

Brighton Papers in Philately

Paper 1/2020: Some Helpful Advice for Collectors

BRIGHTON PAPERS IN PHILATLEY BRING TOPICS OF INTEREST TO MEMBERS, INCLUDING ADVICE ON STAMPS AND STAMP COLLECTING, SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING DISPLAYS, AND EXAMPLES OF EXHIBITS AND PUBLISHED ARTICLES BY MEMBERS

One of the things that many members will have missed during the lockdown is the chance to attend the informative education sessions organised by our Education Committee as part of our regular meetings. To make up for this we thought it would be appropriate to devote our next paper to a range of stamp tips that should be of interest to many members.

John McKay, Editor

Removing Self Adhesive Stamps from Paper

In 2012 we reproduced in the Bulletin an article about the vexed problem of removing self-adhesive stamps from paper. This attracted a good deal of interest and in later issues we included some comments from members. This series is reproduced here for the benefit of members of may have missed it the first time around. Much more recently, the topic has been taken up by Jay Smith, a stamp dealer from Snow Camp, North Carolina specialising in Scandinavian material, and some of his ideas are also included here.

The Original Article

Since the early 1990's, a problem has been encountered in removing self-adhesive stamps from paper. Old fashioned soaking in luke-warm water does not work since the paper manufacturers no longer include the water-soluble layer in their products. The result is that soaking in water does either nothing to release the stamp from the paper or the ink flakes off if the stamp has been left in the water for too long a period of time.

An article in the October, 2010 issue of *The American Philatelist* seems to have come up with a solution this problem. Their article talks about Bestine, a solvent, which is a hydrocarbon containing Heptane. The long-term use of this product raises the question of safety and the product is somewhat hard to find, being available mainly in art supply stores. An alternative to Bestine is discussed and while still a solvent and flammable, is a non-aerosol, natural product with a citrus scent. Here is what you need:

- A can of Pure Citrus (found in the air freshener section of your supermarket)
- A paper towel
- Talcum Powder

Clip the stamp off the envelope leaving at least 1/4 inch of envelope all around

Turn the clipping over and spray sparingly with the Pure Citrus

Turn the clipping over and bend or roll slightly (just until one corner of the stamp is released)

Slowly peel the stamp off the paper (the adhesive will be on the stamp)

Dip your finger in the talcum powder and rub it on the entire back of the stamp

The stickiness will disappear and your stamp is ready to mount in your album

Before this method was discovered, the suggested procedure was to leave 1/4 inch of paper around the stamp and mount the whole clipping in your album. This led to too much bulk on the album pages because many of the modern stamps are self-adhesive. This product is used by Home Depot employees to remove sales stickers from products in their store.

I personally removed on stamp from yellow paper and there was no transfer of colour to the stamp. Removing stamps from red, green or blue paper should be done carefully or remove a damaged stamp from paper of those colours just to see if there is any transfer of colour as

often happens during soaking in water. There is also a Vanilla-scented air freshener and it may work as well but the article seemed to focus on the citrus scented product.

[Note: I have not tested this method and would suggest that you experiment first with an inexpensive stamp! Editor]

Later member John Boykett, offered some more thoughts on this issue:

The UK Post Office has made it virtually impossible, so I cut around close to the stamp. For Australia I generally have no trouble. I use warm water and leave the stamps soaking for some time, even overnight. There is some variation in the glue used – some peel off more easily than others. It is vital to let stamps and paper get soaked through. It is easy to lift a corner by careful bending, then you carefully peel the stamp off, leaving the film of adhesive on the paper. If it stops peeling easily soak it some more- even overnight. If any remnants of adhesive are still on the stamp, gentle rubbing will roll it off, providing the stamp is still wet. Yes it is a bit tedious but after a bit of practice I have found that it works well, and you don't have all those chemicals!

Still later I asked for further input from any other members with experience in this area to give us more tips, and I did observe that there may be no universal solution to the problem since self-adhesive stamps for one country may need particular treatments that are not applicable to issues from some other countries. So far I have not received any other advice from our members but if anyone can now give us further information that would be helpful. Similarly, Jay Smith has asked for feedback from his email list and here is his update on what he has received so far.

I very much appreciate the several interesting and informative replies I have received on this subject. What I expected to be relatively simple is turning out to be a lot more complicated than I thought. I need to do additional research myself before potentially spreading bad or untested information.

The challenge of this subject is that the processes can involve using dangerous chemicals and can potentially cause immediate or long-term damage to stamps. All of the removal methods involve using solvents to loosen the adhesive, but we really don't know the long-term effects of those solvents on stamps' paper, adhesive, inks, postmarks, etc. There have been chapters in the life of philately that some extremely bad ideas (products) were used to display or store stamps. I won't call out product names here, but I think we have all seen collections that have been virtually destroyed by "modern" products that came into use from the 1940s through the 1980s. Time will tell about the products being used today. I am concerned that the chemicals necessary for removing self-adhesive stamps from paper will similarly cause long-term damage. I need more, time and information to sort out information and my thoughts on this subject.

The most obvious solution is to collect the stamps on covers, but since many stamps come to us already cut from covers, that is not always possible. Also, some types of "covers" (such as packages) don't lend themselves to convenient collecting. The second-most obvious and potentially safest solution of all is to NOT remove the stamps from paper. Simply trim closely, but not too close, and mount the item. Because of the weight and bulk of on-piece stamps it is probably necessary to use a stamp mount for secure mounting. That is what a lot of people are telling me that they do.

However, not removing stamps from paper is not always practical from a collecting standpoint. For example, high-denomination stamps on Priority Mailboxes, stamps on padded mailers, or stamps which were slightly overlapped when they were affixed to the envelope or package (thus you can't trim out individual stamps without destroying other stamps).

And to further earn my badge of negativity, we really don't know what will happen to these self-adhesive stamps over the next hundred-plus years if left on paper. There have been different kinds of adhesives, papers, and "systems" used; they will likely age differently. While we can hope that the disaster that was the first U.S. self-adhesive stamp (1974 10 cent "Peace on Earth" Christmas stamp) won't be repeated, we just don't know how these adhesives will age. Will they ooze? Will they discolour? Will they harden and lose their adhesive qualities and fall off (something that all cover collectors should be concerned about)? Thus we may be facing a situation where it might be better to remove stamps from paper than to leave them on pieces of paper. We just don't yet know.

Advice to Non-Collectors for Protecting A Stamp Collection

Jay Smith regularly offers advice on a whole range of topics, and here is one of his recent pieces that we all need to read.

Fairly often I hear from somebody who has inherited a stamp collection (and has considered selling the collection) and who decides to give the collection to a non-collector relative. Sometimes this is just "passing Grandpa's collection down in the family". Other times, the recipient of the collection has some (often unrealistic) hope that the collection will greatly increase in value if they just hold on to it for a few more years.

I look upon this situation as a possibility that the new owner of the collection will actually become a stamp collector. That would be the best outcome of all! However, when that does not happen, the collection is usually improperly stored and soon forgotten. When the collection is again brought to light, it often has significantly degraded, especially in humid climates.

To attempt to protect collections from damage and preserve the stamps for future generations of collectors, I give the following advice to new owners.

- 1) Books, folders, albums, etc., **MUST** be stored UPRIGHT, like books on a shelf (even if they are in a box). Otherwise stamps are more likely to start to stick in the books and be ruined. Storing items flat, and especially under pressure, is one of the greatest causes of ruining mint stamps.
- 2) A stamp collection **MUST** be kept in a fully climate-controlled situation, preferably with **FREE AIR FLOW** in the area. **NOT** in a closet. And preferably on shelves (but not around pets), not in sealed boxes. It is also very helpful if the air is filtered to limit the amount of dust that falls on the collection. (Dust can lead to "infection" by the fungus that cause "foxing" or "toning", and also the development of mildew.)
- 3) Never store a collection directly on the floor (even if in a "dry" area; moisture travels up

through floors). If it must be kept in boxes on a floor, then put something, at least 2 inches thick and preferably with some airflow, under it. This could be empty boxes, Styrofoam chunks from packing materials, etc., ... anything to keep it off the floor. (This will also reduce the possibility of damage from water leaks.)

4) Never store a collection in an attic, basement (even if climate controlled), garage (!!NEVER), or part of the house that is not constantly climate controlled.

5) Avoid storing a collection, even if in a bookcase, against an outside wall (due to higher humidity and greater temperatures changes).

6) Be extremely cautious about storing a collection in a safe. Most modern "consumer grade" safes actually contain a type of "mud" in the walls of the safe. If in a fire, the moisture in the "mud" is expelled into the interior of the safe, reducing the damage to documents -- but ruining stamps. Because of this moisture in the "mud", over time under NORMAL circumstances, the moisture from the "mud" can make its way into the interior of the sealed safe causing all the mint stamps to stick to the albums or each other. (If you want to test this for your safe, put a recording [i.e. max & min] humidity sensor inside the sealed safe. Such max/min sensors can be purchased for less than \$20 and are useful all around the house.) Also, being in a safe can result in mildew growing around/on the stamps. Just last month I examined what had been a very nice collection that had lost over \$5000 of value because of such in-safe humidity damage.

7) Stamp collections kept in homes in which somebody smokes suffer both odour and physical/chemical damage -- sometimes resulting in greatly reduced value.

If you know somebody who owns a stamp collection but has, or may soon, put it in storage, please pass this information along to them. For the protection of your own collection if something should happen to you, please consider printing out this information and putting it with your collection AND with your "important estate documents".

Remember, we are only the temporary custodians of our stamps!

A Way You Can Increase the Value of Your Collection When it is Sold

Again from Jay Smith, some helpful advice, mainly on soaking stamps

If your collection includes used stamps, your collection can have more value when it is sold if the used stamps do not have large hinge remnants. This is particularly true for stamps worth more than a dollar and especially for older stamps. Furthermore, if you remove hinge remnants soon after you purchase stamps, you will have years of enjoyment of nicer looking stamps. This reminds me of the situation in which a person is preparing a home for sale; the person spends days cleaning and painting. Looking upon their (now) much nicer looking home, the person wonders "why did I not do that years ago so that I could enjoy it?" The same is true of a stamp collection; improve it for your enjoyment.

If you (carefully) soak the accumulated hinge remnants off of used stamps, they will be more desirable to a potential buyer, whether that is a collector or a dealer. Furthermore, soaking just a few old stamps can turn the soaking water an ugly brownish/yellowish colour ... and

your stamps will look a lot brighter. It is amazing how dirty stamps can get!

A used stamp with hinge remnants invites potential buyers' concerns that there could be a defect hiding under that hinge remnant. If the buyer is a dealer who plans on putting the higher-value stamps into stock, the dealer may be concerned that his/her potential buyers will not purchase (or not be willing to pay as much for) a used stamp with a hinge remnant on it. However, most dealers just do not have time, nor the labour resources, to soak hundreds of stamps just to be able to put them into their stock.

As a dealer, I face this problem on a daily basis. I don't have time to soak, dry, and press hundreds of used stamps, and my staff is already very busy with many other tasks. Yet, because used stamps with hinge remnants may have hidden faults, it is not acceptable to me to put them into my stock until they are soaked. I would not want one of my clients to receive such an item, soak it him/herself and discover a problem. (In fact, some dealers won't accept the return of a stamp that has been soaked [after being purchased] because theoretically a problem might have been caused by the soaking process.) If a dealer offers you a used stamp with a big hinge remnant on it, it is completely appropriate for you to ask the dealer to soak the stamp and re-offer it to you. (Exceptions include stamps with aniline inks.)

Collectors of mint stamps may be proudly thinking "I don't have that problem!" Well, you potentially do have such a problem in terms of mint stamps with hinge remnants; it is just that if you do have such stamps, there is nothing you can (or should) do about them. It is too risky to try to pry hinge remnants off any stamp. It is also a bad idea to try to humidify the stamp and "lift" the hinge remnant -- you may end up with a stamp with disturbed gum (sometimes even visible from the front) or a future potential buyer may be concerned that the stamp is re-gummed, not just with disturbed gum.

You might not think that excess hinge remnants on used stamps is much of a problem. However, surprisingly, quite a few of the collections I buy contain used stamps with several layers of hinges on them, causing the stamps to have a curved or warped appearance in the album.

NOTE: Modern self-adhesive stamps are beyond the scope of this article. I welcome your tips, tricks, and suggestions for dealing with them.

When soaking used stamps to remove hinge remnants, there are a few caveats and tricks to keep in mind:

- If the hinges will release in cold water, use cold water. The warmer the water, the greater the possibility of damage to the stamp's ink, the cancellation's ink, or the physical stability of the paper itself. Cold water will take longer; be patient.

- It is not unusual for a properly used stamp to still have some gum on the backside. Sometimes it popped off the envelope or perhaps it was just incompletely soaked the first time. Furthermore, there are many stamps with proper, but "favour", cancellations that are not as desirable if the stamp still bears gum. Lastly, if a (used) stamp still has gum that could have been soaked off, there is always the possibility that it will somehow get stuck after being placed in the album, and then potentially damaged when it is later removed from the album. In my opinion, it is usually appropriate to remove all the gum as long as you are not risking damaging the stamp (see below regarding soluble inks). [Exception: CTO

stamps from P.R. China should NOT have their gum removed.]

- NEVER "rub" the backside of a stamp. You can very gently "wipe" material off the back, but there is a fine line between "wiping" and "rubbing". Too often rubbing damages the paper surface. What I do is, after the stamp has been soaking for an ample amount of time, place the stamp face down on the heel of my palm and use the side of a long/smooth (NOT spade-tip) stamp tongs to "wipe" or "scrape" excess hinge material or gum off the stamps. (This takes some practice and can easily damage a stamp, thus practice on stamps that are expendable.) I then soak the stamp for a couple more minutes and "wipe" again.

- Do NOT soak stamps printed with aniline inks (soluble in water). A stamp with even slightly dissolved ink is worth far less than a stamp with large hinge remnants. For example, certain early red U.S. stamps and certain early red or green British stamps are in this category. (In some cases, such as the green British stamps, the soluble ink was used as a deterrent against attempts to wash cancellations off of stamps.) Some or most of these stamps are best left on pieces of the envelope!

- Do NOT soak stamps that have cancellations that have soluble ink. This is difficult to know in advance, but I have learned from experience that if I have a large group of stamps all with the same type of cancellation (a problem I have sometimes seen in modern used Danish stamps), to TEST-soak a couple examples before trying to soak a large group of them.

- Do not soak any more stamps than you can get out of the water within a few minutes. Do not leave stamps in the water any longer than necessary. If you don't have time to complete the project, don't start it.

- It is perhaps even more important to allow enough time to fully dissolve, or at least greatly loosen, the adhesive. NEVER try to pry or peel a hinge or paper off the back of a wet (or dry) stamp. That will almost always end in philatelic disaster. Unless the stamp adhesive is unusual, the hinge or adhesion will eventually easily come off.

- Use fresh, clean water for each group you soak. When soaking old stamps, I use fresh water for EVERY batch and with NOT more than 10 stamps in a batch. The dirt and dissolved gum from one stamp WILL at least partially redeposit on other stamps. Similarly, if you are soaking stamps off envelope paper, the chemicals in many papers (especially coloured papers) can affect everything in the batch.

- If there is any dissolving of stamp inks or postmark inks, these will very likely stain any other stamps in the batch. For this reason, small batches are better. If I want to soak 50 old stamps and if I am in a hurry, I will likely divide them into five different groups in five containers and start each group 3-5 minutes apart. If one group develops a staining problem, at least it is limited to that container.

- If you are soaking modern stamps and you are confident that you have everything under control, you probably just have not yet had enough bad experiences. There is NO reason to be confident! If you are not a little nervous about it, you are not doing it right!

- If any stamps are on coloured paper, or if you have any concerns about stamp inks or cancellation inks, soak them separately. You can get very cheap and clean short drink glasses or coffee mugs at a thrift store and have 20 different items soaking in 20 different

containers. TIP: Lay down a cloth towel under the containers to catch the inevitable drops/spills of water.

- For larger on-paper items, or for larger batches if I am feeling brave, I use photographic dark room developing trays. They have a patterned bottom, to promote settling to the bottom, and a pour spout in one corner. Such trays are inexpensive but be sure to use NEW trays that have never had chemicals in them.

- Unless you live alone and thus won't get yelled at for spilling stamp soaking containers, I suggest using low-height, broad-bottomed, heavy-weight containers. If you use something taller or that is prone to being knocked over... they WILL be knocked over. The containers MUST be extremely clean -- do NOT use anything that has contained food (because of the oils) unless you are absolutely sure it is oil-free and clean.

- Also, unless you live alone, do NOT use a sink or bathtub for soaking. Beyond the obvious problem of soaps, oils, and other contaminants on the surface of such a fixture, you will be in big trouble if you stain the sink or tub. My favourite story is from a friend by the name of Michael (he knows who he is) who had the brilliant idea to soak a large bag of Hong Kong revenue stamps in the family's (only) bathtub. There were at least several thousand small pieces of paper bearing stamps. What he did not think about was that often revenue cancellations very easily dissolve in water and that such cancellations are often red or violet or magenta. In addition to not getting the stamps out of the bathtub fast enough, thus preventing everybody in the family from taking a bath or shower for two days, he PERMANENTLY STAINED the bathtub a magenta colour! Bathtubs can be replaced, but they are costly. However, more importantly to us philatelists, that same staining permeated all those thousands of revenue stamps, making them virtually worthless. If he had done the soaking in cold water, quickly, a few stamps at a time, in a glass or similar container, he would not have had any of those problems. While this incident did not cause a divorce, it definitely did not help the relationship with his wife.

Soaking is only the first two-thirds of the process. The stamps must then be dried and flattened. My suggestions include:

- Use a two- or three-stage drying process. This takes time, but it is important for getting the best results. You can scale these up or down depending upon whether you are working on a couple stamps or a couple thousand stamps at a time.

- It is important that stamps NOT be allowed to dry in an uncontrolled, unflattened situation. When it is wet, stamp paper can physically change its shape and features. Allowing stamps to dry without being flattened will often result in an irregular, warped, appearance that often cannot be flattened out without repeating the entire soaking process; sometimes the warping damage is permanent.

- It is important to know if any of the stamps still have any adhesive on them. Sometimes you simply cannot safely remove 100% of the adhesive when soaking. If you have any such concerns, to avoid sticking, you must closely monitor the stamps as they are drying and very frequently move them to fresh drying materials. For such items, I use "facial tissue" (i.e. unscented and untextured) and I move the stamps to a fresh area of the tissue every 30-60 seconds! (If they do stick to the tissue, the tissue can be almost instantly removed with a small amount of moisture.)

- For more typical stamps, first place the stamps on a highly absorbent material to drain. I use two layers of clean (unprinted!!!) paper towels then the stamps, then two more layers, etc. Sometimes I will end up with a stack 3-4 inches high. Because paper towels are usually textured, NEVER press them; you will push that texture into the stamps. I typically have the stamps in this "sandwich" for one to two hours. (When I am done with this step, I spread the papers out around the house, but not on wood furniture, so that they will dry for re-use and not become mildewed. (If anything becomes mildewed, it must be discarded.)

- Then, while the stamps are still slightly damp, I move the stamps into proper made-for-purpose stamp or photograph drying books. (If I have any concerns about some stamps still having adhesive, I use a different process as noted above.) After such drying books have been used a few times, the pages can become "wavy" or they may develop tiny mildew spots. Be sure you are using areas of the pages that are flat or can be pressed flat. If there are any mildewed spots, they need to be cut out of the page or the page must be removed. [After each batch/use, the book must be dried standing open with the pages fanned out; sunlight exposure may be helpful.] If such a book is still in good shape after 20-30 uses, you are doing well. Drying books are a consumable supply; order several at a time. Do not use any parts or pages that are stained or mildewed. I like the books that alternate blotter pages with smooth-side pages. The smooth-side pages help to avoid sticking (as long as you put the backside of the stamp toward the smooth-side page).

- I usually put several large, heavy books on top of each stamp-drying book. Do not stack up multiple stamp-drying books. Do not put an in-use stamp drying book on a wood surface that you care about. It is important not to leave the stamps in these books too long because otherwise you WILL develop mildew problems.

- After a few hours or a day, I remove the stamps from the drying books. Modern stamps will probably be done at point. Early stamps will probably be dry by now, but they may benefit from additional pressing. For pressing I use a "stamp press", which looks like a miniature version of a bookbinding press or ancient printing press or an evil torture device for squishing fingers. White Ace made a very good, but inexpensive, stamp press; they are no longer in business, but you can find used stamp presses in online auctions. (Sometimes I have used ones available, but not at this moment; I generally have 3-4 of them in use at any one time). I place the stamp between smooth, clean layers of facial tissue (always unscented and untextured); that "sandwich" is placed between layers of blotting paper and then into the press. The benefit of the facial tissue is that it can be more easily removed from the stamp if there is any sticking; also you won't have to (as often) replace the blotting paper.

While these kinds of tasks will seem to some like a lot of bother, others will find it excellent "therapy". It can be quite satisfying and can make a collection of used stamps look a lot more attractive.

Lastly, I am a proponent of stamp mounts, for all stamps, not just for stamps being collected in mint, never hinged condition. Stamp mounts can help to prevent soiling of stamps and prevent abrasion of the stamp surface, etc. They also avoid use of hinges which will build up in layers over the decades. We are only the temporary custodians of our stamps; anything that we can do to protect them will be appreciated by future generations of collectors.

Safer Hinging

Jay Smith has also given some sound advice on the basic topic of hinging stamps.

Applying hinges to mount stamps in albums is a typical method used by many collectors. Hinging stamps is never completely "safe", but there are safer methods. If only for long-term preservation reasons, I do not recommend using hinges for either mint stamps (even if already hinged) or scarcer used stamps, but this article is not about that debate. Today I am discussing only some aspects of how to apply hinges if they are going to be applied. Another time we can discuss the brands of hinges and techniques for safer removal of hinged stamps from album pages.

My motivation for bringing up this topic is a sad situation I experienced recently. A life-long collector contacted me a few months ago about selling part of his worldwide collection. He had already sold sections of the collection by various methods but was not very pleased with the result. He had already offered many stamps in a stamp society's sales circuit books. Unfortunately, he was not having very much success selling in the circuit books and did not know why. As a result, he asked if I would be interested in buying what he had. (For our stock I buy collections of ALL types and sizes; U.S., Worldwide, and of course Scandinavia.)

The collector sent me some "better" individual items from a variety of countries. He collected mint stamps of the world to 1940, so there was a potential for identification problems, quality problems, and gum problems -- unfortunately he had some of all of those problems. However, we got things worked out to his satisfaction.

He then sent me two groups of circuit books: 1) Scandinavian countries, mostly containing used stamps that he had acquired when he bought a collection that contained other stamps he wanted. This group were all RETIRED circuit books from which sales had only averaged a very unsatisfactory 10-15% of items (by value)! 2) French Colonies and related areas, all mint stamps, in a couple dozen circuit books. Again, there were the usual identification, quality/defects, and gum problems, plus a couple early fake overprints. These books had not yet been sent to the society for circulation. However, what both sets of books had in common was HINGING...

A high percentage of the stamps in these books WERE STUCK TO THE PAGES BECAUSE OF HOW THEY WERE HINGED.

The most likely reason that the retired Scandinavian books experienced such poor sales is because of the hinging / stuck stamps. Any experienced collector that encounters stuck stamps in a circuit book will NOT attempt to lift them. The old rule "you break [thin] it, you buy it" applies here. Thus I suspect that most people who saw those books quickly realized that the problem existed for many of the stamps and thus just skipped the rest of the book. That is what I would do. Life is too short to fight with stuck stamps in a circuit book.

The French Colonies books had not yet been seen by anybody but me. I like to buy French Colonies (and the colonies of all other countries). I was excited to see the nice early mint stamps... until I realized that a high percentage of them were stuck. My happiness turned to

great disappointment and frustration. I knew I had to call the owner and give him the bad news, which I knew he would not be pleased to hear.

So, what happened to cause the sticking? I spoke with the owner and he assured me that he had applied the hinges in the recommended manner (see Step 1) and that he did not realize that there was a problem. However, he may (?) have then put them onto the page too soon before the tab on the stamp had fully dried; he may have used excess moisture when applying the hinges to the page; he also applied some of the hinges at an angle and may have twisted some and pressed too hard.

The most-often (that I hear) recommended method of applying pre-folded hinges is:

STEP 1) Put the small tab on the stamp, with very sparing moisture, but wetting the tip of a small finger and touching that to the small tab of the hinge stamp. NOT by licking the small tab. Though the tab is small, try to keep the moisture away from the edges of the tab. (That will also help when it comes to hinge removal.) The small tab is placed on the back of the stamp, as close to the top as reasonably possible, but NOT touching the perforation teeth.

1a) It is VERY IMPORTANT to NOT put the hinge on the perforation teeth. The hinge should be close to the top to maximize the possible degree of freedom of movement in the "hinging action" when the stamp is lifted for inspection of the backside. [If the hinge is farther down the stamp, then the stamp cannot be easily lifted (without bending / creasing the stamp) for inspection.

1b) The stamp, with hinge applied, should be left out to dry for at least a minute or two. By the time you apply the hinges to ten stamps, it is probably the right time to go back and put the first stamp onto the page.

STEP 2) When attaching the already-hinged stamp to the page, there are some important "rules". First is the HOW, but also see STEP 3 regarding ANGLE of placement.

2a) Again with a small fingertip, lightly moisten a SPOT on the MIDDLE of the *LOWER* half of the large hinge tab. You want to avoid moistening all the way to the edge. If the hinge's adhesive is decent, just a small spot should be adequate. Moistening to the edge of the hinge sets up the possibility of excess moisture coming into contact with the gum of the stamp and causing the stamp to stick to the page.

2b) That moistened spot is on the LOWER HALF of the large hinge tab so as to facilitate greater (cantilevered) freedom of movement in the "hinge action" when somebody lifts the stamp for inspection. If attached at the upper half, then all the "hinge action" has to take place at the hinge's fold, which may be okay, but greatly limits the possibilities for viewing and it puts more stress on the hinge's adhesive (thus causing greater "pop off" of hinges).

2c) As long as the moistened spot is in the MIDDLE of the hinge and does not extend to the edge of the hinge material, then placement in the book can be done quickly by simply placing the stamp and then gently pressing it down to the page FOR LESS THAN A SECOND.

2d) Then IMMEDIATELY lift the stamp away from the page just enough (just a couple millimetres is enough) so that there is an AIR GAP between the stamp and the page -- so that

any excess moisture is not in contact with the stamp and if that quick little pressing action put any moisture on the stamp, the stamp is not in contact with the page. Over the ensuing 10-20 minutes as the moisture dries, the hinge should, all by itself, "tighten up" and become flat with the page.

PRO TIP: Some experienced users will have handy a pile of slips of paper about 25% larger than a stamp. When initially lifting the stamp away from the page, as just described above, slide a slip of paper between the stamp and the page, all the way up into the hinge area. This further ensures that the bottom 7/8-ths of the stamp is not in contact with the page while the moisture is drying. Some people will even put such a slip, much smaller, at the top as well. It seems like a lot of bother, but if it means avoiding future thinning (and ruining most of the value of) a \$25 stamp, you might consider it worth doing.

STEP 3: Angle of placement. One aspect of the owner's mounted stamps that I have not yet fully mentioned is that many of them either had the hinge placed on the stamp at an angle and/or the hinge was attached to the page at an angle and then he had twist it a little bit to straight out the stamp on the page. This causes two problems! a) A hinge that is not straight on the stamp will mostly defeat the "hinge action" when one tries to lift the stamp for inspection. b) The little twist just mentioned can expose moisture to the gum of the stamp and can result in the stamp sticking to the page.

This is not really a step by itself, but more of a broader discussion of how to do mounting tasks in such a way to make them more accurate, ergonomically easier, and reduce the risk of stamps sticking to pages.

First, one must recognize and accept that the human arm, wrist, hand, and fingers, do not naturally operate at right angles to a desk, table, or working surface. We were simply not built to work at a 90-degree angle to the object on which we are working. To do so requires that we turn or rotate some part of our body; that is both a waste of time and energy, and if done thousands of times, can cause ergonomic injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome, etc.

To demonstrate this, try an experiment: All you need is to sit at a desk or table, and have a mailing envelope (or similar shaped piece of paper), and a few self-adhesive mailing labels. Place the envelope on the working surface parallel to the edge of the working surface (i.e. just set it on the table, aligned straight with the edge of the table). Grasp a mailing label in your fingers (holding it as you would normally to apply it to the envelope) AND hold your arm and hand completely naturally and at rest, without any regard yet to placing the label on the envelope. Move toward placing the label on the envelope, but do NOT actually do so yet. Notice that you have had to slightly turn your fingers/hand/wrist/arm in order to make the label straight for application to the envelope. Now, still without having yet put the label on the envelope, go back to holding your arm and hand in a completely natural resting position above the envelope. This time first **ROTATE THE ENVELOPE** so that the angle of the envelope aligns with the angle of the label that you are holding. (The envelope is probably now at around a 30% angle from the edge of the table.) Now apply the label. The label is probably very close to straight on the envelope (or else the envelope needs to be rotated slightly more or less).

Over nearly 50 years, I have trained dozens of people in how to apply mailing labels. (100% of them were sure that they knew how to do it, and most were insulted that I thought they needed such remedial training, yet none of them were any good at it without training!) When

I am paying somebody by the hour to apply 10,000 mailing labels, not only do I need them to be efficient, but they will end up with considerable wrist or shoulder pain if they don't heed the training. [Additionally, to save more hours, the next step after applying the label, is to, in the same movement, slide, NOT pick up, the envelope in the same direction of movement as applying the label. Setup the height(s) of the working area, and the receptacle for the finished envelopes, in such a way that you don't have to pick up or tidy anything for at least 15 minutes. You will achieve a high degree of efficiency.]

The same concept is very appropriately and easily applied to hinging stamps into albums. Don't turn the stamp, don't rotate your fingers/hand/wrist/arm.... ROTATE THE STAMP to apply the hinge to the stamp and then in the next step ROTATE THE PAGE ON WHICH YOU ARE MOUNTING the stamp. Once you find the correct angles for each part of the task, you will discover that all the hinges and stamps are straight. No more angled hinges and no more twisting hinged stamps to make them straight on the page.

PRO TIP: Tape a piece of paper or cardstock to your desk surface or work area and draw the appropriately angled lines on it to guide placement of the stamp or page at the correct angle. It's that easy and it makes the entire process much more natural while avoiding ergonomic strain!

NOTES:

Where I have made reference to using the tip of a small finger, some other device might work as long as you can control it at least as precisely. Hands should always be freshly washed when handling stamps.

Also, it is much better to use water, preferably distilled water, rather than saliva. There can be things in saliva which can occasionally cause long-term problems and damage to stamps. However, if you use water, be sure that you can properly control it and not spill it; for example, use a sponge to wet the tip of your finger, instead of an open container of water. You just have to be very sure you can control the amount of moisture.

Stamp Colour

Finally Jay Smith considers the question of colour in stamps, a complicated issue.

I was recently involved in a bit of correspondence about stamp colours, including how best to compare the stamp you have to the various possible colour names listed in specialized catalogues (and sometimes varying naming in different catalogues).

The conversation then evolved into discussing how to best scan and view the colours of stamps. It all very quickly got extremely technical, including calibrating computer monitors, scanners, and colour computer printers if you want accurate colour rendering when printing.

This reminded me that the subject of colour is extremely complicated and yet we take it all very much for granted. In identical viewing circumstances, each of us may potentially view a single colour differently, we may view different single colours and combinations of colours differently, and we may also view them differently depending upon the viewing conditions

(for example, viewing on a back-lit computer monitor is very different from daylight, which is very different from fluorescent lighting, etc.).

With our "modern" emphasis on doing so many things online, it is worth pointing out that it is very difficult to make an accurate comparison of a colour example shown on a website and comparing it to a physical stamp illuminated by a desk lamp. That challenge is magnified further when we only have available to us one example of the possible colour shades of a particular stamp issue.

The subject as we philatelists discuss it is just scratching the surface compared to the conversations I monitor on a computer image editing program (Gimp) discussion forum. Those folks deal with colour at an extremely high level (colour space, bit depth, perceptual colour, gamma, etc.) while I struggle to just comprehend the basics.

Just the same, I attempt to understand what I need to know to provide the colour stamp images for our website. In the recent process of replacing our computer work-stations, we also replaced our scanners and are now using greatly upgraded versions of both our separate scanner software and our image editing program. It is normally best to change one variable of an equation at a time, but we had to change all four variables at one time and now we struggle to find the sweet spot that it had previously taken years to achieve.

Despite the challenges, colour is an aspect of philately that makes collecting all the more enjoyable.

I hope you have found these stamp tips helpful. If you want to make comments on any of these important issues please get in touch. Also, if you would like to have advice on any other philatelic questions please let me know and I will try to find out more for you.

John McKay, Editor