

The Pneumatic Post of Paris

by

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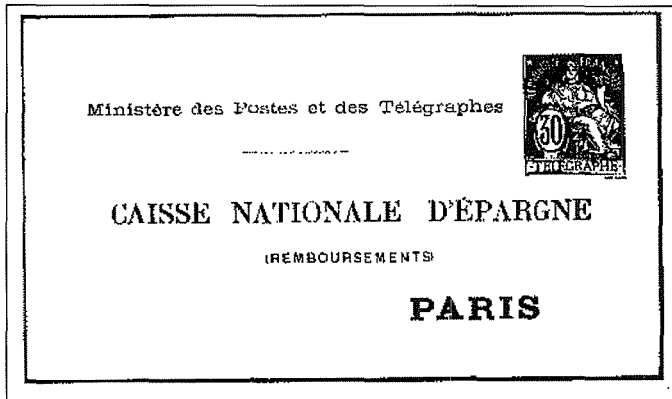
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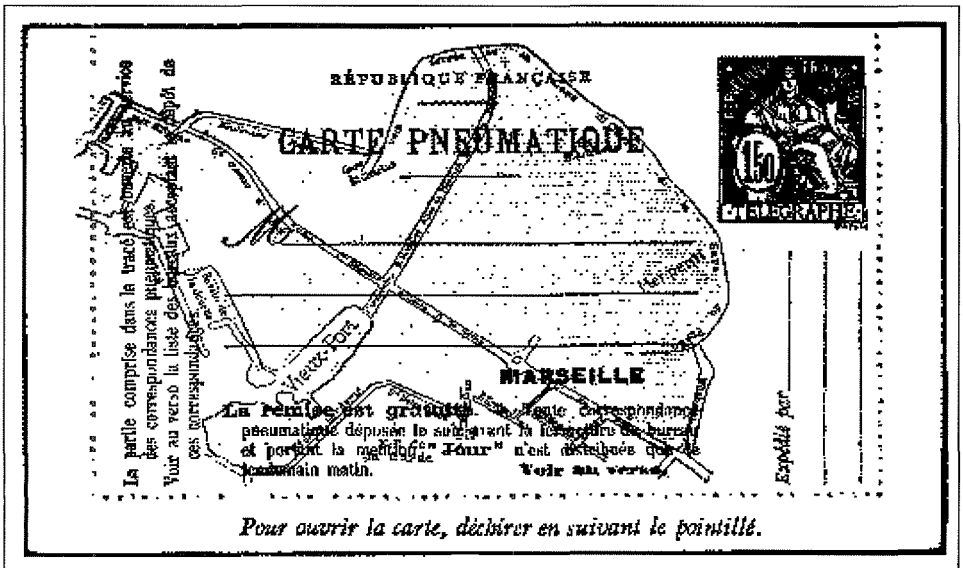


*"Caisse d'Épargne" card
of 1884.*



6fr. "Caisse d'Epargne" card of 1947.

Apart from the standard items of postal stationery that have just been described, there have been three groups of other issues. The first are those for withdrawals from the *Caisse Nationale d'Epargne* in the rue St Romain and consist of reply-paid forms, part for the applicant to complete and part for the *Caisse* to return to him with authority for a withdrawal. They appeared in 1884 as joined cards and then as



1fr. 50 card of the Marseilles Pneumatic Posts of 1929.

folded forms with varying texts between 1890 and 1904 all with a black *Chaplain* stamp of 30 centimes. In 1909 the Sower stamp replaced the *Chaplain* design as had happened with the standard postal stationery and similarly abdicated in favour of the *Chaplain* stamp in 1921 at a value of 60 centimes, increased to 1 franc in 1925, to 1.50 franc in 1928, and to 2 francs in 1939. A 3 franc rate of 1942 was denoted by a stamp of Petain but the *Chaplain* stamp reappeared after the war at 6 francs on what transpired to be the last of these forms. A second type of special postal stationery was associated with the *Pompes Funèbres*, the official agency responsible for funerals. In 1884 there was a fear of a major cholera epidemic in Paris and it was foreseen that there would be a large number of corpses each requiring urgent notification to the *Pompes Funèbres*. The pneumatic post offered a rapid means of notification and two cards were printed, with a 30 centimes *Chaplain* stamp in black, addressed to two of fines of the *Pompes Funèbres*, with spaces in the inside for writing in the length and breadth of the corpse together with other relevant information, all to be filled in by the doctor in attendance. It is doubtful whether any of these cards were ever used. They are rare but even rarer are those carrying advertising matter and which were sold at reduced prices. The very few known were all issued by the one agency '*la Publicité Postale*' and were published around 1898.

Although far from being official, deserving mention are the miniatures of postal stationery which appeared around the turn of the century in children's toy post offices. A 'pneumatic' card of 1898 was so good a reproduction of the official card that there must have been an official demand to change it and one sold in 1900 bears the additional inscription '*La Poste Enfantine*'. The printer of a miniature letter-card of 1898 tried to anticipate the modified prohibitions on the outside of the official card following the admission of private stationery to the tubes but failed to foresee the continuation of the prohibition of the insertion of hard objects, and so his miniature has a different inscription on the back from the official text.

All the foregoing refers to the pneumatic post of Paris; a similar but much more restricted service existed in Marseilles between mid-1910 and 29 February 1964 and which had its own postal stationery until the last war. Letter-cards showing on the front a map of those areas of the city served by the pneumatic post were issued in 1910 (single and reply) with a Sower stamp of 30 centimes. On the reverse were listed the seven offices from which pneus could be sent. Later, as in Paris, the *Chaplain* stamp was used: in 1919 at 40 centimes with an eighth office added on the reverse, in 1921 at 60 centimes, in 1926 at 1 franc, and in 1929 at 1.50 franc, all these being against a blue-green background. The background was changed in 1934 to grey and when the 2 francs letter-card appeared in 1938 the map was deleted; this was the last letter-card. One envelope only was issued: in 1910 and similar to the contemporary letter-card.

Whilst the pneumatic postal stationery of Paris may have occasionally been

used outside Paris and Marseilles, its regular use is known only in Algiers where an express service was operated by messengers inside the city. In 1938 this service was given its own letter card, and the link with the Paris pneumatic post was broken.

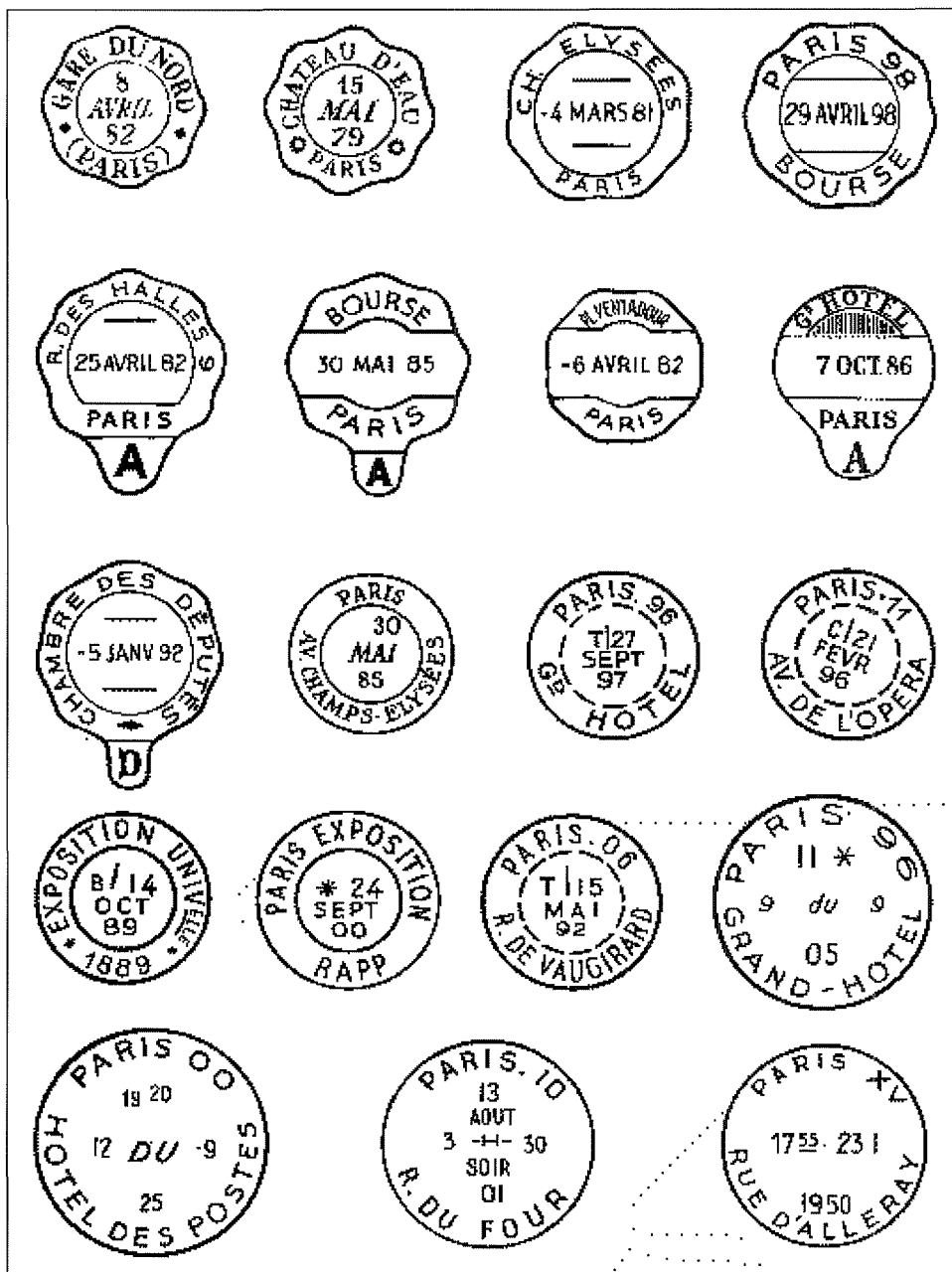
The Postal Markings

It has been continuously emphasised that the pneumatic post in Paris has always been operated by the *Télégraphes* or, nowadays, the *Télécommunications* and the date stamps have therefore been those of that service. In 1885 there was an official decision to make the date stamps of the *Postes* and the *Télégraphes* similar but the telegraph date stamps were to contain, in place of the collection number, a T or, in the case of the larger offices, a letter denoting a particular telegraph counter. However, existing date stamps were to continue in use until they were worn out. This economy led to the retention of date stamps of earlier vintages and, furthermore, when an office changed its address, it used at its new address the date stamps which still bore the old address. In 1879 the most common telegraph date stamp was a small wavy circle of which there were several variants. Other different types were used, some with appendages. Most of these date stamps were applied in blue, some in red, and occasionally in black. The 22 mm diameter 'postal' date stamp is sometimes found on pneus prior to the application of the 1885 decision. The 'postal' date stamp of 25 mm diameter incorporating a B was applied at the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*. Again these were usually struck in blue and sometimes in black, but in the first half of 1894 a number of offices used a violet ink. As has already been described, the Paris post offices numbered up to 9 had their telegraphic numbers preceded by a zero and this appeared in their date stamps. Hexagonal date stamps intended for the late-fee. postal service were sometimes used at some offices even when those offices were equipped with conventional date stamps as were the circular date stamps incorporating an E. At the turn of the century new types of date stamp were introduced which, for the first time, showed the time of despatch of a pneu, so that it was no longer necessary to record this time in the daily register. Two of these differed by having small and capital lettered "d" in "du"

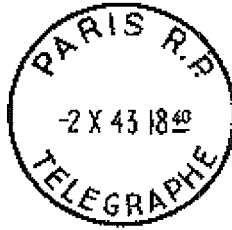
A pneu, during its journey from the sender to the addressee, might have to be transferred from one tube line to another and when this occurred the office of exchange applied its date stamp on the back. Using date stamps incorporating times, the times of each stage of a journey could be ascertained. At the big exchanges of Central and Bourse a stamp was mechanically applied.

Around 1930 a date stamp of the 'Rotoplan' type was introduced with the year appearing at the bottom; shortly afterwards there was another on the same pattern but within the year in the central slug. This is not an exhaustive list of the postmarks but served to illustrate the principal ones.

The auxiliary marks on the conventional post have also been applied to pneus,



Postmarks of the Pneumatic Post.



PARIS-CENTRAL
PN

1965 FEV 24

15:50



HORS LIMITES T 040

Les pneumatiques peuvent être recommandés (Droit spécial 1 fr. 50)

BOURSE .B

PCV 0.20

LES PNEUMATIQUES PEUVENT ÊTRE RECOMMANDÉS DROIT SPÉCIAL : LE MÊME QUE LES LETTRES-MISSIVES

Postmarks & sundry cachets of the Pneumatic Post.

often in a particular context. A pneu put, not into the correct and smaller box, but into an ordinary post-box would, on being sorted, receive the post office date stamp and also the mark 'TROUVE A LA BOITE' before being transferred to the telegraph counter where the telegraph date stamp would be applied. In much the same way, a pneu put into a box attached to the rear of a tram would be taken to the post office adjacent to the Paris terminus of the route of that tram, receive there the post office date stamp and 'B M' (for *boite mobile*) before being transferred to the telegraph counter where again the telegraph date stamp would be applied. Other postal marks such as 'AFFRANCHISSEMENT INSUFFISANT' or 'PARVENU SANS ADRESSE' or 'RETARDE FORTUITEMENT' were equally applied to pneus. In

the early days of the pneumatic post, pneus might be addressed, by accident or otherwise, beyond its boundaries; they were then endorsed in manuscript '*Hors limites*' or '*Hors service*' and transferred to the post. The sorters tired of writing and made up their own handstamps for these and other annotations. In this category of individual initiative handstamps is 'BOURSE B' (B for *banlieue*) applied to pneus arriving at Bourse for the suburbs after the last despatch and held there overnight.

A handstamp often found on pneus of 1938 and the five following years refers to the registration of pneumatic mail. The 2 francs letter-card of 1938 contained on the back the information that pneumatic mail could be registered in the same way as ordinary mail and this facility was widely publicized by a cachet applied by hand to the front of a pneu. There are numerous varieties, those of 1938 show that there was a special registration fee of 1.50 franc for pneus but the later cachets merely announce the facility.

Also from individual initiative came handstamps for deficient payment, such as PCV for '*à percevoir*', and T 0 0, writing in a digit between the two zeroes to show the tax. The pneumatic service was for a long time less severe than the ordinary post in taxing a deficiency and until 1926 only the simple difference was taxed. The original compulsory use of the official postal stationery and the weight limitation of 7 grams made underpayment impossible but after the concessions of 1896 and 1898 underpayments could and did occur. If a pneu or a privately printed envelope bearing postage stamps appropriate to the tariff for 7 grams weighed more than this (but not more than 30 grams) the addressee had the option either of paying the simple difference or of refusing to pay in which case the item was transferred to the ordinary post and delivered later. After 1926, under the same conditions, double the deficiency was required although items were subsequently retained in the pneumatic post provided they were prepaid to at least half the correct fee but still the addressee could not immediately receive them unless he paid the amount due.

The Most Famous Pneu in History

For generations the pneumatic letter-card was known affectionately as the *petit bleu* since, between 1897 and 1902, it was on blue paper and it was under this name that a '*Télégramme*' was a vital piece of evidence in the enquiries which led to the eventual acquittal of Dreyfus. At a court-martial in December 1894 he had been found guilty of passing military secrets to the Germans and was transported to Cayenne. In 1896 the contents of a waste paper basket in the office of Schwartzkoppen, the German military attache in Paris, were taken to the French Intelligence Staff and found to include a torn-up pneu which had never been sent.

When pieced together, it was found that the *petit bleu* contained a message to another French officer, Esterhazy, implicating him in the offences attributed

to Dreyfus. Thus started the chain of events which culminated in 1906 with the ceremonial restoration of his commission to Dreyfus in that courtyard of the Ecole Militaire lying just behind the Pavillon de l' Artillerie which had housed the telegraph office Ecole Militaire until its closure in 1891.

The Celebration of the Centenary of the Pneumatic Service

The P.T.T. recognized the centenary of the service in 1966 by the issue of a commemorative postage stamp with a face value of 1.60 franc, the then basic rate for a pneu. The stamp, designed by Combet, showed the Bourse with the hexagon system of 1867 and, at the side, a cylinder in a section of tube. It was issued on 11 November 1966 at the autumn philatelic salon and was there cancelled by a postmark also showing a cylinder in a section of tube. There was the usual range of first day envelopes and cards together with one letter-card which bore a surprising number of mistakes. Its inscription referred to the centenary of the pneumatic postal service although this will not occur until 1979. It was decorated with a reproduction of a 30 centimes *Sage* type postage stamp embodying the word 'POSTE'. Whilst the true *Sage* type postage stamp embodied the word 'POSTES' (with a S) the design on the first pneus omitted the word altogether and was for values of 50 centimes and 75 centimes; the 30 centimes rate was not introduced until 1902. To make matters worse, at the last moment, it was found that the French postal administration would not accept the letter-card with its unofficial representation of a postage stamp and the offending illustration had to be hidden under a square of adhesive paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The standard work in France on the pneumatic post is '*Cent ans de tubes pneumatiques*' J Boblique, *Echo de la Timbrologie*, 1966.

The engineering aspects of the service are recounted in '*Le réseau pneumatique de Paris*' M Gaillard, *Revue des PTT de France*, 1, 1959.

The postal markings of the 19th century are studied in '*Oblitérations du service des pneumatiques de 1879 à 1900*' R Cantais, *Feuilles Marcophiles*, 168, 1966.

The present writer warmly acknowledges his debt to these authors, and, additionally to M Gaillard for arranging visits to the installations in Paris, and to M Cantais who, until his death in 1971, was always ready to pass on the results of his researches at the *Musée Postal*. Recent research, as yet unpublished, by Dr. G Rykner has also generously been made available to the author.

Tribute is due to the A.C.E.P. members who contributed to these excellent catalogues, the numbering of which has been respected in the abbreviated listings which follow of the postal stationery.

The writer expresses his gratitude to M A Fileyssant for permission to reproduce the hexagonal postmark of place Ventadour and to Mr J E Colley for drawing the

postmarks shown in the illustrations.

The catalogues of the postal stationery are:

'Catalogue des entiers postage de France' Association des Collectionneurs d'Entiers Postaux 1965,

and, with more specialist detail,

'Catalogue complet des entiers postaux de France et Colonies' A.C.E.P., with Supplement 3, 1969

These listings are very similar to those in the American Postal Stationery Catalogues published by Higgins & Gage, but the catalogue numbers do not quite correspond.

PNEUMATIC POST TARIFFS

1879-1901

1 Letter-cards	1879	(1 May)	75c	
	1880	(1 June)	50c	
1 Cards	1879	(1 May)	50c	
	1880	(1 June)	30c	
1 Envelopes	1885	(15 January)	75c	
	1887	(1 January)	60c	
	1896	(17 September)	50c	up to 7g
			1f	7 - 15g
		1,50f	15 - 30g	

Tariffs 1902 -

		Up to 7g	7 - 15g	15 - 30g
1902	(1 January)	30c	50c	1f
1917	(1 January)	40c	65c	1.25f
1920	(1 April)	60c	1f	1.50f
1924	(25 March)	75c	1.25f	2f
1925	(16 July)	1f	1.50f	2f
1926	(1 May)	1.50f	2f	3f
1937	(12 July)	2f	3f	4f
1942	(2 January)	3f	4f	5f
1945	(1 March)	6f	8f	10f
1946	(1 January)	10f	12f	14f
1947	(1 April)	13.50f	16f	19f
1947	(8 July)	19f	24f	28f
1948	(21 September)	30f	40f	50f

1949	(6 January)	45f	60f	75f
1957	(1 July)	100f	120f	160f
1959	(1 January)	125f	150f	200f
1964	(1 June)	1.50f	1.75f	2.25f
1965	(15 January)	1.60f	1.90f	2.40f
1971	(3 January)	3f	3f	3.60f
1973	(7 July)	3.90f	3.90f	3.90f

POSTAL STATIONERY OF THE PNEUMATIC POST (An abbreviated summary)

Letter-cards

1	1879	75c Sage modified TELEGRAMME	
2	1880	50/75c	
3	1881	50c Chaplain	
4	1882	50c with map of Paris, blue shading at west	
5	1883	50c -do-, blue shading at west and north	
6	1884	50c -do-, no shading	
7	1885	50c No 6 with 'Valable pour tout Paris'	
8-15		50c no map 1f with reply coupon	(differing perforations)
16-26	1897	50c CARTE PNEUMATIQUE FERMEE 1f with reply coupon	(differing inscription on back)
27-70	1902	30/50c 60/1f	(on previous types and with differing surcharges)
71		30c black on blue CARTE PNEUMATIQUE	
72,74		30c red on blue	(differing inscription on back)
73,75		30c + 30c	
76	1907	30c Sower	(differing inscriptions on front and on back)
84		30c + 30c	
85	1919	40c Chaplain	
86	1921	60c	
87	1924	75c	
88	1925	1f	

89-92	1927	1.50f (differing colours)
93	1938	2f
94	1942	3f Petain
95	1944	3f Chaplain
96	1946	6f
97	1947	19f
98	1949	30f
99,100	1950	45f (differing inscription on back)
102	1959	125f
103,104	1960	1.25f (differing colours)
105	1964	1.50f
106-109	1965	1.60f (differing inscriptions on back)
110	1972	3f

Cards

1	1879	50c Sage modified CARTE TELEGRAMME
2	1880	50c Sage Chaplain
3		50c + 50c
4		30/50c Sage modified
5		30/50c Chaplain
6		30c + 30c/50c + 50c
7		30c
8		30c + 30c
9	1882	30c with map of Paris, blue shading at west
10	1883	-do-, blue shading at west and north
11	1884	-do-, no shading
16,18,19	1885	30c No. 11 with 'Valable pour tout Paris'
17		30c + 30c No. 8
20,22		30c no map
21,23	1887	30c + 30c no map
24,25,27	1897	30c CARTE PNEUMATIQUE
26,28,29		30c + 30c

Envelopes

1	1885	75c TUBES PNEUMATIQUES
2,3	1887	60/75c
4	1889	60c
5	1896	50/60c

6-8	1897	50c (two formats) ENVELOPPE PNEUMATIQUE
9-15	1902	30/50c on previous types
16		30c
17-19	1907	30c Sower (differing inscriptions on back)
20	1919	40c Chaplain
21	1921	60c
22	1925	1f
23,24,25	1928	1.50f (differing colours)
26	1938	2f

Caisse Nationale d'Epargne repayment demands

1	1884	30c + 30c Chaplain on card
2-5	1890	30c + 30c on paper (differing inscriptions)
6-8	1909	30c + 30c Sower (-do-)
9-10	1921	60c + 60c Chaplain (-do-)
11	1925	1f + 1f
12-14	1928	1.50f + 1.50f (-do-)
15	1939	2f + 2f
16	1943	3f + 3f
17	1947	6f + 6f

MARSEILLES

Letter-cards

1	1910	30c Sower
2		30c + 30c
3	1919	40c Chaplain
4	1921	60c
5	1926	1f
6,7	1929	1.50f (differing colours)
8	1938	2f

Envelope

1	1910	30c
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