"By Grand Trunk Railway", 1853 – 1867

Synopsis

Purpose of Exhibit: this postal history exhibit traces the pre-Confederation development of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada and illustrates the date-stamps used on its Railway Post Offices and mail cars.

General Background: Railways provided the first all-year-round means of communication within Canada, and promotion of inter-provincial railways was a key component of Confederation in 1867. Almost all Canadian railways were required by statute to transport mail and initially **Train Conductors** or **Baggage Masters** were paid for taking charge of the mails on the train. However they were quickly succeeded by **Mail Conductors**, postal employees who took charge of bagged mail, dropping off and collecting bags en-route, also emptying letter boxes which were provided at some stations. The next major development occurred in 1854 with the introduction of **Railway Post Offices**, manned by **Railway Mail Clerks,** who collected, distributed and sorted mail while in transit.

The Grand Trunk Railway, Canada's first inter-provincial railway, was incorporated in 1852 to develop a 'Main Line' linking the Maritime Provinces with Quebec and Ontario. It gained momentum by taking over companies with lines already under construction and by 1860 its 'trunk line' extended over 860 miles from Rivière du Loup in the east, to Sarnia in the west, with international connections to Portland, Maine, and Detroit, Michigan.

This exhibit explains the pre-Confederation development of the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada (its network later expanded through construction and takeover to over 8,000 miles in Canada and 1,164 miles in the United States). In general, **large circular date-stamps** were used on the GTR's mail cars during that era; most were short-lived but a few survived into the early 1870s, and all have high rarity factors. The date-stamp hammers included selectable indicia such as 'UP', 'DOWN', 'EAST' and 'WEST', also letters 'A' to 'D', so several combinations are illustrated.
The exhibit is structured as follows:-

Frame 1: Introduction and overview.

St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad	Montreal to Island Pond (VT) via Richmond	148 miles, opened 1853

Frame 2: Quebec & Richmond Railway

Quebec & Richmond Railway	Quebec to Richmond	102 miles, opened 1853
Grand Trunk Rwy of Canada East	Quebec to Rivière du Loup	115 miles, opened 1859
Arthabaska & Three Rivers Railway	Arthabaska to Three Rivers	35 miles, opened 1864

Frame 3: Grand Trunk Railway

Grand Trunk Railway	Montreal to Toronto via Brockville and Kingston	333 miles, opened 1856
Toronto & Sarnia Railroad	Toronto to Sarnia.	168 miles, opened 1859
	(incorporating the Toronto & Guelph Rwy)	

Copies and photocopies: no proof strikes are known for these early RPO date-stamps and to improve readability we include enhanced copies. All original items and copies of RPO postmarks are mounted on a red backing, whereas photocopies of the 'other' side of covers (reduced to 70%) and 'regular' date-stamps are shown without any backing.

Rarity (fewer than 10 recorded examples) and **items of particular significance** are denoted by a red dot ●

Philatelic References and Research:

Catalogue of Canadian Railway Cancellations;	Ross Gray	BNAPS 2009, updated 2015.
Canadian Mail by Rail 1836 – 1867	L F Gillam	Published privately, 1985.
On Track: The Railway Mail Service in Canada	S M O'Reilly	Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992
How Mail by Rail was processed in 1853	Peter McCarthy	BNA Topics #545, Nov 2015.

We have expanded on Gillam's historical narrative by researching Post Office RG-3 records held in the National Archives, Ottawa, and collaborated with Messrs Gray and McCarthy to gain a better understanding of the development of Canada's Railway Post Office network and the date-stamps used on it, resulting in publication of several articles in RPO Study Group Newsletters and in BNA Topics.