

# The Cover Story

## How I Beat the Cuban Embargo and eBay with the Aid of the Japanese

by Phil Fettig

Most stamp collectors are aware of the 1962 proclamation by President Kennedy that placed an embargo on goods produced in Cuba. What you may not be aware of is the heavy-handed enforcement of this policy by eBay. Further puzzling is the uneven treatment over the years regarding countries like Germany, Japan, Italy and Vietnam. The U.S. Government spent billions of our tax dollars rebuilding these places and, in our simple world of philately, restrictions against the import of their stamps has long since ended.

With regards to Cuba the Scott Catalogue states that “used Cuban stamps can be imported and sold with limitation.” Now, what has all this got to do with the question asked in the title?

**Figure A1 on front cover** shows an item that I found in a mixed box of what can best be described as “stuff” that I purchased a few years back. Now, right off the top let me say the only thing “Cuban” about this envelope is that it is addressed to a location in Habana, or Havana as we know it today. Nothing about this piece was manufactured in Cuba, so I never gave a thought as to either the U.S. Government's or eBay's policy on embargoed items.



I should explain why I was interested in this cover. I do not consider myself an expert on censored mail, but my interest in World War II related items has given some basic familiarity. Two philatelic aspects jumped out when I took a better look. I had never heard of the term “Military Censor Civil Mails” (**Figure A2 on front cover**) and, no matter what the title or authority I had no idea the U.S. Government was still performing censorship as late as 1949. Another nice thing was the use of commemorative stamps (**Figure A3 to left & A4 to right**) on the cover, even with the slight damage to one. The last interesting item is that the cover was addressed to a city in Cuba. Thus, by my thinking I had a cover with an unusual censorship marking, with a late date, with nice commemorative postage and with an unusual Tokyo-Havana route. What possibly could go wrong?



What went wrong was eBay and their overzealous enforcement of how they interpreted the embargo. When you submit, or use any part of the eBay system, your input is constantly monitored by their computer system. So, after spending a longer than normal amount of time crafting what I thought was an eye-catching listing, I hit the submit button....and it all disappeared and left me with a nasty error message. My only recourse was to call them and I was not mentally prepared to do that at 10:30 at night. The next morning, after my workout and a dose of blood pressure medication I made a call to eBay and spoke to a representative, somewhere in the world. We had a healthy discussion of their policy on the embargo and nothing I could say made a difference. I requested to speak to a supervisor, alas, all with the same result. No matter how many times I explained my item was created in Japan and mailed at least 12 years before the embargo, eBay's policy was since they could not be sure, it was not allowed. Further discussion resulted in somewhat of a poor compromise and I dropped “Cuba” from the title line -- but was allowed to leave it in the description.

In one last comment to the representative I asked her to sometime do a search for “Cuba” in Stamps and take a look at all the bogus listings for “1Cuba” or “2Cuba” followed by a Scott number. As I write this I did another search and found 20 listings for just plain “Cuba” before I stopped counting. Is it too much to hope maybe somebody listened? By the way, the cover sold for \$64.00 and is now safe -- back home in Japan.

# Collecting Hometown/ Genealogical Postal History

*APS On-the-Road Course*

Thursday, November 30, 2017 • Prior to FLOREX

Courtyard by Marriott Orlando Downtown • 730 N. Magnolia Ave. • Orlando, FL



## *What is "Postal History"? How do I start a 'Hometown' collection?*

- Learn where to find the background information needed to collect 'hometown' postal history
- Determine what aspects of postal history you should know when searching for items
- Find where to locate covers and other postal items related to your hometown and/or family
- Learn tips for organizing a hometown-genealogical collection



## *What participants will be able to do at the conclusion of this course...*

- Establish the focus for your collection: Rates, routes, usages, markings, history, culture, picture post cards, advertising, institutions, personal correspondence, family, etc.
- Decide if you should be concerned about the authenticity of items bought: Provenance, markings, handwriting, history, sender/receiver information, etc.
- Develop your own list of hometown/genealogical resources and links to informational sites on postal history

*Bring your mystery items, and learn how to begin research on them  
AND  
Bring a laptop or tablet/iPad (if possible) for in-class research*

*Presentation materials  
will be provided*

## *Taught by Tom Horn, APS Director of Special Projects*

Tom has been a stamp collector for about 50 years. Some of his collecting interests include Liechtenstein, Scouts on stamps, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania postal history, postal history of family locations, weaving and fiber on stamps, Post Horn cancels, and worldwide stamps.

Tom worked for the American Philatelic Society while he was a graduate student at Penn State University from 1974–1978. He returned to the APS full-time in 1980 while completing his MBA degree (1981) from Penn State University. Tom was Assistant Director of Sales until 1995, Director of Sales from 1995–2016 and is currently Director of Special Projects. On December 1, 2017, he will succeed Mercer Bristow (who is retiring) as Director of Expertizing.

## Course Information

**Date:** Thursday, November 30, 2017, from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
(lunch on your own)

**Location:** Courtyard by Marriott Orlando Downtown • 730 N. Magnolia Ave. • Orlando, FL

**Cost:** \$45 for APS Members / \$95 for non-members

**Registration Deadline:** *November 24, 2017*

**To Register:** <http://stamps.org/On-the-Road-Courses>

For more information contact the APS Education Department at:  
[education@stamps.org](mailto:education@stamps.org) or 814.933.3803

