

let's talk EXHIBITING

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THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

A critical component of any exhibit is the treatment and development you give to your material. Often simply called “story”, it is an area that judges are expected to consider in evaluating the effectiveness of an exhibit. In fact, how treatment and development is addressed in the various components of a competitive exhibit accounts for a full

30 per cent of its weighting on the Exhibit Feedback Form, so story line is an area that behooves careful consideration by the exhibitor.

As exhibitors, when we ask judges how we can best improve our exhibits, we are often advised to strengthen our story lines. This is polite feedback, shorthand for probably something in our exhibits that still merits improve-



ment and that has led to a feeling among the judges that “had we only” developed our story better we would have received a higher award. (A good judge will then give us more specific and personalized advice on how then to do this.)

Gone are the days when an exhibit was evaluated solely on the strength or value of its material, as nowadays good material does not necessarily lead automatically to higher awards. Instead, exhibitors are expected to “tell a story” in order to lead the interested viewer through the philatelic material shown. There is now an expectation that a good exhibit will blend the text and the material together into a whole, into a more seamless package that will lead the viewer to more fully appreciate and understand what the exhibitor is showing.

The story line of your exhibit is most easily noticed in the textual information you include on your pages. It is a good practice to try and begin each page with a few (and only a few) lines of text, setting the scene for what the viewer is looking at, and logically following from other text on preceding pages. (Hint: if you want to see how understandable the story line of your exhibit is, read only the introductory text on each page, reading each page thus in succession, and decide whether this text in and of itself carries your intended story line through the entirety of your exhibit. If you find that instead this text takes too many detours, separate paths, or leads

2. THE EARLY FISHERIES

2.4 EUROPEAN FISHERMEN IN NORTH AMERICA

2.4.3 THE FRENCH

Jacques Cartier was born in St. Malo, the major French fishing port, and may have been a Breton fisherman. Many historians believe he made voyages to North America before 1534, perhaps as a fisherman, as his 1534 voyage was charted to arrive at the Straits of Belle Isle, the most common fishing destination. Upon his arrival in North America, he reported Basque or other European fishermen in many of the areas he visited.



trial color plate proof 1859 perf 12 two values 1934

Cartier's vessels were probably manned by Breton fishermen, as they were already familiar with the sea route to North America and major landfalls in the new land.



Wide gutter variety, resulting from perforation along interpanneau gutter. Most sheets were instead gullionned into panes.

French claims to fishing rights in North America date from Cartier's voyages. For over 450 years now the French have fished the continental shelf off North America and processed their fish ashore on lands lost and won in various wars with England.



five overprinted values joint issue with Canada - common design

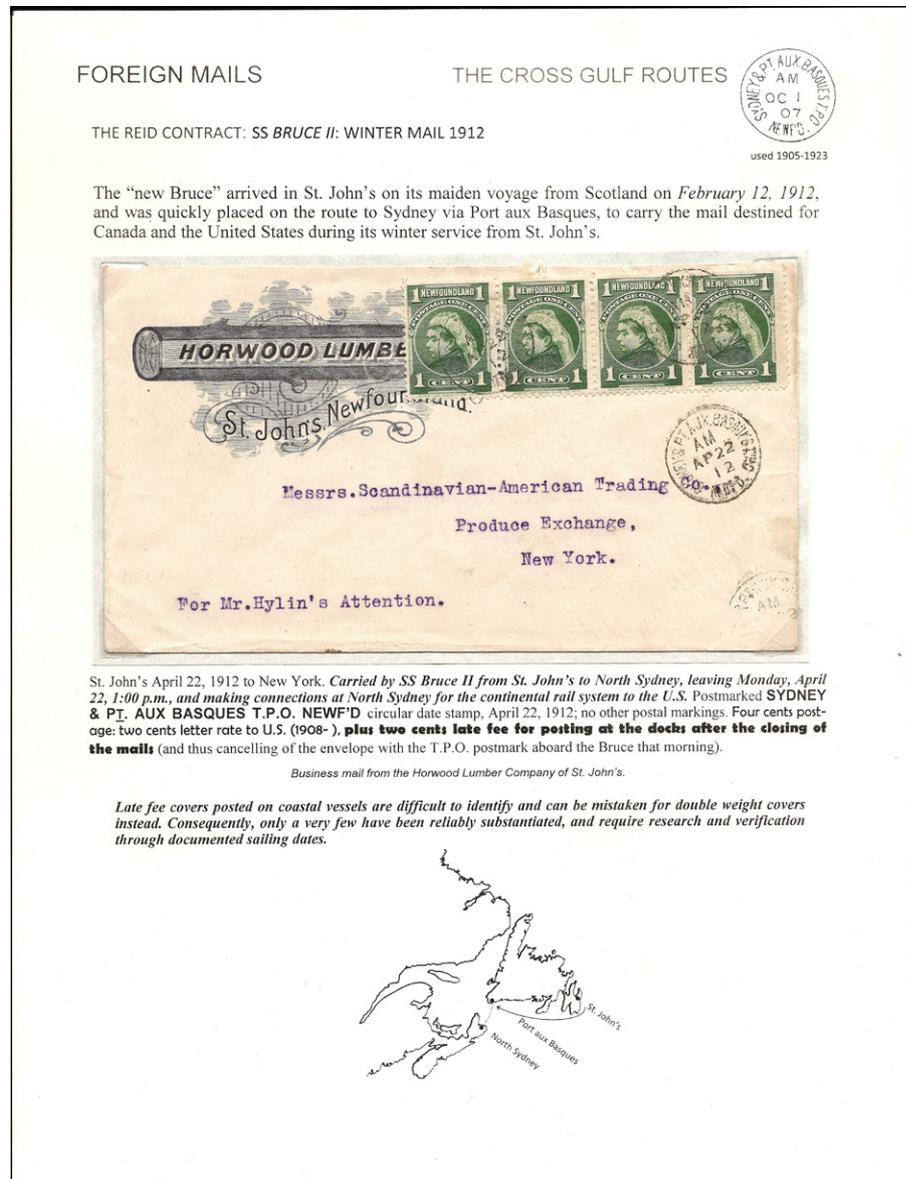
to unanswered questions you may need to consider some reorganization or re-writing to enhance your intentions and the choice of your philatelic material.)

There is an art to all this, as writing for a philatelic exhibit is a skill that demands conciseness, brevity, and relevancy in the choice of words and in the information you want to convey. At the extremes, an overwritten exhibit tends to make the viewer read less, whereas an underwritten exhibit tends to leave the viewer anxious for more information. Both of these reactions need to be avoided, particularly when it may confuse or frustrate the reader (and the judges) and lessen the appreciation for what you are showing.

Thematic exhibitors understand this very well, as their thematic text is crucial in the demonstration of not only their thematic knowledge but also in the development of their topic from chapter to chapter and from page to page. Traditional collectors, I believe, continue to struggle with this as often the material in such exhibits falls into organization in such a natural fashion (e.g., by denomination in a definitive series; or by chronology or printing in a long-standing issue; or by geographical area in a postal history exhibit; etc.) that the exhibitor may believe it should be so obvious to the viewer it need go unstated.

Yet traditional collectors who downplay their explicit story line can weaken the appreciation of their material and lessen the award the material could otherwise obtain. Often, it is not so much what you show but how you show it that will make a difference in terms of how the "treatment and development" in your exhibit is evaluated, and how your story is perceived.

However you decide to carry your story from page to page, it is also good



practice to ensure that your story "looks different" than the philatelic textual information you otherwise place on your pages. Often, in addition to placing the story information and the philatelic information in different places on the pages, a change in font type or font size is all else that is needed.

The two exhibit pages illustrated with this article, one for a thematic exhibit, the other for a postal history exhibit, show one approach to the placement of story line text on a page. Note that in these examples the story text is

in a larger font size than other text describing the stamps, postmarks, or covers and precedes the philatelic material used to illustrate the point.

There are both many ways to tell a story about what you are exhibiting and many ways to place story text in your exhibit and its pages. The interested reader may wish to visit <http://www.aape.org/exhibits.asp> on the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors website to see other examples of how various exhibitors have developed their stories. ✉