

A philatelic and postal history of NEWFOUNDLAND

a continuing series by Brien C. Damien; part eight

After establishment of postal services on the Newfoundland coast in 1851, a skeletal system of coastal boat service began with small sailboats in service. Aaron DeGraw signed a contract with the government in 1860 to provide steamer service to Twillingate in the North and LaPoile in the south twice monthly, in return for £3750 each year; his service steamer *Victoria* stopped at all of the post offices en route to the above mentioned points. However, DeGraw defaulted after a few months, and sailboats were put back on the routes until 1863, when Robert Grieve started the second steamer service with the *Ariel* for £4500 annually. The *Ariel* continued in service for a long period, and was finally supplemented by the West Coast steamer *Curlew*.

The first steamers were replaced with a line operated by the Reid-Newfoundland Rail Company when Reid began its Newfoundland operations in the late 1880s. Its steamers' Scottish names were alphabetical in order: *Argyle*, *Bruce*, *Clyde*, *Dundee*, *Ethie*, *Fife*, *Glencoe*, *Home*, *Kyle*, and *Lintrose*. Also, it owned the *Portia* and *Prospero*, taken over from Bowring Brothers. When the Reid-Newfoundland company turned its assets over to the Newfoundland government in 1923, the coastal boats too became government owned.

Later, the *Baccalieu*, *Burgeo*, and *North-ern Ranger* were added to the fleet, as well as the *Sagona*. These vessels replaced the *Bruce* and *Lintrose*, sold to the Russian government, and the *Ethie*, lost on the West Coast. Postmarks in use by the various boats of the pre-Confederation era include these travelling post office cancels: Coastal South T.P.O., Coastal North T.P.O., Coastal West T.P.O., Fogo District T.P.O., Straits T.P.O., Labrador T.P.O. An "A" or "B" affixed in the marking indicates the direction in which the travelling post office was going at the time of postmarking, away from or toward the home port.

As I have recorded earlier, it is probable that the first road built in Newfoundland with postal purposes in mind was the Portu-

gal Cove Road, connecting St. John's with the Conception Bay port after which it was named. Throughout the pre-Confederation history of Newfoundland, road building was spastic and followed no master plan. Roads — the word is used loosely — were the spontaneous result of an acute need to move something or someone and more often than not were of such a quality to accommodate no medium of transportation more advanced than a horse. In many cases, the only reason for building a road was to put able-bodied men "on the dole" to useful work.

It was not until 1863 that the construction of a decent road northward from St. John's was considered. The government sent explorer Smith McKay on an experimental northern mail run overland during that winter. McKay's findings and recommendations were the basis of the plan for the road completed in 1870 stretching from St. John's northward to Gander Bay, Notre Dame Bay. At the inception of service on the route, the 210 mile road was serviced by six relay stations employing ten men. By 1890, an expanded system employed fifty-four men.

Aside from his road, where only trails existed, horse or dogsled formed the means of transit. In warm seasons these means worked well, but the winter snows brought problems.

After a decade of discussion, construction of the Newfoundland railway began on August 9, 1881. Upon completion, the line spanned the island from St. John's East to Port aux Basques with branch lines to Placentia, Argentia, Harbour Grace, Bay de Verde, Brigus, Lewisporte, Bonavista, Heart's Content, Trepassey, and Buchans. Proposals to build lines to Burin and Bonne Bay had limited success, but the lines were never completed. The government's contractor, Reid Newfoundland Company, operated the line until 1923 when heavy losses encountered over the years made it impossible to continue. R. G. Reid and his family, owners of the Reid Newfoundland Com-

(Continued on page 278)