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Today's Collector
New Opportunities

What Do You Not Understand About Stamps



Things change with new products.

Now everyone carries a Bic Lighter if they still smoke.

This week, I am starting early with a new topic on old problems. We collectors always want to know more about what we collect. Given that people collect odd things, or sometimes common ones, that surround them, such as old kitchen items like egg beaters or cast-iron products. What about Matchbooks, never used anymore, and your 16-year-old granddaughter has no idea what they were used for? But today we talk about stamps. Yes, those little stickers we put on our mail at a high cost of over half a dollar for each. I think back to when I started collecting stamps, and it seemed that a three-cent stamp would work for mailing a letter, but by the time I reached middle school, it had increased to four cents, a 75% increase. Now we have had multiple increases, but I have trouble keeping up with the few-cent increases more often than I wish. So, what does this mean for you, the collector? This is my illustration of just one of the little things that happen to our hobby of stamps and philately. We always seem to be looking for reasons, or maybe we just can't figure out what a stamp is worth, used for, like that matchbook.



In my 7th grade Three cent stamps for many years, but in my Going into 8th grade the PO brought out the 4 cent stamps.

Philately is filled with all types of things that take on meaning, but how often do we search for what they are, how they were used, what they are made of, and all the things we see but do not understand? Okay, a truth that I go by: "Everything has its day, but some things last longer than we might expect. For example, when stamps were first used in 1840 in England, they had dry gum on the back so they could be wetted by someone's tongue or a wet sponge. So, well over a century later, the self-stick stamps arrived, and gum was no more. Early stamps had no way to separate them other than scissors or maybe a straightedge to tear them off the sheet. Perforations seemed to do the trick- well, not so much with the early ones that didn't work so well because of the poorly punched holes. Early Mexican issues with perforations were still separated the same old way with straight edges or scissors, because the perforations didn't do their job. So, new things came and went, depending on what would work in the long run.



The old 25-cent Mexico stamp had perforations, but was separated with scissors.

Stamps today are peeled off non-stick paper and attached with self-stick gum.

Improvement? Not much, especially for the collector.

Each thing we look at in our collections has a story. Sometimes it is short, like the color or who was pictured on it, but other times there are oddities like watermarks, different paper, the same stamp in a different color and denomination, odd changes in perforations, and even things like proofs that are hard to locate for some stamps. What happens is that what we have confronted is often easy to figure out; sometimes a look in the catalog will tell you that the other colors or perforations are found on later issues. So, where do we find answers? Reference books starting with a catalog that covers the issues. Depending on how detailed and up-to-date it is, we should get some ideas that will answer our questions. But there are always things that may not just fall into place. The catalog may not have answers about the overprints you might find as you search back and forth through the pages.



This oddity was actually a mockup for a printer that used the Eagle-Man as the subject.

A hard-to-find stamp in most catalogs.

The second truth is: 'Most catalogs do not always cover everything that is going on with your stamps.' Along come the Specialized catalogs that cover just the country you are collecting in. You will see a world of difference. In Mexican stamps, the catalogs that have this information normally stop with either the period covered, such as Classic, issued in the 1800s. In Mexico, many of the specialized catalogs were published in Spanish, and Specialized collectors had them in their bookcases. In the 1990s, Nicholas Follansbee's catalog was published, which included a great deal of material for specialists as well as the average collector of early issues. When I first received my copy, I thought I had gone to philatelic heaven. My Gosh! It has all the districts for each issue and the denominations valued. Where my Scott covers only five issue denominations for 1856, there were something like fifty of each of them, for every place in Mexico where they were issued, with a district name. But like other things, even Nick can't tell me everything. There were things like the consignment numbers on the Eagle issues, which were used for sending the stamps to the district. Oh, Nick has a list of these, but little information or details. It took more reference material, like Leo Corbett's and, later, Dave Pietch's published catalogs on the Eagles, to widely increase the stories about those beautiful stamps.

District	½r	1r	2r	4r	8r	Note
Acapulco	90.00	85.00	75.00	700.00	1,200.00	1
"Aguascaltes" (1864)	*	3,000.00	1,200.00	4,000.00	*	2
Apam	35.00	15.00	75.00	250.00	150.00	3
B. California	*	*	10,000.00	*	*	
C. Bravos	3,500.00	2,000.00	2,250.00	*	*	
Campeche	90.00	15.00	15.00	200.00	600.00	
Chalco	60.00	25.00	125.00	*	*	
Chiapas	45.00	30.00	65.00	450.00	1,250.00	
Chihuahua	90.00	20.00	8.00	600.00	2,500.00	
Colima (x)	3,500.00	1,200.00	600.00	*	*	4
Córdova	45.00	15.00	8.00	500.00	850.00	
Cuautitlán (x)	—	700.00	1,200.00	*	5,000.00	5
Cuernavaca	60.00	6.00	8.00	300.00	850.00	
Durango	50.00	5.00	4.00	350.00	2,500.00	

This is from Nicholas Follansbees' catalogue on early Mexican issues.

Do we all need such detailed information if we are only collecting for the different types of their stamps? The answer is absolutely not, unless you are trying to find a deeper answer to the stamps you have. Let's think about where general information stops and a specialized message begins. Say I have a Dos Reales Eagle from Querétaro with consignment number 223.1864. Pietsch says it should be worth between \$5 and \$10, but what if I have a similar Dos Reales Eagle from consignment number 241.1864? That one had only 500 sent to Querétaro, and Pietsch says it is worth \$100-200. Yes, you are more likely to have the earlier consignment, but you don't know unless you have this reference. You would also find out that most of the 241 consignments went to sub-offices and are only rarely from the district office. So

if it has a numeral 4 sub office consignment for Celaya, it would have a value of only \$10-\$20. So, if you get the drift, a lot depends on detail in those Eagles.

198-1864	21 OCT		2000/D	4000/B
223-1864	29 NOV		2500/D	5000/B
241-1864	30 DEC	1000/G	500/G	500/G
11-1865	25 JAN		2500/C	5000/B

Detail from David Pietsch's catalog of the Eagles.

The figures are for the amount sent and the key values for that issue.

Now that I have covered what is important in the stamps, it is a walk-through of the background of values, cancels, and sub-office numbers. The search is always interesting, but I must tell you one important thing. Rare means something is rare and unlikely to be found. Not all the time, but most of the time this is true. By studying, I have sometimes found things worth far more than I expected. But those times were not common. Most of the time, I found that the item was not even uncommon. This is when the search is not the value, not the stamps or covers, fun is my objective, so no matter what your study follows, it is the study that is important.

Enjoy!

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