

OLD MAIL AND POSTAL SERVICE  
OF THE NORWEGIAN MISSIONS  
IN MADAGASCAR

1867 - 1897

# Foreword

150 years ago, missionaries from a country that was then among the poorest in Europe, came to share their faith and to carry out an educational, health and social work in remote places in a country at the other end of the world, whose leaders were caught between the hammer of French ambitions and the anvil of English interests.

They themselves had to find their place between the other "Protestants" of the "English party" (Quakers or of the London Missionary Society), and the Catholics, particularly the Jesuits, assimilated to the "French party".

The Norwegian pastors set up a mail transport service, the structure and density of which deserves the name of Post, even if it only concerned the interior of the land and the paid postmarks that they issued for a few years can be qualified as "stamps" and not as simple special service labels.

The following pages will focus mainly on this Post and these stamps, placed in the historical context and in the more general work accomplished by the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar.

The authors who have studied the question have asked how so far from the father land, the missionaries were able to communicate with the outside world and between their multiple stations scattered over a vast territory; how they came to create, in a sovereign country, a private post with issue of figurines whose value was expressed in English currency.

From a philatelic point of view, classic questions arose: what were the series of stamps and their description; when were they printed, in what quantities and by what processes; by whom and for how long have they been used; how were they canceled; what is left of it today?

These questions have been practically resolved thanks in particular to Karl U. Sanne who has scrutinized the archives of the N.M.S., and who kindly allowed me to use his work.

The clever and warm contribution of Pastor Nils Kristian Høimyr, archivist of the NMS, did the rest.

**Luc MONTERET**  
November 2020

*Original text in French language.  
English version provided by the author.*

# Historical Background

Late discovered in 1500 by Portuguese navigators, the mini Malagasy continent is located on the India route that, 150 years later, the European powers covet. The French minister Colbert established a trading post in the south-east, named Fort-Dauphin in honor of the future Louis XIV who, in 1665, declared Madagascar a French colony.

There is not much left in the 1800s because the French had to flee to settle from 1674, in Réunion (Ile Bourbon), then entirely deserted, in Mauritius (called Ile de France) in 1715 after the Dutch abandoned it in favor of their colony of Cape Town, in the Seychelles (1742) and in Sainte-Marie (1750).

In the Treaty of Paris of 1815, France was only left with Reunion island, which the English considered useless because it had no natural harbor. To counter the French claims on Madagascar, not concerned by the treaty, the English declare Madagascar "independent country" and the governor of Mauritius (Sir Farquhar) actively supports the Merina monarchy.

Originally from Austronesia, the Merina of the highlands united a few years before, around King Andrianampoinimerina. The conquest of the island is extended by his son Radama I. Against the stop of the external slave trade (hypocritical concession because the internal slavery continues), the English offer him subsidies, military, technical and "moral" assistance with the support in particular of the pastors of the London Missionary Society of which the first, David Jones and Thomas Bevan, arrive in Tamatave in 1818 then go up to Antananarivo in 1820 and open a school there. They were joined in March 1821 by David Griffiths and his wife.

The expansion of his kingdom and the need to communicate regularly from a distance with his delegates, governors or other representatives scattered around the island, prompted the king to develop the postal service outlined by his father. Concretely, Radama has many relays set up on the routes to be traveled, either in the villages or in existing military posts or to be created for the occasion.



*Full-length portrait of Radama in the uniform of an English general, painted by Copalle.*

Soldiers, named "Mpiandry Taratasy" (those who wait for letters), are placed there in fixed residence and settle there: their families are with them and the children most often take over from their father in this not very restrictive job which furthermore, gives them many benefits (exemption from taxes and drudgery).



# Historical Background

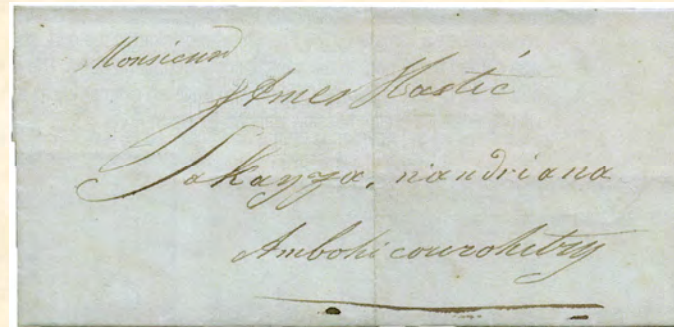


The transport of royal mail and important government letters was reserved for the royal messengers, the "TSIMANDOAS" who formed a class apart. The "mpiandry taratasy" were required to escort them, provide them with food, bamboo, torches for the night marches and even porters if necessary. Equipped with royal symbols, these runners played an important role in the bush. Lightly equipped and fast, they "paid nothing" (tsimandoa).

The mail was only delivered within Madagascar. The envelopes bore no stamps or other postage or travel marks, and the king subjected them to his censorship.

The organization of Radama postal lines was centralized in Antananarivo and initially concerned links to Tamatave and Majunga then gradually extended to the main axes in the east and south, the other localities of the country being served at the discretion of local officials. Due to the difficulties on the ground, no imperative timetable was given. However, the average times were as follows:

- From Antananarivo to Majunga by the western route: 94 hours with 44 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Majunga by the eastern road: 63 hours with 37 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Tamatave: 72 hours with 42 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Mahanoro: 45 hours with 26 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Ankavandra: 52 hours with 16 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Fianarantsoa: 65 hours with 33 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Mahabo: 88 hours with 23 relays;
- From Antananarivo to Ambatondrazaka: 41 hours with 15 relays.



Letter from Radama to his dearest (Sakayza) Hastie thanking him for a fever medicine. (Sale D. Feldman).

Sent by Sir Farquhar, Governor of Mauritius, James Hastie quickly became a very good friend of Radama. He made him sign a treaty suppressing the sale and export of slaves, and organized the king's army with his compatriot Brady. He accompanied Radama in all his military expeditions.

# The Norwegian Missions in Madagascar

When Radama died in 1828, his wife Ranaivalona succeeded him until 1861 for a very long tumultuous reign. Recognizing the scholarly or scientific work of the missionaries, Ranaivalona strongly opposed their religious action as the guardian of ancestor worship and the order established by her predecessors. The pastors of the L.M.S. left the country in 1835. In 1845 Ranaivalona expelled all remaining foreigners and ordered appalling massacres, of Christians in particular. The country reopened to Westerners in the 1860s with the advent of the new King Radama II.

The pastors of the L.M.S. returned in 1862. They were joined in June 1867 by the English J. Sewell and the American L. Street, "Quakers" of the Friends Foreign Mission Association (FFMA). The year before the first Norwegian missionaries had arrived.

Imposed on Norwegians by Danish King Christian III in the 16th century, the Lutheran Reformation was a state religion and, until 2012, at least half of the ministers were constitutionally required to belong to the Church of Norway. The faith was deep, a strict faith which explains a little the missionary epic of this sparsely populated country. In 1890 there were 900 missionary associations and 3,000 women's associations in Norway.

Today, Norway is one of the richest countries in the world thanks in part to a clever management of oil and gas revenues. But in the 1800's, Norway was one of the poorest countries in Europe and half of the population went into exile in the United States, mainly in the middle-west states bordering Canada.

Once under dependence on Denmark, Norway, although a separate state, was since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, united with Sweden, of which it shared the King and the management of foreign affairs. This association was named as the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway that lasted until 1905.

The NMS (det Norske Misjonsselskap), the Norwegian Mission society, was founded by the Lutheran Church in Stavanger in 1842. Two years later, she sent her first missionaries to South Africa in Zulu country. The success she encountered there prompted her to spread to Madagascar in 1866.

Returning in 1862 and well settled in the capital, the pastors of the LMS "conceded" to them after a year of discussion, the evangelization of the highlands south of Tananarive in Vakinankaratra and Betsileo. The Norwegians John Engh, Nils Nilsen and Martinus Borgen settled first in the populated valley between Loharano in the east and Betafo in the west, where they founded their first station in 1867. Pastor Borgen created another one in Antsirabe in 1869, taken over three years later by Thorkild Guttormsen Rosaas.



Hand drawn map by John B. Smith of the districts of Betafo, Masinandrana, Sirabe (Antsirabe) and Loharano, separated by colored lines. (NMS Archiv).



# Expansion of the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar

The missions then moved to the south in Betsileo country (foundation of the station of Fianarantsoa by Arne Farteinsen Valen in 1878) and Bara (in Ihosy) with Rev. Thobias Gahre in 1887.

The ancient presence of pastors with the Merina who control the highlands and the conversion to Protestantism of Queen Ranaivalona II in 1869, facilitate their apostolate there. Ten years after their arrival, they are already 47.

But evangelization was more difficult in the west and south-west around Morondava (Rev. Jacobsen in 1874) and Tulear (Rev. Røstvig and Walen also in 1874), except for the Makoa, slaves imported from Mozambique. Indeed, for the Sakalava who live in these regions, death is the interruption of the history of the individual, but not the end of life : "*Tsy maty ny maty*" (the dead are not dead), say the Malagasy people.

During the period 1894-1897, 99 missionaries, including wives, worked in Madagascar. By 1896, 619 schools had been opened, with 48,643 students instructed by 1,323 teachers, mostly Malagasy.



The Norwegian station at Ivory, near Fianarantsoa, was established in 1878. The pastoral school was built by Knud Lindø in 1894-96.

Postcard dated 7/8/1907. Stamp removed, trace of the cancelation. Back unwritten. No editor indicated.



# Norwegian-American Missions

The Norwegian Missionaries were subdivided into two, according to their nationality: some were Norwegians from Norway, the others were of Norwegian origin but emigrated to North America and of American nationality. Nevertheless, the first two pastors (Hogstad in Fort-Dauphin and Tou in Manasoa), came directly from Stavanger.

The American mission itself, had two branches: the United Church and the Free Church.

The Free American Lutheran Church operated in Manasoa (Antanosy country and Mahafaly country) and then in the Bara country (Betroka and Tsivory), as well as in Saint-Augustine (south-west coast).

The Norwegian Lutheran Mission in America (United Church), had pastors in the districts of Sainte-Luce, Manantenina and especially Fort Dauphin where the Reverend HALVORSON and his wife, supported by Mr. Denivelle, a teacher, ran in 1899 a boarding school for 110 students.

The mission had 17 schools throughout Madagascar ran by 20 Malagasy teachers teaching more than 500 students of both sexes. In 1902, Mr. and Mrs. Halvorson extended their responsibilities to the entire circle of Fort Dauphin which had then schools and two boarding schools (girls and boys) directed by Ms. Emma Dahl and Mr. Denivelle, assisted by 16 Malagasy teacher. Together, they took care of nearly 400 children.

The Norwegians of Norway (by far the most numerous) and those of America have merged ... in 1950 but have always operated very well together.



*House of Norwegian missions in Fort-Dauphin*



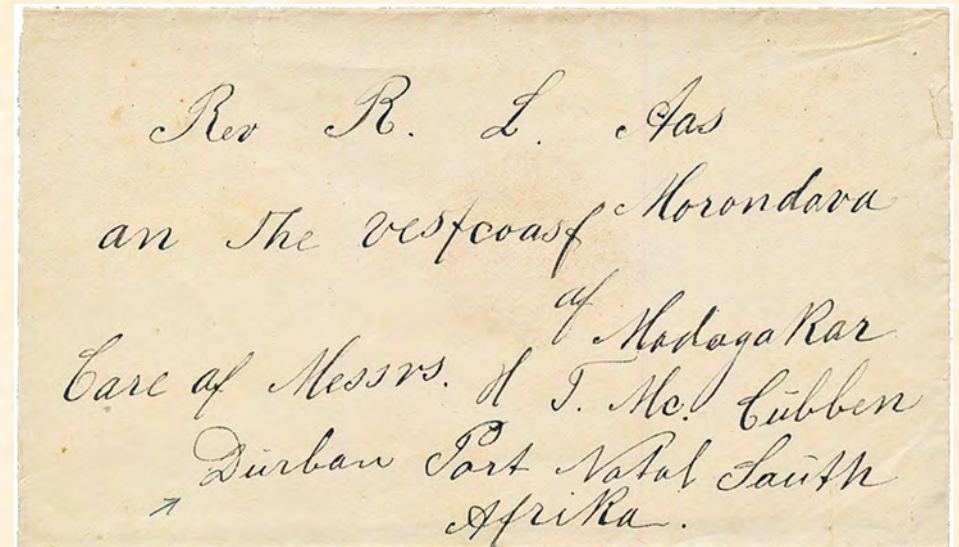
## Incoming Mail



1882 letter from Aalesund (Norway) to Reverend Joh Svendsen, missionary in Fianarantsoa. Passed through France (PARIS ETRANGER MAY 82 cancellation), the letter was sent to Mauritius (arrival June 5, 82 according to the seller. It is more probably June 25, according to the following route: Marseilles on May 28 by the YANGTSE of the line N of the Far East, to Aden; delivered in Aden on June 11 to the DUPLEIX of the Line of 'Aden in Reunion and Mauritius). The courier was in the good care of the "Colonial Postmaster" of Port-Louis who, according to the seller, debited the Missions account and affixed the "Paid" mark. It was then destined for the Tamatave Procter Bros. trading house., responsible for forwarding it to Antananarivo where it was taken over by the NMS network. Handwritten mention "Modtaget 1.7.1882 on the back" (Received on 1.7.1882). D. Feldman sale.

Letter sent from abroad to Reverend Reinert Larsen AAS in Morondava (specifically Betania), delivered via Durban.

The missionaries remained in constant contact with the Mother House, which financed them and to whom they reported. In the early days, incoming mail, essential for the morale and the network of the Missions, depended on random arrivals of sailboats touching the coasts. The NMS herself owned a ship (the Elieser and then the Paulus) which, until 1894, linked Norway to the missions in South Africa and Madagascar. Under the Merina monarchy, there was no outbound postal service. Before the creation of maritime lines directly touching the Red Island, the mail of the missionaries followed the English or French lines to Mauritius. It was addressed to Tamatave from where the British Consul was forwarding it. The letters bore the name of Tamatave's shipping agent with the words: "To be forwarded to Procter Bros. Tamatave, in the care of the colonial postmaster, Port Louis, Mauritius". One could also rely on the good care of friends, co-religionists or the freight forwarder H&T Mc Cubbin based in Natal from where the transport to Morondava, on the other side of the Mozambique Channel, was faster.





# Incoming mail



Letter to arms of Universitas Regia Fredericiana (University of King Frederic), created in 1811 at CHRISTIANIA (name of the city of Oslo until 1924) Cancellation of MAY 26, 1876. Unidentified transit stamp (covered by that of Mauritius) MAY 31, 76. Taxation at 40 cents (mark in red) per 10 grams postage paid (original stamp torn off). On the back, transit stamps NAPOLI UF ° SUCCL DEL PORTO / 2 JUN 76 (type Rooms 697, I-182). On the front, octagonal stamp ITALIE PAQ.FR.N ° 6/8 JUNE 76 affixed to the Naples stopover, established on line N by the agreement of July 15, 1875 between the French State and the Messageries Maritimes (formerly, Impériales) . This stamp, type 1.936, was not known to Salles (V-88) before 1878 and only for covers originating in Germany or Switzerland. The liner n ° 6 on line N (not indicated on the "Italy" stamp) was the HOOGLY, which left Marseille on June 4. Picking up the letter in Naples on the 8th, he left it in Aden on the 19th at DUPLEIX, liner n ° 1 of the T line in its variant "Aden à la Réunion et Maurice", annex of the line from Marseille to Hong-Kong , arriving in Mauritius on July 2, 1876 (cancellation on the backside). The letter then reached Madagascar, without an arrival stamp because the Post Office was only organized there 10 years later.

Pastor Rosaas, addressee, noted in his diary, kept in the NMS archives: "July 22. Yesterday we had the pleasure of receiving mail from Norway. We also received a letter from old Thomassen and the management from the ethnographic museum of Christiania. We even had a letter from Stavem and Skaar, missionaries to the Zulus ". (Lugdunum Philatélie, auction n ° 107, sept 2018, lot 122, sold 228€).



# Incoming Mail

From 1886, the French post office allowed mail to be sent abroad, first via maritime links from certain coastal towns to Saint-Denis de la Réunion, then directly from 1888 when the Line V of the Messageries Maritimes from Marseille to Port-Louis stops at Mayotte, Nossi-Bé, Diégo-Suarez, Sainte-Marie and Tamatave.



Letter addressed on January 11, 1899 from the Norwegian Lutheran Seminary in Minneapolis, USA (Minnesota) to Reverend HALVORSON, recently installed in Fort Dauphin, Madagascar. On the back, date stamps of Majunga (February 13) and Tamatave (FEB 18 99). The letter was sent from the United States to Le Havre, then was taken aboard a steamer from Havraise Péninsulaire which, via Saint-Nazaire, Bordeaux, Marseille and Suez, reached Majunga on the 13th and Tamatave 5 days later, on 18.

Unless transported from Tamatave by land or by a merchant ship, the letter arrived at Fort Dauphin only in March 1899 because the "Tafna" of Chargeurs Réunis, stationary in Tamatave, left on the 10th for Andevoranto, Vatomandry, Mahanoro, Mananjary and Fort Dauphin.

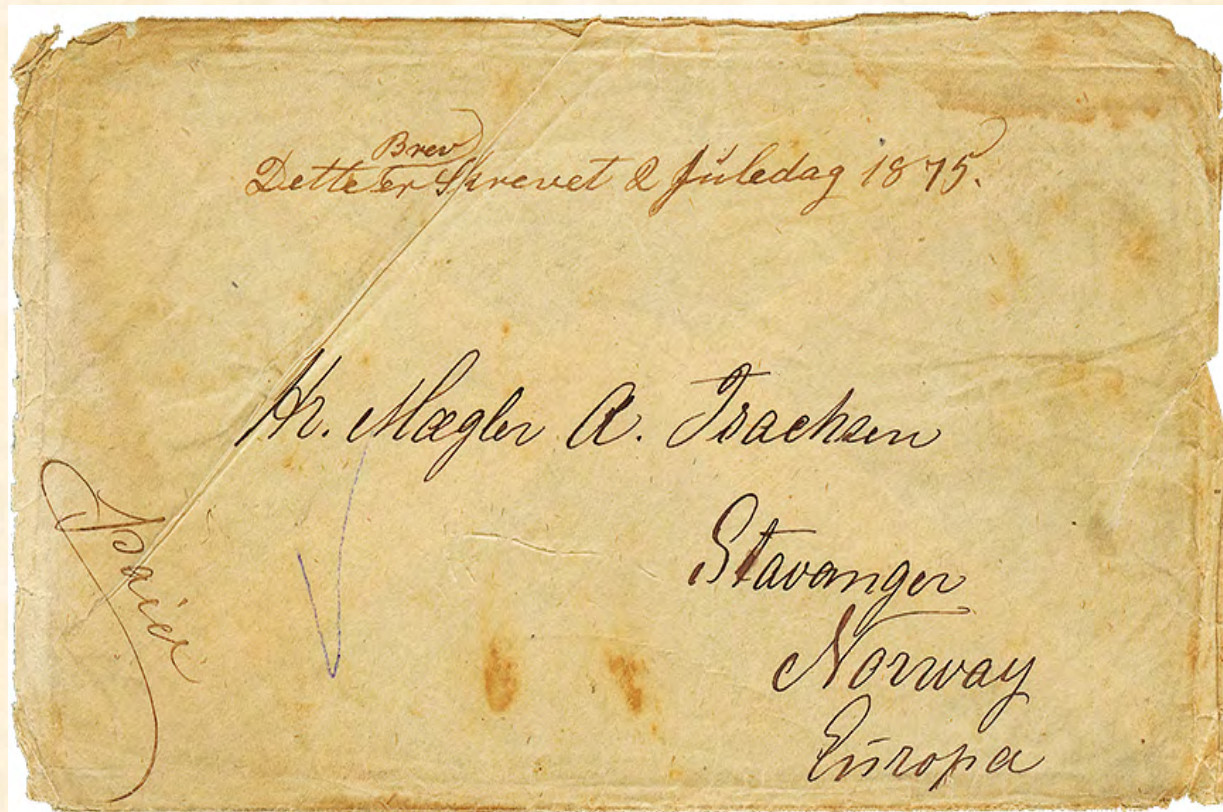




## Outgoing Mail

Until the establishment of the British and then French posts, the exit route was probably the same as the entry route, namely, a journey on foot to a port (Tamatave, Vatomaniry, Mahanoro), for Mauritius. Then franking by the Mauritian Post or simple affixing of the mention "Paid" and, depending on the time, transport to Europe by the English route (via Ceylan or Aden) or by the French route by the line from Suez to Reunion and Maurice (1867-1888) then by Line V. However, the letter opposite was forwarded directly to Stavanger by the ELIESER boat of the Norwegian Missions.

*Letter to Amund Isachsen, a missionary at the Motherhouse in Stavanger, probably from his future son in law Christian Haslund who married his daughter in Madagascar in 1876. According to the seller, the mention "Paid" would have been affixed by the English Post (British runners service) for transport to Tamatave. Handwritten mention "Dette Brev er Skrevet 2. Juledag 1875" (This letter was written on 2. Christmas Day 1875).*





## Outgoing Mail



Rare cancellation from Fort-Dauphin of October 4, 1893. Mail carried to Tamatave by a coastal ship, then delivered on 12 to SINDH, in service on the "Ligne U Annexe des Mascareignes" (before their return trip, the boats of the V Line stayed on site for 15 days and shuttled between Reunion Island and the Seychelles where they crossed the T-Line boats from Australia). VILLE DE LA CIOTAT (LIGNE T PAQ FR N ° 4), picked up the letter in Mahé on Oct., 17 and arrived in Marseille on June 30. The letter then had to travel up to Bordeaux or Le Havre to cross the Atlantic (probably by the French Line from Le Havre to New York) and be delivered there to Reverend Rasmussen in Illinois. (*Lugdunum Philatélie, March 2017, lot 601*).

From 1884, the British provided some mail transport from Antananarivo in connection with their shipping lines. This service was chargeable and materialized by stickers, the upper right corner of which was gummed. The label was removed at destination for the Malagasy domestic service or at the vice-consulate of Antananarivo (the consulate is in Tamatave), which affixed the letter "Paid". Transported to Tamatave by foot couriers (British runners service), the mail followed the English route from the ports of Vatomandry or Tamatave for Mauritius (sometimes Natal), where it received postage at the international rate by the local postal authorities. The service ceased in 1888 (it will resume, with stamps this time, in 1894 when France and Madagascar come into conflict).

In 1886, the first Resident of France, Le Myre de Vilers, set up a postal service from Antananarivo, in conjunction with the Tamatave post office, considered annexed to that of Saint-Denis in Reunion, which was U.P.U. The mail had to be delivered to Tamatave where it was franked with French stamps (general colonies) at the international rate (25 centimes per 15g of weight until 1900). Initially, a tax of 25c. per 15g was added for transport from Antananarivo to Tamatave. It was reduced to 15c., on January 1, 1888, then abolished in June 1889.



# Domestic Transport of People and Goods

Until 1896, Madagascar was lacking infrastructure: no bridges, no roads, only paths traced by the succession of human footsteps. Few of the waterways were navigable, on rudimentary boats. Coastal navigation was based on outrigger canoes, a distant heritage from the Austro-Melanesian ancestors.

The transport of people (who could afford it) was carried out on "filanjana" \*, sedan-chairs carried by 4 people. Two teams were needed, the second replacing the first at full speed. True stuntmen, the "borijano" waded through the mud, sank up to their necks in the water of rivers, climbed or descended steep slopes (Antananarivo is at an altitude of 1,300m). The journey from the capital to the coast cost around 120\$.

For the goods, the carriers put on their shoulders a large bamboo for heavy loads (a stick for the lightest) to both ends of which were attached trunks or baskets. On the Tamatave - Andevorante - Antananarivo route, around 40 porters left each day in both directions, with an average load of 40 kg, for a 6-day journey in the dry season.

\* "filanjana" means "balance" in Malagasy!



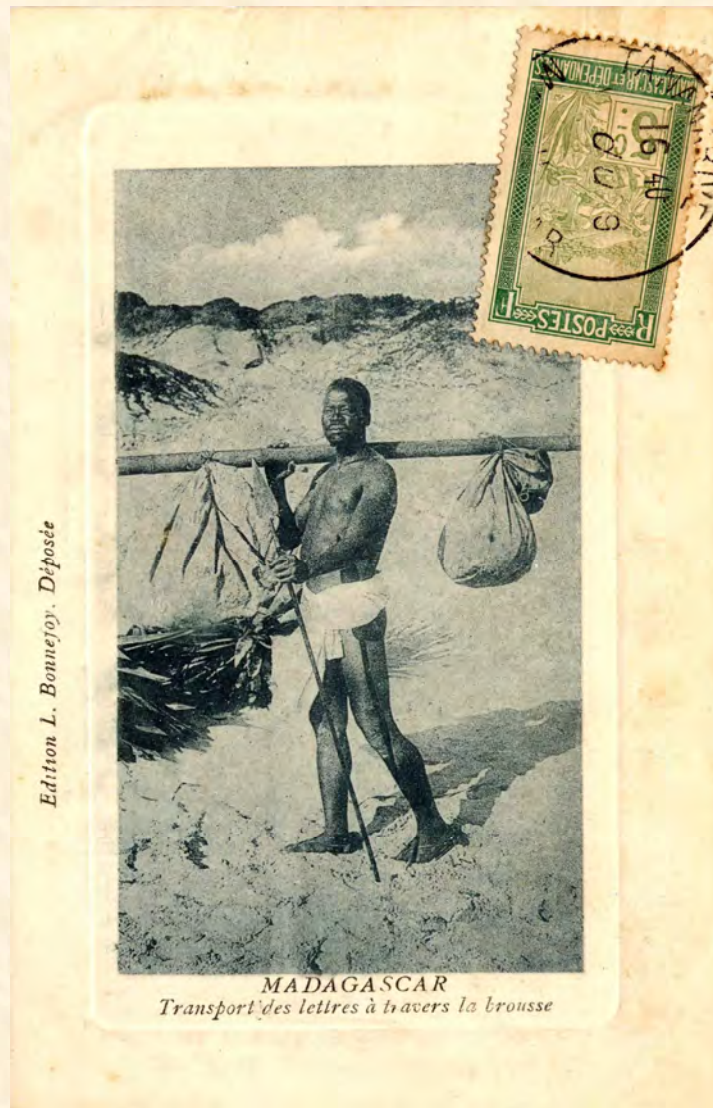
The sender writes: "I know them all too well these difficult passages, hated by porters and carried, in which we painfully do ½ kilometer an hour, happy when the filanjana does not break at 20 or 40 kilometers from a stage".



"Bourjanes" carrying heavy loads leaving Antananarivo for the east coast.



# Domestic Mail Distribution



The first person in charge of the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar was Monsignor Schreuder, previous person in charge of the Missions in Zululand. He seemed quite directive. When he left in 1872, the Missions set up a democratic and deliberative body, meeting annually in Congress - Conference, whose decisions had to be endorsed by the parent company in Stavanger. Congress dealt of course with theological and pastoral questions, but also with the allocation of missionaries and the annual budget of each station. Congress elected a superintendent who, between two congresses, represented the Mission and managed day-to-day business.

For the transport of their books and their increasing mail, the missionaries themselves appealed to "bourjanés" or "tsimandoa" or else used those of other Europeans because, to avoid censorship of the Malagasy royal post, the French and the British had set up in 1859, periodic mail delivery services, mainly from Antananarivo to the coast.

All in all, by the mid-1880s, a transport network had empirically formed between the main Norwegian stations and towards the capital. Leaving each week, the "runners" took 4 days from Antananarivo to Fandriana or Antsirabe where relays were in place for redistribution to the stations of Vakinankaratra and Betsileo. It was free to users, its cost being covered by the NMS budget.



# The Norwegian Inland Mail

According to Karl U. Sanne (see bibliography), who examined the deliberations of the various Congresses, this structured postal service concerned only the "Conference of the stations of the interior and the south-east coast", distinct from that of the west coast (Tulear, Morondava and Saint-Augustin).

It included the 16 stations of the Interior (Indlandet), namely Imerina (Antananarivo), Vakinankaratra (Betafo, Masinandrana, Antsirabe, Ambohimasina, Loharano, Soavina, Manandona and Fandriana), Betsileo (Ambatofinandrahana, Fihasinana, Fenoarivo, Tsaraindrana, Soatanana and Fianarantsoa), the Bara Country (Ihosy) plus two stations on the east coast (Vangaindrano and Manambondro).

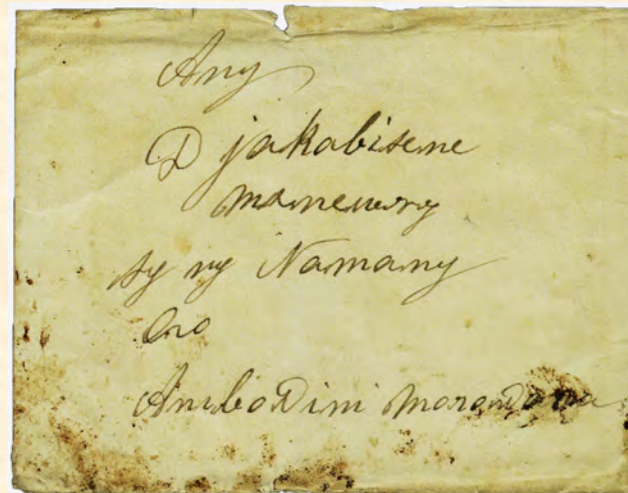
At the Congress of 1887, it was found that official mail was relatively modest, while letters, of an essentially private character, increased considerably, thus straining the budget of the Mission.

A "postmaster" was appointed in Antananarivo (Lars Meling) and another in Fianarantsoa (David Olaus Jacobsen). The network was structured with regular distributions for letters: weekly for the Interior, bi-weekly for the Tanala forest and monthly for Bara country and the east coast.

From congress to congress the question arose of the cost of the postal service because of the volumes and frequency of distribution.

Map established in 1890 by Nils Landmark, of the locations of the stations. He distinguishes between the 16 stations of the Interior, the 3 on the east coast and the 3 on the south-west coast (NMS Arkiv, Stavanger).

Letter for Pastor David Jacobsen in Morondava, thus addressed in Malagasy: « Any D jakobisene mananehevitra sy ny Namany Oro Amdodini Morondava » (For D. Jacobsen and those who think like him and to all his friends at the mouth of the (river) Morondava). D. Feldman sale.





# The Norwegian Inland Mail

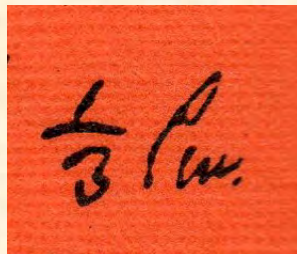
Mail handled by the free NMS service increased so much that the cost could no longer be sustained by the community, while in Norway donations to the Missions were decreasing.

The postal question became a major topic of the NMS Congress which opened on May 6, 1893 (and not 1894 as sometimes mistakenly indicated). The debates were very lively. Some felt that the postage would cut off the missionary's precious time. Others argued that the time spent would be largely paid for by the duties on letters and parcels. Two proposals were put to the vote.

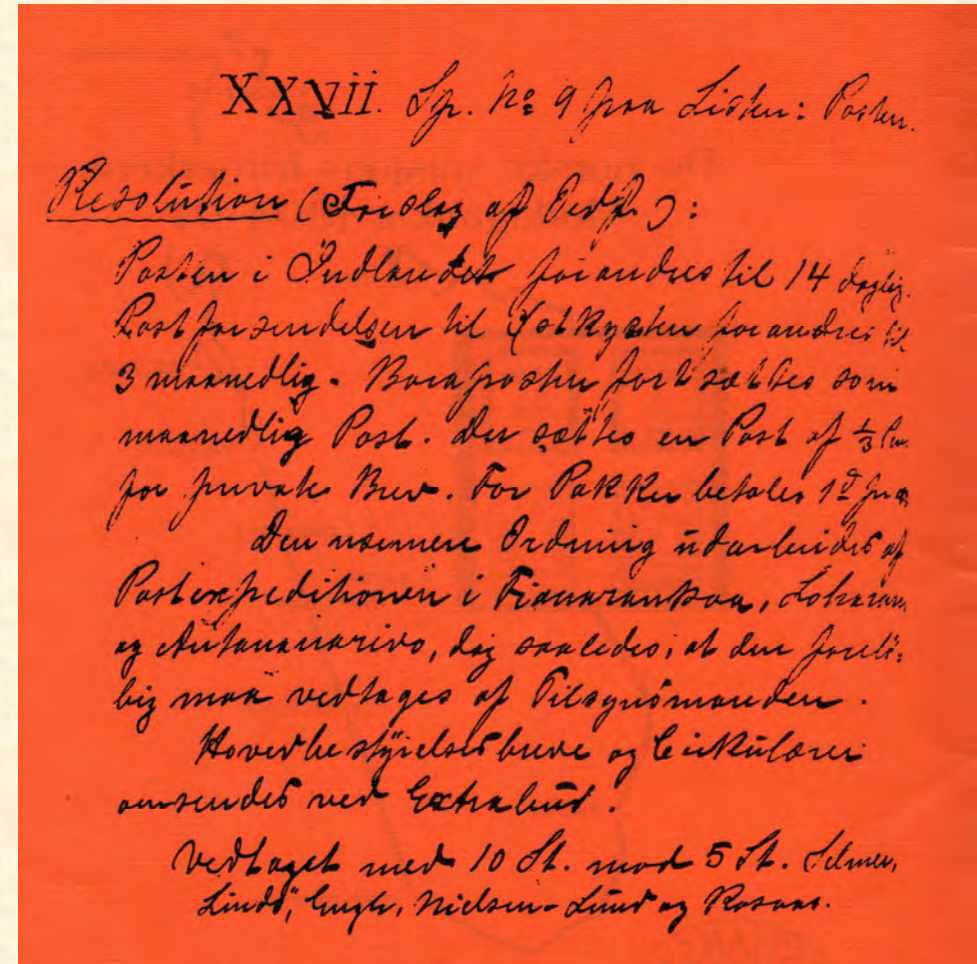
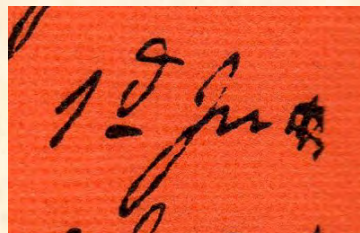
Pastor Selmer's request to postpone the introduction of postage to the end of the year was rejected by 5 votes.

That of Superintendent Borchgrevink was adopted. It consisted in maintaining free service for mail from or to the stations and that of the Malagasy government, but in taxing other correspondence at 1/3 penny for private letters and 1 penny per pound for parcels.

There were nevertheless 5 votes against and not the least. "Vedtaget med 10 stemmer mod 5 stemmer: Selmer, Lindo, Engh, Nielsen-Lund og Rosaas" (adopted by 10 votes for and 5 votes against: Selmer, Lindo, Engh, Nielsen-Lund and Rosaas).



Der sættes en Porto af 1/3 Pen. for private Breve. For Pakker betales 1 d pr. pund (A charge of 1/3 penny is set for private letters. For parcels, it will be 1 penny per pound).



Minutes of the NMS congress of May 6, 1893 (Inside cover of Øystein Grøntoft booklet).



# A few words on the Malagasy Account System before 1896

Before examining the postage rates decided for the post of the Norwegian missions, it is useful to review the monetary system in force in Madagascar before the colonial period.

Madagascar had no currency of its own and had used for a century the piastre (ARIARY) cut into pieces by cold scissors to supplement it. Originally, it was the Spanish 27.073 g silver coin. The French 5-franc ecu weighing 25 g, the piastre was thus theoretically worth 5.41 francs. But the Spanish then South American coins lost their appeal. The 5-franc coin, by its quality of engraving and its guaranteed silver content (900 thousandths fine), was the only one retained from 1893, without the weights being modified. It was thus necessary to bring 27.1g of cut silver change to have a whole 5-franc piece of 25g which was a premium on small change.

In practice, the whole piastre (ARIARY), was rounded to 27.1g of silver. This weight corresponded to 720 grains of paddy or 1008 grains of husked rice. Monetary scales and weights were essential for every transaction.

The piastre consisted of 16 main submultiples under a double system (to simplify): the first consisted of dividing the entire coin by 2 (half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth); the second to divide an old unit, equal to  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the piastre, also by 2 (third, sixth, twelfth, twenty-fourth, forty-eighth), going up to the smallest fraction, that is to say  $\frac{1}{720}$  (variraiventy), the weight of 1 grain of paddy or 1.4 grains of rice (1 plus  $\frac{2}{5}$ ).

The simplest operations (additions, subtractions) being too complex, the public accountancy retained only 4 values, according to the system "A.s.e.v."

- Ariary (**A**), silver piastre, weighing 27.1g or 1008 grains of rice.
- Sikajy (**s**) or  $\frac{1}{8}$  Ariary (126 grains).
- Eranambatry (**e**) or  $\frac{1}{72}$  piastre (14 grains).
- Variraiventy (**v**) or  $\frac{1}{720}$  piastre or 1.4 grains of rice (or 1 grain of paddy).



## 5 v. Stamp (varidimiventy)

It is clear that the rates provided for the Norwegian Post were expressed in English currency (1 and 1/3 of a penny). Several authors have wondered why. Indeed, no English currency was in circulation on the island and all residents were familiar with the complex system in force from the cut piastre.

But nevertheless, if the Malagasy retained the system "A.s.e.v. », everyone could keep their accounts in the currency of their choice. The English counted in Pounds (£), Shillings (S) and Pence (d), the Americans, in dollars (\$) and cents (c.), The French in francs (F) and centimes (c.). NMS records show that its accounts were kept in dollars (\$), Shillings (S) and Pence (d).

This choice was relevant because the dollar, worth 5 francs, was equal to one Ariary and the duodecimal system \* of shillings and pence, with easy divisions by 3, 4 and their multiple, better coped with the Malagasy system.

The first stamp issued in 1894 was thus denominated in Malagasy equivalent, for 5 v. This means 5 times variraiventy [*vary (rice) rai (one) venty (unit of weight)*] which is the smallest fraction of the ariary (1/720) and is worth the weight in silver of a grain of paddy.

5 variraiventy thus equal "varidimiventy" or 1/144 of ARIARY. This is the weight in silver or pieces of metal silver of 5 grains of paddy or 7 grains of rice.

At the time, the British pound, divided into 20 shillings or 240 pence, would run for 25 French francs. The ARIARY being assimilated to 5 francs, was therefore worth 4 shillings (or 48 pence). 1/144 of Ariary is therefore a third of a penny (1/3 d) or 3.5 cents.

\* The LSD system was codified by Charlemagne: Twelve "*deniers*" (pence) in one "*Sol*" (shilling) by decision of the year 779 and 20 "*sols*" in each "*Livre*" (Pound) by Capitular of the year 801.



Box 11. First print  
Actual size: 20.40x22.75mm

Box 12. Second print.  
20.50x22.70mm

On the stamps we can read on three lines : N.M.S.'s in capital letters, then post. in lowercase with the value of the stamp, v.5 in between, which may read NORSKE MISJONSSELSKAP or, in the English style, Norwegian Missions Society's Post. The value (v. with a 5 underneath) is written 5v. , as it is pronounced in Malagasy language and not v.5.

These stamps were to frank private letters from individuals, regardless of distance.

It was very cheap because from 1886 to 1889, the French post taxed at 25 centimes, then 15, the Antananarivo-Tamatave route, or 4 times more. The British rate of 1894 was even higher : 4d (12 times more).

Imperforated and with a more than simple design, the stamps were gummed which, when aging, can affect the color of the stamp.

They were printed by twelve in 4 times three rows, on two sheets differently arranged without knowing the reason. In one, the stamps were separated horizontally by 6.5 mm, in the other, only 3 mm.



# 5 v. Stamp (varidimiventy)

There were three prints on thin porous cream-colored paper then thick buff paper and finally, on thin white paper. The paper was plain and smooth, of varying thickness and without watermark. The back of the sheets was gummed and the gum was coated with a brush so that the layer also varies in thickness.

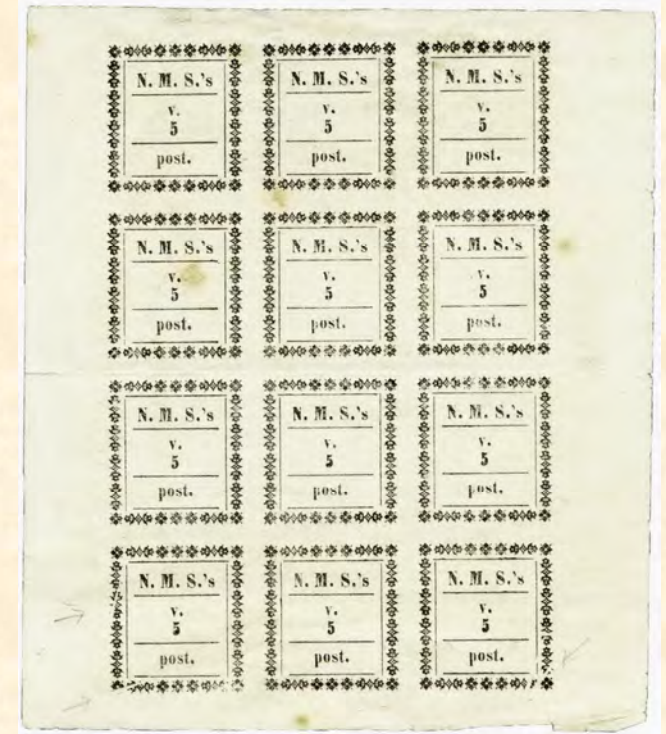
The printing was done manually in letterpress from bulk batches of characters, which makes each element in the sheet unique and different from the others. The sheets were not numbered. All prints were made on the presses of the Missions printing house in Antananarivo, which Pastor Mons LØNØ was managing at the time.



Complete mint sheet of twelve 5 v. black stamps, first printing, large setting on porous thin cream paper. D. Feldman sale.



Complete mint sheet of twelve 5 v. stamps, narrow setting on thick buff paper. D. Feldman sale.



Complete mint sheet of twelve 5 v. black stamps, narrow setting on white thin paper, showing cracked plate marks at boxes 10 and 12. (D. Felman sale).



## 5 v. Stamp (varidimiventy)

J. Desnos examined in detail a complete sheet of the second print (Dimensions: 82x11.5cm - stamps 62x99.5mm) and identified the characteristics of each of the twelve boxes: size of bars (upper, right and left), stamp size, interior bars (upper and lower). His analysis \* is reproduced below.



case	cadre	taille des barres			dimension du timbre	barres aux angles	
		sup.	droite	gauche		sup.	inf.
1	1				20,25 x 22,75		
2	2	15,30	17,25	17,30	20,25 x 22,75	NO + 0,35	SE - 0,25
3	3	15,20	17,30	17,30	20,25 x 22,75	NO + 0,50	SE + 0,40 SO + 0,40
4	4	15,50	17,25	17,00	20,25 x 22,50	NE + 0,35	SO + 0,25 SE + 0,25
5	2	15,20	17,20	17,25	20,25 x 22,75	NO + 0,30	
6	4	15,25	15,30	17,25	20,25 x 22,75	NE + 0,35	SO + 0,25 SE + 0,25
7	4	15,35	17,00	17,25	20,25 x 22,50	NE + 0,25	SE + 0,40 SO + 0,30
8	2	15,25	17,30	17,25	20,25 x 22,75	NO + 0,25	SE - 0,25
9	3	15,25	17,25	17,30	20,40 x 22,75		SE + 0,25 SO + 0,35
10 (1)	4	15,25	17,30	17,35	20,30 x 22,75	NE + 0,40	SO + 0,25 SE + 0,10
11	4	15,20	17,25	17,25	20,50 x 22,70	NE + 0,30	SE + 0,25 SO = 0
12 (1)	3	15,25	17,30	17,35	20,50 x 22,70	NO + 0,35	SO + 0,25 SE + 0,25

(1) détérioration du bas du cadre au 3<sup>ème</sup> tirage

Main findings:

No two stamps are the same size. These vary for the width, from 20.25 to 20.50 mm and for the height, from 22.50 to 22.70 mm.

The most common, if not average, dimension is 20.25 x 22.75mm.

The size of the horizontal or vertical bars is also variable.

There is an overthickness of ink on the middle line of the stamps in boxes 6 and 9 which is specific to this print because it is not found in the others.

Note that the stamp on the previous page, from the first print, in box 7, has the same dimensions as for box 7 of the second print and also has the same other characteristics.

\* Dr Jacques Desnos, *Philatélie Malgache*, Bulletin COL.FRA Hors-Série n°4-8A, page I-49.



## 1 e. 5 v. Stamp (Ilavoamena)



*Stamp in box 9, the only one with a star on the top left and bottom right.*

*Actual size: 20mm x 22.5mm, from one edge of the spirals of the frame to the other.*

The second stamp, also imperforated, was worth 1 e. 5v. It was "1 eranambatry plus 5 variraiventy" or 1/48 Ariary (1/72 + 5/720). The Malagasy called this value "ilavoamena". This is the silver weight of 15 grains of paddy (or 21 grains of rice).

The monetary equivalent is 1 English penny or about 10 centimes, which corresponds to the rate decided at the Congress of 1893.

The stamps were printed by 9 (3x3) on sheets of white paper, in one single print apparently.

This postmark was to frank the packets, for each pound of weight.

Desnos wondered if it was not rather a penny per ounce, which was the rate charged by the British Post for transporting parcels. But that would be 16 times more for an English pound of 453.6g. And the Norwegian pound (Skålpund) weighed 498.1g.

The French post office was a little cheaper but still charged at the beginning, 2 francs per kg for parcels intended for Tamatave and coming from Antananarivo, Fianarantsoa, Mananjary and Fort-Dauphin (with a surcharge of 2.5 francs for other shipping locations). That's 1 franc per pound, or 10 times more than the Norwegian rate.

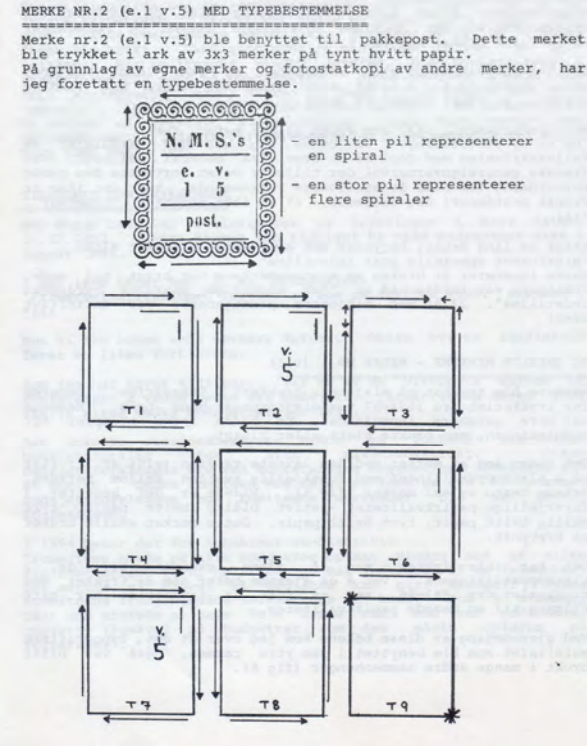
The Norwegian post was definitely very cheap \*.

*\* As an indication, in 1876 the missionaries had an annual salary of \$ 1,000 (i.e. 1,000 Ariary) in addition to living allowances (rent, child support, etc.).*

# 1 e. 5 v. Stamp (Ilavoamena)



Reconstructed sheet of nine comprising block of six (boxes 1 to 6) plus single (box 7) and pair (boxes 8 and 9). Print in black on white paper (D. Feldman sale).



In his book cited in bibliography, Øystein Grøntoft, has studied in detail the 9 boxes of the sheets on which were printed the 1e. 5v. vignettes.

He thus detailed the direction of the spirals and the position of the 5 in relation to the v. above the 5.

(A small arrow represents a spiral and a large arrow represents several spirals).

All 9 elements are different. Also :

- Boxes 3 and 4, the spirals on the left going down are first in one direction, then in the other
- Box 5 at the bottom, half of the spirals wind first to the left, then to the right
- Boxes 1, 3 and 9, the 5 is not exactly below the v but shifted a little to the right
- For box 9 characters were missing which have been replaced at the top left and bottom right, by corner rosettes of stamp n° 1 (5 v.).



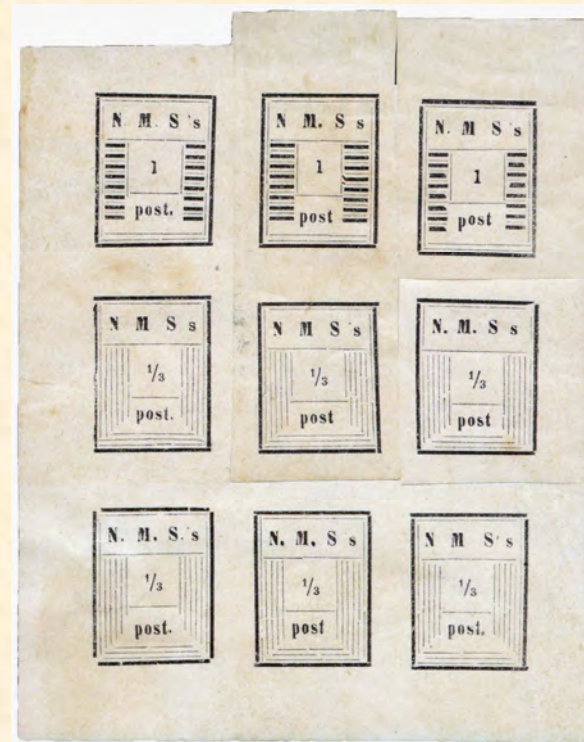
# Stamps expressed in Pence

Two other figurines were printed. In the nomenclature generally retained, these are n° 3 and 4. N° 3 is 1/3, n° 4 has a value of 1. Without further clarification, some have wondered if it was not a new currency, maybe the Norwegian øre. There is no doubt, however, that the Congress of 1893 provided for respective values of 1/3 of a penny and 1 penny per pound of weight.

The question that really arises is why a second series of stamps, of the same fiduciary value as the first, but with a different design and a different denomination? We will discuss this later.

The printing of stamps 3 and 4 was made according to the same process as the first two, but on the same sheet of white paper, with 9 stamps in all: a row of three stamps of 1 at the top of the sheet and, below, two rows of three 1/3 stamps.

This provision meant that twice as many letter stamps were used as for parcels.

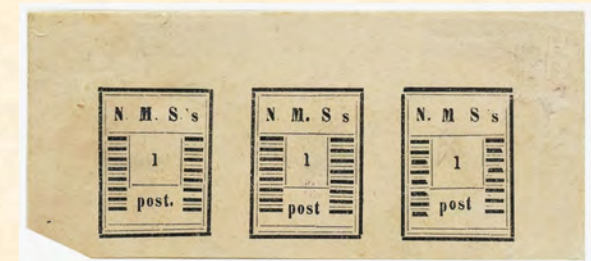


Row of 3 "1 penny" stamps placed at the top of the printing sheet.



Enlargement of a 1/3 penny stamp to frank private letters (box 8). Actual dimensions of the inner frame: 12.75x 18.25mm. But each stamp is unique because of the printing process.

Reconstructed sheet of 9 stamps (3 of 1 and 6 of 1/3). Total value of the sheet : 5 pence. D. Feldman sale.



# Norwegian Stamps Printing Dates

There is no doubt in view of the archives and analyzes of the various authors that the series of stamps in Malagasy currency (5 v. and 1e. 5v.) was printed first, before that in English currency (1 and 1 / 3). But the precise date or dates remain controversial.

Archives of the NMS mention the year 1896 for the printing of the figurines (Prints concerning the stamps of the missions - Trykksak ang. Misjonsmerkene, 1978) but this date is obviously too late for a decision made in 1893.

Brambilla (Stamps of Madagascar, 1972), indicates September 1894, but since he does not really address the matter in depth by covering the whole subject of the Norwegian Post in a very small page, his opinion will be disregarded. Desnos indicates "around April 1894", without citing his sources.

According to Grøntoft, the printing date would be March or April 1894 because the vignettes were already in use at the May 1894 Mission Congress in Ambohimasina. Karl U. Sanne notes that the decision to create stamps was approved by the parent company in Stavanger by letter of December 14, 1893, and that it could not be known to Superintendent Borchgrevink until the following February. He deduces a printing date from February or March 1894 which it seems reasonable to retain.

For stamps expressed in English currency (1 and 1/3 d), the question is whether they were printed in the same time as the first two or a few months later or years later. The point is relevant because one can wonder about the technical, practical and financial interest of circulating at the same time stamps of the same fiduciary values but of distinct denominations and of different appearance (without adding anything to the aesthetic).

If it was a question of clearly specifying that the stamps "were worth" 1/3 and 1 penny, it was sufficient, as the British Consular Post did in 1894 and 1895, to issue stamps denominated both in Malagasy currency and in English currency.



*English stamps issued in 1894 and 1895 and expressed both in English and in Malagasy currencies. 4d or roavoamena was the tariff for inland mail.*



A clearly posterior printing of the Norwegian stamps n ° 3 and 4 could have been justified by the exhaustion of the stamps 1 and 2. The shorter life of the second series would also explain why these stamps reached us in much less quantity.

In a letter summarized in Øystein Grøntoft's work, Pastor Lønø (who ran the printing press when the stamps were made), writes in a fairly literal translation \*: *The marks (stamps) were first printed in 1894, some time later in 1896. Both times in a fairly small edition, the last somewhat different from the first edition in the statement of value.*

"The phrase" the last (printing), different from the first in the declaration of value suggests that the second edition, which was no longer in Malagasy currency as in 1894, was denominated this time in pennies and that it was made in 1896.

Yet, Mr. Lønø's testimony is late (1915) and the prints were not so small since, according to the NMS archivists, packages of whole sheets were later on brought back to Norway.

K.U. Sanne, who was familiar with Grøntoft's book, did not raise the issue. And Grøntoft himself, in an undated intervention but obviously subsequent to his book since it refers to it, does not take up the argument and even proposes, for the printing date of stamps 3 and 4, "Autumn 1894".



# Norwegian Stamps Printing Dates

Reidar Norby (Posthorn 1967) writes: "Indeed, they might all have been printed at about the same time for that matter".

The Norwegian Philately Handbook (Norske Filatelistika) says the fall of 1894.



Karl U Sanne quotes cancellations, ranging from October 1, 1894 to November 17, 1895 for stamp n ° 3, and for number 4, from November 1, 1894 and February 25, 1895. Other detached stamps at 1 or 1/3 reached us, dated 25/10 94 12/12 94 and 11/10 94.

There is no reason to question such a large number of documents. We can therefore conclude, with Sanne (and Desnos), that the two series of stamps, despite different printed values, circulated at the same time, the second series being printed a little later, in the fall (September) of 1894.



*The Norwegian printing press in Antananarivo, located in Andafiatsimo, south of the Mahamasina plain. Simon E. Jørgensen founded the printing press in 1877. Mons Lønø directed it from 1893 to 1897. In the photo, courtesy of J. and A.G. Lønø, Mr. Lønø is on horseback, Madame is in filanzana (sedan chair). Foto: NMS Arkiv.*

# Cancellations of Norwegian Stamps

Documents from Norwegian missions are scarce. However, mainly from the David Feldman sale of May 2010, we were able to collect, in unused stamps:

- 4 whole leaves of 5v.
- 1 reconstructed sheet of 1e. 5v. and one of 6 stamps out of 9
- 1 reconstructed sheet of the second issue (1 and 1/3)
- 1 strip of three 1 penny stamps located at the top of the sheet.

As unused detached stamps we have: 7 v5v.; 5 1e. 5v. plus one pair and band of 3 ; 1 sticker of 1 / 3d and none of 1 penny. Indeed, for this last value, the piece that we were able to collect, is a strip of 3 stamps.

Without risking improbable statistics with such small numbers, the 36 cancellations found here on detached stamps (excluding stamps on envelopes mentioned below), are distributed as follows:

- 24 for 5v. stamps
- 2 for 1e. 5v. stamps
- 7 or 1/3 penny stamps
- 3 for 1 penny stamps

There would therefore be much more franking of letters than of parcels, in a high ratio for letters of about 85 - 15. We naturally expect a difference, perhaps accentuated by the fact that we are more willing to keep a envelope (or the stamp it bears) because it contains a letter, rather than pieces of packaging on packages.

There are 2,5 as many "survivors" of the first as of the second series, which either had a smaller print run or a shorter lifespan.



Most people thought that the cancellation differed from the first to the second print and that they were more or less standardized, namely:

- affixing with a pen, the date and / or the location, as opposite, "Betafo 29/9 94", most often in purple ink.
- a cross made of two strokes of a pen, in black ink (stamp in box 8).

Cancellation is generally a very controlled operation in postal administrations because at the same time as it prevents a reuse, the cancellation guarantees the stamp used, the tariff and the place of departure.



The 1893 Congress had appointed a three-member committee (the postmasters from Fianarantsoa, Loharano and Antananarivo), to develop a detailed organization to be submitted to the Superintendent. Apparently, they have forgotten to address the issue of cancellations, left here to the imagination of postmasters. Indeed, when looking at the 36 cancellations recorded, we found 12 different ways of canceling the stamps, which is not a guarantee of security because counterfeits can be made easier.

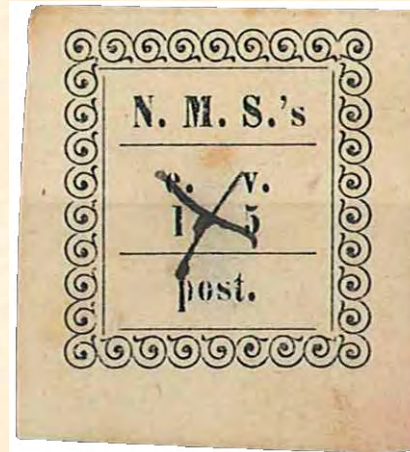


# Different Cancellations of Norwegian Stamps

- By writing the contracted date, in purple or black ink (10 cases)



- With a cross in black ink (6 cases)



- With initials of John Engh (2 cases)



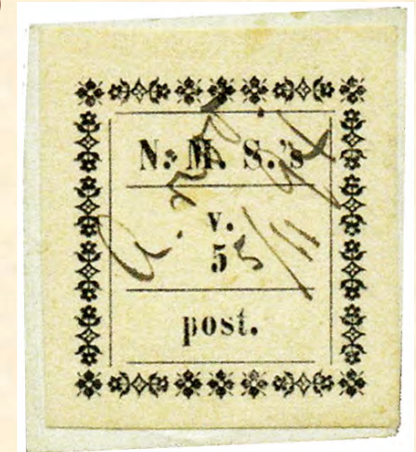
- By writing the full date without the year (2 cases)



- With a cross plus the date (1 case)



- By writing the abbreviated place and the date (1 case)





# Different Cancellations of Norwegian Stamps

- By writing the place in full plus the date, in purple or black ink (4 cases)



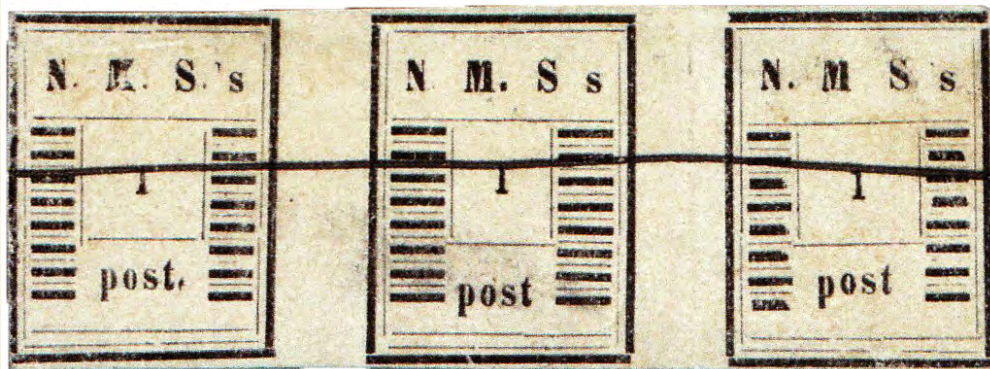
- With a vertical stroke of a pen (1 case)



- By the mention "Paid" (1 case)



- With a horizontal stroke of a pen (1 case)



- With the abbreviated place (1 case)



- By date stamps from the French Post (2 cases)



It is most surprising to find date stamps of the French post such as TANANARIVE 18 OCT 96 or FIANARANTSOA 21 APRIL 97 on stamps of the Norwegian post office!



## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers



It is very rare to find Norwegian stamps on covers. J. Desnos had listed 8 for 1894.

Letter addressed to Ambohimanga, the "holy city" of the Merina, via Antananarivo, to Mrs Y. Peill, in the good care of Mrs Borchgrevink who founded and directed for 40 years the famous Antsahamanitra girls' school in Antananarivo. Her husband, pastor and doctor, was superintendent of the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar. The directory cites the PEILLs among the English in the province of Antananarivo.

Cancellation by handwritten indication of the date : 4 / 12-94. Blank back.

Franking (for a private letter intended for a person outside the Missions), at 5v. is a third of a penny or 3.5 cents.

(Lugdunum Philatélie, December 2019 sale, lot 102, sold € 4,200. Former David Feldman sale, November 2016, lot 50508, sold € 4,000). Purchased and sold twice, the letter is deemed to be authentic (Pascal Scheller certificate).

## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers



One of the most famous Norwegian Missions cover letters.

Mail addressed from Ranomena (*red water*) in the south-east, near Vangaindrano, on 1/11 96 for G (ustave) ALBY, Resident of France in Betafo who had a few months earlier illustrated in the defense of Antsirabe against a powerful attack by the Menalamba rebels .

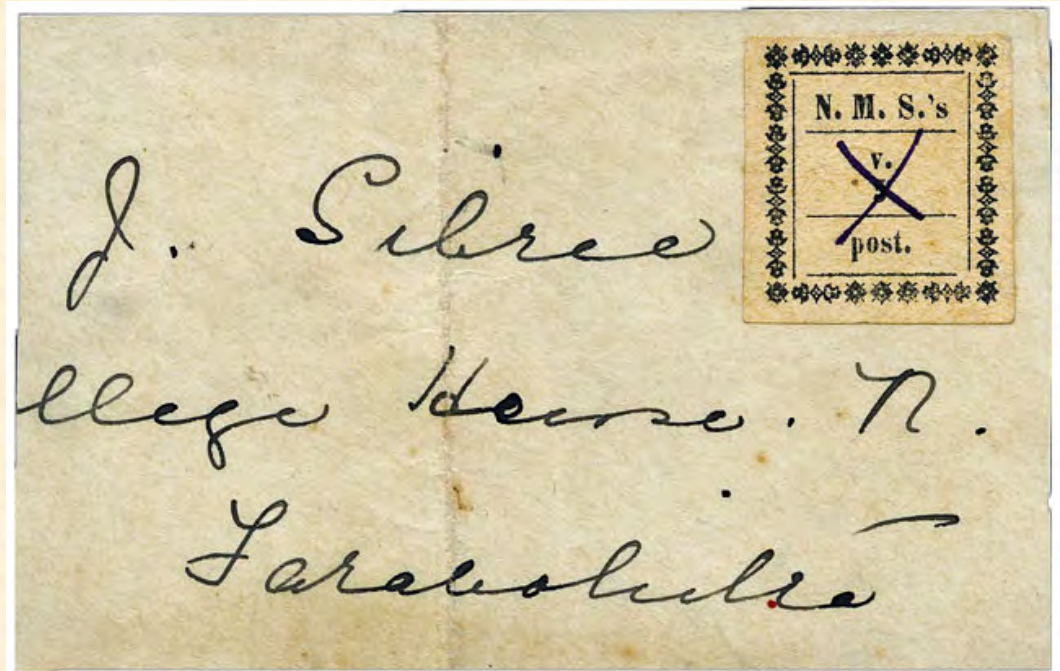
Franking at three times 5v. (i.e. a penny), which is the parcel rate (letters were taxed at 1/3d, regardless of weight or distance). This letter illustrates most of the philatelic works on the subject and the authors believe that the letter accompanied a package. (D. Feldman sale, May 2010, lot 40231, sold for 10,000 €).



## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers



Letter sent from FIHASINANA on November 6, 1896. The only known example of a mechanical date stamp developed by the local post office manager of the Norwegian station of Fihasinana (between Ambositra and Fianarantsoa), founded in 1875 by Pastor Minsaas. (*D. Feldman sale, May 2010, lot 40232, sold for € 5,500*).



Letter cut to the left, addressed to John SIBREE, pastor of the London Missionary Society in Faravohitra (residential area of Antananarivo where much of the English colony was living). Franked at the letter rate by a 5v. stamp canceled by a cross (*scan provided by S. Buchheit*).

## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers



Letter sent from Betafo, then the main establishment of the Missions, on 2 Alakarobo \* 1896 to Pastor John Engh, founder of the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar. Very nice writing. Obliteration by two lines of feather cross. (scan from [www.apra.asso.fr](http://www.apra.asso.fr)).

\* *Alakarobo* (Al-aqrab in Arabic), corresponds to October-November, era of Scorpio. It is the 8th month of the year. The switch from the Malagasy calendar, based on the seasons, to the zodiacal calendar inspired by the Arabs, dates back to King Ralambo (1575-1610, a contemporary of Henri IV of France).

No significant original counterfeit are reported (J. Desnos echoes a crude forgery of 5v. on thin paper). There were very few printing houses in Madagascar and they were supervised. No doubt the manufacturing would have been too expensive for low values.

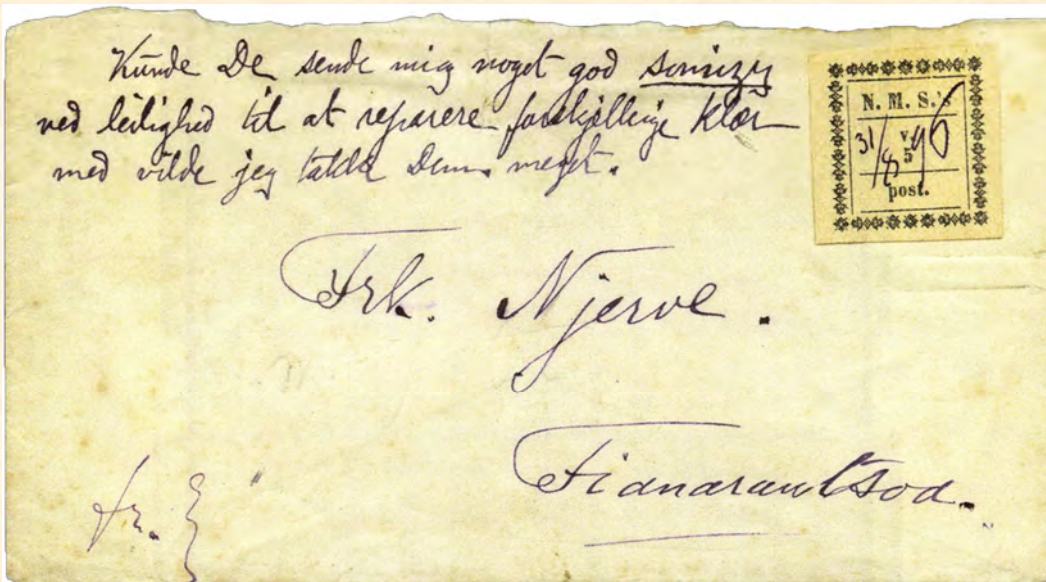
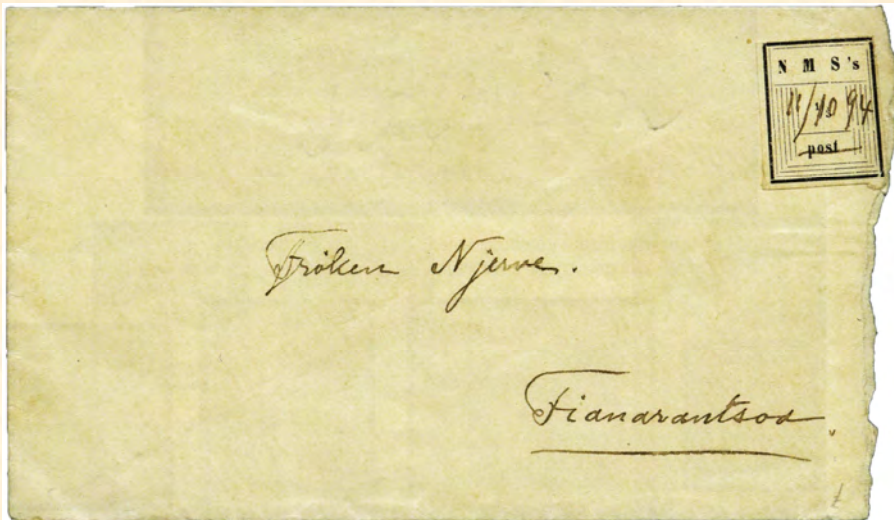
But franked envelopes sell for high prices. It may be tempting to forge some for today's collectors, starting from a letter (or image of a letter) deemed authentic. It is then a question of imitating the writing and pasting a loose stamp already cancelled (or by canceling it by one of the many means known).

These documents should therefore be carefully reviewed by a potential buyer. Here, several questions arise although no formal conclusion can be drawn.

- The ENGH lived in Betafo 160 km south of Ambatovinaky (a district of Antananarivo) where there was nevertheless a school of the Missions.
- The cancellation cross is hesitant and extends far beyond the stamp.
- This type of cancellation (cross on the stamp, full date on the stamp with day, month and year in Malagasy) does not correspond to any of the 12 other cancellation methods noted.
- Everything looks by the same ink and by the same hand as if the sender was also a postman. Apart from the Engh, the only missionary to Betafo then was Else L. Ueland.
- The 1 penny (1e. 5v.) postage was for parcels and not letters (1/3 penny).



## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers

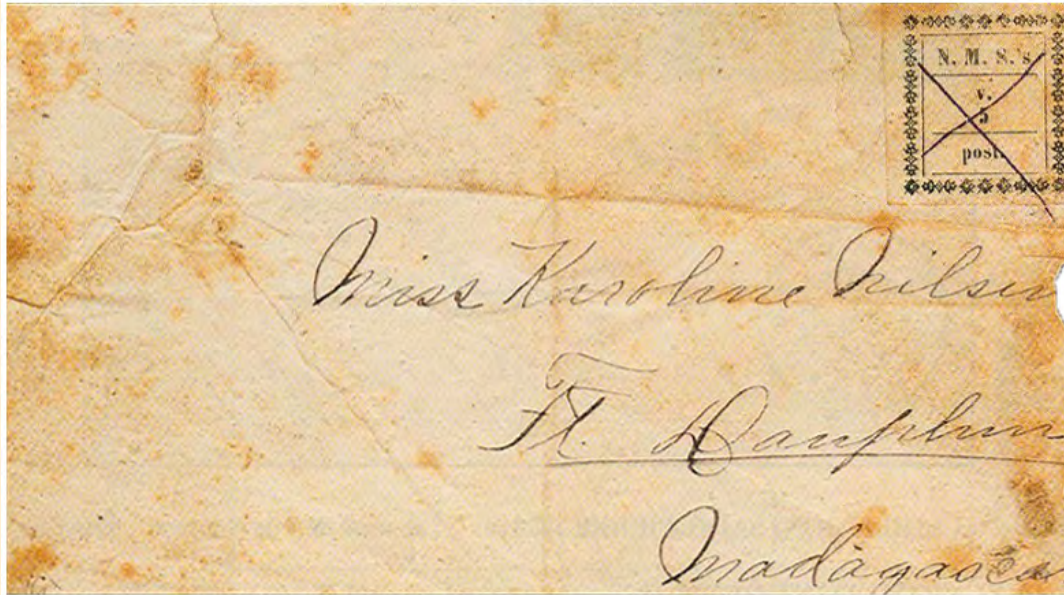


These letters were addressed to Frøken Njerve, (Miss Amalie K. Njerve), teacher in Fianarantsoa. They came from Lars Meling, "postmaster" in Antananarivo until 1894 and director of Ihosy's mission in Bara country from 1896. Their correspondence was sustained, but they did not get married.

The top left envelope is the only one franked with a 1/3 penny stamp, canceled 11/10 94. Regardless of the color which does not matter, there are slight differences, in the writing, with the two other letters franked years later in 1896 and 1897.



## Some remarkable Norwegian Covers



The guide-directories of Madagascar for 1898 onwards indicate a Miss C. NILSEN at the American Lutheran Mission of Fort-Dauphin, assisting the Reverent ISOLANY and his wife. Caroline Nilsen was the daughter of Nils Nilsen, pastor in Masinandraina then Loharano who after 20 years of pastoral life in Madagascar, returned to Norway and then emigrated to the USA in 1886. His three children who grew up in the United States, were then missionaries of the American Mission in Fort-Dauphin. Caroline was a teacher and assisted her brother Isolany, a pastor, who had taken the name of his native village Beitsolany, near Loharano (*She was also the sister of Mrs Halvorson, see slide #10*). Caroline arrived in Madagascar in 1894 from which she left in 1901 for vacation and then returned to Madagascar. *The above document was sold for € 15,000 in 1995 by Maison Roumet. It is considered genuine.*



Another letter for the same person and apparently by the same hand but dated 29/4 94, was on sale in 2006 by a large Spanish House, at a price of € 15,000, accompanied by 3 certificates of authenticity signed by 3 experts from 3 different nationalities.

Fortunately for the potential buyer, the Secretary of the Collector's Club of New York found an article by a famous expert, Jean-François Brun, who had appraised the cover in 1999. By comparing the hand writings, he concluded to a forgery. According to Ed. Grabowski, who knows a lot about the subject, the document then ended up on an online auction site at € 7,500. As if a fake was half-true.



## Pending Items

The controversy over the printing date of the two sets of Norwegian stamps has been discussed at length.

But there are other points unanswered. On the one hand, it is not known how many stamps were issued and used, nor for what amounts. On the other hand, we do not know the precise date the Norwegian Post in Madagascar ended.

In his 1984 book, Ø. Grøntoft recalls that the MNS archives mentioned a sale of stamps in 1894 of around \$ 70. He deduces, assuming a 3/4 - 1/4 distribution between letters and parcels, the sale of 5,200 stamps at 1/3 penny and 1,725 stamps at 1 penny, or nearly 7,000 labels (for 9 to 10 months) .

K.U. Sanne, who arrives at 6,000 stamps with another distribution, finds *"these numbers modest in all respects which explain why it is not easy today to find these stamps"*.

As an indication, the labels of 5, 10, 15, and 25 centimes as well as 1 and 5 francs printed in Tamatave to compensate for a lack of official stamps in 1891 were printed in 75,020 copies by the French post office in Madagascar.

General Gallieni arrived in Madagascar in October 1896. Armed with full civil and military powers, he promptly organized the country. He is said to have immediately called for the withdrawal of Norwegian stamps because the Island became a French colony and thus had a "nationalized" postal service.

The OJ makes no mention of it because the request had come, at the beginning of 1897 without further precision, from a letter of the general addressed to the NMS in Antananarivo allowing it to continue the old postal system for all stations where there was no French post office. But use of Norwegian stamps should be stopped. By 1897 the French postal service was so advanced that there were permanent post offices almost everywhere there was French civil or military authority.

The Missions have adapted accordingly by organizing periodic collections for isolated stations at the closest station with a French post office.

The postal service of the NMS did not therefore continue for long and we will fix the end shortly after the Congress held in Betafo from May 17, 1897. The NMS stopped using its particular stamps. In fact, the missionaries were mainly bothered to stop a postal service which fitted the needs and had given full satisfaction for 22 years.

# Antsirabe



The work of the Norwegian Missions in Madagascar is considerable: pastoral, of course, but also medical (hospitals, dispensaries, leprosaria), educational (schools, both for girls and for boys) and social, and economic as well (introduction of new cultures such as wheat, fruits and vegetables, the acclimatization of dairy cows), environmental (planting many trees) and architectural (churches and schools, solid houses).

The number of missionaries (still around a hundred in the 1970s) is reduced to around ten today.

Known lately to Europeans (1777), Antsirabe (*where there is a lot of salt*), is located on the central highlands, 167 km south of Antananarivo. At that time, lime and sulfur were already exploited, as well as the salt deposited by hot underground springs, of volcanic origin. Suspecting the therapeutic virtues of these waters, Pastor Rosaas had samples of them analyzed at the University of Oslo. The composition proved very close to that of the Grande Grille source in Vichy. Antsirabe thus gradually became a famous spa resort, the Visy Gasy (*Malagasy Vichy*) and the main road to the south which then served Betafo, now passes through Antsirabe.

It is now the third largest city in Madagascar, with an urban area of around 260,000 inhabitants. Built in 1872, the Norwegian mission house is the “dean” house of Antsirabe. The spa town has been twinned since 1989 with Stavanger, the oil town.

*The Norwegian mission house in Antsirabe. Cancellation of January 15, 1929. Franking at 25c by filanzane stamp n° 134 (Collection J. Ranaivo, Antsirabe).*

The Malagasy Lutheran Church, three million strong, joined forces with the Norwegian Mission to create in 2011 on the former property of the Norwegian School in Antsirabe, the Lovasoa Cross-Cultural Competence Center.

The Lovasoa (*Beautiful Inheritance*) is both a guest house, a cultural center and a skills center (courses, student and teacher exchanges). In 2013, Pastor Nils Kristian HØIMYR, recalled from his Norwegian retirement, completed the classification of the mission archives which were transferred there (exceptional documentation but too little consulted, unfortunately). Norwegian students did part of their studies there, in their own language.



The author, Luc MONTERET, warmly thanks Pastor Nils Kristian HØIMYR and his brother Tormod for their friendly welcome, their enlightened advices and for the permission to use many illustrations on the pioneering period of the Norwegian missions in Madagascar.

Documents relating to the Norwegian missions in Madagascar are rare and few can be found in one hand. The illustrations thus come mainly from scans taken from auctions and more particularly from the extraordinary David Feldman sale (Geneva, May 2010), many pieces of which contributed to a part of the subsequent sales of other houses (they are annotated: "Sale D. Feldman"). Many of these pieces came from Karl U. Sanne's collection, itself largely coming from the Hurt collection.

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