

A POSTAL HISTORY OF LABRADOR BEFORE CONFEDERATION

Purpose

This exhibit provides an overview of the postal history of Labrador before Confederation with Canada in 1949. Material is organized geographically into four regions reflecting cultural and economic differences. Coastal steamers were the means of transport in the summer and dog teams in the winter. Privately carried mail is shown along with seminal air service to this remote region. A representative sample of locations served is shown, with emphasis on regional centres such as Battle Harbor, Cartwright, Goose Airport and Nain.

Scope and Presentation

The exhibit is divided into four parts as described below. Material is generally shown in chronological order according to the type of postal service (summer TPO, winter dog team, airmail and special service). The exhibit has been augmented with additional material acquired over the last five years and was last shown in 2012..

1. **North Shore/Straits of Bell Isle**—First region to be settled by Europeans with a reliance on cod, salmon and whaling. Stampless privately carried mail before formal postal service, early examples of winter mail service, Straits and Coastal TPO service, Grenfell mission mail, early air mail service.
2. **Southern Coast**—Strong British and American influence with main activities fishing, trapping and timber. Winter dog team and summer Coastal North and Labrador TPO services, non-post office points, Grenfell mission mail.
3. **Interior**—Settled later than other regions; emphasis on fur trade, timber and minerals; and military activity center. Seasonal mail services, Grenfell mission mail, adventurer mail, and Goose Bay post offices.
4. **Northern Coast**—Home to the Inuit; settled by Moravian missionaries; and fur trade as the major economic activity. Incoming and outgoing Moravian mission mail, explorer expedition mail, and courtesy airmail service.

This exhibit is the most comprehensive and thorough coverage of this topic ever presented. Only scarcer markings or routings are presented using philatelically inspired material if commercial mail has not been located. Rates and unusual usages are shown throughout including registered, redirected and censored mail.

Philatelic Importance

Although this exhibit covers a large geographic area, the population served was very small. In 1949, the population of Labrador was only about 6,000. The cost of service to such outposts was high but a vital part of trade and commerce for the residents and outside interests. Relatively little has been written about the postal history of Labrador.

Condition, Rarity and Difficulty of Acquisition

The condition of mail from Labrador is generally good considering the tremendous distances covered, climatic extremes and difficult traveling conditions at times by small ship, planes and dog sled.

There was little coverage of Labrador through the contemporary philatelic media. Even philatelic mail from Labrador is scarce, while legitimate commercial mail from government personnel, missionaries, fur traders and other non-Inuit is very scarce, particularly before 1900. Several examples are shown, including six stampless covers.

The material assembled for this exhibit has been acquired over more than 35 years of active pursuit. The exhibitor has published a detailed listing of Labrador postal markings in *The Northerner* (newsletter of the Northern Canada Study Group, Postal History Society of Canada) and the British North America Philatelic Society (BNAPS) *Newfoundland Study Group Newsletter*. Reports of new findings amongst the study group members, auction catalogues and philatelic literature have been monitored carefully to ensure the accuracy of scarcity and usage qualifiers used to describe material in this exhibit.

Many early and late dates of markings are shown in this exhibit. Several items are the only reported examples to date. Highlights include:

- all printed registration labels issued to Labrador post offices, including the only reported examples of both types from Battle Harbor;
- scarce markings from the Goose Bay area including CAPO No. 10 duplex, Goose Airport roller, and APO 677 double ring marking;
- only examples of Cartwright crown seal, *Harmony* and *Strathcona* ship markings, and Grand Village, Okak and Stag Bay date stamps;
- scarce usages include post cards to northern Labrador, and both known registered letter envelopes from Labrador.

Research

Few primary source records have survived regarding pre-Confederation postal service in Labrador. Those that are available have been reviewed, including the Pritchard Andrews and Bayley proofs, Newfoundland Postal Guides, and relevant records of the Library and Archives Canada RG 3 (Post Office Department). Secondary sources have been used extensively including the *Newfoundland Specialized Stamp Catalogue*, Pratt's *The Nineteenth Century Postal History of Newfoundland*, *Them Days* and the *Beaver* (periodicals).

The exhibitor's research on Labrador postal history appears in *The Northerner* and this exhibit was published by BNAPS in February 2007 with an introduction and annotated references. Research presented for the first time in this exhibit includes details on the philatelic consequences of the Labrador boundary settlement, special airmail rates to and from Labrador, locations of Nutak and Wabush-Katsao, and the Canadian marking used at Red Bay in 1932, the 1933 Wabush-Katsao flights, and development of Goose Bay postal services.

Exhibit Record

Edmonton Spring Show 1997 (Silver, National); BNAPEX '97 (Vermeil, Sam Nickel Award for Best Postal History Exhibit); Edmonton Spring Show 2004 (Gold); BNAPEX 2005 and 2007 (Gold, Steinhart Reserve Grand and Myerson Newfoundland Award); ROYAL 2006 (Gold, Reserve Grand); ROYAL 2007 (Gold), Edmonton Spring Show 2008 (National Gold, BNAPS Research Award, PHSC Award), and ROYAL 2012 (Gold, Grand). New material has been added since the exhibit was last shown in 2012.

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History of Labrador

The name "Labrador" was derived from 'lavrador' which is Portugese for 'small landholder'. By 1550 Spanish, Portugese and English fishermen and whalers were regularly visiting the Labrador coast. In the early 1700s traders from New France had established posts along the North Shore of the St. Lawrence River and through the Straits of Belle Isle. The Moravians established missions and trading operations on the northern Labrador coast beginning in 1771. Fishing, whaling and the fur trade were the economic activities in Labrador right through to Confederation with Canada in 1949. The permanent population of Labrador in 1949 was only 6,000 people with many more during the summer fishing season.

Postal History of Labrador

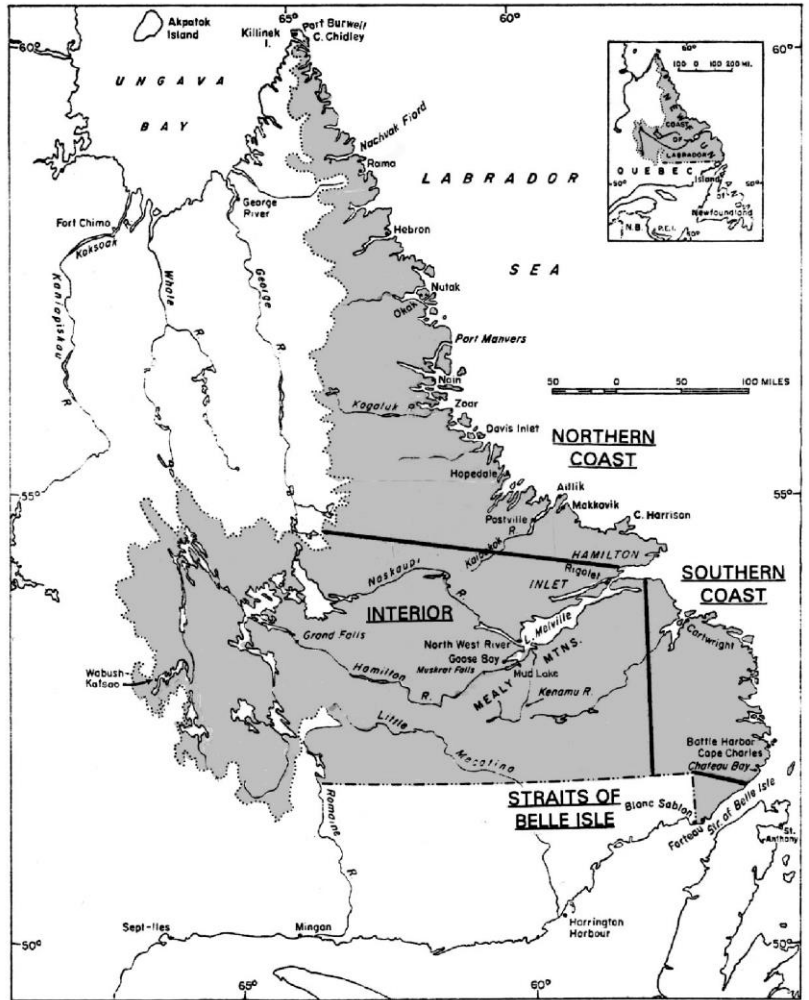
Mail along the coast was carried by steamers and smaller ships in the summer and dog team in the winter.

The first formal mail service to and from Labrador began in 1863 when the Newfoundland government let a contract for summer mail service by coastal steamer. Mail service from Quebec had extended out to the Straits of Belle Isle by the 1880s and afforded an opportunity for winter mail service to and from Labrador.

Way offices were established along the Labrador coast as early as 1882. Waymasters were paid starting in 1886 to handle mail. The first town post offices in Labrador did not open until at least 1889 when date stamps for Blanc Sablon, Battle Harbor and L'Ance au Loup were proofed. In 1891 all way offices and post offices were classified as "post offices". Further post offices gradually opened further north until about 1920. Few Labrador post offices had their own postal markings.

Presentation

Material is organized geographically into four regions as illustrated above that reflect economic patterns. Within each region, material is generally shown in chronological order to illustrate the development of postal services.



TYPES OF LABRADOR POSTAL MARKINGS



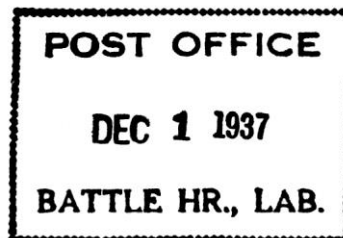
Broken Circle



Full Circle



Circular Rubber



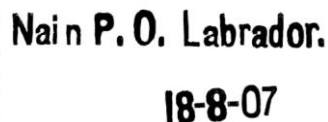
Box Date Stamp



Crown Seal



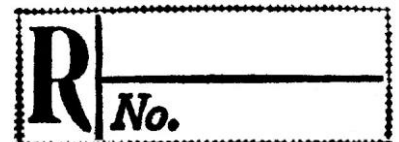
Roller



Straightline



Registration Label



Registration Box