Another First for Canada Post

The 1998 Australian stamp, Scott 1631, featuring the *Marco Polo*.

▼ CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Around 1995, Canada Post decided that it would get more involved in the international marketing of its products. Many arrangements, including the sale of each others' stamps and products, were concluded with countries such as the United States, Ireland and Australia.

With this new marketing approach came a greater participation in international postal administration conferences and world philatelic exhibitions. Stamp launches, overprinted souvenir sheets and show cards made their appearance. The latest in their marketing strategies is a joint souvenir sheet with Australia for AUSTRALIA 99.

In November 1997, during the Shanghai International Coin & Stamp Expo, Canada Post officials mentioned to David Maiden, group manager of Australia Post Philatelic, that they wanted to issue a stamp for AUSTRALIA 99.

Since the theme of the show was maritime heritage, Canada noted that a stamp commemorating the *Marco Polo*, a ship built in Canada that plied the routes between the British Isles and Australia in the 19th century, was being considered. To Canada Post's surprise, Maiden indicated that Australia Post was issuing a stamp in 1998 featuring the *Marco Polo* (Scott 1631).

The *Marco Polo*, designed by James Smith, an Irishman born in Guernsey, was a full-rigged clipper ship of three masts with square sails and three decks. A black ship with a white line around her ports, she bore a full-length figurehead of Marco Polo, the famous 13th century Italian traveler.

The ship was launched on April 17, 1851, at the Marsh Creek shipyards near Saint John, New Brunswick. According to Canada Post researcher Dan McNutt, the *Marco Polo* at her launch "crossed the creek, struck the other side and was beached. Her keel was twisted from the weight resting on the center – something that some later said accounted for her speed!" The ship was first used on the trans-Atlantic cotton trade between England and Alabama. She was then purchased by the Black Ball Line for use in the transportation of immigrants to Australia.

Her claim to fame comes from the fact that, on her first voyage (July 4, 1852), she sailed to and back from Australia in five months and 21 days including a three week layover at Melbourne. This was an outstanding record and the *Marco Polo* was deemed to be the fastest ship in the world.

The ship stayed on the Australia passenger run until 1867 and set many other records before being sold to a Norwegian firm. Her last voyage was to carry a cargo of

planks from Quebec City to London, England. She faced a major storm near Prince Edward Island on July 25, 1883, and began to leak. The captain beached her and while the crew was saved and the cargo salvaged, the ship was reduced to rubble.

The Canadian 46¢ stamp was designed by A. Lee Sackett from one of two paintings commissioned by Canada Post from world renowned Maritime Painter J. Franklin Wright. Both paintings will eventually find their way to the Canadian Postal Archives for safekeeping.

The souvenir sheet was designed by Julien LeBlanc with illustration by Bonnie Ross. The sheet contains a Canadian 46¢ stamp and a version of the 1998 Australian *Marco Polo* 85¢ stamp. The stamps are overlaid on the two hemispheres and show the approximate route of the ship to and from Australia. At the bottom of the souvenir sheet are two *Marco Polo* figures from the stern of the ship. One of these two figures now resides in the New Brunswick Museum in Fredericton.

The souvenir sheet is valid for postage in each country but only for the face value of the stamp of that country.

The design of Australia's 1998 85¢ stamp was digitally provided to Canada Post to incorporate into the souvenir sheet. Both post offices submitted designs for the souvenir sheet and both post offices went to bids for the printing. Canada's design was chosen and Ashton Potter, Canada's printing proposal, was selected.

The original design for the Australian stamp was based on an 1859 painting of the *Marco Polo* by Thomas Robertson (1819-1875) that is now part of the La Trobe Collection at the State Library of Victoria. The Australian stamp in the souvenir sheet is different than the one issued in 1998. These differences include a new perforation of 13 against the original 14.5, a different paper, a different tagging and a much clearer printing. This last difference is more evident in the artifacts and flags on the ship.

The Canadian stamp and the joint souvenir sheet will be launched on the first day of the AUSTRALIA 99 World Philatelic Exhibition in Melbourne to be held March 19-24. The show's koala bear logo appears at the top of the souvenir sheet. Sixteen million stamps and 500 thousand souvenir sheets will be printed.

Australia will get 215,000 sheets and Canada will keep the remainder of 285,000. The sheets will be sold individually by both countries. They will also be available in a three country pack that will include the Canada-Australia sheet and a similar Ireland-Australia sheet featuring the barque vessel *Polly Woodside*.

Interestingly, only Australia and Ireland will sell the pack. The Canadian stamp can also be found in a 13-country Celebration of the Seas: Maritime Heritage Collection that will be on sale at the booths of all 13 countries at AUSTRALIA 99. ▼


One of two *Marco Polo* paintings commissioned by Canada Post. This cropped example was used to illustrate the first day cover cachet.

Canada Post's joint issue first day cover.
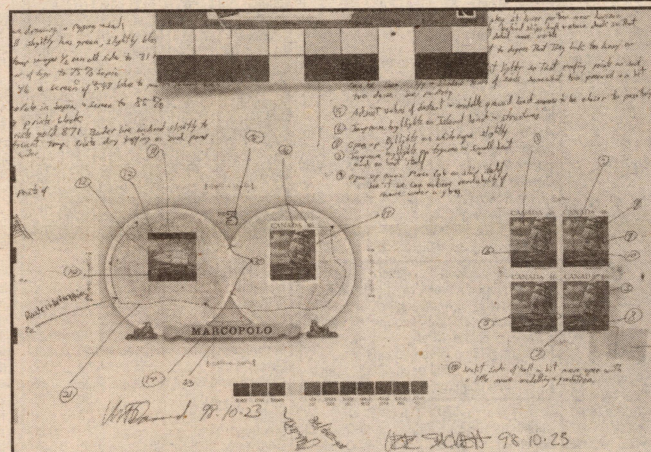
The lower right portion of the first and second proofings of the souvenir sheet with notations and signature of Bill Danard, the Canada Post Design Manager, and the signatures of Lee Sackett, the stamp designer, and Julien LeBlanc, the souvenir sheet designer.
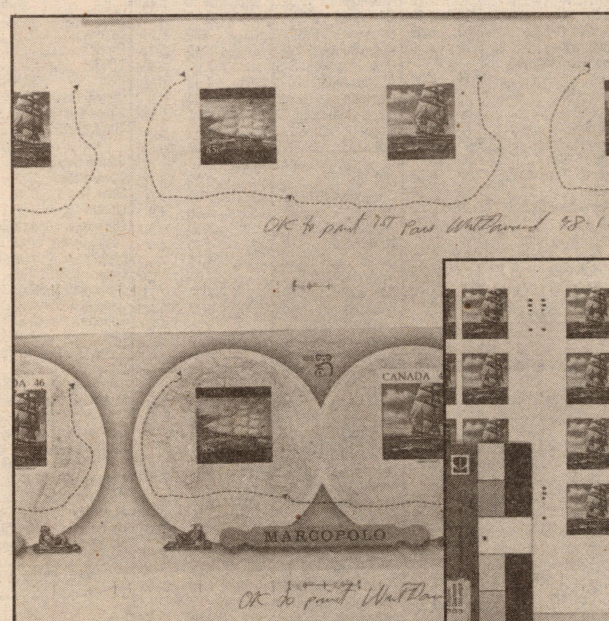
The middle portion of the first and second press run passes of the press sheets for the souvenir sheets. There are 18 souvenir sheets in each press sheet.

A section from the first and second wet trap passes of the stamp press sheet. There are nine panes of 16 stamps in every press sheet.