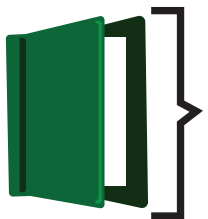


BOOKS & CATALOGS

BY Gary W. Loew



***First Day Cover Philatelic Exhibiting: A Master Class (2024)*, by Andrew McFarlane, 488+xxii pages, plus 431 figures, 8½ inches by 11 inches.** Published by Exhibitor's Press. ISBN: 979-8-3379-8939-6. Price: \$99.73, available from Amazon.com.

At first glance, a book on first day cover (FDC) exhibiting might appear to have an audience limited to exhibitors of such material. A more careful examination reveals *First Day Cover Philatelic Exhibiting: A Master Class* to be a book whose principles offer insights to all exhibitors. Moreover, stamp collectors and postal historians of all stripes will enjoy meticulous approach to philately that author Andrew McFarlane has shared in this 500-page volume.

McFarlane's previous work on exhibiting, *Creating the Philatelic Exhibit Synopsis: A Master Class*, was well received and remains a necessary book in every exhibitor's library. This current tome should enjoy a place alongside its predecessor.

At the 2025 Great American Stamp Show, this book won the Philatelic Literature Competition grand and large gold awards. Other reviewers have gone into great detail about the contents of McFarlane's book, and I have no need to duplicate those here. I will outline the contents and why I think they are explicative of the subject matter.

But I am more interested in citing examples of the author's unique takes on both philately and exhibiting. His refreshing personal approach to the hobby may help readers identify their own special sauce; their unique approach that will draw judges' attention to what makes an exhibit stand out. One might not imagine curling up in an easy chair and perusing a 500-page book on exhibiting. But in this case, perhaps you should.

Scope

Experienced first day cover exhibitors, indeed all exhibitors, will recognize that just because the exhibit is about FDCs, does not suggest that only first day covers belong in the exhibit. But it may not be apparent just how broadly be-

yond first day covers the scope of material can and should extend. McFarlane provides a complete exposition of that scope. Indeed, his table of contents is effectively a checklist of philatelic and non-philatelic elements that ought to be included. It is also a checklist of how to include these elements in an exhibit. I do not recommend stopping after reading the table of contents, but I absolutely recommend starting with a very thorough examination of it.

Organization

As with other categories within philatelic exhibiting, first day cover exhibiting centers around certain components that judges view as essential. For FDCs, McFarlane organizes these into five chapters he calls building blocks: stamp production, issuance, first day use, cachet production, and commercial use. Each is detailed with up to 30 categories of exhibiting considerations. The chapter on first day use, for example, encompasses 22 categories, including eight on cachet considerations. Some of these FDC types might not immediately be obvious to judges or exhibit viewers, such as cachet forgeries, cachet add-ons, or "unusual" first day covers.

First day covers are a comparatively recently recognized category of exhibiting, and the author devotes a chapter to "How FDC Exhibits are Judged." Clearly, this is an important chapter for exhibitors, but one that judges can rely upon as a standard for them to employ in their jury activities.

McFarlane was not the first FDC exhibitor, but he has set the standard in this specialization, and this chapter fully explicates the process.

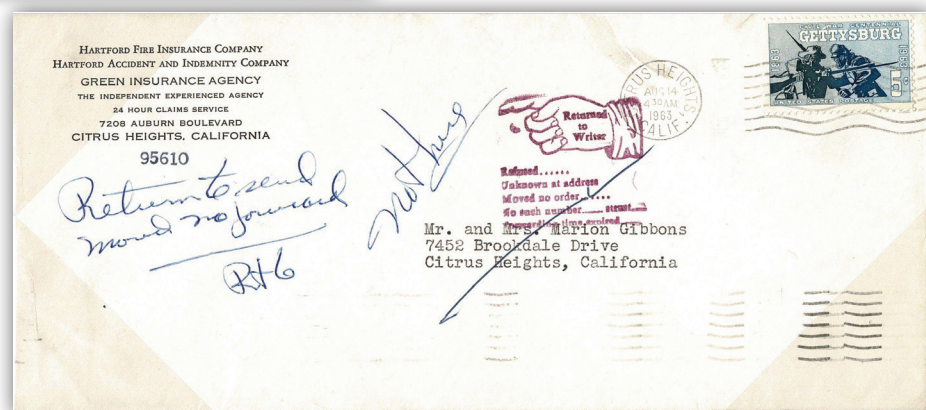
Next is a significant chapter on "Important Sections and Pages of the Exhibit," followed by "Research Resources for a FDC Exhibit." But the pièce de résistance, "Putting it all Together," details more than 100 categories that exhibitors should incorporate. While some are instinctive considerations, like paper, fonts, and page protectors, others, like handling controversial subject matter and QR codes, might not immediately come to mind.

Let me double back to the introductory chapter because McFarlane does something a bit unusual; he includes a sec-





Figure 1. Two first class surface rate covers. Which would you choose for your exhibit?



tion, “Why Should You Listen to Me?” I have always found that informing one’s audience of their bona fides is a worthwhile exercise, as it provides a framework for readers to better understand one’s words.

The Special Sauce

Exhibitors with large collections of covers typically face the challenge of selecting the material that “best” to illustrate a particular feature or topic. There ensues a step of deconstructing a cover and finding that one artifact that will win the judges’ approval. Consider the two covers shown in Figure 1. McFarlane says:

... both covers were from my exhibits. So why did I include the top cover in its exhibit, choosing it over other examples of the same rate? ... What was the big difference that led to its selection? It was blue. Sometimes, that’s all it takes. I felt that it would be more eye-catching in the frames. Never underestimate ‘curb appeal.’

This is advice that you are not likely to encounter in the official judging manual from the APS Committee on Accreditation of National Exhibitions and Judges (CANEJ).

The presence of ephemera in exhibits has gradually increased in recent years. The author makes a special point to address an ephemeron that is most specifically relevant to (and rarely seen in) first day cover exhibiting, embargo notices: “When stamps are shipped to post offices ... [an] embargo notice is placed on the front of the package with a warning that the stamps are not to be placed on sale until

the date listed on the notice, as shown in image below. While such a piece, as seen in Figure 2, might represent a curious but interesting supplement in an exhibit, in a first day cover exhibit it really brings an important focus to the post office’s policy of avoiding sale of stamps prior to the official release date.

This book includes nine pages on the role of the synopsis, which represents a brief treatment of his earlier seminal work on the topic. But McFarlane adds a note about his subsequent conversation with grand award winner Charles O’Brien on the latter’s synopsis. The subject was his inclusion in the synopsis of a listing of the exhibit’s previous medals, a no-no according to McFarlane. Yet, he states “I think I may need to soften my stance on the issue.” McFarlane is nothing if not willing to learn and modify his positions on even important topics.

Research

McFarlane has unparalleled experience in first day cover exhibiting and the depth of his material is striking. Nevertheless, he has reached beyond this material to include postal artifacts from such other exhibiting pros as O’Brien, Ron Klimley, Ralph Nafziger, Tony Dewey, and John Hotchner. This reinforces my earlier observation regarding the extensive detail that the author has incorporated in this book.

The many footnotes identified as “personal correspondence with the author” confirm the broad extent to which he reached out to other experts in doing his research. Some 285

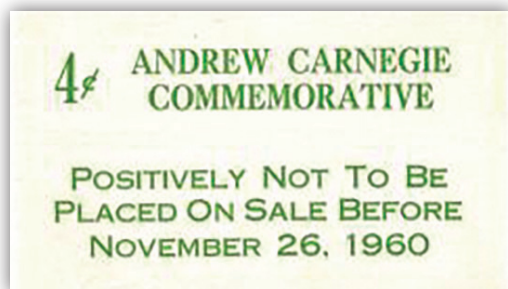


Figure 2. A 3-inch-by-5-inch embargo notice for the Andrew Carnegie stamp of 1960. This was placed on the boxes shipped to Post offices.

footnotes and more than 125 bibliographic citations reinforce that conclusion. McFarlane claims that this is a do-it-yourself book, yet clearly, he did nothing of the sort himself! His diverse council of experts are among the best in the business, and their expertise supplemented the author's.

Accessibility

The author has taken several steps to enhance the accessibility of his book. He ensured that the book was typeset in the APhont typeface at what appears to be a 12 point font. APhont is a typeface that “embodies characteristics that have been shown to enhance reading speed, comprehension, and comfort for large print users,” according to a discussion post on the LINC website, an online community for adult educators. The discussion notes that the font was developed by the American Printing House for the Blind. Despite the book's detail and interspersed illustrations, the pages are easy to read and comprehend.

The illustrations are also worth mentioning for reasons of accessibility. Each figure is carefully selected for clarity and then carefully scanned to ensure high quality print quality. McFarlane paid the same attention to image quality on the book as he does in all of his exhibits.

In the past, I have been critical of exhibiting books that reproduce exhibit pages at the reduced size necessary to fit a book of 8½-by-11-inch pages. The shrunken illustration has effectively 37 percent less area, resulting in difficult read-

ability and poor quality images. McFarlane did not take the obvious step of selecting a book measuring 9-by-12 inches.

But he did respond to my previous criticism by posting his illustrations in their full size as 300 dpi images on his website, <https://aps.buzz/McFarlaneFDCimages>. This adds research value to an already invaluable book.

Another aspect of McFarlane's writing does not generally fall under the rubric of accessibility, but most assuredly makes the book much more accessible: humor. It is rare in the world of philatelic publishing to encounter a volume that concurrently informs and amuses. McFarlane's sense of humor is pervasive here; and all the more power to him. What a delight to read a serious work of non-fiction completely lacking in vapid, ponderous prose!

Errata and Omissions

Some early readers notified the author of a few errors in the book. None is consequential, but it is always helpful to know. Most authors do not focus on errata unless a major error is found, but McFarlane keeps an updated errata listing on his website at <https://aps.buzz/McFarlaneErrata> consistent with his natural inclination to focus on both philatelic detail and the readers of his exhibits and books.

This book is so comprehensive that it is difficult to find any major or minor topic that is not addressed in some manner. I did note the imbalance between U.S. and foreign material. But that is a result of McFarlane's own exhibiting interests. Indeed, the inclusion of 32 stamps from 16 different stamp-issuing entities speaks to his research and outreach to other first day cover exhibitors.

Conclusion

The health of philatelic exhibiting depends upon attracting new collectors into the fold. First day cover collecting is immensely popular within philately and tends to more easily attract younger collectors. McFarlane's new book is a much needed addition to the exhibiting literature. But it importantly represents the bridge that can convert first day cover collectors into exhibitors.

