

The PhilateliKid

The newsletter for Stamp Collecting Clubs for Kids (SCCFK)

Collect Stamps (The Most Educational Hobby)

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Stamp Collecting Clubs For Kids (SCCFK) – a little history

Stamp Collecting Clubs For Kids was founded in 2002 – twenty years ago – by the author and editor of this monthly newsletter, Robert W. Martin. At the time I was newly wed to Linda C. Martin, who was the principal of an elementary school in San Jose, California. She had noticed that during the recess after every lunch, when the students were outside playing, there were a few students who just sat quietly on the ground along the building. For one reason or another, they did not want to play with the other children. In an effort to give an alternate activity for these students, various volunteer programs were offered in the school library by volunteers, including such activities as chess and other games. Usually, these activities lasted a few weeks. I was asked if I could offer something along the lines of stamp collecting as an alternative.

I have been actively collecting United States and worldwide, as well as various topicals since 1957, when, as a boy living on a remote farm in Kansas, I was first introduced to our hobby by my mentor, my father, who was a stamp collector when he was a boy in the 1920's. Note the word "Mentor." He taught me how to hinge a stamp, how to soak a stamp, how to use tongs, and provided me with my first album and a few dozen stamps. Living in a rural area, we had no television (my parents were against it) and the only radio we listened to was classical music. By the time I was 11 years old I was proficient in how to use a Scott Catalogue, was a young member of a stamp club, knew how to obtain "approvals" through the mail, and was hooked. Stamp collecting was my window to the world. I had never seen a live negro person until I was a teenager, but I knew a little about negroes through stamps from countries around the world. I also knew about exotic animals, such as giraffes, kangaroos, and toucans. I knew where the countries were around the world, and the different currencies used. I knew that "Helvetia" were stamps from Switzerland, and "Magyar" was Hungary. I could recognize the difference between Chinese stamps and Japanese stamps. I also knew that some countries that had issued stamps, no longer existed as countries, but were now part of a different country, such as when Newfoundland ceased issuing their own stamps, and began using

the stamps of Canada. I was an eager reader of Linn's. (My father bought me a subscription.) And I knew what a First Day Cover was, and eagerly sent out self-addressed envelopes to post offices all over the United States, along with the necessary four pennies scotch taped to the hand written letter requesting that the postmaster please affix the new stamp, when it came out, to the envelope I provided and mail it back to me.

So, in 2002 I gathered up about 500 inexpensive worldwide stamps and put them into a brown paper bag, about 500 U.S. stamps and put them into a second paper bag, a package of 1,000 hinges, and four pair of tongs, all of which I had accumulated over the previous 40 years. I got 15 free topical albums (18 pages each) from the American Stamp Dealers' Association, and headed for our first stamp collecting club meeting. I hoped that at least two students would show up, and would have been very happy if five came. It was announced in the morning message to the students (loudspeakers in each classroom.) I went to the cafeteria and walked around the tables, just before the after-lunch recess began, saying, "Stamp collecting club in the Library today right after lunch. Everything is free and everybody gets a free Disney stamp to keep." I said it about 20 times as I walked around the cafeteria.

Well...the very first meeting had over 50 students come from 2nd grade through 6th grade – way more than the number of albums I had brought. That afternoon I placed a call to the ASDA and asked for 75 more albums. Two weeks later I phoned again and asked for 125 albums. The following month I asked again, and again, and eventually, within two years, the ASDA informed me that they were out of albums, and were not going to print any more. I asked permission to photocopy their albums and was told to go ahead, and from then on, I printed about 350 albums every year. This was for a school of approximately 600 students. A nearby school heard of this, and asked me to start a program there, which I did. I found myself busy with weekly meetings in two schools. Then three schools, and I realized I could do no more. Occasionally I would get additional adult help, but mostly it was just me. Whenever possible, my wife would attend for a few minutes, and I put her to work taking attendance. That became immediately important because the students could earn "prizes" by attending 5 times, or multiples of 5, which I eventually changed to 3 times and multiples of 3. The prizes were highly desired by all the students. The prizes were Disney stamps. Soon we were giving away over 50,000 stamps a year, and hundreds of Disney stamps. I ran out of my own duplicates, and began buying cheap stamps, and "inexpensive" Disney stamps. Being on a limited budget, I would buy any Disney stamp I could find for 10¢ or less. We normally went through about 60-70 packages of hinges (1,000 hinges each) every year.

Since 2002 we have had over 5,000 students sign up, and have given away almost a million stamps. We also have given away over 1,000 First Day Covers that were donated, and over 250 pairs of tongs, which were given to graduating 6th graders who had attended at least 5 stamp club meetings that year. We also gave away kits of stamps, hinges, tongs, and albums to many home-schooled children, and kits to each student who wanted a kit for the Summer.

Linda made a big sign on a poster board, which I carried around the cafeteria while announcing the club meetings. It said "Stamp club meeting today." On the back side she printed the only rules the stamp club had. There were four rules:

1. Have FUN.
2. Make sure your hands are clean.
3. No food or liquids on the tables.
4. Wait your turn.

After several years of getting down on my hands and knees to clean up the floor in the library from stamps that had fallen, and hinges that had fallen, a fifth rule was added:

5. Pick up anything that has fallen on the floor.

Those five rules are all that we have ever had – for 20 years now. Of course, all the school rules still applied, except one. We took over the entire library, so with the permission of the Librarian, the students did not have to whisper in the Library, but could talk at normal volumes (sometimes pretty loud) and laugh and even sing!

To make things interesting for the students, I began the "Robert W. Martin Lottery," which occurs this way. Each table has two bowls of stamps and two bowls of hinges. At each chair there are a pair of tongs. When all the seats are taken, the students have to sit on the floor, and we give them bowls of stamps and hinges and tongs. I walk around teaching them how to hinge stamps, and insisting that they use tongs. I teach them basic stamp collecting terminology, such as hinge, tongs, and albums. (Not "sticky things, tweezers, or books.") Every five minutes or so, I hold high above my head, so that everybody could see, a stamp that I think they would like, such as a stamp with the Statue of Liberty on it. I would say a couple things about the subject, such as where it is and how big it is, and ask "Who wants this?" Numerous hands would go up, saying "I do," "I do," and "I do." To decide who would get the stamp I would ask a question, and the first student to give the correct answer would "win" the stamp. For younger classes (the students attended stamp club by classes in three shifts: 1st and 2nd, 3rd and 4th, and 5th and 6th) the question would be something like, "I am thinking of a letter between "D"

and “M.” What is it?” I would ask around, sometimes more than once per kid, until somebody came up with the letter I was thinking of. Then that student would get the stamp, usually accompanied by a collective sad sigh for the other students. The older students would get more challenging questions such as, “I am thinking of a state along the Mississippi River,” or I am thinking of a farm animal, animal in the zoo, a color of the rainbow, a nearby state, a country in South America, etc. This was always very popular.

The most popular meeting of the year was the meeting where we soaked stamps. I went to McDonalds and asked for 50 empty plastic salad bowls. I arranged with the school to use a “Lab” room – not the library – where if water got spilled on the table or floor, it would be okay. We got pitchers of warm water from the cafeteria. I set up an 8-foot-long table with about 10,000 stamps “on piece” and allowed each student to pick any 10 that they wanted to soak. We provided paper towels (from the bathrooms) to blot and used newspapers (getting harder to find nowadays) for drying and flattening. Each newspaper had the students name and grade written on it with a black marker, and the following week, voila! They had stamps to put into their own albums.

Unfortunately, during COVID19 all stamp club meetings were suspended, for health reasons. We look forward to having in-person meetings soon. In the meantime, any interested kid, or beginner adult, can receive a kit through the US mail simply by asking.

Donations of stamps and supplies are our primary source of everything. I have successfully gone to Parent-Teachers Associations (PTA’s) to ask for funding some of the out-of-pocket expenses for printing albums, and buying hinges and tongs. When asked, they were eager to help, usually donating about \$500.00. Many individuals who have heard about SCCFK, or seen our website have made cash contributions from just a few dollars to \$1,000.00.”

Finally, I would like to take a moment to thank the hundreds of people who have been supporters of SCCFK, and in particular the widow of Stanley Piller, **Pamela Piller**. Stanley was a well-known, highly respected stamp dealer, author, and expertizer, and President of the American Stamp Dealers Assn. at the time of his unexpected death last November. Pamela gave SCCFK a very generous donation of several thousands of dollars’ worth of stamp collecting supplies from his estate. Pamela Piller took the time to find us, and donated over 50 boxes of supplies. We are now set for quite a while with tongs, hinges, mounts, glassine envelopes, magnifying glasses, stock cards, stock books, mailers, etc.

Also, a big thank you to **Richard Ellis** and **Kemp Fairbanks** who have been long-time supporters of SCCFK with generous donations of stamps, and postage for our newsletters for over 10 years.

And thank you to **Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library** for a donation of about 100 packages of hinges.

Stamp Collecting Clubs for Kids is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are greatly appreciated and if \$10 or more you will be sent a written receipt. You also can donate via PayPal on our website - www.stampcollectingclubsforkids.org or www.yummystampcollecting.org which redirects you to the same website.

