

CCHS - Early Mail and Stampless Letter Markings of Sweden – Script

By Alan Warren

The exhibit downstairs, which is anchored by the Brinton collection, also includes related material that expands our knowledge of the early handling of mail in the United States. Bill's guest speakers have also enhanced our understanding of mails from Colonial times until the late 19th century.

This afternoon I would like to digress on a parallel course by taking a look at the handling of mail and the associated postal markings as they evolved in Sweden. Many countries across the globe were developing systems and procedures for handling mail that were similar to one another.

1) Title Page

2) This is a Proclamation issued in 1725—an official announcement or government edict – pertaining to the accounts and funds of postal administrators. These documents in many cases, like this example, have held up well because the paper has a high content of rag fiber. Some of these proclamations were sent through the mail and are found with addresses and postal markings.

3) Let's first look at what is called Messenger mail or Courier mail. This is a hand-delivered folded letter sent from Lifland to Stockholm November 2, 1611. Lifland was also known as Livonia, and was situated on the Baltic Coast in the area now occupied in part by Estonia and Latvia. There are no markings to indicate what route it took or who the courier or couriers were.

4) Messenger Mail – This folded letter from around 1600 was sent to Hieronymus von Birchholtz, a Brandenburg nobleman who moved to Sweden. Note the manuscript markings: Cito, Cito, Cito, which is Latin for fast, i.e. urgent.

5) Messenger Mail – 1637 letter to His Excellency the Royal Grand Chancellor of Sweden, Axel Oxenstierna, who was instrumental in establishing the postal service under Queen Christina in 1636. The date is provided in the docketing on the back.

6) Queen Christina of Sweden is generally given credit for instituting the postal service. However, you will note that she was only ten years old at the time. It was the Regency or government that implemented the service.

7) and 8) These next two slides describe how the system was set up...

9) Here is a Post Rider and his Post Horn.

10) Crown Post – The Crown Post consisted of communications sent by royalty or government officials, and dates from the early 17th century until 1873 when official correspondence was

taken over by the General Post Office. Beginning January 1874, the first “official” stamps were issued by Sweden.

Typical Crown Post mail is seen with three or more hand-drawn curves or loops with a line through them, often referred to as a coil or meander. This particular 18th century cover has a warning at the bottom noting that the letter “shall arrive the 25th of October with 5 Riksdaler fine.”

11) Crown Post letters of 1744 and 1777 with handstamp markings. The marking on the top cover is associated with the town of Kristianstad. The bottom marking is likely the initials of the sender.

12) Crown Post letter of 1796 with hand-drawn crowns or meander. The letter “S” often indicated to the letter carrier the name of the town where he was to take the mail. Somero is in Finland.

13) Crown Post letter with three handstamped crown markings. Between the handstamps is the manuscript “Em bref” which means official letter.

14) Crown Post, in addition to the manuscript coil or meander, sometimes had feathers affixed to denote urgency or express delivery. Internal notes in this December 23, 1808 letter indicate it transited four locations, all on the same date: Brannestad in Östergötland County, Kumla in Örebro County, Thorlunda in Östergötland County, and Tornby in Östergötland County. The area is in southeastern Sweden, south of Stockholm.

15) Crown Post – stampless folded letters that have one corner turned to the back indicate the mail was that of a commoner rather than royalty or the clergy. It bears a crown handstamp and was sent January 27, 1834.

16) Crown Post feather letter with elaborate manuscript serpentine coil, sent to Lerum, April 28, 1855. Both black and white feathers were used to indicate the highest urgency with transit both night and day.

17) Crown Post – This piece of military mail was sent from Kråk on February 8, 1762 to the regimental clerk in Bredared, discussing a noncommissioned officer who was in debt. Handstamp marking with three crowns.

18) General Mail – As mentioned earlier, Sweden’s General Mail was established in 1636 by Axel Oxenstierna during the reign of Queen Christina. The remaining sections of this talk focus on groupings of postal markings by subject, generally in chronological order.

The Crown Post that we have just seen, used by government and church officials, and the General Mail, used for personal and business purposes, were parallel systems that operated at the same time.

The General Mails are often recognized with the handwritten charter number in the upper right corner. These numbers represent listings of the letters in the records of the postal service. Each day the delivery mailman would assign numbers, let's say 1 to 20, for the 20 letters he was delivering that day. At the post office a logbook had the same letters listed by their charter numbers. Thus each letter could be accounted for with a notation of what date it was delivered to the addressee.

This letter was sent July 9, 1640 to a military college in Stockholm by Conrad von Falkenberg (1591-1654) while he was Governor of Kalmar. Early use of the manuscript "Franco" for "paid."

19) General Mail – Crown B mark. From 1686 until 1708 the General Mail used two basic types of handstamps, consisting of a crown over a capital "B" (for Betalda or paid) or a crown over a capital "F" (for Fribrev or free letter). There are several different types of both markings listed in the Facit specialized catalog.

This letter was sent from Stockholm, March 19, 1687 to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. It was prepaid to Hamburg and then due markings were added in red crayon. From Hamburg to Amsterdam the cost was 5 stuivers (marked with a V) plus another 3 stuivers to reach Rotterdam (VIII total).

20) The Crown F marking, for a free letter, was used on this 1686 letter to Mariestad.

21) Sweden introduced place name cancellations in 1708 in Stockholm. The name appears in a sort of banner with curved ends, known as a "ribbon." Many different types of ribbon markings were used from 1708 to 1751, and are listed in the Facit catalog with beginning and ending dates of use.

22) Ribbon marking – a 1711 letter to Uppsala with a variety of ribbon marking that was in use from 1708 to 1718.

23) Two more varieties of the ribbon marking.

24) From 1719 to 1723 four varieties of a new handstamp marking were used that look almost as if they were hand lettered or written.

25) An example of the hand-written style of Stockholm marking. It was sent May 4, 1719 to Örbyhus in Tierp.

26) Beginning in the 1750s Stockholm used a large variety of undated straight line cancels with the city name in capital letters. This variety, on a letter dated August 17, 1756, was used from 1752 to 1770.

27) In 1819 other cities received their individual undated straight line cancels. These are from the town Avestad, later renamed Avesta. These undated cancels can only be placed in time through

internal contents of the folded letter, or by the dimensions of the cancel as found in the Facit Postal History catalog of Sweden.

28) Straight line Köping. The word “Recommenderas” means that the letter is registered. The manuscript “2” at lower left indicates the second weight step.

29) Straight line Wimmerby, in both black ink and red ink. The red Wimmerby cancel was used from October 1822 to March 1824. Six examples are known. This is one of only three that are dated internally. The dateline is January 27, 1823.

30) Catalog of Sweden’s first dated postmarks, called arc cancellations, which I will explain in a moment. The picture gives you an idea of what these handstamps look like. The town name and the date are carved in brass.

31) Arc Cancel – Awestad. Note the variation in spelling again. The first dated cancellations of Sweden began to appear in the latter part of 1830. They consisted of a single circle with the town name, the month and day in the lower center, and the year numeral placed in curved or arc format on both sides of the month/day numbers. This design distinguishes the Arc cancellation from the later Circle cancellation that has the year date in horizontal format. In some cases the Arc cancels were used as late as 1869. The different types are identified by Type number in the specialized catalog, but I prefer to identify them in an exhibit by the period of use in parentheses.

32) Arc Cancel – Borås, used from 1834 to 1837. The handstamp canceller is very worn with parts of the outer circle missing. It is dated January 19, 1837 which is three days before its last known use.

33) Arc Cancel – Gagnef (1834-1838) marked “In Specie Recommenderas” which indicates that not only is the letter registered but that it also contains cash. The letter was brought to the post office for inspection by the clerk that the money was enclosed and then the letter was sealed. The amount enclosed is verified in handwriting on the reverse beneath the wax seal.

34) Box Cancel – By the mid 1830s when the Arc cancellations were being widely used, a new type of dated handstamp postal marking was adopted to replace the Arc design. The first rectangular or Box cancels were introduced in 1830 in Stockholm for Free (official) Mail. The new box cancels with their bold easy-to-read town names in capital letters and the more legible dates, were gradually sent to the town and city post offices to replace the Arc type. These cancels are also found on covers bearing postage stamps from 1855 on. The Box cancels remained in use in some cases into the 1860s.

This is the Avesta box cancel used in 1848, and a picture of what the handstamp looked like. The month, day, and year were interchangeable.

35) This 1841 Piteå (pee-tow) Box cancel is one of three types. This type was used from 1840 to 1844. The cover was sent to the Swedish town of Bygdeå (bug-dow).

36) Box Cancel – In the town of Piteå the first type of the new Box cancel was delivered in February 1836. This hand-drawn cancel in the format of the Box type is dated January 4, 1836. It was likely made because the Arc cancel was either damaged, or had been returned, and the new Box type had not yet arrived.

37) Box Cancel – This type of Jönköping (yon-shipping) postmark was used from 1853 to 1855. This is late usage in 1855 showing that the box frame has worn down.

38) Free Letter Cancel – Many free letters were simply marked in manuscript at the lower left with Fr Br for Fri Brev or Free Letter. However, several special undated postmarks were used from the 1820s to the 1850s in arc format. This one from Nyköping was used from 1823 to 1853.

39) Free Letter Cancel – Stockholm had four different types of dated Box Free Letter cancels used during the 1830s to 1850s. This 1835 type was used from 1834 to 1837.

40) Postage Due handstamp markings in Sweden began in the 1850s and appear in various denominations like skilling, riksdaler, and öre. This Stockholm octagonal 4-skilling mark on a letter from Upsala to Stockholm was used from 1856 to 1858 .

41) This Postage Due marking of 18-öre on a letter from Copenhagen, Denmark to Landskrona, Sweden, was applied at the Swedish coastal town of Helsingborg, and was in use from 1858 to 1865. The right-hand oval marking denotes Steamship Mail from Denmark and was used from 1862 to 1871.

42) Postage Due mark of 63-öre (used from 1858 to 1866) on an 1860 letter from Hamburg to Stockholm. The double-ring mark is from the Royal Swedish post office in Hamburg and the letter was sent via Stettin. The boxed Stockholm arrival mark has a worn frame.

43) Mail from Abroad, Transit Mark—1834 letter from Liverpool, England to Pernau in what was then Russia, with straight line transit mark applied at Götheborg, Sweden. Reverse has Liverpool dispatch stamp.

44) Mail from Abroad, Transit Mark—1825 letter from Riga to Stockholm, manuscript routing via Åbo (also called Turku), the Finnish port on the southwest coast of Finland, and Eckerö in what is now Åland. Straight line transit stamp of Grislehamn.

45) Mail from Abroad – 1866 letter from Rio de Janeiro to Stockholm on the Royal Mail Ship *Douro*. Sent via London and Lübeck, Germany. The Stockholm TUR mark (variety with 3 mm letters) is actually a delivery mark designating the first delivery of the day.

46) Mail from Abroad, arrival marking – 1848 letter from Lübeck, Germany (internal dateline) to Stockholm, endorsed “per steamship Gauthiod,” with red boxed Stockholm arrival. This arrival marking is distinguished from the transit mark by a slightly larger box.

47) SLUTET