

The Ever-Changing Paradigm of Philatelic Exhibiting

James Peter Gough RDP

Editor Jonas Hällström

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This is the first paper in a new series of philatelic books which are being published in conjunction with the “International Philatelic Summit” being held in Malmö, Sweden.

The first “International Philatelic Summit” in Malmö was held in 2009. With 80 participants from 21 countries, it was heralded as a great success because it offered a venue where serious exhibitors could gather to discuss exhibiting techniques and rules as well as other exhibiting-related matters of interest and concern to them.

When I wrote this text the first time, we were about to prepare the second International Philatelic Summit, to which 8 prominent philatelists were invited and 93 delegates with 23 different nationalities participated. The focus for the summit was “treatment” in the aspect of “story-telling.”

In conjunction with the summit, the first edition of this book was sold out, so this is the second edition, published after the second summit. This first paper was written by James Peter Gough RDP from the USA – who is widely known in the philatelic world as “Jamie.”

I met Jamie for the first time only a few years ago, in Rome, Italy, when I was a judge and he was showing his UPU exhibit in the postal history class at the FEPA-exhibition ITALIA 2009.

When I had finished my assignments in the thematic section, I went through all the exhibits in all the classes at the exhibition, starting with the class most closely-related to thematic philately, postal history. When I came to Jamie’s exhibit I stopped in my tracks, not maintaining my normal pace. Despite the pressure to review all the exhibits in the time remaining, I stayed in front of his exhibit for two hours, reading all the pages. “Wow,” I thought, “this is one of the best exhibits I have ever seen” – especially in regard to telling a postal history story and how to present it.

After investing so much time with his exhibit, I felt compelled to meet this exhibitor. As I have gotten to know Jamie, I have come to appreciate that he has a lot to share with the rest of us, even the advanced collectors and exhibitors.

When Jamie was invited to be one of the speakers at the summit in Malmö, I asked him if he could write a bit about his 46-years of exhibiting. His years of dedication to philately and its aspect of exhibiting are the basis of this mesmerizing essay. And so, we have the first edition in a series being called the “Philatelic Summit Papers.”

I need to thank Jamie for sharing his experiences as well as his thoughts about the evolution of philatelic exhibiting. I would say that Jamie’s paper is one of the most important I have ever read in regard to exhibiting, its trends and its underlying philosophies (which sometimes create unintended consequences as he points out).

I believe that starting this series with Jamie’s paper, is a powerful send-off – like getting a great start out of the blocks in a relay race, moving ahead of the rest, and giving an advantage to the next teammate when the baton is handed off. The tradition of excellence from the two International Philatelic Summits being held in Malmö in 2009 and 2012 continues with the Summit Paper Series.

For that, thank you Jamie!

*Jonas Hällström
Editor & Chairperson of the
“International Philatelic Summit” in Malmö*

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I was asked to write this paper as a prelude to the Philatelic Summit on exhibiting in Malmö, Sweden (April 2012), specifically with regard to my memories of the trends and dynamic forces that have affected treatment in exhibiting during my slightly-less-than 50 years in this competitive art form. Most philatelists today are not able to have historical perspective because so few have participated as consistently or as long as 50 years. Additionally, back in the 1950's/1970's, no one really thought to write about "philately and its future" since the hobby was in a boom; everyone was too busy collecting and socializing (locally and nationally mostly since philately thrived on personal relationships). In addition to historical perspective, I was asked to share "tips" on elements in presentation and treatment that could be useful to exhibitors of all levels: local, national and international.

In writing about my historical observations, one of my goals was to give context for what I have witnessed through these years of tectonic changes in exhibiting. Life and living is all about change in all of their facets. Therefore, context in life is critical so that we can be consciously aware of why things work the way they do -- and not just in exhibiting. If we can be conscious of the forces that shaped current dynamics and attitudes, then we can look at the underlying goals and intentions and see how much they have succeeded ... as well as their unintended, often negative consequences. I think the current debate about the decline of philately has been mis-focused; it has ignored the centrifugal force of exhibiting on the whole hobby. Current perspectives on decline focus on external forces as if we are mere victims. What many do not realize is that exhibiting has been philately's soul for over 150 years. However just as when the soul leaves the body, the body dies, if exhibiting diminishes, I believe philately will also suffer.

I make some observations which are blunt in describing thoughts and attitudes ("paradigms") from various time periods. This is a style of stating an issue in its simplest form and then addressing it -- a style that is commonly used in professional consulting since it gets people's attention and strips away excuses and the blurriness. I have already heard from a couple of readers of the first printing about "I like your book and couldn't put it down...but I did not like your description of.....because that is not the way it is today." But at one time IT WAS TRUE ... and for better or worse, it has contributed to the formation of attitudes and dynamics today. Besides, change is not something everyone participates in at the same time; there are pioneers and there are laggards with the majority of people having one foot in the future and one foot in the past. Just because pioneers say that something is not true today, does not mean that old ideas are still not actively held by many others... or that the old ideas still do not have residual effect, no matter how unconsciously.

Every leader in public life ... or of a philatelic organization ... has had the experience of someone taking a comment or sentence out of context, and in the process, shifting the debate away from the central issues. Now, as we are looking at reprints of this paper after the discussions at Malmö, I thought I should re-write my foreword to get all readers to be conscious on this human tendency so that our dialogue about the issues facing not just exhibiting, but philately itself, can be better directed. Agree or not, that's your choice. But let's keep the discussions (when quoting this paper) within their presented historical and intended contexts.

The Philatelic Summit was a broad sharing of perspectives which were not all the same and sometimes in direct conflict. I learned more than a few things. But as befits a hobby whose foundations are in social relationships, dialogues were full of energy while being even humorous and fraternal. I have never before witnessed such an impressive and collegial group of people expanding the territories through exploratory dialogue about our hobby and exhibiting as I experienced at Malmö 2012. I look forward to continuing dialogues around the world on these matters before the next Summit at Malmö in 2014.



James Peter Gough RDP

James Peter Gough lives in California, where he is the founder and chairman of a bank in Orange County and where he settled down after a career in international banking and in bank/monetary policy consulting. "Jamie" is a long time philatelist and exhibitor with philatelic interests around the globe. He is well recognized in philately, having won the USA's Grand Prix National in 1992 (called the "Champions of Champions"), the FLAF Grand Prix of the Americas in 2008 and the FIP Grand Prix d'Honneur in Paris in 1999. A few weeks before the summit in Malmö, Jamie was named to the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists, which is the most prestigious recognition in philately. (The above photo was taken at PHILEXFRANCE in 1999).