

# The Philatelic Communicator

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Writers Unit 30, American Philatelic Society

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Fourth Quarter 2005

## Writing Book Reviews

*by Alan Warren*

Editor Joe Foley has been urging me to do an article about writing book reviews but I have been reluctant to do so, as I feel I have no special training or expertise in this area. However, I can trace the roots of my interest in the subject to an assignment in my freshman English class in college, when the professor asked that we each write a book review. After turning in the results of my effort, I was surprised the next day to hear the professor read my review in front of the class, citing it as an example of how it should be done.

In addition to writing book reviews for philatelic periodicals I also wrote a few when I was working in a chemical research and development laboratory. These were usually on the subject of chemical health and safety and appeared in several technical journals.

I think the first requirement of a book reviewer is to have a genuine love of books. Although a modest library of one's own is an asset, it need not be an elaborate or extensive one. Being a philatelic literature judge also helps, as that activity develops skills in discerning the good and bad points about a book. The guidelines for philatelic literature judging are on the APS website.

### STRUCTURE OF THE REVIEW

My preference is to begin the review with the essentials about the book to give the reader an idea of what the book is about, what it costs, and where it can be purchased. The title, author or editor, place and date of publication, and ISBN (international standard book number) are used by book dealers to locate a copy for sale to customers. I like to cite the physical dimensions of the book including size and number of pages so the reader knows that the item is a reference book for library shelving, or is a checklist that might be carried in your pocket through a show bourse to identify want-list material.

There is nothing as frustrating as seeing a review of a book in which one has a keen interest, but there is nothing about how to obtain a copy of the book. If it is available from the publisher directly (frequently a philatelic society) or the author, indicate that but also include the address, or

at least an email contact.

Binding is of interest to the user. If the book is available in both a perfect binding (an adhesive holds the pages together and also the usual soft covers) or with a spiral or comb binding (indicating it will lie flat when open), the buyer may prefer the latter if he intends to use the book frequently for reference.

A logical approach is to review the content in the order in which it is presented. Is there a key to abbreviations that appears up front or is it buried somewhere that is not obvious? Are appropriate credits given at the beginning? Is there a good table of contents? Is there a good introduction that describes the scope of the work? Do the sections or chapters appear in logical order or does the author jump around, suggesting a lack of organization?

If there are appendices and they seem important for the potential buyer to know about, show what they are. How are footnotes handled—at the bottom of the page? at the end of the chapter? at the end of the book? Is there a good bibliography documenting sources or leading the reader to further references on the topic?

### CONTENT OF THE REVIEW

What is the book about? Is it a handbook, catalog, reference text, index, bibliography? Is it devoted largely to checklists or tables as opposed to written text? Sometimes the title does not always reveal the content. If it is a catalog, is it a priced catalog, i.e., showing values or at least giving some idea of scarcity using a scale of some sort? The reviewer should suggest the intended audience—beginner, casual reader interested in the topic, or specialist who is looking for a detailed study.

Is the book a retrospective of a popular topic and if so, does the author bring the information up to date and expand on it? Is there some important new interpretation of the subject or new conclusions? A book should not be a rehash of what went before but should add something new. If it is a translation from another language, has some effort been applied to correct errors in the earlier edition and to expand

➤➤ *continued on page 4*

# The Philatelic Communicator

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## The Quill

Joe Foley

Writers Unit 30, APS, publishes *The Philatelic Communicator* four times a year. A subscription to TPC is included with dues paid by members of the Unit.

Manuscripts are solicited on subjects of interest to writers, editors and publishers of all forms of philatelic literature. All submissions for publication, without exception, are subject to being edited. Opinions expressed in *The Philatelic Communicator* are those of their authors, and not necessarily of Writers Unit 30, APS, its officers, editor, publisher or agents. Letters received by the editor may be published unless labeled "Not for Publication." When possible, furnish copy, including letters, electronically (WordPerfect 8, RTF or Word). Include a printed copy as a control. All editorial matters must be handled with the editor.

DEADLINES—For receipt of copy by the editor:

First Quarter . . . . . Jan. 15  
Second Quarter . . . . . April 15  
Third Quarter . . . . . July 15  
Fourth Quarter . . . . . Oct. 15

### EVERY SILVER LINING HAS ITS CLOUD

The Monday following a very enjoyable visit to the APS Headquarters in Bellefonte, I made an appointment to see my doctor regarding a persistent cough. To make a long story short – the diagnosis is lung cancer. At this writing, there are still more tests before a prognosis can be made and the type of treatment decided. It's likely that normal activities will be curtailed. Gene Fricks a long-time member of the WU30 Council and former editor of *The Collectors Club Philatelist* has graciously agreed to step in as interim editor. Contact information for Gene is:

E. E. Fricks  
25 Murray Way  
Blackwood, NJ 08012  
phone: 856 784-9226  
email: [genefricks@comcast.net](mailto:genefricks@comcast.net)

Please support Gene with nothing less than a deluge of outstanding manuscripts.

### ACROSS THE EDITOR'S DESK

It seems like more speciality groups are making their journals available on the 'net. One of the latest I've seen is the New Jersey Postal History Society. A color scan of a cover or other item shows up very nicely and is certainly less expensive than color in hard copy. For an introduction, check out the group's Website at: <http://members.aol.com/njpostalhistory/phsindex.htm>

### COMING ATTRACTIONS

Usually, about this time we publish a report on the circulation of stamp publications. This year, Council Member Lloyd de Vries promises a new approach. Lloyd advised that some journals will not publish their data until after this issue has gone to the printer—so stay tuned. Lloyd will have the story for us in the next issue. □

The devil himself always seems to get into my inkstand, and I can only exorcise him by pensful at a time.

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

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Writers Unit 30 has as its primary objective the encouragement and improvement of philatelic writing in all of its various forms. Calendar year membership dues, payable in advance in U.S. funds through a U.S. bank or Post Office are:

|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| USPS Zip code address | \$15.00 |
| Canada & Mexico       | \$17.50 |
| All other addresses   | \$20.00 |

Please report address changes to the Secretary-Treasurer as soon as known in order to avoid loss of issues.

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# President's Message

by Peter Martin



THE WRITER'S UNIT #30  
HALL OF FAME

As I mentioned in my third quarter column, the Writer's Unit is moving forward on many fronts. One of those areas is the preparation of guidelines for the WU#30 Hall of Fame. Our 2005 inductees were Robert Dalton Harris and Beverly S. King (1876-1935). Both are very deserving and have taken their place of honor among the 136

men and women who are now enshrined there.

However, a third nominee submitted by the Hall of Fame committee did not receive the required votes for admission. The reason: while the individual had a strong philatelic resume, his writing and editing credentials were weak. That action highlighted a long-standing problem with the selection process. There were no council-approved guidelines for the chairmen to use when nominating individuals for the HOF. Over time, each chairman used his own unwritten criteria for making HOF nominations.

A review of the HOF list on the back of the August Writer's Breakfast program reveals the names of many of the hobby's top writers and editors. Pick a name from the list and most of you will be able to cite a book, periodical or specialty area that is associated with that individual. Still, like any hall of fame, whether it is sports, entertainment, professional or otherwise, there are included names where you will need to scrutinize the biography to find the reason for their induction.

To rectify the current shortcoming, I will spearhead the effort to establish HOF guidelines and a complete nomination program and submit recommendations to the Council next year. Among the things that will be decided are:

## Nomination Criteria

Currently, writing excellence; editing excellence; outstanding publishing contributions; and outstanding long-term contributions to WU#30 are under consideration. Are these appropriate? Should there be others?

## Nomination Process

Who can nominate? How should nominations be submitted? What is the time line for the nomination process? Will the Council need a simple majority or two-thirds majority vote for induction?

## HOF Committee

How many members? Should all or a majority be HOF members

## HOF Recognition

Currently a certificate is issued to inductees. Should a medal or other award be created?

Your participation is invited. Contact me at:

pmartin2020@aol.com or write to POB 4503, Danbury, CT 06813.

WRITER'S UNIT #30 HALL OF FAME  
2006 NOMINATIONS

This is a call for nominations for the Writer's Unit #30 Hall of Fame Class of 2006. Anyone may submit a nomination by writing or e-mailing the nominee's name and up to a two-page reason for the nomination, which should focus on the nominees writing and/or editing excellence. Nominations must be received by Feb. 28, 2006. Submit nominations by e-mail to: pmartin2020@aol.com (Subject: WU#30 HOF) or by mail to WU#30 Hall of Fame Nomination, POB 4503, Danbury, CT 06813. □

## WRITER'S UNIT #30 COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

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## WU 30 CRITIQUE SERVICE

Past president Charles J. Peterson operates the WU30 Critique Service. There is no charge for the service. Details are:

**Periodicals**—Submit the four most recent issues. Include postage equivalent to four times the first class mailing fee. Any unused amount will be returned. Critiques can be expected in about 30 days.

**Books/manuscripts**—Inquire before sending, with a brief description of the item. Please include a stamped, addressed envelope for the reply. The time element for a book or manuscript can vary depending on length, other similar requests at hand and other commitments.

All submissions & correspondence should be sent to Charles J. Peterson, Box 5559, Laurel, MD 20726, phone 301 776-9822, e-mail: cjp7777@aol.com. □

►► **Writing Book Reviews** (continued from page 1)  
on the knowledge? The reviewer should be familiar with the field and especially with what has appeared in print before to know how much new information is brought out in the new book. Personal knowledge will enable the reviewer to discern errors in facts or conclusions.

How smoothly does the book read or flow? Is the handling of the language choppy or poorly edited? Do sentence structure and poor grammar get in the way of understanding the text?

Does the bibliography use accepted methods of citation or is there information missing such as place and date of publication, incomplete titles, and obvious errors?

#### PUBLISHING ASPECTS

Are the typeface and font size reader-friendly or are they obstacles that challenge the reader? Are there myriad typos or has the work been carefully edited? If there are typos in the text, then how carefully was the bibliography done? The reader's confidence level in periodical citations may lead to strong doubts about dates or volume or page numbers.

What about the illustrations? Are they placed in the appropriate area or does the reader have to go looking for figure numbers? Are they of good quality or are the images too light or too dark or too small to discern the markings or varieties?

More and more publications are appearing in electronic format such as on compact disc. The guidelines for evaluating content are the same as for print materials but user aspects should be reviewed such as ease of navigation and search capability.

Is there an index? This is not needed for some books that are catalogs or checklists in which the material is presented in some logical sequence such as chronologically. However, reference books really needing an index but lacking one deprive the reader of a very important tool for using the book.

Some European books have a brief table of contents placed at the end of the book. A table of contents belongs up front, and a table of contents and an index are two distinctly different tools.

Keep in mind that philatelic books are mostly a labor of love and are usually not moneymakers. If they are likely to be reprinted or updated within a few years, the authors need to know what they should do the next time around. However, many books may not be done again soon, if ever. Nonetheless, the author does have access to the critique services of experienced writers and editors such as Charlie Peterson and Barth Healey, whose services are mentioned in each issue of the *Philatelic Communicator*. Another excellent reference for book authors is James Negus' book

*Philatelic Literature: Compilation Techniques and Reference Sources*, published by James Bendon, Limassol, Cyprus in 1991.

If you like to write and love books, do your specialized society journal editor a favor and offer to review books so that other collectors can learn about what is new in the field. □

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### Literature Exhibition Calendar

Coordinators of Literature Exhibitions are encouraged to submit full information, including a prospectus, for these listings. Please contact the editor well in advance of the closing date for entries.

#### March 10-12, 2006

COLOPEX 2006, Veterans Memorial Auditorium, 300 West Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43062. Entry fee \$25, entries close January 27, 2006. Information available from Literature Coordinator, Box 20582, Columbus, Ohio 43220, email: literature@colopex.com, Website: www.colopex.com.

#### May 27 - June 3, 2006

Washington 2006, Washington Convention Center, Washington, DC. Entry fee \$55, entries have closed. For information consult the Bulletin at: <http://www.washington-2006.org/draob/bulletin.pdf>.

#### August 4-7, 2005

A.P.S. STAMPSHOW, Chicago, IL. Donald G. Stephens Convention Center, 5555 N. River Road, Rosemont. For information contact Ken Martin, APS, 100 Match Factory Place, Bellfonte, PA 16823, phone 814 933-3803 ext 218, fax 814 933-6128, email: stampshow@stamps.org, Website (which contains prospectus and entry forms): <http://www.stamps.org/StampShow/Intro.htm>.

#### November 17-19, 2006

CHICAGOPEX 2006. For information contact John Kevin Doyle, 5815 Lenox Road, Lisle, IL 60532-3138, email: doyle-stamps@att.net, Website: www.chicagopex.com. □

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### WRITING/LAYOUT MENTORING

Barth Healey, a senior staff editor at *The New York Times* and an accredited national and international literature judge, is ready, willing and able to review society journals and other publications and offer some constructive comments. He has also had extensive writing and layout experience. Send two or three recent issues to him at 86 Bar Beach Road, Port Washington, NY 11050-4029. (Supplying return postage would be a nice gesture.) □

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Adam was the only man who, when he said a good thing knew that nobody had said it before him.

—Mark Twain

## Writers' Forum at STAMPSHOW

WU30 president Peter Martin convened the forum at 11:00 a.m. on Friday of the show. Those in the audience were requested to introduce themselves. Peter then introduced the featured speakers and asked that questions be held until all had finished.

The first was Michael Schreiber, editor of *Linn's Stamp News*. Michael stressed the importance of a writer first identifying his audience and keeping that firmly in mind throughout the preparation of the article. *Linn's* audience is general encompassing the full range of collectors from the very basic to those that are greatly advanced.

The key to having a good release published by *Linn's* is to have the Who, When, Where and What very evident. From time to time, the "when" is missing, creating obvious problems. There should also be something significant in the article—something to create interest and distinguish this item from others that may have preceded it. Schreiber gave an example of a release that was really too bland—nothing to capture the interest of the reader. However a truly new development occurred and was added to it and the item was published.

He also noted that the staff usually handles most news items, but there are exceptions. A notable one was the exposure of fake FDCs that was written by a freelance author.

Next was Michael Baadke, editor of *Scott Stamp Monthly*. Michael reviewed the changes in the journal from tabloid to magazine format with some significant improvement in newsstand distribution. Writers for *SSM* should strive for clarity and if a technical term is to be used, it should be explained. Topical articles as well as a country survey, e.g., the recent one on Sweden, are welcome, as are articles on other philatelic subjects of general interest.

Baadke prefers to receive a printed hard copy draft as opposed to electronic format together with a photocopy of philatelic material that would be used for illustrations. Authors can expect a reply between four and six weeks after submission. Any substantial change will be reviewed with the author and the author will receive one copy of the issue carrying his article.

Charles Peterson, past president of WU30 and the editor of *Chronicle of Classic Issues* followed with remarks about some of the differences that are found in a highly specialized journal. He echoed the early remarks on the basics of a news story and added the importance of How & Why. One of the challenges is to develop a journal that will attract new members without dumbing down the

publication. Routine matters about membership and administration are treated in a separate publication and the society's Website, with the *Chronicle* exclusively treating philatelic subjects.

The most important aspect of a good research article is "to get it right!" The *Chronicle* has section editors and usually requires pre-publication peer review. Source citation is essential and the sources are checked. Peterson prefers to receive drafts in electronic format (generic such as RTF) with an accompanying hard copy. The standard for scans is 300 dpi or better.

### QUESTIONS WERE THEN CALLED FOR

Question to Michael Baadke: I thought the previous efforts to sell through Barnes & Noble were not successful.

Answer: The old tabloid format didn't show well and was usually set horizontally on a shelf. The new magazine format is much more visible and is displayed upright with other similar magazines. We are pleased with the results to date.

Question to Michael Schreiber: How much lead time does *Linn's* require?

Answer: Usually about three or four weeks before the event. Make-up is thirteen days prior to cover date.

Question to Charles Peterson: What percent of your journal is advertising?

Answer: Usually about 18-20% in the *Chronicle*. Depending on the type of mailing, there are USPS regulations to deal with.

Question to Charles Peterson: How do you find authors?

Answer: We have been fortunate in having a number of writers submit material. The basic policy of the *Chronicle* is to only publish original research. However, we will work with an author who would like his material published subsequently in another journal and expect the author to reference to the initial appearance in the *Chronicle*. □

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In stating as fully as I could how things really were, it was often very difficult and I wrote awkwardly and the awkwardness is what they called my style. All mistakes and awkwardness are easy to see, and they called it style.

—Ernest Hemingway

# Producing and Writing a 1,240 Page Stamp Catalog How Two Guys Did it by Themselves (More or Less)

by Richard Stambaugh

All it takes is time . . . and some motivation. Joel Hawkins and I were motivated. We have been consummate meter stamp collectors for most of our lives (we are both now hovering near age sixty). Joel has been president of the Meter Stamp Society for thirteen years, and I have been the editor of the Society's journal for more than twenty. During most of this time we worked with catalogs that were decades out of date. To solve part of the problem we wrote and published a U.S. specialized meter stamp catalog in 1994. We had never considered replacing the hobby's bible, the half-century old Barfoot & Simon catalog of world postage meter stamps, because it was simply too daunting. Still, our success with the U.S. specialized built up our muscles and led us to consider the possibility. This was in 1995, and that was when the idea of a new world book, the recently published *International Postage Meter Stamp Catalog*, was born.

We were not the first to have this idea. In the early 1970s, Charles Smith, a collector and friend of Werner Simon (of Barfoot & Simon), began work on a new edition. He never completed the task, and I became the owner of the unpublished handwritten manuscript when I bought Mr. Smith's collection in the 1980s. Both the 1953 Barfoot & Simon catalog and Smith's manuscript were quite detailed including all varieties of every stamp type they could find. This worked in the 1950s but by the 1970s there was too much information for a practical worldwide catalog and most likely overwhelmed Smith. The manuscript had developed into a confusion of insertions and pointers that was almost impenetrable. Its greatest impact was to confirm the need to simplify and condense the listings out of the massive amounts of data we had to work with.

How did we do that? Mostly by ignoring minor varieties and by grouping into one type stamps that differed only slightly from each other. Thus, we were able to organize an ocean of information into a relatively compact stream. On the other hand, to make the catalog as easy to use as possible, we decided to illustrate every stamp type we could (and at full size), so the space savings was probably nil.

Where did we find our data? We started by documenting our own considerable collections and

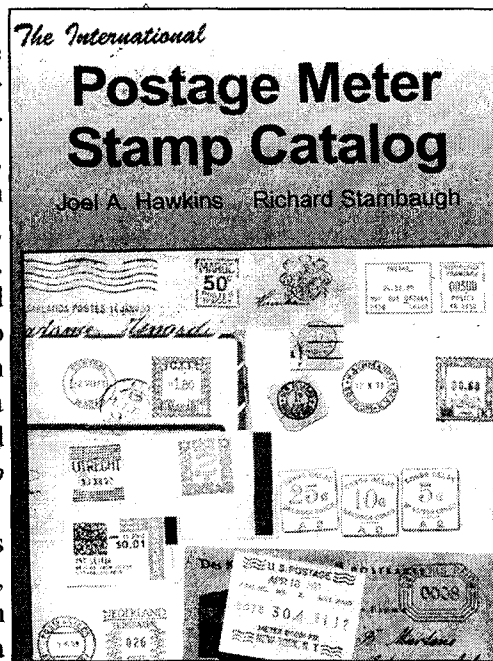
extending Smith's draft with our finds. We then contacted several collectors who also had large worldwide collections for their input. We were able to visit many these people and do much of the cataloging ourselves. In one case we ended up buying the man's complete holdings.

We bought or borrowed every single-country meter stamp specialized catalog we could find plus several other catalogs and books that contained meter stamp information. We merged it all into our draft. Once we had what felt like a fairly comprehensive product we contacted advanced single country and regional collectors around the world known to us and solicited help through meter stamp collecting societies in other countries. We sent portions of the draft to the specialists we found. They corrected our mistakes, added types and varieties new to us, gave us photos of stamps and in some cases the actual stamps if we lacked illustrations, and otherwise improved the draft through their expertise.

Despite all this help, we were on our own for most of the world's countries. Meter stamp collecting groups exist in only a half dozen nations. We found literature or specialists for fewer than one hundred countries. European and North American meter stamps are well documented, but the countries of Africa and Latin America, with some exceptions, have no advanced collectors that we could find and only the skimpiest of published meter stamp documentation. Our catalog is probably weakest in these countries, and over the next couple of years we expect readers to report plenty of new items and corrections — or as we like to call them, "gotcha's."

Philatelic agencies were no help at all. In more than one case agencies denied their countries ever had postage meters despite the several items in my collection. The meter manufacturers were also of no help. We found that if it did not involve a sale, they did not want to be bothered with requests for information or cooperation. We were able to find unofficial help from a small number of meter company employees who also happened to be stamp collectors.

Once it seemed that searching out more data became an exercise of diminishing returns, we began the organizing and polishing process. Most of you know how this is; it just



## A.L. McCready Award for Philatelic Literature

J.E. (Ted) Nixon, president of The R.P.S.C. Philatelic Research Foundation has announced the establishment of a new philatelic literature award to be administered by the Foundation.

Nixon said "the A.L. (Mae) McCready Award will be made annually for the best philatelic research published during a given calendar year." Eligible publications will be handbooks, special studies, or annuals. The work must be a Canadian publication, a publication by a Canadian in another country, or a publication on a subject relating to what is now Canada published by any writer anywhere in the world.

Articles in magazines, auction catalogues, dealers' price lists and exhibition catalogues will not be eligible for this award.

Only publications in English and French will be considered. Evaluation will be conducted using criteria that will examine treatment of contents; originality, significance, and depth of research; technical matters; and presentation. The award will be selected by a panel of three members who will be appointed by the R.P.S.C. Philatelic Research Foundation.

Arthur L. McCready was one of Canada's foremost pioneers in philatelic literature. A newspaperman in eastern Ontario, he was editor of the *Cobden Sun* for thirty years. His major philatelic undertaking was the purchase of *Popular Stamps* in 1939. He turned what was little more than a stamp dealer's trade and price list into one of the country's most successful journals.

Between 1942 and 1947 when *The Canadian Philatelist* was born, *Popular Stamps* served as the R.P.S.C. journal. McCready also published several well known philatelic catalogues and handbooks. Charles J.G. Verge, President of The R.P.S.C. and a fan and promoter of Mr. McCready said "Mac McCready gave "unflinching service to philatelic literature, and to his worldwide list of subscribers which continues as a legacy for Canadian philatelists today."

A.L. McCready was inducted into the American Philatelic Society's Writers' Unit 30 Hall of Fame at a special breakfast held during CAPEX '96 in Toronto.

The award will consist of a specially prepared sculpture mounted on a plaque. The first award will be made next year for material published during 2005. Prospective award nominees will need to send one copy of their publication to the McCready Award Committee, c/o R.P.S.C., P.O. Box 2788, Station 'DI, Ottawa, ON K1P 5W8. □

took us years because of the huge volume of data. We ran into some problems that would not be an issue with a smaller project. For example, we wanted to include the country name on each page in the header or footer. Perhaps with different software this would not have been a problem, but in Microsoft Word it seemed to require a separate file for each country, and the prospect of assembling and paginating error free more than 250 separate files killed the idea. During this extended period we still found new items that had to be worked into the draft. In many cases we were able to adjust the listings so an insertion did not affect more than one page, but often a new item forced the recasting of page after page of listings with text from the bottom of one page being bumped to the top of the next.

When we started the writing phase, affordable computer memory and speed did not allow us to scan in all the stamp images. This changed before we were done, but by then it was too late. We spent hours, days, weeks, verily months cutting out and gluing in each image by hand and then photocopying all the pages. Care was needed to position each image evenly and then we had to white out the shadows from the cutouts that would appear in the photocopy. Although numbingly tedious, I don't know if scanning more than six thousand images and fitting them electronically into a digital document would have been any less torturous, perhaps less messy.

The images themselves also required much work. I purchased a digital laser printer with superior lighting control to aid in this process. When necessary we made further adjustments using correction fluid, razor blade and erasers to remove over-cancels, handstamps and other extraneous markings. I found this faster than using Photoshop that I tried. Perhaps someone more adept with the software would have had a different experience. It was still enormously time-consuming but also surprisingly satisfying to see messy stamp images emerge clear and clean.

Finally, ten years after we began the project we found a printer and sent them tons of money plus the finished draft. A month later we had a garage-full of books that we now hope will shrink rapidly over the next few years. Don't try this if you are more than eighty.

Ed.: The *International Postage Meter Stamp Catalog* was reviewed in the Second Quarter issue of *The Philatelic Communicator*. □

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There is probably no hell for authors in the next world—they suffer so much from critics and publishers in this one.

—C. N. Bovee

## Writing, Writing and More Writing

I recently invited several prominent writers who keep very active commitments to share their thoughts and experiences. The responses follow and provide some very fine guidance and ideas.

JEF

### The Wrong Way to Write Right

by Janet Klug

I'm flattered to be invited by editor Joe Foley to participate in a new series of articles about how philatelic writers write, and specifically for this column I was delegated to write, how I write about philately.

This got me to thinking about something I had never actually thought about before. What processes do I use? How do I write an article? What useful advice could I give others who want to write about our great hobby?

After a lot of angst-filled soul searching, I have come to the conclusion that I have been doing it all wrong, and yet somehow I manage to crank out something to make my deadlines, usually with some breathing room to spare. Occasionally I get a nice letter from someone who tells me they enjoyed something I wrote. Go figure.

#### WRITING METHOD

As an example of how I approach writing in an oddly convoluted manner, let me explain my present surroundings. I am not sitting at my computer. Yes, I know it would save time if I was. I have tried composing an article directly using word processing software and any one of my three trusty computers, but I don't find this to be satisfactory. For me, it hampers creativity. I actually like drawing the words out on a page. I like editing on the fly by crossing out words or beginning a new thought where I please and then drawing an arrow to where it belongs in the finished text. I enjoy doodling in the margins and fiddling with phrases until I like the way it sits on the page.

So I use a yellow legal pad. I sit in my favorite recliner and scribble away. My recliner is certainly more comfortable than my desk chair even if I occasionally have to share it with one or more cats. Oh yeah, and I occasionally also nod off.

In an average year I scribble my way through eight yellow legal pads and I never rip out a page to start over. Every phrase, sentence, and paragraph is worth saving. Sometimes the unused prose will be needed elsewhere, but most of the time it will be saved as examples of what not to do.

I work best in a quiet house, but most of the time the house is not especially quiet. Many of my articles – indeed

all of the ones of which I am most proud – are written in the middle of the night when the house is still.

Before I start writing an article, I will outline it. If it is an especially complicated subject, I will do a very thorough outline. Most of the time I will just jot down the main subjects I want to cover in more or less the order I expect to present. The finished article may end up in a different order, but by having my outline, I know I won't leave out something important.

I get my ideas from everywhere. Sometimes a letter or e-mail from a reader will spark an idea for a column. Occasionally current events will prompt a philatelic idea. Recently I was listening to a radio interview on the local National Public Radio station while I was doing my daily four-mile walk. The guest was a rapper whose life story was surprisingly compelling and he was very articulate. I listened to this man explain how he learned to rap by emulating the oratory of speakers he admired. All while I was walking, I thought about emulating others' successful styles, so when I got home I wrote an article about stamp twins – stamps that borrow design elements from other stamps, as differentiated from joint issues that are deliberate. So I guess a rap artist was my muse that day.

Most often, however, my ideas for articles come from my own curiosity about something in my collection. I figure if I am puzzled about something, maybe somebody else is as well. And if not, at least I have satisfied my own curiosity. Sometimes I do draw a blank and can't think of anything I want to write about. If I am not real close to my deadline, I just wait it out. If I am close to the deadline I fetch a worldwide album and blindly open it to a page and then take something on the page and write about it. This has had some surprising results, because I sometimes find myself writing about subjects of which I have absolutely no knowledge. But that's OK, too. I can take the readers step by step through the process of how I found out about the stamps from North Ingermanland or what the Gurkhas were doing in Malaya in the 1950s.

I don't worry too much about spelling, grammar, and style. I do reread my writing before submitting it to my editors, but I trust they will do their job and make me look good in print. I find most editors to have been gentle to my prose. My voice and style still come through. I am a fairly casual writer and I go off on odd tangents sometimes because that's the way I think. My editors let me do this, but I try not to overuse the privilege. Once a year I read Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*. Sooner or later it will sink in. The best thing in the whole book is this one piece of advice: Omit unnecessary words. I try to do that. Honest.



These days all of the articles I write are delivered electronically to the editor. I use MS Word, as cumbersome a piece of software that has ever been created. It is nowhere near as intuitive as my preferred but no longer supported Ami Pro software. I use Word because it is ubiquitous, and not because I like it.

Once I have completed the scribbles in my yellow legal pad, I usually let an article rest for a day or two. Then I sit at the computer and type away. I type quickly and accurately, but I do have my word processing software set to correct typos and misspellings on the fly. Once it is saved on the computer, I will go back and revise and polish the piece until I am satisfied with it.

Unless otherwise instructed, I send scans of the illustrations that I make on my Cannon scanner. The editor will tell me his preference, but usually 300 dots per inch jpg or bmp files are requested. I might be able to accommodate something fancier, but if not, I can send the illustrative materials for the editorial staff to scan.

#### HANDY REFERENCES

My personal library contains several good general philatelic references. Those I use most often are:

*Fundamentals of Philately* by L.N. Williams

*Stamp Collectors Encyclopedia* by R.J. Sutton

*The Stamp Atlas* by Wellstead, Rossiter & Flowers

*Stamps: Facts & Feats* by James Mackay

I also have the complete run of *Billigs Philatelic Handbooks*, which are dated but useful, and a thirty-year run of the *American Philatelic Congress Books*. I have about thirty shelf feet of other philatelic works for my own collections that prove useful for writing from time to time. What I don't have I can usually borrow from the American Philatelic Research Library.

I have some general reference works that are useful. These include *The Encyclopedia of World History* edited by Peter Stearns, *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Oxford's Companion to Military History*, several atlases, *Webster's Geographical Dictionary*, and *Webster's Third Dictionary*. These added with the multitude of data you can Google up on the World Wide Web satisfy most of my needs for facts and fact checking.

The librarians at my local public library have become trusted and helpful friends. I have found museums all over the world to be both courteous and helpful when I explain my projects to them and share any research I do that is useful to them. People are universally generous with their help when treated with respect.

Editor Joe Foley asked me if I keep articles in reserve. I wish I could! Life would be simpler. I write two articles each month for *Linn's Stamp News* (Refresher Course), quarterly articles for *Scott Stamp Monthly* (Down Under),

a monthly president's column for *American Philatelist*, and assorted odds and ends as the spirit moves me for a multitude of philatelic societies I belong to. It would be a great comfort to have a few spare columns lying in wait for those odd occasions when I can't think of a thing I want to write about....and it's due tomorrow, damn it! God bless those editors who come to me and say, "Janet, will you write about the cause and effect of the Peloponnesian War as illustrated on postage stamps and it is due by February 4!" I not only have a preordained subject, but a date when I can stop thinking about it and move on to something else.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR NOVICE WRITERS

Do I have any suggestions for novice writers? Sure. Two, in fact.

*Suggestion Number One:* Read voraciously. Read fiction, nonfiction, philatelic works, periodicals, the backs of cereal boxes and ads on busses. Read everything everywhere. Become a sponge. Be critical about what you read and figure out why you like or dislike certain styles. Ponder why some of the stuff you are reading is interesting, even if the subject is not. Emulate the good, just as the rapper did.

*Suggestion Number Two:* Write. Go ahead....just do it! Stop procrastinating. Write about your favorite stamp or cover. Submit it to the editor of your local stamp club newsletter or the specialist society you belong to. The editor will most likely keel over in a dead faint from the surprise of receiving an article from someone that did not require a plethora of demeaning begging, pleading and bribery.

When you have finished writing your first piece, write again. And again. Write letters to the editor of philatelic publications. Write about the first postmarks or post office of your hometown for the local historical society. Write about a first day of issue ceremony you attended for your local newspaper. Some of these won't get published, but write them anyway for the practice and joy of writing. Writing is fun.

Trust me....

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## The Challenge of Writing Frequently-For The Philatelic Press

*by John M. Hotchner*

"Mere mortals work from nine to five. A writer works while he's alive." While I don't know the author of this gem, I do know the feeling described. It makes it easier that I enjoy writing, rarely fall into the angst pit where the frightened writer stares at the blank page waiting for inspiration and hoping, praying that his muse will wake

before the arrival of the next deadline. If anything, I'm blessed with more ideas than I have time to translate to paper.

## FREQUENCY

So what does "Frequently" mean for me: Since 1976 I have written for *Linn's Stamp News*; first monthly, then twice a month, and since 1986, weekly, with a focus on 20th Century U.S. philately and the dynamics of collecting. From 1977 through 1995, I wrote a twice-a-month column on the dynamics of running stamp clubs for the late lamented *Stamp Collector*. From 1983 to 1992, when it was "de-funded," I wrote and edited *Stamp Fun* and *Leader Feature*, the newsletters for kids and teachers involved in the USPS Ben Franklin Stamp Clubs nationwide.

Currently besides *Linn's*, I edit and write for *U.S. Stamp News* published monthly by John Dunn; edit and write for *The Philatelic Exhibitor*; do a monthly column on U.S. philately for Michael Rogers' monthly newsletter, do a column for the Errors, Freaks and Oddities Collectors Club quarterly journal, do a column for the sporadically issued Virginia Philatelic Federation's *VPPF Forum* and contribute pieces to other magazines and newspapers as requested or I'm moved. For occasional fun, I edit book manuscripts for friends.

The point is that philatelic writing is not a sometime thing for me. As a constant presence in my life it is something like a garden that requires attention of some sort each day to keep things neat, to prevent the mind from being overgrown with weeds, and to be constantly harvesting fully formed new ideas, and planting new ones to germinate.

For purposes of prompting content for this piece, Editor Foley has asked several questions, and to keep things neat, I will answer them primarily with regard to my *Linn's* weekly column "U.S. Notes," though other thoughts may creep in.

## GETTING STARTED

First let me say that I am a second generation philatelic writer. My dad, Howard Hotchner, was a senior staffer for the Office of War Information during the Second World War, and when it morphed into the Voice of America, he made that a career, retiring with twenty-eight years of service. Always one to show initiative, he and a friend, Bill Miller, created the Voice of America Stamp Club, which ultimately numbered many hundreds of thousands around the world as registered members, with untold additional millions of listeners who could not, or dared not write to VOA. If you never heard of him, it is because by law, VOA did not and does not broadcast within the United States, but he was well known abroad as the writer and announcer of the VOA Stamp Club's weekly program, which focused on

the stories behind U. S. stamps; especially new issues and how they reflected the best of American history and society.

From Dad, I learned the mechanics of writing, the lore of the hobby, and saw his joy in the product. I began my writing career by editing a local club journal. After three years of that I was possessed of lots of opinions and saw no reason why I should not seek to share them with *Linn's* readers, since it was the biggest and best of the philatelic periodicals. Looking back, that was clearly ambition run amok. However, Ed Neuce, then *Linn's* Editor, looked at my samples and said "yes" to a monthly column on the philosophy of collecting.

From the start I determined that I wanted to involve the readers in the project. Even today you will find that I often ask readers for their opinions, information on obscure material that has surfaced, and of course my monthly cartoon caption contests. It didn't take long to build up a loyal readership, and they are the source of about half the content of columns. They continually write with answers to previous questions and new questions about odd things they have found.

The other half of the content comes from diligent searching of three sources: dealer stocks at shows, the content of a dozen or so second level auctions where one is likely to find the weird but inexpensive and from working on my own collections. Suffice it to say that I have enough material for several years into the future. Yet I keep looking; and I jealously guard my shopping time at shows because of the need to find things to give context to subjects in process, as well as to find interesting stories to add to the stockpile of pending material.

## PROCESS

Material on its way into "U.S. Notes" is stored in folders labeled with a subject. No folder is ever closed until its subject is written up and becomes part of a "U.S. Notes" column.

For instance there is a developing folder on Free Postage for the Blind, and another on newly discovered plate varieties. There are perhaps 150 of those folders in which I gather examples, literature references, Internet and other research, reader correspondence, etc. Additional examples, different examples, more information, associated material - all are eagerly sought. When a folder achieves critical mass, I will turn it into a "chunk."

What, you may ask, is a "chunk?" Reading "U.S. Notes" you will see that each week's column is made up of between two and four subjects. Each subject is drafted as a separate item, or chunk. My editor at *Linn's* until recently Rob Haeseler, and now Jay Bigalke, selects from among the available chunks using criteria such as relatedness, variety