

Iceland's "Number-in-Circle" (NICs) Cancels

Exhibit Purpose: to document the use, development, mobility and rarity of Iceland's Breifhring (BH) "Number-in-circle" (NICs) cancels, emphasizing their role in identifying remote postal activity during the formative years of the national mail network.

Exhibit Plan: Present a brief historical background, followed by the first 173 NICs numerically (issued in 1903) arranged sequentially by the assigning District Post Offices. Information will be provided about the NIC's BH location, period of use & rarity of each NIC (on stamps both on & off covers, because far fewer NICs on cover are known than on stamps off cover). NICs 1-173 will be followed numerically by NICs 174 through 300 that were put into use in later years—when & where as needed. Some photos & postcards depicting a few locations & Postal service workers will be included to emphasize the remoteness of Breifhring locations and the human nature of mail service. Exhibit concludes with the final NIC # 300 because NICs began to be replaced with "Bridge cancels" beginning in 1930.

Exhibit Challenges: obtaining examples of all 300 NICs from all 538 locations. Factors significantly affecting this challenge include: Iceland's sparse population in various remote locations, the limited amount of mail sent from these isolated sites, the infrequency of mail delivery, the frequency of NIC relocations & the limited quantity of known NIC strikes. Information will be provided about the number of known NIC strikes on stamps both on & off covers.

Exhibit Highlights: will have a blue border & this symbol  for new discoveries. Significant supplemental information will be in maroon type.

Historical Background Information:

1873 – Icelandic Postal Administration (IPA) created & issued its first stamps. (shown to the right)
 The Postal Administration had 26 District Post Offices throughout Iceland. (see map on page 2) The main post office was in Reykjavik.
 There were two categories of Post Offices: **Póstafgreiðsla** (post office) (PA) & **Breifhring** (mail receiving office) (BH).
Póstafgreiðsla (PA) – offered a full range of postal services; had a postmark, cancelled mail; named for the town location;

Breifhring (BH) – provided limited mail collection services; they initially did not have a postmark & did not cancel mail except in cases of mail not passing a PA on its way to its final destination (then it was "ink canceled"); BHs were managed by a trusted local resident (farmer, shopkeeper, priest, etc.) & often named for the farm/village where the BH manager lived.

1893 – IPA decides BH's should have a canceller, thus "crown & posthorn" cancellers were created. (Examples shown below.) These devices were made of rubber & contained the Breifhring's name (i.e. village, farm, church, etc.) Rubber cancellers were chosen because the cost was 2.25kr instead of metal cancellers which cost 27kr. These devices however, did not prove to be very durable or practical. The rubber would deteriorate over time & when a BH closed and the receiving location would relocate the canceller would move to the new site, but then the name on the canceller would be incorrect for the location of the new Breifhring.

"Iceland's first stamps"



"Ink canceled"



"Crown & Posthorn" cancels



"NIC Cancels"



Bólstaðarhlíð



Stakkahlíð



Höskuldstaður



Útskálar



Breifhring



Möðruvellir



Stakkahlíð



Þjórsáartún



Bólstaðarhlíð



Sveinseyri



1903 – IPA created the "Number-in-Circle" (NICs) cancellers. The first 173 NICs were assigned in 1903. Assignment distribution of the NIC cancellers began with the district post office Hraungerði in Árnessýsla County & followed a geographical progression of Sýsla (counties) counterclockwise around Iceland ending up in the Reykjavik area. Within each district postal area the NICs were assigned alphabetically to the BHs by place name. The NIC cancellers were made of metal and were used mainly from 1903 to 1930, (however some NICs were used into the 1960s & 70s).

There were four types of NICs: NIC numbers 1–200 were (N1a type) cancellers measuring 22mm in diameter & were purchased on April 23, 1903 for 716kr and 70aur from a British firm. (N1b type) NIC # 39 cancels measuring 18.1mm & 20mm with number slightly tilted are believed to be fake. (N1c type) NICs 201 – 210 plus replacement #'s 32, 39, 145 & 180 measuring 22mm with slightly tilted digits were produced in Denmark & arrived in Reykjavik by May 1911. (N2 type) NICs 211–220 plus replacement #'s 82, 117, 144 & 178 measuring 18mm & slightly larger digits were produced in Denmark & arrived in Reykjavik by September 1922; NICs 221-230 arrived by March 1928; NICs 231-250 arrived by February 1929; NICs 251-275 arrived by June 1931 & finally NICs 276-300 arrived by May 1935. Additional NICs (#'s 174 to 300) were added as needed in later years. A total of 300 numbers were used, on a total of 310 cancellers (a few were damaged or lost & had to be replaced), at 538 different locations - 487 farm sites; 17 boat or ships; 31 small towns and 6 islands. Only 63 NICs remained at their initial assigned location throughout their period of use. Some moved as many as 7 times. The NICs proved to be more reliable & useful—the metal devices held up better & the NIC number could be reassigned to a different location, as needed without there being a problem with the device having the wrong location name.

Iceland's Number-in-Circle (NIC) Cancels, 1903–1960 — Synopsis


Purpose. To document the development, mobility, and rarity of Iceland's *brefhirðing* (BH) (receiving office) NICs, emphasizing their role in identifying remote postal activity during the formative years of the national mail network.

Historical Overview. Introduced **April 1903**, NICs were assigned to **BH** locations alphabetically by the supervising District Post Offices to replace previous “Crown & Posthorn” cancellers and resolve use issues. Devices were **portable**, often **reassigned** as postal needs shifted. Use persisted—sometimes decades—until bridge cancels official replaced them beginning in 1930.

Scale of Issue.

- **300 numbers** used on 310 devices at **538 locations** (487 farms, 31 villages, 17 boats, 6 islands)
- **First 173 NICs** assigned by supervising District Post Offices (1903)
- **NICs 174-300** entered into service “as needed in subsequent years
- **Four types of NICs** - **N1a** 1-200; **N1b** questionable 39's; **N1c** 201-210 plus replacements 32, 39, 145 & 180; & **N2** 211-300 plus replacements 82, 117, 144 & 178 purchased at various times between 1903 - 1935
- Earliest use: **1903**; latest recorded: **1960s–70s**

Treatment & Plan

- **Historical background information**
- **NICs 1 – 173** examples assigned in 1903 by the supervising District Post Offices
- **NICs 174 – 300** examples assigned in subsequent years – when & where as needed
-  **Symbol** used to call attention to important supplemental NIC facts
- **Bold type** used to identify NIC's BH location at time of cancel on stamp/cover
- **Maroon type** used for significant supplemental NIC use or location information
- **Bold type** in section for NICs 174 – 300 used to indicate when NIC placed in service

Rarity Profile.

- **Number of known strikes** on stamps and covers
- **43 NICs:** no recorded covers
- **139 NICs:** 1–3 known covers
- **77 NICs:** 4–7 known covers
- **22 NICs:** 10+ known covers
- Most common strike: **NIC 105** (199 strikes on stamps & 16 on covers)
- Most covers: **NIC 215** (21 covers)

Exhibit Highlights:



- **symbol** used to annotate new discoveries significantly enhancing the NIC field of knowledge
- surrounded by a **blue border**

Exhibit Contribution.

- Material shown includes: **252 NICs** from **292 locations**, with **13 newly recorded** strikes not available to Sigurjónsson (2016) and numerous additional “**known**” examples added to the data base represented in Sigurjónsson’s books. Emphasis is placed on **device movement, geographic isolation, postal necessity, NIC rarity & expanded “known” data base.**
- **Significance.** NICs provide the only postal evidence for many farms and seasonal settlements during the period of 1903 - 1930. Their mobility—some devices moved **up to seven times; some traversed the country** —makes them a uniquely challenging and revealing field of Icelandic postal history.

Exhibit Changes:

- **Incorporated Judge’s feedback comments:** provide information about mail routes; enhance & clarify section headings; delete stamp issue dates; reduce number of examples of the same NIC that doesn’t add additional information
- **Remounted exhibit** on double wide paper
- **Added 18 new covers; 16 new NIC numbers; 4 new violent ink cancels; 13 new discoveries; a fourth frame**

Bibliography:

- Sigurjónsson, Brynjósson, *“Icelandic Numeral Cancels 1903-1960” A quantitative study on usage of cancels 1-173 & 174-300* (2013 & 2016) (2 books) (BH locations, BH & NIC use time periods & NIC types)
- *Icelandic Numeral Cancellations* by Foreningen Islandssamlarma (2006) (BH locations, BH & NIC use time periods)
- Flack, Brian, *Icelandic Philatelic Magazine* (various issues) (2016 –2026) (BH locations, BH & NIC use time periods)
- Loe, David, *Iceland: A Postoffice Gazetteer* (BH locations, BH & NIC use time periods)
- Þorleifsson, Heimir, *Póstsaga Íslands 1873-1935* by Íslandspóstur (2004) (District Post Offices & BH locations, mail routes and steam ship data)
- Jónsson, Jón Aðalsteinn, *“One Hundred Years of Icelandic Stamps”* Icelandic Postal Administration (1977) (Stamp issue dates)

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