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West Toronto Stamp Club (WTSC) marks 80th year of philatelic passion

Modern-day collectors now have access to online resources to uncover stamps' history



West Toronto Stamp Club

Photo/PETER C. MCCUSKER

Fred Colburn is looking over some stamps at the West Toronto Stamp Club 80th anniversary meeting recently at the Fairfield Seniors Centre. (March 10, 2015)

[Etobicoke Guardian](#)

By [Cynthia Reason](#)

Eighty years to the day after its first official meeting on March 10, 1935, the West Toronto Stamp Club celebrated the fact that it's still thriving after eight decades – today boasting 88 current members ranging in age from 14 to 96.

To mark the club's milestone 80th year, longtime West Toronto Stamp Club (WTSC) executive member and club historian Frank Alusio put together a special display for the Tuesday, March 10 anniversary meeting at Fairfield Seniors Centre.

"I prepared a display of 36 pages of the history of the club and all the memorabilia that we had, including a photograph of the house where the founders first met on Indian Road," said Alusio, noting that, after his presentation, he and another longtime WTSC member were recognized for their 50-year anniversaries with the club, while another member was honoured for 25 years.

"That shows you how people like this club, that they would stick around that long."

As when it was first founded, the WTSC is one that continues to welcome stamp collectors of every level of interest – from serious philatelists, including four current members who have been named fellows of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, to casual hobbyists, who simply collect for the love of stamps, added Chris Edwards, a member of the WTSC board of directors who heads up the club's membership.

"Those are the two ends of the spectrum of collectors, and our club has a mix of both and everything in between," he said. "The members who are fellows of the Royal Society are obviously very serious collectors, who have exhibited in international exhibitions and won gold medals, but we've also got the hobbyists who just collect stamps because they like them. All are welcome."

For Edwards, 80, stamp collecting is a passion he first took up as a boy while attending boarding school in England and returned to upon his retirement about 15 years ago, when he happened upon a WTSC booth at Cloverdale Mall and signed up.

In the years in between, Edwards said, the art and science of philately has been much changed by the advent of the internet.

“When I was kid, I had an album, I got a stamp, I put it in a space – I didn’t really worry much about the actual stamps themselves, it was all about filling that album. But today with the internet, there’s a huge amount of resources available for collectors online,” he said.

“The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, the American Philatelic Society, the British Society – all have great big websites with all sorts of information online, which anyone can start digging into. You can dig your way into the history of stamps, when they were printed, how they were printed, the printing method, the adhesives, and the whole thing. These days you look beyond the stamp; the stamp is just the thing that opens the door.”

One of the recent philatelic door openers for Edwards personally was a ‘cover’ (a term in philately that refers to the outside of an envelope or package with an address and postage stamps) he procured of a 1932 letter from South Africa to England, from the first air mail service between those two countries.

“It’s the one I really concentrate on,” Edwards said, noting that his research into the cover has uncovered who the letter was from, what route the letter took, the number of planes it took to deliver it, and even the names of the pilots who carried the letter on their flights.

“I dug in and was able to trace exactly how the planes flew, because planes in those days could only fly about 500 miles and it took 17 days for the letter to get from South Africa to England...I was able to find out what the plane was, the name of the pilots, the fact that it travelled in five different planes, and that, because you couldn’t fly over the Alps in those days, the letter went by train from Italy to France, then got into another plane to England.

“And that, I think, kind of sums what stamp collecting is today, in the modern, more interesting way to do it. It’s taking it way beyond just the piece of paper that you stick on an envelope.”

For those interested in taking up stamp collecting, both Edwards and Alusio agree that WTSC is a great place to start.

The club meets every Tuesday evening from the beginning of September until the end of June at Etobicoke’s Fairfield Seniors Centre, 80 Lothian Ave., as follows:

- First Tuesday of the month - the Machin Study Group, a specialist group dedicated to the study of the United Kingdom’s definitive stamp series featuring the image of Queen Elizabeth II, meets in the library starting at 7 p.m.
- Second and fourth Tuesdays - the club’s regular bimonthly meetings, featuring a ‘show and learn’ session and stamp auction, meets in the gym beginning at 6:30 p.m.
- Third Tuesday - a discussion group, including special guest speakers and presentations, meets in the library starting at 7 p.m.

“Stamping collecting is all about enjoyment – enjoyment in big, capital, bold letters,” Alusio said. “It’s not about the dollar value of the stamps, although that’s a plus. It’s an enjoyment I would recommend to anyone, because I learned a lot about history, geography, about people, countries, and cultures. Plus you meet really great people.”

Prospective new members and visitors are invited to drop by either of WTSC’s regular bimonthly meetings (second and fourth Tuesdays of the month) or the discussion group evenings (third Tuesday) to learn more about the club and take part.

For more information about WTSC and how to become a member, go to www.westtorontostampclub.org or email Edwards at membershipdirector@westtorontostampclub.org