

16/2004

**THE STAMPS AND POSTAL HISTORY OF
NINETEENTH CENTURY SAMOA**

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Display and Talk Based on the Book, 23 September 2004
The Royal Philatelic Society London

Samoa's strategic location in the south Pacific gave it an importance in the nineteenth century that grew from the calm presence of missionaries to a political tinder-box that involved three world powers, Great Britain, the United States and Germany. Four philatelic periods are defined:

- The Missionary Period: 1836-1877
- The Express Post Office: 1877-1881
- The Municipal Post Office: 1882-1886
- The Davis Post Office: 1886-1900

The display shows eleven frames of selected pages from the international gold medal exhibit of Jan Berg, of Stockholm, Sweden, who was most instrumental in checking facts and who suggested many useful text changes in the book. The final frame includes material from the Odenweller exhibit that was retired in 1975.

The Missionary Period: 1836-1877

As is true with most of the inhabitants of islands in the Pacific in the early nineteenth century, the missionaries in Samoa were dependent upon ships that called at their ports infrequently. Mail handed to the captain was turned in for carriage through established postal systems, which for Samoa was usually Sydney.

The selection of covers on display shows typical ways in which such mail was carried, starting with the pre-stamp era and continuing with services in the stamped era. Missionary mail, although scarce, survived because the Societies in London were obligated to pay the postage due since the letter could contain directions for payments on accounts held there.



State I

State II

State III

State IV

The Express Post Office: 1877-1881

The proprietors of the *Fiji Times Express* decided to establish a newspaper on the same model in Samoa in 1877. Stamps were needed primarily for the newspaper but they offered mail service as well. Lithographed stamps were produced in Sydney in four "States" that show some deterioration of the master transfer for each subsequent issue.

The only complete reconstruction of all 190 positions is in the Royal Philatelic Collection. This, along with one of two others that are almost complete, was used in the new book to illustrate every position twice, once with identifying marks circled and the other to show the same position without obstruction. Use of this technique permits comparison that might disclose marks that were ephemeral during printing.

On display are 16 pages that show a selection of a fourth reconstruction attempt that, although relatively recently started by Mr. Berg, is remarkably well advanced. Stamps from the first two States are quite difficult to find and some, such as the 5/- State II (here, exceptionally, with double perfs) shown above and in the frame are very rare.

Only eleven covers and nine examples on piece are recorded. Two items on piece are shown in frames 2 and 3, and four of the covers appear in frame 12.

Reprints and forgeries have in the past discouraged collectors from this area. The book solves those problems for any who are faced with Express stamps today.

The Municipal Post Office: 1882-1886

The Express newspaper and post office were not a successful business venture and closed in August 1881. By this time, the three consuls (G.B., U.S. and Germany) had established a municipal government in their joint interest of the coaling harbour of Apia. They asked for the Express postmaster to continue to the end of the year, and then formed a Municipal Post Office to handle mail. All appointments were subject to the approval of the three consuls.

Mail from the period of the first postmaster to serve has not been identified. The second and third had the use of the Apia CDS that was used for the Express post office, and applied it to the cover to signify payment of the 3d per letter authorised by the consuls. The postmaster collected additional postage, depending on where the letter was to be sent.

In the case of mail to or through the United States, U.S. stamps were obtained from the U.S. consul. Usually they were canceled with a cork grid, but on rare occasions were canceled by the Apia CDS if the stamps were already on the envelope when presented for mailing.

Only 24 covers are known from this period, with the census having tripled due to Mr. Berg's study. Four pages in frame 4 show typical examples.

The Davis Post Office: 1886-1900

The final postmaster of the municipal post office was John Davis. When German postal service developed in 1886, the British and American consuls decided to back a separate post office under Davis. This was approved by King Malietoa in December, with stamps already on hand, and it became the official post office of Samoa, even though the Imperial German Post operated as well. Nevertheless, it was operational only in the town of Apia and had no delivery services.

Although the post office started with intention to service mail, later developments saw some philatelic inspiration. A convenient separating point is April 1, 1895, when a fire destroyed the post office and virtually all stamps, which had been perf 12½ or 12 x 11½. Supplies after the fire were perf 11, making distinction between the scarce and the remaindered issues rather easy.

One pre-fire issue that has only now been fully explained is very rare, with printing quantities ranging from 600 to 120. Well over 50% of the known copies are to be found in frame 8 on five pages. Only this year was it concluded that the issue was made a part of New Zealand's UPU application, in which it also sponsored some island governments for whom it printed stamps. The remainder, sent to Samoa, was largely used.

The largest area of previous uncertainty was the postal history of the Palm Trees era, particularly in the early years. That story has also only recently solidified. At first, mail that was sent was charged postage due, which annoyed the recipients. An agreement with the U.S. Post Office and cooperation with the U.S. consul, who supplied stamps as with the Municipal Post Office, continued until 1894.

Rates started at 6d per ½ ounce, but was reduced to 3d when the German post dropped its rate. They finally settled at the UPU 2½d rate, even though the Davis post office could not become a member of the UPU facing the German consul's veto of such an application.

Examples of each of the early rates can be seen in frame 12, along with two letters from Robert Louis Stevenson. The first gives proof of how the postmaster coordinated with the San Francisco mail agent to add U.S. stamps that were not available in Samoa, particularly for registry. The second is a letter with the stamps of three countries, due to a need for returning the letter to the mail after an initial attempt to find the recipient.