

Yesterday in STAMPS:

The Island of Mauritius

by Max Sage (From STAMPS Magazine, July 11, 1941, with images added)

Mauritius, philatelically famous for her "POST OFFICE" issue, is a British Island Colony lying in the Indian Ocean [off the southeast



Mauritius "Post Office", Sc. 1 & Sc. 2

coast of Africa] some 550 miles east of the Island of Madagascar. The Island was first discovered by the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century and later settled by the Dutch, who finally abandoned it in 1710. The French next took possession of the island, giving it the name of Ile de France. In 1810 the British gained control, the island being formally ceded to them in 1814. The area of Mauritius is 720 square miles and the population around 350,000. Sugar and copra form the chief industries. Port Louis is the capital city.

Little is known of the postal history of Mauritius prior to 1846, when the postal system of the island was completely reorganized and the rates fixed for inland and overseas mail; it being specifically stated that stamps were about to be issued, and prepayment of postage upon letters leaving the colony being made compulsory.

Stamps were ordered to be prepared, but the local means for their proper production being non-existent, the job was entrusted to a watchmaker of Port Louis, one Barnard, who engraved by hand both the two required values upon a ladies' visiting card plate, measuring 53 x 36mm. Upon this small copper plate he cut the One Penny value in the N.W. corner, and the Two Pence in the N.E. The 500 copies of each



The proof taken from the original plate made by Barnard for the 1847 "Post Office" issue



A range of impressions: left, Sc. 3a, the 1853-55 1p orange vermilion on greyish paper early impression with a light "14" in double circle cancel; right, Sc. 3e, the 1857-59 1p orange red on yellowish paper latest impression in a horizontal pair.

which were ordered were struck separately, the former in orange and the latter in deep blue.

Ten pounds was the charge for engraving the plate, and ten shillings for printing the thousand stamps. Through Barnard making the error of inscribing "Post Office" where "Post Paid" had been intended, the plate was abandoned, and fresh, larger plates were prepared by the same engraver, each bearing 12 impressions separately engraved. The original plate was discovered in 1912 amongst the deceased Governor's effects. After changing hands several times, this interesting little piece of copper now rests in the celebrated collection of M. Maurice Burrus, of Mulheim [Germany].



1848 2p blue, "PENOE" (instead of "PENCE") issue with Intermediate Impression Sc. 6ad



1859 2p blue, Sherwin re-engraved "large fillet head" issue, Sc. 15

This "Post Office" issue was soon exhausted and for some time no stamps were available; the engraver having to undergo treatment for his eyesight, it was not until May, 1848, that the "Post Paid" plates were ready for use. During the next decade these soft copper plates were so often put to press that they became so worn as to be useless. Another plate for 12 impressions of the 2d was engraved locally by Lapirot, also by hand and on copper; this seems to have worn out in a few months, as although only in use from March, 1859, in October it was replaced by the first Barnard plate for this value, being entirely re-cut by another local engraver named Sherwin. (These two latter are known as the "Small" and "Large Fillets" respectively.) Both values were replaced in the following December by the



1859 2p blue, Lapirot, small fillet head issue, Sc. 14

replaced in the following December by the



1859 1p vermilion, Dardenne "Greek" issue, Sc. 16

lithographed stamps prepared by Dardenne (known as the "Greek Border"). The Barnard 1d, plate was also re-engraved, but never put to press except for the reprints (see below).

In the meantime, other values had been prepared by Perkins, Bacon & Co., from engraved plates bearing the figure of Britannia. Although the printed sheets of the red, green and magenta stamps were delivered in 1848, none were put into use before 1854. The reason for this delay is not known. Early in 1859 Pearson Hill, of the G.P.O., London, was sent out to Mauritius to reorganize the postal services.



1858 (4p) Britannia, Sc. 9



The "Ball Invitation" envelope, one of only three "Post Office" covers in private hands

No bisects were ever authorized, although No. 17 is known thus. For some years the stamps of Mauritius were used in the neighboring islands of Seychelles ("B64" cancellation) and Rodriguez ("B56").



Above, the reprint of the unissued 1d 1859 "Sherwin" issue, made in 1912 by the Royal Philatelic Society after the plates were defaced; right, a print from the back of the 1d plate, advertising "Grand Hotel D'Europe."

Early covers are much sought after, and several of the rare "Post Office" are known on envelopes enclosing invitations to the Governor's ball.



Above, the unique use of the "B65" numeral cancel on cover, on the Mauritius 1892 8c, Sc. 73, used from Rodriguez Island to Mauritius; left, Mauritius 1860 4p. Sc. 26, with Seychelles "B64" numeral cancel.



In 1935, 62 British Colonies and Dominions issued sets of Jubilees, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the accession to the throne of their King. True to tradition, the set from Mauritius leads all the rest. This is the scarcest of all the 62 sets, either mint, used, short sets, in fact any part of the set. Statistics show that only 24,000 of the 1 Rupee were issued, this being the lowest quantity of any value in any colony.



1r used Silver Jubilee, Sc. 207

Mauritius has always been the leading British Colony philatelically, and another reason for this British Silver Jubilee being the outstanding set of the group, is that the Postmaster of Mauritius is the only postmaster of the 62 colonies who has demonetized this set and refused to cancel them after January 1st. Naturally, this adds a great deal of value to Mauritius Jubilee sets used, as very few of them came through used, and many collectors who sent their covers to Mauritius to have them cancelled, received them back uncanceled, as it takes from three to four months to get to this colony, and they reached Mauritius too late.