

■ The ■ coolness of square literacy

It may be an unfair stereotype, but in many circles philatelists have a reputation of being less than hip, if for no other reason than our attachment to an increasingly obsolete method of communication — the postal system. As a stamp collector, I first noticed objectionable indecipherable black blotches on various pieces of mail when I was looking for the much more attractive old-fashioned postage stamps that are being almost entirely replaced by various meter markings and permits. More recently, I have been seeing similar blotches on posters, labels and in printed publications. When I first became conscious of them I realized that they were some kind of fancy barcode, but gave little thought to how they might be useful to me. Like many students who encounter a text they can't understand, I

decided to ignore whatever message was hidden behind these indecipherable blotches of ink. Asking myself, “Who carries a scanner around with them all of the time?” I resigned myself to a state of illiteracy with respect to these mysterious codes.

What I didn't realize was that many people do carry scanners around with them most of the time as part of their smart phone or tablet computer. Suddenly I realized the potential of those ugly black blotches called QR codes as tools for connecting my library patrons with information. Scanning need no longer be limited to the barcodes on identification cards used for borrowing library materials.

continued on page 31