

Postage stamp lovers gather in NYC

Philatelists from all over the world came to the Jacob Javits Center for the World Stamp Show.

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NEW YORK (FOX 5 NEWS) - Henry Gitner traveled to Manhattan from Middletown, New York, carrying America's most beautiful stamp.

"The \$1 Omaha Cattle in the Storm," he said.

The president and owner of Henry Gitner Philatelists Inc., Gitner gathered with philatelists from all over the world at the Jacob Javits Center, Wednesday, for day five of the first World Stamp Show held in the United States in a decade, and the first in New York since the 1950s. The fifth day of this eight-day gathering of the world's leading postage stamp dealers and collectors still hummed with excitement leftover from day four.



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"It's called the Inverted Jenny," Gary Posner Inc. Vice President Bob Prager said.

In 1918, the United States Post Office issued special 24-cent stamps for its new air-mail service, but on one of those sheets of stamps the printers made an error and the image of a Curtiss Jenny Biplane appeared upside down. On Tuesday, the highest-graded of all the Inverted Jennys sold in an auction at the World Stamp Show for more than \$1.35 million.

"Crazy, right?" Prager said. "For a piece of paper?"

Most stamp-enthusiasts traveled to the Javits Center this week not to spend millions on an individual stamp but to browse, buy, sell and trade for more modest personal collections they started assembling long ago.

"Oh, God," Prager said. "I was 13 years old."

"Oh, when I was 8," Gitner said.

"I would have been 6 years old," Frank Walton said.

Walton presides over the 2,200 members from 80 different countries belonging to the Royal Philatelic Society of London.

"It is the oldest philatelic society in the world," Walton said, "and we're very proud of that. We're founded in 1869."

That's just 29 years after Great Britain printed the world's first postage stamp: The 1840 Penny Black. The Smithsonian lent a full sheet of Penny Blacks to the World Stamp Show, in addition to the planet's rarest stamp -- the British Guiana -- and John Lennon's more than 500-stamp collection from his childhood.

"My dad, when I was in middle school, tried getting a club together and nobody joined," college student Jonathan Bailey-Francois said. "I was the only one."

A lifelong stamp-collector, Bailey-Francois admits most kids neither know nor care about 1875, 90-cent Abraham Lincolns.

"It's the first bi-colored set the United States put out," Prager said.

But at the World Stamp Show, a finger pad-sized ink-engraving of the 16th president impresses everyone, stamp people stick with stamp people, and dealers point to the number of stamps in their collections as evidence this aging hobby still lives.

"Well, we have a building with six-and-a-half-thousand square feet filled with stamps," Gitner said, "so I would say many and many millions."

Gitner also owns a stamp from a piece of mail the Hindenburg carried when the airship exploded and believes these pieces of history will continue to draw people to this hobby until the end of time.

"Well, one: They're pieces of art," he said. "And two: They tell the story of the world."