

PHILATELIC FURY.

Philately may seem a gentle advocacy, but Postmaster Larry O'Brien knows better. After he approved a 5 cent stamp to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Henry David Thoreau's birth, furious collectors complained that the Post Office Department was making the Walden Ponderer look like a thug, a Communist, a hippie, or "a beatnik suffering from withdrawal symptoms". One fan even threatened civil disobedience. "If you bring a blown-up poster of this hideous thing into Concord, Mass.," he wrote, "you'd better send a company of the National Guard". Fortunately no one had to call out the troops when the Postmaster General Richard Murphy formally issued the stamp — bearing a rugged, brooding likeness of Thoreau by Artist Leonard Baskin — before a well-behaved crowd of 400 in Concord.

SUGGESTION BOX. Every Postmaster General takes a pasting over stamps. This year the Bureau of Engraving will roll out some 24 billion of them, in 51 varieties, including 24 new issues. A good many are sure to come back on letters from pressure groups, cranks philatelists and historical groups.

Currently, members of the John Birch Society and other right wing organizations are complaining that the Post Office is cottoning to subversive types with a 25 cent stamp portraying Negro Leader Frederick Douglass, a \$1 issue honouring Playwright Eugene O'Neill, an 8 cent Albert Einstein number, and others of Philosopher John Dewey and Revolutionary War Pamphleteer Tom Paine. Last spring the Protestant — dominated Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed suit in U.S. district court to prevent the 1967 reissue, in a slightly larger version of last year's Christmas stamp, a Madonna and Child portrait by 15th century Flemish Artist Hans Memling. The suit charged that O'Brien, a Roman Catholic, is, in effect, proselytizing for his faith.

The department is also besieged by oddball nominations, including recent proposals for the commemorations of mothers-in-law, the ten most wanted men, the Texas longhorn, the pretzel industry, the hamburger, the 100th anniversary of the first daylight bank robbery in the U.S. (a heist on February 13th, 1866, in Liberty, Mo.), and the 4,000th anniversary of the pickle.

Shadows and warts. Sometimes the Post Office does heed its mail. When last year's 5 cent George Washington brought protests, the department agreed that "The stamp needs a bit of a face lift". Last month it doctored the shadows and warts in the design.

All stamp designs (for which commissioned artists receive \$1,000) are reviewed by the Postmaster General's eleven — member Stamp Advisory Council, which is trying to avoid turkeys like the 1948 stamp celebrating the poultry industry. Still, the department must occasionally wince and yield to pressures from Capitol Hill. In 1966, Louisiana's Representative Jimmy Mor-

ri son, chairman of the House postal — rate subcommittee, wanted a stamp commemorating the Great River Road that runs from Canada to New Orleans along the Mississippi — and right through his district. Larry O'Brien, needing Morrison's support for a parcel — post reform bill, ordered the stamp. But when the Congressman came up for re-election last fall, his constituents voted him out of office. As for his stamp, a poll run by LINN'S WEEKLY STAMP NEWS, the philatelist's bible, elected the Great River Road design the ugliest of the year.

First published in "TIME" magazine.

BOOK REVIEW.

Postage Due Handstruck Markings of Malta. A Malta Study Circle Paper No. 5. 24 pages. (8" x 10"). Photo and line illustrations. Price: 8/6. plus postage. Available from the publisher J.G.C., 13, Bucks Avenue, Watford Heath, Watford, Herts., U.K.

Here is another unfinished research published by the busy Malta Study Circle who hopes readers will thereby be encouraged to come forward with first hand information that probably lies neglected in their collections. To Mr. Lander please.

What is assembled here so far comprises a look at the Regulations and Procedures, descriptions of the Handstruck Marks and their development — with their illustrations neatly attractive as the front cover decorations — a table-showing amounts charged against various marks. Markings on Air Mail are included and further tables of "Taxe" and combinations of early Postage Due markings. The adhesives are dealt with separately and include notes on forgeries, specimens, printings and varieties.

The bibliography will help readers in search of deeper instruction — and "Suggested Further Research" is where the readers can learn how to come to the aid of the Circle. If you have Maltese covers within this subject why not make them available now?

R.P.

Acknowledgements to The Philatelist.

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