

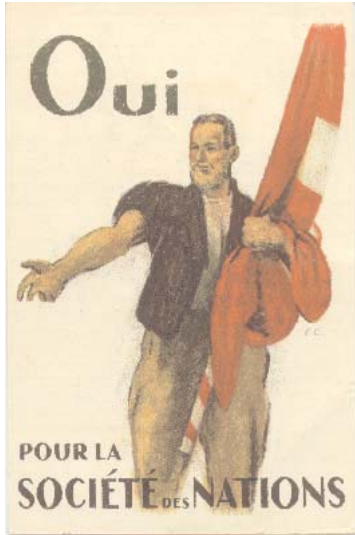
A History of the League of Nations

By Greg S. Galletti

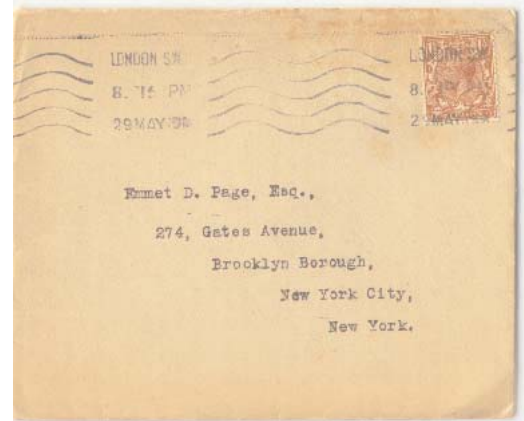
Exhibit Scope:

This is the story of the League of Nations, the first truly international organization created from the ashes of World War I with the hopes of preserving the peace and fostering cooperation among nations for the general good of all mankind. The League was an experiment in political, economic, and technical diplomacy and although the league has generally been immortalized as a failure by many historians, the fundamental principles upon which the League was established have survived to this day in the form of the United Nations Organization. We shall see that in spite of its obvious failures, the League accomplished a great many humanitarian efforts which forever changed the lives of millions of men, women, and children from all corners of the globe.

This exhibit is best characterized as a **Special Study**. That is, an exhibit which tells the story of a historical event or entity, in this case the League of Nations, through the use of postal artifacts.



The second chapter, *The Structure of the League*, describes the three main bodies of the League (Assembly, Council, and Secretariat), and each of the main technical and political organizations, including regional and affiliate organizations, which carried out the League's functions. Chapter two closes with a look at the physical locations the League called home during its life.



The third and final chapter, *The League in Action*, is a fascinating look at some of the most influential events which confronted the League. Events such as the Locarno Conference which defined its greatest success opening the doors of the League to Germany, and the Sino-Japanese Conflict and The Abyssinian Crisis which defined its greatest failures. Additionally this chapter explores the League's attempts to arbitrate international conflicts and maintain jurisdiction over disputed regions such as Leticia and the Saarland. The Final chapter also takes a crucial look at the war years when the League was all but forgotten in Geneva, and the rebirth of hope for peace and prosperity with the creation of the United Nations and transfer of all League assets to the new "light of the world."



The exhibit is arranged into three major chapters. The first chapter, *Origins of the League*, outlines the most significant international events of the late 19th and early 20th century which culminated in the formation of the League as part of the Treaty of Versailles.



Exhibit Outline

Title Page

Outline

Origins of the League of Nations

The Hague Peace Conferences
International Cooperation
The Great War
Forerunner Peace Organizations
National Movements for The League
Birth of The League of Nations
The Treaty of Versailles

The Structure of the League of Nations

The Assembly
The Council
The Secretariat
Technical Organizations
Political Organizations
Affiliate Organizations
Regional Offices and Societies
The Home of the League of Nations

The League of Nations in Action

Health and Social Questions
Economic Questions
War Reparations and Capitulations
International Disarmament
Conflict and Control
The War Years
Transition to the UN
The End of the League

- 5) Registered service cover from the 1933 London Economic Conference bearing special registry date handstamp.
- 6) Service cover from the Leticia Commission in the Amazon, South America.
- 7) Service cover from Permanent Court of Intern. Justice bearing 12.5c Star of David issue.
- 8) Service Cover from the Election Commission in the Sanjak of Alexandretta.
- 9) Only recorded British Command Pay Office Service cover - Saar International Force.
- 10) Only recorded service cover from the UNCIO on note envelope.
- 11) Service cover from the opening session of the First UN General Assembly - London.
- 12) UNEO Service Cover bearing SdN service issues tied by Geneva 10 SdN date stamp.

About The League of Nations Postal System:

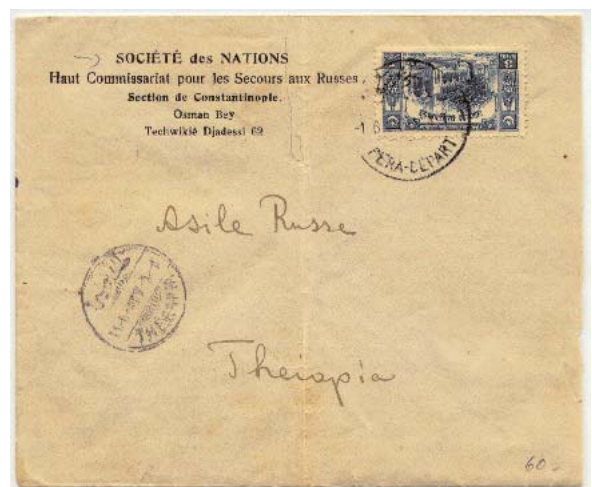
From its birth at Versailles, the League of Nations had a special need for postal operations to ensure timely and efficient transit of official organization correspondence throughout the world. At the bequest of the League's first Secretary General, Sir Eric Drummond, the organization administered its own postal operations at a local post office located within the League's Headquarters. Operations at the League post office commenced from 0700 - 1900 hours daily. Service mail which was posted outside those hours of operation (and all correspondence of the International Labour Organization [ILO]) were processed at the local Rue du Mont-Blanc post office. Such mail typically bore machine and hand cancels with no reference to their League origins. As such, the only method of identifying these as correspondence of the League is by observing the special stationery, or after 1922, the service stamps of the organization. Postal operations at the League Headquarters were similar to other Swiss post offices offering services ranging from domestic first class mail, airmail, registered, express, and special handling such as insured mail to various international services.



Highlights of Exhibit:

Although this exhibit is comprised of some fascinating and exceedingly scarce service covers, a few are worthy of special mention. As you travel through the exhibit, these exceptional pieces are highlighted using a subtle border of blue in lieu of black used elsewhere throughout the exhibit.

- 1) Only recorded example of service mail from the ILO - Basel, Switzerland
- 2) Official mail from the Second League Assembly bearing special rectangular date handstamp.
- 3) Earliest recorded usage of official League service mail (London 1919).
- 4) Service cover from the ILO Governing Body, London England bearing special date handstamp.



For League service mail originating outside of its Headquarters, the only means of identifying such is through the study of the cancels, routing information such as origin cachets, and addressee information when available. In rare instances, League committees and specialized agencies

located outside of its Headquarters printed a supply of stationery bearing the identity of the organization. Today, these official correspondence are often the only postal means of identifying their existence and activities. As can be expected, only a few examples of each have been observed in the philatelic marketplace, as most were either destroyed or retained by the addressors for accounting purposes.

Postage Stamps Used by the League of Nations:

During the short interim period in 1919 when the League of Nations Headquarters resided in London, England, no special service stamps were issued by the British Postal Service for use by the organization. Likewise, with few exceptions, no special service stamps were issued for use during League Council meetings or special conferences convened outside of Geneva, or by League Commissions or Affiliate Organizations (With the exceptions of the ILO, Geneva, Switzerland, and the Permanent International Court of Justice at the Hague, Netherlands).

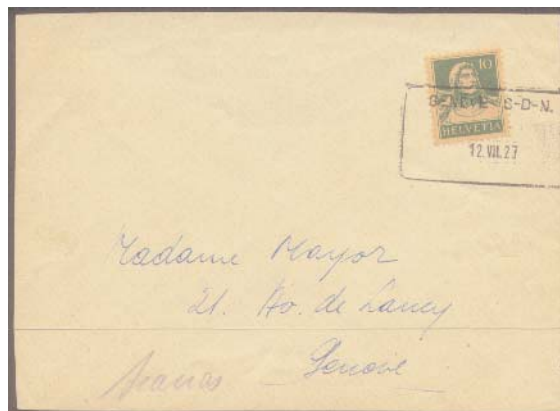


Beginning on October 3, 1922, the Swiss PTT provided some of its stamps, overprinted "Societe des Nations," for use as official service stamps by the League of Nations. Similarly, starting on March 27, 1923, official service stamps overprinted "S.d.N Bureau International du Travail," for use by the ILO were made available to the organization. Prior to that time, ordinary non-overprinted Swiss issues were used on official service mail of the League of Nations and ILO. Between 1922 and 1946, the Swiss PTT issued approximately 91 different issues overprinted for use by the League Secretariat, and 82 issues overprinted for use by the ILO. These issues ranged from modest 3 centime values for use on bulk rate mailings to 10 franc issues for use on heavy domestic and international correspondence.

League of Nations Post Office Cancels:

Beginning on November 8, 1920, the Swiss PTT provided the League of Nations post office with a special circular canceling device for use on Secretariat service mail. The cancel bore the inscription "Geneve 1 Societe des Nations" with the addition of a date and hour indicator in the center. This cancel was used at the original postal station at the League Headquarters located within the Hotel des Bergues, 3 rue du

Mont-Blanc. On February 3, 1921, the cancel was moved to the new League post office within the Headquarters building now located at the Palais Wilson. The "Geneve 1" cancel continued to see use through August 14, 1927, when it was permanently replaced by the "Geneve 10 Societe des Nations" cancel. The "Geneve 10" cancel was used throughout the remaining years of the League until its replacement on January 2, 1947, by the United Nations cancel "Geneve 10 Nation Unies."



On rare occasion, when the standard League canceling device was being serviced, special rectangular auxiliary cancels were used on official Secretariat mail. These auxiliary marks, are commonly referred to as "box cancels," due to their appearance. Two distinct types of box cancels are known bearing the inscriptions "Soc. des Nations," and "Geneve S-D-N." The "Soc. des Nations," cancel is known to have been used on June 4, 1923, and from May 23 - 27, 1924. The "Geneve S-D-N" cancel is known to have been used from June 27 - 30, 1927, and again from July 7 - August 13, 1927. One additional temporary cancel, bearing the inscription "Geneve Special" was used at the League Secretariat from February 17 - 26, 1936, during the move of the League Headquarters into the newly constructed Palais des Nations.

Special Cancels of the League Assembly, Council, and Special Conferences:

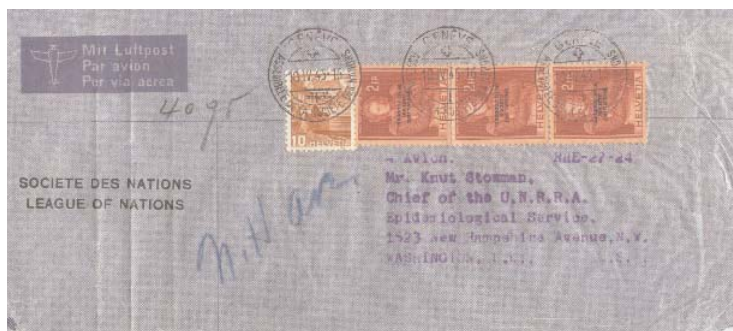


During the League Assembly, which convened annually each Fall (typically September - October, with the exception of the first Assembly which convened in November 1920), the Swiss

PTT made available special canceling devices for use on Assembly correspondence. For the first meeting, two rectangular cancels have been observed bearing the inscriptions "Geneve Assembl." and "Geneve Assemblee." The "Geneve Assembl." cancel is known to have been used from November 15 - 18, 1920. The "Geneve Assemblee" cancel is known to have been used from November 15 - December 21, 1920. For the Second Assembly, the rectangular cancel "Geneve ASS.S.D.N" is known to have been used from September 5 - October 7, 1921. While examples of these three cancels have been rarely observed, almost all have been philatelically created to commemorate the meeting. Official service mail bearing these cancels are exceedingly rare and less than 3 of each have been observed by this author in nearly 30 years of active search and study.

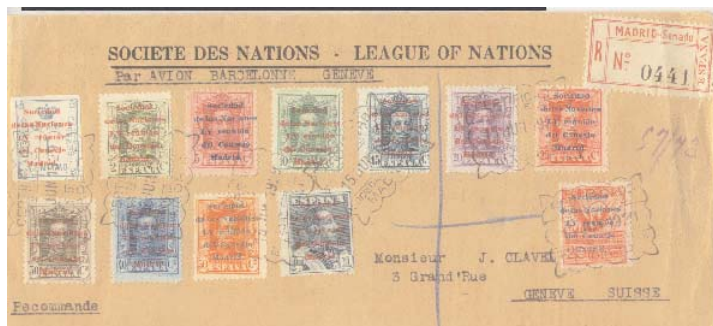


For the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Assemblies, the Swiss PTT made available the circular cancel "Geneve Special" for use on Assembly correspondence. Starting with the 6th Assembly (1925) and for all subsequent Assemblies, including the 20th and final Assembly (1946), the circular cancel "Geneve Assemblee de la Societe des Nations," was used.



Beginning with the special diplomatic conference convened at SPA, Belgium, on July 5, 1920, several special cancels prepared by the presiding governmental postal agencies are known used on League Council and special conference correspondence as a convenience to the officials in attendance, and secondarily, to commemorate the gatherings. As noted earlier, in most cases ordinary postage stamps of the host nations were used on meeting correspondence.

One noteworthy exception to this was the 1929 League Council meeting, in Madrid. Spain. To commemorate the occasion, the Spanish Postal Authority overprinted a set of 14 issues bearing the portrait of King Ferdinand, with a special imprint "Sociedad de las Naciones LV Reunion del Consejo Madrid." As with League Assembly correspondence, philatelically contrived covers have survived in some quantity, while official usages bearing these special Council or conference cancels are exceedingly scarce.



A comprehensive listing of these cancels is provided in Gaines, "United Nations Philately," and is provided for your use.

Bibliography:

Barnes, W., Britain, *The League, and the U.N. a Philatelic Study*, Koln/Kent, 1987.

Gaines, A., *United Nations Philately*, R&D Publications, 1980-1997.

Misteli, C., *Les Timbres SdN et BIT*, edite par le Club Philatelic et Aeropostal de Geneve, 1943.

Misteli, C., *Les Timbres SdN et BIT*, reprinted by the United Nations Philatelists, Inc., 1998.

Swiss PTT, *Verzeichnis der Maschinenstempel und Ortswerbestempel*, Bern, 1967.

UNOP Handbuch 1977, *Die OIT - Studie*, Koln, 1977.

UNOP Handbuch 1995, *Sammlungen zur Philately der Vereinten Nationen*, Koln, 1995.

Wawrukiewicz, A., Beecher, H., *U.S. Domestic Postal Rates, 1872-1993*, CAMA Publishing Company, 1994.

Wawrukiewicz, A., Beecher, H., *U.S. International Postal Rates, 1872-1996.*, CAMA Publishing Company, 1996.

Walters, Francis P., *History of the League of Nations*, Oxford University Press, 1954.

ZACK-Sonderdruck, *Die Posttaxen der Schweiz ab 1862 Band 1 Inland*, 1990.

ZACK-Sonderdruck, *Die Posttaxen der Schweiz ab 1875 Band 2 Ausland*, 1995.