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NEW CATEGORY: TOPICAL EXHIBITS

One of the new exhibit categories, introduced in the *Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting* (2017), is called 'topical exhibits.' It is for thematic collectors, who collect by image alone. Many stamp enthusiasts have been collecting like this all along, but this new category is an indication that their exhibiting pursuits are now being more formally recognized. As a result, further explanation is required to understand the differences between topical exhibiting, thematic exhibiting, and display exhibiting.

The manual indicates the following: "Topical exhibits are composed of a variety of philatelic items, the design of which illustrates a specific topic or subject. If you choose to present a topical exhibit, it would show as many philatelic items as possible with the image of the particular subject or group of subjects that is the focus of your exhibit."

Perhaps the most obvious distinction for topical exhibiting is that

the philatelic items presented are all related through the images on each item. For example, if one is exhibiting 'trains' we would expect to see in its topical development a lot of philatelic items depicting images of trains, whether locomotives, cabooses, mail cars, or other rolling stock, and the treatment of the exhibit would be limited to aspects of trains that can be shown with philatelic items.

Whereas a thematic exhibit on trains might be expected to show, for example, James Watt and George Stephenson, inventors of the steam engine and the steam locomotive respectively, this sort of association and thematic development is unnecessary in topical exhibiting, and one can stick to depiction of trains in all their variations.

Nevertheless, the material selected for a topical exhibit must continue to be appropriate, and a diversity of philatelic elements should still be included. Elements in topical exhibits,

other than stamps and their varieties, include not only thematic elements like postmarks, cancellations, and meter marks, but can also be extended to include revenues, illustrated mail, official cachets, first day covers (if the illustration is relevant), poster stamps, labels, and cinderellas, to name some of the more obvious. In fact, anything that was designed to go through the mail (except picture post cards) is considered fair game. Distinct from display exhibiting, however, a topical exhibit cannot include paper ephemera, coins, medals, ticket stubs, or other non-postal items.

Like thematic exhibits, display exhibits require a plan to indicate how the exhibit will be organized. The story line, often explicit in other types of exhibits, is instead implicit in the topical exhibit's plan. The more complex the plan and the balance of philatelic elements displayed within each heading, subheading, or

further subdivision, the better the appreciation of treatment in the judging process.

As with other types of exhibits, importance is defined in the manual as “the exhibit represents a significant challenge in scope or complexity. The exhibit is the best example of this subject, and it cannot be easily duplicated.” So, the onus is on the exhibitor to select a topic that is relatively complex to show with philatelic material, and thus address the challenge factor in assembling the exhibit. My example of ‘trains’ might in fact be

too simplistic a topic, unless it was to be fleshed out in greater and sufficiently complex detail.

Thematic knowledge is demonstrated by both the organization and treatment of one’s material. Philatelic knowledge, however, must still be demonstrated in a topical exhibit, and this can be illustrated through a wide choice of philatelic elements, appropriate selection and identification of their varieties, and a representation that excludes exceedingly common (e.g., Sand Dune or CTO material) that would otherwise detract.

Personal study and research must also be evident, as should rarity and difficulty of acquisition. It behooves the exhibitor to flag any such study and research, and as with other types of exhibits, to indicate rarity whenever appropriate. Indeed, these are both necessary requirements, and become ways to have others appreciate the depth and complexity of one’s chosen topic.

The accompanying exhibit page, although taken from a thematic exhibit on ‘fisheries’, could just as easily have come from a topical exhibit, as all the philatelic elements shown on the page depict a codfish in illustration of the subheading’s topic. Note, too, that philatelic knowledge is demonstrated by the selection and identification of the various varieties shown, and that a thematic organizational structure (i.e., headings and subheadings organized hierarchically) is present, as required also for topical exhibits. This page would have been an even better example had it included a wider variety of elements, though perhaps the stamp varieties make up for this shortcoming.

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Readers, seeking further information may be interested in a useful article by American judge, Edwin Andrews: ‘How to Judge a Topical Exhibit,’ <http://www.aape.org/docs/HowtoJudgeATopicalExhibit.pdf>. Written from a judging perspective, it also indicates how to organize a topical exhibit for maximum appreciation.

I have devoted previous columns to considerations for thematic and display exhibiting. See *TCP* Nov-Dec 2015; Jan-Feb 2016; Jan-Feb 2017; and Mar-Apr 2017. ☒

Previous columns in this series now also appear on the RPSC website, at <http://www.rpsc.org/exhibiting.htm>. Readers are encouraged to use them to facilitate further discussion at club meetings, and for promoting novice exhibiting at local and regional levels.

1. THE FISH CATCH
1.2 CODFISH

Cod has been the most important fish, historically and economically, of the North Atlantic fisheries. The development of the cod fisheries are tied up inextricably with the development of mercantilism, and with the emergence of many North Atlantic fishing nations.

Early depictions of cod were somewhat fanciful as medieval artists had not yet adopted a fully realistic style.

It has been a staple in the diet of many Europeans since before the Middle Ages. As well, colonization and settlement in northern Europe and the east coast of North America was significantly directed by the proximity of the rich fishing banks and cod stocks of the continental shelves.

1855 thin paper 1870 white paper 1879 rouletted

1887 variety - imperforate

1882 1886 reprint

1887 - plate proof on security paper "teethook" variety - scratch in mouth