



Andrée's balloon expedition took place in 1896.

In 1895, a man named Richard With launched the idea of a weekly tourist ship from Hammerfest to Advent Bay in Spitsbergen. As noted in the magazine *Spitsbergen Gazette* in 1896:

*"This year the popularity of Spitsbergen as a tourist highlight will increase considerably. In addition to weekly voyages between Hammerfest and Advent Bay with the ship "Lofoten" under captain Otto Sverdrup's command, we have noticed that several small tourist ships will visit Isfjorden (Ice Fjord) and other beautiful tourist spots on the west coast during the summer."*

"Vesteraalen Dampskibsselskap" established a mail route and issued two private stamps as local postage between Advent Bay and Norway. All these cards and letters are cancelled with a rubber stamp "ADVENT BAY" and the year "1896." But another postmark was

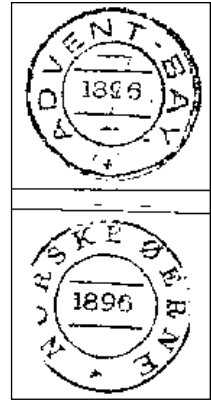


Figure 2.



Figure 3.

also introduced, "NORSKE ØERNE 1896," for the mail cancelled on board when the tourist ship was up north. (See Figure 2.) Vesteraalen Dampskibsselskap also printed envelopes with 20-øre postage.

The crude tourist "lodge" in Advent Bay housed the first unofficial post office in Spitsbergen. In 1896, the new 10- and 20-øre tourist (local) stamps issued by Vesteraalen Dampskibsselskap went on sale. The stamps were cancelled with a

rubber stamp in blue lilac color and fixed year "1896." These stamps are well known from NORSKE ØERNE and ADVENT BAY 1896.

The first letter cancelled from ADVENT BAY 1896 was sent from Spitsbergen to Laurvig (Larvik) with one 20-øre tourist stamp affixed to the envelope. It is postmarked Larvik 11.IX.96. The letter is unsurcharged. (Figure 4.)

Another letter (Figure 5) has two separate 20-øre tourist stamps and is cancelled with the rubber stamp, "ADVENT BAY 1896." Additionally, the letter has a 20-øre Norwegian posthorn

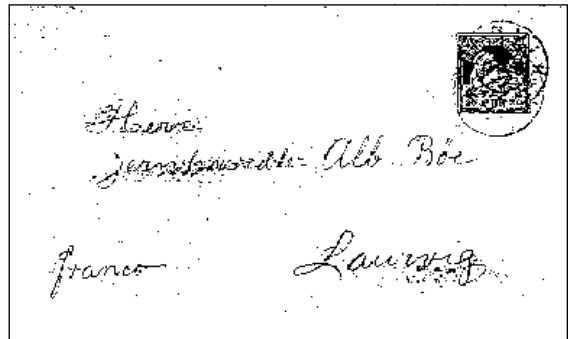


Figure 4.

stamp covering the postage to Germany appropriate for the period from July 1, 1892 to October 1, 1907. The logo in the upper left corner is the Hamburg-Amerika Linie and there is another postmark, Nordlands Postsp.E 29.VII.96. The letter arrived in Speyer August 2, 1896. In principle, mail with these tourist stamps had to be upfranked with current Norwegian stamps when going into the Norwegian mails.

Vesteraalen Dampskibsselskap's private stationery had the same motif as the ➤

20-øre tourist stamp and the text (translated): “The northernmost post office in the world.”

When the postal authorities in Norway noticed that private tourist stamps or labels were introduced, it was decided to establish a seasonal post office in Spitsbergen. In a letter March 18, 1897, the Post Office wrote:

*“In this year’s tourist-season there will be established a sub-office in Advent Bay, Spitzbergen, for the mail transported with ‘Vesteraalskes’ tourist-ship. The sub-office is named Advent Bay, Spitsbergen and will be managed by Hammerfest Post Office. The sub-postmaster will be the owner of the restaurant, Emil Ellingsen, without any salary from the Post Office. The necessary equipment can be arranged with the postmaster in Hammerfest, with reference to this letter.”*

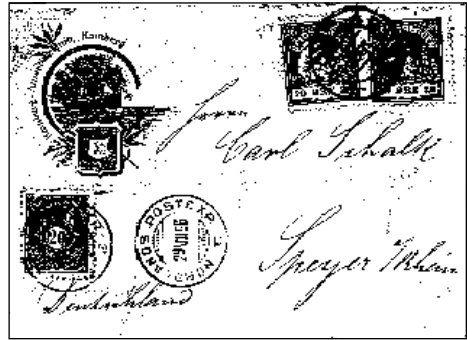


Figure 5.

The establishment of the sub-postoffice was confirmed in Circular No. 19/1897. In the summer of 1897, a postmark and a sealing press (by engraver Ivar Thronsen) were provided (Figure 6).



Figure 6.

In the magazine *Posthornet*, no. 14/1897, we can read the following:

*“There is to be noticed that this summer there have been circulating so-called Spitsbergen stamps for decorations purposes on the envelopes that have been shipped with the tourist ships from Spitsbergen. The stamps were so-called rarities, but have now been ceased.”*

In the summer of 1897, a tourist from Christiania (Oslo) visited the sub-office and purchased a post card canceled 20.VIII.97. We can imagine the possible scene:

*“When I came all the way from Christiania, I had expected that you had something special, something exciting. Well, we have a sealing press, might have been the response. Okay, let me have a mark on the post card. Maybe I also could get a seal, with ink from the inking pad. The postmaster puts a mark next to the wax seal.”*

Figure 7 is the only wax seal I have observed with ADVENT BAY and SPITSBERGEN and the postal emblems (posthorn and crown).

ADVENT BAY SPITSBERGEN postmarks were used in 1897, 1898, and 1899, when the sub-office was closed. A new post office was established again in 1906 with the name ADVENT BAY. The earliest known letter sent from Advent Bay Post Office is ►

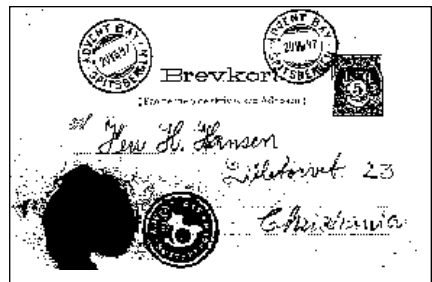


Figure 7.

postmarked 30.VII.97. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 9 shows a newspaper cover for the *Spitsbergen Gazette*, which was published weekly in July and August. The cover, prepaid with a 10-øre Norway posthorn, was postmarked in Spitsbergen 6.VIII.97 and addressed to Christiania.

### The Balloon Flight by Andrée

The Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée, together with Nils Strindberg and Knut Frankel, tried in 1896 to reach the North Pole with a balloon from Spitsbergen. A large hangar was raised on Danish Island (Danskøya), but bad weather made it necessary to postpone the flight until 1897.

Of course, there was mail for the polar flight. Figure 10 is a cover sent from

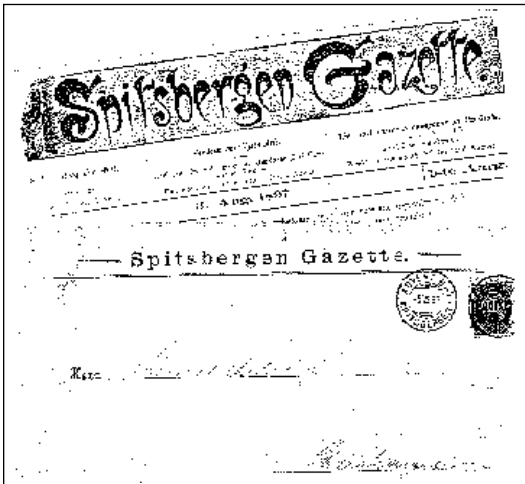


Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 8.

Stockholm 11.7.1896 to Tromsø, then to Hammerfest where it is postmarked 24.VII.96, and finally via "S/S Lofoten" to Spitsbergen.

On July 11, the balloon lifted from Spitsbergen. Later, it was determined that the wind took the balloon from one end to another and it had to land on July 14 due to icing. No one had any information from the expedition. In 1930, a Norwegian scientific expedition found the remnants of Andrée's equipment and the three men in the ice. Andrée's diary was found together with some photographic plates, which were in excellent condition.



Figure 11.

In 1973, the Swedish Postal Administration issued a 1 Kr. stamp (Sweden Facit 830) to commemorate Andrée. Engraver Czeslaw Slania used

one of the discovered photos of the downed balloon on the ice as a background (Figure 11.)

In the *Spitsbergen Gazette* of July 6, 1897, we find: ➤

*“Professor A. G. Nathorst from the paleontology museum in Stockholm will make a large expedition to Spitsbergen. Exploring King Carls Land and the close parts of East-Spitsbergen, where they hope to find the right answers on some difficult questions, regarding botanical and geological conditions. There will be participants from several earlier Arctic expeditions.”*

This expedition took part in the search for Andrée and perhaps almost found him. One letter to this expedition is known, with a 10-öre Swedish stamp on it. The letter is sent from Stockholm and postmarked with a railway cancellation 5.7.1898 and sent to Tromsø (Figure 12.) The letter is forwarded to Advent Bay, surcharged with a 20-øre Norwegian postage due, and finally postmarked with Advent Bay, Spitsbergen 17.7.98.

The Post Office Circular No. 23 of July 22, 1898 contained the following:

*“We remind you that letters to Spitsbergen (Advent Bay and The Danish Island) are regarded as foreign destinations, that means 20 øre for a single letter and 10 øre for a postcard.”*

A lot of tourist ships visited Spitsbergen. Figure 13 shows a post

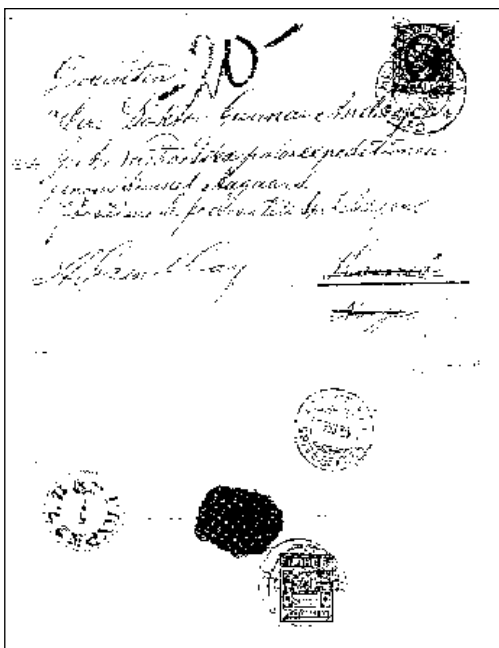


Figure 12.

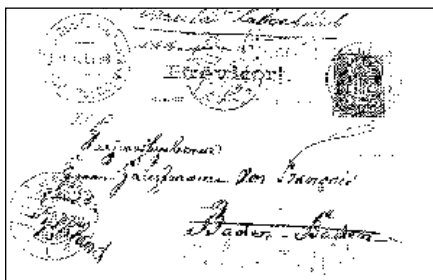


Figure 13.

card printed with 10 øre Norwegian postage and an additional ship cancel, S/S AUGUSTE VICTORIA - SPITZBERGEN 11JULI.98 and an arrival cancel at Baden-Baden. The postage of 10 øre was the UPU rate from 1877 to 1921.

Printed postcards after 1899 were sold on board the tourist ships. These Spitsbergen cards (Figure 14) have the 10-øre private tourist

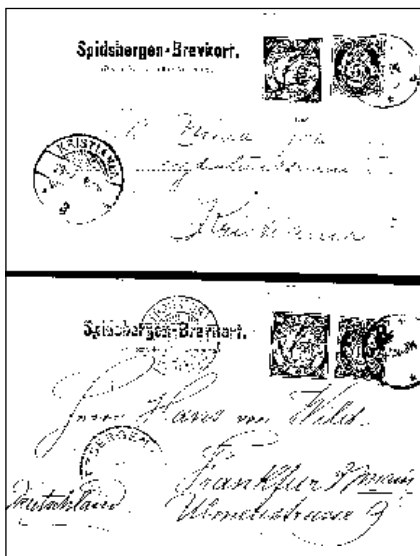


Figure 14.



Figure 15.

stamps on them. In addition there is 5 øre Norwegian ordinary stamp prepayment to Norway addresses and 10 øre to foreign countries. All of them were marked with a rubber cancellation, ADVENT BAY.

Figure 15 is a “S/S Laura” handwritten cancellation 12/7-1877. The ship was wrecked off the coast of Bjørnøya 2/10-1917. Figure 16 shows a card postmarked DIGERMULEN in Norway. These were common between 1900 and 1906.

Finally, we see a Norwegian Svalbard essay by Emil Moestue (Figure 17.) ■



The author is an expert on Spitsbergen philately. This article is adapted from his Norwegian language version published in the 1-2001 issue of *Frimerke Forum*.

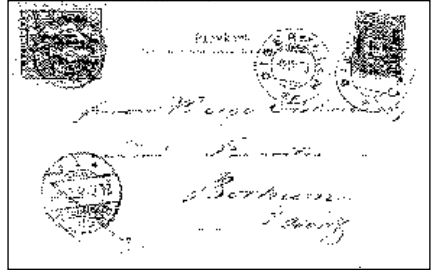


Figure 16.



Figure 17.

## Svalbard Stickers First On, Then Off

The addition of VAT to Norway’s postage on July 1 raised a perplexing question concerning the postal rates applied to mail from Svalbard, which has been declared a tax-free area. Norway Post responded by preparing labels that were to be handed out to customers in Longyearbyen for use on their outgoing mail. The intent of the stickers was to avoid mail being stopped on the Norwegian mainland and charged the 24 percent VAT.



Then, on June 29, the Norwegian government decided to raise the postage on mail from Svalbard on July 1 to the same level as in Norway, but still without the VAT. The reason given was the high cost of airmail freight from Svalbard to the mainland. Thus, the rates are the same in Svalbard and the mainland, and the special stickers no longer were necessary.

“However, since the post office in Longyearbyen had prepared all the philatelic mail with labels already, they decided to send them as normal, but with a cancellation the 2nd of July. The labels are now destroyed,” a Norway Post official informed *The Posthorn*. The Svalbard sticker was placed on 3,000 letters, 50 of which were registered mail.

Illustrated is a registered airmail cover canceled July 2 and received in Colorado 14 days later. Philatelic mail received after June 30 was to be returned without any sticker.

Those July 2 philatelic covers—registered and unregistered—are highly unusual because they reflect the only day of use of the Svalbard stickers.

— Paul Albright