

Electronic Media

Wikipedia Philately Projects

January 15 will mark seven years since entrepreneur Jimmy Wales launched the English-language Wikipedia, described as a “free encyclopedia that anyone can edit.” Wales originally founded Nupedia, an online, public-domain encyclopedia that strove for “a quality comparable to that of professional encyclopedias.” Editors were required to hold a Ph.D. and be *accomplished scholars*.¹ Frustrated by obtaining only 24 articles in three years, Wales debuted Wikipedia as an auxiliary *feeder* site. The idea was for the public to create drafts which professional editors would fact-check, polish, and publish on Nupedia. More than 40,000 articles were created in the first 18 months. Unable to keep up, professional editing was abandoned and Nupedia disappeared by September 2003.² Wikipedia has since become the ninth most-often consulted Web site in the world.³

Although *stamp collecting* and *philately* articles appeared on Wikipedia by fall 2001, content grew slowly until 2003 when specialty articles began to appear; among the first were *plate number coils*, *postal stationery*, and *first day covers*. An explosion followed, due in part to the WikiProject Philately. Today there are several hundred articles on the site. This review assesses two collaborations aimed at improving quality and organization.

WikiProject Philately

[HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/WIKIPEDIA:WIKIPROJECT_PHILATELY](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:WikiProject_Philately)

More than 200 entries are *stubs*,⁴ defined as “an article containing only a few sentences of text which is too short to provide encyclopedic coverage of a subject.”⁵ Longer pieces are often uneven in quality, even on basic subjects.

To remedy the situation, several philatelists banded together circa 2003 in WikiProject Philately, a collaborative effort to improve the general quality of philatelic writing on Wikipedia. They do this by identifying topics that need an initial author and creating to-do lists of existing articles needing revision or illustration. To give philately greater visibility, they began picking an article and concentrate on developing it until it is a candidate for *featured article* status.

The project is meeting with some success. The first philatelic article chosen as a feature by Wikipedia was *Postage Stamps of Ireland* on August 14. Featured articles are linked directly from Wikipedia's home page for one day after being chosen as one of the site's best articles after a review by its editors. According to the site, only one in 1,240 articles on the site has attained this status.⁶ The WikiProject has identified *postal history* and *aerophilately* as the next two entries to be groomed for featured status. Postal history is making progress, but no new edits to aerophilately have been made in more than six months.

There are still many issues for the volunteer editors to address, one of the most important being encouraging responsible use of copyrighted text and images. On visiting the entry for *Postage Stamps and Postal History of Vatican City*, I found large chunks of text that I wrote for the Vatican Philatelic Society's Web site copied and pasted without a footnote or other credit.⁷ One member of the philately WikiProject includes on his to-do list the cryptic entry “APS philatelist bios,” which hopefully does not portend wholesale cutting-and-pasting from the APS Hall of Fame Web site.



Images are even more problematic. For example, a number of contributors take the position, that any image of a U.S. stamp printed before 1978 is public domain because the stamps are federal government works. This is generally true, but applies only to the stamp itself and not necessarily to images of it. The difference becomes important where images of well-known and individually identifiable subjects are involved, such as the unique one-cent Z-grill belonging to the New York Public Library's Benjamin K. Miller collection. The library also owns images created of it. Images of the inverted Jenny, which has been plated to the extent that each copy is singly identifiable, could lead owners of the individual position to claim they also own the rights to images of their particular copy. Others might be able to use them by claiming fair use, but this is very different from asserting they are public domain.⁸

WikiPortal Philately

[HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/PORTAL:PHILATELY](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Philately)

The idea behind Portals, which debuted in early 2005, is to provide a convenient entry point into articles about related subjects. Its function is a sort of index to these articles, which the user would otherwise have to find via a search engine, through a hyperlink embedded in another article, or by browsing through *categories*. The problem with the category approach is that Wikipedia contains thousands of them listed alphabetically, so hunting and pecking for the philatelic ones is a chore.

Portals were introduced to the English-language Wikipedia site in early 2005, and the philately Wikiportal was among the very earliest. It was established on April 3, 2005 by Adrian Mastronardi. Among Mastronardi's other online activities is the Digital Philatelic Literature Project, a collaboration with Project Gutenberg to digitize public domain philatelic monographs and place them online.⁹ Mastronardi appears to have stopped maintaining the site in about July 2006, but the orphaned portal was adopted by Karl Winkelmann, a philatelist who maintains Web

sites for the Éire Philatelic Association as well as several specialist societies in military and censored mail.¹⁰

The WikiPortal has sections labeled *New Articles* and *Expanded Articles* designed to provide convenient links to the most recent content. Someone needs to add the links to these sections manually, as it is not automatically populated. The result is that many new and expanded philatelic entries probably don't actually show up there. There is also a "Stamp of the Month" feature, but this appears not to have been changed since about June 2007, when the Hawaiian Missionaries were selected.

Conclusions

The challenges of maintaining standards in an open source project such as Wikipedia are multifold, as has been shown by several recent scandals involving inaccurate information posted to the site. The two philatelic projects are attempting to keep Wikipedia's philatelic nose clean with much success. However, the online encyclopedia's philatelic content is neither broad nor deep, and its policy against including original research in articles means that for the foreseeable future, hard copy publications and society journals will remain the best source for comprehensive philatelic knowledge.

— Daniel A. Piazza

All World Wide Web sites listed in these references were accessed on October 17, 2007.

Texas Postal History Journal CD-ROM

Texas Postal History Society Journal Index of Volumes 1 through 31 / Images of all issues — Volumes 1 through 31 / 1975–2006, compiled by Richard H. Byrne, Mike Ludeman, and Lyle Boardman. CD-ROM. ©2007 Texas Postal History Society. \$25 postpaid for members and \$43 for non-members, which includes a one-year membership in TPHS and journal subscription. Order from Lyle Boardman, 3916 Wyldwood, Austin, TX 78739-3005; LCBOARDMAN@AOL.COM.

From the title it might be assumed that this is primarily an index, but nothing could be farther from the truth. However, the extensive index in both Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat (PDF) formats, makes the disk much more user friendly. 80-page document is divided into a subject index (63 pages) and an author index (17 pages), and also lists all the journal editors. One wishes that the entries were hyperlinked to the specific articles, although this would be a labor-intensive project. Page format is 8½ × 11-inches.

Except for the Word index and two maps, all the data is provided in PDF, which allows users to easily print out pages for hard copy reference. The disk includes a Texas counties map, an 1836 state map, and a 1900 railroad map, the two latter maps being in image formats that require users to have a graphics viewer or editor. In addition to the index, maps, and individual issues, there are also listings of the Dr. William H. P. Emery Awards for Texas postal history exhibits and society rosters for 2005 and 2006.

The core of the project is a complete set of journals. Here is where the divide between the journals of yesteryear and the journals of today — not merely the Texas journal, but all journals — becomes readily apparent. The first 29 volumes of the Texas Post-

¹ *Nupedia*, [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/NUPEDIA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nupedia)

² *History of Wikipedia*, [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/HISTORY_OF_WIKIPEDIA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia)

³ Exceeded by Yahoo!, Facebook, Google, and Youtube, among others. See Alexa Internet Web traffic statistics, [WWW.ALEXA.COM/DATA/DETAILS/TRAFFIC_DETAILS?URL=WIKIPEDIA.ORG.](http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?url=wikipedia.org)

⁴ *Category: Post and Philately Stubs*, [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/CATEGORY:POST_AND_PHILATELY_STUBS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Post_and_Philately_Stubs)

⁵ *Wikipedia: Stub*, [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/WIKIPEDIA:STUB](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Stub)

⁶ *Wikipedia: Featured Articles*, [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/WIKIPEDIA:FEATURED_ARTICLES](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_Articles)

⁷ [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/POSTAGE_STAMPS_AND_POSTAL_HISTORY_OF_VATICAN_CITY](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postage_stamps_and_postal_history_of_Vatican_City). The most egregious plagiarism is the entire paragraph that begins: "Much, but by no means all ..."

⁸ The library's Z-Grill is displayed at [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/Z_GRILL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Z_Grill), while the National Postal Museum's Inverted Jenny is shown at [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/INVERTED_JENNY](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inverted_Jenny). Clicking on either image brings up the following tag, appended by the user who uploaded the image: "This image of a postage stamp has been released into the public domain by the copyright holder, its copyright has expired, or it is ineligible for copyright. This applies worldwide."

⁹ [HTTP://TPDLR.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://tpdlr.blogspot.com)

¹⁰ [HTTP://EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/USER:WW2CENSOR](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Ww2censor)

al History Society Journal were typed and photocopied. Beginning with Volume 30, it has been printed in color in magazine format by TPHS member Norman Cohen of Dallas. The current editor, Tom Koch, has done a wonderful job of transitioning the publication from a bland black and white (read: gray) journal to a color format that is equally suitable for print or online presentation.



The biggest drawback of the pre-color issues is that they are merely images of the pages in PDF format, meaning they are not searchable. It is possible to create a composite PDF document with searchable text embedded beneath the page image, but this is also labor intensive. Volumes 30 and 31 are true PDF files, meaning they are fully searchable. There is limited linking, mostly for e-mail addresses and some Web sites — a function built into the PDF creator. However, page jumps and references to other issues are not.

This project should encourage other publications to follow suit. When pages are generated for the printer, it is an easy task to create a high-resolution PDF for future use, including delivery on CD-ROM. It is the only nearly bulletproof method of archiving files that are not subject to the vagaries of software and hardware developers, where what works today may not work tomorrow.

It is hoped that the Texas society will offer annual or biennial updates to this disk.

— Albert W. Starkweather