

## The Marconi Station at Banana

by

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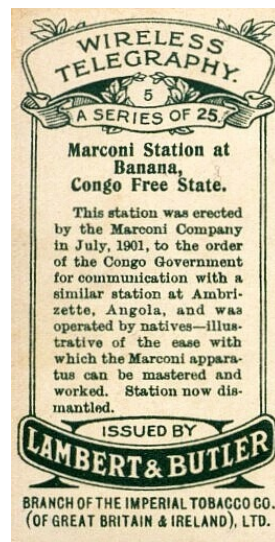
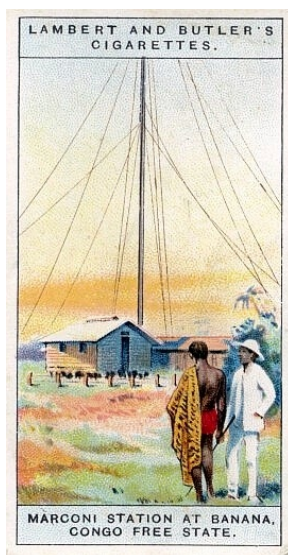
You will be forgiven if you don't immediately associate the words Marconi and Banana. Banana was a port in the Congo Free State, as the Belgian Congo was known in the latter 1800's when it was ruled personally by Belgium's King Leopold II, and the location of an early Marconi station radiotelegraph station. The Congo Free State became a colony of Belgium in 1908, the year before Leopold died. It suffered grievously from the plundering of its natural resources and the atrocities perpetrated against the native peoples.

Banana was (and still is) located at the mouth of the Congo River, where it reaches the Atlantic. A station was also to be set up at Ambrizette (today N'zeto), in Angola, from which wireless messages

received from Banana (including messages sent to Banana via "pigeon post" from Boma, the Congo's then-capital) would be sent to Luanda by wire, thence to Europe by cable. Such were the intentions circa 1901-02, anyway. It appears that the plan was interrupted, and came to fruition only around 1911, when the Banana station finally went into operation.



The undated postcard at left shows the Banana facility, as does the Lambert & Butler cigarette card, which dates from around 1909.



Some manufacturers included such cards in cigarette packs in those days. (For more on cigarette cards, click [here](#).) The text extract below is from Britain's *The Electrical Review* of April 29, 1904 (p. 714). For more on radio and the town of Banana, see Adrian Peterson's "Banana Land Radio" in *Wavescan*, [No. N239](#), September 22, 2013.

**Congo Free State.** — In "Some Congo Impressions," set down by Mr. A. Arkele-Hardwick, and published in the current issue of the *African World*, the writer thus describes a visit he paid to the local Marconi station at Banana:—"The instruments are set up in a little shed, with walls of palm stems; the dynamo, oil engine, and accumulators being housed in a more substantial building a few yards away. The operator was trying to get into communication with Ambrizette, a port in the Portuguese territory, two days' steam to the south, but had not yet succeeded at the time of my visit. It was explained that they hoped to get through in the coming wet season, as in the dry season there was not what electricians would call a "good earth."