

The PhilateliKid

The newsletter for Stamp Collecting Clubs for Kids (SCCFK)

www.stampcollectingclubsforkids.org

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Stamp Collecting on the High Seas

According to insurance experts, the single biggest cause of loss to stamp collections is not fire or theft. Although untold amounts of stamps have been damaged from sunlight, insect infestations, and accidentally being thrown into the trash, none of those are the major reasons for insurance claims. The major cause for damage to stamp collections today is a result of contact with something that covers two thirds of the surface of the earth: water.

That being the case, it seems like only a very reckless person would endeavor to collect stamps aboard a ship at sea. Luckily, the number of philatelic losses resulting from sinking ships is very small. The water damages to stamp collections nowadays come from overflowing washing machines and flooded basements.

Being fully aware of the tiny risks of loss at sea, yours truly boldly took about 15 starter albums, a dozen pair of tongs, about 2,500 inexpensive stamps, and about 400 hinges on a month-long cruise between Vancouver, British Columbia and Seward, Alaska. As usual, my briefcase has a couple large envelopes full of recent US mint stamps, a few souvenir sheets, and a couple dozen old plate number blocks. I also took along a recent copy of *Linns* and a couple recent months of *The American Philatelist*. That filled up about half of my luggage, leaving plenty of room for a few pair of socks, underwear, three shirts, a spare pair of pants, a tuxedo, dress shirt and shoes (worn once on a “formal night”) along with toiletries, cell phone and charger, laptop, and several books for reading should things get too boring.

Being pretty new to cruising, and it being the first time for me to be aboard a ship for 28 consecutive days, I was concerned about getting bored. It never happened.

On the second day at sea, I went to the card room and took over one of the seven tables to do some stamp collecting. During the 90 minutes there I met several people who stopped by and talked stamps, and a girl and a boy ages 10 and 13 that I gave albums to, and taught them how to hinge a stamp. They began collecting stamps and had a really fun time.

I immediately realized I had vastly underestimated the number of hinges I would be needing if I were to continue doing this, so at the next port of call I put in an “emergency order” for 3,000

hinges to two separate stamp dealers, hoping at least one shipment would arrive before I ran out of hinges. I also called an East Coast dealer, Henry Gitner, and asked if they could mail me some inexpensive stamps to give away during the cruise. The timing could not have been worse, since Henry is the person I'd previously had contact with, and he was out of town (at the Michigan StampShow.) Luckily for me, his wife, Debbie, answered the phone and really did more than I expected. My trust in stamp dealers was reaffirmed when packages to me, c/o Radiance of the Seas, arrived at the Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines Port Agent in Juneau, Alaska from Hunt and Co. (Texas), Henry Gitner (New York), and Subway Stamp Co. (Pennsylvania). Also a big shout out to Connie at APS who stepped up and mailed to me 15 (fifteen!) back issues of *The American Philatelist*. (Those were quickly snapped up by fellow passengers and crew members.)

For the next 27 days there was stamp collecting on the High Seas by children (7) and surprising to me, adult crew members and passengers (over 75). I gave out 14 of the 15 beginner stamp albums I'd brought, then took my last copy to the Guest Relations aboard the ship and asked for them to photocopy 10 more copies (16 pages per copy.) They did. I collated the pages, borrowed a stapler, and, voila!, another 10 stamp albums. All those albums also were given away, including the last original, so I actually had zero albums the final day, and had to take addresses to mail out some albums when I get home.

When I say "given away" that is precisely what happened to all 25 of the albums, stamps (about 1,500) hinges (about 2,000) the 15 copies of *The American Philatelist*, and the dozen pair of tongs I'd brought. However, the only people who got the albums, etc. actually sat down and put stamps into them, after I'd written their names on the cover using a black Sharpie I'd brought along.

After the first three days I did do a little "announcing" by making a small card and putting it up on the bulletin board. That resulted in so many people coming to collect stamps, and talk stamps that it overwhelmed the small card room, and the card players were not too pleased.

The saying goes that "necessity is the mother of invention." We needed a bigger place to collect stamps. What could I do? There were all sorts of activities provided by the ship,—lectures, crafts, sports, music, etc. but those people all were officially hired by the ship, had uniforms, name tags, etc. I could not just take over a room for stamp collecting, and figured that at any moment some ship officer would tell me to cease and desist.

How to avoid that? Luckily, I "accidentally" ran across the Cruise Director and asked if she could put a notice in the daily newsletter placed in every cabin each evening. "Sure," she replied. The moment had now arrived: I asked if there were a more suitable place we could

collect stamps. Immediately she offered to let us use the buffet dining room Annex at 2:30 p.m. each day – after the lunch rush had ended. For the rest of the cruise we had plenty of space, and it was not uncommon to see about a dozen passengers sitting around collecting stamps, looking at the stamps I had on display, and asking questions.

Every day thereafter we took two tables, and eventually three tables and a dozen chairs.

Passengers on their own arranged the chairs in a semicircle around me, and thus was launched my “career” as a trivia expert on all things philatelic.

Here is just a sample of real questions I received:

1. How should stamps be stored?
2. Where do you get your stamps from? (That I give away.)
3. Where can I (a fellow passenger) buy stamps?
4. What is the most expensive stamp in my collection?
5. How many albums do you have?
6. How many countries issue stamps?
7. How are stamps collected?
8. I have a shoebox full of stamps my grandfather left me. What should I do with it?
9. What is the rarest/most valuable stamp?
10. Where can I buy tongs, hinges, etc.?
11. Where and when are stamp club meetings held in my (the passenger's) city?
12. Do you have the new Elvis stamp? (Answer: Yes, I got off the ship at Ketchikan, Alaska, walked to the Post Office, and bought a sheet of the new Elvis stamp a few days after it was issued. I displayed it on one of the tables every day.)
13. How do you get the stamps off the envelopes?
14. What kind of stamps do kids like to collect?
15. What is a philatelist?
16. Do you have any stamps from Philippines/ Indonesia/ India? (Those were the three most common requests from crew members, and Yes, I had stamps with me to show to them from each of their countries, and they collected them and I ran out of stamps from those countries.)
17. I have a bunch of First Day Covers. Are they worth a lot?

Among a hundreds of topics, we discussed precancels, perfins, coils, plate number blocks, CTO's, APS, circuit sales, how to decide what to collect, stamp auctions, exhibiting, stamp catalogues, *Linns*, catalogue numbers, who decides what goes onto stamps, who manufactures stamps, PNC's, rare stamps, perforations, watermarks, types of printing, types of paper, and

why are there no stamps issued by Alaska. Because I displayed an Inverted Jenny souvenir sheet, it also was frequently the subject of discussion.

Although everything was being given away free, the display stamps (mostly mint US) were for display and I did not give those away. I guess it is a good sign that stamp collecting is highly desired and fun when somebody tries to “sneak” away with something that is not free (“steal” is the correct word) but there was nothing of great value, and I think only a few stamps were taken without permission.

At the beginning of the cruise the Captain announced that 37 countries were represented by passengers on board. I’m sure that the crew also added to the number of different countries. Even when I could not speak a person’s language, the international language of philately, along with some hand signs, worked just fine. That’s pretty wonderful.

Many of the above questions were asked almost every day by different people, and sometimes on the same day I’d be asked the same question by a person who came after I had already answered the question for somebody else.

My wife, Linda, a non-stamp collector, again helped many of the new stamp collectors by showing them how to use tongs and hinge stamps, A fellow passenger, a retired woman named Crystal (I don’t think I ever got her last name) also helped many new stamp collectors right after I’d shown her what to do. Thanks, Crystal, wherever you are!

In summary, stamp collecting on the High Seas was a lot of fun, and I look forward to it on my next cruise. You can do it too! If you have any questions, or need any help, please feel free to contact me.

The school year has begun and we had our “kick-off” for the local stamp collecting club yesterday. 81 students in Grades 2,3,4,and 5 joined.

If you have something relating to stamp collecting that you think might be appropriate for this newsletter, please feel free to send it to Robert W. Martin at the address listed below.

Comments? Write Robert W. Martin, P.O. Box 1809, Kihei, HI 96753 (Try to use a nice stamp on your letter.)

Stamp Collecting Clubs for Kids is a 501 C (3) organization. All donations of \$10 or more are provided written receipts.

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