

The Cover Story

Now for Something a Little Strange By Phillip Fetting

We all hope to find a major error some day. Some of us have been hopeful to only find we have what is called a “freak” or “oddy” and not a real error. What is the difference?

Scott usually lists errors of “missing or wrong colors, wrong paper or watermarks, inverted centers or frames, inverted or missing surcharges and overprints, double impressions, and missing perforations“. Scott also considers items that are “Inconsistent or random appearing such as imperforations or color shifts as freaks“. There is not a real difference between a freak and an oddity.

Let’s look at two freaks or oddities first. Figure (1) is a pair of coil stamps, Scott 1305, that has a misplaced perforation right down the middle of Roosevelt’s head. Thus parts of three stamps are present, and while this pair has a substantial shift, it is common and only sells for a few dollars. Figure (2) is a booklet pane, Scott 1280e, that should have had six of the Wright stamps. Instead, parts of nine are showing. This item is also not highly priced. The most likely cause for these two freaks would have been miss-registration of the full sheet of subjects prior to the perforation and/or cutting process.

Now for errors - Figure (3) shows a strip of five coil stamps, Scott 2609a, that is totally missing the vertical perforations. It has a listed value of \$15.00 for a pair. It is interesting to note that the more valuable issue is 2609b which is a pair that has perforations on the ends and is only imperf in the middle. It lists for \$75.00.

Now for the major error - look at the block of fifteen two cent stamps in figure (4)....or is it? How about fourteen two cents and one FIVE cent stamp, right in the middle? This is Scott 505, listed at \$650.00 (\$1,000.00 if never hinged) in a multiple item piece. How did this happen? The full story would require a separate article or even a program some meeting night. Here, however, is the short version: During World War I many operations, including the Bureau of Engraving and Printing suffered from the loss of qualified personnel to the military and other war efforts. A proof sheet of the current two cent stamp, what we know as Scott 463, was printed and inspection disclosed three impressions that failed to pass muster. The three offending positions were burnished out and the plan was to re-enter the images with a roller. The siderographer picked up the five cent roller instead of the two and entered the images. [Editor note: A “2” and a “5” look remarkably alike when in reverse.] The error was discovered only after the sheets had been printed and distributed, and although recalled, many remain in collector’s hands. (Information for this article found in part in Scott’s Specialized Catalog, Linn’s Refresher Course and the Mystic Stamp Company website.)

Let me know if you would like to see a program or article on how our stamps were engraved and printed.

[Editor’s Note: My first love of collecting is classic U.S. material from 1847-1940, however I stumbled into the field of the Presidential Series -- Errors, Freaks and Oddities somewhat by accident – and was hooked. Just about all the material is visually interesting and for the most part affordable. That said there are some very expensive pieces that will more than likely never grace my album pages. As a result of this article, by Phil, I will write a cover story on Prexie EFOs some time soon. If your major collecting field has grown a little tired & dull --- try something a little different you might be surprised by what happens!]

Reminiscences



By Michael Rogers

To my mind, what makes a stamp dealer is philatelic knowledge, financial acumen, and the ability to get along with others. Every transaction is a reflection of integrity. Serve the hobby.

A dealer can know his material, be glib and a financial whiz, but if he's corrupt, he won't survive. For that matter, it takes a life to build a reputation, but one sour transaction can destroy it.

I haunted the stamp shops of my youth, buying, selling, chatting the dealers up. Worked on Saturdays in Manhattan's Diplomat Stamp Shop. As a voracious reader, I scooped up whatever philatelic literature that was around. Some handbooks would delve into arcane subjects, without photographs, and assume the reader understood highly technical terms. Auction catalogues pointed directions that I wanted to learn more about. I wasn't an American Philatelic Society member so didn't realize membership brought the ability to borrow books from the swell APS library.

When I designed my stamp shop on tony Park Ave in 1978, the back wall which so impressed folks held our philatelic library. In time, our library grew to over a thousand volumes. My mantra has been that every book I come across which is not in our library is fit for us. At times, I'll include volumes on history and sociology.

A devotion to literature has paid off in so many ways. It's a great advantage evaluating material when buying or selling.

Poking through dealer boxes at a NYC show, I came across some 1922-3 \$2 and \$5 high values on parcel tags priced for little more than used stamps. The Scott Specialized doesn't address this rather unusual usage. Auction catalogues do. Specialists devour this material.

When an advanced collection comes to MRI for auction, we usually have the literature to describe it. While there's much literature in English, technicians on staff read handbooks in Spanish, French, Ger-

man, and Chinese. Scott is a very fine catalogue but it only starts the journey.

Stamp dealers are intellectually curious, unintimidated by research. It's fun poring over books, trying to figure out rates on postal history, FDC cachets, translate cancellations and place philately in a historical context.

And as knowledgeable as one may be, no one knows it all. Never hesitate asking for help.

Any business must be on steady financial grounds. Maintaining a healthy cash-flow is essential. In these troubled economic times, its difficult borrowing capital for those dry spells, so its mandatory knowing where you are. Co-ordinate things as if you always need the funds so when you do, the money is there.

One reason why my stamp shop lasted the 29 years that it did was the rapid turn-over of inventory. I closed it in December 2007 because I saw this recession coming and didn't want to have a street level stamp shop. As an auction/internet sales company Michael Rogers Inc (MRI) is doing well. I'm on the road for consignments and buying many weeks a year. It's enough.

Winter Park Stamp Shop would try to sell new purchases for six months, turning whatever didn't sell over to the auction company for cash flow. For the stamp shop then, as for MRI now, we'd evaluate purchases in terms of how to merchandise and how long would it take to turn-over.

You'll recognize me as a China specialist. Would you be surprised to know that I positioned my company in Chinese Philately way before China became hot? Took time to understand the marketplace,

make contacts, develop the inventory and learn how to merchandise. The initial plunge into China came as the result of a huge purchase in 1982, but I was tempted to flip it. Sure am glad I stayed with it

These days MRI is developing other areas in which we see promise. No matter how narrow the field, there's a core of passionate collectors seeking it. Reaching those collectors is how creative merchandising pays off.

Its common sense that for business to proceed there must be harmony. And yet, I observed a dealer who would interject politics and potty-mouth language which has nothing to do with the equation. An opinionated fellow may offend. I try to be sensitive to the person I'm with, remembering that though I've done this many times before, there's a first time for everyone. The best transaction is one where both are at peace six months hence.

Membership in the American Stamp Dealers Association is a must. Put to the side all the benefits. Membership says the dealer subscribes to a rigorous code of ethics. If a complaint is made over a \$200 transaction, the member must take care of it to the Board of Directors' satisfaction, or risk expulsion. This kind of activity gives the collector a real sense of comfort when conducting transactions with an ASDA member.

Stamp dealers serve the hobby by starting new collectors. Support your local club with donations. The ASDA will supply members with beginner albums that are perfect for distributing at grade or junior high schools. And it feels so good to be helpful! ☒