (1942-2009) to document Słania's engraved works.

The website is currently maintained by Todd Ronnei at: <https://www.ronnei.com/slania/index.html>

My thanks to Todd for allowing me to use some of the information from that great website.

Actors and Performers

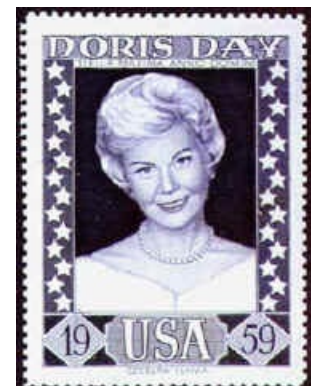
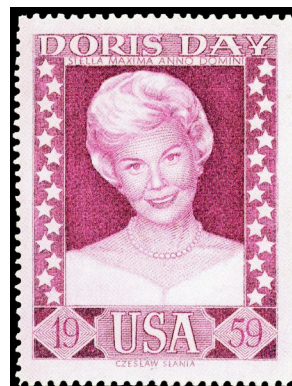


The Italian actress **Sophia Loren**, engraved in 1957 and 1961, respectively. She was born as Sofia Scicolone on 20th September 1934 in Rome and grew up in Pozzuoli, close to Naples. When she was fourteen she entered a beauty contest and won the title of Princess of the Sea. When she was fifteen she met the Italian producer Carlo Ponti and that meeting changed her life. He offered her a seven-year contract and later became her husband.

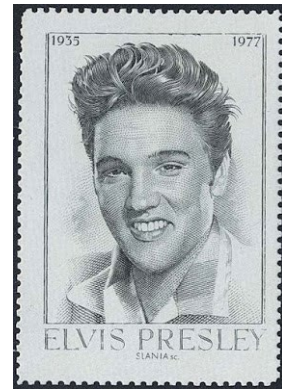


French actress **Brigitte Bardot**, engraved 1958. She was born on 28th September 1934 in Paris, France. She had her international breakthrough in 1956 for her part in the movie "Et Dieu créa la femme", directed by her then husband, Roger Vadim. Upon her own decision she stopped her film career in 1973, and has since then devoted her life to the protection of animals and endangered species.

American actress and singer **Doris Day**, engraved 1959. She was born on 3rd April 1924 as Doris Mary Anne Kappelhoff in Evanston, a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio. She withdrew from her active career as an actress in 1975, and from that time until her death in 2019 she devoted her life to animal welfare.



Actors and Performers (continued)



American actress **Marilyn Monroe**, engraved 1962. She was born 1st June 1926 in Los Angeles, California, as Norma Jeane Mortenson. Throughout her career she made altogether 29 films, the first one being “The Asphalt Jungle” in 1950. She committed suicide on 5th August 1962.

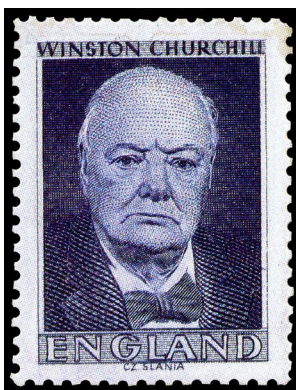
Elvis Aaron Presley (January 8, 1935 – August 16, 1977), was an American singer and actor. Known as the “King of Rock and Roll”, he is regarded as one of the most significant cultural figures of the 20th century.

World Leaders and Royalty



Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970), President of France 1958-1969. This label exists also in black colour.

Richard Nixon. The label is tagged like a stamp, and is an election campaign label for the election day 85h November 1960, printed 1960, but which was never used. There are many colour varieties of this label. The date is wrongly printed, it should have been the American way, showing first the month, then the date, followed by the year.



Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Great Britain. Winston Churchill enjoyed one of the longest and most interesting lives of any person who has ever lived. From his birth at Blenheim Palace on November 30th, 1874, to his death at Hyde Park Gate in London on January 24, 1965, his life was one of action, controversy, setback and achievement. It was never dull.

World Leaders and Royalty (Continued)



John F. Kennedy (1919-1963), President of the United States of America 1961-1963. Engraved after the president was assassinated in Texas in 1963.

Queen Elizabeth II, Great Britain, (1927-2022), engraved in 1985.



King Khaled of Saudi Arabia (1905-1975), King of Saudi Arabia (1964-1975). The king brought his country from near-feudalism into the modern world, and enabled his people to enjoy the benefits of the 20th century while still adhering to the principles of Islam.

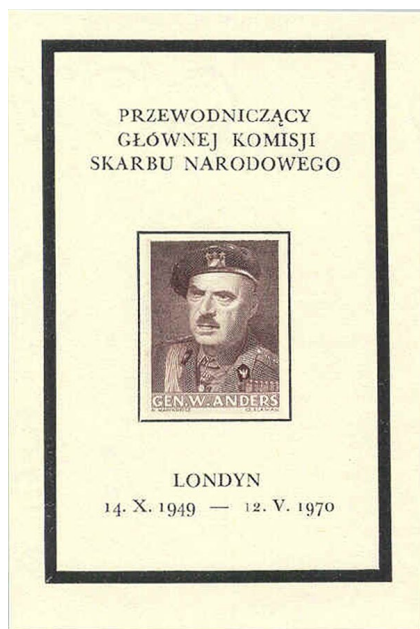
In a personal handwritten letter from Slania to a Polish acquaintance, dated in Stockholm 27th April 1974, Slania stated that someone from the King's family ordered this as a birthday gift.

Mao Tse-Tung (Mao Zedong), (1893-1976), Chairman of the People's Republic of China. This label exists also in black.

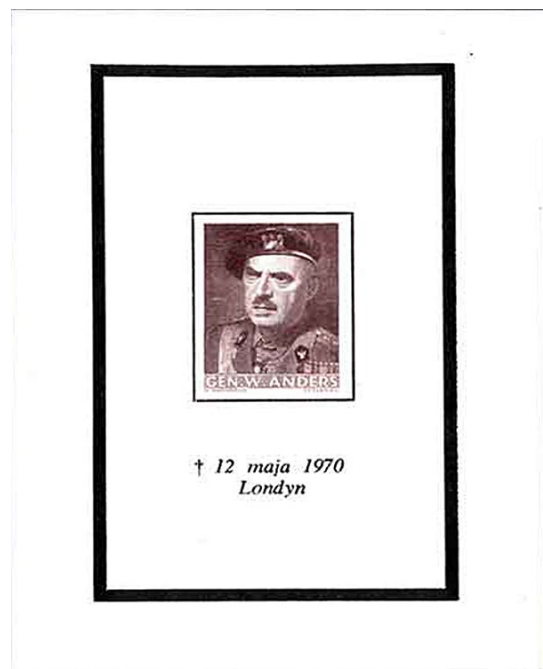


General **Jozef Pilsudsky** (1867-1935), Poland. Many Polish Americans considered Jozef Pilsudski to be the "George Washington of Poland." This revered general did more than any other single Pole, working primarily with Poles and on Polish soil, to achieve the independence of Poland after the first World War. While in secondary school, Pilsudski first became an avid revolutionary.

World Leaders and Royalty (Continued)



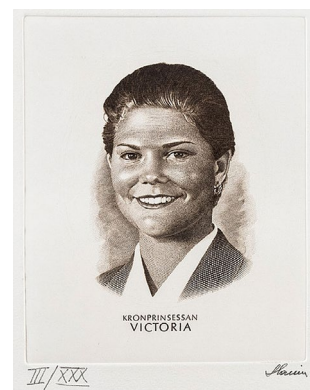
Władysław Albert Anders (11 August 1892 – 12 May 1970) was a Polish military officer and politician, and prominent member of the Polish government-in-exile in London.



The image was engraved for the National Treasury Fund in London, England (affiliated with the Polish Government-In-Exile) of which General Władysław Anders was chairman from 14th October 1949, until his death in London on 12th May 1970. Two different memorial sheets were created in 1970 to honor Anders. The text on the sheet at left “PRZEWODNICZĄCY GŁÓWNEJ KOMISJI SKARBU NARODOWEGO” means “Commander of the High Commission of the National Treasury”. The portrait does occur with perforations, done so by the engraver himself.

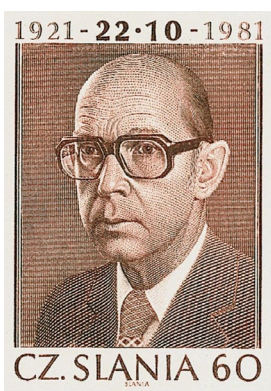


At left:
Queen Silvia of Sweden, engraved 1986. The Swedish Royal Family appeared on many Slania-engraved postage stamps.



At right:
Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden, not a stamp, but an engraving done on the occasion of her 18th birthday in 1995.

Family and Friends



Slania's self-portrait poster stamp designed by him on the occasion of his 60th birthday in 1981.

Family and Friends (Continued)



Slania's mother, **Jozefa**, at the occasion of her 66th birthday 1963.

Jozefa, for her 95th birthday in 1992.

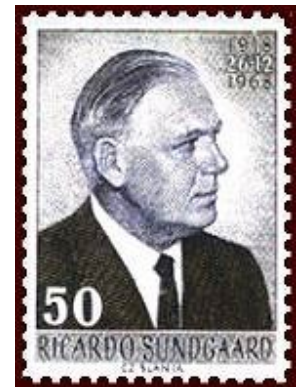


Mrs. **Leokadia Majewska**, Slania's sister, at the occasion of her 80th birthday in 1999.



Ricardo Sundgaard, 26th December 1918 - 12th March 1989. Director of the Danish GPO, and a member of the Danish "Steel Engraving Group".

Sundgaard was instrumental in introducing printing presses for steel engraved stamps in Denmark.



Left: **Count Lennart Bernadotte** (Uncle of King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden), at the occasion of his 80th birthday in 1989. Count Bernadotte passed away in December 2004, 95 years old.

Right: **Countess Sonia Bernadotte**, at the occasion of her 45th birthday in 1989.

Lennart and Sonia Bernadotte are the authors of the book "Life and Work of Czeslaw Slania", which is referred to as one of the sources for this article.



Not a stamp, but this is the Ex Libris created for Castle Mainau in Germany, the estate of Count Lennart and Countess Sonia Bernadotte.

More information about Lennart Bernadotte at:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lennart_Bernadotte

Other Subjects - non-Portrait



“Sista Fastningen” artwork by Maria Hordyj (born 1956), engraved 1988.



The Polish Philatelic Federation in the United Kingdom issued 2 souvenir sheets in dark blue and dark brown to commemorate the “Polphilex 66 - Polish Millennium (of Christianity)” exhibition. The sheets were designed by Jerzy Kwiatkowski and engraved by Czeslaw Slania. As a favour to philatelists, a perforated version 12¼, was also done by Czeslaw Slania. When he finished the engraved plate, he printed examples in several colours perforated 11½ in a frame 51.5 x 27.



The Polish Combatants Organization of the United States, in 1964, on the occasion of the Polish Millennium, had printed a sheetlet of nine seals. Designed by Dana Jarry of France, and engraved by Czeslaw Slania, the dimensions of the sheetlet are 153 x 197 mm, printed in green, individually perforated 14. Each label is 35.2 x 21 mm. All sheets are numbered, but the total number is unknown. The engraver also printed several examples in different colours, perforated 11½. The inscription SPK -- in Polish STOWARZYSZENIE POLSKICH KOMBATANTOW -- means “Association of Polish Combatants in USA”.



Similarly, the Polish Combatants of Sweden issued a label commemorating the Polish Millennium, based on a watercolour designed by Czeslaw Slania and printed in offset. It measures 50 x 29 mm on white, gummed paper. The number issued is unknown. It is printed in sheets of eighteen, the sheet size being 200 x 264 mm.

Scan submitted by Mr. Lars Nyberg (Sweden).

Concluding remarks . . .

I have tried to offer a thorough treatment of Czesław Ślania's privately designed, engraved, and produced stamps, even at the risk of using some sub-standard images.

With the exception of the Heavyweight Boxers set, which is relatively easy to find, all of the other stamps shown here are very scarce to extremely rare. Most of them were issued in extremely limited quantities, and more than a few of them were only intended as gifts from Ślania to select friends or acquaintances.

Because I have worked with secondary sources, print and online, there was little or no information about the actual sizes of many of the stamps.

Some stamp collectors avidly collect the many postage and revenue stamps engraved by Ślania, as well as the poster stamps. There is a lot of information available online, as well as some wonderful print resources.

Some of the resources and references for those interested in learning more about Czesław Ślania can be found below, including references used to create this article.

Websites, blogs, and books devoted to Czesław Ślania:

The following two sources were the primary references used for this article:

<https://www.ronnei.com/slania/index.html>

This website was originally created by Ann Mette Heindorff (1942-2009), as "The ultimate online resource for the engraved stamps and banknotes of the world famous engraver".

The website has been maintained since Heindorff's death by Todd Ronnei.

I have found this to be the most comprehensive source for images and information about Ślania's stamps.

Book: "Lennart Bernadotte presenterar Czeslaw Slanias livsverk", self published in 1989 by Bernadotte himself. It is a large album-style book bound with 4 rings.

Other resources:

Wikipedia (online) was helpful to fill in many minor details about people and places referenced in this article, in particular about the heavyweight boxers.

<https://norbyhus.dk/chuckm.html> (This web page has extensive information about the stamp engraving process)

<https://slaniacrazy.blogspot.com/> (This is an online blog with a lot of good information)

https://www.stampcommunity.org/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=61455&whichpage=1 (This is an online forum-type website, with many posts about Ślania)

<https://thestampforum.boards.net/thread/6181/work-czeslaw-slania> (Another online forum about Ślania)

There was a Czeslaw Ślania Study Group at one time, but it seems to be defunct now.

In closing, here is one final stamp to share.

After Ślania's passing in the spring of 2005 a few Ślania-related stamps have appeared, engraved by his co-engraver and friend in the Swedish Post Office, Piotr Naszarkowski. One of them is the "24th label", produced to honour Ślania with a sort of completion of his famous boxer set, engraved in the 1960s



The label is highly symbolic, showing Ślania with his 1000th engraving (2001) in his hand, and in the background the emblem of Guinness World Record book granted to Ślania for this engraving being the largest engraved stamp ever issued. The "denomination" of 1000 refers to the 1000th engraving. In the context it must be remembered that Ślania himself was an avid boxer and as such a great admirer of the world champions. The number "24" top right refers to label No. 24 of the original Ślania-set.