

Officials at 1999 STAMPSHOW

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"IT'S OFFICIAL!," screamed the headlines, according to 1997 Champion of Champions Richard Drews. Back in November 1994, reporting on the C of C competition at APS Stampshow in Pittsburgh, I described this as "an historic occasion, since not one but two great exhibits surveying this neglected field were on display." This past August in Cleveland, Robert L. Markovits and Lester C. Lanphear, III were joined in the championship class by Theodore Lockyear of Evansville, Indiana, who had qualified by winning the grand award at Indypex 1998 with his peerless showing of the Department of Justice. The legendary Goff correspondence cover, franked with four 30¢ and three 90¢ Justice stamps, would be on public display for the first time. Looking for an excuse to attend, I brazenly entered my own marcophilately collection in the open competition.

Once there, we privately despaired that the surfeit of official stamps on display would work against us, making the material in general look "common" and exposing the holes in each other's collections. With Dr. David C. Lobdell, a long-time specialist in the War Department, and Dr. Dennis Schmidt, a specialist in official stamped envelopes, also in sympathetic attendance, we regarded ourselves as a mutual admiration society. After all, in the intervening years since Pittsburgh, Mr. Markovits had added many important pieces to his showing - most notably the unique \$5 State irregular block of six and the matching proof invert strips - and still was discouraged to receive only a small gold at Paris this summer, judged at 90 points on a par with an exhibit of Egyptian official stamps. Mr. Lanphear had also improved his exhibit, most notably with a 30¢ Executive cover to Rome with Italian postage due stamps.

Anyway, after gobbling up my mousse at the awards banquet and checking around to see if anyone at our table might be allergic to chocolate, I was caught off-guard when it was announced that my own exhibit had won the grand award in the open competition. And Mr. Markovits was even more astonished at the final drum roll, when he was asked to step forward and receive the trophy as Champion of Champions. It is safe to say, we are to a man deeply grateful that the judges have seen fit to recognize our specialty. We have no illusions about popularizing again the collecting of official stamps, which were once all the rage among schoolboy stamp gatherers not after Mr. Markovits' scheduled walking tour of the four exhibits drew only ourselves and the dedicated specialist dealer Albert Chang. But at least we can no longer complain that our field fails to get the respect it deserves. In his remarks, Mr. Markovits paid homage to Rollin C. Huggins, Jr., whose, pioneering articles in *Official Chatter* helped us first think in a systematic, analytical way about what we were collecting. Mr. Markovits himself had arranged for many of us to come speak at the Collectors Club of New York over the years, in an ongoing forum on U.S. official stamps. Since Alfred E. Staubus initiated this section of the *Chronicle* back in 1990, virtually every research article has been dependent on shared material and the pooling of knowledge. Uncertain as to whether this sort of congeniality is typical of most philatelic specialties, I am nevertheless thankful to be able to count all the gentlemen mentioned above as my friends.