

Development of the Congo Free State Postal System (1886 – 1908)

Synopsis

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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.

Aim – The aim of the manuscript is to show how a postal system developed slowly, but methodically, in a primitive and faraway fiefdom of Belgium's King Leopold II.

Purpose - The purpose is to show how the CFS came into existence (1886), followed by the development of the postal system, and how the CFS ended (1908) based on at home, and wide concern about abuse and the slave trade.

Organization – The manuscript is organized chronologically and presented by periods when groups of new postal stations were approved.

1. Introduction
2. Precursors
3. The Beginning: 1886
4. Slow Expansion: 1887-1891
5. Accelerated Growth: 1892-1896
6. Momentum: 1897-1899
7. Moving Further Out: 1900-1905
8. The Final Expansion: 1906-1908
9. End of the CFS: 1908
10. Summary
11. Bibliography

Scope – Discusses stamps, postal stationery, postal picture cards, postal routes, rates, markings, cancellations, and uses, with emphasis on postal station openings and locations in sequential order.

Background and Context - Dr. David Livingstone explored the Congo in 1871, then by Henry Morton Stanley in 1878.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 established the CFS and Belgium's King Leopold II as its sovereign, based on three promises to the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885:

- safeguard free trade
- do away with slave trade, and
- do not request funding for his personal project.

His stated motive for wanting the CFS was “to bring civilization to the people of the Congo area.” However, his actual motive was to obtain ivory, gold, rubber, and other valuable resources.

He kept his promise to bring civilization to the CFS – and a big part of fulfilling that promise was the development of an effective postal system.

During the CFS, 30 stamps, four parcel post stamps, and 19 postal cards were issued. Forty-six postal stations were opened.

However, after 22 years, most of Leopold's promises were not kept, particularly the one about ending the slave trade which ended Leopold's folly. Belgium annexed the CFS in 1908.

Special Items of Interest

- Precursor Angolan stamp with a Banana cancellation
- An 1886 stamp with a rare Vivi cancel
- A Mols issue with a Bateau cancel
- A 306 dot Lado transit mark on a Mols issue cover
- A straight line Matadi mark on a Mols issue
- A registered cover
- A cover cancelled on the last day of the CFS

