

# let's talk EXHIBITING

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## I THINK I WOULD LIKE TO EXHIBIT, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO START

In 2007, the American Philatelic Society reported on a survey<sup>[1]</sup> it had completed on the interests and activities of stamp collectors. Comprised of a sample size of about 1500 members, non-members, and former members, the survey revealed that only six percent of respondents had ever exhibited. Although the question was apparently not broken down much further, this six percent probably applied to exhibitors in general; i.e., to those who had exhibited at a local, a regional, or a national level.

Although I am not aware of any similar Canadian statistics, it may be safe to assume that a similar statistic would result if the RPSC was to sponsor a similar survey. With a current membership of around 1500-1600, a six percent exhibitor rate would suggest only 90-100 active exhibitors in our Canadian midst. To me, such a number seems quite plausible, knowing of many of our exhibitors and having seen or heard of their exhibits over the years.

On the other hand, I know of at least several collectors who have, in personal conversations, each expressed interest in becoming an exhibitor. All are serious philatelists with strong collections and with a desire to take on the challenge of turning their material into an exhibit. My title for this installment of this column thus attempts to capture the willingness, but also the uncertainty, expressed by these potential new exhibitors as they grapple with taking the next steps to developing an exhibit and becoming exhibitors.

So what gives? What is keeping them from exhibiting, and enriching the variety of competitive exhibits seen at our stamp shows? And why aren't there more exhibitors, period, amongst us? I can offer a few observations and suggestions, for what they may be worth.

1. Some are apprehensive about purchasing, and then learning to use, the software that can be utilized to format exhibit pages. Although any exhibit can be created with any word processing program, desktop publishing programs are much superior and much more intuitive in use. Some are then put off by the relatively high cost of programs like Adobe InDesign, Microsoft Office Professional, or WordPerfect Office Professional. Such software suites are overkill, and a simple program, like Microsoft Publisher, costing usually around \$100, has all the power one may ever need.

2. Some feel there are too many "rules" that might interfere with how they want to show their material, or they hear "horror stories" of how other new exhibitors have been treated by any of those who like to dispense their sanctimonious opinions on anything philatelic. However, like any other form of competition, there are some rules, so we learn the scope of what is possible within such rules or guidelines. As to those who are more sanctimonious than helpful, the less said about such negativity the better.

3. Some feel their material is "not good enough". Remember though, exhibits are judged in North America not by what they don't have, but by how well the material is organized to tell a story. We all collect within our budgets, so what can we decide to



show within our collecting interests that might make an interesting story and exhibit? Think of the intrinsic rewards (the satisfaction of a job well done), rather than the extrinsic rewards of medal levels and other such accolades. Think locally, and support the hobby at the grassroots level, rather than expecting to jump right into the National level of competition. And, start with a small exhibit, being prepared to learn by doing and from listening to the advice of other exhibitors (and judges) who have, of course, been new exhibitors once too.

4. Some may not know where to start. That is, there are differences between an "accumulation", a "collection" and an "exhibit". It takes an enormous amount of intention and effort to form an exhibit; i.e., on deciding what to purchase or include, on what aspect of the story to talk about, and on researching the philately of your topic. Not all of us may be cut out to move beyond an accumulating or collecting stage into a stage of careful organization and description. Even moving beyond the idea of creating an album page to creating an exhibit page takes some significant rethinking about what needs to be shown and discussed on each page. Yet nothing helps focus the collecting mind so well as having to decide what material becomes necessary to seek out in order to more fully develop the storyline of an exhibit!

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5. Many of us also collect other items outside the scope of philately. The APS survey mentioned above indicated a significant percentage of its respondents were also likely to collect coins or paper money, books, picture post cards, paper ephemera, or antiques, as well as stamps. With such a varied range of collectibles it may be even harder to dedicate the time it takes to develop a formal philatelic exhibit from the time allotted among our totality of collecting pursuits. Couple this with the range of other

travel and leisure activities stamp collectors also regularly engage in, available time for selective attention to forming an exhibit becomes an even bigger determining factor.

So, despite being in a minority among stamp collecting pursuits, exhibiting has its own challenges and rewards. The solution for the prospective new exhibitor is to move beyond the inertia and indecision, and form the intention to begin. Beyond that initial stumbling block, the field then opens up.

An excellent resource here, “Getting Started in Philatelic Exhibiting”, by John Hotchner, a pamphlet issued a few years ago by the AAPE, is also found on the BNAPS website at <http://www.bnaps.org/education/eex2a.asp>. ☒

#### **REFERENCES:**

1. Found at: <http://stamps.org/userfiles/file/reports/SurveyReport.pdf>. A new survey will probably be completed shortly.