

The Canada Bank Note Engraving and Printing Co. Essays

▼ CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Company takeovers, friendly or otherwise, are not limited to our times. In 1891, the Canada Bank Note Engraving and Printing Co. Ltd. (CBNEP) won the contract to print Canadian stamps. The British American Bank Note Company (BABN), holder of the contract since 1867, did not take this loss magnanimously. The company used its six months notice prior to cancellation to make arrangements to buy out CBNEP.

In the 19th century, William Cumming

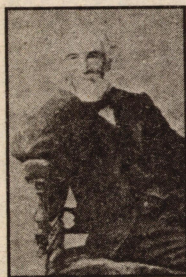


Figure 1: William C. Smillie, vice president, Canada Bank Note Engraving and Printing Company, Ltd. Smillie was heavily involved in all the firms that printed Canadian stamps in the 19th century.

Smillie (Figure 1) was involved with all the printing houses contracted to print Canadian stamps. Smillie, who was born in Scotland on Sept. 23, 1813, first started work in the printing business in 1834 with Rawdon, Wright & Hatch (later Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson (RWH&E), the printers of Canada's first stamps). He then joined Toppan & Carpenter (which went under many corporate names during his tenure there from 1836 to 1857).

He formed the short-lived Edmonds, Jones and Smillie (1857-59); the only firm with which he was associated that did not print Canadian stamps. The company would later join RWH&E, Toppan & Carpenter and other firms in 1859 to form the American Bank Note Company.

Guessing that after confederation the Canadian government would want a firm with a Canadian address to print the bank notes and stamps, he created the British American Bank Note Co. in 1867, became its first President and obtained the stamp printing contract later that year. In 1882, he left the BABN to become vice president of CBNEP. He died on July 2, 1908.

The BABN's stamp printing contract with the Canadian Post Office stipulated that the contract would come up for renewal every five years. So it was that in 1891 the contract, taking effect in 1892, was awarded to the CBNEP. To ensure the win, CBNEP pro-

duced some beautiful essays and underbid its competitor, BABN, by seven cents per 1,000.

BABN had been receiving 20 cents per 1000 for the Small Queens it had printed since 1870. Before the CBNEP could produce any stamps, it was absorbed by the BABN, which then took over the contract and continued to print the Small Queens. BABN had to honor the contract and reduce the cost of printing the stamps to 13 cent per 1000.

Imperforate essays (they are not stamps as they were never issued) prepared by the CBNEP have been on the market at least since the early 1900s. First record of their mention in the literature that I can find occurs in the September 1951, *The Collectors Club Philatelist*, where the composite die essays are discussed. The composite die essays exist in values of 1¢ and 3¢ and 5¢, 10¢ and 15¢. The essays themselves exist on various papers, engraved or lithographed and in different colors. Only the 1¢, 2¢ and 3¢ values were printed.

In 1897, the BABN lost the contract to the Canadian Bank Note Company and had to turn the plates over to the Post Office. They did not do so until 1903 and even then under duress. Records show that they turned over three 12 x 11 inch plates of 100 stamps (1, 2 and 3¢) and three dies. These dies were those of the 5¢, 10¢ and 15¢ combination, the combination 1¢ and 3¢ and the single 2¢ (Figure 2).

Although the records do not state it, it is likely that full engraved printed sheets of the 1¢ (yellow ochre) and 3¢ (carmine) were included in the transfer since



Figure 2: The composite die essay for the 5¢, 10¢ and 15¢; the unique composite die essay for the 1¢ and 3¢ and the die essay for the 2¢. All are from the British American Bank Note Archives sale.

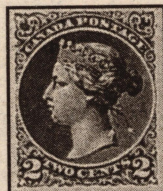


Figure 3: The only recorded 2¢ large die essay in red.

Figure 4: An unrecorded lithographed small die essay in carmine on Japanese paper.

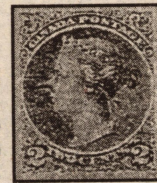


Figure 5: Engraved (on left) and lithographed 1¢ essays.

they are found in the holdings of the Canadian Postal Archives and were transferred there from the Post Office.

The die essays mentioned above are uncommon. Until the sale of part of the BABN Archives in late 1997 at a Spink New York, auction only green and red copies of the composite 5¢, 10¢ and 15¢ were known. After the sale, die essays in black of the 1¢ and 3¢, 2¢ and 5¢, 10¢ and 15¢ were discovered. All the composite die essays are unique. The 2¢ was the value used by the CBNEP to show what they could do.

Many more die essays, papers and colors are known for this value than the other two. Large die essays are known in red (Figure 3) and black, while small die essays are known in yellow orange, red, green and blue. In addition, an unrecorded lithographed die essay on Japanese paper (Figure 4) and an unrecorded 3¢ single die essay have been found.

As mentioned earlier, both the 1¢ and 3¢ were printed in sheets of 100 either engraved or lithographed (Figure 5). They had imprints facing inside on all four sides with counters in both the right and left top margins. Large multiples of both printing methods are known, including a counter block of eight of the lithographed 1¢ in yellow.

Because more than one upper right counter block of the lithographed version exists it is likely that two or more sheets may have entered the public domain. So far, marginal multiples of the engraved version show that it is highly likely that only one engraved sheet of each value made it to the market. The 1¢, both engraved and lithographed, is only known in shades of yellow



Figure 6: The only recorded full sheet of 25 in light brown currently in the Canadian Postal Archives.

ochre while the 3¢ is recorded in red brown, orange and black from the engraved plates and red orange, red and neutral gray from the lithograph stones.

Surviving two cents material would indicate that no lithographed stone was prepared for the 2¢. Dark red, orange red, light brown, brown, yellow orange, black, blue and green are the colors recorded to print the 2¢.

The green printing is the only one recorded in sheets of 100. CBNEP experimented with sheets of 25 for this value and all other colors are found in that format. Imprints on these sheets of 25 are found only on the bottom of the sheet and facing outside. The Canadian Postal Archives own the only full sheet of 25 recorded (Figure 6). Most of the sheets of 2¢ were printed on India paper and mounted on card. Some other papers were used in smaller quantities such as colored glazed paper, transparent handmade paper gummed under the printing, blue wove paper and a faint blue green paper with a two millimeter cross section line on back. This latter paper was also gummed over the printing.

However, the most spectacular printing was done on thin transparent Japanese paper. In green, it was printed in sheets of one hundred. The seven large multiples illustrated in the literature and auction catalogues all fit together and therefore indicate that only one sheet exists. Many collectors view this printing as the most interesting because the printers overprinted the whole sheet with a design that included running horses. From the photos it seems that each of the horses in the overprint is different (Figure 7).

The CBNEP's proposed design did not lay for long in the files of the BABN. The company used the 2¢ carmine design on the Universal Postal Union postcard it printed for the Canadian Post Office in 1896 (Figure 8). It turned out to be the last postal item printed by the BABN for Canada for the next 30 years.

The definitive story of this fascinating series of essays is yet to be written. Anyone who has additional information or photocopies of these essays is asked to write the author in care of the *Scott Stamp Monthly*.



Figure 7: Three examples of the "Running Horses" found on the full overprint of the 2¢ green engraved essay printed in sheets of 100 on Japanese paper.



Figure 8: The 1896 2¢ Canadian postcard using the unused CBNEP design mailed on the Grand Trunk Railway between Montreal and Toronto and mailed to Sydney, Australia.

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