

Newfoundland - The Postage Stamps of 1897

A tale of two secretaries The Cabot and Royal Issues

by ROBERT H. PRATT

PART TWO

There was no mention of the 1 cent. Its color was a brilliant RED, not a U.P.U. specification. During the investigation of the Post Office in 1900 the Postmaster General commented on the mysterious disappearance of the RED 1 cent stamps. The unusual color must have attracted attention to the stamps and increased their sale, 400,000 stamps could not slip away so easily. As we have seen, the 2 cent stamps were 'off' color too, they should have been red but turned out yellowish-orange. The earliest date I have seen of the 1 cent and 2 cent stamps on cover is December 4th, and this must be the 'first day of issue'. The *Evening Telegraph* of December 6th, 1897 carried the following exclamation in its 'ECHOS & EVENTS' column.

"The postal Officials were kept busy Saturday (Dec. 4) rushing out the new issue of 1 and 2 cent stamps. Several hundred dollars worth were disposed of for the 'PORTIA'S' mail, while not a few were purchased up to closing time to send by the 'BRUCE'S' mail this morning. This could be quite a source of revenue to the Colony."

The "PORTIA" sailed the afternoon of December 4th for New York and the "BRUCE" was to leave Placentia on the 6th for North Sydney. Advertisements in the daily papers stated that Late Letters for the "BRUCE" could be posted at the General Post Office up to 4:00 A.M. on Mondays (the 6th) and Thursdays to make the 5:00 A.M. departure of the "Special" to Placentia. Some enthusiasts must have stayed up all night! The *Daily News* confirmed this excitement on December 6th.

STAMP NOTES

"We learn the four cent Newfoundland stamp (Cabot) is in great demand in the Old Country.

"Surcharged 3 cent Newfoundland

stamps are being bought up at \$12.00 per hundred in the city.

"A craze for the last issue of stamps has made itself apparent and in all likelihood there will be another run on the G.P.O. (is this how the RED 1 cent evaporated?)

"It is said that between two and three thousand of the new 1 and 2 cent stamps were disposed of on Saturday.

"The two cent stamp of the last issue is said to be the prettiest we have ever had in Newfoundland."

Fraser had resorted to a specially prepared Post Card to assist him in selling the excess stamps and sets in his office to collectors who wrote in requesting information on availability of stamps. The Secretary's office took note of it and Robinson dispatched the following letter to the PMG on February 18th, 1898.

"Sir:

"An advertising card, apparently issued under your direction, 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 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 a 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.

"J. Alex Robinson"

The cards did go abroad as several in collections attest. This was the first disparaging remark made about Bond's Cabot issue and illustrates Robinson's liking for orthodox stamps bearing the likeness of the Royal Family. We shall hear more from him on this subject and the multiplicity of issues later on. We shall also see how, as time progressed, he seems to have become equivocal in his demands. The next order was an interesting one. Written March 25th, 1898, it said:

"You will please forward as early as possible one million one cent stamps and five hundred thousand two cent stamps from the dies prepared for this Colony and at present in your possession. Our stock of ones will be exhausted in about six weeks, and it is therefore imperative that there should be no delay.

"I should be pleased if, in connection with the present series of medalion stamps you would forward a design on similar lines for a half-cent stamp with the portrait of the infant heir of the Duke of York.

"signed: Robinson

"10,000 sheets 1 cent stamps
5,000 sheets 2 cent stamps."

Notice that there is no mention of the error of color in the 1 and 2 cent stamps. It would seem plausible that some comment should have directed a change to green and red. This must have been taken care of verbally, or the Bank Note Co. (which was certainly aware of U.P.U. requirements: 1 cent, GREEN; 2 cent, RED; 3 cent, BLUE; 4 cent, BROWN) realized its mistake. The stamps which arrived on the "PORTIA", Sunday, May 8th, were pale green and vermilion in color. The Company had complied speedily, as a letter to them on May 9th confirms.

"I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 29th ultimo, enclosing an account for \$539.79. The 1 and 2 cent stamps arrived by the 'PORTIA', but have not yet been opened. I shall be obliged if you will, as quickly as possible, forward the 3's and 5's which we shall require almost immediately.

"The amount of your account will

be paid in a few days.

"(Robinson)"

This is the first mention of these new values. The stamps must have been prepared beforehand, as the answer was most prompt. Robinson acknowledged receipt of a letter of the 19th, enclosing a proof of the half-cent stamp, on May 27th. He accepted the design by ordering a printing of 10,000 sheets (1,000,000 stamps). The letter noted that the 3 and 5 cent stamps had been shipped on the "ROUMANIAN" and would arrive soon. Shipping Notices related that the "ROUMANIAN", although delayed by fog, departed for Glasgow on the 27th. As will be seen later, this establishes the basis for the mysterious appearance of the 5 cents Royal in 1899. It took a long time to remit for these stamps. The draft was not sent to New York until August 6th. It paid for both dies and for the stamps.

Robinson's clean up operation began in early 1898 with instructions to the *British American Bank Note Company* to destroy the dies and plates in their possession. The following Notice indicates the success of that desire.

"Ottawa, May 27th, 1898."

"I hereby certify that I was present with the Auditor General of Newfoundland (Mr. Berteau) and did see the following plates of Newfoundland Postage Stamps destroyed this day: One plate, ½ cent postage; one plate, one cent postage; two plates, 3 cent postage; one plate, 5 cent postage; one plate, 10 cent postage.

"G. B. Burland

"President, British American Bank Note Co., Ottawa.

"F. C. Berteau

The intercourse between Fraser and Robinson was uneventful until November 24th, 1898. Evidently some conversation had developed about the release of the 5 cent stamp. Robinson replied to a letter from Fraser of the 23rd as follows:

"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 five cents should come into circulation, but not before. Our Postal speculations have become a by-word

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 the 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."

Canada however responded with its multi-colored MAP stamp showing the British Empire, issued December 7th, 1898 for the rates which became effective on the 25th. Fraser's retort is unknown. However it can be inferred that some reference to the Cabot series was made. It should be realized that when Robinson was Editor of the *Daily News* and was shown an advance copy of the presentation card for that issue on June 18th, 1897, he congratulated (as designer and instigator of the stamps) the then Colonial Secretary the Hon. Robert Bond "for their very tasty, creditable and pleasing appearance". Read what follows:

"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."

Shades of February 18th, 1898 — the thought is familiar, however something seems to have changed. On December 7th the American Bank Note Company was advised to print and forward to the Post-

master General at St. John's 5,000 sheets of 3 cent stamps. The design and color were to be the same as the last order (9 May) viz:—"Princess of Wales and Orange (not BLUE?) respectively." Receipt of this order was not acknowledged until February 28th, 1899. Question—if there were so many other issue 3 cent stamps available, why were these ordered?

In late December Robinson requested Fraser to send him samples of the stamps for which the American Bank Note Company still retained the dies and plates. He was evidently sincere in his desire to clean up the mess. The day before Christmas he wrote the Company:

"Sirs,

"From the Postmaster General of the Colony I learn that the following Dies are held by your Company all of which are, or will become obsolete at an early date.

"They are the Dies of our old issue of 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13 and 24 cent Stamps. The Twos, Fives, Tens, Twelves, Thirteens and Twenty-fours were issued first in 1865, and the Ones in 1868: the Threes and Sixes in 1870, and the Ones, Twos, Threes and Fives were issued in 1876, but may have been printed from the old Dies.

"I am desirous of having these Dies destroyed immediately, as I am anxious to place the Postal affairs of the Colony on a satisfactory basis. (***) The Royal series commenced by you, and which has gone up as far as the 5 cents, is giving entire satisfaction. (***) Previous issues we wish to have not merely withheld but the Dies destroyed.

"I shall be obliged if you will have their destruction immediately undertaken in the presence of witnesses, and I am writing to Messrs. Bowring and Archibald, of No. 18, Broadway, New York, requesting them to act on behalf of the Colony.

"Will you be so good as to communicate with them."

This caused the destruction of the Dies and Plates early in 1899, however it did not relieve the overage of stamps in the Post Office till. The 5 cent stamp, was acknowledged, but was still unissued. Funnily enough Robinson autographed a large die proof of that stamp on February 19th,

1899 certifying it as the "Original Die". Other authors have stated that the stamp finally saw use in June of that year, however verification has not been made.

"The *Daily News* — March 13, 1899

"POST OFFICE NOTICE

"In accordance with instructions from the Government of Newfoundland the following Plates, Dies and Rolls used in the preparation of Postage Stamps for Newfoundland were destroyed at New York on the 16th January 1899 in the presence of Charles W. Bowring, Esq. and of T. H. Freeland Esq., Secretary and Manager of the American Bank Note Company: One Plate each 1c, 1c, 2c, 3c, 5c, 6c, 10c, 12c, 13c, and 24c.

"Original Dies of above stamps, 5 Rolls, containing the same, which comprises the whole of the Dies and Rolls engraved by the Company named for Newfoundland, excepting only those of the current issue of Postage stamps, that is to say — ½, 1, 2, 3, and 5 cents issue of 1897-98.

"By order of J. O. Fraser

"POST OFFICE

February 24th, 1899"

It is not strange that two 1c plates were destroyed. The National and American Bank Note Company's consolidated on Jan. 31st, 1879 and the surviving American now had both plates. During mid-April a stamp dealer from Halifax, J. Foster Rood, ran many newspaper ads offering to purchase used Royal stamps. The 5 cent value was not listed. The RED 1 cent would bring 2 cents each, the yellow 2 cent at 1 cent each, and the rest at prices from 40 cents to 75 cents per hundred. At this time then, the 5 cent stamp was still not available. I have not seen an actual cover with stamps used until August 15th, when a letter was sent by a stamp company, owned in part by the chief clerk and accountant of the Post Office, to a known collector of first day covers. There were still other 5 cent stamps available.

The clean up operation dallied until November. The Governor and Council had not given their consent toward disposing of the remainders until then. A series of letters illustrates the course of the project. Fraser by this time seems to have become somewhat timid. On November 6th he was advised:

"Sir,

"I have the honor to enclose herewith certified copy of a Minute of Council, approved by His Excellency the Governor on the 4th day of November. I am also to request that you will cause a Public Notice to this effect to be issued in tomorrow's *Royal Gazette*, and at least once a week in the "*Daily News*" and the "*Evening Herald*."

"I am also to say that after the publication of the notice all restrictions on the sale of postage stamps are to be removed.

"The last three paragraphs of the Minute commencing 'The Postmaster General shall be instructed, etc.' have, of course, nothing to do with the Public Notice. You can couch your notice in words which seem most fitting to yourself. It will not be necessary to say anything about the 'Royal' series following the 'Cabot' series as the latter becomes exhausted. Just a bare statement of the destruction of all obsolete stamps, and an enumeration of those stamps which will alone be for sale on and after the 2nd day of January, is all that is required.

This was followed by Fraser's Notice in the papers of the 7th.

"PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

"Notice is hereby given that on the 2nd day of January, 1900, all obsolete postage stamps will be destroyed and after that date the only stamps that will be on sale by the Postal Department will be the ½, 1, 2, 3, 5 cent of the Royal Issue and the 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 30, 35, and 60 cent of the Cabot issue.

"J. O. Fraser"

Fraser sent a proof of his next announcement to Robinson before it was to be published on November 8th:

"GENERAL POST OFFICE

St. John's Newfoundland

November 8th, 1899.

"Dear sir,

"It has been ordered that on the 2nd of January next, the remainder of all stamps issued before 1897, and comprising ½ cent, 1 cent, 2 cents, 3 cents, 5 cents, 6 cents, 10 cents, 12 cents, and

24 cents, shall be destroyed: meantime these stamps are for sale without restriction.

"It is further ordered that 1 cent, 2 cents, 3 cents and 5 cents of the Cabot Series will be disposed of only in full sets until the 26th of December next, when all restrictions respecting the sale thereof will be removed, and the remainder, if any, of the 1 cent, 2 cents, 3 cents, and 5 cents Cabot stamps, will also be destroyed on the 2nd January next.

"J. C. Fraser."

Now Robinson became detailed. This series of letters to the PMG while it seems to delegate authority, also strictly supervises. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that Robinson had a Doctorate degree.

"19 December 1900

"Sir,

"Referring to your letter of the 18th, respecting the sale and destruction of obsolete stamps.

"(1) Kindly carry out the terms of the Minute as rigidly as possible, viz:— Free sale after the 26th: destruction on the 2nd.

"(2nd) As regards free sale, that must be arranged entirely as justice and the fitness of things dictate to you. I have confidence in your judgment, and have no intention whatever of interfering directly or indirectly."

"26 December 1899

"Sir,

"Referring to my letter of December 19th, the instructions thereunder are sufficiently clear to guide you in regard to the sale of the stamps.

"The Postmaster General is beyond question the person who is or should be acquainted with such methods as should be adopted with regard to this sale which would be satisfactory to the public and in the interests of the Department.

"29 December 1899

"Sir,

"The destruction of obsolete stamps will not take place until Wednesday. Be so good as to have the stamps carefully packed and under the care of reliable officials removed to the Press Room of the *Royal Gazette* before 10 o'clock. At 10 o'clock the press will

commence defacing and numbering the various sheets, and when defaced they will be done up into bundles, sealed, and all ready for return to the Post Office for destruction on the following day. You will oblige by forwarding to Mr. Wills a sheet of stamps, of any denomination, defacing it first, in order that he may prepare the bed of the press and the size of the form for defacing purposes. This sheet will be counted in as the first when defacement takes place. Perhaps the simpler way would be to send him up a sheet of paper the exact size of a sheet of postage stamps, and then defacement would be unnecessary. It is desirable that you make such arrangements at the Post Office as will enable you to be present throughout the entire proceedings."

"5 January 1900

Sir,

"Referring to your letter of January 4th, in which you intimate that there was a clerical error of 8,944 5-cent stamps, permit me to say that the discrepancy to which you refer came to my notice about 48 hours ago. The Stock Sheet which I hold in my possession is signed by yourself, the Accountant Mr. G. W. LeMessurier, Mr. A. E. Payne, and Mr. Wm. Campbell. That an error of this size could have crept in without being detected by you for over six months, and that responsible officials should certify as correct what is palatably not correct, does not—to put the most favorable construction upon it—reflect creditably upon the organization of the Department or on the ability of its officers. This, I may observe, is I fear, not the only discrepancy in the list. I do not quite understand how it is possible for a larger number of stamps to be in stock on June 30th, 1899 than there were some months previously, when no new importations were made, and the stamps could not have been returned from the outport offices. That however, is a matter which may be discussed later on. The loose manner in which officials of your Department sign their name to documents calls for censure if not immediate inquiry.

The *Royal Gazette* published the following:

St. John's, Newfoundland
4th January 1900

We hereby certify that we were present on Wednesday the 3rd inst. at the *Royal Gazette* Office, and did see the following obsolete stamps first defaced by the printing press, and afterwards destroyed by fire:

Number	Denomination	Face Value
49,717, orange	2 cent, fish	\$ 994.34
40,638, slate	3 cent, queen	1,219.14
104,569, blue	5 cent, seal	5,228.45
34,422, deep pink	6 cent, queen	2,065.32
92,966, black	10 cent, ship	9,292.60
27,162, blue	24 cent, queen	6,518.88
69,653, pale brown	12 cent, queen	8,358.36
2,658, (Cabot Issue)	3 cent, Bonavista Cape	79.74
13,342, (Cabot Issue)	5 cent, Mining	567.10
		34,327.93

ARTHUR MEWS,
Deputy Colonial Secretary

GEORGE COEN,
Deputy Minister Finance

GEO. W. LeMESSURIER,
Acct. General Post Office

E. DEVEREUX,
Post Office Inspector

WILLIAM CAMPBELL,
Stamp Clerk, G.P. Office

We hereby certify that we were present at intervals on Wednesday the 3rd inst., at the *Royal Gazette* Office during the defacing of the Postage Stamps enumerated in above certificate; and that on Thursday the 4th inst., we were present and did see the aforesaid stamps destroyed by fire at the General Post Office.

J. ALEX. ROBINSON,
Colonial Secretary

J. A. McLEOD,
Manager, Bank of Nova Scotia

F. C. BERTEAU,
Comptroller and Auditor General

Volume IX, The *London Philatelist*, of March 1900, Page 75, contained the following information, which is most interesting.

	Stock	Destroyed	Sold
	Nov. 30, 1899	Jan. 4, 1900	Interim
1c, pale yellow-green, A17	64,000	None	64,000
2c, orange, Type A19	74,000	49,717	24,283
3c, Type A23 (lilac Shades)	51,000	40,638	10,332
5c, blue, 1887	109,000	104,569	4,431
6c, deep pink, 1890 (??)	42,000	34,422	7,578
10c, black, 1887	96,000	92,966	3,034
12c, puce brown, 1890 (??)	73,000	69,653	3,347
24c, blue, 1866	29,000	27,162	1,838

The *Daily News*, for some unknown reason, began to champion the Postmaster General while the destruction was underway. Their lengthy editorial series, which began on December 30th, and lasted until January 5th, 1900 clarifies some of the statements in Robinson's letters of December 19th and 26th. The *Evening Telegram* happily welcomed the *News* to its side of the fence. The initial Editorial, verbose though it may be, is related here because it appeared in the paper where Robinson once was the proprietor.

Daily News, Saturday, December 30th, 1899.

ALL ABOUT STAMPS

"We are informed that the *Herald's* statement of alleged 'facts' published under the above title, is very erroneous and misleading. The truth about the matter referred to is as follows: All obsolete stamps were offered for sale, by advertisement dated November 7th last, and immediately upon the publication of the first copy of the *Gazette* Mr. E. W. Pilot applied for \$200 worth of 1, 2, and 3 of the 'Cabot' issue, only to find that Mr. J. H. Montgomery had applied 20 minutes earlier for \$1200 worth, more than the entire stock of those particular kinds. The question is, how did Mr. Montgomery know they were to be put up for sale? Discussion arose, and thereupon a second advertisement was published dated November 8th last, offering the Cabot stamps for sale in 'sets' only, until the 26th of December, when their sale was to be unrestrained up to the 2nd of January next, when the surplus is to be destroyed by fire, thereby increasing the value of all stamps held by collectors. Consequently on Tuesday morning last (Dec. 26th) there was a run upon obsolete stamps, especially the 'Cabot' issue, and the results, that demand for the latter was very much greater than the supply. It was then announced that the application of Mr. Montgomery, made before the publication of the advertisement dated November 7th, would be regarded as ranking before application made on Tuesday last, and consequently that Mr. Montgomery would get all the ones and twos of the Cabot issue.

"Mr. Pilot thereupon took legal steps to protect his right to the stamps, applied for by him in regular manner in due course on Tuesday. He was acting for himself alone, not for any other person. The matter has not yet been settled and may not be without trouble. It smacks of an attempt to give one man a monopoly. One other error of the *Herald* requires correction.

"That Journal says: 'ALL THE CABOT STAMPS to be destroyed have been applied for five times over.' Those applied for will be sold to speculators while those unapplied for will be burned, thereby increasing the value of the stock held by speculators, and destroying thousands of dollars worth of stamps that the Colony might otherwise sell. The whole scheme is an outrage—a job in the interest of collectors, though put up probably without any such intention on the part of the Government, but with that result nevertheless. It must also be remembered that beside the 'Cabot' stamps, there are thousands of dollars worth of other issues to be destroyed. It may not be amiss to say that the stamps to be burned would net Ten Thousand dollars if sold by the Post Office, and that this vast sum is to be sacrificed to the folly and obstinacy of the COLONIAL SECRETARY. For the Postmaster General has been ignored and overruled in the whole matter and treated without respect for his age, experience or service. The members of the Governor's Council did not concur with the success of the proposal, if their outside talk can be relied on, but inside the Council are as mute as mice and meek as Moses in the presence of their Master the Colonial Secretary. The greater the consideration given to the reasons afforded on behalf of the Government for the intended destruction, the more absurd and insufficient they seem. To say 'we cannot audit them, therefore destroy them' is worse than childish folly. There are reasons for exercising care and vigilance but NOT warranting destruction, and we say again the proposed burning can only benefit speculators and can only be for that purpose. If the course now proposed be adopted several acute dealers, friends of the Government and

otherwise, will make their "Pile" and a number of private collections of stamps will be doubled in value, but the Public Treasury will lose thousands of dollars. The whole matter demands investigation in the Assembly when it meets, and doubtless will receive it.

Daily News, Tuesday, Jan. 2nd, 1900

**"POSTMASTER GENERAL
OVERRULED**

"The editorial on this day carried on in the same vein however stressing the fact that the poor Postmaster General was constantly overruled, ignored and otherwise belittled by the dominant Colonial Secretary."

To be continued

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20	\$35.00	168	\$15.00
23	35.00	175	5.50
61	3.00	183	4.00
62	4.00	187	2.00
78	9.00	188	7.00
80	6.00	189	1.50
81	5.50	192	12.00
115	2.25	208	2.50
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