Stamp catalogues are a debateable tool. While they can be a useful reference, there is still no definitive universal catalogue for the world of stamp collectors.

In my 35+ years of collecting, I have never ordered a stamp via a catalogue number. Well, to be honest — I did at first, but I quickly learned that the catalogue numbering was not universal.

A Stanley Gibbons reference may be acceptable in the U.K. — but American dealers prefer Scott catalogue. Then we have Yvert numbering in France, and Michel numbering in Germany. Catalogue publishers disagree, but then they do want to sell their catalogues don’t they?

The only consistent variable with these publications is the sorting by country, year and description of issue. This is something that I would like to see in a Judaica thematic stamp catalogue — but that discussion is for another day.

In philately, we should collect what we want and not be dictated to collect what appears in the stamp catalogues. There also seems to be no uniform agreement as to what material should be included and what is omitted.

I have recently been trying to track down a 2006 Austrian issue, for Haagen-Daz ice cream. But as it is not listed in certain stamp catalogues, I have been told by some dealers that it was not an official stamp, and was a “private issue”.

This is very debateable, as a “private issue” is when stamps are printed, which are not legal or acceptable by the postal service! This was not the case with the Haagen-Daz issue, as the stamps were legally made for use on Austrian mail.

On the other side of the coin, we have a 2010 Hanukkah set of three machine vended type stamps, issued by stamps.com

However, as these stamps were not sold via the USPS, should they really be included in a stamp catalogue? The people at Scott say yes and have allocated catalogue numbers in their 2011 edition.

Members comments would be most welcome, for publication in a future newsletter.

— Gary Goodman

We are very pleased to announce another fine contribution to our Israeli and Topical Jewish Philatelic site: www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL/Philately.html entitled A Jewish Philatelist’s Voyage on the Seven Seas by Peter Keeda of the University of Sydney, Australia.

It is an article with extensive bibliography and a Stampchart on the topic of Jews and the sea trade.

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In this very timely article, Lawrence Fisher presents his summary of the Palestinian refugee issue and some fascinating documents that illustrate one of the major obstacles blocking a lasting peace in the Middle East.

At the time of writing, the Israeli government is still urging Palestinian leaders to meet them for peace negotiations, without preconditions. All Palestinian political entities, refuse. Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza will not talk with Israel under any circumstances and do not recognize Israel’s existence. The P.A. in Ramallah, which has now submitted a request to the UN Security Council for statehood has consistently refused to submit its own rule to the democratic process, insists on prior acceptance of a raft of demands. Of these, the ‘return’ of Palestinian refugees (95% of whom have never lived in what is now Israel) is the most intractable.

The refugees’ “right of return” has been at the top of the agenda of every generation of so-called “peace talks”. Their story began as early as 1947. Whether the Arabs were expelled as their current spokesmen claim, or whether they left of their own accord, based on the urging of Arab leaders who expected a swift victory, is not at issue here. What matters is that the United Nations endorsed a carefully prescribed right. But only for Palestinian refugees.

Between 1947 and 1949 hundreds of thousands of Arabs, (reliable estimates range from 650,000 to 750,000), left their homes and poured into neighboring Arab countries. This article is concerned only with the consequences for them, and not the larger number of Jews expelled or fleeing from Moslem lands as a result of the war.

FIGURE 1 shows a letter registered from Haifa to an Arab in Jerusalem who had left the country. Interestingly, the letter was sent by an insurance agency, stating that owing to the riots in Haifa, the insurance policy had been cancelled.

The number of refugees was bloated by Arab propaganda to a million. FIGURE 2 shows a letter from Sudan of 1960 with a bilingual slogan — Remem ber the million Palestine refugees evicted from their homes on May 15, 1948. A similar slogan is known on covers from Jordan, but with the word expelled instead of evicted.

The Arabs were put into makeshift camps and were not welcomed by their cousins. The Swedish Count Folke Bernadotte, FIGURE 3, visited the camps and saw men, women and children living in tents. They were poor, hungry and living on handouts which were often not forthcoming: see FIGURE 4, a stamp issued in Jordan in 1969. No country seemed to want them.

The newly-created government of Israel extended citizenship to those who had remained, but refused to accept the refugees back, realizing that to repatriate a hostile population would endanger its security. The Israelis considered settlement of the refugee issue, Muslim, Christian and Jewish, a negotiable part of an overall peace settlement. As President Chaim Weizmann explained: “We are anxious to help such resettlement provided that real peace is established and the Arab states do their part of the job.”

Bernadotte filed a detailed report to the UN, giving his opinion...
on the Palestinian refugee problem. He stated that the situation of the refugees was critical and could not be sustained, (echoed by recent claims made by world leaders about those in the Hamas-ruled Gaza strip.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations convened. Resolution 194 was passed, declaring that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be allowed to do so at the earliest practical date, and compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return." The decision was rejected by Arab states because it did not mention an unconditional right of return, or indeed that Muslim countries would need to compensate expelled Jews.

After the assassination of Count Bernadotte, the United Nations General Assembly convened on 8 December 1949 and announced Resolution 302, which established the UNRWA organization, dealing exclusively with Palestinian Arab refugees. To this day, it remains the only agency dedicated to helping the refugees from a specific region or conflict. It is not part of the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, which is dedicated to aiding all the millions of other refugees in the world.

UNRWA began operating in 1950, figure 5, and replaced the work of the Red Cross, the International Refugee Organization and the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees, (UNRPR), organization which had been established a year earlier. Its mandate was to provide relief, education, health-care, social services and emergency aid to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Under the operational definition of UNRWA, Palestinian refugees are people whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. But uniquely, the descendants of the original Palestinian refugees were also eligible for registration.

UNRWA-managed refugee camps were established in Arab countries such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and on the West Bank under Jordanian occupation, mainly near Hebron and Jenin, and in the Egyptian-occupied Gaza strip. Figure 6 shows the post-mark of El'Arrub refugee camp in 1966, on the outskirts of Hebron.

World Refugee Year was officially launched on June 28, 1959. The idea was initiated by the United Kingdom and approved by the General Assembly in a Resolution which had been adopted on December 5, 1958. Olav Mathiesen of Denmark designed an emblem for U.N. stamps, which subsequently became the official UNHCR logo: a tall standing silhouette between protective hands. Although UNRWA was not a part of the UNHCR, many Arab states decided to adopt this as part of their propaganda. It was used on the stamps of several Arab countries, starting from 1960. Often, they added the wording, "UNRWA for Palestine Refugees". Figure 7 shows a Syrian stamp issued in 1966 for World Refugee Week using the adopted UNHCR insignia.

Initially UNRWA was located in Beirut, Lebanon, in the UNESCO building, with a liaison office in Geneva. Most of the letters sent from these offices were on preprinted envelopes and letterheads, (and as such are not acceptable in competitive Thematics). In 1976 the headquarters moved to Amman and Vienna, presumably as a result of the Lebanese civil war. At the Vienna offices, PO Box 700 of the United Nations building was reserved for UNRWA (Figure 8).

The definition of a Palestinian refugee, according to the United Nations, included all descendants of the original refugees, most of them now dead. None of these refugees were assimilated into the society of their hosting countries, although in August 2010 those in Lebanon were granted strictly limited rights. The Lebanese parliament voted to give the more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in the country the right to work in professions normally open to other foreigners, ending a long-standing policy of confining Palestinians to the most menial jobs. But they would still be barred from working as engineers, lawyers and doctors. Palestinians, who constitute nearly a tenth of the country's population, are not allowed to attend public schools, own property or pass on inheritances, and are mostly...
confined to squalid refugee camps. The proposed legislation does not address any of those issues. Lebanon’s Sunni community support expanding Palestinian rights further, but Christian factions oppose the move, claiming that it would alter the nation’s fragile sectarian balance, since most of the Palestinians are Sunni Muslims.

In Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood and army veterans disagree over how Palestinians should be treated. The radical Muslim Brotherhood, assisted by the Palestinians who became full Jordanian citizens in 1950, are demanding the inclusion of a further 1.2 million Palestinians who entered Jordan after the 1967 Six-Day War. Despite the fact that they have been fully integrated into the economy, academia and the media, they are listed as displaced persons and have no political rights. The army veterans, who number more than 700,000, are totally opposed to the participation of the “displaced” Palestinians in the next elections. They argue that should the 1.2 million Palestinians participate, the percentage of “authentic” Jordanians will decrease from 57% to 43%. “Jordan will not be Jordan any more”, so that the country will be taken over by the Palestinians, they contend.

Today about five million Palestinians defined as refugees, (as compared with 8,900,000 in 1968), are eligible for UNRWA services. Some can only claim one grandparent who may have lived a couple of years in Palestine. Unless this problem is resolved, one day there may be a knock at my door and someone will say, “this used to belong to my great-great-grandfather. Please leave!”.

— Lawrence Fisher

UNRWA web site, www.unrwa.org
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_refugee
jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/refugees.html
United Nations Philatelist, volume 24
United Nations Philatelist monograph, June 2000

Latvia Righteous among the Nations New Issue

Charles Wildstein has kindly sent information about a Latvian stamp released July 4, 2011honouring Johanna and Zanis Lipke.

Only 3,000 of Latvia’s 70,000 Jews survived the war. As a civilian employee of Luftwaffe, Zanis Lipke was assigned to transport Jewish workers to and from the ghetto. Assisted by his wife Johanna, he would provide them food and medicines and quietly move them a few at a time to ad hoc shelters he created within the city or in the safer countryside. Of all the Jews he saved this way, only a dozen or so survived, many having been betrayed by Latvians in the countryside.

The Lipkes were awarded the status of Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem. The Soviets cut Lipke’s pension after he accepted an award from Israel and after he befriended Riga’s small and besieged community of refuseniks. The stamp was released on July 4, 2011.