

Book Reports

May - June 2012 Volume 9, Issue 3



PHILATELIC HISTORY ON COMMEMORATIVE PANELS

Greg Alexander

Among the most appealing (to me, at least) philatelic merchandise offered to collectors by the US Postal Service has been the Commemorative Panel series. The USPS began putting out these vertical cards in 1972, and the series continues, although they are now produced using four-color process printing. The panels measure about 8.5" x 11.5" – each contains a block of stamps and highlights the subject of the specific stamp with informative text.

Until the end of 2001, they typically featured three thematically related intaglio engravings. Many of these vignettes were originally engraved as far back as the 1830s and they are often found on obsolete bank notes, foreign currency, stocks, bonds, and other securities. At least one appears on national currency, an 1861 \$5 note. For me, these engravings are of much greater interest than the stamps themselves. They were produced by many well-known bank note firms, chiefly American Bank Note Company, and span a vast range of U.S. history.

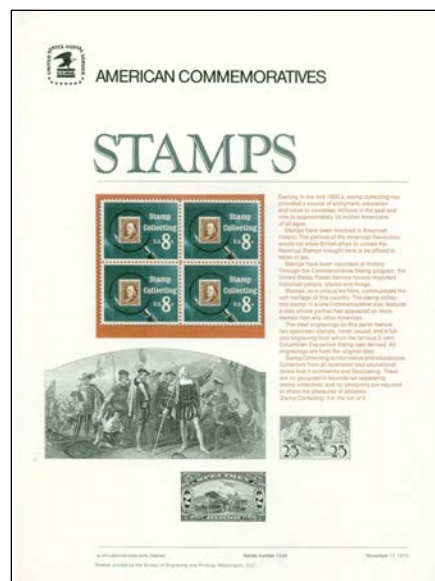


Figure 1 - CP8, one of the first panels produced. It also features a vignette of "Landing of Columbus."

Initially the USPS averaged about 15-17 panels a year; by the late '90s they surpassed 30 a year. In its first three decades, the USPS Commemorative Panel series put out 644 panels, representing well over 1,500 intaglio engraved vignettes. I consider the series to be most cost-effective and comprehensive library of engraved vignettes, portraits and ornaments a collector could acquire – they can often be purchased for a few dollars each. Yet, they are largely ignored by both paper money and stamp collectors, which is a huge misfortune.

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When the series began in 1972, the American Bank Note Company was contracted to produce the panels (but not the stamps themselves). I began collecting them in the early 1980s, but within a few years I noticed the quality of the vignettes had declined significantly. They were still intaglio, but



Figure 2 - American Bank Note specimen stamps from CP8

rarely were they recognizable as security engravings and frequently they appeared to be block prints from old newspapers that had been converted to “engravings” by photogravure or a similar method. Clearly the ABN archive of printing plates was no longer being used.

What had happened? In 1985, Jeffries Banknote Company won the printing contract with a low bid. Jeffries was a minor bank note printing firm in Los Angeles, best known for printing tickets and occasionally stock certificates. Their vault of vignettes had nowhere near the depth, so they resorted to other methods to illustrate the panels. Yet by the early '90s the quality had improved. I wondered why.

I sent an inquiry to the current USPS coordinator of the panel program. Her response was disappointing. The USPS kept no financial record of the contracts with panel printers and they have no historian on staff. “As far as I know,” she wrote, “American Bank Note held the contract until 2002 when Ashton-Potter got the award.”

I knew that was wrong and after closely examining some of the panel vignettes I was able to discern that copyright imprints from Jeffries Banknote started in 1985 and stopped in 1989. One might assume Jeffries lost the USPS contract to print Commemorative Panels...but not really.

The inevitable wave of consolidation ended up overtaking the entire industry. In 1957 Security Banknote and Columbian Banknote merged to form Security-Columbian Banknote Co. They changed their corporate title in 1965 to United States Banknote Corporation. In 1989 U.S. Banknote Corp. bought Jeffries Banknote and in 1990 they also purchased American Bank Note.

By acquiring Jeffries, USBN absorbed the commemorative panel contract and again began incorporating vignettes from its vast combined archive of engraved work. A 1989 vignette shows “© S.-C. B. Co.” — Security-Columbian Banknote Company. By October 1990, an identifiable ABN portrait of President Eisenhower is featured. In the end, all rivers flowed into USBN, which gained an effective monopoly of nearly all commercial banknote printing plates going back more than 150 years.

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Figure 3 - Cinderella proofs from CP61



Figure 4 - Washington vignette from CP88 and 1851-57 series 90 cent (Scott 39)

Until the end of 2001, the wealth of USBN's vignette catalog was featured on these panels. After Ashton-Potter won the panel-printing contract (USPS was correct on that), intaglio vignettes were replaced with color photos and produced using less expensive commercial printing.

The list of panel vignettes of interest to topical collectors is lengthy. You'll find planes, trains and automobiles, as well as stagecoaches, steamboats and sailing

ships. Western pioneering is captured in scenes of mining, agriculture, and ranching, with historical depictions of Native Americans, African-Americans, and Chinese culture. There are scenes from the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, landscapes, waterfalls, cityscapes, classic architecture, pretty ladies, presidential portraits, state seals, animals, birds and insects – even coins.

Surprisingly, philately itself is a topic rarely covered in the engraved vignettes. In fact there are more coins depicted than there are stamps! However, there are a few that should be of special interest particularly to collectors of classic issues:

CP8 – Stamp Collecting (Scott #1474)

On one of the very first panels (Figure 1), American Bank Note took the opportunity to show off its stamp-designing abilities, without actually

reproducing any official postage stamps (which would have required navigating a lot of bureaucracy). Instead they used two specimen stamps to demonstrate their work (Figure 2).



(IG)



Figure 5 – Harp seal vignette from CP366 and proof of 1865 5-cent Newfoundland (#27)

CP61 - Interphil 76 (Scott #1632)

American Bank Note produced quite a number of souvenir “cinderellas” for major stamp shows, as well as World’s Fairs and international exhibitions. Three of these from previous International Philatelic Exhibitions in 1926, 1936 and 1947 (Figure 3) were reproduced on the panel for the 1976 Interphil stamp.

CP88 – Christmas - Washington at Valley Forge (Scott #1729)

In 1851, Toppan, Carpenter, Casilear & Co., one of ABN's predecessor companies, received the contract to print all U.S. stamps. The definitive series of 1851-57 included the 90-cent



Figure 6 - Proof versions of the 2- and 4-cent Columbian issues from CP379

On the panel for the World Columbian Stamp Expo, enlarged proofs of the two- and four-cent issues are reprinted (Figure 6).

CP383 – Voyages of Columbus (Scott #2620-23)

Enlarged vignettes from three more in the 1893 Columbian series (Figure 7) are found on this panel: the central vignette of Columbus from the one-cent stamp; the “Santa Maria” from the three-cent; and the profile of Columbus from the \$5 stamp, which became the signature emblem of the Columbian Exposition. Interestingly, the “Santa Maria” vignette also appears on Newfoundland’s 10-cent Cabot issue of 1897 and a later issue of Costa Rica.

CP387 – NY Stock Exchange Bicentennial (Scott #2630)

1992 was a good year for American Bank Note. They were also contracted to print stamps honoring their single most important client – Wall Street. Over the decades, ABN produced millions (probably billions) of stock certificates, bonds and other securities for member companies of the New York Stock Exchange. This panel shows an enlarged composite version of the 29-cent stamp (Figure 8), as well as a nice vignette of the exterior of the Exchange.



Figure 7 - Vignettes from the 1-cent, 3-cent, and 5-dollar Columbian issue from CP383

A few other panels also exist with philatelic vignettes depicting letter carriers, airmail planes, mail trains and other forms of mail transport. The panels noted here are the only ones I’ve identified which show engraved vignettes that appear on stamps themselves.

denomination (Scott #39) with a vignette engraved by Joseph Pease of a young Gen. Washington. This panel features an enlarged version of the portrait (Figure 4).

CP366 – Antarctic Treaty (Scott # C130)

One of only two vignettes related to foreign stamps is found on this panel. In the lower left corner a small engraving of a harp seal is featured. This vignette matches the five-cent Newfoundland stamp first issued in 1865, printed by American Bank Note (Figure 5).

CP379 – World Columbian Expo ’92 (Scott #2616)

The Columbian issue of 1893 were the last U.S. stamps printed by American Bank Note before the Bureau of Engraving and Printing took over production. A century later, it must have been gratifying for ABN (by then no longer an independent entity) to reproduce these stamps from their original plates, as well as creating the Commemorative Panels for them and other Columbus-related issues.



Figure 8 - Enlarged composite proof of the NYSE Bicentennial issue (Scott 2630) from CP385

The American Society for Philatelic Pages and Panels (ASPPP) is the only organization I know of that specifically serves panel collectors. You can learn more on their website at www.asppp.org/index.htm. The group takes a largely philatelic perspective on panels and is a good resource for collectors. Their annual auctions offer an opportunity to obtain panels, often in complete year sets. (Note: don't confuse panels with Souvenir Pages, which are not intaglio engraved and more closely resemble first day covers.)

Collectors who would like to view on online catalog containing images of all Commemorative Panels can visit the website of The Stamp Professor, one of the few dealers who stocks the entire series — www.stampprof.com/cp/docs/indexcp.html.

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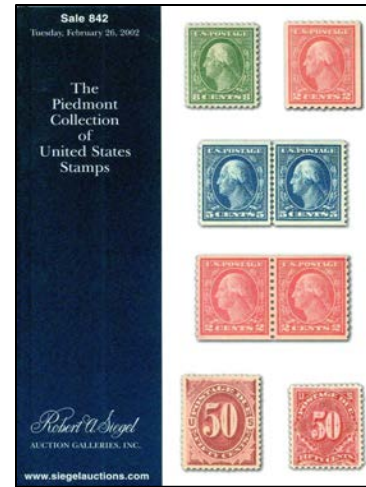


AUCTION OBSERVATIONS

Don Overstreet

Among the shelves in the Northwest Philatelic Library is a section devoted to auction catalogs. These have been acquired over the years almost entirely through donations. The library has a specific policy regarding their acceptance and cataloging in an effort to provide patrons with useful information regarding sales of important and historic stamps, covers, and postal history. A list of prices realized typically accompanies each catalog, allowing collectors to research trends.

Since much information is available on the website of most philatelic auction houses, NPL doesn't stock many catalogs offering the usual run of lots. Rather, we limit our collection to significant 'name sale' publications showcasing truly outstanding examples of material from some of the best collections ever assembled. Since few of us are millionaires, an hour browsing a few impressive big-time sale catalogs is a trip to fantasyland, but it's nice to know what's out there.



A few of the major auction houses represented in the library are Robert Siegel, Shreve's, H.R. Harmer, and Matthew Bennett. Some catalogs are considered historic but most are fairly recent. Occasionally catalogs are donated before the auction dates!

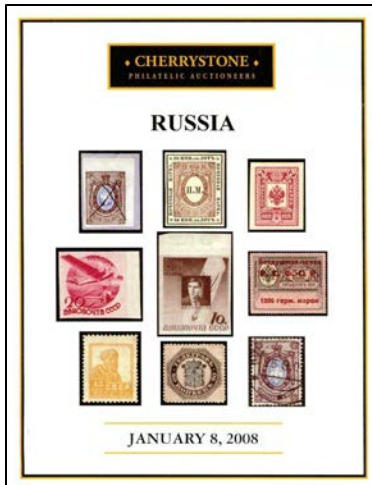
Most large stamp shows are accompanied by an auction, and collectors may attend regional and national American Philatelic Society events for the opportunity to see a world-class sale, in addition to the other activities. Here in the Portland area, the firm of Harmer/Schau Auctions conducts at least two sales yearly with the next scheduled for the PIPEX show in May. Having had the opportunity to attend previous sales both as a bidder and as a worker showing lots to prospective bidders, I've observed an amazing selection of material for sale – as well as an amazing selection of persons vying for the lots! I learned in a conversation with Christopher Harmer that he is the third generation in his family in the philatelic auction business. Watching a seasoned professional knock down lots at the rate of 200 an hour is worth the trip.

The auction catalog is generally the first look at what will be offered for sale. (For the purpose of this article, I refer to live, in-person events, where items may be inspected. On-line auctions could be the subject of another piece.) Buyers will go through the pages and make notes about what they'd like to have a look at. Most catalogs have photos of the better lots and all lots have a general description identifying the stamp or item, issue dates, condition, etc.

The great paradox about auction sales has been true ever since there have been auctions: buyers think they'll get a great deal if nobody else is bidding on an item with no fixed price (or if they just leave their number up until the dispirited competition bows out – the sky truly

is the limit), whereas the sellers believe that *because* of the competition they'll realize a higher price. Both points of view are unrealistic...and both have much truth in them.

Once the previews are over and the buyers have devised their personal strategy on how they'll take home their desired items (how naïve is *that*?) the sale begins. I've found myself *not* bidding on early lots to preserve cash in case there's a bidding war on the lot(s) I *really* want, only to see the early ones go cheap or I'm the only one bidding on the later ones. Go figure.



Then there's the problem of the auctioneer's estimated sale prices. At least it's a problem if some lot is a sleeper – until the room wakes up and it seems everybody wants it and the hammer price is several times the estimate. It's a special kind of agony when the rest of the lots in one's area of interest go for peanuts, but that one prize we out and out covet, the one that inspires unholy avarice, the one that would fill a jeering empty spot in the album for years—you know the one, right? Another guy wants it just as badly and it's bare knuckles until one of them has to go home without it. Or with it!

Of course, this is the point of view of the individual collector. Stamp dealers attend auction sales to purchase inventory for their businesses and usually don't get personally attached to something that isn't theirs. Listening in at the preview can be pretty entertaining. Lots of comments on the quality of the merchandise and how a bidder plans to scoop the dealers on some item—when the customers on either side are dealers. A collector is often willing to spend more than the dealer just because he's not a seller.

To be a success, all auctions need both buyers and sellers; auction items don't just drop from the sky. At least as important as the opportunity to buy is the venue to sell.

Material comes to an auction in many ways. Dealers and individual collectors acquire items potentially valuable enough to make a substantial profit and want a broad cross section of buyers. Dealers decide to get out of the business and liquidate their inventory. Collectors die, their heirs don't collect stamps and the cycle begins again – other collectors and dealers buy the collections and often break them into smaller groups and individual items to sell.

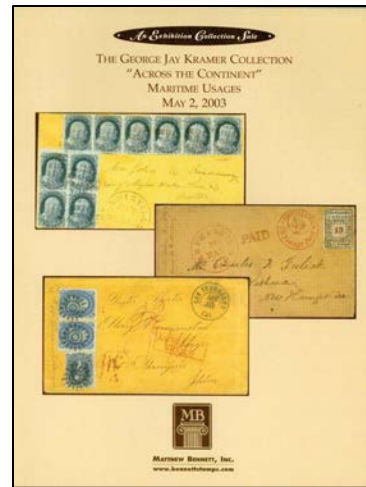
The choicest, most valuable stamps from collections are usually offered as separate lots to realize the greatest value for the sellers and the auction house. For families who inherit stamp collections, the process of deciding how to dispose of a major asset is often a difficult one. If the collector has been open about what he owns, heirs are in a much better position, and the reputable dealer or auction company is prepared to offer the service of making a sale.

The central role of the Northwest Philatelic Library is to provide collectors and the general public with information. Whether you are looking for a catalog to help identify a particular stamp, searching out lists of stamps in a topical area, investigating the postal history of a

region, or just spending time getting a fuller understanding of the hobby in general, the library is here to assist.

Over the past decade the collection has become a major resource for serious scholarship. Particular fields, such as airmail and British Commonwealth, have been given special emphasis through focused acquisition of books and periodicals. While the NPL doesn't subscribe to the catalogs of the auction houses, we receive many donations from members that greatly enhance our growing collection.

Auctions are held frequently in a variety of sales venues. The online process has become so commonplace that many bidders never have to leave home. Mail auctions are a feature of many businesses. The Oregon Stamp Society conducts at least one major annual sale, with 'mini auctions' being a popular feature of regular membership meetings.



As noted above, an auction will be held in conjunction with the upcoming PIPEX stamp show and exhibition. Drop by the Northwest Philatelic Library and check out what we have to offer on stamp auctions. You'll be well-armed with the latest information when you raise your number to bid!

DON'T MISS PIPEX 2012!

May 11, 12, 13

The Doubletree by Hilton Hotel Portland • 1000 NE Multnomah St., Portland, OR

PIPEX is an American Philatelic Society World Series of Philately annual event

- Free admission
- 38-booth philatelic dealer bourse
- Northwest Philatelic Library book sale
- Cachetmakers bourse (May 12 only)
- Competitive display of 4000 collectors' album pages
- Show Auction by Harmer-Schau Auctions Northwest
- *Grandma's Attic* - free stamp evaluation and advice
- National and regional philatelic society participation
- Seminars, lectures, and meetings
- United States Postal Service participation
- Easy access from airport and city on Portland's MAX system

More information can be found online at www.pipexshow.org

LIT ADDITIONS: THE BUSKIRK DONATION

Last fall the library received an intriguing gift of literature, much of it more than a century old, including one scarce limited edition. Jan Buskirk contributed the collection, from the estate of her father, a WWII veteran. His collecting interests appear varied, and Jan reports he was an avid accumulator of books, papers, magazines, maps, etc. covering a large number of different subjects. We gratefully thank her for giving this material a new home.

A Stamp Collectors Souvenir, 2nd ed., C.H. Mekeel Stamp & Publishing Co., St. Louis, MO, 1893.

Julius Adenaw, **A Complete Catalog of the Revenue Stamps of the United States**, Scott Stamp & Coin Co., c1890.

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Louis G. Barrett & J. Murray Bartels, **The United States Stamped Envelopes 1853-1913**, Handbook No. 5, Mekeel-Severn-Wylie Co., 1919.



Victor M. Berthold, **The Die Varieties of the Nesbitt Series of United States Envelopes**, Scott Stamp & Coin Co., 1906.

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William Butler, **The North American Philatelic Year Book**, 1927 Edition, Stamp Herald Publishing Co.

Richard McP. Cabeen, ed., **The Stamp Collector**, The Chicago Tribune, n.d. [Cabeen was editor of the Tribune's stamp [from 1923] and coin [from 1966] column. This series of columns comprises: "Starting a Stamp Collection," "Philatelic Agencies," and "United States Commemorative Stamps, parts 1-15."]

Catalogue of the Postage Stamps of Swedish Issued 1920-1926, International Philatelic Exhibition, New York 1926, Royal Swedish Postal Administration.

Henry Collin and Henry L. Calman, **Catalogue of the Stamps, Envelopes and Wrappers of the United States of America and of the Confederate States of America**, Scott Stamp and Coin Co., 1900.

The Departmental Stamps of the United States, 1st ed., Stanley Gibbons, 1922.

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William S. McLean, **McLean's Stamp Collector's Guide, A Directory**, 1889.

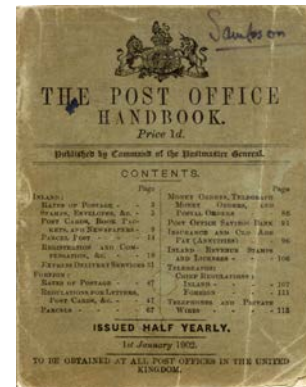
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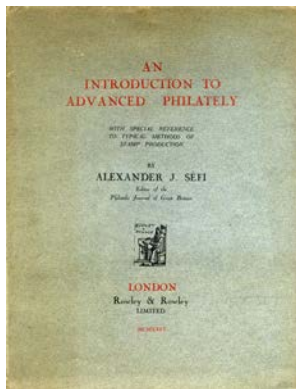
Bertram W. H. Poole, **The Beginner's Guide**, Handbook Number 2, Mekeel-Severn-Wylie Co., 1913.



The Postage Stamps of the United States, 1870 to 1893, Stanley Gibbons, 1923.

The Postage Stamps of the United States Issued During the Twentieth Century 1901 to 1923, 5th ed., Stanley Gibbons, 1923.

Postmaster General, **The Post Office Handbook**, GPO, London, 1902.



Nicolas Sanabria and Harry M. Conwiser, **Standard Catalogue of Air Post Stamps**, 6th ed., 1936.

Alexander J. Sefi, **An Introduction to Advanced Philately**, Rowley & Rowley Limited, London, MCMXXVI. [Signed edition 186/250]

Chris West, **The Revenue Stamps of the United States**, Booklet Number 23, Severn-Wylie-Jewett Co., 1918.

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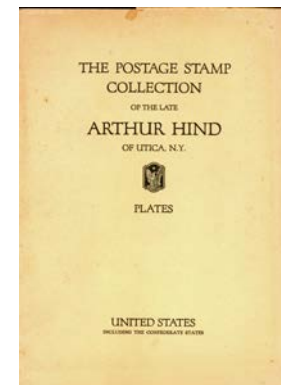
AUCTION SALES CATALOGS

Stamp Collection of Col. E.H.R. Green, Sec. XIV, Edison Fifield, February 24-29, 1944.

Col. E.H.R. Green Collection of United States and Foreign Stamps, Part XV, Hugh C. Barr, March 27-April 1, 1944.

Collection of Col. E.H.R. Green, Part XIX, Eugene N. Costales, February 19-24, 1945.

Postage Stamp Collection of the Late Arthur Hind, Catalogue, November 20-24, 1933.



Postage Stamp Collection of the Late Arthur Hind, Plates, November 20-24, 1933.

SOLUTION: RESEARCH STUMPER #14

Charles Neyhart

The Arctic Air Mercy Flight labels were ostensibly issued in response to a winter 1925 diphtheria outbreak in Nome, Alaska. Their sale was to raise funds for the delivery, by aircraft, of needed medical serum. To my knowledge, there are ten such labels, all of the same design, but with different bicolor centers and frames.



Those who have studied these labels tend to dismiss them as true charity labels. The absence of public evidence in support is compelling. The actual transport of the serum was completed, not surprisingly, by a dog sled relay and it took only a week to organize the medical response and to see the serum on its way. Thus, the time available to prepare and market the labels to pay for the flight would have been prohibitive. In addition, winter flying in Alaska at the time, particularly in the Arctic, was largely limited to the summer months. [Allegedly, there were only two aircraft available at the time, and both had been disassembled and stored for the winter.]

When I look at these labels in Gloria's collection, I'm reminded of the equally colorful and equally spurious Labrador-USA airmail labels. It is conceivable in the circumstances to concoct an elaborate, but overly calculated, defense of these labels. In fact, one could plausibly make the case that these labels were created for a different mercy mission, but no evidence supports this either. My guess is that they are not "charity" labels at all, but were an entrepreneurial means to extract money from stamp collectors and other paper enthusiasts.

If you collect cinderellas, a set of these labels would be an attractive addition to your collection. You can often find them in auction, including eBay. They are not expensive, even in unused condition. [Don't be misled into thinking that a canceled label has more value; in fact, the cancel only serves to detract from the appearance of the label.]

LIBRARY NOTES

Orlie Trier, NPL President

“Philatelic Estate Disposition for the Novice” is the title of an article that appeared in the February 2012 issue of the *American Philatelist*. The article can be located on the APS website (www.stamps.org) by clicking on “Estate Advice” under the Services menu. We also have an article available for you if you need some direction on handling an inherited collection. Just contact us by email at nwpl@qwestoffice.net.

PIPEX is coming May 11-13 at the Lloyd Center Doubletree. The Northwest Philatelic Library will have a table in the entryway. We will have a full table of books and a few periodicals for sale from surplus resources already on our shelves. Please drop by and browse – we may just have that book you need to further your philatelic interests. The price is right.

As a way to promote PIPEX and philately, the Oregon Stamp Society and NPL have collaborated on an exhibit entitled “[Stamp Collecting is Alive and Well](#).” The exhibit will be on display in the Collins Gallery, in the third floor atrium of the



Central Library downtown through June 20. Among the various displays, the NPL has three cases of representative books and material (see photos). We encourage you to make a visit!

We are always looking for articles to include in the *Book Reports*. If you’ve ever researched a topic we offer a great opportunity to share the results with our readers. Often times when I read an article it provokes a new thought or idea and leads me to research a new area.

IN APPRECIATION

To those generous individuals listed below who have made recent donations of literature and other consideration to NPL. We thank you for your generosity and want to assure you that we will make good use of these resources for our fellow philatelist and collectors.

Rex Bates
John Hartong

Bill and Margaret Bitar
Norm Gholston

Michael Dixon
Paul and Laurel Brennan

THANK YOU all for your support!