

Tip 185: An Exhibit May Not Be Enough

Exhibiting is challenging in many respects. One of the many challenges we face in preparing our exhibits is determining just how much text to include on our exhibit pages. There is a tension between being very concise and, quite understandably, wanting to include all the related information on the subject to provide the full context for the exhibit. There are frequently nuances or details that we want to include – or, even feel we *must* add – to make the exhibit as complete as possible and to show what we know. (We also want to get full points for knowledge when the exhibit is judged.) We also want to educate the viewer so they can fully enjoy the material and its context.

I think one of the reasons for this tension between brevity and complexity might be our thinking about our exhibits as the single communication vehicle we have to share our knowledge and our thoughts with the viewer. If we don't include this wealth of information, we fear the information might not be available to others. If we've done a lot of research and know a great deal about our material, we think we have to include it or else it will be "lost".

It doesn't have to be that way. We don't need to use our exhibit as the way to address more than one goal. I am reminded of a recent judging experience: The jury was looking at an exhibit where the Title Page said "The goal of this exhibit is show x and y." We talked about the difficulty in trying to do two different things equally well in an exhibit. It's very hard. In trying to do two things well, there is a risk you won't do either one at a high level of excellence. One of the two needs to be primary. If we try to address two goals in an exhibit, such as preparing a great exhibit *and* educating the viewer in depth and with great detail, we run the risk of doing both of them at less than an exemplary level.

One option is to make an exhibit just that: an exhibit, and to provide detailed and nuanced information in another written product, such as an article. Different formats serve different purposes. Exhibits are seen, usually, for a weekend. An article is available to a larger audience than an exhibit is, is more accessible and has a greater longevity. The two products of philatelic knowledge – an exhibit and an article – complement each other nicely.

Figure 185-1 is a page from one of my exhibits on Revenue stamps of Edwardian India. Figure 185-2 is a page from an article in *The American Revenuer* dealing with the same subject. Note that the same item appears in both places. It is in my exhibit and it was part of a longer and much more detailed discussion in the revenue journal. Two different purposes were served with two different information sharing mechanisms.

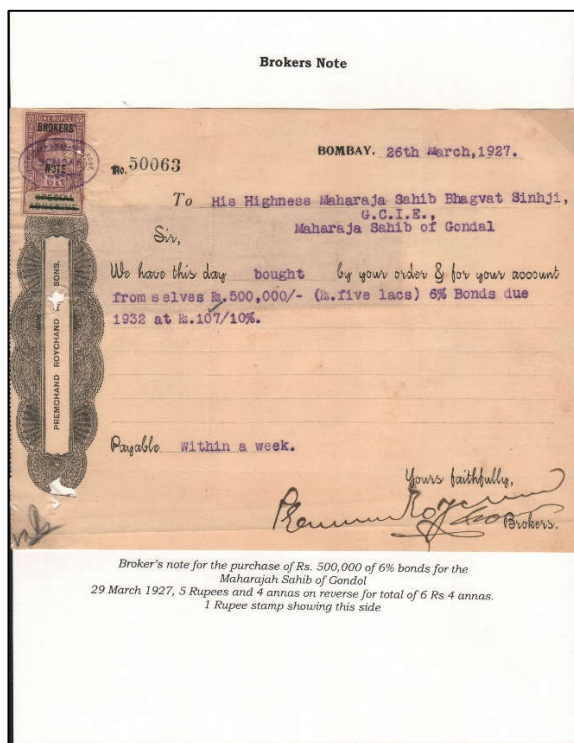


Figure 185-1

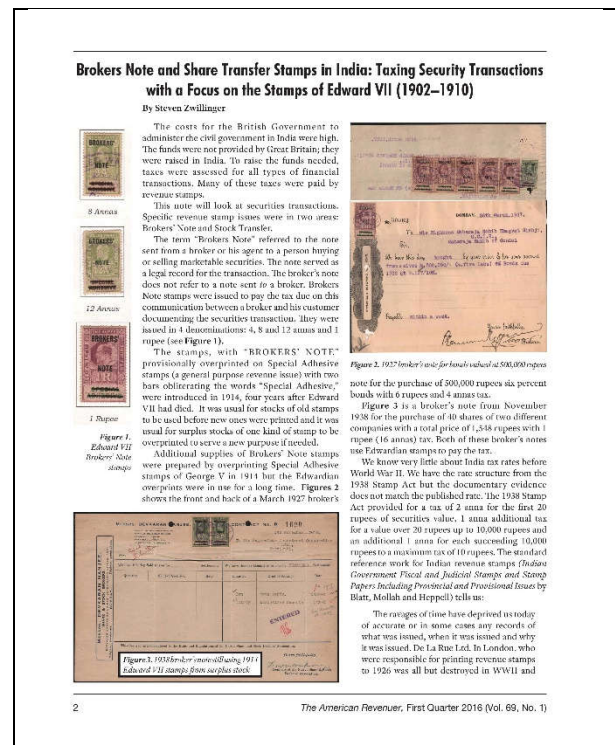


Figure 185-2

While I was writing up a page for a First Day Cover exhibit that had a Crosby cachet with crossed flags, I wanted to know more about this Crosby design. I investigated a bit and it turned into a short article. Figure 185-3 is the beginning of the article. I was lucky; my article was the cover story. (See Figure 185-4) There is more information in the article relevant to my exhibit than I could include in the exhibit.



Figure 185-3



Figure 185-4

We shouldn't limit ourselves. We need to share what we know, even if doing so requires something outside the confines of our exhibits.