

TR-Belgian railway and postal parcel stamps from Belgium



The story of the TR railway stamps: 1

1. Railway stamps were not issued by postal services but by railway companies. Technically, railway stamps are not postage stamps, as they were not used in regular postal traffic. However, an exception is made for Belgian railway stamps, which, as will be discussed in this article, were also found in ordinary postal traffic.
2. Belgian railway stamps are a unique exception, as a number of these stamps could also be used in regular postal traffic. The postal services and railways worked closely together, allowing a package that was stamped with a railway stamp to be handled by a post office in a location without a train station.
3. Since railway stamps are not issued by postal services, they are generally not included in postage stamp catalogs, except when they could also be used for postal purposes.
- 4) However, in some countries, such as Belgium, railway stamps could also be used for regular postal services. In Belgium, packages weighing more than five kilograms had to be transported by the railways, while lighter packages could also be handled by postal services. Furthermore, packages with railway stamps could be presented at post offices, even in locations without a train station. This led to the issuance of many railway stamps in Belgium, which are popular among philatelists, partly because of their use in normal postal traffic.
- 5) In other countries, postage stamps often received a special overprint for the transportation of packages by train. In Belgium, specific postage stamps were issued for this purpose.
- 6) The first Belgian railway stamps appeared in 1879 and bore a watermark until 1900. In the philatelic world, railway stamps are generally not considered postage stamps, as they are issued by railway companies and not by postal services. Belgian railway stamps are an exception to this, as they could also be used for regular mail, even though they were issued by the National Railway Company of Belgium (NMBS).
- 7) The Official Belgian Stamp Catalogue (OBP) contains an overview of railway stamps, which is notable since most catalogs do not include railway stamps. These stamps were primarily used for sending larger postal packages.
- 8) During the Eighteen Day Campaign, from May 10 to May 28, 1940, a large quantity of railway stamps of the type National Coat of Arms was stolen. To neutralize the stolen stamps, it was decided to mark the non-stolen stock with a control overprint, using the NMBS emblem designed by Jean de Roy in 1936. Railway stamps of this type without the NMBS overprint were declared invalid, thus neutralizing the stolen specimens. In 1941, new issues of the National Coat of Arms type were released, but in different colors, which did not affect the stamps that had been declared invalid.
- 9) In 1987, railway stamps were discontinued. However, the NMBS continued to issue new stamps, which had no postage value and are referred to as railway stickers.

The story of the TR railway stamps: 2



1. On May 1, 1879, the Belgian Minister of Public Works (responsible for Railways, Post, Telegraph, Mines, Waterways, Bridges, and Roads) introduced a national uniform rate for parcels of up to 5 kg sent via the State Railways. The costs had to be paid in advance with stamps that had to be affixed to the consignment note. To this end, the firm Gouweloos in Brussels had stamps printed, designed and engraved by Charles Wiener, in four different values.
2. These stamps are referred to as railway stamps in the Netherlands, while the French term "timbres pour paquet de chemin de fer" and the German term "Eisenbahnpaketmarken" better reflect the original function of these stamps.
3. Soon, the rates were also adopted by the many private railway companies that still existed at that time. The post offices handled the transport to locations without a station, also using the stamps from the State Railways. From 1879 to 1932, 167 different railway stamps were issued.
4. On October 1, 1928, a postal parcel service was introduced by the Belgian post offices, for which specific stamps were also issued. By 1932, six postal parcel stamps were released in two series.
5. The parcel service of the post offices was merged on June 1, 1932, with the smaller parcel service of the railways, under the name "Domestic service of postal parcels". All post offices and stations participated in this service. Combined postal parcel/railway stamps also appeared, recognizable by the image of both a post horn and the emblem of the SNCB. The stamps from before 1932 remained valid and could still be used.
6. A feature of the new stamps is that there are as many stamps per series as there are rates. Therefore, with each change of the rate, new stamps in the modified values had to be issued, often first as overprints.
7. In addition to the combined postal parcel/railway stamps, separate railway stamps continued to exist for the franking of consignment notes for goods other than small parcels. These railway stamps were often issued in long series, with stamps for all units, most in tens and some in hundreds. Rate changes did not require the issuance of a new series. Therefore, in 1972, it was decided to exclusively use railway stamps and abolish the combined postal parcel/railway stamps. Additionally, for the franking of consignment notes, franking machines had already been used in some SNCB stations before 1940.
8. It is noteworthy that there are also impressions from a franking machine at the Liège Longdoz station from November 1938. Since this station was then a mixed station, it is unclear whether it was the Nord-Belge or the SNCB that used this franking machine.
9. In 1987, the SNCB stopped using railway stamps on consignment notes. However, the SNCB continued to issue stamps, but these were now only used to collect money at the SNCB cash register. In some catalogs, these stamps are rightly referred to as railway vignettes rather than railway stamps.
10. Images of two railway stamps have been used as printed service stamps on acknowledgments of receipt.
11. For passenger transport, such as the payment of 10 francs for a social subscription, stamps were used that looked very much like railway stamps but were not (for example, TR399, TR455-458, and TR461-465). In the Official Belgian Stamp Catalog, these stamps are referred to as penalty stamps, but they are classified under railway stamps. The SNCB initially referred to these stamps on the application form for a social subscription simply as railway stamps (model D.C. 1723), but from around 1975, they were referred to as tax stamps (timbre taxe), model C 42/D.C.1723. However, the term penalty stamps is misleading, as it involves administrative costs, not insufficiently franked mail. "Levy stamps" would be a more appropriate designation. The tax stamps were canceled at the stations; a nice example of this is the cancellation with "Gare de Mons" in the first line and "Abonnements" in the third line (date 14-10-1965) on 2x TR341, which is included as an ordinary railway stamp in the catalog.
12. Railway stamps were exclusively used for freight transport.
13. It is concerning that sometimes a different type of stamp was used than the prescribed type.

The story of the TR railway stamps: 2

(continued)



14. Additionally, the SNCB has also issued luggage stamps and daily stamps. Since these stamps are railway stamps with overprints, they are generally equated with regular railway stamps.

15. The question is often raised in specialized literature whether railway stamps should be considered as real postage stamps. The postage stamp catalogs do not provide a clear answer to this.

16. The SNCB referred to the railway stamps affixed to consignment notes as "franking stamps" (timbres d'affranchissement), stating on the consignment notes that "the cancellation stamp serves as an acceptance stamp" (le timbre d'oblitération sert de timbre d'acceptation).

17. We believe that the railway stamps issued between 1879 and 1932 should at least be considered equivalent to postage stamps. The majority of these railway stamps are, in addition to railway cancellations, also known with postal cancellations. The combined postal parcel/railway stamps issued between 1934 and 1972 must of course be counted as regular postage stamps. The status of the railway stamps issued between 1932 and 1987 is less clear. Their status as postage stamps is supported by the fact that postal cancellations are still found on these stamps, indicating postal use. However, the number of stamps from this period with a postal cancellation is significantly lower than that of the railway stamps from the previous period. The benefit of the doubt remains. No postal use is known for the luggage stamps, daily stamps, and tax stamps. Sometimes these, just like the railway vignettes, are not considered postage stamps but are included on this site as BA, JO, TX, and TRV.

Model names and information about the railway stamps: [TR304](#) ► [TR321A](#)

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TR304-TR321A: Except for Great Britain, Belgium was one of the main suppliers of steam locomotives for various foreign state-owned companies and private enterprises. An important producer was Cockerill in Seraing, which supplied the first locomotives for the Belgian Railways. John Cockerill, an English entrepreneur, established a large steel company in Belgium.

TR304: The ½F stamp depicts a steam locomotive dating from December 30, 1835. Unfortunately, the original locomotive is no longer visible, but since 1980, a fully wooden replica can be admired in Laforêt, in the Ardennes. Belgium acquired the first three locomotives of type 2-2-2 (with two leading wheels, two driving wheels, and two trailing wheels) in England, from Robert Stephenson's workshop in Newcastle. These locomotives were named 'The Arrow', 'The Elephant', and 'Stephenson' and were used on the route from Brussels via Vilvoorde to Mechelen. Following the British model, a fourth locomotive, called 'Le Belge', with number 6, was built in the Belgian locomotive workshop of Cockerill.



TR305: The 1F stamp depicts a locomotive of type 2-4-0. In 1862, several locomotive workshops were active, including Wilson, Cockerill, and Saint-Léonard, as well as the Haine-Saint-Pierre factories, the Arsenal of Mechelen, and the Couillet Company. The image shows a modernized 'Wilson' locomotive with a square Belpaire firebox, designated as type T.1. This rebuilt locomotive received the subtype number 13.



TR306: The locomotives of the State and private companies were numbered according to a fixed system starting in 1876. Numbers 1 to 19 were intended for express trains and passenger trains, numbers 20 to 39 for freight trains and mixed transport, numbers 40 to 49 for various types with separate tenders, and numbers 50 to 59 for shunting locomotives. The stamp shows a locomotive of type 0-6-0 with a separate tender.



TR307: The 3F stamp also depicts a type 0-6-0 with tender, which was used for both passenger and freight transport. This type of locomotive is also known as 'Bourbonnais'.



TR308: A more modern locomotive is depicted on the 4F stamp. This is a locomotive of type 4-4-0 with a separate tender, more specifically type T.18 bis. A total of 134 locomotives of type T.18 were built, mainly used on the line between Brussels and Antwerp.



TR309: Also from 1902, there is a type 4-6-0 with a tender, designated as T.22. These locomotives were called 'Atlantic' due to the wheel arrangement: four leading wheels and six driving wheels, also known as 'Ten Wheel'.



TR310: Between 1904 and 1927, 437 locomotives of type 0-6-0T were built, equipped with a small coal bunker and water tanks alongside the boiler. Several subtypes can be distinguished for type T.53, and the image shows one of the first examples.



TR311: The depicted locomotive of type 4-6-0 with tender is also referred to as French style. The type T.8 from 1905 was affectionately called 'miss' by the drivers and was mainly used for passenger transport.



TR312: The locomotive has a wheel arrangement of 4-4-2T, with a small coal bunker at the rear and two water tanks next to the boiler. Type T.16 was introduced almost simultaneously with type T.15 (with superheater) and remained active until 1964. In part 2, I will discuss the other eight depicted steam locomotives from the 1949 series.



Model names and information about the railway stamps: [TR304](#) ► [TR321A](#) (continued)

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TR313: A very large locomotive of type 4-6-2, designated T.10, was put into service starting in 1909. This type, called 'Pacific', was first built in a Belgian factory in 1910, which named the 'monster' 'Flamme'. These locomotives remained in service until 1957, and the last one was retired in 1959.



TR314: As early as 1902, the locomotive type 0-6-0 was put into service, designated T.32. Variants of this type then appeared, first with 'saturated steam' and later with 'superheating', leading to higher output. The type T.41 fell under the latter category and was retired in 1959.



TR315: An even larger locomotive than the type 4-6-2 was introduced in 1910, namely the type 2-10-0 with the designation T.36, also known as 'Decapod'. This locomotive weighed 163 tons and could reach a speed of 65 km/h.



TR316: In 1920, a locomotive of type 2-8-0, built in the United States and called 'Consolidation', was put into service on the Belgian railway network. This locomotive replaced the ones lost during World War I. These were freight train locomotives, and 150 units were put into service as type T.38. They weighed 85 tons and could reach a speed of 75 km/h.



TR317: The 30F stamp shows a type 2-8-0 locomotive, which bears many similarities to the models built in the United States.



TR318: In 1930, chief engineer Fernand Legein designed a locomotive of type 2-8-2 for express trains on the route from Brussels to the city of Luxembourg, a hilly area. This locomotive, type 5, was named 'Mikado'. Only four units were built, weighing 130 tons and could reach a top speed of 105 km/h.



TR319: The 50F stamp shows a type 4-6-2 from 1935. This streamlined locomotive, designated as type T.1, was put into service in 1935 with 15 units, followed by another 20 units in 1938. The locomotive was retired in 1962.



TR320: In 1939, only six steam locomotives of type 12 (Atlantic) were put into service for express trains between Brussels and Ostend. The small number was due to the outbreak of World War II, which halted production at the SNCB factory. These locomotives had two powered axles and two inside cylinders (4-4-2). The streamlining is striking and was achieved through plating. The numbering ranged from 1201 to 1206. They weighed 89 tons without the tender, which weighed 59 tons. The last unit was retired on July 29, 1962. The 1204 was saved from scrapping by the Belgian Railways (SNCB) and can now be admired at the Belgian railway museum in Schaerbeek.



TR321 & TR321A: Two stamps featuring an electric locomotive and an electric multiple unit are also included in this series due to their design, although they are obviously not steam locomotives.

