

## Fabulous Firsts:

# Mecklenburg-Schwerin (July 1, 1856)

by B.W.H. Poole (with images added)

Mecklenburg-Schwerin is a grandduchy of the German Empire lying south of the Baltic Sea. The duchy dates from 1710, while the title of grand duke dates from 1815. During the time its postage stamps were in use the reigning Grand Duke was Frederick Francis II.

The grand-duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin did not issue its first postage stamps until July 1st, 1856, though it appears to have joined the German-Austrian Postal Union some years previously, and to have been desirous of issuing stamps. Its currency, however, seems to have been a stumbling block for being in thalers and schillinge some difficulty was experienced in arriving at equivalents acceptable to the other members of the Union.

The thaler, equal to about 72¢ in United States currency, was divided into 48 schillinge, while the thaler of the Postal Union (also worth about 72¢) was equal to 30 North German silber-groschen. After some discussion it was agreed that 1 silbergroschen should be represented by 1 3/4 schillinge, 2 silbergroschen by 3 1/4 schillinge, and 3 silbergroschen by 5 schillinge.

The letter rates within the boundaries of the duchy were 1 schilling up to three German miles, 1 schilling 6 pfennige (or 1-1/2, schilling) from three to six miles, and 3 schillinge for distances over six miles. The rate on printed matter weighing under 1 loth was 1/2 schilling, regardless of distance, and for heavier packages the rate was one-fourth that charged for letters.

The rates for letters sent to other countries within the Postal Union were 1-3/4 schilling for distances up to 10 miles, 3-1/4 schilling for distances of 10 to 20 miles, and 5 schilling for distances over 20 miles. These rates would have necessitated quite a number of different denominations but the difficulty was surmounted by the ingenious expedient of issuing a divisible 1 schilling stamp (so constructed that it could be cut up in to four parts of 1/4 schilling each) and 3 and 5 schillinge values.

In 1864 the 4/4 schilling stamp was issued rouletted and almost immediately after it was changed somewhat in design. At the same time the color of the 5sch was changed from blue to bistre. In September, 1865, the 3sch appeared rouletted.

In 1863 the postal rates were revised as regards inland letters, the new schedule being 1 schilling for distances up to five miles, 2 schilling from five to ten miles, and 3 schilling above ten miles. For printed matter distance was disregarded and the rates were fixed by weight at 1/2 schilling up to 1 loth, 1 schilling from 1 to 4 loth, and 2 schilling from 4 loth to eight ounces.

It will thus be seen that there was considerable necessity for a 2 schilling stamp but a label of this value was not issued until October, 1866. In the following year it underwent a change of color and on January 1st, 1868, the separate series of stamps for Mecklenburg-Schwerin was dispensed with on the formation of the North German Confederation.

The first stamps, as we have already stated, were issued on July 1st, 1856. They were printed at the Prussian State Printing Office, in Berlin, on white wove paper and were issued imperforate. The design of the 1 schilling consisted of four small stamps of 1/4 schilling each in two rows of two, the combined four being about 21 mm. square.

The design on each of these four quarters shows a bull's head (or that of a buffalo according to some writers) the Arms of Mecklenburg, on a dotted ground, heraldically representing a field d'or. This was enclosed by a square frame inscribed "SCHILLING" at the base and "MECKLENB. SCHWERIN FRIEMARKE" on the other three sides, the numerals of value being in the angles.

The 3 and 5 schillinge are alike in design and show a bull's head on a dotted ground within a shield, surmounted by a grand ducal coronet on an uncolored ground. Around this centerpiece is a square frame being



Left, Scott 1, 4x1/4 schillings; Above, cover to Rostock with Burtzow cancels 4/4 and two additional 1/4, total of 1-1/2 schillings 3 to 6 miles rate.



1856 3s Yellow (2) tied by neat strike of "Hamburg 13/6" double-circle datestamp on blue folded cover, paying the 1863 5 to 10 miles rate.



Left, 2sch, Sc. 2



Scott 3

inscriptions similar to those on the lowest denomination except that the word at base is "SCHILLINGE." The numerals in the angles are, of course, "3" and "5" respectively.



The sheets consisted of 120 stamps arranged in twelve rows of ten. According to the late Mr. W. A. S. Westoby "the 480 electrotypes for the 1/4 schilling were arranged in groups of four in two rows of two, 1-1/4 mm. distance from each other, and 1-3/4 mm. between each group." Other writers state that the small electrotypes were placed an equal distance apart horizontally and vertically so that each was virtually a separate 1/4 schilling stamp. The electrotypes for the 3 and 5 schillinge values were spaced about 2 mm. apart. The rows were numbered in the margins at each side from 1 to 12 respectively. Three deliveries of these stamps were made by the Prussian State Printing Office viz. :

Date.	Sheets.	Value.	Stamps
June 9, 1856.	6,300	4/4sch	756,000
June 9, 1856.	1,800	3sch	216,000
June 9, 1856.	600	5sch	72,000
Nov. 26, 1856.	200	3sch	24,000
Dec. 16, 1856	1,650	3sch	198,000

It will be noted that the total supply of the 5sch consisted of only 72,000 stamps so that it is rather surprising its catalogue value is not higher. The only denomination that varies in shade is the 2sch which is found in yellow and orange-yellow.

On June 12th, 1864, a supply of 500 sheets (60,000 stamps) of the 4/4sch stamp was ordered from Berlin and delivered early in July. The printers took it upon themselves to roulette the stamps in this supply and as the innovation was approved by the Mecklenburg authorities all further supplies of stamps were issued with roulette separation.



*Scott 4 4/4, two examples, clearly showing the roulettes*

This rouletting necessitated a new arrangement of the little electro-types. The groups of four were arranged with a space of 3mm. between them, which allowed of a rouletting in line between each group. The paper on which this supply of stamps was printed was of a different texture from that used in 1856, having a smoother surface and being softer with a more pronounced mesh.

Notwithstanding the fact that there were nearly as many of these stamps printed as of the 5sch blue this is the rarest of all Mecklenburg stamps as a glance at the catalogue will show.



*Scott 5, similar design, no dots in background  
4/4, two examples, paying the rate from 5 to 10 miles*