

BANKNOTES OR STAMPS FOR A GHETTO?

The Warsaw Ghetto post office unissued paper currency by Tony James

THE Warsaw Ghetto was ordered established by the Germans in early October 1940. The city of Warsaw had the largest Jewish community in pre-war Europe and the Polish Jews living in the city were required to move and take up residence in the Jewish quarter or ghetto which was separated from the rest of the city by a three-metre high wall surrounding the designated area. From 1939 Jews throughout Poland had been prohibited from possessing large amounts of cash, trading in certain goods, running their own schools, owning telephones or radios. Among many other restrictions, they could not even enter the central post office, and a curfew was imposed from nine pm to five am daily.

Polish paper currency

The Polish currency of the time consisted of zloty and subsidiary units called groszy (1 zloty= 100 groszy). There had been banknotes in groszy in 1924-25; however by the time the ghetto was established, the *General Gouvernement*, set up by the Germans, had introduced a provisional issue in 1939 with an overprint on the 100 zlotych. Then in 1940 the Bank Emisyjny w Polsce (Bank of Issue in Poland) issued a series of notes in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 and 500 zlotych. Any older notes were also stamped by the issuing authority "*General Gouvernement fur die besetzten polnischen Gebiete*". (General Government for the occupied Polish territories). Collectors should be aware that these notes are frequently found with a forged overprint. A new issue of notes was made in 1941 similar to that of 1940 but in the denominations of 1, 2, 5, 50, 100 and 1000 zlotych.

Currency of the ghettos

The most significant difference between the Warsaw Ghetto and others in Poland



Poland 100 Zlotych SCWPM 75a dated 1934 prewar issue overprinted in 1939

and Germany in regard to money is that several other ghettos had a distinct currency for use within the community. Lodz, or Litzmannstat, ghetto had a well-printed paper currency as well as coinage, and Theresienstadt had an authorized paper currency designed by an inmate. Warsaw never had an internal currency; it used Polish paper money and coins. This was very fortunate for the members of the community as, when they crept out of the ghetto to buy food and arms, they had Polish currency to pay for it.

Post Office administration

The post office in the ghetto was run by the Judenrat (Jewish Council) but the money derived from the sale of postal items was sent to the main post office in Warsaw which was under German control. There were eight yellow post boxes situated within the borders administered by the Jewish administration, which was responsible for the collection of outgoing mail between four and six pm,

then censorship and delivery of the mail to the German postal authorities the following morning.

The postal workers in the ghetto were paid from a surtax that ghetto residents were forced to pay to receive each item of mail. This ranged from 10 groszy for printed matter through 20 groszy for inland letters and packets, 30 groszy for foreign letters, packets and registered mail, to 50 groszy for special delivery. All mail that entered the ghetto post office was marked with a rectangular stamp containing the date in the middle and R.Z.w.W. that stood for *Rada Zydowska w Wasziewei* (Jewish Council of Warsaw) on the top and S.P.D.Z. *Skladnica Pocztaowa Dzielnicy Zydowskiej* (Post Office of Jewish District) on the bottom. There was the circular stamp indicating the amount of the surcharge, written in figures at the top, gr. for groszy in the centre and S.P.D.Z around the edge at the bottom. The deliveryman had to collect the surcharge and hope that he would get a tip. Some sources indicate that the postal employees were paid on a piece rate at 6 groszy a letter, others that they received 10 per cent of the surcharge.

There was a project to organize a secret Ghetto Post Office in the Underground as the Jewish resistance grew and the German authorities began rounding up residents and transporting them to the Treblinka and Auschwitz concentration camps.

Proposed post office currency

An early mention of a proposed paper currency for the Warsaw Ghetto is in the first edition (1989) of Campbell's book *Prisoner of War and Concentration Camp Money*, with an expanded entry in the second edition in 1993. The latter entry mentions a "controversial issue of currency" that was allegedly produced by the Jewish



Poland 20 Zlotych SCWPM 95 1940 Bank Emisyjny w Polsce. Valid in the ghetto



Warsaw Ghetto
unissued token paper currency
5, 10, 15, 20 denominations



Warsaw Ghetto unissued proofs, 25 with issuer in full and 50 with significant symbolism

and SPDZ spelt out in full, *Rada Żydów w Warszawie* (Jewish Postal Authorities) and *Składnica Poczтовая Dzielnicy Żydowskiej* (Jewish Council in Warsaw). The 50 denomination depicts the same initials as the lower denominations, as well as 18 stars, a picture of a barbed wire fence, and a flame containing the symbol of the Nazi SS. The 18 stars are a significant number in Judaism; 18 in Hebrew letters means “*Chai*” or “life” and also hope. The wire fence and hated SS symbol are self explanatory.

The printing of the notes is also significant in their crudity, appearing to be a lino or wood cut, and the only colour used is blue; a colour long associated with Judaism and also of the flag of the uprising.

The low denominations are important in that they reflect the need for small change and are consistent with the amount of the surcharge for delivery within the ghetto.

Fakes and forgeries of normal Polish paper currency

One of the difficulties of collecting military and camp money is its scarcity, due to the popularity of both the metal and paper items. This has tempted some to forge and counterfeit items since they are highly

underground in the spring of 1941; however he says that survivors of the ghetto do not recall having seen these notes in circulation. An addendum to the entry states that the notes are usually found in full sets in about uncirculated condition, and that in the 1950s a hoard of between 50 and 100 sets (that have since been distributed), was sold to a stamp dealer in Austria by a former SS officer. The six denominations are listed (Camp 4246- 4251) as 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 50 groszy with pictures of a block of four 10 grozy and single illustrations of the 25 and 50 denominations.

The issue is again mentioned in Zvi Stahl's book *Jewish Ghettos' and Concentration Camps' Money 1933-1945*. First printed in Israel in Hebrew in 1990, the English edition appeared in 2002 and illustrates the denominations and describes the meaning of the inscriptions. It relies heavily on the opinion

of Dr Henry Fenigstein, a collector of the time, who lived in the ghetto, and who considers that the tokens were issued after the war to deceive collectors. Stahl notes that most books do not mention the Warsaw notes and while it might be regrettable that collectors may have spent time and money on questionable notes, evidence of their forgery is inconclusive.

The latest mention of these notes is in Feller's catalogue *Silent Witnesses* where they are given full examination, and various points of view are discussed. The four lowest denominations all have the initials RZWW and SPDZ, a Star of David and the denomination. None of them indicate a unit of currency and it is interesting that the denominations are within 5 of the next higher except for the highest 50. The notes for the two higher denominations are much larger, the 25 denomination has the initials RZWW



Polish banknotes 1940-1941 with false hand stamps produced to mislead collectors

valued by collectors. This scarcity, particularly of camp and ghetto money, has led to the production of several types of forgeries, usually in the form of hand stamps of supposed authorities of the time.

The most glaring examples, as illustrated, are the stamp with the Star of David indicating Litzmannstadt (which actually had its own paper currency, so why issue over-stamped notes?) and the stamp showing the SS symbol the words *Bibliothek Wewelsburg* (Library of Wewelsburg), which was where Himmler started an SS school or academy where scientists practiced "germanische Zweckforschung" (Germanic applied research) This has no relationship to the paper currency of Poland as the town of Wewelsburg is in Germany!

Hand-stamped propaganda banknotes

There have been other over-stamped Polish notes on the denominations of the 1940 issues (Pick 91, 93, 94 and 96). The overprints say "Braterstwo Broni Anglii Ameryki Polski Niech Zyje" (long live the Anglo-American-Polish brotherhood in



1 Zloty Pick 105 dated 1944 issued after the liberation.
Few Polish Jews were alive to see this currency of freedom.

arms) and another on a 5 zlotych P93 with a stamp "A.K.Regula Pierwszy zold powstancy, Sierpien 1944" (Warsaw Resistance Fighters of 1944). These are considered to be genuine propaganda and commemorative overprints. Another genuine overprint that has been recognized and confirmed is

the 100 zlotych with the overprint *GETTO WALCZY* (The Ghetto Fights). Dr Alan York, a prominent US collector wrote in 1982 in the *Shekel* magazine (The Journal of the American Israel Numismatic Association) that these could well have been a patriotic message to circulate outside the ghetto and inform other ghettos of resistance to the German occupation. A most interesting item that appeared in the Spink sale of the Tom Warburton Collection in October 2010, was a one zloty note of 1941 bearing a black stamp reading *OKREG WARSAWSKI DOW-ODZTWO ZGRUP IV* (Group IV Command Warsaw District) together with the Polish eagle hand-stamped, that was attributed to the Warsaw ghetto uprising. However John E Sandrock (*The Currency Collector*) comments that this was a propaganda overprint by the Polish Home Army which was assisting the advancing Soviet forces in August 1944. This would align the issue with others of 1944 mentioned above, rather than the Ghetto uprising.

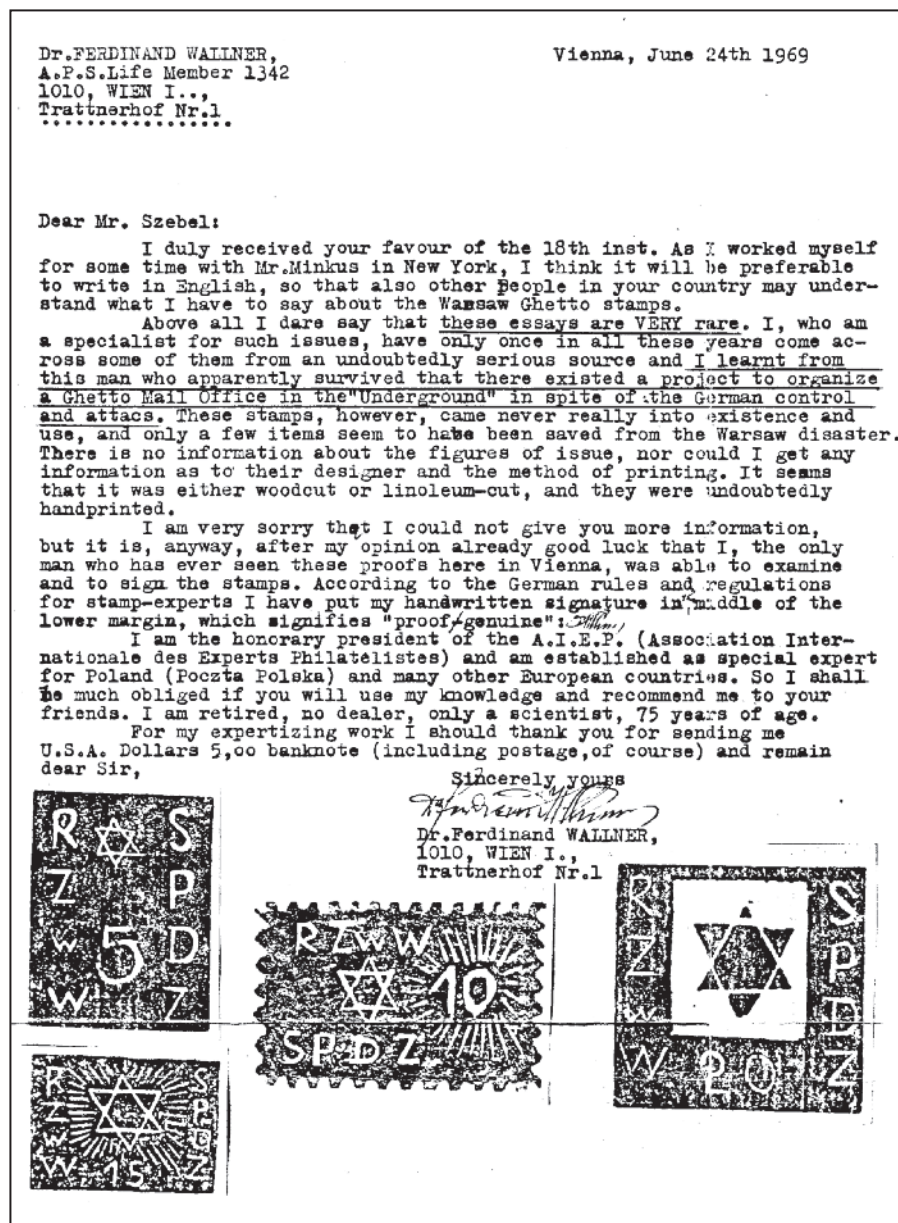
The end of the Ghetto

On February 16, 1943, Heinrich Himmler gave the order for the Warsaw Ghetto to be destroyed, and on April 19, which happened to be the Jewish Passover, German troops led by Colonel Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankenegg marched into the ghetto, intending to complete the liquidation of the Jewish district. The members of the Jewish Fighting Organization opposed them; the final battle for the ghetto had begun. The German forces required a month to squash the last of the opposition and the rebellion ended only when the Great Synagogue was blown up on May 16 1943.

Conclusion

Are these items token paper currency? Or possibly stamps intended for use in the Warsaw ghetto but never put in circulation? Can they be considered paper currency or philatelic items? The conflicting points of view point indicate to me that collectors should review the facts and opinions and draw their own conclusions.

Dr Fenigstein, as mentioned before, refutes the suggestion that these were made during WWII and while he was in the ghetto



Letter from Dr Ferdinand Wallner to Alfred Szebel confirming the items genuine.

“did not remember seeing or hearing about any of the notes” although he visited the post office regularly.

Dr Ferdinand Wallner of Vienna, another survivor, also did not believe the inmates produced any notes or stamps but has agreed that there had been some sort of underground effort to organize the mail office despite control by the German authorities. Correspondence between Alfred Szebel of Illinois USA and himself regarding these notes resulted in a letter certifying that these items were considered genuine.

Stanley Kronenberg of New Jersey, corresponded with collector Henry Schwab in 1971, claims the stamps were postage coupons intended to circulate mail and packages within the ghetto. Another survivor Arnold Shey believed that the notes were indeed intended as a substitute for small change which became scarce in the post office.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website the museum considers the items to be stamps issued by the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization (*Zydowski Zwiazek Wojskowy*) and its translation of the letters on the items reads Jewish Government in Warsaw (RZwW) and Jewish Postal Division (SPDZ). Interestingly, the indexing of entries for the six items (note denominations) is not consistent with description of these initials. This is one of the joys and frustrations of foreign languages and idiomatic translations that change with time, origin and opinion. Whatever the result of the investigations, the items remind the collector of a dark time in history that must never be forgotten.

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Niue Honours Holy Grail In Silver

THE Holy Grail is the latest religious icon to be recognized numismatically. Specifically it is the Holy Grail of Valencia Cathedral considered by many to be that used by Jesus during the Last Supper. Clearly Indiana Jones didn't have his facts straight. He needed to go only to Spain.

The 2 oz, 50 mm silver proof two dollars has been struck by the Mennica Polska for Niue. The reverse depicts the Valencia grail itself made of agate. It dates from between the second century BC and the first century AD. It was donated to the

cathedral by King Alfonso V of Aragon in 1437. A slice of red agate, similar to that used for the cup is embedded in the reverse. The obverse depicts King Arthur and his knights departing on their quest to find the sacred object.

Readers wanting a grail of their own can emulate King Arthur or Indiana Jones by contacting Downies. Call toll free 1300 788 358, or go to www.downies.com, or drop into the stores at Melbourne Block Arcade Coins or Sydney Town Hall Coins. Be quick. Mintage is just 1,500.

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Image courtesy Downies.

TONY JAMES HONoured FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL HERITAGE



Photo: Alan McRae

RESPECTED numismatist and long-standing contributor to CAB magazine Tony James, of Tony James Noteworld, was honoured recently by the Australian Institute of History and Arts for his contributions in his field to preserving Australia's national heritage. Tony was declared a Fellow of the Institute in recognition of his leadership, his knowledge and his understanding of the historical importance of numismatics, particularly banknotes.

His citation read: “By his efforts in this specialized field Tony has succeeded by private initiative in acquiring a greater knowledge of this subject than could ever be obtained by anyone using the normal scholarly channels or established houses of learning. Future generations of Australians will forever be appreciative of this work, which has greatly enriched the archives of our country.”

Of his award, Tony said, “it is wonderful to be recognised for what I love doing.”