

THE BLUE STAMP

An Article by  
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We do not know when postal systems started, but it must have been many thousands of years ago. Jeremiah, who wrote his portion of our present-day Bible about 580 B.C. predicted the fall of Babylon. He says in chapter 51, verse 31;- "One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the King of Babylon that his city is taken at one end."

In the book of Job, written probably 800 to 900 B.C., verse 25 of Chapter 9, reads "Now my days are swifter than a post; they flee away, they see no good."

So postal systems are of great antiquity.

Possible the first great postal system in the world's recorded history is that of the Persians, started by Cyrus, King of Persia, in the 6th century B.C. This was a system of roads to all parts of the Persian Empire, with couriers or dispatch riders carrying messages swiftly between relay points or "Post Offices". Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, described this system in these words - "Neither snow nor rain, nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." These words are carved into the facade of the main Post Office in New York City today. They apply today as they did 2500 years ago.

The Post system of the Romans was the second really great Post system. This followed the Persian system by establishing good roads, relay stations, couriers and riders. The Romans carried letters, government and military orders, supplies and even government officials. Time tables and schedules were followed and meals supplied

Probably the third really great post system was that of the Thurn and Taxis family. The methods used were the same, couriers and riders, but, being a private family and not a government system they had few good roads to use. This family started carrying mails about 1500 A.D. and continued in the business until 1869. During these three and a half centuries they carried the posts for almost every European country. For two centuries they were the official post system for the Holy Roman Empire, which included practically all of Europe. They eventually lost their post systems in various countries by purchase or confiscation by the Governments until about 1860, only their German post system remained. This, they sold to Germany in 1869 for three million thalers. Their system then became the Imperial German Postal System.

Now, all that I have written so far appears to have little to do with a Blue Stamp, but I am coming to the Blue Stamp soon now.

In 1866, a German, named Heinrich Stephan, was Director of Posts for the North German Confederation (part of the Thurn & Taxis families post system). At that time, if you wanted to send a letter abroad, you read all the rules and regulations, consulted all the authorities, asked all your friends what it would cost, added all the answers together, took the average and multiplied it by two. Then, when you handed your letter to the Post Master, he told you that it needed more stamps.

International posts were in confusion. Stephan found that a letter from Berlin to New York cost 90¢ by a German steamer or \$1.25 by a British boat. A letter from Berlin to Rome cost 68¢ via Switzerland or 90¢ via France. A letter from London to Mexico cost \$1.45 at the receiving end regardless of how much you paid at the sending end. Letters to Russia took 13 different routes, ten of which had varying charges. Letters to Australia could take six routes at rates varying from a few cents to over a dollar.



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All countries experienced this confusion of international postal rates but it remained for Heinrich Stephan to do something about it.

Stephan dreamed a dream of international co-operation and tried to make his dream come true. He arranged an international Congress for 1869 and again for 1870, but the Franco Prussian War prevented the meeting. He eventually got the nations of the world together at Berne, Switzerland, in 1874. After 24 days discussion, Stephan saw every one of his proposals adopted. His dream had come true.

Thus, the International Postal Union was born, one of the most amazing one-man, international agreements ever achieved. Twenty one countries and their colonies agreed to co-operate in international posts. Today, this same basic agreement serves practically every country in the world.

But, you say - "What about the Blue Stamp?" Please be patient and read the next bulletin and you'll learn all about it.

You ain't heard nawthin yet.

T. R. WOODHOUSE.

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