

INTERNATIONAL BOTANICAL CONGRESSES 1900–2017

Dr. John Gray, BU1855

[*Ed. Note: This is the first installment of a three-part article on the history of the International Botanical Congresses. The article will continue in the next two editions. Dr. Gray is a retired professor of plant molecular biology at the University of Cambridge, England, and has collected stamps of Great Britain since boyhood. He has written articles on Post & Go stamps and Smilers Sheets for magazines such as Gibbons Stamp Monthly. He started thematic collections on topics related to his work interests in 2006, and for the past ten years he has collected philatelic items related to Charles Darwin, plant genetics, photosynthesis, and the history of molecular biology. He has attended several International Botanical Congresses and has accumulated relevant philatelic items. He joined ATA in 2010, and the Biology Unit in 2013.*]

1st Through 8th Congresses

The current series of International Botanical Congresses started in Paris in 1900 and has now reached the 19th International Botanical Congress (IBC2017), which was held in Shenzhen, China in 23–29 July 2017. These Congresses were initially designed to discuss, and make decisions on, plant nomenclature issues, but are now much more wide-ranging, covering all aspects of plant science, from biodiversity to development and ecology to epigenetics. Ten of the Congresses arranged for special stamps and/or postmarks to be available around the time of the Congress and, for most of the remaining Congresses, items of philatelic interest, such as contemporary postcards or printed Congress stationery, can be found. This article will provide examples of philatelic items that can be acquired for the current series of International Botanical Congresses.

The 1st International Botanical Congress was held in central Paris on 1–10 October 1900, with sessions held in the Palais des Congrès, which was built on the banks of the River Seine as part of the Exposition Universelle 1900. There appear not to have been any philatelic items produced specifically for the Botanical Congress, but there were enormous numbers of postcards produced for the Exposition Universelle and it is possible to find postcards of the Palais des Congrès, postmarked during the International Botanical Congress, with the Paris Exposition Universelle postmark including the distinctive flag design (Fig. 1).



At the end of the Congress, the delegates accepted the invitation from Austrian botanists to hold the next Botanical Congress in Vienna in 1905.

The 2nd International Botanical Congress was duly held in the Imperial Royal University of Vienna on 11–25 June 1905. Again there appear not to be any philatelic items produced specifically for the Congress, although sets of postcards depicting alpine flora, inscribed “*Internat. botanischer Kongress, Wien 1905.*” in red, were available (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1. Postcard from the Paris Exposition Universelle showing the Palais des Congrès. Inset, Paris Exposition Universelle postmark.

The plants were photographed by Guido Kraskovits, a junior researcher in the group of Richard von Wettstein, who was Co-President of the Congress.



Fig. 2. Postcard from 2nd International Botanical Congress, Vienna with a photograph of *Helleborus niger* L.

It was expected that an invitation to hold the 3rd International Botanical Congress in London would be accepted, but the British delegates failed to provide the necessary official authority to tender an invitation and an alternative invitation from Belgian delegates to hold the next Congress in Brussels was accepted.

The 3rd International Botanical Congress was held in the National Botanic Garden in Brussels on 14–22 May 1910, contemporary with the World Fair being held in Brussels in 1910.

Once again there appear not to be any philatelic items produced specifically for the Congress, although sets of

postcards of views of Brussels, inscribed “III^e CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAL DE BOTANIQUE BRUXELLES 1910” were produced by Nels, the largest producer of postcards in Belgium. Postcards showing views of the Botanic Garden were sent by delegates at the Congress, and received the distinctive “BRUSSEL – TENTOONSTELLING 1910 BRUXELLES – EXPOSITION” postmark (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Postcard showing the Italian Garden at the National Botanic Garden, Brussels, with a message from the 3rd International Botanical Congress.

At the end of Congress the delegates accepted an officially authorized invitation from the British representatives to hold the 4th International Botanical Congress in London in 1915.

Unfortunately, World War I intervened and the Congress was postponed until 1920. However, at the end of the war, Britain was not in a position to hold the Congress in 1920 and the organization of the 4th International Botanical Congress lapsed.

An “Imperial” Botanical Congress was held in London in 1924, but, as it was not authorized by the *Association Internationale des Botanistes*, it was not included in the series of International Botanical Congresses.



However, the International Congress of Plant Sciences held in Cornell University in Ithaca, New York on 16–23 August 1926, was authorized by the *Association Internationale des Botanistes* and became the 4th International Botanical Congress.

This Congress accepted the invitation from British botanists to hold the 5th International Botanical Congress in Great Britain in 1930. It was expected that the 5th Congress would be held in London, but the British Organizing Committee decided to hold the Congress in Cambridge on 16–23 August 1930. There appear not to be any philatelic items produced for either the 4th or 5th Congresses, although it is possible to find printed stationery items, such as this printed envelope addressed to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, dated 22 April 1930 (Fig. 4).

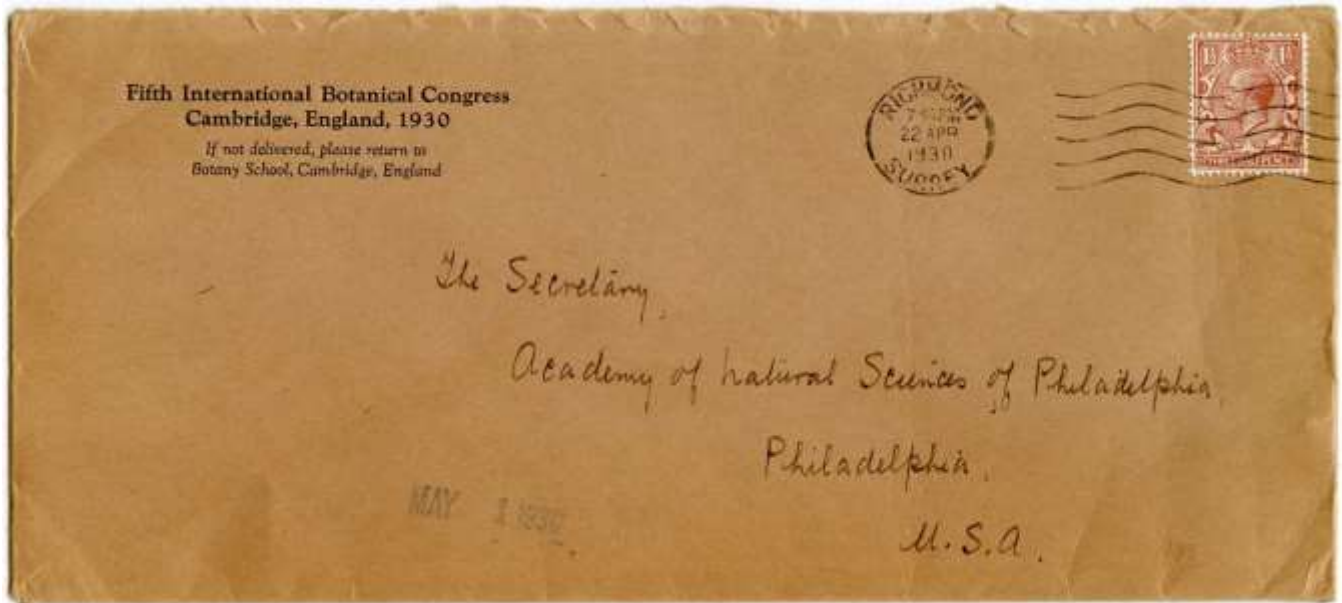


Fig. 4. Cover from the organizers of the 5th International Botanical Congress to the Secretary, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia.

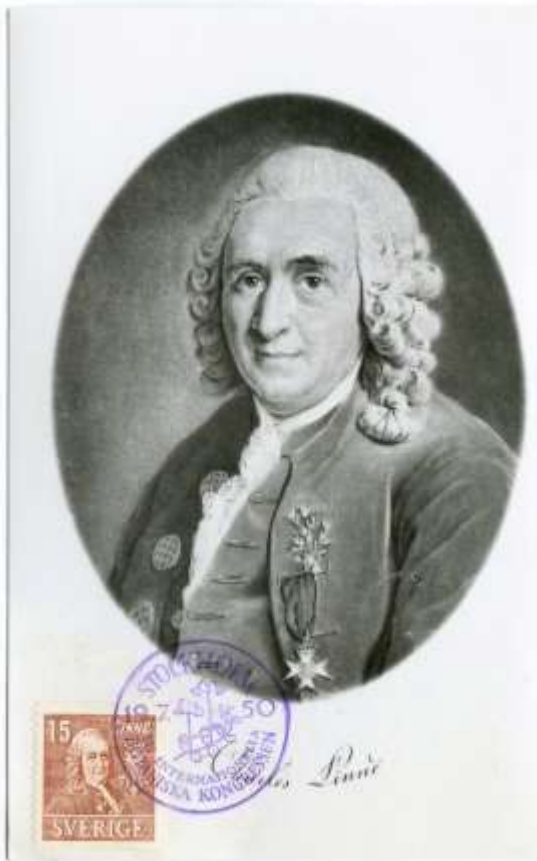


Fig. 5. Cover with handstamps from the 6th International Botanical Congress.

The 6th International Botanical Congress was held in the *Koloniaal Instituut* in Amsterdam on 2–7 September 1935, and for the first time a special handstamp was used on mail posted throughout the time of the Congress. The design shows a stylized flowering stem (possibly of *Linnaea borealis* L.) and the wording "AMSTERDAM 2–7 SEPT 35 VI INTERNATIONAL BOTANISCH CONGRES" with date of posting (Fig. 5).

The 7th International Botanical Congress was due to be held at *Stockholms Högskola* in Sweden on 17–25 July 1940, but World War II intervened and the Congress was postponed until after the war.

It was eventually held in Stockholm, Sweden on 12–20 July 1950 and a special pictorial handstamp was used on mail.



The handstamp depicted flowering stems of the twinflower (*Linnaea borealis* L.), Linnaeus's favorite plant, labeled "STOCKHOLM VII INTERNATIONELLA BOTANISKA KONGRESSEN" with the date of posting (Fig. 6).

A pictorial handstamp was also used on mail posted during the 8th International Botanical Congress held in the Sorbonne, Paris on 2–14 July 1954. The handstamp depicted a stylised plant showing stems and roots, surrounded by "VIII^{ÈME} CONGRÈS INTERN^{AL} DE BOTANIQUE PARIS" with the date of posting below the stems of the plant. The handstamp was used throughout the Congress, but it was first used on 1 July 1954 (Fig. 7).

[to be continued in next edition]



Fig. 6. Postcard of Linnaeus with handstamp of the 7th International Botanical Congress (left) and handstamp from first day of the Congress (right).



Fig. 7. Cover with handstamps from the 8th International Botanical Congress (left) and handstamp from 1 July 1954 (right).