

The Regions of France in the Early Twentieth Century

As Illustrated in Picture Postcards from 1902 - 1918

The early 20th Century saw France emerging from the shock of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of the Second Empire. As the memories of the war faded "La Belle Epoque" described a new mood of optimism and prosperity in the country.

One result was an increased awareness of the rich diversity of the regions of France, and an interest in celebrating the perceived "difference" of a superior French culture. The French railway network made travel throughout France more accessible for both the local population and the growing number of tourists; and these were eager to buy and send illustrations from their journeys.

Picture postcards were printed locally and nationally, showing views of major cities and national monuments, and also smaller communities and local scenes. This exhibit displays postcards representing each of twenty-two Regions that comprised Metropolitan France in this period; the four major cities; and two German postcards from occupied Alsace and Lorraine.



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Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Picardie

1. Berck-Plage: "La Rue Carnot" (Nord-Pas-de-Calais)



Berck-Plage became a fashionable health resort for Parisians after the opening of the railway station at nearby Rand-du-Fliers, 1847. This card, published by Lucien Levy and Sons, a famous Parisian firm, and posted in 1908 to Amiens, illustrates the fashions of about 1906 and the focus on Parisian culture in the advertising.

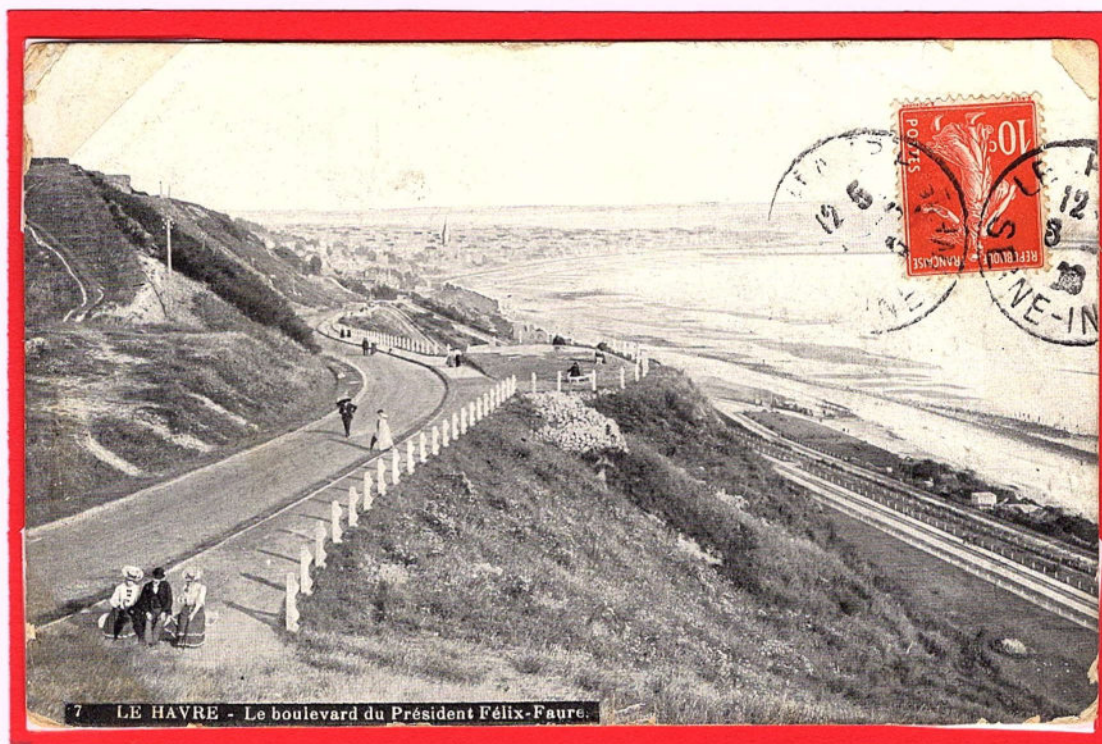
2. Compiègne: "Le Nouveau Pont pris de la Rue Solferino" (Picardie)



This hand coloured card was published by Lucien Levy and Sons and posted in 1915 to an address in Courrone. The photograph captures a working day scene on "the new bridge" across the river Oise (replaced by a modern bridge in 2011). Compiègne was a border town in the long struggle between France and Burgundy, and a centre for hunting.

Haute-Normandie and Basse-Normandie

3. Le Havre - Le Boulevard President Felix-Faure (Haute-Normandie)



The card was published by L.& Cie in Paris, and posted in 1908 to Guildford. Le Havre was founded by Francois I in 1517 to become the port for Paris, connected by the Seine. Largely destroyed by Allied bombing in 1944 this view from the cliffs to the East of the town is still largely unchanged with broad esplanades and wide, sandy beaches.

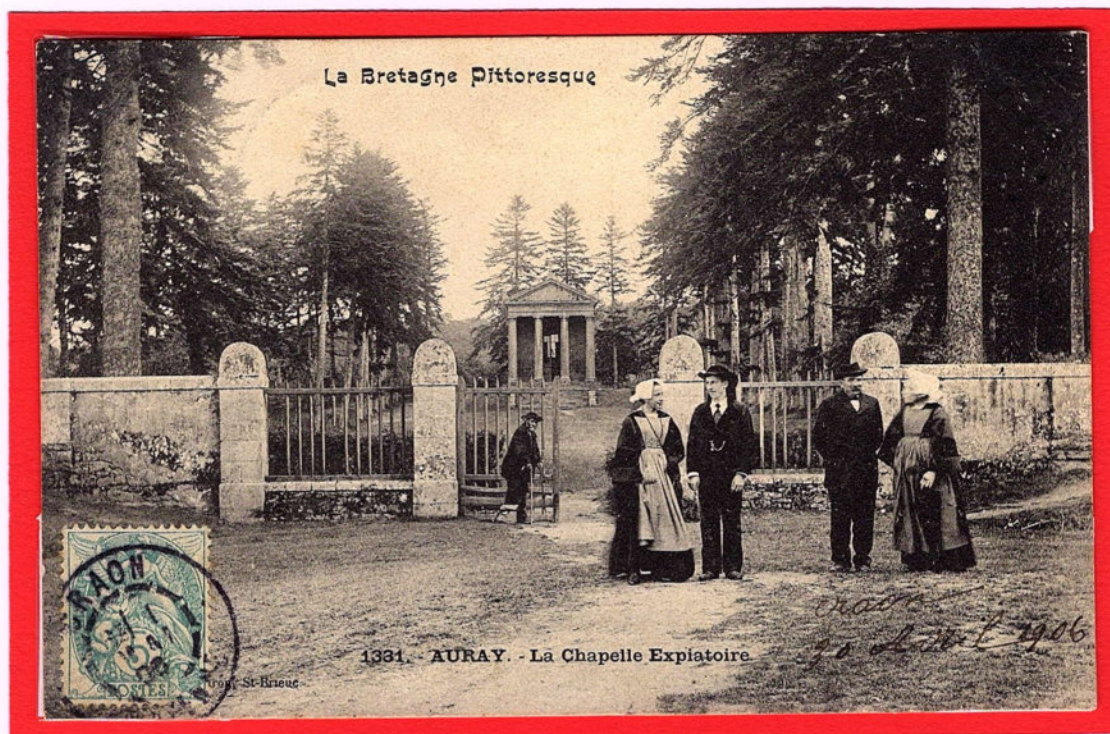
4. Portbail; the church of St Martin of Goeuey (Lower-Normandy)



This card was published by Étienne and Louis-Antonin Neurdein, founded in Paris in 1885. The street scene is of Portbail on the North-west coast of the Cotentin peninsula and shows the ancient church of St Martin which was built in 1818 (and destroyed in 1944), typical French houses of the Restoration period, and a group of schoolchildren with a curate.

Bretagne and the Pays de la Loire

5. Auray: La Chapelle Expiatoire (Bretagne)



The card, posted in 1906, is one of a series published by Armand Waron of Saint-Brieuc under the title of "la Bretagne Pittoresque". It shows a group posing in Breton costume. A railway station was opened in 1862 and this chapel in memory of those murdered after the failed royalist counter-revolution in 1795 attracted many visitors.

6. Angers: Le Chateau (Pays de la Loire)



This card was printed locally and posted in 1911 to nearby Pouance. The picture shows the massive walls of the 13th Century Plantagenet castle built at the confluence of three rivers, and the wide avenue created by infilling the moat. The hand drawn carts were typical of the early 20th Century but the new tram lines may also be seen.

Centre and the Ile-de-France

7. Dreux: Panorama taken from the tower of the Chateau (Centre)



The card, posted in 1906, was printed by Levy Freres et Cie and carries a railway cancellation: Dreux was on the main line from Paris and Versailles. The photograph, taken from the castle, shows the dome of the St Pierre Church to the left, and, in the middle, the turret of the Necropolis for the Orleanist Royal family, which attracted many visitors.

8. Coulommiers: The Hospital Farm (Ile-de-France)



The card was published by J Bourgogne of Paris and posted in 1906 to Landes. The buildings were originally a 13th Century Knights Templar monastery. The title "the hospital farm" refers to usage during the Franco-Prussian war, and then for the production of Brie cheese which flourished after the opening of the railway line to Paris in 1863.

Champagne-Ardenne and Franche-Comté

9. Mézières; Coté Est (Champagne-Ardenne)



This card, published by Charpentier-Richard of Mézières, was posted in 1907 to Landes. On the banks of the Meuse and formerly part of the Spanish Netherland, Mézières was a prosperous river port. Its fortifications were dismantled by Louis XIV in 1687, and annexed by France in 1708, when it became the site of the royal armaments factory.

10. Villersexel: The Chateau (Franche-Comté)



The card was posted in 1906 to Pouancé in Maine-et-Loire, and published by "Industries Photo-Mécaniques" of Baroud of Paris. Villersexel is a small commune of about 1,500 people. The current Chateau built in 1872 in the style of Louis XIII is distinguished by its innovative iron internal structure designed by Gustave Eiffel.

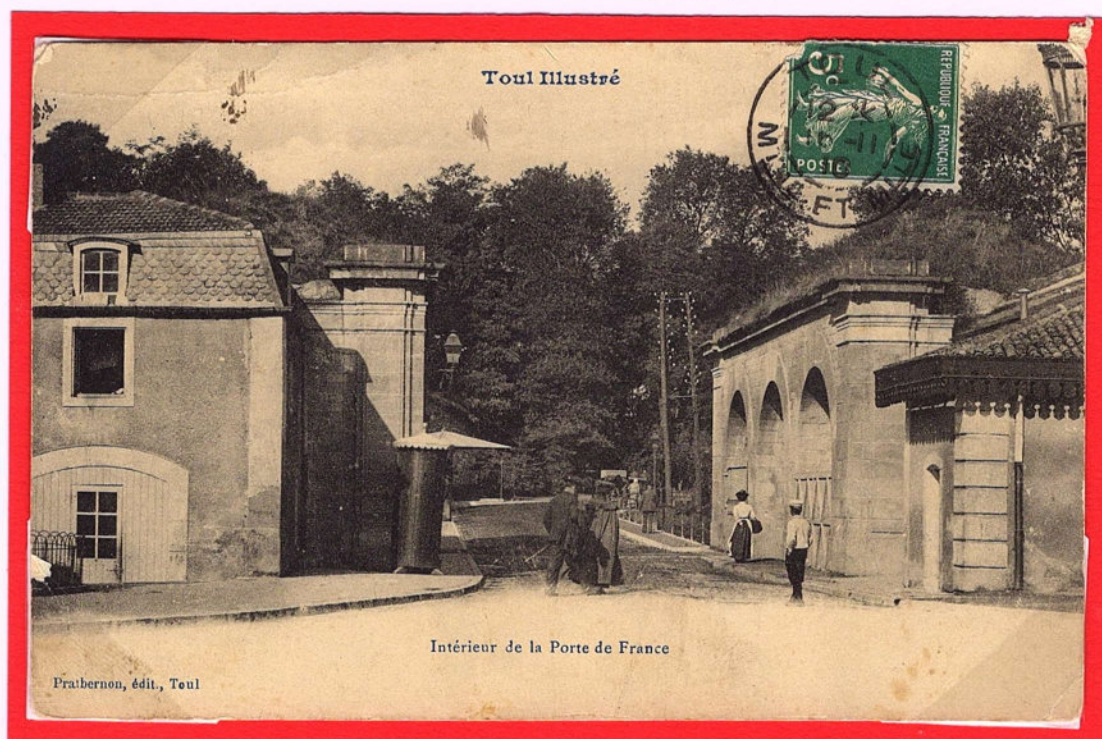
Alsace and Lorraine

11. Belfort: Place Corbis (Alsace)



The card, posted in 1913 to Montargis, was published by J.B.Schmitt and Sons of Belfort. It shows the bridge - rebuilt after the Franco-Prussian war. After 1871 the new German Empire annexed most of Lorraine. Although forced to surrender after a siege, Belfort was not annexed but exchanged for other French territories around Metz.

12. Toul (Lorraine)



The card was posted in 1910 to Royan and was published by Praterbernon, of Toul. It shows the fortifications designed by Vauban, Louis XIV's military engineer. Toul was captured by the Prussians in 1870 but remained as part of France after most of Lorraine was annexed. This "Doorway of France"; ' became a symbol of French Lorraine.

German Occupied Alsace and Lorraine

13. Strasbourg: the Kleber Quai and the Main Synagogue (Alsace)



The hand coloured card, was posted in 1911 to Dresden, and has a 'Germania' 5 pfenig stamp. The card was published by E Hartmann of Strassburg. This card shows Strasbourg under the German Empire. Prussian guards march across the bridge to the "Neustadt" and the new Synagogue built by the Germans, but destroyed by the Nazis after 1940.

14. Vic-sur-Seille (Lorraine)



This embossed card was posted in 1903 with an old French cds used on a 'Germania' stamp, and published locally by Hartmann Freres. It shows a panorama of the town which was annexed by Germany between 1870 and 1919. The Seille (or Selle) is a tributary of the Moselle and the town grew prosperous through salt, and viticulture.

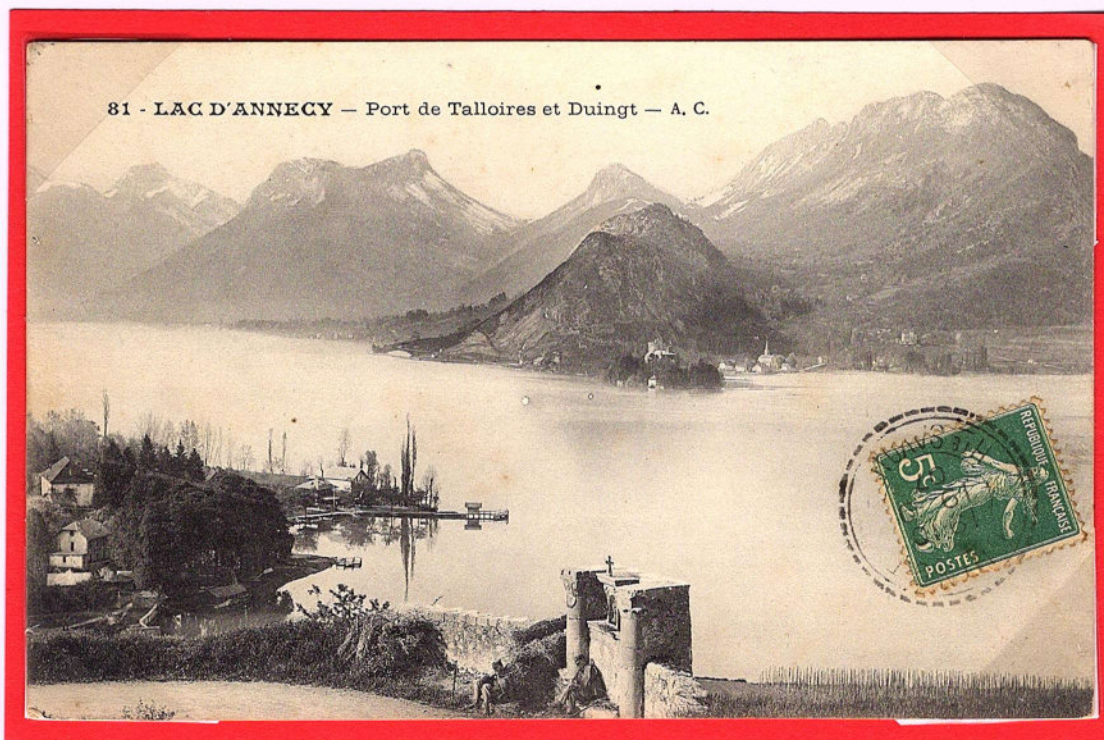
Bourgogne and Rhône-Alpes

15. Antheuil in the countryside near Beaune (Burgundy)



The card, was posted in 1909 to Yonne, and was published locally by P. Ronco. Antheuil is a small, wine-growing, commune in the Côte-d'Or, about 25 kms north of Beaune, with the village clustered around the church of San Antide. With a population of about 200 the vineyards operated as a co-operative first started after the French Revolution.

16. The lake at Annecy and the lake harbours of Talloires and Duingt (Rhône-Alpes)



The card was posted in 1907 to Paris. The view captures the culture of the region with small communes, supported by agriculture on the narrow strips of land by the lake, and fishing. Annecy was connected to the French rail network in 1866, after its transfer to France in 1860, and became a popular summer tourist destination.

Auvergne and Limousin

17. Puy de Dôme (Auvergne)



The card, was posted in 1907 to Celles, and was published by Maurice Tesson, of Limoges. The card shows the dominant feature of the region, the Puy de Dôme and, inset, a girl in traditional dress. The card also shows the bleak volcanic slopes and un-developed roads of one of the poorest and least populated regions in Europe.

18. A view of Limoges (Limousin)



The card was posted in 1913 to Clermont. The card was published locally by Prosper Batier. The view of the town is from across the Vienne river. The town became famous for its porcelain industry (kaolinite was discovered nearby in 1768). The region is also known for the breeding Baronet sheep, Limousin cows, and the manufacture of fine leather.

Poitou-Charentes and Aquitaine

19. View of Angoulême (Poitou-Charentes)



The souvenir card, was posted in 1917 to Chateauroux, and was published by Nouvelles Galeries of Paris. The view is of Saint-Cybard across the river Charente from the old city of Angoulême. The bridge can be seen in the foreground. Originally a fortified Medieval town, Angoulême became a tourist centre after the opening of the railway in 1852.

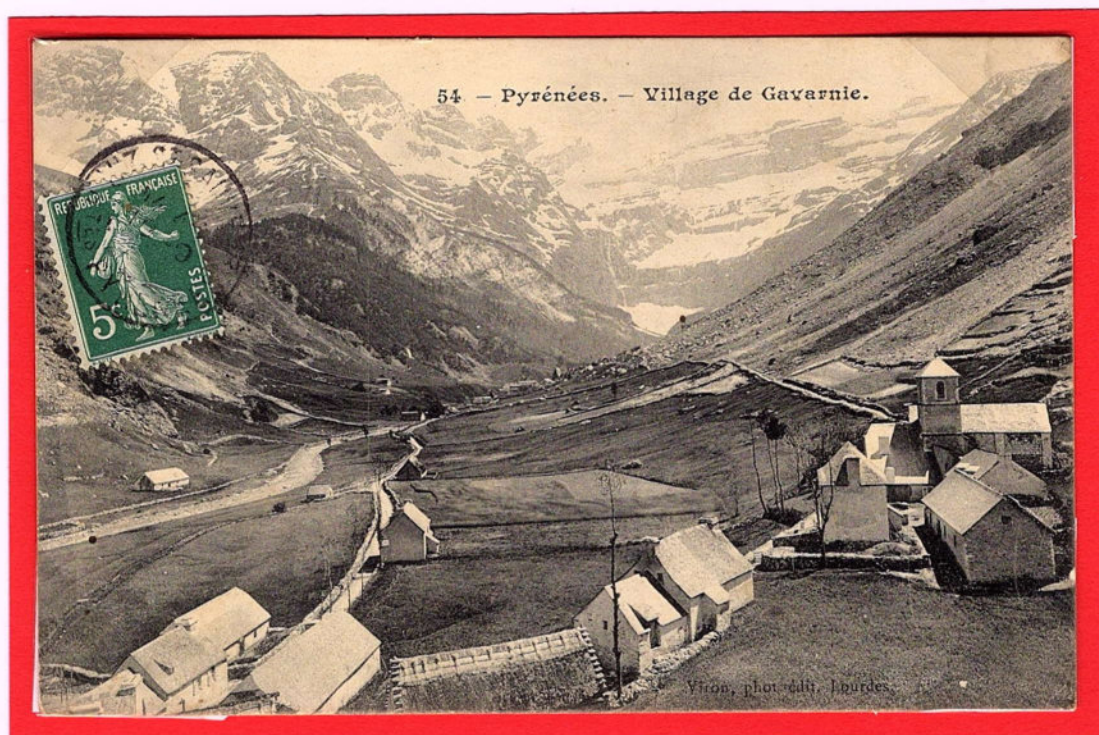
20. The Bridge at Cambo-les-Bains (Aquitaine)



The card was posted in 1908 to Biarritz. It was published by Lucien Levy and Sons of Paris. Cambo-les-Bains is a small town in the Basque province of Labord. The area became fashionable after the Empress Eugenie built her Summer Palace at Biarritz. The railway with its 'new' bridge improved access to the town in 1891.

Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon

21. The Village of Gavarnie (Midi-Pyrénées)



The card was posted in 1911 to Landes. It was published by Viron, of Lourdes. Gavarnie had a population of about 500 people at the end of the 19th Century, based upon sheep herding. The church houses skulls of Knights Templar who maintained the pilgrimage routes to Compostella. Later the mountain scenery attracted many tourists.

22. Béziers: A view from the New Bridge (Languedoc-Roussillon)



The card was 'posted' in 1915 but not stamped as it was carried by hand, possibly by a fellow soldier. It was published locally by Maret-Pons. It shows the 14th Century cathedral of Saint-Nazaire and ramparts overlooking the river Orb. Béziers is one of the oldest towns in France, and produced about 40% of French wine in 1900.

Provence-Alpes-Cote-d'Azur and Corsica

23. Nice (Provence-Alpes-Cote-d'Azur)



This hand-coloured card was posted in 1905 to Dorchester, England, and was published by Lucien Levy and Sons of Paris. The card reflects the tourist interest of "picturesque" sights, rather than views of the town. Nice still had a very distinctive culture in 1905, having only been transferred to France from Savoy in 1860, and became very fashionable.

24. Les Iles Sangonaires (Corsica)



This card was posted in 1906 and shows the Isles Sanguinaires at the entrance to the bay of Ajaccio. Tourists from mainland France had a romantic attraction with the island; as the birthplace of Napoleon; as a place of natural scenic beauty; and stories of brigands and revolution. The card was printed in Ajaccio by A. Guitard and sons.

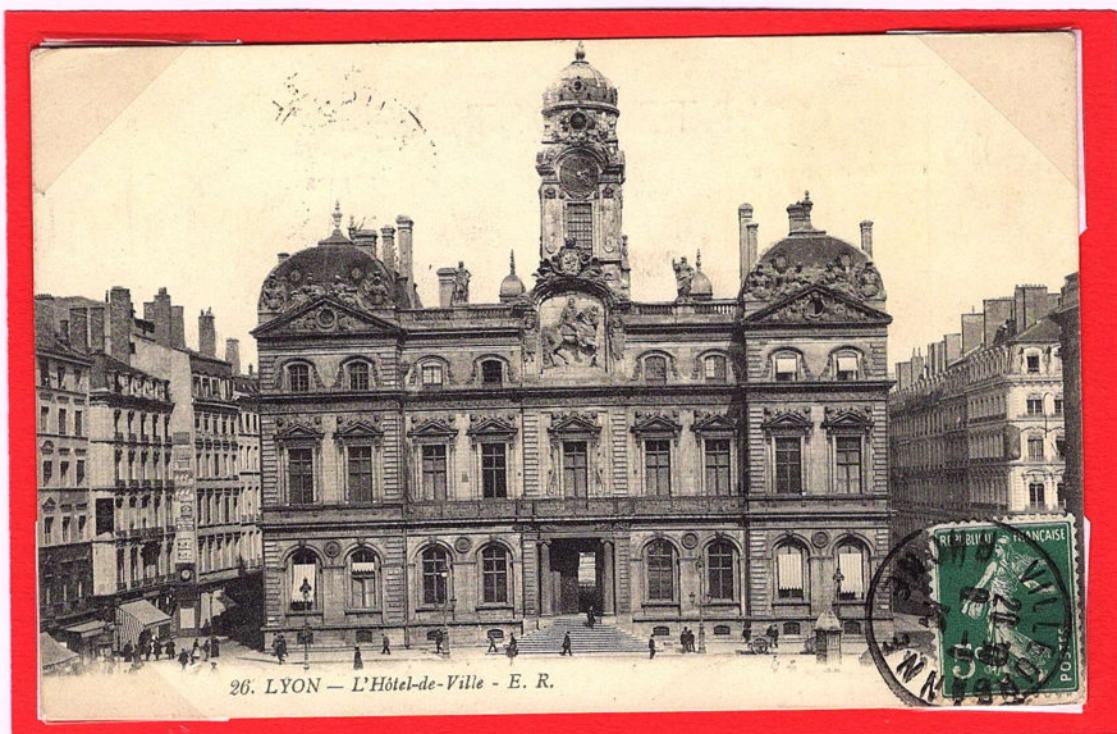
The major Cities: Paris and Lyon

25. Paris: L'Avenue du Bois de Boulogne and the Arc de Triomphe.



This card was posted in 1912 to Buenos-Aires. The card was printed locally and is a copy of a Lucien Levy photograph. The card captures the 'promenaders' on L'Avenue Bois de Bulogne as people and carriages take the air. L'Etoile can be seen in the distance. Paris epitomised France at this time as the European centre of fashion and culture.

26. Lyon: L'Hôtel-de-Ville



This card was posted in 1914 to Brussels, and published by E. Rabus of Paris. The photograph shows the town-hall designed in 1694 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart. Lyon claimed to be the technological centre of France. Historically famous for its silk weaving the town became known in the 19th Century banking, chemicals, and for motion pictures.

The Major Cities: Marseille and Toulouse

27. Marseille: Le Cours Belsuncé



This card was posted in 1905 to an address in Chambéry, Savoy. It was published by Emile Lacour of Marseille. It shows the spacious boulevards in the old city, horse drawn vehicles and the electric tram system installed in 1900. Marseille was the second largest town in France in this period and the premier French port on the Mediterranean.

28. Toulouse: The main Street



The card was posted in 1908 to an address in Herault. It was published by J. Basset, of Toulouse. It shows a street view from the Place de la Capitole and the electric trams that operated from about 1900, as the city modernised. An ancient Visigothic capital in modern times it is regarded as the unofficial capital of the "Lenge Hoc" speaking Occitanie.