
CASTELLUM



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President's Message

by Gary Little

As many of you know, I've been interested in Luxembourg airmail rate covers for quite a while. My focus has been on the post-war period from 1945-1971, but I'm always on the lookout for the elusive pre-war commercial airmail covers. In almost 20 years of looking, however, I've managed to collect only a handful of them.

Much to my delight, I recently acquired the gem shown below. This cover was sent from Luxembourg to the Belgian Congo (a rare destination) in 1934 and was flown there after first reaching Belgium by ground transportation. As per the agreement Luxembourg had with Belgium at the time, Belgian stamps were affixed to the envelope to prepay the airmail fee. (Similar agreements were also in place with France and Germany.) On this cover, a total of 10 Belgian stamps were used to pay the 1.50-franc fee for a 20 g air letter to the Congo. According to Basien & Hoffkamp's *Die Tarif der Briefpost in Luxemburg 1852-2002*, this is the correct rate.



Centenary of the International Reply Coupon: 1907-2007, Part 2

by Allan F. Wichelman

[conclusion of series]

VII. IRCs & Ponzi Schemes. IRCs gained international attention early in 1920 when Charles Ponzi (1882-1949), a renowned international swindler, touted them as the inspiration for what is now commonly referred to as a “Ponzi scheme.” The phrase denotes an investment scheme in which the investor’s returns are paid not from profitable investments but rather from the inflow of cash from new investors.

In August 1919 a Spanish businessman enclosed an IRC with a request for a publication Ponzi had been promoting. Upon seeing the coupon, Ponzi realized that based on post-war exchange rates, IRCs bought in much of Europe were worth more when redeemed in the United States than what they cost in Europe. This realization led Ponzi to offer to enrich investors by buying IRCs in Europe and selling them at a profit in the United States. He successfully convinced investors to give him money in exchange for a promissory note, promising them a 50% profit in 45 days based on his (supposed) transatlantic trading in IRCs.

In fact Ponzi never used his investors’ money to engage in IRC arbitrage. He quickly learned that the IRCs could only be exchanged for stamps, not cash, and that they were not intended for financial speculation. But by July 1920, Ponzi was taking in \$250,000 a day in investments, and his success continued until *Post* magazine revealed that to cover the investments made with his company, 160,000,000 IRCs would have had to be in circulation—in fact, at that time only about 27,000 were actually circulating.

When federal agents shut down Ponzi’s company on August 10, 1920, they found that he indeed had no large investment stock of IRCs. Eventually, Ponzi was arrested, tried and incarcerated in federal and state jurisdictions for mail fraud. In 1924, his bankruptcy estate was the subject of litigation in the United States Supreme Court brought by some of his defrauded investors. In the case report, Chief Justice Taft notes that Ponzi began his fraudulent arbitrage enterprise with capital of \$150. (*Cunningham v. Brown*, 265 U.S. 1 (1924).) Similar schemes abound today on the Internet and through the mails. What was it that P.T. Barnum once said?

VIII. Conclusion. After a century of use, the IRC remains a viable means for writers to prepay the return postage for letters from their correspondents. And finding Luxembourg IRCs _ particularly the various Rome and London designs used between 1907 and 1965 _ continues to provide formidable challenges for postal history and postal stationery collectors. Don’t pass up an opportunity to add them to your collection.

References

Basien, Dieter & Hoffkamp, Fernand, *Tarife der Briefpost in Luxemburg 1852-2002*, (Luxembourg: P&T, 2002), pp. 160-162.

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<http://www.couponreponse.fr/>

Paul-August Koch, Wim V. M. Wiggers de Vries, and Auguste Wery, *Die Internationalen Antwortscheine von Belgien und Luxemburg* (Krefeld-Traar: Bund Deutscher Philatelisten e.V., 1984).

Luxembourg Mourning Philately

by Allan F. Wichelman

Luxembourg can boast of several philatelic firsts, including issuing the first stamp booklet in 1906 and the first souvenir sheet in 1923, and — I recently learned — also the first mourning cover. Ernest A. Mosher in his award-winning, exhaustive tome on the subject entitled *Mourning Covers: The Cultural and Postal History of Letters Edged in Black — Harbingers of Death, Messengers of Grief* (“Mosher”) relates that the first proven mourning cover, a folded letter, originated in 1767. It was sent from the German garrison in Luxembourg-Ville to Baden via Frankfurt by the widow of Eberhard von Gemmingen, the Commander of the City of Luxemburg, mourning the death of her husband and showing the distinctive black borders that identify a cover as a mourning cover. The folded letter contains a printed death notice and funeral invitation and is dated January 6, 1767 (Mosher illustration at p. 20, Exhibit 4-11; “Ex Dancer [sic],” *i.e.*, from the Regency Stamps auction of the late Robert Danzer’s collection).

Mosher defines a mourning cover as a “black edged posted letter used in many countries, especially during the 19th and early 20th centuries, as a harbinger of death and messenger of grief” (p. iii). The Mourning Stamps and Covers Club reports the use of mourning covers by at least 239 past and present postal authorities.

In his list of users, Mosher notes that, based on his extensive collection, mourning covers were seldom used from Luxembourg (or from Luxembourg during the World War II occupation); consequently, all Luxembourg mourning covers are considered scarce, particularly those used during the 19th century (p. 59).

What are the major characteristics of mourning covers in the eyes of the postal historian? Mosher tells us that there are six (p. 10):

- Width of the black marking, varying from about 1 mm. to 4.1 cm. (compare Fig. 5 & 6).
- Size of the cover.
- Shape, most being rectangular but some being square, triangular or a parallelogram.
- Placement of the black marking, usually on the edge but sometimes inset, on the back only, or with diagonal stripes or a single stripe (*e.g.*, see Fig. 3).
- Design of the marking, usually but not always a straight line.
- Reverse and back flap designs, often with a flap embossment and wax seal, especially on early mourning covers (see Fig. 4).

This might be a good time for us to revisit the mourning covers in our collections. What time periods are they from? When were mourning covers most frequently used in Luxembourg? Who were the printers or stationers? When did their use end, if in fact it has? Do they fit Mosher’s six categories?

Here are a few from my Luxembourg postal history collection that I find especially interesting:



Fig. 1: Domestic mourning cover from Wiltz, November 5, 1877, to Diekirch, franked with a 10-centime definitive.



Fig. 2: Mourning cover from Redange-sur-Attert, posted August 11, 1904, at the 12 1/2-centime concession rate to Germany.



Fig. 3: Front and back of a mourning cover posted August 25, 1904, at the 25-centime UPU rate, backstamped Seattle, Washington, September 7th, and University Station, September 8, 1904.





Fig. 4: Official cover endorsed "Service du Grand Duc," posted from the Grand Ducal residence, Schloss Berg, at Colmar-Berg to Wiesbaden (near the seat of the House of Nassau-Weilberg) on March 8, 1912, during the period of mourning for Grand Duke William IV, who had died on February 25, 1912. On the back is the Royal seal. Franked with a strip of three of the four-centime Écusson official, the cover is underpaid 1/2 centime.





Heute vormittag $\frac{1}{2}$ 11 Uhr entschlief nach langer, schwerer Krankheit im 75. Lebensjahre, sanft und gottergeben, unsere vielgeliebte, herzensgute Mutter, Grossmutter, Schwester und Tante,

FRAU

Witwe Kayser

geb. **Bertha Johanna Voos.**

Die Beerdigung findet am **Montag, den 28. Februar**, nachmittags um **3 Uhr**, vom Trauerhause *Fayencerie-Avenue, Limpertsberg*, Haus *Jos. Stenzel* aus, auf dem Liebfrauenfriedhof statt.

Luxemburg-Limpertsberg, Cincinnati, New-York, Montreal, San-Francisco, Versailles, Zürich, Solingen, Derschlag, den 26. Februar 1910.

Um stille Teilnahme bitten

die tieftrauernden Hinterbliebenen!

P. WORRÉ-MERTENS, LUXEMBURG.

Fig. 5: Mourning cover from Luxembourg-Ville, March 10, 1910, to San Francisco, California, mourning the death of Frau Witwe Kayser. A related mourning cover in my collection mourns the death of her husband, who had died in 1906.



Fig. 6: Incoming mourning cover from Bastogne, Belgium, January 10, 1944, to Diekirch, Luxembourg, showing censorship by the German Wehrmacht.

I would welcome receiving scans of mourning covers from and to Luxembourg for my image library. You can contact me by e-mail at wichelman@gmail.com.

References

Mourning Covers: The Cultural and Postal History of Letters Edged in Black — Harbingers of Death, Messengers of Grief, by Ernest A. Mosher, self-published, 1939 S.W. Oakley Avenue, Topeka, KS 66604, 2003, ISBN: 0-9743178-0-2, 354 pages, 958 exhibits, with 16 pages in color, available from the author, \$22.50 postpaid.

Mourning Notes [newsletter], Vol. 1, No. 4 (October-December 2007), p. 3.