

The 20 and 50-Cent Widow Weeds of 1893

▼ CHARLES J.G. VERGE

By 1893, the use of the postal service to mail heavy and large packages and money packets had become a daily occurrence and the volume of newspapers sent through the post had increased to a level where higher denomination stamps were needed. A vermilion 20 cent and a blue 50 cent (Canada Scott 46-47) were issued by the Canadian Post Office on Feb. 17, 1893, to meet the increasing demand.

These were the highest denominations stamps issued in Canada since the 17 cent of 1859 and the 15 cent of 1868. They are considered part of the Small Queen series of Canadian stamps by most collectors and cataloguers, in part because the stamps were released during the lifetime of the series with the last Small Queen, the 8 cent issued to pay the combined registered letter rate (3 cents per ounce and 5 cents registration fee), being released on Aug. 1, 1893.

Figure 1: Original engraving by Alfred Jones used for the 1868-82 Bill stamps and adapted for the 1893 Widow Weeds.



Figure 2: British American Bank Note Co. advertising leaflet that includes the Alfred Jones engraving of Queen Victoria at bottom center.

Others, however, regard these stamps as a separate issue. They feel that the values are different enough to be counted out of the Small Queen series. They do not show the same portrait of Queen Victoria and, at 20 x 26mm, they are much larger in size.

The portrait selected by the post office is known as the Widow Weeds. The name comes from the black dress and white veil worn by Queen Victoria (1819-1901) as a sign of mourning for her husband, H.R.H. Prince Albert of Saxe-Cobourg-Gotha, the Prince Consort (1819-61).

The design of the Widow Weeds is based on an engraving by Alfred Jones (1819-1900) (Figure 1, all illustrations accompanying this article are courtesy The Brigham Collection unless otherwise noted). Jones



Figure 3: The Jones engraving sold to the Victoria Mutual Fire Insurance Co. of Canada by the BABN and used by them as a cachet on their solicitation envelopes.

was born in Liverpool, England. After moving to the United States in 1834, he apprenticed with Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson, the printers of Canada's first stamps. After working independently and for many other firms he moved to the British American Bank Note Co. (BABN) in 1867 to become its vice president. As an aside, he was one of the first victims of the motor car, being accidentally killed by a taxicab on April 18, 1900, while crossing a New York City street.

Jones' Widow Weeds engraving, prepared in 1867, was extremely popular. It was adapted for use on Canadian revenue stamps (the Third Bill issue of 1868-82); advertising leaflets (Figure 2: from *The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Canada* by Winthrop S. Boggs); cachets on commercial envelopes



Figure 4: Vignette for the 1893 Widow Weeds stamps.

(Figure 3) and many other items including the central design of the BABN's trade sample sheet. The vignette of the new stamps was an adaptation of the Jones engraving (Figure 4).

Die proofs were prepared in black and in the color of issue. The 20-cent die proof is also known in red/dark orange red. Plate proofs on India are only recorded in the color of issue. The perf. 12 stamps were printed in Ottawa in single panes of 100 (10 x 10). There was a single printing of 520,000 of each value. The sheet bore a "British American Bank Note Co. Ottawa" imprint in upper and lower case lettering measuring 40 x 2mm. It is an imprint not found on any of the Small Queens printed during the period.

Notable varieties can be found on the 50-cent value. Positions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9, all in the first row, show some doubling of the frame line above "Canada Postage." Positions 2 and 7 show two lines closely together, positions 6 and 9 show two lines with the outer thinner than the lower. Positions 3 and 4 have three lines. In position 4 the three lines seem melded into one.

There is also a constant stop near the lower right corner equivalent to that found on the 50-cent Bill stamp. This could be an indication that the printers used the Bill stamp's master die to produce the 50-cent Widow Weeds master die. No varieties have been recorded for the 20 cent.

The BABN had originally printed the Small Queens stamps in Ottawa (1870-73) but then removed itself to Montreal (1873-

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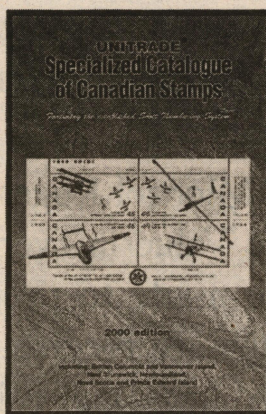
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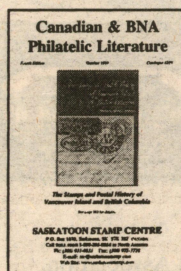
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Figure 5: Blocks of the imperforate Widow Weeds.



Figure 6: A bulk newspaper receipt.

89) and returned to Ottawa in April-May 1889. It was during this second Ottawa period that all denominations were made available imperforate. This included the 15-cent Large Queen still being printed at the time and the 20-cent and 50-cent Widow Weeds.

Some of these imperforate stamps were a gift from postal authorities to Lauchlan Gibb of Montreal. Gibb, a part-time stamp dealer, distributed them to his friends and customers. They were valid for postage and some of the stamps are known used. A quantity of gummed and ungummed sheets were "liberated" from the post office and purchased by the New England Stamp Co. of Boston. They tried to sell them to Scott and Stanley Gibbons who turned them down.

During the 1910s these imperforates gained some respectability. Four reasons are put forward for this recognition: some of the Gibb covers were shown at The Royal Philatelic Society, London; the imperforates were being sold and bought through auction; Clifton A. Howes in his *Canadian Postage Stamps and Stationery* (1911) states that "they were on sale at a Canadian Post Office" and Scott and Gibbons finally did buy the stock from the New England Stamp Co. and catalogued them. (Editor's note: Scott listed these stamps in the 1908 Scott Catalogue, well before the dates listed here.)

It should be noted that Howes book was published by the New England Stamp Co. Although 600 to 1,000 imperforate stamps are recorded for the Small Queens only 200 stamps are estimated for the Widow Weeds (Figure 5).

Usages of the Widow Weeds are normally philatelic unless they are affixed to bulk mailing receipts or pieces of large packages. Commercial usages are uncommon and single frankings are rare. Figure 6 shows a 50-cent Widow Weeds and a 2-cent Small Queen paying the one-cent per pound rate for newspapers. The Figure 7 cover is philatelically inspired. Instead of 72 cents, the rate should have been 10 cents, five cents for the UPU rate to Germany and five cents for the registration fee.

Figure 8 is closest to being a single franking. Posted at Fredericton, New Brunswick on Nov. 10, 1902, to Melrose Highlands, Mass., the 20-cent single franking overpays or underpays by one cent the registered letter rate to the United States. It is made up of the five-cent registration fee with either the remaining 15 cents overpaying the up to seven ounce rate (14 cents) or underpaying the up to eight ounce rate (16 cents). The British Guiana postal stationery envelope has been discounted.



Figure 7: A philatelically inspired cover to Germany.



Figure 8: A commercial single franking... or is it?

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R176 block of four, mint250.00	R250 strip of four, used60.00	R383 used150.00	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD20 mint, VF 125.00
R179 used30.00	R250 strip of four, cancel16.00	R385 used150.00	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
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R181 mint, VF light crease500.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
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R181 cut cancel, VF120.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R184 mint, F-VF 10.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R184b cut cancel, blue h/s, F80.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R187 mint, F25.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R188 mint65.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
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R189 cut cancel 85.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R190 mint17.50	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
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R192a used125.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R193 mint, F-VF 350.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R193 bottom plate #8012, mint, F-VF500.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R198 mint47.50	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R198 used30.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R199 mint14.00	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
R202 mint27.50	R263 mint15.00	R385 perf.37.50	R585 perf.27.50	R672 used65.00	R711 perf.20.00	RB8b F small internal tear, light crease400.00	RB18b used, F-VF25.00	RD24 used, VF75.00
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