

# Can Corner Cards Be Used?

by Fran Adams

(The following letter has been submitted to the editor of *Topical Time*. It is presented here because the subject should be of wide interest to the exhibiting and judging community.)

The topic of corner cards in exhibiting recently appeared in two 1998 *Topical Time* 'Helpline' and 'Postline' columns. Corner cards have a very specific purpose in the exhibiting world, one worth exploring further as we are not exploiting their full potential. I therefore wish to add my views to the current commentary as I believe the discussion oversimplifies the issue. This subject is not limited to thematic exhibits but is of concern to social history, marcophilately, special studies, aerophilately and more rarely postal history as well as other areas.

Philately's historical attitude toward corner cards in exhibits has been less than cordial and they are generally not tolerated at either the national or international exhibiting levels. There are various reasons why they are ignored, but I believe the basic reason has its roots in the following.

As an exhibitor, I attend shows and ask other collectors, exhibitors as well as jury members their opinions on exhibits I'm associated with. In listening, I occasionally hear statements which provoke thought. One such is "Corner cards are unimportant. It's what's on the cover's upper right corner that matters." Corner cards usually appear in the upper left corner.

When I ask what that means specifically, the person generally answers with something like, "If the stamp, meter or cancel doesn't illustrate the subject using text or graphics, the cover is irrelevant and should not be shown." That simple explanation, in my opinion, propagates a habit of ignoring the left cover side during exhibit review. The practice is happily employed without delving into reasons why it may not be a good habit, afterall, it's an accepted practice handed down for generations.

There are however, instances when the right corner of the covers does not graphically or textually illustrate the subject; specifically when the cover in question has a perfin or postage meter without advertising indicia paying the postage fee in that position.

In the United States, a great deal of cor-

respondence from firms, personages and organizations is franked by postage meters. In the last 15 years or so, exhibiting has come to accept the inclusion of such postage meters with either text or graphic advertising indicia which are part of the postage imprinting process.

These advertising indicia are optional as far as the physical meter and prepayment of postage is concerned. Many meters do not have an advertising slug installed. All meters however, have a unique serial number in the franking design. Postal meter machines are generally leased by one customer over a long period of time from the manufacturer and the serial number identifies the user of the machine.

Let's say I include a cover in my thematic exhibit which has a simple, unadorned postage meter used to pay postage fees. The cover includes a corner card from organization 'xxx'. Using the 'ignore the left' practice, the meter stands alone and appears to have no associated reason for inclusion in the exhibit as there is no textual or graphic indicia to make the association evident. The typical initial reaction would be to simply reject the item and mark the exhibit down depending on the number of such items included.

In the item's description however, I state this meter was used by organization 'xxx', which has some relationship to the subject I'm showing. I base this description on the serial number of the postage meter imprint. This piece is shown as organization 'xxx' is related to the exhibit's subject and because this is a 'philatelic element' important in developing the subject through philatelic knowledge, i.e., the organization's mailing processes.

Now that we've established that postal meter franking is legal prepayment of postage, it appears in the upper right corner of the cover and has a relationship to the subject, we're talking validity. But how does the judge know I've done the homework necessary to write that description correctly? One judge might check postage meter company records to ensure the serial number was used by that organization, but it's easier to look at the corner card to determine its origin.

I witnessed exactly this judging practice recently (not my exhibit) after a very

important piece was relegated to the trash bin judging-wise as it didn't have a 'picture' or 'text' in the postal meter relating to the subject. The jury dismissed the item as not relevant when in fact it was the only known piece from that international organization.

The difficult part of this experience was that the exhibitor failed to explain this relationship and there were a number of covers involved. As a result of the 'ignore left' rule, and perhaps a general lack of knowledge concerning meters in general, the jury misunderstood the rationale for these covers and awarded a lesser medal. An 'informed' jury would have brought that gem of knowledge to the exhibitor's attention in the critique, chastising him perhaps, but letting him know they understood the significance of the covers at least as well as the exhibitor did.

The habit of ignoring everything but the upper right corner and nurturing this 'practice' needs review. There are instances where philatelic knowledge must take precedence and the absence of a graphic or textual indicator should not immediately disqualify an item from an exhibit.

Corner cards are an important asset when reviewing either perfined or metered items in particular. As with all things, they should be used within guidelines. By employing elasticity in engaging 'rules or practices' and educating our juries to do the same, we can develop reasonable guidelines for inclusion of corner cards based on rational criteria.

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