TRANSATLANTIC MAIL STUDY GROUP

of the

British North America Philatelic Society

Newsletter No. 39 Jack Arnell, Chairman March 1993

THE DISCOVERY OF THE WRECK OF THE COLLINS *PACIFIC*

In March 1993, the Bermuda Maritime Museum hosted a joint conference of the Conference of American Maritime Museums and the North American Society of Oceanic History. The proceedings of the conference have been published in the BMM's *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History*. One of the papers presented was of particular interest to transatlantic mail collectors and I have extracted the gist of it below.

On 23 January 1856, the Collins Line *Pacific* departed Liverpool on her regularly-scheduled transatlantic crossing to New York. She never arrived. Three days later, the new Cunard steamship *Persia* left Liverpool on her maiden voyage to New York. She arrived on 9 February, several days after her expected arrival; her unusually slow crossing, a result of encountering massive ice fields and even suffering minor damage from colliding with floating ice along her path. She brought no news of the *Pacific*.

Days, then weeks, went by with no news of the missing steamer. For a while, there were frequent rumours of wreckage that must be from the *Pacific*; of the sighting of a steamer in distress along the route supposedly taken by the *Pacific*. One account insisted that she had been positively identified off the Irish coast, near Waterford. But not a single rumour could be verified, and after several months had elapsed, there still was no clear indication of what had happened. Both the American and British governments sent expeditions that ranged many thousands of miles over the Atlantic Ocean in search of the missing transatlantic liner; they returned empty-handed.

Finally, by default, it was agreed that the *Pacific* must have gone down in mid-Atlantic after colliding with an ice floe. The Cunard *Persia* had suffered such an accident, but was thought to have survived only because she was iron-hulled, so that damage was confined largely to her huge side paddlewheels. The *Pacific*, also a side-wheeler, was nearly as large and as powerful as the *Persia*, but she was far more vulnerable. The sheathing of her hull, her main frames, even a major transverse bulkhead placed eighty feet back from her bow —all were of wood.

A number of other vessels had encountered unusually large amounts of ice on the North Atlantic during this period, and experienced travellers and vessel commanders remarked on the severity of the weather conditions, as well as the extent of ice. There were frequent reports of vessels seriously delayed, if not damaged by ice, by contrary winds—often of fearful velocity—and tremendous seas.

For over 135 years, the tragedy of the missing *Pacific* remained a closed issue. Then several years ago, a startling discovery reopened the matter both of where and of how the steamship had been lost. Divers who were working off the coast of Wales, some twelve miles north-west of the island of Anglesey, had occasion to examine the site of an unidentified shipwreck. Like hundreds of other underwater vessel remains, it was marked on Admiralty charts, but previously it had been assumed that this wreck was just one of many that had occurred in the Irish Sea over the centuries. Yet it quickly became apparent to the divers that this was no ordinary wreck.

The divers were led by J. L. (Jack) Smart, a man with decades of experience in underwater work. Smart and his colleagues found an unusually large object down about 130 feet below the surface and largely buried in silt. This object measured approximately 110 feet in length and 40 feet in width. An initial examination determined that it was the forward part of a very large wooden vessel. Moreover, as they report, the distinctive configuration of the bow indicated that this was the remains of a steamship, rather than a sailing vessel. The vessel's forepart stands

upright. A large winch sits forward, collapsed into the wreckage, and a transverse bulkhead is positioned at about the 80-foot mark. There is no evidence of the vessel's stern at this site. Those timbers that can be easily seen are badly worm-eaten and otherwise rotted, although the timbers under the silt appear to be in better condition. There is cargo scattered about the wreck, some of it being higher off the sea-bed than the wreck itself. Subsequent investigation in the area has resulted in finding, about three miles away and in deeper water, what Smart and his colleagues firmly believe to be the larger aft-portion of the same vessel. The portions combined indicate a vessel well over 250 feet in length and more than 40 feet in breadth. The *Pacific*, with a 3000-ton carrying capacity, measured 265 feet long at her keel and 275 feet on her main deck, and she had a maximum width of 46 feet.

Several preliminary examinations at the site of the smaller and more accessible portion of the vessel permitted recovery of a number of items from her cargo. These items included earthenware—especially plates, pitchers, tureens, and platters of the standard 'Blue Willow' china pattern—that bore manufacturing marks which could be dated with reasonable precision to the early 1850s. There also, more significantly, was an unusual item: telegraph wire of the sort that commonly was shipped to America at this time by a Liverpool firm that had a special interest in this material; this firm was Brown, Shipley & Co., agents of the Collins Line. Itemized cargo lists for the *Pacific's* final voyage include both earthenware and telegraph wire.

The extent of tidal action in this area severely restricts diving operations, so that until now the exploratory efforts have taken place only within the brief ten to fifteen-minute periods of slack tide. More extensive underwater exploration and attempts at recovery have to be done during the optimal late-summer period from mid-August into early September. It was anticipated that this would be attempted last summer.

In discussing these facts, Prof. Sloan of Trinity College, Hartford, CT, the conference speaker, raised two possibilities as to how the *Pacific* happened to disappear so close to Wales. One was that there had been too high steam pressure and a massive explosion blew the vessel in half; the other that she had been at sea for several days—there had been a sighting off the Irish coast—and had a major breakdown and was making her way back to Liverpool under sail in stormy conditions, when she broke up almost within sight of land. Only further exploration can provide a possible answer.

CONFIRMATION OF THE START OF 'FREIGHT MONEY'

Members will recall that in the June 1990 Newsletter (No. 17) I showed a *Great Western* cover from the second return voyage on 25 June 1838 with the 25-cent Freight Money charge, and in March 1993 (No. 33) a similar cover from the second return voyage of the *Sirius* on 1 July. Dick Winter accepted my conclusions and decided to try and confirm that this private postage had been announced before the first of the two above voyages. He has written to report success and I quote him below.

I decided that the notations on your three letters were rather strong evidence of early freight money use and that, perhaps, the public was notified before the often quoted *Albion* advertisement, resulting in the early notations on the letters. I decided to check my favorite New York newspaper for maritime information, the *Commercial Advertiser*. This newspaper catered essentially to the merchant trade in New York and provided information of a maritime interest almost to the exclusion of other information. I confirmed that the first two pioneer steamship voyages from New York, *Sirius* of 1 May 1838 and *Great Western* of 7 May 1838, both return maiden voyages, did not advertise for freight money fees. This has been known and reported before. However, when *Great Western* was preparing for her second return voyage from New York, that of 25 June 1838, routine advertising was inserted in the *Commercial Advertiser* by agent Richard York of 98 Front Street. Starting on 19 June 1838, the advertisement ended with the following statement:

'Letters received on board will be charged 25 cents per single sheet; large letters and parcels in proportion.'

On the same day, as adjoining advertisement of Wadsworth & Smith, agents for the British & American Steam Navigation Company that operated the *Sirius*, included the same wording in their advertisement. The fact that they were located at No. 4 Jones Lane, rear of 103 Front Street, is more than coincidental. They advertised for a 23 June 1838 sailing of the *Sirius*, but that sailing was later

delayed until the actual date of 1 July 1838. So, there is a record of advertising for the extra letter charge of 25¢, which we call the freight money fee, eleven days before the *Albion* advertisement.

The earliest advertisement that I could find of a sailing ship company charging the $12^1/_2$¢ freight money fee was the Old Line of Liverpool Packets (formerly the Black Ball Line), Goodhue & Co. agents, with their advertising appearing on 26 October 1838, well after the steamships started charging their 25¢ freight money fees.

Very few letters from New York actually show a notation of the freight money fee. The few that I know of are all uses in 1838.

I can confirm this last statement, for I have a New York letters which were carried on the return maiden voyage of the *Royal William* on 5 August 1838; the fourth return voyage of the *Great Western* on 4 October 1838; and by the Dramatic Line sailing packet *Roscius*—all without a Freight Money notation.

With respect to the first Freight Money sailings, I have an interesting letter, which is shown below. It was written in East New York on 27 June 1838 and marked to go by the *Sirius*. However, it is backstamped with a boxed 'LIVERPOOL SHIP LETTER', showing that it had gone by one of the sailing packets instead, probably the Black Ball on 1 July. It seems likely that on taking the letter to the steamship and learning of the new charge, it was decided to pay the standard 2-cent outgoing ship letter fee and settle for a sailing packet.

A CORRECTION TO THE LAST ISSUE OCEAN MAIL CLERK ITEM

In writing up Horace Harrison's covers in the last newsletter, I inadvertently stated that the first letter shown should have been sorted into the Scotland bag on the steamer. As Ken Mackenzie pointed out in his booklet *The Canadian Ocean Mail Clerk*, the clerks were

not permitted to sort the mail until November 1860. This means that the error in putting this letter in the Liverpool bag was made at the Hamilton, U.C. post office, not on the steamer. On the other hand, the second letter in August 1861 was probably sorted on the steamer.

THE OCTAGONAL REGISTERED DATE STAMPS WITHOUT TOWN NAMES

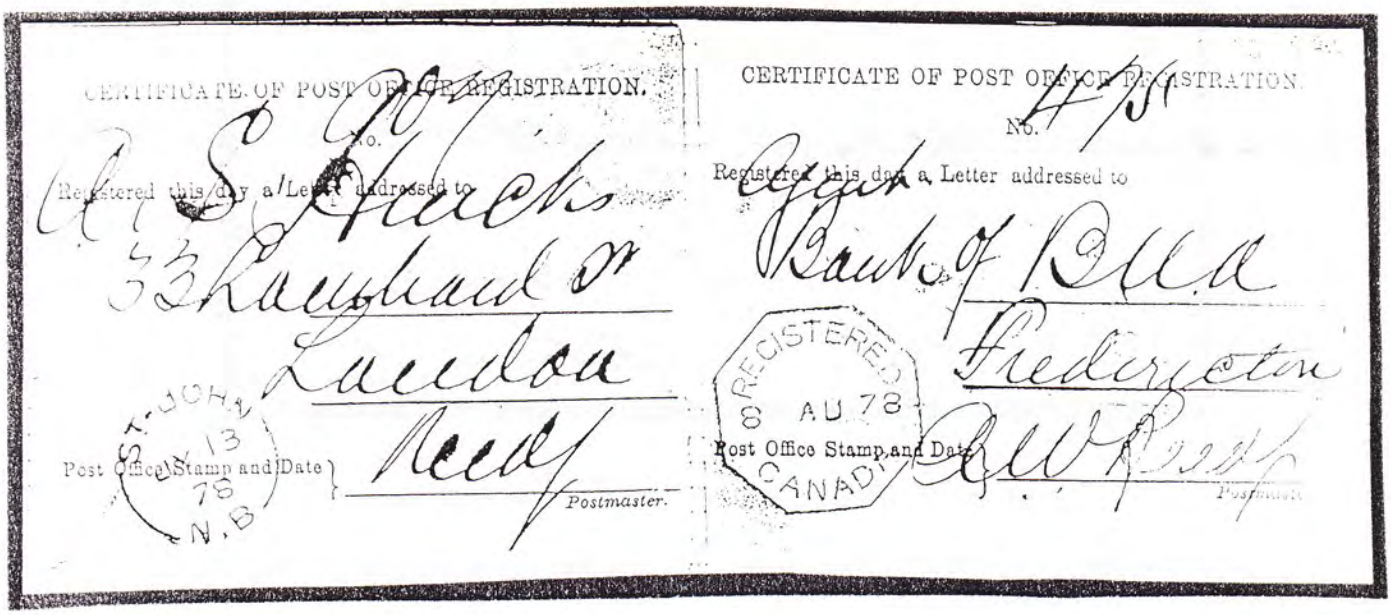
Horace Harrison has written a short study on the octagonal Registry handstamps, which appeared in the late summer of 1878, usually on mail from Halifax and St. John, N.B. These were unlike any other issued by the Post Office, as they had 'CANADA', but no town name. In a very short time, Halifax, St. John and Charlottetown left out the date and used the hammer only to show Registration. Later again, the blank space in the centre was used to write the Registered Letter Number, at least at St. John.

With the advent of serious postal history collecting, covers mailed in Canada to Europe began to find their way back to Canda. It was then noticed that these unusual markings had been struck on covers to the United Kingdom and European addresses from other Canadian towns, particularly Toronto, Hamilton and Quebec—and there were no other subsequent Canadian markings on these Registered Letters.

Horace included a list of seventeen known strikes, which are shown below, together with photocopies of sixteen of them. It is not possible to reproduce all of these, nor would it be particularly productive. Rather I have selected examples of the different types mentioned, with emphasis on the transatlantic ones.

Horace postulates that these handstamps were manufactured by Pritchard & Andrews, as there are two strikes shown in the Hughes Proof Strike books recently published by Robert Lee—one in the Registration Strikes for New Brunswick dated 23 November 1880; and the other for Ontario dated 12 August 1882. The first of these appears nearly identical to Horace's St. John strikes, although his are over two years earlier, and some later. He suggests that the St. John hammer was damaged and sent back for repair. That in the Ontario book appears to be somewhat larger overall, with larger lettering; he has nothing that resembles it.

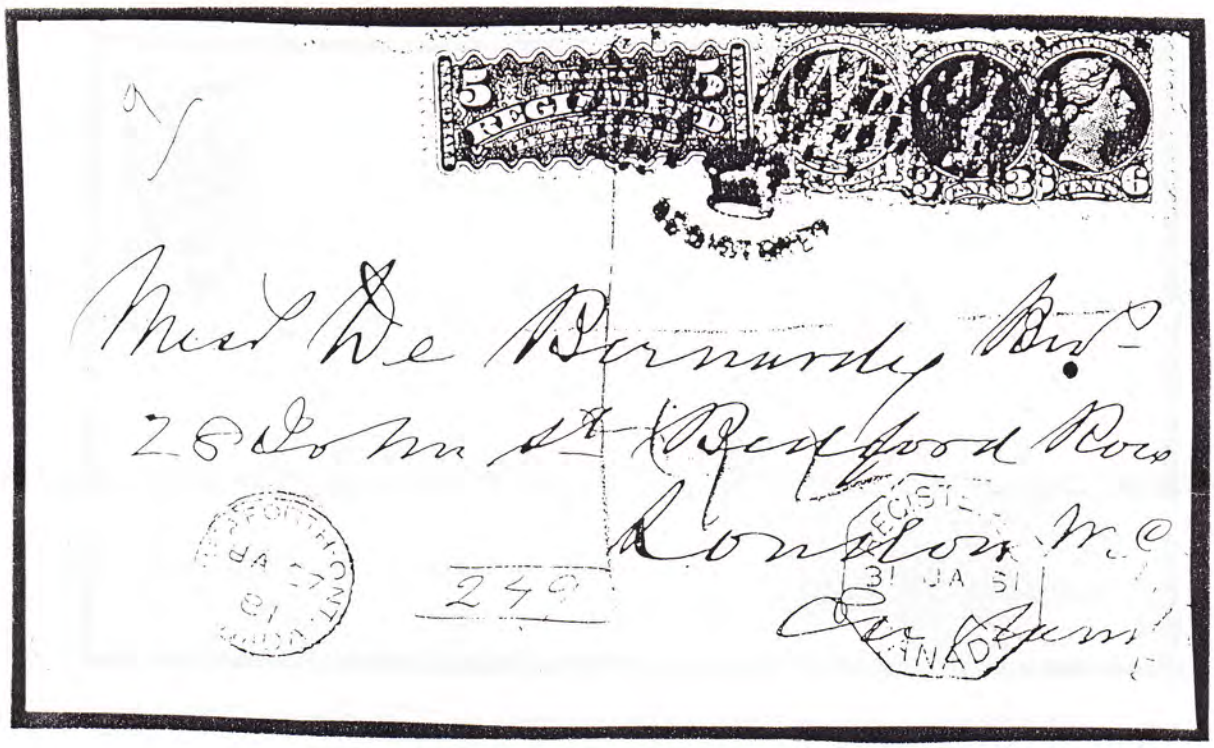
He further postulates that these hammers were issued to the towns at which the Closed Mails were made up for Great Britain, viz. Halifax, St. John, Charlottetown, Quebec, Montreal, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton [and, I suggest, London, U.C.]



Earliest recorded use of the Octagonal datestamp.

St. John, N.B. 1 October 1878 to Hampton, Kings Co., N.B. (Date included)
Backstamped Ossekeag, N.B. 2 Oct 78

St. John, N.B. 29 July 1881 to Frederictton, N.B. (No date, ms. Registration Number)



Seaforth, Ont., 27 January 1881 to London, England.
Backstamped with Hamilton, Ont. Registered Oval 28 Jan 81 and held for Monday, 31 Jan 81
Closed Bag (Octagional strike). Backstamped London Registered Oval 14 Feb 81.

Kamloop (?) from Obliterator to Watermillock, nr. Penrith, Scotland.
Backstamped at Victoria, B.C. 27 Dec 82 and with Hamilton, Ont. Registered Oval 8 Jan 83

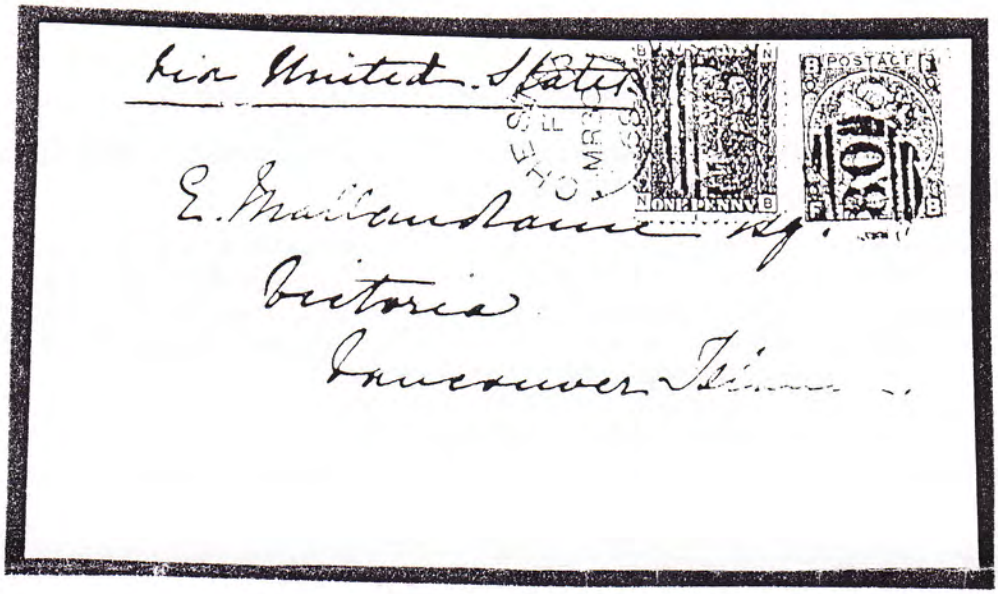
LIST OF OCTAGONAL REGISTERED DATESTAMPS

Strike Date Applied	Date at Originating Office Allan Line Steamer	Destination and Arrival Date
8 AU 78 – St. John	St. John, N.B.	Fredericton, N.B. (P.O. Regn. Cert.)
1 OC 78 – St. John	1 OC 78 – St. John, N.B.	Hampton, Kings Co., N.B.
17 FE – Quebec	17 FE 79 – Quebec	Alt Kischau, Germany 5 MR 79
9 AP 79 – Hamilton (b/s)	29 MR 79 – London, Ont. with insufficient postage. Returned via D.L.O. 5¢ added & remailed 9 AP. *Caspian* ex Halifax 12 AP - Liverpool 22 AP	Colchester, England 22 AP 79
Blank Date	23 AP 79 – Charlottetown, P.E.I. Halifax, N.S. 25 AP. *Hibernian* ex Halifax 26 AP – Liverpool 4 MY	Plymouth, England 5 MY 79
21 NO 79 – Toronto	Toronto, Canada 21 NO 79 *Polynesian* ex Quebec 22 NO - Liverpool 2 DE	Cambridge, England 3 DE 79
30 JU 80 – Halifax	Halifax, Canada 30 JU 80	Sussex, N.B. (No b/s)
8 DE 80 – Toronto	Stratford, Ont. 8 DE 80 (b/s) *Moravian* ex Hfx 11 DE - Lpl 20 DE	Hartfield, England via London 21 DE & Tunbridge Wells 21 DE 80 (b/s)
31 JA 81 – Hamilton	Seaforth, Ont. 27 JA 81 via Hamilton Reg. Oval 28 JA 81	London, England REGISTERED 14 FE
23 MR 81 – Toronto	Toronto, Canada 23 MR 81 *Sardinian* ex Hfx 26 MR - Lpl 5 AP	Scarborough, England 5 AP 81
'561' ms. – St. John	St. John, N.B., Canada 29 JY 81	Fredericton, N.B. 30 JY 81
Blank – St. John	St. John, N.B., Canada 15 JY 82	Philadelphia, Pa. 19 JUL 82
8 JA 83 – Hamilton	No originating c.d.s. Thought to be Kamloops from obliterator, via Victoria, B.C. 2 DE 82 with Hamilton, Canada REGISTERED OVAL 8 JA 83	Penrith, Scotland 20 JA 83
14 MY 83	Illegible illustration on page 78 *Canada Prussia and the Universal Postal Union* by George B. Arfken; Unitrade Press.	
27 J 83 – Toronto	Longford Mills, Ont. 22 JY 83 via MUSK-BR SOUTH 24 JY 83 with REGISTERED, Toronto 24 JY 83	Leeds, England 6 AU 83 Registered
Blank – St. John	St. John, N.B., Canada 29 AU 83	Halifax, N.S. (front only)
4 JY 84 – Hamilton?	London, Canada 7 JY 84 Illus. page 262 *Canada's Small Queen Era, 1870-1897* by George B. Arfken; V.G. Greene Philatelic Research Foundation, Toronto	Cork, Ireland

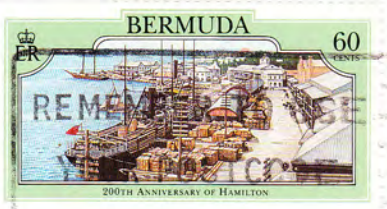
REDUCTION IN RATES – BRITISH COLUMBIA

Malcolm Montgomery notes that at the same time that the rate for letters to British North America carried by British packets via the United States was reduced to *7d* Stg./1/2 oz., the rate to British Columbia was included [G.P.O. Notice 43/1867 d. Dec 1867, eff. 1 Jan 68]. This reduction was short-lived and the shilling rate to British Columbia was restored on 1 October 1868 [G.P.O. Notice 27/1868].

He sent along a photocopy of a letter from Chester, England dated 30 March 1868 with *7d* Stg. prepaid via the United States. It was carried by the Inman *City of Paris* to New York and thence overland to the West Coast.



Dr. I.C. Arnell
P.O. Box HM 1263
Hamilton HMFX
Bermuda



AIRMAIL

PRINTED MATTER

Malcom B. Montgomery
76 Glen Eyre Road
Southampton, SO2 3NL
England