

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

THE INDEPENDENT ETHIOPIAN POSTS

MAY 12, 1899

Alfred Ilg began to organize his private Independent Ethiopian Posts in 1898. His father-in-law, Otto Gattiker, employed three Swiss postal workers in September 1898; Spitzer, Wüllschleger, and Mühle, who arrived in Harar in November, but on their way to Addis Ababa, Spitzer died.

The Independent Ethiopian Posts' first provisional mail courier from Addis Ababa to Harar left on May 12, 1899. Harar's telephone office, now the Ethiopian post office in Harar, transferred the mail across town to the French post office at the Catholic Mission in charge of the mail to and from Djibouti. The French handed over the postal material and its Ethiopian stamps to Wüllschleger in Harar on August 22; an Independent Ethiopian Posts had finally been established. There were two mail couriers per month in each direction between Addis Ababa and Harar. The Director of Posts in Addis Ababa, Henri Mühle, had a staff of 19 Ethiopians.

The postal rates were fixed at:

- 1 guerche for a letter of 15 grams between Addis Ababa and Harar (reduced from 2g)
- 2 guerches for a letter of 15 grams for mail to Djibouti (mail addressed abroad)
- 1 guerche for each additional weight unit of 15 grams

Ethiopian registration introduced, but no registration fee

HARAR POSTES FRANÇAISES CANCELOR

OCTOBER 28, 1899

After the French in Harar had handed over its postal material in August 1899 a new cancelor inscribed "Harar Postes Françaises" was ordered. It was used as a transit mark into May 1902 and as a departing mark at the French PO in Harar into June 1908 when it was closed. The French Somali stamps were canceled in Djibouti.

EARLIEST RECORDED USE "HARAR POSTES FRANÇAISES"



October 14, 1899, Addis Ababa to Zurich, 2 guerches single weight (1 g on back).

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

ETHIOPIAN & FRENCH POST OFFICES IN HARAR

1899

The Ethiopian telephone office in Harar became the Ethiopian PO in May 1899, responsible for the mail between Harar and Addis Ababa. It received mail bags from the French PO in Harar as of August 1899. The Ethiopian Posts transported the mail with donkeys between Harar and Addis Ababa over eight to ten days.



Above: Donkeys with mail outside the Ethiopian PO in Harar.

Below: The French PO at the Catholic Mission in Harar



Stamp from
the 1909
Definitives
issue.

Menelik's Journal Vol. 19/3 July 2003: "A Visit to Addis Ababa's Post Office on January 1, 1900" [Edited]

Menelik's Journal Vol. 22/1 January 2006: "Harar's Ethiopian Post Office Located"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 24/2 April 2008: "Historic Post Offices in Ethiopia"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 24/4 October 2008 "Addis Ababa's 1st and 2nd Post Offices"

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

ENTOTTO CANCELORS USED AT FRENCH AND ETHIOPIAN POS

1899

The French PO in Addis Ababa closed in August 1899 after a period when only French subjects, Alfred Ilg, and Russians were permitted to use it. When the Independent Ethiopian Posts opened in August 1899 the Entotto cancelor used by the French was retired. The Ethiopian Posts began to use an almost identical cancelor, also sent to Ethiopia in 1896.



Entotto cancelor used by French PO.

June 12, 1899

Addis Ababa to Zurich

2 guerches internal rate

Cover sent by Alfred Ilg and carried by the French Legation's couriers.

POSTAL CARDS

1899

The Ethiopian Posts began to sell postal cards in 1899. The 1 guerche card was most frequently used franked with 10c when addressed abroad and with another 25c if registered. The 1/2 g card was sometimes addressed abroad franked with additional Ethiopian postage to cover the 1 g rate to Djibouti and with 10c Somali Coast when addressed abroad.



Entotto cancelor used by Ethiopian PO.

November 24, 1899

Addis Ababa to Zurich

Registered 1/2 g card
franked 1 guerche
internal post card rate.

Card sent through the Independent Ethiopian Posts; written by Fanny Ilg, Alfred Ilg's wife.

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

INTERNAL MAIL

1900

There were no changes to the services or postage rates in 1900. However, as the construction of the railway progressed, the mail couriers from Harar to Djibouti began to transfer the mail to the train at kilometer 90 at the border, which had been reached by March 1900. As the railhead progressed, the transfer took place at kilometer 200 as of January 1902 and at the end of 1902 at the railway's terminus, the new town of Dire Daoua. The latter arrangement remained in place until 1915. The volume of mail remained low; the postal statistics indicate that customers at Addis Ababa's post office sent 817 letters, 65 registered letters, and 112 postal cards in 1900. Statistics for the Ethiopian PO in Harar have not been found, but its volume was lower. *A total of 36 covers and postal cards have been recorded preserved from 1900.*

EARLIEST RECORDED INTERNAL COVER FROM A PERMANENT RESIDENT IN HARAR TRANSPORTED BY THE RECENTLY ESTABLISHED INDEPENDENT ETHIOPIAN POSTS



May 3, 1900

Harar to Addis Ababa

1 guerche rate for internal mail introduced in 1899.

The May 3 departure was missed; postmarked again on May 17 when the next courier left.

Arrival in Addis Ababa on May 27 (Entotto arrival on back).

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

ADIS ABEBA CANCELOR

JANUARY 1901

A new cancelor came into use in January 1901 with the name of Adis Abeba used for the first time. It was used into 1917. The French PO in Harar stopped adding Harar Postes Françaises as a transit mark after Michel had arrived in Harar in April 1902 to become Postmaster at the Ethiopian PO, which now added the Harar transit mark in blue.

FIRST OVERPRINT: "ETHIOPIE"

JULY 18, 1901

Ethiopian stamps had been sold in Paris since 1894 by Maury, the famous stamp dealer, and in 1900 at the Universal Exhibition in Paris. Discounted stamps made their way to Ethiopia and were used for postage. Sales by the Ethiopian Posts declined and it closed in June 1901. The Director of Posts solved the problem: He notified the 41 users of the Posts in Addis Ababa that as of July 18, 1901 only stamps overprinted "Ethiopie" would be valid for postage.



August 24, 1901

Addis Ababa to Stuttgart

2 guerches overprinted "Ethiopie" canceled with the new ADIS ABEBA cancelor
Harar transit mark struck by Ethiopian PO with blue ink as of August 1899.

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

OBOCK STAMPS

1901

Obock's stamps had been transferred to Djibouti in 1899. As shortages of Djibouti stamps developed, the Djibouti PO began to supply the Ethiopian Posts with Obock stamps, which were used with Djibouti stamps in 1901-1902.



February 17, 1902

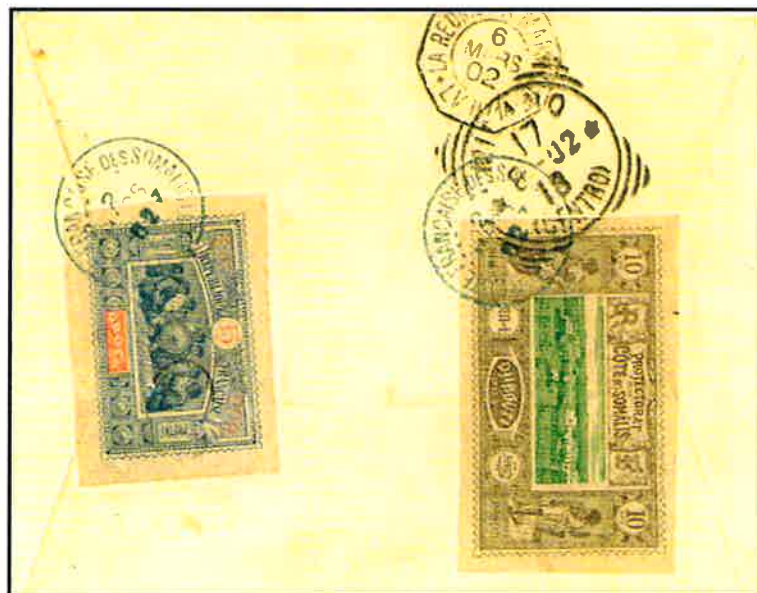
Addis Ababa to Milan

2 guerches, single weight rate. Rare strip of four 1/2 g stamps.

Djibouti 10c + Obock 15c on back.

THIRD CIRCULAR DJIBOUTI CANCELOR

A third Djibouti cancelor was introduced in November 1901 that had a dotted inner circle.



[Reduced 70%]

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

ETHIOPIAN REGISTRATION

1901

The Ethiopian Posts introduced registration in 1899. Registration was indicated by a handwritten “Recommandée” and a registration number. Djibouti’s PO continued to mark the registered mail with a boxed “R” and its own registration numbers. There was no Ethiopian registration fee. Few registered covers have been preserved from 1899-1901.



November 24, 1901

Addis Ababa to Alexandria

Redirected to Cairo

4 guerches, double weight.

Ethiopian registration No. "119"

50c, double weight +

25c registration

Djibouti registration No. "413"

Mixed Djibouti and Obock
franking

Cover addressed in Arabic and then in Latin by Mühle, Director of Posts in Addis Ababa.

Menelik's Journal Vol. 14/4 October 1998: "The Elusive 'Ethiopie' in Violet"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 15/2 April 1999: "More on 'Ethiopie'"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 21/3 July 2005: "Ethiopie in Script"

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

JEAN-ADOLPH MICHEL ARRIVES IN ETHIOPIA

DECEMBER 1901

Harar's Postmaster, Wüllschleger, committed suicide in December 1900. A replacement was hired, Jean-Adolph Michel, a Swiss who arrived in Addis Ababa in December 1901. He was sent to be Postmaster in Harar in March 1902. Prior to his departure, the Ethiopian Posts issued the "Ethiopie" overprint in blue to be sold to collectors and dealers. These stamps were not valid for postage. It may have been Michel's idea. Prior to leaving for Harar, stamps and 1 guerche postal cards were overprinted "Bosta." The Amharic type used for "Bosta" had been found by Michel and came from an old printing press that the first Postmaster in Addis Ababa had brought to Ethiopia.

Michel would have an important role in the history of the Ethiopian Posts. After Mühle, the Director in Addis Ababa, died from small pox in July 1903, Alfred Ilg promoted Michel to Director of Posts in October 1904. Michel immediately created a new overprint, which Ilg refused. In 1905, Michel created Provisionals to increase sales. He also introduced postage dues stamps to pay for internal postage. He began to make fakes of the overprints of 1901, 1902, and 1903 in 1905 to sell to collectors. He moved to Addis Ababa in October 1906 after Alfred Ilg had left Ethiopia. Emperor Menelik expropriated the Independent Ethiopian Posts and made it a government-owned Imperial Ethiopian Posts with Michel as Director. Michel devoted less time to his postal duties in 1907 and the Posts deteriorated. He was fired in early 1908 when the French began to reorganize the Posts to prepare Ethiopia for membership in the U.P.U.

After a brief stay in Europe, Michel returned, became Councilor of State and was responsible for creating Ethiopia's third set of stamps, the "Animals & Rulers" of 1919. After returning to Europe in 1918, Michel became one of the most prolific fakers of Ethiopia's overprinted issues of 1901-1908 and of faked covers using original and faked cancelors. It was only in the late 1970s that the extent of his mischief was revealed.

POSTAL CARD OVERPRINTED "ETHIOPIE"

1901

Only the 1 guerche postal card was overprinted "Ethiopie" in violet in 1901. It was used in the mails in 1901-1902.



February 19, 1902
Addis Ababa to Paris

Menelik's Journal Vol. 16/4 October 2000: "J.-A. Michel in Addis Ababa and Harrar in 1901-4"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 23/2 January 2007: "Commentary on Brule's Article"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 24/4 October 2008: "The Life of Jean-Adolph Michel"

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

PHILATELIC SALES—COLLECTIONS

1902

Ethiopian stamps had been sold in Paris since 1894 but when "Ethiopie" was issued in 1901, collectors had to buy them from the Ethiopian Posts. It sold the stamps affixed to sheets. Sales of these "collections" became an important source of revenue. Individuals in Ethiopia also sent complete sets of "Ethiopie" and future overprints on covers.



Above:

A "collection" of "Ethiopie" CTO in Harar, January 2, 1902.

February 7, 1902
Addis Ababa to Metz
Registered
Set of "Ethiopie" sent by a merchant in Addis Ababa to a dealer in Germany.

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

SECOND OVERPRINT: "BOSTA"

APRIL 1, 1902

A new handstamped overprint in violet "Bosta" (Post in Amharic) was issued April 1, 1902. Stamps overprinted "Ethiopie" were no longer valid. "Bosta" was later made with black ink, in 1903, but only a few covers are known franked with these stamps. A few 1 guerche stamps were overprinted in blue. As of January 1902, there were three monthly mail couriers between Addis Ababa and Harar.



April 13, 1902

Addis Ababa to Zurich

2g "Bosta" in Violet

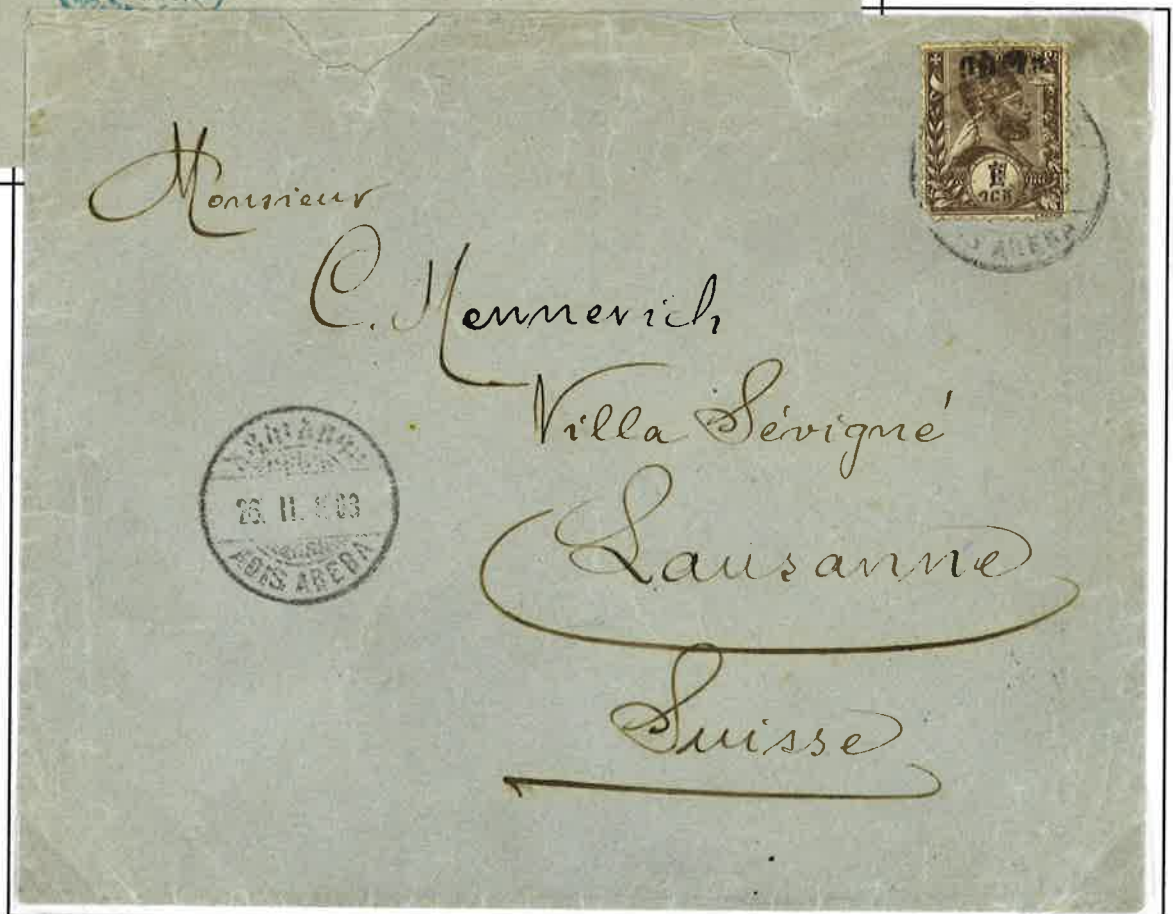
The use of "Harar Postes Françaises" pm as a transit mark stopped in April 1902.

February 26, 1903

Addis Ababa to

Lausanne

2g "Bosta" in Black



ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

POSTAL CARD WITH "BOSTA" / "BOSTA" IN BLACK

APRIL 1, 1902 / JANUARY 1903

Only the 1 guerche postal card was overprinted with "Bosta" in violet. It was issued on April 1, 1902. It is not known when "Bosta" was made with black ink; likely in January 1903 and likely intended to be sold to collectors since the black overprint is common on mint stamps. However, a few copies in black were used in the mails.



February 10, 1903

Harar to Bern

1g postal card

Franked 10 centimes

Côte des Somalis

(colored center) issued in 1902.

January 27, 1903

Addis Ababa to Ipswich

Registered

6 guerches

Rare use of high value

4g unoverprinted stamp

and "Bosta" in black.

4 x 25c Obock on back

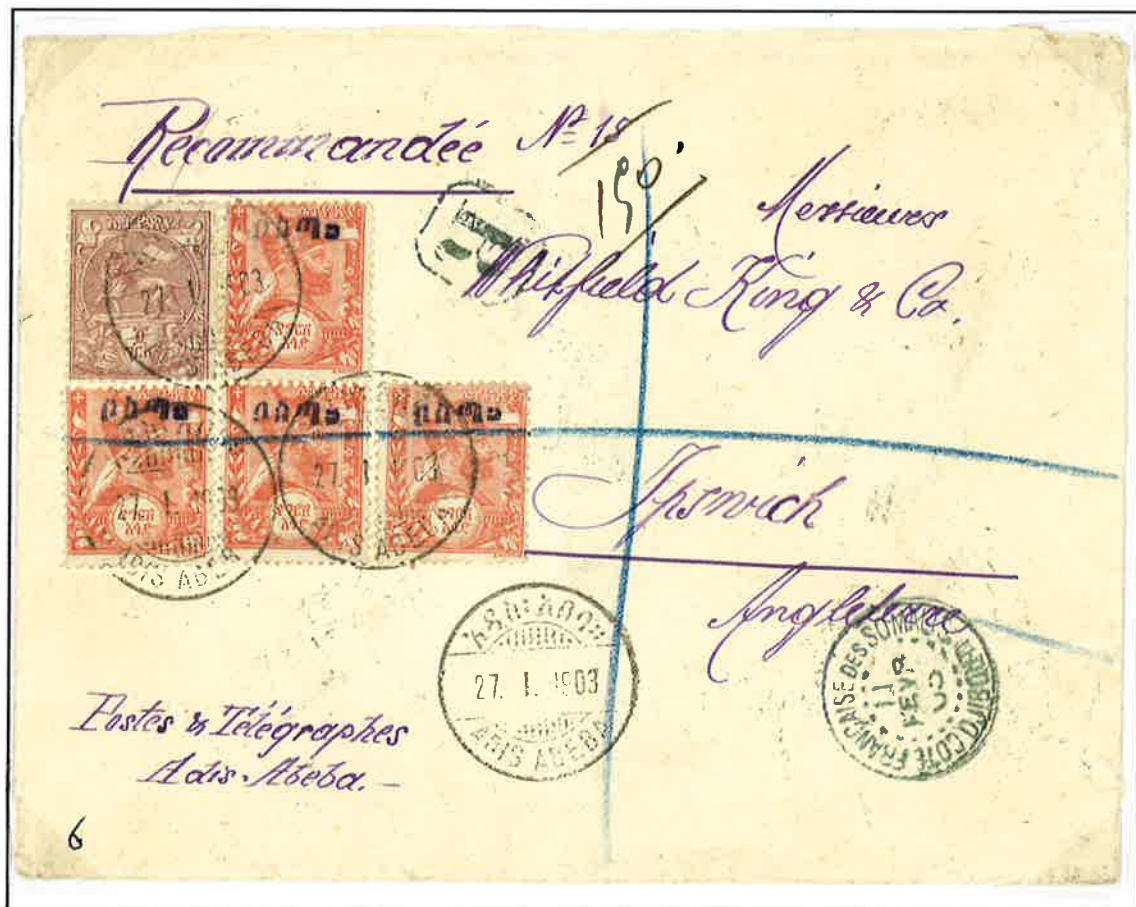
Less than 25 items

recorded addressed to

England in 1895-1908;

half of them to dealer

Whitfield King & Co.



ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

PICTURE POST CARDS / "BOSTA" IN BLUE

1902

Picture post cards imported from Djibouti began to appear in 1902 and became a third category of mail that has been preserved. Harar's Postmaster, Michel, began to privately produce post cards with scenes from Harar and later Addis Ababa. They are now an important historical photographic record of Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Menelik II.



**ONLY RECORDED
ITEM WITH
"BOSTA" IN BLUE**

November 6, 1902
Addis Ababa to Basel
Registered post card
franked 1 guerdie
"Bosta" in blue.

Very few stamps were
overprinted "Bosta"
with blue ink.

A 10c stamp was
removed from the
card.

Card written by Henri Mühle, the Director of the Ethiopian Posts.



[Reduced 80%]

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

THIRD OVERPRINT: "MELEKT"

APRIL 15, 1903

A handstamped overprint in black "Melekt" (message) replaced "Bosta" on April 15, 1903. These stamps were valid until December 31, 1904 when the Ethiopian postal rates were changed and a new overprint was issued.



April 3, 1904

Addis Ababa to Grosseto, Italy

2 guerches "melekt" + 25 centimes

Single weight

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

POSTAL CARDS OVERPRINTED "MELEKT"

APRIL 1903

Both the 1 guerche and 1/4 guerche postal cards were overprinted with "Melekt" but not the 1/2 guerche postal card.



October 3, 1903

Harar to Vienna

Mailed at French PO in Harar, hence card's "stamp" not canceled.

Harar Postes Françaises used as departure mark.



"British Way"

June ?, 1903

Harar to Vosges, France
via Berbera and Aden
1/4 guerche card with
"Melekt"

Ethiopian franking not needed
when sent from Harar via
Somaliland.

Card franked with 1 Anna
Indian stamp overprinted
BRITISH SOMALILAND

Rare use of a British
Somaliland stamp on
Ethiopian mail.

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

UNITED STATES' DIPLOMATIC MISSION TO MENELIK

SEPTEMBER 1904

President Roosevelt sent a diplomatic mission to Emperor Menelik in 1903 to negotiate a commercial treaty. America had become Ethiopia's largest trading partner even though there were no Americans in Ethiopia. The negotiated treaty was taken to Washington, D.C. and was ratified by Congress in 1904. Mr. William H. Ellis, an Afro-American financier on Wall Street, headed the U.S. diplomatic mission that delivered the ratified Treaty to Menelik in September 1904.



September 5, 1904
Addis Ababa to New York
Forwarded to Cambridge, MA
Registered
Arrived October 18
2 guerches "Melekt"
Single weight

Addressed to Mr. Dudley Carter c/o Miss L. Carter, one of the most famous Broadway actresses at the time working for Mr. Balasco who lived at the Balasco theater, the first one in New York to have electric lights.

[Reduced 70%]

Menelik's Journal Vol. 12/3 July 1996: "An Historic Letter from the United States' Mission to Menelik"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 27/1 January 2011: "A Cover Associated with America's Two Diplomatic Missions to Ethiopia"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 19/2 April 2003 "Volume of Registered Mail in Addis Ababa in 1904"

Menelik's Journal Vol. 20/3 July 2004: "The 100th Anniversary of the First Treaty between the United States and Ethiopia"

ETHIOPIA 1895-1913

Independent Ethiopian Posts

EARLY MAIL FROM DIRE DAOUA

1903 / 1904

Dire Daoua became the terminus of the railway from Djibouti when construction stopped in December 1902 and grew to be an important commercial town with many foreign residents. However, Dire Daoua did not have a post office until November 1, 1906; residents and travelers gave their mail to someone on the train who posted it in Djibouti franked with French Somali Coast stamps. Unless marked as coming from Dire Daoua this mail cannot be identified as having originated in Ethiopia. Recorded mail from Dire Daoua is scarce even though the volume of mail was likely significant. This mail bypassed the Ethiopian and French post offices in Harar.



February 9, 1903 & November 7, 1904

Dire Daoua to Italy. No Ethiopian postage; franked 10 centimes on the back.

