

The Newfoundland Specialized Stamp Catalogue (NSSC): A Brief Survey of the First Six Editions by Thomas F. Nemeč

Both philatelists and collectors of Newfoundland stamps, stationery and postal history need to seek out reliable authoritative information if they wish to properly understand and evaluate what they are collecting and in particular what they are purchasing. Potential sources include stamp and auction catalogues (with prices realized), dealers' price lists, philatelic and historical publications and internet sources. John M. Walsh and John G. Butt, of St. John's in an effort to better understand their collections compared the results of their research with those of local, national and international specialists. Their efforts took them to archives, libraries, club meetings, shows and exhibitions as well to the homes of collectors willing to show varieties, rarities and possibly unique items. In 1988 they published a slim paperback that supplemented information found in standard catalogues. Boldly insisting on a new numbering system to replace the antiquated systems initially developed in the 19th century they challenged collectors to reconsider the organizing principles underlying the established systems. Based on the responses of fellow specialists - both positive and negative - they produced a second edition in 1992. Besides realistic prices for stamps and collateral material, it included Walsh's work on plate numbers and positions which challenged the work of some other specialists. John Butt's preliminary work on outport, town and urban post offices and cancels was also included. Since the coasts of the Colony had been the sites of seasonal fishing and whaling stations since the early sixteenth century it is not surprising that between 1200 and 1500 outports eventually were established - many of which had post offices - by the late 19th century. The 3rd edition in 1995 again demonstrated the authors' mutual interest in postal rates, recognizing unlisted perforation varieties and aerophilately. They also broadened their coverage to include pre-1949 viewcards or picture postcards (ppcs). By the 4th edition in 1998 - the last to which John G. Butt contributed - the list of ppcs had increased to over 3600. Most viewcards were published in the Edwardian era locally, elsewhere in North America and in Europe. Collecting different viewcards and mounting them in scrapbooks had become a popular hobby along with tourism and still photography. And as more collectors purchased the catalogue and shared opinion and information with the authors they were able to expand various sections, especially collateral material. Following the tragic accidental death of John Butt in 2000 Walsh continues the work thereby honouring his friend and co-worker's contributions. Although the 5th edition did appear in 2002 without Butt's wise counsel, it was informed by increasing internet use. A major addition was a list of 2100 advertising business covers and corner cards organized by various criteria. These covers reflect the Colony's economy and mercantile establishments, the effects of the depressions that followed the 1894 bank crash, the crash in saltcod prices after WW I and the worldwide depression from 1929 until the construction of U. S. installations, air and naval bases in WW II. As the collateral sections expanded, what was a specialized catalogue was obviously a handbook, an essential reference tool both for philatelists and collectors of ephemera.

The 6th edition (2006) challenged existing Canadian catalogues by incorporating substantial contributions on "New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island and Classic Canada to 1951." It was written by John Walsh "with assistance from C.R. McGuire and contributions from Charles J.G. Verge and detailed postal rate information from Brian D. Murphy." McGuire points out "It complements the period that Newfoundland existed as its own country (NSSC 2006:334). The cataloguing principle Walsh and Butt applied in 1988 to enumeration of Newfoundland issues continues, "... stamps printed from the same plate and/or with the same design are all listed together under one whole number." (p. 334). As a hefty, spiral bound volume of more than 500 pages, with illustrations in colour it is a continuing labour of love for Walsh and a testament to his colleague John G. Butt. The latest 7th edition has over 630 pages of detailed information.