

Stamps celebrate powered flight in Canada

CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Six years after the Wright Brothers 1903 flight at Kitty Hawk, J.A. Douglas McCurdy co-designed and piloted the *Silver Dart* aircraft. He flew it a half mile and 30 feet over Bras d'Or Lake (pictured on a 2006 nondenominated [51¢] permanent stamp, Scott 2192, Figure 1).

Canada issued two stamps to commemorate anniversaries of this event. A 5¢ stamp (Scott 383) was issued in 1959 to honor the flight's 50th anniversary. Most recently, on February 23, 2009, Canada Post issued a nondenominated (54¢) stamp to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the flight (Scott 2317). Both stamps,



Figure 1. The *Silver Dart* aircraft over Bras d'Or Lake is shown on this nondenominated (51¢) permanent stamp (Scott 2192) issued by Canada Post in 2006.

shown in Figure 2, had their first day of issue on February 23, the anniversary date of the flight.

In 1959, the first day of issue for the 5¢ *Silver Dart* stamp took place in Ottawa, Ontario. In 2009, the first-day ceremony for the nondenominated (54¢) stamp was held in Baddeck, Nova Scotia.

The basic design of each stamp is the Curtiss aircraft flown by McCurdy. The aircraft also is shown on a 46¢ stamp (Figure 3) from a souvenir sheet (Scott 1832) issued by Canada Post as part of the 2000 Millennium series. The stamp honors Alexander Graham Bell, who also is featured on a 4¢ stamp issued by Canada in 1947 (Scott 274, Figure 4). Bell was a major player in the history of flight in Canada.

Pictured in Figure 5, Canadian aviation pioneer J.A. Douglas McCurdy (1886-1961) was born in Baddeck. He attended St. Andrew's College in Aurora, Ontario, and the University of Toronto, from which he graduated in 1906.

In 1907, he joined Bell's Aerial Experiment Association (AEA). In addition to Bell and McCurdy, members of the association included engine, aircraft and bicycle maker Glenn H. Curtiss, engineer Casey Baldwin, and

United States Army Lieutenant Thomas Selfridge (Figure 6). Selfridge did not live to see the *Silver Dart* fly. He died as a result of head injuries in a plane crash piloted by Orville Wright September 17, 1908, and is recorded as the first aviation death.

After many years of experimenting with kites, Bell founded the AEA September 30, 1907. In *Aviation in Canada*, author Larry Milberry quotes Bell as saying that he intended the AEA to be a "co-operative scientific association, not for gain but for the love of the art and doing what we can to help one another." The company's capital of \$35,000 in Canadian funds was provided by Bell's wife Mabel, a woman of independent means. The company built five "aerodromes," a term Bell used to describe his airplanes, before disbanding March 31, 1909. The *Silver Dart* was one of the AEA's planes.

McCurdy majored in mechanical engineering. In 1909, with this pioneer

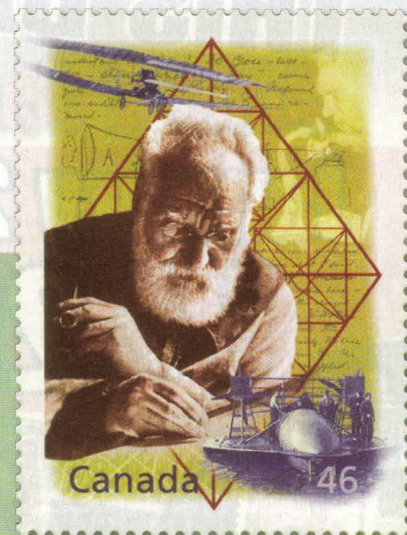


Figure 3. The *Silver Dart* also is pictured with Alexander Graham Bell on this 46¢ stamp from a 2000 souvenir sheet (Scott 1832).



Figure 2. Canada issued two stamps to honor anniversaries of the first airplane flight in Canada: a 5¢ stamp in 1959 (Scott 383), celebrating the 50th anniversary, and a nondenominated (54¢) stamp in 2009 (Scott 2317), to honor the 100th anniversary.



Figure 4. Alexander Graham Bell is shown on this 4¢ stamp issued in 1947 to commemorate the centenary of his birth. Bell was a major player in the history of flight in Canada.



Figure 5. J.A. Douglas McCurdy is shown at the wheel of the *Silver Dart*. McCurdy piloted the Curtiss aircraft in the first airplane flight in Canada near Baddeck, Nova Scotia. *Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives*



Figure 6. Founding members of the Aerial Experiment Association (from left to right): Glenn Curtiss, Casey Baldwin, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Selfridge and McCurdy. *Courtesy of Parks Canada*

flight, he became the first person to fly an airplane within the British Empire, and in 1910, he was the first person in Canada to be issued a pilot's license.

McCurdy founded the first aviation school in Canada. He also was the first man to fly from Florida to Cuba — Key West to Havana — January 30, 1911. Although Cuba has not commemorated this flight on stamps, it issued four airmail stamps for other Florida-Cuba first-flight anniversaries (Cuba Scott C30, C61-C62 and C172).

During World War II, McCurdy served as assistant director general of aircraft production. He remained in that position until he was appointed lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia, a position he held from 1947 to 1952. In

1973, he was inducted into the Canadian Aviation Hall of Fame.

The *Silver Dart* was the fourth of five so-called aerodromes. The others are, in the order that they were built: *Red Wing*, *White Wing*, *June Bug* and *Cygnét*.

The *Silver Dart* was built in Hammondsport, New York, and dismantled and shipped to Baddeck. It had an open-air cockpit and was made of silk balloon cloth, wood, pipe, wire and tape, and was powered by a Curtiss 50-horsepower engine.

The picture of McCurdy at the wheel of the *Silver Dart* and the photograph of the founding members of AEA can be seen on the back of the 2009 Centenary of First Flight pane

of 16 nondenominated domestic-rate (54¢) stamps (Figure 7). The back also shows other photographs and a map of Cape Breton, where Baddeck and Bras d'Or Lake are located.

The plane on the stamp is not based on an original photograph of the period, like the one on the reverse of the pane. Rather, it is an artist's rendition based on a model by illustrator Michael Little and on photographs Little took of the *Silver Dart* replica found in

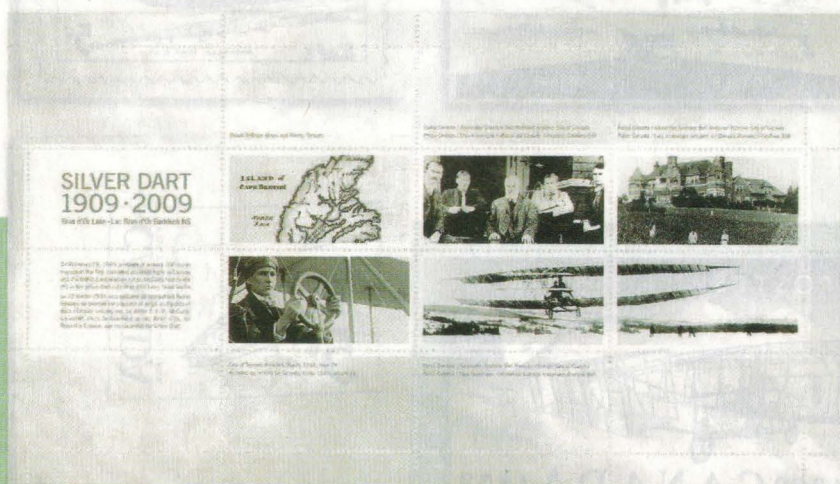


Figure 7. The reverse of the pane of 16 nondenominated (54¢) First Flight Centenary stamps issued February 23, 2009, includes the photograph of McCurdy shown in Figure 5, other photographs and a map of Cape Breton, where Baddeck and Bras d'Or Lake are located.

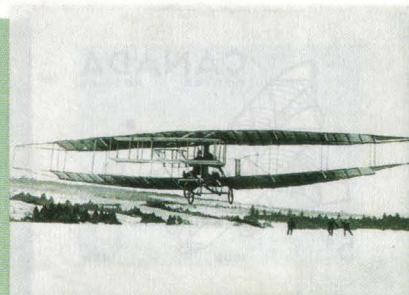


Figure 8. These photographs taken in 1909 were used to create the design for the 1959 5¢ *Silver Dart* stamp. *Courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives*

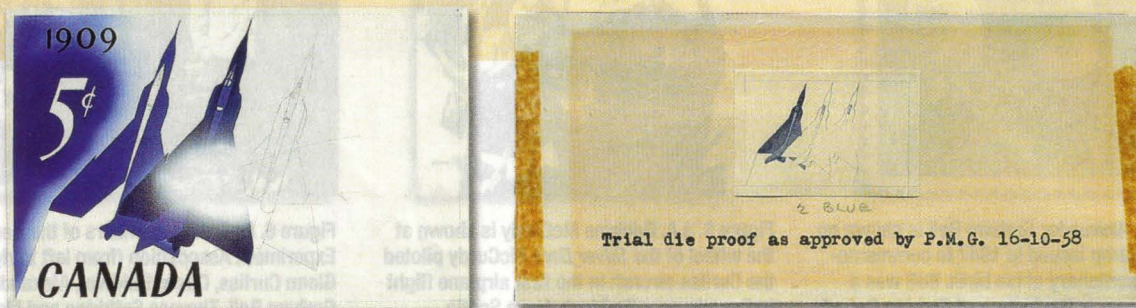


Figure 9. Harvey Thomas Prosser's preliminary painting for the Delta-winged aircraft is shown at left. The progressive die proof (shown at right) for the 1959 First Flight 50th Anniversary stamp was prepared from Prosser's painting.
 Courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives

the Atlantic Canada Aviation Museum (www.atlanticcanadaaviation.com).

The 2009 stamp was co-designed by Crystal Oicle and Dennis Page of the design firm Trampoline. Three million stamps were printed by Lowe Martin in five-color lithography on Tullis Russell paper with pressure sensitive gum.

The 1959 First Flight 50th Anniversary 5¢ domestic-rate stamp was based on photographs taken during

the flight. Designer Harvey Thomas Prosser based his rendition of the *Silver Dart* on the photographs shown in Figure 8. The three Delta-wing aircraft featured on the same stamp are composite drawings created by Prosser. His preliminary painting and a progressive die proof approved by Postmaster General William Hamilton (1919-89, postmaster general of Canada, 1957-62) are pictured in Figure 9.

Several designers submitted de-

signs for the 1959 stamp, and the Canadian Postal Archives (CPA) has these designs among its holdings. Contrary to the norm, the CPA files record the names of the designers on three designs. The top three designs in Figure 10, from left to right, are credited to Robert J. Ginny, J. Blache and Douglas M. Carr, none of whom was in the Canadian Post Office Department's regular stable of artists.

Yves Baril engraved the 1959 stamp,



Figure 10. These six preliminary designs and drawings were created for the 5¢ stamp issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first flight in Canada. The designs in the top row are credited to (from left to right): Robert J. Ginny, J. Blache and Douglas M. Carr. None of the artists whose work is shown here was in the Canadian Post Office Department's regular stable of artists.
 Courtesy of the Canadian Postal Archives