

Since we are interested in the history of official correspondence and franking privilege, we have long been looking to get a Hugh Finlay cover, but they are very elusive. Most of those in existence belong to museums or public archives. So we were delighted to obtain one in a recent auction in Montreal. We were especially pleased because we obtained the full document, in which Finlay candidly gives his opinion on the main issues of the time.

Hugh Finlay emigrated from England to Quebec in 1763. Wealthy and bilingual, he was appointed postmaster of Quebec City that year and in 1774 a deputy postmaster general of North America. As such he was responsible for the establishment of the early Canadian postal system. He remained in office until 1800, a year before his death in Quebec City.

The folded letter was sent from Quebec City on 29 Nov. 1792 to "John Munro Esq^r. / Matilda / by Montreal." It was backstamped with the "QUEBEC" straight-line marking and dated "29 / NO" with a Bishop mark. Although this straight-line mark was in use from 1765 to 1796 and is arguably the oldest Canadian postmark, the first straight-line postmark of Quebec City is a scarce one in a period when circular types were extensively used. The postmark usually comes with the famous Bishop mark, which also had a long life, ranging from 1774 to 1796.

As deputy postmaster for North America, Finlay was, of course, entitled to the postal franking privilege. Consequently, the fold was rated on the front with a manuscript inscription, "Free / H. Finlay." This method of indicating the postal frank would become more common in the 1830s, but it was seldom used in Canada in Finlay's time. We have seen very few letters sent by Finlay himself. In a letter from 1783 he used the "QUEBEC" straight-line postmark on the front and a Bishop mark on the reverse, without any signature or rate indication. On another occasion, in 1790, he used on the front a straight-line "FREE" with serifs within a circular marking, but without his signature and without any other Quebec postmark.

We also have in our collection two folded

letters of the period sent by Edward Edwards, the postmaster at Montreal from 1785 to 1807. Edwards placed a "MONTREAL" straight-line mark on the reverse of the letter along with his seal, but no indication whatsoever was made about the rate. Much research still has to be done on this matter of early franking privilege.

Returning to the Finlay cover illustrated here, on the backside is found a manuscript inscription, "Montreal 5th December 1792 / Forwarded w. Compts of / Your hble Serv^t / T. Wilson." Matilda Township, now in eastern Ontario, lies about 120 miles west of Montreal on the St Lawrence River. Though a postal route had been opened in 1789, service remained irregular and most letters were sent by favour.

John Munro came to North America as a British soldier during the Seven Years' War. After the war he established himself in the province of New York. During the American revolution he joined the loyalist forces of Sir John Johnson. After the war, all his family migrated to Quebec, some settling in the Baie-des-Chaleurs area, where Hugh Munro became in 1789 the first postmaster of New Carlisle. Others settled along the upper St Lawrence, among them John Munro. He located first in New Johnstown and then in Matilda, where he became an eminent citizen and a member of Upper Canada's first Legislative Council in 1792.

The content of Finlay's letter is quite interesting on account of his reference to the existence of two different cultures living side by side. The issue was raised by the time the Constitutional Act of 1791, which created the provinces of Lower and Upper Canada, had come into effect.

The wisdom of Parliament has found it necessary to separate Canada in two. The lower part enjoyed a set of Laws quite adapted to their prejudices & local circumstances. It would have been unjust & impolitic to have touched them by an Act of Parliament, and as Englishmen in a part of the Province where no Frenchmen reside, could not consent to be governed by laws inapplicable to their situation & written in a

language they do not understand, the Canadians were separated from the King's Ancient subjects. Could a wiser step have been taken?

future:

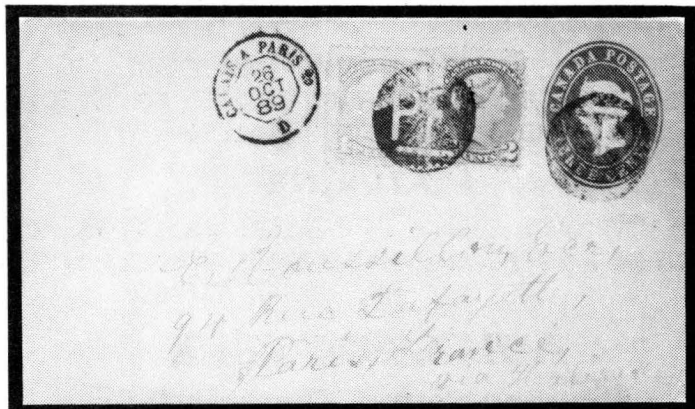
I perceived you are of opinion that you must depend on hemp for your staple. . . . I am firmly persuaded that raising hemp will one day enrich the Province of upper Canada.

As you can see, a few things have not changed in this country, but others have, and not necessarily for the worst.

Finlay goes on to say that the House of Assembly of Upper Canada will be a "free, a very free Government" and that the residents of the new province will be a "very happy people." Then he enquires about the way land is to be granted in the province. Finally, he makes a prediction about its

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