

Postal usages in the Province of Quebec and Lower Canada until 1831

Synopsis

A- Treatment

The purpose of this exhibit is to present the early development of the postal routes and means of transportation in the Province of Quebec and later Lower Canada from the beginnings to February 1831. It is divided in seven parts:

1- Letters from the French Regime

Before the establishment of a structured postal system, letters were obviously carried by private means, here are shown a few covers from this heroic period.

2- Letters carried by 'voyageurs' or 'coureur des bois'

This part presents documents send on long distances in the early period. As few roads were opened, these letters were carried by voyageurs. Most of these letters don't have postmarks because they were send totally outside of the existing postal system.

3- The first postal route

The first postal route, opened in 1763, went from Quebec City to Montreal; Montreal was then linked to New York and the other B.N.A. colonies, but the American Revolution cut this route after 1775.

About 35 covers, presented chronologically and all dating before 1831, illustrate the development of the postal system on the first route. They present the evolution of rates and markings, the opening of post offices, "way" and favoured letters.

4- The way to Halifax and Gaspé Peninsula

With the American Revolution, the route between Montreal and New York was closed for most of the period extending from 1775 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars; therefore, there was no way to communicate in winter between Canada and England. A new route was also opened through the Temiscouata portage in 1784 and a post office opened in the Baie-des-Chaleurs area in the 1780's. We present in chronological order about 20 covers that travelled along this way from 1784 to the end of our period.

5- The route from Montreal to the U.S.

The route from Montreal to New York remained dormant during most of the time of the French revolution. Only after 1815 normal relations were re-established with our southern neighbour. About 8 covers are presented the earliest dating from the 1790s.

6- Development of new routes after the Napoleonic wars

After 1815, new routes were created specially in the Eastern Townships, south of Montreal and, after 1820 toward the north west of the province (Hull area). We present covers dating from 1814 to 1831 that travelled along these new roads and illustrate the first expansion of the postal system after years of stagnation. To keep the coherence in the presentation, we divided them in two subsections:

- a) Postal routes south of Montreal and to the Eastern Townships;
- b) The route to Hull.

6- Populated areas left untouched by the postal system in 1831

Large segments of the province were still unconnected to the system, mostly in areas inhabited by French Canadians. These populations had to send their letters through travellers (favoured letters); some of them asked exorbitant prices for the carrying of mail. We divided their presentation in two parts:

- a) Land mail
- b) Mail from the St. Lawrence islands or from ship sailing on the St. Lawrence

7- Maritime and transatlantic mail

After the American Revolution most of the transatlantic mail was sent as “ship letters”, although a few packets still landed in Halifax. After 1815 most of the transatlantic mail was sent through New York (it is illustrated in Section 4 of this exhibit). From the late 1810’s a few steamboats delivered mail between Quebec and Montreal. We present in chronological order about 15 maritime covers (including a steamboat postmark from 1819) illustrating the different ways and rates that prevailed.

B- Scope

This exhibit covers the whole spectrum of postal usages of the time: rated letters, favoured letters from distant locations, “way” letters, ship and steamboats letters.

In February 11, 1831, the Houses of Assembly of Lower and Upper Canada both passed a similar resolution requiring full access to the information on the management of the Post Office Department. This resolution was due to the many complaints in both provinces about the administration of the postal system by the British authorities including: high rates and poor development of the system. Only the larger communities had access to the post and large chunks of the province were left untouched (for

example in 1831 no postal route led from Quebec City either in direction east (Charlevoix, Côte de Beaupré), South (Beauce) or south west (Lotbinière).

So 1831 marks the beginning of the full expansion of the mail system in Lower Canada. The Deputy postmaster general Thomas Allen Stayner had to testify in front of the committee of the House and answer the numerous complaints. He had to multiply the number of post offices in the province.

Year	No. of Post offices in Lower Canada
1765	3
1800	4
1815	9
1831	60
1841	165

C- Condition and difficulty of acquisition

Most covers shown are in great condition considering their age and rarity, only two fronts are presented (a transatlantic letter from 1758 and a unique Three Rivers hammer) a few covers have been repaired.

We chose to end our exhibit in February 1831, right before the explosion of the mail routes, post offices and markings that began soon thereafter.

In auctions or on the Internet pre-1830 material represents no more than 10% of the total Lower Canada pre-confederation (1867) material. We also chose not the present any cover dating after Jan. 1831, so that only very elusive early usage of the double broken circles markings of 1828 or few double circles hammers could make the cut.

D- Rarity

All part 2 and part 5 material (favoured letters) is extremely rare and has never been seriously studied before, specially letters carried by voyageur, coming or send to islands or written on board ships.

Among the most important covers, please notice:

- A 1697 cover send to Ville-Marie before the name was changed to Montreal
- A 1753 cover from Quebec to Marseilles with French markings
- A 1768 cover from Montreal to Detroit (that was then part of the "Province of Quebec")
- A 1789 cover send from Quebec to Cuthbert Grant who operated a trading post for the North West Co. on Great Slave Lake (actually NWT)

- A 1792 letter signed on the front by Hugh Finlay the founder of the Canadian postal system and sent through a forwarding agent to Matilda (UC.) The postal route to “les Nouveaux Etablissements au-dessus de Montréal” was opened in 1789 (cf. Quebec Gazette 1791)
- A 1784 cover carried by a “coureur des bois” from Madawaska to Rivière-des-Caps (near Kamouraska)
- 1789 New Carlisle to New Johnston (near Cornwall Ont.), from Gaspé Peninsula to « les Nouveaux Etablissements au-dessus de Montréal”!) On the opening year of both the Gaspé and the western (Upper Canada) routes.
- The only known 20mm Laprairie straight line
- 1801 and 1812 covers from France to Canada during the Napoleonic wars.
- A “withdrawn ship letter” from 1815.
- A rare example of the single oval Montreal ship letter marking (1824)

Other covers are important for historical reasons: covers sent from or to officers who participated in the battles of 1759-60 (Malcolm Fraser, Des Méloizes), a cover of 1796 from Rev. Mountain explaining the political details of the nomination of his brother as first Anglican bishop of Canada. Note also a cover sent to Lanouiller de Boisclerc in 1718, Lanouiller was later responsible for the creation of an embryonic postal system in New France (cf. T.A.Hillman, *The Post office Department and the parliamentary record in Canada*, BNAPS 1993, p.vi).

E- Importance

Our study covers the beginnings of the postal system in Canada as a whole. From its infancy in New France, to the creation of a British North American postal system which was coordinated from 1775 from Quebec City with the nomination of Hugh Finlay as Deputy Postmaster General for North America. Even after the separation of Lower and Upper Canada, the postal system remained centered in Quebec City, seat of the Governor General.

F- Knowledge

This collection is the result of 30 years of covers gathering, every cover asks for an expertise not only of the rates or means of communication but also the events, people involved etc.

We published numerous articles on the subject of pre-confederation mail in Lower Canada in the Bulletin d’Histoire postale du Québec including a lengthy series of articles concerning the Gaspé Peninsula and Lower St. Lawrence.

Jacques Poitras was responsible for the Lower Canada part of “Canadian manuscript Town Postmarks”, David Handelman & Jacques Poitras, 1993,

Jacques Poitras is also the coauthor with Cimon Morin of the Catalogue des marques postales du Quebec (CMPQ).

G- Presentation

The covers are shown in chronological order within their proper division or subdivision of the exhibit. In a few cases two covers might have been regrouped on the same page by affinities without strictly following the chronology.