

Feeding The Beast

Michael Rogers

We called it “feeding the beast”: finding enough material to keep the Michael Rogers Inc auctions and inventory topped out. Filling something like 4,000 mail orders for China/Asia and conducting 12 to 14 public auctions and mail sales yearly consumed a lot of stamps and postal history.

I opened a stamp shop in Winter Park Florida in 1978, knowing full well I needed to augment over the counter sales with mail order. My thinking was to build a strong U.S. stock for local collectors and advertise unusual countries on pricelists. As time wore on, I began to look for a specialty.

Winter Park Stamp Shop was designed in a library setting, with discrete teak and glass counters and displays. Collectors would browse for hours, perhaps looking at what I had for sale, or using my library. Fine by me. Pouring over the stamp shop library is how I met Art Bateman. Fall 1982, Arthur Bateman passed away, long before his time, at the age of 54.

Bids were taken on his philatelic holdings and I became a China dealer in October 1982. (For a fuller reading, access my October 2010 Reminiscences article which can be found on the Michael Rogers Inc website.) I hit upon the idea of issuing bi-annual pricelists for China 1878-1949 that would list and price mint/used all but the rarities, anything that was in stock.

Frequent PRC/Taiwan pricelists offering sets came out. Truly a glutton for punishment, I had Japanese Occupation of China pricelists that were Scott/CSS/Chan cross referenced. Thousands of largely inexpensive stamps!

I love retail. Of a certain generation, the young men in my family spent a summer working in my grandparents’ Brooklyn dry goods store. The implied lesson was get an education because retail was monotonous and arduous. Cousin Martin became an immigration attorney, Cousin Milton a corporate finance officer. After my three months, Grandpa asked me what I had learned. “Grandpa, I like this!”. Lovingly he cuffed me on my forehead, saying “First an education, then you can do what you want”. Which is what I did.

Working over the counter in Winter Park Stamp Shop remains one of the most pleasurable experiences of my professional life. Gosh, I have so many treasured friendships that blossomed in central Florida.

Mail sales to sell company owned material started in 1984. It was a good way to establish the value of odd pieces not addressed by the standard catalogues. I was made aware of how little I knew.

During the 1980s, James Kerr was working alongside me. Jim was a recognized philatelic authority and knew a lot of collectors. During the fall of 1987, one of his dear friends, Norman Townsend, consigned his magnificent collection of Chinese stamps and postal history to my company. It became our Dragon Auction, a one owner sale held on January 9, 1988.

In the Dragon Auction, lot 156 held the China 1897 Red Revenue small 2 cent double surcharge, both inverted. This very rare stamp sold for \$41,800. Lots 162 and 163 were the China \$5 Red Revenue, normal and inverted surcharge (\$4,400 & \$6,600). Awesome beginning to a long run of public auctions!

Bateman was a traveling salesman who frequented stamp shops along his routes. Apparently, he didn't have his own collection. Instead he would annotate stock cards in his careful pencil manuscript. You wouldn't know it today, but prior to 1982, China wasn't particularly popular. Many dealers looked upon Chinese Philately as inscrutable and time consuming.

A few months after acquiring the Bateman hoard, I leased additional space nearby my stamp shop for the nucleus of Michael Rogers Inc. I was fortunate in that I recognized I personally didn't have sufficient knowledge in order to develop the Chinese/Asian market the way I envisioned.

When I was a boy, I accompanied my Mother out on Long Island for her shopping. As we went along, I spied a stamp shop. Little did I know the store belonged to an internationally known dealer named John Fox. I have never forgotten his response to my statement that “A dealer has got to be awfully smart”. Mr. Fox said a dealer needs to recognize that no one man knows it all; he must surround himself with good people. That I've always tried to do.

I set out to energize the marketplace. I acknowledged I didn't have a deep understanding of the material and the sharks were circling. As I learned, I shared practical tips. Profits subsidized publishing literature, catalogue correlations and album pages. Rolling along!

I was building an incredible inventory, first with the Bateman material, then aggressively buying. Some dealers would approach us with want lists for specific customers; we had want lists to shore up depleted inventory for future orders. If something was on a pricelist, I wanted a 100% fulfilled order. No credit slips.

Lots of dealers were content to operate on purchases and consignments generated over the counter and through the mails. As the China market was percolating, I couldn't. I felt secure that I had a good staff so started going on road trips. There's nothing so impressive as dealing face to face with the owner. And getting away from the office environment: meeting new folks, reading in the car, sightseeing, does that sound like work?

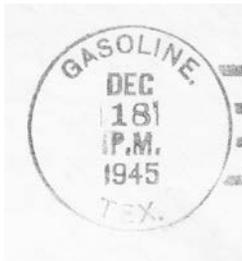
Phil's Corner by Phil Fettig

The Editor knows he can always call on me to provide a quick article for the newsletter. This time I struggled.

After looking around for something I decided to ask my



But nobody could help. Next I decided I better go out and try to find something so I got in my



but, alas, I was out of



so, I climbed on my



and rode all over



and looked under every

That didn't work either.



If only I had the stamps that this collector did: