

When free Franking is not enough...

...Official stamps' role in Parliamentary Mail

Purpose

This is a simple exhibit about a topic which is a smallish subset of Collecting Canadian Stamps and Postal History.

Members of Parliament have always had the “privilege” of free franking for domestic mail, in other words they could mail for free anywhere in Canada, but this extended only to basic services. For special services like airmail and special delivery MPs would have to pay for those or for postage on international mail.

From 1939 until 1963 the Post Office of Canada produced “official” stamps for use by the federal government. Initially these stamps were perforated with the initials: O.H.M.S, (On His Majesty’s Service) in late 1949 the perforation of these stamps ended and was replaced by overprinting O.H.M.S. which only lasted one year and was replaced by the more bilingual friendly “G” which stood for Government or Gouuvernment.

Members of Parliament who required postage for international mail or special services like Airmail and Special Delivery would use, in most cases, these Official stamps.

This exhibit then is about those stamps on covers; at least that is where it began.

Organization

The material was organized by date, starting with an early example of a perforated stamp, in this case one cancelled in 1940 and ending with one in 1963 and two special use envelopes from the Governor General.

Part of the rationale was to show the changes in stamps used in these special services over the 24 years of Official Stamps.

Challenge

Only a few covers were required to illustrate the use of these stamps and they were acquired over only a few years of collecting.

However, as I put this together, I became engaged and fascinated by the MPs who sent the mail and to whom they sent it. There were on the surface the beginnings of some interesting stories.

Significant Items

On page 14 is a cover from PM J>G> Diefenbaker sent to his uncle in a hospital in Regina, who dies the day after the envelope arrived.

The cover is perhaps not remarkable but when the story is revealed this item has greater significance.

There are others that have postage use like the many that pay for special delivery and airmail, such as the one on page 10 from the Minister of Transport, or on page 7 the cover from C.D. Howe to England

As well the three envelopes from the Clerk of the House of Commons which show three different cancellations over the course of 3 years.

About the Collector

As many men my age, born in 1948, I collected stamps as a boy. I spent many hours, days pouring over stamps from around the world, and can attribute a good understanding of geography, history and cultures to the early days collecting stamps.

My parent indulged this pursuit and brought home from their workplaces stamps on many envelopes. My father worked for the Federal Government and the stamps he brought home were usually official stamps...let me hasten to add at this point: these were used stamps from envelopes destined for the garbage.

When I revived the collection about 4 years ago after decades of neglect, I decided that I must focus attention and in part to recall my father's support, I decided to focus on Official stamps from Canada and the covers with those stamps on them.

Collecting covers was not initially part of the plan, but stumbled on them and decided to add them to what has become an extensive collection.

I have only started exhibiting in the last two years and it has added greatly to the enjoyment and "edutainment" value of collecting.