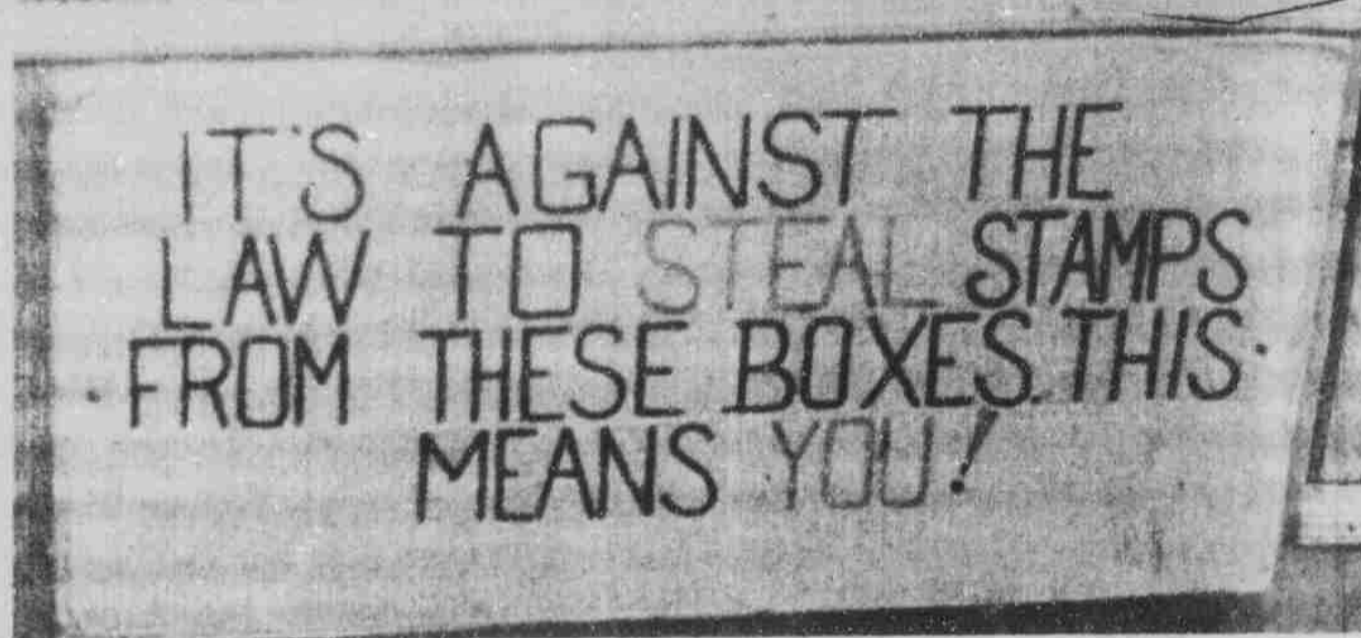


Lam has stamps from more than 93 countries in boxes along the walls. Thieves have stolen stamps and coins valued at over \$100,000 from the boxes and from a stand-up safe behind his desk.



photos and story by Greg Wees

Ye Auld Coin and Curiosity Shop

The market value of all U.S. postage stamps is common knowledge to the most experienced coin and stamp expert in Nebraska.

In fact, except for a brief stint in the army during World War I, stamp and coin collecting is the only profession Charles Lam admits practicing since he sold his first stamp for 25 cents to a friend in 1915.

"It's so damn interesting," Lam says. "You get to see the whole world on postage stamps."

Lam, 83 years old, operates his shop at 105 S. 13th St. in Omaha, where he relocated after completing his wartime duty in Albany, N.Y.

"The worst thing about the business now is the robberies," he says. Within the last 10 years Lam claims burglars rifled his shop safe three times and have netted over \$100,000 in stamps and coins.

Nebraska agents can no longer legally insure stamps and coins against theft, he says, because

of the difficulty of identifying stolen merchandise once police think they have located it is too great.

Lam adds that Omaha police have not been able to recover any of the stolen stamps or coins. Nor have investigators produced any suspects.

He is not a rich man because of his philatelic profession. But, as he says, "An established dealer will never go broke in this business. You will always have enough to eat and a place to stay."

Lam lives by himself in one of the back rooms of the shop he opened in 1969. Since coming to Omaha, he has had one shop at five different downtown locations.

Auctioneering is Lam's chief job. Once a month, or whenever local philatelic estates become available because of the owner's death, Lam alerts local collectors who on occasion have bid as high as \$100 for a single stamp.

"There is nothing like giving one of these collections a going over," Lam says. "You can never tell when you might turn up a real gem."