

Meeting “Old Friends” Again

By Phillip Fettig

Ann & I started collecting stamps in our younger days; long before we met. It should be no surprise that this hobby has been an important part of our lives ever since. We lived in Eau Gallie, Florida (now part of Melbourne for you newcomers) and traveled to Orlando every few months to visit stamp stores. I can recall a list of eight different stores in Orlando and one in Merritt Island that we visited during the years of 1969 to 1977. We also attended our first stamp show -- something called FLOREX, held in Orlando in November 1971. (Little did we realize at the time, but in later years I would work on the last of the “Old FLOREX Shows” and Ann would retire and close the last full service stamp & coin store in Central Florida!)

Now, meeting old friends again can be as simple and pleasant, as two guys passing and looking at each other at a stamp show a few years ago and then realizing they spent hours together with their sons in the YMCA Indian Guides in the mid 1970's. Randall and I still discuss our “5” year old sons who are now in their 40's. Never mind how old we are now!

Also interesting is how material can move in and out of your philatelic lives. Recently I purchased a box lot at auction that contained sales slips from “Fettig Stamps”. That was an early effort to be a dealer, during the 1979-1981.

When A & R closed in 2008, most of the material went into storage. The items included a box of several thousand mint 3 cent stamps, all either Scott 895 (3 Graces) & 898 (Coronado) in sheets with a piece of glassine between each sheet. I was real happy to find a buyer, even at 50% of face value. Three weeks ago I picked up several boxes of material from the widow of a long-time dealer. I was shocked to find another box of the same two stamps with the same type of plastic between and an old A & R card at the bottom. I doubt I'll be able to talk the same customer into buying more! Also from the store was a small stock book holding many duplicate mint booklet panes. It was clear that the book had previously held other material as Scott numbers were written in pencil on the sides of the page. I had recently found it when looking for discount postage material.

Now keep this in mind while I describe another auction box lot that was being worked. I sat at my desk going through ten similar small stock books full of postage and foreign stamps. All of a sudden it hit me that the same pencil handwritten numbers were on the pages. My only guess is that some of the books were sold to A & R many years ago and then I put them together again after the recent auction.

The last story is from a recent Melbourne 2nd Sunday Show. Bob D. was helping me at the show and he counted and carried a box of “priceless” Gold Foil FDC's to a dealer that I had arranged to sell them to. He returned with the money and I thought “good riddance” to them. Later another dealer bought some from the dealer who had purchased mine. Then, a few hours later, a customer approached Bob and tried to sell him some of the same covers that had started the whole deal earlier in the day. Bob politely declined! Now, I'm sure you didn't learn any great philatelic secrets from this article, but hopefully you can get an idea of how much fun it can be if you stick at it.

Reminiscences



By Michael Rogers

I love going on the road. I am always reading, yet amazed at the views of our matchless land. Fortunately, our company has at hand good people who enjoy driving as much as I do reading all day long!

My company advertises to purchase and to obtain by consignment material for our public auctions and mail sales. Lots of folks feel comfortable sending what they have to us by registered or insured mail. FedEx is a good method as well, especially for larger collections.

Sometimes, a face to face meeting is the best way to conduct business. Especially valuable or bulky collections are two examples where a personal meeting is most appropriate. Another situation arises when someone inherits a collection or the owner is not familiar with our firm or our reputation.

One of our 2007 trips comes to mind. I'm a board member of the China Stamp Society (CSS), so I had to be in Los Angeles for the October SESCO stamp show where the CSS had a meeting and my company had a table.

We accessed a dormant mailing list of our customers who at one time had spent money but now had gone silent. We contacted them to say that we'd be passing through and asked if their collection would be for sale. This technique usually produces around 50 responses which get whittled down on the phone.

My friend Barry Williams and I left Winter Park in late September, stopping off at a few places before Louisiana. We looked at a collection in New Orleans which was as depressing as the city. New Orleans still was shell shocked from Katrina. We'd seen a collection on the Florida panhandle, not coming to a resolution, though we did buy it on the way back.

In San Antonio we visited with a retired university professor who had less than \$500 worth of stamps and coins. So for coming halfway across country, things were not good at all.

That night in the hotel we called our next appointment, a Liberia collection

in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who cancelled on us as he was feeling poorly. Faced with a big hole in the schedule, I rooted through my briefcase, coming up with a scrap of paper written nine months ago: "Jim Keaney, China, and his phone #". Nine months before, Jim had mentioned that, if I was in San Jose, California, he was taking bids on his China.

I called Jim finding out he hadn't yet sold his China but that he'd had a couple of bids. He said "Have a nice flight," not considering we were driving! Then Barry and I drove off to some small town west of San Antonio on I-10, stopping off for a meal, and disaster.

I'm lactose intolerant, meaning my body cannot digest milk or anything containing the lactase enzyme unless I proceed it with a Lactaid Supplement. Whatever I ate contained enough milk (I suspect it was the dessert) so a while later I started getting the ever familiar pain. On this part of Texas' I-10 to El Paso, there are mighty few rest stops and none had the medicine I needed.

I phoned my son Kyle from the road, saying I was buying a 10 gallon cowboy hat, now that I'd gone in the desert. I got the idea from Barry Savedow, another dealer who looked so good in one. When I put one on in the store, it looked like the 15 gallon size, eclipsing my head, so I returned it to the rack. Bought a postcard instead.

Barry deadheaded it to San Jose, stopping for a four hour power nap, making it in 26 hours. I lost 12 pounds along the way! I was exhausted.

Jim was adamant on selling his beloved collection, seeking to make things simpler for his wife, Mary. Sitting with Jim, I was taken aback on how frail he looked. Before taking me into his stamp den, he noted that if it were possible, I looked worse than he felt. If only he knew...:)

The stamp collection was wonderful—120 albums altogether, very well organized, painstakingly annotated. He taught himself Chinese characters in order to understand the material, most difficult for a Caucasian. If one were to use PRC as a platform, he had rather substantial collections of mint nh, mint hinged, postally used and cancelled to order. Imperial stamps, cancellations, varieties. 1848-2007 comprehensive—very nice.

I just didn't have the mental acuity to figure his collection. I wasn't feeling well. It wouldn't have been honorable or moral to try to appraise his material because surely I'd miss something. I imagined myself not recognizing an elusive variety, not writing it down. Or tiring along the way.

So returning to the living room, sitting with Jim and his lovely wife Mary, I spoke from my heart, saying that in order to do a proper appraisal of such a complicated collection, it would take two weeks. I wasn't up to it at the moment. I suggested that I FedEx it to Winter Park from which I'd call with an offer. Some explaining and paperwork, then we packed it—2,000 pounds!

A month later, I called from home and made my offer. Noting that because he was ill and unaccustomed to negotiating, I was making my highest price up front. Turns out my offer was a bit more than twice the second highest offer he'd received. He related the others kept on looking at his oxygen tank, figuring he had no other option.

I'd met Jim working at the China dealer Richard Clever's booth some twenty years before. Richard is one of the nicest and most trustworthy guys I've ever known. He had declined making an offer on Jim's collection, not wanting to benefit from his friend's illness. Both fine men. Jim Passed away in 2010. ☒