The Story of an Arctic Cover
Kevin O’Reilly

I obtained a very interesting cover with enclosure, sent by Rudolph Martin Anderson in 1915, in an auction in late 2001 (see Figures 1 and 2). When I bought this item, it raised more questions than it answered. Its successful analysis using archival documents was lengthy and complex but provides a fascinating look at exploration in Canada’s north.

My cover was sent by Dr. Rudolph Martin Anderson (see Figure 3), who was the leader of the Southern Party for the Canadian Arctic Expedition to Lomen Brothers in Nome, Alaska. The letter thanks the Lomen family for sending photos of Anderson during the Expedition’s stop at Nome on its way north in July 1913.

Figure 1: Cover sent by Dr. Rudolph Martin Anderson from Bernard Harbour, NWT to Lomen Bros., Nome, Alaska

Text continues on page 20
Figure 2 (above): Letter from Dr. Anderson enclosed in cover

Figure 3 (right): Dr. Rudolph Martin Anderson of the Canadian Arctic Expedition Southern Party
Several problems arose immediately. Why is there a typewritten return address of Dolphin and Union Strait, N.W.T. but the letter is datelined De Witt Clinton Point, N.W.T.? Why is the letter dated May 15, 1915 but the envelope was put in the mail in Ottawa on December 11, 1915, free-franked?

I love a postal history challenge. The Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-1918, one of the last of the great polar exploration initiatives, is one of the better documented, which certainly helped provide many of the answers.

Background on the Canadian Arctic Expedition

Vilhjalmur Stefansson and Rudolph Anderson were leaders of an Arctic expedition from 1908 to 1912 to the Mackenzie Delta. Soon after its return, Stefansson began planning for a larger expedition. He secured financial support from the National Geographic Society, the American Museum of Natural History and the Harvard Traveller’s Club. He went to Ottawa in February 1913 to try to secure support from the Geological Survey of Canada and the Prime Minister, Robert Borden. Worried about Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic and any claims the United States might make as a result of an American-backed expedition, the Canadian government hastily agreed to finance the whole expedition, which was renamed the Canadian Arctic Expedition (CAE).

Stefansson (1879-1962) was impulsive and visionary, but not a details kind of person. Although born in Canada, he was raised in the US and eventually became a US citizen. Anderson (1876-1961) was born in the US and served in the Spanish American War. He moved to Canada, eventually became a Canadian citizen and worked for the Museum of Nature until he retired. Anderson was seen as a reserved man who was left with much of the responsibility for organizing the Canadian Arctic Expedition. Stefansson would lead the Northern Party with the objective of searching for new lands, north of Banks Island and Prince Patrick Island. He eventually returned to the south in 1918 after narrowly escaping death from typhoid fever while at Herschel Island.

A Southern Party, in the charge of Anderson, was to map and investigate the Coronation Gulf area. This group of scientists from the Geological Survey of Canada conducted survey work along this stretch of Arctic coast and into the interior. Having finished their work, they returned to the south in the summer of 1917.

The different personalities of the two leaders led to inevitable divisions and a long-standing feud for the rest of their careers. The differing objectives of the CAE, Stefansson’s desire for exploration and fame and the Canadian government’s aspirations for the protection of sovereignty and scientific investigation virtually doomed it from the beginning. The Southern Party was made up of loyal government career scientists who saw Anderson as their leader and were actively
encouraged to report directly to the Geological Survey of Canada rather than to Stefansson or the Naval Service.

The expedition would be under the overall command of Stefansson, who was “free to deliver public lectures, write magazine articles, and make general use of the information he had acquired, provided the first use of this information is given to the Canadian government” according to the February 22, 1913 Canadian Order-in-Council authorizing the expedition. Stefansson would only report to George J. Desbarats, Deputy Minister of the Naval Service.

**Arrangement for Outgoing Expedition Mail**

Stefansson would receive no salary for his involvement in the CAE but had already made contracts with some publishers for stories about the expedition that would provide him with a source of remuneration. In a February 13, 1916 letter to G.J. Desbarats, Deputy Minister, Naval Service, Stefansson stated that he had signed contracts with Macmillan Company and the United Newspapers for the sale of the official narrative of the Expedition for £1250 (LAC. RG 42 Marine Branch, Series C-1, Volume 476, Canadian Arctic Expedition--Stefansson Arctic Expedition--Progress reports in Arctic (Stefansson). Files 84-2-29, Part 3). According to Stefansson, if he failed to secure the first publication of news of the Expedition to the United Newspaper, he would forfeit £750. By that point in 1916, Stefansson believed that some members of the CAE had passed along news to other newspapers and that he would have to forfeit the penalty. He was also worried that the Southern Party might return to the south before him or the Northern Party and that this would result in further news stories.

The contracts for the Expedition members required that any diaries or records that were kept would become government property. Any outgoing mail was to be sent directly to the Geological Survey of Canada in Ottawa, where it would be forwarded onwards. The Expedition contract for Diamond Jenness (an anthropologist originally from New Zealand) is printed in a biography by his son (Jenness 1991, see Appendix 7, pg 728). Two clauses of the contract are of interest in the context of this cover:

Special attention is called to the following clauses:

- 2nd. No news is to be given out except through the official reports made to the Geological Survey of Canada, and every reasonable care shall be exercised to prevent the leakage of news.
- 5th. All mail sent out is to be put in a bundle addressed to the Geological Survey of Canada, from which it will be forwarded to its destination.

At the initial meeting of all the expedition members in Victoria, BC on June 8, 1913 shortly before their departure, there was concern about the state of the vessels to transport them and the supplies north (see Jenness, p. xxxiii). There, Stefansson claimed that all diaries and would become government property as he might find...
some ethnological observations or other information that could be useful. Most of the men expressed their strong disagreement with these conditions of engagement. The requirement to send all mail to the Geological Survey of Canada for onward transmission was openly questioned and some members believed that this could result in their mail being opened to prevent leakage of news. Jenness (1991, pg. xxxiv) states “There is no evidence, however, that any letters subsequently despatched from the Arctic through Ottawa were ever opened for inspection”. While this statement may be true of CAE authorities in Ottawa, it was not the case for outgoing mail from the Southern Party that was likely intercepted in the Arctic as we shall see. Several other heated meetings followed, including one in Nome, Alaska on the way north and more when the CAE was in the Arctic.

Expedition Events Prior to the Despatch of the Cover

The Karluk was the main CAE vessel, and was to be used by the Northern Party. The Alaska was to be used by the Southern Party and the Mary Sachs was to be a tender for both parties and for oceanographic research. The objective of all vessels was Herschel Island but the first two got separated past Cape Prince of Wales (see Figure 4). Alaska and Mary Sachs eventually made it to Camden Bay, Alaska, where they would overwinter. The Karluk became trapped in ice about 75 km west of Camden Bay on August 12. Several short trips were made out on the ice and to the mainland for supplies and mail. Stefansson left the ship with five others, including two hired Inuit on September 20. The ship drifted off shortly afterwards until it was crushed in January 1914. Of the 25 crew and scientists on board when it started its drift, only 14 survived and were rescued from Wrangel Island in September 1914.

Following the drift of the Karluk, Stefansson and his party eventually reached the Southern Party at Camden Bay. A series of trips was made by various ships of the CAE along the northern coast of Alaska and into the Mackenzie Delta that winter. The Alaska (Aarnout Castel, Master) and Mary Sachs (Captain Peter Bernard) left Camden Bay on July 25, 1914 to go to Herschel Island, which was reached on August 6. The Alaska and the North Star (purchased by Stefansson to help make up for the loss of the Karluk) left Herschel Island on August 19 with the Southern Party. The Mary Sachs was attached to the Northern Party and left for Bank Island.

The Southern Party headed towards Coronation Gulf, where it would winter and set up its headquarters. On August 24, 1914, the Alaska, with Dr. Anderson on board, reached a sheltered spot that had been used in the winter of 1912-13 by Captain Joseph Bernard, where he kept the schooner Teddy Bear. The North Star arrived four days later and the men set about establishing their headquarters at the newly named Bernard Harbour (Figure 5). On September 6, Alaska left for the west to get more fuel and any available mail. Dr. Anderson and six others were on board. The vessel eventually reached Her-
schel Island and picked up some limited supplies but no mail, and reached Baillie Island again before freeze up.

Anderson and some of his fellow CAE members returned to Bernard Harbour on Christmas Day 1914 by dog team. As a small present, Anderson gave each of the CAE members at Bernard Harbour about a dozen sheets of printed stationery reading “THE CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION”
(the same stationery as my letter) (see Jenness 1991, pgs.362 and 786, note 7). The stationery had apparently been sent by Mrs. Anderson, care of her husband, to the men. Later that winter Anderson left by dog team to try to reach Fort Norman for mail but had to turn around. He got back to Bernard Harbour on March 30, 1915.

The cover of the envelope is on stationery of an odd size for North American mail of this period. There is an embossed imprint on the back of the envelope that reads “WILL H. BECK CO./SIOUX CITY, IOWA”. Will H. Beck Company was a large jewellery store in Sioux City. The Anderson’s lived in Sioux City at the time of the CAE, so Mrs. Anderson probably arranged for the purchase of stationery from this firm. Stefansson also had access to the stationery as shown in Figure 6, a cover he sent from either Herschel Island or Fort McPherson, NWT in 1918.

![Figure 6. Registered cover sent by Stefansson on Canadian Arctic Expedition stationery, mailed from Herschel Island, Yukon or Fort McPherson, NWT. Carried out on the Dawson Patrol of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) and placed in the mail at Dawson on February 28, 1918.](image-url)
Routing of the Anderson Cover

The next trip Anderson made is related to my letter. According to his field notes (Canadian Museum of Nature, Vertebrate Section, Division of Zoology, Anderson Papers, Canadian Arctic Expedition Field Notes, April 21 to June 17, 1915) he left Bernard Harbour on April 21, 1914 with Silas Palaiyak (a young Mackenzie River Inuit who worked with Anderson on his 1908-12 expedition, and again for work on the CAE). They went west along the coastline using six dogs and a sled. Supplies were cached along the way. The objective appears to have been to take outward-bound mail towards Bailie Island for forwarding to the outside world.

On May 8 they had reached Clinton Point (then called De Witt Clinton Point) and Anderson noted, “Wrote some letters today, I have scarcely had a spare hour all winter when it was convenient to write.” The following day they met some members of the Southern Party who were heading eastward to Bernard Harbour. On May 11, the CAE members finished writing letters and sent them on by dog team with Palaiyak and Bolt to Baillie Island, where Captain Dan Sweeney and the Alaska were wintering. Anderson, Chipman, Klengenberg and O’Neil headed east to Bernard Harbour. Captain Sweeny left Baillie Island on the Alaska on July 10, 1915 and reached Herschel Island three days later, carrying the CAE mail from Bernard Harbour.

Captain Louis Lane arrived at Herschel Island on September 7, 1915 on the Gladiator having sold his boat Polar Bear to Stefansson (HBCA). Lane got the Gladiator (also purchased by Stefansson at Cape Kellett from Captain Fred Wolki), partly in exchange for the Polar Bear, and went down to Herschel Island. Lane was headed to the outside and was entrusted with the outgoing mail, including that from the CAE. He was unable to get past Point Barrow and was forced to return to Herschel Island on September 16 still carrying the mail (HBCA).

In order to get the CAE mail to the outside as quickly as possible, the RNWMP detachment at Herschel Island was authorized to lead an overland trip to the Yukon interior. Constable Alexander Lamont led the party of Captain Louis Lane, Burt and Adair (two miners), Naipaktoona and Izyoona as guides, five dogs, a toboggan, 56 days rations, 200 lbs. of dog food and 50 lbs. of mail primarily from the CAE (RNWMP Annual Report 1916, Appendix Z, Constable A. Lamont—Herschel Island to Rampart House and Return). The party crossed from Herschel Island on September 30, 1915 to the mainland in whaleboats and then dog team. They arrived at Rampart House, Yukon on the Porcupine River (where there was a trading post operated by Dan Cadzow) on October 18. Sergeant Dempster was in charge of the RNWMP detachment there. Arrangements were made for Captain Lane to carry the mail forward to Fort Yukon. Lane arrived in Circle, Alaska on October 27, 1915, where he likely placed the CAE mail in closed bags in the US postal system.
A direct exchange of mails between Canada and the US was established effective July 1, 1902 with a Canada Post Office Department contract to carry mail between Dawson, Yukon and Eagle, Alaska, a distance of 104 miles including 12 miles in the US (LAC, RG 3, Volume 617, File 3037, Mail Service to Eagle, Alaska 1902-1916). Ben S. Downing of Dawson got the four-year contract for $9,000 per year. He also had the contract to carry Alaskan mail all the way down to Nome at the mouth of the Yukon River (see Figures 7 and 8 for early examples of mail carried on this route). All classes of mail were to be carried during the summer navigation season between Dawson and Eagle, while only first class mail was to be carried during the winter (not to exceed 500 lbs. per week). This arrangement also provided for the Canadian postal system to carry closed bags of US mail from Seattle and Skagway to the lower Yukon River settlements in Alaska. The charges for the US mails were to be accounted for at the end of the year and charged back, including the portion of the contact to carry mails between Dawson and Eagle using proportional mileage.

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Figure 7. Cover sent from Fort Yukon, Alaska on March 3, 1903 to Dawson, Yukon where it was received on March 22, 1903 during the first winter of the Dawson to Eagle, Alaska international mail service.
Figure 8. Cover sent from South Hero, Vermont on July 8, 1903 to Anvik, Alaska showing transit through the Yukon by closed bag service. Note the Skagway, Alaska transit marking of July 18, 1903 and the Eagle, Alaska transit marking of July 23, 1903 showing a remarkable five day transit time through the Yukon by river steamer.
The famous dog musher Percy De Wolfe held this contact from March 1, 1915 until the opening of navigation in 1918, and then until the contact was terminated in 1949, although he continued to carry the mails between Dawson and Forty Mile, Yukon until he died in 1951. De Wolfe was born in Nova Scotia and had come to the Yukon during the Gold Rush. In 1915 when this cover was carried, De Wolfe was to get paid $125 per trip once per week for the whole year. The winter weight limit for mail was 800 lbs. of which up to half could be US mail, or more if there was not enough Canadian mail. The first mail of the 1915 winter season between Eagle and Dawson arrived on October 25 (Dawson Daily News, October 26, 1915) with the next mail on November 2.

**Summary of the Cover Routing**

Using the above CAE movements and schedules for mail services in and out of Dawson based on items in the Dawson Daily News and other material from my Yukon postal history collection, the following detailed schedule for the cover can be put together from Bernard Harbour to Ottawa:

- April 21, 1915—Dog team from Bernard Harbour, NWT
- May 8—Letter written
- May 11—Letter sent by dog team on to Baillie Island, NWT, where Captain Sweeney was wintering
- July 10—Schooner Alaska leaves Baillie Island
- July 13—Alaska arrives at Herschel Island, Yukon with Expedition mail
- September—Expedition mail put on board the Gladiator with Captain Lane for journey south
- September 16—Gladiator returns to Herschel Island due to ice
- September 30—Party takes Expedition mail to Yukon mainland in a whale boat and then by dog team to Rampart House, Yukon
- October 18—Party reaches Rampart House, Captain Lane takes Expedition mail forward to Fort Yukon and Circle, Alaska
- October 27—Lane reaches Circle, Expedition mail put into Alaska system under closed bag, carried by dog team to Dawson, Yukon
- November 13 or 20—Mail leaves Eagle, Alaska for Dawson, Yukon
- November 15 or 22—Mail arrives at Dawson from Eagle
- November 20 or 24—Mail leave Dawson for Whitehorse, Yukon on White Pass and Yukon Route winter stage service
- November 24 or 28—Mail arrive in Whitehorse, outbound mail put on the White Pass and Yukon Railway to Skagway, Alaska
- December 1—Canadian Pacific Railway ship Princess Sophia leaves Skagway for south
- December 11—Cover placed in the mail at Ottawa
Intercepted Mail?

Stefansson returned from the north when he chartered the ship *Polar Bear* from Captain Louis Lane, who had stopped at Cape Kellett, Banks Island on August 11, 1915 (Dartmouth College, Stefansson Diary). Stefansson was at Herschel Island on August 17-23 before returning to Cape Kellett in early September for another season of northern exploration.

While at Herschel Island, Stefansson opened all the incoming official mail, even if it was addressed to Dr. Anderson, according to his August 23, 1915 report to G.J. Desbarats, Deputy Minister, Naval Service (*Library and Archives Canada* (LAC). RG 42 Marine Branch, Series C-1, Volume 476, *Canadian Arctic Expedition--Stefansson Arctic Expedition--Progress reports in Arctic* (Stefansson). Files 84-2-29, Part 3). Anderson also reported on Stefansson intercepting and opening his incoming and possibly, outgoing mail (see Table 1 on page 27). His outgoing reports are summarized below and display his concerns about the mail. Some of these reports were received in Ottawa at the same time as my cover.

It might be reasonable to determine whether Stefansson actually opened the letter that Anderson sent from De Witt Clinton Point on May 8, 1915, and whether a replacement cover was put on the letter by Stefansson. The letter is handwritten but the cover bears a typewritten address, which at first might support the contention that Stefansson replaced an original handwritten cover.

However, if one compares the typewriter face amongst the return address on the cover, a report sent by Anderson from Bernard Harbour around the same time as shown in Table 1 and a report by Stefansson from the same period, it is clear that the cover was addressed on the typewriter used by Anderson at Bernard Harbour (see Figure 5). The style and punctuation of the return address on the cover and report are very similar. Anderson’s typewriter at Bernard Harbour has very pointed capital “A” while Stefansson’s has a flat capital “A”. (See Figure 9 on page 26.) As noted in his field notes, Anderson did not have much time to attend to personal correspondence in late 1914 and early 1915. Perhaps Anderson simply addressed some blank CAE stationery with a typewriter while at Bernard Harbour and took the envelopes with him on this trip in anticipation of having some spare time.

Conclusions

We know how long mail can take sometimes from isolated areas but even seven months, as this cover took, would be a stretch. Using the many primary and secondary sources available documenting the Canadian Arctic Expedition, I was able to definitively track the travels of this cover. Much of the initial research was conducted on the internet and using e-mail to verify the location of original records. We also know why it was free-franked and routed through Ottawa, in the manner that all outgoing Expedition mail was to be handled. Other postal historians are encouraged to dig into the available original records to explain the routing, rate and background on their own favourite cover.
Any comments or suggestions are always welcome and the author can be reached as follows:

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Figure 9. Comparison of typewritten return addresses on the cover and reports prepared by Anderson and Stefansson. Original reports courtesy of Library and Archives of Canada (LAC, RG 42, Volumes 476 and 478).
Table 1. Reports Sent by Dr. R.M. Anderson to G.J. Desparats, Deputy Minister, Department of Naval Service, Ottawa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Report &amp; Location</th>
<th>Receipt Date in Ottawa</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Method of Mailing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jan. 21, 1915 Bernard Harbour | Dec. 12, 1915 | • Report typewritten  
• Last report was dated Sept. 14, 1915  
• Anderson arrived at Bernard Harbour by dog team on Dec. 25, 1914 | • Same as described in this article |
| Apr. 19, 1915 Bernard Harbour | Dec. 12, 1915 | • Report typewritten  
• “Expect to start with Eskimo Palaiyak to join western survey party, bring them some auxiliary supplies, and probably assist them in their Spring work. Palaiyak will go on to Baillie Island with the mail and help on the Alaska to Herschel Island.” | • Same as described in this article |
| July 29, 1915 | Oct. 14, 1915 | • Report typewritten (different typeface than other typewritten reports)  
• Chipman, O’Neil and Ikey went on west on March 17, 1915 | • North Star given to Northern Party at Baillie Island. Mail likely went out on HBC chartered vessel Ruby directly from Baillie Island (did not stop at Herschel Island). |
• Mail from outside received at Bernard Harbour on November 9, 1915, first mail since Aug. 1914 while at Herschel Island (sent via Mackenzie River)  
• August 21, 1915 letter from Stefansson received and he stated, “I opened your official mail, also other envelopes which I thought might contain official mail as I have not completed my report to the Government. I am keeping these official letters but shall forward them with the El Suena.”  
• Aug. 27, 1915 letter from Baillie Island from Stefansson states: “I went through all the mail and pried into every package that looked as if it might contain one [nautical almanac] but to no purpose.”  
• “Also I do not know whether our mail was sent to Baillie Island on the North Star was set out without delay or interference. | • Likely taken out by ship via Herschel Island to Seattle. |

*Table continued on page 32*
Table 1 (continued). Reports Sent by Dr. R.M. Anderson to G.J. Desparats, Deputy Minister, Department of Naval Service, Ottawa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Report &amp; Location</th>
<th>Receipt Date in Ottawa</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Method of Mailing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 11, 1916 (continued)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“We have had grievance on the mail question since December, 1913 when Mr Stefansson attempted to have the Southern Party's mail from Collinson Point turned over to him after it had been mailed with R.N.W.M.P. at Herschel Island, in order that there would be no chance of mail getting to Ottawa and distributed from there before the London Chronicle should have Mr. Stefansson's stories. We have always felt that we might have a right to have our mail, both in and out, under department regulations, as expeditiously as any other members of the Expedition.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 1916 Cape Barrow</td>
<td>Aug. 28, 1916</td>
<td>• Report handwritten</td>
<td>• Overland to Fort Norman and then via the Mackenzie River mail route to Ottawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Report to be sent via Chipman and RNWMP Special Constable Arden to Fort Norman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Received first mail since Aug. 1914 in Nov. 1915 that included official orders up to May 1915</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• “Mr. Stefansson opened all my official mail last summer and anything that looked official and retained the official mail while sending the other mail in here on the Alaska on the pretext that mail came in that he needed my letters until he finished his reports. The official mail came in here eventually on the El Sueno a small vessel which Mr. Stefansson chartered to bring some more supplies here.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(LAC, RG 42 Marine Branch, Series C-1, Volume 478. Canadian Arctic Expedition-Stefansson Arctic Expedition—Progress reports in Arctic (Anderson) Files)
References

Canadian Museum of Nature, Vertebrate Section, Division of Zoology, Anderson Papers, Canadian Arctic Expedition Field Notes, April 21 to June 17, 1915.

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LAC. RG 42 Marine Branch, Series C-1, Volume 476, Canadian Arctic Expedition-Stefansson Arctic Expedition-Progress reports in Arctic. Files 84-2-29, Part 3, 1915-1917.