

The postmarks of Postal agencies in the Czech Lands 1900 – 1958

What are the “Czech Lands” (Czech: “Země České”)?

The “Czech Lands” are the territories under the rule of the Bohemian kings since the late middle ages, including Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (from the 18. century only a small part of Silesia); from 1526 the Czech lands were part of the Austrian Empire, 1918 – 38 and 1945 – 1992 part of Czechoslovakia; 1938 – 45 they did not exist as a territorial entity; nowadays it is (approximately) the territory of the Czech Republic.

What are “Postal agencies”?

Due to the development of industry, trade and transport in the second half of the 19th century the demand for postal services developed rapidly. The number of postal offices in the Czech lands increased from 455 in 1855 to 2193 in 1900. In the same period a supplementary form of postal presence developed, for (smaller) places without a “full” post office: The postal agency. Tasks of a postal agency were: the sale of stamps, collecting of ordinary letters and telegrams, emptying of the letter box and processing of the outgoing post to the charging post office to which the agency was allocated; processing of the incoming mail including its delivery to the addressees as well. Postal agencies had a canceller at its disposal, usual a rectangular rubber hand stamp with the name of the agency, but no date stamp. The postmark had to be placed beside the stamps, just to confirm the reception of the mail. The stamps were cancelled later by the charging post office. Just a few postal agencies became authorized to use a metal cancel with date stamp and to cancel the stamps (from 1929).

Why from 1900 – 1958?

In 1900 the Austrian postal administration issued, for the first time, “Regulations for postal agencies” which standardized their so far different practices. The Czechoslovak postal administration took over the system and the network of postal agencies in 1918 – so did later the postal administration of the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia (1939- 45). In the Sudetenland area they were integrated into the system of the German postal administration (1938 – 45). They were no longer called “Postablage”, but “Poststelle”(1938), later “Poststelle II” (from April 1st 1939), but the system was the same. After the liberation 1945 the network of postal agencies from 1938 became restored, though a large number of agencies were not re-activated. Moreover, its number decreased from 780 (1944) to 351 in 1948. During the communist period the differences between postal agencies and post offices were reduced more and more, so there was no longer the need for this separate kind of service. The last postal agency was liquidated in 1958. Only after the independence of the Czech Republic in 1993 a new system of postal agencies was introduced.