

STAMPS ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING: How to Build a Diverse and Innovative Thematic Collection

Norman F. Jacobs *The American Philatelist* 138 (September 2024)

GOAL. The primary goal of this article is to help the reader move beyond the conventional boundaries of topical philately.

TREATMENT. Instead of a predictable summary of the sport of tennis illustrated with common stamps and postmarks, the article features a wide variety of unusual philatelic items that connect directly with the tennis story. The broad scope, including items that at first glance seem unrelated to tennis, is designed to appeal to collectors who have not yet considered establishing a thematic collection.

Achieving these goals requires an interesting story and a discussion including concepts not found in standard summaries of tennis. Philatelic items need to clearly connect to the thematic story and at the same time go beyond what the reader would expect.

In writing for this special issue on thematics, the author gave each section a thematic title, emphasizing the need for a coherent narrative. The author's 50 years of playing and studying tennis allowed inclusion of original tennis storylines. Forty years of searching for unusual tennis philately formed the cornerstone of the choice of philatelic material.

SIGNIFICANCE. The philatelic items include rare and unique examples, such as the Hazel Wightman artist drawing, Maureen Connolly's poignant postcard, the recreational sports error trifecta, the tennis V-mail, the Australian color-missing error, and the earliest known tennis advertising cover, among others. Regardless of rarity, the philatelic items are chosen specifically to advance the thematic story.

To illustrate tennis concepts not shown on stamps and postmarks, the article features items such as the Rohr-Post card, the Crazy Horse mill splice, and the Nicaraguan cover with 34 identical stamps depicting the backhand that introduces the idea of repetitive practice. This use of analogies as a concept for writing up a collection represents coordination between this

author and the author of the second article in this issue, to bring attention to this new idea in thematic exhibiting. The approach illustrated here can be adapted for a thematic collection on any topic.

ORIGINALITY. The challenge of writing the lead article for this special thematic issue of *The American Philatelist* required a creative approach to content and presentation. The article needed to be approachable for new philatelists but also provide philatelic depth to capture the interest of more advanced traditional collectors who have not yet explored thematics. Using analogies as a technique provides thematic collectors with a new method of thinking about how to illustrate thematic ideas. Personalizing the introduction and conclusion helps make the article more accessible to these varied groups.

RESEARCH/KNOWLEDGE. Almost every item pictured, except for the few individual stamps, has been researched beyond the obvious, in terms of its significance to the story and/or its philately. Many represent the "first" – the first error on a tennis stamp, first government-issued philatelic item showing tennis, first and only 19th century tennis local post, first mention of tennis on a booklet, and the first mention of tennis on a meter. Others are rare or the "only" – one of two mill splices known on a Great American stamp, the only known Gaze tennis advertisement on cover, and the only recorded tennis Daguin cancellation used after France declared war on Germany. The discovery of the complete story behind the Ecuador specimen stamp was possible only with both philatelic and thematic research.

TECHNICAL. The yellow tennis ball images in the article provide not only a familiar image of the sport, but also a connection to the discussion of the tennis balls' color and pressure. The references include articles by the author that document the research in more detail. In future years this article will be available online without charge in the digital collection of the American Philatelic Research Library.