

# How a Sweet Little Old Lady Helped Several Central Florida Stamp Dealers

by Phil Fettig

Ann joined me in retirement when she closed A & R Stamp & Coin in Kissimmee during the summer of 2008. The coin stock was easily disposed of while the stamps were a different story. The only potential purchaser of the store intact wanted extended terms. Mystic was paying below 10% of retail. Neither of these options was the answer. As time wore on, I suggested a return to the monthly Stamp & Coin Show in Melbourne. This might be a way to unload the remaining stamps that were in storage.

Ann worked up some collections, while I made up box lots and put out some discount postage. The sales for the first couple of months in 2009 were not spectacular but were sufficient to move some material at a small profit. Sales started to climb and, what surprised us was awakening to the fact that we still enjoyed doing a small show (which was how we got our start in 1979). Next, we found ourselves booking additional shows, not only in Orlando, but also in Tampa and New Port Richey. We also changed our direction and started to purchase more material to meet the demand of the increased show schedule. Unfortunately, the travel became a problem with Ann, so we settled into a routine that has worked well since. I would do the travelling to look at potential collections to buy and do the out of town shows while she worked breaking down the purchases and we both worked the Orlando shows. I also started making bids in the Michael Rogers, Inc., local auctions.

When I look back to what renewed our interest in doing shows, a lot of it ends up due to meeting one nice little old lady who collected stamps. A few of my Melbourne dealer friends told me about a lady who was a great customer. Her name was Nan and she was what we all dreamed of – an active general worldwide collector. Nan, and her husband Bill, both well into their 80s, lived in Ft. Pierce and were still very active, including traveling worldwide. After a few shows passing by my table, Nan finally stopped to look at the A & R material. She purchased a few small collections and box lots, but really seemed interested in a red box of general worldwide material in No. 4 glassines. (Note: For several years one of my few contributions to Ann in the store was helping at inventory time. I used to get frustrated at counting up the three red boxes of stamps. They never seemed to go away!) Nan told me there were several items in the box she may want but was unsure without checking her collections. I made a quick decision, based on trust, and told her to take the box home, take out what she wanted and return the box the following month. That moment changed not only A & R's success but has helped at least three other Central Florida Stamp Dealers. The next month Nan returned the box with a significant portion indicated for purchase. She then surprised me with a desire to buy the entire box. A price was negotiated, and the sale completed. I then mentioned the other boxes and one was sold each of the next two months.

At this point I need to explain a previous purchase that was not working out. I had acquired the stock from the estate of a topical dealer who, at one time, had travelled to shows all over the country. His stock consisted of thousands of sets in long drawers with the topics in alphabetical order. Unfortunately, we found that topical sales in Central Florida were not all that great. When mistakes are made, as they certainly will be, sales must be turned into a new direction. Since the majority of the topical sets were in the catalog value range of \$2-\$8, we chose to try offering them at \$1 per set. The drawers of \$1 cards quickly became popular to the point that new collections had to be obtained to keep feeding the sales! These drawers of material quickly attracted Nan's attention and the same offer was soon made to her. Nan would take a drawer full of cards home each month and return it the next.

By this time fellow club member Bob Dowrick was helping me behind the table at these shows. One of his tasks was occasionally helping Nan and Bill carry things to and from their car. This also allowed Bob to become familiar with Nan's collections, knowledge that became important later. At this point, Nan fell into the role of one of my top customers, spending \$150-\$250 per month for several years. **Figure B1** shows a typical spread of items that she would purchase on a monthly basis. The drawer of \$1 cards is one that she took home. The box lots and collections, while not the exact ones she purchased, are exact samples of the items she would purchase. In talking to Nan and Bill, over a period of time, it became clear that Nan's worldwide collection was of significant size. Bill joked there soon would be no room for him in their home! At one point in our business relationship, I purchased a large number of shoe boxes full of Nan's duplicates. After a few episodes of selling Nan back her own material, Ann started to make a little "N" mark on \$1 cards and box lots so Nan could recognize her own stamps that she had sold us!



Unfortunately, by 2013, medical considerations prompted me to cut the A & R Show schedule down from 19 a year to the 6 local shows. By then Bob was a member of the Florida Stamp Dealers' Association and was attending the Melbourne show on his own. In fact, in a total role reversal,

I rode along with him a few times to help out. While my contact with Nan was much less, I still exchanged greetings or at least heard about her through Bob and other dealer friends.

In February 2017, I was sorry to hear that Bill had passed away. Bob saw Nan at a show in Port St. Lucie a few months later and said it was obvious that she was having problems getting to that show, which was only a short distance from where she lived. Nan was never able to make it back to the Melbourne show. It is not uncommon in long-term marriages to hear that after the death of one spouse, the other soon passes on. Later in 2017, I heard the sad news of Nan's death.

Now it is time to introduce another long time Central Florida dealer – David L. Moore of Rockledge, FL. Dave was a fixture at the Melbourne show for years prior to moving to Colorado. Upon his return in 2013, he picked right up and is clearly the top stamp dealer at the Melbourne show. He has also started attending some of the Orlando events. Nan was one of Dave's customers for a long time. When doing her estate planning, Nan had selected Dave to become involved in the resolution of the stamp collection part of her estate. After Nan's death, Dave was contacted in late 2017, by a Bank and Trust Company in Vero Beach to perform an appraisal to prepare for the sale of the collection. After details were worked out pertaining to viewing arrangements and fees, Dave travelled down to Vero Beach and spent eight hours in the conference room of the Trust Company working his way through a huge accumulation of collections in various forms. After returning home, Dave prepared an extensive report for the Trust Company, who then ask him to contact potential buyers.

Dave contacted me to see if I was interested in making an offer. Now, remember that A & R started doing the shows in 2009 just to sell off the stamp stock and go out of business. Over the years, it became a standing joke about our going out of business while I continued to purchase new material and expand our stock. However, about the time Dave contacted me about Nan's collections, we were really talking about slowing down. After much soul searching, I reluctantly declined. Soon thereafter Bob called to tell me he was headed down to Vero Beach to view the material. I offered to assist in any way I could, and he invited me along.

On April 12<sup>th</sup> we arrived at the Trust Company and viewed a mind-boggling room full of albums, binders, boxes and shopping bags full of stamps and covers. Since I had specialized for the past several years in box lots and small collections, Bob decided we would go through each item and discuss what I thought the retail value might be. Each item was marked with a sticky note as to the estimated value. We worked all morning before walking down the street for a lunch break. The afternoon was more of the same until we had made a run through everything, which also included over 30 Scott International Albums. One interesting point was the



number of items I could identify as having been sold to Nan by me over the years. The following week Bob made an offer to the Trust Company and A & B Stamps was the proud owners of some new material! One small problem remained which was solved by Bob and Ann Dowrick driving both vehicles to Vero Beach for the pick-up. **Figure B2** shows the motherload of material obtained.

Since the purchase, Bob has sold the 30+ Internationals to another Central Florida Dealer as well as items at shows, the club and on eBay. This was a large amount of material that will feed collector interest for a long time. In fact, while I

first envisioned this article to be about Nan helping a number of local dealers, I think the larger story is the fact that her collections are now being shared with an even larger number of collectors.