

Canadian Postal History (1859-1870): Overseas Rate and Route Study Using Decimal (Cents) Franked- and Stampless-Covers

Synopsis of Exhibit

Purpose

This is a postal history exhibit organized by rates & destinations. Both franked and stampless covers are included. In places, to understand postal rates charged, routes are provided, especially use of North Atlantic sailing tables. Postal markings provide additional information on routes used. Sometimes, original research was used to understand rates and routes.

Scope

Although emphasis is on postage required during decimal period (1859-1868) a few examples are shown of stamps from outside of their period. On title page, there's a seldom seen example of pence stamp used on foreign mail well after introduction of cents stamps. In Epilogue, use of decimal stamps into early Large Queen period (1868-1876) is shown. This expansion shows observer that Canadian postage stamps have never been demonetized & mixed frankings are of increased interest & tell story of changing postal rates during classical period. Although mail to United Kingdom (UK) dominates exhibit, mail to other foreign countries is hard to come by so any examples are considered to be important (see later notes on Firby's census of foreign mail).

Organization & Treatment

Postal rates begin with showing examples of letter mail most commonly available foreign mail. For UK, most of the mail went via Canadian packet (Allan line after shipping company) or British packet (Cunard). Without getting into all possible ports of call, Allan ships

sailed between Quebec & Liverpool in summer & Portland, Maine & Liverpool in winter when St. Lawrence River was frozen. Cunard ships left New York or Boston via Halifax with intermediate stop in Queenstown, Ireland before commencing to Liverpool. Because U.S. imposed a 5-cent fee for services, Cunard carried mail was more expensive than Allan mail. Usually, but not always, name of specific steamship or "via Cunard" (British) or "via Canadian" (Allan) was written in manuscript in upper left of cover. Mail via UK to other countries was transported on a variety of steamships or local steamers followed overland by rail. Known routes will be mentioned where appropriate.

Example of foreign mail (other than to UK) will be shown as per geography: Europe: France, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Denmark, Papal State & Italy, Spain, Gibraltar, Corfu (Greece), Switzerland. Asia/Africa: Australia, India, Mauritius. Caribbean & South America: Barbados, Jamaica, Tobago, Cuba, Peru.

Challenge

The biggest challenge in collecting foreign destinations in decimal era is locating examples. Fortunately, Charles Firby did a census (1) of all known examples during 1970s-1980s. Latest edition 1984 does give detailed data on numbers and rates of various franked covers that Mr. Firby uncovered in his storied career as important collector, dealer & auction house of Canada/BNA postal history. From census, total mail pieces of all kinds (including letters, registered letters, printed matter, newspapers,

soldier's letters, etc.) are listed below:

Great Britain = 222
France = 24
Rest of Europe = 30
Africa = 2
Asia = 27
South America/Caribbean = 11
Overall Total = 316

A 2nd reference providing information on decimal postal history is book by Leggett/Arfken (2). The latter is not a census but gives information on key rates & important coverage of decimal postal history. In fact, an excellent source of decimal postal history can be found in the "named" collections sold through Firby, Siegel, Bennett, Eastern and many other auction houses. I have many of catalogs of these sales and some of these foreign rarities will appear in this exhibit. Since Firby's census, a number of additional covers have come onto the market but census has not been updated. Firby is now retired. I have been collecting further data & have proposed to BNAPS Pence-Cents Study Group to take a stab at updating decimal postal history census.

Significant Items

This exhibit contains the following philatelic significant and challenging items.

To United Kingdom

- Three U.S. Civil War patriotic covers
- Decimal combination paying Allan rate to Ireland (only reported franking)
- Only recorded triple & quintuple rated covers to UK via Allan Packet.
- Only 12X Allan Packet rate cover; second highest franking of any decimal

cover known.

- Only recorded triple Cunard Packet rate to England
- Unrecorded 51¢ triple Cunard short paid packet rate (new discovery).
- Story of new 1868 Cunard rate but no stamp available
- One-cent newspaper rates: 1) wrapper and 2) entire newspaper.
- Printed matter rate, short paid (only one reported)
- Registration paid in cash, short paid, returned for postage (new discovery)
- Quadruple registered rate, reg. paid with stamp (only reported)
- Quadruple registered rate, reg. paid in cash (only reported)
- New 8 cent Registered rate: stampless (new find), single rate (Allan), double rate (Cunard) (3 covers)
- Forwarded mail within Scotland; only franking reported
- Twice forwarded mail, U.S. Civil War patriotic to Canada, then England, then Scotland (unique).

To Foreign Countries

- France, 22¢ rate, 1¢ underpaid (only reported)
- France, 51¢, triple rate (only reported)
- France, 5¢ printed circular (only recorded)
- France, paid only to England, forwarded to France with postage due (newly discovered)
- Saxony, 12 1/2¢ x2 +4 x 1¢, 1¢ overpaid (only reported)
- Norway, 17¢ +10¢= 27¢ (only reported)
- Norway, 12 1/2¢ x2 + 1¢ x2=27¢ rate, different combo (only reported)
- Italy, 10¢ x 3 =30¢, rate: 29¢ so 1¢ overpaid for convenience (6 reported)

- Papal State (Italy), stampless letter to priest in Vatican
- Gibraltar, 23¢ rate for ½ oz., 4 examples including stampless & 2¢ overpaid.
- Switzerland, stampless U.S. Civil War patriotic, 19¢ rate (new discovery)
- Switzerland, double printed matter rate, 10¢ for 4 oz (only example).
- Corfu (Greece), military mail forwarded from England and redirected back via Malta
- Australia, ½ oz letter rate via England & Suez, 23¢
- Australia, ½ oz via Panama, 22¢, 6d due (misunderstood rate)
- Jamaica, 17¢, 5¢, 1¢ = 23¢ (2 recorded to date)
- Cuba, 10¢ X3=30¢, double letter rate (only reported)
- Barbados, 5¢ X2 =10¢ (via forwarding agent from NY)
- Peru, 25¢ rate, only 2nd known example of decimal cover to South America.

Stampless Covers

There has been no census of stampless covers sent to foreign countries. In some cases, stampless covers are the only available examples of mail to places like Mauritius, Spain and India. Decimal franked and stampless covers have been chased for many scores of years and occasionally pop up as “new discoveries”.

Condition

One would hope that covers from the 1860 would be pristine and free of defects but when only a few examples (or a single example) of decimal covers are available you can hope for the best. My philosophy on collecting postal history is to find best copy available at a point of time & hope that a better copy comes onto market. However, when attempting to find rare items such as depicted in this exhibit, replacements don't come

up very often (or may not be in existence) so one could wait a very long time to get a better cover.

Presentation

Major headings for each chapter are in bold printing and sub-headings are 90% black. Significant covers are outlined in red rather than the normal black. Those covers that required  original research to unravel rates and routes have a small magnifying glass adjacent to cover. Those covers with a certificate of authenticity will have a © adjacent to the cover. If on a cover, the town cancel, an important transit or destination or a postal marking which adds to the story is not readable, I will provide my best interpretation. To demonstrate rarity, I will provide a note on the known population “___ recorded to date”.

Notes on Exhibit

Although, there have been major postal history exhibits featuring decimal issue, recently only myself and a few others have tried to tackle this difficult area especially beyond domestic and cross-border examples. I know where many of the other significant items reside, & it may be a while before I can beef up my exhibit beyond its current content. For example, in past two years, despite my best efforts, I have added a total of 4 significant foreign covers (excluding U.K.) to my exhibit. Although the Firby census is well out-of-date, based on my experience, it is not anticipated that next census will show an increase of covers more than 30-40 percent.

References

- 1) C.G. Firby, Postal Rates of Canada, 1851-1868, Part II for Canada 1859 Issue, 1976, revised Sept. 1, 1984.
- 2) G.B. Arfken and A.W. Leggett, *Canada's Decimal Era, 1859-1868*, VGG Foundation, Toronto, 303pp, 1996.