



# BRITISH COLUMBIA POSTAL HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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**BRITISH COLUMBIA POSTAL HISTORY  
NEWSLETTER  
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*Extract* of Pages 980,981, 982 containing the article "High bids for Gastown mail" by Andrew Scott.

Thank you Andrew Scott and BC Postal history Study Group.

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## High bids for Gastown mail

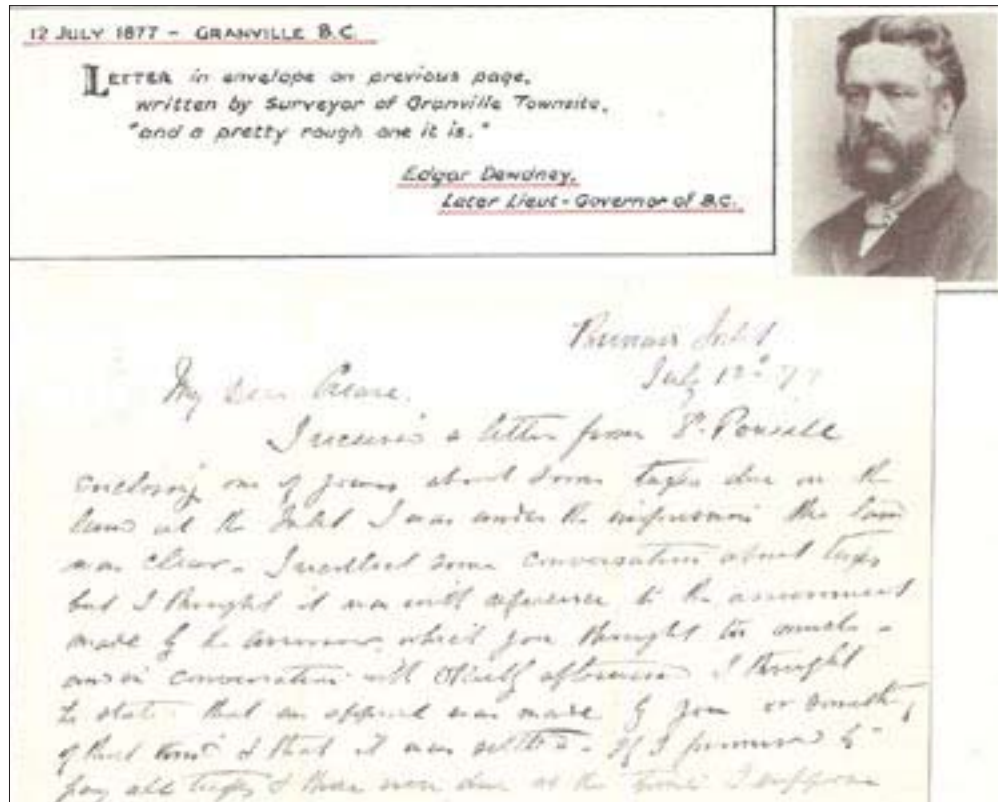
In 1877 Edgar Dewdney was 41 years old, a trained civil engineer and already a significant figure in British Columbia's political and business circles. He had emigrated from England to Victoria in 1859 and was immediately put to work surveying the site of New Westminster with Richard Moody and the Royal Engineers. In the 1860s, with Walter Moberly, Dewdney secured several important trail-building contracts, including one that eventually connected Hope on the Fraser River with gold strikes in southern and eastern

British Columbia and came to be known as the Dewdney Trail. In 1868 he was named to represent Kootenay in BC's colonial legislative council. In 1872, after BC joined Confederation,

he was elected an MP and represented Yale in the House of Commons until 1879.

In July of 1877, Dewdney found himself somewhat reluctantly surveying the townsite of Granville in what is now the oldest part of downtown Vancouver. While there, he wrote a letter to his friend Henry

Crease, at that time a judge on BC's Supreme Court. The letter concerned an esoteric tax problem, but Dewdney added some personal comments. "I am here," he complained, "in a very bad camp and the only one I can get on account of the scarcity of fresh water. I am finishing Granville Townsite, and a pretty rough one it is."



Edgar Dewdney to Henry Crease, July 12, 1877, datelined Burrard Inlet. On Wellburn page.

Granville, or Gastown as it was also known, after "Gassy" Jack Deighton, a bar owner, was where the city got its start. The Granville post office, located in the Hastings Mill store, was established in 1874. Henry Harvey, the

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Dues are payable to the editor: Andrew Scott  
5143 Radcliffe Rd, Sechelt, BC, Canada V0N 3A2

Individual print issues sell for \$2.50 each, post paid.

Editor: Andrew Scott  
email: [andrewscott@dccnet.com](mailto:andrewscott@dccnet.com)

Associate Editor: Tracy Cooper  
email: [tracycooper100@shaw.ca](mailto:tracycooper100@shaw.ca)

Study Group Chair: Tim Woodland  
email: [twoodland@telus.net](mailto:twoodland@telus.net)

Editor Emeritus: Bill Topping

Newsletter submissions may be sent to the editors at the addresses above.

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*Gastown mail continued*

mill's storekeeper, was the first postmaster. In 1886 the office's name was changed to Vancouver. (The store, moved in 1931 to the north end of Alma Street and now a museum, is the city's oldest surviving building.)

Dewdney's letter and envelope found their way into the Vancouver-area collection of lumberman Gerald Wellburn. Wellburn acquired many historical BC covers, letters and documents directly from early pioneer families, including the Creases. Over the past year many of these items have been auctioned by Brian Grant Duff and All Nations Stamp & Coin.

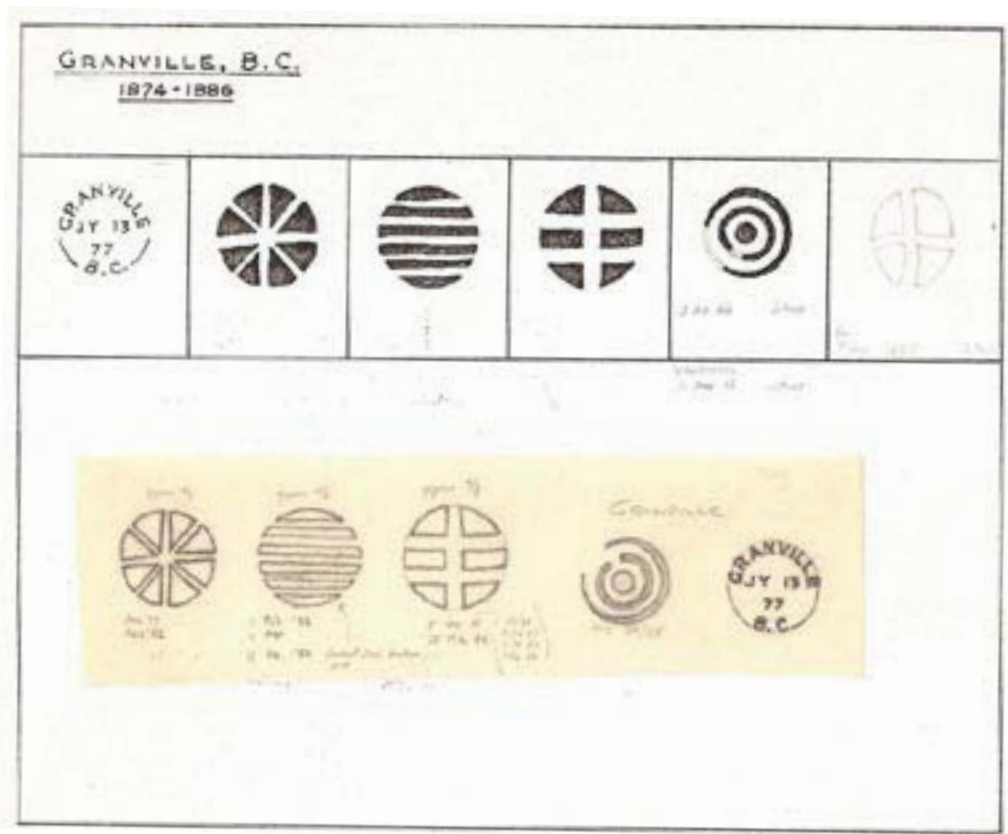


Cover from Edgar Dewdney to Henry Crease in Victoria. "Lands and Works" logo embossed on envelope flap. July 13, 1877, Granville split-ring cancel, same-day New Westminster "BRIT COL" transit strike on reverse. On original Wellburn page.

Wellburn believed that the Dewdney cover bore the earliest reported Granville postmark, and it may well have done so when he was collecting. Now an earlier cover is known, dated Jan 5, 1875. Granville covers are not exactly rare; at least 30 are known, most in rather rough condition. But because of the intimate association that Granville has with the earliest days of one of Canada's great cities, covers carry a certain cachet and usually fetch higher-than-average prices. This one, for instance, sold for \$1,210 in the Jan 21, 2017, auction, while the letter, auctioned separately, realized \$1,815 on Feb 4, 2017.

Although Granville was only open for 12 years, it still used a number of different cork cancels. Wellburn kept track of these and made detailed tracings of five different types. He also recorded

Gastown mail continued



Gerald Wellburn's notes and tracings for Granville cork cancels: lot 87; Oct 15, 2016, All Nations sale; realized \$27.50.

the periods of use of each cork. As these dates don't show up very well on the scan, I've repeated them below in tabular form, adding a previously unreported cork from the earliest reported cover mentioned above (cancel No 1, which is very similar to No 6). Newsletter readers may be able to add new corks or extend the range of these dates.

No	Description	Early date	Late date
1	four-segment I	January 1875	
2	eight-segment	July 1877	August 1882
3	six-bar	February 1882	October 1882
4	six-segment	April 1883	March 1884
5	three-ring	March 1885	April 1886
6	four-segment II	March 1885	

Edgar Dewdney, it should be mentioned, went on to bigger things. Sir John A Macdonald, the prime minister and a close friend, appointed him Indian commissioner (and, later, lieutenant governor) of the North-West Territories in 1879. In 1888 he was elected an MP again and appointed minister of the interior but resigned to take up, from 1892 to 1897, the much-desired position of lieutenant governor of BC.

The *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* summed up his life as follows: "Edgar Dewdney was an accomplished engineer, an indifferent businessman, an adequate administrator and an undistinguished politician. His greatest fault, perhaps, was his partisan loyalty to John A Macdonald, which clouded his judgement at critical moments. He deserves some of the blame for the North-West rebellion and the repressive policies that followed it. The roads he surveyed in British Columbia were his greatest achievement."

—Andrew Scott, with thanks to Brian Grant Duff and All Nations Stamp & Coin for images and notes