

# The SRSC Newsletter

## The Santa Rosa Stamp Club

Promoting the study, knowledge, and enjoyment of stamp collecting.

APS Chapter #1584



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### Editor's Note

Dennis Buss

What is the purpose of The SRSC Newsletter? This might seem to be a rather strange question to ask now that 2023 marks the eleventh year since the newsletter first appeared in April 2012. Over the years I have looked at other club newsletters. Most of them concentrate on reporting club business items as well as reporting on upcoming events including news of local stamp shows and exhibits. Our first few issues followed this format. However, since I was both the first club secretary as well as editor of the newsletter, I realized that our club minutes should serve as a record of club business and that the newsletter should concentrate on philatelic topics that would inform and entertain our members. A few of our articles were written by non-club members but most came from within our membership. They reflected the collecting interests of members as well as observations regarding general philatelic trends and issues both serious and even comedic.

Among these early articles was a series entitled "Get to Know Your Club Members." One member would interview another member to gather basic information about his or her background along with a description of when the member started collecting, how and what he or she collects. Now that we have many new members who have decided to join the SRSC, I think it is time to revive this "getting to know your members" feature. Are you ready to interview, take notes and write up a short piece introducing a club colleague to our membership and describe his or her collecting interests? I can assure you that you and your interviewee will find this to be an enjoyable and rewarding activity and the rest of us can learn more about the amazing people who have joined the Santa Rosa Stamp Club. And don't forget to take a photo of the member interviewed! Let me know if you would like to participate in this project.

### Amazing Stamp Stories #16

#### The FBI and the Mounties?

Stephen Brett

Millions of people around the world are stamp collectors. For some it is a relaxing hobby. For others it is a heroic quest to find the perfect stamps to complete a collection. Countless people may not be aware of the value of their collections; however, some of these collections are so valuable that the authorities must summon the FBI to investigate how they were acquired. In 2004 the Art Crime Team of the FBI was launched. Initially this elite team consisted of only 16 special agents each responsible for art crimes in certain geographical areas.

The FBI Art Crime Team is located at the headquarters of the FBI in Washington, D.C. This team receives training in art investigation and they work with law enforcement agencies around the world. The Department of Justice coordinates with the FBI to have their attorneys assist with the prosecution of art crimes. To date well over 2,000 items with a value of over \$300 million have been recovered.

Now that you have the background, here's the Amazing Story! In 1977 there was a theft of 153 postage stamps from the New York Public Library. The value of the stolen stamps was over half a million dollars. The library had them encased in glass that was supposed to be tamper proof. It



was theorized that someone must have remained behind in the library and used a special torch to cut through the glass to steal them. The library had been closed for the night. The stamps were removed from their panels which were oak cabinets stored in the information center. Among those that went missing were an airmail stamp, the famous inverted Jenny, and a rare embossed stamp issued in 1867.

The FBI was able to get a lead in 1982 by tracing another inverted Jenny that had disappeared almost thirty years before from a stamp show in Virginia. That stamp was traced to a Pennsylvania stamp dealer named Lambert Gerber. After subpoenaing the Estate of Mr. Gerber in 1983, the FBI was able to recover 69 valuable stamps. This number grew as they subpoenaed additional stamp dealers.

Ironically, Gerber was a stamp dealer with an outstanding reputation. He had even sold stamps to President Roosevelt. The day after the theft from the New York Library a person using an alias came to Gerber's home and offered to sell him two stamps from the Miller collection. Gerber, who had no idea of their origin, paid \$60,000 for the stamps. Gerber eventually ended up possessing 82 of the 153 stamps that the thief took from the library. Otherwise, he had a pristine career.

But here's the rest of the Amazing Story. Who spilled the beans on Gerber? None other than a youngster apprenticing in his stamp dealership who had the instincts that something was "rotten in Denmark" (stamps?). He later starred in the highly popular TV series *The FBI*. His name was Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., a very committed stamp collector all his life. It was he who called the FBI into the picture.



### **What Makes an Advanced Collection Advanced and an Advanced Collector Advanced?**

Stephen Brett

A certain resident of Knoxville, Tennessee named Jack Ellison offered this insight to *Linn's Stamp News*, "One might think it is the number of stamps in your collection and the inclusion of specific grades of the stamps or complete sets of certain issues that makes a collection one would label 'advanced.' Instead of numbers of stamps, an advanced collection would be one where the collector has acquired all of the easy stamps, whether mint or used, that cost under \$ 25.00, and is seriously going after the more elusive items. And, as the collector is successful in adding more desirable stamps, whether singly or in complete sets, the collection becomes more and more advanced."



So, an advanced collection can be quantified but that doesn't tell the whole story. If, say 5% to 10% of the stamps, whether cheap or expensive are seconds (folded corners, thins, pinholes, etc.), then the collection is hardly advanced per the definition found in Linn's. The quality of the collection's stamps, however, is only one measure. The other is the collector's knowledge! For example, what if the collector has an advanced collection but paid someone else to put it together? He may like to look at his stamps but doesn't know enough about the printing process, color differences, perforating machinery and so on to appreciate the stamps displayed. So, while this collector has an advanced collection, is he or she an advanced collector? The answer is clearly NO.

Who then can claim to be an advanced collector? For starters, it is someone who understands what the stamps represent, how and why stamps with a similar appearance are different, and more about how their values are arrived at. More than the experience of writing a check for them. If that sounds elitist then it is!

To reach advanced status requires very serious effort. Malcolm Gladwell in his book, *Outliers, The Story of Success*, suggests that 10,000 hours is the magic number for achieving greatness. In other words, to be considered advanced and truly experienced within a certain craft you must have practiced it for at least 10,000 hours. I would add that a lot of that time for stamp

collection would need to be devoted to learning about the subject of our enjoyment, not just their acquisition but to hands on experience with soaking, determining perforations and watermarks, using a millimeter gauge and catalogs, dealing with dealers and auctioneers and more.

The bottom line is that a stamp collection can be described as advanced when it is complete with the easy material and more difficult material being added. Then we can get hung up on HOW advanced the collection is. Defining degrees of "advanced" might include looking for specific items that have achieved a high level of interest in the philatelic community.

#### Skills of the Advanced Collector

I've arranged these philatelic skills as a handy checklist or test of whether you qualify as an advanced collector. It also can be used a prompter for improving your philatelic skills.

- Spotting fakes and forgeries
- Expertizing
- Analytical Philately
- Buying & selling on line
- Stamp production techniques
- Advanced exhibiting
- Errors, freaks, & oddities
- Methods and techniques of organizing and mounting different types of collections and materials
- Identifying material not in Scott's Catalogues
- Collecting trends and market trends knowledge
- Inventory management
- Knowledge and proficiency in the latest tools of philately
- The history of stamps
- Country analytics
- Identifying obscure stamps
- Artistry & production of stamps
- Stamp grading
- What are considered flaws and knowing which are the most detrimental.
- Understanding the grades of stamps
- Restoration of stamps
- Color; what affects color?
- Re-gummed stamps
- Phosphorus papers and related tagging
- Watermarks
- Exhibiting
- How to write up an exhibit
- Buying and selling at auctions
- Postal History
- Financing aspects of philately such as tax implications, record keeping and estate issues.

It is my hope that this article doesn't stress anyone out but acts as an eye opener about how fascinating and challenging our hobby is as well as how many avenues we can still travel even at our current stage in life. In writing the article I've multiplied my own ideas of what I can do over the next five years to keep my interests in collecting growing beyond just acquiring more and more stamps.

## When Is a Minimum Too Much?

Stephen Brett

Winnie the Pooh may or may not have been a philatelist but he did ask the following cogent question: "Did you ever stop to think, and then forget to start again?" Well, I started thinking again about the pernicious and collateral damaging effect of the Scott Catalogue minimum stamp value policy that now stands at 25 cents and is likely soon to rise to 30 cents (or more) due to inflation trends. I began being nagged by the Scott minimum after munching on a couple of Linn's "Kitchen



Table Philately" articles. RAWOLIK II's proud claim of sending \$2.00 to Joe Schmaltz ("Send \$2.00 & Receive \$125.00 in Basutoland off paper stamps, mostly commemoratives") and garnering \$136.75 in catalog value) just didn't sit well with me. Especially when 86% of the stamps were valued at Scott's minimum 25 cents. Then there's the 200 Hungarian stamps for \$ 1.00 amounting to \$95.00 Scott value—all mind you, at the Scott 25-cent minimum (with the exception of one at 45-cents Scott. That was the highest value as RAWOLIK II crowed to us readers. This left me a bit disgusted. But, by late afternoon while savoring an old treasure, *Stamp News International*, September 1955 issue I realized there's a better way for Scott to serve collectors. This old issue of *Stamp News International* rang true with a valuation legitimacy we are all missing today. And, it is so refreshing to see stamps valued at their worth. For instance, item 67156, Saar stamp day, listed at 10 cents; Sarawak 30c Queen Elizabeth value at 17-cents; Spanish Colonies Colonial Day, the complete set of nine values, three each (one regular postage, two semi-postals) for Guinea, Sahara, and IFNI at 17-cents. Sweden Flag Day, two values, cpl., at 17-cents. Isn't this a world we left behind of "clean" evaluation? How refreshing and how much more interesting than meaningless minimums? Frankly, the Spanish Colonies set of nine probably haven't increased in value since 1955, but, by God, Scott would have us believe that they are now worth 9 x 25 cents or \$2.25. As would Joe Schmaltz and Rawolik II.

Which faulty theory forms the foundation of Scott's misleading and distorting (and unhelpful) stake in the 25-cent minimum stamp value? It is found under the heading "Special Notices" - "Understanding Valuing Notation." I will distill it here for you before further debunking it: "The minimum catalogue value of an individual stamp or set is 25 cents. This represents a portion of the cost incurred by a dealer when he prepares an individual stamp for resale." (Scott acknowledges that the lower the stamp value, the higher percentage the handling load). They infer that even that isn't enough and that it covers, really, the stocking cost of the stamp. Scott also states that the sum of the minimum values in a set doesn't properly represent the value of a complete set, especially one that is composed of a number of minimum value stamps or a packet of stamps as such. Thus, they acknowledge that a bag of 1,000 stamps (from Woolworth's, possibly?) isn't worth \$ 250.00.

I, for one, see the 25-cent minimum as being more pernicious and calling for reform by Scott. How many of us order from or stand behind a counter at a dealer to obtain a minimum value stamp? Is this just a bone tossed to the dealers by Scott? It has nearly zero applicability to us collectors while it throws off valuation when trading or selling privately. One needn't struggle in labelling the 25-cent minimum for a stamp humbug. By their own admission, Scotts admits to its own fallacy under the heading of *Understanding Valuing Notations* since they proclaim, "The sum of minimum values in a set does not properly represent the value of a complete set primarily composed of a number of minimum value stamps, nor does the sum represent the actual value of a packet made up of minimum value stamps." Wouldn't you like to have the opportunity to ask the Scott decision makers, then why do you persist with a valuation policy that by your own admission distorts individual stamp and stamp valuation? Returning to their first rationale (covering dealer's handling and stocking expenses) who is Scott's primary beneficiary? Seems that it's the dealer who comes first; not the collector. This is an interesting discovery.



For instance, let's take Scott A482, the ubiquitous 3 cent blue Statue of Liberty issue. It's value per Scott is 25 cents (minimum). Not that anyone of us is searching for this stamp or would pay a penny for it, but how does this stamp equate to Scott 715, the orange 10-cent Washington (1932 Rotary press) for the same 25 cents, cancelled. But, I'm more disconcerted by the first 30 cent used American stamp staring at me: Scott 892 Elias Howe, Famous American Series, 1939. What makes that 30-cent value valid compared to all the 25-cent values, especially stamps worth a penny but only a nickel less than a 3-cent Liberty worth not even a penny? I argue that the 25-cent minimum makes questionable all the pricing bordering on a quarter of a dollar. Doesn't this beg the question: Why shouldn't Scott designate the 3-cent Liberty stamp (and there are more of these than the stars we see in the night sky) as "M" for minimum. Wouldn't that provide more credibility and meaning to all the designated prices in their catalogues?

And what about the dealers and their stocking and handling charges? Why should Scott care enough to throw off the credibility of respectable but lower cost stamps? Let the dealers promulgate their own minimums for handling and processing. They know their own costs, and they vary, don't they? When a Linn's Advertiser selling 500 or 1,000 stamps for \$9.00 and uses a flour scoop to drop them into a glassine envelope, how much cost is he or she incurring for stocking and handling? A quarter a stamp per Scott. But, let's say Scott went beyond designating an "M" as their minimum value and actually indicated such values as 3 cents or 12 cents? To begin with, there is nothing duller than repetition; 25 cents . . . ad infinitum - or "M" "M" "M". Conversely, there is nothing more interesting than variety and differentiation. So, let's argue for 1 cent, 5 cent, 7cent values. We know that not every 25-cent stamp has the same value and some were not printed as much as others and some are from the 19th century and harder to find. Yes, some are the cream of the crop.

Moreover, real pricing of stamps valued at 25 cents or less provides more respect for those valued between 25 cents and say and 75 cents or so. I suspect that the 25-cent Scott minimum has, perhaps unintentionally, demonetized so attractive low-cost material. This material winds up in sacks, packets, cigar boxes and other cardboard receptacles. On the other hand, approval booklets designated with, "Any Stamp 2 cents, or 5 cents, or 10 cents per stamp" remonitizes some nice stamps that can fill spaces. And, may even attract the kids: "Look what you can buy for 2 cents! Or, a nickel?" If candy stores had red licorice sticks for MINIMUM 25 cents for any piece of candy" they would have sold very little licorice.

Please share your thoughts with me. What do you think?



The Santa Rosa Stamp Club meets on the first Tuesday of the month from 6:45 pm to 9:00 pm at the Finley Community Center, Room #1, 2060 W. College Road, in Santa Rosa. Membership dues are \$20 per year. For information about the club visit our website at <http://www.santarosastampclub.org/home.html>

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