

Fabulous Firsts:

Lubeck (Jan. 1, 1859)

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

The little state of Lubeck, comprising an area of only about 115 square miles, is now an insignificant part of the German republic, but in olden days the Free City of Lubeck was a place of considerable importance. The town, then known as Lubeca, was probably founded as early as 1060, and, though small, it was rich and consequently excited the cupidity of some of its larger neighbours.

It was devastated, rebuilt, and the center of numerous intrigues until it was ceded to the dukes of Saxony in 1158, but after that time it attained considerable prosperity. Duke Henry gave it a civil and commercial code (the law of Lubeck) which in later years formed the basis of the law in all the Hanseatic towns.

Lubeck was captured by the Danes in 1201, and on their expulsion in 1226 it was made a free and imperial city and became of such importance that when the Hansa or Hanseatic league was formed in 1241, it became the leader. It was then at the height of its prosperity, but the dissolution of the Hansa dealt it a blow from which it never recovered. The last Assembly of the Hansa met in Lubeck in 1669, and from that date it gradually declined in importance.

Lubeck issued its first postage stamps on Jan. 1, 1859, at the same time as Hamburg, and the currency was also the same, viz., the Hamburg mark of 16 schilling, equal to about 28¢ in U. S. money. There were five different values in the series—1/2, 1, 2, 2 1/2, and 4 schilling—and at first their use was entirely optional.



Top, Lubeck 1859 2½s Rose (Sc. 4) tied by barred cancel with “Lubeck 31/10” double-circle datestamp on 1862 bluish folded cover to Schwerin. [Note placement upper left was preferred, but not required. JFD.]
Bottom, Lubeck 1859 4s Green (5) tied by three blue manuscript strokes and “Lubeck Bahnhof 14/8” double-circle datestamp on greenish ca. 1860s folded letter to Glogau, Berlin (Aug. 14).

However, when used, the public was asked to affix them to the left upper corner of the face of the letter, and this continued to be the recognised method of affixing stamps until 1864. Official proof of this is found in the stamped envelopes—those of the 1863 issue show the stamp in the upper left hand corner, while those issued in 1864 have the label in the more usual upper right corner.

The design is the same for all five values, and shows the Arms of Lubeck on a field of gold (represented heraldically by a dotted ground) within three scrolls arranged in the form of an inverted horseshoe. The lower of these scrolls contains the word Postmarke, the one at the left shows the value in words, while that on the right is inscribed with the word Schilling. In a straight line at the top is Lubeck, while in each of the angles the value is shown in white figures on a ground of solid color. The spaces between the corners are linked up by ornamental lines, and the whole is enclosed within a singleline rectangular frame.

Who was responsible for this design does not seem to be known, but it was probably produced in the printing establishment of H. G. Rahtgens, of Lubeck, who was entrusted with the production of the stamps. The method of printing employed was lithography, and minute differences in the designs of each value prove that a special die or drawing was made for each. From the original design in each case one hundred transfers were taken and arranged on the lithographic stones in ten horizontal rows of ten.

In making up the stone for the 2 schilling denomination, two transfers of the 2-1/2sch were inadvertently inserted in the bottom row. The mistake was discovered before any of the stamps were printed, and to remedy it the lithographer erased the numerals 2-1/2, from each of the four corners of the offending labels and drew in the correct figures 2. However, he either overlooked the fact that the label at left was still incorrect or considered it a matter of little importance, so that



in each sheet of this denomination we find two stamps properly valued “2” in the corners but incorrectly inscribed Zwei Ein Halb (red pointer). The errors occurred on the sixth and

seventh stamps of the bottom row.

As an extra precaution against forgery, the printer of these stamps introduced secret dots into all five designs. The center of the small ornament at the foot of the design consists of a short horizontal line, and above this on all genuine 1/2sch stamps a tiny dot will be noted. In the case of the 1sch there is a similar tiny dot below the line; on the 2sch there are two dots below the line, one at each end; on the 2-1/2sch there are two dots below and one above the center of the line; while the 4sch shows four dots below the line. In the case of the 2sch error, the dots, of course, correspond to the 2-1/2sch. In addition to these dots there are numerous small peculiarities distinctive to each value. Voluminous lists of these have been published from time to time, but for all practical purposes, the following tests of genuineness, described in the Philatelist so long ago as 1871, are ample:—

1/2sch—Eagle’s right beak does not go against the wing. The bird does not touch the label in any place. There is no period after Schilling. The lines by which the figures are divided are very fine, and the figures themselves are small.





1sch—Eagle very much like the one on the 1/2sch, but the right hand end is more flattened and consequently shapeless. Ein is in letters the same size as those following it.

2sch — Eagle's left beak touches the wing, and the right one nearly so;



there are no dots between the heads and wings. Over the U is a diaeresis (two dots)—of very small solid dots.



2-1/2sch —Eagle's left claw is at some little distance from the inscribed riband. No period after any of the words. All the fractional figures are very small, and the strokes dividing them very indistinct. The topmost of the three dashes under the upright stroke upon the left hand is merely a dot.



4sch—The third segment of the eagle's right wing touches the riband. There are either four or five dots (but only three are clearly formed) in the hollow between the beak and the wing, and those not together, but dispersed. The P of Postmarke almost touches the fold of the band.

The paper upon which these stamps were printed was not specially manufactured, but was purchased from the stock of a local stationer named Matz. This tradesman had on hand a stock of thin fancy paper watermarked with a multiple design of the small flowers of myosotis. It was paper intended to be cut up and sold in boxes as fancy note paper. The stamps were issued entirely imperforate, and the sheets were gummed with a yellowish gum as supplies were called for by the authorities. The printer Rathgens, though he printed all the stamps ordered at one time, only gummed these sheets as they were actually needed. Consequently, when the unused remainders of these stamps were disposed of some years later, these were all without gum. It will be noted the Scott catalogue places enhanced values on all these stamps with gum.

The total supplies printed were as follows:—

1/2sch, 400 sheets or 40,000 stamps.

1sch, 200 sheets or 20,000 stamps.

2sch, 1,386 sheets or 138,600 stamps.

2-1/2sch, 500, sheets or 50,000 stamps.

4sch, 1,499 sheets or 149,900 stamps.

As there were two errors in each of the sheets of the 2sch, the total number of normal stamps was 135,828, and there were 2,772 errors.

The quantities printed of the 1/2sch and 1sch would appear to be rather small, but yet the supply lasted nearly two years. A second printing was made in 1861, consisting of 1,100 sheets of the 1/2sch and 499 sheets of the 1sch. No more of the fancy paper watermarked with myosotis flowers was available, so ordinary unwatermarked paper had to be used. The same stones were used, and with the exception of the paper, the stamps are exactly like those of the first issue. All these Lubeck stamps are much rarer used than unused.