

# Belgian Congo Private Wrappers: the Social Backstories: Part 1

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There were no post office postal stationery wrappers issued by the Belgian Congo authorities for the general public. This necessitated the use of home-made wrappers and wrappers printed for private use with the addition of adhesives. The author (JKC) has collected images of wrappers of this kind listed for sale on eBay daily since 2009 and now this database has slightly more than 5,000 different examples. Of these, there are 23 wrappers bearing the stamps of the Belgian Congo. The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss some of these wrappers, their postage, destination and especially their social philately backstories. What was the nature of persons and organizations that existed in the Congo that printed material and mailed it in private wrappers? Many of the extant wrappers have a religious context, reflecting the role of the missions. Tracking down the backstory is often a feat in Google sleuthing – time, patience and lateral thinking generally produce results (and satisfaction!)

This is the first part of a two part article.

## A Missionary Presence

### Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA)

#### *Sender - G Welles on behalf of Rev. Joseph E. Nicholson*

A three-lined black handstamp *Rev. Joseph E. Nicholson // BOMA, CONGO BELGE // WEST AFRICA* identifies the sender. The manuscript *G. Welles* was probably the person assigned to send missionary tracts to those on an address list. The wrapper was mailed to *Mrs. Dan Sherman, Avon Park, Florida, USA.*



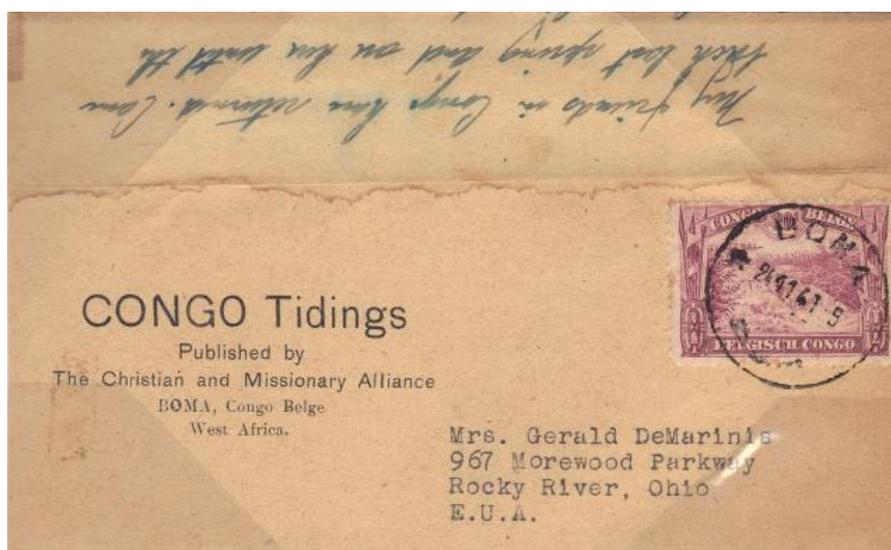
The wrapper is 145 x 252 mm, made using 0.07mm gauge horizontal kraft paper with a 20mm gum line seal. The postage paid was 40c, for which two 20c Mechelen definitives (COB 170) were used. These were cancelled by two Heim & Keach Type 7A BOMA postmarks dated 24 10 35. Why one should be 11.00 h and the other 14.00 h can only be a matter of speculation. At this date the rate for printed matter to the USA was 50c per 50g increment. G Welles made a mistake by using the 40c rate that had been superseded by a higher rate on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1934.



“Reverend Nicholson (19 May 1927-18 Feb. 2010) was born in the Belgian Congo to Rev. Joseph E. and Myrtle Nicholson, missionaries to the Belgium Congo. Surviving is his loving wife of over 60 years, Betty M. Nicholson. Reverend Nicholson and his wife served with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Zaire, Africa for over 20 years and he also pastored a Church in Valley Cottage, New York for ten years. Joe was gifted in writing and teaching God’s word. He also used his carpentry skills everywhere he went and many have benefited from his expertise. He was a humble, patient man, always appreciative and thankful. He genuinely loved people and always made time for everyone.” (*Obituary extract from a US newspaper*).

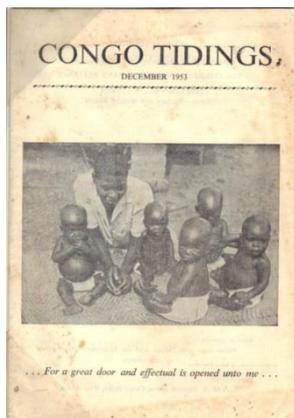
### **Sender - an unknown American**

This wrapper is inscribed “CONGO Tidings // Published by // The Christian and Missionary Alliance // BOMA, Congo Belge // West Africa” and sent from Boma to Mrs. Gerald DeMarinis, 967 Morewood Parkway, Rocky River, Ohio, USA. It is 148 x 250 mm, buff in colour with a 12 mm gum line seal.



The postage paid was 20c, for which a 20c Mechelen definitive (COB 170) was used. This was cancelled by a (H&K) type 8A BOMA postmark dated 24 11 41 and timed at 5(:00). At this date the printed matter rate to the USA was 20c per 50 g. The franking is correct.

There is a handwritten message on the flap: "*My friends in Congo have returned. Came back last spring and are here until the sailing gets safer.*"



The CMA was founded in 1887 by the Rev. Albert Simpson (a Canadian Presbyterian minister) and created the Evangelical Missionary Alliance to undertake foreign missionary work. Its first mission station in the Belgian Congo was established in 1888. Initially, it was closely associated with Pentecostalism and attracted many followers in the colony. By 1928 it was the largest and fastest growing Alliance church "overseas". (The USA is the home of the movement.)

Congo Tidings was a magazine published semi-annually about its work at missionary stations in the Belgian Congo.

### **American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APCM)**

The American Presbyterian Congo Mission has been a significant influence in Congo affairs. Its first mission was established at Luebo, Kasai in 1891 by the Revs. William Sheppard and Samuel Lapsley. Sheppard, an African American had lobbied the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board to send him to Africa. The Board was reluctant to send African American missionaries alone and adopted the policy of sending equal numbers of white and black missionaries with same pastoral status. (At this date the southern states were racially segregated and this action was progressive, though it would raise eyebrows today.) Sheppard took an interest in ethnology and exploring as well as spreading the gospel, which earned him the epithet *Congo's African-American Livingstone*. His reports on the abuses committed by the State administration provided the crucial evidence for reformers which led to the creation of the Belgian Congo as a colony. Over time, the APCM became the largest Protestant denomination in the Congo. Hospitals, dispensaries and schools (elementary, normal, nursing and theological) were built. The Baluba-Lulua language was set in writing and a grammar compiled, which remains a classic today. After independence the APCM transformed itself into an indigenous church, the *Communaute Presbyterienne du Congo* but maintains a strong association with the southern Presbyterian Church in the USA.

***Senders - Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Longenecker***

Inscribed "Greetings from Congo sent by Mr. & Mrs. J. H. Longenecker // A.P.C.M., Luebo // Belgian Congo".



The postage paid was 50c, for which three of the Mechelin definitives [a 10c (COB168), a 15c (COB169) and a 20c (COB170)] and a 5c National Parks (COB197) were used. These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A LUEBO postmark which appears to be dated ??11 -9 and timed 11(:00), which is a puzzle. With very few exceptions (of which Luebo is not one) the arrangement of the digits is Dmyt. Where visible, this postmark suggests ymDt or yDmt! In the period in which this item could have been sent, the postal rate to the USA was 50c for printed matter classified as a greetings card in an open "envelope". The franking is correct. Unfortunately, Mr Longenecker failed to write an address sufficient for delivery. *Miss Carrie Lee Campbell, Monument Ave, Richmond VA* was not enough and the US Post Office applied a purple handstamp "DEFICIENCY IN ADDRESS SUPPLIED BY 7 (code number?) RICHMOND VA". Was "Ask 2204" applied at a dead letter office?

**Sender -Miss V A Allen**

The size of this wrapper is 120 x 200 mm and it is made with a 0.09 mm gauge paper. There is no gum line.

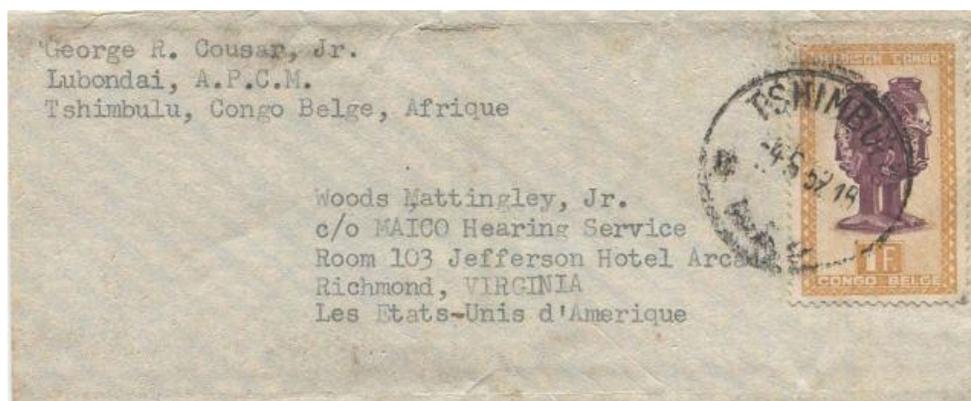


This missionary wrapper declared that it contained a “Souvenir calendar of the // American Presbyterian Congo Mission // sent (to you) with the compliments of //(Miss) V. A. Allen, A.P.C.M., Bibanga // Luluabourg, Sac Privé // Congo Belge” (Miss Virginia Allen was a long serving missionary with reference to her being at Luebo in 1927 and 1954.) On the lower left corner there is a statement: “IMPRIMÉS – Printed matter”. The wrapper was mailed from Luluabourg to *Mr. & Mrs. Stewart Hanks, Salem, Va, Les Etats-Unis d'Amérique*, who may have helped to fund the mission. (Because Salem is one tenth the size of Richmond, a citizen would likely be known to the postal service and even an address less complete than on the previous wrapper did not lead to non-delivery!)

The postage paid was 70c, for which 3 stamps of the Palms issue were used - two 10c (COB 229) and one 50c (COB 234). These were cancelled by a (H&K) type 8A LULUABURG postmark dated ?? ?? 48. Because the wrapper contained a calendar, we can assume it was posted towards the end of 1948, at which time the postal rate to the USA for printed matter was 70c per 50g, which suggests the correct postage was applied by the sender.

**Sender - George R. Cousar Jr.**

Postage has been paid using a 1Fr Native Arts (COB 285) stamp which has been cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A TSHIMBULU postmark dated -4.8.52 and timed at 18(:00). At this date the charge for printed matter to the USA was 80c for the first 50g with 40c for each additional 50g (or part thereof). Depending on the weight, either he over or under paid (by a little)!

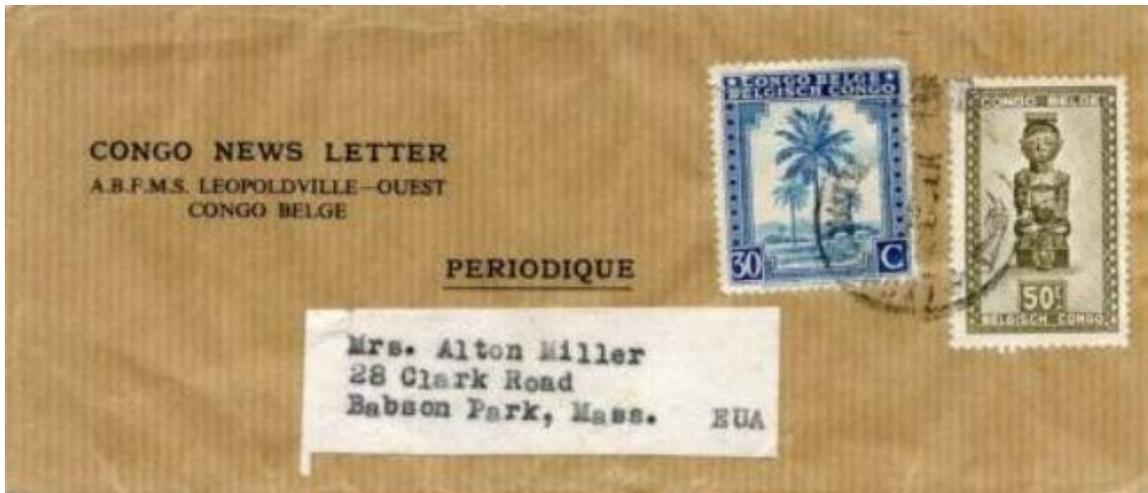


So who was George R Cousar and what was his relationship with the American Presbyterian Congo Mission? Today we can answer such a question with the help of the internet. He was a missionary physician and surgeon in the Belgian Congo from 1927 until 1960 (when he was 69). In 1947 the International Leprosy Association listed him as a member at Lubondai, Belgian Congo. Lubondai is about

10km from Tshimbulu which is the site of the mission and hospital, "l'Hôpital Saint François de Tshimbulu", shown here. Was the Lubondai outpost a leper colony? It is tempting to believe this. The proposed identity of the recipient, Woods Mattingley is a little tenuous. George Cousar's home town was Richmond where a Bernard Woods Mattingley was the city water treatment chemist. Of significance, he was very active in the church and was the superintendent of the Sunday school and chairman of the evangelistic committee. Was he a fund raiser for Cousar's work? We can discount the possibility that the correspondence was about a hearing aid by the nature of the mailing – a wrapper. Wrappers are used to send printed matter; in this case possibly pamphlets to help fund raising. The address MAICO Hearing Service, Virginia, USA, is prefaced "c/o" which suggests another individual on the evangelistic committee was the secretary and his was the contact address.

## The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS)

This brown vertical weave wrapper is inscribed on three lines with CONGO NEWS LETTER // A.B.F.M.S. LEOPOLDVILLE-OUEST // CONGO BELGE and PERIODIQUE. The postage paid was 80c, for which a 30c Palms stamp (COB 253) and a 50c Native Art stamp (COB 282) were used. These were cancelled by a (H&K) Type 8A LEOPOLDVILLE postmark. The date and time cannot be read and the strike is double. A white address label reads “Mrs. Alton Miller, Babson Park, Mass. EUA”.



In the absence of a date on the postmark we can arrive at a window for postage from the stamps that were used. Assuming the franking (80c) is correct, this rate applied to printed matter sent to the USA from the 1<sup>st</sup> July 1949 until the Palms issue was withdrawn on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1953. The content was less than 50g.



The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (ABFMS) together with the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU) formed the American Baptist International Ministries, a Protestant Christian missionary society founded in 1814 in the USA. A presence was established in the Congo in 1878. It engaged in medical and educational work as well as winning converts. As with other missionary societies, at times it was in conflict with the colonial administration who suspected that some of its activities might undermine civil authority. Also, there was an element of “turf war” with the Catholic Church over winning conversions. The title of their periodical “Congo News Letter” can be confused with that of the Congo Reform Association, “The Congo News Letter”. The latter was a secular campaigning paper that ceased publication when its objective had been achieved with the creation of a colony under the rule of the Belgian government and not the king.