

9.1 PARCELS - INTRODUCTION

9.1.1 Some background

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the *Briefpost* (letter post, carried on horseback or fast coach, e.g. *Estafette*) was restricted in the weight that could be carried, and items should have no specified value. This was an administratively separate service to the carriage of heavier items or items of value for which insurance was required. This latter type of mail was sent via the *Fahrpost* (*kocsiposta*, travelling post, which also carried passengers and freight). Eventually the administrations of the two services were merged, but until both types of mail were regularly carried by train, typically from the 1870s onwards, this service separation continued. Only by about 1900 were the two services effectively merged and the term *Fahrpost* was dropped.

The charges for items sent by the *Fahrpost* were complex, and initially large rate tables were required for different forms of item, for example for ordinary goods, for silver in cash, or gold in cash. The charges were made up of the following:

- A basic charge;

- A charge based on weight and distance;

- A charge based on value and distance, equivalent to insurance.

In the days before motorised transport the *Fahrpost* was used for transporting a fascinating range of products, including fresh food, particularly vegetables and fruit, fish, live birds in cages, beer and wine, chemicals, even ammunition for firearms, as identifiable from the declared contents on parcel cards, although there were some restrictions.

The collector of early material is probably most interested in *Wertbriefe* (cover sheets or entire letters containing items of value, such as banknotes, small quantities of coins, small items of jewellery or jewellery materials, stocks, shares, bonds, etc.) which still exist in quantity. These mail items had initially to be taken to the post office open for inspection of the contents by the postal official, after which they were sealed by both customer and post office seals. This was to ensure that the correct contents were written on the front of the letter as a check against claiming a lower than actual value for insurance purposes, and as a check against pilfering *en route*. By 1850 it was possible to send an item pre-sealed by the customer, but this mail had to be stamped *Nach Angabe*, *Angeblich* or *Laut Angabe*, effectively meaning ‘not inspected’. In 1870, the need for a post office seal on pre-sealed mail was abandoned, although it remained possible to have the inspection for a raised price.

For other items, such as parcels of goods, not requiring insurance, there remains little material for collectors until the institution of *Frachtbriefe* (parcel letters) in 1867 [1] or pre-printed parcel stationery (initially *Frachtbrief* and later *Post-Begleitadresse* in German, or *Szállítólevél* (delivery letter) in Hungarian) in 1871 [2] which accompanied the parcel and gave details of content and delivery address.

The introduction throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire of a 5 *kr* tax on the conveyance of parcels from one party to another was through the *Gebuhrengesetzes* (tax laws) of 12.12.1862, coming into force on 01.01.1863. See also PuTVB no.50 of 1862 (not yet available on-line). This tax was prepaid in the form of a fiscal adhesive stamp to be placed on the parcel letter. There were exemptions for various (mainly State) institutions, for example the State Printing House sending out forms, stamps, etc., to provincial Postal Directorates. The 1871 decrees [2] introduced official stationery forms with the fiscal stamp imprinted on them (although privately prepared forms could use an adhesive fiscal stamp), and in the course of a few years these

changed from large paper forms to much smaller cards. With the change of currency in 1900, this tax became 10 *fillér* and remained at this level until the first inflation period of 1920-26 when it rose in steps up to 100 *Korona*. From 01.01.1927 it was 1 *fillér*, rising to 10 *fillér* from 19.10.1931. When the parcel service restarted after WWII the tax was set initially at 20 *fillér*, rising in steps to 1 *pengő*, 10 *pengő*, 100 *adó* (tax) *pengő* and 500 *adópengő*. With the stabilisation of the currency from 01.08.1946 it became 30 *fillér*.

Up to three parcels could be sent to the same address using a single card, thus paying the tax only once. From 01.01.1928 multi-parcel paper forms were introduced to speed up the process of handling, again paying the tax only once.

Details of the design and wording of the *Szállítólevél* forms can be found in references [3], [4] and [5].

Parcels addressed to outside the Empire involved mutual recognition between countries, customs declarations, valuations in *francs*, and are very complex and often dependent on third parties for transport, so are route dependent. For present purposes detailed analysis is outside the scope of the present work. Except for relatively recent times, it would require a date-wise analysis of rates to each individual country in the world for which reciprocal arrangements had been made.

Cash-on-delivery (COD) service commenced formally as soon the money order system was set up, and was used extensively as trade developed (see separate section). Foreign COD parcels could be arranged only between countries that had reciprocal money order services. The developed system remained in place until into the 20th century, but in recent years has become more complicated. See Sections 8.3 and 8.4.

Parcel charges are multifaceted and sometimes difficult to reconcile from the documentation available. Miscellaneous charges include bulky/oversize, perishable (much fresh food was sent by post), postage paid by the recipient (*Porto* charges), value declaration (insurance), cash-on-delivery, notification of arrival (at the recipient's post office - *Aviso* charges), storage (late collection) and home delivery.

The rate data tables reflect the available information, but not all charges are made clear in the PTRT documents.

Readers requiring further information on the early Austro-Hungarian *Fahrpost* practices are referred to reference [6].

References:

- [1] From 31.01.1867, **RGB 29, 21.01.1867** and explanatory text in **RGB 30** of the same date.
- [2] From 15.12.1871, **RGB 127, 14.10.1871**, corresponding with the introduction of COD stationery and a 5 *kr* fiscal duty imprint. The Hungarian version is **Ptrt 20, 18.11.1871**.
- [3] Hodobay, A., *Az illetékjegyes nyomtatványok, űrlapok, kártyazárjegyek és illetékbélyegzések katalógusa*, Budapest, 2016.
- [4] Schneiderbauer F., *Ganzsachen Oesterreich, Spezialkatalog und Handbuch*, 2nd edition, Krems/Donau, 1981.
- [5] Flóderer, I., *Magyar Okmánybélyegek Kézikönyve* (Handbook of the Hungarian revenues), 1990, ISBN 963 7392 661.
- [6] Kainbacher, P., *Handbuch der Brief-und Fahrpost von Oesterreich - Ungarn 1588 - 1918, I Band and II Band*, self-published, Köflach, Austria, 2000.