

Selling Covers

By Richard Pederson

In the December 2010 issue of *U.S. Stamp News*, in his publisher's column, John Dunn asked the question "Do you collect covers?" Upon pondering that question and what my response might be led me to the subject of this article. I have always been more of a cover accumulator rather than a collector with a predefined goal (e.g., collecting Highway Post Office covers from the state of Virginia) and approach to accomplishing that goal. I started saving covers soon after I started collecting stamps (yes I did have an album to guide my stamp collecting) at the age of seven. Although I thought covers were interesting, I certainly had no sense of focus or purpose when I saved them. I simply kept any unusual and many not so unusual covers that came my way. I thought that I would eventually find something to do with them, but never did. Perhaps 15 years ago, I decided that I wanted to start moving toward my long time goal of becoming a stamp dealer and further decided that covers (i.e., postal history, first day covers, event covers, topical covers) would be one area that I would eventually emphasize. It only seemed natural as, by then, I had accumulated many thousands of covers via saving, trading, and purchase of large auction lots. At that point, I started sleeving and organizing the thousands of covers I had acquired over the years. Only then did I finally realize how much work a typical dealer has to perform to obtain a small profit. The work required to identify, sleeve, and price a single cover is not insignificant and when repeated thousands of times, the expected return is very small in relationship to the work put in by the dealer. Despite this realization, my interest did not waiver and in 2008 I finally became a part time dealer and this year, upon selling my information technology consulting business, it became my principal job.

Since deciding to become a dealer, I have purchased a number of cover lots, large and small, and integrated them into my accumulation (now stock). One thing that happened during organizing thousands of covers, I also became a cover collector. Because I did not want to compete with my goal of selling covers, I have limited my collecting to two well-defined areas: covers related to the U.S. 1938 Presidential issue (i.e., the Prexies); and covers pertaining to stamp dealing/collecting. My rule is, if I purchase a cover lot, everything goes into my inventory, with the two noted exceptions. If I have a customer who has a want list containing an item or items that are in my collecting area, the customer comes first. My choice of collecting areas was relatively easy since I am building a Prexie exhibit that includes postal history items and I wanted to collect covers of the many dealers and stamp-related businesses that preceded me. Each dealer or business, for which I find a cover, I intend to research and find out as much about the dealer or business as possible. Some questions to be answered include the following:

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- What dates was the dealer/business active?;
- What did the dealer/business sell?;
- Was the dealership/business operated on a full or part time basis?; and
- Where was the business/dealership located?

The cover at the right was in a small accumulation given to me by a longtime friend. It contains a corner card for Horace W. Paine, Philatelist. I am not sure if Horace Paine was a dealer or serious philatelist, although the fact he took the trouble and expense to create envelopes with his corner card and he was



communicating with my friend's ancestor, who was a stamp collector and lived in a different state may have been an indication he at least was a part time dealer. In fact, via an internet search, I was able to locate the following advertisement from the stamp page in The New York Sun dated February 3, 1934.

US, SUPERIOR SPACE FILLERS:
Send \$1 for big selection. Choose
your copies, return balance. HORACE
PAINE, Westport, Connecticut.

Almost any area of cover collecting can lead you down similar paths. One of the features of cover collecting that makes it so interesting is that every cover has a story. Not only can you research the stamp, meter, or permit on the cover, but you can also examine other features that may be present including post marks, handling instructions, cancels, addresses of the sender and recipient, contents of the cover (if present), advertisements, cachets, and postal markings. From a dealer's perspective, a given postal history item can be both interesting and perplexing. For example, a single cover could have an advertising corner card that relates to hotels, a post mark that pertains to Christmas, and a variety of postal markings that make it a very interesting postal history item. Therefore, the dealer could have multiple customers, each having completely different interests, who are interested in acquiring the item. It's just that conundrum that makes cover collecting so appealing. [Note: This article first appeared in the 2011 First Quarter edition of *NSDA News* and it has been updated to appear on this website.]