

Sirmoor: A Country Collection

by Curtis E. Gidding

Each collector from the start has some sort of basic goal regarding his collection. Commonly, most of us have aspirations to collect either a specific country or group of countries. These plans may lead either to our being able to exhibit a collection, or our merely being content with developing the "complete" country. In this article, I would like to relate my experiences in starting a country collection, as illustration that the process can be exciting, intellectually stimulating, and very rewarding. Primarily, I want to show that country collections can develop into an activity that involves more than just filling spaces in a commercial album.

My interest in India and the Indian Feudatory States began when I purchased a small and inexpensive



Figure 1. The overprinted issues of 1859-99.

more extensive than I had seen elsewhere before. Gibbons listed thirty-three issues of regular stamps, and fifty-seven issues of official stamps. Thus, a potential Sirmoor collection had expanded abruptly in the number of stamps needed for completion.

pies stamp was printed in two different colors: brown and orange. Gibbons states that there were seven printings of the 3- and 6-pies; six of the 1-anna; and four of the 2-anna. Gibbons also states that all of the values were printed in sheets of seventy, made up of groups of transfers showing two or more varieties. The numerical listing of the stamps shows the various printings, and also uses the different color shades to further separate the catalogue numbers. Since color shades did not seem to me to be conclusive methods for identification, I tried to find how a collector could determine to which printing a stamp belonged, without using color. After some inquiries, I was directed by fellow collectors and members of the India Study Circle to some research articles on the subject.

Three journal articles later, I found that it was indeed possible to determine the exact printing of each value of the 1859-99 issues, but that is not to say the task would be an easy one. The article that answered my basic questions was one written by Sir David Masson and appearing in the *The Philatelic Journal of India* in 1906. Using the information

(continued on Page 1149)

Source of Varieties Catalogued or Identified			
Denomination	Scott	Gibbons	Literature
3-pies (brown)	1	2	16
3-pies (orange)	1	2	15
6-pies	1	5	27
1-anna	1	5	23
2-anna	1	3	13
	<u>5</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>94</u>

This number does not include sheet varieties, retouches, etc., as does the total of 124 shown in the text.

collection from a mail auction. Upon examining the group of stamps, I was intrigued by those of the feudatory state of Sirmoor. Referring to *Scott's Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue, 1979*, I found that the state of Sirmoor had issued twenty-two regular stamps and sixteen official ones between 1879 and 1899. This volume appeared ideal, because my interest was in small countries that I could hope to complete.

Shortly after deciding to form a collection of Sirmoor, I came across two copies of the 1859-99 issues overprinted "On.S.S.S.," but not listed in *Scott's* (Figure 1). Upon consulting Gibbons' *British Commonwealth Stamp Catalogue, 1979*, to my surprise I found a listing of Sirmoor issues far

The 1885-1896 issues were shown by Gibbons in greater depth than Scott indicated. Scott merely states that, "There are several printings, dies and minor variations of this issue." I began to gather all available information on these issues, and found the following.

The 1885-1896 issues consisted of four values (3-pies, 6-pies, 1-anna, and 2-anna), all bearing the portrait of Raja Sir Shamsher Prakash (Figure 2). The stamps were lithographed by Waterlow & Sons, and perforated 14-15. The 3-



Figure 2. The four issues of Sirmoor, 1885-96.

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developed and reviewed in this article, I determined that a complete collection of unsurcharged (Raja's head) stamps would consist of at least 124 varieties, excluding shades. A summary of my catalogue and literature^s review is shown in Figure 3.

In addition to the above information, I found that the two stamps shown in Figure 1 were most probably termed "essays," since there is no record of their issuance. These issues were discussed and pictured in an article by L.E. Dawson in *The Philatelist* in January 1966.

As a result of this progression and growth in knowledge about a specific philatelic subject, I have decided to build, and hope to complete, a collection of Sirmoor. I now realize that this endeavor will be more difficult than merely using the basic approach as outlined by various catalogues: Not only will more information be needed, but the material also will be more difficult to find.

I hope that this article has given the reader some insight into the type of groundwork that a collector must lay in order to build the chosen country collection, and I also wish that some interest may be stimulated in the area of the Indian Feudatory States. 