

XII.—THE POST OFFICE.

Historical.—A postal service was established between Montreal and Quebec as early as 1721, official messengers and other travellers making a practice of carrying letters for private persons. When Canada came under British rule, the Post Office was placed on a settled footing by Benjamin Franklin, then deputy postmaster-general for the American colonies, who visited Canada in 1763, opened post offices at Quebec, Montreal and Three Rivers, and also established courier communication between Montreal and New York. Since 1755 Halifax had had a post office and direct postal communication with Great Britain.

As a consequence of the American Revolution and the resulting isolation of Canada from Nova Scotia, the first exclusively Canadian postal service, a monthly courier route from Halifax to Quebec, was established in 1788, involving a seven weeks' trip and expenses of about £200, of which only one-third was met by postal charges. Up to 1804 the postal facilities of Upper Canada consisted of one regular trip by courier each winter with whatever mail might reach Montreal during the season of navigation. Charges were necessarily high, \$1.12 being paid on ordinary letters from London to Toronto *via* Halifax.

The first post office in Toronto was opened about 1800. By 1816 there were 19 offices in the two Canadas, and in 1827 this number had increased to 114. At this time the system consisted primarily of a trunk line of communication between Halifax, Quebec, Montreal, Toronto, and Amherstburg, over which couriers travelled at varying intervals. Branching off this line were routes to Sorel, Sherbrooke, St. Johns, Hull, Hawkesbury, Perth and Richmond, with most deliveries made once or twice a week.

Hitherto the Post Office had been under the control of the Imperial Department, but considerable agitation resulted in the service being transferred on April 6, 1851, to the several provinces. Only enough mutual control was maintained to ensure the continuance of Imperial and intercolonial relations. The provinces had complete jurisdiction over the establishment and maintenance of systems and rates.

At Confederation the provincial systems were transferred to the Dominion. The Post Office Act of 1867 established a service throughout Canada. The domestic rate on letters was reduced from 5 to 3 cents per half-ounce, and in 1870 the rates to the United States and Great Britain were reduced from 10 to 6 cents and from 12½ to 6 cents respectively per half-ounce. In 1875 a convention between Canada and the United States reduced postal rates between the countries to the domestic level. In 1878, on the admission of Canada to the Postal Union, letter postage to the countries of the Postal Union was reduced to 5 cents per half-ounce. After a conference in 1897, Imperial penny postage (2 cents per half-ounce) was established on Dec. 25, 1898, while the domestic rate was reduced from 3 to 2 cents per ounce. These rates were maintained until 1915, when a 1 cent war tax, still in force, was imposed on all 2 cent letters, on post cards and postal notes. Recently the rate to Great Britain has been increased to 4 cents per ounce and that to the Postal Union has been raised to 10 cents per ounce.

The Post Office Department is administered by the Postmaster-General. Besides the several administrative branches within the Department, the Dominion is divided into 15 districts, each in charge of a Post Office Inspector. The Canadian system embraces a territory more extensive than that served by any other systems except those of the United States and Russia, the sparsity of population and the comparative lack of development making inevitable a peculiarly difficult and expensive service.