

# Who Really Founded the American Philatelic Society, Theodore F. Cuno or Schuyler B. Bradt?

by Brian J. Birch

## Introduction

It is always gratifying when someone responds to an article I have written, even if the response contests some point of mine. At least it demonstrates that someone other than the editor and I have read the article!

In his article in the 2nd quarter 2013 *Philatelic Literature Review*, “Theodore F. Cuno; Correcting the Story,”<sup>1</sup> Ken Lawrence takes issue with the note under reference 14 of my article that appeared in the 3rd quarter 2012, “Schuyler B. Bradt and the First Philatelic Index.”<sup>2</sup> The note states: “It is now generally accepted that, against a background of general agitation for a national society, this article by Bradt<sup>3</sup> set the ball rolling and led to the formation of the American Philatelic Association (now American Philatelic Society).” Lawrence disagrees with this assertion, saying that he doesn’t know who the people are who have “generally accepted” Bradt’s pre-eminence in the formation of the Association. Furthermore, he points out that it was his research, in which he was aided by Bill Welch and Herb Trenchard, that led the American Philatelic Society in 2005 to officially recognize and reaffirm Theo Cuno as the man most responsible for founding the organization. In wrapping up his article (p. 50), Ken calls Cuno both “the man most responsible for launching this country’s national society for stamp collectors and the founder of America’s most important and successful stamp collector organization, known today as the American Philatelic Society.”

Although my article was not directly related to the founding of the American Philatelic Association, it nevertheless touched on the matter and thereby caused this controversy. It therefore seems incumbent upon me to revisit my original sources to see whether my interpretation is supported by the documentary evidence at hand. I must stress, however, that I had no partiality as to who was most responsible for founding the Society when writing my article, but simply related what I discerned from the literature.

## Histories of the American Philatelic Society

I am aware of three relevant histories of the Society. The earliest, by Oliver Crinkle,<sup>4</sup> appeared in 1905. It was apparently unofficial and published in a relatively obscure paper, *The Stamp-Lovers Weekly*. The second was by William C. Stone<sup>5</sup> in 1912 and the third by Robert L.D. Davidson<sup>6</sup> in 1986. Both were published in *The American Philatelist* as part of the celebrations for the twenty-fifth and one hundredth anniversaries of the Society, respectively.

I also know of the two recent histories of the Society, one of which, originally compiled by Gini Horn,<sup>7</sup> is kept up to date on the Society's website. The other, by Herbert A. Trenchard,<sup>8</sup> was produced in celebration of the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the Society. However, these are essentially timelines of key events and cast no light on the current matter — although Horn does provide an illustration of the initial circular produced by Bradt and his Chicago colleagues.

### Oliver Crinkle

It is not certain what prompted Crinkle to write his history, although he does mention the upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Association in the following year. According to Lois M. Evans,<sup>9,10</sup> who studied the earliest members of the Association, Crinkle was not a member from the beginning and so may not have been writing from first-hand knowledge. Nevertheless, he did produce a quite detailed and even-handed history, remarking about the Association's foundation in 1886

(Chapter I) that “The movement had been launched early in the year — by whom is not quite certain. They will tell you in Chicago that Schuyler B. Bradt set the ball rolling in an article in the *Philatelic Journal of America* proposing such a society and making so strong a plea for its feasibility that the local stamp societies in New York, Chicago and St. Louis forthwith appointed committees to look into the matter and canvas the situation. They will tell you in New York that Theodore F. Cuno was the father of the Association — that he it was who first proposed the project, at meetings of the New York society, and secured the appointment of a committee from that organization, with himself at its head, which secured the co-operation of Western collectors and brought the Association into being. There is some justice in both these claims.”

Crinkle also pointed out that there had been intermittent talk of such a body for some years prior to its formation.

In Chapter III he provides thumbnail sketches of the principal characters involved in the Foundation of the Association. After Charles H. Mekeel, Bradt was said to have been best-known of the founders and is described as the most ardent and energetic Chicago philatelist of his day. Cuno was said to have been very prominent in founding the Association and labored most zealously and earnestly in that endeavor.

All in all, Crinkle gives the honors as more or less even.

## William C. Stone

Stone points out that he was Charter member number 67 of the Association and from 1905–1907 he was President. Evans<sup>9</sup> also notes that Stone died in 1939, having been a member for fifty-two years. He therefore writes from a first-hand knowledge of the founding years and, in addition, he had his own magnificent library to which he could refer.

As to the founding of the Association, he says “The question of who first suggested a national organization of the stamp collectors and dealers of this country will probably never be settled, but to Schuyler B. Bradt, of Chicago, belongs the credit for starting the actual formation of the present body. In the *Philatelic Journal of America* for April, 1886, Mr. Bradt in a two page article vigorously urged the formation of a national body and urged the various local societies and the philatelic press to agitate the subject. This was done to such good effect that a committee on organization was appointed consisting of representatives of the leading local societies.”

Apart from mentioning Cuno as Chairman of the Committee on Organization, Stone is silent on his involvement in the founding of the Association.

## Robert D.L. Davidson

Davidson was then the APS historian and he points out that the 1880s were a time of great philatelic activity, when many local societies were being formed. In his article Davidson writes that “a number of prominent businessmen who had

been attracted to stamp collecting began to discuss the possibility of forming a national organization of philatelists. These discussions were summarized by S. B. Bradt of Grand Crossing, then a Chicago suburb, in an article in the April 1886 issue of the *Philatelic Journal of America*.”

As with Stone’s history, Cuno is nowhere mentioned other than as the Chairman of the organizing committee. Davidson also provides a short note about each of the founders but these cast no additional light on the activities of either Bradt or Cuno.

Stone and Davidson both give the greatest credit for founding the Association to Bradt and say virtually nothing about Cuno.

## The Founding Documents

### *Cuno’s Address:*

Ken evidently lays great store in Cuno’s address to the National Philatelic Society, of March 22, 1886<sup>10</sup> and quotes



from it extensively. Although the text of his speech wasn't published until April, the same month as Bradt's article, it undoubtedly takes precedence over the latter owing to the date of its initial presentation.

According to Cuno, he considered that the National Philatelic Society "was organized for the sole purpose of facilitating to its members the task of acquiring the possible largest number of interesting and valuable stamps..." He then talks about co-operating with those who have stamps to exchange and the opportunity to be "constantly buying quantities of otherwise unattainable stamps, at wholesale prices, and let the members participate in their distribution..."

As for the mechanism by which this plan was to be put into effect, Cuno says "Let us call a public mass meeting of all the philatelists of New York and vicinity. Let us appoint able speakers who will lay our plans before them, calling upon them to form branches of the National Philatelic Society..."

On page 26 of the same magazine are the proceedings of the National Philatelic Society, recording Cuno's address to the seven members who were present and noting that his motion to appoint a committee to make arrangements for a mass meeting was approved. The Society appointed Cuno and Rosenheim to the committee and provided \$10 to allow them to advertise the proposed meeting.

Nowhere in this talk is there mention of a national society or even a new society, just the formation of branches of the local New York society. This is hardly surprising, since Cuno was an

immigrant from Germany where exactly the same scheme had been put in hand by the Internationale Philatelisten-Verein of Dresden.<sup>12</sup> Founded in 1877, it established branches around the world wherever German-speaking collectors gathered. Its great strength was that it allowed German collectors to form a local society even when their numbers were too small to be viable under normal circumstances, by providing them with a parent organization and journal — the excellent *Der Philatelist*. This approach allowed it to become the largest philatelic society in the world towards the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, Crinkle in his first Chapter makes it clear that the initial idea was for the "German plan" or, failing that, a national organization.

#### *Bradt's Article:*

It is known that Bradt was a member of the National Philatelic Society at some stage and so it may well be that he had some knowledge of Cuno's scheme even before it appeared in print. However, Bradt's ideas were quite different from those of Cuno. There could be no doubting what he had in mind since he used the title "A national philatelic organization" and began his article with the assertion that "The subject of forming a National Society, for the purpose of assisting and advancing the cause of Philately, is one that has occupied the Philatelic mind and press, off and on, for a number of years, but at no time, do I think, has it had the chance of being successfully put into operation that the present time affords..."

Here, a new national society is called for, the sole beneficiary of which would be Philately itself. Immediately after

# The Philatelic Journal of America.

VOL. II. No. 2.

APRIL, 1886.

WHOLE No. 14.

## A NATIONAL PHILATELICAL ORGANIZATION.

The subject of forming a National Society, for the purpose of assisting and advancing the cause of Philately, is one that has occupied the Philatelic mind and press, old and new, for a number of years. But at no time, so I think, has it had the chance of being successfully put into operation that the present time affords, when there seems to be a deep-rooted interest displayed in the collection of our favorites, and when we have several really good papers devoted exclusively to our interests, ready to champion any movement that tends to advance Philately.

And why should we not have a national organization, and a grand one, too? Is not this country large enough to admit of it? Are there not enough collectors in this country to support such an organization? It would be utterly folly, you say, to answer No. to either of these questions. But, the fact remains that we have no kind of organization at all—hardly any assistance as a recognized class, even—and that, too, in spite of the fact that efforts have been made in the past to effect this result.

Now what is the reason for this apathy on the part of American Philatelists? It would seem that either there were not enough of us to form a union—or we claim a hundred thousand followers; or that stamp collecting, *per se*, was not of sufficient moment to warrant it—although our English, French, German, and other fellow collectors across the pond, seem to think it well worth their study; or possibly, we have never taken the right steps toward a proper organization in this country and have thereby failed to accomplish, up to this time, this greatly to be desired result.

I do not want to cast any reflections upon the promoters of previous efforts in this direction,—far from it, for they certainly deserve all possible credit for their endeavors. Nevertheless, I cannot but think that if this self-same subject be

taken up to-day and pushed not and unceasingly through the months it will result in effecting a that will give Philately such a "boom" this country as she has not felt for first place, at the societies of our fellow brethren; they are benefiting their boys and the cause in a manner plain enough to be seen, they bend yate our hobby to the position to which is entitled, and it is common for attention of such as have time to the pursuit made up of pleasure and research, requiring keen observation and a retentive memory.

It is very likely that in our efforts organization, we shall meet with who will scoff at the idea of a union, or at least fail to recognize benefits that might be derived from We must expect to meet many doubters; in fact, the majority of ideas are quite likely to reject the idea we have presented, and we are prepared to convince those of the value. Now what are the probable targets to secure from a national organization? In the first place we the general principle of the strong united effort. This law universally mind as to require no special code it applies to everything else, so as to Philately? Under the present affairs one collector knows very little what his fellows are doing, and this is galled from the stamp paper; pers, he may take, or from the local of which he is a member. In the of an national society being formed, would be drawn asser together by hands of the society,—by means of responsible among themselves—and an item of news would find its way circulation that would otherwise have lost.

There is a large class of Philatelists who have attained considerable knowledge and experience, but who cannot

## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PHILATELISTS.

THE subject of effecting a union of stamp collectors that shall embrace every collector throughout the land who may desire to become a member of such an organization is, at the present time, receiving considerable attention from collectors generally. With the idea of promoting this movement the Chicago Stamp Collectors' Union take this method of presenting a few of the reasons advanced, at its last meeting, in favor of a National Philatelic Society.

First.—In union there is strength," and in the matter of stamp collecting it will be found that the old adage holds just as good as ever if did in another case.

Second.—A national organization will give Philatelists a national recognition as a large and ever increasing class who recognize in the postage stamp an object worthy their attention and study; and such recognition will have a tendency to add realism to our ranks, as well as to strengthen those already in.

Third.—It will bring forth much valuable information that is now withheld, by promoting a more friendly intercourse between collectors, and permitting a free interchange of ideas and opinions.

Fourth.—It will be able to cope with and hold in check the dealers in counterfeit stamps, who are now the pests of collectors.

Fifth.—It will enable collectors, by combining, to purchase their stamps at a considerably lower rate than they now can, while at the same time it will greatly aid in the exchange of duplicates.

Sixth.—While England and the continental countries have well organized societies, the Philatelists of this great land are without any sort of national organization to guide and direct them. If for no other reason than that our fellow collectors across the water are so successfully organized and we dislike to be outdone in such matters, should we not at this time make an earnest effort to effect a National Philatelic Organization?

S. H. BRADY, | Committee on  
O. S. HELLWIG, | National  
R. R. SHUMAN, | Organization.

Chicago, April 19th, 1886.

The C. S. C. U. will be glad to hear from any Philatelists who, after reading the above, feel sufficient interest in the subject to aid in the establishment of such a union. It is to be hoped that all the advocates of stamp collecting, whose attention may have been drawn toward this appeal, will send in their names to the committee, thereby giving it the assistance that fellowship implies, and helping it to ascertain the number of collectors there are who possess enough interest in Philately to assist in placing it, in this country, on as high a plane as it occupies abroad.

Address communication to the chairman of the committee, S. H. Brady, Grand Crossing, Ill.; or to O. S. Hellwig, 411 Royal Inn. Bldg., Chicago.

having published the article, Bradt, backed by the Chicago Stamp Collectors Union, issued a circular on April 19th calling for prospective members to register their interest. According to a report in *The Philatelic Gazette*,<sup>13</sup> Cuno rushed over to see Bradt and reserve his place on the organizing committee. With the backing of the National Philatelic Society, which could place a room at the committee's disposal and had already provided some money for advertising, it is easy to see how Cuno could be made Chairman, with the first committee meeting being held in New York.

## The Proposals for a New Society

The organizing committee was kept deliberately small and comprised the

following members:

Theodore F. Cuno, representing New York

Schuyler B. Bradt, representing Chicago

George Henderson, representing Philadelphia

Charles H. Mekeel, representing St. Louis

W. G. Whilden Jr., representing Boston, but living in Atlanta, Georgia

It is notable that, with the exception of Cuno, the committee members were all delegates of the most important society in the city they represented.

We are fortunate that Davidson's history included an illustration of the circular put out by the committee following its first meeting, and Cuno's

influence is easy to detect. First, the name of the proposed society is none other than the National Philatelic Society — the name of his own society. Second, the main objectives of the new society included “facilitating the exchange of duplicates (through a bureau of exchanges); and obtaining new issues at cost price.” It is evident that he was still battling to have as much as possible of his own plan adopted.

Stone makes it clear that the debate over the new society’s name caused considerable discussion. In the event, no part of the name of the New York society was adopted. It is, however, easy to see, as Ken makes clear in his articles, why Cuno was ideal for the role of the Association’s first Purchasing Agent.

## Conclusions

There is no doubt whatsoever that Cuno’s vision, as detailed in his address to the New York Society, was for a greater National Philatelic Society with branches everywhere — in other words, a society based on the Internationale Philatelisten-Verein model. Also, the rationale he gave for this was to enable him and other collectors to obtain stamps for their collections at the lowest possible cost.

Bradt, on the other hand, called for a completely new national society, to be established purely in the best interests of the hobby in America — a markedly different view.

On the basis of their published papers, there is no doubt in my mind that Bradt’s idea was the direct precursor of the American Philatelic Association and that, seeing his ideas being over-

taken, Cuno simply fell in with Bradt to ensure that as many as possible of his ideas were included.

However, as Ken points out on page 144 of his article, in May 1887 Bradt<sup>14</sup> seemingly gave all of the credit for the impetus behind the founding of the Association to Cuno saying, “It is but little more than a year since Mr. Theo F. Cuno, of Brooklyn, N.Y., read a paper before the New York Society treating on the benefits to be derived from a union of the widely separated philatelists of America into a national association. Portions of this essay were published in the various philatelic journals, and through such publication came under the observation of the Chicago Society and revived therein an almost smothered attempt, made over a year previously, in the same direction. But a short time elapsed before these two societies combined their efforts and, other societies and the press lending their aid, produced the result now so well known, and of which we are so justly proud, the AMERICAN PHILATELIC ASSOCIATION.”

Looking at the first sentence, this is all very correct as far as it goes; however, it fails to point out that the national association proposed was the existing National Philatelic Society, nor did it mention that by far the greatest anticipated benefit was in enhancing the collections of the members.

Regarding the next sentence, that surely can not be correct as it asks us to believe that, having read Cuno’s address of March 22nd in the papers, such as the April edition of *The Empire State Philatelist*, the Chicago Society discussed the matter, created a Committee

NEW YORK, }  
CHICAGO, } June 25, 1886.  
ATLANTA, }

*To the Philatelists of the United States :*

The project of establishing a National Philatelic Society has now been the leading subject with philatelists, philatelic societies, and the philatelic press for a sufficient length of time, and has received enough emphatic and hearty indorsement from leading philatelists, to warrant an effort being made at organization. In order to bring about this result without delay, a National Committee, consisting of the persons whose names are affixed to this circular, has been formed, to undertake the first efforts in this direction, and to take the steps necessary for organizing at as early a day as may be expedient.

The objects we are striving for through the medium of a National Society are the promotion and advancement of Stamp Collecting in all its branches; the dissemination of philatelic knowledge; facilitating the exchange of duplicates (through a bureau of exchanges); and obtaining new issues at cost price.

There is no reason why philatelists in this country should not have as successful a society, with a complete international correspondence, as any of those that are now flourishing in other lands; on the contrary, there is every reason to look forward to a grand organization that shall eclipse them all. It is only a question of time and united effort, and if you will seize upon the present favorable opportunity, and work together, this year will yet witness the organization of a society that any philatelist will be proud to be a member of.

We desire the aid of every philatelist in the land, and would strongly urge the formation of local societies in every community where six philatelists can be brought together. Let every society communicate with the member of this committee who is most convenient to it; and let every individual philatelist, who is not connected with any society, do the same. In this way we will soon be able to ascertain how many, and who, are willing to unite with us. And we would, furthermore, urge the desirability of doing this *at once*; it is not a question that requires a great amount of time for consideration, but one that needs your prompt and earnest action.

We trust that the philatelists to whom this appeal is sent will extend us their aid and support by forwarding their names without delay for enrollment on our list of prospective members.

THEO. F. CUNO (N. P. S. of New York),  
*148 Jefferson Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.*

S. B. BRADT (Chicago S. C. U.),  
*Grand Crossing, Ill.*

W. G. WHILDEN, JR.,  
*93 Washington St., Atlanta, Ga.*

on National Organization, authorized Bradt to publish their response in such short time that it managed to get in the April edition of the *Philatelic Journal of America* and published a Circular calling for interested parties to make themselves known, by April 19th. Also, it should be noted that Bradt's original article makes no mention of Cuno or his address, and carries none of the points made by Cuno. It is interesting to note, however, that the circular does mention as its fifth point Cuno's objective of purchasing stamps cheaply and of exchanging duplicates. This would lead me to think that Bradt's article was produced first, possibly without knowledge of the contents Cuno's address, and the Circular prepared later, once Cuno's address had been received.

As for why the beginning of the article was published in these terms, is it possible that Bradt had forgotten the contents of the two articles so soon — rather doubtful. Could it be that in those difficult times, he sought to bolster the position of the Association's embattled Purchasing Agent while at the same time pouring oil on the troubled waters of the Association, in concert with President Tiffany's efforts to sooth the various factions — a distinct possibility. Alternatively, could it simply be that it was a good story to lead off an article designed to advertise the Association and gain new recruits by demonstrating its unity and democratic origins, rather than by saying I did this, I did that, and I the other — definitely my favorite.

## Final Note

Ken makes much of Cuno's membership number: "In honor of his vision and his service, Cuno became member number 1 of the APA..." That being the case, it is surprising that this is not mentioned in any of the histories. Also, what are we to make of the fact that the other four members of the organizing committee were allocated numbers as follows:

Schuyler B. Bradt — Number 5

George Henderson — Never seems to have joined the Association

Charles H. Mekeel — Number 62

W. G. Whilden Jr. — Number 17

Even Tiffany, who was respected on all sides and elected first President, only rated number 9.

Until some documentary evidence is unearthed confirming Cuno's honor, I suspect that the numbers were simply allocated by Secretary Bradt as he saw fit. This view seems to be confirmed by the data from the Treasurer's files, still held by the APS and published by Evans.<sup>9</sup> From the dates when payments were sent in batches from the Secretary to the Treasurer, it would appear that seven subscriptions were received by the Treasurer on September 14, 1886. With one exception, that of C. S. S. Miller, these were allocated numbers 1 to 7 by Bradt. Thus, Cuno had a one in seven chance of receiving membership number 1.

The situation relating to Miller is quite interesting. It would appear that, as one of the first batch, he was initially allocated membership number 6, but when Philip M. Wolsieffer, Bradt's good friend, paid his dues on October 21st, a zero was added to Miller's number and

Wolsieffer was moved up to number 6.

Ken also reads a conspiracy into Cuno's being dropped from the Association: "In the fall of 1888, Cuno experienced financial difficulty. When his name appeared on the APA's 'unpaid dues' list in April 1889, his adversaries hastened to drop him from the membership roll, and then spurned his request for reinstatement." I can find no confirmation of the second part of this statement. Evans simply notes that Cuno was one of twenty-four Charter members dropped in 1889 for non-payment of their dues, with no indication that Cuno was treated in any way differently from the others. There is also no suggestion that he was prevented from re-joining the Association. Indeed, Davidson notes on page 34 that Cuno re-joined a decade after being dropped and that the Convention of the day voted to restore his original membership number, Tiffany having died in the intervening period. If Davidson is correct, it was quite superfluous for the Board of Vice Presidents to have restored membership number 1 to Cuno, posthumously.

#### References

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12. Wolfgang Maassen, *Philatelie und Vereine im 19. Jahrhundert*, Phil\*Creativ Verlag, Schwalmatal, Germany, 2006, pp. 335–363.
13. *The Philatelic Gazette*, Vol. 5, Whole No. 50, (October 1888): 18.
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