

# The History of the Hansen-Krag



**Postmarking Machine  
and its Factory**

The rapid cancelling machine must be included among the great improvements that have universally aided post offices in handling the ever-increasing volume of mail matter. Not only have they brought relief to overworked postal employees, but their advent made possible an era of "business by mail." The facts connected with the postmark industry, which plays such an important part in the history of postage stamps, are of particular interest to all serious philatelists.

Postmarking machines have been steadily improved over the years, since the first ones were invented over a hundred and thirty years ago. Early examples were tried out in England and Germany. Later, America entered the market with a host of different machines. Then, shortly after the turn of the century, the field was revolutionized by the appearance of a greatly superior machine invented and produced in Norway. Known as the "Krag," this excellent machine became popular all over the world, and has been considered "top notch" right up to the present. Now-a-days, it has possibly been surpassed in speed by an expensive new Japanese machine, but the durable Krag machines are certainly still playing and will continue to play for a long time an important role in the post offices of many countries.

Having myself, for many years, been interested in the study and collection of world-wide machine postmarks, it was indeed a red-letter day for me; when, during a ~~recent~~ trip to Norway, I was graciously permitted to visit the Krag machine factory itself. To actually see things in production and to interview the management about the company's past history and present activities, was a great thrill for me, and I hung on to their every word like an avid disciple attempting to memorize the golden utterances of a prophet. Most of this

information is unobtainable elsewhere for the simple reason that it has never before been gathered together and published.

The Krag Machine Factory, or, as it is known in Norwegian, "Krag Maskinfabrikk A/S," was founded way back in 1896. The founder was a certain Nils Aall Krag, who originally had a large grocery store. Incidentally, he had nothing to do with the at-one-time quite well-known Krag-Jørgensen rifles. Nor did he actually invent the Krag cancelling machine either. That famous invention must be entirely credited to an unknown young mechanic by the name of Gustav Adolf Hansen. It was patented in Norway under #14098. That patent, dated January 14, 1904, was followed by another one the following year, numbered 17467. Yet another one, dealing especially with the circular stamping dies, was granted in March, 1907, under #18300. Further improvements to the first patent were recorded in patent #19703, dated August, 1907. These patents were all in the name of Mr. Krag alone. It was not until 1921 that Mr. Hansen acquired patents in his own name, numbers 36720 and 37546. They both dealt with special apparatus for moving letters forward in the cancelling machines. In 1923, he was granted a further patent, #40933, dealing with separator wheels on the machines. However, as mentioned earlier, the first four and most crucial patents were registered under the name of Nils Aall Krag. Furthermore, the machine itself came to be known as the "Krag" machine rather than the "Hansen" machine. Indications are that at first it was intended to call both the factory and the machine by the joint names. However, "Krag-Hansen" soon gave way to the simpler "Krag." This all seems rather unfortunate for Mr. Hansen, who thereby appears to have missed out on most of the fame and recognition that his mechanical genius so well justified. Never-the-

less, one must also bear in mind that the machine did not become world-famous over night. Without the financial backing of someone like Nils Krag, the untried invention might not have been successfully developed for commercial use and become an international leader in its field. As it was, Krag gambled his money on the new discovery and it turned out to be a very profitable investment for him.

Meanwhile, Gustav Hansen was employed as Works Manager at the Krag factory, a position he held for about 20 years. This collaboration lasted until a final disagreement between Messrs. Hansen and Krag, as to just who should be running things, forced a parting of the ways. Mr. Hansen was bought out for a substantial sum of money (thought to be Kr. 10,000). Thereafter, he went into a completely different field of endeavor. This time he produced an invention to do with asphalt which, however, did not pan out. Eventually, he wound up as an ordinary worker at Akers Mekaniske Verksted, a large machine shop near the docks in Oslo. He has probably passed away by now. At all events, Mr. Krag died in the 1930's and ownership of the share capital of his company passed to his two daughters, Kari and Sigrid, and his son-in-law, a Mr. Helmer.

In 1927, a new and energetic manager by the name of Harald Christoffersen joined the Krag firm. That seems like a long time ago, now, and he recollects in those days even Gustav Hansen's brother and two sons were still working there. When Mr. Christoffersen first arrived, however, he felt things were in a bit of disorder. For instance, he recalls that the supply room had 80 parts which did not fit anything. But worse, he noticed an over-indulgence with intoxicating liquors by a majority of the employees. Now, it is a well-known fact that a continual large consumption of alcoholic beverages by workers on,

or off, the job does not create an atmosphere for successful industrial productivity. Actually, any useful creativeness generally drops to zero level. Unfortunately, in Scandinavia, excessive drinking tends to bring out the wild Viking spirit of their ancestors. This situation is recognized by the law which, in punishing drunken drivers, for example, is considerably stricter than in the US. Anyway, Mr. Christoffersen soon decided that drastic action had to be taken to bring things back to order. He therefore instituted a thorough house-cleaning. After the dismissals and resignations of the "Great Alcoholic Purge" were concluded and the dust had settled, it was found that only 6 men remained on the rolls! From then on, a new page was turned over, and a lot of new people were hired. With his bright new team and the small core of old-timers, Mr. Christoffersen succeeded in building up the company carefully and well during the following years.

Postmarking machines were, of course, the main business, and were exported all over the world. Christoffersen recalls that the first machine he sent off went to Kuala Lumpur in Malaya. Orders for 30 to 40 machines at a time often came in from abroad. Particularly good business was done with South Africa and Finland, he remembers. Orders had also been received from the Russian post office before the war, but although Christoffersen tried to start up business with them again, he was unsuccessful. England has also been among Krag's best customers and has used at least 36 single-impression, and about 300 multiple-impression postmarking machines over the years, with a number still in operation. The Swedes used Krag machines since 1905, but from 1912 on, they have largely been using the product of their own inventors.

Krag machines were tried out in America and Canada a long time ago, but they did not catch on there, too much local competition perhaps. Also, mult-

iple impression machines have never been popular in North America. The trials took place in Washington, D.C. and Toronto in 1907 and specimens therefrom are rare collector's items today. However, another place that Krag did very well in, was Denmark. Of course, in Norway they have always had a virtual monopoly on the production of postmarking machines.

This may be as good a spot as any to explain why I generally prefer to use the description "postmarking machines" rather than "cancelling machines." The former term is more encompassing, in that it includes, besides the machines that cancel stamps, also those that do not cancel anything but instead back-stamp receiving and transit marks or imprint "postage paid" indicia.

Besides the large orders for postal equipment, it is of interest to note that the Krag factory also at one time had a large production of meat grinders, fast choppers and sausage machines. This occurred during the years 1939 and into the 50's, but has since ceased altogether.

I was pleased to hear that Krag's had also done some work for another large company in the vicinity, Standard Telefon og Kabelfabrik A/S, the ITT subsidiary which my father, Einar A. Brofos, was the first managing director of, back in the 1930's.

Originally, a large part of the actual dies of the postmarks were engraved by Finn Hansen, a nephew of Gustav A. Hansen. Later, two independent engravers, Rui and Holth, engraved all the handstamps in competition with each other. Philatelists may also recall the name of H. Rui as a designer and engraver of a number of Norwegian postage stamps, specifically the 1910 krone values, the Svalbard and 2nd Lion issues, as well as the 1st airmail stamp. This part of his work, however, had no connection with the Krag firm. Mr.

Holth and his associates engraved all the machine postmarks from 1940 until 1981. Lorentz Holth himself died ~~many years ago~~, but the firm was continued by the employees, consisting of 5 or 6 engravers.

It is not known exactly what activities took place during the Krag company's early years, but in 1903 they were working on franking meters. At first, the firm had premises in Storgaten 26, Oslo. Later they moved to another street, Vognmannsgaten, and, just after the first World War, to Urtegaten. In 1939, they moved again, to Østerdalsgaten 17, in a small industrial suburb of Oslo near the electric railroad station of Ensjø. Here they rented the third floor and part of the second floor of a long yellow three-story factory building in which there were several other companies. They remained there until the autumn of 1980, when they finally moved into greatly expanded quarters in their own new building. The fine modern factory ~~WAS LOCATED~~ at Akerlia, near Grorud station, on the outskirts of Oslo.

So much for the different localities that the Krag firm has been at over the years. Mention must be made, however, of a subdivision of the company that was in operation for a number of years in another town altogether. Some time in the 1950's, Krag's purchased a small tool factory called "Horten Verktøifabrik." It was located to the South West of Oslo in the small town of Horten alongside the Oslofjord. Here various equipment for the Norwegian Post Office was manufactured, notably mail boxes and rental lock-box complexes for post offices. From about 1962, up to 1970, cancelling machines were also produced there, but the actual stamping dies were made in Oslo. Eventually, it was found to be impractical, if not unprofitable, to have two widely separated manufacturing points. So as not to put out the workers at Horten by closing down, the Krag company kindly sold them the business there in 1970. Under

the name of Horten Stål, ie., Horten Steel, the new and independent firm has continued to produce mail-boxes for the Post Office, but no more cancelling machines. The workers were unable to afford purchase of the building, so that is for the time being still under rental from Krag. Other than that, there is no connection now between the two companies.

As briefly mentioned before, the Krag company began producing franking meter machines in 1903. They were one of the world's first postal meters brought into official use. The inventor was one Karl Uchermann, also known for his animal paintings. The machines were constructed at Krag's, while the attractively designed stamp dies were supplied by the Norwegian Postal Administration. The machines were used by various firms and sub-post offices in Christiania, the present Oslo, up until sometime in 1905. Later, of course, a number of different models of Krag meters have been introduced right up to recent times.

The major stockholder of Krag's today, is a corporation named Frankering A/S, which is especially interested in the marketing of meter machines. The Krag meter machine, aside from its general efficiency and other superior qualities, is the only one in which mail goes through vertically rather than horizontally; therefore, it alone is able to print ads on the mail in a different color from the frank. The horizontal machines of other makes are forced to print both the advertisement or slogan and the frank in the same color. Franking meter machines are the main product of Krag's today. They are not only used to frank mail, but also on railroad freight bills and to pay revenue duties. Besides Norway, the most important customer countries are, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland. None are sold to England or America, however.

An excellent new letter-opening machine from Krag's was marketed in May 1980, and is selling well. Engineer Finn Jacobsen showed me it in operation and I was very favorably impressed with its efficiency and speed. A steady order of 50 machines a month just to one firm has been received.

I had a very interesting conversation with Engineer Stokke of Krag's, a worthy successor to Gustav A. Hansen, whose picture hung on the office wall. Mr. Stokke is the wizard who, in 1971, designed their latest cancelling machine, the Krag type 30.

In 1973, Pitney Bowes Company bought the production rights for Krag 30 and began to market it under the name Pitney Bowes 3910. At the same time, Krag promised to withdraw from the production of postmarking machines for a 7-year period and became the importer of Pitney Bowes postmarking machines to Norway. Thus, the rather unusual situation exists of Norwegian Krag machines being made under license by Pitney Bowes in England and then imported by Krag and sold to the Norwegian post office. But such are the intricacies of big business. The cheapest machine costs today approximately \$3000. In 1980, there were about 450 Krag postmarking machines in use in Norway.

Mr. Stokke told me, after we had been briefly interrupted, that he gets telephone calls from postmasters all around Norway when they need repairs to their cancelling machines. "I suppose they are always in a hurry," I said. "Yes," he replied, "they would usually like the work done and ready before they hang up!"

During a period of years no new cancelling machines have been made at Krag's except a prototype called 18a. That has been on trial experimentally at the Oslo main post office and at Gjøvik in central Norway. The Post Office will probably place orders for further machines later on. The postmarks,

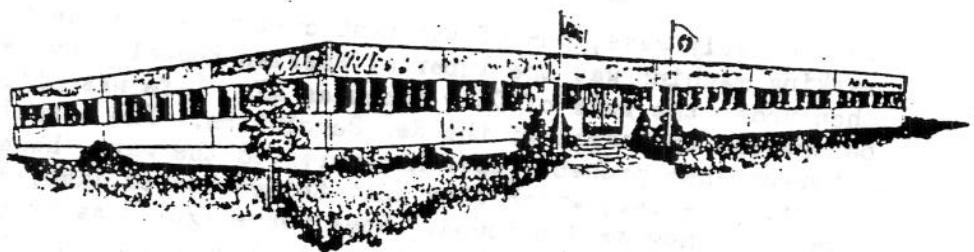
-361-  
however, are said to look just like those of type 30.

A new table-type cancelling machine is being considered for manufacture by Krag's in The near future. A contract with the Norwegian Post Office has been under study and only awaits signature.

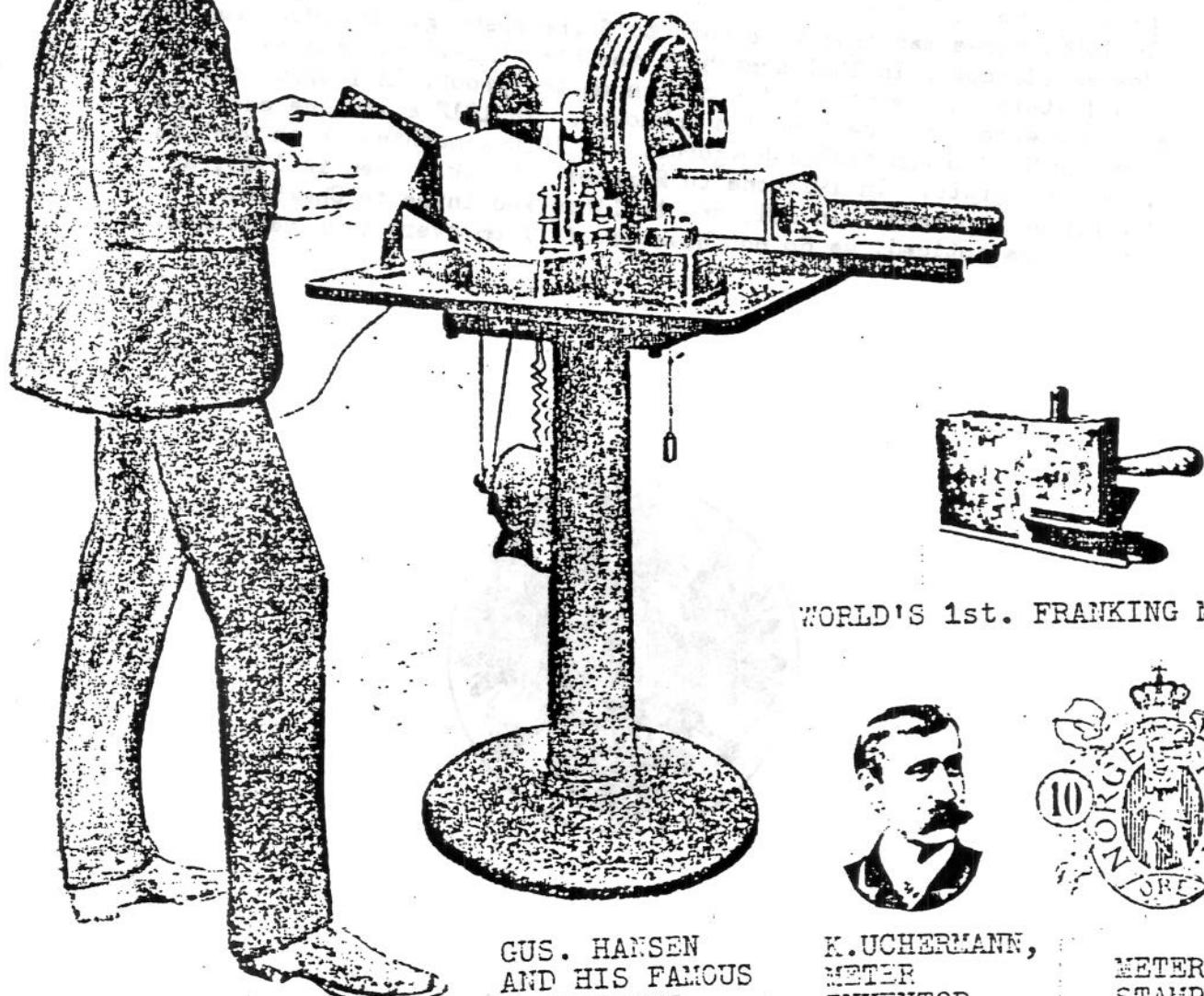
All-in-all, anyone who takes pride in Norway and the accomplishments of that country has every reason to be very proud of the achievements of the Krag Machine Factory, firstly for having introduced, in 1903, <sup>one of</sup> the world's first franking meter machines and then, a year later, the renowned Krag postmarking machine. The latter, in steadily improved versions, has been used since then in more than 60 countries all around the world.

This article would not have been possible for me to write without the kind co-operation of Mr. Nils P. Hellum, director of Frankering A/S, and at the Krag factory, Mr. Finn R. Jacobsen, office manager, Mr. Harald Stokke, works manager, and Mr. Harald Christoffersen, former works manager. I would like to thank them all again for their interest in my project, for their friendly help in showing me things of interest at the factory and for patiently answering innumerable questions. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Krag Machine Factory, in their new location, a bright new future of increasing prosperity and success.





THE NEW KRAG FACTORY AND HEADQUARTERS

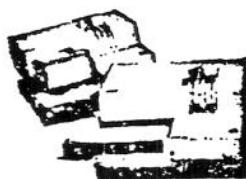


GUS. HANSEN  
AND HIS FAMOUS  
CANCELLING  
MACHINE

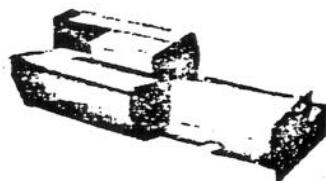
K. UCHERMANN,  
METER  
INVENTOR

METER  
STAMP,  
1903

MODERN  
KRAG  
METERS



LATEST  
KRAG  
LETTER-  
OPENER



Norwegian Postmarking Machines in Czarist Russia

In the early days, one of the best customers for the Hansen-Krag postmarking machine was the Imperial Russian Postal Service. Russia was then under the rule of Czar Nicholas II. Life was different then, before the onslaught of the Red Revolution. The actual machines made in Norway then probably have not survived the war. However, certain die proofs exist, which show what things looked like, since complete covers are now seldom found. Some years ago, I saved them when they were unappreciated and about to be thrown out! The dates are mostly haphazard settings, so do not be mislead. The machines without cancellation lines were used for backstamping/receiving marks. Krag's supplied various kinds of postmarking machines: hand-cranked, by foot-pedal or motor-driven.

In 1906, three machines were sent to St.Petersburg. In 1907, two to Moskva (Moscow). In 1911 a machine for Kiev (Kiev) was redone to make the letters in the name thicker than on the proof. In 1907/08 six machines were sent (destination unknown). In 1912 a machine each was sent to Grodno and Nishni-Novgorod. In 1910 a machine each went to Riga and Saratov. In 1912 one to ~~Saransk~~ Irkutsk. Then in 1913, six to unknown places. In 1915 one to Libau and three to Charkow. As will be noticed, we do not have proofs from every town mentioned.



KRAG MACHINES USED IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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St. Petersburg  
1st. expedition  
1906?



St. Petersburg  
City Post  
1912?



Petrograd  
6th. exp.  
1915?



Moskva  
Exped.  
City Post  
1907?



Moskva  
5 exp.  
1913?



Moskva  
34  
1915?



Bialostock  
1915?



364-

Ekaterinburg

E

1918?



Kiev

a

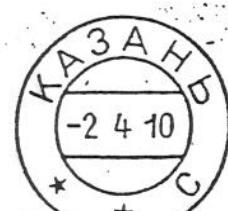
1908?



Kazan

c

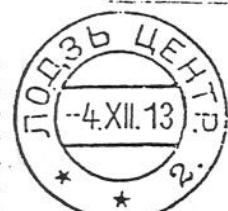
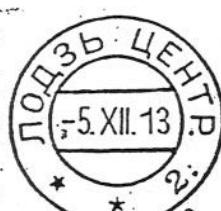
1914?



Lodz

center.  
2

1915?



Mitawa  
(Mitau)

1915



Odessa

a

1917

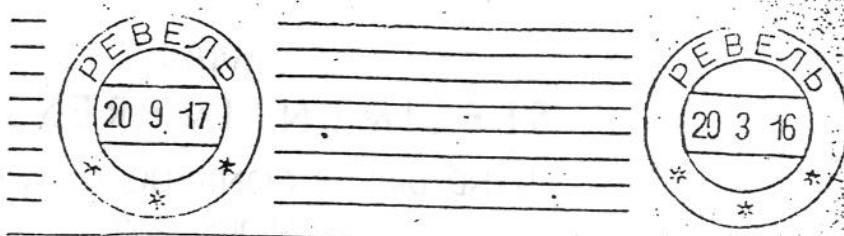


Perm  
у

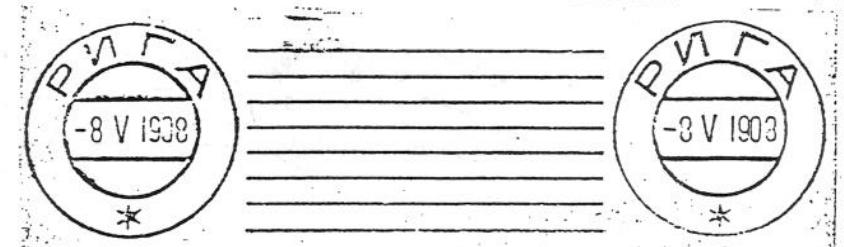
1912



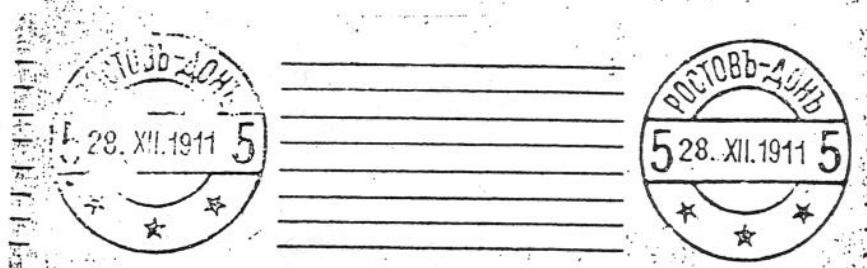
Rerel  
(Rerel)  
2 march.  
1912, 15



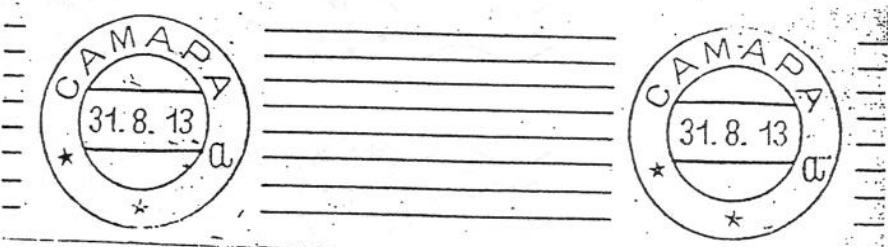
Riga  
1908?



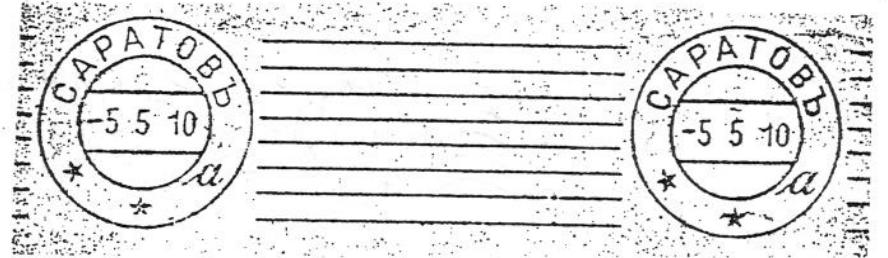
Rostov-  
Don  
5  
1911



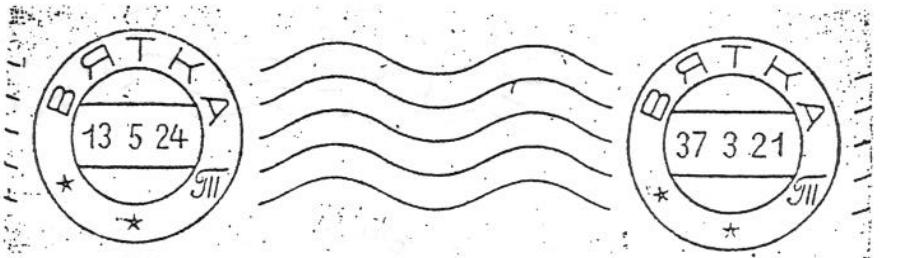
Samara  
a  
1913



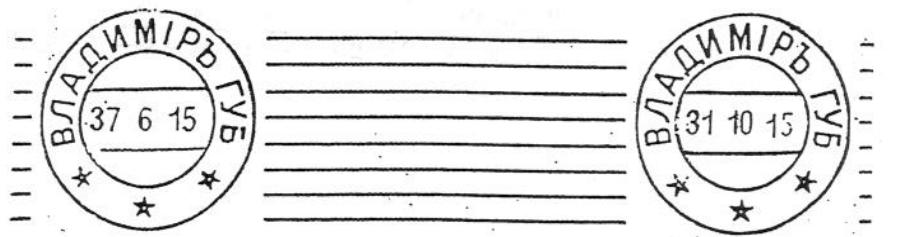
Saratov  
a  
1910?



Viatka  
JII  
1921?



Vladimir  
gov.  
1915?



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KRAG  
SPECIMEN IMPRESSIONS  
HAND DRIVEN CONTINUOUS IMPRESSION  
MODEL XVI



Bergen line  
Norway  
Night  
train I



Bergen line  
Night  
train II



Norway



Greek RPO  
Piraeus-  
Nessalosi



Greek RPO  
Nesselos-  
Piraeus



Norway



France  
Visit City of  
Carcassonne

KRAG

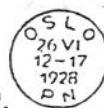
MOTOR DRIVEN SINGLE IMPRESSION  
MODEL XIV



FRANCAREA ESTE  
OBLIGATORIE.  
APLICATI TIMBRELE  
IN COLT SUS  
LA DREAPTA

Romania

MODEL XV



SKRIV FULLSTENDIG AD:  
OG AVSENDERE'S NA

Norw.



Australia



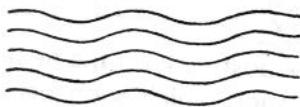
Turkey



Denmark



Engl.



England



REP. ARGENTI  
INVIERTE 81 MILLO  
DE PESOS ORO POR  
EN INSTRUCCION RU

Argentina



France



Engl.



England



Engl.



Belgium



COME TO BERMU  
THE ISLES OF RE

Bermuda

+370  
THE "KRAM" POSTMARKING MACHINES

by Frederick A. Brofos



NORGE



Til *Maurice B. Samuels*

EDITOR'S NOTE

This article first appeared in *The Post Horn*, July 1958. It was updated to include the new Washington, D.C. Krag type that was reported in the Nov. 1976 issue of *Machine Cancel Forum*.

Among the great improvements that have aided the post offices in handling the ever increasing volume of mail matter is the rapid cancelling machine. Not only have they brought relief to overworked postal employees, but their advent made possible an era of "business by mail." The facts connected with the postmark industry, which plays such an important part in the history of the postage stamp, should be of particular interest to philatelists.

Postmarking machines have been steadily improved over the years since the first one was invented over a hundred years ago by Pearson Hill, son of Sir Rowland Hill of Penny Postage fame. The experimental machine was brought into use on September 17, 1857 at the London Post Office. However, as ordinary hand stamping turned out to be faster, the machine was withdrawn the following year. After this "fiasco" Hill made several improved versions, and other inventors both in England and abroad produced many more or less successful types of postmarking machines.

The first rapid cancelling machine used in the United States was invented by the Leavitt brothers, and appeared in March 1875 in Boston, Mass. It was used principally on postcards.

Turning to our beloved Scandinavia, we find that the first stamp cancelling machine in that area was invented and used in Norway in the early 1900's. The machine was produced after considerable experimentation by a young Norwegian mechanic named Gustav Hansen. It could be run by both hand power or electric power, and postmarked approximately

600 pieces of mail a minute. The invention was given the name of KRAM, after the machine factory of Nils A. Krag in Kristiania, the firm which manufactured and exported the machines. The earliest machine showed a single impression, with a date circle at the left followed by the country name "NORGE" in large letters at the right. In the course of extensive postmark searching I have only seen two examples from this machine, one dated August 26, 1903, and the other dated November 12, 1903.



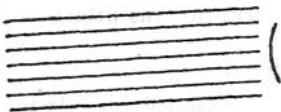
The postmark on the next machine made a multiple impression which soon became characteristic of the Krag machines. I have examples dated from October 17, 1904, to September 5, 1906. There are three hollow 5-pointed stars at the bottom of the date circle. Another multiple impression machine, without the cancelling lines between the date circles, was



used for backstamping letters in the Arrival Section of the Kristiania Post Office. The horizontal bars parallel with the date very soon wore out, and were not replaced. Seen with dates from November 13, 1904 to June 26, 1911 and with TUR (Trip) 1, 2, 3, and 5. Next comes a machine with a hollow 6-pointed star and two black 5-pointed stars at the bottom of the date circle. This I have seen with dates March 4, 1905 to June 9, 1905. A machine with one hollow 5-pointed star at the bottom and the month in Arabic figures instead of the usual Roman figures, I have noticed with dates from June 19, 1905 to

July 21, 1906. There was also a special machine postmark for registered mail, with "NORGE" and a large "R" in between the cancelling lines. This I have seen dated July 14, 1905. Later on this machine was apparently used in the Parcel Post Section, with the "NORGE" and "R" cut out of the die. Seen dated from January 17, 1913 to December 5, 1914. After these early varieties there followed during the next few years a large number of different machines which space unfortunately does not permit me to list for you at the present time.

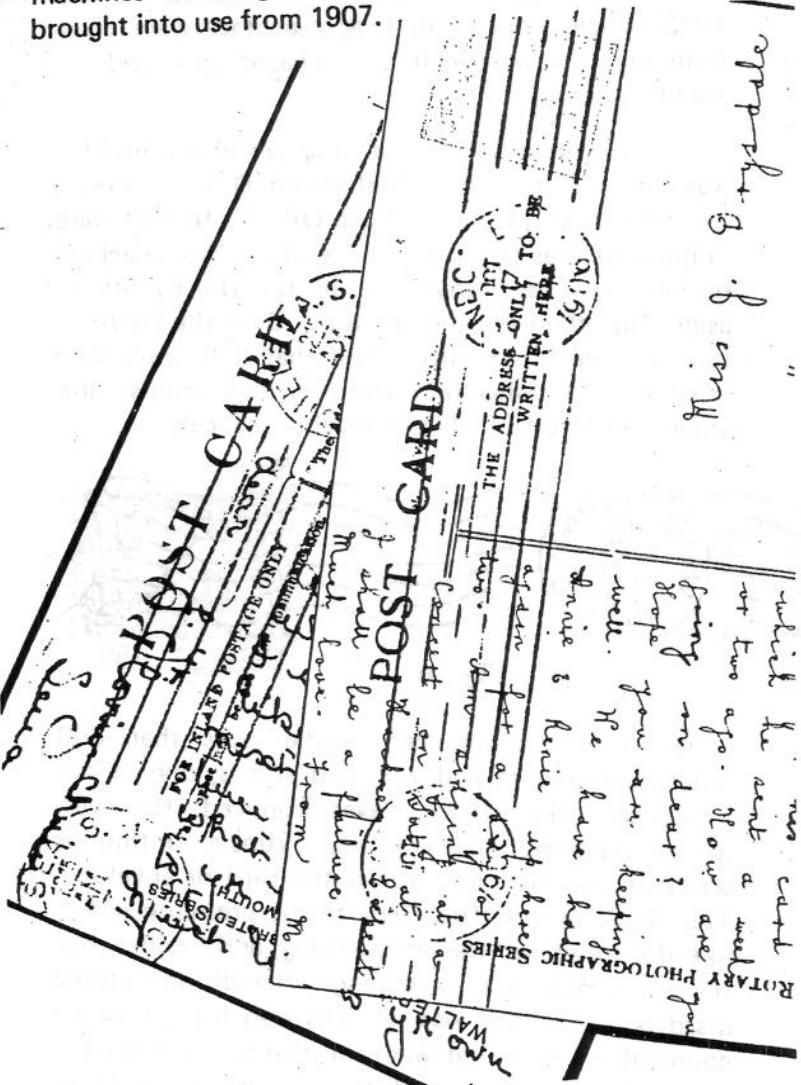
The mechanism of the early Krag machine has been described by the editor E. G. Lanne, who saw them in operation at Kristiania in October 1904, as follows: "After letters or cards have been placed upright in a duct, they are moved by a sliding block (or by hand) towards the lower edge of the duct. There they are caught hold of, one by one, by rubber-coated cylinders that lead them between two cylinders rotating very close to each other. On one of these the postmarks are engraved. The postmark cylinder received color from an inking cylinder located behind it. From the postmark cylinder the mail was led through a series of wheels, arranged in a spiral pattern, which brought it to a horizontal duct where a counter-weight held them upright."



Following successful operation of their machines in Kristiania by the Norwegian Post Office, the Krag firm wrote to the Swedish Postal Administration in November 1904, offering to lend them a machine on trial. The offer was accepted by the Swedish Postal authorities, and from January 1905 two Krag machines, one electrical, the other hand-operated, were used to cancel stamps on letters and postcards at the Outgoing Mail section of the Stockholm Central Post Office. A third machine, which was probably also a Krag, was brought into use on March 22, 1905 at the Receiving section of the Stockholm Central Post Office and used for postmarking incoming letters on the back. The electrically operated machine which had been on trial at the Outgoing section of the Stockholm Central Post Office was purchased by the Swedish Postal authorities in April 1905 for a price of 2,500 kroner. That machine is apparently the one on view in the Swedish Postal Museum today, which is of the same construction as those seen by Lanne in Kristiania in 1904. The later Krag machines, from 1906 on, present quite a different appearance, as early in that year they had been improved upon and could now postmark up to 1000 letters a minute.

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The manufacturing rights for Sweden for Krag machines was acquired in 1905 by the Swedish company A. B. Ofversommaren of Gothenburg, but by September 1909 the manufacturing rights, or at least the sales rights, for the Krag machines were owned by A. B. Globe, another Gothenburg firm. By that time, Krag cancelling machines were used by Post Offices in many parts of the world. Sweden had eight machines, of which six were in Stockholm and one each in Malmo and Gothenburg. Denmark had eleven machines and Norway nineteen. In Germany, machines of Krag design were manufactured and brought into use from 1907.



The Krag postmarking machine was first tried out in England in May 1905 at the West Central District Office in London. It was a continuous impression machine—the first of this kind to be used in England. Although it was slower in use than the American "Columbia" machines, it proved to have certain advantages over them. In January 1906 a faster Krag machine was given a trial at the East Central Post Office in London, and a number of these Krag machines were purchased by the British Post Office in 1907 and were used at Chelsea, London F. S. (Foreign Section), as well as in the London E. C. Office, until about 1910. Krag machines came into

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general use in London and the provinces during the later part of 1908. The straight bars in the impression of the Krag cancellations were gradually changed from the end of 1911 to wavy lines and were reduced to five in number. In 1917, when the London postal districts were subdivided, three offices had their sub-district numbers added in the middle of the bars (E. 17, S.W. 7, and S.W. 10). The continuous impression Krag machines have gradually been replaced by "Universal" and other types of machines, but may still be found used by certain smaller offices. Around 1923, single impression Krag machines were given trials and a few machines purchased and used for about a decade.

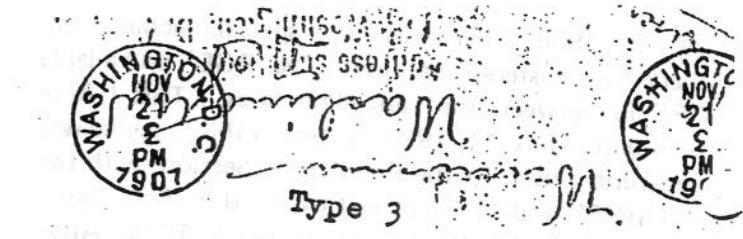
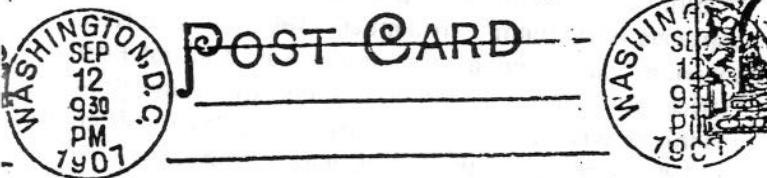
In the United States, the Krag cancelling machine was tried out in 1907 at Washington, D. C. However, it seems that the U. S. Post Office officials were unimpressed, as there is no trace of the Krag machine having been used anywhere in the United States, aside from the experimental unit. Even the Washington machine was so little used that it is practically unknown to collectors, and its impressions rank among the rarest of all U. S. machine cancels.



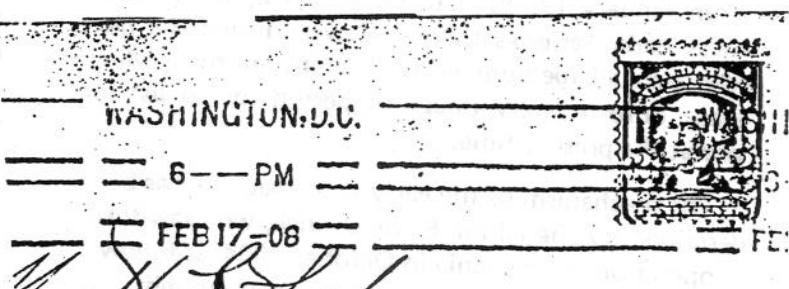
Type 1

The Krag machine can handle more than 800 letters per minute and was, and still is, one of the fastest cancelling machines ever produced. However, it is a "repeater," that is to say it runs a continuous series of imprints right across the card or envelope. The U. S. Post Office Department probably didn't like this excessive needless marking, and besides this, there was much back smudging. In addition to these disadvantages there was no provision for a running count of the mail that was cancelled by the machine. During the attempts to sell the machine to the U. S. Post Office Department several impression-designs were used. The four different types are shown here-with.

Type 2



Type 3



Type 4

Well, this is what I have been able to gather together about the "Krag," the machine invented by the young Norwegian mechanic G. A. Hansen, which rapidly gained recognition and became a leader in its field.

Machines of Krag design are still in use in several countries abroad, I understand, and I am looking further into the matter. At the same time, I would appreciate hearing from any readers with additional information on this interesting subject.

#### Bibliography:

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- "Handbook over Svenska Post-och Makuleringsstamplar 1685-1951," p. 31, 160.
- "Early Machine Cancellations 1857-1893," by Colonel Guy R. Crouch.
- "A History of the Postmarking of Mail in Great Britain 1661-1939," by H. N. Soper.
- "The Krag Machine," XX Killers, July 1949, p. 12; April 1950, p. 16.
- "The Krag Cancelling Machine, Machine Cancel Forum, Nov. 1976."

The Krag machine factory also manufactured the world's first franking meter machines, the invention of Karl Uchermann. They were in use between June 15, 1903 and January 2, 1905. Seven machines were used by four Kristiania Post Offices (H, V, G and O), and others were used by the firms Nils A. Krag, P. A. Larsen (3 machines) and Brage Life Insurance Co.

#### ADDENDA

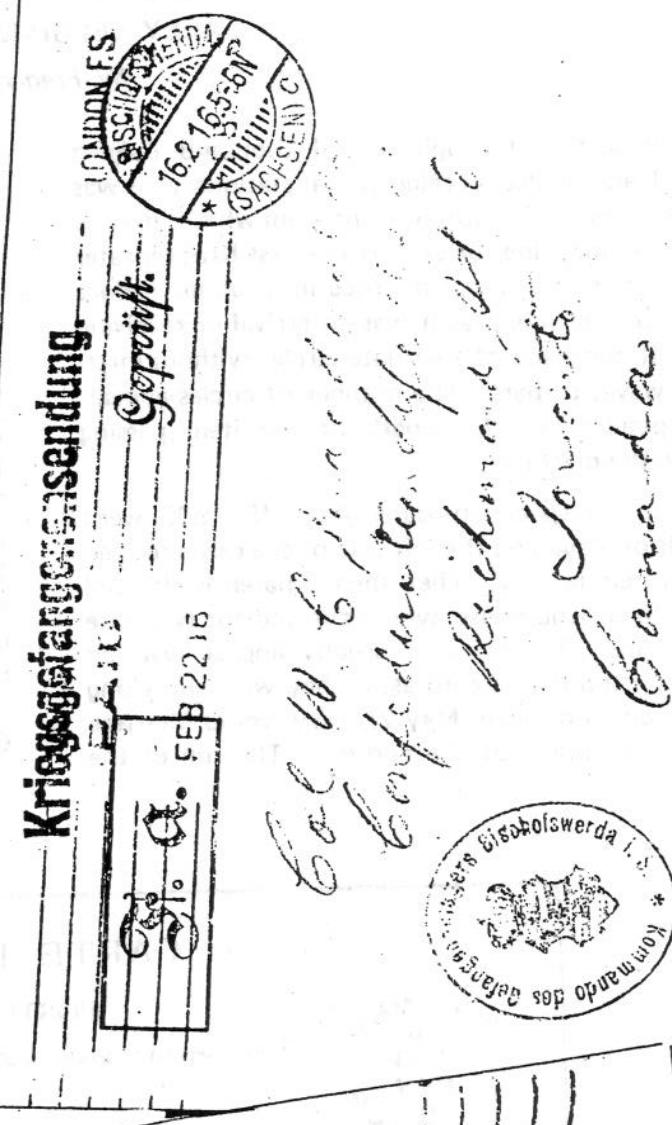
Since writing the Krag article in 1958, new information has come to light necessitating a couple of corrections:

The illustrated single impression machine with

"NORGE" in the killer is a variety of which in 25 years I have only seen two copies, both on postal cards. One, dated 26 Sept. 1903, I donated in a weak moment to the Norwegian Postal Museum, Oslo, as they had no example. The other (shown here) which I retained is probably the end of the trial of this the first cancelling machine used in Norway. It is, however, not a Krag, as I first thought, but a Canadian Bickerdyke made at Deutsche Waffen- und Munitionsfabriken of Berlin and Karlsruhe, Germany. (See pg. 103 of Flag Cancel Encyclopedia 1976) A Bickerdyke from this German factory was offered at a price of 2,750 Marks to the Swedish Postal Administration in August 1903 and a couple months later they were offered the loan of a trial machine. However, the Swedish P.O. replied on Nov. 25, 1903 that they did not want any tests of the Bickerdyke machine.

Frederick Langford wrote me that he was of the opinion that the prototype model and maybe the first few production machines of the Krags were made in Germany by the firm of Schuchardt & Schutte of Berlin and Cologne. This was probably because there were better machine shops and factories in Germany around 1904 than anywhere else in Europe. However, it would seem that manufacturing in Oslo was started by the Krag people as soon as possible.

I briefly mention the Leavitt machine, which is of course not the very first U. S. machine and although mainly found on postal cards does occur on envelopes.



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## EARLY BELGIAN KRAG MACHINE

by Frederick Brofos

While sorting through several thousand Belgian cards (I also collect foreign postal stationery), I was pleased to find a few impressions from what I imagine is the first machine, or at least the first Krag repeater machine, used by the post office in Belgium. It does not cancel the stamp as it was an arrival or receiving mark. It consisted of two date circles without intervening waves or bars. The number of circles appearing depended on the length of the item passing through the machine.

My earliest specimen, dated April 18, 1906, went through on edge and the left side of the card received one date circle only. They then apparently decided to run them lengthwise, which allowed for two date impressions. These marks usually appear inverted across the top of the card as, if they were run along the bottom (one seen, May 2), they would interfere with the legibility of the address. The rim of the

circle on even my first specimen is rather broken up, which seems to me to indicate use from April 1 or earlier. In time this rim deteriorates more and on my last example, dated August 6, 1906, it has largely disappeared. Also, parts of the lettering of BRUXELLES and ARRIVEE are broken or missing altogether. This sad state of affairs undoubtedly led to the withdrawal of this machine soon thereafter. As far as I know, this marks the end of the Krag tests in Belgium. International machines seem to have taken over the job of date stamping the arrival of mail. Looking neat and clear, my earliest is dated 23/11/06. It is, of course, a single impression machine, with time and date in three lines within a double circle inscribed BRUXELLES/ARRIVEE. Similar duty Internationals were later introduced (seen 1909-10) at LIEGE, ANVERS (Antwerp) and GAND (Gent).



THE POSTHORN

August 1999

## THE CUMMINS MACHINE IN SWEDEN

By Frederick A. Brofos

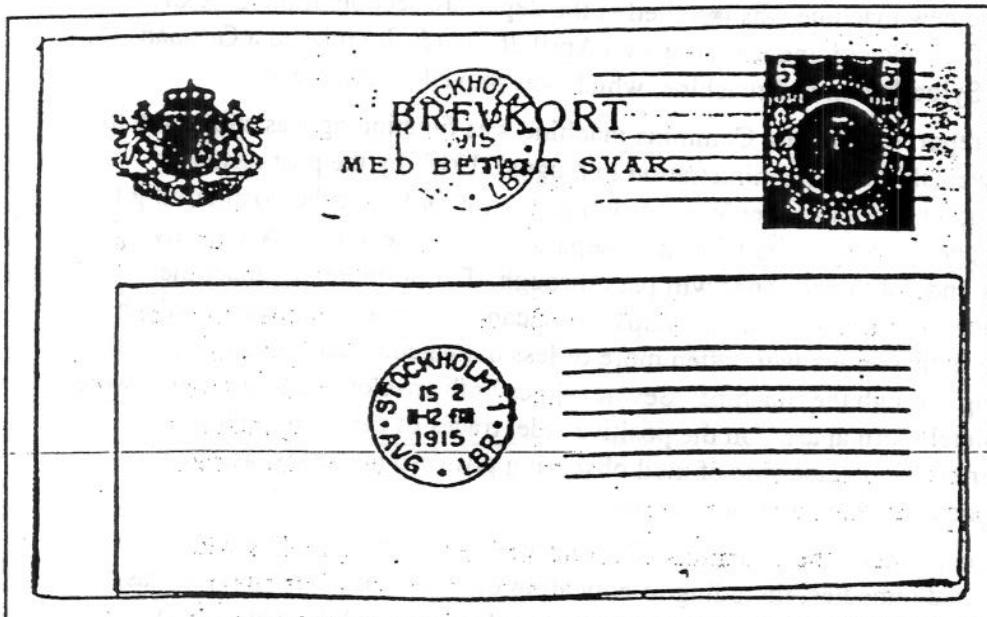


Figure 1. A Cummins Machine Cancel From Stockholm Post Office 1

A cancelling machine from America was used in Sweden for brief periods during the years 1915, 1916, and early 1917. It was manufactured by the B. F. Cummins Co. of Chicago, Ill., formerly called the Time Marking Machine Co. They had already produced a number of machines used by the U. S. post offices.

Although the Postal Services of Denmark and Norway had been approached as early as 1907, no orders had been received. No doubt because they were already supplied and satisfied with the Norwegian Krag or German S&P machines.

The Cummins machine was unusual in that it had a clock-controlled time-die, which gave the exact time on the postmark impression stamped on the mail. Figure 1 shows a Stockholm 1 Post Office Cummins machine cancel. As this was automatic, it was not necessary to stop the machine to change the time, as occurred with other machine makes.

In early February 1914, an improved machine shown in Figure 2, called Cummins Type No. 7, was offered to the Swedish Postal Administration. This electrically-run machine was quite different in appearance and performance than the 1907 machine. The company claimed that at least 600 pieces of short-sized mail could be cancelled per minute. The capacity with larger-sized envelopes was reduced to 400-450 pieces per minute. Obviously, the machine

worked best with postal or view cards and small-size thin letters. It was offered at \$340 freight-paid to Stockholm. Repeat orders within 6 months gave a 5% discount on 5 machines and 7-1/2% for 10 machines. However, the Swedes cautiously ordered only one machine.

The new machine was installed at the departure section of the Stockholm 1 post office and commenced usage on April 26, 1915. It replaced a German-made Sylbe & Pondorf machine, which was moved to Östersund.

A report on how the Cummins machine was functioning was submitted to the Swedish Postal Administration in August, 1915, by the postmaster at Stockholm 1. Postmaster Wiesner writes that, in order for the postmarking to run properly, the postcards must be separated from the letters. Also, only thin letters and not thicker ones will pass through. Furthermore, the machine produces a remarkable lot of "skips" or uncancelled mail. Another disadvantage was that letters were often more or less damaged on the right edge when passing through the machine. Several times both envelopes and postcards were completely torn apart. On the positive side, traces of cancelling ink did not appear on the reverse side of mail obscuring postcard messages, as often happened with the German machine.

Complaints to the Cummins Co. produced several long replies with suggested remedies, including re-educating the operators. This advice was only partly helpful, so eventually the unsatisfactory machine was quietly removed from use in April, 1917. It is now in the possession of the Swedish Postal Museum, where I saw it.

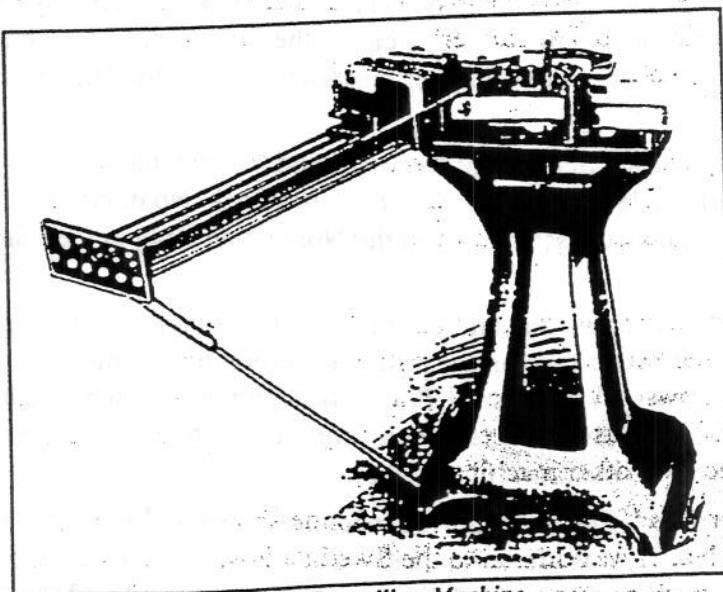


Figure 2. The Cummins Cancelling Machine.

## A LITTLE ABOUT THE HOSTER MACHINE

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by Frederick A. Brofos

How fascinating it would be to see some of the old-time postmarking machines in operation! Other than dreaming oneself back into history, about the closest one can usually come to that ideal is to examine the old patent papers with their accompanying pictures.

I have just looked over British patent no. 270, granted in 1883 to Albert Hoster of 144 High Holborn, London, for "Machinery for Stamping Letters, Postal Cards etc". Mr. Hoster was a German inventor whose machines were tried out by the British Post Office from 1882 to 1893. The very interesting series of cancellations have been well described by the late Col. Crouch in an article (in the Fifth Supplement to The Postmarks of Great Britain & Ireland. Nov. 1943) to which interested readers are referred.

Not mentioned were two red London receiving marks (shown herewith) dated respectively OC 27 87 and OC 15 92, which are obviously from Hoster machines too.

Hoster's machines, costing £105 each, are said to have handled about 300 letters a minute. On the whole, the machines were not considered very satisfactory by the P.O., due to frequent break-downs and a bad percentage of "misses". A few Hoster machines were also given a brief trial in Germany in

1885. They are generally found on postcards and are much scarcer than the majority of their British counterparts. Illustrated are the two types known, one from Berlin C, the other from Hamburg 1. Note the very small die numbers on the left side, 27-1 and 25(?)-1 respectively. These also occur on some of the British marks. Hoster machines are not known from any other country than the two aforementioned.



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## THE OMINOUS "VULCANUS" MACHINE

by Frederick A. Brofos



In the Spring of 1901, various postal administrations of Europe received by mail a little green booklet from Holland. It described a startling new type of cancelling machine and hopefully solicited orders for the same. The "Vulcanus" was "a patent stamping machine for marking and destroying stamps and other papers of value, with a red hot die" (!) The inventor of this amazing apparatus was a Dutch engineer named C.C. van der Valk. He was also the manager (and probably owner) of the firm, at The Hague, that manufactured the novel contraption, namely: De Eerste Nederlandse Automatenfabriek (i.e., The First Dutch Automat Factory). At least the Dutch Post Office appears to have given the machine a courtesy trial, but it seems unlikely that any other countries dared to risk it. I have not seen an actual impression from the 8 lbs. (!) postmark, but if you should run across any curiously burned mail from Holland, it may not be an ordinary "wreck cover" from a train crash or the like. It is indeed lucky for philatelists that the machine never became popular, as the postmark was certainly a *real* "killer" which was designed to ruin all stamps permanently at the rate of 240 strikes a minute. An old photograph shows the ominous machine affixed to a metal table riveted to the floor. A small tube running up the wall is probably the supply line from a fuel tank outside. (Note the mysterious leak marks on the floor!) A metal exhaust pipe above the machine was installed to relieve the operator from the heat generated and possibly from asphyxiation by fumes! A sign on the wall advertises the company. Hanging nearby are a couple of tools, possibly for use in shifting out the red hot die, whenever a time-change was required in the postmark. (No doubt, rather a tricky maneuver!) Even the name "Vulcanus" seems an unfortunate choice, reminding one of an erupting volcano. In spite of all Mr. van der Valk's optimistic and "no cause for alarm" descriptions, one still remains with an uneasy feeling that having this gadget around could be hazardous. Strong possibilities seem to exist for accidental burning into the contents of letters or the fingers of a nervous operator (not to mention setting fire to the post office!).

The promotion booklet was printed in German, French and English. Herewith follows the latter version, which is quite amusing in itself, with its awkward phrasing and spelling mistakes. Since he uses the British term "tap" instead of "valve," I hope his "petroleum" fuel wasn't really gasoline!

### Note:

The Vulcanus machine was tried in the Hague Post Office starting in August 1901. The postmarks it produced are illustrated.

### The reported dates of use:

's Gravenhage 5 Aug - 2 Nov 1901

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