

A few words about card proof blocks

When one looks at the prices for card proof blocks in the *Scott United States Specialized Catalogue* one would think that they are the forgotten step children of proof collectors. The catalog values do not begin to reflect the rarity of these blocks. The only source for these blocks was the remnants of some of the later printings and the portions of the "Lilly" sheets that were cut up. I believe the population of many of the issues is ten or less and I have always been a buyer at auction or on the show floor. I suspect that the catalog will soon catch up with the reality of the marketplace.

Chicago –

No second city when it comes to philately

My current writing project involves telling the story of philately in post-war Chicago during the 1950s and 60s. When my work is complete it will be published over the course of three or four issues of *The American Stamp Dealer & Collector* magazine. Two teaser pieces have already appeared in my *Moving Forward* column on page five of that magazine. Today, my *As I See It* column here will serve as a final teaser for this future work.

I was raised on the far southwest side of Chicago in a community called Beverly Hills. By the time I was 11 I had two passions stamp collecting and a Lionel train set. During the winter of 1959 I wanted to make trees for my train layout. I needed two dollars to buy the materials for the trees at Kelly's Bicycle & Hobby Shop which was about five blocks from our house. It was one of those snowy days in late January and I asked my father for the two dollars and was flatly rejected. However, he told me that an elderly neighbor across the street needed his walk shoveled and that I could probably earn the money I needed by doing his walk. Well, that was the start of my entrepreneurial bent that would flourish from that day forward. By the end of winter I had seven houses that I shoveled regularly. When spring came I started weeding gardens for the same people. Soon I added gutter cleaning and grass mowing to my list of services. Within a year the train layout took a back seat to my stamp collection and I now had my own funding.

When I turned 13 my parents allowed me to go downtown, alone, on Saturdays, taking the Rock Island suburban line into the Van Buren street station. From there I would go to anyone of the 50 or more stamp shops located in the Loop and West Loop area. My favorite was the International Stamp Company on the seventh floor of the 171 West Washington

Street building. In a small office, not much bigger than a closet, a man in his early 60s held court. He had immigrated to Chicago in the late 30s from Eastern Europe bringing only his stamps and setting up shop in Chicago. For the life on me I cannot remember his name, but oh how I remember his bargain book. A large Elbe album filled with manila stock cards, 100 in all, the top of each page numbered from one-cent through a dollar. I could go through and pull out 1930s commemoratives at face! Perforated National Parks sets at just face, sets that I would later sell to my friends who collected stamps and at a profit. He also supplied me with Artmaster blank cachets so I could make my own first day covers. This little shop became my number one stop for several years. I last ran into my friend in the late 60s when I happened to be crossing Daly Plaza one fall afternoon when I was home from college. I am sure he is gone now as well as all of the other dealers and shops from that era, the building at 171 was torn down years ago to make room for a newer, modern skyscraper. Fifty years later, only one long time dealer remains in the Loop, Carl Subak.

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