

# This Day in History... September 19, 1968

## The World Series of Philately

On September 19, 1968, the American Philatelic Society (APS) officially introduced the World Series of Philately (WSP)—one of the most prestigious competitive platforms in US stamp exhibiting. The competition was unveiled at the 82nd Annual APS Convention in Rochester, New York, which ran from September 19–22. Its structure was developed under the guidance of Postmaster General Gordon Morison, who worked closely with APS leaders to answer years of requests from serious collectors for a way to highlight top-tier exhibits at a national level.

Before the WSP, collectors and visitors could only see large numbers of award-winning exhibits at international shows, which were few and far between. Many regional stamp shows struggled to attract enough high-quality exhibits to make attending worthwhile. The WSP changed that by creating a system that encouraged shows to compete for status and exhibitors to bring out their very best material.

Under the new structure, collectors could compete with their finest exhibits at APS-qualified national exhibitions. Each show would give a Grand Award to the best exhibit, and those winners were then invited to compete for the title of Champion of Champions at the annual APS StampShow (now known in many circles as the Great American Stamp Show). This gave collectors a clear pathway from regional competition to national recognition.

From the very beginning, the WSP was a hit. Show organizers had incentives to improve their events—recruiting top exhibitors, promoting their shows more broadly, and scheduling to avoid clashes with other WSP shows so exhibitors could attend multiple events. Many shows added educational seminars, specialist society meetings, and public talks to help grow the community and raise the standard of exhibits.

Because so many shows and exhibitors wanted to take part, APS created strict requirements for WSP status. These rules govern everything from judging standards, classification of exhibits, frame sizes, treatment and research, to show organization. Only shows meeting these high standards could be certified, and APS limits the number of WSP shows to 35 at a time; other qualifying shows are placed on a waiting list. In addition, adult multi-frame exhibits that receive a minimum of a vermeil medal at a WSP show may apply to be shown at FIP (Federation Internationale de Philatélie) recognized international shows.

The winner of the very first Champion of Champions award, in 1968, was Robert H. Cunliffe of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for his exhibit *19th Century U.S. Revenues*. His carefully researched and beautifully presented collection set the tone for the level of excellence the WSP would expect.

Over time, the rules of the WSP have evolved to reflect changes in the hobby. As exhibiting categories grew more specialized, APS updated its judging criteria to include new classes such as thematic, postal history, first-day covers, literature exhibits, and display exhibits. Scoring systems have been refined to further emphasize research quality, treatment of the subject, rarity of material, and balance of presentation (treatment, condition, etc.). These changes have helped ensure exhibits are evaluated fairly across different collecting areas and that newer kinds of exhibits (for example, literature or thematic collections) benefit from clear guidelines.



*Issued in 1972 in response to collector calls for a “stamp of their own.”*



*Issued in 1986 for the 100th anniversary of the APS.*

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