

**United States 1928-1960 mail for St. Pierre & Miquelon
via *The Gull* Fast Train through Maritime Canada
SINGLE-FRAME SYNOPSIS**

Purpose & Scope

This Postal History, single-frame, exhibit traces the routes, and postal markings of United States surface mail addressed to the French Colony of St. Pierre & Miquelon in 1920-1960. All mails from the United States addressed to the French North American Colony of St. Pierre & Miquelon in 1928 to the 1950s were directed internally to the Foreign Section of the main Boston, Massachusetts Post Office.

There, the mail was sorted, bagged, and labelled for dispatch to the Canadian ports of Halifax (in the winter) or North Sydney (in the summer) by fast train. Once at the rail terminus at Halifax or North Sydney, the mail bags were taken on board the commercial steamer contracted by the Colony for delivery at the wharf at St. Pierre Harbour and released to the St. Pierre Post Office.

Treatment

An interesting group of scarce railway waybills allow the journeys of the individual sealed mail bags to be traced during several eastbound trips in 1936. The sealed bags of ordinary mail labelled for St. Pierre & Miquelon were accounted for on pre-printed "St. Pierre et Miquelon" waybills. More involved, crudely printed waybills, which recorded the postal clerks' initials, were struck with the dated RMS and RPO hammers used to account for the more valuable registered mail. In 1936 the Newfoundland Canada Steamships' steamer *SS Belle Isle* held the mail contract from the St. Pierre Colonial Government.

The original waybills are unique artifacts of the routes that a single mailbag made as it was passed from railway mail coach to mail coach and eventually to the contract steamer to complete the journey to St. Pierre.

Importance

The United States Post Office introduced the central collection point at Boston to efficiently track and dispatch mail to the French Islands located 1,200 kilometres northeast. The utilization of four different railway companies across the international land boundary between the US and Canada connecting with the steamship contracted by the St. Pierre Colonial Government exemplified international cooperation.

The international fast mail and passenger train between Boston and the Nova Scotia port of Halifax was named *The Gull*. The name was appropriate as the train followed the North Atlantic coastline throughout much of its journey. The Gull ran on the right of way of four different railroads: the Boston & Maine (B&MR), Maine Central (MEC), and Canada's two largest rail systems, the Canadian National (CNR) and Canadian Pacific (CPR). The train was more a varied, pooled assemblage of through cars, as it switched tracks and equipment rather than an entire through train.

Eastbound *Gull* trains were leaving Boston's North Station mid-evening to cross the United States-Canada border about sunrise as westbound trains left Halifax shortly after

breakfast and crossed the border in the late evening arriving in Boston at 7:00 a.m. *The Gull* ran six days per week, skipping the Saturday departure from Boston and the Sunday departure from Saint John. The train would have a dozen cars: a post office car was behind the steam locomotive and tender, and then the baggage and express car, passenger coaches, and sleepers. It was the only through train on the route, so it carried a lot of mail and express freight.

Knowledge, Study, and Research

The elusive paper waybills with the interesting RPO route markings, recovered as discarded Post Office records from waste bins, allowed personal research to trace the efficient movements of mail during the North American heyday of rail transport and steam engines. The international aspect of the mail handling and the intrigue and romance associated with named trains like *The Gull* increase the interest and challenge. Original research by the exhibitor is published in the *London Philatelist* of October 2019. As more mail, freight and passenger traffic was transported by motor vehicles and faster aircraft, the railway post offices were gradually phased out, and *The Gull* was discontinued altogether in 1960.

Rarity & Condition

Individual waybills are challenging to acquire. Each of the original waybills are unique artifacts of the routes that a single mailbag made as it was passed from railway mail coach to mail coach and eventually to the contract steamer to complete the journey to St. Pierre & Miquelon.

Presentation

The display of the postal documents, front, and back of the waybills, is enhanced using a double page layout. The postal routes are shown on the Eastern United States and Maritime Canada map, especially prepared for the exhibit. The complete story fits a single-frame format.

References:

Clark Steamships, <https://clarkesteamship.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/chapter-6.pdf> Retrieved May 21, 2018

Simmons, J., and Smith, D.N.W., 2015, *The Gull* a truly international passenger train, the final years, *Canadian Rail*, n. 567, July-August, p.143-157, 171-177.

Taylor, James R., 2019, United States 1928-1960 Mail for St. Pierre & Miquelon via *The Gull* Fast Train through Maritime Canada, *London Philatelist*, v. 128, n. 1469, October p. 392-401.