

Completing Sets

An excursion into the pleasant land of stamp collecting

Fill that space!

This month's essay gets back into the weeds of stamp-collecting. FMF Stamp Project essays are written with the non-collector in mind — that is, a reader who has an open mind, a taste for history, stories and pictures. Readers like you also must be interested in what it is that attracts stamp collectors to their hobby. So occasionally I feel entitled to open a door to stamp collecting for those not familiar with its many pleasant practices. One pursuit high on my list is completing sets. Doing so adds value — and looks good, too!

The last FMF Stamp Project essay on this subject was nine years ago. (Mercy! Have we been at it for that long?) Feel free to take a look: <https://mancryfmf.com/2017/04/30/bonus-filling-out-sets/>

This time around, my approach to completing sets has evolved. For one thing, I'm willing to spend more to get what I want, since you can't take it with you. (Neither can you take stamps, come to think of it.) For another, I'm feeling less patient than I was a decade ago. I want what I want and I want it now. Furthermore, my collection has developed since 2017 and there are opportunities to complete many sets by adding just one or two missing stamps to the series, creating value for my collection. One more thing: Artificial intelligence provides new tools for sussing out the missing stamps from the universe of dealers and sellers out there, and delivering them to my computer doorstep. There: four things. Four good reasons to give it another go.

To start the pleasurable process, I went through album pages to make a list of stamps needed to complete sets. This wasn't an inventory of all stamps I was missing — just a visual inventory of the ones that, once acquired, would complete an attractive set.

Which album pages? Why, British Africa of course! That has been my focus of intense research and storytelling over the past several years, such that I've assembled a 250-page manuscript, profusely illustrated, titled, "EMPIRE: The postal history of British imperialism in southern and central-east Africa." In writing my essays, I often took the opportunity to go after stamps from the country I was studying. Thus I built up strong showings in Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Gold Coast, Mauritius, Nyasaland, Rhodesia, Swaziland, even Zanzibar! As album pages were filling out, there were stubborn holdouts — stamps that never seemed to come up for sale or auction. How to track down these shy rascals — some not even that rare or costly — to complete my sets?

Below are items drawn from the three-page list of missing stamps I compiled. The numbers and values are from the Scott Catalogue, which is used universally. (The numbers in the illustrations are from Minkus, which published my British Africa album back in the 1960s, along with its own catalogue and numbers.)

Basutoland

8. (GV) 2/6	$17.50 mint	$22.50 canceled
9. 5/-	35.	50.
10. 10/-	100.	125.
27. (GVI) 5/-	7.50	7.50
28. 10/-	21.50	23.10



My George VI definitive set from Basutoland, above, lacks only the 5/- and 10/- stamps (Nos. 27 and 28 in Scott, 33 and 34 in Minkus). The listings at left show the catalogue prices of the stamps, first mint, then canceled.

Bechuanaland

9. 1/-	$215. mint	$125. canceled
26. 4d	50.	160.
29 1/2d	4.75	13.
74.(EVII) 1/-	12.	15.
81. 6d	165.	210.
90. (GV) 6d	5.75	11.



Wouldn't it be great to find the Bechuanaland 1/- stamp (No. 9)? But look at the catalogue prices on the list at left: $215 mint, $125 canceled. Eek!



My two early Gold Coast Victorian sets would be complete with just a couple of additions.

Gold Coast

4. (VR) 1/2d	$30. mint	$20. canceled
5. 1d blue	13.	6.50
28. 2p	25.	60.
25. 20/-	150.	37.50
79. (GV) 10/-	16.50	23.
80. 20/-	95.	55.
102. 2 1/2d	.85	2.75
106. 2/-	8.50	8.50
107. 5/-	25.	25.
158. (EII) 5/-	21.	6.
159. 10/-	19.	15.50



The QEII definitive set of 1952-4 is missing the two high values.



It would cost a bit to pick up Gold Coast Nos. 102, 106 and 107. I think it will be worth a try..

East Africa and Uganda
29. 50c $6.50 mint $9.50 canceled



Wouldn't this be a darling little East Africa and Uganda Edward VII set to complete? All it needs is No. 29. I could get it for $6.50 or less, and the complete set catalogues at around 40 bucks.



Oil Rivers. What a name for a postal authority! My guess is back in the 1890s, oil was the latest thing. Here I'm missing just No. 6, the 1/- value, to complete the first set from this area that would become Southern Nigeria. The cost is dear: $45 mint, $50 canceled.



St. Helena No. 73 (61 in my Minkus album, above) is missing. It's not that expensive, maybe less than $3. Can you feel it? The impulse toward completion is wicked strong!

I settled on a strategy that couldn't be simpler: Just type in the stamp I'm looking for, using the simplest terms, and let Google and AI do the rest. Brace yourselves for the upcoming account of the philatelic adventures that follow!

TO BE CONTINUED