

Italian LAKE MAIL ON LAGO MAGGIORE

Synopsis

WHAT IS LAKE MAIL?

The major lakes of northern Italy include Maggiore, Como, la Garda and de Iseo. Maggiore and Como are probably the oldest known inland postal waterways dating to Roman times. By the mid-nineteenth century, mail routes were formalized on the lakes with travelling post offices installed on lake steamers. Steamers carried the mails until just before World War II. At that point roads and rail tunnels had been constructed making travel through the Alps accessible.

PURPOSE

This marcophily exhibit is intended to show the progression of lake transported mail on mail-carrying steamers on Lake Maggiore.

TREATMENT


The lake mail story begins in the early 19th century until WW II. The rise and fall of popularity for lake mail service can be traced through its markings. First the simple entry/exit markings, to steamer post offices, then the use of only postal messengers as popularity wanes and Alpine tunnels open.

The approach is straightforward. The story is told beginning with the first lake post office and first known steamer entry marking. The story of the lake mail system is told through the different postal markings of each period. The markings tend to identify the way the mail was handled. The exhibit ends with the last known markings. While *all known marking types are shown*, not all varieties are. They would be redundant.

It should be noted that *rates are not*

an important part of this story, since there was no "lake rate" or surcharge. It is the marking type and format that tell the tale. Most shown rates are common. Rates are detailed as needed to understand the significance of the exhibit item.

THE POSTAL HISTORY

While there are many lake markings, their origins are from small mail routes performing a specialized service that was important to mail flow. Earlier pieces are quite scarce; later examples can be found with some searching. The focus in the exhibit is on scarcer markings of both the 19th and 20th centuries. There are many rare items (less than 5 known) in the exhibit. There are also numerous earliest and latest usages of various markings as well as discovery pieces. A mortarboard icon highlights discovery pieces. 

Items of special interest are boxed in red. In all instances the reason for boxing the covers is indicated in the text or caption.

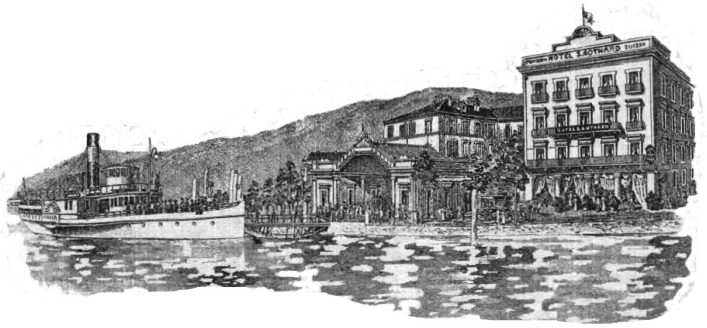
SIGNIFICANCE

This specialized area of postal history has had little exposure in North America. Exhibits and writing on this subject have been primarily European and most writing in Italian. The Italian lakes, especially Maggiore, were important to mail movement to and from the north, an essential small cog in a big wheel. As the twentieth century progressed and tunnels constructed, lake mail usage was primarily from tourists and for intra-lakeside communication.

Very little material has been located in the U.S. and no significant items. There are no known exhibits of this subject in the U.S. Only three exhibits on this subject are known in Europe. None shown for 15 years. There are enough important unique items in the exhibit that make it impossible to duplicate.

In the philatelic world, this is known as Italian lake mail though Maggiore extends into Switzerland and in the early years the western shore was controlled by Austria.

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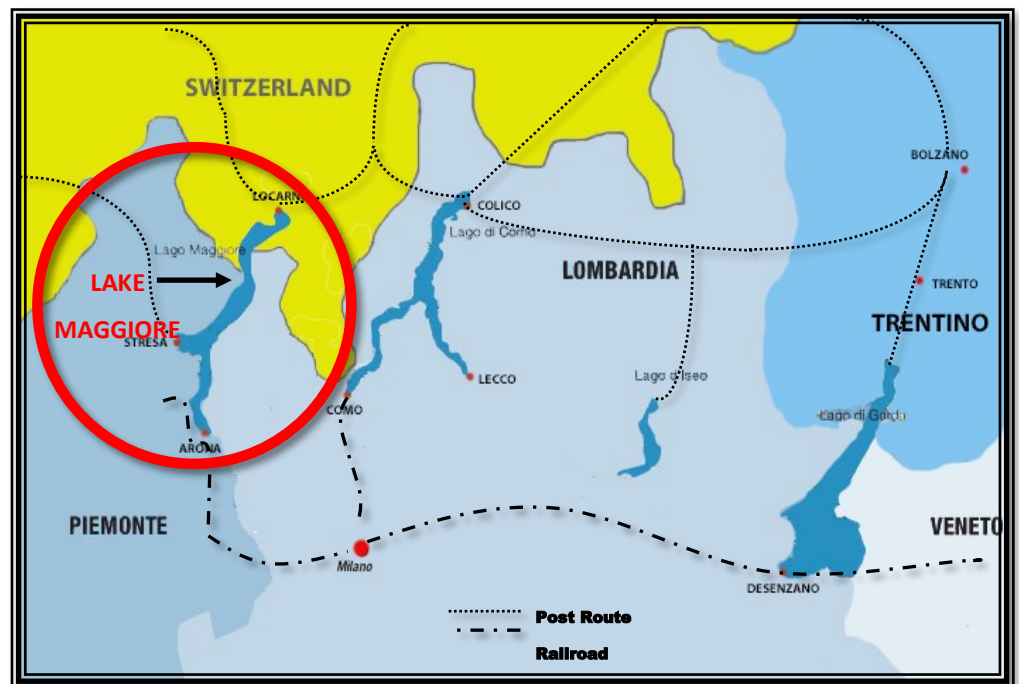


This exhibit documents the use of lake steamers to carry mail on Italy's northern lakes using Lake Maggiore and its markings as the exemplar. Until the first third of the 20th century, before the mountain tunnels, the Alps and rocky routes along the lake shores were difficult and dangerous. Small lake steamers were an easier way to connect area mail to the European postal routes. Four major lakes, Maggiore, Como, di Garda and d'Iseo, used steamers to carry mail. Maggiore, which extends into Switzerland, has the most diverse postal history. There was no special rate or surcharge for use of the steamers. Though utilized from 1808 to WW II, the service is most notable from 1855 until 1910, the emphasis here. As time advanced, the type of markings broadly identified the way in which the mail was handled.

1807 ————— 1851 ————— 1895 ————— 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.



= original research/
discovery

ORGANIZATION:

NAPOLEONIC PERIOD Earliest markings indicating lake travel.

ENTRY/EXIT Exchange offices, lakeside town markings handling mail to and from Lake Maggiore.

TRAVELLING POST OFFICES Aboard the steamers to 1877.

TRAVELLING POST OFFICES 1877—1894.

SWISS POST OFFICE operating as an exchange office in Italy.

LAST NATANTE 1895—1923 The last steamer post office.

MESSAGGERI/COLLETTORE 1895—1940 Increased use of mail messengers rather than shipboard post offices with collettore markings applied to mail collected at intermediate stops denoting its origin.

RAIL/STEAMER TOURS Last messaggeri service.

STEAMER ADMINISTRATION & THE NAVIGATION COMPANY

NON-POSTAL MARKINGS

THE OTHER LAKES Early markings of Como, Di Garda, D'Iseo.