

# The Magnificent De Marchi Collection can now be enjoyed worldwide on the Internet

by Danilo Bogoni

To survive the Second World War a sensational stamp collection had to migrate from a cave to a cemetery, well, not quite as we shall see; this however is only part of the amazing journey of the "famous complete collection of stamps of the Italian States" formed by Marco De Marchi and bequeathed exactly eighty years ago to the Museum of the Risorgimento in Milan. The collection has now reached the digital era and cyberspace. From information published by the philatelic magazine *Il francobollo* in December 1945 we learn that "...at the beginning of the Second World War, foretelling disastrous and regular air raids the manager of the Museum of the Risorgimento decided to move the precious collection to a villa near the Swiss border; the albums were put inside a well constructed trunk which was placed in a cave dug in a nearby hill. After 8 September 1943, the Italian border with Switzerland was used by many persons wishing to leave Italy and the fascist authorities threatened to evacuate the entire population of areas near to the border."

"This scenario could become very dangerous for the precious stamp collection whether it was left unguarded or moved to a new location, especially because at that time hair-raising robberies, confiscations and brigandage were rampant. The curator decided to relocate the collection to a nearby cemetery and bury it in a grave. Luckily this macabre solution became unnecessary because the area was liberated." This unexpected and miraculous development made it possible for the De Marchi collection to return to its home at Palazzo Moriggia in via Borgonuovo 23, in the centre of Milan, where the De Marchi had lived for many years.

## THE COLLECTOR

You may ask: "Who was Marco De Marchi?" To answer that question we offer the short biographical profile written thirty years ago by noted Milanese stamp expert Agostino Zanetti: "Marco de Marchi was born a Sagittarian and a hard rock Milanese on 5 December 1872 at a time when the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia no longer existed and a secular

and resurgent Kingdom of Italy was thriving. At the end of his secondary education he enrolled as a student at the Science Department of the University of Pisa where he remained for two years after which his father's death forced him to go to Argentina where the De Marchi family had made substantial investments. He remained there for five years of tough work. Marco returned to Milan and completed his studies at the University of Pavia with a very impressive doctoral thesis on the Argentine hummingbirds. From there onwards it was business, exclusive clubs and nice parties - all part of the lifestyle of a rich man who, however, had a fifth gear that in 1908 took him to the earthquake victims in Messina. He arrived there not only as a generous benefactor but also accompanied by his wife and a sizable group of professional nurses that had graduated at the well-known De Marchi nursing school in Milan."

Born to love thy neighbour as he loved himself, after many accolades and honours, and after many generous acts and donations as he approached his sixties De Marchi was seduced by stamp collecting. As an enthusiastic beginner he tip-toed to join the prestigious Philatelic Society of Lombardy as a collector of the postmarks of Lombardy-Venetia. In a short time he became very conversant with philately and extended his interest for postmarks to all the former Italian States which led him to form a complete collection of classical Italian stamps, rich of philatelic gems, pre-adhesives postal history, and breath-taking covers of all the Italian States all viewed from the perspective of the Risorgimento (Resurgence) era that shaped the unification of Italy.

## THE COLLECTION

De Marchi's extra gear was also a collection that has as its main theme the Italian Risorgimento; this unprecedented approach to Italian philately became the winning ace of the next generation of collectors led by the great philatelist Giulio Bolaffi.

Although unfinished in its articulation, the collection is grandiose and covers all the aspects of a complex and financially demanding endeavour. The short two or three years De Marchi had to form



*In 1987 Italy issued a Philately Day stamp featuring Marco De Marchi*



*Launching ceremony of the digitalised version of the De Marchi Collection making it available worldwide on the internet. From left to right: Claudio A.M. Salsi (Director of the Superintendence Office of the Sforza Castle), Filippo Del Corno (Municipal Council Member for Culture), Giacomo Bottacchi (Philatelic Expert); and Fabio Bonacina (President of USFI, Guild of Italian Stamp Writers)*

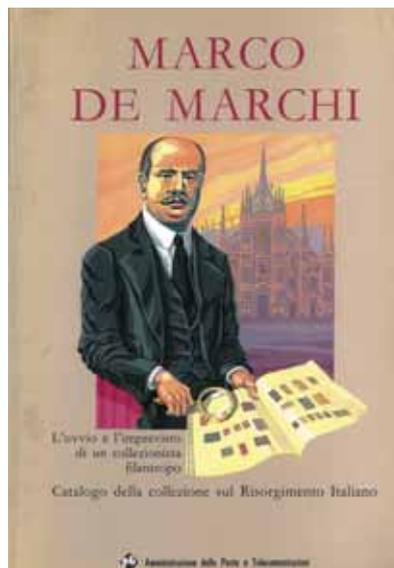
the collection prevented him from fine tuning and filling minor gaps. In 1936, at 63 years of age De Marchi departed this life and Milan virtually inherited all of his assets: the luxurious palace in via Borgonuovo created by Piermarini - the same architect of La Scala and the City Hall - became the seat of the Museum of the Risorgimento which features many treasures and his beloved stamp collection.

After the bequethal, in 1937, the stamp collection was exhibited at the Sforza Castle in Milan; although a sizable hall was designated for the exhibition featuring the Risorgimento collection of De Marchi, the space was still insufficient and the curator had to be content with exhibiting 228 pages. As a result he had the hard task of cherry-picking from a wonderland of veritable philatelic gems.

The collection features all the Italian States including postmarks, cancellations, colour nuances as well as many of the rarest of them, multiples, blocks, strips of six and eight, rare forgeries to defraud the post office, mixed frankings of the first and second issue of Lombardy-Venetia, revenue stamps of Lombardy-Venetia on cover (including a block of six of the 30c.), covers with stamps with the St. Andrew cross on the margin, plus a mesmerizing cover, among many, franked with stamps of the first issue (two strips of eight of the 45c. plus a block of six), three examples of the legendary newspaper stamp called the 'Pink Mercury' (one of them on newspaper). All the major rarities of the other Italian States are represented in quality and quantity that were available in the

1930s but quite difficult to obtain after the Second World War.

A monograph focusing on the De Marchi collection was published in 1940; a similar publication on a bigger scale was co-authored by Agostino Zanetti and Giacomo Bottacchi and published by the Italian Posts in 1987. A postage stamp honouring De Marchi was issued that same year.



*The 1987 volume published by the Italian Posts cataloguing all the postmarks in the De Marchi Collection*

The collection was exhibited in January 1946 in Milan; and again in 1983, in 1997 and finally in 2016.

In the meantime the Unione Stampa Filatelica Italiana (the Guild of Italian Stamp Writers) had spearheaded the initiative of digitalising the De Marchi collection; since 17 January 2017 this project has become a reality and collectors worldwide can now leaf through the many volumes of the De Marchi collection on line at

<http://graficheincomune.comune.milano.it/GraficheInComune/bacheca/>

#### **CollezioneFilatelicaMarcoDeMarchi**

The first volume is "Fondi Preziosi" (FP) by clicking on it you will be able to leaf through the main collection. The other 103 volumes (5500 pages) deal with postmarks, and a world collection, old style, is also there.

Youtube also offers a 6-minute trailer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Q4cRTtraK0>

Before being scanned the collection needed some reconditioning, gentle cosmetics and dusting with the cost of 7000 Euros being paid by sponsors. The delicate process was scientifically conducted by noted stamp expert Giacomo Bottacchi.