

RURAL SCENE GAS BAR COUPONS

by Ross Irwin

Canadian Tire Corporation had 165 Associate stores by the end of 1958 and decided to move into the service station business. In November 1958 it opened the first experimental service station at their corporate headquarters store on Yonge Street, Toronto. Five gas pumps, in nine octane blends, and with standard prices used unbranded gasoline (Texaco). It was originally estimated that annual gallonage would be 750,000.

The lubrication bay had a 56 foot steel conveyor designed to move cars along at 10 to 12 feet per minute. Six to eight men did the lubrication and oil checks and changes. Another team at the end of the line checked tire pressure, anti-freeze and battery. Car interiors were vacuumed. Some 12 underground tanks were part of the system.

Cash bonus coupons having a rural scene (Type 1) and in denominations of 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, 50¢ and \$1.00 were issued from this service station. The coupons were printed by the British American Banknote Company in pastel shades. The coupons were not engraved despite their appearance as there is no evidence of raised ink areas in the lathework border which indicates intaglio printing.

The coupons were used for cross merchandising and were redeemable at a company store for merchandise. It is not known whether the coupons were issued from November 1958 when the gas bar opened, or during the next year.

Each denomination exists with the word SPECIMEN overprinted at an angle from the lower left to the upper right on the back, and on the face of the coupons. Specimen coupons do not have a serial number. They are usually punched with two holes near the bottom of the coupon. The purpose of these notes was to show employees the type of coupon that was to be redeemed - in other words, a teaching aid.

Each series of denominations began with a prefix letter and a five digit serial number; for example, A00001. When the series reached A99999 then it continued as a six digit serial number, A100000. The following table is the basis for an analysis.

Coupon Type	Coupon Value	Prefix Letter	Highest Known	Serial Number Highest Estimated	Book Value	Coupon Type	Lowest Serial
CT-1-1	5	A	180749	225000	11,250	CT-5-1a	318626
CT-1-2	10	B	552445	560000	52,000	CT-5-2a	583905
CT-1-3	25	C	337244	340000	85,000	CT-5-3a	346830
CT-1-4	50	D	50713	55000	27,500	CT-5-4	59764
CT-1-5	100	E	15990	16000	16,000	No \$1.00 in series	

The estimated number of coupons printed is based on the highest CT-1 known to collectors and the lowest CT-5 known to collectors as these were a continuing series of serial numbers. The total book value of coupons amounted to \$191,750.

One problem for collectors is that all coupons were never issued. For example, the highest 5¢ coupon known as used was A180749 but coupon A1457686 was overprinted as a lub chit but never used. Similarly a 10¢ coupon B 2580650 exists in the same format.

All of rural scene coupons are scarce today. I rate them: \$1.00 (60), 5¢ (25), 10¢ (25), 25¢ (10), 50¢ (5); that is, you will find 12 \$1.00 coupons for every 50¢ coupon. The \$1.00 being more common today because they circulated much less in the past. The other coupons just wore out and were withdrawn.

Coupon use and denominations were a function of the company pricing policy. From 1959 to 1963 the posted retail price of regular grade gasoline in Ontario was 39.9¢ per gallon. This was made up of 6.5¢ of retail margin, 14.6¢ of taxes and 4.1¢ of wholesaler margin. There was massive upheaval in gasoline price in 1961 due to the move of discount chain stores, department stores and automobile accessory chains into gasoline retailing. It was at this time that Handy-Andy (Shell), Towers Marts, T. Eaton (B-A Oil), Zellers and others beside CTC were pressuring the line dealers with smaller profit margins and using gasoline as a loss leader, or break-even, to encourage shopping in their stores. There was also excess refining capacity.

CTC at this time were offering a 10 percent discount. The discount at the time was never below 5 percent and for short periods was up to 25 percent. In those days, as now, gasoline was sold by units of dollars; that is, \$5.00 or \$10.00, or \$2.00 if the son borrowed the car for the evening. In the above cases coupons would have been issued in the amounts of 50¢, \$1.00 and 20¢. Based on this analysis it is easily seen why the 10¢ coupon was the most used and greatest number printed. Their survival is not high.