

AN INTRODUCTION TO *Italian* LAKE MAIL

ON LAGO MAGGIORE

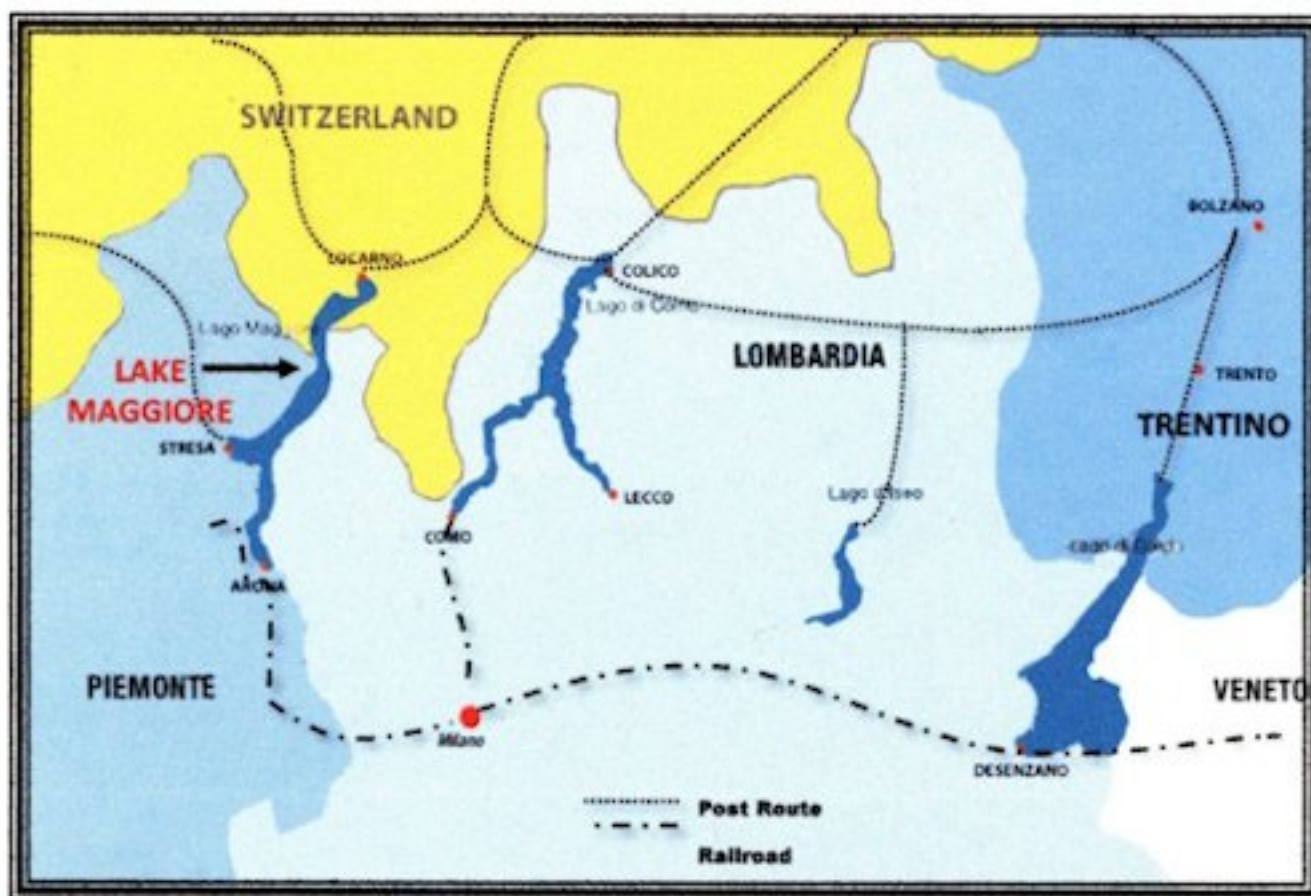


The lakes of northern Italy sit at the base of the Alps. Until the first third of the twentieth century, before the mountain tunnels of the railroads, the rocky routes along the lake shores were difficult and dangerous. Using small steamers on the four major lakes was an easier way to connect area mail to the European postal routes. This is a synoptic exhibit intended to provide an overview of the use of small steamers to carry the mails in the lake region. On the four major lakes, Maggiore, Como, di Garda and d'Iseo, the steamer use for the mails was essentially the same in time and method. This exhibit uses Lake Maggiore as the exemplar of lake mail service. There was no special rate or surcharge for use of the steamers. Though utilized from 1808 to 1939, the service is most notable from 1855 until 1910, the emphasis here. As time advanced, the type of markings broadly identify the way in which the mail was handled and tell the story of how the steamers were used for the mail.

POSTAL MARKING PERIODS

1807 ————— 1851 ————— 1890 ————— 1939

ENTRY/TRANSIENT MARKS SHIP POST OFFICES POSTAL MESSENGERS



Italy's Lake District during the lake mail period showing major postal routes connecting with the lakes.

ORGANIZATION:

PRECURSORS. Entry & transient marks indicating lake travel.

TRAVELLING POST OFFICES aboard the steamers.

STEAMER ADMINISTRATION

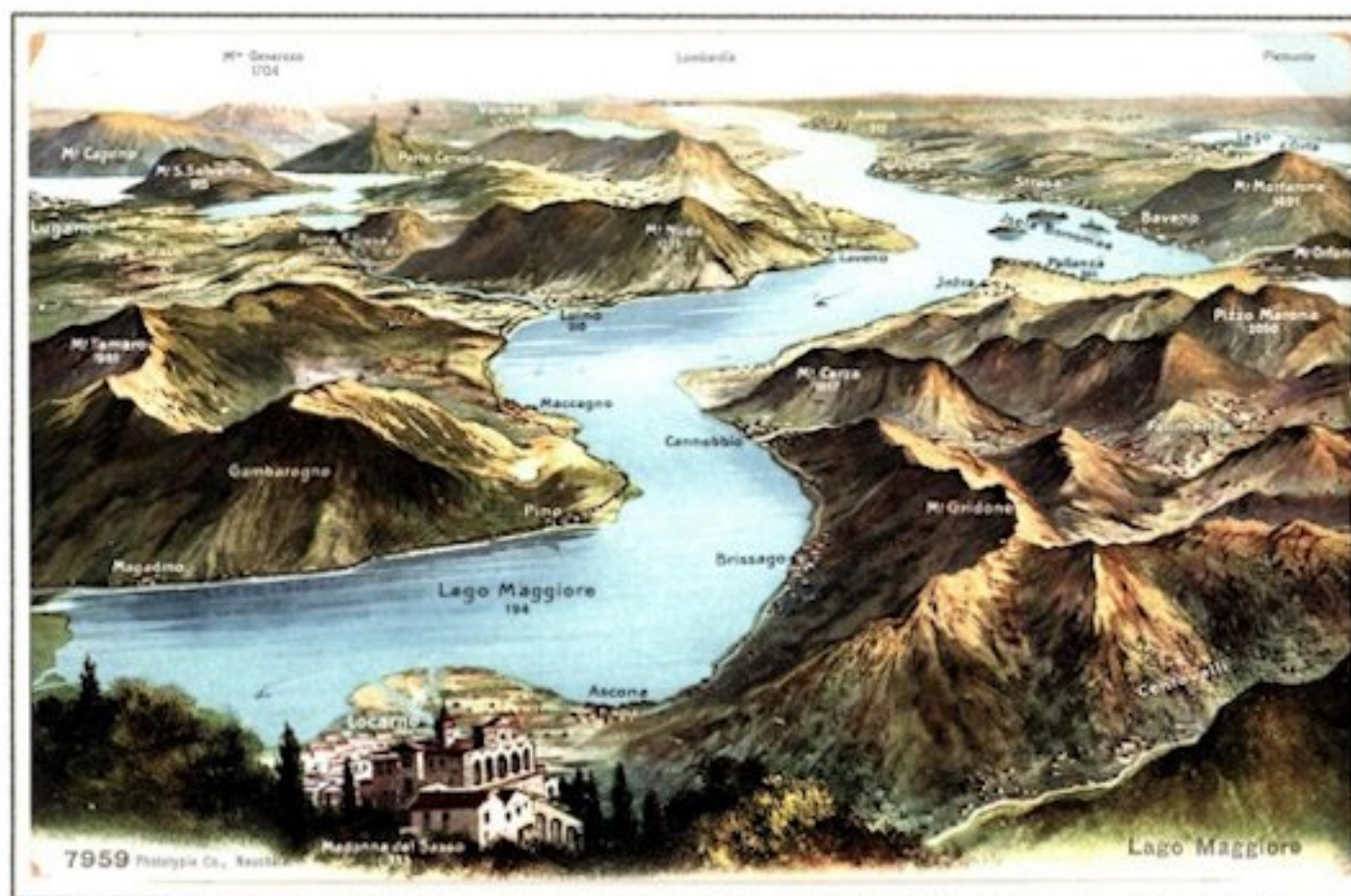
COLLETORE. Markings applied to mail collected at intermediate stops denoting its origin.

SWISS POSTAL AGENCIES along the lake.

MESSAGGERI. Shipboard postal messengers when on-board post offices were discontinued.

THE OTHER LAKES. Como, Di Garda, D'Iseo.

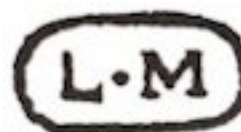
The lakes of northern Italy, particularly Lake Maggiore, are probably among the oldest inland waterways in the world to be used by the post. Lake Maggiore provided entry to European mail routes. There are few extant letters known before 1800, and little is known of the mails until the first steamer was introduced on Lake Maggiore in 1826.



Postcard of Lake Maggiore looking south from Switzerland into Italy showing lake mail towns in both countries. (Printed in Italy, Phototype Co.)



The first lake mail markings to appear indicated exit and entry points. The earliest postal marking was a Swiss "L.M." The *few known* of this marking are lightly struck and from the same correspondence. There is no consensus on the meaning of "L.M." Possibilities are "Lago Maggiore," "Locarno-Magadino." It is most likely an entry mark into Switzerland struck at Magadino.



January 9, 1810. Intra to Schwyz. Faint L.M. marking is at the upper left.

Before post offices and/or clerks (messaggeri) were established on the steamers, lake mail is identified by entry and exit marks placed on the covers.



verso of cover to left.

Intra straight line town handstamp used to denote the entry point of the letter from the lake. Note the manuscript "Lago Maggiore." Cover sent down the lake from Locarno to Intra (Italy) in 1843.

Two covers at right show the two known "VIA" markings on the Lake. They are entry marks that replaced a straightline town handstamp.

VIA DI ARONA



Milan to Borgomanero. Most likely entered the lake at Sesto Calende, exiting at Arona. ARF marking (Franked Frontier Region) refers to the Sardinian border.

VIA DI CANOBBIO



Swiss mark—Canton Ticino. Probably struck at Locarno. This marking most likely represents entry onto the steamer. It is also used for entry into Locarno from the steamers.



1846 letter from Tegna, Switzerland (former municipality of Locarno) to Genoa.



1848 letter sent from Chanbery, France to Morges, Switzerland. Routing was most likely from France to Arona, up the lake with entry into Switzerland at Magadino.

C.S.I.R.

Correspondenza Sarda 1 Raggio.
(Sardinian Mail from Region 1)

Entry mark first used in 1839 was applied in a number of Italian lake towns. On the cover to the left, it was probably applied in Arona.

TRAVELLING POST OFFICES: *Radetsky*

Though mail had been continuously transported on the lake, the first instance of a travelling (floating) post office was not until 1851. Austrian steamship service was established in 1851 with the *SS Radetsky*. Service was up and down the Po and Ticino rivers and on to Switzerland via Lake Maggiore. This was a short lived service when Austria lost control of Lombardy in 1859.



First marking of any lake steamer, c. 1851. Marking was applied on the *Radetsky* where mail was processed on board. *Eight known.*



Modern replica of the *SS Radetsky*. Ship was originally built in 1851.

On Lake Maggiore, the first of the Italian traveling post offices was on the steamer *Verbano*. Three steamers were named the *Verbano*. The last one entered service in 1876. Approximately 30 boats sailed from 1823 to 1950.



First regular post office cancellation is from the first Italian lake steamer with a post office, *Verbano*. From Grono, Switzerland (marking upper left) to Canobbio, 1854.

In 1855 an additional mail steamer was added. The ships were identified as *Verbano* No. 1 or *Verbano* No. 2. It is believed the numbers referred to the post office on each boat.



As a killer, rectangle lozenges were used with a number in the center. Lake Maggiore used 226–229. Even numbers were assigned to #1 and odd to #2.



August 1856 letter to Genova. There is no other marking of origin other than the *Verbano* post office #2 and the 229 killer. Pays 20c Sardinian domestic letter rate.



By this time, with multiple ships traveling the lake, Verbano identified the two post offices rather than the ship. Offices were identified as #1 and #2. Later, the direction of the steamer's travel was included on the postmark, probably for accountancy.



1856 letter, Intra to Magadino. Charged at 20c half rate, sent within 30 miles of border.

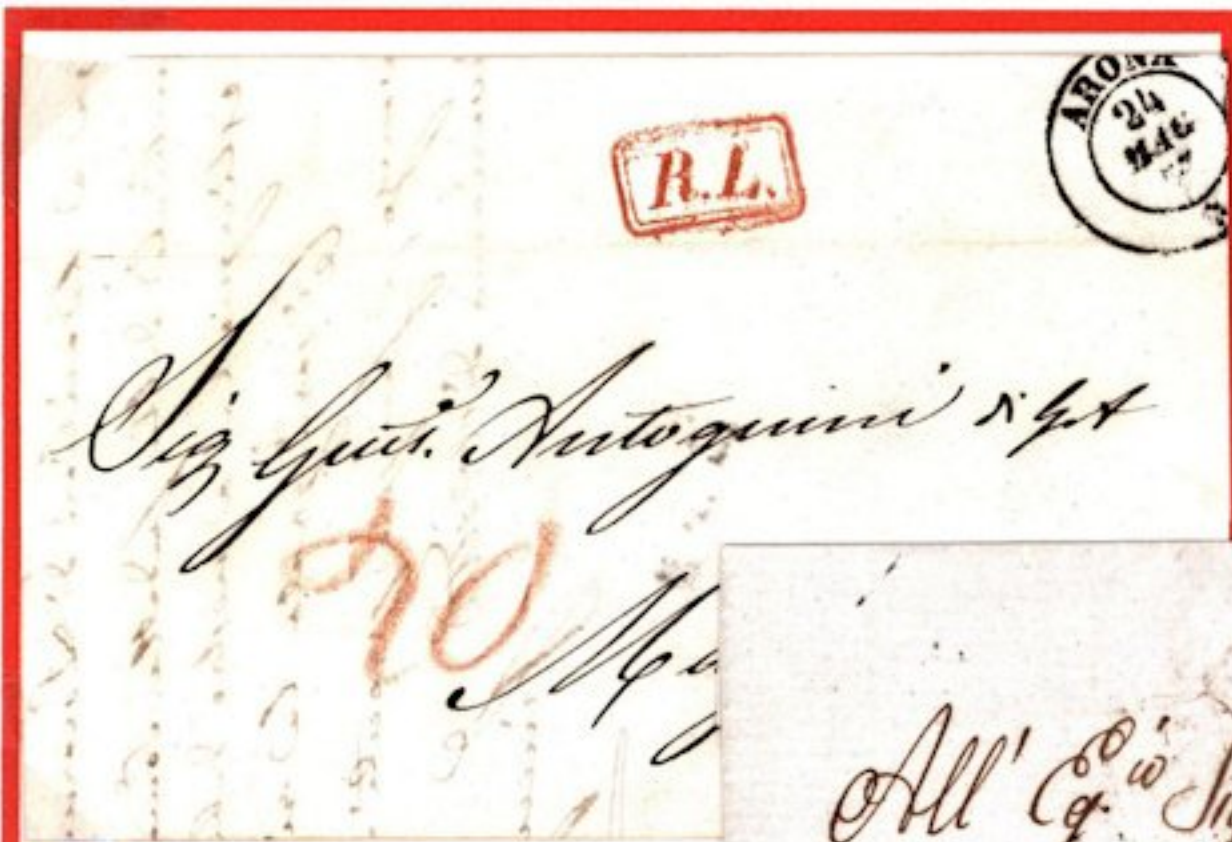


P.D.
Struck from ship #1.



ABOVE: 1872, Udine to Magadina. Boarded at Arona. Double weight letter. Northbound (Ascendente).

TO LEFT: 1872. Vercelli to Torino is not on the lake route. Evidently mailed from a northern area of the lake. 20 c standard rate. Southbound (Discendente).



Arona to Magadino, 1855 with only known red Italian Marking

Locarno, Switzerland to Intra, Italy along the lake, 1862 with only known use of this unlisted Swiss RL marking.

The RL marking (Rayon Limitrophe or Raggio Limitrofo) was applied by the steamer. postal clerk. Used by both Sardinia and Switzerland, the mark indicated 1/2 rate for a limited zone around the border – 20 centesimi for letters within a radius of 30 kilometers of the border. Other than the marking shown below, there are two other common varieties, one Sardinian and one Swiss.



Sardinian accountancy mark for unpaid mail struck on the steamer. Less than 20 known. 1855 Genova to Würzburg via Verbano and Rorschach. Charge is 21 Rheinische Kreuzer: 6 Sardinian transit, 6 Swiss transient, 9 German internal transit more than 150km.

Diritto { Sardo
Estero

Sardinian postage due label with Verbano postmark. Bergen, Germany to Frankfort through Lake Maggiore to Turin to Genova, 1853. Postage due is 1.40 Lire for international and .40 Lire for domestic service. Only three known Sardinian due labels used on lake mail.

105

BERGHEF 21

VERBANO 31

(N.º 200 bis) **POSTE SARDE**

TASSA cumulativa dei diritti dovuti ad Uffici Esteri e della tassa interna, da pagarsi dal destinatario della lettera qui annessa, cioè;

| | Lire | Cent. |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1º Diritto Estero | 1 | 40 |
| 2º Tassa interna | | 40 |
| TOTALE L. | 1. | 80 |

N. B La presente cartolina non dovrà mai staccarsi dalla lettera che accompagna.

Later steamer markings eliminated Verbano and identified the route by the termini—Magadino in Switzerland and Arona in Italy. The post office number was still used for the three offices. The single circle markings were introduced at the post office in 1877, but did not find their way to the Natanti (ships) until 1878 and were used into the 1890s.

There are a number of varieties to the single circle marking, but all showed the termini and post office number. These cards show two different varieties of the postmark.

The postcard rate beginning in 1879 was the same for domestic or international use.



Northbound, 1890 Pallanza to Basel, Switzerland pays the 10c external postcard rate of the period. To the left is the Basel receiving mark.



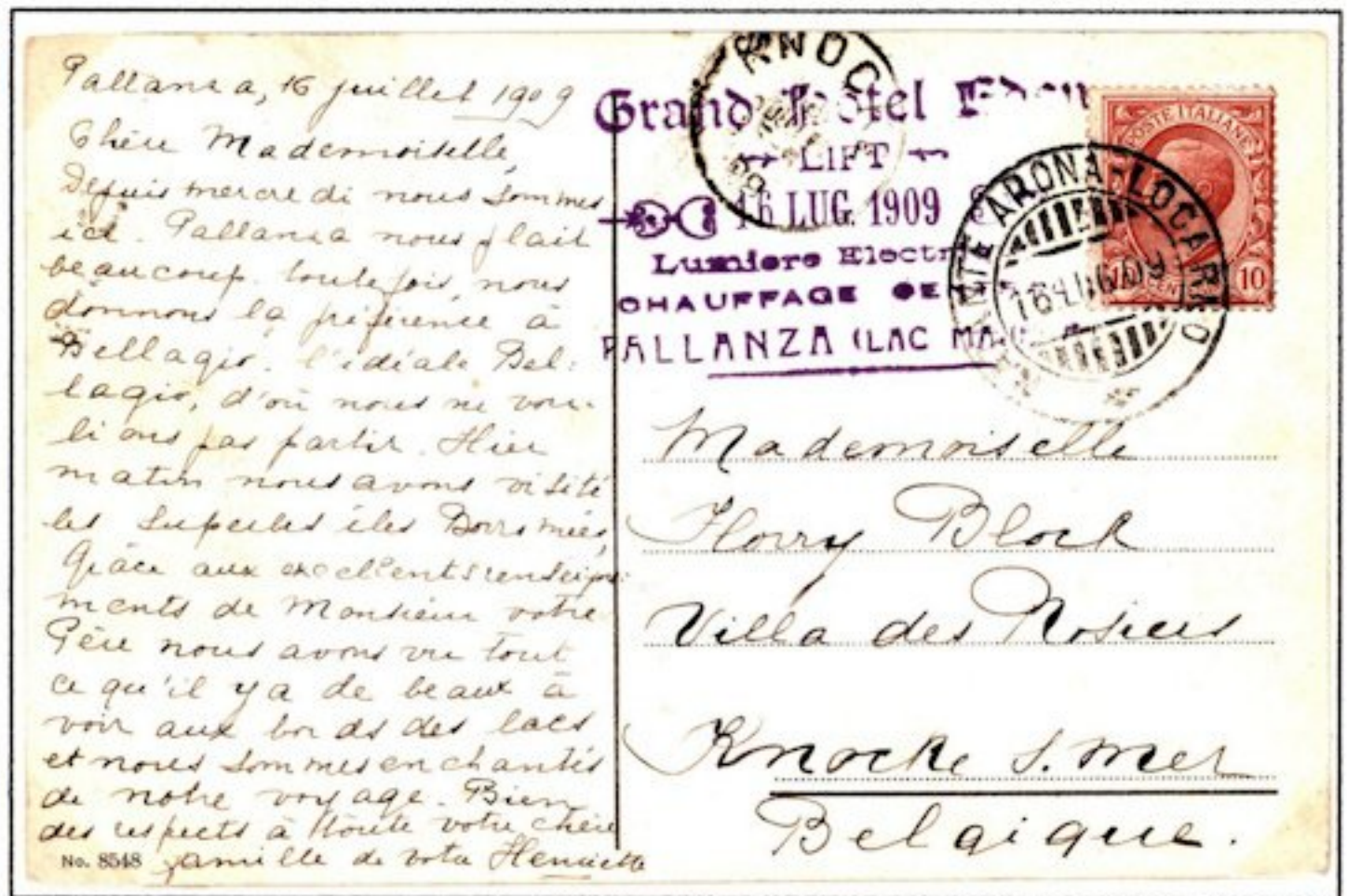
Southbound, 1880 Stresa to Bologna pays the 10c internal postcard rate.

After 1895, there was only one travelling post office on Lake Maggiore as most postal services were provided by the messaggeri. To identify the office, the word "NATANTE" or its abbreviation, "NAT.", was included in the postal marking. The single post office continued until 1925.

Markings continued to identify the termini, though the Swiss terminus had moved from Magadino to Locarno.



"NATANTE" on 1909 postcard to Belgium.



Both these cards sent in 1896 use the abbreviation "NAT." The routing shown in the postmark indicates the direction of travel.



NB. Su questo lato non deve scriversi che il solo indirizzo.

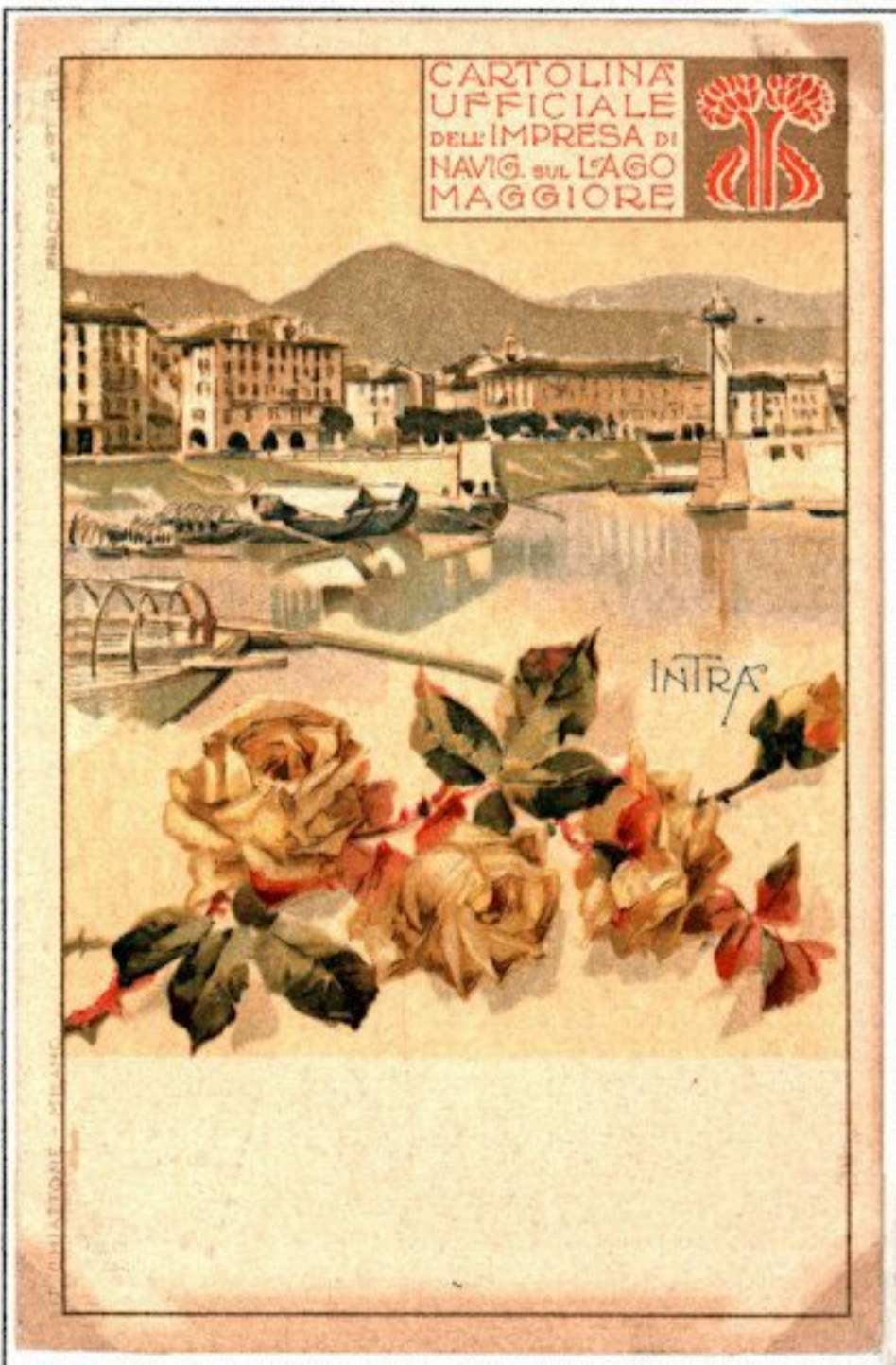




The steamers on each lake were operated by a concession granted by the government. In 1948, because of extensive war damage, the concessions were released back to the government.



Arona to Magadino. No postal marking indicates it traveled free on the company's steamer. 1874.



"Official postcards" were printed by the management company in the early 20th century promoting travel on the lake. Private printing. c. 1900.

LAGO MAGGIORE

Piroscafi eleganti e rapidi con servizio di Ristorante a bordo

Corrispondenza ad Arona, Stresa, Baveno, Laveno e Luino colle Ferrovie dello Stato; a Laveno colla Ferrovia Nord-Milano; a Luino colla Ferrovia pel Lago di Lugano e per Varese; a Luino ed a Locarno colla Ferrovia del Gottardo.



Biglietti di libera percorrenza valevoli tre giorni

Questi biglietti, che trovansi in vendita sui piroscafi e nelle agenzie dell'Impresa, danno diritto di percorrere tutto il lago in ogni direzione e con qualsiasi corsa ordinaria durante i tre giorni della loro validità. — Prezzo L. 9,50 in prima classe, L. 5,50 in seconda classe, più Centesimi 10 di bolli.

Steamer schedule, 1910.

There were messaggeri markings used from the late nineteenth century until lake mail ceased that gave no indication of specific routing. In some cases, they would indicate direction.

The marking on this 1930 post card to Munich indicates a southbound voyage. It most likely was taken off at Arona and on to Germany by train.



The dash above the date or below the date indicates direction.



Though some markings gave no indication of direction, this 1901 letter was probably taken on board at Stresa for the short trip to Arona where it entered the land based mail stream.

SERVIZIO POSTALE SUL LAGO MAGGIORE



Most messaggeri markings in the early 20th century showed the steamer routing.



NB. Sul lato anteriore della presente si scrive soltanto l'indirizzo.

CARTOLINA POSTALE ITALIANA

(CARTE POSTALE D'ITALIE)

To The Manager
Grand Hotel Eden
Pallanza

The two markings show the southern (Arona) and northern Locarno) termini of the steamer. The marking indicates the direction of the trip.



NB. Sul lato anteriore della presente si scrive soltanto l'indirizzo.

CARTOLINA POSTALE ITALIANA

(CARTE POSTALE D'ITALIE)

Gentilissimo Signore
B. Bagnate



Above the steamer routing is Pallanza to Locarno. Below the steamer travels Intra to Laveno to Arona. Both cards were picked up at lake stops along the way.

Later messaggeri markings incorporated the railroad portion of the route. The exact purpose is not known. Current thinking is that the mail was taken by train from Milan to Stresa, then by steamer to Laveno or vice versa. These were the last of the lake mail markings used from the late 1920s until World War II when any significant use of lake mail ended.



Most likely picked up at Pallanza, taken to Stresa then by rail to Milan and Bologna. 1929.

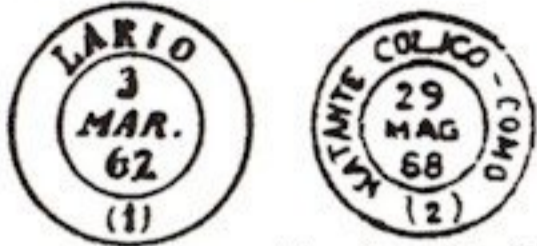


Entered the lake at Laveno, sailed to Stresa and then train to Milan. 1930.

THE OTHER LAKES

In addition to Lake Maggiore, Lakes Como, La Garda and D'Iseo were used for mail service. Service periods and systems were the same for each lake. Service on all lakes continued until World War II when the war, expense and completion of the mountain rail tunnels made the service inefficient. In the later years service was primarily to lakeside towns.

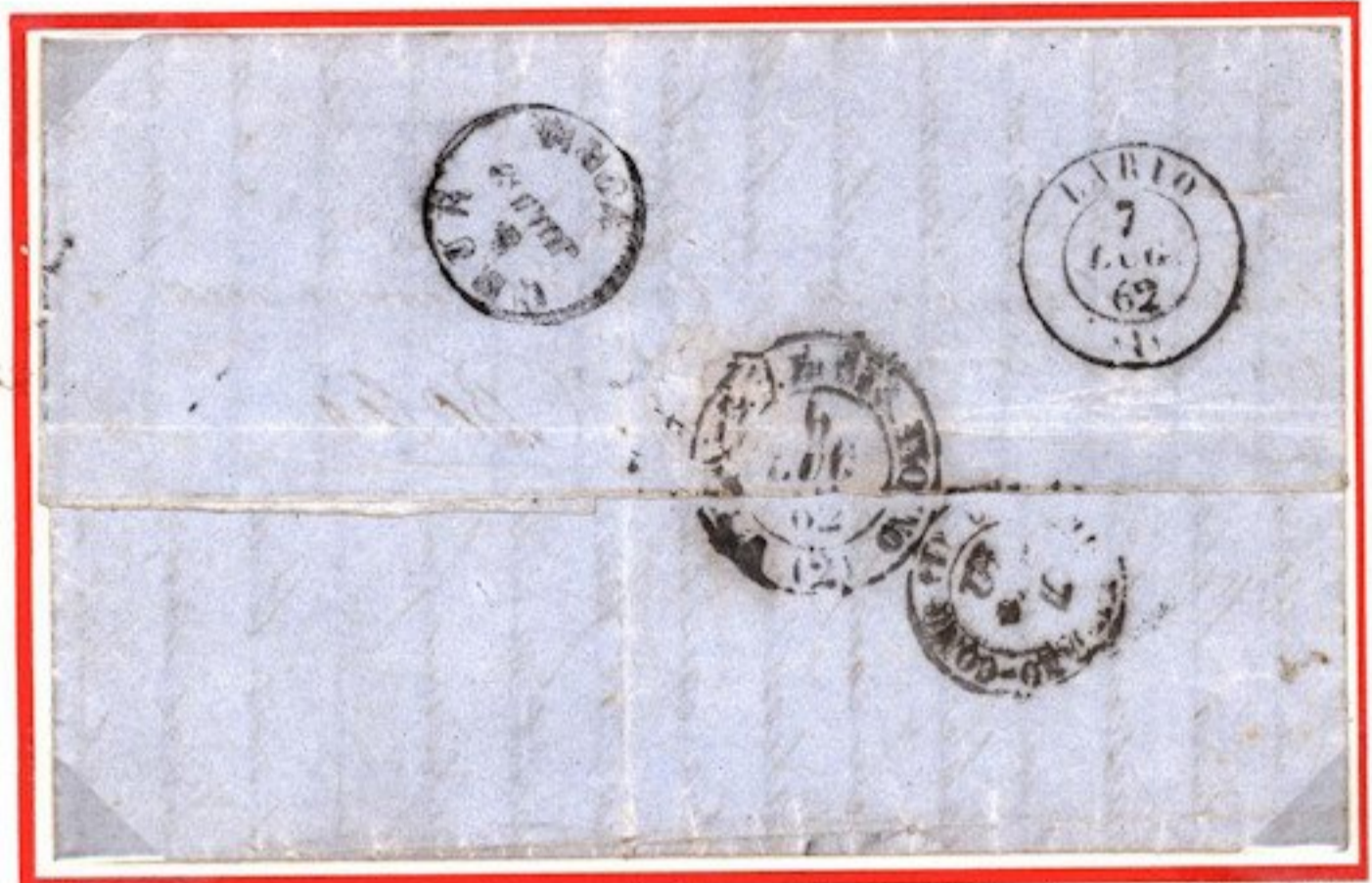
Lake Como, like Maggiore, offered steamer mail service in the early 19th century. The first ship markings were from the steamer Lario in the early 1860s.



Two early, scarce markings from Lake Como.



Front of cover.



1862 cover from Casale through Turin, on the lake to Switzerland. Early steamer markings were typically on the back. Pays Sardinian 40 centesimi rate to Switzerland.



Lake Di Garda 1860 precursor. Austrian post office marking for letters sent to lake costal locations by military steamers.



Lake D'Iseo 1931. Picked up on the lake by messaggere for passage to Trento.