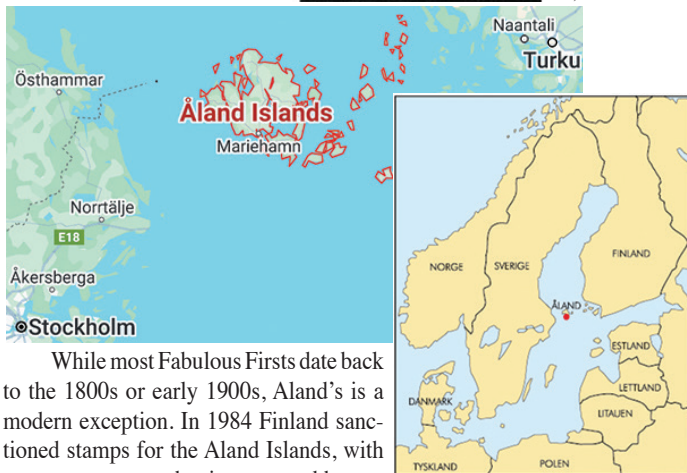


Fabulous Firsts:

Aland (March 1, 1984)



The first set, mint and on March 1, 1984 First Day Cover. Because other definitives were later issued and Scott considers them part of the first set, the Scott numbers for the March 1, 1984 issue, above left, are, top row, Sc. 2, 3, 4, 7, bottom row, Sc. 20, 17, 14



While most Fabulous Firsts date back to the 1800s or early 1900s, Aland's is a modern exception. In 1984 Finland sanctioned stamps for the Aland Islands, with an announcement that is excerpted here:

The relationship between the autonomous Aland Islands in the Baltic Sea (between Sweden and Finland) and the rest of Finland has been close and based on mutual trust. [See page 2 for a brief history]

February 5, 1982 was an important date for the autonomy of the Aland Islands and provided a solution to the stamp question. On this day President Koivisto of Finland issued the statute allowing the province of Aland to issue its own stamps, putting an end to a debate which had been going on for 25 years.

The autonomous position of the islands has not always been looked upon favorably. Originally the people of Aland wanted their islands to be joined to Sweden instead of Finland. Today, the islanders willingly admit that their autonomy has lived up to expectations. Aland today is as much a Swedish speaking area as it was 60 years ago and it is often quoted as an example of a successful minority policy and a working autonomy.

Of the 6,500 Aland Islands about 100 are inhabited, and two thirds of the 23,000 population live on the main island. The Aland Islands have been inhabited since the Stone Age.

Finland and the Aland Islands were both attached to Russia in 1809. When the Russian revolution broke out in 1917 a separatist movement emerged in the Aland Islands demanding the attachment of the province to Sweden. After Finnish independence in 1917 the situation was confusing. A frequent and at times vehement correspondence waged between the governments of Sweden and Finland. Finally, the problem was solved with the help of the League of Nations.

Today the blue, yellow, and red flag of the Islands flies outside the Parliament Building as a symbol of the autonomous status of Aland in accordance with the League of Nations decision of 1921. The Aland Islanders' right to

the Swedish language and their own culture has been safeguarded by law. The internal self-government of the island is founded on the "landstinget" or Provincial Assembly, a house of 30 representatives elected by the people. This has legislative powers and elects the Provincial Executive Council, i.e. the government. National government in the Aland Islands is represented by a Provincial Governor.

The Aland Islands are within a demilitarized zone and the islanders are free from military service. The official language and the language of the educational system is Swedish.

The Aland Islands have a unique status because of their autonomy, colorful history and geographical position. Aland has had its own flag since 1954, as a symbol of its independence and the islanders' love for their home. As of 1984 the islanders will achieve yet another goal: postage stamps of their own.

Finland's Posts and Telecommunications Department will issue the first Aland Islands stamps on March 1, 1984. The first issue will comprise seven stamps with five different designs. One of the stamps will be a commemorative and the other six stamps will be definitives.

The aim in issuing seven stamps in different denominations is to avoid "mixed franking" of Aland Islands stamps and those of mainland Finland jointly on the same item. The design on the two low-value definitives will be that of an important factor of everyday life of the islanders: a fishing-boat typical of the Aland Islands. These definitives, Finnish Markkaa (FIM) 0.20 and 0.50 values, are for use on items in the lowest second-class weight step (printed matter, congratulatory card).

The Aland flag will be used as the design on the stamp used for a first-class letter. The flag has been in use, officially, since 1954.

The stamp used for a letter in the lowest weight step intended for international service and a 20-50 gram letter in the first class rate for internal and Scandinavian service [2.00 FIM] shows Mariehamn's West Harbor. This will be the only commemorative stamp issued in 1984. It symbolizes navigation, which is one of the most important sources of livelihood on the Aland Islands.

The design features the four-masted steel barque *Pommern*, and a modern car ferry. These ships symbolize the change which seafaring on the Aland Islands has undergone during the last half-century.

The purpose of the design on the FIM 3 stamp is to put the Aland Islands on the world map. It shows the position of the Islands relative to the Nordic countries.

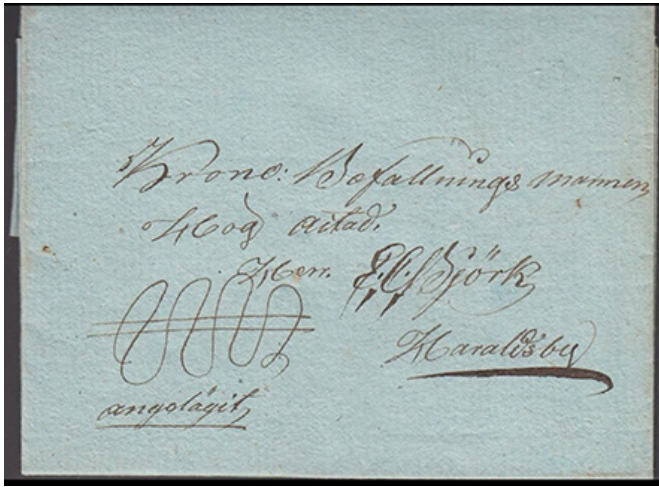
The FIM 10 stamp depicts the 13th century seal of Aland province. This seal, which represents Saint Olof, patron saint of the province, can be considered to symbolize the roots of autonomy.

According to the postal independence statute, the stamps will only carry the text "Aland".

In 1507 the Danish naval officer Søren Norby captured Kastelholm castle on Åland. Many battles would take place between the Danish and Swedish over Kastelholm between 1521 and 1523. Gustav Vasa made Åland a royal castle county in 1537.

Åland became part of the Swedish Empire. The postal service was given a permanent route which went from Stockholm to Turku through Åland.

In 1809 Åland was ceded to Russia along with Finland. In 1921 the League of Nations recognized Åland as part of Finland. The grant of Autonomy in 1951 allowed the Ålanders to send a representative to the Finnish Parliament.



An August 1, 1812 crown letter from Palsbole, Finland, to Haraldsby, Åland with red wax seal



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