

The Cover Story

And Now The Rest Of The Story by Phil Fettig

This is not actually “all” of the rest of the story, but close. Over the past few issues I have been sharing the highs and lows of some recent larger (for me) purchases. I was going to wrap it up with some observations and comments, however my recent surgery altered my ability to get the needed items together. For that reason I am going to take one common aspect of three of these collections and share some thoughts. Other observations will appear in the months ahead as smaller comments.

To recap, the three buys consisted of an approximate total of 36 Scott Internationals full of worldwide material, 35 Scott Nationals with U.S. and another 30 albums with a mix of pre-1945, U.S., Germany & worldwide. The common factor was this huge accumulation of material came with the grand total of 7 or 8 old Scott catalogs. Absolutely nothing else in the way of philatelic reference material to help differentiate the items worth a few cents, from the ones worth hundreds of dollars. And, for the record, the value range was there to be determined and not always correctly identified!

An important note – the goal of this article is not to help you prove an expensive stamp is certifiable as genuine – it is more to help you identify common, but difficult items and screen out others that are not what they were touted to be. If you can eliminate some possibilities, then you might end up with something worth trying to get a certificate on.

These collectors had every right to put these albums together without the aid of philatelic literature and so they did. Now, I would like to present an alternative method, one which you might benefit from in your collecting efforts.

Any discussions on Philatelic Literature [**Figure 1, on front cover**] has to start with the basic publication that is overlooked many times - even if you are a beginning collector with an interest in modern stamps from the U.S. or a few worldwide countries, there is a huge amount of detailed information you can benefit from by studying the front section of a Scott Catalog [**Figure 2, on front cover**]. It never ceases to amaze me the number of times I will meet with a person who wants to sell the collection and they obtained a Scott Catalog to price the material. I then have to explain most of their efforts to catalog the stamps were wasted due to ignoring those little details such as perforations and color. It gets even worse when taking into consideration grills, paper and printing methods [**Figure 3, on front cover**]. So, important lesson number 1 – take some time for a self-help study program using a Scott Catalog! If you want a good solid base of information to build on – look no further, it is in your hands.

For the general worldwide collector, the appropriate Scott catalog will probably be enough. If you decide to specialize with a single country, then you might need to look at a specialized catalog from that country. Examples would be a Stanley Gibbons for Great Britain or a Michel for Germany. These two catalog brands also produce references on most countries in the world. A perfect example is the Stanley Gibbons *Great Britain Concise Stamp Catalog* [**Figure 4**]; published once a year, the roughly 450 pages are packed with highly detailed information for the cost of about \$75. You will find them very expensive to purchase, but I'll discuss an alternative source later. The hard part for a worldwide collector is the cost of a full set Scott's which could run \$500.00 or more new. It is also possible to put a set together on eBay cheaper. The worldwide collector who collects only those issues up to 1840 can refer

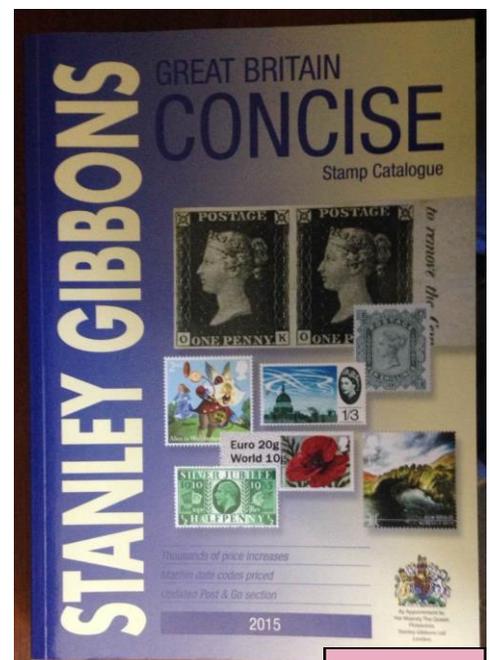


Figure 4

to a wonderful publication, the Scott Classic Specialized Catalogue of Stamps & Covers 1840 – 1940. This is an excellent reference with expanded information on some of the early issues. The cost of a new one is high at \$140.00 but don't forget this one volume gives you A to Z coverage. Older copies can be had in the \$40 - \$60 range. Also for the classic worldwide collector is an exceptional book on forgeries, *The Serrane Guide – Stamp Forgeries of the World to 1926* by Fernand Serrane. The American Philatelic Society published this 1927 work as a handbook in 1998. It is out of print but has been sold on eBay recently for \$100 - \$150. It gives good coverage to worldwide forgeries most likely to be encountered.

For the U.S. collector the list could easily fill the rest of this newsletter. If you collect only commemoratives, proper identification is less critical than things like determining if a stamp has been reperfected or regummed. The area of collecting U.S. that can benefit most from reference literature would be definitive stamps from 1847-1940. When starting to work this material, of course you already started with the excellent Identifier of Definitive Issues in the front of the Scott Specialized. Now, if you obtain no other reference item, the *Scott Identification Guide to U.S. Stamps Regular Issues 1847-1934*, by Charles Micarelli [Figure 5] is the one you must have. (Note: The late Charles Micarelli was a long time CFSC member). This book is available from Amos Advantage and used copies are on eBay.

Now, if you really are serious about U.S. definitives the list can explode so I am going to take a different path. I really enjoy writing articles for the newsletter but since very few of you ever comment or ask questions the thought arises, does anybody read them? I will make an offer toward the end of the article that might give me the answer. Here are a few in this short article that can be of major help to a collector. The U.S. definitives that cause most collectors problems are the series referred to as “Banknotes” and Washington/Franklins. *Large U.S. Banknotes Identification Guide* by Pipes & Einhorn, an APS Handbook published in 2010 dissects this series and all the “secret marks” in a superior manner. Going to spend some time and money on the Washington/Franklin series? Better not until you have looked at *The Expert's Book* by Schmid or the three handbooks by Martin Armstrong. All four of these items are out of print, but available on eBay and from philatelic booksellers. If you want to look deeper into some of the earlier definitive sets, ask me about the books by Brookman, Chase, Johl, Luff and Williard. Interested in more modern sets? Both the 1938 Prexies and the later Liberty series have books written. The list can keep going with subject books on airmail covers, essays, cancellations, first day covers, postcards, naval covers, paper that stamps and envelopes were printed on, grills...ok - you should get the idea – there is a lot out there to research for knowledge! To sum it up, these references are available many places – some are APS publications, most are on eBay at one time or another and I can give you a list of philatelic literature dealers. Since I have most of the items mentioned, I can even bring something in for you to look at, just by you asking. However I saved the best source until last. Each of us can gain access to a treasure chest of reference material by contacting the American Philatelic Research Library at the APS. Want to “test drive” a book before deciding to purchase it? Identified a source for information you are seeking? APS and APRL members may borrow books directly by mail. I have used the APRL in this manner many times. For additional information ask me or go directly at www.stamps.org and click on **LIBRARY SERVICES**

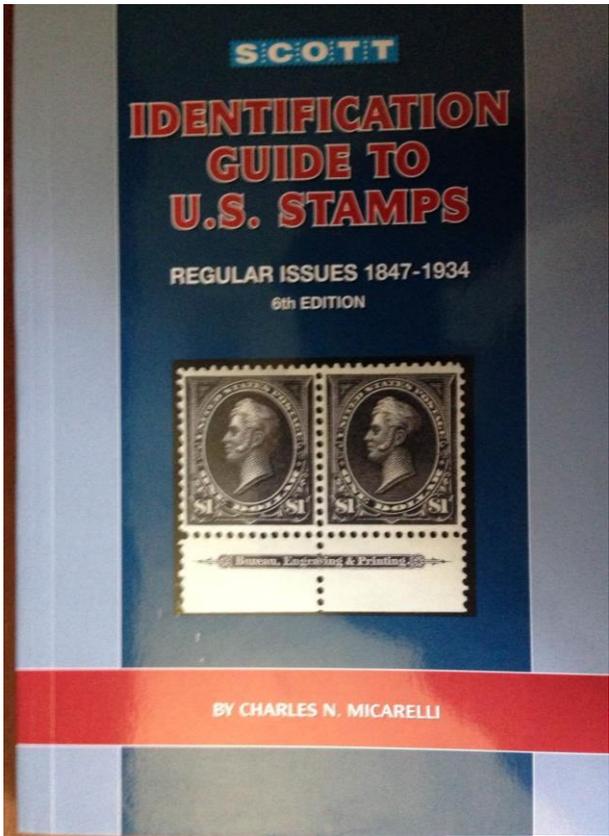


Figure 5