Registration Handstamp

By registering his letter, a sender was asking that a record be made of its delivery.

This earliest registry marking is distinctive because of the rounded corners of the frame. The registry number was written by hand nearby the framed "R". Usually struck in red ink, this marking disappeared from use around 1910.
The “rounded corner R” registry marking was to last well into the first quarter of the twentieth century. This is an example of a late usage. The registration marking was struck with black ink on a mailing to Paris in 1919.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 15-2 19
boxed R with manuscript registration number
Another marking signifying registration was an "R" surrounded by a roughly rectangular frame with diagonal corners. Appearing in the 1880s, it was initially applied with red ink. There were slight variations in the size of the frame. In this case, the dimensions of the frame are 12.5 millimeters wide by 14.5 millimeters high.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  25 JUIL 94
framed R with manuscript registration number
LIGNE N PAQ. FR.NO5  29 JUIL 94
After 1900, the marking was most commonly applied with black ink. The registration fee was 25 centimes. Here the postage for a double weight letter was 20 centimes making the total 45 centimes.

Postmark: 

Quinhon Annam 22 Janv 10
framed R with manuscript registration number

Reverse:

Saigon-Central Cochinchine 23 Janv 10
Bordeaux Gironde 21-2 10
Individual post offices could procure their own markings outside official channels. This practice gave rise to varieties in the registration handstamp. The post office at Phat-Diem, Tonkin employed a distinctive registry mark, seen nowhere else, that was 12 millimeters wide and 16 millimeters high.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PHAT-DIEM TONKIN 1 MAI 13
framed R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 2-5 13
HAIPHONG TONKIN 3 MAI 13
DONAI NORD 31-5 13
Around 1925, the town of Giadinh used a registration handstamp with an elliptical frame. Perhaps the format was the result of repairing a preceding device with the traditional rectangular frame.

POSTAL MARKINGS
GIADINH COCHINCHINE 7-11 24
framed R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
SÉTIENNE R.P. DENFERT LOIRE 5-12 24
The registry marking evolved into a plain "R" without a frame. Like the predecessor markings, the registration number was handwritten next to the "R."

R

POSTAL MARKINGS
BACLIEU COCHINCHINE  23-2 16
plain R with manuscript registration number

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  26-2 16
DHANUSHKODI-F REG.  9 MAR. 16
KOTTAIYUR  13 MAR. 16
Registration Handstamp
1923

The size of the plain "R" varied between post offices. This example from Saigon is 6.5 millimeters wide and 10 millimeters tall.

R

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 17-12 23
plain R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
DHANUSHKODI-F REG. 27 DEC. 23
KOTTAIYUR 28 DEC. 23
Registration Handstamp
Blue Ink, 1930

The "R" handstamp was usually applied with black ink. In this example, both the postmarks and the "R" marking were struck with blue ink.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI E TONKIN 15-3 30
plain R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 15-3 30
Where standard handstamps were not available, postmaster improvised by having them fabricated locally. Here, Laokay’s registry marking was a large, unframed “R” (19 millimeters tall by 18 millimeters wide).

POSTAL MARKINGS
LAOKAY TONKIN 9 DEC 04
plain R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN 14 DEC 04
PARIS XVI DISTRIBUTION 15-1 05
After registry labels were introduced, use of the handstamps gradually disappeared. However, if local shortages occurred, the registry handstamps could be pressed into service once again.

This wartime mailing shows an "R" handstamp with a hand drawn frame meant to mimic a label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
RACHGIA COCHINCHINE 4-10 44
plain R with manuscript registration number
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 27-10 44
Here, a very late usage of the large “R” in 1950 was accompanied by a handstamped “POULO CONDORE” that was usually applied to registration labels.

POSTAL MARKINGS
POULO-CONDORE COCHINCHINE 9-3 1950
R with manuscript registration number
straightline POULO CONDORE handstamp

REVERSE
SAIGON RP SUD VIET-NAM 14-3 1950
CASABLANCA-POSTES MAROC 18-3 1950
Registration Handstamp
Framed R Handstamp of Tour-Cham, 1931

In 1931, the Tour-Cham post office employed a transitional marking that had design aspects of earlier framed “R” registry handstamps and labels with their characteristic rectangular outer frame.

POSTAL MARKINGS
TOUR-CHAM ANNAM 3-2 31
framed “R” registration handstamp

REVERSE
TOUR-CHAM ANNAM 3-2 31
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-2 31
PARIS VII DISTRIBUTION 17-2 31
The first registry labels appeared in November 1927. This letter card was posted from the main post office in Saigon on the seventh day of November making a very early usage for the first registry label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  7-11 27
registration label
REVERSE
SINGAPORE  17 NO 1927
MILSON'S POINT N.S.W.  15 DE 27
REGISTERED SYDNEY N.S.W.  17 DE 27
The first registry label was put into use only in four major cities: Saigon, Hanoi, Haiphong and Phnom Penh. The first label did not use a frame like later versions of registry labels did.
After April 1928, the first registration labels were replaced by newer designs. Thus, they were in use for only about six months. This example from Phnom Penh is from the 27th day of April making it a late usage of the first type of registration label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE  27-4 28
registration label
REVERSE
PONT AUDEINER EURE  25-5 28
The second registry label to appear was widely used throughout Indochina. The new label employed a rectangular outer frame. This style of label is characterized by a letter "N" that is 2.5 millimeters wide and 5 millimeters tall. For the larger cities, the labels were preprinted with the city’s name.

**POSTAL MARKINGS**

HAI-PHONG TONKIN  24-4 36
registration label
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  25-4 36
Registration Label
1939

In the smaller post offices, clerks applied the town name to registry labels with handstamps. In this case, "SAIGON-COMMERCE" was handstamped on the label before it was affixed to the envelope.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON COMMERCE COCHINCHINE 29-4 39
registration label

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 29-4 39
LIBOURNE GIRONDEN 6-5 36
Mail volume from smaller towns did not justify preprinted labels with the town's name. Rather, the name of the town was handstamped on the label resulting considerable variation from town to town. In this example from Sept Pagodes, Tonkin, only the first letter was capitalized.
Labels consisted of two parts. While one part was glued to the cover, the other part of the label was affixed to a form that was used for tracking and record keeping purposes. The portion of the registry label affixed to the form was also stamped with the postal clerk's signature. The large “G3” stood for “counter window 3” or “Guichet 3” at the post office.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 19-12 36
registration label
The third registry label format appeared in 1929. It lacked either a printed or handstamped town name identifier. The letter "N" had serifs and was 4.5 millimeters high. The "R" was set off by a vertical line.
In a later style of registry label that appeared at the start of World War II, the letter "N" became 4.5 millimeters wide and 4.5 millimeters high. As compared to earlier designs, the lettering was located 3 millimeters above the bottom frame line.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CANTHO COCHINCHINE 15-3 44
registration label
REVERSE
SAIGON PRINCIPAL COCHINCHINE 17-3 44
In another variation first seen in 1942, the style of the "R" changed. The "N" and number were printed in a sans serif font.
After World War II, a new imperforate label appeared in which the size of the lettering was much reduced. The "R" became only 6 millimeters high. The letter "N" became very small—only 2 millimeters wide by 2.5 millimeters tall.
A variation of the label did not have preprinted numbers. The registration number had to be handwritten on the label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
BIENHOA COCHINCHINE 2-10 46
registration label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 4-10 46
NEW YORK, N.Y. A.M.F. TOUR 1 OCT 11 1946
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF. REGISTERED OCT 12 1946
One of the last labels used less intense printing. The vertical line separating the "R" from the number portion is a distinguishing characteristic for this label.
Beginning in 1950, registration labels saw one of the most extensive changes since they were introduced when the coloring of the lettering changed from red to blue. The new labels differed subtly in the size of the letter “N.” Here the “N,” which lacks serifs, and is 3 millimeters wide by 4 millimeters tall.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON RP – SUD VIET-NAM 23-9 1950
registration label
REVERSE
SAIGON RP – SUD VIET-NAM 23-9 1950
DALAT PLATEAUX-INDOCHINOIS 25-9 1950
Missing Registration Marking
1926

Everything about this registered letter posted from Saigon in 1926 to Paris is normal with one exception. The postal clerk forgot to apply the framed “R” signifying a registered item. The clerk did write a registration number in blue ink on the cover.
This registered letter from Tour-Cham exhibits a handstamp that mimicked the label formats then in service in 1932.
Indochina’s first rural post was organized in sixteen provinces of Tonkin in 1917. Initially, only the most basic services were offered including the sale of postage stamps. As the system demonstrated success, services were added including registered mail in 1934.

However, registered letters originating within the rural post are rarely seen. As this example shows, the rural post continued to operate through World War II.
The letters "AR" meaning "avis de reception" signified “return receipt.” This early form of the return receipt marking provided space at the top for recording a number. In the case of registered letters, this feature was superfluous as registration provided an official numbering system. This early marking disappeared around the turn of the century.
Return Receipt Handstamp
1924

The format of the most common return receipt marking consisted of an "A R" surrounded by a roughly rectangular frame with diagonal corners, which mimicked the widely-used registry marking.

POSTAL MARKINGS
MYTHO COCHINCHINE 8-8 24
framed R with manuscript registration number
framed return receipt handstamp
REVERSE
ST ETIENNE R. P. DENFERT LOIRE 4-9 24
A late usage in 1939 of the return receipt handstamp shows that the angular corners had become rounded through long-term use. Otherwise, the format of the handstamp had remained the same.
Rather than chopped corners, the return receipt handstmped applied to a 1919 mailing from Thanh-Hoa consisted of the letters “A.R.” in a 13 x 18 millimeter rectangular frame.

POSTAL MARKINGS
THANH-HOA ANNAM  28-1 19
framed R with manuscript registration numberl
framed “AR” return receipt handstamp
REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKIN  29 JANV 19
BORDEAUX GIRONDE  5-3 19
Return Receipt Handstamp
1928

In another design variation from Nam-Dinh, the frame is 16 x 20½ millimeter rectangle. Unlike earlier designs, the lettering is sans serif.
Return Receipt Handstamp
1939

With the passage of time, the design of the return receipt marking became quite simple. The frame dimensions are 11 millimeters in height by 15 millimeters in width.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 21-7 39
registration label
airmail label
framed AR return receipt handstamp
Return receipts were not limited to addressees located in France and her colonies. This example shows a letter sent to India with a request for a return receipt.

POSTAL MARKINGS
MYTHO COCHINCHINE 22-7 29
registration label
framed AR return receipt handstamp
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 22-7 29
DHANUSHKODI-F REG. 3 AUG. 29
Return Receipt Handstamp
Unclaimed Letter, 1933

Even though the sender had wanted a return receipt for this letter to India, the post office there was unable to locate the addressee. After being passed to several dead letter offices, the mailing was returned to the sender.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-4 33
registration label
framed return receipt handstamp (blue)
Unclaimed/Refused Letter label (India)

REVERSE
KILASAVAPATTI 30 MAY 33
framed INCONNU NOT KNOWN
framed D.L.O. MADRAS 1 JUN 33 REG.
framed D.L.O. MADRAS 3 JUL 33 REG.
framed D.L.O. CALCUTTA 6 JUL 33
framed D.L.O. CALCUTTA 7 JUL 33
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 20-7 33
Cash on Delivery
Handmade Label

The Indochinese PTT operated a “cash on delivery” service ("contre remboursement") whereby the postman could collect small amounts of cash when a delivery of an item had been accomplished. To catch his eye and remind the postman to collect the amount due, a triangular label was affixed to the item. Here the label was fashioned by hand and the amount to collect was written directly on the label.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 12-11 37
registration and C.O.D. labels
REVERSE
PARIS-IX DISTRIBUTION 11-12 37
A wartime mailing within Hanoi bears a triangular label (supposedly removed from a corner of the tracking document) that was intended to remind the postman to collect the C.O.D. amount. In this case, a manuscript “CR 1.10” written over a handstamp at the upper right meant that the postman was supposed to collect 1.10 piasters.
Letters insured for the value of their contents typically displayed the value on the outside of the envelope. For this example, the declared value was 1,500 francs. Insured letters were handstamped with a "CHARGÉ" marking to signify the fact they were protected against loss.
This official letter from the Sadec provincial government was insured as it was addressed to the tax collector in Saigon and probably contained negotiable items.

CHARGÉ

POSTAL MARKINGS
SADEC COCHINCHINE 8 MAI 07
insured handstamp with manuscript tracking number

REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 9 MAI 07
Sent from Fort Bayard in the leased territory of Kouang Cho Wan, this 1915 mailing was insured for the relatively small amount of 20 francs. The CHARGÉ marking was accompanied by a handwritten tracking number of “250.” Since the addressee, a telegrapher, could not be located, the letter was returned to the sender.

POSTAL MARKINGS
FORT BAYARD INDOCHINE 4-515
insured handstamp with manuscript tracking number
return to sender handstamp stricken through

REVERSE
HAIPHONG TONKin 6 MAI 15
TCHE-KAM-INDOCJHINE 14 MAI 15
insured cachet
Insured
Hanoi

This example of the insured handstamp was struck with blue ink at the Hanoi post office. Stamps from the Indochinese Offices in China were valid in Indochina proper as the selection on this insured mailing demonstrates.

**CHARGÉ**

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI TONKIN 9-3 26
insured handstamp with manuscript tracking number
Insured Mail Cachet
Cantho, Cochinchina

A Bank of Indochina package with a declared value of 50 piasters was handstamped with the cachet used in southern Indochina for recording pertinent details about an insured mailing.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CANTHO COCHINCHINE 7-2 33
registration label and expedited service label
insured mail cachet
Insured – C.O.D.
Pursat, Cambodia

The Post Office operated a "cash on delivery" service (Service des Objects Contre Remboursement). Money collected by the post office was returned to the sender in official envelopes but the value was not declared on the outside.

This early mailing from Pursat, Cambodia employed a "CHARGÉ" handstamp with a handwritten number for record keeping.

CHARGÉ

POSTAL MARKINGS
PURSAT CAMBODGE 4-7 16
insured handstamp with manuscript tracking number

REVERSE
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 11 JUIL 16
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 14-7 16
BESANCON DOUBS 19-8 16
Insured – C.O.D.
Tourane, Annam

The "CHARGÉ" handstamp varied among post offices. This example from Tourane Annam uses serif letters that are 5 millimeters tall.

CHARGÉ

POSTAL MARKINGS
TOURANE ANNAM 27-10 23
insured handstamp with manuscript tracking number
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-10 23
Insured – C.O.D.
Cho-Dien, Tonkin

Later COD mailings were registered eliminating the need for separate insurance serial numbers. The insured handstamp included a rectangular frame with rounded corners. The sans serif lettering was in 3-millimeter capital letters.

POSTAL MARKINGS
CHO-DIEN TONKIN 8-2 30
registration label
insured handstamp

REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 12-2 30
PARIS R.P. DISTRIBUTION 15 • III 1930
Insured – C.O.D.
Dailanh, Annam

Another variety of the handstamped insured marking from Dailanh, Annam exhibits 4 millimeter lettering.

POSTAL MARKINGS
DAILANH ANNAM  5-1 35
registration label
insured handstamp
REVERSE
NHATRANG ANNAM  5-1 35
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  6-1 35