

“Collaboration Crew”

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“So, what makes you so passionate about this stamp stuff?” he asked me curiously. This was a question recently asked of me by a non-philatelist friend. I paused for a moment and then responded that I just sincerely and passionately enjoy postal history, its research elements, being able to tell the emerging story and to share my learning. I went on to explain that what fuels my passion is being able to work and learn with other passionate philatelists, irrespective of their collecting interests, in support of our hobby.

I felt compelled to share with him a particular sequence of experiences that captured the essence of my ardent enthusiasm for philately. I recounted that several conversations with fellow philatelists brought focus upon elements that could make the hobby stronger and more vibrant while underscoring a positive environment. These are “feel good” discussions where an emphasis on successful problem solving, accomplishing goals and contributing to excellent teamwork is simply hard to beat. Esteemed philatelic colleagues, Fred Reynolds and Cheryl Ganz, undertook the original efforts to bring some of these philatelists together via email exchanges and zoom calls. The dialogue was energizing and quickly turned to the question of “How do we best support the action required to make some of these ideas come to fruition?”.

Each member of our original group valued the power of collaboration to foster efficiency, innovation and the sharing of knowledge in support of philately. It was not long before the group had been dubbed the “Collaboration Crew”. Subsequently, the group was expanded by a few colleagues who expressed a like-minded vision and contributed to the development of a ‘mission statement’ and a set of objectives. Our “Mission” is:

To promote further innovative collaboration amongst philatelic societies and organizations worldwide. These efforts are diverse and will support the growth and positive evolution of philately. We seek to role model, support and facilitate collaborative opportunities.

Much of our early discussion centered around promoting and encouraging joint initiatives between philatelic societies and organizations. We talked about the potential that existed for such opportunities at philatelic events and our initial efforts targeted PIPEX 2024 held in Clackamas, Oregon, May 3-5. In September of 2023, I contacted the executive of PIPEX, asking if they would be willing to work with the convening societies in creating a collaborative focus. The PIPEX leadership team was extremely supportive; thus, I felt comfortable reaching out to the other societies. By December, a zoom meeting was held to explore jointly created sessions that would be part of the show program. Many important questions were raised in association with youth in philately, leveraging the collective reach of partnering groups and promoting education and sharing of knowledge. My challenge became shaping two focus sessions that would yield meaningful outcomes.

PIPEX was very supportive in scheduling our two 90 minute sessions to minimize conflicts with key show elements. One session focused upon the importance of quality research, the challenges inherent in such research and advice based upon research experiences and learning. Each society brought a slightly different perspective. Colin Fraser of the Rhodesian Study Circle provided a case study of collaborative research related to the 'Waterlow & Sons Questions'. Six philatelic societies worked together over several years to ultimately attain understandings that had stumped collectors for years. Another part of the presentation saw the Military Postal History Society use one particular cover to explore how knowledge of research techniques and archive sources helped to explain the intimate details of a cover that managed to cross the Pacific Ocean four times during 1914 in pursuit of the recipient who was in a Japanese POW camp.

I designed the second session to support the sharing of the successes that each convening society was experiencing. Within minutes one could feel a positive synergy in the room with comfort emerging in asking probing questions that just elicited further sharing. Creativity was being sparked! I was delighted with the degree of participant preparation and the richness of the sharing that was embraced by the group. It was refreshing to hear the strategies being deployed to capture the knowledge base of society members and to facilitate sharing it with others even beyond the membership of the society itself. John Hotchner, on behalf of the Auxiliary Markings Club, distributed a handout entitled "Top Ten things to pursue to guarantee a successful society" that sparked much interest and discussion. The importance of "collaboration" was quickly added to his list. I subsequently developed a one page tool to help societies assess their potential for success.

A couple of days after PIPEX had concluded, I received an email from James Buckner, president of the Society for Czechoslovak Philately, who stated: "I now firmly believe that every WSP show (and perhaps larger FIP type shows too) should host a meeting with the convening societies present to discuss ways to collaborate." The structured sharing and engagement session was clearly impactful. There is no question in my mind that the Collaboration Crew is on the right track.

I am already looking forward to GASS and to the opportunity to engage in further discourse with the Collaboration Crew. The Collaboration Crew is hosting a session at GASS in Hartford on Friday, August 16th at 10:00 am in room 25. We will be sharing our vision and engaging in thoughtful conversation with the leadership and members of interested philatelic societies. We hope to see you there and look forward to sharing our passion with you.

The 'Collaboration Crew' currently includes representatives from American Air Mail Society, American Helvetica Philatelic Society, Auxiliary Markings Club, Germany Philatelic Society, Military Postal History Society, Philatelic Traders Society, The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada and the Zeppelin & Airship Collectors Facebook group.