

Canadian Postal History Sources

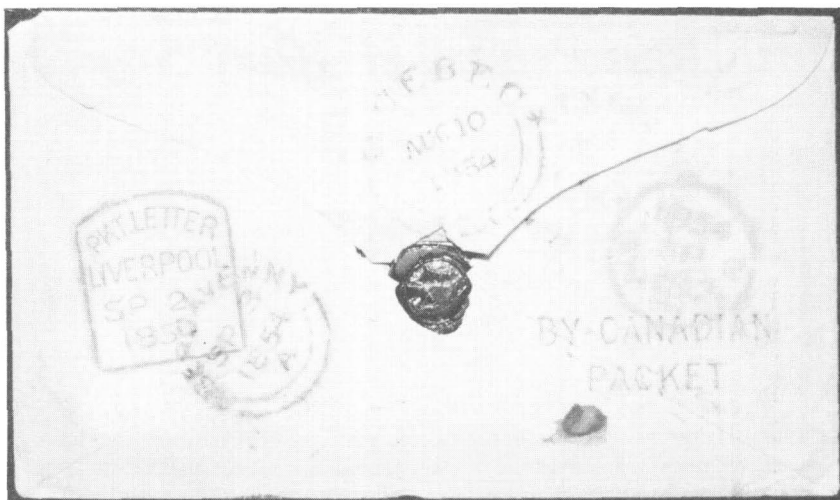
by KENNETH S. MACKENZIE

It is my painful duty to report for the information of His Lordship the Postmaster General the destruction of the Gen^l P. Office in this City by fire on the morning of Monday the 29th ulto., together with every Book—Letter, Authority, etc., pertaining to the general business of the Department, including the whole of my correspondence with the Gen^l P. Office for the fifteen years that I have conducted the duties . . . utter destruction.¹

Thus did Thomas Allen Stayner, Her Majesty's Deputy Postmaster General for British North America, mournfully report the disastrous fire which swept through the Quebec Post Office on a cold, blustery November night in 1841. The description symbolizes the status of the postal service of the time. Not only could a lowly office-keeper's night candle destroy the records of years of effort, dedication, and frustration in establishing a service, but also the matter had to be reported by a deputy to his superior in far-off London, underlining the penurious and subservient nature of the post office in the North American colony. The letter also explains the great gaps in the early post office records which make research so difficult. Nevertheless, sufficient records have survived to permit an accurate reconstruction of the history of the postal service from its inception to the present.

The development of a modern postal system has three main requirements: an educated populace, a reasonably affluent public, and effective means of transportation. In the early days of British North America, few could read and write; even fewer could afford the high postal charges of the day; and transportation was notoriously deficient. Needless to say, perhaps, these three basic factors were absent from New France and no postal network was established. Despite much diligent research by trained historians and avid amateurs, no trace has been found of a formal postal service during the French regime.² Letters were, of course, exchanged between the three main settlements of Montreal, Three Rivers, Quebec, and the mother country, but these were carried by couriers and unscheduled vessels at a cost far beyond the reach of the ordinary person.

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- 1 Public Archives of Canada, Record Group 3, Post Office, Series 1, Volume 1, 5 December 1841, Stayner to Maberly (Secretary to the General Post Office, London).
 - 2 See for example the article by the eminent Quebec postal historian and author, Charles de Volpi, on "Early Canadian Cancellations", in *Topics* (the Journal of the British North American Philatelic Society) 35, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1948).



Cover (envelope) carried by the Canadian Steam Navigation Company vessel *Charity*, September 1854. This is one of only three covers known to have been carried by the short-lived service of Canada's first transatlantic mail contract. (National Postal Museum)

That a considerable correspondence developed between colonial merchants and their agents in France is revealed in a decree issued by Intendant Hocquart on 20 July 1732: the populace was forbidden from boarding ships arriving from overseas, and captains were to deliver any letters on board to a specified location ashore.³ Too often, it seems, unscrupulous firstcomers on a ship grabbed as many letters as possible to engage either in commercial espionage or in ransom-seeking with the mail of others.

Canada's first post office opened unofficially in Halifax in 1754 where residents were able to use the regular mail packetships that put in on their way between Britain and the New England colonies. The service seems to have been an immediate success, for in the following year it was taken over by the General Post Office, London, and made an adjunct to the imperial postal network. When New France was ceded to Britain in 1763, it took only a small step to expand the existing British service on the continent to include the newly won territories. A recently arrived and bilingual Scot, Hugh Finlay, was appointed Quebec's first postmaster, with responsibility for the entire new area. He became Deputy Postmaster General for British North America when the Thirteen Colonies revolted. Finlay then held sway over the post office in Canada until 1799 when he was dismissed because his accounts were delinquent. The history of the service during those years is largely the story of Hugh Finlay.

Between 1763 and 1851 a handful of imperial servants governed the activities of the General Post Office (GPO) in British North America. This and the small size of their staffs both complicates and simplifies the task of tracing the records. The complications are those which face every archivist: the vulnerability of sources when such a small number is involved. But when sources do exist, as in

³ The original is in the Quebec National Archives; the National Postal Museum, Ottawa, has a copy.

OTTAWA POST OFFICE.						
1868. 19th NOV. 1868.						
CLOSE.			MAILS.	DELIVERED.		
A.M.	P.M.	P.M.		A.M.	A.M.	P.M.
	12.15		{ EASTERN.—MONTREAL, QUEBEC, } { &c., by Railway. }	11.20	5.00	
6.15	12.15		WESTERN.—TORONTO, HAMILTON, &c.	11.20		
	12.15		NEW BRUNSWICK & NOVA SCOTIA See Special Time Table.		5.00	
6.15	12.15		UNITED STATES.	11.20	5.00	
11.00		5.00	{ AYLMER & Offices on the North } { Shore Upper Ottawa. }	8.00	11.30	
	12.10		{ PEMBROKE, RENFREW, SAND POINT, } { ARNPRIOR, PAKENHAM, CARP, MARCH, } { &c., and offices on South Shore } { Upper Ottawa. }	8.00		
6.00			{ BELL'S CORNERS, RICHMOND, } { PERTH, &c. }			5.30
		6.00	{ CUMBERLAND, BUCKINGHAM, } { L'ORIGNAL, GRESVILLE, and Lower } { Ottawa—by Stage. }	8.00		
6.15			{ KEMPTVILLE, OSGOODE, and } { Line of St. L. & Ottawa Railway. }	11.20	5.00	
6.00			{ CHELSEA, WAKEFIELD } { and Upper Gatineau. }			6.00
	12.30		{ TEMPLETON. } { Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays. }	11.30		

<p>BRITISH MAILS CLOSE Per Canadian Steamer from Quebec every Friday at 11.30 A. M. Per Cunard Steamer via New York, every Monday at 6 00, A.M. Per Bremen Steamer, via New York and Southampton, every Tuesday, at 6 00 A. M. Letters to go by this mail must be specially so addressed.</p> <p><small>Note.—A Supplementary Mail for Canadian papers will be closed every Friday at 12.45 All letters must be fully prepaid by stamps No Registered Letters can be sent in this way.</small></p>	<p>MONEY ORDERS. On Money Order Offices throughout the Dominion, Great Britain and Ireland, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, can be obtained at this Office. Also.</p>
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POSTAGE AND BILL STAMPS.

POST OFFICE SAVINGS BANK.
 Deposits will be received at this Office from \$1 to \$300. Interest will be allowed at the rate of Four per cent per annum, and deposits can be withdrawn at any time. Five per cent will be allowed on special deposits in sums of \$100, for the withdrawal of which 3 months' notice will be required.

OFFICE HOURS from 8 A. M., to 7 P. M.
 Post Office,
 Ottawa, 19th Nov., 1868. } **G. P. BAKER, Postmaster.**

Advertisement for local post office patrons, Ottawa, November 1868. (National Postal Museum)

the case of the Stayner correspondence after 1841, and the documents of the famous Howe family in the Maritimes (members of which were for many years in charge of the post office in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick), they are likely to exist intact.

The GPO in London was financially responsible for the service in all British colonies and insisted, naturally enough, that each post office and route be self-supporting. A lucrative service in one area—for example, Montreal to Quebec—could not have its excess revenue applied to balance the cost of unprofitable routes. This handicap, under which successive Deputy Postmasters General were forced to operate, meant that postal services expanded to certain settlements much slower than the inhabitants wished. In fact, this situation became a source of considerable irritation to settlers, many of whom would have been much more likely to petition for an adequate postal service before complaining about the absence of a church. Indeed, so keen were some of the communities for a postal service that at least one was willing to pay half the maintenance costs until it proved self-sustaining.⁴

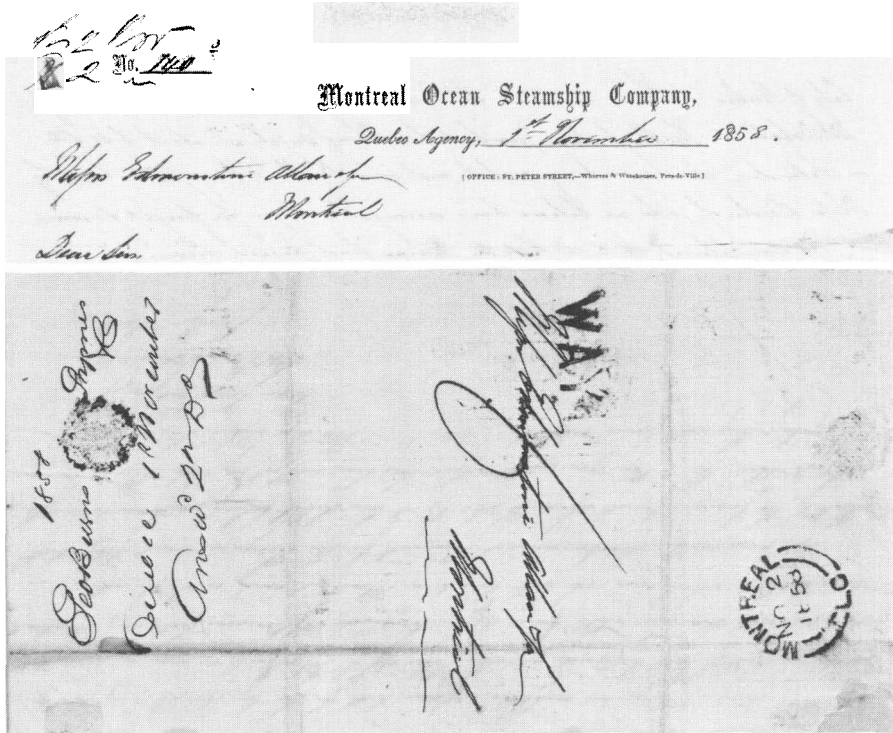
Some of the more complete and most interesting sources for postal history are those detailing the squabbles between beleaguered post office personnel and disgruntled colonists. Such disputes were particularly evident in the Province of Canada where an adversary situation developed which led to the appearance of reports of commissions of the House of Assembly criticizing the postal service, and arguments by Stayner in defence of his activities. Indeed, when Stayner's office burned he was preparing a rebuttal to one such criticism! On the other hand, in the Atlantic colonies committees of the houses of assembly met regularly with imperial postal officials to solve most of their problems.⁵

Stayner in particular became the focus for attack in the Canadas because of his close adherence to the penny-pinching principles of the imperial government, for his identification with the legislative council, and for the relatively huge amount of his salary, the larger part of which was held to be illegal. Some of these complaints were justified, with the result that his powers were gradually whittled away. In August 1842, he lost the important power to appoint postmasters, and in January 1844 his salary was cut virtually in half.

In Britain there was general approval in government circles to turning the colonial post office over to local control—except at the GPO, always jealous of its monopoly. An imperial act of 1834 had been intended to initiate the procedure of devolution of powers, but was deflected with ridicule by the assembly of Upper Canada. From 1846 onward the British Government sought actively to sever the ties between the imperial and colonial systems. An enabling act of imperial parliament was passed on 28 July 1849 but the provinces did not get around to

4 See the letter in the Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 40 L, General Post Office transcripts, Volume 3, 21 January 1830, Stayner to Maberly, in which Stayner, writing of the opening of the Norwich post office, stated that the expense to the department would be 2/6 per week but that "the Actual expence is 5/- a Week but the inhabitants pay half the expence for the first Year—until it can be seen whether or not the Office will pay its own expences".

5 See William Smith, *The History of the Post Office in British North America 1630-1870* (Cambridge, 1921, reprint edition New York, 1973), pp. 188-193, 243 *et seq.*, for a good discussion of this interesting point. This very good book is still the only general history of the post office in Canada.

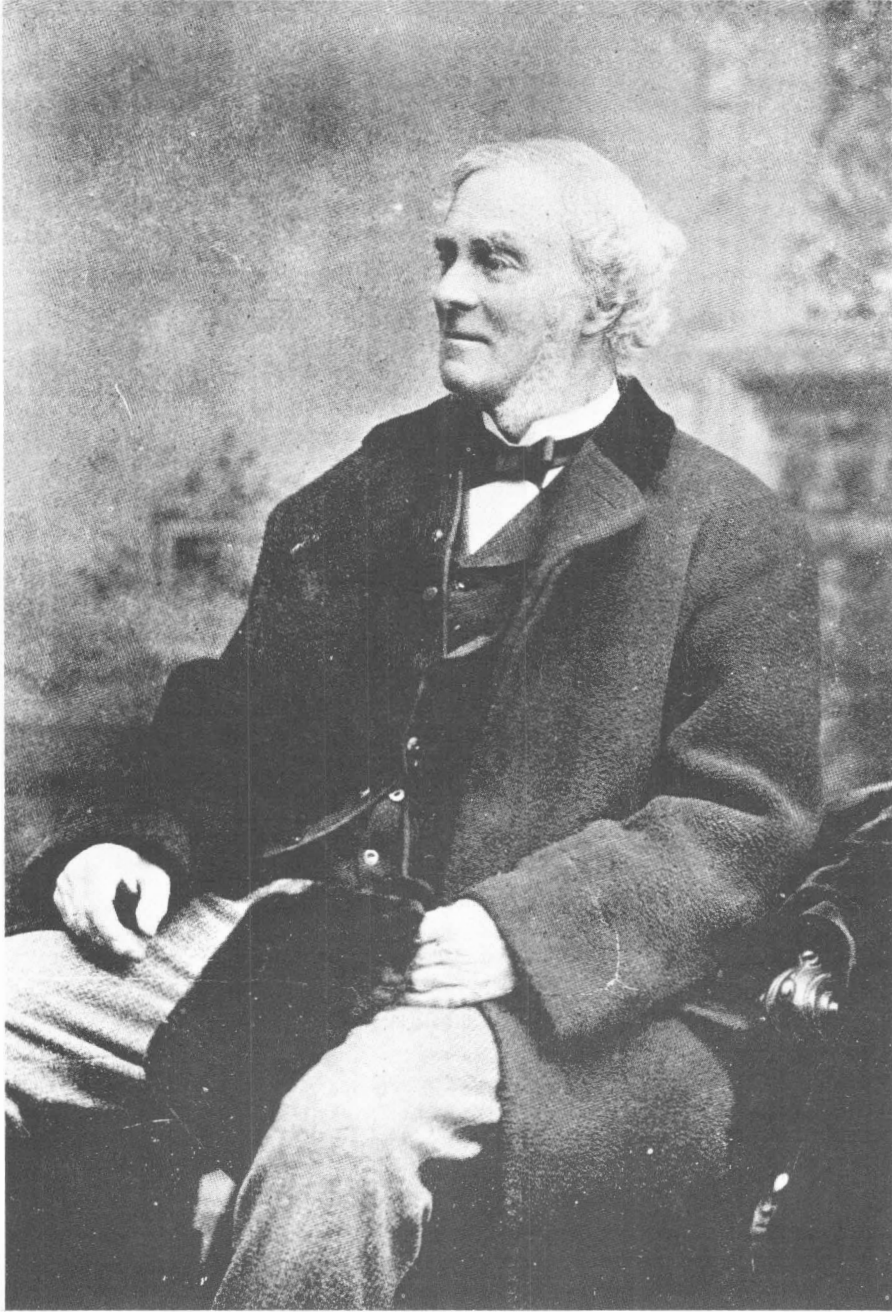


Cover (envelope) and contents, Montreal Ocean Steamship Company (Allan Line) correspondence. Of a kind sought by the author.

preparing their legislation until 1851. Then, in rapid succession, Upper and Lower Canada, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland gained control of their post office departments. From this date, a post office developed in British North America along the lines known today, providing a multitude of services with a minimal regard for cost.

Surviving records of the period of imperial control are just detailed enough to suggest the wealth of information lost with the fire of 1841. Nevertheless, whatever else the colonials thought of the imperial postal service, they did their metropolitan masters the honour of emulating the administrative practices of the older system. There was no disruption in records-keeping procedures at the time of Confederation or even with the introduction of the Dominion's new Post Office Act of April 1868. Indeed, there was little discernable change in the method of handling records until about the beginning of the twentieth century when expanding operations forced a new system upon the department. Except for Stayner, who became the sacrificial lamb, the same people from the Province of Canada kept the same type of letterbooks for the Dominion of Canada.

The Public Archives of Canada (PAC) is the main repository of provincial Canadian and all subsequent post office records for the Dominion. The documents exist either as originals or as transcripts of documents held elsewhere. The



William Henry Griffin at the time of his retirement as Deputy Postmaster General, when he was feted as the "Doyen of the Civil Service" (in which he had served from 1831-1888). Photography by Topley. (Dominion Illustrated, 1 September 1888)

single most important of the earliest sources is MG 40 L, General Post Office, the official designation given to transcripts pertaining to Canada made from the GPO Archives in London. The laborious process of hand transcription, which began at about the turn of the century, seems to have been undertaken at the behest of William Smith, who was then beginning his study of the post office in British North America. The transcripts are a remarkably faithful record of existing direct correspondence between the imperial post office administration and its colonial department. The copies are defective on two counts, however, one avoidable and the other not: insufficient use was made of complementary material from related series of GPO correspondence, and many of the relevant records had already been destroyed or otherwise lost by the GPO by the time the work of transcription started. The PAC and the National Postal Museum are now engaged in an ambitious microfilming project of the GPO records including a wide range of complementary material. When this is completed the PAC will have as complete as possible a collection of post office records.

The transcripts cover the period from the beginning of a postal service in Canada in 1763 to about mid-1848, by which date the transcribers presumably felt that records already existing in Canada were sufficiently full. There is some material pre-dating 1763, whenever it had a Canadian bearing. This is particularly true in the area of the post office packet services which were well established on their North American routes by the middle of the eighteenth century. There is an excellent finding aid (no. 392) for these transcripts, although its very bulk can be a trap for the unwary. Despite occupying 266 pages, the finding aid does not list each document.

As for the existing original records themselves in London, the most vexing problem involves the criteria underlying selection of records for elimination. The destruction of material appears to have been heaviest in the series of regular reports that the Deputy Postmasters General were required to submit. For example, it is known that Stayner did his best to submit quarterly status reports. These documents would have been of crucial importance to postal historians as a particularly reliable source for the dates of the opening and closing of post offices and the appointment of postmasters, yet few now exist. The surviving reports do not readily reveal any special significance which would have shielded them from a systematic destruction; they may simply have been representative of all the records.

Two other record groups at the PAC supplement MG 40 L particularly well: Record Group 8, Series I (the old military "C" series) and MG 21, British Museum, Add. MSS. 21661-21892 (the Haldimand Papers). The military in Canada had a vested interest, of course, in ensuring the safe and timely arrival of despatches. Up to the War of 1812 therefore the army provided conveyance for the mails, either by troops on their regular business, or by seconding individual soldiers to act as couriers during periods of military inactivity (such as winter), or by providing the means of conveyance (such as government vessels on the waterways). The level of this aid diminished after the War, though it was revived briefly in 1872 during the North West Rebellion. Important information about the mail service can be found concentrated particularly in four volumes of the old "C" series, and in lesser amounts throughout other volumes in the record group.

NOTICE TO SHIPPERS.—Goods at Liverpool will be received at
the Duke's Dock daily.

STEAM
BETWEEN
LIVERPOOL AND CANADA.

(Under Contract with Her Majesty's Provincial Government of Canada.)

THE SWIFT AND POWERFUL SCREW STEAM-SHIP

“GENOVA,”

WALTER PATON, Commander,

(Who has had great experience in the St. Lawrence Trade.)

NOW LOADING IN THE BIRKENHEAD DOCKS,

WILL BE DESPATCHED FOR

QUEBEC & MONTREAL,

DIRECT,

ON TUESDAY, THE 19TH INSTANT.

CABIN PASSAGE, (including Steward's Fee,) £21.

FREIGHT, 60s. per ton Measurement, and Five per Cent. Primage. Weight by special agreement. Parcels 5s., and upwards, according to size and weight.

No Goods will be received after mid-day of 18th instant, by which time all Bills of Lading must be sent in for Signature.

For Freight or Passage, and Plans of Cabins, having very superior accommodation for Passengers, apply to

MCKEAN, MCLARTY, & CO.

31, WATER STREET,

LIVERPOOL, 7th April, 1853.

LIVERPOOL.

The *Genova* will be succeeded by the Steam-Ship “CLEOPATRA,” 1,500 Tons, and 300 Horse-Power,
on TUESDAY, the 17th MAY.

FARES,—per “CLEOPATRA,”—First Cabin, £21; Second Cabin, £12 12s; Third Class Passengers, £6 6s.

Broadside for the first Canada-subsidised transatlantic mail steamship service. (National Postal Museum)

The Haldimand Papers, copied from the British Library (formerly the British Museum), illustrate the requirement for resourcefulness on the part of researchers and archivists. Their value to the study of postal history derives from the fact that Deputy Postmaster General Hugh Finlay held another important post during his lifetime—that of *maitre des postes*. Through this he exercised authority over the post house system in Lower Canada, the network of inns and stables along the roads where travellers could obtain a change of horses and accommodation. This was a local position for which he was responsible to the Governor. As the duties were described, the position had no bearing on his work as Deputy Postmaster General, but in practice the two jobs could not be kept separate. Finlay's correspondence with Governor Haldimand has survived and does help complete the picture of the communication problem in early Canada.

Research possibilities improve immensely in records generated after the fire in the Quebec Post Office which so distressed Stayner. The main post office holdings at the PAC, Record Group 3, commences with his correspondence (Series 1). This consists basically of his letterbooks, along with a sparse portfolio of letters received.⁶ These letterbooks are divided into letters to his superiors in the GPO, to his Post Office Surveyors, and to the general public. There is a preliminary inventory to Record Group 3, and despite being incomplete, it is useful in locating relevant files.

The significance of this correspondence transcends purely postal matters. In it can be found letters that give details of day-to-day events in communities as well as of the operation of the Post Office Department. These letters, which represent the working papers of the department and of its employees, can provide a broad picture of the nature of the frontier communities served by the post office. The position of postmaster, though never in itself remunerative,⁷ had advantages that far outweighed the meagre salary. The post office was a central meeting place, the one location where everyone in the community was likely to call, providing a captive audience for the tavern, general store, hotel, or wherever it was that the postmaster carried on his business.

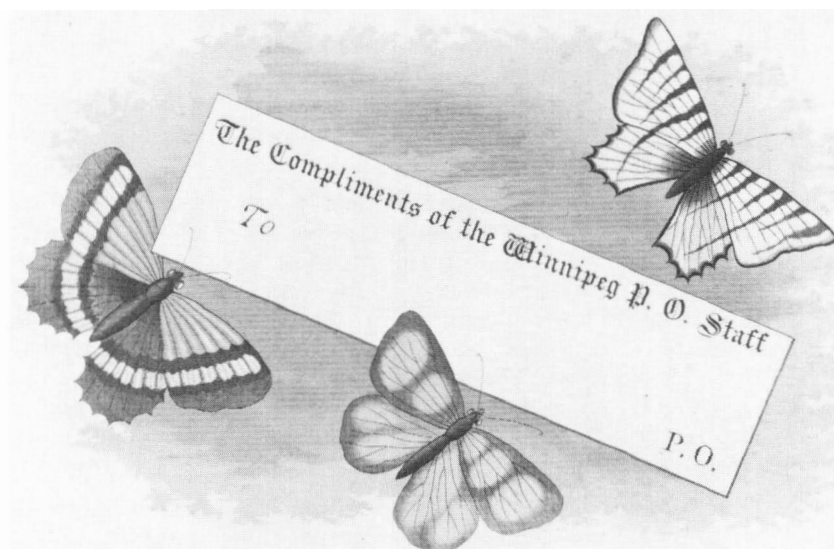
The Post Office Department rarely opened an office on its own initiative; normally, community leaders would petition the Deputy Postmaster General for such action. He would then request his Post Office Surveyor (later called Post Office Inspector) to investigate the matter and report. If it were deemed feasible, a recommendation that the request be granted would be forwarded to London. The proposal would be well documented as to the viability of the proposed service or office, even to the point of including a copy of the Surveyor's report. If the response were positive, the Deputy Postmaster General would then correspond with the Governor General (through the Provincial Secretary) for a nomination for the position of postmaster. This would usually be sought from the local

6 A recurrent difficulty in post office records is the dearth of incoming correspondence: postal officials always seem to have been convinced of the value to posterity of the letters *they* wrote, but markedly less so of the letters they received.

7 In Stayner's time postmasters received a flat 20% of the revenue their office took in, as well as, until 5 January 1844, free franking privileges for all their mail. It was the rare postmaster who directly earned more than £10 a year. Not only that, but the government did not pay any rent for the space occupied by the post office paraphernalia; occasionally a pittance was allowed for the purchase of stationery and so forth. Things did not get notably better after 1851. The 1852 *Annual Report* shows that the average salary for 814 rural postmasters was a paltry £11:12:0.

member of the provincial parliament or other prominent figure, and in due course the Deputy Postmaster General would be told who was considered suitable. This procedure, of course, dates from August 1842 when Stayner lost the power of appointing postmasters directly. The records of this exercise of his authority were largely lost in the fire of 1841. Thereafter, the records of nominations may be found in the civil correspondence of the Governor General for the two Canadas.⁸

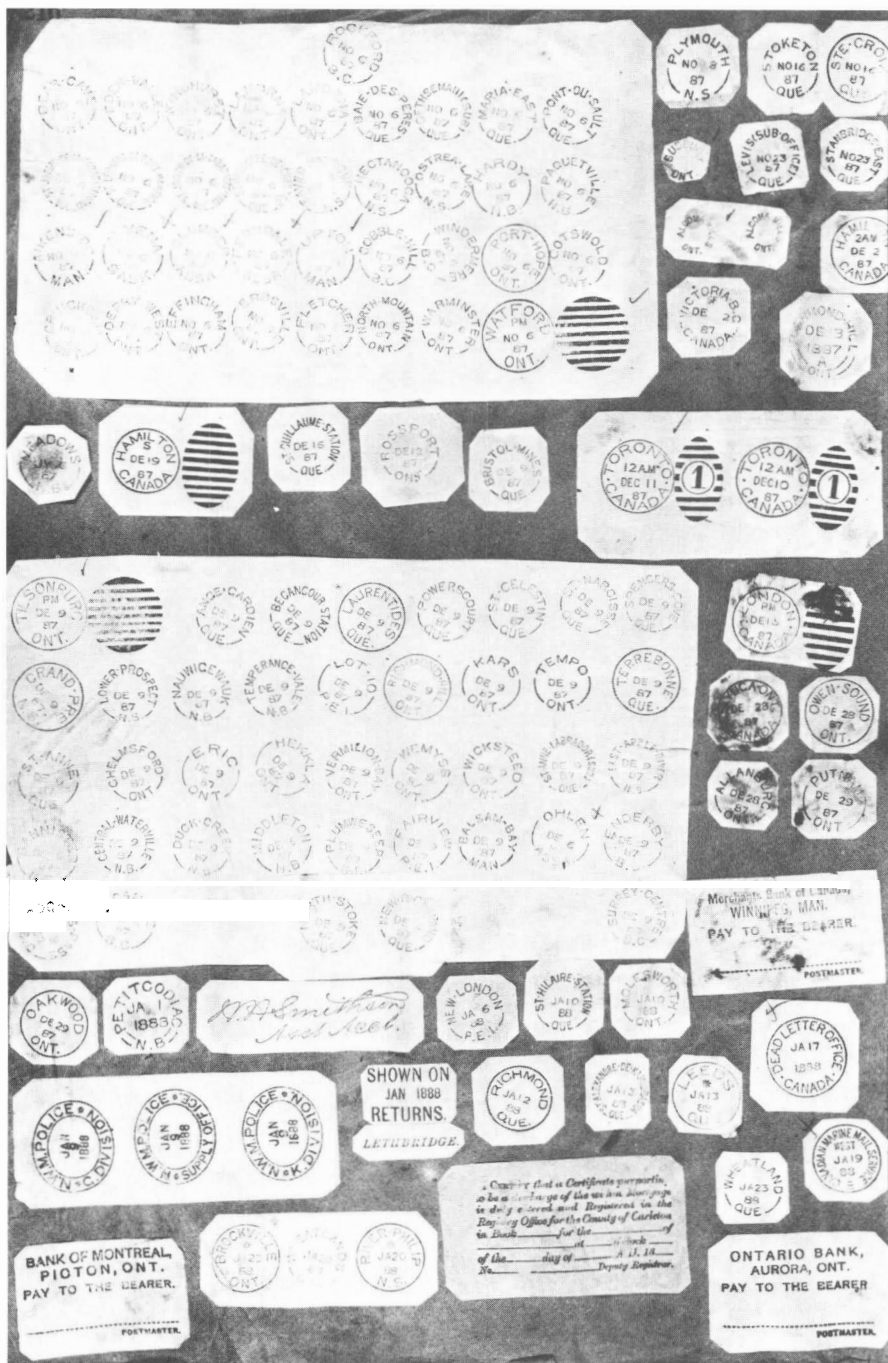
The importance and advantages leading from the physical location of a post office within a community not infrequently led to hotly contested petitions from rival factions, often to the detriment of what might be seen as a common purpose: the establishment of a post office in the community. At times, the resulting correspondence became so acrimonious that the post office was hard pressed to come to a decision. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this is provided



Early greeting card from the staff of the city Post Office, Winnipeg, Christmas 1881. The staff members are listed on the reserve side and their careers may be followed in Public Archives of Canada, Record Group 3). (National Postal Museum)

by the case of the post office at Binbrook, Canada West. The first of five contradictory petitions advocating an office be located there reached Stayner in April 1846. He replied immediately that the Surveyor would look into the matter. By the time Stayner was able to digest the other four petitions, obtain the Surveyor's recommendations, and ask the GPO for authority to open an office, several months had passed. He finally received permission to open the office in July 1847, but the controversy in Binbrook continued throughout the year while the

⁸ Public Archives of Canada, Record Group 4, Civil and Provincial Secretaries' Office, Canada East, (Finding Aid 993), and Record Group 5, Civil and Provincial Secretaries' Office, Canada West, (Finding Aid 995).



Proof impressions sheet. The National Postal Museum is endeavouring to build a complete collection of Canadian proof impressions. (Philatelic Foundation, New York)

Surveyor made further investigations. The net result was that the office did not open until 6 June 1848, with the delay largely the fault of the feuding inhabitants of the community.⁹

The postal records of the Atlantic colonies for the decades leading up to Confederation are located in provincial repositories, and, with one exception, are less complete than those of the united Canadas. Virtually no postal records have been discovered in Prince Edward Island, while popular belief suggests that those of Newfoundland disappeared in the not-too-distant past.¹⁰ The Archives of New Brunswick houses a good set of financial accounts of the postal service, but little correspondence. Only Nova Scotia's holdings compare favourably with those of the province of Canada. They are maintained as Record Group 24, Post Office Records of Nova Scotia, and are adequately described in the published inventory of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia.¹¹

A particularly significant development from provincial control of postal services was the publication by the respective Postmasters General of detailed annual reports. This type of report remained standard until 1875, when the very useful "Report of New Offices and Post Routes Established and of Offices and Routes discontinued and closed within the said year" was itself discontinued. Gradually thereafter the financial overcame the personal reports. With the 1918 annual report, the document had withered to the point of being simply a financial statement, as noted by the Deputy Postmaster General in his report to the Postmaster General:

on the recommendation of the Editorial Committee on Governmental Printing, it was decided to edit from this report a considerable portion of the statements hitherto published, showing in detail the business of each separate branch of the department, and to substitute therefor the summarized statements which will be found in the following pages.¹²

From this date, annual reports of the Postmasters General include little of value to postal historians; current reports are little more than glossy public relations material.

Various other items were published to complement the annual reports, the most notable of which was the *Canada Official Postal Guide*. This was and still is the bible for postal clerks in their work, listing details such as postal rates and regulations, and all the minutiae entailed by running a postal service. The National Postal Museum in Ottawa probably houses the most complete collec-

9 The documents can be found in Record Group 3, Series 1, Volumes 4, 8, 11 and 12. See also my article on "The Binbrook Post Office" in the *Journal of the Postal History Society of Canada*, 21 (March 1980).

10 The Newfoundland documents were transferred to the Post Office Department, Ottawa, shortly after that province joined Canada, where they were destroyed. Some employees remember this destruction, but apparently it was not documented.

11 *Inventory of Manuscripts in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1976), Record Group 24, pp. 187-192.

12 As stated in the preface to the *Annual Report of the Postmaster General for the year ended 31 March 1918*, 21 November 1918, Deputy Postmaster General R.M. Coulter to Postmaster General P.E. Blouin.

tion of these guides (which through the years have been printed as often as quarterly, with weekly supplements) as well as of the annual reports of the provinces and the dominion.

For the years 1851 to 1902, the PAC's holdings in RG3, Post Office, are distributed through eight series: international correspondence, subject files, general correspondence, and correspondence with various postal officials. Each series essentially comprises letterbooks, registers, and the occasional thin file of letters received. There is an additional miscellaneous series covering the period 1807 to 1958, in a total of 304 volumes. Many of these "miscellaneous" volumes belong in other series, but time has not been found to place them correctly. The preliminary inventory does not describe these volumes at all satisfactorily.

Series 2, International Correspondence 1851-1902 (104 volumes in 24 feet), is probably the most complete unit within the group, indicating the importance the department attached to this correspondence. With their takeover of postal services the provinces also obtained the right to negotiate bilateral agreements with foreign countries. This right was exercised mostly by the Canadians, who promptly signed a postal treaty with the United States and later with countries such as Belgium, France, and Prussia. With Great Britain, of course, arrangements continued to be made on an *ad hoc* basis, without the need for elaborate international protocol. This series also includes correspondence with the GPO dealing predominantly with the settling of various financial accounts between the two offices.

Series 2 also encompasses the correspondence between the dominion and the administration of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). This organisation, which Canada joined in 1878 four years after it had been established, regulated postal transactions between countries and bestowed the blessing whereby each member country accepted prepaid letters from the others as being fully prepaid and without insisting on receiving a percentage of the postage. Prior to 1874 countries had to account to each other by means of a complicated formula dividing the postage on each letter among those countries through which it had passed—an incredibly cumbersome and time-consuming practice.

Series 3, Subject Files 1851-1890 (15 volumes in almost 2 feet) is neither voluminous nor complete. The files deal mainly with narrow facets of the Canadian Ocean and Railway Mail Branches, and are largely agreements and contracts with the companies (rail and steamship), which carried the mails. These are selected documents which the department's custodian felt were especially interesting and worthy of being removed from their original series and kept separate. Because they form a nice neat package, this material has been used extensively by researchers and is unlikely to provide any new information. Partly because these documents were removed from their natural context, they give a distorted picture of policy and operations.

Series 4, General Correspondence 1851-1902 (240 volumes in 60 feet) is a minor monument to the delightfully vague notions of general correspondence in earlier days. The series contains information on virtually all aspects of the postal service. Here may be found letters answering requests for new offices and routes, complaints against existing services, suggestions from the public for improving the postal service and tendering inventions to accomplish that worthy objective,

as well as a myriad other subjects. These volumes are all well indexed. This is also the series which most clearly reveals the lamentable lack of incoming correspondence. The department's letterbooks have survived intact and provide tantalizing evidence of the wealth of information which once existed.

Registration of incoming correspondence did not start until 1880 and the retention of any Series 4 correspondence did not begin until 1883. Even after this date, the record is very slight. A random comparison of registers with correspondence still on file suggests a destruction rate at least as high as 80% in some parts of the material. Again, the criteria underlying the selection for retention are not readily apparent. Nevertheless, the registers do give a very brief description of the contents of incoming letters, and the replies (which may be found in the letterbooks) are such as to allow a reconstruction of at least the import and nature of incoming correspondence. Certain rather astonishing mistakes in numbering some volumes in this series have occasionally disrupted the prevailing chronological order, the fault here lying in the haphazard way in which the material was turned over to the PAC. However, staff of the Postal Museum have prepared an annotated copy of the preliminary inventory correcting such problems.

Series 5, Correspondence with the Chief Inspector 1873-1898 (32 volumes in 12 feet), *Series 6, Correspondence with Divisional Inspectors 1851-1902* (431 volumes in 176 feet) and *Series 8, Correspondence with Postmasters 1862-1873* (4 volumes in 1 foot) encompass the most attractive material for postal historians and local history societies. These are the series most likely to include the official paperwork leading to the opening of new offices and routes, appointments, and investigations undertaken to handle complaints about irregularities in the department. Series 6 is slowly being microfilmed, and an index prepared, listing all the reports, but it will be years before this is completed.

Even as late as the mid-twentieth century the procedure for expanding services had altered little from the 1840s. Through the years, different people were approached for the distribution of the patronage involved in appointing postmasters (for example, after World War II this task fell to officials of the Canadian Legion), but the same care went into deciding the viability of a new service. Many of the reports of investigations house considerable quantities of demographic information as well as small sketch maps of areas studied. Used in conjunction with the Post Office Record Cards¹³ and Postmastership Files after 1926 these records can, for the periods covered, provide significant insights into the development of postal services.

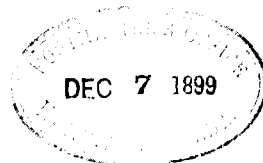
Allied with these series is an uninventoried amalgam of records which have yet to be properly arranged by the PAC. They derive from the post office's efforts in the 1880s to meet the increasing need for mail delivery to growing settlements off major transportation routes. Generally in the form of large ledgers, these documents supply information about mail contractors who travelled from the main railway arteries and from major urban centres carrying mail to as many people as possible. In particular, the ledgers note the stops along these secondary routes—details absent from the published annual reports listing all mail routes.

13 These cards give the names and tenure of all the postmasters for particular post offices.

~~ON HER MAJESTY'S SERVICE~~

20-10700-1410-8

FROM CANADIAN CONTINGENT. FREE
AT CAPE DE VERDS



Postmark devised by the Postmaster of Hamilton, Ontario, to ensure that mail passing through his office from the Boer War Canadian contingent was sent in Canada free of charge. (National Postal Museum)

These volumes eventually mutated into records of rural mail delivery (which begin in 1908), highway services, free letter carrier delivery (which commenced in 1874 in Montreal and slowly spread across the country), and airmail services.

As yet, no finding aid or inventory has been prepared for this material, but Series 12, Mail Tender Registers, can be useful in locating specific items, especially as they were compiled chronologically. Unfortunately the ledgers and the registers are located in different parts of Ottawa, complicating research. The experience of the National Postal Museum during the past three years suggests that local historical societies are becoming as interested in who carried the mail as in who looked after it at the local post offices. The way in which these files are located in three different places makes them particularly difficult to follow. In fact, assistance from staff of either the PAC or the Postal Museum is usually required by researchers engaged in systematic studies of the transportation of mail.

Series 12, Mail Tender Registers 1839-1966 (132 volumes in 100 feet) is of use mostly for clues leading to more detailed information which may be found in the ledgers. Nevertheless the registers also outline tenders submitted: routes, distances, names of persons tendering, proposed service, amount of tender, and disposition of each tender. In addition, there are ten volumes of contracts within the series.

Series 9, Miscellaneous Records 1807-1958 (304 volumes, more than 25 feet) must surely embarrass those concerned with post office records because of their extent. Virtually all of the material could be distributed properly among existing series of its own. The first 155 volumes is a place of last resort for researchers who cannot locate what was sought in earlier series. Fortunately, this series often rewards research tenacity; it is reasonably well described in the Preliminary Inventory, while the balance of the series is extremely accurately identified, as will be seen later.

Series 9, which obviously has undergone some form of selection, gives a slight clue as to the criteria used in deciding what should be kept: it is here that personnel records are most likely to be found; the next most voluminous set is that dealing with matters of patronage. Modern perception of the latter may well be wonderment that files such as these would have been kept so meticulously, let alone preserved for posterity. While patronage most certainly exists today, it is usually treated with considerable circumspection and it is doubtful whether any minister or department, how ever the reality might be blurted out in public, would be likely to keep detailed records. At least sixteen of these miscellaneous volumes, however, deal unabashedly with the distribution of patronage. This fact is paralleled in Series 4, in the letters received section, where a high percentage of material also relates to patronage. There is no doubt that the department was determined that this important aspect of the operation of the post office and its political superiors should be retained. The topic bears research!

The most important aggregation in Series 9, however, is the personnel records. Sixty-one volumes (12-16, 133, 229-267, and 289-304) covering 1831 to World War I—even to 1949 in a few cases—reveal early and rudimentary efforts by the department systematically to maintain personnel records. These include comprehensive records of appointments to all positions in post offices (the so-called Inside Service) and Outside Services (such as Railway Mail Clerks) as well as record books documenting steps in the careers of all post office employees. Information within these volumes hint that volumes pre-dating 1831 once existed. A supplementary set in Series 4 (volumes 80-88, June 1895 to December 1904) deals with financial aspects of personnel matters. This is an example of the occasional and unexplained anachronisms noted above.

Personnel records in Series 9 can be difficult to use because of the considerable overlapping between volumes whereby the same information on the same individuals may appear in different places. Perhaps successive clerks attempted to start anew with different records keeping schemes, but did not have the nerve to discard earlier efforts. The net result, nevertheless, is that for salaried personnel from about 1831-1935 there is an excellent chance of locating important information. This is significant, for if any personnel files as they are known today were kept on post office employees before 1902, they have apparently been destroyed. Oddly enough the potentially so useful information which can be supplied from these records is rarely sought by the public. Queries on personnel matters almost invariably concern rural postmasters and mail contractors and their terms of office—the very thing that deficiencies in the records render nearly impossible to supply.

The final 150 volumes in this series are not described in the preliminary inventory, except to refer the researcher to Accession 71/436. However, checking with an archivist reveals that this accession is described in detail in a paper held by the Public Records Division, thus giving easy access to records held at the PAC.

Series 7, Correspondence with Marine Mail Officers 1878-1888 (3 volumes in 8 inches), the smallest series in the Record Group, epitomizes the problems facing researchers using post office records. The Marine Mail Officer (or the Ocean Mail Clerk, as the department referred to him in official correspondence) was responsible between 1860 and 1887 for sorting mails carried on transatlantic mail

steamers. Technological advances in steam travel resulting in too many ships going too fast to allow sorting to be completed during the voyage soon overwhelmed this once important part of the postal service, but in their heyday these employees were considered to be the elite of the department.¹⁴ Correspondence detailing their appointments will be found where it should be: Series 4, General Correspondence. Yet the records in Series 7 begin in 1878, a full eighteen years after the Ocean Mail Clerk was introduced. Diligent searching of Series 9, Miscellaneous Records, has identified three additional volumes (202, 203, and 205) which fill the gap. These volumes reveal that the post office department had made a rare exception for those days by starting an entirely new series of letter-

CHANGE OF POSTMASTERS

Archives *Sask.*

(NAME OF OFFICE) ELECTORAL DISTRICT AND PROVINCE

DATE OF ESTABLISHMENT *1-2-1913* OFFICE CLOSED *Immensely closed 30-9-64*

OFFICE RE-OPENED

CHANGES IN NAME

FORMER NAME DATE OF CHANGE

NAME OF POSTMASTER	MILITARY STATUS	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF APPOINTMENT	DATE OF VACANCY	CAUSE OF VACANCY
<i>Victor Eldstrom</i>			<i>1-2-1913</i>	<i>12-1-1917</i>	<i>Resignation</i>
<i>W. J. Peterson</i>			<i>26-6-18</i>	<i>21-7-19</i>	<i>Res.</i>
<i>Geo. B. Newberry</i>			<i>1-11-19</i>	<i>14-1-21</i>	<i>Res.</i>
<i>John B. Johnson</i>		<i>7-8-1871</i>	<i>4-3-21</i>	<i>25-4-26</i>	<i>Res.</i>
<i>John Walter Sharpe</i>		<i>25-5-1913</i>	<i>1-5-26</i>	<i>Acting</i>	
<i>John Walter Sharpe</i>		<i>23-2-13</i>	<i>15-7-46</i>	<i>18-9-04</i>	<i>Resignation</i>

G. P. 19-7,596-19-7,60

Post Office Record Card, Archive, Saskatchewan. The reverse of this card sometimes contains useful data on office location. (National Postal Museum)

books for documents dealing with a specific topic. In fact, the letterbooks are complete from 1861 to 1888, after which time the clerks were either transferred to other branches of the department or were superannuated.

The entire matter of ocean mail service is further complicated by four volumes on "Ocean Mail Service 1858-1872, 1890", located in the meagre subject-file correspondence of Series 3, and by two volumes of scrapbooks in Series 9 (64 and 65) containing newspaper clippings, posters, and so on, relating to the service. The former consists of copies of most early contracts by which the Allan Royal Mail Line conveyed transatlantic mails for the Canadian government. These twelve volumes, scattered through three series, provide about 85% of the sources available for the study of this interesting phase of Canadian postal history. This

¹⁴ For the story of these colourful gentlemen the reader is referred to my booklet *The Canadian Ocean Mail Clerk 1860-1887* (Ottawa, 1978), available through the National Postal Museum.



Cancelling stamps automatically, April 1923. (Public Archives of Canada PA-61875)

example underlines the need to reorganize the record group to remove such anomalies. To leave them as originally transferred simply underlines the jumbled state in which the post office stored them, and would represent a misapplication or misunderstanding of some abstract archival principle while unnecessarily obscuring the informational content. Sooner or later these records must be reshuffled to reflect the order in which they were originally kept.

By the turn of the century, it was clear to all government departments that their traditional methods of records keeping were inadequate and that changes were needed. The post office department responded to this need in about 1902. By coincidence, just as the bureaucracy was contemplating such fundamental changes, one of the department's long-term servants was planning his retirement. After nearly fifty years of service, Chief Inspector Matthew Sweetnam, even at this late stage in his career, was concerned about the huge quantity of records he knew to be scattered throughout the system. Consequently, he launched a scheme to establish a retention schedule, pared to the minimum, for records stored in local post offices across the country. The department's secretary supported him wholeheartedly, writing that "it would be satisfactory to know that there was no useless rubbish lying about our country Post Offices".¹⁵

The implications for archivists in this tacit approval for widespread destruction are bad enough, but the whole matter was magnified a year later when Sweetnam got around to considering the fate of his own official records. Then he was told:

with reference to his communication of the 27th inst., enquiring how he is to dispose of correspondence on file in his Office, the Chief Inspector is informed that he may destroy any papers which he considers to have no permanent importance or value as records, and the remainder may be sent to Ottawa.¹⁶

Thus the fate of an entire series of records came to rest on the whim of one man as he approached retirement. It is a measure of his capacity and judgment that so many documents did indeed survive to be transferred to Ottawa. But it is also another example of the haphazard nature of records keeping that existed in the post office and which now bedevils archivists and researchers alike.

Series 10, Registry Files 1902-1948, and *Series 13, Central Registry Files 1917-1956* (both series unmeasured) are the legacy of the subject file system inaugurated in 1902. The division into two series simply indicates a change in the method of numbering files in what amounts to a separation into an old and a new series. There is some overlap in dates between the two series as the new system was installed over a number of years. Even so, retrieval of specific files is very easy as they are all well described in documents accompanying the transfer, and because the PAC has produced a totally adequate Key Word Index common to both. Destruction of files which should be in these series seems to have been minimal, with the dismaying exception of the Postmastership Files.

Series II, Postage Stamp Division—Records and Stamps, is a very valuable collection of the rare "Inverted Seaway" stamp that the post office issued in 1959.

15 RG3, Series 5, Volume 32, 11 November 1897, Wm. Le Seuer to Sweetnam.

16 *Ibid.*, 31 October 1898, Le Seuer to Sweetnam.



Royal Mail Trolley Car operating between the Grand Trunk Railway station and Post Office, Kitchener, Ontario, c. 1925. (Public Archives of Canada PA-61563)

It has been repatriated to the Postal Museum where it will eventually form part of a display.

Little archival work has been done on Record Group 3 since the main body of records was acquired by the PAC in the late 1920s. This appears to result from a chronic shortage of personnel at the Archives and the lack of research interest in post office records. One thing has been done, however, which would have been best left undone: the destruction of the Postmastership Files and possibly other records dating between 1902 and 1926. This was a cooperative venture between the PAC and the post office. No certificate has been discovered of what materials were destroyed, but in the case of the Postmastership Files at least, the destruction was complete. Apparently it was thought that the information contained in these records was duplicated elsewhere, but this proved in time not to be the case entirely. The result, of course, has contributed to deficiencies in the earliest records—especially those of rural post offices—in relation to later documentation bearing on the same topics. This sad coincidence seriously mars the value of post office records in one of their more popular aspects, and has played a major role in inhibiting research activity.

The physical location of the bulk of the records also poses a problem. Series 1 to 3 are located in the main archives building in Ottawa, but all the others are stored in a warehouse across the Ottawa River in Hull. Such matters as excessive

heat in summer and snow in winter have been known to limit their availability for research. In short, the twice-daily pick-up system for documents stored in this warehouse cannot always be maintained. Of far greater significance to those concerned with the survival of the postal record is the fact that the warehouse concerned does not meet archival storage standards.

Another problem involves the nature of transfers of documents to the custody of the PAC and underscores the differences between archival, dormant, and current records. The Archives is well in control of records in its possession, even though they might be stored all over the National Capital Region. The Post Office Department has a reasonably good knowledge of its current material and it may occasionally invoke the 30-year rule to deny access to certain files. But dormant records lie in an archival limbo at Tunney's Pasture where researchers and archivists venture at their peril. While researchers can obtain access to these materials and departmental personnel do have right of access, the ordinary researcher will face an almost impenetrable barrier to his work. To locate the files quickly, staff members at Tunney's Pasture (or, more accurately, the Public Archives Record Centre) require accession numbers, but the Post Office Department is regrettably unable to determine which files were transferred at what time. Consequently, for records stored at Tunney's Pasture—and these include many of the files on rural delivery, city service, and highway services described earlier—a person must know precisely what is being sought, enlist the help of someone



Rural Mail Contractor, Vegreville, Alberta, 1927. (Provincial Archives of Alberta, Ernest Brown collection)

either at the Archives or at the Postal Museum, and then be taken in hand to the Records Centre. A plan is under way to have these files transferred to the Public Records Division at the Archives' main building on Wellington Street.

The National Postal Museum, which is part of the Post Office Department, maintains a special relationship with the staff of the Archives. The Museum staff feels a strong proprietary interest in post office records, and does not consider that the transfer of material to the Archives excuses them from being thoroughly conversant with the historical evidence. In fact, since the Museum opened in September 1974, staff members have been trying to recapture the spirit of the post office by careful studies of the past. The Museum does not have archives as such, but by virtue of the rapport existing between the two institutions, the Museum has retained small sections of post office records to which very frequent reference is made either because of queries from the stamp-collecting public, or because of the Museum's everyday activities. There are four categories of these materials located at the Museum: the Post Office Impression Books (better known as the Museum Proofbooks), Post Office Records Cards, philatelic records, and a small number of unique and attractive items required for Museum displays.

The Proofbooks and the Record Cards are inextricably related. The cards detail the history of virtually every post office in Canada that closed before 1971. Similar records for offices still operating are held in postal regions across the country. The information on these cards consists of postmasters' names, dates of birth and tenure as postmaster, reasons for changes in postmasters (and if patronage or "political patronage" was involved the cards note that!), and the various name changes for post offices. For prairie post offices, the cards give exact geographical information on the location of the building. These were the cards being relied upon when the destruction of the Postmastership Files was approved. The principal missing component of the cards is the annual report of the postmaster on which he made an impression of every cancelling device and rubber stamp in the office. To some degree the Museum Proofbooks help overcome this lacuna by supplementing the record cards with a record of impressions of all cancellation devices authorized and supplied by the department for use in the various offices. For example, the Archive, Saskatchewan, postmark was taken from the Proofbooks. Unfortunately, the proofbooks are complete only from about 1908, though the Museum has reconstructed a partial record for about ten years before that from a variety of sources. Further back in time there is a gap until the period when the GPO in London was providing such instruments for the British North American provinces. The Museum is now negotiating the acquisition of a film copy of the British proofbooks, which will supply a reasonably complete record of all the cancellation devices used in British North America and subsequently Canada.

Some archival materials, such as the contracts and correspondence with security printers and bank note companies which have printed stamps for Canada, have remained with the National Postal Museum. This arrangement is based on the close relationship between such materials and all the artwork, preliminary and final, connected with the production of stamps and which the Museum mounts in displays. Once again the records are incomplete, but from about the turn of the century for the contracts, and from 1926 for the correspondence, the

Museum does hold adequate material to answer most philatelic enquiries and to prepare attractive exhibits. Furthermore, the queries from the public which must be answered from these files are usually so technical that philatelic experts are required to prepare adequate responses. About 30% of the Museum's enquirers are absorbed by the philatelic aspects of the hobby, such as origins of stamp designs, background information on designers, artists, and engravers, the minutiae of variations in printed stamps (including the type of paper and gum used), perforations, design changes, quantities printed, and errors or varieties in printing. Museum staff has been responding to letters from the public for about seven years (that is, for about two years before the Museum's official opening), and in this period fewer than fifteen researchers have carried their studies through to the production of a major work, either book, article, or display.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this should not be taken as a denigration of the very real enjoyment that the ordinary person receives from the reply to his or her query.

Despite the broad scope of post office records, extending far beyond postal history and philately, they are seldom used at the PAC. Only twelve written enquiries were made during the first half of the fiscal year 1979-80 that required use of the records, and three of these were transferred to the Postal Museum for reply. One team of researchers from Queen's University has undertaken a demographic study using the postal records, but for the most part professional researchers have remained largely ignorant of the possibilities offered by the post office materials.

The Museum is the obvious place for hobbyists, either stamp collectors or amateur postal historians, to send their queries. About twelve letters a day are handled by staff. Excluding the purely philatelic queries, most enquiries only require fairly limited research. At least 50% of the letters, representing perhaps 80% of the time absorbed in dealing with written enquiries, involves questions concerning the opening and closing of post offices and the establishment of rural routes. Generally these questions can be answered most expeditiously by reference to the Post Office Record Cards (an easy task though time-consuming), or to the rural route ledgers (a difficult as well as time-consuming process). Some queries have included lists of more than three hundred post offices for which the writer wanted photocopies of the cards! These requests are normally handled on an as-time-permits basis and in a piece-meal fashion. If a researcher indicates the request is urgent, Museum staff will most often recommend a personal visit to the Museum or the engagement of a researcher from a list of free-lancers maintained by the Museum. While each of these approaches has been used occasionally, most enquirers seem content to await the sporadic trickle of letters which will gradually complete the more elaborate responses. The longer lists of questions usually come from retired hobbyists with considerable time on their hands to devote to a grand scheme of collecting town postmarks. The more reasonable lists derive from local history societies which are interested only in the offices of a certain locality. Finally, with the increasing public realization that post office

17 Yet there are almost endless possibilities for publishing works on philatelic and postal history topics; there are literally hundreds of journals and bulletins published by and for the hobby, ranging from high academic to low popular.

records are a good starting point for genealogical research, such enquiries are on the increase.¹⁸

The increase of general interest in some of the more sophisticated aspects of postal history has had some unpleasant side effects. One of these is of particular concern to archivists because of the threat this represents to their records. The pages of recent issues of *Archivaria* bear eloquent testimony to the activities of a mercifully small minority who use their knowledge of market trends in the hobby to loot archives systematically of material which will fetch handsome prices from collectors. While it is beyond the scope of this article to describe exactly what is considered by such thieves, it should be nevertheless pointed out that the market is so omnivorous that it is easier to decide what will *not* sell than to decide what will find a buyer. All archival records are vulnerable to such criminal behaviour, forcing archivists to become ever more conscious of the real monetary value of their holdings. Unfortunately, defences against such theft usually entail a reduction in easy access to originals.

18 The Ottawa Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society (P.O. Box 8346, Ottawa, Ont., K1G 3H8) recently published a short description of post office records from the perspective of its members.



Interior of Railway Mail Car, 1938. (Public Archives of Canada KA-650)

Copy sent Mr. Herwig.

Post Office Department, Canada

L. J. Chase, Esq.,
Provincial Secretary,
Canadian Legion,
Room 4,
New Canada Life Bldg.,
Regina, Saskatchewan.

Ottawa, 1st May 1946.

Dear Sir:

Re: **Archive**
Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.
Elect. Dist.
Approximate Annual Remuneration: **\$168.00** Bonus: **\$18.04**

There is a vacancy at the above named Post Office and as the appointment, under an amendment to the Civil Service Act, comes under the control of the Department, the necessary steps are being taken to appoint a new Postmaster.

At the request of the Postmaster General, I am bringing the matter to your notice in case any members of your organization who are patrons of the vacant office should care to submit his application. Anyone desirous of applying for the position should submit his application to the Department at the earliest possible moment.

The remuneration of the Postmaster, which is based on the revenue of the office, varies from year to year and at present approximates the amount shown above. Out of this amount the Postmaster is required to furnish whatever assistance is required to conduct the office properly, and supplies of stationery, twine, etc.

The Postmaster will have to provide at his own expense the necessary quarters for the Post Office.

Yours very truly,

(Sgd.) Geo. C. Avery.

61-79

Acting
Chief Superintendent
of Post Office Service.

Section of Postmastership File, Archive, Saskatchewan. A typical post-war letter requesting nomination as postmaster. (Post Office Department, dormant file)

In defence of hobbyists, however, it should be emphasized that the light-fingered are a distinct minority. By far the majority are characterized by those who cooperate with historians and archivists to make available, in one form or another, items from their collections which have more than philatelic significance. Thus, a collection of town cancellations on stampless envelopes (that is, those used before postage stamps were put into use in Canada in 1851) could very easily include a whole series of letters to an important figure whose position was such that he or she received copious amounts of mail. This is equally true of large companies that have gone out of business. Postal historians possess many items acquired legitimately in the market-place, from government sources of years gone by when records were discarded indiscriminately, or from private sources. The late Bernard Amtmann was a determined publicist—albeit not entirely altruistic—of the existence of private papers which have been and are still being dispersed far and wide, often to the detriment of other kinds of research which require the use of collections of material rather than discrete isolated items. Experienced postal historians are well aware of many more examples than even Amtmann might have suspected.

Most philatelic auction houses issue excellent catalogues of material being offered. Some meticulously maintain records of the more extraordinary papers handled before dispositions; on rare occasions, they have even published books



Bagging catalogue, c. 1955. (National Postal Museum, photograph collection)

reprinting a run of correspondence.¹⁹ Very few reputable firms will deny a legitimate and reasonable request for photocopies of items listed in their auction catalogues, and the material itself is always available for public viewing at their premises, and sometimes can even be mailed to prospective bidders. These catalogues should be required reading for those archivists involved in the acquisition of materials. Any study on sources for the history of postal services would be incomplete without reference to the records of other government departments. Some have already been mentioned, but the all-encompassing aspect of postal history is nowhere more evident than when other major sources within government departments are searched. It is noteworthy that in general terms, the survival of records of sister departments has been greater than those of the post office. Thus, when seeking information on the construction of federally-owned post office buildings (an important feature for heritage reconstruction), the records of the Department of Public Works must be studied. That department has long had responsibility for the fabric of all government buildings. For many years the Department of Finance awarded the contracts for the production and supply of postage stamps. Post Office records house correspondence between Finance and the security printers, but contain none of the details of the negotiations leading up to the signing of contracts. Even the Department of Justice enters the picture, for postage stamp contracts were often matters of such concern and disagreement that occasionally litigation ensued.

For the important topic of major steamship subventions (and later for even the smallest ones) no less than four other departments were responsible at various times. The Chief Commissioner for Public Works signed the first-ever contract for an ocean mail service in 1852. The Post Office Department itself then negotiated and signed the contracts for a short period. First the Department of Finance; and then in 1893 the Department of Trade and Commerce took over the authority for these subsidies. The records generated in connection with these matters are voluminous, and the post office letterbooks contain many examples of exasperated exchanges between the various departments involved from time to time, including tardy departments trying to renegotiate essential mail contracts that had inadvertently been allowed to lapse. The examples cited above cover only a few of the more important governmental sources for postal history. Many others exist.

Post office records are a large, vital, and virtually untapped source for Canadian history. They are neither as deficient nor as parochial as the lack of use of them would seem to suggest. Judicious use of existing inventories, indexes, and registers will help overcome the vast majority of research problems, and, if all else fails, the staffs at the PAC and the National Postal Museum are trained and able to provide the additional assistance required to permit a fuller exploitation of these records. The material provides a rewarding source for all students of Canadian history, amateur or professional, and deserve to be used more often.

¹⁹ Robson Lowe, *The Codrington Correspondence 1743-1851* (London, 1968).

Résumé

Chose surprenante, les archives postales canadiennes sont presque inconnues et peu utilisées. Leur origine, leur spécificité et leur disponibilité sont discutées dans cet article qui veut indiquer le rôle qu'elles peuvent jouer dans les différents champs de la recherche. L'emphase est mise sur les sources concernant les Îles britanniques.