

Americana Obscura

By David A. Kent

Since the United States is (or at least was) one of the world largest manufacturing countries, it's not unusual to find American-built equipment on stamps from foreign countries. Iceland recently released two booklets of stamps picturing farm equipment. The two stamps in one of the booklets show a bulldozer built in this country by the International Harvester Company back in 1943 and a Ferguson farm tractor, a 1949 import from the U.S. The tractor is also pictured on the cover of the stamp booklet hauling a hay rake (not an American one).



Iceland 2008 (Scott 1132a-b)



France likes to celebrate its aviation pioneers, the best known of whom was Louis Blériot, who gained fame when he became the first to fly across the English Channel in 1909. Not long after that, the Marquis de Polignac hosted the world's first air show. It took place in August 1909 at Bétheny on the Marne. Among the many balloon and heavier-than-air aircraft contests held was the first ever Gordon Bennett International Aviation Cup race, won by the American Glenn Curtiss flying his Curtiss-Herring biplane. Bennett was an American expatriate living in Paris, where he was publisher of the *International Herald Tribune* newspaper. Over the years he offered trophies for all sorts of races, including aviation, ballooning, yachting, automobiles, and even soccer!



France 2009
(Scott 3690)

One of the great engineering achievements of the 20th Century was the completion of a railroad link from the seaport of Guayaquil, Ecuador, to the country's national capital at Quito. The problem, of course, is that Quito is perched at an altitude of more than 9,000 feet up in the Andes Mountains, presenting a challenging engineering feat for any company that might try to build a railroad that high. Design work began in 1895 and ac-



Ecuador 2008 (Scott 1932)



Ecuador 2008
(Scott 1933)

tual construction in 1899. They faced many obstacles, not the least of which was an almost perpendicular wall of rock called the "Devil's Nose," forcing them to zigzag across the rock face with intricately designed switchbacks. It took another decade for them to reach the capital city, and the train's triumphal entrance into Quito was greeted by arches of palms, laurel wreaths and flowers, bells tolling, banquets, dances and popular festivities that lasted four days. It was also greeted by a commemorative stamp that is reproduced on a recent single stamp and souvenir sheet. The engineering work, of course, was done by an American firm, led by technicians Archer Herman and Edward Morely.

[Note: The late Art Carver, one of our founders, coined the term "Americana Obscura," referring to a stamp that has an Americana connection that is not immediately apparent, and that requires some research to reveal it. -These occasional articles are a tribute to him.]

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), Poet, Short Story Writer

From the Editor's Files

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door...



San Marino
2009 (Scott 1789)

The above lines from the beginning of his most famous poem, "The Raven," are probably what first comes to mind when we think of Edgar Allan Poe. But his tales of terror and sadness, of the macabre and gothic horror ("The Fall of the House of Usher" or "The Tell-tale Heart") essentially created a new genre. With works like "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," he is also credited with the invention of the detective story. Born in Boston, he had a problem with drinking most of his life and died in Baltimore, supposedly after a drinking binge in Baltimore and buried in an unmarked grave.