

THAI PHILATELY



Journal of the Society for Thai Philately

Volume 8

Number 3
(Whole Number 31)

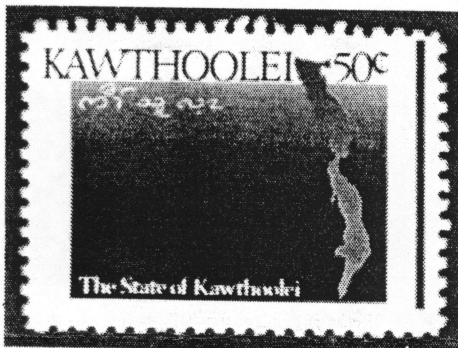
Fall 1990



Theodor Collmann

Kawthoolei Separatist Stamps

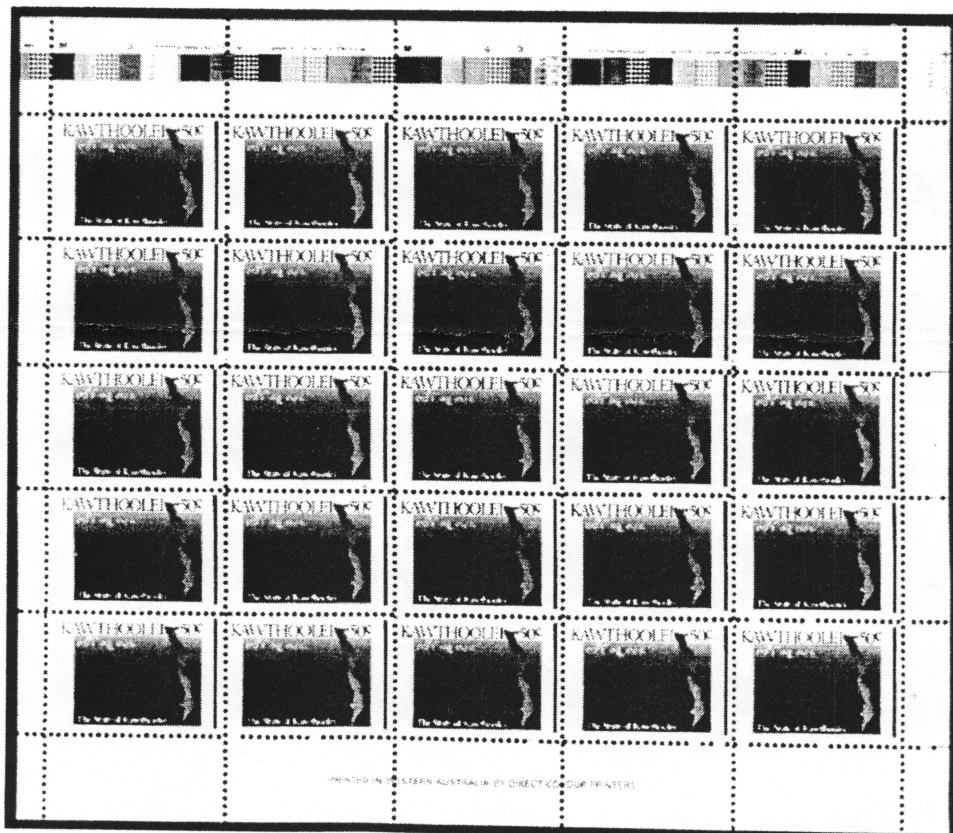
By Carlos Swanson



In 1986, stamps issued from the Karen (Ka-rin) independent self-proclaimed state of Kawthoolei appeared. Like the stamps from the Shan States described and illustrated in *The Thai Times*, Volume 27, Number 3, these stamps are issued by a self-proclaimed state of ethnic minority peoples in Myanmar (Burma).

The stamps from the Shan States were crudely produced in black and white apparently by the Shan peoples of northeast Myanmar. The new issues from the Karen peoples who have set up the independent state of Kawthoolei (Caw-to-lay) are well produced with a note in the margin of each sheet indicating they were printed in Western Australia by Direct Colour Printers.

Six values, 5c, 10c, 30c, 50c, \$1 and \$3, are printed in sheets of 25 stamps per sheet. A letter from the Karen National Union Department of Foreign Affairs gives the value of a Kawthoolei dollar as being equal to 20 cents US. At the top margin of each sheet are numerous color swatches used by many of the color printing houses, the stamps being printed in a multicolor format.



Illustrated on the 5c stamp are two Karen children singing or studying; the 10c stamp shows the red, white, and blue flag of Kawthoolei; the 30c value has a picture of the Karen national leader, General Bo Mya; and the 50c value illustrates a map of the state of Kawthoolei. The \$1 value illustrates the seal of the government of Kawthoolei and the \$3 value pictures a view of the mountainous region and a river (the Salween?) where the state is located.



It would seem that these stamps, though nicely produced, would be capable of providing postage only within the state of Kawthoolei, if that. Little mail is carried within the country and that probably by the Karen national army which essentially represents the government of the country. Certainly the Myanmar government is not able to provide mail service in this area over which they have exercised virtually no control since World War II. As a large number of the Karen people reside in the northwest of Thailand as well as the eastern part of Myanmar, it is probable any mail carried by these stamps would have to be deposited within the Thai postal system with additional Thai postage affixed were the destination beyond the very fluid borders of Kawthoolei. Such postal items are at present not known to the author. It seems probable that the purpose of these issues would be the raising of funds from stamp collectors for the continuation of the ongoing struggle for independence of the Karens against the central government.

Those collectors who would be interested in obtaining stamps of this issue may contact the author for further information. □