

Synopsis: Belgium: The Origin and Development of Postal Instructional Labels

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The Article: This article is about the early UPU mandated return labels of Belgium. It covers the period from 1892-1914. This study will concern itself with the first four generations of Belgian auxiliary labels, beginning in 1892, with the first generation and concluding in August 1914, with the German invasion of the country which began World War I. Following the invasion postmasters across the country destroyed a good deal of the postal items then in their possession, to prevent them from falling German hands. This resulted in a decrease in the use of labels, which were replaced largely by handstamps.

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to present the first thorough study of this topic in the English language. The author has been collecting these labels and researching them for over fifteen years and is the recognized North American expert on them.

Structure: The article is chronological.

Treatment: The article begins with a discussion of the historical background of UPU mandated return labels. It then continues through a review of the first four generations of these labels in Belgium.

Importance: The development and mandating of the UPU return label coincided with the tremendous increase in international mail. Because of the cost of sending mail to another country, it was necessary, when mail was returned, for countries to specify the exact reason why this was done. The affixing of letters ensured to the sender that all proper protocols were following in attempting to deliver the letter.

Challenge: The challenge with writing this article comes from the very small amount of information available on the history of these labels. To date there have been only three articles on this topic, two in French and one in Dutch. Primary source materials are sparse at best, because of the destruction of much of the Belgian Postal Archives during World I and II.