



The Civil War Post

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Grow My Money!

Grow my money, I am sometimes implored. Please, NO. That is not my job.

I am a dealer. But primarily, I am a collector at heart. And a historian. I cater to those who feel the same way. I love the stories and history behind the covers. Also, the stamps and their intricacies. But my passion is researching the mail routes and people who sent and received mail during the Civil War. Or finding new unrecorded markings or unlisted patriotic cover designs, new imprints and the like.

Over the years, I've had people approach asking if I would create an investment portfolio for them. I choose not to. Not that stamps and postal history can't be terrific investments, but because I believe the passion should come from the collector and not just be looked at as a means to make money. I don't want to be obligated to study stamp trends for clients. Nor be accountable if they don't make money.

Stamps may well perform better than cash in times of high inflation. As a tangible asset, a stamp cannot go out of business like a company quoted on the stock exchange. And they are a relatively confidential investment.

Non-collecting investors are interested in securing their capital and in their returns. If the market dips and curves, as it inevitably will, a true collector understands this and is generally not uncomfortable with these inevitable downturns in the market. Interest in stamps as an investment tends to increase when traditional investments are not doing well, causing investors to seek alternatives. But only a foolish investor will know nothing about that in which he is investing.

Unless you have the talent of a professional, no one expects to make money playing golf. But it costs money to join a golf or country club, pay greens fees, pay for lessons, caddies, golf carts, golf clubs, balls, special clothing and more. This is simply the cost of a pleasurable pastime.

An avid collector accumulates philatelic treasures because he or she loves the hobby. And, even if – when ready to sell – there is a financial loss for the collector, he or she has gained immense pleasure that is hard to quantify.

Someone who is strictly an investor may want to be able to bail out at any given time, which may not be the right time in the market. Of course, this is true in the stock market and with other investments as well.

I have seen collectors on the floors of stamp shows search-



ing for what I consider almost the impossible. An example would be original gum, never hinged, examples of the Confederate lithographed issues. Do they exist? Yes, they undoubtedly do – at a huge premium most are unwilling to pay – and should come with authentication certificates as such. But, more often, they are regummed or – yes, never hinged but badly stained and possibly deteriorating because of that “precious” gum, which is more detrimental than desirable, in my humble opinion.

I am often told by readers of this column how much they enjoy what I write, yet often they are not collectors of Confederate material. It is the history and personal connection with the writers of the correspondence that keeps them reading.

Today, with the widespread use of the Internet, descendants are finding covers online that emanated from their families. Usually, the first question they ask is where I got Great Aunt Nellie's and Uncle Henry's correspondence, usually in a politely accusatory way. They are generally shocked when I can often trace the item back decades through various auction houses. But rarely can it be traced back to their families. And, while I will reveal the names of public auction houses, I will not reveal names of private collectors.

Collecting stamps and postal history can be a solitary pursuit, even more so now with the Internet, or it can be as social as you want – the social interactions of stamp shows, joining specialty organizations, local clubs, exhibiting and more. Research and writing is both solitary and social – sharing information with other serious students of the same area. This is a hobby for both the introverted and the extroverted. “King of Hobbies and Hobby of Kings.”

Trish enjoys hearing from readers. She may be reached at trishkauf@comcast.net.