



Fig 2

**Charles Verge**

## **CANADIAN VOYAGEUR COVERS TO AND FROM EGYPT**

In the latest *Maple Leaves*, John Burnett in his article, Some Interesting Postal Usages on The Small Queens, Part 2, shows a cover addressed to Surgeon-Major Hubert Neilson and claims that “only seven covers are known to exist to the Canadian Voyageurs”.

A record of the surviving covers and post cards sent to and from the Voyageur Contingent was prepared by J. H. E. Gilbert for a paper he read before the Royal Philatelic Society, London, on 12 April 1962. This was subsequently published as a two-part article in *The London Philatelist* (Vol. 71, October 1962, pp. 159-163 and November 1962, pp. 186-190). In it Gilbert indicates that 12 covers have been identified and recorded. Four of these mailed by members of the expedition to Canada and eight from Canada to Egypt. Subsequent to Gilbert's report, six more covers to Egypt have been found.

All the mail to Egypt was sent to one man, Surgeon-Major John Louis Hubert Neilson. Four of the fourteen surviving covers were sent to him by his wife, Willie, who then lived in Quebec City. Neilson, a Red River veteran, was at the time a member of AB Battery of the Canadian Artillery and was appointed medical officer of the Contingent. He was the Gordon Relief Expedition's correspondent for the *Toronto Star* and the *Nouvelliste* of Trois-Rivières. In 1898, he was appointed the first Director of the Canadian militia's medical services. Of the six covers not listed by Gilbert, two were from Neilsonville, Quebec (November 21 & 27, 1884), one from St-John, New Brunswick (December 2, 1884) and three from Kingston, Ontario (September 20 & December 11, 1884 and the other with an indistinct date). The September 20 cover is the earliest recorded and in is now in The Small Queen collection of Ron Brigham and should be available in a forthcoming auction of The Brigham Collection. Only one cover to

Neilson was underpaid bearing a 3 cents Small Queen rather than the 5 cents which paid the UPU rate for letters overseas weighing less than 2 ounce. That cover was to be auctioned by Corinphila on May 28, 2015 as part of the late Dr. Peter A. S. Smith Collection of Egypt and Sudan.

No new covers addressed from Egypt have been discovered since 1962. This is quite remarkable since many of the boatmen and officers must have written home. One of these, an Egyptian postal card, was used by the sender, Fred C. Denison as a Christmas card. Lt. Col. Frederick C. Denison was placed in command of the Contingent. A veteran of the Riel Rebellion he was a member of the Governor General's Body Guard and a Toronto alderman and barrister. Only one boatman's letter has survived. It was from a C. Nofallum and was sent to a Winnipeg lawyer, Henry Nason. Based on handwriting samples, this boatman's letter was written for him by Neilson. Was he illiterate or had he injured his hands? Illiteracy was definitely a factor in the small amount of correspondence from Egypt found but this is certainly an area of Canadian postal history still open for more discoveries since the officers were literate as well, some of the boatmen were very literate. Ed Richardson in his article, Canada's Voyageurs Contingent On the Nile B 1884 - 1885 found in *BNA Topics* (March-April 1983, pp. 40-47) mentions the name of two boatmen who were far from illiterate: Alexander McLaurin, a boatmen foreman, was the *Ottawa Free Press* correspondent and William Robinson, a wheelman who operated the steamers pulling the whalers, later became a prominent businessman and banker in Winnipeg. Good searching and let me know if you find anything.

The information above was updated from articles I wrote for *Scott Stamp Monthly* and the *PHSC Journal* in 1999 and the *American Philatelist* in March 2003.

*(Editor's note: I am delighted to report that the Society will be offering one of these rare Voyageur covers from Canada to Surgeon Major Neilson in Egypt for sale in our forthcoming Convention Auction – the cover in question is illustrated below in fig 3)*

