



Fig 2 — Examples of the Fox Street cancellations of 1936.

# The 'Wanderstempel' of Johannesburg

by George van den Hurk

In *Postal* of July 1983 Derrick Olmesdahl tells the story of the City and Suburban post office:

It is not often that a post office has a notice in the window advertising that the premises are TO LET.

The City and Suburban post office, established in 1927, was situated in Commissioner Street, Johannesburg.

When it opened, one small room was big enough for the requirements of that time, but within a few years the next door premises had to be acquired and the two rooms were made into one. This had to serve until December 1938 when it was found that much larger premises were essential as that part of the city was growing rapidly and had developed into an important business and engineering area. On 3 January 1939 a new post office, the name now changed to "Commissioner Street Post Office" was opened and the old vacated premises were to let.

When comparing the year of establishment in the story as told by Derrick Olmesdahl, with postmarks and covers in my collection, it was found that some information contained in the card-index of the post office museum was not quite correct and that in fact the story of the City and Suburban post office in Commissioner Street is more complicated than appears at first sight.

Fig 1 — Part of a registered cover postmarked Commissioner Street on 21 December 1921, before the office name change to Hollard Street in 1923.

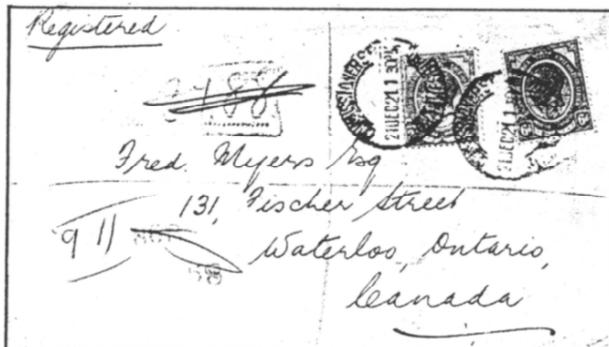


Fig 3 — Early City and Suburban registered cover dated stamped 17 December 1924. In 1938 the post office was renamed Commissioner Street.

The Commissioner Street post office was opened in 1920. The illustration shows a registered cover postmarked with a "Commissioner Street", Johannesburg, canceller dated 21 December 1921c (Fig 1) and backstamped on arrival in Canada on 19 January 1922. According to Post Office circular No 249 the name was changed to Hollard Street in 1923, and Hollard Street was renamed Fox Street in 1931.

It follows that there was no Commissioner Street post office by that name for the period 1923 until 1938, when the City and Suburban post office was renamed, as will be seen later.

One of the exhibits shown at JIPEX 1936 was provided through the courtesy of Mr McGuffog, postmaster of Johannesburg, and mounted by the Philatelic Society of Johannesburg. The exhibit is described in the exhibition brochure as "showing every type of postmark in use in the city at the present (1936) time."

There could not have been any Commissioner Street or Hollard Street postmarks in this collection, but it features, quite correctly for 1936, five different "Fox Street" cancellers. (Fig 2).

The City and Suburban post office was opened in 1923. A registered letter in my collection is postmarked "City & Suburban, Johannesburg" and dated 17 December 1924. (Fig 3). The McGuffog collection contains one double circle datestamp (Fig 4) and one single circle relief type datestamp. (Fig 5). It is quite well possible that the large double circle datestamp in-

Fig 4 and 5 — City and Suburban postmarks in use in 1936.

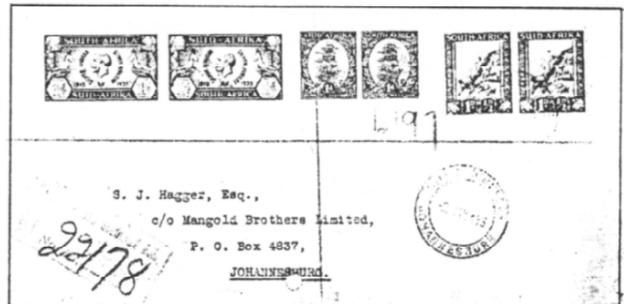


Fig 6 — The City and Suburban strike on a 1935 cover registered to Mr Jack Hagger RDPSA.

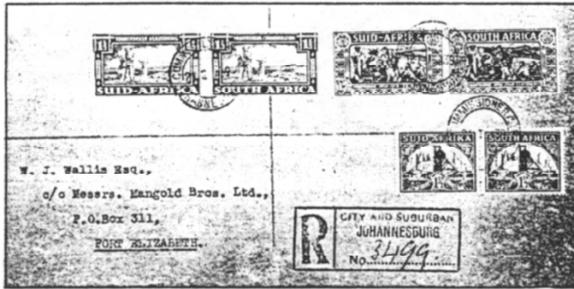


Fig 7 — Part of a registered cover with the Commissioner Street postmark yet the City and Suburban registration cachet.

roduced in 1923 as shown on the registered letter of 1924, became worn out and was replaced by the relief datestamp because all three strikes cancelling three pairs of stamps on a registered letter addressed to S J Hagger, Esq, dated 2 May 1935, are very faint indeed and can hardly be seen. (Fig 6); or were perhaps the nearly invisible cancels done at the request of S J Hagger Esq?

As mentioned in the story by Derrick Olmesdahl, on 3 January 1939 a new post office, the name now changed to

Fig 8 — Registration label of Commissioner St/Str overprinted EXCOM, 1978.



“Commissioner Street Post Office”, was opened and the old vacated premises of the City and Suburban post office were to let.

The change of name is vividly illustrated by a registered cover postmarked “Commissioner/str., Johannesburg”, dated 21 January 1939, but it still shows the old registration cachet of “City and Suburban, Johannesburg”. (Fig 7). There cannot, therefore, be any doubt that Commissioner Street and City and Suburban were housed in one and the same office in 1939.

Forty years later: l’histoire se repète, when in 1978 the Commissioner Street Post Office situated at the corner of Nugget and Fox Streets put up signs “to let”, is moved to the corner of Mooi and School streets and is renamed “EXCOM”; this is illustrated by a registered letter dated 10 November 1978 with the old registration label of “Commissioner st./str.”, however, now over-stamped in red, “EXCOM”, and soon afterwards replaced by “EXCOM” registration labels.

I would like to thank Derrick Olmesdahl and the Post Office Museum in Pretoria for their assistance with research, Mr S J Hagger RDPSA for material and information supplied.