

# Magdalens postal history, part I: Canada's barrel mail

Lola Caron & Jean Walton

**S**EVERAL years ago, the first author wrote an interesting and exhaustive study of the modern post offices of the Magdalen Islands of Quebec and their cancels. This was published in French [C], but has never been published in English. It included some intriguing philatelic stories, including *Le Ponchon* below. We felt it was time to expand the subject, and make this information available to BNA philatelists who do not read French.

Here we discuss the story of Canada's own Barrel Mail—a tale no less intriguing than Tonga's tin can mail or the barrel mail of the Galapagos [W]. It has been commemorated on cacheted first flight postal covers from 1933, when regular airmail service was opened to the Magdalens between Charlottetown and Cap-aux-Meules.

Part II will include a study of the current post offices on the Magdalens, and a survey of what we have been able to find of cancels from the older, now closed post offices on the Islands. Much information is still to be discovered in this intriguing area of philately.

The Magdalen Islands are shown in the map in Figure 1. This archipelago is made up of six major islands, all connected by ribbons of sand dunes. The road which runs from the northern town of Grande Entrée to the southernmost town of Havre-Aubert is about 60 miles (100 km) long. A seventh island, Entry Island, lies six miles (9.5 km) to the east, with no land connection to the others. A few other small offshore islands make up the total of 12 islands in the archipelago.

The Islands are basically low-lying. Green hills and red cliffs drop to the sea, and the highest point above sea level is only 571 feet (174 meters), located on Entry Island. The population is now largely Francophone, except for Entry Island and Grosse Île, which both have Anglophone populations. Historically, both English and French communities existed on these islands from their beginnings, as the Islands passed from France to England, and then in 1774, became part of Lower Canada. It is easy to understand the isolation these people have felt, especially in the days before modern communications, air travel, and ferry service were available to them.

A telegraphic cable was laid in 1880. In winter, there was no navigation. Thus for many years the telegraph was the only means of communicating

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Keywords & phrases: Magdalen Islands, barrel mail

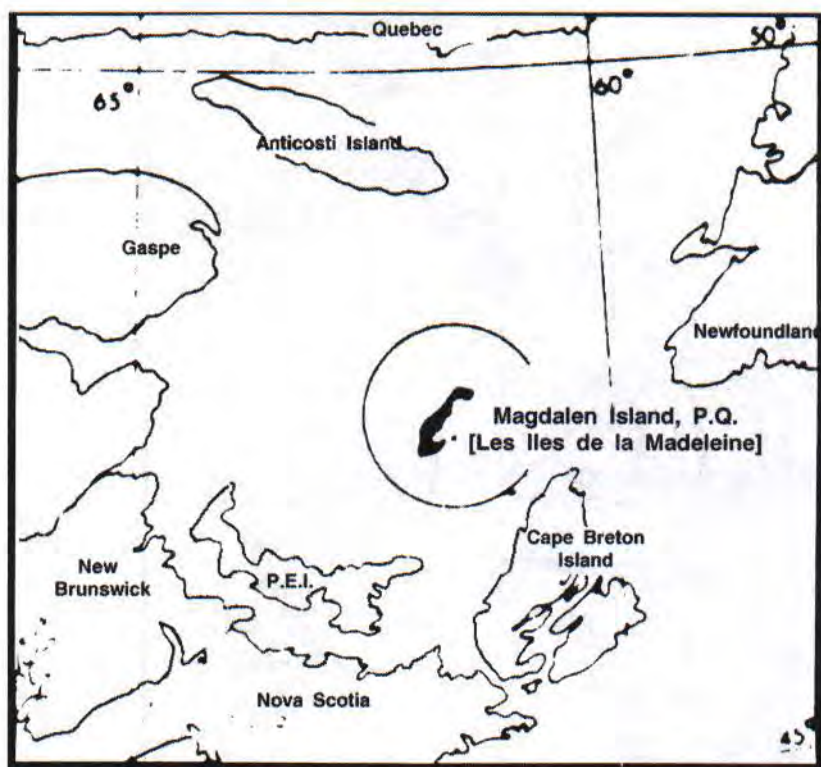


Figure 1. Map showing Magdalen Islands within Maritime Canada

The Magdalen Islands lie approximately 75 miles (120 km) north of the eastern tip of Prince Edward Island, 180 miles (290 km) east of Gaspé, 60 miles (96 km) from the coast of Cape Breton Island, and a little less than 100 miles (160 km) west of the western tip of Newfoundland, in the centre of the Gulf of St Lawrence.

with the rest of the world during the long winters. With these facts in mind, we examine one of the most interesting occurrences in Canadian philately, the Barrel Mail of 1910. The story begins in January, when the telegraph cable between the Magdalens and the mainland broke, leaving the residents of the Islands with no communication with the rest of Canada, or the rest of the world.

## Canada's barrel mail: The story of *Le Ponchon*

When we first explored this story, we had high hopes that stamped cancelled covers might be found from this event. Sadly for philatelists, these letters

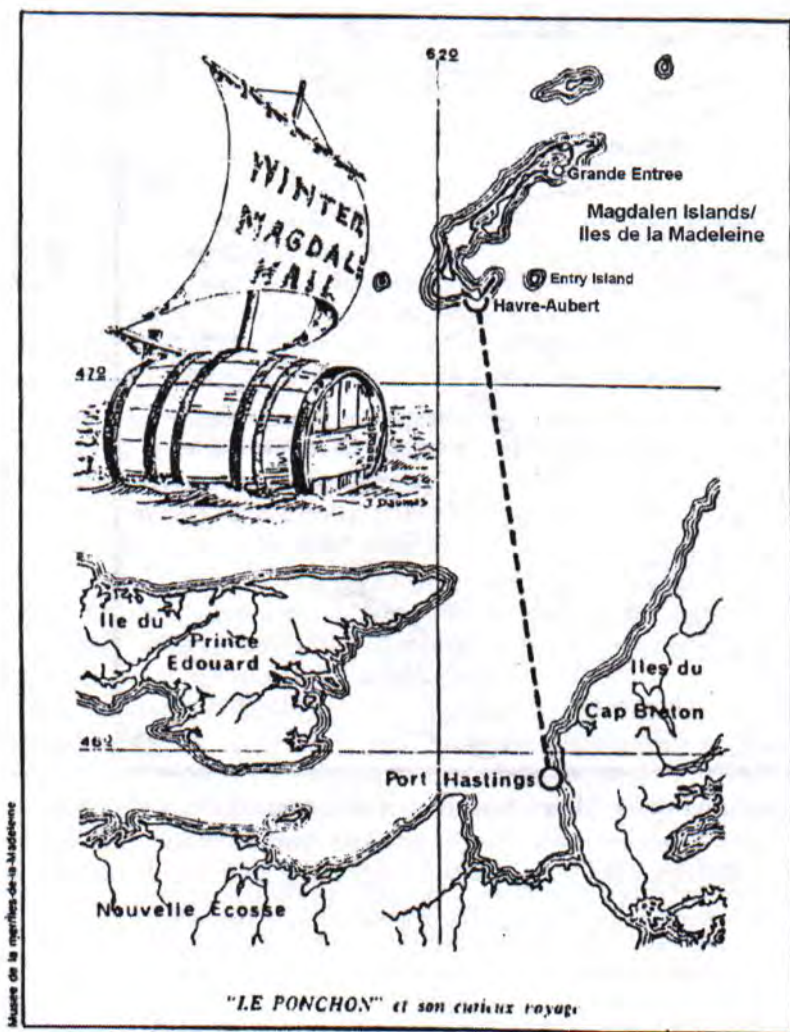


Figure 2. *Le Ponchon* and its curious trip

were neither stamped nor postmarked before leaving the Magdalens, and did not pass through any Magdalen Island post office. Nevertheless, the story of this little barrel (called a *ponchon*—the corresponding English word is “puncheon”, a wooden barrel with a capacity of 84 US gallons) containing 27 letters by and carried by the north wind to the mainland without captain or crew, is an intriguing part of Canadian postal history.

On 6 January 1910, the telegraph cable from the mainland to the Magdalens broke, cutting off all communications. The Magdalen Islanders, after considering other options, invented this form of barrel mail to carry news of their plight to the mainland. They launched their barrel on the afternoon of 2 February. It arrived at night on the beach at Port Hastings (NS) ten days later. A description of this event by Frédéric Landry [11], a writer native to the Islands, is included below.

A *ponchon* is a barrel which is usually used for transporting molasses. This is the story of a particular barrel named *Le Ponchon*. The story occurred in 1910. Navigation between Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and the Magdalens ended in December (1909), not to re-open until the following May. This left the inhabitants of the Magdalens very isolated. They had a telegraph cable which linked them to the mainland; this was their only means of communication. However, on the sixth of January, the cable broke and communication became impossible.

... Several Magdalen sailors considered making a crossing. The sea was free of ice, the wind favorable. The wiser of the older people, however, dissuaded these young navigators from their courageous enterprise. Remember that at this time, fishing boats were equipped with sails—and possibly a small one-cylinder engine—and this equipment was likely to be insufficient should the weather change. Besides, harbours on the mainland would be iced in, and access would be difficult. Then a clever idea came to a sailor from Havre-Aubert, Alcide Gaudet.

"Why not trust the Royal Mail to the fortune of a boat which, alone, without a crew, ... would be oriented so as to land in Nova Scotia?" The wind was good that day, and the older people were sure that it would continue to blow from the northwest for several days; it was a chance that should be taken. ... However, what boat would carry the valuable parcel? The choice was made of a vessel of very novel construction—the famous *Ponchon*, which was equipped with a rudder and a sail. On the sail, the women embroidered a star and the following inscription: *Winter Magdalen Mail [according to other accounts, the sail was metal—in which case, some method other than embroidery was used to apply this message]*. This was not without a touch of humor. The inscription was in English, as this frail skiff was headed for the coast of Nova Scotia.

The mail, consisting of about 100 letters [*other sources give 27–30*—among which was one addressed to the Minister of the Department of Marine and Fisheries in Ottawa—was put into boxes used for packing lobster. These boxes were soldered shut and put into the barrel, which in turn was tightly closed to make it ready for the sea. The launching took place on 2 February, at around 2 PM, at Havre-Aubert. The little boat sailed out on the waves ... to the cheers of the entire population of the Islands. It carried with it all the hopes of the Magdalen Islanders; the letter to the Minister was to inform him of the broken cable, and to dramatize the situation in which they found themselves.

... After a few days, the *ponchon* arrived at Port Hastings (NS). Once the identity of the curious boat was recognized, its contents were sent to Halifax, for distribution via the regular postal services. When the Honorable Rodolphe

Lemieux received the message of distress from his electors, the Minister of the Department of Marine and Fisheries gave orders to send the steamer *Harlow*<sup>1</sup> from Sidney. On 1 March, the Magdalen Islanders received the message that their request had been taken under consideration, and that no matter what, there would be winter communications with the Magdalens. That autumn, a wireless station was established at Cap-aux-Meules, which has been in service since that time.

A letter offering a reward of \$30 was enclosed in the barrel, addressed to the person finding it. Murdoch McIsaac of Port Hastings claimed this reward. On 12 February, he spotted the strange object near the shore and went to investigate. According to an account by Mme Alcide Gaudet [M], he mailed the most legible letters, and forwarded the others to the Postal Inspector at Halifax. If any were, in fact, actually mailed at Port Hastings, the postmarks on those letters would have to be 12 or 13 February 1910, and the return addresses would indicate Havre-Aubert or other towns on the Magdalens. None are known to us at this time.

A contemporary report from the Montreal newspaper, *La Patrie* 16 February 1910, confirms the arrival of the mail in the puncheon on 12 February.

#### Strange "boat-post" from the Magdalen Islands

*Mail is sent by a barrel mounted with a sail from a small community isolated by winter*

All the mail, that is, letters, newspapers, etc., put into a hermetically sealed barrel, then entrusted to the whim of the waves—surely this is hardly commonplace, and at first glance, seems as if it could not possibly work. It did work, however, and we are indebted to Mr H A Cholette, a lawyer in Montreal, for this interesting story. This morning, he received the following notice from the Postal Inspector at Halifax:

Halifax, Feb 14, 1910

Dear Sir,

The enclosed letter addressed to you, was found, with several others, in a barrel launched by the inhabitants of the Magdalen Islands. It landed at Port Hastings the 12th current.

Yours sincerely,  
Inspector of the Post

If one believes the letter written by Mr Cholette's cousin, all communication with the mainland is impossible for the Magdalen Islanders. Oddly enough, the snow and ice have completely disappeared, and they come and go in summer vehicles. The cable was broken in January, and has not yet been repaired, and they await a steamer that has not yet arrived. Faced with this situation, the Islanders devised this method to communicate with relatives.

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the steamer *Harlaw*, spelling corrected in one of Landry's later books. Built in 1888, it was lost off the coast of St Paul's Island (NS) in April 1911, wrecked by ice. This underscores the dangers involved in sending a steamer to the Islands this early in the season.

Let the words of Mr Cholette's charming cousin [Mrs Cyrus Painchaud (Virginie Chevrier)] tell the story.

I trust this letter to the fate of the waves, and may the ardour and legitimacy of our desire that they reach their destination change these hopes to sweet reality.

If necessity is the mother of invention, what more audacious enterprise than this to break the bonds of such a long captivity? My heart is full of emotion; tears escape in spite of myself as I write these lines which must bravely cross the perilous limits which separate us from the rest of humanity. The rig is ready—a barrel with a sail and an iron rudder which is turned in such way to bring it to land. Our letters have been put into packing boxes, to keep them dry. At two o'clock this afternoon, the launch of this *fantastic vessel* takes place; the wind is favorable, and blessed be he who is the first to go to the aid of our little sail which carries the message,

#### Winter Magdalen Mail

The date of the letter from the Postal Inspector quoted in *La Patrie* indicate that he had received the letters by 14 February. It is plausible that any letters which were forwarded to him were mailed the 14th or soon thereafter. However, it appears that these were sent as enclosures (in post office covering envelopes). Unless we find some letter from the Postal Inspector, carrying sufficient postage for an enclosure and some indication that one of these letters was enclosed, we are unlikely to come upon a truly used cover. We also have not uncovered any of these.

While no covers have been found from *Le Ponchon*, two letters are known—the one above, thanks to *La Patrie*, and another hanging on the wall at *La Musée de la Mer* at Havre-Aubert. It is badly foxed, and held together in places by tape, but for the most part, it is still legible. It is written in English by George Savage to his father. Unfortunately, the envelope does not accompany it. The letter, shown in Figure 5, reads:

Amherst, M.I.

February 1st, 1910

Dear Father,

I am writing this letter but not sure if you will receive it, as it is sent adrift in a puncheon, as the cable was down and no other way of sending news, we thought of trying this.

Well, we are having a very mild winter, today people went to Etang-du-Nord in carriages. Every thing is going all right. We have forty boats fishing at Etang-des-Caps factory, and eighteen at the Grindstone factory. We have begun making [illegible]. It is too bad that they have not repaired the cable.

Well, if there is not any communication, I will mention here the things required for the Spring: 175 to 200 coil rope, 25 to 50 bags of flour, coffee, beef, pork, two lobster shovels, beans, barley, pease, molasses, seven boots, women's



Figure 4. Illustration accompanying the *La Patrie* article

The legend is amusing—"The latest model Royal Mail boat". The misspelling of *Magdalen* has been attributed to a Francophone's misrepresentation of the English spelling.

boots, oil pants, gasoline. Well, hoping that you are all quite well and that we will soon have some kind of communication, either by wire or steamer. There is not a bit of ice around the Islands and on shore it is the same. Well as this is uncertain to reach, I will close, & I remain

Your affec. Son

George

All well, send also 12 lobster baskets, same as those we got before. The rope ordered is for here and Etang [*du Nord*].

It was not until the beginning of March and the arrival of the steamer *Harlaw* that the Islanders learned of the success of their "Royal Mail boat". The next winter, the Islanders had a new Marconi wireless station, which operated for many years. Until 1915, a ship arrived at the Islands two or three times during the winter months. In 1927, the Federal Government granted a permit to Trans-Continental Airways of Quebec to carry mail to the Islands during the winter months by amphibious aircraft. From 1929–1941,

Dear Father  
 I am waiting for letter but  
 not sure if you will receive it or not and  
 drift in a few hours on the water as a storm  
 will be there day of Sunday never did they  
 if they had then. Well the old building is very  
 old and the people don't like to stay in  
 it with garages, every thing is going all  
 right. We have got books for the school day  
 and the school is at the same time. I have  
 got some cooking things, and to bed. But  
 they have cut up the the cut off the  
 a good many things. I am waiting for the letter  
 and then I will say more for the school.  
 1/10. I don't get a lot of time, I don't like to  
 go to the school. I have got some books, and  
 I have got some books, and I have got some  
 well. I hope that you are all well and that  
 you will come back soon. I am of course  
 waiting for the letter.

There is a lot of fire around the Islands  
 and a big fire. The wind is in the  
 so there is a lot of fire. I am of course  
 waiting for the letter.

Well, I am of course waiting for the letter.

Figure 5. Surviving letter from Le Ponchon

Foxed, taped, torn, . . .

Canadian Airways served the Islands from Moncton and Charlottetown, in the early '30s making two trips a week. By 1937, they were making 37 trips and carrying 18,000 pounds of mail during winter. Isolation was a thing of the past.

Illustrated in Figure 6 is an early airmail cover from the Magdalens. Planes

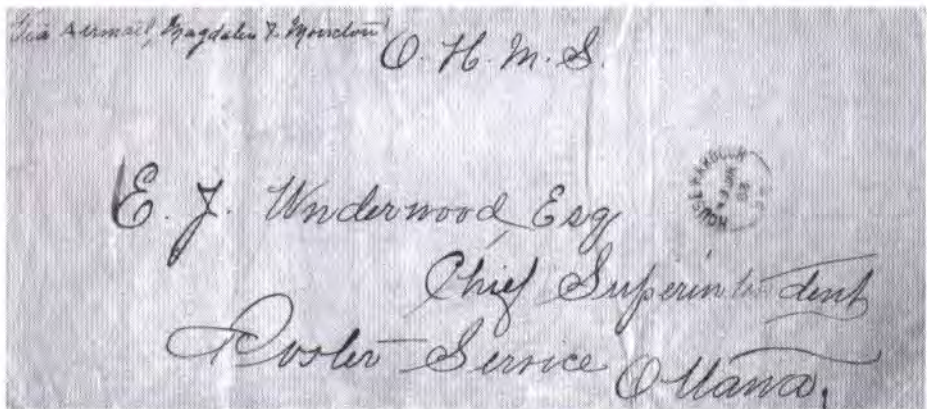


Figure 6. Early airmail from Magdalen Islands to Moncton (1928)

Mailed OHMS by the postmistress at House Harbour 7 January 1928. It first went to Grindstone Island and arrived in Moncton on 13 January.

used for these early airmail flights to the Islands were often fitted with skis or pontoons, as landing surfaces were likely to be unpredictable.

Today first class mail originating west of Montreal arrives in the Magdalens directly from Montreal's Dorval Airport via Air Nova (a feeder of Air Canada). Other first class mail from east of Montreal is prepared in Quebec City, then sent to Rimouski, where it is sent daily, again by Air Nova, to the Islands at Cap-aux-Meules. Non-priority or second class mail is sent twice weekly from Rimouski, where it is carried by a CTMA trailer truck to Prince Edward Island. From there it travels by the CTMA ferry from Souris (PE), to Cap-aux-Meules in the Islands. This information is courtesy of Denis Roy, head of mail transportation in this district.

One final note: in the year 2000, to commemorate the voyage of *Le Ponchon*, and to acquaint the younger generation with this event, a re-enactment of the launching was proposed. Mail was collected from those interested, and on 10 September 2000, a barrel was set sail, with 200 letters enclosed, in the hope that it would again come to rest on solid ground, and the letters be forwarded to their destinations. It was found a week later by fishermen near Grande Entrée in the Magdalen Islands, and set adrift again to the east of Grande Entrée, with the hope that it would reach either Newfoundland or the mainland. That seems to be the last that was heard of it [Hu]. The winds and currents were quite different from those on that afternoon of 2 February 1910, so there was ample reason not to expect a similar outcome. However, it does remind us of fragility of the lines of communication, and how fortunate it was that the first *Ponchon* arrived safely at Port Hastings.

## References

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- [W] Kenneth A Wood *This is Philately* Van Dahl Publications (1984) Albany, Oregon.

## Own Canada's newest re-entry

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### postage

The 6¢ Pearson stamp was part of the Caricature booklet pane (Scott #586a) from 1972–77. On some copies on the plate, the word 'postage' is sharply re-entered, particularly clear in "stage". This is not a kiss or slip print, but a true modern re-entry. I have a limited quantity of these booklet panes (no covers) for immediate sale. These panes have sold in the past for \$20–30 each. I offer you a MNH pane for only c\$9.99, postage included. I accept payment through PayPal, Canadian or International money order, or cheque if you include your BNAPS number. For more information on this re-entry, please visit my website at [RE-ENTRIES.COM](http://RE-ENTRIES.COM)

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**HR Brahms versus Thurn & Taxis** A letter, written by Johannes Brahms, was put in an autograph auction. The envelope had a 2Silbergroschen in blue from Thurn & Taxis. The Michel catalogue gave it a value of 2000Deutschmarks. A Brahms autograph usually brings about that amount. Should this cover have been sold at a stamp auction or an autograph auction? It went for 1800DM. Maybe it would have done better at a stamp auction. (*Hans Reiche*)

# Magdalen Islands postal history II: Post offices

*Jean Walton & Lola Caron*

**F**OR the Canadian postal historian, the Magdalen Islands provide an intriguing area of study. For so small an area (78 square miles, or 202 square kilometers) stretched across some 60 miles (96 km) in the middle of the Gulf of St Lawrence, the Islands have had a rich and interesting postal history. In the past 150 years, there have been 42 different post office place names in the Magdalens, representing 31 distinct offices. The remaining 11 are name changes within a single post office. Putting together a collection of all of these presents a challenge which can take years to complete.

## Post Offices

Only ten of these remain in operation today; they are indicated by the postal code in parentheses.

Amherst Island  
Arseneault  
Aurigny  
Bassin (GOB 1A0)  
Blaquière  
Boisville  
Bryon  
Bryon Island  
Cap-aux-Meules (GOB 1B0)  
Chemin-des-Buttes  
Dune-du-Sud  
Entry Island (GOB 1C0)  
Étang-des-Caps (GOB 1E0)  
Étang du Nord  
Fatima (GOB 1G0)  
Fauriel  
Grande Entrée (GOB 1H0)  
Grand Entry  
Grand Ruisseau  
Grindstone Island

Gros Cap  
Havre-Aubert (GOB 1J0)  
Havre-aux-Maisons (GOB 1K0)  
House Harbour  
La Cyr  
L'Anse-à-la-Cabane  
Lapeyrère  
La Vernière  
Le Martinet  
Lemieux  
Le Pré  
Les Caps  
Leslie (GOB 1M0)  
Magdalen Islands  
Millerand  
Old Harry  
Pointe-au(x)-Loup(s) (GOB 1P0)  
Pointe Basse  
Portage du Cap  
Solomon

As with many areas in Quebec, post office names have changed with the changing nature of the population, and with the language directives of the province. This is particularly true in the Magdalens, where a much larger Anglophone population had existed previously. Both English and French

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surnames were common in Havre-Aubert, Cap-aux-Meules, Étang du Nord, and Havre-aux-Maisons. The two populations existed amicably side-by-side. Today the population is about 14,000. Of this number, approximately 800 (about 6%) claim English as their mother tongue. The Anglophone population is now centred largely around Leslie in the municipality of Grosse Île, and on Entry Island.

Of the 31 separate post offices, 23 have had only one name, but eight have gone through (in some cases) a procession of names. The asterisks (\*) indicate a direct translation from English to French. (This does not include *Pointe-au-Loup*, which apparently by accident has used *Pointe-aux-Loups* and the ungrammatical *Pointe-aux-Loup*.)

- Magdalen Islands  $\mapsto$  Amherst Island  $\mapsto$  Havre-Aubert
- Solomon  $\mapsto$  Bassin
- Bryon  $\mapsto$  Fauriel  $\mapsto$  Lemieux  $\mapsto$  Leslie
- Grindstone Island  $\mapsto$  Cap-aux-Meules\*
- South Beach  $\mapsto$  Dune-du-Sud\*
- Lapeyrère  $\mapsto$  Fatima
- Grand Entry  $\mapsto$  Grande-Entrée\*
- House Harbour  $\mapsto$  Havre-aux-Maisons\*

These eight offices account for 19 different post office names in the Magdalen Islands. The map in Figure 1 shows a basic overview of the Islands, with the main islands identified. We will indicate post office locations on maps appearing later in the article. The location of the short-lived Blaquièrre (post office open 1913–1918) is unknown, although it is suspected to have been on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules near La Vernière.

For many years, the connecting links between the Islands were tenuous. The long dunes between the islands served as roadways, and despite some sections which were literally below water level, they could be travelled at low tide between the Island of Havre-Aubert (Amherst Island) and Étang du Nord on Cap-aux-Meules Island (Grindstone Island). A drawing showing the crossing from Grindstone Island to Amherst Island appears in Figure 2. The text accompanying the illustration [c] reads as follows.

The ford was marked by twigs fixed in the bottom at rare intervals, and also by land bearings known to the guide. But it was narrow, and great care was necessary to avoid getting into deep water. The water came up repeatedly over the hubs into the bottom of the cards. The poor horses panted with the exertion. The passage was successfully accomplished after we had preceded a distance of a mile through the water.

To the northeast of Cap-aux-Meules, a small flatbed ferry made this connection for many years before a bridge was built to the Island of Havre-aux-

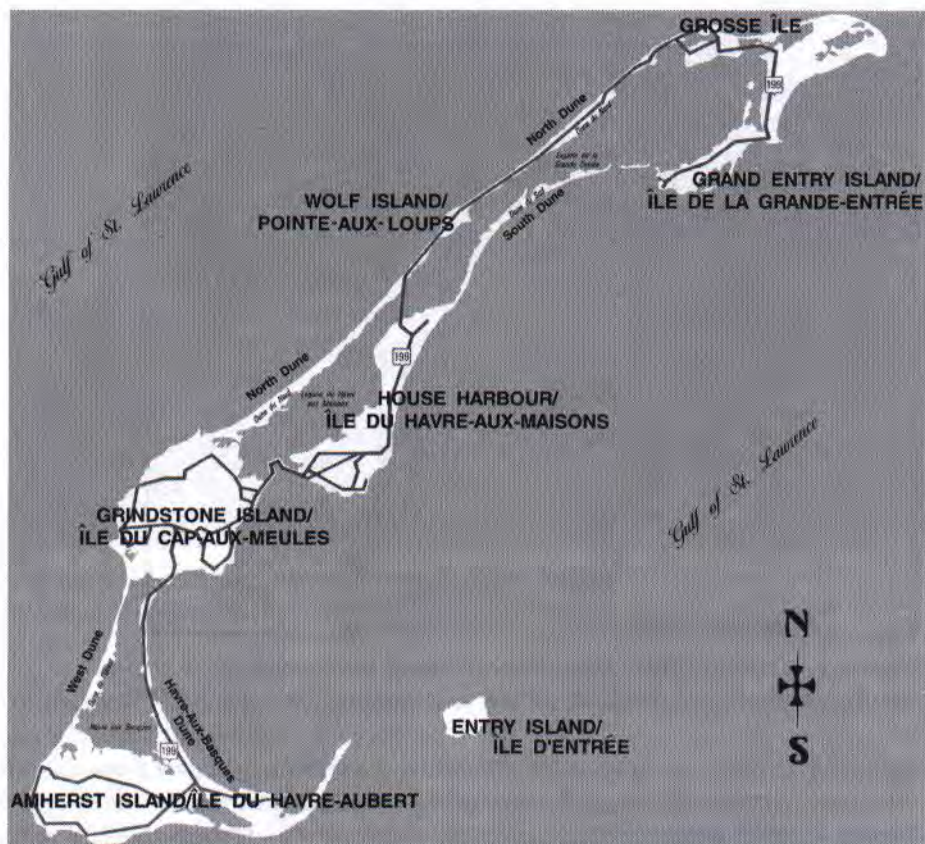


Figure 1. Map of the Magdalen Islands

Maisons. A trip north to Grande Entrée (Grand Entry) was accomplished by travelling the South Dune to its end, then raising a flag to alert local fishing boats nearby that passage was needed across the harbour entrance to Grande Entrée. A small boat called the *Local* provided the surest connection between the towns in the Islands.

In 1928, a covered bridge replaced the ferry between the Islands of Cap-aux-Meules and Havre-aux-Maisons, later replaced by a more modern bridge. However, it was not until 1947 that a bridge was built between the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons (House Harbour) and Pointe-au-Loup on the North Dune, making it possible to travel to Grande Entrée by road, and not until 1956 that the road and bridge between Cap-aux-Meules Island and the Island of Havre-Aubert was completed.

Population growth on the Magdalen Islands was slow. In the 1850s,



Figure 2. Crossing from Grindstone Island to Amerst c 1884  
Crossing the ford by way of the West Dune. This drawing appeared in [c].

the total population of the Islands was 1750. From 1854–1870, the entire archipelago was served by just one post office, located on the island of Havre-Aubert, which at that time was the busiest harbour and the major business center of the Islands. It was called simply “Magdalen Islands” (Figure 5). Even as other post offices opened, this first post office did not change its name.

By the 1870s, the population had expanded to 3200 and four other post offices were opened. With the addition of the offices at Étang du Nord (1870), Grand Entry (1873), Grindstone Island (1875), and House Harbour (1879), each of the major islands now had its own post office. In the 1890s, a number of post offices were added to those already present, so that by 1900, the Islands’ 5000 residents were served by 13 post offices, including a summer office on Bryon Island.

The next thirty years brought about a proliferation of post offices, so that by 1930, there were 29—the greatest number open at any one time on the Islands—serving the 8000 residents (one post office for every 265 people). It was not until a major post office reorganization took place in 1968–1969 that seventeen of these post offices were closed, leaving twelve. All



Figure 3. Maritime Central Airways plane 1940s

Boarding passengers and mail on the beach in the Magdalen Islands.

but two of these are still in operation today (Millerand closed in 1985 and La Vernière in 1988).

Air mail service had begun, and the Islands were suddenly less isolated (Figure 3). Ties with family members who had left the Islands were reinforced by year-round mail, and the bonds with the rest of Canada, particularly the Maritimes, were forged.

We will take a geographic approach to the study of the Island post offices, beginning with Havre-Aubert in the south, where the oldest post office was established, and moving north. We will look at each island separately, and try to provide an overview of post office development over time.

Many smaller post offices were located in stores or homes. A change in postmaster would thus mean a change in the location of the post office. Marriage, death, or even a different political party in power would frequently bring about a change of postmasters in what were often one-person offices.

We will show a variety of cancels from some of these post offices. Only those post offices which were in existence in 1939 or later will have a money order office number (MOON), and only the most recent ones (since 1973) will have a POCN. We will show what we have been able to find, and supplement when necessary with cancels from the Proof Strikes of Canada (National Archives of Canada), published by Robert A Lee. The following list

summarizes the dates of opening and closing of the offices on the Magdalens, and in addition determines the order in which we discuss them.

In the following, the symbol  $\mapsto$  denotes a name change. Currently operating post offices are indicated by the postal code (GOB ... ).

### Island of Havre-Aubert

After the closure of the offices in L'Anse-à-la-Cabane, Aurigny, Solomon, and Millerand, the communities were served by the post office at Bassin. Similarly, the regions covered by the offices at Étang-des-Caps, Portage du Cap, Vigneau, and Le Martinet were covered by the Havre-Aubert post office.

1854 Magdalen Islands  $\mapsto$  1899 Amherst Island  $\mapsto$  1907 Havre-Aubert (GOB 110)

1886–1932 L'Anse-à-la-Cabane

1896–1968 Aurigny  $\mapsto$  Bassin (GOB 1A0)

1913–1969 Solomon  $\mapsto$  Bassin (GOB 1A0)

1907–1968 Étang-des-Caps

1918–1968 Portage du Cap

1926–1968 Vigneau

1928–1985 Millerand

1959–1968 Havre Aubert

### Entry Island

1896 Entry Island (GOB 1C0)

### Cap-aux-Meules Island

After the closure of the post offices at La Vernière, Blaquièrre, Gros-Cap, and Boisville, their territories were covered by the Étang du Nord office. Similarly, the regions covered by Les Caps and Grand Ruisseau were assumed by the office at Fatima.

1870 Étang du Nord (GOB 1E0)

1875 Grindstone Island  $\mapsto$  1964 Cap-aux-Meules (GOB 1B0)

1899–1988 La Vernière

1906 Lapeyrère  $\mapsto$  1949 Fatima (GOB 1G0)

1913–1918 Blaquièrre

1914–1968 Les Caps

1926–1947, 1959–1968 Grand Ruisseau

1928–1968 Gros-Cap

1937–1968 Boisville

### Island of Havre-aux-Maisons

After the closure of all but one of the offices by 1969, the remaining office (Havre-aux-Maisons) covered the entire Island.

1870 House Harbour  $\mapsto$  1964 Havre-aux-Maisons (GOB 1K0)

1894 South Beach  $\mapsto$  1963–1969 Dune-du-Sud

1896–1969 Pointe Basse

1912–1932, 1937–1969 Arsenault

1923–1969 Le Pré

1927–1968 Chemin-des-Buttes

## Pointe-aux-Loups

1922– Pointe-aux-Loups (GOB 1PO)

## Gross Île & Grande Entrée

When Old Harry and La Cyr post offices were closed, their communities were covered by the Grande Entrée office.

1873 Grand Entry → 1855 Grande-Entrée (GOB 1HO)

1894 Bryon → 1898 Fauriel → 1903 Lemieux → 1906 Leslie (GOB 1MO)

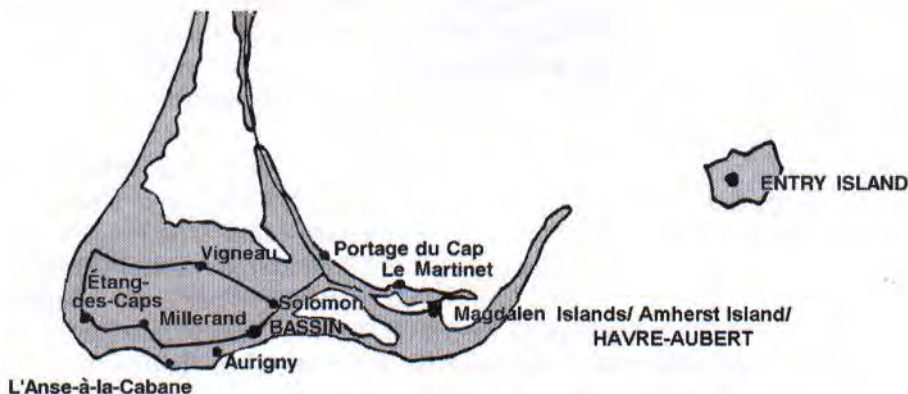
1904–1970 Old Harry

1921–1968 La Cyr

## Bryon Island

1898–1931 Bryon Island (summer only)

## Island of Havre-Aubert



Map of Île du Havre-Aubert/Amherst Island & Entry Island

Showing locations of post offices.

The municipality of Havre-Aubert today encompasses two islands, all of the Island of Havre-Aubert (formerly Amherst Island) & Entry Island, 5 miles (8 km) to the northeast and reachable only by water or air. The Island of Havre-Aubert is divided into two distinct areas, that of Havre-Aubert, and Bassin, the western half of the island, much more rural and with a much more dispersed population. The Island of Havre-Aubert is 9 miles long and 3 miles wide (14.5 km × 5 km). It is attached to the Island of Cap-aux-Meules

to the north by two long dunes and a causeway, enclosing a lagoon called Havre-aux-Basques. The causeway was completed in 1956.

*Magdalen Islands 1854–1899* (Figure 5) The oldest of the Island post offices opened on 1 September 1854, and was called simply *Magdalen Islands*—a name attributed to Champlain from his 1632 map [D].



Figure 5. Magdalen Islands post office (1854–1899)

Two distinct double broken circles in 1855 & 1856 (earlier one courtesy of Jacques Poitras, Québec; the later one appears to be from Frank Campbell), two later post-Confederation typeset dated single broken circles, 1875 & 1899.

Mme Caron mentioned this office in her AQEP article, and illustrated an 1856 cancel which we repeat here, for purposes of comparison. The two early cancels we show (1855 & 1856), while both double ring cancels with date added in pen, are noticeably different (the 1855 cancel is courtesy of Jacques Poitras, a student of and specialist in early Quebec markings). In two other post-Confederation cancellations (1875 & 1899), the dater is now part of the cancel. These too are clearly different.

*Amherst Island 1899–1907 & Havre-Aubert 1907–present* (Figure 6) On 1 October 1899, not long after the latest Magdalen Islands strike shown, the name of the post office was changed to “Amherst Island”. The English name for this community comes from Jeffrey, Lord Amherst, Governor General of British North America (1761). That name remained in use until 1 September 1907, when it was changed to “Havre-Aubert”, its current name. Although the Amherst Island name was in short use (less than eight years), it is a cancel seen fairly often, as merchants in this busy seaport prepared envelopes with advertising corners and apparently carried on a fair amount of correspondence. I have seen no varieties of the split ring.




Figure 6. Amherst Island & Havre-Aubert

Amherst Island (1901), and two Havre Aubert broken circles (1928 & 1935), circle (courtesy of Danny Handelman), and a 1989 POCON.

Havre-Aubert appears to be a corruption of Harbour Ober, a name found on a 1756 map [D]. The 1928 cancel uses the abbreviation QUE while the 1935 cancellation uses PQ. The money order office number was 0410, the POCN is 181781, while the postal code in GOB 110.

While no longer the "capital" of the Islands, Havre-Aubert is today the second largest community in the Magdalens, and remains a significant centre of commerce.

 L'Anse-à-la-Cabane 1886–1932. To anyone visiting L'Anse-à-la-Cabane today, it might occur to them to wonder that this was the second post office to be established on the Island of Havre-Aubert (1 July 1886). Today, it is a tiny rural community overlooking the sea. It still has a small fishing port. Yet this is one of the oldest fishing villages on the Islands, a place where Basque and Norman fishermen came to hunt walrus and seal. The *Cabane* is said to refer to Micmac lodges that once stood here [D]. *Cabane* means "shack", as in *cabane-à-sucre*, "sugar shack." *Anse* means small shallow bay.

L'Anse-à-la-Cabane is located towards the western end of the Island of Havre-Aubert; the village of Havre-Aubert is towards the eastern end, so it makes some sense to have placed a post office here. While the post office existed for 46 years, until 30 June 1932, it is more difficult to find cancels from L'Anse-à-la-Cabane than from Amherst Island, a name which existed only eight years. It was closed in 1932 owing to "limited usefulness" [NA] and this area was then served by the Aurigny post office. Today it is covered by the Bassin post office.

*Aurigny* 1896–1968 (Figure 7) The next post office to be added on the Island of Havre-Aubert to serve the growing population, is midway between the eastern and western ends of the island. It opened 15 December 1896. The name is the French version of Alderney, in the English Channel.

Aurigny had a standard split ring cancel made with a metal hammer, and a money order office number of 0036. It closed on 28 October 1968, and this area is currently served by the Bassin post office.



Figure 7. Aurigny & Solomon

Aurigny broken circle (1938?) and MOON (#0036, 1962) and Solomon broken circle (1935) and circle (1956, courtesy of Danny Handelman).

**Solomon 1913–1969** (Figure 7) On 1 June 1913, the post office at Solomon was established close to Aurigny. These two post offices were hardly a mile apart and it must be remembered the the entire island of Havre-Aubert is only eight to nine miles long. It was named for a well-liked doctor on the Islands. It is now too long ago for us to discover just what social or political forces brought about a need for this additional post office so close to the first. However, both post offices existed almost side by side for 65 years, until a major reorganization in the postal service closed both.

**Bassin 1969–present** (Figure 8) When Aurigny and Solomon were closed, they were consolidated into the Bassin post office, which opened 3 November 1969. The money office order number for Solomon (1830) was carried over to the new Bassin post office. The name comes from a large pond (or “basin”) found nearby, on the southern side of the island. The office served the areas of both Aurigny and Solomon, as it does today. The POCN is 188123 and the postal code is GOB 1A0. (Confusion can occur with a Bassin post office in Chicoutimi County, open 1895–1915.)

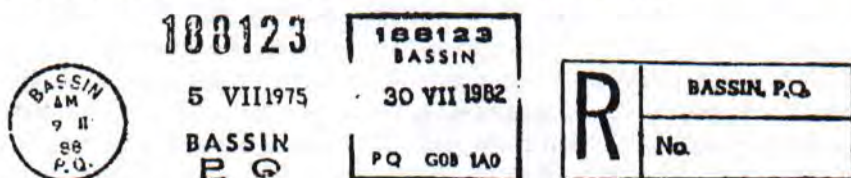


Figure 8. Bassin

Single circle (1988), POCNs (1975 & 1982), and registration box.

**Étang-des-Caps 1907–1968.** This post office opened 1 September 1907. Its name derives from a pond in the northwest corner of the Island of Havre-Aubert (*étang* means “pond”). It was a small fishing village on the west coast of the Island of Havre-Aubert. Like L’Anse-à-la-Cabane, this was a spot used by Basque and Norman fishermen for fishing and walrus hunting in the seventeenth century. Today the walrus are gone, and the collapse of the groundfish industry has left Etang-des-Caps looking to tourism for its well-being.

The post office here existed for 61 years (it closed 17 February 1966, reopened a few weeks later, and closed for good on 3 June 1968). However, we have no example to show, except one taken from the Proof Books [L], published by Robert A Lee. Note that it has a singular *DE* preceding the plural *CAPS* and no hyphens. Whether a corrected canceller was ever received remains an open question. National Archives of Canada lists the money order office number as 71450.

Perhaps the very rural nature of the community explains the dearth of cancels. The post office was located in a home and a store. With the reorganization of the post office in 1968, this post office was closed on 3 June. It is now a rural route out of the Havre-Aubert post office.



*Portage du Cap* 1918–1968. This was a post office on the road between Havre-Aubert and the islands to the north, along the Havre-aux-Basques dune, north of the village of Havre-Aubert. This route north literally involved a portage across the entrance to Havre-aux-Basques before the road to Cap-aux-Meules was completed. This post office opened on 1 October 1918, and closed—along with many others—on 23 October 1968. It is currently served by Havre-Aubert.

The cancel we show is a typical steel hammer split ring. The money order office number was 1459.



*Vigneau* 1926–1968. The road which circumnavigates the western side of the Island follows the coastline to the south and west, and then cuts across a height of land now known as La Montagne. This is where the next post office—Vigneau—was opened on 16 August 1926. This area is one of the few wooded areas left on the Islands. Like Portage du Cap, this post office was also closed on 23 October 1968. It is now a rural route of the Havre-Aubert post office.

Again the steel hammer split ring cancel is typical. The money order office number was 15081.

*Millerand* 1928–1985 (Figure 9) This little community is just to the northwest of L'Anse-à-la Cabane, on a rise overlooking the sea. Here a post office was opened on 10 July 1928—although the post office at L'Anse-à-la-Cabane remained open until 1932. In its 57 years of existence, the Millerand office was always housed in a store. Millerand's money order office number was 0398, and its POCON was 181722.

Millerand served as the post office for the western end of the Island of Havre-Aubert until 1985, when it closed in December. Its area of service is now covered by the Bassin post office.

*Le Martinet* 1959–1968 This office opened 16 February 1959 to serve the area just north of Havre-Aubert. It probably served much like a sub-office of Havre-Aubert, and was housed in a store. It was very close to the Portage du Cap post office, so it is not surprising that it lasted only until the post office reorganization in 1968. It closed 23 October 1968. It is now served by the Havre-Aubert post office. We have no examples from this nine year period, and have found none in the Proof Books.

The Island Of Havre-Aubert has had a total of nine post offices (with a



Figure 9. Millerand

POCONS (1962 & 1975), registration box, duplex (1977), and circle (1985).

total of 12 names). Eight operated concurrently for many years. Today there are two, Havre-Aubert and Bassin.

## Entry Island

Entry Island, separate from the main chain of islands, is only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles long and a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile wide (about  $4\text{ km} \times 1\text{ km}$ ). This small and beautiful island is the isolated home to a community of some 150 anglophones of Scottish descent. It boasts the highest point in the Islands, Big Hill, at 556' above sea level (174m). Very few roads mar the landscape of this island even today.

*Entry Island* 1896–present (Figure 10) This office opened 16 June 1896, and still functions today. Despite this long period of use, we have found none of the early cancels, but show a variety of “modern” ones. The oldest is from the Proof Books [L]. Entry Island had a money order office number of 71432. The name is an old one, as *Entrée* appears on a 1744 map, and no doubt was given because it seems to guard the sailing channels to the Islands. Although local maps now often show the island as Île d'Entrée, the post office has always carried the name Entry Island. Its POCON is 189588, and the postal code for Entry Island is GOB 1CO. It is one of the two post offices in the Islands designated for bilingual service.

## Island of Cap-aux-Meules

Located north of the Island of Havre-Aubert is the Island of Cap-aux-Meules, formerly Grindstone Island. It appears to have been named for the resemblance of two of its hills to grindstones. The French name is a loose translation of the English, a *meule* being a millstone or grindstone.

The Island of Cap-aux-Meules is about eight miles (13 km) north of Havre-



Figure 10. Entry Island

Circles (proof strike and 1977), registration box, POCONS (1977 & 1989).

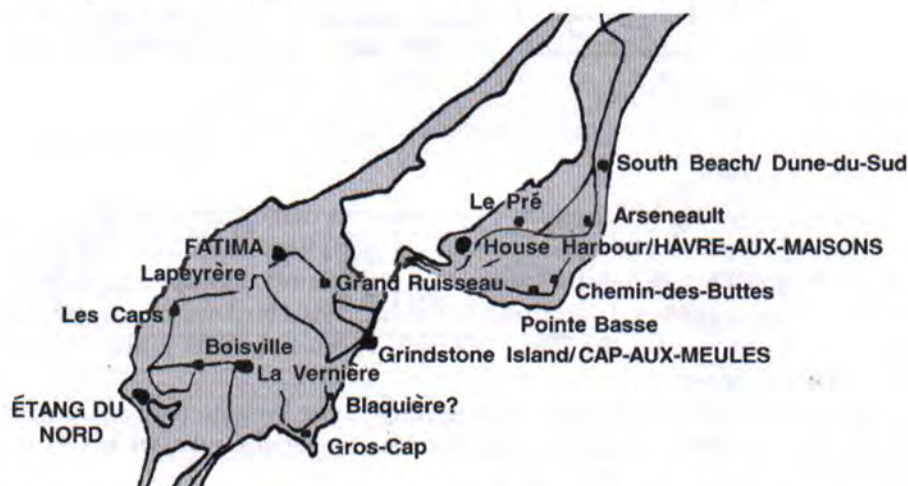


Figure 11. Île du Cap-aux-Meules &amp; Île du Havre-aux-Maisons

Showing locations of post offices.

Aubert, and is 6 miles long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles wide (about 10 km×6 km). In the interior is a height of land, almost as high as the Big Hill on Entry Island. Today, there are three municipalities on this island: Étang du Nord in the southwestern corner, Fatima in the northwestern corner, and the town of Cap-aux-Meules on the eastern side, each with a post office. Cap-aux-Meules is currently the “capital” of the Islands and the home of the district post office distribution centre. Several other smaller communities also had post offices in the past.

*Étang du Nord* 1870–present (Figure 12) This first post office on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules (and second over all the Islands) opened 1 July 1870, and remains open. It has operated under just one name, and appears to be written without hyphens, only occasionally with the accent on the first É.

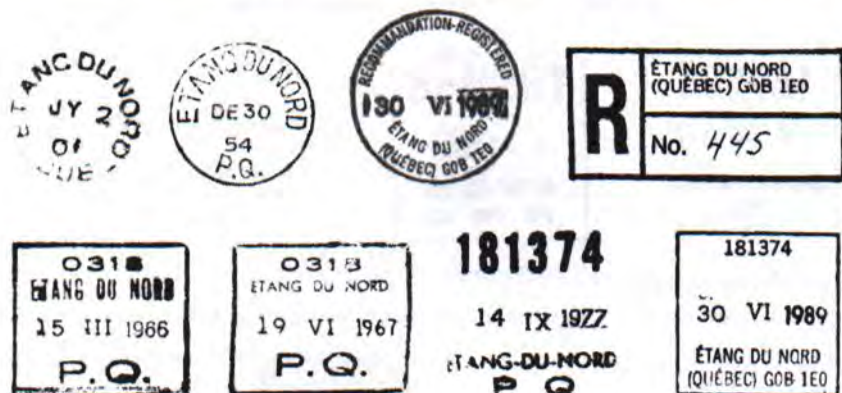


Figure 12. Étang du Nord

Broken circle (1901), circle (1954), registration circle (1989), registration box (1989), MOONS (1966 & 1967) and POCONS (1977 & 1989).

The municipality of Étang Du Nord takes its name from a small pond in its vicinity. There is a large fish processing plant here and it has always been one of the most active fishing harbours in the Islands. Houses are placed for the best view of the sea. In addition to fishing, it is a bird-watcher's paradise, as it is well known for the many different species of birds found amongst the cliffs and the rocks.

Many different cancels have been used over the long history of Étang du Nord. The money order office number was 0318; the POCON is 181374. Today the postal code is G0B 1E0.

*Grindstone Island* 1875–1964 (Figure 13) This was the next post office opened on Cap-aux-Meules Island, on 1 November 1875. It operated under this name until 1 November 1964, when the name changed to Cap-aux-Meules. The harbour here has now become the busiest in the Islands, and this is the centre of both government and shipping on the Islands today. Large ships dock at its piers, and the ferry from Prince Edward Island as well as boats from Montreal debark here. Most second class mail arrives here aboard the CTMA ferries that serve the Islands today. This post office has been central to the Islands for many years, and many different cancels are known. The money order office number was 0395.



Figure 13. Grindstone Island

Broken circles (1878 & 1903), circles (1933 & 1945), duplex (1959), machine (1933, slightly truncated at right), MOON (1963), registration box (1952).

*Cap-aux-meules* 1964–present (Figure 14) The name change to French took place in 1964; neighboring House Harbour was changed to Havre-aux-Maisons (its name in French) that same year. A few examples of *Cap-aux-Meules* cancels are shown here. It appears to have been spelled both with and without hyphens. The money order office number continued as 0395, and in 1973, it acquired the POCON of 181706. Today's postal code is GOB 1B0, but as the postal distribution centre of the Islands, it also has a postal code used for that purpose of GOB 1Z0.

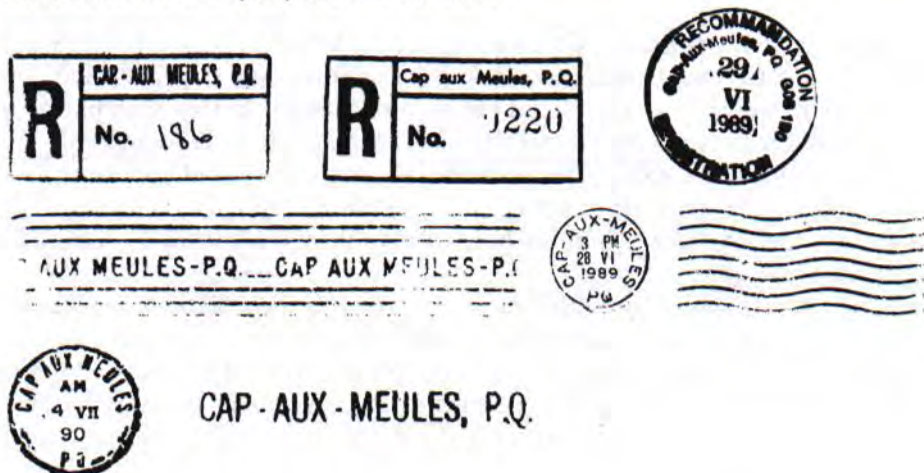


Figure 14. Cap-aux-Meules

Registration boxes (1977 & 1989), registration circle (1989, in red), roller (1989), machine (1989), straightline (1989, in red).

*La Vernière* 1899–1988 (Figure 15) The next post office to open on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules is the first community one arrives at when travel-



Figure 15. La Vernière

Broken circle (1937), MOON (1962), registration boxes (1962 & 1982), roller, circles (1962 & 1977), POCONS (1975 & 1982). The use of MI (for Magdalen Islands) on the 1982 registration box is curious, since the French version, IM, had long been in use.

ing north from the Island of Havre-Aubert. La Vernière is about equidistant from Étang du Nord to the west, Fatima to the north, and Cap-aux-Meules to the east, in the heart of the Island of Cap-aux-Meules. In this high plain, the abundant crosswinds are referred to as *Les Vernes*, an old French term. This is the origin of the name. The post office name was spelled consistently as two words. The post office opened 1 September 1899. At the turn of the century, there were 25 families here. Today it is considered a "suburb" of Cap-aux-Meules.

The money order office number was 0610, and the POCON was 182788. It existed long enough to acquire a postal code, GOB 1LO. La Vernière closed in May 1988, and its territory was incorporated into that of the Étang du Nord post office. Indeed, the postmaster at La Vernière became the postmaster at Étang du Nord, and we are indebted to him for a great deal of information [B].

*La Peyrière* 1906–1949 (Figure 16) This town in the Island's northwest corner, was next to be added to the list of post offices on Cap-aux-Meules. The origin of the name is unknown—but families by the name of Lapierre were well-known on the Islands, and perhaps it is taken from this. This area overlooks the lagoon to the north between the North and South dunes.

The post office opened 1 October 1906. Despite the 42 years under this



Figure 16. Lapeyrère (1937)

Only reported strike.

name, we have found only one cancel. The money order office number was 0325. This number was retained by Fatima when the name changed 23 August 1949. The post offices may have been in slightly different locations.

*Fatima* 1949–present (Figure 17) The heights of this village are on the aptly-named Butte-du-Vent (Windy Hill). From there, all of the islands are visible, and on a clear day, even Cape Breton in Nova Scotia is visible. The shore has particularly steep cliffs, giving way to the Dune du Nord (North Dune—mentioned above)—a long, flat dune that extends for miles to the northeast. This beach was the site of the first landing strip in the Magdalens. The current POCON is 181382, and the postal code is G0B 1G0.



Figure 17. Fatima

MOON (1961), circle (1989), registration box (1989), small roller (1989), and machine (1989).



*Blaquière* 1913–1918. This was the next office to open on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules. This is a mystery, for there is no longer any place by that name in the Islands, and no one we have found can remember a post office by this name. In fact, the only reason we place it on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules is that the only family on the Island today with this surname lives near La Vernière—however

they too have no recollection of it. At one time, the priest at La Vernière was named Blaquièrre, so our assumption is that the post office was named for him, or for the family.

A "Nixie List" (an internal PO listing of closed offices and re-routings) from 1969 shows Solomon on the Island of Havre-Aubert as the place where mail to Blaquièrre was to be shipped, but it appears to have been created well after the fact, as this office closed in 1918. There is therefore no particular reason to suspect that information is correct, and all other evidence points to the vicinity of La Vernière. Searches have been done in Ottawa [BE] and in the Magdalen Islands for information about this post office, but so far no definitive answer has been found. The office existed for only five years (1 June 1913–31 May 1918), and we have no cancels, except the one shown here from the Proof Books [L]. We presume that the territory that this post office covered would now be a part of Étang du Nord, as is the case with La Vernière. Any further information would be welcome.

*Les Caps* 1914–1968 (Figure 18) On 10 October 1914, Les Caps, (not to be confused with *Étang-des-Caps* on the Island of Havre-Aubert), between Étang du Nord and Lapeyrère, joined the post office community on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules. Although it was a very short distance from both of these post offices (approximately two miles), Les Caps existed for 54 years. It is within the municipality of Fatima, and it overlooks the Gulf of St Lawrence to the west.

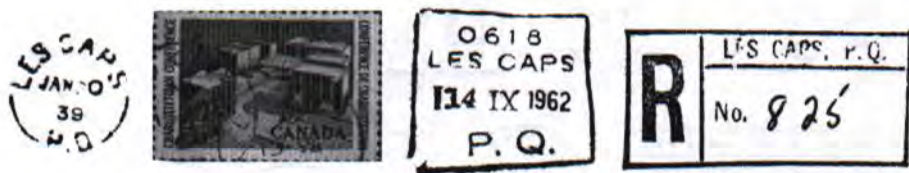


Figure 18. Les Caps

Broken circle (1939, known used to at least 1954), circle (1964, courtesy of Danny Handelman), MOON (1962) and registration box 1962.

A few cancels are illustrated here. The money order office number was 0618. The Les Caps post office was closed on 19 October 1968, when the post office was reorganized. It is currently within the purview of the Fatima post office.



*Grand Ruisseau* 1927–1947 & 1959–1968. This office, situated between Fatima and Cap-aux-Meules, opened 1 December 1926, and was in operation for 21 years, closing 9 December 1947 because of "limited usefulness". However it reopened in

1959—on 1 August—and continued in operation until the post office reorganization. It closed on 18 October 1968. So for about thirty years it served the public, but we have managed to find only one example of its postmarks, a split ring from 1935 with the curiosity that the year (at top) and the dater are inverted in relationship to the place of origin. Perhaps one day we will find one where the postmaster was more careful.

The money order office number for Grand Ruisseau was 15082. This post office was on the northern shore of the Island of Cap-aux-Meules, in the municipality of Fatima. It is currently a part of the Fatima post office.



Boisville 1927–1932 & 1937–1968. Again, we have a single cancel from this office, which—like Grand-Ruisseau—opened (1 October 1927), closed (30 September 1932), and then re-

opened (1 February 1937). Its money order office number was 0112. Like Grand Ruisseau on the other side of the Island, it too met its demise with the post office reorganization in 1968, closing on 19 October 1968. This little community is located about midway between Étang du Nord and La Vernière, and is currently served by the post office at Étang du Nord. The illustrated postmark places the year above the date, with the timemark at the bottom.

*Gros Cap* 1929–1968 (Figure 19) This was the last post office to open on the Island of Cap-aux-Meules, on 3 September 1929. It too operated until 1968 (21 October). The money order office number was 15079. The territory that this post office covered is now part of the Étang du Nord post office. A few cancellations are illustrated.

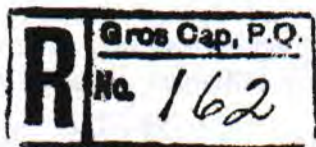


Figure 19. Gros Cap  
Broken circle (1962) and registration box (1962),

This community sits on the southeastern tip of the Island of Cap-aux-Meules, overlooking the Baie de Plaisance. Besides its scenic attractions, it is home to a lobster processing factory. Lobster and other shellfish harvesting is now a major industry in the islands, especially with the decrease in the groundfish industry and the moratorium on seal hunting.

With this we come to the end of the many little post offices of Cap-aux-Meules Island—nine in total, plus two name changes. Three remain: Fatima,

Étang du Nord, and Cap-aux-Meules. Today, it is the "centre" of the Magdalen Islands.

## Island of Havre-aux-Maison

Just east of the northern tip of Cap-aux-Meules Island is the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons, three miles long and two wide (approximately 5 km × 3 km). The municipality encompasses this island, and the island of Île-aux-Loups, as well as the dunes between. The Island of Havre-aux-Maisons has maintained a more rural nature than Cap-aux-Meules, which has a total population today (including Fatima, Étang du Nord, and Cap-aux-Meules) of around 7500. Havre-aux-Maisons has a population of only about 2000, with another 200 at Pointe-aux-Loups. It is home to the Islands' present airport as well.

The landscape is largely treeless, because of extensive lumbering in the past. Nevertheless, the green heights of land and the beautiful red cliffs all contrast with the blue sea to make this one of the loveliest places on the Islands. To the northeast, South Dune (or Dune-du-Sud) extends towards Grande Entrée at the northern end of the archipelago. From Cap-aux-Meules Island, the parallel North Dune extends from Fatima to Grosse Île, enclosing a lagoon. It is approximately ten miles (16 km) from Havre-aux-Maisons and Cap-aux-Meules to Pointe-aux-Loups.

There are currently two post offices in this municipality: Havre-aux-Maison and Pointe-aux-Loups. As in other parts of the Islands, several others served as well.

*House Harbour* 1879–1964 (Figure 20) This was the first post office on this island (once known as Alright Island). It opened 1 July 1879, and operated as House Harbour until 11 January 1964, when its name was changed to Havre-aux-Maison. This post office is still open, under its French name.

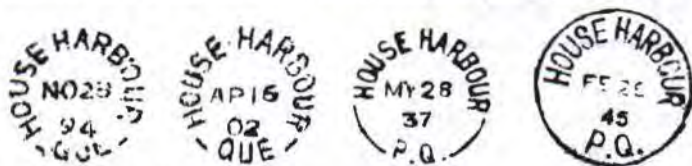


Figure 20. House Harbour

Broken circles (1894, 1902, & 1937) and circle (1945).

Postmarks from House Harbour are not too difficult to find, and we show three different split rings. The differences are very minor in the earliest two. The 1937 cancel has replaced QUE with P.Q. The money order office number for House Harbour was 0428.

*Havre-aux-Maisons* 1964–present (Figure 21) In 1964, this post office took the French version of its name. The same money order office number was used for Havre-aux-Maisons as for House Harbour (0428). Two different MOON cancels are shown below, coincidentally used only two days apart, suggesting that this post office had two MOON cancellers in service at the same time. The letters on the left are taller and unserifed, and the numbers are narrow. On the right, the letters have serifs and the numbers are broader and further apart. Currently the POCON is 181897, and its postal code is GOB 1K0.



Figure 21. Havre-aux-Maisons

MOONs (just two days apart in 1972), POCON (1989), circle (1989, also known in 1983), registration box, and roller (1989).

*South Beach* 1894–1963 (Figure 22) This office is on the northeastern edge of the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons, where the South Dune extends to the north. A post office was opened here on 1 October 1894. The money order office number for South Beach was 1804. Some typical cancels are shown.



Figure 22. South Beach

Broken circle (1913, known to at least 1934), circle (1962/1963), MOON (1962), and the “original number” registration cancel (1962, truncated at edge of envelope).

The date on the circle is determined from the fact that it was on a stamp issued in 1962, and the fact that the post office name was changed in 1963.

The original number/subsequent numbers registration cancel shown for South Beach, although light and blurred, is illustrated here because it is so unusual for the Islands. This type of cancel is frequently seen for other parts of Canada, but this is the only one of which we are aware from the Magdalen Islands.



*Dune-du-Sud 1963–1969.* On 21 September 1963, the name of the South Beach post office was changed to Dune-du-Sud, and it continued under this name until it closed on 19 July 1969. Hence cancels are somewhat difficult to find, as it only operated under this name for six years. The MOON for Dune-du-Sud was the same as that for South Beach, 1804. This post office was discontinued before the introduction of POCONS. It is currently served by the post office at Havre-aux-Maisons.

*Pointe Basse 1896–1969* (Figure 23) The next office to be opened on the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons was Pointe Bass, on 15 December 1896. This post office was on the southern shore of the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons, a fishing port and a processing point for smoked herring.

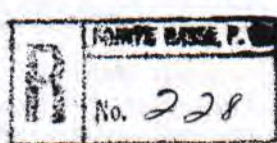
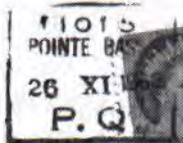


Figure 23. Pointe Basse

Broken circle (1905, known to at least 1935), circle (1962), MOON (1962), and registration box (1962).

Registered mail from South Beach seems to have gone through the Pointe Basse post office from the turn of the century into the 1930s. The money order office number for Pointe Basse was 1015. This post office, along with Dune-du-Sud, was closed 19 July 1969, before the assignment of POCONS. Cancels from Pointe Basse are fairly common. The split ring hammer seems to have been in use for a long period. This post office is currently covered by Havre-aux-Maisons.

*Arseneault 1912–1932 & 1937–1969* (Figure 24) This post office was located between Havre-aux-Maisons and South Beach, and opened 1 November 1912. The name is taken from a common surname on this island, and in fact, two of the postmasters serving here were named Arseneault. It was closed 29 February 1932, but reopened 15 November 1937. It continued in service until 20 January 1969. The office was located in a house. The

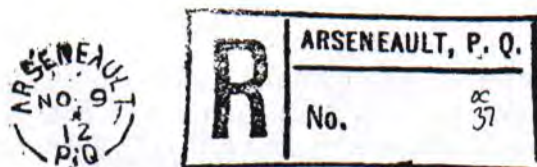



Figure 24. Arsenault

Broken circle (1912), and registration box (1937), both from Proof Books.

money order office number was 70115. Despite the 42 years of service, we have no examples of cancels to illustrate, except these from the Proof Books. This area now falls within the Havre-aux-Maisons post office.

 *Le Pré* 1963–1969. The post office at Le Pré (“meadow”) opened 20 November 1923, in an area overlooking Le Grand Barachois—the lagoon of Havre-aux-Maisons—enclosed by the North and South Dunes. It was between Havre-aux-Maisons and Arsenault. The money order office number was 73016. The split ring cancel shown seems to have been in use for some time. It closed, along with others on this island, 19 July 1969, when the post office was reorganized. The region is currently served by Havre-aux-Maisons.

*Chemin des Buttes* 1927–1969 (Figure 25) The name means “path of heights”. This was the last post office to open on the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons, on 5 September 1927. It was situated on the southeastern side of the island, not far from Pointe Basse, on this outer and very scenic road around the south shore of the island. The money order office number for Chemin des Buttes was 70910. We show a split ring and a registered box.

This post office, like others on this Island, closed 19 July 1969, when the post office was reorganized, and it is now covered by Havre-aux-Maisons.

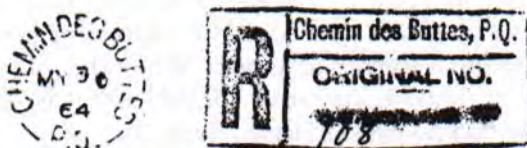


Figure 25. Chemin des Buttes

Broken circle (1964) and registration box (1962).

Thus over the period 1927–1969, six different post offices served the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons. Two of these went through a name change from English to French, making a total of eight names we can ascribe to this island. One remains today: Havre-aux-Maisons.

## Pointe-Aux-Loups

Approximately ten miles from Dune-du-Sud (16 km), we come to the tiny Island of Îles-aux Loups (Figures 26). It is three quarters of a mile long and a half mile wide (a little over a kilometer by four fifths of a kilometer), and currently has a population of 200 people. This little island is hardly more than a widening of the sand dunes, and was called Wolf Island on the oldest maps. This appears to be after the animal, not the general, although some maps show it as Wolfe Island [D]. Directly translated into French, it is today more often associated with *loup-marins*, a local term for earless seals once common here.

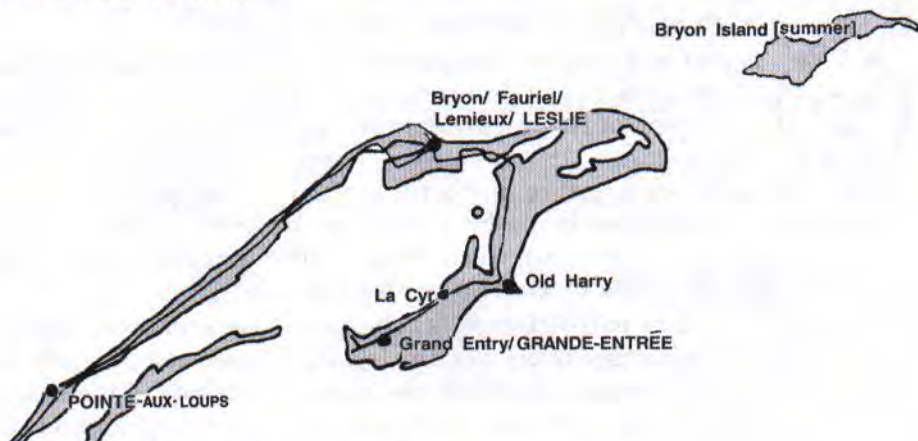


Figure 26. Map of Pointe-aux-Loups  
Grosse Île, Grande Entrée & Bryon Island,

*Pointe-aux-Loups* 1922–present (Figures 27 & 28) A post office has been located here since 5 September 1927, and is still in operation today. In 1985, Pointe-aux-Loups was perhaps the smallest of the Island's freestanding post offices; Today it has been relocated to a converted garage. While this office continues to operate today, that building is currently for sale and it is rumored this will be the next post office to close in the Islands.

While this post office did not go through any formal name changes, it has managed to have a series of different versions of its name, including Pointe-au-Loup (with and without hypens), Pointe-aux-Loups (usually with hyphens), and even, as Mme Caron has pointed out, a cancel with an error, Pointe-aux-Loup—with the plural *aux* but the singular *loup*. This makes collecting it a little more interesting. The sign outside the post office which read *Pointe-au-Loup* in 1985 has been changed today to read *Pointe-aux-Loups*.

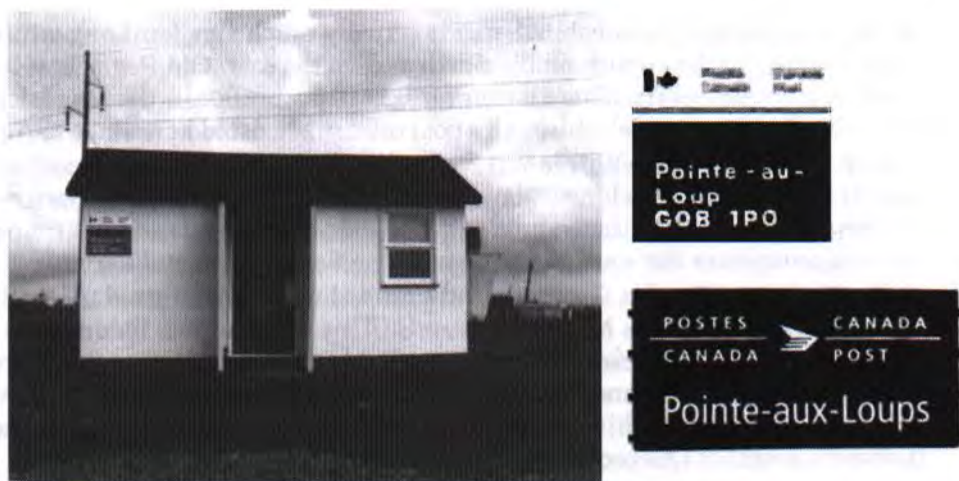


Figure 27. Pointe-au-Loup post office and signs

The photograph was taken in 1985; the top sign was there at the time, and the bottom sign is the current one.



Figure 28. Pointe-au-Loup and variants

Broken circle (1961, all singular), circle (1985, plural *aux* & singular *loup*), 29mm circle (1989, year inverted), and POCON (1989).

The money order office number for Pointe-au-Loup/Pointe-aux-Loups was 1022; the POCON is 183695, and the postal code is GOB 1PO. Both of the 1989 cancels show the currently accepted form, all plural, with the postal code added.

## The Island of Grosse Île and Grande Entrée

Another nine miles (14.5 km) north along the North Dune from Pointe-aux-Loups are the islands of Grosse Île and Grande Entrée.

Grosse Île, an island which is ten miles long and three wide (16 km × 5 km), is home to an Anglophone population of about 560. The eastern end of the Island (Île de l'Est; formerly East Island) is largely made up of ponds and sand dunes. A major part of this section has been designated a National Wildlife Preserve, so while the island itself is large, compared to some others

in the archipelago, the inhabited area is actually much smaller. Long white sand beaches border it both on the north and on the east. Old Harry is at its southeastern extremity. There has never been a post office in the Magdalen Islands called "Grosse Île", although a post office has existed here since 1894.

The Island of Grande Entrée was formerly called Coffin Island, named after Sir Isaac Coffin. It is long—about seven miles (11 km)—but very narrow; at some places it is less than a mile (1.5 km) wide. The population of around 700 is centred on the southern arm, near the fishing port and harbour.

The two communities, Grosse Île and Grande Entrée, are referred to jointly as the "East End" of the Magdalen Islands. This is home to a fishing community, with lobster being the most profitable product. Blue mussels are farmed in the Bay at Grande Entrée, and lobster pounds abound. A hundred lobster fishermen use this fishing port as their base, and it is known as the "Lobster Capital of Québec".

To the east are two islands, Bryon Island and Bird Rocks, the first landing place of Cartier on these islands in 1534. Neither is inhabited today, although a lighthouse and a post office did exist on Bryon Island at one time. The first post office to open at this end of the Islands was Grand Entry.

*Grand Entry 1873–1955* (Figure 29) This office opened 1 August 1873, and continued in service under this name until 1955. Today the English speaking population is largely on Grosse Île, but in earlier days, more Anglophones also lived here in Grand Entry, as well as at Old Harry. This post office served the fishermen, and as the only post office at this end of the Islands until 1894, it was well used. The money order office number for Grand Entry was 0379. On 16 July 1955, the name was changed to Grande Entrée, using the same MOON. The cancels illustrate the use of both the English and French names.

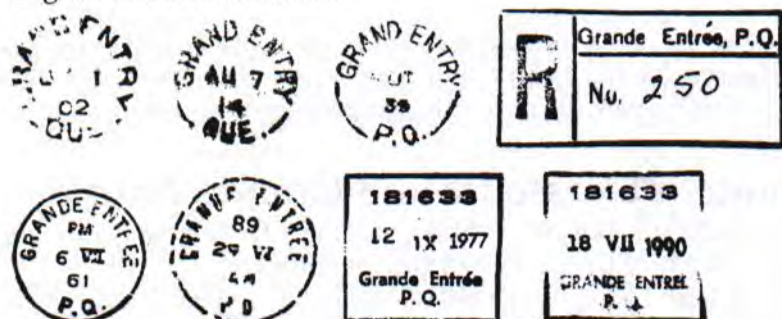


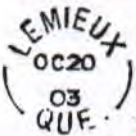
Figure 29. Grand Entry/Grande Entrée

Broken circles (1902, 1914, & 1938), registration box (1961), circle (1961 & 1989), POCONS (1977 & 1990).

*Grande Entrée* 1955–present (Figure 29) This community is still a very active fishing port. The post office, which changed to its French name in 1955, still serves the Island of Grande Entrée. We show two POCONS, 181633. The current postal code is G0B 1H0.

*Bryon* 1894–1898 (No illustration) Here is the saga of a post office which seemingly could not decide on a name. It began its life as Bryon, 1 October 1894. It was located on Grosse Île, and the postmaster was Norman Clarke, a very common name in this end of the Islands. We have no examples of cancels from this office—not surprising, since it existed for only four years under this name—although the reader will find examples of both this and the following post office in an article by Fernand Belanger [BE]. The name of this post office and that of Bryon Island can be traced back to Cartier, who in 1534 gave this name to the island lying north of Grosse Île, to honour his patron, Philippe de Chabot, Seigneur de Brion.

*Fauriel* 1898–1903 (No illustration) The Bryon office was renamed Fauriel on 1 July 1898. There seems no reason for this, except that another post office, on nearby Bryon Island, was opened on that same date, presumably there was concern that this would cause confusion and the mail would have trouble finding its proper home. Norman Clarke continued as postmaster. The origin of the name is unknown. Although Belanger [BE] shows an example, we have none, and as with Bryon, we have located no examples in the Proof Books.

 *Lemieux* 1903–1906. Fauriel became Lemieux 1 May 1903, and then was renamed Leslie on 1 June 1906. Lemieux was quickly taken up as a name (in fact, on the same date) by a post office in Lotbinière which had formerly been Forestdale. This is important to the collector of Magdalen Island cancels—a Lemieux postmark must be dated 1903–1906 in order to represent an office in the Magdalen Islands. Again the origin of the name is not known.

We have only one cancel from Lemieux, and consider it one of the rarer of the Island postmarks, existing for only this short three-year period.

*Leslie* 1906–present (Figure 30) The post office finally settled on the name Leslie, after Robert Leslie, Deputy for the Islands. He died in 1905 as a result of the sinking of the ss *Lunenburg*, a ship which carried passengers and mail to the Islands. Norman Clarke continued as postmaster through this final name change. The post office continues under this name today; the current postmistress is Norma Jean Clarke. The money order office number was 0607, and it used a split ring cancel for many years. The current postal code is G0B 1M0. Leslie and Entry Island are the only post offices on the Islands designated bilingual.

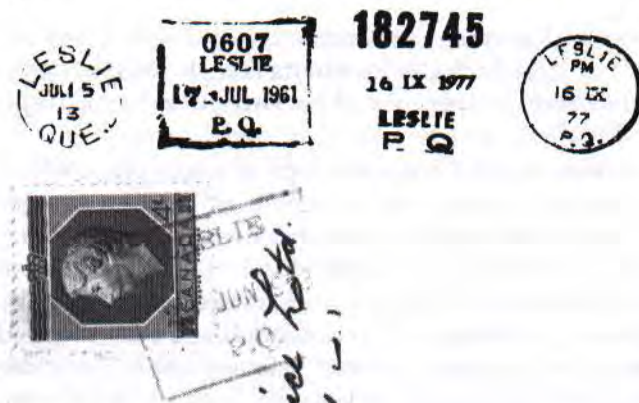


Figure 30. Leslie

Broken circle (1913), MOON (1961), POCON (1977), and circle (1977); second line shows a MOTO (1953), courtesy of Danny Handelman.

*Bryon Island 1898–1931 summer only* (No illustrations) Every year from 1898 to 1932, a post office operated on Bryon Island, a small island approximately ten miles (16km) north of Grosse Île and the Island of Grande Entrée. It is about four miles long and two wide (6.5km×3km) and was occupied year-round by only three families.

The summer-only designation does not indicate that this was a resort or cottage community. At the opening of navigation and the beginning of the fishing season, the population grew to around 100; fishermen came to these rich waters off the island, many spending the months here away from their families in the southern part of the Magdalens, while eking a living from the sea. Hence this post office opened every year in late April or early May, and closed again in late November or early December, when the ice closed in and it was no longer possible to fish. So we do not have a population sending post cards home about their delightful summer vacation on this northern island; these men were too busy for much communication even with their families, and so far, we have not uncovered a single postmark of this post office, nor any Proof Book examples. Belanger [BE] illustrates cancellations from thirteen Island communities, and does show an example of Bryon Island. In 1984, it became a wildlife reserve and sanctuary. There is no current population, and visits are limited to short stays.

*Old Harry 1904–1970* (Figure 31) This is a small Anglophone community on the eastern side of Grosse Île, originally a fishing village named in the eighteenth century for Harry Clarke, who it is said, was the only resident here for many years. The cliffs and crags make this my favorite place in the



Figure 31. Old Harry

Broken circle (1914, known to 1938), MOON (1961), circle (1962, courtesy of Danny Handelman), and registration box (1961).

Islands. A post office was first opened here 1 November 1904, with a postmaster named Clark (without the final “e”)—in fact, the various postmasters here were all named Clark until 1961. The money order office number was 15062. The post office closed 20 July 1970, before POCONs came into use.

Old Harry is the home to CAMI, the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders, which maintains an historical centre here and a museum on Entry Island. Today this area is covered by the post office at Grande Entrée.

*La Cyr* 1921–1968 (Figure 32) Named for Mme J A Cyr, a local teacher, *La Cyr* was the last post office to open at this end of the Islands. It opened 1 June 1921, and was in service for 47 years. This community was situated at the northern end of the Island of Grande Entrée. The money order office number was 15134. As for many post offices, it was closed with the post office reorganization of 1968–1969. The registered box (August 1961) shows considerable wear, and it is not surprising that it was soon replaced. It was struck in red, which also contributes to the difficulties in reproducing it here. *La Cyr* used a split ring for many years, but the month indicia changed to roman numeral c 1961. The community is currently served by the post office at Grande Entrée.

Figure 32. *La Cyr*

Registration boxes and broken circle (both 1961) and broken circle (1937).

The East End of the Islands has had only four offices over 150 years, although with name changes, there were eight different post office names. Two continue to operate, Leslie and Grande Entrée.

We have thus examined the 31 different post offices that existed on the Magdalens. No doubt some of this number can be attributed to politics, in the sense that a post office placed in one community no doubt created the "need" for another in a nearby community. Many post office records, particularly in the 1930s when so many post offices existed at one time, indicate dismissals of postmasters due to political partisanship—so we can infer that at one time, the position of postmaster was closely tied to the party in power.

Most of these post offices existed over a significant period of time. Some, however, had very short life spans—notably the earlier names for Leslie, Dune-du-Sud, Blaqui re, and Le Martinet, none of which were in existence for more than nine years.

## Current Magdalen Island postmarks

In updating the articles previously written on the Magdalens, a survey of the current post office cancels was done, with some interesting results. Of the ten remaining offices, seven have been issued the new "wings" type canceller. These are Bassin, Cap-aux-Meules, Entry Island, Grande Entr e, Havre-Aubert, Havre-aux-Maisons, and Leslie. Of these, Entry Island and Havre-aux-Maisons do not appear to have the new POCON canceller. The remaining offices,  tang du Nord, Fatima, and Pointe-aux-Loups, were not issued a wings canceller, but do have updated POCONS (Figure 33). Two interesting machine cancels are also illustrated (Figure 34).

Perhaps most interesting, however, is that the Bassin wings cancel, which has the proper postal code GOB 1A0, has the name * les de la Madeleine* instead of Bassin. In all likelihood this was an error, but it is curious to note that these Islands, originally graced originally with the post office name Magdalen Islands, now return to a post office also named (at least on the canceller) * les de la Madeleine*. No one in Bassin seems to find this particularly strange, but to philatelists, it is noteworthy. It is also interesting to see that Quebec is indicated in a variety of ways—even on the newer wings cancellers—it shifts between P.Q. and QC. On one of the wings cancellers (Havre-aux-Maisons), no province is indicated. The POCONS show the same lack of consistency, using P.Q. for the most part, sometimes QU BEC in parentheses, and in one case (Bassin), no province at all.

We recommend this field to anyone who enjoys the challenge of an area of philately requiring patience and persistence. In the 20+ years spent collecting this material, we are still missing cancels from some communities—the mysterious Blaqui re, Bryon and Fauriel (the two earlier names of what is now Leslie), Bryon Island (the summer post office to the north of the main

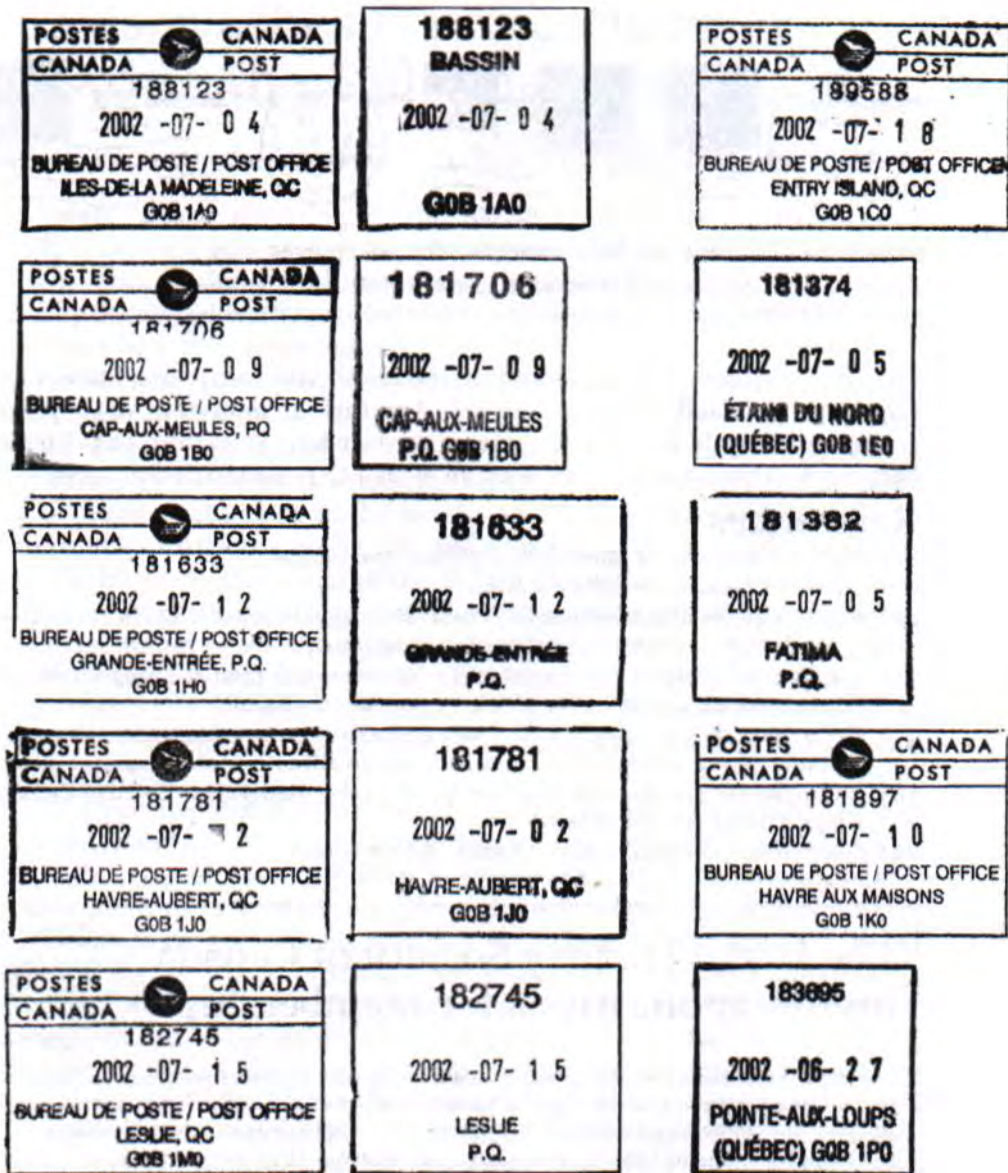


Figure 33. Some current postmarks of the Magdalen Islands

Bassin (GOB 1A0) wings & POCON, Entry Island wings, Cap-aux-Meules wings & POCON, Étang du Nord POCON, Grand Entrée wings & POCON, Fatima POCON, Havre-Aubert wings & POCON, Havre-aux-Maisons wings, Leslie wings & POCON, and Pointe-aux-Loups POCON.



Figure 34. Current machine cancels—for sharp eyes only

Étang du Nord (GOB 1EO, but no town name) & Havre-aux-Maisons (mis-spelling of *maisons*).

islands), Arsenault (on the Island of Havre-aux-Maisons), and Étang-des-Caps (on the Island of Havre-Aubert). Any further information, copies of cancels, etc, would be welcome. Please contact Jean R Walton, 125 Turtle-back Rd, Califon NJ 07830 or send an e-mail to [jwalton971@aol.com](mailto:jwalton971@aol.com).

## References

- [AC] National Archives of Canada, Post Office files (online)  
[www.archives.ca/08/0806\\_e.html](http://www.archives.ca/08/0806_e.html)
- [BE] R Belanger *The Magdalen Islands*, J Postal History Society of Canada 26 pp 23–25; followed up by Ralph Michener in same journal, 28, p 37.
- [B] P E Bourque (former postmaster at La Vernière, and then at Étang-du-Nord), private communications, for which we are very thankful.
- [C] *The cruise of the Alice May*, a three-part article in *Century Magazine* Vol xxvii and subsequent (1884). The third part was entitled *Among the Magdalen Islands*.
- [D] R Douglas *Place names on the Magdalen Islands Quebec*, Geographic Board of Canada, Kings Printer (1922) Ottawa.
- [L] *Proof Strikes of Canada*, many volumes, Robert A Lee.

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