

The REVEALER

Political Labels of Ireland

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There is a fascination and history in the postage stamp which goes beyond its intrinsic value. For all countries it has become a symbol of nationhood and a right to take its place among the postal systems of the world.

With the introduction of the postage stamp in the nineteenth century, it was a natural symbol to be utilized by the Society of Fenians which was formed in the United States at the close of the Civil War for the purpose of establishing an Irish Republic by force of arms. These Irish veterans of the War Between the States as early as 1865 caused to be prepared in New York City essays of postage stamps for the use of the Irish Republic they visualized.

A report of about that time is to the effect that three designs had been produced - a value of 3¢ and 10¢ in green and blue and a 24¢ in green and lilac. The evidence available as to the 10¢ value is inconclusive but there is much stronger evidence as to the 3¢ and the 24¢ values.

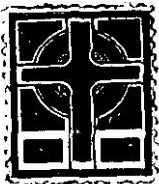
There is also a 1¢ in black on green or blue paper, apparently belonging to the same series. It has been claimed that it was issued in connection with an abortive Fenian Raid on St. John's, New Brunswick, in 1866, but the evidence is not convincing.



The 24¢ stamp shows in the centre a harp, surrounded by an oval band bearing the motto, "LIBERTAS ET NATALE SOLUM." The design is filled out to rectangular form with a frame inscribed "REPUBLIC" (at left) "OF IRELAND" (at right) "POSTAGE" (at top) "24 CENTS" (at bottom). The plan for the uprising in Ireland never matured and these essays, of course, never were legitimately used in Ireland and must rank merely as forerunners of the Irish stamps.

Sometime later in the 1890's, a curious set of impostors appeared in the stamp world. They are the 2d blue and the 4d brown. These forgeries are lithographed stamp issues of Queen Victoria's reign. These are thought to have been produced in Boston. The name IRELAND was inserted in the name tablet across the top of the design, above the Queen's head. These are definitely bogus stamps and there is no evidence they were ever intended for or that they were ever circulated in Ireland.

In 1907, the Sinn Fein party produced propaganda labels in two designs which while lacking any denominations of value were intended to symbolize "Irish nation-hood" to the world. Arthur Griffith, the founder of Sinn Fein urged the production and use of these labels both for revenue and propaganda purposes.



The first of these stamps was designed by Miss L. Williams, a prominent Dublin artist and represented the large Celtic Cross with the inscription EIRE in the center of the cross, a shamrock leaf in each corner and a Celtic Knot at either side of the foot of the Cross. This design was later employed by Miss Williams in her proposed design for the definitive issue in 1923 for the 3d and 10d values.

The other design showed a vertical oval in the center containing the symbolic female figure and harp, the four corners containing the coats of arms of the four Irish Provinces and at bottom a reclining grehound. The designs were engraved on wood by Mr. W.W. Kirkwood and were lithographed by Whelan & Co., of Upper Ormonde Quay, Dublin.



The original printings of the female and harp design was a three-color issue in green, yellow and black and was perforated 11. The gum was yellowish. The reprints of this design differed in color. The green of the original printings was blue-green whereas in the reprints it is yellow-green. The gum of the original was yellowish but in the reprints was colorless.

There seems to be some confusion as to the number of stamps in the sheets. The original report was made in 1908 that the stamps were printed in sheets 11 x 10, and that the harp design contained two stamps printed tete beche in each sheet. The Christian Science Monitor of December 6, 1917 stated: "The originals had been in sheets of ten stamps each way, the reprinted ones were in sheets of nine stamps one way and eight the other."

Although usually termed reprints the later printings were from different plates, easily recognized by the hound at the foot being too fat. Varieties found with this design include tete beche and double perforation.

A letter from Mr. W. Duffy dated January 23rd 1908 gives the purpose and use of the stamps or labels: "I enclose specimens of the two new Sinn Fein stamps which have just been issued in Ireland, and which will, no doubt, interest you as they are singularly well designed, and they are put upon correspondence by members of the Party known as 'Sinn Fein' together with the ordinary revenue stamp."

A series of postcards recently found give further information on the use of these stamps or labels on correspondence. Each postcard was posted in London and contained the 1p adhesive stamp in the correct location and the label on the same side at the top left corner. In no case was the label post-marked however. The first is dated "Friday 24 January 1908" and reads:

"Above is the Sinn Fein stamp. I'm disappointed with it. I'll send the other next time. It's far worse. The Sinn Feiners make it a rule not to answer letters they get unless they have one of our stamps on them. They are so cheap we think every one should use them. Please do, won't you? I must keep our rules.... Nearest place for you to get stamp is 35 Upper O'Connell St. Please explain to others. They may think me rude or autocratic but it is not my fault. The proceeds go to further the National cause & industries; to found a paper first of all, then bank."

The next interesting card is dated "Monday 3 February 1908" and reads: "I was delighted to get your note this morning. I was so afraid, as you didn't use the Irish stamp last time, that you had taken it the wrong way; and of course I couldn't be able to explain. I'm so sick of family rows that I positively dread another....The 2nd supply of stamps got here, some 1600, was almost exhausted when I went to get them 24 hours after arrival...."

These recently discovered postcards indicate that the labels were first issued either in January 1908 or perhaps at the end of 1907; that the

printer had difficulty in keeping pace with the orders and that the use of these labels was almost mandatory if the person wished a reply from a party member.

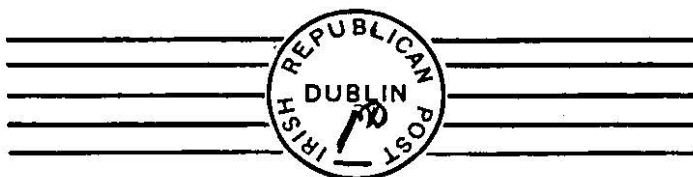
These stamps attained an unprecedented popularity and the British Government considered it necessary to intervene and suppress their use on correspondence. The regulations forbade the use of these labels on the front of the envelopes in conjunction with the English stamps. These labels do exist attached next to the ordinary King Edward ½d and 1d stamps and cancelled along with them. These escaped the notice of the postal authorities. These labels reappeared during the Easter Rising in 1916 in conjunction with other propaganda labels.



A larger stamp or label, depicting a female figure playing a harp with the inscription "PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT IRELAND" at the top and "IMPERIAL UNION" at the bottom flanked either side by a figure I and perforated 11 was believed to have been produced in Manchester in 1912. The stamp appeared in either emerald green, dull yellow green or dull orange, ungummed. In addition, it is found in dull yellow green imperforate on thick card. This stamp is not known with postmarks and there is no evidence that it ever did or could have had any real postal significance or use.

The "IMPERIAL UNION" design was not the only one issued as propaganda for the anti-Home-Rulers. Another had the inscription "PATRIOTS MAINTAIN THE UNION !" with the arms of the United Kingdom, on unwatermarked paper, perf. 15x14, and sold at 1d each. A third cost 1s. each and had the red hand of Ulster as the symbol with the date 1914 and the legend "FOR GOD AND ULSTER" together with the name of one of the districts, e.g. "South Belfast".

In May 1912 the English magazine Punch had a full-page cartoon - parodying the then current 1d postage stamp, with Redmond standing on the lion in place of the King's head. A Dublin photographer reduced this to stamp size and toned his prints in various shades of blue on varied papers, then perforating and gumming them!



One item which has been sold as a rebels' stamp seems to have been only a flag-day emblem. It is known as the Manchester Martyrs "stamp" but has none of the characteristics of a postage stamp. It was produced by Messrs James Walker (Dublin) Ltd., a week before the Easter Rising in 1916. It depicts the tricolour Irish flag in green, white and orange, whereon, in a shamrock frame, are three slight portraits of the Irish patriots, Markin, Allen and O'Brien, in the three branches of the emblem, between which branches is a harp. Below is the inscription "God Save Ireland." The labels are not perforated and appear on both gummed and ungummed paper.

It is claimed that prior to the Easter Rebellion, the Sinn Fein party maintained an "underground postal system" which conveyed letters between sympathizers at a charge of 1d prepaid in cash but without the use of stamps. Branches were said to have been maintained at the party headquarters in Dawson Street, at J.J. Walsh's shop in Berkley Street and at the home of Tom Clarke. Confirmation of these reports is lacking, but envelopes survive with handstruck markings of the "Irish Republican Post".

There is also a claim that at the outbreak of the Easter Rebel
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lion, it was decided to utilize the Celtic Cross label as the 1d postage stamp of the Republic and the tricolour label of the Manchester Martyrs, Allen, Larkin and O'Brien as the 1d value. It is also reported that a limited number of letters franked with these stamps were actually conveyed by the Republican Post during this Easter Week and were duly postmarked at the G.P.O. Dublin while it was in the hands of the rebels. These reports are presumably based on the existence of envelopes bearing these labels "cancelled" with genuine post office cancellers. The more likely explanation is that these were perpetrated after the event with the aid of handstamps looted during the rising.

These labels and events have profoundly influenced the subsequent philatelic history of Ireland. The Celtic Cross design was incorporated into the definitive series of stamps; the Arms of the Provinces became an accepted design; and the Easter Rebellion was commemorated by the significant and attractive "Gunman" issue of 1941.

Tom Clarke, who gave his life for the Republic in 1916 was recently honored with a commemorative issue. Mr. J. J. Walsh whose name has been mentioned above was destined to become the first Postmaster - General of Ireland under the Provisional Government. He did much to establish the new postal system of Ireland and is known in America - as the "Benjamin Franklin" of the Irish Post Office.



1916—The General Post Office, Dublin, headquarters of the men of Easter Week, after the surrender. The flagstaff which had carried the Tricolour saga from a corner of the gutted building.

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- Extensive correspondence with and suggested revisions by Mr. Fred E. Dixon of Rosslare, County Wexford, Ireland.