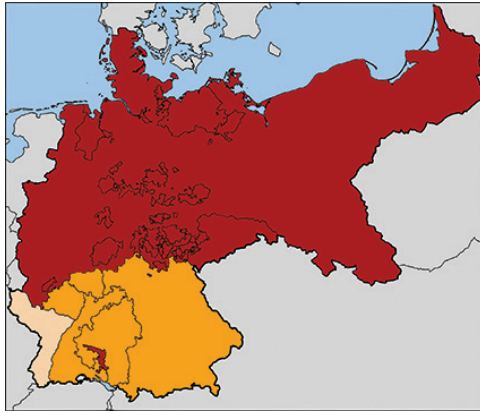


Fabulous Firsts:

North German Confederation (January 1, 1868)

By B. W. H. Poole

The North German Confederation (red). The southern German states that joined in 1871 to form the German Empire are in orange. The red territory within that marks the original principality of the House of Hohenzollern, rulers of the Kingdom of Prussia.



Alsace-Lorraine, the territory annexed following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, is in tan (lower left).

Below, a detail map of the North German Confederation (NGC) showing the German States ("Provinz") within the NGC.



The Austro-Prussian War of 1866, which gave the kingdom of Prussia the supremacy in Germany, led to the formation of the North German Confederation, composed of Prussia (which had previously acquired Hanover and the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein by conquest) and 21 other German States, the only exceptions being Baden, Bavaria, and Wurtemberg. The first meeting of the North German Parliament took place at Berlin in February, 1867, and as later on in the year Prussia had completed the purchase of the postal rights of the Prince of Thurn and Taxis, the way was paved for the introduction of a general postal system for the whole Confederation, having its centre at Berlin.

This new Postal Union was inaugurated on January 1st, 1868, by an issue of stamps adapted for the Confederation. The differences in currency in the various states still presented some difficulty, as in the case of the issues for Thurn and Taxis, so that two series were again necessary, one with values in groschen and the other with its denominations expressed in kreuzer. The groschen is the same as the silbergroschen for the Northern District served by the Thurn and Taxis Administration but a new basis of equation was adopted to bring the two currencies to a closer approximation of their real values. Thus 1kr now equalled 1/3gr; 2kr=1/2gr; 3kr=1gr; 7kr=2gr, and 18kr=3gr.



Above, NGC groschen values, 1/4gr, 1/3gr, 1/2gr, 1gr, 2gr, 5gr, Sc. 1-6



NGC kreuzer values, 1kr, 2kr, 3kr, 7kr, 18kr Sc. 7-11



Under a new law of the new German Parliament the rates of postage were readjusted and the rates within the confines of the Confederation were fixed as follows:-

1 to 10 miles—Single letters under 1 loth (1/2 oz.), 1 groschen. Double letters (over 1 loth) or parcels weighing under 3 lbs., 2 groschen.

10 to 20 miles—Single letters, 2 groschen. Double letters and parcels under 3 lbs., 4 groschen.

Over 20 miles—Single letters, 3 groschen. Double letters and parcels under 3 lbs., 6 groschen.

As letters were allowed to be included in parcels it will be seen that the rates of postage were remarkably low for that time on letters weighing over 1/2 ounce. A particularly bulky letter was simply treated as a parcel. These rates also give proof of probably the earliest instance of a governmental postal system handling a parcel post.

These low rates did not apply to foreign postage which varied according to destination. Thus the rate on single letters to England was 5gr, double letters (1 to 2 loth) 10gr; letters weighing from 2 to 3 loth, 15gr, and so on. Late in 1868 an agreement was made with the British Post Office under which the rate of postage to Great Britain was reduced to 2 1/2gr per loth.

Parcel letter to Paris, France, with Prussia, 1866 30sg (Sc. 22, lower right), two 10sg rose (21) and North German Confederation, 1868, 1/2gr Orange (Sc. 3, two on back, one lower left) and 2gr Ultramarine (two Sc. 5), all tied by "Eibenstein 2 III 68" double-circle datestamps on



manuscript notation stating "Valeur: Cinq cents Francs" (500 francs) and weight as being 16lb 20oz, "W 336 W" (green print on single line label), also with with France 20c "Timbre Imperial" revenue stamp (lower left over 1/2 gr single) applied on receipt and tied by indistinct hexagonal cancel, an exceptionally fresh parcel letter with five-color franking of Saxony, North German Confederation, and French revenue stamps.

The stamps were issued on January 1st, 1868, there being one design for the groschen values and another for the values in kreuzer.

The groschen series show a large numeral in the centre in a circle with background of short vertical lines and dots. Around this is a circular band decorated with oak leaves, and surrounding this is another circular band inscribed "NORDDEUTCHER POSTBEZIRK" (North German Postal Circuit). At the foot the value is shown in words in uncolored letters on a straight label of solid color; in the upper left and lower right spandrels are winged wheels; and in the other two spandrels are posthorns.

The design of the kreuzer values shows the numerals within an upright oval, enclosed within a leaf decorated oval, and then an inscribed oval band. This band contains the same wording as the groschen series in its upper part while in the lower portion the value is stated in words. The spandrels are ornamented in a similar manner to the groschen design.

The dies and electrotypes forming the printing plates were made in the Government Printing works at Berlin, and the stamps were printed there in sheets of 150 arranged in 15 horizontal rows of ten each. The paper is ordinary white wove and as a precaution against counterfeiting the paper was, before printing, covered with a network pattern, similar to that on the stamps of Alsace-Lorraine, but in a colorless preparation which only becomes visible when acted on by certain chemicals. In the early seventies these stamps were frequently reported as existing on a watermarked or mottled paper, these evidently being specimens on which the network had become faintly visible.

The stamps were rouletted in line in all kinds of gauges varying from 8-1/2 to 12-1/2. All values are known imperforate and though Gibbons' catalogue states they "were not issued for use, although some specimens were passed through the post," there seems no reasonable doubt that these are bona-fide varieties, put out by the Government though not constituting a separate issue. Mr. Westoby states "the pressure was so great to despatch the necessary supplies, in order to make the issue on January 1st, 1868, that many were sent out without being perforated, and at the time of the issue it was easy to make an entire series of unperforated specimens."

The free city of Hamburg was furnished with a special stamp for use on local or drop letters corresponding in value to the

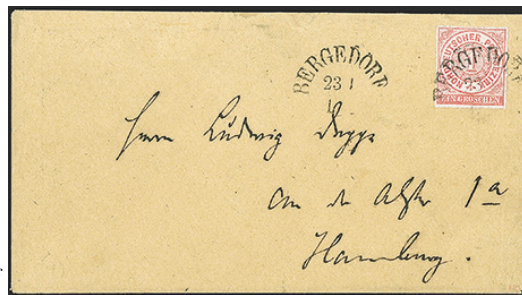
1/2 schilling (about 3/4¢) rate which had been in use there for many years previously. This is of similar design to the kreuzer series but without any numeral in the centre or, in fact, without any designation of value at all anywhere in the design. At the base of the inscribed oval the words "STADTPOSTBRIEF HAMBURG" (Town Postage Stamp for Hamburg) is shown. This label is rouletted like the others of the same period.



Hamburg local, NGC Sc. 12

A Selection of Usages

NGC 1868 1gr rose (Sc. 4) on buff cover to Hamburg, tied by "BERGEDORF" arc datestamp, repeated again to the left of the stamp, one of only six covers known used from Bergedorf with North German Confederation stamps.



NGC 1868 1gr Rose, 2gr Ultramarine, 5kr Bister (Sc. 4-6) tied by three clear strikes of "Leipzig 7 Apr 69" double-circle datestamp on cover to Calcutta, India, sender's directive "via Triest & Bombay", blue company cachet handstamp, Triest transit and Calcutta (May 5) arrival backstamps, blue "India Postage" octagon handstamp on back with manuscript "2as" added.



NGC 1868 18kr Bister (11) used with 3kr Rose (9) tied by "Frankfurt A.M. 21/12" (1868) circular datestamps on cover to Philadelphia Pa., also with light strike of red New York transit datestamp.



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Prussia 1866, 10sg Rose (Sc. 21 used with North German Confederation 1868 1kr Green (7), each tied by light strikes of "Worms 9/5 68" circular datestamps with additional strike



at bottom right on folded letter to Paris, also with France blue company cachet handstamp, red "PD" handstamp, red French entry and Paris (May 11) arrival datestamps, rare combination cover

NGC 1868 3kr Rose, 7kr Ultramarine (9-10) each tied by "Frankfurt AM 1915" circular datestamp with additional strike at center on 1869 cover to Alexandria, Egypt, sender's directive "via Triest", also with Triest (May 22) transit backstamp.



Not mentioned in the article, in 1870 the North German Confederation issued Official stamps in denominations for 1/4gr to 7kr, Sc. O1-9, the groschen values black on buff, the kreuzer black on gray. Seen here is the 1/4gr, Sc. O1, in a block of four, tied by four strikes of "Calbe AS 10/6 70" double-circle datestamp with additional strike at bottom right on folded cover to Magdeburg, with (Jun. 10) arrival backstamp.



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