

Precancelled Stamps on Decks of Playing Cards
– Part 1 –

by Christopher D. Ryan

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PRECANCELLED STAMPS ON DECKS OF PLAYING CARDS

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The author has been permitted by a local collector of playing cards to photograph a number of decks in his collection. The majority of these decks bear George V war and excise tax stamps with United States Playing Card Company (USPCC) precancels. The collector reports that these playing cards formed part of a horde found in the abandoned basement of a Toronto dealer who ceased operation in the 1920s. The horde also included stationery, children's books, advertising cards, greeting cards, and Christmas ornaments.

The first deck (Figure 1) bears a horizontal pair of 4¢ blue war tax stamps (van Dam's FWT 10) with a red USPCC precancel. These cards were manufactured by USPCC in Toronto from which the company moved to Windsor in 1918, the first year of the Canadian stamp tax on Playing cards (effective May 1st).



Figure 1.



Use of a pair of 4¢ cent stamps indicates that this deck was either manufactured or in stock at the manufacturer during the first few months of the new tax (May/July 1918). As shown by the following quote from a June 22nd, 1918, Revenue Department circular, the 8¢ George V war tax stamp did not yet exist at the time of the tax's implementation. The circular stated:

An Inland Revenue War Tax Stamp of an Eight Cent denomination is being prepared for greater convenience and economy in stamping packages of Playing Cards. This stamp will be ready for distribution, and supplies may be obtained in the course of a week or ten days; in the meantime, stamps of other denominations may be used. The new denomination may also be employed for stamping other goods, subject to War Tax.

The following five decks each bear a pair of the 4¢ war tax stamps with a printed red double red line precancel. A single of this stamp is illustrated in Figure 2. The horizontal red lines are 1 mm. wide and separated by a 5½ mm. gap. The printed nature of the precancel, combined with its presence on decks from four manufacturers (one foreign, three domestic) and two repackagers, suggests that it was used by a large wholesaler as opposed to the small dealer in whose basement the horde was found. The June 22nd circular quoted previously also required the stamping of all wholesale and retail stocks on hand by July 1st, 1918:



Figure 2.

Playing Cards which were imported or manufactured in Canada before the 1st of May, 1918, and which, on that date, were in the stock of importers or manufacturers, are not subject to the Tax, unless remaining in the hands of dealers on the 1st of July. All Playing cards imported or manufactured in Canada after the 30th of April, 1918, and the stock in the hands of agents, wholesalers, retailers, or other dealers on the 1st of July, 1918, will be subject to the Tax...

Excise Officers and Preventive Officers are expected to be vigilant in seeing that on and after the 1st of July no package of Playing Cards (or matches) is offered for sale without having the proper stamps affixed and cancelled by law...



Figure 3.



Figure 3 illustrates a deck manufactured by *Charles Goodall & Son Ltd.* of London, England, and repackaged by the *Copp Clark Company* of Toronto, Ontario, under the brand name “Capital Playing Cards.”

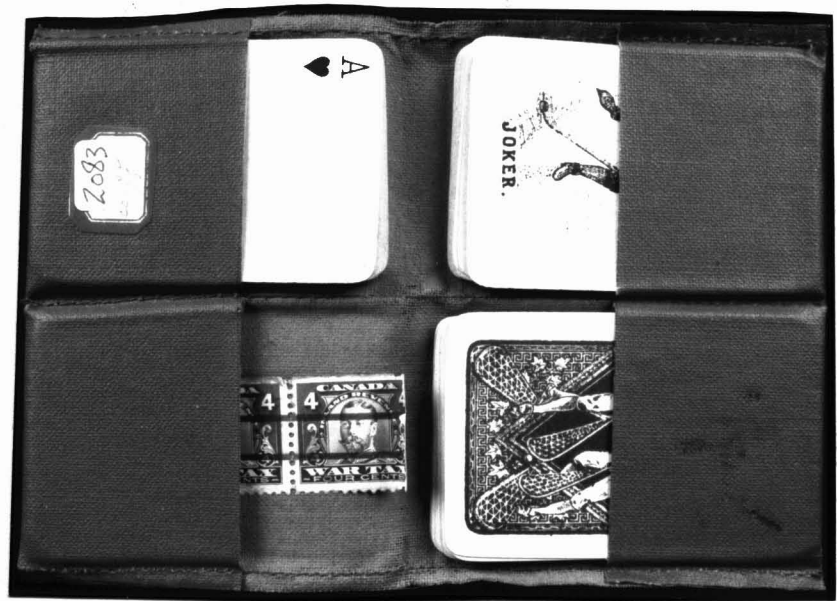
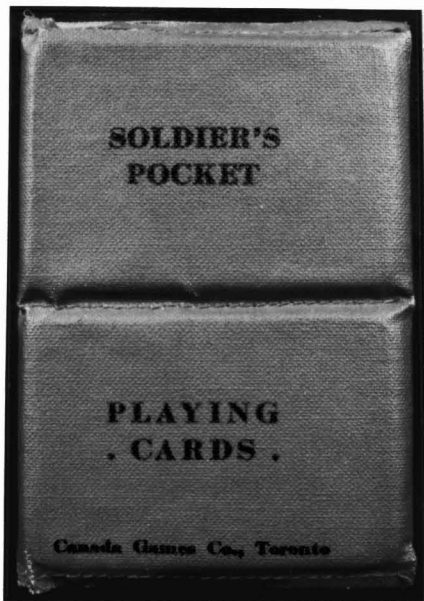


Figure 4.



Figure 4 illustrates a deck manufactured by the *Montreal Consolidated Litho. & Mfg. Company* and repackaged by the *Canada Games Company* of Toronto, Ontario, under the brand name "Soldier's Pocket Playing Cards."

Figure 5 illustrates a patriotic "Allied Armies" deck manufactured by the *Montreal Lithographing Company*.



Figure 5.

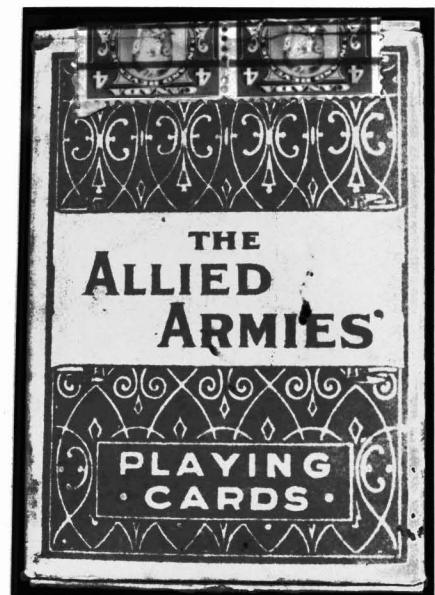




Figure 6.

Figure 6 illustrates a patriotic "For Freedom" deck manufactured by *Charles Goodall & Sons Ltd.*. Figure 7 illustrates a "Cadets" deck manufactured by the *United States Playing Card Company* of Toronto.



Figure 7.

A search of directories from the period around 1918 yielded two possible origins of the double red line precancel: *William Croft & Sons Limited* or *J. & A. Aziz*, both of Wellington Street, Toronto.

Toronto directories list only Croft & Sons and USPCC under the heading of "Playing Cards". Elsewhere in the same directories, Croft & Sons is listed as a wholesale dealer in fancy (i.e. ornamental) goods, notions, smallwares, and other miscellaneous items such as combs. In a 1918 advertisement Croft & Sons describes itself as a wholesaler for "*fancy goods, notions, smallwares, dolls and toys, needles, fishing tackle, sporting goods, hammocks, fireworks, flags, tobacconists' sundries, pipes, cutlery, baseball goods, druggists' sundries, brushes, purses, bags, leather goods, casseroles, cut glass, toilet and manicure sets and playing cards.*"

J. & A. Aziz is listed in the Toronto directories as a wholesaler in dry goods and is not included under the "Playing Cards" heading. Yet, Aziz is listed (along with USPCC) under the heading of "Playing Cards" in the Ontario section of contemporary editions of the *Canada and Newfoundland Gazetteer*. These gazetteers, however, do not list Croft & Sons as a dealer in playing cards.

It has not yet been, and may never be, possible to conclusively assign the double red line precancel to either Croft & Sons or J. & A. Aziz. It is also possible that neither firm was the user of this precancel.

(To be continued.)