

# Visiting the ABNC Archives via Christie's

by John M. Walsh

When I read that the American Bank Note Company archives were to be auctioned to the public, my philatelic desires were aroused. My thoughts were *have to go and see this once in a lifetime event, check out the sheets as to their printing size and see any heretofore unknown and hidden varieties (goodies).*

Finally, Christie's catalogue with the British North America portion of the archives arrived in the mail on August 20, 1990. *Not much time to dally before the sale date*, I thought. With a quick glance through it I began to drool over some of the contents. For two weeks thereafter I couldn't put the catalogue down. The reason should be obvious to those who have studied Newfoundland material. In the Newfoundland section were items listed that seem to contradict all the philatelic histories of Newfoundland.

*This can't be*, I thought. *How could all these knowledgeable writers have missed the obvious? Oh well, maybe the auction employees have misdescribed what they were seeing.*

To put my inquisitiveness at rest and to learn I bought a plane ticket and took off to the *Big Apple*.

On Monday, September 10, I arrived at La Guardia and by 1:00 p.m. there I was seated at Christie's viewing table on Park Avenue.

With me at the viewing was the *revenueur* Erling Van Dam. We had been introduced at the airport by auctioneer, Gary Lyon, who was travelling with me.

Erling asked to see lot #2115 while I checked out lot #2113. Little did we know that we were teetering on the brink of sensory overload. I finished my lot and asked for several other Newfoundland lots. While I was viewing these lots (most were single item lots), Erling was still with his first lot. Next to his hand he had placed a stack of computer paper to write down what he saw so that it could be listed in his Revenue catalogue. The Christie's viewer helper, Eon (I can't recall his last name) had reached into the large box and took out a file folder and placed it in front of Erling. Phrases such as *My God* and *The market will go crazy*, etc., were evident as this folio was being viewed.

When the information had been carefully recorded onto several sheets of paper, the folio was passed back with a request to see the next lot. Eon said he *.....would get the next lot but wouldn't you like to see the rest of this lot?*

When the remainder was placed on the table we knew then that there wasn't enough time in the days remaining to list all that was to be sold. By this time we had been viewing for over two hours.

By now what I was seeing brought dark thoughts of dread. How was the market going to absorb such large quantities of the plate proofs of Newfoundland's 1865 First Cents Issue and the 1897 Cabot Issue? No wonder that at times it sounded like a prayer litany coming from our part of the viewing table.

The following Newfoundland lot #'s 2113, 2202, 2223, 2229 and 2236 held me spellbound. The contained knowledge was contrary to what has been published.

In lot #2113 other than some Canadian material there was found Newfoundland 1905 Officially Sealed stamp. It contained:

a) one sheet of 50 subjects; on India paper; no gum; no gutter; margin imprint inscriptions in the center on all four sides; imperforate (this sheet is unique);

b) there were 5 panes of 25 subjects; gummed; perforated; (the word *Specimen* in red was overprinted on each stamp. Most of the sheet margins and their imprints were missing from these due to the manner of handling);

c) there were 2 sheets of 50 as well as a pane of 25; India paper on card; no gum; no gutter; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions. This lot was acquired by Mr. K. Bileski.

In lot #2202 there was the 1897 Cabot Issue set from 1¢ to 60¢ in sheets of 100; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions. But what did show up in this lot as being unique was the 3¢ value. It was present as a sheet of 200 subjects; no gutter and as above. This lot was withdrawn from the auction viewing and sale on Tuesday morning, September 11.

Viewing this lot explains why the 3¢ Cabot value is found with straight edges. These occur on the top side or the bottom side of the stamp. As there is no gutter between the two panes of 100 subjects, straight edges had to occur when the sheet of 200 was guillotined in half.

In lot #2223 was found the 1/2¢ olive, 1¢ green and 3¢ orange of the 1897 Royal Family issue. This lot in the manner it was described turned out to be a sleeper. The items it con-

tained were unique and the information priceless. The following was noted:

a) 1/2¢ olive; 200 subject sheet; gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions.

b) 1/2¢ olive; 200 subject sheet; no gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions; cutting arrows in top and bottom margin at middle of sheet of 200 providing when guillotined two panes of 100. Again we have explained the reason why there are straight edges on the 1/2¢ value with either the right side or left side of the stamp having the straight edge.

c) 1¢ green; 200 subject sheet; gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions.

d) 1¢ green as above (c) but with the numeral 3 (reversed) found in UL corner. This is a plate number.

e) 1¢ green; 200 subject sheet; no gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions; cutting arrows in top and bottom margins at middle of sheet of 200. This shows why the 1¢ green is found with a straight edge on either the right side or left side.

f) 1¢ green as above (e) but with the numeral 2 (reversed) as a plate number found in UR corner.

g) 3¢ orange; 200 subject sheet; gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; bottom margin imprint inscription on each pane of 100 in the center of the pane. Also noticed is the numeral 4 (reversed) found in UR corner. This is a plate number.

h) 3¢ orange; 100 subject pane; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; bottom margin imprint inscription. This lot was withdrawn from the auction viewing and sale on Wednesday, September 12.

The lot #2229 contained 1¢ green, 3¢ orange and 5¢ blue of the 1897 Royal Family issue. Again, this lot was a real sleeper. Its items were unique. There was:

a) 1¢ green; 200 subject sheet; no gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions; cutting arrows at top and bottom margin at middle of sheet of 200. The word *Specimen* was overprinted in red on each stamp. Also found was the plate numeral 2 (reversed) in the UR corner.

b) 3¢ orange; 100 subject pane; India paper

on card; no gum; imperforate; bottom margin imprint inscription. The word *Specimen* was overprinted in red on each stamp. The plate numeral 2 (reversed) is found in UL corner.

c) 5¢ blue; 100 subject sheet; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; bottom margin imprint inscription. The word *Specimen* was overprinted in red on each stamp. This lot was withdrawn from the auction viewing and sale on Wednesday, September 12.

In lot #2236 was contained the 2¢ Map Issue of 1908. Again, a sleeper lies dormant. Its contents are unique. Found was:

a) 2¢ carmine; 200 subject sheet; gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions. Two sheets were evident although one was not on card.

b) 2¢ orange-brown; 200 subject sheet; gutter; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions. The lot description calls this sheet oxidized. This is incorrect. It is really a trial color with the color being, in my opinion, an orange-brown.

c) 2¢ carmine; 100 subject pane; India paper on card; no gum; imperforate; no margin imprint inscriptions. Three panes are present.

d) a letter pertaining to a request to make the Newfoundland Officially Sealed stamp similar to that of Canada except to change the Monarch's likeness.

From those lots which I was very fortunate to view before they were withdrawn from viewing and sale (they were given to Canada's Postal Museum by the new owners of the ABN Co.) I can safely say that *the proof was in the pudding* because several values of various issues were printed in sheets of 200 subjects. This is contrary to what has been written by others previously. Similarly, the same can be said for the non-presence of margin imprint inscriptions.

Those two lots described above that did make it into the public domain will give collectors who desire these tasty morsels a challenge to acquire them for their award-winning collections.

As to the postal card stationery of Newfoundland, I will reserve judgement. Others more knowledgeable can explain the discrepancies from what was on view at this auction compared to what has been written.