

ICAO ACCOMMODATIONS: A PAGE OF HISTORY

by Albert Pelsser

The Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization (PICAO) was established by the Chicago Conference, which concluded on 7 December 1944, as an interim body pending the ratification of a permanent world civil aviation convention. Canada was selected at Chicago as the host country of the provisional organization. The Canadian Government chose Montreal for locating PICAO's headquarters, as it was at that time the leading metropolis of the country, the most cosmopolitan and international city; it was also the main hub for international civil air transport.

THE CANADIAN PREPARATORY COMMITTEE

On 6 June 1945, the required number of twenty-six nations had adhered to the Interim Agreement on International Civil Aviation, so that the Provisional ICAO could come into being. The host country set up a working group, called the Canadian Preparatory Committee (CPC), for the purpose of studying the intended functions of PICAO, planning the organization that would be required to carry out these functions, and formulating the procedures that

would necessarily lead to the commencement of PICAO's activities. Over a period of six weeks (from the end of June until 15 August 1945), the CPC held 18 meetings in Montreal, Ottawa and Washington, D.C.; a small secretariat of twenty-five staff had been seconded from the Canadian Government and was located in the Dominion Square Building. The first session of the Interim Council met on 15 August 1945 (the same day that the end of WWII was proclaimed) at 14:30 in the Rose Room of the Windsor Hotel and began PICAO's activities. It is interesting to note that the Big-Three countries (Canada, United Kingdom and United States of America), which were most advanced in aviation at that time, formed a triangle around the U-shape table covered by a green carpet; among the twenty countries invited, Brazil and Mexico could not arrive on-time for the opening meeting.

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATIONS UNDER PICAO

Temporary accommodations had been sought in the Windsor Hotel, prior to occupying more permanent quarters



Figure 1



Figure 2

in the Dominion Square Building. With 94 staff in January 1946, PICA0's quarters were located on the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 10th and 12th floors of the Dominion Square Building (see cover at Figure 1).

However, due to unsatisfactory accommodations available in the Dominion Square Building, the PICA0

Council came quickly to a recommendation to solicit office space in the Sun Life Building. In June 1946, staff from the administrative offices started to occupy space in this building. At the same time, a Council Committee on Accommodations was formed to make recommendations on questions relating to the housing of the permanent Or-

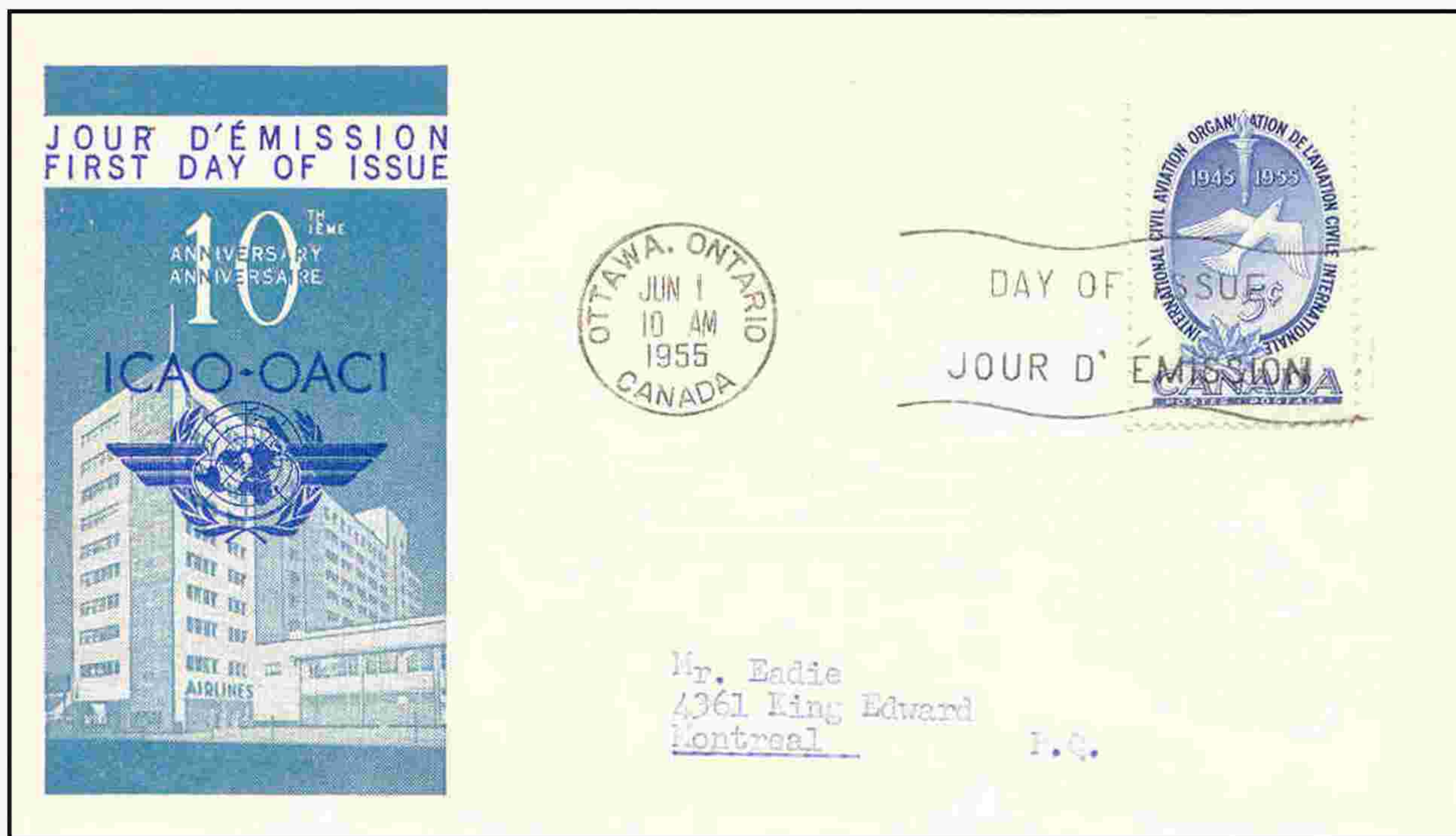


Figure 3



Figure 4

ganization.

When ICAO came into being on 4 April 1947, the total space occupied by the Organization was distributed as follows: 28,200 square feet in the Dominion Square Building and 27,600 square feet on the 12th floor in the Sun Life Building, to locate the Council Members and the 341 staff that the Organization numbered at that time.

Arrangements for additional temporary space were occasionally made with the head office of the International Labour Office (ILO), transferred from Geneva to Montreal during war time until 1948 at the invitation of the Government of Canada and McGill University. Their offices were first located on 3480 University Street and later on 3450 Drummond and 3540 Mountain (now de la Montagne). When ILO's head office moved back to Geneva in 1948 and was replaced by a Branch Office for Canada, the whole of ICAO's Air Navigation Bureau occupied the empty space left by ILO on Drummond until ICAO's new premises on University Street were completed.

The buildings around the Dominion Square are an excellent example of Montreal's rich architectural heritage. Officially inaugurated in 1878 and enlarged in 1909, the Windsor Hotel is of Second Empire style and projected an image of opulence for the rich bourgeoisie of the time; the site chosen for the hotel was a sign of the gradual shift North-West of the business and social centres of Montreal, mainly due to the construction of two train stations in that area, and the large fire of 1852 that swept a great part of the hotels and business establishments. Depicting the

Beaux-Arts style, the Dominion Square Building was built in 1927 as a commercial building facing St. Catherine Street; its structure uses the modern technology of the time, steel-frame. The Sun Life Building (see postcard at Figure 2) was once the tallest building in the British Empire and is representative of the rapid development of Canada in the 1920's; the classical elements found in this building are part of the Beaux-Arts styling.

FIRST PERMANENT ACCOMMODATIONS

From July 1946, the Organization started negotiations with the host Government and the Canadian National Railways to establish a permanent accommodation to replace its temporary quarters consisting of parts of two adjoining buildings on the Dominion Square; by 1949, the Secretariat staff numbered 390.

The new commodious office accommodation would become the *International Aviation Building*, for a total calculated space of 90,000 square feet reserved for ICAO, to be constructed at the corner of Dorchester (now Boul. René-Lévesque) and University Street (at 1080 University Street); the new building was depicted on one of the first day covers issued for the 10th anniversary of ICAO shown at Figure 3. It had the additional attraction of adjoining the city's central railway station. ICAO would occupy the six upper floors of the new US\$ 4 million 10-storey building.



Figure 5

The premises were ready for occupation by 15 July 1949. The Conference Centre was located on the 10th floor; the ICAO Council with its 21 seats was depicted on the first day cover shown at Figure 4. Air conditioning was not installed until 1964 and then only on the tenth floor, while ventilation on other floors came from the windows on the perimeter of the building, resulting in more lost space between perimeter offices and central corridors due to lack of heat, ventilation and natural light in these intermediate areas. Furthermore, open windows in the summer months meant lots of dust and dirt blowing around, making conditions even more uncomfortable. Elevators were close to one end of the building, causing excessive walking. The maintenance of security and privacy in the building was complicated due to three main entrances to the building in addition to many side accesses. No parking facilities for automobiles were available on the premises. The building also accommodated various airline offices and the headquarters of IATA, the *International Air Transport Association* (on the 2nd floor).

It is to be noted that no provision was made in the new building for a conference room in which to hold the Assembly Sessions. They were therefore held either in Montreal at the Windsor Hotel or outside Canada at the invitation of one of the Members States; during the first 20 years, ICAO Assemblies were convened at seven different locations (see commemorative cover at Figure 5). Due to the Organization's expanding work, an increasing number of staff of the Secretariat (close to 500 in 1970) and an ever-growing number of Member States (119 in 1970), the accommodations built in the 40s had become too cramped

and restrictive for efficient operations of ICAO. From an initial space occupied of 90,000 square feet in 1949, the Organization occupied in 1970 almost the whole of the *International Aviation Building*, for 160,000 square feet.

SECOND BUILDING

By the early 70s, the number of delegates of States attending the regular triennial Assemblies was outstripping the capabilities of almost all major convention centres in the world; costs of holding Assemblies with full services in four languages, including multiple and simultaneous meetings, had become prohibitively high. In addition, the building presented inadequate rooms in number and size to accommodate major technical meetings held in Montreal.

The implications of various financing and management alternatives of a new Headquarters building, i.e. wet-lease (with rental and all building services included), lease purchase and complete ownership, had been considered at that time by the Organization; a pure lease arrangement had appeared to offer definitive advantages and seemed to be the only practicable option taking into account the Canadian Government subsidy.

Thus, Canadian Government authorities sought to construct new facilities specially conceived for the Organization on the prestigious Sherbrooke Street (at 1000 Sherbrooke Street West), facing the McGill University campus and overlooking Mount Royal, which were ready for occupation by mid-1975. The construction proposal was

known as the Schreiber project; in addition to the importance of the architectural concept, a factor which would contribute to ICAO's identity, general quality, interior space layout especially with regard to the Conference facilities, it was selected due to the desire for a downtown location easily accessible by every means of transportation and within easy walking distance of major hotels. The award-winning 27-storey building (including a five level base structure) was designed by a firm led by Montreal's architect André Vecsi; ICAO initially occupied fifteen floors of the building, as well as the whole conference complex adjacent to it to the rear. The new Assembly facilities could accommodate 600 people and the total space rented was 220,000 square feet. Contributions from Contracting States, typical of their arts and natural treasures, were sought for the furnishing and decoration of the new building, which was officially inaugurated on 3 October 1975.

BACK TO UNIVERSITY STREET

In the early 90s, ICAO had outgrown the old building on Sherbrooke Street, now owed by Monit International Inc. Staff had grown from 490 in 1970 to 595 in 1990. ICAO's success was evidenced by the dynamic and

sustained increases in the number of States adhering to its Convention after the decolonization in Africa and the collapse of the countries in East Europe; the number of States Members had grown from 119 in 1970 to 162 in 1990, whereas in the same time the number of members of the Council had been increased from 27 to 33. The 600-seat Assembly Hall could no longer accommodate all the delegates in attendance (including non-member states and observers), with the spill-over forced to listen in on closed-circuit TV. The building on Sherbrooke was no longer well-enough equipped to meet future needs, in terms of electronic security and print shop. Since the early 90s, the need for more suitable accommodations for ICAO were perceived by the Government of Canada, as host of the Organization.

Initially, it might have asked if moving was the best solution to ICAO's space problems. When ICAO moved in 1975, the total site area included an open piece of land (some 10,000 sq. ft.) on the west side of the building, which became the *International Aviation Square* or ICAO Plaza; however leasing arrangements permitted this land to be sold in 1988 by the owner of the ICAO building for the site of the Scotia Bank (a 27-floor office building), thus eliminating any possibility of expansion of ICAO's building, and precipitating a series of environmental (e.g. air quality) and security problems for the Organization.

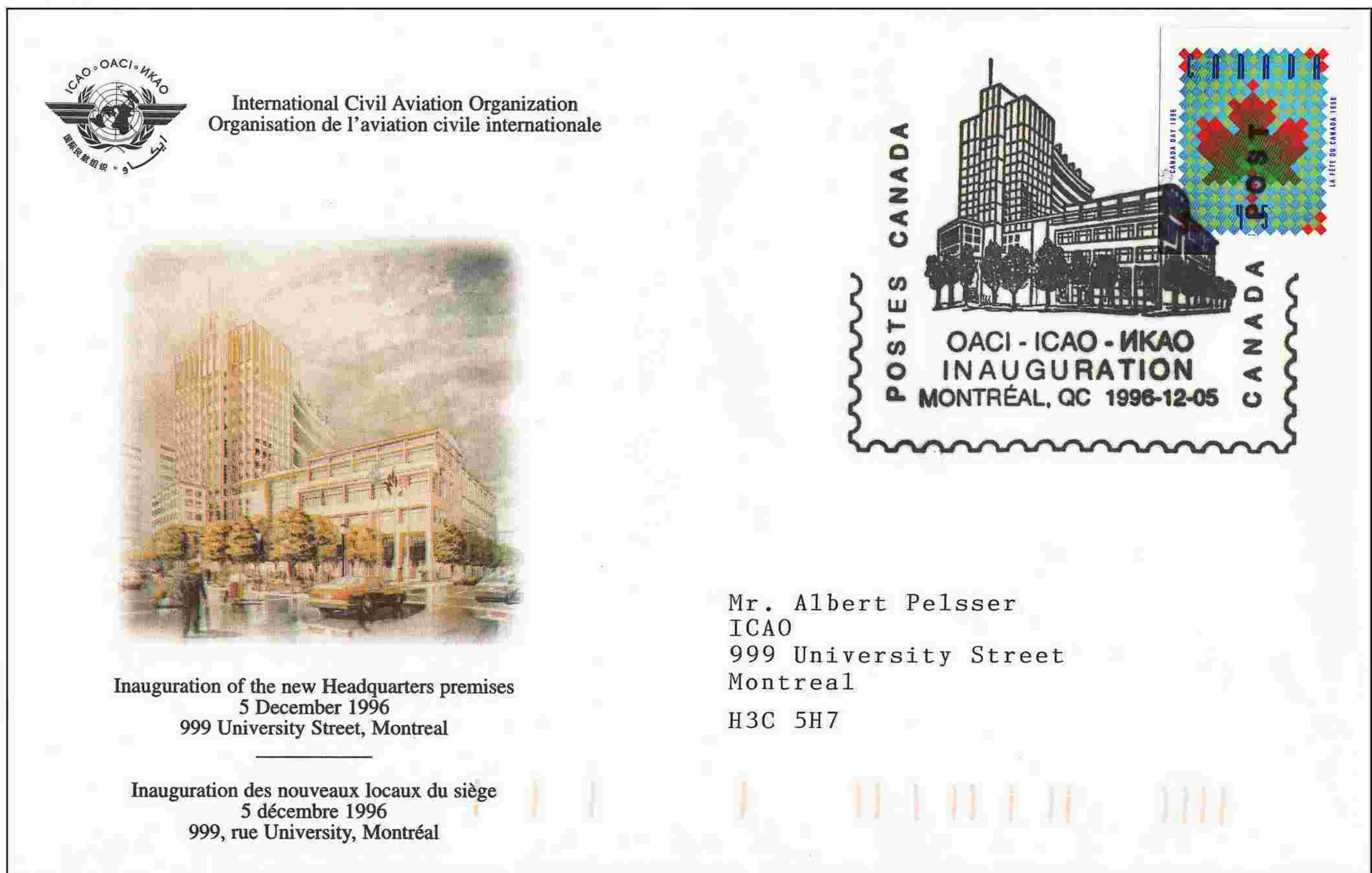


Figure 6

Owned by Westcliff Group and the Canapen Group (Canadien National), the new and current premises (a 100-million dollar project) located at 999 University Street, whose unique architectural design admirably captures the dynamics of the Organization, was occupied by ICAO in October 1996 and officially inaugurated on 5 December 1996 (see cover commemorating this inauguration at Figure 6). Ken London Architects was the prime architect responsible for the base building design, while Provencher Roy Associés was responsible for the overall design of the interior space and common areas. Rented by the Government of Canada for 20 years, the new complex encompasses an area of 40,000 square metres, for 350,000 square feet of rentable space. Flanked by the flags of ICAO, Canada, and local governments, the complex is located along a pres-

tigious gateway into Montreal and contributes immeasurably towards unifying and structuring the city's downtown urban fabric. Severe challenges in terms of air quality, noise, vibration, site serenity and security were presented to the engineers, as the building site is located directly over the westbound and eastbound tunnels of the Ville-Marie Expressway. Two separate steel and concrete structures, a 15-storey office tower and a 5-storey conference block, are joined by a dramatic glass-covered atrium, flying bridges and criss-crossing escalators. The result is a delicate balance of transparency and continuity, in a classic yet modern environment. Limestone and precast concrete represent the strength of the Organization, while back-painted textured glass permits natural lighting to wash the walls with a delicate filtering effect.

CHECKLIST

Canada	354	1955 Jun 01	10th anniversary of the founding of the International Civil Aviation Organization
United Nations-New York	31-32	1955 Feb 09	International Civil Aviation Organization

REFERENCES

Freer, Duane W. *Special Series*, ICAO Bulletin, October 1986 through January 1987.
 ICAO. *Various Council Working Papers and related minutes*.
 Schenkman, Jacob. *International Civil Aviation Organization*. Librairie E. Droz, Genève, 1955.
 Yee, Susan. *Dominion Square, History of Architecture in Canada*. 21 April 1987.

