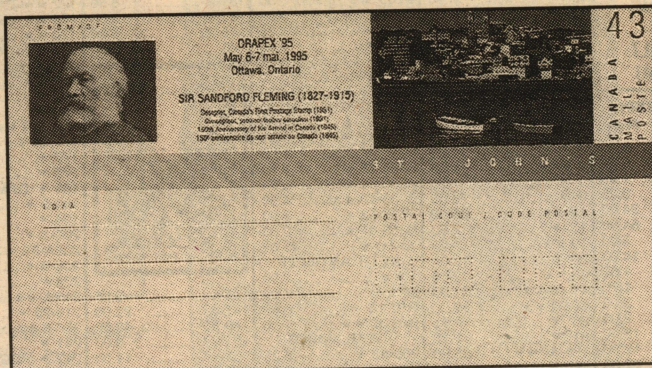
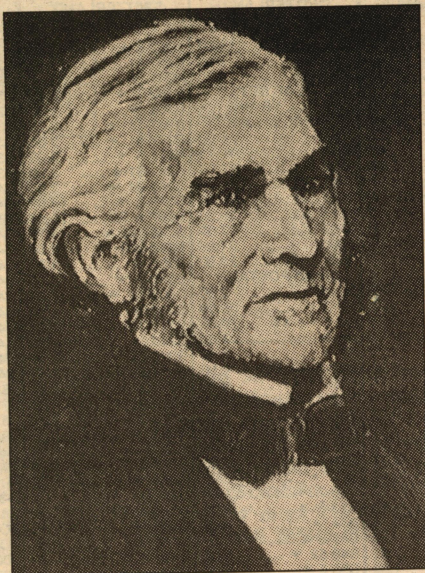


**Figure 1:**  
The Honorable James Morris, postmaster general of Canada at the time of the issuance of the first Canadian adhesive postage stamp, from a painting by Al Otto Lang in the Canadian Postal Archives.



**Figure 2:** A #8 envelope prepared by Canada Post in support of ORAPEX '95, Ottawa's National Stamp Exhibition. It shows Sir Sandford Fleming in old age and was issued to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Fleming's arrival in Canada.



**Figure 3:** The 1780 print "Beaver Hunting in Canada" that inspired Sandford Fleming in his design of the three penny beaver. There is a pen notation at the bottom reading "The old 1780 print which gave Sir Sandford the inspiration for the Beaver and Waterfall."

# CANADA'S FIRST STAMP: The Three Penny Beaver of 1851

*"Breakfasted at Ellah's Hotel with Mr. Rutten and Honble Jas Morris Post Master General. Designing postage stamps for him."*

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

**Figure 4:**  
An 1851 Ellis & Co. engraved company promotional business card. This company produced the black three-penny and one-shilling essays (Courtesy the Brigham Collection).



So reads Sir Sandford Fleming's diary for Feb. 24, 1851, and so begins the production of adhesive postage stamps in what was then the Province of Canada (composed of the present Provinces of Ontario and Quebec). The first three stamps were issued in April and May 1851, in denominations of 3, 6 and 12 pence. Subsequent columns will cover the 6-pence and 12-pence stamps.

Official mention of adhesive stamps for the prepayment of postage in Canada first occurs in the journals of the Legislative Assembly (Lower Chamber) on May 22, 1849, where a resolution was made "that postage stamps for prepayment be allowed and that Colonial stamps be engraved." The resolution was approved on May 25, and received the approval of the Legislative Council (Upper Chamber) the following day. However, opportunity to act on this resolution only came in August 1850, when the Province's Post Office Act transferred the administration and management of the Post Office to the Province from the Colonial Office in the United Kingdom effective April 6, 1851. The other catalyst was the appointment of the Honorable James Morris (Figure 1), a wily and visionary politician, as postmaster general on Feb. 22, 1851.

Two days after taking office he met in Toronto with a 24 year old surveyor and designer, Sandford Fleming (Figure 2), who had done some work for a Mr. Rutten, the Toronto Sheriff. Rutten, a friend of Morris, had recommended Fleming highly. Born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, in 1827, Sandford Fleming emigrated to Canada in 1845 and is considered a man for all seasons. Throughout his long life he worked in engineering, surveying and in the railways. He was the founder of the Intercolonial and Canadian Pacific Railways, the inventor of durum wheat and the creator of Standard Time for which Queen Victoria knighted him. He died in 1915. At that breakfast with Morris, he suggested that the beaver should be the subject of the stamp design since it was already a symbol of Canada, was a staple of the economy and the industriousness of the beaver would symbolize that of Canadians. He then went on to draw a rough sketch on a napkin. After breakfast he returned to his studio to draw out in full detail two versions of the stamps: a 3 pence (3d) and a one-shilling denomination. His inspiration came from a 1780 wood cut entitled "Beaver Hunting in Canada" (Figure 3). Fleming then took his designs to the firm of John Ellis and Co., Engravers and Banknote Engravers (Figure 4), to render them on to copper plates.

For years it was thought that John Ellis, who is frequently called James in philatelic literature, printed both the black and red essays of the 3d — of which four still exist, two of each color — and the single surviving black shilling essay from his copper plates. New research by stamp dealers Bill Longley and Charles Firby (The Sandford Fleming 3 Pence Essay, Charles G. Firby Auctions, Oct. 22, 1996) now prove that this is not so. Although they agree that the two 3d black beavers and the one-shilling black beaver are undoubtedly die essays produced by Ellis, Longley and Firby believe the red ones are from a different printer. In fact they believe one of the two is an actual stamp.

To know the current whereabouts of these pieces is helpful. One of the 3d black and the one-shilling black (Fig. 5) once graced the collections of Dale-Lichtenstein and Fred Jarrett and are now housed in the collections of the Canadian Postal Archives (CPA). The other 3d black, the sole example in private hands, was recently acquired from the Lindemann Collection and is now in the Brigham Collection.

Sandford Fleming once owned the two red "essays." One was in his scrapbook (Figure 6) that his family donated along with his papers to the Dominion Government Archives in 1915 and now resides in the CPA. The other copy, which Longley and Firby believe is a stamp, is the one found on the Fleming diary page mentioned above (Figure 7) and was sold

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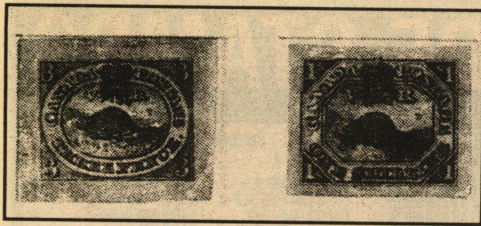
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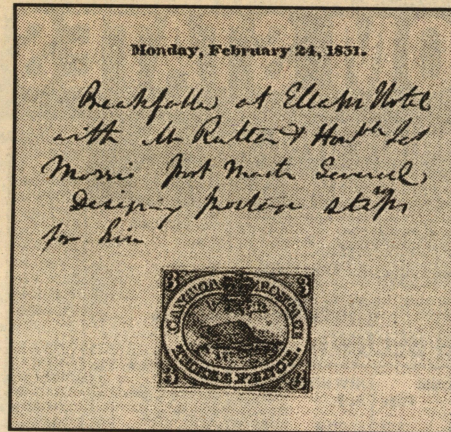




**Figure 5: Ellis black essays for the three-penny and one-shilling beaver stamps. The one shilling was never issued.**



**Figure 6: Extract from Sir Sandford Fleming's scrapbook owned since 1915 by the National Archives of Canada and now housed in its subsidiary, the Canadian Postal Archives. It shows the Hugh Scobie lithographic venetian red essay.**



**Figure 7: The former "red essay" now, following research by stamp dealers Bill Longley and Charles G. Firby, proven to be a lithographic stamp printed by Hugh Scobie. The only surviving copy of a print order reputed to be some 250,000 stamps.**



**Figure 8: Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson's completed die proof in black on India of Canada's first adhesive postage stamp. The number "261" is an inventory number inscribed by the printers or by its successor the American Bank Note Co. Ltd. (Courtesy the Brigham Collection).**



**Figure 9: Block of 6 of the three penny on medium wove paper with the left three stamps showing the stitch watermark (Courtesy the Brigham Collection).**



**Figure 10: The only recorded perforated block of the three-penny beaver issued Jan. 1, 1859. Six months later, On July 1, 1859, Canada switched to decimal currency and the three-penny beaver became the five-cent beaver (Courtesy the Brigham Collection).**

by Firby's firm in October 1996, to an American collector after being in the hands of the Robson family of Ottawa for the last 56 years.

Their research is based on contemporaneous documents, newspaper reports and correspondence of the period that seem to prove that Postmaster General Morris would have dealt with a Toronto firm of printers before dealing with the New York firm of Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson (RWH&E). Morris approached Hugh Scobie, a Toronto lithographic printer, and verbally authorized him to prepare a lithographic 3d stamp.

The red essay found in Sandford Fleming's scrapbook is now viewed to be an essay prepared by Scobie. Longley and Firby's case that the 3d red mounted in Fleming's diary was a stamp is very convincing.

Their booklet spells the reasoning in detail but two of these reasons are important. The existence of minute flaws including two distinct red dots found to the right of the lower right numeral "3" and to the right of "A" in "Postage," are telltale signs of a stamp impression taken from a lithographic plate. However, the more important of the two reasons is the existence of a "considerable" offset of the same design at the back of the diary page stamp. "More importantly, this offset also shows the frame line of the next stamp above the offset example on the reverse." Therefore Longley and Firby conclude that the "portions of two different stamp images offset on the reverse" prove that the stamp on the diary page was taken "from a sheet of stamps and was not a single impression of the essay."

Evidently, Scobie's lithographic issues could be easily counterfeited. Morris, who was on his way to Washington to sign a Postal agreement, stopped in Montreal to confirm the possibility of counterfeits with Montreal engraver George Matthews. Matthews then suggested that Morris stop in at the offices of RWH&E on his way to Washington. Matthews happened to be their agents in Canada. He also confirmed Scobie's view that there were no Canadian engravers/printers able to do the work.

In New York, Morris saw the work of RWH&E, then printers of United States stamps, and gave a second verbal contract. RWH&E confirmed that order in a letter of March 27, 1851. The dies were quickly completed and proofs pulled from them were sent to Morris on April 5, 1851. Based on this correspondence, die proofs were known to have existed but none had ever appeared on the market until the sale of the American Bank Note (ABN) archives, successors to RWH&E, in 1990.

The sale produced two die proofs: a progressive die proof now in the CPA and a completed black die proof purchased by the Lindemann Collection at the sale and now in the Brigham Collection (Figure 8).

Trial color proofs were also pulled in 1851: red with a horizontal carmine SPECIMEN overprint; brown red with a horizontal green black SPECIMEN overprint and black with no overprint and with horizontal carmine and orange SPECIMEN overprints and a diagonal carmine SPECIMEN overprint. The SPECIMEN overprint is typographed in a setting of 100 subjects (10 x 10) and shows slight variation in size, 2 1/2 - 2 3/4 mm. high by 20 1/2 - 21 mm. long in the horizontal and 3 mm. high by 23 mm. long in the diagonal. A plate proof in red was pulled in 1857 and an orange yellow trial color proof in 1864.

The plates made by RWH&E of the 3d were made of unhardened steel and consisted of two hundred subjects arranged in two panes of 100 (10 x 10) separated by a gutter 10 - 10 1/2-mm. wide. Placed one above the other they are identified as panes A & B. A full proof sheet from the plate were shown for the first time ever in "The Gems of Canadian Philately" display at CAPEX '96, the World Philatelic Exhibition held in Toronto in June 1996. The panes had been separated many years ago and pane A had, for many decades, been with the CPA and, before that, the Post Office. The CPA had acquired pane B at the ABN Archives sale in 1990. It was only when preparing the material for CAPEX '96 that Cimon Morin, Chief of the CPA, realized the two panes fit together and the import of that discovery.

Scobie's stamps were destroyed and seemingly only the copy in the Fleming diary survived. RWH&E stamps went on sale April 23, 1851. One hundred thousand stamps were shipped and, a little later, another 150,000 to complete the first order. Only 21,700 3d

stamps were left out of a total of 3,550,400 printed when the Province of Canada changed to decimal currency postage stamps on July 1, 1859.

The first printing on laid paper had not satisfied Morris. By 1852, RWH&E had switched to handmade wove paper made by Ivy Mills of Chester, Pa., and in late 1857 to machine-made ribbed wove paper by Crane Mills of Dalton, Mass. The handmade paper exists in thin to medium, thin oily and hard stout versions, while the machine-made paper exists in soft and hard ribbed varieties.

A few stamps on wove paper are found with a stitch watermark. This occurred when the paper, during manufacturing, passed over part of the canvas that had been stitched together, the stitches leaving a watermark (Figure 9). Unused or mint stamps in large multiples are extremely scarce. Two blocks of four are the largest multiples recorded for the 3d on laid paper. One has a corner cut off. On wove paper the largest multiple is a block of eight.

Canadian postal officials noted the improvement in stamp separation brought on by using perforations in Great Britain in 1854. In a letter dated Nov. 13, 1854, they requested RWH&E to perforate the next orders of Canadian stamps. The contractor was unable to meet this request until it merged, in 1858, with other firms to form the American Bank Note Company.

The first perforated 3d was ordered on Oct. 12, 1858, and perforation of the stamps started on Nov. 23, 1858. Three hundred thousand were delivered on Dec. 30, 1858 (Figure 10).

Trial or experimental perforations are found and have been authenticated from 1855 on, and possibly as early as 1852. So few dated copies exist that pinpointing the dates accurately is difficult. Enough copies exist however to indicate that there were at least five different experimental perforations: a sewing machine type with small punched holes, not aligned but regularly spaced; a roulette perforation with small slanted horizontal cuts without paper removed; a perforation 13, punched with unaligned oval holes; a straight saw-tooth cut perforation, aligned and regularly spaced; and aligned and evenly spaced perforated 14 punched holes called the Kingston perforation. It gained this name from a cover addressed to New York bearing a pair of the stamps dated May 30, 1857, from the Ontario Foundry Co., Machinists. Historians believe that this company was probably the maker of the perforating machine.

The first printings are generally defined as red and can be found on all papers except the harder wove papers where the color is red brown and can run to an almost brown shade. Some thin wove stamps have a rose red hue to them. The orange red shade can only be found on laid paper. Sheets had no marginal inscriptions until December 1852. This is when an imprint "Rawdon, Wright, Hatch & Edson, New-York." was added in Diamond type upper and lowercase letters. The 28mm imprint occurs eight times on each sheet: twice on each side of the sheet. Consequently, there is no imprint on the laid paper of 1851 and the thin paper of 1852.

Important postage rates for which the 3d beaver was used included the 3d per 1/2 oz. effective April 6, 1851, for domestic letters within the Province of Canada and the same rate, effective July 6, 1851 for letters to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

The earliest known use of a pence adhesive postage stamp is found on two covers both dated May 1, 1851. One is the property of the estate of a prominent New York first day/earliest date of issue cover collector. The other can be found in the Bytown Collection in Ottawa.

Two of the stamps made up the 6d rate to the United States. Multiples of the 3d, mainly in strips, were used to pay various overweight rates. Two used blocks of six are also known, on and off cover.

Regulations prohibited the use of parts of stamps for payment of postage. However, with the introduction of the 7 1/2d rate for letters to the United Kingdom by Canadian Packet in May 1856, some bisecting was tolerated by the Post Office. The 3d was cut in two to make a 1 1/2d and added to a 6d or two 3d it made up the rate until the issuance of the 7 1/2d stamp in June 1857.

If the subject of Canadian Pence issues interests you, there is a substantial amount of literature available on the subject. A list of basic catalogues and handbooks can be obtained by sending a SASE to the editor.