

Why I Collect Stamps

The event on the surface wasn't dramatic or outwardly impressive. A middling crowd of members attended the meeting that night, which was devoted to a bourse – a sale of stamps and supplies. We all wore masks and tried to keep our distance, but most of us hovered a foot or two apart from each other, sometimes engaged in quiet conversation while perusing the offerings. I lost count of the number of stamp packets and bins of covers displayed about the room, from a multi-album worldwide collection to a pair of uncommon 19th century US stamps. One could tell a lot of hard, thoughtful work went into the bourse preparations. As I wandered the perimeter of the group of display tables, I heard a call, almost a whisper, drawing me to a small box of glassine envelopes and loose stamps. The box was unimposing, measuring only 3 x 2 x 7 inches. However, the price was low, the Club asking only \$3.50 for the lot. I thumbed through the glassines with mild anticipation, noting mostly countries and stamps I already possessed. Still, the stamps seemed to run on the older side, so I was inclined to take a chance. There had to be a few interesting stamps I needed lurking in those envelopes, right? I continued my shopping, purchased a few other inexpensive items, and then hurried home to examine my treasure.

Two hours later I was wrapping up my first sort of the mystery box, and the adventure was just beginning. I discovered almost 300 loose stamps, which I tackled first. A significant portion of the loose stamps were used German WWI and later issues. While I had most of these, they were definitely collectible, many valued at 60 cents to \$2.00 in Very Fine used condition. Someone new to collecting Germany would have been thrilled. Moreover, even if I filled only a few holes in my collection, I was making progress (if one considers stamp acquisition important). When my count of the glassine and approval envelopes reached 100, I stopped, noting only a few extra. Although some of the envelopes contained just a single stamp, others had 50 or more. I estimated 1000 stamps total for the small box.

I haven't yet begun cataloging in earnest, but I've already encountered a few surprises. One approval envelope had a folded depression-era German Banknote (5 million marks) which I've seen at coin shows in "\$1 boxes" of miscellaneous currency. Another envelope contained puffin stamps from Lundy Island (the unrecognized Potentate of Puffin) -- not exactly what you would find in a typical packet or mission mix! Other envelopes had the Mozambique Company (always a crowd pleaser) and some anti-Soviet stamps from the "Vichy France" government. A small glassine caught my eye, and when opened, it revealed what appeared to be the 1 centime France 109a – an imperforate version of the more common perforated 109. I can't tell if it is genuine or not – I have my suspicions because it is closely cropped and lacks a normal envelope border—but an online vendor lists a similar used 109a for about \$20. Whether genuine or fake, it will find a place in the album I've set aside for my son.

As I continue my search while writing this note, I find other interesting stamps, like an unused stock transfer stamp from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (online price \$4.00) and some early Russian commemoratives. Clearly, sorting through, cataloging, and selecting the stamps I will keep is likely to take me several more hours. The exploration of my inexpensive mystery box will provide an entertaining journey at nominal cost. While it is nice to retain some specimens for my collection, the real reason I continue to collect stamps and go to Club meetings is the pleasure I experience in making small discoveries. *Stamp collecting can be an adventure!*