



# BRITISH COLUMBIA POSTAL HISTORY NEWSLETTER

Volume 29 Number 4

Whole number 116

December 2020



This issue's favourite cover is from Gus Knierim. A colourful registered letter, it was posted at Lower Capilano (a rarity factor D office in North Vancouver) on Oct 1, 1938, to Zurich, Switzerland. It arrived on Oct 12, not a bad schedule at all, especially as the letter was only franked 15 cents (five cents for sea mail to UPU countries, plus ten cents registration).

More interesting is how the letter was addressed. It was mailed to Monsieur Hans Frisch, "Address unknown/Frisch's last letter stated [return address]

Schaffhausenplatz, Zürich, Switzerland." Marked in bright red, presumably by a postal official, are the words "Schaffhausenstr 89. Ask." The letter was mailed by one A. Bernat, 1509 Marine Dr, Lower Capilano, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada. All writing is in a very clean Modern German script.

The cover came to Gus from an eBay seller in France. He got his lots mixed up and sent Gus this cover by mistake! He didn't want it returned, because of high postage costs.

## In this issue:

- |  |        |                                   |        |
|--|--------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| • Favourite cover: Lower Capilano gem    | p 1219 | • Unpaid cover from Fort Colville | p 1227 |
| • BC POCOS are looking for a home        | p 1221 | • Stampless from Savona to Yale   | p 1228 |
| • Pt Coquitlam assessments & tax notices | p 1222 | • Farmer searches for a wife      | p 1229 |
|  |        | • Iroquois coastal connection     | p 1232 |

## BC newsletter wins Siverts

The September 2020 BNAPS eLetter announced that the *British Columbia Postal History Newsletter* has won the 2019 John S Siverts Award for the most informative Study Group newsletter published during the previous calendar year. The award would normally have been presented at BNAPEX 2020 in Halifax.

The editor would like to thank all the contributors and supporters who help make the newsletter possible, especially Tracy Cooper, Tim Woodland and Morris Beattie. Producing the newsletter is a communal activity. Publication wouldn't be possible without the commitment and enthusiastic curiosity of a core group of collectors, researchers and historians.

Other BNAPS awards were also announced. Jon Johnson won the Rich Toop Memorial Award for best military article or book published in 2019. Alex Globe took home the Vincent Greene Award for best article or series appearing in *BNA Topics*. And Mark Oakley of the Pacific Northwest Regional Group won the Jack Levine Fellowship Award for his contribution to the success of a regional group.

## New discovery on the GTP

Another unreported BC post office can be moved to the "reported" list. Firmin Wyndels has found the first example from the first period of Decker Lake (just northwest of Burns Lake). This office had two periods of operation: 1913-14 and 1922-64. The earlier period served the construction crews in the area working on the Grand Trunk Pacific Rwy. Markings from that period, obviously, are rare indeed. Bill Topping's *BC Post Offices* does not even list Decker Lake as existing at that time, and only mentions the 1922 opening. The proof book, however, shows strikes for Decker Lake dated MY 2/13 and OC 6/22.

In his *British Columbia Post Office Revenues 1871-1921*, Tracy Cooper states that Decker Lake was opened on June 1, 1913, and closed on Jan 31, 1914.

The *British Columbia Postal History Newsletter* is published quarterly by the BC Postal History Study Group, an affiliate of the British North America Philatelic Society (BNAPS).

Annual subscription fee for printed and mailed newsletters (four issues) is \$15, in Cdn or US funds. Individual print issues sell for \$2.50 each, post paid.

Dues are payable to the editor: Andrew Scott  
5143 Radcliffe Rd, Sechelt, BC, Canada V0N 3A2

Revenue for the office was \$241.40. "Decker Lake wasn't a money order office," Tracy explains, "but a majority of stamp sales would have been for registered mail, as workers sent their paycheques



home to their families. Once the construction was done in the area, there was no need for a post office." The card's homemade photoview is of wagons "on the way to Fort Fraser," about ninety kilometres east of Decker Lake. It is dated NO 14/13 and was forwarded to the General Hospital at Vancouver.



*Proof strikes of the split-ring hammers in use at the beginning of Decker Lake's two periods of operation.*



## Numeral grid cancel census

Wayne Smith's census of BC numeral grid cancels is now available on the BNAPS website. Wayne lists about 400 covers so far, including 11 Large Queen and 39 Small Queen items. The census can be accessed by clicking the "What's New" button on the BNAPS home page (upper right), then scrolling down to the entry for Sept 9, 2020, and clicking "View the Census." Wayne hopes study group members can add new material.

Editor: Andrew Scott  
email: [andrewscott@dccnet.com](mailto:andrewscott@dccnet.com)  
website: [www.andrew-scott.ca](http://www.andrew-scott.ca)

Associate Editor: Tracy Cooper  
email: [tracycooper100@shaw.ca](mailto:tracycooper100@shaw.ca)

Study Group Chair: Tim Woodland  
email: [twoodland@telus.net](mailto:twoodland@telus.net)

Newsletter submissions may be sent to the editors at the email addresses above.

Free digital newsletters can be downloaded as PDF files at [www.bnaps.org/hhl/n-bcr.htm](http://www.bnaps.org/hhl/n-bcr.htm) (for all issues), or at [https://spideroak.com/browse/share/Andrew\\_Scott/Backissues](https://spideroak.com/browse/share/Andrew_Scott/Backissues) (for recent issues only). Issues 89 to present are in full colour; earlier newsletters are in b&w only. File size is approximately 1.5 Mb/issue.

# FREE: the makings of a BC POCON catalogue

by Andrew Scott

Twenty years ago, I was chatting with Bill Topping, the founder and long-time editor of the *BC Postal History Newsletter*, about the six-digit numbers that have been assigned, since 1973, to every post office in Canada and that appear on office cancelling devices. Before the appearance of the six-digit system there had been a four-digit MOON system (short for Money Order Office Number).

Bill and I admired the astonishing achievement of BC philatelist Mike Sagar, who had published a series of catalogues that described the MOON system and listed all known MOON cancels, province by province, complete with rarity factors, and early and late recorded dates of use.

"I think we can safely assume," said Bill, "that no one will ever produce a similar catalogue for the six-digit system." That system, after all, has been in use, so far, for 47 years,

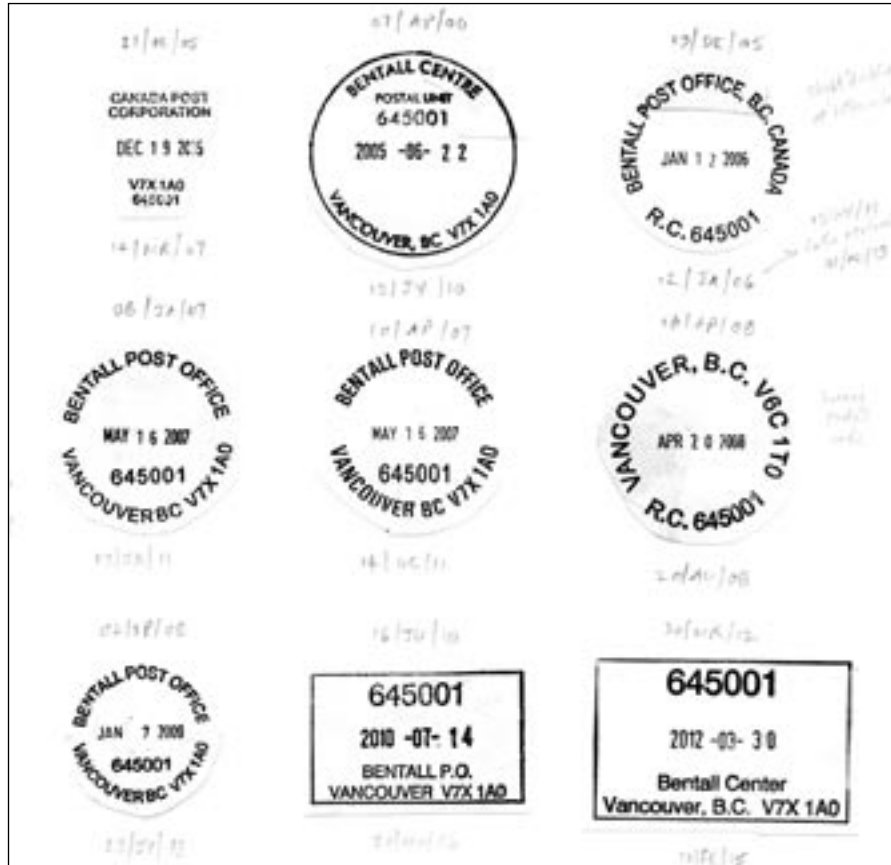
compared to 23 years for MOONs, and some offices have used as many as 20 different six-digit cancels. Also, the numbering sequence had been through a series of confusing changes, while still retaining the six-digit format. And, mysteriously, the system has gone by several different names: POCON (Post Office Computer Organization Number), RC (Responsibility Centre), HRIS (Human Resources Inventory System) and CCN (Cost Centre Number).

Bill hadn't meant his comment to be a challenge, but it caused me to take a deeper interest in the six-digit system in BC. I had, at the time, access to an abundant source of commercial covers, and every month, for a donation to a local charity, I received a large bundle

of envelopes with BC six-digit hand cancels. I got involved with a group of like-minded collectors who contributed to *The Bull.MOOSE*, a fine newsletter (now sadly defunct), edited by Doug Murray, with a focus on technical postal systems, and we had great fun deciphering the numeral series and learning how to gather the latest data on post office openings from

the Canada Post website.

I maintained an inventory of all known BC six-digit cancels, with early and late recorded dates of usage. (I'm sure that many cancels haven't been recorded yet.) Over the years, this inventory had expanded to fill six three-ring binders with neatly reconstructed photocopies of six-digit datestamps. Sadly, Bill's comment remains true so far; I've run out of time and steam to proceed further with this project, yet I hate to see all my efforts wasted. I recognize that



Sample from the six-digit inventory. See also page 1136 of the *BC Postal History Newsletter* for another example from the POCON hoard.

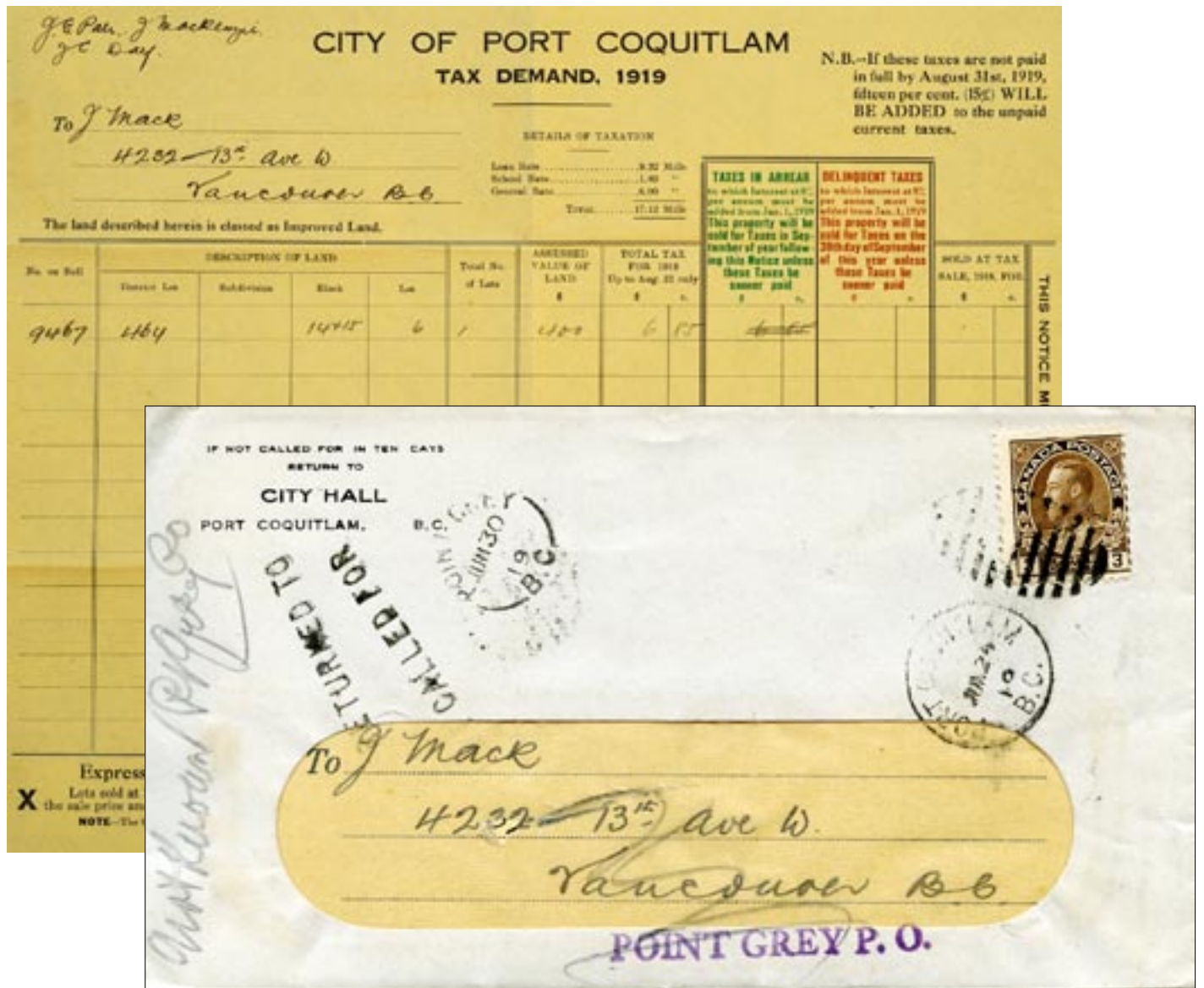
six-digit cancels are not exactly a glamorous field for collectors, and I'm not looking to sell anything here. I would, however, like to GIVE AWAY my six-digit hoard, preferably to someone interested in keeping it up. Besides the inventory of photocopied datestamps, I also have some useful reference materials, several thousand unprocessed covers and pieces with BC six-digit cancels, and a box of "future rarities" (ie, six-digit markings from very short-lived offices). My only condition is that the accumulation be handed over somewhere close to where I live, either on the Sunshine Coast or in the Vancouver area; it's too heavy to be shipped. If you're interested, please contact me by email: [andrewscott@dccnet.com](mailto:andrewscott@dccnet.com)

# PoCo property assessments & taxation notices

by Bruce Pollock

**Port Coquitlam city history** Situated about 25 km east of what is now downtown Vancouver, the area which became Port Coquitlam began to be settled by Europeans in the mid-1800s. Land could be purchased for ten shillings an acre in the 1860s.

The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885 was a major influence on the development of Port Coquitlam, because the main line ran right through the area on its way to Vancouver. In 1911, the CPR moved its freight operations from Vancouver to Port Coquitlam and became a major employer. Today, the CPR yards comprise a large section of the city.



Figures 1 and 2. Originally mailed from Port Coquitlam, June 24, 1919, to J Mack, Vancouver. Directed to Point Grey; addressee not known there (note scarce straightline cancel). On June 30 cover forwarded to Kerrisdale, arriving July 2, 1919 (backstamp). Returned to Port Coquitlam July 12, 1919 (date obscured). Assessed value of land was \$400 and taxes owed were \$6.85.

With the pending completion of the Panama Canal before World War I, land promoters and speculators visualized a great port at the city, because the area also bordered the banks of the Fraser River. This proximity, coupled with the CPR operations, triggered a "Panama Fever," and much land was bought and sold. However, the port concept never materialized; the young town suffered a major fire, and development

*PoCo taxation assessments continued*

went dormant. As often happened, landowners were unable to sell unwanted land and stopped paying their taxes, and the city eventually took back their properties.

**Property assessment and taxation** Prior to 1974, towns and cities in British Columbia were responsible for their own property assessment and taxation, while the province retained jurisdiction over rural and unincorporated areas. Each developed its own scheme for placing a value on the land, which often led to



Figures 3 and 4. This early plan of Port Coquitlam shows Lot 464, Block 14, where the property described in Figures 1 and 2 was located. That property now forms part of a large commercial/residential building (Shaughnessy Square, 2099 Lougheed Hwy) valued today at multiple millions of dollars. Thanks to Deputy Assessor Bryan Muraio of the BC Assessment Authority for assistance.









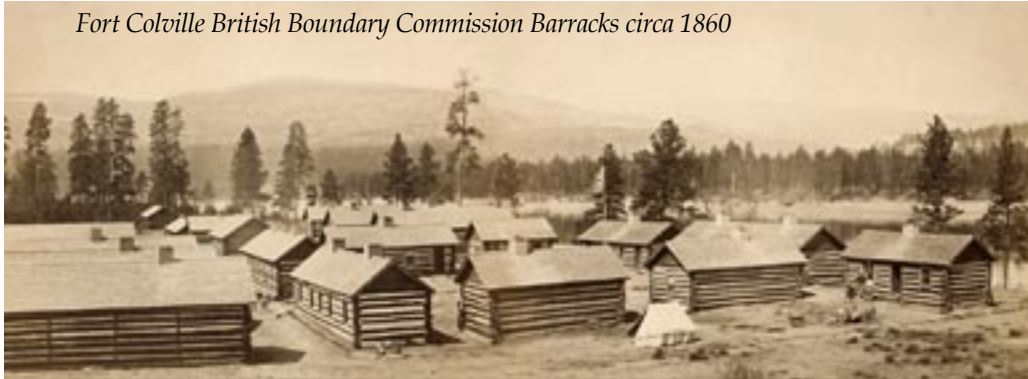


# An unpaid cover from Fort Colville to Canada

by Dale Forster

The following note is a response to an article by Gray Scrimgeour and Tracy Cooper in the last issue of the *BC Newsletter* ("Two unpaid 1866 covers from the US to Victoria," Issue #115, September 2020, page 1211). See also "The Fort Shepherd, BC, postal cover of 1862," Issue #112, December 2019, pages 1157-60.

*Fort Colville British Boundary Commission Barracks circa 1860*



I attach a scan of a cover from a well-known BC&VI correspondence (there were many Rumsey covers in the 2004 Lichtenstein sale) with a "Due 15" changed to "10." It was mailed at Fort Colville, Washington Territory, but I suspect the letter was written north of the border at Fort Shepherd or at some mine in BC, then carried across the border for mailing. The receiving Ingersoll CDS on back has an unclear date; possibly 1864, after the US transcontinental rate was lowered from 15 cents to 10 cents as of July 1, 1863. In theory prepayment was required, but you see collect mail occasionally.

Had the cover been mailed north of the border, it would have required BC and US postage and have gone west to Hope on the Dewdney Trail to be routed via San Francisco. Mailing it at Fort Colville saved some time; I presume it was carried by the US post office via Walla Walla, then by stage via Boise and Salt Lake City.

Fort Colville, northwest of today's Spokane, Washington, was established by the Hudson's Bay Co in 1825 on the route of the annual express canoe brigade from Fort Vancouver across Canada. Mail carried by the brigade originally travelled up the Columbia River, across the Rockies (by snowshoe), then via the Athabaska and Saskatchewan rivers to Lake Winnipeg. Yet another canoe trip, on the Hayes River, brought the mail to York Factory on Hudson's Bay. Its final journey was by ship to England.

## A stampless cover from Savona to Yale

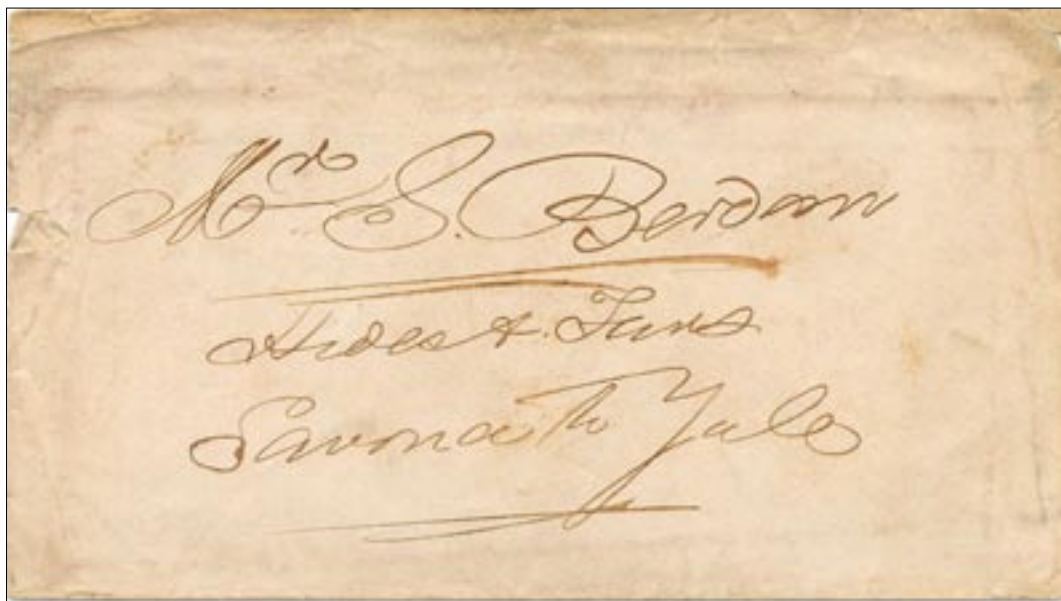
by Gray Scrimgeour

This simple stampless cover bears no postmarks. It is addressed to Mr S Berdan, Hides & Furs, Savona to Yale. The cover was carried by favour from Savona to Yale via Cache Creek and Spence's Bridge. It was sent either during the period when Savona had no post office or in 1881 before Savona had a postmarking device.

Savona is a small community located near the west end of Kamloops Lake, 41 kilometres (26 mi) east of Cache Creek and 35 kilometres (22 mi) west of Kamloops. A wagon road was constructed between Cache Creek and Savona in 1865. A Colonial post office was open there briefly from July 1866 to 1870. A Canadian Post Office opened—under the name Savonas Ferry—on June 1, 1881; it was on the 185-kilometre (116-mi) mail route between Cache Creek and Okanagan Mission. A broken-circle datestamp for Savona Ferry was not proofed until August 20, 1881. Savona was at the east end of the Pacific Section of the CPR construction, thus it was a short-term end-of-track.



*Village  
of  
Savona  
about  
1885.*



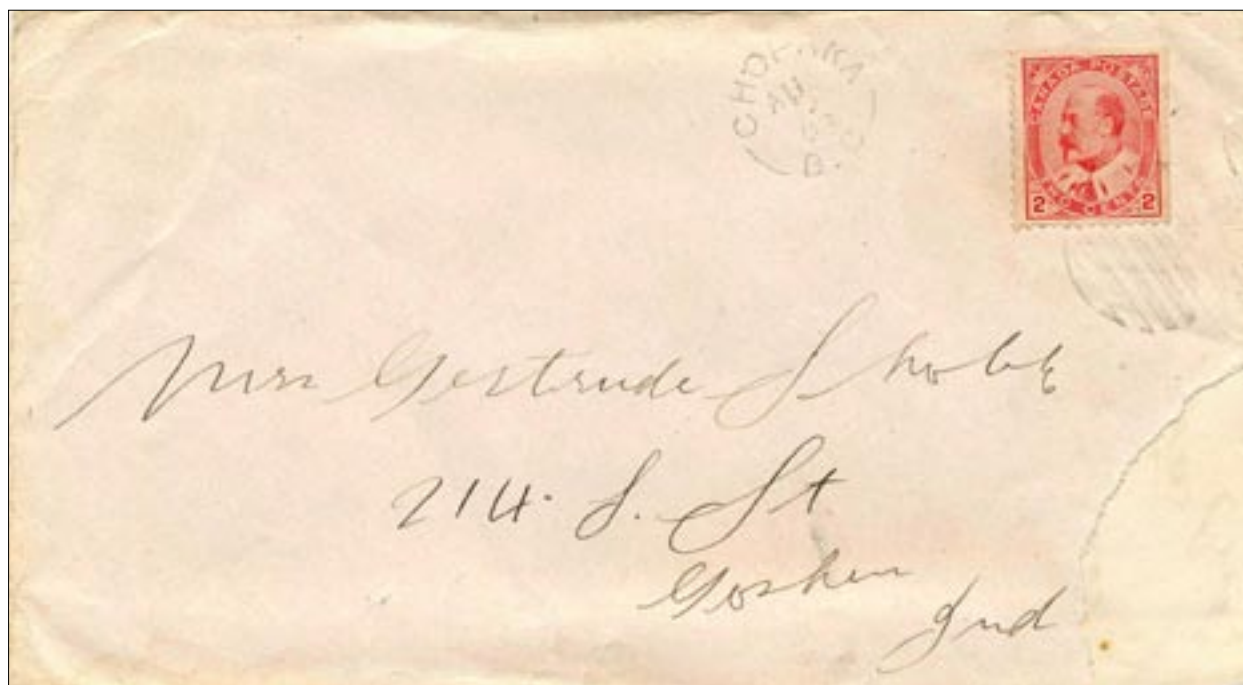
Samuel Berdan and his older brother Isaac Freeborn Berdan (both from Elgin County in Ontario) were part of a group of Overlanders from St Thomas, Ontario, who trekked from Ontario to British Columbia in 1862 via Fort Garry and Fort Edmonton. Freeborn died in 1863 from mountain fever. Samuel is listed as a "freighter," working in Yale in the 1870s. The date and location of his death is not recorded. Several 1880 and 1881 letters for Samuel (including one written in Savona) were left with the office of the BC Official Administrator as an intestate estate.

# Chopaka, BC: the rancher searches for a wife

by Gray Scrimgeour



*Farmland between Chopaka and Osoyoos, BC Travel Industry, 1953.*



*Two-cent Edward dated August 1908 paying the one-ounce-or-less letter rate to the US.*

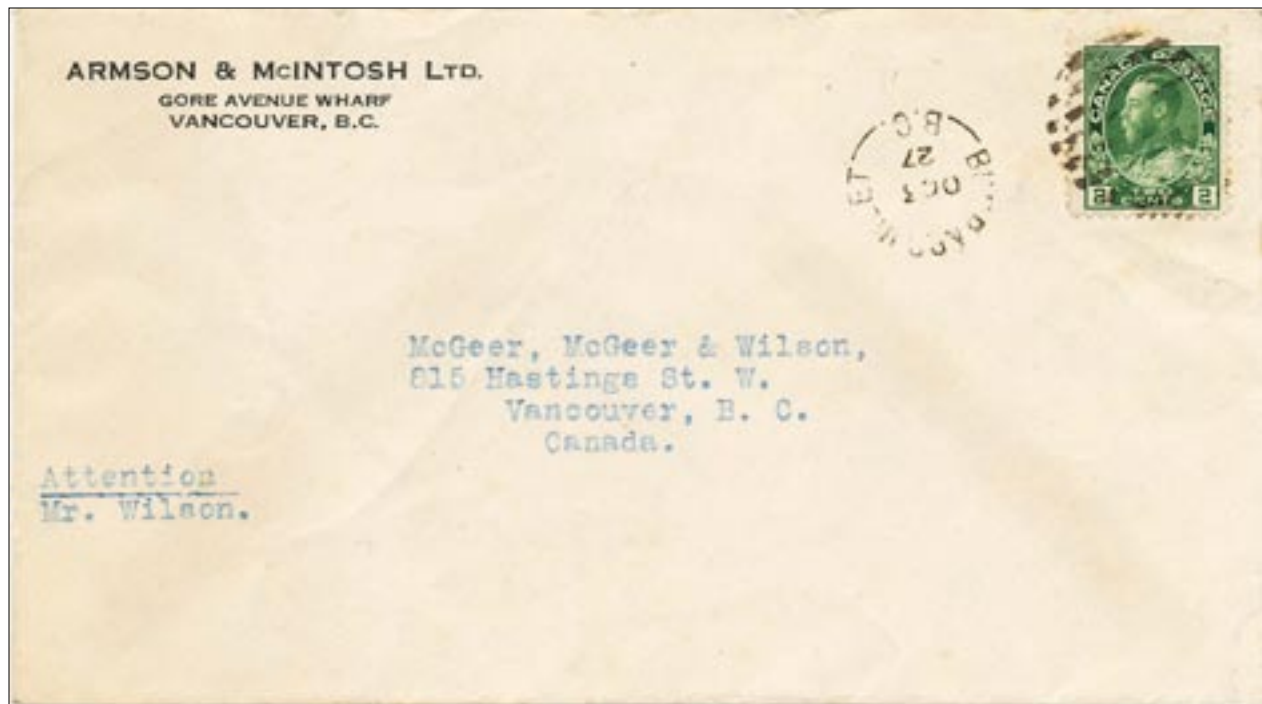
A few months ago I purchased this cover mailed at CHOPAKA, B.C., for my Similkameen district collection. A matching piece of paper has been temporarily added to the lower right corner to make it look more like an envelope. The postmark is dated AU/08 (no day). It must have been mailed on August 30 or 31, 1908, because it contains a letter written at Fountain Ranch on Aug 30, 1908. Ink was probably in short supply in Chopaka, both with the writer and at the post office. The letter is faint and so is the postmark. The cover's contents tell a touching story.

*Chopaka wife continued*

Chopaka is a tiny community on the Similkameen River, south of Keremeos, at the US border (near Nighthawk, Washington). A post office operated for eight months at Chopaka, from Mar 1, 1908, to Oct 31, 1908. I remember when Bill Robinson found this cover a few decades ago. It was the first report for Chopaka. I don't remember Bill talking about the contents. There are two long letters—one written by Joe Armstrong (a sheep rancher living near Chopaka) and one written to him on Aug 26, 1908, by a friend, Azela P, of Quilchena, BC.

Azela says they have been writing back and forth weekly. Joe's latest letters must have included a marriage proposal because Azela writes, "as I said before I do not intend to get married for a little while yet. . . . So I think it is better to bear my sorrows alone & not be burden to anyone else with any more cares & sorrows for awhile." Joe almost immediately wrote a love letter to Mrs Gertrude J Noble in Goshen, Indiana: "I have just received a letter from Azela. She has turned me loose so all that keeps me from sending for you today is the car fair." He writes how he will earn the train fare quickly by selling mutton. "I received your two cards today, got them and Azela's letter both at the same time. . . . I am enclosing Azela's letter so you can see for your self that she has turned me loose. . . ." Apparently Gertie also turned down Joe's offer of marriage, because the 1911 census lists Joseph Armstrong (born 1862), his wife Catherine (born 1868), a daughter (born 1888) and a son (born 1898).

## Boat or office processing for Burrard Inlet mail? *by Gray Scrimgeour*



This innocent-looking cover tells a bit of a story. It is postmarked BURRARD INLET OC 3/27 with the second broken-circle datestamp (proofed in 1913) from that office. The envelope has a corner card for Armson & McIntosh (wholesale oil dealers), Gore Avenue Wharf, Vancouver. The office of Harbour Navigation Co, which operated the ships making the calls at the non-post-office points on Indian Arm, was nearby with the same address. Apparently Armson & McIntosh sometimes made use of the Burrard Inlet post office for their office's outbound mail. This lends strong support to the suggestion that the postmarking of the Burrard Inlet mail was performed in the office of Harbour Navigation—not on board vessels. (Note the addressees: the well-known Vancouver barristers McGeer, McGeer & Wilson. Gerry McGeer, in particular, went on to become one of Vancouver's best-known politicians. He was a Liberal MLA 1916-20 and 1933-35, a Liberal MP 1935-45, a senator 1945-47, and twice mayor of Vancouver: 1935-36 and 1947.)

# The Arrow Lakes spa of Halcyon Hot Springs

by Cec Coutts

An attractive corner card is seen on this 1917 registered cover from Halcyon Hot Springs, BC, to Coleman, Alberta. Note that the NO 13 date is inverted. Two war tax stamps plus a regular two-cent Admiral cover the total charge of eight cents. The two-cent war tax was originally printed in red, but a red stamp was already in use for other purposes, so, to avoid confusion, on Aug 29, 1916, the colour was changed to brown, as seen here. The corner card carries the names Davis & Davis. From 1916 to 1919 Grant Davis was postmaster at Halcyon.



*Eight-cent registered cover, dated Nov 13, 1917, from Halcyon Hot Springs, BC, to Coleman, Alberta. Backstamps are Robson and Arrowhead RPO (Nov 13), Medicine Hat & Nelson RPO (Nov 14) and Coleman (No 14). The photograph of the hotel at left dates from the 1920s but the photographer is unknown.*

The ROB. & A'HEAD R.P.O. (Robson/Arrowhead) was a waterway post office that carried mail by steamship between the two points. The dater (Gray WW-8-03) indicates that this cover was carried southbound from Halcyon, then transferred at Robson to MED HAT & NELSON run NO 14 (Gray WT-344-041), arriving at Coleman the same day.

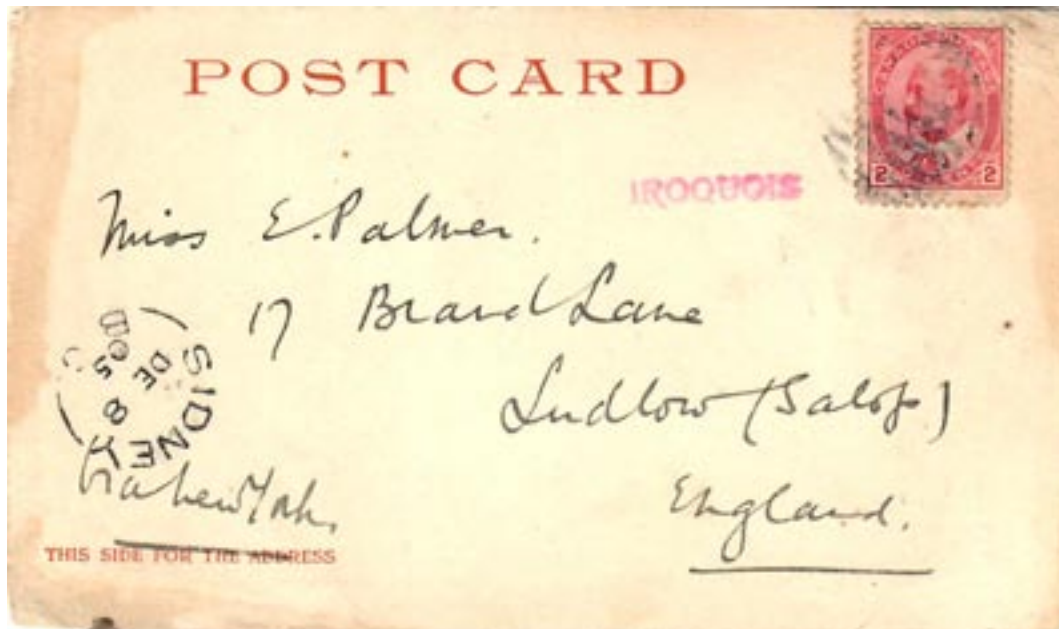
The photo of the Halcyon Hot Springs Hotel dates from the 1920s; the photographer is unknown. The name, meaning "calm" or "peaceful," was bestowed by Robert Sanderson, a steamboat captain, and is pronounced "HAL-see-on." The hotel was built in 1894 on the east side of Upper Arrow Lake. Access was by steamboat only. After regular boat traffic ended, the hotel changed hands a number of times and was in decline by 1924. The spot was known for its mineral water, used by many for health purposes. The water was even bottled and sent round the world.

A post office named Halcyon Hot Springs opened Mar 1, 1898, and closed Dec 30, 1950. In 1924 retired Brigadier-General (and surgeon) Frederick E Burnham took the place over and revamped the hotel as a sanatorium. Burnham was also postmaster from 1924 to 1950. In 1955 the hotel burnt to the ground and took the doctor with it. Today, the popular Halcyon Hot Springs Village and Spa on Highway 23, 32 km (20 mi) north of Nakusp, occupies the spot. (For more on Halcyon Hot Springs, see pp 937-38 in Issue #98.)

# The SS *Iroquois*: a coastal mail connection

by Morris Beattie

Small steamers and ferries played a significant role in the transport of mail along the British Columbia coast in the late 1800s and early 1900s. One such steamer, the *Iroquois*, provided a link to Sidney on Vancouver Island for a brief period. Gray Scrimgeour has previously written about early post offices on the Saanich Peninsula



Top: postcard to England (via New York) mailed aboard the *Iroquois* on the Port Guichon to Sidney route. Red straightline marking and fine Sidney split-ring dated Dec 8, 1905. Bottom: cover mailed in Nanaimo to Cadboro Bay Rd in Victoria on Jan 27, 1910. Carried aboard the *Iroquois* on the Nanaimo coaling run and received a blue straightline. A faint Victoria general delivery mark is dated Jan 28, 1910 (AM).

(PHSC Journal #121, March 2005, pp 11-16), showing that the Sidney post office opened June 1, 1892. Also in 1892, a proposal was made to the city council of Victoria for a standard gauge railway link through

SS Iroquois *continued*

the central Saanich Peninsula between Sidney and Victoria. This railway, operated by the Victoria & Sidney Railway Co and often known as the "Cordwood Limited," reflecting its fuel supply, opened for business in 1894. It had been hoped that the railway would link to other centres on Vancouver Island through a connection with the E&N railway in Victoria, but agreement with the E&N could not be reached and the connection never happened. The railway was constructed under the direction of Thomas Wilson Paterson, who by 1895 was the company's general manager. Paterson later became the MLA for North Victoria from 1902 to 1903, the MLA for the Gulf Islands from 1903 to 1907, and the ninth lieutenant governor of BC from 1909 until 1914.

*Below: Realphoto viewcard to Shortreed, BC, of wrecked steamship at Jacks Point, dated Nov 16, 1908. Sent from Retreat Cove on Galiano Island, a rare (RF E) postmark. Message reads, "See our boat on the rocks? . . . I hope she will not act like this when I board her for home."*



Paterson anticipated that the V&S would be awarded the mail contract to the Gulf Islands, and he decided to have a small steamer built. The *Iroquois* was constructed at Port Moody and launched on Feb 19, 1900. The 25-metre (82-ft) steel-hulled, steam-driven vessel was capable of carrying a load of 100 tonnes and could travel at 12 knots.

For a period of time in the early 1900s the boat made regular round-trip runs from Sidney through the Gulf Islands to Nanaimo and back. The departure from Sidney was on Mondays and Thursdays, and the vessel returned on Tuesdays and Fridays, connecting with the evening train to Victoria. On Wednesday and Saturday the *Iroquois* made a round trip through the Gulf Islands to Nanaimo for the purpose of refueling with coal and returned to Sidney the same day. At another time the vessel did a regular run between Port Guichon, near present-day Ladner, and Sidney. Despite being involved in several accidents, the steamer appears to have made more than 2,000 trips to its various ports. Its period of service was relatively short, as on April 10, 1911, the boat left Sidney in an overloaded condition and capsized when rough seas were encountered. Twenty-one people died, while 11 others survived due to the heroic efforts of local First Nations people.

The SS *Iroquois* did not provide official postal services. Mail was carried by favour to Sidney, and received an undated straightline "IROQUOIS" along the way. The marking (Topping 01-L1), which can be found in various colours, has been recorded in use between Nov 2, 1904, and Aug 5, 1910. It is not uncommon.

# Beyond the call of duty at Union Steamship

by Morris Beattie

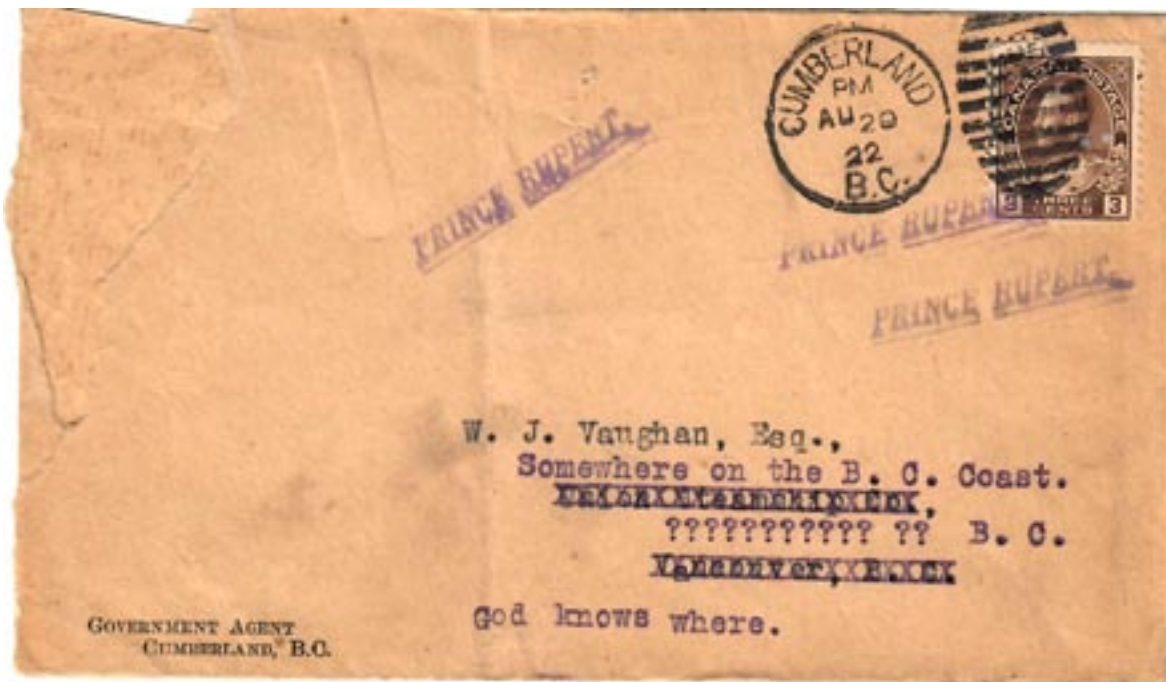
This three-cent domestic cover was mailed by the government agent at Cumberland, BC, receiving a Cumberland duplex cancel dated Aug 20, 1922. It was addressed as follows:

W. J. Vaughan, Esq.,  
Union Steamship Co,  
Vancouver, B.C.

Apparently Mr Vaughan was not at this location at that time, and someone at the Union Steamship office obliterated the address and redirected the cover:

W. J. Vaughan, Esq.,  
Somewhere on the B. C. Coast.  
???????????? ?? B.C.

God knows where.



It seems that a Union employee in this case was familiar with the addressee and knew that he was in Prince Rupert. The cover received several purple PRINCE RUPERT straightline markings and, as it was not "Returned to Sender," we assume that it was delivered to Mr Vaughan.

*Editor's note:* From Gerald Rushton's *Whistle up the Inlet: The Union Steamship Story*, we learn that "One-eyed Billy" Vaughan (as he was known to cannery workers up and down the BC coast) worked for Union in Vancouver and Prince Rupert as a freight agent. Before that he'd been a purser on the Boscowitz Steamship Co's *SS Venture* (later acquired by Union). Vaughan's knowledge of the coastal salmon-packing business and acquaintance with the cannery managers was of great value to Union.

Right: *SS Venture*, at unknown location about 1925.

