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THE PROSSER FANTASIES

In August 2002, I attended PHILAKOREA '02 in Seoul. Most days of the show saw torrential rains fall on the Korean capital and it was nigh to impossible to tour around. Instead, I spent many of my days studying the exhibits in detail. On one of those days, I was dismayed to see what purported to be a Canadian progressive die proof in a youth exhibit. I informed the Jury Secretary that, to the best of my knowledge, the item shown was not as described by the exhibitor but rather a fantasy engraving and recommend that the young person, a Korean national, be told about it and suggested that it should be removed from the exhibit.



Fig.1

Many of these fantasies, by the same engraver, showed up in the sales list and auction catalogues of Canadian stamp dealers between 2001 and 2004. At the beginning they were being sold as real die proofs. An item similar to those in Figure 1 was described in a 2001 auction as:

Lot 1046 - Scott 157P - Progressive die essay on India (51 x 34 mm) in dark brown of the central vignette for the 20¢ Harvester issue, a few minor wrinkles, edge bends/tears, still very fine and scarce. Est. \$400.



Fig.2

By 2003, the same auctioneer described two items, similar to Figure 2 as:

Lot 1586 - Two fantasy essays (65 x 92 mm) for a Cartier vignette in green and brown, with cross hatching, interesting collateral items. Est. \$150.



Fig.3

Items similar to Figure 3 were being described in 2003 by two different auctioneers as:

"Lot 338 - Newfoundland - Proof in sepia with likeness similar to partial design Nfld. Dog. Scott # 56. May be privately produced but still nice. Est. \$50." and "Here is set of eight different engravings depicting the Newfoundland Dog. A very scarce set possibly used for Newfoundland Scott #56. This issue has been one of the most popular and many specialty collections have been built around it. This is sure to be a beautiful addition to any collection. Best Buy Price. \$595."

The artist has managed to find contemporary paper to print some of his 19th Century replica engravings on, giving them the look and paper of the period.



Fig. 4

These fantasies first came to my attention in late 2000, when a dealer approached Ron Brigham to sell him some of them. At the time, Mr. Brigham was putting the finishing touches on his exhibit of Canadian Pence and Cents that would ultimately win the Grand Prix d'Honneur at BELGICA '01, in June 2001. The dealer tried to sell Mr Brigham items similar to those found in Figure 4. Since both Mr. Brigham and I had spent many hours studying the early issues of the Province of Canada we quickly came to the conclusion that these were fantasies made to defraud the collector.

It turns out that this is not quite the case. Fantasies - yes. Made to defraud the collector - no. The fantasies were prepared by a former Canadian Banknote Company (CBN) portrait engraver, Gregory Prosser, who left the company in 1984 to become an Art Director at the British American Banknote Co. until 1994 when he left to work as a freelance painter, master etcher and engraver. His work came to the attention of a stamp dealer who found that he could make a profit and took the opportunity to pass them on to the philatelic public.



Fig.5

Gregory Thomas Prosser was born 23 November 1952 at Ottawa, Ontario, and was the son of Harvey Thomas Prosser, a staff designer at CBN who worked on 64 Canadian stamps between 1959 and 1977. He received his art education from the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa School of Art and Schiller College and l'École des arts décoratifs, both in Strasbourg, France. He did his banknote design apprenticeship between 1970 and 1973 and his banknote portrait engraving apprenticeship from 1975 to 1980. He has also worked on a number of publications, films and theatre projects. In addition to his other work experience he has also been an oil painting instructor and a lecturer on aesthetics. He engraved 54 banknotes for different countries and has engraved stamps for Canada and New Zealand. Amongst those for Canada are the 1987 CAPEX '97 issue (Fig. 5).



Fig.6

In Figure 6, the reader will find an assortment of other stamp related fantasies by Mr. Prosser. From top left and going clockwise, the fantasies are related to the Admiral Issue (Scott 104-122); the Large Queens (Scott 21-33); Newfoundland's 5¢ from the definitive issue of 1880-1896 (Scott 54-5); the 1967 Centennial issue's \$1 Edmonton Oil Field (Scott 465B and the 8¢ Alaska Highway (Scott 461); and, either the 3¢ from the 60th Anniversary of Confederation issue (Scott 143) or the \$1 from the definitive series of 1928-9 (Scott 159). Since 2004 few of these fantasies have been seen on the market since, hopefully, they are now known to be what they are: fantasies.