

A clash of culture and commercial themes

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On March 18, Canada Post issued a 50¢ stamp marking the 150th anniversary of the Toronto-Dominion Bank Financial Group (Figure 1). The issuing of stamps for Canadian commercial businesses by Canada Post has proven to be far more controversial than many of its other recent innovations in stamp subjects and stamp production

— even more so, it seems, than picturing live people on stamps, which it has also done in recent years.

For the record, I am a member of Canada Post's Stamp Advisory Committee, which recommends both the subjects and the designs of Canadian stamps. I also firmly believe that Canadian businesses and living people should be honored on Canadian stamps. With these caveats out in the open, I would like to further examine the topic of Canadian postage stamps that depict commercial subjects.

In 2004, Canada's Home Hardware Stores were commemorated with a 49¢ stamp on the chain's 40th anniversary (Scott 2032, Figure 2). A viewer of a Quebec television program called *Cinq sur Cinq* — a program that asks its audience to write in with questions that are subsequently answered on the air — asked if Canada sold the space on its postage stamps to commercial enterprises, and wondered why he had to be bombarded with advertising stamps.

The answer to his first question is an emphatic "no." It should be noted, however, that Canada Post does invite companies and groups to participate in the development and marketing of philatelic products related to specific stamps.

The answer to the second question lies more within the scope of this article.

Many Canadians perceive a difference between commercial enterprises

and cultural icons that often is just not valid.

Some might say, for example, that Air Canada, the National Hockey League and the Stratford Festival are all cultural icons worthy of being featured on Canadian stamps. And, as Figure 3 shows, these institutions (and others like them) have been featured on stamps for a number of years.

Other observers, including me, recognize that these are also commercial enterprises that sell tickets and seek to make a profit. Where is the line, therefore, between icon and enterprise?

There is no hue and cry when hospitals, theaters, universities, and religious or social groups are recognized on stamps for their involvement in their communities or in developing the fabric of Canada. So why are commercial enterprises so different?

The Toronto-Dominion Bank, for example, like many of its banking counterparts in Canada, contributed to the development of the financial landscape of Canada since well before the country's confederation in 1867. It contributed millions of dollars to more than 1,000 charities focusing on children's health, education, the environment and literacy.

The employees of the Toronto-Dominion Bank play as important a role in their communities as the employees of the post office, hospitals, churches and community groups that have been honored on Canadian stamps.

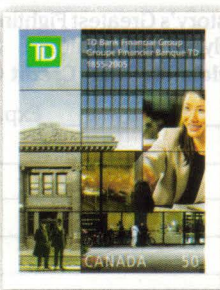


Figure 1. The 50¢ Toronto Dominion Bank Financial Group stamp issued March 18 is one of Canada's controversial stamps commemorating a commercial enterprise.



Figure 2. The 49¢ Home Hardware stamp of 2004 represents a new approach for Canada Post to business-oriented stamp design.



Figure 3. Three stamps from the 1980s and 1990s representing companies that most Canadians don't mind seeing on stamps, because they consider them "icons" not commercial enterprises.



Figure 4. Five private Canadian golf courses are named on five stamps issued in 1995.

One reason many Canadians become upset about a stamp featuring a commercial entity is because they believe that these stamps are free publicity for the enterprise. And they may be right.

CBC/Radio Canada — Canada's national television and radio broadcaster — has been commemorated on stamps (Scott 541, 1103, 1821d), but its competitors, CTV and the Global Television Network, have not.

Air Canada has been honored on a stamp (Scott 1145), but none of its rivals have.

Five private golf clubs were featured on stamps in 1995 (Scott 1553-1557, Figure 4), but hundreds of others have not had the same honor.

In addition, recent Canadian stamps for businesses show their logos and use their corporate colors. This adds to the disquiet of those who have objected.

However, the direct commemoration and (as some perceive it) the outright promotion of Canadian businesses has not always been as evident in past stamps that one could still easily identify as "commercial." Directly and indirectly, Canadian business has been commemorated on 63 separate stamp issues since 1959, with 60 different commercial enterprises being honored.

Of these, eight have been on stamps more than once: the National Hockey League has been featured seven times (on Scott 1443-1445,

1460, 1885a-f, 1935a-f, 1971a-f and 1972a-f, 2017a-f and 2018a-f, and 2085a-f and 2086 a-f); and the CBC has been featured three times.

The St. Lawrence Seaway (Scott 387 and 1015), the Canadian National Exhibition (Scott 767 and 2023), the Quebec Carnival (Scott 780 and 2019), Petro-Canada (1283a, 1284a, 1285a and 1286b, and 1867), Kraft (Scott 1399-1403 and 1414-1418), Ford (Scott 1527 and 1605) and Bombardier (Scott 1527 and 1832d) have all been showcased twice each.

For some of these businesses, the acknowledgements have taken the form of marginal inscriptions.

My definition of a Canadian business for the purposes of this article is any private or crown corporation that is in the business of making money for its owners or its shareholders.

I have eliminated the post office from the equation, although it, too, is a corporation that has product to sell, and seeks to make a profit while providing dividends to its shareholders.

From my point of view there have been three phases in the development of commemorating businesses on Canadian stamps. The first, from 1959 to 1987, was very low key (Figure 5).

In both 1959 and 1984, joint issue stamps with the United States for the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway were produced to commemorate a major engineer-

ing achievement, rather than the seaway's function as a commercial for-profit body.

In 1968, stamps were issued for George Brown (Scott 484) and Henri Bourassa (Scott 485), the respective founders of *The Globe and Mail* and *Le Devoir*, commercial newspapers that still exist today.

The most interesting example, however, is a stamp issued in 1986 for the 150th anniversary of the death of John Molson (Scott 1117).

When the name Molson is mentioned anywhere in Canada, the first thing that comes to mind is Molson beer and the breweries of Molson Canada. Molson's other achievements, such as building the first steamboat in North America, financing the first Canadian railway and being president of the Bank of Montreal, are unknown by many and too often completely ignored.

With the second phase, from 1987 to 1999, stamps began showing discreet logos, or more aggressive ones on the margins of panes (Figure 6). A 1987 stamp shows an Air Canada logo on the tail of a jet plane (which, by the way, appears to have no engines), on the occasion of the airline's 50th anniversary (Scott 1145). Twice in 1992, booklet panes of stamps for the Winter and Summer Olympic Games bore the logo of the Kraft Foods in the selva.

In 1994, the name "T. Eaton Company" was inscribed at the bottom

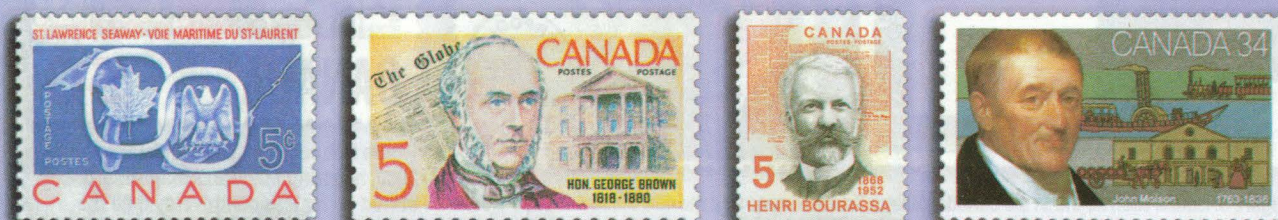


Figure 5. The first design phase portraying commercial entities on Canadian stamps used a subtle presentation.

Figure 6. The second design phase used a discreet approach, but with the business aspect more apparent. The Kraft Foods logo appears in selvage on this 1992 issue.



Figure 7. The third stamp design phase commemorating businesses has a direct approach that prominently features the business identity.

of the 43¢ stamp honoring the company's founder (Scott 1510). A 1996 Stamp Month sheet of 16 and a four-stamp souvenir sheet featuring Winnie the Pooh and his friends, also show the Walt Disney World Florida brand as well as the resort's fairy tale castle (Scott 1621a and 1621b).

The third phase of stamp design involving commercial entities starts in 1999. It moves further in depicting business brands and their products directly on the stamps.

In observation of the millennium, Canada Post issued 68 stamps in a special book in 1999, and then reissued them again in sheetlets of four in 1999 and 2000. Several of these stamps showed company logos or products directly on the stamps. Among them were Pabulum (Scott 1833b), J.A. Vachon et Fils (Scott 1834c), Weston's (Scott 1834d), Harlequin (Scott 1828d), Rogers (1818c), McCain (Scott 1833d) and others.

As shown in Figure 7, this trend continued with stamps in 2000 for Petro-Canada (Scott 1867), in 2001 for the Toronto Blue Jays (Scott 1901), in 2002 for the Toronto Stock Exchange (Scott 1962) and in 2004 for Home Hardware (Scott 2032).

Not every commercially related stamp falls neatly in each phase. For example, the more subtle presenta-

tion of Princess Cruise Lines' Canada-Alaska cruises (Scott 1991C-1991D, in 2003) and the Cunard Lines (Scott 2041, in 2004) more resemble issues of the first design phase than they do to the third (Figure 8).

While the Toronto-Dominion Bank stamp creates controversy, the stamp issued on April 12 for *Maclean's* magazine's 100th anniversary has barely created a ripple (Figure 9). The *Cinq sur Cinq* viewer explained his opinion that *Maclean's* is a cultural icon rather than a commercial enterprise. But the fact is that *Maclean's* is a profit-making news magazine, no different in that respect than *Time* or *Newsweek* in the United States.

To complain that Canada Post promotes commercial entities by producing stamps on behalf of Toronto-Dominion Bank and other businesses, while accepting stamps for *Maclean's*, the National Hockey League, and the Stratford Festival as celebrations of Canadian culture, is to apply an unfair double standard. In my opinion, any commercial institution that has contributed to the building of Canada is worthy of consideration for commemoration on a Canadian stamp. ■



Figure 8. Issues such as the \$1.25 Canada-Alaska Cruise Scenes and the 49¢ Cunard stamps chronologically fit in the third commercial design phase, but their designs hark back to the first phase.

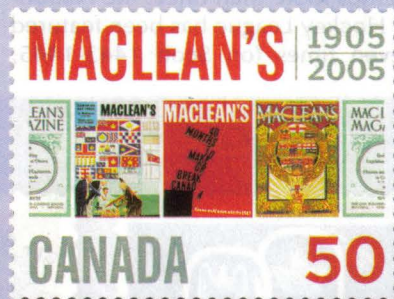


Figure 9. A second "commercial" stamp in 2005, honoring *Maclean's* magazine, has stirred up far less controversy than the Toronto-Dominion Bank issue.