

## Billig's Philatelic Handbook by Phillip Fettig

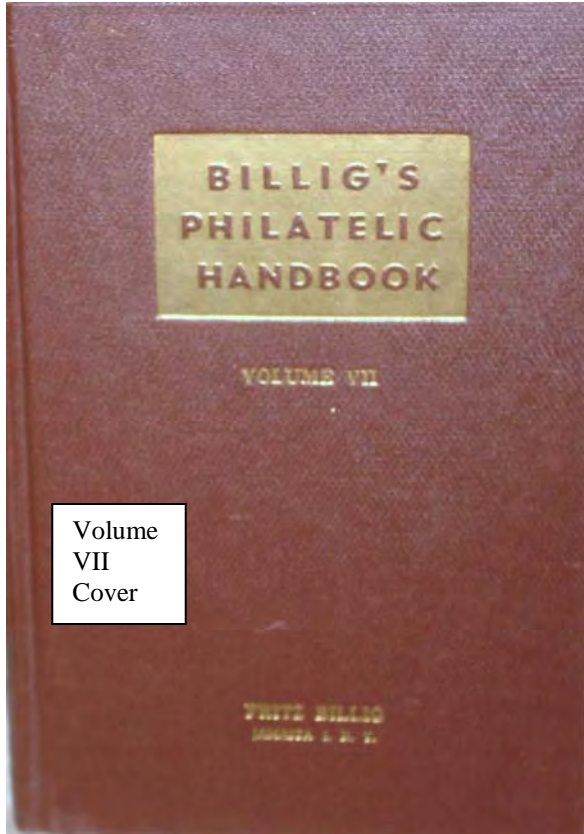
Hopefully we have all experienced that magic moment when a highly sought after stamp is obtained or a set completed. I have also had that feeling when acquiring philatelic books. Several years ago I had the opportunity to buy a set of Billig's Philatelic Handbooks and thus obtained something that is harder to complete than a set of Columbians or Zepps. [Figure 1 – Complete set of 44 volumes.]

Not many collectors are familiar with the Billig's set and even if so, at first they can be a confusing and overwhelming series of books. Let's see if we can shed some light on these great reference books!

These handbooks were first published in the early 1940's by Fritz Billig, a Vienna stamp dealer who came to the United States in 1938 to



escape the unrest that preceded World War II. He settled in Jamaica, New York and started publishing after a few years. The basic set consists of 44 volumes, some with many editions. Some editions have completely different contents which add to the initial confusion. Trying to put together a complete set can be a real challenge. Late in the 1960's, a Florida concern, HJMR, Co. purchased the rights and reprinted the handbooks. Also, sometime later, a flooded HJMR warehouse destroyed a large amount of philatelic literature, including some handbooks. This unfortunate incident also adds to the difficulty in obtaining a set piecemeal.



Now, so much for the messy background - what you end up with is a treasure chest full of philatelic knowledge. This set belongs in the "Top Ten Books" for any serious philatelists to have on the shelf. I can't promise that the handbooks contain every piece of information you might look for, but the variety of subjects is amazing. Do you have a requirement to know about "Swiss Hotel Posts", "Estonia Post Offices", U.S. Jack-o-lantern cancels" or "Plating the Penny Black"? There are just a few of the hundred's of random subjects you will find within the 44 volumes. Some volumes contain parts of other philatelic reference books on major subjects, especially ones like U.S. Cancells and itish Commonwealth subjects.

One last comparison to a set of stamps - have you ever noticed how the last stamp of the 35 subject set of U.S. Famous Americans (Alexander Graham Bell) has most of the catalog value of the set? It is the same with a set of Billigs - a big part of the \$900.00 retail value rests in the final 11 volumes as they are the most difficult to locate. You can locate an index to the subjects on the eBay website - Go take a look and then you can have the fun of the chase in obtaining it.

# Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

**Y**ou never know what's coming in the door of a stamp shop. I had a front window that piqued the interest of even a non-collector, inviting the curious into a living room setting. The window displayed documents and maps, illuminated stamps and postal history. Stamp collecting kits sold at a discount introduced beginners of all ages to collecting.

Took a while to get the shop going so I would buy just about anything that came my way, figuring I'd find a home down the pike. My theory was if someone saved it, someone else would like it and pay money. About the only time I'd pass on anything was when we couldn't agree on price. Two reasonable people can disagree and part amicably. Not a problem.

Mid 1978, when I didn't have much of a stock, I bought 1200 lbs of metered mail from a lady. Complete envelopes they were. When I opened up the first box, my heart quickened because the top meter was the very rare Jacksonville Florida flying eagle. As was the next, and the next, and the next! Darned near everything was the same so the population of the very rare item went from a handful to a gazillion.

Problem is, meters aren't all that popular in relation to stamps. Still I thought it was pretty neat. It just wasn't worth what it could have been worth. So I bought the lot, did a bill of sale and paid by check. Done deal? Not quite!

I started selling a #10 box of metered envelopes at \$1 per pound. Thankfully, I'd only sold a couple of boxes before I asked myself why anyone would hold onto all these envelopes. Then it occurred to me that maybe I should look inside and you know what? I realized the envelopes were someone's containers for sorting.

So I looked inside every envelope. Gosh knows I had the time. Some had goodies like 19th century U.S. I found a crumpled used No. 11 block of 16—later on I sold this very rare piece, though damaged, for \$250. Others contained worldwide or



For decades, central Florida's open door to philately was Michael Rogers' Winter Park Stamp Shop, an intimate, friendly place with a full-time staff.

British. Adding my figures, I determined that had I been aware of the contents, I would have offered her \$3,000 more.

I returned to the bill of sale so I could pop her the \$3,000 check and do the right thing. She'd just scrawled her name and phone number. So I called her and explained that if I'd done a competent appraisal of her material, I would have offered her more money. "Please give me your address and I'll send you your check." Hey, my Mama raised me right.

Well, she was so surprised that she thought it was a trick! "Nope I've got a check for you, because it's the right thing to do." We went back and forth, so I went to plan B; "Come in and pick it up" I said. Well, she wouldn't do that either! So I remarked that if I didn't see her in a week, I'd make a \$3,000 donation to the American Cancer Society. I was feeling kind of dumb right about here.

So the gal comes in right when I had six or seven customers and she blasts me for inconveniencing her. I was mortified. A few years later she phoned to say her granddad had passed and did I want to buy the stamp collection? Obviously, she'd thought it over, and realized I was

trying to do right by her.

Grandpa lived near downtown Orlando in a white wooden framed three story home. He'd been ill for some time so unable to convey his wishes to the family on how to best dispose of his collections. Each floor was themed according to the material for his collectibles.

His especially large stamp collection, fine art and wonderful library were housed on the first floor, so I reckoned this to be the "paper" theme. A substantial coin collection joined antique mechanical banks and beautiful clocks on the second floor. I thought of this as the "metal" floor. But the greatest treasure of all was on the third floor, a wondrous array of collectible glass! All posed to catch the sun's rays, to tell a story as the day progressed. Tiffany and more. Dazzling!

The stamp collection was marvelous. British Commonwealth virtually complete 1938-68 mint LH, a smashing Mexico collection, Confederate patriot-ics, U.S. to die for.

My only regret was that I had never met the Grandpa to realize what an interesting man he must have been. ☒