

Advisory committee shapes Canada's stamp program

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Have you ever thought you had a good subject idea for a Canadian stamp or stamp series, but didn't know how Canadian stamps are conceived?

Suggestions for postage stamp subjects come from a number of sources. They come from individuals like you, who want to celebrate a community anniversary, a beloved ancestor or a noteworthy event. They may also come from or be supported by the governor general; or they may originate with federal, provincial and municipal politicians who believe that some local, national or international event or person deserves recognition.

They come from communities, as represented by national and international organizations that feel their group or mission should be promoted or honored on a postage stamp. They



Figure 1. Canadian stamps are intended to feature subjects of national interest. Scott 967 shows the Legislature building in Regina on the occasion of that provincial capital's centenary.

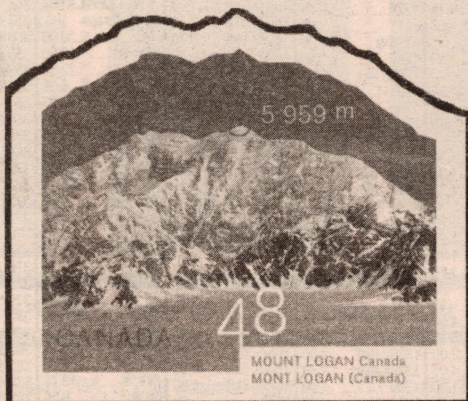


Figure 2. Canada celebrated the International Year of Mountains, as designated in 2002 by the United Nations, with the release of eight 48¢ stamps showing mountain peaks from all over the world. The stamp shown here pictures the Yukon's Mount Logan, Canada's highest peak.

come from members of Canada's Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), currently 13 men and women from all parts of Canada, whose responsibilities include choosing the subjects and final designs of Canada's postage stamps.

They also come from members of the Canada Post staff who conduct research on worthwhile subjects deserving postal recognition.

Suggestions flow into Canada Post headquarters at the rate of 500 to 800 per year. All suggestions are acknowledged and the basic principles of stamp subject selection are explained to the writer with a promise that their proposal will be presented to the SAC.

What kind of suggestion is likely to be retained? People, places or events to be portrayed must be Canadian or have a Canadian link, and the individuals or events to be recognized should be national in scope. As an example, Figure 1 shows a 1982 stamp celebrating the anniversary of a provincial capital — Regina, Saskatchewan — but such individual commemoration is unlikely for Canada's numerous small villages.

Specially designated years sponsored by the United Nations are also acceptable subjects. The international organization named 2002 the International Year of Mountains, for example, as part of an effort to protect mountain ecosystems and strengthen mountain communities. Canada subsequently issued eight 48¢ stamps Oct. 1 that show the highest peaks of the seven continents as well as Canada's high-



Figure 3. The 30th anniversary of Canada's flag was celebrated on Scott 1546, a non-denominated (43¢) stamp issued in 1995.

est peak, Mount Logan (Figure 2).

Any anniversary to be commemorated on a Canadian stamp should be proposed for a multiple of 25 years, such as the 50th anniversary, 75th anniversary, and so on. There have been rare exceptions, including the 30th

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Figure 4. Living people have been appearing with greater frequency on Canadian stamps. The reigning monarch has been depicted throughout history as a matter of tradition. Queen Elizabeth II is shown at left on Scott 704. In recent years, Canada's NHL All-Stars series has pictured living legends of hockey (Guy Lafleur is shown in the center on Scott 1935b). Scott 1657 at right shows a living postal employee, serving as a model on a stamp commemorating the World Congress of Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International Labor Union.

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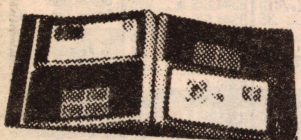
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Figure 5. Four Tulip stamps make up Scott 1947, from a souvenir sheet of four issued Aug. 30, 2002. The concept for the Tulip stamps originated with Canada's Stamp Advisory Committee.

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anniversary celebration of Canada's flag on Scott 1546, a nondenominated (43¢) stamp issued May 1, 1995 (Figure 3).

Living people stand little chance of being on postage stamps, the monarch being an exception. Queen Elizabeth II has appeared on numerous Canadian stamps, including

Scott 704, a 25¢ stamp issued in 1977 to mark the 25th anniversary of the queen's reign (Figure 4, left).

This final criterion seems to be slowly fading, though, as still-living hockey stars have appeared on Canadian stamps, and recognizable live people have been used as models for stamp designs (Figure 4, center and right).



Figure 6. Scott 1915 (left), a late addition to the 2001 program to commemorate the 300th anniversary of peace between the native tribes and the French regime. At right is a similarly late addition to the 2002 program to honor the 100th anniversary of the Quebec Symphony Orchestra.

SAC members prefer selecting subjects that honor positive anniversaries. Birth rather than death anniversaries, and peace rather than war, are usually favored. In 2003 a Canadian stamp will be issued to commemorate the armistice ending the Korean War, but no stamp was issued to mark the anniversary of the beginning of the war, despite the suggestions sent forward by many veterans and military groups.

Some generic subject suggestions such as flowers, animals and events or groups came from the general public, but most of these emanate from SAC members. The 2002 Tulips stamps pictured in Figure 5, and the 48¢ Teaching stamp issued Oct. 4, are examples of this.

Even with all these sources of subject ideas, it happens from time to time that some subjects are not brought out in the normal process. These are often added as late additions to the yearly schedule and may come from any of the sources previously identified. The 2001 47¢ Great Peace of Montreal stamp (Scott 1915) and the 47¢ Quebec Symphony Orchestra stamp issued Nov. 7, 2002 (Figure 6) are two examples of late entries to the stamp programs for their respective years.

Let's follow the 2002 Teaching stamp through its paces (Figure 7) and see how an idea becomes a stamp.

One of the SAC members, a teacher, had suggested on a number of occasions that a stamp be issued for teachers. In Fall 2000, the entire committee agreed with her and put the subject on the preliminary approved list for 2002, along with some 30 or 40 other subjects.

Then came the paring-down process. The

teachers stamp survived to be selected as a final candidate, but during the discussion that preceded the selection the committee members decided that the stamp should honor the teaching profession rather than teachers, and that it should be issued close to World Teachers' Day, Oct. 5. It actually was issued



Figure 7. Canada's 48¢ Teaching stamp began as an idea from a member of Canada's SAC. The committee accepted the subject and suggested modifications to the issue's design. The stamp was issued Oct. 4.

Oct. 4 (Figure 8), as Oct. 5 was a Saturday.

Once the approved subject list is completed, Canada Post's Stamp Products Group proceeds to do final research on the selected subjects and draws up design concepts it subsequently tenders to stamp designers and design firms.

Rarely does the SAC give instructions to the Stamps Products Group as to how they want the design to be done. One exception was the stamp honoring Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau issued July 1, 2001 (Figure 9). The SAC unanimously directed that the stamp should show the late prime minister's official portrait that hangs in the Canadian Parliament buildings.

Several months after receiving the contract, the design firms or individual designers submit their proposed designs to Canada Post and

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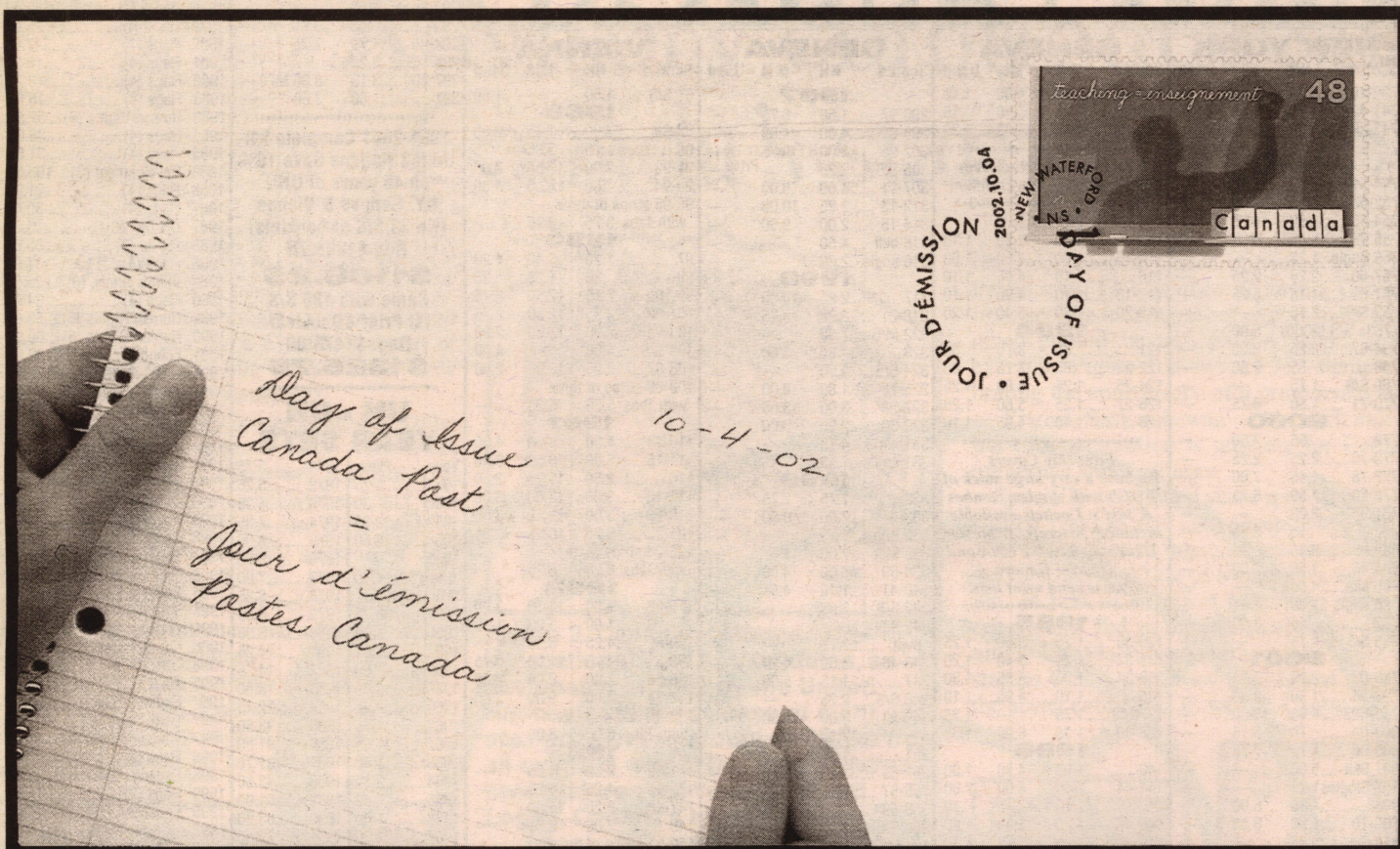


Figure 8. The Teaching stamp on a first-day cover postmarked Oct. 4, 2002, one day before World Teachers' Day.

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they are presented to the SAC for consideration and approval. The number of these proposed design vary: two to five different is the norm for each stamp or stamp series. The committee then looks at these designs, comments and votes on which they prefer.

From time to time, none of the proposed designs meet with SAC approval and the designers are sent back to the drawing board. This was not the case with the Teaching stamp,

as the selected design was unanimously approved. At this point in the proceedings members of the SAC can suggest slight modifications to the design to render it more appealing or to ensure historical, technical or design accuracy. The placement of the name "Canada," the color of certain elements or the strengthening of some details are some examples of the suggestions that are made by members.

Once the design is approved it is normally the end of the process for the SAC until it sees

the final printed stamps at one of its subsequent meetings. On occasion, the design is returned to the SAC for additional changes, either because the designer has added other design elements that the committee had not seen or requested, there is a radical design change required by the fact that the original design was conceived with a specific printing firm in mind and now that firm is unable to print the stamps, or a SAC member requests a reconsideration because he feels that after fur-

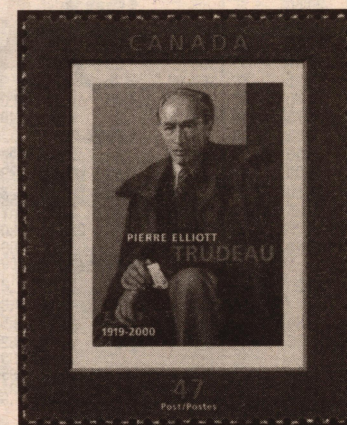


Figure 9. Canada Scott 1909 commemorates Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000), former prime minister of Canada. The Stamp Advisory Committee insisted the official portrait by Myfanwy Pavelic be used as the basis for the stamp design.

ther thinking the stamp design should undergo additional changes. This happened with the Teaching stamp and the SAC decided to slightly modify the design.

This, in a nutshell, is the way a stamp sees the light of day in Canada. Your idea for a Canadian stamp that meets the criteria mentioned above may be sent to the Chairman, Stamp Advisory Committee, Canada Post, 12th floor, 2701 Riverside Drive, Ottawa, Canada, K1A 0B1.

O Canada columnist Charles J.G. Verge has been a member of Canada's Stamp Advisory Committee since April 2000. Committee members are appointed for three-year terms. Two current members were teenagers at the time of their appointment: David Johnston at 16 years of age and Marie-Christine Provost at 18. Nine of the 13 members are stamp collectors at one level or another, and eight are members of the national federation, The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. **SSM**

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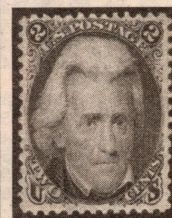
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