

Prosit Neujahr!

by Dale Hallmark



1936 Bronze 23 mm chimney sweep token by Joseph Prinz. The reverse is blank. The inscription "Ich bringe glück" means "I bring luck".

The *Prosit Neujahr* tokens is a continuation of a tradition seen on postcards dating back into the 1890s.

Many collectors may be surprised to learn of a national mint that issues tokens and creates custom tokens for anyone willing to pay the fees, but that is exactly what the Austrian Mint in Vienna does. Although ownership of the mint transferred from the central government to the Austrian Central Bank in 1989, the mint still makes all the circulating and collector coins for the country as well as annual tokens and medals.

Beginning in the mid 1930's, (maybe as early as 1934) the mint began issuing "Happy New Year" (*Prosit*

Neujahr) tokens. These popular tokens often depict scenes from folktales, include lucky designs, and have inscriptions wishing one, "Happy New Year" as well as, "Good luck". It is a fairly common practice, maybe less so now than in the past, to give one to friends and loved ones on *Silvesterabend* (New Years Eve). Many will carry a good luck token in pocket or purse throughout the year for that little bit of extra luck.

Early tokens were minted in bronze and silver and the reverses were blank or only had a date. They



1937 bronze 23mm New Year's Babe. The reverse has been customized for Neues Wiener Journal (New Vienna Journal). The inscription "Viel Glück" means good luck.



1948 Aluminum 23 mm token by Adolf Ludwig Hofmann, chief engraver of the Austrian Mint who passed away in 1953.



1955 0.900 Silver 23 mm token marked "HK" (possibly Hans Köttendorfer). The obverse inscription, "Gute fahrt ins nuen jahr", translates to, "Have a good journey in the new year". The reverse translates to (top), "Everything should succeed", and (bottom), "I will bring you luck."



were designed that way so that the reverse could be the canvas for customers' designs. There are literally hundreds of issues and variations in the series and most are modest in cost, rich with history, have intriguing designs, and have served a multitude of purposes.

Early in 1938, Germany occupied Austria, and the National Socialists

were quick to take over civil service jobs which included the mint, and consequently attempting to identify tokens from the Austrian Mint issued between 1939 and 1945 is problematic.

Due to the scarcity of material needed for the war effort bronze was temporarily replaced with zinc. Zinc Austrian tokens from 1946-1947 are easy to acquire but being zinc means

that really nice examples are difficult to locate. By 1948 bronze was again being used for tokens, and aluminum was also popular for a few years.

The mint issued tokens each year and in some early years issued several designs. When a design was issued it was then available afterward to be used by customers. Up through 1959 the tokens were 23 mm in diameter; thereafter and through 2011 they are 21.5 mm. Token designs may exist in both 23 and 21.5 mm, as a regular or custom issue, in various metals, and with obvious variations in design all of which makes them a fun series for the collector. I know of at least 11 distinct major variations for 1949 and that seems to be the rule rather than the exception. They are poorly researched and new variations can be uncovered fairly easily. In later years, tokens were available in proof finish and since at least the 1960's have been also issued in gold.

The Sacher Hotel Tokens

The Sacher Hotel tokens are a complete sub-series (1957-2012) and

can stand alone as a very collectible series in their own right. For many years, the Sacher Hotel sent a holiday card to the people on its guest list. The card contains a Happy New Year—Good Luck token. The tradition of mailing a holiday card and token to customers continues today. The tokens are affixed to the holiday card with glue and seem to be used as a thank you, a holiday well-wish, and a reminder (advertisement) of the hotel.

At the beginning in 1957 the hotel tokens were produced at the Austrian Mint, but starting in 1991 or 1992 the tokens came from the company Schwertner und Cie in Graz, Austria. I am unsure of the exact year as it happens the 1991 token is one of the very few I have been unable to collect. So 1990 and before is from the Austrian Mint; 1992 and after is from Schwertner. I really want a 1991! Schwertner tokens are an entirely different collectible series



1968 Gold-plated 21.5 mm Sacher Hotel in Vienna, Austria. This piece depicts the famous Ferris wheel at the Vienna Prater. The tall spire to the right of the Ferris wheel is St. Stephen's Cathedral, and the reverse design is by Kurt Bodlak.



Holiday card with token from the Sacher Hotel, shown with the token-covering flap in both the closed and open positions.



of tokens and they have been issuing them since at least 1953. In recent years Schwertner produces four designs for the year as well as lots of customer issues.

I have a Sacher Hotel holiday card which I received from the hotel in May of 2010; it contains a 2010 token. Normally it would be mailed late in 2009 for the 2009 Christmas-New Year holidays. I wasn't on their mailing list (never stayed at the hotel as it was beyond budget), so I asked to purchase one and they graciously sent me one free with a lot of other literature. It is quite substantial and

when closed measures around 7-5/8 inches square. I assume each year to be different but I have never found another...I would like to collect a few. It opens as a tri-fold. The front has a flap window which when opened reveals the token with the reverse visible showing the hotel monogram "S". The token is not enclosed, but is glued to the card though it is easily removed. Having removed glue from a lot of Sacher Hotel tokens it is obvious that they used more powerful glues in the past. I

The Prosit Neujahr tradition is active to a lesser extent in some adjacent countries such as Hungary, Germany and a few others. This Slovak postcard combines two good luck symbols, the chimney sweep and the pigs. In fact, there appears to be a horseshoe on the ground, and I'll bet there's some significance to the foliage the sweep is feeding the pigs, so this particular card is absolutely overflowing with good luck!



1974 0.900 Silver 21.5 mm Engine # 13. The inscription, "Bin ich auch nur klein und rund bring doch glück ich jede stund", roughly translates as "Although I am small and round I will bring you luck all the year round". The piece has the designer's initial "B".



1986 Silver-plated bronze 21.5 mm, Intercontinental Hotel in Vienna. Designer's initials "BK". The front depicts a rider and Lipizzaner stallion from the famous Spanish Riding School in Vienna.



2007 Proof 0.900 silver 21.5 mm token depicting "Froggy" fishing for luck, and it looks like he made a fine catch!

always was curious about the glue and when I got the card...mystery solved.

Attractive for Collectors

Considering the Austrian Mint tokens have been minted from approximately 1934 through today, come in various metals, sizes, design variations, custom and regular issue, proof and normal finishes and have intriguing designs with a story to tell, there is likely to be something of interest to all collectors. I think we could all use a little extra luck at times. What could be luckier than collecting luck?

Editor's Note: I happened to buy an unusual token on Ebay recently, and while trying to find out a little bit about it on the Internet was lucky enough to stumble across www.AustrianCoins.com, a site maintained by Texan Dale Hallmark. I e-mailed him some specific questions, and in addition to answering them completely, imagine my delight when he agreed to my request to provide an article for TCN on this interesting subject as well. Hope you enjoyed it. If you get a chance drop by his Web site and take a peek around...GB