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The Canadian Map and Christmas Stamp of 1897

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The 1898 “Map and Christmas” stamp of Canada (Fig.1) is graphically significant because it was not only the world’s first stamp to be printed in more than two colors, but it was also printed using two different processes. (Scott 85 & 86, Stanley Gibbons 166–168)

The stamp was produced because Canada was to join the British Imperial Penny Post system, a agreement which was to enable a number of British territories to send a ½-ounce letter to other British territories for the local currency equivalent of one British penny.

The stamp was made available for sale from 7 December 1898 for use from 25 December, the day that the new rate became effective, thus making it the world’s first Christmas stamp.

While many British Empire stamps were designed by friends or relations of postmasters, Sir William Mulock, the Post Master General of Canada, commissioned four notable artistic professionals to create this fascinating and complex stamp. They were Robert Weir Crouch, Gustave Hahn, Alfred Harold Howard and Robert Holmes.

Robert Weir Crouch (1865–1943) was an emigrant from England and worked in Canada as a graphic designer and died in New Hampshire USA. He was probably responsible for the statement line on the stamp which reads “We hold a vaster Empire than has been.” That line was from the poem by Sir Lewis Morris “A Song of Empire 1887.”

Gustave Hahn (1866–1962), an immigrant from Germany, was a teacher at the Ontario College of Art and



Fig.1. Canada 1898. Map of the British Empire on Mercator Projection, [Sc86]

created murals in the Ontario Legislature and the old Toronto City Hall. He was probably responsible for the artwork that was used to create the black line engraved working of the stamp.

Alfred Harold Howard (1854–1916), another English immigrant, had been a lithographer who worked as a graphic designer in Toronto and was made an academician of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 1883. He probably was responsible for the choice of printing methods, and the fact that he had been a lithographer may account for the early suggestions that the oceans and British landmasses were litho printed.

Robert Holmes (1861–1930) was Canadian born and a student at the Toronto Art School, and later he attended the Royal College of Art in South Kensington in London, England. He became head of the department of design of the Ontario College of Art. He was also the painter, in watercolor, of numerous wild flowers housed

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Fig.2. Plate proof showing the black line engraved plate.



Fig.3. Plate proof showing red having been added to the black printing.



Fig.4. Plate proof showing the final blue-green printing.

in the National Gallery of Canada. His contribution was probably the responsibility for centering the American continents on the world map.

The stamp was printed 100 stamps per sheet, in three colors, with the black working from a line engraved plate, but the landmasses of British territories were printed from copper electrotype plates by letterpress (typo) in red, and the oceans were printed from copper electrotype plates by letterpress (typo) in shades of blue-green. There were 20 million stamps produced for the first printing—half with light blue oceans and the half with deep blue oceans.

There has been controversy as to the printing sequence used by the Canadian branch of the American Banknote Company, and there were early suggestions in philatelic circles that the blue-green and red workings were

litho printed. In 1947, a researcher had the help of the Canadian Banknote Company (the successor to ABNCo), and it was stated that the blue-green and red workings were definitely letterpress. In 2009 a large collection of the “Map and Christmas” material was sold, from which the plate proofs shown here clarify the sequence of printing as being the black line engraved plate first (Fig.2), with the red second (Fig.3) and the blue-green last (Fig.4).

References

Boggs, W. S. *The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Canada* (reprint) Quarterman Publications Lincoln Massachusetts 1974.

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Canada 1898. Canadian Map and Christmas stamp on advertising cover. [Sc85]

