

RUSSIAN RURAL POST - ZEMSTVOS

Synopsis

In 1862, Czar Alexander II freed 45 million serfs from bondage and at the same time provided 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 which he refused to relinquish or enlarge. In order to retain this as his own royal privilege he zealously guarded this sphere of taxation.

The Zemstvos however had a desperate need for this vital service and they began their own mail services almost immediately and within the first three years some of the Zemstvos began issuing their own illegal postal stamps. By 1870 the Czar was forced to yield somewhat, and ultimately did sanction the Russian Rural Post but with severe restrictions as to usage and areas to be served. Eventually about 150 Zemstvos are recognized as having issued postal stamps within the 40 year period of the Rural Post's operation from 1865 - 1917. This exhibit focuses on a those very special and unique segments of this Rural Post System, or Zemstvos Post as it has come to be recognized.

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. 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.

From the 150 Zemstvo areas that instituted postal systems, there were about 30% or 43 of these which 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. Postal stamps for these are included in this exhibit.

There were also some Zemstvos which utilized only one basic design of stamp, but they operated for extended periods of between 8 - 10 years. These single design stamps for Zemstvos which operated over longer terms are included in the exhibit under the "Extended Use" section of the display.

Some Zemstvos were virtually destitute and had very meager means at their disposal for both design and printing, and as a result utilized very primitive stamp designs or were required to print stamps manually. Because the Royal Mail ceased delivery at locations remote from some residents, there were charges both for delivery to the addressee as well as mail bound for mail delivery outside the Zemstvo. Some Zemstvo used different stamps for the Post Due and Prepaid Post.

Other Zemstvos utilized numbering systems to both control Revenue and ensure Delivery. As the Russian Rural Post became more entrenched and matured, the State Printing office began designing and issuing more stamps for the Zemstvos. The attractiveness of Tete Beche stamps and various other printing peculiarities did not escape the printers' notice and these anomalies, which were sometimes intentionally introduced into the production runs, developed many variations for philatelic pursuits.

The following outlines the main features of this exhibit:

Introduction page.

- The Beginning of Zemstvo Post

- The Vagabond Stamps Issued before Royal Sanctions The One -
year Issues

Single Design Issues

Two Design Issues

Stamps with Number Control

Simple and basic Designs - The small & Large Stamps -

Hand Stamped Issues

One Design extended use

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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 within this exhibit.

One of the more renowned philatelic collector 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, 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.

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 assigned the "R" category denoting the rarity depicted as one "R" being one of less than fifty items, with further groupings up to the "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.

The Frames in this exhibit are organized as follows:

Frame 1 -Page 1 - Introduction with Block of 4 Schlisselburg

Stamps -

Page 2 - The Zemstvo Map

Pages 3 - 16 The Early Zemstvos with Short periods of Operation and One or two Stamp Issues

Frame 2 Pages 17- 32 Single & 2 Design Zemstvos Extended periods of Operation

Frame 3 Pages 33 -48 Hand Printed Issues

Frame 4 Pages 59 - 64 Unique & Special Design

Stamps

Frame 5 Pages 65 - 80 Later & State Printed Designs

Bibliography

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

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

Imperial Russia Zemstvo Post, 1993 - Faberge, Oleg A

Russian Zemstvos - F.G. Chuchin 1925 Catalogue of the Russian Rural Postage Stamps -

Commissioner for Philately and Vouchers of U.S.S.R.,-Moscow 1925

- F.G. Chuchin 1925 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

Also available in German is

Die Postwertzeichen der Russischen Landschaftsaemter

- Schmidt's Catalogue of Zemstvo's in the German Museum (Reprint)

Internet Sites -

- Focus on Philately

Cataloguing the Zemstvo Post of Russia - <http://www.zemstvo.net/english/classification/>

- The Treasury of Russian Philately -

<http://fuchs-online.com/zemstvos/intxoduction.htm>

<http://web.inter.nl.net/hcc/Langenbexg/Zemstvo.html>

<http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/pages/Z/E/Zemstvo.htm>