

Province of Canada Domestic Letter Rates during the “Pence Era” (1851-1859) shown through the Québec City Post Office Window

Purpose of Exhibit: The purpose of this two-frame exhibit is to show the variety and the evolution of **domestic postal letter rates** in the *Province of Canada* (then made up of Canada East and Canada West, which correspond approximately to the actual provinces of Ontario and Quebec) during this important period for the postal and philatelic history of Canada.


Historical & Postal Contexts: On 10 August 1850 the Canadian Legislature passed *The Post Office Act, 130 & 140 Cap 17*¹. The subtitle was: *An Act to provide for the transfer of the management of the inland Post to the Provincial Government, and for the regulation of said Department*. The Act came in effect on April 6, 1851. Then, the postal system of the Province of Canada achieved significant advancements in services: **Uniform rate** despite of distance (1851), introduction of **Postage Stamps** (23 April 1851), **Registration** of domestic letters (1st May 1855)), between other developments. Transportation and communication became faster, more reliable and much more widespread. During this eight years or so period (6 April 1851 to 30 June 1859), the number of Post Offices in the Province (Canada East and Canada West) grow from 601 to 1638, and the number of treated letters double, passing from 4,3 million to 8,6 million².

Treatment/Organization: To allow a better evolutionary understanding of letter rates during this period, the exhibit, based on the various documented rates, is presented following this plan:

1. Letter rates

- 1.1 Drop Letters
- 1.2 Soldier / Seaman Mail
- 1.3 Adjacent Post Offices
- 1.4 City Delivery
- 1.5 Letter Rates by Weight
- 1.6 Redirection
- 1.7 Free Mail
- 1.8 Money Letters
- 1.9 Registered Letters

Philatelic Importance/Challenge: What we call *The Pence Era* (6 April 1851 to 30 June 1859) is a revolution in the postal history of our country. The drastic drop of postal rates and the introduction of the first postage stamps have democratized access to the postal service. Adding to this, with the creation of new postal services, such as registered mail and the use of railway, the volume of mail processed during this period exploded. To the best of authors' knowledge, it is the first time such a national letter rate study is done through the window of only one Canadian post office (Québec City). It is a real challenge as examples of some Canadian rates of this period are known - when known - often by only one or a few covers and not necessary in relation with Québec City.

Knowledge, personal Study and Research: This Canadian postal history is probably the most researched ever since a long time. Original research in this classic field is not easy as many fellow philatelists, among the greatest of all times, worked well before the exhibitor. However, the exhibitor continues to make research in the Public Archives, philatelic literature, old Auction catalogues, as well as continuous correspondence with postal historian friends. Primary research and exhibitor's discoveries are noted by the icon .

¹ Arfken, George B., Arthur W. Leggett, Charles G. Firby, Allan L. Steinhart, *Canada's Pence Era – The Pence Stamps and the Canadian Mail 1851-1859*, K. G. Scrimgeour editor, 1997, Vincent G. Green Philatelic Research Foundation, 1997, 421 p.

² *Ibidem*, p. 3

For more information about the rates and general postal history of this period, please consult:

Arfken, Leggett, Firby and Steinhart, Canada's Pence Era: The Pence Stamps and the Canadian Mail 1851-1859, VGG Philatelic Research Foundation, 1997, 421p.

Boggs, W.S., The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Canada, 1975 (reprint), 870 p.

Firby, C.G., The Postal Rates of Canada 1851-1868, The Provincial Period – A recording, 1983; Firby, C.G. & V.C. Wilson, Canadian Posted Letter Guide, 1996.

Firby C. G. Auction catalogue of the Wilkinson, W.R., FIP World Exhibition Gold Medal Collection of Canadian Postal Rates 1851-1859, 2007.

Smith, Wayne, The 'Canada Pence Issue 1851 – 1859 Cover Census', bnaps.org/ore/Smith-CensusPence/Smith-CensusPenceCovers.pdf.

Steinhart, Allan L., The Rates of Postage of Canada 1711-1900, including Some Rules and Regulations Regarding Rating and Treating of the Mails, Gray Scrimgeour Editor, PHSC, 2011, 443p.




Condition and rarity: Every possible effort has been taken to include items in the best condition obtainable, but if many letters (rates) from this period are very commons, some are known to only one or a hand-full copies (pre-stamp, stamped or stampless letters or covers), while others, who should exist, are still unknown or have not yet been recorded. Large and heavy envelopes are often found in very average condition. So, the hunt is on!

What is not shown in this exhibit:

Non-letter mail (e.g. Newspapers, Circulars, Printed Matters, Parcel Post, etc.).

Usages to other destinations (e.g. Other BNA Colonies and international).

Legend:

- Primary research or discoveries on the part of the exhibitor is noted by the icon 
- Secondary remarks: 
- Important or unusual items are marked with a red dot ●
- The provenance of some important items, researched by the author, is indicated as follow: ex. (Name)
- Certificate of authenticity is indicated by this icon: 

Synopsis BNAPEX 2023 – August 2023