



Photographs by B. POKROVSKY

By L. MONINA

# Soviet Woman STAMPS 1-69 ABOUT WOMEN ARE HER HOBBY

*"... I am very fond of philately and would like to know if there are any women philatelists in your country," writes Alice Watson, an English reader.*

When people become collectors, I am sure they enter an enchanted world. My experience with women collectors has further confirmed this belief. I have met philophonists who collect gramophone records and tape-recordings, numismatists who collected paper money, banknotes and old coins, philocardists who have a passion for picture postcards, ex-libris-ists and philatelists. Now I want to speak of one of the philatelists.

In the few hours I enjoyed Lydia Kurakhtova's hospitality there was not time to take in all her wonderful collection of 1,800 stamps: they are on "Women of the Socialist Countries" and tell a visual story of women's role in the politics and economy of their countries, the struggle for peace and friendship among all peoples, developments in science, literature and art. Some of the stamps show women's successes in aviation, the cosmos, and sport.

"How did you become interested in stamp collecting?" I asked.

"More than 10 years ago I visited the International Philately Exhibition in Moscow, which was on during the World Youth Festival. It so impressed me that I decided to start

collecting stamps myself and, after talking it over with my husband who has long been a collector, I decided on one theme. It was: 'Women of the Socialist Countries.' I have never regretted my choice. Searching for stamps on this subject takes a lot of time but I find it very rewarding."

At that moment little Andrei, Lydia's grandson, came in. He was going visiting and he couldn't decide what toys to take with him.

"You work for the State Insurance, attend to your family, and collect stamps! How do you find time for everything?" I asked.

"I spend most of my evenings with my stamps, especially when Andrei is asleep and it's nice and quiet."

There was another interruption, the telephone this time. Someone was asking Lydia Kurakhtova to work as a guide at the USSR Philately Exhibition.

"I see your hobby takes up your time during the day as well?" I remarked.

"I wouldn't agree with your expression," Lydia remarked. "It doesn't 'take,' it 'gives.' It's a very enjoyable pastime and opens up new horizons. For instance, once I had to prepare a collection of stamps for an exhibition in Paris devoted to famous French people in science and culture, and in order to give a short summary of their work I had to spend a lot of time looking up facts about them in the library. As you can imagine I learnt a great deal. I'm now preparing a collection of English stamps. I have over 200 already, and am the proud possessor of an unfranked stamp of one pound denomination. It is No. 266 Gibbons edition of the year 1902 with a portrait of Edward VII."

I asked Lydia to tell me where, besides the Soviet Union, she has exhibited her "Women of the Socialist Countries" collection. It seems that this unique collection, has had great success at world and international exhibitions in Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Rostock, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Sofia, and Paris. It has just returned from the International Exhibition in Poland where its owner was awarded a silver medal.

"How many does that make?" I asked.

"Twenty."

Lydia took me to a glass show-case where there was an impressive array of gold, silver, and bronze medals.

At the USSR Philately Society I was told that no other woman has won as many awards as Lydia Kurakhtova. Not long ago it was thought that only men became collectors.

"The authors of this erroneous conviction were mostly men, of course," I suggested to Alexander Smyslov, assistant chairman of the Society.

"It seems like it," he smiled. "You see, we divide women into three categories: one—collectors, two—wives of collectors who take an interest in their husbands' hobby, and three—wives, whose husbands' passion for collecting can give rise to family conflicts."

"Which is the biggest category?"

"Right now, the first. I should mention that women not only collect, but help run various groups and clubs, and I can assure you they do a good job."

... I said goodbye to Lydia Kurakhtova, convinced that women are firmly entrenched in one more field where there used to be only men.

Top photo: Lydia Kurakhtova's awards. \* Below: Her grandson, Andrei, is also interested in stamp collecting

