

Reminiscences by Michael Rogers

I'd left John McDaniel's employ in June 1976 with just \$600 to figure out my future. Entering graduate school to become a medical social worker was tempting. But, I believed I was cut out to be a stamp dealer. Testing my faith came when I was so broke that I was reduced to selling penny stamps to neighborhood kids out of my apartment.

Fortunately I had great friends. One was disposing of a family hoard - an unbelievably huge accumulation of both valuable and mundane US and France. Its disposal came at a time when I surely needed the income. Other friends encouraged me to continue the quest: you can do it, Mike!

I approached a coin shop situated about a mile from my home about working there on a commission basis. Its building was so ramshackle that you could see there were gaps between the walls to the outside. I surely didn't know how their security system had any sense of integrity.

Winter came and I was so cold. In those days, I was a gangling six footer at just 155 pounds. No insulation. We tried newspaper to plug the gaps in the walls. Something had to be done.

One of the owners was a charismatic man named Sam. He'd made his money in another field and was doing this as a lark. Wiry thin and standing perhaps 5'7", Sam was full of life. He always had a cigarette in hand accompanied by a coffee cup.

After a few months, Sam came up with the idea of relocating to posh Park Avenue in downtown Winter Park. Although the rent was \$400 a month, my stamps yielded the store \$600 monthly as they were on consignment with the coin shop netting 10% commission. I benefitted from the Park Avenue location. A win-win.

Business was great on the Avenue as it's the perfect showcase for buying and selling collectibles. Sam was a natural salesman and it was fascinating watching him do his stuff. Once in a while, he'd meet his match.

One day a dignified guy came in to buy ten \$20 gold pieces. He introduced himself as Malcolm Forbes. Picking up the gold, he said he had to retrieve his checkbook from his car. As Sam waited for "Malcolm" to return, and waited, he informed us of his buyer's identity. As he slowly realized the guy wasn't returning, I gently told him that I subscribed to Forbes Magazine and this imposter didn't resemble Mr. Forbes at all. Con men are so good!

Coins would be offered to purchase all the time. One day when the shop had a bunch of customers, a guy came in with several coins that he desired to sell. Sam looked at them, made an offer, and purchased them. After the guy left, Sam looked at one Morgan silver dollar more carefully and yelled out "I got him!" Right in front of all those collectors! I thought to myself "Oh, no!" But I couldn't say anything because that would only compound the problem. I hate confrontations.

Then just 30 seconds later, Sam thought to take a sharp pointed instrument to the mint mark on the coin he'd been yelling about, and you know what? The mint mark fell off! Then Sam exclaimed "HE took me!" Standing in the background amongst the customers, my facial expression changed from dismay to a buck-toothed grin. Unfortunately, as I was grinning, Sam self-consciously realized he had an audience to this fiasco, and zeroing in on me, he exclaimed "You're laughing at me."

I was signed to a contract of eighteen months duration. With just my desk and three shelves of display, I assumed the coin shop would be real pleased to continue the same arrangement of 10% commission on my sales. A few months before the end of my contract, they proposed 15% of my sales and they wanted me to kick in 15% on top of whatever I paid someone else. I had no problem with the sales part but choked on the purchases. That meant I would no longer be competitive.

Negotiations proved futile so I was back in my apartment, again. My attorney and friend David Cunningham presented me with the lease for Winter Park Stamp Shop on Park Avenue a few weeks later in the Spring of 1978. I was on my way!

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Stamp show moments to be treasured.

The life of a stamp dealer often includes participation in stamp shows. Most dealers carry U.S. and worldwide stamps or postal history that will appeal to just about any collector who stops by his booth. Not me! Since the mid 1980s, we were taking only China and Asia, so, either we had a wonderful show, offering material which blew away the competition or a sliding scale downward, depending on who attended. We carry a unique product.

Determining which shows to rent a booth at depends on the number of customers we have in a 150 miles radius. That's about as far as a collector will probably drive for a stamp show. Our company does extensive advertising as well.

These days, when our company does the New York City ASDA National Show, the crowds are so large we rent three booths. But our company has built a following over the years, hence the demand.

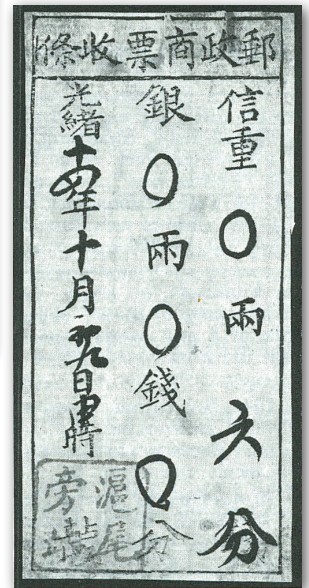
In March 1989, we did a show in the suburbs of Chicago. I was about to get married so couldn't go out with my friends after show hours whooping it up. Reading in the hotel room Friday night passed the time, but for Saturday evening, I had an appetite for different fare.

I remembered the legendary China collector, Richard Canman, had lived in Chicago. A long life, great fortune and keen eye gave him the opportunity to build a fabulous collection. Nineteen albums sold outright during his lifetime; the balance was sold by public auction after his passing on December 15, 1988, by Harmers of New York.

Having nothing to do that evening, I picked up the phone book and saw a listing for the Canman residence. I explained to Mrs Canman that I'd like to come over to make a condolence call. She said all



Michael Rogers thrives on a major stamp show bourse—like here at NAPEX in 2012.



the stamps had been sold. I assured her it surely wasn't a business call.

I took a cab to Lake Shore Drive. The Canmans had joined two fine apartments together for one extensive dwelling. First thing she did was swat down my pockets, looking for checks. A lively gal in her late eighties with a sharp mind and a sharper tongue, Mrs Canman was not short of sharing her opinion.

I enjoyed her company immensely. She told me stories of Richard hunting down stamps in Asia, how they met and courted, and of life in Chicago long ago. Two hours flew by. Then she paused to retrieve three items which had been returned by the auction house as not genuine.

I was of the opinion that the China \$5 Red Revenue (above) and Taiwan 1893 receipt stamp (above right) were genuine but I wasn't sure about the China large dragon / Austrian postage combination card. She was incredulous: "What, you think you know more than the auction house?" My thinking was sometimes auction buyers returned material because they had "buyer's remorse" and the auction house didn't send the items out for certification, but the \$5 Red Revenue was

a very good stamp and the Taiwan receipt stamp immensely valuable.

She pondered my words and offered them as a gift. Generous as she was, I didn't want to take it.

I cannot tell you why, but it just didn't feel right. From our conversation, I knew Richard had passed due to cancer, so I said that when I returned home and calculated the value of the three items, I'd send a check to the American Cancer Society. She beamed.

Then she asked me to the rear of the apartment. She had prepared Richard's philatelic library for donation or sale on a large pallet. They were mine, if I wanted them. Did I! I love literature, especially difficult to obtain books and manuscripts in hand-tooled binders.

First thing that went through my mind was "Impossible getting these home!" Then I got to action. I called a taxi service for a stretch cab. The apartment house had plenty of cardboard boxes on hand plus someone to assist. We ended staying over in town a day longer to facilitate handling by DHL. The extra expense of accommodating hundreds of treasured books was worth it. ☑