

The Danby, Quebec, Post Office in 1883

by Cimon Morin

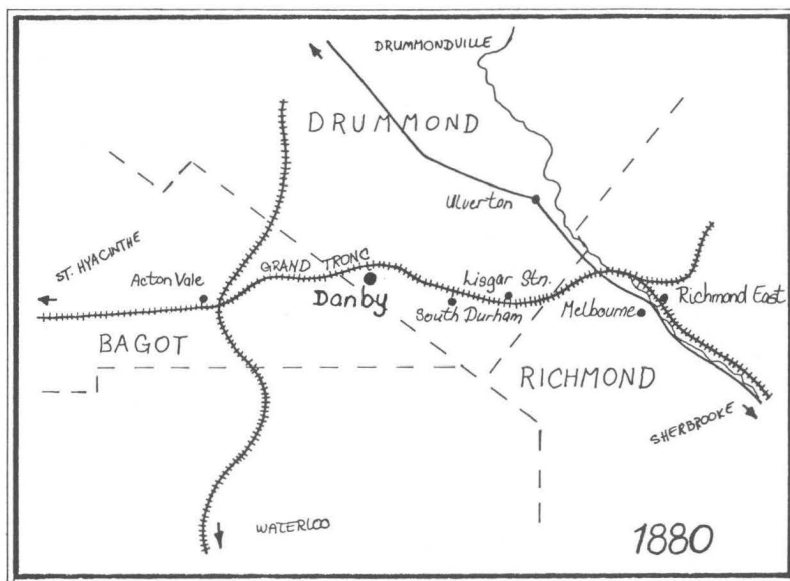
Translated by Mrs. Anna R.E. Brennan from an article in French in La Philatélie au Québec, October, 1979.

The Danby post office in Drummond County, was opened in November 1872. It was located near the Grand Trunk Railway line only a few miles from the most important localities in the Eastern Townships, Acton Vale and Richmond. John R. Reece was the first postmaster. After some years of service he left the village and was replaced by Louise Laforce, who resigned seven months later and was finally replaced by R. Cox. The latter resigned on May 21, 1875 and for several months there was no-one to ensure mail service in the small village of Danby. Finally on October 1, one William Duff was named postmaster and he opened an office in his home. However, he resigned in 1884 upon leaving the village but resumed his position in 1890 when he returned to live in the area. William Duff was

then employed by the Post Office for a total of nineteen years. Up to 1883 he received an annual salary of \$34.00. In addition he was granted a contract to transport the mail from the railway station to the post office - a distance of roughly 50 yards - twice daily, except Sunday, for an annual payment of \$12.00.

It seems that William Duff was held in esteem by his fellow citizens and that he was a good postmaster, but Danby was a small village where there were frequent quarrels and an incident arose in 1883. On February 16, three villagers, Thos. Beattie, W.H. Beattie, and Théophile St-Laurent, sent a petition with a view to having him dismissed, to their member of parliament in Ottawa, Bourbeau. A few days later the Honourable John Carling, the then Postmaster General, received the complaint.

The grievances presented by the signatories were to the point and numerous; William Duff was accused of selling liquor in the area he had set aside for the post office; in addition it had become difficult to send children to get the mail because the latter were being frightened; he refused to deliver the mail to certain people; a certain number



of businessmen, due to lack of confidence in their postmaster, were compelled to send money by other than registered mail; he often read received postcards and went so far as to inform strangers of their contents; and, finally, certain people had received packages which had been opened and, as a result, they were forced to go to the neighbouring post office in South Durham to post or receive their mail.

On February 22 the Postmaster General ordered his inspector from the Montreal postal division, E.F. King, to look into this affair and to submit a report to him as soon as possible.

Certain villagers, getting word of the affair and of the possible dismissal of their postmaster, wrote to the Minister asserting total confidence and utmost satisfaction in William Duff. The letter was signed by 39 citizens, including the Mayor.

In order to proceed with the enquiry, the postal inspector had William Duff come to Montreal on April 14 and questioned him there about the complaints that had been received. Duff rebutted each accusation levelled at him:

of the allegations concerning the sale of liquor in the post office, there can be no question here as I don't keep alcohol in the house and further I have no permit to sell liquor. It could very well be that they want to refer to last Christmas, when, on one occasion, several of my friends were in my house and, during this festive period, liquor was passed around. It is likewise false to believe that the children don't come to the post office because they are afraid of me. In a discussion with my wife she told me that one time she became angry with the Beattie children as they were in her kitchen bothering her - at a given moment, in order to make them skedaddle, she yelled "go home or I'll scald you". It seems ridiculous to me that such a phrase delivered under such circumstances can be the basis for a complaint! As for my refusal to deliver mail to certain people, that is a lie. One must recall the time when the young Beattie boy came to get the mail; that day there was a registered letter for his father and being unable to get a signature from him for the register, I didn't give him the letter. On the other

hand it is true that I read certain postcards. There are villagers who have not learned to read or have considerable difficulty reading and it sometimes happens, only at their express request, that I read the contents of these cards; it has also happened that on certain occasions strangers were present in the post office and consequently could easily hear what I was reading. Finally, pertaining to the parcels that had been opened, I have no reason to place any truth in this and if these facts be true how is it that more villagers have not signed the complaint?

Following Duff's declarations and thanks to other information, Inspector King communicated his report to the Minister:

After questioning the Danby postmaster, I have every reason to believe that the latter administers his office as an honest man and alleged complaints against him are unjustified. Additionally a good proportion of the villagers, who have business with the post office, have testified favourably for Mr. Duff, including the Mayor, a councillor, and a Grand Trunk Railway agent. Moreover the postmaster has added that "the townspeople would be ready to testify that they have no important complaint to present against me - that the present complaint was drawn up by Thos. Beattie following an altercation I had with him some time ago". The latter works in a sawmill in Upton. The other signatory on the document, W.H. Beattie, is, in fact, his son, a labourer working for the Grand Trunk Railway, and it is possible he signed at his father's insistence.

As you can ascertain, the cause of the complaint is principally due to a personal quarrel as often happens in our small centers. At one time, Mr. Duff even had the intention of instituting legal proceedings against Mr. Beattie but I succeeded in dissuading him. I do not believe that this enquiry should go any further.

(signed) E.F. King, Postal
Inspector, May 16, 1883

Calm returned to the little village and the Danby Post Office only closed its doors on July 31, 1959. During its 87

years of existence more than fourteen postmasters succeeded one another.

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Some Remedies For Ailing Postal History Collections

by Graham J. Noble

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The banter among postal history collectors these days invariably swings to bemoaning the current bullish market. The basic pressures of supply and demand, coupled with inflation and a much greater awareness on the part of collectors and dealers alike, have radically altered the postal history market over the past five or six years. Not surprisingly, there have been negative as well as positive effects as a result. The days of the vast general collection are virtually over, and gathering material in bulk for 'future study' is likewise becoming impossible. On the positive side, those who joined the game early enough are reaping the rewards of a sound judgment.

But all is not lost -- in fact far from it. For those looking for new areas to branch out into, and especially for those who hesitate to plunge head-first into what could be viewed as a bottomless pit, here is a personal view of the areas which can offer the rewards of diligent search and the possibilities for study we have come to associate with the traditional areas of interest.

SLOGAN CANCELS

I see this as perhaps the area with greatest potential. The classic slogans (pre-1930) are attractive, elusive and considerably underpriced in relation to their true rarity. The later ones are plentiful and cheap. The Proulx catalogue offers an established numbering system and is a good guide, but the pricing is generally conservative in relation to supply, and in some cases erratic. The great rarities can still be

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had, when available, at under \$50. A golden opportunity to get in on the ground floor, and the choice is open for an extensive or an intensive study.

STAMPLESS COVERS

Surprisingly, the most traditional field in postal history still offers amazing variety and the opportunity to make good discoveries. The key to this field lies in an intensive study of the sizeable body of available literature. Material is relatively plentiful, still modestly priced relative to today's market, and the possibilities for the study of rates, towns, hammer types, cross-border markings, and so on, are unlimited.

PICTURE POSTCARDS

On the surface this is perhaps a curious choice, given the current frenetic interest, but don't lose sight of the long-term potential. Most of the material coming on to the market today is from new sources, in contrast to the sizeable percentage of 'recycled' covers. Due to this influx of material the market will remain relatively unsettled for the next three or four years at least. Then look for substantial price increases. Why? First, there is a finite supply of eighty-year-old ladies with postcard collections. Second, postcards appeal to a much broader segment of the population than does postal history. Many 'non-collectors' are happy to have early views of the old home town and don't mind paying well for them. Third, Canadian historical photographic resources are very limited. Photo-historians and archives are eagerly snapping up good material,