

What are *My* Stamps Worth?



One stamp here is worth \$7, the other \$7,500! Which is which?

We get asked lots of questions as stamp collectors, but the question above is by far the most popular! There are plenty of myths about what makes a stamp valuable, so let's investigate some of them.

Myth 1. If it's old, it must be worth some money.

Wrong. Age may give you "bragging rights," but it doesn't guarantee value. Some US stamps issued during the Civil War were printed by the tens of millions and used over many, many years. Even today this overabundance remains and some can be bought for 25 cents or less!

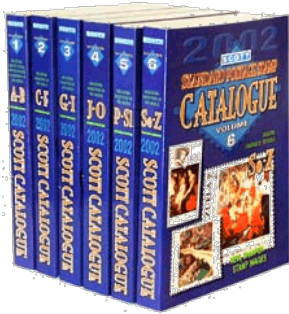
Myth 2. Mint (unused) stamps are always worth more than used stamps.

Not always. Some stamps were in use for a very short period of time or released for very obscure reasons and simply weren't used often. In these cases their value will be enhanced if they remain on the envelope they were originally used on. Never remove stamps from their envelope unless you know what you have.

Myth 3. Sheets of stamps have greater value than the sum of the individual stamps.

Again, not always. Not long ago people were "told" that by saving whole sheets of stamps in the 1940's and 1950's they could eventually put their kids through college. Well, plenty of people did just that. These stamps were printed in the hundreds of millions and when it came time to sell them the laws of supply and demand took over, leaving most disappointed to say the least!

So how does someone figure out value?



The pricing "bible" used by stamp collectors in North America is known as the "Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue." It is issued yearly and comes in several volumes listing postage stamps from the US and around the world. Each page depicts stamps in full color and gives relative retail values for them in both mint (unused) and used condition, as this part of a sample page shows. Larger libraries have these, although they may not have the most updated version. Notice the word "relative" was used here. Values are not what you can expect to necessarily sell your item(s) for. Dealers and collectors buy at a percentage of catalog value, and that percentage can be quite varied from dealer to dealer, especially if sold along with a mass of other items rather than individually.

And some stamps can at first glance look similar but have very different prices. Take another look at the two stamps at the top of the page. On the left is U.S. Scott #424A, a rare Perf 12x10, valued around \$7,500, even though it is off center and a bit discolored. On the right is U.S. Scott #405, Perf 12, valued around \$7.

You should take your holdings to an expert who knows value and what to look for. There is no charge for a cursory examination by us. We can also recommend area collectors or dealers who may be interested in them.

If your holdings are more extensive than a few stamps or albums, or a more formal appraisal is required, we can recommend members or dealers who can do that for you.