

Canada's External Mail, 1873 – 24 December 1898

This exhibit shows a wide variety of mail between Canada and the rest of the world – both inward and outward - during the generation before Imperial Penny Postage, 25 December 1898, to suggest that the Universal Postal Union was indeed universal. Universal in two ways. Both that all countries or colonies of the world could exchange mail, and second, that all people in the world could participate. Covers either to, from, or via Canada and 126 other countries or colonies are in the exhibit. To show that each individual could participate in the global postal system is more difficult. However, a wide variety of mail types existed and are exhibited here. They are offered as proof that the UPU aspired to meet everyone's needs.

Importance or so-what? From an historical, but non-philatelic view, 1873-1898 was the era of making the UPU real, the era of railways and steamers – of the spread of Western domination. So external mail was important. On the purpose and working of the world wide postal system, see Robinson, Howard, Carrying British Mail Overseas, New York, 1964, and see <https://www.gbpa.org.uk/information/sources/treaties/upu-conventions.php>

Philatelically, the answer is also yes – yes the universality of the UPU was important! Philatelists like destinations, and want to see letters, Post Cards, Reply Cards, printed matter, registration, parcels, shortpaid & dues, forwarded, etc, etc. Those were the types of mail by which the UPU aspired to meet the needs of everyone. On the philately of the era see George B Arfken, Canada's Small Queen Era: Postal Use during the Small Queen Era 1870 1897, Toronto, c1989. His book is on both internal & external mail; most, but not all info, on external mail is pp 197 – 390. More generally, Arfken's many articles give insight into the global postal system of the later 19th century.

Treatment

Title. "External" not "foreign" for two reasons. First, foreign is neither correct nor universal. Britain & the Empire or Commonwealth was not foreign. All, Canada included, were British. That division – between British & Foreign - is in the Postal Guides. Second, I dislike the concept of foreign, which sounds to me as alien or other, or people of whom we should be wary, even suspicious. So I use External, even if this 2nd reason is rather syrupy & happy-feel.

Organization. By the six inhabited continents with United Kingdom and West Indies as two additional sections. Then, within each of the eight sections, alphabetically. But two exceptions: I United Kingdom (nine pages); VII Oceania is two parts, Part A shows the pull between Atlantic & Pacific routes for each of the seven Australian & New Zealand colonies, and Part B (the UPU era) shows those seven colonies and the Pacific Islands alphabetically.

Continent/ Section	# of Pages	# of Origins/ Destinations	Continent/ Section	# of Pages	# of Origins/ Destinations
I United Kingdom	10	1	VI Asia	24	20
II Europe	31	26	VII Oceania non-UPU	10	
III North America	10	5	“ UPU & Islands	10	7
IV Central & South America	16	15	VIII Africa	23	30
V West Indies	24	22	Epilogue	1	

Development of the Collection

1. I have wanted as many different destinations or origins as possible. Thus two questions: first, what is a destination or origin, and second, how many existed? The definition came to be - a distinct geo-political entity with a postal system. But not necessarily a postal system that it operated or controlled. How many existed? About the year 2000, three lists of such possible entities were identified: UPU members as given in Arfken, Small Queen Era, pp 440 – 443; the Postal Guides late 1890s; and the stamp issuing entities in Gibbons catalogue. From those three lists, one list was developed of about 176 distinct geo-political entities with a postal system.

2. In the early 1990s (or before computers), I went through auction catalogues at the Postal Museum Library in Ottawa and made index cards of covers that interested me, including destinations and origins. That index card

record has been occasionally added to. Additionally, I have kept (or acquired) the auction catalogues of about 25 collections of Small Queen external covers, 1966 – c2023. Catalogues and data on covers to Canada are more difficult to get, and the sources more varied. Of the 176 or so entities in the late 19th century global communication system, covers are known to exist between Canada and about 135 or 140!

3. Routes: Arfken frequently cited a series of six articles by Mathew Carstairs on postal routes between Canada & the world, except Africa. (Carstairs, M W, “The Letter and Post Card Rates of Canada 1875 – 1898”, Maple Leaves, 1982-1984.) I used Carstairs’s structure in three articles in Topics 1999/2000 about mail between Canada, and i) Africa, ii) West Indies, and iii) Pacific Islands, to plan collecting, and later exhibits including a BNAPS collection book in 2013. Those works are not recommended to the judges. Routes dictate a thoroughly geographic structure, and so make individual countries difficult to find, especially within Europe, Africa, & Asia. So within continents countries are here exhibited in alpha order, not geographic order. But route & ship info is used. It was valuable particularly for the first part of Australia. That route data is mostly from Australian sources, especially White, John S, et al, The Postal History of New South Wales 1788 – 1901, The Philatelic Association of NSW, 1988.

4. Sailing & arrival dates of mail ships on Canada’s major postal routes have been published. For United Kingdom, see JC Arnell, Atlantic Mails, The National Postal Museum, Ottawa, 1980; for via Vancouver, both Asia & Australia, see Scrimgeour - https://www.postalhistorycanada.net/php/Library/Research/ShipTables/int_pacific.php - ; for the West Indies, the Cunard dates, c1853 – 1886, are published, but not the Pickford & Black sailings, 1888 ff. For that data, this exhibit has used Halifax newspapers. One example of the use of shipping data to understand rates & their rarity is Arfken’s “Halifax Packets to the Caribbean”, Maple Leaves #248 June 1994, 259-265, 274.

Rarity. “Rarity” notes are beside many covers. The info comes from index cards & auction catalogues mentioned above. However, it is harder to know the rarity of non-Canadian covers, so claims of rarity are mostly for Canada.

Condition. Decades ago, Fred Stulburg once rebuffed my whining about the condition of one of my covers – “We are all always trying to upgrade every cover we have”. He was right, so I try to accept that one cannot always have great condition. Worse, rarity is often in conflict with condition or appearance. An example, is a pre-UPU cover to “Afrique Espagnole” (frame 9, about page 8. All page references may be slightly off in the new version exhibited here. Apologies.). The Afrique Espagnole is extremely rare; but, sadly, in poor condition. Although irreplaceable, perhaps that cover in condition that poor, should be dropped. But I can not bring myself to do that! In contrast two covers to Portugal (f3, p 5?) – one rare & one extremely rare - are shown, both in exceptionally fine condition!

Similarly, I dislike & try to avoid philatelic covers and covers without receivers. Any cover to a known philatelist is included only if it is a correct rate and very rare. For example, an 1879 Post Card, between two early dealers – one in Quebec City and the other in Constantinople is shown (f 7, p 16?). Also included are covers from Gabon (f 9, p 16?), Griqualand West (f 10, p 1?) both to Henry Heckler, Japan to a stamp dealer in Sierra Leone via Canada (f 7, p 7?), & Canada to Montenegro (f 3, p 6). All four are to dealers, but are correct rates, and exceedingly rare, probably unique. Covers to philatelists are here only by exception. The criteria to include a letter cover without a receiver are the same, but more demanding as receivers are essential to confirm ships and routes. Backstamps for all covers are listed in the descriptions.

Presentation. The text has been reduced from the 2012/2013 version. Exhibits are to be looked at! So they should be visual - not articles on the wall. However, some text is needed: titles, identification, a bit of explanation, maybe. Here, contextual info is in small print: backstamps (as b/s), provenance, & literature. Rarity is in bold.

Exhibits today are usually in colour and other special effects, but that requires too much computer virtuosity. Also we should distrust such whiz bang splashery. I would like to have more maps. They are visual explanation; not writing on the wall. Are they helpful? Too much space?

I love pairs of balanced or similar covers, often same correspondences, showing different rates or different routes. For example, see frame 1 page 2 for two covers between Victoria BC & UK carried by the same ship on the same trip, but in opposite directions – one cover each way! To & from Belgium in the first month of the UPU (frame 1, p 16). France, two covers weeks apart to the celebrated painter Robert Harris with different routes & rates (f 2, p 3);

Netherlands to Canada, via London 20c & via New York 25c (f 3, p 3); Jamaica ditto (f 6?, p 2?). Then, my favourite, via Martinique to Canada & via Canada (from St Pierre & Miquelon!) to Martinique (frame 6, p 6).