

Ever since I can remember, I have been interested in the field of ophthalmology. The reason is that when I only was two years and eight months old I had an operation to eliminate a glioma in the retina of the right eye. The operation was performed by the then-famous Dr. Horacio FERRER Díaz (1876-1960), a very well known Cuban ophthalmologist. Dr. Ferrer was very active in the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898), reaching the rank of Colonel of the Liberator Army. During the Republic he served as Secretary of War in an interim Cuban government in 1933.

An overview of my collection of "Cuban Medicine and Stamps" reveals a rather extensive representation of ophthalmology and persons connected with that field of medicine. Let us take a look.

Ophthalmologists

I can identify two Cubans and two foreign ophthalmologists. The two Cubans are Dr. Carlos Juan FINLAY Barré or Barrés and his son Dr. Carlos Eduardo FINLAY Shine. Of the two foreigners, one died in Cuba (Dr. Francesco AN TOMMARCHI Matey) while the other is Dr. Ludvic Lazarus Zamenhof (*Scott* 2926), who is better known for his efforts to create Esperanto, a constructed language designed for international communications.

For his discovery of the mosquito as the vector that transmits yellow fever, Dr. Carlos J. Finlay can be found on a number of postage stamps from Cuba and other countries. Several examples are shown on nearby (**Figs. 1-3**). Carlos J. Finlay (1833-1915) completed his pre-medical studies in different cities in France, including Le Havre, Rouen and Metz. Due to several epidemics in Europe, he returned to Havana where his studies were not accepted to enter the University so he completed his medical studies at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia where he obtained his medical degree in 1855. After he returned to Havana, he had to revalidate his studies at the University of Havana (1857) and subsequently started a medical practice in Havana as a general practitioner and ophthalmologic surgeon.

His son, Carlos E. Finlay, also a recognized ophthalmologist, became professor of ophthalmology at Havana University during the Republic. He is depicted leaning on a desk in a meeting with his father and several others discussing his father's theory of yellow fever transmission (**Fig. 4**).

The sojourn of Dr. Francesco Antommarchi (1780-1838), who was born in Corsica but eventually wound up in Cuba, is also very interesting. Dr. Antommarchi is better known as the physician who assisted Napoleon Bonaparte, his friend of many years, during Bonaparte's illness and death on the island of Saint Helena. After the Emperor's death, Dr. Antommarchi traveled first to France and later on to New Orleans. From there he traveled to Cuba and settled in Santiago de Cuba, where he died in 1838. While living in Cuba, Dr. Antommarchi made extensive studies of mineral water springs near the city of Puerto Principe



Fig. 1 Carlos J. Finlay's autograph. Cuba 1965 (*Scott* 989)



Fig. 2 Carlos J. Finlay Cuba 1965 (*Scott* 991)



Fig. 3 Carlos J. Finlay. Panama 1950 (*Scott* 372)



Fig. 4 Carlos E. Finlay with his father. Cuba 1965 (*Scott* 995)



Fig. 5 Death of Napoleon. Cuba 1981 (*Scott* 2453)

(now Camagüey). He has been credited as having performed the first cataract operation in Cuba. He is depicted on a 50-cent stamp issued in 1981 showing a painting by Charles Baron von Steuben¹ that recreates the death of Napoleon Bonaparte in St. Helena. In the painting, Dr. Antommarchi stands at the head of Napoleon's deathbed with his left hand on the pillow (**Fig. 5**).

Dr. L. L. Zamenhof (1859-1917) was an ophthalmologist



Fig. 6 Ludvic Zamenhof. Cuba 1987 (Scott 2926)



Fig. 7 José Guerra Aguiar. Cuba 1991 (Scott 3293)



Fig. 8 Robert Koch. Cuba 1982 (Scott 2525)



Fig. 9 Benjamin Franklin. Cuba 1956 (Scott C150)



Fig. 10 World Health Day. Cuba 1976 (Scott 2048)



Fig. 11 CDR, 10th Anniv. Cuba 1970 (Scott 1555)



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Other Scientists

Other scientists related to ophthalmology depicted on Cuban stamps include José Luis GUERRA Aguiar (1914–1990) (Fig. 7), who graduated as an optometrist at Havana University, performing his professional services at the Havana Municipal Hospital for Children. Mr. Guerra is better known for his knowledge and expertise of Cuban philately. Among other activities in this field, he was curator of the Cuban Postal Museum from 1965 until his death in 1990. He published several books related to Cuban philately, including a Cuban stamp catalogue that bears his name. Mr. Guerra has been depicted directly and indirectly on several other Cuban stamps: 1) a stamp issued January 2, 1995 (Scott No. 3610) showing the front page of his book *Historia Postal de Cuba* and 2) a set of three stamps issued January 2, 2005 (Scott 4446–4448) advertising the 40th anniversary of the Cuban Postal Museum that bears his name. The stamps feature several pre-philatelic covers as well as several places and cities in Cuba.

Two other foreign scientists related to ophthalmology depicted in Cuban stamps are Robert Koch (1843–1910) (Fig. 8) for his work in conjunctivitis and Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) (Fig. 9), who is credited with the invention of bifocal lenses. Benjamin Franklin was a man of many talents

with interests in the fields of science, politics and diplomacy. He had poor vision and needed separate eyeglasses for distance viewing and for reading. Constantly changing eyeglasses became tiresome and he thought that by inserting two different crystals within the same frame he would avoid this nuisance. The result was what we now know as bifocal lenses. It is interesting to observe that in the stamp he is shown without glasses. He is also depicted on a postpaid envelope issued during the American occupation of Cuba.

Anatomy of the Eye

One stamp was issued on April 7, 1976, (Fig. 10), to advertise the World Health Organization (WHO). The stamp show the drawing of an eye and relates to trachoma—an ophthalmic infectious disease that is the leading cause of blindness worldwide.

A stylized eye (Fig. 11) as a symbol of the CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution) can be seen on a 1970 postage stamp. The CDR is a paramilitary communist organization created by the current Cuban government to supervise (spy on) the political activities of neighbors within each block of houses in the cities. This organization is also charged with the task of performing some medical activities such as immunization of the population and, for that reason, the stamp is included in my medical collection.



Fig. 13 Postal cancellation "Ciego de Avila".



Fig. 14 Obverse of prepaid postal card. Legend reads "How much happiness is reflected in you, Daddy"



This envelope includes a Cuban postal tax stamp showing a mother and child that was issued December 1, 1941 (Scott RA4) and an advertising label showing a stylized eye. The label is based on a poster designed by Franz von Stuck (1863–1928) for the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, Germany, May–October 1911. The cancel is dated December 3 commemorating Carlos J. Finlay's birthday. It is also the day dedicated in Cuba to honor the medical profession as "Medical Doctor's Day".

Eye diseases

Blindness is depicted on a stamp showing an oil painting (Fig. 12) entitled "El Ciego" (The Blind Man), by painter Manuel VEGA López who was born in Havana in 1892. I also include in my collection a postal cancellation from the city of Ciego de Avila. "Ciego" means "blind" in Spanish (Fig. 13).

Optical instruments:

There is a prepaid Cuban postal card showing eye glasses (Fig. 14). A 75-cent stamp was issued in 2004 showing fluorite, a mineral used in the manufacturing of optical lenses (Fig. 15). I am not including within the optical instruments all the microscopes depicted in Cuba stamps.



Fig. 15 Fluorite and microscope. Cuba 2004 (Scott 4417)

Note: I have highlighted the usual family name of some of the persons included in this paper to indicate that this is the name by which they are known. It is customary in Spanish speaking countries to use two surnames, the father's first, and then the mother's. This is interpreted by persons of other languages to assume that the current family name is the last one listed.

Reference

1. Charles Guillaume Auguste Henri Francois Louis von Steuben was born on 19 April 1788 at Bauerbach, near Mannheim, then Grand Duchy of Baden, now Germany. He died in Paris on November 1856 of a paralysis.

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Danish Cancer Society, 80th anniversary. Denmark 2008 (Scott B93) Cover of booklet of 10 semipostal stamps

Ophthalmology and Cuban Philately

By Marcos A. Iglesias

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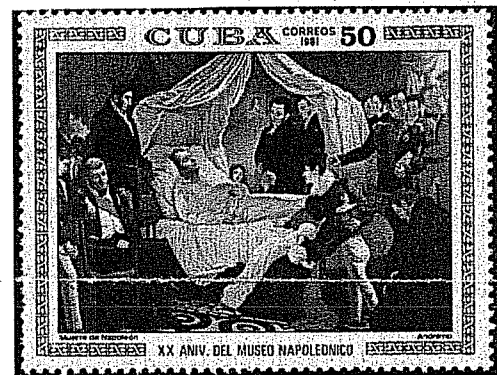


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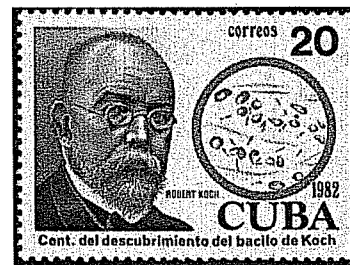


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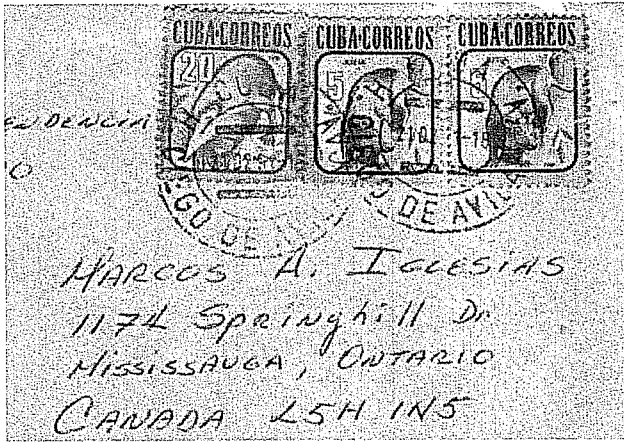


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Danish Cancer Society, 80th anniversary. Denmark 2008 (Scott B93) Cover of booklet of 10 semipostal stamps