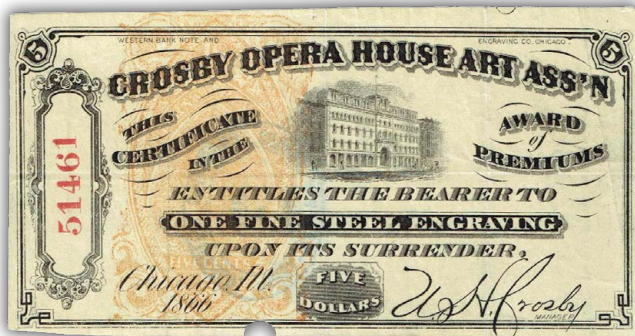




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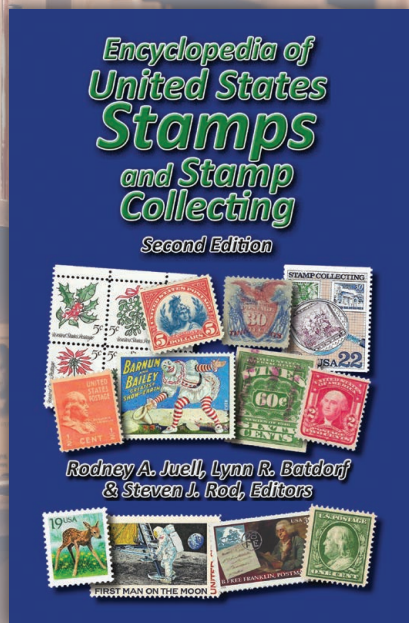
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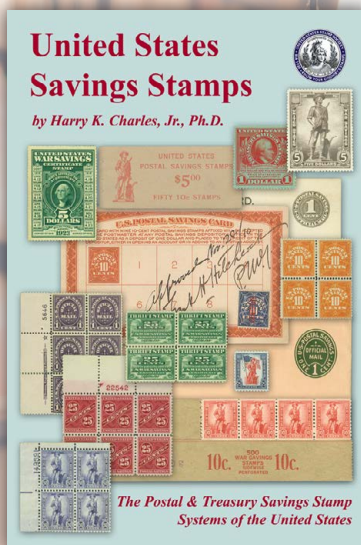
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American Philatelic Society Affiliate No. 150

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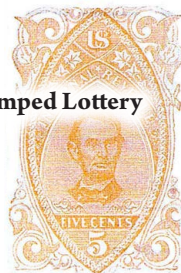
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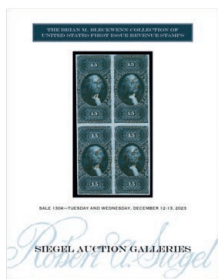
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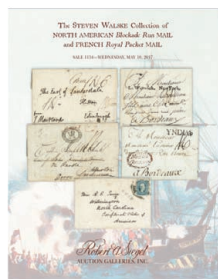
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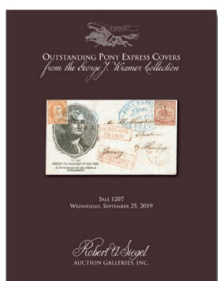
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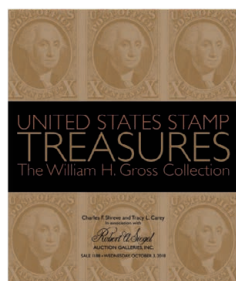
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The Great Americans

An Overview of the Great Americans Issue of 1980–1999

by Jay Stotts

USSS #10921 | ✉ stottsjd@swbell.net



Figure 1. The 19¢ Sequoyah Stamp issued on December 27, 1980.

The Great Americans Issue represents one of the most interesting definitive issues in US Twentieth-Century philately. The issue began in late 1980 with the release of a Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) 19¢ stamp featuring Native American Sequoyah, as shown in Figure 1.

The issue didn't end until almost 20 years later, in 1999, when a contract-printed self-adhesive featuring Justin Morrill went on sale. (See Figure 2.) The most notable statistic is that the issue includes 63 face-different stamps.

The series survived the demise of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing as the key printer of United States postage stamps. The series outlived six different Bureau of Engraving and Printing presses and three different BEP perforators.

Toward the end of the issue, four different private sector contract printers produced stamps for the issue. Six different tagging configurations were involved in the issue's production. First class domestic letter rate postage would almost double during the issue's tenure, going from 18¢ to 33¢ per ounce.



Figure 2. The 55¢ Justin Morrill stamp issued on July 17, 1999.

Who were the Great Americans?

The issue depicts some well-known persons as well as many more who were lesser known, yet the United States Postal Service (USPS) selected the moniker “Great Americans Issue” when it issued the USPS Souvenir Page for the Sequoyah stamp. Figure 3 shows the disclosure as it appears on the Souvenir Page. The final count featured four Native Americans, four foreign-born individuals, fifteen women, and two African Americans.

The Sequoyah stamp will be the first issue in a new series of regular stamps that gradually will replace the current Americana Series. The new series will be called the Great Americans Series.

Figure 3. Disclosure of the name of the new definitive series by the United States Postal Service (USPS) on the USPS Souvenir Page for the 19¢ Sequoyah stamp.

Michael Schreiber, writing in *Linn’s Stamp News* on November 24, 1994, stated, “The Great Americans stamps may be viewed as a kind of melting pot, although certain minitopical collecting areas stand out in the series: those mentioned (women, black Americans, Indians) as well as others (scientists, politicians, soldiers, doctors, writers, humanitarians).”

Labeling them “The Unknown Americans,” Gary Griffith wrote in *Stamp Collector* on October 26, 1998:

On occasion, the Postal Service also added stamps to the series for various political reasons, or in response to lobbying pressure. Each of those is an interesting story in itself.

But for the most part, the individuals on the Great Americans issues were not well known outside of their areas of specialty.

Thus, students of these stamps will also learn a bit of American history if they delve into the subjects of the stamps as well as the production details.

<i>Great American Chronology</i>			
Scott Specialized Catalogue			
#1844 - 1869			1980
#2168 - 2197			1981
#2933 - 2943			1982
			1983
			1984
			1985
			1986
			1987
			1988
			1989
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			1999

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			1995
			1996
			1997
			1998
			1999

Table 1 (left). Graphical representation of Scott’s approach to listing the Great Americans Series. Table 2 (right). Extended dates representing the continuing evolution of varieties of Great Americans issues.

Most specialists like to refer to the Scott *Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps & Covers* as a starting point when sorting out the details of their favorite issue’s varieties, so we can expect if we have peaked your interest in the Great Americans issue that you’ll be interested in how the catalog treats the issue.

Scott has assigned the Great Americans, by date of issue, into three groups, a seemingly simple treatment after reading Mr. Snee’s description above. Table 1 shows the simplified classification graphically. The first group, Scott Numbers 1844 to 1869, lists 26 face-different stamp designs with individual numbers. Any existing production varieties are relegated to minor status with a small-letter suffix. The first listed group are designs that debuted in 1980 through 1985.

A second group, Scott Numbers 2168 through 2197, lists 28 face-different designs, again allocating a single Scott number to a face-different stamp. This group all made their appearances from 1986 through 1994. If you’re doing the math, you realize that there are still nine designs to account for, and Scott has assigned the group 2933 through 2943 to the last nine stamp designs, those issued between 1995 and 1999.

It is simple. 63 face different stamps and 63 Scott numbers. Great for single-stamp collectors who mount an example in a designated spot in a commercially printed album. In fact, the Scott numbering system drives album publishers as well as sellers, especially online sellers on popular websites such as eBay, HipStamp, etc. Sellers tend to group the appropriate number of stamps by Scott numbers and list them on their sites. Figure 4 shows a commercially published album page for the first Scott-listed group of 26 Great Americans.

Table 2 shows the same content as Table 1, but with the bars extended to show that the stamps that are classified by Scott by start dates actually continued to be produced as

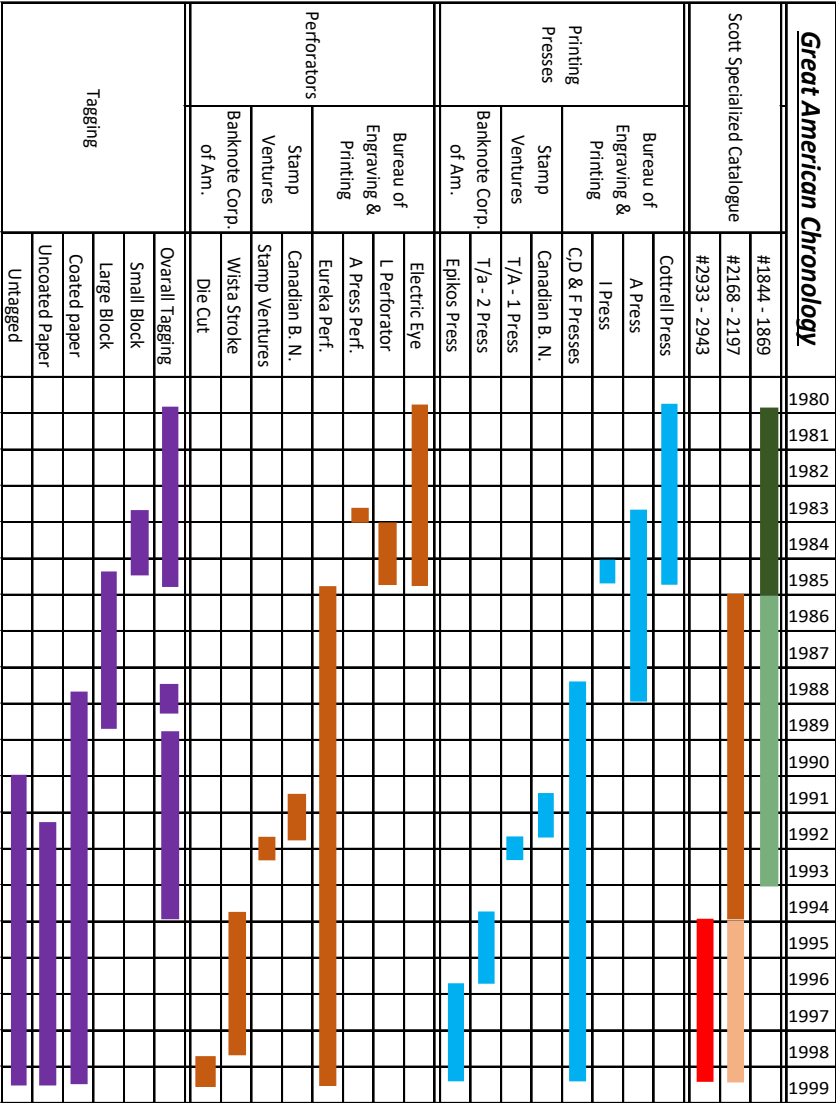


Table 3. Comparing the production changes related to printing presses, perforators and tagging processes versus the basic Scott listing

varieties into later years. This approach to listing varieties as minor small-letter suffixes minimizes the chronology of the issue for students seeking to understand its evolution.

Table 3 compares the production changes related to printing presses, perforators and tagging processes with the basic Scott listing. Readers can compare the various production devices to the simplified catalog listing and hopefully realize that the Great Americans issue is a complicated, interesting, and challenging collecting area.

For those who have conquered the nuances of their current specialties or haven't yet delved into specializing in an issue, we'll offer a series of follow-up articles laying out the production chronology of the issue, hopefully in a way that is easy to follow, yet inviting enough to engage you.



From The Farley Era Committee

FDR and the Alaska Territorial Commemorative Stamp

by **Paul M. Holland**

USSS #16849 | ✉pholland.thorleaf@gmail.com



“ It is with pleasure that I send you this letter to which is affixed the special 3-cent postage stamp issued in honor of Alaska.

The subject of this stamp is a view symbolizing present-day developments in this Territory, with a reproduction of Mount McKinley in the background.

This letter is being mailed through the Juneau, Alaska, post office, which was authorized to have the first-day sale of this stamp. ”

—From a signed November 12, 1937 letter sent with a Favor First Day Cover of the 3¢ Alaska Stamp to Master Eddie White by Postmaster General James A. Farley

It was the Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, who first suggested to President Franklin D. Roosevelt that stamps honoring United States territories be issued. Like the earlier series of stamps celebrating the National Parks, Ickes thought that this would help attract attention to US territories, which at the time included Alaska. FDR agreed

and told his Postmaster General James A. Farley that he “believed the stamps would be favorably received.”¹

The story of Alaska becoming a US territory dates back to the American Civil War and Lincoln’s Secretary of State, William H. Seward. When Seward, depicted in Figure 1 on the 1909 Alaska-Yukon Exposition stamp, learned in 1864 that Alaska, then owned by Russia, might be for sale, he pressed for negotiations. Following Lincoln’s assassination, Steward remained Secretary of State, and eventually, the Russian minister Baron Eduard de Stoeckl was given the authority to make the sale. In March 1867, a final purchase price of \$7.2 million was agreed upon, and the Senate ratified the treaty on April 10, 1867. Initially, Seward was lampooned, and the purchase was termed “Seward’s Folly.” However, at a price of 36¢ per acre, Alaska later proved to be a great bargain.



Figure 1. Seward depicted on 1909 Alaska-Yukon Exposition stamp (author’s collection).

Work on producing stamps honoring US territories proceeded, and on September 8, 1937, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) submitted two designs for the Alaska Territorial stamp. The first, in Figure 2, portrayed an idyllic vision of an “Alaska of the future,” showing added trees, a train passing by a town and farming scene, with Mount McKinley in the background. However, this was rejected in favor of one whose vignette was based more closely on the photograph of Mount McKinley supplied to the BEP by the Interior Department shown in Figure 3.²

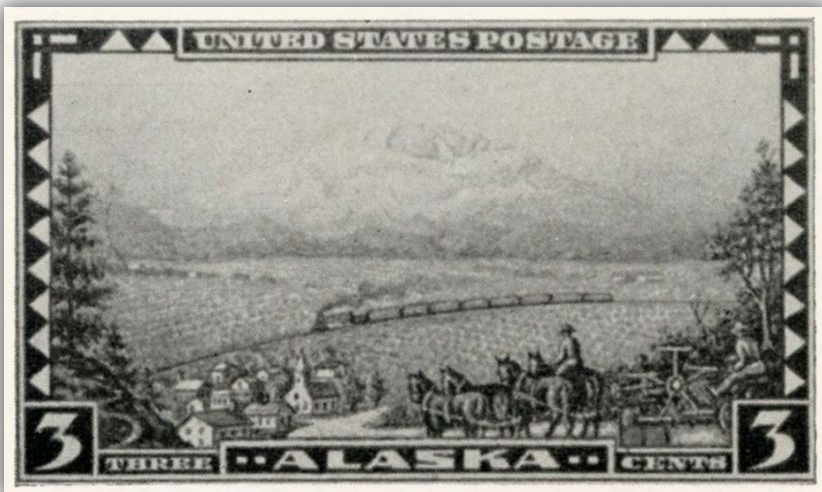


Figure 2. Rejected design of Alaska Territorial stamp.²

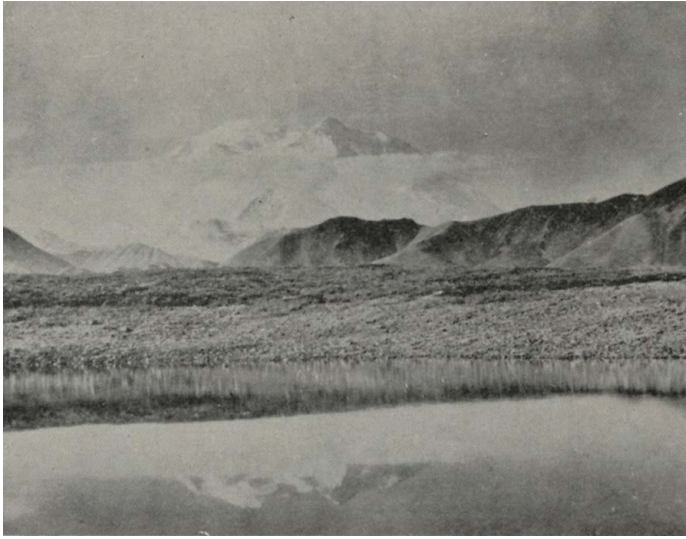


Figure 3. Photograph of Mount McKinley supplied to the BEP by the Interior Department.

Figure 4 shows a preliminary drawing by Victor S. McCloskey, Jr., which became the basis for the final stamp design. Again, trees have been added on both sides, along with a village by a lake on the left and a farmer plowing a field in the foreground. Presumably, this was designed to make the rather stark view shown in the original Mount McKinley photograph much more inviting to people living in the lower 48 states.



Figure 4. Preliminary drawing of selected stamp design by Victor S. McCloskey, Jr.

The die was engraved by Carl T. Arlt, and the frame and lettering for the stamp were by W. B. Wells. Four printing plates were employed, and printing began on October 19, 1937.² The stamp's first day of issue was November 12, 1937.

In Figure 5, I show a favor first day cover (FDC) on official stationery for the Alaska Territorial stamp from my collection. Mailed from Juneau, Alaska, this is addressed to Master Eddie White with the enclosed letter signed by Postmaster General James A. Farley. Curiously, the young Eddie White came from a family of famous diplomats, including William Pinkney (1764–1822), who served as US Minister Plenipotentiary to Russia under President James Monroe.

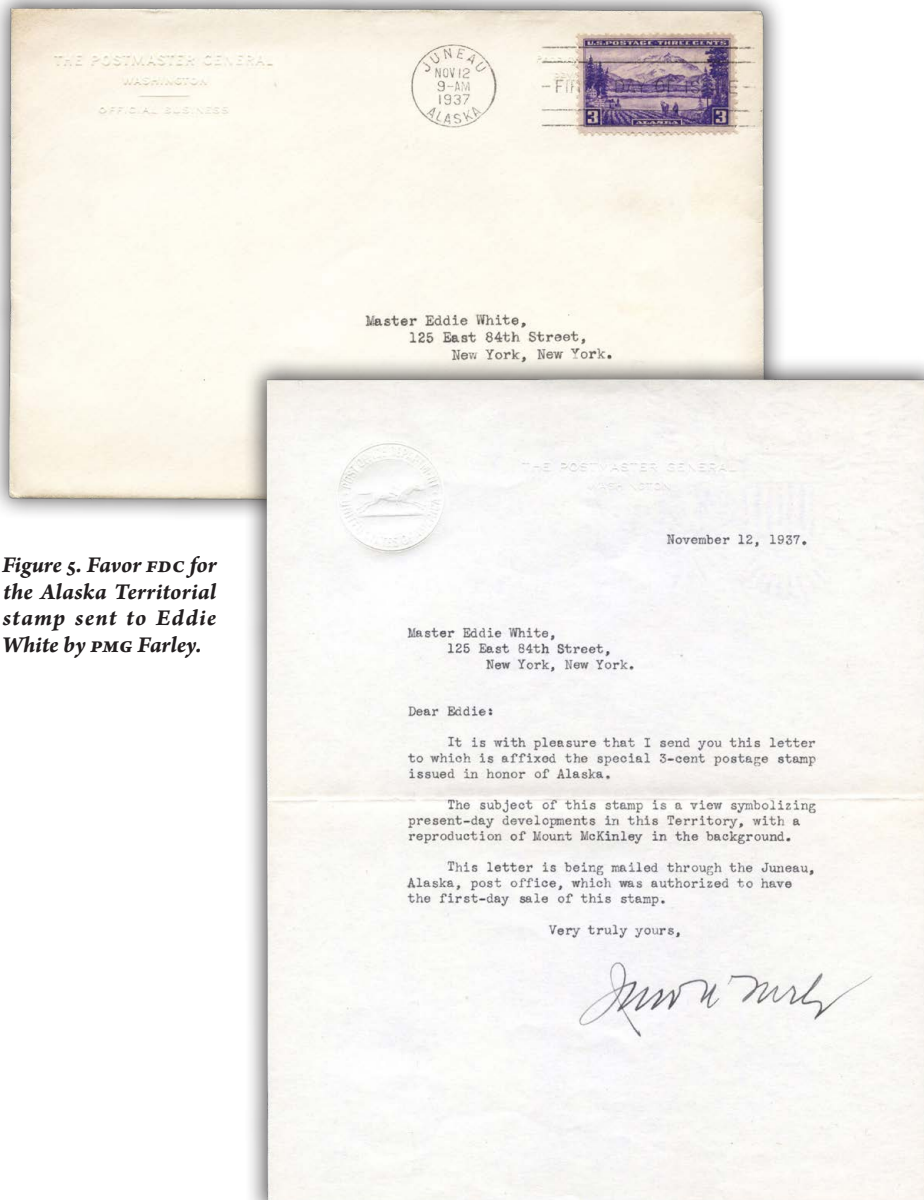


Figure 5. Favor FDC for the Alaska Territorial stamp sent to Eddie White by PMG Farley.

Shown in Figure 6 is a FDC of the Alaska Territorial stamp on official White House stationery sent to Jules Rodier, a white-haired telegraph operator who had been in the White House since the days of William McKinley, himself. FDR must have liked him, since in 1941, he issued Executive Order 8903 titled “Exemption of Jules A. Rodier From Compulsory Retirement for Age.”

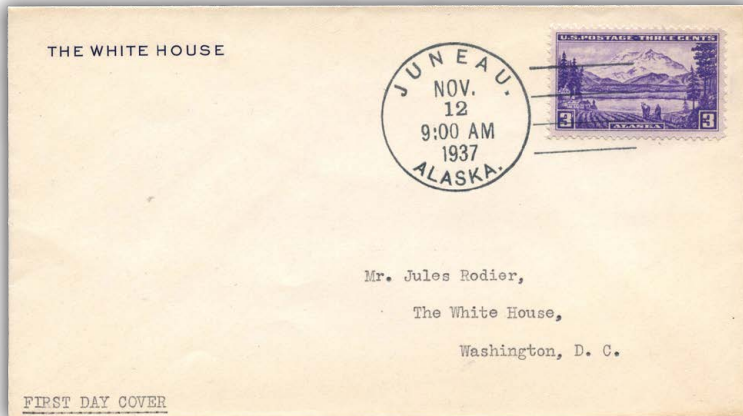


Figure 6. FDC of Alaska Territorial stamp sent to Jules Rodier on White House stationery.

Commercially cacheted FDCs were also produced for the stamp, including the example with loor cachet shown in Figure 7. This shows a gold rush mining scene in Nome flanked by totem poles, with a Husky or Malamute shown overhead. Unusually, gold at Nome was found in beach sand, making it much easier to recover, with the gold rush lasting from about 1899–1909. As an aside, the Nome gold rush provided the setting for the 1960 John Wayne film *North to Alaska*.



Figure 7. FDC with loor cachet showing gold mining at Nome, Alaska.

Shown in Figure 8 is an especially interesting first flight airmail cover sent to FDR from Fairbanks, Alaska. A favorite from my collection, this was mailed a week before National Air Mail Week on May 8, 1938. It is franked with a horizontal pair of the Alaska Territorial stamps and has a bi-color printed cachet with an insert photograph showing the "Passing of the Malamute Mail" with the dogsled team looking up at an airplane overhead. Malamutes are sled dogs closely related to Huskies but are much larger and were bred for strength and endurance instead of speed, especially for pulling heavy loads. There is also a hand-stamped Fairbanks-Juneau First Flight cachet.



Figure 8. Fairbanks-Juneau first flight cover sent to FDR on May 8, 1938.

I also have a number of items that came from the estate of FDR's Presidential Secretary, Marvin McIntyre, in my collection. Among these are autographed covers franked with the Alaska Territorial stamp from Dr. Homer F. Kellems, Commander of the Alaska Memorial Expedition to erect a monument to humorist Will Rogers and famed American aviator Wiley Post at Point Barrow, Alaska, on August 15, 1938, near where both men were killed when flying from Fairbanks, Alaska, three years earlier. These covers, the second is cropped, are shown in Figure 9.

Will Rogers was a beloved actor, social commentator, and comedian who represented the viewpoint of the "common man." A strong supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, he participated in political events and had known FDR since the 1924 Democratic Convention. At the bottom right in Figure 9, Rogers is shown getting a laugh out of FDR when he says, "I am not a member of any organized political party; I am a Democrat." During a 1932 campaign event at the Hollywood Bowl that helped launch FDR's 1932 presidential campaign, Will Rogers introduced FDR by saying, "I knew him almost since childhood. I knew him when he first started in nominating Al Smith... We must have some eighty or ninety thousand people here tonight. That's the most people that ever paid to see a politician." It's clear that when Will Rogers died, FDR lost a friend as well as a supporter.

A former newspaperman himself, Marvin McIntyre had friendly relations with many prominent figures in the press, and one sees evidence of humorous newsroom banter in his correspondence. For example, shown in Figure 10 is a June 21, 1940, first flight cover from Juneau franked with the 6¢ bi-color airmail stamp with an enclosed note from



Figure 9. Signed Alaska Memorial Expedition covers from Point Barrow, along with Will Rogers getting a laugh out of FDR at a political event.

James G. Stahlman, publisher of the Nashville Banner newspaper. In his note to McIntyre Stahlman, he says, "I'd bring you a totem pole, but my baggage allowance forbids. Since I'm mashing my way to Nome, I must be off. Igloo!" There is also a handwritten note scribbled at the bottom wishing McIntyre well, as he had been in poor health and was recuperating in Asheville, North Carolina, while on leave from the White House.

McIntyre's replies during correspondence with the press could also be jocular, as shown in Figure 11 in his November 1933 note on official White House stationery to David Stern, publisher of the *Philadelphia Record*. This item came from the Malcolm Forbes collection of documents related to US Presidents. Addressed to "Dear Hairshirt" and signed hurriedly by McIntyre with his initials, this was in response to Stern's detailed letter to FDR wherein Stern provides advice to FDR, concluding that he was "with you heart and soul, even though I may be the hair shirt of the Administration."

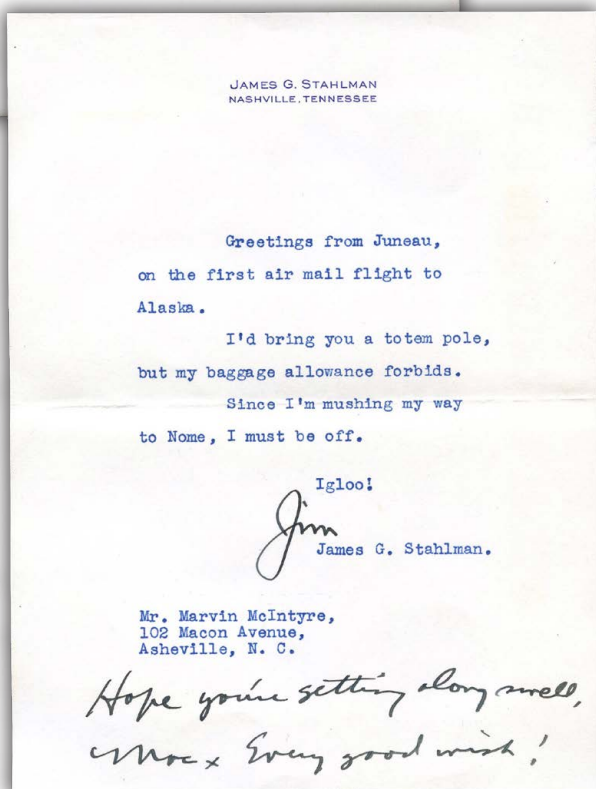
Wartime censorship applied to Alaskan mail sent during World War II, as there were legitimate wartime concerns. In fact, Japan had invaded and occupied islands in Alaska's Aleutian Island archipelago in June 1942. Shown in Figure 12 is an August



Figure 10. First flight cover from Juneau with enclosed note to Marvin McIntyre.

21, 1942, censored cover sent from Nome, Alaska, to the University of San Francisco, a private Jesuit university. The examiner number 13952 on the paper censor tape shows that it was opened for inspection in Seattle, Washington. For context, this was mailed near the beginning of the pivotal campaign to capture Guadalcanal from the Japanese, and the receiving stamp shows that it took about two weeks to arrive.

FDR visited Alaska in August 1944, following meetings in Hawaii with top commanders, including General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz. Besides Presidential aides, FDR traveled with his dog Fala aboard the USS *Baltimore*, a heavy cruiser escorted by destroyers. On the return voyage, a stop was made at Adak Island in the Aleutians Islands, where FDR was shown eating in a Quonset hut mess hall (Figure 13). They continued to Kodiak Island and finally Auke Bay near Juneau, where the Presidential party transferred to one of the smaller destroyers to complete the voyage back to the United States by way of the Inside Passage. This somehow became the origin of a story



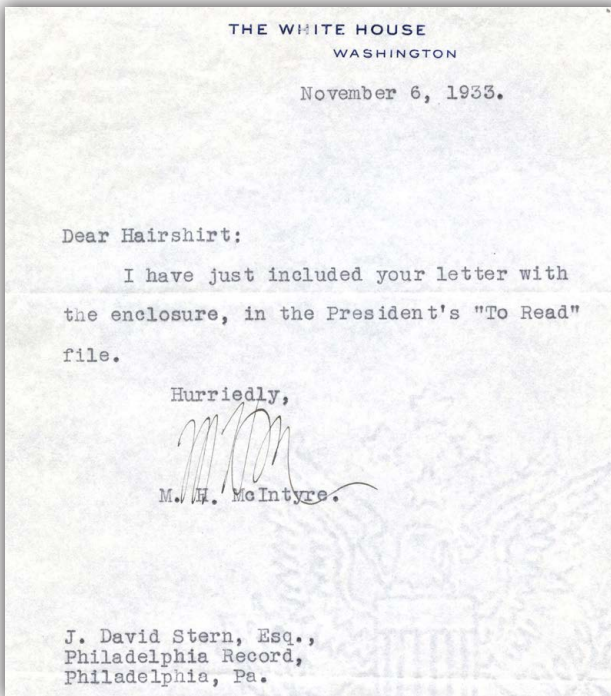


Figure 11. White House letter from McIntyre addressed to "Hairshirt."

by Republicans that falsely accused FDR of sending a US Navy destroyer at a cost of millions of dollars to pick up Fala after he had supposedly been left behind during FDR's visit to the Aleutian Islands. This was refuted the following month in FDR's hilarious speech to a nationwide radio audience that laid this spurious issue to rest and crushed any hopes that the Republican candidate Thomas Dewey had during the 1944 Presidential campaign.³

Finally, shown in Figure 14 is a US Army censored cover sent from Shemya Island, Alaska (A.P.O. 729), a lonely outpost in the Aleutian Island archipelago

some 1,200 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. This pre-addressed cover was posted on March 3, 1945, to the offices of *The Alaska Sportsman*, a magazine started in 1935 in Ketchikan, Alaska. Presumably, this was to renew a soldier's magazine subscription. The cover is franked with a 6¢ Transport Airmail stamp taken from the bottom of a booklet pane, as revealed by its three straight edges. Also note the use of transparent censor tape by the US Army censor and that although an airmail rate of 8¢ for Alaska came

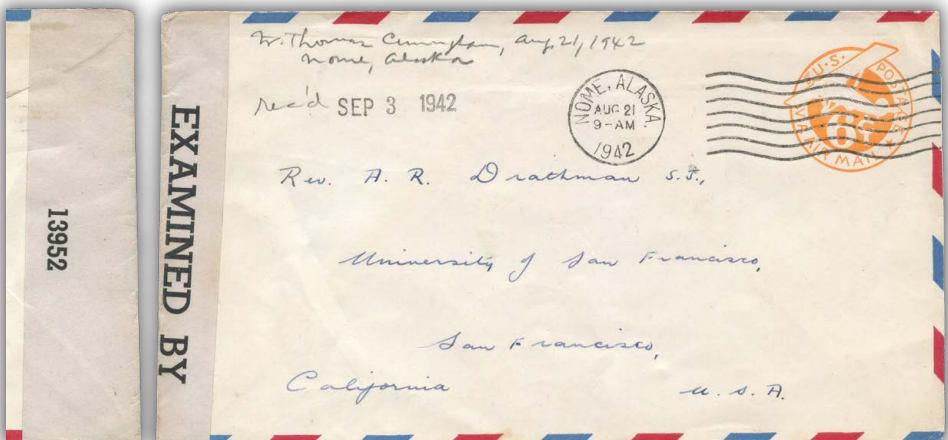


Figure 12. Censored cover sent from Nome, Alaska on August 21, 1942.



Figure 13. FDR eating in a Quonset hut mess hall in the Aleutian Islands, August 3, 1944.

into effect on March 26, 1944, the soldier's rate of 6¢ applied. For wartime context, this cover was sent during the battle on Iwo Jima.

The Territory of Alaska was transformed during World War II, then further transformed by the growing military requirements of the Cold War. For example, the 1,700-mile-long Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) highway was constructed in 1942 by the United States Army Corps of Engineers to provide a secure land route to Alaska. In the 1950s, military bases were expanded, and manned radar stations of the Distant Early Warning (DEW Line) were added. All this development activity and the resulting rapid growth of Alaska's population helped lead to a movement for statehood, and Alaska was proclaimed the 49th state on January 3, 1959.

Note that all covers and correspondence shown in this article are from the author's collection.



Figure 14. Army censor cover sent from the Aleutian Islands on March 3, 1945.

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2. Max G. Johl, The United States Commemorative Postage Stamps of the Twentieth Century: Volume II 1935-1947, H. L. Lindquist: New York, 1947, pages 81-82.
3. Paul M. Holland, "FDR and the 3¢ Win the War Stamp," The United States Specialist, March 2023, see especially pages 108-09.



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From The Booklet and Booklet Panes Committee

The Monthly Random Booklet: Scott 3048a and BK237

by Dieter R. Kohler, Ph.D.

USSS # 12538



Figure 1. Front covers of Scott 3048a at left, BK237 at right.

Introduction

In 1996, The United States Postal Service (USPS) started to replace traditional stamp booklets (one or several panes fastened into a cardboard cover) with self-adhesive convertible and vending booklets (no extra cardboard, the backing is the cover). For the new postcard rate of 20¢, a sheetlet and a vending booklet containing ten 20¢ Blue Jay stamps were issued on August 2. USPS had Stamp Venturers make some pre-folded and sealed Blue Jay booklets (BK237) for sale in vending machines. The same web stock was used to produce both the Blue Jay vending books and convertible booklets, both having the same size (but the web was trimmed differently). Confusion was high at the start of the period, so these convertible booklets were variously called booklets, convertible booklets, self adhesive panes or simply panes (since the convertible booklets are collected in the original issued form, unfolded and with peel strip intact).

This article mainly details the sheetlets, it has something for every collector grade (for defining grades, check the introductory article¹).

Getting Through the Grades, One at a Time

As far fewer vending booklets were made than sheetlets, care has to be taken when buying a vending booklet BK237 that could actually be the more common sheetlet, folded with the peel strip removed.

Figure 1 shows the easiest way to distinguish between the folded Scott 3048a sheetlet and the vending booklet BK237 is the \$2.00 value printed on the front cover. On the vending booklet, the value almost touches the edge of the cover. On the pane, the value is several millimeters above the edge. This downshift is also visible on the stamp sides. On the sheetlet, the cover rouletting is in the middle under the peel strip, while in the booklet it is close to the third stamp row.

Table 1 gives us the first look at the basic collectible varieties. Two varieties for each issue fulfill the entry grade of collecting. The rouletting on the vending booklet fold is 12.5 for plate S1111 and 8.5 for plate S2222. Only these two collectible varieties exist for BK237, so we will concentrate on the panes.

Item	Plate S1111	Plate S2222
3048 unfolded plane	□	□
BK237 vending booklet	□	□

Table 1. Grade 1 level of collecting Scott 3048a and BK237

Initially, convertible booklets had writing on the backing paper informing the users that the stamps are self-adhesive and to not moisten the stamps, but that was later eliminated.



Figure 2. Liner writings type C (at left) and type D (at right).

The writing is printed on a diagonal, and can be found both in normal (type C) and inverted (type D) reading orientation. The easiest way to see the writing is to peel a stamp off, but that is certainly not recommended. Instead, try shining a bright light through the pane from the back while holding it with the stamp designs in their normal upright orientation. The orientation given in the listings is always determined by looking through the stamps onto the backing paper/plastic.

Table 2 includes the backing liner varieties:

Plate S1111		Plate S2222		
Type D liner	Blank liner	Type C liner	Type D liner	Blank liner
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 2. Grade 2 level of collecting Scott 3048a.

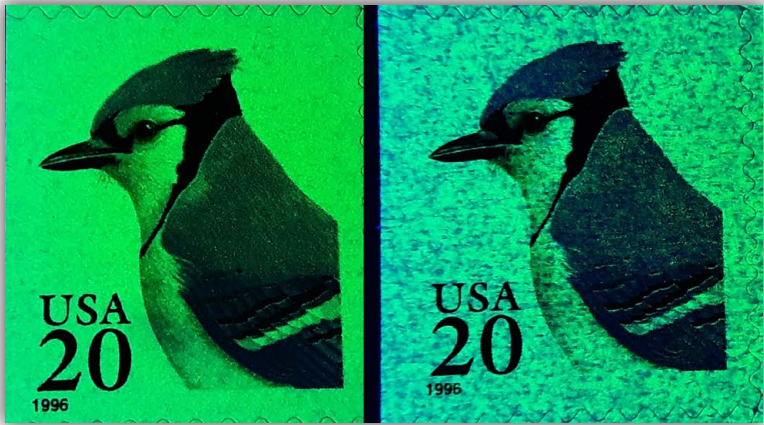


Figure 3. Smooth tagging (at left) and mottled tagging (at right) under uvc light.

The initial shipment for BK237 was made from plate S1111 type D liner, a second shipment was made from plate S2222 with blank liner.

Liner type D plate S1111 panes show either smooth or mottled tagging. The difference is relatively difficult to detect but is not just an effect of different taggant quantities applied to panes. The backing paper of all issues do not show any reaction under uvc light.

The tagging difference adds two more varieties to the list, as shown in Table 3.

Plate S1111			Plate S2222		
Type D liner		Blank liner	Type C liner	Type D liner	Blank liner
Smooth tag	Mottled tag	Mottled tag	Mottled tag	Mottled tag	Mottled tag
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 3. Grade 3 level of collecting Scott 3048a.

Varieties

Two different combinations of red and blue inks seem to have been used to print the panes. The difference is noticeable in the blue ink appearance. More red ink lead to a darker, reddish shade, shown at left in Figure 4. The color difference is purely a result of a red color misalignment. The darker birds have the red dots misaligned as can best be seen along the crest of the bird's head.

A close look into the bird's eye shows an almost uniform red eye in the “redder” variety:



Figure 4. Different “blue” Blue Jays, and a look in the eyes. At left reddish blue, at right bright blue.

A rather odd curiosity is the way the individual plate number digits were formed. The entire text, including the plate numbers, is printed using individual rhombi. This can lead to odd looking digits when viewed under magnification, like the zigzag blue digit “1” in Figure 5, for example.

Usually the individual digits are horizontally aligned but plate s2222 panes exists where the plate number forms a stairway structure.



Figure 5. Plate number s1111 and a “stairway” plate number s2222.

The Search for “Secret Marks”

Now for the “fleyspeck” booklet specialist on grade level 4, things get a little mysterious. Careful examination of panes show that some contain small die cut markings. Either interrupted or non-interrupted lines and arrows at more or less identical locations across different printings can be seen if the pane is held at a grazing angle to a light source. These marks were first noticed by dealer Kim Cuniberty of Contemporary Coils.

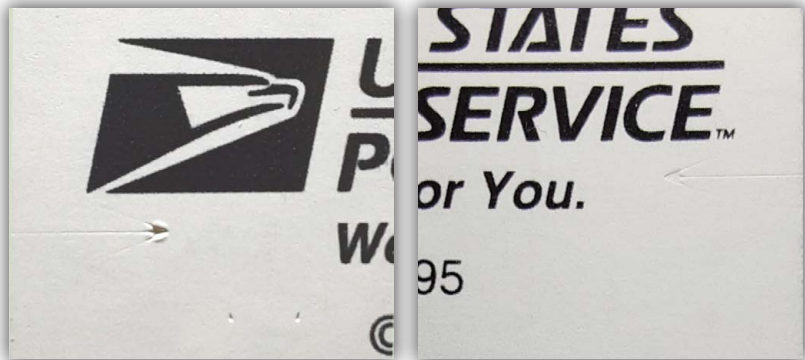


Figure 6. Two typical "Secret marks" found on Scott 3048a panes.

Most of the markings do not show on scans but can be photographed under grazing light. Figure 6 shows two prominent examples of "secret marks", an arrow below the



Figure 7. "Secret marks" on Scott 3048a panes. Drawn in red for clarification.

eagle emblem (with two gripper-like marks below) and another pane with an arrow at right. The marks are drawn enhanced in red in Figure 7. The origin and purpose (if any was intended at all) of these secret marks are not known.

The following markings can be found. The positions and strengths of the marks can slightly vary from pane to pane.

- L1 Long bar from left edge to the copyright symbol.
- L2 Short bar from the left edge below and to the middle of the Eagle emblem, at the height of "USPS."
- L3 Longer bar below emblem at height of USPS, vertical bar above horizontal bar into bottom left edge of emblem.
- L4 Short bar below middle of the eagle emblem, at height of USPS.
- L5 Arrow from the edge pointing left just below the eagle emblem.
- L5b As L5, but with two gripper-like marks below right edge of the emblem, at height of "USPS." The arrow wings may not show fully. (Figure 6 at left).
- L6 Arrow head near the top left of the pane.
- R1 Bar from the left edge to "E" of "SERVICE" at height just above "We Deliver For You."
- R2 Intermittent bar across the pane just above "We Deliver For You."
- R3 Complete bar across the pane just above "We Deliver For You."
- R4 Arrow head pointing to left below "CE" of "SERVICE". Four gripper marks at the base of 1995 below "ICE."
- R5 Bar from the right edge to "For" of "We Deliver For You", above the text.
- R6 Arrow from the right edge of the pane, pointing left to "CE" of "SERVICE" just above "We Deliver For You." (Figure 6 at right).

So for the ultimate grade 4 collector crowd, each field in Table 3 could be complemented with these 12 "secret marks" varieties.

References

1. Dieter R. Kohler, The Monthly Random Booklet, *The United States Specialist*, Vol. 93 No. 10, Oct. 2022.
2. Michael O. Perry, *Folded-Style and Pressure Sensitive Booklet Checklist*, available on the Society website.

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Vintage Photo of the Month

Louisiana Purchase Exposition— Missouri State Building

by **Rodney A. Juell**

USSS #13852 | P.O. Box 3508, Joliet, IL 60434



23205

*Missouri State Building, Dedicated June 3rd, World's Fair, St. Louis, 1904
Copyrighted 1904 by William H. Rau.*

This month's photo shows the Missouri State Building at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, held in St. Louis. The building was destroyed by fire before the exposition closed.

Nearby is a cover franked with a 5¢ stamp issued to honor the exposition. The cachet on the cover is a depiction of the Missouri State Building. It is postmarked and canceled with a St. Louis slogan cancel promoting the World's Fair.

Also shown nearby is one in a series of non-postal labels issued for the exposition. It is inscribed "Missouri State Building." However the image shown is clearly not the Missouri State Building, at least not the same design for the building that was actually built. The frame for the label appears to have been suggested by the frame used for the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition stamps.



The law implemented the use of Documentary Revenue Stamps evidencing tax payment to be affixed to documents such as promissory notes, checks, receipts, powers of attorney, proxies, protests, and life insurance policies (Figure 2). Though the Act was intended to finance the War, these taxes persisted long after the conflict was over.



Figure 2. Revenue stamps and stamped documents.

Government-issued Proprietary Revenue Stamps and approved Private Die Proprietary stamps were issued to collect taxes on practically every type of manufactured goods, including patent medicines, sin, and luxury items like liquor, tobacco, playing cards, and jewelry (Figure 3).

The Department of the Treasury created the Office of Internal Revenue to administer these excise taxes. Congress also implemented the first income tax, moderately progressive and ungraduated. It imposed a three percent tax on annual incomes over \$800, which exempted most wage earners.

The 1862 Revenue Act, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, had authorized that evidence of tax payment could be shown by “adhesive stamps, or stamped paper, vellum, or parchment.”

Initially, the Act did not tax checks written for less than \$20. Naturally, many people avoided the tax by simply writing multiple smaller checks, so the law was changed on July 1, 1865, to encompass checks of any amount. It then became practical for many firms to have checks with a revenue stamp indicium printed directly upon them, giving rise to revenue stamped paper. Stamped paper, commonly referred to by collectors as “revenue



Figure 3. Proprietary stamps and use.

stamped paper,” included not only checks but also numerous taxed documents such as insurance policies, stock certificates, bank checks, bank drafts, and receipts (Figure 4). Stamped paper bears the same relationship to revenue stamps as postal cards do to postage stamps. Thus, such checks and related documents proliferated in the 1865–83 period.

All stamped paper was printed by five private security printers from dies approved by the Office of Internal Revenue. The stamps were printed under government supervision in various denominations and 24 different designs and colors. Most of these stamps were typographic, though some were engraved (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Revenue stamped paper.

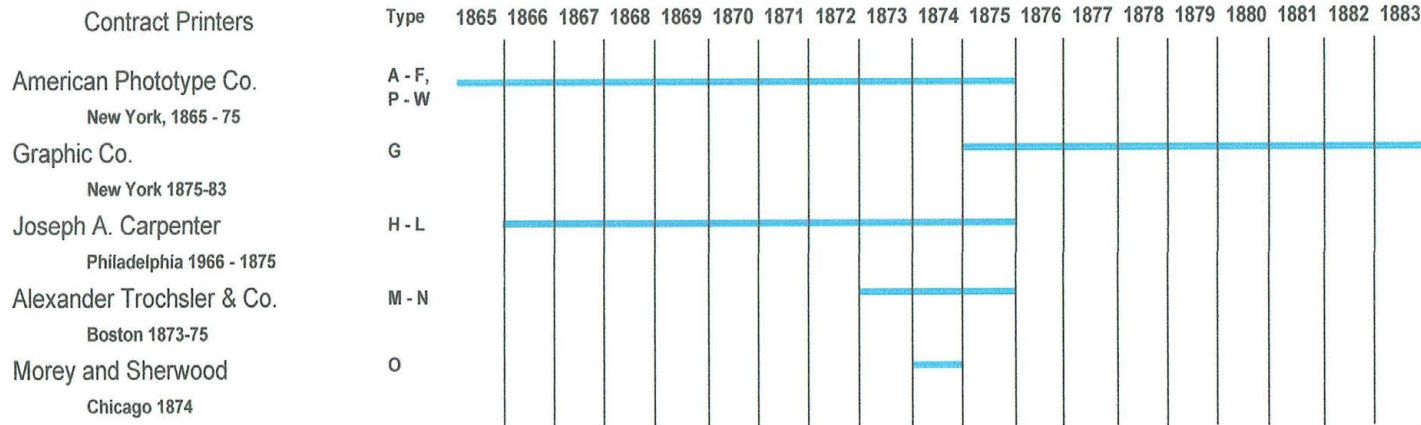


Figure 5. Security Printers that printed the Stamped Paper.

The introduction of revenue stamped paper brings us to the introduction of Uranus Harold Crosby, born August 17, 1831, in Brewster, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. (Figure 6). On September 4, 1850, at the age of 19, Crosby came to Chicago on the recommendation of his cousin Albert, who insisted that the city was well-cultured. Albert had arrived two years earlier to establish a wholesale liquor and tea trading house and soon opened a distillery with Uranus and three other Crosby family members. The Albert Crosby & Co. distillery became Chicago's largest wholesale distributor of distilled alcohol, and the Crosbys became wealthy.

Despite his new-found wealth, Uranus Crosby was disappointed at the lack of culture he was promised in Chicago. The growing city could offer little more than brothels, saloons, and gambling houses for entertainment. By 1863, Crosby, an admirer of Italian opera, believed that the city was overdue for a grand opera house. He selected a site on the north side of Washington Street between State Street and Dearborn Avenue in the business district now known as the Loop.



Figure 6. Uranus Harold Crosby.



Figure 7. William W. Boyington

Crosby hired William W. Boyington to design his opera house. Originally from Massachusetts, Boyington studied engineering and architecture in New York State. He practiced there and served in the New York State Legislature before deciding to settle and work in the emerging metropolis of Chicago in 1853. Some of Boyington's work includes Chicago's First LaSalle Street Rail Road Station and the Second Presbyterian Church. He designed the State Capitol Building in Springfield, Illinois, the first University of Chicago Administration building, the Sherman House hotel, and Chicago's Water Tower and Pumping Station.

After embarking with Crosby on a tour of opera houses in the East and four cities in Italy, Boyington designed Crosby's Opera House with assistant architect John W. Roberts. Construction of the five-story Opera House (Figure 8) began in late spring of 1863. Despite rising wartime prices, construction continued until the opulent building was completed in April 1865.

The first floor housed four stores with street addresses 63, 65, 67 and 69 Washington Street, with the name of each business carved in stone above each storefront.



Figure 8. Crosby Opera House.

Number 63 was occupied by W. K. Kimball, dealer in pianos and other musical instruments; number 65 housed Root & Cady, music publishers. Number 67 was Herbert M. Kinsley's, the most expensively decorated and fashionable restaurant in the city. J. Bauer & Co., also a dealer in pianos and other musical instruments, occupied number 69. Crosby devoted the second and third floors to studios for teachers of vocal and instrumental music, and the fourth floor was an art gallery equipped with studios for artists. Crosby's Art Gallery, with its own magnificent and much-admired domed skylight occupied a thirty by sixty-foot portion of the fourth floor. The 3,000-seat opera house was situated in the rear of the building. The center ceiling dome was encircled by paintings of Beethoven, Mozart, Auber, Weber, Verdi, and Wagner, surrounded by ornamental frescoes. A forty-foot painting of Aurora, goddess of dawn, was displayed at the front of the stage above the orchestra.

The building had a primitive form of air conditioning to help relieve sweltering Chicago summer temperatures. Large fans circulated air from the above-ground floors of the building into the relatively cool basement (below ground) to cool the air and return it to the upper parts of the building. The structure cost \$600,000 (equivalent to \$10,925,000 in 2024).

The Opera House was scheduled to open on the evening of April 17, 1865. However, the April 14th assassination of Abraham Lincoln forced a three-day delay of the opening event (Figure 9).

American Shakespearean actor appeared with a company led by John Edward McCullough and James Edward Murdoch, who gave a reading for charity on February 5, 1866.

After its brief heyday, the opera house began to experience a lull in activity. The house remained open between opera performances by programming minstrel shows and comedy acts, dancing, and theater performances. Clearly, Crosby had overestimated the demand for opera in the city. The public's disinterest in operatic performances, paired with Crosby's inexperience as a theater manager, caused serious financial problems.

By early 1866, after holding only occasional performances, Crosby was heavily in debt to his investors, who were weary of his leadership and failure to make significant profit on the property. The situation was becoming desperate, and Crosby, together with his major creditors and prominent Chicagoans Samuel M. Nickerson (Crosby's cousin) and Edmund Aiken, decided to sell the magnificent Opera house (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Crosby Opera House, view toward the northeast (from stereoview by J. Carbutt, Chicago).

The Lottery

On March 26, 1866, the Crosby Opera House Art Association was formed and organized a scheme to raise funds to dispose of property through a lottery. The Association was designed along the lines of an "Art Union" plan, whereby all members belonging to the union would receive value for the shares they purchased.



Figure 12. Western Bank Note and Engraving Company.

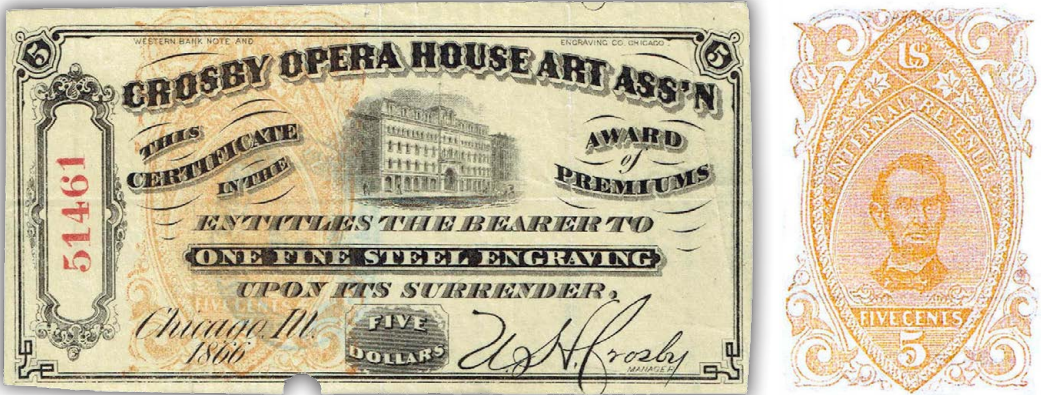


Figure 13. Crosby Opera House Art Association ticket #51461 and an illustration of the tax stamp printed on the ticket.

Crosby hired the Western Bank Note and Engraving Company of Chicago (Figure 12) to print his lottery certificates. Western, founded two years earlier in 1864, would by the end of the 19th century be second only to American Bank Note Co. as contract and bank note printer.

Western produced certificates numbered from one to 210,000 with a \$5 face value for the Crosby Opera House Art Association. Certificate number 51461 is illustrated in

Figure 13. Each ticket entitled the bearer to receive a steel engraving. The ticket required a five-cent tax for a Promissory Note or Draft, with a value from \$2 to \$100, evidenced by the printed five-cent tax stamp.

For \$5, a buyer purchased a chance to acquire not only any of the great works of art in the gallery wing of the opera house, but also the Grand Prize, which was the entire opera house building. Instead of having people think they were gambling, they encouraged people to believe they were promoting culture in the city.

Branch offices were opened in major cities to satisfy the demand. The Crosby Opera House Art Association was described in a 20-page prospectus that was mailed to prospective "members" in envelopes, as illustrated in Figure 14.

The name and address of each purchaser were recorded for every

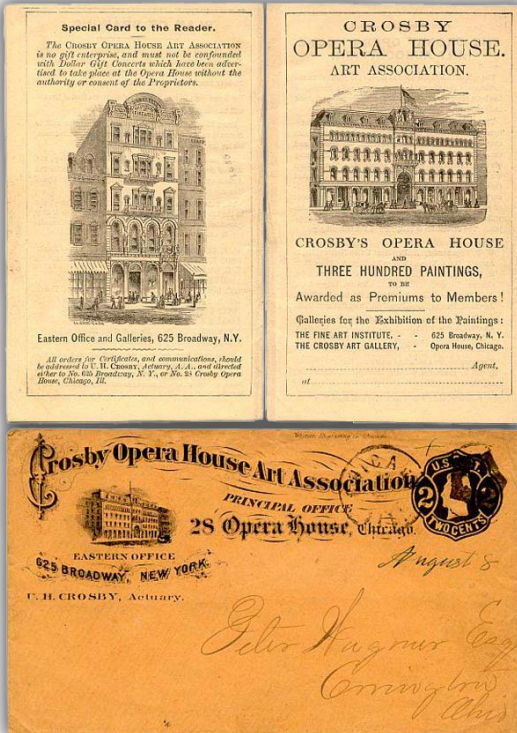


Figure 14. Crosby Art Association Prospectus and Enclosure (Courtesy of Robert D. Hohertz).

ticket sold. The “Art Union” scheme was just outside the realm of lottery illegality. The “certificate” was carefully worded, as was the 20-page prospectus, to avoid any mention of the word “lottery.” For the purchase price, the holder of one of these certificates was entitled to a first-class steel engraving of a famous painting, free admission to the galleries of the association, and a share in the award of additional premiums by lottery.



Figure 15. Four types of “Engraving Delivered” backstamps and ticket #51461 backstamp.

Receipt of the steel engraving was acknowledged by a dated backstamp on the back of the certificate ticket. Four different backstamps are known on the tickets, as shown in Figure 15. illustrated with the September 6, 1866, double line oval backstamp reading “Engraving Delivered, Crosby A.A. New York” noted on certificate number 51461, purchased at the Art Association’s Eastern Office at 625 Broadway, New York. For the purchase price, the holder of one of these certificates was entitled to a first-class steel engraving of a famous painting, free admission to the galleries of the association, and a share in the award of additional premiums by lottery. For five dollars, one share of “certificate of membership” was issued with a steel engraving of either Thomas Faed’s *The Little Wanderer* or Jerome Thompson’s famous *Gathering Apples*. For ten dollars, two certificates were issued, and the holder received a steel engraving of *Washington Irving and His Friends at Sunnyside* by Christian Schussel. For 15 dollars, three certificates were issued together with an allegorical engraving of *Mercy’s Dream* by Daniel Huntington. A 20-dollar purchase of four certificates brought the holder three of the above steel engravings or a superb chromo engraving, printed in colors, of Jasper Francis Cropsey’s *An American Autumn* (Figure 16).

A Crosby Opera House Art Association receipt dated August 25, 1865, for four certificates purchased by the firm of Hewett & Watson of Keesville, New York, is illustrated in Figure 17.

The association distributed 210,000 tickets with the Crosby Opera House and land valued at \$600,000 plus \$30,000 expected earnings per year as the Number 1 Grand Prize.

Additionally, three hundred works of art in the permanent collection of Crosby’s gallery were offered as lesser lottery prizes. Even with the frantic ticket buying, eventually 25,593 tickets remained unsold, which were retained in Uranus Crosby’s name and eligible for the drawing. Ticket sales, nevertheless, grossed nearly a million dollars. The



Figure 16. Engravings Awarded for one, two, three and four certificates.

money raised helped the opera house continue performances, which were free to anyone holding a ticket.

Other than the Grand Prize, the next seven prizes, artworks valued from \$20,000 down to \$3,000, were:

Albert Bierstadt's *Looking Down Yosemite Valley*, valued at \$20,000.

Jasper Francis Cropsey's *An American Autumn*, valued at \$9,000.

Christian Schussele's *Washington Irving and His Friends*, valued at \$5,000.

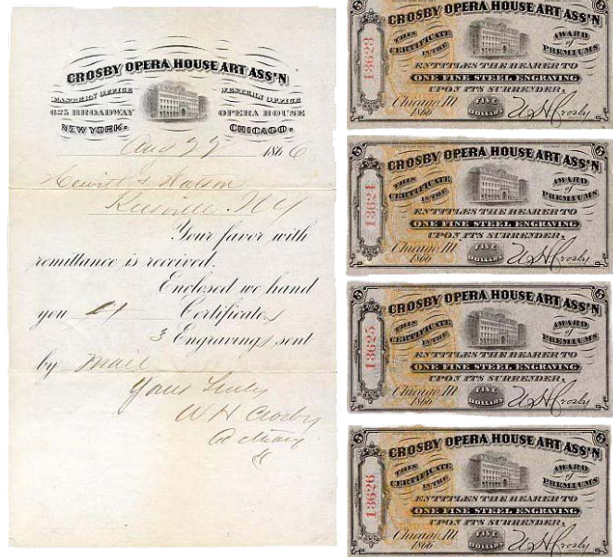


Figure 17. Receipt for four Certificates (Courtesy of Robert D. Hohertz).

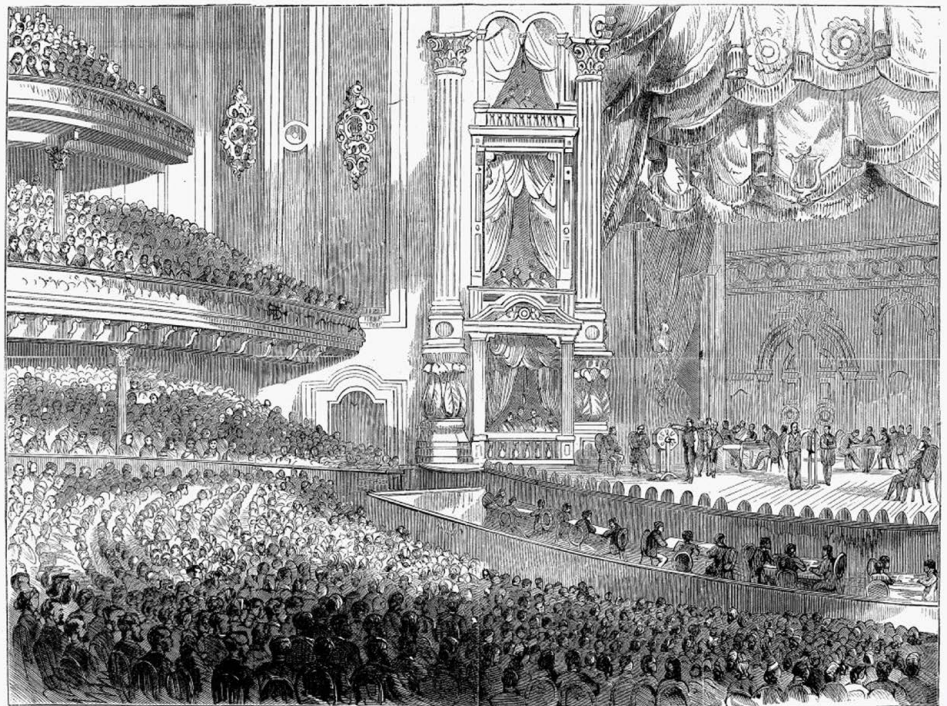
James McDougal Hart's *Woods in Autumn*, valued at \$5,000.

Constant Mayer's *Recognition*, valued at \$5,000.

William Holbrook Beard's *Deer on the Prairie*, valued at \$4,000.

Régis François Gignoux's *Alpine Scenery*, valued at \$3,000.

The drawing, originally scheduled for October 11, 1866, was delayed until January 21, 1867. On that day, most shops and businesses in Chicago closed so that employees could attend the drawing, which was overseen by 19 trusted public officials from around the country. That morning special trains brought ticket buyers to the Opera House (Figure 18) from all over the country into the city.



DRAWING PRIZES IN THE CROSBY OPERA-HOUSE LOTTERY.—[SKETCHED BY THEODORE R. DAVIS.]

Figure 18. *Drawing prizes in the Crosby Opera House lottery, sketched by Theodore R. Davis.*

Hundreds of hopeful ticket holders crowded around telegraph offices in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, and San Francisco, each contemplating the fantasy that he or she would, within hours, be the owner of America's most magnificent opera house.

The larger of the two wheel drums on stage contained numbered counterfoils for each of the 210,000 tickets. The smaller drum contained another set of cards with the numbers of the 302 prizes shown in the printed catalog. At precisely 11:00 AM, the first ticket, number 13,165, was pulled from the larger drum and matched with a prize card, number 267, pulled from the smaller drum. Ticket number 13,165 had won the painting *Where's Lily?* by Joseph H.S. Reed.

Ticket after ticket was drawn, and painting after painting was picked when, at 20 minutes past two, ticket number 58,600 was drawn and matched with prize number one, the Opera House. Late that Monday evening, the committee finally examined the books and discovered that ticket number 58,600 had been sold the previous August to Abraham Hagerman Lee (Figure 19) of Prairie Du Rocher, located in a relatively unpopulated part of western Illinois.

Lee, a Civil War veteran from Randolph County, Illinois, whose wife had been in poor health, preferred his simple life as a miller and family man in the beautiful countryside. Lee had little interest in moving to Chicago, so on January 25, he met with Crosby and agreed to sell the Opera house to him for \$200,000. The public had bought over \$922,000 in chances on a \$600,000 building. Subtracting the \$200,000 given to Lee, Crosby paid off the remaining construction costs and debts, pocketed \$100,000 in profits, and still maintained ownership of the opera house. Given the convenience of the transaction, the public began to speculate as to whether or not A. H. Lee even existed or if Crosby had staged the outcome.

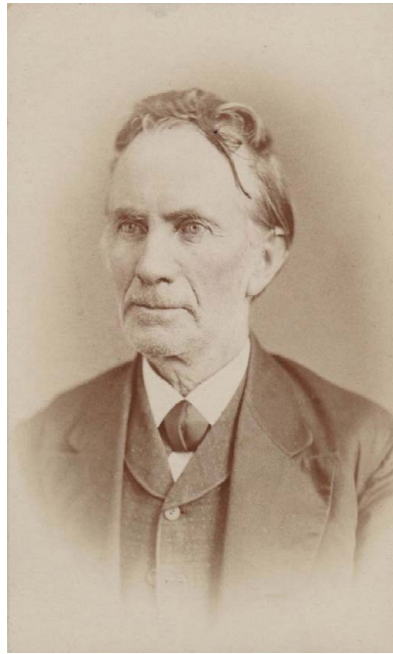


Figure 19. Abraham Hagerman Lee.



Figure 20. Albert Crosby.

Newspaper editorials, particularly those in the *Chicago Times*, gave rise to unsettling public speculation about Uranus' repurchase of the opera house. The public seemed to want to see Uranus somehow punished for the fact that they had not held the winning lottery ticket. The bad press and pressure mounted and Uranus finally had enough. To keep the opera house in the family, Uranus sold the opera house to his cousin Albert Crosby (Figure 20), who by 1866 had become president of Downer & Bemis Brewing Company, a large brewer and distiller.

The amount Albert paid to Uranus for the opera house, commercial building, and music hall was never revealed. Uranus remained involved with the management of the opera house, and the hall began producing more consistent

and well-attended performances. During 16 spring, autumn, and winter opera seasons, 131 operas were performed from 1867 through 1871.

The 1868 Republican National Convention was held in the Crosby Opera House from May 20 to May 21. Ulysses S. Grant ran unopposed and was chosen for president by acclamation on the first ballot, and House Speaker Schuyler Colfax of Indiana was chosen for Vice President (Figure 21).

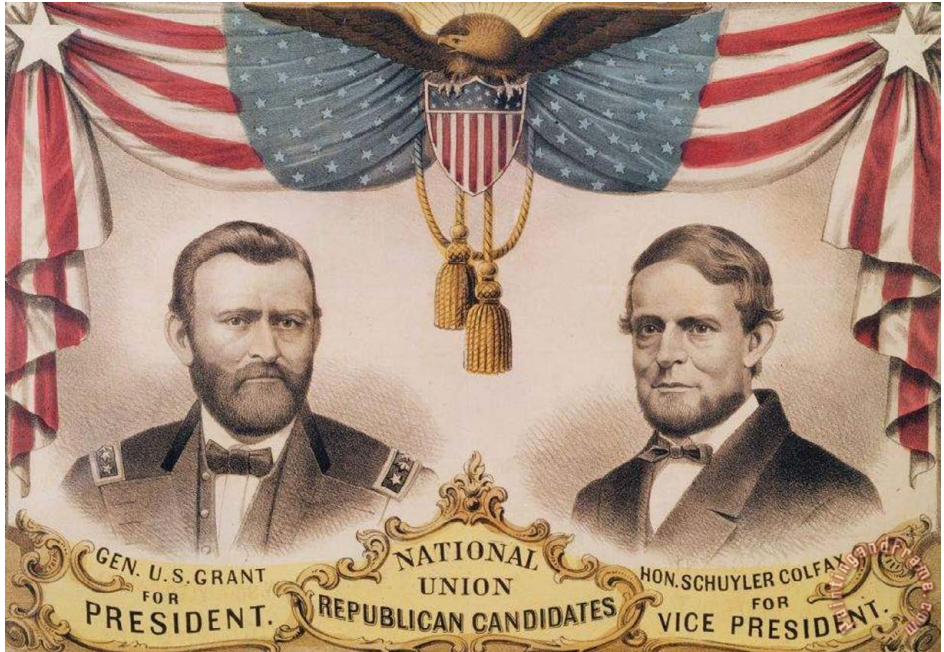


Figure 21. 1868 Republican National Convention at the Crosby Opera House.

1871 Refurbishing

In the summer of 1871, after two years of planning, the opera house underwent \$80,000 of alterations to lavishly redecorate the venue. The date set for work to begin was July 15, the day following the last performance of the spring and summer attractions. On the night of July 13, the lights finally went out on the first six years at the Crosby Opera House

Albert had confirmed the final arrangements for the grand reopening on Monday evening of October 9 (Figure 22). Theodore Thomas and his orchestra, an organization of sixty musicians, would present ten symphony concerts. The box office at the opera house opened on October 4, and the rush was so immense that practically all the seats for the ten performances were sold by the next day. Workmen had been toiling literally around the clock to complete the repairs and re-decoration in time for the opening night. By six on Saturday evening, all that remained was to remove the scaffolding and workmen's tools from the building.

Albert and Uranus Crosby had invited 200 of Chicago's press and most prominent citizens to a reception to preview the renovated opera house on Sunday evening. Everyone

agreed that the old, faded auditorium and its lobbies had been transformed into a place more brilliant and resplendent than when it first opened to the public. Visitors entering the building ascended a completely redesigned grand staircase leading to the main foyer. Carved black walnut balustrades had been added, and all the iron pillars that ran from floor to ceiling in the foyer were now painted brown and ornamented with gold lines. The vaulted ceiling over the staircase was elegantly frescoed, and the walls were covered with stucco work in white and gold. Entering the auditorium, visitors were dazzled by its brilliance. The balconies and floors were covered with Brussels carpeting. New seats, upholstered in scarlet plush and gold molding, were installed throughout the theater, and each balcony box was padded in crimson fabric. The panels surrounding the ceiling dome had been repainted with portraits of Shakespeare, Byron, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Beyerbeer and Beethoven. Sunday evening's guests were encouraged to wander the building at will to admire the decorations until 8:30 when they gathered in the auditorium for a presentation by Albert and Uranus Crosby.



CROSBY OPERA HOUSE.
GRAND OPENING
MONDAY EVENING, OCT. 9, 1871.

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CONCERT ORGANIZATION
OF SIXTY
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PERFECT CONCERT TROUPE
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Will give a series of
Ten Grand Symphony and Popular CONCERTS.

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 Tuesday Evening, Oct. 10.
 Wednesday Evening, Oct. 11.
 Thursday Evening, Oct. 12.
 Friday Evening, Oct. 13.
 Saturday Afternoon, Oct. 14.
 Saturday Evening, Oct. 14.
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SIGNOR LUIGI ROCCO,
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PRICE OF ADMITTANCE—One Dollar, reserved seats, Fifty Cents each, Gallery Seats, Thirty Cents each, Family Boxes, Eight Dollars.
Small Carriage Place Reserved.
NOTE: The sale of reserved seats will commence on Wednesday morning, Oct. 4, at the box office of Crosby Opera House.
Provision for the whole series can be had at all News-stands at 7c. to commence at 8.

Figure 22. Grand Reopening, Monday Evening, October 9, 1871.

The Best Laid Plans...

The advanced showing of the “new” opera house was a success. As the visitors departed into the street around 9:30, they were greeted with the odor of smoke. Most believed the acrid smell was little more than the result of recent fires that had occurred in parts of the city, especially the smoldering coal yard that ignited on Saturday. The Crosbys and a small party had gone to a restaurant after the reception; shortly after ten, one of the waiters informed the Crosby party that a new and very serious fire had started in the western division.

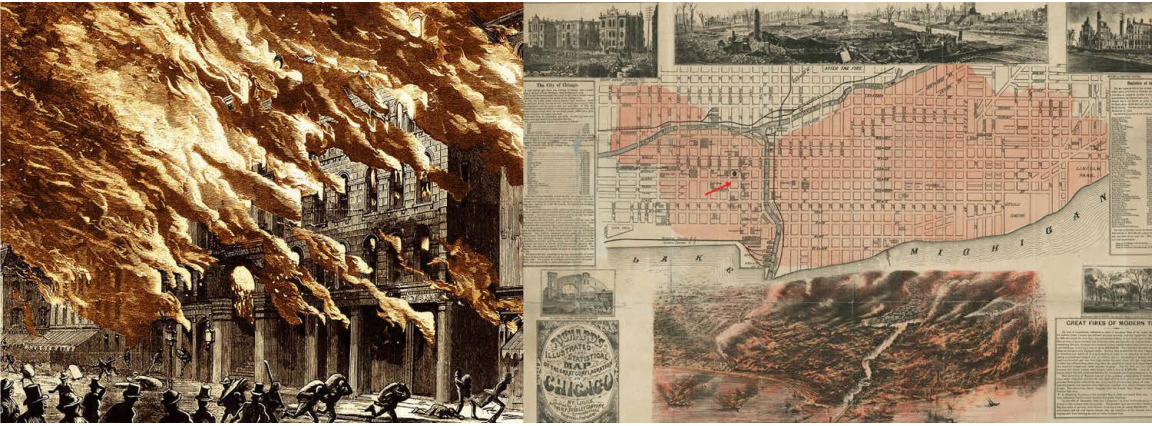


Figure 23. Opera House on fire.

As the evening progressed, it became apparent that the “Great Chicago Fire” was out of control and the city was in danger. Uranus and his party made their way back to the opera house, rushed in, and tried to save as much of the artwork and other valuables in the building as possible.

A wall of fire roared north along LaSalle Street, shooting long sheets of flame across Washington Street. Dearborn Street was by now covered almost completely with a canopy of fire. Albert Crosby could see that fire had been sucked into the windows behind all the first-floor stores. Then, the entire opera house building suddenly erupted in flame, with long streams of fire bursting all at once from every window on every floor and from the roof (Figure 23). At four-thirty, the entire façade of the opera house seemed to melt like wax and fall inward.

By the evening of the next day, the day the opera house was to reopen, the Great Chicago Fire had destroyed over 3.3 square miles of the city. The opera house had stood for less than six and a half years before being destroyed and never rebuilt.

Albert Crosby was one of the heaviest losers, with destroyed property valued at more than \$1,500,000. His insurance policies were in the amount of only \$75,000, most of which were never collected due to the failure of several insurance companies. Nonetheless, Albert stayed on in Chicago, remained a director of the Chicago City Railway Company, rebuilt his brewing company, invested heavily in real estate and railways, and amassed a second fortune.

Uranus Crosby, however, having experienced six of the most exhilarating years of his life, suddenly found himself with nothing. Everything he had done in the name of Chicago’s musical enlightenment had disappeared, and he was profoundly depressed. Chicago held no further promise for him. Though urged by friends to stay, he soon boarded a train back East to Brewster, Massachusetts. He carried no luggage; everything he owned had been lost in the fire.

Addendum

The author gave a presentation about the Crosby Opera House to the New York Chapter of the U.S. Philatelic Classics Society on the evening of September 12, 2023. The

event was mentioned in the December issue of the Classic Society's *The Chairman's Chatter*. Jerry Palazolo, a reader of that issue, wrote the author the following: "Years ago I purchased some steel dies and plates at a numismatic auction for a catalog project I was working on. I wanted to see firsthand what the engravings of the period looked like. I thought you might like to see one of the examples as it directly relates to your topic. The object at the top of the attached scan is the actual steel die. The illustration at the bottom of the scan is a positive image from the American Banknote archives (Figure 24).



Figure 24. Crosby Opera House Gold Co. plate and Capital Share image.

Though the plate and proof were found in the archives of the American Banknote Company, an examination of the plate below the top border line revealed it was the manufacture of the Western Bank Note and Engraving Co. Chicago. Unlike the Art Association certificate for the opera house lottery, this was a \$5 Capital Stock certificate for the Crosby Opera House Gold Co. For the first time in over 150 years, it appears Crosby had devised another scheme to save his opera house. There is absolutely no documentation found in the surviving records and newspaper sources referencing

the Crosby Opera House Gold Co. Neither is the Gold Co. mentioned by Eugene H. Cropsey, a great-great-grandson of Albert Crosby, in his widely researched scholarly 452-page book *Crosby's Opera House*, subtitled *Symbol of Chicago's Cultural Awakening*, published in 1999. The stock certificate is dated 1866, the same year as the inception of the Art Association and eventual lottery. For whatever reason, the plan to raise money by selling ownership in the opera house never took to fruition.

To quote Eugene H. Cropsey in the final paragraph of his book's Introduction: "All the unanticipated difficulties notwithstanding, Crosby's Opera house, fondly known by Chicagoans as their "Temple of Art," was the proverbial dream come true for Uranus Crosby, who had sacrificed his fortune to build it. All traces of this great institution, however, vanished on the day of the great Chicago conflagration—as well as from the memories of generations of Chicagoans to come."

Author's Endnote

As a collector of stamped and embossed revenue paper, the author's interest was piqued on noticing the Crosby Opera House Art Association certificate #51461 illustrated in Figure 13. offered on eBay. An internet search quickly revealed the fascinating story of Crosby and his dream to bring opera to America's Midwest. There is a story behind every philatelic cover and document, and Crosby's is just too good not to share.

[A version of this article first appeared in the First Quarter 2024 edition of *The American Revenuer*, the journal of the American Revenue Association. —Ed.]

Resources

1. Cropsey, Eugene H., *Crosby's Opera House: Symbol of Chicago's Cultural Awakening*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1999, 452 pages
2. Castenholz, Bill, "The Great Crosby Opera House Lottery," *The Check Collector*, Jan/Mar 1997, No 41
3. Piszkiwicz, Leonard, "A Philatelic Story of Crosby's Opera House," *Illinois Postal Historian*, Aug 2008, pp 15–31
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crosby's_Opera_House
5. www.greatchicagofire.org, The Great Chicago Fire & The Web of Memory
6. www.chicagology.com, Crosby Opera House
7. www.drloihjournal.blogspot.com, Crosby's Opera House and his lottery scheme, Chicago, Illinois (1865–1871)
8. www.derbyhistorical.org, history of revenue stamped paper

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▲ #????

B11111

2r x 4c

Betty Ford

+

+

LL

LR

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8*



▲ #?????

B1111

3r x 3c

\$1 Floral Geometry

UL

+

+

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1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9*

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17549 Glenn Coppe, Vienna, VA		ADDITIONS:	
17550 Rudi Carlton, Aberdeen, MD		New members	5
17551 Frank Jamison, Hemet, CA		Reinstated	4
17552 Everett Parker, Hudson, ME		Total	+ 9
17553 Winston Marshall, Sherman, TX		SUBTRACTIONS:	
17554 Jean Lhuillier, Millbrae, CA		Deceased	2
		Total	- 2
		NET CHANGE	+ 7
APPLICATIONS PENDING		TOTAL MEMBERSHIP April 30, 2024	
17541-17547			1374
NEW MEMBERS		DONATIONS	
17536-17540		<i>(received outside of annual dues cycle)</i>	
REINSTATED		Winston Marshall	
13085 Janet Gillis		Richard Zane	
14751 David St. Maurice			
16818 Michael Amer			
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11784 Dickson Preston			
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