

Some Newfoundlanders give their views on stamps as advertising

BY ROBERT H. PRATT

In 1897, the Hon. Robert Bond was Colonial Secretary of Newfoundland. It was he who initiated the purchase of the Cabot issue of stamps which were presented to the public on June 24 of that year. On February 17 he wrote to Mr. J. O. Frazer, Postmaster General of the island:

"Sir, referring to your note of Date the 6th Ultimo addressed to Mr. Berteau of this department relative to the proposed "Cabot" issue of postage stamps. I think we should consider the matter not only from the historical standpoint, but also from the financial, and if I am correct in that view would it not be well to make our number of designs and value of stamps as large as possible?

"The United States made a very large sum of money out of the Columbian issue. I see no reason why this colony may not expect a handsome return from its Cabot issue.

"I have thought that the following values would be about right, viz: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 24, 30, 36 and 48, the complete 'Cabot' issue having the value of \$2.04. I shall be glad to receive your views anent the matter and also to learn how many stamps of each denomination you consider it would be desirable for the government to order?

"I have, etc. Hon. R. Bond, C.S."

On the 19th the stamps were ordered; however 35c and 60c values were substituted for the 36c and 48c requested. Time passed, governments changed and J. Alex Robinson became Colonial Secretary while J. O. Frazer continued on as Postmaster General. A year and a day after the above

letter, the Colonial Secretary wrote to the Postmaster General:

"Sir, an advertising card, apparently issued under your directions, has come to my notice. I beg to remind you that the sale of stamps for other than postal purposes is not the province of, but only incidental to, your department, and the Government of the Colony are not ambitious to place themselves in rivalry with stamp dealers. Already the reputation of the Colony is suffering from speculation in stamps and silver, and the inevitable results are being experienced. I have to request that you will immediately withdraw these cards from circulation, and for the credit of the Colony, I can only hope that they have not already received circulation abroad.

"Pardon me for reminding you that the post office was established for the convenience of the people, and not as a stamp speculating concern, nor as an emporium for the sale of pictures.

"I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant, Colonial Secretary."

Alas, alack, these postcards (the last of three different ones to be prepared) *did* make it to the outer world; examples are known delivered in the United States; they offered the 'Royal' Issue stamps for sale to collectors. Later on in the year, Newfoundland joined with many of the British colonies in effectuating Penny Postage. Canada issued its map stamp to commemorate the event and evidently the same idea was present in Newfoundland. Colonial Secretary Robinson wrote another of his epistles to Frazer on November 24:



"Sir, in reply to your letter of the 23rd, I can only repeat what was previously decided upon, that no new stamps are to be issued until the old issue is exhausted. When the old five cents are out, the new (Royal) five cents should come into circulation, but not before. Our postal speculations have become a byword already, and it will be a very serious thing if we attempt any more double issues. I shall be very pleased to hear of a recommendation from you to destroy all remainders at present in the office, so that we may place the whole stamp system on a sound basis.

"I note what you say relative to the issue of a new stamp in commemoration of Penny Postage, and will lay the matter before the Council. Personally I very much disapprove of the idea. I consider that the Colony has gone so far in this sort of thing as to be past losing its reputation amongst philatelists.

"I have the honor to be, Sir, Your obedient servant, Colonial Secretary."

Newfoundland did not commemorate Penny Postage with a stamp and remainders of some of the Cabot and older issues were destroyed January 4, 1900. Higher values of the Cabot stamps were retained for use on parcels. The above letter provoked some response from Frazer, and Robinson replied on November 29 with the following letter which completes our word-picture of two different Colonial Secretaries. Robert Bond would become Prime Minister in 1900 and Robinson the last Postmaster General, prior to the establishment of a Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, in 1917.

"Sir, Your letter of the 28th, it is hardly necessary for me to say, entirely misinterprets a remark made in a recent letter. I did not refer to the Cabot stamps, but I did emphatically refer to the number of remainders at present in the Post Office. Newfoundland is, I presume, the only country in the world which can boast of three sets of 3 cent stamps on sale at the same time.

"I observe what you remark as to the interests of the public being sacrificed, and am entirely in accord with you. At the same time I would remind you that there are 3,000,000 stamp collectors in the world from whom we can make a very legitimate revenue, so long as we do not permit the Colonial Post Office to be transformed into a picture shop.

"I have the honor to be, etc."

As a sidelight, the Hon. Robert Bond designed and approved the 2c red Map stamp prepared in 1908. This was another of his efforts to 'sell' Newfoundland.

The Caribou issue, (January 2, 1919) was issued to commemorate the activities of the Newfoundland Regiment in World War I and as early as April 1917 Postmaster-General J. Alex Robinson had expressed an opinion that he "was favorably impressed with the idea of issuing stamps to recognize the actions of the Newfoundland Regiment." The Caribou issue came out under his aegis.

In 1936, G. D. Fraser, secretary of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, wrote in a report:

"The adoption of this suggestion would render obsolescent all the issues of "Industrial" stamps (as many stamps as possible should bear a simple portrait of the King). With my limited experience of Newfoundland I cannot say what would be the reaction upon the public. I have taken into consultation my heads of departments and I am assured by them that the reaction would be unfavorable, not from any sense of disloyalty to His Majesty, but because the "Industrial" stamps are regarded as an advertising medium of Newfoundland's natural resources, and evidence of the country's individuality in the matter of its stamp issues."

The Long Coronation issue of 1937 came out in the next year and retained the designs of the industrial issue, but now were enlarged to include an oval vignette of the King's head. Thus, the advertising philosophy and homage to the king were both satisfied.

