The Fraktur

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MUNICIPAL NOTES OF RUSNĖ 1917-1920

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Vilnius, Lithuania

In the beginning of the 19th Century, Jews began to establish themselves in Rusne. In 1863, they established a synagogue. By the end of the 19th Century, the proportion of Jews had increased to 10 percent.

From ancient times, the fishermen of Rusne were known as providers of tasty fish. For example, during the 16th and 17th centuries, England and France imported 1,000 tons of sturgeon from the Courish Lagoon. Later the number of sturgeon and salmon begn to decline. The last sturgeon caught in the Courish Lagoon was in 1955. It was 254 centimeters long (39.3 inches), 120 kilograms (264.55 pounds) in weight and contained 18 kilograms (40 pounds) of caviar.

Besides the fisheries trade, Rusne profited from logs which were floated down from Lithuanian forests. Here the logs were cut in the score of local mills for shipment to German markets to the tune of millions of talers!

This encouraged other small tradesmen, craft and service enterprises. Cultural life also flourished, a library was founded, a printing shop, a bookbinding establishment, a library and a pharmacy were opened. A credit bureau also functioned.

Even though many men from Rusne died during World War I, the fish business continued to flourish in spite of the roar of the cannons, and many men were still required to fish. Thus, it is not surprising that Rusne issued its emergency municipal notes a year before the District of Heydekrug/Silutes issued its emergency money.

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Monthly Notgeld Quote. . .

Koestritz
50 Pfennig
L-715

Black beer from Koestritz
Helps mothers to raise
Vigorous children

ABOVE: Type 1-E. Signatures: Violet, violet, black. Note: no illustration available for Type 1-D. Refer to chart

Today, it is difficult to determine the exact purpose of this currency, or to determine the actual reason for its issuance. Perhaps there was a shortage of media of exchange, or possibly too much inflationary currency in circulation, necessitating the issuance of a local currency.

The first issue of Rusne notes appeared in 1917, in the denomination of 50-Pfennig, dated May 2, 1917, measuring 72 by 125 millimeters. Several signature varieties were issued. The basic text read OSTPREUSSEN. KREIS HEYDEKRUG 50 PFENNIG (twice) GUTSCHEIN UEBER FUENFZIG VERBUERGT DURCH DIE GEMEINDE RUSS; ZAHLBAR BEI DER ORTSKASSE. RUSS, DEN 2. MAI 1917 DER GEMEINDEVORSTAND.

This translates, "East Prussia, District of Heydekrug. 50 Pfennig. Voucher for fifty pfennig. Legal tender, authorized by the Rusne council, payable at the local exchange office. Rusne, 2. May 1917 The Local Council."

Each note has a mechanically printed serial number, either with four digits, 5.5 millimeters in height, or five digits, 6 mm. A stamped seal may have used ink colored black, blue or violet. The centrally imprinted seal may be one of two types, one reading GEMEINDEVORSTEHER RUSS KREIS HEYDEKRUG (President of the Council of Rusne, District of Heydekrug).

The second seal reads GEMEINDE VORSTAND, RUSS OSTPR, KREIS HEYDEKRUG, translating "Municipal Council, of Rusne, East Prussia, District of Heydekrug.

Three signatures or facsimilies appear on each note. Considering the varieties of legends, serial numbers and signatures, there are possibly nine varieties, as indicated on the chart. There is no pattern connecting blocks of serial numbers and signatures, suggesting that each signer started with serially numbered sheets out of numerical sequence.

ABOVE: Type 1-F. Signatures: Black, violet, violet.

EMERGENCY BANKNOTES OF RUSNĖ 1917-1920

type of money	centre of seal RUSS 4N	RUSS 5N	Russ Ostpr. 5N	colour of seals black	blue	violet	characteristic of signatures I position No of signature	I position No of facsimile	II position No of signature	II position No of facsimile	III position No of signature	III position No of facsimile	quantity not smaller than	quantity not more than	emission	value
1a	+			+			1		2			3	866	1.950	I	R
1b	+					+		4	2			3		4.019	II	R
1c	+				+		2			3	5		1.263		III	R
1d	+				+			4		3	2		?		IV	R
1e		+			+			4		3	2		1.761		IV	R
1f	+				+		6			3		7		3.651	V	
1g		+			+		6			3		7		10.318	V	
1h		+			+			6		3		7		1.279	VI	
1i			+	+				6		3		7		?	VII	R

ABOVE: Type 1-G. Signatures: Black, violet, violet.

Particularly similar are squares with a center circle pattern used for the security background of both the Rusne notes of 1917 and the Heydekrug/Silutes notes of 1918.

Some municipalities in the Heydekrug/Silutes district had their emergency notes printed in Tilsit/Tilze on the other side of the Nemunas River.

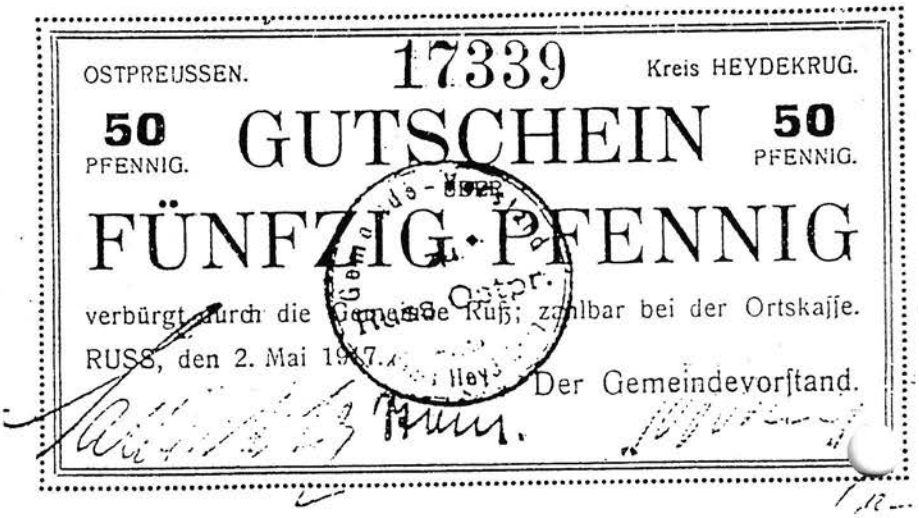
* * *

In the July 1997 issue of THE FRAKTUR, there appeared earlier comments about the 50-Pfennig notes of 1917 issued by Rusne. These comments were taken from THE KNIGHT, published by the Lithuanian NumismaticAssociation, edited by Frank Passic, 900 S. Eaton St., Albion, Mich. 49224.

Classified Advertising

WANTED: BRIEFMARKENGELD, Notgeld with Briefmarken and Kapselgeld all countries. Bob Jones, PO Box 461, Dahlgren, Va. 22448

ABOVE: Type 1-H. Signatures: All violet.



ABOVE: Type 1-I. Signatures: All violet

Half-Mark note of Heydekrug/Silutes, 1918, has a background security design of circles in squares, similar to the Rusne design. (Size reduced)

Classified Advertising

GERMAN-FRENCH, WORLD PAPER NOTGELD. Over 10,000 pieces in stock! Large free lists. Ian A.Marshall, Parkway Mall, Box 62509, 85 Ellesmere Road, Scarborough, Ontario, CANADA. MIR 5G8.

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ODD & CURIOUS wanted: Aluminum, leather, felt and other varieties of odd and curious Notgeld. Ken Hallenbeck, 711 N. Nevada Ave., Colorado Springs, Colo. 80903-1007

We will close the year with a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all and a bit of reminiscing.

We have been curious why no more than one, perhaps, of 10 sample requests results in a subscription to THE FRAKTUR.

Why do readers drop out without a word of explanation? Do we not serve their needs? Cost too much? Is $10 per year too much to ask? Perhaps $100 per year would attract more persons. Other hobbies to pursue?

Are there problems about housing a collection? Paying for expensive albums and plastic sheets can often exceed the value of the notes displayed. Is this reasonable?

Recently a book was ordered, and the buyer let us know how helpful it was --"Now I can organize my collection and order with a purpose," he said. The book, and a more adequate one, have been listed in our pages for 10 years.

Here is a word about Notgeld books.

I have mentioned in earlier commentary that since I was 14 I was a COIN collector. I spent five years in Germany, 1960-1965, and came home with precious little paper stuff. During that German experience, I ran into a metal Notgeld book written in 1922. It is the most worn, abused, dog-eared volume in my library today. An off-shoot of it appeared in 1965, just before I left Germany.

And in that time I was in correspondence with Dr. Arnold Keller, paper money guru of German paper money.

So I can understand and agree with collectors who want to know what is to be collected, how much it may cost, and the usefulness of books..

Beginning in the late 1960s the Ernst Battenberg publishing firm in Munich began reprinting the Keller works, rewrote one and issued two post-World War II Notgeld volumes. The firm of Erich Proeh in Berlin started issuing booklets on metal and paper Notgeld. A German monthly coin magazine began publishing a paper money monthly.

The closest organized Notgeld paper money group in the United States came in the late 1930s, meeting in various homes in New York City. Reports of their meetings are to be found in *The Numismatist.* World War II scattered the group and that was that.

After World War II Arlie Slabaugh tried a Notgeld publication and Dwight Musser started to advertise paper money, including Notgeld, in *Popular Science* Magazine. In the mid-1960s, Slabaugh joined the staff of *Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine,* and in the 1960s we were favored with the German and French metal Notgeld series by Robert Lamb, later printed into books.

The Lamb book was probably the first Notgeld catalog with English text.

What we are trying say here is that it is difficult to navigate without a compass or map, and the dearth of English-language catalogs kept many persons out of the hobby.

Let me list some personal efforts to spread the Notgeld word. At a Los Angeles convention once I displayed and spoke about Notgeld literature. Once in Florida I had a slide program on emergency paper money of France. In Kohler, Wisconsin, I showed a note signed by German Army Sergeant Kohler that never raised an eyebrow. At least twice in New York City I displayed German paper Notgeld, in an effort to display one note dated each day of August 1914. Only three days were not covered, and in those cases, an index card listed towns which did issue notes on those days. When you are competing against gold coins, Notgeld displays tend to be ignored.

Incidentally, I think that the day-by-day issue display could be continued to at least September 15, 1914.

Perhaps two factors work against building a Notgeld library. One is language, and one is cost. Each of us ponders, when looking at the price of a book, "How many pieces of Notgeld could I buy with the money that the book requires?" With some current books, worthy as they are, costing $80, that they could buy many notes is without question.

Coin collectors had their Harry Basses who accumulated gold coins and Amon Carter Jrs. who didn't question the cost of a paper note offered to them. Few of us are Arnold Kellers who can donate a worthy paper Notgeld collection to a central bank museum.

But I do believe that with basic books, we can understand our hobby better, chart a personal collecting course and be ready to display at coin club meetings and shows, write for club bulletins and enjoy our hobby more.

Recently I read a statement which I will paraphrase and say "A Notgeld collector without other Notgeld collectors with whom to commune is an orphan."

How many Notgeld orphans have we? You go to a coin club meeting and the Notgeld collector is considered a cheapie because much of it -- once -- cost so little.

How does one get information? Notes? Books?

This is evident to a slight degree in small coin club meetings in Germany, including the coin clubs on the American bases.

Dozens and dozens of collectors have shown enough interest to ask for a sample copy of THE FRAKTUR. What were they looking for? Was it Investment potential? The interest in Notgeld, for some, is the absence of "investment potential," "slabs," "grading services," "colored sheets," or "trends."

Several dealers offer Notgeld along with world paper money, some very knowledgeable in Notgeld. There are Swiss and German numismatic firms today whose genesis was in Notgeld, and that was the item that kept them alive in the early years of the the firm's development. Today some of them are selling antiquities and gold in posh offices, forgetting what got them started.

Classified Advertising

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