

**HISTORY OF THE
TELEPHONE AND
TELEGRAPH IN
BRAZIL, 1851-1921**

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History of the Telephone and Telegraph in Brazil, 1851-1921 by Victor M. Berthold

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VICTOR M. BERTHOLD

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Telephone and Telegraph
in
Brazil

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By
VICTOR M. BERTHOLD
of the
American Telephone and Telegraph Company

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Transport

BRAZIL

Area: 3,276,358 square miles

Population: 30,553,000 (census of 1920)

Capital: Rio de Janeiro. Population 1,130,000 (census of 1920)

STATE TELEGRAPH

Introduction and Development under the Empire, 1851-1889

The introduction of the telegraph in Brazil is contemporaneous with the war waged by the Empire from 1851 to 1854 in defense of Uruguay against the Argentine dictator, Rosas. According to the "Memoria Historica"* Euzebio de Queiroz Coutinho Mattoso da Camara, then Minister of Justice, notified the Director of Semaphores on May 5, 1851, that he had decided to replace the optical telegraph with the then recently invented electric telegraph. In the same year the Brazilian Minister at Washington, Sergio Teixeira de Macedo, transmitted to his home government a proposal of J. L. Leonardt, a citizen of the United States, to interconnect various important cities of Brazil by electric telegraph lines. This offer, however, was not accepted.

It is reported that Euzebio de Queiroz decided to discontinue the slow-working optical telegraph, which up to that time had been the only means of transmitting messages in Brazil, as rapid communication

*Official publication of the Brazilian Telegraph Administration, printed in Rio de Janeiro, 1909.

between Rio de Janeiro and the port of Mangaratiba had become imperative so as to prevent the illegal landing of slaves, which was a frequent occurrence in those days. To carry out this project Euzebio de Queiroz instructed Dr. Paula Candido, a professor at the School of Medicine, to build a short trial line between the police headquarters in the capital and the optical telegraph station on Castello Hill. Dr. Candido, with the assistance of Colonel Polydoro Q. da Fonseca Jordão, police commissioner, secured the loan of a telegraph apparatus from Dr. G. Schüch de Capanema, professor of physics at the Escola Central. A few days later the Colonel, bitterly disappointed, returned the apparatus to the professor, saying: "Tome lá as suas machinas que não prestam." (Take back your apparatus which is useless.) He soon learned, however, that he was mistaken, for Dr. Capanema connected up the apparatus properly and gave Colonel Polydoro an actual demonstration of electrical transmission. Realizing the value of the new means of electrical communication, Colonel Polydoro went immediately to Queiroz and obtained from him an order instructing Dr. Capanema to build a line from Quinta Imperial, the country residence of the Emperor, to the Quartel do Campo, the military headquarters. This line, although constructed with cheap material, operated satisfactorily, and on May 11, 1852, telegrams were exchanged between the Emperor and Queiroz and Capanema, both stationed at military headquarters. This date is officially recognized as the date of the introduction of the telegraph in Brazil. Shortly after this took place the Consul of Brazil in Prussia was requested to

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obtain five sets of Morse duplex telegraph apparatus and some line material. This equipment was received from Europe in the following year and a line was constructed between the various military establishments and the capital.

The first ordinance relating to the electric telegraph was issued by the Minister of Justice on January 17, 1864, and provided for the telegraphic interconnection of important administrative offices.

In Brazil, as in many other countries, the electric telegraph lacked the support of the public during its early development. In fact, an examination of the newspapers published in Rio de Janeiro during this period shows that there were the usual scoffers who predicted that, on account of the climatic conditions prevailing in Brazil, that country was unsuited for the successful use of the electric telegraph. Undaunted by such statements, however, Dr. Capanema commenced the construction of a line from the capital to Petropolis. The total length of this line was 50 kilometers (about 31 miles) of which 15 kilometers consisted of a submarine cable. By an imperial ordinance of March 17, 1855, Dr. Capanema was appointed Director Geral dos Telegraphos Electricos (Director General of Electric Telegraphs), and was requested to create an administrative office known as Direcção Geral.

The electric telegraph was used for official business only until 1858, when on August 1st the Government opened the Prainha-Mauá-Fragoso-Petropolis line to the public.

The first "Reglamento" or rules and regulations governing the telegraph service are embodied in

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decree No. 2614 of July 21, 1860, which stated that the telegraph service should be placed under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works. This decree prescribed that service should be furnished to the public between the hours of 6 A.M. and 6 P.M. in summer and 7 A.M. and 5 P.M. in winter, and established a tariff consisting of a charge of 80 reis* (2.6 cents) per word for a message of 20 words and 40 reis (1.3 cents) for each additional 20 words.

From 1852 to 1860 the Government spent 136,863 milreis (\$45,165) upon the electric telegraph, of which 68,993 milreis (\$22,768) was for salaries and wages and the balance for material. In 1861, nine years after the inauguration of the telegraph in Brazil, the total extension of line was 65 kilometers (about 40 miles), consisting of the Prainha-Petropolis line of 50 kilometers and 15 kilometers of line within the city of Rio de Janeiro. At that time there were 10 telegraph offices and 16 sets of telegraph apparatus in the country.

Decree No. 3519 of September 30, 1865, changed the telegraph tariff of 1860 and made the rate for an ordinary telegram of 20 words sent over a line of 200 kilometers (124 miles) one milreis (33 cents), with a further charge of 500 reis (16.5 cents) for each additional 10 words. This rate increased proportionally for each additional 200 kilometers of line.

From 1865 to 1870 the Empire employed all its resources in carrying on the sanguinary war against the Paraguayan dictator, Francisco Lopez, who had invaded Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. Robert P.

*One paper milreis (1,000 reis) approximately 33 cents in U. S. currency.

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Porter, in his book "The Ten Republics," states that this war cost Brazil £50,000,000 (about \$243,000,000), and adds, "an expenditure which indicates the material progress she had made, since it did not quite ruin her." It was in the second year of the war that Dr. Capanema conceived the idea of having a telegraph train accompany the field forces and to use the telegraph for connecting the military headquarters in Tuyu-Cué with the advance guards. At the outbreak of the war the Government instructed the Director of Telegraphs to build a line from the capital to Porto Alegre, which line was opened in September, 1866. Later on Rio de Janeiro was placed in telegraphic connection with Tijuca and Botafogo, and the line from the fortress of Santa Cruz was extended to Nictheroy.

Although the rules and regulations stated that the electric telegraph constituted a monopoly of the Government, decree No. 4350 of April 5, 1868, provided for competitive telegraph service by private companies. In accordance with this decree a 20-year concession was granted to F. A. Kieffer for the construction of a telegraph line between Rio de Janeiro and Ouro Preto, with branch lines to Rezende and S. João da Barra.

Under decree No. 4491 of March 23, 1870, Charles T. Bright, E. B. Webb, and William Jones received a 60-year concession to lay a submarine cable to the north and south of Rio de Janeiro, the northern terminal to be the city of Pará (province of Pará) and the southern S. Pedro (province of Rio Grande do Sul), thus practically extending along the entire coast of Brazil. This concession also gave the