

# The Cover Story

## A Tale of Three Collections, Part III of III by Phil Fetting

This is the third article with dual recurring themes. First, do not try to figure the right or wrong way to collect, but instead do it the way that gives you satisfaction. The second is the hope that by sharing some of my experiences in purchasing a collection you can better prepare for that day that you or your representative disposes of yours.

Like the subject of the second article, this collection was also formed by a retired successful businessman. The significant difference was the majority of this collection was United States material instead of world wide. The main portion of the collection consisted of 31 Scott U.S. National albums. There were also 4 Scott Specialty albums of Israel material and a few miscellaneous items. **Figure [1] on front cover** shows a part of the large number of National Albums on one of my storage shelf units.

I arrived at the appointment and met first with Steve Patrick, the source of this referral. This was a new experience in location as we entered an elevator on the way up to a condominium several floors up. Unlike the material described in the Part II article which was jammed in a full room, this collection sat in neat rows on a bookcase in the well-furnished living room of the condo. The only items “out of place” were a few miscellaneous albums on a desk and on the floor next to the bookcase. These items included a few cover and stamp card collections from the Postal Commemorative Society along with other minor material. The desk contained a huge amount of mounts and some purchase records. The desk and bottom shelf of the bookcase also contained a coin collection which was relatively small compared to the size of the stamps and which was not part of the purchase.

After meeting and briefly sharing how I evaluated material with the widow of the collector, it was time to go to work. Steve waded into the huge amount of face value material represented by singles, plate blocks, sheets and booklets while I tackled the early material, officials, back of the book material, U.S. Possessions and Duck stamps. At that point I knew we were in for several hours work. Steve had previously looked at the collection and had provided me a list outlining what he could see. From this list I knew the collection started with used singles of Scott 1 and 2 and went up through 2013 with a mix of mint/used singles, pairs, plate blocks and sheets. While certainly not complete, it had classic better items such as a nice White Plains S/S (630), mint Zepps (C13-15) and a vast amount of mid-range and common values. He had also uncovered a major clue how this transaction was likely to go, even before I had viewed it. It was clear that the gentleman had purchased most of his early items from the Mystic Stamp Company. While I do not make rash judgments without seeing the stamps, this fact meant I would find two things: First, although verification would be necessary, the stamps were probably correctly identified, and second their grades would most likely be at the lower end of the average to very fine scale. For example, I knew the Kansas – Nebraska set was complete. I was able to compare catalog value vs. eBay prices realized at different grades. In the week prior to the appointment I easily spent 10 – 12 hours preparing possible value estimates depending on the conditions and grades we might expect to find. Experienced dealers with larger operations would not be faced with this task. It was necessary in my case as I had never attempted to purchase this large of a collection consisting of 99% U.S. Material, especially including the early items. The time spent preparing this preliminary rough pricing data beforehand saved critical time during the decision making process at the time of preparing my offer.

Where did I start my actual pricing you ask? With U.S. Scott #1 of course! The good news is the collection had one....the bad news is shown in **figure [2] on front cover**. It is not nice to refer to a collector's stamp as a “dog”, but since I now own this one I will do just that. In fact, it is a “junkyard” dog. Just looking at it shows it is faded and the image is not clear. There are at least two creases that efforts have been made to smooth out. Both creases have the beginning of a tear. It appears a thin has been filled in on the reverse side. The 2016 catalog value is \$400.00 for this stamp in the grade of very fine (vf). The very good (vg) value in the

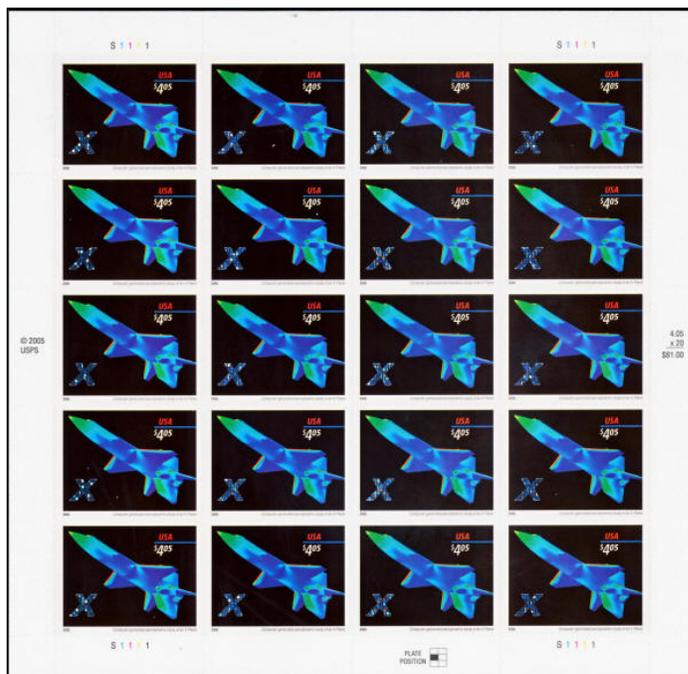
“Specialized by Grade” section is \$105.00 and while I might normally use this number as a rough starting point in setting retail, that will not work here. This is clearly a “space filler” and will be priced accordingly. This stamp set the tone for the majority of the older and better U.S. material. This collector certainly had the ability to purchase material in a much better grade and condition. For whatever reason he chose not to and that is one of the major points I preach. This is what he wanted to do and he did it. Some have already questioned me on why I would purchase lower grade material. The answer is the same as it would be for better – it sells if you price and market it properly.

I previously mentioned much of the material was purchased from Mystic, a company that sells on the high end while delivering material in lower grades. This collection is full of multiple examples but I will only illustrate one and discuss another. **Figure [3]** shows an official stamp, U.S. O-16 and a line of information from the Mystic invoice.



The stamp is mint without gum and is graded as vg by the standards in the Scott Specialized. (This grade is also commonly referred to as average (avg) and is the lowest under the Scott system.) This stamp has a 2016 cv of \$30.00, however when you apply the vg or avg grading, it is reduced to \$8.75. Checking recent eBay sales for this stamp in a similar condition showed eight examples sold with a range of \$0.99 up to \$1.25, with a few more making it up to \$4.00. This collector paid \$15.00 plus postage for this stamp. An example of a much newer item **figure [4]** is Scott 4018, a priority mail stamp with a face value of \$4.05. He purchased a sheet of 20 with a face of \$81.00 at a net price of \$299.00 plus postage from Mystic. The sheet was still available during the same time period from the USPS for the \$81.00 face plus postage.

This person's only foreign collection was Israel and he chose to expand the normal issues with a series of special issues promoted by Marlen's, a major dealer in Israel material. One of the benefits of dealing is meeting the challenge of expanding your philatelic knowledge out of necessity in order to market new material. This was the case when evaluating some of the Israel material in this collection. The items listed in Scott's were not a problem as you would expect. However there were some items not listed or just referred to in small notes. I am going to defer describing some of these items until I can obtain a specialized Israel catalog and/or talk to an experienced collector or dealer.



There is a second reason to hold off which by the time you read this, should be over. At the time of writing this I am less than a week away from a knee replacement. It is time to put down the stamps and finish getting ready for the surgery. With that said, next time I will finish the story of this purchase and sum up some comments and lessons learned, both good and bad, from the last two major (for me at least) buying adventures.

[Editor's Note: Part I appeared in the November/December 2015 issue and Part II in the January 2016 issue.]