

Electronic Machinery Will Be Used In City Postal Mail Sorting

30,000 Letters Per Hr. Can Be Processed Now

The tremendous expansion of Canada's Cities since the Second World War, has placed an enormous burden on the Canadian Postal Service. The ability of men to sort mail quickly and efficiently, and their memories being strained to the utmost.

In an effort to find an answer to this situation, the Canadian Postal Service is turning to electronic machinery to aid in the handling of the mass of letters mailed daily in the major cities across the country.

The electronics industry has made great strides in recent years, and therefore the Post Office Department in conjunction with the National Research Council decided to approach and explore the possibility of handling letter mail by means of electronic machinery.

A small research group was formed, and their findings were made available to the manufacturing specialists who, under contract, produced prototype machines. The first mechanical mail sorter was tested at Post office headquarters in 1953. This machine used a code placed on the back of the envelope, employing a phosphor substance.

The electronic reader could read the codes at a fairly fast rate. Major difficulties were found to be of a mechanical nature, rather than electronic, and the initial machine was slow and damaged the letters on occasion.

In 1954 the Post Office entered into a contract with a precision manufacturing company to bring to the Post Office Department engineers, technicians and mechanics, to carry out experimental work along with the Post Office laboratory staff. In 1956 trials proved that the basic principles of automatic sorting were sound. However, machinery developed up to this date was not completely satisfactory as it still damaged a portion of the mail.

A new machine was evolved which grasped each letter in a trap-like device, and through 1956 to 1958 further modifications and improvements were made on this equipment. In February, 1959, the machine was turned over to Canada Ltd., at Montreal, who were asked to design the coding apparatus, refurbish the sorter and computer (memory) developed by the post office laboratory. Canadair was also asked to maintain and evaluate the equipment over a six-month period, and to report on the various aspects of the performance of the equipment.

The post office in turn, were responsible for the selection and training of personnel to operate the machine, building facilities, and a directory of codes and distribution.

They were also responsible for the operational, and system evaluation of the equipment and the principles involved. The experimental electronic letter sorting machine is being placed in the Montreal Post office during the fall of 1959. Montreal was chosen because of its large volume of mail, the fact that it is a foreign mail despatch point, and its mail has bilingual characteristics which present interesting problems to the electronic sorting operation. It is also a convenient location to both Canadair Ltd. and the Post Office headquarters at Ottawa.

The experimental electronic sorting machine consists of one sorter, and six coding desks, and it will be tested over a six month period for cost, service, speed, efficiency, operator fatigue and other factors.

In operation, faced up and stamp-cancelled letters are fed into the coding machines, the operator reads the address, and imprints a code on the letters by pressing keys on a keyboard in front of him. The letters then go to a stacker and when this is full they are taken to the sorting machine. This machine makes thirty-one separations for the sorting of out of town mail. These separations consist of nine provincial, two foreign, and twenty large Canadian towns.

Letter mail coming into a city, plus local mail, can be sorted down to the individual Letter Carrier's route. The basic concept of this coding and multi-sort principle is that a letter destined for Montreal, mailed in Vancouver for Montreal, with the appropriate street and street number, and then automatically sorted with outgoing mail for despatch to Montreal. On receipt in Montreal, it would be fed through the sorter and automatically go to the individual letter carrier. It follows that the best results in machine sorting can only be attained if every mailer is sure to address letters fully and clearly - street and street number, city or town and province.

Some details of the equipment are as follows: the code consists of two separate units, one above the other, each with six own independent stagger viewing windows, printer and output stacker. The operator reads letters from each unit alternately, that is, he codes letters alternately from the top and bottom viewing windows. Each of the two coder units can be operated independently so that in the event of a mechanical or electrical failure only one unit would be out of action, resulting in the code being readable but at reduced efficiency.

The sorters will sort mail at approximately 84 letters per second or 30,000 per hour. The mail is transferred from the reader through a synchronous motor drive to the letter trap where it is securely held. Each letter is carried by its own individual letter trap to the appropriate stacker. Mail may be re-sorted as many times as desirable that is to the small practical bundle for despatch.

The letter is then transported past a photoelectric reader which reads the code and gives this information to the computer. The code as read on the letter, is then compared with the codes in the memory drum. The distribution information on the memory drum for that particular code is transmitted to the gate selector. It then operates the appropriate gate at just the right instant to deflect the letter into the correct stacker.

The memory drum or computer consists of 110 tracks. About 110 of these tracks are allocated for forward or out of town sorting. Each Post Office in Canada has a four letter code and each track has 150 of these four letter codes showing the appropriate stacker number for both primary and secondary sorting.

As regards training special training equipment has been developed in order that operators and supervisors can be properly trained to operate the equipment in time for its installation this fall. The operator uses a special 15 key keyboard on which a multiple number of keys are depressed simultaneously, which action converts the alphabetical character into the binary code pattern. At the present time selected personnel from the Montreal Post Office staff are being trained in the code using the special training equipment developed by the Post Office Department Engineering Staff.

Mr. J. W. Scott took to Winnipeg on Wednesday to attend the funeral of his brother Mr. Robert Scott, a former resident and well known in this district.

Mr. Donald McEwen and Mrs. Bessie McEwen, parents of Mr. Scott, were in the city for a week with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Allan and family.

Mr. James Lantz and daughter Bonnie, visited for the weekend with her father, Mr. Tom Mack.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Gibson entertained friends and relatives at a dance in the hall at St. Andrew's following their daughter's wedding last Saturday. During the evening the band moved dancing to Don's Hotel Orchestra and family and wedding cases were served by the hostess.

Mr. and Mrs. John McEwen and Mr. and Mrs. Louis McEwen attended the wedding of Calvin Spruille and Margaret Mallon in Hamilton on Saturday.

Constable George Gibson has returned to duty at Prince George, B.C. after spending two weeks holiday at his home.

Mr. and Mrs. Tom Gibson and Duncan attended the wedding on Saturday in Fern of Betty Sinclair to John Beatty of Kit chester.

The second annual Christian Youth dinner was held in the church basement on Friday, October 23rd at 6:30. About forty set down to a beautiful turkey dinner served by the Women's Association of the Ballinacraig church. The guest speaker for the evening was Mr. Ron Atkinson, B.A., a student from Emmanuel College and Mr. John Ambrose, also from the college, led the singing. A toast to the Queen was proposed by Joyce Keenan and to the church by Ken Leung.

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LEGION NOTES

Thought is the regular monthly meeting and a good crowd is assured, if for no other reason than that the tickets for our Remembrance dinner go on sale to many this is the highlight of the Legion year and it is unfortunate that more than the two hundred odd cannot attend this grand evening.

Let us not forget on the anniversary of the day that we are remembering those of our comrades who did not return.

It is extremely gratifying that all of our members who were present at the dinner on Friday, October 23rd, at 6:30. About forty set down to a beautiful turkey dinner served by the Women's Association of the Ballinacraig church. The guest speaker for the evening was Mr. Ron Atkinson, B.A., a student from Emmanuel College and Mr. John Ambrose, also from the college, led the singing. A toast to the Queen was proposed by Joyce Keenan and to the church by Ken Leung.

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as always, is right in there pitching when it comes to anything for the benefit of the community.

Naturally, at the beginning a few of the members were a bit doubtful of our ability to raise that much money, but once the 50 ahead was given by the Branch everyone seems to have placed their shoulder to the wheel and really worked. Our congratulations again to all who are working so hard at this time.

Received an interesting communication from Gail Martin. We haven't room to reprint this week but will do so next issue something about a Van Sumer award, Legion's highest honor. Congratulations to G. on success.

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