

The Victoria Post Office and Undeliverable Mail 1874 – 1925

When British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, regulation of postal services was transferred to the Post Office Department (POD) in Ottawa. In accordance with regulations, all undeliverable mail was sent to Ottawa for processing. Prior to the opening of the railway in 1885, transmission of BC's mail was by ship to San Francisco, California or to Tacoma, Washington, then east by train. When the CPR began transcontinental service, procedures did not change, so there was a significant delay in the delivery or the return to sender of BC's undeliverable mail. In 1888, the POD authorized Victoria's P.O. Inspector to locally process most undelivered mail, dramatically reducing the turn-around time of such mail. On July 1st 1898, the POD created several regional Dead Letter Offices, including one at Victoria, to deal with 'dead' or undeliverable mail.

The **purpose** of this exhibit is to show the handling of undelivered mail by the Victoria post office from 1874 to the discontinuance of the service in the mid-1920s. A variety of posted items, date stamps and regulatory markings illustrate the activity of this office.



Exhibit Plan

Important items are marked ●

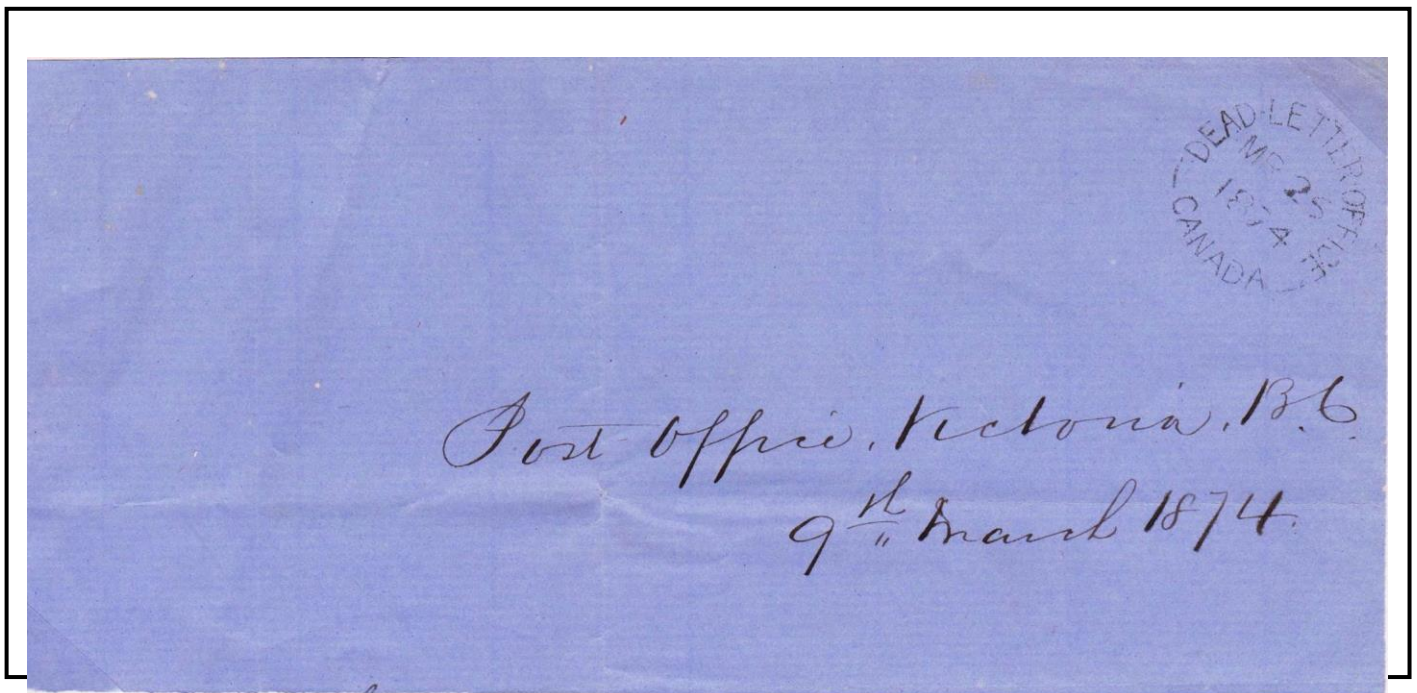
Page 1	Title and Exhibit Plan
Pages 2 – 3	The Problem of Time
Page 4	The Victoria Exception
Pages 5 – 8	The Expansion Period : July 1 st 1898 to 1913 Date Stamps and Instructional Markings
Pages 9 – 10	Yukon Mails
Pages 11 – 15	The Late Period: 1913 – 1925 Date Stamps and Instructional Markings
Page 16	The End of the Story

The Problem of Time

1874

Located on Canada's west coast, Victoria's post office—in the early years—was bound by postal regulations designed for a service based in Central Canada. These regulations stated:

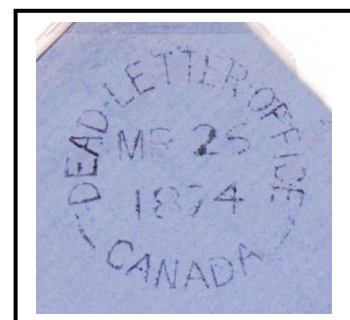
Letters posted without any direction, or addressed so imperfectly so that they cannot be forwarded to their intended destinations, and also unpaid or insufficiently paid letters addressed to countries to which letters cannot be sent without the postage is prepaid, are returned to the writers through the Dead Letter Office.



Reverse portion of a wrapper forwarding a packet of undeliverable mail to the Dead Letter Office, which was in Ottawa. Mailed by Postmaster Wooten of Victoria on March 9, 1874, it traveled on the steamer **Prince Alfred** to San Francisco, and arrived in Ottawa on March 26, 1874 via New York and Montreal. ●

An article in the Daily British Colonist of March 10, 1874 reads: **The Steamer Prince Alfred will set sail for San Francisco from the outer harbor at 6 o'clock this evening.**

The *Prince Alfred* was a passenger/cargo steamer built in Great Britain in 1852. Owned by Rosenfeld and Birmingham, she sailed bi-weekly between Victoria, Tacoma and San Francisco. The usual transit time was four days. The delay in the trans-continental trip on this occasion was due to a blizzard-related train stoppage in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

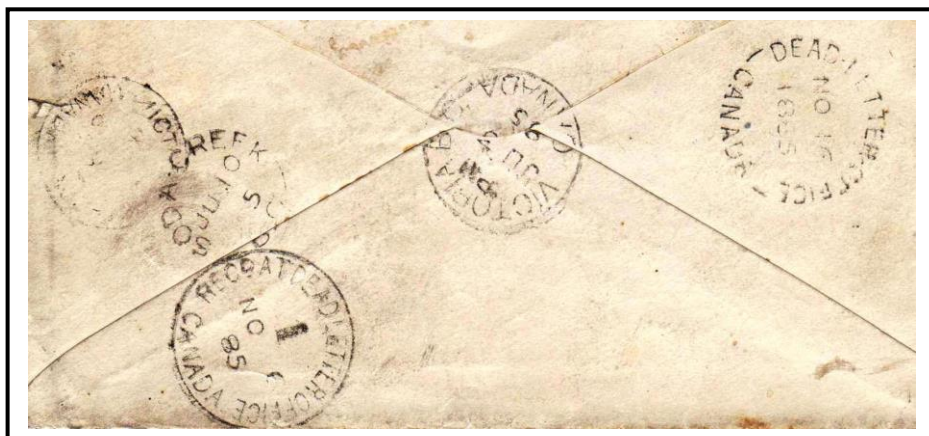


Receiver's strike DLOS-11
MR 26/1874

In spite of frequent complaints about the long delay in returning undelivered mail of Pacific origin, the problem remained and worsened through the 1880s.



This cover was mailed at Victoria June 5, 1885 and arrived in Soda Creek on June 10. Held for six weeks and then marked NOT CALLED FOR, it was sent via the post office in Victoria to the Dead Letter Office in Ottawa, where it was processed and finally returned to Victoria, being dispatched from Ottawa on November 16, 1885. The total time from original mailing to return to sender in Victoria was about 170 days. ●



DLO dispatch
NO 16 / 1885

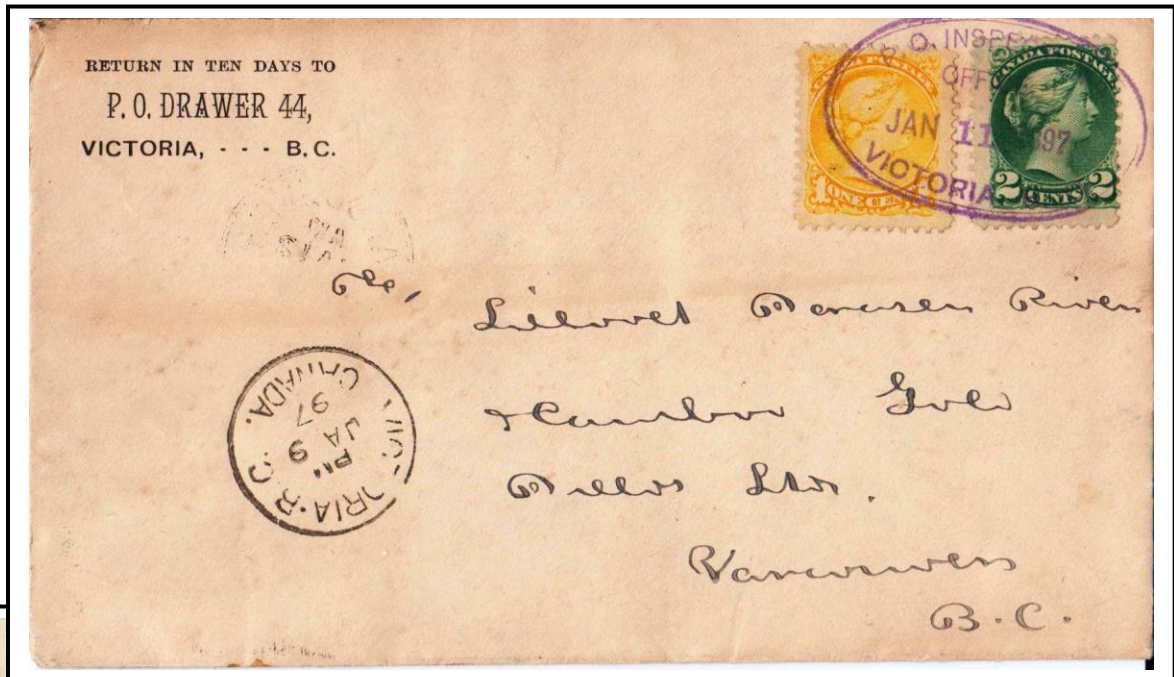
Markings applied in
Ottawa

DLO receipt
1 / NO 6 / 85

The Victoria Exception

1888 - 1898

After increased lobbying in Ottawa by Victoria businessmen and politicians, an exception to the regulations was granted to the Victoria post office. In a *Circular to Postmasters in British Columbia*, issued on January 1, 1888, P.O. Inspector E.H. Fletcher advised BC's postmasters that as of that date any letters addressed to places in British Columbia or the Pacific States that could not be delivered, for whatever reason, were to be sent to him for processing.



Reverse shown
at 75% original

This letter was mailed at Victoria without postage on January 9, 1897. In compliance with the instructions from E.H. Fletcher, it was sent to his office for processing. The shortfall in postage was collected from the sender (who was identified by the P. O. Drawer Number) and the item forwarded on January 11 to the addressee in Vancouver. It was received on January 12. ●

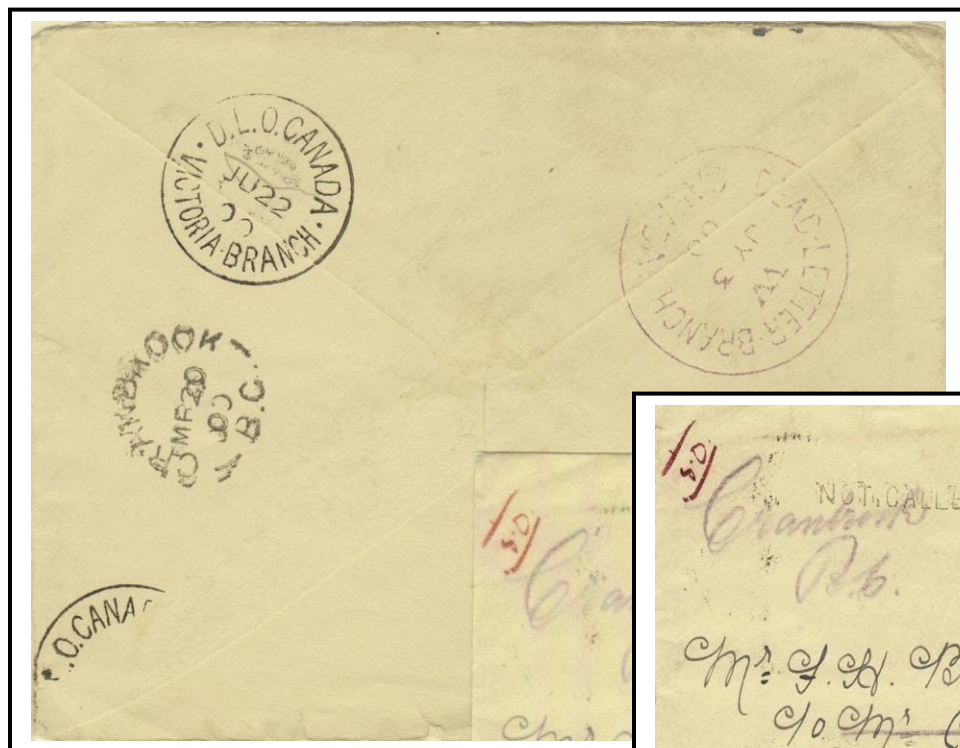
The Expansion Period

July 1, 1898 to 1913

On June 1, 1898, the POD announced the decentralization of dead letter services, and informed postmasters that as of July 1, (1898) offices would be opened in several Canadian cities. The establishment of a Branch Dead Letter Office* in Victoria was heralded as a coup for British Columbia and brought with it the promise of enhanced service and further reduction in the delay of return of undelivered mail.

*Branch Dead Letter Offices were authorized to process letters and all other classes of dead or undeliverable mail matter.

This cover is an early example of processing of a dead letter by the Victoria Branch DLO.



D.L.O. CANADA / VICTORIA
BRANCH
JU 22 / 00

DEAD LETTER BRANCH /
CANADA
W/ JY 3 / 00

The significance of the 'W'
is not known.



Cover front shown at 75% of original size

Mailed at Bristol England on March 6, 1900 this cover arrived in Winnipeg on March 17. Forwarded to Cranbrook, it arrived on March 29 where it remained unclaimed and was held for three months before being marked NOT CALLED FOR. The cover was then sent to the Pacific regional Dead Letter Office in Victoria for return to sender. Victoria applied its circular Branch DLO date stamp, and on June 22 forwarded the cover to the Dead Letter Office in Ottawa. It was date-stamped there on July 3, 1900 before being returned to England.

The Expansion Period

July 1, 1898 to 1913

The previously-outlined regulations were modified slightly and continued into the 20th century, with an addition indicating that the reason for non-delivery must be (clearly) stamped or written on the address side of the undeliverable item before it was sent to the Dead Letter Office. A date stamp of the Dead Letter Office was also to be applied to signify completion of that office's activity. In the fall of 1905, Victoria seldom complied with these regulations.

The items shown below illustrate partial non-compliance with these regulations. What is notable is the absence of a Dead Letter Office date stamp although both items would have been processed there.

From: Victoria 22/SP 13/05

To: Alameda, California

UNPAID

Forwarded: 16/SP 22/05



From: Victoria 18/SP 26/05

To: Portland, Oregon

UNPAID

Forwarded: 14/OC 2 /05

The UNPAID hand stamp was a colonial postmark used on unpaid mail. On October 1, 1875, prepayment of postage by stamps became mandatory in Canada. This UNPAID mark was used in the mid 1860s and in 1875. It probably was resurrected (as seen here) to meet the postal requirement that mail sent to the Dead Letter Office have the reason clearly marked on the address side.

The Expansion Period

July 1, 1898 to 1913

By 1906, mail processed by the Branch Dead Letter Office in Victoria used specific handstamps. The previously used circular date stamp (sometimes seen in conjunction with a flattened, double-ring oval dater) disappears, only to re-appear briefly in 1913. The most common marking seen in 1906 and 1907 is the heavily worn double oval, which by this time appears as a 'fat' single ring.

The first item shown below illustrates partial compliance with regulations by the presence of a Dead Letter Office date stamp but an absence of a reason for its being sent there. The second item shows full compliance with the DLO oval plus a weakly struck UNPAID marking.



From: Victoria 16/No 23/06
To: Acton West, Ontario

No UNPAID or other marking signifying the reason the item was sent to the DLO

Forwarded: De 10 1906
Cancellation: oval marking
BRANCH DEAD LETTER OFFICE / VICTORIA, B.C.

From: Victoria 11/SP 7/07
To: Walpole, Massachusetts

UNPAID (faint)

Forwarded: SEP 23 1907
Cancellation: oval marking
BRANCH DEAD LETTER OFFICE / VICTORIA, B.C.



The Expansion Period

July 1, 1898 to 1913

In 1902, the Post Office Department opened a Branch Dead Letter Office in Vancouver. This office assumed responsibility for undeliverable mail in British Columbia with the exception of such mail originating or failing of delivery on Vancouver Island. By 1908, fully 90 percent of undeliverable mail was being processed at the new office.

The old, worn-out flattened oval marking used at Victoria was replaced in 1908 with a new double-oval handstamp showing small unserifed lettering over a large, serifed VICTORIA B.C. An example of this marking is shown below.

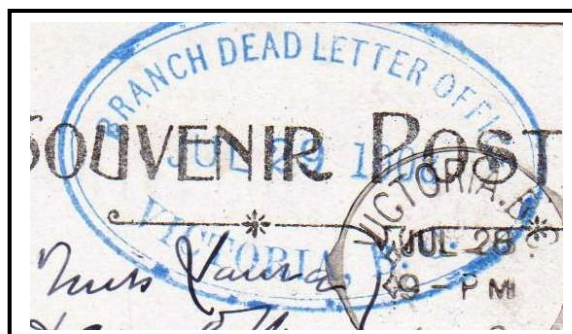


Mailed at Victoria on July 28 1908 with correct postage, the stamp was apparently missing when this card arrived at the post office. In compliance with regulations, it could not move forward and was sent to the Dead Letter Office for processing. No instructional marking was appended.

The DLO postal clerk correctly noted that postage had been applied, writing **Paid** on the item before date stamping it and returning it to the regular mail stream for delivery. The significance of the red markings is unknown, but may represent a street address correction applied in Boston.

BRANCH DEAD LETTER OFFICE /
VICTORIA, B.C.

JUL 29 1908

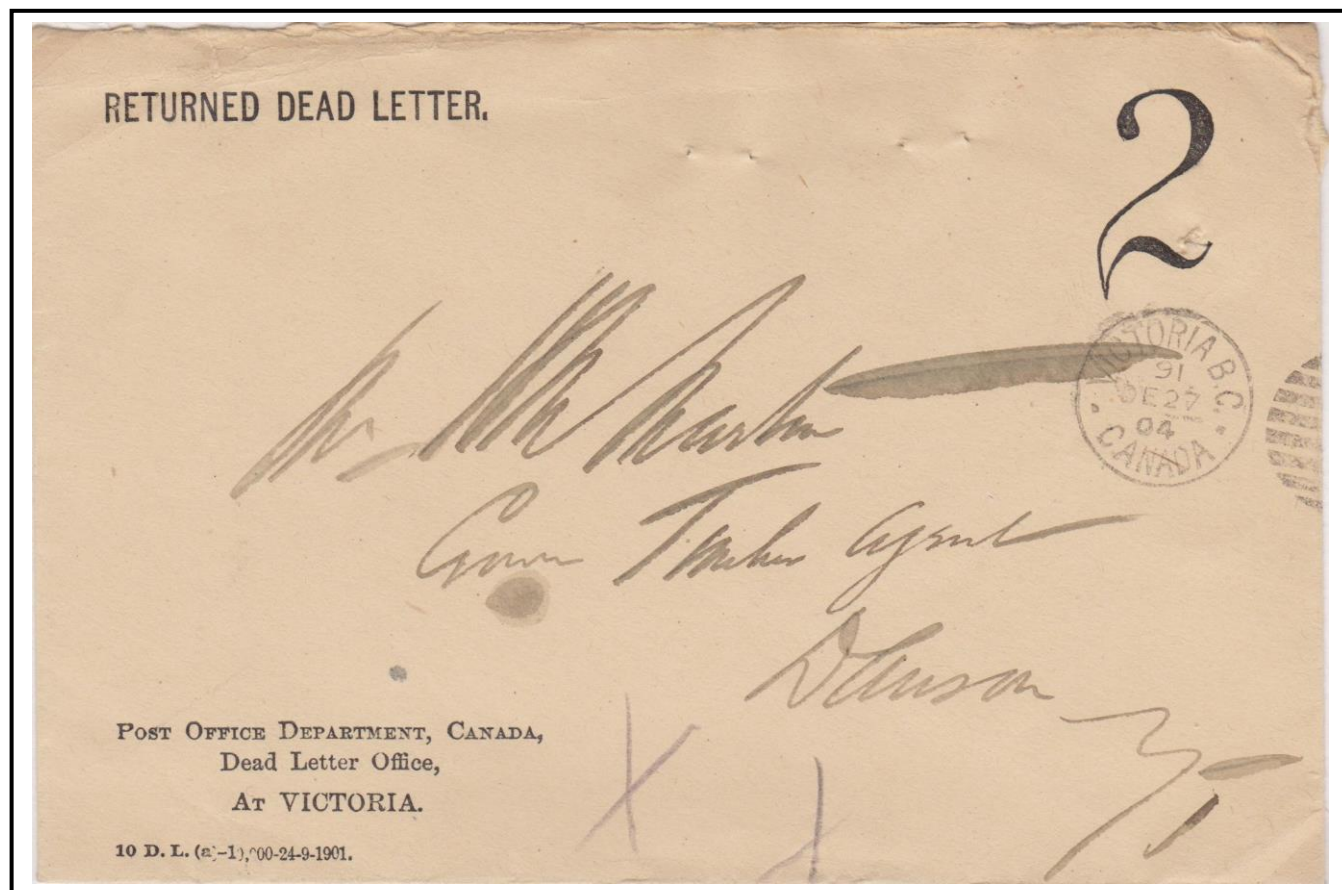


Yukon Mail

The Victoria Connection

When the Branch Dead Letter Office opened in Vancouver in 1902, it was widely anticipated that undelivered Yukon mail would be processed in that city. In spite of this expectation, the Post Office Department decided that Victoria should retain the function of processing such Yukon mail.

The item shown below illustrates this service.



This RETURNED DEAD LETTER cover, 10 D.L. (a) – 10,000-24-9-1901, was used at Victoria on December 27, 1904 to return undelivered mail processed at the Dead Letter Office in Victoria to Dawson, YT. It was received on January 6, 1905. The fee of 2 (cents) was the only charge levied, and represents a service charge for the return of the letter. Had the enclosure been short-paid, the fee would have included a double short-paid tariff.

*The enclosed Dead Letter is returned by direction of the Postmaster General
for the reason thereon assigned.*

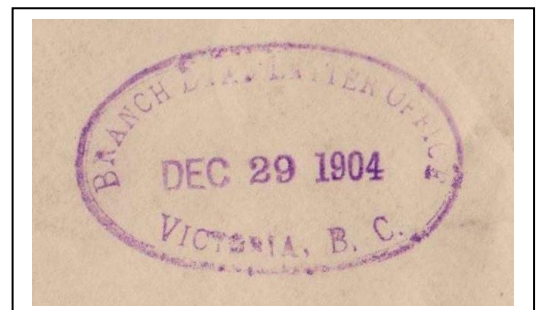
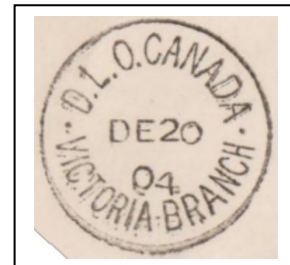
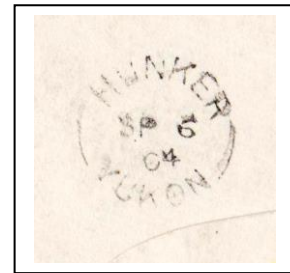
Wording on the reverse flap of the above cover

Yukon Mail



The Victoria Connection

This letter was mailed in Dawson on September 3, 1904. Addressed to Gold Bottom YT it was sent to the nearest post office at Hunker. It was not called for, and after three months, was sent to the Dead Letter Office in Victoria for return to sender. No reason for its being sent to the DLO is noted. It was received at the DLO on December 20 and returned on December 29, 1904.



The final period of operation of the Dead Letter Office in Victoria is characterized by a variety of different dated handstamps and one unique instructional marking. The oval marking that appeared in 1908 was gradually replaced by a new oval marking with two outer rims and a third inner rim, between which appeared the wording and two Maltese crosses. This marking, which was proofed in mid-1912, saw extensive use until its disappearance in 1918.

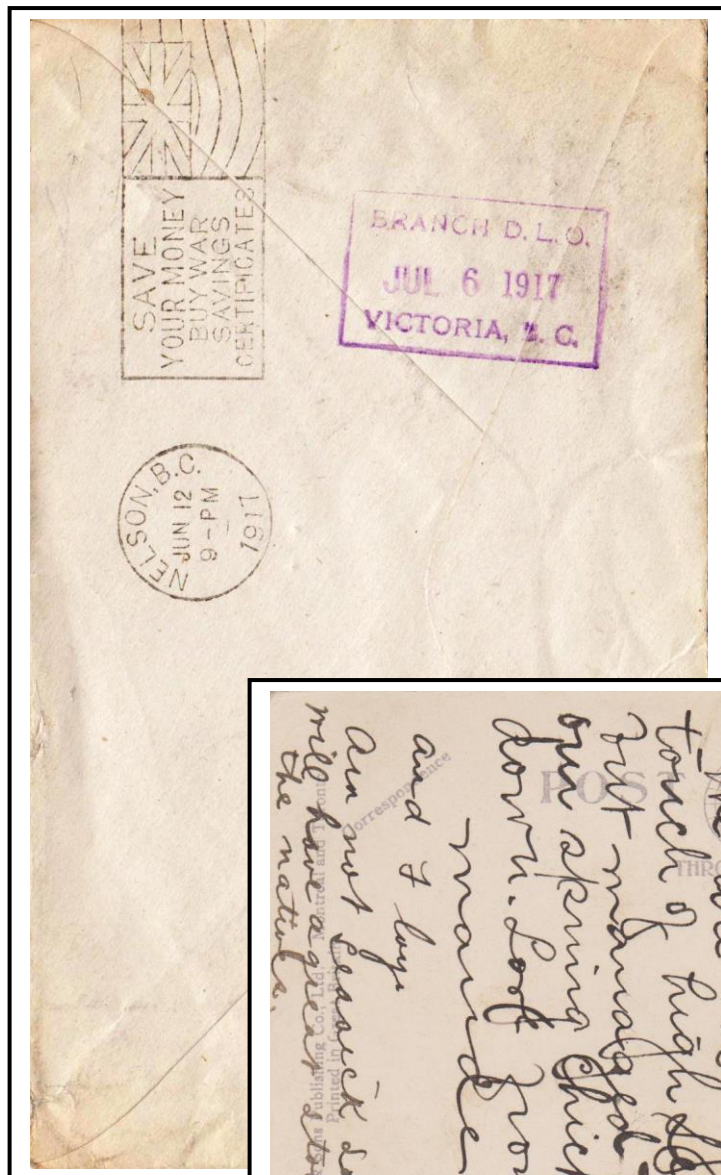
The cover shown below demonstrates the overlapping use of both date stamps in July 1912. The card shows a clear example of the new marking.



The cover, mailed at Victoria, bore American stamps, and was sent to the Dead Letter Office for collection of postage. It was date stamped on June 27 1912 using the new device. Upon receipt of postage, a stamp was added and the cover returned to the regular mail stream on July 8 1912, the old dater being used to signify completion of DLO activity.

The postcard, mailed in Victoria on June 10, 1916 and addressed to the United States, was short-paid. The advice marking RETURNED FOR WAR TAX was applied and the item sent to the Dead Letter Office where it was received on June 13. In compliance with regulations, it was forwarded to the Dead Letter Office in Ottawa, the office closest to its destination, where final processing took place and appropriate postage was collected.

In June 1915 another date stamp was issued to the Dead Letter Office in Victoria. This rectangular device was only used for a short period of time between July 1915 and July 1917.



Mailed at Slocan to an addressee in Victoria June 12 1917, this cover was undelivered for the reasons noted above. It was sent to the Dead Letter Office in Victoria for processing.

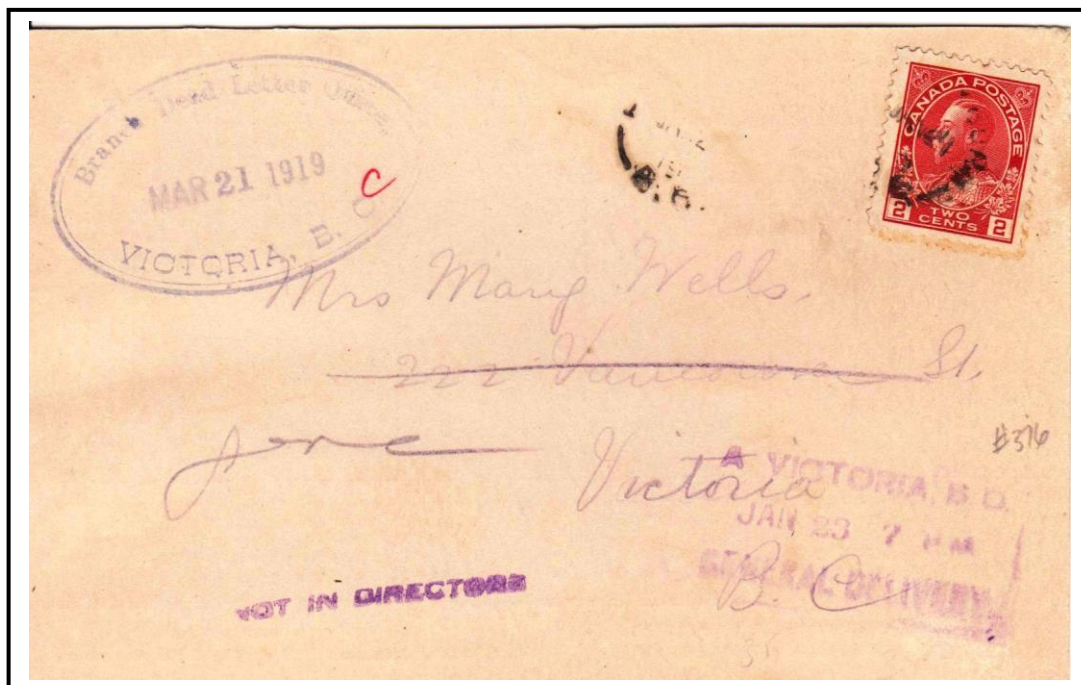


This postcard was mailed at Victoria on July 12 1916. Addressed to Meadowdale Washington, it was shortpaid by 1 cent. No advice or regulatory marking was appended before it was sent to the Dead Letter Office for collection of the required postage. The postage having been received, the item was forwarded to the addressee on July 19, 1916.

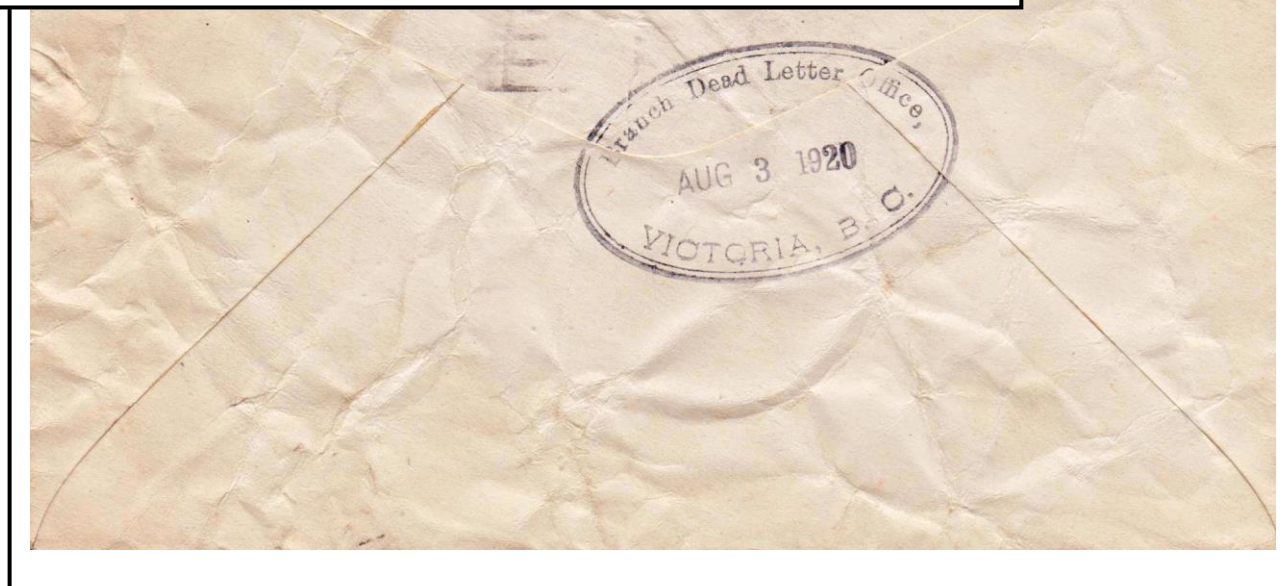
The Late Period

1913 to 1925

By 1919, another oval date stamp appears in use in Victoria, although it is not found in the proof books. This marking demonstrates lettering of mixed size and case, and full serifs.



Mailed from W. Vancouver March 20 1919, this card was undelivered. It received an advice marking before it was sent to the Dead Letter Office to be returned to the sender.

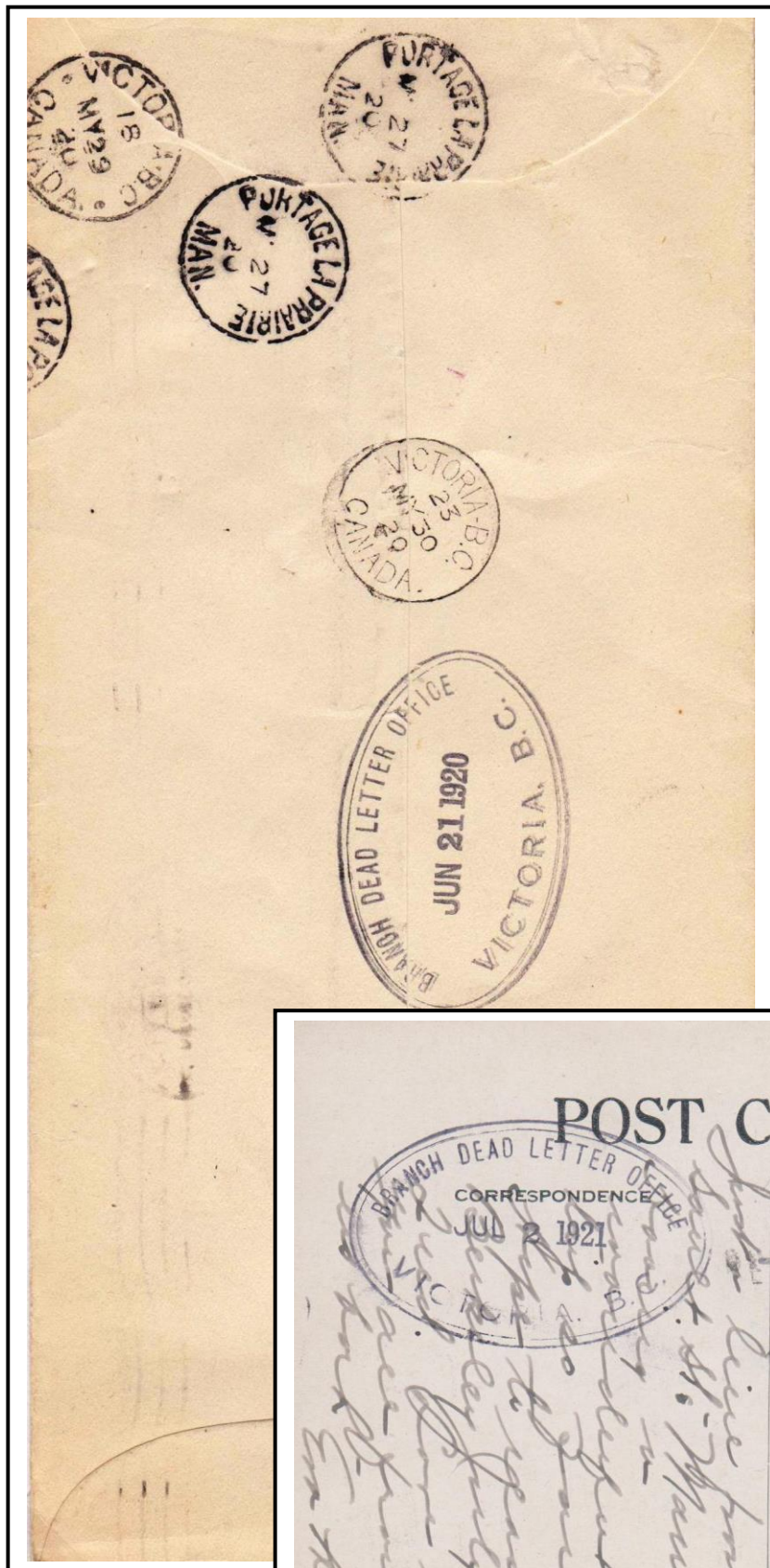


This cover was mailed at Victoria on July 31 1920. Addressed to 'Lot 3 Highland District, Victoria', it failed of delivery and three separate advice markings were applied before it was sent to the Dead Letter Office. These were:

RETURNED FOR / BETTER DIRECTION
PLEASE HAVE YOUR MAIL/DIRECTED TO STREET AND NUMBER
Outside Letter Carrier's Delivery / Victoria, B.C.

The Late Period

1913 to 1925



The final date stamp used by the Dead Letter Office in Victoria was proofed on February 8, 1919. It is a large, crisp, double oval with mixed-size, unserified letters.

This registered cover from Portage La Prairie Manitoba to Victoria was NOT CALLED FOR. It was so marked and sent to the Dead Letter Office where it was date stamped on arrival on June 21 1920.

The postcard shown below bears a similar date stamp.

Sent from Sault Ste. Marie Ontario to Berkley California and bearing American postage stamps, this card should have been sent to the Dead Letter Office in Vancouver. Instead it was sent to Victoria where the Dead Letter Office did the necessary processing and collection of due postage before forwarding the cover to the addressee on July 22 1921.

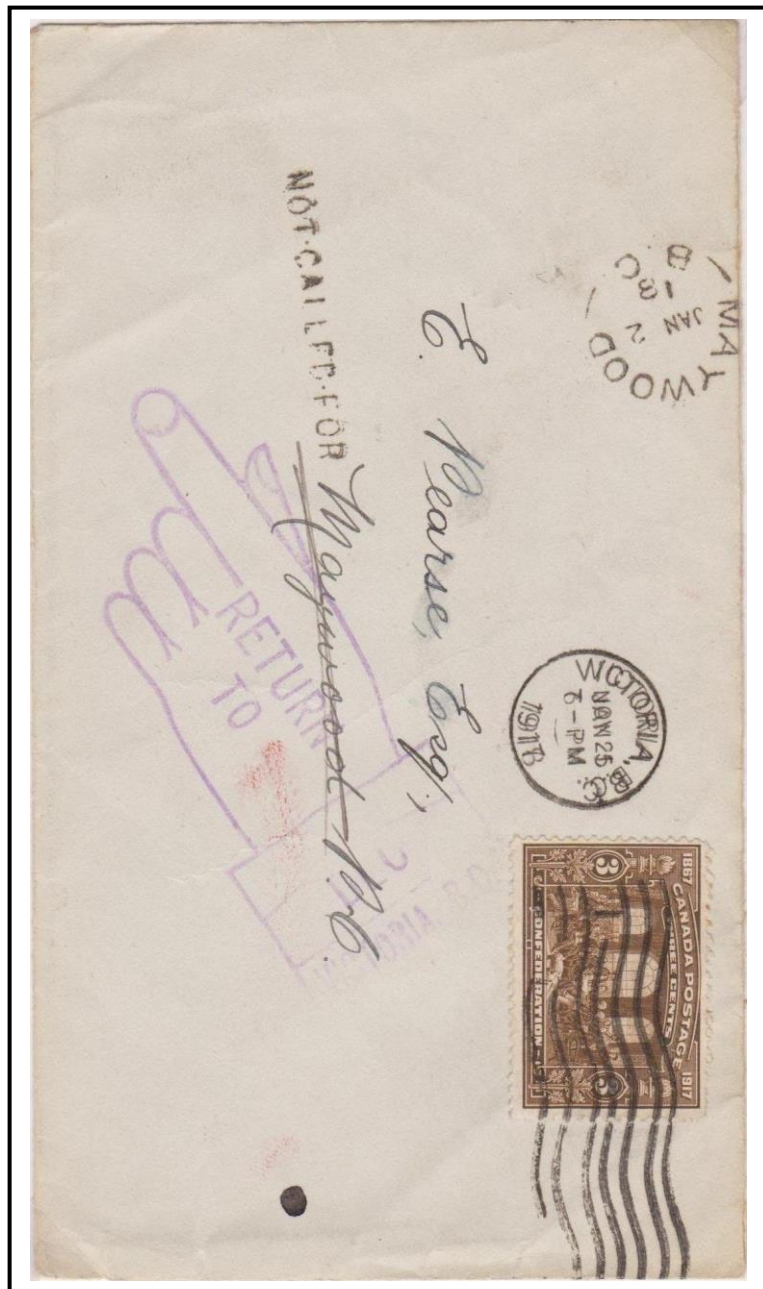


The Late Period

1913 to 1925

During this final period of the Dead Letter Office in Victoria, a unique, undated, instructional handstamp is known from this office. Although of unknown origin, it is similar to a marking from Winnipeg that appears in the proof book.

The handstamp is a pointing finger with the wording RETURN / TO along the back of the hand, and D.L.O. / VICTORIA B.C. in the cuff. The date line is empty.



Although one might postulate that this is a damaged DEC marking, the sequence of dates precludes this conclusion.

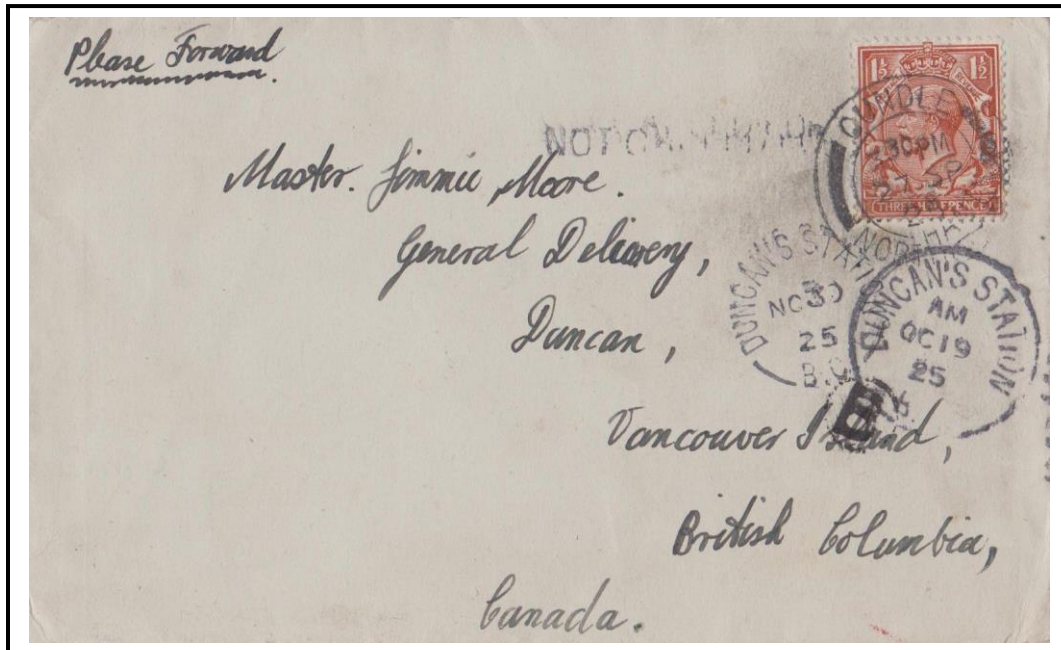
- Victoria: November 1 1917
- Maywood: January 2 1918
- Victoria: January 25 1918

This cover was sent from the City of Victoria to Maywood B.C. (now in Burnaby) on November 1 1917. Undelivered, it was marked NOT CALLED FOR before being sent to the Dead Letter Office in Victoria on January 2 1918. The pointing finger handstamp was applied at this office, the marking on the front directing the postman to the reverse of the cover where a second impression points to the City of Victoria insignia. •

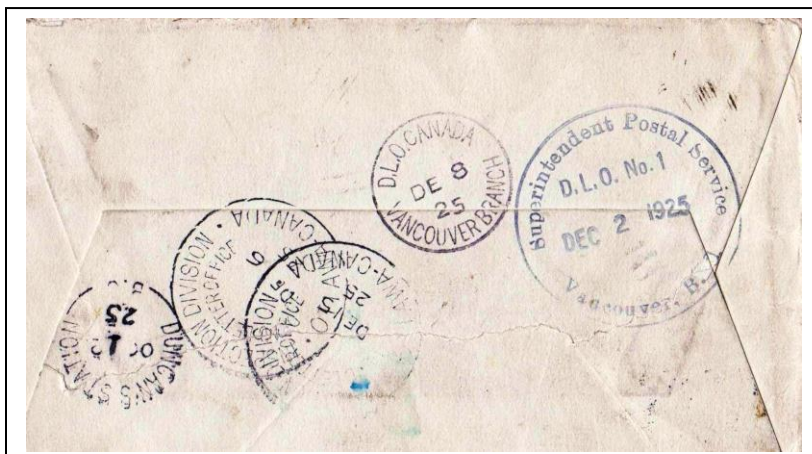
The End of the Story

1925

In the mid-1920s, a postal reorganization resulted in the closure of the Branch Dead Letter Office in Victoria and the transfer of all its functions to the Branch Dead Letter Office in Vancouver. This meant that all mail originating from Vancouver Island or addressed to Vancouver Island that failed of delivery was no longer processed there. The cover shown below illustrates this new situation and confirms the end of the Dead Letter Office in Victoria.



This cover was mailed at Oundle, Northamptonshire, England on September 17 1925. Addressed to Duncan, Vancouver Island, it arrived on October 19. Held until November 30 it was marked NOT CALLED FOR and sent to the Branch Dead Letter Office in Vancouver for processing. It was received on December 2, 1925 by clerk No.1. On December 8, 1925 it was forwarded to the Dead Letter Office in Ottawa where it arrived on December 15. The following day it was returned to the British postal authorities for return to sender.



Superintendent Postal Service / D,L,O.
No.1 / Vancouver, B.C.
DEC 2 1925

D.L.O.CANADA / VANCOUVER
BRANCH / DE 8 / 25

INSPECTION DIVISION / DEAD
LETTER OFFICE / OTTAWA-
CANADA
DE 15 AND DE 16 / 25

DUNCAN'S STATION / B.C. / OC
12 / 25 (? error for October 19)