

Why I Joined ESPER

By Gloria Lu

Greetings fellow ESPER members. Stamp collecting was a wide-spread hobby for my grandparents' and parents' generations, and they passed down many of their collections to me. I opine that my generation that grew up during the 1980s was perhaps one of the last generations to write correspondence or simply pay the bills and post it via the mail on a regular basis. Although I am a life member of the American Philatelic Society, I stopped collecting during my college years, and eventually career, family, and graduate school obligations rose to the fore. In fact, over the last two years, I sold or gave away the bulk of the multiple collections I accumulated. It was simply too much material, and learning that no one I know has any interest in philately, it felt better to give away stamps to children as a supplemental treat to candy during Halloween, or to sell what was of interest to niche collectors seeking particular stamps or covers.

However, while reviewing all of the collections, I could not part with many covers and stamps bearing sentimental value to me, namely those acquired during visits to stamp shows with family members or my childhood teacher and mentor, or those created by stamp pen friends.

One of my grade school teachers remains dear to my heart, as she was an exemplary educator who was as thirsty for knowledge herself as she was in imparting it to her students. My teacher was an African American who, decades before she taught me, and along with her husband, an African-American doctor, ventured out to the West Coast from the Midwest after they completed their undergraduate and graduate degrees in the 1950s. My dear teacher passed away decades ago when I was thirteen years old, yet I still recall and strive to uphold the core values and lessons she molded into her many students. As she was a philatelist herself, and the U.S. Postal Service still maintained a Benjamin Franklin Stamp Club, our class enjoyed visits from a representative who provided stamp collecting materials and newsletters throughout the school year. Additionally, since my elementary school was located just a short bus ride away from the old longtime venue of San Francisco's annual WESTPEX stamp show, the Cathedral Hill Hotel (which has been torn down and will be replaced by a hospital), my very first visit to WESTPEX occurred as a classroom field trip. I credit my teacher for creating a philatelist in me.

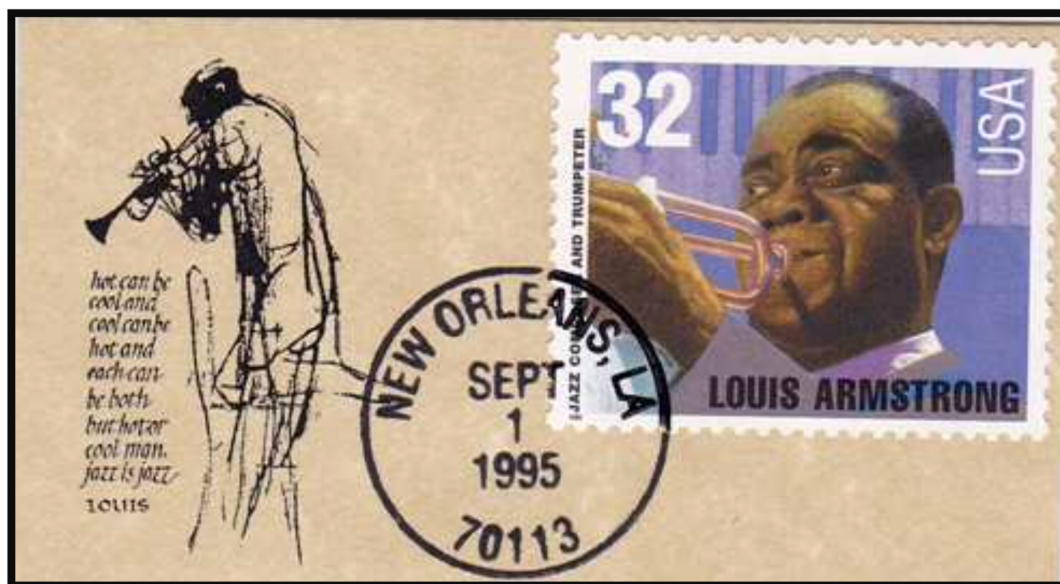
Fast forward to the present, and while disposing of most of my collection the past few years, I also read Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns*, which movingly chronicles several stories of African Americans and The Great Migration. It was then that I suddenly thought back to some of the life stories my teacher shared in passing but not in full detail. My teacher was born in the segregated South, but her parents moved their family north to Ohio where she was raised for most of her life, and then after completing a Master's in Education and teaching for several years in Michigan and Ohio, she and her husband moved to California. From that moment of reflection, and after looking at some of the stamped postcard souvenirs given to us students at my first Westpex show, I decided I would maintain a small collection of Hong Kong and early China stamps to honor my ancestors, as well as a new collection encompassing the USPS' BlackHeritage commemorative series and First Day Covers to honor my teacher and to learn more about African and African-American culture and history.

On that note, after winning a stamp essay contest in Linn's decades ago, a kind collector and FDC cachet artist by the name of Mr. Arthur Rosenberg forwarded a letter and some covers to Linn's to send to me. Mr. Rosenberg and I began a correspondence that lasted until my college years when I could no longer devote much time to collecting or correspondence. Throughout our time writing to each other, I was always embarrassed at the fact that Mr. Rosenberg was so generous in sharing his First Day Covers, but he insisted that it made him happy to share some of his handmade covers. I only later learned that Mr. Rosenberg passed away in 2006 at the age of eighty-six. Mr. Rosenberg spent many hours creating his own First Day Cover cachets, during a time when he used a color photo printer and sometimes a copy machine to reprint a picture onto thick card stock, then affixed the illustrations onto his covers to mail in for the cancellation. His miniature covers measuring 1 3/4" by 3 1/4" were always made in a small number, usually ten each, and those were hand-folded envelopes with the reprint of an illustration on the front, and hand-signed by him on the reverse. The other covers where he applied reprinted illustrations were rubber-stamped on the reverse with his initials "AR" in an artistic rendering. All of these covers by my

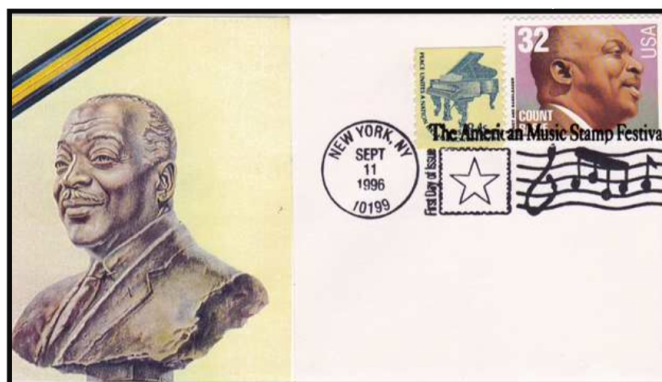
former “St. Louis connection” or “St. Louis friend,” as Mr. Rosenberg always signed off his letters to me, were some of the first to be organized into my new cover album.

Although ESPER is an APS affiliate, I found it via a google search, and am glad the content-rich website provided an immensely helpful start for my renewed collecting interest. Now I’m interested in learning about other ESPER members’ specific collecting interests, as at this time I’m only focused on U.S. stamps featuring African and African-American persons, subjects, and events.

A miniature Arthur Rosenberg First Day Cover for musician Louis Armstrong.



A Black Heritage stamp First Day Cover of Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., U.S. Scott #3121, with preceding Black Heritage stamps.



Mr. Rosenberg had a knack for combining other stamps that suited the stamp’s subject, such as adding U.S. Scott # 1615c stamp of a piano with the Count Basie stamp, U.S. Scott # 3096.



Similarly, for the Mighty Casey stamp he affixed other baseball players featured on U.S. stamps, including Jackie Robinson and Roberto Clemente.



Finally, Mr. Rosenberg added the U.S. Scott #1372 W.C. Handy stamp issued in 1969 to his First Day Cover of the Glenn Miller stamp from the Big Band Leaders series.