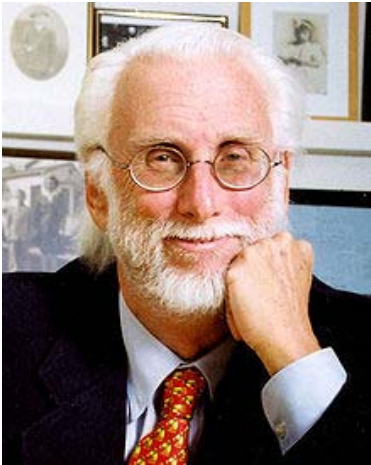


Wanted: 24 Pounds of Stamps off Paper, Must be All Different

Pete Boulay
Maplewood Stamp Club

Stamp collectors in the 21st century have it pretty easy. With the click of a mouse, and fairly deep pockets, you can instantly purchase pretty much any stamp collection you want. Not true in the 1970's. Just simply finding stamps could take a person to the corners of the earth, rummaging through dusty stamp stores and toting tattered lists of stamps.

In 1977, the Scott International Albums were comprised of eleven volumes with spaces for 195,000 or so stamps. Filling the albums completely was a daunting task, and thus far only one pair of collectors has accomplished this. What follows is the story of



Above: Stan Cornyn
Courtesy Wikipedia

how these two collectors who were able to do just that, in just six short years!

Stan Cornyn, a Warner Bros. record executive, entered a department store in 1971 and thought it would be a good idea to buy a stamp album for his 6-year old son, Christopher. It was a great way for his son to learn about geography he mused. This starter album was woefully inadequate and the Cornyns moved to the then seven-volume Scott International Album series. However, sunny California offered more enticing opportunities in the form of a skateboard and the albums were left to his father and a pal of his dad's- Murray Geller. Mr. Geller was a man who liked numbers and in collecting pounds of stamps there are numbers aplenty. Want lists were scribbled on sheets of paper and index cards, wearing down pencils to a little nub.

At first their goal was to find any stamp that cost a nickel, then ones priced at a dime. Eventually stamp collecting mania took hold, and the search was on to find those missing spaces. Stamp dealers in Syria were contacted to find obscure stamps that their US counterparts didn't have in their holdings. By the summer of 1976 the duo were just down to 28 stamps. The last stamp to find a place in the album was a Malaya Kelantan #10 overprint, found at Union Philatelic in New York City. Thus the collection was complete-all 195,219 stamps. The most expensive stamp in the collection was valued in the 1971 edition of the Scott Catalog for \$750. If one would try the same feat in 2011 one of the more expensive stamps is US Scott #2 that catalogs \$1,200 for a used specimen.



1847 US Scott #2.
Courtesy: Wikipedia

I had a chance to correspond with Stan Cornyn about “Collecting the World” I asked him if there was any stamp store that stood out in his mind during the hunt: **“I remember walking into one in Munich, and just handing them a list (not using any German stamp catalog's numbering system), and they walked into the back room, then came out with good stuff for me.”** One method that helped Cornyn and Geller was picking through collections as Cornyn describes: **“The most frequently visited (store) was in Los Angeles. I think it might have been called Superior Stamp and Coin. They got used to Murray and me, and if they'd bought a big collection from someone, they'd just let us go through the albums, extract what we needed, and they'd do the pricing when we were finished, based on a percentage of catalogue values. But these stores needed to put up with nerds like (us).”** I asked Stan if he had any advice for the would-be world collector. **“Collectors these days have viral connections to like-minded collectors. They can amass them on Facebook, so much easier than sending a letter (with a stamp on the envelope). Take advantage of today's communication media -- have a Blog of Your Needs, and lure people to visit it. So much easier than finding a stamp store in the Sudan.”**

When Cornyn and Geller completed the world, their quest was finished, and over course of a year sold their collection in a series of auctions that fetched somewhere north of a hundred thousand dollars. Cornyn and Geller hung up their stamp tongs and have since retired. And the stamps? Probably scattered across the country by now, maybe lurking in an obscure stamp shop just waiting for the next person to come along with a goal to complete the world.

A special thank you goes out to Stan Cornyn for his assistance. Some of the information in this article is from: “They Collected the World” by Cynthia Gorney, **The Washington Post**: April 26, 1978.