A STAMP DEALERS REMINISCENCES
WRITTEN FROM ACTUAL EXPERIENCE
OR
RELIABLE INFORMATION
BY RUDOLPH C. BACH
(The Montreal Philatelist, Vol. 1, No. 7 – November, 1898)

THE ROMANCE OF A 12 PENCE CANADA.

One cold night in November 1851, two men were seated in a small room in a building facing the mighty St. Lawrence river. Montreal was a small city then. The principal firms had their offices and warehouses at the river front, in some instances almost at the brink of the mud wall which protected the city from floods in the spring-time, and this house was one of them. You could throw a stone from its window with ease into what was ten one of the deepest parts of the river in that vicinity, for there was the wharf where the Quebec boat moored. The night our story opens, the river was covered with a thin sheet of ice. The men in the little room were having a hot argument. On a small table stood an iron box, a small affair, the lid of which was open, showing it to be filled with documents of various kinds. Beside this box lay a large package with many seals, addressed and stamped. The stamp on it was – the 12 pence black. This very package was evidently the bone of contention between the two men. They were strangely contrasted. One, an elderly man with a firm resolute look, his hair streaked with grey, and the other a dissipated looking fellow of about 30 or so. It was he who was walking angrily up and down, while the other was standing by the table, his hand resting on the package. “No Clement,” he said, “I cannot let you have any of this money. It does not even belong to me. I was entrusted by Francois Rochette, of Quebec, to collect his accounts here, which I have done. To-morrow, the money will be mailed to him. No man shall ever say that Charles Goodwin betrayed his trust.” “But,” here broke in Clement, “I must have money” and under his breath he added, “I will have it too.” “You are always wanting money Clement Hanson.” retorted Goodwin. “Ever since I helped you up, you have been drawing money out of me, and it has got to stop. When your father, who was my best friend, died, his last words to me were, ‘Charles, take care of my boy.’ I promised him to do so, and have done so. I gave you a position, gave you money whenever you wanted it, and now, because I have no money on hand, you demand to rob those who trust me.” He had got excited while he spoke, and without knowing it, had taken his hand from the package on the table. Clement saw this, with a sudden spring he reached the table, grabbed the precious package. Quick as he was, however, Goodwin was nearer to the door and reached it first. He faced round and cried, “Thief, would you make me a ruined man? I, who have done so much for you? give me back that package, or I shall take it from you.” “Ha,” laughed Hanson, “I have it now and I am going to keep it.” Goodwin made a spring at him, grasping him by the neck, and wrenched the package from him. Struggling to and fro, they upset the lamp, which fell to the floor with a crash, the burning oil quickly setting fire to the wooden partitions. Goodwin, seeing the place on fire, released his hold on Hanson, and throwing the package into the iron box, he slammed the cover, and grasping it in his arms, made for the window. Hanson, who had reached the door, suddenly pulled out a pistol, and levelling it, fired, and Goodwin fell. Then he turned and fled down the stairs, for the fire was spreading rapidly, muttering to himself, “In the morning when they search the ruins, the box will be uninjured and will pass into my possession.” But Charles Goodwin was not dead, although badly wounded. With a superhuman effort he
reached the window, and lifting the precious box, put all his remaining strength into a last effort and threw it far out of the window into the river. It crashed through the thin ice and immediately sank. In those days the fire department was different from what it now is. The company reaching the scene first received a bonus from the insurance companies, consequently there was a great rivalry between the various stations. The man who brought the alarm to the station received a shilling. When the first hose company arrived at the fire, the house was almost destroyed, and all that could be done was to save neighbouring property. Next morning, the ruins were diligently searched by Hanson and others, but although Goodwin’s remains were found, no trace of the iron box was discovered. Goodwin’s death was put down to accident. Hanson was killed soon after in a drunken brawl.

Now let us skip forty-one years. All this time the iron box had lain on the bottom of the St. Lawrence, covered with an ever-increasing layer of mud. In 1892 Dredge No. 4 of the Montreal Harbor Commissioners, was dredging the channel opposite Jacques Cartier square. The depth of the channel was being increased from 20 to 32 feet. Suddenly one of the men on the mud scow, onto which the earth, etc., taken up by the dredge was dumped, noticed a rusty iron box. Nobody was looking, so securing it, he stowed it away inside the locker where he kept his clothes. That night he took it home, well wrapped up. There, the box was opened, and on top lay the package with a stamp on it, such as he had never seen before. This man was honest, he was not going to keep the money and papers if the heirs of the rightfully owner could be found after these many years. He went to his lawyer, who after a long search, found the heirs. In his gratitude at recovering the papers, which really were valuable title deeds, he presented the man with the package on which was this rare 12 pence, and with a handsome cheque besides. Through his lawyer, the man sold the 12 pence to a Montreal philatelist, for $350, and it now rests as the gem “par excellence” in a superb B.N.A. collection. And its present owner has good reason to be proud of it, for few stamps have such a history.

Note: Scott 2009 lists this stamp unused (which it is here as it never passed through the mails) at $110,000 USD. This issue has been sold in 2009 for almost $300,000; 2011 at $425,000 and in 2013 at $225,000.