

Yesterday in STAMPS: Finland's Postal History

By Carl E. Pelander

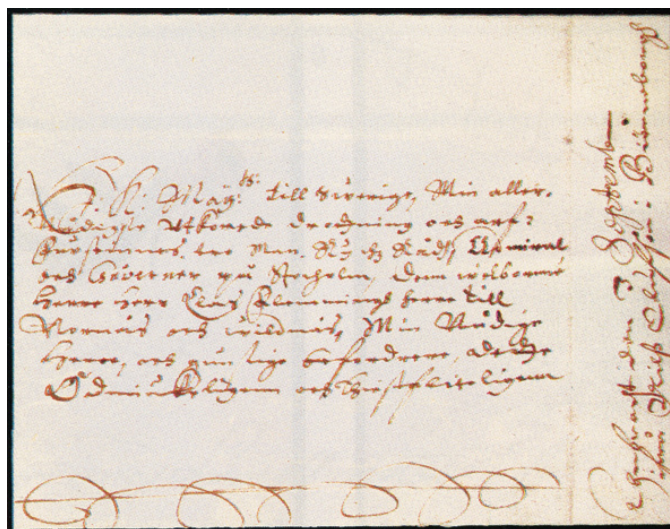
(From STAMPS Magazine, September 3, 1938, with images added)

The Finnish Postal System will celebrate its tercentenary on September 6th, 1938, with the issuance of a set of four commemorative postage stamps. These stamps will depict the progress of the Postal System from the beginning to present age.



Finland Sc. 215-218 on FDC, 300th anniversary of Finnish postal system, left to right: early post office, mail delivery in 1700, modern mail plane, Helsinki post office

Count Per Brahe, during his second term as Governor General of Finland, which then was a Dominion in Sweden, instituted on February 20th, 1636, the first postal service in that country, based chiefly on the then recently installed and successful Swedish system. Though this service was instituted in the early part of 1636, it was not until September 6th, 1638, that uniform rates for letters were adopted. These



A courier letter from the first year of the Finnish postal system, carried from Bjorneborg 3 September 1638 to Admiral Flemming in Stockholm.

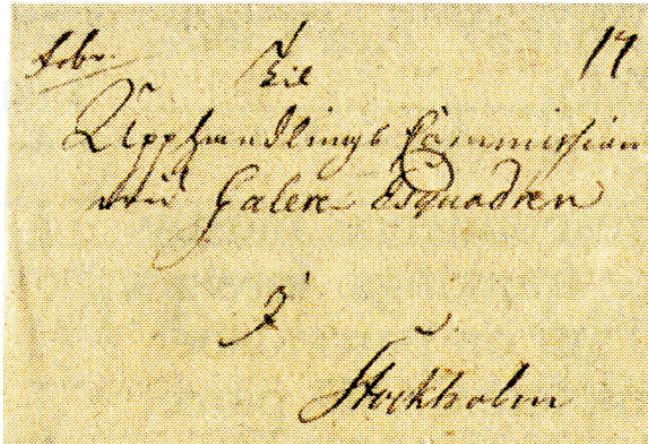


Finland Sc. 776-781, Finnish postal system 350th anniversary, left to right: postal tariff issued by Queen Christina of Sweden September 6, 1638; postal cart circa 1880; mail van; Malmo post office interior; skier using mobile phone; telecommunications satellite

rates were based on the weight of the letter and the distance carried; e.g., a letter weighing 1 loth (1/2 oz.) cost thirty cents for each One Hundred miles—so that the cost of a single rate letter from Abo to Helsingfors would be thirty cents, whereas a similar letter carried from Tornea to Stockholm (535 miles) would cost One Dollar and sixty cents (\$1.60).

The first method of carrying mail was by means of runners. Relay stations were established on all State Highways, at twenty to thirty kilometers (12 to 18 miles) intervals, and once, each week, the runners or carriers were sent out with the mail from the various cities and towns in the country. The carrier was equipped, in addition to his pouch, with a post horn, which he blew when nearing his goal, notifying the relief-runner as to his coming, so that he may carry on with the mail, day or night, rain or shine. These runners were compelled to cover a distance of ten kilometers (six miles) per hour. Failing to do so, they were discharged from their post in addition to being given a penalty of eight days in prison on bread and water. They were also prohibited from talking to anyone while discharging their duties. An offense of this kind was punishable by thirty days on bread and water, and at hard labor. This mode of carrying the mail soon became very popular, but proved too slow and insufficient for the volume of mail carried, so that Bernhard Von Stenhausen was dispatched to Finland, in 1638, by the Swedish Government, to reorganize the Finnish Postal Service. It was at this time that the horse courier, or rider, was substituted for the runners, which proved to be more satisfactory and was continued for almost a

Above, 1766 Free letter from Abo, Finland, to Stockholm, Sweden with courier number "17" upper right.

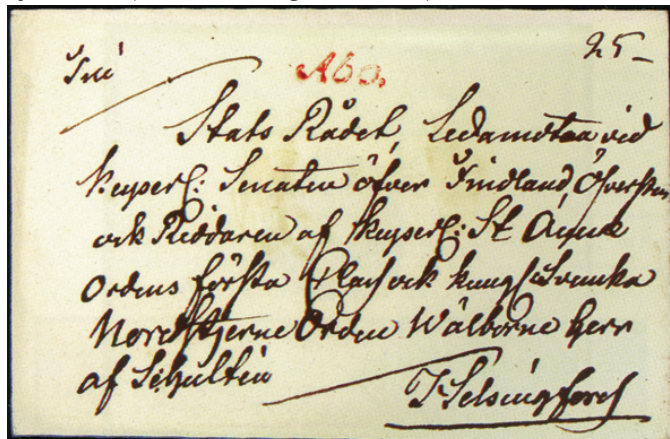


century, when the post-chase replaced it as a still more convenient method of transporting the mail.

At this early stage of the Finnish Postal System, postal markings were unknown, and did not come into use until about 1812. Prior to postal markings, a letter was deposited with the local postmaster, who, after the regulation fee was paid, applied the courier seal consisting of a sitting greyhound. If especial haste was necessary, an additional fee



1778 proclamation from Hattula with black feather (attached by red seal)



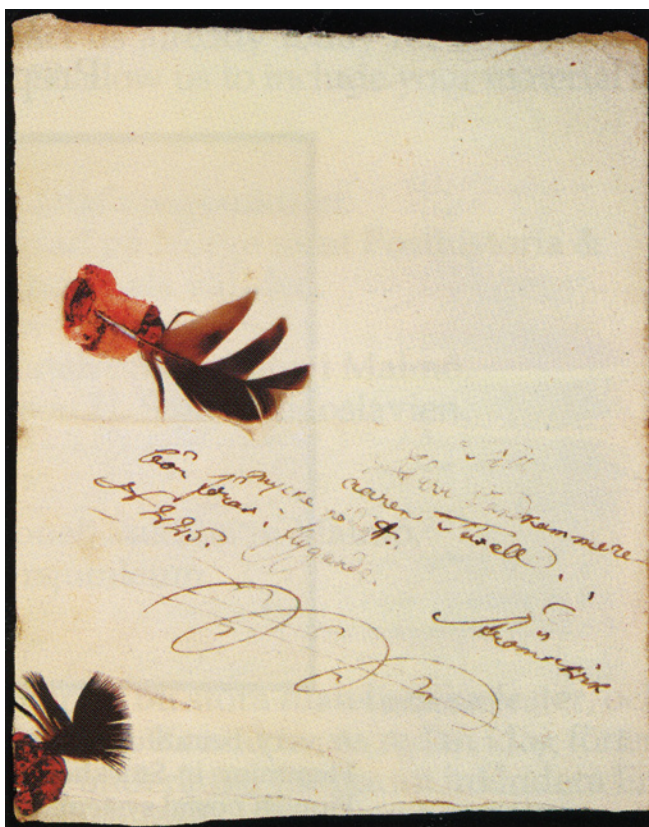
Rare cover to Helsingfors with "Abo red cancel" and "25" courier number upper right.

was paid, and a feather attached to the seal, which may, practically, be termed early special delivery. The letter was then handed to the courier, whose number was written at the top of the letter. (See top cover, this page.)

Immediately following the war of 1808-09, when Finland came under Russian Domination, there were practically no changes in the Postal System. The first regular "Shippost" between Abo and Stockholm, was instituted in 1836. Later with the issuance of the first stamped envelopes on January 1st, 1845, and still later, when the Railroad began to function in the early sixties, a complete revision was made in the Finnish Postal System.

Finland, even though not a member of the Universal Postal Union (due to being a Dominion of Russia), always had her stamps recognized by that body, and at all

times maintained a representative with this Postal Union, until 1917—at which time she was admitted to full membership as an independent republic.



A September 21, 1809 cover with two brown feathers



Feather cover used in Finland, December 25, 1809, with (lower left) crown coil and "M" for unable to read.

1839 cover to Sweden with postage due notation, "Losen 5 Sk.Bco." across top, also with "Helsingfors" single line upper right, "Grisslehamn 11.4 1839" boxed handstamp and single line "Eckero" running into the upper left of the boxed handstamp.

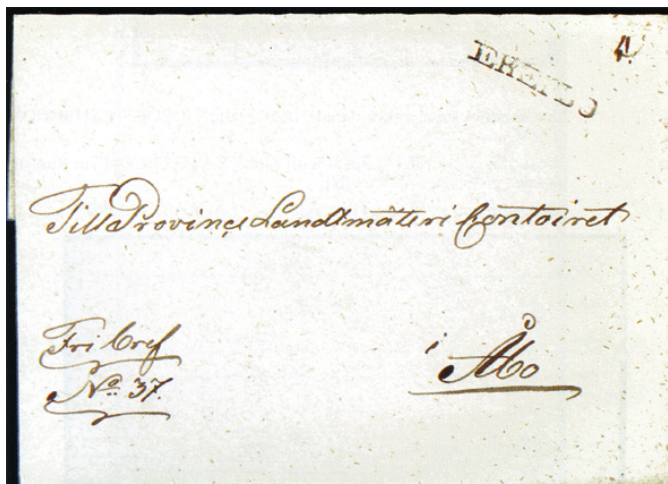


March 24, 1845 cover to Dahlkarsag at Umea in Sweden from Aland with very rare (and very light—arrow) Cyrillic "Eckero" cancel and red "Grisslehamn 27.3.1845" in red.

The 1845 10p "Portostempel" envelope, with very light Cyrillic "Tammerfors" cancel upper right (arrow).



A September 1, 1845 cover to Abo with rare "Eckero" in Cyrillic letters cancel



Finland Sc. 769, Finlandia 1988 issue showing philatelist Agathon Faberge and Finnish rarities

Aland Sc. 29, 1988 issue for 350th Anniversary of Postal Service, showing loading of mail barrels on sailboat, with old post office, Eckero in background; and a Maxi-Card with photo of the old post office, now a postal museum. (Although the population speaks Swedish, Aland is an autonomous region of Finland.



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