

Fabulous Firsts:

Bremen

by B.W.H. Poole (From *Mekeel's Weekly*, December 20, 1937 with images added)

The town of Bremen owes its origin to a bishopric founded in 788 by Charlemagne. Tiring of the episcopal yoke, it joined the Hanseatic league in the 13th century, this league being a confederation of German towns banded together for mutual protection and for the promotion of commercial advantages. Bremen seems to have been a somewhat troublesome member of the league for it was expelled several times and later readmitted.

By the 16th century it was in a highly prosperous condition and despite numerous vicissitudes since, it has retained much of this prosperity. In 1810 it was annexed by France, but recovered its independence three years later and joined the Germanic Confederation, subsequently the North German Confederation, and finally was merged in the German Empire.

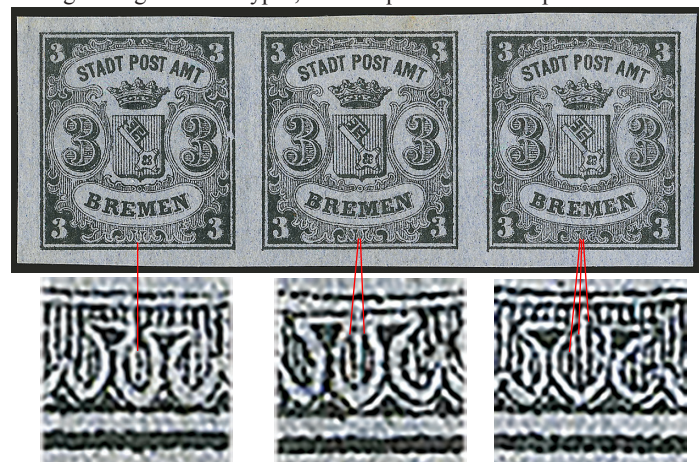
Its modern prosperity dates from 1830 when Bremerhaven was founded, this port being now only second in importance to Hamburg. Though the second in importance of the three main Hanseatic towns of Hamburg, Bremen and Lubeck, Bremen was the first to employ postage stamps. Its first stamp was issued on April 10, 1855, and was purely for local use. Its facial value was 3 grothe (a trifle over 3¢ in our money) and it was intended for franking letters within the town, including Bremerhaven and Vegesack,

The stamps were lithographed in Bremen, the design showing the Arms (a key) on a shield surmounted by a crown, with STADT POST AMT. (Town post administration) above and BREMEN below. The name is in shaded capitals while the upper inscription is in plain sans-serif capitals. On each side of the shield is a large numeral "3" in shaded figures within an oval, richly ornamented with scroll work, and in each of the angles is a small uncolored "3" on a solid covered ground.

The key is emblematic of the independence of the once free city for the *Stamp Collectors Magazine* stated many years ago, "The Bremen burgesses kept the key of their own door, instead of giving it into the custody of some neighbouring potentate, and knew how to maintain their independence long after other equally important towns had succumbed".

The stamps were printed in black on dull grayish-blue paper of moderate thickness, gummed with a colorless gum thinly applied. The paper is very plainly laid and the laid lines may be found running both horizontally and vertically, the latter being a little the rarer unused and much scarcer used. This 3 grothe stamp was, as we have already stated, produced by lithography. Three drawings were made of the design, each different, in small particulars from the others. The three types appear side by side repeated throughout the sheet, which consisted of 72 stamps in twelve rows of six. Consequently any horizontal strip will show different types but stamps in any vertical strip will be exactly alike.

There are numerous small differences in various parts of the design distinguishing the three types, but the quickest and simplest test will be



found in the fancy scroll ornamentation in the lower border below BREMEN. The center of this ornamentation consists of a small loop and in type I a single vertical line runs through the center of this loop. In type II there are two vertical lines in this loop, while in type III there are three vertical lines and the loop itself is open at the top instead of being closed as in the other two types. All three, types are found with and without a break in the line above the inscription STADT POST AMT.

These stamps, in common with all others issued subsequently in Bremen, were manufactured by the Hunkel Lithographic Company, the leading firm doing this class of printing in the town of Bremen. The different currencies in use in Germany at the time these stamps were issued must have caused considerable confusion and that of Bremen seems to have been distinct from all the others.

Though the reichsthaler or thaler was the standard coin over part of Northern Germany, it was split up into 72 grothe in Bremen (consequently a full sheet of stamps was worth exactly 3 reichsthalers), and into 24 gutesroschen of 12 pfennige each in Brunswick and Hanover. Eleven grothe was considered equivalent to 5 silbergroschen of Prussia so that the stamp of lowest denomination (the 2 grothe issued in 1861) was worth a little less than 1 silbergroschen. The reichsthaler was worth about 78¢ at that period so that one grothe was equivalent to a fraction over 1¢.

The Five Different Bremen Design Types and Denominations



1855 3 gr. Sc. 1
Design Type A1

1856 5 gr. Sc. 2
Design Type A2

1860 7 gr. Sc. 3
Design Type A2



1859 5 sgr. Sc. 4
Design Type A3

1863 2 gr. Sc. 6
Design Type A4

1861 10 gr. Sc. 7
Design Type A5