

RUSSIAN RURAL POST

ZEMSTVOS

Synopsis

In 1862, Czar Alexander II freed 45 million serfs from bondage and at the same time established a Municipal form of Government as an administrative framework for the populace. This was achieved by dividing Western Russia into 150 Gubernias or Provinces (States), which were further sub-divided into municipalities that were termed Zemstvos (*Zem = land*). One service he did not expand however was the postal service, which he retained as his own private domain and steadfastly refused to relinquish or expand the areas served, which did not extend to the majority of the Zemstvos. In order to retain this as his own royal privilege he zealously guarded this sphere of taxation.

The Zemstvos had a desperate need for the most vital mail service and began their own dispatch services almost immediately by developing a courier service to transport vital documents between the various government agencies within their own jurisdiction. In the early stages these items were transported on a gratuitous basis to circumvent the Czar's edict regarding the exclusivity of the royal mail tariff. However, this soon led to the inclusion of commercial and personal items among the dispatch rider's deliveries. Ultimately this enigma developed the need for a marking system to indicate those items that had paid the imposed tariff. Initially these marks were accomplished by seals affixed to the address area on the documents. This soon proved very cumbersome and within the first three years some Zemstvos began issuing their own illegal postal stamps. Schlisselburg was the first Zemstvo to issue a stamp in 1865, but it was suppressed within its first year of service. In 1866 Verknednieprovsk issued two stamps, one for prepaid post, and a second stamp for postage due to cover the charge for mail which originated from outside the Zemstvo. But being delivered to the recipient within the Zemstvo. In 1867 Kozolets and Kherson introduced their postal stamps and by 1870 the issuance of stamps had spread to some 25 additional areas. The Czar was ultimately forced to relent and in August 1870 sanctioned the Russian Rural Post but with severe restrictions as to usage and areas to be served. The one major restriction specified that mail destined beyond the Zemstvo, required Royal Postage. Within this exhibit those original 28 Zemstvos have been termed "***Vagabonds***".

Eventually about 150 Zemstvos are recognized as having issued postal stamps within the 52 year period of the Rural Post's operation from 1865 – 1917. This exhibit focuses on four selected and unique segments of this Rural Post System, or Zemstvo Post as it has come to be recognized. Those stamps issued by the first 28 Zemstvos in the first five years prior to the royal sanction embrace the first frame of the exhibit. While 150 Zemstvo areas finally instituted postal systems about 30% or 43 of these operated for very short periods; either because they were suppressed by the Czar or were influenced to close for other reasons.

These 43 Zemstvos which also encompasses some of the "***Vagabonds***" are very unique, not only because their tenure were very short, but also during the brief term of operation they issued only one or two stamps each. These Zemstvos which suffered similar fates in alphabetical order were Akhtyrka, Balashof, Berdyansk, Boghuchary, Cherkassy, Demiansk, Dmitrief, Dmitrof, Donez, Kashira, Kazan, Kologrif, Krapivna, Kozolets, Malmzyzh, Maloarkhangelsk, Mariupol, Melitopol, Novorzhef, Novomoskofsk, Novouzensk, Odessa, Pereslaf, Piriatin, Saransk, Saratof, Schigry, Staraya Russa, Samara, Sumy, Syrzan, Tambof, Tula, Vasil, Viatka, Volchansk, Yaransk, Yekaterinoslaf, Yassy, and Zemliansk. Fatezh did not issue stamps but persisted with the original

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method of marking for delivery charges by placing impressions directly on the envelope flap. These are all included in this exhibit. The Zemstvo of Alatyr also issued a stamp, but none have been seen since 1940.

The infrastructure and resources available to many of the Zemstvos in the early stages of the population's release from serfdom were very meagre. As a result many of the stamp designs were very basic and the printing of the actual issues was done on whatever paper stock was or on hand at the time. At the same time, the impression in some instances was applied by hand pressure. There were also some Zemstvos which perceived a need to control the initial issue of stamps; either as a means to ensure the payment for service or to ensure delivery of the item. Whatever the determined need; these Zemstvos assigned numbers to the stamps as they were issued, and/or attached a counterfoil or "*talon*" thus comprising a form of early registered postal delivery. Examples of these somewhat unique issues of the applicable Zemstvos comprise the next segment of the exhibit.

As the Zemstvos matured and the Czar's dominance receded, the Russian Rural Post became an integral adjunct of the Russian Mail system, and some Zemstvos contracted the printing and design of the stamps to the State Printing Office in St. Petersburg. Examples of those issues, as well as the integration of the more sophisticated designs into the issues of later adherents to Russian Rural Post comprise the fourth segment of the exhibit.

The layout of sheets for printing and the methods used by some of the Zemstvos to print the stamps presented opportunities for some interesting studies and examples of six such issues - Podolsk, Borovichy, Chern, Rostov, Korcheva and Krasny make up the fifth frame of this exhibit.

Page 1 -	Introduction with Block of 4 Schlisselburg Stamps
Page 2-	Map of Zemstvo Areas
Pages 3 – 12	First Zemstvos to issue Post Stamps prior to Royal Sanction
Pages 13 – 24	Zemstvos with Short periods of Operation and One or two Stamp Issues
Pages 25 - 36	Simplistic Designs , Hand Stamped & Pre-numbered Issues
Pages 37 -48	Later Postal Issues- and State Designed & Printed Issues
Pages 49 – 60	Special Studies

Unfortunately early examples of postal history for most of these postal regions are very limited, possibly because delivery was in very remote areas, and the letters were not retained, or as was often the case the postal items leaving the area had to also bear the Royal Mail stamps, and once collectors removed these items, they destroyed the envelopes. It is also possible that the 1917 Revolution caused the destruction of much of this aspect of the postal history.

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Bibliography

The publications utilized in researching this topic.

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The information available in English on this aspect of Russian Philately is very restricted but following is a list of books, articles and web sites that have been of assistance in compiling this exhibit.

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Catalogue of the Russian Rural Stamps – Wm. Herrick- 1978 Reprint -

Harmer's 1939 Catalogue of the Agathon Faberge Collection – listing, photographs and descriptions of items

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The Rossica Journal - Various Issues & Articles – Published by the Rossica Society of Russian Philately

Internet Sites –

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