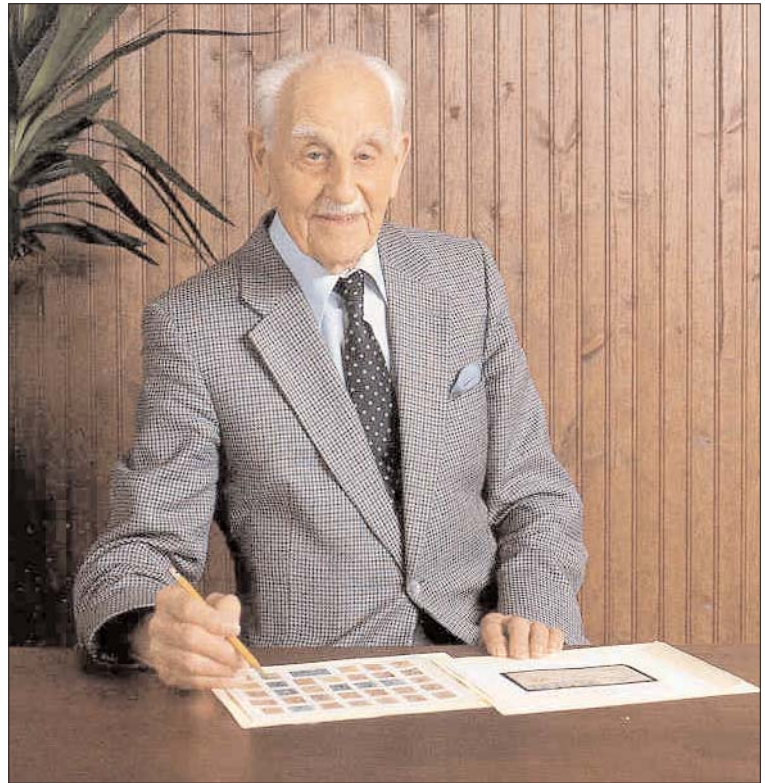


Gerald E. Wellburn

*Logger and lumberman,
draftsman and historian,
railway and automobile
enthusiast, schoolboy
stamp collector and
pioneering philatelist
– these are rich
accomplishments of a long
life in which “stamps
make friends”.*



A Social Philatelist

By Peter R. Newroth

Gerald E. Wellburn (1900 - 1992) is perhaps best remembered today for his superb specialized collection of Vancouver Island and British Columbia stamps and postal history. Gerry's enthusiasm for collecting stamps and especially postal history remains alive in stamp clubs in Victoria, British Columbia. Many members often remark about Gerry's displays of his collections. Or of the many times he spoke with knowledge and affection about "the old days" of Victoria and Vancouver Island which he knew so well as a boy.

I am one of those fortunate enthusiasts who enjoyed Gerry's polished presentations. More than 20 years ago he also encouraged me to pursue my own philatelic interests and to specialize (in the Gold Coast). I consider Gerry to be my philatelic role model!

Recently, I came across a cover that Gerry prepared for friends to celebrate Christmas in 1941 (Figure 1). This greeting and the sentiment behind it led me to review and reflect on Gerry's principles and achievements. Few collectors today would aspire to cover his range and depth.

Gerry joined stamp clubs locally, nationally, and internationally and his interest in people demonstrated his ongoing support for the social aspects of the hobby. Recognition came to Gerry from philatelic organizations around the world including many awards of Fellowships and Honorary Life Memberships. He became a

TOP OF PAGE: G. E. Wellburn, examining his album page of numbered British Columbia cancellations. (Photograph from Eaton and Wallace, 1987)

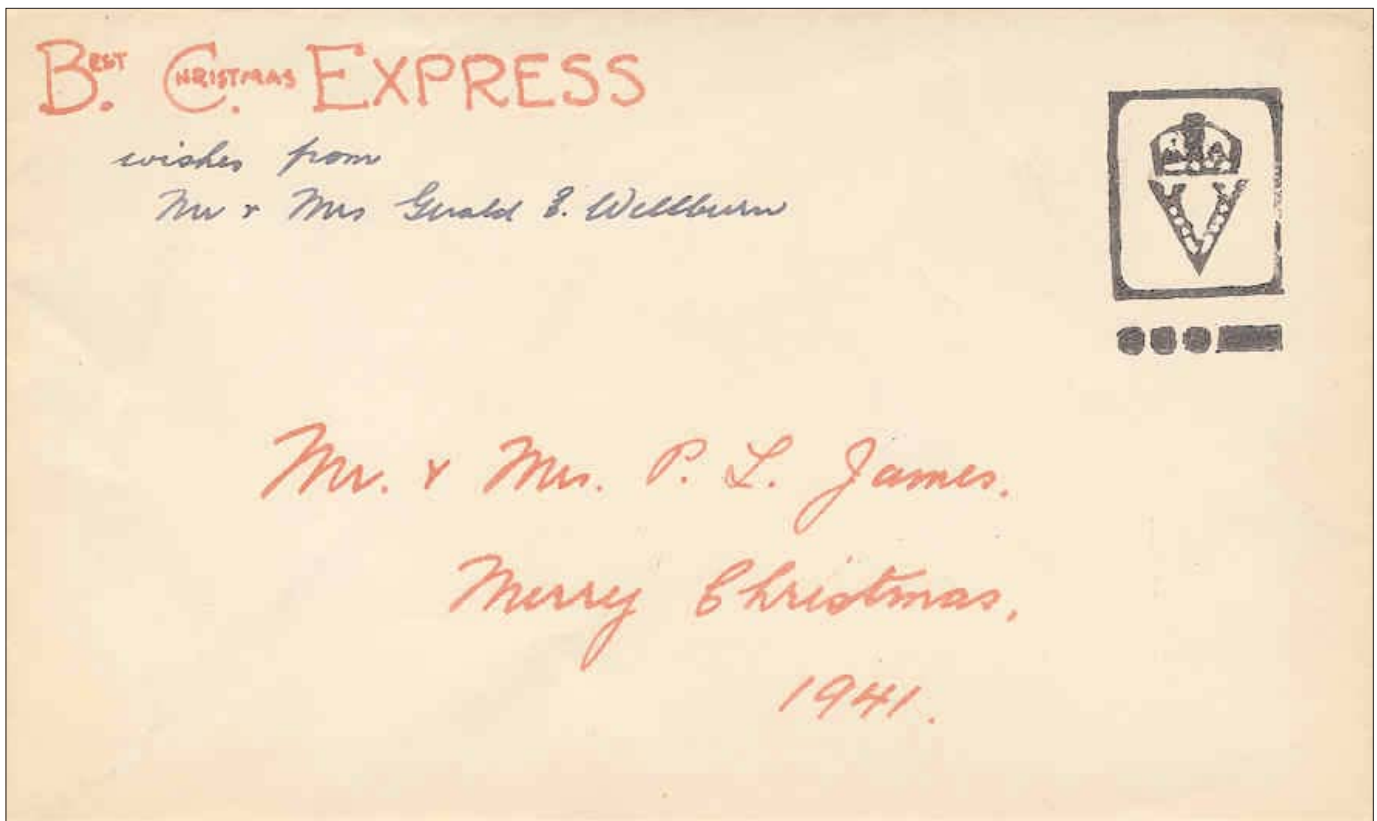


Figure 1. G. E. Wellburn prepared this “stamped” envelope to convey Greetings at Xmas 1941 while he was president of the Vancouver Island Philatelic Society. The recipient was a well-known architect and also a VIPS Past President. Gerry wrote on the reverse:

“To remember the “V for Victory” design of the B.C. stamps 75 years ago”.

signatory of the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists in 1951, only the third Canadian to be so honoured.

Gerry also enjoyed sharing his collections and knowledge. As a philatelic ambassador for British Columbia, Gerry exhibited over a 50-year span that began in New York in 1936. He exhibited seven frames of rarities of Canada and British Columbia at the 1950 London International Stamp Exhibition and achieved the highest international awards in Toronto CAPEX (1951, 1987) and Basel (Prix d’Honneur, 1974). He also participated in exhibition juries and assisted at many international exhibitions.

Gerry’s exhibiting style established new standards of presentation, perhaps anticipating the current interest in Display Class exhibits. He artistically drafted his album pages (mostly hand-made in oblong format) so as to achieve perfect balance. They maintain the principle that philatelic material should dominate but Gerry enhanced many of his pages with vignettes, sketches, and even social commentary. These pages and

especially his hand-drafted additions are delightful and are appreciated by collectors and non-collectors alike. Distinctive “Ex Wellburn” pages are sought-after items and remain as interesting now as they were years ago when Gerry displayed them at service clubs and stamp meetings.

His collections grew from boyhood and his zeal and capacity for acquiring material are well known. Gerry’s early efforts and his diligent searches probably saved many exciting and rare early British Columbia covers from destruction. One story tells of covers that Gerry owned with missing stamps that had been removed as cut squares. He traded to get these missing squares back and reunited them with their covers.

Gerry avidly researched his finds, no doubt helped by connections he made while he was president of British Columbia Museums and Historical Associations. Background material on stamp design, production methods, themes that were illustrated on stamps and their history – all were investigated.

A scholar of British Columbia history, Gerry was keenly interested in and wrote extensively about early Canadian stamps, postal history and express companies of British Columbia. Morin (1979) lists 24 published articles written by Gerald Wellburn, spanning 1937 to 1967. Some were reprinted in several journals. This provides a remarkable amount of research literature and is an underestimated legacy.

I recall Gerry showing thematic material on the origins of mail, and parts of his New Brunswick collections. His great collections of Canada and colonies of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were dispersed, mainly by auction. The catalogues hint at their scope and rarity.

The 1976 Robson Lowe auction sale of the Wellburn Great Britain collection comprised 937 lots. The catalogue described this as "A survey of the postal history and philately with particular stress on the humanity connected with the usage of the stamp and the contents of the letter". Indeed, to me, this sums up the collector.

It is notable that Gerry arranged and probably supplied the 14th to 17th century letters in the First Frame of the Postal History Society's Exhibit at the 1950 London International Stamp Exhibition. Highlights were the earliest express letter, first letter with a postal charge and probably the first letters to cross the Atlantic Ocean!

We are fortunate that the National Archives of Canada retains photocopies of eleven Wellburn collections, comprising over 1,200 pages of Canadian stamps and covers from 1851 to 1942, some reproduced in colour. Eaton and Wallace (1987) illustrate much of his remarkable British Columbia collection and is the most accessible published record.

In 1992, the Gerald E. Wellburn Philatelic Foundation was established from capital funds donated by Gerry to promote stamp collecting on Southern Vancouver Island. Through the Executive and Directors of the Foundation, funds are being raised to supplement the capital and promote the ideals demonstrated by Gerry Wellburn. Activities that meet the objectives of the Foundation include funding philatelic exhibitions in Victoria, developing school programs to introduce children to the joys of stamp collecting and assisting them to enjoy the hobby. In 2002-2003, nine school programs were supported, led by Don Shorting

and Andrew Blanchard. Over the years, 17 schools have established stamp clubs many of which remain active. The Foundation also supports the local Junior Stamp Club.

Perhaps this is the greatest of philatelic legacy from Gerry Wellburn. I am honoured to be the President of his Foundation, 2002-2004. 🌟

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Author's Biography:

Peter Newroth is a Life Member of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada (#8256). He is a Past President of the Vancouver Island Philatelic Society, and is the current Archivist and RPSC representative for the Society.


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