

SOME NORWEGIAN LOCAL POST HISTORY

A Philatelic Tale with an Unfortunate Ending

By Frederick A. Brofos

Prologue

I suppose that philatelic treasurers are inadvertently destroyed every day around the world by the unenlightened. In addition to the regular massacre, material is lost through fire, water damage, theft, or other mishaps. It is especially unfortunate when the lost items have never been written about or illustrated in a philatelic publication.

This story shows how careful one always must be. We are, after all, only temporary custodians of our prized stamps and covers and have a duty to preserve them for future generations.

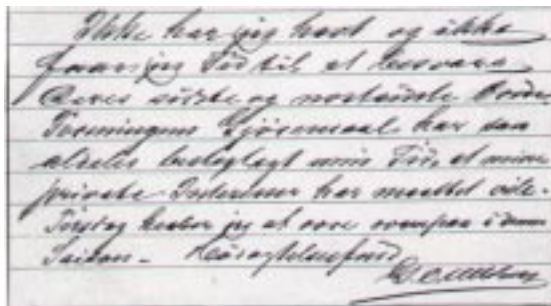
Cards to a Local Post Operator

I was looking through some old Norwegian postal stationery cards of the 5 øre emerald 1887 type. I noticed that some were addressed to a Mr. M. Børresen of Drammen, whose name seemed familiar. That these cards survived was no doubt due to his being a part-time stamp dealer in the old days. They were probably sold by him to a collector or dealer and, after passing through many hands, finally were brought to America by me.



Figure 1a

Figure 1b



Mr. Børresen ran a small hotel, as well as a café, which sold only non-alcoholic beverages (a so-called “Nøkterhedskafe”). He supplemented his stamp business by being directly involved with operating several Local Posts or “Bypost.”

The cards deal with local post history, a subject about which there is little documentation remaining. A small glimpse into the past is vividly given here with the help of this correspondence between five Norwegian Local Post owners, showing a connection between them. Two of the cards bear local postmarks and the one from Brækstad (Figure 3) is particularly interesting, showing as it does a willingness to swap his own products with the stamps produced by another local postmaster.

The translation of the card to Børresen canceled in Christiania, 19/3/91 (Figure 1a) is:

“I have not had, nor will I have, time to answer your last and next to last order. The Society’s business has completely occupied my time, so that my private interests have had to rest. Thursday I hope to be ready for this season. Respectfully, G. O. Ulleberg” (Figure 1b).

It was G. O. Ulleberg who, in 1869, started the first Local Post in Drammen, which was later taken over by I.B. Hagen. In 1885, when Ulleberg had moved down the coast to Arendal, he started a Local Post there, in association with the Herlofsen brothers. In 1886, he also edited Norway’s first stamp journal, which continued as *Nordisk Filatelistisk Tidsskrift*. In 1889, when he left town, he sold the local post to N. Herlofsen. He is also said to have been involved with local posts in Grimstad, Kragerø, and Mandal.

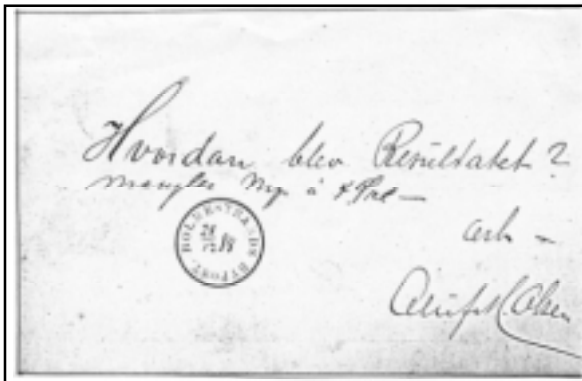


Figure 2

Figure 1b shows him in touch with Børresen (in 1891) but very busy with other affairs.

The Holmestrand Bypost was opened by M. Børresen on June 1, 1888, and was supposed to have closed by December 31, 1888. During June, only about 50 letters had been posted in the three letterboxes. Stamps, stamped envelopes and postal cards were available. Børresen supplied these, and the frame

ornaments on the card borders are identical with those on a 5 øre Børresen adhesive of Drammen. H. Sogn of Drammen may have printed both of these.

The message to Børresen from Oluf M. Olsen in Figure 2 (canceled 28/12/88) reads: "How was the result? Am Lacking 4 øre stamps."

Olsen may have been asking if Børresen was successful getting an extension for the local post. In writing of a stamp shortage so close to the closing deadline, it would seem that the post continued on a bit, at least with sales to philatelists.

John Brækstad, bookseller and stationer of Thronhjelm, purchased the Local Post started by G. F. Krogh in 1865. Brækstad reported that, in June 1888, he had 22 letterboxes that were cleared twice daily. One messenger and two assistants were employed. He claimed about 30,000 letters and bills, etc. were handled during a year. This Bypost had a record run, lasting until 1913. An important sideline was the sales to stamp collectors. The demand for the early issues was enough to have Brækstad reprint them. Indeed, he permitted all his reprints to have postal validity.

Brækstad dated his card (Figure 3) to Børresen on March 31, 1891, but

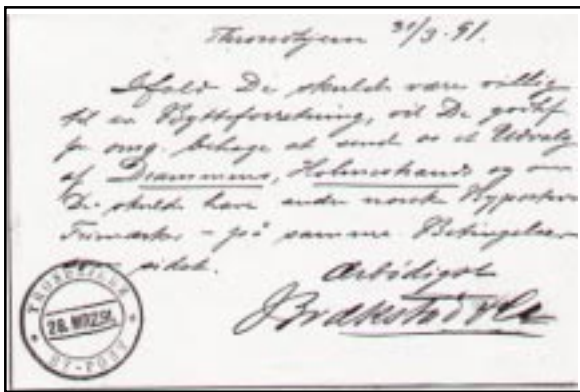


Figure 3

apparently did not update his canceler, which shows March 28. The use of the German abbreviation "MRZ" for March is a hint that the unusually fancy-lettered cancel was made in Germany.

The translated message is: "In case you would be willing to an exchange business, would you kindly be so good as to send me, by return mail, a selection of Drammen, Holmestrand and if you should have any other Norwegian Local Post stamps – on the same terms as last time. Respectfully, Brækstad & Co."

Figure 3 is interesting in that it proves that Brækstad was a stamp dealer, if not a philatelist himself.



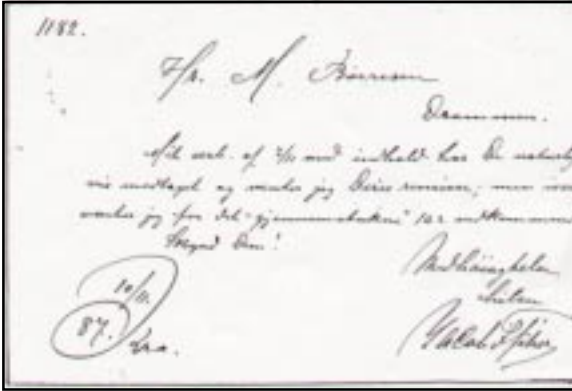


Figure 4

Although Jacob Fischer did not run any local post himself, he was a well-known stamp dealer at Skippergaden in Kristiania. He also was one of the founders of the Kristiania Filatelist Klub in 1886, now Oslo Filatelist Klubb.

Figure 4 shows some stamp dealing with Børresen, who was late in paying up. Fischer wrote Børresen on 10/11/1887, saying: “My letter of 2/11 with contents you have naturally received and I await your remittance; but I especially await the ‘rouletted’ 16 skilling. Hurry up! Respectfully, regards Jacob Fischer.”

Epilogue

These fascinating cards, which have been cherished for many years in the Brofos collection, were brought out to share with you in this article. Unfortunately, the original cards are now lost and only photocopies remain. The cards were forgotten at a copy shop and subsequent searching and inquiries were fruitless.

I am inclined to think someone assuming they were discarded picked up the cards. Perhaps they now repose in some minor stamp or postcard collection. The new owner is blissfully unaware that they are NOT just common cards and that it is the unique messages on the reverse sides that make them outstanding.

As for myself, I attempt to find some consolation in Ibsen’s famous line: “Evgit ejes kun det tabte — One only owns forever that which is lost.”

References

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