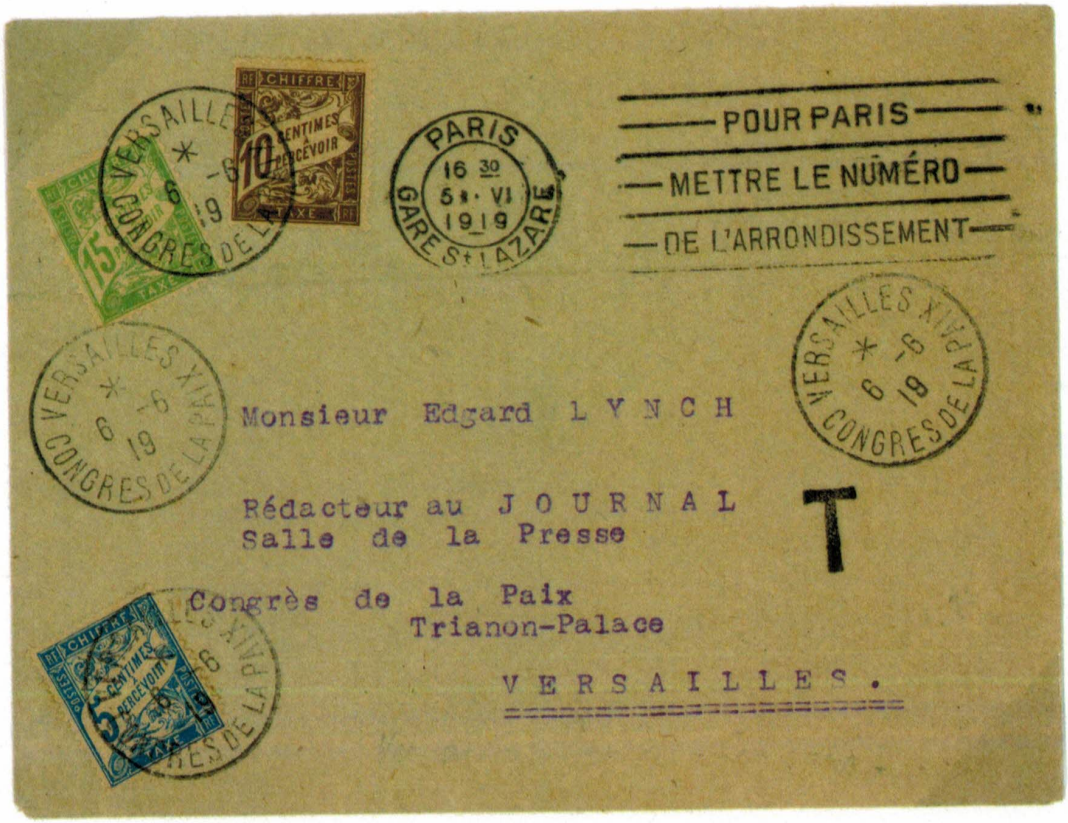
MAIL OF THE CONGRESS OF VERSAILLES 1919

In the wake of the Armistice agreement on 11 November 1918, The Allied & Associated Powers convened a meeting in the Chateau of Versailles, which had been built by King Louis XIV outside of Paris, to work out the terms of peace with defeated Germany. In the meantime, the Kaiser and Crown Prince had abdicated and sought exile in The Netherlands, while a Republic was declared as the new government back home in Germany.

Scarcely three weeks after the Armistice, President Wilson sailed for Europe on the S.S. *George Washington*, landing at Brest, France on 13 December. After visits in France and Britain, Wilson returned to Paris for a preliminary session of the Supreme War Council held on 12 January 1919. The first plenary meeting of the Peace Conference was held on the 18th. Although representatives of 32 Allies were invited, it soon became clear that the "Big Four" (Premier Clemenceau of France, Prime Minister Lloyd George of Great Britain, President Wilson of the U.S. and Premier Orlando of Italy) would make most of the decisions.

There were long negotiations on a host of details, including boundary disputes, plebiscites, colonies, war reparations, future German armaments, etc. Finally a draft was completed and given to the Germans on 7 May. There were to be no negotiations, but the German representatives could comment on it and then in the end had to accept it more or less as originally written. The formal signing ceremony took place in the Hall of Mirrors in the Chateau on 28 June 1919.



Inbound mail sent to participants in the Congress is extremely elusive and seldom seen on the philatelic market. This example was mailed unfranked in Paris on 5 June 1919, but was charged the double deficiency rate of 30 centimes on delivery. Receiving postmarks of the Congress post office were applied.

Mail from the participants in the Congress, from both Versailles and the various meeting places in Paris, can be found, but it is surprisingly elusive. As a result, the impression created is that much of what may have exist4ed at one time is still held in official archives or has been discarded. Some communications were sent by courier to insure promptness and confidentiality, and examples are included in the exhibit. The order in which the material is shown is alphabetic for the Allies, then followed by covers from the German delegation.

AMERICAN PEACE COMMISSION
Paris

Postal Express Service No. 975
1 Avr 1919
3 Mai 1919

Although President Wilson and official members of the American Delegation arrived in France on 13 December 1918, little more than a month after the Armistice, it took some time to organize the conference and gather the delegations from some 30 countries. The actual work of the Commission staff extended over a number of months until being completed in April 1919. A special APO designated as No. 975 was established in Paris to handle the mail of the Americans. Letters could be sent free but postage was required for special services. Registered mail from this APO is quite unusual.

AMERICAN PEACE COMMISSION
Paris

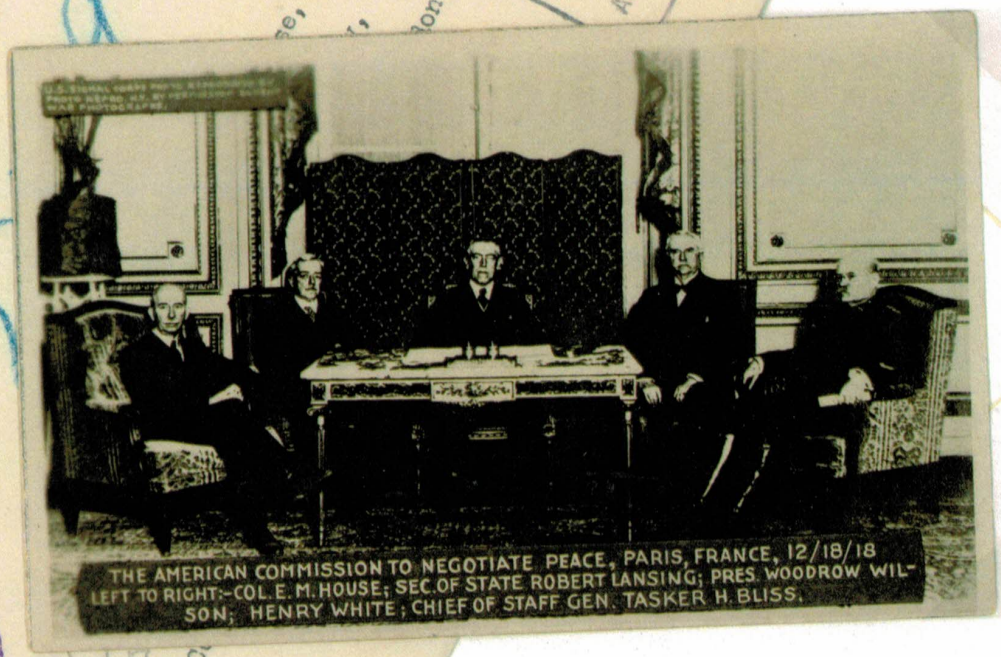
Postal Express Service No. 702
28 Avr 1919

U.S. Military Postal Express Service No. 702
22 Nov 1919

Special imprinted envelopes and cachets were used to designate official correspondence of the American Commission. These examples were sent by military courier. The envelope inscribed "Mission for Germany" is the discovery example, being unrecorded in the *Postal History of the A.E.F., 1917-1923.*

AMERICAN PEACE COMMISSION
Paris

Postal Express Service No. 702
20 Aout 1919



Cover sent by Courier as an Official Registered letter from Mr. Polk in Paris to Col. House in London, where it was received on 22 August 1919. Mr. Polk was Undersecretary of State and the Chairman of the American Staff of the Commission. This example of his personal cachet is the only such example seen by exhibitor.

BELGIAN PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

Versailles
19 May 1919

Versailles-Chateau
28 June 1919

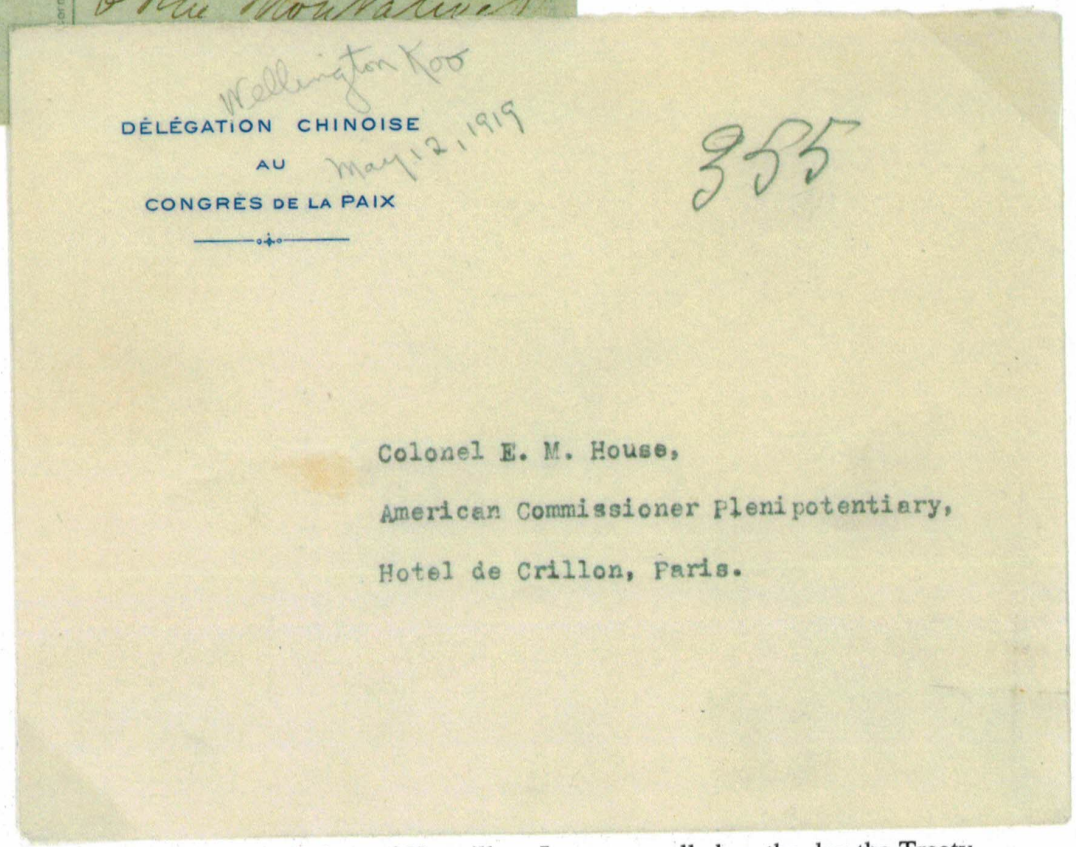
As one of the key interested participants, the Belgians sent a substantial delegation to the Peace Conference at Versailles. The lower cover was mailed from the special post office in the Chateau on 28 June 1919, the day that the Treaty was signed.

BRITISH PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

CHINESE PEACE DELEGATION
Paris

Versailles-Chateau
28 June 1919

12 May 1919



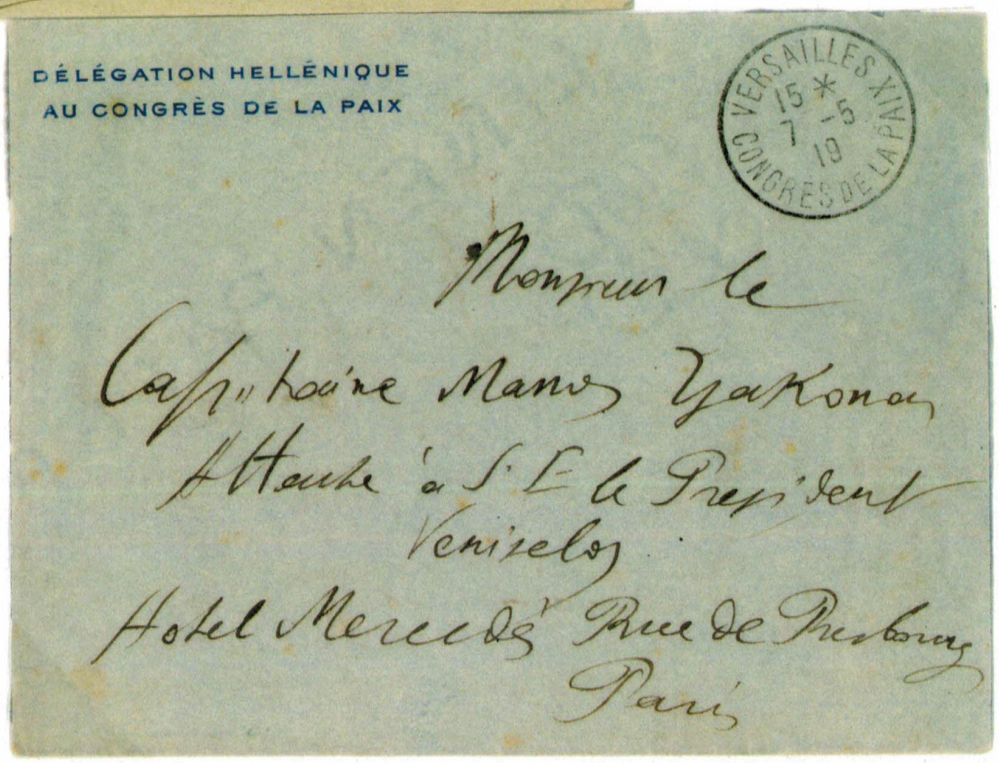
The postcard above depicts the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. It was cancelled on the day the Treaty was signed and sent to the British Consulate General in Paris, presumably as a souvenir by a member of the British Delegation.

Cover below was sent by courier from Ambassador Wellington Koo to Colonel House at the Hotel Crillon.

FINNISH PEACE DELEGATION
GREEK PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

12 May 1919

Versailles
7 June 1919



Postcard depicting the Hall of Mirrors sent by a member of the Finnish Delegation to Helsinki.

Cover below was mailed by a Greek Delegate from the special "Peace Congress" post office in Versailles. It is addressed to the attache of Prime Minister Venizelos in Paris. A very unusual usage.

FRENCH PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

Versailles
7 May 1919
28 June 1919

Postcard and cover with special markings of the "Headquarters of the Interallied Supreme Council of War," which was responsible for enforcing the terms of the treaty. The cover was mailed from the civil post office in Versailles on the day that the treaty was signed, 28 June 1919.

HEDJAZI PEACE DELEGATION
Paris

20 April 1919

CONFÉRENCE DE LA PAIX

SECRÉTARIAT
DES DÉLÉGATIONS HÉDJAZIENNES

Colonel E. M. HOUSE

Faisal
Apr 20, 1919

Crillon
PARIS

Led by Col. T. E. Lawrence, an Arab uprising against the Ottoman Empire succeeded in the creation of the State of Hedjaz on the Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula. in 1916. Prince Faisal went to the peace talks to look after the Arab interests. This cover was sent by him via courier to Col. House. An exceptionally elusive usage.

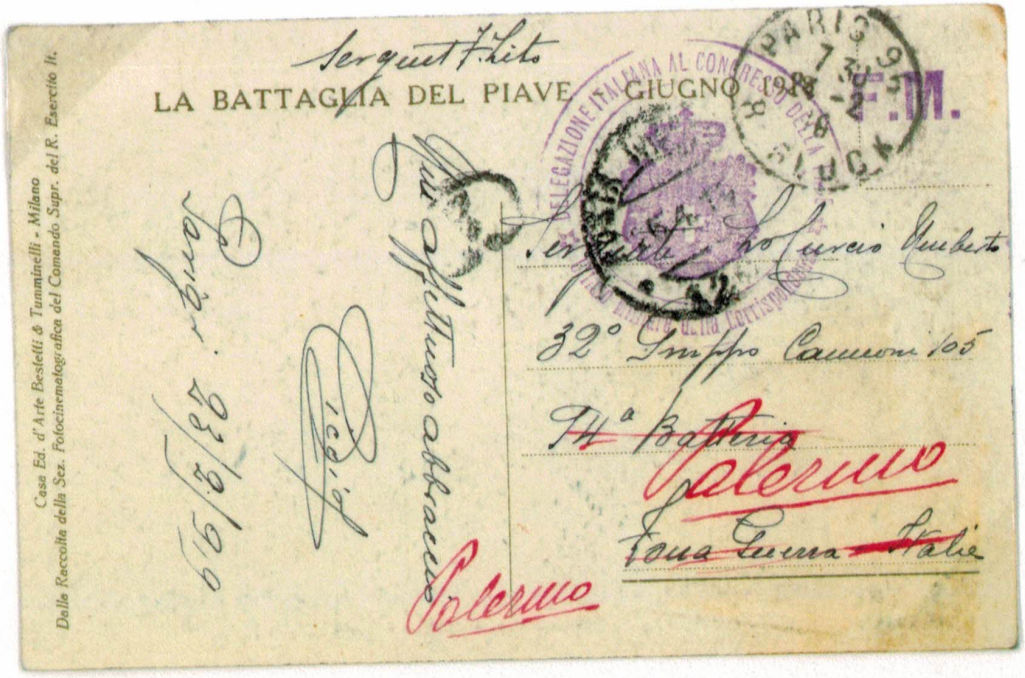
ITALIAN PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

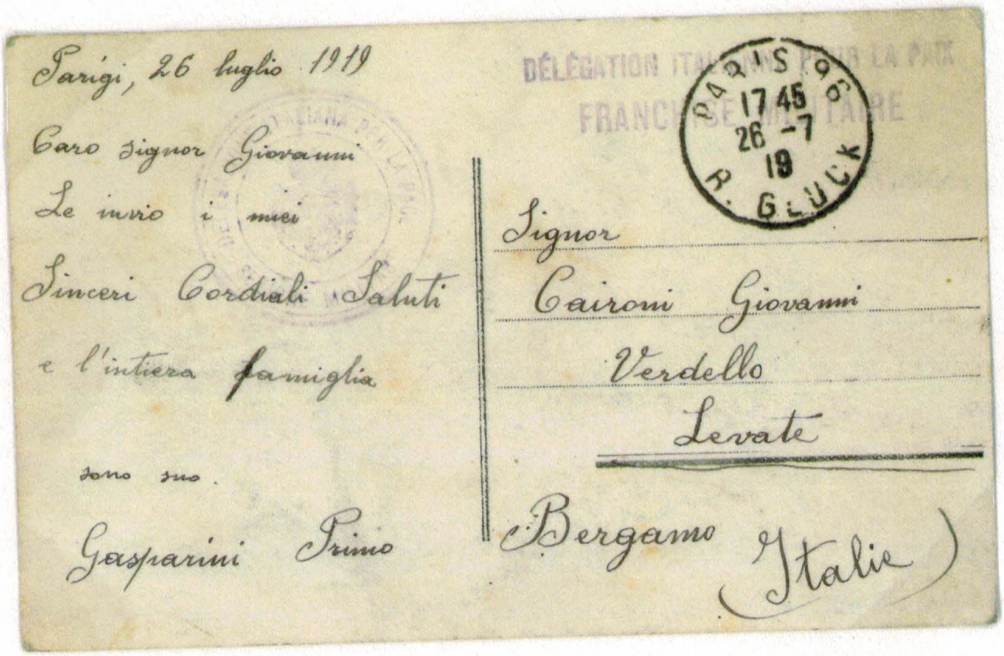
Versailles
June 1919
4 June 1919

The Italian Peace Delegation operated as a section of the Interallied Supreme War Council at Versailles. The above covers with a printed corner card (in Italian) and a similarly worded cachet (in French) are from the correspondence of Lt. Col. Casati to his family in Italy.

ITALIAN PEACE DELEGATION
Paris

Paris
24 February 1919
26 July 1919

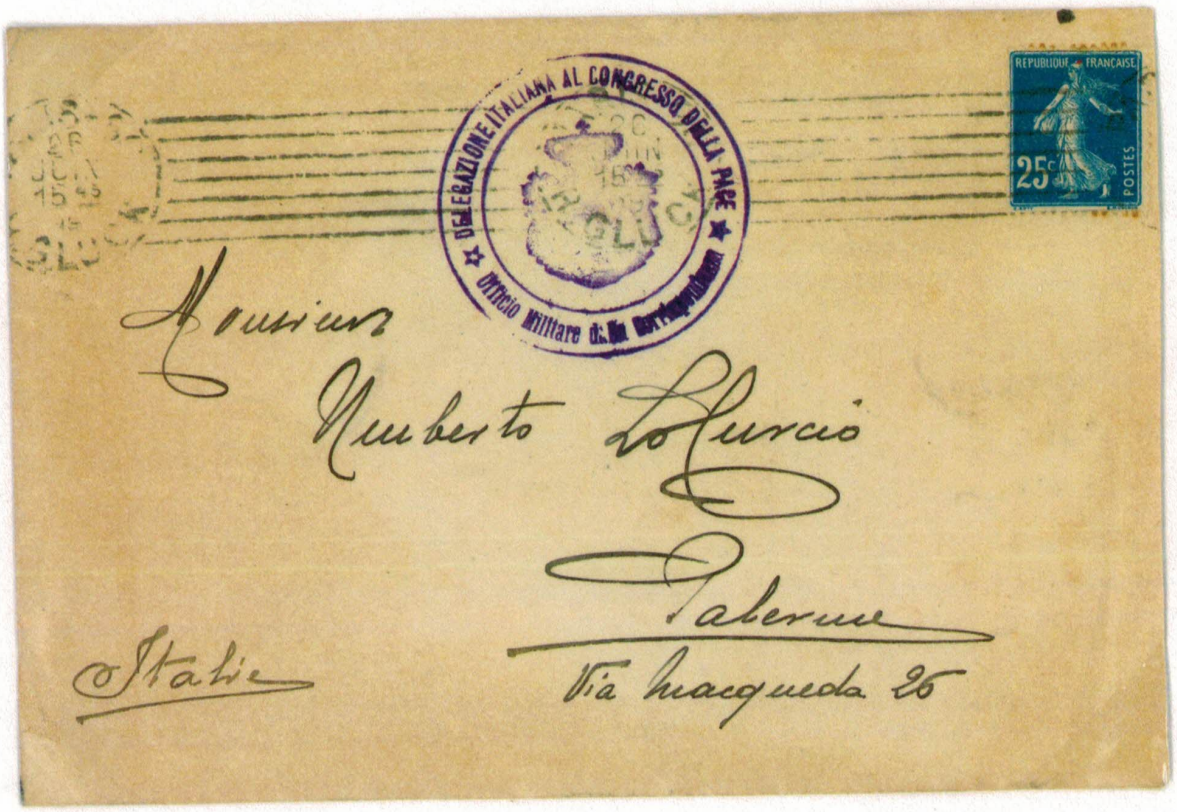




Cards showing two different and elusive cachets of the Italian Delegates to the Peace Congress and the Military Section for the Peace.

ITALIAN PEACE DELEGATION
Paris

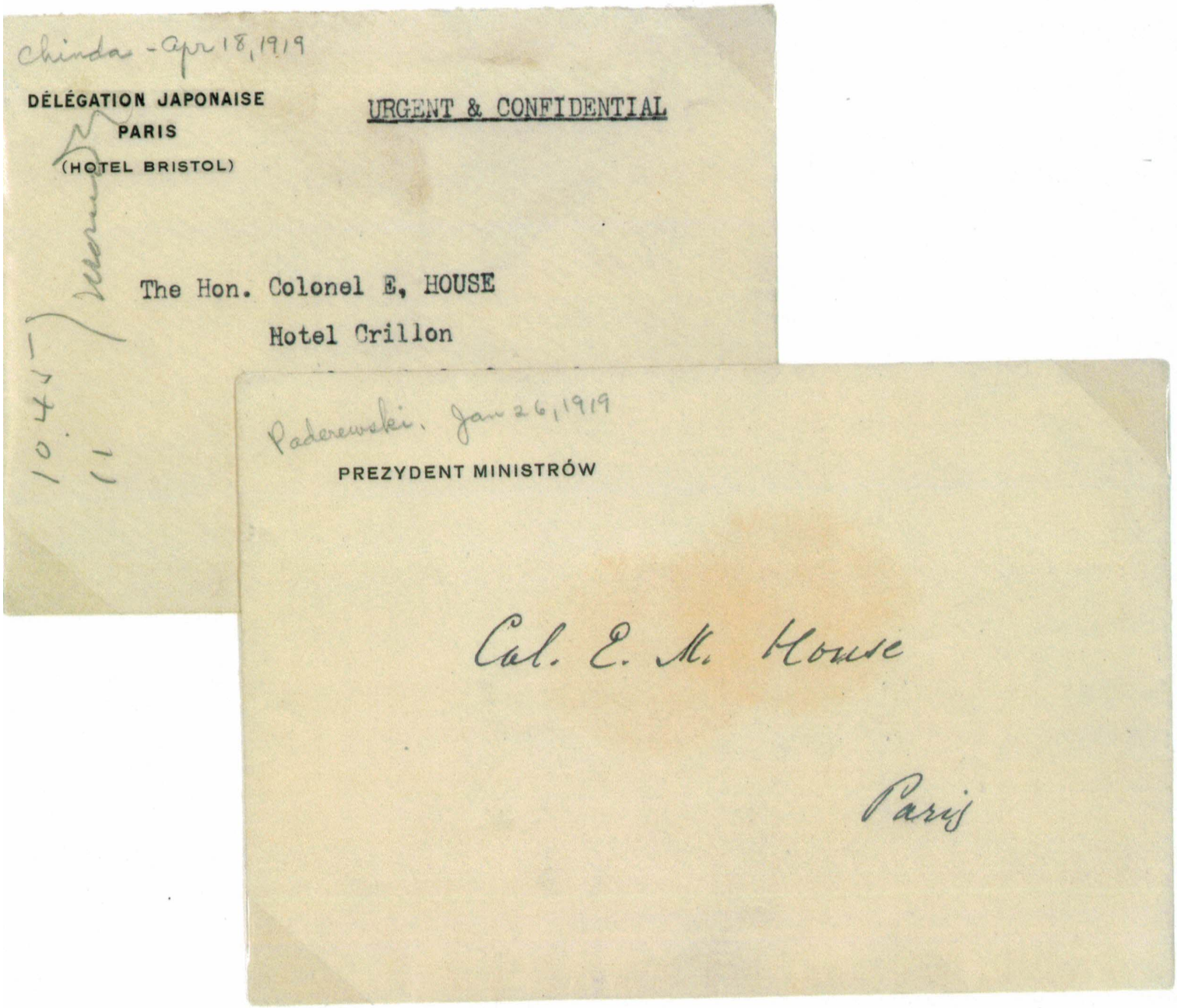
Paris
26 June 1919



Implementing the terms of the peace treaty fell to the staff of the delegations operating in Paris. Above cover was sent by a member of the Military Section of the Italian Delegation to Italy.

JAPANESE PEACE DELEGATION
POLISH PEACE DELEGATION
Paris

18 April 1919
26 January 1919

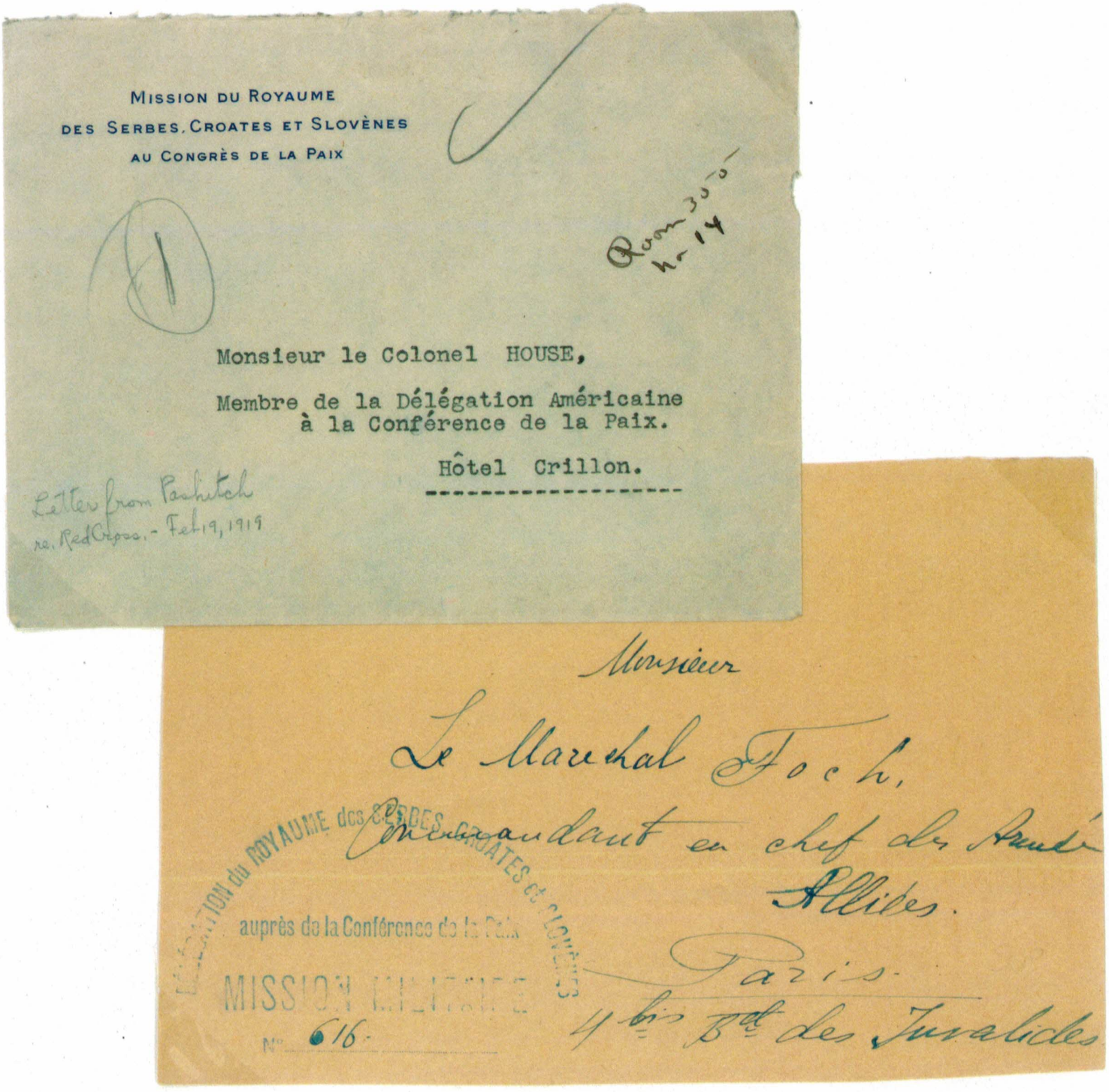


Due to its efforts in taking over a number of the former German colonies in the Pacific, Japan was treated as a full-fledged member of the Allied powers. However, it did not take an active part in the peace negotiations except with regard to taking over the German leasehold on the Shantung Peninsula in China. Upper cover sent by courier from Baron Chinda at the Bristol to Colonel House at the Crillon in April 1919.

Poland declared its independence on 11 November 1918. Minister President (Premier) Ignace Paderewski was the leader of its peace delegation. Lower cover sent from him by courier to Col. House at the Crillon in January 1919.

SERB, CROAT & SLOVENE DELEGATION
Paris

19 February 1919



The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats & Slovenes (renamed Jugoslavia in 1929) was created at the end of the war out of the countries of Serbia and Montenegro plus territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy inhabited by South Slavs, including Bosnia-Hercegovina, Croatia, Dalmatia and Slovenia. These examples of mail sent by courier to Col. House at the Hotel Crillon and to Marshal Foch, the French Military Commander in Chief.

GERMAN PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

Deutsche Friedensdelegation
2 June 1919
11 June 1919

The Germans were not invited to Versailles until very late in the process, on 6 May 1919, with the position of the Allies being that there would be no negotiations but that the Germans would be required to sign the completed document as presented. A special post office was established for the German delegates, with the mail being postmarked and sent by diplomatic pouch to Berlin for distribution to the addressees. Note that the special seal of the Delegation still included the imperial eagle, although the Kaiser and Crown Prince had abdicated months earlier. Registered mail with the special label is rarely seen.

GERMAN PEACE DELEGATION
Versailles

Berlin W8
3 November 1919
23 April 1920

Although the Germans arrived late to the party, they were required to stay much longer than most of the others in order to report on how their government was complying with the various terms of the Treaty. In due course, the activity was moved from Versailles to Paris and the emblem on their cachet was changed from the imperial eagle to a less warlike bird representing the Weimar Republic. The special post office was closed, and mail was sent by pouch to the Berlin W8 Courier Office. Eventually, the activities of the Delegation were moved back to Germany, mainly in Berlin and Dusseldorf.