



The Young Collector

By
Joseph Perrone

I would like to address a vital aspect of philately, which is lacking in most collecting circles. This important and virtually missing link is the youth factor. In the 1950s and '60s, it was the odd kid who did not collect stamps. Many kids found it interesting and fun.

Over recent decades, this absorbing and educational pastime has largely lost its appeal to the young. The same kids who would have been fascinated by stamps are now glued to the Internet and spend a lot of time playing video games.

In this column I will share, as a young collector, a few ideas that, hopefully, could help foster more youth involvement in this virtually limitless, educational, and rewarding hobby. Starting young friends with samples of stamps could serve as an inspiration to acquire a nice collection of their own. Let them know that this hobby is not all about dusty old albums and ancient history of forgotten times. Tell them there are so many different areas that they can choose to pursue.

Subjects featured on a wide range of stamps include: cars, planes, trains, boats, military (this is especially good for boys), celebrities, music, bands, butterflies, flowers, birds, and insects. My interest developed at the West Toronto Stamp Club while exploring military stamps from around the world, including those depicting WWII tanks and personnel; and leaders including Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, and Adolf Hitler, Germany's dictator.

Something I especially enjoyed at the start was searching through the bucketful of random stamps available at club meetings. These consisted of every type of stamp that any young person would be thrilled to own. It was hands-on. I could pick up and examine what I wanted to buy. In fact, as soon as I walked through the doors, I rushed directly to the massive bins of stamps. To sort through, and buy any that interested me for five cents, really fuelled my interest. I couldn't afford expensive stamps, so it gave me a lot of bang for my buck. For the young collector, stamps do not have to be valuable, they just have to be of interest.

In some cases, clubs offer stamps for free to young people just to get them started. In my case, I proudly showed my finds to one of the collectors who always



found something interesting to say about them. This was one of the main reasons that I continued going to the stamp club.

It's also a good idea for parents to join their children at the club. The parents might become interested too – and, as I discovered and appreciate, their support is valuable. The stories I was told by older collectors about stamps sparked my imagination and made me want to learn more. One of my problems was that I was collecting bags full of many diverse stamps, but didn't have the knowledge to arrange them in an organized way. This is why helping young people to build their own collections is extremely important. Otherwise, they may get lost very quickly and wander off track.

For this reason, I cannot stress enough that a knowledgeable and enthusiastic mentor is crucial for a young collector. I probably would have stopped collecting if Garfield Portch hadn't taken me under his wing. He's a



long time enthusiast and member of the West Toronto Stamp Club with a wide range of interests. Not only has he given me a great deal of good advice on what I should collect, he has also shown me how to use a stamp catalogue. He also taught me how to identify forgeries, and the difference between wet and dry printings. In the

days of engraved stamp printing some stamps were produced with the same designs but with slightly-different sizes.

As vice-president of the Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Foundation, Portch took me to its offices in Toronto, where he showed me an amazing forensic instrument. The VSC 6000's primary use is to authenticate rare stamps that require a certificate. A truly wonderful scanning machine, it can do an extreme close-up of a stamp, a colour analysis, and a spot fluorescence test, which can detect printing inks, as well as damage and repairs. Like many other young people, I am fascinated by technology and I did not realize how high-tech stamp collecting could be.

The vast resources, which a knowledgeable mentor can explain, must be passed down to the next generation of collectors. A mentor can also plan a practical strategy that will build confidence for new collectors who need to narrow down their collecting interests to something rea-

sonably attainable. For example, it would not be feasible for a young collector to start an in-depth collection of the first cents issue of Canadian stamps produced in the 1850s. Cost alone would be impractical!

A philatelic presentation, during which an expert displays and describes what he or she collects, might further inspire young people to think, "Hey, if that guy can have so much fun doing this, then so can I." One presentation about Australian rocket mail -- by the famous Canadian demographer, the retired University of Toronto professor David Foot -- really captured my attention. It made me want to take on such a project, although on a simpler level.

Portch gave me a research task, which really spurred my interest in exploring subjects related to stamps. It especially might have appeal for youngsters who love being on the Internet. Portch provided a cover with plenty of clear circle date stamp (CDS) cancels. He asked me to track down where the cover originated and the route it travelled, which was indicated with postmarks applied at every post office the cover went through. This technique applied on mail decades ago, plus on some modern express and registered mail.



Producing a map of the area where a cover originated, and tracing the routes it was carried on, as indicated by postmarks, adds to the story. If that research was enjoyable, add to the information by reading about towns and cities on Wikipedia sites to learn more about places where the cover stopped. This not only teaches how mail travels; it also includes lessons about geography, communities, and history.

An enthusiastic mentor is probably the most important factor in attracting youth, and influencing their genuine and lifelong passion for the hobby. I sincerely hope that young people find my ideas helpful, and that established collectors will also use this information to encourage the important next generation of stamp collectors. ☒