

Yesterday in Mekeel's:

The First Stamps of Sweden

by Bertram W. H. Poole (From Mekeel's Weekly, August 29, 1938, with images added)

The kingdoms of Sweden and Norway were governed by one sovereign at the time their first postage stamps appeared though each seems to have had its individual postal administration. At that time King Oscar I, son of Bernadotte, was on the throne and the currency was the rather cumbersome one of the riksdaler (worth about 42¢) divided into 48sk banco. Norway was the first of the dual monarchy to issue postage stamps, its 4sk value being issued on January 1, 1855.

The Swedish stamps appeared just six months later, the series consisting of five different denominations viz. 3, 4, 6, 8 and 24sk banco. They were intended to defray the various rates of postage dependent on weight and distance as computed under the rather complicated system then in force.



King Oscar I of Norway and Sweden, on the 1856 Norway 4sk, imperf variety, Sc. 4a

Matters were somewhat simplified in 1857 when the Riksdag passed a law making a uniform charge of 4sk for a single letter, not exceeding one lod in weight, mailed and delivered anywhere within the confines of the kingdom.



First day usage of the 4sk, Sc. 2, tied by an Upsala July 1, 1855 cancel.



An example of the complicated rates, two singles of the 6 sk, Sc. 3, on a cover from Halmstad to Laholm paying the three-fold rate for weights from 2-1/4 to 3-1/4 lod.



A cover front with a single 3sk, Sc. 1. As there was no 2sk rate, this cover is underpaid by 1sk and makes this a rare example of a 3sk single on cover.



Another interesting usage, a 6sk and 4sk, Sc. 3, 2, on cover paying the special 10sk rate to the border with Finland, leaving the addressee to pay the 10 kopek balance. The cover is endorsed "franko gransen" (franked to border) lower left and "Losen 10. Kop Silber" (due 10 kopeks silver) upper right.

The design is the same for all five denominations, and shows the Arms of Sweden, consisting of three crowns in a shield, surmounted by a royal crown, within a rectangular frame measuring 21 by 18mm, the ground within the frame being of curved intertwined lines and dots. At the top is the name SVERIGE between blocks of solid color carrying the numerals of value. At each side is FRIMARKE reading down at the left and up at the right while across the bottom the value is shown in words: — TRE (3), FYRA (4), SEX (6), ATTA (8) or TJUGUFYRA (24) as the case might be. The stamps were manufactured by works in Stockholm. The matrix die included the whole of the design with the exception of the numeral blocks in the upper angles and the tablet at the bottom. Secondary dies with these details added were prepared and from these casts in type-metal were made the printing plates, being composed 100 of such casts arranged in ten rows of ten.



Sweden Sc. 2



Margin pair of the 4sk, Sc. 2, showing the crown, flourishes and lines watermark in the margin

The paper was wove, grayish-white in color, and handmade so that it varies considerably in thickness and most specialists arrange separate series for the thin and thicker papers. The paper was entirely unwatermarked so far as the stamps are concerned though in the margins are two parallel lines on each side terminating with an ornamental design surmounted by a crown at each angle. At the time these stamps were issued the perforating machine had been perfected so that Sweden is one of the few important stamp issuing countries that has no imperfs as a first issue.



The unique imperf error pair of the 6sk, Sc. 3f

The horizontal perf is always exactly 14 but the vertical one varies a trifle between 13-1/2 and 14. The gum is always of a brownish tinge. Although this issue had a short life of only a few years, all values show some rather striking ranges of shade. The 3sk varies from green to blue green, the 4sk from gray-blue to blue, the 8sk from yellow to orange, the 24sk from dull red to vermillion, while the 6sk comes in two almost distinct colors—gray and gray-brown.

In this issue we find one of the rarest of European stamps, in fact one of the rarest of the world's postage stamps, the 3sk printed in orange [now described as yellow], the color of the 8sk, instead of its normal blue-green. The 6sk in the gray-brown color is known entirely imperf, and it is believed one sheet without perforation was regularly issued and all were evidently used for no mint specimen of this imperf error is known.



The Treskilling Banco color error, Sc. 1a

While the design of these stamps is rather ineffective and certainly not unduly attractive, their variety of color redeems them from the charge of utter ugliness.

Unused stamps of this issue should be purchased with great care for some of the reprints can be distinguished from originals only by experts who have made a very close study of this issue. These stamps have been reprinted on three separate occasions; in 1868 and 1872 with the same perf as the originals, and in 1885 perf 13.

The last set, of course, is readily distinguished for what it is by the perforation, but in the two earlier sets the colors of the 4, 8 and 24sk banco are almost identically like the originals.

The other two values—the 3 and 6sk—can usually be told by the shades, which are yellow-green for the former and lilac to brown-lilac for the latter.



Left to right, the 1855 3sk, Sc. 1; 1871 reprint; 1885 reprint

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