by Robert L.D. Davidson

Gathering Momentum

For the American Philatelic Society, 1912–22 was a decade of consolidation, internal strengthening, and growth in services. The era, though marked by a depression in 1915 and the impact of World War I, was a relatively stable one. In 1916, President Clifton Howes was able to remark that annual meetings were “serene and comparatively uneventful,” quite different from the turbulent conventions of the previous century.

Membership during the decade remained consistent, with the number of members — between 1,400 and 1,600 — generally reflecting the economic condition of the country. Dues, for some too high, continued to be $1.80 per year. The Society-published AP flourished, becoming at last an acceptable, albeit not self-sustaining, journal.

Philatelic auctions blossomed, particularly in New York. One of Eugene Klein’s sales in Philadelphia realized some interesting results: $56 for a pair of dark red-brown imperforate 5-cent (Scott No. 12) on cover, $81 for an 1895 $5 green block of four with original gum, etc.

During these years, the AP listed a variety of new publications, evidence that philatelic scholarship was becoming standard. And the “stockholders” lists continued to carry names well-known today for their contributions to American philately. Harmer, Cole, Chase, Lybarger, McCoy, Herman, Glass, Gibson, Lichtenstein, Costales, Ashbrook, Lindquist, Mozian, Keleher, Norona, Poole, and

Where Our Members Live. A map dating from 1913 shows the number of APS members who lived in each of the United States. The table at the right lists members from other countries.
many others were active in the Society during this decade.

The APS continued to choose distinguished leadership. During these ten years, the presidents of the Society were: Frederick R. Cornwall (1911–13), Gen. Charles A. Coolidge (1913–15), Clifton Howes (1915–17), John W. Scott (1917–19), Henry H. Wilson (1919–20), and one of the greatest philatelic scholars of all time, Dr. Carroll Chase (1920–22).

From 1913 to 1917, William E. Ault filled dual roles, serving as both secretary of the Society and as editor of the AP, and accomplishing both jobs with exceptional thoroughness. He surrendered the secretariat to Dr. Holland A. Davis, who, in 1917, began his nearly three decades of service in that position.

During these years, the APS mourned the loss of a number of its early and charter members. By this decade, loyal founders, active members for more than thirty years, some of them seldom missing an annual meeting, had passed away. One of these, Eugene Doeblin, an original officer of the Society and, for many years, its International Secretary, died soon after attending the Niagara Falls Convention of 1914.

In October 1913, Volume 27, Number 1 of the AP noted that printing of the magazine had been moved from Columbus, Ohio, to the Federalsburg, Maryland, firm of J.W. Stowell Printing Co. This arrangement would continue for more than fifty years. The Stowells and their heirs are remembered as regular and supportive guests at APS conventions over the years.

One of the first international philatelic exhibitions to be held in the United States took place in New York in October 1913.

It was considered a success in every way, and attendance was surprisingly high. Because the exhibit occurred before the outbreak of World War I, a great many foreign visitors and exhibitors were able to participate.

“Commodore” George Worthington presided at the international event, and speakers at the opening ceremonies included former APS President Cornwall, as well as the then-current president, Gen. Coolidge. Other Society members were involved in the exhibition as sponsors, underwriters, hosts, exhibitors, and dealers, and one veteran member of the APS, Henry Duveen, won the grand award.

One estimate placed the total value of exhibits at $2 million, a considerable sum for the time. A report on the exhibition included a listing of some of the items on display:

It is impossible to note the many interesting items shown by the various exhibitors, but just to mention a few of the greater rarities, we list the following: — Three Alexandrias, 10 cent Baltimore on Cover, two Brattieboros, two Milburys and 54 St. Louis, 1861 Premiers Gravures complete, numerous Confederate locals; Hawaiian Missionaries used and unused; 60 “wood block” Capes, all shown by Commodore Worthington; “Post Office” Mauritius 1p. and 2d both unused. British Guiana 1850 on covers; mint block of fifteen 3d Sydney View; Western Australia 1854, 4d. inverted swan; early Germans; block of nine double Geneva and block of twenty 5c. Geneva large eagle; shown by Mr. H.J. Duveen. A wonderful unused collection of France, the property of Mr. Franze Reichenheim, and an exceedingly complete collection of Great Britain shown by Mr. Sydney Loder. A quarter sheet of twenty-five first issue Sweden 4 sk. b. unused exhibited by Baron Erik Leijonhufvud. Two volumes of the “Rivadavia” issue of Argentina, belonging to Mr. Chas. L. Pack. A large collection of Postmaster and Carrier stamps by Mr. C.E. Chapman. A complete collection of Philippines, with the exception of No. 112 by Mr. J.M. Bartels. The existence of that stamp is in doubt. An almost complete collection of the same country by Major F.L. Palmer. A collection of the first issue of Bolivia shown by Mr. Edward M. Taylor, who also exhibited the collection of Mexico which was awarded the Research Cup. 380 specimens of the Muiready and its caricatures, shown by Mr. William Homan; Uruguay, 1856 and 1866 — 72 issues, in an amazing array, plated, owned by Mr. C.L. Pack. We could go on indefinitely, and still not note many of the things which deserve attention. Rare philatelic publications were shown by Messrs. Deats, Rich, Ricketts, and Luff.

In 1914, a series of articles entitled “The Development of the American Postal Service” began to appear in the AP. Reprinted today — with additions to bring the material up to date — the series would still command a wide readership.

During the early years of World War I, the AP carried many references to and advertisements for charity (semi-postal) issues to support the war effort. These included aid to victims, as well as numerous occupational overprints. The “Belgian” overprints on German stamps, surcharged in pfennig and mark values, were advertised by one dealer in blocks of four for eighty cents. German territories of the Pacific and Africa were likewise overprinted by Allied occupiers, and this would have been a propitious time to purchase them.

The APS Sales Department, supervised by P.M. Wolsieffer, was prospering, although a chronic complaint, not unheard today, frequently emanated from his office: “There is a shortage of books made up entirely of United States stamps. . . .” Profits at this time went to the superintendent.

Wolsieffer was also still the Society’s chief recruiter, recognized regularly as a leader in this activity. A few years later, he was elected president of the APS (1924–25), so obviously his peers approved of his activities.

For a short time, beginning with the June 1915 issue, the AP appeared twice a month, and the editor immediately sounded the tocsin for more contributions. Radical changes in European stamps caused by the war provided some copy, but it soon became clear that twice-monthly issues could not last.

Increasing numbers of members attended the annual conventions until 1917–19, when, obviously, the war infringed on this aspect of participation in Society affairs. As it does today, convention attendance varied, depending on the location of the

Frederick R. Cornwall served two terms as president of the APS, from 1911–1913.

A souvenir from the twenty-eighth Annual Convention of the APS, held in Put-in-Bay, Ohio, in 1913. When President Cornwall called this meeting to order, he used a gavel made from the wood of Admiral Perry’s battleships, the Niagara and the Lawrence.
meeting. Thus, while only a handful of members from east of the Mississippi attended the San Francisco convention of 1915, held in conjunction with the Panama-Pacific Exhibition, Californians were there in full force, along with two APS members from Hawaii.

Attempts were regularly made to hold meetings at “watering places” or resorts, and Niagara Falls and Alexandria Bay, New York, were among the most successful hosts early in the century. As time went on, however, conventions were more and more likely to be held in areas where there was strong local interest, perhaps an active branch of the Society, or where there was a concurrent celebration of some other nature.

The trend was toward large cities, and during this decade, annual meetings were held in Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, Providence, Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and Springfield, Massachusetts. Wherever conventions were held, though, the problems that plagued the Society seemed to be the same: proxies, unsolicited approvals, fraudulent stamp and stamp-selling schemes, and failure to pay dues.

In November 1915, the AP began to run a series of articles that had first appeared in The Philadelphia Stamp News. Written by Russell L. Stultz and entitled “The United States Aerial Postal Service,” they heralded a new field for American collectors. Although stamps specifically issued for this purpose did not appear for another three years, articles on the aerial service seem to have commanded a great deal of attention.

The 1916 issue of the AP expressed the view that collectors who were far-sighted enough to gather up coil varieties, which had been available since 1906, were very wise indeed. This was the time when U.S. “flat plate” coils were being phased out and the “rotaries” introduced. The United States was cited for leadership in this and in many other areas of stamp production.

It should be noted that, during this decade, branch societies continued to expand, and news of the stronger clubs regularly filtered back to the APS. The AP carried frequent mention of the groups in Chicago, Affiliate No. 1; San Francisco (Pacific), No. 3; Philadelphia, No. 18; Garfield Perry, No. 30; Los Angeles, No. 85; Detroit, No. 25; Indianapolis, No. 45; and New York, No. 44.

Reports from some other groups were not quite so frequent, but many of these, too, appeared to be quite active in their own regions. Unfortunately, during the war, some of these chapters were dropped for non-payment of dues.

Some of the wartime notes that appeared in the AP are interesting reading: In August 1916, it was reported that a pony express cover was discovered. This is early recognition of a great U.S. rarity.

In May 1917, the Danish West Indies came into the possession of the United States. With some regret, the AP noted that only U.S. stamps would be used in the newly renamed Virgin Islands.

The APS Roll of Honor printed in the AP listed Society members in the U.S. armed forces, and included a former president, Gen. Coolidge, and a future one. Dr. Carroll Chase was serving in a medical unit in the French Army, as was well-known collector Henry E. Gibson. A gold star was added to the list when Fred D. Pollard of Proctorville, Vermont, was listed as killed in action while serving in the “18th Infantry.”

“Doc” Davis of Denver was the Society secretary, as well as the editor of the AP in 1918. Among other items of interest in that year was the fact that the Sales Department was prospering, with recorded sales of more than $12,000. Also, the library holdings in Pittsburgh were being substantially augmented, and a committee was actively investigating federal incorporation for the Society.

The 1919 convention in St. Louis paid its respects to the Society’s late president, John W. Scott, who had died in office. In a special tribute, his successor stated, “I wish we could do something more out of respect for our dear departed President, dear old Father Scott.”

Also at St. Louis, Hiram Deats, founding member, former president, and volunteer custodian, made it known that he was eager to transfer or dispose of a storage house full of “junk” that included back
Attendance at the Society's 1917 annual meeting at Alexandria Bay was down somewhat, as the war interfered with participation in this aspect of Society affairs.

numbers of the AP and various archives. His concern was precipitated by the fact that he had received from the Stowell Co., a large shipment of recent copies of the AP.

Mr. Deats was instructed to store the extra material (at the cost of the Society?) and refer the matter to the Board of Directors for further action and advice on its disposition.

The question of whether the war was really over in August 1919 was a matter of concern to the Society treasurer, who wanted to know when he should begin collecting dues from former servicemen. APS members serving in the armed forces had been exempt from the responsibility of paying dues for the "duration of the war."

The St. Louis convention arbitrarily and officially ended World War I then and there, but the question of what to do about foreign members who had been in good standing in 1914 presented yet another problem for the Society. This was resolved by increasing dues for foreign members to $5.

As a final thrust, to end the decade and usher in the roaring '20s, the AP changed editors once again.

The Chase Era

The post-war period provided new and unusual opportunities in stamp collecting. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary evolved from the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A newly reconstituted Poland and various parts of the German Empire that were occupied by the Allies or that became plebiscite areas provided more stamp-issuing governments.

Former German colonies that had become war spoils; territories lost by the Soviet Union, including the three Baltic states — Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania — and Finland; and countries created from what had been the Ottoman Empire — all provided a bonanza for philatelists.

Capping all this was the plethora of U.S. issues pouring into the market: coil waste, offset printings, and the results of various wartime exigencies. For U.S. postal stationery fans, there was a whole gamut of surcharged stamped envelopes, as wartime rates of three cents were reduced to two cents, etc. And for anyone with extra cash, the U.S. government announced its plan to sell war savings certificates and stamps, which had not previously been readily available in small lots.

All of these phenomena caused a flurry of renewed interest in philately that, for the first time, sent membership in the American Philatelic Society to more than 1,700. More names that would figure prominently in the Society's future began to appear: Kimble, Lehman, Sloan, Needham, Fife, Domansky, and Guest. The last of these, J.E. Guest of Minneapolis, was appointed sales superintendent in November 1919, a position he was to hold for thirty-seven years.

AP advertisers offered stamps of Lettland (Latvia) printed on captured German war maps, issues of the "Bolshevik" state of Azerbaijan (sic), and postal material from such enclaves as "Northern Epiris," Korytza, Fiume, Kuban, Thrace, and the new Albania. Soviet issues, some of them commemorating the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, were also available.

Spelling the names of these new entities apparently was a problem: The AP editor noted with amusement that, in a single issue of Mekeel's, he had found the "name of the new republic formed from Bohemia, Moravia and Slavonia" styled six different ways, from Czecho-Slovakia to Ceskoslovenska. He further reported that, in response to his query, the president of the National Geographic Society said proper spellings could not be established until "a standard of transliteration has been established."

Articles by Dr. Carroll Chase, home from his wartime medical service in France, began to appear in the AP in May 1920. This splendiferous material on early U.S. stamps would form the basis of his later classic publications. In that same issue of the AP, Sales Superintendent Guest promoted his department in a full page advertisement. Remember that Guest, who was also a dealer, retained a percentage of the Sales Department's total sales as a personal fee for his services.

In the meanwhile, the AP was prospering under the editorial leadership of former president W.C. "Uncle Billy" Stone, a charter member from Springfield, Massachusetts. Appointed by the Board of Directors in October 1919, he assumed his new duties with zeal. Stone was a fine scholar and writer, and during his tenure, several of his splendid articles appeared in the AP.

Under his leadership, the journal began to take on a professional aspect, and his editorialists would still be acceptable today. Much of his writing dealt with continuing irritations — repairs, frauds, unsolicited approvals, etc. By June 1920, counterfeits of even the war-savings stamps of 1919 were in full production and sale!

In July 1920, the AP ran a long article on the French government's sale of "Baron Ferrary's" stamp collection, reputed to be worth more than $2 million. The collection, though housed in France,
had been bequeathed by the Baron to the Berlin Postal Museum. Thus, it was fair game for confiscation by the French under the "alien property" clause.

Among other rarities, the collection contained the famous 1-cent British Guiana of 1856, a fine copy of the 2-cent blue Missionary stamp of Hawaii, and the "Post Office" issues of Mauritius. The article commented, "There has never been a stamp collector who indulged in his hobby in so princely a manner. . . ." Ferrari was, without a doubt, one of the two or three most famous philatelists of all time.

President Henry N. Wilson, in his opening address at the Providence convention in 1920, stated that the 1917 goal of 2,000 members was impossible to realize. In that year, 1920, the Society claimed just over 1,700 members.

The new president, Dr. Carroll Chase of Brooklyn, New York, was already an acknowledged authority on U.S. stamps. He was to become one of the half-dozen greatest authorities on these issues.

Elected for two terms — in 1920 and 1921 — Dr. Chase gave the Society a quality of leadership that embraced the very best in philately at that time. During his tenure in office, he began work on his classic, The Three-Cent Stamp of the United States 1851–57 Issue. Although this treatise was revised and expanded fifty years later by Thomas Alexander, it remains the basis for many studies.

Senator E.R. Ackerman of New Jersey, another of America’s leading collectors, made the 1920 Society banquet speech at Providence. Mr. Ackerman, however, was not the only star in the convention constellation: Judge Robert D. Emerson, president of the host club, was also present. Both men displayed portions of their magnificent holdings, and in terms of famous philatelists present and exciting exhibits on display, the 1920 convention had to be one of the best ever. At last, membership in the APS reached 1,800.

Henry C. Needham, whose articles on U.S. locals ran for more than a year in the AP, was also at the Providence meeting, along with Ashbrook, Ackerman, Bartels, Hugh Clark, Costales, Farnham, Good, Klein, Luff, Mann, Mozian, Ohlman, Severn, and, of course, "Uncle Billy" Stone. The illustrious list makes a modern-day philatelist wish he might have shared in the company. And, in addition to the notables, another seventy-five or so "ordinary mortals" were also in attendance.

One of the post-war events that stirred much rancor was the proposed sale by the Australian Commonwealth government of "part of the booty taken from the former German Pacific colonies." The Australian Stamp Journal was quoted as saying, "We do not know on what principle of equity these stamps are put on the market, as is being done, and an effort made to obtain $4000 or $5000 for stamps of which the face value amounted to $97 odd . . ." was surely "obscene."

Many of the articles Editor Stone received for the AP were papers that had been read at regular meetings of one or more of the various branch societies. This was a good source of original material, and most of it was first rate. As a result, the AP was a readable journal that contained a great deal of information for philatelists.

Under Stone’s guidance, the AP became the exceptional publication that it has continued to be in the ensuing years.

After the August 1921 convention in Milwaukee, Stone stepped down as editor and Adolph D. Fennel of Cincinnati took

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Society dues were raised to $2 at the annual meeting in 1921, as reflected by the purple handstamp at the bottom of this printed receipt.
to Dallas, and was based there for the rest of his long tenure as sales superintendent. The 1922 meeting in Springfield, Massachusetts, attracted 171 members (stockholders) and many guests. This convention ended Dr. Chase’s leadership, as he turned the gavel over to the new president, Charles F. Heyerman of Michigan. Again, a listing of the distinguished philatelists in attendance is cause for envy. Imagine Ashbrook, Elliott Perry, Tracy Simpson, Needham, Atherton, Deats, Klein, Lindquist, George Sloane, Steinway, Hind, Ward, and Walcott all in the same room!

Another milestone was reached in 1922, when the Society treasurer reported a balance in excess of $10,000. But Dr. Chase had not only led the APS to a sound financial position during the post-war era, he had also established it as a leader in American philately.

At this time, the Scott catalogue was recognized as the “official” register for U.S. stamps, as well as for the issues of several other countries, including Canada. The Scott company was a regular advertiser in the AP, along with Wolsieffel, Bartels, Perry “Himself,” Klein, Colman, Ohlm a, Phillips, and the Nassau Stamp Co.

Another controversial issue was resolved at the 1922 annual meeting. Geographical limitations were eliminated for all elected officers except the vice presidents, who, by necessity, had to live in close proximity to each other. The matter was accomplished only after being referred to the membership, but the resolution eventually prevailed.

The new life-membership status, approved at the Providence convention, was reported to have been well received, with more than 150 members already paid up. Eugene Klein’s four-year-old daughter, Delores, was a member of this group. Members also voted to aid the Boy Scouts of America by instituting a merit badge in philately.

When Billy Stone gave his familiar “sine die” motion to close the 1922 convention, he recalled that he had attended twenty-eight of the Society’s thirty-seven conventions (probably equaled only by Deats), including the first.

During these years, philatelic auctions were increasingly popular throughout the country. The AP regularly reported realizations from many of these, and many of the auction firms were in fact headed by active members of the Society. At the same time, the number of APS branch societies was also rapidly increasing, with clubs in many of the smaller cities becoming Society affiliates.

Stanley Ashbrook, writing for the AP in 1922, began his great study of the U.S. 1851 1-cent stamp. The drawings he used for his original study are still the authoritative illustrations for the then-known types. During the same year, Society secretary Dr. Holland Davis began his study of the U.S. 1887 3-cent vermilion. And for ten cents, Eugene Klein offered a listing entitled “Air Mail” that included “an excellent priced list of both airplane stamps and covers. . . .”

A thorough evaluation of the legal and historical aspects of the APS as related to incorporation and stockholding appeared in the July 1922 AP. Prepared by Gordon Ireland, it occupied ten pages of the issue.

Among the most important events of this period was the modification of “caveat emptor,” at least as it applied to the buying and selling of stamps. In Klem vs. Grinnell, the Superior Court of California at Los Angeles ruled that the seller of fraudulent stamps was required to return the full purchase price to the buyer when the latter had made the deal in good faith, believing that the material was genuine.

The “Chase Era” ended on the up-beat for the APS, with the membership anticipating the Springfield convention of 1923.

Next month: Coming of Age.