

**Special Delivery: Canada's Postal Heritage.** CHANTAL AMYOT, BIANCA GENDRAU, and JOHN WILLIS. FRANCINE BROUSSEAU, ed. Ottawa: Canadian Postal Museum, 2000. 152 p. ISBN 0-86492-310-4.

This is an unusual book. One's first impression is that it is simply a large format, coffee table book with excellent photographs. But this is more than a picture book. Although billed as the "history of the post in Canada," *Special Delivery: Canada's Postal Heritage* is neither a traditional postal history (a study of postal rates, routes, and markings), nor a scholarly archival work. With considerable text that is suitable and well balanced, the book is an overview of the development of the services for mail delivery in Canada, explained for a general audience. As part of the explanation, it presents many items from the collection of the Canadian Postal Museum, holder of the country's three-dimensional postal artifacts.

The photographs, which are excellent and make up a large part of the book, include some of Canada's scarcest and most important stamps, as well as many modern issues. Unfortunately, inclusion of both levels of stamps without an explanation of rarity may be misleading to non-philatelists (presumably the majority of the readers). The general reader probably will not recognize the significance of the corner pair of twelve-penny black stamps shown on page 51, or of the sheets of proofs on pages 46 and 54. These early items have been given no more emphasis than that given to some of Canada Post's recent, common productions. The photographs of the production material of the Bluenose stamp are a wonderful addition to the book, showing graphically the major stages in stamp production, from photograph through essay to final stamp. Other photographs include post offices, postal workers, letter boxes, mail-order catalogues, and mail-inspired toys.

The twelve relatively short chapters discuss a wide variety of aspects and history of our postal service. The first is an introduction to the delivery and international exchange of mail – the development of postal communication as we know it. The following chapters are devoted to specific topics, from the process of writing a letter (writing surfaces and implements), to methods of moving the mails (from mail bags carried by stagecoaches and sleighs to plastic bins carried by airplanes). The chapter on the establishment of the post in North America is one of the best, clearly summarizing the important role of the mail service to the growing colonies in the 1700s and 1800s. The varied architecture of the post offices of Canada is well served by its own chapter, and the one that follows, entitled "The Rural Postmaster," is a fitting supplement that presents the interior architecture of post offices. However, in my opinion, the chapter on "Art and the Post" minimizes the excellence of the engraver's art on our early stamps in order to advertize the newer media and the contemporary art in the collection of the Canadian Postal Museum. The

true philatelic masterpieces are the engraved stamps, always most popular with philatelists.

There are a few minor errors in philatelic description throughout the book, and the text at times is a little tentative, perhaps lacking the love and certainty that could have been presented by a dedicated collector. However, the average reader will not notice this weakness. The anecdotes are interesting, and should attract people to our collecting hobby, to the museum, and to the Canada Post sales wickets.

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