

# Scribblings

...from the Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library



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March - April, 2004

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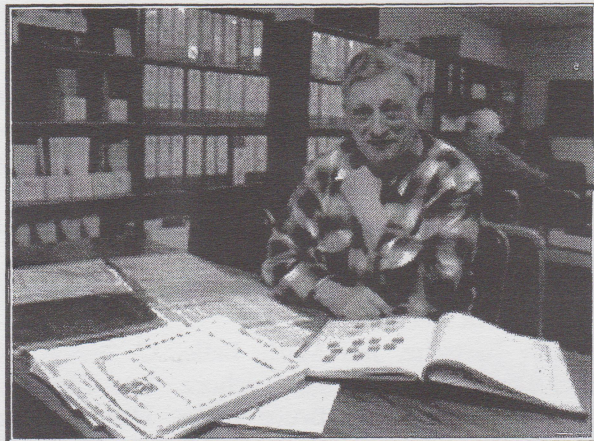
E-mail - info@rockymountainphilatelibrary.com

Ellengail Beuthel, Librarian

A multimillion dollar stamp scam...

## ADVENTURES WITH A CROOKED STAMP COMPANY

by Phil Purcell, RMPL Volunteer



Phil Purcell with items he saved from the 1950s when he bought stamps and invested in what turned out to be a pyramid scheme.

"PROFIT FROM STAMPS—WITHOUT RISK," the flyer said. And since my father had just won £20 in the Irish Sweepstakes, I volunteered to give him half the profits if he would let me invest his winnings. He was a bit skeptical to say the least, but he let me have the check and I sent £20 off to Shanahan's Auctions in Dublin, Ireland.

I had bought a few lots through Shanahan's Auctions in 1958 when the surefire "investment" opportunity was presented. It was my first serious foray into stamp collecting as an adult, and I won lots from the U.S., Great Britain and South Africa. The South Africa collection cost me \$30, a figure which may not sound like much now, but it was quite a bit for someone with a \$425 a month

income in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

As it turned out, my introduction to buying at auction landed me in the middle of one of the biggest stamp scams ever perpetrated. Something didn't seem quite right at the time, so I saved all of my invoices, purchases, auction catalogs and other paper work thinking it might make an interesting story some day.

The whole saga is long and complicated. The bibliography in the box on the right contains references that give all the details, and all the literature is available in the Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library.

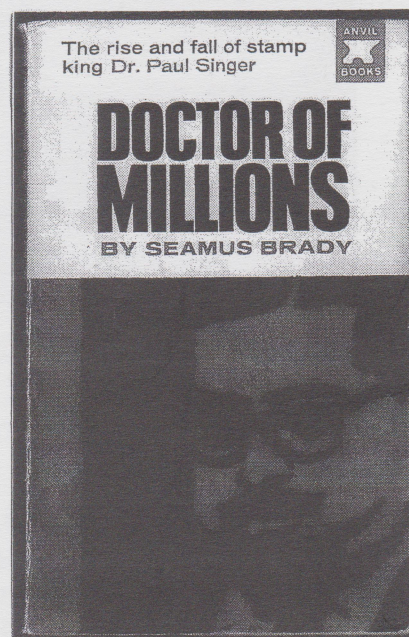
The short short version is that a promoter and hustler named Dr. Paul Singer managed to start a stamp company that quickly threatened to become the largest in the world. He built it with a classic pyramid scheme, using new money to pay off interest on old money. Singer claimed profits from many unsold lots he insisted did sell.

The Shanahan stamp empire collapsed after a burglar stole a million dollars worth of stamps one night and there was no insurance. Investors lost confidence and asked for their money back. Those investors and Singer's creditors were owed more than \$5,500,000. Singer was sentenced to jail after a fraud trial, but he managed to win acquittal on a technicality after a second trial.

Singer and his wife disappeared the day after the acquittal, probably with millions stashed in foreign bank accounts.

Two other parts of the story make it interesting for stamp collectors. A Scott No. C3a inverted Jenny was part of the burglary loot, one of six Jennys from the discovery pane of 100 reported stolen over the years. Its fascinating story is given in The Inverted Jenny: Mystery, Money, Mania by George Amick.

Also, just before the burglary, Singer made a deal with one of the greatest stamp collectors of all time, M. Maurice Burrus, to sell his collection. Singer was going to



### Literature about Dr. Singer's stamp fraud:

- Brady, Seamus. *Doctor of Millions* (Anvil Books, 1965)
- George Henhoeffler, "Singer of the Shanahans - 'The Case of the Fabulous Fat Man,'" *American Philatelist* (May, 1975): 417-424.
- Shanahan's Stamp Auctions, Ltd.*, (auction catalogs)
- Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* "Burrus Collection to be Auctioned by Shanahan's," (May 15, 1959): 153, 156.
- Bierman, Stanley M., M.D., *The World's Greatest Stamp Collectors* (Frederick Fell Publishers, no year): 261-263.
- Amick, George, *The Inverted Jenny* (Amos Press, 1986): 186-189, 206.

pay six million dollars for the collection, which eventually brought eight million when sold by other auction houses. I have wondered if Shanahan's ... and Dr. Paul Singer ... might still be in business today if there had not been a burglary. The Burrus sales would have given Singer a big boost.

I was not one of the losers in Singer's investment scheme. In fact, I received £22 pounds, 10 pence in return for the £20 pounds I sent. The flyer had said, "And remember, your Capital is absolutely guaranteed and will be returned to you intact, whatever happens." Thousands of other investors found out the hard way just what Singer's "guarantee" was worth.

Later, I received a letter from the sheriff over there. It said that if I had a claim, I should get it in. I was one of the lucky ones, and had no claim. I survived one of the biggest stamp scams in history!

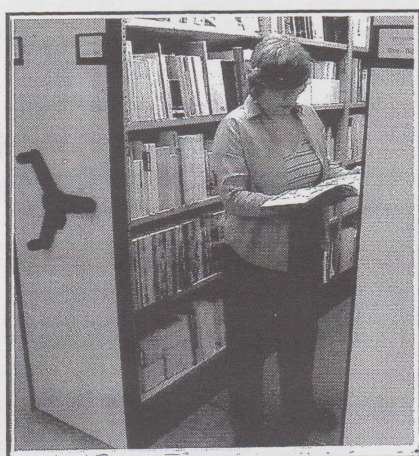
*Note: All of the invoices, correspondence and auction catalogs Phil saved are available for inspection at the RMPL.*



*Shanahan's letterhead shows Dr. Singer's flair for showmanship and a rich image.*

## News From the RMPL...

### SHELVES ON WHEELS



*Sheri Soraci browses in the library's new compact shelving in the back room.*

The library has 40 new bookcases .. on wheels. The compact shelving installation is complete in the back room and new shelves have increased available shelf space by about a third. At the current rate we are acquiring philatelic literature, the RMPL now has room for up to five years worth of donations.

When you get a chance, drop by and take a look. Turn the cranks, move the shelves around a bit.

You'll be surprised at how many shelves fit in such a small space.

The expansion has given the library a new lease on life and has made all the rooms seem brighter and bigger. There is definitely less "clutter."

The RMPL has always been a great place, but now it is even nicer for volunteers and visitors.

### SECOND SATURDAY AT THE RMPL

Attendance at the RMPL's Second Saturday programs has been setting records, and those who show up always seem to enjoy themselves.

Two more excellent programs are scheduled. On March 13th Jan Marie Belle will present "WWII Patriotic Covers of the U.S."

Then on April 10th Colorado postal history expert Erwin Engert will show "Early Corner Cards on Western U.S. Covers."

Please plan to attend and bring someone with you. The program and friendly atmosphere provide a good way to introduce someone to the library.

### THANK YOU FOR DONATIONS

Donations of literature and other philatelic material are part of the lifeline that keep the library healthy. We don't throw anything away. Literature that is duplicate to the collection on the shelves is sold to raise money for operating expenses. Stamps and other donations are sold or given away.

The following people have made contributions to the library in recent weeks:

Tim Bartsche, Jan Marie Belle, C. Benoit, Norm Camara, Dave Capra, Roger Cichorz, Ros Cleaver, Joe Crosby, Ward Crowley, Bruce Elkin, Harry S. Emily, Arthur J. Faix, Catherine Fechner, Bob Fiori, Norman Flowers, Jr., John & Estella Grigg, Eddie Hackstaff, Charles Klein, Harold Lord, Stan Luft, Dennis J. Lutz, M.D., Glenn Mallory, Mike Masselli, Dasa Metzler, Mike Milam and Carol & Bill Mobley.

Also, Vic Neas, Stephen Pacetti, Steve Peckar, William Plachte, Thomas Pollard, Richard Ruth, Roger Rydberg, Scandinavian Collectors Club, Jim Sherwin, Richard K. Smith, Colin Spong, Richard Thomas Philatelics, Mark Vainer, Jack Van Ens, Vi Weinman, George Wright and Matt Zieringer.

RMPL donors may deduct the fair market value of their items if they itemize deductions on their income tax.

### WEB MAKEOVER COMPLETE

The library's web page has a new look.

There are news articles, feature stories, and a new menu that takes advantage of the latest software available which makes it easy to navigate the site.

Also, one of Jack Willard's Colorado view postcards will always be on view on the main page. There are hundreds and hundreds of cards, and we'll change the one on display every few days to keep the it fresh and entertaining.

Our hat is off to webmaster Roger Rydberg for spending the time to bring our web technology into the 21st century.

Take a look and let us know what you think. The internet address is:

<http://www.rockymountainphilatelibrary.com>.



## **William S. Dunn** **1927 - 2004**

The Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library has lost one of its best friends. William S. "Bill" Dunn, one of the founders of the RMPL, passed away February 22, 2004.

He died from pneumonia following six months of treatment for lung cancer. He was 76.

Bill was born March 17, 1927 in Falls City, Nebraska. He joined the U.S. Coast Guard and served in the Pacific in WW II, then attended Nebraska Wesleyan University, graduating with a degree in chemistry. He was the Chief Chemist for the Colorado Department of Health for nearly thirty years.

He was the recipient of many honors for his work in environmental chemistry, petroleum identification and public health and held several patents for uranium processing.

Bill's service to the library was invaluable. He was on the Board of Directors and was the Secretary for ten years. More recently, he has been the Vice-president. Bill's leadership has assured that the RMPL has continued to grow and be the best possible resource for collectors in the Rocky Mountain Region.

He was extremely proud of his association with the library and was the unofficial ambassador wherever he went. He represented the RMPL at many stamp shows, and seemed to thrive on greeting people and helping them with questions about philately. He would spend the same amount of time with someone with a question about a stamp worth 3-cents as he would with someone with a cover worth \$300.00.

His passion and enthusiasm for stamp collecting was always on display. His helped countless people with his vast knowledge of stamps and postal history.

Bill was given the "Distinguished Philatelist Award" by the United States Philatelic Classics Society in 1998. He was an accredited national judge for the American Philatelic Society (Emeritus) and expertised coil waste issues for the Fourth Bureau and Washington-Franklin Issues for the APS.

He also reviewed the U.S. Liberty series and WW II Croatia for the Scott Publishing Co.

His most important national office was as president of the United States Stamp Society (formerly the Bureau Issues Association) from 1986 to 1992. He held memberships in 23 local and national stamp organizations.

Bill served as president of four local stamp clubs at various times and belonged to two others. He was president of the Rocky Mountain Stamp Show (formerly ROMPEX) in 1981 and 1982.

He was an exhibitor and speaker at local, regional and national exhibitions, and prepared slide shows on United States philately, Latvia and WW II Croatia.

Bill added his expertise as an editing assistant for "The Prexies" by Roland Rustad, Leonard Piszczkiewicz, Editor, and "U.S. Stamp Booklets," by Don Littlefield, Sam Frank, Editor.

His collecting interests included the two-cent carmine Washington stamps of 1922-1938, the Liberty Series of 1954-73, Colorado, Nebraska and the city of Denver postal history, machine cancellations, "funny looking things" (odd postal markings and frankings), Latvia, World War II issues of Croatia, and wet and dry printings of the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

In addition to his wife, Sue (Sprague) Dunn who lives at the family home in Denver, Bill is survived by a son, Lawrence A. Dunn and wife Anne, two grandchildren, a daughter, Diane, all of Denver, and a brother, Robert A. Dunn of Lincoln, Nebraska.

The family has asked that memorials be sent to the Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library, 2038 So. Pontiac Way, Denver, Colo.

## WEATHER WARNINGS

As we enter our snowiest months of the year (March and April), if weather is threatening or if there is a fresh snowfall of three or more inches, please call ahead if you plan to visit the library (303 759-9921). Sometimes the building is closed for the safety of our volunteers and patrons.

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

We are pleased to report that the following people joined the library in December and January:

Dr. Walter Figel, Jr., Castle Rock, CO

Collects U.S. and Russia

Joseph C. Hunter, Wheatridge, CO

Collects worldwide specializing in Asia

Ken Stone, Denver, CO

Charles J. LaBlonde, Colorado Springs, CO

WWII mail to/from Switzerland

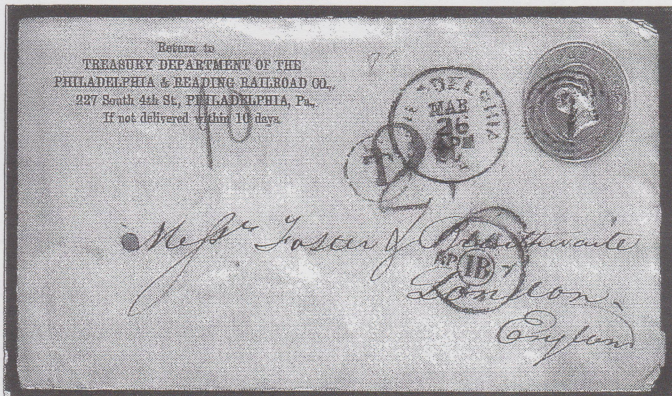
Red Cross mail to Geneva

Harold W. Churches, Denver, CO

Collects worldwide - regulars and "back of the book"

## POSTAL MARKINGS MYSTERIES

by Bill Dunn, RMPL Vice President



Several markings on this cover to London have left us scratching our heads. Can you help?

This cover was a donation to the RMPL and some previous owner or dealer marked it \$8.00. Why would it be worth so much? It was sent deficient in postage with a 2 cent postal stationery envelope instead of the 5 cent rate.

It was deficient by 3 cents. When doubled it should have been marked 6 cents due, shouldn't it? Why the "T" with a large "2"? And what does the number "10" (in blue, over the corner card) mean?

The round cancel with a prominent "IB" in the center is a puzzler, too. It also has "AP" to the left and a manuscript "7", which probably means April 7th, 1883 (see backstamp).

If you can figure this out, tell us. We will bring honor and recognition and fame and glory to you!



Backstamp on the cover to London showing it was received on April 7, 1883.

## SECOND SATURDAY

### SALE SALE SALE

### MARCH 13, 2004

### 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

The RMPL is going to hold a sale of duplicate and surplus material to raise money for operating expenses. Some of the material was discovered as we were cleaning out for the recent expansion.

Items available will include:

- Philatelic books (500+)
- Supplies, including stock pages, stock books, glassines, album pages, stamp albums (40+), mint sheet files, first day cover albums, stamp mounts (many 1000s), empty binders, cover protectors
- Several stamp collections
- (2) 2-Drawer black legal filing cabinets for \$20.00 ea.
- (2) Metal storage cabinets for \$15.00 ea.
- (4) Metal shelf units for \$20.00 ea.
- (1) Magazine rack for \$10.00

**PLEASE COME EARLY  
FOR THE BEST SELECTION!**

## NEW BOOKS

Here are a few of the new books which librarian Ellengail Beuthel has cataloged for the RMPL's main collection during the last two months:

### COLORADO AND WESTERN U.S.

Robert W. Richardson's Rio Grande - Chasing the Narrow Gauge. Hamburger House Publishing Company, 2002

It Happened in Colorado by James A. Crutchfield. Falcon Publishing, Inc., 1993.

Five Points Neighborhood of Denver by Laura M. Amuck. Arcadia Publishing, 2001.

### CHINA

Reprints published by the China Stamp Society:

China, Imperial Maritime Customs. Returns of trade and trade reports, 1905.

Descriptive Catalogue of the Postage Stamps Issued by the Maury Local Post by Juan Mencarini, 1897.

Descriptive Catalogue of the Postage Stamps Issued by the Honking Post Office by Juan Mencarini, 1898.

The Postage Stamps of China 1878 to 1883 by Juan Mencarini.

### CANADA

The Postal Stationery of Canada: A Reference Catalogue compiled by Nelson Bond. Published by Herman Hearts, Jr., 1953.

### JAPAN

United States and British Exchanges with Japan 1942-1943 by Michael E. Rigger. International Society for Japanese Philately, 2003.

### MEXICO

The Revenue Stamps of Mexico by Richard B. Stevens. Mexico-Elmhurst Philatelic Society International, 1968.

# What's happening at the RMPL...

*"Come and enjoy the activities."*

~~ Daily Hours ~~

Monday....10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Tuesday....10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Wednesday....10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Thursday....2:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Friday..... 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Saturday..... 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Closed Sundays and Holidays

## March, 2004

**March 3** - Meeting - Aurora Stamp Club  
6:30 PM Trading; 7:30 PM Meeting and Program

**March 6** - Meeting - 10:00 AM  
Scandinavian Collector's Club

**March 6** - Meeting - 2:00 PM  
TOPical Philatelists In Colorado

**March 10** - Meeting - 7:00 PM  
Denver Germany Stamp Club

**March 13** - 10:00 AM - 4 :00 PM  
Sale of the library's duplicate and surplus material

**March 13** - 9:00 AM  
**Second Saturday at the RMPL**  
Program by Jan Marie Belle  
"WWII Patriotic Covers of the U.S."

**March 13** - Meeting - 10:00 AM  
Mexico/Latin America Philatelic Group

**March 13** - Meeting - 2:00 PM  
Universal Ship Cancellation Society  
U. S. S. Colorado Chapter

**March 20** - Meeting - 1:00 PM  
Russia Study Group

**March 23** - Meeting - 7:30 PM  
Rocky Mountain Stamp Show Committee

**March 27** - Workshop - 10:00 AM  
RMSS/RMPL Exhibiting Workshop

**March 27** - Meeting - 1:00 PM  
China Stamp Society

## April, 2004

**April 3** - Meeting - 10:00 AM  
Scandinavian Collector's Club

**April 3** - Meeting - 2:00 PM  
TOPical Philatelists In Colorado

**April 7** - Meeting - Aurora Stamp Club  
6:30 PM Trading; 7:30 PM Meeting and Program

**April 10** - 9:00 AM  
**Second Saturday at the RMPL**  
Program by Erwin Engert  
"Early Corner Cards on Western U.S. Covers"

**April 10** - Meeting - 10:00 AM  
Mexico / Latin American Philatelic Group

**April 10** - Meeting - 11:30 AM  
Rocky Mountain Aerophilatelists

**April 10** - Meeting - 2:00 PM  
Universal Ship Cancellation Society  
U.S.S. Colorado Chapter

**April 14** - Meeting - 7:00 PM  
Denver Germany Stamp Club

**April 17** - Meeting - 1:00 PM  
Russia Study Group

**April 24** - Workshop - 10:00 AM  
RMSS/RMPL Exhibiting Workshop

**April 24** - Meeting - 1:00 PM  
China Stamp Society

**April 27** - Meeting - 7:30 PM  
Rocky Mountain Stamp Show Committee

## Monthly Stamp Show Schedule...

### March 20

BANAPEX 2004, Banana Belt Stamp Show, Buena Vista Community Center, 715 E. Main, Buena Vista, CO.  
Robert Hitpas, 802 W. 2nd St., Salida, CO 81201, (719) 539-3776

### March 26-27

COLORADO STAMP BONANZA, EmbassySuites, 7525 W. Hampden Ave. (I-25 at Hampden Ave., Exit 201, then go east). 20th Century Classics, Pat Dowling, (719) 598-7307, www.20thonline.com.

### April 3

COLORADO SPRINGS STAMP BOURSE, 6450 North Academy Blvd. (Exit I-25 at Academy Blvd., then go south).  
20th Century Classics, Pat Dowling, (719) 598-7307, www.20thonline.com.

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Ron Mitchell, Editor

The Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library is a chartered Colorado nonprofit corporation. Membership subscriptions over that for the annual regular membership, and donations of appropriate philatelic materials, are deductible for U.S. income tax purposes. The RMPL is an Internal Revenue Service designated 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

### RMPL Board of Directors

President: Ron Mitchell - Operations Manager: Don Beuthel - Vice-President: Bill Dunn - Secretary: Robert Brown - Treasurer: Robert Blatherwick - Members at Large: Jim Kilbane - Sergio Lugo - James L. Ozment - Maury Pautz - Steve Schweighofer - Jack Willard (Emeritus)