lost two Mission 66–era visitor centers, being replaced by designs that go back to the rustic architecture style. Other parks have removed or severely altered many of their modernist structures, although some Mission 66 buildings, like the headquarters building at Rocky Mountain National Park, have been named to the National Register. If Carr errs in his book, it is that he fails to recognize these losses or connect them to the larger loss across the American architectural landscape. Recent past buildings, those post–World War II modernist structures that defined our shopping, living, and work spaces, are coming down fast and furiously. These buildings, both within the parks and across the country, represent the physical legacy of the postwar expansion of the United States. Carr’s history of Mission 66 captures one important slice of that story.

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In the introduction to More Than Words: Readings in Transport, Communication and the History of Postal Communication, editor John Willis grapples with the question, “What is postal history?” Academics, business leaders, museum professionals, and philatelists—all of whom approach the question differently—also seek a better understanding, interdisciplinary collaboration, and, perhaps, an encompassing definition. As interest in and support for postal research expands, museums lead the way by supporting conference panels, hosting symposiums, posting writings on Web sites, and publishing books on the subject. The Canadian Museum of Civilization published More Than Words as the fifth Canadian Postal Museum paper in its Mercury Series. This compilation takes a significant step in the journey toward identifying the scope and impact of postal history.

The volume’s essays are divided into four sections that explore the postal system and service, plus epistolary studies and material culture. Maps, images, tables, and diagrams support the essays. The research covers over three centuries in North America and Europe, with an emphasis on Canada and the role of the post in transforming Canadian society. Some essays appear in English, others in French, and all provide bilingual abstracts. To compile the volume, Willis brought together a diverse group of authors from museums, universities, libraries, governments, and business. Brief biographies of the authors would have reinforced this achievement.

The topics covered vary as much as the perspectives presented. Part 1, focusing on the post as a system, includes macro and micro case studies ranging from relationships between the government and the private sector to the processing of mail. Breadth is evidenced by a study of seventeenth-century transatlantic delivery methods of official correspondence and new informa-
tion on the Post Office Riot of 1938, when unemployed protesters and a riot squad clashed inside the Vancouver post office. Particularly thoughtful is the essay about internal museum ethic debates over salvaging postal artifacts following the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and the health and security risks associated with contaminated objects.

Epistolary studies comprise part 2, with offerings on the use of goose feathers for the quill writing market, secret and coded writing during war, and letter-writing culture. A well-illustrated investigation of penmanship instruction and letter-writing manuals provides evidence of the complex relationship among instruction, writing performance, and gentility. At a time when handwriting was considered an extension of the writer’s body, the repeated copying of business and personal sample letters instilled the standards of conduct expected of a promising young man and promised graceful and acceptable forms of communication.

Part 3 focuses on people and their letters. Mail provides an important communication link for migrants, whose letters disclose the importance of sharing the daily human experience, as well as for soldiers at the front who need a lifeline to their families’ routine lives. One examination of a Danish Canadian’s seven hundred documents reveals the cultural distances and immigrant identity as well as reinforces the role of correspondence in developing chains of migration and maintaining strong family ties.

The book’s final section examines communication and transport. Here the patterns of sixteenth-century traders and mariners to remote fishing stations in Terra Nova (Newfoundland), preserved through correspondence and detailed records, illustrate transatlantic communications for these tradesmen and their families in France and Spain. Another essay explains the importance of the arrival of the mail to homesick miners on “Steamer Day” in California following the discovery of gold in 1848. Yet another researcher analyzes the role of the radio in Canadian society during the Royal Tour of 1939 to provide evidence that the coverage legitimized the authority of the Canadian state, the Commonwealth, the monarchy, the bonds between Canada and the United States, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation as the broadcasting authority.

While postal historians may identify this collection of essays as a page-turner, public historians will take away a new perspective on the idea of postal history and how it might be integrated into compelling stories over time and space. As a tome on the museum bookshelf, the historiography in the introduction and each essay’s bibliographic endnotes justify it as a reference for years to come. An index would have improved accessibility to the rich offerings in the text. More important, however, is the way this book can serve as a source of inspiration. The essays point to how much research can yet be done in myriad ways both in future publications and in museum exhibits on site and online. Writing, postal operations, mail, and communication are integral to so many compelling stories that we have yet to share.

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