

Perils of a Modern Collector

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I started collecting at a remarkably interesting time. I ran across a great YouTube channel; *Exploring Stamps*¹ and Graham's genuine excitement for a topic that he himself was just learning ignited a memory.

The memory was of a time in the 70's when I approached my dad and told him that I wanted to collect stamps. Give the man credit, he had no knowledge and zero interest but tried to get me started with some modern first day covers. I was bored instantly. You see, where I grew up, no one collected stamps unless you count cigarette stamps. There was no one to talk to, to learn from, or someone to tell me that just because I found the first day covers boring that did not mean that there were not some other aspects of this vast thing called philately that would rock my world.

Away went those stamps, in came hockey cards.... I wonder what happened to those anyway?

So, there I was, an adult with a disposable income, and a rekindled desire to collect little slips of paper. Ok, I can handle that says I, I have learned over the years the value of learning from those that know more than I do, so the first thing I do, ok the second. The first thing I did was hit eBay and buy some stamps with squirrels on them.



Figure 1. Eurasian Red Squirrel. Tannu Tuva. 1935

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/c/ExploringStamps>

The second thing I do is hit the web looking for resources, the American Philatelic Society (APS)² has some great stuff, cool, back to YouTube for more *Exploring Stamps* followed by *Ted Talks Stamps*³ and others.

Ok, I am feeling it now. I own a stock book, some tongs, more squirrel stamps and the first of my new Singapore collection. I have read about the Royal Philatelic⁴ and how the members share info and resources. Seems the logical next step, right? I will find a local group of collectors that will encourage me, share resources, and get together to show off our latest acquisitions. It will be exactly what I need to take my collection up a notch and really, how hard could it be to find a local club if I can find YouTube content right?

Wrong.

I had not been searching the web for an hour and I was already worried. Searching my local plus stamps, nothing. My local plus philately, nothing. Ok, don't panic, let's look at Meetup, nope. Twitter? Bupkis. Instagram? Ditto. Ok, what is up with this? I know people are collecting. There are some folks that are shouting into the ether on YouTube, and people are selling stamps; so others must be buying but where are they?

Ok, I did not get where I am by giving up. Back to first principals. The APS website and start digging. Ok, there are the registered clubs and here is my local...thin options but there are a couple. Wait, snail mail address for contact? I mean, I know this is about stamps, but come on, an email or phone number would have been nice to reach out to for info. A website with some info and pics along with contact options would have been great, but at this point, I will take what I can get.

I spend more frustrating time tracking down all area clubs with some form of electronic contact, or phone, and start reaching out. At this point, I am still excited. I did the leg work, and now I get the pay off. The payoff was weeks of silence. My enthusiasm was beginning to wane. I got a few desultory replies stating that meetings were either

² <https://stamps.org/>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/@tedtalksstamps>

⁴ <https://www.rpsl.org.uk/language/en-US/Home>

not happening at all because of poor attendance or loss of meeting place. But what I mostly got was a vast silence.

This started putting me off the whole organized philately thing, but I still had visions of the Royal, so I pressed on. Besides, I had something to offer. I am a tech guy; I work in tech and have for more than 20 years. I know a bit about websites and have a good working knowledge of social media. I can help update whatever club finally invites me to a meeting and help them grow!

Wrong again.

I did finally connect with a group that had not met in a while due to the membership declining in a way that could politely be described as attrition. They had not introduced new members in years. Well, I say I can help with that or at least help get the word out. I will find us a place to meet and set up a website and social media, so we are easier to find. Sound good?

What happened next really shocked me. I was told that a website was too complicated and expensive to maintain. I was offering to do all the work and not asking to be paid. We would need to spring to buy the domain name but that was about it. Ok, ok, what about social media to bring in some fresh blood and make you easier to find? The answer was that “*Serious Collectors*” don’t use social media and that *the kids* that are on social media won’t be interested. I came to find out that when people said, “*serious collectors*”, they meant collectors of a certain age. I never could get them to understand that we need to meet collectors where they are on their journey, not where we think they should be. I explained how hard it was for me to find them and that we could make it easier for the next poor fool. I was promptly told that the contact info was available from the APS. And that was that.

Here is the thing, the APS is a great resource if; A-you know it exists. A lot of new collectors may not even know that it is out there and, B-the clubs that are listed have updated contact information. I cannot tell you how many dead links and dead emails I chased. It's still a problem now. I recently tried to reach out to a club about something and had to try four different emails before I hit one that did not bounce. Then there is response time. I live in a world where emails are responded to in a day or so, not in

weeks or never replied to at all. I still have emails out seeking information that have never received a response. We need to do better if we are going to attract new people. When you don't put effort into updating contact information, or you wait a week to reply to an email, you are telling people that you do not value them as potential members or colleagues. This will not help move the hobby forward.

Like I said, I don't give up easily. So I got permission to set up social media for the group and started posting content. I found us a place to meet, and we had two meetings with the six members, and then COVID hit. Cue the long hiatus. During this time, I was posting to the social media accounts on a regular basis, and we have followers! Well ok, I have followers. No one else in the group had ever submitted a single thing to post; so I really feel it's mine at this point. There was not much in the way of interest in meeting in-person with the few members that remain, and it looked like the club would fold. This was a shame since this club was one of the country's oldest.

In the next club bulletin announcing a reorganization meeting, I asked the current person who was sending it to include a write up which I provided on how we could modernize the club, use social media, zoom, and all the modern tools available to reenergize and rebuild the club.

I was told that to have a functioning club we needed people willing to take on the roles and responsibilities of officers. So, I gave it a shot. I leveraged our Facebook group to get the word out. At that meeting, folks stepped up to be secretary and treasurer, and the people who attended asked that I be president. No member of the old club attended this meeting or ever reached out with thoughts or opinions.

This is where things took an unexpected turn. I excitedly sent out an email to the only member of the old club I had ever met and gave him the good news: we had officers, we had a place to meet, and we had a small but interested group of people that wanted to press on. It took several days to receive a reply and that reply was, No.

The current non-active members decided that a club that leaned on social media and the internet was uninteresting and had decided to fold the organization. I was further told that I had no standing in the club to make changes or have access to the club's mailing list. I was not allowed to directly contact any member and explain what I

wanted to do. I was shocked. I came to find out that in the three years I had been working to bring the club back to life, my contact had never submitted my name for an actual vote. So, I was not a member. What was more shocking was that the current membership, that was inactive, would decide to allow a club founded in the 1800's to die, rather than evolve.

I will not lie, this hurt. I was feeling betrayed and had another “why bother with clubs” moment. But a remarkable thing happened, that core group that was at the last meeting with me still wanted to move forward.

We were asked not to use the old name; we changed it slightly and started our own thing.⁵ As of this writing, our membership is still small, but we have received our APS charter. We have a website, and we have monthly in-person meetings that all include Zoom for folks that want or need to attend remotely. At our last few meetings, we had a visitor join on Zoom from India.



Figure 2 Greater Boston Philatelic Society logo.

Our website is modern and lists one email address for any query. That address is checked multiple times a day. The site also has a chat function in case someone wants to reach out that way. I often check the links on my site to make sure I do not send someone to a dead end. After the initial building of the site, the maintenance takes me less than an hour a week.

⁵ <https://thegbps.com/>

It's been a long, slow road but worth the work. Recently, we sent out mailers to all the APS members in the general area inviting them to join and are hoping that it will help us get our information out there. We have also reached out to the good folk at Boston2026⁶ to see how we could help them with the event.

Clubs are still an important part of philately; we encourage each other and build each other up. Clubs are a place where new folks learn from more seasoned collectors and serve as a vital touchpoint between the collecting community and the world at large. When you first start on the journey of collecting anything, most folks will look for a guide. Now there is a vast amount of information on-line to help you on your way. But that only enhances the experience, it does not replace the impact and fellowship of having a place where you can ask face to face questions and draw upon the work of others. We need to find a way to help traditional clubs be a visible and welcoming place for people at all stops on their journey. We need to meet people where they are, not where we want them to be. In today's digital age that means we, as clubs, need to be reachable on the internet and through social media.

There is a work that goes into to this, but if we lean on our younger collectors, we can learn from them how to stay current, even as they learn more about philately from the more seasoned collectors. We just need to be open to change and be willing to listen.

⁶ <https://boston2026.org/>