

Fabulous Firsts:

Hamburg (Jan. 1, 1859)

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



The first postage stamps for Hamburg were placed on sale on January 1st, 1859, the set consisting of seven different values. The design, which was the same for all values, consisted of the Arms of Hamburg, partially covered by large open numerals denoting the value as a centrepiece.

The Arms are composed of a castle with three towers, the central one being domed and the others battlemented. Above the central tower is a cross, while the side turrets are surmounted by stars. On a scroll at the top is "HAMBURG", and on a similar scroll at the base is "POSTMARKE" i.e. 'post stamp'. On the left, reading upwards, the value is shown in words, and on the right "Schilling" appears. As the inscriptions on the left side varied in length, according to the value which had to be expressed, small ornaments were introduced to fill the vacant spaces before and after the shorter words.

There was a separate die for each value, and these were engraved by a gentleman rejoicing in the euphonious name of Johann Friedrich RexZiesenist. There is no record of the name of the designer—probably he was not proud enough of his handicraft to let his name be handed down to posterity!

From each die ninety-six casts were taken in ordinary type-metal, and these, arranged in twelve horizontal rows of eight, formed the printing plates. There was a space of 3-1/2 mm. between the vertical rows and of 1-1/2 mm. between the horizontal rows. A line of printer's rule was inserted between each of the vertical rows, and, as these were the same height as the clichés, they show at the side of the stamps.



Hamburg 1859 1/2s block of four showing the printer's rule between vertical rows.

Each horizontal row was numbered in the margin, and at the top of each sheet the words "Hamburgische Postmarken" were shown. The plates were made and the stamps printed by Th. G. Meissner, printer to the State of Hamburg.

Whether by accident or design we cannot say, but in all the stamps engraved by Ziesenist there are so-called "secret" marks. As these are of considerable value in distinguishing originals from the many forgeries that exist, we give a list of these as follows:—

1/2 Schilling.—There is a small dash in the space between the base of the right-hand tower and the line above [that is, to the left] of "Schilling."

1 schilling.—The serif at the foot of the "T" of "POSTMARKE" ends with a dot at the left.

2 schilling.—There is a tiny dot under first "i" of "Schilling-," and, in

clearly printed specimens, a small dash above the "ng" in the same word [neither discernible in our illustration].

3 schilling.—There is a dot on the left side of the "H" of "HAMBURG" near the top of the letter, and, in most cases, another dot is shown under the "r" of "Drei" [indiscernible here].

4 schilling.—There is a dot between the letters "Sc" of "Schilling".

7 schilling.—There is a dot in the space at the right of the Arms opposite the top of the "S" of "Schilling" [indiscernible here].

9 schilling.—There is a tiny dot after the "P" of "POSTMARKE" level with the bottom of that letter [indiscernible here].

The stamps were all printed on white wove paper, each sheet being watermarked with twelve horizontal undulating lines, each undulation being about 15 mm. deep, bounded by a single-line frame. It was intended that these lines should correspond with the twelve rows of stamps, but owing to some of the sheets not being carefully fed into the printing press an outside row was occasionally printed on the plain portion of the paper, and the stamps were thus entirely without watermark.

The stamps of this issue were not perforated, and they were gummed with a brown gum, which makes some specimens appear to be on toned paper. The remainders of these stamps are all without gum, and as the stamps as issued, with the original brown gum, are so much scarcer than the remainders, our publishers give two lists of prices for the unused stamps in the Catalogue. [Scott's "No gum" values would be for the original printings that at one time had gum, but no longer do.]

There are very distinct shades in the 4, 7, and 9sch values, but the colours of the lower denominations vary but little.

A Selection of Covers



1863 cover to London with Hamburg 1859 2, 3, and 9 schilling issues (Sc. 3, 4, 7), tied by barred cancels with "Hamburg Jun ?? " circular date stamp, boxed "P.D." and "London JU ?? Paid" receiver.

Continued on page 2



Hamburg 1859 1 schilling brown (Sc. 2), tied by barred cancel with "F.P. 12/10" tombstone datestamp on locally addressed cover.



Hamburg 1859 3s blue (Sc. 4), tied by barred cancel with fancy fleuron "Hamburg 21 Feb 1860" two-line datestamp on folded letter to Bremen, also with blue company cachet handstamp and boxed Bremen (Feb. 22) arrival backstamp.



Hamburg 1859 2s red (Sc. 3), tied by blue wavy-lines cancel and "Ritzebuttel 6/2 62" circular datestamp on cover to Hamburg, a choice cover, particularly rare with the wavy-lines cancel tying the stamp on cover.



1859 9 schillings yellow (Sc. 7), two singles, tied by bar cancels on folded letter, paying the 18s rate on a folded letter to New York, with "Hamburg Paid Mai 14 1860" departure circular date stamp and "Paid York Hamb. Pkt.", both in red, also with manuscript "Per Lasconia"



Hamburg 1859 2s Red (Sc. 3), pre-cancelled by blue wavy-lines cancel and "Ritzebuttel 25/1 64" circular datestamp on blue folded cover to Hamburg, also with blue company cachet handstamp.