

Traditional and Unusual Nova Scotia Postal Markings in a Transitional Era 1867 – 1893

Synopsis of the Exhibit

Purpose

This exhibit examines how the Nova Scotia postal system transitioned from traditional style pre-Confederation postal markings to unusual and experimental markings in the 25 years following Confederation.

Treatment

This is a postal history exhibit organized by postmark types. Within a postmark section, there is either a chronological development (e.g. the T-E CDS) or an alphabetical organization (e.g. double split rings). 1893 is the chosen end date because practically all the exhibited postmarks had ended their period of use by then.

Postmark Types

In 1867, postal procedures in Nova Scotia transitioned from the Nova Scotia Post Office Department to the Canada Post Office. Other transitions followed. Initially, colonial postmarks remained in use, and 16 new double split rings were issued in the 1869 -1873 period. The Temporary-Emergency circle marking with movable type, issued in 1843, was sent to 8 different post offices post-Confederation. Since the use of postage stamps was not mandatory, "PAID" handstamps on stampless covers still appeared. Infrequently, manuscript postmarks became a necessity as the Canada Post Office could not always supply datestamps in a timely fashion, especially following the conversion of hundreds of way offices to post offices in 1876. Also, way office markings of various kinds lingered into the late 1870s.

Experimental Postmarks

Nova Scotia began issuing single split ring postmarks in the early 1860s, and this style eventually became the dominant type. However, during this transition period other styles were experimented with. Several creative postmasters obtained unique postmarks, probably locally supplied. Also, 4 post offices received split rings which had either "W.O." in the marking or were missing the provincial designation. Another 5 post offices had split rings with experimental text inscriptions. In addition, 55 post offices received the "CANADA" style split ring between 1879 and 1881. Adding to the variety was another national series of markings, the 2-ring numerals.

Importance

This exhibit is a ground-breaking study of an era (1867 – 1893) in Nova Scotia postal history that is largely unexplored. For the first part of this era, official records are few and little has been written in philatelic journals and books. The exhibit reconstructs the era by focusing on the unusual postmarks. This is possible only through a collection that has been amassed over nearly five decades.

Significant Items

The exhibit has the only known strike of 11 postmarks. Four of these are Temporary-Emergency markings from Economy, Sheet Harbour, Londonderry Station and Wentworth Station. Two others are the Dartmouth "PAID" single split ring and the New Glasgow "PAID" CDS. There is also a unique 1873 New Glasgow double circle. The "BLUEBERRY, N.S. / CANADA" split ring is known by only one strike. Three unique manuscript postmarks are included – Inglisville, Hillaton, and Dalhousie Road.

In 2011, the exhibitor discovered three strikes of the previously unknown River Debert DSR. Two are displayed here. The way office material included here is scarce, especially the green registered wrapper that travelled from one way office to another.

Study and Research

In referring to Nova Scotia postal history in the 1867 – 1873 period, L. B. Macpherson states:

The postal history of Nova Scotia in the period immediately following Confederation, which includes the change from Provincial to Dominion jurisdiction, is almost as obscure and undocumented as the early beginnings of the system. Official records are scarce, incomplete, or non-existent. No proof impressions of the time have so far been discovered. Even the opening dates of many post offices are inferred, not documented. This is in sharp contrast to the abundance of Post Office records and proof impressions that refer to 1875 and after.

(*PHSC Journal* No 50, June 1987)

Macpherson's observations remain largely valid 36 years later. Proof strikes are much more readily available now, but not for the pre-1875 period. There are still few published studies for this era. Mark Berner's 2021 study of the Wolfville oval is one of the few since Macpherson.

I have researched, studied, and collected Nova Scotia postmarks in this era for 47 years. During that time, I have been able to acquire items from notable collections of the past. The research presented in the exhibit was largely obtained from my own study and collection. As an example, in 1987 Macpherson listed 14 post-1867 DSR postmarks. I have eliminated one as non-existent (Acadian Mines – an error from Campbell) and found 3 new ones – River Debert, Elmsdale, and Enfield.

References

My primary references for this exhibit are these:

1. L. B. Macpherson, "Nova Scotia Offices and Marks, 1867-1873," *PHSC Journal* No. 50, June 1987
2. _____ "Nova Scotian Postmark Oddities," *PHSC Journal* No. 30, June 1982
3. _____ *Nova Scotian Postal History Volume 1, Post Offices (1754-1981)*, Halifax, Petheric Press, 1982.
4. Annual Reports of the Postmaster General of Canada 1868 – 1878.
5. Hughes, Paul, ed, *Proof Strikes of Canada Volume IV Split Circle Proof Strikes of the Maritimes*, Kelowna, Robert A Lee, 1990.

Rarity, Challenge, and Condition

A large number of the postmarks in this exhibit are known to exist in only 1 to 4 strikes. This has made locating strikes a challenge. Such low numbers also present challenges in condition quality selection. In addition to the quality of the cover, the quality of the postmark strike has been a prime factor in selecting covers for the exhibit. Condition is the best that I have been able to find in 47 years.

What You Will Not Find

Pre-Confederation postmarks used after 1867 are not included in the exhibit. Regular split ring and regular CDS markings from 1867 to 1893 are not included. The exhibit focuses on unusual markings. Although fancy cancels are an appropriate fit for this exhibit, the subject is too extensive to be handled here. One page on fancy cancels is included to acknowledge their presence in the era.