



AUSTRALIAN PHILATELIC FEDERATION LTD

AN INTRODUCTION TO STAMP COLLECTING

“A relaxing and interesting pastime”

Stamp Collecting

Did you collect stamps when you were at school? Do you remember the enjoyment of obtaining stamps by asking friends and relatives for any stamps off their letters, or maybe you saved up money from birthday presents to buy attractive stamps.

Many people throughout the world collected stamps in this way. Typically, interest in stamp collecting wanes during the teen-age years as people focus on their studies, and later on, their careers, families and mortgages. However quite a few people return to this hobby as adults, possibly with access to more disposable income. Some continue to collect stamps in the same way they did as children, whilst others become more specialised.

Broadly speaking, there are three ways in which collectors can specialise

- **The design of the stamps.** Choose a particular theme which might be a hobby, or something that interests you such as flowers or football. You can collect stamps that feature this theme in the design. People also collect other non-stamp items with these designs such as aerograms or postmarks or postcards.
- **The way in which the stamps were produced.** Some people concentrate on a particular stamp issue. They collect things such as the artist's drawings and various items such as colour trials prepared by the printers before the stamps were actually issued. Some stamps were in use for many years, so there were later printings that may have differences in the type of paper, the watermark, the size of the perforations and many other aspects. Sometimes the wear and tear caused noticeable differences in some stamps, which are called errors or flaws.
- **The way in which the stamps were used.** Many collectors concentrate on the whole envelope, not just the stamp. This lets you see the postage rate, which changed over time. You can also see the different postmarks used to cancel the stamps. You may also be able to deduce the route that the letter travelled to its destination, and before you know it you are also learning about the developments of communications by ship or by aeroplane.

The term “Stamp Collecting” is in itself a misnomer. It is a generic term covering the accumulation of actual mail, or material relating to the actual or intended carriage of mail, whether carried or issued by a postal authority or private source.

In other words, “Stamp Collecting” does not necessarily relate to the collecting of “stamps”, per se. In fact, there are many fine collections of material carried prior to the issue of the first postage stamp in Great Britain in 1840.

What is Stamp Collecting

Brochure No 1 of this series has described Stamp Collecting as follows -

Stamp collecting is one of the world's most popular hobbies, and is well known as “The hobby of kings and the king of hobbies.” Ever since a young Victorian lady advertised in The Times for Penny Blacks to wallpaper her room, stamps have fascinated and delighted collectors.

Collecting stamps satisfies our collector instincts while providing an insight into the history, geography and culture of the countries whose stamps we collect.

Besides being educational, stamp collecting is fun!

It is a hobby suitable for all ages from youngsters of six or seven to adults in their nineties. It is a hobby that offers tremendous scope from casual collecting of stamps from the mail to detailed studies of printing methods and postal and social history.

Whether you are interested in the whole world or only one small specialized part of it, you will find a kindred spirit out there with a similar interest. Stamp collecting transcends national boundaries and offers a peaceful hobby that is enjoyed by millions worldwide.

There are two key elements in this description; firstly, stamp collecting is a hobby, and secondly, it should be enjoyable. In addition, collecting can promote feelings of well being. Just imagine the thrill of tracking down a hard to find item; the satisfaction when it is finally run to ground. If you prefer a real challenge, you may become involved in research. Discovering new information can give you a feeling of euphoria that lasts for many weeks.

Collecting Options

One of the great attractions of Stamp Collecting is the myriad of options available. Consider the following collecting alternatives -

- Collect a nominated country;
- A nominated period;
- A nominated region, e.g., Europe, Polar region;
- A nominated theme or event(s), e.g. flowers;
- Stamps for a single issue;
- Mint or used stamps;
- Single stamps or blocks;
- The process of producing stamps, etc;
- Production errors and variations;
- Forgeries;
- Simple or specialist collection;
- Postal stationery, e.g. aerogrammes;
- Postal history, postal routes and rates;
- Postmarks;
- Different methods of carriage of mail;
- Study a postal authority service;
- Postcards;
- First Day Covers;
- Maximum cards;
- Any combination of the above.

Unless you have either a previous collection which you now wish to re-discover, or you have inherited a collection that you are happy to continue, it is strongly recommended that you are NOT too ambitious initially.

Like most hobbies, there are costs associated with stamp collecting, with material ranging in price from as low as a few cents to many thousands of dollars.

There are probably two important questions that you need to consider prior to deciding upon your collecting option –

1. How much money am I prepared to spend upon my collection? And
2. How much time can I devote to it?

A realistic answer to these questions will go a long way to determining your initial collecting options.

Another important factor to consider is the strong possibility that your collecting options will change once you acquire a better knowledge of the hobby. Generally, most new collectors are over-ambitious with their selected scope of collecting options, which breadth will later be contracted. Excess ambition can stem from the desire to collect a reasonable quantity of material in a short period.

It can be quite useful when making this decision to discuss it with a friend who is also an established collector, or with the local stamp dealer.

Getting Started

Starting out can take many different directions depending upon how you want to approach your collection.

The cheapest way is to start with new issues. This method can be frustrating due to the slow rate at which your collection grows. Until you get a reasonable amount of material, there is very little involvement on your part, which is not very satisfying.

A more appropriate method could be to buy a basic collection from a dealer or at an auction, and then build on it. Alternatively, you could make a reasonable initial purchase from a friend or dealer. Either way, you now have something to work with.

Once you have some material you need to make some more decisions –

- How am I going to store my material?
- If on pages, how will I mount the material?
- Where do I get pages?
- Should I use blank pages, quadrille pages, or pre-printed catalogue pages?
- What do I need to handle the material?
- How do I find out what I still need to get?
- How am I going to write up the collection, if at all?

There is much general information available on the APF website on the Collecting page to assist with resolving these questions. However, as the choice of collecting options is so wide, it is preferable that you discuss your particular choice with either a friendly collector or dealer.

It is preferable to start with temporary storage facilities, thus allowing complete flexibility to subsequently change options. This step will defer addressing the question regarding writing up the material until you decide on a more permanent storage method.

Naturally, you will need to know what material you still need to get, so it is advisable to obtain a catalogue which adequately covers your collecting interests.

Stamp collecting, in all its facets, is truly a window on our past, our present and our future. More is written each year about this hobby than any other. Stamp collecting will carry you through life and offers you exercise for the brain - a key ingredient to a long and healthy life.

For Further Information

www.apf.org.au

or

Contact your State Council

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GPO Box 980 CANBERRA ACT 2601
NSW: Philatelic Development Council - NSW
PO Box 220 Darlinghurst NSW 1300
QLD: Queensland Philatelic Council
PO Box 941 Wynnum Plaza PO
WYNNUM WEST QLD 4178

SA/NT: South Australian Philatelic Council
GPO Box 9800 ADELAIDE SA 5001
TAS: Tasmanian Stamp Council
GPO Box 9800 HOBART TAS 7001
VIC: Victorian Philatelic Council
GPO Box 9800 MELBOURNE VIC 3001
WA: Western Australian Philatelic Council
GPO Box 9800 PERTH WA 6001

(Further contact details, including email addresses, are available on the APF website.)

Other brochures in this series are available from the Australian Philatelic Federation or your State Council:

- 1 *Why Collect Stamps*
- 2 *Why Join a Stamp Club?*
- 3 *I have just inherited a stamp collection - Where do I go from here?*
- 4 *I have just rediscovered my old stamp collection – where do I go from here?*
- 5 *Where do I get stamps for my collection?*
- 6 *Beyond Australia!*
- 7 *How can I identify and value my stamps?*
- 8a *An introduction to exhibiting – Part 1*
- 8b *An introduction to exhibiting – Part 2*
- 9 *Thumbnail Descriptions of the Exhibition Classes*
- 11 *Using the Internet to Widen Your Research Boundaries*