



The Philatelic Communicator

Newsletter of the American Philatelic Society Writers Unit #30 • Winter 2025 • N° 225



HALL OF FAME

Gough, Lyons, Luft are 2025 inductees

James P. Gough, Larry Lyons and the late Stanley J. Luft have been voted into the APS Writers Unit Hall of Fame, committee chair Cheryl Ganz reported.

Gough authored the 2020 Crawford medal-winning *The Postal History of the Universal Postal Union: The Postal Card (Worldwide) 1869-1974*.

An international judge and Luff Award winner in 2020, Gough had extensively researched postage dues and the impact of UPU regulations on worldwide postal services, publishing articles in the *Collectors Club Philatelist* as well as the *London Philatelist*.

Lyons, executive director of the Philatelic Foundation since 2010, is the author of *The Identifier for Carriers, Locals, Fakes, Forgeries and Bogus Posts of The United States* and *The 2007 Pricing Guide for Unlisted Carriers, Locals, Fakes, Forgeries and Bogus Posts of the United States* as well as more than 140 original research articles in various journals and publications.

He received the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society Carroll Chase Cup in 1998 and was twice awarded the Diane D. Boehret Award (in 2009 and 2011) for Excellence in Philatelic Literature.

The late Stanley J. Luft, a geologist who resided in Golden, Colorado, was a well-known French philatelic specialist and a prolific writer on just about every aspect of the field.

Luft wrote or co-authored over 100 articles for various journals, but chiefly the *France & Colonies Philatelist*, which he edited from 1993 to 2007. His writings also appeared in *The American Philatelist*, *Collectors Club Philatelist*, *American Philatelic Congress Book*, *Military Postal History Society Bulletin*, *London Philate-*

Continue reading on page 5

Whither the Writers Unit?

First of all, a personal apology is in order to the members of the Writers Unit 30 for my failure, as your editor, to produce September and December issues of this newsletter. Chalk it up to

Matthew Healey a crisis of confidence and some kind of editor's block; I'm sorry to have let you down. Fear not; our Writers Unit carries on, although there will be some changes in the near future. For starters, I've agreed to step aside and let my friend Mark Kellner take the reins as editor; I will continue to collaborate with him.

If there's a silver lining to my period of silence, it's that the break gave me some time to think. And this is where I'd like to ask for your feedback.

There are two important questions facing our organization: One, What is the purpose of the WU30? And two, is a quarterly newsletter really the best vehicle to serve our needs?

Traditionally, the WU30 has been concerned with how we can develop as writers, editors or content producers—mastering the nuts and bolts of our trade. Lately we have also discussed how to communicate in other media such as audio and video, through podcasts and social media postings. In recent months, these are some of the areas we've touched on:

¶ Keeping up to date on philatelic literature publishing by compiling competition results and occasional reviews (we could, and intend to, do more);

¶ Followed developments at philatelic libraries across North America, some of which are in crisis and need our renewed engagement to survive;

¶ Heard from commentators such as Jay Smith about the serious problem of preservation of digital knowledge;

¶ Knowing that the future of our hobby depends on nurturing the next gener-

Please take our brief member survey on p.4

ation of writers and editors, Gary Loew has led discussion of the best methods for approaching this monumental task together.

Which brings me to my second question about whether a quarterly 12-page newsletter is the right way to carry on.

There are several arguments against persisting in the form we have used historically: printed newsletters, or their PDF versions, are now largely a thing of the past. They worked well in an age when most communication happened on paper, via the mails; now, in the second quarter of the 21st century, we have better ways. *A quarterly print publication is a constraint, not an enabler.*

Online networks offer far greater benefits, such as two-way communication, easy search and retrieval, and the removal of quaint constraints such as the physical length of a sheet of paper.

But beyond migrating our newsletter to a platform such as Substack and adding a bulletin-board function to our web site (neither of which we've done yet), what else could we do? And what about the folks we would inevitably leave behind in such a process, whose membership in our group we still value? I'm hoping readers can help me work this out.

I'd like to see an active, online space where we can congregate (not in real time, naturally, but asynchronously) to exchange Q&As, ideas, tips and tricks, little discoveries, literature updates, library news and the like. In short, the kind of thing that historically has filled these pages, but in a much more dynamic, accessible, bite-sized and interactive

Continue reading on page 4



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Manuscripts are welcomed on subjects of interest to writers, editors, and publishers of all forms of philatelic literature. All submissions for publication are subject to editing for style and accuracy. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors, and not necessarily of the Writers Unit 30, its officers and editor, or the American Philatelic Society. Letters and emails received by the editor may be printed unless the writer explicitly requests otherwise. Use of trademarks, product names and/or images that may be subject to copyright protection is only for identification, explanation and/or commentary, without intent to infringe.

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Volunteers are sought for the following positions: *Historian, Publicist, Special events, AIJP liaison.* Please reach out to the President if interested in helping with any of these roles.

What on Earth is going on?

A philatelic Rip Van Winkle who fell asleep in 2005, and awakened today, 20 years later, could be forgiven for asking, “*What on Earth has happened?*”

Mark A. Kellner Even if stamp collecting’s salad days were in the rearview mirror by the first decade of our century, there was still plenty of life left in the hobby.

However, we need to take a clear-eyed look at where the hobby is, and not where we wish it was. This involves a realistic appraisal of the business side of philately, the organizational component, and the external forces acting on it.

The headlines interrupted—and emphasized—this meditation: On Feb. 10, one day after President Donald J. Trump ordered the Treasury Department to cease production of one-cent coins, economics professor Clifford F. Thies of Susquehanna University in Virginia told the BBC World Service that stamps were also on the way out, given the dramatic drop in U.S. first-class mail after the rise of electronic payments and email/text messages.

Thies later told me that the high price of first-class postage—currently 73¢ for a one-ounce letter—also hurt stamp use and U.S. Postal Service revenues. (That’s an argument also made by Keep US Posted, a lobbying group that wants to halt the twice-a-year rate hikes established under Postmaster General Louis DeJoy.)

The economic argument leads to a possibly obvious philatelic conclusion: If mailers can’t afford stamps, neither might collectors and the hobby is threatened. Some die-hards will make sacrifices to acquire new issues, I know, but oth-

ers will either stop collecting at a certain end point or forsake the pastime entirely.

While the precise future of philately is up for debate, there’s no dispute: We’re in a diminished place from where we were 20 years ago.

Then ... and Now

There were 45,277 members of the American Philatelic Society in 2005, while in 2023, that number stood at 25,546—not much more than half.

Long the hobby’s flagship news publication, *Linn’s Stamp News* had a circulation of 31,843 in 2008 (the earliest year from the 2000s I could find at the *Linn’s* archive). In October 2024, *Linn’s* reported “total paid distribution” of printed copies at an average of 2,451 for the preceding 12 months and 4,635 paid electronic copies (PDFs) on average during the same period.

Add up those two 2024 numbers and you don’t get 25% of the 2008 circulation. Whatever other issues may involve Amos Media, the owner of *Linn’s*, I would suggest that the precipitous drop in the periodical’s circulation partly explains the 2024 decision to abandon print altogether for PDF publication and distribution.

Linn’s editor Jay Bigalke did not supply the 2005 numbers or any thoughts on how they planned to grow circulation in response to my email request.

Moving beyond what are arguably the hobby’s two principal publications—*Linn’s* and *The American Philatelist*—there are several U.S. stamp magazines, such as *American Stamp Collector* &

Continue reading on page 5

Contents

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------|---|
| Three named to Hall of Fame | 1 | Call for nominations | 3 |
| Whither the Writer’s Unit? | 1 | Membership survey | 4 |
| Editor’s opinion <i>Mark A. Kellner</i> | 2 | Sarasota Literature palmares | 6 |
| President’s message <i>Lloyd A. de Vries</i> | 3 | Secretary-Treasurer’s report | 6 |

Will anyone show up?

Wow. I haven't been under a bus since summer camp, when I was the only kid willing to retrieve the balls that rolled under it. This situation is somewhat analogous, because only three members of the WU30 Council showed up for our meeting in Hartford last summer. The difference is I wasn't thrown, I voluntarily crawled under the bus.

I admit I have not been the most dynamic president of the Writers Unit #30. At that meeting, in fact, I offered to step aside for new, more-active leadership. Of course, there were only two Councilors there to hear my offer. Other members of the Council said they forgot about the meeting.

As president of this group, I have tried to bring us into the third decade of the 21st century, but gradually. Philately is changing, our shows and conventions are changing, and even our philatelic media are changing. The challenge is to attract new members without discarding any of the present ones.

Food Dysfunctions

Stamp organizations that have traditionally hosted breakfasts or banquets at shows (called "food functions") are facing whether to charge more than \$100

a ticket, subsidize their cost and charge less, or give up on them. The "leisure industry" (i.e., hotels, convention centers, restaurants) are raising prices at a much faster rate than overall inflation, tacking on fees and increasing minimums.

One venue for an upcoming show is imposing a 25 percent gratuity! (The cynic in me wonders how much of that the staff will see.) Last year, catered snacks at GASS meetings were taken away after 90 minutes "because of health concerns." Right, potato chips and popcorn spoil really quickly at room temperature.

About Message Boards

Online social media discussion groups are wonderful, but they require a great deal of work. I think I know something about this; I've been running such groups for more than 30 years now.

Someone has to administer and moderate them, deciding who may participate and who may not, which messages are inappropriate and what steps to take, and posting discussion-starters to keep the group alive and active.

These groups must be monitored 24/7. The internet trolls always figure out a way to spam discussion groups and never stop trying. Several times a week, for example, someone named

"Aliyah Martin" tries to post an advertisement for an Asian dance troupe in a Facebook group I moderate that has nothing to do with dance. Facebook is either unwilling or unable to stop this troll. For The Virtual Stamp Club's WordPress discussion group, I pay \$100 a year for a spam-catching service (Akismet).

I once spent three hours in the middle of the night removing dozens, perhaps hundreds, of spam messages by one Fine Fellow from the bidStart message board. They had to be deleted one at a time, because the whiz-bang software purchased by Stanley Gibbons (the owner of bidStart) didn't have the extra-cost option for mass deletions of a particular user's messages.

That was 12 years ago. I thought I was done with all that, and I pretty much am. I'm not taking on any more online discussion groups. And don't ask me to be the "backup moderator;" I'm not making that mistake again.

Do we have enough volunteers to run an online discussion group, volunteers who can be depended on to show up? And keep showing up?

Given the attendance at last summer's WU30 Council meeting, I have my doubts.

Call for nominations

We need to hold elections for officers and Council members. According to our Bylaws (wu30.org/bylaws.pdf), we should have a President, First and Second Vice Presidents, and a Secretary-Treasurer. All of them, plus the Editor and Immediate Past President, serve on the Council, which can have additional Councilors, for a total of no more than eight members in total.

We are so far out of compliance with the Bylaws! I propose we draw a line and

start from scratch. I don't think we need a fancy process here: Self-nominations are fine. The "petition" stipulations for a small organization like ours seem unnecessary.

I am willing to run for one more term as President, but no more, and I think Alan Barasch feels the same about Secretary-Treasurer. And if the members would rather have someone else as President, that's fine with me, too. So, we need one or more candidates for—

- ¶ President
- ¶ First Vice President

- ¶ Second Vice President
- ¶ Secretary-Treasurer

With the Editor, that makes for five on the Council; the Bylaws require a minimum of four, and a maximum of eight. Let's add two Councilors-at-Large which will give us a total of seven.

Please send nominations to the Secretary-Treasurer, in time for publication in the Second Quarter issue of *TPC*. Voting will start immediately after publication and close 30 days after that.

—Lloyd A. de Vries

Whither the WU?

Continued from page 1

format. Such a space could be some combination of message board and digital newsletter. I don't know where exactly it would reside, but I'm sure some of you have ideas and opinions.

Most important of all, I'd like to hear from volunteers who could help set up such a thing and make it real.

On the next page is a survey about some of our options. It is also being sent out in digital form to every member, separately from this newsletter. Please take a few moments to complete it,

either on paper (and kindly mail it back to us) or from your email.

I recognize that retreating into anguished silence is not the solution, and I'm sorry again for my absence. But now that I have everyone's attention, let's get to work. Sharpen your pencils and put on your thinking caps. Thank you!

Seven short questions about our society's future direction

Kindly take about 10 minutes to share your opinions with us about the future direction of the Writers Unit 30 by answering the following questions. All replies will be anonymous and confidential; however, if you wish to have the Editor or another officer of the WU30 reach out to you for further in-person discussion, please feel free to add your name and contact information at the end. **Thank you!**

1. I have been a member of the A.P.S. Writers Unit #30 for—

- a) Over 20 years
- b) 10–20 years
- c) 2–10 years
- d) Just joined! cca. 2 years ago or less

2. The main reason I originally joined the WU30 was to—

- a) Learn how to become a better writer or editor
- b) Meet and make friends with fellow philatelic communicators
- c) Pass along what I've learned to others
- d) Tackle some important issues to ensure the longevity of our hobby
- e) Other: _____

3. Please rank the following from 1–5 and try to add one suggestion of your own: In my view, the most important functions of the Writers Unit, today and in the coming years, are to—

- _____ a) Provide hints, how-to's, tips and tricks for becoming a better writer

_____ b) Gather in person at stamp shows or on other occasions

_____ c) Provide an outlet or forum for me to share my wisdom

_____ d) Help brainstorm solutions for critical issues our hobby is facing

_____ e) Other: _____

4. The area where I'd like to see the Writers Unit 30 benefit from some improvement is—

a) Change in the format or frequency of *The Philatelic Communicator*

b) More articles on the subject of: _____

c) Increased presence/visibility for WU30 at more stamp shows

d) Seminars or talks at stamp shows on the following subjects:

e) Other: _____

5. I feel I could usefully contribute to the Writers Unit by—

a) Contributing articles or writing letters to *The Philatelic Communicator*

b) Giving a talk or presentation on behalf of WU30 at a stamp show

c) Helping staff a WU30 table at a show

d) Engaging in a conversation or round-table with ideas for solving some of our hobby's challenges

e) Serving as an officer or on a committee (standing or *ad hoc*)

f) Recruiting new members

g) Other: _____

6. *The Philatelic Communicator* is something I would read regularly—

- a) In digital form only, on a desktop computer
- b) On a mobile device (a tablet or smartphone screen)
- c) Printed out at home/office
- d) Only by hard copy in the mail
- e) I don't read *TPC* regularly

7. There's something that hasn't been mentioned yet, but I think it's important to consider:

Optional: If you would like to be contacted in person for an informal follow-up chat, please add your details:

Writers Unit #30 Hall of Fame Adds Three for 2025

Continued from page 1

list, and *Feuilles Marcophiles*.

He authored the three volumes of *The Regular Issues of France According to Their Normal Postal Usage* (1974, 1979, 1984) and *Military and Postal History of the Revolutionary Armies in the West of France 1791–1802* (1993). With co-author William Waugh, he wrote *A Chronology of French Military Campaigns and Expeditions with Their Postal Markings 1815–1983* (1984).

Luft was a philatelic and literature judge, founding member of the Académie Européenne d'Etudes Philatéliques, and recipient of the APS Luff award for distinguished philatelic research (2008). He served as an officer for the American



From left: 2025 Hall of Famers James P. Gough, Larry Lyons and Stanley J. Luft.

Philatelic Congress Council, where he chaired the Boehret Award committee, and France & Colonies Philatelic Society. He served as president of ROMPEX national stamp show, the Philatelic Society of Cincinnati, and the Collectors Club

of Denver. He was a fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society, London and won the France & Colonies Philatelic Society Gerard Gilbert Memorial award for philatelic literature three times for his books.

—Mark A. Kellner

What Is Going On?

Continued from page 2

Dealer and Kelleher's Philatelic Quarterly. Do you know of a U.S. daily newspaper that still runs a weekly or biweekly stamp collecting column? I don't.

All this sounds rather bleak, and frankly, it is rather grim. Once upon a time (read: the 1970s and 80s), the USPS claimed 20 million Americans collected postage stamps. Today, the APS website cites a *Linn's* estimate of 5 million U.S. collectors. While obviously a fraction of that earlier 20 million, having a market of 5 million potential customers is nothing to sneeze at, as the saying goes.

Media meltdown

It's no secret that the media industry in the United States (and elsewhere) is melting down quickly. Print and broadcast companies in the so-called "mainstream media" face powerful headwinds. For example, *The Washington Post* has lost thousands of subscribers and millions in revenue, while CNN's viewership has cratered since the 2024 election. Neither company can likely sustain operations with dramatically lower revenues.

The same would hold in the philatelic

space, I'd imagine. If *Linn's* has less than a quarter of the circulation it had 17 years ago, that would likely pose a problem for its owners, Amos Media, who also publish the Scott catalogues.

In the general media world, everyone from Joe Rogan to Mark Zuckerberg to Elon Musk has been blamed for at least some of the industry's troubles. Rogan's podcasts have a larger viewership than the TV network news programs. Facebook has had an uneven record in driving viewers to news media sites. Musk now touts X as the world's top news platform, the place where tens of millions find out what's going on in the world.

At the heart of all this lies a word few of us knew decades ago: *monetization*. If you can't somehow turn the information you produce into cash, paying the rent is hard. What's true for CNN is equally true for any philatelic publisher.

Finding an answer

It appears there are no "easy" answers to the crisis in philatelic media. Unless someone with a ton of money (such as reputed stamp collector and billionaire Mark Cuban) wanted to step in and buy Amos Media's philatelic publishing unit, we may see further challenges there.

Billionaires, of course, have a mixed record swooping in to buy up legacy publications—see what happened with Jeff Bezos and *The Washington Post*.

It's doubtful stamp collecting columns will return to general newspapers, whether digital or printed. A regular column needs to draw reliable advertising revenue to justify the column inches devoted to it, and the stamp dealers of today are not likely to invest much in mainstream advertising—why would they, when they can reach their customers much more effectively through email and online platforms such as HipStamp or eBay?

But there are bright spots. Much has been made of Graham Beck's "Exploring Philately" video series on YouTube. The video endeavor suggests a potential avenue to further promote the hobby in the digital age to a digital audience.

One of the first steps in solving a problem is acknowledging that there is a problem. As a community of philatelic writers, it might be time to not only realize a problem exists (and may be growing), but also to brainstorm solutions. The pages of this journal are open for your input!

Sarasota: Grand award to Kroft for Holy Land article

The annual Sarasota philatelic literature exhibition, co-sponsored by the APS Writers Unit #30, took place Jan. 17-19.

Unlike most other philatelic literature competitions, the Sarasota event is only for articles, making it comparable to a single-frame philatelic exhibition.

The Grand Award went to Ed Kroft for his article, "Ottoman Mail Service for Inhabitants of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the Holy Land: 1882-1918" that appeared in *The Israel Philatelist*. The Reserve Grand went to Jean Wang for "Thematic Exhibiting: Storytelling through Philately" in the *American Philatelist*.

Special awards included the APS Research Award to Charles J. DiComo for his article on the Loewenberg-style decal and the Collectors Club of Sarasota Award for Treatment to Ed Kroft.

Akthem al-Manaseer chaired the literature jury, with John Hotchner and Patrick Walters also judging.

GRAND AWARD

Ed Kroft, "Ottoman Mail Service for Inhabitants of Jewish Agricultural Settlements in the Holy Land: 1882-1918," *The Israel Philatelist*

RESERVE GRAND

Jean Wang, "Thematic Exhibiting: Storytelling through Philately," *The American Philatelist*.

LARGE GOLD

Ed Kroft, "Ottoman Mail Service for Inhabitants of Jewish Agricultural Settlement in the Holy Land: 1882-1918" *The Israel Philatelist* (93 points)

Jean Wang, "Thematic Exhibiting: Storytelling Through Philately" *The American Philatelist* (92)

Thomas Lera, "Postal History of Indian Key, Florida" *Collectors Club Philatelist* (91)

Ronald J. Klimley, "Zloty Centennial," *The American Philatelist* (90)

GOLD

James Mazepa, "Gems of Polish Philately" (four columns), *Bulletin of the Polonus Polish Philatelic Society* (89 points)

Charles J. DiComo, "New Discovery: A Loewenberg Style Decal Used on a Cover" *The Chronicle* (88)

Michael Wilson, "Celebrating 50 Years of Airmail Service to Bermuda: A FDC from 1975 & Maybe One from 1925" *First Days* (87)

Charles J. DiComo, "The U.S. 3c 1851 Stamp: Newly Discovered Plate Flaw on

91R1L" *The Chronicle* (86)

Julian Jones, "Incoming Mail from the USA: Sorting Prior to Arrival in the UK and the Application of Postage Due Markings" *The London Philatelist* (86)

Ralph Nafziger, "U.S. Exploration of Mars, the Red Planet" *First Days* (85)

Thomas Prutch, "Papal States Military Postal History" *Military Postal History Society Bulletin* (85)

LARGE VERMEIL

Ron Breznay, "The Headsville Post Office: From West Virginia to Bellefonte" *The American Philatelist* (83 points)

VERMEIL

Juan Riera and Steve Swain, "The South Dade Settlement of Cutler, Florida" *Florida Postal History Society* (76 points)

LARGE SILVER

Juan Riera, "The Sikorsky S43 Baby Clipper" *Airpost Journal* (73 points)

Emilio Jimenez Soler, "Straight Lines on Maps: Land Borders" *The New Carto Philatelist* (72)

SILVER

Ken Gilbert, "Estonia New Issues for Mare Balticum 2024" *Linn's Stamp News* (66 points)

Secretary-Treasurer's Quarterly Report

Since the beginning of 2024, we have signed up 14 new members:

- 2090 Stephen B. Pacetti
- 2091 Andrew S. Kelley

- 2092 Scott T. Ney
- 2093 Frederick Lutt
- 2094 Edward D. Cahoon
- 2095 Harold Krische
- 2096 Colin G. Fraser
- 2097 Jeff Stage
- 2098 Francois M. Steichen
- 2099 Steven Vastola
- 2100 Nester C Nuñez

- 2101 Michael L. Wilson
- 2102 Michael Bloom
- 2103 Cynthia L. Scott

We have collected dues and a purchased mailing supplies so our bank balance is now \$3,981.48.

Respectfully,
Alan Barasch, Secretary-Treasurer
Secretary@WU30.org