

Yesterday in U.S. Stamp News: **A Specialized Catalog of Dealers**

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Just as stamp collectors come in every shape and size (see “Profiles in Connoisseurship”, *Stamp News Online*, June 2011, by selecting from the Index by Subject on the home page), dealers too come in a wide variety of flavors, so that collectors can select the type with whom they prefer to associate. After all, if you’re going to part with your hard-earned money, you’d rather it go to a decent sort than some unspeakable creep. But, as one man’s Mede is another man’s Persian (apologies to George S. Kaufmann), the spectrum of dealer types has a broad latitude for the foibles of human nature. Here are a few of the ones I encounter every month.

First Among Equals



If he had a store, he’d serve imported espresso in china cups. His stock contains few items that are not “Superb”. His table at the show is covered in black velvet, his cards and pages were professionally designed, his tongs are gold, his cases leather. You have to be very rich to afford him, for his prices are up in the stratosphere. His sales pitch is “quality,” his manner patrician.

This kind of dealer relates best to other snobs. Woe unto you if you show him a stamp you bought somewhere else or (heaven forbid!) at auction. He will find at least three ways it “just doesn’t measure up.” The reality, as you can learn from his fellow dealers, is that things that seem too good to be true—e.g. his stock—are not quite what they seem, and he has been known to engage in a little “improvement” over the years. Sour grapes on their part? Jealousy? Who knows?

Mr. Dregs



His motto is “If it isn’t any good, would I sell it to you?” The answer—sure. He circles serious philately like a sea gull around a fishing boat, living on leavings and scraps. Three-margin classics, some of dubious ancestry, misidentified Washington-Franklins, damaged or monkeyed-with covers, moldy collection balances, lots at tiny percentages of catalogue, these are his stock in trade. They won’t let him in the bigger shows, so he takes a table (often in the darkest part of the room) at the little ones. There, his pricing formula is apt to be, “Halfa stamp, half catalog—but I’ll take less.”

He wouldn’t recognize a real stamp if it bit him. Condition or authenticity are not his concern. Someone starting a reference collection would be well advised to check this guy’s stock first—noted forgers like Fournier and Spiro are well represented among his “good stuff.” Fortunately, guys like Mr. Dregs rarely do much business with anyone other than fellow barrel-bottom scrapers, and the volume of his sales is unlikely to cause even the I.R.S. to take much notice.

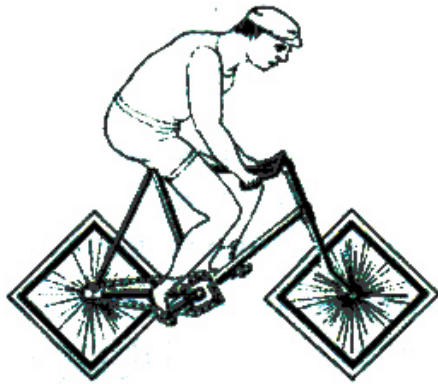
The Authority



He claims to be one of the reigning experts on U.S. Philately, especially the Classic Period. He is a member of three expert committees, writes articles, attends the major auctions. But his stock is full of off-quality material that he has priced to the skies based on rarity (not value), and if you ever try to sell him back one of the gems he sold you, you’re in for a big shock. His “advice” (should you ask it) always seems to coincide with his stock, leaving little room for objectivity.

His fellow dealers give him little respect; he's tooted his own horn once too often, and gotten caught in his "expertise" a little too frequently. The shame of it is, he does know a lot about his subject; if he wasn't so bent, he'd be a great resource.

The Churner



He'll buy anything and sell to anyone. If he buys a lot at 10 a.m. and hasn't sold it by 2 p.m., he's panicky about whether he's made a mistake. He could buy the world's greatest collection of something for peanuts (by accident, as he really doesn't know stamps), and sell it within two hours for peanuts plus ten percent. At

the end of each month, he tries to clean out his remaining stock at cost.

The Charmer

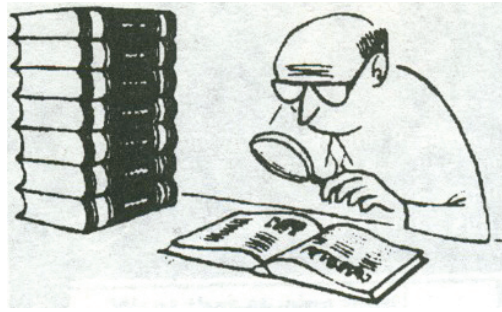
With his old world accent and well-developed marketing techniques, he doesn't appear to work too hard. He puts forth immaculate box lots filled with a variety of stuff, always "salted" with a few great items that he just won't sell individually. God knows how many hours he has to spend putting these "goodies" together; his back room must be a factory.

His best technique is the age-old "I have a little something, but it's not for you". By the time the customer has expended the effort to coax whatever it is out from under the table, by persistent whining if need be, the dealer knows that there is no way now that the customer could possibly pass it up, even, as is usually the case, if it's really not for him.



Plain Vanilla

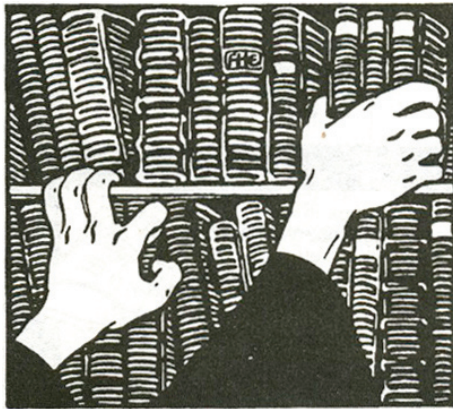
The man with no personality, and a stock to match. Those who are uncomfortable talking to strangers flock to him—he's got the same problem. Books, cards, albums, the stamps must sell themselves. He's along for the



ride to take your payment. Don't ask him any technical questions—he just doesn't know, or he won't venture an opinion that might be proven wrong.

You won't find any really unusual stuff in his stock—too risky. And don't bother showing him anything for sale—not interested. But chances are his prices are right on the money, his descriptions are accurate, and his merchandise correctly represented. Now, if someone could just get him to smile once in a while!

The Specialist



He has carved a niche for himself in one particular area—British Empire, U.S. Revenues, Airmail Covers. He is knowledgeable, his stock is well rounded, he can find what you need or answer a question or quote provenance and rarity with the most erudite collectors. But there's a catch. One such specialist

says, "When you buy from me, you'll pay 10% of catalog for the stamp, and 110% of catalog for my personal attention."

These are the guys you'll have to come to, hat in hand, after you've filled all the readily available spaces in your albums at the more reasonably-priced dealers. The Specialists comb the world for material in their areas, they will pay a premium to fill the needs of their customers,

and they keep track of where all the known examples of the rarities of their area are at any given time. The shame is, they'll probably never be able to record or pass down the immense store of knowledge they have accumulated in the process.

Ye Olde Generalist

The stamp dealer of yesteryear, who had several sets of world albums to pick from, who had boxes of covers priced for the used stamps, who would buy or sell a little of anything without bothering with premiums for



special cancels or exceptional condition. He had a price formula and he stuck with it.

His reputation, like his stamps, was rock solid. Sure, he wouldn't pay much for collections coming in through the door, because he knew they would sit on his shelves for years, slowly recouping his investment.

They're gone now, most of these guys, squeezed out by inflation and old age and the desperate need of most dealers to find a profitable "niche." But I sure miss 'em.

Recognize Anyone?

Most of the dealers you'll encounter have a combination of the above traits, depending on what their backgrounds or personalities are. Because stamp collecting is the most democratic of hobbies, you are free to patronize whomever you like, depending on the criteria you set for yourself. Part of the fun of the hobby is turning up a great little gem for your collection from an unlikely source, or in buying stuff from a dealer who doesn't fit in with his stock, so you get it at a great price.

So keep looking, asking, trying, no matter who the dealer is, because you never know where your next great "find" might be lurking.