

# THE PATH TO A SPECIALISED COLLECTION – PART 1 THE CENTENNIAL ISSUE OF 1967

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Sooner or later, most novice stamp collectors feel the urge to specialise. This may be to just one country, a specific time period or even just one stamp issue. If your desire is to form a collection of just one stamp issue, collectors of Canada are, on paper, spoilt for choice. Many of the early issues from the country, the Pence or Cents issues, the Large or Small Queens or even the Admirals of 1912 offer huge scope for specialisation. However, they also require pockets that are a fair bit deeper than most collectors can contribute to their hobby. In this series of articles, we will explore a few of the more modern Canadian stamp issues which also offer considerable scope to form a specialised collection but without the need to break the bank and with material that is, for the most part, still fairly readily available. We start some 55 years ago with the Centennial issue of 1967, in many respects the issue that opened the field of modern specialised collecting.

Your author has a bit of a soft spot for this issue as I am old enough to have been collecting new issues when this set of stamps was released. Now, in truth, the 1950's and 1960's was not a very exciting era for new issue collectors. Every year, Canada Post would put out a bulletin listing the stamp issues to be released in the following 12 months. On the appointed day, the stamps in question would appear. Little or no philatelic input was required aside from finding the odd minor plate variety or the even more unusual major variety like the Inverted Seaway stamp. All this was set to change as the 1960's drew to a close.

Even then, the release of the Centennial stamps in February 1967 was fairly inauspicious. Yes, it was the first full definitive series to be issued by Canada since 1935 but the designs were not exactly inspiring (Canadians were, in fact, so unimpressed that the issue lasted a mere seven years before being replaced). The issue comprised some 12 stamp values from 1 cent to \$1, along with a trio of coil stamps, two stamp booklets, a couple of cellopaqs and the low value stamps issued with the Winnipeg phosphor tagging – all produced by the Canadian Bank Note Company (CBNCo) and all looking remarkably similar to that which had gone before. Indeed, the most exciting philatelic item in the new issue was a 'stamp box'. A plastic creation, containing a card with a full set of the new stamps on it (see fig 1 on page 452). Collectors have spent the last 50 years trying to work out how you can possibly fit this philatelic novelty into a display.

In a few short years, however, this initial issue of 12 values had grown to just under 100 different stamps apparent to the naked eye. Arm yourself with a UV lamp and the list grew to some 230 different varieties – and that if you only considered three different types of paper. Bearing in mind that an early book on the issue attempted to list a staggering 13 different grades of fluorescent paper, the scope for specialisation is



*Fig 1 Card enclosed in the commemorative stamp box showing the full set of original stamps in the Centennial issue.*

clearly considerable! Add in a wealth of postal stationery items, both regular and special order; many tagging errors and varieties, commercial perfins, precancels and, of course, a huge field of postal history and you have an issue that can keep the most avid collector busy for many years.

A number of factors combined to cause this explosion in stamp varieties. The first of these came about as a result of some printing innovations. By 1967, the British American Bank Note Company (BABNCo), rivals of the CBNCo, had got hold of some neat European technology that allowed the printing of large, folded, booklet panes and also panes with se-tenant designs in different colours. Canada Post was so impressed that the BABNCo was given the contract to print all the Centennial booklets from late 1967 on. This was the first time that a Canadian stamp issue had been produced jointly by two different printing firms. Needless to say, the two printers used different perforating machines. The CBNCo stamps were perf 12 (as all issues since 1935 had been – albeit with some very minor variances – *see ref 1*). The BABNCo initially produced stamps with perf 10. When this proved to be unpopular with the public they increased the gauge size – not to perf 12 but to perf 12½ x 12. With three different perforations in use, the explosion of varieties had begun!

The second major factor affecting the number of stamp varieties was the drive for mechanisation in postal sorting. The Winnipeg phosphor tagging, first introduced on some Canadian stamps in 1962 was an early spin-off of this but during the 1960's the authorities had also moved to try and improve the 'whiteness' of stamp papers by adding fluorescence. (Many of the earliest examples of this were only discovered when collectors started looking backwards from the Centennial issue). The most extreme example of this paper whitening was the so-called 'hibrite' paper – a brilliant white paper readily distinguishable from the normal cream paper with the naked eye. However, many intermediate grades of fluorescence can also be found; although a UV lamp is probably required to best distinguish these.

Other technical changes were to follow. Around 1971, the printers switched from a shiny dextrine gum to a dull, matte, PVA based gum. In the same time frame a new type of tagging appeared to replace the Winnipeg tagging. This new type, initially referred to as Ottawa tagging but thereafter as General tagging can be found in two different types. The initial OP-4 type proved to be highly migratory. A later refinement, OP-2, was more stable and was used on all Canadian stamps from 1973 onwards.

Another technical change occurred in 1968 when the printers switched to metric sizing of stamp designs. This change is often overlooked and whilst the change to an individual stamp design was small and is best observed by looking at large blocks of stamps (see fig 2 overleaf) it is, nonetheless, quite impressive when viewed this way.

The final factor impacting on the number of stamp varieties was our old friend inflation. The first class letter rate was increased from 5 cents to 6 cents in late 1968 requiring a new 6 cents stamp. The printing contract for this was given to the BABNCo who from this point on printed all of the first class letter rate sheet stamps in the issue. The initial colour chosen for the new 6 cents stamp (orange) did not work too well with the sorting machines and it was changed to black in early 1970. Further rate increases required a 7 cents stamp in June 1971 and an 8 cents stamp later that same year.



Fig 2 Pair of blocks showing the precancel warning strips. The 1 cent block on the left has the stamps printed in the original imperial design size. The 6 cents block on the right shows the stamps printed in the slightly smaller metric design size. The difference only becomes obvious when seen in large blocks like this.

From a collectors' point of view, the key thing about all of these changes of perforation, paper, gum and tagging was that the Post Office did not regard them as 'new stamps'. No notice was given of any of these changes and collectors were left to try and identify them as they appeared (or more often than not to try and work backwards to see if they existed at all). Given all the changes that were taking place simultaneously, it is not surprising that many of the variants were very short-lived. Indeed, several of them were only discovered some time after the Centennial issue had been replaced (for example a mint copy of the rare 6 cent orange stamp with Winnipeg tagging printed on hibrite paper which was issued in December 1969 and replaced by the new black stamp a few weeks later – see fig 3 below - was first discovered as late as 1987). For the first time, in a long time, Canadian philatelists had something to get their teeth into!

So, if you are looking for a challenge and an area to specialise, this is a good place to start. The material is still available in bulk and much postal history can also be found quite cheaply. Yes, there are a few (thankfully a very small few) expensive howling rarities, mostly involving the 'hibrite' paper, (see fig 3 for some examples) but the vast majority of the stamp varieties and the associated postal history along with postal stationery can be obtained reasonably cheaply though they may require a fair amount of



*Fig 3 A few of the Centennial rarities. You may need to save up for these! Shown on the left is the 6 cents orange sheet stamp perf 12½ x 12 on hibrite paper with Winnipeg tagging and on the right imperforate pairs of the 6 cents orange and 6 cents black coil stamps, both on hibrite paper.*

hunting down. There are also a huge number of minor stamp varieties which should also not break the bank (see fig 4 overleaf for some examples). Those interested can refer to the Unitrade Catalogue (ref 2) which has an excellent listing of this issue. An even better and more comprehensive guide can be found in the seminal work on this issue by Robin Harris (ref 3).

Finally, this is an issue that offers up the occasional oddity and humorous item.



The doubling of 'C'  
variety from plate  
position 10.

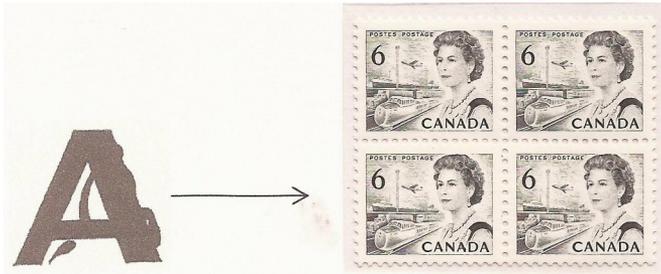


Fig 4a A few of the less expensive varieties to be found from this issue. The 6 cents orange block shows the 'doubling of C' variety on the top right stamp from plate position 10. The 6 cents black stamp shows the 'doubling of the second A in Canada' variety on the lower left stamp. The 5 cents block shows the vertical line through 5 variety on the lower left stamp (plate position 11 from plate 3.)



*Fig 4b Two varieties which come from booklets. The block of 2 cents stamps from the Opal booklet of 1970 shows the ‘missing tree trunk’ variety on the lower left stamp. The cut down scan of the \$1 booklet pane from 1972 shows the top 8 cents stamp with the variety ‘missing design at right’.*

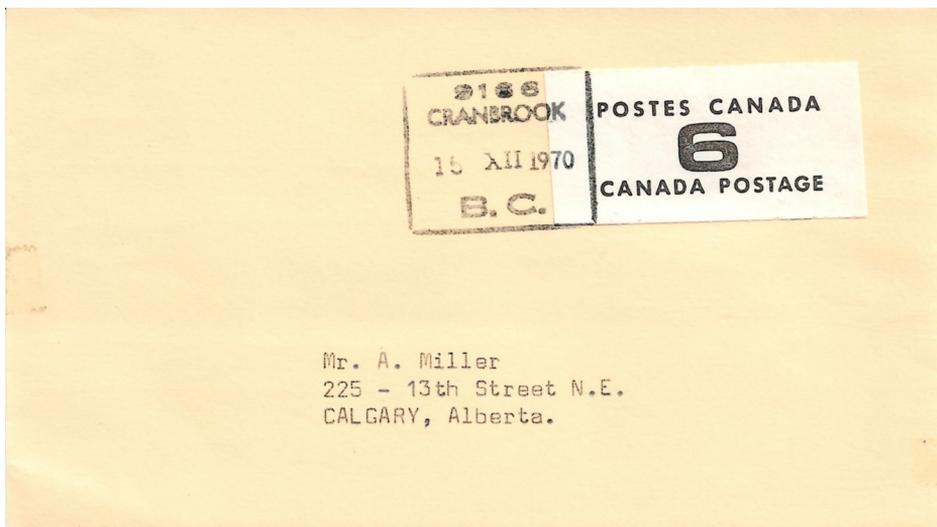
Prior to producing the perf 10 x imperf coils, the CBNCo undertook trials of a new printing process. The trials produced some ‘dummy’ coil stamps. When the 6 cent coils were issued in rolls of 100, these dummy stamps found a use. The Post Office marketed a coil dispenser, designed to hold a roll of 100 stamps and aimed at high volume postal users such as small businesses, and put these dispensers on display in selected outlets to advertise them. Fig 5 below shows a strip of six stamps attached to a long strip of ‘dummies’. When this strip was rolled up, the dummy coils were not visible giving the impression that a full roll of 100 stamps was in the dispenser. This way, if the dispenser was stolen from the display the Post Office only lost 36 cents and not \$6!



*Fig 5 Strip taken from a roll held in one of the Post Office coil dispensers. It was made up of 6 copies of the 6 cents stamp (4 are folded over here) attached to 94 copies of the ‘dummy coil stamps’.*

These coil rolls of 100 stamps also had descriptive wrappers. When these first appeared, a few people had a go at using them for postage either believing they were stamps themselves or possibly just trying it on! See fig 6 on page 460 for an example of one that was used successfully – clearly not all the postal staff were aware of what they were either.

Whilst it may have been a rather uninspiring and short-lived set of stamps, the Centennial issue left a lasting legacy for philatelists. Every subsequent stamp issue – particularly the more complex definitive issues – and even a few earlier ones, have been subject to greater scrutiny by collectors. Now we find ourselves looking out for perforation, paper, gum and



*Fig 6 Coil wrapper from the 6 cents black coils used successfully to pay the postage on a December 1970 card from Cranbrook to Calgary.*

tagging varieties from day one rather than seeking them out in hindsight. Future articles in this series will take a look at a couple of the more recent definitive issues that offer similar scope for specialised collections.

References:-

1. Discovery of Stamp Perforation Changes that started in 1962; Julian Goldberg and John Walsh; Maple Leaves Jan 2020 pages 243 – 259.
2. Specialised Catalogue of Canadian stamps published annually by the Unitrade Press
3. Centennial Definitive Series 1967 – 1973 by D. Robin Harris, published in July 2000.

*Note that the illustrations of the plate varieties in fig 4a are reproduced from reference 3 which illustrates many other similar varieties to hunt down.*

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