

Calgary's lovely centennial stamp of cowboys rasslin' down a plunging bronco, designed for issue last year by Bernard Reilander and based on Walt Petriego's photograph "Untamed," is typical of the fine art reproduction which goes into Canada's special issue stamps. The quality of Canadian stamps has been forging ahead of recent years, making full use of new production methods, and the public in Canada is very much involved — from being invited to submit ideas and designs in the early stages to the consumer reaction that invariably follows a new issue.

Taking up the trail of public reaction to new stamps, journalist Kay Kritzwiser of the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, found that it led across the Ottawa desk of the Postmaster General and came to rest at the postal and retail products branch in the Sir Alexander Campbell building on Confederation Heights.

(The branch was organised in May 1973 to cater for the increasing demands — and often crotchety whims — of Canadian philatelists.)

More specifically than that, it spills to the desk of Frank G. Flatters, an amiable man, engrossed in stamp lore, who is manager of postage design and development.

"Do we get letters? Of course we get letters! I had one recently where the lady signed herself 'Yours in disgust!' Of course we've taken raps on the knuckles!"

He reached into a folder, pulled out a sheet of stamps and looked at it with something like wistfulness. "There's the Manitoba Centennial stamp. It was the most beautiful graphic design you could ask for anywhere, but there's no way the people of Manitoba will ever make peace on that stamp. Just mention it and they twitch all over again."

Flatters is a patient listener, which is nice, considering that he is also a frustrated philatelist. "I don't dare be a collector. It would be like a bank clerk collecting money. I have enough hazards in this job without that."

Perhaps that's why he can listen objectively to criticism of the one-, the six- and the eight-cent stamps bearing the face of Queen Elizabeth. Those particular stamps fall into the definitive or regular issue category, as opposed to commemorative and special stamps. They're planned for longer use; as a rule, three to five years. The subject is usually Canadiana, such as the series on Canadian Prime Ministers, not living, and modern skylines of our cities. Queen Elizabeth, being royalty, is the only living person who may come into this stamp category. That's the Canadian postal law.

But Queen Elizabeth, handsome woman that she is, is not a philately designer's dream. "Engravers say the Queen is the hardest person to do. It's hard for them to get a natural reproduction. Well, look at the dollar bill."

Flatters defends the eight-cent blue of the Queen and the Prime Ministers series.

# The stamp of approval is hard to find



Selection of recent Canadian stamps includes Calgary centennial (bottom, left); Manitoba centennial "Prairie settlers" (to left of Queen); the "Beaver," first steamship in the North Pacific, one of four in last year's "Coastal ships" series, and a few of the stamps issued for this year's Olympics — including one to mark the Arts and Culture programme that will run concurrently with the Games.



"We're trying to break out of the time-honoured engraving tradition to do something in a contemporary way. The Prime Ministers were human beings too, you know. They were not starchy, stodgy people in gold frames. They were homey guys with rumpled hair and their lines showing. We tried to depict them as hardworking men, to give them a feeling of personal warmth.

"Anyway, the Queen was shown the proofs of that stamp when she was here for the Commonwealth Conference. She made no bones about it. She accepted it."

When Flatters uses the word "We" it is very much in a collaborative sense, he makes haste to explain.

In the case of the commemorative stamps, it begins with the public. Anyone can make a suggestion to the Canada Post Office for a future stamp design, and annually some 200 persons do. The 1968 issue to honour the Canadian war poet John McCrae and the 1971 issue to mark the 50th anniversary of the discovery of insulin came from the public.

There are governing rules of course, or the Post Office would be swamped with kooky requests. Subjects must depict the cultural and economic life of Canada, its traditions, history and accomplishments. That does not include particular fraternal or service organizations, religious denominations, particular professions, commercial products, wars and particular battles.

Individuals may be subjects after death only. Anniversaries must be the 50th, 100th or a multiple of these. Ideas should be submitted as early as three years before the stamp is to appear.

## Design experts

All these design suggestions regularly go before a design advisory committee which was organized in 1969. Flatters is the permanent chairman of the committee, but its seven members, who meet 10 times a year in Ottawa, are constantly renewed.

On the present committee, making regional representation, are Molly Bobak, Fredericton artist; Carl Mangold, Montreal philatelist; Joan Murray, director of the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa; Sam Nickle, Calgary philatelist; William Rhone, Vancouver architect; Jean-Louis Robillard, Montreal architect and professor of environmental design; and Marion Sherman, Prince Albert radio and television broadcaster.

The final choice of subject matter is made by the Postmaster General, but the committee recommends the artist-designers, assesses the designs submitted, recommends final choice and makes final approval of the artwork and die proofs.

The stamp programme is planned a year ahead. In 1974, 15 commemorative stamps were issued. Lack of time, according to Flatters, is sometimes a serious handicap.

"Time is essential to good stamps. If we don't have enough time, even with the

best people available, we can come up with a pup."

What about size? Why, for example, such a big stamp for the Canada eight-cent commemorative issued to honour Dr. Samuel Dwight Chown? The Canadian minister, who died in 1933, fought to see the merger of Methodists, Congregationalists and some Presbyterians into the United Church of Canada.

"Reduction is a factor in design, just as it is with photography," Flatters explained. "The size of a stamp is dictated by the subject matter."

Canadian stamps have forged ahead on the philatelic scene by taking advantage of the methods of reproduction now available. As is the case with Canadian printmakers, the urge to research new techniques, and adaptations of old, must be recognized.

Three methods — intaglio printing (once used for all Canadian stamps), lithography (which allows for more than one colour) and photogravure, which incorporates both processes — are now used in Canada, to an extent used by very few other countries.

"How are our stamps regarded outside of Canada?" said Flatters. "Very highly. If you take one year's issue and set it up against a year of all the other countries, artistically, esthetically, we belong in the top three or four. Ask Allan Fleming (the internationally recognized graphics designer). He was on our committee for four or five years."

Flatters admitted that Canada has produced some ugly stamps, some duds. "Designs forced on the committee by organizations or circumstances or time have been a choice anything but unanimous with the members. But other countries produce ugly stamps too.

"One of the strengths of our stamps is the wide variety of aesthetics and design styles. British stamps are very highly rated. I wouldn't quarrel with anyone who said so. But they have less style. They're beautiful, but they suffer from uniformity. We do take chances, but we wind up in front."

The stamps of France often held up as the philatelic ideal. "Nonsense," said Flatters. "Set a year of French stamps against a year of our issues — including their pretty reproductions of the Impressionists — and you'd have second thoughts about the quality of their stamps."

Flatters concedes that Canada must bow to the superiority of the stamps of Liechtenstein, that little country nuzzling Switzerland. "They put out consistently beautiful stamps, little gems, but their stamps are a catalogue of their considerable art treasures. Besides, it's a little country and there's little demand for postage within its boundaries. Cost is no object. They're printing for philatelists. We have to tailor our stamps to our budget."

The Canada Post Office produces 2.5 billion stamps a year on a budget of between \$3 - million and \$4 - million. "A budget can go down the drain very quickly," Flatters said.