



Mistakes Made in Passing

Regular readers of this column may wonder where the Civil War figures into this narrative. But this a topic relevant to all, no matter what you collect. In my case, these incidents revolve around my collection of antique valentines. It might have been a more appropriate column for the month of February, but the memories did not come to mind until after that column deadline had passed.

So why do I bring this up now? Well, it's really Schuyler Rumsey's fault. As the March column deadline looms, he just posted a gorgeous Valentine's Day Sale full of mouth-watering classic valentines — the theme of one of my favorite personal collections.

My late husband, John Kaufmann, and I were married on Valentine's Day 1975. Appropriately, his wedding present to me was the familiar classic Civil War valentine, similar to the one shown in Figure 1.

It is known as the Soldier's Farewell, fashioned from an earlier Romeo and Juliet valentine where a Renaissance man was fittingly edited into a Union soldier. Figure 2 is a frequently encountered enclosure, a valentine displaying a flag-draped tent which opens to show a Union soldier seated at a camp desk and writing home to his sweetheart.

That one Civil War valentine became the jumping-off point for a favorite philatelic exhibit I created in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From that first gift, I began acquiring antique valentines in earnest, from single items to entire collections — mostly with covers but some without. I bought the earliest valentines I could obtain, and, for purposes of exhibiting, I cut off at the end of the Civil War — and I had only a few nice examples of those. Philatelically, the collection ranged from a half-cent rate to as high as an 80¢ rate. In the exhibit, they were all



Figure 1. "Soldier's Farewell" Civil War valentine showing a Union soldier bidding farewell to his sweetheart.



Figure 2. A valentine displaying a flag-draped tent that opens to show a Union soldier seated at a camp desk and writing home.

U.S., although I had a goodly number of British valentines and even a few foreign in my non-exhibit collection.

Although I had already begun collecting valentines in 1976, I managed to buy the fabulous collection initially created by philatelic luminary Marc Haas, which became a serious collection nucleus a few years later. Marc's valentine collection had been purchased as a whole by the late Andrew (Andy) Levitt for his then-wife Nicole (Nikki). Nikki had little interest in it, but Andy had excitedly shown it to us when we visited them in their home in Danbury, Connecticut. When they divorced, Nikki still had the collection and put it up for sale with Siegel Auction Galleries, where it sold as one lot. I was the blessed buyer with fairly mild competition, to Andy's lasting ire. To that core, I added such items as the only recorded Brattleboro, Vermont, postmaster provisional on a valentine and numerous other gems. It

was a fun journey of which I never ceased to tire.

So what mistakes am I referencing in the column title? I made two mistakes with that cherished valentine collection.

Mistake 1

If you have seen any classic valentines, you are likely aware the early ones are often enormous in size, which made exhibiting them a challenge. The valentines themselves were gorgeous, but the envelopes were often plain and devoid of ornamentation. When I began exhibiting, I logically — to me — overlapped the unadorned envelopes with the gorgeous valentines.

Did I mention my “Tokens of Affection” exhibit was entered in the postal history class? I knew the collection was a good study of rates, as shown through valentines, and thus worthy of a postal history class exhibit. Imagine my disappointment when I only got a silver medal on my first outing. A chat with a judge was needed to determine how to improve. I no longer remember exactly who that judge was. But he helped me correct Mistake Number 1. If you exhibit, swallow your pride, don’t be combative, and listen to the judges’ advice. It paid off for me.

That kindly judge said unless I wanted to exhibit in display class, I needed to overlap my dazzling valentines with those austere envelopes. Ugh. Not visually appealing for sure, but I immediately realized the wisdom of his advice and painstakingly made the changes on what I believe were eight to ten frames of material.

Voilà — I struck Gold! There were no Large Golds given in exhibiting at that time, so I had reached the pinnacle of basic awards in my very next outing. Was a Grand Award potentially in the future?

At HOUPEX ‘83 in Houston, Texas, I happily came home with the Reserve Grand, a lovely Lalique bowl, as well as the Most Popular Exhibit trophy in the form of a wooden State of Texas with an engraved plaque, as shown in Figure 3. It still hangs in my office more than forty years later, a sweet memory.

The collection and that reserve grand caught the attention of others, one of whom was a dealer with a wealthy client in Germany. Long story short, that German collector made me an unsolicited offer through a series of dealers on both sides of the Atlantic. After some sleepless nights of pondering, I booked a flight and hand-delivered the valentine exhibit accompanied by a good dose of melancholy, although the sizeable check helped salve my emotional wounds. As Marc Haas said in 1979 when he sold his stellar collection to Stanley Gibbons International of London for \$11 million, “I feel like I’ve lost my children.”

While in Europe delivering the valentines to their new owner, we visited Schuyler Rumsey. Schuyler was at that time working for David Feldman in Switzerland after an earlier stint at Kaufmann Auctions in Washington, D.C., which he began when he was in his late teens. We’ve remained friends ever since.

When Schuyler returned from Europe, he paid me a visit and bought the balance of my non-exhibit valentines that I had retained. When he more recently obtained the spectacular



Figure 3. HOUPEX 1983 Most Popular Exhibit award for “Tokens of Affection” by Patricia A. Kaufmann.

consigned valentine collection, now decades later, he called to tell me he was looking at some of my “old friends,” as he recognized them as formerly belonging in my collection. It’s a bit bittersweet but I’ve enjoyed reminiscing with the auction catalog.

I never achieved my quest for a Grand Award with the valentines, as they departed my care prematurely. But I greatly enjoyed the journey with them and learned many things along the way.

Mistake 2

Mistake 2 revolves around the valentine collection as well and amounts to being overly enthusiastic with my spring cleaning a number of years ago. I realized my error too late and have regretted it ever since.

I did an enormous amount of research on my valentines, which will surprise no one who knows me well. Before I sold the collection, I took color slides of the better pieces — think Kodak Carousel here, old days — and gave talks about them — often on or around Valentine’s Day. These included civic groups and women’s clubs, as well as stamp clubs. I also took black and white photocopies of all my exhibit pages.

In my enthusiasm for spring cleaning one year, I tossed the sizable stack of exhibit photocopies, reasoning to myself that I had the color slides which were “so much better than the photocopies.” NOT.

What the color slides did *not* have was all my carefully recorded research. I had only taken color slides of the covers and valentines, not the write-ups. Thus, all that information is lost. Forever.

I learned that lesson the hard way. While it’s not as bad as some stories I’ve heard, it’s bad enough. I continue to figuratively lick my wounds over that error in judgment.