

Rev. Gertrude Snyder: Article - Writes of Long Journey to Interior Congo

Brookland Daily Eagle Date: SEPT 18, 1896; Page 14 [go back...](#)



Long Journey to Luebo Station

Mrs Gertrude Snyder:

REVOLT OF CAPTIVES IN CONGO FREE STATE.

First News of the Uprising Sent
to the Eagle by Mrs.

Snyder,

A FORMER BROOKLYNITE.

Description of the Long Journey to the
Luebo Station in the
Interior.

The following communication to the Eagle will be read with interest by residents of Brooklyn, not only for the fact that it contains news of a small rebellion in the dark continent, which has not heretofore been given to the world, but because the writer, Mrs. Gertrude Wood Snyder, was a former resident of this borough, where she had hosts of friends and acquaintances.

Mrs. Snyder is the daughter of the late Ebenezer Wood, who was well known in Brooklyn, where he long resided. Mr. Wood was for many years a trustee of the Twenty-third Regiment Veterans' Association, was identified with church and philanthropic interests and a prominent figure in the real estate business world. Miss Wood was married about a year and a half ago to the Rev. Mr. Snyder, an English clergyman, with whom she left to enter the missionary field in Africa. Her letter to the Eagle, which is given below, will afford an excellent idea of the conditions which surround her field of duty:



Tuesday we found every seat engaged—there are only twenty—so we waited until Friday. In a letter recently received a friend says, "We speak sometimes of 'waiting a week' for a car in Brooklyn, but you actually did so out there."

The description in my previous letter of our railroad trip from Boma would answer very well for this trip also. The same narrow gauge track, tiny engine and cars, the same wild, beautiful scenery as before. Undoubtedly the railroad is a remarkable evidence of engineering skill, when we consider the enormous difficulties to be overcome. The large, well built bridge over the Nkissi River is also a most commendable piece of work and impresses one at once as a really remarkable sight in this wild region. In one place the road appears to be laid on mountain tops. One sees other high hills like great sea waves on every hand and the train never appears to descend into the valley. From the top of Palla Balla Mountain the wildest scenery enchants the eye. Winding down one great mountain we see a bridge three times before we actually cross it.

The first day we traveled from 7 A. M. until 4 P. M., stopping then for the night at Ntumba, a small state post about midway between Matadi and Leopoldville. Here we stayed in a tiny house belonging to the English Baptist Missionary Association. At 6 the next morning off we started again.

Tyranny of State Authorities.

Luebo, Congo Free State,
Kassai District, Africa, May 25, 1900.

To the Editor of the Brooklyn Eagle:

Word has just come to us of important happenings at the capital of the state in which we live, in an account of which the readers of your paper will, I feel sure, be interested. But little is known outside of Congo land of the tyranny of the state authorities over the poor, helpless native, nor of the dread which these people have of Bula Matadi, as they call the state, as represented by its executives. This name, Bula Matadi, was first given to Stanley when the natives saw him breaking rocks to make paths. Matadi means rocks. The town of that name is so called because of its rocky situation and surroundings. Bula expresses the idea of breaking, and since Stanley's advent all who have come opening paths, etc., have been called Bula Matadi. Now the name represents the executive force of the state.

Some three years ago Dhanis, the great Belgian explorer went to the headwaters of the Nile, taking with him as soldiers a large company of Batatela. These people had been forcibly taken from their homes, their wives and children given, probably, to the Catholic missions, for such is the usual mode of procedure, and the men forced into service by the state authorities. Somewhere on this expedition the unwilling soldiers revolted and ran away with great quantities of ammunition and guns. The majority of them were afterward captured and sent to the capital, Boma, where they were kept chained together by twos, ill fed, very scantily clad even for natives, and made to work hard. As far as we can learn this seems to be the history of them. When we landed at Boma we saw numbers of them, forlorn looking creatures indeed, thin and sad faced, who came on board to remove the baggage of the state officers, closely guarded by soldiers well armed.

Prisoners Revolt at the Capital.

Now the news has come to us that on April 17 these prisoners, having begged to be allowed to return to their far away home in peace, and being refused permission to do so, rose in desperation, killed the white man in charge of the arsenal, captured guns and cannon and actually bombarded the capital city.

Expensive Railway Journey.

We were much interested to notice in two or three places along the way quite a stretch of fine white sand as clean and pretty as Sea Gate or Brighton can boast, far removed from any marsh or river but suggesting that this very region may once have been the bed of some mighty river. Just as the sun was setting we reached Leopoldville, the terminus of the road. We would suggest that any one wishing for a unique, delightful little trip should run over to Matadi and take this journey. The tickets are \$100 each, the distance 275 miles and a well filled lunch basket is a necessity, as no restaurants are to be found along the way and the train boasts no dining car.

In Leopoldville we waited eight days for a river steamer to bring us to our journey's end, and at last on the morning of January 29 bade our missionary friends goodby and started once more on our travels. I wish I might paint you a vivid picture of that state steamer the Ville du Bruxelles as we know her after spending thirty-seven days upon her. In size about eighty feet by twenty, dirty, out of repair, slow, ill kept, she rises before our mental vision like some horrid dream.

On the upper deck there was barely room for the twelve passengers to place their chairs and sit in comfort. Here, too, were the cabins. Our room, eight feet by five, was assigned us, nothing furnished but a small shelf and a few nails to hang clothes upon. It is needless to say we lived as much as possible on deck, for when once our various trunks and other baggage had been deposited therein the room was no longer empty looking.

One small cot bed was all our space allowed to be put up and Dr. Snyder was obliged to make himself as comfortable as possible in his deck chair during those weary, hot, mosquito infested nights. On the deck below us natives were huddled together like sheep (black) in company with goats, dogs, pigs and chickens. It was here, too, that our food was cooked by a native boy, and here that the wood gathered at night by the Bangala workman was chopped for the engine fire.

Unique Table Service.

The table was spread with unbleached muslin and when we had been on board some eighteen or twenty days this piece of muslin accidentally caught fire and the necessity furnished us with a clean cloth. The napkins at the beginning were strips of the same material half a yard by the width of the muslin. These gradually diminished in size as the days went by, the most soiled portions being torn away to obviate the need of laundering.

The great steamship *Albertville*, plying between Antwerp and Matadi, was just coming into port, and upon her the natives fired, causing her to retreat in all haste back to Matadi. They have started up country, we hear, but, of course, the Senegalese soldiers were at once dispatched after them, and the chances that any of the *Batatela* will ever see home or family again are less than nothing.

The Hardships of Travel.

From the capital of the Congo Free State, Boma, to this little settlement at Luebo appears but a small distance on the map, and with an Empire State Express in mind a distance easily traversed, and yet to us it meant two months of weary travel. We left Boma on Sunday morning, January 14, and in a few hours, having passed safely through the whirlpool, found one stage of our journey at an end. Here, at Matadi, we bade our genial Captain Sparrow of the Stanleyville good by and went at once to the home of a Swedish missionary, situated delightfully on a bluff overlooking the river. Here we were obliged to remain until Friday waiting for a train. Passenger trains run from Matadi to Leopoldville on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Tickets must be purchased and baggage attended to the day before. This we could not do on Sunday. On



Our food consisted of goats' meat, chickens, pork, soup, yams, coffee (?) and cake and pancakes wonderful to see and more wonderful to digest. It was a slow journey. Often we stopped at 2 in the afternoon and remained on the edge of some deep dark forest until 6 the next morning. No traveling is ever done on the rivers at night. The steamer carried us within three days of Luebo, then turned aside and took us on a thirteen days' trip up the Sankura River to Lusambo, an important state post. In spite of the discomforts of the trip no one with an eye for the beautiful and a heart responsive to the wonders of God's creation could fail to thoroughly enjoy the beauty of the scenery on either side of the river. New and magnificent varieties of trees, great vines making of dead trees lovely imitations of old world ivy clad ruins, feathery palms large and small, and here and there new foliage of vivid scarlet lighting up the soft, deep green.

Here I made the acquaintance of hippopotami, elephants, monkeys, crocodiles and brilliantly plumaged birds in their native elements, and of strange, dark skinned uncivilized brothers and sisters of ours for whom Christ died and who know it not. As the steamer reached Luebo on the afternoon of March 6 and my husband and I received the welcome accorded to us by hundreds of natives so delighted to see their friend "Ngangabuka," as they call Dr. Snyder, we felt that in spite of the trials, the noise, the poor accommodations and food and our first experience with the African fever, and because of the work, the education, and the manifested mercy and goodness of God we were glad we had come to minister to this people and teach them as best we can. We are quite settled now in our little home at Luebo, and in subsequent letters I shall be glad to tell the *Eagle* readers of the people among whom we labor and of the life in this far away land.

GERTRUDE WOOD SNYDER.



Would you like to [go back...](#)
or return to home page? [click here.](#)