

MAIL TRANSPORT ON Lake Como *Synopsis*



PURPOSE

This marcophilic exhibit is intended to provide an overview of mail transport specifically on Lake Como with emphasis on the 19th century.

TREATMENT

Though likely practiced since Roman times, using the northern Italian lakes to carry mail through the Alps is not well documented until the 19th century when small steamboats were introduced. Steamer post offices operated on Lake Como until WW II when the boats were hidden in canals. The exhibit approach is straightforward. The story begins with an early piece of lake mail, moves to the period where steamer use was documented by entry and exit marks, then to the travelling steamer post offices and, finally, the messengeri, travelling postal clerks. The markings tend to identify the way the mail was handled. The exhibit ends with the latest known use of a steamer post office marking from Lake Como. The emphasis is on the 19th century the most important and popular lake mail period, connecting Italy to European routes. While the service was active in the first half of the 20th century, it was primarily for lake tourism mail and local correspondence. In the 20th century, mail went by rail through new Alpin tunnels. *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. In short, the exhibit begins with the earliest known piece of lake mail on Como and ends with the last.

WHY ONE FRAME?

While *all known marking types are shown*, not all varieties are. To show small differences would be redundant. Fly-specking markings is not important to the story. The complete story of Lake Como mail is thoroughly told in sixteen pages. No important facts, markings or events are omitted.

THE POSTAL HISTORY

Lake mail markings are from small mail routes performing a specialized service. Earlier pieces are quite scarce; later examples can be found with some searching. The focus in the exhibit is on scarcer markings of the 19th century. There are many rare items (less than 5 known). There are also numerous earliest and latest usages of various markings. Where there is some special significance, it is noted in the comments in bold italics. However, of special interest to the general collec-

tor would be the Sperati forgery on cover (page 8). For lake mail collectors, it would be the company markings on cover (page 5) and the “PIROSCAFI SUL LAGO” straight-line (page 12) and the 1763 lake letter (page 2). These and others are boxed in red. Earliest known uses are identified with **EKU**

SIGNIFICANCE

This exhibit brings a little known area to the American philatelic community. This specialized area has had little exposure in North America. Exhibits and writings are primarily European and most in Italian. The last lake mail exhibit was by a British exhibitor twenty-five years ago at NAPEX. The Italian lakes, especially Como and Maggiore, were important to 19th century mail movement to and from the north, an essential small cog in a big wheel as the lake served as a European gateway. Though only one frame, because of the rarity of the material, it would be impossible to duplicate.

REFERENCE

Most are in Italian. Best English reference:

Lindsey, Grahme, *Italian Lake Mail Postal Markings*, Italian Study Circle, 2004.