

What's the Buzz on Stamp Collecting?

In most states and counties, it is common to find a variety of groups catering to the hobby of collecting stamps. People engage in stamp collecting as a general interest; other times they are in it because of the possibility of profit in collecting rare stamps. This profit comes from the fact that stamps hold a degree of history of a community, or even an entire country.

While some people collect stamps without regard for its quality or details, the more dedicated stamp collectors who understand this profitability pay attention to a variety of details that would determine the worth of the stamp.

#### CONDITION

The first and most simple rule of thumb is—if the stamp is damaged, it's likely to be worth very little, or worth nothing at all. The condition of the stamp plays a huge factor especially with dedicated collectors.

A used stamp in excellent condition is one with its complete set of perforated edges and is not torn, has the design centered in the stamp, still retains a degree of vibrancy of color as when it was issued, has a very light cancellation stamp (as with used stamps), and the gum or adhesive of the stamp as close to intactness as possible, and is not creased or folded in any way.

A stamp without its complete set of perforated edges has lesser value than its counterpart with less physical damage.

Meanwhile, a stamp with equal spaces placed between the perforation and the stamp's design is considered 'centered'; its value marginally decreases when it is poorly centered, and greatly decreases when the perforation runs through the design.

The vibrancy of the colors of the design, on the other hand, is affected by the soaking or lifting method used on the stamp to remove it from its original envelope attachment, or by exposure to sunlight. Obviously, the more vibrant the colors are, the greater the value of the stamp.

The cancellation of a used stamp plays a vital role because if the stamp is too heavily cancelled, there is a huge possibility that the visibility and clarity of the design is compromised.

Lastly, a stamp with the gum or adhesive as close to being intact has greater value. Hinges, or the marks left by heavy licking and attachment to paper,

greatly affect the value of the stamp. A lightly hinged stamp would be of higher value than one that is heavily hinged.

Unless one is an expert in stamp lifting or soaking, many stamp collectors opt to keep their stamps attached to a small portion of the envelope they were originally attached to. The first reason for keeping the stamp attached is the fear of tearing or damaging the physical wholeness or condition of the stamp, which may happen when removing the stamp with insufficient or no soaking at all. Another possibility is that of the ink of the stamp running. This happens usually with stamps issued before the 1940s. During this period, fugitive ink, which runs in water, was used to print the designs on the stamps. Some of the ink used in canceling stamps may also run in water onto the design and completely ruin the stamp completely; therefore with the difficulty of identifying the ink used in stamp cancellations, stamp collectors either resort to stamp lifting or simply keeping the stamp in its original form. Soaking stamps may also cause the design to fade and lose its vibrancy.

#### UNIQUENESS

The second consideration that must be put to mind is the uniqueness of the stamp. The profitability of the stamp comes from the fact that many collectors seek out particular designs. A unique stamp may be three things—a stamp from a much earlier period, and thus holds a great historical value, a stamp that was released in limited numbers over a short period of time, and a stamp that features a particular historical or social event of note to collectors and the general public. The fewer of the stamp available for acquisition in the free philatelic market, the likelier the stamp enthusiasts will bid higher for it.

In relation to this second consideration is the DEMAND for the stamp. This is usually indicative of the market value that a stamp can go for, and is usually revealed in stamp catalogues. Stamp catalogues, which are accessible from most libraries, will not only reveal the possible selling price of the stamp (although most sellers mark their stamps at a lower price), but also how many of the stamp was issued, where it was issued, and how it may be classified. Some popular stamp catalogues available in libraries include the Scott, Stanley Gibbons, Michel, OCB, Hibernian, and Sakura catalogues. The price quoted in the catalogue will clearly imply how much collectors are willing to pay to get that stamp.

At the end of the day, a professional stamp dealer may help in the valuation of the stamp. The valuation of the stamp may be subject to the experience of the professional dealer and his or her knowledge of its demand; however, he or she will still return to the basic three listed above. This is because among all

else, these are universal standards by which a stamp's worth is measured.