

The lucky buyer thought he/she had just purchased a brand new shiny Cadillac.

The inspiration for having my friend of 40+ years, Bill Weiss, as a guest columnist in this issue came from the sale of a beautiful sheet margin copy of Scott No. 13 with a pen cancel that sold at auction late last year. Earlier this year it turned up on eBay without the pen cancel and gum added and offered as a mint example of the stamp with a catalog value of around \$30,000.00. Unfortunately it sold for over \$3,000.00. The lucky buyer thought he/she had just purchased a brand new shiny Cadillac at a bargain basement price. Unfortunately, someday they will discover they wound up with a rusted out 1960 Nash Rambler. The sad truth is this type of material is becoming more prevalent on eBay. The time has come to help educate the novice collectors who flock to eBay for "great deals!"

By Bill Weiss

Jim Lee is one of my oldest and dearest philatelic friends, and I am honored that he has invited me to be a guest columnist in his newsletter to allow me to talk about an important and growing concern for those stamp collectors who shop online, particularly on eBay.

As a nearly 50-year APS member who has been involved with online fraud since 2006, I am deeply concerned at recent developments at online giant eBay that may directly affect countless collectors who shop there, particularly in the Stamps Category.

Beginning in 2003 eBay formed several Community Watch groups designed to provide peer/expert overview and/or review of items listed that might be considered deceptive, misdescribed, fake or problematic in some other way. In the Stamps Category, eBay partnered with APS who provided the program with support in several ways, not the least of which was that the person who was in charge of the program was Frank Sente who was at that time, the Director of Administration for APS.

That program successfully involved reviewing listings that members submitted through the "Report Item" function on each selling page. Those reports were then forwarded to the SCW members (there were 4-5 expert people) who examined the report for accuracy, then made recommendations to eBay to either remove them, correct them, or affirm that the listing was correctly represented. As the years passed, eBay decided to change the program by separating from APS. They also formed a new program, the Enhanced Member Reporting program (EMR) in which expert member were provided a special web form when using the "Report Item" function. This program also successfully provided good peer-review oversight for problematic listings.

Then, in 2014, the EMR program was abruptly cancelled, with no specific reason provided and peer oversight was eliminated as well. This was clarified recently by eBay who stated that they believed the new "Report Item" web form was adequate for them to accurately decide whether any action should be taken - despite no way for the reporter to state a detailed reason for the report! This response is totally inadequate because there is no qualified peer involved who can determine whether or not an item should be actioned simply because eBay has no qualified philatelists to review reports. So since they depend only on member's reports on problematic items, if there is no qualified philatelist, how can any action be taken without a detailed explanation of the problem?

We believe it can't, so another concerned person - Don Denman, and myself have created a new website; "Stamp Smarter" to try to educate buyers and sellers by building a database of deceptive or problematic listings anywhere online (not only eBay). This data base will be built by reports provided by members of Stamp Smarter only, who must provide their real name to us before they can make reports (although members may use a pseudonym when making reports). The reports are then screened by the site administrator and myself or other qualified experts for accuracy. Sellers are given the opportunity to respond and the goal, of course, is to try to eliminate problematic listings from online selling venues.

We believe that the problem of online fraud is far bigger than the average person realizes, but since I've been intimately involved with this since 2006, I clearly see the magnitude of it. We hope that our fellow collectors and dealers will get behind us in this effort to combat deceptive or problematic online stamp sales. The American Stamp Dealer's Association has endorsed the site and our efforts to combat online fraud and we hope that the American Philatelic Society may do likewise at some point. We invite you to Join us at www.stampsmarter.com.

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