

# Using Ephemera in Exhibiting

ARTHUR H. GROTEN

**E**phemera is printed material intended for short-term use and then to be discarded (Figure 1). It is, thus, the documentation of everyday life. Stamps are ephemera, though exhaustively and rigidly cataloged.

Let me ask some questions: Is the personal letter enclosed in a cover ephemera? The cover certainly is; it has no utility once the letter is taken out. But the letter does. Is it meant to be kept? If so, is it ephemera? Such letters are certainly bought and sold as ephemera. If it is kept with the cover, suggesting a post-mortem utility for the cover, i.e. preserving the contents, does that impart a different connotation to the cover? If so, why do we insist on separating the cover from the contents and only talking about one or the other?

I don't intend to answer any of these rhetorical questions but merely pose them for your consideration when selecting material for a philatelic display. How you answer these questions in your own mind will determine how you use such materials. The trick is to use your imagination. You have been given an opportunity to flex it in a somewhat inflexible world. Seize it!

Looked at from a slightly different perspective, all philatelic items are ephemera. But from an exhibiting point of view the purely philatelic aspects of stamps and covers stand alone, separated from the non-philatelic nature of the piece. A good example is illustrated mail, where a study of the advertising carried on the cover takes precedence over



Figure 1. Ephemera used to enhance exhibits include (clockwise, from left): a keepsake issued to mark the tercentenary of William Shakespeare in 1864; a poster stamp from the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Co.; a dinosaur stamp album sponsored by Sinclair; chocolate bar wrapper; a poster stamp from the Second International Book Fair of 1925 in Florence (Firenze), Italy.



the philately, acknowledging its ephemeral nature. But a study of philatelically inspired cachets – for first day covers, let's say – would not be considered ephemera as they were created to be saved. First day covers are a recognized sub-category of philately.

While this isn't a seminar on judging exhibits, I will note that judging criteria have to be open-ended. A judge has to try to get into the mind of the exhibitor and see what it is they see and look at it from their point of view. A judge who imposes their own interpretation on the material and mode of presentation misses the point and diminishes the exhibit. Judging is never an easy task, and it is made more difficult for exhibits with ephemera by the very nature of ephemera itself: something that cannot be codified rigidly, for which the criteria of what should and should not be included is either unclear or irrelevant. The display exhibit class was

created to deal with some of these problems.

When you look at Display Class exhibits keep the question of relevance in your mind. Try to imagine the exhibit without certain key pieces that move the story or embellish it, and I think you'll understand what I'm getting at.

Let me talk about some of the ways I have used ephemera. Remember that the key to the use of ephemera is to have rules flexible enough so that the exhibitor's story can be fully told. Each of you might look at the same piece and find that it fulfills a different purpose for the story you want to tell. And, of course, some pieces will serve more than one purpose.

Here are a couple of examples from exhibits I made and exhibited in the past. The images may be sub-optimal but they make the point.

A one-frame exhibit of trans-desert mail from Haifa to



Figure 2. Part of an exhibit about transdesert mail includes a map.



Figure 3. Documents are shown in a philatelic exhibit regarding the Levant Fairs of 1926 to 1936.

### On Display Class Exhibiting, from the *APS Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting*

Display exhibits tell a unified, cohesive story by combining philatelic material from any or all of the other exhibit types along with a significant number, range and diversity of non-philatelic elements. There is no set ratio of philatelic versus non-philatelic items; however, a display exhibit is primarily philatelic, meaning the philatelic items should carry the story.

The extensive and varied inclusion of non-philatelic material distinguishes a display exhibit from all the other types. You are allowed the widest freedom of expression in a display exhibit...

Non-philatelic material in your exhibit may include almost anything that is not dangerous, illegal, or might damage a show frame. As in other exhibits, you should strive to display only original or archival material, not copies or reproductions.



Baghdad (Figure 2) shows both the land and air routes superimposed on a windowed original survey lap map of the air route from 1921. Above are examples of air carriage, which occurred first. Below, the institution of a formal land route by the Nairn Overland Mail Company, 1923. Both philatelic material and ephemera are used to tell the story. I attached the image captions at the upper right for ease of presentation.

I also show here (Figure 3) the lower half of the first frame of a six-frame exhibit on the Levant Fairs held in Tel Aviv from 1926 to 1936, during the Palestine Mandate. Because of the size of much of the ephemera, I chose to make a single panel for each frame, allowing inclusion of the material at the appropriate place in the exhibit to tell the complete story.

Sometimes, a single piece can make the point made by a philatelic item more readily apparent. For example, here the brochure underscores the message on the air label (Figure 4).

I hope this brief note gives you an idea of the value of lateral thinking, of thinking out of the box.

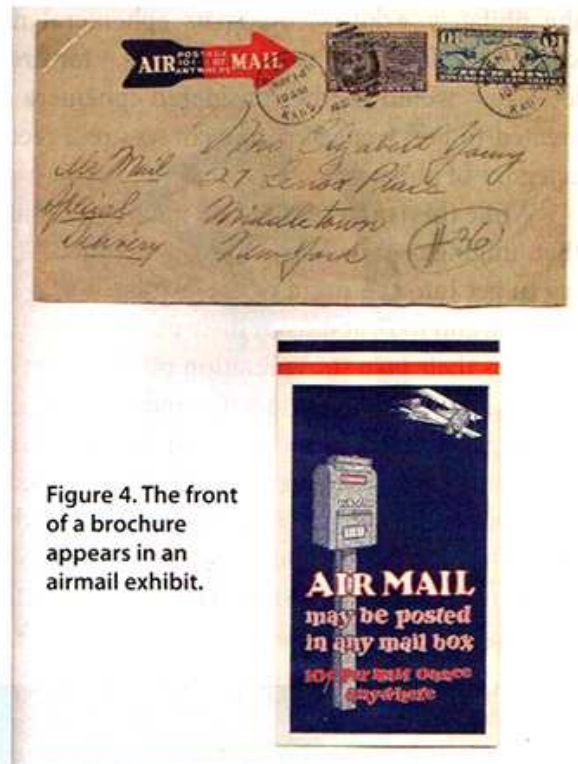


Figure 4. The front of a brochure appears in an airmail exhibit.

## FOR FURTHER LEARNING

Recommendations from the APRL research staff:

Anon. "Display Class A 'Liberal' Way to Exhibit" *Airpost Journal* (December 5, 1997).

The Ephemera Society of America. *Expand the Philatelic Story with Ephemera* [Exhibit] (Cazenovia, NY: The Ephemera Society of America). [HE6215 .E63e EXHIBIT]

Groten, Arthur H. "The Paraphilately Page: Ephemera from Washington 2006" *American Stamp Dealer* (July-August 2006).

Steinberg, John. "On Exhibits and Exhibitions: Display Class Exhibits" *American Philatelist* (February 1998).

