

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

This edition of the *SRSC Newsletter* features a bit of a philatelic time warp. Paul von Gottfried takes us back to 2350 B.C. to reveal the ancient origins of postage stamps while Steve Brett imagines what stamp collecting will be like in 2084. In both cases we see the essential role that a postal system plays in fostering human communication. Whether they take the form of clay tablets or images on a cell phone or computer, the postage stamp represents an artifact of this attempt to communicate. When viewed from this perspective, our stamp collections serve to preserve and document how messages from all corners of the globe have been sent. No wonder we are fascinated by this wonderful pastime.

We would be remiss not to mention the fragility of our hobby in the face of the horrific fires that struck the Santa Rosa region on October 8 and 9. One of our club members, Bill Sargis, lost his entire collection to the Tubbs fire that destroyed his home. The members of the Santa Rosa Stamp Club can all empathize – we shudder at the thought of losing our own collections never mind the other precious family objects and mementoes that were consumed by the fires. We extend both our heartfelt sympathy to Bill and his family including his daughter Tiffany for their losses and our best wishes as they rebuild their future. We also offer our condolences to Carol Westly, a former club member, who lost her home in Coffey Park.

Origins of the Postage Stamp: Ancient Cylinder Seal Stamps

Paul von Gottfried

The earliest precursors of our modern postage stamp originated during the 3rd millennium, B.C. in the ancient civilizations of Sumer and Akkad, located in Mesopotamia. This corresponds roughly to modern-day Iraq. The Sumerian civilization flourished around the so-called City-God temples from approximately 3500 to 2300 B.C. The high priest, assisted by an assortment of subordinate priests and scribes, ruled over the city.

Characteristic of the Sumerian civilization was the development of cylinder seals, an art form expanded and refined by the Akkadians. The earliest seal carvings were cylindrical decorations and pictographic symbols distributed around the surface of a small cylinder.

The 'die' thus carved, was rolled onto moistened clay to create impressions that reflected Sumerian culture, similar to pictographic symbols developed in Egypt.

With the decay of the Sumerian civilization (c. 2350 B.C.) the Semitic Akkadian dynasty was founded by King Sargon I, centered in the city of Akkad. During the next two centuries, the art of cylinder and carving reached its apex (c.2350-2150 B.C.). The Akkadian Empire was overrun by barbaric hordes from Gutium (c. 2150 B.C.). Its civilization with all of Mesopotamia was absorbed by Babylonia during the conquests of Hammurabi in 1800 B.C.

The temple scribes of Akkadia extended the art of seal writing by refining the art of cuneiform characters, which were inserted into the pictographic record itself. The scribes also inscribed clay tablets with official and historical permanent records, religious and cultural subjects, as well as messages similar to letters. One of the innovations was the messenger tablet, history's first development of an official communication system and the beginning of the first seal-stamp of primary philatelic import.

These cylinder seals were impression stamps, often quite intricate in design, and were used throughout Mesopotamia. They were known as *kishib* in Sumerian and *kunukku* in Akkadian and were used by everyone, from royals to slaves, in the transaction of business and sending correspondence. These seals were worn by their owners on strings of leather or other material around the neck or wrist or pinned to a garment. Their purpose was to serve as a personal signature on a document or package to guarantee authenticity or to legitimize a business deal as one signs a letter or form in the present day. The seal was rolled onto the moist clay of the document as an official, binding signature.



Contemporaneous with cylinder seals were stamp seals that were smaller and less ornate in design. The typical cylinder seal was between 3-4 inches (7-10 cm) long while stamp seals were less than an inch (2 cm) total and more closely resembled a signet ring. While some scholars (such as Dr. Stephen Bertman) claim the stamp seal preceded the cylinder seal, others (such as Dr. Gwendolyn Leick and Dr. Senta Green) claim that the two seals were used contemporaneously. The claim that the stamp seal came first would seem to make sense as it is a less refined means of sealing a document, and one would logically assume that the more refined and ornate cylinder seal developed from the more primitive stamp seal. While that may be, evidence suggests that stamp seals were popular throughout Mesopotamia at the same time as cylinder seals, and especially in the regions known today as Syria and Turkey.



Stamp Seal, circa 2250 B.C.

The question of whether the cylinder seal replaced the stamp seal or simply became more popular comes into play owing to disagreement among scholars as to what, precisely, was being sealed. Some scholars argue that cylinder seals developed from stamp seals given the need to seal bullae, hollow, rounded balls of clay which held tokens representing a financial transaction (for example, four white pebbles to represent four sheep), while stamp seals were used to secure flat clay envelopes which would be broken open upon receipt. The flat envelopes, the theory goes, were used before the development of the bullae, and so the stamp was an efficient means of securing a message or transaction. With the development of the bullae, a seal that could be rolled onto rounded clay was required, and so the cylinder seal developed. The archaeological evidence makes clear that both kinds of seals were used by the people of Mesopotamia and were used for both envelopes and bullae containers pre-dating the invention of *cuneiform writing*.

Documents and letters were used primarily by government officials to record important procedures and information such as tax liens, political and social liaisons, crop information, military campaigns, legal and judicial procedures and slave usage. Personal disputes among the elite were handled by correspondence. Such conflicts were subject to the whim of the court. These decisions were all delivered by *runners* who were usually trusted slaves. With the development of commerce and larger urban areas, the development of seals and stamps by the ruling class and wealthy citizens was a natural occurrence over time. The development of a bureaucratic class to handle the affairs of state

increased as the state grew. These seals and stamps became more sophisticated over time. Much of our historical record is based on these clay tablets that have been saved, both as official correspondence and personal letters

Whichever came first, the use of personal seals and stamps for correspondence goes back to at least 3500 B.C. in the Mesopotamia area. Similar developments took place wherever civilizations flourished, such as in Egypt where written language and pictographs developed. These cylinder stamps and seals were the ancient equivalent of official documents, personal letters and, eventually, the modern postage stamp.

Attend a Stamp Show

East Bay Collectors Club Show, Civic Center, Walnut Creek: October 28 and 29, 2017
SACAPEX, Scottish Rite Temple, 6151 H Street, Sacramento: November 4 and 5, 2017
Filatellic Fiesta, Elks Lodge, 444 W. Alma Ave., San Jose: November 11 and 12

From The Diary of Luke "Flash" Garcelon—Entry, December 24, 2084

Steve Brett

With a little time on my hands on Christmas Eve, the house being quiet - but, not for long! - I think I'll write about the changes I've experienced in my lifelong hobby of stamp collecting. After all, I'm turning 78 in a few days and tonight is the 70th anniversary of what was the best Christmas gift I ever received. It was Christmas Eve 2014 and as was the custom in our home, we opened our presents. My main present was a starter stamp album set. I think it was called The Voyager album. Back in 2014 I was able to go to the neighborhood post office and buy the latest stamps. Now, my grandkids ask me "Papa, what's a stamp?" They don't even know what a post office is. It was about 40 years ago when the last U.S. post office closed its doors and the last actual letter was delivered to some one's house. I think it was in Philadelphia to commemorate the birth of our American postal system and its first postmaster Benjamin Franklin. An already worn out drone delivered the last letter ever to a house and then made it back to the postal airdrome in Kelly Park. And, that was that. By that time mail delivery was almost 100% privatized with the Hallmark Corporation taking over the handling of any personal letters, greeting cards and the like and FedEx picking up on anything that was not a personal letter.

The last stats I've seen on the subject shows 97% of what used to be mail now appearing on screens of one sort or another. Oh, it's private. It only comes to the party with the embedded chip on his or her shoulder. If you don't wear a chip on your shoulder, then Hallmark is the preferred route. No more post offices, of course. Most were converted to low cost housing for down and out former postal employees. A few, not many, became Hallmark pick up and delivery locations. Most were torn down especially the main post offices. A few became I.T.H. Resorts (Ivanka Trump Hotels) after much renovation and gilt.

I've held onto my first stamp album as a keepsake. Like everything else, collecting is virtual and paperless. When I buy a stamp or trade a stamp it moves from either an

internet catalogue into my *Ipad* or from another collector's collection to mine. I can see it anytime I want and anywhere I carry my *Ipad*. The Scott catalogue link is available beneath the stamp with the catalogue number and current market value constantly updated. Unlike the old days, all the tedium of figuring out how many and how much value is gone. I know what I have in my particular collection and what is missing. I've chosen to network with all worldwide collectors and they know what I'm missing and what I have. I have the fun of on line bidding to me personally for what I have and might consider trading or selling and offers for what I want. I can collect or sell 24/7 and I always can squeeze in a little collecting during down times. Security isn't an issue. Anyone caught hacking or stealing stamps from a collector is forced to collect coins.

I'm a member of several stamp syndicates. These sprang up in the 2050's when some of the rarities became way too pricey for almost anyone. So, for instance, I bought 1,000 shares of the famous British Guiana stamp and I am a 1/36,000 owner. The same with the US C13-C15 zeppelins where I am a 1/49,000th owner. Six times a year these and other issues that I share ownership will appear on my *Ipad*. I can choose which days the stamps are part of my collection giving me ownership "bragging rights."

Stamp dealers have given way to syndicators. They make their money by lining up rarities and collections and make a brokerage commission from people like me who enjoy fractional ownerships. They tell me that very soon there will be means for collectors to short famous collections and rarities. Also, to buy options on stamps of interest based upon life expectancies and gossip! That will be a new and exciting fun way to be a collector.

Well, while no one is looking. I'm going to sneak into the attic and put a couple of stamps in my album. Hinges aren't easy to find. I still have some old ones a guy named George Land gave away to my grandfather when he was a member of a club in Santa Rosa. Sometimes, you just have to get away from unreality!

SRSC

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, 2060 W. College Road, in Santa Rosa. Membership dues are \$20 per year. Following a discussion of club business matters, the meetings feature a philatelic presentation and a member auction. For further information about the club visit our website at <http://www.santarosastampclub.org/home.html>

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