At the invitation of the postmaster general, the APA’s “postage stamp exhibit” at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 was held in the imposing U.S. Government Building.

APS: The First Century

by Robert L.D. Davidson

A World’s Fair

Plans for the American Philatelic Association meeting at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893 took up a great deal of space in the AP of that year. In January, Postmaster General John Wanamaker announced the particulars of the new Columbian series that would be released as part of the festivities and, until the dollar values were announced, everyone seemed pleased. “It is also believed,” said the AP, “that this issue will greatly stimulate interest in the exposition both abroad and home.”

In the same issue of the magazine it was announced that, according to the by-laws of the corporation, officers who had received plurality victories at the convention were automatically elected to office. John Tiffany was beginning his fourth term as president.

An editorial in the October issue of the magazine, most likely prepared by a member of the “Literary Committee,” succinctly answered a question that had been raised about the official publication:

Distasteful as controversy is to me, and glad as I should be to let the subject drop, I cannot refrain from making some reply to Mr. C.H. Mekeel’s remarks, made at the recent convention, concerning the report of the Literary Board.

In this Herculean effort, Mr. Mekeel permits himself to distort and exaggerate facts and figures to such an extent that there is good

The “Official Catalogue” for the first exhibition “arranged under the auspices of the American Philatelic Association” contained full descriptions of the exhibits, as well as photo-engravings of some of the rarities.
copies consist of paper, press-work and mailing. Grant that 400 sample copies were mailed — and the number has rarely been so great — the cost did not exceed $5.00 per month.

In some other figures which he gives, Mr. Mekel does serious injustice, and I cannot show this better than by quoting from his speech.

"And we find it here stated that the Literary Board have circulated 1,200 copies a month, which is about 500 copies more than is necessary for the members, for the use of officers, for exchanges and for outside subscribers." Behold how the wonder has grown in the following sentence: "I think that the Literary Board should account for the circulation of this six or seven hundred copies more than was necessary for the members and other requirements."

Compare this with figures showing our necessary mailing-list for August, 1892:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members A.P.A.</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside subscribers</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanges</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officers, Secretary, European Agent and Literary Board</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisers</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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At the beginning of the year we had 568 members and ninety outside subscribers, thus easily bringing the list up to 900. So it will be seen that the number of sample copies circulated has been, at most, from 300 to 350. Place this beside 700. But Mr. Mekel was working for a desired result, and he permitted his zeal to influence his imagination.

The editorial went on for several more paragraphs. It is obvious from its jaundiced tone that criticism was regularly given, but not often well-received. Another milestone in the hassle over the AP.

Planning for the August convention in Chicago, with all of the publicity and preparation the event demanded, seems to have pervaded every aspect of the APA. The postmaster general invited the Association to hold its exhibit in the U.S. Government building, one of the most outstanding edifices at the fair. It was a rare compliment for the fledgling organization.

The Columbian issue, because of the large size of the stamps, was not well-received. It would be many years before collectors recognized the beauty of the set and it became both desirable and expensive. Congress, like other critics, was less than pleased, as indicated by a report that appeared in the Congressional Record on January 19, 1893:

**SALE OF COLUMBIAN STAMPS**

Mr. Wolcott, I desire to call up from the table a joint resolution which I introduced two days ago, instructing the Postmaster General to continue the sale of the ordinary postage stamps, which have been used for years by the people of the United States, and to sell the Columbian postage stamps only to such people as may call for them, my object being to move a reference of the joint resolution to the appropriate committee.

I have been at a loss to understand why the Columbian stamps were ever manufactured. I find by referring to the annual report of the Postmaster-General — in which he asks, and very properly, for increased appropriations, appropriations aggregating some $80,000,000 — that he expects to receive a million and a half dollars extra profit out of these stamps by selling them to stamp collectors. That is a trick which some of the little Central American States do sometimes. When they are short a few thousand dollars they get up a new stamp and sell it to stamp collectors all over the world, and get money for it. It seems to me, Mr. President, this is too great a country to subject 60,000,000 people to the inconvenience of using this big stamp . . . in order that we may unload a cruel and unusual stamp upon stamp collectors to file in their albums.

The president pro tempore of the Senate went so far as to refer the matter to the committee on Post Office and Post Roads. But despite the criticism, the stamps were issued, and they were available to the public for years. The size of the stamps irritated critics more than anything. Most regular issues of the United States — particularly since 1890 — had been small.

Among the questions being debated by APA members in 1893 was the question of amalgamation with other "national groups." Consolidation was eventually approved, but only on condition that any groups joining the APA must adopt APA standards and regulations. It was a slightly arrogant demand, but it reflected the members' pride in their organization, and it did work.

About this time, the names of Luff, Bartels, Worthington, Severn, and Rich began to appear in the Association's proceedings and in the AP, joining those al-
Members and guests gathered for the obligatory group photograph at the ninth annual convention of the APA in 1894 at Niagara Falls.

ready so familiar to American philatelists. Preparations for Chicago continued, with the committee meeting almost monthly. It was announced that the frames available would be identical to those that would be used for the government’s exhibition, and illustrations of those frames show they were similar to the ones used in the Philatelic Division of the old post office in Washington. Security was confirmed and explained, and allowable space was defined.

The AP reported that an official catalogue would be issued by the committee and that it would contain full descriptions of the exhibits, as well as photo-engravings of some of the rarities. It was to be priced at fifty cents.

As an aside, that same issue of the AP carried a long article on the 3-cent pink of 1861. It concluded that most people who thought their collections contained one probably were wrong—a situation not unknown today.

On August 15 and 16, 1893, the Eighth Annual Convention of the APA convened at the Chicago World’s Fair. The incorporation and certain tumultuous activities at some of the meetings had cut membership substantially and, as a result, only forty-five to fifty members were present, with a proxy vote of 219. The “panic of 1893” and the uncertainty of the times also contributed to the sparse attendance. Because of the panic, Joseph Rechert of New York missed his first meeting.

Nevertheless, the APA’s presence at the fair was proclaimed by a large red and white banner that proudly announced, “American Philatelic Association. Loan Exhibit of Postage Stamps.” Perhaps the report of the “Chairman of the World’s Fair Committee” best explains the success of the exhibit:

We can congratulate ourselves that of the thousands of stamps exhibited, valued at many thousands of dollars, we have returned them safely to their owners, who so kindly and generously loaned them for exhibition; and not only have we returned them safely, but there has been no report of any of the stamps being damaged by light, which was feared so much. We can also congratulate ourselves that of the thousands of dollars subscribed and pledged by collectors, every cent has been paid in to the Treasurer of this Committee. This is a very unusual state of affairs, and one that speaks well for the subscribers.

The exhibition was a success in many ways and it is the belief of your Committee that it has been the means of increasing the ranks of philatelists, not only in bringing new recruits into the field, but reviving the philatelic spark in many collectors whose collection had lain dormant for many years.

The exhibit of United States stamps was one that could not be excelled, and if we could not have exhibited a single foreign stamp it would have well repaid the outlay and the time and trouble it cost. We can hardly realize all the good this exhibition has accomplished. It certainly was in this department all that we could ask for.

Many of the foreign countries were complete, and rarities that the average collector had only read of were to be seen in the handsome cases. Only to the very few advanced collectors, whose collections contain the great rarities, was the exhibition a failure. If we had been able to secure all the stamps that were promised us, so we could have made nearly a complete display,
I think that we could not have accomplished any more than we did in showing to the general public our interest, and the fascination of this our hobby.

The APA expressed special thanks to Hiram Deats, who exhibited his choicest gems "to the value of over $6,000."

At Chicago, Association meetings were devoted primarily to routine business, and once again the AP came under attack. It is difficult to determine what the actual resolution was, but the Philatelic Journal of America became the official APA publication from September 1893 to June 1895. During this period, "Proceedings" and other reports of Association business were mailed separately to members in an official bulletin. This practice continued for some years, while several different journals were designated as the official publication.

During the course of 1893, many events had transpired, not the least of which was the stamp exhibition at the World's Fair. The celebration was the year's long-anticipated climax, and it offered proof that, although it was plagued by dissension, the APA was healthy and progressing.

Winding Down the Nineteenth Century

It has been the purpose so far to describe the Association in more detail than might seem necessary, simply to set the stage for the more rapid future development. The birth pains are interesting and important, but so much specificity will not hold the attention of a reader.

By the ninth annual convention, at Niagara Falls in August 1894, the fledgling Association was in good order, incorporated, and, despite a few setbacks, actually gaining members. The secretary's report noted a total membership of 770, including 110 from overseas and ten from Canada. This represented an increase of 280 members since the Chicago convention.

In 1895, the Association convened at Clayton, New York, a resort community located at the point where Lake Ontario empties into the St. Laurence River. Clayton was chosen because many of the members who had attended the Niagara Falls convention wanted a "watering hole."

The 1895 convention marked the end of the ten-year "reign" of John Tiffany, who had so effectively guided the diverse and quite often recalcitrant membership. Any account of the early years of the American Philatelic Association must recognize Tiffany's popularity, leadership, and administrative abilities. He was, indeed, the founder of the APA.

Forty-three members attended the convention at Clayton, and they held 620 proxies! The Association accounts showed a surplus of more than $1,000, and the corporation was apparently solvent, thriving, and well on its way to success. The principal discussion centered on N.F. Seebeck and his "scandalous dealings" with Latin American stamps. His tactics and speculations added a new word to the philatelic lexicon—Seebecks are still a troublesome area of the hobby.

At long last, consolidation of the Board of Trustees (corporation) and the Official Board (Association) was effected. The board would be the unifying factor for some years and was, at that time, the body that elected officers. John Tiffany was leaving office after implementing a new and stronger system of philatelic government which, despite its soundness, had been accepted only after quite a parliamentary struggle.

The August 1896 meeting was held at another resort area, Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota. Tiffany, remaining inactive on the advice of his physician, was absent and sent his resignation by mail. In fact, by the time of the convention, he was on his deathbed.

Thirty-six "stockholders" were present, most of them from the "western" area. Only the reliable H.E. Deats and two others came from the East.

Among the officers chosen by the new board was Col. Frank F. Olney of Providence, Rhode Island, who was named president. Olney was not a charter member, but he had been an active leader at previous conventions.

When Olney opened the twelfth convention in Boston in 1897, eighty-four stockholders were present with 417 proxies. This time, attendance was skewed toward the East. The Boston Philatelic Society was a gracious and generous host, and entertainment was as much a part of the convention as the business meetings. The secretary reported that the Association had 879 members.

At Boston, it was decided that the APA's library, as well as any future acquisitions,
would be placed in the care of the trustees of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A Carnegie librarian was to be named "an ex officio member of the Association and Chairman of the Library Committee." Deats was elected assistant librarian to expedite transfer of the holdings to Pittsburgh.

Dues continued to fluctuate. At this meeting, they were reduced to $1.20 per year.

In 1896, a group of New York City philatelists had formed an organization that became known as The Collectors Club. Many of the members were well-known internationally, and a majority of them were members of the APA as well.

Over the years, The Collectors Club has had a strong and positive influence on philately, and it has been a source of much philatelic research and study. It established a club location and created a strong library, housed today in a landmark building designed by architect Sanford White which the organization has occupied since 1937. It is worth noting that F. Burton Sellers, one of the former distinguished presidents of The Collectors Club, is now president of the APS.

In August 1898, the thirteenth APA convention met at the original Collectors Club in New York. Membership was down again, because 224 individuals had been dropped for non-payment of dues.

The vice presidents were busy with claims, counterclaims, and attempts to resolve law suits. At least one of the last was settled: "Stigel's flight from Denver put an end to the matter."

The library had been moved successfully to Pittsburgh, and everything seemed to be moving along as smoothly as possible. However, there were rumblings again about changing the last word of the organization's name from "Association" to "Society," and yet another "official journal" was designated: the Metropolitan Philatelist of New York published by Scott.

Business at one session in particular apparently dragged on, for the minutes record: "Mr. Davison: The trolley will leave here today at half past one. We have to get our dinner in the meantime, and there is very little time left. I move we adjourn." The rest of the session that day was held aboard the steamer William Fletcher on the North [Hudson] River.

In the year that followed, a great deal of interest was shown in the various series of overprinted and surcharged stamps issued for the islands that came under U.S. administration as a result of the Spanish-American War. It was also during this period that revenue stamps were first issued with values of up to $1,000. As might be expected, reaction to these issues was hostile and varied. In addition, the matter of "our own official publication" came off the back burner.

Thus, there was much to discuss when the fourteenth annual APA convention met in Detroit in August 1899. Twenty-seven members attended and about twice as many visitors were present. Among their concerns was an attempt to make "the results of our convention more interesting and of practical benefit," and they named a committee to study the recommendation.

The Boston Revenue Book, prepared by that city's philatelic society — "without hope of reward" — was discussed. The Hiram Deats collection was the basis of the study, and purchase of the book and support for the project were urged.

The "Obituary" of the APA once again called attention to the departure of some charter members; the Weekly Philatelic Era of Portland, Maine, was named the "official journal" for the coming year; Deats was present, as usual. The Yearbook (part of the official publication) listed an impressive group of journals in as many as nine languages that were available in the new library. George L. Toppan of Milwaukee succeeded Olney as president of the Association.

At Detroit in 1900, the APA marked the close of the century with a record turnout of well over 100 members/stockholders and guests, proving that, at the end of its first fifteen years, the Association was a well-organized and successful endeavor.

The minutes of the convention contain a listing of fifteen branch societies that included Chicago; New York; San Francisco; St. Louis; Pittsburgh; Staten Island; Cleveland; Philadelphia; Toledo; Kansas City; Portland, Maine; Worcester; Boston; Reading, Pennsylvania; and St. Paul. State branches listed were Ohio and Colorado, both of which were inactive.

Several of these societies were non-stockholders, but were continued, without membership, as potentially active groups. Most likely, the compromise was a political maneuver to avoid offending future clubs. The idea of publishing an American Philatelist "on our own" was still harbored among some members, but it was again shelved in favor of continuing with the Weekly Philatelic Era.

It had been a good fifteen years. Many of the charter members were still active, and some of them were officers. In general, though, it would be a new group of members, vital and active, who would usher in the new century.

Next month: Into the twentieth century, to the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration.