Resourceful Recycling

in the Postage Stamp World by Carol Bradfield

While visiting my family in Australia, I have been buying stamps at a village post office near my mother's home for quite a few years. The postmaster is very helpful to collectors, keeps stock of new issues, does light cancels on request and connects stamp collectors. He introduced me to Morgen, another regular client, who is also a stamp collector and lives in the area. We have become friends, trading and sharing stamps. I enjoyed looking at some of her collection.



When I was there earlier this year, we were perusing her quite extensive collection from Latvia. She pointed out some blocks of stamps with a 'new-to-me' feature. The back of the mint stamp was printed as well as the front. Figure 1 shows the front and Figure 2 shows the back. The back is clearly some sort of map. These are the 5 Kap red stamps issued December 18, 1918 (Scott # 1). Why, I asked.

Our research indicates that blank printing paper was a very scarce resource at the end of World War 1 in Latvia. However, the German Imperial Army left an ample supply of military maps. So instead of using the usual paper to print the stamps, the Latvian government printed on the plain side of the maps. What a wonderful way to recycle and save costs!



In reading about this phenomenon, I also discovered that this is considered a somewhat rare philatelic event and appears confined to the early 20th century, between World War I and World War II. Estonia, Mexico, Ukraine and Libya are examples of other countries that have used printed paper for stamps.

[Editor's note: At the end of World Wars I and II, paper shortages were endemic throughout Eastern and Central Europe. These stamps mark an interesting and unique part of postal history. The usage was also seen during the American Civil War when wallpaper was often used for the same purpose.]

To further explore this interesting niche of philately, reference the link:
https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/06/30/vicksburg-daily-citizen