

75 Years Ago in Mekeel's:

Money Stamps of Latvia

(by Mannel Hahn, from Mekeel's Weekly, May 24, 1937, with images added)

Most collectors know of the paper shortage in the Confederacy at the close of the Civil War, but comparatively few know of the paper shortages in Northern Europe at the close of the [First] World War, which produced a number of interesting varieties of stamps: for instance, those of Latvia in the first three years of that country's existence.

The first issue of stamps was on December 19, 1918, and was printed in Riga by Schnakenburg. The only paper available was the military maps that had been made in the same printery a few months previously, so sheets of 228 were fitted to the backs of these maps.



Block of four of Latvia Sc. 1, showing the map on the back; this is from a specialized study of this issue at <http://www.apsit.com/mapintro.htm>

A little later a supply of watermarked paper was received at Libau by Gotlieb Meyer, who re-drew the original design (which was by Ansis Zihrul).



Redraw, Sc. 3

The next issue, which was for the commemoration of the Liberation of Riga (Sc. 44-46, shown Sc. 46) a year previously, was also printed by Meyer on watermarked paper secured from Germany, while a third type was issued at about the same time for the army.

It was at this period that the German armies, under General Bermond, moved on Riga and captured numerous cities, where German banknotes were prepared, but before they were issued, the armies



were driven back; similarly, Bolshevist armies attempted to capture Latvia, but were repulsed, leaving in the hands of the Latvians supplies of Russian banknotes half finished, i.e., printed on one side.

During 1920, a series of ambitious



Sc. 68, printed on the back of a Russian bank note



designs was undertaken. Thus on the 18th of November, 1919, we have the first Anniversary of Independence issue (Sc. 59-63, shown Sc. 59) which appears on vertically laid hand-wove paper, as well as horizontally laid paper, sometimes with a thin blue line in it, while the 1 ruble value appears on the backs of Bolshevist banknotes.

Shortly after, the state printing works at Riga took over the production of stamps and later in the month produced the higher values of the same issue on the vertically laid paper.

In December of 1919, the Liberation of Courland [Kurland] was commemorated (Sc. 64-67, shown Sc. 66), but this time on wove paper, and evidently the issue exhausted the supplies of this, because in March, 1920, the Liberation of Lettgallen [Latgale] was commemorated by an issue on the backs of General Bermond's occupation notes (Sc. 68-69, see Sc. 68 front and back above). In April, 1920, a further supply of wove paper was received and used for the First Assembly Commemoration,



but by August the issue of Red Cross stamps (Sc. B1-B12, shown, Sc. B1) had to be made on the backs of Bolshevist notes and two more of the Bermond notes. By 1921 a sufficient supply of paper was arranged and by 1922 the League of Nations undertook guarantee of Latvia independence, and thereafter there was no further shortage.



A very interesting collection can be made at little cost by getting the different types of banknotes, etc., these issues represent. The writer has found on No. 1, for instance, six different types of maps represented on the backs of stamps. Some of the most interesting of these stamps are from the selvage edges, showing no trace of the map, or, perhaps, just a single line of the border.