

# THE PRESERVATION OF OUR PHILATELIC HISTORY

---

## Cimon Morin<sup>1</sup>

as delivered in Edmonton at the BNAPEX'95 annual convention, September 2, 1995

I have entitled my speech "The preservation of our philatelic history", which means in simple terms the preservation of records relating to the hobby of Canadian philately.

As you all know, stamps were first issued in 1840 and collecting stamps began in Europe in the early 1860's. The philatelic trend came to Canada in 1864 especially in the Maritimes, Québec and then Ontario. It then moved to the prairie and western provinces along with the development of these areas. Stamps dealers were supplying the stamps and the initial tools by publishing catalogues and stamp albums, and then the magazines. These provided a forum in which philatelists and dealers started to advertise, write of their research and communicate with each other on a larger scale.

In 1995, some 130 years later, the following facts exist, that we can be proud of:

- Canadian stamps collectors have started, at one time or another, hundreds of different philatelic periodicals, generating thousands of issues; BNAPS itself has published more than 450 issues of BNA Topics in 50 years!
- Stamp collectors have published more than 10,000 articles all over the world dealing exclusively with Canadian stamps and postal history;
- Stamp collectors have formed, since the 1870's, hundreds of societies and groups at local, regional, national and international levels;
- Stamp collectors have organized, since the 1920's, hundreds of philatelic shows and exhibitions (By the way, one of the first stamp exhibition dealing exclusively with stamps was held in Yorkton, Sask. in 1923, followed by Winnipeg in 1924 and Montréal in 1925)
- Philately is one of the most organized hobbies because of its structure, people, collectors and dealers, auction houses, societies and publications. I believe it is still the "King of the hobbies" as it was called 50 years ago... even if it has shown some decline in membership as a whole through the years.

---

1. Cimon Morin is currently Chief of the Canadian Postal Archives, a section of the National Archives of Canada. He is responsible for acquiring, describing and documenting Canadian philatelic and postal records for permanent retention. He is the author of several articles as well as the compiler of Canadian Philately: Bibliography and Index published by the National Library of Canada in 1979 and 1983. He can be contacted at the National Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0B1.

When one wants to study the hobby of philately (i.e., the people, the collections formed, the organizations and exhibitions) only ONE source can be relied on: the published information in stamp magazines and in some exhibition and auction catalogues. It is, with some exceptions, the only source of documentation relating to the hobby. It seems that other sources of information have been destroyed or lost with the collectors who made history! In very simple words, we, stamp collectors, philatelists, have not preserved, through the years, the archival records of our hobby.

By archival records, I mean the records such as our personal papers, the correspondence exchanged between collectors, dealers and researchers, the photographs taken at meetings and in the course of social activities, the unpublished notes and studies done in isolation or in groups and the research files built up over the years. This is equally true for local, regional, provincial and national societies, and clubs and exhibitions, etc. from which minutes of meetings and photographs of philatelists have vanished over the years. Archival records could also include a certificate or a medal received at an exhibition, a list of awards, a description of collections exhibited or simply a copy of a speech delivered at a meeting.

We have done well in bringing together the best collections, and through our collections we have assured the survival of essays, proofs, stamps, covers and related material that may not have survived otherwise. We have researched and documented our collecting pieces, but we have forgotten to document ourselves.

Why didn't we preserve the records relating to the hobby? Some of the answers that come to my mind are that until recent years, there was not really any archival repositories that could properly address the issue. Philately was forgotten in the overall historical archival world. It may also be because we are collectors, and archival records could not be collected as easily as stamps and covers. There is not really a market for that type of collectable, and it is not appealing because it is not material that is as readily organized as stamps, postmarks or covers. It is simply we are collectors and not archivists or historians.

Usually, when the time comes to dispose of a philatelic collection, we ask a friend, a dealer or an auctioneer to sell our philatelic treasures. What remains, i.e. all the components relating to the history of that collection (let's say the papers) is then disposed of by giving it to a friend who would carry on the same topic or simply by leaving it aside for the garbage can! As history tells us, we as individuals have been great philatelists but, with a few exceptions, poor keepers of our own history.

"Archives have probative value: they confirm legal contracts, incorporations of clubs, etc. They have general information value and, as such, are an inexhaustible source of information. Finally, archives have evidential value: they document actions taken; they reflect the intensity and complexity of discussions and debate; they attest the decisions taken. By virtue of their content and of their organic nature - they are spontaneously created through the activities of individuals, organizations - they trace the development of organizations and the paths of individuals, and reveal their basic values, convictions and beliefs" (National Archives of Canada Annual Review 1993-1994, p. 8).

The philatelic community has a rich history and much diversity. It has brought together a number of prominent and great collectors, who gave the hobby their time, energy and dedication.

As an example, some years ago the Toronto Stamp Collectors' Club was celebrating its



100th years of existence. Thanks to the efforts of some members through the years, a good part of the Club's papers such as proceedings, notes and correspondence have survived, and it has permitted Gray Scrimgeour to properly research and retrace the history of the Club. The results were published in book form. Unfortunately, very few examples like this have survived as most of the records have been lost or destroyed through the years.

At the National Archives of Canada, I have tried within the past years to collect these new kind of philatelic records, and I have been successful in some areas, thanks to the cooperation of philatelists. In terms of acquiring, preserving and documenting the hobby I have been able to acquire the papers or archival records relating to societies such as:

- The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada;
- The Montréal Philatelic Society (in the 1890's);
- The Toronto Stamp Collectors' Club;
- The Toronto Philatelic Club;
- The Toronto Philatelic Society;
- The CAPEX 1951 exhibition;
- CANADA 1982 International Youth Exhibition;
- The RA Stamp Club of Ottawa

and also some papers of philatelists:

- The George Marler papers; (his specialized research and photographs on the Admirals and his 40 years exchange of correspondence with well-known philatelists of the time)
  - The Harry Guertin papers; (and his research files on the wartime mails)
  - The Richard K. Malott papers; (documents related to his aerophilatelic research and involvement in numerous national and international societies)
  - The Harry Sutherland papers; (relating to his involvement with the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada)
  - The papers of Marguerite Fortin (who played a major role in the creation of the Fédération québécoise de Philatélie, 25 years ago)
  - The Douglas and Mary Patrick papers (of great interest are the 250 archival recordings relating to interviews with philatelists that Doug did as part of the CBC Stamp Club in the 1960's)
- ... and many more

I have also received promises from philatelists that their papers will be given and preserved in due course.

Once preserved and organized, these records permit us to capture the history of our hobby. They then allow us to research, in conjunction with published documents, the history of philately in Canada. It will also enable Canada to be one of the first countries in the world to initiate the concept of the preservation of philatelic archives.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite BNAPS members to preserve their philatelic papers as part of their own history - to research the hidden papers left by our past colleagues and foremost philatelists and to bring them back to life through research.

In knowing more about ourselves as a whole, we will bring new life to our hobby as well as pride for our philatelic past and present.