

## Finding Treasures

They're still out there.

Fred Schmitt



Not long ago, I was visiting one of those small local stamp shows that are, in my opinion, one of the longtime mainstays of our hobby. Such events usually have anywhere from ten to 20 dealers, generally in a meeting room at a medium-sized motel near an Interstate highway, and are responsible for keeping philately healthy in the hinterlands.

While I was looking over one of the cover boxes of a dealer friend of mine, a middle-aged gentleman walked up holding an old box in his hands—a bit bigger than a shoebox. He remarked to my friend, “I’m not a collector, but I just found out that my great uncle was—and I happened to find this box of stuff in a corner of his attic. I brought several boxes just like this one—all packed with old envelopes. I have no idea if they have value, but I’d like to sell ‘em.”

Every stamp dealer I’ve ever known has regular encounters like this. Most of the time, they don’t end up realizing much value for the seller, for such shoeboxes are usually loaded with covers that don’t date back too far. Don’t get me wrong—there’re usually some decent finds in practically every old cover holding, but not as spectacular as the one this gentleman was about to find out about.

I have a pretty good knowledge of U.S. postal history, so the dealer asked me if, while he was helping another customer, I would mind looking over the contents of the old box. Naturally, I said, “Yes!”

Inside was one of those rare eye-openers. Stacked neatly—and packed to the gills—was cover after cover from the pre-1930 period dating on back to the middle of the 19th century. A cursory run-through of the holding did not reveal any major rarities, but essentially, the material I was examin-

ing was full of worthwhile covers—ranging in value (to the buyer, like my dealer friend) from \$10 to several covers I surmised would rise to a level well above \$500. Two of them were in the \$2,000 range.

Apparently, this man’s uncle, who had recently died at the age of 91, was an oldtime hoarder and collector and, judging from the names on the covers, some of the mail was to and from the man’s relatives and ancestors. This was truly an honest-to-goodness oldtime holding! The seller spent nearly two hours at this dealer’s table and went away with a check for the fair value of his holding. It would have bought him a nice car.

Never let anyone tell you old holdings have dried up. They’re still out there. See if you can turn up one for yourself! ✉