

Robert Dalton Harris, 2005 inductee in the Writers Unit Hall of Fame

Our inductee into the Writers Unit Hall of Fame has been a stamp collector for more than 55 years, having begun at age 5 while in a hospital for polio. His mother challenged him to collect as many stamps as she had in her album, a collection that she had formed with the help of a Panama Canal engineer. At 7, Robert Dalton Harris had collected 1,218 stamps and his mother gave him her collection. By his college years at Stanford University, he had limited his collecting to pre-1920, but worldwide. After finishing his physics degree in 1965, Rob moved into postal history and postal stationery, neither yet very popular. His first article appeared in *Stamps* magazine in 1968 and, by 1971, he had published about a dozen articles, several in *The American Philatelist*. That year, his article, "The First Postal Card," was published in *The American Philatelic Congress Book*, complete with three "Frequency against Time" graphs of postal card usage that, while unusual in philately, were second nature to a newly minted Ph.D. from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Since the 1970s, Rob has written a variety of postal history and other philatelic articles for myriad periodicals, including not only the *AP* and *Congress Books*, but also the *SPA Journal*, *Scott Stamp Monthly*, *U.S. Stamps & Postal History*, COMPEX programs, and even his local newspapers. Early on, Rob co-founded the philatelic and antiquarian business known as aGatherin'; he is a charter member of the Ephemera Society of America, a former editor of the *Ephemera Journal*, and an organizer of numerous ephemera symposia and exhibitions, many of philatelic interest.

In 1979, Rob and his wife in business and scholarship, Diane DeBlois, revived the quarterly journal, *Post Script*, later called *P.S. A Quarterly Journal of Postal History*, begun by Rob in 1977, which they then co-authored and co-edited for 15 years in total. *P.S.* was a rich stew: original research that obviously was philatelic in significance; original research that was of interest to philately only if one followed the ways in which Rob and Diane were attempting to broaden what could be and should be of interest to philatelists; book reviews; reprinted rare documents and book excerpts; photographs of fascinating and rare items; and more. Shortly after discontinuing *P.S.*, Rob was a regular contributor to the *Postal History Journal*, which he and Diane now co-edit. For eight years, from September 1996 until last summer, Rob and Diane wrote a monthly column about philatelic ephemera for *Stamp Collector*; from January 1998 until today, they have written longer pieces for *U.S. Stamp News*.

Robert Dalton Harris also has edited the Series of Primary Sources volumes published by The Printer's Stone, written the telegraph section of the *Stampless Cover Catalog*, and, with Diane, wrote *An Atlantic Telegraph: The Transcendental Cable* (1994). Rob's knowledge of postal history, telegraphs, and their intersections is well-known and sought out, from non-philatelists postal historian Richard John as he researches telegraph history, to George Kramer and Richard Frajola writing a book about the Pony Express. Last year, Rob's work continued to be recognized in an international and interdisciplinary fashion as two papers presented in Europe, one on postal networks and the other on the Wiener Rohrpost, were slated to be published by the Business History Association and the French Post Office, respectively. Today, the Writers Unit recognizes Robert Dalton Harris as a researcher and writer who is not only a postal historian in every sense of that term, including focusing on postal history's technology and political economy, but also essentially philately's leading anthropologist and cultural studies scholar.