

# America's Library – The Library of Congress

## Synopsis

The purpose of this Display Division exhibit is to tell the story of the Library of Congress using a variety of philatelic and non-philatelic artifacts and to show how the Library of Congress has used mail to carry out its mission.

I have been aggressively collecting postal and other items relating to the Library of Congress for more than fifteen years. The Library of Congress is an extremely complex institution with a 210 year history. This complexity and longevity made it difficult to decide on the arrangement of the exhibit. After extensive thought and consideration I arrived at the arrangement which is shown below. Although each section of the exhibit has a distinct purpose, there is some unavoidable overlap.

### **Title Page and Plan Page**

I have made use of the Title Page and the Plan Page to make note of two libraries that served Congress before the establishment of the Library of Congress.

### **Historical Overview**

This section of the exhibit provides an overview of the history of the Library of Congress in chronological order. The approach in this section is similar to that which would be taken in a thematic exhibit. I have carried out extensive research related to the history of the Library of Congress which has enabled me to tell an accurate story of the library's history.

### **Library Mail**

The purpose of this section of the exhibit is to provide an introduction to how mail was sent and received by the Library of Congress throughout its history. It is an institutional postal history of the Library of Congress. Other sections of the exhibit that follow include many more examples of mail sent and received by the Library of Congress. My fifteen years of collecting postal items related to the Library of Congress has resulted in a substantive research collection of these items. This collection along with philatelic research and study has enabled me to accurately document how the Library of Congress used the mail to conduct its services throughout its history.

The section on Library Mail is divided into four sub-sections dealing with outgoing domestic mail, outgoing foreign mail, incoming domestic mail, and incoming foreign mail. In the sub-sections on outgoing mail I have shown the sequence of the methods used by the Library to send outgoing mail from the use of free franks to official meter mail. This has not been documented at this level before and constitutes original research. In the sub-sections on incoming mail I have also documented the extensive use of date received stamps by the Library of Congress to date incoming mail from 1900 to the 1940s. This has not been done before and constitutes original research.

## **Copyright and the Library of Congress**

A significant component of the exhibit focuses on the copyright program of the Library of Congress. This program has generated more mail than any other service of the Library of Congress. I chose to separate this aspect of the postal history of the Library of Congress from the Library Mail section of the exhibit because of the very specialized nature of the postal activities related to the administration of the copyright program in the United States. My documentation of this specialized aspect of the Library's use of the mail has not been done before and constitutes original research.

## **Library Services**

This section of the exhibit is about the services which are provided by the Library of Congress to its users. A variety of philatelic artifacts are used to document and illustrate this aspect of the Library of Congress.

## **Library Collections**

This section of the exhibit provides an overview of the extensive variety and scope of the collections of the Library of Congress including how they are acquired and cataloged. A variety of philatelic artifacts are used to document and illustrate this aspect of the Library of Congress.

## **Bicentennial Celebration**

I chose to conclude the exhibit with a section on the celebration by the Library of Congress of its bicentennial in the year 2000. The Library planned and executed an elaborate celebration which it used to promote its history and services. It involved the national library community in this celebration including second day of issue ceremonies for the Library of Congress commemorative stamp.

## **Rarity and Condition**

Covers actually sent to and from libraries are not common. I estimate, based on more than 15 years of searching for these covers, that there is no more than one library cover for every 10,000 covers of a general nature. Covers that have been sent to or from the Library of Congress represent less than ten percent of those library covers. The major challenge of this exhibit and its value lies in the totality of the items that were assembled rather than the acquiring of any specific items. There are numerous individual items that tell interesting stories relating to the history of the Library of Congress and its use of mail. I have chosen not to highlight individual items other than by providing expanded written comments. I have included material in the exhibit in the best condition available.