

Postal Beginnings at Rigaud, Québec

Cimon Morin, FRPSC

Translated by Robert C. Smith FPHSC

Rigaud was founded in 1783, when the first house was built there; the first road was constructed in 1792. At the turn of the 18th century Rigaud was developing as a staging-house for the wood cutters and loggers and boasted 12 inns. Rigaud later became an important embarkation port for lumber and grain directed toward Montreal. The first wooden bridge to span the Rigaud River was constructed in 1810. Ten years later a first church, Sainte-Madeleine church, was built of stone. The feudal seigneurial mill was built in 1830.

The Point Fortune-Carillon ferry came into service in 1833 on the Ottawa River, thereafter allowing easier access to the Lower Laurentian and Laurentian regions. At the time of the 1837-38 rebellion several patriots took refuge on the mountain at Rigaud. The first municipal election at Rigaud took place in 1845. In 1855 the Act of Municipalities and Roads of Lower Canada established the municipal regime of Quebec; the municipality of Sainte-Madeleine de Rigaud was created as a result¹.

T. A. Stayner, the man responsible for the mails in Canada, received two applications for the opening of post offices in this region. The first application, from Edward T. Jones dated November 6, 1834, was for a postal route serving Pointe-Claire, Sainte-Anne-Bout-de l'Isle, Vaudreuil and Rigaud. A similar second application from C. Larocque was dated April 20, 1835². The opening of this first postal route meant that these offices were linked beginning October 6, 1835.

From 1838 to 1841 the mails were transported along this route on a contract granted to J. Deschamps. Stayner noted in passing that "the expenses for mail transport are £52 per annum with a net revenue of £40 annually, for a deficit of £12 per annum. On this route as well as on several others, the expenses exceed the revenues, and on several of them the difference is considerable; however, considering the populace that benefits from it, and the tendency toward growth of revenues in several of these offices, I do not believe it at all necessary to reduce the facilities that the mails get on these routes, as long as the Department's funds allow me to meet these expenses." Eventually this route would cross the river to the west of Rigaud in order to serve Chatham (which became Carillon in 1841)³.

In 1843 the mail was carried over a distance of 42 miles on horseback or in a cart, and by sled in winter. It left Lachine every Wednesday at 2 p.m. and arrived in Rigaud at 10 p.m. in order to deliver the mails at Carillon on Thursday at 8 a.m. It left Carillon Thursday at 10 a.m. and returned to Lachine at 9 p.m. The contract of £54 was awarded to Joseph Deschamps⁴. From 1845 until 1848 mail came to Rigaud twice a week along the same route: leave Lachine on Tuesdays and Fridays at 3 p.m., arrive at Carillon Wednesdays and Saturdays at 9 a.m.; leave Carillon Wednesdays and Saturdays at 10 a.m. and arrive at Lachine on the same days at 8 p.m.⁵ The contract was given to Paul Deschamps.

<i>Postmaster</i>	<i>Period</i>
Étienne Stephen Fournier	October 6, 1835 – July 5, 1848
Antoine Guillaume Charlebois	July 6, 1848 – March 31, 1884

Étienne Stephen Fournier

In 1832 Stephen Fournier (Figure 1) was named Canadian agent for the Bingham family, to attend the Rigaud Seigneurie⁶. His involvement with the Rigaud community in the period preceding the troubles of 1837-38 is not known.

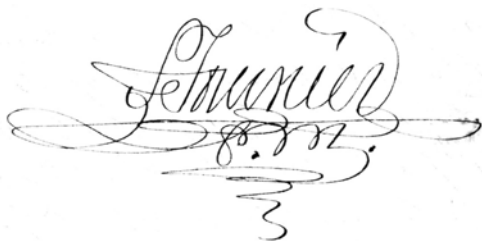


Figure 1. Signature of Stephen Fournier [LAC RG4-B52, vol. 3, part 2, no. 142]

As far as his participation in the rebellions is concerned, it was minimal. The only bits of information collected concern his presence at the Vaudreuil assembly of patriots of August 6, 1837, attended by 600 people⁷. Then, in a secret note to the civil Secretary, the Justice of the Peace John A. Mathison warned the government to be wary of Fournier. The missive reads as follows: “further to say that this letter, nor any other communication of this nature cannot with safety [be] confined to the hands of the Post Masters above named.” The other name referred to is that of the head patriot Joseph Rassette, postmaster at Vaudreuil⁸.

The Rigaud post office was opened on October 6, 1835⁹. The sureties for Fournier were provided by Donald McMillan and A. W. Charlebois of Rigaud. Fournier did not seem to have been bothered by the authorities, since he remained at the helm of the post office until 1848. For the post-rebellion period, Fournier occupied the position of authorized power of attorney of the Rigaud seigneurie on behalf of the seigneur, William Bingham¹⁰. When Bingham sold the seigneurie in 1897, Fournier moved into the seigneurial manor house.

We do not know the amounts initially paid to the postmaster, which was compulsorily 20% of the sum of the tariffs on letters, but we have found some numbers for the years 1838-1840:

According to postal historian Father Lawrence Walker, the post office would have been located in Stephen Fournier’s house, which at that time was a large stone dwelling (Figure 2). This house later became the convent of Sainte-Anne in Rigaud¹².

As mentioned above, we are unaware that Fournier committed any disloyal acts against the postal service during the troubles associated with the rebellions of 1837-38. He nevertheless stepped down as postmaster on June 22, 1848. He was replaced by

<i>Rigaud post office</i> ¹¹			
	1838	1839	1840
Total revenue of the office	£16 0s 4d	£10 10s 9d	£17 12s 7d
Postmaster’s salary	-	-	£3 19s 11d



Figure 2. Large stone house built in 1812 by J. B. Fournier. This imposing edifice later became the Convent of Sainte-Anne; it was demolished in 1907 [Luke de Stephano collection]

Antoine Guillaume Charlebois, who signed his name “A. W. Charlebois,” Guillaume becoming William in English. This was the same Charlebois who stood security for Stephen Fournier upon the opening of the post office in 1835.

As all postmasters did, Fournier benefitted from 1835 to 1846 from the postal franking privilege for the transmission and reception of mail (Figures 3-4). In 1841 he mentioned that he received or sent from 80 to 100 letters per year, and that if free franking were to be abolished, he would accept nothing less than £10 per year over and above his regular commission¹³.

We believe that he remained in his position up until July 5, 1848.

Antoine-Guillaume Charlebois

Antoine-Guillaume Charlebois was born in Vaudreuil on July 9, 1804. He was the elder son of Joseph Amable Charlebois,

farmer, and Marie-Amable Cholet (called Laviolette), of Saint-Michel-de-Vaudreuil. He was the brother of Hyacinthe Fabien Charlebois, notary, who became postmaster of Vaudreuil on July 6, 1849. He studied at the Sulpicien Seminary in Montreal. In 1830 he purchased the general store of Charles Rockbrune (called Larocque) in Rigaud. Around the same time he had a store in Hawkesbury, Upper Canada, and later owned several businesses in Quebec and Ontario. He settled in Rigaud in April of 1839 with his young family. The Charlebois store was located at the present site of the entrance to the Rigaud bridge (Figure 5).

Antoine-Guillaume Charlebois married Catherine Giroux on November 27, 1833 and they raised six children. Catherine died on May 25, 1846. He married Catherine Desautels on March 8, 1851 and they also had six children. She died shortly after her last child was delivered in 1861.

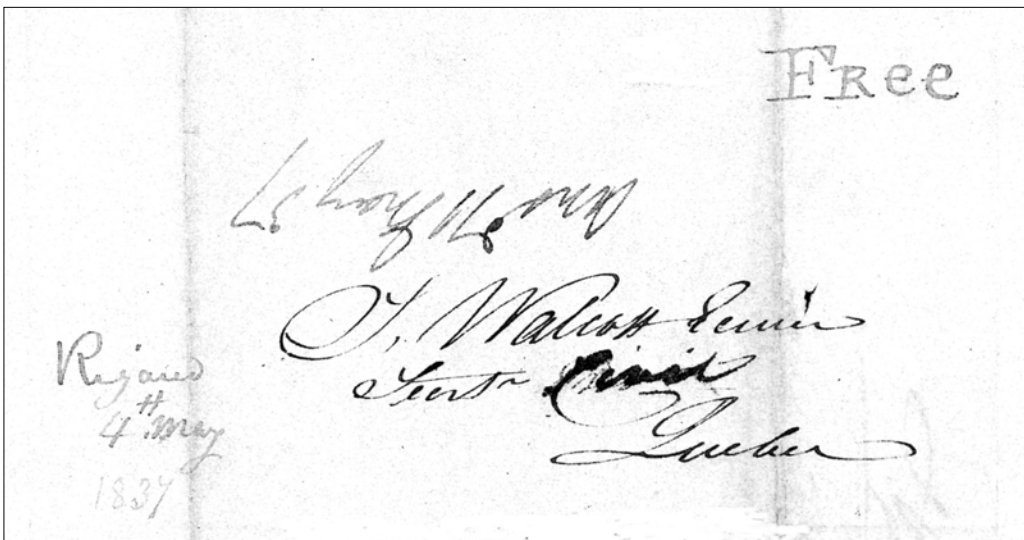


Figure 3. Letter sent under free frank with manuscript postmark of "Rigaud 4th May 1837" [LAC RG4, A1, vol. 509, no. 17701]

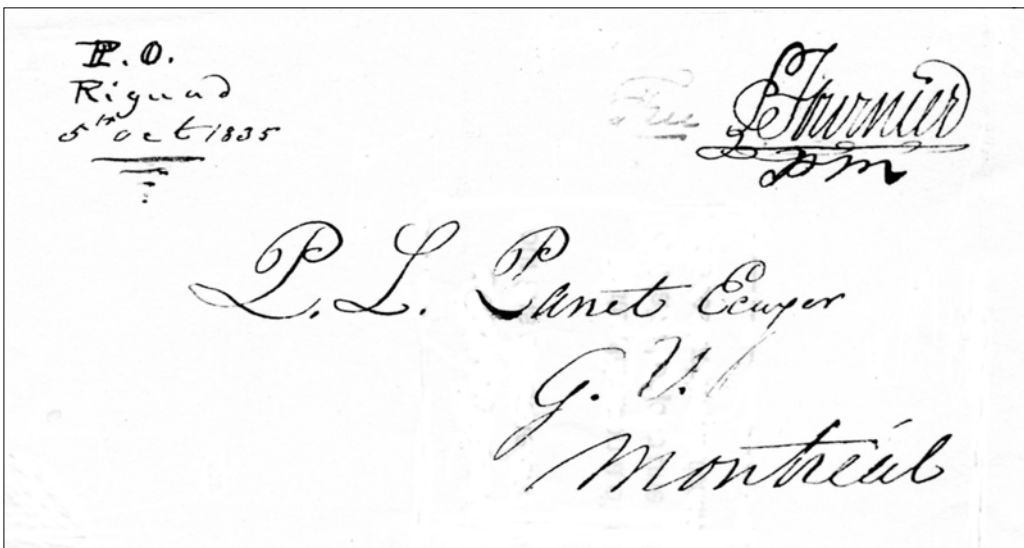


Figure 4. An unusual cover! It is the oldest reported letter, which travelled by the first mail to leave Rigaud. It is identified and dated "P.O. Rigaud 5th Oct. 1835" with Fournier's signature as franking. [BAnQ]



Figure 5. The Charlebois store with *POST OFFICE* sign over the right-hand door. [Centre d'histoire la Presqu'île]

In 1847 Charlebois was named lieutenant in the 4th Battalion of the County of Vaudreuil's militia. He was promoted to the rank of captain in 1852, and finished his military career as a major in the reserve militia. He was named Justice of the Peace in 1849. Charlebois died suddenly on November 22, 1894 following an accident¹⁴.

When Charlebois became postmaster (Figures 6-7) the salary was set by Stayner at £10. His candidacy was recommended by Jean-Baptiste Mongenais (1803-1887), Member of the Legislature for Vaudreuil¹⁵. The Provincial Secretary forwarded this recommendation to T. A. Stayner on June 21, 1848. We believe that Charlebois took up the position on July 6, 1848, which is to say in the third trimester.

Extract from a letter dated at Rigaud on June 17, 1848, addressed to the Honourable R.B. Sullivan, Provincial Secretary:

"I would recommend to you the person of Mr. A. W. Charlebois as an appropriate and suitable person to manage the office and as having the most influential position in the above-mentioned Parish of Rigaud."

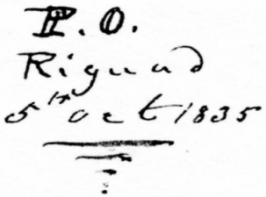
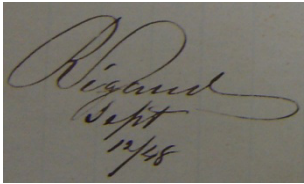


(signed) J. Bte Montgenais

In 1851 the postmaster's salary was £13 10s 11d¹⁶. Charlebois remained in the position until March 31, 1884, when he was replaced by Josephine Charlebois.

Figure 6. Rigaud manuscript marking of 1848 [BAnQ, Fonds E13, vol. 297, no. 1152]

Figure 7. Rigaud cover with the double circle in blue dated July / 28 / 48 [LAC, Lawrence Walker collection, 1992-208, ex David Ewens]

<i>Rigaud - Average number of letters received per week¹⁷</i>							
1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	Moyenne
12	12	18	17	10	23	18	16

Postal Marking of Rigaud		
		
1835-1837	1848	1837-1850
BAnQ	BAnQ, Fonds E13, vol. 297, n° 1152	LAC, RG4-A1, vol. 509, n° 1770
		
	1850-1879	
	<i>Proof</i>	

References

[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigaud_\(Qu%C3%A9bec\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rigaud_(Qu%C3%A9bec))

² Post Office Department, *Second Report of a Special Committee of the House of Assembly of the Province of Lower Canada on the subject of the Post Office Department*, published in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada*, vol. XLV, Appendix GG. 1836, section n° 95.

³ LAC, MG44B, vol. 5, p. 15.

⁴ LAC, RG3, vol. 684, p.7, n° C-25.

⁵ LAC, RG3, vol. 684, p. 36, n° C-37.

⁶ Chevrier, Lorraine Auerbach and Raymond Séguin, *Rigaud en histoires*, Pointe-Fortune, Cercle d'histoire de Rigaud, 2009, p. 69.

⁷ LAC, RG4, A1, vol. 516.

⁸ Messier, Alain, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique et historique des patriotes 1837-1838*, Montréal, Guérin, 2002, p. 194.

⁹ The date is controversial since, in two documents prepared by T. A. Stayner, both April 6, 1835 and October 6, 1835 are mentioned. LAC 44B, vol. 5, p. 15: Stayner, in a letter addressed to the British Postmaster General dated December 8, 1835, presents the list of post offices established since April 6, 1835. In the *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affairs of the Post Office in British North America*, published in the *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, Appendix F, 1846, Section D-29, it is mentioned that the opening date of the office was October 6, 1835.

¹⁰ Mathieu, M., [« Recueil de Jurisprudence et d'Arrêts »], *La revue légale*, vol. XII, Montréal, 1884, p. 594.

¹ *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Affairs of the Post Office in British North America*, Appendix F, Province of Canada Legislative Assembly, *Journals*, 1846. The Commissioners' report is dated December 31, 1841.

² Walker, Anatole « Le bureau de poste de Rigaud », *Bulletin d'histoire postale et de philatélie*, n° 58, 1996, p. 9-13. Also published in *PHSC Journal*, no. 50, 1987, p. 40-46 and *Philatélie Québec*, n° 121, 1987, p. 49-53.

¹³ LAC, RG4, B52, vol. 3, part 2, no. 154. Letter dated 18 March 1841.

⁴ Chevrier, Lorraine Auerbach, op. cit., p. 145-153.

⁵ LAC, RG4-C1, vol. 230, report 1916.

⁶ *Annual Report of the Postmaster General – Year ending 5th April 1852*, Québec, John Lovell, 1852, p. 27.

⁷ LAC, MG44B. Various statistical reports found in vols. 14 (1842) to 58 (1848).



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