

## SYNOPSIS

### Ethiopia 1895-1913

**Ethiopia 1895-1913** presents the **Postal History of Ethiopia during the Reign of Emperor Menelik II.** This six-frame exhibit begins in 1895 with the organization of the Ethiopian Posts; follows its evolution to U.P.U. membership on November 1, 1908, and ends in 1913 when Emperor Menelik died.



**Introduction:** Emperor Menelik founded modern Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Posts (photo). He expanded Ethiopia's territory; preserved Ethiopia's independence in 1896, defeating an Italian army invading from Eritrea; negotiated Ethiopia's borders with Italy, France, and England; and made important treaties, including a commercial treaty with the United States in 1903. He awarded a concession to build a railway from Djibouti that influenced the history of the Ethiopian Posts. Construction began in 1897 and ended in 1902 in Dire Daoua, a new town far from Addis Ababa, the railway's intended terminus.

**Postal History Summary:** On February 10, 1893, Alfred Ilg, Menelik's Swiss advisor, was awarded a concession to set up a Private Ethiopian Posts. A set of seven stamps was printed in France in 1894. They were used for the first time on January 29, 1895, in Harar, on philatelic covers to announce that the Posts had opened, but it had not yet been organized. A cover to Maury, the famous French dealer, paved the way for Maury to sell Ethiopian stamps to help finance Ilg's venture. A future consequence was that the stamps were overprinted annually in 1901-07 to protect the Ethiopian Posts' revenues.

Regular mail service between Addis Ababa and Harar began in May 1895, where Ethiopia's only two post offices were located. It was the real start of the Ethiopian Posts. The French Catholic Mission in Harar and the French Legation in Addis Ababa managed the mails. Alfred Ilg started an Independent Ethiopian Posts with bi-monthly couriers between Addis Ababa and Harar in August 1899. The Ethiopian post office in Harar now exchanged mail with the French post office at the Catholic Mission; which remained responsible for the mail in and out of Ethiopia via Djibouti into June 1908.

Jean-Adolph Michel, a Swiss who had a central role in managing the Ethiopian Posts, arrived in Ethiopia in December 1901, became Postmaster in Harar in 1902, Director in October 1904, and made changes in 1905 aimed at increasing the Ethiopian Posts' revenues, including creating postage dues to pay postage on all incoming mail. Alfred Ilg left Ethiopia in 1906; Menelik expropriated the Posts and made it a government-owned Imperial Ethiopian Posts with Michel as Director. The French opened a post office in Dire Daoua in November 1906, subordinated for half a year to the post office in Port-Said and then Djibouti. Dire Daoua was the third town in Ethiopia to have a post office.

At Menelik's request, the French began to reorganize the Ethiopian Posts in early 1908 and Ethiopia was admitted to the U.P.U. on November 1, 1908. A new set of stamps was issued in January 1909, followed by the creation of the Dire Daoua Provisionals in 1911, a speculative issue, and postage dues in 1912. After Menelik's death in December 1913, there were no significant postal developments until 1917 when overprints were made. A third set of stamps was issued in 1919; postal rates were changed in the 1920s, and post offices began to be opened in small towns in the late 1920s.

During the pre-U.P.U. period and after, the French, British, Italian, and American legations had their own mail couriers. The British and American legation mail was franked with Indian stamps and forwarded to

Aden via Zaila or Djibouti. Mail from Italy's Royal Commercial Agencies in northern Ethiopia was franked with stamps from Eritrea and taken to Eritrea.

**Treatment:** The exhibit documents all important as well as lesser developments in the history of the Ethiopian Posts in 1895-1913. The material is organized chronologically and is also anchored in the annual hand-stamped overprints that were introduced in 1901 after the Independent Ethiopian Posts had opened in 1899. The coverage is complete and includes many items that have never been exhibited since they were discovered in recent years. Because the Ethiopian Posts conveyed mail only between Addis Ababa (Entotto in the early years) and Harar for forwarding to the French Somali Coast during the nineteen years the exhibit covers, all changes in routes, rates, means, markings, and stamps are shown. Very rare internal mail, rare incoming mail, and previously undocumented legation mail is woven into the story since it competed with and reduced the Ethiopian Posts' revenues.

**Routes:** Mail was carried by donkeys the 320 miles between Addis Ababa and Harar in 1895-1913; by camels between Harar and Djibouti, and by boat to Obock in 1895, but only to Djibouti after its port opened in March 1896. After 1897, camels carried the mail between Harar and the railway head starting in May 1899. After 1902, donkeys carried the mail between Harar and Dire Daoua where construction of the railway had stopped. There were no changes in the mail route in the years thereafter. Also shown is mail that entered and exited Ethiopia via Zaila and Aden (the "British Way") and in the north, via Eritrea.

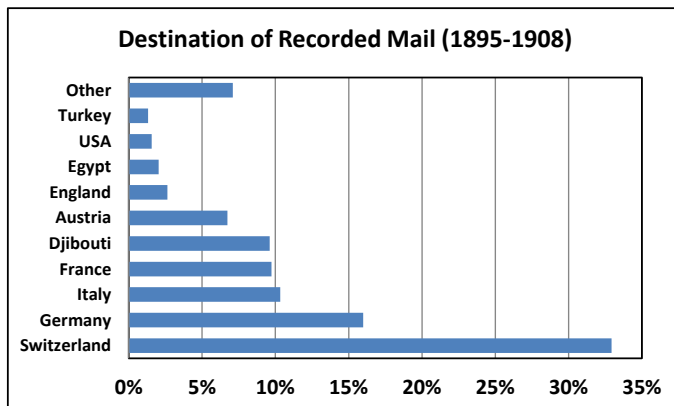
**Rates:** The postal rates were established in 1895, reaffirmed in 1899, and changed in 1905 and 1908.

**Means:** The means of transportation were donkeys, camels, and, as of 1899, partially by railway to Djibouti where the mail was picked up by French steamers.

**Markings:** All postmarks are shown in chronological order. The emergency use of the Maltese Cross, the Ankober and French Legation cancelors, recorded on only a handful of covers, is shown. The various registration marks and other recorded markings are illustrated.

**Stamps:** Ethiopia's stamps were only valid inside Ethiopia (and to Djibouti) until November 1, 1908, when Ethiopia joined the U.P.U. Before that, all mail addressed abroad needed franking from a U.P.U. member country. Stamps from the French Somali Coast, Obock, Port-Said, French Levant, India, British Somaliland, and Eritrea were used. The three highest values of the Ethiopian stamps, with the Heraldic Lion design, were infrequently used except to frank philatelic covers with entire sets.

**Destinations:** Close to 1,100 preserved covers and cards addressed abroad have been recorded from 1895-1908. Most of that mail (80%) was to Switzerland, Germany, Italy, France, and Djibouti; countries that had political interests in Ethiopia. The dominance of Switzerland (33%) was due to Alfred Ilg, J.A. Michel, and the other postmasters being Swiss. England had a dominant political role and legation in Addis Ababa as of 1898, but its mail and that of British subjects was sent with the legation's couriers to Aden, bypassing the Ethiopian Posts and reducing its revenues. Most of the recorded mail to England is to Whitfield King & Co., a stamp dealer. Only thirteen covers have been recorded to the United States.



**Organization & Key Items:** The phases of the Ethiopian Posts' history are grouped by frame with some minor overlap in coverage. Key items are listed below and important items are framed in blue.

**Frame 1: Ethiopian Posts / French Management**

First Mail from Addis Ababa / First Recorded Internal Mail / Incoming Mail to Emperor Menelik

**Frame 2: Independent Ethiopian Posts**

Earliest use of "Harar Postes Françaises" p/m / Internal Mail 1900 / U.S. Diplomatic Mission Cover

**Frame 3: Ethiopian Posts Managed by Michel**

Incoming Cover to Dire Daoua / Value Declared Cover / Incoming Cover from USA

**Frame 4: Imperial Ethiopian Posts**

Levant Postal Card / Postage Dues as Emergency Postage / Postage Due on Incoming Cover

**Frame 5: Reorganization & U.P.U. Membership**

Piastre & Scroll as Postage Due / French Legation p/m Cover / Italian Legation Mail

**Frame 6: 1909 Issue and Legation Mail**

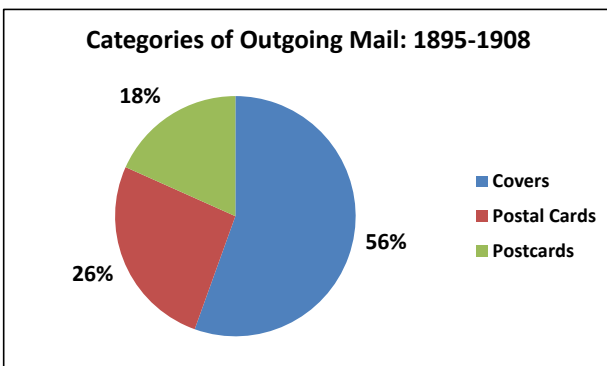
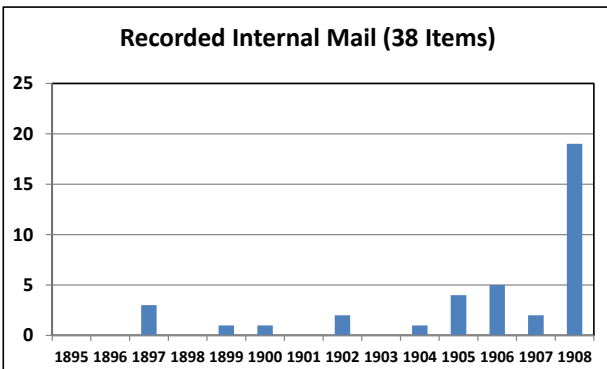
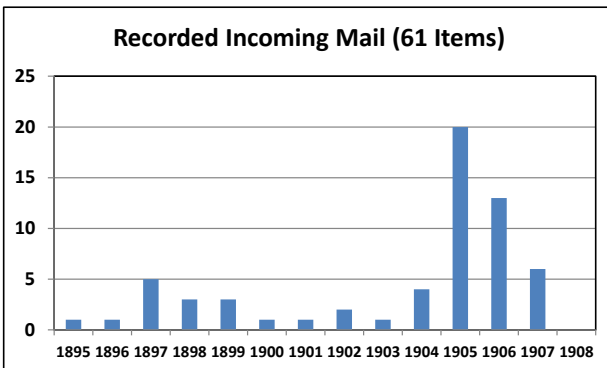
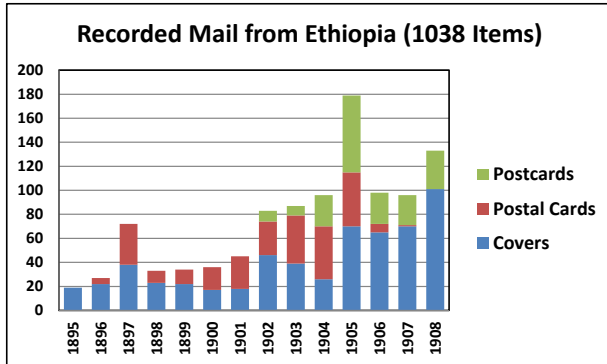
Card with Postage Due / American Legation Mail / Dire Daoua Provisionals / Ras Tafari Official Mail

**Philatelic Importance:** The early years of the Ethiopian Posts have been exhibited by John Boksenbom, Nachum Kaplan, Rev. Eric Payne, Prof. Roberto Sciaky, and more recently by Dr. Juha Kauppinen. The importance of this exhibit is its comprehensive and complete coverage of all major developments of the Ethiopian Posts in 1895-1913, inclusive of important discoveries made in the past decade. The exhibit showcases recently discovered items, previously unknown incoming mail, very rare internal mail (25% of the total items recorded), and American and Italian legation mail. Many of the items have not been previously exhibited and have expanded the current knowledge of Ethiopia's postal history and have rewritten some of what was previously accepted as historical fact. Philatelically, Ethiopia's postal history is important since it differs from those of all other African countries since Ethiopia kept its independence and was never a European colony with established ways of managing the Posts.

**Personal Study & Research:** Two decades of extensive personal research, focused on covers, stamps, and markings due to a complete lack of official Ethiopian documents from the period covered, has resulted in many new discoveries and an expanded knowledge of Ethiopia's postal history. The research has rewritten portions of Ethiopia's postal history as previously documented by Henri Tristant in his monumental "*Histoire Postale de l'Ethiopie sous le Regne de l'Empereur Menelik II*," published by *L'Académie de Philatélie* in 1977, and translated into English by Huguette Gagnon in 1995.

Among numerous findings, the personal study led to the discovery that Menelik turned the Posts into an Imperial Ethiopian Posts in 1906; that J.A. Michel had moved from Harar to Addis Ababa in 1906 to manage the Imperial Posts; that Michel did not issue the "Dagmawi" overprint in 1907 in Harar and that it was used for only a few weeks, but that the overprint was made in Addis Ababa and that the Ethiopian Posts had not closed in July 1907 as previously believed. Research into the Dire Daoua Provisionals of 1911 proved that it was a speculative issue not caused by a shortage of stamps as the postmaster who made them had claimed. A survey has documented over 100 covers franked with the DD Provisionals, 100 sets of the stamps, and that two covers with the stamps used in the international mails to promote the issue among dealers in France have survived. Covers with complete sets are considered rare, but for perspective, the 100 covers can be contrasted against the fact that just about 1,100 covers and cards have been recorded as preserved from 1895-1908! Extensive research of books about Ethiopia, in which travelers often commented on the Posts and its Swiss Director, has led to a biography of Michel and the discovery of contemporary descriptions of the post offices in Harar and Addis Ababa. Those findings, and other personal research, have been published in many in-depth articles in *Menelik's Journal* since 1992. Articles published by the creator of this exhibit are listed in blue at the bottom of each exhibition page

that has an item that has been researched to explain its place in Ethiopia's postal history. The exhibitor became President of the Ethiopian Philatelic Society (EPS) in 2001 and Editor of *Menelik's Journal*, its quarterly newsletter published in color with 32 pages in each issue. Articles have also been published by the exhibitor in *The Lion*, the quarterly newsletter of Ethiopian Collectors Club, U.K.



**Rarity:** For two decades, EPS member Luciano Maria has recorded outgoing, incoming, and internal mail from 1895-1908 in collections and auction catalogues. The list grows yearly with a dozen discoveries and close to 1,100 items are recorded. A fraction of the mail from those 19 years that has survived has shed light on the growth of the volume of mail of the Ethiopian Posts, its composition, destinations, and the rarity of items prior to 1902 and of incoming and internal mail. The statistics (graphs) provide an unbiased measure of rarity and the difficulty in duplicating this exhibit, which has many of the key items from the gold-medal collections of Boskenbom, Payne, Kaplan, and Sciaky, along with many new rare discoveries. Many of them are one-of-a-kind or only 2-3 comparable items have been recorded. Building a collection of the caliber exhibited would be very challenging.

**Condition:** Quality is the best possible when selection among similar items was possible. Some covers show damage but are included; comparable items that develop the story may not exist. The only incoming cover recorded from 1895 is missing its stamp; the 1904 cover to the USA is scruffy due to its long travel-distance and time and redirection from New York to Boston. The 1905 Declared Value cover franked with Harar Provisionals is damaged but it is historically important.

**References:**  
 Sciaky, Roberto: *Ethiopia – Tewodros to Menelik – Postal History from the Napier expedition to the Independent Ethiopian Post 1867-1908*, Vaccari, Italy, 2002.  
 Tristant, Henri: *The Postal History of Ethiopia During the Reign of Emperor Menelik II*, English Translation by Huguette Gagnon, Private Printing, USA, 1995.