

# The Thrill of the Hunt

## Finding Hidden Treasures in Stamp Accumulations

By M. Treyson

There's a moment every collector knows. You're flipping through a dusty lot you picked up for next to nothing — an estate find -- a bulk auction grab, a shoebox from a garage sale — and suddenly, there it is. A stamp that doesn't belong with the others. A stamp that has no business being in this pile. A stamp that just made your day.

That's the treasure hunt. And if you know what to look for, it happens more often than you might think.

### *The Uninformed Seller Is Your Best Friend*

Most stamps change hands between people who know exactly what they have. But a surprising number don't. Estate sales, online lot auctions, and collection break-ups are full of material priced by people who simply want it gone. They see a pile of old stamps. You see opportunity.

The key is learning to search the way an uninformed seller lists. Vague titles like “old stamp collection” or “foreign stamp lot” on an auction site are your signal. The seller isn't a philatelist — they're a nephew cleaning out an attic. And that attic may have been untouched for forty years.

Here's a trick the seasoned hunters already know: search for the misspellings. The same seller who doesn't know what they have often can't spell it either. Try “satmps,” “stmaps,” or “ablums” on your next eBay search. Look for “revenew” stamps, “philatlic” material, or a “scarce” stamp listed as “scare.” These typo-riddled listings are invisible to collectors running tight, correctly-spelled searches — which means the competition disappears entirely. One misspelled word in a title can be the difference between a bidding war and a buy-it-now bargain that nobody else even saw.

### *What's Actually Hiding in Those Lots*

The beauty of stamp accumulations is that hidden value shows up across the entire hobby — US classics, foreign issues, back-of-book material, even modern stamps in pristine, never-hinged condition tucked inside an album page nobody opened.

Some of the best finds come from overlooked categories. Revenues and fiscal stamps get mixed into general US collections constantly, often unrecognized. Foreign stamps from countries with strong collector bases — Germany, Great Britain, Japan — frequently appear in “miscellaneous foreign” lots priced as filler. A single well-centered early issue with original gum can outshine an entire album of common material sitting right next to it.

Condition is where real value hides in plain sight. Two stamps that look identical at a glance can be separated by a factor of ten in catalog value based on centering, gum, and perforation. The casual seller doesn't see that. You do.

## *A Story from the Hunt*

Here's a real example of how this plays out. Not long ago I came across an online auction listing for a mixed lot of old US airmail stamps. The title was plain and unremarkable — just “mixed lot of old US airmail stamps.” The pictures showed common airmail material, nicely organized, nothing to get excited about. Ten or twelve photos in all.

But I looked at every one of them. And buried near the end, in one of the last pictures, was something that made me stop. At the very edge of the frame, barely visible, was what appeared to be a US C-14 Graf Zeppelin stamp. Just a sliver. You could almost talk yourself out of it.

I didn't talk myself out of it. I bought the lot for \$52 plus postage.

What arrived was a mint never-hinged C-14 Zeppelin — and that wasn't even the whole story. Also hiding in those pictures, completely unmentioned and unrecognized by the seller, were a C3a single and a C3a block of Peter Winter replicas of the famous inverted Jenny error stamps. Beautiful material that the seller simply didn't know they had.

I sold everything except one Jenny replica, which went straight into my own collection. The rest brought over \$500. Not bad for a \$52 gamble on a stamp that was barely visible at the edge of a photo.

**The lesson: look at every picture. Scroll to the last one. The seller buried the treasure without knowing it was there.**



*The Peter Winter replica of the inverted Jenny (C3a) — one of the hidden gems from a \$52 lot.*

## *The Hunt Is Half the Fun*

There's a reason we keep coming back to the hunt even after a find that should satisfy us for months. It's not just the score — it's the process. The sorting, the scrutiny, the moment of recognition. Every accumulation is a small mystery, and every mystery has a chance of being something special.

The stamps are out there, hiding in plain sight, waiting for someone who knows what to look for. That someone is you.

*Happy hunting.*

[Editor's note: The author of this article is a club member who prefers to remain unnamed.]