

Presentation: The Manitoba Antique Association (MAA)
5 March 2014 @ Thirsty's Flea Market, 1111 Erin Ave.

Hello to all of you, members of the Manitoba Antique Association. I thank you for the invitation to come speak to your group. My name is Roger Fontaine. I am both a stamp collector and a stamp dealer here in Winnipeg. Personally, I have been collecting stamps since about age 8. I have been actively pursuing the dealer side of the hobby for about 6 years. I call it my retirement project. Like all of you, I too will retire rich, on beach, somewhere in the Caribbean. I am a founding member of the Scandinavian Collectors Club (26 Years) and an active member of the Winnipeg Philatelic Society (4 years). This January, I launched a website: Stampman9.ca. That's me.

In this presentation, I will talk about the following ideas. The health and future direction of stamp collecting. Collector clubs, shows, auctions and activities in Winnipeg. Dealers and their role in within the hobby. Estate planning, yard sales, great finds and other stories. I will take questions at the end of the presentation and your questions are most certainly welcomed and encouraged. For your convenience, I've handed out my business card and a general listing of stamp clubs and organisations in Winnipeg. A more complete listing is available on my website. The second card is that of a dealer with whom I've partnered up to provide stamp collecting supplies.

Now about the hobby itself: Stamp collecting has been called the hobby of Kings, Queens and Presidents. Stamp collecting began pretty much right after the release of the world's first stamp: The British Penny Black May 1st 1840. Philatelic clubs and organizations had sprang up throughout Europe and beyond by the 1860's. The term "Philately" is a French word coined by George Herpin in 1864. It means the collection and study of postage stamps, postmarks and related material.

The hobby like many other hobbies has had its glory days and there were times when people thought it would die off completely. Remember Postal meters, those paper strips used as postage on office mail, well postage stamps were going to disappear. And E-Mail, now that certainly will be the death of stamps and with it stamp collecting. Let's see now, E-mail has been around for what, about 20 plus years. I have a friend a former Winnipegger who works for a major US auction firm. A few years ago, I had asked Rick about the fate of Stamp collecting. Is it a dying hobby. His answer to me summed it up fairly well. He said Roger, our auction house alone sold for \$32.1 million dollars' worth of stamps last year. The hobby is alive and well but his companies sales are worldwide. China for example has a huge and growing market. Stamp collecting certainly had its North American hay day especially back in the 1960's and 70's. A client of mine recently returned from a trip to Germany. On any given Sunday 6:00 AM, in a local town square, stamp and coin dealers set up. And by noon, everyone is gone and the sales were good. If you show up at 10:30 AM, like my client did, you've missed the best of the sales. He saw an unbelievable range of material. Lots of dealers and lots of collectors milling about.

In North America, there seems to be a common lament within the collectables world. There are very few stamp and coin stores left in Winnipeg or anywhere in North America for that matter. There also seems to be fewer collectors. Personally, I do believe that there are less collectors per capita than say back in the 1940's and 50's. But there is a point that needs to be made here however: that stamp collecting as a hobby is alive and well but it has changed. It has evolved. We are competing with the internet, with changing personal interests, with economic challenges. As a teenager growing up in Winnipeg, I can remember at least 6 or so stamp stores. Today: not so many. The cost of maintaining a store front, rent, taxes, labor costs... It's almost impossible to survive. I do Ok working out of the home and by attending shows. Most of Winnipeg's stamp dealers work from home and as with most, it's a side line after their regular job. The collectors in Winnipeg have also changed. In Winnipeg in particular, a lot of the club members are much older and many are no longer accumulating stamps but rather selling off their stock and parts of their collection. There are however new and younger collectors about. We have seen many new and younger faces at the WPS public auctions. Today's collector has access to the world from the comfort of his or her home. Many of today's younger collectors don't readily join clubs or associations. The trick is to reach and to connect with these people. As a dealer and through adds on Kijiji and by E-mail, I have had contact with many of these at home collectors. I've been able to draw a good number of new people to the club.

What is the dealers' role within the hobby? As a stamp dealer, I see myself playing an important role in the health of the hobby, in the life of the collector and the betterment of his or her collection. I want to do more than just sell stuff. I have met some great people in the process and I've made some very good friends. I am in their eyes, "The Expert". I field their questions. I advise collectors on different strategies that best fits their collecting interests. I've had to help some of them focus their attention as to what they want to collect and to what ends. I've played the role of a broker between buyer and seller. I done hunting for elusive items for them. And I will refer collectors to other dealers. In my opinion, another dealer is not competition. Another dealer only enhances the hobby and allows for more choice for the collector. No one dealer as everything. This is why I've listed other dealers along with their contact information on my web site. It's a small community. Collectors support dealers, clubs and club auctions. Dealers support collector and clubs and clubs support collectors and dealers. Round and round it goes. What's good for the one is good for the other and the hobby grows and new members join.

We have also seen growth in the way of club auctions. The WPS has an in-house auction once a month and holds an "Open to the public auction" twice a year. The Scandinavian Collectors Club holds an in-house auction in April. The auctions are growing. They are proving to be an excellent way to buy and sell material. The breath and scope of the variety in the material is remarkable and it just keeps getting better. Other philatelic activities are the annual spring Stamp and Coin Show put on by the WPS. May 2 – 4. Featured are competitive exhibits, a kid's table, local and out of town dealers and various presentations. Then there is the annual fall Coin and Stamp Show put on by the Numismatic Club. Last June, Winnipeg hosted a National level stamp show: Royal 2013 Royale. Collectors dealers and exhibitors came in from across Canada and the US. It was well attended and a success. The Red River Stamp Bourse is held at the CharterHouse Hotel on York Ave. It's a stamp and coin market hosted by local dealers and held the 2nd Sunday of every month. The Winnipeg Art Gallery too has a stamp sale to raise

funds for the galley in April. This year it's April 11, 12 & 13. You can find all of these events on the website. Yes, there are a lot of activities in our world but the number of collectors and people attending has dropped off over the years. It's simple demographics. There are a lot of older collectors in Winnipeg who are retiring their collections. But that in its self opens up new opportunities. One door closes, another door opens. Collections and entire estates can be picked up for good value.

This brings me to the topic of appraisals. Most of my stock comes from collections that I have bought locally or within Manitoba. Most of the local dealers will do appraisals for a fee. The rule of thumb is that if I purchase the collection that I am appraising, the fee is waived. I always make a point of being fair and open with my clients as well as with the people from whom I buy collections. I explain to them the difference between a dealers purchase and selling price, catalogue value versus local market value etc. I provide clients with the same listing and website access that I've given you. I will try to match a specific collection to a buyer or direct the seller to a number of options for disposal. Sometimes a donation to one of the children's club is appropriate.

I always recommend to people to have an appraisal done on a collection, especially if it's something that's been inherited. You need to know what it contains. One such appraisal consisted of about 4 cases of stamp books and material. The family knew that their granddad was an avid collector but they didn't know any more than that. I found not 1 but 2 early covers from the UK. Both covers bore the penny black stamp. These covers catalogue at \$450.00 to \$500.00 each. But, not only were these penny blacks on cover but these were mailed within the first week of issue May 1 to 8th 1840 and both had been cancelled with a red Maltese Cross Cancel. The value per cover... \$1000.00 plus each. The granddad had also assembled the entire series of Canadian Large Queen stamps on album pages showing colour variations. 8 to 12 stamps for each value. Some of the higher value Large Queen stamps catalogue at \$100.00 to 600.00 each. It was an incredible collection that valued at over \$45,000.00. The family had no idea of what they had inherited. That appraisal took over 4 hours to do. The family decided to keep the collection. Most appraisals need only take 2 to 3 hours as I am not listing and identifying each and every stamp. It is a general overview with a listing of better items and pricing of material according to market and of the expected sale at auction. Appraisals should always be done in the presence of the owner. Your best source for general valuation is the Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue and the Unitrade Canada Specialised Catalogue. Experience come in handy of course.

What do you look for in a stamp collection? Well, like with any antique business, I always look for the unusual. Condition is very important as is whether the collection has taken in or has been exposed to any moisture. Stamps and moisture don't mix well, especially mint stamps. A not so great find was a Russian stamp album that had been store in a basement for a few years too many. It was part of a bigger lot that I bought years ago. I had forgotten to bring my stamp tongs that day so I didn't get to lift some of the stamps. A common thing to do to check condition. Most of this collection consisted of used stamps and as such with no gum. No problem however, Russia has issued a great many stamps that were cancelled to order which means that the stamps are cancelled, thus used but are still with gum. Well over 70% of the stamps were stuck or partially stuck to their pages. I did eventually

manage to sell that album at a huge discount to a collector who ultimately had to wash off most of the stamps. A true labor of love. Another not so great find was a collection of about 22 photo albums that were used to house stamps and covers and postcards. It appeared that these had been stored flat, one on top of the other. The combination of weight and time had conspired to press the stamps right into the gum of these gum lined photo albums. Some of the stamps were salvageable, but a lot of them were ruined. My recommendation to the family was to sell the photo albums at a yard sale. Ask for \$20.00 each and settle for \$10.00 or \$15.00 you'll come out way ahead. Such is the risk when people collect in what I call "In a Vacuum". Stamp clubs, dealers, and other collectors are there to help guide people along. Oh! And as an aside, Scotch tape is another "Stamp Killer". A question was asked about stamps at yard sales. My own experience with finding stamps and stamp collections at yard sales is that they don't show up very often and when something does, it's usually marginal material. The same applies at pawn shops. As a rule, people know when they have something of value like stamps or coins. But then again you never know what you'll find and sometimes it's the referrals that pay off. Assessing the value of a stamp collection takes time and expertise.

For many dealers in the antique trade it's more than what they have time for or interest in. Understandably so. It's why I personally don't deal with coins for example. When I find coins or sports cards in an estate lot or collection, I take it to the experts or to a friend in that business. I recommend the same for you. Over time, with regular contact and with good interactions, friendships develop. Collectors can certainly help each other out. I'll look at your stamp collection and maybe you give me first opportunity to buy the lot. But above all else & by far my favorite part of the hobby is the people. I've met and I have gotten to know a lot of different people and some have become very good friends. The success and the future of collecting is based on cooperation and goodwill. The Winnipeg Philatelic Society, the Scandinavian Collectors Club, The British North American Philatelic Society, Good Neighbours / Bronx Stamp Club and others all share in a common Goal, the continuance of the hobby. The late Glenn Hansen was a weekend columnist for the Winnipeg Free Press and a good friend of mine. He once said to me, "You never truly own a stamp, you are it's custodian for a time and then you pass it on to the next generation". Sales and exchanges are good, the auctions have grown in popularity and the clubs are holding their own. If you're interested in attending a stamp club meeting, you're always welcome to drop in as a guest once or twice. Common in and see if it's for you. Stamp collecting is a hobby that is here to stay. People like to collect. Collecting of most anything as a hobby is here to stay. I wish you all well in your own areas of collecting endeavors.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to your group.

I welcome your questions.

Roger Fontaine
March 5, 2014.