

1985: space cover collectors get their own exhibition class. 25 Years of Astrophilately

Exactly fifty years ago the first human went into space. And it took yet another 25 years until the International Philatelic Federation (FIP) established its own exhibition class for those who document space flight with space covers. The crucial moment was on November 5th, 1985: during its Congress in Rome, FIP adopted the motion of its bureau to establish a Section on Astrophilately within its Commission on Aerophilately. The first Special Regulation was adopted and Beatrice Bachmann from Switzerland was named first head of section. **On the very day of the anniversary, a pictorial postmarker was used in Rome to commemorate the anniversary.**

Collecting space covers had doubtlessly become a popular field in philately at that time: already four years after the launch of the exhibition class, 31 astrophilatelic exhibits from 12 countries were shown on Ad Astra 1989 at Zurich. But not only in terms of quantity, also in terms of quality the new class was competitive. Just three years later, the first Great Gold Medal was awarded to an astrophilatelic collection, during the Philakorea 94 World Stamp Exhibition at Seoul.

During its recent meeting at Lisbon, Astro delegates from 16 nations celebrated the anniversary. Beatrice Bachmann is still alive and kicking: While the grand old lady of Astrophilately has sold her Honor Class level collection last summer, she was sharing a vivid account of the very early days that led to the foundation of the Astro Class. During the meeting on the fringe of this year's FIP Congress on 8 October, 80 year old Bachmann remembered her philatelic companions who fought with her for the establishment of new class. With Ben Ramkissoo from the US, who could not come to Lisbon because of old age and failing health, she is the only survivor of that generation of space pioneers. Peter Wilhelm (Germany), Georges Lauwers (Belgium) and Purnendu Gupta (India) have all passed away in recent years.

The celebrative meeting at Lisbon climaxed with a greeting from space. ISS Commander Alexander Skvortsov transmitted pre-recorded wishes to the space collectors. *"From aboard of the International Space Station we would like to send you our best space regards and congratulations. The 24th Expedition to the International Space Station wishes you success in collecting, to enlarge your collections, to improve your exhibits and to get high ranking awards at philatelic exhibitions."*, the 44 year old Colonel of the Russian Air Force told the delegates assembled in the Portuguese capital.

Like few other fields of collecting, astrophilatelists are currently undergoing a generation change. Already two years ago, Russian airline pilot Igor Rodin was elected Chairman of the section, following Spaniard Jose Grandela. **Miri Matejka from Austria supports him as Secretary. In Italy, a new astrophilatelic association, ASITAF, was founded, with the new Italian delegate Umberto Cavallaro serving as President.** And also Spain sent a representative of a new generation: Antoni Rigo from the sunny island of Mallorca.

Astrophilately is a field of documentary philately. Astrophilatelists are documenting space and rocket launches using philatelic covers postmarked on launch day at a nearby post office.

*Jürgen Peter Esders
German delegate to the FIP-Section on Astrophilately*

Image legends:

- Wilhelm Raketenpost: Co-Founder Peter Wilhelm was honored with a rocket mail cover from Austria.
- Hafnia 87 Delegates Meeting:
Four of the founding fathers and mothers of Astrophilately: Ben Ramkissoo (USA), Beatrice Bachmann (Switzerland), Peter Wilhelm (standing, Germany), Georges Lauwers (Belgium). Foto: private
- dcs-2732: Delegates from 16 nations celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Astrophilately during the World Stamp Exhibition at Lisbon, Portugal Foto: Trömmer-Schiltz/FIP