New Yorkers Stage the Second IPEX: A Major Success!

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

The 1926 IPEX (International Philatelic Exhibition)

By 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 11th 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 Organizing Committee, and brings you the most spectacular IPEX ever! Our issues of ASD&C in 2015 will bring you the story of each of these previous ten shows. We began in our January issue with the story of the first IPEX 1913.

1926: A Great Many “Firsts”!

Thirteen years after the first U.S. International Philatelic Exhibition (IPEX) took place, the second IPEX opened on October 16, 1926, at the Grand Central Palace on Lexington Avenue in midtown New York City. [Note: See photo on page 11.]

The show established the pattern of a U.S. International being held once a decade in the “6” year (except in 1947 and 1997, when the show was used to commemorate the 100th and 150th anniversaries of the first U.S. postage stamps.

Under the enthusiastic patronage of Postmaster General Harry S. New, the U.S. Post Office Department was responsible for a number of ‘firsts’ at this show. One member of the philatelic press described the eight day show by saying it was indescribable: “It

At exactly 2:30, on October 16, 1926, President Coolidge pressed a button in the White House which lit up Grand Central Palace to open the show. Note the label and the time on the handstamp and machine cancel! This cover was, obviously, one of the key souvenirs of the great show.
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 286-page show program is a veritable encyclopedia of the worldwide stamp collecting hobby in the year 1926. It had to be seen to be appreciated and those who had the pleasure experienced a philatelic treat that we doubt will ever be exceeded.”

At exactly 2:30 pm on Saturday, October 16, President Calvin Coolidge pushed a button in the White House that opened the exhibition. As 1,000 lights over the entrance to Grand Central Palace lit up at that moment, more than 2,000 guests from all over the world streamed into the exhibition.

Unlike the 1913 IPEX, which featured only a stamp exhibition, the Organizing Committee made sure that this reinvented IPEX was the stamp collectors dream come true. In addition to adding a dealers’ bourse on the floor of the event the exhibition leaders, throughout the spring and summer of 1926, got the Post Office Department to agree to issue a special stamp for the show. Week by week the story evolved, as described in the philatelic press, culminating with a decision to change the original issue date for the stamp honoring the Battle of White Plains. It had been announced for October 28, at White Plains, N.Y.—the actual 175th anniversary of the battle. The date was changed to October 18, and the venue to New York City at the IPEX. The USPOD was very pleased to announce that, in addition to the stamp being issued in the usual panes of 100, they would issue the stamps in miniature sheets of 25 with a souvenir inscription about the Show in its margins.

Thus was born the United States souvenir sheet, now referred to in the Scott Catalogue as No. 630, the White Plains Souvenir Sheet.

For the first time ever, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing authorized the printing of stamps outside of its Washington headquarters. At the center of the Post Office’s Exhibition Substation, stood a hand press surrounded by a railing. As throngs of viewers stood around the railing, BEP employees would demonstrate stamp printing, utilizing Plate No. 18872 to print imperforate miniature panes of four sheets of the White Plains Souvenir Sheet.

The BEP had originally intended to send these demonstration sheets back to Washington, to be gummed and perforated, and then fly them back to the Show to be sold with the rest of the stock. This bold idea was never implemented, and all of the sheets bearing plate No. 18772 were destroyed. Rumors persisted for more than a year that examples of the imperforate No. 18772 would soon surface in the philatelic market, although none has ever been re-
ported. (Certainly these rumors were a foreshadowing of the “Farley’s Follies” of the early 1930s when Postmaster General James Farley allowed imperforate versions of stamps to be distributed to family and friends.)

The Post Office Substation was a sight to behold! No less than 177 different stamp emissions, dating back to 1887, were on sale for face value at its counters. When the show closed, the USPOD reported that the stamp sales grossed just short of $30,000, the equivalent of more than $390,000 in today’s dollars.

Another major first at the 1926 IPEX was PMG New authorizing “postmarking by favor” for the first time. Clerks at the show’s post office were allowed to hand stamp or machine cancel franked covers, and then hand them back to the customer rather than placing them in the mail. This makes a great Jeopardy! Answer: “At the 1926 IPEX” Question: When were unaddressed first day covers born?

First day covers containing a full souvenir sheet of 25 are scarce. Not only were show visitors generally unaccustomed to preparing first day covers at this time (the custom of cacheted covers had just passed its 3rd anniversary when the show opened), but finding an appropriately sized envelope for the full sheet was not on most visitors minds. There are many cachets for the White Plains commemorative from the pane of 100 (Scott No. 629), but no one produced a cachet exclusively to honor the souvenir sheet. (Scott No. 630).

A special portable International (that’s the name of the company) Type-T canceling machine was installed, and special International Exhibition hand cancellers were produced. Both black and magenta inks were allowed on the hand cancel devices, another “first,” since magenta ink had heretofore been restricted to the canceling of registered mail. Unaddressed covers (handback covers) from the show are relatively scarce as most show visitors were not aware they were available. Postmaster General New supported the show because he believed stamp collecting was a “national asset in that it stimulates patriotism and brings about a study of American History.”

Charles Lathrop Pack was president of the Exhibition Committee. Other members included Col. E.H.R. Green, Carroll Chase, Arthur Hind and a dozen others. There was also a directing committee, chaired by Alfred Lichtenstein, assisted by Eugene Klein, Philip Ward, Harry Lindquist and 18 others. (How poetic is it that Wade Saadi, President of World Stamp Show-NY 2016, is receiving the Collectors Club’s highest honor, the Alfred Lichtenstein Award this year.)

Chairman of the judges was John N. Luff, assisted by a panel of 19 judges, seven from the United States and 12 from England, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Italy, Germany, Sweden, France, and Czechoslovakia.

There were 650 different exhibits of stamps, covers and literature. They were shown in 20 different categories (contrasted to 13 in 1913 and 50 in 1976!) The frames and showcases contained hundreds of thousands stamps on exhibit.

Each exhibitor was being judged on his entire collection, not just material being shown in the frames. The judges had to review the
balance of each collection in a “bin room” where exhibitors’ actual stamp albums were securely stored.

The Grand Award went to Alfred Lichtenstein for his exhibit entitled “Uruguay.” This was a four-frame (and three albums) exhibit which included “Diligencia, 1856, plated;...Montevideo...imperforate issues....later issues, many in blocks, practically complete including the inverts.”

No fancy title page, no write-up, most of the material not even visible in the frames, and this fabulous collection was able to take the Grand Award!

Reading through the exhibition catalog one sees a veritable microcosm of philatelic style in the second decade of the 20th century. In addition to the Grand Award, there were 12 “Palms of Honor” considered to be the next 12 best exhibits. These included the collections of Arthur Hind—his U.S. collection and his Mauritius collection; Alfred Caspary for his U.S. Carrier Stamps and Michel Van Gelder for a collection of “Europe.” (Imagine an exhibit at World Stamp Show-NY 2016 entitled “Europe”!)

Occupying the entire fourth floor of the Grand Central Palace were more than $10 million worth of stamps that kept collectors saying to one another “Take a look at that baby, will you!”

Opposite the main entrance, and surrounded by four armed guards, were four frames housing the stamps entered into the “Rarity Class” The star here was the 1¢ 1856 British Guiana, for which Arthur Hind had then recently paid $32,500. ASD&C readers know that it recently changed hands for $9.2 million dollars. It has not been on view since Ameripex in 1986, and the philatelic community is hoping that arrangements can be made for it to be shown at World Stamp Show-NY 2016.

There were 47 booths representing 30 dealers and a dozen philatelic societies. The booths lined the perimeter of the room and exhibitions frames were in the center. All of the booths were the same, costing the dealer $200 for the eight-day show. Three of the dealers chose to have a double booth, and the Scott Stamp and Coin Company of New York City had a quadruple booth (booths 17-19-21-23). The Scott booth was staffed by 13 employees to handle the large volume of business. Black Tie and Evening Dress were worn by all of the Scott staff and staff of several other boothholders.

Included in every Exhibition Catalogue was a set of four American Bank Note Company poster stamps that were the “official souvenir” of the IPEX, and which was also available for sale at 10c for the set. There are many other collectibles from the show, such as the banquet menu, various admission tickets and small publications. However, because of the introduction of the souvenir sheet (a veritable surprise to many of the show attendees), the portable machine cancel, and the two color canceling by favor, the best souvenirs of the show are the plethora of unique covers produced by collectors during the eight days.

The show was a huge success in every way and it is interesting to note that the same cast of characters mentioned in this article went on to plan and execute the 1936 show, dubbed TIPEX. Stay tuned for that story in the March issue of ASD&C. Let’s all meet at World Stamp Show-NY 2016—check it out at www.ny2016.org!