

# Uncovering more than 70 years of “hidden” dates on Canadian stamps

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When I first joined organized philately in the 1970s, many stamp clubs, youth and adult alike, frequently gave out prizes for people who could discover, on quiz night, where the hidden dates were on Canadian stamps. The rub was that some stamps — although very few — did not have a hidden date.

The systematic inclusion of a date, usually hidden in the design of the stamp, started in 1935. This practice continues today as a Universal Postal Union-mandated feature of stamp design.

Dates were not the only hidden feature added to stamp designs. On some stamps, the designer's initials or other added design features could be found.

Hidden dates on Canadian stamps do not include large dates that are easily visible on the stamps, dates that are

integral to the design or those in the margins of stamps, panes, sheets, souvenir sheets and booklets. R.J. Sutton, in his book *Stamp Curiosities* (1959), said, “All of the stamps since 1935, other than those already dated, have tiny figures of date engraved upon them. ... They are very successfully hidden too, in some of the values, and it is a fascinating job to find them all.”

Several years later, in 1970, Glenn Hansen wrote in *The Guidebook and Catalogue of Canadian Stamps*, “The fact that these dates are well hidden and often do not coincide with the date of issue of the stamp itself has made the hunt for them an interesting one for many collectors.”

Typically, the date was drawn into the artist's design before the stamps were engraved, and one or more years

might pass between the creation of the artist's rendition and the stamp being issued. The engraver faithfully reproduced the date in the design.

At the beginning of this phenomenon, when the Canadian Bank Note Co. received the printing contract in 1935, its engravers began engraving on the die in minute numerals the year the die was engraved. The first stamps to be so decorated were the 1935 King George V pictorial stamp series (Scott 217-227, C5 and E6). On the low-denomination stamps (1¢ through 8¢), the hidden date is found in the lower-left oval surrounding the king's portrait, to the right of the maple leaf north of the numeral. For the larger pictorial stamps (10¢ through \$1), the hidden date is not in a consistent position. It is located in the lower-right quadrant



Figure 1. The first hidden date to appear on a Canadian stamp can be found on the 1935 George V pictorial series. Shown here is the 20¢ stamp (Scott 225). The date is found in the maple leaf.



Figure 2. Only part of the year date (51, for 1951) is featured on this 4¢ stamp (Scott 311) issued for the Capex philatelic exhibition and the centenary of the Canadian postal administration.



on the 10¢, 13¢, \$1 regular issues and the 5¢ airmail stamp; in the upper-right quadrant on the 20¢ stamp (Figure 1); and in the lower-left quadrant on the 50¢ regular issue and the 20¢ special delivery stamps.

Several reasons might explain why certain stamps have no hidden dates. The first, as illustrated by the 1937 3¢ carmine Coronation stamp (Scott 237), is because the date is an integral part of the design. In hidden-date parlance, these are called open-dated stamps.

One exception to this rule can be found during this period. In 1951, four stamps (Scott 311-314) were issued

to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Canadian postal administration and Capex 51, Canada's first international philatelic exhibition. All four stamps bear the dates 1851 and 1951 as part of the design. The 4¢ stamp (Scott 311) has what appears to be the last two digits of the hidden date "51" (Figure 2). Eventually, the policy was changed to include hidden dates even when the date was already part of the main design.

The second reason for excluding the hidden date is because the anniversary date is mentioned. An example of this is the 1957 4¢ ultramarine David

Thompson Centennial stamp, where the 1857 date is part of the design; the stamp (Scott 370) was issued in 1957.

A third reason is the extreme simplicity of the design, such as the 1962-64 Queen Elizabeth II cameo design stamp series (Scott 401-409).

The fourth reason for not including a hidden date is because the method of printing did not allow for this kind of addition. The only examples during the period under review are the 1965 5¢ Sir Winston Churchill memorial stamp, the first Canadian stamp to be printed in duotone lithography (Scott 440), and the 1967-78 series of post-



Figure 3. A selection of stamps showing initials of stamp designers: H (Emanuel Hahn), Scott 324; LH (Lawrence Hyde), Scott 324; M (Carl Mangold), Scott 371; P (A.L. Pollock), Scott 381; GT (Gerald Trottier), Scott 378; and W (Philip Weiss), Scott 390.



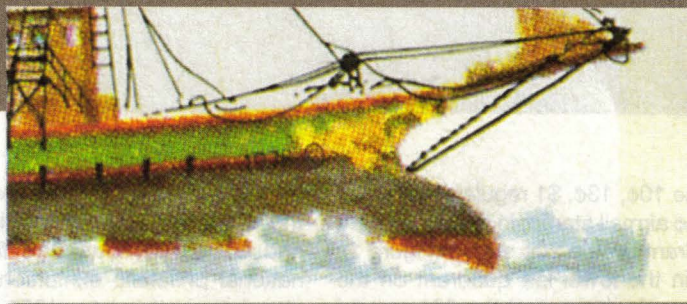


Figure 4. The international copyright symbol © was added to Canadian stamps in 1974. The copyright symbol follows the date on this 14¢ stamp (Scott 776) issued in 1978. The stamp, part of the Sailing Ships series begun in 1977, pictures the ice vessel *Chief Justice Robinson*.

age dues (Scott J21-J40).

From 1952 to 1963, some issues carry the initials of the stamp's designer, in addition to the date. Initials found are those of Emanuel Hahn (H: Scott 323-324, 330, 335-336, 352, 360-361), Lawrence Hyde (LH: Scott 365-369), Carl Mangold (M: Scott 371), A.L. Pol-

lock (P: Scott 334, 363, 375-376, 381, 395, 400, 411), Gerald Trottier (GT: Scott 378-379) and Philip Weiss (W: Scott 390, 398, 410, 412). Examples of these initials are shown in Figure 3.

In 1974 the international copyright symbol (©) was added to the left of the hidden date. All 1974-76 Montreal

Olympics semipostal stamps (Scott B1-B12) are examples of this type of hidden date. Two exceptions exist where the mark follows the date: the 1977 12¢ Tern Schooner stamp (Scott 745) and the 1978 14¢ Chief Justice Robinson (Scott 776, Figure 4).

In 1978, two versions of the 50¢



Figure 5. Two printers and two engravers resulted in two different hidden-date placements on this 50¢ Main Street, Prairie Town stamp issued in 1978 (Scott 723, 723A).



Canada 82  
International  
Philatelic Youth  
Exhibition 1982

Canada 82  
L'Exposition  
philatélique mondiale  
de la jeunesse 1982

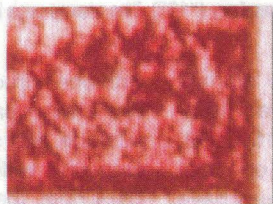


Street Scene definitive were engraved — the first by the British American Bank Note Co. (Scott 723), and the second by the Canadian Bank Note Co. (Scott 723A). The ABN version has its hidden date on the grain elevator door; the CBN version has the date on the car's license plate (Figure 5).

Hidden dates can be found in all formats of a stamp. If the stamp was printed in sheet, coil and booklet formats, the hidden date is in the same place on all formats. Some stamps were printed only in one format, usually in sheets, but a few, such as Scott 797 and 800, were printed in booklet format only. The booklet stamps, like their sheet counterparts, have hidden dates. On Scott 797 and 800, the date is ©1979.

In 1982, the design for the 1935 10¢ Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Scott 223) was used again as a stamp-on-stamp design on a 35¢ stamp (Scott

Figure 6. Two different hidden dates appear on this 35¢ stamp-on-stamp design from the Canada 82 souvenir sheet (Scott 913a). The 1935 10¢ Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Scott 223) pictured on the stamp features the tiny date "1935." The inscription "©1982" is shown in the white margin in the lower-left corner of the stamp design.



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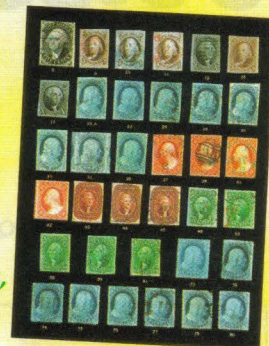
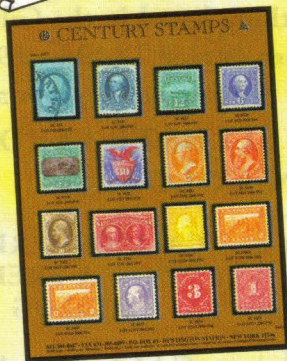
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Figure 8. These Heritage Artifacts stamps (Scott 1080 and 1081, respectively) show the dates the designs were created (1982 and 1983, respectively) rather than the date the stamps were issued (1987).

date that differed from the year of issue is the 20¢ special delivery stamp (Scott E8) that has a 1937 hidden date but was not issued until 1938. Many stamps, including the 1959 5¢ Royal Visit stamp (Scott 386) and the 1963 5¢ Sir Martin Frobisher stamp (Scott 412), have a gap between the engraved date and the date of issue. The most extreme gap is between the design-creation date (©1982) on the 25¢ Butter Mold stamp (Scott 1080) and its 1987 year of issue. The stamp is from the Heritage Artifacts series, which

began in 1982. The 25¢ stamp likely was planned and designed when the other lower-denomination stamps of the same definitive series were issued in 1982. The 42¢ Linen Chest stamp from this series has a four-year gap between its design date (©1983) and its year of issue (1987). Both stamps are pictured in Figure 8.

Only one stamp is known with its design date later than its issue date. The 37¢ Queen Elizabeth II definitive of 1987 (Scott 1162) bears a ©1988 design date.

Between 1935 and 1988, a number of stamps were issued with no hidden dates. The reason for the omission is unknown. The stamps include: 1970 6¢ Group of Seven (Scott 518); all stamps issued in 1971, 1972 and 1973; the 1979 panes of Provincial Flags stamps (Scott 821-832); and the 1976 10¢ definitive showing Queen Elizabeth II (Scott 605). The die of the 1973 8¢ Elizabeth II definitive (Scott 593, 604), which had no date, was used for the 1976 10¢ Elizabeth II stamp. ■

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