

Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers



Amazingly, I'd become a China dealer in one fell swoop in November of 1982, bidding in competition against two other dealers. Here I was, with a mammoth, specialized though heartily disorganized inventory of China from classics to new issues, mainland 1878-1949, PRC with liberation area (much non-Scott) and Taiwan. Twenty nine cartons of stamps and postal history.

Right off the bat with my first price list I learned the lesson not to rely upon Scott for specialized material. One guy crowed that because the "China C48 paste-up pair with the right stamp having an inverted surcharge" that I sold him for \$100 was one of only 10 known, he would have paid ten times as much. So many repeat orders for rare stamps made me wonder how to price them. And I had gobs of postal history which no catalogue identified or priced.

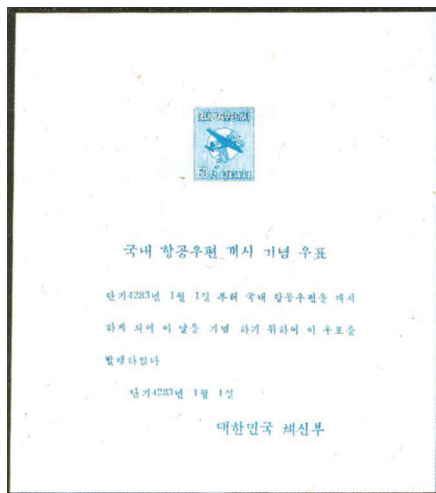
About this time I met an engaging fellow named Joe Cartafalsa who would drift in and out of my future. Joe's background was in postal history; he'd traveled extensively in Southeast Asia.

We released a postal auction dated August 31, 1984. "Postal" differs from "public" in that it's a clerical, not live person-to-person event. It's the same as a mail sale. This was before the Internet so bids were received by snail mail.

Content was specialized China and also the Zeppelins and Airposts that I'd taken a professional interest in prior to becoming a China dealer. I had a swell stock of both.

Where we screwed up was in the presentation. The catalogue was a 5½" x 8½" size with 6 black and white photo plates. The printing company sized them 50% too small! The job was already paid for (we weren't given proofs ahead of delivery) and Linn's ads had announced the date so we went ahead and mailed them. Fortunately, most folks took the tiny photos in stride.

By the fifth postal auction in 1986, we adopted our 8½" x 11" format. China in-



cluded a used block of 6 of the one cent Red Revenue which sold for \$57.50 and the 1949 UPU miniature sheet without overprint which sold for \$525.

James Kerr became my right hand man in 1986. Fluent in all the romance languages, plus Korean (!), Jim was one of the most knowledgeable philatelists I'd ever known. His contacts shepherded many collections our way.

Norman Townsend built a formidable China 1878-1949 collection. Because of his lifelong friendship with Jim, my company was chosen to offer the Townsend China collection in our first public auction. The "Dragon" Auction was held on January 9, 1988.

Jim and I flew up to Cleveland to meet with Norm and his charming wife, Marjory, to do the paperwork in person, and pick up the collection. Once we did the signing, the MRI insurance policy covered the material.

China at auction does not present well in collection or accumulation format because some good stuff might go unrecognized. What is overlooked by Scott may be of great interest to a specialist. When we describe a Chinese/Asian consignment, we'll usually disassemble it into as many lots as practical.

Star of that auction was the 1897 Small 2 cent double surcharge, both inverted, on 3 cent red revenue. This sold for \$41,800. (Sc 79f/Chan 84f \$180,000)

Norm and his wife had flown in for the auction. I hadn't told him of the strong bids received thus far or that there was a major collector on the floor. He was naturally tense.

When the Small 2 cent double, both inverted Red Revenue was hammered down, Norm's first reaction was to embrace his wife. Then he looked my way with a striking thumb's up.

After the auction, all were invited to my home for kosher deli hors d'oeuvres. We knew renowned collectors would attend as did the Taiwanese Consul General, so the dilemma became what to serve that would delight the palette yet impress guests.

The daughter of the Consul General proclaimed a knish "food of the gods". Mouth-watering pastrami and corned beef on Jewish rye bread with savory pickles, potato salad and chopped liver was a hit.

What a great way to end a joyful day.

Julius Gerlach joined the company as an unparalleled writer of airpost material. Retiring as a Cleveland Heights, Ohio pediatrician, Jake was driving south to the east coast of Florida, scouting for retirement property, when he stopped in for a visit. His ears perked up when I said I sure wish the company could continue with Airpost auctions but for the fact China/Asia was occupying all my time. Jake found an apartment nearby and befriended us all.

For Public Auction #12, Vernon Page placed the very rare PRC North China 1937 Half White Sun (Yang NC2) which sold for a record \$15,600, the highest price at the time of any PRC liberation stamp at any public auction. Dr. Page had found it in a Chicago stamp dealer's 3 cent basket. He lucked out because this unfamiliar local isn't in Scott.

In 1990, my company published the revised second edition of Jim Kerr's *Korean Kingdom and Empire Philatelic Catalogue and Handbook*. Jim also brought to us Horace Sharrocks, the retired Christian missionary with a fabulous Korea collection.

I flew to California to obtain the Sharrocks collections for auction, running into trouble at the airport on the return. Arriving at the Oakland airport, I was greeted by Army personnel, finding out that the United States had invaded Iraq, as the Oakland airport was in the process of lock-down. My flight was to be the last one out.

I'd packed the collection as my carry-on. Soldiers wanted to separate me from the collection, to ascertain that no hazardous material was accompanying my luggage. There was no way I was going to have non stamp collectors handle deli-

cate stamps away from my presence so I protested until an understanding sergeant came by. Not a philatelist, he nonetheless waved me through. "Its paper, not metal."

For the same auction, the Trustees of the Collectors Club of New York committed the famous Stephen Rich collection of Korea on consignment. Though best known for China, Mr. and Mrs. Ellery Dennison sent along their Korea, so our June 9, 1991, public auction was ablaze with Korea!

Turned out it was also the peak of the speculative market for Korea. Unbeknownst to us when we planned the auction, in the capital city of Seoul, South Korea, there was to be a big auction in conjunction with a national stamp show, held six weeks after our auction.

Sharrocks had a rollicking good collection: virtually all the presentation sheets,

rare varieties of the 1884-95 issues: essays, die proofs, errors, multiples, rare cancels, etc. Falcon color essays, Imperial covers. Highest priced piece was a 1950 Plane/Map presentation sheet (Sc C4/KPC PSC 31) selling for \$31,900.00, a record for any Korean item at auction.

Some of the dealers went to Dr. Sharrocks prior to the auction, enticing him to withdraw his consignment until after the auction in Seoul could be held. A nervous Dr. Sharrocks came to me, asking if we would realize more at auction if we waited until after the Seoul auction. I stood my ground and pointed out to him that perhaps he was being used.

When the Seoul auction was finally held, another 1950 Plane/Map presentation sheet came up for sale. This identical quality sheet sold for about \$20,000. That's not even two-thirds of the MRI realization. How about that? ☒



Early Florida Space Launch Covers by Phil Fettig



This cover marks the first launch of a TITAN Missile and shows a simple cachet and the old "Cape Canaveral, FLA" cancel. This "Blast Off" started a series of TITAN launches that continued 46 years until October 2005. The TITAN carried all the GEMINI flights into space as well as numerous satellites and test vehicles. This cover and cachet have been described as hard to find and seldom seen.

Although rocket launches were conducted shortly after World War II by the United States using captured and copied German equipment, it was not until the latter part of the 1950s that launch covers started to appear. Today we are overwhelmed with hundreds of thousands of covers, both space and first day that were mass produced, never placed in the mail stream and may not have even actually been near the launch site. The cover shown in Figure (1) clearly is not the case.