

King Edward VII Issue of Canada

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Introduction

With the death of Queen Victoria on 22 January 1901, her son who was to be crowned King Edward VII, succeeded to the throne. A new series of Canadian stamps showing the portrait of the King was, however, not issued for nearly two and a half years. The process for preparing a series of stamps bearing the portrait of a Sovereign involves designing and engraving a likeness and obtaining approval for the design and portrait from the new monarch. This invariably results in a delay before proceeding to engrave the individual dies and lay down the plates for each value to be printed. In this case the longer than usual delay is believed to be the result of the Postmaster General of Canada, Sir William Mulock, waiting 18 months until the coronation in August 1902 before approaching King Edward and the Prince of Wales (a keen philatelist who would become King George V) to discuss the proposed design. The design itself was the work of the Prince of Wales, at the time the President of the Royal Philatelic Society, and J.A. Tilleard, his philatelic mentor and the Honorary Secretary of the Royal Philatelic Society. The London Philatelist reported at the time:

“The Prince, with his characteristic energy and courtesy, cheerfully undertook the task . . . H.R.H. wisely decided, in the first instance, that it is advisable to have some continuity of design in succeeding issues and therefore adopted the frame and groundwork of the then current stamps as his basis. In selecting a portrait of His Majesty, the Prince decided to rely upon a photograph giving a true likeness of the King as we know him, in lieu of an idealized representation by an artist. The photograph eventually chosen, with the full approval of His Majesty, was one taken shortly before the coronation.”

The overall design is a simple and dignified arrangement reminiscent of the previous Queen Victoria Maple Leaf and Numeral issues. The King is shown in his coronation robes within an oval framed with the words ‘CANADA POSTAGE’ at the top and the value designation in English at the bottom. Tudor crowns were used for the first time on a Canadian stamp and replaced the maple leaves of the Victorian issues in the top corners, but maple leaves were retained as ornaments above and beside the numeral boxes in the lower corners.

Production

John A.C. Harrison of Perkins Bacon and Co. Ltd., London, England, prepared an engraving, based on a head and shoulders portrait of the King in his robes of state taken by the photographer William E. Downey. A die proof of this approved essay was subsequently used by Charles Skinner of the American Bank Note Co. (ABN) in New York to engrave a die for the Edward issue in 1903. This die consisted of the head, shoulders and most of the ermine cape, but without background shading lines in the portrait area, the oval portrait outline, the corner spandrels or the denominations in words or numerals. A number of subtle changes were made to the approved design in the ABN engraving process to accommodate high-speed rotary press printing in Ottawa. These included creating coloured numerals on a white background thereby reversing the

original design, reducing the size of the maple leaves to increase the size of the numeral boxes and permit two digit values, and substituting diagonal lines for horizontal lines in the portrait background.

Five secondary dies were created from this die on which the missing design elements as well as the denominations in numerals and words were added for the original 1, 2, 5, 7 and 10 cent values issued in 1903. As there were still ample stocks of the 20 and 50 cent Queen Victoria stamps available at post offices, it was decided to use these up before replacing them with equivalent denominations in the new design. A secondary die was subsequently engraved for the 20 cent value issued in 1904 and another for the 50 cent value issued in 1908.

Although a ½ cent postage rate remained for prepayment of single newspapers and periodicals under 1 ounce until May 1909, no stamp of this denomination was issued for the Edward series, and the earlier Queen Victoria ½ cent stamps continued to be available for over 6 years followed by the ½ cent Quebec Tercentenary stamp issued in 1908.

Production of the printing plates for each value required a number of steps. Firstly, the finished line-engraved steel die for each denomination, bearing the stamp image in reverse, was case-hardened by heating the die in a furnace to about 800°C (1500°F) and then quench cooling it in an oil bath. Next, a transfer roll, a cylinder of soft steel, was rolled under pressure back and forth over the hardened die to impress the image in positive relief on the surface of the roll. Typically for the Edward issue, six image reliefs were impressed on each roll, sometimes divided between two or three denominations. After hardening the transfer roll, the best relief for each value was initially used to rock-in or transfer the desired number of impressions or subjects onto a soft steel printing plate as the recessed stamp design. As this relief wore, another relief would be used for the transfer process. The use of two different reliefs is easily seen in the case of the 1, 2 and 5 cent values, as the early plates show a ragged edge to the cross-hatching in the top or bottom of the oval band surrounding the portrait, while later plates show clean edges at the oval band.

To ensure the correct alignment of the 200 or 400 subjects on the printing plate, a series of vertical and horizontal layout lines was scribed initially, followed by punching guide dots on the plate to allow the siderographer to correctly align and space each subject. The layout lines were then normally burnished off. After all subjects were transferred, the imprint 'OTTAWA-N^O –' and the plate number were added to the plate using a separate transfer roll. Initially the finished plates were not hardened, allowing individual subjects to be easily re-entered if they showed wear during the printing process. Starting in 1905, plates were hardened to extend their life, requiring that the plate be reheated to soften it before any subjects could be re-entered.

The first finished plates consisted of 200 subjects divided into two panes of 100 stamps each, arranged in 10 rows of 10 subjects with a 15 mm vertical gutter between the two panes. On these plates, the imprint and plate number appeared once, centred over the top row of each pane. In 1907, for the 1 and 2 cent denominations only, the ABN changed to a 400-subject plate divided by horizontal and vertical gutters to create four panes of 100 subjects, again in an arrangement of 10 rows of 10 subjects each. On these plates, the subjects, imprints and plate numbers of the lower two panes were all inverted relative to the top two panes. Thus the imprint and plate number again appeared once, centred over the top row of each pane. To aid in distinguishing the

upper and lower panes on these plates, initially a dot was punched into the upper panes after the plate number. Later this practice gave way to punching the letters ‘TOP’ with a reversed P, which evolved to include the word ‘TOP.’ on the transfer roll after the imprint and plate number. Plates 33 and 34 for the 1 cent value also show a spinning top. Lastly, the printed panes of 200 or 400 subjects were divided into post office sheets by guillotining at the gutter(s) resulting in the post office sheets having narrower selvages on the gutter side(s).

Until about April 1911, post office order numbers were not punched on the top margins of the plates, but were simply recorded in the ABN record books and referred to all denominations requisitioned on a particular date. Post office order number 69 is the lowest number that was actually punched on the plates, namely plates 67 and 68 of the 1 cent value. While this order also covered sheets of the 5, 7, 10 and 20 cent denominations, order number 69 does not appear on these values, probably because the ABN had enough stock on hand to fill this order for these denominations. Subsequent orders were identified by defacing one or both digits as needed and punching the new order number on the plate.

Paper

All values were printed on a wove paper with the grain normally running in the vertical direction. The exceptions were the early printings of the 5 cent value on bluish paper, a small number of early 2 cent sheet stamps and the 2 cent booklet stamps that were all printed on horizontal wove paper.

Sheet Stamps

The original Edward VII stamps issued by the post office in sheet form on 1 July 1903 consisted of the 1 cent green, 2 cent carmine, 5 cent blue, 7 cent olive bistre and 10 cent brown lilac denominations. Subsequently on 27 September 1904, a 20 cent olive green value was issued, and finally on 19 November 1908 a 50 cent purple value was issued. All denominations were perforated 12 x 12, or more precisely 11.9 x 11.9, with a perforation hole diameter of about 0.9 mm, compared to the subsequent King George V Admiral issue which had a larger hole diameter of about 1.0 mm.

The number of plates and printing orders placed prepared by the ABN for each value, as well as the quantities issued are shown in the following table.

Value	Plates	Printing Orders	Quantity Issued
One Cent	72	35	1,470,000,000
Two Cents	86	35	2,160,000,000
Five Cents	6	39	66,210,000
Seven Cents	2	39	25,305,000
Ten Cents	2	38	15,080,000
Twenty Cents	1	13	3,150,000
Fifty Cents	1	5	500,000

Some uses of single stamps are summarized below:

- The 1 cent stamp paid the postcard and printed matter rates,
- The 2 cent stamp paid the domestic and US one ounce letter rate, the half ounce UK letter rate until October 1907, and later the one ounce rate,
- The 5 cent stamp paid the half ounce letter rate to UPU countries until October 1907, later the one ounce rate, and the UPU registration fee,
- The 7 cent stamp paid the one ounce domestic registered letter rate,
- The 10 cent stamp paid the half ounce registered letter rate to UPU countries until October 1907, later the one ounce registered letter rate, and the domestic special delivery fee after August 1907,
- The 20 cent stamp paid the 3 ounce foreign registered letter rate and a domestic (10 ounce) parcel rate,
- The 50 cent stamp paid a heavy (25 ounce) domestic parcel rate.

The standard catalogues recognize several shades for all values, which is to be expected as there were many printing orders with large quantities of sheets produced over the life of the issue, and the printing inks were mixed by hand. To date, however, no systematic attempt has been made to produce a colour guide or to associate shades with specific plates or printing dates.

The last printings of the 5, 7, 10 and 20 cent value Edward stamps were made between December 1911 and January 1912, and in similar shades to the King George V Admiral issue which had started to be issued in late December 1911. These Edward printings were required as the equivalent value Admirals would not be in post offices until mid to late January 1912. Only the 7 cent Edward from this last printing can be distinguished from earlier printings, as it was in a distinct straw shade.

Booklet Panes

In addition to sheet stamps, a booklet consisting of two panes of six 2 cent stamps with a wax paper interleaf, postal information sheets and cardboard covers was issued on 1 July 1903. The plates used for the regular post office sheets were not suitable for printing booklet panes as they lacked an appropriate selvedge for binding the 3 x 2 stamp booklet pane format. Thus special plates were prepared consisting of two groups of 84 subjects each, separated by a vertical gutter to create 14 horizontal rows of six subjects, with the first three subjects erect and the second three inverted. The 168-subject plate provided 28 booklet panes after guillotining. Thirteen plates were prepared between May 1903 and June 1911, and 26 printing orders were placed with the ABN for a total production of 10.6 million booklets. Based on subtle variations in these plates, it is possible to divide booklet stamps into seven different types. A number of re-entries and re-touches can be found on some positions of these plates.

Hairlines

Hairlines are fine irregularly shaped lines occasionally found on 1 and 2 cent Edward values and rarely on the 5 cent value. They were the result of minute cracks on the printing plates that took up ink and printed the same way as the engraved design lines. These cracks can form as the

result of inferior steel quality when subjected to repeated printing press pressures, or later in the life of plates bent to fit the curved rotary press cylinder. Hairlines can be found on both unhardened as well as hardened Edward plates, but are not found on plate proofs when the plates were new. Generally the hairlines run horizontally as the plates for the sheet stamps were bent on the horizontal axis, but they run vertically in the case of the 2 cent booklet stamps as these plates were bent vertically. The plates used for the higher value Edward stamps were not bent and are not known to exhibit hairlines.

Re-entries and Retouches

When a plate subject wore after extensive printing or was considered unsatisfactory after initially being laid down, the transfer roll could be reapplied to strengthen the faulty impression. The subject was thus re-entered on the plate. If there were a slight misalignment with the original subject, some parts of the impression would be doubled, resulting in a plate variety. The engraver using hand tools could also touch up individual plate impressions manually. The result of this process was often unintended engraving line irregularities that can be seen on the printed stamp. The relatively low number of plates used to print the large quantities of the lower denominations of the Edward issue resulted in the need to rework the plates several times due to wear. Consequently a large number of re-entries and retouches can be found on this issue.

Precancels

To save time and speed up the processing of third class bulk mail, in 1889 the post office began the practise of precancelling sheets of stamps using a self-inking hand roller with straight or wavy lines applied row by row to the sheet. These are known as bar precancels and come in various styles. Two bar styles known as T and U were applied to the Edward issues. Beginning in 1903, the post office changed their approach and began to precancel full sheets using an electrotype containing straight bars in various styles together with the name of the originating town or city and province. Twenty-three different town and city precancels can be found on the Edward issue, as well as one business, Brown's Nurseries. These precancels can also occur with the additional wording 'FOR THIRD CLASS MATTER ONLY' replacing the name of the province. In addition to the normal horizontal orientation of precancels, a number of varieties are known such as vertical application, inverted orientation, and doubled and tripled application.

Perforated Initials (Perfins)

Some companies started the practice of perforating their stamps with their initials or insignia in 1887 to discourage theft and use of these stamps by their employees for personal mail. Beginning in 1910, the post office required that perfins not exceed a certain size and that the Postmaster General approve the design. Perfins can be found on various Edward values applied by 88 companies, some of which used these stamps at several of their branch locations. In addition, five companies, including three that also used perfins on regular Edward stamps, applied perfins to city style Edward precancels, again in some cases from several cities where they had operations. No bar style precancels, however, are known with perforated initials. Varieties exist such as different perforation orientations, double perforations and damaged die perfins.

Imperforate Stamps

In keeping with the normal practice at the time, ungummed imperforate proof sheets were given to the post office by the ABN when the original 1 cent through 10 cent values were printed. As two plates were used for each of the 1, 2 and 5 cent values, a total of 400 imperforate proofs are thought to exist for each denomination, compared to the 7 and 10 cent values for which one plate was initially used, and thus 200 imperforate proofs are believed to exist for these values. No imperforate proofs are known to have been given to the post office for the 20 and 50 cent denominations issued some years later as these did not constitute a new issue. While these imperforates were never issued to the public, they have entered the market over the years starting in 1924, with one source being the estate of a former post office official.

Three sheets of gummed 2 cent imperforate stamps, one each from plates 31, 32 and 43 were found in 1965. These sheets had been demonetized by drawing a single horizontal inked line through each row, in black on plates 31 and 32, and in red on plate 43. These sheets are thought to have been used in a 1907 experiment to assess the feasibility of dry printing stamps on pre-gummed paper, a departure from the then-current wet printing process. Dry printing would reduce production costs as it eliminated the time-consuming requirement to dry the damp sheets before gumming and perforation. As would be expected, the dry printed stamps from plates 31 and 32 are about 0.5 mm wider than those from comparison plate 43 that was wet-printed. An earlier experiment in 1905 had also been undertaken using plates 13 to 16 for dry printing some gummed perforated sheets. It appears both experiments were unsuccessful likely because the additional pressure needed for the dry process caused excessive wear on the printing presses. The dry printing method was not ultimately adopted by the ABN until 1923. A number of perforated dry-printed 2 cent stamps are known to have been provided from these plates to post offices as regular stock. Based on an examination of 30,000 used copies, Marler found 200 wider dry-printed stamps originating from these plates.

In contrast to these imperforate issues, 1000 gummed imperforate sheets of the 2 cent value were sold to the public in Ottawa from July 1909 until April 1920 when the stock had been exhausted. They were printed from a newly prepared 200-subject plate with a vertical gutter between the 10th and 11th column, and identified in the top left half as "Plate 13" and as "Plate 14" in the top right half. As the printer was using plates 71 and 72 at this time for 2 cent perforated sheet stamps, the rationale for identifying this new plate with these inscriptions remains unclear. These phoney plates 13 and 14 are not the original plates 13 and 14 used for perforated stamps, as there are distinct differences in the placement and detail of the inscriptions on the sheet. Furthermore, stamps from the perforated plates 13 and 14 have the slightly ragged finish to the cross-hatching at the oval typical of the early printings, while those from the phoney plates 13 and 14 show a sharper edge at the oval seen on stamps printed after October 1905 from a second die relief. In April 1909 the post office issued the following announcement concerning the impending release of gummed imperforate stamps:

"In view of the representations which have been made to the Department, it has been decided to permit the sale of the 2-cent denomination of Canadian postage stamps of the current issue, in sheets of 100, without the usual perforation."

It remains uncertain whether these representations came from a US vending machine company already supplying machines dispensing proprietary imperforate coils to the US post office, or the public. It seems likely that in order to avoid the accusation that a potential rarity was being made available only in the US, the Canadian post office agreed that imperforate sheets would be sold to anyone at face value.

Experimental Coils

Between fiscal year 1902/03 and fiscal year 1909/10 the volume of letters and postcards mailed annually in Canada had increased by 90 percent. As a result of this significant increase in mail volumes, the Post Office Department became interested in selling stamps from unattended, automatic vending machines. While secure and reliable coin-operated vending machine had been used in a number of countries to issue cardboard theatre and subway tickets, post cards and other products since the 1880s, the challenges of dispensing individual, thin stamps from perforated rolls was not overcome until 1905 when Robert J. Dickie and John H. Brown of New Zealand patented a practical postage stamp vending machine. The Canadian Post Office appears to have supported different companies in the UK and US that were attempting to improve the Dickie and Brown machines to work reliably with the Canadian Edward issue. Sisters Georgina E. Kermode and Katrine E. Fawns made patented improvements to this machine in the UK to obviate the need for two large holes between each stamp to advance and dispense them. They formed The British Stamp and Ticket Automatic Delivery Co. Ltd. in 1907 to market and install their machines in British post offices. That same year in the US, Sara L.W. Coe and her sister Henrietta T. Werden formed the US Automatic Vending Machine Co. in New York to manufacture and sell coin-activated stamp vending machines under patent rights obtained from Kermode and Fawns.

In late 1910 the Canadian Post Office Department ordered 50 stamp vending machines for experimentation from Kermode and Fawns. The post office requested the ABN in New York to conduct experiments with these machines using sheets of perforated, gummed 1 and 2 cent Edward stamps that had been demonetized by defacing them with a parcel roller cancel or precancel before being torn into strips of ten and pasted together to form rolls. Stamp strips are known with the Ottawa, Ottawa 1 and Ottawa 14 style parcel roller cancel applied both horizontally and vertically, as well as the type T bar precancel applied horizontally. The Department subsequently entered into an agreement in 1911 to grant a 10-year licence with further successive 10-year options to sell postage stamps in Kermode and Fawns vending machines on a 2% commission. The company formed for this purpose was known as The Dominion of Canada Postage Stamp Vending Co. Ltd. The licence was revoked without cause in 1920 by the next Postmaster General resulting in a Supreme Court case settled in 1930 in favour of the Crown, ruling that a Postmaster General could not bind their successors or the country.

Demonetized gummed 1 and 2 cent Edward stamp rolls made from perforated sheets were also supplied to The British Stamp and Ticket Automatic Delivery Co. Ltd. for their experimentation in the UK. A number of both values found their way into the public domain in the 1960s. More 1 cent coil strips were found in 1971 in the estate of Frederick W. Hall, a partner in this

company, and husband of Katrine Fawns. These experimental coil strips also subsequently entered the public domain.

Examples of uncanceled, gummed coil strips prepared for the ABN and UK experiments were retained in the Postmaster General's files and later given to the Deputy Postmaster General Robert M. Coulter. Following Coulter's death in 1926, they were purchased by the Marks Stamp Co. of Toronto which auctioned them to the public in 1928.

Production of the phoney plate 13 and 14 gummed 2 cent Edward imperforate sheets may be at least partly the result of requests received from the US Automatic Vending Machine Co. which presumably had hoped to secure a contract to supply their vending machines to the Canadian post office to supplement their sales to the US post office and US commercial businesses. Their machines required imperforate sheets on which to apply their patented edge notch and slit stamp separation method, thus creating a proprietary coil design. The key feature of their machines was the use of peripheral pins to engage the roll of coil stamps and feed it through the machine without the need for handles or knobs to advance and dispense stamps, unlike other contemporary stamp vending machines. They produced both vertical (Type I) and horizontal (Type II) experimental coils from these imperforate 2 cent Edward sheets. The former were intended for larger vending machines in post offices and hotels, while the latter were for use in countertop machines in stores. In the past, it was believed that they also supplied Heiman and Zork, a New York distributor of their countertop vending machines, with notched horizontal 2 cent Edward stamp rolls that Heiman and Zork were forced to perforate vertically to avoid infringing on Coe and Werden patents. These are known as Type III experimental coils. It is now believed that the Type III experimental coils were actually specialty or favour items made by the US Automatic Vending Machine Co. for sale to stamp dealers and collectors.

None of these early experiments was fully satisfactory in consistently dispensing stamps on insertion of the correct coins, and machine-vended endwise coils (horizontally perforated) would not become available to the Canadian public until the King George V era in late 1912.

Further Reading

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