Letter to the Editor

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Letter to the Editor
Dear Martin:

Just a note to tell you how much I enjoyed reading the last issue of the Newsletter especially your excellent article on Verdi's letter to Mauro Corticelli. It unexpectedly struck a tone on matters philatelic that jogged my memory on Italian postage. The stamp, seen to best advantage on page 22, a 20 centesimi stamp (E Bollo: Franco Bollo) was among the first issued by the new Kingdom of Italy. Right after unification, as early as 1863, a contract for engraving and printing was given to the English firm of De La Rue in the archives of which detailed correspondence and records were preserved that survived the bombing of London in the 1940's when the headquarters and factory were destroyed. The English engraved and printed stamps presenting the right profile of the king in an oval border around which read the legend Vittorio Emanuele Re D'Italia, perhaps one of the first appearances of this acronym related by some to Verdi. A little later, about 1867, it was decided to build a plant in Turin with the know-how, machinery, and dies of De La Rue but run by Italians trained in their establishment, which retained contracts for supplying paper and technology until 1895. During this period the price of a normal letter was 15 or Quindici Centesimi. But needing more revenue the parliament voted to increase the price to Venti Centesimi, and having invested lots of money in the 15 Centesimi stamps had De La Rue overprint the old stamps with the new price. Perhaps it was this increase in postage by means of overprinting that kept the increase in price in Verdi's memory and irritated him so.

The design of the Corticelli letter stamp, going back to an earlier Tuscany model is oblong with the same engraving of Vittorio Emanuele but without the oval border and legend.

The price is given along the bottom with capital “C” but lower case “ent.” with a period indicating the abbreviation of Centesimi. The border beginning from left to right has three cartouches printed in capitals: F BOLLO (the “F” stands for FRANCO) or postage stamp; POSTALE; and ITALIANO.


You can chalk this letter to my having some free time waiting for an auto glass place to replace a cracked windshield in my son Garo's car. In any event, congratulations on the new format.

Sincerely,

Victor P. Yellin*

* Editor's note: Prof. Yellin is a composer, musicologist and member of the faculty at New York University.