The Hudson's Bay Company, under the governorship of the King's cousin, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, was granted a charter in 1670 over much of the central and western wilderness in what would eventually become the nation of Canada. Operating its fur trade out of their headquarters at York Factory on Hudson's Bay, the Company acted as the de facto government of this 1.5 million square mile territory, dubbed "Rupert's Land."

An 1811 grant of 116,000 square miles of this land to Lord Selkirk by the Hudson's Bay Company opened the land south of Lake Winnipeg along the Red River to settlement to non-fur traders. However, communications to and from the colony were sketchy at best.

By 1835, settlers could send and receive mail through the Hudson's Bay Company supply ships. The ships arrived at York Factory in the Spring with supplies, and departed for England in the Fall with the season's furs. An overland and water route through Fort William and Sault Ste. Marie on Lake Superior was also used, though it proved difficult to maintain and closed after a few years.

The 1850 opening of a post office in Pembina, 68 miles to the south, provided the most reliable communication route. By 1853, monthly ox cart trains traveled between the Red River Settlement and Pembina. From Pembina, these ox carts brought furs, supplies, and mail to and from St. Paul and connected with Eastern rail lines.

In 1868, the British Parliament authorized the sale of Rupert's Land to Canada, ending the Hudson's Bay Company control of the area and leading to the establishment of the Province of Manitoba in 1870.

Four special mail routes to and from Rupert's Land and the Red River area were employed:

- To and from Montreal by the Ottawa River – Canoe relays to Rupert's Land and beyond.
- Through Norway House and York Factory – Canoe and York boat relays connected the south and west with Hudson's Bay Company ships at York Factory on Hudson's Bay.
- Through Sault Ste. Marie – Ox carts, canoes, and toboggans carried mail to and from the settlement to Fort William on Lake Superior and on to Sault Ste. Marie and Ontario.
- Through Pembina – Ox cart trains through Pembina in the Minnesota (later Dakota) Territory to St. Paul connected with rail lines in La Crosse to Chicago and the East.

This exhibit shows examples from each of these routes, highlighting the rates, routes, and markings employed from the opening of communications in the 1820s, through the establishment of the Province of Manitoba in 1870.

Notable items are outlined in red.

### Key to map markings:
- British/Canadian mails
- United States mails
- Carriage outside of government mails

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**To Montreal by Canoe Brigade, then to France**

Datelined “St Boniface de la Rivière Rouge 7 Juillet 1838.”

Letter from Joseph-Norbert Provencher, first Catholic Bishop of Western Canada.

Endorsed “Via New York & Le Havre.”

Carried by Hudson's Bay Company summer canoe packet to Lachine (±100 day transit to Québec). Red “Québec / OC 17 / 1838” datestamp; “PAID 11½” [Cy to border] and “PAID 18¾” [U.S. to NY]


Packet ship Poland to Le Havre, where received “PAYS D'OUTREMÉ / PAR LE HAVRE”

(Ship letter Le Havre) handsamp, manuscript “10” [grams] at upper left and “19” [decimes] collect.

Smudged Havre transit datestamp and blue Paris, November 30 datestamp on verso (147 day transit).

Private (Hudson's Bay Company) carriage to Lachine and Québec

Canadian domestic postage rate, Québec to U.S. border (paid): 11d Cy

U.S. domestic postage to New York 18½¢ U.S.

Packet ship fee to Havre ("decime de mer" collect) 1 decime FR

French domestic postage, 10 grams, 500-750 km (collect) 18 decimes FR

Following the Great Flood of 1825, the British Protestants rebuilt their settlement on the west bank of the Red River and took the Red River name for their own. The French Catholic east bank settlement retained the parish name, St. Boniface.
Wirksworth, FE 17 1841 datestamp.
Penny black adhesive paying postage from
Wirksworth to London.
London 18 FE 1841 transit datestamp on verso.
Re-addressed by Hudson's Bay Company to
Red River Settlement and endorsed “RR”.
Private carriage from London on Hudson's Bay
Company Spring 1841 supply trip to York Factory.
Then by York boat and canoe to Red River Settlement.

As originally mailed from Wirksworth—adhesive is a replacement.

Hudson's Bay Company supply ships made twice-a-year round trips between London and York Factory delivering supplies for the trappers and traders, returning with furs and other collected materials. Writers friendly to the Hudson's Bay Company were allowed to send letters to the North American settlements. Letters were sent to Fleet Street, London, sorted by HBCo, bundled, and the top letter marked with “RR” or “RRS” (Red River Settlement), “MR” (Moose River), “YF” (York Factory), or “NR” (Norway House), routing marks, depending upon destination.

Fewer than a dozen letters with HBCo. routing markings have been recorded.
Letter from Samuel Black, fur trader and explorer at Fort Coville on the Columbia River in what is now Washington State.

Private carriage by Hudson's Bay Company canoe relay through the Rocky Mountains via river and lake system to York Factory.

Redirected to Hudson's Bay House, London.

Entered the mail at Deal and handstamped “Deal Ship Letter” and rated “1/4” Stg. collect to London. Docketed as arrived 25 October 1837 (186 day transit).

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Letter from John Ballenden, Hudson's Bay Company's Chief Factor at York Factory to John Stuart (former fur trader, explorer, and Chief Factor). Carried by H.B.C. supply ship to England where it entered the mail as a Deal ship letter and rated as 1/4 Stg. collect to London. Docketed as arrived 25 October 1837 (39 day transit).

Contents relate that "...there is still a much greater evil lurking about, i.e. the small Pox, it has (caused) awful ravages among the Plains Tribes in the Saskatchewan...vaccination has been resorted to, as the most effectual means of avoiding the Contagion...it is considered expedient that I should see most of the Post fall & spring, which I admit is very proper, but it is attended with inconveniences, arising from my being so much out of the way, when the Expresses pass and repass..."

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Letter from James Hargrave, Hudson's Bay Company's Chief Factor at York Factory to John Stuart at H.B.C. headquarters in London. Carried by H.B.C. supply ship Prince Rupert to England where it entered the mail as a Ramsgate ship letter and rated as 8d Stg. collect to London. Docketed as arrived 16 October 1844 (54 day transit).
Through Sault Ste. Marie

Westbound

Datelined “Township of Zone, County Kent, Western District, Canada West, April 12, 1844”
Entered the mails with “MOSA, U.C.” handstamps with manuscript 11th April 1844 date
Matching “PAID” and “7” handstamps for postage (to Windsor)
Red WINDSOR, C.W. / 12 APR 1844 two-line backstamp
Entered the U.S. mails with blue “DETROIT, Mich, APR 13” datestamp and lines through “PAID”
Manuscript “18¾¢” postage due to Sault Ste. Marie
Then by HBCo canoe relay to York Factory
Docketed with “August 8” receipt date (4 month transit)
Canadian domestic postage to Windsor (paid): 3d Cy
U.S. domestic postage Detroit to SSM (collect): 18¾¢ U.S.
Map Route:

Endorsed: “To Mr. Donald Ross York Factory Hudsons Bay, to the care of the Agent of the honorable Hudsons Bay Company at the Sault Ste. Maries, forwarded by Sandwich and Detroit, the postmaster at Detroit are respectfully requested to forward this letter to Lake Superior”

“Zone” was special district in Canada for the Native Americans of the Moravian Mission. Donald Ross was born in Scotland in 1797 and joined Hudson's Bay Company in 1816. He became secretary to George Simpson in 1826 and went to the Columbia River with him in 1828. Ross quickly rose to become Chief Trader in 1829 and Chief Factor in 1839. He was in charge of Norway House from 1830 to 1851 and died on November 19, 1851.

11th April 1844

11th February 1854

SAULT ST. MARIE, C.W., FE 13, 1854 datestamp
Red “3[¢]” ratestamp
Manuscript docketing “Recd March 2d 1854”
Canadian domestic postage rate, SSM to Toronto (collect): 3d Cy

Eastbound:

Hudson's Bay Company sled/ox cart/canoe relay from Red River Settlement to Fort William on the shore of Lake Superior.
Likely around frozen Lake Huron to Barrie.
Overland to Toronto.
Map Route:

Endorsed: “To Mr. Donald Ross York Factory Hudsons Bay, to the care of the Agent of the honorable Hudsons Bay Company at the Sault Ste. Maries, forwarded by Sandwich and Detroit, the postmaster at Detroit are respectfully requested to forward this letter to Lake Superior”

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23rd February 1853

Endorsed: “To Mr. Donald Ross York Factory Hudsons Bay, to the care of the Agent of the honorable Hudsons Bay Company at the Sault Ste. Maries, forwarded by Sandwich and Detroit, the postmaster at Detroit are respectfully requested to forward this letter to Lake Superior”

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23th February 1853

11th April 1844

11th February 1854

SAULT ST. MARIE, C.W., FE 13, 1854 datestamp
Red “3[¢]” ratestamp
Manuscript docketing “Recd March 2d 1854”
Canadian domestic postage rate, SSM to Toronto (collect): 3d Cy

Eastbound:

Hudson's Bay Company sled/ox cart/canoe relay from Red River Settlement to Fort William on the shore of Lake Superior.
Likely around frozen Lake Huron to Barrie.
Overland to Toronto.
Map Route:

Endorsed: “To Mr. Donald Ross York Factory Hudsons Bay, to the care of the Agent of the honorable Hudsons Bay Company at the Sault Ste. Maries, forwarded by Sandwich and Detroit, the postmaster at Detroit are respectfully requested to forward this letter to Lake Superior”

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11th April 1844

11th February 1854

SAULT ST. MARIE, C.W., FE 13, 1854 datestamp
Red “3[¢]” ratestamp
Manuscript docketing “Recd March 2d 1854”
Canadian domestic postage rate, SSM to Toronto (collect): 3d Cy

Eastbound:

Hudson's Bay Company sled/ox cart/canoe relay from Red River Settlement to Fort William on the shore of Lake Superior.
Likely around frozen Lake Huron to Barrie.
Overland to Toronto.
Map Route:
By 1853, settlers established a monthly courier service to Pembina, Minnesota Territory, 68 miles to the south. Contemporary newspaper reports indicate a 3d fee for each single sheet letter. From Pembina, it traveled by ox cart to St. Paul; river steamer to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and then by rail through Chicago to the East.

In 1855, the Council of Assiniboia established a post office in Red River Settlement with William Ross as the first Postmaster. It is believed that Ross developed this manuscript postmark, as its use ceased after Ross’ death in May 1856.

Fewer than 10 examples of this Red River manuscript postmark are recorded.

Postmaster William Ross reported on 26th May 1856 that 2821 letters, 2437 newspapers, and 580 packets were sent through the Red River Settlement post office in the prior year. Following Ross’ death in May 1856, William Drever was appointed postmaster. Two months later, Nathaniel Logan took over the position.

The courier fee to Pembina was reduced 1d for letters not exceeding ½ oz. and an additional 2d for letters exceeding ½ oz. at the 25 June 1857 Meeting of the Council of Assiniboia.
Through Pembina

Westbound

Berthier, Canada, to Pembina, Minnesota Territory, via St. Paul.

Berthier L.C. Feb. 22, 1852 datestamp
Blue “6d” in circle handstamp for combined Canadian-U.S. rate
Montreal Feb. 23 backstamp
Red “CANADA” arc handstamp (Montreal of Toronto)
Red “Saint Paul Min. Ter. 29 Mar.” datestamp
Forwarded to Pembina with manuscript “fwd” and “5” handstamp
“15” below for total due

- Canadian treaty rate postage to Pembina (due): 6d Cy
- Converted to U.S. currency (due): 10¢ U.S.
- Forwarding from St. Paul to Pembina (due): 5¢ U.S.
- Total due at Pembina: 15¢ U.S.
- Plus courier from Pembina to Red River Settlement (collect): 1d Cy

Toronto to Red River Settlement via St. Paul and Pembina, Minnesota Territory.

Toronto, U.C., MR 24, 1860 datestamp
Red PAID handstamp (Toronto)
SAINT PAUL, Min., APR 14, 1860 datestamp
Black MISSENT handstamp (St. Paul)

- Canadian treaty rate postage to Pembina (paid): 10¢ Cy
- Courier from Pembina to Red River Settlement (collect): 1d Cy
- *Note – Red River Settlement did not convert to the Canadian dollar until Manitoba became a province in 1870.

The “St Paul” in the address on this letter likely caused the letter to be routed to that post office where the proper destination was determined, the datestamp and “MISSENT” markings were applied, and it was sent by ox cart or stage to Pembina.

This is the earliest of the four decimal-period stamped covers to the Red River Settlement.

Stornoway, (MAR) 11, 1853 boxed datestamp
Boston Br. Packet 1 APR 24 and 19 cents (due) Exchange Office handstamps
SAINT PAUL, Min.Ter, APR 30(?), 1853 datestamp (reverse)
Black 5 handstamp (St. Paul) due for forwarding to Pembina
Manuscript 29 due for postage and forwarding

- British treaty rate postage from Scotland to St. Paul (collect): 24¢ U.S.
- U.S. Postage rate for unpaid forwarding to Pembina (collect): 5¢ U.S.
- Plus courier from Pembina to Red River Settlement (collect): 3d Cy

22nd February 1853

Letter is from Ann Kittson to Norman Kittson, who was a fur trader, he joined the American Fur Company and established a post at Pembina.

11th March 1853

Traveled on the Cunard Line Niagara, which departed Liverpool March 19, 1853, arriving Boston on April 1. Rail to LaCrosse, Wis.; Steamer to St. Paul; ox cart through Pembina to Red River Settlement.
Prepaid with U.S. Postage

Fort Garry, 3 October manuscript
PEMBINA, DAKOTA OCT 4 datestamp
MONTREAL, Q. OC 19, 1870 datestamp verso

Courier from Ft. Garry to Pembina (paid): 1¢ Cy
2x U.S. 6¢ per ½ oz. treaty rate to BNA: 12¢ U.S.

PEMBINA, DAKOTA MAR 2 datestamp
MONTREAL, NR 19 69 datestamp verso
Québec C.E. MR 21 69 datestamp verso

Courier from Ft. Garry to Pembina (paid): 1¢ Cy
United States treaty rate to BNA: 6¢ per ½ oz. (paid): 6¢ U.S.

U.S. postage stamps were available for sale in Fort Garry to facilitate the prepayment of postage through the United States.

3¢ Pink 1864-65 stamped envelope mailed from Fort Abercrombie, ≈180 miles south of Pembina to Fort Garry, in what is now downtown Winnipeg. Embossed corner advertisement reads: “GREAT NORTH WESTERN DEPOT / H McKENNEY / IMPORTER / TRADER / ASSINIBOIA / B.A.”

Fort Abercrombie was established by authority of an act of the U.S. Congress on March 3, 1857. The post office there opened in 1860.
The Manitoba Act of 1870 established Manitoba as a province of Canada. At this time, a closed mail service via the United States was established.

**Westbound**

Canadian domestic mail rate postage to Manitoba – 6¢ per ½ oz.: 6¢ Cy

The addressee, E.L. Barber, was a businessman and agent for furs, hides, and firewood.

Canadian domestic mail rate postage to Manitoba: 6¢ Cy

**Letter rates between Canada and Manitoba from 1870:**
- July 15, 1870 (province established) – October 31, 1870
  - 6¢ Cy per ½ ounce
- From November 1, 1870 - regular Canadian letter rates apply
  - 3¢ Cy per ½ ounce

*This is the only recorded Small Queens cover to or from Manitoba during the 6¢ rate period.*

**Eastbound**

**FORT GARRY, MANITOBA, FE 28, 72 datestamp**

MONTREAL C.E. MR 14, 72 transit datestamp verso
ST JOHNS, C.E., MR 15, 72 receiving datestamp verso

**28th February 1872**

**FORT GARRY, MANITOBA, JU 5, 72 datestamp**

MONTREAL C.E. MR 14, 72 transit datestamp verso
ST JOHNS, C.E., MR 15, 72 receiving datestamp verso

23rd September 1870

HAMILTON, C.W., SE 23, 70 datestamp

Canadian domestic mail rate postage to Manitoba: 6¢ Cy