



BY MICK ZAIS *president*
mzais@newberry.edu

Tales From a Novice Exhibitor

Education, Planning, Listening and Revision Help Create a Successful Path

Recently I tried my hand at exhibiting. At the advice of my exhibiting mentor, Steve Zwillinger, who also serves as president of the board of the American Philatelic Research Library, I tested the waters with a one-frame exhibit. Earlier, I had taken Steve's course on exhibiting at the American Philatelic Center in Bellefonte. Enthusiasts refer to the annual gathering as "stamp camp." Not only was the week enormously informative, it was a ton of fun as well.

Steve was persuasive in convincing me to narrow the scope of my first exhibit by keeping it to one frame. That was the single best piece of advice I received all week – advice which I heeded reluctantly. I initially had a full, 10-frame exhibit planned. I gave up that idea with some remorse. But Steve understood – and as I was soon to learn – there is a huge gap between planning and execution.

After absorbing as much information as possible from Steve's extensive experience, interesting presentations, and excellent handouts, my first task was to pick a topic for a one-frame exhibit. I settled on "Hand-Drawn and Hand-Painted First Day Covers of the 1937 West Point 5¢ Commemorative."

Next I had to figure out the story I wanted to tell and which of the covers in my collection would best tell that story. It turned out I didn't do a very good job with this step, as subsequent events would reveal.

Then I worked on the title page, explaining why the stamp was issued, the purpose of the exhibit, and the significance of the material. Of course, the title page had to include a killer cover.

This was followed by creating a write-up for each cover, arranging the covers on a table as they would look in the frame, and then adjusting.

What came next probably took the most time: learning Microsoft Publisher by experiment and error to finally get the formatting and layout I envisioned.

Eventually, I had my "first draft" assembled and mounted. Then I showed it to my wife who doesn't know a first-day cover from a first-flight cover. This was another experience in humility. She pointed out many things I took for granted that were not clear to the casual viewer. She also found multiple typos and inconsistencies in formatting.

After revising the exhibit based on her feedback, I was ready for the next big step: mailing the exhibit, with scans of the covers rather than the covers themselves, to the critique service of the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors. Yet another lesson in humility. The exhibit was returned with an in-depth analysis of each page and the exhibit as a whole. All of the comments were insightful, expressed with tact and diplomacy, valid, and when adopted, produced a far better exhibit. My hat is off to those knowledgeable volunteers who spend so much of their valuable personal time to teach beginners like me and experienced exhibitors alike.

As a consequence of this next round of feedback, I totally revised the plan of exhibit, its purpose, and exchanged a significant number of covers that better told the new story I was developing.

Then came the moment of truth. As the exhibit featured first-day covers, it was appropriate to unveil it at the American First Day Cover Society's annual show, Americover, held in August in Independence, Ohio. My plan was to personally carry the exhibit to the show, but work in-



Chris Lazaroff and Mick Zais (right) with his single-frame exhibit, "Hand-Drawn and Hand-Painted First Day Covers of the 1937 West Point 5¢ Commemorative."



tervened with other plans. Luckily, Chris Lazaroff lives relatively nearby. He is the former president of the AFDCS and, to the best of my knowledge, the only person to attend first-day-of-issue ceremonies in all 50 states and some territories as well. He was able to tote my exhibit to the show, mount it, receive feedback from the judges, and then schlep the exhibit back to South Carolina.

The result? A vermeil award! (Layers of vermeil just follow grand and gold in the levels of awards.) The additional takeaway was more feedback on how to improve the exhibit. This did not entail spending money on better material. Rather, the judges explained how to improve the storyline and how to more effectively describe the covers shown. As a result, my respect for the judges increased even further. They know what they are doing and they truly want to be helpful.

So, what's next? Well, based on feedback from Americover, I significantly revised the exhibit yet again. Each time it gets better. And, barring unforeseen circumstances, such as that which kept me from Americover, I'll show the revised version February 23 to 25 at AmeriStamp Expo in Birmingham, Alabama.

I still think back to Steve Zwillinger's sage advice: "Start with a one-framer to master the fundamentals before attempting a multi-frame exhibit." Had I not heeded his urgings, I can't imagine where I would be. I certainly wouldn't have learned as much nor had as much fun with my first foray into exhibiting. ☺

Quality

Raymond W. Koch Collection of Masonic
Cancellations both on and off cover

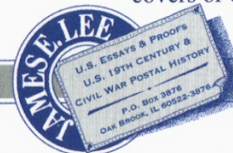


64b – Masonic “Square & Compass” cancels

3c Rose-pink, two singles tied by bold strikes of “Square & Compass” cancels to cover from Mittineague, Mass. to Kenosha, Wis. The stamps pay a double rate. Tracing is hinged in place and can be removed. (S/E FR-M4c 1) **Ex-Edward S. Knapp Collection.**

\$750.00

What would you like to see in the way of Masonic
covers or cancels on approval?



P.O. Box 3876 • Oak Brook, IL 60522-3876

Phone: (847) 462-9130
Email: jim@jameslee.com

www.JamesLee.com

