

SYNOPSIS

Dominica

of the Leeward Islands

The Development and Study of the Postal System and the Island Post Office

From the Mid- 1700's through World War II

This is a postal history exhibit developed as the history of a postal system. While it does look at routes, rates, and markings in some detail, the focus is on the history of the Post Office itself. As Dominica is a small country, the entire scope of most aspects of its mail system over an almost 200-year period can be studied in an eight frame exhibit.

What is shown is how mail was sent before there was a formal post office, how a postal structure was developed from the introduction of the British Packet Ship lines, how the London British Colonial Government set up a formal post office for the Island using Great Britain stamps, and after this how local Island government began issuing its own stamps and postal stationery. What then also ensued was the development of an internal postal system involving a number of village post offices all around the Island. Later in the 20th Century air mail routes were set up and a system of censorship of mail was developed during World War II.

The formal Chapters of the exhibit are:

Forerunner Ship Mail Mid to Late 1700's

Packet Mail Systems and Markings 1792-1850

Dominica Post Office and Mail System 1850-1860

Postage Stamps and Stationery 1860-1898

Leeward Islands Post Office Issues 1890-1903

Resumption of Dominica Stamps and Stationery 1903-1919

Village Post Office System 1920's-1930's

Postal Operations in the Pre-War Era 1920's – 1940

World War II and Censored Mail 1941-1945

Each Chapter starts with an Introduction to explain the significance of the subject and material to be shown.

The Treatment or story line is more or less chronological within each Chapter although the topics of some chapters do overlap to some extent.

Each cover or card in the exhibit is described with regard to its postal markings, routes and manner of transport, and the postal rates for the transport.

Special items, i.e. rarity or unusual aspects, are denoted in a box with the especially outstanding pieces described in red.

The exhibit has a significant number of the major Dominica rarities that have been identified over the years, and it would not be possible to duplicate the exhibit today.

A great deal of research and personal study has gone into identifying material appropriate for the framework of the exhibit and also understanding the very complex markings, routes and rates involved, particularly for the 18th and 19th Century material.

What makes collecting postal history from a small island such as Dominica extremely difficult is the basic point that there just was not very much mail that was sent and then survived.

Several "philatelic" items are shown in the exhibit simply because the material/stamps could not be found otherwise. The high values of the early stamp issues were used almost 100% of the time for Revenue purposes and the only way non-revenue copies now exist is because collectors like ourselves wanted postally used examples. Putting a few such items in this exhibit is to show them as part of the history of the Post Office.

A couple of period picture post cards are shown both as postal history and also a copy of the photo side to give an idea of life on Dominica in the early 20th Century.

Finally, the broad scope of this study of the Dominica postal system allows it to be a useful and important model for the overall development of similar systems of the numerous islands of the British Caribbean area.

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