

STEAMSHIP MAIL IN THE EARLY DECIMAL PERIOD OF NEWFOUNDLAND 1865-1910

SYNOPSIS OF THE EXHIBIT

PURPOSE

This is a postal history exhibit *organized by postal steamship routes*, either around the island for domestic communication, or off the island for communication with the rest of North America or with Great Britain to the rest of the world. Secondary emphases are placed on postal rates; on postmarks or other postal markings contemporary with the period; and on usages of the postal issues of this period.

SCOPE

This exhibit begins at the start of the decimal period (i.e., with the "Cents" issue of postage stamps begun in 1865), and with the early contracted steamship services for domestic and foreign mails. I continue with the development and refinement of steamship routes over the next four decades and into the period of the Reid monopoly of mail conveyance on most domestic steamship routes. I end during the period when the postal routes were functionally integrated between the various means set up to convey the domestic and foreign mails, and otherwise *at the end of the natural period of use* of the last printings of the "Royal Family" and "Map" issues (1908-1910).

ORGANIZATION AND TREATMENT

The development of postal communication on these domestic and foreign steamship routes is treated in a chronological fashion within each chapter. Successive mail contracts and their routes are tabulated and shown and (if and when introduced) their domestic TPO markings are each included.

On coastal mail routes, I also indicate the name of the specific vessel(s) that conveyed each cover.

Within each route I may show, when appropriate, a variety of postal issues that were used during the period of the route. I may also illustrate a variety of rates that occurred during the period of the route. Although not exhaustive of all postal issues or all postal rates (*this is neither a usage or rate exhibit*), they are included to enrich the challenge and variety of covers shown, and to give a more comprehensive treatment for each section.

CHALLENGE

Early Newfoundland postal history is eagerly sought after, and only occasionally comes on the market in any quality. This collection has been formed over the course of more than 25 years, and was infused by early "Cents" material from the Siverts collection (Maresch 1989), and later "Royal Family" material from the Walsh collection (Jamieson, 2006), among others.

All early "Cents" covers of the ABNC issues (with the exception of the 12-cents rate Waterman correspondence to England) are scarce to rare, with few surviving examples of each usage recorded. I use Whaley's 2004 *Census* to annotate rarity for the 35 or so of these covers shown in this exhibit.

The challenge for the BABNC issues is primarily in the period 1880-1892, because the great St. John's fire of 1892 destroyed so much of the archived business correspondence from that period. Domestic covers from the outports in this period are uncommon; this exhibit nevertheless shows a significant number of covers from smaller outport towns within this period.

As well, covers to outport towns are correspondingly more difficult to acquire than covers to St. John's. This exhibit also includes a significant number of outport destinations.

The greatest traditional challenges in Newfoundland postal history are in the rates charged for non first-class letters (e.g., circulars) and special concessionary rates (e.g., soldier's and seamen's mail). Although this is not a rate exhibit, some of these rates are nevertheless included to enhance the story line, and are highlighted accordingly. When known, the provenance of such covers have been indicated.

The greatest challenges in forming this postal route exhibit however *have been instead to determine and illustrate some of the lesser-known mail routes* by which mail was occasionally conveyed off-island, because some routes were of only temporary expedience or shorter contracted duration, and are not yet well researched. As well, mail to St. Pierre and Miquelon is particularly difficult to find as the market for it extends well beyond those interested in only BNA material. Both of these topics receive coverage in this exhibit.

SIGNIFICANT ITEMS

This exhibit contains the following significant and challenging items:

Routes:

- St. John's to Fogo, 1875. *Only reported northbound Great Northern Mail Route cover* (Coastal Mails/ Winter Mails/ Great Northern Mail Route)
- Bay Roberts to Labrador, 1878. *Only reported cover to Labrador in period 1865-1880.* (Labrador Mails/ Bowring Bros. Contract)
- Rose Blanche to Burgeo 1879. *Only reported strike of Rose Blanche "Fleurion" date stamp on cover.* (Coastal Mails/Coastal West/The Bowring Bros. Contract)
- "Western Mail Boat" SS *Harlaw* covers, 1893 and 1900. (Foreign Mails/Cross Gulf Routes/Pickford and Black Contract)
- SS *St. Pierre* cover, 1895 (Foreign Mails/Cross Gulf Routes/FD Corbett Contract)

- Bay Islands to Transvaal 1899. *Returned Boer War cover involving two trans-Atlantic sailings.* (Foreign Mails/Great Britain/Allan Line Steamers/ Returned Mail)

Rates:

- Harbor Grace to Nova Scotia 1865. *Stampless, paying 13-cents rate.* (Foreign Mails/BNA and Canada/The Cunard Line Contract)
- St. John's to PEI 1867. *Two-cents circular rate, one of two known to BNA.* (Foreign Mails/ BNA and Canada/ The Cunard Line Contract)
- Five cents Late Letter Fee 1891. *Discovery copy.* (Foreign Mails/ BNA and Canada/ The Wood Contract/The late Letter Office)
- St. John's to New York 1901. *Half-cent manuscript rate, previously unrecorded.* (Foreign Mails/United States/The Reid Contract: Winter Mails via Halifax 1900-1901)
- Bay Islands to England 1898. *One of five known two-cents soldiers' and seamen's rate covers.* (Foreign Mails/Great Britain/Allan Line Steamers/Soldiers' and Seamen's Rate)

In addition, other significant items are highlighted in the exhibit.

KNOWLEDGE, PERSONAL STUDY AND RESEARCH

For primary sources I have relied extensively on:

- *The Year Book and Almanac of Newfoundland*, (issued annually). St. John's NF: Queen's Printer, for postal routes, stopping places, and certain named vessels; and,
- *The Evening Telegram*, (1879 through 1915). Daily newspaper, St. John's NF, for names and sailing dates of mail ships.

(Both are found at: Memorial University of Newfoundland's Digital Archives Initiative: <http://collections.mun.ca/>)

My comprehensive primary source research has proved invaluable for the correct identification of certain routes, vessels and sailing dates and extends, *in significant measure*, the philatelic knowledge now available on this topic.

This research has also resulted in several publications between 2014 and 2017. Papers published in 2015 led this exhibitor to be a co-recipient of the Collectors Club of Chicago 2015 *Robert Pratt Award* for "best series of articles related to Newfoundland philately".

CONDITION

The condition of the early "Cents" ABNC covers included in this exhibit is generally of the finest known, and was commented on in personal communication to me by Whaley during my contribution to his 2004 *Cover Study* census.

For the post-1880 covers, I have otherwise attempted to select only better condition covers and with complete strikes of postal markings. Material of marginally weaker condition, more the norm when encountering postal history from this period, has usually been excluded from the exhibit.

PRESENTATION

As a finding aid, running headings, for both chapters and sub-chapters, are at 100% black when first introduced, and at 90% black on subsequent pages. As well, major sections are first introduced using colored text boxes. Steamship company contracts are first introduced in tabular form at the beginning of each major section.

The technical information included underneath each cover, begins with an *analysis of the route or other routing information*, and is given in *bold italics*. Such analysis has mostly been determined from the exhibitor's personal study and research of the aforementioned primary documents in order to substantiate the routing behind each cover. This is followed by information about the postmarks and any directional indicators. Also included are the names of the towns, and any TPO postmarks, and given in **BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS**, in approximation to the type face used in the postmark. A description of the postal rate and the postage stamps used usually ends each cover's technical information.

Rarity and philatelic importance (not always the same thing) is indicated separately by a both a rose-coloured matte behind the cover, and often by *red bolded italic text* underneath the cover's technical information.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO SEE

As this is a postal history exhibit, *focussing on postal routes*, a large number of maps, simple line drawings highlighting these routes, are found throughout the exhibit and are used as a pictorial complement to assist with an understanding of the routings of the covers. Also, as Newfoundland geography and place names are not often well known, this is a succinct and visually accessible way to communicate such necessary information to the viewer.

WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT EXPECT TO SEE

- Directional markings were not applied by the Post Office. Unless the correspondent placed their preferred routing or vessel on the cover, no directional markings otherwise exist.
- Mail not required to be postmarked (e.g., newspapers, printed matter) is not included, as without a postmark routing cannot be accurately determined to a high confidence level.
- Only one Labrador West TPO marking is known. A poor strike on an oversized cover, it currently resides in another collector's exhibit. I had previously declined it when initially offered for sale.

NOTES ON THE EXHIBIT

As a long-time exhibitor and judge, I am not aware of a similar Newfoundland postal history exhibit of this period using a postal route treatment and development. The postal history exhibit by Colin Lewis in Great Britain, although it overlaps within the timelines of my exhibit, is a rate exhibit. The postal history exhibits by Brian Stalker, also in Great Britain, are specialized exhibits of individual TPO's and their marcophily.

STEAMSHIP MAIL IN THE EARLY DECIMAL PERIOD OF NEWFOUNDLAND 1865-1910

Newfoundland is “Britain’s oldest colony”, and St. John’s, its capital city, is “North America’s oldest city”. The story of the development of its steamship routes, **the purpose of this postal history exhibit**, is the story of the growth and maturation of its maritime postal arrangements, not only for transport of the mails for its residents around the island, but also to the rest of North America as well as for the trans-Atlantic mails to Great Britain.

My story begins almost from the start of steamship communication around the island, and also from the early days of reliable steamship communication to the rest of North America and to Great Britain. It traces the development of coastal, North American, and trans-Atlantic mail routes originating from on the island.

Also shown are special routing accommodations; i.e., the winter mails when icebound northern harbors necessitated overland domestic courier routes, and winter mails to Halifax when North Atlantic sailings were instead routed through that Canadian port.

I begin my story at the start of the decimal period in 1865 when the adoption of steamships for Newfoundland’s mail conveyance was in its earliest stages, showing relevant postal history from the first “Cents” issue of 1865 and, following with postal history from the next four decades of postal issues, through to the end of the normal period of use of the last printings (1908-1910) of the “Royal Family” and “Map” issues, and otherwise to when the steamship routes were well and fully established for the domestic and foreign mails. I thus end before the great disruptions resulting from WWI and the slow eventual insolvency of the island’s economy.

Items of particular philatelic significance (i.e., rarity or importance) are shown on rose colored matting, and are also described using rarity statements in **red bold italics**.

Abbreviations: ABNC - American Bank Note Company
BABNC - British American Bank Note Company

References:

- Pratt, R.J., *The Nineteenth Century Postal History of Newfoundland* (1985). Chicago, IL: Collectors Club.
- Stalker, B.S., *Travelling Post Office Postmarks of Newfoundland and Labrador* (2004). Calgary, AB: Auxano Philatelic Services/British North America Philatelic Society.
- Whaley, S., *Newfoundland:1865-1879 The New York Printings - a Cover Study* (2004). Opp, AL: privately printed by the author.



In researching the routing of my covers, the *analysis* of their *postal history*, I have used archival documents (e.g., the *Almanacs* and daily newspapers of the period) to determine the names, and sailing dates, of most all the vessels identified within my descriptions. **This extends, in significant measure, what is otherwise only briefly reported in the standard philatelic references for this period. Such personal study and research is shown in bold italicized text within the write up under each cover.** The viewer may thus assume all such

vessel identification as is indicated has been established and verified through personal research in archival documents.

Although my *primary* emphasis is on the development of the steamship routes, my *secondary* emphases, to increase the *depth* of the exhibit, are to show usages of the stamps and postal stationery from this period, to utilize a wide variety of town and travelling post offices (T.P.O.) postmarks, and to include both common and less common rates. *Not only are a variety of uncommon routes shown, a variety of uncommon or unique covers and postmarks are included, as well as some particularly scarce postal rates.*

Plan of the Exhibit

- I. Coastal Mails
- II. Labrador Mails
- III. Foreign Mails
 - The Cross Gulf Routes
 - BNA and Canada
 - United States
 - St. Pierre and Miquelon
 - Great Britain