

SYNOPSIS

CANCELS USED BY THE RAILWAY POST OFFICE OPERATING ON ROUTES BETWEEN HALIFAX and SYDNEY, NOVA SCOTIA

SCOPE: This exhibit examines, primarily on covers, all of the different cancellations, and their varieties, used by the Railway Post Office on trains travelling along the route between Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Note: throughout the time period of this exhibit there were many train and RPO routes passing from Halifax through Truro, bound for Amherst, Moncton, and other points. Mail on these west (or east) bound trains destined for Sydney would be off loaded in Truro to continue onwards to Sydney. To stay within the scope intended, the only route originating in Halifax incorporated into this exhibit is the Halifax & Sydney route.

STRUCTURE: The exhibit is organized chronologically. Frame one shows all the routes from the 19th Century and their progression into the routes of the 20th century, shown on frames two and three. The exhibit ends with seven pages of rare clerk cancels.

Headings in the exhibit distinguish each railway line and a brief description follows each heading describing the years of RPO operation and the hammer(s) used. With each description is a reproduction (100%) of the hammer strike. (see bibliography). After the description, examples of the hammer strike are shown – in many cases more than one hammer was used over the years on a particular railway line. To provide clarity descriptions and examples are all identified by the (MT) numbers used in the Gray catalogue.

ABOUT THE EXHIBIT: This was a new exhibit in 2017. It was awarded Gold at Novapex 2017 Regional, Gold at BNAPS 2017, and a Large Vermeil at Canpex 2017. With critiques in hand I have done an overhaul of most pages to enhance the flow of the material. The title and title page were redone because it was pointed out I was alluding to a theme that was not there. It was never meant to be there... it was more to do with poorly thought out wording. The style used to highlight the rare material has been altered somewhat to ensure it is seen but not distract from the overall exhibit. Material wise, the most significant addition is the cover on page 42 acquired last fall from an Ontario dealer. This is the only known copy of the cancel. It is a clerk pre-cursor and is back stamped on a cover.

CHALLENGE & RARITY: Covers and stamps in this exhibit have been selected from my Nova Scotia RPO collection, which is part of a Maritime Canadian collection. The collection began many years ago and has been actively worked on since 2001. Portions of frame one were exhibited in 2012. The later part of frame three exhibits material which, until 2017, had not seen the light of day in many years.

Most of the rarer covers have been acquired through dealers and auctions one by one. Having depleted the stocks of local and visiting dealers most acquisitions now come from searching auction catalogues. Large auction lots of the Halifax & Sydney and Truro & Sydney routes, has enabled a comprehensive hammer study. These routes ran for a longer period and involved a large number of individual hammers. Still, some of those hammers were only in use for brief periods, thus while the route may have a low rarity factor overall, certain hammers within that route will have a higher rarity factor.

It should be noted that good, clear strikes of any RPO can be difficult to locate, especially the scarcer material.

The Gray catalogue has restructured the rarity factor of strikes from a numerical value to a value from A to G, G's being extremely rare and in many cases unique (only one known example). The covers shown in this exhibit range from A to G. The scarcer material is generally found with the older material, although there are some unique items within the more common cancels as well. The rare items in the exhibit are outlined or highlighted in red. The clerk cancels fall into the rare category.

HIGHLIGHTS: Page 10 shows a **new** Earliest Recorded Date of use. Page 15 features two covers with the 1898 Map Issue. Pages 32 and 35 show Naval/Military covers. RPO cancels on such covers are uncommon. Two items on page 39 show a **new discovery**, and a recorded **ERD**. Page 40 shows **two new discoveries** on one cover. Page 42 shows the two rubber cancels that are essentially precursors to the clerk rubber hand cancels. One of these cancels is the **only known copy and is on a cover**. Pages 43 to 48 feature very scarce clerk cancels on the Sydney & Truro route. Exhibited are 7 of the 8 known clerks. The missing clerk is known by just a single copy. That said, there are among the shown cancels **three only known copies**. As well there are **two ERD's** and **two LRD's** shown.

HAMMER STUDIES: This is one of the most challenging aspects of RPO collecting. Certain hammers (not all) are known to have varieties. That is to say there was more than one hammer created for a route. While the information on the hammer is the same and thus carries the same catalogue number, the hammers are distinguishable by studying the "chordal measurements" – the distance in millimetres between two fixed points on the hammer's type. These measurements are shown in charts in the exhibit. Extensive hammer studies have been done on all of the routes known to have used more than one hammer. The measurements were originally made by Lewis Ludlow in the 1970's and published in BNAPS Topics, and the BNAPS RPO study group newsletter. Sub sequentially, in 2000, Ross Gray placed all these measurements (along with new additions and observations, into one publication, "Railway Postmarks of the Maritimes". Which brings us to the second phase of hammer study - measurements must be made on the actual examples. Many of the measurements are less than ¼ mm and good clear strikes are a necessity. Fortunately under a good glass faded strikes are often very sharp. Measurements can certainly be made on partial strikes, but it has to be done on the relevant portion of the cancel.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Catalogue of Canadian Railway Cancellations and Related Transportation Postmarks, Lewis M. Ludlow, 1982

Railway Postmarks of the Maritimes by Ross Gray, 2000

Catalogue of Canadian Railway Cancellations, Ross Gray, 2009, and 2015 (2nd Edition)

Webb's Postal Stationery Catalogue of Canada and Newfoundland, Earle L. Covert and William C. Walton, 1988

History of Railway Companies in Nova Scotia, www.littletechshoppe.com

Significant Dates in Nova Scotia Railway History, 1850-1899, by Ivan Smith, www.trainweb.org/canadianrailways

All postmarks used in the headings are 100% scans (actual size) taken from Railway Postmarks of the Maritimes, used by permission

Chordal measurements described in the exhibit that were originally compiled by Lewis Ludlow and published in BNAPS Topics : page 2 July-Aug 1979; page 9 May-June 1978; pages 18, 26 & 27 Nov-Dec 1976; pages 28 and 31 May-June 1979; Ross Gray has subsequently compiled these hammer studies with updated information, and hammer studies of his own in his publication Railway Postmarks of the Maritimes. This is the source of measurements used on pages 7 and 12 and as well is the final definition (updated from Ludlow by Gray) on the other pages.