
A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR WITH POSTAL HISTORY FEW THINGS ARE EVER CERTAIN.....

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The recent articles by John Reynolds in both the January 2026 issue and above in this issue of Maple Leaves have gone a long way to helping us understand the use of different currencies in the early years of the Colony of Canada.

They have also provided evidence that the long held belief that the Postmaster of Toronto was guilty of persistent overcharging for postage was untrue. Like many collectors of early postal history, I found myself having to do a swift re-write of several of my album pages.

However, when looking at all of my early covers and relating them to John's research, I found one that didn't quite fit with the new wisdom.

The cover, shown opposite in fig 1, is a pre-manuscript Money Letter mailed from Belleville to York in January 1822.

The write up from my album page (pre John Reynolds research) reads as follows:-

The above letter from the Customs House Office at Belleville to the Receiver General of Upper Canada contained £25 in banknotes but shows no markings to indicate that money was enclosed. It also contained an enclosure requesting the payment of £1.15 in

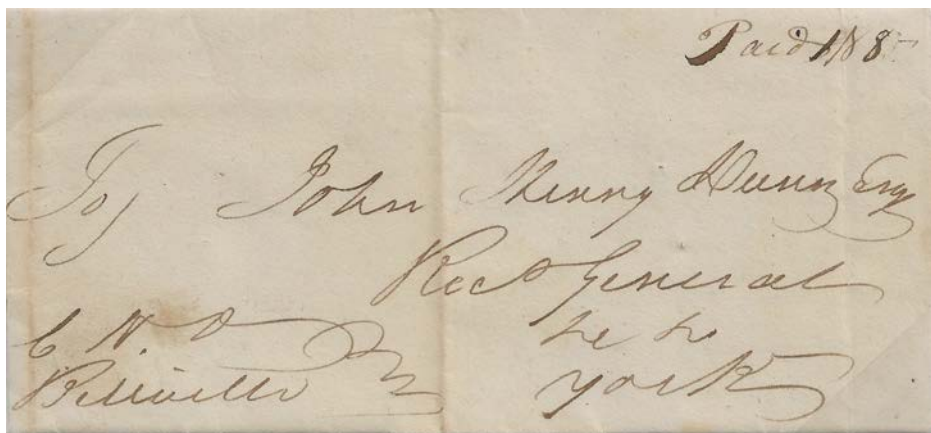


Fig 1

Halifax Currency to Stephen Jarvis. The enclosure incurred an additional postal rate but the money did not.

The letter from Belleville to York – double rate, should have been charged 1N6 (2 x 9d currency). However, the letter was charged at 1N8. This practice of a postmaster overcharging in Upper Canada was raised in the Colonial Parliament where it was found to be quite widespread in the period around 1820.

Now, the use of Halifax currency had been standardized across both Lower and Upper Canada from 1st September 1821, so my assumption here that the letter was rated in Halifax currency would appear correct. The distance from Belleville to York (Toronto) is around 120 miles so the rate of 9d per sheet would also be correct. So, is this letter really an example of overcharging by the postmaster, William Allen?

Well, John and I have had a close look at the cover and come up with another possible explanation. What if the postmaster at Belleville was still using York Currency some four months after the move to standardize on Halifax currency? If this were the case a rate of 10d York currency per sheet would give the correct rate shown on the cover of 1N8. Now the 10d rate only applied in principle to letters carried up to 100 miles but as John has shown in his research there is a body of evidence to show that 10d was the maximum charge applied within Upper Canada in this period regardless of actual distance.

In summary, the cover could be rated in Halifax currency and have been overcharged or equally it could be rated in York currency out of the correct period.

Which explanation is correct? Sadly, we will never know for certain but that, I guess, is one of the joys of collecting postal history!