

## *Fabulous Firsts:*

# Prussia (November 15, 1850)

By B. W. H. Poole

(From *Mekeel's Weekly*, November 15, 1937, with images added)



4pf, Sc. 1, with ringed "103" (Berlin) cancel

Although Austria had taken the lead in introducing postage stamps into its postal service, and Bavaria was the first of the German States to issue stamps, Prussia was not far behind and, by the energy of its postal administration, rapidly took the lead in postal matters throughout the whole of Germany. A decree of King Frederick William IV, dated Dec. 21, 1849, introduced new regulations for the postal service under which

the rates for single letters were 1 silbergroschen up to 10 German miles, 2 silb., for distances between 10 and 20 German miles, and 3 silb. for distances beyond 20 German miles. Heavier letters were charged according to weight; the registration fee was fixed at 2 silb.; and a commission of 1/2 silb. was charged on packets and money orders. This decree also announced that stamps would be prepared but it was not until Oct. 30, 1850, that a circular from the Minister of Trade and Works fixed the issue of the stamps to the public to take place Nov. 15, 1850. At that time the currency of Prussia consisted of the thaler (equal to about 72¢ in our money) divided into 30 silb., each of which consisted of 12pf.

The first set of postage stamps consisted of four denominations—6 pfennige, 1, 2 and 3 silb.—by means of which the various postal rates then prevailing could be easily made up. The 6pf stamp was largely used in payment of a charge made

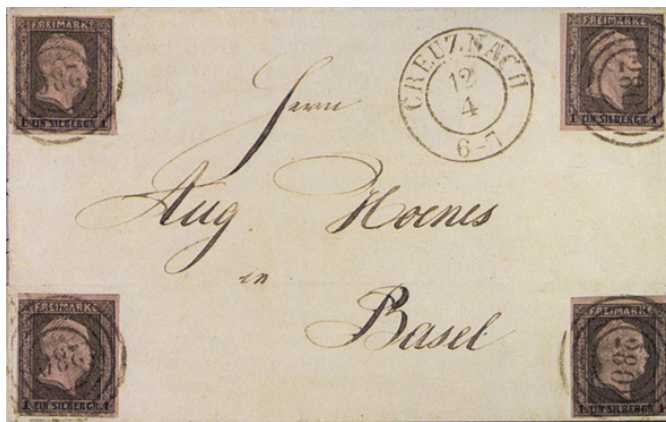


6pf pair, Sc. 2, with framed Berlin Hamburger BHNHF cancel

6pf, Sc. 2, on cover (upper right) tied by framed Züllichau 27/6 cancel, used with 6s green and 7s brick red cut to shape entieres tied by ringed "1722" cancels on 1860 folded letter for a parcel addressed to Berlin.



for the delivery of letters. This charge or fee was fixed at 1/2sgr (6pf) where there was a regularly established post office and 1sgr for other places. When letters



Four copies of the 1sgr black, Sc. 3, each tied by ringed "280" cancel on letter sheet with Creuznach 12 4 double circle cancel.

were called for, no delivery charge was made.

Shortly after the issue of these stamps the German-Austrian Postal Union was formed for the interchange of correspondence between Austria and various of the German States. It was chiefly due to the efforts of Prussia that this Union was made possible—this being the first of many progressive steps



2sg, Sc. 4, tied to piece by double circle "Danzig" cancel and large red "2-1/2" handstamp, also with red "p." in circle and "London Paid" markings.



*3sg, Sc. 5, with  
Friennohl 11/5  
cancel*

taken by the kingdom in the interests of increased postal efficiency.

May 1, 1856, a 4pf stamp (see page 1) was added to the series for the prepayment of matter sent under wrapper so that this, the last of the set to appear, because of its low face value, becomes number one in the catalogue.

All five values are similar in design and show a profile portrait of King William IV, with head to right, on a ground of lines cross-hatched horizontally and vertically. The portrait is enclosed within a rectangular frame inscribed FREIMARKE at the top and with the value in words at the bottom. The side borders are filled with oak-leaf ornamentation; there are small crosses in the upper angles; and in the lower corners are numerals of value.

The design and necessary dies were the work of Eduard Eichens, a Berlin engraver, so far as the four higher values were concerned. The original die consisted of the central portion with portrait from which four subsidiary dies were made to which the borders and inscriptions were added. This may be proved by small differences which are common to all stamps of each value.



*1856 4pf, Sc. 1*

When the 4pf value was required an engraver named Schilling had taken Eichens' place and while he used the original die for the portrait, his treatment of the borders was slightly different. It should be noted he made a peculiar error in the lower inscription by spelling the value as PFENNIGE in place of the more usual pfennige. The plates, made of steel, each contained 150 impressions

arranged in fifteen horizontal rows of ten each. The vertical rows were then numbered 1 to 10 in the top margin, and the horizontal rows were similarly numbered 1 to 15 in the left-hand margin (see page 4). In the center of the





*This top margins strip of a later issue, the 1858-60 6pf, Sc. 10, shows the margin markings described on page 3.*

right-hand margin the number of the plate was engraved thus:—"Plate No. 15". How many plates were used is not known but plates now housed in the Berlin Postal Museum are numbered 7 for the 6pf; 14 for the 1sgr; 12 for the 2sgr; and 10 for the 3sgr. These numbers probably belong to a series referring to the plates made by Eichens or the firm by which he was employed. The only other number we know of is plate No. 13 which was used for the 1sgr. There were at least two plates for the 4pf value but neither of these had any marginal notations as in the case of the earlier issued denominations.

The stamps were printed on handmade paper which was specially manufactured by Ebart Brothers of Berlin. It was watermarked with a special device of two branches of laurel forming a wreath, and the group of 150 watermarks was enclosed within a single lined frame broken on the four sides for the following watermarked inscription :—FREIMARKEN—DER—KOENIGL. PREUSS—POST meaning Postage stamps of the Royal Prussian Post.

The stamps were printed on white paper for the pfennig values and on colored papers for the silbergroschen stamps. There are well marked shades of the 4pf and 6pf but, with the exception of the 3sgr, the colored papers differ hardly at all. The 3sgr, however, appears on paper distinctly orange buff in color as well as the more usual yellow. The State Printing Office did not exist until Jan. 1, 1853, so the original supplies of the 6pf, 1, 2 and 3sgr stamps were printed under contract by some firm in Berlin whose name seems to have been completely lost to fame.

The State Printing Office soon became a very important establishment and in subsequent years printed stamps

for many of the German States as well as those of Prussia itself. In many cases, too, the emissions of Prussia served as a guide and pattern as to color and value for the issues of many of its neighbours. To quote from a short article in the *Stamp Collectors' Magazine* from the pen of Overy Taylor:—"In matters postal Berlin was the capital of Germany long before she assumed that position politically, and it is to the credit of the Prussian administration that for a long period it vindicated its right to direct the postal service of the Confederation by the intelligence with which it seized on improvements and led the way in every useful innovation".

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