

NTSS Judging Preparation

I've recently completed my first apprentice judging assignment at NTSS 2001 in Mesa, AZ. under the tutelage of several fine judges and thank the ATA, Alan Hanks of the ATA Judges Committee and Steve Luster, the Jury Chairman for that opportunity. In reflecting on my preparation, I asked a question likely formulated by another apprentice earlier. I'd like to share my thoughts, from a viewpoint after the judging assignment.

Question: If you were researching 40 exhibits in 60 days, what would you want to minimize the time you invest?

Answer: An "Information Index"

1. Exhibit synopsis. During preparation, the synopsis/plan/title pages were key - in that order. The synopsis served to amplify areas of the subject not included in the plan or title page.

Exhibitors seem not to realize the impact these pages have on preparation. Not every entry had a synopsis and those cases made preparation more difficult. It boiled down to the more information, the easier I learned and the more I enjoyed it. Let's face it, who wants to do stuff that's no fun and not get paid for it either? I committed to toughing it out and it's been an eye-opening adventure. I usually include a synopsis or title page but when I exhibit in the future, you can bet all of these pages will accompany my application.

2. Bibliography - Having this information helped immensely as it provided immediate references. I looked for subject references as well as philatelic; not 20, but 2 of each providing a general overview worked fine. The internet is the wave of the future, so make sure you also provide one or two website addresses if available. That's maybe four to six entries and the judge now has a choice of research methods.

3. Local references - For research on an exhibit's theme, the local library was valuable, but the internet was indispensable as the library was closed at the most inconvenient hours. Using a simple 'search' usually pops up thousands of references, too many for this

lifetime. Referring to the exhibit's plan provides words and ideas for a more specialized search.

For the postal material side, ATA checklists provided a rough idea of the number of stamps and when they were issued. Twenty stamps may be enough for a single frame exhibit, whereas a single frame entry with 2,000 stamps available might be in the wrong ballpark (class) depending on the exhibit's scope. Please understand a checklist is an overview tool, not the end all - be all, but an indication of the wealth of stamps related to a theme. More than one checklist might apply AND in no way does using one mean other elements such as stationery, etc. should be ignored. End result - judicious use helps but it's one of many tools. An array of specialized handbooks provides information on other elements to review.

4. The APRL - Publications, especially articles, were sparse for many exhibits. I'm sure they provided everything recognized as being directly associated with the exhibit titles submitted. (Titles relating to exhibit content is another story.) It would be most helpful if an index of major articles in Topical Time and a list of ATA handbooks is made available to future NTSS juries and the APRL. Existing ATA digests and the list of publications for sale might be a starting point.

5. Specialty Information - The APS Judging manual provides general guidance for judging thematic exhibits. The specialty information I'm referring to is a pamphlet titled "Judging the philately of country ZYX." Where are these thematic references? I often hear that judges don't understand how difficult it is to find the elusive 'canoe over the Empire State building at midnight with moonbeams in selvage' or some such. We have study groups on nearly everything. Might these expert groups produce the same 'propaganda' as traditional areas? These few pages should be reviewed and 'blessed' by the respective ATA/APS judging committees as meeting proper judging standards.

Observations

As thematics are my foremost philatelic interest, I was disappointed by the sparseness of information sources. Knowing a mountain of articles, etc. exist, I was amazed at the obstacles in accessing this information as I don't own every ATA handbook, to say nothing of handbooks which include cancels, meters and stationery. Think about it - I'm a thematic collector, a member of ATA, APRL, a number of study groups, have a small thematic library, access to the internet and still had enough difficulty to warrant writing

these paragraphs! What pain must our traditional judges go through? How many hours do they spend trying to find information, never mind reading it?

Suggestions

In light of the above, I respectfully suggest we form a vision of what tomorrow's "information index" might be and work toward that goal using the information and technology available. May I suggest a simple CD containing thematic checklists, indexes of ATA articles and handbooks to be provided to judges at NTSS shows. Or, why not to all accredited ATA/APS judges and eventually include study group submissions (judging "subject ZYX"). This is doubly important in light of new divisions and the fact that the display class has been part of NTSS recently. Who knows, other organizations may follow and the 'grandmother of all judging tools' will include these documents and more. While we're at it, a copy of jury score sheets should be provided to each judge for their library at the end of the show.

What am I personally willing to contribute? Any study group, thematic or otherwise, wishing to publish a guide to judging their specialty will find a home (storage space with link) for their draft proposal and/or finalized document on my philatelic website free of charge - no strings. Send it to fadams@adnc.com and I'll ensure it's available immediately.

Bottom line - judges are being taxed to their limits. Let's give them a head start in thematics by helping with their homework, and not just at NTSS!