

A review of OH/MS perfins issued by the Canadian Post Office

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The four-hole OH/MS perfins on the stamps of Canada are extremely common, but you can still find expensive stamps in this field and from the authors' research you can also find fakes. One way to find these fakes is to know the history of the Post Office's involvement in perforating stamps.

Before we go into this history we should point out how this history can help identify some fake perfins quickly.

In a November 1980 Toronto dealer's auction, a lot was described as "Sissons No. OCE1-4 mint set of four complete. First three inverted horizontal 'OHMS.' OCE4 is vertical (F) VF-NH....Cat. \$200.00."

On a following page the auction catalog shows a photograph of CE4. One look at this stamp and a person can tell by knowing the history that the OHMS is a fake. Just in passing, the current Lyman's price for the same material not perforated was \$17.50.

The history of the four-hole OHMS perforated stamps starts back on the 10th of May 1938 when the Treasury Board issued minute T.173975B which in part stated that "The Post Office Department is to make arrangements required to provide that all stamps sold to the Government are perforated with the letters OHMS."

The regulation was to go into effect on the 1st of July 1938. It was initiated as a result of the quantity of postage stamps that had been stolen from Government departments.

The Government, however, made one small error: they forgot



Figure 1. The Department of Finance used their Cummins Model 52 perforator to perforate the five-hole OHMS pattern. The machine could perforate five small stamps across and three stamps deep.

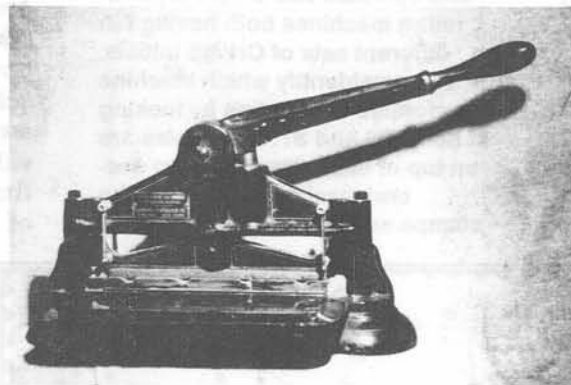


Figure 2. The Post Office Department ordered two Cummins Model 53 perforators, one in 1939 and the other in 1945. With one machine they could perforate ten small stamps across and three stamps deep with their four hole OH/MS design. Tests done by the Post Office show that they could perforate between 40,000 and 50,000 stamps per hour with each machine.

to inform the Post Office Department prior to the 1st of June 1938!

The Treasury Board again issued the same regulation, word for word, on the 18th of March 1939 under minute T.170926B which was to go into effect on

the 1st of July 1939. This time the Post Office was informed and they did some experiments with the five-hole OHMS perforator which was borrowed from the Department of Finance.

This five-die Cummins Model 52 perforator was found to be too small for the job so an order was placed for a ten-die Cummins Model 53 perforator through the Ottawa distributor of the Cummins Perforator Company of Chicago. The order was placed on the 31st of May 1939 with a delivery time of "...at least three weeks...."

The ordered machine did not arrive in time to meet the July 1st deadline. This delivery problem, we might add, was the reason the Department of Finance's five-hole OHMS perforating machine was used by the Post Office.

The volume of stamps that the Post Office was perforating was increasing, with 22,158,036 stamps being handled in 1945 alone.

By April 1945 the 1939 perforating machine was showing signs of wear and was in need of repair but "...due to the demand for perforating stamps, he (Mr. Deaville) cannot allow the machine to be taken out (of service) for any length of time." An electric operated machine (a Cummins Model 56) was to be ordered but it was found that due to the war conditions the electrically driven machine was not available.

An order was placed for a second Cummins Model 53 perforator on the 30th of June 1945. By January 1946, the new machine still had not arrived but "...the plate on the present hand-

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“Buyer Beware” when purchasing high value OH/MS perfins

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machine is beginning to show definite signs of wear.” The second hand-operated machine was finally supplied to the Postage Stamp Division of the Post Office on the 21st of June 1946.

The first perforating machine was kept around, but by 1949 it was so badly damaged, mainly because it had never been repaired, that in October of that year it was destroyed by the Post Office.

In July 1949, the decision to overprint stamps with O.H.M.S. was made, which greatly reduced the use of the second perforating machine. Machine number two was reactivated to full service in January and February 1950 to perforate the two- and three-cent revised design of King George VI 1949 stamp issues because of the temporary shortage of overprinted stamps.

The two Post Office perforating machines each had ten sets of pins or dies to form the insignia OH/MS but no two dies were identical. There is, however, enough similarity between the dies that you can visually distinguish the dies of the first perforating machine from the dies of the second perforating machine.

The key is in the S, holes number S6 and S7.

In the second machine the two holes are generally one above the other. In the first machine the two holes are clearly staggered. An easy way to find what the dies of the first perforating machine looks like is to study the 1937 King George VI issue because, according to the authors’ research, the second machine was never used to perforate these stamps. For the second machine’s dies you should look at the 1949 King George VI issue with Postes & Postage.

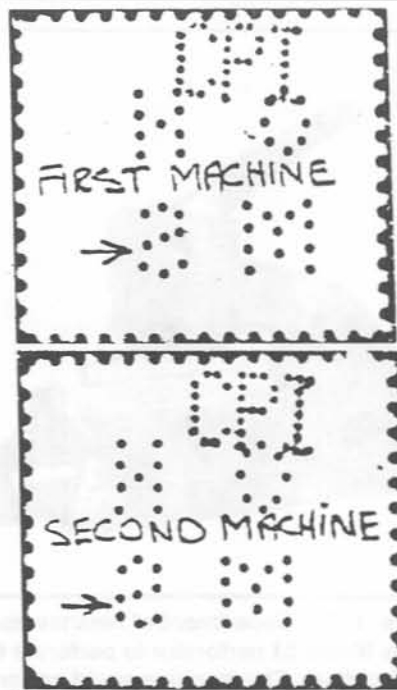


Figure 3. The Post Office owned and operated two different perforating machines both having ten different sets of OH/MS initials. You can identify which machine perforated the stamps by looking at holes S6 and S7. If the holes are on top of each other then the second machine perforated the stamps sometime after the 21st of

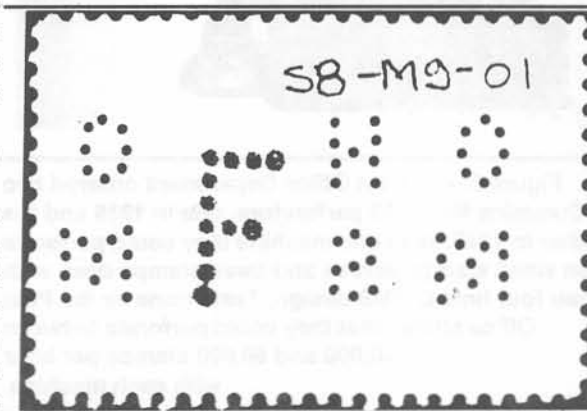


Figure 4. This four hole OH/MS is a fake on a 1938 pictorial \$1.00 issue. Note the difference in the hole spacing in the Os.

Looking back at the CE4 in the auction catalog, this looks very much like a perforation from the first machine but the Post Office reports that in Janu-

ary 1946 “...the plate on the present hand machine is beginning to show definite signs of wear.” CE4 was first made public sometime after the 16th of September 1946. Therefore the holes in this CE4—as shown in the auction catalog—are too clean for a genuine perforation. If it was this clean it should have been from the second machine.

The question still remains, because the authors did not physically examine the lot, whether the other three stamps in this lot are genuine. Since the other three stamps are perforated horizontal, there is a fairly good chance that they are genuine. It should be noted that the auction firm withdrew this material after being contacted by the authors.

There are a few four-hole OH/MS fakes on the market and we are sure that there are a few fakes in some of the good collections also. The authors themselves found a few fakes in their own collections among the high value stamps. To be quite honest, the authors have not checked all of their common four-hole OHMS

perfins because of the large number of stamps that were perforated. Between 1946 and 1949 the Post Office perforated 75,779,298 stamps, so finding fakes in this material is very time consuming.

In general, material that is in an unusual position or on high value stamps, whether mint or used, should be examined closely for fake perforations. The old saying “buyer beware” is very applicable to perforated material because the majority of the people who market this material cannot readily identify fake perfins from the genuine ones.

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