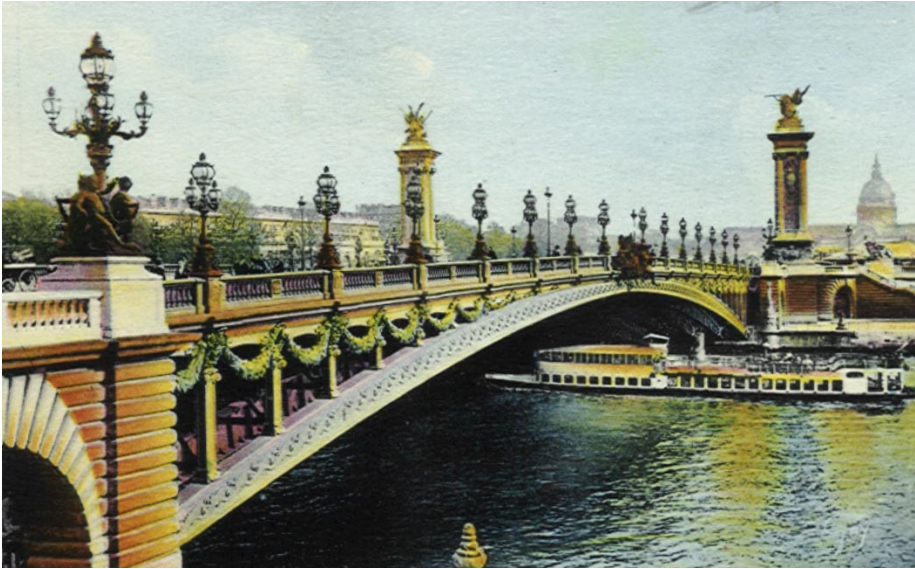


## The World's Most Beautiful Bridge

by Tom Broadhead

France and Russia had become close political allies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and visits between the Russian czars and French presidents became common. Czar Alexander III visited France on more than one occasion, the latest being in 1894, the year of his unexpected death. In October 1896, Czar Nicholas II and the Czarina Alexandra traveled to Paris for a state visit, which included the laying of the cornerstone for a new bridge across the Seine River. This monumental bridge, named for Alexander III, was completed in time for the opening of the Paris Exposition Internationale of 1900 and has been a Parisian landmark since.



The Alexander III Bridge links the Grand and Petite Palaces, exhibit halls of the 1900 exposition, with the Esplanade des Invalides to the south. The Church of the Invalides with its prominent dome houses the tomb of Napoleon I, whose downfall was hastened by his disastrous invasion of Russia in 1812.

With gilt statues atop square columns at each end, beautiful street lamps, and spectacular wrought iron work throughout, I think it is the most beautiful bridge in the world!

Both the bridge and the czar have been illustrated in postage stamps – but only one design and denomination each. Russia issued its first stamps in 1857, during the reign of Alexander II, but it was not until 1913 that pictures of czars appeared on stamps. As part of the series commemorating the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Romanov dynasty, Alexander III appeared on the 3 kopek stamp, which in 1917 was reprinted on thin cardboard with an inscription on the back for use both as a stamp and as currency (Scott 141).



It was not until 1949 that the Alexander III bridge received equal treatment, this time on a 100 franc airmail stamp issued to commemorate the International Telecommunications Congress. The large format of this stamp does justice to the beautiful north entrance to the bridge, with the Petite Palace in the background. The stamp was designed by the famous French stamp designer Gandon. It is beautifully engraved and printed in dark red (Scott C28).

Oh, and there is another Alexander III bridge, shown in the 1913 postcard at right. This one is a railroad bridge over the Volga River in Russia. I don't know if it still stands, but I thought I should show it. Don't be mistaken about which of the two I think is the most beautiful bridge in the world!

