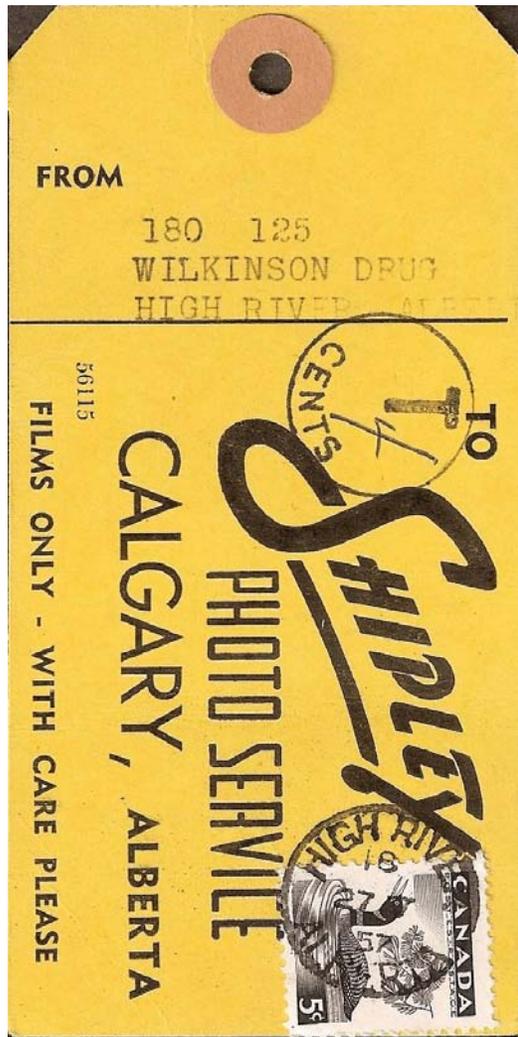


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THE SHIPLEY PARCEL TAGS

by Dale Speirs

Introduction.

In 2017, huge quantities of parcel tags came onto the Calgary philatelic market from a horde squirreled away by an unknown employee of Shipley Photo Service in Calgary. I was able to buy boxes of them at the monthly auctions of the Calgary Philatelic Society. I generally paid \$3 a box, with hundreds of tags in each, which proves it pays to belong to a stamp club.

These tags were used by clients of Shipley to send undeveloped rolls of film to Calgary. The clients were rural pharmacies and general stores who offered a film developing service to their local customers via Shipley. Most of the clients were in rural Alberta but there were a number of them in British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

The tags had common postage stamps on them, mostly definitives but a surprisingly large number of commemoratives and high values, depending on how many rolls of film were sent in the bag or package to which the parcel tag was attached.

I bought them for my Alberta postal history collection. There were only about thirty towns represented, and about three or four types of postmarks per town, so I quickly had a surfeit of tags. I therefore sorted the surplus by other themes.

I don't collect stamp varieties such as engraving marks or shades, but there was some interesting material in the tags by way of usages and cancel types. All of the tags are genuine commercial usage, never philatelic. All but one are addressed to Shipley in Calgary. The company also had an Edmonton branch. Where those tags ended up is unknown to me, if indeed any Edmonton employee saved them.

Shipley Photo Service.

John W.B. Shipley (1922-2001) was born in Calgary. He served in the RCAF during World War Two. Upon returning to civilian life, he took over the photofinishing operations of McDermid Drugs and transformed it into Shipley Photo Service, later opening a second plant in Edmonton. In 1985, the company closed down [1].

The Calgary tags were almost all bright yellow and pre-addressed to Shipley. They had the return address of the client store embossed by an Addressograph machine or mimeographed. That makes it very handy to determine where blind cancels such as rollers and killer corks were applied. The reverse side was blank. The yellow was printed, not part of the cardstock, because often the two sides are different shades. Shipley supplied the tags to its clients as part of its service.

The tags were produced in large rolls. The client simply tore one off, applied the stamps, and attached the bag or packet of undeveloped rolls of film. The tags had a five-digit code somewhere on the address side which was the printer's job number and indicated what year they were produced.

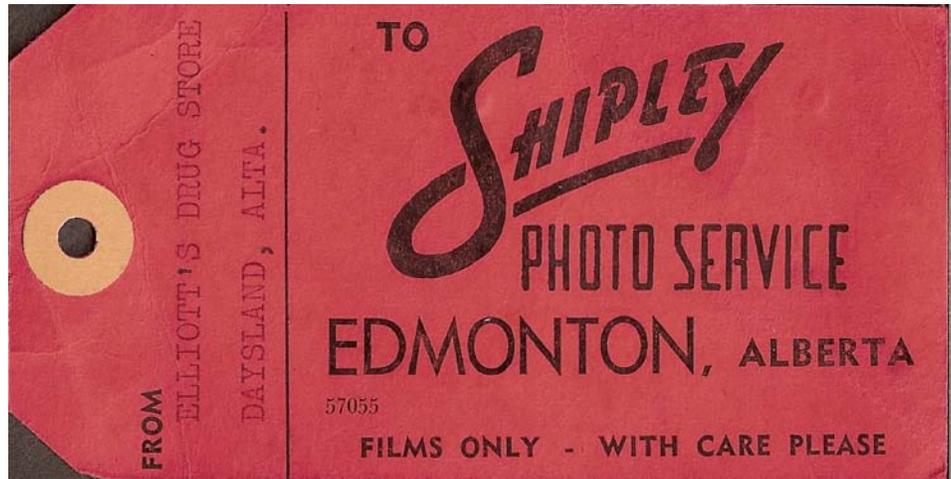
References.

[1] Glenbow Archives (downloaded 2017-06-10) Fonds Glen-3820, John Shipley fonds. ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesMainSearch.aspx



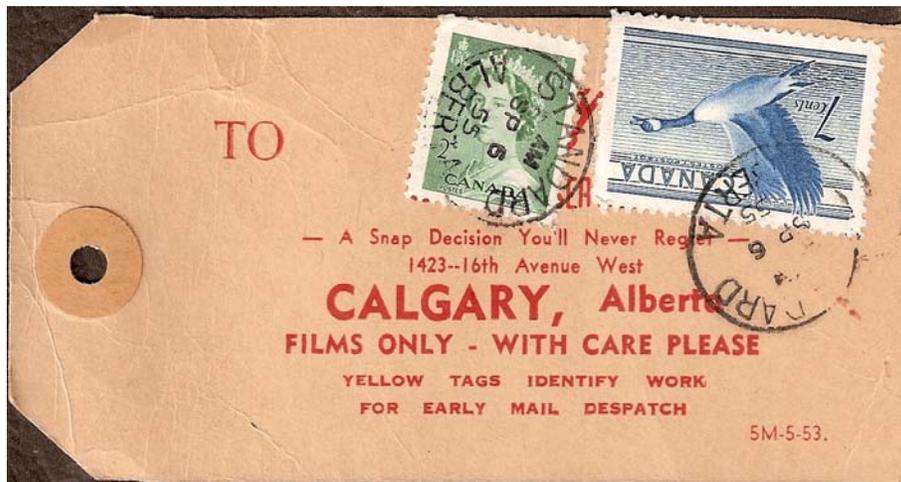
A typical tag is shown at left. The stamps were sometimes applied on the address side but more typically on the blank reverse.

Edmonton tags were bright red. The only example I have of an Edmonton tag, which somehow got mixed into the Calgary lots, is shown below.



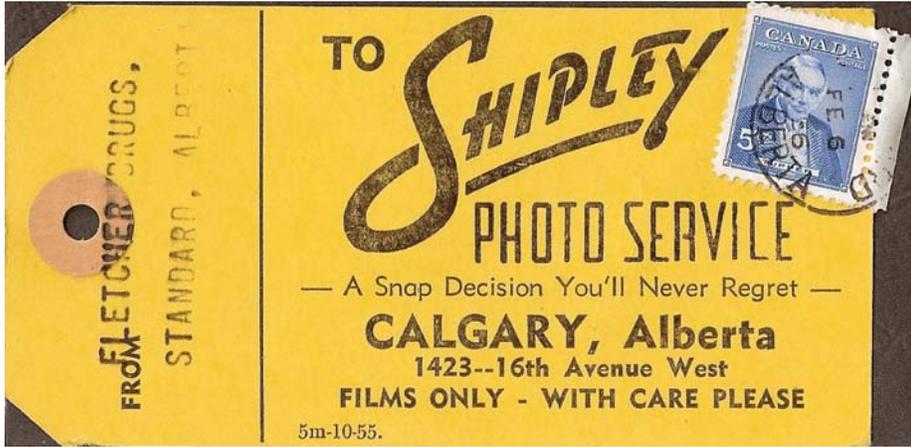


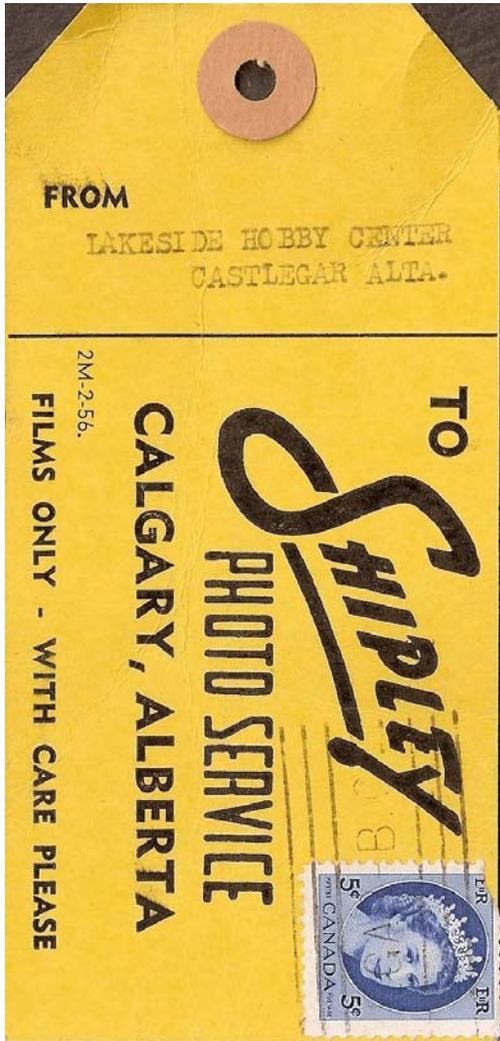
Over the years there were a number of variations in the tags as one might expect. All but a few had black text, but early in the company's history some tags had red text. The company seems to have initially used colour-coded tags to quickly sort incoming film. At left is a red-lettered yellow tag with a 1953 job number on the lower right corner of the tag.



This is from the same year (note the printer's job number) but is a buff tag with a different job number. It was apparently used for lower-priority films. This system seems to have been discontinued several years later because all tags to Calgary were yellow thereafter.

Below is another variation from 1955; note the printer's job number in the lower left.



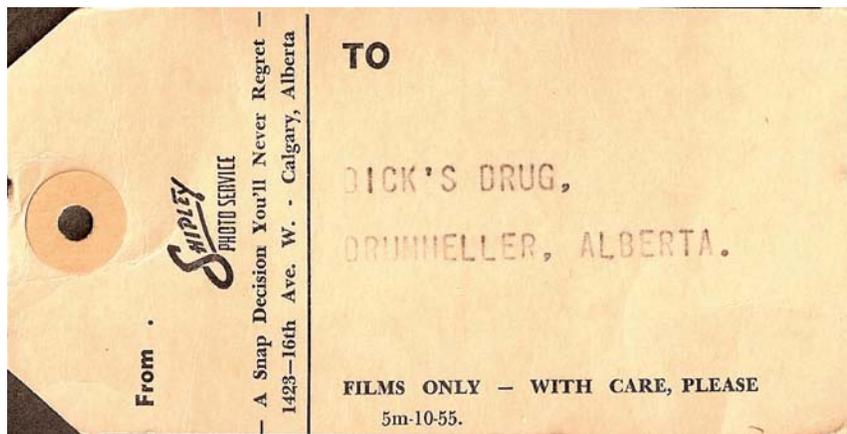


Shipley mimeographed or Addressographed its clients addresses on the rolls of tags but slipped up on one occasion. At left is a tag with the return address of Castlegar, Alberta. This wouldn't have made any difference when the client mailed the films from British Columbia. It must have been quickly corrected because this is the only example I have. The roller cancel shows the Castlegar, B.C., postmark.

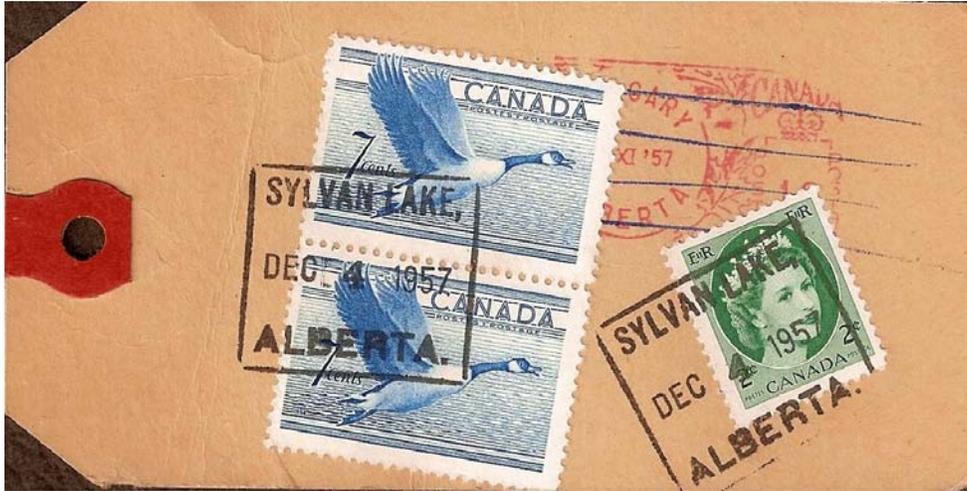
A number of tags are simply pieces of cardboard cut to shape and size and then addressed and stamped to Shipley. Evidently the client had run out of the pre-printed tags and used whatever was at hand. Some of them used miniature tags of the kind used for key tags or small items. I collect miniature envelopes and postcards, and so was delighted to add them to that collection. An example is shown below.



For obvious reasons, there are only a handful of tags going in the opposite direction when Shipley mailed the developed photographs back to the client. Shipley paid the postage with a meter imprint. The two sides of an example are shown below.



Sometimes the client recycled the tags, putting stamps over the Shipley meter mark. The other side of this tag has the Shipley address overwritten atop the original address.

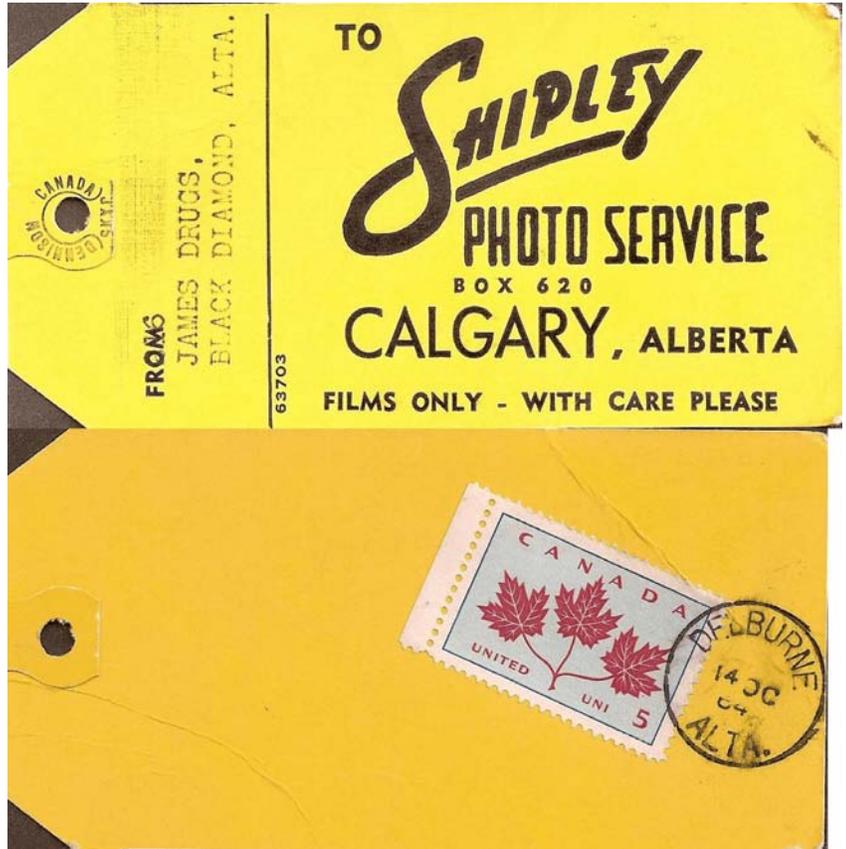


Postal Usages.

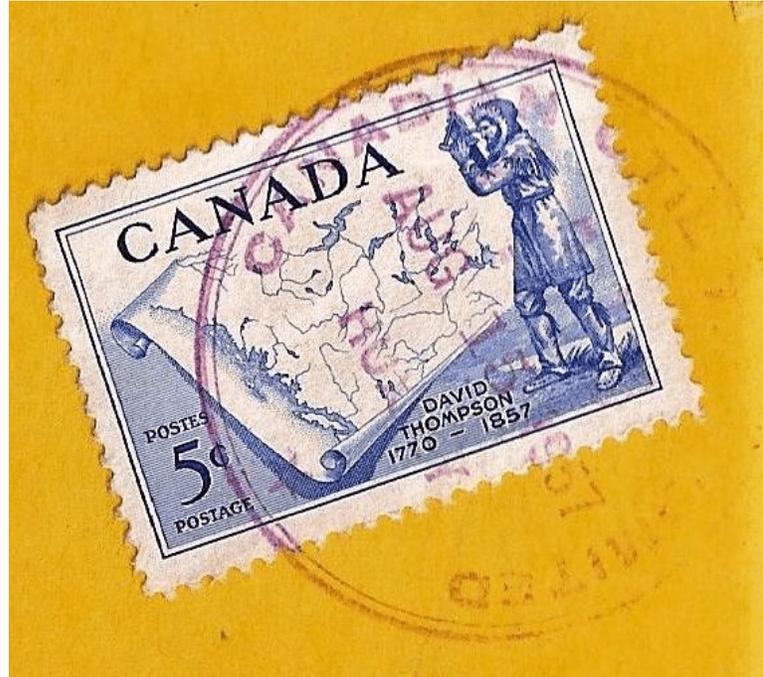
Unless stated otherwise, all post offices cited are in Alberta. There are some strange anomalies in the postmarks. At right is a tag for a client in Black Diamond, about 30 km southwest of Calgary, but the reverse side was postmarked in Delburne, about 175 km north-northeast of the city.

It couldn't have been a mis-sort because it would have been postmarked in Black Diamond before any mis-sent accident occurred. It may have been that the Black Diamond client was visiting Delburne when he discovered he had forgotten to mail the item and still had it in his pocket, so he dropped it in the mails there to expedite the package.

(Variation in tag colour is an artifact of scanning.)



Here is an example (graphically cropped) of a tag mailed from Huxley but cancelled with a private Canadian Utilities Ltd handstamp, not the post office cancel. At that time, the post office was in a general store.





At first I thought I might sort out examples of different postage rates and weight classes, but this quickly proved impossible. In order to do it properly, I would have to know the weight of the film rolls and how many there were, not to mention the constantly changing postal rates during the 1950s and 1960s, the era of these tags.

As an example, here are three different tags mailed from Arrowwood during a nine-day period in August 1956, each paid with a different amount of postage. This obviously reflects the number of rolls of film that were sent.

Of thousands of tags, I have only seen one Special Delivery tag, shown below. It was sent from Vulcan in 1964. A customer must have been in a frantic rush for the developed pictures. It is possible the client store absorbed the substantial cost of the extra postage, but more probably surcharged the customer for the amount.

I doubt if any time was saved. Vulcan is only an hour from central Calgary by road, and by 1964 the mails were transported by truck, not train. The postmarks indicate that the films were received in Calgary the following day, which would have been the normal service anyway. Possibly the Special Delivery saved a day in Calgary after arrival.

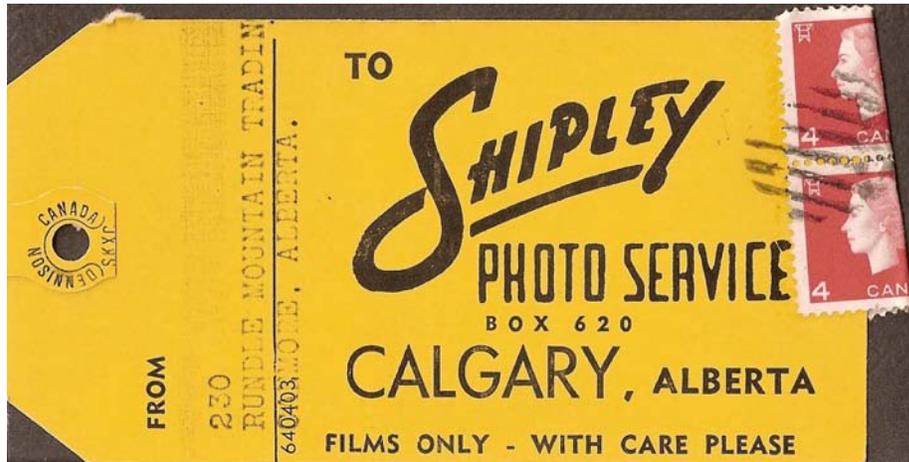


Postmarks: General Comments.

Rural post offices often used their original cancelling devices for decades after they had become obsolete elsewhere. The amount of mail they processed was small enough that the cancellers never wore out. Here is a duplex cancel used in Vulcan in 1964.



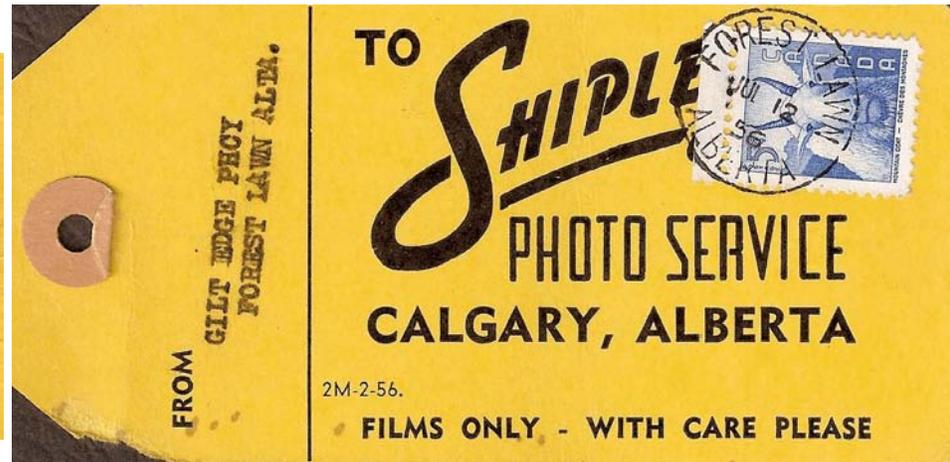
The Shipley tags are particularly useful for identifying where blind cancels such as rollers or killers were applied, since the address of the sender was printed on the tag. One particular example I noted was that all but a few tags sent from Canmore did not have dated postmarks but had the stamps cancelled with a barred killer. Below left is an example proving the point of origin. A better and much clearer Canmore strike is shown below right, graphically cropped from the blank side. This cancel was used over many years in the 1950s and 1960s.



A type of postmark that doesn't get the respect it deserves is the barrel cancel, a large postmark used in the 1950s. The only example I found in the Shipley tags was from Lethbridge in 1955, as seen below left (graphically cropped).

Below right is an example of a postmark that requires a bit of historical knowledge. Non-Calgarians may not know that Forest Lawn was annexed by Calgary in 1961. It is on the far side of the Bow River valley from the downtown and is today a central suburb, although back then it was out in the boonies. This tag was mailed from the Gilt Edge Pharmacy. I checked the post-1961 tags to see if there were any from this drugstore with Calgary postmarks but there were none.

This leads to a point worth considering. None of the tags were Calgary to Calgary, nor any of the surrounding villages such as Forest Lawn, Montgomery, or Bowness that were subsequently swallowed up by the city. I suspect that Shipley had its own pick-up and delivery service within the city, or else hired a common carrier.



Special Dates.

I checked all the dated stamps to see if any were first day of issue tags, but no such luck. I don't know if this was because the person who compiled these tags picked them out or if rural post offices were always late in opening packages of new stamps. Given that about three-quarters of the tags had undated roller cancels, it is possible that some of them may have been first day tags but can never be recognized as such.

One tag that isn't a first day but matches another date is shown below, a strip of three of the Alberta-Saskatchewan 50th anniversary stamp. It was issued on June 30, 1955, well ahead of the actual date the two provinces came into existence, which was September 1. The strip is postmarked from Kindersley, Saskatchewan, and the date is September 1, 1955, a perfect match for the theme of the stamps.



Postmarks: Roller Cancels.

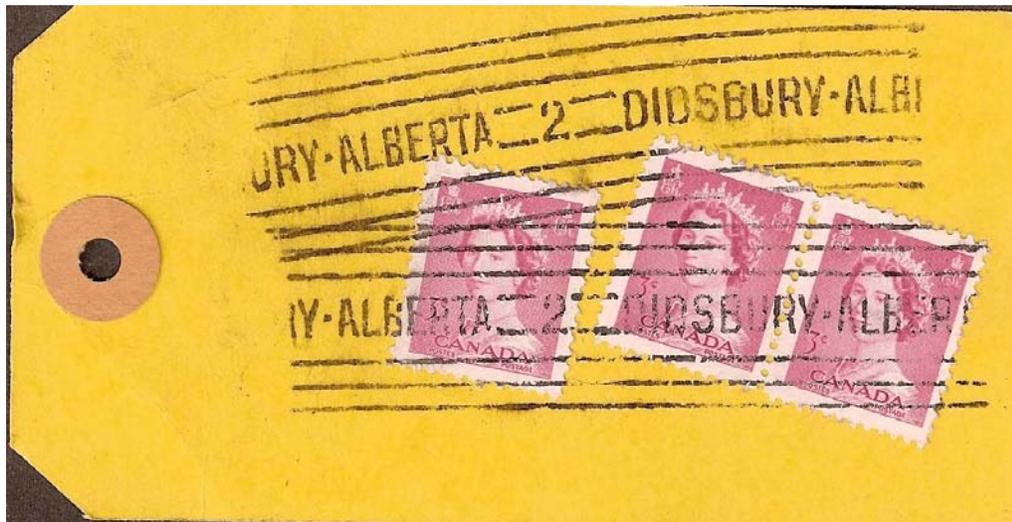
Blind roller cancels can only be identified by the client name on the tag, but some towns had rollers with their names embedded in the cancellers. Named roller cancels came in many styles over the years. This is the Brooks roller cancel, which was used quite often by that post office and shows the large letter style.



Below is another common style of roller (graphically cropped), this one from Bellevue, with the name perpendicular to the roller.



Some post offices had more than one roller cancel for their parcels and odd lots, as shown here, a Three Hills #1 cancel (graphically cropped), and a Didsbury #2 roller.





The Didsbury roller cancel shows an error on one of the tags, with an 11 instead of a 1. This is not blurred ink; the numerals are clear and distinct. The vertical bars are different as well.

A few of the parcel tags out of hundreds were uncanceled at the originating post office and missed by the receiving post office, that is, Calgary. They did catch most of them though, and thus some of the tags have Calgary cancels even though mailed from a rural town. Below is an example of a dated roller cancel after an uncanceled tag was caught by a Calgary postie.



Below is a classic example of the type of cancel that has raised the ire of generations of philatelists around the world, the crayon cancel. This one was mailed from Olds, and the crayon roller, if I can call it that, could have been applied at either end. I found only six crayon scribbles in the thousands of parcel tags I sorted. This may have been because whoever set aside the tags at Shipley threw out the spoiled ones.



From out of province, I illustrate examples from Eston, Saskatchewan, and Creston, British Columbia (both graphically cropped).



Postmarks: Railway Post Offices.

Shipley had customers in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, as a result of which a few of the tags had RPO postmarks. I haven't found any RPO strikes from British Columbia, but several tags came along the Saskatoon and Drumheller line. RPO postmarks would have been rare since by the middle 1950s most mail transportation had shifted from trains to trucks.

Below left is a 1955 postmark (graphically cropped) on a tag sent by a Kindersley, Saskatchewan, client. The tag below right was dispatched from a Rosetown, Saskatchewan, client in 1958. Both of them went along the same rail line.



Postage Dues.

The complexity of postal rates and weight increments was such that numerous film shipments must have slipped through at incorrect payments. However, there were a dozen or so Shipley tags with postage due assessed, indicating that someone in the Calgary post office was at least doing spot inspections. There is no indication on all but one of the tags that the amounts due were collected, but this may have been done with a card or bulk payment by Shipley. The photo processor had a huge mail business and likely used ledger sheets or cards to settle up with the post office.

Below is the only tag I have seen with a postage due label attached, a 2-cents label of the 1935 issue. It was mailed from Eston, Saskatchewan, sometime in the late 1950s. The postmark date didn't impress onto the tag, but the reverse side has a printer's job number indicating it was printed in 1955.



The majority of tags marked with postage due were only for 2 or 4 cents, indicating the films were short paid by 1 or 2 cents respectively, since double the deficiency was charged. Examples are shown below, from High River owing 2 cents, and from Pincher Creek owing 4 cents.



The largest amount seen is 18 cents due from Pincher Creek, indicating a short payment of 9 cents.



Stamps: General.

The stamps applied were what the local post office had at hand, although a few mailers had their own postage meters and applied meter strips. As to be expected, the vast majority were QE2 definitives, mostly Wildings. Rural post offices often carried stocks of obsolete stamps for many years. An example from the Shipley tags is shown here (graphically cropped), where King George VI stamps were still being used in 1958 in the village of Beiseker. I suspect the postmaster had cleaned out some desk drawers and found them buried in the back.



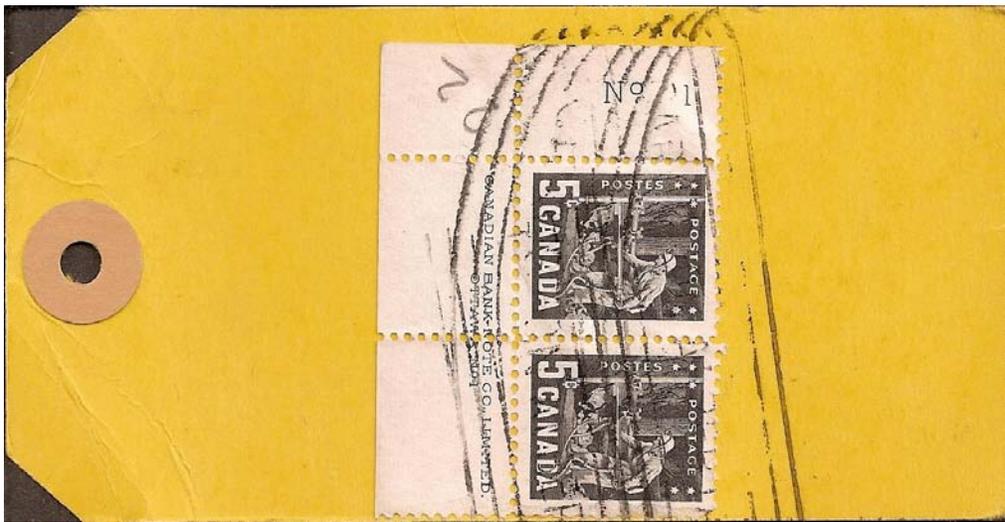


Plate blocks were rare in the boxes of tags but their occurrence indicated genuine non-philatelic use.

At left is a Cardston tag, and below left is from Stettler. I only found four plate block inscriptions out of thousands of tags.



Stamps: QE2 Definitives.

The vast majority of the Shipley tags, about three-quarters by visual estimate, used QE2 definitive stamps in various combinations, often with commemoratives. The Karsh Portrait design was issued in 1953. The following year it was replaced by the Wilding Portrait series, which had a much longer lifespan until the Cameo series appeared in 1962. The tags with stamps only from one of the issues, excluding single stamp tags, are rare. Much more common was a mixture of Karsh and Wilding stamps. In absolute quantities though, the Wildings were by far the most common on the tags. This is not surprising given the longer lifespan of the Wildings.

Almost all of the Karsh stamps in the Shipley tags were the 3-cents carmine-rose and the 4-cents violet. There were a few 2-cents green mixed with other stamps, and none of the other Karsh values. Below is a single 2-cents stamp used with a block of 4-cents, mailed from Olds. I never found any multiples of the 2-cents Karsh.





The largest block of 3-cents Karsh within the tags mix is shown at left, used from Claresholm. Below left is the largest pure use of the 4-cents Karsh I found, a block of six and a single mailed from Claresholm.





At left (graphically cropped) is the most typical kind of tag in all the boxes I went through, a mixture of several values of Wildings.

As I sorted through the tags, I kept an eye out for the largest blocks of a single value. Starting with the brown 1-cent value, below left is a block of six used from Drumheller in 1955.



There was also a larger block of eight plus a pair used on a double non-Shipley tag, seen below. After sixty years, the Scotch tape used to hold the two tags together had dried out. It fell apart when I opened it up to see the inside where the return address was.

The tag was mailed from Fort Macleod in 1956. The address was a vague “Shipley Photo Studio” and the package therefore returned to sender. He added “Calgary” in the same handwriting but a different colour ink. It went through the second time, as proven by the fact that it wound up in the Shipley accumulation.





The largest block I found of the green 2-cents Wilding is shown at left. It was mailed from Milk River in 1958 and was cancelled in red ink. All the postmarks from Milk River of this era that I have seen are in red ink, so there is no special significance to the colour.



The red 3-cents Wilding is shown below left. The multiple of two strips of four is the biggest I have found, although the stamp was commonly mixed in with different values on other tags. The roller cancel is Claresholm #1, almost unreadable but which could be easily verified by looking at the sender's return address on the other side.

The purple 4-cent Wilding was by far and away the single most common stamp on all the tags, commonly used to make up the postage with other stamps. Below is the largest block of them found on the tags, with a beautiful clear Brooks roller cancel.

Pause for digression: In going through these tags and looking at all the different types of postmarks, it was obvious which postal clerks had pride in their jobs and who were just putting in pensionable time. Claresholm, in this era, had dirty worn postmarks, while other post offices such as Brooks, Rocky Mountain House, and Drumheller had clear readable cancels.





The blue 5-cents Wilding, also a commonly used value, is shown at left. It was mailed from Didsbury with 39 cents in postage, indicating a fair number of film rolls.

The orange 6-cents Wilding was the least commonly used stamp of that series. Below it is seen with the Canmore barred cancel, its point of origin verified by the return address on the other side. I'm surprised the 6-cents Wilding wasn't used more often for larger packages.





In 1962, the Cameo issue began, the second ugliest depiction of the Queen ever done by Canada Post. (The 1953 Coronation stamp still remains as one of the worst stamp designs in Canadian history.) These stamps had dark solid backgrounds which made postmarks illegible.

The Shipley tags had some but not many of these. I found no large multiples, but did spot a 4-cents coil pair from Eston, Saskatchewan. This is shown here as a graphically cropped image.

Coil stamps are not normally sold by post offices in ones or a few at a time. The customer has to buy the entire roll. This pair was mailed from the Eston Co-op, so presumably they used enough stamps to buy them in coils.

Stamps: QE2 Commemoratives.

There were a fair number of stamps commemorating the Queen during the 1950s, with and without Prince Phillip, mainly because they made several Royal Visits during that decade. The earliest I found on the tags was actually a hangover from 1948, a Princess Elizabeth wedding stamp used in 1956 with a Karsh QE2 stamp from Bassano (below left, graphically cropped).

The 1957 Royal Visit stamp was very common in the Shipley mix. Other QE2 commemoratives are relatively rare, but Canada Post seems to have pushed quite a few of the 1957 stamps out to the rural post offices, judging by their use. The tag below right has a strip of this stamp used by a client in Golden, British Columbia.





Pietro Annigoni's famous portrait of the Queen, which she has said was her favourite, was used on the 1959 Royal Visit stamp. At left is a usage of this stamp. It was relatively scarce among the tags.

Below (graphically cropped) is a use of the 1964 Royal Visit stamp five days after issue. In searching through the thousands of Shipley tags, I have not found any first day cancels of this or any other stamp.



Stamps: Prime Ministers.



During the 1950s, there was an ongoing series depicting Prime Ministers of Canada, used as definitives although technically commemoratives. These are the second-most common type of stamps in the Shipley tags. The stamps were issued at 3-, 4-, and 5-cents values, with no lower values.

As a consequence, they appear either as singletons paying for one roll of film, or as multiples with QE2 stamps to make up a 1- or 2-cents deficiency. Here are the 4-cents Bennett and 5-cents Tupper values respectively.

Stamps: High Values.

Philatelists of a certain age can recall when 10-cent and higher stamps were considered to be high value stamps. Because the Shipley tags were often sent with many rolls in a package, the high values of that era are fairly common.

The most commonly used high value in the Shipley lot was the 10-cent Inuk kayaker stamp issued in 1955. The tag below shows a frequent type of single stamp use of this stamp, originating in 1959 from just over the border in Field, British Columbia. It is on the Trans-Canada Highway and thus would have come direct to Calgary with only a few intervening stops. Below right (graphically cropped) is another British Columbian use, from Golden, where the stamp was supplemented with makeup postage.





A 10-cents stamp that was commonly used on the Shipley tags was the Fur Resources stamp of 1950, as seen at left (graphically cropped).

The use of 15-cents commemoratives was rare, and I only found a couple of them in thousands of tags. Below left is graphically cropped from a tag mailed from Sylvan Lake in 1957 with that year's stamp in honour of the Universal Postal Union conference in Ottawa.

A few years later, the Sylvan Lake post office used the 1963 Flying Geese 15-cents value, mailed in 1964. It is shown graphically cropped below right.



The 15-cents Gannet stamp was issued in 1954 but was still in use for a long time thereafter. Below is a 1957 use of it from Claresholm. The roller cancel is undated but the printer's job number indicates the tag was ordered in 1957. The job number is somewhat ambiguous because the last two digits might indicate it was printed in 1955. However, by comparing with the job number of the tag on page 41, it is obvious the year date was the first two digits.





The use of 20-cents stamps was not as common on the tags as were multiple copies of 10-cents stamps. At left is Hanna, in 1955, (graphically cropped) and below left is Gleichen, in 1964, showing two types of 20-cents stamps used for bulkier film packages. Note, incidentally, that Gleichen was using a duplex canceller as late as 1964.





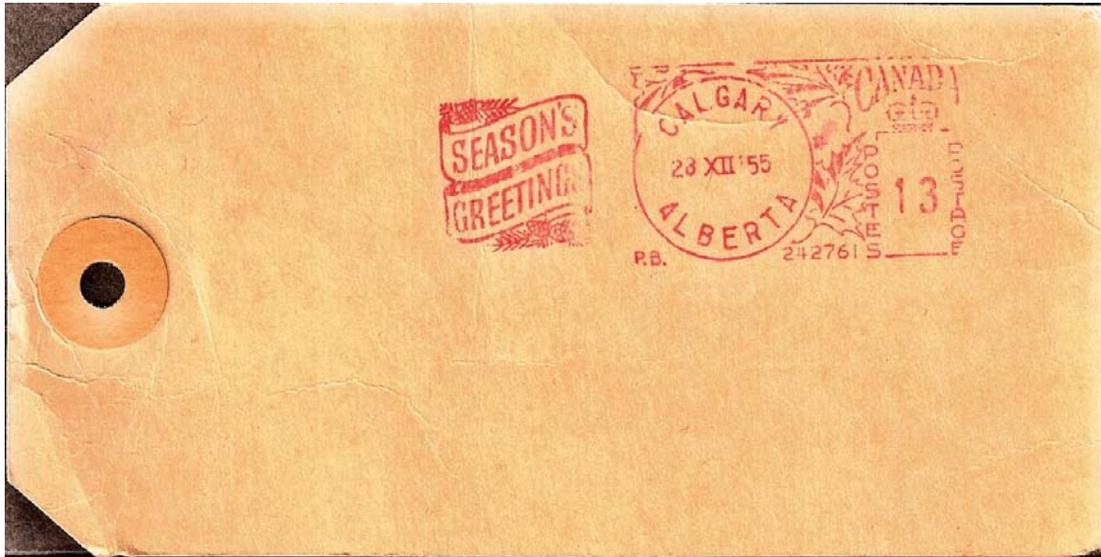
The highest payment I have found in a Shiple tag using high-value stamps is at left, where 32 cents was needed for the quantity of film rolls. This was mailed sometime in the late 1950s, and was equivalent to modern-day mailers paying \$5 to mail a package from a retail postal outlet.

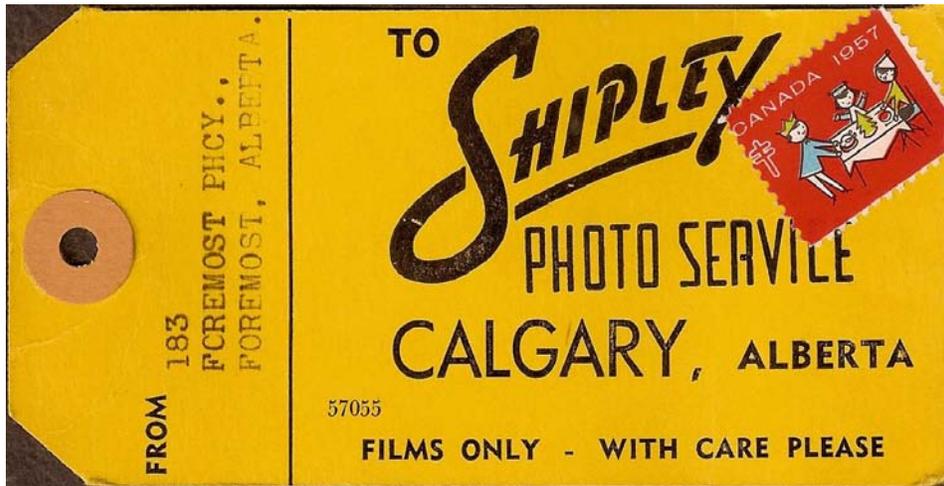


Canada Post issued a red 25-cent Chemical Industries stamp in 1956 that saw little use. In all the thousands of tags I sorted, I only found two of them used, one of which is shown below left (graphically cropped).

Stamps: Christmas.

Shipley returned the developed photos using tags with meter marks. Figure 66 shows a tag with a seasonal meter mark from Shipley. It is dated December 28, 1955. I'm sure that the post-Christmas and New Year's Day period was very busy for Shipley as customers sent in all their holiday snaps.

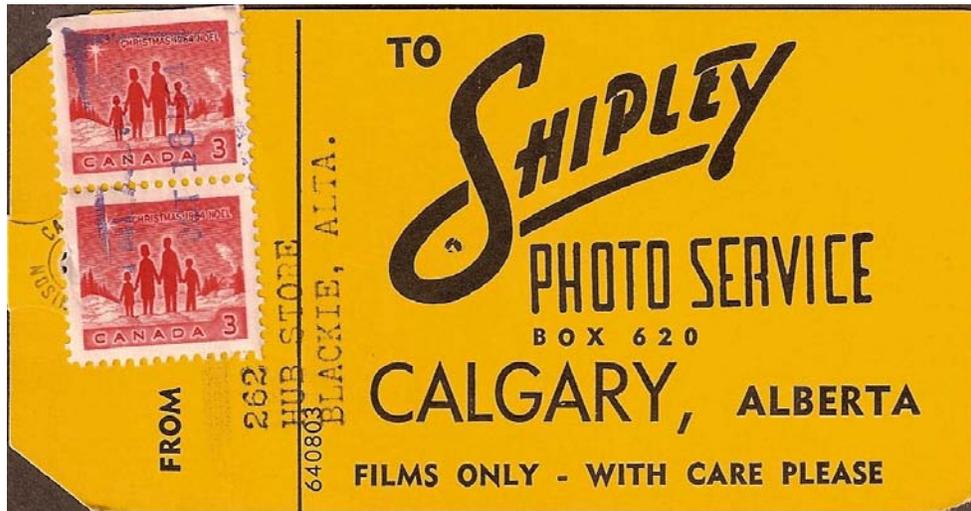




In November 1957, the Foremost Pharmacy, of the village of Foremost in deep southeastern Alberta, used Christmas seals on its tags. Perhaps the pharmacist wanted to brighten up the day for the Shipley employees.

Two examples are shown here. This is the only genuine commercial use of Christmas seals I have ever seen on parcel tags.

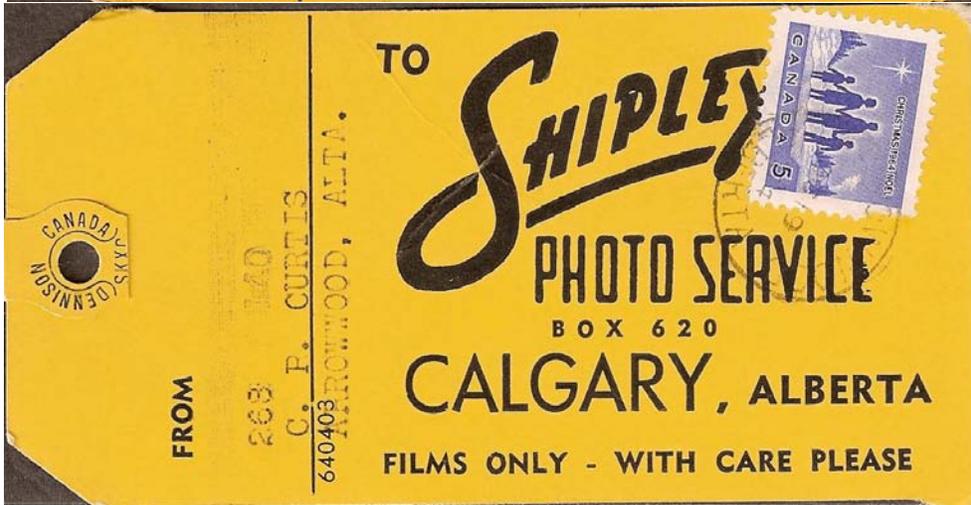




Despite the fact that the Christmas season was the busiest time for photofinishers, not even a half-dozen Shipley tags were found with Christmas stamps. This may be due to the fact that the tags I examined only went up to early 1965, and Canada's first regular Christmas stamps weren't issued until 1964.

(The 1898 Map stamp is considered the world's first Christmas stamp but it wasn't issued nor used for that purpose.)

I found a few tags with the 1964 issue. The stamp appeared in two denominations, a red 3-cents stamp and a blue 5-cents, and were available as miniature sheets called Cello-Paqs. They were only found on tags by themselves, not as or with make-up stamps.



Stamps: Straight-Edge Varieties.

I did not check any of the stamps for shades, perforation varieties other than straight edges, ultraviolet reaction, paper type, or engraving variations such as retouches or line breaks. Only what was immediately obvious to the eye without a magnifying glass or some instrument was segregated, such as straight edges or strongly off-center stamps.

The QE2 Wilding stamps were produced as regular sheets with selvedge, coils, two-rowed booklet panes, and Cello-Paq miniature sheets. If the stamps on a Shipley tag had a straight edge, I was often able to tell which format it came from. I did not find any coils.

A block of 5-cents Wildings is shown here, mailed from Turner Valley in the early 1960s. The block has straight edges along the bottom and right side, but the top side is perforated. Therefore it came from a Cello-Paq. If it was from a sheet, it would have selvedge, and if from a booklet, which had two rows, the top edge would be straight as well.





Here is a strip of four 2-cents Wildings that could only have come from a Cello-Paq. The stamps are straight-edged along the bottom, and the righthand stamp is straight-edged on the side.

The tag at below left has two singles from a Cello-Paq, and was mailed from Eckville in 1962. The lefthand stamp is straight-edged on its top and left sides, only possible if it came from a Cello-Paq miniature sheet. The righthand stamp is straight-edged along its top.



That configuration is possible with a booklet stamp, but it is improbable that the sender tore a stamp from a Cello-Paq sheet, but then got out a booklet for the second stamp.

Here (graphically cropped) is an L-shaped piece of 5-cent booklet stamps with a 1-cent sheet stamp added to make up the postage. The three 5-cent stamps are still connected, not merely placed together. The top and bottom of the piece are straight-edged, but the sides are perforated, which is possible only in a booklet.



Stamps: Off-Centre Oddities.

Canada Post specified standards in its stamp printing contracts for allowable variations in the production of the stamps. Major printing errors were not condoned, but items that didn't affect the usability of the stamps were ignored.

I found about a dozen Karsh and Wilding QE2 stamps that were noticeably off-centre but still okay for selling across the post office counter. These are not errors. Minor faults such as these are at best oddities and command no premium in the marketplace. The off-centres shown here are all graphically cropped from the tag scans.



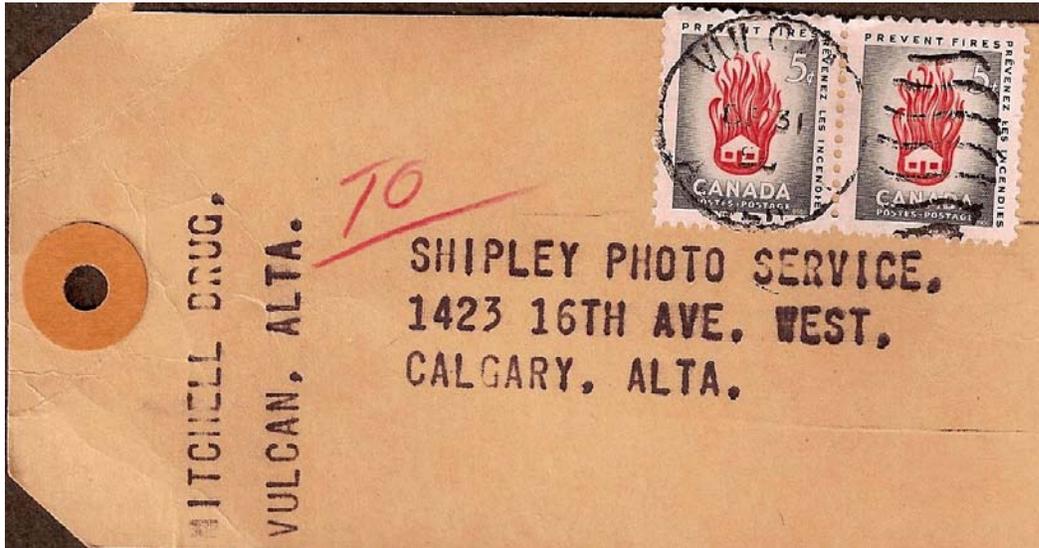
The graphically-cropped image here has a reasonably spaced 3-cents Wilding and a 4-cents Wilding with an obvious downward shift. The Eckville roller cancel is undated, but the tag has a 1958 printer's job order number on the other side.

The image at below left was mailed from Gleichen in 1956. All three Karsh stamps have the same off-centre shift, indicating that they came from one sheet. The image at below right (both images graphically cropped) came from Bellevue; the printer's job number on the other side was 1955. The shifts in the stamps are different than the Gleichen stamps, indicating that off-centres were an ongoing product of the printing press.



Stamps: Design Oddities.

In 1956, a stamp was issued publicizing fire prevention, showing a burning house. An example used on a Shipley tag is shown below left. It didn't take long before people noticed that if the stamp was upside-down, then the design appeared to be that of a long-haired woman (below right, graphically cropped).



That same year, a block of four stamps was issued on the theme of recreational sports. Three of the stamps depicted swimming, skiing, and fishing, all very harmless (unless you're a fish, of course). The fourth one was for hunting, and showed a hunter who just fired his rifle, shown below, graphically cropped. Nothing wrong with the design per se, but it would be politically incorrect to issue it today.



Meters.



A few of Shipley's clients had postage meters and used strips therefrom to pay the postage on the tags. An example of a single-rate meter strip is shown at left.

In those days, postage meters had relatively low limits on the maximum amount of postage that could be printed on a single strip. Below left is a parcel tag mailed from a client who had to put several strips on the tag to make up the postage rate of 62 cents. It must have been a heavy package indeed, with quite a few rolls of film.

