

## Belgian Congo Private Wrappers: the Social Backstories: Part 2

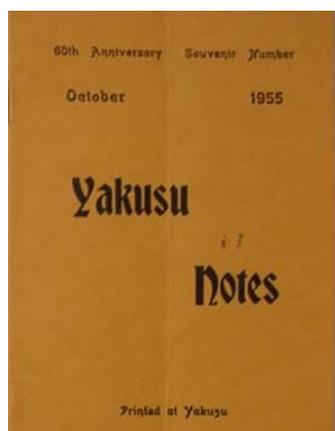
John K. Curtis FRPSL & Charles Lloyd

### The Baptist Missionary Society

This wrapper is inscribed YAKUSU QUARTERLY NOTES with Périodique Imprimé and was sent to “David S. Tatum, YONKERS, New York, USA”.



The postage paid was 50c, for which a 50c Palms stamp (COB 234) was used. It was cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A STANLEYVILLE postmark dated 11 -5 43 with the time unreadable. For this franking to be a correct, the item would weigh between 50g and 100g (2 x 50g @ 25c). The American censor inspected the content, passing it and applying a purple inked circular handstamp “US CENSORSHIP PASSED” which was then hand initialed. (Was it read because the name Yakusu sounds very Japanese?).



A Baptist Missionary Society mission station was established in 1896 at the highest navigable point of the Congo River, just below the Stanley Falls. During the colonial era Yakusu was a center of missionary and medical activity. Nurses were trained as both evangelists and health assistants.

**Yakusu Notes** was a quarterly newsletter for the hospital staff of the BMS's hospital at Yakusu. This magazine contained articles, poems, etc. written by various members of the medical and religious staff. Often it was illustrated and had a map on the back of each issue.

### Mission (des Églises) Libre Suédoise (MLS)

The Pentecostal Church was established in Norway and Sweden at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its first missionaries were sent to the Belgian Congo in 1919 to work at pre-

existing Swedish Protestant missions. Separation from these (for theological reasons) was inevitable and The Mission Libre Suédoise was created in 1923. MLS concentrated its evangelism in Kivu and Urundi. In common with other missionary movements, they provided health care and education as well as salvation. This work still continues, though local people play a leading role now. Today, BP266 Bukavu (see wrapper) is the postbox for several hospitals, at least one of which is supported by the Community of Pentecostal Churches in Central Africa.

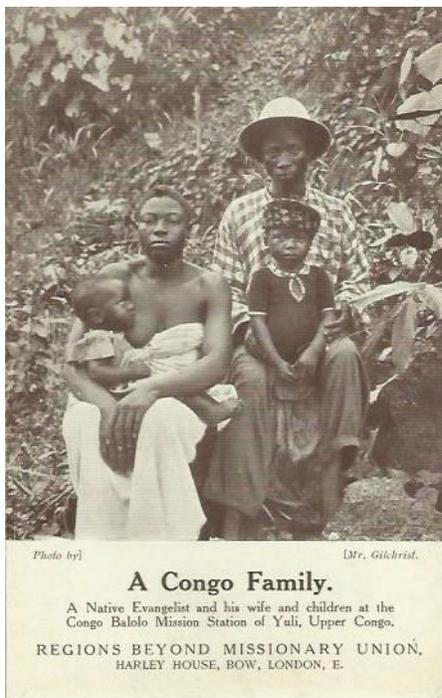
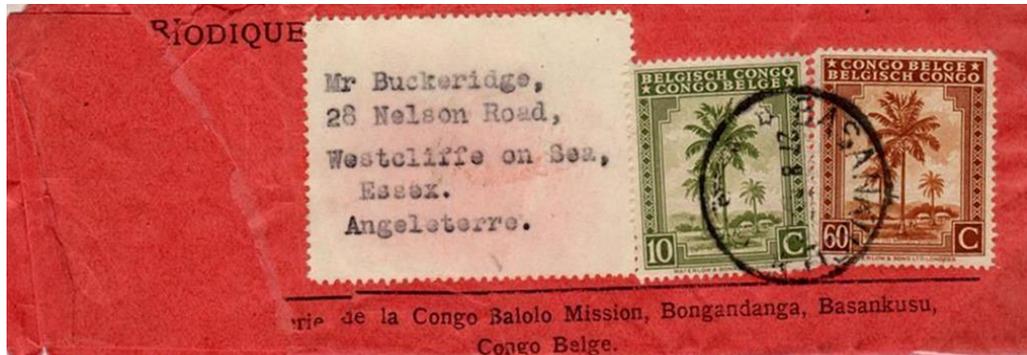


This wrapper was used to send a periodical to the Philadelphia Church at Tenhult, a small town in central southern Sweden. “Shahidi La Kweli” is Swahili and translates to “Witness of the Truth” which could well be the title of the periodical being sent. The (airmail) postage paid was 13Fr, for which a 10Fr Belgian Congo Flowers stamp overprinted CONGO (COB396) and a 3Fr Protected Birds (COB 487) stamp were used. These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 10(-G)- BUKAVU-1-G postmark dated 26-9-64 and timed at -8(:00). This date is 6 months after the ordonnance specifying postal tariffs in place at and after independence was abrogated. We do not have access to the tariff that replaced the 1959 tariff for printed matter sent by air to Europe. (Nevertheless, it is interesting to calculate what it might have been according to Ordonnance 69/77 1959. If the item weighed 31g to 40g the charge would have been 2 x 20g @ 5Fr50 + 1 x 50g @ 60c = 11Fr60. Clearly, prices had been raised.)

### **Congo-Balolo Mission**

This red wrapper appears to have been torn open roughly, causing partial loss of the left side. It carries the mission’s name and address “??? de la Congo Balolo Mission, Bongandanga, Basankusu // Congo Belge” It is addressed to “Mr Buckeridge. Westcliffe on Sea, Essex, England”, typed on a perforated white label. Above and to the left this is the instruction (P)ERIODIQUE.

The postage paid was 70c, for which stamps of the Palms issue were used, a 10c (COB229) and a 60c (COB 255). These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A BASANKUSU postmark dated 27 8 ???. (The year and time cannot be read.) Assuming the franking is correct there are two possibilities for when it was posted. If posted between 15<sup>th</sup> December 1945 and 31<sup>st</sup> June 1948 the weight of the item would have been between 50g and 100g (i.e. 2 x 50g @ 35c). If posted after this but before 1<sup>st</sup> July 1949 it had to be 50g or less (i.e. 1 x 50g @ 70c).



The Congo-Balolo Mission (CBM) was a station of a British Baptist missionary society active in the Belgian Congo from 1889 to 1915. It was the predecessor of the “Regions Beyond Missionary Union” (RBMU), established in 1900 and which today is called “World Team”. The leading figure in its establishment was Henry (“Harry”) Grattan Guinness II. He wanted to extent the field of missionary activity further upstream into the tributaries of the Congo in what is now Equateur. The new mission, called The Congo-Balolo Mission, had plans to operate on six southern tributaries of the Congo River.

Their missionaries arrived at a time of great stress. Brutal methods were being used to coerce the local population into harvesting wild rubber. Slavery continued and epidemics were causing considerable loss of life. This disruption to native life and the

apparent failure of the old systems may have made the people more receptive to the new message brought by the missionaries. They taught local people to spread the word and these evangelists communicated their understanding of the bible in their own words.

## The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army was founded by William and Catherine Booth in London in 1865 and as the name implies is organized along quazi-military lines. It is derived from Methodism and seeks to bring salvation to the poor, destitute and hungry by meeting both physical and spiritual needs. Soon, it grew to become a major international Christian church and charity. Traditionally, the Salvationists have a vocation to work in urban areas. In September 1934, Adjutant Henri Becquet of the Belgian Salvation Army and his wife Paula arrived in Leopoldville to undertake the work of this movement in the capital. The Salvationists focused their charitable work on education. (The Salvation Army's arrival coincided with both the Catholic Scheut and the Protestant BMS missions establishing churches in the *Cité Indigène* to serve the growing African urban population.)

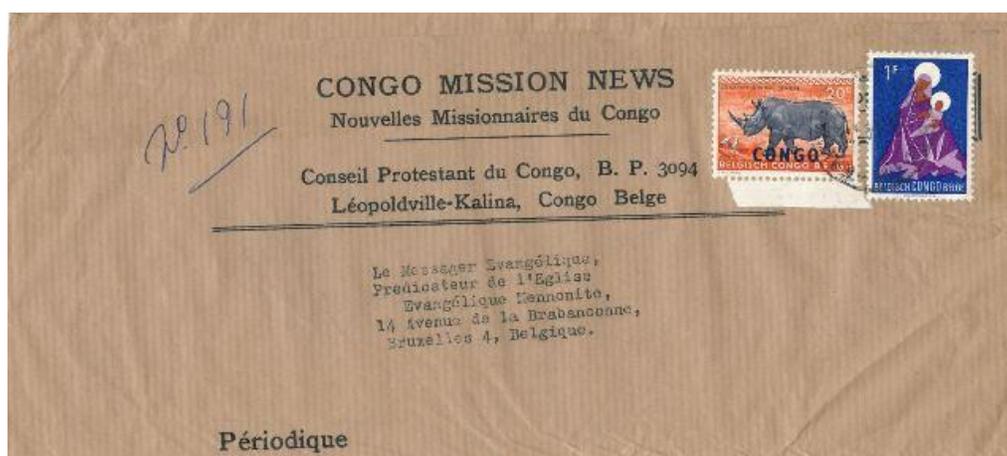


LE MESSENGER DU SALUT headlines this wrapper with the added information that it is the "Official Journal of the Salvation Army of the Belgian Congo and in French Equatorial Africa" and that it is "Published by Salvation Army Headquarters, Leopoldville". The Francophone version of Salvation Army logo is present. The postage paid was 25c, for which two of the Native Arts issue were used, a 10c (COB 277) and a 15c (COB 278). They were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A LEOPOLDVILLE postmark dated -9 -6 -53 and timed at 12(:00). The wrapper is addressed to "The Editor, Salvation Army, Cape

Town, South Africa". Being in the African Postal Union, the cost of sending printed matter to South Africa was then 25c for the first 50g. The franking is correct. *Le Messenger du Salut* is the Congo equivalent of the *War Cry* newspaper that is published in English and the wrapper might have contained a complimentary copy of *Le Messenger* from one editor to another.

### **Protestant Council of the Congo (publication - Congo Mission News)**

This wrapper image has been captured from eBay. Consequently, the dimensions, gum, paper gauge and any markings that might appear on the reverse cannot be reported. The two-line bilingual inscription, CONGO MISSION NEWS and its translation into French is followed by the name of the publishing organization (Conseil Protestant du Congo) and its post box number at Léopoldville-Kalina. The paper used for the wrapper is vertical weave brown. The recipient is of interest, being the Mennonite Church in Belgium. The Congo was a major area of Mennonite evangelism, concentrated in West Kasai. Faced with competition from Roman Catholicism, the Mennonite Congo Inland Mission became affiliated to the Conseil Protestant du Congo. Thus, the recipient may well have subscribed to the Congo Mission News.



The *Congo Mission News* was an inter-denominational quarterly newspaper for Protestant missionaries. In 1948 they cooperated to build a new Bookshop and installed a modern press. Congo Mission News, schoolbooks, and many other items were printed there. Such centralized and modern printing led to a decline and cessation of individual mission printing presses.

The postage paid was 1Fr20, for which a 1Fr Christmas (COB 363) and a 20c Protected Animals with the CONGO overprint (COB 401) were used. Unfortunately the post mark is very faint and unreadable. However, the date is most likely to be in the early part of the 1960s. Stockmans and Gallant state that the tariffs set in 1959 remained unchanged after independence until the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1964. Because the wrapper contained a

Périodique the charge for delivery to Belgium was 40c per 50 g, which implies the weight of the item was more than 100g, but less than 150 g.

### Documentation & Information Africaines (DIA)

The Documentation and Information Africaines (DIA) was the official Catholic news agency, the press organ for the Roman Catholic Church in the Congo. Its mission statement was to promote a just and human democratic society with a Christian perspective.



This wrapper (in the author's collection) shows a rather crudely drawn DIA in relief within a hatched box, 41x70mm. DOCUMENTATION et INFORMATION AFRICAINES // // BUREAU DE PRESSE LEOPOLDVILLE appear to be typed along with the instruction PAR AVION. The paper used has a gauge of 0.08mm and the wrapper is 217 x 329mm in size. It is un gummed. The postage paid was 18Fr, for which a Belgian Congo 8Fr Flowers stamp overprinted CONGO (COB 395) and a 10Fr Protected Birds stamp (COB 493) were used. They were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 12C LEOPOLDVILLE 1 / LEOPOLDSTAD 1 postmark, dated 23-2-64 and timed 10:(00). It is addressed to The "Editor, N.C.W.C News Service, Washington DC, USA" (NB not shown on the image). The printed matter / newspaper postal rate to the USA was, at this date, 60c per 50g with an airmail surtax of 5Fr50 per 20g. If the item weighed 51g to 60g the charge would have been 3 x 20g @ 5Fr50 + 2 x 50g @ 60c = 17Fr70, which is close enough to the franking to make little difference.

### Secular Newspapers & Periodicals

#### Le Courrier D'Afrique



This horizontal weave brown paper wrapper has a white address label headed “LE COURRIER D’AFRIQUE”. PAR AVION is instructed. The destination is Belgium, to “Monsieur Edm. KONINGS at BRUXELLES”. Perhaps Edmond Konings was an ex-colonist keeping up to date with news and events. However, there is another possibility. In its annual reports for the early 1950s The Banque National de Belgique lists Edmond Konings as a senior officer (Member, Conseil de Régence). As a banker, was he monitoring the situation in the colony through its press?

The postage paid was 5Fr25, for which the 10c and 5Fr stamps of the Native Arts issue (COB 277 and COB 290) and the 15c stamp of the Palms issue (COB 250) were used. These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 10(.B.)- LEOPOLDVILLE 1.B. postmark, dated - 2-10-50 and timed at 17(:00).

Interpreting the franking presents a problem. We assume that the publisher would know the correct amount to apply. Our interpretation of the information presented in Stockmans and Gallant suggests that the airmail charge for objects other than letters (AO) in table 2 of Ordonnance 259/PT 1947 is still a surtax. Perhaps another member can confirm this? At this date, the postal tariff for newspapers and periodicals by surface mail to Belgium was 25c per 50g (set 1<sup>st</sup> August 1949). The AO surtax required for delivery by air was 1Fr25 per 5g. Consequently, if the weight of the item was between 16g and 20g the charge should be 1 x 50g @ 25c + 4 x 5g @ 1Fr25 = 5Fr50. This might seem remarkably light for a newspaper. However, it is sufficient for a brief newspaper. Old newsprint is about 50% heavier than today’s newsprint. Belgium adopted SI paper sizes for newsprint in 1924. If we assume the paper was A3 size (i.e. twice the page area of this bulletin) 4 sheets (or 8 pages) would weigh 18 to 20g.



Le Courrier d'Afrique was a French medium newspaper published by the Societe d'Imprimerie du Courrier d'Afrique, in Leopoldville from 1930 to 1972. Founded by Scheutist (CICM) missionaries, at first it was conservative and elitist. This changed in 1946 when the paper was taken over by the Confederation of Christian Trades Unions and the editorial policy became more radical, with an emphasis on social issues. As independence of the Congo approached the number of management and newsroom staff who were indigenous Congolese gradually increased.

### **La Voix Du Congolais**

Sensing the atmosphere of change at the end of World War II, the colonial administration created the first national African newspaper, the monthly La Voix du Congolais to serve an emerging Congolese elite. Appearing first in January 1945, it offered news and literature with a Congolese perspective which marked the beginning of Congolese literature. Contributors were attracted from across the Congo and the content demonstrated a political and cultural awareness on the part of the Congolese with a desire to transform the colonial society. It offered the Congolese elite an opportunity to raise awareness of their own identity and membership of a social group. With independence in prospect, its objective was in sight and publication ceased in 1959.

This wrapper was used to send an American subscriber her copy of LA VOIX DU CONGOLAIS, Revue Mensuelle (The Congolese Voice – Monthly Review). This 248 x 445mm wrapper is made using vertical weave 0.07mm gauge craft paper and has a gum line varying in width from 26 to 31mm.



The postage paid was 1Fr60, for which the 20c and 40c denominations of the Native Arts issue (COB 279 and COB 281) and the 1Fr of the Flowers definitive (COB 310) were used. These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 10(.E.)- LEOPOLDVILLE KALINA E postmark dated 8-7-52 and timed at 19(:00). The stamps are applied over a default printed PORT PAYÉ, which presumably applied only to internal mail. At this date, the rate for printed matter (newspapers) to the USA was 80c for the first 50g and 40c for each successive 50g. Consequently, franking is correct for an item weighing between 101g and 150g.

### **Concluding remarks and observations**

The wrapper for printed matter has been a neglected subject, in general. We suspect that most were destroyed or at best only the stamps were saved. Yet, in the colonial era regular news from home was considered important for morale and colonists wanted to keep abreast of national and world affairs in addition to letters from loved ones. Of course, internal distribution was as important. Also, the delivery of catalogues allowed the colonist and administrator to order goods not available locally. To make this mail affordable a concessionary printed matter tariff (imprimés) was allowed. It is an aspect of postal history that deserves further study. In addition, wrappers allow the social aspects to be uncovered (as has been shown). This was extremely difficult before the advent of the World Wide Web, which puts an increasing archive of information in the hands of the philatelist at home.

The Belgian Congo is a great country for this aspect of social philately / postal history. The presence of a network of missions for different Christian denomination and even duplication within these has produced the largest number of (surviving) wrappers from mailings of newsletters / pamphlets to benefactors in America and Europe. (The drive to maintain charitable giving for good work existed long before the television era!)

We ask members to examine their collections and hunt-out wrappers and report these for a fuller picture. No doubt further examples of wrappers with a connection to a Belgian Congo mission will be found. A cursory reading of the literature about mission schools and churches indicates that they existed in surprisingly large numbers - many thousands and several Christian denominations. The Society of Red Hill Missionaries is but one additional example.

### **References**

C Stockmans and R Gallant (1997) *Arretes et Ordinnances Concernant les tarifs postaux au Congo Belge et Ruanda Urundi*.

A I Heim and R H Keach 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (2004) *The Cancellations of the Normal Post Offices of Belgian Congo 1886 – 1960 and Ruanda-Urundi 1917 – 1962, Including the Telegraphic Cancellations*. BCSC