

Cancellations of India's Madras Postal Circle Experimental Post Offices: *An Introduction* 1900's - 1971

Purpose: A study of India's Madras Postal Circle Experimental Post Office cancellations.

Brief History: India is a vast country. The British East India Company established post offices in 1764 – 1766 to serve only the Presidencies. In 1774, the East India Company was reorganized, and changed from a government-use only to an all-people's use company. To facilitate this huge new postal system, **Postal Circles**, similar to Regions, were created for more efficient delivery of mail. Bengal (C), Bombay (B), and Madras (M) were the first Postal Circles. From then on, Postal Circles were added, deleted, merged and separated over time. An **Alpha-Numeric Code** was used to identify the Postal Circles and post offices in those Circles. Identification proved to be difficult at times when numbers were sometimes used in more than one Postal Circle as the Circles changed and cities were moved from one Postal Circle to another.

Each Postal Circle had a main **Post Office (P.O.)** with full postal and financial services. A **Sub-Office (S.O.)** was subordinate and accountable to the main Post Office. **Branch Offices (B.O.)** held a lower status than a Sub-Office and were intended for villages and locales too small for a Sub-Office. A school master, shopkeeper or other resident with sufficient education ran the Branch Office.

Experimental Post Offices were established on a regular basis and given six months or more to determine if the area or locale could support a post office. Sometimes, they started out as a **Sub-Office**, advancing to a full **Post Office**. Each **Experimental P.O.** and **S.O.** had a Postal Circle Alpha-Numeric designation.

There is solid early research on experimental cancels; this exhibit picks up from 1900 onward. The exhibit currently concentrates on Experimental Cancellations from Madras Postal Circle (M/MS), showing covers in chronological order. The timeframe of this exhibit will shorten and additional frames added as additional quality items are acquired.

Madras Postal Circle was established 1 April 1774¹. Over the years, new cities from other Circles were added to Madras as well as some Madras cities removed and added to other Circles.

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Circle</u>	<u>HQ Station</u>	<u>Period</u>
M	Madras	Madras	1873-1884
MS	Chennai (Madras)	Chennai	1893



EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / M-681 – 31 MY / 08. There is no information on the front or back of the cover to tell us the Experimental Cancel designation, except that it did originate from within the Madras Postal Circle. Cancel on reverse is **Rasipuram / 3 JU 08 12__PM**. Rasipuram is in the Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle.

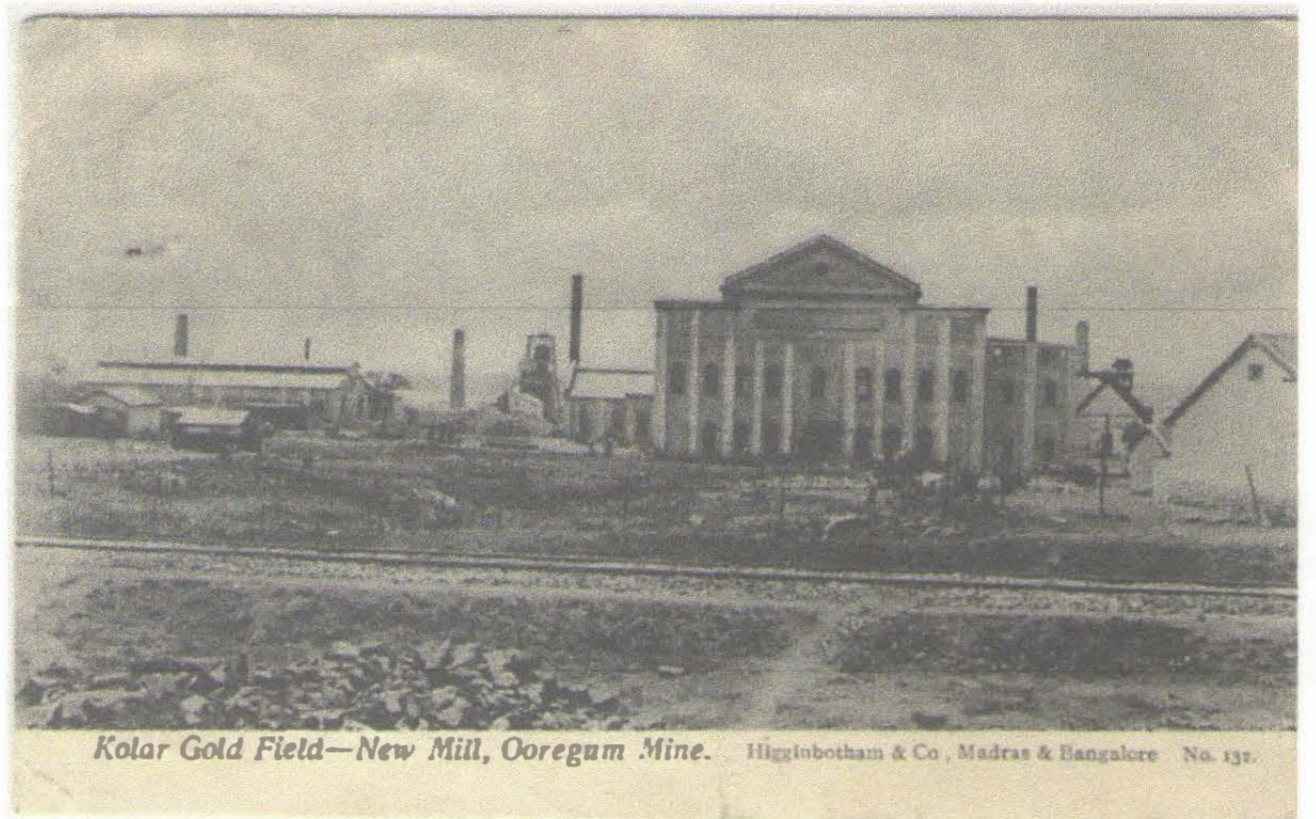
¹ *India Postal History 1947-1997*, by Ashok Kumar Bayanwala, 1997, internet

Madras Experimental P.O.

M1064 Unknown, 1908

Benkipur B.O., Sea Post Office

Picture postcard to Cornwall, England. No return address to inform us where this originated from. Picture side does offer some clues: Kolar Gold Fields is a 40-mile mining region in *Karnataka State* (formerly *Mysore State*) in South India. Ooregum (Oorgaum) was one of 4 main veins that opened in early 1880's. Eventually, the mines declined in production, were nationalized in 1956 to prevent closure and finally closed in 2001. The miners moved their families 60 miles away to Bengaluru (Bangalore). This entire area was a part of Madras Postal Circle in 1908.



Scan of postcard front



*Purple matting denotes special items.

EXPERIMENTAL P.O. M-1064 / 26 MA / 08. Nothing here that directly tells us what post office this is. With front postcard information, I suspect city of **Bangalore**. This postcard obtained **BENKIPUR / B.O. / 28 MA / 08** cancellation two days later. Benkipur (Bankipur/Bankipore) is **Branch Post Office** on River Ganges in *Patna, Bihar State, Bengal Postal Circle*.

SEA POST OFFICE / A / 28 MA / 08. This is a **Bombay-Aden-Suez Sea Post Office** cancel. The contract for this service was signed in 1867 between Indian Post Office and Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company for their steamer service from Suez to Bombay, via Aden. The first sailing to carry mail to India was May 1868. Sorting of mails in both directions and originally carried out by six teams (with designations A – F) under control of Indian Post Office. An intermediate stop was made at Aden to drop off and collect mail to and from East Africa and Arabian Coast, and to refuel the ships.

Madras Experimental P.O.

M-381 Tambaram, 1938
M196 Tiruvannamalai, 1939

Cover to Geneve, Suisse (Switzerland)

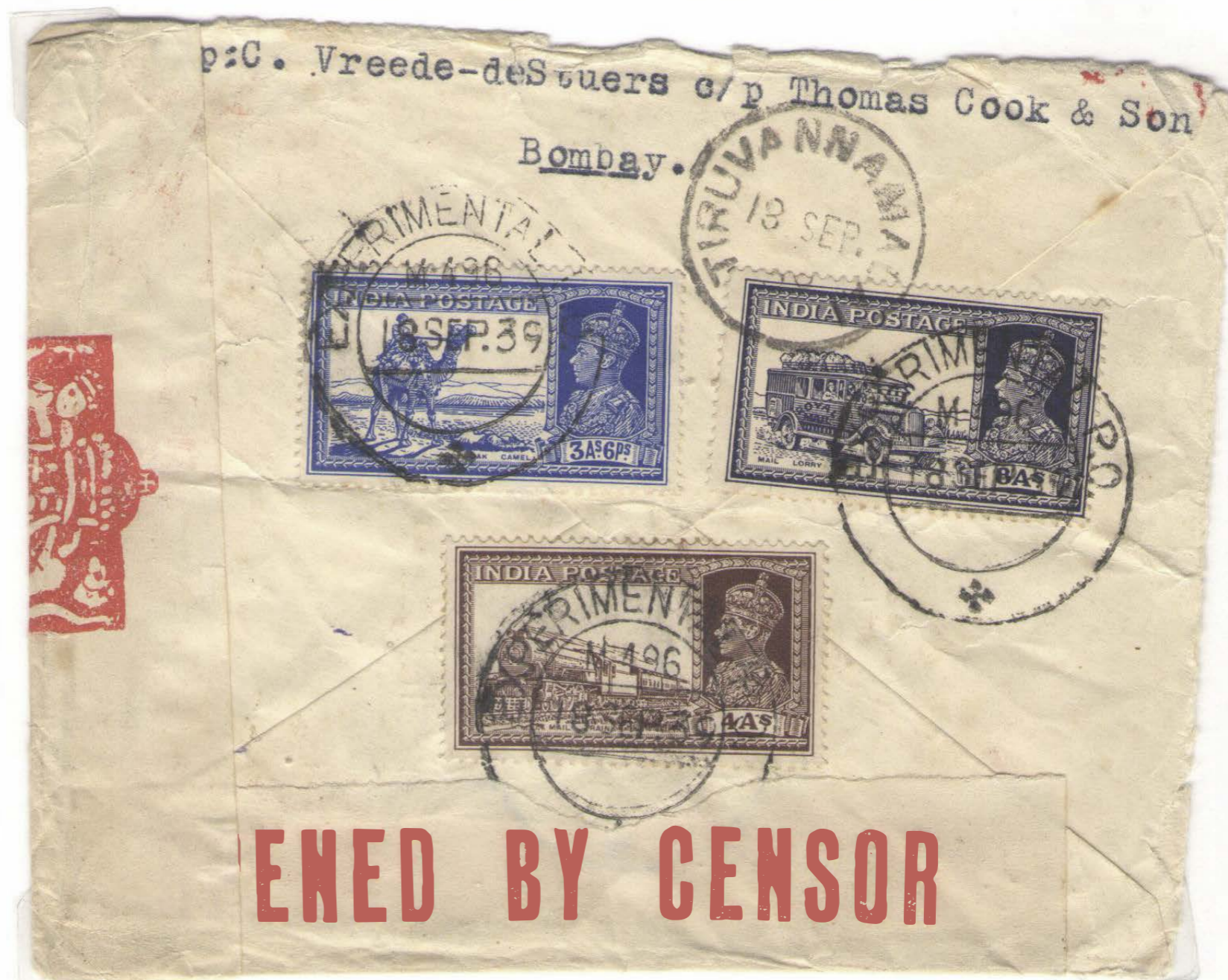


EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / M-381 / 28 DEC 38. There is nothing on the front that tells us where this airmail cover came from. Reverse of cover has handwritten **Tambaram Madras India** at the top. *Tamil Nadu State in Madras Postal Circle.*

Censored cover to The Hague, Holland:



Scan cover front.



EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / M196 / 18 SEP 39. Cover sent from Bombay. Notice Tiruvannamalai regular cancel. There is nothing else telling us where the experimental cancel may be from. **Tiruvannamalai** is in *Tamil Nadu State*, Madras Postal Circle, so M196 may be from an office between Bombay and Tiruvannamalai.

Registered cover to Kattukudipatti, India from
Matale, Ceylon:



Scan of front of cover

EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / M-481 / 11 MAY 41.
Unknown which post office this passed through. The cover is going to Kattukudipatti in Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle. Notice cancel **KATTUKUDIPATTI / B.O. / 11 MAY 41 / RAMNAD.** B.O. = Branch Office in Tamil Nadu State, a small village office run by schoolmaster or village store owner, etc.

Madras Experimental P.O.

MS-103 Bangalore State, 1942
MS-147 Military, 1945

1942 Air Mail, Registered letter to Miami, Florida



EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / MS-103 / 29 APR 42. Mailed from **Bangalore** (Bengaluru), India, in *Karnataka State, Madras Postal Circle*. Hindustan Aircraft on Registration label. Founded 1940, designed/built 1 wooden 10-seat glider 1941-1942. Became Hindustan Aeronautics 1964, aerospace/defense company. Boeing has ties. India did not fly mail on planes, not a Flight Cover. Local village post, post office branch on plant site or nearby air field post?

Military cover, Unit Censor mark Octacamund, Nellgherry District, Bangalore State, Madras Postal Circle:



EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / MS-147 / 3 DEC 45. Handwritten on reverse **1544937 ACI F COOP / R.A.F. / India Command / Written in English.** Rapid Action Force, Military. Madras Postal Circle. Military base information is confidential.

British cover from Brough, East York, England to Deolali India Command in *Nashik District, Maharashtra State, Mumbai/Bombay Postal Circle*, and rerouted back to West Brough, East York, England



Scan of front of cover



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / DELY / 28 NOV 46 / 4—PM in Double Circle Cancel. **EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 30 NOV / 1946 / 11 AM / MS-78** in Single Circle Cancel. This cover arrived and probably left back to England from the same **Sub-Office** in *Madras Postal Circle*.

Route cover traveled:

28 Oct 46 Brough, York, Great Britain
18 Nov Bombay, India
21 Nov GHQ 2 nd Echelon India Command
28 Nov DELY Experimental S.O. MS-78 double circle cancel
28 Nov DELY 1130 am location illegible
30 Nov Experimental S.O. MS-78 single circle cancel
Handstamp box on front – NOT AT H.B.T.D. (Homeward Trooping Depot) 15-11-46
Penciled on back: 15 Bd FLD Regt RA

Madras Experimental P.O.

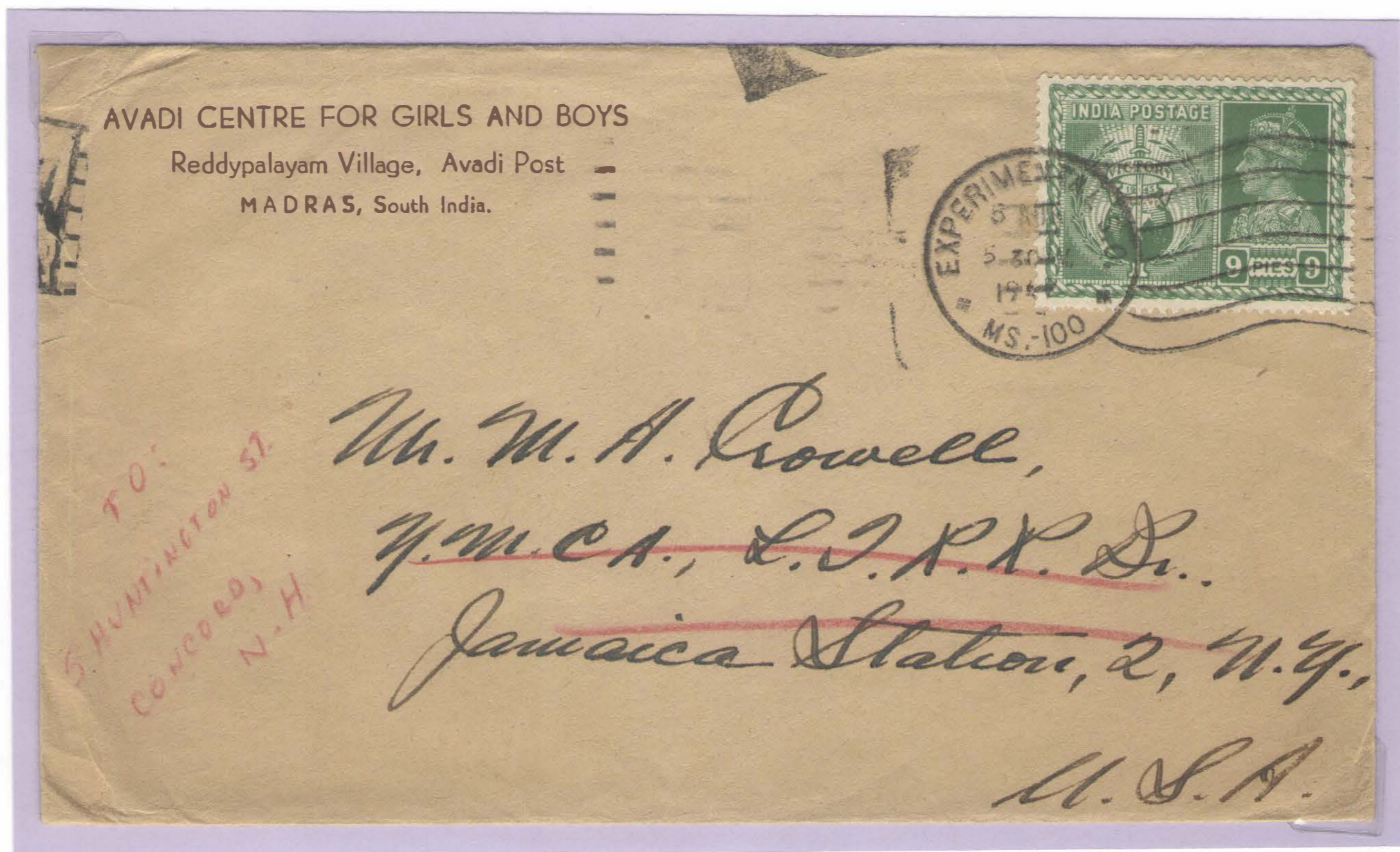
MS-100 Reddypalayam Village, 1947

After Independence – India and Pakistan separated August 14, 1947; India gained Independence from the British on August 15. Madras Postal Circle maintained its M/MS alpha notation.



Scan of cover reverse

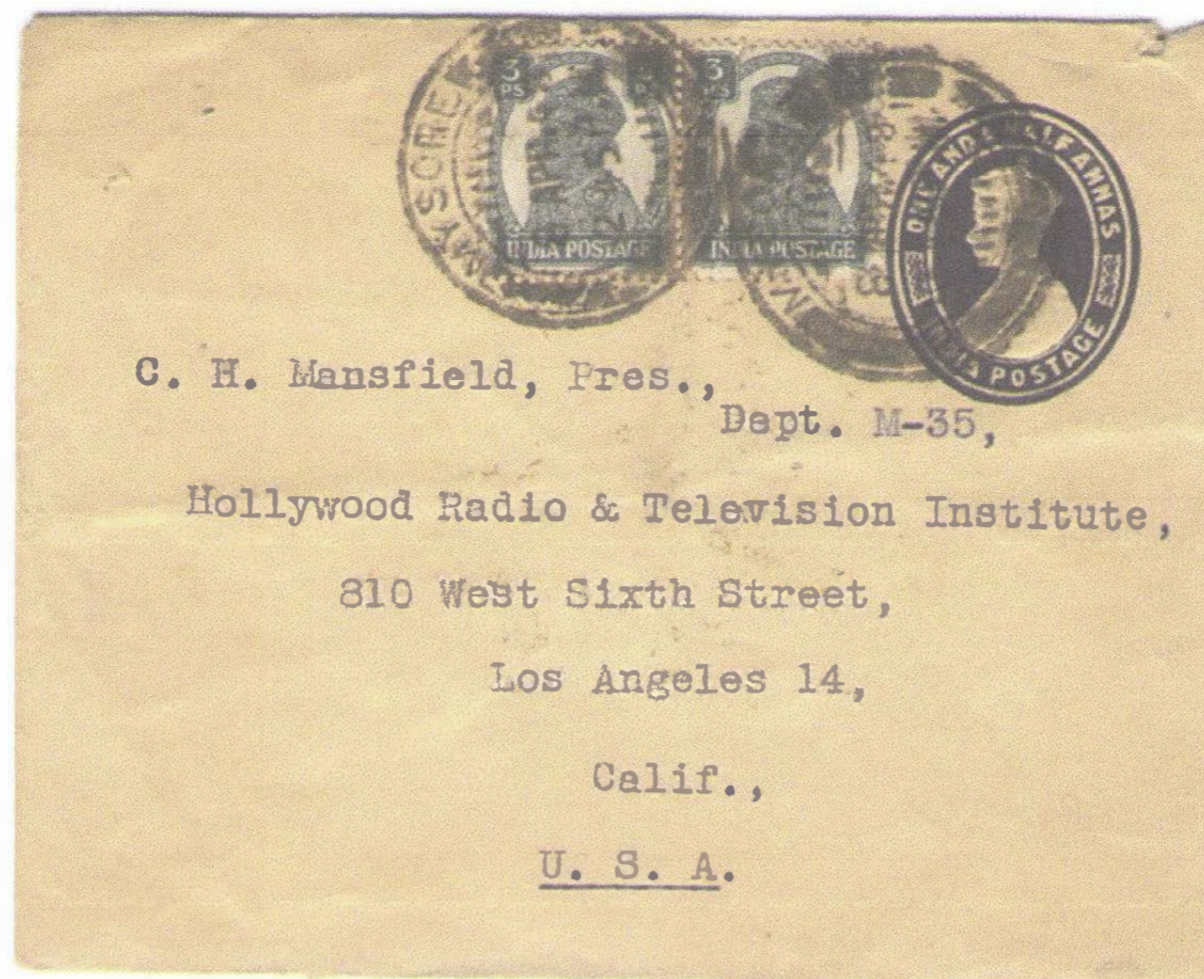
Cover re-routed from New York to New Hampshire



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 5 __ / 5 30 PM / 1947 / MS-100. Cover from **Reddypalayam Village**, a **Banking Branch Office**; **Avadi Post** was most likely a **Military Post Office**, the **Sub-Office** of this cancel. All are in **Madras, Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle**.

The month and year date are difficult to read on the front cancel, but on the cover reverse (scan above) is **JAMAICA, N.Y. 6 / OCT 21 / 17 PM / 1947**. Unless it literally took months to get to the United States, this cover was mailed two months *AFTER* independence.

Cover to Los Angeles, California, USA

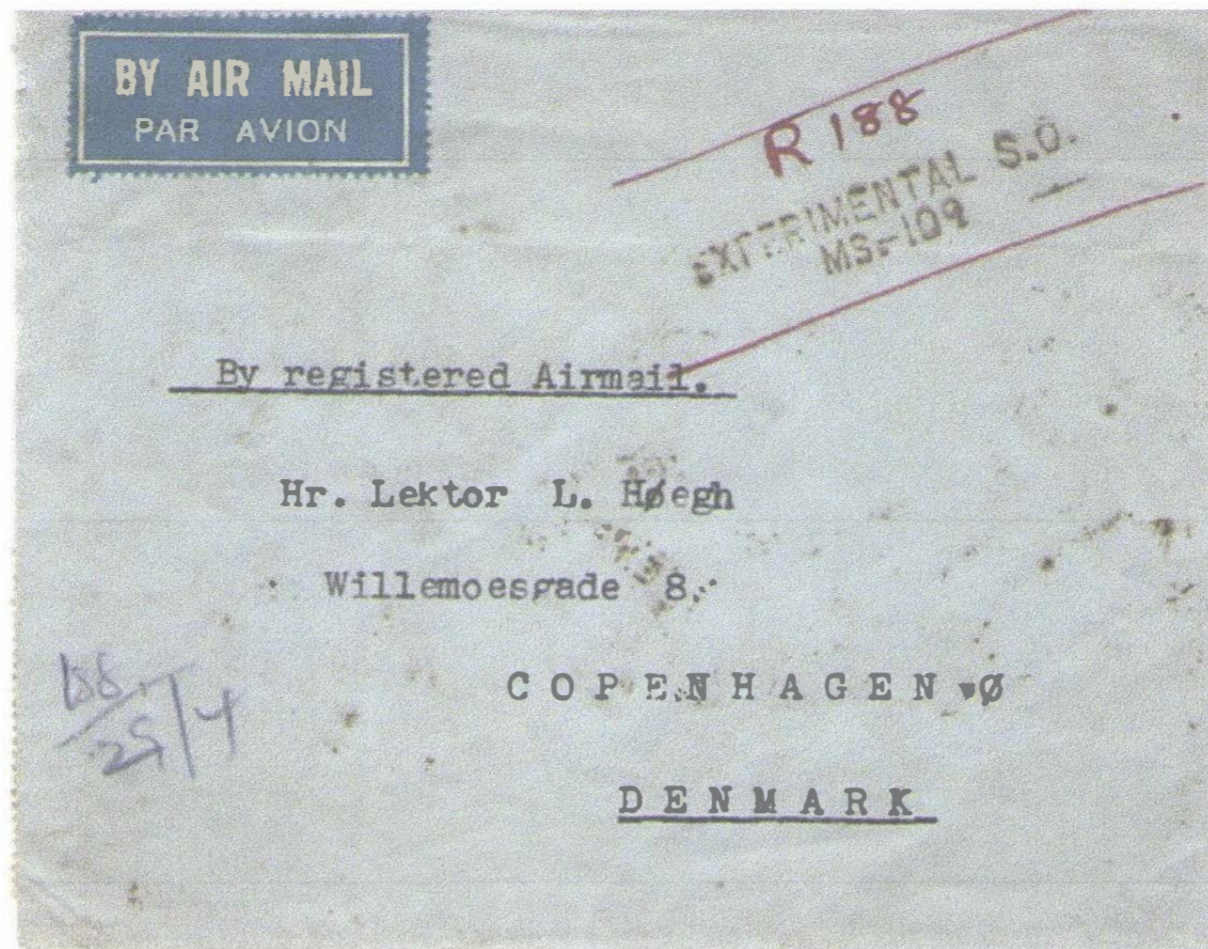


Scan of cover front



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 8 APR / 9 30 AM / 1948 / MS-103, Single Circle Cancel. Two Double Circle Cancels on front state **MYSORE / 8 APR 48 / 12 45 PM**. Cover was posted from **Mysore, Karnataka State, Madras**, and passed through an unknown **Experimental Sub-Office** (sometimes called **Sorting Office**) on its way to the US. All are in Madras Postal Circle.

Registered cover to Copenhagen, Denmark



Scan of cover front

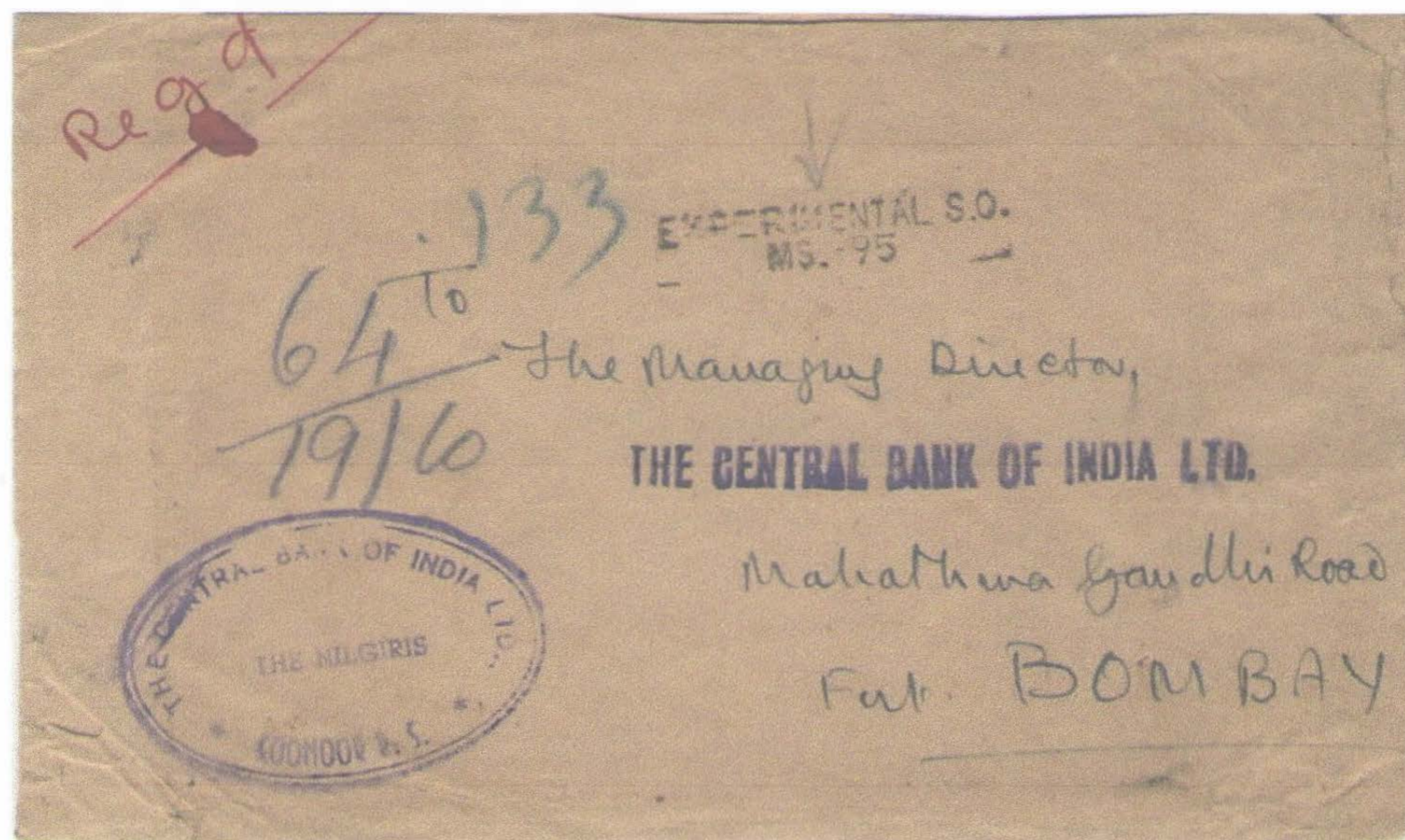
Very clear handstamp **EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / MS.-109** on cover front.



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 29 APR 48 / MS-109. Multiple strikes of cancel on back of cover. With return address of **Tinnevely, South India**, it is a good bet that MS-109 is that town. Research shows that Tinnevely, South India, was the name under British rule era. So was this area still under British rule almost a year after Independence, or did writer simply not use the newer names of Nellai or Tirunelveli. This area is *Tirunelveli District, Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle*.

India Cements Ltd is now located in Chennai, still Madras Postal Circle.

Registered cover to Bombay Bank with **EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / MS-95** rubber stamped on front (scan)



Scan of cover front

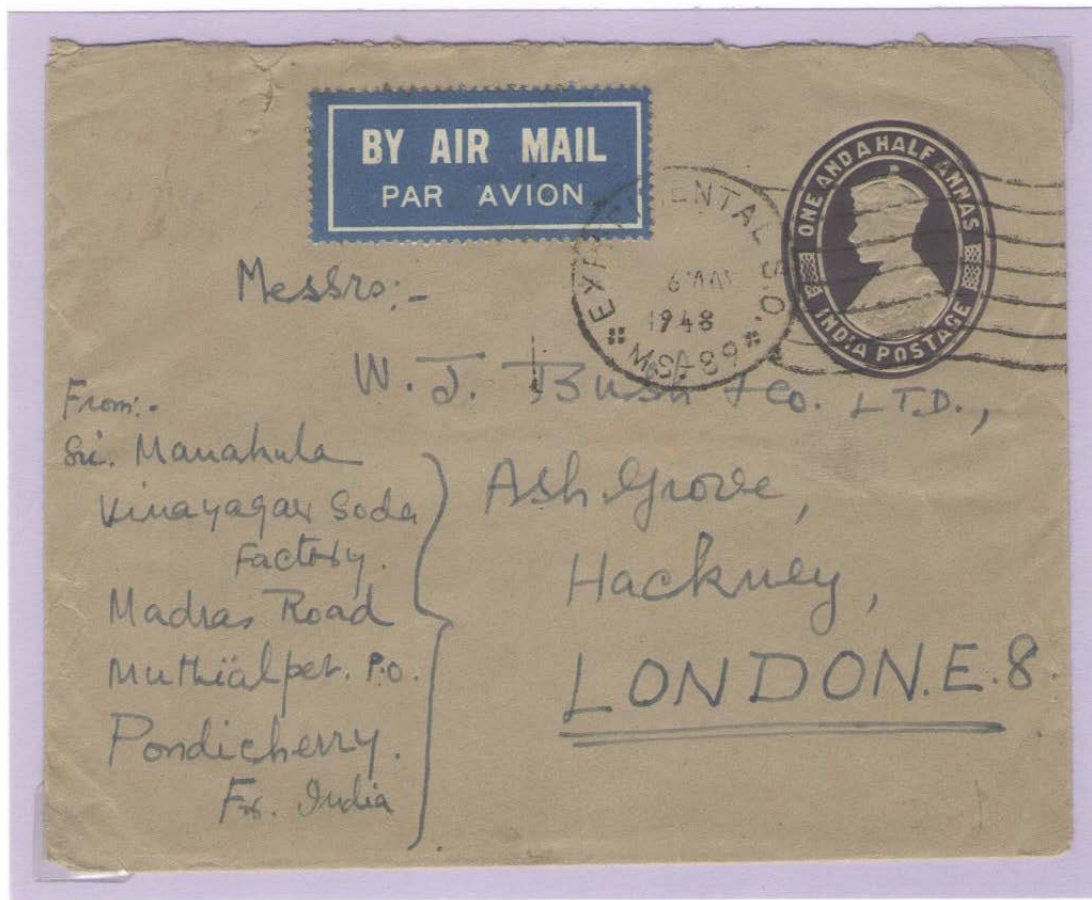
On reverse:



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 19 OCT 48 / MS-95. Another mystery **Sub-Office**, but the cover came from Madras Postal Circle and ended up in Bombay Postal Circle.

Notice the **INS and REG / DELY / 23 OCT 48 / 11 30 A.M. / OFIC DEPT / BOMBAY SPO** cancel. Cover was delivered to this location. There is vast country between Madras and Bombay, so the **Experimental Sub-Office** could be from anywhere.

Air Mail cover to London, England



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 6 MAY / 1948 / MS-89. Return address is **Pondicherry, French India**; *Pondicherry State, Madras Postal Circle*. Cover was mailed almost 9 months after India Independence. French control of India Pondicherry was not transferred to India until 1 November 1954. Actual signing of the *de jure* transfer of territory agreement between France and India was not until 16 August 1962, eight years later!



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 6 MAY / 1948 / MS-89 cancel on back of cover (scan).

Madras Experimental P.O.

MS-48 Unknown, 1949
MS-123 Unknown, 1949

Cover to Chicago, Illinois, USA



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 8 JUN / 1949 / MS-48. There is no indicating factors as to where this cover came from within the Madras Postal Circle, so cannot identify the postal station yet.



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 6 DEC 49 / MS-123. Again, no markings to indicate where this Book Post cover originated from within the Madras Postal Circle.

EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 20 JUN / 3 47 PM / 1950 / MS-194. Re-usable envelope for O.H.M.S. Income Tax mailing. Inside document states *Karaikudi District, Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle*.



II Adde. Income tax Office, Circle I
Karaikudi, Dt. 16-6-50
or on dunn
no. 1945-46 - 93ri RM.
- pay ment 8 -
has not paid the tax Rs 214-30
350 for the above year. The
relatively paid and the fact
that they wish a heavy penalty
S. Nagendran
II Adde. Income tax Office,
Karaikudi
16650



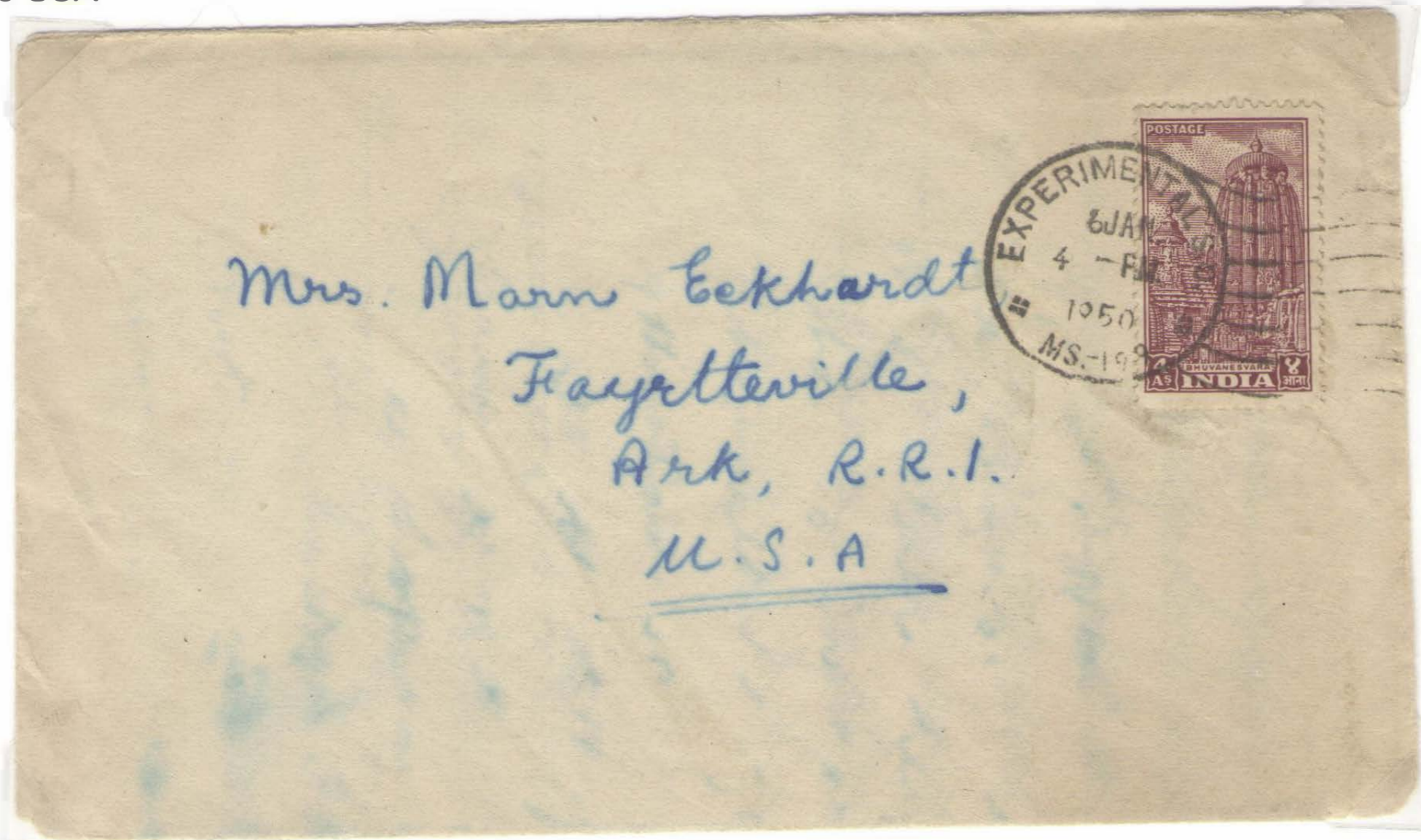
PULANKURICHI / B.O. / 21 JUN 50
/ RAMNAD. Branch Office
Receiving postmark on back of
cover, a small village in Tamil Nadu
State, Madras Postal Circle.

Document enclosed in envelope
stating sender's location.

Madras Experimental P.O.

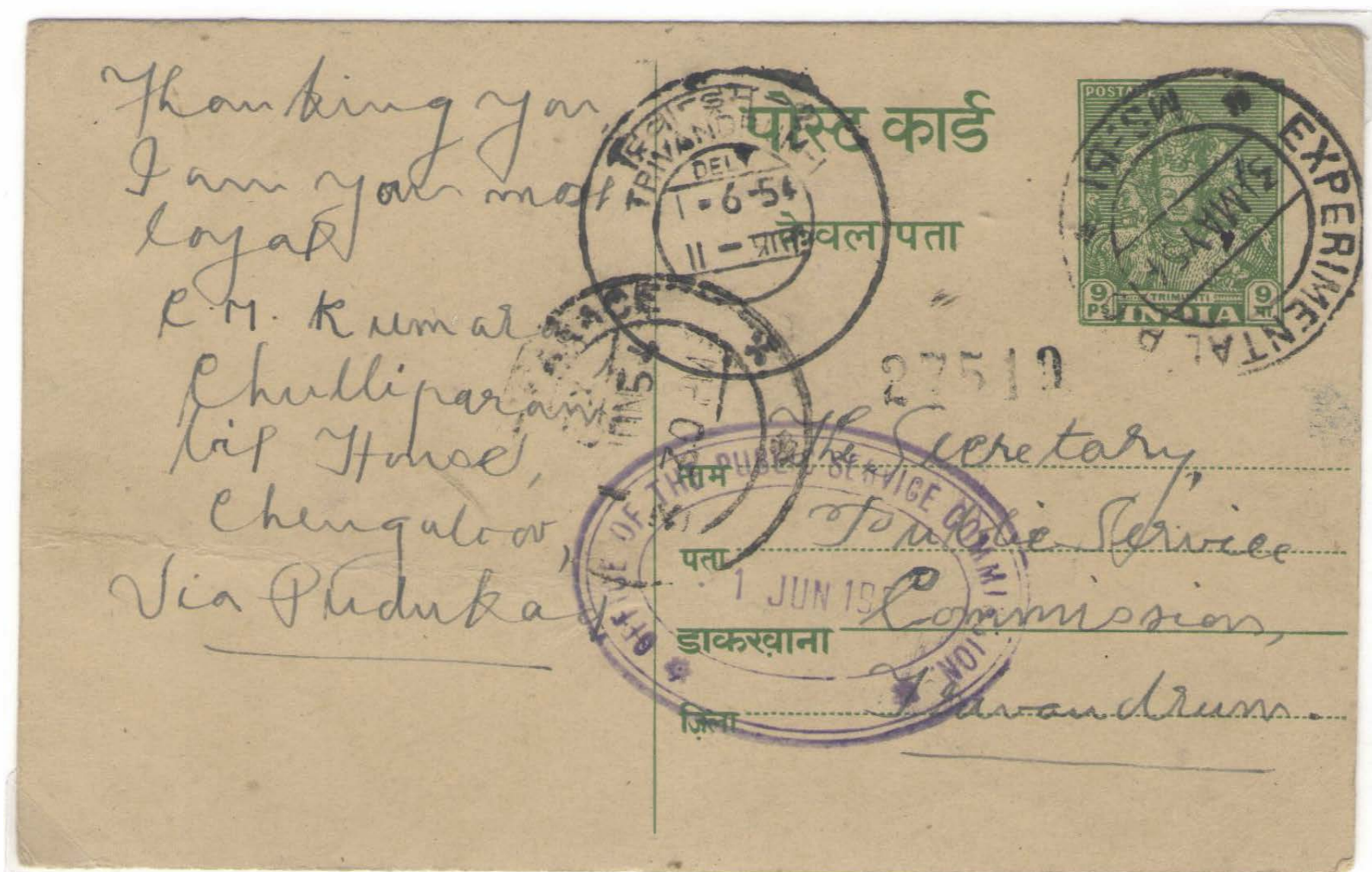
MS-199 Rajahmundry, 1950
MS-151 Chungaloor, 1954

Cover to USA



EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / 6 JAN / 4 – PM / 1950 / MS-199. Return address on back states **Rajahmundry, S. India**, which is in *Andhra Pradesh State*, Madras Postal Circle. Enclosed letter denotes *olcotts garden, Rajahmundry, 30th Dec. '49* when letter was written.

India Postal Card mailed to Office of the Public Commission in Trivandrum, India



EXPERIMENTAL P.O. / 31 MAY 54 / MS-151. Mailed from **Chungaloor** (also spelled **Chengaloor** or **Chengullur**), *Trivandrum, Kerala State* in Madras Postal Circle. Kerala State citizens speak English and Malayalam. Look at center Delivery cancel – has both languages, which is common.

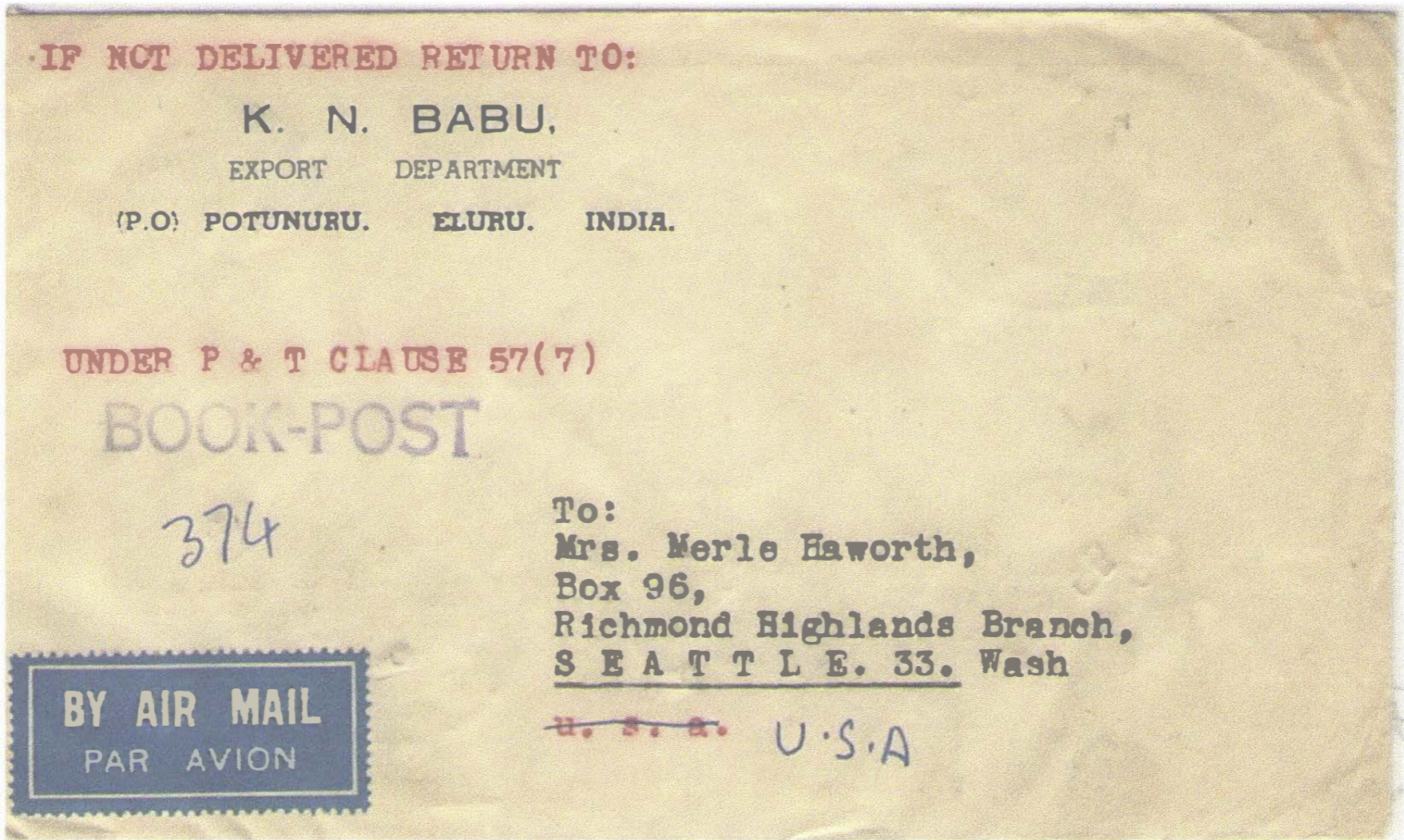
Madras Experimental P.O.

MS-52 Unknown, 1955
Potunuru B.O., 1955

Air Mail Book Post cover to Seattle, Washington

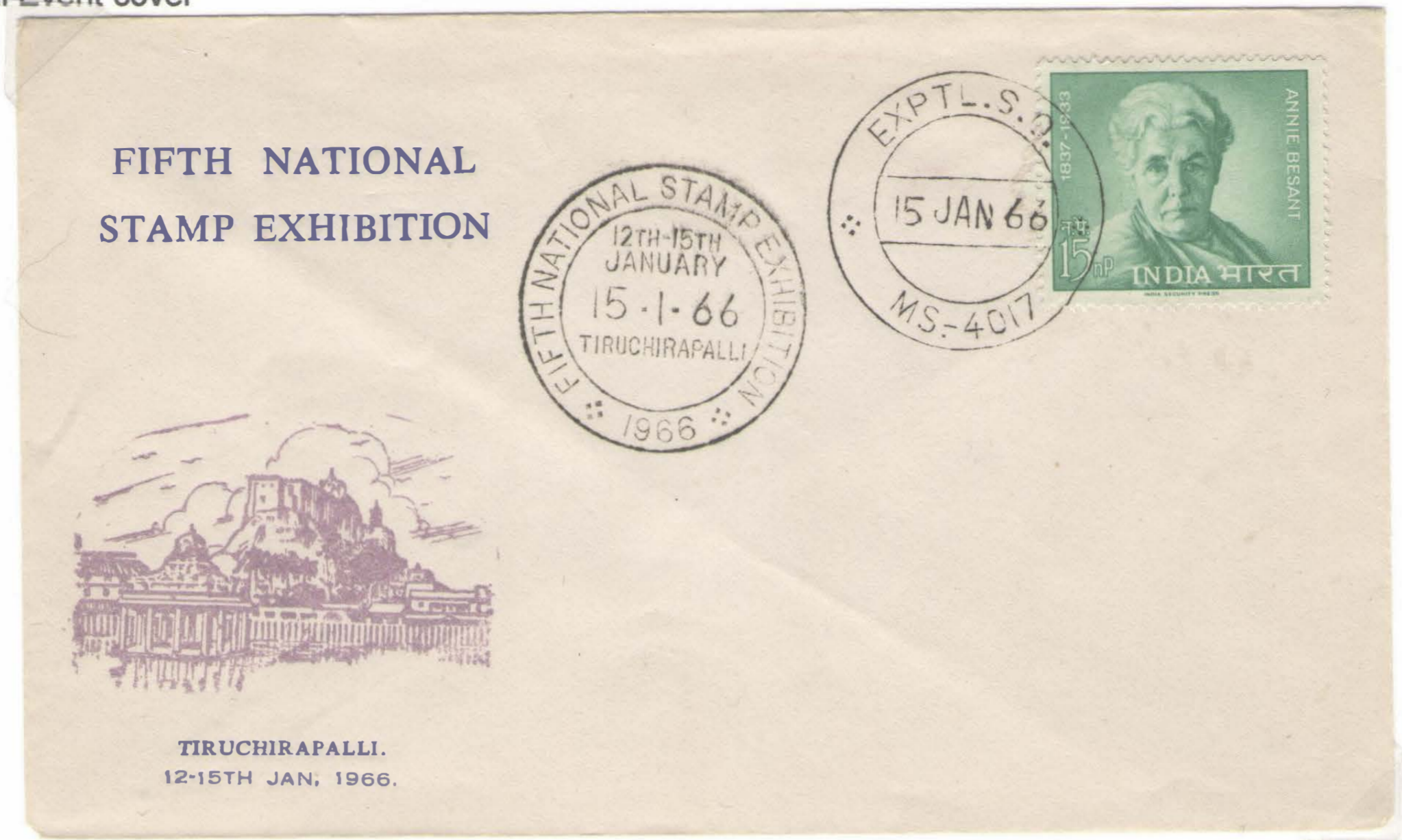


EXPERIMENTAL S.O. / DELY / 9 FEB 55 / MS-52. This denotes a **Delivery** cancel, but cover was sent to Seattle, Washington, USA (see scan below). There are 4 identical postmarks of **POTUNURU / B.O. / 9 FEB 55 / WEST GODAVARI**.

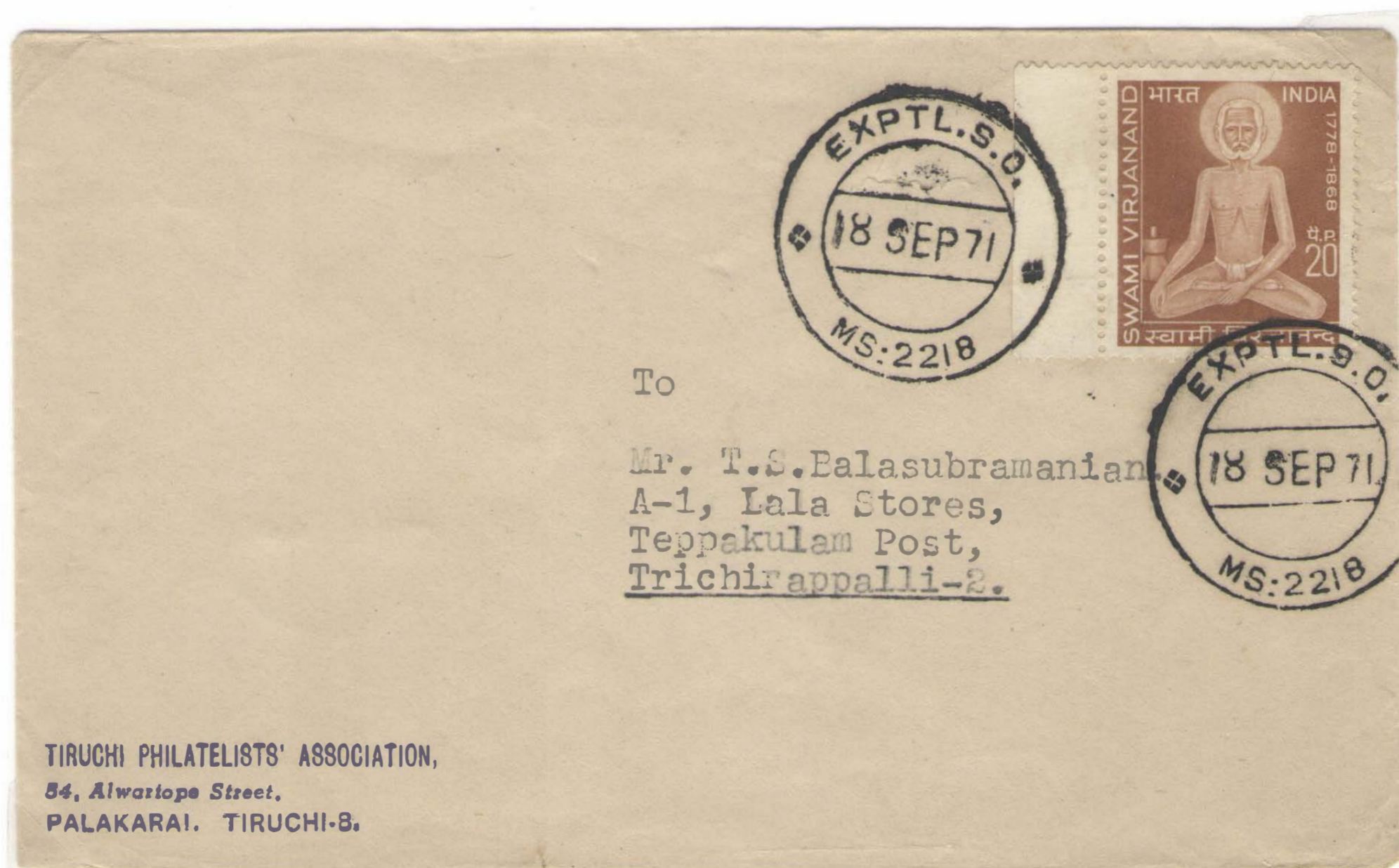


Front scan shows cover sent from **Potunuru**, a village in *West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh State, Madras Postal Circle*. Cover sent from village **Branch Office** to main **Sub-Office** in Potunuru before heading out of the country.

Special Event cover



EXPTL. S.O. / 15 JAN 66 / MS-4017. Special covers make identification easy. Tiruchirapalli is in *Tamil Nadu State, Madras Postal Circle*.



EXPTL. S.O. / 18 SEP 71 / MS-2218. Notice Experimental is now abbreviated in the cancels as EXPTL. I do not have data yet on when India shortened this. Nice clean cancels are important in studying Experimental cancels. Cover from Palakarai in Tiruchirapalli-8, Tamil Nadu State, *Madras Postal Circle*.

Conclusion: India continues to set up new post offices using Experimental P.O. and S.O. cancels on mail.