

## Our 25th Anniversary

May 1st of this year will mark the start of our 25th year as a full time professional philatelist. Later this year will mark the 17th year of this publication, *James E. Lee's Philately*. It was warm afternoon in September of 1996 when Randy Neil showed up at my front door to discuss his new venture, Neil Creative Media—a new kind of firm that, among other things, would specialize in writing/editing/design of publications. Randy was on his way home to Kansas from Danbury, Connecticut where he had just left the employ of Andy Levitt.

I had the good fortune to become his second client and this publication was born a few months later utilizing his talents. What started off as an eight-page black and white has grown into a 20 page four color publication. In the past 25 years as the philatelic world has gone digital I still see the need to incorporate a printed newsletter as part of my marketing strategy. It will always be the oil that keeps the philatelic machine rolling forward.

### The Meaning of 25

I spent the first 20 years after college in the printing industry. Twenty-five years later when I look back on where that industry has gone since I left, it is not a pretty picture. Those firms that had the capital to keep current with the ever changing technology still survive. However they were the few as the majority collapsed under the weight of change. Leaving it behind in May of 1990 was the right decision.

When I started this business I had limited capital so I could not afford a single mistake (but I survived many). After about six months of buying and selling stamps I knew that strategy was not going to work as everybody bought and sold stamps. So I examined my strengths and weaknesses and chose to concentrate on my strengths. Using my love of literature, knowledge of essays and proofs and the American Civil War I cobbled together a new strategy. My knowledge base was turned into three niches that I could build and dominate. So for the past 25 years I built a philatelic literature, essay and proof and postal history business. All three have served me well.

This year marked the end of our active literature business. Over the past seven years nearly a half million dollars of book inventory has slowly gone away leaving just a couple of shelves of books. I truly loved the literature business but I loved having time to do other things more (like visiting grandchildren). I will still buy an occasional small deal because I still have client want lists to fill. But the months of 150 shipments are just a memory.

### The Next 25

Now here comes the challenge. In 25 years I will be 90. Melanie tells me “we are in the fourth quarter of life” and I have added “praying for at least double overtime.” I plan to keep doing exactly what I am doing now but at a slower pace for the next 15 years. I pledge to provide the same great service and always be available to talk on the phone. However, those two little boys are starting to carve up all of that “book time” that I just got back.



Hunter having lunch in the Sonoma town square (I managed to keep my mouth shut for this one).

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