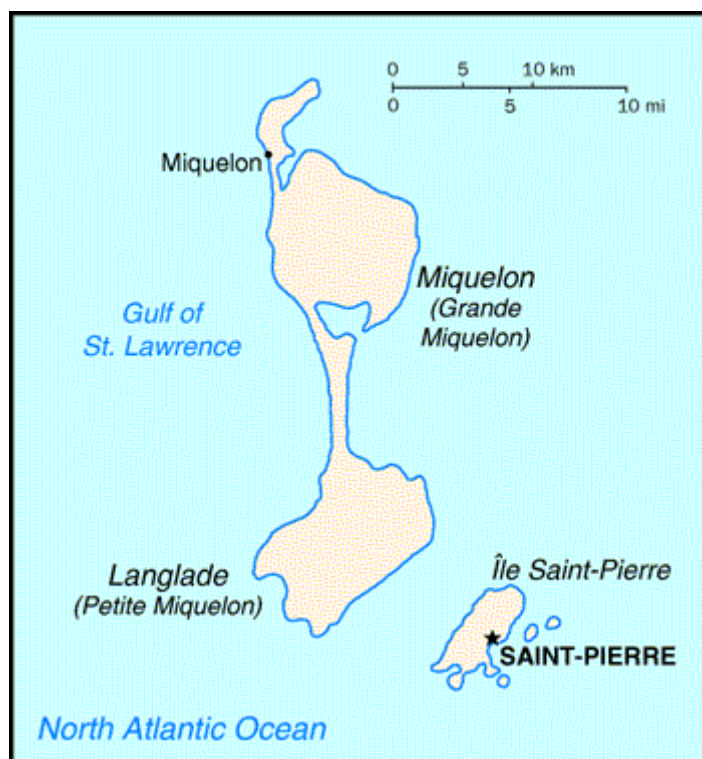


## A little piece of France in North America

Jack Searles

Did you know that there is a little piece of France in our own North American backyard? Well, the answer is there is! To this day there remains a remnant of the French colonial empire in North America, first occupied in 1604. Of course, I am referring to St. Pierre and Miquelon. St. Pierre and Miquelon have used the stamps of France and their own stamps, all of which provide the collector with a long and interesting history!



Source: [http://saint\\_pierre\\_and\\_miquelonnorth\\_america.your-directory.com/www.lib.utexas.edu::maps::americas::st\\_pierre\\_miquelon\\_sm97.gif.html](http://saint_pierre_and_miquelonnorth_america.your-directory.com/www.lib.utexas.edu::maps::americas::st_pierre_miquelon_sm97.gif.html)

Let's start with a little geography. St. Pierre and Miquelon are located a scant 10 miles off the coast of the southwest coast Newfoundland, Canada. This country is composed of two small island groups which include the islands of St. Pierre, Grand Miquelon, Petite Miquelon and Chien. It has been estimated that the area encompassing these islands is about 93 square miles, and has a population of 6,652 (1993). These islands have been described by many as "barren, rocky islands" that "have little soil to support

the scanty vegetation”. So what is the allure of these islands? Well, the answer once was simply cod, but now the answer has generalized to fish and fishing, in general. You see, St. Pierre and Miquelon are located strategically close to the Grand Banks. Fish and canneries thus constitute a major source of revenue for these islands. This is how it is and how it has always been.



Source: <http://www.virtualtourist.com/m/57bb3/56f>

St. Pierre and Miquelon played an important part in the French and English struggle for North America. The British attacked these islands several times. The islands also served as a base for French attacks against the British. In 1763, after the Seven Years War, France formally lost the majority of its North American possessions. After being occupied by the British, St. Pierre and Miquelon were returned to French as a fishing outpost by the Treaty of Paris. Later, these islands would change hands several other times. There has always been competition between the French, the inhabitants of the islands and the British, the residents of Newfoundland and more recently Canada over fishing rights and fishing related matters. In 1886, for example, the Bait Bill was passed in Newfoundland. This legislation was specifically aimed at reducing the ability of French fishermen to fish through prohibiting the sale of bait to French fisherman by Newfoundlanders. Conflict has flared up as recently as 1977 when both France and Canada extended their economic zones to 200 miles surrounding their territories, thus creating a maritime border conflict that would go on for fifteen years. This conflict was only heightened when an international tribunal on June 10, 1992 found that St Pierre and Miquelon only had a

territorial limit of 24 miles to the west and 200 mile long, 10 mile wide corridor to the south. In essence, St Pierre and Miquelon became an island group with basically no fishing resources. The final settlement of this matter would have to wait until 1994 when a treaty between France and Canada for “bilateral corporation” was signed.



Stamps were first issued for St. Pierre and Miquelon in 1885. These stamps were stamps of the French Colonies in circulation at the time with hand stamps applied to them. These hand stamps usually noted the initials “spm” (St. Pierre and Miquelon). Later, in 1892, French stamps of the Navigation and Commerce issue were issued with the inscription “St. Pierre et Miquelon”. During this early period as postal services were being established between Canada and Newfoundland, mail services between St. Pierre and Miquelon and the mainland were subject to the whims of fishing vessels. As a natural consequence of this situation, there are covers known that incorporate stamps from Newfoundland and later Canada on mail originating from the islands. By the 1880s postal arrangements were formalized with Canada and the use of Newfoundland/Canadian stamps ceased. The year 1909 saw the issuance of the first stamps specific to the islands. Quite naturally, many of the stamps of St. Pierre and Miquelon have a maritime theme to them. During Prohibition in the United States, the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon provided many “rum runners” with a foreign port through which they were able to purchase then illegal (in the US) liquor.



At the outbreak of World War II, St Pierre and Miquelon was “liberated” by Free French forces under General DeGaulle. The US, at this time, took great exception to this “invasion” and demanded the return of the islands to the Vichy Government of France. Ultimately, a plebiscite was held, with DeGaulle receiving 90% of the vote. The stamps of this period reflect the events of the day with existing issues overprinted with “France Libre”. The Scott catalogue notes that the Free French Administration of the islands resulted initially in small quantities of most stamps being overprinted and quickly sold to speculators. Later, production of these stamps was transferred to the Free French Agency in Ottawa, Canada. The warning is noted that “excellent counterfeits of these surcharges and overprints are known.”



On July 1, 1978 the islands became an Overseas Department of the Republic of France and French stamps were substituted for those of the islands. Later on June 11, 1985, St Pierre and Miquelon became a Collective Territoriale, which restored local control of the islands and allowed for the



re-issuance of local stamps. Currently, visitors to Paris can purchase the stamps of St. Pierre and Miquelon from the French Philatelic Bureau.



You see, you don't have to go that far from home to find a little piece of France in North America!

**Sources used:**

1995 Information please almanac. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995, p.189.

American Peoples Encyclopedia. Saint Pierre and Miquelon. p. 17-115, Chicago: Spencer Press, Inc., 1952.

Finlay, William. St.Pierre & Michelon. Stamp Mart. September, 1997, pp. 94-6.

Marc Cormier. Saint-Pierre et Miquelon stamps Web Page at <http://www.io.org/~socrates/poste/English.htm>

Pratt, Robert H. Canadian and Newfoundland stamps used in St.Pierre and Miquelon at <http://www.cancom.net/~encyspm/poste/Allen/CNS.html>

Scott Publishing Company. 1992:Standard postage stamp catalogue, Volume 4 P-Z. p. 466.

Wood, Kenneth. Where in the world: An atlas for stamp collectors. Albany, OR: Van Dahl Publications, 1985, p. 292.