

# Don't Like Taxes? Then You're a "Philatelist"

by John F. Dunn

If you or someone you know collects stamps, then you may be among the few who know that "philatelist" is a fancy-sounding word for "stamp collector".

Stamp collectors who *think* they know more about stamp collecting than other stamp collectors like to call themselves "philatelists." To truly qualify as a philatelist, you need to know what the word means.

Most "philatelists" know this. Many "stamp collectors" do not.

'In the beginning' "philately" had nothing to do with collecting stamps. "Philatélie" is a combination of the French "phil"—meaning "love" in English—and the Greek "ateleia"—meaning "tax exemption" in English. Literally, philately is the love of tax exemption, more commonly interpreted as "love of freedom from paying a tax".

At a time when tax avoidance and tax reduction is such a hot theme, it's a wonder more people don't realize they are "philatelists."

"But how", you ask, "do we get from 'love of not wanting to pay taxes' to 'collecting stamps'?" Here's how:

Before the creation of postage stamps, most mail was sent unpaid by the sender, with the postage to be paid by the recipient; and that postage was a fee, or tax, paid for the delivery of a letter.

When postage stamps and other forms of prepaying postage for a mailed letter were developed, the *recipient* was freed from paying for the letter, which can also be described as being exempt from the postage fee or tax.

As you might expect, recipients just *loved*

not having to pay the postage fee, or tax—thus, making them "philatelists".

Then add in the fact that the recipient also could keep, save, and collect those stamps that freed them from paying for the postage and you know why philatelists, usually defined narrowly as stamp collectors *also* can be people who love not having to pay a tax.

## *Enter The Tea Party*

No, not the current political movement, but the 1773 Boston Tea Party. Actually, *that* Tea Party was not a protest against taxes as such, but a protest against taxation *without representation*. The patriots who tossed the tea into Boston Harbor were not against *any and all* taxes, but were against taxes that filled the coffers of King George III at their expense.

Through the Tea Act of 1773, the British tried to levy a tax on tea, in part to protect the monopoly of the East India Company, which had sole control over the importation of all tea into the Colonies.

Shown here is an example of a "Tea Party" Tax Stamp (Scott RM31). Although issued even before the Tea Act of 1773, it was still in use in 1773. Depending on condition, these Revenue Stamps sell for hundreds, even thousands, of dollars.





There is another “Tea Party” issue—not a valuable 18th century collectible, but a depiction of the historic event. Shown here (Sc. 1480-83) it was issued by the U.S. Postal Service in 1973 as part of a wonderful series of issues leading up to and including the American Bicentennial in 1976. Depending on the source, this block of four stamps might cost about 50¢.

(Note to Tea Party followers: to use these stamps on your mail you can buy them in quantity at close to their 32¢ face value, but at today’s 46¢ First Class letter rate, you will need another 14¢ to send a letter. Ever since the United States Postal Service was charged by Congress with operating as if it were a private enterprise, they may not be operating profitably, but they have adopted the private enterprise model of raising rates as fast and as often as they can.)

Coming back to the Tea Party, the American Revolution and the Bicentennial, there were dozens of stamps issued by the USPS leading up to and during the celebration—and even more issued by scores of other nations. Even Great Britain issued a stamp (Sc. 785) for the Bicentennial. It pictures a bust of Benjamin Franklin by Jean-



Jacques Caffieri and I guess you can’t blame the Brits for drawing our attention to diplomat Franklin instead of an historic battle or even more embarrassing, their surrender at Saratoga, which was highlighted on this 1975 stamp from Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso, Sc. 357)—a stamp that also shows the 1927 U.S. stamp reproducing John Trumbull’s “The Surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga.”



This stamp from a former French Colony in northwest Africa makes another point: many nations were not celebrating the American Bicentennial, but the fact that they could sell those stamps to collectors, and some very nice collections were formed around the theme of our Bicentennial.

On the other hand, the United States is a lot less likely to celebrate events for other nations. For example, the most widely celebrated event was the Royal Wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana, when more than 400 stamps were issued by nations large and small from every corner of the globe.

Great Britain, of course, celebrated the event, but with typical modesty, by issuing two low value stamps. Many other members of the Commonwealth also joined in with stamps, but Canada did not.

On the other hand, Canada did mark the Royal Wedding of their Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge—that’s Prince William and “Kate” Middleton to you, shown in this souvenir sheet on their wedding day.

But the United States did not issue stamps for any of the Royal Weddings. This is in part because we have enough subjects of our own

for which stamps U.S. are issued—too many, according to some collectors.

Royal Weddings would have been among those events that would not have qualified anyway, but another reason is that up until recently, the good news that you were going to appear on a U.S. stamp was accompanied by the bad news that you had to be dead to qualify.

That rule was only recently changed, but no one as yet as been selected to be the first such honoree.

*Who would you nominate?* Keep in mind that it should be someone who won't later embarrass us. In fact, some critics of issuing stamps for living Americans remind us

that when he was a famous running back and sports hero, there were some calls to issue a stamp for O. J. Simpson. 'Nuf said?

And coming back to the subject of “philatelists” as lovers of not having to pay a tax, they just might want to see one of their own—Grover Norquist—on a stamp...

