

Why Collect Haiti?

by F. Burton Sellers*



Whenever I have shown my collection of Haiti to other philatelists, I have invariably been asked why I collected Haiti. Often I fear my answer to that question has never been lucid or complete – I had never really thought out all the possible answers, for there are many. Now that I put the reasons on paper, I find there are even more than I had originally imagined.

from \$10 to \$20. All the rest catalog \$8 or less. The majority are under \$1.00.

To the collector of modest means, and most of us are in this category, the foregoing is of major importance. It means a good collection of Haiti can be built with nominal expenditure. Perhaps more important, it means that a substantially complete collection of the major varieties is within the means of most collectors. They must exclude two – at the most three – from their collection because of price and/or unavailability. There are not many current stamp issuing countries with more than 500 major varieties which can make this claim.

Anyone who has struggles with the 1908-1917 issues of the United States, or with the issues of Argentina or Brazil, to name a few, will rejoice in the absence of



Perhaps the most cogent reason for collecting Haiti can be found in a casual inspection of the right hand columns of Scott's catalog – low catalog value. With only three exceptions there is not a major variety of Haiti that presently has a catalog in excess of \$17.50, used or unused whichever is cheaper.* even the three rarities are modestly priced by the usual monetary standards for rarities. No. 176, of which there are only 10 copies, rates a \$600 valuation. No. 108c and No. 161 carry \$200 and \$50 valuations. Less than a dozen catalog at

watermark varieties in Haitian philately. Haiti has only one issue of six stamps on watermarked paper, and the watermarks can be seen just by looking at the reverse of the stamp. Oh fabulous joy – collect Haiti and be emancipated from the black tray and the benzene fumes!

Do you now collect a country where you must be continually on your guard against counterfeits and forgeries? Haiti has some, too, but they are not really much of a problem. The fakes of the common stamps are crude and cheap – they assault the eyes and cry out their fakery – not even a novice could mistake them. The counterfeits of the first perforated issue are rarer than the genuine stamps! Why? Because they are postal counterfeits made to defraud the government of postal revenue and not to mulct collectors. They are much sought after by Haitian specialists – particularly used copies – and command premium prices. Here is the



case where you can rejoice if a counterfeit is foisted on you. The surcharged issues of 1902 and 1906 are the only real fly in the ointment.

But how about present - day Haiti? Do we have to worry about unneeded issues – manipulated issues – printers’ waste that reaches the philatelic market through some back door? This is a common problem with many countries, but Haiti comes to the collector with exceptionally clean hands. She hasn’t even issued a Rotary commemorative or a 1956 Olympics topical! Seriously, there has been very little questionable in Haitian philately – nothing whatsoever in recent years. Haiti has issued only a few semi-postals and those with



modest surtaxes. The author knows of no manipulated or short issues – the modest catalog values of Haitian stamps confirm this observation. There seem to be no issues or values which do not serve some valid postal need. There are no exorbitantly high values – the highest value issued to date is equivalent to \$1.50. The stamps are generally available and commercially used.

They are printed by well-known companies with reputations for integrity and a complete absence of “backdoor” deal. Most of the 20th Century issues have been printed by the American bank note company which is so zealous in guarding the interests of their clients that they won’t even tell me how many stamps were in a sheet of some of the Haitian issues they printed in the 1930’s! More recent issues have been the work of Waterlow and sons of London or Courvoisier of Switzerland, both firms of international repute in the printing of postage stamps. Further, the present postal policies of Haiti provide the collector with several colorful issues each year but he is never swamped with the rash of issues that some countries offer to bolster sagging revenues or to provide tax-free living for their residents. A five-dollar bill each of recent years would cover Haiti’s annual postal output.



Another pleasure in collecting Haiti has come to me as an unexpected dividend – Haiti has a fascinating history! As I studied the scenes or people depicted on Haiti’s stamps my curiosity was aroused. I checked on this and that – read a little here and there and soon found myself so engrossed in the developing history of Haiti that I read everything I could find. You, too, will be amazed when you dip into Haiti’s turbulent history – when you learn about the first all-negro republic on this hemisphere. You will learn that a Haitian contingent aided the United States in its struggle for independence, that the country has been a kingdom and empire as well as a republic – and sometimes both at the same time! Read about the events that led up to the occupation of Haiti by the U.S. Marines in 1915 – an occupation that continued until 1934. But enough of history. I will leave that pleasant investigation to you after your collection is under way.



If you are the collector who is interested in virgin territory for collecting, again Haiti is recommended. The opportunities to be a trail-blazer are manifold. So little is known about the postal history of Haiti – so much remains to be explored and reported. If you have a talent for research or reporting, you can be assured of all the material for study, all the leads to be followed, a host of unanswered questions and big and little mysteries – enough to keep you engrossed for a lifetime.



Has the simple collecting of 500 plus varieties of Haitian stamps no appeal to you because it is too simple? Are you the collector who wants to “specialize”? If you are in that class, Haiti has much to offer you, too. Let me mention a few sidelines to which you can devote your ‘specializing’ bent. How about stampless covers? They go back to the mid 1700’s or earlier, and continue up to 1881 when the first stamps appeared. You can even find them addressed to such famous Frenchmen as general Leclerc and Rochambeau. Or do you like plating? Then you can tackle the reconstruction of the sheets of 50 of the first and second issues – no simple job, I assure you.



Maybe you would be interested in British and French stamps used in Haiti. Both of these countries operated postal services in Haiti from 1865 until 1881, using distinctive postmarks which indicate Haitian usage of their stamps. These are quite rare and much sought after, not only by Haitian specialists but by specialists in British and French as well. To this you may add the famous Hapag (Hamburg-American Steam Packet Company) and Royal mail Steam Packet Company stamps used in Haiti. Both of these companies operated in Haiti prior to 1881 and their stamps are among the “rare birds” of Haitian philately.

If your specializing interests do not run to such rare items, attention can be given to packet boat cancels. Haitian stamps abound in these cancels and an extensive showing of the many varieties can be assembled by a little assiduous searching and with a minimum of expenditure. Both the Dutch West Indies and Hamburg American lines used several varieties of packet boat

cancels and there are at least a half dozen other types of markings that can be found on Haitian stamps.

Perhaps some of the sidelines of yesterday are more your meat. Then why not collect revenues or postal stationery? Haiti has a good variety of both – enough to test any specialist. And to these could be added a long series of Pioneer and First Flight covers for those who might have an aerophilatelic leaning. It is quite a difficult trick to assemble the point-to-point covers that originated in Haiti on FAM-5, 6, and 10 air routes.

One could go on listing specialists’ items – U.S. Marine Corps cancels, essays and proofs – but you can now see that Haiti could be a specialist’s paradise as well as an interesting country for a collector who just wishes to get an almost complete showing of attractive stamps from a fascinating country at modest cost.

Did someone ask me why I like to collect Haiti? Why not join me? You can’t beat it!

[*Reprint of article published in the *Pan American Philatelist* Vol. 3 Whole No. 28 Feb.- June, 1957. F. Burton “Bud” Sellers is an Honorary Life Member of the Haiti Philatelic Society (A.P.S. Affiliate #81) because of his efforts to promote the philately of Haiti and his service to the society. He served twice as president of the American Philatelic Society and also as president of the Collectors Club of New York. Though the catalog values and number of stamps issued have changed and are obsolete, the point made remains true to this day. Anyone interested in the Haiti Philatelic Society and membership can view our website:

www.haitiphilatelicsociety.org

or

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