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Captain William Mitchell in Nanaimo, Vancouver's Island wrote a 3-page folded letter to his brother Charles in Charlestown, Massachusetts on August 18, 1853. William Mitchell (1802-1876) entered the service of the HBC in 1836, served on ships going between Britain and Vancouver Island, and then was mate and later master of several HBC coastal ships. This is the earliest reported cover from Nanaimo.

The cover is postmarked 1 OCT / SAN FRANCISCO CAL / PAID / 6 (in red). The cover is marked *Paid* (manuscript, probably by the writer) and 6 / 6 (in red). This probably means 6¢ postage with a second, darker 6 to reinforce this payment. From March 3, 1851, the US letter rate was 6¢ per ½ ounce for over 3,000 miles (10¢ if unpaid).

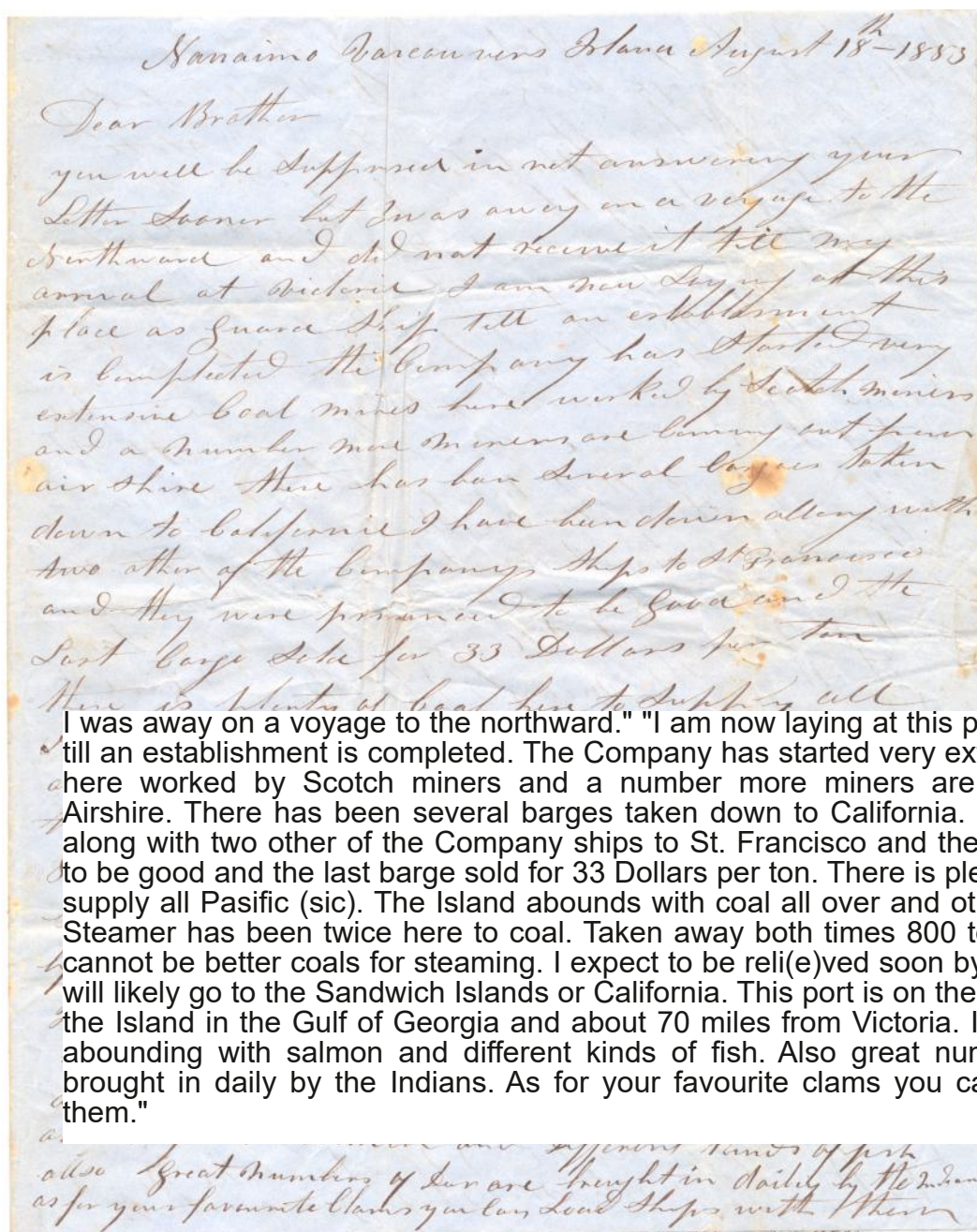
This letter was probably carried by HBC boat to connect with the steamship *Columbia*, which arrived from Astoria at San Francisco on September 30. It then went to Panama in the steamer *Pacific*, which departed San Francisco for Panama with mails on Saturday, October 1st.

One page from this correspondence is shown on page 1621, together with an extract that includes comments on the then-new settlement at Nanaimo.

Courtesy of Gray Scrimgeour

Contents

• An early cover	p 1620	• S.S Ramona	p 1635
• Gabriola Post Offices	p 1622	• 1939 Royal Visit	p 1636
• Colonial Transition Rates	p 1630	• Recent Sales Results	p 1637
• Robert Ward	p 1633		



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The Post Offices of Gabriola Island

by Brian Copeland

Gabriola Island is about 5 km. east of Nanaimo. Settlement began soon after the start of coal mining at Nanaimo in the 1850's. By 1874 there were 25 settlers on Gabriola.[1] The community at the south end of the island developed first, although a few settlers lived at the north end.[2] A steamship running between Victoria and Nanaimo passed by the island twice a week without stopping and so residents had to go to Nanaimo for their mail. Those at the south end had to travel about 15 to 20 km. by canoe or small boat to get to Nanaimo. An editorial in the Daily British Colonist in 1874 pointed out that regular visits to Nanaimo were often difficult and urged the authorities to establish regular mail service to the island.[1]

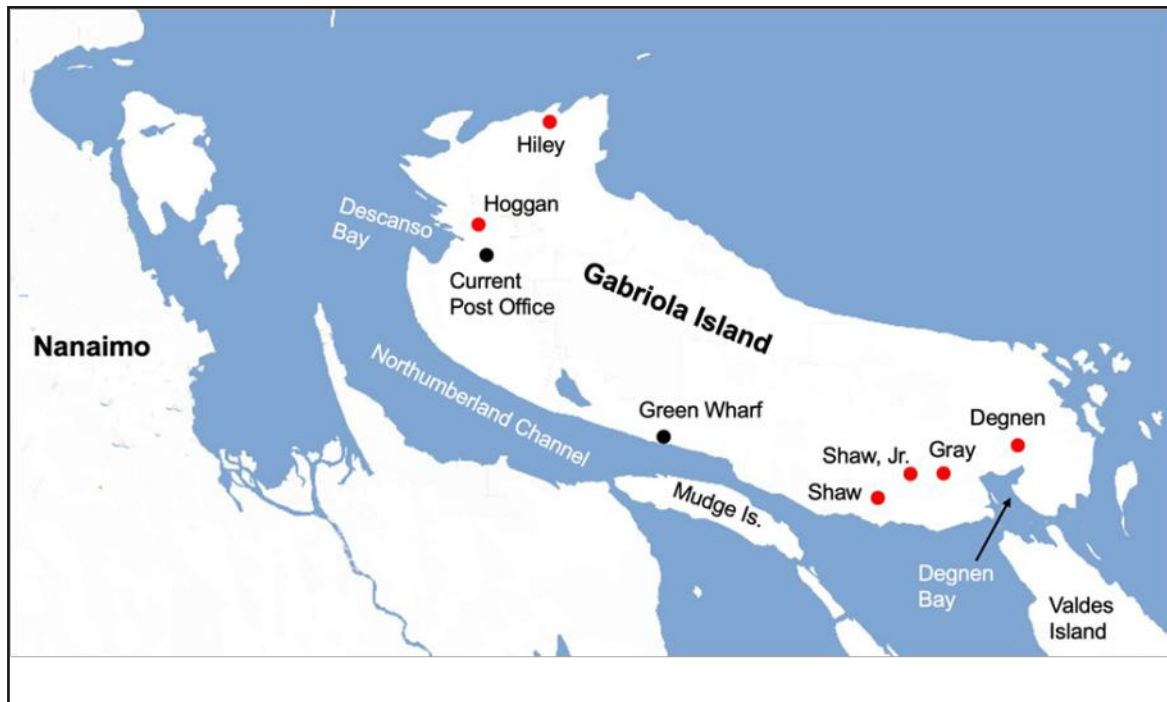


Figure 1. Map of Gabriola Island. Red dots indicate where some of the early postmasters lived (they are indicated by name). Hiley built a small post office near his home; the others ran the post office in their houses.

As was the practice in many small communities without a post office, local residents cooperated in dealing with the mail. According to June Lewis-Harrison's local history [3], two early settlers on the south end of the island, Thomas Degnen and Robert Gray, had boats and would carry mail to and from Nanaimo for their neighbours on the south end of the island. Members of the Hoggan family carried mail to and from Nanaimo for settlers on the north end.

Fig. 2 shows a post card sent to George Wake at Gabriola before the first post office opened.[4] His father, Captain Wake, was a teacher on the south end of Gabriola until 1878 [5], but the family lived at the north end of Valdes Island (near Gabriola). This card would have been delivered to Nanaimo and picked up either by Captain Wake or by one of the other settlers who lived at the south end of island.

The islanders were anxious to get their own post office. A proposal for an office was submitted by Post Office Inspector Wallace in 1878.[6] To support the post office, a wharf was needed for a steamship to stop and drop off the mail. With support from the B.C. Land and Works Department, a wharf was constructed in 1878 near the site of the "Green Wharf" in Fig. 1.[7] However the proposal for a post office was nevertheless turned down.

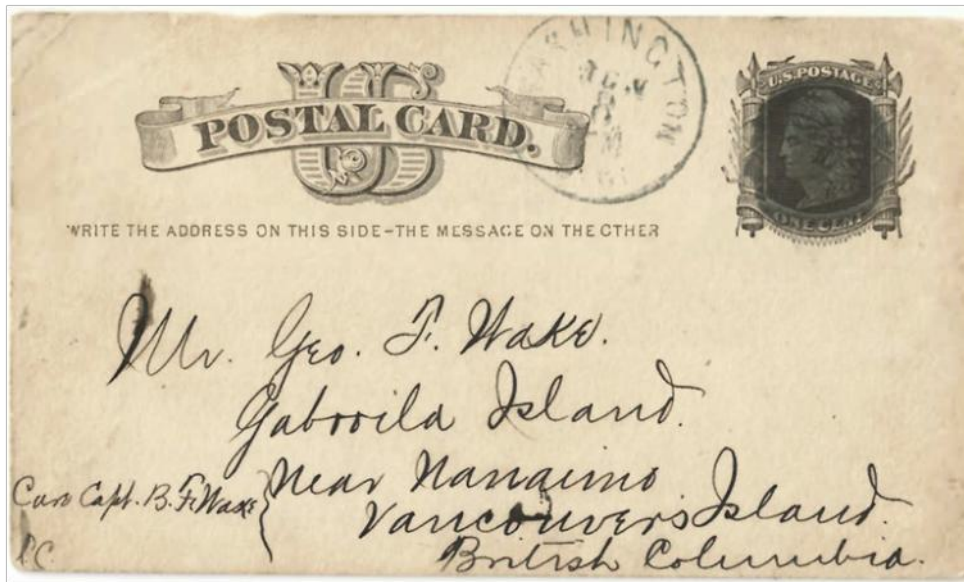


Figure 2. Card sent from Washington DC on June 8, 1877 to George F. Wake c/o Captain B.A. Wake at "Gabriola Island Near Nanaimo..." There is a Victoria June 21, 1877 transit mark on the back. Courtesy of Tracy Cooper.

Residents were unhappy with the quality of the wharf. Access was difficult and within a year it was in poor condition. With BC government support, a new and better wharf was constructed in 1883 about 200 metres closer to Nanaimo than the original wharf. Over time the wharf at this location was known as the Gabriola Wharf, the Big Wharf, the Government Wharf, and eventually Green Wharf.[7]

Post Office Inspector Wallace sent in a new proposal for a post office around the same time as the new wharf was constructed. This time it was successful.[6] On May 9, 1884, Wallace's successor, Acting Post Office Inspector E.H. Fletcher, placed an ad for "Mail Contracts" in the Daily British Colonist inviting sealed tenders for carrying mails "three times a week between Nanaimo and Victoria, calling twice a week both ways at North Saanich, Cowichan, Maple Bay, Burgoyne Bay, Salt Spring Island, Chemainus and Gabriola Island...." The contract was awarded to the People's Steam Navigation Co. which was run by J.W. Turner who operated the steamer *Amelia*. [8]

The Gabriola Island post office opened on Oct. 1, 1884 with Alexander Shaw as postmaster.[9]. He operated the office out of his house (the approximate location is shown on the map in Fig. 1).[10] The Postmaster General (PMG) Reports from 1886-1888 show him having a contract to carry the mail between the wharf and the Gabriola Island post office, a distance of 2.5 miles. The mail was delivered to the wharf by steamship.

In 1887 his son, Alexander Shaw, Jr., took over as postmaster. He also had a contract to carry mail from the Gabriola wharf to the post office in his house for most of his time in office. But for 5 months (May 1 to Sept. 30, 1889) he had to go to Nanaimo to get the mail.[11] The People's Steam Navigation Co., which had been carrying mail to the island, faced strong competition from the E&N Railway and lost business on the Victoria to Nanaimo run. The company shut down and their contract to carry mail by steamship between Victoria and Nanaimo ended April 30, 1889.[11,12] By October 1889, the E&N Railway had the steamship contract and operated the steamer *Isabel* which stopped at way ports between Victoria and Nanaimo and between Comox and Nanaimo.[11,13] Once this contract was in place, Shaw was again picking up the mail from the Government Wharf on Gabriola. In later years, other steamships operated by the E&N Railway and by the Sidney and Nanaimo Transportation Co. stopped at Gabriola. Lewis-Harrison [3] reports that early residents recall the steamers *City of Nanaimo* and *Iroquois* stopping regularly at Gabriola at various times, and this is supported by sailing notices in the Colonist over the years.

On May 1, 1890, James Gray became postmaster. He was the son of another early settler (Robert Gray). The post office moved to his home, which was not too far from the Shaw home. He also had the contract to carry mail from the wharf to the post office. Fig. 3 shows a rare early Gabriola Island registered cover from Gray's time as postmaster. Because the outgoing postmark is light, I have shown an enhanced version of the cancel.



Figure 3. Registered cover sent from Gabriola Island on Feb. 14, 1891 to London, Ont. via Victoria and Ottawa. The registration fee was 5 cents and postage was 3 cents.

James Degnen became postmaster in 1895 and served until 1906. The PMG reports indicate that his contract was to carry the mails for a distance of 4.5 miles from the wharf to the post office (in his house). This is consistent with the map in Fig. 1. James Gray became postmaster again in 1907 and served until just before the office at the south end of the island closed. Fig. 4 shows a cover from early in Gray's second term as postmaster.



Figure 4. Registered cover sent from Gabriola Island on April 6, 1908 to Hamilton via Nanaimo. The registration fee was still 5 cents, but the domestic postage rate had fallen to 2 cents on Jan. 1, 1899.

The Gabriola Island post office served the south end of island. Travel across the island was not easy as the roads and trails were poor. People at the north end continued to get their mail from Nanaimo. Fig. 5 shows a cover sent to James McLay in 1889. He and his wife Catherine came to Canada from Scotland in 1872 and settled on Gabriola. They had four children and lived on a farm near the present-day Sandwell Park. The steep hill on the North Road near the site of their farm is known as McLay Hill. Catherine died of tuberculosis in 1883.[14]. James appears in the 1891 census as a 52-year old farmer and widower on Gabriola. The cover is addressed to him in his role on the board of trustees for the North Gabriola school district. But his mail went to Nanaimo rather than to the post office at the south end of the island.

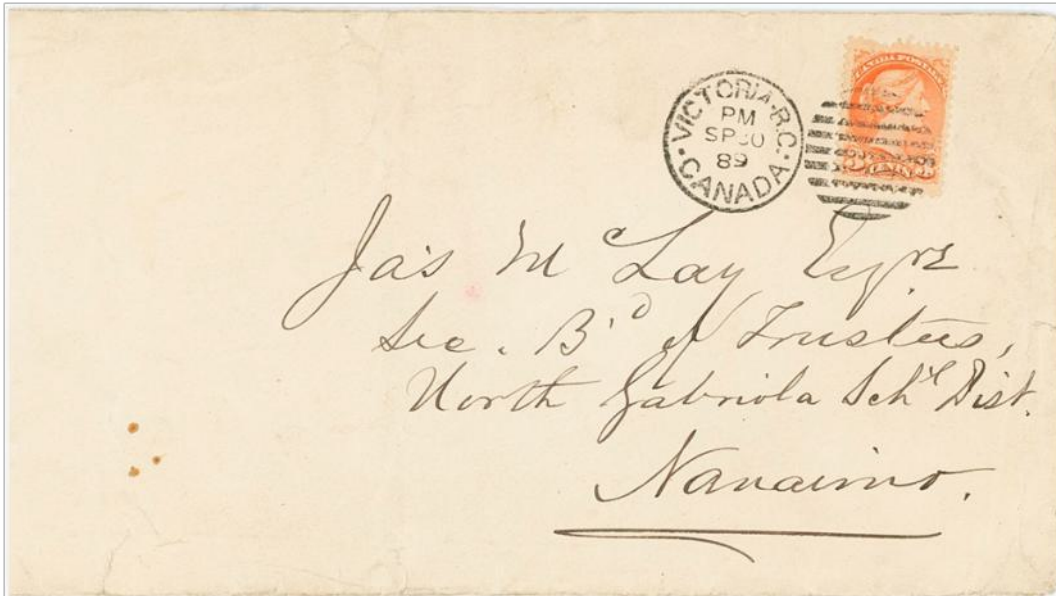


Figure 5. Cover sent from the Education Office in Victoria on Sept. 30, 1889 to James McLay, Secretary, Board of Trustees, North Gabriola School District.

An application for a post office with the name "North Gabriola" was sent to Ottawa on July 17, 1899. Post Office Inspector Fletcher noted that there were 9 families and about 10 single men at the north end of the island who would be served by the office. The proposed postmaster was James McLay. However Fletcher was not supportive.[6] He said, "The settlers at North Gabriola visit Nanaimo at least once a week for supplies &c. and the necessity for a Post Office at that point is not very great." The proposal was not successful.

A post office eventually opened at the north end of the island on Aug. 1, 1908. Robert (Bob) Hoggan had the contract to carry the mail from Nanaimo, a distance of 4 miles across the water. (PMG reports 1909 - 1918). The first postmaster was Mrs. Martha Holm, who was Hoggan's sister. Hoggan became postmaster on Aug. 1, 1908 and he continued in that position until he resigned in 1917. Bob Hoggan was the son of Alexander Hoggan, an early settler on Gabriola. He married Rosinda Blakey in 1913. She had come from England to teach school. Tragically, she died in the sinking of the *Empress of Ireland* in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1914. [15]

Fig. 6 shows a card sent from North Gabriola to Mrs. James Gray, South Gabriola Island. Mrs. Gray was the wife of the postmaster at the south end of the Island. Mail between the two Gabriola post offices went via Nanaimo. The card was carried to Nanaimo on Bob Hoggan's boat, and then went by steamship from Nanaimo to the Government Wharf on Gabriola. From there, James Gray carried it to the post office in his home. This card does not have a transit mark, but I have another card from the same correspondence that has a Nanaimo transit mark, confirming the routing.

Although the North Gabriola post office was open for 23 years, surviving covers and cards are very scarce. Annual postal revenue was low and ranged from \$66 to \$146. [6]

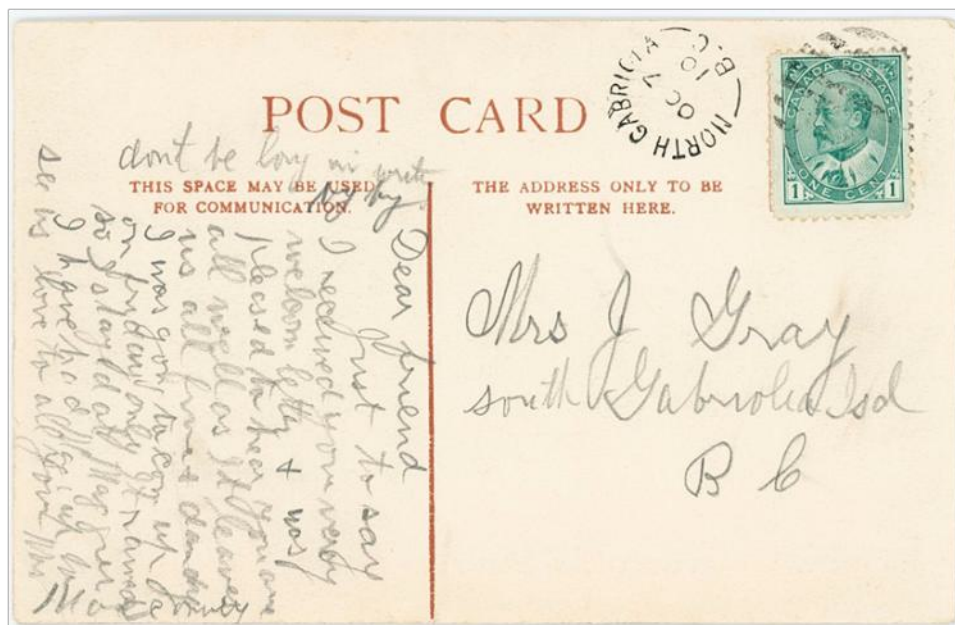


Figure 6. Card sent on Oct. 7, 1910 from the North Gabriola post office to the Gabriola Island post office at the other end of the island.



Figure 7. Post card showing the ferry Atrevida arriving at Gabriola.

There were two post offices on the island until 1931. That was the year that the government decided to support a ferry service connecting Gabriola and Nanaimo. The location of the ferry terminal on Gabriola was a major source of rivalry between the communities at the north and south ends of the island. After much political debate and lobbying, the government decided to locate the ferry terminal at the north end. Tenders to operate a ferry service from the north end to Nanaimo were called for on Feb. 23, 1931. The existing government dock at Descanso Bay (see the map in Fig. 1) underwent extensive upgrading to support the new ferry. The first ferry, the *Atrevida*, went into service in August 1931.[3,16,17] Fig. 7 shows a picture of the ferry.

James Gray, the postmaster at the south end, retired in 1930. Roads and transportation on the island had improved to a level that led the Postmaster General's office to decide that one post office on the island would be sufficient. Mails were now going to be carried by the ferry and so it made sense to locate the post office at the north end near the ferry dock. Residents at the south end of the island would be served by rural mail delivery. The Gabriola Island post office (at the south end of the island) officially closed on June 15, 1931. The community at the south end was not happy about this.[3] Fig. 8 shows a fairly late cover from this office (such covers are surprisingly scarce). Fig. 9 shows an interesting card addressed to Mr. and Mrs. William Nairn Shaw, R.R. 1, Gabriola Island. They lived at the south end of the island.[18] The card was sent on June 16, 1931. This was the day after the Gabriola Island post office was closed and so it was received at North Gabriola on June 20, 1931 and then carried to the south end by rural mail delivery.

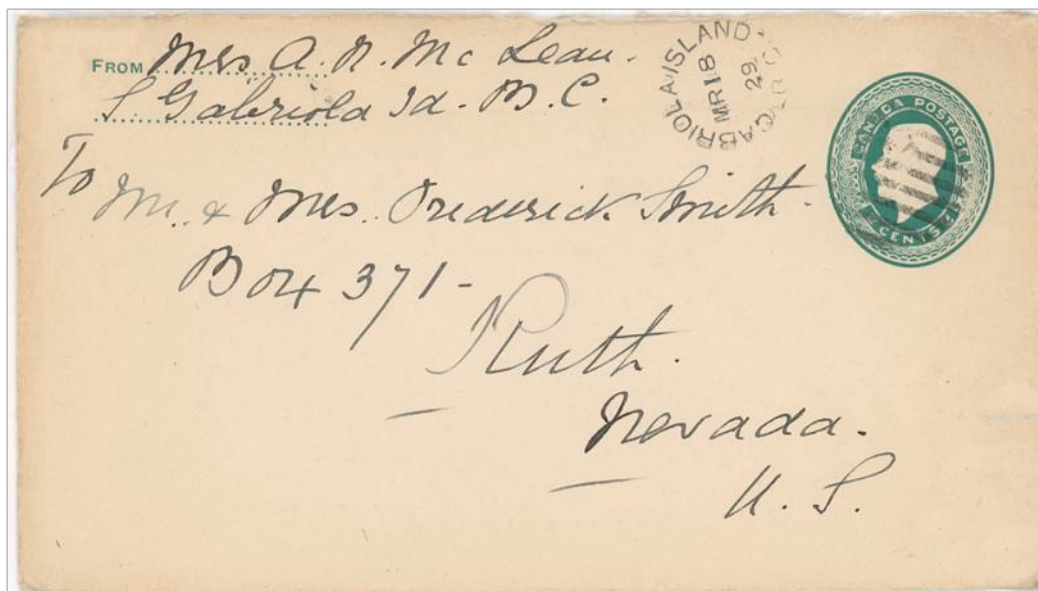


Figure 8. A late example of a cover from the Gabriola Island post office sent March 18, 1929 to Nevada.

Figure 9. Card sent from Woodland, California on June 16, 1931 to Gabriola Island. The Gabriola Island post office closed the day before it was sent and so the card was received at North Gabriola on June 20, 1931.



Figure 10. Gabriola (Oct. 11, 1932) to Victoria.

The post office at the north end became the only post office on the island and its name was changed to reflect that. On Sept. 1, 1931, the name of the North Gabriola post office changed to Gabriola. Fig. 10 shows the earliest surviving cover from the Gabriola post office that I am aware of, and Fig. 11 shows a registered cover.



Figure 11. Registered cover from Gabriola sent on Jan. 27, 1948 to Tacoma.

George Walton Dixon had succeeded Bob Hoggan as postmaster at North Gabriola in 1917.[9,19] He retired a few months after the name change to Gabriola and the start of rural mail delivery. He was followed by several postmasters [9], and the office moved to different locations on the north end of the island as the postmasters changed. Several of these postmasters held the job for just 1 or 2 years. The longest serving postmasters after George Dixon were Thomas P. Taylor and Frank Hiley. T.P. Taylor was postmaster from 1935 to 1948. The post office was in his house not too far from where the current post office is today.[10] Frank Hiley became postmaster in 1952. He was instructed to build a free-standing post office. It was a small wooden shed located at the corner of Seagirt and Berry Point Roads (labelled on the map as "Hiley"). [10] Fig. 12 shows a cover sent during his time as postmaster. The Gabriola split circle postmark was used at least into the 1970's. In 1970, the federal government built a new post office closer to the ferry. It is located at the junction of North and South roads, less than 1 km. from the ferry dock.

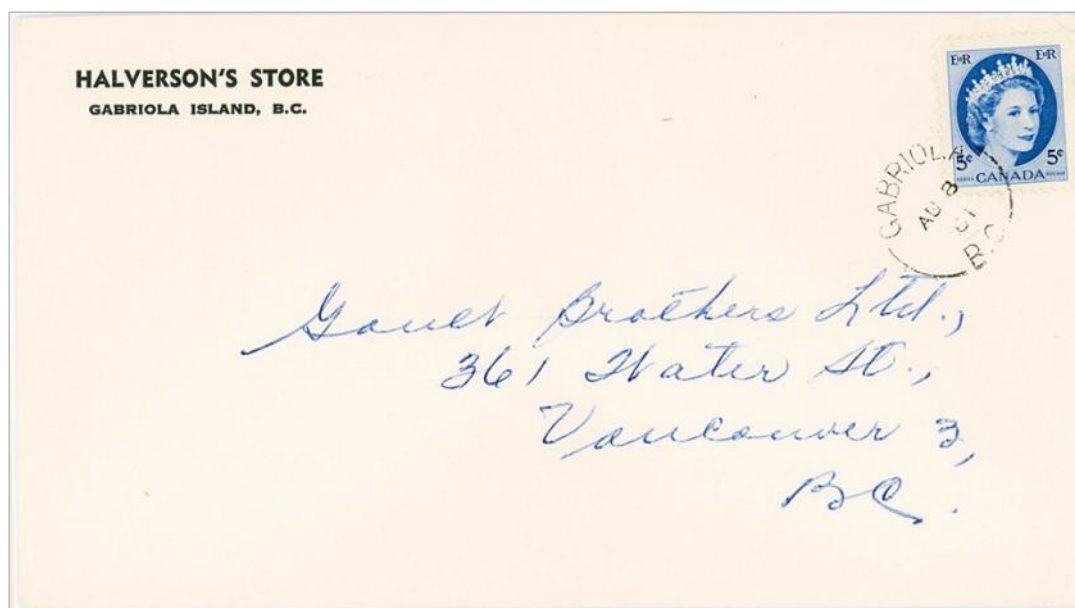


Figure 12. Gabriola (Aug. 8, 1961) to Vancouver.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Tim Woodland for help in obtaining research material and for suggestions that improved the manuscript.

Notes and References

- [1] Daily British Colonist, July 11, 1874.
- [2] The island has a northwest to southeast orientation, but the part of the island closest to Nanaimo became known as the north end, and the other end (near Valdes Island) is known as the south end.
- [3] Lewis-Harrison, June, *The People of Gabriola: A History of our Pioneers*, Self-published, 1982.
- [4] A different card from this correspondence is shown in Scott, Andrew, "Early mail to Gabriola and Valdes islands," *British Columbia Postal History Newsletter*, Vol.28. No.3, Sept. 2019. Andrew provides details on the recipient. 3 surviving cards from this correspondence have been recorded.
- [5] Poulton, Lynda, "Capt. B.A. Wake and his family," *SHALE* 5, pp.3–13, December 2002.
- [6] Cooper, Tracy, *British Columbia Post Office Revenues, 1871-1921*.
- [7] Gehlbach, J., "Gabriola's wharves—Northumberland Channel," *SHALE* 27, pp.5–17, December 2013.
- [8] Government of Canada, *Report of the Postmaster General, 1886, 1887*.
- [9] Information on postmasters and opening and closing dates of post offices is from the database on the Library and Archives Canada website.
- [10] Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, cited above, provides biographical details about some of the postmasters, especially in chapter 30, which discusses mail service to the island. The Gabriola Museum website has a map showing where the early settlers lived. <https://gabriolamuseum.org/history/history-of-the-people-and-community/>
- [11] Government of Canada, *Report of the Postmaster General, 1890*.
- [12] See *Victoria Daily Colonist*, May 19, 1889; and Farrell, David. "Keeping the Local Economy Afloat: Canadian Pacific Navigation and Ship-owning in Victoria, 1883-1901." *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord* 6(1), 1996, pp. 35-44.
- [13] See regular ads with timetables for the Steamship Isabel in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* from Oct. 22, 1889 (p.3) and later. The Isabel was operating prior to getting the mail contract, but it is not clear if it stopped at Gabriola. See for example, *Victoria Daily Colonist*, March 26 1889.
- [14] See the Gabriola Museum website for a brief biography of the McLay family. <https://gabriolamuseum.org/james-and-catherine-mclay/>
- [15] Information on Robert Hoggan and his wife Rosinda is available on [Ancestry.ca](https://www.ancestry.ca)
- [16] Gehlbach, J., "Gabriola's wharves—Descanso Bay", *SHALE* 27, pp.46–56, December 2013
- [17] Clapp, Frank A., *Ministry of Transportation and Highways Inland and Coastal Ferries*, Government of British Columbia, 1981.
- [18] Gehlbach, J., "Gabriola's industrial past—the brickyard," *SHALE* 15, pp.3–35, May 2007.
- [19] Lewis-Harrison in *The People of Gabriola* (cited above) says that Thomas Dixon handled the mail at North Gabriola after Hoggan. However, Library and Archives Canada lists George W. Dixon as postmaster, and both the 1921 and 1931 censuses report George Dixon's occupation as postmaster (a 1916 voter's list indicates that he was a farmer at North Gabriola). He and his family came to Canada from England around 1907. His son was John Thomas Dixon. He is listed as a labourer at the brickyard in the 1921 census, but possibly he helped with the mail at some point. I have not been able to determine the location of Dixon's house, but Nick Doe says that a map from the 1930's shows a short trail labelled "Dixon" heading north from close to where the current post office is located. See Nick Doe, "Gabriola and Mudge road names," <https://www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp515.pdf>

We note with sadness, the passing of study group member Dr. Brian Plain. Brian was known for his generosity with his knowledge and his readiness to lend a hand.



Transitional Period – Colonial Postal to Dominion Postal Rates - July 20, 1871 to Aug 16, 1871

(also hard life on early Vancouver Island)

by Tracy Cooper

I recently picked up this cover from Ebay UK and was delighted to add it to my collection of covers from the very earliest period of British Columbia as a province of the Dominion of Canada.

This cover demonstrates how postal rates were applied within the Colony of British Columbia in the very short period between when British Columbia joined Confederation (July 20, 1871) and when official postal instructions and the first Canadian stamps arrived in Victoria. (Aug. 16, 1871)



Figure 1. Cover mailed at
Victoria July 29, 1871 to
Derby, England.

British Columbia entered into formal postal relations with the United States on July 1, 1870. This cover shows that despite BC's entry into Confederation, the Colonial rates of postage, for letters to England still applied.

An analysis of this interim period covers shows the following.

The 5c BC O/P Colonial postage stamp, cancelled with a Numeral 35, showed that the 5 cent requirement for internal postage to be pre-paid was still being applied.

The 6c Lincoln of 1870, affixed in Victoria, paid the international rate as per the Postal Convention with the United States of July 1st, 1870, specifically:

"Postal Convention between the United States and the Provinces of Vancouver's Island and British Columbia.

Signed at Washington on the 9th of June 1870 and at Victoria on the 25th July 1870.

The authorized weight of a single international letter shall be 15 grams in the United States and half an ounce in Vancouver's Island and British Columbia.

The postage on a single international letter shall be 6 cents if prepaid at the mailing office in either country and 10 cents if postage unpaid.

Prepaid letters dispatched from one country to the other shall be plainly stamped with the words 'PAID ALL' in red ink in the upper right-hand corner of the address; in addition to the date stamp of the office of origin."

Interestingly enough, the Dominion letter rate from Canada to the United Kingdom was as of Jan. 1, 1870 6¢ per half ounce direct and 8¢ per half ounce via the USA. A two cent, per half ounce advantage if mailed from British Columbia through the United States instead of a letter being sent to the UK from Canada but passing through the United States.

Addressee: Mrs. Musters/Kirk Langley/Derby/England
Kirk Langley being an ancient Parish in the county of Derbyshire.

The writer of this letter was W.C. Musters, a farmer at Comox to his mother and the contents details his troubles as a farmer in remote Vancouver Island.

Franking: 5c British Columbia O/P tied by Numeral 35
6c Lincoln 1870 issue cancelled with indistinct cork

Routing:

Letter written at Comox on July 18, 1871

Posted: **VICTORIA**/B.C. double oval in blue JUL/29/1871

Transit: OLYMPIA/W.T.Y. 23mm CDS AUG/3

Transit: CHICAGO/PAID 25mm CDS in red AUG/15

Received: D2/DERBY 14mm CDS AU 28/71

It is likely that this letter went in a closed bag via Windsor and then onward to Derby as noted by the 6 cent rate. Also unusual was to have the original letter enclosed.:

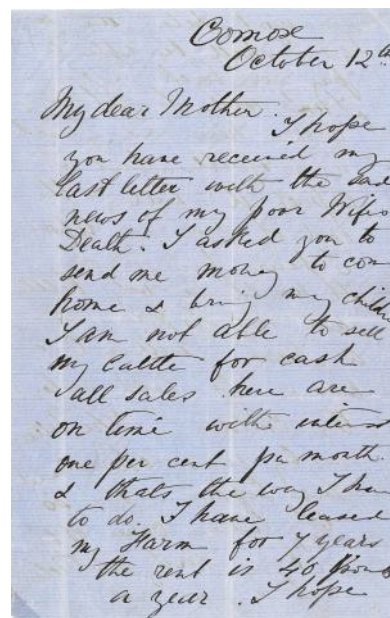
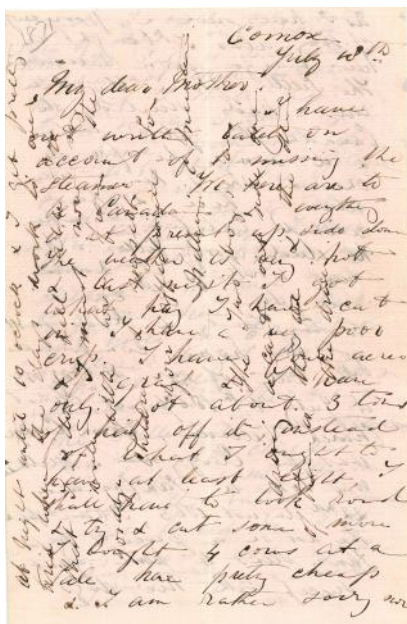


Figure 2. Reduced images of letters. The content is shown on the following page.

"Comox
July 18th, 1871

My Dear Mother

I have not written lately on account of its missing the Steamer. We here are to be Canadians and everything at present is upside down. The weather is very hot and last night I got what hay I have cut in. I have a very poor crop. I have four acres of grass and I have only got about 3 tons of hay off it; instead of what I ought to have at least eight. I shall have to look round and try and cut some more. I bought 4 cows at a sale here pretty cheap and I am rather sorry now as I have such a poor crop of hay. Also I bought a new wagon from Victoria. The settler where the sale was had started to Canada to get a wife and it seems he found one and she and him were returning here and had reached California when she died. Poor fellow has been working very hard over since. I came to the county and had just go this home comfortable. The date of our marriage is July 8th 1867 at Christ Church Victoria. Dean Cridge was the Clergyman. Gertrude was born in San Francisco 22nd August 1863. I have put the rest on a piece of paper. Henry seems to have great success with his dogs. I wish I could only have one of them out here. Poor old Sal is deaf blind. I have not liked to shoot her but I shall have to do so as I can't get any game without a dog and I don't shoot for pleasure but for meat. I am very glad you saved the few silver things as I shall have something to give my children. We have no Clergyman here. The Bishop went home to England. I believe to get money. I hardly believe in any church now. The way the settlements are neglected. There are 20 children in Comox and no Clergyman and even the burial ground is not fenced in and the pigs go and root up the graves. You would fancy than in your 10 years we could have a Clergyman here but when I come home I shall be able to tell you more. Only I believe less in Clergyman than ever. I did as most of them out here we must endeavor to make money and don't attend to the duties little Gertrude has had a bad leg, she let a saucepan full and burnt her leg but now it is healing well. We have splendid hot weather here now and the grain begins to change colour. I never can find a time to write to any of my sisters, they will think me very selfish. I never can get any cows home at night until 10 o'clock and I get pretty tired when the days work is over that I don't feel able to write. I must now say goodbye with love from the children. I myself with affection.

Love William C. Muster"

Comox
October 12th, 1871

"My Dear Mother

I hope you have received my last letter with the sad news of my poor Wife's death. I asked you to send me money come home and bring my children. I am not able to sell my cattle for cash. All sales here are on time with interest one per cent per month and that's the way I have to do. I have leased my farm for 7 years and the rent is 40 pounds a year. I hope you won't delay the money as I shall be able to pay you back again. I wish to get away from here as quick as possible but I expect it will be the end of October before I hear from you. It would be very little use my stopping on a farm without a woman to look after the children. The little baby was christened Lucy Sophia. She is being taken care of by a lady in Victoria who has been wanting to adopt her but I could not agree to that so I have to pay 15 dollars a month but she will be too young for us to bring to England and I am sure they will be kind to her. There is a settler here expecting to go to England and I shall try and arrange to come with her as he will be a great help. I don't know what to tell you more my dear Mother excepting we are all miserable here.

Affectional Love.
William C. Muster

(We hope with Gods will to spend Christmas in old England)"

The Mysterious Robert Ward

by Gray Scrimgeour

I have a rather ordinary 1895 cover (Fig. 1) from the Henry Morgan correspondence that is related to a prominent but somewhat mysterious Victoria businessman, Robert Ward. Henry Morgan compiled a series of Canadian Who's Who-type books. In preparation, Morgan distributed questionnaires seeking information for his books. His filing system was to save the covers of the questionnaire answers, and to add any additional notes to these envelopes. My cover contains two letters written by R. Edward Gosnell [1], the first librarian of the British Columbia Legislature. It also contains five tiny notes Morgan wrote about Ward.

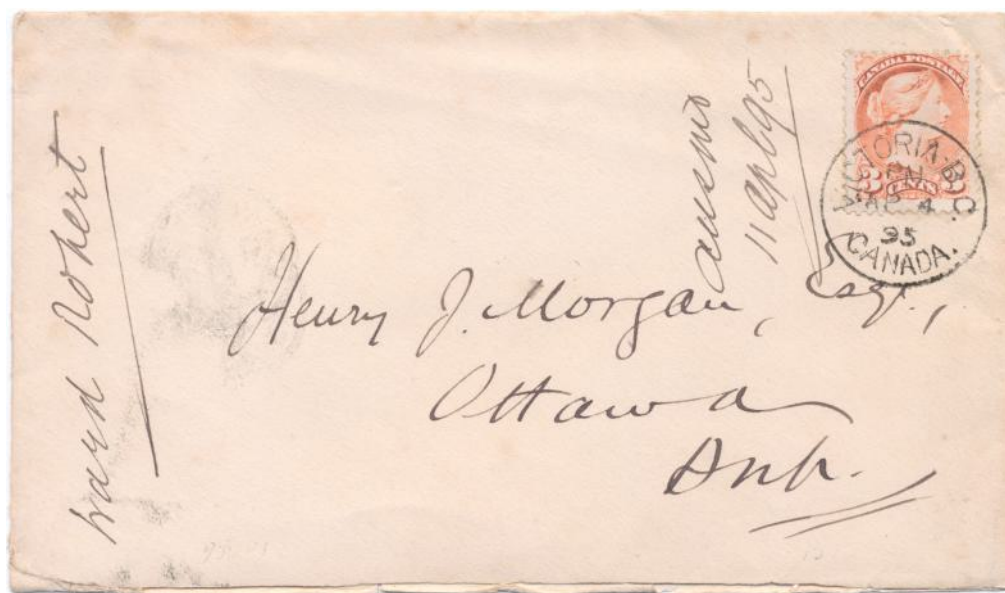


Figure 1. Cover sent by R.E. Gosnell in Victoria to Henry Morgan in Ottawa, mailed April 4, 1895.

Ward's entry in Morgans' next book—*The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: a Handbook of Canadian Biography*, W. Briggs (Toronto) 1898—starts:

WARD, Robert, merchant, was b. and ed. in Eng. Coming to B. C., 1870, he was at first employed in the Auditor-Genl.'s office in Victoria. Subsequently, he joined the commercial house of Stahlschmidt & Co., and in the course of time acquired sole interest in the business. Extending and enlarging its operations, he finally merged it into Robt. Ward & Co. (Ltd.), of which incorporation he is President...

Ward's birth place and birth date are missing in Morgan's book.

There are numerous online references to Ward, many related to his office building and residences. The Victoria Heritage Foundation[2] reports that Ward was born in Winton, Hants, England circa 1849, and died in-1928, and married Mary Pauline King (b. London, England c.1856–1934) in Victoria in 1876. This is the only reference I could find with these dates. Apparently Ward came to Canada in 1870. Gregson[3] says that Ward and family left suddenly in the early 1900s, when Ward was "at the height of his career ... without any explanation and never returned."

Gosnell's first letter (dated April 4, 1895, Fig. 2) says "I enclose you a sketch of Robt. Ward supplied by himself." The second Gosnell letter—dated April 19, 1894 (error for 1895)—adds some mystery.

"I am in receipt of your favr the 11th inst., and beg to state that in my opinion it would be useless to enquire of R.W. the date & place of his birth, as from what I understand it is a matter of some delicacy with him and I am quite sure the omission was purposely made."

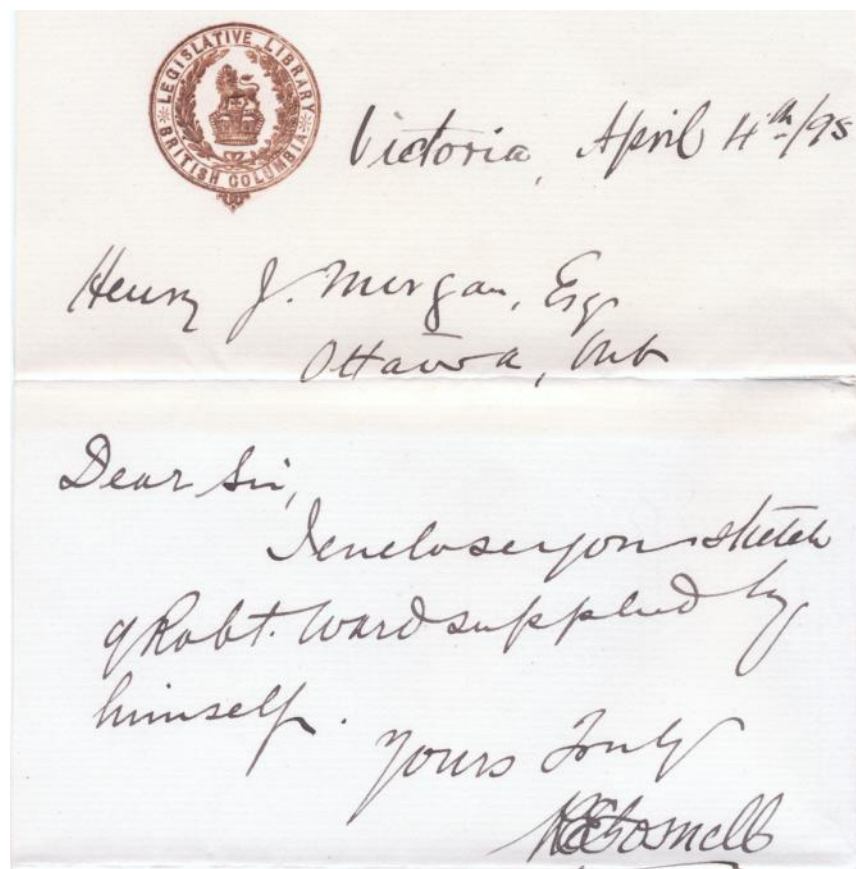


Figure 2. Portion of the first letter sent by R.E. Gosnell.

Morgan's notes about Ward include statements such as "has been Pres. Of B.C. Bd of Trade," "Consul for Sweden & Norway for BC" and "head of Robt Ward & Co. commission merchant & importers of Victoria & London."

Robert Ward's efforts were aided by his brother William Curtis Ward (1842–1922) who was manager of the Bank of British Columbia in Victoria for many years⁴.

I have conducted many online and book searches for an explanation of why Ward went from Canada to England or any reason why he did not want his biographic information known but found no answer.

References:

- [1]. David Mattison, "GOSNELL, R. EDWARD," in Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 16, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, accessed May 12, 2026, https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/gosnell_r_edward_16E.html.
- [2]. Victoria Heritage Foundation, <https://victoriaheritagefoundation.ca/rockland/1249-rockland-avenue/>
- [3]. H. Gregson, A History of Victoria, 1842–1970, Victoria Observer Publishing Co. Ltd., Victoria, (1970).
- [4]. <https://victoriaheritagefoundation.ca/rockland/1021-gillespie-place/>

Some
Favourite
B.C.
Pictorials



The S. S. Ramona

by Morris Beattie

It is always fun to find an auction lot that makes you aware of something that is a bit uncommon such as a relatively unknown coastal steamer that played a small part in the Klondike gold rush [1]. Such was the case for the c1905 postcard showing the steamer *S.S. Ramona*, (Figure 1) that appeared as an auction lot (No. 37) on the All Nations site on June 13, 2026. The listing shows a view of the sternwheeler *Ramona* on the Fraser River near New Westminster. The message at the bottom of the card mentions *S.S. Beaver* as being similar to the *Ramona*.



Figure 1. Postcard showing the S.S. Ramona sailing along the Fraser River.

The *Ramona* was built at Portland, Oregon in 1892, and until 1898 worked on the Willamette River. In 1898, with the coming of the Alaska Gold Rush, *Ramona* was sent north to Alaska to work on the Stikine River, where there was an effort being made to develop an alternative "All-Canadian" route to the Klondike gold fields. While the CPR was focussed on having the distinction of having an "all CPR" route from the southern coast to Stikine and on to Glenora, the *Ramona* left Wrangell, Alaska on May 2, 1898 ahead of the CPR steamer, completing the trip in four days.



Figure 2. S.S. Ramona moored at Salem, Oregon. (Wikipedia).

Finally, the *Ramona* was transferred to the Fraser River to replace the steamer *Edgar*. On April 17, 1901, while in service on the Fraser River near Fort Langley, *Ramona*'s boiler exploded, killing at least four people.

The *Ramona* was repaired following the boiler explosion and returned to service. The vessel had several more incidents from which she survived, including an earlier event of getting stranded on the Stikine River and later striking the Mission railway bridge in 1903, but finally, April 22, 1908, she sank at Wharton's Landing near the mouth of the Harrison River.

The report of the Canadian steamboat inspector summarized the end of the *Ramona* as follows:

"April 22, 1909. Steamship Ramona, plying on Fraser River, while returning to New Westminster, when near Wharton's landing, ran on a snag, striking her midship on port side. She immediately sank becoming a total loss."

1939 Royal Visit

The July 28 issue of Canadian Stamp News included an article about stamps and covers related to the 1947 Royal Family visit to Africa. It reminded us of the 1939 Royal Family visit to Canada. Covers resulting from this visit exist, such as the incoming example shown in Figure 1. No articles regarding this visit and how it relates to B.C. postal history are noted in the newsletter index. Either we have no royalists in the group or such collectors have not chosen to write about it. Here is a challenge - does anyone have additional B.C. material for this trip and if so please share it.



Figure 1. Cover mailed aboard the 1939 Royal Train addressed to Vancouver.



Figure 2. Stamp issued in 1986 depicting the 1939 Royal Train, CPR locomotive 2850 in its Royal Train livery.

Recent Sales Results from Hugo Deshaye



Figure 1. June 22, auction no 686,
Lot 14.

Cover from Fort Steele via Golden
to England dated Aug 13, 1889.
Sold for \$200.

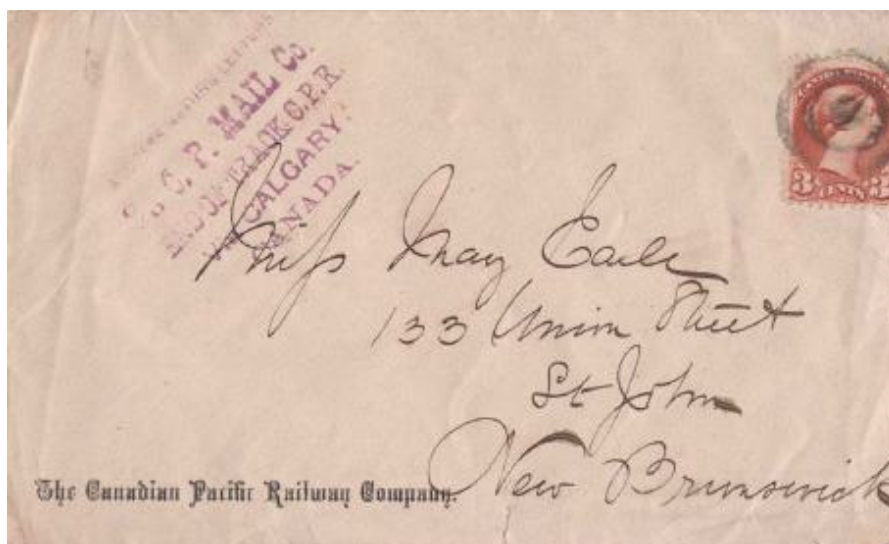


Figure 2. June 29, auction 687,
lot 11.

End of track cover dated 1884
from the May Earle
correspondence. Comments on
this correspondence previously
included in September 2018 BC
Postal History Newsletter.
Sold for \$2000.