

**"The story was that Pinedo brushed aside the stamps, saying that they were of no interest to him . . ."**

## **The frustrations of flying and stamp designing**

However I have a much more personal memory of Cotton. One frosty morning in January, 1922, a friendly rival in the newspaper field came to tell me that if we could hurry down to Kitty Vitty, Cotton would take us up for a flight over St. John's. (Let me say at this point that I last told this story two years ago when my newspaper friend, then Premier of Newfoundland, was in the audience).

Nothing at the time of my story was more improbable than this was the man destined to lead us into union with Canada and terminate the career of Newfoundland as a stamp-issuing country. Let's call him Joey for short. And now, to get on with the story, we came to the frozen lake where Cotton had his Martynside plane, equipped with skis, and he agreed to take us up. It was a flimsy machine with a plywood framework covered with a fabric known as "doped linen".

It had two open cockpits, one in front for the passengers and one in the rear for the pilot, and they contained no such refinements as safety belts. You sat in them with head and shoulders above the level of the cockpit, protected only by a wind-screen. When you climbed aboard you had to be careful not to put your foot through the wing.

At one stage we were flying over the harbour at about 2,000 feet when I suddenly found myself lurching out of the plane. I looked around to find my companion, unable to see enough by looking over the side, had climbed on the seat. Everything from his knees up was above the level of the cockpit and the only thing that was keeping him in the plane was his grip on my shoulder. As I pointed out when I told the story, just think how I could have changed history if I had pushed. Philatelic history would also have been changed for Newfoundland might still be issuing its own postage stamps.

Now I have been asked to say something about my association with the Pinedo overprinted stamps. As most of you know, he was an Italian marquis who touched down at Trepassey on the last leg but one of a five-continent flight. This was too good a chance for the stamp speculators in the post office to miss. One morning late in May the deputy minister of Posts invited me to come and see the special issue of stamps prepared for a mail which Pinedo had reluctantly—he was superstitious on the subject—consented to carry to Italy.

The post office people were delighted with the thought that they had found a happy association with Italy in the stamp they had chosen to be overprinted. This bore the portrait of King Henry VII who had granted to Cabot, an Italian, a charter that led to the discovery of Newfoundland.

That was the story they wanted me to write. Then I asked if I could see the stamps and the three virgin sheets were placed before me. I asked if I could buy some, little realizing that I was holding the future equivalent of a million dollars in my hands. How many did I want?

The stamps were 60 cents each and I had only a five dollar bill with me so I was modest in my request. Oh, I said, I think eight will do. There was a brief private colloquy and then the Deputy Minister nodded. You can have eight, he said.

I notice that Cyril Harmer in his breakdown of the distribution of the Pinedos credits me with only four. That was the block I kept for a short time and then sold through him. The other four were used to frank letters, three of which came back to me on their covers.

I doubt, however, if I realized the nature of the coup I had brought off and was naive enough to be astonished when I sold my block of four for a net return of \$500. I believe the last time it changed hands it fetched \$50,000 but that, I suppose, is the luck of the game.

One interesting tale about the Pinedos relates to the 20 stamps that were set aside for presentation to the airman. They were sent by courier to Trepassey where Pinedo was living in a railway car. With him was a Portuguese fishing captain who was an agent in St. John's for the purchase of salt cod and was serving as Pinedo's interpreter.

The story was that Pinedo brushed aside the stamps, saying that they were of no interest to him and telling the interpreter that he could have them if he wished. But he was not interested either. The courier was then supposed to have brought the stamps back to St. John's and divided them up with some friends. That may be wholly apocryphal but it was widely reported in St. John's at the time. The irony of it is that soon afterwards the Portuguese fish merchant found himself in financial trouble from which possession of the stamps would have rescued him.

Just as footnote, there is another sad little story. The day after I bought my stamps I was having lunch with my father-in-law who was then Minister of Finance. He professed to be contemptuous of anything to do with stamps and when I suggested that the Pinedos might have some value in the future, he repudiated the notion. Then he took from his pocket an envelope containing two complimentary stamps that he had received and, to my horror, thrust them into his trousers pocket. He never saw them again. I expect they were taken to the cleaners and by the cleaners or else were gummed inseparably to the lining of the pocket of a pair of trousers.

Finally I must tell the story of my own brief venture into stamp design. It was in 1930 and the Minister of Posts had asked me if I could suggest some designs for a permanent air mail set of three stamps. I took the request as a challenge, decided that the stamps should reflect the contrast of the old and new in the carriage of mails in Newfoundland and that one should commemorate our part in trans-Atlantic aviation.

The proof that I am no artist is to be found in my original sketches which have

been on display in the exhibition in the Art Gallery at the Arts and Culture Centre for the past few days. I refused a fee but asked to have the original drawings returned to me and this was duly done. When pressure of other affairs and a sense of frustration that I could add little that I could afford to my collection caused me to sell it, I included these drawings when I sent it to Harmer's for sale.

Much to my surprise, they fetched about fifty dollars. That was nearly 40 years ago. Not too long, Cyril Harmer wrote to tell me that my drawings had again come to him for sale and this time had fetched \$2,250.

That worked out at about \$750 a square inch which puts me in the front rank with the old masters. I may add that I shall be quite happy to accept new commissions at a much reduced rate. I admit that I looked at these drawings and the Pinedos with a certain amount of longing and regret when I visited the exhibition but I have at least two consolations — once I possessed some very great philatelic rarities and now I have seen my work hung in the university art gallery. These are achievements of a kind.

I could not help wondering whether some of you who specialize in the stamps and postal paper of British North America may yourselves be feeling a growing sense of frustration as time goes on since, other than acquiring prized pieces from one another, you are left with the feeling that there are no new worlds to conquer.

The likelihood of new material being found must have long since ended and even if some of you may meet the test of membership in the fictitious New York Philatelic Society and are 20 times a millionaire, there may be little more you can add to your collections. But you have had the thrill and satisfactions of the hunt in what has been, I think, the most interesting of all philatelic areas with Newfoundland holding pride of place. You can enjoy at will examining your cherished specimens and sharing them with others as you have done with your marvellous exhibition in St. John's. These are things that can give you continuing satisfaction.

*The foregoing is the conclusion of a speech given at the BNAPS annual banquet on September 9 in St. John's, Newfoundland, by Albert Perlin. As well as having witnessed early flights and designing stamps, he was for years the editor of the morning daily, THE NEWS.*