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The 1880 UPU Parcel Post Convention and Swedish Foreign Parcel Mail, 1881 - 1921

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The Universal Postal Union

The Universal Postal Union was established in 1874 to regularize international mail procedures. Conventions were established and treaties were signed so that countries would handle each other's mail consistently and reciprocally. It shortly became apparent that further work was needed to make standard procedures and rates to facilitate international parcel-post service. In the fall of 1880, the UPU held a three-week meeting in Paris at which many countries were represented. Sweden sent Adolph Wilhelm Roos, regarded by many as Sweden's most important postmaster general.

On November 3, an agreement was signed by most of the participants, the provisions of which were to go into effect on October 1, 1881. The 1880 Convention was not fully successful as not all the countries agreed to the terms. The U.S. and Great Britain, for example, were not interested in the program.

Procedures and Cross-Border Rates for International Parcel Post

The proposed agreement included an initial simplified rate scheme. It was suggested that postal fees for transiting an international parcel as heavy as 5 kilograms should cost the equivalent of 50 French centimes to be received by each country handling the item. However, some countries, including Sweden, found the planned fees too low. Sweden objected to the low international rates because its own domestic rates already were higher for heavier parcels. For instance, postage for a domestic 5-kg parcel was the equivalent of 3 kronor – eight times higher than the Swedish equivalent of 50 centimes! Modifications were made to make international rates to be somewhat proportional to individual countries' domestic rates.

The Paris accord initially established the maximum international package weight at 3 kg, and it gave some countries the right to add extra fees of 18-72 öre for incoming or outgoing parcels. Sweden was allowed to add as much as 72 öre.

All centime rates for normal parcels sent in accordance with the UPU Convention were in increments of 25 centimes, and all Swedish rates for these parcels were therefore in increments of 18 öre at the contemporary exchange rate. Conveniently, international exchange rates remained largely unchanged from 1880 to 1920, although there was some fluctuation during World War I.

Surcharges for cross-border mail also included an additional fee for sea transport. A maximum ship surcharge of as much as 3 francs was allowed to be imposed according to distance, but for sea transport of packages ➤



Figure 1. Address card for parcel to Germany, 1883.

from Sweden to Germany, the fee was only 18 öre as the distance was less than 500 nautical miles. Furthermore, there was no fee for the very short sea transport to Denmark, but the ordinary transit fee charged by Denmark was 36 öre for overland mail transit.

Therefore, transit rates might have been 18 öre for a package direct to Germany on a long-distance ferry, but 36 öre for a similar-weight package overland through Denmark to the German border. To make the charges consistent, however, Sweden adjusted its outgoing fee. In other words, a 3-kg package carried by ship in 1885 from Sweden to Germany would have cost Sweden's ordinary postage, its normal outgoing fee, the ship fee, and Germany's postage cost. The total fee would have been 36+72+18+36 öre, or 1.62 kronor. The same overland package would have been charged Sweden's ordinary postage, its adjusted outgoing fee, the Danish transit fee, and Germany's postage cost, or 36+54+36+36 öre = 1.62 kr. (See Figure 1.)

The author knows only two Swedish parcel post cards used before the fees were reduced in 1886. In an 1886 rate change, the same package would have cost 18 öre less.

Parcel Cards

The North American student may find the use of special address cards unfamiliar. It has been a long tradition in Europe that separate address cards accompany parcels. These cards are normally sent along with the parcels. They advise recipients to fetch their parcels at the post offices as the carriers deliver only smaller parcels. In the illustrations, one can also see the card and label formats that were decided at the Paris Convention. The formats were specified in special appendices to the UPU convention documents. There was also a bigger label with the same number to be affixed directly onto the parcel.

The UPU's simplified parcel postage rate makes it possible to compute the total postage fee from the known country-handling rate parts and the currency-exchange rates. The table below lists some countries' extra fees for incoming and outgoing parcels:

Country	Conversion Rates	Source/Destination Fees
France	25 centimes	0
Sweden	25 c = 18 öre	50 - 100 c (36 - 72 öre)
Germany	25 c = 20 pfg	0
Denmark	25 c = 18 øre	0
Norway	25 c = 18 øre	0
Italy	25 c = equivalent	25 c
Switzerland	25 c = 25 c	0

In addition, the source country and the destination country would assess ordinary postage fees. Therefore, one can find that the total fee for a small parcel from Norway to Italy, for example, might be:

Norway postage	= 50 centimes
Norway outgoing	= 0
Sweden transit	= 50 c
Denmark transit	= 50 c
Germany transit	= 50 c
Switzerland transit	= 50 c
Italy incoming	= 25 c
Italy postage	= 50 c
Total = 325 centimes, or 2.34 Norwegian kroner	

However, exceptions abounded. Some countries had special, non-UPU agreements for direct connections, and there were other fees for heavier parcels. Weight rates also changed from time to time, and the maximum weight for the UPU parcels was increased to 5 kg in 1896. ►

When Russia (including Finland, Baltic states, Poland, etc.) joined the parcel agreement on November 1, 1895, at first a special fee of one krona was established for packages as heavy as 3 kg in direct connections to Finland (Figure 2). Therefore, this is one of the few exceptions where the fee is not divisible by 18. Later, for heavier packages to Finland (3-5 kg) and all parcels up to 5 kg to other parts of European Russia via Finland, the fee was 198 öre from 1899 to 1918. The 198 öre is the Swedish normal fee of 36 öre, Swedish extra fee of 54 öre, Baltic Sea fee of 18



Figure 2. Special 1 krona address card.

öre, Finnish (Russian) normal fee of 36 öre, and Finnish (Russian) extra fee of 54 öre. There was also a fee of 234 öre for packages via Germany. This was made up of the Swedish normal fee of 36 öre, Swedish extra fee of 54 öre, sea fee between Sweden and Germany of 18 öre, German transit fee of 36 öre, Russian (Finnish) normal fee of 36 öre, and Russian (Finnish) extra fee of 54 öre.

Insurance and Other Service Fees



Figure 3. Address card for insured parcel to Italy.

It was not agreed to charge for additional services at the 1880 Convention. However, by 1920, fees for insurance, cash on delivery, return receipts, and express mail services had been added. A charge for bulky items also was instituted.

Insurance of parcels sent according to these special UPU rules was introduced in Sweden and some other countries on April 1, 1886. Centime rates for insuring normal parcels sent in accordance with the UPU conventions were not in increments of 25 centimes but in steps of 5 centimes per country involved. Each step insured a declared

value of 200 francs (144 kronor in Sweden). In 1892, the fee was changed so that the same fee applied to 300-franc increments of insurance.

A parcel card for an insured package to Italy is shown in Figure 3. The insurance fee is for two insurance increments @ 5 centimes per country x 5 countries = 50 centimes, or 36 öre. The domestic ➤

and transit postage was 2.34 kr to make the total fee of 2.70 kr.

A wartime situation required stamps in 1917 with the strange denominations of 1.98 and 2.12 kronor. (Editor's Note: See figures on front cover.) The reason is found in the parcel rates shown above. These odd values were mainly used for parcels to Russia. During World War I, neutral Stockholm became a re-mailing point for transiting (smuggling) parcel mail to Russia from the rest of Europe, largely from Switzerland. This caused a large demand for 1.98-kr stamps (= 275 centimes), which was the fee for an uninsured parcel, and 2.12 kr for an insured parcel (see Figure 4).

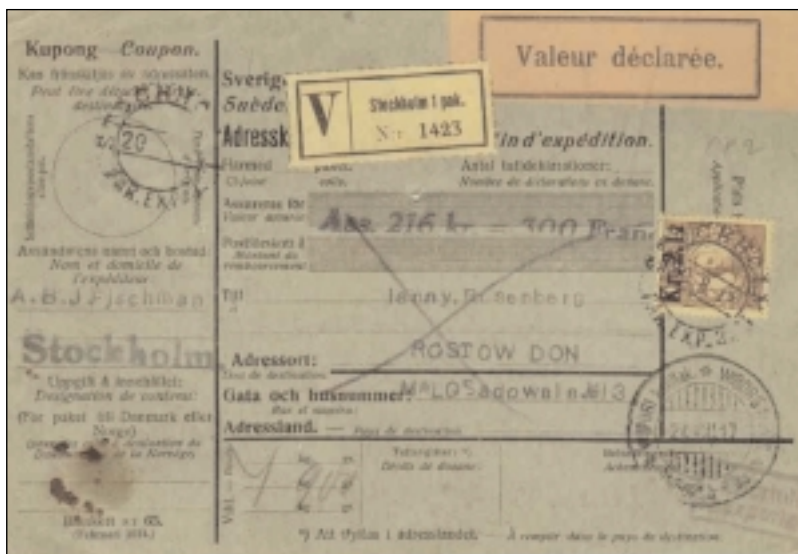


Figure 4. Address card for insured parcel to Russia with 2.12 kr stamp.

On April 1, 1886, it also became possible to send cash-on-delivery (COD) parcels according to the UPU conventions. This fee was not as uniformly regulated as other fees: Sweden charged 15 öre for each 15-kr COD increment. Special rectangular labels in rose color with the French word “Remboursement” were initially affixed on the address cards. The labels were changed later and became triangular and orange. A special form of address card was introduced in 1911 for these parcels. It was a double card where the second part was returned as a postal money order to the sender.

The introduction of extra fees for bulky items may perhaps not be called a service, but it is nonetheless interesting for postal historians. The UPU allowed these extra fees in 1885, but they are not found in Swedish rate books until 1895. The size of the parcels was originally to be small, with a maximum length of 60 cm, or about two feet. Bigger items could be sent if one paid an extra fee for bulky items. Some fragile items were also charged as bulky. The extra fee was 50 percent of all fees except for the special surcharges for incoming or outgoing parcels, rounded up to the next 5-centime increment.



Figure 5. Address card for bulky parcel to France.

or about two feet. Bigger items could be sent if one paid an extra fee for bulky items. Some fragile items were also charged as bulky. The extra fee was 50 percent of all fees except for the special surcharges for incoming or outgoing parcels, rounded up to the next 5-centime increment.

In the case shown on Figure 5 for a bulky package to France, the normal fee was 180 öre (250 centimes), of which 75 centimes is Sweden's outgoing fee. The special surcharge ➤

calculated as $(250-75) \times 50\% = 87 \frac{1}{2}$ centimes, rounded up to 90 centimes and converted to 65 öre. The total fee is therefore $180+65 = 245$ öre.

Express delivery is also dealt with in the UPU parcel conventions. It did not signify swifter transportation of the parcel, just immediate delivery after the item arrived at its destination post office. The UPU fee for this service was 50 centimes, equal to 36 öre. This fee was used for items to Denmark and Norway from 1893 and to Great Britain in 1912.

Express delivery was not available elsewhere until 1913. Figure 6 shows an address card for an express parcel to Germany with its parcel fee of 144 öre and express fee of 36 öre.

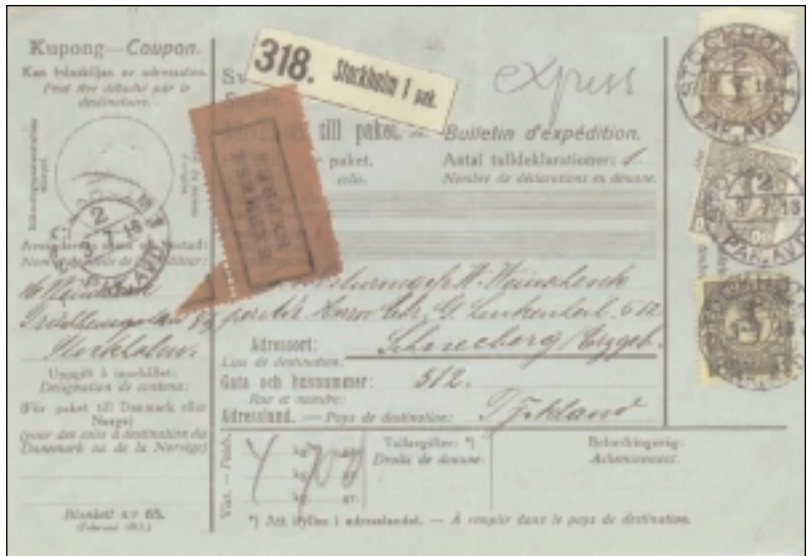


Figure 6. Address card for express parcel to Germany.

Special non-UPU Rates

Originally, the British were not involved in handling parcels. It was not until May 1, 1886, that an agreement went into effect with simplified parcel rates to Great Britain via Göteborg. The rate structure differed from the one used for the traditional UPU parcels. There were two or three rate



Figure 7. Address card for parcel to France via England during World War I.

groups according to weight. During WWI, problems arose in sending parcels to countries beyond Germany, so many of these items had to be routed through England. It then occurred that rates became combinations of the special rates to Great Britain and the ordinary UPU 50-centime rates.

Figure 7 shows a parcel card to France. The total rate is the combination of the fees for 1-3 kg to Britain (180 öre), the sea rate across the English Channel between countries (18 öre), and French postage (36 öre).

End of the First Rate Accord

Post-war European hyperinflation forced most countries to require rapid rate adjustments that shortly led to the end of the initial period of the UPU parcel-rate structure. The UPU Congress in 1920 in Madrid led to major changes in the rate structure, and these became effective in 1921 – a subject for another article. ►

Extant Parcel Cards

For a collector, it may be of interest to know how rare or common parcel cards from the pre-1921 period are. The total number of address cards known for parcels sent during this period from Sweden to foreign countries may be around 300. The most common destination is Finland. A second group is Belgium, Russia, Switzerland, and Germany where 7-20 cards are known to each of these countries. Two to six cards are known for packages sent from Sweden to France, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Spain, Austria, and Turkey. Items are also known to Canada and The Netherlands, but on all these one or more stamps have been removed.

Items without any extra services are, of course, the most common. Insured cards are found quite often. COD items are quite rare and only about five express cards are known. Only one bulky-item card is so far known, and I have not seen any item with a return receipt requested. There is only one known copy of the second part of the COD address card used as a money order from abroad. These rarity listings only apply to parcels sent under the UPU conventions before 1921.

There were non-UPU and bilateral agreements used mainly for heavier items and for items to Denmark and Norway. I also know of three parcel cards to the United States from before 1920, which were sent using non-UPU rate agreements.

The above discussion could be confusing because of rate exceptions that were not noted. Much about the rates to various countries and for various services can be calculated, however, by accounting for the rates that one knows were applied, and subtracting that figure from the total fees that were paid. I offer to help readers decipher rates on cards they have if there are questions about how the rates were applied. ■

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