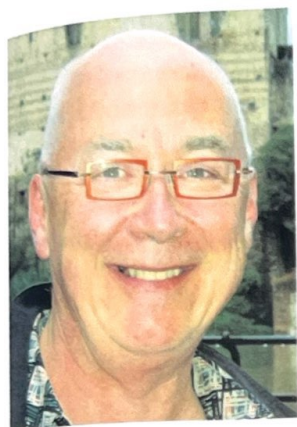


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A CANADIAN LOCAL TO DISCOURAGE THE USE OF A MAIL SERVICE



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Canadian and British North American (BNA) locals are normally viewed as fanciful creations with no postal usage or validity. Samuel Allan Taylor's reputation in that area of Canadian philately has made collectors wary of collecting BNA locals. Figure 1 shows a 5¢ label produced by the Upper Columbia Tramway and Navigation Company (U. C. Co.) of Golden, BC, to discourage patrons from entrusting mail items to their care. It was an interesting way of doing business by providing a disincentive for using a service. A contemporaneous collector and philatelic writer, Basil G. Hamilton (1869-1933) of Winnipeg¹ (Fig 2), felt that these labels were legitimate locals equivalent to those issued by the Barnard's Cariboo Express Post. He was the first person to publish an article on the U. C. Co. locals, in the October 1900 issue of *The Montreal Philatelist*².



Fig. 1 The U. C. Co. / 5¢ label with denomination. Type 1 G, positions 7 or 14. Courtesy Sparks Auctions.



Fig. 2 Basil G. Hamilton on the right and his wife Anna Maud Mary Crawford on the left.

The U. C. Co. was incorporated by an Act of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia on April 20, 1891 and began operating in 1893 with Thomas B. H. Cochrane (1856-1925) of Ryde, England as President³ (Fig. 3) and Captain Francis Patrick Armstrong (1859-1923) as Manager (Fig. 4). The service was abandoned upon the opening of the Crow's Nest Pass in 1898 and the company was dissolved, with other no longer operating companies, by a 1927 omnibus Act of the Legislative Assembly.



Fig. 3 T. B. H. Cochrane beside his car on the Isle of Wight.



Figure. 4 Captain Francis P. Armstrong.

The U. C. Co. used four steamships⁴ and two-horse or mule drawn tramways to provide passenger and good services on the Upper Columbia River, its system of lakes and the Kootenay River. The tramways were built from Golden to the steamboat landing on the Columbia River and from Mud Lake to the north end of Columbia Lake.

Captain Armstrong held the contract to deliver the mail along the Golden to Fort Steele's 230 km portion of the route including Windermere and other towns on the route until March 9, 1897. He had initially obtained a contract from the Canadian Post Office Department on May 1, 1888, to carry mail on the 247 km route from Golden to Cranbrook. In the summer the mail was carried once a month on the Steamer Duchess, or when the water was low, on the Steamer Marion, up to Columbia Lake (Fig. 5). Then it was carried by stage across the Canal Flats and down the Kootenay River Valley to Cranbrook via Grohman and Fort Steele. The contract was renewed each year from 1889 to 1897. However, only the 1893 contract was given to the U. C. Co. All other years they were in the Captain's name. During low water or when the river was frozen, the mail was carried overland on the wagon road adjacent to the Columbia River. The mail contract subsidy was an important asset to Captain Armstrong and it helped maintain the Company in business. Captain Armstrong left the Company in February 1898 to go to the Klondike Gold Rush.



Fig.5 The Duchess on the left and the Marion on the right.

In 1897, the U. C. Co. lost the mail contract to a company led by a Mr. A. Doyle that used a line of stagecoaches to provide the service. There was no additional fee for the stagecoach service nor had there been for Captain Armstrong's service. Letters were posted at the regular letter rate; e.g., 3¢ per ½ oz. for domestic and United States letters. Postal patrons, miners and lumberjacks were not inclined to use the new service and continued to hand their letters and packages to officers and crew members of the steamships. The U. C. Co. found this a nuisance particularly since it did not receive a fee from the government for its service and because of the responsibility it entailed for the Company. Settlers and miners would call the ship to shore and hand over the letters. The ship's crew would stop hoping that they were being hailed for the transportation of individuals or goods.

The company's bookkeeper and secretary-treasurer, Charles Herbert Parson (1868-1939) or, less likely, Captain Armstrong - there are diverging opinions on this subject - decided to arrange the transport of the mail on the steamers for a fixed 5¢ prepaid fee in addition to the current postage rate required by the post office. Likely Mr. Parson was the initiator as he was later postmaster at Golden (1913-1939) and had indicated to Mr. Hamilton "that he had at one time taken an interest in stamp collecting"⁵.

For this purpose the company had 1,000 labels⁶ printed in sheets⁷ of 20 subjects in two settings of ten each in a tête-bêche arrangement. The sheets were likely printed in two stages with one setting of ten being printed and then the sheet of paper reversed to print the other ten labels (Fig. 6). It is possible, but unproven, that the press was too small to accommodate a complete sheet. The labels were virtually the same size as a definitive stamp of the period and were perforated 12 on the inside with the margins left imperforate - therefore 14 stamps have at least one straight edge. The type-set design has a border of what looks like stylized tulips with a two-line inscription "U. C. Co. / 5¢" in deep red ink (crimson) on a medium

weight white wove paper with smooth white gum⁸. The labels were printed by either The Thomson Stationery Co. or The Richardson Stationery Co. as the U. C. Co. used both firms for their stationery needs. However, with the introduction of its disincentive fee, its postal service was limited and few of its labels properly used are recorded.

Because of the ten-stamp tête-bêche setting all varieties are found twice on the sheet. Stamps in positions 5, 10, 11 and 16 have 38 tulip-like ornaments while all the others have 34⁹. The tulip floral designs are either outlined or printed in solid colors. Positions 1, 2, 6, 7, 14, 15, 19 and 20 are outlined. In addition there are ten flower orientation varieties per setting. Detailed information for these varieties is found in an article by H. Warren K. Hale, Canadian Locals, in *The Collectors Club Philatelist* (Vol. XIII, No. 2, April 1934, pp. 79- 83)¹⁰ with an updated article by the same author in *BNA Topics* (Vol. 3, No. 1, January-February 1946, pp. 4-10).

For ease of reference and keeping in mind the difficulty of obtaining some of the quoted references, the author has slightly amended Mr. Hale's 1946 varieties listing and has copied it below. Readers are reminded that Mr. Hale's Type I is found on labels with outlined flowers while his Type II is for labels with solid flowers. His study of the labels shows that each one is plausible.

Type I A: Positions 1 and 20 have 34 outlined flowers in the border, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base at the right of the centre in the upper border and below the centre of the left border; they meet top-to-top in the centres of both the upper and the lower borders. The top and left side have straight edges.

Type I B: Positions 2 and 19 have 34 outlined flowers, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and the lower borders; they meet top-to-top at the left in the lower border and low in the right border. The top has a straight edge.

Type II C: Positions 3 and 18 have 34 solid flowers, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and lower borders; they meet top-to-top at the left and right of centre in the lower border. The top has a straight edge.

Type II D: Positions 4 and 17 have 34 solid flowers, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and the lower borders; they meet top-to-top at the right in the lower border and low in the left border. The top has a straight edge.

Type II E: Positions 5 and 16 have 38 solid flowers, with eighteen changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the upper border at the left and centre, in the lower border at the centre and right, twice in the left border and three times in the right border. The flowers meet top-to-top at the left and right of centre in the upper border and at similar positions in the lower border, twice in the left border and three times in the right border. The top and right sides have straight edges.

Type I F: Positions 6 and 15 have 34 outlined flowers, with eight changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and the lower borders, low in the left border and high in the right; they meet top-to-top at the left and at the right in both the upper and the lower borders. The left side has a straight edge.

Type I G: Positions 7 and 14 have 34 outlined flowers, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and the lower borders; they meet top-to-top at the left in the upper border and low in the right border. The four sides are perforated.

Type II H: Positions 8 and 13 have 34 solid flowers with six changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the centres of the upper and the lower borders, and high in the right border; they meet top-to-top at the right in both the upper and the lower borders, and low in the left border. The four sides are perforated.

Type II I: Positions 9 and 12 have 34 solid flowers, with four changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base in the

centres of the upper and the lower borders; they meet top-to-top at the left in the lower border and low in the right border. The four sides are perforated.

Type II J: Positions 10 and 11 have 38 solid flowers with sixteen changes in direction. The flowers meet base-to-base at the left and right of centre in the upper border, in the centre of the lower border, three times in the left border and twice in the right; they meet top-to-top in the centre of the upper border, at the left in the lower border, and three times each in the left and the right borders. The right side has a straight edge.

Less than a year after the labels were introduced the Canadian Post Office Department objected to the practice and the company ceased to use the stamps. The remainders of the stamps were held by Mr. Parson and he refused to sell them. In his 1933 letter to Mr. Bainbridge he wrote that the remainders had been lost in a fire at his home in 1930¹¹.

Mr. Hamilton investigated these labels while on a four and a half month trip to the Columbia River area in the summer of 1898. The Winnipeg collector "made enquiries of all the settlers that I met" and few had seen the stamps with most reporting no knowledge of them. However, he was assured by "certain postmasters, particularly the one at Windermere¹², that letters bearing the stamps had passed through their offices but they did not remember 'seeing many' "¹³. This was also confirmed in his interview with Mr. Parson who admitted to Mr. Hamilton that "the greater portion of the blocks [sheets of 20] were then on hand in his office, at Golden, B. C." At the time of his visit, Mr. Hamilton was able to purchase four sheets from the Company's Secretary at face value. One of these is likely the one sold for £30 in the April 27, 1955 Robson Lowe Postal History Auction (Fig. 6). Its whereabouts remain unknown since its sale. A block of four is also reported but not seen by the author as well as several pairs; one of which is illustrated in Figure 7.

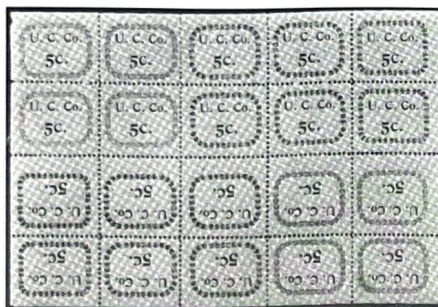


Fig. 6 Full sheet of the U. C. Co. / 5c label from Robson Lowe Ltd. 1955 auction.

Fig. 7 A pair of U. C. Co. / 5c labels. The top label is Type I B, positions 2 or 19 and the bottom label is Type I G, positions 7 or 14.

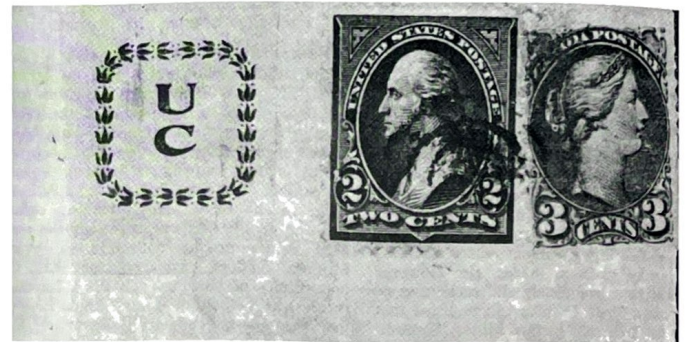


Fig. 8 U. C. Co. label - Item 1 in the inventory list.

U. C. Co. labels without denomination are also known¹⁴ (Fig. 8). These labels may be the legitimate ones as their use seems to have been in the 1897 period while the denominated labels came later. Some writers and students of this label indicate that the non-denominated label may be an essay because of its crude printing, large margins, lack of denomination and that it is imperforate. Tracy Cooper in "The Magic and Mystery of the Upper Columbia Company" in *British Columbia Post Office Research* (Vol. 5, No. 3, September 1996, p. 149) believes that "these labels were printed first and used for internal use and as 'favours' for their better freight paying customers". The paucity of information and postal material does not allow for a definitive answer to this question.

R. A. Jamieson in an article in *Popular Stamps* (Vol. IV, No. 4, May 1941, p. 9) indicates that the service was operational between July 27, 1898 and August 22, 1899. This now appears inaccurate as he based his statement on cover

dates that now are out-of-period or downright philatelic. The earliest known usage is dated July 21, 1897 - it bears the non-denominated label. Few labels were sold. Once the patrons realized that they were no longer getting a free service they sent their mail through the cheaper stage coach service and U. C. Co. made its point. Most surviving covers are philatelic in nature being addressed to Mr. Parson (July 27, 1898) or to Bert Lowe (both covers dated July 22, 1899).¹⁵

Mr. Hamilton, in his article, quotes Mr. Parson, saying that the labels were "at one time in use" clearly implying that, at the time of Mr. Hamilton's Summer 1898 visit they were no longer used. Therefore it is safe to assume based on that report and the covers below that the service was discontinued in early 1898.

What follows is a list of known covers and pieces with an explanation of whether their use is genuine.

U. C. Co. labels

1. Undated - Piece - Destination unknown; however, covers from the Cranbrook area are known posted with mixed franking via Jennings, MT between 1892 and 1898 (Fig. 8). - 3¢ SQ (Scott 41) and US 2¢ (The Scott number is difficult to identify. The stamp could be one of many numbers with the same design.)

2. 1897, July 21 - Piece from Golden, BC (Fig. 9). - 1¢ Jubilee (Scott 51) and 5¢ SQ (Scott 42). Possibly pays the double rate to Canada or to the USA.

3. 1897, August 6 - Golden, BC to Calgary, AB (Fig. 10). - 3¢ Jubilee (Scott 53). - Indistinct Calgary split ring backstamp.

U. C. Co. / 5¢ labels

4. 1897, August 9 - Piece from Golden, BC (Fig. 11). - 3¢ Jubilee (Scott 53). In period. Type II C, positions 3 or 18.

5. 1898, July 27 - To C. Parson, Golden, BC to Golden BC (Fig. 12). - 3¢ Leaf (Scott 69). The use of the label is questionable as it was not required when addressed to a company official and, furthermore, the drop letter rate was 1¢. - Type II E, positions 5 or 16.

6. 1899, February 18 - Golden, BC. - Out of period. - Reported by Frederick E. Bruce of the Garfield-Perry Stamp Club prior to 1906. Mr. Bruce visited the area in the mid-1900s and was able to obtain this label. Its whereabouts and Type are unknown.¹⁶

7. 1899, February 20 - Two used labels cancelled Beaver, BC (Fig. 13). - Out of period. - Top label is Type II I, positions 9 or 12; bottom label is Type II D, positions 4 or 17. - The service did not operate when the river and lakes were frozen. - Beaver, BC was not on the Columbia River mail route but 40 km down river from Golden¹⁷. The U. C. Co. steamers did not operate below Golden. Labels cancelled by the Donald, BC post office are reported but not seen by the author. Donald, like Beaver, was not on the steamer's mail route¹⁸.

8. 1899, July 22 - Two identical covers to Bert Lowe, Golden, BC to Carbonate, BC (Fig. 14). - Franked with 2¢/3¢ Numeral (Scott 88) - Out of period. Top cover is Type I F, positions 6 or 15 and bottom cover is Type II C, positions 3 or 18. - The franking is cancelled with the later Golden, BC split ring hammer proofed on December 23, 1915 (Fig 15). Typewriters were rare in the interior of BC in the 1890s and their keys would not produce properly aligned type such as that found in the address lines of these covers. Finally, Carbonate¹⁹ was a non-post office stop on the mail route and would therefore not require Canadian postage to be delivered.

9. 1909, September 18 - Calgary, AB to Wilmer, BC²⁰ tied by Calgary machine and handstamp cancels with Golden and Wilmer backstamps. Franked with a pair of ½¢ (Scott 96) and a 1¢ (Scott 97) Quebec Tercentenary. Label not tied. Image available is too small to identify the Type of label.



Fig.9 U. C. Co. label - Item 2 in the inventory list.

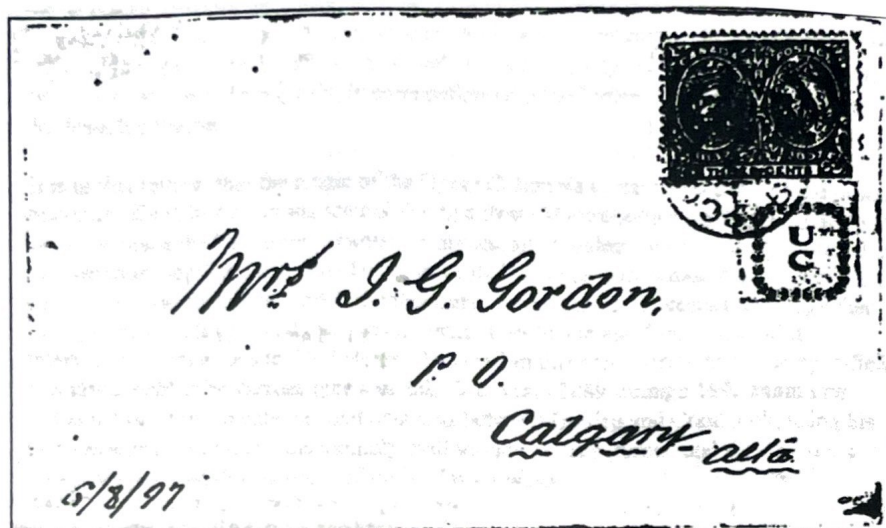


Fig.10 U. C. Co. label -The Calgary cover. Item 3 in the inventory list.

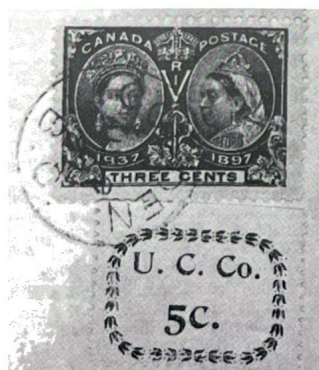


Fig.11 U. C. Co. / 5¢ label - Item 4 in the inventory list.

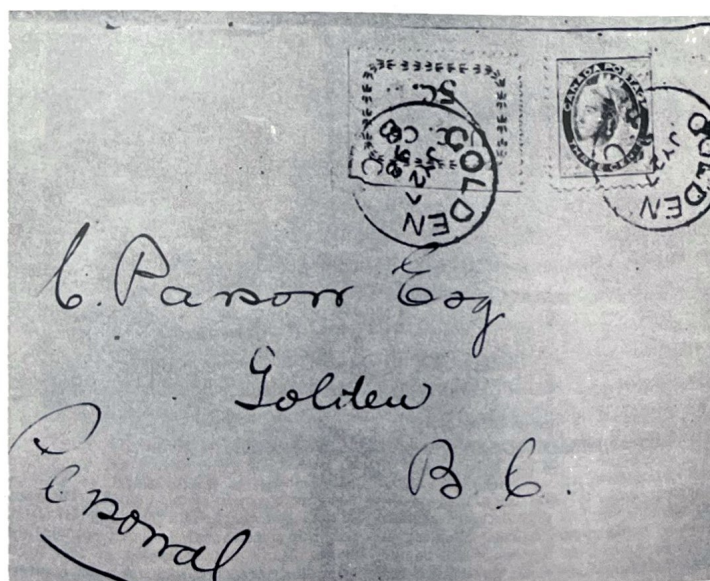


Fig.12 U. C. Co. / 5¢ label -The Parson cover. Item 5 in the inventory list.

A CANADIAN LOCAL TO
DISCOURAGE THE USE OF
A MAIL SERVICE

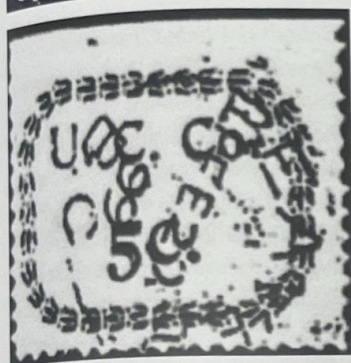


Fig. 13 U.C. Co. / 5c label - The two labels cancelled at Beaver, BC. Item 7 in the inventory list. The Top label is Courtesy of Saskatoon Stamp Centre.

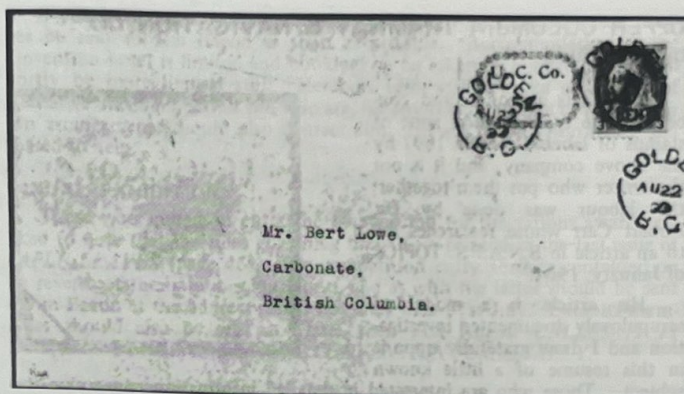
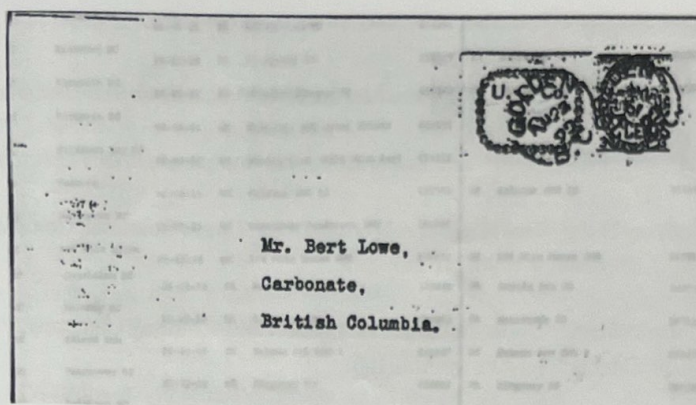


Fig. 14 U.C. Co. / 5c label - The Lowe covers. Item 8 in the inventory list.

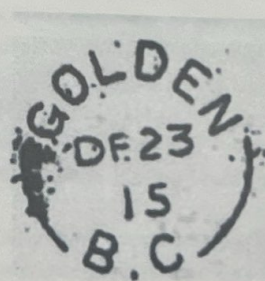
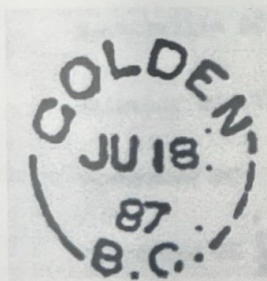


Fig. 15 The proofs of the Golden split-ring hammers showing on the right the 1915 hammer used to cancel the Lowe covers. Courtesy British Columbia Post Office Research.

The author feels that only items Nos. 3 and 4 above are genuine usages. There is a possibility that No. 2 might also be a genuine usage since it is within period and has the proper Canadian stamps for the period. It is the author's opinion that all the other covers/pieces or used labels are philatelic creations likely by Mr. Parson during his tenure as Postmaster of Golden, BC. In the course of the study of these labels the author did not find any occurrence of forged or facsimile labels.

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Notes

- (1.) Basil George Hamilton, numismatist and philatelist, was a Canadian Pacific Railway Clerk who later moved from Winnipeg to Calgary (1908) and then to the Kootenay District (1910). In 1912, he built a house in Invermere not far from where the U. C. Co. operated.
- (2.) *The Montreal Philatelist*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 42. The article was reprinted in *Stamp Collectors Fortnightly*, Vol. 6, No. 150, December 8, 1900, p. 156.
- (3.) Thomas Belhaven Henry Cochrane, of the Earls of Dundonald, was a Lieutenant in the British Navy and later became Deputy Governor of the Isle of Wight (1899-1910).
- (4.) Captain Armstrong operated the following ships built during the time he and the U. C. Co. held the mail contract or shortly thereafter: Duchess II (1888-1901/02), Pert (1887-1905), Marion (1888-1901), Hyak (1892-1906), Gwendoline (1893-1898), Ruth (named after Captain Armstrong's daughter - 1896-1897) and North Star (1897-1903).
- (5.) Mr. Parson originally entered the Civil Service of Canada as a Preventive Officer at the Department of Customs on July 1, 1900.
- (6.) Mr. Parson, in a letter dated March 14, 1933 to G. P. Bainbridge, wrote, "I think we had 2,000 printed". However, Mr. Hamilton reported as early as 1900 that 1,000 were printed and this information had been "gleaned from Mr. Parson". It is likely that 1,000 was right since the 2,000 number was first mentioned on a 35-year old recollection. George Philip Bainbridge (1886-1981), a Victoria/Vancouver, BC stamp collector, had immigrated to Canada on board the *Canadian* on March 5, 1912. He entered the country as a farmer but soon found work in the contracting industry.
- (7.) Mr. Hamilton and other early philatelic writers used the term blocks when writing about the sheets.
- (8.) E. F. Hurt, "Private and Local Posts of the World XXVI" in *The Philatelist* (Vol. 6, No. 9, 1940, p. 256) describes the label as "printed in rose on rather thick white paper and perforated 11½". This information has also been quoted by others such as Jamieson who copied Hurt's description.
- (9.) Some writers describe it as a fleur-de-lys rather than a tulip.
- (10.) Reprinted in *The Collector's Magazine / Le collectionneur*, Vol. 1, No. 9, June/Juin 1934, folios 161-162.
- (11.) At the time of his death, in 1939, Mr. Parson had two copies of the label in his possession.
- (12.) The postmaster was Rufus A. Kimpton (1860-1934) from April 1897 to September 1912. At one time Mr. Kimpton owned a store and hotel in Donald, a string of trading posts in the Kootenays, a store in Golden, a stage line south of there and a trading post and ranch in Windermere. In 1897, when the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) abandoned the town; he moved his house from Donald to Windermere. With the help of his CPR friends and Captain Armstrong, he also moved the Church from Donald to Windermere. He became known as the man who stole a church.
- (13.) H. Warren K. Hale, "Canadian Locals" in *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, April 1934, p. 80-81.
- (14.) The labels with no denomination show the letters "U" and "C" one on top of the other.
- (15.) Albert "Bert" Lowe (1851-?) was the bridge tender at Spillimacheen, a town located at the confluence of the Spillimacheen and Columbia Rivers, upstream and southeast of Golden. In the 1901 Census of the riding of Yale-Cariboo he is listed as a lodger, with two other male lodgers, in the dwelling of Eugène Tremblay. A marginal note indicates that these individuals are "squatters on unsurveyed lands west of the CNP Ry." Golden and Windermere were towns in the East Kootenay District of the riding. In the Census report, Mr. Lowe is recorded as being born in Ontario on May 4, 1851.
- (16.) "A Canadian Local.", *Philatelic Journal of Great Britain*, Vol. 16, No. 190, October 25, 1906, p. 170. Also reported, around this time, in *Mekeel's Weekly*.
- (17.) Library and Archives Canada's database on Post Offices and Postmasters does not have an entry for Beaver, BC. Such a town did in fact exist and must have had a post office since Begg & Lynch's Handbook & General Guide to British Columbia (Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1893) lists a W. Neilson as postmaster of Beaver.
- (18.) John Henry (pseud.), "Upper Columbia, Co., BC" in *Post West: The Western Canada Postal History Journal*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 1976, p. 23.
- (19.) Carbonate, BC was an unincorporated hamlet. Tracey Cooper identifies the town as Carbonado. Although there was a Carbonado Colliery Mines, a town with that name did not exist.
- (20.) Wilmer, BC is half way on the route between Golden and Cranbrook near Invermere, BC. John M. McLeod was postmaster between 1906 and 1910.