

# Postal Beginnings at Beauharnois, Québec

By Cimon Morin, FRPSC

Located on the shores of Lac St-Louis, Beauharnois<sup>1</sup> takes its name from the Seigneurie of Beauharnois, granted in 1729 to Claude de Beauharnois de Beaumont et de Villechauve (1674-1738) and to Charles de Beauharnois de La Boische, Marquis de Beauharnois and Seigneur de Villechauve (1671-1749). Charles de Beauharnois was a naval officer and Governor General of New France for 21 years (1726-1747). Beauharnois was set up as a village municipality in 1846 and incorporated as a city in 1863<sup>2</sup>.

The post office, opened on April 6, 1829, was located just nine miles from the office at Chateauguay, opened on the same date. The office was 33 miles from Montréal and 205 miles from Québec. The village had a population of 800 residents in 1851. In April of 1829 a contract was established for the transport of mail once a week between Lachine and Beauharnois via Châteauguay, a distance of 16 miles. In 1832 a transportation corridor already existed between Lachine and the Salmon River.



Figure 1. “The Seigneurie of Beauharnois” watercolour on pencil drawing, 1838 [LAC, C-13370]

This route linked Lachine to Châteauguay, Beauharnois, North Georgetown, Huntingdon, and Dundee three times a week<sup>3</sup>.

From 1839 to 1842 the conveyance of mail between Châteauguay and Beauharnois – a side route – was granted to Andrew Lang for an annual expenditure of £25. There were three trips per week on horseback of 1¾ hours return<sup>4</sup>. In the summer of 1846, Thomas Allen Stayner, Deputy Postmaster General, announced that a daily mail service (except on Sundays) would be operated to Beauharnois<sup>5</sup>.

<i>Postmaster</i>	<i>Period</i>
Thomas McDonald	April 6, 1829 – April 5, 1832
Robert H. Norval	April 6, 1832 – October 5, 1832
Marc-Damase Masson	October 6, 1832 – January 1838
[The post office was operated January 1838 – January 5, 1839 by Masson's former clerks]	
John Ross	January 6, 1839 – January 5, 1843
Henry Bogue	January 6, 1843 – April 9, 1857

### Thomas McDonald

Thomas McDonald settled in Beauharnois during the autumn of 1826. He was just 22 years old and was a merchant; he had previously worked at the same calling in Montreal. When Stayner, decided to open an office in the village, the natural choice for postmaster fell on the merchant. According to Stayner's report, McDonald was postmaster until April 5, 1832<sup>6</sup>. Unfortunately, very little is known about his

life, and it seems that he died at Beauharnois on August 11, 1832 at the age of 28, during the period of the cholera epidemic which devastated Lower Canada at the time. The population of Beauharnois was about 300 in 1832.

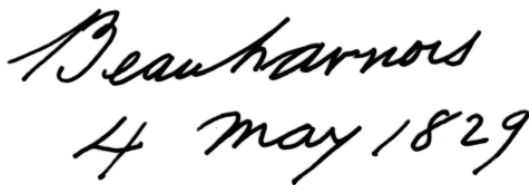


Figure 2. Manuscript postmark dated 4 May 1829, written by Thomas McDonald [LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 286, no. 584]

### Robert Howden Norval

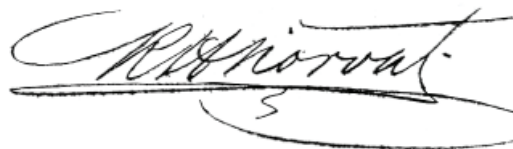


Figure 3. Signature of postmaster R. H. Norval [LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 334]

Beginning April 6, 1832<sup>7</sup> McDonald was temporarily replaced by Robert H. Norval, who acted as postmaster until October 5 of the same year. He was justice of the peace at Beauharnois. In this era the County of Beauharnois had two battalions, of which one member was Major Norval. When the rebellion broke out in Beauharnois in November 1838, Major Norval rejoined the Beauharnois Loyal Volunteers – a volunteer unit. It was said of him that his loyalty was unquestioned, and that the insurgents made him their prisoner and removed his arms

and accoutrements during the rebellion. His work as postmaster brought him a sum of £3 13s 9d in the course of his six-month tenure.

### Marc-Damase Masson<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4. Photograph and signature of Damase Masson [Frank Mackey<sup>9</sup>; LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 524]

Marc-Damase Masson, known as Damase, was born at Sainte-Geneviève on the Island of Montreal, on February 23, 1805<sup>10</sup>. Son of Eustache Masson and Scholastique Pfeiffer (Payfair), Marc-Damase spent the early years of his childhood on the family farm up until 1827, when his father left home to go

to Saint-Clément-de-Beauharnois, where he established a business. Trained in business, Damase launched into commerce himself in 1829.

On February 1, 1830 he married Virginie Jobin, daughter of notary André Jobin, postmaster at Sainte-Geneviève and well-known Patriot. Eight children were born of this union: three sons and five daughters. Like a good citizen, Marc-Damase enlisted in 1832 and became adjutant in the second Beauharnois battalion. He was named a justice of the peace in 1837<sup>11</sup>. After his participation in the Patriot movement and the loss of his properties, Masson went to Montreal in 1839 to start over again.

Thanks to his business knowledge and his tenacity he succeeded in rising to the first ranks of businessmen of Montreal. From his wholesale and retail grocery business, D. Masson & Co., he turned up as administrator of the *Banque d'Épargne* from 1846 to 1850. On December 13, 1846 he was chosen as church warden of the Notre-Dame church. In February 1855 the popular vote opened up a path for him to enter municipal politics. He sat for three years as alderman for the Saint-Laurent district and for some four years held the reins of the finance committee. In 1858 he set out along the path that led him to the presidency of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society, and in 1861 joined a group of businessmen who, under the leadership of Hugh Allan, founded the *Banque des Marchands*. Masson was one of the directors up to his death in 1878, and one of its largest shareholders. The bank was bought by the Bank of Montreal in 1921. Marc-Damase Masson was also a member of the board of directors of a

myriad of insurance companies, including the North British and Mercantile Insurance Company. He was also a director of the *Compagnie du Richelieu*, which engaged in the transportation of merchandise on the Richelieu River. He died in Montreal on April 23, 1878 at the age of 73.

At the time of the Rebellion of 1837, Masson sided immediately with the Patriots. His position in the business world was flourishing at that time, and despite his convictions he stayed on to be actively involved in the second uprising of 1838. Masson acted as an interpreter of the British authorities for the Patriots during the negotiations on the release of some

of them. His involvement in the Patriot movement cost him dearly; his properties were destroyed by the soldiers and he lost the fruits of many years of labour.

During the course of the first uprising in 1837 Stayner, the person most accountable for the postal system in Canada, and who required the loyalty of all postmasters to the existing administration, was aware of Masson's Patriot sympathies. As mentioned above, Masson's father-in-law was the notary André Jobin, postmaster at Sainte-Geneviève and well-known Patriot. His cousin, Dr. Luc Hyacinthe Masson, was also a postmaster at Saint-Benoît; he was exiled to Bermuda following the troubles of the

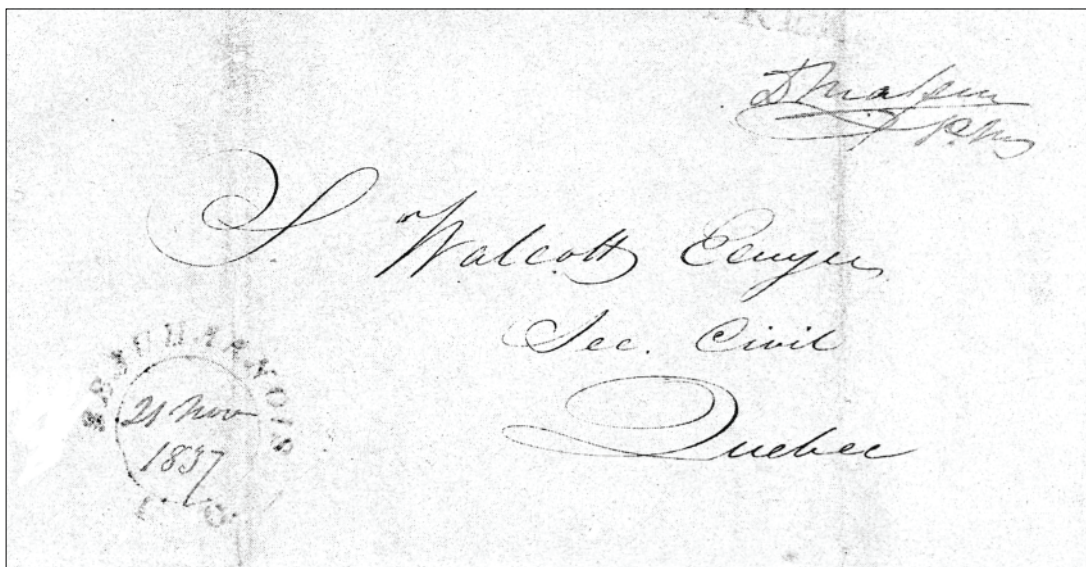


Figure 5. Usage of the free-franking privilege by postmaster "D. Masson P.M." dated November 21, 1837 [LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 524, no. 1916]



rebellion. Masson was assisted in his duties as postmaster by two clerks, R. D. Beaubien (1833) and N. Laviolette (1834). His annual commission was £5 12s 3d (1834).

#### Revenues of the Beauharnois post office

1832	1833	1834
£17 12s 2d	£23 17s 8d	£22 4s 5d

Stayner received permission from the authorities of the General Post Office in London to dismiss from their duties all postmasters in Lower and Upper Canada who participated in patriotic activities, if he deemed it to be appropriate<sup>12</sup>. He had no choice but to dismiss Masson for his participation in the Patriots' cause immediately after finding another person to take on the office of postmaster. Masson was relieved of his duties probably at the end of January 1838. On this subject we have a copy of a correspondence dated March 16, 1838 addressed to Colonel Rowan, civil secretary in Montreal. The cover is postmarked with a double circle and rated at 4½ pence; if Masson had been postmaster at that time, he would have had the right of free franking<sup>13</sup>. From the end of January 1838 until the appointment of the new postmaster John Ross on January 6, 1839<sup>14</sup>, postal service in Beauharnois continued in operation. We believe that the mails were operated by one of Damase Masson's former clerks.

Several years later, in 1846 Damase Masson demanded the sum of £1046 as compensation for the troubles of 1837-1838. The reply from the Commission stipulated "that after a careful investigation, the

commissioners are unanimously of the opinion, that the plaintiff cannot be ranked in the category of loyal persons in the sense of the Statute"<sup>15</sup>.

#### John Ross



Figure 6. Signature of John Ross [LAC, RG4-B52, vol. 4]

John Ross was born in Scotland in 1806 and died at Concord, New Hampshire. He married Catherine Gilchrist. A loyal citizen, he was appointed on January 6, 1839<sup>16</sup> by Stayner. John Ross left Montreal and established himself in Beauharnois in 1825. He was a merchant, and with the help of William Becket, opened the first store of consequence in Beauharnois. The two people who provided his sureties were the former postmaster Robert Howden Norval and Lawrence George Brown. His clerk or assistant was Edward Brown. During the rebellion Lieutenant John Ross was imprisoned by the rebels and all of his properties and merchandise pillaged by the Patriots.

Ross stepped down from his position on January 5, 1843<sup>17</sup>. At the Commission of Inquiry into the Post Office in 1841 he stated that he received or sent about 40 letters per year under free franking<sup>18</sup>.

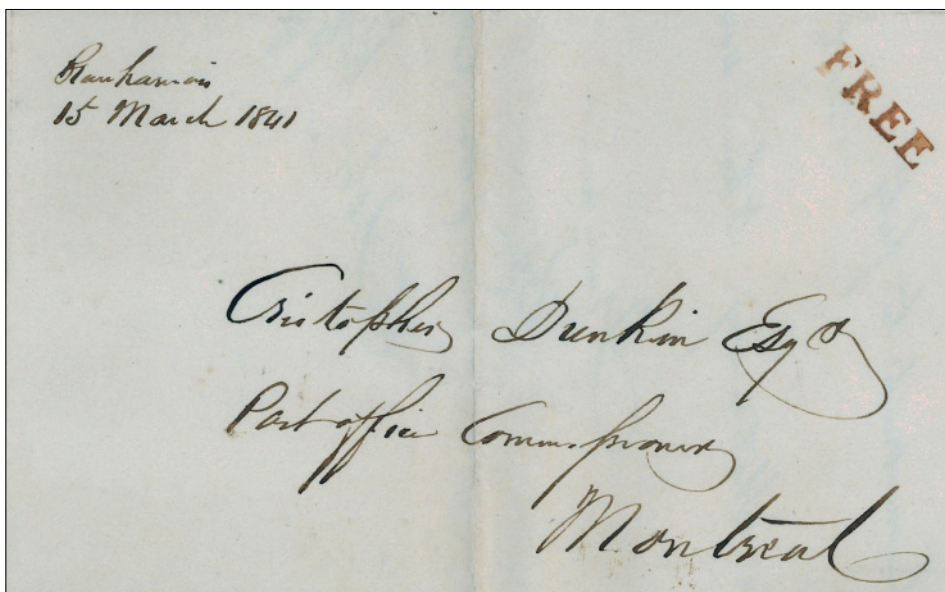


Figure 7. Use of the free-franking privilege by postmaster John Ross, dated March 15, 1841 LAC, RG4-B52, vol. 4, no. 301]

## Henry Bogue

Figure 8. Signature of Henry Bogue, dated November 15, 1842  
[LAC, RG4-C1, vol. 73, report 2885]

Following the Commission of Inquiry into the Post Office, the appointment of postmasters process was changed in 1842. Control of the partisan appointments was

transferred from Stayner to the Governor General of the province. Following an exchange of correspondence<sup>19</sup> with the Provincial Secretary, the Honourable D. Daly, in November 1842, Henry Bogue informed him that he would accept with honour the duties of postmaster.

Henry Bogue was a merchant, and became mayor of Beauharnois in 1845. The procedures linked to the functions of postmaster were not always followed, and some residents complained about the discrepancies in the rating of letters. Stayner asked his Postal Inspector for Lower Canada, Henry Griffin, to undertake an inquiry "on the curious views which the

postmaster at Beauharnois takes of his duty with regard to the rating of letters and give him suitable instructions<sup>20</sup>". Henry Bogue remained postmaster until April 9, 1857.

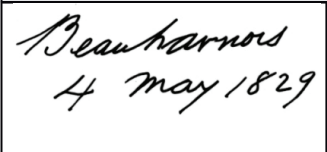

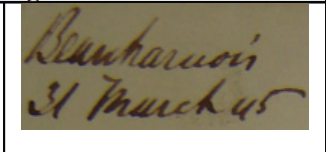
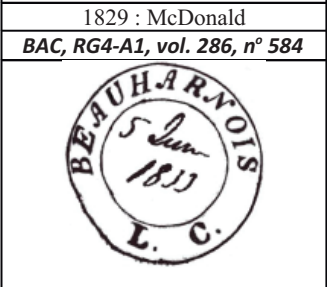
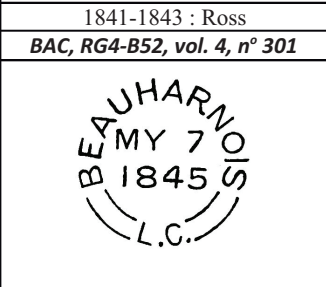
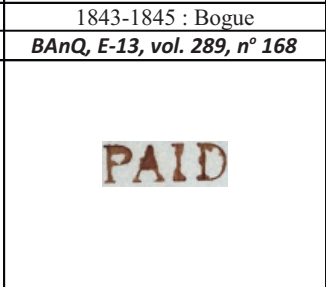
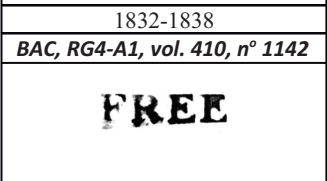
Bogue's salary for the year 1844 was nearly £16<sup>21</sup>. However, according to the statistics below it is apparent that his revenues were diminishing because of the decrease in the

volume of mail to this municipality.

### Bibliography

Leduc, Augustin, *Beauharnois, paroisse Saint-Clément 1819-1919 : Histoire religieuse, histoire civile : fêtes du centenaire*, [s.l. : s.n.], 1920, xix, 321p.

Sellar, Robert, *The history of Huntingdon and the seigniories of Beauharnois and Châteauguay from their first settlement to the year 1838 and revised to the 1900's*, The Huntingdon Gleaner Inc.,

Early Beauharnois Postal Markings		
		
1829 : McDonald	1841-1843 : Ross	1843-1845 : Bogue
BAC, RG4-A1, vol. 286, n° 584	BAC, RG4-B52, vol. 4, n° 301	BAnQ, E-13, vol. 289, n° 168
		
1832-1838	1846-1876	1841-1852
BAC, RG4-A1, vol. 410, n° 1142	Épreuve	BAC, RG4-C1, vol. 56, n° 590
		
1837-1841		
BAC, RG4-B52, vol. 4, n° 301		

Beauharnois – Average number of letters received per week <sup>22</sup>							
1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	Average
61	101	107	52	54	40	52	67

Huntingdon, 1888, 634p. See also *A companion to Robert Sellar's History of the county of Huntingdon and the seigneuries of Châteauguay and Beauharnois*, The Innismacsaint Press, 1987, 64p.

## References

1 See also Cimon Morin, "La poste à Beauharnois, de ses débuts à 1851", *Les cahiers de l'Académie*, Opus XV, Académie québécoise d'études philatéliques, 2008, p. 197-202.

2 *Noms et lieux du Québec*, Commission de toponymie du Québec, 1994 and 1996. Micro-Intel. See also <http://www.toponymie.gouv.qc.ca>

3 *Report of the Special Committee of the House of Assembly on the Post Office Department in the Province of Lower Canada*. House of Assembly, [Quebec] 1832, p. 36.

4 Province of Canada Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1846. *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affairs of the Post Office in British North America*, Appendix F Section D-29. The Commissioners' report is dated December 31, 1841.

5 LAC, RG3, vol. 2747, file 127. *Post Office, Montreal. "Arrival and Departure of the Mails. Summer Arrangements 1846"*.

6 LAC, MG44B, vol. 4, p. 211.

7 Département des postes, *Premier rapport du Comité spécial nommé pour s'enquérir de l'état actuel du Département des postes, afin de porter un remède efficace aux défauts de son organisation et administration*, 8 mars 1835. Appendix G.G. to vol. XLV of the *Journaux de la Chambre d'assemblée de la province du Bas-Canada*, 1836.

8 See also Michel Gagné and Cimon Morin, "La poste et les Rébellions de 1837-1838: Marc-Damase Masson, maître de poste de Beauharnois (1832-1839)", *Bulletin d'histoire postale et de philatélie*, n° 128, 2015, p. 26-28.

9 Frank Mackey, *Steamboat Connections: Montreal to Upper Canada, 1816-1843*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montréal, 2000, p. 160-161.

Photograph taken from *The Canadian Album* by J. Castel Hopkins. Photographer: Richard Arless Jr. 10 Andrée Désilets, "Masson, Marc-Damase", *Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*, vol. X, 1871-1880; [http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/masson\\_marc\\_damase\\_10F.html](http://www.biographi.ca/fr/bio/masson_marc_damase_10F.html)

11 Cimon Morin, "La poste à Beauharnois", *Les Cahiers de l'Académie*, vol. XV, Académie québécoise d'études philatéliques, 2008, p. 197.

12 LAC, RG3, vol. 2746, file 119. Letter dated February 6, 1838 from secretary of the General Post Office.

13 LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 532, n° 2008.

14 LAC, RG3, vol. 1171, T.A. Stayner circular dated January 6, 1839. See also Province of Canada Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1846. *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affairs of the Post Office in British North America*, Appendix F Section D-29. The Commissioners' report is dated December 31, 1841.

15 LAC, RG19-E-5b, vol. 5465. Document "Lower Canada Rebellion Losses Claims, 1846".

16 Province of Canada Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1846. *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affairs of the Post Office in British North America*, Appendix F Section 16. Montréal: L. Perrault, 1846. See also LAC, RG3, vol. 1171, T.A. Stayner circular, dated January 6, 1839.

17 LAC, RG3, vol. 908 and vol. 1171.

18 LAC. RG4-B52, vol. 4. Letter from J. Ross, dated 13 March 1841.

19 LAC, RG4-C1, vol. 73, report 2885. Letter from H. Bogue dated November 15, 1842.

20 LAC, RG3, vol. 912, p. 141-142.

21 Province du Canada, *Journaux de l'Assemblée législative de la Province du Canada*. Session 1844-45, Appendix I to volume 4, Table no. 4.

22 LAC, MG44B. Various statistical reports found in volumes 14 (1842) to 58 (1848).