

Are We Barking Up the Wrong Tree?

By Stan Cronwall

Like many of us, I wonder from time to time just what is going to happen to my nearly life-long interest in stamps and stamp collecting in general and more specifically my various collections.

My sons have never been interested. Of my four grandsons, I tried and failed with the two older ones although I did get them to some local club meetings and even a few shows and bourses, bought them albums, stamps, hinges and tongs. However, they live four and half hours away and we see each other less than half a dozen times a year. My fault perhaps.

The local clubs in their area were not of much help either holding their meetings on "school nights" during the week.

The two younger grandsons both under 10 live on the East Coast. Not much of a chance to grab their attention from here, and their father never has shown an interest.

Locally we have tried to interest younger people having very limited success. A few have been club members in the footsteps of their mothers or fathers but then drift away into the apparently far more interesting areas offered by the teenage years and more recently there always on hand and demanding electronic friends.

We all know and recognize that stamp collecting is a solitary hobby. Yes, we can go to local club meetings, get together with other stamp collecting friends over coffee or a meal, attend shows and bourses, but when it comes down to actually dealing with your stamps and collections you are by yourself in thought and action huddled over your desk or table with references, catalogs, magnifiers, and tongs.

Working on your stamps, you are as distant as those married or dating couples we see in restaurants totally absorbed by their electronic friends even before they look at a menu. And, this addiction begins at an early age possibly two and half or three.

But, maybe those very same electronic devices are an overlooked way to actually reach, if not really touch, the younger set.

What if those in the philatelic world (including us) stopped beating a dead horse, and instead reached out to younger people by showing how they can use their electronic devices to do philatelic research on a particular stamp, country or topic.

We need to embrace the electronic world in which they live and use it to our advantage. The next time we help the Scouts with their Merit Badge program, run a workshop at a library, or have a youth table at a local stamp show, we should have people on hand who are savvy enough to demonstrate how their electronic devices can materially help their introduction to our world of stamps and stamp collecting.

Are we ready for that challenge? I for one certainly hope so.

Feedback: "Are We Barking Up the Wrong Tree?" article

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Thank-you for your opinion piece, "Are We Barking Up the Wrong Tree?". I think you are absolutely correct that when working with people on the values and virtues of stamp collecting, we need to shatter the false impression that stamp collecting is a 19th century hobby. We should show off digital microscopes, software from companies like EZ-Stamp and, of course, eBay. What is really lacking is a really active social media presence. There are a few attempts, but none that have really caught much attention from youth. Being a stamp collector doesn't have to mean living in the past.

Stamp collecting continues to suffer from several well entrenched false perceptions and missed opportunities:

- It is for old men to put little scraps of paper in dusty old albums
 - Women can enjoy collecting just as much as men/boys.
 - While albums fill a niche, they are NOT the only way to collect!
- Stamp collecting is full of rules and can only be done with strict adherence to these rules
 - Many are shocked when informed the only hard rule is to not damage the material.

- A simple hand-out on to handle stamps, covers, and postcards would be nice to have.
- The value of staying in touch with your personal/family heritage in a country is often missed by people
 - Lots of people are looking for ways to stay in touch or teach their national heritage.
 - Integrating genealogy with philately is another interesting entry point for people.
- Topical collecting is often completely unknown to people outside the hobby
 - Collecting trains, planes, pop culture, animals, nature, (or any topic) is VERY popular with youth.
 - Integrating scrap booking paper and embellishments are great way to add creativity to a collection.
- Long time collectors have to become less resistant to change or the hobby will die
 - The "fuddy-duddy" factor of "we never done this before" is far too prevalent.
 - We need to embrace change, not reject it.
 - Don't quit trying to create new collectors just because some don't embrace it.
 - Focus on the fun when teaching anyone, especially young people.
- If you want new people, go where they are, don't expect them to come to you.
 - For any demographic of people, go out to where those people are to introduce the idea of stamp collecting.
 - Show how they can integrate stamps into the other aspects of their lives.
 - For a youth who plays soccer, they can collect soccer on stamps.
 - Love art, but cannot afford an original Monet? Collect impressionist art on stamps.
 - Create opportunities for people of all ages to try it. Host a "stamp party", put a table at a local culture fair...
 - Host a Boy Scout stamp collecting merit badge at your club's annual show
 - This badge is at great risk of being dropped by the BSA for too few boys earning it.
 - When given a chance to go to a class, boys will sign-up (I've had nearly 800 boys over 15 years earn their merit badges).

Most of all, I think we need to focus on how much fun it can be. We all like to do things that are FUN.

I welcome your feedback on my comments,

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