

# Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers



I'll never forget the phone call. That voice! "Michael?"

She rattled on how her husband Richard and his first wife had baby-sat my sister and me when my mother and father had gone to the opera from our apartment in Manhattan, and now that he was gone she had the house in Manhattan stuffed with stamps, so would I come up and help her? (OK—Problem: my mother and father didn't like each other enough when my sister and I were growing up to go out with each other; they sure weren't sophisticated enough to go to the opera, and we didn't live in Manhattan. My family lived in the borough of Queens. Manhattan was across the East River, a 15¢ subway ride away. So, surely this gal had me confused with someone else?)

The European accented voice was coming at me with the speed of a revved-up motorcycle, even when I was doubtful she had the right guy. When I sat in her living room, I saw Richard's photo on the fireplace mantle, and it all fell into place. I wept with tears of joy.

I'm so grateful that I've met the exuberant Anne Marie Mayer that now I feel towards her as family. Just when I need a pick-me-up at a busy NYC stamp show, Anne Marie will turn up with a box of mouth watering rugelach, the Jewish pastry of raisins, walnuts and fruit. Kiss, kiss, on both cheeks, of course!

Richard, Anne Marie's husband, and his brother Albert Mayer owned the Diplomat Stamp Shop in Manhattan, on the ground floor of the Diplomat Hotel. Before I went to college in 1967, New York City's philatelic world was energetic with a great many businesses being stamp shops or high above as offices. Gradually, insurance concerns and other corporations which could afford higher rents pushed the mom and pop single owner stamp companies away from the city.

Miserable in bed with measles at age 7, an uncle gave me a stamp collecting kit thinking it a diversion. I took to collecting with a passion. Going door to door, seeking additions to my collection, I filled up

pages of a worldwide collection. When the 7-cent Hawaii airmail came out in the summer of 1959, I walked the mile to the Main St. Flushing Post Office and bought a block, selling the three duplicates to my friends, earning 2 cents over face per stamp. "Wow! Six cents profit." I thought, added to the dime weekly allowance I received from my parents. "What an easy way to earn money!" My first experience as a stamp dealer.

An older gentleman named Jerry Lapin owned the nearest stamp shop in Jamaica, a 35-minute bus ride. I remember Jerry as a friendly, gentle soul. The downside for me was that as an inquisitive youngster without any real money to spend, I received scant attention. Just a schoolboy.

I'd heard from store chatter that, in Manhattan, there were a great many stamp shops. To reach Manhattan meant riding the IRT subway, an adventure in itself. After my 13th birthday, I could disappear on Saturdays to go into the city with my spending money earned selling stamps at school. At first I ventured to fabled Nassau Street to see what that was all about, then at other times, I walked through midtown. It was great fun.

The great 42nd St. and Fifth Avenue library had a collection of U.S. stamps in glass wall panels of amazing grace and power. I saw 1869 inverts and a complete set of Columbians. Heady stuff!

Coming off the IRT subway, I'd see Carl Dinnerstein who had a shop one level below 42nd St. Always a gracious fellow, I still have one of his sales pages as a memento.

Mr. and Mrs. Max Sage owned the Broadway Stamp Shop on West 54th St., formerly of Nassau Street. Max could turn a phrase and make the trivial sound like a treasure.

I'd go into the Dumont Stamp Shop, until the owner banished me. Too many questions, too little money; I was disappointed I wouldn't be able to look anymore. It turned out well, in the end.

My next stop was the Diplomat Stamp Shop, operated by twin brothers, Richard

and Albert Mayer. Tall, identical twins, 6'7", I believe. Inquiring as to why I was dejected, the story came out about Dumont. I got a job offer! Well, sort of: Help with stamps on Saturdays. No pay, not in cash, but you know what? How thrilling that I'd found my mentors. In between sorting, I had the chance to ask anything that came to mind.

I came in most Saturdays until I was age 17, when my father figured out I was "working" without pay. That offended him so I had to quit.

Fast forward some years. I'd become a stamp dealer, manning a booth at a New York ASDA show. Richard Mayer, now gray hair and stooped shoulders, came by. We embraced. I don't believe that he could have been any prouder of me than if I had been a doctor or attorney.

When Anne Marie called in mid 2004, I traveled to NYC. Their Central Park West brownstone had been purchased in 1967. Upon closing the Diplomat Stamp Shop, the inventory was transferred to the mansion and safely stored there for decades. Both brothers had passed away.

Stamps and covers were to be found four stories high, in boxes and cabinets, under floor boards (skinny arms snaking their way!) and in a discontinued boiler. One basement runs under the street. We'd endured the winter's cold and the summer's heat down there but we'd found stamps, covers, Tammany Hall political tracts, costume jewelry, and coins. We'd shipped something like 60 cartons weighing an average of 40 pounds a pop home. Some went to auction, most into inventory. My rule was if I was unfamiliar with the value of an item, I'd place it in my auction to give the family top money, otherwise, I'd purchase it for my stamp shop.

Anne Marie's phone call brought home memories of kind folks who made me the better for it. Glad I could be helpful for her. ☒

# Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers



Let me throw this out to you: as stamp dealers are immersed in philately, how could they resist collecting? Now and then I'll hear that dealers ought not collect, as if the two roles were mutually exclusive. I would say that most every dealer I know collects, whether a narrow area or a wide swath. Think of it as balance: dealers need cashflow and aren't going to retain the coolest, most valuable pieces for themselves as the fear might be.

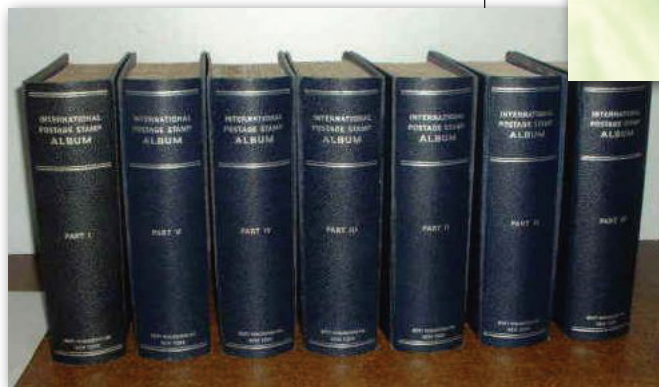
When I was starting my business, I had neither time nor money for collecting. Now that life is easier, what better hobby?

That I'm a stamp collector makes me a better, more attuned stamp dealer. Because I've cut mounts and have my own albums, stayed up all night working on my collection, I know how collectors feel so it's more than a business. That I have so much fun comes out in my writings and interactions with other collectors and dealers.

My collections run to something like 115 albums. Those that are country collections go from Andorra to Yemen. I've got topicals and cover collections. If it won't fit on an album page, it's not for me. Blank pages mean I can make stamps more meaningful with memorabilia: covers, stickers, artwork. My collections, my rules— :) :

My initial foray into Ethiopian philately came when I was a college student, exchanging letters with John Moohr of Chicago, the proponent of Ethiopian Philately in the U.S. in the 1970's-80's. Matthew Bennett auctioned a major collection in 2000 where I bought heavily so I was off to the races. My extras became the nucleus of the stock for my company. As soon as I published the first pricelist, the president and vice president of the Ethiopia Philatelic Society both sold me their collections, too.

I make my own pages, including stamps, fdc's, and memorabilia. Right now, I have 23 Ethiopia albums. In 1999, my company auctioned \$50,000 of Yemen's



Ordinarily, one might expect a stamp dealer to display a set of albums like these on a shelf and put a price on them for the retail trade. But like the author, many dealers actually collect stamps just like their customers.

1926 issue. Our rule has always been to hire an outside advisor when we are handling material which goes beyond our expertise. We checked around and found the charming Alex MacDonald who flew down to analyze this very complicated issue for auction. In doing so, I became fascinated with them, and was able to bid successfully for some of the key pieces. My Yemen collection extends thru the newest issues and runs to 9 albums. A great many Yemeni stamps do not qualify for being listed by Scott or even Michel. Good—who said it should be easy?

One day I had the opportunity to acquire the most beautiful artistic works! Larger size art sheets of imperforate French Andorra trial color proofs of 10 different color combinations each. These became the centerpiece of a French and Spanish Andorra collection.

I collect Japanese first day covers up until 1954. You wouldn't know there's gobs of different cachet makers per each issue, just like in the U.S., until you get into them.

My father was born in London, so I collect Great Britain & the Channel Islands. One of my favorite British issues is the 1965 missing Post Office tower, a striking "lemon" color-omitted error.

Naturally, I have a China collection though it's formed unlike any I know of. It's filled with memories of friends long gone or milestones of years past. 'Twas

only in 2007 that I obtained the Scott 1878-1949 album to hold them all. So, I don't have an 1878 one candarin mint (No. 1) because it's not associated with a special event.

Back in the late 1970's, I was issuing Zeppelin and Airposts flight cover pricelists. Although China occupied most of my time from 1982 on, I've always enjoyed the history and romance of aerophilately. Mini-collections sprouted in my den, until one day I had the chance to purchase a multi volume Scott Worldwide Airpost album. It's since grown to 13 volumes of stamps and covers. I surely would like to find the 1961 and 1962 supplements.

Most of my albums are Scott though my Israel and Vatican City are White Ace. I use clear Showgard mounts because I'm not careful enough to cut a consistent straight line for so many mounts. Using clear mounts—it doesn't matter how awkward my cutting is.

I maintain a philatelic library of several hundred volumes at home, both for my collections and aiding my articles. Augmenting these resources is an equal number of texts on history and culture. I love the feel of a good book.

Collecting allows me to know an area in greater depth than I would by simply dealing because I'd never have the time to spare for study. And I have a great deal of fun along the way. ☒