

# THE PORCUPINE'S GOLD AND EARLY POSTAL HISTORY

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A glance at a road map of Northern Ontario shows a group of communities along Highway 101, beginning 45 miles west of Matheson, including Porcupine (originally known as Golden City), South Porcupine, Dome, Schumacher and Timmins (Fig. 1). All of these towns were located in a gold-bearing, volcanic, intrusive matrix that became the "Porcupine Camp" upon the discovery of gold there.

This inaccessible, uninhabited area could be entered from the Temiskaming & Northern Ontario



Railway (T&NO) at mile 228 at McDougall's Chute (Fig. 2), traveling by canoe to Frederick House Lake, up the Frederick House River to Nighthawk Lake, then up the Porcupine River to Porcupine Lake<sup>1</sup>. While earlier prospectors thought that the geology "looked promising" and there was one mine on Nighthawk Lake in 1907, it was not until 1909 that George Bannerman and Tom Geddes found good



Fig. 1 – A portion of a recent road map showing the location of the communities lying within the gold-bearing stratum on Route 101. Pamour is also indicated as is the Gold Centre, an underground mine tour.



Fig. 2 – A printed postcard with a broken circle cancel of McDougall Chute dated SP 28/09, the writer suggesting that they are further north than Cook and Peary.



surface showings north of Porcupine Lake<sup>1</sup>. However their mine, the Scottish-Ontario (later called the Canusa and the Banner-Porcupine mine), was not a large producer<sup>1</sup>. In May-June of 1909, a group of prospectors began serious mapping and prospecting southwest of Porcupine

Lake, discovering a dome of quartz with visible gold in the seams of schist. The vein, several hundred feet long and 150 feet wide, became known as the Golden Staircase – “the gold was in blobs like candle drippings and in sponge-like masses, some as large as a “cup”<sup>1</sup>. This claim became the Big Dome, central to the Dome Mine holdings (Fig. 3).

Other prospectors were working in the region and, with the “dome” staked out, moved to the west of it. Benny Hollinger and Alec Gillies found a moss-covered dome of quartz about 60 feet long and 6 feet wide

splattered with gold near Pearl Lake<sup>1</sup>. This claim became the Porcupine Crown property and was consolidated into the Hollinger Mine owned by the Timmins brothers (Fig. 4). Sandy McIntyre and Hans Buttner, aware of the Hollinger/Gillies find, began prospecting at Pearl Lake, their claims becoming the centre of the third great mine of the Porcupine camp, the McIntyre Mine (Fig. 5). Unfortunately, these prospectors, grub-staked by investors, were essentially employees and did not share in the future wealth other than to have their names associated with the Hollinger and the McIntyre mines<sup>1,2</sup>.

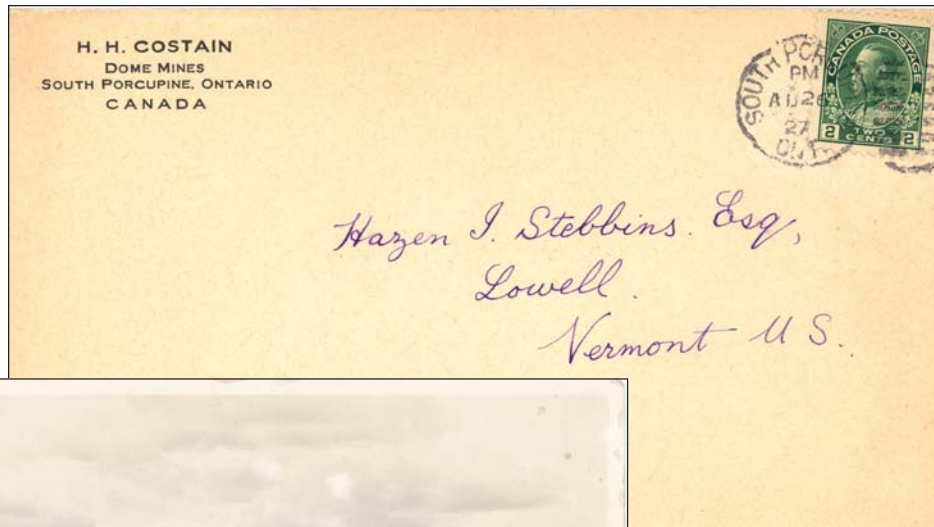


Fig. 3 – The Dome Gold Mines, vintage 1917, with a later advertising corner card envelope with a duplex cancel (DON-1555) dated AU 26/27.

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Fig. 4 – An early photo postcard of the Hollinger Mine, the “x” marks explained by the sender as how he spent his summer – whitewashing the buildings and stacks. Mailed to St. Catharines, an RPO (North Bay-Cochrane, Train #2) dated AU 19/13 cancelling a 2¢ Admiral (#106).

With such difficult access, a rough corduroy road was built by Noah Timmins (his wealth coming from the La Rose Mine in Cobalt<sup>3</sup>) from mile 222 of the T&NO railway to Nighthawk Lake, with another 20-mile road to reach Pearl Lake, the road opening on New Year’s Day, 1910<sup>1</sup>. In the spring of 1910, T&NO chairman Jake Englehart, ordered a survey of a railway link into the Porcupine area. The railway line was completed within 6 months at a cost of \$450,000, the junction with the North Bay-Cochrane line

being two miles north of Kelso at Porquis Junction<sup>1</sup>.

As the mining activities in the Porcupine Camp expanded, communities developed and much of the mining history is intertwined with the towns mentioned above. Originally, they were collections of tents, shacks, tree stumps, rough terrain and even worse streets<sup>4</sup>. Table 1 lists the opening dates of post offices, showing that even within a year of the discovery of gold, offices were in place.

Fires at mines were a constant hazard since

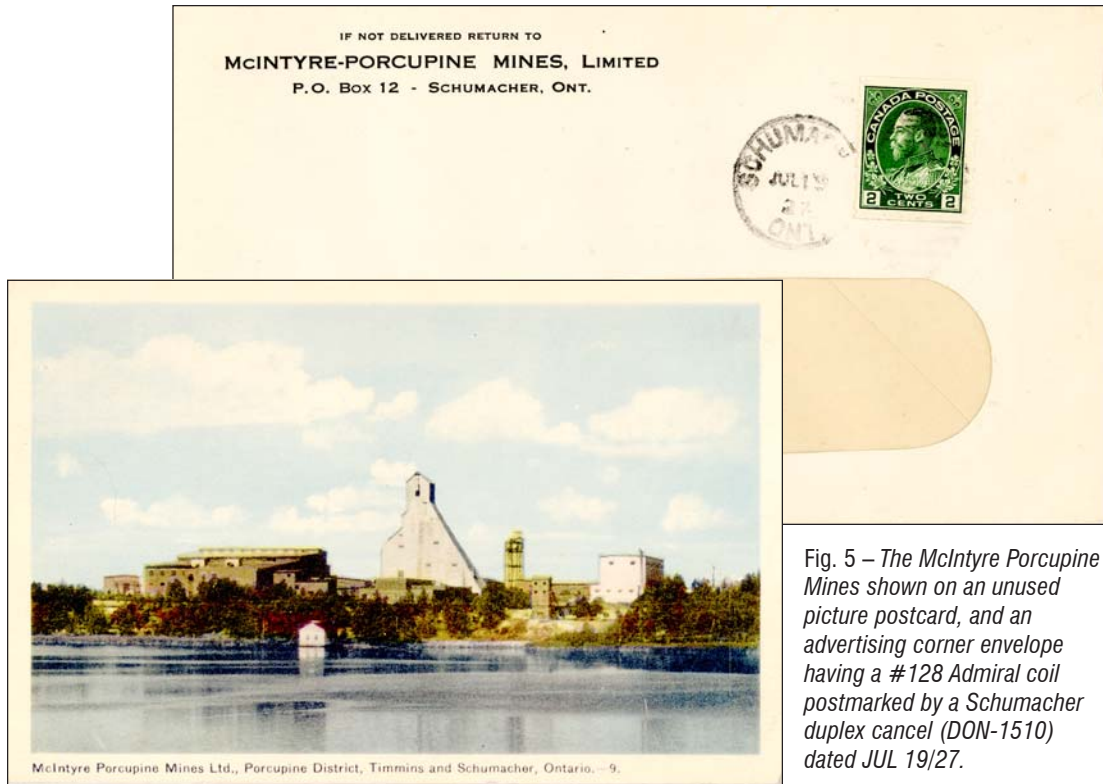


Fig. 5 – The McIntyre Porcupine Mines shown on an unused picture postcard, and an advertising corner envelope having a #128 Admiral coil postmarked by a Schumacher duplex cancel (DON-1510) dated JUL 19/27.

**TABLE 1**  
**POST OFFICE OPENINGS IN THE PORCUPINE CAMP\***

POST OFFICE	OPENING DATE	CLOSING DATE
Aura Lake	Dec. 1, 1910	Mar. 1, 1912
McDougalls Chute	July 1, 1907	Sept. 1, 1911
Pamour	Oct. 21, 1935	Aug. 15, 1973
Porcupine	Feb. 7, 1910	
Schumacher	Mar 1, 1912	
South Porcupine	Mar. 1, 1911	
Timmins	Jan. 1, 1912	

\*R. C. Smith. *Ontario Post Offices, Vol. I – An Alphabetical Listing.* Unitrade Press, Toronto, 1988.

Fig. 6 – Early photo postcards of South Porcupine taken (a) before the fire of July 11, 1911, and (b) during the fire as it approached the town (mailed AU 3, 1911).



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Fig. 7 – A photo postcard of South Porcupine showing the desolation following the July 10, 1911 fire and the temporary shelters being erected by the survivors. Mailed from North Cobalt, the 1¢ Admiral (#104) being postmarked by a broken-circle dater June 10/14.

each one had its own wood-fired source of energy production. For example, in mid-May, 1911, the new Hollinger surface plant was destroyed, an omen of terrible things to come. The winter of 1910-1911 had little snowfall and, as an unduly hot summer progressed with little rain, the forest became exceedingly dry. Several small fires caused by burning slash, smoke-stack embers or carelessly attended campfires proved difficult to control. One fire, at the gold camp at Star Lake (Keefer Township), some 30 miles from the

Porcupine Camp, was deemed responsible for the destruction of a vast area of Northern Ontario in early July, 1911<sup>1</sup>. This fire generated high winds (90 mph) on a 20-mile wide front that obliterated many mine sites, camps and communities in its path including South Porcupine (Figs. 6 and 7), Pottsville and part of Porcupine<sup>4</sup>. Some 500 square miles of bush were destroyed<sup>1</sup>. The official death count was 73 but, because there were many prospectors caught in the path of the fire, estimates have run as high as 200 deaths<sup>1</sup>. Rain fell two days

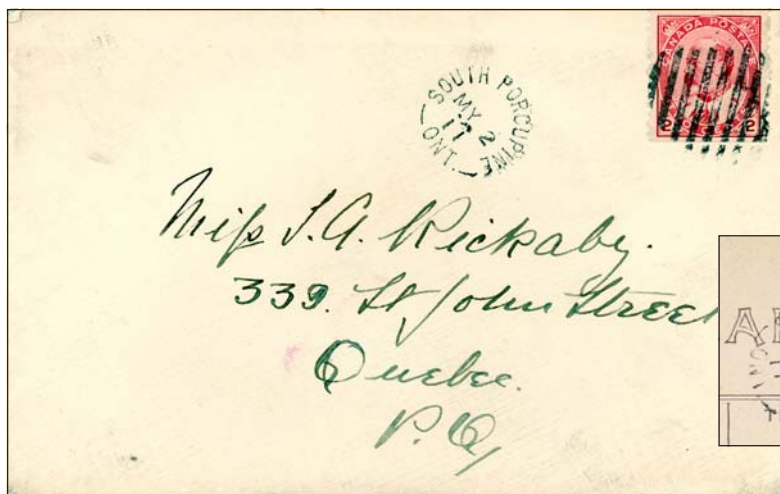


Fig. 8 – An early broken-circle postmark (A1-type) of South Porcupine dated MY 2/11, two months after the opening of the post office and two months before the destruction of the town.



Fig. 8b.

after the fire. The only good to come from the fire was that it burned away the overburden (peat, moss, brush, etc.), exposing many new quartz deposits<sup>1</sup>. Within two years of the fire, the towns were rebuilding<sup>4</sup>.

Fig. 8 shows an early, broken-circle cancel of South Porcupine. Only one earlier cancel, MR 18/11 has been reported (Fig. 8b)<sup>4</sup>. Proofed on March 9, 1911, this hammer was obviously destroyed in the fire of July 10-11 since a second,

**TABLE 2**  
**GOLD MINES OF THE PORCUPINE DISTRICT\***

Acme	Newray
Anglo-Huronian	Northcrown
Aunor**	Pamour **
Buffalo Ankerite	Paymaster **
Carium	Pearl
Coniaurum**	Platt Veteran
Dome**	Plenaurum
Hallnor**	Porcupine Crown
Hollinger**	Preston East Dome **
Hunter	Scottish-Ontario
Jupiter	Schumacher
Mace	Three Nation
McIntyre**	Vipond
Moneta	West Dome

\* M. Barnes, *Fortunes in the Ground*. Boston Mills Press, 1986.

\*\* All mines having produced more than a million ounces of gold. (Kutz, 1998)



Fig. 9a –

A sampling of postmarks from the  
PORCUPINE CAMP

SCHUMACHER ONT.  
SP 24 / 17  
DON-1510



Registered  
Letter from  
PAMOUR, ONT.  
37  
JUN 28 / PM  
CDS

PAMOUR, ONT.  
JUN 10 / ??  
MOON

SCHUMACHER  
ONT.  
PM  
OC 10 / 40  
DON-1512



PAMOUR, ONT.  
PM / SP 23 / 63  
CDS

PORCUPINE  
ONT.  
21 IX / 51  
CDS  
4066  
PORCUPINE  
10 VI 1966  
ONT.  
MOON



4394  
SOUTH PORCUPINE  
10 VI 1966  
ONT.  
MOON



4394 / SOUTH / PORCUPINE  
16 IX 1962  
ONT.  
MOON

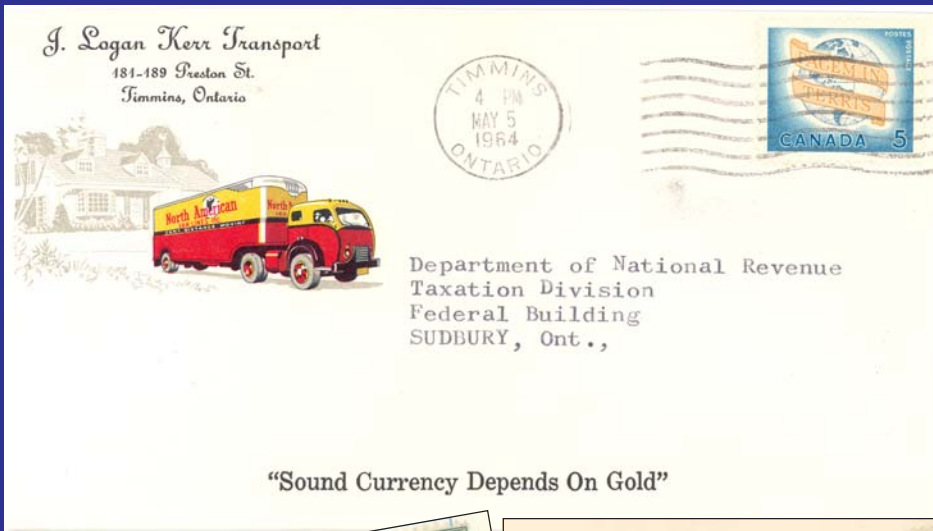
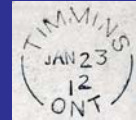
SOUTH PORCUPINE ONT.  
PM / 31 III / 52  
ONT.  
DON-1557



Fig. 9b –

# A selection of TIMMINS postmarks

TIMMINS ONT.  
JAN 23 / 12  
A1 (19-mm, arcs 9.0 mm)



Advertising cover to the Tax Man handing over the gold  
TIMMINS ONTARIO  
4 PM  
MAY 5 / 1964  
(Machine Cancel)

TIMMINS ONTARIO  
12 M  
DEC 9 / 1943  
(SLOGAN)



028738  
2002-10-01  
TIMMINS, ON  
P4N 2G0 (POCON operations)



TIMMINS ONTARIO / 12 M / DEC 9 / 1943 (SLOGAN)

CANADA POST / POSTES CANADA  
TIMMINS GOLDMINE TOUR / SHANIA TWAIN CENTRE  
2008-02-11  
(promotional postmark)



TIMMINS ONTARIO  
1 PM / FEB 21 / 1944  
(SLOGAN)



Fig. 10 – An unused photo postcard of the Paymaster Mine alongside an advertising corner envelope having a Timmins machine cancel dated OCT 10/53.

similar A1-type broken-circle hammer was proofed on July 21, 1911<sup>5</sup>. The postmark shown in Fig. 8 was struck two months after the opening of the post office and two months before the fire. An increased volume of mail to and from these communities resulted in the introduction of duplex hammers by early 1911 or 1912<sup>6</sup>. A collage of markings used over the years in the towns of the “Porcupine Camp” is shown in Figs. 9a and 9b, including different duplex, circular date, etc., daters.

In addition to the “big three” mines mentioned above, many others were scattered throughout the region, with production

occurring within 5 years of discovery (Table 2)<sup>17</sup>. Many shut down early due to insufficient investment capital and the high costs of hardrock mining below ground. The proximity of these claims to the holdings of the major mines resulted in consolidation of properties. One example, the Paymaster Mine (Fig. 10), a consolidation of several claims adjoining the Dome property, began operations in 1915, producing nearly 500,000 ounces of gold prior to 1947. It closed in 1964 having produced nearly \$38 million in gold from 4.9 million tons of ore<sup>7</sup>.

Fig. 11 shows the Jupiter Mine at Aura

Fig. 11 – An unused photo postcard of the early stage of the Jupiter Mines at Aura Lake.

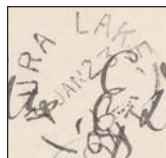


Fig. 12 – The scarce Aura Lake broken circle, dated JAN 23/12.



Lake, this community having a post office between late 1910 until March, 1912 (Table 1) when the name was changed to Schumacher with the arrival of the railway and the donation of land by Ed Schumacher conditional to renaming the town. While duplex cancels of Schumacher are relatively common, the broken circle daters (proofed in 1912 and

1915) are rarely found as is the broken circle postmark of Aura Lake (Fig. 12)<sup>4</sup>.

Offices for most mines were located in South Porcupine, that of the McIntyre was in Schumacher while the Hollinger, Moneta and Preston East Dome mines were based in Timmins. ✉

#### SOURCES

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