

= Epaulettes (stamp) =

Epaulettes (French : Épaulettes , Dutch : Epauletten) is the colloquial name of the first series of postage stamps issued by Belgium . The stamps , which depicted King Leopold I and his prominent epaulettes from which the type 's name derives , became legally usable on 1 July 1849 . They were produced as the result of a series of national reforms to the postal system in Belgium , based on the success of similar British reforms in 1840 . Two denominations with the same design were issued simultaneously : a brown 10 centimes and a blue 20 centimes . The stamps allowed postal costs to be pre @-@ paid by the sender , rather than the receiver , and led to a sharp increase in the volume of mail . Although quickly superseded by new types , the Epaulettes proved extremely influential and have since inspired several series of commemorative stamps .

= = Background = =

Heavily influenced by the example of the British postal system , which issued its first stamp , the Penny Black , in 1840 , the Belgian government supported the inauguration of a Belgian equivalent . Under the existing system , postage costs were paid by the receiver rather than the sender , which discouraged people from receiving , and therefore sending , letters . The idea of postage stamps , which would allow the sender to pay in advance , was officially sanctioned by Leopold I on the Loi apportant des modifications au régime des postes (" Law bringing modifications to the postal system ") on 24 December 1847 while the radical liberal and future Prime Minister , Walthère Frère @-@ Orban , served as Minister of Public Works . The debate on the reform of the postage in Belgium occurred at the same time as widespread postage reform , influenced by the British example , in France , Bavaria and elsewhere .

A second act , the Loi sur la réforme postale (" Law on postal reform ") , was signed on 22 April 1849 . The second law set out more detailed terms for the launch of the postal system and on 17 June 1849 , Leopold I officially requested the new Minister of Public Works , Hippolyte Rolin , to act on the new laws .

= = Stamps = =

On 1 July 1849 , the first postage stamps were launched , produced in two denominations with the same design . The first , a brown 10 centimes stamp , could be used to send a letter up to a distance of 30 kilometres (19 mi) ; the blue 20 centimes could be used on all other ordinary national mail . The successful design was just one of a variety of options produced by Jacob Wiener .

The stamps were officially described by an Avis ministériel (" Ministerial notice ") of 1849 as each being a " small engraving representing the portrait of the King , with indication as to their value ... they will be printed on a paper of which the reverse is coated in a thin layer of glue . "

The Epaulettes stamps depicted Leopold I wearing military uniform , with highly visible epaulettes , and were printed using the intaglio method . They were inscribed " POSTES " (" postage ") at the top , along with the stamp 's value in numbers . At the bottom was the stamps face value in French language text . No Dutch language version was produced . Like the first British stamps , it did not carry the name of its country of origin since they were intended for use only within Belgium . The stamp was designed by Charles Bagniet , based on the King 's official portrait painted by the artist Liévin De Winne . Its composition was by Jacob Wiener and the engraver John Henry Robinson . It was not perforated and was instead cut from sheets of 10x10 by hand .

The stamp carried the two crossed " L " s monogram of Leopold I as a watermark . To attach it to an envelope , the stamp , which already contained gum , had to be moistened before application . Around 5 @, @ 250 @, @ 000 examples of each denomination were produced .

Philatelists distinguish several minor variations among the series . For the 10 centimes , some slight colour variations exist , described as grey @-@ brown (brun @-@ gris) and russet @-@ brown (brun @-@ roux) . In the 20 centimes , variations in dark blue (bleu @-@ foncé) and milky blue (

bleu @-@ laiteux) have been noted . Of all the colour variations , the russet @-@ brown examples commanding the highest premium among collectors . Some double @-@ printed (error) stamps are also known .

= = Operation = =

The stamps were sold from post @-@ offices across the country but some were also issued to postmen for sale . Sales started on 25 June 1849 , however their use only became legal on 1 July . Because of the lack of an infrastructure of post boxes , particularly in rural areas , letters could be given directly to the postman in person rather than delivered to post offices to be sent .

For use , the stamps were cancelled with a heavy , circular black ink stamp . The cancellations , like their British equivalent , had a number in the centre (between one and 135) which was different for each post office around the country .

= = Effects and legacy = =

The introduction of the postage stamp , along with daily delivery , allowed a large increase in the volume of mail carried . By 1849 , between ten and fifteen million letters were being carried each year . The creation of the stamps also led to a structural expansion of the national postage system , which in 1830 had counted just 123 post offices and 240 postmen .

The success of the initial Epaulettes series inspired the introduction of three new varieties with different designs and denominations in October 1849 . These new types replaced the epaulettes design with the so @-@ called " Medallion " (Médaillon) type , featuring Leopold I 's portrait within a circular medallion window . In the same issue , a new denomination of forty centimes in red was produced for overseas mail . It was rumoured at the time that Leopold I did not like the design at the time , and believed that the epaulettes gave him a childlike aspect . The Epaulettes were officially superseded in 1859 , but remained legally valid until 1 July 1866 when , following Leopold I 's death , all stamps bearing his effigy were demonetised .

A nearly identical re @-@ impression was made in 1866 on laid paper which are distinguished by slightly different dimensions . Further re @-@ impressions date to 1895 . The Epaulettes have also subsequently been the subject of various commemorative stamps . The Epaulettes featured as part of the design of stamps issued by Belgium in 1925 and 1972 . For their 100th and 150th anniversary , in 1949 and 1999 , the Belgian postal service published commemorative series .