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Study Unit

150 Years of Swedish Stamps

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On 26 May 2005, Sweden Post celebrated the 150th anniversary of the country's first-ever piece of perforated postage by issuing a series of commemorative postage stamps and maximum cards in its honor. The new postage stamp system made it possible for everyone to send correspondence throughout Sweden at a uniform rate, regardless of the distance. The simultaneous introduction of mailboxes in Sweden also made it easier to send correspondence by mail.

Even before the classic skilling banco issues appeared in 1855, Sweden had had a long postal history. The country established its postal service in 1636. That first correspondence carried hand stamps with the letters "B" or "F" for "paid" or "free." Beginning in 1660, *Carta Sigillata*, or stamped paper, was used in legal transactions that were stamped with the appropriate duties. In the 18th century, postal authorities developed a system unique to the country—attaching feathers to the seals of letters to indicate the need for speed in delivery. A century later, Swedish Lieutenant Curry Gabriel Treffenberg (1791-1875) was a contender for the title of inventor of the pre-paid postage stamp. Modeling his proposal on the *Cavallini* ("little horsemen") of Sardinia, which were duty marks stamped on letter sheets, in 1823 he devised a scheme for stamped stationery, wherein "various kinds of stamped paper bearing different values" would be produced "for the purpose of containing letters [that] could be handed over to a post

office without further payment being required." His proposal was brought before the Swedish *Riksdag*, or parliament, but was never implemented for letters. It undoubtedly served as the basis of the newspaper tax stamps introduced the next year, whose designs used Treffenberg's three crowns emblem. The tax stamps were struck directly onto the newspaper, however, and were not produced as separate stamps.

In 1847 Peter Martenson proposed postal reforms and the use of adhesive postage stamps modeled after those of Great Britain, but resistance to uniform rates encountered by Swedish authorities and procrastination in the Swedish *Riksdag* delayed the introduction of this measure until 1855. The groundwork was laid by a *Riksdag* resolution on 25 October 1854 that established a single inland tariff regardless of how far the letter was to be sent. Martenson died of cholera in 1854, but not before he had seen the reorganization of Swedish postal rates and other preliminary steps that led to the issue of Sweden's first stamps on 1 July 1855. The new stamps also sparked what has been called a "soft revolution," because it granted all social

classes equal access to communication via letters. At that time similar systems existed in some 50 other countries.

Sweden's first stamps have been characterized as "aristocratic" because their production was entrusted to a nobleman, Count Per Ambjörn Sparre (1828-1921). Four years earlier, Sparre, then a mere 23 years old, had secured the contract to print Sweden's currency, and in that posi-



Figure 1: Sweden Sc2513e

tion he made valiant efforts to introduce forgery-proof bills. Beginning in 1855 all Swedish postage stamps were printed either by him or his associates, G. and E. Scheutz (Figure 1). Sparre drew the proofs, made the original engravings, and initially did the printing in his print shop on Hötorget Square in Stockholm. Sparre also introduced a new perforating device of his own design, the first of its kind in the world, which was used until 1920. If too many stamp sheets were perforated at the same time, however, the bottom sheet could remain entirely or partially unperforated. That circumstance created a rarity in 1855, the imperforate 8-skillung banco stamp (Scott 4c); only two copies are known to exist today (Figure 2).

The first series of Swedish postage stamps had five values, featuring a four-skillung value for mailing letters weighing up to 16 grams. All five issues depicted the triple crown emblem of Sweden. Except for supplementary postage on mail going abroad, postal patrons seldom used the lowest, 3-



Fig. 2: Sweden Sc4c

skilling denomination; most of the first printing was later destroyed. Normally printed in green, the 3-skillung yellow error stamp (Scott 1a, where it is recorded as "orange"), which has been touted recently as the world's most valuable stamp, was printed in 1857, when a 3-skillung cliché was inserted by mistake in a plate of the 8-skillung. Having shortly thereafter adopted a decimal currency, in 1858 Sweden began to issue its new stamps in öre values (5 to 50 öre), or 100ths of a krona; they used the same design as the first series.

Sweden Post is celebrating the Swedish stamp's 150th anniversary with a commemorative, eight-design booklet titled Swedish Stamps 150 Years (Figure 3). The booklet was printed using a combination of intaglio and four-color offset. The first four designs in the booklet (Fig. 8), chosen seemingly at random, depict details from previous issues of Swedish stamps and focus on design and artistic expression. The designs feature the following issues:



Fig. 3: Sweden Sc2512-2513 Complete Booklet

- *Lady with a Veil* from the 1972 Gustavian Art issue (See Fig. 4, Sc940),
- 5 öre from the 1951 New Numeral Type issue (See Fig. 5, Sc430),
- *Mounted Postal Courier* from the issue Tercentenary of the Post Office in 1936 (See Fig. 6, Sc250), and
- *Angelica* from the 1984 Mountain World issue (See Fig. 7, Sc1490).

The anniversary booklet's other four issues

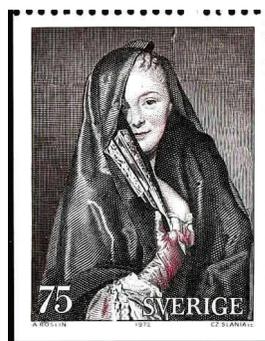


Fig. 4 Sweden Sc940
Lady with a Veil
from the 1972 Gustavian Art issue



Fig. 5 Sweden Sc430
5 öre from the 1951 New Numeral Type issue



Fig. 6 Sweden SC250
Mounted Postal Courier
from the issue Tercentenary of the Post Office in 1936



Fig. 7 Sweden Sc1490
Angelica from the 1984 Mountain World issue.

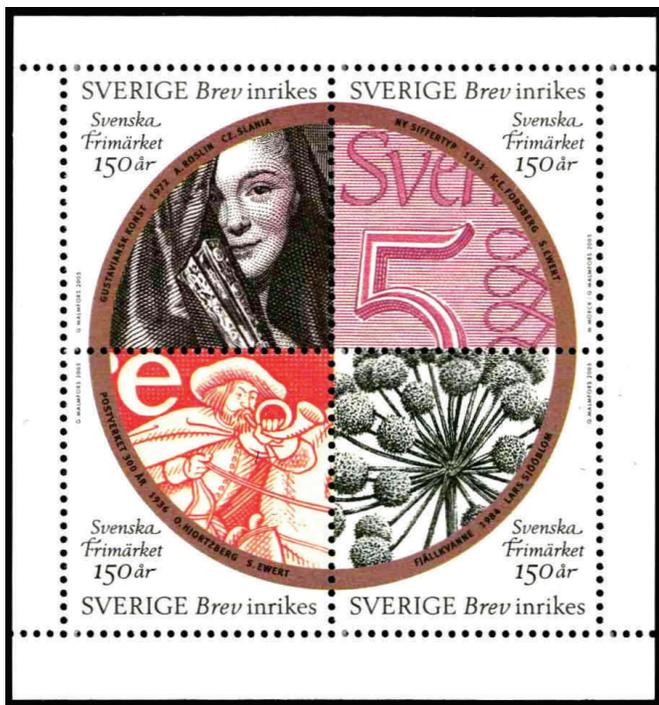


Fig. 8: Sweden Sc2512a-d



Fig. 9: Sweden Sc2513a-d

(Figure 9), all designed by Gustav Malmfors, celebrate the social development of the stamp and the Swedish Post from 1855 up until the present.

Count Pehr Ambjörn Sparre is depicted on the upper left stamp, along with the Albion press on which he printed Sweden's first stamps. Engraved by Martin Mörck.

Another design is *The Letter* (upper right), which illustrates how correspondence facilitates contact with loved ones the world over. Engraved by Piotr Naszarkowski and based on a photograph made of an illustration by Thorsten Fridlizius.

The third design, *Transportation* (lower left), demonstrates how the Post Office has used modern modes of transportation, such as

trains and airplanes, when they arrived on the scene in the 19th and 20th centuries. Engraved by Piotr Naszarkowski.

The fourth and final design is *Rural Postman* (lower right), which illustrates how the Sweden Post reaches even the most remote homes in Sweden. Engraved by Martin Mörck.

Postryttaren is the annual yearbook of the Swedish Postal Museum. This year's 55th edition, *Svenska Frimärket 150 år* [*The Swedish Stamp 150 Years*], edited by Jan Billgren, for the first time includes English summaries of the articles written in Swedish. Most of the articles focus on the classic skilling banco issues. The ten authors who are represented have succeeded in creating a lovely souvenir of a major Swedish philatelic anniversary.

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Fig 10: This figure features the 5th of 8 maximum cards issued on 26 May 2005 as part of the 150th anniversary celebration. The photograph shows a close-up of an inspection of the printing cylinder for *Gustaf VI Adolf, 1951-1971* [Sc574].

