

# The Northerner

Number 97

Autumn 2015

**Newsletter of the Northern Canada Study Group  
NWT Yukon Labrador Early Manitoba, Northern Ontario, & BC  
A Study Group of the Postal History Society of Canada**

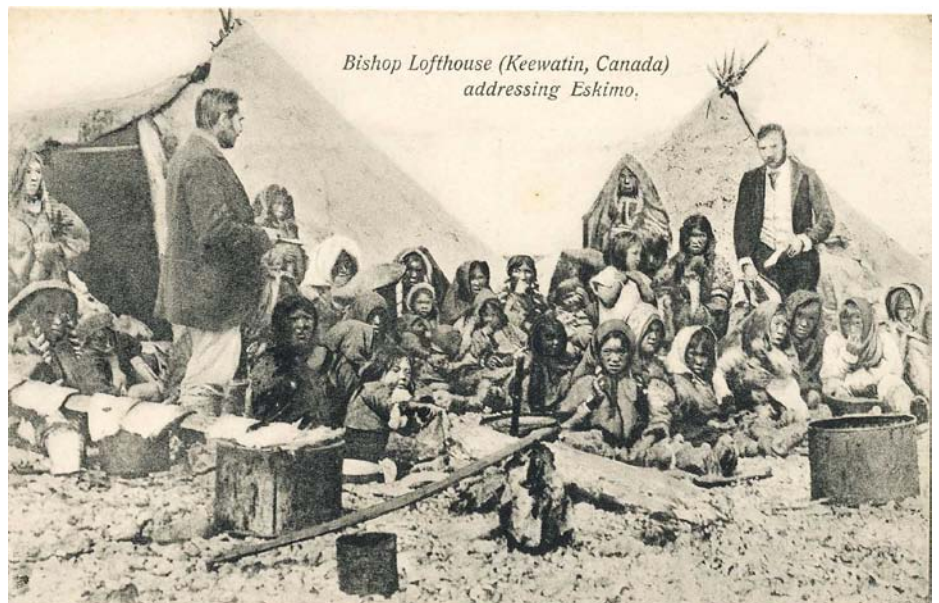
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[gray@scrimgeour.ca](mailto:gray@scrimgeour.ca)

## **Dr. Don Thompson's Keewatin Material.**

Thanks to Keith Spencer, I have been able to examine most of the District of Keewatin covers and cards owned by the late Don Thompson. This material is reproduced in this special issue of *The Northerner*. It will be auctioned in February 2016 by Eastern Auctions as part of the Thompson sale.

The boundaries of the District of Keewatin underwent many changes. Keewatin started as a territorial region between Ontario and Manitoba. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, both the Province of Manitoba and the Province of Ontario claimed this area. Two of these early Keewatin post offices were transferred to Manitoba: Whitemouth in 1882 and Cross Lake Station in 1886. The remaining open offices—farther east—were transferred for postal purposes to Ontario in 1886. This group included both the offices on the Canadian Pacific Railway and those south of the Lake of the Woods. There was a small cluster of post offices north of the original Manitoba: Gimli, Hoosavick, and Pine Falls (which became Fort Alexander in 1881). The 20<sup>th</sup> century group of Keewatin towns (“Later Keewatin” in the following table) were north of the Provinces of Manitoba and Ontario. When Ontario and Manitoba were extended north in 1912, these six offices were incorporated into Manitoba. The detailed postal history of the offices of Keewatin is described in References 1 through 4.

To start, here's an unused picture post card showing Bishop Joseph Lofthouse Sr. (1855–1933; first Bishop of Keewatin) addressing Eskimos.



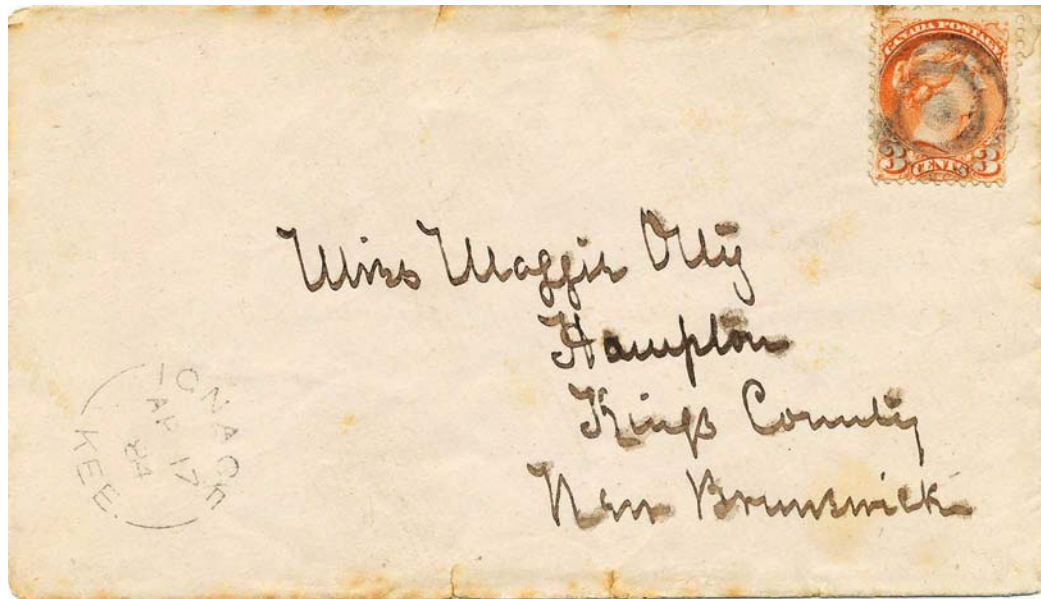
The covers and cards are presented in the same order as the list on p. 2954; i.e., alphabetically for each of three groups: Early Keewatin – mostly on the CPR, Lake of the Woods region, and Later Keewatin.

#### Early Keewatin

**HOOSAVICK, KEE.** The HOOSAVICK, KEE. postmark on this pair of 3¢ Small Queen stamps is dated NO 24, 1879. The provenance of these stamp: originated with Graham Noble, and sold at Bob Lee and then LCD. This is the only report I have for Hoosavick (also written Husavik). Hoosavick is on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, near the lake's south end.

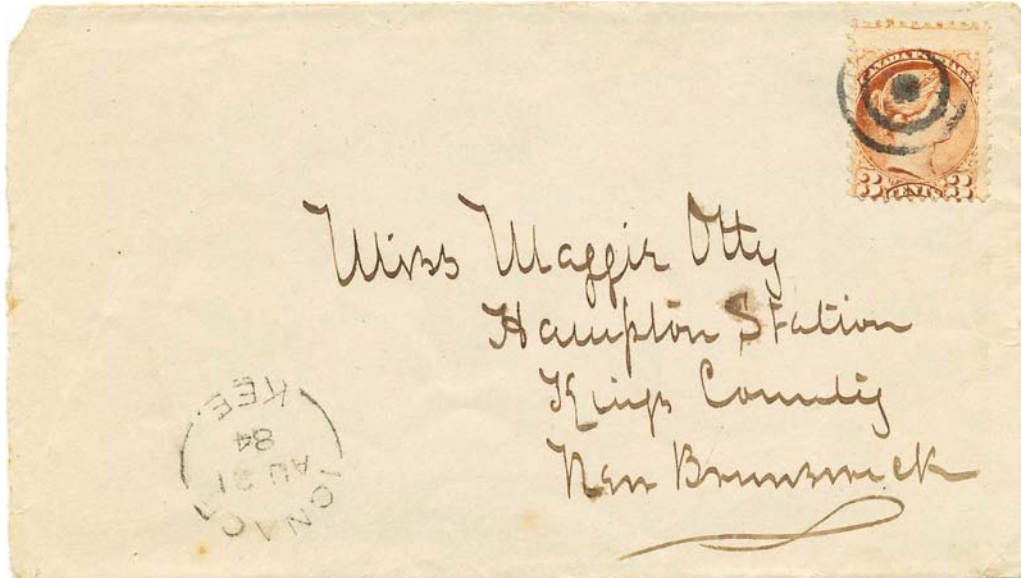


**IGNACE, KEE.** The only two reported, postmarked IGNACE, KEE. covers are in this accumulation. They both are addressed to Miss Maggie Otty, Hampton, New Brunswick. Both were mailed in 1884: one in April and one in August.



Here is the April 17, 1884 cover. It has no backstamps. I have recorded that it appeared in the 1967 “George Hicks” sale, then in the Ed Harris sale at Maresch.

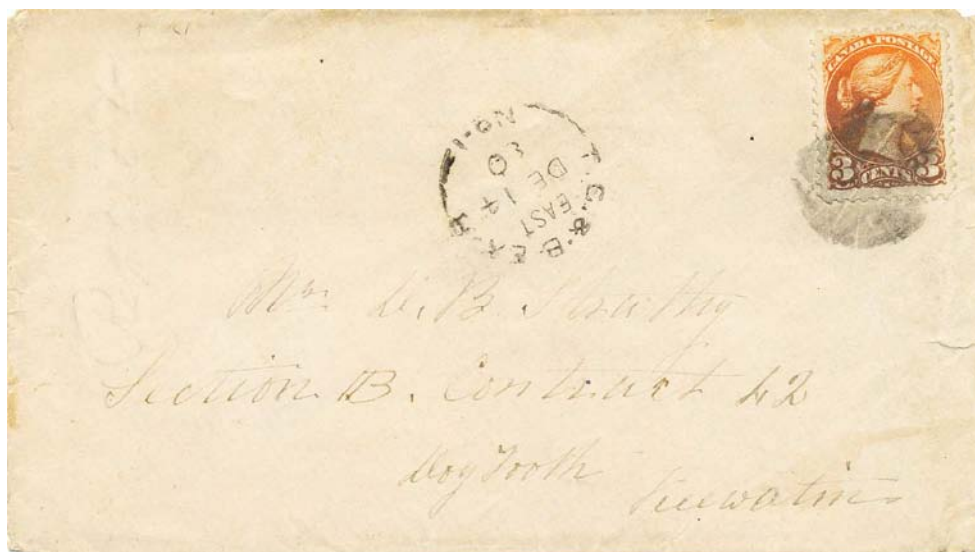
Next is the August 21, 1884 IGNACE, KEE. cover. Its only backstamp is WINNIPEG, CANADA dated 2 / AU 22 / 84. Recall that the CPR was not operating east to Toronto until 1885, so mail from Ignace went west to Winnipeg, then east via the United States.



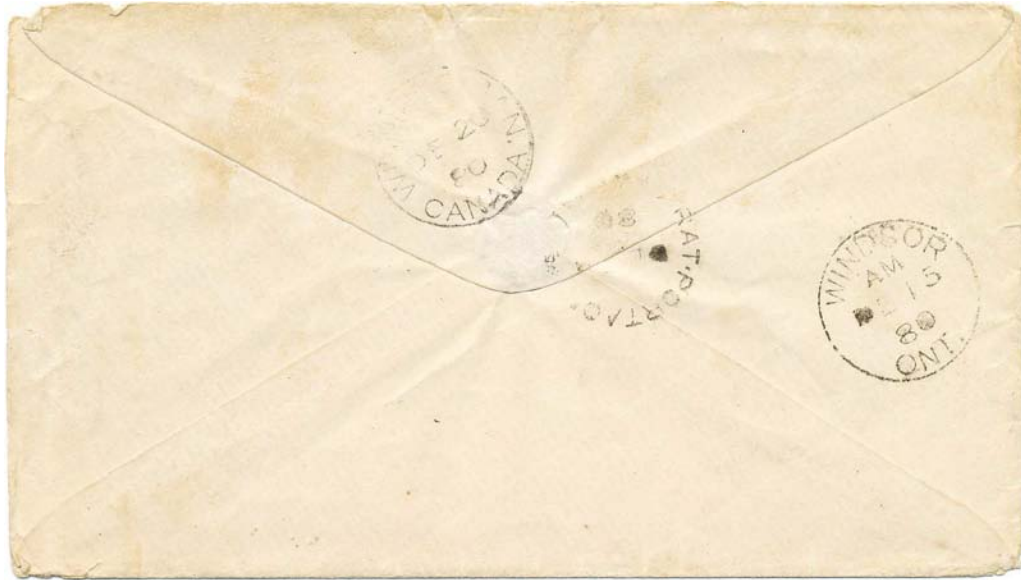
This postmark was illustrated first by Frank Campbell. The cover was sold in R.A. Lee Sale #61.

**RAT PORTAGE.** All of the remaining Early Keewatin – CPR line covers in the Thompson collection that I have seen are from Rat Portage (now part of Kenora, Ontario). Rat Portage had two Keewatin hammers: one reading RAT·PORTAGE KEE./CANADA that was proofed on DE 6, 1879 and one reading RAT·PORTAGE, KEE. proofed on JAN 3, 1883.

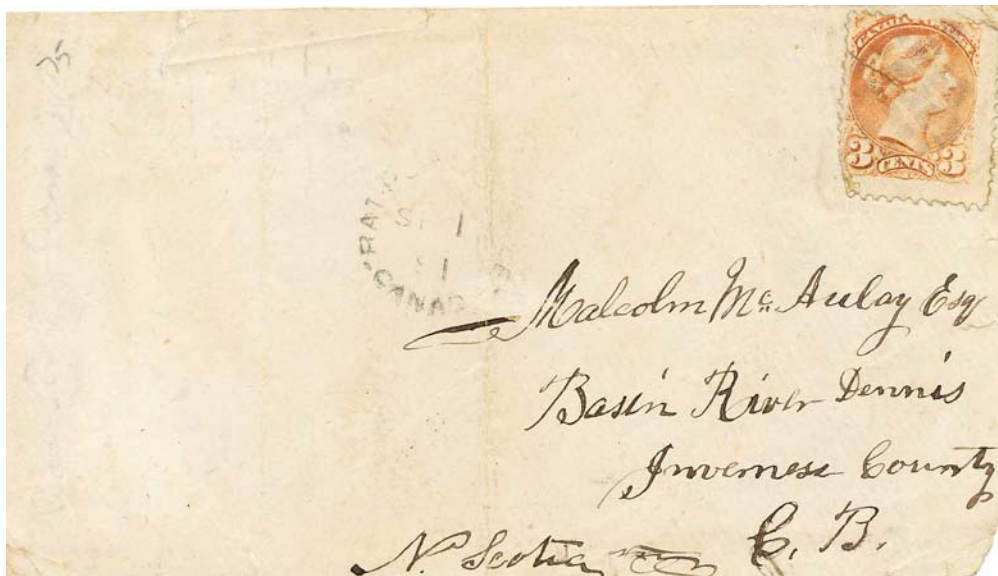
The earliest of these covers (with Hammer 1 as a backstamp) is shown next. It originated on the Toronto, Grey, and Bruce Railway on December 10, 1880. It is addressed to Mr. D.B. Strathy. Section B, Contract 42, Dog Tooth, Keewatin. Dog Tooth was a CPR construction site between Rat Portage and Eagle River. The front of the cover is shown below, and the reverse is shown on the next page.



Here is the reverse of the cover to Dog Tooth. The backstamps are WINDSOR, ONT. (AM / DE 15 / 1880), WINNIPEG MAN. / CANADA (DE 20 / 1880) and RAT-PORTAGE-KEE / CANADA (DE 28, 1880). I have a fairly similar cover to the non-PO point Dog Tooth, Keewatin. This cover is ex-Stewart Kenyon.



The second item bearing the first broken circle (RAT PORTAGE-KEE / CANADA) is shown below. It is a front only, with the pencil notation "Malcolm D. McLean, Hawk Lake, Sect. B, C.P.R. Via Winnipeg, Manitoba" on the reverse. I recorded this as belonging to Graham Noble. It passed through a John Talman auction, then Bob Lee's sale in March 1990. The originating postmark is RAT PORTAGE-KEE / CANADA dated SP 1, 1881.



The remainder of the Rat Portage covers are dated with the RAT PORTAGE, KEE. (second) broken circle datestamp. This postmark is one of the two most common for KEE. but is still very desirable. I remember a late afternoon about 1978 when Phyllis and I were shopping at the South Leaside Loblaws store in Toronto when an excited Allan Steinhart rushed in [to buy a large steak for his dinner], and said “Scrimgeour, I just met someone who has about a dozen RAT PORTAGE, KEE. covers.” This turned out to be David Ewens of Toronto Book Auctions (formerly Montreal Book Auctions). The company had sold the large Robert Bell manuscript estate in four dedicated sales, and David—for his efforts in handling the huge consignment—was given the envelopes that had contained the Bell letters. David formed a collection of Western Canada postal history based on the Bell covers. I have a photocopy of this exhibit, from which over the next few years David sold the covers and registration slips. A number of the pages of the photocopies have the notation “AK”, which meant Absolute Keeper. Gems, of which I am fortunate to have a few. There were many nice Bell covers from others parts of Canada, which David kept in a carton. Regarding the Rat Portage covers, David sold a few through Maresch’s and Talman’s auctions but sold the bulk to Allan or to me. Five of them wound up in the Thompson collection.

The eight RAT PORTAGE, KEE. items owned by Don Thompson are shown in chronological order. The first was mailed there on MY 9, 1883 to Englishtown, N.S. (received there MY 9, 1883). My records show this was in Bob Lee’s Sale #61. The datestamp was proofed on JA 3, 1883 and this is the earliest strike I have recorded.

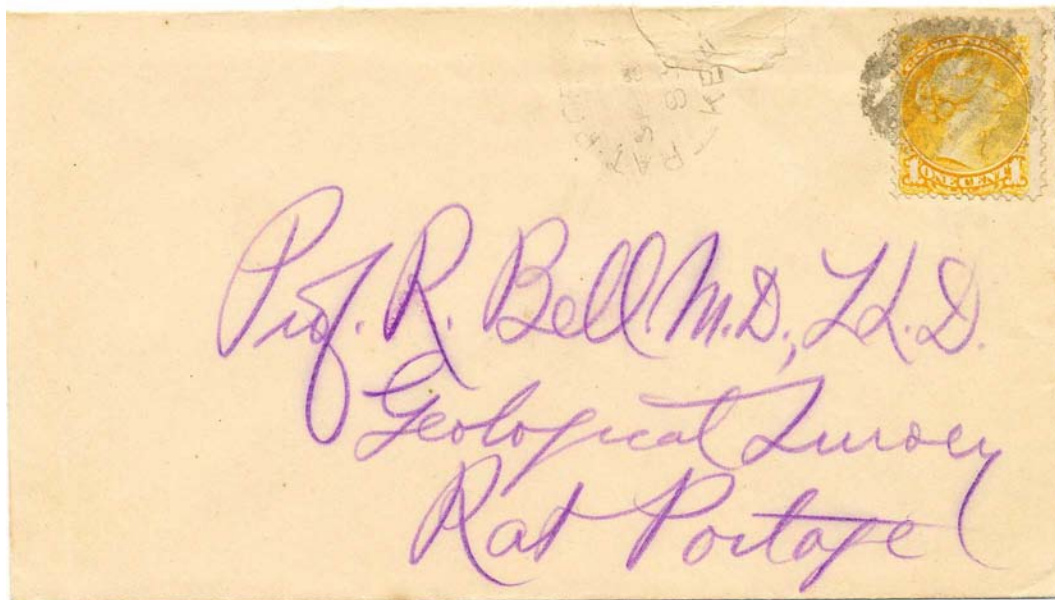


Now we come to the first of the Robert Bell RATPORTAGE covers (top of next page). It entered the mail stream at Rat Portage while Bell was there for survey work.

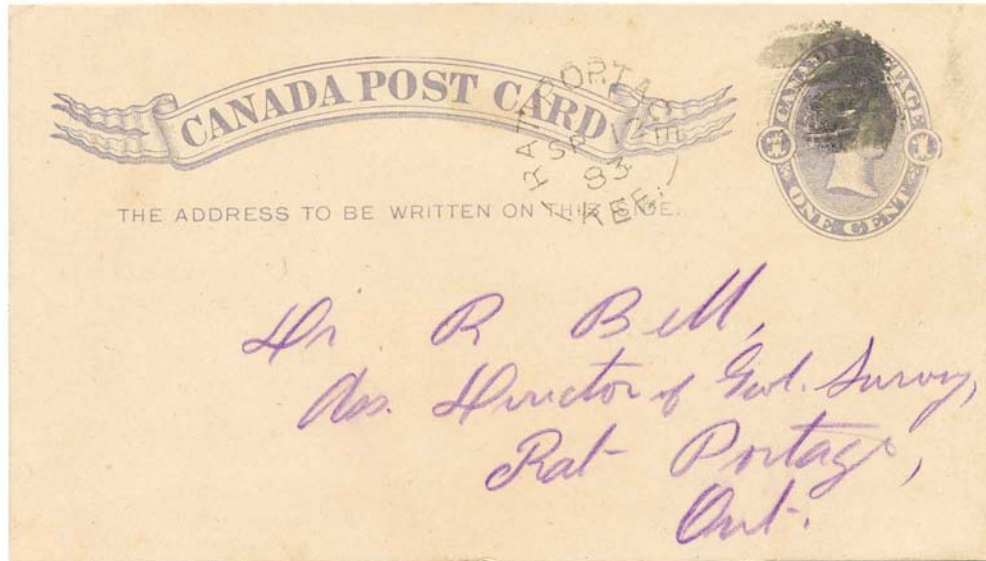


The cover was mailed August 11, 1883. There are, naturally, no backstamps. The postage was paid with a 3¢ Small Queen stamp, not a 1¢ stamp, which suggests that it was written outside Rat Portage and carried to the post office there. Maresch Sale #188, Lot 602.

The next cover to Dr. Bell is a drop letter mailed on SP 8, 1883. Postage for this local letter was 1¢. There is a cork cancel. Notes with the cover say that it came via a John Talman auction.



The next RAT-PORTAGE item is a postal stationery card mailed locally to Dr. Bell on SP 12, 1883. This card was in Wild Rose Sale #26, then in the Stewart Kenyon sale at Hennok. The card carries a message to Bell from a member of the survey party. Written SP 11, 1883.



11/9/83.

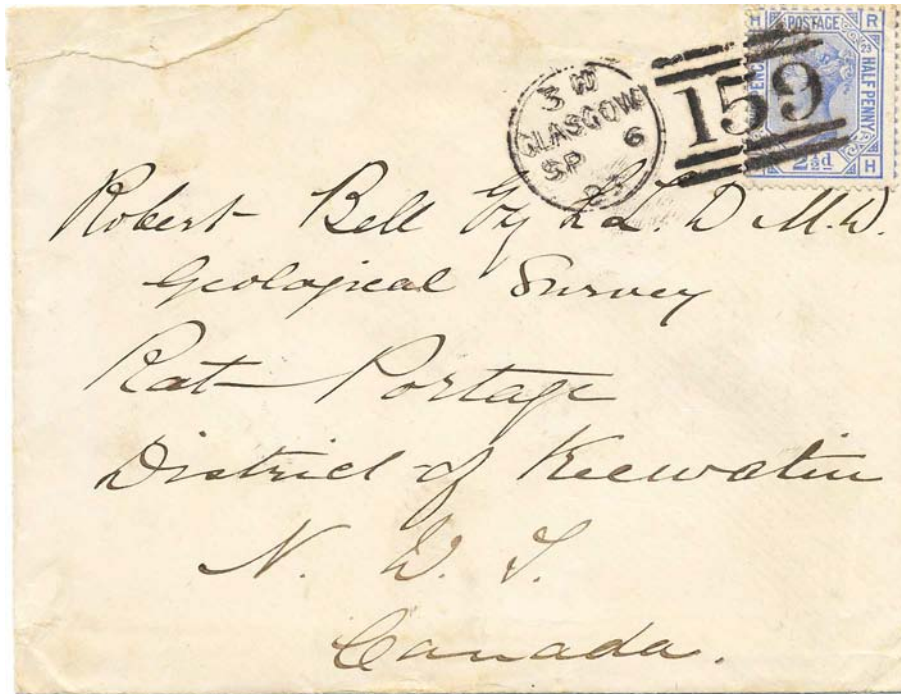
Robert Bell, M. H.

Dear Sir,

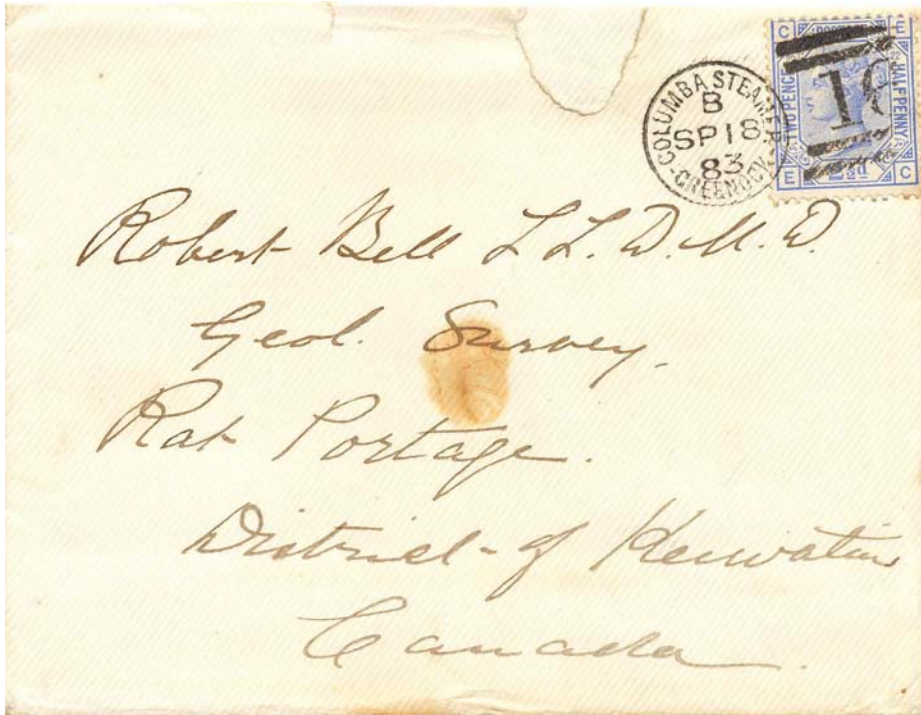
I left Dawson this morning at the entrance to Blind Lake. He has gone into the lake with the canoe and two men but is to be in town before Saturday night. I am now going out in the direction of Hay Island to make surveys of several islands but shall be back by Friday night.

Yours etc.  
 L.W.D.

The next two covers are from Great Britain to Bell at Rat Portage. The first was mailed at Glasgow, Scotland on SP 6, 1883. Its sole backstamp is RA:PORTAGE, KEE. SP 21, 1883. Via Bob Lee, March 1990.



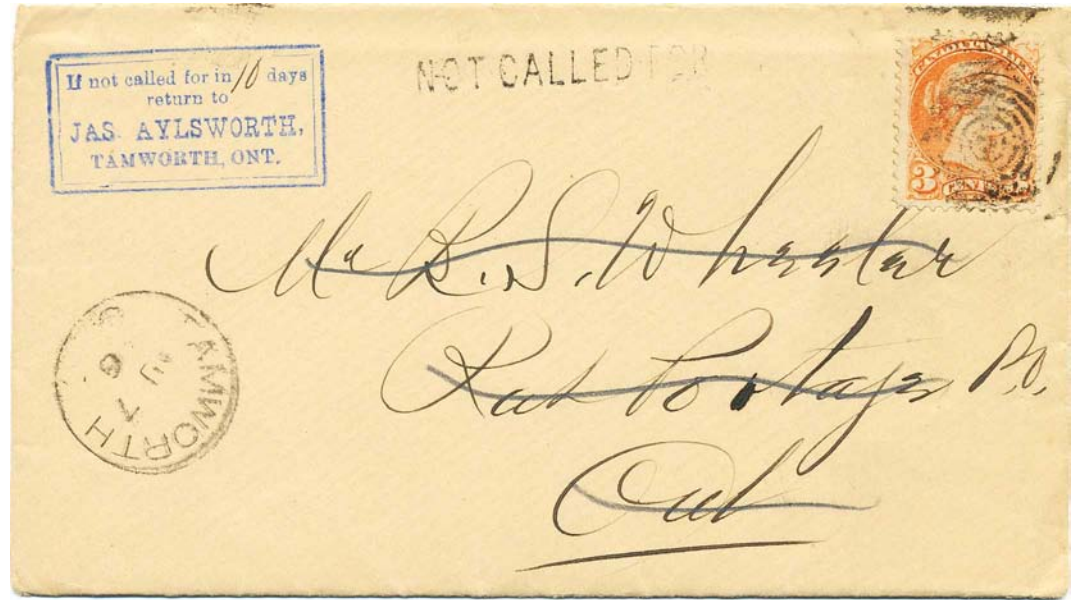
This cover was posted on the Clumba Steamer / Greenock B / SP 18 / 1883. It was received in Rat Portage on OC 3, 1883. Purchased at a Talman auction. Originated with David Ewens, of course.



Don Thompson's last RAT·PORTAGE, KEE. cover is a registered, mailed to Philadelphia on FE 5, 1886. It bears a 3¢ Small Queen stamp and a 5¢ Registered Letter stamp. Both stamps are cancelled with targets. I don't recall seeing another registered cover from Rat Portage. [I do have a registration slip.] Note the Winnipeg oval registration mark (FEB 6). There is a partial and very light RPO backstamp; C.P.R. ??? xxx/3 dated FE 6 and a partial ST. VINCENT & WINNIPEG ?? backstamp dated FE 7. Scarce RPOs but not clear enough for me to identify easily. Both very desirable RPOs, I think.



Here's the last RATPORTAGE, KEE. cover in the collection. It is a cover sent from Tamworth, Ontario by James Aylsworth to Mr. R.S. Whestar, Rat Portage P.O., Ontario. It was posted on August 7, 1886 and reached Rat Portage on August 13, 1886. This is the latest reported use of this postmark. The letter was NOT CALLED FOR so—having a return address—it was returned to Tamworth via Napanee, Ontario (SP 6, 1886). A note with the cover says that it came from Chas. Firby, October 1989. The enclosed letter is an announcement of a Lorne Lodge, A.F. & A.M. meeting to be held August 17<sup>th</sup>.



There are two more items related to the Rat Portage area. There is a postal stationery card mailed with a RAT-PORTAGE / ONT. postmark dated OC 16, 1889. No Winnipeg backstamp.



There is an uprated 1¢ postal stationery envelope mailed at Winnipeg on 4 / AU 19 / 1897, addressed to “Mrs. Mulock, Keewatin”. It has an 80% strike of KEEWATIN, ONT. dated AU 19, 1897. Only part of the T of ONT. is there (shown below the cover). It was sold as having a KEEWATIN, KEE. backstamp.



This was mailed to the town of Keewatin, Ontario, which—with Rat Portage and Norman—became part of Kenora.

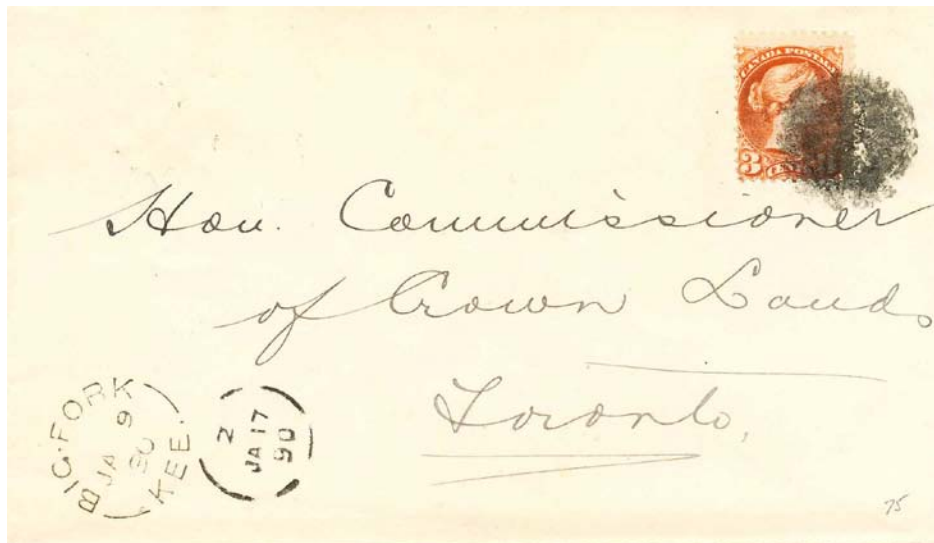
### Rainy River Area Portion of Keewatin

South of the Lake of the Woods, there were several communities that had Keewatin postmarks: Big Fork, Fort Frances (misspelled Francis), and Rainy River.

**BIG FORK.** There are three covers with BIG-FORK, KEE. postmarks, all used as originating postmarks. That's three of the six reported Big Fork, Kee. postmarks. All three covers bear a 3¢ Small Queen stamp cancelled by a cork. The earliest (mailed DE 26, 1889) was sent to Toronto [see the JA 4, 1890 carrier mark]. There is a RAT PORTAGE, ONT. backstamp applied in January 1890. Ex Carstairs and Kenyon.



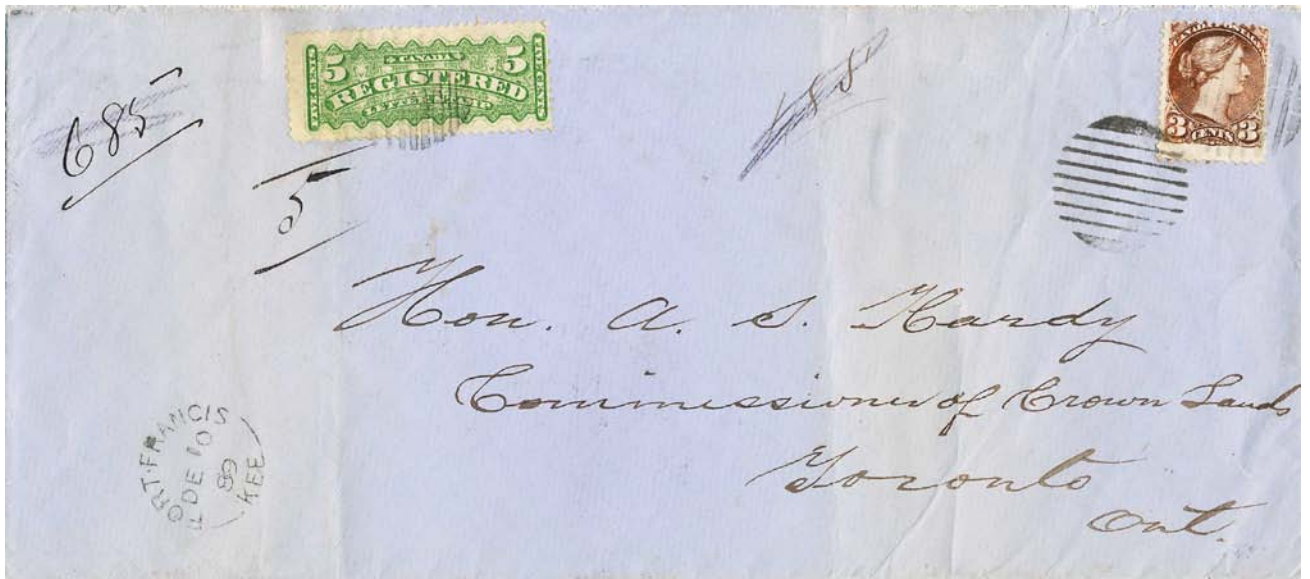
The next BIGFORK, KEE. cover is dated JA 9, 1890. It also is going to Toronto. It has a RAT-PORTAGE, ONT. backstamp dated JAN 4, 1890. From J.N. Sissons, July 1968.



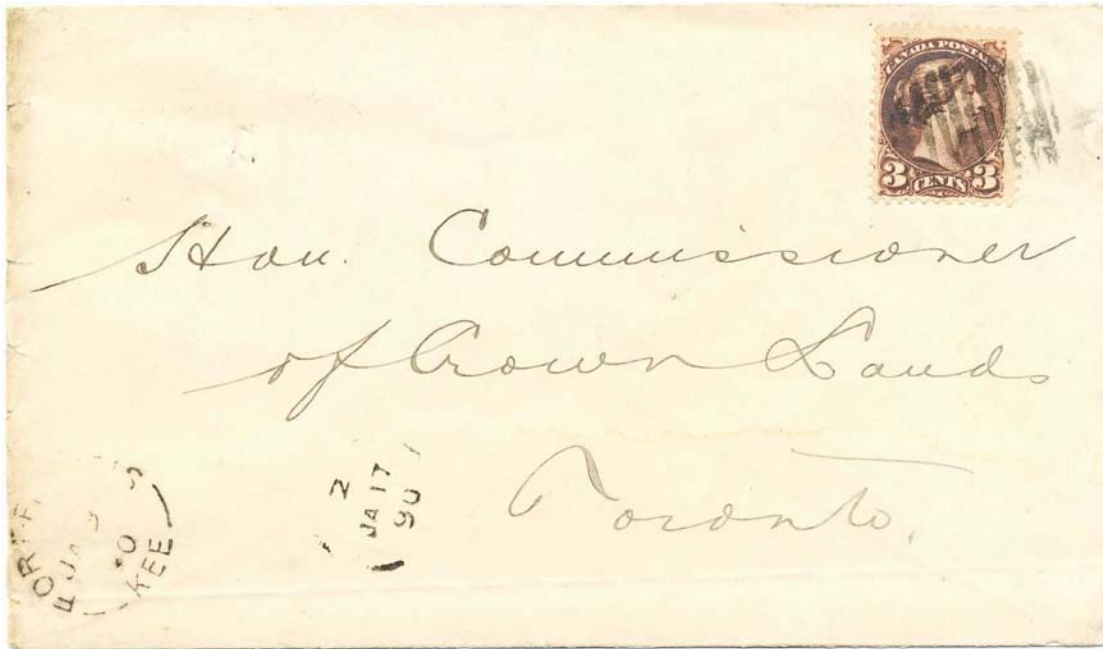
The third BIG-FORK, KEE. cover also came from a Jim Sissons auction: July 10, 1975. It was mailed on April 10, 1890 (the latest known use of the Big Fork, Kee. hammer).



**FORT FRANCIS.** There are four FORT-FRANCIS, KEE. covers in the Thompson collection. The earliest is a large registered cover dated DE 10, 1889. It has a DE 10, 1889 RAT-PORTAGE backstamp, along with C.P. Ry. Pt. ARTHUR & WINNIPEG M.C. / 6 / E / DE 16, 1889 and TORONTO / CANADA DE 20, 1889. Franked with a 3¢ Small Queen and a 5¢ RLS. Ex Ed Harris.



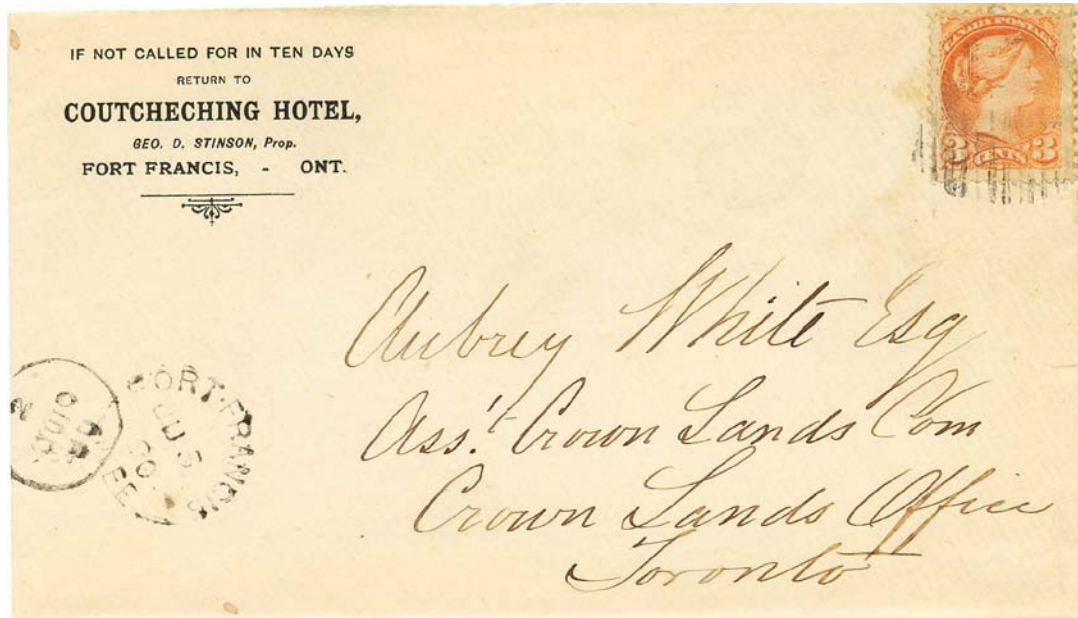
This example was mailed to Toronto at FORTFRANCIS, KEE. on JA 9, 1890. It has a JA 14, 1890 Rat Portage, Ontario backstamp and was received in Toronto on January 17<sup>th</sup>. It has an interesting provenance. It was bought by "Peters" at the Sissons Westhaver sale in January 1962, acquired from him in 1968, by Jim Karr. It was sold by Jim in Bob Lee's Sale 73 and in Maresch 188. In 2007, it was sold at Firby's sale of Alan Selby material.



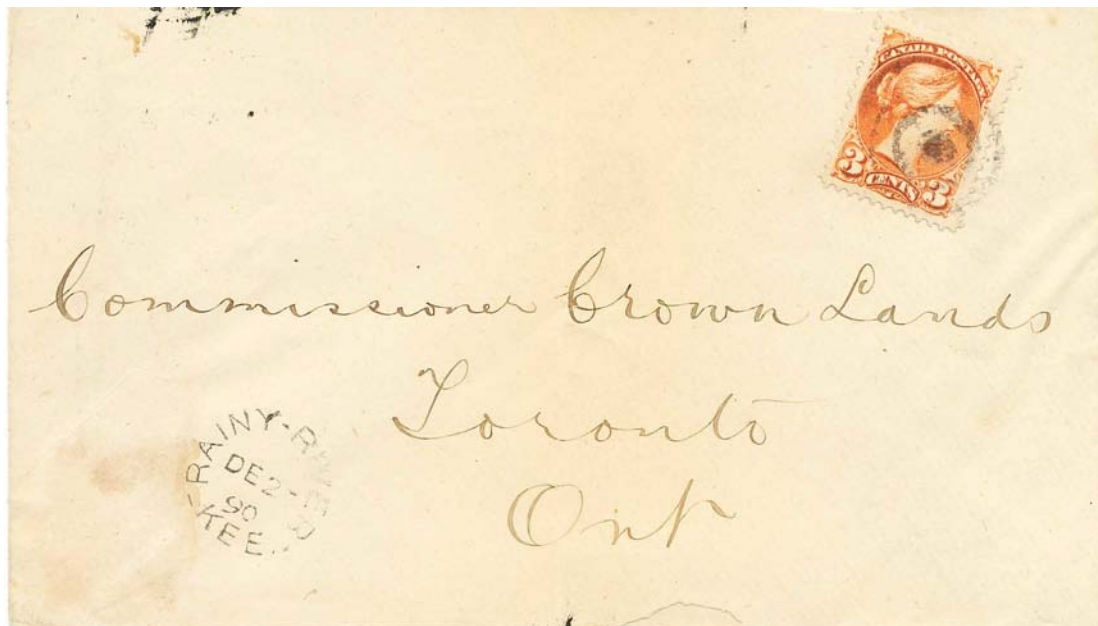
This cover to Cache Bay P.O., Ontario was mailed at Fort Frances on March 24, 1890. It bears a March 31, 1890 Rat Portage, Ontario backstamp. Cache Bay is near Lake Nippissing, west of North Bay. This cover was in Bob Lee's Sale 74.



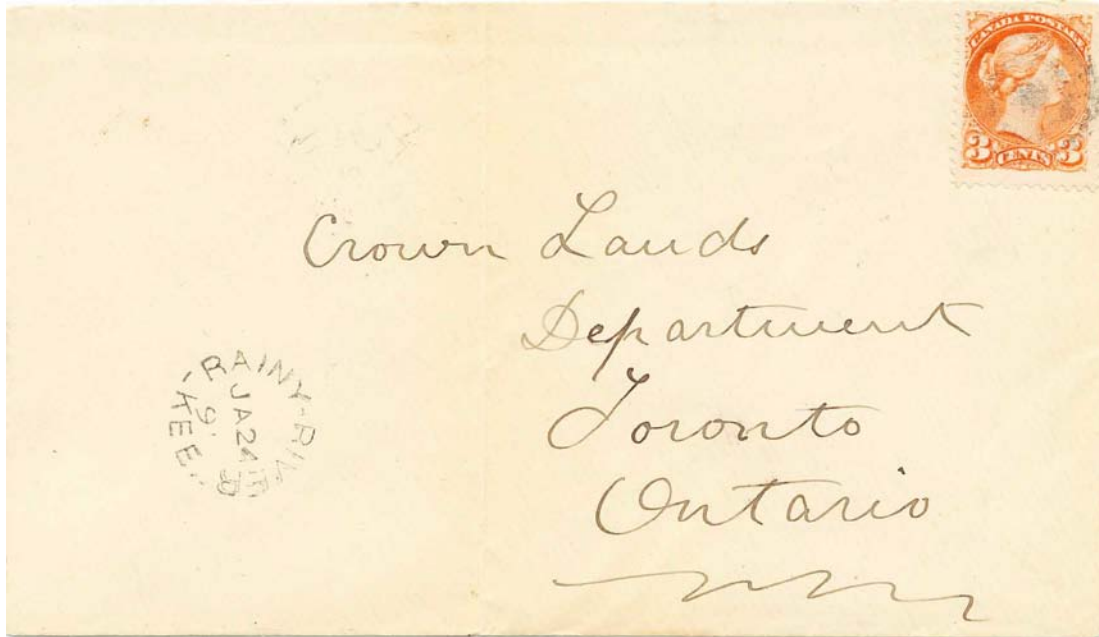
The latest FORTFRANCIS, KEE. cover (JU 5, 1890) has a Coutcheching Hotel, Fort Francis, Ont. corner card. It has a June 7<sup>th</sup> Rat Portage, Ontario back stamp and was received in Toronto on June 10<sup>th</sup>. It was purchased by Don Thompson from the DeVolpi Sale at Jim Sissons in May 1990.



**RAINY RIVER.** There are four RAINY-RIVER, KEE. covers in Don Thompson's collection. The earliest is a Crown Lands cover mailed DE 25(?), 1890.



Here is another Crown Lands cover, mailed JA 24, 1891. Transited Rat Portage on JA 29, 1891 and reached Toronto on FE 2. The first three Rainy River covers all have 3-ring target cancels.



The next RAINY-RIVER, KEE. cover was posted on FE 18, 1891. It is a Pearce Seed cover, to London. It transited Rat Portage on FE 29 and reached Toronto MR 3. It was once owned by Vincent G. Greene. It was Lot 701 in the Westhaver January 1962 sale. At the time it was first mounted, the write up said "Not listed in Boggs' and the only recorded example" Pencilled in is "One other known". The census at the end of this issue shows 22 recorded.

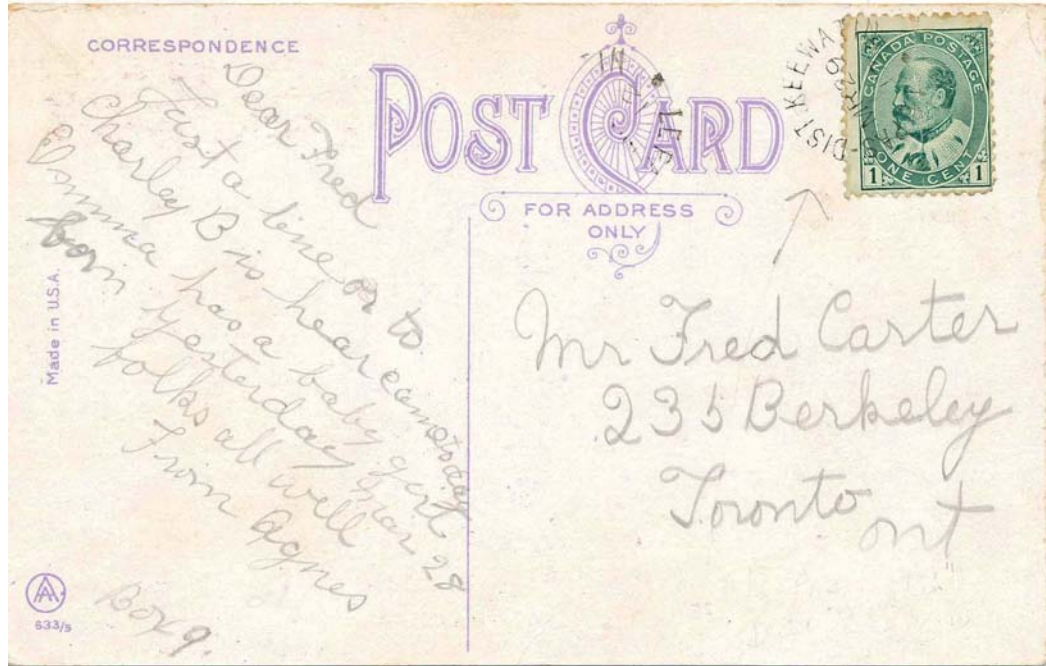


Later Keewatin

LE PAS. To conclude the Keewatin postmarks, we now turn to two communities that are now in northern Manitoba: The Pas (four strikes) and Norway House (three strikes). The earliest of the LE PAS DIST. KEEWATIN / • postmarks is on a picture post card mailed to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan on AP 4, 1911. It was Lot 426 in Jim Hennok Sale 57.



This greeting card has a MR 29, 1912 strike of the LE PAS·DIST. KEEWATIN postmark.



This postal stationery envelope to Bruton, England was mailed on August 7, 1912. It bears two strikes of the LE PAS·DIST. KEEWATIN postmark. There are two BATH S.O. / 3 transit marks dated 10AM / AU 21 / 12. Sealed with a wax seal.



The latest Le Pas postmark is on a real photo view card showing a Bird's Eye View of Le Pas. It was sent to Merritt, B.C. on August 22, 1912. Bob Lee October 2000.



**NORWAY HOUSE.** There are five items from Norway House bearing the NORWAY HOUSE / KEEWATIN postmark. The earliest is a letter written to H.M.E. Evans at Churchill by F.C. Swift. See Item 668, *The Northerner*, p. 2267 for a description of the correspondence that this letter came from. This is the second letter in the Evans correspondence owned by Keith Spencer. The cover was postmarked at Norway House on January 29, 1907, and it has backstamps that were applied at Icelandic River (February 9) and Gimli (February 12).



The next came from Jim Hennok's Sale 57. It's a postmark on the picture side of a card mailed at Norway House (FE 11, 1908). The card is addressed to Windsor, N.S.



A late addition. Here is another card with a FE 11, 1908 postmark. It also was mailed at Norway House to Nova Scotia.



This cover to Abbotsford, Quebec was mailed on AU 14, 1910. It passed through Selkirk, Manitoba on AU 19 and reached Abbotsford on AU 22.



This greeting card was addressed to Norway House, Via W. Selkirk, Man. It was mailed at Brampton, Ontario on MR 20, 1911. Received at Norway House on AP 6, 1911.



Here is one of several KEEWATIN, ONT. covers owned by Dr. Thompson. Keewatin is a community adjacent to Rat Portage. It—along with Rat Portage and Norman—was incorporated into the city of Kenora. The Keewatin, Ontario (2) post office opened on July 1, 1888, and is still open. This example was mailed on MR 31, 1890.



There are two nice covers not from Keewatin but from northern Ontario in this accumulation. The first is a stampless cover from Manitowaning written to Dr. Robert Bell care of G. Notman, Dundas. It was mailed July 2, 1861 and received in Dundas on July 10<sup>th</sup>.



Finally, here's a FORT-WILLIAM / LAKE SUPERIOR cover (Crown Lands) mailed JA 30, 1879. Franked with a 1¢ cent and a 2¢ Small Queen, and received FE 17. Ex-Kenyon.



You may wonder why the accumulation shown here does not have a Lake Deception, Kee cover. Don Thompson attended the Bob Lee sale in 1992 at which two were sold. Allan Steinhart bought one and I bought the other. Recently, I found out that Don had driven from Toronto to Kelowna for the sale. He fell asleep before these two covers came up, and missed bidding. When he woke up and found out, he asked if bidding could be reopened but Bob said no. I have always wondered who bought the copy from Allan.

Here is a list of the post offices in Keewatin and their broken circle postmarks.

**Broken Circle Postmarks of the District of Keewatin**

Name Nom	Proof date Date d'épreuve	Type Type	Diam Diam	Opened Ouverture	Closed Fermeture	Early Plus ancienne	Late Plus récente	Comments Commentaires
<b>Early Keewatin</b>								
BIG FORK	OC 6 1883	A1	22	AU 1 1883	JUL 1 1886	SP 9/84	AP 10/90	To ONT
CROSS-LAKE-KEE/CANADA	DE 6, 1879	A4	21	NO 1 1879	DE 1 1880	AP 23/80	SP 22/80	To MAN
CROSS-LAKE-STATION, KEE	*	A1		SP 20 1883	JUL 1 1886	OC 15/87		To MAN
DARLINGTON, ONT	JAN 3, 1879 Became CROSS LAKE	A2	21	DE 1 1878	NO 1 1879	SP 2/79		
FORT ALEXANDER, KEE.	DE 2 1881 Was PINE FALLS; was in Manitoba only, not Keewatin.	A1	23	NO 1 1881		MR 17,/84	MY 9/87	
FORT FRANCIS, N.W.T.	DE 2 1881	A2	20	AP 3 1876				4,3.5 mm arcs
FORT FRANCIS, KEE	AP 9 1877	A1	21	"		JUN 1883	NO 22/90	6 mm arcs
Both these hammers are incorrect spellings for FORT FRANCES.								
GIMLI	JAN 2 1878	A1	21.5	DE 1 1877	JUL 1 1881	AP 19/83		To MAN
HAWK LAKE				MY 1 1885	JUL 31 1885			
No datestamp reported; no proof strike.								
HOOSAVICK	SP 20 1878	A1	20	JUL 1 1878	FE 28 1881	NO 24/79		To MAN
IGNACE, KEE	*	A1	22	FE 1 1884	JUL 1 1886	AP 17/84	AU 21/84	To ONT
KEEWATIN-ONT./CANADA	OC 9, 1879 Became RAT PORTAGE.	A4	21.5	SP 1 1879	NO 1 1879			
KEEWATIN-MILLS, ONT.	OC 23, 1880	A2	21.5	MR 1 1880	JUL 1 1886			
KEEWATIN MILLS, KEE.	*	A1	21	"	"	AP 15/85	AU 5/86	To ONT
LAKE DECEPTION, KEE.	JAN 26, 1881 Became CROSS LAKE STATION	A1	21.5	DE 1 1880	JAN 31 1884	JUN 28/81	1883	
PINE FALLS	DE 6 1879 Became FORT ALEXANDER	A4	22	NO 1 1879	JUL 1 1881			
RAINY RIVER	*	A1	19.5	OC 1 1885	JUL 1 1886	FE 24/88	SP 14/93	To ONT
RAT-PORTAGE KEE./CANADA	DE 6, 1879	A4	21	NO 1 1879	JUL 1 1886	AP 27/80	MY /83	
RAT-PORTAGE, KEE.	JAN 3, 1883	A1	21.5	"	"	MY 9/83	AU 13/86	To ONT
VERMILLION BAY, ONT	*	A2	22	JUL 1 1884	JUL 1 1886	DEC 29/84		
In December 1884, used an ONT hammer (no proof strike), did not use a KEE. hammer.								
WHITEMOUTH, KEE.	JAN 3, 1881	A1	21.5	NO 1 1880	JUL 1 1881	OC 17/81	FE 1/86	To MAN

**Later Keewatin**

BARROWS, SASK.	*	A2	21	MR 1 1904	JUL 1 1918	SP 20/07	AU 24/10	
BARROWS, KEEWATIN	OC 3 1911	A3	19	"	"	JUL 24/12	FE 25/13	To MAN
CEDAR LAKE				AP 1 1905	?? 1915			
	No early hammer recorded yet; to MAN.							
GRAND RAPIDS				DE 1 1900	?? 1914			
	Opened in SASK.; to MAN about 1914; no early hammer recorded yet.							
MOOSE LAKE, SASK.	AU 16 1907	A2	19	JUL 1 1907	JUL 1 1913			To MAN
NORWAY HOUSE, KEEWATIN	*	A3	20	DE 1 1904	JUL 1 1912	JA 2/08	1913	
	Opened in SASK, transferred to KEE, then to MAN.							
THE PAS, SASK	*	A2	21	NO 1 1895	1915 or 1918			
THE PAS-DIST. KEEWATIN	MR 25 1911	C5	19	"	"	" AP 2/11	OC 11/12	No arcs
	Opened in SASK, transferred to KEE on AP 1 1911, then to MAN.							

The census of KEE. postmarks on the next page is based on counts I have made since about 1980, updated with information from the Thompson accumulation. I would be glad to hear of unreported postmarks, especially from any unreported offices.

**References:**

1. G. Scrimgeour, "Post Offices of the District of Keewatin, Part 1," *PHSC Journal*, No. 20 (December 1979) pp. 11–14.
2. G. Scrimgeour, "Post Offices of the District of Keewatin, Part 2," *PHSC Journal*, No. 24 (December 1980) pp. 4–10.
3. G. Scrimgeour, "Keewatin—The CPR Post Offices", *PHSC Journal*, No. 113 (March 2003) pp. 3–19.
4. G. F. Hansen, "A postal history of Rat Portage, Keewatin with some reference to the Province of Keewatin, its own postal and railway history. 1876-1886," *BNA Topics*, (March-April, pp. 43–49; May-June, pp. 20–23; and July-August, pp. 30–32, 1981).

**Census of Keewatin Postmarks****Early Keewatin**

	No. of strikes recorded	
BIG FORK	6	
CROSS·LAKE·KEE/CANADA	2	
CROSS·LAKE·STATION, KEE	1	
DARLINGTON, ONT	1	
FORT ALEXANDER, KEE.	2	
FORT FRANCIS, N.W.T.	0	
FORT FRANCIS, KEE	10	
GIMLI	1	
HAWK LAKE	0	No datestamp reported; no proof strike.
HOOSAVICK	1	
IGNACE, KEE	2	
KEEWATIN·ONT./CANADA	0	
KEEWATIN·MILLS, ONT.	0	
KEEWATIN MILLS, KEE.	2	
LAKE DECEPTION, KEE.	3	
PINE FALLS	0	
RAINY RIVER	22	
RAT·PORTAGE KEE./CANADA	10	
RAT·PORTAGE, KEE.	32	
VERMILLION BAY, ONT	1	Did not use a KEE. hammer.
WHITEMOUTH, KEE.	4	

**Later Keewatin**

BARROWS, SASK.	2	
BARROWS, KEEWATIN	3	
CEDAR LAKE	0	No early hammer recorded yet.
GRAND RAPIDS	0	No early hammer recorded yet.
MOOSE LAKE, SASK.	0	
NORWAY HOUSE, KEEWATIN	27	
THE PAS, SASK	1	
THE PAS·DIST. KEEWATIN	15	

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