

Stamp Celebrates Sweden's Oldest Newspaper

By Christer Brunström

Today, many collectors are disgusted by the avalanche of new stamp issues. Thus, it's not surprising that older stamps or the more esoteric philatelic areas are increasingly popular among collectors seeking to go beyond the pretty pictures of today's stamp output.

To many collectors Sweden's 1930s and '40s stamp issues might seem rather dull. They were all printed in one color and there were not too many issues each year. The designs, however, are generally quite interesting and reflect important people and events in Swedish history. The stamps were all engraved and usually released in coil and booklet formats.

I don't really collect Sweden, but recently I have assembled a small collection of older Swedish stamps on the quiet. I found many of the stamps in lots of scrap postage that can often be obtained at a steep discount from face value. Occasionally I discover a stamp or two that I can add to my collection.

Now, let's go back in time to the year 1645. Sweden was at war with most of Europe, and the country had been run by Chancellor Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna (1583-1654) ever since King Gustav II Adolph (Gustavus Adolphus) had been killed in 1632 at the Battle of



Sweden Sc360, 5-øre value, a se-tenant booklet pair. Can you spot the variety?

Lützen, near the city of Leipzig in Saxony. At that time crown princess Kristina was just six years old. She finally became Queen of Sweden in 1644.

The long war ended with Sweden getting territories in Northern Germany. Denmark was also defeated in a war that ended in 1645 with Sweden gaining the province of Halland [where Christer Brunström resides. --Ed.] and other territories. Waging a war for so long was extremely costly and, although a victor in 1648, Sweden was a country in great financial trouble.

As can be appreciated from this short historical sketch, there was a lot going on in Europe in 1645. People wanted to know about the war, but there was no source of information available at that time. Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna felt that there was a need for a newspaper and he asked Postmaster Johan von Beijer to make arrangements for such a paper to be produced. The Ordinari Post Tidjender (Ordinary Postal News) published its first edition in 1645. It contained mostly war news from other parts of Europe. It was



A First Day Cover of the Tercentenary of the Swedish Press issue (Sc360-361), both values depicting a torch and quill.

This was recently the case when I went through a lot of mint stamps. I discovered a se-tenant pair of the 5 øre Tercentenary of the Swedish Press stamp released on 29 May 1945. The stamp depicts a torch and a quill, but more about that later.

printed by Ignatius Meurer, a German who had come to Sweden at the turn of the century as an apprentice; he would become one of the 17th century's most prominent printers.



Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna

In 1760, a sister publication called *Inrikes Tidningar* was started. King Gustav III, who reigned from 1771 to 1792, actively promoted the arts and sciences in the country. He apparently felt that the Swedish Academy (of Nobel Prize fame), founded by him five

years earlier to nurture the Swedish language and literature, needed a regular source of income and, in 1791, he decided to transfer ownership of the two newspapers from the Crown to the Academy, which today is still the official publisher of the newspaper.

In 1821, the two newspapers were amalgamated under the present title of *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* (Postal and Domestic News). The newspaper is Sweden's oldest, and one of the world's oldest, having been published regularly for 360 years. It is published five days a week and, since the 1920s, no longer contains "hard news," but only legal announcements about new positions in the state administration. In fact, all new Swedish legislation must be published in *Post- och Inrikes Tidningar* before becoming legally valid. Today the newspaper has a circulation of some 1,500 copies.



Oxenstierna appears on Sweden Sc248 and Sc251, the latter shown here.

The Tercentenary of the Swedish Press was of course an important event that certainly deserved a commemorative stamp issue (Scott 360-361). The design was the work of

graphic artist Bertil Bull Hedlund (1893-1950), and both values depict a torch, representing freedom of the press, and a quill. In my opinion, it's a delightful design in all its simplicity.

The design was engraved by Sven Ewert (1895-1959), who engraved most of Sweden's stamps from 1928 until his death. Today there are many worldwide collectors who specialize in the work of the late engraver Czeslaw Slania. I believe a collection of Sven Ewert's stamps would be an equally fascinating specialty.

There were two denominations, both shown on page 1 on a FDC: 5 öre and 60 öre. The 5-öre green was released both in coil format (80.6 million copies) and as a booklet (12 million stamps). At the time, 5 öre was the printed matter rate. The stamp was also used to make up other rates. With more than 90 million copies printed, this stamp is still very common 60 years later.

The 60 öre stamp was printed in red-carmine. It was only issued in coil format and 5.6 million stamps were printed. It was intended for heavier letters, parcels, and letters to foreign destinations. In mint, NH condition, this stamp can still be had for less than \$5. In Sweden, the complete set comprises four stamps: the two coil stamps and an attached booklet pair with straight edges at the sides.

Now let's return to the booklet pair, which was found in my lot of scrap postage. I looked it up in my *Facit Catalogue*, which indicated



Sweden Sc360-361

there is an interesting plate variety where the quill is broken. In Swedish philatelic circles this variety is known as "the broken pen."

Much to my delight, one stamp in the booklet pair that I possessed had this variety (indicated by the arrow). A stamp for which I had paid less than one cent turned out to be a \$30

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**The "Broken Quill"
on Sweden Sc360**

a \$30 stamp! Often non-collectors ridicule those philatelists who take pleasure in discovering the so-called flyspeck varieties. In this case, however, the broken pen can be easily seen (even my wife's philatelically untrained eyes spotted the variety).

I suppose it is discoveries like this one that make our hobby so exciting. Collectors wanting to find out more about Swedish stamp varieties need a copy of the Facit catalogue where the more prominent varieties are listed and illustrated.

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