

My Perspective On “Is Philatelic Exhibiting In The US In Trouble?”

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When I began reading Robert Bell's article, *Is Philatelic Exhibiting in the US in Trouble?* in the January 2009 *TPE*, I thought, “Here we go again,” particularly when I saw the first bold statement: **The Importance of Money**. My views were confirmed when I read the paragraph about “money plays a part in literature exhibiting.” Whichever judge relayed to him the information he repeats should be hung, drawn and quartered and drummed out of the judging corps.

Just as well thought-out, researched and presented stamp exhibits will be properly rewarded so will literature exhibits. It is not because they have illustrations in colour that they get more points, it is because more attention is put towards clear illustrations when they are in colour. Many of the black and white photos in books and periodicals are poorly reproduced for many reasons, but mainly from lack of attention and pride on the part of the author—albeit sometimes the printer is at fault. If the black and white illustrations are crisp and clear they will be rewarded. If the exhibitor is writing about the 23 different colour shades of the 3¢ Small Queen and chooses to use black and white illustrations it is a waste of time and the points will reflect that. The question really is: Is colour necessary for what you are writing about, to get your point across? If colour is required does the book need to be full-colour or, can a mixture of both be acceptable?

Many of the “hard cover books” are more expensive, yes—you pay for the pleasure of a hard cover, and get better results, yes. It is not because they are more costly. The reason, nine times out of ten, is that they are definitive works, show a lifetime of research and are technically better. Technically better doesn’t mean better paper, hard cover, and size of book. It means they have the publication data including, an ISBN number; they have a table of contents, list of illustrations, list of tables, a bibliography, an index and many other of the “technical” features that make a book a good research tool, a definitive handbook and a good read. Like a stamp exhibit poor presentation, lack of research and lack of development and forethought will get you poor results in a literature exhibit. Oh, and good writing counts too. Where judges may let pass some poor sentence construction and typos in a stamp

exhibit, you cannot do that in a literature exhibit. Nobel Prizes for literature are not given for a romance novel. Grand Prix or Best in Class for literature are not given for shoddy work or works of less import or with a finite life such as, with all the due respect it deserves, a stamp club newsletter. It may be the best stamp club newsletter in the country but it does not compete against the fruit of somebody’s twenty years of research. And, stamp club newsletters have their own competition where they can get their Gold medal.

As to publishing, there should be no difference in a judge’s mind whether the book is commercially or self-published. We should not care. What we should care about are the subject, the research, the technical matters and the presentation. As for the subject being written up: classical issues over modern material, it should not matter. Much of the classical material has been overwritten and nothing much is new to report. A definitive work on the Great Americans definitive series, for example, can be worth just as much and maybe more than a rehash of the 1847 issue, all other judging elements being equal. The Great American series would benefit by being given higher research points as much of the research would be of original nature and would be more difficult to obtain. An 1847 book would rely heavily on the research of others and therefore suffer in that criterion. This brings out another point. Second or later editions of a definitive work will not receive the same level of medal as the First edition. In most cases the First edition, if properly done, will have received higher points for research. The Second or subsequent editions will not unless there have been major revisions and/or substantial amount of new research added.

Importance and/or significance are the bane of a judge’s life. What is more important or significant? You choose. Is it brand new information on the Great American definitive series in a carefully researched, technically accurate, well written and well presented paper back or an assembling, albeit in a different expensive format—coffee table book comes to mind—of information already known about the 1847s? My money and, as a judge, my point allocation for importance and/or significance would be on the Great American series. If the other judging criteria mentioned above are

met or excelled, the book on the Great American series should get a better result.

I kept on reading Dr. Bell’s article and I don’t disagree with him on his comment that many of the top winning exhibits have expensive material in them and, in very rare cases, that’s the only reason why the exhibit wins a Grand or Reserve Grand. In most cases however, they also meet the other criteria. If one looks at the point breakdown used all over the world except in North America—although many judges like me, who are international judges, mentally use the point system in this part of the world—you will see that material or money spent on an exhibit is not what gives it the most points. If you look at the points allocated for Treatment (20), Research and Personal Study (35), and Presentation (5) you see that 60% of the points have nothing to do with the cost of material.

The remaining points, Importance/Significance (10), Material (20) and Condition (10) may be influenced by \$\$. However, I would beg to differ when it comes to \$\$ being the only criterion to allocate these points. I will not dwell on the subject of Importance/Significance—I spent time earlier on the subject. Material will get you many points if you have classical, hard to find items but I hasten to point out that the criterion Material is not only viewed for \$\$ but also for difficulty of acquisition. Some 20th Century material can be very difficult to find. Condition is condition and, in fact, it is more difficult to have great condition with “dirty brown covers” and classical stamps with missing perforations and cut through margins on imperforates. Well-centered and pristine looking 20th Century stamps lend themselves to a higher condition score. I know of several exhibits of under \$10,000 who have won the Grand or Reserve Grand Awards in the past. Perhaps we think they are more valuable but because they meet the other criteria in spades.

Dr. Bell points out that exhibit training and advice and support “should be available to all” and not only those who have money. I have a number of comments to make on this point. Most judges and exhibitors I know are very free with their advice without regard to whether the exhibitor has a fat wallet. The AAPE has a free mentoring service for exhibitors. Judging critiques are free advice sessions.

A man is not old until regrets take the place of dreams. — John Barrymore

Stamp shows and organizations have free seminars and hands-on sessions. The latest edition of *FIP-FLASH*, the house organ of the Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (FIP), has a long list of free international seminars for judges and exhibitors being offered around the world including, June 6-7 at NAPEX in McLean, Virginia. I have given many of these free seminars locally and nationally. They are rarely well attended in part because the collector-exhibitor or potential exhibitor is more interested in the bourse. The same comment goes for the best free self-teaching tool: visiting the exhibits. Usually the frames are rows upon rows of empty bowling alleys.

Free advice is readily available in writing or in person. If a show asks, many judges will do free tours of exhibits but in my experience, few people go along for the ride. You want a free private critique at the frames or just want free information about an exhibit or how to begin exhibiting, ask a judge or a seasoned exhibitor. In most cases, if we have the time, we will be pleased to do it. You have an exhibit in preparation the AAPE offers a free (except for postage) critique service.

Oh, and by the way, my pet peeve is related to those exhibitors and collectors and even judges who feel that exhibitors should mount their own exhibits and not use the services of professional mounters. If you can do your own carpentry or repair your own car, my hat is off to you. In most cases, we hire professionals to do the work. You want a gift nicely wrapped and you know you're all thumbs, you pay for the service unless it is offered free by the department store. What is the difference with a stamp exhibit? In my experience, most exhibitors who use professional mounters are very knowledgeable about their subject, dictate the treatment and approach to take and provide the research. Mounting is a technical job and, in most cases, it is not relatively that expensive.

Dr. Bell's comment that philatelic exhibiting is like the Olympics leaves him open for darts and slings. Steroids = money? I disagree. Steroids are illegal. There is nothing illegal about using money. In fact, it is essential. Where does one find the hundreds of thousands of dollars required to train an Olympic athlete? Are we all cut out to be Olympic athletes? Does this mean that any child can become an Olympic athlete given money to buy the training, advice and support? And yes, the trainers, coaches, physiotherapists, sports psychologists, etc., are all paid. They do not do it out of the goodness of their hearts. At that level nothing comes for free. Oh, by

the way, where does natural ability for sports come into the equation? What about body structure, metabolism, determination, grit and strength of character and any other above-average trait an Olympic athlete has?

Do Olympic athletes whine because they don't have enough money, train for six hours or more a day, redo a routine over and over again? Do our whining collectors/exhibitors have the grit and determination to find the funds, research their exhibit in-depth at libraries, archives, etc.—not only the Scott catalogues, and accept public criticism of their exhibit and redo it many times? I am willing to help any of those who answer all of these questions with a firm yes.

One should also mention that most of the judges have spent untold hours and many thousands of dollars over many years getting training, building a library and learning about subjects that are out of their area of collecting. In any other field they would be very well paid consultants.

Bottom line when it comes to money is that many stamp collectors are skinflints. They complain about frame fees but don't hesitate to spend the equivalent on a carton of cigarettes. They get upset if they are told that the presentation of their exhibits leave something be desired because they don't want to put the money towards the materials required to put a well-presented exhibit together. They begrudge the \$350 given to each of the judges. It costs most of us well over \$1,000 for each show we judge (travel, hotel and meals) and, for some of my colleagues, they must take time off from work. They whine that the big boys win the award but they will not spend \$200 in one shot—to buy an important piece for their exhibit preferring to spend 10 times \$20 buying twenty less important pieces most of which are duplication of each other. You want the frame fees to be lowered; I think they should be higher. Try being a show organizer. You want the judges to provide their expertise and training *pro bono*, you will get what you paid for. If you find anyone to judge it will likely be only the well-off judges who will be giving you their verdict and, let me tell you, exhibitors were not enamored of that judging process in the middle of last century. That's why we pay an honorarium to judges today.

Dr. Bell lists many reasons why "anecdotally" individuals are shying away from exhibiting. Most of the nonfinancial reasons cited are those related to the individual, perception of their exhibit's worth and the foibles of human nature (fear of failure, procrastinations, misplaced perceptions,

etc.) Judges, stamp shows and stamp societies can do little about these. No, as individuals, we don't like failure; no, we don't like to be criticized and: no, we don't like to redo work but, as the expression goes, "Rome was not built in a day." The art of exhibiting, like that of writing and painting, for example, is a craft. Like all the others it needs to be learned, honed and worked on. A Gold medal and a Grand Award are not given to all exhibits and certainly not normally on the first try.

At the end of his article, Dr. Bell has a long shopping list of proposed solutions. Many of these ideas are underway in one form or another. Many require time, money and people to work at the solutions. Where are these "angels"? It does not happen overnight and it requires long-term commitment by individuals to one of these programmes for it to be successful. The whole issue is leaders in our hobby wear many hats because there are not enough interested individuals to take on the different "jobs" available. The hobby needs a lot more volunteers. Not only volunteers who wish to work but also highly skilled ones. I challenge Dr. Bell to find a demographer or actuary who will, *pro bono*, put his proposed surveys together, collect the data and analyze it meaningfully. Can he find a *pro bono* organizational developer who will lead focus groups, write a Mission Statement and goals, stay the course, and monitor and refine those goals over many years? Can he find retired educators/philatelists who will *pro bono* give their time to setting up, devising and writing-up education programs, seminars and self-thought courses while at the same time publicizing, monitoring consistency in delivery and arranging for the seminars/courses to be given? If not, can he suggest where the money will come to implement his proposals.

If money is not a requirement then how can we have a meaningful impact on recruitment of new collectors and exhibitors? For example, has Dr. Bell asked AARP how much an ad costs in their magazine. I have, and it is prohibitive. There are other solutions. For AARP, for example, you might try writing an article and, if they consider your writing skills acceptable, they might publish it. The problem is you need to find a readable writer who will write on a subject of interest to the readers of AARP. Most of our collectors and, with all due respect, most of our philatelic writers would not make the cut.

I am in complete agreement with Dr. Bell on some of his other proposals such as

programs to reach baby boomers. I firmly believe that that is where the future of our hobby is. Other of his ideas need fleshing out and I, for one, would be pleased to hear more from him on how he suggests we "expand and support" the different classes and divisions such as Frugal Philately, Display, Cinderella, etc.

Finally, I would not like to let pass his comments regarding the changes brought forward by the FIP's Commission for Postal History and particularly those relating to the moving from geographical breakdowns to time periods in the way exhibits are classed and judged at an international exhibition. I do not believe it will be the panacea he thinks it will and, as far as I am concerned, it will not be the end of "check book competition." The time periods equate roughly to pre-UPU period (before 1875 and most of the stampless period), what is considered the colonial era (1875-1945) and the post-colonial era (post 1945). There are many reasons the Commission took this decision. Many are of a technical nature. For example, it was becoming more and more difficult to find judges who were expert in all time periods in a geographic area. Many of us who judge postal history are far more capable at judging the stamp period than the stampless one or vice-versa. Others have more affinity with what is considered the "classic stamp period" (until 1940) while others are more interested in the modern issues and the many problems raised by the varied stamp production technology, mechanization of the postal system and varieties in

printing that come with them.

Although exhibitors might have a more sympathetic ear overall in their time period, they should not be deluded that they will be judged differently in one time period from another. They will still have to meet the judging criteria. In addition, once the judging is done, higher level medals such as those of Vermeil and higher will be "balanced"; i.e., exhibits at those levels will be looked at as a group, with all periods included, to see if there is a balance in how the judging results were achieved. Another balancing act will follow for all the Golds and Large Golds who will be subjected to a peer review of senior judges from all the classes at the exhibition and "balanced" against the other classes.

In my view, the time periods are a minor improvement compared to the other Commission changes. These are more important and will have more impact. The ability to add relevant "nonphilatelic" material to "tell your story" that you couldn't before is far more useful to an exhibitor. The addition of a "historical" postal history class where you will be able to look at new perspectives of the history of the post is more than welcome. For example, an exhibit may now look at the history of a post office that served primarily one client such as a nursery, hotel or summer camp and tell the whole story including that of the company or the camp including materials such as their corner cards, letterheads, solicitation postcards and any other items that explain why the post office was created, how it operated, how it served and

why it was closed. The variety of new exhibits that could come out of this change alone should dwarf the benefits of the time periods.

Probably these Commission changes will be of no interest to most readers as, if Dr. Bell's criterion of money is paramount, exhibitors will not be willing or able to pay the \$50 per frame fee required at the international level. However, such changes should be applied at national shows in North America. This will mean that all our judges will have to be retrained on the new approaches. Again, this will not happen overnight, so, if the changes are made in North America, exhibitors should brace themselves for uneven Postal History judging for a while.

This Letter to the Editor is too long as a Letter but I felt I needed to put my thoughts on paper and share them with members of the AAPE. Additionally, it might seem to infer that I am negative about the future of our hobby. This is the last thing on my mind. In fact, I think our hobby is flourishing. All we need to do is adapt, reduce our resistance to change, get hundreds of new qualified volunteers, stop being petty about what other collectors do or achieve and find the funds to get the programs going.

And, if any of you wish to be an exhibitor, at any level, do you have the determination, grit and strength of character to start, persevere, accept criticism read and apply the rules and rework your exhibit over and over again. If yes, stop procrastinating and get going. If not, exhibiting is not for you.

Show Listings

AAPE will include listings of shows being held during the seven months after the face date of the magazine if they are open shows and if submitted in the following format with all specified information. World Series of Philately shows are designated by a ★. Because of space limitations, only those shows that are still accepting exhibit entries will be listed. Requests for a prospectus should be accompanied by a #10 SASE.

★ **September 25, 26 and 27, 2009 MILCOPEX 2009.** Sponsored by the Milwaukee Philatelic Society. A WSP show. Held at Mount Mary College, N. 92nd Street two blocks south of Burleigh, Milwaukee, WI. 16-page frames available at \$25 for first three frames per exhibit (total, not per frame), and \$10 for each additional frame. No charge for youth exhibits. All classes of exhibits welcomed. Free Admission. Youth table, 35+ dealers. USPS and UN. Show cachet and cancel. Further information and prospectus from Robert Henak, P.O. Box 170832, Milwaukee, WI 53217-0832, by e-mail from henak8010@sbcglobal.net or from the web site at [www.milwaukeephilatelic.org](http://milwaukeephilatelic.org).

October 3-4, 2009, Cuy-LorPex2009, 51st annual exhibition of the Cuy-Lor Stamp Club

(Cleveland, Ohio area). Free admission and parking. Nine-page frames; fees for open competition: \$3 per frame, youth exhibits — not in open competition — no charge. Fifteen frame maximum for a competitive exhibit. Hours 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, October 3 and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, October 4. Location — Lutheran West High School, 3850 Linden Road, Rocky River, OH 44116. Exhibit prospectus available by e-mail request to cuylorstampclub@hotmail.com or USPS mail to Cuy-Lor Stamp Club, Exhibit Chairman, P.O. Box 45042, Westlake, OH 44145.

October 18, 2009, THAMESPEX 2009, hosted by the Thames Stamp Club at Waterford High School, Waterford, CT. Located near intersection of US Rte 1A and Ct Rte 156 just west of New London. Show hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Free admission and parking.

Frame Fees: competitive \$5 per frame (\$8 single-frame); noncompetitive \$2; juniors free. There are 80 frames available. The Prospectus is available from Bill McMurray, PO Box 342, Westerly, RI 02891 or by E-mail at McMurraypanc3@att.net. The show commemorates the 50th anniversary of the launch of the navy's first nuclear powered guided missile submarine USS Halibut SSGN-587 on Jan. 9, 1959.

★ **November 13-15, 2009, VAPEX 2009** at Lexington George Washington Inn and Conference Center, 500 Merrimac Trail, Williamsburg, VA 23815. 200 frames of exhibits. \$8 per frame/adults and \$5 per frame/youth. \$25 single frame exhibits. Free admission and parking. More information from <http://vaphilatelic.org/vapex.htm> or Mike Nethersole, show chairman, at Mike.Nethersole1@verizon.net.

Attention Show Committees: When sending your exhibits list to your judges, send a copy (of title pages, too) to Gini Horn, APS Research Library, 100 Match Factory Pl., Bellefonte, PA 16823. Doing so will help Gini and staff to locate background literature of help to the judges, and thus facilitate the accuracy of results! Please cooperate.