

Forty years of Canadian Christmas stamps

CHARLES J.G. VERGE



Figure 1. In 1964, Canada began its ongoing annual series of Christmas stamps. The two first stamps of the series have similar designs with 3¢ and 5¢ denominations.

In the December 1998 *O Canada* column, I wrote about the 100th anniversary of Canada's 1898 2¢ stamp, Scott 85 and 86, celebrating the implementation of the penny rate throughout the British Empire. Some collectors refer to the issue as the "Map Stamp" because it shows a full map of the world with the British Empire dominions and colonies colored in red.

Many also consider it the world's first Christmas stamp, because it bears the words "XMAS 1898" at the bottom. Those words were added in part because the new Imperial Penny Post rate came into effect on Dec. 25, 1898, and in part because it was sold to Queen Victoria (whose approval was required for all stamps) as a stamp for the "Prince of Peace."

It was not until 1964 that Canada issued Christmas stamps again. The United States had issued its first Christmas stamp in 1962 (Scott 1205). Many Canadians thought this was a good idea and suggested to the Post Office that it should follow suit.

The first year there were two stamps of the same design issued. Canada Scott 434 and 435 each show a family of four standing outdoors with the star of Bethlehem in the night sky (Figure 1). The 3¢ stamp paid the unsealed card rate then in effect in Canada. Only five handwritten words could be included in a card to qualify for this rate, otherwise it would be considered to be a

first-class 5¢ rate item.

The losers, as a result of this new stamp product, were those festive writers who mailed their cards locally (drop letter). The rate was 4¢ for a first-class letter and therefore they could not use the Christmas stamps for their cards with lengthy messages: they had to use a regular 4¢ definitive. This problem was never resolved by the post office and it went away on its own on Nov. 1, 1968, when the drop-letter rate was discontinued.

The Canadian Christmas stamps produced over the past 40 years have appeared in many formats, but mainly in sheets and booklets. It was only in 2003, when the production costs were low enough, that Canada's Christmas stamps were produced in self-adhesive format. The booklets containing those stamps, Canada Scott 2004-2006, are shown in Figure 2.

Christmas stamps produced between 1964 and 1967 were made available to postal patrons in smaller sheets of 25 and were sold prepackaged in tightly sealed "cello-paqs" containing two sheetlets. These were the years when Canada was experimenting with different tagging and papers. The tagging and the cellophane used to make the cello-paqs frequently damage the stamps inside if the stamps are not allowed to breathe.

Canadian Christmas stamps issued from 1968 to today can be purchased in booklet form. In fact, since 2003, it is the only format in which the holiday



Figure 2. Canada's first self-adhesive Christmas stamps were issued in 2003 in three denominations: 48¢, 65¢ and \$1.25.



Figure 3. The 1969 Christmas issue was discovered with a striking black-missing error. The normal stamp is shown at right.

Figure 4. The 1979 Knitted Doll stamp was printed with gold inscriptions missing. The normal stamp is shown at right.



issues have been made available.

There are many unintentional varieties of these stamps, but considering the huge number of Christmas postage stamps printed each year, it is surprising that there aren't more.

In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the varieties had to do with the fluorescence and phosphor bars applied to the stamps, and the papers available.

The first major variety that occurred regularly between 1969 and 1980 was that the color used to print the inscriptions — mainly black — was missing, such as the black-missing error on the 1969 6¢ Christmas stamp depicting children (Scott 503, Figure 3). In 1975, the black inscription was doubled on the 8¢ Family and Tree issue (Scott 677).

The 1977 series had many varieties. The 10¢ Hunters Following Star stamp, Scott 741, is recorded imperforate hori-

zontally between, printed on the gum side, and with the black inscriptions doubled. The 12¢ Angelic Choir stamp, Scott 742, has some pairs imperforate between either vertically or horizontally, and with the black inscriptions doubled. The 25¢ Christ Child stamp is the only value to have escaped unscathed.

The 1978 14¢ Virgin and Child stamp, Scott 774, is known missing the black color. The gold inscription went missing on the 1979 35¢ Knitted Doll stamp (Scott 841a, Figure 4).

A major paper fold variety occurred on one sheet of the 1982 30¢ Holy Family stamp, resulting in two dramatic errors. On the portion of the pane covered by the foldover, all colors of the design were omitted except for black (Scott 973a). Those missing colors are found on part of the folded-over gum side, printing all of the stamp design ex-

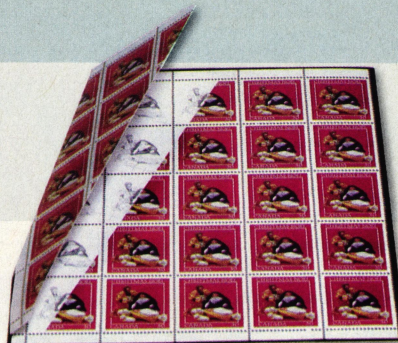
cept for the black (Scott 973b). A card mockup shown in Figure 5 illustrates how the fold created the error.

Quality control improved. From that point on no major varieties are recorded except for two stamps, one in 1989 and the other in 1993. In both these cases, Scott 1259 and 1499, the cause of the imperforate-between stamps was misperforated sheets or miscut booklet panes (Figure 6).

In 1994, Canada Post had hoped to raise its rates and was so certain that it would happen that in August of that year it printed Christmas stamps with the new denominations. The Canadian government, however, did not approve the rate hikes, and Canada Post had to reprint the stamps using the denominations for the then-current rates. Several years later some of the "new rate" 52¢ and 90¢ stamps appeared on the market

Figure 5. A remarkable double color-missing error was caused by a paper fold on a single pane of the 30¢ Christmas stamp of 1982. This clever holiday card recreates how the error occurred.

Courtesy Saskatoon Stamp Centre.



Canada's Christmas Stamps 1964-2003: Usages, Rates and Subjects									
Year	Scott #s	Unsealed & Coded*	First Class	USA	International	Religious	Secular		
1964	434-435	3¢	5¢			Star of Bethlehem			
1965	443-444	3¢	5¢			Gifts of the Wise Men			
1966	451-452	3¢	5¢			Praying Hands by Dürer			
1967	476-477	3¢	5¢					Children caroling	
1968	488-489	5¢	6¢			Mother and Child Inuit carvings			
1969	502-503	5¢	6¢			Children praying			
1970	519-530	5¢ (5)	6¢ (5)	10¢	15¢		Children's drawings		
1971	554-557	6¢	7¢	10¢	15¢			Snow flakes	
1972	606-609	6¢	8¢	10¢	15¢			Candles	
1973	625-628	6¢	8¢	10¢	15¢		Modern stained glass		
1974	650-653	6¢	8¢	10¢	15¢	Paintings by Lemieux, Masson, Todd & Gagnon			
1975	674-679	6¢ (2)	8¢ (2)	10¢	15¢		Children's drawings		
1976	697-699		8¢	10¢	15¢	Stained glass Nativity scenes			
1977	741-743		10¢	12¢	25¢	Algonquian religious scenes			
1978	773-775		12¢	14¢	30¢	Madonnas			
1979	839-841		15¢	17¢	35¢		Children's toys		
1980	870-872		15¢	17¢	35¢		Paintings by Hennessey, Hallam & Morris		
1981	900-902		15¢ (3)				Christmas Trees		
1982	973-975		30¢	35¢	60¢	Crèche figurines			
1983	1004-1006		32¢	37¢	64¢	Church paintings by Simard			
1984	1040-1042		32¢	37¢	64¢	Paintings by Dallaire, Bouchard & Milne			
1985	1067-1070	32¢	34¢	39¢	68¢			Santa Claus Parade paintings by Carroll	
1986	1113-1116	29¢	34¢	39¢	68¢	Angels			
1987	1148-1151	31¢	36¢	42¢	72¢		Paintings by Dumas		
1988	1222-1225	32¢	37¢	43¢	74¢	Icons			
1989	1256-1259	33¢	38¢	44¢	76¢			Winter scene paintings by Brymner, Suzor-Coté, Harris & Robinson	
1990	1294-1297	34¢	39¢	45¢	78¢				
						Native nativity scene paintings by Beardy, Morrisseau, Qiatsuk (?) & Reid			
1991	1339-1342	35¢	40¢	46¢	80¢			International Santa Clauses	
1992	1452-1455	37¢	42¢	48¢	84¢			International Santa Clauses	
1993	1499-1502	38¢	43¢	49¢	86¢			International Santa Clauses	
1994	1533-1536	(38¢)	43¢	50¢	88¢			Choirs & Carolers	
1995	1585-1588	40¢	45¢	52¢	90¢			Holly (40¢)	
1996	1627-1629		45¢	52¢	90¢	Nativity scenes from column capitals (45¢, 52¢ & 90¢)		Canadian art used on UNICEF Christmas cards	
1997	1669-1671		45¢	52¢	90¢	Mother and Child stained glass windows			
1998	1764-1766		45¢	52¢	90¢	Angels			
1999	1815-1817		46¢	55¢	95¢	Angels			
2000	1872-1875		46¢ (2)	55¢	95¢	Paintings by disabled artists Mathias (46¢), Guillemette (55¢) & Carter (95¢)			
2001	1922-1924		47¢	60¢	\$1.05			Picture postage frame with Holly (46¢)	
2002	1965-1967		48¢	65¢	\$1.25	Aboriginal art by Odjig, Youngfox & Katak-Anguititq		Outdoor Christmas lights	
2003	2004-2006		48¢	65¢	\$1.25			Christmas gifts	

*Envelopes had to be left unsealed and could contain a written message of no more than five words. This service did not exist from 1976 to 1984. In 1985, it was reinstated and the same rules applied but the stamps could only be used on specially printed envelopes requiring the manual inclusion of bars to indicate the postal code. It was again discontinued in 1996.

Figure 6. An upper-left block of the 1992 43¢ Christmas issue with vertical perforations missing between the second and third stamps in each row. Courtesy Saskatoon Stamp Centre.



Figure 7. These Christmas stamps with 52¢ and 90¢ denominations were printed in 1994 but never issued. Copies of the unissued stamps turned up in the philatelic market several years later. Counterparts with denominations of 50¢ and 88¢ were regularly issued and appear in the catalog as Scott 1534 and 1535.

Courtesy Saskatoon Stamp Centre.

(Figure 7). The story of these stamps was told in my O Canada column in the December 1999 *Scott Stamp Monthly*.

On a number of occasions, Canadian stamp dealers and Canada Post have used the designs of Canada's Christmas stamps to create innovative Christmas cards. In fact, the illustrations for Figures 5, 6 and 7 are all derived from Christmas cards sent to the author by John Jamieson of Saskatoon Stamp Centre.

A selection of Canada Post's cards is found in Figure 8. The card bearing the design of Canada's 1974 stamp, shown at left in Figure 8, is from a series of

cards produced in 2002 by Hallmark and sold to the general public. The other two cards in the illustration were created for the exclusive use of some Canada Post senior officials and employees.

To complete an extensive review of 40 years of Canada's Christmas stamps might on its own require the space of an entire magazine, so to help the interested collector I have compiled the accompanying checklist, which provides the collector with additional specific information about these holiday stamps that might otherwise take hundreds of words to describe.

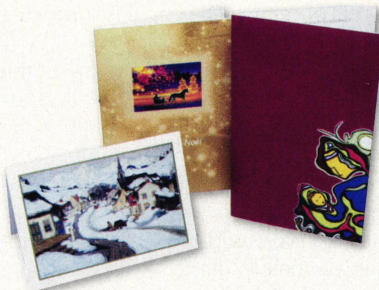


Figure 8. Canada Post Christmas cards sent to the author picture stamp designs of 1974, 2001 and 2002. Some of these holiday cards have the corresponding actual stamp affixed inside, postmarked with the first-day cancel.

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Scott #	F/VF	Filler	Scott #	F/VF	Filler	Scott #	F/VF	Filler	Scott #	F/VF	Filler
233	5.25	3.00	276A	125.00	70.00	309	4.90	2.75	619	9.00	5.00
234	5.50	3.00	277	275.00	195.00	310	17.50	10.00	620-21	11.00	6.00
235	15.75	7.00	278	405.00	305.00	311	49.00	28.00	634A	9.75	5.00
236	7.70	4.00	279	35	25	313	535.00	450.00	832b	65.00	—
237	5.50	3.00	279b	30	25	314	9.75	6.00	833	3.00	1.50
238	49.00	25.00	280	1.25	.75	315	325.00	—	834	2.50	1.50
239	63.00	35.00	281	1.10	.75	320	11.40	7.50	1053	5.50	3.00
240	125.00	70.00	282	3.25	1.75	323	3.00	2.00	C1	21.00	13.00
241	435.00	235.00	282c	3.25	1.75	324	1.20	.75	C2	29.25	17.00
242	420.00	235.00	283	2.90	1.75	325	18.00	10.00	C3	28.00	17.00
243	735.00	395.00	284	6.50	3.75	326	15.00	8.00	C4	9.50	6.00
244	910.00	525.00	285	4.50	2.75	327	18.00	10.00	C5	19.50	12.00
245	1120.00	650.00	286	1.60	1.00	328	3.00	1.50	C6	19.50	12.00
254	3.90	2.25	287	14.50	8.00	329	2.75	1.50	C18	45.00	35.00
255	4.50	2.75	288	13.65	7.00	330	18.00	10.00	RW1	95.00	57.00
256	14.00	8.00	289	27.50	15.00	367	1.00	.60	RW2	105.00	63.00
257	11.50	7.00	290	19.50	12.00	368	14.00	8.00	RW3	52.50	31.00
258	8.75	5.00	291	122.50	65.00	369	199.00	120.00	RW4	42.00	24.50
259	38.00	23.00	292	425.00	290.00	370	1.20	.75	RW5	40.00	24.00
260	87.75	45.00	293	725.00	425.00	371	15.00	9.00	RW6-9	ea...	31.50
261	225.00	125.00	294	1.95	1.00	372	2.85	1.50	ea...	31.50	19.00
262	780.00	500.00	295	.65	.35	373	18.00	11.00	RW10-11	ea...	17.00
265	2.00	1.25	296	9.75	5.00	399	5.75	3.00	RW13-16	ea...	11.00
266	3.50	2.00	297	9.00	5.00	523	195.00	125.00	RW17-20	ea...	8.50
268	1.30	.75	298	32.50	16.00	524	28.00	17.00	ea...	7.25	4.50
269	2.00	1.25	299	16.25	9.00	547	33.00	18.00	RW21-35	ea...	7.25
270	1.95	1.25	302	2.25	1.00	550	10.50	6.00	ea...	7.25	4.50
271	5.25	3.00	303	1.50	1.00	572	7.25	4.50	RW36-51	ea...	5.00
272	1.50	.90	304	1.30	1.00	573	9.75	5.00	ea...	5.00	3.50
273	1.30	.75	305	2.25	1.00	578	145.00	75.00			
274	9.00	5.50	306	1.95	1.00	579	125.00	70.00			
275	19.50	12.00	307	1.80	1.00	599A	7.75	4.50			
276	58.50	35.00	308	5.85	3.00	616	8.50	5.00			

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