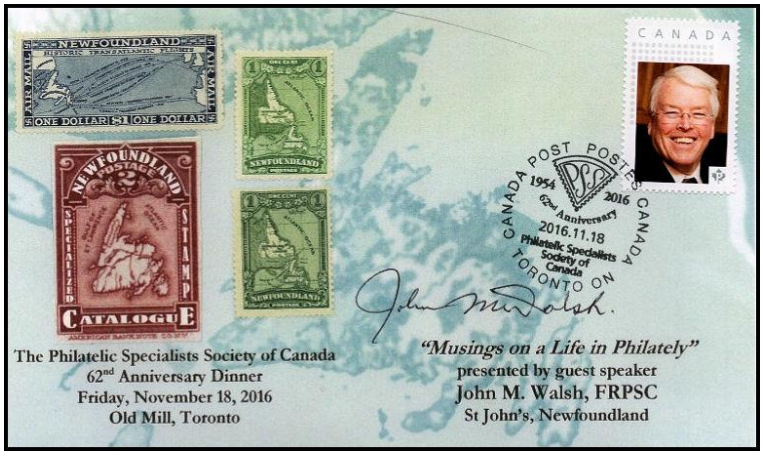
MUSINGS ON A LIFE IN PHILATELY

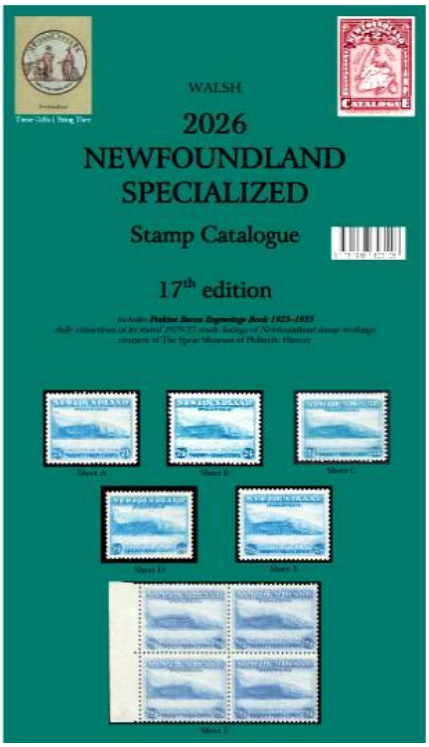
PSSC banquet speech 2016

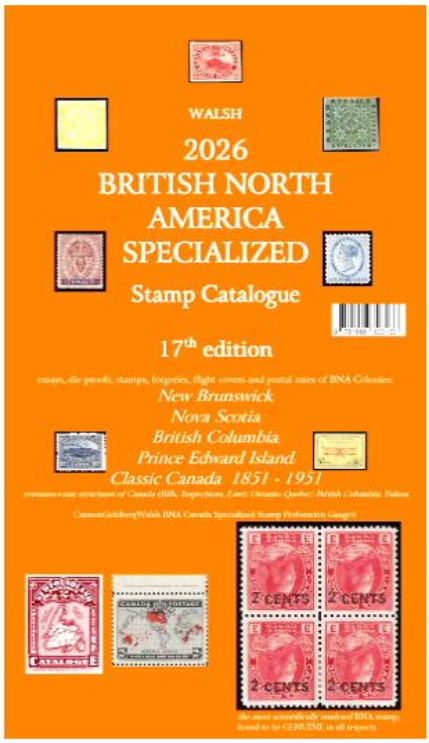
by John M. Walsh, FRPSC



Summary from the November 2016 PSSC Newsletter.

John Walsh, spoke on *Musings on a Life in Philately* describing how he became interested in Newfoundland philately and how his collecting and exhibiting activities revealed errors and gaps in the published literature leading him to start his Newfoundland Specialized Stamp Catalogue which is a living record of all available information including new finds and additional research. He talked about the challenge of exhibiting whole documents with revenue stamps and the dearth of information on the fees that the revenue stamps paid. He also mentioned that following the success of the Newfoundland catalogue he moved on to produce the BNA Specialized Catalogue covering the issues of the BNA Colonies.





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John's catalogues are much more than a list of the stamps that were issued. They bring together almost all the available information including rates, forgeries etc. and provided references to additional sources.

Hello and Good evening,

Thank you, President Nessel, for the invitation to talk with fellow members of our Society and our guests.

I will not be too long because I know some of us get withdrawal symptoms when away any amount of time from our paper children! For this event I was lucky because my 'nearly favourite' son didn't say "Are you off to another lick and stick convention.?"

Tonight, I will speak about my interest in philately especially of Newfoundland and the creation of my namesake catalogues. I would like to expound on how a member of our society (namely me) has philatelically grown due to the guidance and mentoring of fellow philatelists like yourselves.

When I took up studying Newfoundland stamps, I noticed within the literature how many inconsistencies were presented. For instance. I had a few blocks and single stamps that displayed plate numbers, and I wanted to do this as a collection. What great difficulty I had in finding information on them in the literature. I pored through all the BNA Topics issues and other literature. I read the Meyerson brothers columns intently. There I noticed that the brothers would file a report from a fellow reporter that a stated item existed. But when it was finally presented visually to the Meyersons; many times, it had been incorrectly described to them.

The Meyersons then had to correct themselves in the next issue. A most uncomfortable manner of releasing "information." So, I just went ahead and collected all the plate numbered items I could find.

I asked my friend and dealer Gary Lyon to find every plate number item he could lay his hands on. At that time, he was very active in going to shows. And find he did!

So, I bought all he sent; separated those I needed from the duplicates and resold them back to him. At times packages containing dozens of blocks would arrive weekly even twice weekly. You would think he thought I was made of money!

But I found by this method that I was able to find many interesting plate numbers that had not been seen or even thought of by those earlier reporters. Today I see very few plate numbers being offered in the marketplace. Where have they gone I wonder. I now realized that I was ahead of that collecting field curve. My interest in reporting my findings manifested itself. Lots of fun and enjoyment was received by me. Who doesn't like making new findings.

Another example was the observation about the stated size of the printed postage sheets. Not the Post Office issued sheets but those on the press. I could find and prove that many stated facts were not correct.

As with new findings that you report, some readers do not always agree with your interpretation of what you believe and can show are the facts. Most abrasive words do get expounded. But I got get past it. Obviously, they had not seen those printed massive geographical maps! Now, those are from some press sizes!

I took the plate number exhibit on the philatelic road and had a great time. Many new friends were encountered. These shows are a great way to meet people. That exhibit did get to go into the international ring where I enjoyed its reception at that level. No other plate number could be found to augment what I had put together. My plate number exhibit was the best ever formed. Probably because I was in the correct time to see and to handle the many finds. So, she was done boy, she was done.

My desire to keep collecting drove me into another direction. Postal history: you know; it's what many of you collect. To do this subject, stamp wise, you have to figure out what issue will give you the most satisfaction and the ability to accomplish your goal. To me, not many issues in Newfoundland lend

themselves to this challenge because the issue may be too long in denominational values; for example, the 1897 Cabot issue. Or no postal material can be found having the correct use of the high denomination value in a given issue let's say the 1932 Resources issue or 1933 Gilbert issue. Trying to do what I wanted to do was not going to happen with some of the Newfoundland issues.

In my case I had the plate numbers of the 1897 Royal Family issue. This is the earliest Newfoundland issue having plate numbers. They are needed to add to its postal history. So, this became the starting point to develop this new adventure.

Now going in this postal history direction, you will end up meeting completely different collector people. A postal history collector is no ordinary stamp collector. A true specialist they be. Look at yourselves.

Mad I tell you; utterly mad. What with the chasing of folded up pieces of glued paper. Sometimes there are no stamps present; but we call ourselves stamp collectors. A dichotomy for sure. Often the rate is present, but it looks and even reads to be like hen scratching! Glee shows in your eyes when you find such an item.

Now, those covers with stamps will present unparallel delight.

You fawn over the stamp; its perforation; its originating cancellation; its destination receiver cancellation. And if a letter or manuscript is present you believe you are in heaven. But above all else is the determination of the correct postal rate for the address destination. That was a great challenge for me. Meeting and dialoguing with many about rates became a new passion. I even got to take it into the international exhibiting ring.

That international ring!

This was at London 2000. I had applied and was accepted. Wow.

So, there I am accepted from little old Newfoundland. I prepared to go and see this extravaganza. I got there on Monday the opening day from the plane and then the train at about 10 minutes after opening and stayed until following Sunday closing.

The B&B adventure near the Earls Court Exhibition Center where I was lodged is another story. Exhibits were wonderful. And well, the dealers were all pushing Nfld. Pence. I never saw so many Nfld. pence stamps. Everywhere.

I thought I was back in an 1860s Nfld. Post Office stock room. At the show I meet a Welsh person. He collected early Newfoundland covers with a passion as strong as my own. His knowledge of my country of origin was all encompassing. I realized much was to be learned from him. I had met Colin Lewis at his exhibit frame. A great relationship we developed from that point on.

I saw a few Canadians who were the aristocrats of Canadian collecting. Most have since gone to their stamp rewards. To take in all of this show I even bought my palmarès dinner ticket.

A few collectors in Canada who knew I was going to this dinner told me I was mad when they learned the price I paid to attend; and that is after the plane and room fare!

I had to attend; I was there. Well, what an evening. I will tell you about it.

The pre dinner meet was beautiful; the Canadian contingent was most helpful to this novice. The champagne pours like a fountain. What heavenly joy! Horace Harrison, Cliff Guile and their cohort put

me into a wheelbarrow to get me to my table. I noticed some others were delivered in the same manner. At the assigned table was seating for 10. It had 4 red and 4 white wine bottles. When all sat down my table had 6 people.

An older stamp exhibitor who collected Palestine suggested that no wine was going back; we all seconded him. The meal had 8 courses. I enjoyed. Those naysayers certainly missed a fine time. The evening came to an end with the cry of "carriages at midnight". What a fine call to end the evening. An experience to be had if ever there was.

The next day I went to the judges' critique where you know you always learn. I have enjoyed them in the past and still do today. Now remember, my exhibit is definitely stated as Newfoundland 1897 Royal Family. Even Colin really like it. It has all the dies available and even some were unknowns. And rates galore. So away I go on the judges' critique journey of the frames. We came to mine and I ask for the critique comments.

Well, lo and behold out of the mouth of the babe came "No Pence". Tormented I was to say something. Yep, a most beneficial critique!

Now having said this I realize that I would not be where I am today in collecting if not for the valuable critiques that I have received over the years. I have taken each one seriously and strived to incorporate suggestions into my exhibit. As all exhibitors try to do.

From all these shenanigans the catalogue on Newfoundland became born.

My friend John Butt and I decided to take this on after Gary Lyon, Ed Wener and many others kept saying "we need a Newfoundland Specialized catalogue". I collected only stamps whereas Butt collected mint, used and covers. We had a great time poking at each others' peccadillos. "What can you learn from mint stamps", he would say to me. While I countered with "why are you collecting a used stamp when you have it on a cover!" We survived each others torment and did the dastardly deed.

We looked at the catalogue as a living and growing source of information. From all our readings and from all our friends we took the imparted factual information and combined it into a single source. By doing new releases we could add more information that had come on stream, as well, we could correct those errors that do creep into the printed format. Unfortunately, John Butt's life was shortened by a terrible accident in 2000. To help continue the development of the catalogue I went looking for specific people having strong knowledge in their chosen stamp field. No one can know it all; not possible. But a written book continually updated can. But if you ask recognized knowledgeable collectors, help does flow towards you. Thus, the Newfoundland Specialized Catalogue has grown to what it encompasses today.

While trying to better improve the catalogue, deep study of some of the issues became important. Happenstance is all it takes to trigger a research drive. For instance. A local friend had an mint invert Halifax airmail stamp. On its back were many signatures by experts. What no one had recorded since 1921 was the mirror offset on the back in the same inverted manner as the front. Well, what a find to report!

A mirror offset shows that when it lands on what preceded, that the ink on the previous is still wet. Because some of that wet ink then transfers onto the gum. We found several stamps with offset on the back from the same row of stamps; thus, very positive confirmation that it had happened. From this factual finding it can be deducted that a sheet exactly like this one had to precede it. So another inverted sheet was made. In reality there were 5 inverted sheets made. Shades of blasphemy! Thus, there were two of the same sheet orientation while three others are in their single sheet orientations as reported in the literature. As to what happened to that fifth sheet who knows. Same as, who created those inverts in the first place. Some journals cannot accept such nonconformity to the published reference books. Too bad for them. Others are able to understand what is offered and do publish the presented facts. Their readers then make up their own minds

as to what really did happen. Was it pure accident or was tomfoolery performed? Not my problem. It happened.

Another is the Newfoundland 1897 Surcharge. All who collect Newfoundland would be familiar with the reference literature. It is numerically stated that 2 sheets in red ink were printed. Imagine my surprise when I was offered a lower left sheet corner to view and found it was different than the two known lower left sheet corners. Thus, there were three such sheets printed where the literature says only two were made. Can't be! So, another adventure into fact finding was undertaken. Such searching leads to the desire to report your findings for all to see. The Canadian Philatelist has reports on these adventures for you to read. It is gratifying when others recognize your research findings.

Having accomplished the exhibiting of two different Newfoundland research goals: Plates Number and 1897 Postal History I wondered what I was going to do to keep me in the game so to speak. While enjoying the continued development of the Newfoundland Specialized Catalogue I took on the same determination to present the other British North American Countries in a specialized manner. It was set up to grow in the manner as the Newfoundland Catalogue. Knowledgeable colleagues and friends were approached to provide fresh and new information to an old chestnut. Did they ever oblige! And the British North American Specialized Catalogue became a living entity. Yes, it ends with the 1951 issues as that is where my interest wanes.

While doing research for the BNA Catalogue it was observed to be shown that the errors of cataloguers began rearing its head. The findings will be forthcoming in the BNA Topics that will astound.

Even Canadian Philatelist editor Shaman had threatened me and my coauthor Julian Goldberg with peer review! Shaman can't believe our findings. He is an editorial dictator. He has been known to temper my enthusiasm and keep me in check. But my facts do win him over.

His "treat" of subjecting us to peer review for Canadian Philatelist drove us to beseech BNA Topics to print it. When you read who was hoodwinked you will have to wonder what peer is going to do our review. Those hoodwinked, or is it, those hoodwinkees were Jarrett, Sissons and Patrick. Many others fell into the trap. "Can't be" will be the mantra by some readers. "How did that happen like that" will be the cry of others. But the presented facts will win out. I know saying this will be a teaser for you to read BNA Topics.

And there is more to follow in BNA Topics. They will even have an article so intriguing that the subject matter causes me to refer to my co-author as "Julian d'Evangelist". Have a read and see if he is preaching to a choir of three! Why three? Because we have heard of another like minded researcher. And nope, Jeff and Ron did not put me up to this.

To keep my collecting interest enthused I went into the collecting of intact Newfoundland Revenue documents. Why intact documents? Because anyone can do the basic revenue stamps, but intact documents are not readily available. Finding them presents a daunting challenge. An article in BNA Topics did outline the adventures I had to go through to research the information on Newfoundland revenue issues depicting the three monarchs.

To collect and exhibit revenue documents the exhibitor has to be able to interpret the presented rate fee as seen on each document. This is the same manner that is employed by those who are doing postal rates.

You need that information to understand the postal history of a cover, same for the revenue documents.

Judges tend to forget this BECAUSE many countries do not have the rate structure fees recorded and therefore the exhibitor would not be expected to properly present the rate fee structure. No explanation no gain is my motto.

Those that do present and explain the fee rate should be praised. Are you listening Mr. Judge? As well, the presenting of intact documents in frames causes great difficulty. The judges chant "They are So Big" and cite blasphemous things to do to them such as stuff, buckle, bend. They make you cringe. The Canadian Philatelist reported the adventures of those daring documents. Tony always enjoyed humorous fact presentations.

What revenue document exhibitors find, is that most judges forget that in cover displaying you have a tiny piece of paper called a stamp stuck onto another little bit larger piece of glued paper called an envelope AND that in turn is affixed to a sheet of paper which is designed to fit between two shelves in the specifically created exhibit frame. Talk about needing a big paper mouse trap to present such a small item!

By the way, the revenue document does all of that without the fooling around to build any mousetrap. Respect needs to be applied. Yes people, respect for the big sheet.

Both of my catalogues provide the revenue rate structures. Knowledgeable people did help to provide the correct information. God bless them. The continuing idea is to consolidate all information pertaining to each specific country into one book. Upon examining these catalogues, you can see how many past research masterpieces are embedded into these two books. Even the die proofs are now in these catalogues. No other catalogue has ever attempted to do this.

With the Newfoundland Queen Victoria first revenue issue since 1898 no one has been able to find a die that was used to develop this issue. I will leave you in suspense here. But please read about such an adventurous happening in the BNA Topics journal in 2017. And no, Ron and Jeff did not put me up to this.

I have often been asked "Why are your catalogues not in a paper format?"

Especially from John Jamieson; and often. I continuously reply they use to be but the future beckoned. Anyway, I had an email from Johnny J the other day (after Halloween!) where he tells me he acquired the ecatalogue and then lo and behold he says he went and had it printed. He asked me to forward a shipment of pulp logs to make up for the paper he used! He informed me that his shelf was bending. I think he is cracked. Well in my case the catalogue pages are now 10-inch x 16-inch and in the 800-page volume size for each book. No manner of printing will enable one to handle such a book. But as an eBook no problem. You can readily carry such a size book around without any difficulty. I have both in my pocket. It is only as heavy as a thought. It can be put into your phone or in any other electronic device you own. As well you can print whatever page or pages you wish to paper handle.

To my way of thinking the eBook format is the way into the future. It can be in PDF format (like mine) versus epub but unlike PDF the epub can't handle the color images. And do my catalogues ever have color images! Yes, many grumble and say they do not understand computers.

But I believe you will find that most do their banking by the phone technology without any trouble. So, the problem is not there. Just attitude. Oops. Beg pardon. Sorry.

The costs associated with using paper in books and to mail them has grown astronomically. Also, as soon as a book is inked it is obsolete because new findings are always arising. What was considered the cats meow at printing time has now become passe. This is especially true in relation to those reference books of yesteryear. Everyone is always trying to uncover that new finding and call attention to its lack in those earlier books. Continuing research will do this. Many articles by me have been offered to Tony so he can apply his ink to the Canadian Philatelist in the past year that prove this specific point. He has wondered how such discoveries have remained hidden so long.

To close out I will tell you I went to the 2016 New York FIP show. My exhibit had been accepted and was on display. I had to go. It is only on this side of the pond every 10 years. There were 4500 frame faces. 200 dealers. A massive event. And what a time I had. An adventure it turned out for sure.

We, the exhibitors, had been informed months prior that the frames were the standard 36-inch x 48-inch. So, I setup my exhibit document pages to conform and they were sent of to the commissioner to enable lots of time to get to destination. Then, less than two weeks before the show opens the exhibitors get the email that the frames were 34 inches wide. We were told to adjust our pages appropriately! Even the European A4 size were too large with their sheet protectors on them. The designer and the show officials forgot that the material generally shown is material that is from that previous time period when the paper pages used to write on are 8.5 inches wide which makes it larger in width than 34 inches with the sheet protector on it! Many had to do the chainsaw waltz to get their material inside the mis-designed frame. Those that could not pare down their too large sheet ended up doing the overlap dance and you know what that causes? Poor presentation: and there goes those 5 points you thought you had in the bag. Oh well. That international ring!

Even though I was there for five days I had great opportunities to meet collectors and dealers I have know for eons. Our PSSC society booth was an entertaining locale to hang out and reminisce. Amazing the people whose name you are aware of who passed by for a chat. Some even got caught by the paparazzi! Even my exhibit got newspaper attention! You can't ask for much more.

So, I believe you have heard enough from me. I offer a sincere thank you for your interest.

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