

Philatelic Cannibalism by Josh Furman

One of my less esoteric philatelic interests is simply an international stamp collection. It started with an International Junior album, the one that I've had for almost seventy years. I have added to it twice, so that now it goes all the way to 1959.

And it's a cannibal. You know what I mean. I buy at auction (often at the club) an old album of stamps. Then I sit down with that album next to my album and pick out the stamps that I am missing and add them to my collection. Invariably if I already have four or five of a set of seven or eight, some of the missing ones are in the album I just bought. So it's fun and it passes the time.

Every once in a while, something like this happens along. This one fell out of the album as I was taking it off the shelf, so I had no idea where it came from.

I don't think I've ever seen anything like it. It has the look and feel of a stamp but no recognizable value or country name. What to do?

Ahh, the virtues of a library. I first turned to the APS Stamp Identifier. It has lots of funny-looking words and phrases, but they are all in our common Latin alphabet. Just to be sure, I went through it twice. No luck.

Then I went to The Stamp Finder, created by H. E. Harris & Co. back in the day. The scotch-tape-bound one I have also includes The Stamp Collector's Dictionary, a guide to the words, phrases and abbreviations in common use among stamp collectors. This too, has all kinds of odd bits, and even pictures of stamps from some out-of-the-way places like Batum and Hejaz and Far Eastern Republic (wherever that is). But nothing that resembles this item.

Next it was Scott's What Stamp Is That? "An illustrated guide to the identification and classification of postage stamps of the world." No luck there either, even among the twenty-two pages of pictures of weird stamps.

OK, on to the Standard Handbook of Stamp Collecting, by Richard McP. Cabeen. Aha! This volume has a section on alphabets, including the Cyrillic alphabet whose 48 letters are in use in various combinations by five different countries. So I looked at the English sound equivalent for each of the letters in the maybe-stamp pictured above. Does *golodashchnia* mean anything to you? It didn't to me either. But a few pages on there were some listings of Selected Inscriptions in Cyrillic Letters! The solution was there!

In case you haven't guessed by now the stamp above is a Russian Semi-Postal. It is in the catalog as B34.

So what's the point of this story? There are two. One is that cannibalism is really quite harmless, at least if it's the philatelic kind, and two is that research is really fun. You too should have a philatelic library.



Reminiscences



By Michael Rogers

I would like to tell you of my friend Judd Nevenzel, a charming man of high intelligence. He was one of the original Los Alamos “Atomic Bomb” scientists, and an accomplished philatelist, yet quiet and modest. From time to time I think of Judd, remembering how we came together, developing the friendship. Warm feelings.

As I prepared for my first WESTPEX show in the 1980s, I ran ads saying I’d be in San Francisco. My ads were chatty, asking if I could bring anything of particular interest for customers. I received a letter from a Jack Service, asking me to bring an accumulation of used Chinese stamps for him to purchase as he was a collector of postmarks. His name clicked, so when I went home, looked him up. Apparently, he was the John Stewart Service whom Joseph McCarthy forced out of the State Department for allegedly showing dispatches to the other team. I replied affirmatively to his request for material with a note saying I’d bring some used material along, and a postscript, asking if he was McCarthy’s “friend”?

At the same show, a tall gentleman introducing himself as Jack, came to our booth and pumped my associate Jim Kerr’s hand, thinking Jim was me, saying “you have a good memory!” because of my McCarthy association. Jack and Jim were about the same age so they related well. Jim pointed me out, saying “that’s Mike.” Jack said, “that pup?”. I’ve always looked a whole lot younger than I really am. A gift.

As for meeting Judd Nevenzel, here’s how it happened. On three occasions in 2002, he sent me packages of lovely Asian postal history that was so far afield of my knowledge that I didn’t know how to make a reasonable offer on them. Great stuff. Russian Offices in Mongolia which compared to the best in Meiso Mizuhara’s collection, a Hong Kong 96 cent QV single value on folded letter, Augustine Heard correspondence. I’ve been doing this for a long time so don’t come up empty all that often. He was adamant

about not consigning to auction; I was puzzled why not. Judd just wanted to sell outright even after I explained I felt out of my depth. Each time I bought his previous shipment, he was perfectly happy with my offer. Ah, but then, I turned around and placed “our” material in my auction, giving it a special consignor number to keep track. When the covers sold, I sent him a letter explaining my thinking, that I was splitting the amount with him on the monies realized in excess of the price that I’d paid him. I did this for each package.

Given that in October of 2002, I was doing a public auction in conjunction with the Los Angeles SESCAL stamp show, and that Judd lived in a L.A. suburb, here was my chance to meet him. I’d gone on the web and realized he was an original Los Alamos scientist. I was curious of his experiences and what he could tell me about J. Robert Oppenheimer.

On calling Judd ahead, he assured me that he had no more stamps for sale, and I was rather relieved since I’d just passed an exhausting weekend at a stamp show. I was looking forward to simply meeting Judd and relaxing. My staff had already gone home after the show though one remained with me.

Meeting Judd on his front steps, he looked me up and down, saying “Aren’t you the eager one? I want you to clean out my garage.” So I passed a silent glance to the guy with me to say nothing and go along. I figured there was more on the plate than what we could see. Meet me and you’ll know physical labor is not my strong suit. I wrecked the suit I was wearing doing the garage. I reckon we barely made a dent.

Exiting the garage, knocking on his kitchen window, things got clearer. Judd was having me jump over hurdles, pushing me. Short of stature, in his eighties, he led us to a bedroom pointing to two small refrigerator cartons, saying we should take them to the living room. We spread the contents over the living room floor and there were piles of cool Portugal & Colonies, still on auction cards, some purchased forty years ago. Asking me what I would pay for them, I bleated “I’m too tired to think.” So Judd offered me everything for \$6,000. I tussled with him because I said the price was too cheap & he said he didn’t need the funds. He was touched that I’d sent him the extra money those three times before.

I was just the one he was looking for to sell his stamps. He disdained selling by auction because he’d tried it in the 1980’s. A consignment made to another auction house before went badly. In response to his complaint, they sent a young man to hear him out. The visitor shoved Judd as he turned away. Small of stature, slick wood floors. I could envision it in my mind. So, no auction.

Until the year he died, whenever I traveled to California, I’d take him out to lunch or food shopping. Lovely man, easy to chat with, I’m glad to have known him.

Judd retained his Mexico collection. As we gazed upon the pages of his Hildagos, his passion for this lovely material came forth. Whatever holds your interest, you’ll be delighted with Mexico. After Judd passed on, I purchased his Mexico from his family. It felt like Judd was coming here! ☒