

RAMSEY COUNTY

# History

*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*

A Farmer's Fair:  
The Birth  
of the Ramsey County Fair  
*James Lindner*

—Page 11

Spring 2014

Volume 49, Number 1

## *Neither Posters Nor Stamps:* Poster Stamp Advertising in St. Paul

*Leo J. Harris, page 3*



*"Poster Stamps" promoted the wide range of poster stamps printed by Brown Treacy & Sperry Company in St. Paul in the first decades of the twentieth century. A related printing company, the Harvey Blodgett Company, used a poster stamp to highlight its marketing of poster stamps to merchants. This particular poster stamp features a bill poster in overalls examining a poster stamp under his magnifying glass. The Brown Treacy & Sperry stamp is courtesy of Robert Bradbury and the Harvey Blodgett stamp is courtesy of Leo J. Harris.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 49, Number 1

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations  
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program  
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Colorful and quirky—those adjectives could describe several articles in this issue. Lovely poster stamps advertised St. Paul businesses in the early part of the twentieth century. Leo Harris gives us a tour of this nearly forgotten art form, which was produced by several respected St. Paul printing establishments. It's a great illustrated read. Steve Trimble has provided us with Mike Sanchelli's vivid remembrances of the Italian community in Swede Hollow, where poverty coexisted with a great neighborhood spirit. He recounts his father's vivid rendition of "America, the Beautiful," which rang out every Sunday night from the bridge over Phalen Creek and signaled bedtime for the children playing outside. And Janice Quick reminds us that even in the 1920s, police were on the alert for cars without lights sitting in city parks after dark, which could mean (gasp!) covert affectionate activity. It's unclear whether such activity also occurred at the Ramsey County Fair, whose White Bear Lake origins James Linder traces for us in another article. But we know that a circus performed there, complete with trapeze artists. Ramsey County has always had its share of fun!

*Anne Cowie,*  
Chair, Editorial Board

# Neither Posters Nor Stamps: Poster Stamp Advertising in St. Paul

Leo J. Harris

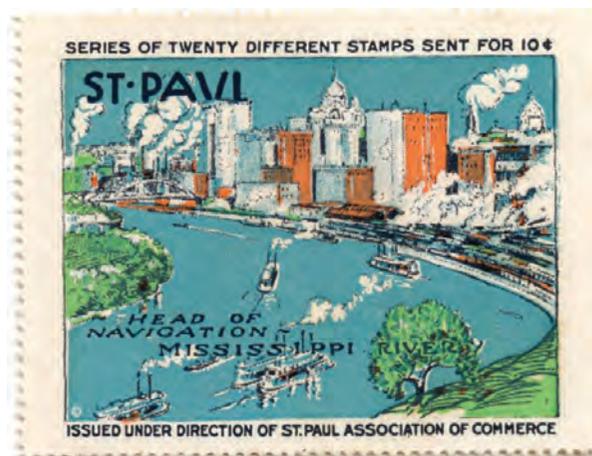
If you were a retail merchant in St. Paul during the 1860s, you probably would have advertised your products or services by word of mouth, or perhaps by signs placed in your store window, or perhaps even with a short message painted on an exterior wall of your store. During the 1870s you might well have expanded your business by using small newspaper advertisements, some of which had simple marginal ornamentation. As the chromolithographic printing process became common among St. Paul printers during the early 1880s, trade cards, usually printed on coated cardboard became common. The front side of these cards had attractive four-color images, while the rear side had a printed message. They were given to customers to advertise the products and services of that merchant.<sup>1</sup> The chromolithographic printing process was also used in the final decades of the nineteenth century for the printing of large, colorful posters. These posters often advertised sporting events and other public activities, such as traveling circuses. As the twentieth century arrived, advertising formats included other devices such as billboards, railroad and streetcar posters, window cards, hangers, newspaper print advertising, and letter inserts. Finally, in the second decade of the twentieth century, this St. Paul merchant would also utilize poster stamps for advertising.

Poster stamps were neither posters nor stamps but are related to both. Printed in sheets of various sizes that were then gummed and perforated, poster stamps became, as did trade cards, an early form of collectible advertising. Poster stamps were distributed by the millions, cost next to nothing, and reached a huge audience of prospective buyers. Poster stamps presented in miniature what large billboards, located on public streets and roadways, offered to the public. They were attached to the merchant's packages, letters, envelopes, catalogues, and price lists. Eventually they were placed in albums of collectors.<sup>2</sup>

This, then, is the story of poster stamps, many of which were designed and printed in St. Paul, and many of which were distributed by St. Paul merchants for nearly a half century.

## The Theory and Practice of Poster Stamps

What made poster stamps so useful to merchants? The poster stamp as an adver-

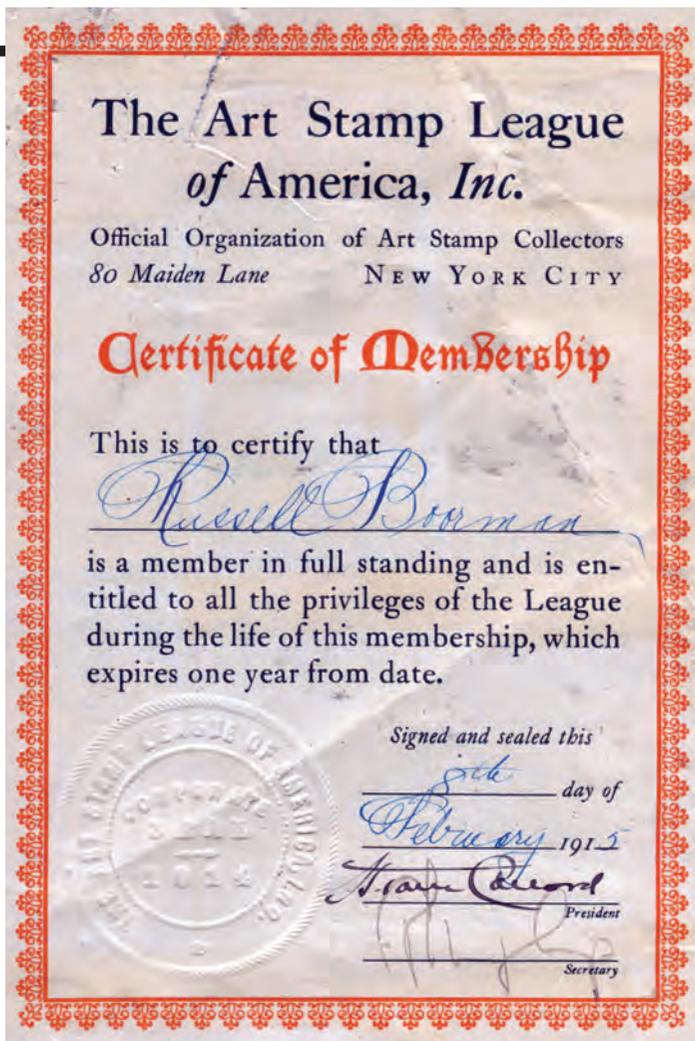


The St. Paul Association of Commerce, which was the predecessor of today's Chamber of Commerce, issued a series of twenty poster stamps featuring a variety of buildings, scenes, and industries that promoted the city. Poster stamp courtesy of Leo J. Harris.



This poster stamp used a stock background of an elegantly clad woman and a distinctive breed of dog to advertise the Schuneman & Evans Department Store in St. Paul. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.

tising device has been carefully considered by recent scholars. According to historian Rachael Huener, "they comprised . . . a largely unprecedented social space within which producers and consumers shared and developed fictions concerning products and consumerism. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Poster stamps were one of the first predominantly visual forms of advertising. They moved from marginal ornamentation of a textual message in published media to modern product advertising. The latter seeks to persuade the consumer not primarily through product information, but through a far more effective means: displaying a picture of the item concerned. The costs, through time, of printing these stamps dropped considerably, and the chromolithographic technique improved to the point that detailed,



In 1915 the largest and earliest poster stamp collectors club issued this certificate of membership. Certificate courtesy of Paul Hempel.

elaborate, and varied designs were able to be produced in miniature.

Poster stamp advertising was considered one of the least expensive and most successful methods of early advertising, since the space it advertised did not have to be purchased. As with the advertising matchbook, poster stamps were an efficient, cost-effective means of reaching a wide audience with an aesthetic approach. Where other methods of salesmanship were less than successful, such as the door-to-door salesman, these stamps effortlessly entered the front doors of most American homes. Producers of consumer goods or services in this time period were well aware of the buying power of the female consumer. Day-to-day purchases for the family household were customarily done by women so many of the stamp designs were crafted to appeal to this particular audience.

Poster stamps were specifically created to market the products or services

of a particular merchant or, alternatively, a poster stamp was designed with a pleasing generic image and was used to advertise a multitude of products and services. In the latter instances, the names of the merchants were simply inserted in a blank field located at the base of the poster stamp. The importance of advertising poster stamps probably should not be overstated. For example, the book *Advertising in America: The First Two Hundred Years*, displays 566 illustrations of advertisements, including many trade cards, but does not show a single poster stamp.<sup>4</sup>

Poster stamps should not be confused with charity seals, such as those for Christmas or Easter, which made their debut in the first decade of the twentieth century. Their intended use was charitable rather than mercantile. Like poster stamps, Christmas seals were widely collected. In addition, poster stamps should not be confused with trading stamps. The

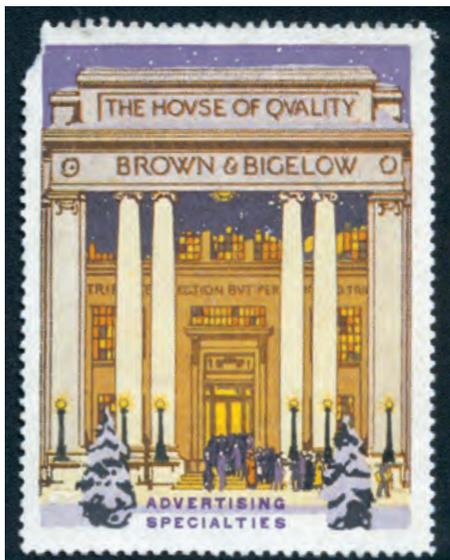
latter were rather small, gummed and perforated as well, and were handed out by merchants. They were then placed in simple, small booklets, and were redeemed by the consumer for merchandise at the premises of the issuing company. This particular marketing tool lasted for nearly 100 years.<sup>5</sup>

Other organizations besides merchants who wanted to get their message out found poster stamps to be useful advertising tools. In the early twentieth century, for example, sellers of passenger-friendly means of transportation, including railroads, bicycle manufacturers, and automobile companies, created poster stamps. The growing popularity of travel to state and national parks also provided ways in which a variety of poster stamps could be used to advertise these destinations. States, cities, and educational institutions used poster stamps. And, finally, patriotic poster stamps appeared during both World Wars.

By the early 1920s, modern advertising began to shift its focus from promoting the merits of a product to advertising the lifestyle advantages to the consumer from buying an advertised product or service. Soon thereafter, widely distributed popular magazines and, as a mass medium in the 1930s, radio also overtook poster stamps as an advertising medium. Nevertheless, the production and collecting of poster stamps has continued, sporadically, to the present day.

### Poster Stamps as Collectible Ephemera

The originally intended user of poster stamps was the merchant who produced particular goods or services, but at the peak of their popularity a new category of users emerged. These were the collectors of poster stamps. They traded them, or purchased them from dealers, or ordered them from advertisements directed to collectors. As time passed, these collectors more and more often removed the poster stamp from its intended marketing purpose, and they bypassed the conventional model of distribution through individual merchants. Instead, collectors created an extensive parallel market of buying, trading, and selling poster stamps. These efforts included elaborate



*St. Paul's Brown & Bigelow Company used poster stamps to advertise its production of advertising specialties, including the printing of poster stamps. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.*

institutional supports such as collectors' bourses, exhibits, as well as catalogues, bibliographies, and clubs. Among adults, collecting U.S. and foreign postage stamps was primarily a hobby for men, but women predominated in collecting of poster stamps.

Unlike the typical postage stamp collectors' albums which provided dedicated space for stamps based primarily upon the country of origin, denomination, and date of issuance, poster stamp albums encouraged the collector to assemble his or her own collection according to individual or personal dictates. A particular collector could assemble an entire series of poster stamps as issued, or instead, sort the stamps in a topical theme by date, artist, graphic style, or any other desired criteria.

In the early days of collecting poster stamps in the United States, a single adult collectors' group predominated. The Art Stamp League of America, based in New York City, issued, among other things, an early "Official Album" for poster stamps. Even so, however, the majority of early collectors were older children. Consequently, *St. Nicholas Magazine* was one popular magazine of the early 1900s which actively advertised and prompted poster stamps for this age group.

## Printing Poster Stamps in St. Paul

Printing had always been a major industry in Minnesota. Commercial printing, along with complementary industries such as paper manufacturing, the packaging industry, and related work in the visual arts, rapidly expanded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The printing of newspapers was also a major Minnesota industry. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* was not only a large newspaper printer, it was also a major job printer (commercial printing done for customers who had no direct connection to the newspaper) in the city. Other large printing arts firms located in St. Paul at the time included Buckbee-Mears, a large photoengraving provider, on Sixth Street; West Publishing Company, a major legal publisher located on Third Street (now Kellogg Boulevard); and Brown & Bigelow, an important specialty advertising printer, which had a large facility on University Avenue in the Midway area.

Chromolithography, and the printing of images which was done thereby, originated in Germany. By the late 1870s the techniques and machinery used in that process had arrived in Minnesota, along with printers who were familiar with both. Very few Minnesota job printers were equipped to produce poster stamps, however. Machines to perforate the stamps, and place gum on the reverse side were required, as well as a sophisticated sales force for their marketing. Between 1914 and 1920, however, two St. Paul printing establishments became quite active, nationwide, in the preparation and marketing of poster stamps. The first was Brown & Bigelow.

## Brown & Bigelow Company

Founded in 1896, Brown & Bigelow began business by producing advertising calendars, and eventually specialized in "Remembrance Advertising." Among such items were calendars, playing cards, memorandum pads, key cases, blotters, pens, pencils, and, of course, poster stamps.<sup>6</sup>

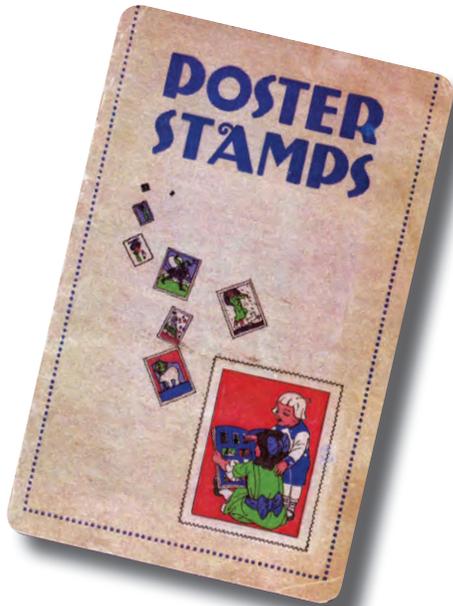
Robert C. Bradbury, a long-time collector and dealer of poster stamps, and the editor of a specialized catalogue of these stamps,<sup>7</sup> posed to the author the question, "what city's printers produced the most poster stamps in the US from



*About 1910 the Great Northern Railway began its "See America First" advertising program to promote travel to Glacier National Park. Included in this campaign was a series of poster stamps printed by Brown & Bigelow. Shown here is a portrait of Buffalo Body, a Blackfoot Indian chief, which was painted by artist Joseph Scheuerle for one series of stamps. Charles Marion Russell painted another series that featured dramatic action scenes on the Western plains involving cowboys and Sioux and Blackfoot warriors. Poster stamps courtesy of Paul Hempel.*

1913 through 1915?" Bradbury replied that "most answer New York City. But this is a trick question and the answer is St. Paul because Brown & Bigelow printed runs of millions of each Great Northern Railway poster stamp. There were dozens of issues. So if you add up all the poster stamps produced in St. Paul the total would be something like a 100 million or even more."<sup>8</sup>

The *Berkeley Daily Gazette* provides more information on these particular railway stamps:



The Brown Treacy & Sperry Company in St. Paul produced this album for collecting poster stamps about 1914. Photo courtesy of Charles Kiddle.

The Great Northern Railroad was so overwhelmed by requests for their first issue of thirty poster stamps—featuring their slogan, “See America First,” picturing scenes in Glacier National Park and the heads of famous Blackfeet Indians—that they were so forcibly impressed with the great possibilities of the wonderful new advertising avenue opened up to them, that they immediately had their first order duplicated and instructed their artists to prepare over thirty new poster stamps. . . . Some of the poster stamps are fine specimens of art. The beauty and ingenuity of design are frequently products of sheer genius. The note struck is bold, modern, audacious, bizarre, grotesque, amusing. The imagination shown in the designs is sometimes simply astonishing.<sup>9</sup>

The “See America First” series of poster stamps featured the work of noted artists. Charles Marion Russell (1864–1926) painted the underlying pictures for the Glacier National Park stamps, while Joseph Scheuerle (1873–1948) painted the Plains Indian portraits which were the basis for the Indian Portrait series. Unlike most poster stamps, these Brown & Bigelow stamps credit both Russell and Scheuerle for their work. It is clear that Brown & Bigelow benefited greatly from the efforts of Louis W. Hill, who was then president of the Great Northern Railway, to publicize the rapidly growing passenger service of

his railroad to Glacier and other national parks and monuments in western states. In addition, the Great Northern, which was headquartered in St. Paul, used Brown & Bigelow to print calendars, posters, menus, and other train-related ephemera.<sup>10</sup>

In 1914 Brown & Bigelow produced a loose-leaf album with post binding and fifty leaves for the mounting of poster stamps. A printed insert at the flyleaf of this album noted, in part:

The Poster Stamp as the name suggests is a poster in stamp form. Poster Stamps present in miniature all that the largest bill-boards portray, and accomplish all that is required of an efficient poster. . . .<sup>11</sup>

### Harvey Alvaro Blodgett and His Companies

The second major St. Paul producer of poster stamps was Brown, Treacy and Sperry Company (from 1901 to 1915), which was succeeded by Brown, Blodgett & Sperry Company (1916–1921), and then by Brown-Blodgett Company (1922–1930s). The ultimate successor today of these companies was the McGill Lithograph Company. Harvey Alvaro Blodgett (1869–1946) was the principal figure involved with the production of poster stamps, and he also utilized the Harvey Blodgett Company for the mar-



Harvey A. Blodgett was a St. Paul entrepreneur who was one of the leading promoters and printers of poster stamps in the nation. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

keting of the stamps to collectors. Having worked 57 years with these various firms, Blodgett was widely known among his peers as the “Dean” of employing printers in St. Paul.<sup>12</sup>

Brown, Treacy and Sperry prepared and sold a *Poster Stamps* album for collectors as early as 1914. The interior pages of this album contained empty spaces for the collector to arrange the poster stamps as she or he saw fit. The back cover contains a useful summary of the rationale for collecting poster stamps:

Collecting poster stamps has proved a most fascinating pastime. The custom originated in Germany, and was by no means confined to children. Adults, too, had their collections of Poster Stamps.

Poster designing is recognized as a high art, which justifies the popularity of Poster Stamps. Many advertisers are using this method of getting their wares before the people in an attractive way.

The collection of Poster Stamps has an educational value. Many skillful artists, some of national renown, are expressing their skill in this form. The collector becomes, unconsciously, an art critic.

Those who acquire more than one stamp of a kind will find other collectors glad to exchange with them. The collector’s album soon becomes a “Gallery” of worthy art subjects.<sup>13</sup>

Brown, Treacy and Sperry also prepared and distributed to its clients in 1914 a small booklet entitled *The Poster Stamp. The Pictorial Advertisement Which Speaks a Universal Language*.<sup>14</sup> The booklet was a promotion for the practical advertising results of using poster stamps and indicates that “we are prepared to offer valuable suggestions to clients who contemplate entering this field of publicity.” Topics addressed in the booklet include: “what a poster stamp should be,” “the effect of the poster stamp on commercial design,” and “distribution suggestions.” Tipped in the booklet was a pane of poster stamps, advertising various Brown, Treacy and Sperry products, including office furniture, copper plate printing, business stationery printing, lithography, and bookseller inventory.

One notable advertising poster stamp vehicle that Harvey Blodgett promoted was the so-called “Thrifty Alexander Series,”

which presented in pictorial form the life of an advertising figure with the curious name of Thrifty Alexander. In this series Blodgett accomplished the difficult feat of advancing his character from one year of age through each of fifty-two drawings, beginning with Thrifty Alexander's father starting a savings account for his newly born son.<sup>15</sup> Blodgett wrote the text for each stamp, while Frederick G. Cooper, a well-known New York writer, cartoonist, designer, and illustrator supplied the artwork.<sup>16</sup> *The Inland Printer/American Lithographer*, a printing trade publication, concluded as to Thrifty Alexander that:

From the standpoint of art in their design, from the standpoint of printing mechanics in their execution, and from the advertising standpoint, this probably is the most notable series of poster stamps yet issued by any firm.<sup>17</sup>

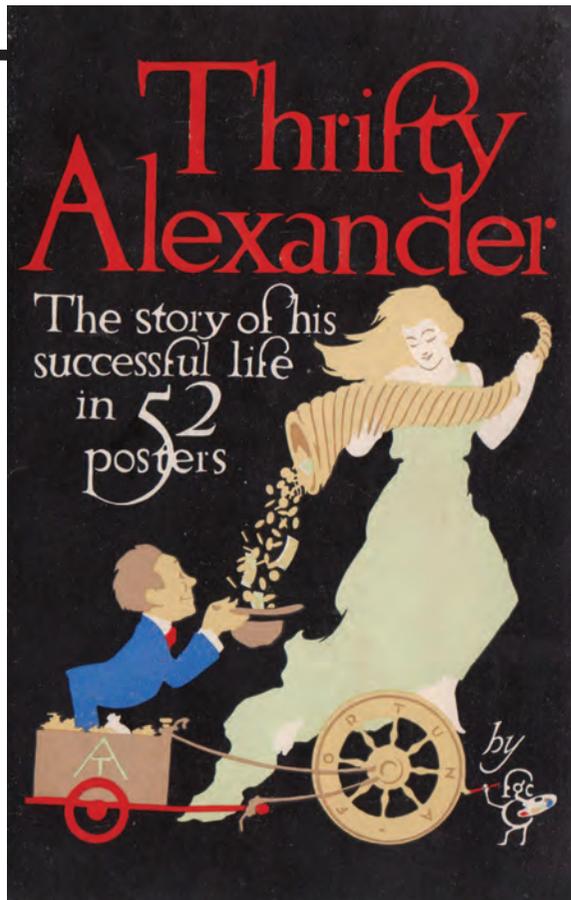
Brown, Treacy and Sperry was also fastidious about protecting their poster stamps from illegal copying. They made it a long-standing practice to obtain copyrights for the stamps which they produced.<sup>18</sup>

Harvey Blodgett was one of the earliest to advertise nationally, seeking agents for the production and sale of poster stamps. The following is the text of a typical advertisement:

Agents wanted to sell our beautiful line of stock-design Poster Stamps to banks and business houses. We have over 30 designs at present and more in preparation. They are real Poster Stamps, not gummed stickers. A printer who will do well with our line may also handle our Thrifty Alexander series for banks. Send 50 cents for album with stock designs and booklet "How to Sell Poster Stamps at a Profit"; 50 cents for our Thrifty Alexander series of stamps with album. No stamps sent gratis.

Harvey Blodgett Co., St. Paul, Minn.<sup>19</sup>

Harvey Blodgett also was a prolific writer. Between 1918 and 1936 he



This is the cover of the promotional booklet advertising the "Thrifty Alexander" series of poster stamps that was produced in about 1914. Photo courtesy of Charles Kiddle.

wrote thirteen books, dealing with such diverse subjects as business and economics, philosophy, art and architecture, and law.<sup>20</sup> His last book, sixteen pages in length, was entitled *Story of the poster stamp. Published for the attention of advertisers to poster stamps as a medium of increasing sales to consumers.* A promotional blurb for the book noted that:

Brown, Treacy & Sperry Co. of St. Paul, call attention to their facilities for producing poster stamps by means of a booklet which gives much valuable information about this method of advertising. It is accompanied by a number of poster stamps, all of which are well-handled, showing the broad flat treatment and strong colors which should characterize designs of this kind. The booklet will doubtless be of much interest to those interested in this subject, and should serve to attract attention to what this firm is accomplishing in the poster-stamp field.<sup>21</sup>

Although the use of poster stamps by merchants had seriously declined by 1936 when this book was published, Harvey



One of the 52 poster stamps in the "Thrifty Alexander" series, which was printed by the Harvey Blodgett Company. Poster stamp courtesy of Robert Bradberry.

Saturdays from 12:30 to 2 o'clock.  
Other week days from 3:30 to 4:30 o'clock.

Call at window bearing the sign "Poster Stamps," write your name and address on card which will be given you, and you will receive Album and first Stamp of series.

A new Stamp will be issued every Saturday until entire series of 52 is distributed.

Back numbers to date may be obtained, while supply lasts, by those who start their collections after first week.

But one Album will be issued to a person.

Be sure and get the entire series. It is a splendid collection of Poster Stamps, and will give you and your friends much pleasure.

**CAPITAL TRUST COMPANY**  
Capital and Surplus, \$500,000.00  
Capital Bank Building Fifth and Robert Streets  
SAINT PAUL

Drawings by F. G. COOPER  
Verses by HARVEY BLODGETT

An advertisement for the Capital Trust Company of St. Paul explaining how to obtain "Thrifty Alexander" poster stamps, 1914. Harvey Blodgett wrote the copy for this promotion. Photo courtesy of Charles Kiddle.

Blodgett clearly was not yet prepared to give up his previously profitable printing specialty.

### An Interesting Connection

As an addendum to the above discussion there is a curious historical connection between Brown & Bigelow Company and the Brown, Treacy & Sperry Company. Both contain the name "Brown." As Harvey Blodgett explained it in a 1944 speech:



1937, top, and 1941 poster stamps advertising the St. Paul Winter Carnival. Poster stamps courtesy of Leo J. Harris



The Gotzian Shoe Company of St. Paul used the "Hiawatha" series of poster stamps to promote sales of its shoes. Poster stamp courtesy of Leo J. Harris.

I don't recall the exact year, about 1896, but early in the nineties a young man appeared in our office and introduced himself as Herbert H. Bigelow. He said he wanted to start a calendar business—and had in his pocket a check for \$500 borrowed from his mother. Mr. Brown took a shine to Bigelow and the upshot was the firm of Brown & Bigelow. On Brown's death, Bigelow succeeded to the interest, but wisely kept the Brown name, as we have done in our business. There has been no Brown money in either business for about 40 years.<sup>22</sup>

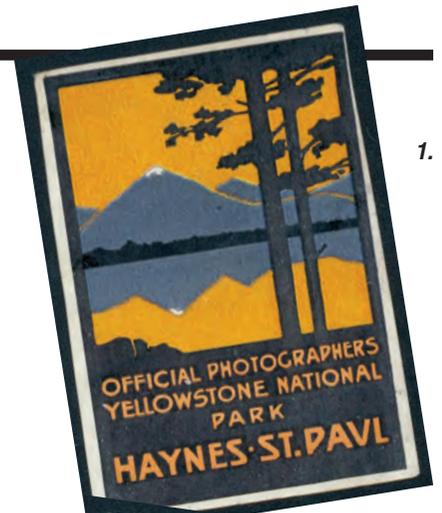
The Brown which Blodgett was referring to was Hiram D. Brown (1848–1905). Active in the printing business for his entire life, Brown was the president of Brown, Treacy & Sperry, and was the principal early investor in Brown & Bigelow.<sup>23</sup>

### Other Minnesota Producers of Poster Stamps

In addition to the printing companies mentioned above, Curtis & Baker (St. Paul); Kamman–Art Printing Company (St. Paul); Leicht Press (Winona); Monasch Lithographic Company (Minneapolis); Pioneer Company (St. Paul); Printing Services Company (Minneapolis); Greene Engraving Company (St. Paul); and Tribune Printing (Minneapolis) also produced poster stamps during the first part of the twentieth century. Not all poster stamps credit the companies which produced them. To the extent that this information is available, the captions under poster stamp illustrations reproduced here will indicate the printer concerned.

Cities and civic organizations publicized their virtues and activities by the use of poster stamps. The St. Paul Winter Carnival, the St. Paul Association of Commerce, and the City of St. Paul issued them, as did the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Fair.

St. Paul merchants utilized poster stamps, including C. Gotzian & Company (shoes); Schuneman & Evans (men's and women's clothing); the St. Paul Book & Stationery Company (books and paper goods); and banks and trust companies, including Capital Trust Company, First National Bank, and the Merchants National Bank. Other merchants included



1.



2.



3.



4.

**Poster Stamps, left:**

1. Pioneer western photographer F. Jay Haynes (1853–1921) opened a studio in St. Paul in 1889. As the official photographer for the Northern Pacific Railway and one of the first photographers of Yellowstone National Park, Haynes had a very successful career. This poster stamp promoted his St. Paul studio, where customers could also have their portrait taken. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.

2. Early in the twentieth century, Holm & Olson was a florist shop in St. Paul that catered to the city's carriage trade. This elegant poster stamp features a young woman whose dress and appearance reflects an idealization of feminine beauty that was very popular from the 1890s to the start of World War I. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.

3. This poster stamp promoted the Griggs, Cooper Company, which was organized in St. Paul in the 1880s. Griggs, Cooper specialized in wholesale groceries, which they shipped to merchants in small towns across the western states. By 1900 the company had also developed its famous "Home Brand" of canned goods and other foodstuffs, which were produced in its plant on University Avenue. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.

4. Even banks and trust companies advertised with poster stamps. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.

Holm & Olson (florists); the Dayton Company (department stores); F. Jay Haynes (photography and portraits); J. H. Allen & Company (foodstuffs); and Northwestern Electric Company (electrical equipment and automobile supplies). Still other merchants included Crescent Creamery (milk, butter and cheeses); Griggs, Cooper & Company (food wholesaler); and John Leslie Paper Company (paper products). Finally, as mentioned previously, the Great Northern Railroad issued poster stamps in series devoted to particular subjects or destinations and the producers of poster stamps themselves used this medium of publicity, including Brown & Bigelow, the Harvey Blodgett Company, and Brown, Treacy & Sperry.

**Lick 'em, Stick 'em**

*Lick 'em, Stick 'em: The Lost Art of Poster Stamps* is the title of a book concerning poster stamps that readers may find useful if they want to know more.<sup>24</sup> The goal

## “President Garfield Shot!”

That was the St. Paul newspaper headline in the early-morning editions of July 2, 1881.

An eleven-year-old paper boy was delivering his copies of the *St. Paul Dispatch* newspaper at the time. Some fifty-two years later on November 28, 1933, he told a reporter that “Aproned storekeepers popped from their shops, bookkeepers with spectacles far down the nose leaned their ears out of second-story windows and housekeepers went to their doors as word of the crime spread along the street.”

Harvey Alvaro Blodgett (1869–1946) was that newsboy. That morning he was besieged by prospective buyers of his newspaper when he trudged down Jackson Street on his delivery route. But Blodgett turned down these requests; the papers were meant only for his regular subscribers. Blodgett served on carrier routes for the *St. Paul Dispatch* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* from 1880 to 1887.

An aspiring journalist, Blodgett's earliest route started at Jackson and Third Street, one of the city's busiest intersections. From there it took in Robert Street and the cross streets

above Ninth Street. “In rainy weather unpaved Jackson Street was a sea of mud and the youth had to pull on rubber boots to slog through to his 135 patrons.” His weekly income was the princely sum of \$1.50.

Later, as a *Pioneer Press* carrier, his route covered Third Street from Sibley Street to Seven Corners. “In the darkness of early morning, obliged to ascend to second-story offices, he had to negotiate among slumbering drunks and tramps who used the hallways for flophouses.” To avoid stepping on these obstacles, Blodgett carried a lantern strapped to his wrist. This was the flashlight of an earlier age. Instead of batteries it burned whale oil and emitted obnoxious odors.

These were some of the early memories of Harvey Alvaro Blodgett. In 1888 he took a job as a clerk, for \$7.00 a week, with the printing firm of Brown, Treacy and Company. He was to stay with this firm for the remainder of his life. He later became president of the company, wrote a number of books and among other things, printed and promoted poster stamps.

of this short article was to help readers discover the lost art of poster stamps and their relationship in years past to St. Paul. A public awareness of these little pieces of printed paper clearly has been off the radar screen for a number of years, but the story is worth telling. This article recalls a time when poster stamps were prominent in advertising and will help us to understand the transitory place of these bits of ephemera in our daily lives.

Leo J. Harris thanks Paul Hempel for lending his collection and allowing him to use some of his poster stamps as illustrations. Rachael Anne Huener wrote her

doctoral dissertation on this subject, and the author is grateful to her for carefully describing a number of useful advertising concepts. Robert C. Bradbury and Charles Kiddle, both of whom are highly knowledgeable collectors, authors about, and dealers in poster stamps, furnished suggestions as well as items to illustrate. Finally, gratitude goes to his wife, Moira F. Harris, who urged him for years to write about this subject. A resident of Ramsey County, Leo J. Harris has contributed several articles over the years to this magazine. His most recent appeared in the Summer 2013 issue.

## Endnotes

1. A useful discussion of advertising trade cards in the United States is contained in Jay T. Last, *The Color Explosion: Nineteenth Century American Lithography* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Hillcrest Press, 2005), 244.

2. See the broader introduction to poster stamps contained in the author's *Minnesota on Paper: Collecting Our Printed History* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 94–95.

3. Rachael Anne Huener. *Reklamemarken in Wilhelmine Germany: Consuming Fictions* (Minneapolis: Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Minnesota (November 2001), 5. In her thesis, Ms. Huener develops and describes many of the concepts and ideas which contributed to the growth and popularity of poster stamps.

4. Charles A. Goodrum and Helen Dalrymple, *Advertising in America: The First Two Hundred Years* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1990). This curious fact was noted by Robert C. Bradbury in *United States Advertising Poster Stamps, 1912–1915* (Worcester, Mass.: self-published, 2008).

5. Jeff R. Lonto, "The Trading Stamp Story," <http://www.studios-7.com/stamps1.html>, accessed May 29, 2013.

6. Much has been written about Brown & Bigelow. See, for example, Bruce Rubenstein, "A Prayer for Uncle Charlie: The Rags-to-Riches-to-Rags-to-Riches Saga of an Extraordinary Man Named Charles Ward," *Twin Cities* (October 1985): 54; and also, "Expansion—By the 'Calendar,'" *Business Week* (August 10, 1948): 106.

7. Robert C. Bradbury, *United States Advertising Poster Stamps, 1912–1915*. Another useful catalogue is Charles Kiddle, *Poster Stamps: The American Story* (World Poster Stamps, 2009).

8. Email of Robert Bradbury to the author, dated June 26, 2013, a copy of which is in the files of the author.

9. "Poster Stamps Have Come." *Berkeley (California) Daily Gazette* (August 29, 1915).

10. Biloine W. Young and Eileen R. McCormack, "'He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful:' Louis W. Hill and Glacier National Park," *Ramsey County History* 45: 2 (Summer 2010): 3, 8, and 11.

11. Loose-leaf album, Item No. 1980.29.2, contained in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minn.

12. "H. A. Blodgett, Businessman, Dies at 76," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 9, 1946.

13. *Poster Stamps* (St. Paul: Brown, Treacy & Sperry, 1914), back cover.

14. *The Poster Stamp. The Pictorial Advertisement Which Speaks a Universal Language* (St. Paul: Brown, Treacy & Sperry, 1914), 16.

15. "Collectors Turn Their Attention to Poster Stamps," *Printed Salesmanship*, 64 (September 1914): 26, 40.

16. "It's Cool," by Joyce K. Schiller, curator Rockwall Center for American Visual Studies, Norman Rockwell Museum. <http://www.rockwall-center.org/exploring-illustration/itscool>, accessed June 27, 2013.

17. "A Distinctive Series of Poster Stamps," *The Inland Printer/American Lithographer*, 55 (1910): 253.

18. See, for one of many examples, *Catalog of Copyright Entries: Works of Art. Part 4, No.2* (April 28, 1915), 185.

19. *American Printer and Lithographer*, 60 (1915): 225.

20. The Harvey Alvaro Blodgett author listing is contained on the OCLC WorldCat web site, [http://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=worldcat\\_org\\_all&q=harvey+a.+blodgett](http://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=worldcat_org_all&q=harvey+a.+blodgett), accessed June 26, 2013.

21. *The Printing Art Suggestion Book*, 14 (1914), 513.

22. "Notes for an Informal Talk by Harvey A. Blodgett, Honoring the 'Old Timers' at the St. Paul Graphic Arts Association Dinner at the St. Paul Athletic Club, January 1944," contained in the Minnesota Historical Society collections, Brown-Blodgett Company, P1454, box 1, p. 4.

23. "Active Career Comes to Close," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (April 17, 1905), p. 2.

24. H. Thomas Steele. *Lick 'em, stick 'em: The Lost Art of Poster Stamps* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989).



*To promote sales during the winter holidays, St. Paul Book & Stationery Company issued a series of poster stamps that showed cute children with gifts of toys or flowers. Poster stamp courtesy of Paul Hempel.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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*About 1935 artist Jacob Theodore Sohner painted this scene of the Phalen Creek neighborhood in Swede Hollow. Although the colors Sohner used here are primarily shades of brown, black, and other dark tones, the reminiscences of Mike Sanchelli, who was born and grew up in Swede Hollow in the 1920s and '30s, largely reflect other, more colorful shades of an artist's palette. Photo of Swede Hollow by Jacob Theodore Sohner courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society. For more on Mike Sanchelli and Swede Hollow, see page 17.*