

Calendar

Hinged Jenny

Stamp-Collecting Show

The Inverted Jenny? The U.S. stamp that shows the upside-down airplane? You won't find one of those at the show," says stamp dealer Nick Moravec, speaking of the monthly collectors' event he has been running since January in Kearny Mesa. "If it's never been hinged — it's worth \$200,000, according to the price guides. If it's been hinged, which means somebody was crazy enough to put it into an album, it's worth \$170,000. A block of four is worth three-quarters of a million."

Rather than rarities, you'll find "topicals" in, well, abundance. In

LOCAL EVENTS

addition to being more affordable than rarities, topicals are often prettier.

"For years a lady collected hands from me," says Moravec, who sells stamps in 110 topical categories: "Autos, butterflies, Christmas, chess, coats of arms, dogs, dinosaurs, explorers, fairs, fire-fighting, flowers, fungi, insects, maps, military, monuments, nudes, police..." The hand lady doesn't come to shows anymore, however. She has suffered a couple of strokes. Stamp collectors are often old collectors, the 61-year-old Moravec laments more than once during our phone conversation.

Does anybody in San Diego, young or old, collect feet?

"No."

Why not?

"I don't know." He sounds annoyed. "It's just not something

anybody has ever — Okay, let me give you a clue on hands. Boy Scouts, okay? The salute? And then there are all the handshakes on stamps that show international cooperation. And then there are hands holding flags. You can imagine that hands show up in stamps quite frequently."

Kurt Benirschke, the retired UCSD medical professor who was president of the San Diego Zoo from 1998 to 2001, buys animal stamps from Moravec.

Charles Ellis-MacLeod, the clarinetist, looks for bird stamps. He has been known to come to a show before a performance with the symphony, wearing his "penguin suit," says Moravec.

There is also "a little old guy" who collects music and art stamps. "Now he's so old he can't drive, so he takes the bus. It turns out, this grizzled guy was the chief electronics designer for Disney World in Florida and had 700 people working for him."

Are some topicals hotter than others? "It goes in cycles. When I started as a dealer 12 years ago, it was trains. Then it was cats: I couldn't keep a cat. Recently, science has been good, and space is getting good again. In San Diego, sea life is always popular, because so many people here relate to the sea."

What new topics have been recognized lately? "Holograms. There's one that shows Lady Di." A number of the 3-D stamps were issued in 2000, along with those in another new category, the millennium.

People still do collect countries, of course. "Every country keeps producing new stamps, on a monthly basis," says



Bird stamps from around the world

Moravec.

And the world keeps producing new countries. "Especially in the former Soviet Union, lots of new ones have cropped up, and people collect those."

Other collectors covet stamps from "dead countries," says Moravec. "Portuguese colonies, Dutch colonies. There are fewer of those stamps available, so that makes them worth more."

As a collector, Moravec has his own specialties. One of them is stamps produced by countries under British rule during the reign of George VI (1936–1952): Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa.... He says he is attracted to the British Commonwealth stamps by the quality of their engravings.

Moravec likes to collect them "mint," looking like new stamps that have come directly from the post office. In other country categories, some stamps are more valuable if used. "That happens if the stamps come from, say, the South Pacific, where there are three and half people on an island and only one of them can write. It's rare to get a stamp on an envelope from one of those places."

Some smaller municipalities overproduce stamps on purpose, says Moravec. They make more stamps than their citizens could ever use, then sell

the surplus to the world's collectors. Vatican City did it first, says Moravec. "The stamps were sold to the Catholics and everyone who collected stamps and all the tourists. It was a money-making thing."

On Sunday, Moravec expects 200 collectors and 20 dealers, some of whom, including himself, will have more than one table. "In my case, I need more space than dealers in classical stamps who'll sell you a picture of some monarch's head for a couple of grand."

The most expensive stamp that Moravec has ever sold at a show in San Diego was one such "ugly, old picture of somebody" from 19th-century Germany. Price: \$1500. "That's how most stamps used to be: there'd either be a face on it or a number. Everything was pretty dull, quite frankly, until the end of the 1950s. The U.S. didn't catch up until the 1970s. That's when we started to produce some beautiful topicals of our own."

— Jeanne Schinto

Stamp Collecting Show
Sunday, April 21,
10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.
Al Bahr Shrine Center Auditorium
(Hwy. 163 and Clairemont Mesa Blvd.)
Free
Info: 619-469-0337

Local Events
page 67

Classical Music
page 82

Art Museums & Galleries
page 84

Theater
page 87

Pop Music
page 93

Restaurants
page 126

Movies
page 138



Nudes