

Beckley collection exceeds \$2.5 million at auction

By Charles Snee

The Will Beckley collection of classic United States stamps realized more than \$2.5 million at auction Nov. 16 in New York City.

H.R. Harmer sold the collection that businessman Beckley carefully assembled with help from his father and grandfather.

Beckley purchased most of the best stamps in the collection. More than 50 percent of the stamps were sold with graded certificates from Professional Stamp Experts.

Beckley was an early supporter of numerical grading, which PSE introduced in 2000.

"H.R. Harmer has offered many outstanding U.S. stamp collections in its 65-year history," stated H.R. Harmer president Andrew Kupersmit, "but the Beckley collection was one of the most significant for two reasons.

"First, Mr. Beckley acquired most of the stamps issued by the United States, and in doing so achieved a much higher degree of completion than most other collectors.

"Second, he selected only stamps of the finest quality and condition to place into his collection, including many rare issues that



This attractive 1875 10¢ brown Thomas Jefferson stamp, from the Will Beckley collection, sold for \$54,625 in an H.R. Harmer sale.

were either the finest known examples or ranked highly on the list of finest known examples."

Among the highlights of the Beckley collection was the 24¢ Jenny Invert airmail error stamp (Scott C3a) illustrated nearby, which sold for \$276,000. Prices mentioned in this story include a 15 percent buyer's premium added to the hammer price.

The stamp is position No. 67 from the famous original error pane of 100 that William T. Robey purchased May 14, 1918, at a post office in Washington, D.C.

A 2005 PSE graded certificate ("80," very fine) accompanied the stamp, as did 1971 and 2004 certificates from the Philatelic Foundation.

The 2¢ Pan-American Exposition stamp with the vignette (central image) inverted sold

for \$60,375. The stamp has full original gum that is lightly hinged.

Three certificates attested to the stamp's genuineness: two from the Foundation, issued in 1988 and 2002, and one from PSE in 2005, which graded the stamp an "85" (very fine to extra fine).

Beckley's 10¢ brown Thomas Jefferson stamp from the Continental Bank Note Co. special printings of 1875 (Scott 172), pictured at the left, realized \$54,625.

The 1875 special printings were issued without gum in perforated panes that typically were cut apart with scissors. As a result, many of the surviving stamps have varying degrees of perforation and design damage.

The perforations at the left and bottom of the pictured stamp were carefully cut with scissors. The perforations, although cut, are intact and even.

Many stamps in the Beckley collection sold for significant multiples above catalog value.

Illustrated on this page is the 1903 2¢ lake George Washington stamp (Scott 319f) that sold for \$2,645, almost 118 times more than the \$22.50 value listed in the Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers*.

A 2005 PSE graded certificate ("98," superb) accompanied the never-hinged stamp, which H.R. Harmer described as "a large-margined single whose equal may not exist."

A back-of-the-book stamp from the Beckley collection that sold for well above catalog value was a never-hinged 1888 10¢ Running Messenger special delivery stamp (Scott E2).

The stamp sold for \$12,075, slightly more than 14 times its Scott U.S. specialized catalog value of \$850.

In 2005, PSE assigned a grade of "95" to the 10¢ Running Messenger, and H.R. Harmer stated that the stamp is the "highest graded example [of Scott E2] on the PSE population report." The stamp also carries a 2000 Foundation certificate.

Kupersmit acknowledged that a strong mar-



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ket precipitated many of the strong prices in the Beckley sale.

"The stamp market continues to be strong and it remains exceptionally so for high quality classic American stamps," said Kupersmit. "In my 11 years as a professional philatelist and auctioneer, I have never seen such a robust market, and all signs point to its continuing like this for the foreseeable future." ■



This nice 24¢ Jenny Invert airmail error stamp from the Will Beckley collection of premium classic United States stamps was auctioned for \$276,000 Nov. 16 in New York City.

