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Commentary



IS THE GRADED STAMP MARKET HOT?

By Michael E. Aldrich

You bet. If you cannot see it, you may be living in a cave. The press, major philatelic auctions, stamp shows and internet are alive with the sound of graded music. It seems that everywhere you look someone is writing or responding to someone writing about this grading business. One thing that you can be sure of is that grading stamps is not a fad. In fact, we have probably seen just the tip of the iceberg.

One facet of grading that will become visual and very public, and likely will be extremely controversial, is the grading of very inexpensive stamps. I am not talking about stamps that catalog \$5-\$25. I am talking about stamps that catalog .25 cents. Before I continue, I will take a minute while you are pulling yourself up off the floor. You read that right, .25 cents. We will soon see quantities of 1938 Presidentials and Famous Americans with graded PSE certificates. What you actually see, are stamps with very, very high graded certificates. It is my opinion, that only those stamps with grades of 98, 98J, 100 and 100J will get themselves to the marketplace. Be prepared to see stamps cataloging under \$1 that have retail prices over \$100 and probably over \$200. I know that you are shrieking by now. It is enough to pull one's hair out. (I am very well aware of the fact that many of us are already follicle challenged.) Get back in that chair and take a deep breath. I will explain.

One must look at the history for some solace and understanding here. Coin grading has been around for over thirty years. Coin collectors have made the adjustment, and in fact, have for the most part, embraced grading as an important and valuable part of the coin market. Early on, coin collectors were also dismayed with grading and many were concerned about the future of coin collecting, in general. It took time, but grading has become as important to the coin market as crust to bread. More currently we need only to look at what is happening to Commemorative State Quarters. There are thousands of common state quarters submitted to coin expertizing firms every month in hopes of getting grades of MS69 or 70. "MS" stands for Mint State and 70 is the highest grade possible short of



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