

Rare Canadian Stamps

Canada has a very interesting postal history right from French control (1608-1763) to the Dominion of Canada since 1868. In the interim period, Canada also had British and provincial control. We take a look at some of the Rare Canadian stamps through the latter half of this period.

The first set of stamps issued, were in three different values. The lowest value 3d (1/4 shilling) stamp pictured a beaver in an oval frame. It is considered to be the first ever Canadian postage stamp and also the first to officially picture an animal. The other two stamps were the 6d (1/2 shilling) and the 12d (1 shilling). The former had a portrait of Prince Albert while the latter featured a portrait of Queen Victoria. These issues were all before 1852 and made on laid paper. An interesting point to note is that only 1450 copies of 1 shilling stamps were ever issued on laid paper. Post 1852 printing shifted to wove paper. Keeping all this in mind one realizes the rarity of these laid paper stamps which make them among the first Rare Canadian stamp.

Dominion of Canada came into being on July 1st 1867. The first stamp to be issued by the new government featured a profile of Queen Victoria. This issue superseded all previous ones and was popularly referred to as "Large Queens". While a bulk of the printing was done on wove paper, very few of these issues were still printed on laid paper. Today for an avid stamp collector there are not more than two Canada 2c Large Queen stamps on laid paper, making it not only one of the Rare Canadian stamps but Canada's rarest stamp.

One amongst the other Rare Canadian stamps was the Maple Leaf issue. The year 1897 saw the advent of the same. A regular stamp based on the jubilee portrait of Victoria with Maple Leaves on each corner was issued, but only for a few months. The original design was modified and replaced shortly. The stamps issued before the modified design ones replaced them are sought after even today.

After being contracted in 1897 to print stamps for the government, the first job given to the American Bank Note Company was to design and print the 1st first commemorative stamps of Canada. The design once again revolved around the young Victoria. It was rather surprising to note that the series of stamps in 16 denominations targeted stamp collectors rather than people posting mail. These stamps being rare and expensive today enter into the Rare Canadian stamps category.

Finally an interesting anecdote about Rare Canadian stamps: On January 5th 1899 the post master in Port Hood, Nova Scotia was running out of 2¢ stamps. Guess what he did? He cut about 300 3¢ stamps into pairs of uneven vertical strips. Lo and behold! He suddenly had 1¢ and 2¢ strips which he then sold. These weird looking stamps are amongst the great rarities of Canadian stamp collecting. Many a stamp collector does not recognize these bits as rare stamps because the post master created them without getting the requisite permission.

- Mrs. Nagalakshmi Tadakaluri, Philatelist.