RUSSIAN RURAL POST – ZEMSTVOS
An Introduction
Synopsis

THE BACKGROUND OF THE RURAL POST (ZEMSTVO)

In 1862, Czar Alexander II freed 45 million serfs from bondage and at the same time provided an administrative framework for the populace which was structured as a Municipal form of Government. This was achieved by dividing Western Russia into 36 Gubernias or Provinces (States), Within these provinces were rural districts (*uezd*), generally named after their principal towns and governed by elected Zemstvo assemblies. A review of this organization indicates the there were usually 12 Zemstvos within each of the Gubernias. The lowest and smallest administrative level was the *volost* which generally consisted of a small group of villages headed by an elder. There was one vital service which was not expanded however, the Imperial Russian postal system, which in the latter half of the nineteenth century served only the major cities and towns of the realm, but unfortunately did not extend to the remote communities.

It would appear that The Czar chose to retain the Postal Service as his own private domain refusing to either relinquish or enlarge the system to include the vast number of rural communities not serviced by the Imperial postal routes and as a result vast areas had no postal service.

BURGEONING OF THE RURAL POST

The early beginnings of the Russian Rural Post also known as the Zemstvo Post, began almost as soon as the Gubernias were organized. The political and administrative reforms enacted in 1862-64 led to the formation of elected rural councils (Zemstvos) and after 1864, a number of these districts unofficially commenced their own local messenger services with the *Volost* offices generally accepting documents which would be collected and processed by the main district Zemstvo administration office. The items such as registration papers, court documents, and government memorandums were bound and sealed and sent by courier. Expediency soon prevailed and wax seals evolved into the use of printed seals which then matured into the postage stamp.

These ad hoc postal services increased the pressure on the Czar and he was ultimately forced to yield. In 1870 the Royal Mail System ultimately sanctioned the Russian Rural Post but with severe restrictions as to usage and areas to be served. Zemstvo districts were allowed to accept and deliver mail, including parcels and money orders, within their own borders, or, in respect of external correspondence, from or to the nearest Imperial post office.

THE EXTENT OF THE RURAL POST

There were 6 of the larger Gubernias - Moscow, Novgorod, Perm, Poltava, Pskof and Vologda , that contained in total 58 Zemstvos, which history has recorded, accounted for more than 1500 postal items or 70 % of the issued postal items and 6 of the next largest Gubernias with 24 Zemstvos issued over 300 postal items to account for an additional 350 varieties of postal items.

From the remaining 70 Zemstvo that instituted postal systems, about 60% or 43 of those operated for very short periods, either because they were suppressed by the Czar or were influenced to close for other reasons. These Zemstvos were very unique, not only because their tenure was very short, but also

during the brief term of operation they issued only one or two stamps each. These are categorized in the exhibit as "One or Two Design" Zemstvos. Some of those Zemstvos which utilized the one basic design of stamp also operated for extended periods of between 8 – 10 years. These single design stamps for Zemstvos which operated over the longer terms within the exhibit are described within the exhibit as "Extended Use".

Those Zemstvos which issued the early stamps before the Royal Sanction in 1870, have been termed the **"VAGABOND ISSUES",** of which there were about 25 Zemstvos.

Some Zemstvos had very meager means for both the design and the printing of the stamps. As a result they issued very primitive stamp designs or were required to print stamps manually.

Other Zemstvos utilized a numbering systems for both Revenue control and to ensure Delivery, as a form of Registered Mail. As the Russian Rural Post became more entrenched and matured, the State Printing office began designing and issuing more stamps for the Zemstvos.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 ultimately closed down the Zemstvo Post, nonetheless within the 50 year period of the Rural Post's operation (*from 1865 – 1916*) 40% or 157 Zemstvos within 33 of the 36 Gubernias are recognized as having issued over 2,300 postal stamps and postal material including wrappers and postal stationery.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EXHIBIT

As statistics indicate the Russian Rural Post topic is extensive, and for this reason the exhibit is designed to provide a broad overview of the subject and portray the various stamps issued by each of the Zemstvos within the system.

To achieve this objective, 1,700 items were selected for display, with selections from each of the 152 Zemstvos that comprised the Russian Rural Post network. The variety will provide the viewer with a perspective on the diverse styles of postal items issued over the years. The selections have been sorted according to the Gubernias in which the Zemstvos were located, and captioned according to the following categories:

- The Beginning of Zemstvo Post
- Vagabond Stamps Issued before Royal Sanctions
- Hand Stamped Issues
- Single and Two Design Issues
- Simple and basic Designs
- One Design issues utilized for extended periods
- Stamps which utilized a Number Control system
- Zemstvos suppressed or closed prematurely
- The smaller & Larger Stamps Issued are identified
- Stamps issued by the State Printing Office

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The exhibit contains an example of a cover from the early postal system implemented in 1860 using the wax seals on the document wrappers and examples of the early printed seals used prior to the issuance of postage stamps as well as some of the early envelopes on which the stamps were first printed. As an example Fatezh did not issue stamps but persisted with the original method of marking for delivery charges by placing impressions directly on the envelope flap.

Included in the exhibit are stamps from Schlisselburg which was the first Zemstvo to issue a stamp in 1865, but was suppressed within its first year of service. Examples of postage stamps from those other early Zemstvos which issued stamps in the years prior to Royal sanction in 1870 are included, some of which only issued one stamp during their brief tenures.

Unfortunately examples of postal history for the Zemstvo postal regions are not plentiful, possibly because the Postal Systems operated in very remote areas, and the letters were not retained, or as was often the case the postal items leaving the Zemstvo also required the Royal Mail stamps. Once the philatelic collectors had removed the Royal Post items, they may not have been too careful with the residual envelopes upon which the Zemstvo stamps were affixed. It is also possible that the 1917 Revolution caused the destruction of much of this aspect of the postal history. The rarity of the Zemstvo covers is the major reason there are only a few examples (24 items) within this exhibit.

One of the more renowned philatelic collectors of the Russian Rural Post Issues was the distinguished jeweler of the Russian Czars, Oleg Faberge, who had been taken hostage by the Bolsheviks in 1917, and was later released under "*House Arrest*" in order to evaluate the Crown Jewels, which were subsequently used by the revolutionaries to finance their insurgency. During his tenure within the Soviet union, prior to his ultimate escape to Denmark then to England, he accumulated many remnants of the Russian Rural Posts. Segments of this most impressive collection has been disposed of by his estate over the years. Such items emanating for this collection are denoted as "ex Faberge" and are very much sought by Zemstvo collectors. Certain items in this collection display this reference.

One other large collection of the Zemstvo aspect of Russian Philately resides in the Reich post Museum in Germany . Cataloguing of this collection was undertaken by Karl Schmidt in 1909 and finalized in 1916 and was republished in 1934. In 1987 Alex Artuchov from Canada commenced a six volume cataloguing effort expanding on the two previous works. The Artuchov undertaking was a monumental task, and was essential for some of the research when compiling this display.

The relevant rarity of certain items within the Zemstvo Post issues, was categorized by F. G. Chuchin in the 1925 catalogue which was prepared for the *Commissioner for Philately and Vouchers of USSR*, and depicted some of the more elusive items to which he has assigned the "**R**" category denoting the rarity depicted as one "**R**" being one of less than fifty items, with further groupings "**RR**" fewer than twenty ", "**RRR**" category being one of fewer than ten, and "**RRRR**" as fewer than five. This exhibit makes mention of some of these parameters in assessing the rarity of some of the displayed items.

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The Frames in this exhibit are organized as follows:

The first frame is intended as an Introduction to the Russian Rural Post together with documents that provide some insight into the early documents that the system generated and an orientation as to the various Gubernias.

The six largest Gubernias Moscow, Novgorod, Perm, Poltava, Pskof and Vologda have each been allocated to their own particular frame which is augmented by some of the smaller Zemstvo issues as seemed complimentary to the exhibit.

Frame 1 Page 1 - Introduction with Block of 4 Schlisselburg Stamps
Page 2 – The Zemstvo Map outlining the location of the various Gubernias
Pages 3 – 16 The First Zemstvo within St. Petersburg to issue Stamps
& Those Zemstvos which influenced the State Printing Designs

Frame 2 Pages 17- 32 The Gubernia of Moscow with the 5 Zemstvos & 5 smaller Gubernias

Frame 3 Pages 33 - 48 The Gubernia of Perm with 6 Zemstvos plus the Gubernias of

Saratof & Tavrida

Frame 4 Pages 49 – 64 This frame displays The Gubernias of Novgorod with 10 Zemstvos &

Viatka with 7 Zemstvos

Frame 5 Pages 65 – 80, The Gubernia of Poltava one of the largest Gubernias has 12

Zemstvos and utilize the full frame.

Frame 6 Pages 81 – 96 The Gubernia of Pskof & Kherson with 6 Zemstvos each.

Frame 7 Pages 97 – 112 The Gubernia of Vologda , Samara & the Don Territory

Frame 8 Pages 113 – 128 Displays Six of the smaller Gubernias

Frame 9 Pages 129 – 144 The Gubernia of Ryazan, Tver & 2 other Gubernias

Each of the Zemstvos exhibited also feature a map so as to provide orientation on the Zemstvo's location within the area.

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Bibliography

The following are some of the publications available in English on this topic.

The Zemstvo Postage Stamps of Imperial Russia, Volumes I-VI *Alex Artuchov,*

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Russian Zemstvos – F.G. Chuchin1925 Catalogue of the Russian Rural Postage Stamps –*Commissioner for Philately and Vouchers of U.S.S.R,-Moscow 1925 -* F.G. Chuchin1925 Catalogue - J.Barefoot 1988 Reprint

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

Available in Russian

- **Stamps of the ZEMSTVO posts of Russia Catalog 1866-1919**
    - Author Гуревч, Юрий Ефим.вич

On CD-ROM – **ZEMSTVO Catalogue** *(in Russian)*

Also available in German is

- **Die Postwertzeichnen der Russischen Landschftsaemter**
- **Schmidt's Catalogue of Zemstvo's in the German Museum** (Reprint)

Internet Sites -

- **Focus on Philately** - http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/2001/440118.shtml
- **Cataloguing the Zemstvo Post of Russia** - http://www.zemstvo.net/english/classification/
- **The Treasury of Russian Philately** – http://fuchs-online.com/zemstvos/introduction.htm http://web.inter.nl.net/hcc/Langenberg/Zemstvo.html http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/pages/Z/E/Zemstvo.htm
- **The Stamp Collector's Handbook** By Edward L. Pemberton *Pages 159 -191* (***Google****- Pemberton Stamp Handbook-Pages 159 -191*)