

# ATTILIO GATTI – AFRICAN ADVENTURER

## Background

This single-frame exhibit chronicles the adventures of Attilio Gatti, an Italian cavalry officer, who developed a love for African exploration. Beginning in 1924, he led a series of thirteen expeditions to the Dark Continent. According to promotional literature of one of the expeditions, these experiences “*made Attilio Gatti today one of the greatest living African explorers, a leading authority on the topography and wild life—both human and animal—of Africa.*”

## Importance

This exhibit is the first to chronicle the philatelic aspects of the 9<sup>th</sup> through 13<sup>th</sup> Gatti African expeditions (the only Gatti expeditions for which mail is known).

Gatti’s historical importance is multi-faceted:

- Gatti extensively used the mail as a method of promotion. Promotional postcards and letters were mailed from the expeditions.
- He employed special expedition cancels and sometimes cachets on the expedition’s mail.
- He was a master of self-promotion, with numerous advertising tie-ins with corporations.
- He was a prolific author of books and magazine articles about his expeditions.

## Exhibit Highlights

1. The only recorded cover from the 9th Gatti Africa Expedition to the Belgian Congo, the “Gatti Zoological Expedition” of 1936.
2. A postcard from a member of the 10th Expedition to the Belgian Congo and Ruanda Urundi in 1939 to a friend at home.
3. A registered cover containing a Flexograph (a recorded dictation on a flexible disk) from Gatti during the 11th Expedition to East Africa in 1948, most likely containing material for a book. Also a ham-radio QSL card from the expedition in Uganda (only 233 sent).

Difficulty of  
Acquisition

This exhibit is the culmination of 30 years of searching for material from the Gatti expeditions. Because the expedition mail was used as commercial promotion (and not for philatelists), it is not clear how much expedition mail survives. Included in the exhibit is personal communication from expedition members – much more difficult to find than the standard promotional mail.

Research

An extensive philatelic story of Attilio Gatti is found in:  
“Attilio Gatti, African Adventurer”, Regis Hoffman. *The American Philatelist*. January 2016.

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