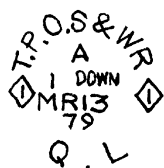


SYNOPSIS

THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICES OF QUEENSLAND: THE PROVISIONAL MARKINGS AND CIRCULAR DATESTAMPS



Treatment & Philatelic Significance

- **Treatment:** This is a traditional exhibit of all of the travelling post offices (TPOs) that operated in the Australian state of Queensland from their inception in 1877 until the withdrawal from service of the past TPO in 1932. The objectives of this exhibit are to show the cancellation types used including their identifying characteristics and periods of use and to display examples of TPO usage on both outgoing and incoming mails.
- **Reasons for TPOs:** The railways were critical for the development of Queensland. Queensland has a coastline of over 5,000 km with most of the initial development along that coastal strip. As pastoral and mining developed inland railways were built to service them, but the railways were built from inland to the nearest port. Thus a number of independent railways systems developed all running inland from the coast. By 1924, all of these lines had been linked by the North Coast Railway. Special rail vans were manufactured for the TPOs to allow for the efficient sorting of mails while the train was in motion. The TPOs also provided valuable service to the far flung rural areas of the colony before the establishment of conventional post offices or when population was too sparse to support a post office. In 1891 8% of the mail routes were by train accounting for 33% of the gross yearly mileage. The TPOs were all withdrawn from service by 1932.
- **Archival Documentation:** Scant reference is made in the available official government documents to the installation or operation of the TPOs within Queensland. Nothing appears in the records to indicate the cancellation types used or their periods of use, the meanings of the various numbering schemes and the purpose and use of the provisional cancellations. Very limited information is available concerning train schedules for pickup and delivery and the volumes of mail processed. The TPO operations must be deduced from the available philatelic material.
- **Materials Available:** No adhesives were issued for TPO usage, their existence being recorded by specially designed cancellations used on covers received and/or sorted on board a TPO. Cancellations are divided into the provisionals (known for five of the individual railways) used before the advent of the formal TPOs and the specific TPO cancellations (known for five slightly different railways). Cancellations may be UP (away from the coast) or DOWN (towards the coast). Sometimes mail was accepted directly on the train and cancelled with the TPO postmarks. Other times the mail was accepted at a post office and then handled and sorted on the TPOs – such involvement can usually be identified through the use of cancellations as backstamps.
- **Philatelic Importance:** The Queensland TPO system is interesting for a number of reasons:
 1. TPOs were in use for a period of 55 years during which time Queensland and its railways and postal system expanded dramatically.
 2. The TPO markings provide the only evidence of the involvement of the railways in the delivery of the mails, even though much of the mail was transported by train. Most mail was put onto

the trains in sealed bags which were unloaded at their destination without any markings. The TPOs provide us with insights into the routes and methods used to deliver the mails by rail.

3. The TPOs provide insights into the level of service and organization of the small country post offices and the methods of provision of an efficient mail service throughout Queensland.

Philatelic Knowledge & Personal Research

- Information regarding the workings of the TPO system, the routes served, the periods of service, the cancellation types and benchmarks for earliest and latest dates are from Campbell (1990) and the various addenda published in *Philately* from Australia.
- Information about the rail routes, the dates of completion and the stations served were extracted from various official government publications and government mapping.
- The exhibitor has contributed significantly to the TPO section of the Queensland Postal Markings web site.

Condition & Difficulty of Acquisition

- Relatively few of the stamps of Queensland (less than 1%) have a TPO cancellation. Many of these are partial or blurred cancellations which cannot be deciphered.
- There are 16 different provisional TPO cancellations, almost all of which are very rare with 3 or less copies known 10 of the 16.
- There are about 140 distinctly different TPO cancellations with about 20 being recorded as unique examples. About 40 of the 140 are known in quantities of less than 5.
- All of the provisional cancellations are known only on stamps and no covers have been reliably reported in the past 20 years.
- Most of the TPO cancellations are known as backstamps with a much lower percentage (less than 10%) appearing as the principal cancellation on the front of a cover.

Presentation

- The seven different railways which used TPO cancellations (either provisional or TPO) are shown separately. The railways are arranged in chronological order of opening and the markings are shown by type which is again in chronological order.
- 8 of the 16 different provisional TPO cancellations are shown including several unique or discovery copies
- About 80 of the 140 different TPO cancellations are shown including about 20 which are unique or discovery copies. A high proportion of these are shown on cover or card.
- Items of incoming mail are shown from England, Ireland, Cape of Good Hope (Boer War letter), New Zealand, India, and Germany.
- Items of particular interest are noted with larger bold type.

Bibliography

Campbell, Hugh M., *Queensland Postal History*, The Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, Melbourne, 1990 (plus various addenda published in *Philately* from Australia)

Campbell, Hugh M., *Queensland Postal History and Australian Numeral Cancellations Supplements*, The Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, Melbourne, 2001

Queensland Postal Markings until 1913

<http://www.boomspeed.com/stampmad/IndexPage.htm>