

Corner Folds On The Caricature Definitives

by Leopold Beaudet

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In the May-June 1998 issue of **Corgi Times**, John Hillmer illustrated two blocks of the 1973 2c Laurier Caricature definitive in which the perforations run diagonally through the stamps. The variety was caused by a large paper fold that occurred in the upper left corner of a pane, and the two blocks come from the same fold. Whoever discovered this major corner fold massacred it by splitting it into eight pieces, the two John Hillmer illustrated, two that I own, and four others, probably to obtain as much money as possible from its sale.

Inspired by John Hillmer's article, I sifted through price lists and auction catalogues to compile a list of corner fold varieties on the Caricature definitives. Why? Corner folds are extremely interesting for a number of reasons. They are visually arresting, they provide revealing and sometimes rivetting information about printing methods, and the most dramatic ones typically command awesome prices.

The list of known corner folds on the Caricature definitives turns out to be rather short - five "classic" examples, one unique piece, and two masqueraders. They were all produced by Canadian Bank Note Co. (CBN), and most of them occurred at different points in the printing process.

Some background printing information on the Caricature definitives before delving into the list. CBN printed the 1c to 6c sheet definitives, British American Bank Note Co. (BABN) printed the 10c, and the two printers took turns printing the 7c and 8c. CBN used a sheet-fed rotary press, printing the stamps in sheets of 6 panes, 2 rows by 3 columns. The engraved colour was printed first, then the tagging, after which the sheets were perforated and guillotined into panes of 100 stamps. CBN first perforated the stamps with a 2-row H-comb, but switched to a 1-row H-comb of the same gauge sometime between June 1974 and April 1975. BABN produced the 7c, 8c, and 10c on its Goebel web-fed press from cylinders of 600 stamps. After printing, the web was perforated with a drum perforator, and guillotined into panes of 100 stamps.

At CBN, each step in the production of stamps is separate. A stack of sheets is fed through the press to print the design, and then the sheets are re-stacked. The sheets are fed through a second press to print the phosphor bars and stacked again. The stack is fed through the perforator, four or five sheets at a time. The perforated sheets are stacked once more and guillotined into panes. At BABN in contrast, the perforator and guillotine are integral to the multicolour Goebel press, so printing, perforating, and guillotining are performed in one continuous operation on the web. The web is not rewound after each operation.

I claimed that corner folds reveal information about the printing process. As we shall see, the folds described in this article corroborate at least two statements made above about CBN's printing methods, namely, CBN used a sheet-fed press, and the design was printed before the tagging.

All eight pieces of the corner fold John Hillmer reported on the 2c Laurier were sold in a series of auctions conducted by J & M Philatelic Auction of Vancouver in the early 1980s. With a bit of computer magic, I reconstructed the original block from illustrations in the auction catalogues. Figure 1 shows the reconstruction, identifies the auction each piece appeared in, and lists the prices realized. Note that one of the pieces appeared in two different auctions.

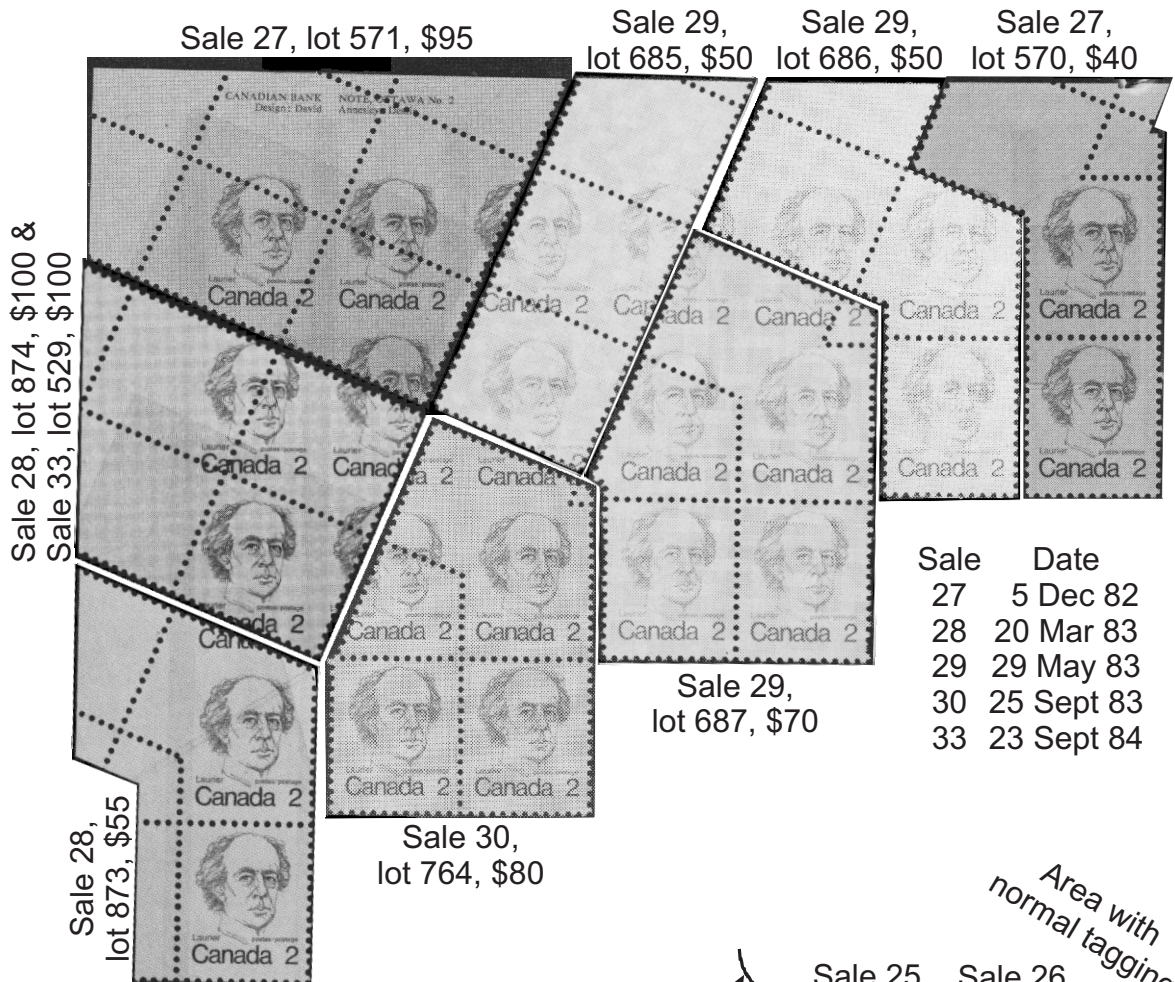


Figure 1. UL corner fold on 2c Laurier from plate 2, separated into 8 pieces.

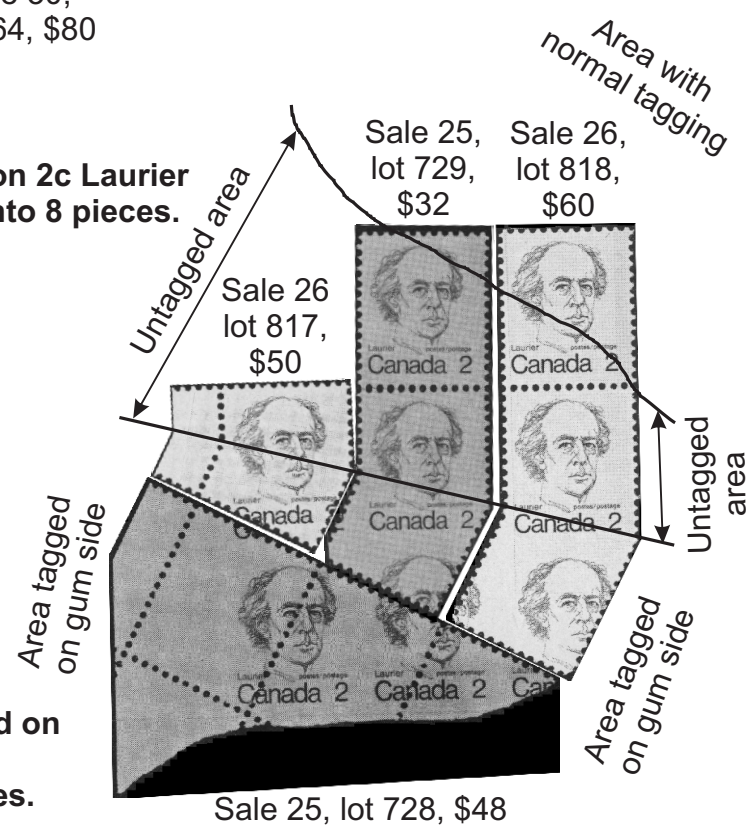


Figure 2. LL corner fold on 2c Laurier, separated into 4 pieces.

The reconstruction shows that the fold runs from the bottom part of stamp 4/1 to the right edge of stamp 1/7. Among corner folds on the Caricature definitives, this one affected the most stamps, but paradoxically it is neither the biggest fold nor the most impressive. The fold occurred after the stamps were printed and tagged, but before they were perforated and guillotined. It is the only known fold on the Caricature definitives to have occurred at this point in the printing process. The sheet was folded back towards the gum side.

By definition, a corner fold occurs at the corner of a pane. A corollary to this is that the fold must occur at the corner of the sheet if it occurs before the sheet is guillotined (and incidentally if the fold occurs after guillotining, it's worth less than face!). As a result, the fold should display the full sheet margin including any part that is trimmed off even philatelic panes. Since the fold in Figure 1 comes from the upper left corner of a pane, it must also come from the upper left corner of a sheet. Thus it reveals the full sheet margin, not just the pane margin. At the fold, the left margin is much wider than a normal pane margin, but the top margin is no bigger than that of a normal philatelic pane. It appears the sheet did not have any extra paper in the top margin. The untrimmed plate inscription reveals that the variety comes from plate 2. Since plate 2 appeared after CBN switched to a 1-row H-comb, the sheet was perforated using a 1-row, rather than a 2-row, H-comb.

J & M Philatelic Auction sold not one but two massacred corner folds on the 2c Laurier. The second fold, shown in Figure 2, occurred in the lower left corner of a pane. There is at least one piece missing from the right side of this reconstructed block. To my knowledge, the missing piece was never auctioned. The bottom piece is obviously torn. It seems probable that this piece formed part of the bottom left corner of the pane, but this can't be confirmed because of the tear. Lot 729 from Sale 25 is in the collection of Ron Brigham of Brigham Auctions Ltd.

The tagging on this block is fascinating. As Figure 2 indicates, a small area at the upper right is tagged normally, the middle area above the fold is completely untagged, and the area below the fold is tagged on the gum side. Explanation? Easy! The sheet was folded towards the face side of the stamps, not the gum side like all the other Caricature folds. Also, the sheet was torn and folded after the design was printed but before the tagging, perforating, and guillotining. Thus the folded paper covered the portion of the sheet immediately above the fold when the tagging was applied. As a result, the tagging was applied on the gum side of the folded paper rather than on the stamps underneath. This proves that the design was printed before the tagging.

This fold again displays an extra wide left sheet margin. Unfortunately, information about the bottom sheet margin was lost when the bottom of the sheet was torn away.

The third of the five classic corner folds, shown in Figure 3, also occurs on the 2c Laurier. Ron Brigham displayed it in the "Gems of Canadian Philately" exhibit sponsored by BNAPS at CAPEX 96, and the fold appears in the book published in conjunction with the exhibit. The block was offered several years ago in an Eaton and Sons auction. The fold occurs in the upper left corner and runs from the top of stamp 2/1 to the left edge of stamp 1/3. It occurred after the design was printed but before the stamps were tagged, perforated, and guillotined, providing more proof that the design was printed before the tagging. Like the fold in Figure 1, this one displays a wide left sheet margin and a normal (for a philatelic pane) top margin. The plate inscription, plate 2, appears in the top margin.

← Sheet margin trimmed off philatelic and field panes.

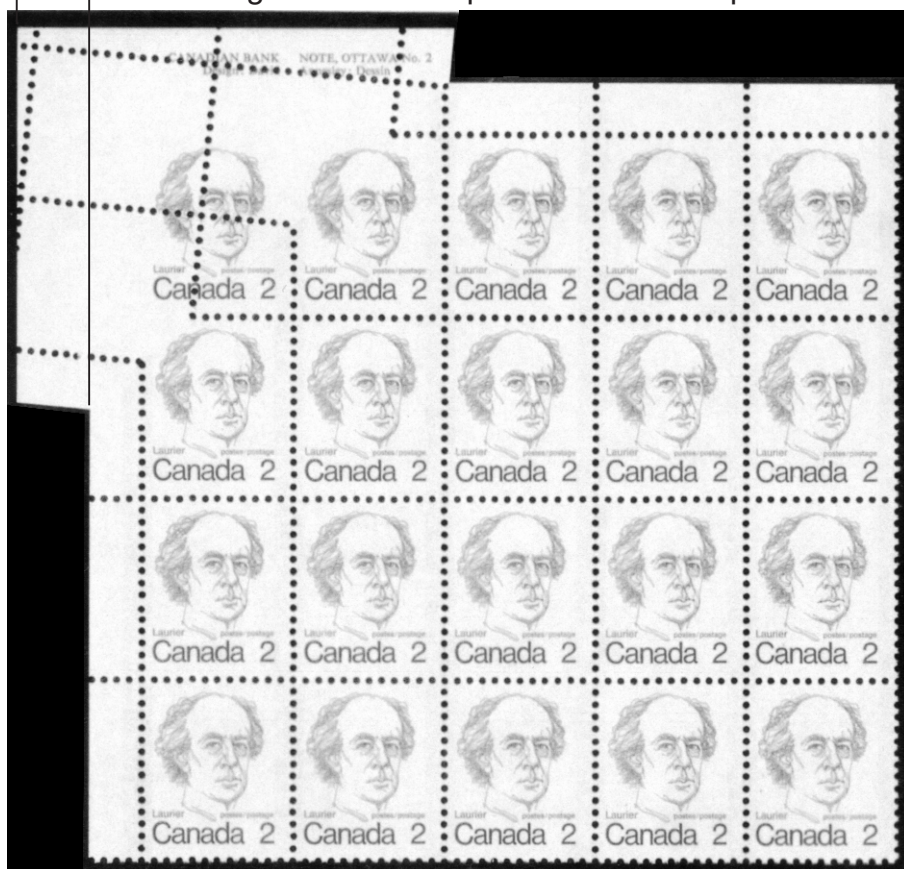


Figure 3. UL corner fold on 2c Laurier from plate 2.
Courtesy Ron Brigham of Brigham Auctions Ltd.

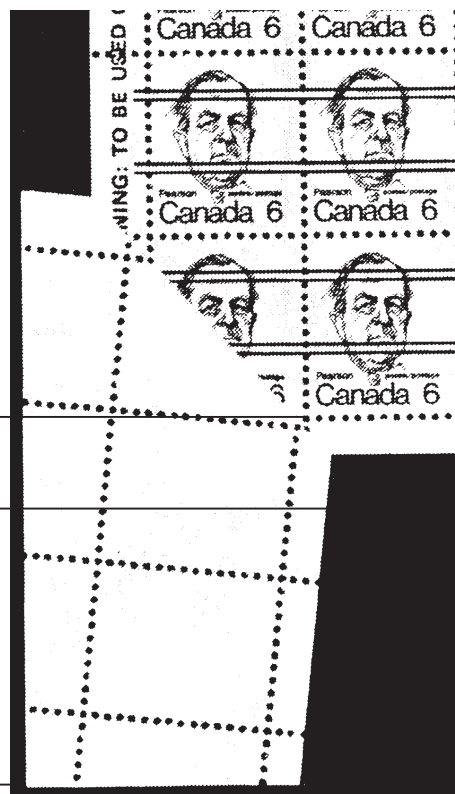


Figure 4. LL corner fold on 6c Pearson precancel. Courtesy Robert A. Lee Philatelist Ltd.

The fourth corner fold, Figure 4, is on the 6c Pearson precancel. It was offered by private treaty by Eaton & Sons in August 1977 for \$195 and again in August 1978 for \$175, and was sold by Robert A. Lee Philatelist Ltd. in 1979 (auction sale No. 9, 3 Nov. 1979, lot 186). It appears again in the article “Erreurs et Variétés Canadiennes - Partie 6” by Claude Beaulac and Richard Gratton in 1986 (*Philatélie Québec*, Vol. 12, No. 8, April 1986, pp. 305-308). The fold occurs in the bottom left corner, and goes from the bottom of stamp 9/1 to the left edge of stamp 10/2. The printing stops abruptly at the fold indicating that the corner was folded towards the gum side even before the design was printed. Thus the fold occurred much earlier in the printing process than the three folds on the 2c Laurier, and the contrast is quite dramatic. This fold reveals the full extent of the bottom sheet margin, a huge margin, much wider than that of a normal philatelic pane. As expected, the left margin is the same width as the three 2c Laurier folds. The stamps were almost certainly perforated using a 1-row H-comb which indicates they came from a plate 2 or plate 3 printing.

The last of the classic corner folds is a spectacular one on the CBN printing of the 8c QE II shown in Figure 5. It was offered in a full pane as lot 1022 in R. Maresch & Son auction sale 267-270, 8-9 Oct. 1992, and sold for \$925 as noted on page 18 of the Oct. 1992 issue of *Corgi Times*. The fold is in the lower left corner, and goes from the top of stamp 9/1 to the middle of stamp 10/5. It affected a larger area of the sheet but fewer stamps than the first fold on the 2c Laurier. The design was printed normally but the tagging stops at the fold, providing yet more proof that the design was printed before the tagging. CBN had abandoned the 2-row H-comb before getting the contract to print the 8c value, and all 8c stamps including the variety were perforated using a 1-row H-comb.

The left and bottom sheet margins are similar in size to the 6c Pearson precancel. Because the fold occurred after the design was printed, it shows the plate inscription (plate 7). Much more startling, the bottom sheet margin that is normally trimmed off reveals a control number (which is upside down and reads “785 No. 7”) and horizontal and diagonal lines that form a cross-hatch pattern.

Control numbers were a regular feature of lower left plate blocks from the time CBN won the stamp printing contract in 1935 until the Post Office tried to eliminate plate blocks in 1958. They were the subject of an interesting article, “Control Numbers On George VI Stamps Of Canada” by T. B. Higginson, *BNA Topics*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1952, pp. 66-71. Although control numbers were banished from plate blocks in 1958, CBN certainly didn’t stop using them. Besides the example on the 8c Caricature, a control number appears on a corner fold on the 17c Parliament definitive (illustrated in Donald LeBlanc’s article in the May-June 1999 issue of *Corgi Times*), and I’ve seen control numbers on proofs of the 1978 14c Parliament sheet stamps and even the 14c coil held by the National Archives of Ottawa. It appears that CBN continued its practice of putting control numbers on engraved plates even through the numbers were trimmed off the issued panes.

The cross-hatched lines in the sheet margin are not unique to the 8c QE II. Similar lines exist on some Centennial definitive corner folds. See “Under the Looking Glass” by Ken Rose, *Canadian Philatelist*, Vol. 24, No. 3, May 1973, pp. 139-141, “The PVA Gum Enigma” by Doug Irwin, *BNA Topics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 1981, pp. 37-39, and *Canada The 1967-73 Definitive Issue*, second edition, edited by Douglas C. Irwin and Murray H. Freedman, 1984, p. 67. The reason for these lines is still a mystery.

There you have the five “classic” corner fold varieties. There is also a unique corner fold, in my

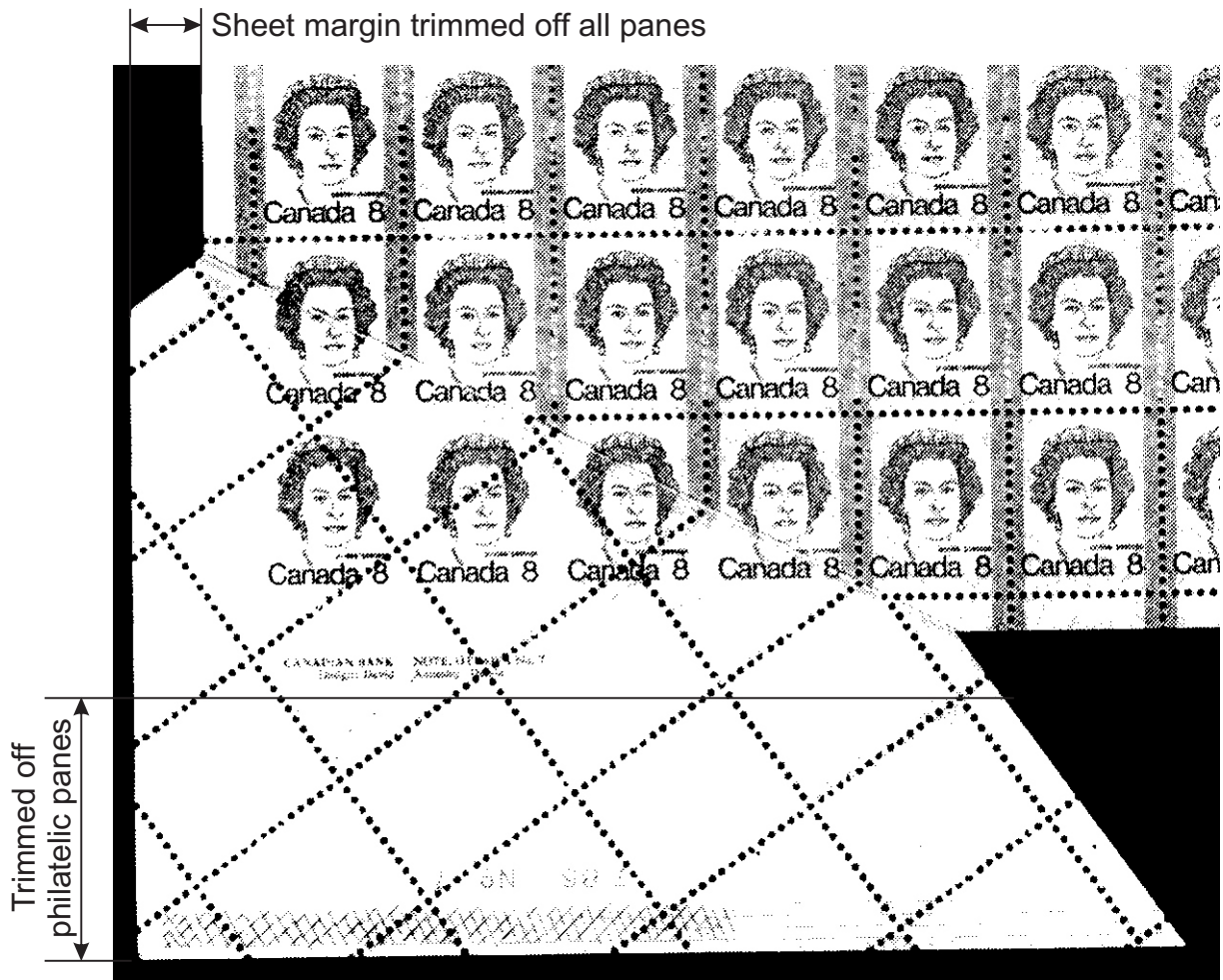


Figure 5. LL corner fold on 8c QE II, CBN printing, plate 7.
 Courtesy R. Maresch & Son.

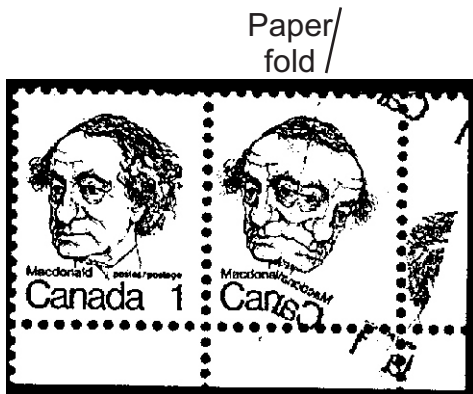


Figure 6. "Double head" variety on 1c Macdonald. Courtesy Saskatoon Stamp Centre.



Figure 7. 2c Laurier full reverse image offset on gum side.



Figure 8. 1978 14c Parliament partial reversed image offset on the gum side.

opinion the most impressive one even though it is much smaller than the first 2c Laurier fold or the 8c QE II fold. If you've been a member of the Elizabethan Study Group for a while, you've seen it several times already. The unique item is the "double-head" variety on the 1c Macdonald that John Hillmer features in his **Corgi Times** advertisements (Figure 6). Mr. Hillmer displayed this remarkable variety in the CAPEX 96 "Gems of Canadian Philately" exhibit, and it was reproduced in the exhibition book. The variety is listed in the D. Robin Harris **Caricature and Landscape Definitive Series 1972-1978** catalogue where it is priced at \$1,500. It was originally sold by Winnipeg dealer Kasimir Bileski around 1978. I quote from Bileski's write-up which was supplied by John Jamieson of Saskatoon Stamp Centre who also handled the variety:

"The 1 stamp in a billion. Probably a billion of this stamp were printed and this is the only one ever found double faced! The error is due to fold and offset and the miracle is that it survived. The pair is still unused but someone threw it into a box of used stamps and gave it to a church group. They noticed the pair and sold it separately to me."

I have never seen a comparable corner fold variety (not just on the Caricature definitives, but on any stamp). I am not entirely sure how it was produced, so what follows is part theory, part conjecture.

Varieties consisting of reversed offsets of the stamp design on the gum side, while uncommon, are well known. Figure 7 shows a full offset on the gum side of the 2c Laurier, and Figure 8 illustrates a partial offset on the 1978 14c Parliament definitive which, like most of the Caricatures, was printed by CBN using engraving. How is this type of variety produced?

Figure 9 shows a simplified view of an engraved printing press. One or two semicircular engraved plates are mounted on the printing cylinder. Inking rollers transfer ink from the fountain to the plates. Meanwhile, a sheet of stamp paper leafs its way around an impression cylinder to the printing cylinder. Where the impression and printing cylinders meet, the paper comes in contact with the plate, and, under pressure, absorbs the ink in the grooves formed by the design on the plate. The sheet moves on to air blowers where the ink is dried, and falls on a stack at the end of the press.

Offsets such as those shown in Figures 7 and 8 occur either because the ink on a sheet is still wet when the next sheet is stacked on top of it, or because a sheet was misfed through the press. In the second case, the impression cylinder comes in direct contact with the plate, picks up the ink from the plate, and transfers the ink onto the gum side of the next sheet fed through the press. Because the offsets in Figures 6, 7, and 8 are quite strong and because the variety occurs on stamps printed by engraving, I suspect the second explanation is the correct one for all three examples.

What would cause a partial offset such as the one on the 14c Parliament? The preceding sheet may have been skewed when it was fed through the press so that it came in contact with only part of the plate, or perhaps the preceding sheet had a folded corner like the 6c Pearson precancel shown in Figure 4. In either case, the impression cylinder would have come in direct contact with the portion of the plate that the sheet missed, and picked up the ink on that portion.

The double-head variety is similar to the partial offset on the 14c Parliament in that the reversed image stops abruptly in the bottom right corner. So presumably the preceding sheet was skewed or

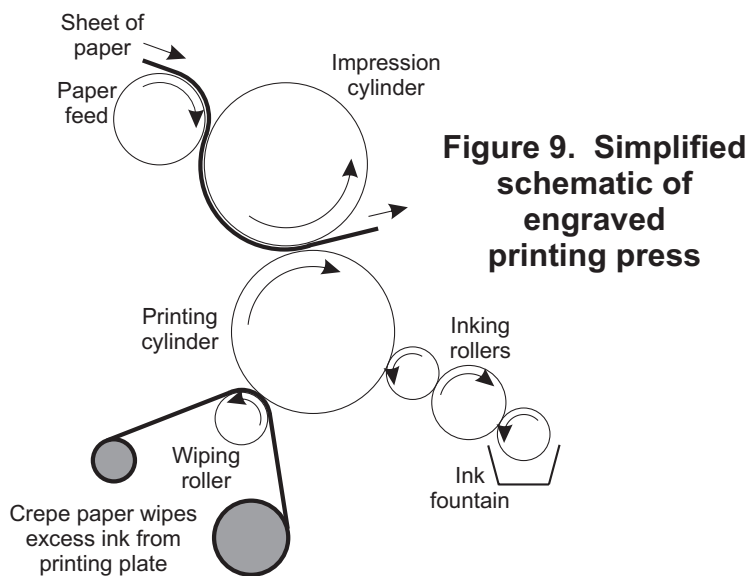


Figure 9. Simplified schematic of engraved printing press

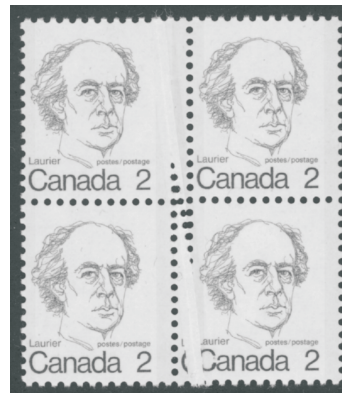


Figure 11. Pre-printing paper crease on 2c Laurier.

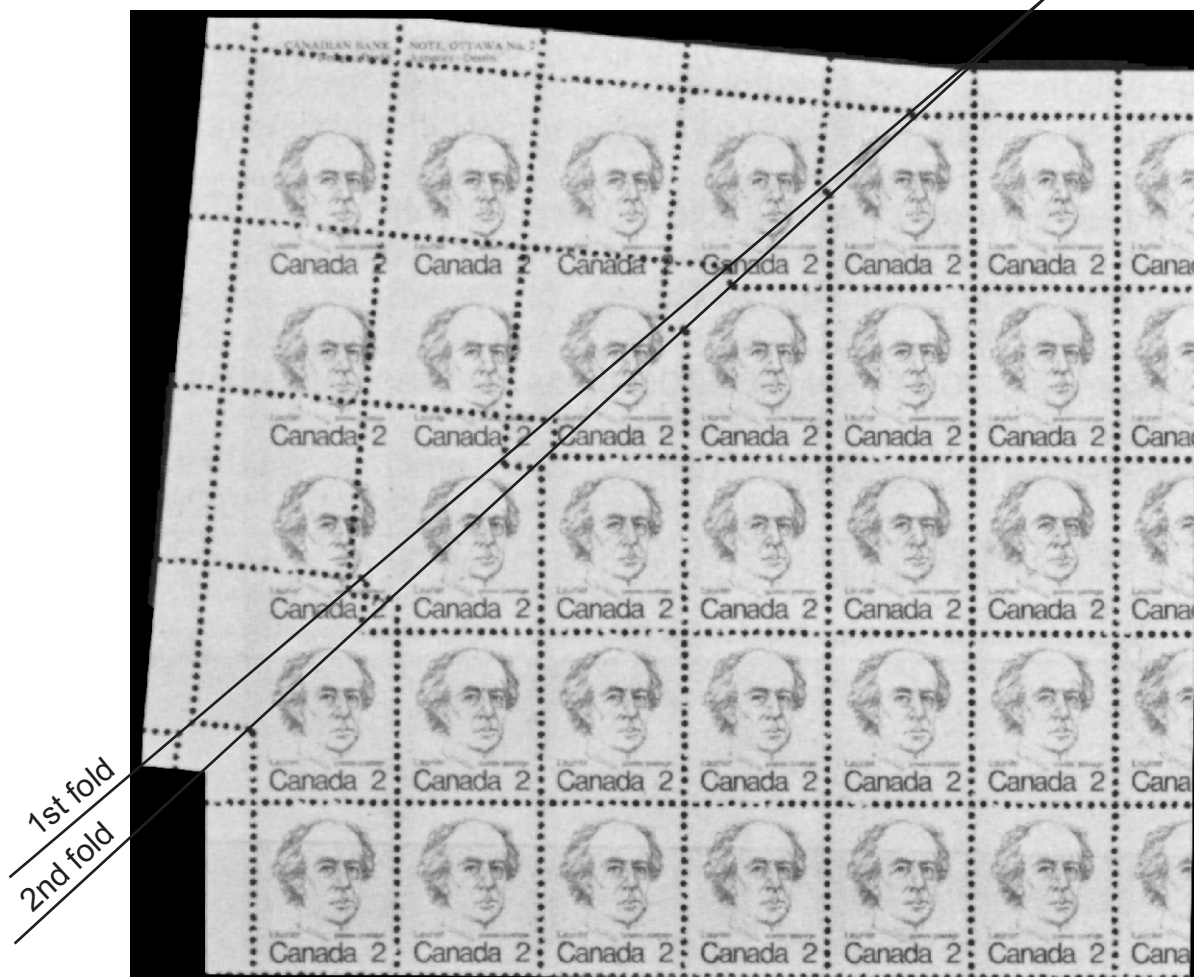


Figure 10. A paper crease “masquerading” as a corner fold. The diagonal lines indicate the folds that form the crease. Courtesy John H. Talman Auctions.

folded when it went through the press. But the double-head offset occurs on the face of the stamp, not the gum side, because the sheet with the variety was also folded when it went through the press. Note that the fold must have occurred before the design was printed just like the 6c Pearson precancel.

There's more! Did you notice that the perforating and guillotining were normal? The corner fold must have somehow become unfolded before the sheet was perforated. Of the two hundred or so corner folds I've seen, less than five have a fold that somehow corrected itself part way through the production process.

Oh by the way, the rightmost stamp is 1-bar tagged. The stamp has the normal phosphor bar on the left side but is missing the bar on the right, and there is no tagging between the two reversed stamp images. This observation is not quite as frivolous as it may seem. As noted above, CBN applies the tagging as a separate operation, necessitating a second pass through the printing press. The fact that the right bar is missing implies that the sheet was still folded when the stamps were tagged, but the other elements that produced the reverse image were absent. John Hillmer notes that there is a very fine line of phosphor along part of the fold.

Besides trying to explain how it came to be, the double-head variety poses yet another dilemma. Where do you mount it in your collection - with corner folds, offsets, or one-bar tagged varieties?

While John Hillmer's double-head variety is unquestionably unique, incredibly, there is a second double-head variety! It occurs on the 1988 38c QE II definitive, and was described and illustrated in the Mar.-Apr. 1996 issue of **Corgi Times**.

When I first compiled this list of corner folds, there were two more items on it. The first is the 2c Laurier upper left corner block shown in Figure 10. Looks like a corner fold, doesn't it? The perforations zigzag, the shape of the block is irregular, the block has an extra wide left sheet margin, and there is a plate inscription (plate 2) that would normally be trimmed off post office stock. With all these indicators leading me astray, it was some time before I realized this block was a "masquerader". The variety isn't a corner fold at all but rather a large diagonal paper crease that occurred after printing but before perforating and guillotining. The diagram shows where the two folds forming the crease occur. Several features mark the variety as a paper crease rather than a fold: 1) there are two folds in the paper, not one (the actual folds are not too obvious on a photocopy!); 2) the perforations zigzag not once but twice; and 3) the full sheet margin that one would expect to see on a corner fold was cut at an angle that wouldn't occur on a corner fold.

The variety was lot 700 in John H. Talman's auction sale 28-30, 18-19 Feb. 1981, where it realized \$400, and is now in the Ron Brigham collection. It was an impressive block, so I illustrated it in "Canadian Stamp Varieties - 5" in **Canadian Philatelist**, Vol. 32, No. 4, July-Aug. 1981. I didn't study the illustration closely enough at the time, and assumed the variety was a corner fold. It is probably the variety described in the D. Robin Harris catalogue as "paper fold affecting upper left 13 stamps".

The second "masquerader" is also a diagonal paper crease on a lower left corner block of the 2c Laurier (again!). Dick Schweizer illustrated the variety in a slide presentation on the Caricature

definitives he prepared for the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. In his write-up dating back 15 to 20 years, Mr. Schweizer raised the same corner fold - paper crease question I tripped over while preparing this article.

Paper folds and creases are caused by different phenomena and usually produce quite different effects. However, since a diagonal crease can sometimes be mistaken for a fold, it might be useful to define what each type of variety is.

A paper fold occurs when part of a sheet is folded over, almost always at a corner, at some point during the printing process. Donald LeBlanc has illustrated a multitude of corner folds in **Corgi Times** beginning on page 94 of the Mar.-Apr. 1999 issue, and Robin Harris features many spectacular folds in his Karsh, Wilding, and Cameo definitives catalogue. Note that a corner fold implies a sheet-fed press. Corner folds are impossible on a press like BABN's Goebel web-fed press simply because the web of paper doesn't have corners. No stamp printed on the Goebel press has ever appeared with a corner fold.

A paper crease occurs when the paper is folded in on itself under pressure. A crease consists of two "folds" in the paper, usually close together and more or less parallel. Most creases tend to run in an irregular line, usually vertical but sometimes (as in the case of the two "masqueraders") diagonal. When the crease is stretched out, the part of the paper that was "hidden" may be blank or may have several or all of the colours printed depending upon when in the printing process the crease occurred. Some of the stamps in a pane with a paper crease will have a perf and/or a colour shift. Only an example of the crease reveals the true nature of the perf or colour shift variety.

Figure 11 shows a typical pre-printing crease on the 2c Laurier. The variety comes from John Sheffield, a London, Ont., dealer, who got it on consignment from Barrie, Ont. The original find was split into several pieces. Other examples illustrated in **Corgi Times** include a large, more or less vertical pre-printing crease on the 2c Laurier (Vol. III, No. 4, Jan.-Feb. 1995, p. 67) and a long thin vertical crease also on the 2c Laurier (Vol. VI, No. 4, Jan.-Feb. 1998, p. 65).

Although some may quibble, I ascribe the 38c QE II double-head variety referred to earlier to a paper crease rather than a corner fold. Certainly the corner of the sheet didn't simply fold over. The cause of the reversed offset is different than on the 1c Macdonald, but amazingly the effect is the same.

Paper creases are more common than corner folds. I estimate that there are at least five times as many creases as corner folds on the Caricature definitives.

Corner folds are spectacular varieties that are usually illustrated when offered at auction. It is this fact that made this article possible. However, folds are unique items with a receptive market. They can zip along from finder to dealer to collector without a blip in the philatelic literature. How many more corner folds are there on the Caricature definitives? Do you have one, or know of one?

I would like to thank John Hillmer, John Jamieson of Saskatoon Stamp Centre, Ron Brigham of Brigham Auctions Ltd., Robert Lee of Robert A. Lee Philatelist Ltd., Tony Maresch of R. Maresch & Son, and John Talman of John H. Talman Auctions for providing information and illustrations for this article.