

## Fabulous Firsts:

# Norway 1854-1924

by Clifford A. Howes (*From Mekeel's Weekly, August 6, 1928 with images added*)



Left, an 1855 4sk (Sc. I), mint with original gum, regarded as the finest known example; right, a magnificent used example.



The Kingdom of Norway, from which most of the Norsemen came in the early ages, is the most northerly kingdom of Europe and in its comparatively narrow strip of mountainous territory along the western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula it includes a hardy population of some two and a half million people.

Norway was independent in the middle ages, but was united with Denmark from 1450 to 1814. In the latter year it was ceded to Sweden but the strenuous objections of the Norwegians finally modified this to "independence in union with Sweden," the two forming a dual kingdom, each with its own local government but united under the Crown with the King of Sweden as the King of Norway also.

Mutual jealousies and particularly the refusal of Sweden to allow Norway to have its own consular service, because of its preponderance in shipping, finally brought on a crisis in 1905, when Norway declared the union dissolved and deposed King Oscar. To the great credit of both nations, this did not result in war but was settled by mutual agreement on October 26, 1905, when Norway became independent. A Danish prince was elected King on November 18, 1905, who took the title of Haakon VII.

On July 7, 1854, the Postal Law was passed which authorized the issue of postage stamps and changed the rate of postage making it uniform at 4 skilling per lod (about 1/2 ounce) irrespective of distance. Thus we have but the one stamp of that value for the first issue which occurred on January 1, 1855. The simple design shows the arms of Norway in a shaded circle, the word Frimaerke (postage stamp) above and the value beneath.

The currency at that time was based on the speciedaler which consisted of 120 skilling, the value in United States' currency being about \$1.10 which makes the face value of the stamp just under four cents.

The design was the work of a mechanical engineer of Kristiania named Zarbell, who submitted several essays and finally was awarded the contract for furnishing the stamps on June 20, 1854, before the Postal Law was passed even.

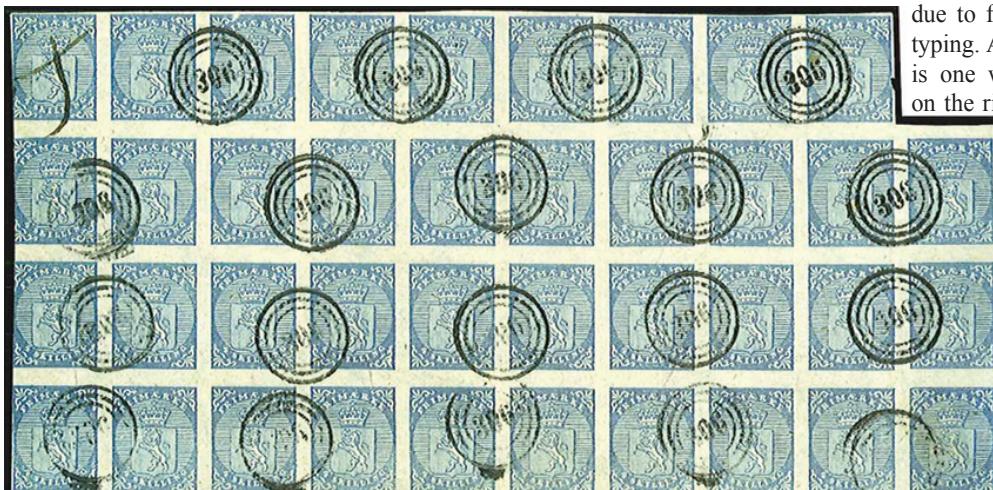
The following extract from the contract may prove interesting. "In pursuance of your offer you are hereby entrusted with the provision of postage stamp plates, as well as with the printing of postage stamps, in connection with which it will be your duty to make provision for the impressing of a watermark to appear in the sheets of paper, which watermark is to consist of the Norwegian Lion with St. Olaf's Axe. The paper required for the stamps will be delivered to you by the Department to the necessary number of reams, after which you will be held responsible to account for the full total after deducting such as may have been manifestly ruined in process of printing. The materials made use of in the process of printing, including printing blocks as well as the actual dies, will, so soon as the stamps are ready, be delivered to and become the property of the Department of the Interior."

The contract provided for printing at least two million stamps at 18 skillings per thousand, and there were actually accepted 2,018,200. It is supposed that stamps rejected at first as faulty were afterwards issued because of postal needs, so that the total issue may have been as much as 2,367,600 stamps.

In manufacturing them, the design was engraved on steel which was pressed into a copper matrix, and from the latter separate castings in molten type-metal were made (the process known as stereotyping), these casting or cliches being clamped together to form the printing plate. The latter consisted of two panes of 100 each, ten rows of ten, placed vertically one above the other. The printed sheet was therefore of 200 stamps but was separated into Post Office sheets of 100 stamps each.

There are many curious variations found on the stamps, especially in the corner ornaments and the lettering, which are evidently due to faults in the stereotyping. A prominent variety is one with a double foot on the right hind leg of the lion. The stamp is of course normally imperforate but is known with an unofficial roulette.

The circular announcing the issue of the stamps, sent out in September, 1854, provided that: "Each postage stamp shall



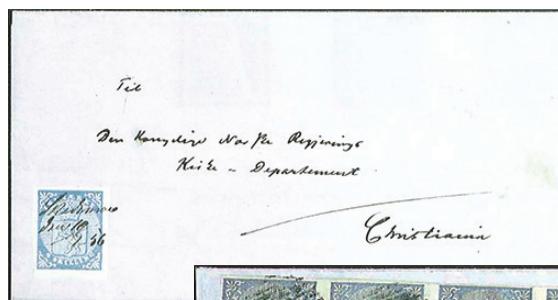
The Trondheim Block, the largest known multiple of Norway #1

at the time of posting be cancelled by a canceller and blackened. The postage stamps upon letters which are handled by country post offices which have not been provided with a cancelling stamp are to be crossed with ink and cancelled later in the prescribed method by the receiving office." This canceller was the well known grid of 10-12 bars with a circular outline.

In January, 1856, it was "decided that the cancellers which are used to obliterate postage stamps shall be engraved with a numeral so that each cancellation stamp shall bear its own special number." This was of course the three concentric rings enclosing a number, the numbers running up to 383. Finally a circular announced that from January 1, 1859, "all postal stations which are furnished with date-stamps shall cancel every letter with the time and date of postage in such manner that the date cancellation shall obliterate the postage stamp." As the first stamp had been superseded by a second issue toward the end of 1856, one would not look for postmarks on the earlier stamp, yet they are not rare and show by their dates that they were used thus in spite of regulations during the years of their issue.



The only known block of four with a pen cancellation.



Cover to Christiania with Sc. 1 tied by "Skedsmoe/den 10.2.1856" pen cancel



Sc. 1 vertical strip of four tied by an 11-bar blue grid on a folded cover with Drammen 15.6.1855 c.d.s.



Left, Sc. 1 with numeral "194" (Loiten) manuscript cancel; right, Sc. 1 with numeral "329" handstamp cancel



1857 cover from Christianssand to Laurvig with blue January 28 cds, the only known first issue mixed franking with the 1855 4sk (Sc. 1) paying the domestic rate and Oscar 8sk (Sc. 5) paying the registered fee.

The cheap appearance of these stamps, the lack of perforation and the poor gumming, even as soon as three weeks after the first stamp was issued, led the Post Office Department to make inquiries as to whether the production of stamps could be undertaken in London. An estimate was obtained from Messrs. De La Rue & Co. but was considered too costly, so negotiations were entered into with firms in Sweden. In December, 1855, a contract was entered into with P. A. Nyman, an engraver of Stockholm, who delivered the first lot of a new 4sk stamp on June 5, 1856.



Sc. 4

To Be Continued

## Fabulous Firsts:

# Norway 1854-1924, Part 2

by Clifford A. Howes (*From Mekeel's Weekly, August 6, 1928 with images added*)

When the first stamp was issued its use was restricted to the domestic mails, but from February to April, 1855, its use was authorized on mail matter for France, Denmark, Germany and Great Britain. This showed the need for stamps of higher value so that an 8sk stamp was added to the 4sk. A decree of November 7, 1856, authorizes the issue of these two stamps but requires the old 4sk stamp to be used up first.

The design shows a profile head to the left of King Oscar I of Sweden and Norway. The name "NORGE" now appears on the stamps at the top with "FRIMAERKE" at either side. The die was engraved on steel with the omission of the bottom label which was to bear the indication of value. Matrices taken from the die then had the figures and lettering required for the different values engraved on them where the bottom label belonged and were then ready for taking stereotyped moulds or cliches for clamping together into printing plates,

The stamps were printed at the Government Printing Office in Stockholm in sheets of 100, ten rows of ten, upon unwatermarked paper as far as the stamps are concerned but with a marginal watermark of two wavy lines all around, broken at the corners by the "Lion of St. Olaf." They are perforated 13 and the 4sk is known in imperforate condition postally used.

About the end of 1856 the letter rates were reduced to 2sk for letters posted and delivered in the same town and 3sk for letters delivered within a certain suburban postal radius.

Two new stamps of these values were added to the set on February 28, 1857.

The previous stamps were never wholly satisfactory to the Norwegians, partly because they bore the head of a Swedish King and partly because they were not of domestic manufacture. In 1862 the Norwegian Postal Department considered new designs and entered into a contract for a new issue with Schwenzen's Lithographic Works of Kristiania at a price of 30sk per thousand.



1856 4sk, Sc. 4



Sc. 4a, the 1856 4sk imperf



1857 2sk, Sc. 2



1857 3sk, Sc. 3



1856 8sk, Sc. 5

A decree of February 7, 1864, fixed the highest value at 24sk leaving the other values to be determined by the postal authorities, who made no change in the values already in use. The design reverted to the arms of Norway now properly shown with shield and crown. The paper was similar to that of the previous issue with marginal watermark only. The perforation gauges 14-1/2 by 13-1/2 and was done by a machine procured in England.



1863 24sk, Sc. 10



1863 3sk, Sc. 7, corner margin block of 9



1863 2sk, Sc. 6

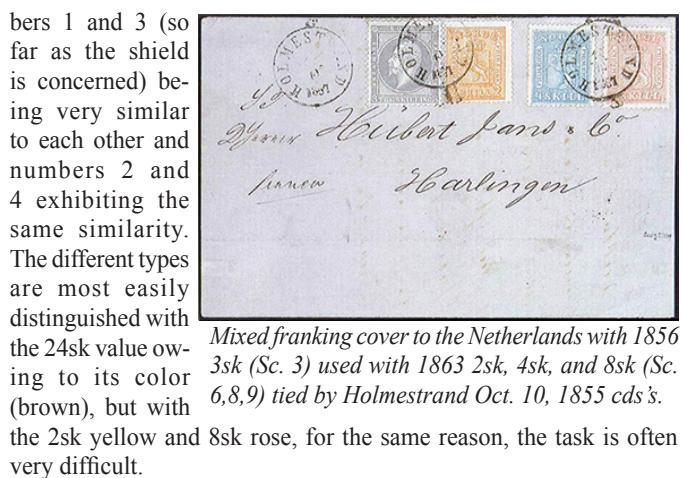


1863 4sk, Sc. 8, block of 4



1863 4sk, Sc. 8, imperf pair

This is one of the most interesting of the issues of Norway to the specialist as there are four minor varieties of type in each value, and as there were two plates of the 4sk there are eight varieties of this denomination. The stamps were lithographed in sheets of 100 composed of twenty-five blocks of four. These blocks are all identical, but the four stamps of the block all differ slightly from one another. It is to be noted, however, that the blocks can be further divided into two groups, num-



Mixed franking cover to the Netherlands with 1853 3sk (Sc. 3) used with 1863 2sk, 4sk, and 8sk (Sc. 6,8,9) tied by Holmestrand Oct. 10, 1855 cds's.

bers 1 and 3 (so far as the shield is concerned) being very similar to each other and numbers 2 and 4 exhibiting the same similarity. The different types are most easily distinguished with the 24sk value owing to its color (brown), but with the 2sk yellow and 8sk rose, for the same reason, the task is often very difficult.

Full details of the differences between these four types are available in publications for those desiring them. As to the cause of the varieties and their similarity in pairs Mr. W. A. S. Westoby, in the *Adhesive Postage Stamps of Europe*, says it appears probable that two separate engravings or drawings were made of the portion of the design that is common to all the values. From these transfers were taken and arranged in blocks of four. The values were then added and the four designs were touched up generally. Twenty-five transfers of this finished block of four were laid down on the lithographic stone which was then ready for printing. But the main stumbling block is why were two original engravings or drawings necessary where one should suffice?



1863 8sk, Sc. 9

The 8 and 24sk were the first values of this set placed on sale on August 31, 1863. The 4sk followed in January, 1864, the 2sk in 1865 and the 3sk in 1866, stocks of the previous issue being used up before the new ones were placed on sale. The 3sk was not in use more than two years and is the scarcest of the set. The 24sk unused is fairly common as here were 491,000 of them in a lot of remainders sold in November, 1913.

Further information from a Norwegian publication shows that the date of issue we quoted for the new 2 and 3sk stamps as February 28, 1857, could not be correct for the latter stamp, as it was not printed until March 13th. It was probably issued about the end of March. There were 1,000,000 of the 2sk printed and issued and 1,050,000 of the 3sk.

From the same publication it appears that the issue of 1863-66 was produced by making four original drawings of each value on a lithographic stone, and then transferring these blocks of four twenty-five times to the printing stone to make the sheet of 100 stamps in ten rows of ten. The large number of 4sk stamps required, that being the domestic letter rate, caused a second drawing of a block of four for producing new printing plates, and this is what has been termed "plate II," as the new drawings all differ in detail from the first block of four.

In 1867 the Norwegian Postal Department reverted to the typographical method of producing its stamps, giving the contract to Mr. P. Petersen of Kristiania. The design of the new issue was changed but little, the principal difference being in the lettering at the bottom and the repetition of the numerals of value; the background also is now composed of vertical instead of crossed lines. The stamps were produced from a single original steel die, the numerals of value being engraved upon secondary dies from which stereotyped cliches

were obtained for clamping together into the printing plate of 100 in ten rows of ten. There are therefore no variations of type. As there were plenty of 24sk of the previous set on hand, and as this value was not used much it did not appear in the new type.

New rates for printed matter, however, required a stamp of 1sk, so this value was added.



1867 1sk, Sc. 11

The 2 and 4sk stamps were the first to appear in June, 1867, and were printed on the same paper as used for the previous issue, with watermarked lines in the margin and lions at the corners. The remaining values and later supplies of the



1867 2sk, Sc. 12

4sk were printed on a thinner paper with no watermark at all. The perforation was 14-1/2 x 13-1/2. The 8sk was issued about October, 1867, and the 1 and 3sk in May, 1868.



1867 4sk, 8sk, Sc. 14, 15

To Be Continued

## Fabulous Firsts:

# Norway 1854-1924, Part 3

by Clifford A. Howes (*From Mekeel's Weekly, August 6, 1928 with images added*)

The 2 and 4sk stamps were the first to appear in June, 1867, and were printed on the same paper as used for the previous issue, with watermarked lines in the margin and lions at the corners. The remaining values and later supplies of the 4sk were

printed on a thinner paper with no watermark at all. The perforation was 14-1/2 x 13-1/2. The 8sk was issued about October, 1867, and the 1 and 3sk in May, 1868.



1872-75 6sk, Sc. 20, block of 4

1872-75 4sk, Sc. 19, block of 4

A reduction in the domestic letter rate from 4sk to 3sk, and other changes, took place on January 1, 1872, and a new issue was furnished for this occasion. This was in an entirely new design known as the "posthorn" type, which has remained in use with slight modifications ever since. It was produced by Petersen as before, in the values of 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7sk, the 8sk having been dropped.

The original die was engraved with the value label blank save for the word "skilling," and a hole in the circle of the pattern for inserting a plug with the figure of value thereon. The method of producing a plate was then to insert the plug with the desired numeral in the die and make a "subsidiary" die, probably by electrotyping, on which the word of value was engraved by hand before the word "skilling." From this subsidiary, die cliches would be made either by stereotyping or by electrotyping, to make up the printing plate.

A study of this issue by Mr. Jellestad convinced him that the subsidiary "die" had been composed of twelve reproductions of the original die for the 1, 2, 3 and 4sk stamps, he having found this number of varieties in the engraving of the word of value in each. As the greatest number of any one variety appearing in the printed sheet is ten, there must have been at least ten reproductions of the

subsidiary "die," thus making 120 cliches of which only 100 were necessary for making up the printing plate, leaving 20 in reserve to replace any damaged in use. One might think that the strip or block of cliches made up from the subsidiary "die" would be used thus in making up the plate, but it is evident from the irregular distribution of the varieties over the printed sheet that it was cut up into separate cliches in each case.

With the 6sk Mr. Jellestad finds word, which, were made up require but to obtain the cliches for the sary reserves. originally 12 as the pearing on subsidiary 10 reprodu and itself 12 times to has found a second setting, however, in which appear 12 new varieties in slightly smaller and thinner lettering than the first plate. These he thinks must have been due to heavy damage to the first plate, necessitating the making of a new subsidiary "die" (of 12 reproductions of



1872-75 7sk, Sc. 21, block of 4

the original this time) to obtain enough new cliches for repairs and reserves. The new cliches were mixed in with the old ones to the number of 31, the greatest number of any one variety being four so this setting has been termed plate II. The 1sk also comes in two settings, known as plates I and II, but they are simply different arrangements of the same varieties.



1878 Registered cover with 6sk used as 20 ore and 1877 20o (Sc. 20, 27) tied by Aasnaes Oct. 16, 1878 cds.