

Why We Collect Stamps By Richard Pederson

Much has been written and said about why people should collect stamps, but, it is a topic well worth re-visiting. If you consider why you like the hobby, it may help focus your approach when attempting to sell novice and prospective collectors on it. Following is a candidate top ten list of why people should collect stamps.

1. Stamps are educational
2. Stamp collecting is challenging
3. Stamps are miniature works of art
4. Stamps can be acquired on any budget
5. A stamp collection can be tailored to your specific interests
6. Stamp collecting can be a social activity
7. Stamp collecting can be a personal activity
8. You set your own collecting goals
9. Stamp collecting is for all ages
10. Collecting stamps is fun.

In addition to the above reasons, stamps can have some intrinsic value (side benefit). Although your list may vary some from mine, I imagine there are a number of similarities. My list of reasons encompasses people of all ages since I think there is as much value in encouraging seniors to collect as there is to encourage young people. The following paragraphs discuss each of my reasons for collecting stamps.

Stamps are educational. There are few hobbies that can claim the educational benefits of stamp collecting. Stamps can help teach history, art, literature, geography, politics, sports, science, or virtually any other topic you can name. Many a teacher has realized that stamps could be used as a teaching tool and brought them into the classroom. For instance, the stamp at left (U. S. Scott 230), which depicts Columbus in sight of land on his first trip to the Americas, could easily be used as an aid in a history class.



Stamp collecting is challenging. Most collectors like a challenge and stamp collecting can be made as challenging as necessary without having to spend large sums of money to do so. There are relatively inexpensive stamps and covers that can be very difficult to locate. For example, assembling a collection of covers postmarked on your birth date, from your date of birth to the present year will not require a substantial investment but will be very difficult to complete, requiring many hours of searching through the cover lots of postal history

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dealers.

Stamps are miniature works of art. Although each of us differs in what we consider to be an attractive stamp, everyone can agree that the world's postal administrations have been responsible for producing many beautiful stamps. Whether you prefer the detail and depth of line on engraved stamps such as the \$1 Western Cattle in Storm stamp (U. S. Scott 292) from the U. S. Trans-Mississippi set of 1898 (see picture at right), or modern color lithographed stamps, there are stamps that appeal to everyone. Many people collect stamps depicting famous paintings, statues, or other artwork that appeals to them.



Stamps can be acquired on any budget. One of the best things about stamp collecting is that you do not have to be wealthy in order to get enjoyment from the hobby. Those with limited financial resources can collect used stamps from mail that they or friends and acquaintances receive. Inexpensive mixtures of used stamps can then be purchased to build their collection. For example, dealer stocks or stamp mixtures can serve as sources when collecting socks on the nose cancels (SOTNs) of each stamp produced of a certain issue or from a specified time frame. This can be quite challenging, yet can be done on a relatively small budget. As indicated by the name, a SOTN cancel is one in which the entire cancel, such as the circular date stamp or CDS, shown below, is contained on the stamp. The pictured stamps are the U. S. 1957 and 1954 special delivery issues (Scott E21 and E20) with SOTN cancels. Those with sufficient financial resources can pursue anything available on the philatelic market including highly sought after rarities such as the Inverted Jenny (U. S. Scott C3a).



A stamp collection can be tailored to your specific interests. One of the wonderful things about stamp collecting is that there is no "right" way to collect. You decide what interests you and what to include in your collection. You can even choose to collect by topic or theme and collect items that are related to your job or other interest. For example, an attorney can collect stamps, covers, and collateral material pertaining to the field of law.

Stamp collecting can be a social activity. Many outside the hobby think of stamp collecting as a sedentary hobby for loners, but for many hobby participants, that

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is far from the truth. If you participate in clubs, purchase stamps from a stamp shop, attend stamp shows and bourses, or participate in live auctions, stamp collecting becomes a social activity where you interact with other people having similar interests. Often, collectors form close and lasting friendships with people with whom they interact in the stamp hobby.

Stamp collecting can be a personal activity. Stamp collecting is a hobby that lends itself to personalization. You decide what you collect, how you store and display your collection, and how you go about acquiring the philatelic items making up your collection. Despite what some hobby insiders might say, there is no right or wrong way to collect. Only you can decide exactly what pleases you. If collecting inexpensive cancelled-to-order stamps depicting topical themes, there is certainly nothing wrong with that as long as the quest for that type of material makes you happy.

You set your own collecting goals. Whether you want to acquire one stamp from every entity that ever issued stamps, or desire to form a complete collection comprising all know stamps for a specific stamp issuing entity, or pertaining to a single topic, is a personal decision. You can also adjust your collecting goals as you go along. Perhaps you wish to broaden the topic you collect, collect one or more countries that are related to one you already collect, or you want to incorporate postal history items into your stamp collection. Whatever you decide, it is your choice and no one else's. The variety and flexibility the stamp hobby offers help attract people to the hobby.

Stamp collecting is for all ages. Stamp collecting is a hobby that can be enjoyed by young and old. Many collect as youth, leave the hobby while raising families, and then rediscover the pleasures of stamp collecting while middle-aged or as a senior. Because stamp collecting does not impose unusual physical demands, people of all ages are able to participate on relatively equal footing.

Collecting stamps is fun. I have saved the most important reason for collecting stamps for last. The purpose to any hobby should be to have fun and relaxation. Your hobby should be an escape from the drudgeries of everyday life. If you do not get pleasure from your hobby, you should be looking for something else to do in your spare time. The other reasons for collecting stamps that are listed above should merely enhance the enjoyment and satisfaction you obtain from working with your stamps. True stamp collectors are not in the hobby to make money, although some do. They are not into stamp collecting to learn things, although virtually every collector does. Stamp collectors are drawn to and kept in the hobby for the simple reason they are having FUN pursuing their personal stamp collecting goals.

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