

## British postal history of south/central/east Africa



South



Central



East

### Introduction: The philatelic phamily tree

The three stamps illustrated above were issued within months of each other, in 1890-91. Two of them represented companies chartered by Queen Victoria: The British South Africa Company (BSAC) and the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). The third stamp was from British Central Africa, a protectorate. For years, the BSAC and IBEAC masqueraded as governments, with police and courts, taxes and postage stamps. In London, Prime Ministers Gladstone and Salisbury traded places a half-dozen times during this period. Gladstone was the less-enthusiastic imperialist, but both men appreciated that the chartered companies were bearing the expense of Britain's colonial ambitions. They also were counting on the companies to press into unclaimed territory and hold off the Boers, the French, Germans, Portuguese and Italians. In the 1890s, the Scramble for Africa was in full swing.

London was so concerned about Boer and Portuguese intrusions into British Central Africa that it stepped in directly to declare the region a protectorate. If this sounds like a protection racket, you're on to something. To the imperial powers scrambling for advantage and influence and territory, "protecting" the interests of indigenous people was an afterthought. Forty years earlier, David Livingstone had explored the area, spreading the Christian gospel, seeking the abolition of slavery. By this time, missionary zeal had been replaced by the imperial quest for hegemony — and the corporate quest for all the gold,

diamonds, ivory, copper and cash crops that could be produced or extracted from the rich African earth.

Before taking a closer look at these three stamps, and those that followed, how about a quick overview of the immense area they claimed to represent? Here is a genealogical romp through the postal history of southern, central and east Africa, starting in 1890 with the **British South Africa Company**.



1913: New name

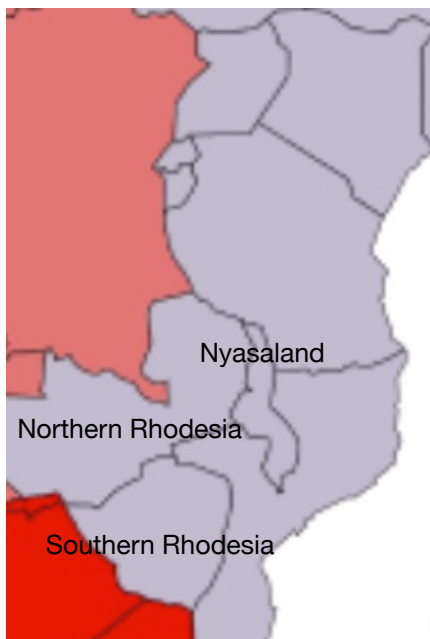
It turned out running a company — and a country — in southern Africa was not easy, or cheap. Railroads had to be built, hostile tribes and imperial rivals held at bay. By 1907, the BSAC had run out of steam, and London stepped in. With the new administration came a new name: Rhodesia, honoring the controversial, consequential Cecil J. Rhodes (1853-1902), about whom more later.

This would be a good time for a regional map, so you can distinguish between the northern and southern parts of Rhodesia.

By the 1920s, north and south had separated. Northern

Rhodesia, another British protectorate, would issue its own stamps for the next 30 years. So would the more populous Southern Rhodesia, a self-governing (by whites) colony.

In 1953, the two territories merged, joining Nyasaland (formerly British Central Africa) to become Rhodesia and Nyasaland.



1924



1925

The federation included five separate governing bodies: one federal, one for each of the three territories, and one for the British overlord. This bureaucratic beast had so many overlapping parts that an observer called it "one of the most elaborately governed countries in the world."

The federation's strength was that it provided economies of scale and administrative convenience for its three members — including postal services. But two divergent impulses doomed the enterprise from the start: first, the desire of the British to pursue racial moderation, as practiced in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and to restrain the brash racism that prevailed among the far-larger white population in Southern Rhodesia; and second, increasingly insistent calls for independence from Black nationalists, who saw the federation as an attempt to shore up and sustain British imperialism.



1959



Here is a scrap bearing new Northern Rhodesia and Zambia stamps, both from 1964

By the 1960s the imperial game was up. All the colonial cards were thrown in the air and up for grabs. The federation dissolved in 1964, the British dominions were briefly reconstituted, and stamps were issued for all three. Within months, Northern Rhodesia

achieved independence as Zambia, and Nyasaland became independent Malawi. In

Southern Rhodesia, white supremacists took matters into their own hands, declaring independence from Britain in 1965 as Rhodesia. While the rest of sub-Saharan Africa emerged from white domination, Rhodesia and South Africa did not.



1964



In Nyasaland, revenue stamps were hastily overprinted and put in service in 1964



Here is a small gallery of stamps with different names from the same place. Far left is a picture of a turkey — er, guinea fowl — from the lame-duck colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1964. Next to it is some kind of coat-of-arms — looks to me like two grinchies holding up a wooden eagle. The same badge is on the \$2 flag stamp from independent, white-ruled Rhodesia in 1970. Majority rule finally came in 1978. The Zimbabwe stamp from 1980, far right, shows Victoria Falls, the majestic landmark between Zimbabwe and Zambia — still named for the British monarch whose agents tried to subdue and subjugate a continent.

**TO BE CONTINUED**