

THE AMERICAN ISSUE OF GREENLAND

By Dr. Dan Laursen

Part One: The American Issue

Five years of military occupation began for Denmark in April 1940 when German forces assaulted the country. This severed the connection between Denmark and the colonies in Greenland. The interruption of the connection with the administration and other offices at home made it imperative to establish an administration for and in Greenland and a connection for the provision of supplies from somewhere else. Immediately, the Danish minister to the United States, Henrik Kauffmann, declared that he represented *Danish interests* and that instructions from the government in Copenhagen had to be judged by their value. By maintaining this unambiguous stand, Minister Kauffmann gained the confidence of the American government, which was a tremendous advantage for Greenland during the following five years. Canada followed the United States, and these two countries provided what Greenland needed to survive.

Normally, Greenland was administered from Godthåb/Nuuk for the southern province and from Godhavn/Qeqertarsuaq for the northern province. A Landsfoged (provincial bailiff), the highest administrative authority for that part of the country, was situated in both towns. When news of the events of April 9 in Denmark reached Greenland, a joint session of the Landsråd (the provincial council) was called. It was decided to have only one administration for all Greenland with the office in Godthåb/Nuuk. In addition, a delegation (the Greenland Delegation, a.k.a. Greendel) was sent to the United States establishing its office at New York in connection with the Danish General Consulate there and the Embassy in Washington, D.C. The first year, Landsfoged Eske Brun of the northern province was leader of the office in New York and Landsfoged Aksel Svane of the southern province was situated in Godthåb/Nuuk. The following year, Brun came to Godthåb and Svane to New York where they remained until Denmark, and thereby Greenland, was free again.

The Stamps

The greater part of the provisions supplied from North America came from the United States. When, therefore, in 1943 it looked as if the postal administration might run out of stamps, Eske Brun decided to have a limited number of stamps made in the U.S. From the existing correspondence, it appears that several banks were interested in producing the stamps. The Greendel office finally contracted with the American Bank Note Co. Eske Brun told the author that he decided to have stamps made in the same values as the existing series

(Christian X and Polar bear) plus two higher Krone values due to the heavier air mail letters and parcel post sent from Greenland to America. The additional values were 2 Kr. and 5 Kr. (See Fig. 1.)



Fig. 1. The American issue. The motifs of the values.

Drawings were made by the American Bank Co. and approved by Greendel and the office in Godthåb/Nuuk. The engraving and printing were done next, and the work was finished and delivered to Greendel in December 1944 or early January 1945. The issue of January 15, 1945 of “Meddelelser om Grønlands Administrationen” (Information about the administration of Greenland) has this notice (translated): “The administration has issued a set of new stamps in the values 1, 5, 7, 10, 15, 30 Øre and 1, 2, 5 Kroner whose validity come into force 1st February 1945.” (See Table A for a description of the stamps cross-referenced to the most used catalogs.)

Reaction to the stamps

In the Danish language newspaper “Grøniandsposten,” printed and issued in Godthåb/Nuuk during the war, editor Christian Vibe writes in no. 4, 1945 (in translation) that the American issue “designs are all very pretty which unfortunately can not be said about the color combinations which are rather in bad taste. Of the designs the dog sledge on the 30 Øre stamp is a questionable choice because the sledge is Greenlandish whereas the team appears to be hitched the Canadian way with two and two in a row whereas in Greenland the fan hitch is used exclusively.”

Several writers repeat this critique of the colors and the color-combinations, as well as the remarks about the dog team (Eichner-Larsen, 1972). However, Jens Rosing, the well-known Greenland stamp designer has given the following explanation (verb. info.): “The photo used as basis for the design is probably from East Greenland where the two and two hitch often is used when driving on the sea ice with its many ice packs. Here the broad fan hitch is impracticable; narrow passages are negotiated better with the Canadian hitch.”

TABLE A
Greenland's "American Issue" Stamps

VALUE	DESCRIPTION	AFA	DAKA	Facit	Hj̄t me	Michel	Scott
1 re gray/violet	Seal on ice floe	8	8	10	8	8	10
5 re rose lake/olive green	Seal on ice floe	9	9	11	9	9	11
7 re green/gray	Seal on ice floe	10	10	12	10	10	12
10 re purple/olive green	Christian X	11	11	13	11	11	13
15 re red/ultramarine	Christian X	12	12	14	12	12	14
30 re blue/gray brown	Dog sledge	13	13	15	13	13	15
1 Kr. brown/green	Polar bear	14	14	16	14	14	16
2 Kr. dark brown/green	Kayaker	15	15	17	15	15	17
5 Kr. dark purple/gray brown	Eider duck	16	16	18	16	16	18

Design: The American Bank Note Company, New York; Designer: Unknown

Process: Steel plate printing

Engraving: The American Bank Note Company, New York; Engraver: Unknown

Paper: Lightly toned paper; Watermark: None

Printer: The American Bank Note Company, New York

Print: Sheets with 100 stamps in the sheet

Size of Issue: 100,000 sets of each value. When later about 30,000 sets were overprinted, it left about 70,000 sets of the original issue

Marginal Number: F 11826 used for all values. In addition is the value number of the stamps printed in the selva.

Perforation: Line perforation 12x12

Also, the horse under King Christian is said to be an ambler, whereas "Rolf," the King's famous riding horse, was not.

Several writers have made remarks about the chosen values. They find it strange that the 15 and 30 Øre stamps were issued when the Danish rates, which Greenland was supposed to follow at that time (1944), were respectively 20 and 40 Øre as indicated in a notice of July 1, 1940 from Grønlands Styrelse (Administration of Grønland). It is my impression after several conversations with Eske Brun about the situation in Greenland during the war that the Greenland administration (in fact Brun himself) did not find it necessary to make any rate changes as long as the other postal services simply received the Greenland mail with the original rates without taxing it. Covers with upfranking postage are almost all from after the liberation.

The DAKA catalog has Harald Moltke as designer and Johs. Britze as engraver of the American issue. It apparently is an error of some kind. The

two men are, respectively, the designer and engraver of the first Greenland series (ChristianX - Polar bear) in 1938.

Some philatelists maintain that the size of the American issue was not specifically known. I disagree. It was officially stated that 100,000 sets of each value were ordered, printed, and delivered to Greendel's office in New York. The office received the stamps but unfortunately did not count the delivery. There is, however, no reason to believe that the American Bank Note Co. would miscount the order. The number 100,000 sets is generally accepted as the size of the American issue. (See Table B.)

TABLE B
Disposition of American Issue Stamps

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	671	69,125	573	44,892	16,308	7,366
5 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	664	69,136	573	44,900	16,307	7,356
7 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	670	69,130	573	44,892	16,308	7,357
10 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	663	69,137	573	44,901	16,306	7,357
15 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	671	69,129	573	45,012	16,098	7,446
30 re	100,000	30,200	69,800	673	69,127	573	44,810	16,387	7,357
1 Kr.	100,000	30,200	69,800	673	69,127	573	45,510	14,287	8,757
2 Kr.	100,000	30,200	69,800	672	69,128	573	45,552	13,306	9,697
5 Kr.	100,000	30,200	69,800	672	69,128	573	45,552	13,206	9,797

1: Total issue; 2: Overprinted; 3: Original stamps available; 4: Unsold stamps; 5: Stamps in circulation; 6: Stamps used as gifts and sent to UPU; 7: Sale in Denmark; 8: Sale in USA; 9: Sale in Greenland. Source: Torben Hjørne (1983, p.142)

Hjørne (1983) takes exception to some of those numbers due to the insufficient information about the sale in the USA and the missing control as to the size of the entire issue. The sale in USA is calculated based on the documented sales in Denmark and Greenland plus the documented use of 30,200 sets for overprinting.

I have earlier commented on these numbers (Laursen, 1985/86), but will for completeness repeat it here. I find that Torben Hjørne has done a very good and painstaking job. However, a few corrections may still be needed to the numbers. They seem to indicate that the sale of the American issue was mostly in entire sets rather than in single stamps. The sale of the lower values (1, 5, 7 Øre) is almost the same as that of the higher values. The 30 Øre stamp used for the letter rate from Greenland to North America seems not to have sold any more than the other Øre stamps. This seems questionable.



Fig. 2. First weight-class letter franked with 5 + 15 Øre.

Actually, more 15 Øre stamps were sold than 30 Øre – 89 more to be exact. I think the franking to Denmark after the liberation on May 5, 1945 may be responsible for this. I received several letters from friends in Greenland during that time and they were all franked with 15 Øre + 5 Øre. (Fig. 2). Also, two 15 Øre stamps were often used to fulfill the second weight-class rate of 30 Øre. (Fig. 3).

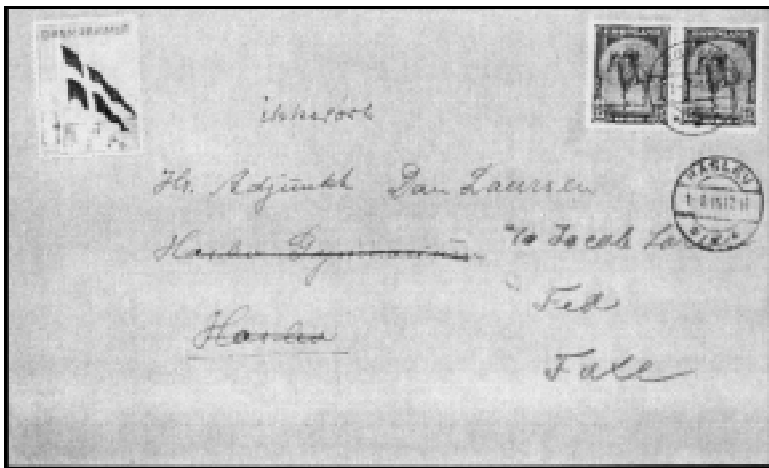


Fig. 3. Letter of second weight-class franked with 15 + 15 Øre to fulfill the going rate of 30 Øre.

The sale in Greenland of the Krone values is comparatively higher than the sale of the most sold Øre values viz. the 15 and 30 Øre as shown here (and see column 9 of Table B):

	15 Øre	30 Øre
1 Krone	1311	1400
2 Kroner	2251	2340
5 Kroner	2351	2440

The higher sale of the Krone values supports Hjømme's supposition about the need for higher Krone values for airmail. From personal experience, however, I am more inclined to believe that the high values were used on parcels or cards to Denmark when communication was resumed in the summer of 1945. Denmark was short a great many goods whereas Greenland was comparatively well stocked. Those in Greenland who knew the situation in Denmark sent a lot of "liberation" parcels with goodies of all kinds. Krone values were on sale in Greenland as late as: 1Kr. in 1949; the 2 Kr. in 1951; and the 5 Kr. in 1958/59.

It is a real difficulty that the accounts reflect no difference in sale numbers between the general issue and the subsequently overprinted stamps. We know, however, that 302 sheets of each value were delivered for overprinting on May 17, 1945 following the liberation. Accepting 1,000 as the total number of sheets of the American issue, then the general quantity was 69,800 stamps of each value ($1000 - 302 = 698$ sheets, or 69,800 stamps of each value). This is the number the Danish catalogs indicate, whereas the foreign ones use 70,000.

First day of use

The 10,000 stamps of each value were sent to the central office in Godthåb/Nuuk. They were then distributed to the various post stations at the first opportunity. The first day of validity was February 1, 1945, but according to the receipts, the stamps were not sent until February 5 and received at different times at the different stations. It is obvious that the first day cancellation of "1 Februar 1945" was done with turned-back cancellers, which is illegal. The receipt from the Godthåb post office is dated February 7, 1945, which probably was the actual day the stamps were received and counted at the station. The stations on the west coast were reached on various dates during the spring by boat, dog sledge, or both combined. Scoresbysund on the east coast was first reached on July 17, 1945, several months after the occupation was over.

The earliest known non-philatelic cover is from Godthåb dated March 13, 1945 (Lindskog & Hopballe, 1983, p. 46). Hjørne (1983, p. 114) estimates the complete number of FDCs to be about 3,500 of which 2,000 were sold in Denmark, 1,300 in USA, and a few in Greenland. Regular cancellations are

TABLE C
Stamps of Each Value
Distributed to the Stations

Julianehåb/Qaqortoq	1,000
Ivigtuut	1,110
Frederikshåb/Paamiut	180
Godthåb/Nuuk	700
Sukkertoppen/Maniitsoq	250
Holsteinsborg/Sisimut	200
Egedesminde/Aasiaat	400
Christianshåb/Qasigiannuit	150
Jakobshavn/Ilulissat	280
Godhavn/Qeqertarsuaq	150
Kudtligssat	180
Umanak/Uummannaq	350
Upernavik	300
Thule/Qaanaaq	130
Angmgssalik/Ammassalik	400
Scoresbysund/Ittoqqortoormiit	200

known from all the post offices in Greenland at the time this issue was in use.

The number of stamps of each value delivered to the stations is shown in Table C (according to the receipts).

The currency

The time during which the stamps were current plays a considerable role for some philatelists. It is most often defined as the time in which the rate covered by the stamp was valid or until a new stamp covering the rate was issued. In this case, it would have been until a new stock of the Chr.X - Polar bear series of 1938 arrived after May 5, 1945 concerning the 1 Øre to 1 Kr stamps. The 2 Kr of the American issue was replaced August 15, 1950 and the 5 Kr not until August 14, 1959

and was still available at some stations well into the late 1960s.

Mint stamps of the American issue were sold first in the USA, then in Greenland. They were never sold from either the KGH home office or the Danish Post-og Telegrafvæsen (P&T). Both the regular and the overprinted stamps were not reported to UPU until late in 1946 and through P&T, which represented the Greenland Postal Service.

What the first day cancels may tell

As mentioned, the day of issue was February 1, 1945. The stamps did not reach Greenland, however, until the fifth of that month. It also took some time before the stamps reached the various post stations from the Central Office in Godthåb/Nuuk. Nevertheless, most of the FDCs were canceled 1 February 1945; thus, they are CTO [canceled to order]. Hjørne mentions (1983, p 42) a peculiar example illustrating this entire FDC fiasco: A FDC cover from Frederikshåb in South Greenland is canceled: Frederikshaab 19-3-1945. De Grønlandske Posthistorikere (The Greenland Posthistorians – DGP) also mention one canceled like this and furthermore provided with a side stamp of 1-2-1945! The first date is obviously the correct date the envelopes were canceled after which the true and faithful postal employee added the first day postmark.

TABLE D
First Day Covers of American Issue

	Cancelled in Greenland	Sent to DK	Sent to USA	Sold in Greenland	Sent to DK	Sold Dec. 1945
Hjølne	ca 3,500	ca. 2,000	1,300	some	2,400	1,800
DGP	3,900	2,168		1,732		

Add from Thule 101 and from Scoresbysund 99

Although the marble quarry Marmorilik and the fishing harbor Færingehavnen were closed during the war, FDCs from those stations also exist. (See Table D for the reported number of FDCs.)

The reaction in Denmark

The news concerning the American issue was received in Denmark by early spring 1945 via Sweden, where the issue was mentioned in some newspapers. The news stirred anticipation among Greenland collectors as great as the expectation of a speedy end to the war following the successful conclusion of the Battle of the Bulge by Allied forces.

As news circulated concerning the existence of the American issue, plans were launched to overprint some of the stamps in commemoration of Denmark's liberation on May 5. This decision to overprint a portion of Greenland's American issue led to a scandal that remains an issue more than 50 years later.

(To be concluded in the February 2000 issue of *The Posthorn*. References will be included with the final installment.)



Greenland's Postal Service: The Early Years

Greenland's postal service started with the landing in 1721 of "Greenland's Apostle," the Rev. Hans Egede. No exchange of mail is known between the Viking Norsemen in Greenland (ca. 972- ca. 1450) and the rest of the then-known world. (Laursen, 1992).

The first letters were sent from Hans Egede to the Mission Collegium in Denmark on the ships sent by Bergen merchants. Various shipping companies conducted later postal service. From 1774, the ships of the Royal Greenland Trade (Den Kongelige Grønlandske Handel – KGH) carried out the voyages. For more than two centuries (1721 to 1938) mail was carried free of charge between Denmark and its distant colony (free parcel post was discontinued in 1905).

Letters and packages were carried free of charge because they took up very little room in proportion to the rest of the cargo. With the addition of Danish officials over the years, the volume of mail and especially of parcel post was increasing. Newspapers from back home particularly took up more space. At the beginning of the 20th century, the question of how to limit the parcel post became acute; it was decided to introduce a duty on the parcels. Beginning May 1, 1905, parcels sent from Copenhagen were charged a fee. For parcels from Greenland, the arrangement started with the first ship homebound in 1906.

In 1874, Denmark, the Faroes, and Iceland joined the Universal Postal Union (UPU). In 1877, Greenland and the Danish West Indies Islands (DVI) were admitted as colonies. However, only the DVI and Iceland obtained their own stamps whereas the Faroes and Greenland continued to use the current Danish stamps. As mentioned, mail between Copenhagen and Greenland was carried and delivered free of charge. Mail sent from or to all other destinations had to be franked with valid stamps.

The volume of letter mail increased steadily during the first third of the century. To defray the rising costs, the KGH decided to introduce postage on all mail from Greenland to all destinations worldwide. Application for full membership to the UPU was requested in 1936 and acceptance granted in 1937. The necessary preparations for postal service such as drawing, engraving and printing of stamps, making of postmarks, and determining the number and placement of post offices were carried out during 1937 and 1938. In the fall of 1938, KGH was able to send the first stamps to the 19 new postal stations (Fynbo, 1956).

The stamps were to be used only after the last ship left the ports of the various post stations in the fall of 1938; in other words, on mail to be transported to Denmark with the first ship sailing in the spring 1939. World War II broke out when Hitler's Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. The last ship from Greenland was S/S Gertrud Rask arriving in Copenhagen October 31, 1939. With the German assault on Denmark April 9, 1940 and followed by the occupation until May 5, 1945, the connection between Greenland and the Motherland was disrupted and supplies were suspended from home.

This was the direct reason leading to issuing of the American series.

-- Dan Laursen

References: Fynbo, Jens: Grønlands Postvæsen. In: Grønlands Filатели. Offprint Tidsskriftet Grønland. Ed.: Dan Laursen, Copenhagen 1956.

Laursen, Dan: Postal History of Greenland. Part I. 982 - 1492 AD. *The Posthorn*. Vol 49, No. 2, pp. 51 – 56, 1992.