

Collecting Germany – The Hitler Heads

By Richard Pederson

Up to the present day, over 60 years after the defeat of Germany and the Axis powers by the Allied powers in World War II, there is still a fascination with Nazi Germany. A large portion of this fascination stems from the atrocities committed by Hitler-led Germany, prior to and during the war, and a lack of understanding as to how a civilized country such as Germany could allow such events to occur. My purpose here is not to delve into how Hitler was able to lead Germany down such a path, but to look at a set of postal emissions from that government. In particular, I am going to examine the set of stamps issued during the period of 1941 through 1944, popularly called the “Hitler Heads”.

As a youth, this set of stamps attracted many of those in my generation of Baby Boomers that grew up following World War II. Many of us knew little about Hitler or, in fact, exactly what had occurred during World War II. Our parents wanted to put those times behind and, in many families, there was limited discussion of what happened. Despite that, the Hitler Heads attracted many of us budding stamp collectors. The set is large enough to be a challenge and has two basic designs, one for the lower denominations (up through the 80 pfennig) and one for the upper denominations (1 through 5 marks). Figure 1, Lower Denomination Example, and Figure 2, Upper Denomination Example, picture the two basic designs.



Figure 1. Lower Denomination Example



Figure 2. Upper Denomination Example

Although all values in the set have the same profile of Hitler, the lower values (through the 80 pfennig) have a solid background, while the upper values (1 mark and above) have a line background. The set also has stamps in three different sizes: the one pfennig through 24 pfennig stamps (Scott numbers 506 through 517) are 18½ millimeters by 22½ millimeters; the 25 pfennig through 80 pfennig values (Scott numbers 518 through 523) are 21½ millimeters by 26 millimeters; and the 1 through 5 mark stamps (Scott numbers 524 through 527) are 24½ by 30 millimeters. In addition, there is a 42 pfennig value (Scott number 529) issued in 1944 that some include with the set. It is identical in size and design to the 25

through 80 pfennig values, except that it is inscribed “Grossdeutsches Reich”; at the bottom instead of “Deutsches Reich”. Figure 3, Grossdeutsches Reich Variety, shows this third design.



Figure 3. Grossdeutsches Reich Variety

The Hitler Head issue is attractive because it has engraved designs, for values 10 pfennig and above (there were engraved and non-engraved versions of the 10 and 12 pfennig values), and each denomination is a different color. For young collectors of my generation, the biggest selling points were that the set was attainable and, when completed, was attractive on an album page. With the multitude of different, yet contrasting colors, the set also had a striking appearance, similar to that of the U.S. 1938 Presidential set (the Prexies).

In the 1950s, when I was first attempting to assemble a set of Hitler Heads, there were a number of options available to me. My first step was to go to Woolworth's Five and Dime and to the local hobby store looking for inexpensive packets of stamps containing a representative selection of the stamps I was seeking. I then attempted to trade with my many friends who collected stamps. My final options were to go to a local stamp store or write an approval dealer, such as H. E. Harris. Fortunately, the Grossman Premier World Stamp Album that I used at the time only pictured 15 of the 24 stamps included in the basic set, although there were blank spaces I could use to mount other values I might encounter. I was eventually successful in filling all of the spaces allotted for the Hitler issue in my album, plus a number of the other denominations and varieties that were not pictured.

Although I moved on to looking for other stamps once I accomplished my goal of filling the pictured Hitler issues in my album, there is much more that can be done if you are interested in collecting this issue. Even today, the basic set can be acquired in unused fine to very fine condition for under twenty dollars. For those interested in more of a challenge, try collecting some or all of the following varieties:

- Color varieties of various values including the 1, 5, 6, and 40 pfennig issues;
- Imperforate Issues;
- Booklet panes;
- Perforation varieties of the 1,2, 3, and 5 mark denominations;

- A military parcel post item (Scott number MQ3) created by surcharging the 40 pfennig value with “FELDPOST 2kg”; and
- The 1 through 80 pfennig values were overprinted by Germany as occupation issues for use in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Scott Russia N9-28) and in the Ukraine (Scott Russia N29-48).

If successful in finding all of the above, an even greater challenge can be found by attempting to locate genuine postally used (not cancelled to order) copies of each stamp. This challenge can be made even more difficult by trying to find genuine on cover postal uses of each value. Finding on cover uses can be extremely difficult because many of the values were in use for a very short time and/or saw very limited distribution. Although catalog values for postally used copies and covers are, at times, much higher than those for the corresponding unused stamp, the catalog values may not fully reflect the true scarcity of the items. If you want some fun and a challenge for a reasonable price, look into collecting the Hitler Head issue today.