

## THE ICAO CORNER

by Albert Pelsser

### UNITED NATIONS: ERNEST CORMIER



Figure 1

This month's story of the series titled "The ICAO Corner" focuses on the artwork of Ernest Cormier, Canadian Architect and Engineer (1885-1980) and in particular his association with the United Nations (UN). The First Day Cover serving as basis of this story, shown at Figure 1, was issued on 9 February 1955 by the United Nations for the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Interim Agreement on International Civil Aviation and the first PICA meeting.

The cover bears the two stamps of this issue with the International Civil Aviation Organization's acronym in English, French and Spanish; this Organization has its headquarters in Montréal, Canada, since 1945. Interestingly enough, in 1955 when this set was issued, *Linn's Stamp News* had to write a special article explaining that there was no error on the 8-cent value (dark carmine), since the 8-cent uses the French acronym of the Organization (OACI - Organisation de l'aviation civile internationale) or Spanish acronym (OACI - Organización de Aviación Civil Inter-

nacional), which is just the reverse of the English acronym (ICAO - International Civil Aviation Organization).

After World War II, the structuring of civil aviation was greatly helped by international cooperation through the ICAO, established by the Chicago Conference in 1944. It was provided that, thirty days after the governments of 26 nations (that is, half of those present at the Conference) ratified the Convention, the new organization to be known as the International Civil Aviation Organization would come into existence.

On 7 December 1944, the Chicago Conference concluded with the signature by all delegations present, except Liberia, of a final act that was a formal and official record summarizing the work. In addition to the Convention on Civil Aviation (also known as the Chicago Convention), another main instrument contained in this final act was the Interim Agreement on International Civil Aviation opened for signature. Its purpose was that of a bridging



Figure 2

mechanism to permit an early beginning of the global effort while awaiting the ratification of the Convention. This Interim Agreement was accepted by the 26<sup>th</sup> State on 6 June 1945. Thus the Provisional International Civil Aviation Organization (PICAO) was born on that date and began to function in August 1945. It performed remarkably well until the permanent organization came into force on 4 April 1947, 30 days after ratification of the Convention by the 26<sup>th</sup> State.

Since that time, ICAO has created and continually updated International Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), as well as the related policies and guidance. Thus in 1955, the UN stamp issue commemorated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PICAO's formation and honoured ICAO's work.

In 1947, two years after the largest international peacekeeping organization was founded, the United Nations began searching for the location of their world headquarters. After numerous offers from cities around North America, the United Nations settled on a 17 acre plot of land on the banks of the East River in New York City after John D. Rockefeller donated the land. Rather than holding a competition for the design of the facilities for the headquarters, the UN decided to commission a multinational team of leading architects from the founding nations to work on the design in collaborative and unifying spirit for an international organization. American architect Wallace K.

Harrison was named Director of Planning and the Canadian Government appointed Ernest Cormier as a member of the advisory board in the design. The UN complex was completed in 1952.

In March 1950, the Canadian government received an invitation from the UN Secretary General Trygve Lie to contribute to the interior or exterior decor of the United Nations' permanent headquarters with a gift that would express an aspect of Canadian culture. One year later, the idea of seven ornamental doors for the main entrance to the General Assembly was settled on as an impressive and appropriate gift from Canada. Because the doors were to be installed in August 1952, the idea of a national competition was not considered and the Canadian government awarded Ernest Cormier the contract for the design of the exterior doors of the UN General Assembly Building in New York, a prestigious contract that would contribute to his international reputation.

Cormier appeared to have received little guidance as to the design of the metal doors and their decorative motifs other than the instruction that the doors should have a distinctively Canadian quality. Cormier first suggested that the doors be made of a nickel-ferrochrome alloy, estimating that six and a half tons would be required. However, given the difficulty of procuring enough nickel, Cormier suggested then an alloy of nickel, copper, iron and manganese, as a substitute; later as a further reduction in

the percentage of nickel was required, Cormier finally recommended an alloy of nickel-silver (because of the particular significance of those metals to Canada, which is among the largest world’s producers), containing only 18% nickel.

In January 1952, the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs and the Director of the National Gallery of Canada stipulated that the final design of the working drawings be contracted to a nationally recognized sculptor. Cormier chose Maurice Félix (1895-1972), a professor of art and sculpture at the Montreal School of Fine Arts, whom he asked to make small-scale drawings, wax models, plaster casts and final touches to the plaster casts. He gave Félix working-size drawings with instructions to provide the designs a freer movement. In May 1952, dissatisfied with the work’s progress, Cormier ended the verbal agreement he had made with Félix and took it upon himself to complete the four wax figures and to make the hollow molds and plaster casts. Thus, Cormier was able to claim authorship of the sculpted panels. The doors themselves were manufactured by the Montréal firm Robert Mitchell Co., Limited.

The design of the doors consists of four horizontal glass panels each separated by bands of metal; to the right of the glass panels, the architect placed four allegorical figures in bas-relief representing Peace, Justice, Truth and Fraternity (*Pax, Justitia, Veritas, and Fraternitas*), ideals or aspirations upon which the UN Organization was founded.

On 27 March 1953 on behalf of the Canadian Government, Lester B. Pearson, then President of the 7<sup>th</sup> regular Session of the General Assembly, presented the

seven nickel-silver doors used for the public entrance to the General Assembly Building.

The cachet at Figure 1 shows the four designs as created by Ernest Cormier. It is worth noting that Cormier added the maple leaf motif to each of the designs, streaking thus the Canadian origin of the gift.

UN stamps are issued under separate agreements with the postal authorities of the USA, Switzerland, and Austria and are valid for postage only on mail deposited at UN headquarters in New York and at the UN offices in Geneva and Vienna. In connection with the theme of this story, it is to be noted that, under special arrangement with the Canadian Government, the UN issued a set of five stamps expressed in Canadian currency in relation to the Montréal’s World Fair of 1967 (Expo 67), which was Canada’s main celebration during its centennial year. Those stamps were valid for postage only from the UN pavilion at the World Fair and depict Cormier’s four designs used on the doors of the UN Assembly Hall in New York. Figure 2 shows the First Day Cover issued on this occasion by the World Federation of United Nations Associations, bearing the 5 stamps of this issue, including one stamp depicting the pavilion of the UN at Expo 67. 25,000 of these covers were issued seeking to promote public understanding of the UN.

Ernest Cormier spent much of his career in the Montreal area, erecting notable examples of Art Deco architecture, such as the central building of the Université de Montréal or the classic chateau-styled Supreme Court of Canada building in Ottawa.

CHECKLIST

United Nations New York 31-2	1955 Feb 9	10 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Interim Agreement and first PICA0 Meeting
United Nations New York 170-4	1967 Apr 28	Montréal’s World Fair Expo ’67

REFERENCES

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<http://www.icao.int/secretariat/PostalHistory/index.html>

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