Landpost "über" Lehrte
An Example of the Rural Mail System in Germany 1933-1992

Purpose: Illustration of the rural postal system in Germany using the system around the small crossroads city of Lehrte as an example.

Scope: Beginning of the system in Lehrte in 1933 to the fading out of the system in the early 1990s, as the automobile transformed rural life and transportation.

Introduction: The "Landpost" or German rural mail system was started by the German Reichspost in 1928 (in Lehrte in 1933). Post offices were often many kilometers from rural residents. Pensions and other monetary services went through the post office. Often a pensioner or other recipient of money was robbed on the walk home. German farms radiate out from a village with farm buildings surrounding the core, unlike in the US, where farms are separate, so the Reichspost met the need using postal vans and rail to serve a system of smaller rural postal offices and agencies tied to a central receiving post office.

Lehrte, just east of Hannover, was a natural location as the main collection point for this section of the rural post system, as its main post office was adjacent to the main rail line. The main East-West and North-South rail lines and autobahns cross here. Rural post offices depicted in this exhibit were generally within 20 km northeast, east, and southeast of Lehrte.

Italics: Postal rate information. Bold and Green Matting: Items of Note

official city meter showing city as crossroads

30 pf rate for standard letter under 20 g from Apr 1, 1966 to Aug 31, 1971

I came to Lehrte as an exchange student in Lehrte in 1973, sparking my interest in its postal history.

The rural mail system in the Weimar Republic evolved from the previous system of smaller "Posthilfstellen" or auxiliary postal agencies of the late 19th century. Usually run on a volunteer basis by a local resident of note, often a shop owner, they handled the postal needs of the rural residents, including payment of the old age pensions introduced by Bismarck (as German post offices also acted as a bank). It was a position of trust, as the mail was not considered officially accepted until it reached a post office. By 1913, there were almost 25,000 of these agencies across Germany. Many later became official post offices with civil service staff and were given canceling devices.

In 1928, due to advances in transportation, in particular, reliable trucks and roads, the new Landpost system began to be introduced, though the Lehrte region would not become part of the system until 1933. Former Posthilfstellen were converted to Poststelle I (PSt I) and Poststelle II (PSt II) offices, depending on size. The larger PSt I offices were under the charge of a civil servant working for the post office and had almost full service and regular hours. They became part of the rural service as they were on the routes used to service the smaller PSt II offices (often via Kraftpostwagen (postal vans) or rail). They were permitted to have canceling devices as they were under the direction of an employee of the post office and only had to settle accounts with the Leitpostamt monthly.

Sample Poststelle I Cancel

Poststelle II offices were not permitted to use a canceling device but were given an auxiliary marking of the form "Town über (via) Area Post Office", did not have post office employees, had to settle accounts with the Leitpostamt on a daily basis, and had reduced service, but still supplied many of the services found at larger post offices. Only commonly used stamps and forms were generally available. They did not have enough business for a full service office and did not have to have fixed hours, but were required to be open before and after the postal van arrived. During the Landpost era, many PSt II offices grew and became PSt I offices. A wide variety of markings were used.

Sample Poststelle II Auxiliary Marking

As a Leitpostamt (lit. managing post office), Lehrte managed the operations of the PSt I and PSt II offices reporting to it. It should be noted that there *were* full post offices in the region covered that were not part of the rural system, examples being the Burgdorf and Hämlerwald post offices.

Outline

1. Third Reich Era

    a. First Postal Rate Period
    b. Second Postal Rate Period
    c. Third Postal Rate Period
    d. Transition to Poststelle I
    e. Mail to Lehrte Rural Post Destination

2. Germany under Allied Occupation

    a. Items without a Postal Code (in Postal Markings)
    b. Items with Postal Code 20
    c. Items with Postal Code 20a

3. Federal Republic of Germany (Deutsche Bundespost)

    a. Items without a Postal Code
    b. Items with Postal Code 20
    c. Items with Postal Code 20a
    d. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destination (Postal Code 20a)
    e. Four Digit Postal Code
    f. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destination (Four Digit Postal Code)

4. End of the Rural Post System