

# 1965 A. F. Lichtenstein Memorial Award To Alvaro Bonilla Lara of Chile



Established in 1952 for *distinguished services to philately*, thirteen philatelists have been the recipients of the world-famous *Alfred F. Lichtenstein Memorial Award*. All have been English-speaking; ten were from the United States, one from Great Britain, one from Australia and also one from Canada.

For the first time, the philatelist chosen for the 1965 award by unanimous vote of The Board of Governors of the Collectors Club is a Spanish-American, *Mr. Alvaro Bonilla Lara of Santiago de Chile, Chile*.

Although this award is for distinguished services to philately, Mr. Bonilla Lara also has had a distinguished career outside of stamp collecting.

He was born in San Jose, Costa Rica on November 3, 1903 and was educated there. In 1922, he came to Chile where he attended the university for his degree as a doctor of law. He remained in Chile, practiced law in Santiago and married there.

When President Picado of Costa Rica became the head of this country in 1944, Alvaro Bonilla Lara returned to his native land and was appointed *Minister of Finance*, serving during the entire administration of President Picado from 1944 to 1948.

In 1945, he was one of the Costa Rican delegates to the first United Nations Conference in San Francisco, Calif., thus playing a part in the formation of the United Nations. As a result, for the last eight months of the Picado Administration, Mr. Bonilla was appointed to the important position of *Minister of Foreign Affairs*. In 1948, he returned to Chile and resumed the practice of law.

(Incidentally, there always is confusion about the name. Spanish names are different from ours; the last name is a man's mother's name. Consequently, many people in English-speaking countries incorrectly call A. Bonilla Lara Mr. Lara. The correct appellation is *Mr. Bonilla*).

## **Grandfather Costa Rica's First Postmaster-General**

The first postage stamps of Costa Rica were introduced in 1863. The man responsible for the introduction of postage stamps in this American republic was Recaredo *Bonilla Carrillo*, the grandfather of Alvaro *Bonilla Lara*. In 1863, Recaredo Bonilla was the Postmaster-General of Costa Rica.

To commemorate the 100th Anniversary of its postage stamps, on June 26, 1963, Costa Rica issued a colorful set of four air mail stamps (Scott C362-C365). The 2 Colones (Scott C363) has its design with its first Postmaster-General, Mr. Bonilla, the grandfather of the 1965 recipient of the *Alfred F.*

### *Lichtenstein Memorial Award.*

Alvaro Bonilla Lara never knew his grandfather, Recaredo Bonilla Carrillo. But it is of interest to note that one of the grandchildren of Costa Rica's first Postmaster-General collects the utilitarian pieces of paper that his grandfather had introduced. Little did grandfather know in 1863 that, one of the things he started, later would afford his grandson so much pleasure.

### **The Stamp Collector**

Now, for philately. As true of most all of the *Alfred F. Lichtenstein Memorial Award* medalists, Mr. Bonilla has been collecting stamps since boyhood and it has remained his life-long hobby. Obviously, the stamps of his native country were his prime interest. Therefore, over many years, he assembled what was without question the most extensive collection of Costa Rica. The time came when there was so little more to be added, so that in 1961 the Costa Rica collection was sold at auction in New York City. As proof of the great status of this collection, it was the first time in the history of stamp auctions that one sale was exclusively Costa Rica.

Currently, Alvaro Bonilla Lara has special interests in Bolivia, Chile and Guatemala, both with their philately and postal history.

In addition, he intently studies stamps and has paid much attention to postal forgeries and counterfeits of Chile. There are also two interesting sideline collections. One is of stamps that were prepared for use but never placed on public sale. There are about 280 of such unissued stamps and Mr. Bonilla now has 250.

The other interest is "real off beat." These are postage stamps overprinted for revenue (fiscal) use. Being the latter, very few such stamps are listed in any postage stamp catalogue. This is a truly pioneer field on which practically nothing has been written nor recorded.

### **Philatelic Editor and Author**

In 1933, Alvaro Bonilla Lara played an active role in the reorganization of the *Sociedad Filatelica de Chile* and since then he has held the following posts in that Society — 1934 Librarian, 1935 Director of Auctions, President 1936-41 and again in 1953 to 1955.

This Society also publishes a respected journal, one of the best in South America. Mr. Bonilla was editor of the "Gaceta Filatelico" from 1933-36. In 1936, the name was changed to "Chile Filatelico" and he edited this from 1936 to 1943, when he had to relinquish this work to return to Costa Rica.

In 1953, he resumed the editorship of "Chile Filatelico" and he is still doing it. Alvaro Bonilla Lara not only edits this journal, but there is seldom a number that does not have at least one article with his byline.

Most all of Mr. Bonilla's philatelic studies have been published in Spanish and in many different Latin American periodicals. Also, he has written several articles in English. These were published by the "Aero Philatelist Annals" and the "Essay Proof Journal." At present, he is working on a manuscript on the Garcia stamps of Bolivia. This will be written in Spanish, translated into English and published as a future article in THE COLLECTORS CLUB PHILATELIST.

### **Philatelic Judge And Expert**

Due to his studies of postal forgeries and counterfeits, Mr. Bonilla was appointed to the *Expert Committee of the Sociedad Filatelica de Chile*. He is still very active in this work and has been this committee's president. Also



Recaredo BONILLA Carrillo shown on the 100th Anniversary of Costa Rica's first postage stamps (Scott C363). (Courtesy of Scott Publications, Inc.)

leading Expert Committees and individual experts throughout the world consult with him, because of his profound knowledge of Chilean stamps.

He has been called upon often to judge national stamp shows in Chile. Also, six times he has served as an international judge — in Buenos Aires (1950), New York (FIPEX 1956), Rio de Janeiro (Santos Dumont 1956), Argentina (1958), Buenos Aires (1960) and (1962).

Alvaro Bonilla Lara, a devoted husband, father and grandfather, has had a distinguished career in law, national and international politics and, of course, in philately. He is a great music lover. Thus, when he visits New York, it is difficult for him to decide whether to first see his philatelic friends and drop into the Collectors Club or to go to the Metropolitan Opera House to hear his favorite opera.

From personal experience, this writer has seen the high esteem that most all philatelists in South America have for Mr. Bonilla. He is truly one of the great philatelists in Latin America, and it is fitting and deserved that *the 14th recipient of the Alfred F. Lichtenstein Memorial Award is Alvaro Bonilla Lara of Santiago de Chile, Chile.* (H. M. G.)

## Samuel W. Langston

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### Bibliography

1. "One of the results of our gradual development was the appearance at our camp of expressmen or mail-carriers, as they should more properly been called." *Hunting For Gold* by Major William Downie, a prominent pioneer, for whom the town of Downieville was named. Book was published in 1893.
2. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, No. CCCIII, Vol. LI, August 1875, in an article entitled "An American Enterprise."
3. Ernest A. Wiltsee was the author of *Gold Rush Steamers, Pioneer Miners & Express* and many interesting express articles. His famous collection has been preserved in the in the history room of the Wells Fargo Bank in San Francisco.
4. *Western Express Franks, Their Origin, Necessity and Use.* The American Philatelist, Vol. 46, No. 6. March, 1933.
5. *Sierra Citizen* Downieville, October 20, 1855, and *The Golden Era* San Francisco, August 10, 1856.
6. *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, November 23, 1855.
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