

Notes on a Display presented before the Royal Philatelic Society on January 6, 1983by G.D. Buckley

In the 19th Century European Russia comprised some 40 provinces, each with its own Provincial Government, responsible to the Tsar and the Imperial Government for the administration of the province. In 1864, however, Alexander II initiated far-reaching reform by introducing a second tier of local government. The provinces were now divided into districts (usually 10-15 per province), each of which was governed by an elected District Council or Zemstvo with responsibility for the provision of medical, veterinary and education services, agricultural organisation and advice, maintenance of roads, and other matters of concern to its electorate.

At that time the Imperial Post Office provided a collection and delivery service only in the major cities and in a few of the more important Districts. In most districts there was a single post office only in the main town, and all mail from the District (which might be as large as Yorkshire) had to be delivered to this office for despatch, and all mail coming into the district was held at the Post Office until collected by the addressee or his representative. No communications between residents of the same district were provided for.

The Zemstvos soon sought to improve on this unsatisfactory situation, and from 1865 onwards the Districts began to organise their own internal postal services. The general principle was that mail coming into the District was collected from the Imperial Post Office, sorted at the Zemstvo Office and distributed through the District by mail coaches and postmen. Outgoing mail was collected at sub-offices in the sub-districts and villages and also directly from the sender by the postmen and delivered to the Zemstvo Office which passed it to the Imperial Post Office for despatch.

In 1870 the Government formally recognised the Zemstvo Posts as an autonomous auxiliary of the Imperial Post Office, and issued detailed regulations under which they were authorised to operate in any District until the Imperial Post was ready to take over operations in that District. They were absorbed into the Imperial Post gradually, but many of them continued to function right up to the Revolution in 1917. Nearly all the Zemstvos established postal services, which they were left free to organise and finance in any way they wished, and the major proportion of them were content to provide a free (on the rates!) collection and delivery service and therefore had no need of postage stamps. Others, however, and especially those which provided more elaborate services such as registration and money order facilities, sought to cover the cost by charging for the service, usually by means of postage stamps, and in all 162 Districts issued stamps at various periods. In these districts mail arriving from outside the District, which was already stamped with Imperial stamps, was additionally stamped with a local stamp at the Zemstvo Office and the postage due was collected from the recipient by the postman. Outgoing mail had to be stamped with both local and Imperial stamps, and purely internal mail was stamped with local stamps only.

The prototype of the Zemstvo Posts was the District Post of Wenden in the Province of Livonia. In 1863, i.e. some time before the establishment of the Zemstvos, the Livonian Order of Knighthood, which had the city of Wenden as its headquarters, obtained permission to establish a local postal service for the city and surrounding area and to issue its own postage stamps. This Post operated until 1903 when it was taken over by the Imperial Post Office, but from 1870 onwards it had to conform to the regulations governing the Zemstvo Posts. The first true Zemstvo Post was established by the District of Vetluga in the Province of Kostroma in 1864, but the service was provided free until 1908 when it issued its first stamps. The first Zemstvo stamp was issued by the District of Schlüsselburg in St. Petersburg Province in 1865, but this was quickly suppressed by the Imperial Post Office.

The stamps which were issued are of exceptional interest and infinite variety since they were the products of local initiative and skills, and did not have to conform to any set pattern. Hence we find many features which are not found elsewhere, e.g. stamps numbered individually in ms. (Lubny, Krapivna), stamps with numbered receipt counterfoils (Kotelnich, Zadonsk) and special stamps issued to people who paid an annual subscription for the postal service. (Lubny).

Most of the stamps were printed locally, probably in the Provincial Capital, by lithography and they range from crude monochrome stamps to 6-colour works of art. They demonstrate the full range of litho techniques and provide a fascinating field for the student of lithography. Many issues were also printed Typographically from settings of movable type, and these also are of great philatelic interest. In a few cases more surprising methods were used, some of them never used for printing stamps before or since, e.g. hektography (Arzamas, Lokhvitza), collotype (Poltava), die-stamping, embossing both en plein and in colour, and even hand-painting (Tikhvin 1878).

Many of these stamps were printed in very small numbers, and we owe, not only our knowledge of them, but the very survival of the stamps to a small band of 19th Century enthusiasts who formed the St. Petersburg group of the Dresden Philatelists Club. Their researches were ultimately collated and published in catalogue form by Agathon Fabergé and Karl Schmidt in the 1930's.

The Display in the Frames

My display today is concerned with the stamps rather than the postal history, although ^I show a few covers to illustrate some of the different usages, and I have arranged them by provinces. For every province there is an introductory sheet with a map of the province and a stamp from each of the stamp-issuing districts. This is followed in all but a few cases by a detailed study of the stamps of one or more of the districts. The provinces are arranged in the following order:-

FramesProvinces and Districts

- 1-3 Livonia (District of Wenden); Samara (Bugulma, Buguruslan, Buzuluk); Ekaterinoslav (Verkhmednieprovsk).
- 4-15 Poltava (Districts of Priluky, Zolotonosha, Zienkov, Kremenchug, Lokhvitza, Konstantinograd, Lubny, Pereyaslev, Gadiach and Poltava).
- 16-18 Kharkov (Kharkov, Starobielsk, Valki, Volchansk).
- 18-20 Kherson (Kherson, Ananiev, Elisavetgrad, Alexandria and Tiraspol).
- 20 Chernigov (Kozelets); Kazan (Chistopol).
- 21-23 Novgorod (Bielozersk, Kirillov, Borovichy, Novgorod, Valdai and Tikhvin).
- 23 Kostroma (Kologriv and Vetluga).
- 24 St. Petersburg (Gdov, Luga, Novaya Ladoga, Schlusselfburg); Olonets.
- 25-27 Vologda (Ustsysolsk, Griazovets, Kadnikov, Velsk and Totma).
- 28-32 Perm (Cherdyn, Perm, Ekaterinburg, Kungur, Verkhotur, Solikamsk and Irbit).
- 32-33 Viatka (Glazov, Kotelnich, Malmyzh, Urzhum, Viatka).
- 33-34 Ufa (Belebey).
- 34-36 Tula (Tula); Voronezh (Zadonsk, Bobrov, Ostrogozhsk).
- 37 Saratov (Volsk, Khvalynsk, Atkarsk); Vladimir (Pereslavl).
- 38 Territory of the Don Cossacks (Rostov-on-Don).
- 38-39 Taurida (Dnieprovsk, Berdiansk).
- 39-41 Tambov (Morshansk, Lebedian, Borisoglyebesk, Shatsk).
- 41 Penza (Penza).
- 42 Bessarabia (Soroki); Kursk (Lgov, Schigry).
- 43 Orel (Livny); Simbirsk; Smolensk (Dukhovstschina, Krasny).
- 44-45 Ryazan (Egorievsk, Dankov, Ryazan, Sapozhok, Ryazhsk).
- 46-47 Pskov (Opochka, Pskov, Ostrov).
- 47-49 Twer (Twer, Korcheva, Byezhetsk, Vessiegonsk).
- 49-50 Nizhni-Novgorod (Ardатов, Arzamas).
- 51-52 Moscow (Podolsk, Bogorodsk, Kolonna).