

Falling in Love with Stamp Collecting

By Yvonne Singley

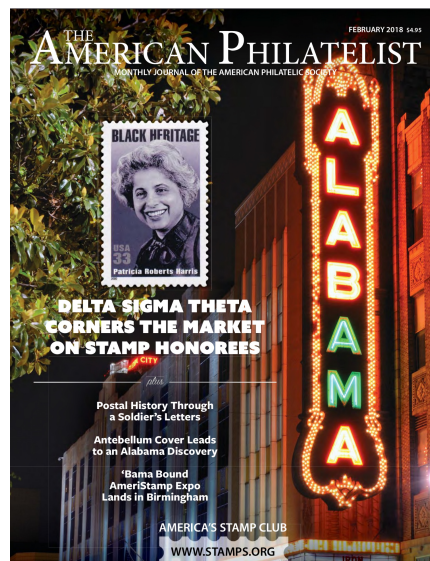


My husband, Elijah, grew up in Bessemer, Alabama, at a time when he was not allowed to use the public library because of segregation. Despite these constraints, he became a voracious reader, always seeking to get his hands on any items to read, including comic books, paperbacks, newspapers, advertising brochures, to name a few. Later in his life, his love for reading manifested itself in his university studies when he majored in library science and later while working as a librarian at Alabama State University (Montgomery, Alabama) and eventually at Lincoln Land Community College (Springfield, Illinois). After 39 years of marriage, I had become used to his routine visits to the Lincoln Public Library to

bring me reading materials which often were scantily reviewed. In February 2018, Elijah brought home an American Philatelic Society (APS) magazine with a cover picture of Patricia Harris on it, the first African-American woman named as an American envoy, a U. S. Ambassador to Luxembourg by President Jimmy Carter, and a member of Deltas Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. The front cover headline read “Delta Sigma Theta Corners the Market on Stamp Honorees.” After reading the article by Ms. Bernice Fields, I was awestruck, and to use an appropriate vernacular, “I was smitten.” Thirteen Delta women are honored on U. S. postage stamps, women whom I had always held in high esteem but did not realize that they were members of my sorority, or to be more correct, that I was a member of their sorority.

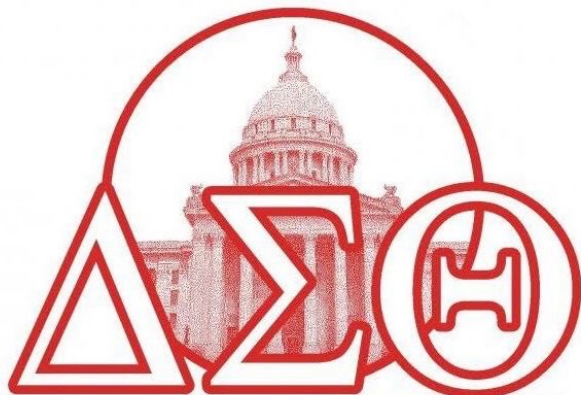
“What is the American Philatelic Society?” I asked myself. How can I learn more about this organization? Who is Bernice Fields? What was her inspiration to write about Deltas on U. S. stamps? How can I cultivate my interest, knowledge, and skills in stamp collecting? And more importantly, how can I share my interest in stamp collecting with my sorority sisters in the SpringfieldDecatur (Illinois) Area Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc? With these questions in mind, I proceeded to educate myself in the hobby of stamp collecting.

I contacted Bernice Fields, expressing an interest in stamp collecting as well as my desire to have her come to Springfield to present to Springfield and Decatur audiences her research about the African-American women commemorated on U. S. postage stamps. As we talked about her plans to come to Springfield, Ms. Fields began mentoring me. Over a period of months, she gave me resources to look up on the Internet and cautioned me about the different stamp vendors who were fair-minded dealers and others who might not be. She made me realize that appreciating a stamp collection is just as important as organizing and categorizing stamps. Admiring the beauty of stamps has an emotional and intellectual benefit to the collector.



Continuing my search for knowledge, I attended the APS show in Birmingham, Alabama, where I joined both the APS and the Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections (ESPER). At the APS show and subsequently ESPER's 30th Anniversary Celebration, I met lots of people, including members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., who have given me great advice about stamps. The network within ESPER is phenomenal. One of the phenomenal persons I met through ESPER was Charlene Blair, award-winning exhibitor, and Executive Director of the National Museum of African Americans on Stamps (NMAAS). She consented to join Ms. Fields in my sorority chapter's Extraordinary, Ordinary Black Women on U. S. Stamps Event on March 30, 2019 at 11:30 am, at the Inn at 835 (835 S 2nd St., Springfield, Illinois). The combination of Ms. Fields' presentation and Ms. Blair's exhibit will make for a dynamic experience for participants. Ms. Fields says that African Americans are the fastest growing group of stamp collectors in the country. I'm hoping that the Extraordinary, Ordinary Black Women on U. S. Postal Stamps Event will help build the membership in ESPER, particularly in the Midwest.

In addition to being a member of APS and ESPER, I have joined the Springfield (Illinois) Philatelic Club. I was a bit intimidated at first because I realized I was the only African American in the group of about 15 members. The members there have also volunteered to mentor me. They realized that I got the stamp collecting fever when I distributed flyers announcing my sorority chapter's event in March. Subsequent to my announcement, club members have volunteered to look through their collections for Black Heritage stamps to be given to participants at the event. Further, I continue to show my enthusiasm because I have volunteered to set up a stamp display in Springfield's main post office for Black History Month. Of course, my display will include advertising for the upcoming event, along with stamp images and first day covers of Maya Angelou, Lena Horne, and Gregory Hines.



Springfield-Decatur Area Alumnae Chapter

My love for stamps is evolving. The more I learn about stamps, the more I want to learn. The members of ESPER have fueled my enthusiasm for which I am so appreciative. I look forward to seeing ESPER members, including my sorority sisters from other states, in Springfield for the Extraordinary, Ordinary Women on U.S. Postal Stamps Event in March. African-American stamp enthusiasts can help build the sacred part of our culture that is so needed among African-American communities. We have so many treasures in our history, and stamp collecting is a way to display and celebrate these gems. For more information, visit SDAACDST.org

Yvonne, is asking for donations of African American stamps to pass out to attendees at

Extraordinary, Ordinary Women on U.S. Postal Stamps Event in March. You can contact Yvonne at ysingley1@icloud.com