

Book Review

How to build a better FDC exhibit

An enjoyable “read” is one not only from an authoritative expert, but also one that invites the reader into the author’s realm with an informal first-person approach that has touches

of humor. Such is this new book by Andrew McFarlane where he seems to say, “Come sit beside me and I will show you how to do it.”

Excellence in first day cover exhibiting has been demonstrated by McFarlane over the years and documented with his many Gold and Grand awards at national exhibitions. His expertise on exhibiting was previously revealed with his book on *Creating the Philatelic Exhibit Synopsis: A Master Class* (2021). Exhibitors will welcome both of his books that help novice collectors as well as experienced exhibitors to create and improve their competitive displays.

Serious FDC exhibiting really began when the American First Day Cover Society held annual conventions with their own competitive entries, beginning in the 1950s and later named Americover. The AFDCS and American Philatelic Society worked together to bring the show into the mainstream of APS-accredited exhibitions and judging.

McFarlane describes the many types of first day cover exhibits that have a specific focus: single stamp, stamp series (e.g. the Prexies), cachet maker, postal history (e.g. auxiliary markings on FDCs), topical/thematic, and combinations of these. He explains that a single or stamp set study begins with the stamps themselves, showing essays and design work, die proofs if known, plate layout and marginal markings, formats (sheet, coil, booklet), phosphor tagging, and even freaks like misperforations, missing colors, and double prints.



The next chapter deals with all aspects of the stamps’ issuance: first day ceremonies and programs, postal service promotions and announcements, press releases, and official first day cancellations. A major chapter covers many aspects of first day uses: cachets (first cachets, general purpose, etc.), cachet-design material, unofficial cancels, pre-date or earliest known uses, autographed covers, and FDC servicers, among others.

Cachet production covers various printing methods, hand-painted designs, use of labels, computer printed, and silk screening. After the first-day aspects are exhausted, an exhibitor should show commercial usage of the stamps; there are sections on rate classes, foreign destinations, censored FDCs, military post offices, penalty envelopes and even use of perfins or precancels if known.

McFarlane emphasizes that competitive exhibiting requires a lot of work. An outline should be made first for organization of the exhibit. The title page is a key part of the display, and he shows examples. Many exhibits end with a brief epilogue such as the next stamp issued, or when the stamp was taken off sale. He devotes many pages to studying the APS *Manual of Philatelic Judging and Exhibiting*. Adhering to its guidelines will help achieve higher medal levels.

The author explains that the synopsis

First Day Cover Philatelic Exhibiting: A Master Class by Andrew McFarlane. 8½ by 11½ inches, hardbound, 512 pages, Exhibitors Press, Silver Spring MD, 2024. ISBN 979-8-3379-8939-6, \$99 plus shipping from Andrew McFarlane, PO Box 669, Bartonsville PA 18321, or sales@exhibitsynopsis.com. A softbound edition is also available for \$89.

is a critical document for competitive exhibiting. It does not appear in the frames but is used to inform the judges of aspects that might be overlooked such as research or new discoveries, key items and why they are scarce, and a few literature references so the judges can better understand the material. The synopsis page content can also be organized by the Exhibit Evaluation Form (EEF) that the jury uses to provide feedback. Sections include treatment, importance, knowledge and research, difficulty of acquisition, condition of the material, and presentation.

McFarlane goes on to cover archival mounting materials, oversized exhibit pages, tools for preparing the exhibit (knives, paper cutters, hinges), mattes to set off items, and printers among others. Expertizing has a section of its own.

As detailed as this book is, an extensive bibliography will take exhibitors to other sources for further study. Indices for subjects, country names and U.S. Scott catalog numbers conclude this wonderful handbook. A list of abbreviations and their definitions appear at the beginning of the book.

One nice feature is a humorous relief between chapters. If the last page of a chapter ends on a righthand page, the reader will turn the page and see a cartoon by cachet maker Dave Bennett on the left, rather than a blank page.

The layout and typeface are pleasing. At over 500 pages, this book’s heft is an indicator of the degree of explanation and expertise that McFarlane provides. First day cover exhibitors now have an authoritative source for how to prepare and improve their displays.