



## My Topic

### A Collaborative Column

#### Pat Morgan: Eclectic Philately

It had been nearly a lifetime since Pat Morgan actively collected stamps. Sure, like so many other collectors, he had been into the hobby as a kid, but the demands and distractions of life had drawn him away. When he was ten years old, his grandfather passed away. It was when his grandmother gave him his grandfather's collection that Pat got interested in stamps. He began by collecting US issues. But, as many of us can say, his collecting interests took a back seat to developing a career – from camera shop clerk (he was an aspiring photographer), to technical illustrator to manager with IBM – and raising a family. Along the way, Pat earned his MBA and became very involved with the Susan G. Komen Foundation in Missouri, serving on the St. Louis Affiliates' board of directors for four years.

Then, in 2018, with retirement visible on the horizon, Pat joined the Greater Mound Stamp Club in St. Louis, Missouri (an ATA chapter, [greatermoundcity.org](http://greatermoundcity.org)). At that point he still thought of himself as a US collector (and still is) but found a whole new world with the range of topics to explore. Through club meetings and conversations with new friends, Pat was encouraged and inspired by the breadth of what his fellow club members collected. His interactions in the club have led Pat to collect a variety of atypical subjects which result in him calling his topic “eclectic philately.” The combination of Pat's intel-

lectual curiosity, his lifelong interest in a wide range of subjects and the unique concentrations of his fellow club members caused Pat to look at philately in a whole new light.

Inspired by Roger Grider, Pat collects non-paper postage stamps, those stamps printed on a variety of materials like the wooden issue shown in Figure 1. The novel approach to stamp substrates (“substrate” is the material onto which something is printed) may have started in the 1960s when Tonga issued stamps printed on gold foil. Since that inno-



Figure 1.

vation, stamps have been printed on steel, aluminum, silver, polyester, wood, silk and more. There are even stamps with rock and meteorite dust embedded in the substrate. *For a related topic, see “Timely Topics” on page 36.*

“Place Stamp Here” is another of Pat’s topics (Figure 2), this one influenced by Gary Hendren. This focus involves assembling a collection of covers that include various text and graphics indicating where a mailer is supposed to place the stamp. While often overlooked as payment and donation envelopes are employed for their original (or other) purpose, these inconspicuous diagrams often provide creative, poignant and even humorous instructions.

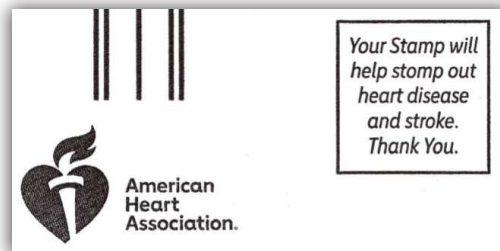


Figure 2.

In the running for the most bizarre topical focus is Pat’s category of “What Were They Thinking?” where he accumulates some of the most unusual examples of philately. Often based in satire, weird humor and maybe even irreverent illustrations, this topic assembles souvenir sheets, covers and a variety of peculiar examples from the philatelic world; all of which cause the average collector to wonder what someone was thinking when they created that item. The clearly unofficial sheet shown in Figure 3 is purportedly from Abkhazia which Wikipedia lists as “a partially recognized state in the South Caucasus, at the intersection of Eastern Europe and Western Asia.” While this topic does cause collectors to scratch their heads in amused confusion, the examples found in dollar bins and eBay listings do inspire chuckles and snickers.

In the realm of more convention topics, Pat also collects poster stamps of the 1904 World’s Fair (Figure 4). These cinderellas commemorate various aspects of the Louisiana Pur-



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Figure 3. What were they thinking?

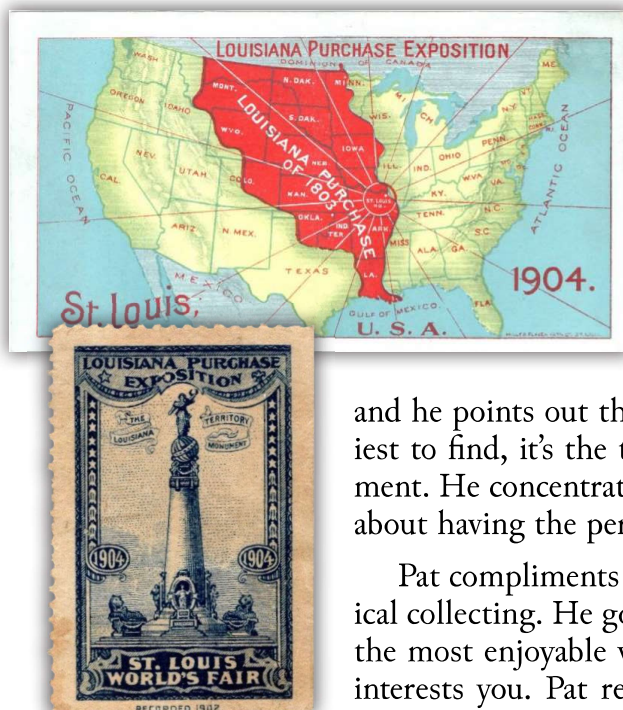


Figure 4.

chase Expo held in St. Louis, Missouri from April 30 to December 1, 1904.

Although not ordinarily considered a “topic,” Pat’s favorite collecting focus involves the work of cachet artists, Tom Mueller and Verna Mann. While one is an accomplished artist, the latter appears to have looked at philately as a way to make ends meet. Pat says he enjoys the research that goes into uncovering the artist’s story more than the actual covers. His articles on both artists have both been published in *First Days*, the journal of the AFDCS. Verna Mann was a fascinating person, not so much an artist, though. He tells how he is connected to Tom Mueller’s story as they were co-workers at McDonnell Douglas in the 1980s. Pat also conveys the importance of their relationship when he shares that they continue as friends today. The cover shown in Figure 5 bears a cachet that Tom Mueller painted of Pat and his wife Lesa. It is one of the most cherished items in his collection and carries special significance since Pat and Lesa met at a blood drive.


Like many other topicalists, Pat notes that most of the items in his eclectic collections are relatively inexpensive. He assembles his material in much the same way as other collectors and he points out that while his topics are not always the easiest to find, it’s the thrill of the hunt that provides the enjoyment. He concentrates on items with a story and doesn’t worry about having the perfect stamp to fill up an album.

Pat compliments ATA for doing a great job promoting topical collecting. He goes on to say he thinks topical collecting is the most enjoyable way to assemble a collection of what truly interests you. Pat relayed the story of how Dale and Andrea Smith of StampSmith were the first to help his wife Lesa when she was trying to decide what to collect. With their help, she settled on accordion (Concertina) stamps and then helped develop the ATA’s accordion checklist (List #1510).

Pat also mentioned that his collections might not be what most ATA members think of as “topical” collections. But he emphasizes how the organization and the members he has met have inspired him to think outside the box of traditional philately and collecting. He likes to find topics with very few philatelic examples, like PEZ and Tornadoes (see “Timely Topicals” in *Topical Time*, January-February 2023) and enjoys sharing those finds with other collectors.



Figure 5. Tom Mueller painted this cachet showing the author and his wife, Lesa Morgan, also a topical collector.

Today Pat is retired and, in addition to philately, enjoys woodworking, doing handyman work, helping out with a couple of websites ([greatermoundcity.org](http://greatermoundcity.org) and [posterstampcc.org](http://posterstampcc.org)), hunting, fishing, golfing, and “hanging out with my wonderful wife.” He also proudly mentioned both his daughters and his grandchildren. Many thanks to Pat Morgan for sharing his topic of eclectic philately. 

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