

Preservation and Care of Philatelic Materials

Subsidiary Page 11 Chemically Altered Stamps

A great deal of hesitation occurred when writing this section, but today so many stamps that have been chemically altered are being offered as genuine that the author decided to go into the subject briefly. The experts are not fooled by these fakes. The philatelist should not be fooled either. Do not be deceived by "rare" shades, missing colors and the like that do not have an expertizing certificate.

Dozens of chemicals are available that will remove one color element and leave the other colors almost intact. In cases where the chemical might remove two colors, the fakers will mask the one color or area with paraffin wax. After "doctoring" the stamp chemically, they remove the wax with a hot iron and blotting paper. Many chemicals that remove color do not disturb the gum. This fact makes the fake more believable to many wood-be purchasers.

To show how easy it is to alter a stamp chemically, we will give you two simple examples. Purists will argue that we should not mention these. On the other hand, a knowledgeable philatelist cannot easily be deceived. Immersion in acetone or contact with acetone fumes will change a green stamp to blue, an orange stamp to yellow, and, in many cases, brown will change to black. Thirty seconds in boiling alcohol will remove the red coloring from some stamps. If, for whatever reason, boiling alcohol is required, the alcohol should be heated with an electrical heat source, never a flame.

These are just two examples of the dozens of ways that stamps can be altered. Chemicals, even water, will change a stamp. The stamp will lose its brightness, and other colors will change shades to a greater or lesser degree. Even the paper, when viewed under a microscope, will look different.

Have you ever been offered a stamp that is narrower or shorter than it is normally? A sodium hydroxide solution will shrink the paper fibers. Sodium hydroxide will usually not affect the ink color to any noticeable degree. Again, it is best that the stamp variety offered come with a certificate of authenticity. If you must experiment with the effect that sodium hydroxide can have on stamps, use an inexpensive stamp and exercise intense caution with sodium hydroxide as it is a very caustic solution which can cause blindness if splashed into the eye.