

let's talk EXHIBITING

David Piercey, FRPSC

EXHIBITING POSTAL HISTORY

Many of us collect covers – the envelopes, postal stationery and other official postal documents which have passed through the mails in the normal operations of the postal service, and many of us may specialize in the covers of a favourite issue or era in the country we collect. Organizing and mounting these covers to tell a philatelic story falls within the purview of a postal history exhibit.

Postal history exhibits are usually organized either by rate, by route, by markings, by means of transport, or by any other aspect of the historical development of mail transport in our selected area. As examples, postal history exhibits at recent Royal/Royales have included exhibits with titles like “The Traveling Post Offices of Victoria 1865-1832”, “Brant County Postmarks and Cancels to 1930”, “London Cancels: Development During the Victorian Period”, “The Postal History of the Yukon”, and “The Way Mails of New Brunswick”, among many such others. Each of these exhibits has shown covers (or cancels) to exemplify their topic, and stamps are only included insofar as they have been used on these postal documents.

There are no particular tricks to exhibiting postal history, just the hard work of searching out a variety of covers in our area, analyzing the significance of each cover and developing a continuous running story line to weave all the covers together. Easier said than done, however, as our philatelic knowledge, for example, must be demonstrated by how well we analyze each cover

and such knowledge often expands well beyond what a standard catalogue or a specialized handbook may survey. In fact, a postal history exhibit is evaluated using the same Big Four areas of Treatment, Philatelic and Subject Knowledge, Rarity and Condition, and Presentation, so must in some way be seen to address each of these criteria in the exhibit's formation.

As a particular example, let's consider what may be involved in the analysis of just one cover, as a postal history exhibit is expected to go beyond the mere description of each cover and instead bringing forward its significance within the exhibit and its story line. Take the single cover illustrated herein, an 1897 Newfoundland cover from a small outpost to Halifax.



A simple description of this cover, to be placed alongside the cover in an exhibit, might go as follows:

“Lamaline to Halifax NS, July 14, 1897. Three cents letter rate to Canada plus five cents registration.”



But, this is far too simple for a postal history exhibit, as it is only descriptive, and adds little beyond what is immediately apparent to the viewer. It fails to show little, if any, philatelic knowledge, which must be uncovered by further analysis through personal study and research.

A marginally better description might read:

“Lamaline to Halifax NS, July 14, 1897. Three cents letter rate to Canada (1893-1898), plus five cents registration, paid with ABNC Cabot issues of June 1897.”

This description begins to show greater philatelic knowledge, but is really not yet suitable for a postal history exhibit. (It may be sufficient, however, for a thematic or perhaps a traditional exhibit, however.)

The following description demonstrates greater philatelic knowledge, proves a more thorough description of salient aspects of the cover, and is much more appropriate in a postal history exhibit:

“Lamaline to Halifax NS. Carried by courier from Lamaline to Burin; then carried by SS Alert to railhead at Placentia for conveyance to St. John’s; Postmarked Lamaline Newf’d split-ring July 14, 1897. Backstamped St. John’s Newf’d barred circle July 19, 1897, and Halifax NS Canada circular date stamp July 23, 1897. Three cents letter rate to Canada (1893-1898), plus five cents registration, paid with ABNC Cabot issues of June 1897.”

Note too that the italicized text in the description begins to show a level of analysis beyond what is obvious on the cover, demonstrating some amount of personal study and research, which is an area that judges also look for in evaluating its award level.

Postal history exhibits, while interesting to the exhibitor and a small number of specialists, sometimes suffer from “too much sameness” in that showing page after page of similar-sized covers becomes somewhat monotonous for the viewer. Here the challenge then is for the exhibitor to make the exhibit more visually appealing by searching for variety in the covers, either covers with more than one stamp used to pay a proper rate (thus being perhaps a bit more colourful), by including covers with printed return addresses (“corner cards”) or with attractive printed graphics (“illustrated mail”), all with an intent to enhance visual appeal. As long as such covers do not distract from the exhibit’s treatment and development, they are fair game to include, and may even add to the difficulty of acquisition factor.

The illustrated exhibit page herein incorporates two covers, each having paid the proper rate



with more than one stamp. As well, one cover is a piece of postal stationery, thus adding to the variety in the items shown. Note too the extensive cover write-up analyzing the postal history aspects of each cover and how the text is placed in an attempt to enhance the visual arrangement of the two covers.

In conclusion, postal history exhibiting is often very rewarding for the exhibitor, as one can choose the scope and content of the exhibit, unbound by the expectations more frequently encountered in Traditional exhibiting. The only expectation is the exhibit must be interesting and tell a cogent story based on the text and the covers used to illustrate the story.

.....

A new book on Exhibiting has just recently been published – “The Path to Gold – 175 Proven Stamp Exhibiting Tips”, by Steven Zwilling. It is available through the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors. Cost for non-members is \$39.95 USD for the soft cover edition, plus \$7.00 shipping to Canada, and may be ordered at <http://www.aape.org/orderbook.asp>. Covering such aspects as preparation of Title and Synopses pages, exhibit layout and layout difficulties, exhibit endings, and including many, many illustrative examples of pages from Gold-medal level exhibits, it is heartily recommended! ☐