

SYNOPSIS

CANADA'S EMBOSSED STAMPS 1974 - 1981

Background: In the 1960's and 1970's inflation forces were increasing on the Canadian Postal system. These forces were causing Canada Post to look at the cost/benefits of everything from stamp production to mail handling to organization. On 16 October 1981 The Canada Post Office Department became Canada Post Corporation, a Crown Corporation, as a means to inject business practices into a Government operation. Just prior to this conversion one of the programs Canada Post tried was the use of multicolor lithography and precision embossing to produce postage stamps in lieu of engraving or recess printing. It was hoped that multicolor lithography combined with precision embossing would produce stamps as resistant to counterfeiting as stamps produced by traditional engraving. Between 1974 and 1981 ten stamps were issued using this technique. They are Scott #'s 577, 580, 633, 656, 657, 689, 736, 819, 820, and 856. The test must have been a success because at least one embossed stamp has appeared every year between 1998 and 2022.

Before discussing the exhibit, a question needs to be answered "What is precision embossing and how is it different from traditional embossing?" Precision embossing combined with multicolor lithography is a much different process than traditional embossed stamp production. In traditional embossing of stamps, the embossing and printing of the stamp occurs at the same time utilizing the same pressure to put ink to paper as well as embossing the paper. With multicolor lithography and precision embossing, the printing and the embossing occur at different times. Lithography uses the principle that oil and water do not mix. Thus there is no pressure with which to emboss the paper. In other words the printing, including any coatings such as tagging, is done first. Embossing is done last and it need not even be done by the same company that prints the stamps. It has to be done this way because inked areas are embossed. It is what make precision embossing secure. This appears to be an important point not recognized by collectors.

Purpose: The purpose of this display is to gather what little is known about these particular stamps and present them to the collecting public in order to inform and spark interest in modern Canada philately.

Treatment: Stamps with usages are presented in their chronological order of appearance which is not the catalogue sequence. There are no traditional pre-production items available to collectors -- no artist's drawings, no proofs, nothing. The closest to pre-production articles are the pre-issuance publicity brochures. Several are included in this display.

Importance: This is an important philatelic subject because it reflects Canada Post's attempts to control costs in an inflationary age as it affects the hobby of stamp collecting. The ten stamps in this exhibit are the ones tested by Canada's Post Office Department. The first one to appear under Canada Post Corporation management was not until 1986, a five year gap, and then fourteen years passed before embossed stamps became a regular feature of Canada Post's stamp program. Thus, the 10 stamps in this exhibit are the original 10 test subjects.

Knowledge: The only published information on this subject as far as I can determine comes from a summary of a speech given by the Deputy Postmaster-General of Canada, J. A. H. Mackay, before the members of the British North America Philatelic Society at their convention in San Francisco on 18 September 1976 in the societies journal, *BNATopics*. Additional information has been obtained a little at a

time from printing company officials, collector specialists, graphic artist and visits to Archives Canada. Archives Canada has very little as Archives Canada and Canada Post Corporation have never agreed on exactly what is to be archived.

Rarity: For each of the stamps issued in this exhibit tens of millions were produced; thus they are not rare nor even scarce. What is rare are errors without embossing. Of the ten stamps in this exhibit the only known example of missing embossing is shown. It has been certified by the V. G. Greene Foundation as being without embossing. However, the one shown may not be an error. This exhibitor believes it to be from the test printing described by J. A. H. Mackay in his speech to BNAPS to show officials the visual difference between embossed and non-embossed stamps. While other proof sheets for this stamp are in Archives Canada, this particular one is not there nor did it ever make it to the Canadian Postal Museum. Now, after 45 years it is still the only known one without embossing of those produced by Canada Post Office Department.

Single usages on full cover are scarce because of the inflation in postal rates. The domestic letter rate went from 8 cents on 1 January 1972 to 34 cents on 24 June 1985, a 425% increase over just 13 years, in seven jumps. Foreign letter rates took an even greater leap in the same time period. The fixed denominations quickly required additional postage to meet the changing rates. Thus, single usages in period are quite scarce and are quite challenging to find.

Condition: Being modern stamps, their condition is perfect. However the condition of covers from this era is generally poor. Poor envelope paper, poorly struck postmarks, and gum residue from attached labels all degrade the covers. The only covers that look decent are First Day Covers.

Presentation: This is a traditional presentation and in keeping with that spirit this presentation has been hand lettered using pencil on old fashion quad-ruled album pages. Hand lettering with pencil was selected because this is a hobby and after working at a computer all day hand lettering was far more relaxing. Also, blocks of text in pencil being grey and not black do not compete visually with the material. It allows the material to stand out, not the text.

References: Mackay, J. A. H., *More than Meets the Eye*, BNA Topics, November-December 1976, pp 6 - 9. <http://bnaps.org/hhl/Topics/BNA%20Topics,%20Vol.%2033,%20No.%206,%20November-December%201976,%20Whole%20No.%20356.pdf>