

CollectorsClub Philatelist



The Development of the Congo Free State Postal System 1885 – 1908

The Development of the Congo Free State Postal System 1885-1908

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This manuscript presents what is thought to be the first complete story on how the Congo Free State (CFS) postal system started, evolved and ended. It is organized chronologically and presented by periods when groups of new postal stations were approved. The scope of the manuscript includes an introduction, background, new postal offices, postal rates, stamps and postal cards, postal routes, a summary and a conclusion.

Introduction



Figure 1. The CFS in Africa.

In 1877, after three years of exploring the 7,000 miles of the Congo River from its eastern reaches, Henry Morton Stanley emerged at the mouth of the river on the Atlantic Ocean proclaiming to the world – “here lay the next great El Dorado” (Figure 1). In response, King Leopold II of Belgium (Figure 2) said – “I do not wish ... losing a fine chance to secure for ourselves a slice of this magnificent African cake.”

Leopold realized basic infrastructure – roads, a railroad line around the first Congo River rapids, and river stations – were needed to conduct trade. He thought this would establish his prima petition over the Congo area. Therefore, in 1878, using his own \$19M Belgian Francs, Leopold sent Stanley back into the African rainforest with orders to “purchase as much land as you will be able to obtain.” Stanley was able to negotiate treaties with 450 tribal chiefs. Leopold used the treaties to convince other Western colonial powers that he had legal right to the Congo River Basin.



Figure 2. King Leopold II of Belgium.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 established the CFS with King Leopold II as its sovereign leader, based on three promises: 1) safeguard free trade, 2) do away with the slave trade and 3) never request funding for his personal “project.” His stated motive was “to bring civilization to the Congo people,” hence the name – “The CFS” (Etat independent du Congo). He often talked about building an empire that would increase his nation’s prosperity. He is quoted as saying, “to gather rubber in the district, one must cut off hands, noses and ears.” The truth is – the CFS became Leopold’s private fiefdom with a goal to exploit its natural resources – ivory, gold, and rubber – even at the expense of its natives.

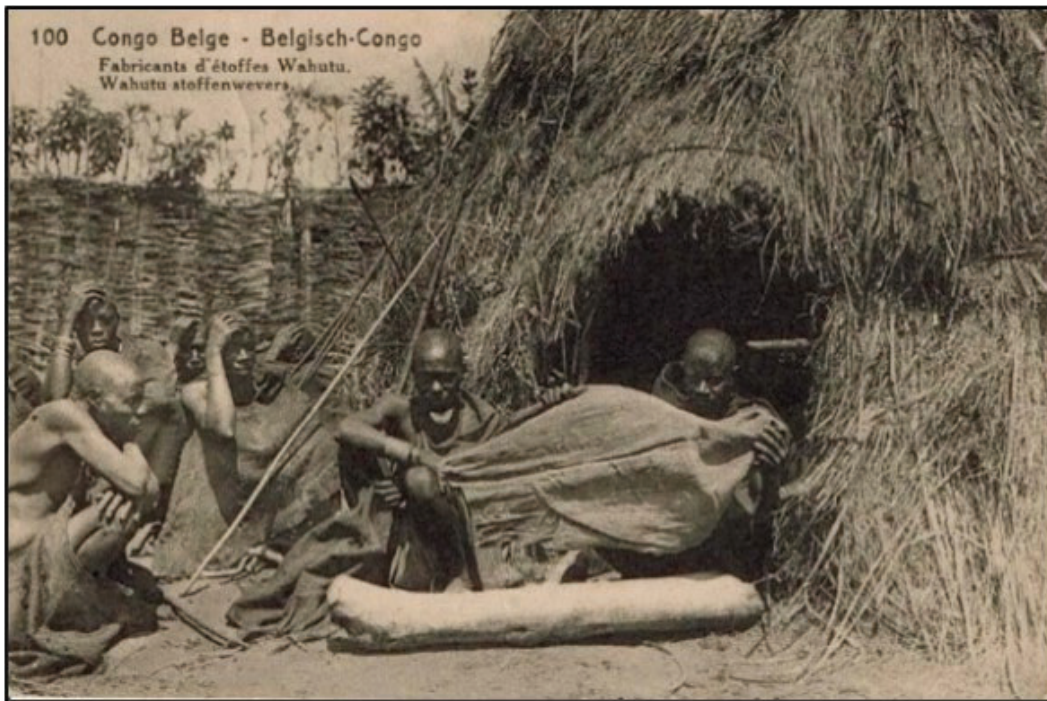


Figure 3. Remote Wahutu Weavers.

In 1886, the CFS was wild, primitive and geographically diverse. Many small tribes lived along its rivers, but the people rarely ventured far upstream or downstream from their villages. Contact with others was either by foot on trails or by small riverboats. Most Congolese people shared important social structures and beliefs. Labor was divided by gender, and economics were organized at the village level. Most villages were remote (Figure 3). Note: The government issued 72 postal view cards like this having a picture side printed by publisher Ets Nels in Brussels, then the card was sent to Waterloo & Sons in London to receive the franking face. Their purpose was to promote interest and investment in CFS.

Precursors

Prior to the CFS (Jan. 1, 1886), there was no official postal system. However, a small second-class Angolan (Portuguese) post office opened between 1870 and 1875 on the north side of the Congo River near the Atlantic ocean. All Portuguese boats sailing between the west coast of Africa and Portugal were required to stop at Banana for mail on both the outward and return voyages. The postal business was good so, on Dec. 30, 1882, Angola purchased a large plot of land in north Banana for a larger post office.

One of three cancellations used by the Angolan post office was a Type I double-circle cancellation (Figures 4 and 4a). The post office officially closed after three years on May 5, 1885, seven months before the territory became the CFS. Some think it was actually closed in December 1884. The last letters known from Banana with Portuguese cachets/cancelers are dated November 1884.



Figure 4. A scarce Angola 50 rs Blue Crown Issue (1884) with a Partial Blue "BANANA" cancellation.

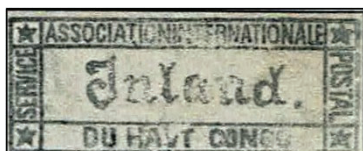
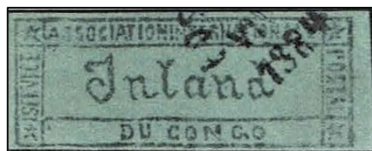


Figure 4a. A clear Angola postmark from Banana.

The International Association of the Congo (AIC) was established in 1884 by King Leopold II to acquire new territories, establish control of the Congo Basin and exploit its economic resources. Instead of using the Angolan Banana post office, agents of the AIC preferred to send their mail directly aboard steamships stopping in Banana. According to Maselis, "it was partly franked using stamps of the same country as the steamship on which they were carried."

To carry mail from far regions of the Upper Congo (the area beyond Leopoldville), the AIC developed its own mail system, which was difficult and dangerous because of the hostile native population, and many natural obstacles, such as large, unnavigable sections of the Congo River. Private individuals carried mail to remote areas operated by traders or missionaries, and it often took months to reach its destination.

In 1884, Hertwig, an employee of the AIC stationed in Issanghila, created (unofficially), a set of labels (Figures 5a-c); he said it "made it easier to sort the mail." To avoid issuing an illegal private postage stamp, he called these "sorting labels,"



Figures 5a-c. Unofficial Hertwig mail sorting labels.

and made three dies (from engravings on wood blocks) with which he could print three different labels (authentic ones are rare). The "HOME-WARD" label was for overseas mail. The white "INLAND" label was for mail going to the Upper Congo. The green "INLAND" label was for mail going to the south Congo. The labels or imprints were pasted or applied directly on the cover.

Edouard Manduau was hired by the AIC as a clerk in 1884. Like Hertwig, he took upon himself to make improvement to the embryonic postal services by applying one of four types of one- or two-line handstamps to outgoing mail bound for Europe (Figure 6). These

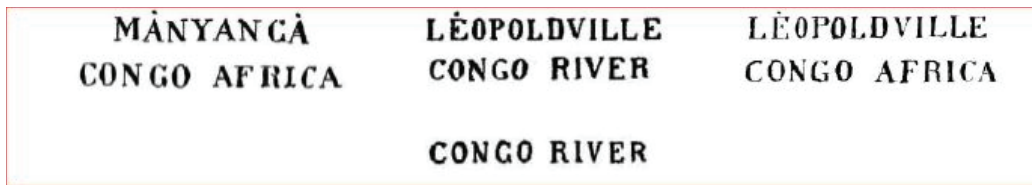


Figure 6. Manduau labels.

postmarks are known on mail dispatched between June 1884 and June 1885 and are found in both red and black.

From 1883 to January 1885, two existing supply routes were used for pre-CFS mail delivery. All Hertwig mail went via a North-South Route (Issanghila-South Manyanga-Leopoldville), and all Manduau mail went via a Southern Route (Vivi-South Manyanga-Leopoldville).

1886: The Beginning

The CFS Postal Service was decreed by King Leopold II on Jan. 1, 1886, the same day the CFS became a member of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). It was established to facilitate communications between the CFS and Belgium and to support new trade. The postal administration was in Brussels and was assigned to the administrator general of the CFS.

First Postal Stations. Initial plans called for three main categories of post offices: principal, sub-post offices and auxiliary post offices. Each sub-post office and auxiliary post office was responsible to its assigned principal post office. Mail to and from the smaller offices passed through the principal post office for which they were responsible.

The first four post offices opened on Jan. 1, 1886, and three were located near the mouth of the Congo River. (Figure 7)

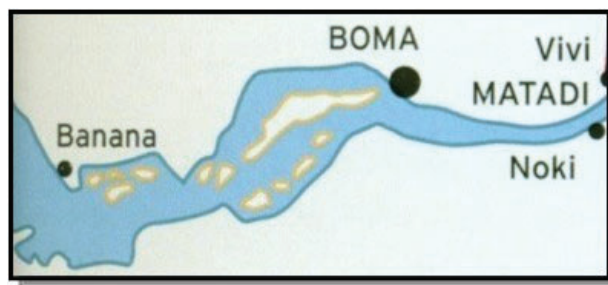


Figure 7. Locations of Banana, Boma and Vivi post offices.

1. **Boma** was located 60 miles upstream from the Atlantic Ocean on the Congo River and was the capital of the CFS. It was a principle post office responsible for organizing postal services between the Lower Congo (Banana to Leopoldville) and Upper (Haut) Congo (the upper reaches of the Congo River beyond Leopoldville). Boma was also an exchange office linked to offices in Brussels and Antwerp.

2. *Banana* was located at the mouth of the Congo River. Like Boma, it was also a principal and exchange office in charge of the incoming cross-border mail, and the mail to be sent abroad. (Figure 8)

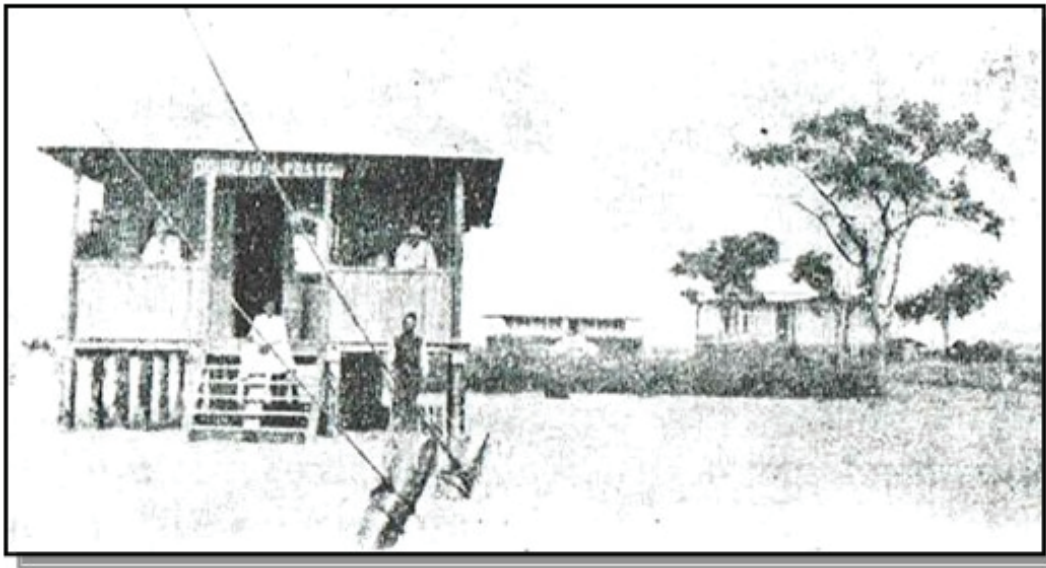


Figure 8. The Banana post office 1886.

3. *Vivi* was a principal post office located on the north bank of the lower Congo River, across the river from Matadi. It opened on Jan. 1, 1886, and closed after only 108 days (May 18, 1886), because the Boma office became responsible for organizing postal services between the Lower Congo and Upper Congo. Consequently, the Vivi post office became redundant. Due to its short duration, postal items with Vivi cancellations are rare (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Belgium Congo 1886 issue with rare VIVI cancellation (Type 1,1, DMTY) of March 31, 1886.

4. *Coquilhatville* was the fourth post office and opened on July 1, 1886. This outpost substation of Boma was located 1,000 miles upstream from Boma. Stanley found this village and called it "Equatorville," because the equator crosses just before it.

First Postal Rates. The first postal rates were 25¢ for internal letters and 50¢ for foreign use. Postal cards were 15¢ for both internal and foreign use. Registration (Figure 10) was for postage, plus 25¢ for internal use, and postage plus 50¢ for international use. And the delivery fee was 50¢.

First Stamps. The issuing of stamps for the newly created CFS was a matter of urgency. The first five stamps (Table 1 of Appendix) share three basic designs with differing frames showing Belgium's King Leopold. They were changed from the Belgium issue of 1869-78 by altering the inscription and



Figure 10. Registered mail example from Boma (Feb. 21, 1902) to Neuchâtel, Switzerland (March 20, 1902), via Brussels (March 19, 1902), carrying 5 Fr. The Tariff Rate (1886) was 1 Fr.

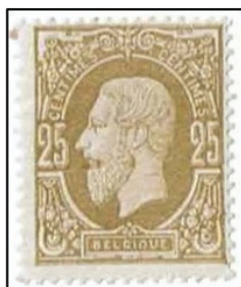


Figure 11 (far left). Belgium stamp.

Figure 12 (left). Converted Belgian Congo stamp.

some of the values and were surface printed by the Belgian Government Printing Works in Malines, Belgium (Figures 11 and 12). All were issued Jan. 1, 1886.

First Postal Cards. The first postal cards sold were for 15¢ and intended for foreign use. The first postal card, a 15¢ brown stamp on buff, was issued Jan. 1, 1886. The number printed was 15,000. The second one, a 15¢ blue stamp on a light blue card was issued July 1, 1886; 60,000 were printed.

Early Mail Movement. Early steamship companies delivered mail to and from the CFS. The *Empreza Nacional* had one departure every month from Lisbon. The British and African Steam Navigation Company and the African Steamship Company had one departure every month from Liverpool to Banana, then eventually to Boma. At first, mail movement between the first four post offices was delivered by runners and, in some cases, using dugout canoes.

1887 to 1891: Slow Expansion

During this period, conditions were still primitive and dominated by tribal rules and culture. Although the first year of the new postal service was deemed successful, it was still in its infancy. Postal authorities soon realized additional postal offices and services were needed.

Three New Post Offices. At first, postal stations were developed along the Congo River and its tributaries. As colonization and the presence of Europeans gradually increased, other offices eventually opened further inland.

5. *N'Zobe* (later named Zobe) was located across the river from Boma and opened on April 15, 1888, then closed on April 1, 1898.

6. *Leopoldville* was located 296 miles upstream from Boma. The post office started as a substation of the principal post office at Boma on May 1, 1889. It was upgraded to the principal post office on March 15, 1900.

7. *Matadi* was located 92 miles inland from the mouth of the Congo River and between Boma and Leopoldville. It became an important harbor and place to drop off and pick up mail from further inland. It started as a principal post office on Jan. 3, 1891.

Parcel Post Introduced. It soon became apparent that a postal service for letters and postcards was not sufficient to ensure economic growth. So, on Feb. 28, 1887, an agreement was signed between the CFS and the Belgium State Railways, for parcel post service between the two countries. Only the Banana and Boma offices were responsible for the parcel service. At the time, there was no domestic service for parcels.

Parcel Post Rates. Parcels were limited to 11 lbs. and a maximum size of 18 by 6 ft. For parcels sent from the Congo to Belgium, a fixed rate of 3.5 Fr. (1 Fr. for the Congo Postal Authorities, 2 Fr. for the transit and 50 centimes for the Belgium Authorities) was established.



Figure 13. The 5Fr single-frame parcel post stamp.

Parcel Post Stamps. In 1887, there was no stamp with a denomination of 3.5 Fr. Therefore, the first 5 Fr. value was surcharged by a rubber handstamp 'COLIS POSTAUX' 3.5 Fr. Subsequently, the 5 Fr. value of the second series was similarly surcharged (Figure 13). Later the hand stamp was changed to a double-lined frame and applied to both the violet and the gray 5 Fr. values of the second issue (Table 2 of Appendix).

Parcel Post Use. In 1887, 36 parcels were dispatched abroad and 186 were received from abroad.

Postal Rates. Except for parcel post, postal rates stayed the same during this period.

New Stamps. On Oct. 20, 1887, eight new stamps (5¢ to 5 Fr.) were issued pic-

turing King Leopold (Figure 14); 25 Fr. and 50 Fr. stamps were printed but never distributed.

New Postal Cards. Five new postal cards – two domestic and three international (like Figure 15) – were issued during this period. Two had attached “reply cards.” These presented a problem when someone used the reply card for outgoing mail. Hence, they were marked with the expression “Boma Carte Incomplete” (Figure 15). Use of postal cards during this period started slowly – only 480 were used in 1887, but rapidly grew to 2,316 in 1891.

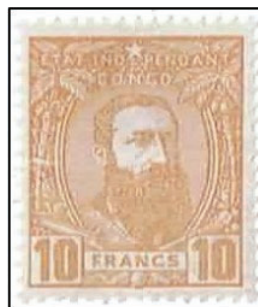


Figure 14. The 10 Fr stamp.



Figure 15. Coquilhatville to the Beverloo Military Camp in Belgium (1898), via Leopoldville and Boma with “Boma Carte Incomplete” marking, and uprated with a 5¢ stamp.

Mail Movement/Routes During This Period. Early on, runners delivering the mail had to make it from Leopoldville to Boma in 11 days. They left on the first and 15th of each month and could average 36-41 miles a day. Mail was put in sealed bags in Boma and Matadi with a register showing the number of documents it contained.

Eventually, some shallow draft, ocean-going ships could go to Matadi, but no further due to shallow water and the rapids. Thus, the need for river (paddle) steamers (Figure 16) with low drafts. The first river steamers on the Congo River were built in sections and hauled overland to the middle Congo River by Stanley in 1879. The Oxford Baptist Missionary Society also built a steamer for evangelical work in the area in 1884.



Figure 16. Typical paddle river steamer shown on 10 fr. CFS stamp.



Figure 17. A Bateau-Poste canceled CFS stamp.

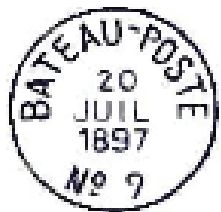


Figure 18. A clear Bateau-Poste postmark.

In 1886, five steamers belonging to the CFS were carrying mail on the lower Congo River between Banana, Boma and Matadi (a 93-mile stretch). Until 1902, these boats delivered mail posted with the BATEAU-POSTE cancellation (Figures 17 and 18) up and down the Congo River.

1892-96: Accelerated Growth

Accelerated postal growth occurred during this period based on the number of new stamps and new postal cards issued, and new post offices opened. Several events catalyzed this growth: a zeal by the European community for civilizing primitive areas, Christian evangelizing by an increasing army of missionaries and increasing opportunities to conduct commerce.

New Postal Stations Established. Fifteen new post offices. (Figure 19).

8. *Popokabaka* – Feb. 24, 1896
9. *M'Toa* – April 1, 1898
10. *Basoko* – July 1, 1896
11. *Albertville* – July 1, 1896
12. *Bumba* – July 1, 1896
13. *Lukungu* – July 1, 1896
14. *Nouvelle-Anvers* – July 1, 1896
15. *Nyangwe* – July 1, 1896
16. *Stanley Falls* – July 1, 1896
17. *Cataractes* – July 1, 1896
18. *Sankuru* – July 22, 1896
19. *Lusambo* – July 22, 1896
20. *Tumbu-Mani* – Nov. 25, 1896
21. *Tumba* – Nov. 26, 1896
- 21a. *Ibemo* – March 31, 1897

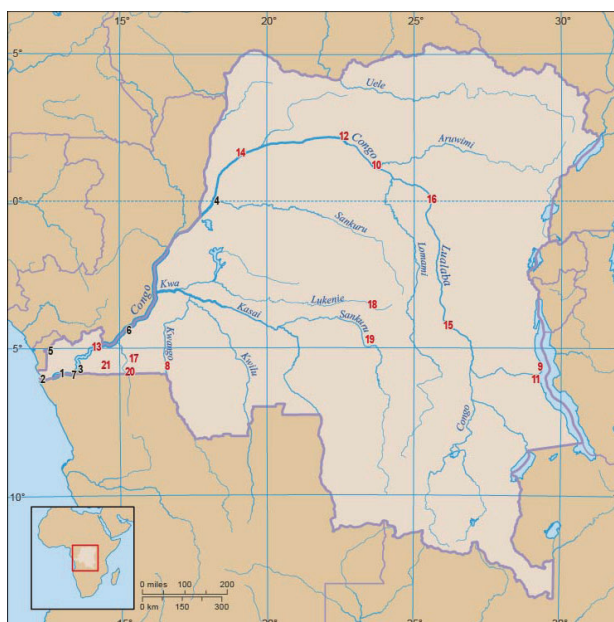


Figure 19. New Post Offices (in red).

Stamps/Rate Change. Starting in 1894, the CFS issued an attractive series of 16 line-engraved unilingual (French), bicolor stamps with black centers and vibrant colors on the borders. Most were Congolese views (Figure 20) and were the first colonial stamps issued. The frames are engraved with ornate inscriptions

“Etat Independent du Congo.” They are commonly known as “Mols Stamps,” as the designs were based on a diorama exhibition created by Robert Mols and Piet van Engelen for the Antwerp Exposition of 1894. The image for the 5 Fr. stamp may have been from a photo. A few of three Mols stamps were printed with inverted centers: the 10¢ blue stamp of 1895 (40 known), the 10 Fr. green stamp of 1898 (seven known) and the 10¢ carmine of 1915 (10 known).



Figure 20. The 1 Fr. Mols stamp.

The postal rate changed for internal letters from 25¢ to 15¢, while the other rates remained unchanged.

Postal Cards. Eight new postal cards were issued during this period – four each for international and domestic use. The 1892 postal card issue used two palms and a star image, while the 1894 issue used an image of Leopold II. From 1892 to 1896, the usage of postal cards increased to 29,130.

Mail Movement/Routes. Once post offices emerged, marked by offices in Coquilhatville, Bumba, Stanleyville, Nyangwe and Albertville, east-west and south-eastern routes were established for communication within and outside the CFS.

East-West Routes. When the Banana, Boma and Vivi post offices were opened on Jan. 1, 1886, and for five years, only the Lower Congo area had normal postal services. By July 1896, 15 new post offices emerged (seven in the Upper Congo beyond Leopoldville), and a fleet of 10 mail-carrying boats was launched on the Upper Congo. However, because of the rapids between Matadi and Leopoldville, mail still had to travel by land.

Mail to and from the interior was carried by runners to Leopoldville and to the upper Congo using three East-West Congo River routes (Figure 21). Who the

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Figure 21. East-west postal routes.

runners were and how they were paid is unknown. During the early days of the CFS, mail traveling long distances frequently received the postmark of every post office that handled or sorted it enroute (Figure 22).

1. The Northern Congo River Route. Vivi - Matadi - Issanghila - Leopoldville. Sorting was done in Viva. Christian missionaries developed this route to



Figure 22. East-west routed cover from Stanley Falls (Nov. 1, 1896) to Leopoldville, to Boma, and arriving in Berlin on Feb. 15, 1897. The uprated stamps were missing in transit.

supply stations along the river to Stanley Pool. Porters carrying the mail traveled the route twice a month from Boma to Leopoldville, passing through Matadi and Lukungu. The station head offices at Matadi and Lukungu were authorized by postal authorities to add Boma and Haut-Congo letters (from the upper Congo area north and west of Stanley Pool) to the mail bags. These duly franked letters were left in the post box outside the station head's office and canceled by the double-circle postmark (for mail added from Matadi, Lukungu, Stanleyville, Lukafu, Figure 23).



Figure 23. Double-circle cancellation of porter-carried mail on the Matadi to Lukungu route.

2. The Southern Congo River Route. Boma - Matadi - Manyanga - Leopoldville. Sorting was done at Boma. This was the interior route that met up with the northern route at Manyanga.

3. The East-West Caravan Route. Caravans (Figure 24) were needed to help missionaries travel to arrival destinations and to move material and mail into the Upper Congo using a more southern route.

From April 1, 1888, Boma had taken steps to forward mail from overseas to the Upper Congo by the route of the caravans (Figure 25), this requiring a surtax because it was an additional and unusual transport service. "The levy was made before dispatch to the Upper Congo by means of postage on correspondence to the interior." Few covers with the surtax have survived (Figure 26). Eventually, many secondary mail routes emerged from the east-west route, consisting of navigable tributaries to serve centers outside the main artery from Boma to Leopoldville.



Figure 24. A caravan likely carrying mail on a journey.

The Southern Routes. During this time period, a much greater amount of mail started traveling south from the eastern part of the CFS using three primary routes.

1. The Albertville Route. Albertville was located in the far eastern section of the CFS and on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika. The lake's eastern border was in Tanzania. Mail going to Europe was routed from Albertville to Pweto, then to Musofi, as it was the only foreign exchange office in the eastern section of the CFS. From there, the mail usually traveled to Cape Town, South Africa (Figure 27).

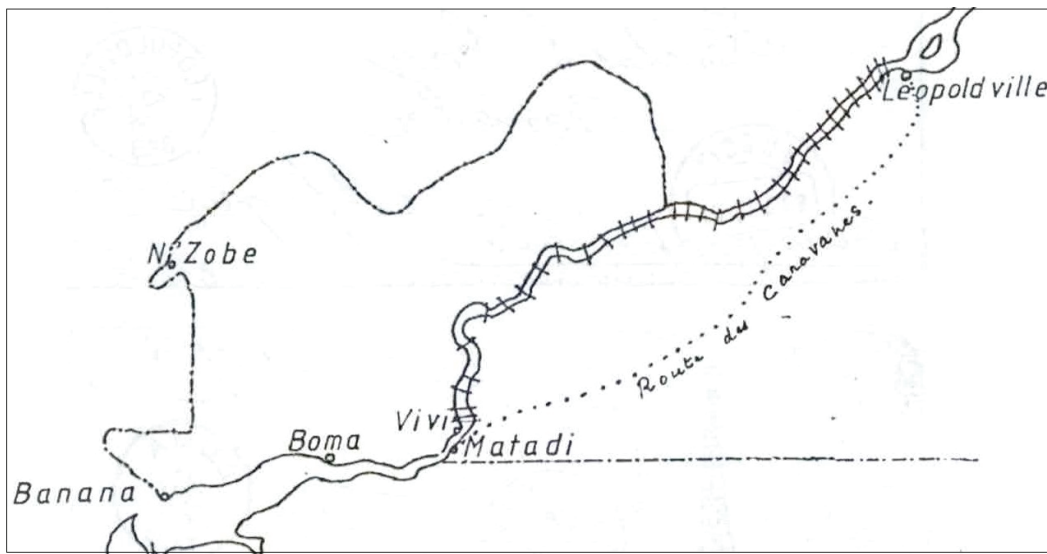


Figure 25. Route of the caravans around the rapids.



Figure 26. Only known surtaxed cover (as of 2016).

2. The Katanga Route. Katanga is a large province in the CFS, rich in copper, tin and cobalt. Positioned in the far southeastern corner of the country made it easier (and sometimes faster) for European mail to be sent from Lukafu and Pweto to the Musofi (the foreign exchange office), and on to Northern Rhodesia and South Africa.

3. The Lado Enclave Route. This territory was located in the extreme north-eastern portion of the CFS, just north of Lake Albert, and to the west of the White Nile, in what is now South Sudan and northwest Uganda (Figure 28). The location on the west bank of the upper Nile was claimed by both Britain and Belgium because it offered access to the Mediterranean. The dispute was settled in a curious way – it was to be the possession of Leopold as a person, not as king of Belgium. On his death, it would revert to Britain.



Figure 27. Albertville (1908) to Siuosa, Italy - Via Pweto, Musofi and Cape Town, South Africa, using the southern route. A circular "24" postman's hand stamp. Card is underpaid by 5c.

Although some mail flowed through the Lado Enclave, Leopold never opened a post office there despite suggestions made by the Anglo-Sudanese authorities in 1902, probably because the European community there was small. Mail going through the Lado with an uncanceled CFS stamp usually traveled one of two ways: 1) carried and canceled by the White Nile (Sudan) Traveling Post



Figure 28. The Lado Enclave (upper right).

Office to Khartoum Egypt, then to Alexandria, or 2) taken by courier to Redjaf on the west bank of the Nile, and loaded on a Egyptian boat going north, where



Figure 29. A CFS Stamp with a 306 Dot Khartoum Transit Mark.

it received the Retta transit mark boat in Khartoum (Figure 29). The purpose of the Retta was to cancel any stamp that had not been canceled at the point of origin, including non-Egyptian stamps that were loaded on board a ship heading to an Egyptian port.

When part of the journey was in Congolese territory with carriage by the CFS, franking could not consist of Sudanese stamps exclusively, but acceptable with mixed franking. Lado markings and postal history are considered scarce.

There were two primary routes to and from the Lado Enclave.

The Congo Route. Mail usually traveled westward – at first to Ibemo on foot and by canoe and took about two months. However, new post offices at the end of 1899 opened, and mail started flowing with routing to Boma via Dungu, Buta, Ibemo, Bumba and Leopoldville (Figure 30).

The White Nile Route. This route (Figure 31), referred to earlier, was opened about May of 1900 and had a twofold advantage over the Congo Route – it was significantly faster and less expensive, going north through the Sudan by a travel post office. For example, a delivery from Ibemo to Boma took 47 days, and then to Brussels another 27 days. In comparison, a letter sent from the Lado Enclave via the Nile would reach its destination in just three weeks. The Congo tariff was 2¢ for a letter and 15¢ for a postal card, against the Universal Postal Union (UPU) tariff in the Sudan (Figure 32) of 25¢ and 10¢ respectively.

A third route through Uganda existed, but was rarely used by agents of the Congo.

The Missionary Influence on the Postal System.

Between 1853 and 1856, Scottish missionary David Livingstone completed a coast-to-coast journey across the African continent. After returning to Africa (and not lost, as many suspected), he was found in 1871 by Henry Stanley who was seeking the origin of the Congo River. During the period of 1892-96, European and American missionary organizations started flourishing (Figure 33) and they relied heavily on the postal system (Figure 34) for communication back and forth with their parent organizations and families back home.

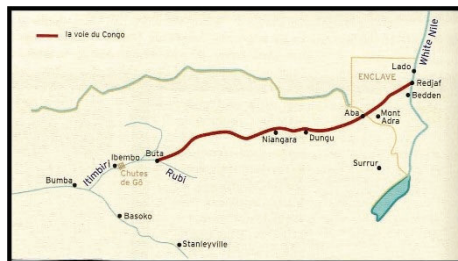


Figure 30. The Congo Route from the Lado Enclave to Boma.



Figure 31. The White Nile Route from the Lado Enclave to Alexandria, then onto Europe.

The growing missionary population and increasing number of missionary stations increased the volume of mail flowing back and forth between the CFS and Europe and this, along with mineral exploration in the southeastern CFS, pushed the development of new mail routes and a need for faster delivery of mail.



Figure 32. Written in Dungu (CFS) 1904 – traveling the Nile Mail route to Cermier, Switzerland (Jan. 23, 1905), with a Sudan transit mark.



Figure 33. By 1904, there were 500 missionaries at 150 missionary stations using the CFS postal system.



Figure 34. Missionary mail from Leopoldville (Nov. 29, 1894) to the Convent Anglais in Bruges, Belgium.

1897-99: Momentum

The postal system was now gathering steam, catalyzed by the exploration and mining of Katanga's commerce region rich in copper, tin and cobalt (Leopold's dream come true).

Postal Stations. Six new offices opened.

22. *Banzville* – Jan. 25, 1898

23. *Bena-Bendi* – June 16, 1898

24. *Stanleyville* – July 15, 1898

25. *Luali* – July 30, 1898

26. *Libenge* – Sept. 15, 1898

27. *Umangi* – Aug. 2, 1899

Postal Rates. Starting on March 1, 1889, domestic postal cards were 10¢, and those with a reply card attached were 10¢/15¢. The foreign counterparts were 15¢, and 15¢/25¢. Starting on April 1, 1896, internal letters needed 15¢. And, starting on Jan. 1, 1897, internal reply cards needed 10¢ and foreign reply cards needed 15¢. **Note:** The reason the postal history throughout the CFS period is dominated by postal stationery is due to the rate difference between postal stationery (15¢) and letters (50¢) (Figure 35).

Stamps. In 1898, it was found necessary to complete the Mols issues by the introduction of the two high-value stamps – the 3.5 Fr. and the 10 Fr., printed by Waterlow Bros & Layton of London (Figures 36a and 36b). The 3.5 Fr. value was intended for the sending of parcel post, and the 10 Fr. value was primarily for telegrams and gun licenses.



Figure 35. Stanleyville to Copenhagen, Denmark, May 5, 1908, via Leopoldville using correct 50¢ letter rate.

Postal Cards. Six new postal cards were issued in 1897, all using the palm tree image (Figure 37). Postal card use grew to 26,853 in 1899.

Telegraphic Cancellations. The first CFS telegraph station was in Gongolo on Sept. 9, 1897, followed by Boma, Leopoldville (later named Kinshasha), Matadi and Tumba on May 1, 1899, all using handstamp cancellations.



Figures 36a and 36b. The 3.5 fr. and 10 fr. issues of 1898.



Figure 37. Banana to Wurttemberg, Germany (1898), uprating 10¢ postal card with 5¢ stamp to make 15¢ international rate.

Sixteen of the 46 CFS post offices were also telegraph offices from 1895 to 1908. Postage stamps to the value of the cost of the telegram were affixed to the telegram form on which the message was written. The stamps were canceled with the telegraphic date stamp (Figure 38). Three types of telegraphic octagon cancelers were used during the CFS.



Figure 38. Matadi Telegraphic cancel.

Mail Movement/Routes. Until mid-1898, mail in the CFS was moved by runners, canoes, caravans and river boats. Stanley once said, "without a railway from Leopoldville to Matadi, the Belgian Congo (to circumvent the unnavigable stretch of the Congo River) is not worth a red cent."

There were four railways started and two completed during the CFS (Figure 39); all carried mail.

1. Chemin de fer Congo.

This railway linked Leopoldville to Matadi and was started in 1892, through rough terrain and conditions, and completed in 1898. During its building, 1,932 people died from disease and exhaustion. During construction of the railroad, Matadi used a *Tumba Poste* cancellation

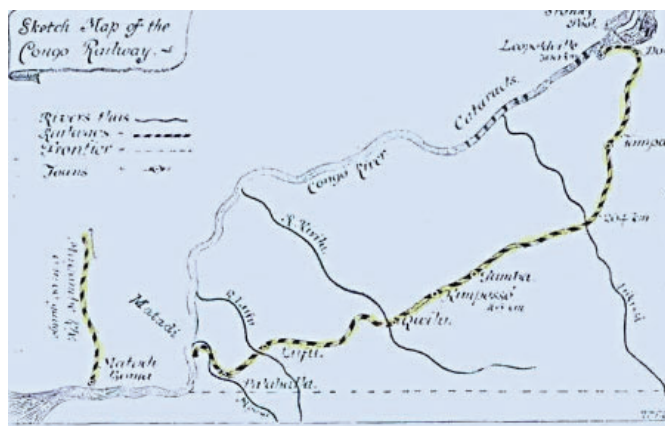


Figure 39. The Chemin De Fer and Chemin de fer Mayombe Railroads.



Figure 40a. Tumba to the main railway station in Namur, Belgium, via Boma on Nov. 19, 1897. "TUMBA POSTE" is the first cancellation of the post office and was used during the construction of the "Matadi - Leopoldville" railway of which it was part. One stamp is missing.



(Figure 40). Formerly, letters arriving at Matadi took a month to reach Leopoldville, but with rail, it took just two days.

Figure 40b. A clear Tumba Poste cancel.

2. Chemin de fer Mayombe Railway. Started in 1899, this railway linked Boma northward with Luki (1900), Lukula (1901) and eventually to Tshela (140 km from Boma) in 1912. It allowed commerce and mail to flow from the interior to Boma, then to the port at Banana. Mail posted at a railway station used a "Gare" cancellation (Figure 41).

3. Chemin de fer du Congo & Katanga. Started in 1906, this railway linked the Port of Bukakma (Southern CFS) on the navigable section of the Lualaba River through the important mining region and to Elisabethville, then to Sakania, where it eventually connected to the Rhodesian railway network in 1910. Mailing to and from this commerce region was critical to making King Leopold's dreams come true.

4. Compagnie du Chemin de fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains. Started in 1903 and finished in 1906, the railway connected Stanleyville in the east with Ponthierville (Ubundu), a distance of 75 miles. This linked the navigable section of the Congo River near Stanleyville and the navigable section of the Lualaba River.

Once railways were developed, mail moved along those routes provided a dynamic shift on how mail was delivered. Surprisingly, there seems to be no information about how the mail was handled on the trains. Also



Figure 41. Scarce "Gare De Luki" cancellation from a rail station on the Chemin de fer Mayombe line from Boma to Tshela.

missing – how railroad stations could cancel stamps. There were no transit marks on mail carried by trains.

1900-05: Moving Further Out

Railroads were being built, commerce was booming and colonization was in full swing, therefore there was a need for more post offices in the interior.

New Postal Stations. Seven new postal stations opened from 1900-05.

28. *Basongo* – June 1, 1901

29. *Pweto* – July 8, 1902

30. *Banza-Boma* – Nov. 29, 1902

31. *Chutes Francois-Joseph* – July 15, 1904

32. *Lisala* – Jan. 1, 1905

33. *Basankusu* – Feb. 1, 1905

34. *Thysville* – Oct. 15, 1905

Postal Rates. Rates remained the same through the end of the CFS (1908).

Stamps and Postal Cards. No new stamps were issued during this period, but there were three new postal cards, all using the Mols palm tree. In 1900, three new postal cards for domestic use were issued. From 1900 to 1905, postal card use rose to 201,317.

Mail Movement. By 1905, mail was carried on two completed railroads, and mail started to be delivered to stops already completed on the two other railroads under construction. Thus, mail between cities and villages along these railroads was moving much faster.

1906-08: The Final Expansion

No new stamps or postal cards were issued during this final period of the CFS. Between 1906 and 1908, 202,130 postal cards were used. Postal rates were unchanged.

New Postal Stations. Eleven new post offices (Figure 42). The new ones are colored red. Of note is a post office in Beni in the Ituri Forest of the Bambuti Pigmyes. Previously, according to Wach, there was no settled government or even a hereditary chief.

35. *Inongo* – Jan. 1, 1906

36. *Uriva* – Jan. 1, 1906

37. *Beni* – Jan. 1, 1906 (Figure 43)

38. *Irebu* – Feb. 2, 1906

39. *Buta* – Sept. 15, 1907

40. *Dungu* – July 1, 1908

41. *Lukafu* – July 1, 1908

42. *Musofi* – July 1, 1908

43. *Pania-Mutombo* – July 1, 1908

44. *Avakubi* – Aug. 1, 1908

45. *Kinshasha* – Dec. 1, 1908

Postage Due Cancellation During the CFS. The Belgian Congo did not introduce postage due stamps until 1929. So, during the colonial period (1886-1908), the Type 1 “T” marking showed the receiving post office the package or letter was underfranked.

The use of postage stamps overprinted with “T,” “Taxe” or “Taxes” was authorized for paying postage due in a government circular dated Oct. 31, 1906. The legitimate cancellation (not an overprint) was applied after the stamp had been affixed to the package, letter or stamp (Figure 44) and used to extract postage. There were five main types used, including the T.

Mail Movement. Though railroads were built, mail was still being carried by runners and caravans to outlying villages. Riverboats were still important.

1908: The End of the CFS

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 established the CFS and King Leopold II as its sovereign, based on three promises: 1) safeguard free trade, 2) do away with the slave trade and 3) never request funding for his personal “project.” Did his stated motive, “To bring civilization to the Congo people” happen? Yes, but not in an effective way. His real motive was obtaining ivory, gold, rubber and cobalt, and the natives suffered immeasurably from it. History shows the ultimate reason for the demise of Leopold and the CFS was the brutal treatment of the indigenous population (Figures 45 and 46) that disgusted people in Belgium and many parts of Europe and the rest of the world. As a result of the outrage of the violence brought into the CFS by Leopold II, Belgium annexed the CFS as the Belgian Congo (Figures 47 and 48).

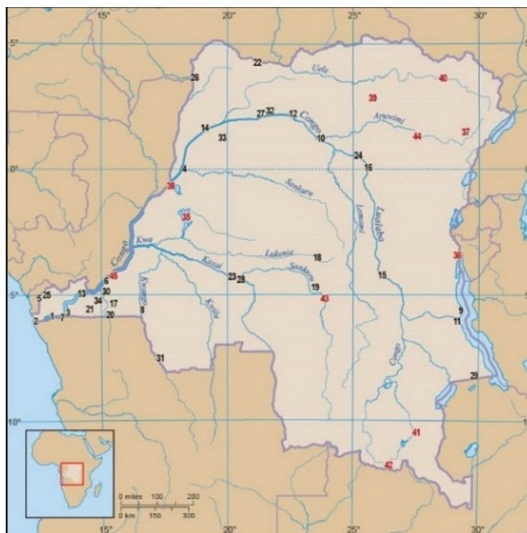


Figure 42. The 46 Post Offices of the CFS (last in red).



Figure 43. The Beni post office - Began as a sub-station post office on 1/1/1906. Business was light and transferred to the Avakubi post office on 8/1/1908



Figure 44. Type IV Tax Overprint on a 25¢ Mols Stamp.

However, the CFS postal system was successful and left intact after annexation, then eventually evolved as the Belgian Congo postal system. CFS stamps marked as "Etat Independent" were valid until July 30, 1909. Many were overprinted in black with "Congo Belge" until new stamps could be printed.

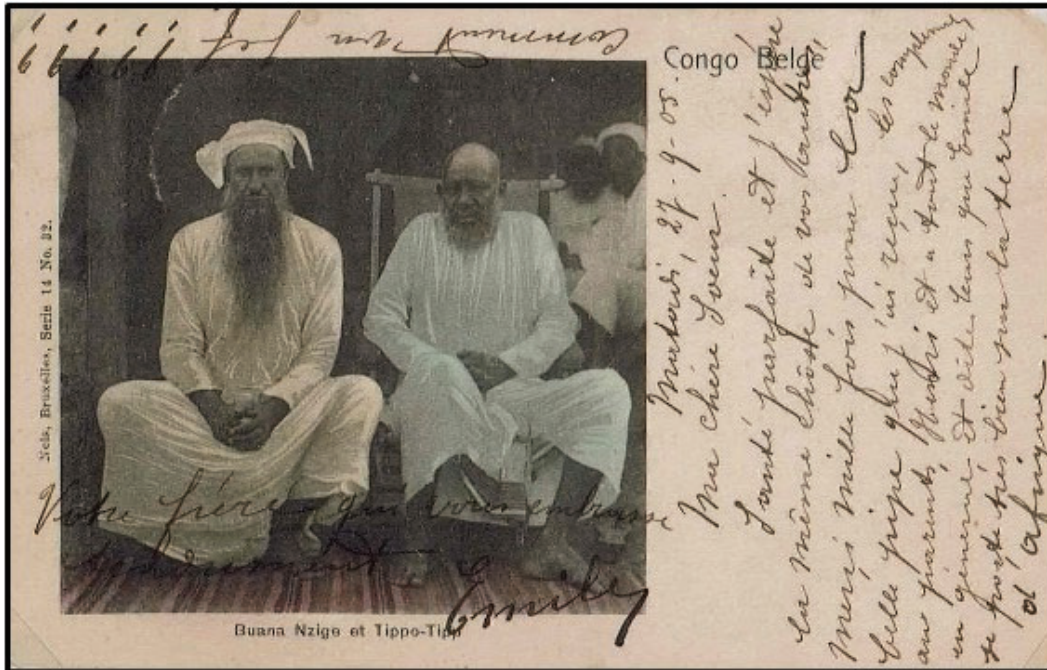


Figure 45. Postcard (1905) showing famous slave trader "Tippo-Tipp" (on left), the most powerful slave trader at that time.



Figure 46. Back side of 1905 postcard to Tilemont, Belgium, via French passenger ship *Loango á Bordeaux*.



Figure 47. Souvenir postcard of Belgium's annexation of the CFS.

King Leopold II died on Dec. 17, 1909, and the Belgian crown passed to **Albert I**, the son of Leopold's brother, Philippe, Count of Flanders. His funeral cortege was booed by the crowd in expression of disapproval of his rule.

Figure 48. Lukula to Neuchatel, Switzerland, posted on the day before the last day of the Congo Free State (Nov. 15, 1908).



Summary

The development of the postal system in the CFS was the first step in establishing the infrastructure so desired by King Leopold II. It took 23 years to fully develop into a viable postal system. During that time, the CFS postal system:

- Issued 30 different stamps, four different parcel post stamps and 19 different postal cards.
- Opened 46 postal stations.
- Used dugout canoes, runners, caravans and, eventually, trains to deliver the mail.
- In its first year, 880 items were posted internally and 33,000 internationally.
- In its last year, 188,572 items were posted internally and 680,331 internationally.
- Developed the infrastructure to improve civilization.

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