Have you ever seen a marking like this on a German cover and wondered what it was?

Image 1. Typical Landpost marking ca. 1934

This (Image 1) is an example of a German rural mail (Landpost) auxiliary marking. Rural mail is an important part of major postal systems. There are varied ways in which this need was met, often following how rural areas were organized. In the United States, post offices were set up in rural towns, but this often involved lengthy travel as most farmers lived on their own farms, strung out along country roads. This led to the introduction of Rural Free Delivery in 1896, which was helped by the introduction of motorized vehicles and better roads in the first half of the 20th century. In Germany, rural areas developed differently. Farms radiated outward from a central village, which was easier to defend, with larger villages being walled. The mosaic quilt of German states prior to the Empire made the transfer of mail between different government systems a challenge. One solution was the famous and private Thurn and Taxis system (Image 2), which covered most of the smaller states and served all of Germany including rural locations. Some states, such as Baden, had a rudimentary rural system, as may be seen, for example, from the well-known Landpost postage dues of Baden (Image 3), which paid for delivery to rural addresses not served by a post office.
Prussia took over the private Thurn and Taxis system in 1867. Their postal system was combined with other northern German systems to first form the North German Postal Confederation in 1868 and then the Reichspost in 1871, after the German Empire was formed that year (though some states, such as Bavaria, retained their own postal systems as late as 1920). In 1871, 53% of the population of the new empire were not served by a post office. To provide this service to its citizens and cement the unification of Germany, the Reich government greatly expanded the system of post offices and postal agencies (Postagenture, basically contract offices) and then introduced Posthilfstelle (auxillary post offices) in 1881, which were usually run by local citizens as part of a store or pub. This visually demonstrated German sovereignty to the rural citizenry. As in the United States, the post office bound the country together. Bavaria also used Posthilfstelle in this era (Image 4), and these markings may be seen as a forerunner for the later system.
There were other differences. In Germany, the postal services also included telegraph services and, as time went on, telephone services. The system also ran its own bank. This was important in Germany, as Bismarck had introduced the first national old-age pension system in 1889. For much of the rural population, the postal bank would be used for this, which allowed those pensions to be paid anywhere there was a post office. This had its dangers. Often a pensioner or other recipient of money was robbed on the walk home, as the distances often were still great. As the system grew, it became unwieldy. Too many of the small post offices had the same town name--and even some of the larger cities, such as Frankfurt am Main and Frankfurt an der Oder. Delivery to the correct post office or agency was a challenge. There were still unserved or underserved areas. By 1926, the Reichspost was already thinking about a new design for serving the rural population, based in part on the existing postal agencies.

In 1928, the Reichspost began a complete overhaul of the rural mail system. This was made possible due to the advancement in mechanization in the late 19th and early 20th century--in particular, the development of reliable transportation methods: first rail and then automobiles, trucks, and busses. The latter forms of transportation allowed regular, daily postal service to the most remote parts of the Reich through the Kraftpost (Image 5), postal vans and busses that could also carry goods and people, and the opening of a new form of postal office, the “Poststelle,” which was akin to the old Posthilfsstelle. New postal markings were introduced for these Poststelle and new cancels for the Postagenture, which led to a rich field
for collection. This article will show the evolution of these markings and cancels. This “Landpost” (lit. “Rural Post”) system was introduced in full on April 1, 1928, but it was rolled out over a few years to other areas (for example, in my collecting area of Lehrte, it was 1933).

In 1928, the main Reichspost was divided into 45 Oberpostdirektion (OPD) offices in major German cities. These were the regional offices of the national system. Under this were the various Leitpostamt (LPA), or directing post offices. As a Kraftpost/Landpost line was begun, it would be put under one of these LPAs. Both Postagenture and Poststelle could be served by a Landpost line. LPA’s often ran more than one Landpost line and often handled mail from other full post offices (not part of the Landpost) in the region served.

The larger Postagenture continued to use a canceling device (modified to indicate rural use) as they were under the charge of a civil servant working for the post office. They had almost full service and regular hours and only had to settle accounts with the Leitpostamt monthly.

The Poststelle were not allowed to use a canceling device, as they were considered to be subsidiary to a full post office and were not run by a post office employee. They had to settle accounts with the LPA on a daily basis, and had reduced service, but still supplied many of the services found at larger post offices. Only commonly used stamps and forms were generally available. They did not have enough business for a full service office and did not have to have fixed hours, but were required to be open before and after the postal van arrived. The cancellation for mail from the Poststelle took place at the LPA in charge of the route.

However, the Reichspost wanted to be able to indicate that a particular piece of mail had been accepted by the system. This led to the introduction of a rubber stamp with the village name of the Poststelle and the LPA in various formats – and a rich and interesting subject for collecting. From
the approximately 7,000 Poststelle at the beginning of 1928, the number of Poststelle climbed to almost 26,000 by 1938. Peter Griese, who wrote the definitive work on these markings, “Poststellen Stempel 1928-1988,” states that there were at least 50,000 different marking stamps in use up until the end of World War II. Similar markings would be continued to be used by the successors to the Reichspost in both West and East Germany for many more decades, up to and including the introduction of a four-digit postal code in both countries.

References


These markings, excepting those for the four-digit postal code in West Germany in 1961, were not given a specific format and varied widely, though a few specifics were required by the Reichspost and its successors. The original markings in 1928 were to include the following on the marking: the name of the LPA, the name of the Poststelle, and the word “Land” (see Image 1 for an example: Weckesheim Friedberg Land). The cancel of the LPA also included the word Land, to indicate use in the Landpost system. The Reichspost also noted that a similar but slightly different form should be used by customers to address letters to a rural postal address: “Poststelle ‘über’ (via) LPA”. This was of high importance due to the large number of repeated town names in Germany. For example, there are quite a number of towns with the name Neustadt (at least 25 in the region covered by the Reichspost according to Wikipedia). Addition of the LPA made it far easier to direct mail to the correct LPA and thus the correct Poststelle. In 1933, the Reichspost decided that this form should be used for the Landpost markings as well (Image 2). Postagenture offices also used Land/über (via) LPA format in their cancels (Image 3) and addresses for the same reason. After 1939, the term

Image 1. “Land” auxiliary marking (1928-1933): Weckesheim in Friedberg Land
Poststelle (I) was used for Postagentur and Poststelle (II) for Poststelle, and after 1952, the terms Poststelle I and Poststelle II were used. During the Landpost era, many PSt II offices grew and became PSt I offices. The latter terminology will be used in the remainder of the article, as is standard in this collecting area.

The Poststelle II markings could and did use a variety of material.

**Image 2.** Poststelle ‘über’ (via) LPA marking: Breitenberg über Calw (Poststelle II)

**Image 3.** Postagenture (Poststelle I) cancel: Abbensen über Lehrte

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**Image 4.** Poststelle II: Seiffen über Kollburg (Eifel)
formats: one line, two lines, or three lines, with and without enclosures. A number of typefaces may be seen. Originally “Fraktur” was used. But Bormann’s edict of 1941 against the use of Fraktur, which he considered to be a “Jewish script” led to the use of “Antiqua” typeface and later “Grotesk”. Violet and sometimes black ink were used. Images 4 and 5 show some examples.

The Poststelle markings were added when the item was received by the Poststelle clerk or Kraftpost clerk. They were then cancelled at the Leitpostamt. This sometimes led to a local item (Image 5) making a 30-40 km round trip in cases where the sending and receiving Poststellen were only a couple of kilometers apart—unless the receiving Poststelle followed the sending Poststelle on the route. Then it was permitted to use the Landpost marking as a “cancel” (Image 6) and the mail item did not have to go through the Leitpostamt but was left at the receiving Poststelle.

Image 5. Poststelle II: Gross-Lobke über Lehrte to Clauen über Lehrte (4 km away). On the same route, but Clauen came before Gross-Lobke, so the item went to Lehrte first, a round trip of almost 40 km.
Image 6. Local use of a Poststelle II marking as a “cancel”: Rethmar über Lehrte to Haimar über Lehrte. Haimar followed Rethmar on the route (4 km away), and the card did not go through Lehrte.

Landpost markings were also used in some occupied territories, as may be seen by a parcel card from the Poststelle 1 office Wojciechow über Radomsko in the General Government (occupied Poland) to the infamous Flossenburg concentration camp (Image 7)—which itself was a rural mail Poststelle 1 office—Flossenburg über Floss—as may be seen from the receiving cancel.

One major change took place in 1941: the introduction of two-digit postal codes (though some areas also had a letter) (Image 8). At first, this was limited to packages only, but in
1943, this was extended to all mail. In January 1944, postal patrons were required to add this to both sending and receiving addresses, and in June 1944, Poststelle I and II were required to add the postal code to their stamps and cancelers. Some were modified from old devices and some were new. These are relatively rare, due to the realities of the war. Postal services became more and more restricted, and more and more areas fell under Allied control. An example of the new marking is shown in Image 9.

Postwar uses were a mixture of many styles at first. You will find markings, cancels, and labels with and without the postal code and those where a postal code region was split—such as

**Image 9.** Poststelle II: Ölerse über Lehrte with new postal code (20)
Image 10. Poststelle II: Postwar Use in Bizone, Obershagen über Lehrte (20)

Image 11. Poststelle II: Bizone, Abbensen über Hannover (20a)

Image 12. Poststelle II: West Germany, Röddensen über Lehrte (20a)
20 to 20a and 20b and often mixtures of usages on a single cover, but eventually these settled down (Images 10-14). Both East and West Germany retained the Landpost system. However, as in the US, a two digit system was not robust enough for modern sorting and delivery. West Germany and Berlin in 1961 and East Germany in 1964 introduced a four digit system, and both introduced new Poststelle II markings.

In West Germany, the first digit represented one of the 8 zones (1-8), the second represented the region within the zone, and the third the Leitpostamt. A 1 for the fourth digit was for a Poststelle office under the Leitpostamt. 2-9 for the fourth digit were used for other independent post offices under the Leitpostamt. Zero was a place holder when any of the other digits were not used. For example, Munich as the main office for Zone 8 had the postal code 8000. The town I lived in as an exchange student, Röddensen, had the code 3161: 3 for Hannover zone, 1 for Celle region, and 6 for Lehrte as the Leitpostamt, while the last 1 indicated its Poststelle status. One should note that, unlike in the US, a single postal code could be and was used for multiple Poststelle offices under a Leitpostamt. For example, there were 40 towns that used the 3161 code, as the code was basically used to get the mail...
to and from the correct Leitpostamt, where final sorting for the rural offices would take place. Interestingly, 0 and 9 were not used for the first digit, as they were reserved for possible use in a unified Germany. For Poststelle II, Landpost markings with the new four-digit codes were used, mostly standardized

Image 15. Poststelle II: West Germany new four digit auxiliary marking: 7401 Schwalldorf (Tübingen)

Image 16. West Germany four digit postal code cancel: 3161 Haimar (formerly Haimar über Lehrte)

Image 17. Germany 3160 Lehrte 8 cancel (formerly 3161 Arpke and Arpke über Lehrte)

(Image 15, though some variants exist. This changeover lasted until well into 1962. For Poststelle I cancels, the old postal code was removed until new devices arrived. These four digit auxiliary markings did not last long and are harder to find than other Landpost markings, as in February 1962, the Federal Postal Minister decided that all offices, including Poststelle II offices, should have full canceling devices with the new codes (Image 16).

Land reform in the 1970s resulted in the consolidation of many villages under a main city or town. This led to many of
the former Landpost offices becoming branch offices of the main town post office (Image 17). Increased use of automobiles in the rural population also made many rural post offices redundant. Then, in 1985, the Bundespost retired the postal van system, resulting in the further closure of many rural post offices. Finally, in 1993, the Bundespost introduced a 5-digit system and at the same time introduced large regional sorting centers (Briefzentrum) which fully integrated the old rural system into the national system.

In East Germany, Poststelle markings with four digits continued to be used at least until Unification in 1990. An example may be seen in Image 18. These, like the West German offices, were integrated into the new unified national system in 1993.

References
