

Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

A Herd of Buffalo.

I built a house of cards of three mortgages in order to purchase my dream residence on Interlachen Avenue in Winter Park. Closing in 1987, I set upon renovations. In times past, the first floor had been split to accommodate a rental unit. Returning the mansion to its natural elegance meant quite an overhaul. Money sure was tight.

Days after the purchase, a surprise visitor came knocking on my door. Sam Ewing, the finest interior designer in Central Florida, offered his services on my Interlachen residence, and wanted to know my budget. Sam Ewing! I had enough money for one room and his supervision on the rest of the house!

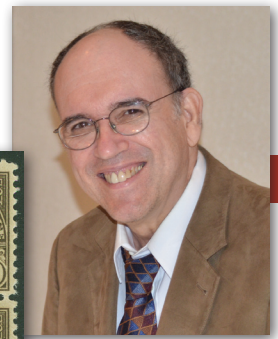
After Interlachen was completed, Sam's partner called saying that her brother had inherited a stamp collection and wanted help. Would I be of assistance? Heck, folks bring us collections all the time, so sure I'll be helpful.

But it wasn't that easy. Her brother came around to my stamp shop, explaining that his grandmother had given him the collection when he was seven years old. He was going up to Tennessee to retrieve some family possessions including his grandmother's stamps. Would I accompany him? We'd drive up and back.

Stands to reason that 99% of the time stamps given to a 7 year old are common and inexpensive. My time was oversubscribed with the stamp shop going great guns and the China business non-stop. Thus I saw no advantage to sightseeing in Tennessee. (I found out later that his grandfather was Governor of Tennessee.)

He was a fine young man, and earnest in his quest. I let him down gently, saying I would enjoy seeing the stamps once in Florida.

Weeks later, he returned, with a VCR tape in hand as he had recorded the collection. I had to wait until I returned home that evening. My eyes widened as I viewed a nice US collection with 1893 Columbians & 1898 Trans-Mississippi



(heavily hinged), then Migratory Bird (Duck) plate blocks, and huge quantities of buffalo plate blocks, and Trans-Pacific plate blocks. Wow!

We got together for an appraisal and offer. The U.S. singles collection would provide easy selling material in the stamp shop. It included a VF-NH set of RW 1-30 plate blocks of six, a rare and valuable unit. For this alone there was a buy price in the stamp papers for \$30,000. Then there were almost 450 plate blocks of the 1923 flat plate buffalo No. 569, and fortunately very few of the more common 1931 buffalo plate blocks produced by rotary press No. 700. (Apparently the collector was a buffalo topical collector.) And there were almost 500 each of the 1937 20 cent and 50 cent Trans Pacific Nos. C21-2 plate blocks. They were all NH.

After I purchased this accumulation, I set about selling the U.S. singles in my shop. Priced as a reflection of the heavy hinging, these sold easily, which was the aim, for this was the simple part of the lot. Merchandising the plate blocks posed formidable challenges.

What to do with a large quantity of flat plate nO. 569 buffalo plate blocks? Retail for a VF-NH example was \$500 vs F-VF/NH at \$350 and I had 450! My gut told me not to let anyone know the quantities I had. I approached a plate block specialist dealer, offering him 20 VF-NH, only to receive a quote of \$150 each which seemed far too low in relation to his retail. He made the point that they might sit in stock awhile. He was hesitant with an inventory of 20 and I had hundreds.

Because of my China/Asia advertising, I was fairly well known, albeit not in

the U.S. marketplace. I placed a two inch ad in *Linn's* classified under "U.S. Plate Blocks" offering the No. 569 VF-NH at \$350 and F-VF-NH at \$250 plus the C21 and C22 VF-NH at \$50 each. After a year of continuous advertising, I sold just about every one!

Ah, the RW1-30 plate blocks VF-NH. For a year or so, I didn't do anything with them. I had a \$30,000 price tag on the unit. I decided to stand pat on the price because I had never owned a set. I had a hunch I would never own such a perfect set again. So, this was the price.

One day, two U.S. dealers came visiting. I knew Stan Kopkin very well, the other, not at all. Being a retail shop, not set up to wholesale to other dealers, pretty much all we could do was talk, but then again I did have the RW1-30 plate blocks which I knew Stan would appreciate. Price? \$30,000.

Before Stan could saying anything, the other dealer got up and started shouting how unrealistic my price was. He offered \$18,000, then upped it to \$19,000. Shout, yell, whine. Stan and I sat there amused. I wasn't coming off my price. Stan opined it was a fair price, just not one he wanted to pay because it was unneeded inventory. The other guy got real red-faced.

A couple of weeks later, two of my favorite regular customers came in the shop and asked if I had anything exceptional for their U.S. album. There went the RW1-30 plate blocks for \$30,000. Without hesitation, payment came in the form of American Express. I was pleased this rare and perfect set of RW1-30 VF-NH plate blocks found their home with fine folks. ☒