APS: The First Century

Robert L.D. Davidson

Coming of Age

In 1922, Charles F. Heyerman, an active and avid collector and APS Life Member No. 2, was elected president of the Society, an office he would hold through two terms (1922-24). According to an article titled "The Newly Elected President" that appeared in The American Philatelist, Mr. Heyerman was from Detroit, where he was "identified with a general Real Estate and Insurance business." He was also a veteran of both the Spanish-American War and the "Great War" of 1914-18.

The most pressing issue before the group that gathered in convention at Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1922 was discussion of a bill before Congress "legitimizing the illustration of foreign stamps, many members opposing it because it does not include United States as well." President-elect Heyerman was authorized to appoint a committee "to do all in their power to have permission granted under proper safeguards to use illustrations of United States stamps as well as foreign."

The only other significant actions taken in that year involved the Society's recognition that its annual gatherings involved a financial burden for its hosts: "Owing to the considerable expense falling upon the local clubs entertaining conventions it was voted to authorize such clubs to charge a registration fee to all attendants at future conventions if they deem it necessary." In addition, "The sum of $100 a year was authorized towards the convention expenses of the President at future conventions."

By 1922, the American Stamp Dealers Association was a going concern. Established in 1919, it represented most of the important dealers. A letter from the ASDA to APS Secretary Davis was printed in the AP following the Springfield convention:

Aug. 24, 1922.

Dr. H. A. Davis,
Secretary American Philatelic Society,
3421 Colfax "A",
DENVER, Colo.

Dear Dr. Davis:

The A. S. D. A. members in convention at Springfield, Mass., Aug. 14, 1922, authorized me to transmit to the American Philatelic Society their sincere thanks for the hearty cooperation, the expressed good-fellowship, and the extensive entertainment accorded us by the Society as a whole, and particularly by the members of the A. P. S. branch society known as the Springfield Stamp Club.

In carrying out the wishes of A. S. D. A. members present, and expressing to you an official representative of the American Philatelic Society — our sincere thanks, I desire to state that our members (who mostly are A. P. S. members) will have an eye upon the preparations for the 1923 convention at Washington, and whenever and wherever possible they will lend a willing hand to the work which is to be done by the other A. P. S. members there.

Very sincerely,
W.F. SLUSSER,
Secretary A. S. D. A.

During these days of maturing, the Society had its usual struggle with the continuing problems of philately. Resolutions
and recommendations for changes in the by-laws were presented regularly, in an attempt to solve the ever-present problems of forgeries and fraudulent stamps, the government’s lack of cooperation on the question of stamp illustration, the twin issues of proper compensation and expense allowances, and the myriad small irritations that persist to this day.

At this time, the International Philatelic Union applied for listing as an APS “Corresponding Society.” At the 1909 convention, this category of affiliation had been established for such organizations as the Royal Philatelic Society of London. By the early twenties, about fifty such member groups regularly exchanged publications.

The International Philatelic Union had been founded in 1881 in Albany, New York, and had, with some success, tried to encourage philatelists worldwide to get together. Although the organization was more readily accepted in England than in the United States, the American end was upheld by a loyal group of leaders, most of them also members of the APS. The IPU was accepted as a Corresponding Society of the APS in 1924.

Among the members who served the APS regularly and well during this period was Eugene Klein, a Philadelphia dealer, who was international secretary of the Society for seven years. He later was elected president (1935-37).

Several of the charter members — among them, Deats, Stone, and Alvah Davison — were still playing active roles in Society affairs, after more than thirty-five years of affiliation with the APS. Davison, in fact, became a life member in November 1922. Evidently, he was not about to stop his contributions to organized philately.

A big recruiting program was begun in 1922, and Society membership did increase slightly. However, many of the new members added were offset by a substantial list of members dropped for non-payment of dues.

In 1923, Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News celebrated its thirty-third anniversary, and its publisher-editors, Severn, Wylie, and Jewett, all long-time APS members, were congratulated. The same year, Scott
published its first *U.S. Specialized* catalogue, edited by another APS member, Eugene Costales. Costales had the benefit of a powerful advisory group from the APS that included Chase, Ashbrook, Luff, and others.

The Society also congratulated the U.S. government on the new transcontinental flights, hailing them as a great achievement. Finally, a committee was created to study a complete revision of the by-laws and to consider the wisdom of re-incorporation, perhaps under a national charter. This report took longer than had been expected: It was not yet ready for presentation at the 1924 convention in Detroit.

In May 1923, many APS members went to London for the third great international exhibition, said to have “demonstrated how world wide the interest in stamp collecting” had become. Fluctuating currencies and national bankruptcies — in Germany, for example — seemed not to have affected the stability of stamp values, and the London exhibition was a great occasion. Brussels was announced as the host city for the 1924 international.

The widespread membership of the APS is indicated by the fact that the Japanese earthquake was reported sadly in the October 1923 issue of the *AP*. Among the hundreds who died in the disaster were a number of APS members. In the same sad vein, the death of life member George H. Worthington was reported early in 1924.

About this time, a “10c ‘47, a magnificent copy, very large margins, and square green cancellation, a remarkably fine and beautiful copy, cancellation fully guaranteed,” brought $60 at a Los Angeles auction!

At Detroit in 1924, President Heyerman, ending his second term, had 300 members present at the annual convention, a new and splendid representation that exceeded the record of 256 attendants set in Washington, D.C., the previous year. Much time was spent discussing plans for the international philatelic exhibition to be held in New York in 1926, paralleling the Sesquicentennial Exhibition in Philadelphia.

Society membership was at last starting to burgeon, with the secretary’s report showing a count of 3,031 as of August 1, 1924. And the *AP* was finally becoming a major advertising vehicle for American philately. Fifty major ads (more than eighteen full pages), and almost two full pages of the brief “Wants and Exchanges” appeared in the September 1924 issue of the journal. About this time, too, a number of specialist groups were expressing an interest in affiliating with the APS. The Pre-Cancel Society was among these organizations, and it was admitted.

Some more of the important APS names joined the Society: Mrs. Manning, later head of the Philatelic Agency of the U.S. Post Office Department; Clay Musser, later APS executive secretary; Thomas Doane Perry; Edward S. Knapp; and Richard Cannman.

The January 1924 *AP* featured an article titled “Our Charter Members,” which named twenty-one of the Society’s founders who were still living, and cited thirteen of those as still being very active members. The article included brief biographies and photographs of Alvah Davison, P.M. Wolsieffer, H.B. Phillips, E.B. Sterling, H.L. Calman, C.F. Rothfuchs, C.F. Richards, Col. Spencer Crosby, W.C. Stone, Gen. C.A. Coolidge, W.A. MacCalla, and J.M. Hubbard. The photos are reproduced here.

At the Detroit convention in 1924, charter member P.F. Wolsieffer was elected president and the Society set about the serious business of revising the by-laws. Dues “shot up” from $2 to $3, an action accompanied by much groaning and moaning. But the membership at last exceeded 3,000, and the treasury had almost $30,000 in “stock fund” and bond investments.

For a time, the *AP* carried a regular series of articles called “Under the Hammer,” reports on the results of important auctions held during the period since the last issue. These can be very interesting reading for today’s collector, who must be sure to bear in mind that the results are in 1925 dollars.

The 1925 convention in Los Angeles was attended by 122 members (stockholders), but only eleven of them were from east of the Mississippi River. Very few of the “regulars” made this long and expensive trip on the “cars.” President Wolsieffer was among the absentees. But the California philatelists appeared in substantial numbers. The membership had expanded. A.H. Wilhlem of San Francisco was elected president.

The *AP* reported that it was operating in the black for the first time, primarily because of increased support from its advertisers. ‘I saw your ad in the *AP*’ was the new slogan advanced by the editor.

During these years of the twenties, other names familiar to philatelists joined the APS: Jere Hess Barr, Harold L. Ikices (later Secretary of the Interior in FDR’s cabinet), Clarence Brazier, Ezra Cole (listed as a farmer from New York state), Carter Glass Jr., Robson Lowe of London, and L.G. Brookman (then of Iowa).

Another year passed with no final report from the special committee on the revision of the by-laws and incorporation. Uncle
Billy Stone was not going to submit anything that was not thorough.

The New York meeting in 1926 was a record-breaker. The AP reported that "five hundred and twenty-five A.P.S. members registered at the Hotel Waldorf Astoria headquarters and due, fortunately and unfortunately, to the fact that the International Exhibition was going on at the same time there were at least five hundred more members on hand that failed to find time to register."

After two years of active recruiting, Society membership on September 1, 1926, was reported by the secretary as 3,838, with almost 400 life members. Some well-known names had joined the roster, among them John R. Boker, Stephen Rich, and Sir Nicholas Waterhouse. Two long-serving charter members, Gen. Coolidge and E.B. Sterling, passed away.

One of the New York groups hosting the big convention was the New York Collectors Club. Founded in 1896, it had become a prestigious group of philatelists. Over the years, it has acquired an outstanding philatelic library, and it continues today to play an important role in American philately. Most of its members have also been members of the APS, and one of the club's recent presidents, F. Burton "Bud" Sellers, is now president of the APS. Members of this group added greatly to the brilliance of the Society's 1926 convention.

The forty-first meeting of the APS — which marked the Society's fortieth anniversary — was held during the great International Philatelic Exhibition in New York, October 18–23, 1926.

The U.S. Post Office recognized the international by issuing the Battle of White Plains stamp, Scott No. 630, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of that Revolutionary War battle. This, in itself, was unusual, but further excitement was created by the fact that the stamp was issued in a small pane of twenty-five, as a souvenir sheet, one of the first such ever presented and surely the first in U.S. postal history.

The APS convention featured a great many entertaining diversions, as well as plenty of opportunities to see the great exhibition. But much hard work was also accomplished. President Wilhelm, with masterful hand, conducted the long discussion and debate over proposed revisions to the by-laws, which substantially changed the Society's structure. The primary changes proposed in 1926 were summarized by the editor of the AP as follows:

**ARTICLE ONE. MEMBERSHIP.** — It is proposed to change Section One so as to provide for an "Admission Fee" instead of a share of stock, and also require the endorsement of TWO members for each applicant instead of one as formerly.

It is suggested that the articles of incorporation be amended to effect the change from issuing shares of stock to that of charging an admission fee so as to get away from the intricate legal technicalities involved in the present stock system. It is also felt that the requirement of two endorsers to an application beside two commercial references will better safeguard the continued high character of the membership. It is admitted that this requirement will probably add to the difficulty in securing new members, but it is thought the added prestige that comes to every Society that exercises great care in who it admits to membership will offset that difficulty.

**THE ADMISSION FEE** is fixed at Two Dollars instead of the One Dollar now required to purchase a share of stock. The annual dues to remain at $3 as at present.

**LIFE MEMBERSHIP** is fixed at $30.00 plus the $2. admission fee.

**PERMANENT FUND.** This is provided for in Section Four, Art. One, which calls for the transfer of the present Stock Fund and all of the future admission fees (including Life Membership fees) to a so-called "Permanent Fund" which shall be held by one or more Trust Companies and only the income expended for Society purposes...

**ARTICLE TWO. OFFICERS.** Provides...
for a term of two years for the officers of the Society and that "no officer of the Society shall by occupation be a dealer in stamps". It is also provided that the three Vice Presidents must reside within a radius of fifty miles, and the other six officers, members of the Board of Directors, that is, the President, Secretary, Treasurer, International Secretary and the two Directors at large must reside in as many different States.

A BUDGET is provided for under Sec. 7, Art. Two. This is to be made up by the Board of Directors and no officer or committee shall have the right to exceed the amount provided in the budget for the year.

THE SALARY OF THE SECRETARY is fixed at $1200 per year plus an allowance not to exceed $75 per month for clerical and stenographic services. He shall receive his transportation fare to and from Conventions and $10 per day while convention is in session and the reasonable expenses for postage, stationery and printing.

THE SALARY OF THE TREASURER is fixed at $200 per year and postage, stationery and printing expense.

ALL APPOINTEE OFFICERS except the Sales Manager and Editor shall hold office for two years and the latter for five years. Any appointive officer may be removed by the Board for just cause and suspended at any time, pending an investigation, when the Board deems that the interest of the Society requires such action.

THE SALES MANAGER shall hold office for five years, receive a salary of $25 per year and a commission of 12½ percent on the gross sales made through the circuits.

THE EDITOR OF THE A. P. shall hold office for five years, receive a salary of $600 per year and a commission of 15 percent on paid advertising together with his expenses of postage and printing.

"CHAPTERS" is the term used in the suggested changed by-laws for the present "Branches" but the rules under which they are to be formed are very similar to the present provisions on that subject. It will require 25 members to form a "Chapter."

"UNITIS." — A new feature proposed is the formation of "Units" within the Society for the study of any phase of Philately. These may be formed by any five members who shall elect a Chairman and may collect dues from their members. They shall have the right to publish articles in the A. P. bearing on their subject and may establish an exchange department. This plan is suggested as a means of taking care of the specialists in such subjects as "Airmails," "Pre-Cancels," etc. without the necessity of forming new Societies.

The laws of the state of Minnesota, under which the Society was incorporated, required a clear majority of "stockholders" to agree to the revisions. As the AP noted, "The Convention body, representing the vote of over half the membership adopted the entire new schedule without a single dissenting vote."

These reforms were much needed, and many of the changes made in 1926 were retained as part of the system under which the APS continued to operate for many years. The one matter that seems not to have been changed at all was the proxy system, which had plagued the APS for forty years.

Nevertheless, there seems to have been no idea of eliminating the system of proxy voting. In fact, the August 1926 issue of The American Philatelist carried the following plea, signed by the secretary:

At the New York Convention the new By-Laws as presented by the By-Laws Committee will be voted upon. It is essential that every member be represented, either in person or by proxy. If you cannot attend, please be sure and send your proxy to some member who will be
present, or send it with your ballot to the Credential Committee... send it to some one so we will have enough members represented in order to do business.

As noted above, votes were cast by more than half of the Society's total membership of 3,838, although only 525 members were registered at the convention headquarters. Clearly, APers had responded to the secretary's urgings.

The AP, while operating in the black, still had a deficit from previous years that needed to be overcome. The sales department was beginning to supply some additional moneys to the general fund. Thus, except for the usual worries, the APS was quite healthy.

The Society's fortieth anniversary observance coincided with the nation's celebration of the sesquicentennial of the American Revolution, which occasioned a whole series of commemorative issues. One brief article in the AP bears inclusion here:

**NEW ISSUES OF THE UNITED STATES**

arouse about the same feelings among collectors abroad as do the pictorial commemoratives of foreign nations in this country. An Englishman who likes to hear the eagle scream just as some citizens of the U. S. like to hear the lion roar when you twist his tail remarks that he likes the figure of "Vision" on the new Sc Ericsson stamp because her clothes hang upon her so wonderfully and she combs her hair with unaccustomed dexterity with her left hand. He says that undoubtedly the charming figure standing over the inventor of the Monitor accounts for the beatific smile on his face. Of the Liberty Bell stamp he speaks less kindly as he takes the American Eagles on top the pillars supporting the bell to be newly hatched chickens and horrors, on the bottom of the pillars he claims to detect a crawling cockroach. That's pretty rough but we suppose we have been almost as unkind in reviewing some of the same kind of stamps from abroad. Gibbons Monthly Journal features some acrostic puzzles in the good Victorian style and the answer to a recent one is illustrative of the same kindly feeling for modern U. S. It reads:

**Usually New Issue Tried Every Day So That American Treasury Expands Satisfactorily.**

[The solution to this particular puzzle is UNITED STATES]

New York's International Philatelic Exhibition was a huge effort, but apparently well worth it. The AP reported that:

**THE EXHIBITION** was an outstanding success and as such is certain to have a far reaching influence on the hobby in the U. S. The social and philatelic contacts made, the education in higher philately that the average collector absorbed in viewing the exhibits and the publicity gained among thousands of non-collectors are but a few of the forces put in motion that will improve and extend the hobby. The show was a big splash in the philatelic sea and ripples from

**Prospectus**

of the

First Annual Stamp Show

SPONSORED BY THE

AMERICAN PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Open to All Stamp Collectors

Hodgson Building, 2nd Avenue South at 4th Street, Minneapolis

At the time of the American Philatelic Society Convention in the Twin Cities, August 19-24, incl., 1929

A 1928 resolution suggested that large philatelic exhibitions held in conjunction with the Society's conventions were detrimental to the conventions. APS members rejected the proposed resolution then and there. A year later, the Society sponsored its "First Annual Stamp Show."

Exhibition conducted by the National Philatelic Exhibition of 1929, Inc.
under the auspices of the Twin City Philatelic Society.

it will reach and agitate collecting within a tremendous circle. One result is certain and that is that we are to see more public exhibitions of stamps in the U. S. than in the past. The thousands that saw the New York show were deeply impressed with the healthy interest the non-collectors took in the show and already plans are being laid for several local exhibitions. Why not give one in your town?

Today, some sixty years later, the same paragraph might be used to describe the salutary effects of AMERIPEX '86 on philately in general.

The whole New York experience was a fine public relations effort for philately. And the New York convention had seen the adoption of a really sensible set of by-laws — certainly not perfect, but a remarkable improvement over what had been. Charter members Dents, Denison, Stone, and Wolsieffer were among those in attendance, and the editor of the AP editorialized that the convention “without question accomplished more for the Society in a constructive way than any previous legislative meeting.”

The vote to go to St. Louis the next year was two to one over Toronto, so the forty-second annual convention met in that city in August 1927. This was the third time the Mound City had hosted an annual meeting of the APS. Ralph Siler, longtime city alderman in St. Louis and a veteran member of the APS, twice was instrumental in persuading the Society to meet in his city.

Attendance in 1927 took on a more even distribution, as some thirty-five states were represented by the 113 members and fifty-five guests present. In St. Louis, the APS meeting happily coincided with reaction to Lindbergh’s famous flight, and many eulogies appeared, like this bit from the St. Louis Globe Democrat that was included in the convention proceedings:

Daring the wrath of a turbulent sea,
A spirit incarnate, a Viking was he;
Urged to his task by an invincible will,
Guided by instinct and aided with skill,
Strengthened by danger, unfettered by fear,
True to the spirit of a real pioneer;
Taking a bold and magnificent chance,
Bearing America's Message to France;
Glory that day received a new name,
Lindbergh, American, crowned forever by fame!

In the mid-twenties, the APS library, then assigned to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, was a source of considerable discussion. The host library believed the material submitted to it was forever committed to its holdings, and its director was quoted as saying that "they would not give it up as it is their property."

What to do? At St. Louis in 1927, and again at Toronto in 1928, the question was raised. Should the Society wash its hands of the whole idea, thus giving the Carnegie
Library the right not only to take over the holdings, but also to improve upon them?

In St. Louis, the motion was made that the Society wash its hands of the library, but no official action was taken. In Toronto, the matter came up again. Dr. Kenneth Day, an APS member from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who was the Society's assistant librarian, had this to say on the matter:

[Last year] the recommendation of the committee and my recommendation as assistant librarian was that the present library was absolutely useless and that there was no interest taken in it anyway. . . . A library such as we have will hardly be a success with the members scattered all over the country and the library located at one point, the books from which must be obtained by writing in to the library. The head of the Carnegie Library has told me that they never have known of a corresponding library of that type to be a success.

The matter was resolved — for the time being — when a motion made by Mr. Stone was carried:

I move that the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh be officially informed by our secretary that the American Philatelic Society abandons all claim to any possession or connection with the society's library at present deposited with that institution, and that the Carnegie Library be permitted to make such disposition of it as they see fit.

It would be almost a half-century before the creation of the American Philatelic Research Library, now housed in the American Philatelic Building in State College, Pennsylvania. Today, the Society's membership is still scattered, and the library's holdings are available to most of those members only through the mails. Fortunately, however, Mr. Day and his committee, as well as the head of the Carnegie Library, were wrong: The APRL has proved rather conclusively that a "corresponding library" can indeed be a successful venture.

The 1927 convention proceeded along pacific lines, really debating only the types of investments for which the Permanent Fund could be used. This now included both stockholders' money and life membership fees, and amounted to a sizable $18,000. When this was added to the Insurance Fund, total retained moneys made up a holding of $30,000.

Interestingly enough, and in part because of a mix-up in the voting at New York City two years earlier, the idea of convening the 1928 meeting in Toronto met with almost unanimous approval. For this convention, 160 members (no longer stockholders) and 105 guests traveled to Canada. Dr. Clarence Hennan was there, along with Arthur Hind. The usual "regulars" and officers were in attendance, along with other members named Konwiser, Phillips, Norona, Adolph Steeg, Lichtenstein, and Sloane. "Uncle Billy" Stone reported on deck, as well.

But the Society was not growing very rapidly. A successful recruiting campaign had been offset by the number of members dropped for non-payment of dues — 368 of them between the 1927 and 1928 conventions. Although APS membership on August 1, 1928, stood at 4,106, Secretary Davis reported in Toronto that, "Our gain for the year in numbers has been but 40."

The business of the Society again ran smoothly. The revised by-laws, now two years old, seemed to be generally accepted. Debate was engendered only by minor disputes concerning the officers of the Units, the spending of income from the Permanent Fund, and the establishment of a Committee on Exhibitions, to be made up of certain officers. There was some rivalry to host the 1929 meeting, but the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were selected.

Among the resolutions presented for the consideration of the convention were two that may be of interest to APS members today:

1) RESOLVED, That a committee be appointed to confer with wealthy members, in an effort to secure endowments or bequests in their Wills, toward securing and maintaining a permanent home for this Society. . .

2) In the belief that large exhibitions, held in conjunction with these conventions, is detrimental to this Society,

RESOLVED. That extensive exhibitions, of philatelic nature, shall not be permitted in conjunction with the holding of our annual conventions.

Resolution No. 1 was adopted by the convention, on the recommendation of the Resolution Committee, which believed "the intent to be beneficial and progressive," and which suggested "the selection of a committee to devise a practical plan for the proposed philatelic headquarters, this committee to report to a later convention."

On Resolution No. 2, however, good sense prevailed. The Resolution Committee disagreed with the resolution, citing instead its belief that "the combination of shows and conventions are desirable and would tend to increase attendance at conventions and at the same time aid in general publicity." So be it — even today.

One sad note in St. Louis was the passing of another charter member, Alva Davison, one of the most loyal of members over the years.

President Wilhelm served through the Minneapolis meeting, which was attended by 210 members. Only minor adjustments to the by-laws marked the event. The collapse on Wall Street had not yet occurred, but the Great Depression was about to descend upon the country, affecting the APS as it did everything else.

Next month: Into the thirties, as the Society prepares to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary.