

A STRAIGHT-LINE POSTMARK from the “WAY OFFICE” ISLE BOURDON, L.C.

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The discovery of a previously-unreported straight-line postmark from Isle Bourdon, dated January 21, 1829, leads us to believe that there was a Way Office at Isle Bourdon.

A bit of research shows that Isle Bourdon itself was a concession granted to M. De Repentigny on November 3, 1672 by Jean Talon, Intendant, for two islands called Bourdon (ref. *Régistre d’Intendance*, No. 1, folio 36). In the edicts and orders of March 3, 1722 concerning the scope of the parish, it is mentioned that “Isle Bourdon is located across from the mouth of the L’Assomption River.” In an 1834 document (ref. *Journal of the House of Assembly for Lower Canada*, App. A), it is mentioned that “from the Island of Montreal up to the island above, the depth of the water is from six to ten feet, and from there between the other islands up to Isle Bourdon, from eighteen to thirty feet or even more. The depth of the water from the Island of Montreal up to Isle Bourdon, where Mr. Porteous’s bridge was built, is of eighteen to thirty-two feet or more; and from Isle Bourdon up to north of Joseph Deschamps’ house, the depth of the water is between seven and seventeen feet.”

In the Act of Incorporation of the village of Terrebonne as the City of Terrebonne in 1860, Isle St-Jean, Isle du Moulin, and Isle Bourdon, as well as four other small islands located opposite the village, were included. It is important to mention that Isle Bourdon was on the postal route between Montreal and Quebec City. In order to cross to Repentigny from the “Bout de l’Isle” of Montreal, it was necessary to use the crossing from Isle Bourdon (a bridge or a ferry, depending on the period). A map of 1840, drawn by Chief Surveyor Joseph Bouchette, allows us better to situate Isle Bourdon (Fig. 2).

We are reporting a cover (Fig. 3) sent by L. De Martigny of Varennes on January 21, 1829 to Lt. Col. C. Yorke, Provincial Secretary at Quebec, rated 9d (the single sheet rate for the distance between Montreal and Quebec).

There was never a post office at Isle Bourdon. We have nevertheless found an 1824 document in which the name of Isle Bourdon is preceded by the letter “W”. We believe that this “W” signifies “Way Office”, used to indicate an office or location for the deposit of letters where the courier would stop along his way on the Quebec-to-

Fig. 1 – Straight-line postmark of Isle Bourdon, January 21, 1829.





Fig. 2 – Map of the postal route crossing Isle Bourdon, indicated by the arrow.

Montreal postal route. The document in question is a sheet of mail courier routes entitled “Bill du Chemin de Montréal à Québec.” [Bill for the Route from Montreal to Quebec].

This letter was thus left at the Way Office on Wednesday January 21. From there, two possibilities arise.

The first hypothesis could be that the proprietor of this way office, one W. P. (could this have been William Porteous – a resident of the place and a member of the Thomas Porteous family, responsible for the construction of the bridge?) struck the straight-line marking ISLE BOURDON on January 21, 1829, and added the rate marking 9 pence.

Bill for the Route from Montreal to Quebec

Date 1824	Name of Office	Arrival time	Departure time	Signatures	Remarks
July 26	Montreal	–	4½	Jas Williams, P.M.	
	W – Isle Bourdon	7.10	7.12	W. P.	
	L’Assomption	82	8.40	L. G. Nolin, P.M.	
July 27	Berthier	1	1½	P. Olivier, P.M.	
	Rivière du Loup	5½	A.M.	A. U. Dame	
	Trois Rivières	9.50 A.M.	11 A.M.	John Bignell	Quebec mail arrived at 10 o’clock.
July 28	Sainte Anne		4½	Ch. Taillon, P.M.	
	Québec		6 A.M.	Hy Cowan, P.M.	

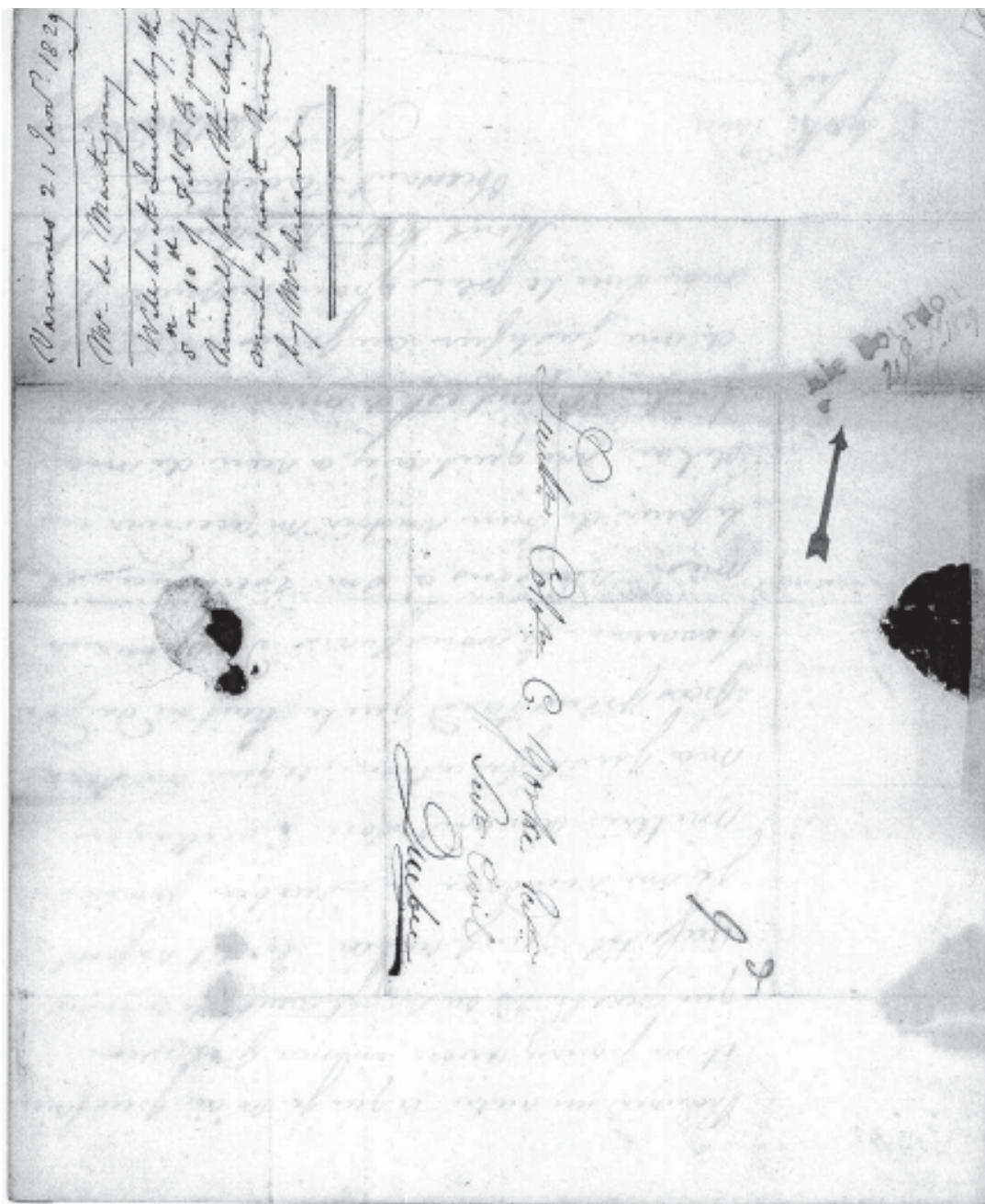


Fig. 3 – Cover mailed at Isle Bourdon on January 21, 1829, addressed to Quebec.

The letter was subsequently collected in the afternoon by the mail courier when he arrived at L'Assomption on the Montreal-to-Quebec route. (Note: in 1829 there was mail service on this route every day except Sundays and Fridays.) However, it hardly seems likely that this proprietor would be allowed to establish the postage rate (after all, he was not a postmaster!)

The second hypothesis suggests that the letter, left at the Isle Bourdon office and postmarked by the agent W. P., was collected by the mail courier. It was delivered to the postmaster at L'Assomption (L. G. Nolin, postmaster from 1826 to 1833), who applied the rating of 9d and immediately placed it in the mail bag destined for Quebec City. However, this second supposition, although more plausible, gives rise to some thought, since the handwriting of the "9" differs from the usual handwriting of the L'Assomption postmaster (verified by comparison with several covers from L'Assomption of this period). Furthermore, it was quite rare in that period for the L'Assomption office to use the notation "d" for pence.

In any case, it is important to state that a

location of the "Way Office" type existed at Isle Bourdon, at least during the period between 1824 and 1829. This office accommodated the residents of the region, which was too far to be served from the main office in Montreal, and from that at L'Assomption. The present report not only establishes the first formally-identified Way Office in Lower Canada, but also adds a new straight-line postmark.

Acknowledgements

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REFERENCES

- Fig. 2 – Library and Archives Canada, NMC 15119.
Fig. 3 – Library and Archives Canada, RG4, Series A1, vol. 277.
Table – Library and Archives Canada, MG44B, vol. 1, p. 345.

