



BRITISH COLUMBIA POSTAL HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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In this issue the newsletter celebrates the 150th anniversary of British Columbia's entry into Confederation. The colony became a province on July 20, 1871. The letter above, dated Sept 14, 1871, was written by Sir John A Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, to BC politician John S Helmcken, who was retiring from politics. Macdonald regretted Helmcken's leaving, but was "fully impressed with the reasons you give for doing so." Cover and letter courtesy Tracy Cooper, ex-Wellburn.

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Anniversaries to note

British Columbia joined Confederation 150 years ago, on July 20, 1871, and the BC post office became a branch of the Dominion post office. To honour this significant event, Associate Editor Tracy Cooper has prepared a series of articles that will examine, over the next few issues, how the post office in BC survived its first decade as part of a much larger national operation. It was during this period that the former colony jettisoned its confused, chaotic former postal systems and became a reliable component of a federal service.

A rather different anniversary was celebrated on Feb 27, 2021, when All Nations Stamp & Coin held its 1300th auction. Brian Grant Duff managed to produce, once again, a handful of unusual items, originally gathered by noted collector Gerry



1872 US postal stationery envelope sent from Oregon to Murdo McKenzie at San Juan Island, Washington Territory.

Wellburn, that attracted considerable interest and several dramatic bids.

Most of the lots were associated with the so-called "Pig War" of 1859, a dispute between Britain and the US over the ownership of the San Juan Islands, located at the entrance to Puget Sound. Depending

on where the boundary between Canada and the US was drawn, the islands could end up belonging to either country. Settlers arrived on the San Juans, and military camps were established by either side. Violence inevitably occurred, but the only serious injury, thank goodness, was to a Hudson's Bay Co pig, which was shot and killed.



1859 #10-sized Department of the Interior cover from Washington, DC, to Mary McKenzie on San Juan Island.

The 13 Pig War-related lots included many covers and enclosed letters to HBC farm manager Kenneth McKenzie and other McKenzie family members. Documents included an invitation to a San Juan Island ball, a dinner-party invite and various newspaper clippings. The dispute, apparently, did not seriously interrupt island social life.

Most lots sold in the \$200-300 range, except for an 1871 cover and letter mailed from Washington, DC, from Canada's first prime minister, John A Macdonald, to BC statesman John S Helmcken. The letter mentions Helmcken's speech on the "San Juan question," and thanks Helmcken for reminding him of "Point Roberts." The lot was given a \$1,500 estimate. It sold for \$20,000! Have a look at our John A Macdonald letters on pp 1251 and 1255.

In its infinite wisdom, Canada Post has given the editor a new postal code: V7Z 0G5. Please update your address book. (Other Sunshine Coast residents are similarly afflicted.)

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British Columbia joins Confederation: the First Ten years, 1871-1881

by Tracy Cooper

Introduction:

British Columbia, far-flung colony nestled on the northwest coast of North America, has been referred to, for its storied history, as the romantic outpost of the British Empire. The transition from dependent cash-strapped colony to Canada's west-coast economic engine, has been inspiring. July 20, 2021, marks the 150th anniversary of BC joining the Dominion of Canada, that grand and unique experiment, as the sixth province of Confederation. Rather than focussing on BC's Colonial postal system, about which much has already been written, this series of articles will discuss the first ten years of postal service in the newly minted province, and will be broken into five chapters.

Part 1: Negotiation, 1870-1871

Part 2: Integration, 1871-1872

Part 3: Decline of the Express Companies

Part 4: Consolidation, 1872-1879

Part 5: Expansion, 1880-1881



March 6, 1871, double-rate cover from Ottawa to J S Helmcken, Victoria. Endorsed "S L Tilley," one of the Fathers of Confederation. Letter dealt with proposed CPR terminus. (Short-lived rate, in effect October 1870 to Aug 15, 1871.)

Part 1: Negotiation, 1870-1871

The story opens in the spring of 1870, when public discussion often centered on the best interests and future of the colony. The first 20-plus years of the separate and united colonies of British Columbia and Vancouver Island had been dominated by the economic dependence on San Francisco for goods, trade and the all-important postal link to the outside world. For all practical purposes, BC at the time was a satellite of the United States, and many residents saw the future as being part of the US union. The middle and late 1860s were also times of economic depression and increasing debt for the struggling colony.

By early 1870 three options for the future were presented to the colonists: Confederation with the new Dominion of Canada; continued colonial status by maintaining and strengthening the historic and loyal ties with mother England; or joining the United States, with its promise of future economic stability. In March 1870, the BC legislature began a series of sessions which became known as the "Great Confederation Debates." Governor Anthony Musgrave appeased the anti-Confederation forces in the Legislative Assembly by assuring civil servants that they would either receive pensions or new positions after Confederation. By April 1870, with the resolve of Musgrave and others, opinion had been swayed towards joining Canada

BC joins Confederation continued

by the promise of a transcontinental railway connecting east and west coasts. Other promises included the assumption by Canada of the colony's \$2-million debt and the establishment of a stable and reliable postal system. (*The British North America Act, 1867, VI.91.5*, provided that "the postal service of any colony absorbed by the Dominion of Canada should come under the exclusive authority of the Canadian Parliament.")



Twenty-cent double-weight Large Queen cover from Ottawa to Mrs Trutch in Victoria. Addressed and initialled by Joseph Trutch. Dated June 6, 1870 (ie before Confederation).

Shortly thereafter, BC sent a delegation of three men to Ottawa to negotiate union with Canada. They were John Sebastian Helmcken, Joseph W Trutch and Robert W Carrall. Negotiations began on June 7, 1870. Canada offered generous terms, and an agreement with the three representatives was hammered out. The BC electorate began debate on the agreement in November 1870 and passed it without change in 1871. Confederation and being "Canadian" was in sight. On July 20 crowds gathered in Victoria to watch the Confederation festivities. Roman candles were burned and bells rang through the city at midnight.

Just prior to Confederation the following 29 British Columbia colonial post offices were in existence (handstamp numeral in parenthesis where definitively known):

Ashcroft	Est July 23, 1865
Burrard (28)	Est July 2, 1869
Cache Creek	Est Jan 4, 1868
Cariboo (10)	Est July 1, 1864
Clinton (8)	Est Sept 10, 1864
Comox	Est June 22, 1868
Cowichan	Est prior to 1867
Duck & Pringles	Est June 13, 1870
Esquimalt	Est July 21, 1864
Hope (3) (Fort Hope)	Est Nov 30, 1858
Kamloops	Est May 5, 1870
Kootenay	Est July, 1866
Lake La Hache (16)	Est Sept 10, 1864
Langley (26)	Est Sept 19, 1870
Lillooet (Cayoosh)	Est circa 1859
Lytton (7)	Est circa 1859
Maple Bay	Est unknown (1867?)
Nanaimo (36)	Est Dec 31, 1858
New Westminster (1)	Est April 23, 1859



Dr J S Helmcken (left) and Joseph Trutch at Niagara Falls, en route to Ottawa to approve terms admitting BC into Canada.

BC joins Confederation continued

150 Mile House	Est June 2, 1871
Quesnelmouth (13)	Est July 16, 1864
Skeena	Est Feb 21, 1871
Soda Creek (20)	Est Aug 8, 1864
Sooke	Est Aug 8, 1864
Spences Bredge (27)	Est June 17, 1868
Sumass	Est <i>circa</i> 1867
Van Winkle	Est July 1, 1871
Victoria (35)	Est <i>circa</i> 1852
Yale (4)	Est Nov 1858

Note: Cowichan, Maple Bay and Sumass were **not** reported in Deaville. There may also have been a colonial post office at Chemainus, but more documentation is needed to prove this contention.

Except for the larger centres, postmasters were mostly unpaid; and given the state of colonial postal contracts, mail delivery was unreliable at best. This was a source of consternation for residents of the colony, and a major consideration in the push towards Confederation, which promised a reliable, stable postal system. Part 2 of this series of articles, "Integration, 1871-72," will discuss the future of these colonial post offices, their integration into the Canadian Post Office Department, and the tendering of Dominion mail contracts for salaried postmasters. (*All illustrations are from the author's collection.*)

References:

Alfred Stanley Deaville, *The Colonial Postal Systems and Postage Stamps of VI and BC 1849-1871* (Victoria, 1928)
Library and Archives Canada



Letter to The Hon **J S Helmcken**, Victoria, BC; Private, Ottawa, July 17, 1871; My dearest Sir: You will have been informed by telegram of the appointment of Mr Trutch to the Lieut Governship. We found after Confederation in 1867 that in each of the Provinces there was a lurking feeling that it would be over-run by non-residents, and we supposed that the same feeling would naturally arise in British Columbia. We have therefore thought it well to ask a British Columbian statesman to be the first Governor. Mr Trutch was unwilling to assume the duties, which are not at all in the line of his profession, but he has consented to act. . . .

Of course with you, as elsewhere, there are some people who will not be satisfied with

anything and there may be some grumblers at Trutch's appointment. He is fully prepared to administer Public Affairs under the principles of Responsible Government, and I have no doubt will carry those principles into practice with that straight forwardness and good faith which characterize him. . . .

Trutch was greatly disconcerted by an intimation from you that you had given up politics, and his feeling of dismay at your retirement has extended to my colleagues and myself. We hope that you will reconsider that determination. I can, from my own experience, quite understand that political life is not conducive either to domestic comfort or pecuniary advantage: still someone must undertake the task and make the sacrifice. I hope sincerely you will do so. It will give Trutch very great confidence in the performance of his responsible task, if he has you as his chief advisor. Let me take the liberty then of urging you very strongly in the interests of British Columbia, and I may say of the Dominion, to come to the rescue and aid Trutch in the formation of his first Government. . . . If the Government succeeds in this respect, they may count upon holding the reins of power for four years, during the existence of your first Parliament. It will be a most interesting task, during the period, to organize and put in good working order the new state of affairs.

Pray pardon me for pressing my views upon you, but the importance of the subject and my anxiety to see Trutch properly sustained is my excuse.

Believe me, yours very faithfully,

John A Macdonald

John Newell Evans and Mary Jane Davies

by Bruce Pollock

As a relatively recent BNAPS member, I've spent time browsing through past issues of the *BC Postal History Newsletter*, an excellent resource. But coming across an article by Tracy Cooper in Issue #89 (April 2014) almost knocked me out of my chair. His article "*Large Queen Usage in British Columbia*" included two covers sent from Victoria and addressed to Miss M J Davies, Bath, Placer County, California. I'm certain that these covers were written by my great-great-grandfather, John Newell Evans, to my great-great-grandmother, Mary Jane Davies, prior to their marriage.

Further investigation, with the assistance of Tracy Cooper, Andrew Scott and Wayne Smith (see Wayne's "BC Grid Cancel Census, September 2020" on the BNAPS website), has shown that at least eleven covers were sent to Mary Jane. Ten are shown below in date order (the eleventh exists only as a partly dated piece):

Stamp	Date	Notes
BC #8 2¢ overprint x3	28 Apr 1871	Three 2¢ BC#8 paying 6¢ rate to USA, with one #35 Victoria blue ink grid cancel and covered by smudge cancel.
BC #8 2¢ overprint x3	8 Jun 1871?	Wing margin strip of three 2¢ BC#8 tied with two #35 Victoria black ink grid cancels. Blue Victoria circular datestamp, 8 June likely 1871. Olympia W. Ty. Jul 18 back stamp.
BC #8 2¢ overprint x3	10 Aug 1871 see next page	Strip of three 2¢ BC#8 tied with two #35 Victoria black ink grid cancels. Blue Victoria "money order" ribbon type date stamp 10 Aug 1871. Olympia W. Ty. Aug 14 transit date stamp on front.
Canada #27 6¢ Large Queen	13 Sep 1871	One 6¢ Large Queen with #35 Victoria black ink grid cancel. Blue Victoria "money order" ribbon type date stamp. Olympia W. Ty. Sept 18 transit date stamp (see newsletter p 794).
Canada #27 6¢ Large Queen	4 Jan 1872	One 6¢ Large Queen with #35 Victoria black ink grid cancel. Victoria split-ring date stamp 4 Jan 1872. San Francisco 10 Jan 1872 transit date stamp on front (see newsletter p 791).
Canada #27 6¢ Large Queen	25 Jan 1872 see next page	One 6¢ Large Queen with #35 Victoria black ink grid cancel. Victoria split-ring date stamp 25 Jan 1872. No back stamps.
Canada #39 6¢ Small Queen	31 May 1872	One 6¢ Small Queen with #35 Victoria black ink grid cancel. Victoria split-ring date stamp 31 May 1872. To Davies at Bath, Cal
Canada #39 6¢ Small Queen	2 Aug 1872	One 6¢ Small Queen with segmented cork cancel. Victoria split-ring 2 Aug 1872. Rough left edge. To Davies at Bath, Cal. Address crossed out and redirected to Black Diamond, Contra Costa Co.
Canada #39 6¢ Small Queen	15 Aug 1872	One 6¢ Small Queen tied with segmented cork cancel. Victoria split-ring date stamp 15 Aug 1872 Rough left edge. To Davies at Bath, Cal.
Canada #37 3¢ Small Queen x2	8 Nov 1872	Two 3¢ Small Queens with segmented grid cancel. Victoria split-ring date stamp 8 Nov 1872. SAN FRAN/Paid All Nov 18 red receiver on front. To Davies at Nortonville, Cal.

These covers were of obvious interest from a family history perspective; they also spanned an important period in BC postal history. The first two covers were sent just before BC joined Canada on July 20, 1871. The third was sent after Confederation, but before the Victoria post office had received its supply of Canadian stamps, thus it used BC stamps. This is followed by three covers franked with Large Queens during their brief usage in BC, and the final four with Small Queens. It's an impressive 18 months.

Evans and Davies continued

The Cowichan Valley is one of the earliest areas of European settlement in the province, and my family has deep pioneer roots there. The story of John and Mary Jane Evans is representative of the history of North American immigration from the United Kingdom in the mid-1800s. As a result, I'm particularly interested in the postal history of the valley.



Victoria to California, Aug 10, 1871. Mailed shortly after Confederation, but before Canadian Large Queen stamps were available. See third item on table on previous page.

We know much about their life stories because they were well-documented by John himself and by other family members over the years. Both were born in Wales; John was born May 9, 1846, in Berriew, Montgomeryshire, while Mary Jane was born Jan 22, 1853, in Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorganshire. Mary Jane's family emigrated first, arriving in New York in 1854 when she was only a year old. The following year her extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles also came to the US and eventually settled in Philadelphia. By 1862, the whole family decided to move west with the intent of building a sawmill in Foresthill in the heart of California's gold-mining region. But that plan was never realized after a train car



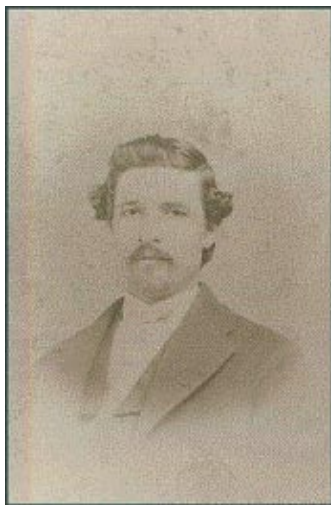
Victoria to California, Jan 25, 1872. Mailed after Confederation, but with a Canadian Large Queen stamp. See sixth item on table on previous page.

full of sawmilling equipment they had purchased burned in mysterious circumstances in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Nonetheless, they did make the move to California to start a new life, traveling by wagon train for 11 weeks across the Great Plains from Missouri to Salt Lake City, Utah, where they spent the winter of 1862-63. In the spring of 1863, they carried on and settled in Foresthill, California. John's mother died when

Evans and Davies continued

he was about ten years old. Then the farm his father was renting burned down. The family was broken up, and John went to live with relatives in London. In early May 1862, his two older brothers, James and David, decided to emigrate to British Columbia. Two years later, on Apr 2, 1864, John left England to join them. He was almost 18 years old.

John kept a diary during his outbound sea journey to Panama, and it's from a photocopy of this diary that I was able to compare the handwriting on these covers. John arrived in Aspinwall and crossed by train to the Pacific side of Panama where he took a ship first to San Francisco and later to Victoria, arriving in June 1864 to join James and David. His brothers' first idea in BC had been to join the Cariboo gold rush, but by the time they were underway, the rush had peaked. They got no further than Yale, where they found



Top: John Newell Evans and Mary Jane Davies at the time of their marriage, Feb 2, 1873. Bottom: Cutting hay on John Evans's farm in the Tansor area of Sahtlam, North Cowichan, about 1916.

employment building the Cariboo Road. They returned to Victoria and were living there when John arrived. John obtained labouring employment in Victoria, including working on the construction of Craigflower Road. Gold fever died hard for John's older brothers. When gold was discovered at Leechtown, near Sooke, David staked a claim but found nothing. He gave up and shortly afterwards pre-empted 40 hectares (100 acres) of land in the Cowichan Valley and started farming. In 1865, James decided to go to Bath, California, near Foresthill to work in the goldfields. The next year, John followed him. It was in Bath, in 1869, that John met Mary Jane at a dance. In March 1870 he returned to BC to visit his brother David, with a promise to Mary Jane that he would write to her. It was his first time in the Cowichan Valley, and he was impressed

Evans and Davies continued

enough that on Sept 23, 1871, he purchased land in the Tansor area of Sahtlam and began to improve it. My speculation is that the Sept 13, 1871, letter may have been to tell Mary Jane that he was in the process of buying land in Cowichan. It was written only ten days before he closed the deal.

In these early days, local roads were the responsibility of the provincial government. A superintendent named Titus, who actually lived in Victoria, would come to Cowichan in the summer on an inspection tour. He couldn't understand why the settlers were complaining about the road conditions, which were significantly worse in winter. After many conversations about the appalling state of the roads, John Evans and fellow settler William C Duncan decided to petition the province to incorporate the District of North Cowichan, so that local residents could take more control. In late 1872, John returned to California, and it may be that the final cover in this census was to inform Mary Jane of his travel plans. They were married there on Feb 2, 1873, and almost immediately moved to Cowichan to live on the land that John had purchased.

Pioneer life in the forest of Sahtlam was difficult. Mary Jane was unhappy and lonely (the nearest female neighbour was several miles away), and she wanted to return to California. One of John's brothers agreed to look after their property, and they went back to Foresthill in June 1873. Their two oldest children were born there, but in the late spring of 1877 they returned to Cowichan permanently and had six more children.

Throughout his life, John was keenly interested in politics and public service. After playing an instrumental role in its incorporation, he served several terms as a councillor on the newly established District of North Cowichan. He was later elected reeve (mayor) for seven terms between 1885 and 1903. John also worked to develop the education infrastructure in the district and served as a school trustee. In October 1903, John Evans was elected to represent Cowichan in the provincial government legislative assembly. This was the first BC election formed along party lines, and John ran as a Liberal candidate, sitting in opposition to the Conservative government of Sir Richard McBride. He served only one term, because Mary Jane eventually told him that she had had enough of his gallivanting back and forth to Victoria. One of his interests as an MLA was the creation of a superannuation system for provincial employees. As a 21st-century recipient of said superannuation, I thank my great-great-grandfather for his efforts.

Mary Jane died on Feb 24, 1937, and John on Jan 8, 1944, leaving an important pioneer legacy in the Cowichan Valley. Evans Road in North Cowichan is named for them. Many of John's papers are held by the BC provincial archives.



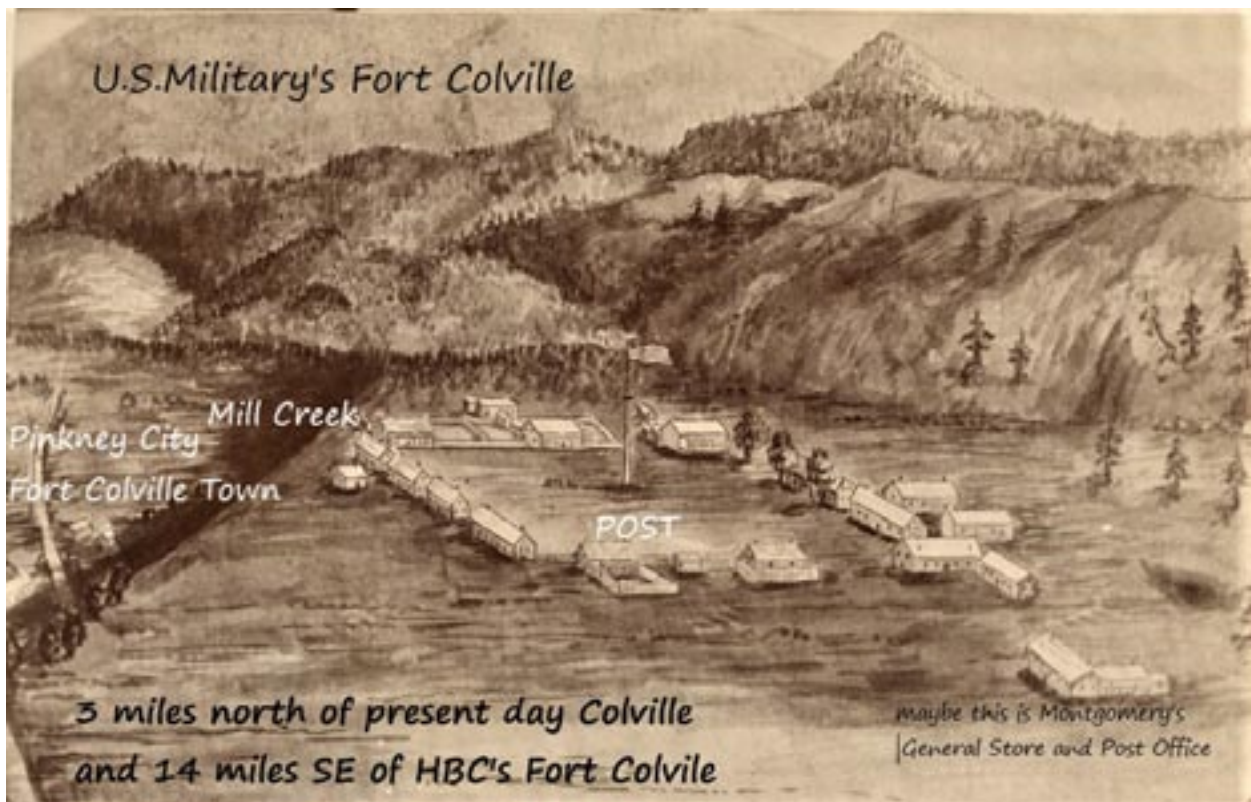
Finally, my research into these covers is ongoing, and there may well be additional material out there addressed to Miss M J Davies in Bath, California. If anyone can shed light on the provenance and current ownership of these or other covers, please contact the author: bruce.pollock@telus.net.

Left: Wedding photo of John Newell Evans and Mary Jane Davies. Above: John and Mary Jane Evans, circa 1933.

A Fort Colville postal cover from 1863

by Ed Mannings

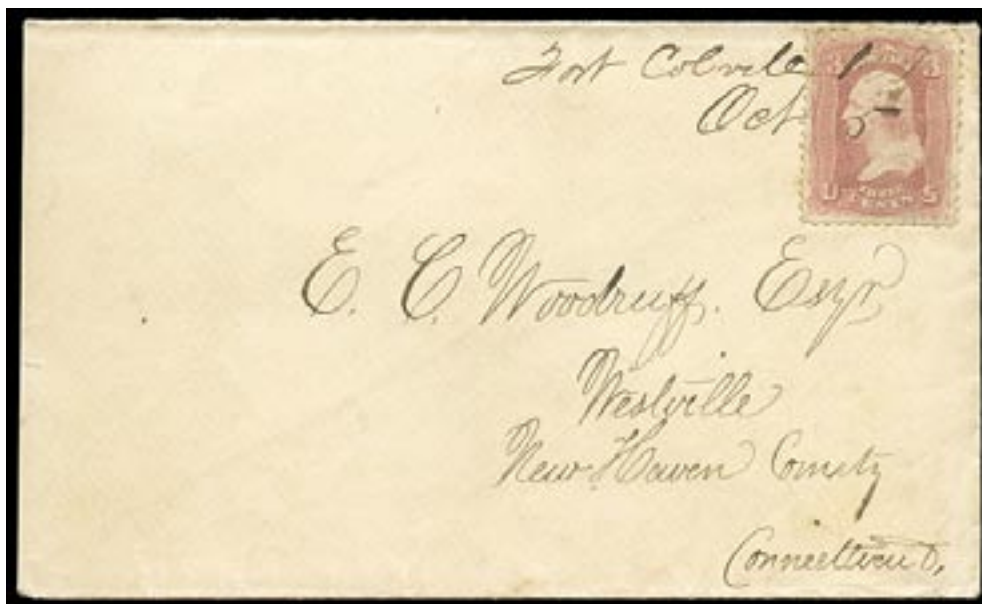
See also "The Fort Shepherd, BC, postal cover of 1862," by Ed Mannings, in Issue #112, pages 1157-1160, and "An unpaid cover from Fort Colville to Canada," by Dale Forster, in Issue #116, page 1227.



Fort Colvile continued

The Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Colvile [sic] was established in the year 1825 as a fur-trading post, agricultural centre and stopping point on the York Factory Express route to the Pacific. It operated continuously until 1871. The location within the company's Columbia Department was strategic until the Oregon Treaty of 1846 established the border at the 49th parallel, and all lands south of the border were ceded by Britain to the United States. However it was not until 1859-61 that the border was finally surveyed, and not until 1869-71 that the HBC's properties in American territory were finally indemnified by the US in a \$650,000 gold bullion settlement.

The US military's Fort Colville [sic], built 23 km southeast of the HBC fort, was established in 1859 to protect settlers, miners and travelers; to uphold the peace with non-treaty First Nations; and to provide a headquarters and escort for the US Boundary Commission. It operated until 1882. A small settlement named Pinkney City sprang up across Mill Creek from the military fort. But Pinkney City was soon renamed Fort Colville. The British Boundary Commission established their headquarters a



kilometre or two north of the HBC's Fort Colvile, and called it Fort Colville barracks. To add to the confusion, the Hudson's Bay fort was often spelled Fort Colville, both contemporaneously and in subsequent historical references.

The many farms stretching between and around the Hudson's Bay fort and the US military fort were referred to as being in the Colville Valley, and the placer mines stretching north into Canada were called the Colville Mines. It's therefore no surprise that when the US Postal Service opened a post office in the area, on November 25, 1862, they too chose to name it Fort Colville. (They had previously opened a post office in Pinkney City for a few months in 1859-60, which was called Colville Valley.) Then, in 1883, a new town of Colville was established, and the post office moved there and was renamed simply Colville. These are the town and post office names that survive to this day.

In 1862 the US surveyor general estimated that there were more than 1,000 residents in the Colville Valley, many of whom were Scottish and French-Canadian former HBC employees along with their indigenous wives and Metis children. (In 1886, a group of Colville Valley farmers headed north into Canada on a prospecting trip, discovered the famous Silver King Mine near present-day Nelson, and set off a mining boom that created the towns and cities of the West Kootenay that we know today.)

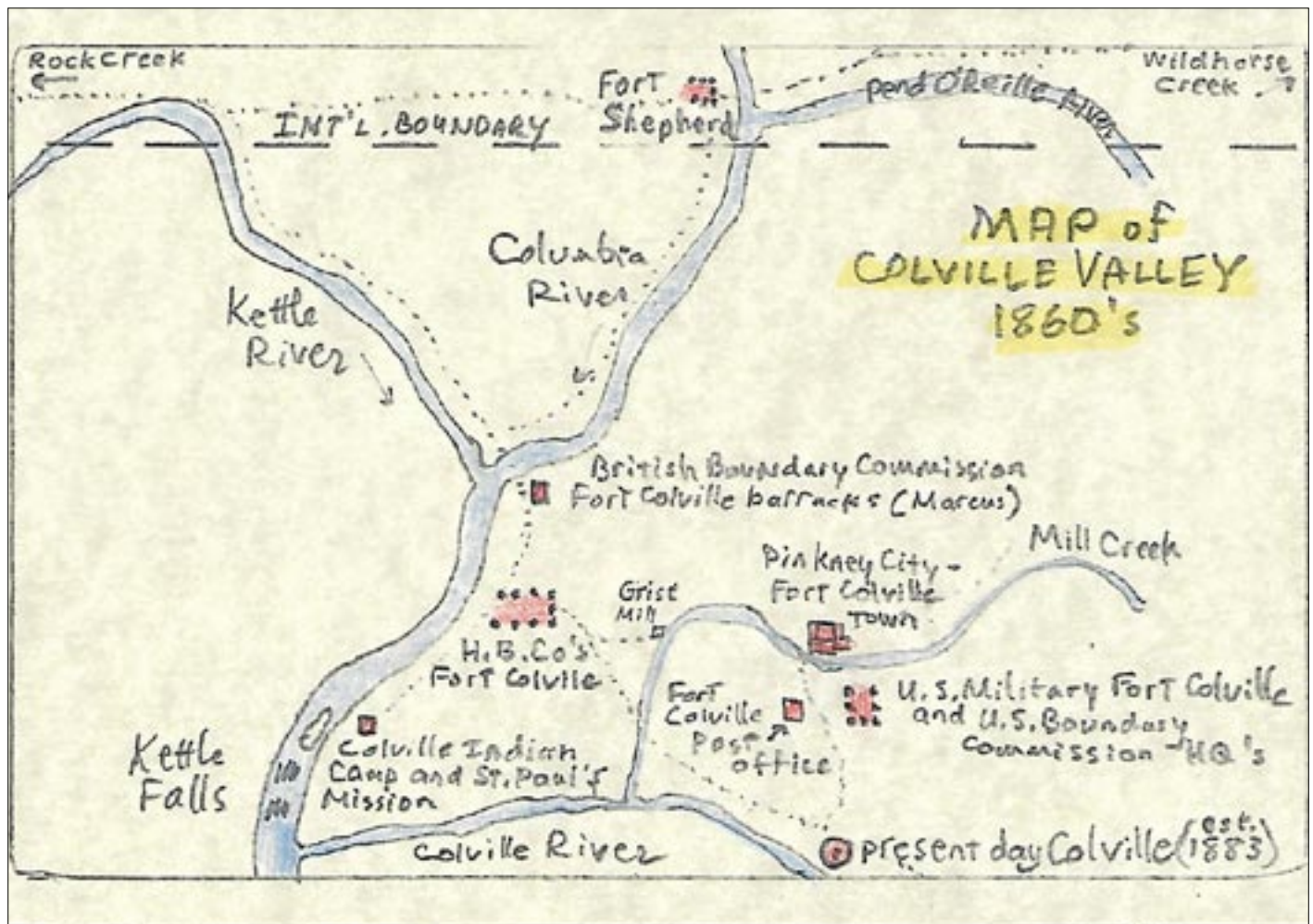
A settler named Charles H Montgomery arrived in the Colville region from Canada on October 12, 1859. He ran a general merchandise business at Fort Colville and was postmaster for 13 years. His business was on the same side of Mill Creek as the military post, and it's possible that it was in the building in the period drawing shown **above**. (The original has no text.)

Fort Colville continued

The cover illustrated here was manuscript postmarked by Montgomery on October 5, 1863. Curiously, he wrote "Fort Colville, WT," using the spelling of the Hudson's Bay Co fort. Is it possible that, as a Canadian, he was making a subtle political statement supporting the property claims of the HBC? Or was he just a poor speller?

During the American Civil War, the 355 regular troops at Fort Colville were called away, and the fort was manned by the 1st Washington Territory Volunteer Infantry Militia. Most of the volunteers were recruited at Fort Alcatraz in California, due to a shortage of capable men in the lightly populated territory. Company B was mustered at Alcatraz and stationed at Fort Colville from July 11, 1862, until May 25, 1864.

From state records we found that a Charles S Woodruff joined Company B at Alcatraz on April 1, 1862. From the Woodruff Family Tree records, we found that Charles Sherman Woodruff was born June 21, 1837, in



New Haven, Connecticut, and died March 3, 1914, in Los Angeles at the Old Soldiers Home. He was noted to have been a Corporal in the 1st Washington Volunteer Infantry, and he had an older brother named Elias Clark Woodruff, who was a bank lawyer in New Haven.

We can only wonder what Charles had to say when he wrote to Elias about being stationed in an uneventful and remote corner of Washington Territory, while the Civil War was being waged on the other side of the country. Commanding officer reports of the time suggest that illegal whiskey dealing, drunken confrontations between miners and local people, and incidences of desertion by the fort's own troops, were the biggest problems of the day.

Hazelton, BC: pack-train capital of Canada

by *Glenna Metchette*

The village of Hazelton, nestled at the foot of Roche de Boule Mountain, was founded in 1866 at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley rivers. This was the head of navigation for coastal paddlewheelers, a convenient connecting or stopping place for canoes, pack trains, dog sleds, ancient trails and, eventually, rail. The population remains a blended mixture of the original Gitksan indigenous people and settlers. For eleven years, I happily taught their children art and English at Hazelton secondary school.

In early days, Hazelton was the home of many firsts for the area between Prince George and Prince Rupert. Among these were the first bank, first hospital, first telegraph office, first newspaper and first post office. It became the staging point for the Omineca gold fields. This was the first real invasion by white men: miners, pioneers and trailblazers. The Gitanmaax trail ran from the Gitksan village near Hazelton over the Babine Mountains to Babine Lake. In 1871 and 1872, miners used this trail to reach their Omineca claims. The local First Nation people acted as carriers, charging ten cents a pound for freight and mail.



Town realphoto view, Hazelton, BC, Coffee photographer, circa 1914.

In 1891, R S Sargent arrived in Hazelton. He opened a store which included the first post office, and he became the first postmaster on May 1, 1899. Then history repeated itself with another gold rush, this time to the Yukon. The restless miners of the Cariboo headed north over the old Collins Telegraph Trail, where 1,600 kilometres of telegraph wire had been strung through the wilds. While hiking this trail, my husband and I found old, tilted telegraph poles with rusted wire hanging in loose festoons, a rare glass insulator and the collapsed roof of the first of nine lineman cabins.

Once more, Hazelton saw pack trains carrying mail and freight up the Skeena, heading for Telegraph Creek, Dawson and the Yukon. Anywhere miners went, Jean Caux—aka Cataline—BC's most famous mule-train packer, followed. His pack trains consisted of sixty mules and horses, each carrying 100 to 150 kilograms. All trails left from Hazelton, which became known as the Pack-Train Capital of Canada.

It was assumed in 1903 that the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway would be coming through near Hazelton. A flurry of excitement erupted, and hundreds of settlers poured into the district, buying whatever land they could find. Everyone was certain there was a fortune to be made. Jobs were available at the Silver Standard Mine on Glen Mountain and the Roche de Boule Mine overlooking Hazelton. Both mines operated commercially from 1910 to 1918, shipping ore on the GTP. While hiking up Roche de Boule Mountain, Amarak, our large wolf/dog, treed a bear cub. In waist-high grass we couldn't see the mother, so we fast-tracked down the mountain.

Hazelton continued

While a steady stream of editorials complained about poor mail service, local newspapers acknowledged that the greatest handicap to development in the area was a lack of rail transportation. The arrival of steel would not only produce a steady mail service and greatly reduce the cost of freighting in goods, it would be the conduit for the district's ore. That meant the end of packing freight and mail on paddle steamers. Pack trains began hauling supplies for rail construction as well as mail until the railway was completed in 1914.

The first free mail delivery service in rural Canada was inaugurated on October 10, 1908. Burns Lake, Telkwa and Cedarvale established post offices in 1910; Terrace followed in 1912; Smithers in 1913; and Vanderhoof and Prince George in 1914. Such was the response that a mail car was added to the route on



A fabulous franking of Edwardian and Numeral stamps, dated Hazelton, Nov 7, 1904, on a bag tag addressed to Victoria. The block of eight 20-cent stamps is particularly unusual. The total postage paid was \$1.68 plus five cents for registration, enough to cover a weight of five pounds, four ounces. Furs, perhaps?

February 28, 1914. The population of the Bulkley Valley blossomed from 75 in 1905 to more than 1,200 people by 1920 and continued to grow. Postal conductors accompanied train mail, but were soon replaced by railway mail clerks, who sorted and cancelled mail. In later years, as the volume grew, only letters mailed at railway stations and all registered mail were cancelled in the RPO, increasing the rarity of these cancels for collectors.

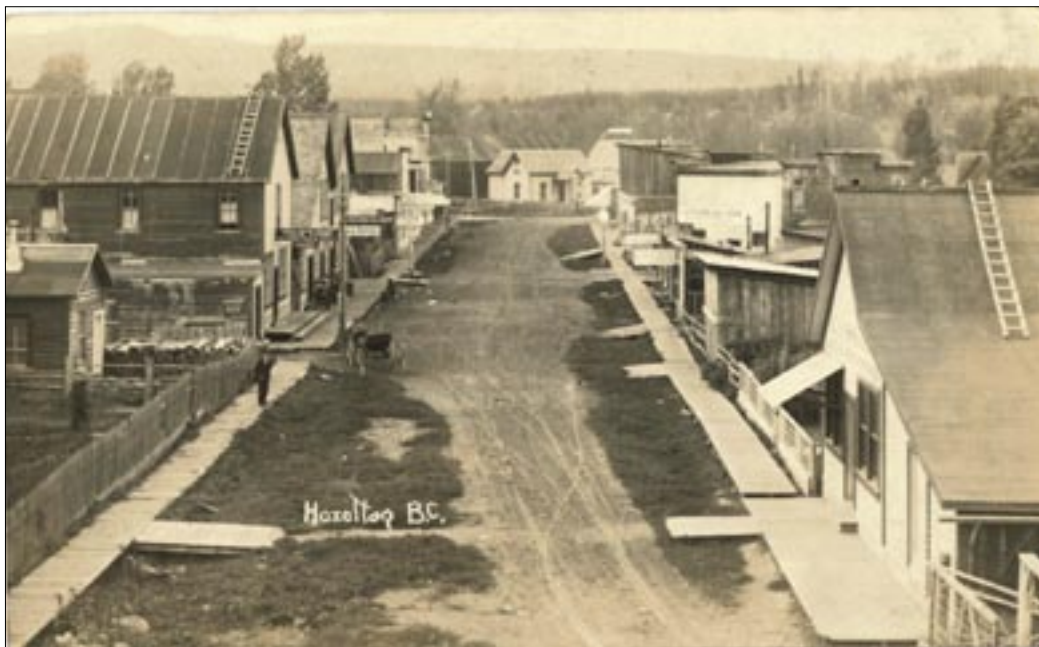
Mail was picked up on the fly using a catch arm on the side of the car, swung out by a mail clerk who, at the same time, kicked off a sack of mail for that place. This was a tricky manoeuvre, especially at night or in bad weather and at high speed. One thing is for sure: if the catch was missed, the train didn't stop! Rail delivery of mail lasted until 1971.

Construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific began in 1905 with a dynamic and visionary general manager named Charles Melville Hays. He envisioned a chain of resort hotels, matching what Canadian Pacific had built along its line, stretching all the way to the coast and culminating in the proposed Chateau Prince Rupert. As a result of these grandiose plans, the population of Prince Rupert, some 3,000 people in 1909, swelled in anticipation of the boom the town would undergo. However, because of the difficult terrain, especially between Prince Rupert and Hazelton, the line took four years to complete.

Hazelton continued

Extreme weather conditions and a shortage of workers made the company's position dire by 1912. That spring, Hays was in England trying to drum up financial support for the GTP, but was anxious to get back to Canada. He was invited by J Bruce Ismay, chairman of the White Star Line, to join him on the maiden voyage of its newest ship, the *RMS Titanic*. At 11:40 pm on April 14, the ship struck an iceberg and in less than three hours sank, taking Hays with it. His wife and daughter were helped into a lifeboat by Hays and survived.

Work on the railway continued, and on April 7, 1914, the last spike was driven home just east of what is now Fort Fraser. However, the start of WW1 in August 1914 severely impacted rail travel and settlement,



*Street realphoto view, Hazelton, BC, Coffee photographer, circa 1914.
All photos courtesy Tracy Cooper.*

and the loss of Hays proved a lasting blow. The company's finances deteriorated, and in July 1920, the GTP was placed under the management of a Crown corporation, the Canadian National Railway.

Despite its importance as a distribution center, Hazelton took a long time to get established. It remained mainly a place of temporary abode. Even the essentials were neglected. In the 1920s, one could still see Chinese residents delivering water door-to-door in oil cans filled from the river. Today, the town is incorporated and water is piped in from Hospital Lake. We lived only a short hike from Hospital Lake, where we enjoyed many winter skates.

The GTP was eventually built on the south side of the Bulkley River. This was a blow to Hazelton, which was on the north side, and threatened, for a time, the town's very existence. It caused two new communities—South Hazelton and New Hazelton—to come into existence, with direct access to the railway. "Old" Hazelton survived, however. While the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway may not have been successful as a national enterprise, locally it continued to be an important stimulus to the economy, a convenience to the citizens, and an influential factor in the distribution of mail.

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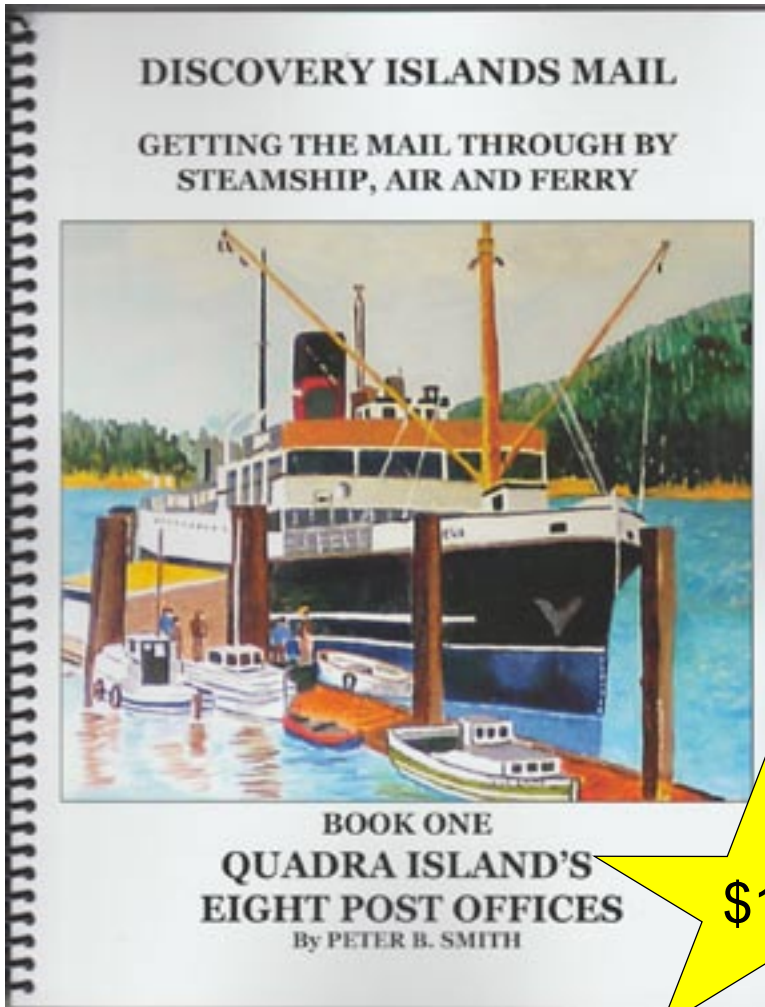
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