

Capex Show Report



"The stamp event of the decade" is how Canada billed its latest world philatelic exhibition, Capex '96, which was held in downtown metropolitan Toronto between 8-16 June.

Several well known philatelic personalities were on flight BA089 out of Heathrow on the Thursday before the show opened. These included David Beech, Head of the Philatelic Collections at the British Library and Charles Goodwyn, Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection, both of whom were displaying part of the holdings in their care. Also seen were several of our dealer friends, including representatives from Argyll Etkin, Alan Berman, Euro Yu, and David Feldman. We left behind a heatwave temperature of close-on ninety degrees in London and flew into fifty-four degrees and heavy rain!

On the following day, I took the opportunity of familiarising myself with the city and went on a five hour rain-sodden walk taking in the sights. I never came across one stamp shop or, for that matter, Post Office or advertising for the exhibition - not even at the convention centre. The local radio station did, however, have paid advertising plus several mentions of the show in its 'family fun' features. The pre-show ads focused very much on stamp errors and called Capex "the world's largest stamp event".

Well, the biggest in Toronto, I suspect would be more accurate, for I have certainly attended larger events elsewhere in the world.

The weather had not improved much as the opening hour of 10am approached. However, the rain had not dampened enthusiasm, as the crowds who were there for the opening ceremony proved. Apparently.

Unfortunately, despite my being an exhibitor, I had not been invited and although all pre-show literature including their World Wide Web site showed 10am, it was actually held at 9:30am and I missed it. I was not impressed with this, nor the length of time that it took to register and acquire my pair of season tickets and catalogue as it took over 35 minutes in a slow-moving queue. Complaints were many*. I was beginning to be dubious about what the event itself might be like, but, as it happened, I need not have worried for it was a fine show.

The theme of the exhibition was transportation and Canada Post had excelled itself in devising unique marketing opportunities, including the sale of special uncut printers sheets of the miniature (!) sheets of 25 transportation stamps. These sold well at C\$20 (plus tax) each and, as is usual at these world events, the home Post Office just kept on selling. It had created an amazing and innovative range of gifts that incorporated stamps including framed pictures, paperweights, cards, clothing and phone cards. A complete "set" would have put back the purchaser hundreds of dollars.

The dealers and postal administrations/agents were there in force and the support from the United Kingdom based dealers was excellent with 24 companies representing around one-third of all present. Indeed, they amounted to the largest overseas contingent. It was good to have access to fifty-plus traders whose stocks were new to me.

Twenty one philatelic societies had their own tables to recruit new members and meet with existing members.

The competitive exhibits were often quite stunning and well worthy of their high awards. I especially enjoyed the Mulready display and some of the early gems of Canadian philately. Sometimes, especially in the thematic class (an area that I can claim some knowledge in having attained international level as an exhibitor in this class myself), disappointing. It was good to see, therefore, that the judges recognised the deficiencies in this section and six exhibitors received only a Certificate of Participation. No other classes had a single 'certificate only' awarded and begs the question how did the exhibits get into a world exhibition, where the minimum qualifying standard is supposed to be

a national Vermeil?

The non-competitive displays by the British Library, those from Her Majesty's collection, plus other displays such as the world-class rarities loaned by private collectors, national bodies and commercial organisations were a joy to behold and, in many cases, had never been seen abroad before and certainly not all together at one time.

A series of lectures, society meetings, stamp launch ceremonies, Internet demonstrations together with various receptions, both on and off site, were all superb. Additionally, displays and/or demonstrations relating to mailboxes, the collecting bug, the Yukon discovery of gold, stamp perforating by Canadian Banknote, stamp affixing by Ashton Potter Canada and intaglio printing by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing all added to the enjoyment of the show for those with the time to see it all.

The 'ultimate' reception for me was the prestigious Palmares and medal ceremony. This was well attended and around 500 collectors from around the world shared a fine meal, drinks and dancing. Unfortunately, there was something of a free for all as to who sat where and with whom, as there was no formal table plan. Still, this was my first banquet overseas in a 'penguin' suit and I enjoyed the atmosphere of the event immensely - this despite my being on a table of non-English speaking Czechs!

An event that I would not wish to have missed was the reception laid on by the United States Postal Service, who had organised a superb gathering at the Royal York Hotel's banqueting suite, complete with live music and large sculptures of the American eagle and USPS logo in ice lit from below by candles. Quite spectacular. A millennium stamp show in Orlando, Florida to be organised by the USPS was announced during the evening, adding to an already over-full, but exciting, calendar of philatelic events for the year 2000.

Attendance figures for Capex are, I am sure, well down on the expected eighty thousand - indeed on some days, including the second Saturday and Sunday, the spacious hall was noticeably empty. This is a shame, but those that did attend will, I know, have experienced a good time. I know that I did!

Memories of my stay in Toronto will be of the sight-seeing trips, food and drink enjoyed with existing friends, of the new friends that I made during the fortnight and of a well organised event of world-class philately. My final memory will be of the show the day after it closed to the public - what a sorry sight a dismantled exhibition makes.

Congratulations to the hard-working organising committee who made it all happen and to Tony Brander, the British Commissioner, who looked after the interests of our exhibitors so well.

* Exhibitors are (rightly) bound by many FIP regulations if we wish to exhibit our stamp collections or literature and I do feel that this is an area of exhibition administration where there is tightening-up needed on what is expected of the organisers. This is not the first time that I have been disappointed at overseas shows in this respect. Often it is the little things that can separate a 'fine' show from a 'great' show in the minds of those who have chosen to support world philately and the problems can so easily be put right with a little forethought.

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