

# Reminiscences

By Michael Rogers

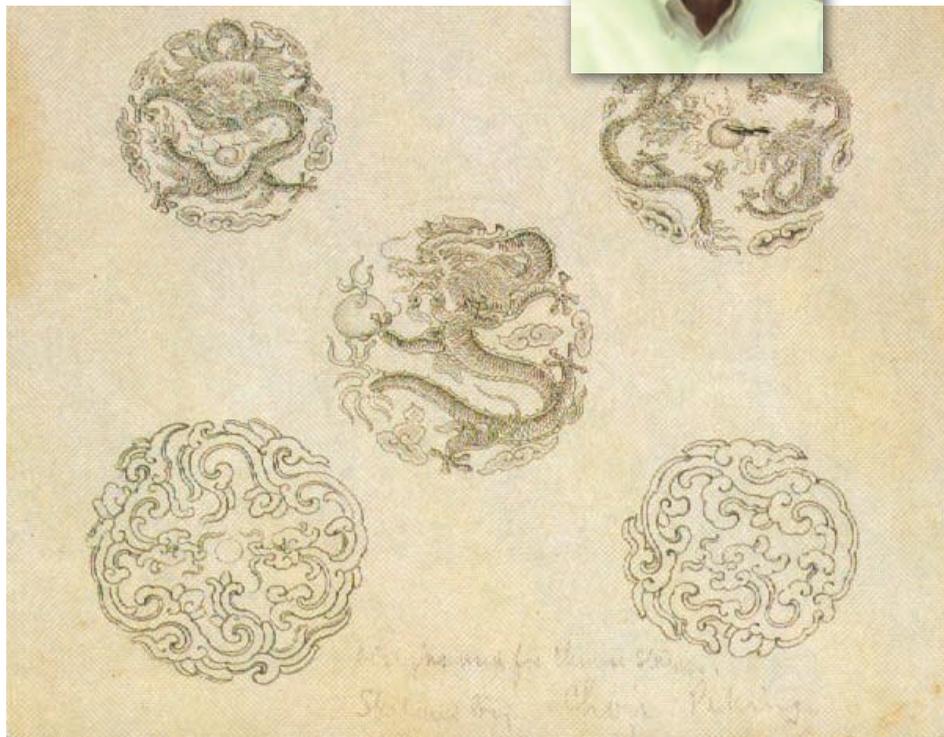


Neither the seller nor I knew what to make of it. Perhaps doodlings from long ago? I was buying the China stamp collection from my mentor and associate James Kerr, the son of Christian missionaries based in Korea. Jim thought he'd picked up this scrap of paper in China decades past, but why it was in his stamp collection, was a long ago memory. Little did I realize that this piece would position me for a great acquisition!

After college, I drifted to Jacksonville Florida in 1973, helping my friend Barry Williams in his stamp and coin shop. I'd heard John McDaniel of Winter Park—a respected general dealer with an office doing shows and mail sales—had an assistant's position open. Seemed the way to go, so I called John, securing the job saying "don't tell me the salary, just say you can find me an apartment within walking distance." I'd heard John was thrifty & knew Winter Park was an expensive place to live so I short-circuited the process. I figured, given time, I'd impress him for a raise. I don't drive (I have vision problems over 21 feet. Never fear: it doesn't affect philately, unless you hold a stamp 21 feet away from me :)

Boy, when I got that first paycheck, I about died! Thank God for minimum wage! Oh, and the apartment he found me? Yup, I could afford it: providing I raked the leaves off the driveway every morning! I didn't mind the raking but I couldn't control more leaves from coming. Around 9 a.m. when I was at work and the retired ladies in the complex were waking up, additional leaves had blown over the places I'd cleared up at 8 a.m. Those nice ladies actually had my work number, wanting me to return, hour after hour.

Each day, I walked the neighborhood looking for another place to live. One day I happened upon 301 Interlachen North which was being shown by a realtor. I tagged along. The house took my breath away, it was a classic French Colonial de-



signed by Winter Park's signature architect James Gamble Rogers (no relation) with two stories, white brick with black accents, six bedrooms, three baths, and separate guest house.

Fast forward 13 years. I'd been employed by John McDaniel 1973-6, went out on my own in June 1976, opened Winter Park Stamp Shop June 1978, became a China dealer October 1982. A whirlwind ride.

During 1985 the 301 Interlachen North residence came up for sale, priced for a half million dollars. There was no way I could afford it. But I kept my eye on it.

In September 1986, the seller lowered her asking price to \$386,000. I did the math, thinking, maybe, just maybe, I could squeek this through. Worth a shot.

I had a good friend who was a Winter Park real estate agent so I called her, saying that I was going to buy the big house on Interlachen but it just galled me that the seller's agent would get the entire 6 percent commission "so why don't you come along with me, but understand that I'm going to do the negotiating myself."

So Debbie walked with me, simple as pie.

I simply asked the seller for the bottom line, all the terms up front. I said selling a home was deep down personal. Just tell me what you want because I'm not leaving until we do a deal. So she said \$379,000 with a closing six months down the pike. The buyer (me!) signs a statement saying that he will finance 80%, and will put down \$65,000 upon closing and \$10,000 escrow in a week.

She needed the far off closing because she'd just gotten engaged and did not wish to vacate until her marriage. What best accommodated her was the only way I could purchase because I did not have the liquidity. Now that I had a goal of six months, it seemed achievable.

I could do the escrow but the closing depended on raising the remaining \$65,000. I had six months to do it. I already owned a much smaller home which I placed on the market with little equity so raising the money I needed wouldn't come from that source unless my first home sold. Couldn't count upon it.



The author decided to settle, and develop his stamp business in, Winter Park, Florida—certainly one of the country’s most attractive communities. With securing a very nice new home in Winter Park as one of his early incentives, the author worked to become one of the hobby’s most well known dealers. He’s shown at right at his booth at SESCAL in Los Angeles several years ago.



I had some savings and started selling assets. Business was pretty good, but I had a big nut to crack. My family was very helpful as well. I looked at darned near all sources. Finally I came within two weeks of the Interlachen closing, just \$10,000 shy of my goal, literally without an answer.

Jim Kerr and I prepared our stock for the Los Angeles 1986 SESCAL show. It is one of my favorite show venues—always a good crowd and many from well outside southern California. Many of the most knowledgeable China/Asia collectors find their way to SESCAL. At the last minute, I placed the curious drawing I’d gotten from Jim in my briefcase to show around.

You wouldn’t have known from Carl Kilgas’ unassuming demeanor that he’d formed one of the finest China collections around, but my friend was an authority second to none. Moreover, he never was one to put on airs. During a pleasant conversation with Carl, I remembered the drawing, asking his opinion. (See the image on the previous page.) I’d determined the paper to be watermarked “A. Pirie & Sons” who were involved in Shanghai’s large dragons and paper money. The manuscript in pencil read, “*Designs used*

*for Chinese stamps, sketched by Chan, Peking*”. Carl didn’t know so I returned the drawing to my case and he left.

Immediately, a wealthy and astute collector I knew sat down, pointing to my case, saying he wanted to examine what I had. I complied. He asked the price, to which I demurred. A \$1,000 offer came immediately. I was stunned, to which he immediately raised his offer to \$5,000! (He was bargaining against himself!) I was going to agree, until I looked up and saw this bead of sweat at the corner of his eye-brow. Then I wondered what was at play that I didn’t understand. Not greed, just wonderment.

\$6,000! I was having an out of body moment. Truly what I was thinking of was “my” house on Interlachen. He mistook my “Kodak flash” grimace for stonewalling.

\$12,000! Too fast! So I halted this barage, saying that we should meet at my company booth on Sunday.

I played the “What ifs” all weekend. I couldn’t find out anything more on the drawing. As the money achieved my goal, I decided to go for it. Just as I was closing my eyes Saturday evening, I had a scary thought: “What if my bidder didn’t show up on Sunday?”

Sunday came, and when I was on a break, the gentleman sat down at my booth. As I made my way around the back of the booth, I tripped on an electrical cord, and righted myself with a pained expression. The buyer thought I was mad at him so right off, he said “\$20,000!” and I agreed. The arrangement we made was he could have the full payment returned in 90 days for any reason at all. Didn’t matter to me. I’d have access to the \$10,000 I needed.

On the plane home, I explained to Jim what had happened. Said if the 90 days passed and the sale went through, I’d give him \$10,000 of the money. He thought it unnecessary but I said the \$20,000 was a gift from heaven. I had my reprieve so Jim should share in the rewards.

In the end, the buyer changed his mind, on the very last day returning for a refund. It didn’t matter. I’d purchased my dream home as planned. I placed the drawing in the first MRI public auction, taking place on January 9, 1988, where it sold to an eminent collector in competitive bidding for \$2,100. He remarked that he was pleased to obtain it so inexpensively. I smiled, saying “if you only knew how much pleasure this drawing has given me.” ☒