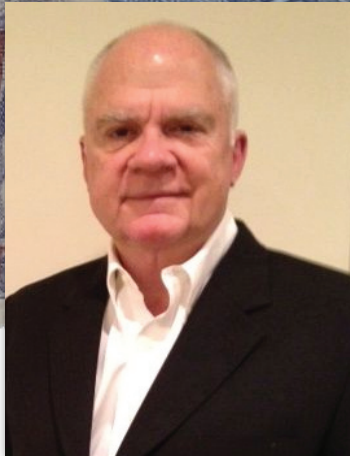


The

Expert's Corner

A New Column By
J. RANDALL SHOEMAKER



Stamp images courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc.

Over the past year, the ASDA has been seriously considering different ways to help educate not only our dealer members, but also our collector readers of the **ASD&C Magazine**. Hopefully this monthly column will bear some of the fruits of this endeavor and become a valuable source for all.

In future columns, we will be highlighting the techniques used to authenticate United States stamps and stimulate your curiosity to become a much more knowledgeable philatelist. The more you learn, the more fun you will have! Topics we will cover include basic use of tools, developing your own reference collection, the perforations, detecting genuine coils, proper identification of types, paper differences, proper use of the Kiusalas Perforation gauge, secret marks, original gum vs. regummed, removed cancels, identifying shades correctly, watermarks and their spacing, plating, plate varieties, useful books, etc.

You will want to save this information so we will try to make it as user friendly as possible. If you have any areas you would like to see discussed, drop me a line at randyshoemaker1@gmail.com. If we get enough interest, we will consider it in future treatments.

As you begin your future as a stamp collector, the most important first step is to get a good grasp of the fundamentals of handling and examining your collection. To this end, we will start with the proper tools to use. During this series of articles, we will be using these devices throughout and show you their utility. They are shown together in the photograph...and include tongs, magnifiers, Ott-lite True Color light, Watermark fluid/Ronsonol, watermark trays/cards, measuring devices (Peak Gauge), UV Lamp, soft lead pencil and other special devices

1. Tongs - Get a set of tongs that are comfortable to you and one that you can wield around without much chance of damaging the stamps you handle. But always remember, be careful and

gentle with your stamps, tong tips can do a fair amount of injury if you are not careful! I prefer Showgard 902 tongs. (However, if you drop these tongs, be sure to check the tong tips for bending or burrs on the points; these can be removed with an emery board.) They have a sharp point so always slide them under the stamp first. You can easily get into pockets on auction lot sheets, stock books, mounts and other various stamp holders. Once you get used to them, it will be like another set of fingers. These are available from your local supply dealer or through Showgard suppliers.

2. Lighting - The light source you use is extremely important and my suggestion is getting an Ott-Lite Truecolor lamp. It is indispensable in proper stamp examination. Colors will leap off the page as compared to viewing with incandescent bulbs. As an example, you must examine colors under the same lighting conditions all the time for consistent proper identification. And with the movable 'arm' of the lamp, you can change the angles of the light to help 'bring out' various points such as creases, tears and perforation hole structure. Available anytime at a good price from your favorite stamp dealer.

3. Watermark Fluid - Commercial watermark fluid is fine to use for watermark detection but it dries too fast to be of much value in detecting faults in the paper. It is best to have both commercial watermark fluid AND Ronsonol Lighter Fluid. Ronsonol is completely safe when working with United States stamps and is best for detecting defects since it dries much slower, enabling you to see creases, tears and thins much easier than the standard watermark fluids. It also costs one-third as much! Available at CVS Pharmacy and other similar retailers.

4. Watermark tray - You can purchase many different designs from your local stamp store or just use a matte surface Showgard black stock card. They all work just about the same. The card takes up much less room and you really only need a drop of fluid on most stamps.

5. Perforation gauge - You can get commercial perforation gauges but almost all are really technically worthless for good examination. The only satisfactory gauge I've ever used is the United States Specialist Gauge for United States stamps (also separately available for Canadian stamps and costs about \$20+ if you can find them) by Kiusalas (copyright 1965). These gauges are made of strong aluminum and have the proper spacing and perf hole size for US & Canadian stamps. This is absolutely critical for detect-



ing reperforated stamps. They are very difficult to come by since they are no longer manufactured. A possible substitute is the Sonic Imagery Labs Precision U.S. Specialty Multi-Gauge on transparent acetate. However, I strongly suggest ONLY the "10 Measuring Devices" version. The '11 measuring device' version is NOT ACCURATE in some of the measuring devices and should be passed on if the '10 device version' is available. The perf gauge is OK on the 11, but other measures are a bit off.

6. Magnifiers - You can actually spend as much or as little as you like here. Best strengths are 4X, 6X, 8X, 10X, 20X and a stereo microscope with zoom up to 45X. That covers the gamut of 'usable' sizes. I have a 4X, 5X, 8X and 20X that I use on almost 95% of my examinations. Magnification is really a subjective parameter since everyone's eyes are a bit different and react differently. You need to pick a few that relate to the task at hand. A PEAK 10X Scale Loup is ideal for measuring sizes of things down to 0.05mm accuracy. For grading, this item is an absolute requirement unless you can measure under a computer scanner with distance measuring capabilities

7. UV Lamp - Get a good Long wave/Short wave Combination UV light (UVP Model UVSL-14P). These can be used for checking UV coatings (Tagging), removed pen cancels, alterations in design, fluorescence of different inks, etc.. You can usually obtain one from your local stamp shop or other retail outlets. For advanced specialists, a Spectroline Model SB-100P will be useful for detecting repairs, defects and design alterations (cost about \$300-\$500).

Sources for Philatelic Supplies:

1. Your local retail stamp store
2. Mail order at Subway Stamp Shop, www.subwaystamp.com

Once you have gathered your tools, the next step is to be able to examine your stamps in the optimal environment. Consistency in the lighting, ventilation and comfort are very important. This way, you look at things in the same identical condition every time.

How to set UP your stamp examining room:

1. Dark Room - The best conditions for examining stamps includes the use of a dark room, the darker the better. The reason for this is the necessity to be able to see the stamps in obtuse lighting angles to check for tears, creases and other faults. If you have incandescent lights overhead, this kind of lighting is detrimental to proper examination.

2. Lighting - The best lighting for examination of stamps is an OTT-Lite Truecolor lamp as described above which is 99% sunlight. When examining stamps, it is very important to always view them under the same, ideal conditions. Therefore, set up your 'examining room' so that you can recreate the same conditions every time you bring out your collection or new purchases.

3. Proper Ventilation - Most professionals use various forms of 'watermark fluid' to check for not only watermarks, but also faults. If you are examining more than just a few items at a time, it is important to have adequate ventilation to get rid of noxious and potentially dangerous hydrocarbon fumes. It is best to get up every 30 minutes or so and make sure the room is aired out a bit. If the room you are using is fairly large, it won't take much time to eliminate these trace gases.

4. Comfortable seating - It is best for you to have a desk or table that reduces the stress on your back. Having the correct height of the platform you are using and a comfortable chair will make it much easier to sit and examine your collection over long periods of time. Getting up and walking around for a few minutes also helps to reduce stress in your back muscles.

In the months to follow, we will begin an in depth study of the postage stamp from proper identification to fault detection. Each facet will include close up photography and descriptions of what to look for with attention to detail. You will learn more in the next twelve months than you can ever imagine. We hope this makes your indulgence in this hobby all the more rewarding. ☒