

INTRODUCTION

As the editor of *La Posta: The Journal of American Postal History*, I have been fortunate to work with many of the top writers in the American postal history field. Their contributions to the journal reflect the wide scope of this philatelic specialty.

La Posta has been the leader in the American postal history field since its founding by Richard “Bill” Helbock in 1969.

Bill’s efforts went a long way to bringing postal history into mainstream philately. When he began in 1969, many collectors were still soaking stamps off envelopes and collecting two-by-four-inch cutouts of postmarks. A lot of great postal history wound up in trash cans. Serious collectors of covers with intact stamps and markings were few in number.

That gradually changed. At the United States Interphil ‘76 international philatelic exhibition in Philadelphia, postal history was finally added as an exhibiting category and that helped spur a new wave of interest. Today, postal history has a worldwide following.

In the intervening years, *La Posta* developed an incredible following with nearly 70 per cent of subscribers receiving the journal for more than 10 years. Renewal rates are frequently around the 90 percent rate. *La Posta*’s 48th year of continuous publication was marked in 2016.

La Posta readers are passionate about postal history and highly supportive. But, like the rest of philately, three-quarters of them are at least 60 years old. And, like the rest of philately, efforts must be made to recruit new and younger members into the specialty.

It is with that thought in mind that the idea for this book had its beginnings. The goal is to provide a showcase for the top writers in a wide range of postal history subjects and put them together into one book so that current postal history collectors can expand their interests and those not familiar with postal history can find an introduction to a broad spectrum of the American postal history field.

Once introduced to this fascinating area, I have no doubt that many will select one of more areas for further study.

There are more than 50 United States and Canadian philatelic organizations that include some part of postal history within their charter. I selected 16 of the most popular subjects and invited the top writers

in these specialties to participate in this project. All enthusiastically agreed. The results are the Sweet 16: 16 top authors writing about 16 different aspects of the American Postal history field.

The authors represent the nationwide interest in postal history. They come from 11 states covering the northeast, southeast, midwest, southwest, west coast, and Alaska, plus one from Canada.

For each author’s feature, their chapter header is on the recto page and reflects the postal history category. Endnotes and references, where appropriate, are at the end of each article, along with an author biography and contact information. For subject matter, here is a brief review of what you will find.

We begin with the American Civil War, a subject familiar to all. Trish Kaufmann, a collector, exhibitor and dealer, and one of the most prolific writers in the Confederate postal history field, tackles the incredibly difficult area of secession dates and state and territorial involvement in the Confederate movement, and incorporates the related postal history for her in-depth article that sets straight the record for this subject and is a lasting reference for all Civil War buffs.

John Hotchner, another well known, popular and prolific author, then takes on another difficult, and much less documented, subject: U.S. auxiliary markings. Hotchner is a pioneer and leader in this vast field and his award winning exhibit has promoted the subject to a wider audience. Here, he provides an overview of how auxiliary markings are a reflection of postal service operations.

Most postal history advocates collect at least one town or region of interest and Paul Petosky, who writes a regular newspaper column about Michigan postal history, examines the postal history of Drummond Island, a tiny spot on Lake Huron on the edge of the United States-Canada border.

Topical subjects are increasingly adding a postal history twist and there is no better example than Christine Sanders’ walk through 18th and 19th century Christmas Day. Her discussion of the subject and amazing examples will provide new insights into this traditional holiday.

Social postal history examines postal history in the broader sense, including the interaction of commerce and society with the postal system. It has a growing following and no one has provided better examples

than Jesse Spector whose column in *La Posta* features regular examples. Here, he provides a fantastic philatelic exploration of American slavery.

Eric Knapp, a past president of the Alaska Collectors Club, covers three postal history areas at one time when he offers an excellent and easy to understand introduction to civil mail censorship in Alaska during World War II.

Advertising covers, a subset of illustrated mail, are always a popular subject and Brady Hunt introduces the hotel mail of Oklahoma, including Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory before it became the 46th state admitted to the Union in November 1907.

The Liberty Series and the Prexies, the two most popular stamp series of the 20th century, are the subject of separate features by subject matter experts Roland Austin and Chip Briggs. Both showcase some of the rarest postal history uses for these issues.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center are still on most people's minds. Rich Hemmings, a serious researcher who tackles a wide range of difficult and unusual subjects, and who was the inaugural winner of the Richard Helbock Prize in 2013, provides an historical tour of the streets and alleys surrounding the World Trade Center site incorporating postal history and ephemera on his ride.

Exposition postal history has a very strong following and Charles Nehart Jr., a three-time winner of the Richard Helbock prize for the best article in an annual volume of *La Posta*, examines the 1905 Portland Oregon Exposition stations. His thorough coverage of this subject includes much of the behind the scenes actions related to this major event.

Highway post office collecting was once a thriving specialty that has waned over time. Here, Will Keller, one of the top HPO specialists, suggests ways that HPO collecting can be revived and incorporated into regular postal history collections and exhibits.

Documenting modern postal history is becoming increasingly more important, and more difficult. Here, specialist Kelvin Kindahl contributes a thorough examination and review of contract stations, an often overlooked component of postal history.

Postcards, particularly those mailed in the early 20th century during the Golden Age of Postcards are always an excellent source of rare postmarks. Tied with interesting and unusual subject matter on the front, they have a wide following. Charles Fricke, a pioneer researcher and postcard and postal card subject matter expert and who, at 95, is the oldest contributor to this work, takes a look at how one postcard provides insights into an obscure story about Chicago's short-lived tunnel mail.

Military postal history is a huge field and Sergio Lugo, the editor of the *Military Postal History Society Bulletin*, provides an in-depth overview of the subject, including a list of resources to help newcomers to the subject.

Finally Ralph Nafziger, an award winning first day cover exhibitor and well-known author, reviews the postal history of the three-cent Oregon Territory stamp of 1948.

I think that you will agree that this exceptional lineup of authors and postal history subjects is sure to have something of interest for everyone.

Enjoy your trek into the exciting world of American postal history!

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