

The Story of Gandhi Stamps

by T.N. Mehta

On January 21, 1948, when Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister of India and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai held the Communications Office, the Director General, Posts and Telegraphs (P&T), sent a letter to Security Printing at Nasik Road calling for specimen designs for Gandhi stamps.

The idea was to issue a set of three or four stamps on Gandhi's eightieth birthday (October 2, 1949) depicting memorable events in his life, such as the fast for communal unity in 1924, the Dandi march of 1930, and the fast for communal peace in Delhi a few days earlier.

It did not take the Master of the India Security Press more than six days to suggest a compact set of four denominations: 1½ annas, 3½ annas, 8 annas, and 1 rupee. He proposed that the first three values be printed in a single color in the existing anna size, and the fourth value in two colors in rupee size.

A line portrait of Gandhi prepared earlier already was available at the Nasik Security Press. Two trial copies, one in the anna and the other in the rupee size, showing Gandhi's characteristic pose, were submitted for consideration. Alternatively, it was suggested that a photograph approved by the Mahatma be adopted for the proposed stamps.

While these preparations were afoot, however, tragedy struck. Gandhi was assassinated on January 30. The picture changed entirely and the government switched over to designing a "mourning" stamp.

Accordingly, on February 6, the Security Press was asked to furnish quickly fresh designs based on an approved sketch drawn by C. Biswas, an Indian artist. Two denominations were proposed, a 2½-anna for inland

air mail and a 12-anna for air mail to the United Kingdom. Proofs of the designs, in somber shades of grey and olive green, were sent by the Security Press on February 17.

Jawaharlal suggested that the word "Bapu" be included in the proposed stamp designs both in Hindi and Urdu. This was a welcome suggestion in view of Gandhi's life-long struggle to maintain peace and communal harmony. The inclusion of Hindi and Urdu inscriptions was of special significance — both politically and philatelically. On no other Indian stamp does Urdu find a place; the script used is Hindi (Devanagari) and English.

Asked on March 12 to send revised proofs, and to include a 10-rupee denomination in the proposed set of the mourning stamps, the Security Press promptly submitted these on March 16 (Figure 1). Although this correspondence apparently was at the final stage, the authorities in New Delhi, in a typical bureaucratic manner, carried on negotiations behind the back of the Nasik Press with the Austrian State Printing Press, Vienna, as well as with the well-known Swiss printers Helio Courvosier, S.A., La Chaux De Fonds.

The print order finally was placed with the Swiss firm, which was known for its works of art. Naturally, this led to bad feelings. The Nasik Press felt it had been deprived of its legitimate right to offer indigenously produced Gandhi stamps. The Master of the Nasik Security Press, R.C.G. Chapman, an Englishman, wanted to quit, but Rafi Ahmed Kidwai saved the situation.

It was argued that India did not have the photogravure printing which the Swiss printers could offer to produce the best results in stamp printing. If Gandhi had been alive to see his own stamps produced as originally envisaged, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that he would have put his foot down on "videshi" printing. Coarse or not, the stamps would have been acceptable everywhere.

An extensive search also was on at this time to obtain suitable photographs of Gandhi to be used on the stamps. After a wide, wild hunt,

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Figure 1.

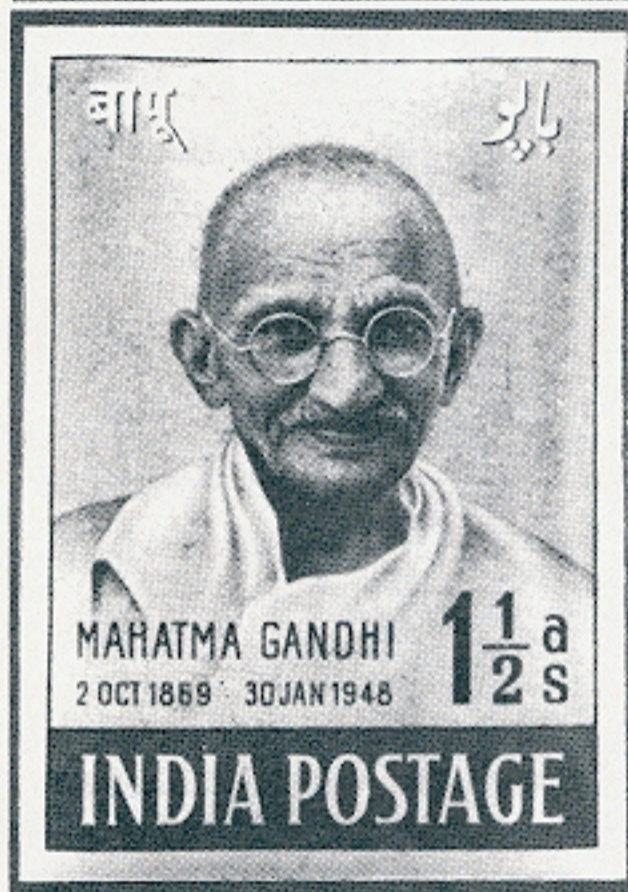
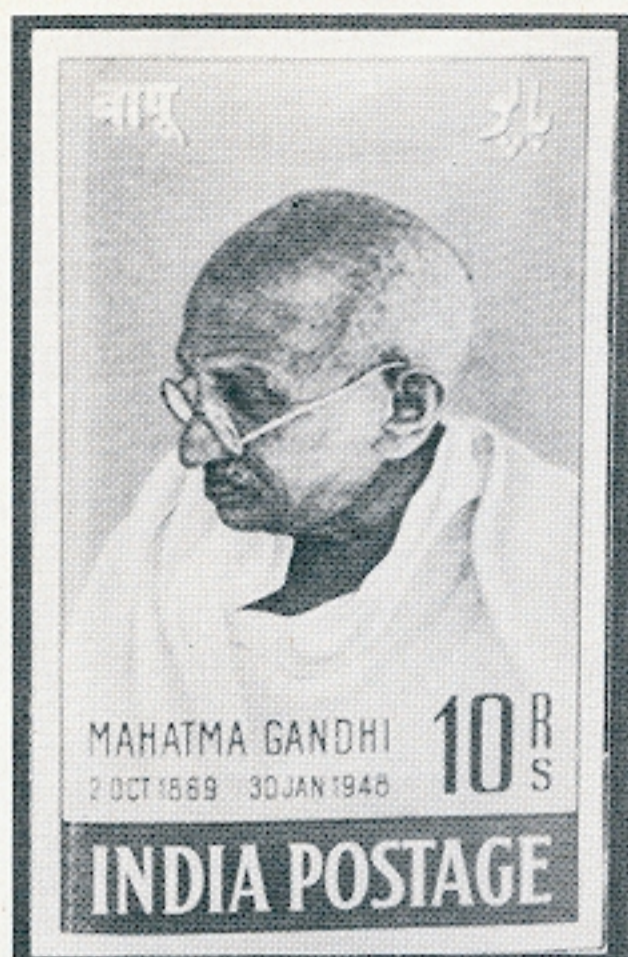


Figure 2.

those entrusted with the task stumbled upon two photographs — one from the now-defunct *Life* magazine, and the other lent by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, but which belonged to Kanu Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma. The photograph from *Life* showed the Mahatma unclothed above the waist, perhaps taken at his Ashram in Wardha during the summer months. Officials thought that it would be derogatory to portray the “father of the nation” in such a manner, and so they asked the Swiss printers to adequately cover the naked portion of his body. This they did, but the sketched-in clothing in no way approximated

Indian garb, or the way Gandhi used to put on Khadi (as could be seen in his portrait adorning the Central Hall of the Parliament, and in several of his photographs in official and private collections).

The Swiss firm secured orders for printing thirty-two million stamps in four denominations: 1½ annas, 3½ annas, 12 annas, and 10 rupees — the first three in a single color, and the fourth in two colors (Figure 2).

Why a 10-rupee Gandhi stamp? Commemorative stamps invariably are issued in popular postage denominations; the 10-rupee variety in the Gandhi series is probably the solitary example of its kind. This step deprived a large number of collectors of possessing the full set because they could not afford the 10-rupee stamp. To other



Figure 3.

philatelists, however, this was a boon, because the value of the set has been steadily mounting year after year.

Philatelists the world over were agitated by this inclusion of a high denomination in the Gandhi set. Margaret Bourke-White of *Time/Life*, who knew the Mahatma well, met with Sir Benegal Rama Rau, the Indian Ambassador to Washington, and later sent a long cable strongly protesting this move, and stating that it was highly improper for the government of India to issue a 10-rupee stamp in the name of Gandhi, who always used the cheapest means of communication — a postcard.

Bureaucracy could not have done a greater disservice to Gandhi! Yet another move that inflated the value of

the Gandhi stamp occurred when the sale of these stamps (initially) was restricted to three months. This meant that the unsold stocks had to be withdrawn and destroyed in substantial quantities, resulting in great loss in terms of foreign exchange involved in the printing of stamps. As soon as the stocks were reduced, prices shot up.

It was on August 15, 1948 — the first anniversary of India's independence — that the Gandhi stamps were released. They had been printed by the heliogravure process on coated paper made of pulp and silk fibers, but the gum on the back of the stamp sheets did not suit the Indian climate, particularly during the season when the stamps were released, when the humidity was high.

As soon as the sheets were taken out of the packings and exposed to the atmosphere, they became stuck to the thin paper inter-leaving, thus, from the philatelic standpoint, ruining the stamps. It is possible that the Swiss printers were not familiar with climatic conditions in India, or with the properties of the gum applied to the stamps.

Later the same year, some high-ranking officials proposed that an extremely limited quantity of the Gandhi stamps be overprinted with the word “Service.” These were to be used on official mails emanating from the Secretariat of the Governor-General C. Rajagopalachari. The P&T Department believed that because the stamps were commemorative, it would be against philatelic ethics to overprint them (Figure 3). But these observations were overruled, and the required quantities were overprinted. There never has been



Figure 4.

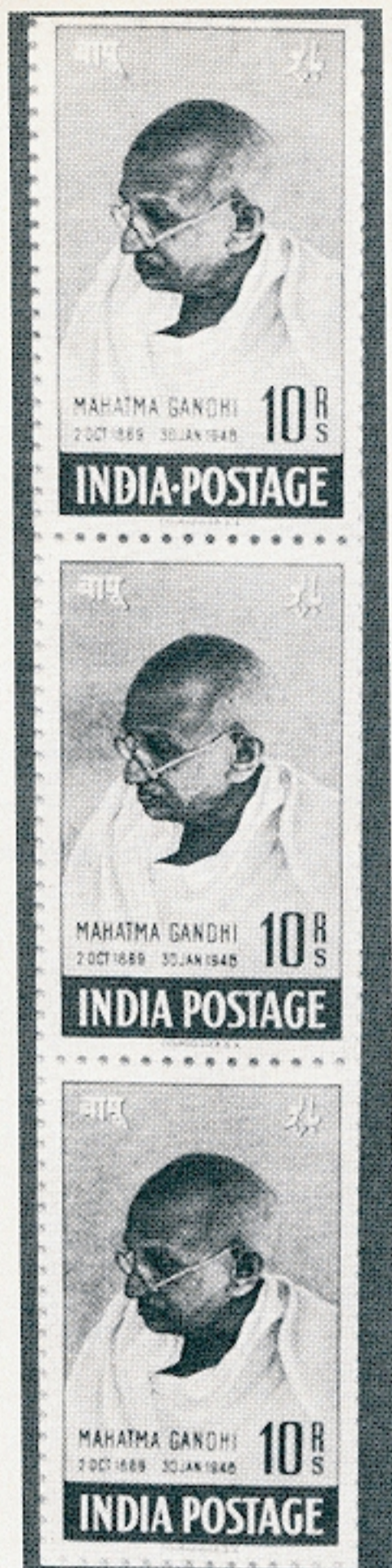


Figure 5.

a case such as this when the philatelic code was ignored and the will of the bureaucrat prevailed.

A few "used" copies of these "Service" stamps are known to exist, but I am not aware of even one copy of the 10-rupee denomination surfacing. These stamps thus turned out to be the rarest gems of the independence issues.

The limited supplies have led to forgery, a common evil in philately (Figure 4). However, these are crude forgeries, restricted to the anna values.

The Indian officials who went berserk probably did not understand that philately has its own norms, and that

American Philatelist



Figure 6.

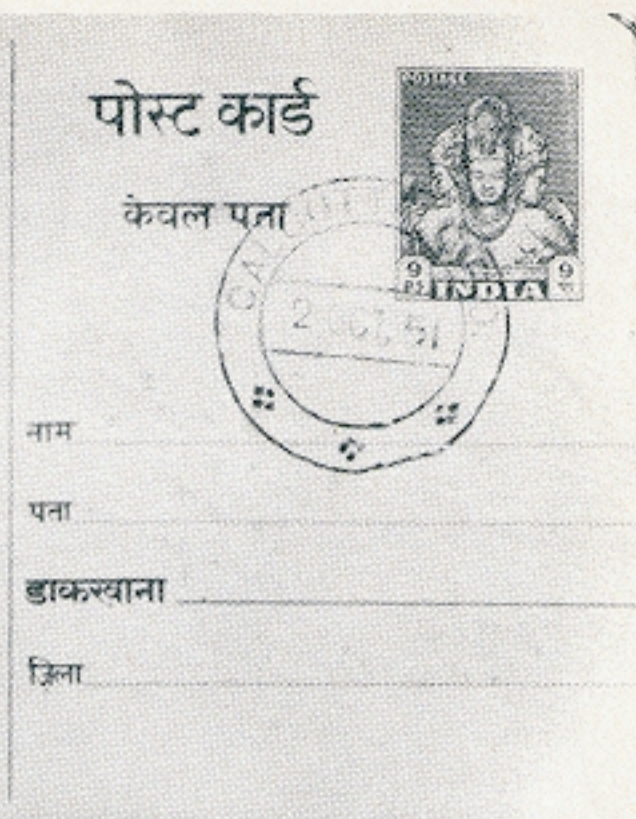
any breach of these would affect the entire stamp collecting fraternity, to which Gandhi himself belonged. With all his social and political preoccupations, he still found time to collect stamps. He wrote that in 1896 he was faced with the task of circulating what came to be known as the "green pamphlet," and this is how he solved the "manpower" problem:

But I hit upon a much simpler plan. I gathered together all the children in my locality and asked them to volunteer two or three hours' labour of a morning, when they had no school. This they willingly agreed to do. I promised to bless them and give them, as a reward, used postage stamps which I had collected.

The P&T Department should have realized that taking too many philatelic liberties would cause bad feelings. It still is rumored that the Swiss printers supplied a small number of Gandhi stamps imprinted with the word "specimen" to the Indian legation in Berne, which in turn presented them to certain dignitaries.

The Berne legation had only given the P&T Department a few sheets of the 10-rupee Gandhi issue containing a printing flaw — a dot between the words "India" and "Postage" occurring on the first stamp of the third horizontal row. These are on view in the New Delhi Philatelic Museum (Figure 5).

But no "specimen" stamp actually was received by the P&T Department and none was printed or circulated according to records. It is possible that the Gandhi stamp series — a many-splendored thing in its own right — caused much more than a ripple in the sea of stamp collecting. The "specimen" stamp could be a forgery, a stunt,



or, at best, a philatelic fantasy, but one never knows.

The P&T Department also brought out a set of four Gandhi picture postcards (Figure 6) with the introduction of inland postcards printed for the first time in Hindi (Devanagiri script) and released for use, effective October 2, 1951, which coincided with Mahatma Gandhi's eighty-second birthday. The picture postcards, imprinted with the face value of 9-pies each — the then prevailing postcard rate — were sold at double the face value — i.e., 1½ annas per postcard — a rather unusual and extraordinary measure adopted in this instance. The pictures reproduced on these postcards were obtained from the collection of Kanu Gandhi who demanded a royalty payment of 12½ percent on the sale of such cards.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, then Minister of Communications, persuaded him to accept a token royalty of 2,500 rupees. The job of printing the picture postcards was entrusted to the India Security Press, most likely to placate it for what had happened over the printing of the Gandhi memorial stamps.

The story of Gandhi stamps would

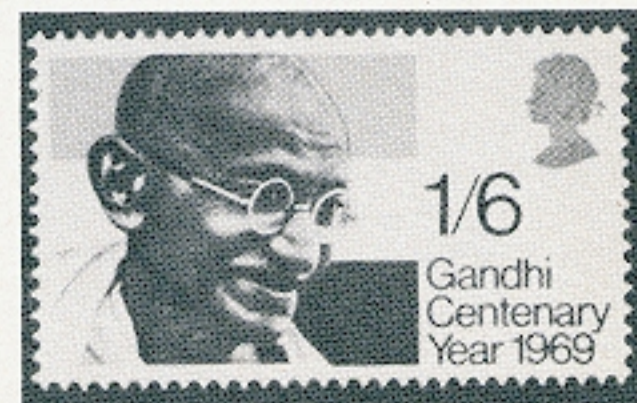


Figure 7.

not be complete without saying a word about all other Gandhi stamps — those issued in commemoration of the Gandhi centenary (1969), and others which formed part of a series dedicated to "Workers for Peace" (for example, Martin Luther King). Forty-one countries of the world, including the United States and Britain, issued such stamps. However, on the Asian continent, only India (which had sponsored the Gandhi centenary commemoratives), the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Southern Yemen issued such stamps. Burma, as a token of its participation in this great event, authorized the use of a special postmark on October 2, 1969, to frank mails at the Rangoon General Post Office. The postmark bore the inscription "Gandhi Centenary 1869-1969."

A critical view of all these Gandhi stamps shows that the British version of the Gandhi stamp is the most outstanding and a classic example of philatelic art and printing. This stamp could well be acclaimed the world's



Figure 8.

best Gandhi stamp. Designed by Biman Mullick, an Indian artist living in Britain; the stamp, released in 1 shilling 6-pence denomination, bears Gandhi's characteristic smiling pose against a background of the Indian tri-color. The stamp was printed by the photogravure process at the world renowned Harrison and Sons Limited (England), one of the oldest security printers in Britain (Figure 7).

The unique feature of this stamp is that it is the only one in the whole of the British stamp series devoted to a non-British personality — a rare honor indeed. This was an extraordinary gesture on the part of the British government; the stamp is an everlasting

(continued on Page 765)

The Return to Normalcy

by D.K. Lindo

The normalcy Americans voted for was not what they received. Instead of a return to a peacetime economy, they got a throwback to the political scandals of the 1880s.

As was the case with many presidents before him, Warren G. Harding had previous political experience. He had been governor of Ohio. As governor, he allegedly spent much of his time finding jobs for friends rather than studying or creating legislation.

The political adage, "the smoke filled room," can be traced to the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Here various deals were made to assure Harding's nomination as Republican candidate for President.

Stamp Facts:

Person pictured: Warren Gamaliel Harding

Face value: 2 dollars

Date issued: September 29, 1938

First day city: Washington, D.C.

Designer: Victor S. McCloskey

Basis for design: Medal by George Morgan

Perforations: 11 x 11

Types of issue: Sheets

Method of printing: Flat plate

Person Facts:

Born: November 2, 1865

Died: August 2, 1923

After his election, Harding depended on Congress and his cabinet to provide the nation's leadership. He was deluged with office seekers, many of whom he put in high places. The powerful clique created became known as the "Ohio gang."

The nation, literally leaderless, was soon swallowed up in the sharp worldwide depression of 1920-1921. It is reported that 4.75 million Americans were unemployed.

In 1921, Congress attempted a return to its understanding of normalcy. It created immigration quotas for the first time; taxes were reduced to stimulate business; and tariffs were elevated to record new heights. Those actions, coupled with the depression, caused severe Republican losses in the mid-term elections of 1922.



Meanwhile, back at the ranch in Washington, Harding and the Ohio gang were having their share of troubles, too. First came the Teapot Dome Scandal. Secretary of Interior Fall was convicted and sent to prison for accepting a bribe to lease government (Navy) oil reserves. Attorney General Daugherty, the administrator of the Alien Property Custodians Office, was tried on charges of misappropriation. He was acquitted. Charles F. Cramer committed suicide when misuse of funds in the Veteran's Bureau was discovered, and Director Charles R. Forbes was jailed.

Harding undertook a speaking tour to try to regain public confidence in government. He took a side trip to Canada and Alaska (the first President to do so). Returning via Seattle, he became ill and died.

Events occurring during Harding's administration included:

- The Lincoln Memorial was dedicated;
- The Italian government became a dictatorship under Mussolini;
- The USSR was formed;
- The Washington Arms conference agreed to limit naval arms;
- Women voted for the first time in a presidential election;
- Presidential returns were broadcast on the radio for the first time.

As a result of the scandals that rocked his administration, Harding, like Grant, is best remembered for his failings.

USN. By: 76240, D. Wray
 113994 Gerald C. Wright SALEM, OREG. US-UN-GB-CANADA; 44; Physician's Asst. By: 42702, S.C. Johnson
 113995 Mrs. Lillian E. Wright SHORT HILLS, N.J. TOPICALS-US-GEN; Legal; Dealer
 113996 Nelson C. Wright DAYTON, OHIO US; 28; Elec. Tech.
 113997 Thomas R. Wycoff GAHANNA, OHIO BRIT-UPU-US-EUROPA; 58; Carpet Dist. By: 108297, E.W. Foster
 S-113998 Mrs. Martha B. Younger HOUSTON, TEX. AUST-CANADA-US; 40; Ser. Repr.
 113999 German American Stamp Club SPRING VALLEY, CALIF. El Cajon, Calif., Pres., Richard Madlener; Secy., R. Edward Prall; APS Repr., R.E. Prall

NEW CHAPTERS

113283 Plainville Stamp Club, Plainville, Conn., Chapter 1147
 113284 Fort Myers Stamp Club, North Fort Myers, Fla., Chapter 1148
 113285 South Miami Stamp Club, South Miami, Fla., Chapter 1149
 113286 Chillicothe Stamp Club, Chillicothe, Ohio, Chapter 1150

CHANGE IN NAMES

97936 Charnock, Glen W., 864 Palomar Way, Oxnard, Calif. 93030, has changed his name legally to Jean S. Lawrence.
 103060 Fuchs, Jonathan I., P.O. Box 314, Woodmere, N.Y., 11598, has changed his name legally to Jonathan I. Foxx.

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

3280-112561 Ahlersmeyer, Richard L.
 3283-80692 Hansen, Robert G.
 3278-40881 Higgins, Mrs. Gladys
 3281-112852 Huff, Martin
 3284-101261 Pike, Neal D.
 3277-34913 Simmerman, Byron C.
 3282-74824 Stallings, James H.
 3279-69739 Ringneck Stamp Club

RESIGNATIONS RECEIVED

2477-21383 Perkins, Sherman T.

SUSPENDED

46964 Yeatts, H. Coleman, P.O. Box 1258, Jacksonville, Fla., is suspended pending appeal of felony conviction.

DECEASED

57177 Applegate, Vernon C.
 45927 Cobb, Carlton R., Jr.
 57247 Cornell, Edward L.
 98412 Layton, Philip D.
 66269 McCane, Henry L.
 1117-9400 Mechin, R.J.
 62906 Phelps, Orson M.
 3195-27013 Richert, Paul J.
 85683 Shepard, William F.
 110038 Silverstein, Allen B.
 98236 Spindler, Vestus J., Jr.
 3007-23441 Talg, M.O.
 71040 Volansky, Stanley
 37586 Weaver, Dr. Thomas H.
 1428-13897 Weigel, Richard C.

APPLICATIONS RETURNED

Bergeron, Mrs. Michel

APPLICATIONS RECALLED

Carpenter, Fred L.
 Chamberlain, Keith R.

DEALER APPLICATIONS

The Board of Vice Presidents has approved the following members for a part-time (P) or full-time (D) stamp dealer classification.

84335 Bansner, Philip T. (P to D)
 62389 Burke, David H. (P to D)
 68506 Campman, Glen G. (D)
 101457 Carlson, John R. (P)
 2665-60148 Cross, James A. (P)
 1965-42382 Dempsey, James T. (P to D)
 S-90794 Frye, Marian N. (D)
 58040 Gaumont, Ronald E. (P to D)
 64149 Harris, Jan B. (P to D)
 109845 Henry, Ronald (P)
 98383 Hepp, George A. (P)
 69896 Major, Thomas M. (P to D)
 79966 Narbonne, Roger F. (P to D)
 100764 Natoli, Stephen J. (P)
 55546 Pohl, Siegfried W. (P to D)
 98911 Reid, J. Graham (P to D)
 50671 Smith, Edwin W. (P to D)
 47970 Stewart, Kenneth J. (P to D)
 84859 Wilson, Warren D. (P to D)

SUMMARY

Total Membership, May 31, 1980	48,722
New Members	726
Reinstated	137
	<hr/> 863
	49,585
Deceased	15
Resignations Accepted	5
Dropped, non-payment of dues	13
	<hr/> 33
Total Membership, June 30, 1980	49,552

Junior American Philatelist


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available to answer these questions, or to point the child toward the sources he needs.

The novice collector will be experimenting with various aspects of his hobby for some time. As this progresses, he may come to the conclusion that all this study just is not worth it. This may be hard for the die-hard collector to accept, but if these are the child's feelings, so be it. The challenge was presented, but not met.

Do not, however, think that your efforts have been a waste of time. Perhaps sometime in the future that interest will rekindle and another former collector will rejoin the fold.

If, however, the child's interest in stamp collecting grows stronger with the introduction of alternatives, be willing to offer the young collector the chance to assume some responsibility. For example, I see no reason why the young collector should not be permitted to use your ultraviolet light to study tagged stamps. I am not saying that he should have his own lamp, but if he is serious about the hobby, he should also be responsible with the appropriate tools. The young collector's interest will be reinforced if he is treated as an adult. This tells him that he is being thought of not as a child, but as a novice collector.

A final way to offer the younger collector some help is to show him the social world of our hobby. Introduce him to the fun of a stamp show, the interesting reading of the stamp publications, and the many benefits that stamp collecting clubs can offer him. I am not necessarily suggesting that you finance these ventures — just that you make their existence known. Certainly, a trip to a stamp show and bourse can bring out the excitement of stamp collecting. With a little help from you, a youngster can discover that a stamp collection is not just something to pull out on a rainy day. 

Bezell

from Page 696

1. Robert C. Bezell received, through the mail, beautiful and unusual cacheted handmade envelopes on buff or photographic paper during the period 1929 through 1937 — it is assumed that he created these.

2. He received these covers at addresses in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Los Angeles, California.

3. There are about 400 different cachets.

4. Very few of each cachet exist today.

This information is needed:

1. Where was he born?

2. What was his occupation?


3. How did he develop an interest in this field?

4. When, where, and why did he start creating cachets in 1929?

5. Did he design, produce, or service these cacheted, handmade envelopes?

6. Why did he move to Los Angeles for a short period?

7. When, where, and why did he stop in 1937?

There are many more questions that need to be answered about R.C. Bezell. Hopefully, someone reading this will be able to contribute a piece to this mysterious jigsaw puzzle. Please submit any information or leads to me at High Street, Kohler, WI 53044 (414-351-0330). I will gladly discuss this subject with those who are interested. 

*Available from The American Philatelic Research Library, P.O. Box 338, State College, PA 16801.


Gandhi

from Page 700

symbol of goodwill and friendship.

The first country other than India that honored Mahatma Gandhi on its stamps was the United States. Two stamps (4- and 8-cent denominations) were issued on India's Republic Day for the U.S. Champion of Liberty Series of 1961, with printings of 120 and forty million, respectively. The quantities of the 4-cent stamp are the largest of any single Gandhi commemorative stamp issued thus far (Figure 8). The portrait of Gandhi adopted on these two stamps was obtained from R.L. Lekhi, official photographer of the government of India's Photo Division. The U.S. Post Office Department organized a special ceremony for the release of these stamps at which Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Indian Ambassador Mahomedali Currim Chagle were present.

I will conclude by quoting from the review of a book by Haskel Frankel:

If one brash American heart can break through one Englishman's starched reserve, what is not possible between people in this tortured world? And what is loneliness but an illusion of private affliction which people are waiting to dispel at the other end of a postage stamp? 

An abridged version of this article appeared in The Illustrated Weekly of India. Figures 1, 2, 3, and 5 courtesy of the Government of India Photo Division, Akashwani Bhavan, Parliament Street, New Delhi.