



# The Hobby of Kings ... and Queens

BY STACY ADAM

When I first began collecting stamps in 2017, I shared the common belief that philately was a hobby largely dominated by older men. The demographic numbers of many philatelic organizations support this stereotype (in 2018 and 2019 the APS reports a 9 percent female membership), and even the common stamp collecting slogan, *The hobby of kings, and the king of hobbies*, made me feel as if women were a rarity instead of the norm when it comes to the hobby. However, social media platforms — like Instagram — present an entirely different reality. As a new, young, female stamp collector, I've spent a lot of time connecting with other woman on social media who have interests in stamps, postmarks, stamp chain cards, postcards, and other mail-related ephemera. The APS demographics shocked me in part because from my position, 9 percent does not seem like an accurate representation of the number of women interested in philatelic subjects.

In the spring of 2018, I was beginning to develop my master's thesis on stamp collecting, and the same question kept surfacing: Why are female membership numbers so

low in philatelic organizations? I couldn't ignore this question anymore, so I decided to focus my project around *why*, and how to recruit more women into philately.

A "brotherhood" mentality has historically surrounded philately. For example, some clubs took on names like "The Sons of Philatelia" and the "Philatelic Sons of America" that, while not directly excluding women, stressed the brotherhood presence and mentality. This explains in part why the stereotype of stamp collecting as a man's hobby exists, but there has always been a female presence in the hobby, so again the question emerged, *Why the divide?*

## The Survey

To attempt to uncover some of the reasons for the gender divide, I created a survey, "Women in Stamp Collecting," that was distributed on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Facebook groups like American Postage Stamps and Postcrossing/PostcardSwapping, and prominent Twitter accounts, such as the APS (@APS\_stamps) and Exploring Stamps with Graham Beck (@ExploringStamps), distributed my survey, generating a wide range of responses. The results proved to be quite interesting, demonstrating that **there is a shared perception from women that they should not (or would not) consider themselves philatelists, despite**

## WOMEN vs. MEN

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A survey conducted among women and men who have interests in stamps and other mail related hobbies found that:

### COLLECT STAMPS:



### INTERESTED IN HISTORY OF STAMPS:



### INTERESTED IN POSTAL HISTORY:



58%

Only 58% of the women surveyed consider themselves a philatelist...

87%

...but 87% of the men surveyed, with similar interests, do call themselves a philatelist.

having similar interests as their male counterparts.

The survey responses were comprised of 50% women. 82% of the women who participated in the survey collect stamps, 88% are interested in the history of stamps, 87% are interested in postal history, and 85% are interested in how stamps are created, but only 58% consider themselves philatelists. Alternately, 96% of male respondents collect stamps, 94% are interested in the history of stamps, 86% are interested in postal history, 83% are interested in how stamps are developed, and, unlike women, 87% consider themselves philatelists.

When over 80% of the women who responded have interests that go beyond merely collecting stamps, why is it that 42% do not consider themselves philatelists, when 87% of men do?

One of the survey questions asked “If you are not a current member of an organization/club, what would entice you to join?” Some of the most common answers from women were:

“I didn't find any clubs or organization to join.

“Younger members, and yes, more female members. It really is an old man's club right now.

“I collect some stamps for fun. My collection is quite chaotic. I don't think I would join any group of real experienced collectors

“I don't know how to approach it

“I sometimes would be the only lady member participating comfortably.

Some of these responses seem easier to address. For instance, make sure that everyone (including women) is aware of organizations and what they have to offer, and ensure that people of all levels of philatelic interest know they are welcome to join — this should be enough to encourage women to become members and participate. But how do you get the word out to women if they aren't coming to your website, or attending meetings and stamp shows? I believe that a blend of old and new forms of communication and marketing is the answer, but **women have to be targeted**

.....  
 “Meeting some women specifically for it to make an impact. Additionally, new ways of collecting should be accepted and incorporated into philately.  
 .....  
 in stamp collecting would help. Currently I know of one woman in our area.  
 .....



Figure 1. When participating in chain cards, while there is a necessary process to follow, each person typically has their own set of preferences. Some people only like to participate in groups that use mint stamps that are canceled and sent from the country of origin. Other people might be less strict and are happy with a card filled with similar themed stamps. These members often don't care if a stamp comes from its country of origin, if it is previously used, and in some cases don't mind if it is not canceled at all. For more information about the process, you can visit [aps.buzz/ChainCards](http://aps.buzz/ChainCards)

### In with the New

Many philatelists seem unaware of a relatively new stamp-related hobby that uses social media and online forums to facilitate a unique way of collecting stamps from around the world: chain cards. These are not the chain letters of the past, with silly threats if you don't pass a letter on. Chain cards are postcards that travel across various countries or all over the world, between a group of about 4 to 6 members. The cards collect stamps and/or postmarks as they travel, usually with a specific topic. The end results are pictured above (Figure 1).

I have been participating in chain cards for over a year now, and many of the members with whom I've become well acquainted do not consider themselves philatelists. Some don't even consider themselves stamp collectors, since they do not collect stamps in any other format. How-

.....  
”I would be too nervous to join because I feel that I do not know much about stamps and their history and would be afraid to feel like an amateur.  
.....

ever, these participants — largely comprised of women — should feel welcome in the stamp collecting community — after all, their collections are not so different from those who collect covers, postmarks, and even used stamps soaked from their paper.

If new areas of stamp and mail-related interests, like chain cards, are accepted by philatelic organizations, and women have evidence that philately is more than just a group of men sorting stamps, I believe they would be enticed to join as well and share their collections and experiences. This would not only encourage people who participate in chain cards, but would demonstrate to the wider world that the philatelic community is open to new ideas and new ways of collecting.

It’s time to break the stereotype that philately is only “a hobby of kings.” After all, following the reigns of King George V, who started the Royal Philatelic Collection, and King George VI, Queen Elizabeth II has continued to build on its legacy. *Cosmopolitan* magazine recently reported of Queen Elizabeth that “[the collection] is one of her pride and joys.” Let’s start encouraging every woman who demonstrates interest in stamps and mail-related topics to join this hobby that is fit for a queen.

To share your story or ideas about women in philately, please contact [mediateam@stamps.org](mailto:mediateam@stamps.org), subject line “Women in Philately”. I’d love to hear your comments and ideas as I continue working on my thesis.

#### Further Reading and Resources

- Brennan, Sheila. *Stamping American Memory: Collectors, Citizens, and the Post*. (University of Michigan Press; 2015).
- Ganz, Cheryl R. “The History of American Women in Philately,” *The American Philatelist* 123, no. 12 (December 2009).
- Gelber, Steven M. *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- Malbon, Abigail. “The Queen’s stamp-collection hobby has apparently earned her £100 million,” *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Modified September 19, 2019. Accessed October 9, 2019. <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/reports/a29120312/the-queen-stamp-collection-hobby-money/>.

#### The Author

**T** Stacy Adam began collecting stamps in 2017. Her interest quickly expanded from U.S.-issued plate blocks to first day covers, special postmarks, and internationally-issued souvenir sheets. The stamps and covers in her collection range in a wide variety of topics from women’s issues to astronomy. Stacy is a graphic designer currently working on her Master of Fine Arts. She began working on her thesis in the spring of 2018; her focus is on bringing more women into philately, and empowering them to call themselves philatelists.

Stacy would like to express special thanks to Lisa Foster for her support and for informing her of the opportunity to write an article for this issue.



# A Brief History of Women in the Hobby

BY STACY ADAM

## Mid 1800s: Womens' Interests Curtailed

Some of the first stamp collecting gatherings in Paris were hosted and attended by women.

"The Beginnings of Philately," *The American Philatelist* (May 1919).

In the United States, the *Boston Daily Advertiser* referred to stamp collecting as "a young ladies' mania."

Lawrence, Ken. "The origin of stamp collecting in America, Part 1: How stamp collecting came to the United States," *Linn's Stamp News* (2014).

Philatelic club members began to organize and analyze stamps in ways that differed from how women tended to collect and display stamps; in "The Beginnings of Philately," the author notes early examples of women collectors and points out that "although stamps were collected . . . the great principles of philately were lacking."

## Late 1800s: Organized Philately Reigns

The American Philatelic Association (today, APS) accepted women applicants from the beginning. Mrs. R.L. Phillips of New York, was a charter (voting) member. In 1889, the APA only reported five female members.

*The American Philatelist* (January 1986) and "List of Members of the American Philatelic Association, 1889," (American Philatelic Association, 1889).

**Oh Boys!** Look here, the **Boy's Own** price list is just out and contains the **greatest bargains in foreign stamps ever** offered to young collectors. Sent **FREE** to all. Address [84  
**A. F. WICKS, 372 Horton St., LONDON, ONT.**

1886

The Denver Stamp Collectors' League reported in 1886 that it "solve[s] the question of female membership by admitting all lady stamp collectors as honorary members."

*The American Philatelist* (January 1986).

1889

Some clubs for young collectors took on names like "The Sons of Philatelia," excluding young girls in name if not in practice; *Weekly Philatelic Era* published "Boys Own Price List" for young collectors in 1894. (left)

Brennan, Sheila. *Stamping American Memory: Collectors, Citizens, and the Post*. (University of Michigan Press, 2018) and *Weekly Philatelic Era* (November 1894).

1894

## 1900s: Women Push for Inclusion

In 1915, Gordon Crouch tells AP readers, "We Collectors are brothers, comrades, citizens of a great, progressing, ever-widening Brotherhood."

"On Collecting," *The American Philatelist* (1915).

In 1926 AP article "Filatelic Figures," Col. Lector compiles the occupations of new APS applicants from 1923-5. In the occupation "Women: Married," 19 members; "Women: Unmarried," only 9 applicants.

*The American Philatelist* (March 1926).

1915

In 1922, Catherine L. Manning was selected as curator of the National Philatelic Collection at the Smithsonian Institution. In 1935, Manning was the first woman elected to office as the Vice President for the APS.

Lawrence, Ken. "The origin of stamp collecting in America, Part 2: How stamp collecting matured and spread," *Linn's Stamp News* (2014).

1922

1926

1933

In 1933, Sophie Buser founded the Women's Philatelic Society of New York, dedicated to women in philately.

Ganz, Cheryl R. "The History of American Women in Philately," *The American Philatelist* (December 2009).

## 2000s: A Hobby for All

In 2003, APS elected Janet Klug, the first woman to serve as President. She served until 2007.

In the last ten years of the Luff Award, the most prestigious philatelic award offered by the APS, 21% of award winners were women (7 out of 33 total). In comparison, in the first 60 years of the Luff Award (1940-2000), of the 116 people honored, only 6 were women: an unimpressive 5.5%.

2003

2010

In 2010, the National Postal Museum inducted Mary-Ann Bowman, Liz Hisey, and May Day Taylor to the Council of Philatelists advisory board of philatelic leaders.

2020

21% of current APS Board of Directors and APRL Trustees are women, and 23% of voting APS Committee members are women.