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## Vanuatu Voyage?

*Following the featuring on this site of Bruce Davies's piece of a New Hebrides paquebot cover bearing a Hong Kong 20 cent, John Cooper drew our attention to a full cover with remarkable similarities.*

*Now, the owner of this latter cover, Gary Loew, has sent his reflections on its origins....*



### **The Hong Kong / New Hebrides Paquebot – Some Additional Notes**

**Gary Wayne Loew**

If covers could tell stories, not all of them would be about their initial journeys. In some cases, perhaps, their most interesting stories might be about the people who created the covers or even the journeys represented by transfers among subsequent philatelist-owners.

One such cover that caught my eye was shown on the home page of this website ([www.silverjubileestamps.com](http://www.silverjubileestamps.com)) in July of 2015. It depicts the 20¢ Hong Kong Silver Jubilee with a New Hebrides Paquebot. This cover was of particular interest to me as I am the present owner of this charming little philatelic creation. I had purchased it for several reasons. Of course, the combined origin/destination was unusual. And, since I'm a Silver Jubilee collector, the use of the SJ stamp added to its allure. Moreover, the Paquebot mark is known to be rather scarce. But it also appears that this is a Leralle cover and outside of this cover (and its 3 siblings), I'm not aware of any other Leralle SJ covers. My research into this cover led me in a few interesting directions.



Figure 1

The obverse of the cover (Figure 1) has a single example of the 20¢ Hong Kong Silver Jubilee (SG136). The stamp is cancelled SON by a sharp example of a New Hebrides Paquebot and there is a non-tying second impression to the left. The Paquebot mark ("N-HEBRIDES / -3 AOUT 1936 / PAQUEBOT") is identified as 1804 in the Dovey/Morris 4th edition of Hosking's work (it was 851 in the earlier editions). The reverse has a single strike of the receiver, "NEW HEBRIDES / -3 AUG.36 / --VILA--". The cover is addressed to "Messrs Wa Hing & Co. / Island Traders / Erromango". The envelope has been opened and the contents removed.

One thing that stands out is the date of the cancellation, 3-AUG-1936. The Hong Kong SJs were removed from counter sale on 31-DEC-1935. So someone had to have held onto the stamp for over seven months before it was used, placing this stamp at the extreme end of its "normal" usage period. The delayed use notwithstanding, 20¢ pays the correct surface foreign letter rate in 1936. Of perhaps greater interest is the circumstances under which a Hong Kong stamp could have been properly used on a Paquebot to New Hebrides. Two usage possibilities were identified by Mike Dovey :

Option 1. If the ship was HK registered and the crew posted using the correct stamps then the ship could well belong to CHINA NAVIGATION (John Swire) who traded for years around the Pacific and were based in HK. The only downside to this is that their ships were GB registered but as the crew would never be able to get GB stamps then HK stamps could well have been used.

Option 2. If the ship was trading out of HK and was the last port of call before Vila then the letter could have been posted using what they call "third nation posting" i.e., the ship could use stamps of the last port of call. In this case if it was HK then the crew would use HK stamps but if this is the case then the ship could be registered anywhere and could be any shipping line.

As we shall discuss momentarily, the second option is the more likely. But regardless of the explanation, our ability to identify a ship or an exact route is very constrained. Few shipping records likely survive from the mid-1930s for this region and I've not been able to locate any helpful records.

This is certainly a very pretty envelope and, the commercial addressee notwithstanding, has the appearance of a philatelic cover. When researching New Hebrides philately, a wonderful place to start is Roland Klinger's robust and richly illustrated website . Searching that site uncovers in interesting surprise: not only is a scan of my cover to be found, but two nearly identical SJ siblings as well! Both sport the same 20¢ SJ and the same Paquebot CDS. Figure 2, reproduced from Klinger's website, is addressed to Vila and appears to be in the same handwriting as my cover. (Notice, for example, the shape of the initial capital M in the address.) Figure 3 shows a cover addressed to Malikolo (today the island is called Malekula), but again in the same handwriting. Figure 4, not from the Klinger website, shows a 4th example from the collection of Rob Schneider of PhilaGallery – this one addressed to Vate (the island of Efate). While it is always possible that these are strictly commercial covers, additional evidence points to a shared philatelic origin.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Four pretty philatelic covers merit some research about their creator. It was suggested by New Hebrides collector Alain Millet that my Paquebot might be a Leralle cover. If so, then based on handwriting all 4 would have emanated from the same creator. Some of Millet's research is included in the Leralle webpage on the Klinger website . This is an extensive discussion of Leralle and worth viewing. There is no need to duplicate that work here.

Let's revisit the conundrum of these covers' usage. Considering the late usage of the Hong Kong SJ, the unusual origin/destination combination, and the diverse addressees in the same handwriting, it seems highly unlikely that a ship's crewman was the source of the covers (Dovey's Option 1). Far more likely is that Masseur Leralle created these confections and then had a philatelic "agent" aboard a commercial vessel arrange for

the Paquebot handling. Philatelist Leralle seems to have accomplished similar tasks around the globe. The Klinger website documents 177 such items.

I would be interested in learning about any similar Paquebots with SJs or about other Leralle covers that include SJs from other colonies. More perplexing is the actual route taken by these covers. Many ships plied the waters between Asia and the South Pacific in the years before World War II. Can any reader assist in documenting the ship or route taken by these covers?

### *Acknowledgements*

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1. Dovey, Mike & Morris, Keith, Paquebot Cancellations of the World and more... 4th Edition. (Gorsley [UK]: TPO & Seapost Society, 2010). Pg. 120.
2. Email conversation between Mike Dovey and the author dated 1-AUG-2015.
3. <http://www.ro-klinger.de/NH/index.htm>. Accessed on 16-SEP-2015.
4. See Millet's powerful New Hebrides exhibit, found at <http://issuu.com/codaxa/docs/nouvelleshebrides>
5. <http://www.ro-klinger.de/NH/1-phleral2.htm>

G.W.L. - September 2015

### *Tailpiece*

Roland Klinger, who has the site: "The New Hebrides: Postal History & Stamps", writes:

*André Leralle was in the Pacific area with the "Banque d'Indochine" and visited many places there. As he was a stamp man he produced a lot of covers while visiting the islands. You can read the few facts we know on the start page of the "Leralle"-section <http://www.ro-klinger.de/NH/1-phleral2.htm>*

*Obviously he had good relations to the local Post Officer. He even produced covers with fantasy PAQUEBOT*

*cachets. There is no special ship connected with this cover you mention. The date 3 August 1936 is a date*

*between the visits of the regular Burns Philp (English) or Messageries Maritimes (French) ships so I suppose*

*that he stayed in Vila for some time and then took another ship to go on. Most of his covers are from Indo-China*

*but he frequently used stamps from other countries - sometimes not in accordance with the UPU paquebot regulations.*

He is also sure that the cancel on Gary's cover is a genuine one.