The Roots of World Stamp Show-NY 2016 go back 100 years!

Part One in a Ten Part Series
By Steven J. Rod

The Very First IPEX
(International Philatelic Exhibition)

In May 2016 when you step into the Jacob Javits Convention Center in New York City to attend World Stamp Show-NY 2016 (WSS-NY 2016), you will be attending a unique eight day event that traces its history back for more than 100 years. WSS-NY 2016 is the eleventh in a series of International Philatelic Exhibitions (IPEX) held every ten years in the United States, most often in the “6” year. WSS-NY 2016 takes the best of these ten shows, adds its own ingenious Organizing Committee, and brings you the most spectacular IPEX ever! Our 10 issues of *ASD&C* this year, 2015, will be devoted to bringing you the story of each of these previous 10 shows.

It should be noted that the “first stamp exhibition” anywhere took place in Dresden, Germany in 1870. (Some sources cite 1852 in Brussels, but the majority agree upon the Dresden exhibit.) The first stamp exhibition in the United States took place at the Eden Musee in New York City 1889. While there were a plethora of shows from 1870 until 1900 in Europe, there were few held in the US during this time period. The APA (now known as the APS) held an annual meeting each of these early years, which today is known as StampShow, coming up in Grand Rapids, Mich. this August.

“IKEX, you can visit the Engineering Societies Building which is still standing (right) at 25 East 39th Street. The sites of the 1913 IPEX, and the 2016 IPEX are a 15 minute walk from one another!”

“Not just mere dead, dry bone stamps, but charming little talismans...”

The first U.S. IPEX took place from October 27 thru November 1, 1913 in New York City. Many *ASD&C* readers may have thought that the first of the IPEXs was the show held in in NYC in October 1926. They know for a fact that the first U.S. souvenir sheet (Scott No. 630—The White Plains Souvenir Sheet) was issued at this colossal IPEX, and therefore it must have been the first IPEX. This is a fairly common belief due to the fact that there was no philatelic USPOD emission to commemorate this first show.

It had been dubbed the “Great Exhibition.” And in evaluating it, phil-

The front cover of the detailed program of the 1913 international exhibition.

On the morning of October 27, 1913, The New York Times ran this extensive article on America’s first International Philatelic Exhibition. It was quite a tribute to the stamp collecting hobby!

The first International Philatelic Exhibition held in this country will be opened to the public at 10 a.m. this morning in the Engineering Societies Building 25-33 West Thirty-Third Street. Many of the best stamp dealers and collectors of the country will be here, and all who love stamps should not miss this opportunity to see what this country is capable of doing in the way of philatelic exhibitions.

The front cover of the detailed program of the 1913 international exhibition.

The article starts with a quote from Hugo Griebert, the stamp editor at The New York Times, who proclaimed that the New York International Philatelic Exhibition was not only the best in the United States, but also equal to any exhibition of stamps held in Europe.

One of the greatest tributes to the show was made by Fred J. Melville of London, already a very famous collector and philatelic writer worldwide. Speaking at the show's banquet, held at the Hotel Astor, he told the dinner guests: "I must say without any qualifications that the New York Exhibition of stamps is equal in every respect to anything of the kind that has ever been held in Europe."

The usual amenities of an IPEX, cacheted covers, souvenir sheets, commemorative stamp issues, and special cancellations did not begin until the second IPEX held in 1926. The 1913 New York show was a gathering of stamp collectors and stamp exhibits, from around the USA and the world, under one roof, without the three major icons of the all of the later IPEXs: there were no stamp dealer booths, there were no post offices from around the world, and the U.S. post office turned down the invitation to participate.

In fact, the closest thing to official U.S. government participation at the 1913 IPEX was that Joseph E. Ralph, director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, was the guest of honor/guest speaker at the Exhibition banquet held at the Hotel Astor.

Thanks to the Hamilton Bank Note Company of New York, there are poster stamps honoring the Show. It is a beautiful set of steel engraved stamps featuring the portrait of George Washington and calling attention to the forthcoming IPEX. A zealous U.S. attorney forbade their circulation since he felt that they looked like postage stamps and might be fraudulently used as such. This seems to have been a particular strange decision since the stamps were three times larger than the U.S. stamp in circulation at the time! After a prolonged battle, almost too late to help promote the show, a compromise was reached to overprint the labels "Open October
27 to November 1” and their distribution was once again permitted. It was felt that their overprinting would prevent their use as postage stamps. These engraved poster stamps were the only philatelic item especially prepared to promote and/or honor the 1913 IPEX. Collectors do seek out admission tickets, banquet tickets and menus, and the Show Program.

The success of the Great Exhibition was attributed in large part to its hard working executive committee, almost all of whom were our early hobby leaders, and members of the Collectors Club, the driving force behind this show. The nine members were J.M. Barthes, J.B. Chittenden, J.A. Klemann, Eugene Klein, John N. Luff, L.B. Mason, J.C. Morgenthau, Arthur K. Owen, and J.W. Scott. All but Mason, Chittenden and Klemann have been elected to the APS Hall of Fame. (Have you checked out our hobby's Hall of Fame listings? Go to www.stamps.org/hall-of-fame. Meet the men and women who came before us.)

Exhibitors from all over the United States and the world attended the show. There were 331 exhibits, of which 211 won six levels of medals: grand gold, gold, silver gilt, silver, bronze, and certificates.

Here’s the most interesting part of the story: these exhibits were all displays of selected pages from the exhibitors albums. Rule No. 11 of the Exhibition Prospectus states: “Albums of stamps will be shown open at such pages as seem interesting to the Executive Committee. These pages will be varied from time to time during the Exhibition. Such albums will shown in cases and may not be inspected, except by the judges, without the permission of the owner, and then only in the presence of the owner or a member of the Committee.

Considering World Stamp Show-NY 2016 will have 4,000 exhibition frames featuring 64,000 exhibit pages, we can see the sea change in philatelic exhibiting that has occurred since the first IPEX. Save this entire series to see the changes which occurred every 10 years.

The three top prizes (“Grand Golds”) went to the collections of George H. Worthington (who happened to be the IPEX President) for his outstanding U.S. collection; Sydney Loder for his Great Britain collection and Henry J. Duveen’s Mauritius collection. Each is worthy of our interest to this day.

Worthington’s untitled exhibit of U.S. stamps seems to have been his entire collection. It included “…the Premiere Gravure Issue complete, Postmaster Provisionals, Carriers’ and several thousand blocks and sheets of government issues (referring to the pre-1894 BEP issues) as well as all the Bureau Printings which were represented by entire sheets.” Wow! You won’t see this exhibit at World Stamp Show-NY 2016… it is the exact opposite of what exhibiting has become in the 21st century.

Loder’s untitled exhibit of Great Britain material was called “the finest collection extant of this country next to that of the late Earl of Crawford, as it consists…of material which defies description in the pages of an exhibition catalogue. The catalogue then follows with 13 paragraphs describing the contents of his Grand Gold collection.

The last grand gold went to Henry J. Duveen for his untitled exhibit of Mauritius material. Compared to the very long catalogue description of Worthington and Loder, Duveen’s description is “Unused Copies of both the 1d and 2d ‘Post Office’ are shown.

The issue of 1848 includes a block of four of the 1d and a single copy of the 2d, both on yellowish paper and unused, in the earliest state of the plate; also a block of four of 2d yellowish paper; unusual, medium state of the plate. There are reconstructed plates of both values and numerous specimens showing all stages of wear of the plates.

There are also reconstructed plates of the small and large ‘fillet’ of 1859 as well as single specimens unused and used. The collection includes numerous unused copies of the lithographed stamps of 1859, a perforated 1sh green of 1862, unused, and is practically complete in all subsequent issues, unused.

Writers reviewing the exhibits used mouth watering superlatives in describing all three, as well as dozens of others on view.

Of interest is the award of the “visitors cup,” which was awarded to the exhibit receiving the most votes from exhibition visitors, or as we call it today, the “most popular” vote. The cup went to Joseph A. Steinmetz of Philadelphia. His exhibit, listed under the “Miscellaneous” category was a bit strange. He described it as "A Hundred or so graphic pages, selected at random from a wonderland collection—Messengers from the Isles of the Seven Seas, from the Orient and the Occident and from the Polar Lands of the Snows."

“Not just mere dead, drybone stamps, but charming little tal-
ismans of the Arabian Nights of Stampdom, living, vibrant happy children of the Fairy Kingdom of our entrancing hobby.” The exhibit also won a silver medal, showing that the most popular is not necessarily the grand award winner or its runner ups!

Shown here is the self-promoting booklet that Mr. Steinmetz had printed and distributed to show visitors…. A sort of “Hey, vote for me!” giveaway. Consulting the dictionary reminded me that one of talisman’s definition is “anything whose presence exercises a remarkable or powerful influence on human feelings or actions”.

Highly respected philatelic editor, C.H. Mekeel, writing in the December, 1913 Philatelic Journal of America discussing the jury noted, “The opinion has been freely expressed that the judges did not have sufficient time to properly perform the duties, in connection with the several hundred awards they made, but that they did magnificent work in the time performed is the universal expression.”

WSS-NY 2016 Jury Chair Stephen Reinhard is busy making sure his jury, coming from all over the world, will be large enough to accomplish all of the “duties” in a timely manner.

For a USA first, the show was a great success. It was marred only by the theft of three of the 1869 inverts belonging to C.E. Chapman (15¢, 24¢ and 30¢) and valued at $2,500. According to the 2015 Scott Specialized Catalogue these three stamps have a value of $2,550,000 today!

The stamps were stolen on the last day of the show as the show was about to close. A reward of $500 and “no questions asked” was offered by Mr. Chapman in advertisements in the philatelic press, and he arranged for many foreign publications to carry this notice as well. Reference to their recovery has never appeared in subsequent years.

The show took place in what was known as the Engineering Societies Building located at 25 East 39th Street near 5th Avenue. It was built in 1907 as a gift from Andrew Carnegie to the City, and was considered state of the art exhibition space. It is interesting to note that the Grand Central Palace, site of the 1926, 1936 and 1947 IPEXs had opened in 1911.

We will discuss the second U.S. IPEX, held 13 years later in 1926 in New York City. It is the show that began the decennial cycle in the “6” year, an exciting tradition which is next occurring in the City in May 2016.

In the meantime, we hope you are making plans to travel to take in WSS-NY 2016. See you there! ☺️