

100 Years of Heinrich Köhler Auctions

Heinrich Köhler - his life, his business, his successors



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*Front cover: Oil painting of Heinrich Köhler, still today
in the company's principal office in Wiesbaden*

Introduction

Heinrich Köhler today is mainly known for the auction company he set up in Berlin in the famous Friedrichstrasse just one and a half years before the outbreak of the Great War. To tell the story of Heinrich Köhler the person, the stamp dealer, the stamp expert and his auction house which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2013 we must go back in history a little further than that.

The main periods in Heinrich Köhler's life, his philatelic activities and his company can be broken down as follows:

Heinrich Köhler and his ancestors to 1945

Anna Köhler (wife) and Henriette Schmidt-Köhler (daughter) 1945 to 1966

Hartmut C. Schwenn (1967 to 1970)

Volker Parthen (1970 to 2000)

Afinsa/Spectrum (2001 to 2012)

The current era (2012 to date)

A remarkable number of Heinrich Köhler's male ancestors were artists - singers, voice teachers or actors. And in fact, Heinrich's great-great grandfather Bernhard (born 1762) is known to have been in the artist industry. Heinrich's father found his first acting job in Vienna and later lived in Oxford with his wife Ida, before they returned to Germany and moved around repeatedly.

The early times



*Bernhard Köhler,
Heinrich's father*



August Drahn



*Bernhard Köhler,
Heinrich's older brother*



Heinrich Köhler at the age of 17

It was probably in Leipzig where Heinrich Köhler's father (also called Bernhard like all the first-born sons before him) discovered his affinity with stamps and stamp collecting. Leipzig was at that time the Mecca of philately in Germany. The Senf Brothers who published stamp catalogues and later albums were based there as well as many other stamp publishing companies and stamp dealers. Bernhard became friends with the Cologne stamp dealer August Drahn and was active in organised philately. He was a founding member of the Federation of German and Austrian Philatelic Societies.

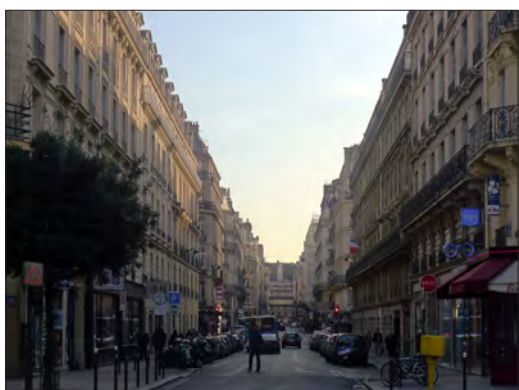
Bernhard and Heinrich, father and son most probably shared an interest in stamps and philately. Today it cannot be proven which of the two – or both together – were responsible for the 'wanted/for sale' advertisements in specialised magazines looking for Liebig pictures. While his older brother Bernhard (named according to family tradition) became an opera singer, Heinrich decided to take a completely different path, as we know today.

Thanks to his father's connections, Heinrich served an apprenticeship at August Wilhelm Drahn's stamp shop in Cologne. Heinrich was a fast learner, and after only eighteen months he was sent to a very advanced collector named Georg Koch in

Giessen to arrange and structure his collection. Koch was a very keen collector with little time for the hobby, as he was a busy man. He had outstanding material of the German States, Switzerland, Austria, the rest of Europe and overseas. Koch trusted young Heinrich and, with all the material he was able to deal with and learn from during his time with Koch, it was no problem for him to finish his apprenticeship successfully.

He travelled for some months and went to Nicaragua, where he visited his Uncle who owned a gold mine, and returned to Germany, back to his fiancée and wife-to-be Anna Rener after some months. He went back to August Drahn and worked hard for a few years from Cologne but unfortunately a long way away from Anna.

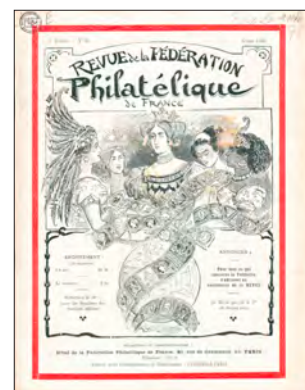
The Paris years



The Rue Le Peletier today. Still a grand street.



Anna Köhler, wife of Heinrich Köhler. Picture of 1910.



Official journal of the French Philatelic Federation.

Heinrich began to travel internationally and frequently went to London, mostly to attend auctions, but also to sell stamps he had in stock. In London, he met a young French dealer named Gérard Gilbert. The two became friends and in 1904 founded a stamp shop in Paris with the simple name 'M. Gilbert & M. Koehler'. In the same year Heinrich married his fiancée Anna Rener and together they moved into a new home in Paris. Their two daughters were born in 1907 (Renée) and 1909 (Henriette)

During his years in Paris, Heinrich built contacts with international dealers and collectors. In 1906 Gilbert & Köhler issued catalogues of the fiscal stamps of several European countries, among others of Great Britain.

It was in 1908 that an old German contact of Heinrich Köhler's came on the scene again and wanted to sell his collections of German States, Europe and Overseas: Georg Koch of Giessen. We don't know if it was the desire to expand their sales channels or simply the sheer quantity of material that made the two partners decide to sell these important collections at auction. Clearly, with the amount of material that was to be sold, several auctions had to be organised, and the Koch collection was split up into three auctions held from June to November 1908. 3,620 lots were sold in 15 days of auctions.

The total hammer price after three auctions amounted to approximately 320,000 gold marks, the equivalent of 2.5 million pounds sterling today.

From these days on, Gilbert & Köhler were of course an important player in the international stamp auction scene. Both Gilbert and Köhler maintained strong links with the leading associations in Europe, be it the Royal Philatelic Society London or the Société Philatélique de Paris.

In the following years, the partners managed to put together and celebrate important sales, among others the sale of the famous Mirabaud collection in 1909 and the collection of M.A. Fournier in 1911.

No proven reason for the separation of the two partners in June 1912 can be found. The fact is that the young Köhler

family went back to Germany and settled in Berlin. Times were difficult, as Anna had a long illness and the political situation before the beginning of the Great War didn't make life easier.

Gilbert continued with the company formerly owned by the two partners and in 1924 sold the legendary and enormous collection of Philippe la Renotière von Ferrary which the French state had received as part of the reparation payments which Germany had to make after the Great War. Gilbert and Köhler lost sight of each other and most probably didn't meet again before 1930, on the occasion of the international stamp exhibition IPOSTA in Berlin.

A new beginning in Berlin and the Great War



Berlin, „Friedrichstrasse“, office of Heinrich Köhler



The catalogue of the first Köhler auction in April 1913



At many of Heinrich Köhler's auctions Bruno Kossak served as the „crieur“

Heinrich's return to Germany's philatelic centre, Berlin was not easy. In those days distance was much more important than today in our world of the Internet. The European centres of philately were London and Paris, and even in Berlin there had been stamp auctions before Heinrich went there. These auctions were not very important and they were organised by a dealer in Berlin named Hellmut Karge in his little shop. Other ones were 'internal' auctions conducted by the International Stamp Dealers' Association in Berlin or the International Philatelic Association of Dresden at the end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 20th century Philipp Kosack together with Moritz de Vries held auctions until 1903.

Ironically, it was ten years later in Philipp Kosack's 'Berliner Briefmarken-Zeitung' that 'the first grand German stamp auction' was to take place in Berlin, and the philatelic world was holding its breath! Köhler's auctions were therefore not the first ones in Germany, but the first substantial ones.

Heinrich Köhler moved into his new office and stamp shop in the famous Friedrichstrasse in Berlin on 13 April 1913. He must have been working from home until that date, because his first auction was to take place only ten days later. By today's standards this seems virtually impossible, but somehow Heinrich Köhler managed to organise his move from Paris to Berlin and at the same time put together his first stamp auction in Germany without an office and in only a few weeks.

The auction was planned to take place from 23 April to 26 April in the Künstlerhaus, a large enough venue to hold an auction for an international clientele. By fixing this date, Heinrich Köhler was just a few weeks earlier than Kurt Maier who had planned his sale for 15 to 17 May 1913.

The interest in this first Heinrich Köhler Berlin auction was great and viewing began two days before the auction. Köhler's office rooms were crammed with far too many people wanting to view the material on sale. The auction room itself, the Berliner Künstlerhaus was quite spacious compared to Heinrich Köhler's office rooms. Collectors and dealers were all prepared for the long bidding sessions to come.

And at last, on 23 April, at 2.51 pm the first bid was made. The reports after the auction were enthusiastic, especially the

fact that after London and Paris, Germany was at last a landmark in international philately. The total turnover of the sale amounted to 47,000 marks. Prices realised are said to have been far higher than those paid on a dealer/collector direct sale basis.

Köhler at this time was not the only auctioneer in Germany. Other auctions were organised by Kosack & de Vries, Maier or Kohl (in Munich). But Heinrich Köhler was obviously the only one who would organise stamp auctions as an ongoing business, while the others held theirs only once in a while and when they had received sufficient material. Köhler, with his international contacts and experience from his time in Paris was more active in bringing in high-value material for his sales.

The Great War influenced the following years significantly. Heinrich Köhler was able to stay in Berlin as an interpreter and censor; therefore he managed to work part-time and was able to put together nine auctions during the war. The challenge of this period was not economic depression; on the contrary it was very difficult to gather in good material for the auctions. Demand was high and finding buyers for high-value items was not a problem. For the first time Köhler included postal stationery in his sales and even one auction was held offering only covers with stamps.

Rudolf Siegel, who organised stamp auctions under the company name Marken und Ganzsachenhaus (House of Stamps and Postal Stationery), was Köhler's strongest competitor in those days. In 1917 his sales had nearly twice the turnover of Heinrich Köhler's sales.

Inflation and economic crisis



In 1923 Heinrich Köhler introduced advertising vignettes in the form of envelope seals.



A festive evening after a Köhler auction in Brünn/Brno, August 1923.



Alfred Weinberger was a long-standing auction customer of Heinrich Köhler's and a good friend of his.

Fortunately, the family and the business had survived the war with some ups and downs.

The post-war world economic crisis and inflation didn't make life easier for the stamp auctioneer Köhler. Catalogue prices were long out of date by the time the lots were put together in the auction catalogue. This made pricing difficult and in some cases the catalogue values in French francs in the Yvert catalogue were used as a basis.

Heinrich Köhler reduced the number of auctions per year and at the same time increased the number of lots per auction substantially.

It was in 1920 that Heinrich Köhler first offered an expertising service. In the beginning, while Thier was still active, the service was only available for Köhler's customers. At that time Max Thier was still active as an expert respected by all major players in the market.

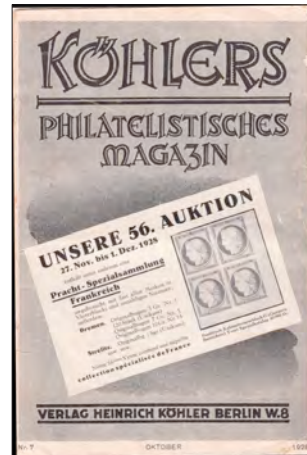
During times of galloping inflation, Heinrich Köhler celebrated the tenth anniversary of the company. At the same time, the German economy was near to collapse with companies closing down all over. In order to continue his stamp auctions based on hard currency, Heinrich Köhler held five auctions in Czechoslovakia between 1923 and 1925. His old friend

Consul Alfred A. Weinberger, a stamp collector who was highly respected internationally, strongly supported Köhler in those difficult times.

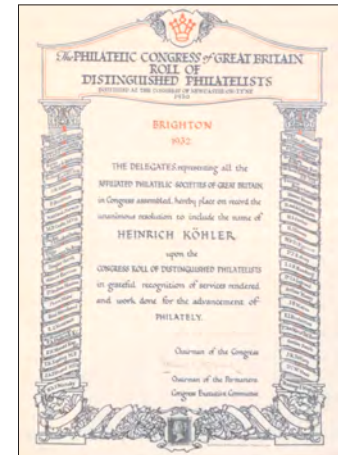
Times change



In 1927, the unique block of twelve found a buyer.



Köhler's „Philatelistisches Magazin“ was first published in 1925.



Signing the Roll at Brighton in 1932.

In 1925, five years after Heinrich Köhler had first advertised his expertising service to his customers, he announced the opening of his expertising office for stamps. Max Thier had passed away at the beginning of that year. From now on, Köhler's office did not only expertise for his own customers, but for everybody. His service was accredited by the leading philatelic organisations.

Stamps would always give Heinrich Köhler reason for study. He spent long hours studying and also had a desire to detect forgeries and repairs in order to protect fellow collectors. In Heinrich Köhler's opinion plating stamps was a key to combating forgery.

Thier had standardised the making of marks on the back of stamps, indicating the authenticity of the items, Heinrich Köhler refined Thier's system by also indicating the quality of the items by placing the mark in a certain position. This system is still being used today by the German Expert Association.

In 1934 he was appointed sworn expert for stamps by the Chamber of Commerce in Berlin and in 1936 the National Federation of Philatelists listed him as the Federal Senior Expert.

He was also asked to serve the Expert Committee of the Royal Philatelic Society London.

It was also in 1925 that Heinrich Köhler for the first time printed his 'Philatelistisches Magazin' which was intended to be issued at regular quarterly intervals. The magazine contained interesting news of the philatelic market, price indications, reports on international exhibitions, comments on the latest auction results, etc. Köhler used the Philatelistisches Magazin to keep collectors informed about forgeries which were circulating and would give advice as to how to detect manipulations and forgeries. He regarded philatelic science as being a common good. Probably due to lack of time, frequency of the publication never reached the level Köhler had anticipated, and the magazine was printed for the last time in 1936 with only 11 copies issued in total.

As much as he brought expertising to perfection during his time and for his expertising areas, Köhler knew that every expert may sometimes make mistakes. His motto was: 'no expert is free of mistakes; the best expert is the one who makes the fewest mistakes!'

For the same reason, Heinrich Köhler started to work on his card index including all important items of the German areas.

The card index is still today an indispensable part of the company's resources.

Heinrich Köhler wanted to set standards in describing lots in his auction catalogues; it was intended that buyers at his auctions would be able to rely on his descriptions. This he announced in his first auction catalogue of 1926. Possibly this desire for descriptions of a standard quality was influenced by his activity as expert.

He started to travel again and revive his contacts abroad. On his trip to New York in 1926 he met all the big players of the time. A long-lasting friendship with Alfred Lichtenstein began during this trip, which was also most helpful for the success of the business.

In Monaco in 1928 Heinrich Köhler for the first time acted as juror at the international philatelic exhibition held in the principality. By this time Heinrich Köhler himself had already been participating successfully at international exhibitions as an exhibitor.

Heinrich Köhler's 62nd auction in 1929 for the first time included a special catalogue. In this sale the famous postal stationery collection of Köhler's good friend Gaston Nehrlich was offered.

1930 was a very important year for Heinrich Köhler: He was appointed a 'corresponding member' of the French Academy of Philately in Paris as acknowledgement of his wide-ranging activities in philately. IPOSTA 1930, the international stamp exhibition was held in Berlin. Heinrich Köhler was one of the main sponsors of the exhibition, which saw participation from all over the world. During the hard times of the worldwide economic crisis, the organisers needed deficit guarantees and Heinrich Köhler was in the first rank of those who assisted the organisers.

He was also a member of the jury, alongside great philatelists such as Dr. Emilio Diena and Dr. Herbert Munk. Of course the company had a representative stand at the show, right beside Corinphila.

In 1932 the first publication of a handbook covering forerunners of German colonies' stamps and their maritime postmarks was announced.

During all these years his wife Anna was at his side and also played her part as a representative of the company, when guests came to Berlin from all over the world. Their daughter Henriette married Hans Schmidt in 1932.

Another great event came into Heinrich Köhler's life when he was invited by the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain in 1932 to sign the prestigious 'Roll of Distinguished Philatelists' in Brighton. After Dr. Herbert Munk who had signed the 'Roll' a year earlier, Heinrich Köhler was the second German who had received this honour. Surely, this was the highlight in Heinrich Köhler's life as a philatelist!

The Third Reich



Heinrich Köhler in his office at Friedrichstrasse 166, Berlin



Philipp Kosack and his secretary. Photo taken 1931.



Heinrich Köhler and Corinphila were neighbours at IPOSTA with their stands side by side against the wall.

The take-over of political power by the national socialists and their policy towards isolation unfortunately also affected the philatelic market in Germany and all involved. WIPA 1933, the International Philatelic Exhibition in Vienna was the big event in Europe after IPOSTA in Berlin three years earlier. Only the President and Vice President of the German International Association of Stamp Dealers received visas to attend the show. These were Alfred Bock and Heinrich Köhler. All others were refused a visa.

A new Association of Stamp Dealers was created by the regime and the two existing ones were suspended. Anyone who wanted a licence to deal in philatelic material was forced to become a member of the Association. This was a result of the overall forced 'alignment' during the Third Reich.

For the collectors the regime ruled that only those collectors who were in a club which was aligned had the right to obtain the new stamps issued by the Post Office.

Heinrich Köhler was affirmed in his positions of sworn expert and chief expert.

He was anonymously discredited by someone in 1934 who stated that he had denounced Philipp Kosack as having donated 50,000 reichsmarks to the communist party. This provoked him – as a signatory to the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists – to send a telegram of defence to the Royal Philatelic Society London. Just a few months later the Jewish Philipp Kosack was out of business. Typical of the times and typical also of the fact that respected personalities such as Heinrich Köhler were abused for political scheming.

Köhler resigned from the German Dealers' Association in June 1934. Nevertheless he kept his positions as expert. In 1937 he participated in the International Exhibition PEXIB in Paris as a juror. It was there that he met his oldest daughter Renée for the last time. She had emigrated to England via France and was engaged to a Russian of most probably Jewish origin.

1938 was the year of the 25th anniversary of Heinrich Köhler's auction house in Berlin. On the occasion of his 99th auction he offered a 1d Red 'Post Office' Mauritius.

As time went by, Heinrich Köhler suffered more and more health problems and the times in general didn't really help to cheer him up at all.

World War II



97 per cent of all lots sold!



Anna Köhler cared for her husband during the last months of his life in 1945.



1942/43: Only with immense difficulties could Köhler maintain his certifying service.

The isolated situation of Germany, the outbreak of World War II and Köhler's weak constitution were the reasons for the

company running slowly in the years that followed. Twelve auctions were organised between 1940 and Köhler's death on 21 June 1945. In 1940 he sold his entire stock of complete sets to the Hamburg-based Wilhelm Sellschopp.

During the war years, some auctions were postponed and some others were held 'against immediate cash payments by order of the authorities' (June 1942).

The number of lots decreased dramatically, and mostly complete collections were offered; hardly any single lots. The last auction before the end of the war took place on 25 July 1944, almost a year before Heinrich Köhler passed away.

Yes, Heinrich Köhler always played an important role in the world of philately, also during the Nazi times he was a sworn expert for the authorities and head of the expert committee of the philatelic association. But he never became member of the Nazi Party NSDAP. This may be difficult to believe, but no evidence is to be found that could support the contrary.

Anna Köhler and Henriette Schmidt-Köhler 1944 to 1966



The 123rd auction of March 1949 was the last Köhler auction in Berlin.



Anna Köhler (right), her son-in-law Hans Schmidt (left) and daughter Henriette with her second husband Ludlow Grosse (above).



Now Wiesbaden on the cover of the catalogue !

Of course such a pioneer owner as Heinrich Köhler could not be replaced. His Wife Anna and his daughter Henriette picked up the activities and Anna remained for 9 years before she passed away in 1954. Henriette together with her husband Hans Schmidt continued until 1966.

For the first four years the company remained in Berlin and operated from the same office at Friedrichstrasse 166. The first auction after the war was held in December 1946, eighteen months after the 116th auction of July 1944. The first auctions were small and of rather low value; times were difficult. Just to find paper to print the catalogues was a miracle.

The company moved within Berlin when the office in Friedrichstrasse was confiscated. In 1949 the big move was made to Wiesbaden where the economic conditions seemed better and where there were family roots. Auction 124 in May 1949 was the first sale that was conducted in Wiesbaden, in the famous Hotel Nassauer Hof, while a second address was kept in Berlin until 1952.

By this time Henriette – Heinrich Köhler's younger daughter – had taken over most of the responsibility together with her husband Hans Schmidt. We know that the older daughter Renée had emigrated and lived on her own in England. What we didn't know is that Heinrich had a third daughter with his bookkeeper Lina Bereiter who had been working for Heinrich Köhler since the 1920s. Lina's and Heinrich's daughter Gretel-Maria was born on 9 December 1925. Heinrich Köhler did not quite run away from this responsibility. In a sort of way he took care of his daughter and her mother by arranging a wedding with a distant relative of his from the Zerbi family.

The first years in Wiesbaden



One of the first large-size Köhler advertisements on the cover of the DBZ in 1951.



Henriette Grosse-Köhler and Ludlow Grosse at their jubilee auction of 1963.



Henriette Grosse-Köhler receiving congratulations at the 173rd auction in June 1963.

Friedrich Stachauschek, the senior philatelist of the times in Berlin, left the company and did not move to Wiesbaden. Henriette and Hans had to find a complete new team. There were many applications, however it was very difficult to put together a new team.

A first really successful auction was held in 1950; from then on the company gradually gathered pace.

In 1952 again, a 'Post Office' Mauritius 1d was auctioned and this was the best advertising the company in Wiesbaden could have had at the time. It was the same stamp that Heinrich Köhler had auctioned 14 years before. It was not the first and not the last stamp that the company auctioned more than once. Even the loudly vociferous Edgar Mohrmann, the most important competitor of the time, was not able to compete with that! From now on, Heinrich Köhler called itself the 'oldest auction house', and also the 'leading auction house'.

In 1963 the company celebrated its 50th anniversary receiving letters and telegrams of congratulation from all over the world, among them personalities such as John R. Boker, Edwin Müller, Herbert Bloch and Bud Hennig. By now Ludlow Grosse was on Henriette's side, both privately and in business.

Henriette Köhler-Grosse and her husband Ludlow Grosse decided to sell the company in 1966 and retire after that.

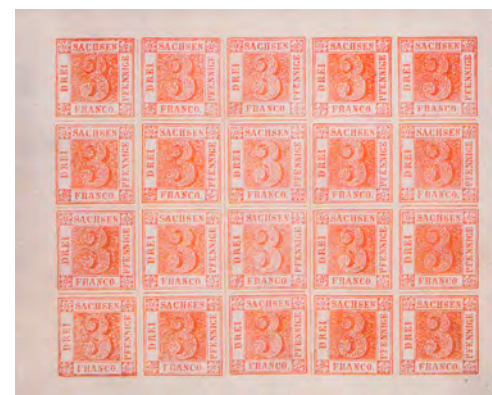
The company leaves the family



Hartmut Schwenn, the new owner.



Schwenn Auction Catalogue.



The only existing complete sheet of a „Saxony Three-Pfennig“ stamp.

As of 1 June 1967 the Schwenn Group became owner of Heinrich Köhler auction house. The man behind this group was

Hartmut Caspar Schwenn, born in 1941 in Wernigerode, a town in Sachsen-Anhalt. It was always his dream to become a stamp dealer and when times became dangerous in Eastern Germany in 1961 he moved to the West, where he had already been doing business for some years. When Schwenn bought the Heinrich Köhler auction house in 1967 he had already been known on the scene for years. He was still expanding his group which had its head office in Switzerland.

His German auction company Schwenn was already holding fantastic auctions when he offered to buy Heinrich Köhler. Sometime later Schwenn said he bought the company because it wasn't expensive. With his supporter Karl-Friedrich Meyer-Beer, Hartmut C. Schwenn, this young and motivated entrepreneur virtually overran the German auction scene. He was a good philatelist and had completely new marketing ideas.

Hartmut C. Schwenn managed to place stamps, stamp collecting and investment in stamps in the mass media. Daily newspapers were reporting on his activities. National television liked to visit Schwenn and report on his companies on prime-time television.

He was the first in the industry to understand that selling is more than buying something and offering it to clients. The stories behind the product and how to tell the stories, those were Schwenn's strong points.

Public figures liked the company of this young entrepreneur and he knew how to play to the gallery. He was filmed with such people as Franz-Josef Strauss, or even the President Heinrich Lübke.

He sold legendary items such as the sheet of the 'Sachsen-Dreier'. And at the same time he owned the large mail order company 'Mauritius-Versand' near Frankfurt. There they sold ordinary and standard material in large quantities.

Schwenn was able to get his hands on a huge stock of German high value standard material which he broke down into investment packets which were even sold over the counters of banks. The investors were promised a nice return on their investment. For several reasons this system collapsed and with it the entire Schwenn Group went under. During Schwenn's ownership, Heinrich Köhler was not too important to him; his focus was elsewhere. Köhler was the 'scientific' corner of the business, not the cash cow.

Schwenn controlled Köhler from a distance. Working standards were set, monthly and quarterly reports were set out and Köhler was run as a separate entity. Volker Parthen had been working for Schwenn since 1965 as a student helper and in 1967 Schwenn assigned Volker Parthen to be responsible for the running of Köhler. Later he became Director and in the meantime he obtained his licence as auctioneer. Jakob von Uexkuell was part of the philatelic teams, first at Schwenn's and later at Köhler's.

Thanks to the enthusiastic team and of course the co-operation within the Schwenn Group Köhler operated profitably and seriously during Schwenn's ownership.

When the Schwenn Group began to struggle and finally went into bankruptcy, Schwenn tried to go into partnership with Volker Parthen, who wanted to buy Köhler out of the bankruptcy procedures. The partnership didn't work out though, because apparently Volker Parthen had already found another supporter.

Looking at the Schwenn era from a Heinrich Köhler perspective, there are two great achievements that must be credited to Hartmut C. Schwenn:

- Philately was in the public eye, even non-philatelists
- Schwenn was the person who hired Volker Parthen, the future owner of Köhler

The Volker Parthen era



Volker Parthen



John R. Boker, Jr.



Erivan Haub (left) with Prof. Carlrichard Brühl

Volker Parthen was 31 when he bought Köhler, still very young. He interrupted his studies when he was appointed manager of the Schwenn-owned company Heinrich Köhler. For the take-over he had the financial support of Karl-Friedrich Meyer-Beer whom he repaid within 8 months (!).

Many people in the philatelic world heard the name Volker Parthen for the first time when he began marketing the German States collection of John R. Boker Jr. in 1985. But of course there is much more to say about Volker Parthen – his story could well fill a book on its own.

Volker Parthen's innovations

Volker Parthen made the Köhler auctions become more international by finding consignments of non-German collecting areas. For this he had good friends who helped him.

He revived the work on the card index which years later was one of the key factors in the negotiations with John Boker.

In 1973 Volker for the first time organised a 'special sale'. As well as the main catalogue, a separate, 'special' catalogue was produced for a very special collection of Austria.

Only three months later he introduced the idea of a special catalogue with 'added value' for the collector. Under Volker Parthen, Heinrich Köhler organised 23 special sales with dedicated catalogues – excluding the Boker sales.

It was Wilhelm van Loo and Volker Parthen who agreed to invent 'The Heinrich Köhler Prize of Merit for Extraordinary Services Rendered to Certification and Expertising' in 1996. The prize shows the strong links the company had and still has with the German association of philatelic experts.

With the Boker sales Volker Parthen and his wife Claudia celebrated philatelic festive evenings which are unparalleled even today.

In the catalogue of the first auction under his ownership Volker Parthen described the principles of the company: *„The principles of the Heinrich Köhler auction house, solidity, honesty in the description of the lots offered, accommodating arrangements with our buyers and consignors, will remain our primary endeavour. I will spare no effort to carry on the tradition of the house, which will be preserved by my friendly relationship with Heinrich Köhler's heirs.“*

The development of the company

Sales figures increased steadily in the 1970s and 1980s. Already at the end of the seventies the company's sales were over

DM 12,000,000. The company was again among the major players in the auction scene.

Volker Parthen's greatest coup was – of course – the series of sales of the Boker collection of Old German States. Volker Parthen set records, among others the highest hammer price for a German philatelic item – the error of colour of Baden on cover. In 1985 it sold for a hammer price of DM 2,300,000! Prices in general were overwhelming. The Boker collection was sold over a period of 15 years in 18 special catalogues. The marketing was perfect - perhaps this was something Volker Parthen picked up to a certain extent when he was working for Hartmut C. Schwenn.

Germany's unification was the biggest thing that had happened in German history since the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. And Volker Parthen didn't think twice when it came to re-opening an office in Berlin. The company existed for 16 years before it was closed down again by his successors. The reasons for this decision were that the East German and Berlin market was not as strong as hoped for, one of the co-shareholders wanted to retire and the other's health was not at its best.

Activities beyond the running of the auction houses

Volker Parthen was President of the Federation of Stamp Auction Houses in Germany for ten years and was very active in all the other important German federations such as the Federation of Stamp Experts and the Federation of Stamp Collectors' Associations. In 1994 he became a member of the Consilium Philatelicum.

He received the Honorary medal of the German Stamp Collectors' Association, the Sieger Award for philatelic literature, the Hans Grobe medal, the Vermeil medal of the German Stamp Dealers' Association and posthumously the Heinrich Köhler medal.

Volker Parthen's philatelic knowledge was extremely good and very broad. His advice was welcome everywhere and he liked to share his knowledge, especially with collectors.

He got to know his wife Claudia in the company in 1967 when she was a helper. They have two children. Without Claudia, who brought up the children and worked nearly full-time in the company until 2002 Volker might have made some mistakes thanks to his enthusiastic approach to everyone who was an enthusiastic stamp buyer. It was mostly Claudia who first identified the not so enthusiastic payers among that group.

When Volker Parthen passed away in the year 2000 he had already negotiated a take-over with the new owner. Unfortunately he died before the transition could be executed. Claudia Parthen had to take over at this moment and prepared the transition from personal ownership by Claudia Parthen to the new owners, the Afinsa group of Spain.

During the period of transition it turned out that the best person to manage the company at that very moment was Dieter Michelson, a 40-year-old manager of a stamp wholesale company owned by Afinsa at the time.

Afinsa, Escala and Spectrum



A new Spanish-German team: Heinrich Köhler and Afinsa.

Dieter Michelson had always dealt with new issues. Classical stamps or postal history were not part of his knowledge. As the Köhler team remained the same as under Volker and Claudia Parthen, the new challenge was easier to master than if he had had to put together a completely new team.

With the predecessors he had, the best thing was not to change too much, as they had all been successful.

The number of special auctions offered in special catalogues was strengthened as catalogue production became easier.

The entire production of the pre-print catalogue was prepared in-house.

The upcoming importance of the World Wide Web had to be taken into account and the company's services in this respect were adapted.

In 2003 the companies were taken over by the American ESCALA Group, a NASDAQ-listed American group. Afinsa was the main shareholder in ESCALA, which was later renamed as SPECTRUM.

Karl Louis, an old-time employee of Heinrich Köhler was taken on board, as Michelson's responsibilities within the Afinsa Group also covered the other stamp auction houses which were Corinphila in Zurich (and later Corinphila/Netherlands), John Bull in Hong Kong and H. R. Harmer in California. Karl Louis became responsible for Corinphila in Zurich and at the same time was and is responsible for the marketing of Heinrich Köhler.

The Afinsa scandal

In May 2006 the Spanish authorities prohibited Afinsa – the grandmother company in Madrid – from continuing with their stamp investment scheme and closed down the company on 9 May.

Due to reactions in the market and people being nervous, the company struggled, but it didn't fall. The people in the market didn't entirely understand what was actually going on and what the connection was between Köhler and Afinsa. Most of them still thought Köhler was a direct subsidiary of Afinsa.

A New marketing approach

The same year Louis and Michelson presented the EDITION D'OR series of books which is most popular today. The books present the collections of collectors worldwide who have exhibited their collections and who won Large Gold medals.

More and more the advantages of the international network of the group become obvious: Joint auctions such as the Wolff collection of Zeppelins or the Kirchner collections of Germany, Switzerland and Italian States are an important 'added value' for philatelists today.

An ISO 9001 Standard is implemented, ensuring buyers and consignors transparent work flow with the highest degree of security for their purchase or consignment. No other collectible auction house worldwide has the same standard.

Innovative marketing ideas – very different from the usual Advertisement in stamp magazines - have been realised in the past years.

Preparing for the future

All in all Michelson together with Louis have managed Heinrich Köhler and the other companies of the group in the way they thought was appropriate and best for the mother company SPECTRUM. And there was no complaint. It seemed that the SPECTRUM C.E.O. Greg Roberts was quite happy that he didn't have to devote time to managing the people who were taking care of the stamps - the collectibles he liked least of the range of products SPECTRUM was handling. His attitude to philately might explain why in 2012 things began to change quite quickly.

At that time the liquidators in Spain were selling all the assets of the company of which one big chunk were the shares they owned in SPECTRUM. They were negotiating with the Americans and finally came to an agreement whereby SPECTRUM



Policemen and Investigators systematically blocked the entrance to Forum Filatelico.

would buy the remaining shares in ASFINSA. In order to finance the deal, SPECTRUM had put together a group of investors, but the amount accumulated was still not sufficient.

They therefore decided to sell some of their companies, among them all the stamp companies. Greg Roberts approached Louis and Michelson and they were fond of the idea to organise a management buy-out. Negotiations were not too easy, but after approximately five months agreement was reached.

On 13 September 2012 Louis and Michelson managed to buy out the philatelic auction houses Heinrich Köhler; Corinphila, Corinphila Netherlands, John Bull/Hong Kong and H.R. Harmer/California with the help of an investor.



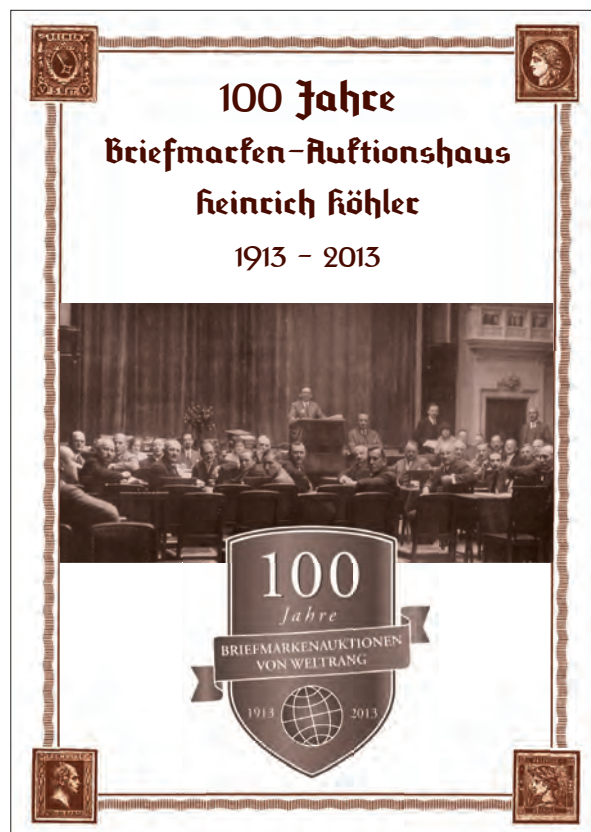
The families Michelson and Louis.



Helga and Erivan Haub.

Let us be optimistic that, 100 years from now, there will be a presentation here at 41 Devonshire Place on the 200th anniversary of this great company. I don't believe any of us will be here.

Wiesbaden, 9 October 2014







Heinrich Köhler at his desk in his Berlin office