

The Cover Story

How Did You Start Collecting?

by Phil Fettig

Several months ago the Editor of this fine publication asked me to write an article with my prediction on the state of stamp collecting in another 50 years. After he read my effort, it was with great tact that he stated “This is a little on the dark side”. Actually, it was – but I had my reasons. Let me ask – How did you start collecting stamps? Many of us will probably answer - “with approvals through the mail”.

In my case I answered a few ads in *Boy's Life*, the national Boy Scout magazine. **Figure (A1) on the front cover** is a good example of *Boy's Life* (March of 1951). In addition in 1951, an issue of *Stamps* would be something that caught my attention [**Figure (A2) on front cover**]. **Figure (A3)** shows a small sample of the approval ads found in *Stamps*. *Stamps* was one of the top sources of philatelic information for years. This issue contained 71 pages with 173 display and 143 classified ads in addition to a full page back cover ad from Raymond H. Weill Co. in New Orleans. (That is a store I visited years ago, but will have to wait for another article in the future). In the following years, the number of ads increased in *Stamps* as well as several other fine publications including *Linn's*, *Stamp Collector*, *Mekeel's*, *Stamp Wholesaler* and others.

☆☆	APPROVALS	☆☆
60% OFF CAT.— Approvals by countries. Sharrott, 1039 Grassmere, Far Rockaway, N.Y. (tf)		
100 DIFF. MANCHUKUO 50c Approvals. Miller, Box 35M, Sioux City 20, Ia. (983)		
GERMANY, COLONIES, OFFICES, STATES Affiliates. Singles, sets, in fine condition; mostly 1/2-1/5 catalogue. Send today for superb approvals—free list. Myers, 251-14 Van Zandt Ave., Little Neck, N. Y. (tf)		
UNITED STATES APPROVALS — Select copies, used or mint. Kingsbury, Woodbury, Vermont. (tf)		
500 MIXED STAMPS AND SURPRISE 10c with approvals. Alfred B. S. Atascadero, Calif. (tf)		

Figure A3

All stamp publications usually have ads all through the issue, including a classified section at the end. I have a copy of *Linn's* (November 24, 1986; Vol. 59 Issue 3029) with the story of the 1986 FLOREX in my files. In addition to the usual ads spread throughout the 88 pages, it includes over 15 pages of classified ads. It includes 156 ads for approvals and nearly the same number for mixtures and packets. A current *Linn's* is just 36 pages that are less than half the size of the older issues. The classified section is a little over 4 pages and had 10 approval ads. However, the biggest negative fact is that of all the aforementioned

publications, only *Linn's* and *Mekeel's* survive today, both in much reduced size. And you ask “How is *Boy's Life* doing?” Well, it is still around in a smaller format as is the norm for today’s paper media. There are no ads for stamps.

US-234 UNITED STATES Price \$1.25
210 / 698
1883 - 1931 - 16 Var.
ALL STAMPS GUARANTEED GENUINE
DO NOT BREAK SET
JAMESTOWN STAMP CO. JAMESTOWN, N. Y.

No. 1030
P2-13 | 20 UNITED ARAB REP.-EGYPT Price \$1.75
ALL-DIFFERENT ALL-GENUINE POSTAGE STAMPS
BUY ONLY THE BEST... INSIST ON THE TRADEMARK YOU CAN TRUST

Figure A4, A5, A6 & A7
Clockwise from upper left.

SPECIAL OFFER
BULGARIA (27-7) 35c
WHERE EAST MEETS WEST
30 Varieties. A colorful semi-Oriental country, Bulgaria has been buffeted for centuries by the ebb and flow of military and political power between Europe and the Orient. Chiefly dependent on agriculture for survival, the "Land of the Ploughing Festivals" issues many stamps depicting the harvests wrested from the soil. Here is a very interesting collection of 30 different stamps — at barely over one cent each!
H. E. HARRIS & CO., BOSTON

Y-6 *QATAR 25c
GIANT PICTORIALS
1968-72, 6 varieties. Tiny, oil rich sheikdom displays exotic bird, and pays tribute to UNICEF, Munich Olympics as well as to combat of racism.
MYSTIC STAMP CO., GARDEN, NEW YORK

Approvals took many forms and were an easy way to obtain inexpensive material for your collection. Before looking at some of the ways approvals arrived, there are two other aspects that need to be mentioned. I quickly overextended my limited budget – a problem shared by many other young philatelists. Parental intervention quickly controlled that. The second is a fact known by all dealers, but not all collectors - a cheap low value stamp 60 years ago remains a cheap low-value stamp today. Now, that

is not meant to be a criticism of inexpensive items that are found in all collections. It is just a philatelic fact to be considered when deciding what and how to collect.

Approvals were available from many companies and in numerous forms. If you collected U.S. stamps then the items from Jamestown Stamps might be for you as seen in **figure (A4)**. Items were available from all countries, large and small. **Figure (A5)** contains material from Egypt while **figure (A6)** would add some Bulgaria to your album. Both of these selections are from Harris, a well-known name in the philatelic world. Mystic Stamp Company is probably the largest mail order dealer left standing. Over the years, several smaller companies have been merged to create today's operation. **Figure (A7)** shows a small selection from Qatar.

One additional method of building collections were the purchase of larger packets. **Figure (A8)** shows a group of packet titles that were available from Harris. You could choose general worldwide, a specific country or area of the world, or a multitude of topical subjects.



When writing these articles I usually start with an idea that produces a rough outline. When finished, that path may have been followed or I sometimes have an additional thought or two that may lead down a different road. In this case it was just an interesting lingering mystery. The 1951 *Stamps* issue that I counted ads in was addressed to the Golden State Stamp Company in San Francisco. I noticed some ads with pencil marks. They included Mint Gibraltar, Fine Used Canada and another for Canada New Issues. I checked online but could find no record of that stamp dealer. I went to bed that night wondering if the search was for new material or checking other dealer's ads.

This brings us to one of the reasons for the “dark” tone of my earlier article. All of the collecting methods mentioned in this article are still available to the novice collector. Most of the dealers or companies mentioned are no longer with us, but a few still are. My concern remains that the rich multitude of beginning opportunities are very limited now and the number of young potential collectors interested in philately are extremely low. How are we going to attract the next generations of collectors? Of course, the answer has to involve computers. Well, I'm old and barely able to keep up with the ever changing electronic world. I am going to have to challenge some of you to go online, check out what is available and write a rebuttal to my gloomy outlook!

[Editor's note. I also began collecting from approvals found in the back of Boy's Life as I was involved in Scouting from 1970 until 1985. Another source of approvals was advertising on match book covers. Since my father was a smoker – there was always match books lying around. I recall doing this a couple of time. As an unfocused youth collector, I was intrigued with most anything that was stamp related. My first visit to a stamp shop was in uptown Utica, New York; Comiskey's Stamp Store was there for many years, until it disappeared sometime in the 1970s. I shall tell that story in a future issue.]