



The Young Collector

By Joseph Perrone

EACH STAMP IS A LITTLE HISTORY LESSON

Last year I decided to enter my first stamp exhibition to share my interest in World War II history through some stamps I had collected. The category chosen for my exhibit was a 'single frame' presentation. It's the simplest form, so a good way to start. The challenge of this format is to express one thought clearly and effectively.

As I worked, I found that exhibiting would be a great way to combine my passion for history and for stamps. By studying the various images on stamps in my collection I had previously noticed that conflicting messages were portrayed. Therefore, I began to explore further how stamps had been used for political purposes during World War II.

My task was to highlight the stories depicted by stamps issued by opposing governments. Nazi Germany had some of the most visually exciting postage. From a scene of SS troopers on the lookout with machine guns, to deadly Luftwaffe aircraft streaking down from the sky onto a soon-to-be destroyed target, the stamps are captivating.

The Polish government later responded with interesting anti-war stamps depicting scenes of its towns and cities flattened by the Nazis. These stamps are among



Polish stamps, not as visually appealing, but they do show the carnage.



German stamps, heroic, eye catching, without showing the atrocities and damage of war.

my favourites since they cleverly convey before-and-after effects of war by contrasting images from 1939 and 1945.

After discussing my ideas with some members of my stamp club I came up with the title of my exhibit: Propaganda vs. Truth. Since this was my first exhibit, and stamp collecting is about learning from others, I sought and received guidance and helpful suggestions from experienced exhibitors. The result was a selected assembly of specific stamps arranged to deliver powerful and contrasting concepts.

I won first place at the West Toronto Stamp Club for the single frame exhibit. The judge thought I had succeeded in portraying one interesting aspect of stamps succinctly on a single page. However, upon reflection, I won a great deal more than reward and recognition from participating in this exhibit.

First of all, I learned that each stamp is a little history lesson. The stories depicted are fun to research and consider historically. Exhibiting has helped me learn and build my collection and network with other experienced collectors and dealers. Through my exhibit, they now know what I collect.

Stamp collecting isn't just about filling holes in an album. It also means having a good time at the stamp club and socializing. Exhibitions, at which you can share and receive philatelic knowledge, are a satisfying aspect of what makes the pastime so much fun.

Further, when you exhibit your stamps, more people come to know your material and what your interests are. They often give you excellent information and share



their material with you. For example, just this week a gentleman from my previous club, who remembered my exhibit, was kind enough to mail me a military cover. He included a detailed page of his own research about this gift.

I was honoured to receive this beautiful cover from another exhibitor who inspired me to create my own. Furthermore, the envelope in which the cover came was nicely franked with what I believe is a new and collectible experimental kiosk stamp.

Once you start researching for your exhibit, you begin to discover unusual details of stamps you may not have noticed before. You begin to see them in new ways as you connect with the past. Consider, for example, my topic: Propaganda vs. Truth. As one observer, Hiram Johnson, noted during World War I, 'the first casualty, when war comes, is truth.' I discovered that some stamps have been highly controversial. In fact, some countries have produced stamps whose images are deliberately misleading – what you might call a philatelic version of 'fake news.'

By far, one of the best features about exhibitions is that you get to view other entries. You are inspired as you meet the whole range of stamp collectors, from beginners, to people who pass out certificates of authenticity at the Vincent Graves Greene Foundation. You will find detailed displays of items, and you might even become interested in one of the topics.

My favorite exhibit, so far, was by David Foote regarding Australian rocket mail. He gave a wonderful talk about this very unusual way of transporting mail. Due to

difficulty crossing a swollen and dangerous river, a rocket with a tin containing mail was launched and sometimes received by the postmaster on the other side who would deliver it accordingly. What an interesting detail of postal history! I found this mailing method amusing, since some rockets blew up on the ground and some flew badly off course. I saw some of these flight covers and I suppose they may be correctly termed as 'disaster mail.'

(Disclaimer: I do not recommend this method of transporting mail, as serious injury or even death may occur. Kids, do not try this at home.)

Another intriguing exhibit that fascinated me was a history of the Toronto post offices and their various cancellations and postmarks. Because of this exhibit, I now search for strange postmarks, fancy cancels, and local cancellations.

Currently, I am looking for some material from where I live in Massie, Ontario. So far, I have located one cover with a Massie receiving postmark containing two intact letters from 1906.

Stamp collecting and exhibiting have helped me learn many history lessons, and have also helped with the building of my collection. Presenting is a thrilling, knowledge-building experience which allows you to interactively share your interests and inspire yourself and others. I highly recommend exhibiting for any collector, especially for those who are new to the hobby. ☒

