Landpost "über" Lehrte
An Exemplar of the Rural Mail System in Germany

Purpose: Illustration of the rural postal system in Germany using the system around the small crossroads city of Lehrte as an example and showing postal markings of the rural offices there.

Scope: Beginning of the system in Lehrte in 1933 to the fading out of the system in the 1990s, as the automobile transformed rural life.

Introduction: The "Landpost" or German rural mail system was reformed by the German Reichspost in 1928 (in Lehrte in 1933), leading to a wide variety of new postal markings, which allowed for better sorting and delivery. Post offices were often many kilometers from rural residents. Pensions and other monetary services went through the post office. Often a pensioner or other recipient of money was robbed on the walk home. German farms radiate out from a village with farm buildings surrounding the core, unlike in the US, where farms are separate, so the Reichspost met the need using postal vans and rail to serve a system of smaller rural postal offices and agencies tied to a central receiving post office.

Lehrte, just east of Hannover, was a natural location as the main collection point for this section of the rural post system, as its main post office was adjacent to the main rail line. The main East-West and North-South rail lines and autobahns cross here. Rural post offices depicted in this exhibit were generally within 20 km northeast, east, and southeast of Lehrte.

official city meter showing city as cross-roads

30 pf rate for standard letter under 20 g from Apr 1, 1966 to Aug 31, 1971

Outline

1. Early Steps and Forerunners

2. Third Reich Era

    a. Mail from Lehrte Rural Offices
    b. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destinations
    c. Transition to Poststelle I
    d. Introduction of Two Digit Postal Codes

3. Germany under Allied Occupation

    a. Mail from Lehrte Rural Offices
    b. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destinations

4. Federal Republic of Germany

    a. Mail from Lehrte Rural Offices
    b. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destinations
    c. Transitions between Rural Systems

5. Introduction of Four Digit Postal Code

    a. The Last Auxiliary Markings
    b. Mail from Lehrte Rural Offices
    c. Mail to Lehrte Rural Destinations

6. End of the Rural Post System in Lehrte
7. Epilogue

Landpost Lehrte Synopsis (updated February 2025)

This exhibit has undergone a important revision since it was last shown at Indypex 23. Discovery copy (p 10) of item cancelled outside Lehrte now noted in exhibit as suggested by Sam Chiu at Pipex 22. Routes added based on an 1937 Hannover newspaper article from Eckhardt Krause of Lehrte/Ahlten.

Theme. Postal history of the rural post in Germany as exemplified by the city of Lehrte, Kreis Burgdorf, Germany, which was the central receiving office (Leitpostamt) and rural hub for this area near Hannover.

Scope. Start of the service in Lehrte in 1933 to the end of the rural service, as such, in the early 1990s, as rural areas and then their post offices were consolidated into towns and branch post offices of those towns, respectively. In Lehrte, this began with the 1974 land reform in Kreis (County) Burgdorf. As this consolidation happened, the rural offices were gradually closed and the Kraftpost lines privatized. Lehrte was chosen for two reasons: it was a transportation nexus, making it an ideal example of a rural mail hub, and it was the town the exhibitor lived in in the Spring of 1973 as an exchange student.

Importance. Rural populations are an important part of any country's populace, given the high percentage of rural populations in the early to mid-20th century. Even today, almost 30% of Germany is rural. How a country serves that population postally is thus quite important to the history of that country, especially in a major postal system like Germany. One important reason was the growth of mail order.

Treatment. Items chosen for this exhibit were the best quality available to the exhibitor at this time. A variety of usages, types of mail, and rates are shown. Mail order was particularly important for rural areas, so there is a selection of items appropriate to this. A secondary goal was to show markings and cancels from as many of the rural offices as possible. A tertiary goal was an interest in social philately. In some cases, research was done on the senders or receivers of the mail, bringing to light aspects of the correspondence, such as references to historical events. Rates given in *italics* in smaller type; important items shown in **BOLD** type with **green** matting (see list below). Town names are color coded corresponding to routes: **red**, north; **blue**, central; **green**, south; **yellow**, new central loop. Epilogue on last 4 pages.

Scarcity: Examples of the German rural post are relatively common (over 50,000 different markings), but specific usages from Lehrte as Leitpostamt and in particular some of the very small villages (pop. less than 100!) are not. Lehrte was slightly over 11,000 persons in 1939, with a current population of 43,000 (now including some of the former rural offices). In 1939, there were at least 13 towns on the routes with a population under 250, making those PSt II offices in this exhibit challenging to obtain. Beinhorn (pop. 80) and Rötzum (pop. 56) are new to the exhibit. Four digit PSt II town markings are even scarcer, as they were quickly replaced (less than a year) in most cases by 4 digit cancels. There are 3 PSt II covers from November 1933, at the start of the rural service in Lehrte. Early use rural covers are considered challenging to find by rural mail collectors. A landpost cover cancelled in Haemlerwald rather than Lehrte as LPA is the **Discovery Copy**—one known.

Research. The sources shown were consulted as well as the aforementioned German collectors of this area. A full search of the 1944 Ortverzeichenis was done to ascertain all of the possible offices in the Lehrte region in that year. The exhibitor speaks German and can read the original sources.

Note on Quality. Use of two hole punches (sometimes one hole) on some items result from a German filing system in use for commercial correspondence, which stored the items this way in a two hole binder or other device. This is common for non-philatelic German business mail and does not affect the philatelic value of the pieces shown. This filing system preserved, albeit imperfectly, many usages and town postal markings and cancels that otherwise might have been lost. Items are presented in chronological order within their section.

Coverage. Of approximately 54 rural offices during this period, 53 are represented in some form in this exhibit. The missing one, Ramhorst, is known (population 40 in 1975), but I have only seen one example, which I do not own.

Note on Addresses. Old German (Sütterlin) script can be very difficult to interpret as the letters can look considerably different from modern usage. Example: p 18 where Hohenhameln looks like "Gofrufenulu". Close inspection of the letters and comparison with an on-line Sütterlin chart allowed an accurate reading in most cases.

Items of Note. Unusual usages and items important to explaining the system and how it worked are noted, with a brief boldface text and a red frame.

Page 4: Earliest known use for Lehrte, three days after service was inaugurated in Lehrte area.
Page 7: Discovery copy. Lehrte landpost item *not* cancelled in Lehrte. I have never seen another.
Page 14: Beinhorn marking (population 80)
Page 17: Rötzum marking (population 56)
Page 18: Local usage on same route where marking is used as a cancel (did not go through Lehrte) [two examples known by me] and local usage on same route where item did go through Lehrte.
Page 23: Airmail from Iraq with currency censorship
Page 33: "Turned" (reused) cover due to post war paper shortages.
Page 34: West zone currency reform covers. Last day of 10X use of old postage (a three day rate).
Page 39: East zone currency reform cover. Last day of Hand Overprint (HOP) use.
Page 46: Full package card with customs information for important international company based in area.
Page 49: Mail order from PSt II office.
Page 58: Radio lottery card--used by a youth entrant.
Page 62: Four digit postal code auxiliary marking. Used less than a year.
Page 63: Cancel modification (removal of old postal code) as part of introduction of new four digit codes.
Page 64: Unusual use of tete-beche booklet pane pieces.
Page 75: Express mail with extra fee paid for delivery out of the usual hours.

Selected References (English translation/identification given, where needed, below in smaller type)

Gilbert, K. An Introduction to German Rural Mail (Landpost) Markings and Cancels. *The German Postal Specialist*, 2020: Part 1, March 2020 Vol 71, pp 75-79. Part 2, April 2020, Vol. 71, pp 104-113. Erratum: *The German Postal Specialist*, 2020, May 2020, Vol 71, p 160. E-copy may be found on SESCAL site.

Ortsverzeichnis I; Reichsdruckerei: Berlin-Tempelhof, 1944.
Listing of all towns and cities in 1944 Germany with postal facilities and the type of facility

Greise, P. *Poststellen Stempel 1928-1988*; Neue Schriftenreihe der Poststempelgilde, e.V., Band 175; Poststempelgilde: Manching, Germany, 2008.
Poststelle (i.e., rural postal agency) Markings 1928-1988; New Reports from the Postal Marking Guild

Michel Postgebueren-Handbuch Deutschland; Schwaneberger Verlag: Munich, Germany, 2001.
Michel Postage Rate Handbook for Germany

Mikus, W. *Lehrte: Die Auswirkung eines Eisenbahnknotenpunktes auf die geographische Struktur eine Siedlung-am speziellen Beispiel von Lehrte*; Buchdruckerei Michael Lassleben: Regensburg, 1966.
Lehrte: The Effect of a Railroad Crossing Point on the Geographic Structure of a Settlement

Die Post im Hannoverschen; Oberpostdirektion Hannover: Hannover, 1967. The Post in Hannover (Region)

Der Landkreis Burgdorf; Walter Dorn Verlag: Bremen, 1961. The Rural County of Burgdorf

Google Map was used to obtain approximate distances between locations in the area around Lehrte.

http://www.briefesammler.com/wt_landpost.htm is a good German language source on Landpost focused on the town of Esslingen

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poststelle_(Postamt) is another German language source.

Articles on the various towns and villages surrounding Lehrte as well as the history of postal codes in Germany from Wikipedia proved useful (usually German Wikipedia, as it was more detailed).