

Early Postal History Of Newfoundland

HARBOUR GRACE — The following is part of an address given by the late Rev. Hugh Kirby to the Historical Society of St. John's in 1840. The address was reported at that time by Mr. S. L. Sheppard of Harbour Grace who was then Chicago Tribune correspondent and was edited by Richard McP Cabean for STAMPS.

"This writer is indebted to the Kirby family for this and other historical material and hopes that it will be of sufficient interest to be used in the DAILY NEWS columns.

"My interest in the early postal history of Newfoundland grew out of an effort to collect its postmarks. I learned through Robson Lowe that the first known postmark of this country is dated 1821. It reads "St. John's" in a straight line in black letters about five hand stamp dates 1810. This is a double circle with the Royal Coat of Arms and inscriptions "Post Office" at top and "Newfoundland" at bottom. This is a black design with colorless letters. In 1827 this mark is in black with black letters.

"There is extant a Newfoundland letter sheet dated 1764, bearing a hand stamped figure "4" and a mass inscription "Paid" in black. Did Newfoundland have a postmaster at that time? Judge Prowse in his "History of Newfoundland, page 653, first edition, states "McAusland appointed Deputy Postmaster, October 1778."

"The first post office in Newfoundland was established in 1803 by Sir Erasmus, Governor, who appointed Simon Solomon as postmaster. This was a local affair, and merely meant the fixing of a place in St. John's where letters for despatch in outgoing vessels could be deposited, and where captains on arrival could deliver letters with which they had been entrusted in Great Britain.

"A letter passing through the London P.O. to Newfoundland cost 1s. 3d. by packet to Halifax and 8d. by private vessel, to which sums was added the postage from the place in

Great Britain at which the letter was deposited, to London. It appeared that little of the correspondence between Newfoundland and Great Britain was exchanged by these expensive means. St. John's was in the happy position of being able to send and receive mail by the many vessels using the port, placing letters in charge of the captain who would collect a penny or 2d. for each letter from the person to whom he delivered them at the time of arrival."

(To Be Continued)

August 31, 1959

From an address given by the late Rev. Hugh Kirby. (Continued from last week)

HR. GRACE—There is a record of a St. John's merchant being notified of a packet on which postage was due. At first, he refused the packet declaring that it could contain only newspapers, but through curiosity, he took it and finding his surmise to be correct, he endeavoured to return the package to the postmaster, declining to pay the postage. The postmaster reported the case to England for a suiting, and was informed that the acceptance of the parcel carried with it the necessity of paying the postage on the part of the merchant.

At this time, the mails from Great Britain were brought to Canada by sailing packets running between Falmouth, England and Halifax. In 1828, Governor Cochrane appealed to the British Postmaster General to establish a post office at St. John's to ensure the safe arrival of his despatches from the Colonial Office.

Failing that, he asked that the despatches be sent to a company in London which was in constant communication with Newfoundland. However, nothing seems to have come of this.

Mail for Newfoundland went direct to Halifax and was held there for chance transportation back to St. John's.

In 1838, the Chamber of Commerce presented a memorial to the Colonial Office, asking that the sailing packets running between Falmouth and Halifax might call at St. John's on their voyages. The admiralty refused the application.

In 1840, the Cunard Steamship Line was established between Liverpool and Halifax, and, on June 3, 1840, an agreement was entered into between James Tobin of St. John's and a rural commission for executing the office of Lord High Admiral to convey H.M. Mails between Halifax and St. John's. A sailing vessel of not less than 100 tons with accommodation for the Postmaster and Post Office was specified to make fortnightly trips and, in winter monthly trips at a rate of four pounds fifteen shillings. The first trip from Halifax was to be July 14, 1840.

About this time, William Lemon Solomon was appointed Postmaster of Newfoundland at a salary of four hundred pounds per annum. To this, he added an additional sum of thirty to sixty pounds on Post Office receipts—6d. on all letters and 2d. on newspapers received from other places and 2d. on each letter despatched from his office.

(To Be continued)

Sept 3, 1959

The original circular G.P.O. signed by W. L. Maberley, Secretary, reads as follows:

"You will herewith receive a dated stamp and seal, and usual supply of shifting ink, with which you will, in a distinctly and legibly every letter put into your hands, discontinuing the use of the present stamp.

"You will not fail to attend to the date day by day, and will be especially careful to stamp every letter according to the date that is deposited in your office, that, in case of any delay you may be able to certify the same. Any neglect of the material duty will inevitably be attended with serious consequences.

"You will take good care of the stamp, and figures will be held responsible for their safe custody and protection. Common ink must be used with this ink but not ink or some material mixed with water from a tin with a hard brush little spirit of turpentine.

The following is the form for the composition at present in use in the inland department here, which is found to be better than any other.

"One pound of printer's well mixed with one ounce of linseed oil.

I am, your obedient servant
W. L. MABERLEY

At least from 1821 and 1840, the only postmark of St. John's was the straight line mark previously mentioned. This was of local origin, the G.P.O. circular, Mr. St. John's was furnished with stamp seal, first used, I believe, on June 3, 1840. For the first time the name of Newfoundland appears in a notice issued by the G.P.O. London, England, 1840, regarding mails for America.

Instructions given by William, Earl of Wickford, Postmaster General to J. Solomon reads in part (8)

"You are to cause all letters put into your office in Great Britain, to be distinctly marked with the name of the place from which they are sent, and the sealed side and ink with the proper rate of postage at the other side, and to distinguish such letters above 1/2 ounce in weight tax them accordingly. All letters are to be taxed with ink and the unpaid with ink."

Oct 1, 1959

Continued
Last week, we substituted for this article one on the historic Court House at Harbour Grace, which, judging from many favorable comments, (we believe) was equally as interesting as this.

However, there are a couple of further paragraphs to be written on the postal history of Newfoundland, as compiled by the late Rev. H. Kirby and so we continue.

"The outstanding Harbour Grace packet was the "Express" which started service on August 25th, 1825. She was a cutter boat and formerly belonged to that famous missionary of Trinity Bay, Rev. W. Bullock, the author of that well known hymn "We Love The Place O God". She gave regular service every other day. This famous packet, after being enlarged and practically rebuilt was lost in a storm at Portugal Cove, Jan. 11, 1842. As a rule, these packets were laid up during the winter months, and smaller boats were used in the service until sailing weather commenced, a courier carried a weekly mail to St. John's.

"Reprise" No. 11 was built at St. John's South in 1842, by Michael Kearney, considered a genius in ship building. She was built at Ferryland. It was he who repaired at St. John's, the Cunard Liner "Hibernia", Capt. Ryall, which went Kearney's last ship was the "Shamrock", built for Hon. John Burke, Carboner, 1885.

There is a Packet "Nora Creina" owned by James Doyle, Carboner. She is famous, not only for her long service as a mail packet, but for having towed the wrecked schooner "Sylph" into Mosquito.

The "Sylph", out of Liverpool with a valuable cargo of English merchandise, struck an iceberg in Conception Bay and was abandoned by the crew, but the "Nora Creina" towed her into Mosquito and received a handsome salvage from the underwriters. As far as can be learned packet boats had no distinguishing mark for mail carried, save on an occasional rate mark which was 6d. single, 1/2 double.

The recipient of a letter occasionally indicate time and name of packet by which letter arrived, or the writer may indicate in letter the agent by which letter was sent. The "Nora Creina" is the exception, as her captain had a small seal inscribed with the packet's name. A great grand grandson of the Captain, Mr. Doyle has, we understand presented this seal to our museum."

Sept 25, 1959

House The Old And The New

BY M. DAVIS, Harbour Grace

HARBOUR GRACE—Situated at the extreme Eastern end of Harvey Street, Harbour Grace, is a stone structure of historic significance. This is known as the Court House of which the corner stone was laid in 1830 and which defying the ravages of time and stress, stands out with dignity in the province, and certainly, the oldest in this town.

It was the privilege of the writer to be taken over the Court House last week by its present Magistrate W.E. Mercer. It was a visit of considerable interest both from the standpoint of a look into the past and a view of the considerable improvements which have been recently completed in order that a landmark—too many of which have fallen into disrepair or have been removed—may be preserved.

We were shown the earliest records of administration and in which fine penmanship yellowed with age, are becoming illegible. These are signed by oldtime magistrates or surrogates such as Charles Davis Garland, William Lilly and Rev. L. A. Anspach etc.

We noted that these records referred to the administration of the first Court House which stood, we believe, somewhere near where the United Church now stands.

Magistrate Mercer showed the Coat of Arms and read from it the following inscription which we copied thus: "This Coat of Arms, so conspicuously placed on the walls of this Court Room was drawn and painted by James Clance, about the year 1850. Clance was a literateur, a painter and a musician, who came from Ireland, supposedly because of some trouble. He was the keeper of Rogerson's Farm on the South Side of Lady Lake. Proud and gentlemanly he would brook no interference as to his condition. He lived in obscurity during the latter part of his life, and was found dead in January, 1865, in the Eastern house of a range commonly called Great Eastern on the S. E. corner of Harvey Street and Kerry Lane."

We then took a look at the changed appearance of the interior of the Court House. As it stands today following the recent facelifting which it has received under the direction of Magistrate Mercer, and the workmanship of William Hennessey and co-worker of this town.

Court House

Hitherto, the interior carried a gloomy and depressing appearance as those who have come before the bar for their offences. Today, it presents a cheerful attractive atmosphere within which have been redecorated in pleasurable and subdued tones of cream and tan, the ceiling lightened by its coat of soft blue and white. Bar, bench, witness box and table are all shining and the old benches on which witnesses and spectators sat out weary anxious hours, have been replaced by sturdy but comfortable chairs.

Over the Magistrates desk, one notes on a dais, the portrait of H.M. Queen Elizabeth, which was presented by the Provincial Government as a fitting memento of her recent visit to this Province in June, 1959.

The waiting room adjoining the office of the magistrate has also received new paint and chairs are conveniently placed there for the comfort of those who await the magistrate's convenience.

On entering the office, one is struck by the bright and cheerful shades of green which have been used to replace the gloomy tints of the past. The office has been enlarged and made more convenient for a busy magistrate and his secretary, Mrs. G. Simmons.

Washroom with hot and cold water and toilet add greatly to the conveniences.

Magistrate Mercer is keenly interested in the preservation of the dignity and history of this

Court House. We were told that records of administration for over a century and a quarter remain in a room off the office. What a wealth of history could be traced through these.

It is the intention of the present magistrate to place on the walls of the ancient court room portraits of as many of former magistrates and judges as are obtainable. Should there be persons who have in their possession pictures of any former Judge and who might like to have them preserved for future generations, they are asked to get in touch with Magistrate Mercer at the Court House. Already, a picture of the late Judge Bennett has been given by Mr. O. E. Grimm, one of Judge W.A. Oke by his son, Mr. E. L. Oke and one of Judge A. H. Seymour, through the assistance of Mr. Oke, Monsignor W. Casey has presented one of his late father, Judge John Casey.

It is hoped that a painting of Magistrate McNeil may be had from a relative. But the list is long, and there are many yet to be obtained. Recent magistrates include Judge Leonard Ash, Mr. C. Sheppard, M.H.A., the late Magistrate G. Penney and the present Magistrate W.E. Mercer.

The exterior of the Court House was put into good condition a few years ago. Presently, the grounds are clean, tidy and orderly. In the centre of the grounds stands a flag pole from which is flown daily the Union Jack.

One cannot but be impressed with the excellent condition of the surroundings and it is hoped that these will aid in reminding citizens that here stands a pattern of orderliness which might be well followed by them in order that the dignity of a town which can boast of eight or four hundred years of history, may be preserved.