

# Finding Treasures

The goldmine that eBay can be.

Fred Schmitt

Gems from the listings of eBay, clockwise from upper left: A pair of first day covers franked with complete sets of the Kansas-Nebraska issues; a striking Dorothy Knapp cacheted first day cover; a cover from a Howard Hughes around the world flight in 1938; an unusual first flight from New Brunswick to the Canal Zone; and a well-doodled 1857 cover franked by three No. 23s.



This morning, I got myself a cup of coffee and sat down to do something that has become a regular part of life for most philatelists who delve into postal history: I got on eBay. There were, would you believe, 170,173 auction listings in the stamps section of eBay for covers—and that was just in the United States section, alone.

Amazing.

That would be putting it mildly.

Mind you, the vast majority of the covers are rather common, but one can find some real buys in there—for yes, some rare postal history is being sold on eBay. Of course, one must pay close attention to the condition of the material. For instance, if you do find a potential good buy and the scanned image of the cover shows only the front, then you may want to ask the seller to provide you with a scan of the reverse.

Not only that, but bear in mind that a large number of eBay sellers don't seem to know what a flatbed scanner is—so they end up taking pictures of covers with a handheld camera with the cover lying on a table or propped up on a bed. I'm not kidding. Not very many people have discovered that the only way to scan a cover is by using a flatbed scanner that shows all portions of a cover squarely and without distortion.

The only times one can receive less than what he thought he had purchased is when the bidder is unable to adequately view a high quality scanned image of an item. Obviously, the wise seller knows this and provides not only a high-resolution scan, but one that includes both sides of a cover. Some sellers even provide blowup/enlarged scans of particular cancellations and markings. Those are the successful sellers!

Buying covers on eBay shouldn't be much different, actually, than perusing,

and buying from, a dealer's stock at a stamp show.

The thoughtfully-prepared purchaser is always looking for a cover that is priced well below market because the dealer doesn't completely understand, or know about, what he is offering for sale. On eBay, this can happen, by the way, with the countless "Buy It Now" sellers who have opted to offer an item at retail rather than put it up for auction. But it can play out well in auctions, too, for then the educated bidder is pitting his knowledge against other bidders. On occasion, I've picked up a serious piece of postal history, outbidding many other bidders—most likely because they didn't know as much about the piece as I did.

As with any marketplace, on eBay and elsewhere, knowledge translates to power. ☐