

Essays show development of Canada's Fishing Resources stamp

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On February 1, 1951, the Canada Post Office issued a \$1 definitive stamp honoring Canada's fishing resources (Scott 302, Figure 1).

Fairbairn Art Studios in Ottawa, Ontario, designed the stamp with the co-operation of officials from Canada's Department of Fisheries. The stamp was modeled by Herman Herbert Schwartz (1885-1962) and engraved by Silas Robert Allen (1888-1958), who were both near the end of their illustrious careers with the Canadian Bank Note Co. (CBN).

Canada is blessed with three ocean coasts and a large portion of the world's freshwater lakes and rivers. As a result, it has one of the most extensive fisheries in the world. In the 1950s, Canadian fisheries yielded a tremendous quantity of high-quality fish, resulting in steady economic growth in this important sector of Canada's economy.

The stamp portrays not only the industry and its fishermen but also emphasizes Canada's great fishery wealth by displaying in the margin some of the most important resources of the industry.

Figure 2 shows the treasure trove of thematic material depicted on the stamp's border. Starting at the Pribilof seal at the bottom of the design and moving clockwise, the fisheries prod-

ucts include clam, albacore tuna, halibut, herring, mackerel, cod, shrimp, scallop, lobster, Atlantic salmon, sock-eye salmon, lake trout, whitefish, haddock and oyster.

As an aside, the Pribilof seal is also known as the northern fur seal. It is surprising that the designer chose this seal rather than the harp seal, which is more commonly associated with Canada. Most of the world's Pribilof seals are found in the Pribilof Islands off the west coast of Alaska.

Little is known about the Fairbairn Art Studios. For information about the studios, I contacted John Cullen of Brockville, Ontario, who spent a year apprenticing at the Fairbairn Studios in 1951-52. His apprenticeship concentrated on commercial art, so he knew nothing about the Fishing Resources stamp or who designed it. He was responsible for the art used for the instructions on how to open the first carton of milk produced by Sealtest.

Cullen described the firm as small, with only three or four artists. Gordon Fairbairn led the firm. According to Cullen, the studios concentrated pri-

marily on advertising art for newspapers and magazines, and on commercial art advertising.

Figure 3 shows a preliminary sketch by an unknown Fairbairn Art Studios artist for some of the fisheries products shown in the border of the stamp. The stamp sketch, done in red and black pencil on paper, is the first drawing for the stamp. The arrangement of the products in the border differ from the order in which they appear on the issued stamp. The preliminary drawing also has a much less dramatic fishing scene than the final stamp.

Figure 4 shows two rejected drawings prepared by artists at the Fairbairn Art Studios. The first, with a 30¢ denomination, shows different types of fishing vessels framed by fishing nets. The drawing is in green and black pencil on paper with white watercolor retouches.

The second, inscribed 35¢, shows what is purported to be a fisherman jumping out of a map of Canada superimposed on a fishing net. The fisherman is dressed in an artist's version of a sou'wester and a protective weath-



Figure 1. The \$1 Fishing Resources definitive stamp depicts a fisherman and Canada's wealth of resources for this industry.



Figure 2. A thematic treasure trove of fishing symbols is shown on the border of the 1951 \$1 Fishing Resources stamp. The designer chose the Pribilof seal instead of the harp seal.

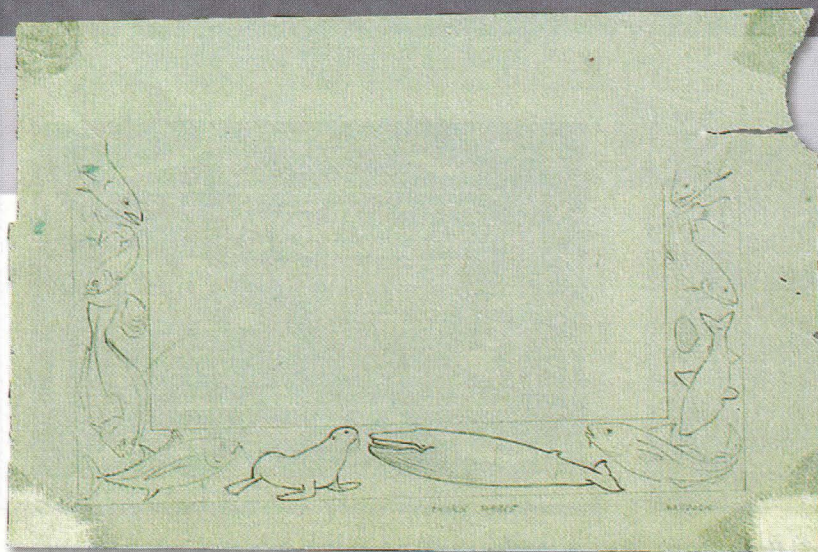


Figure 3. The artist's preliminary sketch for the border (left) and the first drawing for the stamp (above).

erproof coat that is drawn much too tightly around his body. The essay was drawn in shades of blue watercolors with gouache and ink on card.

Figure 5 shows two more essays prepared by unknown artists. The first, with a 10¢ denomination, is striking in its simplicity, showing a close-up of a pair of hands hauling a fishing net into an imaginary vessel with a seagull in the background flying over the sea. The illustration shows a black-and-white photograph of the essay.

The other, a rejected \$1 design showing a peaceful fishing scene, was drawn at least twice, both times in pencil on paper. There are subtle differences between the two versions. For example, on the lower portion of the drawings, the bottom ornaments on one don't appear on the other. The center drawing is an original, while the essay on the right was photographed after it was redrawn.

Fairbairn Art Studios started the for-

mal approval process with an exquisitely drawn essay in watercolor and ink on paper (Figure 6). The essay gives the impression that the smiling fisherman is fishing at dawn.

A much darker and foreboding essay was also prepared by Fairbairn Art Studios and completed September 13, 1950. In this design, also shown in Figure 6, the fisherman seems to be at sea at night. He has a squarer jaw and a more determined look. This is the photo essay that was approved September 30, 1950, by Gabriel-Édouard Rinfret (1905-1994), who served as Canada's postmaster general from 1949 to 1952.

Two proofs, in green, were pulled from the die prepared by Silas Robert Allen and submitted to Walter J. Turnbull, who was deputy postmaster general from 1945 to 1957. The proofs are shown in Figure 7. Turnbull approved them on November 24, 1950.



Figure 4. Two rejected essays for the Fishing Resources stamp. The design with the 30¢ denomination shows a fishing vessel. The design with the 35¢ denomination shows a fisherman jumping out of a map of Canada.



Figure 5. Two more rejected designs by unknown artists from Fairbairn Art Studios. The second design, with a \$1 denomination, was drawn twice. The center design is the original drawing. The essay on the right was photographed after it was redrawn.



Figure 6. The two versions of the final design for the \$1 Fishing Resources stamp showing a smiling fisherman and a stern-looking fisherman.

Early in December, the Canada Post Office announced that a new \$1 green stamp would be issued. Later, on December 22, 1950, Turnbull approved the final die proof in what was to be the color of issue, bright ultramarine. The change was announced to the public on January 15, 1951, two weeks before the stamp went on sale in post offices.

A discrepancy in the printing numbers exists for the \$1 Fishing Resources stamp. The Canadian Postal Archives records 4.5 million stamps printed, while the *The Untrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps* (2007 edition) reports that 4,460,000 stamps

were printed by CBN.

The discrepancy may be explained two ways. First, the Canadian Postal Archives quantity includes the 40,000 stamps that were overprinted with the letter "G" (for Government/Gouvernement) and prepared for official use by Canadian Government departments and agencies (Scott O27, Figure 8). Untrade does not include these overprinted stamps.

Second, the discrepancy may include the difference between what was ordered and what was received from the printers.

Only one plate was used for the \$1

stamp, and all stamps are perforated gauge 12. The stamps were printed in sheets of 200 subjects, arranged in upper and lower right and left panes, and cut into post office panes of 50 stamps each.

It is fascinating to note that throughout the whole conception and approval processes of the selected design, no one noticed that the fisherman's coat was buttoned on the wrong side. This implies that the artist, in preparing the essay, must have reversed the original photograph or portrait from which the fisherman was taken.

I am grateful to D. Robin Harris, editor of *The Untrade Specialized Catalogue of Canadian Stamps*, for this tidbit of information.

All illustrations in this article, except for the stamp in Figure 1, are courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives. ■

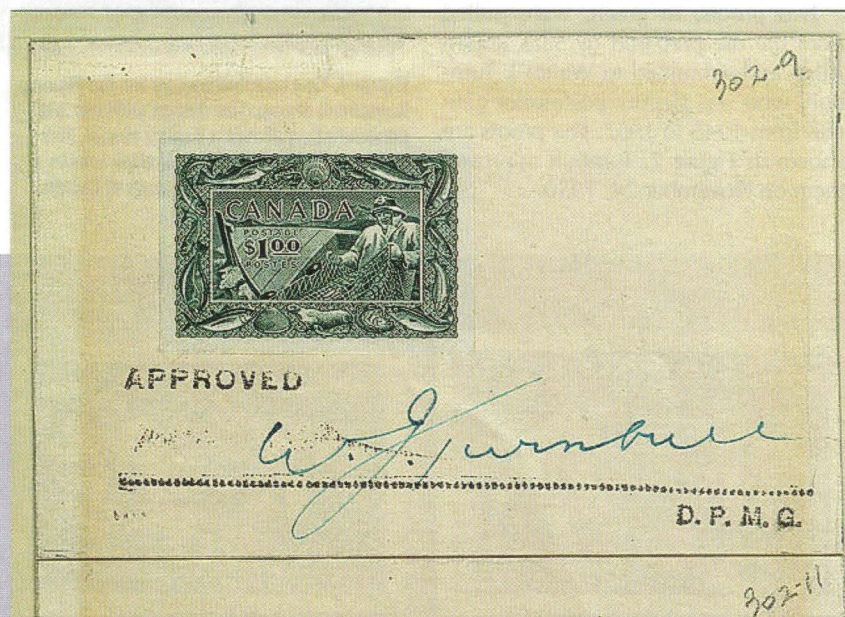


Figure 7. A green color trial proof of the final design of the \$1 Fishing Resources stamp.



Figure 8. The Fishing Resources stamp was overprinted "G" (for Government/Gouvernement) for use on official government mail.