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THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPORTANCE

In the evaluation of our exhibits, ‘importance’ counts for 10 points, or 10 per cent of our overall score. It is one area that has the potential to affect our total score. If our exhibit is not considered ‘important,’ it could be significantly downgraded to the point where we may even drop a medal level. Yet importance is often only partially understood and can be easily misinterpreted. In the *Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting (7th Edition)* it is defined as “a measure of the challenge in creating the exhibit.” It has two parts.

1. *Philatelic: how much philatelic depth and diversity is shown in the development of the exhibit;*
2. *Exhibit: the significance of the exhibit within its subject area. The exhibit can be important because it is the definitive showing of the subject, because it shows creativity in treatment, or because the exhibitor provided unusual or special insights in the exhibit. (p.19) and is often summarized as simply ‘philatelic and subject importance.’*

We can take this further. Importance may refer to the subject of the exhibit’s importance to philately; it may refer to the region or the country’s overall importance to philately; it may refer to the challenge and difficulty evident in creating the exhibit; or it

may refer to the exhibit’s importance in comparison to other similar exhibits. And, if one is showing a thematic or a display exhibit, it instead should refer to only the exhibit’s importance; i.e., the significance of the exhibit within its subject area. Confused? Join the club.

No wonder the judging fraternity is still discussing how to judge importance at the frames and how to ensure it can be reliably assessed from show to show with different juries and differing opinions of importance.

What we can determine from this is the following: In general – and all other scoring of two exhibits’ evaluations being equal -- an exhibit of a philatelically important country should be ranked higher in importance than an exhibit of a less philatelically important country. An exhibit of a philatelically important region, county, or city should be ranked higher than a less philatelically important region, county or city. An exhibit of elusive or esoteric philatelic material should be ranked higher in importance than an exhibit in which the material is more generally available. A comprehensive showing of something is more important than a less comprehensive showing of the same material. And a topnotch thematic or display exhibit should be ranked as more important than a second tier showing of the same material.

All of this is somewhat subjective and hence contentious. Judges are expected to weigh all these various factors in determining a score for importance in any particular exhibit, calling on their relative experiences obtained from studying a lot of exhibits. In fact, in some cases, importance should be evaluated last after a full impression of the exhibit has been obtained.

This subjectivity demands that the exhibitor clearly delineate the importance of his, or her, exhibit. This can be done by explicitly explaining the importance of the exhibit in the synopsis. Remember, the synopsis is the two-page outline of the exhibit submitted along with the title page and the exhibit entry form when applying to compete. In other words, it is important to state the importance of one's exhibit, at least so far as the exhibitor sees it.

Let's see how this is done in practice.

First, let's consider David McLaughlin's Royal 2018 Royale grand award-winning exhibit, The Maple Leaf Issue of Canada 1897-1898. From his synopsis, I excerpt his comments on how he sees the importance of his exhibit.

Subject and Philatelic Importance: Factors contributing to the subject and philatelic importance are:

-Shortest period lifespan for any Canadian definitive issue (e.g. three cents – only 23 weeks).

-First definitive issue produced by the new American Bank Note Company (ABNC) plant in Ottawa under the terms of the 1897 contract awarded to ABNC. The fully framed design set the style for Canadian stamps for over 40 years.

-Staggered introduction and replacement dates for all values and continued sale of the high values of preceding issues during Maple Leaf period created in period mixed franking usages.

- First overprinted Canadian stamp.

-New colour scheme complies with UPU Washington Conference resolution on colours.

Exhibit Importance: Traditional exhibits of the Maple Leaf Issue are difficult to assemble due to the short period of use and the low printing quantities. Preproduction material for this issue is rare and several preproduction items in this exhibit are believed to be unique. This issue was the first definitive issue produced by the American Bank Note Company in its new Ottawa plant.

You can see that McLaughlin makes a case that the Maple Leaf Issue has both subject and philatelic importance, and that the exhibit is important in its own right too, being a highly comprehensive showing with much scarce material.


Next, let's consider Joel Weiner's large gold exhibit Cancellations Used by the Allied Forces in Palestine During World War I 1917-1920. I excerpt his comments on importance:

Importance: *The postal history of the Holy Land has been of interest to philatelists since the earliest days of philately because of its importance to three major religions. All aspects, from the Ottoman era through the turmoil of the 20th century, have been extensively studied by postal historians. The First World War period was particularly tumultuous and it has been examined in detail by several students. It is a significant chapter in the postal history of the Holy Land as it required the development of an Army Postal System to meet the demands of the military, the need for large scale postal censorship and the provision of communication services (mail and telegraph) in the captured territory. Further, in terms of importance the cancels and postal markings, which form this exhibit, detail the large number of field post offices that had to be established and the difficulties of establishing lines of communication in the very undeveloped Middle East. The exhibit also shows how the British system integrated with Indian, Australian, New Zealand, French and Italian postal services."*

You can see here that Weiner argues for the historical and philatelic importance of his topic, as it is an important study within both the history and the philately of the Holy Land.

In summary, each exhibitor should try to determine the importance of the exhibit, and communicate why they feel the exhibit is important. Otherwise, the judges may overlook or fail to appreciate its full importance. The onus is on the exhibitor to state this clearly and unequivocally in our synopses. ☒

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



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