

The Cover Story

A Tale of Three Collections, Part I of III by Phil Fettig

Hopefully this is more than just another story about buying collections – I see something here to learn about how these three philatelists collected and what the surviving family members knew about “all that stuff”. You have heard me say, probably too many times, “there is no right or wrong way to collect – do what makes you happy”. So having said that, I cannot be critical of what the first collector did, but I have a few comments on how she maintained it. It appears the main portion of her stamp interest was in obtaining, soaking and separating thousands and thousands of common low value definitives from France, Netherlands, Great Britain (no Machins) and smaller amounts from other countries including the United States. Once the preparation tasks were completed, then the stamps were mounted on white plain paper and placed in cheap 3-ring binders with no order apparent. **Figure (1) [On front cover]** shows examples of this effort. Hundreds of envelopes with these items, on and off paper, not yet mounted were found in a huge trunk, suitcases & boxes. Next came the cover portion – some in albums and others loose in the same trunk and other storage items. In one album, and various small loose groups, were some nice Space covers from the 1960's and early Colorano First Day Cards. The vast majority of the covers were envelopes and cards, routine mail from the 1920s – 1940s. Many contained the original correspondence but far too many were torn open. **Figure (2) [On front cover]** is the best of three Zeppelin covers, each with a C-18. **Figure (3) [On front cover]** shows four interesting corner cards dating from 1913 and 1937. The 1913 Grocier (spelling used in that time period) letter contained a request for Italian food products and was written in Italian from a Pennsylvania business. The space related cover, **Figure (4)** is interesting from the viewpoint of showing how actual real time use of Spy Satellites was beneficial. Bob Dowrick determined that a suitcase was actually part of the stamp accumulation and the flight covers were found there. The third part of the collection was postage. The last portion (and the reason I purchased it) shall go undescribed until a later article.

Now for the bad news -- and the lesson from this collection. First, let somebody in your family know what you have and how to dispose of it; if not the family, then a trusted friend. Some family members thought the collection was valuable while others did not. Second, and maybe most important, keep your stamps safe and dry! First of all the items were stored in an attic in Pennsylvania, obviously with no climate control. Then a move to Florida was made and most of the items were stored in a huge travel trunk, boxes and a suitcase. Unfortunately all those containers were placed in an attached storage unit at the back of the house and next to the swimming pool. There was no a/c. airflow or windows in the storage area. Bob & I made several trips with material into the house to sort it out, with a large part damp or mildewed. Closer to the trunk's bottom the mildew began to look like mold and I stopped for safety reasons. At the end of the day, I purchased the postage, some covers and a huge supply of used common stamps. An auction company was paid to empty the house by the end of the day. Over half the philatelic material was boxed and loaded for transport to the dump before we had packed my car with the purchased portion. Much of this could have been avoided if sometime in the past the collector had discussed the “stamp facts of life” with the family regarding storage and real value.



Next time – The world wide collector and his thirty-six Scott's Internationals.

[Editor's Note: Part II will appear in the January 2016 issue and Part III will follow in February]



Reminiscences The "Best of the Best"??

By Michael Rogers

I became a China/Asia dealer in late 1982. Merchandising has always been my strength. One abiding rule I lived by was never to sell what I didn't understand. That way I wouldn't inadvertently give away a golden treasure. The key was to hire talented people who would fill in the gaps in my own knowledge. And I have to tell you I sure felt overwhelmed.

I was lucky. Initially I had Bob Womack to sort through and put up in Elbe stock books the Scott listed China and Asia. Willy Dow of Jacksonville stayed at my home occasional weekdays to describe some postal history. Joe Cartafalsa spent some time with us.

Around 1985, Joe Sousa, the former executive director of the Society of Philatelic Americans group, came to work with us. Joe was a soft spoken, easy going gentleman. All too soon, he was diagnosed with cancer. I had a show in Honolulu, Hawaii coming up which was the perfect venue for work and pleasure.

I don't think we made \$300 in sales but I didn't care; our hotel was on Waikiki Beach! I shipped the stock home, Joe went island hopping and sight-seeing and I laid on the beach.

Coincidentally as Joe was saying his good-byes to working with us, Jim Kerr and wife Janice Bain-Kerr moved to Winter Park. Joe and Jim served together in Korea during the war some 35 years before.

Working with James Wilson Kerr was joyful. I had a lot to learn, and who better to teach me than this highly intelligent, funny master of all things. Over the many years I knew Jim, I came to respect and love him as my father.

Jim was born and raised in Korea, his parents were U.S. missionaries. He wrote an acclaimed book *Korean Kingdom and Empire Philatelic Catalog and Handbook*, a teaching guide of flowcharts and short essays. First published in 1965, my company updated it in 1990. Naturally I learned how to catalog the very difficult Korean Empire

issues from Jim Kerr.

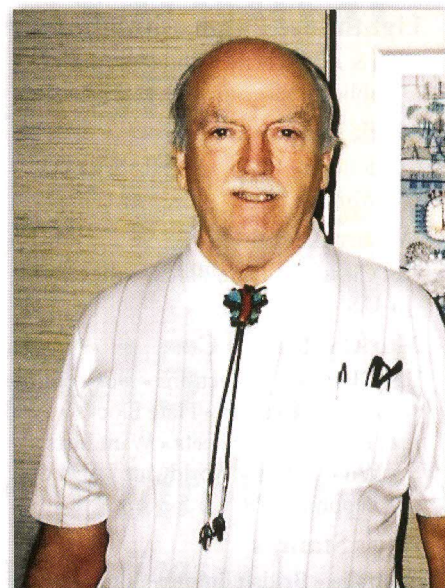
I put the knowledge to good use. After Jim suffered a series of strokes in the 2000s and could no longer be helpful, I handled a couple of intensive Korean Empire holdings which went far beyond Scott and other traditional catalogs.

Jim's influences were continually felt. The content of our first public auction in 1988 came about because Jim contacted Norman Townsend. Norm owned a swell Shanghai and China collection that was gathering dust. One of the few known China 1897 2 cent on 3 cent both inverted small surcharge on red revenue was housed in the Townsend collection. It sold for \$56,000.

He knew many collectors whose collections would come to us. Sometimes I would surprise his friends with my knowledge of them. Harry Anderson of Houston offered a heavenly China postal history accumulation at \$2 each. Two bucks a cover! I called him up with a counter offer of multiples of that. Harry got sort of upset because he thought I was disputing his knowledge of the marketplace. I charmed him by saying this was my market. "Take the money." He did and I got a thank you note. Couple of years later, Harry passed away and I purchased his estate.

As accomplished as Jim was in his previous life, I heard but a few words of it. He was career Army, where his knowledge of Korean was of great value. He received a degree in Nuclear Physics with the Army and was highly decorated. A purple heart, three Bronze Stars, and more. After the Army he was with FEMA.

One of my favorite stamp shows is the Washington, D.C. NAPEX event, held in Tyson's Corner, Virginia. During one of these shows, Jim was to attend a luncheon in the Pentagon and he took me along. It was a little dicey dealing with the guard as I didn't have clearance, but Jim knew how to handle the situation. As these retired Korean War vets and CIA types recounted their exploits, I discovered how highly his



The talented Jim Kerr

friends thought of Jim. Awesome. Heck, he never let on what he had done.

Jim didn't suffer fools. He had a keen sense of fair play. We were working a stamp show in San Francisco one year. Jim had a busted pinky toe and the crowd was four rows deep.

All of a sudden, our new hire said something really dumb and offensive to a customer. Jim heaved our new guy by the lapels of his shirt into the aisle, banishing him from the booth. He can fly! ✉