Crowdsourcing at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum

*Arago* Researcher Program
What is Arago?

www.arago.si.edu
Arago Researcher Program

• Program Description
  – Volunteer researcher program
  – Experts around the world
  – Online means of managing assignments & communication, 24/7

• Program Goals
  – Enhance & expand information in collections records
  – Capture knowledge of subject specialists
  – Establish mutually beneficial relationships/community

Welcome to the Volunteer Arago Researcher Program

Do you have specialized knowledge in philately or postal operations?
Do you want to share your expertise with the general public and other specialists?

Help the National Postal Museum in presenting our collection to the public by joining the volunteer Arago Researcher Program. Learn more about this Volunteer Researcher Program [here].

Researcher Qualifications

Required
  • Expert knowledge in a specific area of philately or postal history.
  • Recommendations from authoritative experts or organizations.
  • Desire and willingness to share knowledge.

Preferred
  • Written or published demonstration of expert knowledge.
  • Skills and demonstrated knowledge are current.
  • Bibliography of reference sources related to your area of expertise.

Apply Here!

Registration Process

Upon receiving approval from NPMA staff:

1. Compose an online Researcher Biography.
3. Complete the required Smithsonian BVP Volunteer Registration Form. (Print and submit form via fax or mail to the Arago Researcher Coordinator.)
4. Review the following Program Documents.
Who are the volunteers?

- **Arago Researchers**
  - Philatelists
  - Historians
  - Local, national, international

- **Selection Process**
  - Application
  - Solicited or by open invitation
  - Vetted by curatorial staff

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Application Form

Thank you for your interest in the volunteer Arago Researcher Program! Please complete the following form, and click 'Submit' to apply. Museum staff will notify applicants of subsequent approval.

For your records, please save your content prior to clicking 'Submit'.

Applicant Information:

- Name:
- Street Address:
- City:
- State:
- Postal Code:
- Country:
- Telephone:
- E-mail Address:

Specialty studies (Philately, Postal History or Topical Study):

- United States: [ ] pre-19th C [ ] 19th C [ ] 20th C
- International: [ ] pre-19th C [ ] 19th C [ ] 20th C

Area(s) of expertise:

Countries:

Other Evidence: (Please submit documents that demonstrate additional qualifications. Examples include a CV, resume, bibliography of reference sources, etc. Prepare text in a word document, then cut and paste in text box.)

Referred to program by:
Currently this category does not have an overview narrative description. As part of the on-going additions to Arago™ the National Postal Museum works with an international, online audience of philatelists, historians, educators and students to supplement the existing collections information. The museum offers an open invitation to specialists to continue making Arago™ a critical online resource. Please visit again in the future!
Arago Researcher Tools

- View assignment information
- Submit narrative
- Communicate
- All Digital Transfers
Results

• Worldwide volunteer network established
• Expertise in all areas of collection
• 160 researchers in program
• Researchers responsible for 75% of stories published on Arago
• Adding approximately 1,000 new objects each year
Quality Control

• Establishing expectations
  – Style Guide
  – Handbook
  – Researcher Tools Guide

• Editors
  – Content (often curators)
  – Copy

• Arago is NOT open source information sharing and retrieval – it’s a closed system
What Works

• Research supplements and expands NPM’s knowledge base
• Leads to more complete object records
• Collaborative effort- creates a special community
• Increases scholarship
What Doesn’t

• Limitations of publishing
  o What if we can’t find researchers for objects we want to publish?
• Consistency of content
• Website navigation not intuitive/ User frustration
• Proprietary software
Recommendations

• The researcher program can be scaled down for use at a smaller institution
• Program works best when there’s already an established community
• Staff buy-in
• Workload
• Funding