

# Charles Connell and the price of vanity

Perhaps the finest compliment a country can pay to one of its great citizens is to feature the person on a commemorative postage stamp. The fact that millions of stamps are issued and seen by millions of people makes this form of acknowledgment very special. Furthermore, stamps, like diamonds, are "forever." Either their sheer number or rarity value guarantees their continued existence.

Both Canada and the United States, however, have a few rules that govern who will be featured on a postage stamp. In Canada, the first rule states that unless the person is royalty, he (or she) may not be shown on a stamp while still alive. Similar rules apply in the United States, with 10 years after death the general rule (and former presidents reduced to two years). Such restrictive rules, of course, make it rather difficult for a person to influence a decision on a stamp design which depicts himself. (See note below.)

In 1860, this stringent regulation was broken by Charles Connell, the postmaster gen-



*My Dear Ella: I have been asked many times if I had the stamps...*

eral of New Brunswick. Upon his own volition, Connell had his image shown on a new issue of a 5-cent New Brunswick postage

stamp, the most widely used denomination at that time (Scott 5). A few days before release of the printed stamps, copies were sent to the "stamp council" for approval. Exactly how this happened, assuming Connell was aware of the rule (if such was official at that time), is unclear.

Nevertheless, the council was enraged with the idea and ordered Connell to destroy all the stamps and the plates used to produce them. He also was ordered (or he volunteered) to reimburse the provincial treasure for all the costs involved with the production of the stamps.

Connell carried out the order of the council, but he had already given out stamp samples to a number of friends, and two sheets of 100 stamps each to his daughters, Alice and Ella. It is apparent, however, that Connell's vanity caused him much stress. After his death in 1873, and probably the subsequent deaths of his daughters, a letter came to light that had been written from Alice to Ella. It read in part:

*My Dear Ella: I have been asked many times if I had any of the stamps, and if I had, would I sell one of them. As you know, I had a whole sheet as you have. But I do not think we should make money out of something that caused our dear father so much mental anguish. I have burned mine. I pray that you will burn yours.*

The years slipped by and then in 1933 a pair of the stamps surfaced in England, the stamps appeared in a London auction in 1963. □



Charles Connell (Canada/New Brunswick #5)

**NOTE:** This article was written before the rules changed. Both the USA and Canada now depict living people (other than royalty in the case of the latter) on stamps.