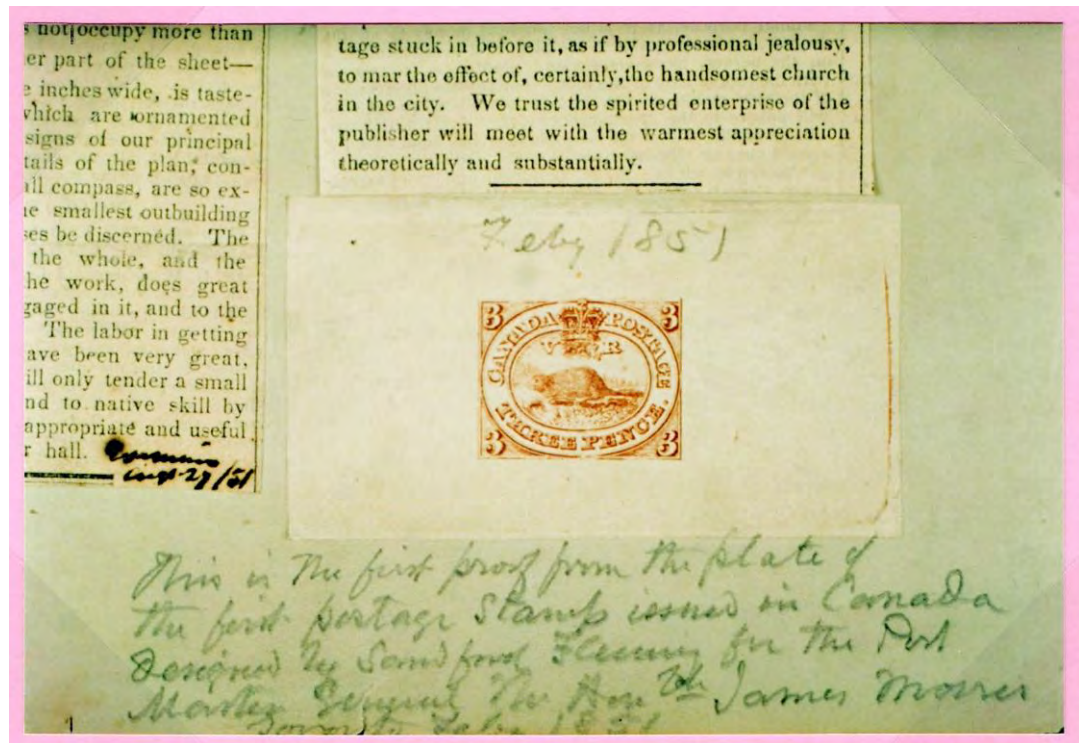


THE FIRST POSTAGE STAMPS OF CANADA



SANDFORD FLEMING

1858 portrait of Sir Sandford Fleming, the designer of the first Canadian stamp. Fleming was a Scot, born in Kirkcaldy in Fife in 1827. He died in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1915 at the age of 88.



Scrapbook part page belonging to Fleming. The comment under reads, in part... 'This is the first proof from the plate of the first postage stamp issued in Canada' The original of this item is now held in the Canadian Postal Archives in Ottawa.

Among the other achievements of Fleming; he was the founder of the Canadian Pacific Railway, one of the world's greatest railway systems, he was the father of the use of standard time around the world, he laid out the town plan for Toronto in 1850 and also many other major road schemes.

THE FIRST STAMP ISSUED IN APRIL 1851



Three stamp values were issued during the second quarter of 1851. They were printed by the firm of Rawdon, Wright, Hatch and Edison who were security printers based in New York. The early printings were made on laid paper which is what the printers used for their stock business of bank note printing.

The laid paper proved rather unsatisfactory for stamps as it resulted in a slightly 'fuzzy' image. A switch was made to hand-made wove paper as early as 1852 for this 3 pence value.

All values were produced imperforate.

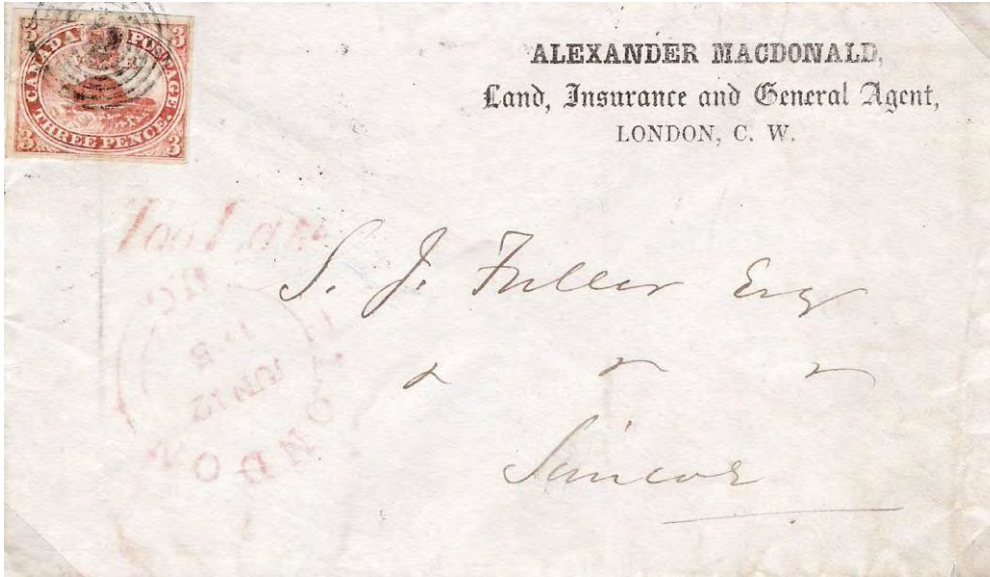
The 'pence' on these stamps are not sterling pence but Colonial pence – which had a slightly lower value.

In truth, Canadians did not take readily to the use of stamps. Despite being in use for 9 years, only 2.8 million 3 pence Beaver stamps were ever issued, all printed from just one plate. Compare this to the Penny Black which was in use for only 1 year. Over 68 million were issued, printed from 11 plates.

This 3 pence value paid the domestic letter rate for a letter of up to ½ oz sent anywhere within the Province of Canada.

The stamp is interesting as it is the earliest stamp in the world bearing a thematic design – a definite 'number 1' for any collector of animal stamps!

THE DOMESTIC LETTER RATE



June 1851 letter from London, Upper Canada to Simcoe franked with a 3 pence stamp on laid paper. Orange- red shade.

June 1853 letter from London, Upper Canada to Kingston franked with a 3 pence stamp from the initial wove paper printings. Red shade.

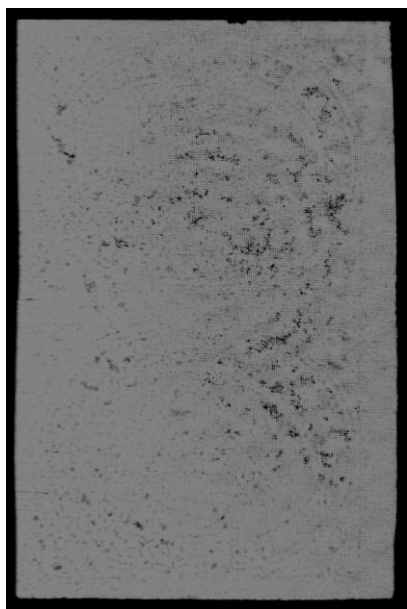


It is interesting to note that both these covers have been franked contrary to the Post Office regulations which specified that the stamp should be placed at the upper right of the envelope. Canadians were never very good at following regulations!

PAPERS

As we have seen, the very first printings of these stamps were made on laid paper which has distinctive 'laid lines' on the back. Later printings were made first on hand-made wove paper and then machine-made wove paper. From 1857 some printings were made on wove paper with ribbing. In total, at least seven different types of wove paper were used to print these stamps.

In trying to understand the large variety of wove papers and shades, we should keep in mind that the main business of the printer was printing bank notes. Printing stamps was a relatively small part of their business and only some 10% of the stamps they printed were Canadian stamps. It should come as no surprise that the printer might use whatever paper was conveniently to hand and that the shade of the stamps would vary from one printing to the next.



Vertical pair of 3d stamps on laid paper – the horizontal laid lines are most easily seen in the right margin and are approx. 6 to the cm. The lines on the 6d and 12d values were vertical.



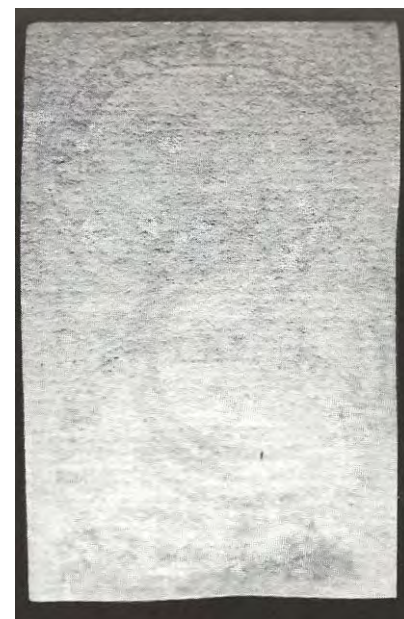
Early handmade wove paper
circa 1852-53



Very thin oily handmade wove
paper, used circa 1854 -55



Thick machine made wove
paper from late printings made
in 1858.



Vertical pair of the 3d stamps on wove paper with horizontal ribbing. The ribbed lines are much closer together than laid lines (approx. 30 to the cm). This paper was used for some printings in 1857 and 1858.

THE OTHER POSTAGE STAMPS ISSUED IN Q2 1851



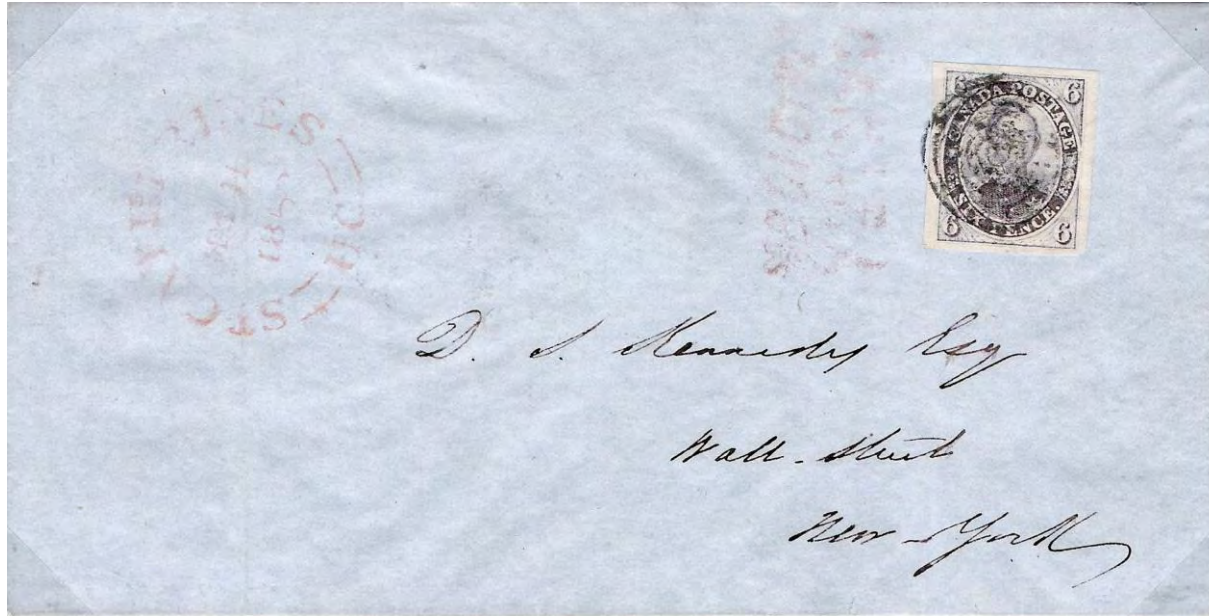
Whilst the authorities were happy to have the Beaver design on the domestic letter rate stamp, it was felt that the higher values – which were intended primarily for mail to overseas destinations – should carry portraits of the monarchy.

The initial stocks of laid paper 6 pence stamps lasted a long time and printings of this value on wove paper did not appear until 1855.

The 6 pence value paid the letter rate up to ½ oz to the United States excluding the West Coast. It could also be used to pay the double domestic letter rate.

The design features a portrait of Prince Albert.

LETTERS TO AMERICA



March 1852 letter from St. Catharines, Upper Canada to New York franked with a copy of the 6 pence stamp on laid paper.

Many letters to the USA were franked with multiples of the 3 pence stamp. The example here was sent from London, Upper Canada to New York in December 1853. The stamps are on wove paper and are in the brown red shade.



THE OTHER POSTAGE STAMPS ISSUED IN Q2 1851



Logic may suggest that the 12 pence stamp, shown here, might pay the letter rate to the United Kingdom. It did, however, pay the rate for letters sent to Newfoundland, Bermuda and the British West Indies; all places to which Canadians of the day rarely, if ever, sent letters. It could, of course, also be used to pay the double rate to the USA.

The design features the Chalon portrait of Queen Victoria.

The 12 pence black is, probably, the iconic Canadian stamp.

Although some 51,000 copies were printed and sent to the postal authorities, it's highly limited use meant that only 1510 copies were ever distributed to Post Offices and, of these, 60 were returned in 1854 when the use of the stamp was discontinued. The remaining, undistributed, stamps were destroyed in 1857. All examples of the stamp were printed on laid paper.

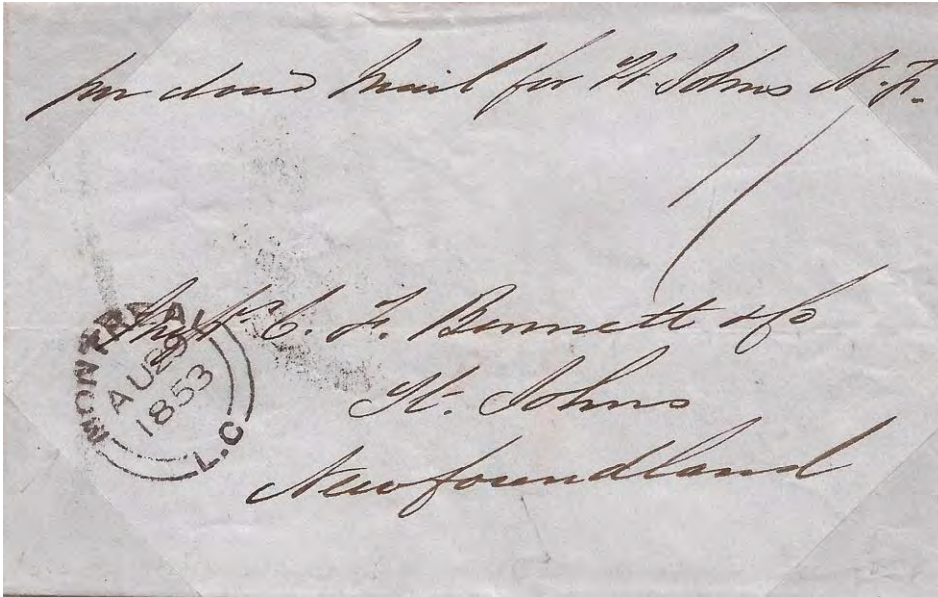
The very small number of stamps used made this a rare stamp even in the earliest days of stamp collecting and over the years many attempts at forgery have been made.

The example on the left is one such forgery. In this case a very good one as it has been produced by putting a faked cancel onto a plate proof (itself a very scarce item). From the front it looks perfect, but if you look at the back will you realise that there are no laid lines. The plate proofs were printed on India paper.



The back of the stamp shows it is printed on thin 'India' paper with no laid lines.

EXAMPLES OF THE 12 PENCE STAMP NOT BEING USED WHEN IT COULD HAVE BEEN



The 12 pence stamp could be used to pay the letter rate to Newfoundland but ironically no example is known prepaid with stamps. Only three covers have been recorded sent from Canada to Newfoundland in the 1850's. The example on the left was mailed from Montreal, Lower Canada to St John's in Newfoundland in August 1853. Sent unpaid and showing a rate of 1 shilling.

March 1852 double weight letter from Hamilton, Upper Canada to Boston franked with two copies of the 6 pence stamp.

Although Hamilton was one of the few post offices to be issued with 12 pence stamps it appears that this letter was initially franked with a 6 pence stamp and then found to be slightly overweight requiring the second stamp.

The handful of genuine 12 pence black covers all pay this double rate to the USA.



**IF YOU ARE GOING TO FAKE A COVER MAKE IT SPECTACULAR AND
JUST A BIT SCRUFFY**



Part of a large cover 'mailed' in 1855 to Alexandria in the USA and apparently bearing a horizontal pair of the 12 pence black. The stamps would have paid the quadruple rate. No genuine example of such a cover exists although a few examples of used pairs of the stamp are known. To make a good forgery better, the cover also carries a free strike of the rare early RPO cancel of the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Railroad. Sadly, the 'stamps' are relatively modern facsimilies.

SO WHAT ABOUT THE LETTER RATE TO THE UNITED KINGDOM?

Clearly, a lot more Canadians would have wanted to send letters to the UK than to Newfoundland, Bermuda or the West Indies so it is odd that no stamp was produced for this purpose. Indeed, prior to 1854 there was not even any combination of stamps that would pay the rate of 1/4d cy (or 16 pence) for a letter to the UK. Such letters had to either be sent unpaid or prepaid in cash. This did not stop a few folk having a go at paying with stamps; albeit 1/3d cy was as close as you could get.....

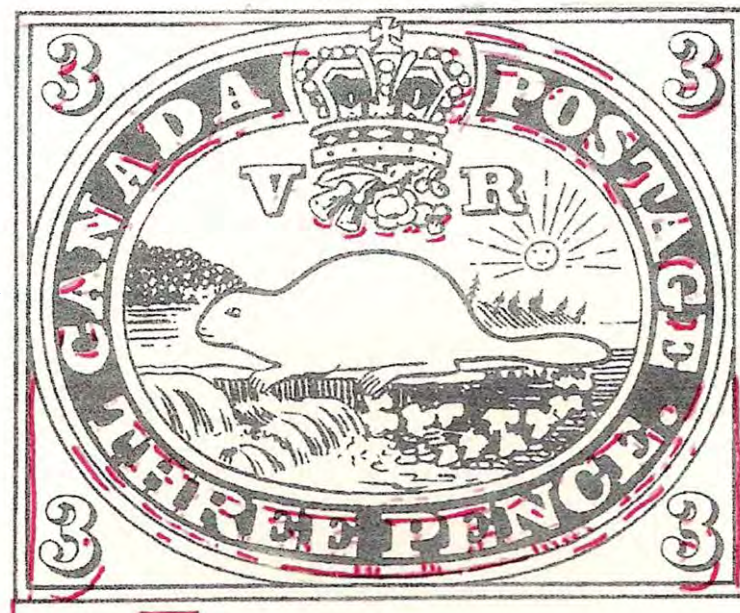


Letter from Quebec to Hartlepool, England mailed in August 1852. It bears a single 3d stamp on wove paper and pair of 6d stamps on laid paper and was carried on the Cunard steamship 'Europa' which left New York on 11 August 1852. The handstamp 'MORE TO PAY 1' was applied on arrival in Liverpool.

Only four examples of this practice have been recorded, two of which were accepted as fully prepaid. The other example rated as above bears five 3d stamps.

RE-ENTRIES

Although the 12 pence stamp had a short life, the other two values remained in service until 1859. Remarkably, both were printed from just a single plate. The 6 pence value shows no significant re-entries but the 3 pence value has several major re-entries. The example below shows the most extensive of these major re-entries.



*The major re-entry from
pane A – pp 47*

The 3 pence stamp was printed from a single plate of 200 subjects, arranged in two panes of 100 (10 x 10) one above the other. Several prominent varieties and re-entries exist that are found on all printings of the stamp, including the perforated stamps from 1858/59. Philatelists had, long ago labelled the two panes 'A' and 'B'. Recent study of the plate proofs has shown that the 'A' pane is, in fact, the lower pane, with the 'B' pane being the upper.

BLOCKS OR STRIPS

As is the case with many early imperforate stamps such as the Penny Black etc., you very rarely find blocks of these early Canadian stamps. Postmasters would normally pre-cut the sheets into strips to allow for easy dispensing of single stamps. If multiples were required, they are, therefore, more often seen as strips.



Strip of four of the 3 pence stamp from the 1855 printing on oily paper – scarlet vermilion shade.

Much rarer block of four in the red shade. The stamps are from plate positions B53/54/63/64. The upper left stamp from position B53 shows the 'VR' re-entry.



1854 – A NEW STAMP APPEARS

Following the emergence of a cheaper Canadian transatlantic mail service, the British reduced the letter rate via their Cunard service from 1/2d Stg / 1/4d Cy to 8d Stg/ 10d Cy in early 1854. Later that same year, the Canadian Post Office released a 10d Cy stamp to pre-pay this rate allowing Canadians to send stamped mail to the UK for the first time.



Portrait of Cartier by Francois Riss which formed the basis of the design for the new 10d Cy stamp. Riss was a Russian artist who lived in France and exhibited at the Paris Salon between 1831 and 1861. The original painting is in the Hotel de Ville at St. Malo, the birth place of Cartier.

The stamp design shows Jacques Cartier, the French explorer who made three voyages of discovery to North America between 1534 and 1541 searching for the fabled North West Passage. He, instead, found the St Lawrence and is attributed with the naming of Canada after misinterpreting the name the local Indians gave to their village.



The stamp is unusual in showing the denomination in two different currencies, local and Sterling, presumably as an aid to British postmasters.

10D VALUE – RE-ENTRIES

The 10 pence value was also printed from just one plate. The colour of the stamp aids the identification of re-entries of which there are several. Two are illustrated below.



Major re-entry from plate position 53



The strongest of the major re-entries to be found on this value – from plate position 29

LETTERS SENT TO THE UK AT THE NEW, LOWER, RATE



The 10d stamp used to pay the British Packet rate on an April 1859 letter to England. The letter was sent by George MacBeth, a member of the provincial parliament and carries his signature at lower left and the distinctive Legislative Assembly shield handstamp in red. M.P.P.'s enjoyed free franking privileges on domestic letters but this did not extend to overseas mail where normal postage was required.

April 1858 letter to London from Montreal showing a pair and two singles of the 10d stamp paying the quadruple (2 ounce) British Packet rate. This is the largest recorded multiple of the 10d value on cover and is one of five known examples of this rate.



THE LONG ARM OF THE CRIMEA

Whilst the British (Cunard) Packet rate was reduced to 10d Cy in 1854, this reduction did not apply if you sent your letter via New York and the American shipping lines when the old 1/4dCy rate still applied well into the 1860's. Not surprisingly, very few letters took this latter routing after 1854. One exception to this came in 1855 when many of the Cunard ships were requisitioned by the British government to be used as troop carriers in the Crimean War. This greatly reduced the Cunard service to and from Canada and those needing to send an urgent letter to the UK were left with no alternative but to use the more expensive American, Collins Line, service. Interestingly, by this time it was possible to pre-pay the 1/4d Cy rate with stamps using the new 10d stamp with a 6d stamp.



October 1855 letter from Toronto to London, England showing the Collins Line rate of 1/4d Cy pre-paid with a 6d stamp on laid paper and a 10d stamp on thin wove paper. Only seven examples of this rate being pre-paid with stamps have been recorded.

1857 – ANOTHER NEW STAMP VALUE IS ADDED

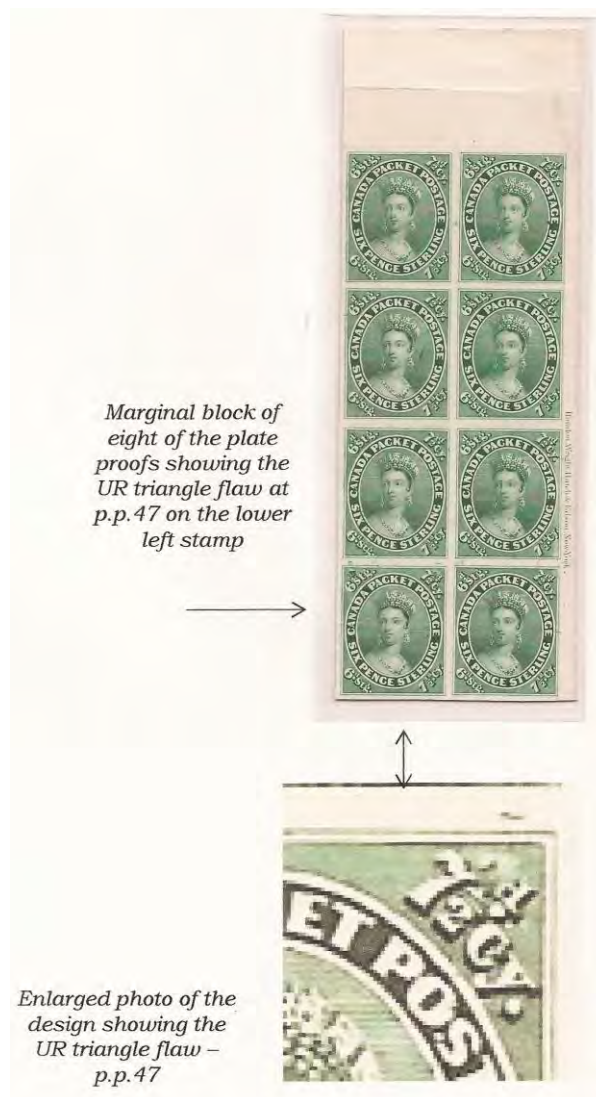
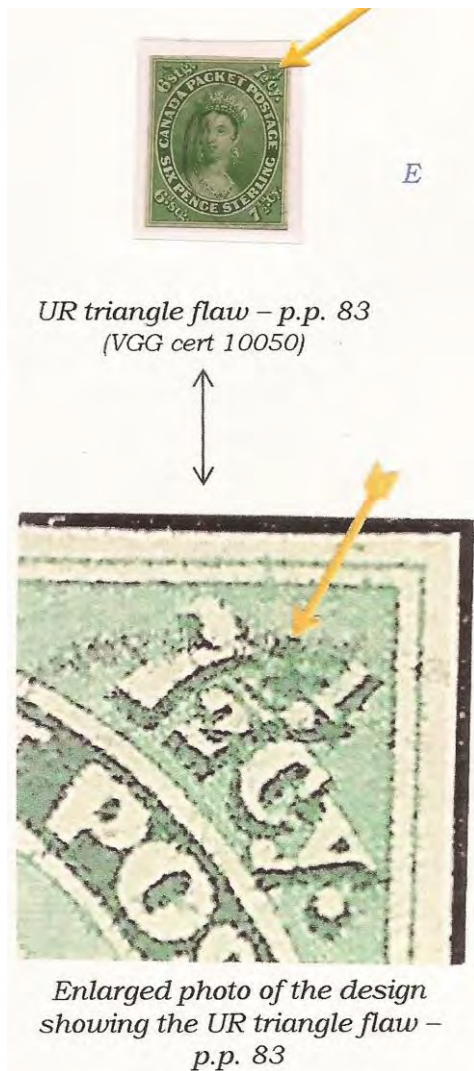
Initial attempts to run a rival Canadian transatlantic mail service which would under-cut the British Cunard service failed due to the unreliability of the service. However, in 1856 Hugh Allan established a reliable Canadian service which carried letters to the UK for just 6d Sterling or 7½d Cy. A year later, the Canadian authorities issued a stamp to pay this rate. The design featured the same Chalon portrait of Queen Victoria used on the, then defunct, 12d stamp. It also showed the denomination in two currencies as the 10d stamp had.



The 7½d stamp used on a December 1857 letter from Perth, upper Canada to Scotland. Note the handstamp 'BY CANADIAN PACKET'.

PLATE VARIETIES TO BE FOUND ON THE 7½D VALUE.

The 7½d stamp was printed from a single plate with 120 subjects. Whilst there is one significant re-entry to be found on this value it is nothing like as impressive as those on the 3d or 10d stamps. There are, however, two very similar plate varieties to be found which affect the upper right corner of the design. Both were caused by misplaced entries.



Stamp from plate position 7
showing the major re-entry.
Best observed in the 'X PEN' at
lower left.

1857 – A SIXTH VALUE IS ADDED

In July 1857 a half penny stamp was issued featuring a portrait of Queen Victoria. The design appears to have been taken from the, then current, 4d stamp of Great Britain. The stamp was issued to cover postage on printed circulars, drop letters (letters mailed at a post office for collection at the same office) and transient newspapers; all rates which prior to 1857 had to be paid in cash or sent unpaid. In the 1850's a huge number of newspapers were conveyed in the post in Canada and the stamp is often referred to as the 'Newspaper stamp'. Although it only had a life of about 2 years, some 2.6 million copies were printed, almost as many as the 3 pence stamp which was in use for 9 years on domestic letters. It was printed from a single plate of 120 subjects and many re-entries can be found.



Plate proof from position 120, the lower right stamp on the sheet. This shows the most extensive of the re-entries to be found on this value.

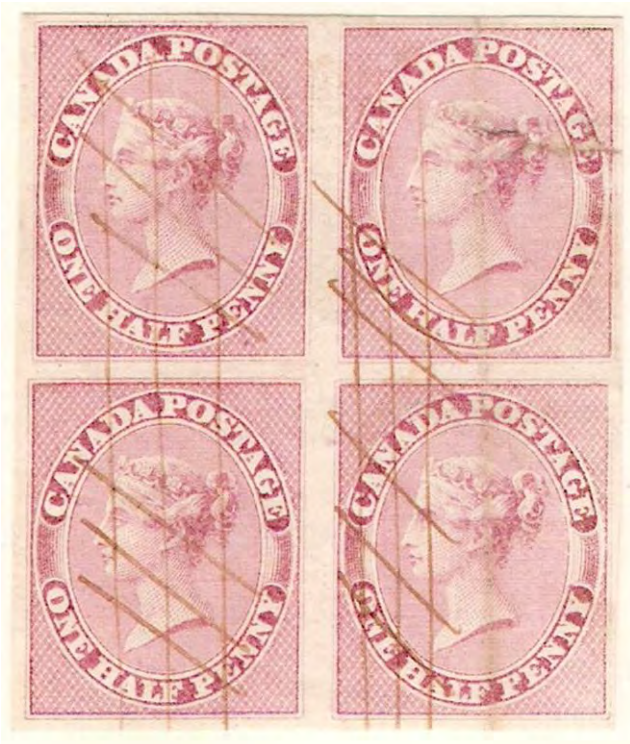
BUY YOUR STAMPS IN BULK

One oddity of the halfpence value was that if you purchased 20 or more copies from the Post Office you got a 5% discount. Frugal Canadians quickly latched on to this and often used blocks or strips of the stamp to pay higher rates. This is, therefore, the one Pence stamp that can often be found in multiples.



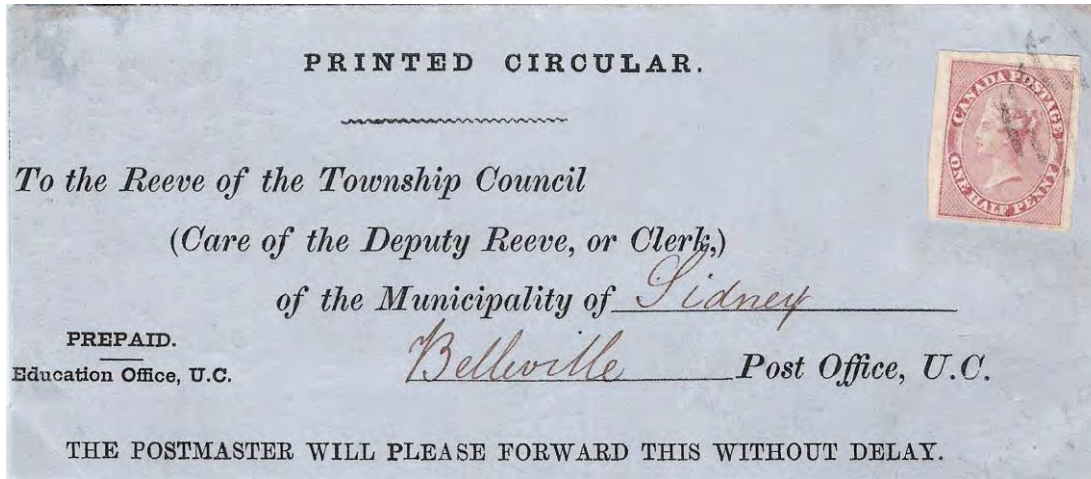
Strip of six of the ½d stamp. Such strips were often used to pre-pay the 3d letter rate.

Block of four. Such blocks are great rarities for all other values of the Pence stamps.



USES OF THE HALFPENNY STAMP

The vast bulk of these stamps were used on Newspapers but very few of these have survived. The examples below show some other uses of the stamp.



Used on a printed circular sent to Belleville, Upper Canada in July 1858.

A more unusual usage; five copies on a printed circular from Quebec to Norway, mailed in July 1858. The stamps pre-pay the correct rate of 2½d Cy. Routing was via the Allan Line to London and then onward via Hamburg to Norway. Only four Pence franked covers to Norway have been recorded, all are Prices Current like this one, mailed at the printed matter rate in 1858 and 1859.



THE FIRST PERFORATED STAMPS

In December 1858 and January 1859, the printers started to produce stamps with perforations. Only three values; the ½d, 3d and 6d values, exist in this form and all had a very short life as Canada changed to decimal currency on 1 July 1859. The perforations were made using a treadle-operated machine with rotary punches, the sheets of stamps being hand fed into the machine.



The spaces between the stamp designs were very small on the imperforate sheets and with hand operation of the perforating operation, the perforations invariably cut into the stamp design with well centred examples being virtually unknown.

USE OF THE PERFORATED STAMPS



Perforated 3 pence stamp used on a mourning letter sent from Hamilton to Coteau Landing in Canada East in July 1859.

Perforated 6 pence stamp used on a letter sent from Montreal to New York in July 1859.

It is worth noting that both the covers shown here were mailed a few days after Canada switched to decimal currency. The old 'Pence' stamps continued to be valid for postage until stocks were exhausted.

