

POSTAL MARKINGS ON
MAIL FROM SAINT-PIERRE-ET-MIQUELON
1858-1958

SYNOPSIS

At the beginning Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon (SPM) was quite isolated. There never was a direct transatlantic connection between Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and North American or overseas countries. However, Halifax was a port of call for many transatlantic ships sailing from New York to Southampton or from Boston to Liverpool in Great Britain. Consequently mail from SPM was routed through Canada by fishing vessels or ships chartered by the local government. More specifically, letters were directed to North Sydney, Nova Scotia, as it was the nearest harbour to SPM (16 hours sailing time). They were forwarded to Halifax by train for dispatch to their final destination. When the North Sydney harbour was blocked by ice during the winter months (from the end of December to the beginning of April) the mail was directed to Halifax (34 hours sailing time). Exceptionally, mail was routed to Saint-John's in Newfoundland.

Usually letters deposited at the post office in Saint-Pierre were placed in closed (sealed) bags, and the stamps on those letters bear a Saint-Pierre cancellation. These bags were only opened in Halifax where mail was sorted and forwarded to its destination.

Interestingly, a fair amount of mail was also transported in open pouches. The SPM stamps these letters bore were cancelled at the port of entry with Canadian devices before being forwarded to Halifax for further processing.

Thus during this period the stamps on letters from Saint-Pierre received either a SPM postmark or a Canadian one.

PURPOSE OF THE EXHIBIT

The purpose of this exhibit is to show the postal markings from Saint-Pierre, Halifax, North Sydney and St. John's applied to letters leaving Saint-Pierre for destinations in Canada, France and the United States.

THE CHALLENGE FACTOR

As outlined below not much mail from this period exists. It has taken me over 10 years to assemble the exhibit in its present form. In Halifax and North Sydney, the cancelling devices used on the SPM stamps varied a lot (see the following page). The cork cancels, cut out of wood, wore out quickly and had to be replaced often and no two of these were identical. It seems that sometimes the post office clerks used whatever device was handy.

MATERIAL HIGHLIGHT

Rarity is difficult to establish as, in general, is relatively rare as little mail was sent since there were only 2800 islanders in 1858 and about 6000 nowadays. Most mail relates to fishing and business activities. Letters of a personal nature, usually sent to France, are very rare especially before 1850 since it was only in 1852 that a post office opened in Saint-Pierre. Some of the items shown in the exhibit are rare as only 3-5 examples have been reported.

ORGANIZATION

The exhibit has been organized by harbour location (SPM, Halifax, North Sydney and Saint John's) then chronologically from 1858 to 1958 when a regular airmail service became available.

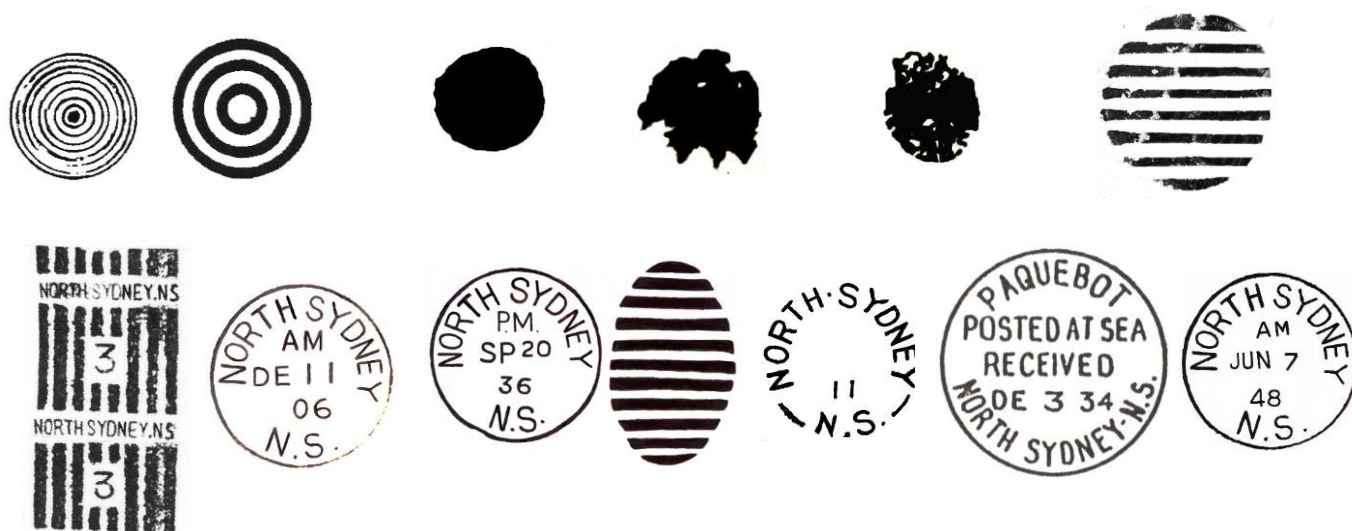
Mail in sealed bags, postmarked Saint-Pierre Pages 3-7



Mail in open bags, received in Halifax



Mail in open bags, received in North Sydney



Mail in open bags, received in Saint John's Page 32



REFERENCES

Stone, R.G., Ship Letters from Saint-Pierre. The Collector's Club Philatelist. 54, May 1975, 143-161, 185.
 Salles, R., La Poste Maritime, Vol.1. Paris 1973.
 Bergier, J. Les premiers cachets de Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. Philatélie Québec. 277 mars-avril 2009, 28-31