

## Steamboat Letters from Three Rivers

by Guy des Rivières, FRPSC

In 1809 a tentative service carrying passengers by ship was initiated between Quebec and Montreal. This service was very successful, and people started giving their letters to the captain or other officers, paying a small fee of 1d at a time when the regular mail between Quebec and Montreal cost 9d.

Postal authorities tried to prevent such activities without much success. As these illegal activities were increasing, the postal authorities decided in 1841 to start a regular mail service by steamboat during the navigation season. A mail clerk, then called a Post Office Conductor, was posted on board to take care of all letters mailed on board from Quebec or Montreal or from intermediate points including Three Rivers.

In May, 1841, the following notice was published in the Quebec Gazette:

### POST OFFICE NOTICE

Commencing this day, Her Majesty's Mails will be conveyed between Montreal and Quebec daily, (excepting Sunday), by the Government Mail Steamers.

These Vessels will start from Montreal at 6, and Quebec at 5 P.M., and will touch at Sorel, Port St. Francis, and Three Rivers.

To enable the Postmasters to close their mails in proper season, the following Regulations with regard to the posting of letters (intended to go by the Steamers) will be observed:-

At the Montreal Office - Letters for Quebec, William Henry, Berthier, Port St. Francis and Three Rivers, will be taken until half-past 5 o'clock. - Letters for other places must be posted at five o'clock.

At the Quebec Office - Letters for Montreal, William Henry, Berthier, Port St. Francis and Three Rivers, will be taken until half-past 4 o'clock. - Letters for other places, including Upper Canada, the United States, and the Eastern Townships must be posted by 4 o'clock.

BUT UNPAID letters for every destination will be received on board the Boat, by the Post Office Conductor in charge of the Mails until the moment the Vessel leaves the Port.

A LAND MAIL three times a week, to leave Quebec and Montreal respectively during the Summer, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 6 o'clock, P.M., and arrive on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 8 o'clock, A.M. will serve those Offices on the North Shore which cannot be accommodated by the Steamboat arrangement.

Following the start of this new official mail service, DPMG Stayner ordered two hammers, one for Quebec and the other for Montreal, of oval form (fig.1). These were put into use in 1843. These hammers in copper of poor quality deteriorated very rapidly, therefore it is difficult to find a clear strike of this mark. For this reason the DPMG ordered new hammers for Quebec and Montreal in 1845 (fig. 2).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

As the mail clerk on board had only hammers for Quebec and Montreal, letters mailed at Three Rivers could not be identified as originating from there. However, the two covers illustrated in figs. 3 and 4 show a clear identification of steamboat letters originating from Three Rivers, with the Quebec Steamboat letter mark.

The letter (fig. 3) showing the oval Quebec Steamboat strike is dated October 1st, 1844, and the clerk, to indicate that the letter came from Three Rivers, wrote '3 Rivers' inside the mark above the date. This identification is quite scarce for it seems that the clerks very seldom bothered to mention the origin of letters mailed from ports other than Quebec or Montreal and struck all these letters with the Quebec or Montreal handstamp.

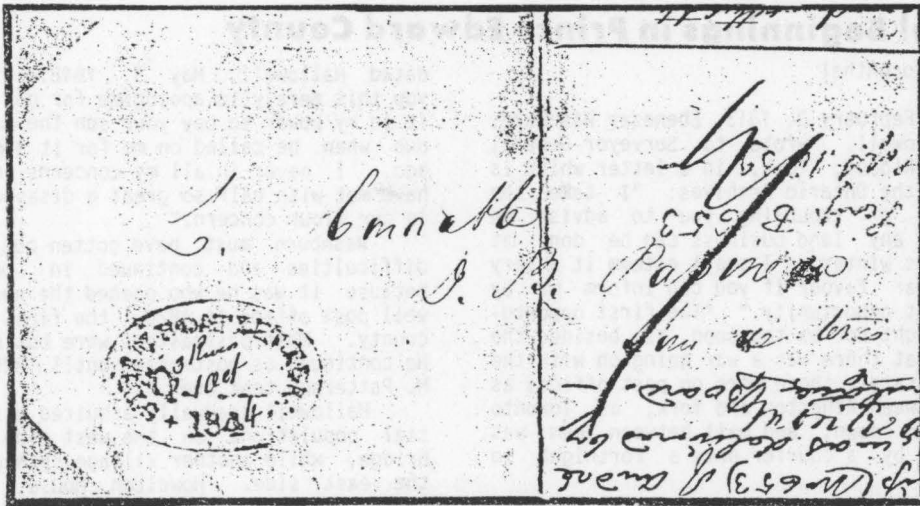


Fig. 3

The other letter (fig. 4) is dated November 13, 1853, from Three Rivers to Quebec with a circular Quebec Steamboat Letter mark (fig. 2), but this mark had no space inside it as did the oval mark, so the clerk just wrote '3 Rivers' in the upper corner of the cover. Both the above letters are rated 7d, the regular rate for a letter from Three Rivers to Quebec or Montreal.

The writer would appreciate hearing from any readers having Steamboat letters which could be identified as originating from Three Rivers or any other port of call of the mail boat, so further study could be made of the usage of the Quebec or Montreal Steamboat Letter strikes on letters received on board at other ports.

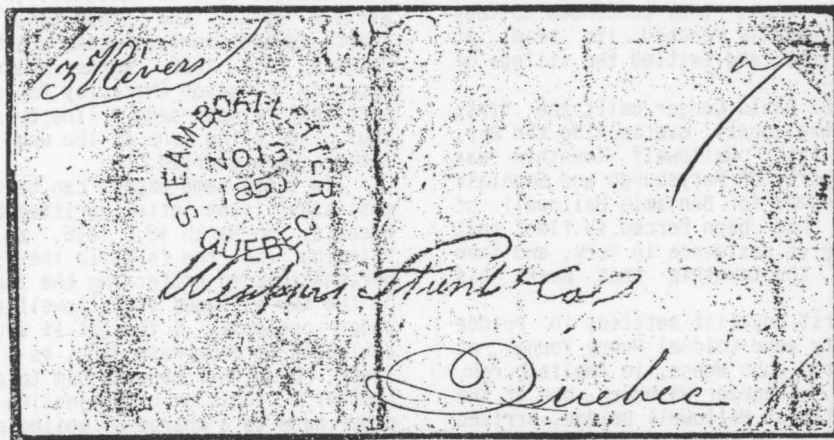


Fig. 4