

Charles Connell of New Brunswick and his 5¢ stamp

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

There likely has been no more controversial stamp in Canada's postal history than the 5¢ stamp bearing the portrait of Charles Connell, postmaster general of New Brunswick (New Brunswick Scott 5, Figure 1). It has been written about extensively as

early as 1865, when an abbreviated version of its story was published in the June 1 issue of *The Stamp Collector's Magazine* (Vol. III, No. 29).

The unknown writer had the story substantially right, except for the year the stamps were produced was not 1861, but 1860. The article attempted to whitewash Connell's action, blaming the furor over the "five-cent that

rocked a colony" on his political opponents.

What had gotten Connell in hot water? His own likeness appeared, without authorization, on the most common stamp used in New Brunswick, the 5¢ issue used to pay the domestic rate.

Charles Connell (1810-73) had been a member of New Brunswick's legislative assembly since 1846 and had been appointed postmaster general in 1859 (Figure 2). As one of his first acts, he was instructed by the lieutenant governor, J.H.T. Manners-Sutton, Viscount Canterbury (Figure 3), a first-class cricket player and later to be Governor of Trinidad and Victoria, to order new stamps for New Brunswick to be available in 1860 when the colony changed its currency from the British system to the decimal system.

His request was for stamps denominated 1¢, 5¢, 10¢ and 12½¢. Connell added a 17¢ value to pay the rate to the United Kingdom via the United States.

New Brunswick's pence and shilling stamps had been printed in England, but Connell felt that a printer closer to home would be more appropriate for what he had in mind, so he approached the American Bank Note Co. (ABN) of New York — the printers of the Province of Canada's stamps — to prepare dies for New Brunswick's new stamps.

A May 1 issue date was contemplated and the ABN Co. was more likely to meet this short

deadline. It is fascinating to see that the same types, and bewildering numbers of die proofs and color trial proofs, and post-contemporary proofs, are available for these New Brunswick stamps as they were for the Canadian stamps of the period.

Connell was quite original in his choice of subjects for the stamps, New Brunswick Scott 6 and 8-11. Apart from Canada's beaver, very few countries at the time showed anything else but the head of state or a numeral as the main feature of their stamps.

On the 1¢ stamp Connell introduced a locomotive, purported to be the Ossekeag No. 9 of the European and North American Railway, which had begun operation in New Brunswick in 1857 and extended its lines in 1860. The locomotive on the stamps has some affinities in its design with

locomotives built for the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railway.

The 12½¢ stamp showed a steamship variously described as the *Royal William*, the first steamship to make the North Atlantic crossing; or the *Washington*, the first American Trans-Atlantic mail steamship.

The Royal family was represented on the 10¢ (a Chalon portrait of Queen Victoria) and the 17¢ (the Prince of Wales). The prince's image may have been chosen in anticipation of his scheduled visit to the British North America

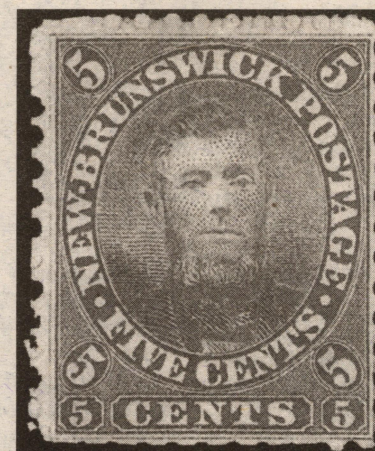


Figure 1. The infamous New Brunswick Connell 5¢ stamp of 1860 (Scott 5) showed the likeness of the postmaster general, without authorization.

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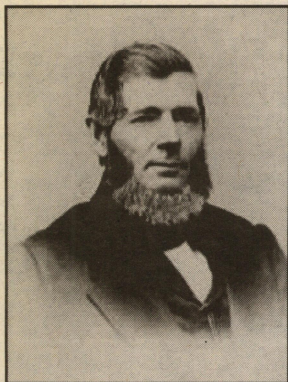


Figure 2. Charles Connell (1810-73) was postmaster general of New Brunswick from 1859 to 1860.

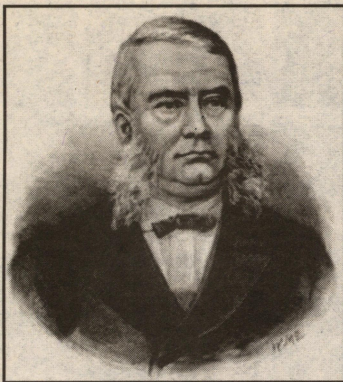


Figure 3. J.H.T. Manners-Sutton, later 3rd Viscount Canterbury (1814-77).

Brunswick in mid-April, but because of the controversial portrait of Connell on the 5¢ stamp their issue was delayed until May 12, with the 5¢ being suppressed and a new order made to the ABN for a 5¢ showing the Chalon portrait of the queen.

Original die proofs for the Connell stamps must exist in black, but none are yet recorded. There are secondary die proofs in deep blue, deep green, violet (lilac), dark brown, clear brown, yellow brown and slate black. The example shown in Figure 4 is one of six auctioned May 13, 2000, in the Rarities of

colonies between July 23 and Sept. 20, 1860.

And for the 5¢ stamp, Connell chose a portrait of himself — or did he?

This controversy has never been settled conclusively. Nor has the question of whether the 500,000 stamps printed were destroyed by the government, or if Connell bought them back and later destroyed them himself.

So much contrary information has been written by family members, people who allege they knew Connell, and philatelic writers, that it is difficult to get to the truth. Suffice it to say, that the official documents of the period are silent on these two questions. The stamps were delivered to New

the World sale by Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries Inc., of New York.

Post-contemporary die proofs exist as well. They were likely printed at the same time as their Province of Canada counterparts: the composite dies (with the 10¢ Queen Victoria) in 1864 (Figure 5); and the Goodalls (the name refers to ABN president Albert G. Goodall) in 1878 (Figure 6).

It seems that the composite die proofs were printed only on India paper, contrary to the Canadian ones that were available on at least six different types of paper. Connell composite die proofs are found in black, light blue violet, orange, red, green, dark blue, and brownish red. Other col-

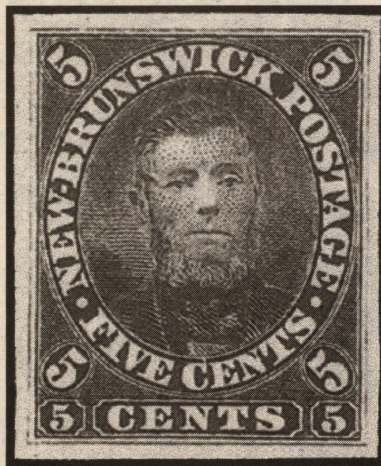


Figure 4. A secondary die proof of the Connell design. The lower corners are distinctly different from those on the printed stamps.

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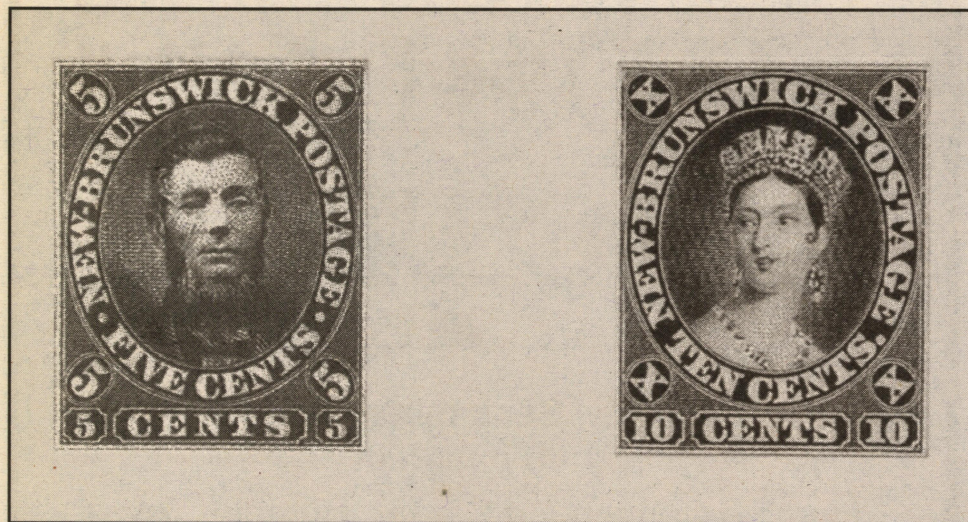


Figure 5. An example of a bicolored composite die proof pulled in 1864.

ors may also exist. In addition there are a few composites that are bicolored. The Goodalls are in the same color as those printed for Canada and the first issues of the United States: brown, blue, green, red and black.

Contemporary and post-contemporary plate and trial color proofs exist with or without the overprint "specimen." Without the overprint they exist in many shades of brown and in orange (pulled in 1864).

A complete plate proof sheet (Figure 7) was offered for sale when the J.J. Macdonald Collection of Connells was auctioned by Eastern Auctions Ltd. of New Brunswick on Feb. 22, 2003. The items pictured in Figures 5 and 6 were offered as part of the same sale.

The "specimen" overprint was only applied in red (vertically with thin or thick letters with sans-serif letters, or diagonally with serif letters) and only on the brown trial plate proofs. An additional plate proof exists that could also be an imperforate version of the actual stamp. It is printed on paper (wove) and with gum very similar to the printed stamp.

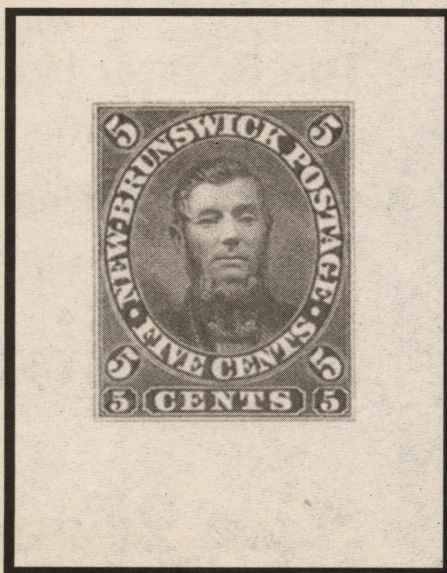


Figure 6. An 1878 brownish red trial color "Goodall" die proof.



Figure 7. The 5c brown complete plate proof sheet of 100, recently offered at auction by Eastern Auctions Ltd. of New Brunswick.

According to Nicholas Argenti in his *The Postage Stamps of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia* (published in 1962 by the Royal Philatelic Society of London), only three copies exist. One was sold at the Macdonald auction (Lot 291) previously mentioned, and another was sold at the 2000 Siegel Rarities of the World sale (lot 500), also previously mentioned.

Since 1962, another copy or two may have surfaced but no extensive research has been made to prove it. Again, it is highly likely that Argenti is right that imperforates exist, since the ABN did produce at least a single sheet of imperforates for each of the Province of Canada's stamps that were current at that time.

Genuine Connells were perforated by a machine giving an irregular gauge (11.6×11.75). The perforations are distinctly ragged and often are found blind (that is, punched by the machine, but with the paper still present).

From time to time, perforated plate proofs are offered for sale as the genuine item. These are usually perforated 11.8×12 and are normally on thick to very thick bond stock. Most genuine stamps are damaged and frequently perforations are missing.

According to Argenti, fewer than 50 Connell stamps remain today of the 500,000 originally printed. A vertical pair

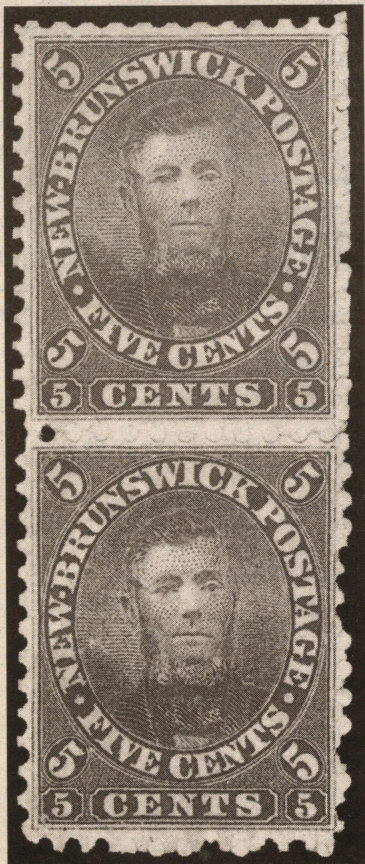


Figure 8. The only multiple recorded of the 5¢ Connell stamp is this vertical pair, which realized \$19,000 at a 2000 auction by Robert A. Siegel Galleries of New York.

is the only multiple recorded (Figure 8). It graced the collections of Reford, Galt, Argenti and other collectors before coming into the hands of Ron Brigham, who parted with it; the pair was last seen in the 2000 Siegel Rarities sale as lot 497.

A few used copies — at least three — exist, but experts on this issue believe that although the stamps are genuine, the cancels are not. One, for example, bears a Nova Scotia grid cancel rather than a New Brunswick grid. Many urban legends rose around this issue, including the existence of two covers bearing the stamps. However, none have ever surfaced and if they did, they would likely have been “prepared” by Connell or one of his friends. Until July 12, 1860, no 5¢ New Brunswick stamp was available, so the postal patron could either pay in cash or use a bisected 10¢ stamp.

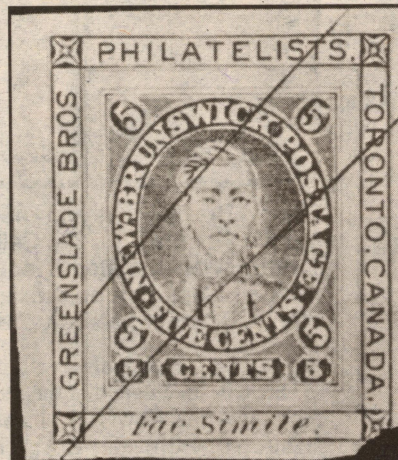


Figure 9. The only recorded forgery of the Connell issue, illustrated in *The Postage Stamps of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia* by Nicholas Argenti. The plate was prepared and stamps were printed but destroyed. This is the only pull from the defaced plate.

At least one forgery exists, in addition to the fraudulent perforated proofs mentioned previously. It was prepared from a defaced plate that had been engraved to replicate the Connells, and from which 1,000 stamps had been printed, but which were subsequently destroyed (Figure 9, as illustrated in Argenti's book).

Although Connell had to resign as postmaster general for this act of *lèse-majesté*, it did not impede his further political career. He was re-elected to the legislative assembly in 1861 and 1865 and was appointed surveyor-general of New Brunswick in 1866. At Confederation, in 1867, he was elected to the House of Commons where he sat until his death in 1873.

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