

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS, 1800 - 1901

Purpose: This exhibit traces the postal history of the Straits Settlements (principally comprising Malacca, Penang, and Singapore) until the end of Queen Victoria's reign in 1901.

Background: British presence in the settlements arose from the outward expansion of operations of the East India Company which before 1800 was firmly established in India. Control of Penang Island (1786) was followed by the first occupation of Malacca (1795), and the acquisition of the island of Singapore (1819). From these footholds, British presence grew and its influence extended to the native states of Malaya through agreements providing for British advisers to their rulers and placing them under British protection. Postal operations among the settlements and native states were integrated.

Organization: The exhibit is divided into two main sections: **The Prestamp Period** shows mail from the settlements under different colonial or postal administration phases of the East India Company. **The Stamp Period** shows usages of the "India" and "East India" stamps until 1867, and of the "crown colony" stamps period thereafter. The Straits Settlements joined the UPU in 1877; the exhibit concludes in 1901 (end of Queen Victoria's reign).



The Straits Settlements were located in the west side of, and at the tip of the Malayan Peninsula, along the Straits of Malacca, with the island of Sumatra to the west

The Prestamp Period: Early mail from Malacca, Penang, and Singapore during the early prestamp period are scarce or in some cases rare (those with postal markings recorded few in number). The early letters were mainly from missionaries, the military, or commercial firms, mostly going to England. The mail route was mainly via the Cape of Good Hope to southern England. Extension of operations of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) into the Indian Ocean (in 1842) and establishment of the overland route were major events in postal developments during this period.

The Stamp Period: This period started in 1854 with introduction of "India" postage stamps (as postal affairs of the settlements were under the control of the Postmaster-General, Bengal, and later under the Inspector of Posts, Burma). Upon attaining "crown colony" status in 1867, Straits Settlements postage stamps were issued starting with provisional overprints on then current India stamps. The opening of the Suez Canal (1869), extension of European rule in Southeast Asia, and expansion of P&O services increased the importance of the Straits of Malacca, and of Singapore, with corresponding increase in volume of trade (and of mail). Unoverprinted Straits Settlements stamps were used in the native Malay states, the Philippines, and Netherlands East Indies during this period.

Items of rarity or particular significance are matted in gold. *Texts in italics at the bottom of a page are not necessary for understanding the exhibited item but intended as additional information or historical background.*