

THE R.P.O. NEWSLETTER
OF THE CANADIAN R.P.O. STUDY GROUP (BNAPS)

W.G. Robinson
5830 Cartier St.
Vancouver, B.C.
V6M 3A7

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Whole No.61

April, 1987

EXTRA ISSUE - In Canada years ago, the "York" chocolate bar increased their size, and marked the addition "your extra piece". Recently, several lengthy articles and many short bits of news have been received by your Editor, so it was decided that you would each receive an "extra piece" this year. In this issue, you will find an article submitted by Bruce McCallum of Hamilton, Ont., a relatively recent BNAPS member (and not yet a member of this Study Group) - taken from the December, 1968 issue of the Post Office employee magazine "The Postmark". It is one of the best accounts I have ever seen on the activity in a railway mail car. The other main contribution is from our new member Joe Smith of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, giving the 1890 statistics for the Nova Scotia District of the Railway Mail Service.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP - Warren Bosch reports strikes on air stamps as follows - on C-1 - W-89; on C-3 - O-378; on C-5 - MA-241; on C-6 - W-86, 132, 161, 196; on C-7 - W-111d; on C-9 - W30s, 196; total - 10. On Special deliveries he reports - E-2 - MA80, E-6 - O411, W5, W87; E-7 - O-107, 393, W68; E-9 - W51; E-10 - W22; E-11 - MA11, 81, 208, 0262, 377, Q156; total - 15. On maps - MA137, 191, 251; Q270; O67, 181, 280, 283, 292, 302, 329, 340, 358, 374, 387, 398, 423; W30; RR25; DD18, 26; total - 21. He doesn't differentiate between the "fugitive colors". Warren advises that 100,000 4¢ War Issue arrived for Christmas, and that he is half way through sorting with the RPOs running about 2.8% - many Camp. & Levis later hammers. He says - "It will probably be a year before I finish that task. I love lengthy Christmas gifts."

Here is another early "ad" from the lot submitted by Ron Kitchen of Ottawa.

Dr. John McCrae sends a copy of a hyphenated train number used on a U.S. run - NEWPORT & SPRINGFIELD /R.P.O. duplex Train 210-78, September 23, 1956. John says this shows use on CPR Train 210 from Newport to Wells River, and Boston & Maine Train 78 from there to Springfield.

Do we know of any similar Canadian examples? John also advises that he has just published a four-page addendum to his R.P.O. Postmarks International which is available free of charge to present owners of the book. The price of the book is \$ 4.85 US, or \$ 4.50 to Mobile Post Office Society members - available from the author at Box 172, Monroeville, PA, 15146, U.S.A. If you are interested in R.P.O.s other than Canadian, it is strongly recommended.

Reduction in Freight Rates.

THE GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY WILL continue to send out, daily, THROUGH CARS for CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL, and other Western points, at reduced rates from the winter tariff.

Shippers can get full information by applying to Mr. BURNS, Agent G. T. R., Chabouillet Square, or at the Office of the General Freight Agent.

C. J. BRYDGES,
MANAGING DIRECTOR.

P. S. STEVENSON,
General Freight Agent. 7-21 11

Montreal

THE MONTREAL & TORONTO R.P.O. in 1903 - The following article was submitted by BNAPS member Bruce McCallum of Hamilton, Ont., and we thank him very much for this insight into the working life of the Railway Mail Clerk. The article appeared in the December, 1968 issue of "The Postmark", the employee magazine of the Post Office. Here is the title page -

Published Monthly at Ottawa
for the 48,000 postal employees
across Canada
by the
Information and Public Relations
Branch
Post Office Department
J.G. CUNNINGHAM,
Director

The Postmark

December 1968

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MISS M.E. HARVEY
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MRS. S. DUBOIS

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V. MILLAR

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ON OUR COVER THIS MONTH: Mrs. J.G. Cunningham and sons Jim (left) and Rick (middle) prepare for the choir's Christmas program at St. Luke's Church.

Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery
ROGER DUHAMEL, F.R.S.C.
Ottawa, 1968.

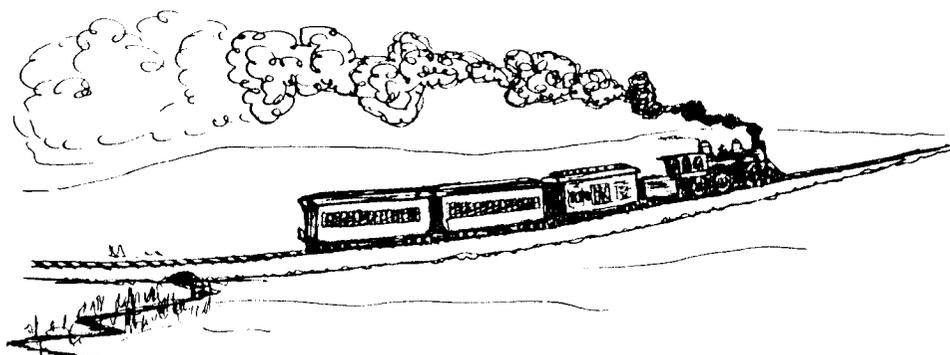
Vol. XXII

No. 10

Postsketch

In 1903 a Toronto newspaper correspondent spent Christmas Eve aboard the mail car of the Toronto-Montreal Express. His observations that night inspired a colourful, three-column news story describing, in the words of the reporter, "the arduous duties of the men who sort and prepare letters, parcels, etc., sent through the mails on the day before Christmas".

In place of its regular instalment of postal history, this month's "Postsketch" reprints that story of the Railway Post Office Service as it was at the turn of the century. It is presented at this time in recognition of the men of the Service who, throughout its one hundred and fourteen years of operation, have been getting the mails through worked—even on Christmas Eve.



Numerous Marvellous Features of Railway Mail Service

While the night mail speeds between Toronto and Montreal, the haughty plutocrat slumbers in luxury in his palatial compartment. The successful citizen snores fitfully in his two-dollar berth behind the heavy curtains. The economically-minded traveler endeavours to curl up six feet of humanity with some degree of comfort upon a plush cushion three feet in length, always supposing that he has contrived to retain that whole three feet from encroachment. The immigrant baby squalls in the uncompromising openness of the second-class upper berth. The colored porter dozes in his nondescript retreat, and dreams of the morning's tips. The engineer and fireman are awake, very much so; but they are getting credit for it in the popular imagination. They are the thin coal-black line of heroes whose watchfulness stands between the crowded train-load and destruction; but the train-load knows it, and is grateful for it. Travelers have even been known to remember them in their prayers. But who remembers—how many even know—that on the night mail there are five more men, awake and alert, doing as hard work under as difficult conditions as any man in the service of the public, and doing it solely and entirely to cut time in two for the benefit of him who writes to his friend in the next township or on the next continent?

What They Do Not Do

There are a few people who know that there is such a thing as a railway post office, though few would recognize it under the mystic initials "R.P.O." A few more have noticed the strange-looking car up among the express and baggage-cars, with its many pigeon-holes and the Royal Mail inscription. Most of the latter think there is a gentleman inside who takes in bags of ready-sorted letters and sits on them till the train arrives at its destination. This conception is not accurate. There is yet a further class who pride themselves on their intelligence in discerning that the persons in this car are engaged in a fiendish task of dividing the Conservative mail from the Liberal mail, and seeing to it that the correspondence and papers of their political opponents go beyond their destination, and are not delivered till 24 hours after they should be.

Complaints are not infrequent from newspaper subscribers who aver that the political organ which they do not like is always thrown off at the right station and the one they do always goes wrong. If these complainants knew that there is no branch of the public service with a greater esprit de corps, and more enthusiastic desire to perfect its operations, they would look into their complaints with greater care before forwarding them to headquarters.

What They Really Do

The railway mail service is by far the best organized branch of a department whose service is universally admitted to be excellent. Nowhere is more work done under a responsibility so definite and inscrutable. Nowhere are so few errors made and so many corrected. The whole system is a marvel of modern human machinery. Why? Picked men, tried methods, constant training and examinations, and every man responsible for his own work, all his own work and nothing but his own work. Let us accompany the east-bound Montreal mail that left Toronto on Wednesday night, the last mail, to secure delivery in the East before the great feast of Christendom. The train leaves at ten, but that is not when the railway mail clerk begins his work. That everything may be in the most advanced stage of distribution possible as the great train reaches each stopping place, and finally brings up in Montreal at seven a.m., it is necessary that the five men who work the railway post office should commence their duties at half-past three in the afternoon. From half-past three to seven in the morning is fifteen and a half hours of straight, solid work. There is time for a meal at Toronto before leaving, but their night refreshment they take with them and eat in brief intervals on the train. Two of the five operate only on the Toronto end of the line. They change trains at Napanee, if on time, or nearer if not, and return to Toronto in the morning, to resume the same routine in the evening. These are the assistants. The others, the two chief clerks and the porter, go on to Montreal, and come back next night, but from Montreal their hours are a trifle lighter. At the Bonaventure station work does not begin till nearly six. After two consecutive nights of this it will hardly be disputed that they are entitled to thirty hours rest.

Cars Full of Matter Handled

On the night we have taken for a sample, business was heavy. The car from Toronto made up 125 "separations" of papers and parcels and 325 of letters. Many of these separations filled the allotted sack several times over. Of this enormous amount of matter—more than enough to fill the car to overflowing if all left in it at one time—a great part was sorted and made ready for Montreal trans-shipment before the train left, and this was all transferred to the baggage car. This total does not include what was taken in at way stations, as other bags were thrown out, and this would run from half a dozen to two dozen bags at each station. The whole staff worked like beavers to get the matter into proper shape. A certain amount of this was not handled separately—that is, it came in already sorted into small bundles ready for casting off at way stations or for placing without further investigation into bags for Sherbrooke, Halifax, Prince Edward Island or a score of other points beyond Montreal. The newspapers especially in their own interests have been compelled to adopt very perfect classification of their parcels, and bundles of Newses containing from twenty-five to a hundred or more papers would require no more handling than to be cast bodily into the

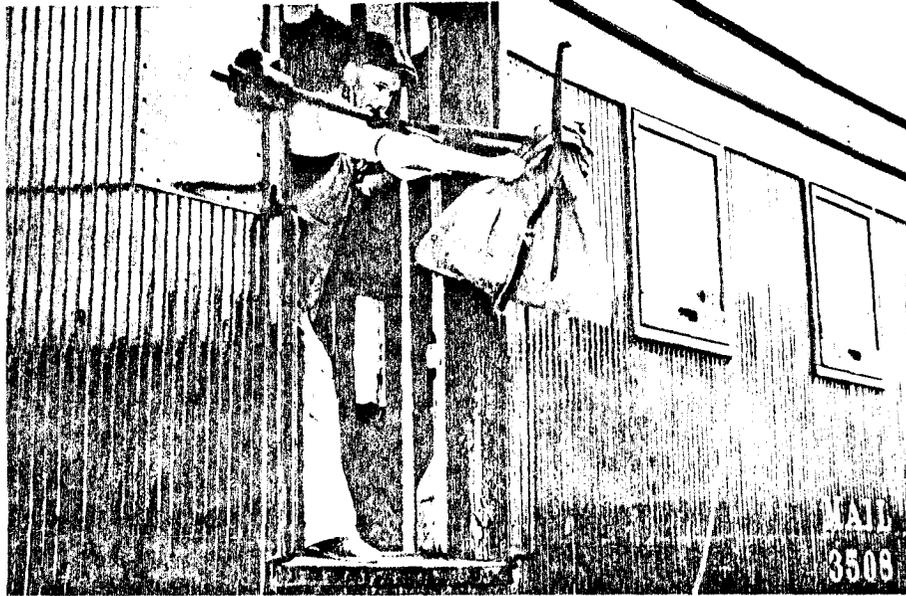
appropriate bag. In technical language, they are made up for the same "distributions" as are required to be made on the Toronto-Montreal mail—nearly one hundred distributions. For each of these distributions—each representing a station, a branch line or a through connection of some kind—a pigeon-hole yawns at the letter-end of the car, and a big canvas bag is spread open in a long rack down the middle. Each of them the expert distributor knows by a sweet short name. The mail for Belleville and Peterboro' branch, itself a railway post office, which will look after its own subdivision, he slings into a cavity euphoniously known as "Belle-and-Pete". Many are known by bare initials, others by the abbreviation of long-defunct railway titles. Each sack and each bag when he fills it up is found to bear the correct designation on a card clipped into a grooved strap of metal at the end of its card. Each bag of letters is threaded at the top upon a small metal bar and the bar padlocked with a uniform lock of which the railway mail clerk treasures the key as he would his life. Each registered bag is tied with twine as well as locked, and the knot heavily sealed in an iron ring and impressed with the car seal "Toronto-Montreal". For these the car takes a receipt, as it gives one for each parcel of registered mail that it accepts.



INSIDE AN R.P.O. railway mail clerks sort the mail in transit.

His Special Abilities

What must be the special capabilities of the men who perform these varied duties? In the first place, above and beyond all requirements of intelligence, skill and honesty stands the fact that the railway mail clerk must have a constitution of iron. He must be able to face at all times and all seasons a day's work of continuous mental stress and physical strain lasting for twelve to sixteen hours at a stretch, and he must be able to shift this work at a minute's notice from the hours of day to the hours of night. It is no easy position, and the man who cannot stand the strain without flinching is of no use to the Department. Then, too, he must possess a thorough geographical knowledge of the post offices of Canada (and what that means we will consider shortly), and a working knowledge of the time-tables of every railway, stage route and steamer line with which his run comes in contact. As long as he is on schedule time his connections are, of course, arranged for him; but once let his train drop so far behind that a regular connection is missed, and it is the chief clerk of the car who has to plan out the best possible device for securing the delivery of his mails. For example, many small stations on the main lines are reached only once a day in each direction by an accommodation train. The bags for these will be thrown off normally at the stations where the accommodation train begins its run; but if the connection be missed they must be taken



REMOVING the mail bag from the catch-arm.

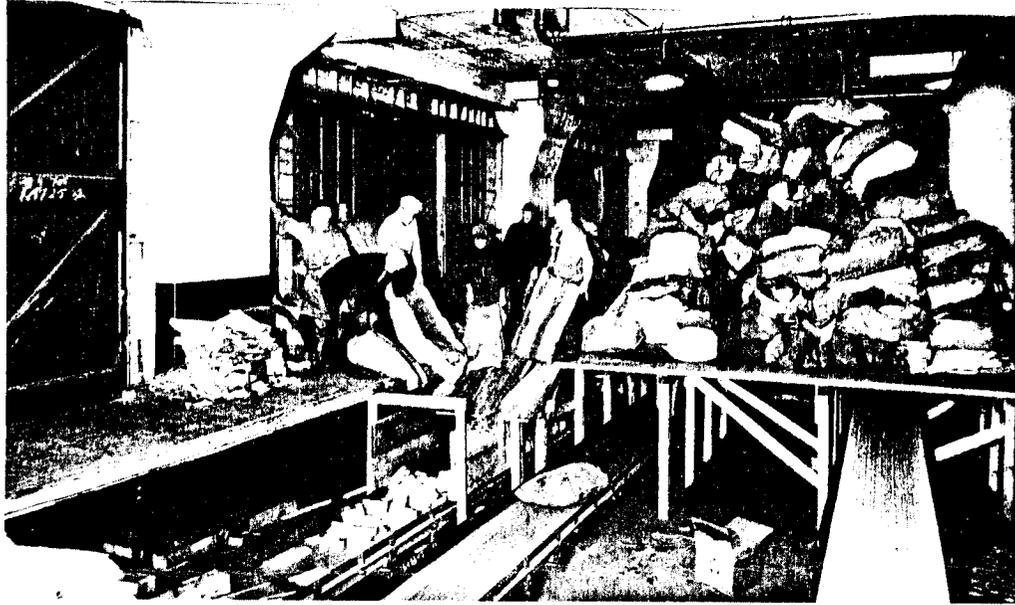
on to the point where the run ends, and taken back from there along the line. The mail clerk must instantly adapt himself to these changes of plan, or the district he serves will lose, instead of a few hours, a whole day in the delivery of their mail.

The Innumerable Post-Offices

His knowledge of the post offices is now the matter of a special annual examination, in which he must make 90 per cent, or lose his annual increase of salary. Public service is no private snap on the railway post office, and the man once in must keep up his standard of work to stay in. In the Toronto district the examination is usually confined to Ontario, though the practical requirements of the case compel a man to know a good deal outside of that limit. The test is called the "case examination". There are about 3,500 post offices in Ontario, and a chance selection of 1,500 cards, each bearing the name of one of these offices, and no two being similar, is placed before the candidate, who is required to make them up into 100 or more separations, on precisely the same lines as if he were handling them on a railway mail car. There is no time limit, but a good man handles his 1,500 in slightly over an hour (the record is forty-nine minutes), and the percentage of accuracy is usually over 97, while 100 per cent is not infrequent. This means a thorough knowledge of the exact location and method of reaching any and every one of the 3,500 post offices. A strict record is kept of every examination in a book which contains the official biography of each clerk, and in which is scored up every report made of him, for mis-handling a piece of mail, and every correction which he himself reports of a mis-handling by some other office——the sending to his train of a letter which should not have come there at all, or the doing up in a parcel destined for for one section of a letter destined for another. On Wednesday, for example, no less than seven letters in one parcel reached the Toronto-Montreal train from a city post office, when they should have gone to the Toronto-Ottawa. Had they reached sorting before ten o'clock they would have been handed over to the Ottawa car; as was, they had to be forwarded from Brockville, with a slight loss of time, just the same way as the Ottawa Valley mail picked up along the line. The parcel in which they were done up bore the date stamp of the office making it, and the initial of the clerk, on a slip of paper at its back, and this was endorsed with a memorandum of the number of mis-sent letters and the initials of the correcting clerk, to whom the correction will be duly credited. It may be noted that the railway clerks, chiefly owing to the highly systemitized working of their departments, correct about five times as many errors as they make.

The Distributor at Work

An expert railway mail clerk in the full operation of sorting, is a sight worth seeing. At work he frequently exceeds his examination average of 1,500 per hour. With a stack of letters in his left hand, he stands like a card dealer under the dim and flickering light of the railway lamp and plays over his hundred pigeon-holes with the certainty and unmistakable action of an organist



UNLOADING the mail bags from an R.P.O. run.

drawing his stops. Only very rarely does he hesitate, and then it is seldom for his own ignorance. What little trouble he has is caused by bad or indistinct writing, or insufficiency of address, and he is not the man who suffers most from this, for the only word in which he is interested, is the name of the post office, and that is usually recognizable. In any event, there has been an enormous improvement in the quality of address writing in the last ten years. The typewriter and the spread of education are about equally responsible, and except for an occasional specimen in the European mails the indecipherable address is very infrequent. Here are two historic examples, showing the difference between the bad addressing which does worry the railway mail clerk, and the bad addressing which does not. The first, of course, would afford no one any trouble until it reached the St. Thomas post office:

(1) "Kains St.
St. Thomas, Ont.
"i don't no the gent's name."

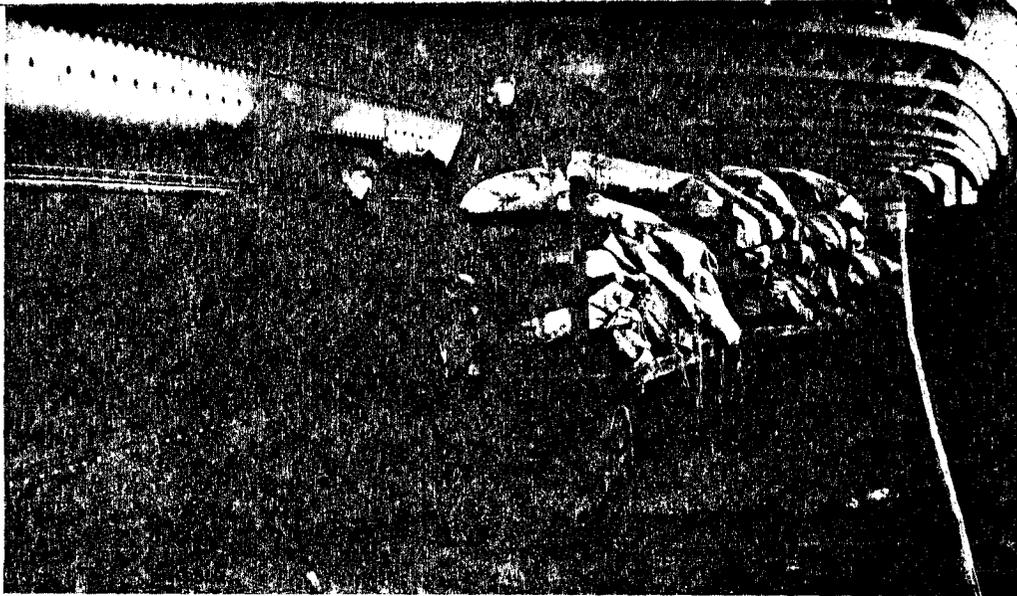
(2) "M.S. Marbarrett,
At a farm
1,700 miles beyond Montreal,
North West Territory,
Canada."

The Service at Large

There are nine railway post office districts in Canada, of which Toronto is easily the most important. The present number of employees is 403, which was slightly exceeded in '93 and '96 at the end of the regime of Sir Adolphe Caron. Although the salary list is now lighter than in those years, the amount paid for mileage is greater, which would seem to indicate that the reduced staff are at least doing quite as much work. There is, by the way, a curious anomaly in regard to this mileage. It is half a cent per mile by day and one cent by night, this being the only compensation for the more arduous night service. But if the night clerk's train is so late as to cover part of its mileage after six in the morning he loses the half cent on that distance. If a train due at Toronto at six o'clock, is held up sixty miles out until six o'clock, and does not get in until eight, the clerk loses thirty cents, as well as two hours of his own private time. It is true the belated day clerk gains in the same manner, but this is merely a reasonable compensation for lost time, while there are some lines which have no day service, and never give their clerks an opportunity to profit in this way.

The Toronto District

The Toronto district embraces twenty-six different railway post offices. There are two—night and day—on the Toronto-Montreal line, a night car only Toronto to Ottawa, day cars from Toronto to Port Hope, Niagara Falls, Hamilton, London, Elora, Sarnia, Owen Sound, Gravenhurst, North Bay and Midland, and the following branches—Hamilton-Meaford, Beeton-Collingwood, Port Colborne-Port Dalhousie, Whitby-Mania, Belleville-Peterboro', Belleville-Madoc, Picton-Tren-



THE R.P.O. takes on another load of mail for its next run.

ton, Napanee-Tamworth, Kingston-Tweed, Lindsay-Tamworth, Orangeville-Teeswater, and Allandale-Penetanguishene. In the two latter the post office official has no compartment to himself, and dwells in the baggage car. The genial Toronto superintendent, J.E. McLeod, an enthusiast on postal service and systematization, a popular head, and a veteran whose appointment dates back to the MacKenzie regime, has under him an office staff of four, seventy-eight railway mail clerks, eight transfer agents and one train porter. The Toronto-Montreal line is the chief railway route in Canada, and it takes thirty-two men from the two districts to keep it in operation. The Toronto district staff includes University graduates, old boys from Upper Canada College and Bishop Ridley, and, generally speaking, as fine a selection of men as work in any public service. The salary commences at \$480., but is subject to an annual raise of \$50., conditioned on the case examination and the conduct report. These case examinations have only been in use since 1898, but the records show an extraordinary improvement in the efficiency of the men.

A Strenuous Life

Life on a railway car is not heaven at the best, and when combined with hard mental work for fifteen hours at a stretch it is very difficult. There is no small element of danger, too, in spending one's life a few feet behind the engine of an express train. The long standing and the constant vibration are ruinous to the constitution. The responsibility is unceasing and worrying. Is the railway mail clerk a man to whom the public owes its gratitude, especially at this festive season of greetings between friend and friend greetings that forgets his labors, and make it impossible for him to celebrate with the rest of us? Perhaps a few lines of W.D. Nesbit's on the particular phase of the strenuous life may make fitting reply:

No flag is snapping over him,
No band is playing loud;
There are no cheers in strident vim
From some applauding crowd;
But night and day he toils away,
Until his work is done—
No ranting fifes or bugles play
To lighten his long run,
He has no time to think of fear,
Or talk of pluck or nerve,
With danger always lurking near
In every lurching swerve.

The swaying lamps make shadows dim
To taunt his straining eyes;
The jolting car makes mock of him
As madly on it flies.
It may be north, south, east or west—
The mail must hurry through
The postal clerk may take no rest
With all these things to do,
He does not see what waits ahead,
Nor cares what lies behind.

Extract from 1890 P.M.G. Report - Courtesy of Joe Smith
 Showing details of Railway Mail Service in Nova Scotia.

54 Victoria.

Sessional Papers (No. 16.)

A. 1891

PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

DETAIL of all payments made for Salaries, &c., in Nova Scotia; showing, in each case, the name of the person, the service or duty performed, and the amount paid within the Year ended 30th June, 1890.

Name.	Service.	Salary.	Mileage.	Total of Classes.	Grand Total.
		\$ cts.	\$ cts.	\$ cts.	\$ cts.
NOVA SCOTIA DIVISION.					
C. J. MacDonald.	Post Office Inspector	2,400 00			
J. D. Story	Assistant Inspector (24 2/3rd December, 1889 (superseded))	700 00			
D. Stewart	do do from, 2nd 1st Class Clerk by, 31st December, 1889	1,200 00		4,300 00	
T. E. Davison	2nd Class Clerk	1,150 00			
S. J. R. Sireom	do	1,000 00			
A. Costley	do (promoted from 3rd Class, 1st November, 1889)	825 67		2,975 67	
W. W. Page	3rd do	520 00			
T. J. Curran	do	400 00			
S. Howe	Temporary Clerk	60 00		1,010 00	
A. H. Kelly	Messenger	300 00		300 00	
Total, Inspector's Office.					
RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE.					
A. Browne	Chief Railway Mail Clerk	1,500 00	71 05	1,571 05	
J. McN. Gabriel	do 1st Class	900 00	204 57		
J. W. H. Cameron	do	900 00	263 45	2,448 02	
R. Davison	do 2nd	800 00	248 30		
J. McNeill	do	800 00	273 48		
S. Hall	do	773 33	195 74		
G. A. Hawkesworth	do	773 33	163 63		
J. D. Ross	do	720 00	243 33		
T. Keith	do	720 00	221 24		
W. Bennett	do	720 00	210 96		
Total, Railway Mail Service.					9,246 67

Extract from 1890 P.M.G. Report - Continued

54 Victoria

Sessional Papers (No. 16.)

A. 1891

DETAIL of all payments for Salaries, &c., in Nova Scotia, made within the Year ended 30th June, 1890—Continued.

Name.	Service.	Salary.	Message.	Total of Classes.	Grand Total.
		\$ cts.	\$ cts.	\$ cts.	\$ cts.
NOVA SCOTIA DIVISION—RAILWAY MAIL SERVICE—Continued.					
W. C. McKeown	2nd Class Railway Mail Clerk	726 00	262 08		
A. Campbell	do	649 00	350 07		
W. H. Y. R. Leitch	do	540 00	252 73		
C. E. H. West	do	640 00	259 91		
W. F. Eason	do	630 00	280 25		
F. Scudell	do	550 00	251 12	11,263 21	
H. R. Laid	do	220 00	128 04		
D. G. Sullivan	do	220 00	240 81		
R. H. Ross	do	506 07	85 85		
E. Robinson	do	500 00	200 51		
A. M. J. Ham	do	480 00	340 18		
J. E. B. Gray	do	480 00	120 23	4,680 05	
	Total Railway Mail Service	12,378 00	4,680 84		20,248 88
		24,826 06	4,680 84	24,826 06	24,826 06
	Grand Total carried forward			24,826 06	24,826 06

W.G. Robinson
5830 Cartier St.
Vancouver, B.C.

NOV 22 1897

That's all for this time. Hope you found these items interesting. Please consider this as an extra edition, as there was just too much material piling up which required to be seen by the membership. Also, we are taking advantage of current mail rates. These will increase by an average of 6% on April 1, 1897. The next issue should reach you in about May, and there will be another for BNAPEX.

Bill