

Vancouver lawyer's hobby anything but taxing



Philatelic PROFILE

By Jesse Robitaille

Edwin Kroft, a collector from Vancouver and president of the Society of Israel Philatelists (SIP), turns 60 this July.

And there's reason to celebrate, as 50 of those 60 years have been spent collecting stamps, something Kroft said he's "very excited" about, like Judaism and tax law.

"All hobbies are wonderful," he said. "If you really make an effort, your hobby can introduce you to people from around the world. The social aspect is very important to me."

During the past half-century, Kroft has explored the hobby's many offerings, rising through its ranks to become a well-recognized philatelist with a keen interest in postal history.

In addition to serving as president of the SIP, which has about 800 members in 24 countries across the world, he also serves as its research co-chair, rounding out his double-duty for the society.

Kroft's current philatelic focus is on the future of the SIP. Between now and the end of his term in 2017, he hopes to add more collectors to its ranks by taking advantage of the collaborative power offered by modern technology.

"We're trying to make the SIP website (israelstamps.com) the one-stop shop for Holy Land philately so people can join our society as members and collect materials related to that."

The SIP recently made a deal with the American Philatelic Society (APS), of which Kroft is also a member, to hire one of its executive assistants to help with administration and communication to SIP members.

"We're the first to do this, and the APS see it as a sign of things to come," he said. "I think it's a great thing."

Kroft said the SIP has been fortunate in regards to membership but hopes to boost its numbers even further in the coming years.

"We want to continue to be relevant to collectors across the globe. Like a lot of societies, we

went through some transition years, and we're very happy with our current executive and membership base."

On top of his involvement with the APS and SIP, which he joined in the mid-1970s, Kroft is a member of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada; British North America Philatelic Society; Postal History Society of Canada; Philatelic Specialists Society of Canada; Canadian Aerophilatelic Society; American Air Mail Society; 21 Club; and the Holy Land Philatelic Society.

By day, Kroft works as a tax lawyer and regularly appears before the country's highest courts, representing clients in tax disputes.

In 2009, he was appointed Queen's Counsel, and in 2012, he was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of his significant contributions to the work of the Canadian Tax Foundation.

Before all of this, however, Kroft was just a boy with some stamps.



Growing up in Toronto in the mid-1960s, Kroft and his family didn't have much money to spend on travelling, but stamps allowed him to travel the world from the comfort of the classroom.

"You can learn so much from stamps – history, geography, social issues – and I could travel, hypothetically, to all of these places that could only be dreamt of before."

cause I collected the 1938 Prexie issue, I could name all the presidents of the United States."

Kroft never looked back, forming a stamp club at school and later working at a stamp store to help pay for university.

"When my wife and I started dating, I was working at a stamp store," he said. "I just loved it. I loved working with stamps – putting them away, organizing them, looking at them – so it was great."

In 1978, he earned his doctor of law degree from York University's Osgoode Hall. Two years later, he earned his master of laws in tax from the University of British Columbia and was later admitted to the British Columbia bar. In 2010, he was admitted to both the Ontario and Alberta bars.

While philately has some intellectual correlation with his career as a tax lawyer (both deal with the collection of revenue, for example), specifically, it helps with a multitude of things, Kroft said.

"It helps me in my job with history and geography, because if someone calls and says they're from Vanuatu, I can say I know where that is," he said, adding the hobby prevents ignorance of other countries, cultures and people.

Ed Kroft, president of the Society of Israel Philatelists, says philately has helped him in his career as a tax lawyer.

"It helps with communication between people from around the world. You learn about their cultures and postal systems, and you learn a lot about how they do business. It's a helpful thing."

Aside from being a tax lawyer and a Torah, haftarah and Megillah reader for many years, Kroft has written many scholarly articles on various aspects of Holy Land philately, including the postal history of Rishon LeZion from 1882-1948; the early postal history and postal rates of Israel; and Palestinian postal history.

His main collecting interests include Holy Land postal history and aerophilately, which comprise a vast personal collection that fills both binder and bookshelf in his Vancouver home.

"I love it because it allows me to learn so much about so many things," Kroft said of his passion for postal history. "It makes the hobby come alive for a lot of people who think it's a dry exercise of putting stamps in albums, measuring perforations and analyzing colours."

Kroft said more emphasis on postal history could bring people back to the hobby.

"There's something for everyone in stamp collecting, and people like a broader base to relate to and learn about," he said, adding it's vital to embrace how the hobby has changed since he started collecting.

"I think it's important to broaden the net and get people involved," said Kroft. "I think rising tides lift all boats." 🍁

This hobby is full of interesting people and we'd love to help our readers get to know more of them.

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This parcel card was sent using Doar Ivri (or 'Hebrew Mail') stamps from 1948, the stamps' first year of issue and an exciting time for Holy Land philately, said Kroft.

"I was about 10 years old, and my Grade 5 teacher brought in his stamp collection to show all the students," he said, of how his philatelic journey began. "It was awesome. We made little exhibits, and we actually learned a lot."

Because the young Kroft collected worldwide stamps, he wasn't limited to a particular country and could learn about people and places from all corners of the globe.

"I loved U.S. and Canadian stamps, and by Grade 8, be-