

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

Transcribed by Steve Jarvis from a Booklet Donated to the BWISC Library by Derek Nathan

Up to the time of the English conquest of the three Colonies which now form British Guiana, there was no Post Office. Of course people wrote letters, and sent them in the best way they could, but there was nothing like certainty or regularity either. in the departure or arrival of the mails.

When the head-quarters of the colony of Essequibo were at Kyk-over-al, the West India Company sent out one or two vessels annually, to carry supplies and bring back the produce of the colony. By each vessel a package of letters was sent to the Commandeur. From the "Articled Letter" of the Company we are able to glean the regulations for this correspondence. The Company was very jealous that its affairs should be kept secret, and to this end provided by Articles 54 to 56 against information being given to those not concerned. No servant of the Company was allowed to write anything relating to the trade, commerce, war, or conduct of any other servant, to any but the Directors or the Chambers, on pain of losing three months wages. To the end that this should not be infringed it was forbidden to carry private letters, but they were to be delivered to the highest authority in the place, and enclosed with the correspondence of the Company. These letters were all opened, and read and certified before delivery, or might be detained if the Directors found anything which they thought should not be known. Under these circumstances there could be no private letters, and the servants of the Company as well as the few planters in Essequibo had to be very careful in writing to their friends.

This primitive system lasted from the earliest times, up to the latter part of the last century. A package of letters was sent to the Commandeur, who opened it himself, took out his own correspondence, and handed the remainder to the Secretary, who delivered the letters to their owners when they were called for. It does not appear that any postage was charged at first, but the Secretary exacted a fee of one guilder each when the correspondence became of importance: This amount did not err on the side of being too little, as the Secretary had such a small salary that he could only manage to live by means of the heavy fees he exacted.

There was no regular communication with Berbice or Surinam, but it was often necessary to send letters to the latter colony to be forwarded to the Netherlands, on account of the long intervals between the regular vessels. Even Essequibo and Demerara were quite isolated from each other, the planters having to send to Fort Island for their letters when a vessel arrived. The Government proclamations were sent round in canoes under the charge of colony slaves, the managers or proprietors signing their names to show that the publication had been exhibited. In Berbice, proclamations were read at certain places, the inhabitants being called together by beat of drum.

After the arrival of so many English 'settlers from Barbados and other islands, about 1740, communication with the West Indies became frequent, and letters were sent by private vessels. These did not go to the Secretary's office, but were delivered by the ship-captains or their consignees. No interference took place in this matter, and for a long time the Government-mail from the Netherlands was quite distinct from the ship letters. Letters for Demerara were often sent from England to Barbados, and called for there by petty traders from this colony.

The British would probably have established a Post Office in 1782, if the French had not captured the colony before things became settled. The only item referring to letters during the British occupation, is a publication, that it was forbidden to send letters to Berbice, unless they had been first read by Captain DAY, who then represented the supreme authority, the Governor and Court of Policy being however still retained. Immediately after the French conquest, on the 10th of February, 1782, it was published that "a ship will sail for France in 8 or 10 days, by which anyone. can send letters to Holland or other countries," and that a letter bag would be provided at Mr. SCHUYLENBURGH's house. In January following, ADRIAN LONCO was appointed the first Postmaster of Demerara. He was bound to deliver the letters by four white servants, within four days after their arrival. The first messenger went along the West Coast, the second to the East Coast and Courabana, the third up the West Bank as far as Harmensteyn, and the last up the East Bank to Land of Canaan. They were to get receipts for each letter, and the Postmaster was entitled to charge a fee of five stivers. Persons who lived in Mahaica Creek and beyond, as well as those in the Upper Demerara, got their letters in the best way they could. A trusty person was sent by the Postmaster to Essequibo, who delivered the letters for a fee of two schellings (26 cents). Correspondence for Europe was to be delivered to the Postmaster, who charged half a schelling

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

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for each letter and the sender might demand a receipt. It was also agreed by the Court at the same time, that a mail should be despatched to Berbice every two months.

After the restoration of the Colonies to the Dutch in 1784, the Post Office was abolished, and the old system of receiving letters at the Secretary's Office restored. During the following years, up to 1796, the inhabitants suffered greatly from the want of regular communication with the mother country. In 1791 it was resolved by the Court of Policy that a subsidy be paid to provide a Mail Service to Berbice and Surinam. During the war with France between 1793 – 5, the mails were received and sent by way of Barbados, and a vessel was chartered by the colony as a Packet boat, but when the Batavian Republic was established, all communication with the British Colonies was cut off. On one occasion an American vessel was engaged to carry the Mails to and from St. Eustatius, as it was unsafe to send them under other than neutral flags.

In 1793 the first attempt was made to establish a local postal delivery by an Attorney-at-Law named J. C. DE LA COSTS. This gentleman established the first Printing Office, and published the pioneer newspaper of Demerara on the 1st of November 1793: Every subscriber to this paper was entitled to the privilege of having his letters carried free of charge, while other persons had to pay ten stivers for each letter. The messengers left Stabroek every Sunday morning and Wednesday afternoon, returning two days after-wards. This arrangement lasted for two years, but does not appear to have given any profit to Mr. DE LA COSTS, in fact a purely local Post Office in private hands could hardly be expected to pay in such a small colony.

With the British conquest of 1796, the want of proper postal communication was at once felt by the new possessors. On the 11th of June of that year, Lieutenant-Colonel HISLOP called the attention of the Court of Policy to the absolute necessity of establishing regular conveyance of letters to the army, for which he wanted Packet boats to ply weekly between Demerara and Barbados.

The Governor said that the establishment of a Packet Boat and a Post Office would be a general benefit to the inhabitants. He would therefore like to hear the opinions of the different members as to such an establishment. After deliberation it was resolved :

" In consideration of the extensive use and benefit to be derived from such an establishment, for the community at large, that a Post Office shall be established in Stabroek, at the expense of the Colony, and under the management of a proper person, who shall receive an annual salary of 1200 guilders."

To raise this sum each letter was to be charged five stivers on delivery, but no charge was to be made for those to be forwarded abroad. The Postmaster was to render an account every six months, and if the postage should not have amounted to the salary, any deficiency would be supplied from the colony chest.

It was further agreed that a Packet boat should be hired, as it would be too expensive to buy such a vessel. Until the Postmaster should be appointed, the arrangement with the Secretary's Office was to be continued, but instead of his charging a guilder per letter as before, he must only exact five stivers. All masters of British vessels were ordered, immediately on their arrival, to hang up their Letter Bags at the Secretary's office, and, after it was established, at the Post Office; also to call for them before going away; no vessel being allowed to clear or enter without a certificate that this had been done.

The Post Office was thus fairly started as a Government institution, but, the first Postmaster was a failure. On the 26th of May, 1797, the Governor reported to the Court, that Mr. THOMSON had absented himself without leave, and his whereabouts was unknown. He (the Governor) had found the Post Office in confusion and disorder, and put it under the control of the Secretary's office for the present. It was resolved to dismiss the delinquent postmaster and appoint another, Mr. JAMES MURRAY being chosen.

This gentleman did not hold the office long, being superseded by a nominee of the Postmaster-General, Mr. JAS. OGLE, who exhibited the following letter to the Governor in July, 1798 : –

General Post Office, London,
April 4th, 1798

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, FL.S. (Published 1890)

Sir,-In the Mail for Barbados, that is now making up in this Office there will be a bag included, containing the letters for the Colonies of Demerary, Berbice and Essequibo, which the Postmaster of Barbados will deliver to you. My Lords the Postmasters General, at the instance of the merchants here, trading to the Colonies in question, have consented to give you a nominal appointment of Postmaster, you will of course dispose properly of the letters, and I beg to add that the Postmaster of Barbados is authorised to demand from you the payment of the postage as often as he shall find it convenient.

S. FREELING,
Secretary.

P.S. – Any such letters as you may not be able to deliver, from not finding the persons to whom they may be directed, or who may have left the place, &c., the Postmaster of Barbados will return you the postage for, as dead letters.

*To JAMES OGLE Esq., of Demerary,
or the person appointed by him to receive the Demerary Bag, Barbados.*

As a natural result of this communication, the Colonial Postmaster was discharged from his duties, and the Post Office was carried on under the immediate control of the London authorities. The letter from the Governor to Mr. MURRAY, was as follows:

Government House, Stabroek,
July 3rd, 1798

Sir, – Mr. Ogle, who has arrived in the colony, has shown me a letter signed by the Secretary of the General Post Office in London, comprehending a nominal appointment conferred on him as Postmaster in Demerary, Berbice and Essequibo. In consequence, by his acting in that capacity within this Government, your function of a Postmaster under the Colonial appointment here will cease. At the first meeting of the Court of Policy, I shall make to them the communications necessary by the above circumstance, and lay before the said Court the amount you have delivered me of postages received during the time of your acting In the meanwhile, with respect to such letters as have not yet been taken up, and are still in your possession, I request you will cause a list of them to be inserted in the Essequibo and Demerary Gazette, noticing the persons to whom they are addressed, to send for them within a month after the date of the advertisement, as at the expiration of that time they will no longer be held by you, but submitted to the Government of the Colony to take such measures respecting them as may be deemed proper.

I return you thanks for the trouble you have taken, on my proposal, in discharging hitherto the foregoing function, and am, with great regard,

Yours, &c.

ANTONY BEAUJON.

When the colony was restored to the Batavian Republic in 1802, Mr. C. T. RAPIN was appointed Postmaster, and in January 1803, arrangements were made for regular and quick Mail Packets to and from Barbados. However, these arrangements were almost immediately frustrated by the war again breaking out, the Mail boat being detained, and the colonists put to great inconvenience from want of regular communication until October following, when the colony was again captured by the British.

On the 17th of October 1803, the Court of Policy considered the necessity for making new arrangements with Barbados. The existing state of things was unbearable. The mails had come sometimes when opportunity occurred, but there had been no certainty of their coming at all, while, when they did arrive, it was only after long delays. Mr. RAPIN proposed that the schooner Fanny,

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

belonging to Mr. BYNOE be engaged, she being known as a fast sailer and well suited for the purpose. Her owner was willing to depart from Demerary on or before the 10th, and in three days after his arrival in Barbados, be ready to return with the mails. BYNOE would take the risk of the sea, provided the Government took that of capture by the enemy, and the cost would be three joes or 66 guilders, per day.

On deliberation, the Court came to the conclusion that it was not desirable to settle the matter until they heard from England, as probably something might be done by the Postmaster General. Meanwhile the Colonial Postmaster was ordered to make arrangements with Barbados, so that by the first opportunity after the arrival of the Mails there, they might be forwarded by British vessels. It was agreed that a premium of five joes should be paid to the vessel bringing the Mails, to raise which, the Postmaster was empowered to charge ten stivers for each letter; if this should not be sufficient the Court would make other arrangements.

On the 31st of January, 1804, Mr. RAPIN represented to the Court the material loss sustained by the Post Office, from the practice of letters being distributed by captains of vessels, and also the serious risks of the Mails being captured by the enemy. A Publication was therefore issued, ordering all persons coming from abroad to deliver their letters to the Post Office, on pain of a fine of 25 guilders for each letter otherwise delivered. Nothing could be done, however, to protect the Mail boats, so they were obliged to trust to their fast sailing in escaping the enemy.

On the 29th of May following, the Governor informed the court that His Majesty had appointed Mr. THEOPHILUS WILLIAMS Receiver of Essequibo, and Postmaster of Essequibo, Demerary and Berbice, and that Mr. WILLIAMS had arrived some days ago. Mr. RAPIN was thus superseded, and the Colonial Post Office again gave way to the Deputy Postmaster General.

Mr. THEOPHILUS WILLIAMS having several other offices, appointed his brother as his deputy, a sort of thing not uncommon at that time, when a patentee of an office had in many cases never even visited the colony. The following account of an outrage on this Deputy Postmaster's Deputy will be interesting: the Gazette of November 22nd, 1806, says :

"Between one and two o'clock on Tuesday last, a young man alighted from his horse at the Post Office, and went in and enquired if there were any letters for him. On being answered in the negative he used much abusive language, which occasioned Mr. WILLIAMS to desire him to depart, and to enforce his desire by pushing him on the shoulder, when the young man drew a pistol from his pocket and shot BB Mr. WILLIAMS a little above the hip. He then deliberately mounted his horse and rode off. Mr. WILLIAMS did not fall immediately, but ordered his boy to endeavour to seize the assassin, which was attempted, but without effect. The best surgical assistance was immediately procured. Drs. LLOYD, DUNCAN and WADDLE attended, but all attempts to extract the ball proved fruitless. He bled profusely, did not appear to suffer much pain, was perfectly calm and collected, and made his will."

From the meagre report it does not appear what was done to the would-be assassin. He was captured by Dr. ROBINSON while trying to escape up the East Coast. A week afterwards Mr. WILLIAMS was out of danger and ultimately recovered.

There were other complaints of detention of letters, from which it appears that some persons thought the Postmaster either very careless, or else that he wilfully withheld them from the addressees. In the Gazette of March 2nd, 1813, Mr. WILLIAMS published the following

peremptory demand from Mr. J. C. SCHULTZ :

Sir, – As I am positively assured that Captain WILTON brought a letter from London to my address, and which he accordingly deposited in the Post Office, I have therefore to request you will deliver it to the bearer ; otherwise I shall be under the necessity of addressing myself to His Excellency for the recovery of the same, – having repeatedly requested that my letters should not be delivered to any person without a written order from me."

To this charge and others the Postmaster publicly stated, that he had reason to believe that letters had been brought by passengers or retained by captains, contrary to law, and in this way never reached their owners.

In 1810 a special Mail Packet Service was established to sail monthly from Falmouth, direct to Surinam, where the vessel lay for four days, thence to Berbice, remaining three days, and finally

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

coming to Demerara, where, after a stay of three days, she proceeded home by way Barbados and Martinique. This arrangement remained in force until the latter part of 1813, when the Mails were again despatched twice a month by way Of Barbados. The regular West Indian Mails were then made up in London On the first and third Wednesday in every month. The colony paid the expense of the "Demerary Packet" from Barbados, which cost in 1815, 20,098.10 florins (£1675).

For the first fifteen years Of this century the Mails were very irregular. The risks and dangers from the enemy were supplemented by delays caused by the convoy system, while it sometimes happened that the Mail Packet was captured. The American war was very disastrous ; in August, 1813, the Berbice Mail, in October the Morgiana Packet and three other vessels, and the English October Mail to Barbados, were all captured by American privateers. On the 11th of February, 1815, the Chesterfield Packet arrived, and reported having had a fight with an American privateer off Madeira which lasted three hours and a half. "The enemy was superior in weight of metal, but not in bravery and skill." After both vessels were much cut up and damaged, the American made off, to the great satisfaction of the plucky little Mail Packet. In July, 1806, H.M. Ship Nimrod fell in with the William bound for Berbice, and chased her for five hours without knowing what she was. The William threw her letters overboard, and both vessels got aground before they found out their mistake.

Under such circumstances the Post Office in these Colonies was of very little importance. The regular Packet was often behind time, so that it was a common complaint that the news brought by the Mail had been anticipated by other vessels. The desire for European and American news was well met by the " Royal Gazette" and " Guiana Chronicle", which almost ignored local items, while their selections were very good. The rivalry of the two local newspapers kept them on the look-out for vessels, and every now and again a complaint comes up, that the. "Chronicle" had succeeded in getting hold of a newspaper that should have gone to the "Gazette."

On the 8th of March 1822, the editor of the Royal Gazette wrote

"Confound the regulators of the Post Office, say we, who do not make our packets come by steam; then we should go on at a nice jogtrot, from fortnight to fortnight, knowing exactly what quantity of pap we could afford to give our nursling at a time, being well assured of a fresh supply at the moment required; but now in this lubberly way of one packet staying a week beyond, and another coming two weeks before its time, we are bothered for three weeks together to find wherewithal to make a respectable appearance. And what kind of appearance do we make? One talks nonsense of scarlet fever and small pox and t'other responds about doctors and hempen cures. Alas I alas I for the poor folks who belong not to any book club; for if they depend for intellectual food upon the newspapers, thay must starve."

The anxiety for news is well portrayed in some verses by "JERRY SNEAK," "scribbled in consequence of the hubbub the signal for a ship made this morning," July 11th 1838, of which the following extracts will show the style :

A sail-a sail-a promised prize to hope
Her nation-flag-what says the telescope?
Is it the "Underwood" from London, fraught
With doleful tidings, that too soon are brought?
Or shall the " Hopkinson" the bearer be
Of what we're anxious for, yet dread to see ?
But all agree a ship is coming in
And two hours more will silence all the din
Then we shall see (as showmen say at fairs),
"What we shall see." So useless all the airs
Of quidnunc prophecy=' Who's out," " Who's in;"
Whether they're finished, or yet to begin."

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.
By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

Except by the regular Packet, there was no communication with Berbice. A correspondent in the "Royal Gazette" of February 24th, 1818, suggested that some of the Colony negroes should be employed as messengers; to carry Mail bags to Mahaica, and (by arrangement) exchange with other messengers from Berbice. Nothing, however, came of this recommendation.

The enormous fees of the British Post Office was a crying evil in the early part of this century, but the charges here were entirely unreasonable. A single letter, i.e., one sheet, cost a shilling for ocean postage while the Deputy Postmaster charged a guilder (1/8) for receiving and delivering it when called for. The smallest enclosure made a double letter, and in doubtful cases the Postmaster held the letter up in a strong light to see if it contained any tiny bit of paper.

The excessive charges were represented in the Court of Policy in 1810, but nothing could be done, as the Post Office was beyond the control of the Government. On November 2nd, 1815, the inhabitants of Demerary petitioned the Court of Policy against the exorbitant charges of the Post Office. They had to pay 66 per cent on the English postage and a guilder for ship letters. A meeting of Planters had been held at the Union Coffee House on the 26th October previous, and a tariff proposed on the basis of 10 stivers to the office for each letter. This had been submitted to the Post-master, but without result. It was decided that the Court could not interfere, as the rates of postage were settled by Act of Parliament.

In 1818 a complaint was sent to the Postmaster General by Mr. J. H. H. HOLMES of Demerara, from which it appears that franked letters had been charged the full postage, and also that the then Deputy forced the inhabitants of Georgetown to pay extra for quick delivery, those who did not pay being subject to great delay and vexation.

Deputy Postmaster B. HARPER, in October 1824, had a little difficulty with Governor DURBAN, which ended in his resignation. It appears that the Mail arrived a little after sunset, when the Postmaster despatched the Governor's private bag, leaving the others until morning. As the Governor expected other letters, he wrote to the Post Master for an explanation, who referred to the rules that if the Mail arrived after sunset the letters were to be delivered the following morning. He said, in his letter to the Government Secretary, "it would have taken me at least two hours by candle light, before I could have assorted the letters in the different bags, to have enabled me to ascertain if there were any for His Excellency, either private or public – not being very well I retired to bed about my usual hour, 8 o'clock. I take this opportunity of requesting you will do me the favour to state to His Excellency, my wish to be relieved from this unpleasant and unprofitable office, by appointing some person to take it over, until the pleasure of His Lordship the Postmaster-General may be pleased to appoint my successor."

Mr. WM. FRASER, who was then appointed, did not get on very well, on account of his charging ship letters as double or triple, when, according to the opinions of the inhabitants and the custom of former Postmasters, there should have been one uniform rate of a bitt for each. The following complaint was sent by him to Governor D'URBAN on the 8th of February 1825:

May it please your Excellency. – I feel at all times the greatest possible reluctance in intruding myself on your Excellency's time, or being in any respect troublesome in laying before Your Excellency a complaint or grievance under which I may labour, so be it that such grievance could be endured with any degree of toleration – but when as in the present instance the cause and rise of my complaint is grounded on wanton and seemingly premeditated aggression, urgent and present necessity must plead my excuse, and procure for me Your Excellency's forgiveness.

The Mail Boat, the Anne and Eliza. Captain BENNETT, from Barbados, bringing the 2nd December Mails, arrived yesterday afternoon in the harbour, and duly delivered at this office, a little before the hour of 4 o'clock p.m., the mail bags. The letters and papers were assorted and ready for delivery at about fifteen minutes before the ensuing hour of five o'clock; – from this period till about the hour of seven, or until it became dark, my assistant and myself continued to deliver letters and papers – in the course of which time we distributed and sold more than one half of the quantity received. The glut of people having by that period completely and wholly subsided and, as I supposed entirely ceased, my assistant departed and I closed the Office for the night. I had no sooner retired to my apartment to prepare myself for refreshing the wants of nature, and prepare

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

the Berbice Mail for Captain BENNETT's return, than my hall was completely filled with a crowd of young clerks, who in the most disorderly and contumacious manner demanded their Employers' letters. From encountering so much petulance and unmerited disrespect from young men anything but respectable, I absolutely and in the most peremptory manner refused appropriating any portion of my private time to the use of a public who so ungenerously and shamefully conducted themselves in so unhandsome a manner towards me. During this altercation Captain BENNETT returned, ver' fortunately for me, for the Berbice Mail Bag. He was so shocked and astonished at the insolence and abuse showered upon me that he in the most handsome and spirited manner, although an entire stranger to me, condemned as "unjust and highly indecorous, their conduct – a conduct at once so unbecoming and improper, that although he had been for for the space of fifteen years (he said,) in the Packet employ, he had never seen nor heard anything to equal it – for sheer insolence, down. right imposition, and daring infringement on the respectability which ought by right to belong to the situation of Postmaster" and "which he had always seen everywhere else excepting in Demerara, duly respected and upheld with deference and due decorum."

The whole of this disorderly proceeding appeared to me, please your Excellency, to have arisen from a premeditated plot or conspiracy set afoot among a number of young men, who seem determined to annoy me by every means and method in their power. Out of the many offenders in the present inst I have in a more especial and particular manner to point out to Your Excellency – a young man of the name of ANTHONY Fox, Clerk in the store of Messrs. NURSE, TROUGHTON and NURSE, and another youngster of the name of LAW, in the store. of Messrs. MURRAY BROTHERS & Co.

'This, then, please Your Excellency is the whole matter. And in the full hope and confidence of being shielded by Your Excellency's condescending protection, both as a private individual and as a person holding an office of great responsibility and trust – having never before been in or out of my own house, so openly and audaciously, insulted. I beg in the most humble manner to leave my cause in Your Excellency's hands as the Protector and Guardian of the Public Safety, as well as of the peace and security of individuals.

.I have the Honour with the highest consideration and respect, to be most faithfully and devotedly Your Excellency's very obliged servant.

WILLIAM FRASER.

The salary of the Postmaster at this time was £100 per annum, with fees amounting to about £85 extra. I have been unable to discover when E. H. DALTON became Deputy Postmaster, but it was some time before 1830, from which time he and his successor E. H. DALTON were connected with both Imperial and Local Post Offices up to 1875. With the organisation of the Police System in 1839 an imperfect Postal arrangement for the country districts was initiated, and carried on for a long time. It seems to have been more for the purpose of distributing the mails from abroad than for local letters. In the report of the Inspector-General of Police to June 30th 1841, he stated that the casualties in running the Overland Mail to Berbice had been numerous. It was in contemplation to establish Mail communication with the Arabian Coast through Leguan and Wakenaam to Spring Garden, and thence to Pln. Richmond, as soon as the Leguan Steamer now daily expected, commenced to ply. On the 27th of October following, the Court of Policy sanctioned a regular Mail twice a week to Airy Hall by the Steamer Royal Victoria, thence to be carried by a Mail gig to the Police Station at Capoey, thence to Henrietta, and finally to Windsor Castle.

In January 1842 arrived the first Mail Steamer. This event was said by a correspondent to the Royal Gazette to be the opening of a new era, "the advantages of which we cannot yet form any idea." The Clyde was described as a beautiful specimen of naval architecture. Her engine room was enough to give some ideas of what the art of man could do. She was fitted up with great elegance and comfort and could accommodate upwards of a hundred passengers. Captain WOODRUFF entertained a large party of ladies and gentlemen, including the Governor, who were all highly delighted with the appearance of the vessel, and the attention they received. The fare (£51) was considered too high; if it had been put at a charge below that of sailing vessels, the Gazette thought they would have secured all the passengers, and increased the number of travellers. The postage was a shilling the half-ounce for British and CC foreign letters, four pence a

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

single letter for British Colonies, and two pence for newspapers. The Steamers were very irregular at first and it was many years before there was any certainty of the Mail arriving when due.

The want of facilities for transmission of printed matter (other than newspapers) was very much felt. When the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society was formed in 1844 a hundred copies of the Prospectus were sent in a parcel to a correspondent in London, for the purpose of being posted there. On opening the parcel at Southampton, the Custom House authorities, finding each prospectus wrapped and addressed, put the lot in the Post Office, with the result that each addressee had to pay two shillings postage. The Society petitioned Lord STANLEY to have the postage reduced on such packages, but nothing was done for a long time afterwards.

During the struggle between the Combined Court and the Governor in 1849, the local Mail service came to grief. The Court having stopped the supplies, the police were almost disbanded and the Mails ceased to run. In the following year however arose the nucleus of our present Post Office System, and with it the introduction of Postage Stamps. The "Notice" was dated June 15th 1850, and was published in the "Gazette" of the same day. After the first of July, Mails would be made up every afternoon (Sundays excepted) for Plaisance, Beterverwagting and Buxton, to return the following morning and be delivered at 10 a.m. in Water Street and Main Street. This delivery was apparently an innovation. and, with an exception to be presently noted, did not get beyond the two principal streets for many years. Every Tuesday and Friday, a mail went to Berbice, and on the same days others went to Essequibo, calling at various points on the route: The postage was 4 cents for the East and West Coasts, 8 cents for Mahaicony, Leguan and Wakenaam, and 12 cents for Berbice and Essequibo; newspapers being free. Prepayment was necessary in all cases, to facilitate which Postage Stamps of the respective values of 4, 8 and 12 cents were being printed, and would be ready for sale on or before the 24th June at the Post Offices in Georgetown, New Amsterdam and at the different receiving offices. .

It is noticeable in this connection that Stamp Collectors claim to have a two cent stamp of the same issue, which is so rare as to fetch enormous sums, whenever by chance a specimen appears. This stamp appears to have been issued in accordance with a notice dated February 22nd 1851. By order of the Governor, and upon the request of several of the merchants of Georgetown, it was proposed to establish a delivery of letters, twice daily through the principal streets of the city, as far as the Roman Catholic Chapel on the Brick Dam. To pay for this convenience an extra stamp of the value of two cents was to be used, without which the letter would not be delivered, but remain in the Post Office until called for. This delivery was to commence on the 1st of March following, but as it was discontinued soon afterwards, it is probable that the extra stamp prevented that support necessary to pay for the additional Postman.

While thanking the Governor and Mr. DALTON for establishing a regular Mail along the Coasts, the colonists were not very well pleased with the system of charging by distance. A correspondent in the "Royal Gazette" stated this objection as the reason why the Inland Post was not more used. At first sight it appeared very fair and just, but when it was considered that anyone could send letters by boat for almost nothing, it could not be expected they would pay twelve cents; it should be four cents throughout the colony.

The matter came up in the Combined Court on April 2nd, 1851, when the Estimate was under consideration. The cost of the Inland Mail was \$600, with \$200 for the Postmasters of Demerara and Berbice, and \$1,600 for contingent expenses. Mr. O'DONOGHUE moved a resolution, which was adopted, that the Court of Policy be requested, in any Ordinance for regulating the Inland Post to fix a single rate of four cents for letters and one cent for newspapers, throughout the colony. In accordance with this resolution a notice was published on the 25th of December following that on and after the 1st of January 1852, the postage would be reduced to 4 cents per half ounce and that a charge of 1 cent would be imposed on each newspaper.

It will be interesting to collectors to read the following account of the early issues of stamps from a letter of Mr. E. T. E. DALTON, dated December 16th 1861 :

"Prepayment by stamps was first introduced into the colony on the re-establishment of the Inland Mail in 1850. These stamps were of the respective value of 4, 8 and 12 cents, and were printed in the colony on yellow, blue and red paper. As they could be easily imitated at any printing office, I

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

was obliged to initial them. They were of the commonest description, and were only in use a few months, until a better sort could be got out from England. The next were of the value of 1 and 4 cents, as a postage of 1 cent had been imposed on all local newspapers, forwarded per post, and the postage on letters had been reduced to one uniform rate of 4 cents per half ounce; 1 cent red, 4 cents blue. I may here observe that the postage on papers was soon taken off, and not re-imposed until the local Post Office Ordinance was passed in 1860. These stamps were for local letters only; those for places beyond the limits of the colony were prepaid in money. In May 1858 the Postmaster-General conceded to all the West Indian Colonies, except Barbados and Trinidad, the privilege of pre-payment of letters by English Stamps, and sent out for that purpose four different kinds, 1d., 4d., 6d, and 1s. These continued in use until the colony took over the Post Office in May 1860, when stamps of equal value, but of different currency, were executed for the service of the Colonial Post Office. The stamps then executed are those now employed, and with the 1 cent and 4 cent previously used make six kinds. The colours are 1 cent brown, 2 cents orange, 4 cents blue, 8 cents lake, 12 cents lilac and 24 cents green. Letters for Great Britain must be prepaid, as well those for the Islands. For places beyond Great Britain, not requiring prepayment, there is no difference in the postage, whether they are prepaid or not. On local letters however, posted unpaid, double is charged."

The Inland Mail was a very great boon to the colony, but strange to say the members of the Combined Court did not see this. The spirit of opposition to the Government was so strong that everything emanating from that source was attacked inveterately. On the 15th of May 1856, when the cost was estimated at \$8,706, Mr. PETER ROSE said that the mails should be carried on horseback, so as to save the expense of carriages and harness. Mr. SMITH had moved an amendment to the vote that the Inland Mail should be done away with altogether, except fortnightly to Berbice for the English Mails. He said that the roads were very bad, and it was not wise to incur heavy expense for them unless there was sufficient trade, to require the communication. The Police Stations were placed in most inconvenient positions, to suit the Mail, but not where they were most wanted, which was in the principal villages. The Governor said that if they merely reduced the expenses of the Police for the Overland Mail to Berbice, "they would find the saving all moonshine." The amendment was lost, and the Mail carriages continued running, although they sometimes broke down through the badness of the road. On one occasion the Berbice Mail was overturned into a trench and one of the horses drowned, while minor casualties were quite common.

The Royal Mail Company suffered many severe losses in its early years. In the latter part of 1851, the S.S. Demerara was wrecked on her trial trip, and then came the loss of the Amazon, which was such a horrible catastrophe that it sent a thrill through the civilized world. The story of this ill-fated vessel has often been told, but there are a few points which have been ignored' by ordinary writers, that were particularly interesting to the friends and fellow-citizens of the lost, and which are worth relating.

On the 27th of January 1852, the usual "Review for Home Readers" was published in the "Gazette", in anticipation of the Mail, and on the 29th, the Editor called attention to the fact that the packet was overdue. He went on to say that the constant detention of the Mails was a serious annoyance, from which he hoped they would soon be exempted, as it was reported that the Mail after the one then due would be carried to St. Thomas by one of the new, large, swift steamers, the Amazon, which had already proved satisfactory on her trial trip.

No great anxiety was felt as yet, because irregularities had been common, but when the Derwent arrived on the 3rd of February without the English Mails, people began to wonder what had become of the missing steamer. The "Gazette" supposed it was the Dee," one of the worst 'boats of the Company," and hoped that if any accident had happened, neither lives nor mails had been lost, but that she had been able to put back. Papers received from the Islands told them that the missing vessel was supposed to be the Amazon, and showed that considerable anxiety was felt with regard to her fate. This failure of a new steamer so soon after the disaster to the Demerara was particularly distressing.

Meanwhile the Amazon had left Southampton on the 2nd of January, with a crew of 110 men, and 50 passengers among the latter being Mr. M'LENNAN, (a Stipendiary Magistrate) with his wife and infant, Mr. ROBERT NEILSON, Mr. ROBERT HICK, and Miss. SMITH, all bound for Demerara.

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

Some little anxiety was felt by the passengers when on two or three occasions, the engines had to be stopped to prevent the bearings becoming over-heated, but no danger was anticipated. However, a little after midnight on the morning of the 4th, when steaming through the Bay of Biscay, with half a gale of wind in her teeth, the passengers were woke with a cry of "Fire! Fire!"

The scene of confusion was indescribable; the passengers ran on deck in their night-dresses to find the flames lighting up the surrounding darkness, and roaring horribly as the wind rushed to feed them like the blast of a furnace. Mrs. M'LENNAN caught up her child and ran across to her husband's berth. The door was locked, and it was not until she had knocked loudly and called out at the top of her voice that he woke up. They rushed on deck in their night-dresses and Mr. M'LENNAN exclaimed, "Oh God, the ship is on fire!" He then urged her to go down and get some clothes for herself and the child, and went down himself, but she was too frightened to move. An officer said to her, "give me your child and I will save him." He took the boy, handed him to a seaman who was sitting in the pinnace, and lifted her up into the same boat, against her protestations that she wanted to fetch her husband. The officer then sat beside her and ordered the men to cut the lashings. The boat dropped at one end, but owing to a hitch in the block the other end held fast. As the boat was hanging almost vertical, most of the people fell into the sea, but Mrs. M'LENNAN caught hold of a fixed seat by one arm and her baby by the other, and hung there until almost exhausted, calling for help. At last some men coming to look after the boat found her, and having righted it, got in with her, and succeeded in getting clear of the burning vessel. They were tossed about for 17 hours, Mrs. M'LENNAN being drenched to her waist in water by the sea continually breaking over the boat. Without food, clothes or shelter, the poor wife (or widow) held on to her babe through that night and the next day. A shawl which she had snatched up to cover the child, was the only article they had to make a sail to keep the boat before the wind. They were at last picked up by a Dutch vessel, the Gertruida, and taken to Brest, Mrs. M'LENNAN being almost insensible, but still clinging to her babe. Her husband having been lost she went back to Edinburgh, and abandoned her intention of coming to Demerara.

Miss SMITH, who was coming to Demerara as a governess, awoke at the first alarm of fire and ran on deck in her night-dress, with a blanket thrown over her shoulders. She saw the cutter floating at the side of the steamer and jumped into her, (a distance of fifteen feet) just as the boat was pushing off. The lady lay in the bottom, covered with the blanket, but gave up her covering when told that it would make a sail. The sailors however contributed what coats they could spare to cover her, and she sat in the stern-sheets translating their orders to the steersman, who happened to be a Belgian. They pulled through the night and all Sunday, until quite exhausted, when at last they were picked up by the Gertruida, which had just before rescued the pinnace.

Altogether, five boats were picked up, containing fifty-nine survivors; the burnt and drowned therefore numbered 102. Mr. NEILSON got off with others in the life-boat, which was picked up by the Marsden, but Mr. M'LENNAN and Mr. HICK were never heard of afterwards.

The news was brought to Demerara on the 12th of February, "throwing a great gloom over the community." All the shipping in the river hoisted their flags at half-mast, as did also the authorities of the Reading Room. The "Gazette" said that "the manner in which that new steamer had been lost was shocking, dreadful, – perfectly frightful. Of the hundred and fifty-six persons on board not a third were saved. Some were burnt to death, others suffocated in their berths, and others drowned. The fearful scene on board surpassed all description." Hopes were still entertained that Messrs. M'LENNAN and HICK might yet be picked up, but they were doomed to be disappointed. In 1850, on account of new English Mail arrangements, and the difficulty in answering a letter by the same steamer, several gentlemen on the East Coast made arrangements for signalling her. A blue and red flag was carried on the Railway engines, and a similar signal hoisted at the stations, whenever the Mail arrived in the night or early morning, so as to give the people along the line notice to go for their letters. Sometimes the Mails were made up before the steamer was signalled, at other times only a very short time was allowed: The colony had to thank ANTHONY TROLLOPE for a little concession in this matter, he having recommended Mr. DALTON not to close the letter box until the Mail was signalled.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE arrived in the colony by the steamer Derwent on the 25th of February 1859 and left on March 11th following. This short residence of a fortnight gave him material for his amusing account of the colony in "The West Indies and Spanish Main." His visit here meant a

The Post Office in British Guiana before 1860.

By James Rodway, F.L.S. (Published 1890)

revolution in the economy of the Post Office, he being deputed to make arrangements for the abolition of the Deputy Postmaster General. The following is a copy of his letter to the Governor': –

Georgetown, Demerara 26th February, 1859.

Sir, – Your Excellency is aware that the Postmaster-General is anxious to induce the Colony of British Guiana to undertake the control of the two Post Offices, which are now established under His Lordship at Demerara and Berbice. The matter has, I believe, been twice submitted to the local Legislature, and the proposal has, on each occasion, been rejected by a majority.

The Post Offices at, by far, the greater number of English Colonies have now been taken up by the Local Governments. This has lately been done at Barbados and Trinidad. There are many reasons why they should be better managed under the control of a resident Governor than by surveillance exercised at so great a distance as London; and this would certainly be done with greater economy by the Local Government.

Your Excellency is aware of the terms, with reference to the division of the rates of postage, upon which it has been proposed to hand over the Post Office to the colony.

It appears that such a transfer is peculiarly desirable at Guiana, where there is a Local Post Office already under local control, together with local rates of postage, and a local system of post conveyance.

Under these circumstances, the Postmaster-General would be glad that Your Excellency should make any suggestion that may occur to you with the view of carrying out this object. It may perhaps appear to you probable that the measure might be" a third time submitted to the Legislature with some chance of success, or failing that, that other steps might be taken by the home Government which would have the effect desired.

I have the honour, &c.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, Surveyor, General Post Office.

As a result of ANTHONY TROLLOPE'S visit "An Ordinance to establish a Colonial Post Office" was passed on the 3rd of January 1860 and came into operation on the 2nd Of May following. Since that time there have been many improvements, and altogether it may be said that our Mail service, both inland and foreign, has attained to a wonderful degree of perfection as compared with what it was thirty years ago. There is, however plenty of room for improvement, especially with regard to postal deliveries in the country districts.