

Iceland's Numeral Cancels (NICs)

Exhibit Purpose: to present Iceland's Numeral ("Number-in-circle" / NIC's) cancellers; as well as information about location usage & rarity regarding on stamps & covers.

Exhibit Plan: exhibit will be organized as follows:

1. background information leading to the creation of Iceland's NIC's;
2. describe the 4 different types of NIC's; (See chart below)
3. present NIC's numerically with BH's location & rarity information (primarily on stamps) from all 26 Postal Districts (starting with the first 173 NICs and then the additional NICs that were added as needed);
4. conclude with some examples of "Bridge cancels" - that replaced the NIC's (beginning in 1930).

Background Information:

1873 – Icelandic Postal Administration (IPA) created & issued its first stamps. Main post office - Reykjavik; system arranged in 26 Postal Districts, each with a supervising Post Office. (See map on page 2)

Two categories of Offices: **Postafgreidsla** (post office) (PA) & **Brefhirding** (receiving office) (BH).

PA - offered full range of postal services; had a postmark, cancelled mail; named for the town;

BH - *provided limited mail collection services; initially did not have a postmark & did not cancel mail except in cases of mail not passing a PA on its way to its destination (then it was "ink canceled"); managed by a trusted local resident (farmer, shopkeeper, priest); & 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 on page 2) Devices made of rubber & contained Brefhirding's name (did not prove to be very durable or practical). The rubber would deteriorate over time; & when a BH relocated to a new site, the canceller would also move, but then the name on the canceller would be incorrect for the location.

1903 – IPA created NIC's. NIC cancellers - made of metal; used mainly from 1903 to 1930; **first 173 NIC's - put into service in 1903.** Distribution and assignment of the cancellers started in the Arnessysla County Postal District & followed a geographical progression counterclockwise around Iceland ending up in Reykjavik. (See map - page 2) NIC's were assigned alphabetically to BHs within each Postal District. Additional NICs added as needed in later years. **300 numbers were used, on a total of 310 cancellers, at 538 locations - 487 farm sites; 17 boat or ships; 31 small towns and 6 islands. Only 63 NIC's remained at their initial assigned location throughout their usage.**

NIC's began to be replaced with "Bridge cancels" beginning in 1930. (Examples on page 48)

Exhibit Challenges: obtaining examples of all 300 NIC's & educating the viewer regarding the degree of difficulty of this challenge. NIC rarity is due to Iceland's sparse population in various locations & limited amount of mail sent, thus some photos & postcards depicting a few locations will be included to highlight this point for the viewer.

Exhibit Highlights: presented with a blue border. Rarity will be a determining factor in selecting highlights.



NIC 76 Goodalir farm
Rarity **R5** 9 known on
Stamps / not known on cover



NIC 95 Bordeyri farm
latest known usage

Four types of NIC's exist: They are labeled – **N1a; N1b; N1c; & N2**

N1a	N1b	N1c	N2
Postmarks 1 – 200 22 mm in diameter Produced in Great Britain	Postmark 39 18.1 mm & 20 mm diameters Numbers slightly tilted Unknown producer Cancels believed to be false	Postmarks 201-210 plus replacement cancels 32, 39, 145, & 180 22 mm in diameter Numbers slightly tilted Produced in Denmark	Postmarks 211 – 300 plus replacement cancels 82, 117, 144, & 178 18 mm in diameter Numbers slightly larger Produced in Denmark

Iceland's Numeral Cancels (NICs—number-in-circle) Synopsis

PURPOSE & SCOPE: present Iceland's Numeral Cancels (NICs—number in circle cancels) used at Breffhirding (Receiving offices) locations throughout Iceland beginning in 1903. The exhibit is about the NICs and where they were used and not about postal rates or routes found in other traditional postal history exhibits.

TREATMENT & PLAN: The story begins with some background information and a few examples of the Crown & Posthorn cancellers that were used at Breffhirdings before the use of NICs. The story then follows a progression of the NICs assignment by each supervising Postal District for the first 173 NICs that were put into use in 1903, and then in numerical order for NIC's 174 thru 300 (which were assigned and put into use as needed in subsequent years). The story includes information about the locations and time periods where each NIC was used; the rarity of the NIC on a stamp or on a cover; as well as information about when each stamp was issued (as the stamp issue date assists in showing location of the NICs use). The NICs will primarily be presented on stamps (off cover), but some covers with NIC cancels are included. Additionally, photos of a few Breffhirding locations and Post Master/Post Mistresses are included to enhance the viewers understanding of the remoteness of the locations and to put a face to some of the individuals who were there at the time and using the NICs. The story concludes by presenting a few of the Bridge cancels that replaced the NICs beginning in 1930.

Example—Presentation Key:

Postal District Supervising Post Office - Kirkjubæjarklauster Kirkjubæjarklauster - village	NIC's 22 – 25
	NIC 22 black, violet & blue ink
	Bogarfell 1903-31.12.1913 Hild 1.1.1913-31.12.1916 Flaga 1.1.1917-06.1930
	Rarity 2 (on cover 3)
	< Landscape issued September 12, 1925

The highlighted section on the map shows the location of the Postal District and the heading presents the name of the supervising Post Office for that District and the NICs that were assigned to the Breffhirdings in that district. NIC 22 is presented on a Landscape stamp that was issued on September 12, 1925, and the locations & time periods that NIC 22 were used at, are listed to the right of the stamp, followed by the rarity of NIC 22 on a stamp (and on a cover). Thus the viewer can conclude that this NIC 22 was applied to the stamp at **Flaga** (shown in bold print) in the later years of usage.

IMPORTANCE, RARITY & CHALLENGES: NICs were used during an early period in the development of the Icelandic Postal system at remote mail receiving offices to indicate locations of mail departure and receipt. NICs were also put into use to address the issues of a longer lasting canceller and not being used in a location with an incorrect place name. The Crown & Posthorn cancellers had the location name on it, so if it relocated to a different place, then it had the wrong location name on it. NICs could be moved to various locations and not have this issue. The rarity of the NIC on a stamp, as well as on a cover is included to assist the viewer in understanding the difficulty of findings NICs and why this exhibitor has chosen to present most of the NICs on stamps. Many NICs are known on less than 10 covers, and in some cases the same is true for a NIC on a stamp off cover. Many of the covers with NICs are in the hands of a few collectors in Iceland. (Svein Sneinsson has an outstanding exhibit on covers.) The rarity scale used is as presented in Brynjolfur Sigurjonsson's two books on Icelandic Numeral Cancels 1930—1960 A qualitative study of the cancels. Numerous factors such as location remoteness; duration of usage period; limited population in the area; accessibility and frequency of mail pickup & delivery, all contribute to the rarity of the NICs. Some locations were only accessible a few times a year, or only by ship.

KNOWLEDGE & RESEARCH: The exhibitor, an Icelandic Philatelist for nearly 30 years has observed, discussed and studied NIC exhibits in Iceland with members of the Icelandic Philatelic Society, as well as consulted with Brynjolfur Sigurjonsson, author of the most current books on Iceland's Numeral Cancels. Additionally, have traveled to some of the remote Brefhirding locations with author David Loe in an effort to research and update his book, Iceland A Post-office Gazetter. The result of exhibitor's research is the finding of NIC 167 in blue ink (first known example) and the latest known usage of NIC 95 (both shown on the title page).

HIGHLIGHTS:

NIC 76 rarity 5 (known on 9 stamps & no covers/ only known use on a 1937 King Christian X Silver Jubilee issue;

NIC 95 late usage in 1937 on a King Christian Silver Jubilee issue (rare to find NIC 95 used after 1913);

(the King Christian Silver Jubilee issue was only valid for usage from May 14, 1937 to April 30, 1938)

NIC 41 tied on piece along with a Crown & Posthorn cancel from Skorrastadur;

NIC 63 rarity 4 on cover - Grimsey an island on the arctic circle about 40 kilometers north of mainland Iceland;

NIC 97 rarity 3 on cover - only 7 known examples on cover;

NIC 123 rarity 4 on stamp (not known on cover);

NIC 167 rarity 4 on stamp (rarity 5 on cover) * first known NIC 167 in blue ink:

NIC 177 known on only 7 covers; (with Lasse Neilsen cert. # 297078);

NIC 185 rarity RR - known only on 2 covers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: In 1903, there were two categories of postal facilities in Iceland. *Postafgreidsla* (full service post office) and *Brefhirding* (receiving offices which provided limited mail collection services). The Brefhirdings were typically located in remote areas of Iceland. They were often named for the farm; village; parsonage, or ship and were managed by a trusted local resident (farmer, shopkeeper, priest, etc.). Prior to the use of NICs the Brefhirding used a Crown and Posthorn canceller (see page 2 for some examples). The Crown and Posthorn canceller was made out of rubber, so would wear out and had the name of the Brefhirding location on it. This posed a problem if the Brefhirding moved to a different location, because then it had the wrong name on it. The NICs were created to address the problems. They were made of metal and only had a number on it, so it could be moved to different locations without the problem of a wrong name on it. The Postal system consisted of 26 districts. Each had a supervising Post Office and a number of Brefhirding locations. The supervising District Post Office received the number of NICs needed for the district and assigned them alphabetically to the Brefhirdings within the district. The first 173 NICs were assigned in 1903 and additional NICs were put into service as needed in subsequent years. 300 numbers were used on a total of 310 NIC cancellers (some were broken or lost and had to be replaced); at a total of 538 different locations - which included 487 farm sites; 17 boat or ships; 31 small towns and 6 islands. Beginning in 1930, some of the NICs were replaced by "Bridge" cancels (see examples in the conclusion). The primary period of usage for the NICs was 1903 to 1930, but some NICs were used as late as 1960.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Sigurjonsson, Brynjolfur, Icelandic Numeral Cancels 1903-1960 (2 books) A quantitative study on usage of cancels 1-173 & 174-300 (2013)

Icelandic Numeral Cancellations by Foreningen Islandssamlarma (2006)

Flack, Brian, Icelandic Philatelic Magazine (various issues) (2016 –20220

Loe, David, Iceland: A Postoffice Gazetter