

Aunt Esther's Attic

By Richard Pederson

My Great Uncle Walter, who passed away in 1958, had been an avid stamp collector for many years. Because of his health problems, he had disposed of much of his stamp collection during the last year of his life. Thus, it was a big surprise to me when my Great Aunt Esther informed me that my uncle had stored a number of his less valuable holdings in the attic and that they were still there. Aunt Esther then asked if I would like to go through what was left and pick out some items for my collection.

Not knowing what to expect, I followed my aunt up to the attic. The stamps were located in a small semi-finished room with an overhead light and a single window. What greeted me was the largest single accumulation of stamps that I had ever seen. There were boxes of stamps in glassine envelopes. Many large boxes containing postal history and first day covers were piled upon the floor. Stacks of files containing mint sheets, plate blocks, and souvenir sheets were everywhere. There were also stock books of mint stamps, boxes of neatly trimmed pieces of envelopes containing many thousands of used stamps, and old albums still packed with pre-1940 stamps. It was almost as if I had my own personal stamp store to pick and choose from at my own convenience. Pictured below are a few of the stamps that were in Aunt Esther's attic.



Perhaps my favorite stamp issue, to this day, is the 1936 National Parks issue and I discovered that my uncle had put away an enormous selection of that issue. There were first day covers, including many signed by James A. Farley, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Postmaster General. Numerous mint and used copies of every denomination, perforated and imperforate, were present. Plate blocks and special printings were also in abundance. In addition to the National Parks stamps, many other things caught my eye. There were hundreds of colorful Potato Tax stamps, which I had never even seen before. Many Hitler-era

German semi-postals were present. I also saw a nice selection of U.S. revenue stamps, European colonial issues dated prior to 1930, and many U.S. coil stamps and plate blocks, including numerous Washington-Franklin issues.

My aunt allowed me to choose one hundred dollars catalog value worth of stamps, which seemed like a fortune to me, but once picked out appeared almost inconsequential compared to the hoard at hand. Although my aunt intended to sell the remainder of the stamps, she let me go through the remainder and pick out many of the items that I would like to have in the future. Over the next year, I went through the entire accumulation selecting the items that I most wanted. For the next several years, birthday and Christmas presents from my aunt consisted largely of items selected from the attic treasure. I also did many odd jobs around the house and yard for my aunt and each time I was rewarded with a selection from the stamps that had been set aside.

I was sorry when the time came that I received the last group of stamps from my aunt's attic. To this day, I still have fond memories of the times spent in Aunt Esther's attic going through my uncle's stamps. When I go through my collection and spot one of the items that was in my uncle's collection, I still think of the many pleasant hours I spent sitting in that attic surrounded by piles of stamps and of the fond memories I have of my Great Aunt Esther and Uncle Walter, who started me on the always wonderful adventure of collecting stamps.