

In the National Postal Museum: The Lady McLeod Cover

by Thomas Lera

Sugar and cacao plantations dominated the economy of Trinidad in the nineteenth century and the British Colonial government opened land to settlers interested in establishing these estates. The resulting population and economic growth inspired the people of Trinidad to campaign for a postal service between the towns of San Fernando and capital city Port of Spain. However, as late as 1844, no such service had been authorized. The only mail and parcels carried between the two ports was by an old, expensive and unreliable steamer, the *Paria*.¹

In 1845, Messrs. Turnbull, Stewart & Co. introduced a more modern steamer named the *Lady McLeod* after Governor of Trinidad Sir Henry McLeod's wife. Built by Robert Napier in Greenock on the Clyde in Scotland, she was a 67-ton, three-masted paddle steamer, 109 feet in length with a 40 horse-power engine. With David Bryce as its the first Captain,² she set out for Trinidad on September 5, 1845, and, after a 48-day voyage arrived at Port of Spain.

Her first trip out of the Port of Spain was to San Fernando on November 3, 1845. The following day, an official notice was placed in the *Port of Spain Gazette* by J.A. Allen, Henry Scott and John Losh of Turnbull, Stewart and Co. stating:

the ship would carry letters, public officers, magistrates and police free of charge.³

On November 21, they placed another notice in the *Port of Spain Gazette*:
Steamer The Lady McLeod

Letters, Money and Small Parcels will be carried from this date for subscribers only, at one dollar per month from each Subscriber or Estate, payable quarterly in advance; letters of non-subscribers will be charged 10 cents each. Letter box at Michael Maxwell's San Fernando, and Turnbull, Stewart and Co. Port of Spain.

N.B. The Commander can only be held responsible for parcels or letters containing money, for which a receipt is given and a commission of one-half per cent [paid].⁴

The transport of mail was paid for in cash either in port or on board ship. Many times this caused problems, as the ship's captain ran out of loose change and had to refuse letters.

In November 1846, the ship was sold to David Bryce and by April 16, 1847, he had overcome the small change situation by printing his own stamps. Mr. Bryce placed another notice in the *Port of Spain Gazette* which stated:

The Subscriber experiencing inconvenience in collecting the Money for Letters of Non-Subscribers, has procured Labels, which may be had of him or the Agents for the Steamer, at five cents each or Four Dollars per Hundred.



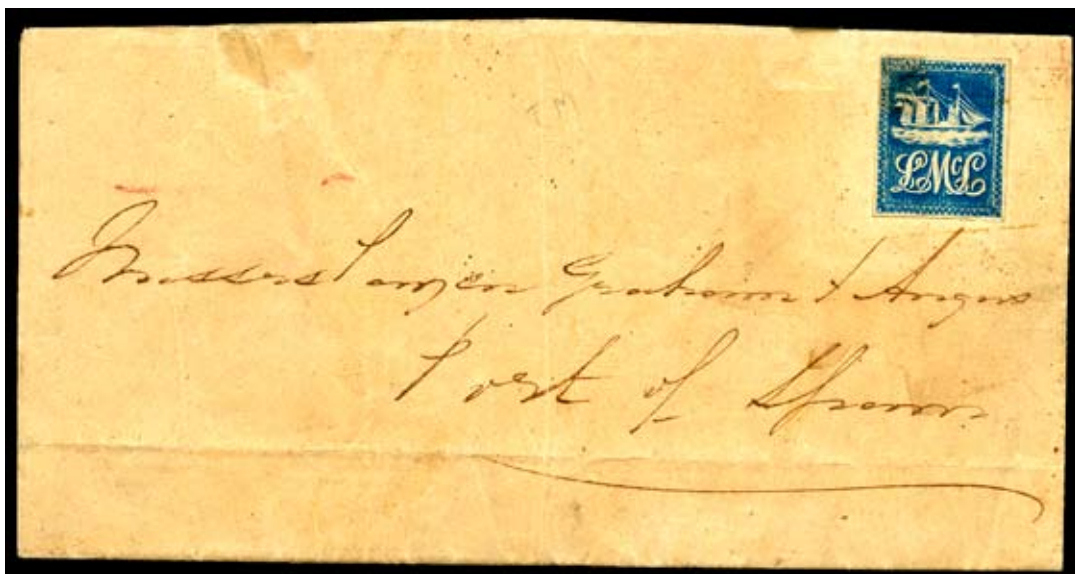
No other Letters but those of subscribers who have paid in advance or such as have these labels attached, will be carried, from and after the 24th instant.

Freight for parcels and small packages as heretofore.⁵

Although an unofficial issue, the Lady McLeod stamp was the first adhesive postage stamp ever issued relating to “post by sea.”

Very little else is known of the stamp, other than they were lithographed in deep blue on thick, yellowish paper, in a design that showed the ship at sea with the letters “L Mc L” in fancy script. It has yet to be discovered who printed the stamps, how many impressions were on a sheet, and how many sheets were produced. Some suspect Charles Petit could have been responsible for this issue as well as the lithographs, since he was in the Caribbean area during this time period.⁶

A soon to be published book, *Trinidad—a Philatelic History to 1913*, by Sir John Marriott, Michael Medicott and Reuben A. Ramkissoon, contains “Appendix 4—A Census of the Lady McLeod Stamps.” The census states that there are 26 copies of unused and 24 copies of used stamps, with 39 usages on cover or on piece, with six additional items listed from vintage auction catalogs.⁷



This Smithsonian National Postal Museum cover is listed in the book as number C23. It is dated October 23, 1847, and was mailed from Taylor & Co. in San Fernando, and is addressed to Taylor Graham & Angus in Port of Spain, with a small “Pemberton/Wilson & Co.” handstamp.⁸

The lettersheet reads:

Dear Gilbert, Yours per steamer to hand. I write you per ... about the ... It's not worthwhile making a song about it for one dollar if the others will fetch cost, as far as that is concerned, but if yours is much the worse and you are consigning at any rate, you may put it in.

It would be a delicate matter to make enquiries regarding the corner store, but I doubt not Graham will tell me when the decision of the senior partners is known.

I would not give more than \$130 for the front house and store as somebody or other people don't seem to thrive there.

As listed in Appendix 4, the first recorded Lady McLeod cover was April 28, 1847, addressed to Messrs. Taylor Graham & Angus⁹ in Port of Spain, and the last recorded

Lady McLeod cover was dated March 20, 1849, sent to Alex Taylor, Esq. in San Fernando. There are later known covers but the stamps have been removed, cleaned and replaced so they cannot be certified as belonging to the lettersheet.

The Lady McLeod Cover is from the Smithsonian National Postal Museum Collection. The author thanks James O'Donnell for scanning the object.

The National Postal Museum Library is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 PM and on the third Saturday of each month from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Please call Paul McCutcheon (202) 633-5544 for an appointment. To view this collection or other museum collections, email Jim O'Donnell at ODonnellJA@si.edu for an appointment.

Endnotes

- 1 John B. Marriott, *The Philatelic History of Trinidad to 1862*, British West Indies Study Circle Paper No. 3, 1963, pp. 12-14.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Morton, C.S. "The Romance of The Lady McLeod," *Stamp Collectors' Fortnightly* (Dec 10, 1921), No 698: p. 393.
- 4 S. Ringstrom and Tester H.E.. *The Private Ship Letter Stamps of the World, Part 1, The Caribbean*. No place of publication (but Trelborg), Undated (1979), pp. 10-11.
- 5 C.S. Morton, op. cit., p. 393.
- 6 J.B. Marriott, "The Lady McLeod Stamp of Trinidad," *An Album of Rare Postage Stamps*, ed. L. Norman Williams (Vallancey International, 1982), pp. 41-45.
- 7 Sir John B. Marriott, Michael Medicott, and Reuben A. Ramkissoon, *Trinidad—a Philatelic History to 1913* (to be published by the British West Indies Study Circle, Pennymead Books, United Kingdom), Chapter 4: pp. 251 - 298.
- 8 Pemberton, Wilson & Co. were philatelic dealers and publishers, publishing and editing *The Stamp Collector's Handbook* and for many years *The Philatelic Journal of Great Britain*. They may have owned this cover because their handstamp is found on many covers.
- 9 James Graham Taylor, one of the addressees was a stamp collector and preserved many of these lettersheets. He corresponded with Sir Henry Bacon who authored "The Postage Stamps, Envelopes, Wrappers, Post Cards and Telegraph Stamps of the British Colonies in the West Indies, Together with British Honduras and the Colonies in South America," *The Philatelic Society*, (London , 1891), p. 143.

Special Announcement – 2009 One-Frame Competition

The one-frame competition for 2009 will be held at the Collectors Club on Wednesday, November 11 at a special meeting devoted solely to the exhibition. As usual, the competition is open to all members of the Collectors Club. Because of the twenty-frame limit at the clubhouse, only single entries will be accepted, unless we have a shortage of exhibits. A prospectus will be mailed to each resident member in August. Non-resident members who wish to exhibit should call or e-mail Irene Bromberg (212) 683-0559 or collectorsclub@verizon.net for a copy of the prospectus. The prospectus will also be placed on the Club web site (www.collectorsclub.org). APS-accredited judges will award a standard array of awards – a Grand Award, a Reserve Grand Award and Awards of Merit. Awards will be announced at the close of the meeting. For immediate additional information contact Ed Grabowski at (908) 337-0039 or edjgg@alum.mit.edu.