

## EUROPEAN CLASSICS

### XXX. MECKLENBURG-STRELITZ

The Grand Duchy of *Mecklenburg-Strelitz* was one of the smallest Old German States. Its main part was situated between Mecklenburg-Schwerin and the Prussian provinces of Pomerania and Brandenburg, while it was separated from its smaller part, the duchy of Ratzeburg by Mecklenburg-Schwerin; this latter part bordered to the west on the Free City of Lubeck and to the south-west on the duchy of Lauenburg, which became Prussian in 1865. The total territory of the Grand Duchy comprised 1130 square miles, with a population of almost 99,000 in 1867. At the same time, the capital, *Neustrelitz*, had 8500 inhabitants.

The *History* of Mecklenburg-Strelitz until its separation from Mecklenburg-Schwerin in 1701 is dealt with on page 173. From then on, it was a separate entity, but in most respects followed the example of its larger sister state. They had a common legislative body and, from 1755 on, the same constitution. It was an absolute monarchy, the rulers being members of the same family as those of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. In 1806, the country was occupied by the French, but liberated shortly afterwards. Forced to join the Confederation of the Rhine, the duchy nevertheless participated in the war of liberation against Napoleon. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, it was made a grand duchy and became a member of the German Confederation. In 1866, under the Grand-Duke Friedrich Wilhelm, who ruled until the 20th century, it joined the North German Confederation and became part of the German Empire in 1871.

The *Postal History* until 1701 was that of the two Schwerins, of which the duchy was a part at that time. After becoming a separate entity, it generally followed in its postal policies those of its sister state. But it joined the German-Austrian Postal Union half a year earlier, on July 1, 1850. Its postal independence ended on December 31, 1867, the postal service being taken over by the North German Confederation on January 1, 1868, which was replaced by the "Reichspost" of the German Empire on January 1, 1872.

When postage stamps were introduced on October 1, 1864, Mecklenburg-Strelitz

had 11 *post offices*, of which one—at the railroad station of Neubrandenburg—was a branch of the post office in the city. Only one new post office was opened during the stamp period, on January 1, 1867 at the Oertzenhof railroad station. Therefore, on December 31, 1867, twelve post offices were in operation. They were supervised by the "Cammer- & Forst-Collegium", which also directed most other government enterprises. The mail in 1864 amounted to about 250,000 letters and 6000 pieces of printed matter, therefore about 22,500 per post office and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per head of the population.

The postal service in the duchy of Ratzeburg was conducted by Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Only one post office, at Schönberg, was in operation there.

Mecklenburg-Strelitz had the same *currency* as Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the Thaler (th), divided into 48 Schilling (s), the latter in turn consisting of 12 Pfennig (pf). In the postal service, the Prussian currency, 1 Thaler (th) equivalent to 30 Silbergroschen (sg), one Silbergroschen being 12 Silberpfennig (spf) was used, except for part of the domestic mail. The same rates of exchange were used as in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, namely  $1/4\text{sg} = 1/2\text{s}$ ,  $1/2\text{sg} = 1\text{s}$ ,  $1\text{sg} = 1\frac{3}{4}\text{s}$ ,  $2\text{sg} = 3\frac{1}{4}\text{s}$  and  $3\text{sg} = 5\text{s}$ . For *distances* and *weights*, the same units were used as in Mecklenburg-Schwerin.

Mecklenburg-Strelitz was the last Old German State to introduce postal stamps. *Postage Stamps* and *Postal Envelopes* were issued on *October 1, 1864*. These were the only kinds of postal adhesives or stationery in use there during the  $3\frac{1}{4}$  years of the stamp-issuing period.

The *Postal Rates* at the time of the introduction of postage stamps, which remained unchanged during the whole stamp period, were rather simple. Domestic letters paid 1sg for each loth, printed matter  $\frac{1}{3}\text{sg}$  for each loth, registration fee was 2sg, delivery fee  $\frac{1}{4}\text{sg}$ , special delivery fee 3sg for day delivery and 6sg for night delivery. For city mail and between Neustrelitz and Altstrelitz, reduced rates were partly charged, namely for letters 1s per loth, for printed matter  $\frac{1}{2}\text{s}$  ( $=\frac{1}{4}\text{sg}$ ) per loth and for samples 1s per two loth; registration fee was 2s and special delivery fee 4s. For mail to the countries of the German-Austrian Pos-

tal Union, the same rates as in Mecklenburg-Schwerin were charged, namely for letters 1sg per loth up to 10mi., 2sg above 10 and up to 20mi. and 3sg above 20mi.; printed matter paid  $\frac{1}{2}$ sg per loth and registration fee was 2sg. To other foreign countries, various fees were charged, for example to France 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ sg and to Switzerland 5sg per loth.

Six *demoninations* of postage stamps, covering the principal rates, were issued on October 1, 1864, namely  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg for city printed matter,  $\frac{1}{2}$ sg for printed matter, 1s (=  $\frac{1}{2}$ sg) for city letters, 1sg, 2sg and 3sg for the three rate zones of the German-Austrian Postal Union, the first also for domestic letters. Of the *postal envelopes*, only three denominations, 1sg, 2sg and 3sg were issued.

The use of stamps was not obligatory and letters could be mailed at the same rates paid as well as unpaid, to be paid by the addressee. This explains that between October 1, 1864 and December 31, 1867, only about one third of all letters and printed matter was franked with postage stamps or sent in postal envelopes, while for two thirds postage was paid in cash, either by the sender or by the addressee. The delivery fee had to be paid in cash. Incidentally, as in Mecklenburg-Schwerin, more letters were sent in postal envelopes than franked with adhesive stamps.

No stamps or envelopes were *withdrawn* during the stamp-issuing period, and all were *demonetized* on December 31, 1867, when they were replaced on the following day by stamps and stationery of the North German Confederation.

The stamps of Mecklenburg-Strelitz show as *design* the arms of the country, which were, aside from rather insignificant variations, the same as those of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, a bull's head on a shield, with the crown above. For the three low values, the arms are in an upright rectangle on solid ground; the frame is rectangular and shows a guilloched groundwork. The country's name MECKLENB. is at left, STRELITZ at right and the value indication EIN VIERTEL/SILB. GR., EIN DRITTEL/SILB. GR. and EIN/SCHILLING respectively at top and bottom. Figures of value are in the four corners, colorless on solid ground. For the three high values, the arms are in an oval on solid ground, the frame is oval and shows a

guilloched groundwork, but the outer frame is octagonal. It contains MECKLENB. STRELITZ at top, the value indication (EIN, ZWEI or DREI SILB. GR.) at bottom and the figures of value in small circles, colored on colorless ground, at left and right. The envelope stamps have the same design as the adhesives. The envelopes had the stamps in the top right corner and an oblique double-line overprint in the same corner, extending to two flaps on the back. It read EIN, ZWEI or DREI SILBERGROSCHEN POST-COUVERT respectively, in endless repetition. A circular colorless embossing was on the upper flap, identical with the embossing on the contemporary envelopes of Prussia, Mecklenburg-Schwerin and other countries.

The printing material as well as the stamps and envelopes were manufactured by the *Prussian State Printing Works* of Berlin. Typography combined with embossing was used for all stamps, adhesives as well as those on the envelopes.

To obtain the *dies*, the arms were first cut in steel by the engraver E. Schilling of the Prussian State Printing Works. Working dies were made from this die and the frames added, which were cut separately for each denomination of the adhesives. In addition to these secondary dies, there were three separate secondary dies for the envelope stamps, made in the same way but which seem to have been cut deeper, in order to be more usable for single printing. The dies for the corner overprints of the envelopes were cylindrical, allowing printing of endless rows of the text. The dies for the embossing on the flap were old ones, previously and at the same time used for Prussian and other envelopes.

The *printing material* for the adhesives was obtained by taking 100 electrotypes from the die of each denomination and assembling them in a printing form of 100 (10x10). Numerals (1 to 10) were inserted in all four margins, at top, bottom, left and right. No other printing was on the sheet margins. For the envelopes, the original dies were used for the printing on the single envelopes. The necessary counterplates and counter-dies were made by embossing the printing forms for the adhesives and the dies for the envelope stamps in a soft material, probably gutta-percha. The overprint and the colorless embossing on the flap

were applied singly, each in a separate operation. No plate varieties of any significance are known.

The *printing* was done very carefully in typography, by using the counterplates for the embossing. No varieties of any significance are recorded.

The *paper* was a wove machine-made paper of medium thickness and had no special characteristics.

The *color scheme* adopted for the stamps was that of the German-Austrian Postal Union, which prescribed *green* for the  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg, *rose* for the 1sg, *blue* for the 2sg and *brown* for the 3sg. Of the two remaining denominations, for the domestic service, the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg was *orange* and the 1s *violet*. The envelope stamps were printed in the same colors as the adhesives; the overprint was in *brown*.

As there was only one printing for most denominations—there were two printings of the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg and  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg of the adhesives and of the 1sg envelope, small size—there is practically no variation in the *inks* used for the printings. Of the two printings of the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg, the first, which is much scarcer, was yellow orange, the second reddish orange. The difference is less evident for the  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg, the scarcer first printing being in a somewhat darker green than the second; the rose of the second printing of the 1sg envelope is paler than that of the first one.

The adhesives were issued *rouletted*, and the same line roulette 12 as used for the stamps of Mecklenburg-Schwerin was employed, which was applied by forms of parallel broken lines which were sharpened. The rouletting of each sheet was made in two operations, first in one and then in the other direction. Horizontally, the roulettes run only to the sheet margins, while vertically they cross the sheet margins at top and bottom. No rouletting varieties are recorded; the centering was generally not too good, and perfectly centered copies are a small minority.

The special features of the *envelopes* were uniform, as far as the overprint is concerned, as no varieties of it are recorded. All three denominations were issued in two sizes, small (147x84mm.) and large (149x115mm.). The colorless embossing on the flap was also uniform, but the 3sg in the small size is also known with the flap embossing of the Saxony envelopes, while the 1sg in the small size and all three denomina-

tions in the large size were in the Ferrari Collection with the flap embossing of the Brunswick envelopes. As all these varieties are known unused only, it can be assumed that they are either proofs or products of the famous faker Fouré who had access to the original dies.

There also exist *Money Order Cards* without imprinted stamps, but as they are known only unused, it is doubtful that they were ever issued, as no money order service seems to have existed in Mecklenburg-Strelitz.

The stamps were delivered to the post offices in *sheets* of 100 as printed.

Although the postal authorities had figured that the original printing of the stamps and envelopes would last for about two years, this calculation proved entirely wrong, as stamps were used for only a fraction of the mail and postage on a large majority of the mail was paid in cash. Only for the two low values, namely  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg and  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg, did the ordered quantities prove too low, but this was not due to their actual use, but a consequence of substantial purchases of these denominations by stamp dealers for collectors. As a result, after the  $3\frac{1}{4}$  years during which the stamps and envelopes were used, considerable *remainders* were on hand, of which the adhesives were sold several years later and reached the stamp market. No exact figures are available for the quantities, but reliable estimates give as figures for the remainders 5000 for the 1s, 10,000 for the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg, 15,000 for the 1sg, 17,000 for the  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg, 50,000 for the 2sg and 60,000 for the 3sg. These figures may be somewhat too high, but they seem to show the right proportion, the 3sg being the most common and the 1s the scarcest in unused condition. There are sufficient supplies of *unused* stamps available to satisfy the demand, and there is no really scarce stamp among them.

The story about the remainders of the *envelopes* is a different one. They were just as considerable as those of the stamps; actually only the 1sg envelopes were used in quantities, while of the other envelopes considerable quantities remained unsold. Of the large size envelopes, almost the whole quantity originally printed was still available on December 31, 1867. Of the 3sg, only a little over 1000 large size envelopes, of the 2sg of that kind only about 1500 copies, and of the 1sg 3000 copies were sold during

the period of use. The remainders of the envelopes were not sold, but in 1868 sent to Berlin and together with envelopes of other Old German States overpasted with specially prepared 1g North German Confederation stamps and then used up in that way. Therefore, the unused copies available for the collectors come from purchases which were made by stamp dealers during the  $3\frac{1}{4}$  years of use of the envelopes. These purchases were obviously mainly in whole sets, as the three denominations are of about the same rarity, the large size envelopes being somewhat scarcer than the small size ones. Although less than 1000 sets of the latter must have been purchased for collecting purposes, they are still in ample supply and sell for much less than the adhesives, of which large remainders came into philatelic hands. The general unpopularity of postal stationery is responsible for this anomaly.

*Unused multiples* of the adhesives are not plentiful and of the scarcer denominations in rather short supply, although blocks of all denominations are not too difficult to obtain. Of several denominations even full sheets of 100 are recorded as still existing.

In *used* condition, Mecklenburg-Strelitz is, after Bergedorf, the most difficult of the Old German States, and the collector will have a hard time obtaining satisfactory single copies for his collection. The by far rarest denomination is the 1s, followed by  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg, then  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg and 3sg, eventually 2sg, while the 1sg is the least scarce and the easiest to obtain. Very rare are the first printings of the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg and  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg in used condition. The difficulty with these stamps is not only their absolute rarity but the fact that a large percentage of them has a blue crayon or pen stroke in addition to the postmark, which makes such copies unacceptable for the discriminating collector. On most other copies, the cancellation is more or less indistinct, so that it is often very difficult or even impossible to ascertain its genuineness. Therefore it is quite difficult and expensive for the collector to obtain all six denominations in satisfactory condition. This is still more true for the envelopes, of which used entires are all considerably rarer than unused ones. The 1sg is the least rare, the 3sg the rarest, which applies to the small size and still more to the large size. Of the used 3sg in large size, only three copies are recorded, and it

is one of the great rarities among the Old German States envelopes. Only the smaller demand for postal stationery makes the other denominations still not too difficult to obtain, and at a fraction of the prices paid for the much less rare adhesives.

It should not be surprising under the above circumstances that not many *used multiples* are known of the adhesives. Although used pairs are known of all six denominations, only of the  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg are a few strips of three recorded. No larger used strips and no used blocks are known.

Due to the big difference of value between unused and used stamps, they are especially desirable *on entires*, as the genuineness of the cancellation can be more securely ascertained for items on entires. Unfortunately, the supply of stamps on entires is very small and, except for the 1sg, not much larger than that of Bergedorf covers. While the 1s, 1sg, 2sg and 3sg usually come as single frankings, the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg and  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg were mainly used to pay the 1sg rate of domestic letters. In single frankings they were used only on wrappers and are extremely rare as such. Otherwise, the rarity on entires is the same as that of copies off cover; the 1sg is the least rare, the 1s the rarest. Of course, covers with four  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg (Fig. 130) or three  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg are also rarities of the first order, as are all frankings with two or three different denominations; we have never seen more than the latter on a cover. The collector of stamps on cover will have to be satisfied to have the 1sg, which is within the reach of everyone, but he better forget the other denominations as there are no examples on the market, the few existing covers being in large collections and not available.

There is not much to be said about *frankings*. As stated before, all denominations are generally found as single frankings, except the  $\frac{1}{4}$ sg and  $\frac{1}{3}$ sg, of which single frankings, especially of the former, are rarities. Both were more often used in multiple frankings of 4 or 3 copies respectively to pay the 1sg letter rate; the former was also often used on letters to foreign countries, for which the rate required a  $\frac{1}{2}$ sg stamp (Fig. 131). Two copies of the 1s stamp were also sometimes used to pay the 1sg rate. A rather frequent franking is 1sg plus 2sg for the 3sg rate. It is remarkable that in most of these and other frank-



Fig. 130

ings, envelopes with imprinted stamps together with adhesives were used to pay the postage.

Of *emergency frankings*, only envelope cut squares used as adhesives are known, but they are of considerable rarity, only a few examples having been recorded. We know the 1sg and 2sg—the latter as a great rarity—but the 3sg is also reported.

No *reprints* were ever made of Mecklenburg-Strelitz stamps or envelopes.

No good *forgeries* exist of Mecklenburg-Strelitz stamps, only crude ones in the picture-book category; the unused stamps were always in sufficient supply, so there was no incentive for imitation which due to the manufacturing process would have been rather costly. But the country abounds in *fakes* which consist exclusively of faked

cancellations. The great difference in rarity and price between unused and used stamps has tempted many fakers to apply imitated postmarks on the easily available unused stamps, and some of these fakes are so excellent that they sometimes baffle even the expert. The fact that the genuine cancellations are rarely distinct, but mostly applied with insufficient ink and pressure, makes their checking difficult, especially when only a fraction of the postmark is on the stamp. Almost all known cancellations have been faked, and the collector who acquires used Mecklenburg-Strelitz stamps without having them checked first by an expert committee certainly acts foolishly and is due for considerable disappointment when he wants to dispose of his stamps. Even whole covers were faked and, of course,



Fig. 131

also the cancellations as well as transit and arrival postmarks on envelopes.

We do not know of any official decree which introduced *postmarks*. It seems that they were created in connection with a new postal convention with Meeklenburg-Schwerin which was concluded in 1817, as the earliest postmarks we have seen are from the same year. They were straight lines in Roman capitals, without date indication, and partly had the town name abbreviated, for example N. BRANDENBURG. A few years later—the earliest example we know is of 1826—similar straight lines, but with date indication—day, month in Roman capitals and year date—started to appear. They remained in use for about thirty years, then they were gradually replaced by small single circle in Roman capitals, with the date in figures—day and month only—in the center. Some of them had the abbreviated name of the country, MBG, at bottom.

Of additional markings of the pre-stamp period only distribution postmarks are recorded, which were stamped on the back of arriving mail at Neubrandenburg and Neustrelitz. They were oblong boxes with the date, day and month in figures, separated by an asterisk from the delivery number, No. 1, No. 2 or No. 3.

The ink used for the pre-stamp postmarks was generally black, but blue ink can be found occasionally.

When stamps were introduced on October 1, 1864, two post offices, namely Feldberg and Wesenberg, still used the straight line postmarks, the former without indication of the year. The other post offices had single circles, two of them—Friedland and Fürstenberg—with MGB. at bottom. All these were continued in use, now as cancellers. It is a curious fact that when used in such capacity, the postmarks were often struck rather indistinctly, and this may have been the reason that in many cases the post offices applied a second cancellation to the stamps, a blue crayon or pen stroke. No special cancellers were introduced, but, almost simultaneously with the issuance of postage stamps, two new types of postmarks were introduced. The ones were rectangular boxes, with the town name in the first line and the date in figures, separated from the year by an asterisk, in a second line. Such postmarks are known only from Mirow and Stargard i/Meklb. The second type, the

so-called segment postmarks, had a frame formed by a segment of a circle. The date indication was either like that of the boxed postmarks—such postmarks are known of Brandenburg and Brandenburg Bahnhof—or they had no year date, which type exists of Oertzenhof Bahnhof and Wesenberg. All together, only about 15 different postmarks can be found used as cancellers, and when we also include the few blue cancellations, the number is still below twenty. Only to the entirely uninformed collector may it seem an easy task to try to assemble a complete collection of these cancellations. But it will actually take many, many years of eager collecting to get such a complete collection in full and distinct strikes on adhesives, while it is somewhat easier to obtain them on postal stationery.

The use of the distribution postmarks was continued during the stamp period, but they are not known used as cancellers.

The majority of all stamps are cancelled by circle or segment postmarks, while boxed postmarks and straight line ones are scarcer. Black is the predominant color, and blue cancellations are rather rare. In many cases the cancellations are indistinctly struck, which increases the difficulty of checking on their genuineness. A large portion of all used stamps, if not a majority, has an additional cancellation by blue crayon or pen strokes. This is less obvious because in many cases these unattractive second cancellations have later been "improved", by making them lighter, or an attempt was made to remove them completely to make the copies in question more presentable. Crayon or pen cancellations alone are scarce and can be found very infrequently.

In regard to *Literature*, conditions are very similar to those described for Meeklenburg-Schwerin. The same literature, the handbook published in 1894 about adhesives and postmarks by H. Krötzsch and the 1892 handbook dealing with the envelopes by C. Lindenberg, are the standard guide for the collector. Other publications, mostly in German philatelic magazines, are scattered in various articles and notes, all, like the handbooks, in German. Some specialized catalogs (Grobe, Kricheldorf, Michel) are of help to the collector who does not understand German, but more intimate information in the field is unobtainable without such knowledge.

The *Scott Catalog* correctly lists the six issued denominations of the adhesives. There is a big difference between the prices of the unused and used stamps, the latter being many times higher. The complete country is priced unused at only \$83.50, but used at almost \$1200.00. Unused the cheapest stamp is priced at \$5.00, the highest at \$27.50. The prices for used start at \$27.50 and go up to \$425.00. The collector who is satisfied with the cheapest kind will not have much difficulty in obtaining the country complete unused, but when he insists on used copies and is at the same time condition-conscious, it will not only cost a lot of money, it will also be quite difficult for him to get all six denominations in satisfactory condition, with a clear town cancellation and without additional crayon or pen stroke. This is also the reason that collectors must be advised not to try to build a specialized collection of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. There are no varieties to speak of, and the only fields on which the collector can concentrate are cancellations and frankings. Both are expensive, the latter even very expensive. In addition, it will be a frustrating experience, because all the better items are in big collections. No items of importance have come on the market in recent years, and none seem to be expected to be offered in the near future. The collector had better leave Mecklenburg-Strelitz alone, considering it a barren field for the student as well as for the specializing collector.

(Next: XXXI. Modena)

#### SUBSCRIPTION TO CATALOGS

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Collectors who are bidding only occasionally or not bidding at all can subscribe to the Catalogs and Lists of Prices Realized. The charge for one year (ab. ten catalogs and seven price lists, no such lists published for mail sales) is \$5.00, refundable against purchase of at least \$25.00 in one sale. Foreign bidders can have the catalogs sent by airmail, for which service we charge \$1 per catalog. Or clippings of the countries in which they are interested can be sent, for which the charge is \$3.00 per year.

## MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

● The next issue of the *MERCURY STAMP JOURNAL* is scheduled for May 1961.

● The partners of the *Mercury Stamp Company* will again visit Europe this summer and travel extensively in England and on the Continent. Almost all free countries of Europe are on the schedule this time and will be visited by one of the partners to see business friends and customers as well as to look for new connections. Generally, the purpose of these trips is to secure material for our auctions, but our partners are also willing to take interesting and valuable collections over there for private sale. Collectors interested in such a proposition are invited to contact us without delay. We will also be pleased to have suggestions from friends in Europe in regard to visits to specific places and for specific purposes. An exact itinerary of the trips of our partners will be published in the next issue.

● The *Fédération Internationale de Philatélie*, at its General Assembly held in Warsaw in September 1960, recognized two International Exhibitions for 1961, namely at Budapest, scheduled for Sept. 23 to Oct. 3, 1961, and at Torino, the date of which does not seem to have been fixed. For the following years, international exhibitions at Prague and Buenos Aires (1962), Istanbul and Luxembourg (1963), Sofia (1964), Rio de Janeiro (1965) and Belgrad (1966) were recognized.

● An International Airmail Exhibition will be held at The Hague in the Netherlands from August 4 to 14, 1961. The first Congress of the newly founded Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Aérophilatéliques (F.I.S.A.) will also be held during the exhibition.

● An Exhibition "Der Brief im Wandel von fünf Jahrhunderten", will be held from Aug. 30 to Sept. 5, 1961 at Nürnberg, in connection with the German Philatelic Congress. The exhibition will show letters of five centuries, with special attention to postmarks and postal stamps.

● The "Spital" Stamp, supposedly issued in 1839 by the postmaster of Spital in Carinthia (Austria), which had been claimed to be the "oldest postage stamp in the world" and for which a fabulous amount was asked