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## EXHIBITING POSTAL HISTORY: POSTMARK STUDIES

### HALIFAX BRANCH DEAD LETTER OFFICE

Halifax is one of the original Branch Dead Letter Offices upon decentralization of the Ottawa DLO July 1, 1898. The earliest Proof Strike is September 9, 1909 (certain proofs are known missing from 1897 to 1905). Until recently no pre 1900 item has been reported. Seen below is a November 1898 Halifax Dead Letter Office steel circle handstamp on cover.

Five main types of handstamps are known for Halifax with three having multiple subtypes.

Steel Circle	8 Subtypes	3 proofs known
Oval	10 Subtypes	6 proofs known
Rubber Circle	1 Subtype	
Rectangle	2 Subtypes	2 proofs known
Registration	1 Subtype	

Three previously unreported handstamps are included below with only the proof having been known prior to the discovery of these covers. The use of Halifax Dead Letter Office handstamps declined after the 1920's with only a few known in the 1930's and 1940's, a few examples are included.

The earliest and latest known Halifax DLO handstamps are shown in this exhibit, **1898 & 1947**.

D.L.O. CANADA  
NO 26  
98

•HALIFAX•BRANCH•

24mm diameter

100%  
reverse



Steel Circle

EARLIEST KNOWN HALIFAX DLO HANDSTAMP

'H' - 'D' distance 3mm

Side dots  
and dot  
between  
'X' • 'B'



No proof known

'Stamp Previously used' marked on Pleasantville, N.S. Nov 14 98 letter, sent to the Halifax DLO Nov 26 98 and forwarded for illegal use Nov 30 1898.

A subcategory of postal history is specialized studies of postmarks – whether town postmarks, office cancels, or auxiliary markings applied by the post office in its normal course of business. This area is called 'marcophily' and is a quite legitimate area within which to form a specialized exhibit.

Postmarks are the nuts and bolts of operations within a postal system. A well-crafted postmark exhibit necessarily tells the story of how, when, or why postmarks were utilized in the moving of the mails. The exhibitor has at least the same degree of freedom as with any other philatelic exhibit and the only constraints are both the exhibitor's imagination and the guidelines as to how all philatelic exhibits should be shown and developed. Thus, the same criteria apply: the marcophily exhibit is evaluated against its title page; its treatment and development; the knowledge, study and research the exhibitor shows in the exhibit; the rarity and condition of the material; and its overall neatness in presentation.

Marcophily exhibits allow for deep specialization in a collection of postal markings. This is, however, a double-edged sword. Specialized knowledge must be demonstrated, but this knowledge must be accessible to the judges and the casual viewer. Not only is the exhibitor using a taxonomy involving the organization of the collection of postal markings, this taxonomy must be logical so that it can be appreciated

## CANADIAN DEAD LETTER OFFICE HANDSTAMPS

**Purpose:**  
The exhibit shows the evolution of **Canadian Dead Letter Office (DLO) handstamps** from 1872 up to the introduction of Undeliverable Mail Office handstamps in 1954.

**Treatment:**  
Exhibit begins in **Ottawa** when the **Canadian Dead Letter Office/Branch** was located only in **Ottawa** up to decentralization on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1898. It continues with **Ottawa** in 1898 onward, then **Branch and Local DLO Offices** created after decentralization and in use until a major Post Office reorganization was made in the late 1940's. This resulted in the use of the words: **Dead Letter Office, D.L.O.** and **Bureau des Rebutis** no longer being used past 1954.

The Dead Letter Office received and treated mail matter that could not be forwarded to its final destination. This included mail addressed for delivery in Canada, mail posted outside of Canada and addressed for delivery in Canada, and Canadian mail originally addressed to foreign countries then returned because it bore insufficient forwarding information.

**Structure:**  
**Items are usually listed by type, dimensions, lettering including periods, commas and dashes.** This will result in a general chronological order, but not for every item. The listing for each item includes the lettering of the handstamp and indicia, major and subtype of handstamp, dimensions, important variations as compared to similar handstamps, if a strike proof was taken and importance such as Previously Unknown, Only Known Copy (**OKC**) or Earliest (**ERD**) and Latest (**LRD**) reported dates of use. Throughout the exhibit are numerous previously unknown, unreported, earliest and latest reported dates discovered by the exhibitor.

Frame / Page	City / Type
1 -	Ottawa pre 1898
2 p9	Ottawa 1898 - 1950
4 -	Halifax
4 p9	Montreal
6 -	Toronto
7 -	Victoria
7 p4	Winnipeg
7 p10	Calgary
7 p13	Edmonton
8 -	Moose Jaw
8 p2	Regina
8 p5	Vancouver
9 -	Local DLO Offices
10 -	Advice markings Wax Seals

With Confederation in 1867, the Post Office Department created the Dead Letter Office. D.L.O. handstamps however were not produced until the early 1870's.

At right is an only known 1868 precursor of later printed Dead Letter Return envelopes with manuscript instructions for un-paid letters.

April 29 1868 un-paid letter  
**RETURNED-FOR / POSTAGE**  
and examined for name and address to return to sender.

Significant items:

and understood by the viewer. And, because of the close similarity of material, page after page, the exhibit needs to be visually attractive in order to draw the viewer into wanting to keep reading.

There is also a tendency to over-write a marcophily exhibit, as a fair amount of explanation may seem necessary about the variety and various uses being exhibited. It may be easier to turn the material into a handbook than into an exhibit; but this should not dissuade the determined marcophily exhibitor as this is an area of philately in which original research can still be pursued and presented to interested stamp show attendees.

Our exemplar here is the 'Canadian Dead Letter Office Handstamps', a 10-frame exhibit by Gary Steele of Nova Scotia. The Dead Letter Office (DLO) was the place where letters were sent if they were deemed undeliverable (for

various reasons), and then had to be opened by the postal authorities in an attempt to return them to the sender. Over the last few years, Steele's exhibit has won virtually every major award that it could earn at our Canadian national and BNAPS shows.

His exhibit tells a story by developing when and where DLO postal makings were used across Canada between 1872 and 1954. It takes them from their earliest use only at Ottawa and then through all the cities where DLO handstamps were eventually used. He shows the variety of handstamps used within each office, and ties them into known proof strikes of each type. His research includes previously unknown types, previously unreported strikes, and a variety of the earliest and latest recorded examples.

His title page tells us what he intends to show. The left-hand column includes his plan, and a main text sec-

tion outlines his purpose, his treatment, and his exhibit structure. I also find it visually appealing as he uses his artistic license to superimpose some DLO postmark graphics around his title. He has even managed to include an 1868 cover as a precursor to the DLO markings he will be showing. Note, too, that he includes a key as to how he will highlight his rare items. He will outline significant graphics with a red double frame to draw attention to them.

The first page of his Halifax DLO chapter comes four frames into the exhibit after he has thoroughly covered the Ottawa DLO. He introduces the chapter with a text box that includes background information on the types of handstamps used at Halifax and the known proofs, and then concludes with what he will show in the chapter regarding previously unreported strikes or early and late dates.

He then illustrates a cover with the earliest known Halifax DLO hammer, highlighted by the red double frame, and with enough descriptors to allow identification and classification of the type of steel circle hammer used. Most importantly, he illustrates the hammer with a full-sized photocopy of the DLO strike as found on the back of his cover, authenticating its use for the audience.

Marcophily exhibits are challenging to put together. The exhibitor may constantly add new material, and may decide to revise many pages of the exhibit. Gary Steele's exhibit has certainly evolved over the years, as he continues to make modifications. Like all exhibitors, he may never be finished, never fully satisfied. Forming such exhibits provides new learning experiences that drive many exhibitors to improve. Such is the motivation behind the craft. ☒

*Previous columns in this series now also appear on the RPSC website, at <http://www.rpsc.org/exhibiting.htm>. Readers are encouraged to use them to facilitate further discussion at club meetings, and for promoting novice exhibiting at local and regional levels.*