A Decidedly Non-Philatelic Review of German History 1816 – 1871.

Germany in 1860

Destruction. Anarchy. With the rise and fall of empires throughout the ages because of war, at times a fresh start presents itself; an opportunity to rise up from the ashes like the Phoenix of Egyptian mythology. The German states of 1816 found themselves at such a crossroad.

Napoleon had recently been defeated. He was finally driven out of Central Europe in October of 1813 at the battle of Leipzig, where a coalition of Russian, Prussian, and Austrian forces, called the Sixth Coalition, was able to defeat Napoleon and initiate an invasion of eastern France.

The German states had seen their share of war. From 1792 until the battle of Leipzig, wars with France had become all too common place. Napoleon had tried to consolidate Germany a bit by forming the Confederation of the Rhine which was made the 16 German states, which officially dissolved the Holy Roman Empire after hundreds of years of existence. So when the German states attended the Congress of Vienna in 1816 to decide the fate of Europe, it was no surprise the German Confederation was formed to replace the Holy Roman Empire, and was akin to the Confederation of the Rhine.

The new Confederation consisted of 38 states Germanic states, encompassing all of present-day Germany. Appointed delegates would meet in assembly called the Bundestag,

F   Battle of Leipzig, 1813

located in Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt). Prussia was clearly the biggest winner from the new Confederation, gaining the Rhineland and Westphalia. The population of Prussia instantly increased, and Prussia gained valuable mineral resources, especially coal. This subsequently set up an economic boom for Prussia, shaping the future of the Germanic people for years to come.

At the same time the culture of central Europe was rapidly changing along with that of the entire Western world. This was a period of nationalism. Finally rid of war after so many years, many Germans took the time to reinvestigate their ancestral homelands and roots with a newfound pride in their part of expelling the French from Europe. A hard-earned sense of the pride and comfort of home seemingly spread across Europe.

A typical Delacroix called "The Death of Sardanapalus'

That feeling of comfort and of long-awaited ease also expressed itself in the musical and artistic movement of the day, Romanticism. Taking time to enjoy nature, listening to beautiful music, expressing   nationalism in positive ways infiltrated and dominated the arts during this time. Moving away from stark, harsh reality and forgetting the brutality of war seemed paramount to most people in Europe, and in the German states there was absolutely no exception. Caspar Friederich, Eugene Delacroix, Theodore Gericault, and Philip Runge are some of the painters associate with the Romantic era. Writers, pining away for the Germany of the Middle Ages with nature-based stories include Hoffmann (Der Sandmann and von Eichendorff (Das Marmorbild [The Marble Statue]). Their writings were full of sentimental, emotional stories, based often on Goethe's 18th century writings of increased emotional, romantic notions.
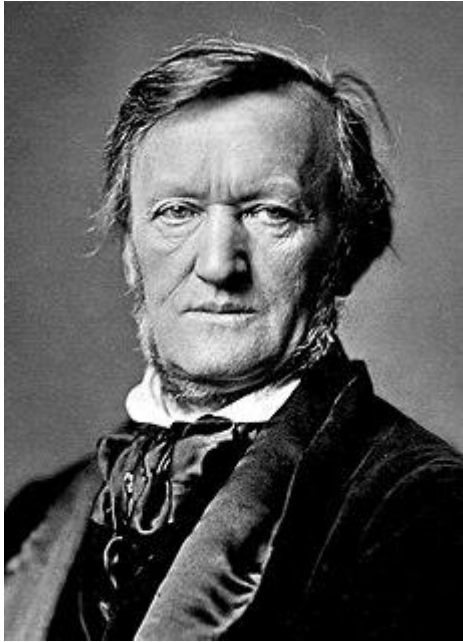
The German people ruled the world in the creation of romantic music of the 19th century. Beethoven was reinterpreted to be a composer of early romantic music. Enjoying music became about how one felt when they listened to the music. From Beethoven, the next generation took those emotional reactions to music a huge step further. Chopin made music to be enjoyed from a Polish perspective; Franz Liszt did the same from a Hungarian viewpoint. Robert Schumann led the charge from a Germanic perspective, *Carnaval* being one of his most important works.

Robert Schumann

Richard Wagner tried to synthesize all of these romantic ideas with his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art), which tried to synthesize the poetic, visual, musical and dramatic into his operas. *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The ring of the Nibelung) may have been his best effort at this. But what all of these composers did in very different way was to make music and experiences that was to be felt. That music came from the background and the nationality of the composer. It was not about being uniform; it was about being expressive, individualistic, and nationalistic.

Richard Wagner

Economically this was a time of growth. Homes had to be rebuilt, cities remade, and more efficient transportation and communications became the order of the day. In response the Prussians formed a customs union called the Zollverein. With it tariffs and economic policies between states could be managed much more efficiently. This facilitated economic expansion throughout the area. The Zollverein is the first instance in history in which independent states had consummated a full economic union without the simultaneous creation of a political federation or union.
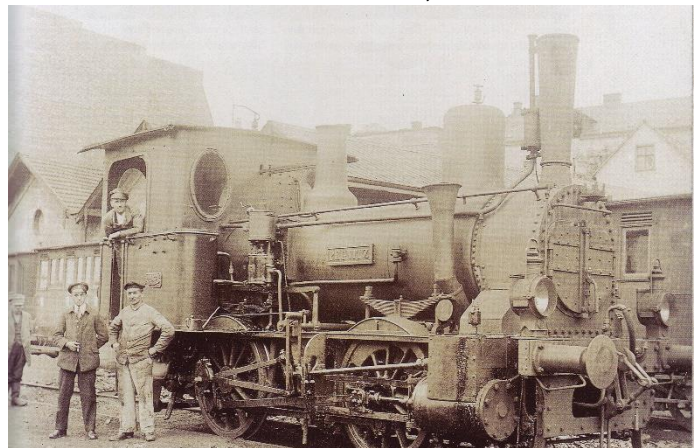
That economic growth increased the need for the transport of goods and services. The railroads provided the solution. The first railway, the Bavaria-Ludwig Railway, connected Nuremberg and Furth in 1835. Instantly popular, railway use exploded in the subsequent years. Prussia grew incredibly strong because of this, while its rival, Austria, was excluded and remained primarily an agricultural country. Its status grew weaker, as the states overall enjoyed good economic times.

These movements often came together to form a newfound populism. War weariness, nationalism, romanticism, and an economic explosion thrust the mind of the average German to the individual self. Enjoying the newfound prosperity and peace promoted individualism. And that individualism created the desire for more responsive and egalitarian rule. Government was not intrinsically trusted as it had in previous generations; after all, these governments are the same ones that led to these long-lasting cataclysmic wars. The integrity of the state was being threatened throughout Europe and especially in the German areas as never before.

After a series of poor harvests throughout Europe in 1845 to 1848, revolts began across Europe and the great revolutions of 1848. The German Confederation was not exempt. King Frederick William IV of Prussia try to appease the revolt is by granting a constitution to the Confederation, a move that he hoped that would be seen as a way to appease those out of power. Violent protests ruled the day, and in Vienna, the great Austrian Chancellor, Klemens von Metternich, was forced to sneak out of the city to temporary exile in England, ridding central Europe of the last major conservative politician.

The Bavarian-Ludwig Railway

But what about the stamps? Philatelics is very much a part of German history. With the rise of economic activity, individualism,

Metternich

and mobility, a demand for greater mail communications was inevitable. Great Britain took the lead in 1840 with the printing of the penny black stamp in 1840, devised by Sir Rowland Hill. It became quickly apparent that this was the most efficient way to provide payment for mail service, and the idea spread throughout Europe over the next 10 years. By 1849 Bavaria had become the first state to print postage stamps. Saxony followed, becoming the second stamp-producing state in 1850.

The 16 states that printed postage stamps:

- Baden
- Bavaria
- Bergdorf
- Braunschweig
- Bremen
- Hamburg
- Hanover
- Heligoland
- Lübeck
- Mecklenburg-Schwerin
- Mecklenburg Strelitz
- Oldenburg
- Prussia
- Saxony
- Schleswig-Holstein
- Wurttemberg

We can't forget about the House of Thurn and Taxis. It's essentially a king with no kingdom. While they do not own the land, they do own a castle and provided mail service for the holy Roman Emperor since 1497. Thurn and Taxis also brewed beer, making them a very wealthy house.

With such dynamic changes economics, politics, and culture, it is no wonder that the Confederation of German states could not last forever. The beginning of the end had to be in 1862 when King Wilhelm the first became the King of Prussia and subsequently appointed Otto von Bismarck on September 23, 1862

as President and Foreign Minister of Prussia. Bismarck favored a "Blood and Iron" policy to create a united Germany under the leadership of Prussia.   He soon found his openings to accomplish this formidable task.

In 1864 the Danes tried to incorporate Holstein and Schleswig in northern present-day Germany into the Kingdom of Denmark. Bismarck responded with a vigorous military response, making sure to include Austria as part of an alliance. Historians debate if Bismarck had a long-term plan by including Austria in such a role, but this "Second Schleswig War" proved to be an easy victory for Prussia. Holstein and Schleswig were preserved in the Northern German Confederation that Prussia had recently formed. The next step to rid Prussia and the German states of foreign interference from the Austrians stemmed from the concluding peace.

As a result of that war, Germany and Austria were to co-administer Holstein and Schleswig per the Treaty of Vienna of 1864. By 1866 Bismarck accused the Austrian Empire of stirring up troubles and it drove his troops into Holstein to secure the entire area. The Austro-Prussian war ensued (also called The Seven Weeks War) reflecting how little time it took Prussia to defeat Austria. Austria was excluded from meddling into the German states' affair, and politically, this war set the table for reunification.

However, one more group felt threatened with German reunification: the French. Because of concerns that French Emperor Napoleon III had, the Emperor demanded the territories of the Rhineland and in present-day Belgium. With an emphatic, "No!" from Prussia, and consolidation of Prussian power in southern Germany, the Franco-Prussian war began in 1870. War quickly concluded in 1871 with Prussian troops capturing Paris. The resulting Treaty of Frankfurt put Alsace and Lorraine into the German fold.

 King Wilhelm I, now to be called Kaiser Wilhelm I, would be the leader of a new, united Germany. Nationalism had succeeded, and the romantic notions of a united Germany had finally been realized. The era of the German states ended, and except for Bavaria (until 1920) and Wurttemberg (until 1923), so too ended the era of German state philatelics.

Kaiser Wilhelm I

Enough of the background information! Other articles on this website address each state's philatelic history, providing a launching pad for in-depth analysis, discussions, findings, and topics that make stamp collecting great! Ultimately, a journal will get going!