

Figure 1

## Postal History Of Canada Under The French Regime, 1608 - 1760

By J. J. CHARRON, RPSC 6741

During the early development of Canada, water travel played an important part. The awkward ships of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could, with care, be sailed up the St. Lawrence to the port and fortress of Québec, founded in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain (1567-1635).

Before the middle of the seventeenth century, when Canada was little more than a mission and a fur-trading post, little attention was given to roads; but after the establishment of the Régime Royal in 1663, and the increase in population that followed, it was no longer possible to depend wholly on the St. Lawrence for transportation and communication and overland carriage had its small beginnings. Prior to the seventeenth century, the bulk of the correspondence travelled between Québec and the Port of La Rochelle in the old Province of Aunis, France, by the sea-route.

From 1666 to 1700, the population increased rapidly when it climbed from 3200 to nearly 10,000 inhabitants. During this same period, the population of New

England reached one million. Though the majority of the Old French Provinces contributed immigrants to Canada, the smallest of them, Aunis, ranked fourth in number of immigrants between 1608 and 1700. The fact that the Port of La Rochelle was located in this province was, without doubt, a great influence in the immigration. (1)

With the founding of Ville Marie (now Montréal) in 1642 by Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve (1612-1676), internal exchange of correspondence increased. The lines on which the business of the colony was conducted seemed to call for a fairly large interchange of letters within the country itself. The society was made up of its seigneurs, military officers, clergy and civil servants, who would beyond doubt have an extensive correspondence with friends at home. Mention of the clergy brings up that remarkable series of letters written by the Jesuit missionaries between 1622 and 1671, from the wilds of Canada, known as the "Relations des Jésuites", which form so large a part of the



foundation on which the history of the country in the seventeenth century rests. (2) Though the great mass of people were unable to either read or write, they differed but little in this respect from the same class of people in other countries at the time.

One of the earliest known covers (Fig. 1) under the French Régime is dated "18 Mars 1681" and is addressed to "Monsieur Rambaut, Maitre-Menuisier a Monrealle en Canadas". It was written by his wife, Magdeleine Thérèse Sallé, then in Paris.

Around 1690, a Canadianized Portuguese, Pierre DaSilva, offered for a small sum, to serve as a regular courier between Québec and Montréal. The earliest known such document (Fig. 2), found in the Judiciary Archives of Montréal and dated "10 Juillet 1693", reads as follows:

"Plus fait dépense de vingt sols

Payé au Portugais pour le port  
d'un paquet de lettre de cette  
ville a Québec"

It is believed that this is the oldest document showing that an individual had been paid to convey the mail. DaSilva's "diligence et fidélité" were noted in high places.

Under the administrations of Intendants Talon, Bouteroue, Duchesneau, De Meulles and De Champigny, covering the period of 1665 to 1702, a courier system existed for the use of government dispatches. Although no regular postal system had been formulated during this period, an arrangement existed by which the letters of the Governor and Intendant were carried by an appointed messenger.

All mails were not of course carried by appointed messengers. Some were conveyed as a favour by private individuals. One such individual, Charles LeMoyne, First Baron of Longueuil (Fig. 3) (1656-1729), eldest son of Charles LeMoyne (1625-1685) certifies, on "30 Janvier 1704", to have carried two letters twenty five years ago (in 1679) to France.

The letters were addressed to a person named "Guérin" who had died of sickness in the army. It is known from historical facts, that "Longueuil" served in the armies of Louis XIV in France from 1672 to 1679. The story of the LeMoyne family, whose numerous sons are known as the "Maccabees of New France", is a saga in itself.

On December 23rd, 1705, Intendant Jacques Raudot (1705-10) granted a commission to Pierre DaSilva dit Portugais as "ordinary messenger to convey the letters of the Governor General and ours in the King's service throughout all this Colony, permitting him to convey those of private persons, to deliver them at their destination and bring back the replies. We have established the charge of ten sols for the conveyance of each letter from Québec to Montréal, and as much for the return trip. and the rest proportionally, according to the places where the letters are delivered". The Intendant also warned all persons

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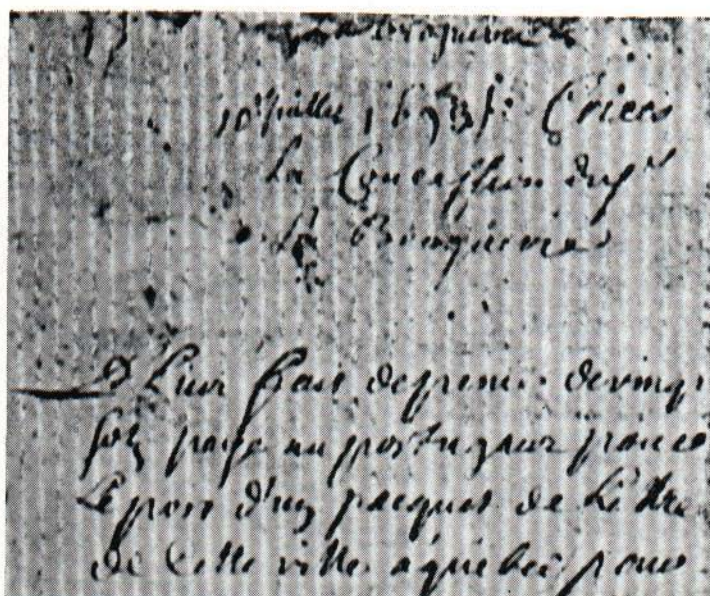
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DIXVILLE

QUEBEC





(Figure 2)

not to impede him in his functions and ordered all officers and soldiers to lend him "main forte et assistance". (3) When the intrepid postman died in 1717, after a quarter of a century of service, he was succeeded by his son-in-law, Jean Moran.

On January 27th, 1721, Intendant Michel Bégon (1710-23) granted to Nicholas Lanouillier the exclusive privilege for twenty years of maintaining a postal system, including post-houses, for letters and couriers as well as stage coaches. (4) Born in Paris in 1679, Lanouillier arrived in Québec in 1714. In 1720, he was a general agent of the "Compagnie des Indes". (5) Since there was no road between Québec and Montréal in 1721, and as Lanouillier's scheme involved the construction of a road, the Intendant gave him the exclusive privilege of establishing ferries over the rivers which would cross the road he undertook to build. As the population of Canada in 1721 was about 25,000, and the towns of Québec, Trois-Rivières and Montréal contained no more than 2300, 325 and 3200 people respectively, an

enterprise of that magnitude could not possibly be profitable. Lanouillier no doubt realized this, for he did nothing in the pursuance of the scheme. He had to obtain from Louis XV confirmation of the Ordinance within a delay of one year. Royal sanction arrived a few months later with double restriction: reduction of the twenty year privilege to ten years and commencing only from the date of registration of the commission. It appears that Lanouillier did not follow his obligation of registering his commission and it was dropped. (6) In 1722, Lanouillier was a member of the "Conseil Supérieur", Attorney-General in 1727 and Keeper of the Seals in 1735. He died in Québec in 1736 at the age of 57. (7)

The "Almanach Royale de France", founded in 1699, (8) announced in 1723 that on letters to Canada, there would be a charge of seven sols which would pay for the conveyance from Paris to La Rochelle, while between La Rochelle and Canada, letters were carried free of Charge. (9) This is probably due to



Je soussigné Certifie que le bonhomme Bréau  
 Para. Me fera de ma charge de deux lettres pour porter  
 à ambassade de ces parons. le dernier voyage que j'ai fait  
 en France Il y a environ vingt cinq ans ou au plus  
 et qu'il n'a pu de lui former de ces dits parons  
 si il n'avoit pas de nouvelles de son grand-père Guérin  
 Je prie <sup>donc</sup> le Curé qui me donna des papiers à lui  
 à porter que l'on voit par quel d'édit guérin étoit  
 mort à l'époque, <sup>et qu'il n'y a eu de son</sup> fait à Montréal  
 le 30 Janvier 1731, Longueville

(Figure 3)

the fact that, up to near the end of the eighteenth century, the French posts were farmed out, the leases restricting the farm privileges to continental France.

In 1727, the courier Jean Moran, who had married DaSilva's daughter Elisabeth in 1705, had continued the postal service following his father-in-law's death in 1717. Moran received official recognition by Intendant Claude-Thomas Dupuy (1725-29), duly receiving his commission as "messenger du Roy en Nouvelle-France". (10) It is presumed that Moran continued as postal messenger until his death in 1754 since no records have been found to the contrary or as to his successor.

Jean Moran, in 1728, complained to Intendant Dupuy that money was owed to him by the public for his services and that this was due to the lack of hard currency. This anomaly was fairly well settled with the introduction of card money ("monnaie de carte"), by Ordinance of March 2nd, 1729. (11)

Intendant Gilles Hocquart (1731-48)

issued an Ordinance, dated July 20th, 1732, the purpose of which was to regulate the arrival of foreign mail in the town of Québec. He had received complaints that rowboats and canoes went to meet the ships arriving in the port of Québec from overseas in order to pick up the letters for themselves and for others. The Ordinance forbade the boarding of ships, except with special permission in writing, prior to the captain setting foot on land. A fine of 50 livres was imposed on any offender. Persons onboard ship responsible for the letters had to hand them over to the addressee personally. (12)

In order to soften the harshness of the Ordinance towards persons of good faith, the merchants were authorized, if they judged convenient to their interests, to delegate an individual, merchant or otherwise, to receive all letters and to proceed with the distribution, under the Intendant's authority. This Ordinance had to be registered at the Provostship of Québec, published and posted in ordinary and accustomed



places in the Lower and Upper Town of Québec, even in the port. (13)

In 1733, Moran reported to Indendant Hocquart that the "Maitres de postes", living near rivers flowing into the St. Lawrence, refused to put a ferry at his disposal after sundown and it was only after spending the night in the post-house that the "maitre de poste" would help him reach the opposite shore, which caused Moran great delays and unnecessary expenses. This situation was corrected the following year by an ordinance, which we shall discuss later on.

The St. Lawrence River was for a long period the best and easiest means of communication between Québec and Montréal and was used in all seasons. When the ice permitted, messengers used ice skates. An experienced skater could travel the distance with a favourable wind without resting. One such messenger went beyond his endurance. Sent in urgency from Montréal to Québec with a dispatch he travelled in 18 hours the distance of 180 miles and died on arrival. Some said he died of exhaustion, others maintained that he ate a big meal en route. (14)

#### Editors note—

The second part of this interesting article and its bibliography will be concluded in the next issue.

## TRADE NOTES

### HARMERS TO SELL DR. GELBERT'S STAMPS

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Mr. Bernard Harmer has announced that, on instructions received from the Executors of the Estate, the majority of the philatelic holdings of the late Dr. George Mackinley Geldert, will be sold by H. R. Harmer, Inc. at their Galleries in New York in the New Year. A group of Malta and Great Britain used in Malta will be offered in London.

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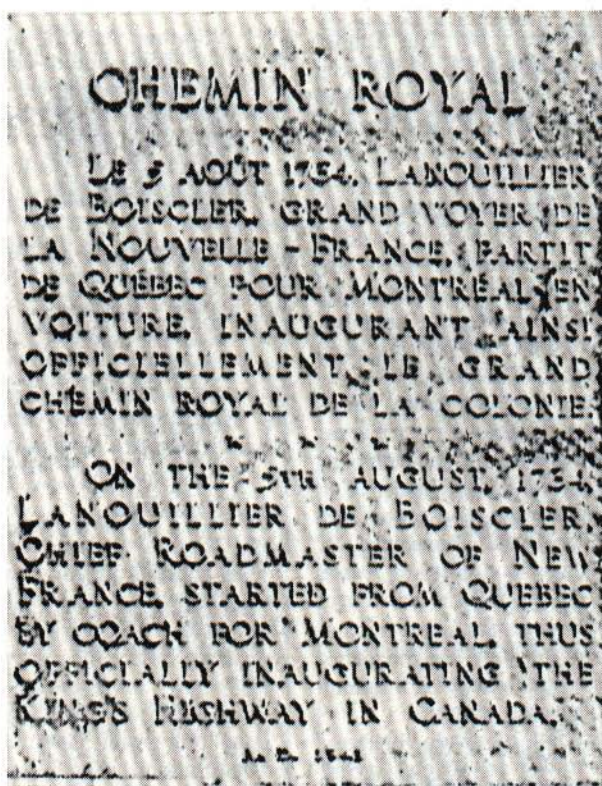
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(Figure 4)

## Postal History Of Canada Under The French Regime, 1608-1760

By J. J. CHARRON, RPSC 6741

(conclusion)

The French found no horses in the St. Lawrence Valley, and both horses and wheeled vehicles were imported. (15) On June 25th, 1647 arrived in Québec the first horse, a beast unknown to the Indians in the valley. It had been sent from France by the Director of the "Compagnie des Habitants" as a gift to the Governor, Charles Huault de Montmagny, the third Governor of New France (1636-48), after Champlain and Châteaufort. In 1665, twelve horses picked from the King's stables were sent to Canada at the request of Pierre

Boucher, who was Governor of Trois-Rivières (1662-67) and Lieutenant General of the High Seneschal of New France. Another shipment of horses arrived in 1670 from France and were distributed as rewards to those seigneurs who had favoured the clearing and cultivation of the land. (16)

With the rapid increase of the equine population, major construction projects as roads, bridges and the like could be undertaken. Roads were needed, and were gradually built. As the roads expanded, so did the communications and



the correspondence. There were great difficulties in the way: (A) The almost continuous forests called for the heavy preliminary work of cutting trees and removing stumps: (B) Many streams made bridges or ferries necessary, and though the snow of the winter was more of a help than a hindrance, the spring brought a period of deep mud. Added to these natural difficulties were the small number of scattered settlements of the population. In spite of these obstacles, a system of road-making was gradually evolved in Canada.

Between Québec and Montréal, there were no roads practicable for carriages, except for long lengths of roadways in the more populated seigneuries. For travel and transportation, the canoe and ferry were used on the St. Lawrence. In winter, one could use to a great or lesser degree of route on the river's ice. Forcibly, all the mails used the same means of communications, except for the official dispatches that were sent throughout the country by special couriers.

The administration of roads, bridges, and ferries was under an official styled the "Grand Voyer" or Roadmaster, the name being taken from the Superintendent of roads and bridges in France during the period 1599-1626. It is somewhat odd that this title was used in Canada for the first time twenty five years later. The construction of the road from Québec to Montréal began only ten years after Nicholas Lanouillier was given the privilege of the Post in 1721. With the previous "Grand Voyers", René Robineau, Baron de Bécancour (1626-1699), appointed in 1651, and his son Pierre in 1689, the task remained a sinecure, of which the two titulars abstained from any initiative. Upon the death of Pierre Bécancour, the King named to this post, Jean Eustache Lanouillier de Boiscler, on March 26th, 1730. (17) Boiscler, the younger brother of Nicholas Lanouillier, was born in Paris in 1681. In 1719, he was Comptroller of Fortifications in Canada. (18) He must have been a good engineer and an excellent administrator. Under the drive of Intendant Hocquart construction work began on the north

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shore of the St. Lawrence. The road progressed rapidly due principally to the know-how and energy of Boiscler. His job was made somewhat easier since he was able to recruit manpower by "Corvée". Most of the work on roads and bridges was done by what was known as the "Corvée du Roy" to distinguish it from the ordinary farm work due to the seigneurs. Between 1707 and 1760, there were 849 Ordinances issued on behalf of the "Grand Voyers". (19) Although the French in Canada were more concerned with road-making than has usually been represented, they always depended largely on water transport.

Following up Jean Moran's complaints and Boiscler's recommendations, the Governor, Charles de la Boische Beauharnois (1726-47) and Intendant Hocquart decreed on April 30th, 1734, that owners of ferries on the rivers Batiscan, Trois-Rivières, Sainte-Anne, des Prairies, Grand Yamachiche, Grand Rivière, du Loup, Maskinongé (large and small) and others were officially appointed and fees established in order to prevent any difficulties that may arise between the conductors of the ferries and the travellers and that the latter must be transported at any hour of the day or night. (20)

On August 5th, 1734, Boiscler travelled from Québec to Montréal by "calèche" and inaugurated the "chemin royal de la colonie".

In 1735, Boiscler wrote that he had driven in a carriage during the summer in four and a half days. In 1737, the route, Québec-Montréal, offered such facilities that the trip could be done with a single horse. The new route opened the land around Lake St. Peter to colonization. Intendant Hocquart, in 1739, made the trip in comfort. As Boiscler opened the new roads from Montréal to La Prairie, to Fort Chambly, the volume of correspondence increased accordingly. (21) It is known definitely that the post-road opened in 1734, post-houses were established and postmasters were app-

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A. Madame  
 Madame Miller  
 Demeurant chez M. Champagne  
 Cordonnier à Montréal.

(Figure 5)

ointed. The services of this organization were also extended to those who wished to ride or travel post. Post-houses were located about every "3 lieux" (9 miles) and ferries were in operation.

There exists still today a post-house, some 260 years old, located 45 miles west of Québec City, more precisely 4 miles east of Deschambault on route No. 2, linking Québec and Montréal on the north shore. The house belongs to Louis Hamelin, a direct descendant of Louis M. Hamelin who, in April 1690, purchased the land from the Seigneur de Lachevrotière on which the post-house was built.

With the completion of the Québec-Montréal road in 1734, many new roads were laid. In 1738, a new "chemin royal" was opened between Kamouraska and Rivière Ouelle, on the south shore, down river from Québec. During the last years of the French Régime, the area around Québec has a good road network and Boiscler wrote that the Governor's and Intendant's letters from Québec to the lower St. Lawrence arrived in good time. (22)

During the last few years of his service, Boiscler failed to maintain the energy that had been an earlier char-

acteristic. The hard working engineer died in Québec in 1750 at the age of 69.

The population of Canada in 1760 was between 65,000 and 70,000. Under the circumstances, the achievement of New France in road-making was no mean one, and the organization that was worked out served as a model in later years. After Boiscler's death, the country was in a constant state of war, so that even if there had been an efficient "Grand Voyer" to succeed him, the general neglect into which the domestic affairs fell would have affected the condition of the roads. (24)

The latest known cover (Fig. 5) under the French Régime is one dated "21 Juin 1759", written by "Miller" at "Camp de la Marine" at Beauport (near Québec) to his wife "Madame demeurant chez M. Champagne, cordonnier a Montréal". It is interesting to note that "Miller" instructs his wife to buy a house in Montréal or in the "Faubourg St-Laurant ou des Récollets", after stating that he had sighted fourteen enemy ships and had taken twenty eight "prisonniers Anglais". The permission to buy a house in Montréal is certified by a notary.



Letters under the French Régime are recognizable only by the superscription and contents, there being no known postmarks yet discovered. The latter would have served little purpose since overseas mail was free of charge from the port of embarkation to Québec and the time element of conveyance was not regulated as we understand it today. Letters from Metropolitan France to Canada with French postal markings for the conveyance from a given place in France to the port of embarkation to Canada must certainly exist since the French postal system in France in the eighteenth century, though farmed out, was highly organized. It is superfluous to mention that such letters are very rare and those available are in museums.

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