

Stamping American Memory: Stamp Collecting in the U.S., 1880s-1930s

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

By

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Fall Semester 2009  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

## DEDICATION

For Roy

Thank you for your wisdom, guidance, patience, and kindness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I started this project under the guidance of the late Roy Rosenzweig. Roy presciently saw that my idea to write a synthetic history of collecting in the U.S. might be too large of a topic for a dissertation, but he let me figure that out on my own. He encouraged me to begin where I had already done some research, stamp collecting, thinking that I had stumbled upon some good material. Roy was right. I was lucky to have learned from him as my teacher and advisor, my boss and mentor. Roy was an amazing person and irreplaceable in so many ways.

I am ever grateful to my Director Alison Landsberg and committee member Mike O'Malley who suffered personal losses themselves, but did not hesitate when I asked them to step into shoes they did not want to have to fill. They pushed me in the best ways and encouraged me endlessly as I struggled through each chapter. Thank you. And to James Snead, I appreciate you serving on my committee at Roy's request.

As we all know, writing history is not a solitary pursuit, particularly when hunting for source materials. I spent much of my time researching at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum where the staff was very excited about my topic and supportive of my research, especially Cheryl Ganz, Thomas Lera, Paul McCutcheon, MaryAnn Wilson, and Allison Wickens. Ginny Horn at the American Philatelic Library always assisted me when I contacted her with odd requests. And, Meg Ausmann of the United States Postal Service History Office not only helped me find sources, but checked on my progress periodically.

I most often was distracted from my dissertation by my day job at the Center for History and New Media. Through working at CHNM, I have been able to merge my professional interests in new media and public history. More important, I have made great friends and met some really smart people. CHNM supports and encourages its staff to take time for research and writing, and I am grateful for the support shown for my work by all of my colleagues, especially Dan Cohen, Sharon Leon, and Tom Scheinfeldt. Other members of the GMU history faculty, including Mills Kelly, Rosie Zagarri, and Christopher Hamner encouraged me and offered advice throughout this process. I must extend a special thanks to Susan Smulyan at Brown who has provided me with endless support and chapter feedback because I was lucky enough to be her research assistant eleven years ago.

To my Murky Coffee mates (Bill Carpenter, Katja Hering, Chris Hughes, Jenny Landsbury, Steve Saltzgeber, Kevin Shupe, and Rob Townsend) who read my poorly-crafted drafts, I will miss our discussions when we sat on the uncomfortable

furniture of the old Murky. But, I look forward to a time when our writing group will transform into a book club, and we can sit on comfy chairs while talking about our pleasure reading.

My family and dear friends, living near and far, have shared in my journey back to school seven years ago and patiently listened to me as I complained and consistently gave dissertation progress reports that simply stated, “oh, it’s coming along.” You all have sustained me through this long process and other ups and downs along the way. I could not have done any of this without your humor, love, and support, especially from Grandma Brennan, Mom, Marty, Jada, and Ian.

And finally, to my partner-in-crime, Ian: at last, we can learn what marriage is like without graduate school.

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## ABSTRACT

STAMPING AMERICAN MEMORY: STAMP COLLECTING IN THE U.S.,  
1880s-1930s

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George Mason University, 2009

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This dissertation traces how stamp collecting developed from an obscure leisure time activity in the 1880s into one of the most popular hobbies in the 1930s, and demonstrates how communities of collectors and non-collectors, and the postal service, engaged in a conversation about citizenship and race through the subjects of commemorative stamps. Often unexamined as cultural evidence, stamps provide visual snapshots of the American past that spoke to Americans about their present, particularly at a time when the United States emerged as a global imperial and industrial power. In the early years, stamp collectors formed communities and defined themselves as philatelists to achieve an expertise in this leisure activity. By the 1890s, the United States Post Office Department (USPOD) capitalized on that growth in popularity to earn money and support for its agency by printing limited-issue

commemorative stamps. During this process, the USPOD began to see collectors as consumers with money to spend, even if it was only two-cents at a time. The Department expanded its already close relationship with Americans by encouraging them to purchase and save commemoratives as patriotic souvenirs. Stamps circulated widely containing government-sanctioned narratives that honored select heroes and events from the past that spoke to contemporary cultural debates over immigration, and racial and gender inequality. Because of the accessibility of American commemoratives, these stamps served to reinforce and naturalize an exceptionalist and triumphant vision of the American past that obscured the complicated legacies of conquest, slavery, and inequality.

## Introduction

“Much of the revelation was to come through the stamp collection Pierce had left, his substitute often for her—thousands of little colored windows into deep vistas of space and time... No suspicion at all that it might have something to tell her...what after all could the mute stamps have told her...”

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*<sup>1</sup>

Scholars, like Thomas Pynchon’s character, Oedipa Maas, often overlook stamps and the practice of stamp collecting, missing how those “deep vistas of space and time” imprinted visions of the past on the cultural memory of those who viewed them. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Maas becomes the executor of former boyfriend Pierce Inverarity’s remaining estate, including a large stamp collection possibly connected to an underground postal service operated by a European ex-patriot network, the Tristero. Maas is torn between believing in this conspiracy theory about the Tristero and believing that Pierce arranged a series of clues and stories merely to fool her. Through Maas, Pynchon hints of an uncovered complexity and influence of the U.S. postal service not only for communication, but also as a central institution managing

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: J.B. Lippencott Company, 1965), 31-2.

and shaping visual meanings. Amidst this adventure to determine what Inverarity left behind for her in his estate Maas was surprised to discover “that the legacy was America.”<sup>2</sup> Many historians also often overlook postal operations, in general. Specifically, many treat stamps as mere instruments, rather than as objects deeply embedded in culture, with complicated stories to tell.

Pynchon’s text stages both the importance of the postal service as an index to national life and the value of looking more closely at the practices of collecting. As the auctioneer cries out for the bidding to begin on “lot 49” of Inverarity’s stamps, Pynchon’s work urges its readers to re-examine the ways that stamps and the postal service shape national life. This study follows Pynchon’s mandate and demonstrates that American commemorative postage stamps hold meanings beyond their mute images illustrating how Americans and their government commented on the past and the present. In order to investigate the meaning of the stamps, one must also examine the institution producing them and the ways in which people collected stamps. Inverarity’s world of stamp collecting emerged in the United States independent of the postal service, and changed once the United States Post Office Department (USPOD) recognized an opportunity to earn money from collectors by printing commemoratives. Because those stamps were rarely redeemed for postal delivery, commemoratives increased the gross income earned by an agency constantly struggling to balance its budget. During the early twentieth century, the USPOD emerged as the

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<sup>2</sup> Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 149.

federal agency perhaps most involved with public history making prior to the New Deal as it presented and selected scenes and figures from the American past for printing on commemorative stamps. This dissertation investigates the relationships and intersections among stamp collectors (philatelists), non-collectors, and the postal service and the influences that such relationships have on concepts of nationalism, consumption, and memory making in the United States.

My study begins after the American Civil War, when collecting stamps emerged as a leisure time activity approximately thirty years after the postal revolution began when Great Britain introduced the postage stamp. In 1840, the British developed a system for pre-paying postage based on the weight of a letter rather than on the distance it traveled. The stamp served as a physical representation of paid postage, bearing the head of reigning monarch Queen Victoria. This system emerged from the needs of the sprawling British Empire, where a very small letter might travel thousands of miles and across oceans to reach its destination within British territory. European, and North and South American nations followed the new British model and also adopted the pre-paid postage system in the mid-nineteenth century. A few individuals found these colored bits of paper curious and fascinating, and so began casually collecting and trading stamps among associates without the acknowledgement or support of government postal services.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mary H. Lawson, "Philately," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, D.C.: National Postal Museum, 2006), <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027477>.

The fact that stamps existed to serve the needs of empires makes it unsurprising that collecting stamps often mimicked imperialistic tendencies, but on a much smaller scale. Stamps often acted as official and visual press releases to the world announcing the establishment of a newly-independent nation, the ascension of a new monarch, or the election of a national leader. All stamps contained identifying signs to indicate the country of origin in words and/or symbols, the denomination in native currency, and a design that included color, typography, and imagery. These variables combined to present a vision of national identity presented on an individual stamp. For colonies, protectorates, and occupied territories that vision most often was controlled by the ruling authorities who focused imagery on the beauty and exoticism of place to de-emphasize questions of sovereignty. With governments issuing stamps, national or imperial, collectors could easily use that distinction as a consistent way to classify and arrange stamps.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in the late nineteenth century, collectors amassed and traded stamps representing different nations and then organized them by country or colony neatly in albums. Scholars of collecting assert that collections created something new even when collectors followed common conventions for arranging those objects.<sup>5</sup> A stamp collector could create their own small empire by collecting stamps from around the world or focus on specific countries, say Brazil and South

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<sup>4</sup> Jack Child, *Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995); Leah Dilworth, ed., *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Susan M Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

Africa. By collecting the “stepping stones” of American history through U.S. commemoratives, a collector created a vision of American exceptionalism—as told through the postal service—through the narratives present in their album.<sup>6</sup> Fittingly, the practice of collecting stamps grew in popularity in the U.S. as America’s role increased economically, politically, and militarily around the world.

The development of stamp collecting from the 1880s through the 1930s not only mirrored the transformation of the U.S. into an international political power, but also mirrored the transition of the U.S. into a consumer society. Russell Belk posited that collecting by non-elites occurs only in consumer societies, when objects are bought, traded, and consumed in ways similar to other material goods. Stamp collecting became popular at a time when mass-produced items were readily available and Americans increased the amount of money spent on non-essential household items, even if discretionary spending for most remained modest.<sup>7</sup> Stamps, in general, were not expensive and people had many opportunities to obtain free stamps in product packaging, through trading duplicates, or from clipping friends’ and neighbors’ mail. Collecting stamps held broad and varied appeal: for some it was purely aesthetics, others were intrigued by subject matter, the potential value, the methods of production, while some simply enjoyed the thrill of the hunt. Collecting and the desire to increase a collection was not new to the time period I examine, nor

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<sup>6</sup> William J. Reed, “The Sun Never Sets in Philately Land,” *Philatelic West* 85, no. 2 (February 1927): np.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*.

new in light of royal collections, but collecting became increasingly accessible and acceptable to Americans as the culture of desire and consumerism developed and was shaped by merchant capitalists, private and federal institutions, and advertising agencies from the 1880s to the 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Part of this consumer culture was a new and powerful advertising industry. Advertisements sold consumer goods by referencing the American past and invoking national symbols to associate purchasing a product with patriotism and good citizenship. Simultaneously, the Post Office Department printed and sold its own products that invoked national symbols and referenced the American past. These stamps served dually as pre-paid postage and as a consumer collectible. Commercial advertising strategies framed consumption as an essential component of American identity and citizenship. Purchasing consumer goods, as constructed by advertisers, had the power to unite Americans through what Charles McGovern defines as “material nationalism.” To advertisers, Americanness was found in things, and the language of those things promoted social harmony and assimilation, while simultaneously erasing the presence of people of color or ethnic minorities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of A New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Matthias Judt, Charles McGovern, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Washington, D.C: German Historical Institute, 1998); Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2002). See also: Lizabeth Cohen, *Making the New Deal, Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Similarly, the USPOD sought to unite Americans by selling a selective and triumphalist vision of the American past. This vision embodied the contradictions of civic and racial nationalisms as defined by Gary Gerstle.<sup>10</sup> While promoting the principle that all Americans enjoyed economic opportunity and political equality, commemoratives obscured complicated narratives that also masked racial, gender, and class barriers to achieving full rights of citizenship. History presented on stamps functioned to tell its citizens, “this is your story” even when it did not reflect the diverse realities of Americans. The fact that the USPOD emerged as such a powerful institution in legitimizing particular narratives about the national past explains why, as I will show later, different groups lobbied so strenuously for their images and events to appear on commemorative stamps.

Commemorative stamps functioned as a type of federal souvenir that when saved became miniature memorials. Susan Stewart sees a souvenir as an object that offers an incomplete vision of an event or place that it represents thus requiring a new narrative that displaces the authentic experience. Stories on stamps were derivative narratives of historical events and biographies. Although small in size, stamps’ availability made them more accessible than memory sites, such as museums, archives, and monuments. These sites have the power, according to Pierre Nora, to be nation-building tools that erase a personal, experiential memory of the past. Much like

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<sup>10</sup> Gerstle, *American Crucible*.

structural memorials built in public spaces one vision of the past dominates the stamp's imagery, which often screens out other perspectives.<sup>11</sup>

Marita Sturken, in her study of memory and consumerism following terrorist attacks in Oklahoma City and on September 11, recently proposed that Americans occupy the role of "tourist" when relating to their history. Tourists of history, as defined by Sturken, experience history as a "mediated and reenacted experience" much like tourists who visit sites where they do not live and as tourists, people approach their visit to the past from a detached and innocent position. Kitschy souvenirs, produced to make money from tourists, also imprint a specific image of that site that can be replayed in the memory of person keeping the trinket. Sturken also argues that in the role of a detached tourist, an American citizen "participates uncritically" in a culture that simplifies complex realities of late twentieth and early twenty-first century history.<sup>12</sup> I will demonstrate how the federally-printed commemorative stamps act as souvenirs of the American past that evolve into miniature memorials. By nature of their size and the imagery represented on these miniature memorials, stamps teach

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<sup>11</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 132-151. Stewart and Nora's definition draw upon the concept of a screen memory developed by Sigmund Freud. A screen memory stands in for an original unpleasant personal memory from the past in order to protect an individual as they live in the present. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1948).

<sup>12</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

collectors and consumers to be tourists of history in the early twentieth century as well.

As scholars of memory and memorialization have shown, the institutionalization of memory in a society serves the needs of a nation or community at a given time. Often, the messages projected through a memorial's design are contentious, like the conflict over the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. John Bodnar sees these struggles as the result of clash between an official and vernacular culture. The voices of official culture want to present the past in patriotic ways to emphasize ideals and achievements rather than in such a way that engages complex realities. In contrast, the voices of vernacular culture represent the varied interests of diverse groups reflecting personal experiences emerging from smaller communities.<sup>13</sup> Stamps provided official narratives generated by the USPOD, but by the 1920s commemoratives were the products of negotiations among collectors, non-collectors, and postal officials. Some conflicts arose when the postal service chose to print commemorative stamps resulting from vernacular petitioning to honor a local anniversary or hero. Once selected for printing, particularly the examples I study, local stories were elevated to national ones. These stamps carried unmatched official legitimacy lent by their

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<sup>13</sup> John E Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Susan A. Crane, ed., *Museums and Memory* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000); James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

designation as a government issue, and yet the same designation stripped away any complexity of that original narrative. Once circulated and saved, the images became “entangled” between history and memory, hence embedded in the cultural memory of all those who viewed the stamp.<sup>14</sup>

Millions of Americans, some have estimated, collected stamps at one point in their lives between the 1880s and 1930s, and yet despite its popularity stamp collecting has not been examined closely by scholars. My study is a cultural history that draws its historiographical base from literature on postal history, nationalism, consumption, collecting, material culture, and memory and memorialization. Historians of the postal service tend to focus on the Post Office’s institutional contributions to government, business, commerce, and communications such as found in the works of Wayne Fuller, Richard John, and Richard Kiebelwicz. David Henkin’s recent cultural approach examines the postal service’s influence in shaping interconnectedness in nineteenth-century American life. His study of “the postal age” is particularly useful in demonstrating how the postal service was intimately involved with Americans’ daily

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<sup>14</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. I favor Sturken’s concept of “cultural memory” here rather than Halbwach’s “collective memory.” Certainly, Americans could be categorized as one social group and stamps contributed to the memories of that group. Stamps, however, live beyond the countries where they are printed and have lives within homes and stamp albums of individuals. The interpretation of stamps also lie “entangled” between history and memory, because they are produced by governments in an official capacity yet they are used by collectors and non-collectors in different ways to suit their interests and needs.

experiences and emotions through delivery and care of mailable matter.<sup>15</sup> While Henkin sees a decline in that postal culture resulting from decreased postage rates and the emergence of the telephone in the late nineteenth century, I see those relationships increasing as consumers and collectors develop an intimate relationship with the USPOD because of the connections they make with stamps produced to be collectibles.

Recent studies in consumerism will be particularly helpful as I make important connections between consumption, the state and its citizens. Lizbeth Cohen argues that post-World War II America became a “Consumer’s Republic” where public policy debates were shaped by consumer-citizens needs and desires. These behaviors were rooted, she proposes, in the New Deal. The New Deal’s most powerful result, according to Alan Brinkley, was the adoption of Keynesian economic policies focused on supporting the production of consumer goods and maintaining consumer spending levels. Charles McGovern shows us that by looking back to the late nineteenth century, one can trace how definitions of citizenship became solidly intertwined with

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<sup>15</sup> Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Wayne E. Fuller, “The South and the Rural Free Delivery of Mail,” *The Journal of Southern History* 25, no. 4 (November 1959): 499-521; Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth Century America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail; Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Richard B Kielbowicz, “Postal Subsidies for the Press and the Business of Mass Culture, 1880-1920,” *The Business History Review* 64, no. 3, Service Industries (Autumn 1990): 451-488; David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (University Of Chicago Press, 2006).

consumerism by the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> My study will draw from McGovern's and Cohen's works, while also proposing that the postal service acts as another player in the matrix that comprises the emerging consumer culture from the 1880s through the 1930s.

Because the USPOD, as engine of the state, emerges in the early twentieth century as a powerful institution to legitimize certain narratives of the American past, I must also examine literature on constructions of nationalism and race. Some scholars engage in transnational approaches to studying consumption and nationalism, while others focus on the cultural impact of war, racial hierarchies, gendered foreign policy decisions, and the ways in which definitions of citizenship change in relation to global politics and conflicts. Benedict Anderson's concept of nation as imagined and constructed through various ways, including the press—facilitated by the postal service—remains useful as I contemplate the reach of the USPOD through their commemorative stamp program. Additionally, Gary Gerstle and David Roediger look

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995); Lawrence B Glickman, ed., *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999); *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending*; Judt, McGovern, and Strasser, *Getting and Spending*; Kristin L Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); McGovern, *Sold American*; Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Mark A Swiencicki, "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 773-808; Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Simon J. Bronner, ed., *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (New York: Norton/Winterthur Museum, 1989); Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of A New American Culture*.

at how national identity, public policy, and American culture are intricately intertwined with exclusionary constructions of race and ethnicity.<sup>17</sup> Imagery on stamps and the dialog that emerged among collectors, non-collectors, and postal officials contribute to this conversation on national identity and race.

Non-elite collecting emerges, as I stated earlier, in consumer societies and studies on the subject come from a variety of fields including of material culture, economics, and psychology, but rarely offer a historical component. As I have discovered, writing a synthetic historical treatment of the subject is challenging which may explain why few historians have tackled this task. Scholars still cite *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: The Story of Collecting* from 1949 when seeking a summary of the origins of collecting globally or practices in the United States specifically. A collection of essays edited by Leah Dilworth offers a more recent effort to close that gap in collecting scholarship by examining the cultural implications of different collecting activities in the U.S. Most of the remaining literature attempts to define what collecting is, broadly, and then apply those definitions to individuals and objects without regard for historical or cultural context. Susan Pearce and Russell Belk offer contemporary

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<sup>17</sup> Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium*; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Gerstle, *American Crucible*; Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: BasicBooks, 2005); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

perspectives on collecting that come from Pearce's work in museums and Belk's research as an economist. Their works importantly examine how some individuals systematically collect very specific things and how those people derive meaning in their lives from nurturing collections. In their psycho-analytic examinations of individual collecting habits, Werner Musterburger and Jean Baudrillard see all collectors as obsessive and compulsive, but they do not see beyond the handful of examples they cite in their works to view the complexities of collecting practices or collectors. Musterburger, Baudrillard, and Pearce attempt to answer motivational questions, such as why do collectors collect; do collectors fetishize objects; does collecting fill a psychological need created by an earlier trauma in their lives?<sup>18</sup> This dissertation will not dive into psychological or motivational debates about collecting. Instead, I will firmly plant stamp collecting and collectors within the time in which they lived to focus on the cultural work performed by such practices.

By studying stamp collecting as a practice, I can look to a handful of studies that treat collecting as a hobby. Popular discussions of finding a hobby, or a productive leisure activity, emerged in the late nineteenth century and grew to include activities such as collecting, craft making, gardening, fishing, and do-it-yourself

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas and Elizabeth Rigby, *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: The Story of Collecting* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1949); Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society*; Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Leah Dilworth, *Acts of Possession*; Pearce, *On Collecting*; Susan M. Pearce, Alexandra Bounia, and Paul Martin, *The Collector's Voice : Critical Readings in the Practice of Collecting* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Baudrillard and others discuss psychological implications of collecting, in general in, John and Roger Cardinal Elsner, ed., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

projects. Steven Gelber closely studies hobbies as a way to re-examine definitions of work and leisure in the U.S. He focuses on how many of these activities emulate paid work more so than other leisurely pursuits, such as mass cultural spectatorship.

Kristen Haring investigates how ham radio enthusiasts carved out cultural space for themselves through the acquisition of technical knowledge and becoming experts with that knowledge during their free time. Haring's work on a hobbyist community will provide some framework for looking at stamp collectors and their clubs. While Gelber draws heavily on stamp collecting sources to shape his section on collecting, he ignores how the practice has developed and changed over time.<sup>19</sup> My work will demonstrate the ways that stamp collecting developed over time, from the 1880s through 1930s, and include much needed analysis of the USPOD's role in shaping collecting.

By investigating the role played by the USPOD in stamp collecting activities, I will also broaden our vision of the ways in which the federal government participated in remembering the American past. Attempts to involve Congress in funding historic preservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries met with consistent resistance, particularly when solicited by private groups seeking appropriations to maintain homes of former presidents. Federal involvement in historic preservation and commemoration is often traced to New Deal programs, such as the expansion of the

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<sup>19</sup> Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Steven M. Gelber, "Free Market Metaphor: The Historical Dynamics of Stamp Collecting," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 4 (October 1992): 742-769; Steven M. Gelber, "A Job You Can't Lose: Work and Hobbies in the Great Depression," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 741-766; Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio's Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

National Park Service (NPS) when such historic site funding requests finally were considered and accepted.<sup>20</sup> The government had long been preserving episodes of the American past through stamp production. The scholarship of American memory has carefully analyzed physical memorials and museums but has not viewed commemorative stamps as memorials or as contributing to the national practices of remembrance. Even Michael Kammen's comprehensive tome, *Mystic Chords of Memory* misses the opportunity to discuss the impact of commemorative stamps in chapters on Americana, regional commemorations, and collectors.<sup>21</sup>

This dissertation traces how stamp collecting developed from an obscure leisure time activity in the 1870s and 1880s into one of the most popular hobbies in the 1930s. By the 1890s, the United States Post Office Department capitalized on that growth in popularity to earn money and support for its agency by printing limited-issue commemorative stamps. During this process, the USPOD began to see collectors as consumers with money to spend, even if it was only two-cents at a time. The Department expanded its already close relationship with Americans by encouraging them to purchase and save commemoratives as patriotic souvenirs. Stamps circulated widely when printed, and individuals collected, saved, and displayed stamps to be

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<sup>20</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*; Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1999); Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*; Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*; Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves.*, Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*; Sturken, *Tourists of History*.

looked at repeatedly. These images, albeit small in size, were not fleeting or insignificant, but rather transformed by their collectors into miniature memorials to an idealized American past.

Chapter 1 traces the development of elite collecting clubs and how stamp collecting emerged as a hobby in the United States beginning in the late nineteenth century. Stamp collectors distinguished themselves as philatelists by forming exclusive clubs that mimicked professional associations. The way collecting became a popular hobby outside of clubs is the subject of Chapter 2. An abundance of stamp collecting references in popular culture during the early twentieth century help to weave philately into the daily lives of many Americans. This accessibility and visual appeal of stamps invited different groups to use stamps as pedagogical tools for teaching about nation, imperialism, and consumerism. Chapter 3 explores how the USPOD transitioned from an institution indifferent to collectors to an active participant in collecting culture and public history making. Merchant-capitalist, department store founder and owner, and Postmaster General John Wanamaker recognized that collectors were consumers and he pushed the Department to print its first commemorative stamp series celebrating the World's Columbian Exposition in 1892. That success prompted the Department to print other World's Fairs stamps, participate in public exhibitions, and open the Philatelic Agency to serve collectors. Finally, Chapter 4 examines how collectors, non-collectors, and postal officials engaged one another in negotiations over how best to represent a diverse America on

commemoratives. USPOD constructed commemoratives to showcase the uniqueness of the American past. While standing for all Americans, the faces on stamps were overwhelmingly male and racially white and scenes celebrated Western European immigration, conquests of native peoples, technological conquest of lands, and military heroism.

This dissertation will demonstrate that stamp collecting was not just an insignificant hobby practiced by a few obsessed individuals. Rather, stamp collecting provides us a way to examine how millions of individuals and the federal government participated in a conversation about national life in early-twentieth-century America. Some may view my study as yet another historical effort in American exceptionalism by focusing on collecting in the U.S. when stamps can be an intriguing step into a deeply comparative work. I have chosen to focus on stamp collecting and production in the United States, because such a history does not yet exist. Stamps and the practices of collecting are understudied and this dissertation seeks to offer an example of how one might integrate these sources into other projects. In order to move forward and examine production and collecting activities and those interconnections in a global context, one must have a starting point. This dissertation is a beginning.

“The auctioneer cleared his throat. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 152.

## Chapter 1: Becoming Philatelists, Building Communities

“Well, I declare! You stamp collectors beat my understanding!”

“Well, I suppose to one who is not interested in philately, stamp collecting seems like a queer business.”

“It isn’t a business—it’s a disease.”

“The Prevailing Malady,” 1895<sup>1</sup>

The earliest stamp collectors earned reputations as “cranks” who were afflicted with a disease, often referred to as the “collecting mania;” a perception that continued for decades after the emergence of the hobby in the 1870s and 1880s. Many collectors felt the need to justify why collecting stamps was not “a queer business” and battled accusations that they were engaged in a childish folly by insisting it was a worthy pursuit.<sup>2</sup> Wealthy Americans and nouveau riche industrial capitalists collected fine art yet their behavior rarely was equated with a mania.<sup>3</sup> Economically stable Americans of more modest means also learned to collect things in the nineteenth century, and stamps became one of the most popularly collected items, due in part because of the strength of their hobby community that took form in the U.S. in the 1870s and 1880s.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Prevailing Malady,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> “The Collecting Mania,” *Washington Post* (originally published in *New York Tribune*), March 17, 1889; and E. D. Koontz, “Collecting’ Stamps,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 77, no. 1 (September 1920): 29.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel P. Weisberg, et al., *Collecting in the Gilded Age: Art Patronage in Pittsburgh, 1890-1910* (Pittsburgh: Frick Art & Historical Center; Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997); and “Collecting Past and Present,” *The Nation* 109, no. 2841 (December 13, 1919): 736-77.

People began collecting stamps in Great Britain and France soon after the postage revolution in the 1840s, and the practice spread to the U.S. The first dealer in the U.S. was a transplanted Frenchman who opened a Boston shop in the 1860s. To promote a serious aspect of studying and collecting stamps, Georges Herpin coined the term “philately” in 1864, drawing on the Greek root “philos,” meaning fond of, and “atelia,” meaning exemption from tax or tax receipt. Early collectors in Great Britain focused on the colors and subjects of stamps. In contrast, French collectors began examining the elements of stamp production including the variation of shade, paper, watermarks, and perforations with less concern for the subjects. As a handful of international businessmen joined casual enthusiasts in analyzing stamps for their subjects and their production qualities, stamp collectors slowly became “philatelists.”<sup>4</sup> Philatelists began to connect with other collectors in the U.S. and by the 1880s, the first American stamp association had been established. Predating technical hobby clubs created after World War II, philatelic societies formed a national network of clubs in the nineteenth century to help legitimize their activities, to explain their hobby to a broader audience, and to increase the popularity of the practice.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Stanley M. Bierman, *The World's Greatest Stamp Collectors* (New York: Frederick Fell Publishers, 1981); and “Good as Chest Protectors,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1893. Some European collectors preferred the term “timbology” to refer to stamp collecting. “Timbre” is the French word for stamp. Mauritz Hallgren, *All About Stamps: Their History and the Art of Collecting Them* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940), 177-185; and Mary H. Lawson, “Philately,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, D.C.: National Postal Museum, 2006), <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027477>.

<sup>5</sup> Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio's Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

This chapter will investigate the development of a stamp collecting culture that emerged when collectors established communities through the formation of membership clubs and the publication and circulation of an active philatelic press. These communities sought to define themselves by a set of practices and behaviors that distinguished members as “philatelists” and constructed philately as a type of scientific pursuit. While white male members wanted to attract new collectors to philatelic clubs, they also constructed barriers and rules that merely reinforced the exclusivity of a privileged class represented by their paying members, which was practiced by other types of members-only clubs.<sup>6</sup> Other collectors never joined clubs but participated in the philatelic culture through the circulation of stamp literature. These institutional structures helped to shape how philatelists and collectors viewed themselves and how they practiced their hobby. This community became influential, as shown in following chapters, as the hobby grew in popularity and in the ways that philatelists shaped stamp production in the U.S. through the early twentieth century.

Collecting is a centuries-old practice most often associated with European royalty until the revolutionary era of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the emergence of capitalism, particularly in the United States. During the Early Republic period, prominent individuals such as Thomas Jefferson and Charles Wilson

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<sup>6</sup> The Book-of-the-Month Club is an example of that tension. Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Also available online at [netlibrary.com](http://netlibrary.com).

Peale collected a variety of natural, technological, and art objects as interest in collecting slowly increased in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Some sought to complete autograph sets containing the signatures of each signer of the Declaration of Independence, while others pursued art, coins, and books. Many collectors retained their collections privately, while others wanted to connect with like-minded individuals and founded clubs in the mid-nineteenth century. Those interested in learning more about art and who lacked the money to purchase original pieces on their own joined the American Art Union (AAU), one of the earliest collecting clubs in the U.S. From 1839-1853, the AAU's dues supported American artists and each year gave members an engraved print created from paintings by artists including Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and George Caleb Bingham.<sup>8</sup> Others interested in coins might have joined the American Numismatic Society (ANS), established in 1858 to pursue and study ancient coins. The ANS positioned itself as a national organization that brought together local numismatic associations established in cities across the U.S. and encouraged the formation of new groups. Wealthy New York bibliophiles established the Grolier

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<sup>7</sup> Tom Stammers, "The Bric-a-Brac of the Old Regime: Collecting and Cultural History in Post-Revolutionary France," *French History* 22 (September 2008): 295-315; Paul A. Gilje, ed., *Wages of Independence: Capitalism in the Early American Republic*, 1st ed. (Madison: Madison House, 1997); Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Douglas and Elizabeth Rigby, *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: The Story of Collecting* (Philadelphia: Lippencott, 1949).

<sup>8</sup> Rigby, *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: The Story of Collecting*, 277-78. Additionally, AAU members had an opportunity to obtain original art through an annual lottery system. In 1852, the New York Supreme Court, however, declared the art lottery to be illegal and forced the AAU to dissolve and auction off its remaining holdings. At its peak, the AAU's rolls grew to include nearly 19,000 members across the U.S. For a list of sample AAU membership prints, see finding aid: *Guide to the American Art-Union Print Collection, 1840-1851* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 2002), <http://dlib.nyu.edu/eadapp/transform?source=nyhs/artunion.xml&style=nyhs/nyhs.xml&part=body>.

Club in 1884 to discuss their book collections and to dabble occasionally in poster collecting.<sup>9</sup>

Many others collected privately without belonging to clubs. This was particularly true for women and children who collected a variety of free or found objects from butterflies to buttons, to trade and prayer cards. In the 1870s and 1880s, colorfully printed and mass-produced chromolithographic trade cards appeared in consumer product packaging to encourage brand loyalty among consumers. The advent of advertising trade cards also signaled a deliberate move on the part of consumer capitalists to produce items for the purpose of collecting and preservation that encouraged spending to broaden a collection. At the same time, churches and religious societies saw the popularity of advertising cards and printed their own versions that included biblical figures and passages or prayers. Some practicing Christians enjoyed collecting prayer cards because it offered a material connection to their faith and also functioned to identify themselves as part of a larger religious community. Some of these private or home-based collections made by men, women, and children landed in scrapbooks, while others were merely thrown away.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> William R. Weeks, *History of the American Numismatic and Archeological Society* (New York: American Numismatic and Archeological Society, 1892); and Neil Harris, "American Poster Collecting," 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Dreaming in Commerce: Advertising Trade Card Scrapbooks," in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 66-85; Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); and Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

With the growth of collecting in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, we see collectors of all types of objects labeled as being afflicted with “the collecting mania.” Evidence as early as 1812 in French publications referred to collectors as developing a mania for pursuing autographs and historical letters, but this language does not resurface until the 1860s. According to one assessment in 1868, a stamp collecting mania appeared in the U.S. and affected young people, while the mania for collecting pictures and coins mainly affected adults.<sup>11</sup> Discussions of manias were not uncommon in the press or popular literature at this time. Generally, manias were associated specifically with women at a time when many health professionals believed the female physiology made them more susceptible to mental disorders. Popular discussions positioned the mania in opposition to the scientific ideal as both concepts were being developed and shaped by cultural, gender, and class-based stereotypes. Women, identified as middle-class or of means, who shoplifted merchandise from department stores were not common criminals, but instead were afflicted with kleptomania that left them physically unable to resist goods that passed before them.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly the collecting mania was not gender-specific, yet collectors, male and female, still did not act rationally in the eyes of observers. When afflicted, collectors could not help their desire to acquire more objects.

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<sup>11</sup> Originally published as a column in the *Paris Spectator*, January 4, 1812; collected and translated in Etienne de Jouy, *The Paris Spectator, Or, L'hermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin, Containing Observations upon Parisian Manners and Customs at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. William Jerdan (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1816), 96. This article was then re-published in: “A First Night in Racine,” *The Knickerbocker*, April 1844; and “Collectors and Collecting,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 22, 1868, O3.

<sup>12</sup> Elaine S. Abelson, “The Invention of Kleptomania,” *Signs* 15, no.1 (Autumn 1989): 123-143.

To prevent the mania from setting in, a variety of articles warned readers against collecting objects of any kind by the 1880s and 1890s. Something that started innocently as a childhood activity, according to one observer, might progress to an adult “disease” or to the early stages of dementia leading one to an asylum. While stamp collecting appeared to onlookers in the nineteenth century as “merely a form of mild insanity or monomania,” for some “enthusiastic collectors, it became the principal interest of their lives.” By the 1920s, as collecting grew in popularity, more adults accepted it as a suitable leisure activity even if the collecting mania remained “curious.” Observers found that collecting offered individuals “the surest remedies against the tedium and monotony of life.”<sup>13</sup> In the early twentieth century, more Americans grew interested in collecting, and public opinions of collectors began to change, as will be seen in the next chapter, due in part to the growing legions of stamp collectors.

### **Philatelic Clubs and Collectors**

Kings, queens, lords, czars, and American politicians put a public face on philately in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century periodicals, but most American collectors were not famous or worthy of headlines. They worked in a

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<sup>13</sup> “The Collecting Fiend,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1877; and “Stamp Collecting,” *Boston Daily Globe*, July 11, 1896; and “Collecting Souls,” *Youth’s Companion* 94, no. 29 (July 15, 1920): 422. After keyword searching through Proquest newspaper and periodical databases, the term “collecting mania” appears most often—in 40 separate articles—between the 1890s and 1900s. Between 1840 and 1940, the term appears 134 times.

variety of occupations and lived both in rural and urban areas.<sup>14</sup> *Rogers' American Philatelic Blue Book* of 1893 indicated that late-nineteenth-century stamp collecting was truly a pursuit of young adults who worked in a variety of occupations. The *Blue Book* listed more farmers than doctors and more clerks than bankers, and showed that skilled workers such as electricians, carpenters, blacksmiths, quarrymen, patternmakers, and coal miners publicly identified themselves as stamp collectors. More than half of the 2000 respondents did not belong to a philatelic association, but they must have occasionally read a philatelic paper to know about Rogers's free listings in this directory. Directories, like Rogers's *Blue Book* and another printed by prominent philatelic publisher, *Mekeel's*, showed collectors living in big cities and small towns across the U.S. Most collectors listed themselves by their last name and first initials, making gender speculation difficult, but the occupations listed indicate that most were male. Rogers compiled his directory to grow membership in the

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<sup>14</sup> "They're Stamp Mad," *Chicago Daily*, August 12, 1894; "Stamp-Collecting as a Hobby, Wealthy Philatelists," *Current Literature* 15, no. 5 (May 1894): 428; D.B. Armstrong, "Stamp Collecting in the British Royal Family," *The Living Age* 279, no. 3617 (1913): 296-302; "King George Swaps Stamps with Arthur Hind; Five Americans Win Honors at London Exhibit," *New York Times*, May 19, 1923; "Wife Says Balked Sea Career Led to Roosevelt's Ship Hobby," *New York Times*, January 13, 1931; "Floral Gifts for Silas Chapman, Jr.," *Hartford Courant*, September 3, 1916; and Alfred Dezendorf, "Henry J. Crocker and His Stamp Collection," *San Francisco Call*, January 12, 1902. For a source of lists of philatelists, see Stanley M. Bierman, *The World's Greatest Stamp Collectors* (New York: Frederick Fell Publishers, 1981); and Stanley M. Bierman, *More of the World's Greatest Stamp Collectors* (Sidney, OH: Linn's Stamp News, 1990). Biographies of prominent men in the early twentieth century often mentioned stamp collecting as a childhood hobby, such as Henry Cabot Lodge and Anthony Comstock: Henry Cabot Lodge, *Early Memories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 24-6; and Charles Galludet Trumbull, *Anthony Comstock, Fighter, Some Impressions of a Lifetime of Adventure in Conflict with the Powers of Evil*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), 24-5.

American Philatelic Association, of which he was a member.<sup>15</sup> Circulating lists of collectors with their addresses also gave people the opportunity to facilitate communities across geographical boundaries via the mail system by writing to others seeking to trade or buy stamps. By the 1890s, stamp collecting was an established pastime shared by many men working in white and blue collar occupations across the country who had a few extra dollars and hours to spend on a hobby, and some of them joined newly-forming philatelic clubs.

For a hobby that men appeared to dominate, at least publicly, it is intriguing that women played a formative role in shaping the mythology of early philately. One philatelic writer claimed that the first gatherings of stamp collectors in Paris in the 1860s were hosted and attended by women who exchanged their duplicate stamps on Sunday afternoons in the Tuilleries Gardens. When the postage system was still new in Britain, women collected stamps featuring the profile of reigning monarch Queen Victoria. Although stamps were collected in the mid-nineteenth century by women, as

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<sup>15</sup> Albert R. Rogers, *Rogers' American Philatelic Blue Book, Containing a List of Over Two Thousand Stamp Collectors and Dealers, Philatelic Papers and Societies, with Valuable Information Concerning Them, and Seven Hundred Advertisements of Collectors and Dealers* (New York: Albert R. Rogers, 1893). Rogers' *Blue Book* provided some excellent information about collectors not found in other directories of collectors (such as Mekeel's), particularly age, occupation, and affiliations. Out of the 2000 collectors listed, only 1718 were American collectors, and only 54 identified themselves solely as dealers. Every person did not answer every question. Rogers did not ask about race or gender of collectors, so I have no way of knowing those critical pieces to this puzzle. Most listed themselves with initials only so it is too difficult to speculate on gender. He placed ads in various stamp publications and sent notices to stamp clubs in the U.S. and Canada to gather the names in this directory. Mekeel, *Mekeel's Stamp Collectors' and Dealers' Address Book*, 138. A handful of individuals listed a business or school address so you can see some occupations of these collectors. It is unclear to me whether some of those listed under colleges are students, staff, or professors. Mekeel required payment of \$1.00 to be listed in his directory, but all of those listed also received free space for an exchange notice where they described what type of stamp varieties they collected.

illustrated by these anecdotes, the author noted that “the great principles of philately were lacking.”<sup>16</sup> Those principles, however, had not yet been created in the mid-nineteenth century, but would emerge in later years with the help of philatelic clubs that would guide collectors into organizing and analyzing stamps in particular ways. While women may have collected and met, they did not participate in the formalized collecting culture that emerged in the late nineteenth century.

Collectors distinguished themselves by constructing their hobby as a scientific and rational pursuit that contrasted with criticisms that they were afflicted with a mania. American philatelists used the term “science” broadly to describe the type of research-related activities that many collectors practiced when gathering stamps, including observation and classification. Similar to Progressive era social scientists working to create a science of the socio-historical world, philatelists tried to utilize scientific practices by studying the world of stamps with support of their newly-created associations.<sup>17</sup> The idea that philately could be scientific may also have been rooted in nineteenth-century European philosophical ideas about writing history. This type of historical inquiry was promoted by the newly-formed American Historical Association and was taught in graduate programs training “professional” historians. Collecting documents for careful study and comparison helped historians draw

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<sup>16</sup> “The Beginning of Philately,” *American Philatelist* 33, no. 5 (1919): 161. Other stories referenced included how one woman placed an advertisement in the *London Times* in 1841 seeking canceled stamps to decorate her dressing room. And in 1842, *Punch* poked fun at female collectors who anxiously sought out the Queen’s head by collecting images of Victoria postage stamps.

<sup>17</sup> Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

conclusions about historical “facts” that led to supposedly objective histories.<sup>18</sup>

Although not seeking to answer historical questions, philatelists studied stamps as primary documents. Such research equated to scientific study in the minds of some. One British publication asserted, “If minute observation, research, dexterity, taste, judgment, and patience are sufficient to lift a pursuit from a hobby to a science then assuredly Philately is a science.”<sup>19</sup>

Philatelic associations and individual philatelists perpetuated the idea that the collection and study of stamps was a scientific practice, even if they did not explicitly explain why. In one 1886 British book describing *The Study of Philately*, Arthur Palethorpe simply declared that “philately now ranks as a science.” Devoting an entire book to the subject, Palethorpe equated the practices of philately with that of a serious discipline. A philatelist classified a stamp by country of origin, year issued, denomination, paper type, paper perforations, printing process, and subject. Careful observation of the ink or perforations of a stamp might lead a collector to find differences or perhaps a mistake. Because stamps were mass-produced, any differences within a sheet or printing were considered to have more value than the monetary

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<sup>18</sup> Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1994); and Robert B. Townsend, “Making History: Scholarship and Professionalization in the Discipline, 1880-1940” (PhD dissertation, George Mason University, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> “Recent Sales of Postage Stamps,” *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* 6 (May 4, 1889): 287-88.

amount assigned to that stamp.<sup>20</sup> Stamp journals printed by philatelic associations reinforced the notion that philately was scientific. The editors of the *American Journal of Philately* commented that their readers enjoyed debating “in the field of our sciences,” while the *Northwestern Philatelist* included the subtitle, “a monthly magazine devoted to the sciences of philately.”<sup>21</sup> Whether thinking about philately as scientific history or using “science” to gesture to individuals engaging in research and study of stamp design and production, incorporating this rhetoric was prevalent in stamp literature.

Defining their hobby as a science also offered philatelists an opportunity to achieve an expertise in the small bits of paper they collected, traded, or bought. Some collectors hid their collecting practices out of embarrassment and were mindful of public criticism of their hobby that appeared in newspapers and magazines. Eva Earl, a contributor to *Pennsylvania Philatelist*, acknowledged that in 1894 it was “customary to laugh at the devotees to stamp collecting—all the world laughs.”<sup>22</sup> Some collectors chose to define themselves as philatelists and found support from these criticisms in

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur J. Palethorpe, *The Study of Philately* (Bury S. Edmund’s, England: Nunn, Christie & Co, 1886), 6; John M. Luff, *What Philately Teaches: A Lecture Delivered before the Section on Philately of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, February 24, 1899* (New York: n.p., 1915); also available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15713/15713-h/15713-h.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> *American Journal of Philately*, 2nd ser., 1 (1888): i; *Northwestern Philatelist: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to the Science of Philately* (Elk Point, South Dakota: J.C. Richard, R.J. Ellis, 1899-1900); American Philatelic Association, *Catalogue of the American Philatelic Association’s Loan Exhibit of Postage Stamps to the United States Post Office Department at the World’s Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893* (Birmingham, CT: D.H. Bacon and Company, 1893), 10; and Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 176-78.

<sup>22</sup> Gelber, “Free Market Metaphor,” 755; and Eva Earl, “A Girl’s Philatelic Reminiscence,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 5, no. 3 (February 1894): 207-8.

the new associations and societies formed in the late nineteenth century. Vindication of this push for recognizing philately as a disciplined pursuit came in part when the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences established the Section of Philately devoted to the study and promotion of stamp collecting in 1898. The Institute hosted lectures and meetings where collectors could bring their stamps for “study and comparison” for the purpose of making meetings “profitable and interesting.” More than a quarter century later, the Maryland Academy of Sciences elevated philately from a subsection of its history department to become its own department, placing philately, once again, “among the sciences.”<sup>23</sup>

Philatelic associations worked to define the practice of philately and helped to legitimize stamp collecting as an activity. The formation of a philatelic association mirrored some of the processes undertaken by newly-forming professional associations that demanded its members uphold certain standards and practices. These societies, as almost exclusively all white, all male, and all admitted through sponsorship, demonstrated the exclusivity common to late nineteenth-century clubs. These collectors were part of the “consuming brotherhood” that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Spending money on dues and stamps was similar to how members

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<sup>23</sup> H.A. Talbot, “Communications Report,” *American Philatelist and Yearbook of the American Philatelic Association* 12 (1898): 27; H. Toelke, “Section of Philately, Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences—an occasional correspondent,” *Weekly Philatelic Era*, 14, no. 2 (October 30, 1899): 20; and “Second Exhibition of Postage Stamps by the Section of Philately of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences,” *Weekly Philatelic Era* 14, no. 14 (December 30, 1899): 118. Even the correspondent from the Brooklyn Institute signed off his contributions to stamp papers with “Yours in Science.” “Stamp Collecting Raised to Science,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 1925.

of fraternal orders and elite dinner clubs consumed as related to their clubs for costumes, paraphernalia, or cigars. Stamp societies created standards for normative collecting behaviors that lent legitimacy to their practice so outside observers would see purchasing stamps and collecting paraphernalia as non-frivolous and worthy expenditures.<sup>24</sup>

Club founders and members were stamp dealers, who bought and sold stamps for a living, and casual collectors, who bought, traded, or sold their stamps during their free time. Informal meetings of collectors were not new, but when those collectors formed associations, they organized in a more systematic way. The first permanent organization in the world was the London Philatelic Group in 1869, now known as the Royal Philatelic Society. In 1872, a young collector who was eager to join a stamp club for boys wrote to *Oliver Optic's Magazine*. Even at that time, before the American Philatelic Association (APA) formed in 1886, the editors of *Oliver Optic's* assumed one had already formed because there was such a great interest in collecting and establishing clubs. The APA's founders encouraged local groups of adults to form wherever "six philatelists can be brought together." As a national

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<sup>24</sup> Mark A. Swiencicki, "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," *Journal of Social History* 31, no. 4 (Summer 1998): 773-808; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Mentor, 1899); Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Daniel Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); and McGovern, *Sold American*.

society, the APA would connect smaller groups meeting across the country in the pursuit of philatelic knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

The founding members of the APA were not isolated from the transitions of American business and leisure life near the end of the nineteenth century. Robert Wiebe's influential work, *The Search for Order*, detailed the breakdown of local autonomy in small "island communities" beginning in the 1870s as hierarchical needs of industrial life took hold in the United States.<sup>26</sup> The APA sought to join island communities of stamp collectors to form an infrastructure that supported and nationalized the hobby. The founders believed the adage, "in union there is strength," applied to stamp collecting communities. Bringing national recognition to the hobby, the APA promised to promote philately "as worthy and rational" because "it should be regarded in the same light as are the generally recognized specialties that have worked their way from obscurity to the positions they now apply."<sup>27</sup> Signifying similarities with newly-forming professional associations, these founding members suggested stamp collecting could emerge from obscurity with a formal organization leading the way. By establishing a society of like-minded individuals, philatelists hoped to spread the word about stamp collecting to a national audience.

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<sup>25</sup> Halgren, 185-6. "Our Letter Bag," *Oliver Optic's Magazine, Our Boys and Girls* 12, no. 233 (1872): 827. Theo. F. Cuno, S.B. Bradt, and W.G. Whilden, Jr. to The Philatelists of the United States, June 25, 1886, in *Official Circular Number 1*, American Philatelic Association, (November 1886): i.

<sup>26</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

<sup>27</sup> American Philatelic Association, *Official Circular Number 1*, 6. S.B. Bradt, O.S. Hellwig, and R.R. Shuman, "National Organization of Philatelists," Chicago, April 19, 1886, American Philatelic Society Archives, <http://www.stamps.org/Almanac/history1.htm>.

On September 14, 1886 the APA held their first meeting to draw up by-laws and a constitution, elect officers, and establish membership and affiliation rules. By-laws detailed best practices for obtaining stamps and discouraged counterfeiting. According to the preamble of their constitution, the APA would help members learn more about philately, cultivate friendship among philatelists, and encourage an international bond with “similar societies” in other countries.<sup>28</sup> The APA believed that connecting with groups outside of the U.S. would raise the stature of this association and make the APA the premiere national philatelic organization. The overall mission of the APA sought to legitimize and publicize the practice of stamp collecting.

Less concerned, rhetorically, with excluding unaffiliated stamp collectors, APA’s constitution encouraged people to join. Technically, “any stamp collector” could apply to the Secretary of APA for membership. Current members considered a candidate’s background for one month before voting to accept or reject petitioners. This procedure was in place to ensure no known counterfeiters applied. Yet if a candidate was not sponsored by another member, chances were high that the application for membership would be denied. This practice mimicked how other exclusive social clubs operated in an attempt to keep out undesirables, namely women and people of color. For an annual fee of \$2.00, APA members received the *American Philatelist* journal, gained access to the APA library, and enjoyed the community of collectors for buying and trading varieties. While embracing all stamp collectors, the

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<sup>28</sup> By-laws and constitution published in American Philatelic Association, *Official Circular Number 1*, (November 1886): 2-3, 4-8.

APA firmly and publicly rejected those dealing in or making counterfeit stamps.<sup>29</sup> By denying membership to known counterfeiters, the APA reassured their members that the stamps they dealt or traded were government-issued stamps.

While partaking in social gatherings was one aspect of club life, leadership in the APA encouraged a serious study of stamps as part of membership. APA President Charles Karuth asked members in 1899 what the APA had done for the “advancement of the science of philately.” Karuth saw its membership as comprising mostly of collectors and not philatelists as he carefully distinguished between the “mere amassment of stamps” and the study of philately. So as not to be viewed as “stamp cranks” and to distance themselves from schoolboys who swapped stamps, Karuth encouraged APA members to engage in the valuable and scientific side of philately. If they did this, he believed that philatelists would be “recognized as gentlemen who had chosen a valuable branch of study.”<sup>30</sup> Karuth’s plea illustrated how the APA sometimes functioned like a professional association as it distinguished between professionals and amateurs. At the same time, Karuth’s comments also demonstrated a growing tension among club philatelists who wanted to encourage more individuals to collect stamps, but only to do so within strictures established by clubs.

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<sup>29</sup> American Philatelic Association, *Official Circular Number 1*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Charles P. Karuth, *American Philatelist and Yearbook of the American Philatelic Association* 8 (1899): 32-4. Much is said about the “science of philately,” yet little is defined within the stamp journals. It seems as if careful study into subject representations on stamps or the specifics about the production of stamps seem to qualify the science.

Philatelists stressed that they engaged in rigorous study, and they represented their pursuit with an allegorical figure, “Philatelia,” the Goddess of Philately. Philatelia symbolized their pursuit and may have acted as a guide for those pursuing philatelic knowledge. The APA adopted the image of Philatelia for their seal, still in use today. In the seal, Philatelia holds a stamp album in her left hand while she places a stamp into it with her right. As a figurative deity, she sits on a globe to appear larger than the physical world that she sits upon while tending to the stamps kept in her album. Her position suggests that she can control the world on which she sits, gesturing that collecting stamps is symbolically similar to the imperialistic logics that justify how one country believes others are available to be collected and controlled. She is focused on her stamp album appearing studious and unaware of others and is not welcoming or open as she faces away from observers. Her focus on the album and its stamps offers a model for all philatelists who described themselves as “prostrate admirers and worshippers,” and admitted that they were “all in love with one female—the Goddess Philatelia.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Philatelia appears as the APA’s seal on the first *Year Book* from the American Philatelic Association in 1886. Use of Philatelia by other clubs can be found in catalogs such as Rigastamps, *Fields-Picklo Catalog of Philatelic Show Seals, Labels, and Souvenirs*, May 2005, <http://www.cinderellas.info/philexpo/philp-r.htm>. For references to the goddess, see Cullen Brown, “Classes to Collect,” *Canadian Journal of Philately* 1, no. 1 (June 1893): 15; and American Philatelic Association, *The American Philatelist Year Book* 7, no. 13 (1893): 53.



Figure 1: Seal of American Philatelic Association, *American Philatelist* (American Philatelic Society)

Similar to female figures incorporated into other seals and artworks, Philatelia represented the ideals of the APA. Personified representations of America and Columbia, as well as other ideals and virtues, took female forms with which some Americans were no doubt familiar. Iconography similar to Philatelia appeared on public murals in the 1890s, with painted women representing Justice, Patriotism, and even the disciplines of science in the Library of Congress. Imagery represented a real political and cultural conflict because some of the principles personified by women were not legally available to them at the turn of the century, including rights to participate in democracy, to make economic choices, and to be protected equally under the law. Similar to these female mural icons, Philatelia celebrated activities that

took place predominantly in a male world and was beloved by those men.<sup>32</sup> We know that women collected stamps privately but were not welcomed in most philatelic clubs. Philatelia, like other female idyllic icons, had limited symbolic powers to represent equality for American women at the turn of the century.

As the APA and other philatelic groups sought to expand their memberships, they still did not welcome women or people of color. Evidence of white women collecting stamps does not explain why many were turned away from pursuing memberships in stamp societies. First, formal organizations were exclusive and remained that way for many years, and some club names implied they were not for women or girls. The Sons of Philatelia and the Philatelic Sons of America were founded in the 1890s to encourage philately among young people, but sounded like a male-only fraternal organizations. Records indicate, however, that a few female collectors belonged to these organizations, but their numbers remained insignificant.<sup>33</sup>

With some club names sounding like a fraternal organization, many male collectors believed that philately was in fact a brotherhood—even transforming them into a brotherhood of Renaissance men. Knowledgeable in many subjects, including history, astronomy, geography, and languages, philatelists portrayed themselves as

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<sup>32</sup> Joshua Charles Taylor, *America as Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 3-34; and Bailey van Hook, “From the Lyrical to the Epic: Images of Women in American Murals at the Turn of the Century,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 63-80.

<sup>33</sup> *Weekly Philatelic Era* 9, no. 10 (1894): 91. Often collectors referred in exchanges to their membership number and organization, perhaps to indicate that they were serious collectors. For example, Anna Lambert, of St. Paul, Minnesota, identified herself a member of the Philatelic Sons of America in an exchange notice she submitted to the *Weekly Philatelic Era*. This identification as a club member may have been more important to a female collector to demonstrate that she was a philatelist and not merely a collector.

cosmopolitan men of the world. “We Collectors are brothers, comrades, citizens of a great, progressing, ever-widening Brotherhood.”<sup>34</sup> This concept of brotherhood was no doubt grounded in ideas learned from experience with fraternal organizations and dinner clubs, and perhaps observed in saloons, where men socialized in their leisure time. Philatelic club kinship was referred to as “a Freemasonry among Stamp Collectors,” where a fellow collector was “always warmly welcomed.”<sup>35</sup> Likening the bonds formed to Freemasonry solidified philatelic clubs—in their minds—as a white male-only domain, while participation in the hobby was not.

Clubs protected the brotherhood by controlling who earned memberships, making philatelic clubs almost exclusively male and white. In the 1880s, a few women applied to join the Staten Island Philatelic Society but never enrolled as members. Rolls from the APA indicate that there were five female members in 1889, but women never became a strong portion of national stamp collecting societies. By 1915, three percent of the Southern Philatelic Association’s membership was women. Most women, it appears, gave up on applying to clubs created in the late nineteenth century, as only one percent of total applicants to the American Philatelic Society (the renamed APA) in 1925. By the mid-1920s, some women turned to newer and smaller stamp

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon H. Crouch, “On Collecting,” *American Philatelist* 28, no. 13 (1915): 222.

<sup>35</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood: Men’s Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930,” and “Stamp Collecting as a Hobby,” *Weekly Philatelic Era* 16, no. 28 (1902): 227-28.

societies where the membership rules were less stringent. Even as late as 1990, one of the most exclusive clubs still did not allow female members.<sup>36</sup>

These clubs were not welcoming for people of color, either. Surprisingly, as African Americans established fraternal, religious, and social clubs on their own terms, stamp collecting appears to be almost absent from their leisure time activities.<sup>37</sup>

African Americans are completely absent from philatelic discussions and literature until the 1930s, when they appear in pejorative and cartoonish ways—representative of racial stereotyping and racism commonly found in American public discourse. As I will discuss in later chapters, the subjects on American stamps privileged a white male perspective of the American narrative, and no U.S. stamp carried an image of an African American until 1940.<sup>38</sup> While African Americans clearly were not welcome into philatelic clubs, it is probable that some were familiar with the practices of collecting available through philatelic literature. Stamp trading and buying often occurred through the mails and one did not have to identify themselves by race or gender to participate.

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<sup>36</sup> Philatelic Association American, *List of Members of the American Philatelic Association, 1889* (Ottawa, IL: American Philatelic Association, 1887); Col. Lector, "Filatelic Figures," *American Philatelist* 39, no. 6 (March 1926): 362; and Christ, "The Adult Stamp Collector", 91. Cheryl Ganz, Curator of Philately at the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum, threatened legal action against the Collectors Club of Chicago because they did not accept female members. They acquiesced and she became a member. Cheryl Ganz, conversation with author, May 25, 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>37</sup> David G. Hackett, "The Prince Hall Masons and the African American Church: The Labors of Grand Master and Bishop James Walker Hood, 1831-1918," *Church History* 69, no. 4 (December 2000): 770-802. I found that there was a Tuskegee Philatelic Club in 1940 for the issuing of the Booker T. Washington stamp, but it's unclear to me when the club began. "Tuskegee Philatelic Club Prepares Booklet On Art," *The Chicago Defender* (National edition), January 27, 1940.

<sup>38</sup> Examples include: G.R. Rankin and Al Pois, "Philatelic Tragedies," cartoon, *American Philatelist* 43, no. 5 (February 1930): 220; "A Fiji Variety," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 46, no. 45 (November 7, 1932): 555; and "A Specialist in Turkey," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 46, no. 47 (November 21, 1932): 580.

Philatelic societies carved out their place in American culture over time and the APA, in particular, envisioned itself as an emerging international leader in philately. Disliking “to be outdone,” the APA set forth from its establishment to build a strong national philatelic organization in the U.S. because British and continental European collectors had already formed their own national philatelic clubs.<sup>39</sup> One example of the APA’s desire to lead came in an illustration from 1906, entitled “The Philatelist’s Dream.”<sup>40</sup> The scene demonstrated how the APA could be a leading stamp society in the world. In this illustration, a vision emerges from a philatelist’s cigar smoke rings while he sits at his desk with his stamp album open. The first smoke ring approximates the APA’s seal with Philatelia sitting on a globe studying her album. In the next ring, Philatelia turns towards the viewer with her album on the floor, and stretches as if she has awoken from a dream. The third ring is empty, as if Philatelia left the APA’s seal. She appears above the three rings holding the globe and stamp album in her arms as she extends her right arm in an action of leadership and movement. Boys, men, and at least one woman follow APA’s Philatelia as she leads them west across the image.

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<sup>39</sup> Bradt, Hellwig, and Shuman, “National Organization of Philatelists.”

<sup>40</sup> “The Philatelist’s Dream,” illustration, *American Philatelist and Yearbook of the American Philatelic Association* 20 (1906): n.p.

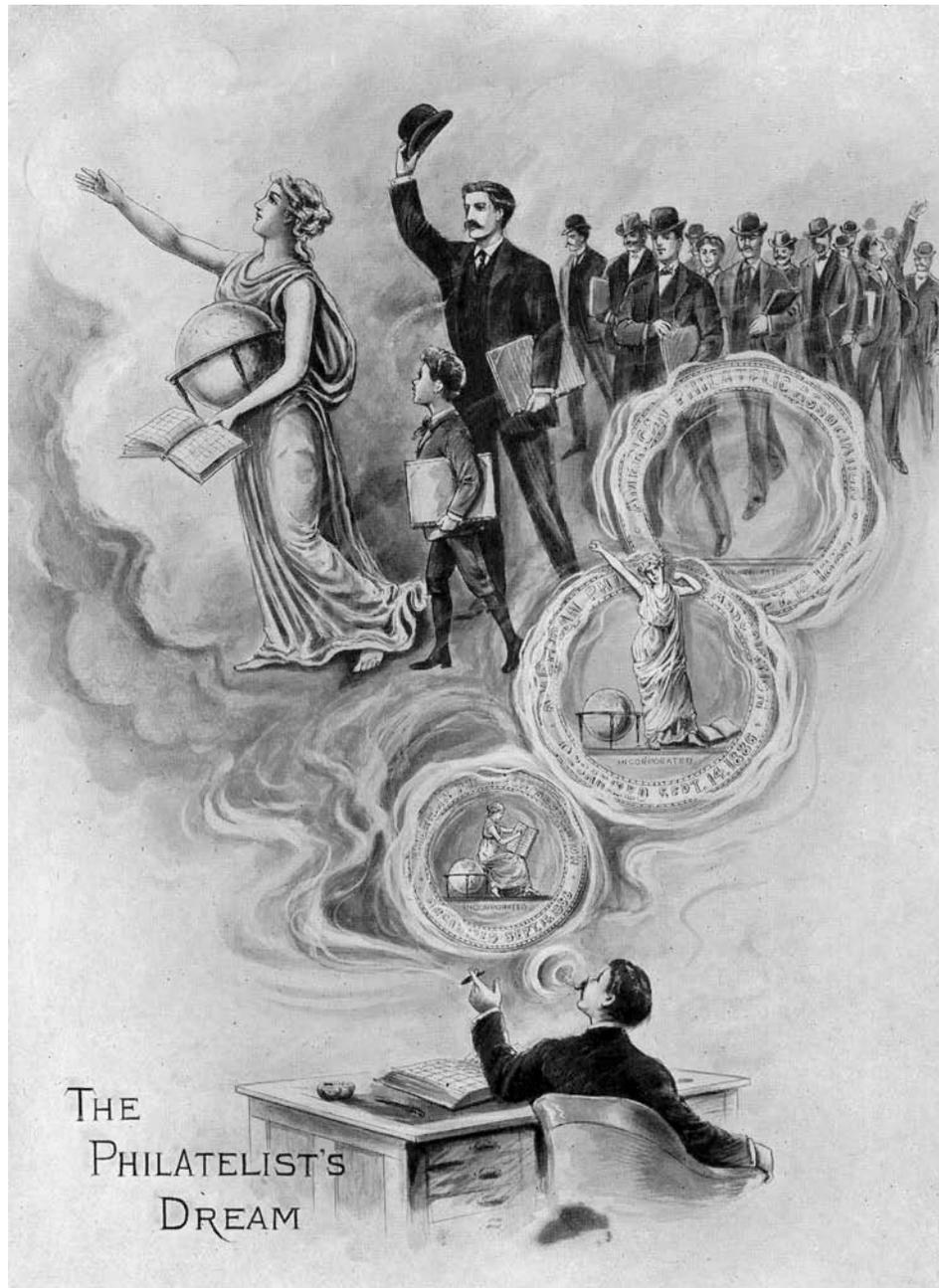


Figure 2: "The Philatelist's Dream," illustration (American Philatelic Association)



Figure 3: “American Progress,” oil on canvas, John Gast (Museum of the American West)

This image represents a striking similarity to late-nineteenth century art representing American destiny and progress, as the APA envisioned itself as a leader in the philatelic world. The “Philatelist’s Dream” is reminiscent of the 1872 painting “American Progress,” by John Gast, that was distributed and sold in lithograph form. The female figure wears the “Star of Empire” and floats above people leading them and approving of their westward movement as settlers from the east proceed west across the painting. Settlers push out herds of buffalo and Native Americans, with trains, stage coaches, and ships bringing more settlers to complete the conquering of peoples and lands. The female figure carries a book in hand, not unlike Philatelia’s album,

symbolizing knowledge and learning.<sup>41</sup> This awakening of the APA's Philatelia suggests that club philatelists internalized a vision of America as a unique place with a distinctive history, extending that exceptionalism to their philatelic association. Through this imagery we see that some club philatelists equated studying and collecting stamps with the cultural of imperialism. As the U.S continued to conquer North America and islands in the Pacific and Caribbean, American stamp collectors became leaders in conquering the world in their philatelic knowledge and also in the ways that they amassed nations, stamp by stamp.

The APA's exceptionalist vision extended beyond the "Dream" sequence to include an organizational theme song first presented at the 1906 annual meeting.

"Rah! For the American Philatelic Association"

Verse 1:        Listen now! Ye nations all,  
                  To our Philatelic song,  
                  That shall tell the story of the A.P.A;  
                  The Association great,  
                  Of a Nation big and strong,  
                  Which for enterprise most surely leads the way.

Chorus:        'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah! For the A.P.A.;;  
                  It's the pride of the U.S.;;  
                  For it holds in loving thrall  
                  Stamp collectors great and small,  
                  And throughout the world its power is manifest.

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<sup>41</sup> John Gast, *American Progress*, oil on canvas, 1872, Object# 92.126.1, Museum of the American West, [http://www.autorycollections.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=image;hex=92\\_126\\_1.jpg](http://www.autorycollections.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=image;hex=92_126_1.jpg).

- Verse 2: From Atlantic's rugged coast  
 To Pacific's Golden Gate,  
 And from Southland's gulf to shining northern lakes,  
 Are the mighty bounds from which,  
 Representing every state,  
 A.P.A its worthy membership takes.
- Verse 3: And its members, they are true  
 To Philately's good cause,  
 Making A.P.A. their ever-guiding star;  
 For it is a tie that binds,  
 By its strong but simple laws  
 That most wonderful and wise in nature are.
- Verse 4: So, we hear from Europe's marts,  
 Round the world to Isles of Spice,  
 Hearty commendations given A.P.A;  
 And the nations each declare,  
 "We would give a handsome price  
 Could we learn the art of building in such way."<sup>42</sup>

The lyrics demonstrated that members enthusiastically believed that the APA's organization provided a leading example in the international philatelic world and amply represented the "big and strong" United States. This organization of white male philatelists paired evenly with American foreign policy that constructed a narrative of masculine progress and "manifest" destiny that justified occupations and invasions of sovereign nations.<sup>43</sup> Rhetorically, the APA constructed itself to be as strong, and perhaps as masculine, as the United States had become in the geopolitical landscape.

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<sup>42</sup> Karuth, *American Philatelist and Yearbook* (1899): 34; and "Rah! For the American Philatelic Association," *American Philatelist* 20 (1906): 57.

<sup>43</sup> Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

The lyrics call out to the world's philatelists to notice the APA's strength that comes from its members—"great and small," "representing every state." For its members, the APA stands as the "ever-guiding star," which is almost equivalent to Gast's "Star of Empire," leading philatelists to gain new philatelic knowledge, and also to become a leader in philately. Much like the "Dream," the lyrics indicate how APA members internalized the idea of American exceptionalism—of the U.S. as a nation and with regard to APA. The APA certainly was not the only club with members hailing from all states, but its members believed it stood for ideals of America that those trading and collecting stamps in marts in Europe and Asia recognized the APA's strength as an organization.

The Philatelist's Dream and theme song alluded to a grand vision the APA's members held for its organization as it expanded and faced competition from other organizations. By 1908, the APA changed its name to the American Philatelic Society (APS), perhaps to appear on-par with the well-established Royal Philatelic Society, or to distance itself from professional associations that it initially mimicked. The APS began publishing its journal, *American Philatelist*, quarterly rather than yearly, and *American Philatelist* began soliciting and printing articles that focused on the study and history of stamps rather than merely publishing the minutes and speeches from the annual conventions. Members were constantly encouraged to recruit acquaintances,

and membership nearly tripled from 574 in 1895 to over 1500 in 1908.<sup>44</sup> As it grew, the APS relied on its members to perpetuate the infrastructure built up as the national society for stamp collectors, as many other groups formed across the United States. Clubs like the APS recruited new members and communicated the practices of philately through the circulation of journals and papers.

### Stamp Papers

Philatelic clubs shaped communities of collectors by defining practices and limiting memberships, while simultaneously a larger collecting community developed out of a flourishing philatelic print culture. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, this print culture facilitated the growth of an imagined, and perhaps more diverse, community of stamp collectors and philatelists stretching across state and national borders.<sup>45</sup> Publications disseminated information about the practices and vocabulary of the hobby to novice collectors. The first serial, *Stamp Collector's Record*, was issued in Albany, New York, by S. A. Taylor in December 1864, and the numbers of publications grew exponentially from that time. Between 1864 and 1906, over 900 stamp papers were published in the United States alone. While Americans created the largest number of stamp papers during this time, hundreds of other publications circulated from Great Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Argentina, Egypt, Spain,

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<sup>44</sup> *American Philatelist* 22, no. 1 (1908): 72, 141; John W. Scott, "A Few Lines from the President," *American Philatelist* 31, no 6 (1917): 86-7; and Casper, "All Together for the Good of the A.P.S.," 134-6.  
<sup>45</sup> Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

Turkey, and Venezuela. Some publications published serious studies of stamps, watermarks, or articles about the countries that produced specific stamps, while other papers were the work of one person sitting at home writing a newsletter.<sup>46</sup> American periodical postage rates dropped to two-cents per pound in 1874 and to one penny per pound in 1885, allowing for the circulation of many more periodicals on all subjects including philately.<sup>47</sup>

Some papers were small outlets for local philatelic clubs, while others attempted to generate business for dealers. Dealers such as Scott Stamp and Coin Company Limited and C.H. Mekeel Stamp Company became publishers, printing papers to encourage philately and generating business for stamps and collecting paraphernalia. *Mekeel's* became the first weekly newspaper in 1891 and reported philatelic news from around the world by publishing notes from clubs, announcing new issues, and hosting stamp exchanges. Like most periodicals of the day, *Mekeel's* also sold advertising space. Few in-depth articles could be found in its tabloid-style

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<sup>46</sup> Edward Denny Bacon, *Catalogue of the Crawford Library of Philatelic Literature at the British Library*, rev. ed. (Fishkill, NY: Printer's Stone, with the British Library, 1991). First printed as a bibliography of James Ludovic, Earl of Crawford, personal collection of philatelic literature, the Crawford Catalogue has become the best reference guide to early stamp-related publications. An ardent stamp collector in the 1860s while attending Eton, Ludovic's interest died out until he encountered stamps at a Sotheby's auction in 1898 that he decided to buy and restarted his collection. According to his introduction, the earl sought out literature on stamp collecting and found an abundance of resources, but most were difficult to obtain. He started his own library and increased it substantially when he bought the library of J.K. Tiffany, a philatelic writer from St. Louis, MO, who began collecting stamp papers from their earliest days. Eventually, the Earl of Crawford donated this large collection of philatelic literature to the British Museum where it resides today. *Stamp Collector's Record* was published from December 1864 to October 1876. Taylor also started Canada's first philatelic journals of the same name.

<sup>47</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, "The Populists and the Post Office," *Agricultural History* 65, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 1-16; and Jane Kennedy, "Development of Postal Rates: 1845-1955," *Land Economics* 33, no. 2 (May 1957): 93-112.

pages, but it maintained its hold as the definitive newspaper for collectors from 1891 to the present. *Philatelic West* began in 1895 as the journal of the Nebraska Philatelic Society and quickly grew from a regional to national publication by 1902 when it became the official organ of more than ten collecting associations. Its publishers boasted of the largest paid subscription list of any American philatelic monthly.<sup>48</sup>

Many individuals contributed to this print culture even if their papers were short-lived. One teenager, known later in life for his fiction, started *Stamp Collector* in his Syracuse, New York, home. L. Frank Baum printed at least four issues of this serial between 1872 and 1873. During the 1870s—“the golden age of amateur publishing”—it was not uncommon for boys, more so than for girls, to create publications using the Novelty Toy Printing Press and to distribute them locally or to mail them to

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<sup>48</sup> Examples of regional journals include the following: *Evergreen State Philatelist* (Hartland, WA: R.W. French, 1894-1900); *California Philatelist* (San Francisco: E.F. Gambs, 1883-1899); *Southern Philatelist* (Charleston, SC: Southern Stamp and Publishing, 1889-1896); *Virginia Philatelist* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Philatelic Publishing, 1897-1905); *Ohio Philatelist* (Westerville, OH: H.W. Keller, 1888-1889); *St. Louis Philatelist* (St. Louis: E.F. Gambs, 1876-1882); *Michigan Philatelist* (Detroit: Union Stamp Company, 1877-1879); *Pennsylvania Philatelist*, (Reading, PA: C.W. Kissinger, 1891-1898); *Eastern Philatelist* (Fitchburg, MA: Eastern Philatelic Publishing, 1887-1899); *Western Philatelist: A Monthly Journal for Stamp Collectors* (Chicago: Western Philatelic Publishing Company, 1887-1888); *Lone Star State Philatelist* (Abilene, TX: Bradley, 1894-1899); and *American Journal of Philately*, 2nd series (New York: Scott and Company, 1888-1906). Scott and Company produces the standard catalogue for stamps. *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* (Portland, ME: Severn-Wylie-Jewett Co, 1891-1996). *Mekeel's* is still an active publication, but with a different publisher. In 1901, *Philatelic West* changed its name to *Philatelic West and Camera News* and is now the official publication of the following clubs: Nebraska Philatelic Society, Nebraska Camera Club, Kansas Philatelic Society, American Camera Club Exchange, Stamp Collectors Protective Association of America, Boy's Collecting Society, Michigan Camera Arts Association, Pennsylvania Camera Club Exchange, Spanish-American Philatelic Society, International Souvenir Card Exchange, and the Stamp Dealers Protective Association. For listings see *Philatelic West and Camera News* 15 (March 1901): boiler plate. While claims to the large circulation are said to be substantiated with open subscription books for others to count, the actual numbers are absent. See “Philatelic Advertising,” *Philatelic West and Camera News* 18, no. 3 (March 1902): n.p. *Philatelic West* expanded to a general hobby-collecting magazine that became *Hobbies* by the 1930s.

interested young readers around the country. Baum was no doubt familiar with these and other stamp-related papers as he created his own.<sup>49</sup>

While young printers delighted in their creations, some adults cringed at the abundance of many amateur publishers. One adult writer found no “earthly use” for amateur papers often produced by boys with “limited knowledge” of stamps that “only bring ridicule upon collecting from outsiders” and disgust from “advanced” collectors.<sup>50</sup> If forming stamp clubs and publishing journals helped to legitimize the hobby of stamp collecting, the interest generated by younger collector-publishers was viewed by some as a distraction rather than as a boom to stamp collecting. Even the smallest and shortest-lived papers show us that there was great enthusiasm for participating in a public discussion about stamps and the practice of collecting them.

Philatelic publications were so prolific by 1892 that they became the subject of separate articles. Harry Franklin Kantner of the *Pennsylvania Philatelist* declared that the “philatelic writer” was “one of the most potent factors in the Philatelic field,” fighting for the progression of the hobby. To fully express his concerns, he wrote a poem entitled “The Philatelic Publisher’s Soliloquy.” This parody mocked the dilemma facing an amateur publisher who invested their own money and time “to clip

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<sup>49</sup> Bacon, *Catalogue of the Crawford Library of Philatelic Literature at the British Library*, 770. There is some confusion as to where Baum’s paper resides. Neither the American Philatelic Society library nor the library at the National Postal Museum has it available but it is believed to be in a special collection. Paula Petrik, “The Youngest Fourth Estate: The Novelty Toy Printing Press and Adolescence, 1870-1886” in Elliot West and Paula Petrik, ed., *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850-1950* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 127. Young journalists even formed their own society, the National Amateur Press Association, elected officers, and held a conference.

<sup>50</sup> *Philatelic Journal of America* (1893): 168.

news by the sweat of his classic brow,” gather postal statistics, and “revamp old philatelic articles that delight none.” The Soliloquy borrowed from *Hamlet*:

To publish or not to publish,—that is the question.—  
Whether 'tis better to announce a new philatelic journal;  
The fulfiller of a long, long felt want  
Or to give up these grand ideas of gaining popularity  
And never issue the wished for journal?<sup>51</sup>

Kantner’s disapproval of the proliferation of stamp papers continued the following year when he decried that “the ‘stamp fever’ had become the ‘publishing fever.’” His article actively discouraged “all ambitious young men” from starting new papers. In December 1894, the *Weekly Philatelic Era* rejoiced that an “exceedingly small number” of new philatelic papers appeared that season, which was much more pleasant than the “obnoxious” mushroomed-growth of past years. An author for *Philatelic West* desired to start his own paper in the 1890s and reflected how fortunate he was that he did not burden himself and the “already long suffering philatelic public” with such a venture.<sup>52</sup> These collective comments demonstrated that while some stamp associations openly encouraged all to collect stamps, not everyone agreed that all collectors should participate in the philatelic print culture, or even the broader community of

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<sup>51</sup> Harry Franklin Kantner, “The Philatelic Writer,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 2, no.1 (June 1892): 3; and H. Franklin Kantner, “The Philatelic Publisher’s Soliloquy,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 2, no. 1 (June 1892): 3.

<sup>52</sup> H. Franklin Kantner, “Philatelic Journalism,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 3, no. 3 (February 1893): 49-52. “Review of Philatelic Press,” *Weekly Philatelic Era* 9, no. 18 (1894): 141; and “Philately in 1895,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 77, no. 1 (1920): 28. Kantner’s use of “young men” indicates that a majority of the publications were headed by men in the late nineteenth century. Few female writers appeared in the journals I reviewed, but some like Eva Earl mentioned earlier in the paper encouraged women to collect and participate in philatelic societies.

philatelists, equally. Within the philatelic community, philatelists drew lines among their own.

Applying a hierarchical framework to stamp papers and journalists was in keeping with the post-Civil War tendency to distinguish between high and lowbrow activities.<sup>53</sup> Even as stamp collectors tried to construct a cultural space for themselves as learned philatelists through clubs and readership of their publications, some proposed fracturing within their own ranks. Kantner proposed instituting hierarchical labels for philatelic publications. He categorized papers into four classes: professional, semi-professional, amateur, and price-list journal. He classified his own journal, *Pennsylvania Philatelist*, as semi-professional because it was less “scientific” but more literary than the “professional” *American Journal of Philately*. Kantner criticized smaller “amateur” papers that merely reprinted stories from larger journals and did not produce original articles. Quite aware of philatelists’ place within the greater American culture, Kantner commented that it was “not only a progressive age in general affairs but also in philatelic matters.”<sup>54</sup> Philatelists used the structure of a club, like that of a professional association, to promote standards of practice. Many stamp collectors believed in American exceptionalism in all matters, including philatelic. One way to ensure that American philatelists contributed to a global print culture was to classify papers by their content and discourage just anyone from starting his or her own

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Kantner, “Philatelic Journalism,” 52. For a discussion of nineteenth-century cultural hierarchies see Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

papers. As a group, stamp collectors were earning an expertise in their collections, but some philatelic writers, like Kantner, felt that even enthusiastic philatelists needed to respect the hierarchy and demur to the expertise of others.

Despite complaints by vocal writers such as Kantner, the journals lived on and connected thousands of collectors each year. Like professional journals, most philatelic publications kept members abreast of the field and facilitated communication among societies. Articles featured news of first issues of American and international stamps, explanations of different types of stamps, philatelic literature reviews, and letters from readers.<sup>55</sup> A handful of papers, like *Weekly Philatelic Era*, offered subscribers a free exchange notice to facilitate the commerce of stamps among the community that was facilitated through the postal service. Beyond articles, most papers accepted advertisements from dealers in stamps and collecting ephemera. Such items advertised included albums and specialized tools for handling stamps. Merchants engaged with hierarchical rhetoric and might call out to “serious collectors” in an advertisement.<sup>56</sup> Not only were collectors defining themselves in ways typical of the period, but in reading about their hobby they were also bombarded with advertising by dealers and manufacturers selling accessories including magnifying glasses, hinges, and tongs. A

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<sup>55</sup> W.C. Eaton to *American Journal of Philately* editors, May 25, 1894, in *American Journal of Philately* 7 (June 30, 1894): 288; *Philatelic West* (Superior, NE: Brodstone & Wilkinson, 1896-1898). The *American Journal of Philately* published minutes from many of these smaller societies. *Quaker City Philatelist* (Philadelphia: Quaker City Philatelic Publishing, 1886-1894).

<sup>56</sup> Warren H. Colson, “Advertisement,” *American Philatelist* 36, no. 4 (1922):161, 91; and Halgren, *All About Stamps*, 186. I reviewed many journals to discover these patterns, including *American Philatelist*, 1886-1898; *American Journal of Philately*, 1888-1899; *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 1891-1900; *Philatelic West*, 1896-98; *The Quaker City Philatelist*, 1891-94; *Texan Philatelist*, 1894-98; and *Weekly Philatelic Era*. I will treat the philatelic journals again later in the paper.

cottage industry grew up around philatelists. By reading these papers, collectors educated themselves in the minutiae of philately.

Connecting and corresponding with other collectors was an important part of the collecting culture. Philatelic publications helped collectors connect with others to buy, sell, and exchange stamps, meaning that one did not need to belong to a club in order to acquire more stamps and participate actively in the hobby. Around the time that C.H. Mekeel began his *Weekly Stamp News*, he also printed a directory containing names and addresses of collectors and dealers who paid one dollar to be listed. Five thousand collectors responded in 1891, which increased to nine thousand by 1897, and each person's entry described what countries' stamps they specialized in and sometimes mentioned the languages in which they corresponded. The listings are very international; not only were collectors living outside of United States represented, but many philatelists wanted to connect with foreign collectors and dealers. For instance, Leon Lambert of St. Paul, Minnesota, desired to "correspond in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Dutch to exchange on the basis of any catalogue. Sample copies of foreign papers desired." Charles Townsend of Akron, Ohio, called out to collectors "in all part of the world, particularly those in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Islands in the West Indies." And, dealers from Peru, Britain,

Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and France bought ad space in this directory.<sup>57</sup> Not only were stamp collectors and dealers supporting the governments who produced stamps by purchasing them, but were also supporting the postal system by conducting transactions through the mail. Stamp papers and directories provided contact information to allow collectors and dealers to conduct transactions and facilitate the practices of collecting on their own.

Collectors also used their philatelic papers to discuss what they liked about collecting. Some journals, like the *Philatelic West*, offered regular testimonials, and others published philatelic poetry that expressed the joys of stamp collecting or of reading a particular paper. In the *Philatelic West*, “Modern Maud Muller” skipped past her lover to get to the post office in a blizzard to retrieve the latest copy of her *Philatelic West* magazine, which she loved more dearly than her man.

And when to his heart her form he pressed,  
There was something nearer to her heart—THE WEST.<sup>58</sup>

This light-hearted poem penned by a man in 1901, stated that the *Philatelic West* was so good that a “modern” woman, who might be more swayed by matters of the heart, put aside her love interests to read her favorite stamp paper.

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<sup>57</sup> C.H. Mekeel, *Mekeel's Stamp Collectors' and Dealers' Address Book*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: C.H. Mekeel Stamp and Publishing Co, 1891), 8, 10, 24, 42; and J. de Q. Donehoo, *Mekeel's Address Book of Foreign Stamp Collectors and Dealers: Containing over 9000 Names and Addresses from 127 Countries and Colonies, Being the Most Complete Work of the Kind Ever Issued* (St. Louis: C.H. Mekeel, 1897).

<sup>58</sup> George J. Remburg, “The Modern Maud Muller,” *The Philatelic West and Camera News* 15, no. 2 (1901): n.p.

Readers of philatelic journals often heard from editors that they needed to recruit more members of their society or subscribers to the paper. Verna Weston Hanway encouraged philatelists to enlist at least one more collector and proposed starting philatelic societies in the public schools.<sup>59</sup> One tactic was to recruit women as subscribers to stamp papers even if they were not members of a philatelic society. Some women read philatelic papers, like *Philatelic West*, whose editors recognized its readership. As early as 1905, the *West* offered readers a “Woman-Collectors’ Department” authored by Hanway. In her column, she encouraged women to collect and wrote various articles on stamps, curios, and books. She urged busy women to get a healthy pleasure to relieve them from the turmoil of their days, that they might find pleasure in their collections. She called out to women readers, perhaps through their fathers, brothers, or husbands, with statements like “curiosity is ceded to be an essentially feminine attribute,” therefore women were genetically predisposed to be collectors.<sup>60</sup> *Pennsylvania Philatelist* and *Philatelic West* were the first papers that really identified a need to attract female readers and society members. Of course, since these papers were businesses, attracting any and all new readers or members was key to their long-term success.

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<sup>59</sup> Verna Weston Hanway, “Philatelic Complaining,” *The Philatelic West and Camera News* 29 (1904); “An Aside,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 63, no. 2 (1914); and Bradford Peck, *The World a Department Store; a Story of Life under a Coöperative System* (Lewiston, ME: B. Peck, 1900), 61.

<sup>60</sup> The first column of the Woman-Collectors’ Department I found was from September 1905, appearing in the back of the *Philatelic West* portion of the journal once it was printed together with *Camera News*. By December 1906, Alma Appleton took over the column. Verna Weston Hanway, “Woman-Collectors’ Department,” *Philatelic West and Camera News* 31, no. 1 (September 1905): n.p.; and Verna Weston Hanway, “Old Manuscripts,” *Philatelic West and Camera News* 32, no. 3 (April 1906): n.p.

As philatelists discussed and defended their hobby, it is undeniable that stamp papers played an important role in the growth and shape of philately. Though some collectors and journalists did not like the proliferation of philatelic literature, one cartoon printed in *A. C. Roessler's Stamp News* captured the reason for the paper's existence. In panel one, the first man says to the other, "I don't subscribe to stamp papers—they cost too much." In the second panel, the other man holds the first one down, beating him, saying, "Without papers your hobby would be dead in a year, you poor it."<sup>61</sup> Granted, this was published in a stamp paper that also needed to justify its existence and remind its readers to send in their subscriptions. But, the cartoon deftly illustrates that the print culture acted as the glue that connected stamp collectors from around the world and made stamp collecting a popular pursuit. Papers offered subscribers opportunities to acquire more stamps, to learn about different varieties, to best care for their collections, and to create an imagined community. Although many small American stamp papers disappeared or merged with other publications by the early 1900s, many still thrived and supported the growing numbers of stamp collectors into the twentieth century.

### **Philatelic Collections and Albums**

Philatelic clubs and publications set standards of practice and shared information with readers about the ways to care for a proper stamp collection.

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<sup>61</sup> "The Outbursts of Mr. Phil A. Telic," cartoon, *A.C. Roessler's Stamp News* 97, no. 1 (1917).

Novices learned that philatelists did not keep stamps in cigar boxes or decorate furniture with stamps. By setting standards of collecting behavior, club collectors were able to distinguish themselves as philatelists while others who collected stamps were mere collectors. Some philatelic literature offered primers on collecting practices for novices. Young readers learned how to start collecting with the *ABC of Stamp Collecting*. Philatelists admonished novices to care for their collections properly, because “nothing detracts more from the interest and value of any collection, than a slovenly, careless and dirty arrangement.”<sup>62</sup> This only matters, of course, if an individual collected for the purpose of re-selling their stamps or participating in a public exhibition.

Keeping stamps in albums offered a neat and orderly way to organize stamps. The first albums appeared in France in the 1860s as publishers began printing albums in Europe and the United States. Early albums were organized visually by geography: first by continent, then region within the continent, and last by country. Later albums listed countries alphabetically, including colonial headings such as “German East Africa” or “British Guyana.”<sup>63</sup> Albums forced an organizational structure, by country and denomination, but also provided blank pages for an individual to augment an album with issues not represented in the pages or to collect in their own schema.

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<sup>62</sup> “Stamp Collecting as a Hobby,” 227-28; and Fred J. Melville, *ABC of Stamp Collecting* (London: Drane, 1903).

<sup>63</sup> Lewis G. Quackenbush, “The Evolution of the Stamp Album, from Lallier to Mekeel,” *Philatelic Journal of America*, reprinted by Earl P.L. Apfelbaum, Inc, 1894), <http://www.apfelbauminc.com/library/evolutionalbum.html>.

Albums also protected stamps from human and environmental damage and separated stamps designated as collectors' items from stamps purchased to mail a letter. While some albums were custom-made, say for British royalty, most were commercially produced by publishers and sold by dealers or novelty shop owners.

Philatelists promoted the need for albums as ways of classifying stamps and controlling order in a collection, as well as highlighting empty spaces that might encourage collectors to acquire more stamps. Albums enforced standardized collecting practices that emphasized the scientific classification of stamps. Album publishers reminded consumers that albums provided “a valuable and necessary aid in providing for a collection.”<sup>64</sup> These albums became a way philatelists judged one another and separated philatelists from occasional or casual collectors. Philatelists spent much of their time carefully placing stamps in their appropriate slots within an album. This also meant each time he or she opened an album, empty spaces stared back. Empty space had the power to encourage a collector to fill them in an effort to complete a set—defined by the individual. An empty space was something unseen when one created their schema for collecting or kept stamps in a box or in blank album pages. Often non-collectors did not understand this need to organize stamps in albums. One cartoon illustrated these differences. Printed in *American Philatelist*, two men sit at a table as one flips through what appears to be a book, while pieces of paper fly out

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<sup>64</sup> “1919 Scott Stamp & Coin Imperial Stamp Album - eBay (item 110338724052 end time Aug-14-09 02:43:11 PDT),” [http://cgi.ebay.com/1919-SCOTT-STAMP-COIN-IMPERIAL-STAMP-ALBUM\\_W0QQitemZ110338724052QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH\\_DefaultDomain\\_0?hash=item19b0b350d4&\\_trksid=p3286.m20.l1116](http://cgi.ebay.com/1919-SCOTT-STAMP-COIN-IMPERIAL-STAMP-ALBUM_W0QQitemZ110338724052QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH_DefaultDomain_0?hash=item19b0b350d4&_trksid=p3286.m20.l1116).

from its pages. The non-collector states, “Mmm-nice collection you have here,” while the collector sweats and looks on in anger. The cartoon’s caption reads, “The occasional collector who runs thru your album like a book.”<sup>65</sup>

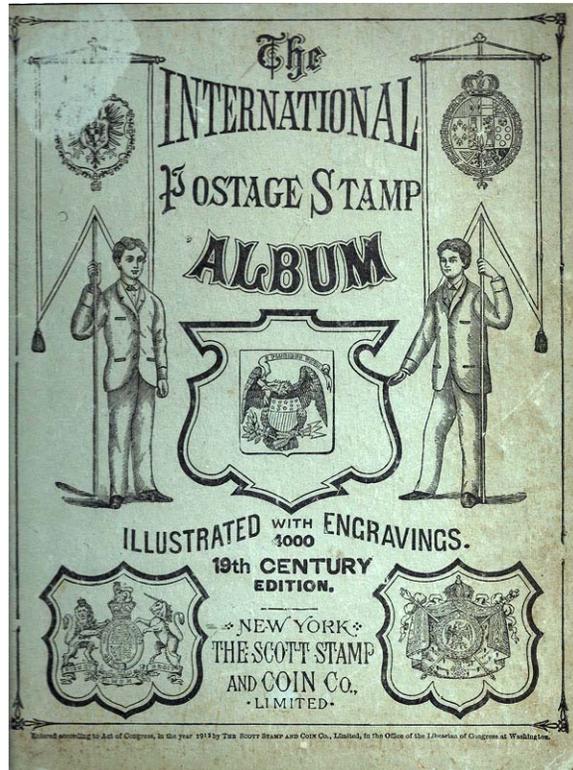


Figure 4: Cover, Scott’s International Postage Stamp Album, 1912 (author’s collection)

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<sup>65</sup> Jack Doly, “Philatelic Thrills,” *American Philatelist* 40, no. 11 (August 1927):782; and Alexander Haimann, “Albums,” *Arago: People, Postage, and the Post*, National Postal Museum, February 2007, <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2040893>

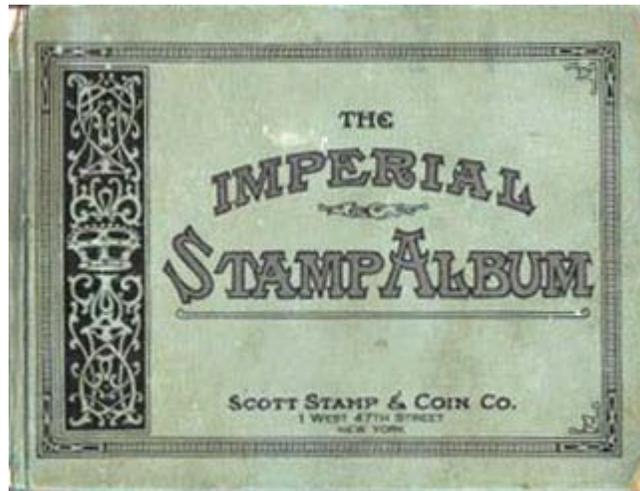


Figure 5: Cover, Scott's Imperial Stamp Album, 1919 (*eBay* item)

An album offered the collector an apparatus to classify and display stamps from different countries, empires, and colonies, giving the appearance that a collector held the world in their albums. For example, Scott's "International" and "Imperial" albums offered spaces to hold collections of all varieties of postage stamps printed, while Mekeel's created albums for specialists in Mexican or American stamps from North and South America. Order was dictated in an album so that the collector placed stamps from a specific geographical location in a specific place. When flipping through an "International" album, one found maps of continents and regions that represented national borders but not states or provinces within each country. In the map pages, we find North and Central America first, and then localities follow in alphabetical order

after the stamps of the U.S.<sup>66</sup> Selling to American customers, it is not surprising that Scott's privileged the U.S. map and American stamps within this international album. American exceptionalist narratives were prevalent in commemoratives, as will be discussed in later chapters, and these ideas were present in American album design as well. Philatelists bought and traded countries, represented in stamps, and then ordered the world in their albums. This process was influenced by an imperialistic view of the world where imperial powers fought over lands, natural resources, and peoples in an effort to gain an economic and political edge. An individual stamp collector chose which countries to collect and then made an effort to achieve that goal. As a virtual representation of the globe, an album offered collectors the opportunity to show off their stamps and glimpse the holdings of others with an eye towards acquiring those countries as well. Collectors occasionally spoke of their collections in this imperialistic way. Verna Hanway described how many philatelists fondly laid their eyes upon a valuable stamp sitting in an album with the "pride of a conqueror."<sup>67</sup> One could create their own miniature empire within their own collections held in albums.

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<sup>66</sup> Quackenbush, "The Evolution of the Stamp Album, from Lallier to Mekeel"; *The International Postage Stamp Album* (New York: Scott Stamp and Coin Co. Limited, 1894); *The International Postage Stamp Album*, 19th century ed. (New York: Scott Stamp and Coin Co. Limited, 1912); "1919 Scott Stamp & Coin Imperial Stamp Album - eBay (item 110338724052 end time Aug-14-09 02:43:11 PDT)"; and "Old Scott Stamp Co. Imperial Stamp Album 450+ Stamps!! - (eBay item 230188290640 end time Nov-10-07 09:42:36 PST)."

<sup>67</sup> Verna Weston Hanway, "Firelight Reveries," *Philatelic West and Camera News* 31, no. 2 (November 1905): n.p.

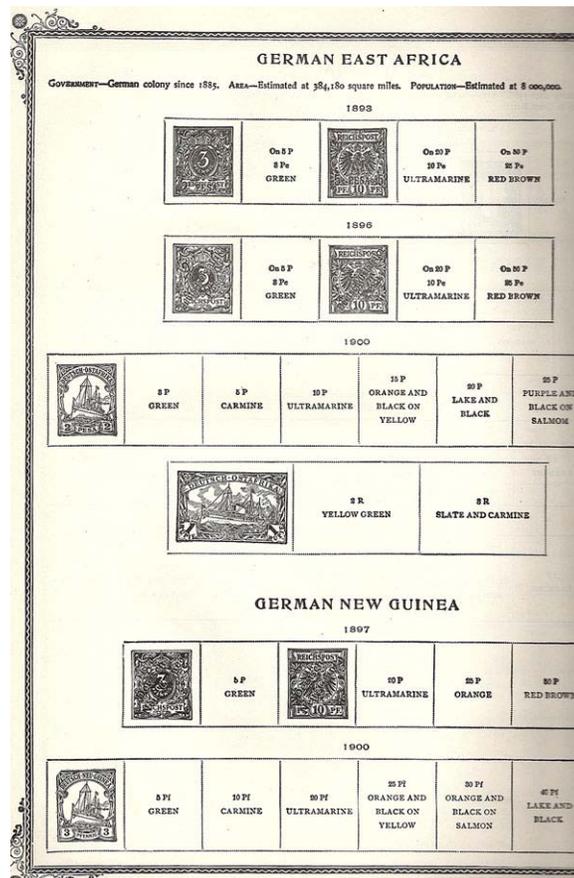


Figure 6: Page from Scott's International Postage Stamp Album, 1912 (author's collection)

Albums also facilitated looking at stamps in certain ways that made them appear like souvenirs from an international shopping spree. Physically visiting a foreign country was not necessary for acquiring stamps as souvenirs because an individual acquired stamps through dealers or exchanges, or from fellow collectors at club meetings. Souvenirs offered an incomplete vision of an authentic place or experience that allows the consumer or recipient to create their own narrative

surrounding that new object, which delighted some collectors.<sup>68</sup> H.R. Habicht found great romance in the idea that a French Napoleon stamp “witnessed” the commune in Paris and then was carried to South Africa with its new British owner only to be auctioned off after the Boer War to someone who would later donate it to the Berlin Postal Museum.<sup>69</sup> Stamps gave people like Habicht an opportunity to connect with the past and create their own memories of events or places that they had never experienced. Stamps, then, held a transformative power for some philatelists who built their own narratives of a stamp’s history or by projecting themselves into the stamp narrative itself.

Verna Hanway also imagined the stories hiding in the pages of album. Engaging in a collection was an intimate experience that involved the collector’s personal context of memory. For Hanway, remembering “the old days” was one of the pleasures of a collection:

But you and I fellow collectors, hold its memory as something tender and sacred. Others, materialists, may deem it a madness, but if this be madness, “there is a pleasure in being mad, which none but madmen know.”<sup>70</sup>

Stamps told stories to Hanway, and her album brought her closer to those stories and the personal memories she associated with stamps. She distinguished collecting stamps from a practice merely for the sake acquisition. Mining these personal relationships

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<sup>68</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> H.R. Habicht, “The Enjoyment of Stamp Collecting,” *American Philatelist* 36, no. 4 (1922): 159-61.

<sup>70</sup> Hanway, “Firelight Reveries.”

forged through stamps is difficult for the historian who looks at stamps carefully placed in an ordered album but cannot necessarily read the meta-narrative present for the collector.

Gathering evidence of different ways that people collected and illustrated their own narrative through their stamps proves difficult because philatelic standards do not recognize collecting conventions falling outside of standard album keeping. Handmade albums or decorative stamp pieces are often discarded because the philatelic community places little or no value on them. For instance, the album pictured below is worthless in the eyes of auctioneers today. Someone made this album using a local department store catalog and reinforced it with cardboard. The collector gummed—without the hinges typically used with a philatelic album—inexpensive stamps and stamp-shaped stickers to each page in colorful patterns over the illustrations of women modeling the new winter line of coats. Created during World War I, this collector designed a red cross in stamps that may have been a way that this person remembered those wounded in war. Stamp papers discouraged this type of decoration with stamps and particularly discouraged gumming stamps directly to paper.<sup>71</sup> This collection fell outside of the philatelic practices as formulated by the philatelic community, meaning that other evidence representing non-standard practices has not been saved.

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<sup>71</sup> This particular piece was rescued by Cheryl Ganz, Curator of Philately at the National Postal Museum, because it had no value at an auction. Someone planned to throw it away but thought Ms. Ganz might enjoy it because of her work.



Figure 7: Pages from homemade stamp album, ca. 1917 (courtesy of Cheryl Ganz)

Philatelists tried to distinguish themselves as experts in stamp knowledge, and they acquired that knowledge through careful classification and study of stamps as placed in their albums. This meant most disapproved of other ways that people collected and used stamps, particularly in decorating. As early as the 1880s, *Godey's Lady's Book* openly recognized that some of their readers collected and decorated with postage stamps. The article provided instructions for creating a postage stamp table. Women gummed rare stamps to the top of a small wooden white table and then glazed over the stamps for a smooth veneer. In 1905, an American woman made a dress that was completely covered with patterns created from over 30,000 stamps. William O. Sawyer papered a twelve-foot square room with over 20,000 United States postage stamps in 1921. Responding to the latter, *Philatelic West* exclaimed, "oh the affront to philately!" This style of collecting or amassing stamps for the sake of decorating was never recommended in philatelic journals because the stamps were not carefully protected and saved in album.<sup>72</sup> Once used in a decorative way, stamps could not be resold. The value of saving stamps might be considered lost on a decorative project.

Decorating was more often associated with female stamp collectors and not with male club philatelists, which begins to address one of the more puzzling pieces of this history of stamp collecting: how men came to dominate this hobby. Steven Gelber proposes that a commodification of stamps took hold in the 1860s when the earliest

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<sup>72</sup> "One Way of Collecting," *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 78, no. 1 (1921): n.p.; and "Work Department," *Godey's Lady's Book* 101, no. 605 (1880): 477. Reported by *London Tit-Bits* but reprinted in "Costume of Postage Stamp," *Eagle County Blade*, 1905, 3.

collectors began trading stamps and amassing sets. Gelber sees that because stamps were classified by country, year, and denomination, those sets possessed “real market value.” Sets were meant to be completed. Male philatelists developed a market model of collecting that they taught to other club philatelists through gatherings and the philatelic press. This model militated against female participation and made stamp collecting feel like a business endeavor. Stamp dealers set up shops in business districts, such as in Manhattan’s financial district on Nassau Street, furthering the connection between the male world of business and philatelic practices.<sup>73</sup> Caring for a collection in albums not only enforced the idea that stamps needed to be classified properly, but that stamps comprised sets and the sets were meant to be filled. In order to complete one set you might have to break up another, so one protected stamps in case one wanted to sell or trade them. Collectors who decorated with their stamps were not participating in the market model, nor were they studying their stamps carefully for their watermarks or perforation. They collected stamps because they liked them for other reasons, particularly aesthetics.

Even with men dominating the club-level hobbyists, women still collected and were urged to participate. Verna Hanaway and others urged women to collect because they seemed to naturally fit in with women’s interests. Even though Eva Earl found life as female philatelist challenging, she still encouraged other women to participate in

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<sup>73</sup> Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 117-19; Herman Herst, *Nassau Street: a Quarter Century of Stamp Dealing* 1 (New York: Duell, 1960).

this hobby. Noting that stamp collecting was quite usual for “our brothers,” it often was discouraged in girls. She began her collection with duplicates she received from her brother, and then Earl “caught the fever.” She became more curious than ever about the pastime that she described as one of the “most seductive of pursuits.” Schooled in the market model, so to speak, Earl worried that she might not be able to continue collecting because “we girls have little or no money,” unlike “you men, you have every thing.” Even as Earl wrote publicly about her experiences, she was quite aware that she did not have many sisters in philately in 1894.<sup>74</sup>

Another journalist tackled the question of what happened to the women in the same year as Earl’s reminiscences. Clifford Kissinger observed that the numbers of female philatelists were quite small and that they were rarely heard from in the philatelic press. His solution, of course, was that women needed more encouragement from “the sterner sex,” urging married male collectors to encourage their wives to begin their own albums. Kissinger insisted that “our hobby must appear favorably to the feminine taste” because of the “pleasing colors of many of stamps” and “handsome designs.” Speaking to a mostly male audience, he urged men to, “encourage the ladies—we need their presence, and should gladly welcome them to the ranks, and accord them that recognition to which they are entitled.”<sup>75</sup> I think many women did collect but their presence is not seen, particularly from 1880s-1920s, because they were

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<sup>74</sup> Eva Earl, “A Girl’s Philatelic Reminiscence,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 5, no. 3 (February 1894): 207-08.

<sup>75</sup> Clifford W. Kissinger, “The Fair Sex in Philately,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 5, no. 2 (January 1894): 172-73.

excluded from most collecting clubs. Material evidence of their collecting practices and habits most likely were thrown away, much like what almost happened the handmade album shown above.

Some club philatelists collected in certain ways based on the stamp as a commodifiable object, but not all male philatelists approved of a completely-market driven model. Some voiced concerns that too many collectors focused on earning money from stamps rather than on the enjoyment of collecting. In 1901, L.G. Quackenbush wrote that the motivation for collectors should be research and hours of enjoyment gleaned from stamps, not the potential for earning money. He berated the collector “whose attachment to Philately is so much a matter of dollars and cents that a decline in the catalogue value of his stamp means a corresponding decline in his pleasure in them.” Quackenbush saw philately as a serious intellectual pursuit and tried to separate its fierce connection with its market side:

Let us strive to educate the rising philatelic generation to a different standard. Let us teach them that the intellectual and ethical beauties of philately are the keystone of its power, and that its greatest benefits and largest dividends are not in negotiable coin.<sup>76</sup>

Twenty years later, some were still concerned because philatelic papers published articles emphasizing the financial benefits of collecting, leading non-collectors to believe that “to collect stamps was a royal road to fortune.” This author reminisced about a time when a majority of collectors were amateurs—and keeping

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<sup>76</sup> L.G. Quackenbush, “The Sordid Side of Philately,” *The Philatelic West* 15, no. 2 (April 30, 1901): n.p.

stamps was for pure philatelic interest alone.<sup>77</sup> Obviously, that was not the case; there seems to have been a constant tug within the philatelic world between those who believed they were “true” philatelists interested in the education and enjoyment of the hobby and unconcerned with making money, and those who collected stamps to sell and trade in the hopes of earning money. As the hobby attracted more followers, the marketability of a stamp collection made collecting more interesting to some. The hope of getting rich from finding rare, old stamps in an attic or in a relative’s trunk persisted, even when a majority of collectors never got rich from their stamps.

Identifying themselves as philatelists, stamp collectors created a large community in the late nineteenth century that extended well into the twentieth through the establishment of clubs and the success of a wide-reaching philatelic press. Defining themselves as experts, these collectors wished to bring respectability to a leisure activity that they enjoyed and that others ridiculed. Clubs and literature established the study of stamps as a serious discipline, defined by their own as scientific, and created a professionalized feeling about the hobby through club meetings and publications that mimicked academic journals. As new groups of

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<sup>77</sup> “Hobby of Business,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 79, no. 2 (1922):n.p. Despite the author’s admonition of stamp papers for promoting the lure of the big find, additional articles were printed that featured great finds. In “The Lure of Stamp Collecting,” re-published eight years later in the *Philatelic West*, N.R. Hoover tells the stories of a few “almost unbelievable” stories of lucrative stamp finds. These stories continue especially into the 30s during the Great Depression. N.R. Hoover, “The Lure of Stamp Collecting,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World*, 89, no. 1 (August-November, 1930): n.p.

philatelists formed and dissolved, hierarchies also emerged in the philatelic world as clubs restricted membership based on race and gender, and “philatelists” distinguished themselves from mere “collectors.” Philatelists also debated among themselves about the practices of philately, and whether it led its followers down a path of knowledge and enlightenment or a path toward materialism and greed. Philatelists formed a national network that helped to legitimize their activities, and the next chapter will show how this hobby expanded to a broader audience and grew in popularity.

## Chapter 2: Learning to Look at Stamps

O Mary found a little stamp,  
A rarity, conceded.  
In fact 'twas just the very one  
Her dear old daddy needed.  
It also chanced, this wondrous stamp,  
That Mary did discover a  
Rare Patriotic Cover.

Now, Mary knowing that her dad  
Liked stamps found in a garret,  
Made haste to yank from envelope  
Said stamp, as well as tear it.

And thus she brought it to her dad  
In ecstasy to show him,  
But, from his look of seething rage,  
She found she didn't know him.

A fortune he had won and lost  
Through his beloved daughter,  
Because to leave old stamp intact  
He ne'er before had taught her.  
And thou, O stamp-collecting sire,  
Take this advice from me:  
While in their youth, and ere too late,  
Teach kids Philately.

G.M. McCracken, "Poor Mary," 1933<sup>1</sup>

One might expect to find this jokingly didactic poem about the need to teach children philately in a philatelic paper, yet this appeared in the *Washington Post* in

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<sup>1</sup> G.M. McCracken, "Poor Mary," *Washington Post*, August 27, 1933, sec. JP.

1933. By the 1930s, stamp collecting permeated public culture and was no longer thought to be a mania. In fact, one journalist in 1934 declared that “collecting things, just as a small boy accumulates stamps,” had become “a national pastime.” The *Christian Science Monitor* captioned a photo of a young boy looking at his stamp albums: “you can find him in the homes along every street,” noting widespread participation in stamp collecting in the U.S. and reinforcing that the hobby remained strong within white America.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines how stamp collecting grew in popularity into a “national pastime.”

From the 1880s to the 1930s, Americans learned to see postage stamps as something other than purely a sticker that represented pre-payment for mailing correspondence. In the poem, Mary noticed the stamp on the “Rare Patriotic Cover” because she had been trained to see it as something attractive and worth saving. Mary ripped the stamp and envelope because she did understand the conventions followed by self-defined philatelists, but she knew enough that the stamp meant something to someone. Like Mary, even if an individual did not belong to a philatelic club or subscribe to a stamp paper, one learned that people collected stamps for fun from consumer promotions, newspaper or magazine articles, school, radio programs, or advertisements for a philatelic exhibition. Stamps’ accessibility in price and in visual appeal made them attractive to people for a variety of reasons. As more individuals learned about stamps and collecting in the U.S., the federal government noticed, as I

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<sup>2</sup> “Hobby of Collecting Things Stirs Dust in Many an Attic,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 5, 1934; “A Young Collector,” photograph, *Christian Science Monitor*, July 24, 1934.

will discuss in the next chapter, and began printing limited-issue commemorative stamps that celebrated themes of American World's Fairs and championed the U.S. government's role in the conquest of lands and peoples. This triumphant, exceptionalist narrative of America's past gestured towards the U.S.'s growing role in international affairs in the 1890s.

As the American international political role grew in the world, purchasing goods manufactured outside of the U.S., including stamps, was quite fashionable. Those with modest incomes could afford to purchase Chinese fans or British ceramics to showcase in their homes.<sup>3</sup> Others purchased or traded foreign stamps. Stamps were often associated as consumer goods when tobacco companies gave away free foreign stamps in cigarette boxes and when department stores enticed customers with free stamps to make additional purchases. Stamps emerged from the needs of a sprawling British Empire, and many stamps hailed from British and European colonies. Much like the relationship with foreign consumer goods, the collector did not have to travel to obtain them or interact with people living in those localities—the collector merely wanted a product. One might be led to exoticizing about a foreign land through collecting stamps, particularly when imagery emphasized natural resources, including their flora and fauna.

This relationship between the collector and the stamp began to approximate an imperialistic relationship that encouraged an Orientalist gaze at the world. Nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Kristin Hoganson, "Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002): 55-83.

and early-twentieth-century scholars defined a massive geographical region of Asia and the Middle East as the “Orient” and began constructing an entire ideology that saw anyone of Asian descent as a unified group of people who lived and functioned in ways almost in complete opposition from people from the western European powers. In the process of learning about the “Orient” and constructing differences, Western imperial powers not only controlled these regions politically, but culturally as well.<sup>4</sup> Stamp collectors most likely internalized this approach to viewing peoples and regions outside of Europe and the United States. By applying Said’s arguments to stamp collecting, nineteenth and early-twentieth-century philatelists learned just enough about different countries and colonies to own more of those stamps. Once philatelists amassed a significant collection representing a particularly country or empire, they identified themselves as specialists without needing to visit such locations.

While specialists believed they were experts in the nations they collected, non-specialists and collectors alike learned to view and interact with stamps from a tourist perspective that led to an uncritical assessment of what might be represented in the imagery.<sup>5</sup> Some educators believed that stamps helped students learn the geo-political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the rise in stamp

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<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

collecting's popularity coincided with the rise of the United States as an imperial power. In the late nineteenth century, many nations grappled with their national identities as they competed with one another for economic, military, and racial superiority. Theodore Roosevelt shaped the American identity at the turn of the century through his roles as a Rough Rider, a progressive reformer, and a president whose approach to solving problems emphasized order, hierarchy, and control.<sup>6</sup> Such attention to order, hierarchy, and control were also integral to philately, particularly as it was practiced by collecting club philatelists. As the diffusion of philatelic practices widened, those teachings increasingly controlled the ways that individuals learned about stamp collecting and viewed stamps. A stamp album, comprised of postage from different nations, symbolized an ordered world where each country, protectorate, or colony retained its distinctive nature. Stamp albums were not and never could be crucibles or melting pots among nations. However, the viewer saw an entire nation, regardless of cultural, religious, racial, gender, or class differences, represented as a unified body on a stamp. Stamps were small but carried identifying signs that combined to present a vision of national identity.

Even if not examining these signs critically, students and adults in the 1880s began to internalize stamp imagery as significant. A more specific understanding and popularity of stamps would later motivate some Americans to petition the U.S. Post Office Department to represent images of local heroes and anniversaries on stamps.

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

First, I must examine how non-collectors, the general public, learned that stamps were for postage and for collecting. Americans saw stamps visually and physically associated with consumer goods and consuming palaces and read about collecting clubs and their practices in the media. Teachers introduced stamps and albums to classrooms hoping to teach geography and recent political history; young people collected in after-school clubs; and adults learned about the hobby from public exhibitions and public recreation classes. By the late 1930s, stamp collecting was one of the most popular hobbies in the U.S. Drawn to stamps for a variety of reasons, Americans used stamps and the practices of collecting and arranging them, sometimes in quite subtle ways, as pedagogical tools to teach about consumerism, empire, and American exceptionalism.

### **Seeing Stamps as Collectibles**

As philatelists exposed non-collectors to their hobby in the 1880s, Americans began to view stamps as something other than postage. Collecting, in general, became increasingly accessible and acceptable to Americans as the culture of desire and consumerism developed and was shaped by merchant capitalists, private and federal institutions, and advertising agencies from the 1880s to the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> In the 1880s, stamp publishers and tobacco companies used chromolithographic trade cards and free stamps to advertise their products. Many dry goods companies capitalized on new chromolithography technology and customized cards branded with the company's

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<sup>7</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

name and product. These trade cards were a popular collectible in their own right because they came free in packaging and contained attractively colored images that belonged to sets, meant to be completed. Many children, particularly girls, collected and kept cards in scrapbooks; an activity that prepared girls especially, according to Ellen Gruber Garvey, to become keen and brand-conscious shoppers for their future households.<sup>8</sup> Trade cards that advertised stamp albums associated stamps and related materials as consumer products to male and female consumers.

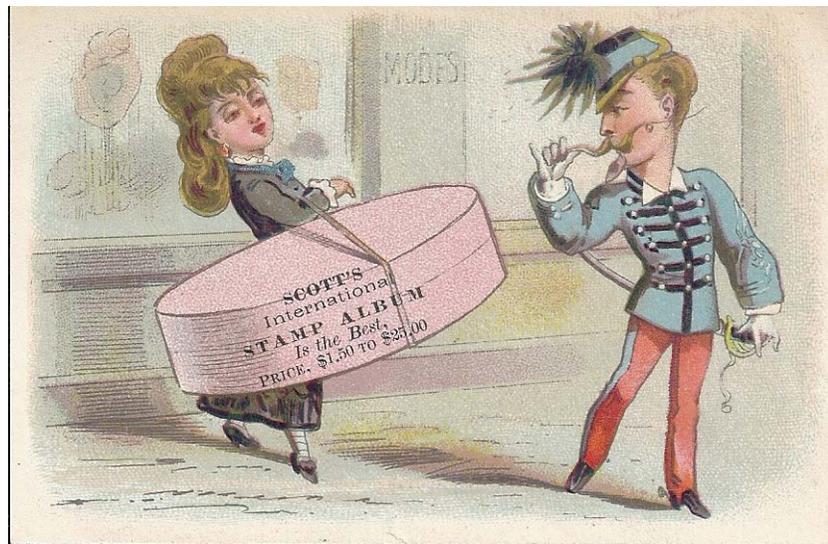


Figure 8: Scott's International Stamp Album trade card, late 19th century (author's collection)

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<sup>8</sup> Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Some trade cards advertised for stamp dealers and publishers, while others contained stamps and encouraged the collecting of the cards and the stamps. Scott's Stamp and Coin Company used stock cards to advertise their most popular album. In the image above, we see the Scott's imprint labels on the large clothing box, visually equating it with consumable woman's clothing, and possibly expensive French clothing. Charles A. Townsend, a dealer in Akron, Ohio, stamped his name and address on the front of a series of famous persons cards, including President Buchanan and actress Pauline Markham. On the reverse side, Townsend printed a shortened price list of stamps he held in stock at the time.<sup>9</sup> Stamp dealers and publishers promoted their business in ways very similar to how other consumer good merchants and manufacturers advertised their products in the late nineteenth century.

Rival tobacco companies competed for adult customers in the late nineteenth century by offering card sets with illustrations of presidents, baseball players, animals, and fish. In an effort to attract more customers into trying their cigarettes, W. Duke and Sons offered smokers a series of trade cards relating to postal matters that included a "genuine foreign postage stamp" in every box. On the back of the cards, Duke told customers that these stamps were not only for "the beginner," but the "owner of a

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<sup>9</sup> "Antique Stamp Dealer Trade Card Pauline Markham Bufford," *eBay*, [http://cgi.ebay.com/Antique-Stamp-Dealer-Trade-Card-PAULINE-MARKHAM-Bufford\\_W0QQitemZ300338364520QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH\\_DefaultDomain\\_0?hash=item45ed8fc068&\\_trksid=p3286.c0.m14](http://cgi.ebay.com/Antique-Stamp-Dealer-Trade-Card-PAULINE-MARKHAM-Bufford_W0QQitemZ300338364520QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH_DefaultDomain_0?hash=item45ed8fc068&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14); and "Antique Stamp Dealer Trade Card Pres. Buchanan Bufford," *eBay*, [http://cgi.ebay.com/Antique-Stamp-Dealer-Trade-Card-PRES-BUCHANAN-Bufford\\_W0QQitemZ300338366671QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH\\_DefaultDomain\\_0?hash=item45ed8fc8cf&\\_trksid=p3286.c0.m14](http://cgi.ebay.com/Antique-Stamp-Dealer-Trade-Card-PRES-BUCHANAN-Bufford_W0QQitemZ300338366671QQcmdZViewItemQQptZLH_DefaultDomain_0?hash=item45ed8fc8cf&_trksid=p3286.c0.m14).

large collection” would find stamps “such as he could never find before.”<sup>10</sup> Duke recognized that not only were trade cards printed to be collected, but so were stamps. Advertisers identified an emerging philatelic culture among men of certain economic means and hoped some of them might consider trying a Duke cigarette if they were already inclined to smoke and collect.



Figure 9: Sample trade cards with stamps printed by Duke Cigarettes (John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library)

<sup>10</sup> Ethel Ewert and Rachel K. Pannabecker Abraham, “‘Better Choose Me’: Additions to Tobacco, Collecting, and Quilting, 1880-1920,” *Uncoverings* 21 (2000): 79-105; “Postage Stamps - Loose Cards,” 1880s, available online, Duke Digital Collections, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/ea.D0150/>.

To encourage saving stamps that accumulated from buying cigarettes, the Duke Company recruited a trusted name in philately, J. Walter Scott, to produce a beautifully designed album to hold the complete set of stamps available to Duke's cigarette customers. Scott, who advertised his own albums, including the one pictured in the trade card above, endorsed this album as a legitimate philatelic product—something that club philatelists would easily recognize. In a letter printed on the album's inside cover, Scott stated that Duke's generosity in giving away stamps on cigarette cards "made this album a necessity." Many who had "never seen a foreign stamp before have now become eager collectors." An album was a necessity if one adhered to principles of philately that clubs and dealers promoted. The album forced an order so that new collectors learned to arrange the free stamps by country. Duke's album represented a complete set of stamps to be distributed in cigarette boxes, which was not as large as Scott's International albums that represented all known varieties produced and circulated in the world at a given time. While stamps offered their consumers an "educational advantage" because, according to Scott, stamps led people directly to the study of history and geography, this album cried out to be filled and encouraged consumers to smoke more cigarettes.<sup>11</sup> As stamp collecting grew and clubs

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<sup>11</sup> W. Duke Sons & Co, *Duke's Postage Stamp Album* (Durham and New York: W. Duke, Sons and Company, 1889), available online, Duke Digital Collections, <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/ea.D0003-01/pg.1/>; W. Duke Sons & Co, *Duke's Postage Stamp Album*; John Walter Scott, *The International Postage Stamp Album*, 8th ed. (New York: Scott Stamp and Coin Co. Limited, 1886).

began to form, Duke Tobacco and Scott Stamp and Coin merged their capitalist interest to sell cigarettes and stamps in the 1880s.

This advertising tactic, combining stamps and trade cards, may have counteracted criticisms Duke faced for circulating images of “lascivious” women on other card sets. Trade card advertising generally appealed to women, but tobacco cards clearly were meant for male audiences, even if others held onto the cards within a household. It would not be until the 1920s that cigarette companies acknowledged female smokers in their advertising campaigns.<sup>12</sup> Duke possibly experimented with offering stamps on a trade card because the company believed that stamp collecting as a hobby already appealed to a class of men with means.

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy Bowman, “Questionable Beauty: The Dangers and Delights of the Cigarette Industry, 1880-1930,” in *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*, ed. Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 52-86.

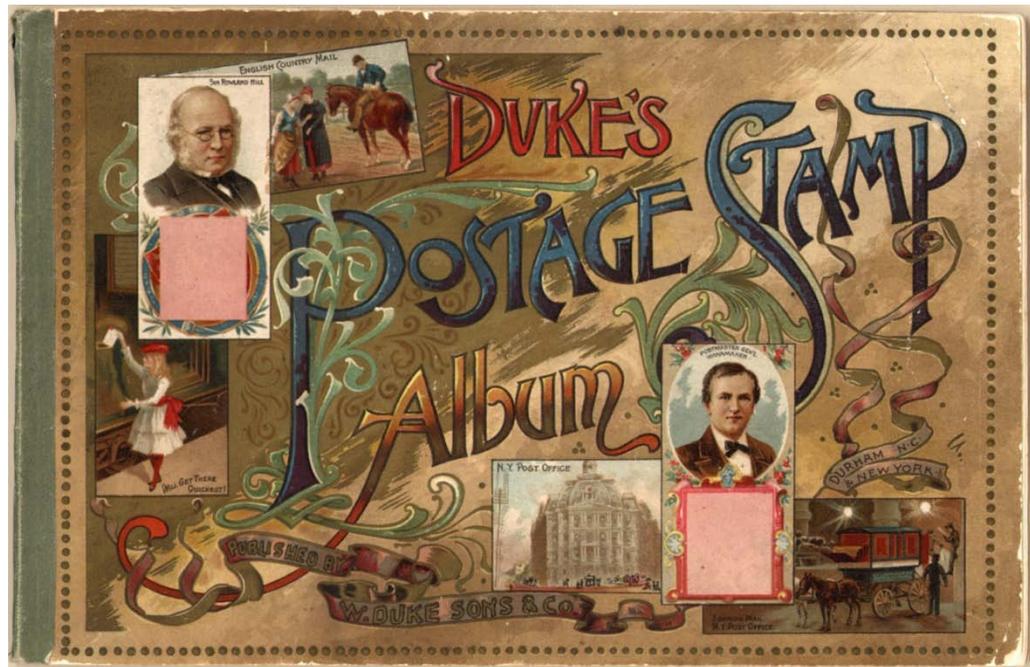


Figure 10: Duke's Postage Stamp Album, 1889 (John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising & Marketing History Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library)

Fifty years later, the stamp continued to be associated with other consumable goods when department stores sold stamps to customers and offered free stamps as promotions. Department stores were consuming palaces that lured customers with elaborately-decorated windows and lavishly-designed interiors that bred a culture of desire and want. Stores competed with one another for business and often ran various promotions. Beginning in 1929, department stores such as Gimbel's recognized the popularity of stamp collecting when they organized lectures and store-based clubs, and they even sold stamps within their doors. Stamp discussions were held in the boys' department of Carson Pirie Scott, in Chicago, and encouraged young ones to join their no-dues, no-obligation stamp club. Kann's, in Washington, D.C., organized stamp

weeks and offered consumers discounted packs of foreign postage. Bullock's, in Los Angeles, brought in a known New York philatelist, Arthur Barger, to answer shoppers' questions about stamps and to show off his own collection.<sup>13</sup> Downtown department stores shaped commercial aesthetics in the early twenty century to offer those who walked by their windows or entered their buildings a tempting vision of a life filled with unnecessary objects. By luring customers into their stores with philatelic promotions, merchants associated postage stamps as a consumer good.

### The Role of the Press

Looking beyond advertisements to the popular press, we see how the media exposed the American public to information about stamp collecting and increased interest that may have led to broader adoption of the hobby. Whether extolling the values of collecting, perpetuating the idea that anyone could find a rare stamp in a box of old letters, or by framing stamp collecting as a "mania," stamp collecting was in the news. The presence of stamp collecting articles in U.S. newspapers and magazines was not overwhelming, but the numbers of articles increased greatly from the 1870s to the

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<sup>13</sup> Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of A New American Culture*; "Carson Pirie Scott and Co.," advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 24, 1920; "Carson Pirie Scott and Company," advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 18, 1931; "Kann's," advertisement *Washington Post*, April 20, 1930; "Bullock's," advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1931, sec. B; Olive Gray, "Rare Stramp Collection Put on View," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1931, sec. A; "May Company," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1932, sec. A; "Gimbels," advertisement, *New York Times*, February 21, 1932; and "Attention Stamp Collectors," advertisement, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 6, 1932, sec. F6. All of these stores offered junior or beginner packages of stamps containing common foreign stamps of relative low value to get people started without a large investment.

1930s, marking a sharp growth in exposure never shared by similar hobbies, including coin collecting.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1880s, women's magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Ladies' Home Journal* proposed that stamp collecting was an appropriate activity for women. Because it was an indoor amusement, "restful" and "quieting after the mind has been busily occupied with duties," it was viewed as a proper way for middle-class women to spend their leisure time. Women were well suited to the pastime because it involved creativity—when arranging a collection—that capitalized on their "natural artistic tastes." *Godey's* instructed women how to decorate tables with stamps, and *Ladies' Home Journal* taught women how to throw a "fad party" that included a stamp collecting hunt.<sup>15</sup> As noted in the last chapter, club philatelists never advocated for these collecting practices but rather urged collectors to protect and save stamps carefully in albums. Nonetheless, these articles exposed women to the hobby even

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<sup>14</sup> There are numerous articles referencing a mania to collect stamp and that negatively categorized stamp collectors, and I only reference a few examples here: "The Postage Stamp," *Boston Daily Globe*, June 25, 1880; "A Mania for Stamps: How It Affects a Good Many People in Washington," *Washington Post*, February 28, 1886; "The Collecting Mania," *Washington Post* (originally published in *New York Tribune*), March 17, 1889; "The Stamp-Collecting Mania," *New York Times*, May 20, 1894; and "The Stamp Mania," *Youth's Companion*, October 18, 1894. I analyzed the contents of the Proquest Historical Newspaper Database using keyword searches in the following papers: *The Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. While these larger newspapers are limited in readership, reprinting of articles happened somewhat freely, and it is likely that some of these articles were reprinted in smaller papers. I also think this represents a good sampling from markets across the United States. More important was that I noticed an overall increase in numbers of articles particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. I also searched for articles on coin collecting/numismatics and noticed a remarkable paucity of articles on collecting coins when compared to philately.

<sup>15</sup> "Work Department," *Godey's Lady's Book* 101, no. 605 (1880): 477. Reported by *London Tit-Bits* but reprinted in "Costume of Postage Stamp," *Eagle County Blade* 1905. MacClung Strickler, "To Make a Postage Stamp Collection," *Ladies' Home Journal* 18, no. 4 (1901): 6. In the fad party, stamps were hidden around the house and participants had to find as many stamps as possible until a bell sounded to end the hunt. Bertha A. Law, "A Novel Fad Party," *Ladies' Home Journal* 21, no. 12 (1904): 57.

when women were not openly accepted into many philatelic clubs in the late nineteenth century. Articles of this nature that encouraged creative arrangements of stamps nearly disappeared in the early twentieth century, suggesting that club philatelists influenced the information about collecting that circulated to the general public. This does not mean that women or those who collected in ways that fell outside of philatelic practices ceased their activities, but most evidence of these practices was not saved.

As early as the 1870s, youth magazines promoted stamp collecting as an appropriate and educational activity for young people. *St. Nicholas* published numerous articles on stamp collecting that offered primers to teach child readers about stamps from different nations and the practices of collecting. These articles functioned like philatelic magazines did for adults. Unlike most articles published about collecting, *St. Nicholas* instructed its readers to consult a map and an encyclopedia when encountering a foreign stamp. As a result, young collectors learned political geography. According to one article, if Russia and Turkey were “quarreling over Montenegro,” a stamp collector could “discuss the cause of the troubles.” Parents were urged to give their boys and girls help in pursuing stamp collecting because it was an “elevating, refining, and character-developing pleasure.”<sup>16</sup> How, exactly, one could glean the causes for political rancor through indentifying two different countries on a map was not made clear in this article. However, the idea that stamps led children to

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<sup>16</sup> “Postage-Stamp Collecting,” *St. Nicholas, An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, November 1875, 49.

read about faraway places or made students smarter was a common theme of many articles on stamp collecting.

Families reading other publications, such as *Frank Leslie's* and *Christian Union*, were also told that stamp collecting educated boys and girls in contemporary history and geography. After the U.S. postal service issued the first series of commemorative stamps celebrating Columbus's landing in the "new world," *Christian Union* noted that a mere collection of stamps did not offer "any practical educational benefit to the collector" except when boys and girls were encouraged to investigate the places from which the stamps originated or the historical events represented on the postage. Only then would an album become "the foundation of a library" and actually appear as educational. Most philatelists agreed that the "mere accumulation of stamps without some knowledge of the countries of origin, the history, and the differences of detail in the stamps collected, (was) not philately at all."<sup>17</sup> Prior to the formation of national philatelic societies in the U.S., youth literature taught communities of young people to look at stamps in new ways. Readers learned that stamps were produced by different countries for the purposes of mailing a letter, but also saw that stamps carried messages and helped to distinguish one country, colony, or protectorate from another with its imagery.

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<sup>17</sup> "Sir Rowland Hill, Inventor of Penny Postage," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, November 1879, 601; "Aunt Patience's Writing Desk," *Christian Union*, March 31, 1880, 307; "Columbian Stamps," *Christian Union*, January 28, 1893, 170; and "Education in Stamps," *New York Times*, April 12, 1922.

*St. Nicholas* was among the first non-philatelic publications to devote valuable copy space to promoting stamp collecting, a trend that many other periodicals would soon follow. *St. Nicholas*'s editors observed an increase in the number of boys and girls starting stamp collections and decided to open a stamp department in 1894 devoted to penning one article a month to the subject.<sup>18</sup> In 1910, the *Christian Science Monitor* began publishing regular articles on stamps for young readers and *The Youth's Companion* started their stamp collecting column in 1919. This trend spread to the dailies as well. In the late 1920s, the *Los Angeles Times* printed a regular hobby column that often included articles on stamps; the *Chicago Daily Tribune* began a Sunday stamp column in 1932; and the *Washington Post* added the "Stamp Album" to their Junior Post section for young readers in 1934. The *New York Sun* even bought ads in the *Chicago Tribune*, inviting its readers to subscribe to the *Sun*'s Saturday paper merely to read a special stamp collecting section. In 1936, the *Philatelic Almanac* listed 150 papers supporting stamp departments that generated regular articles or columns.<sup>19</sup>

For papers that lacked columns, the American Philatelic Service offered a service to provide articles. Advertising in 1917, the Philatelic Services tempted

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<sup>18</sup> Crawford Capen, "Stamp-Collecting: How and What We Learn From It," *St. Nicholas, An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, January 1894.

<sup>19</sup> "The Growing Interest in Philately," *Collectors Club Philatelist* 11, no. 2 (April 19, 1932): 133; H.M. Harvey, "Philatelic Departments," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 46, no. 46 (November 14, 1932): 564; "Stamps to Stick," *Youth's Companion*, March 20, 1919; Russell J. Reed, "Junior Philatelist," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 13, 1910; "Announcing a New Department on Stamps and Stamp Collecting," display ad, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 4, 1932; J.C. Salak, "Philately," *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1928, sec. L; "The Stamp Album," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1933; "For Stamp Collectors," display ad, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 2, 1934; and Frank L. Wilson, *The Philatelic Almanac: The Stamp Collector's Handbook* (New York: H.L. Lindquist, 1936), 107-09.

newspaper editors to subscribe to their service as a good way to stir interest among a paper's readership who were not necessarily "active" philatelists.<sup>20</sup> The *Chicago Defender* did not have a regular column, but in the mid-1930s, the Bud Billikens Club published letters written by young stamp collectors wishing to correspond with other collectors.<sup>21</sup> Some papers even used philately to promote subscriptions and to reward subscribers. In 1929, the *Atlanta Constitution* hosted a day with the President of the Chicago Philatelic Society at the *Constitution's* building exclusively for its subscribers. The *Chicago Tribune* devised a stamp identification game with a prize of \$10,000. In Los Angeles, the *Times* tried to attract new young readers by offering a free Imperial Stamp Album and 500 stamps as a gift "for boys and girls securing one new two month subscription." Newspapers employed a variety of tactics to attract readers, especially as they lost advertising dollars to the growing advertising juggernaut of commercial radio broadcasting.<sup>22</sup>

With the emergence of commercial broadcasting in the U.S. in the 1920s, listeners not only tuned in to hear musicians and comedy acts, but also listened to

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<sup>20</sup> Philatelic Service American, "How It Is Done," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 31, no. 35 (September 1, 1917): 292. Some papers carrying their articles include: *Philadelphia Ledger*, *Providence Journal*, *Buffalo Express*, *Brooklyn Eagle*, *Hartford Globe*, *Salt Lake City News*, *Newark Call*, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, *Jacksonville Metropolis*, *St. Paul News*, *Spokane Chronicle*, *Portland (OR) Journal*, and *Champaign News*.

<sup>21</sup> "Stamp Collectors In Gathering At Y," *The Chicago Defender*, national edition, January 30, 1937; "Billikens Play Santa To Needy," *The Chicago Defender*, national edition, January 2, 1937; George Manuel, "African Youth Desires Letters," *The Chicago Defender*, national edition, October 3, 1936; and Catherine T.I. Bell, "Catherine Is A Stamp Collector," *The Chicago Defender*, national edition, December 21, 1935.

<sup>22</sup> "Philatelic Expect To Meet Here Wednesday," *Atlanta Constitution*, February 12, 1929; "Stamp of the Nations,' a New Tribune Game," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 5, 1930; "500 Different Stamps with Stamp Album," advertisement *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1932, sec. I; and Alice Goldfarb Marquis, "Written on the Wind: The Impact of Radio during the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 3 (July 1984): 385-415.

stamp collecting programs. E.B. Power from Stanley Gibbons's New York office hosted a program that broadcast on WJY and WJZ in New York, WOR in Newark, and WNAC in Boston. Newspapers listed daily programming from their home city and from other regions that reveal shows running from fifteen minutes to one half hour. *Mekeel's* tracked philatelic radio programming and listed nine regular shows in 1932 broadcast from stations in Illinois, Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey. By 1936, more than 60 stations broadcasted philatelic shows. Those who listened regularly were exposed to stamp collecting practices and "the drama of the postage stamp."<sup>23</sup> Powers represented the Gibbons Stamp Company, which was one of the first international stamp dealers; it is possible that his presence on American radio not only spread the word about philately, but also encouraged the commercial side of collecting and investing. It is unclear whether Gibbons officially sponsored the program, but it is easy to see how Powers could promote his company as *the* place to shop or turn to for philatelic advice. As radio emerged as a medium to

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<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate any transcripts or recordings of these stamp programs. Powers's programs were broadcast in different stations and markets. It is possible that the programs began because radio stations needed to fill air time and daytime programming lacked competition in the early days of broadcasting. "Today's Radio Program," *New York Times*, January 15, 1924, 21; "Today's Radio Programs," *New York Times*, February 5, 1924; "Today's Radio Programs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 3, 1924; "Radio Programs," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1924; "Broadcasts Booked for Latter Half of the Week," *New York Times*, August 12, 1928, sec. XX; "Chicago Radio Talks," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 46, no. 39 (September 26, 1932): 476; "Radio Philately," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 46, no. 41 (October 10, 1932): 504; and Wilson, *The Philatelic Almanac*, 110-11. For a few sources on the history of commercial radio, see Marquis, "Written on the Wind," 385-415; Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); and Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

advertise as well as to provide entertainment and news, it is not surprising that professional dealers discussed the ins and outs of philately on air.

The medium of radio not only broadcasted stamp collecting programming, but it also connected collectors and helped them obtain new specimens. When listening to KDKA in Pittsburgh, one collector learned that the station received a letter from the United States Shipping Board vessel *Cathlamet*, detailing that the ship picked up the station's signal on the radio while sailing off the Gold Coast of Africa. While the station was thrilled that their wireless waves carried that far, the collector contacted the station and asked for the envelope bearing the letter read on air. To his delight, the director saved the envelope and the collector went to the station to pick up the envelope affixed with a stamp from the Gold Coast. According to this individual, "stamp collecting and radio were working in harmony at last!" First published in the *New York Times*, this story was reprinted for philatelic audiences in the *Philatelic West*.<sup>24</sup>

Other collectors combined an interest in short-waved radio with philately. Part of the thrill for George Mathewson and other amateur radio enthusiasts was communicating with hobbyists in other countries. To create a written record of such communication, each operator sent a letter or postcard from their hometown and country that the other would sign and postmark. For Mathewson, the act of receiving

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<sup>24</sup> "Stamp Collector Finds Radio Useful in Locating Specimens," *New York Times*, January 23, 1927, sec. X; and "Stamp Collector Finds Radio Useful in Locating Specimens," *Philatelic West* 85, no. 3 (May 1927): n.p.

many foreign-stamped letters turned him into a stamp collector. Once he established contacts in other nations, he then actively requested stamps from those with whom he communicated. Additionally, as radio listeners tuned into as many stations across the country as possible, they then mailed out postcards to those stations who returned the cards with a unique (non-postage) stamp verifying contact. Radio hobbyists collected those cards and pasted them, with unique station stamps, into albums produced for this purpose, creating a type of “radio philately.”<sup>25</sup> Stamp collecting meshed well with radio enthusiasts’ interest in seeing how far their signals traveled and in connecting with others with similar interests.

As philatelic information spread in different media, stamp collecting attracted new practitioners and appealed to the interests of different people. Magazines, newspapers, and radio programs brought some activities that had been exclusive to philatelic clubs and publications out into a public realm. For collectors who did not belong to a club, this exposure increased their philatelic knowledge or allowed them to connect with the philatelic community through the media. This media presence also exposed non-collectors to the hobby and taught them that many people saw something special in stamps and spent time collecting them.

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<sup>25</sup> Kristen Haring, *Ham Radio’s Technical Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); “Stamp Collector Finds Radio Useful in Locating Specimens,” *New York Times*, January 23, 1927, sec. X; “Stamp Collector Finds Radio Useful in Locating Specimens,” *Philatelic West* 85, no. 3 (May 1927): n.p.; “Amateurs Becoming Radio Philatelists,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 4, 1924, 6; and George M. Mathewson, “Radio Philately,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 43, no. 41 (October 14, 1929): 616.

## Stamp Collecting as Educational

The media exposed general audiences both to collecting and to the idea that collecting itself might be educational. In 1894, one collector wrote that “stamp-collecting brings the situation of every important nation of the earth again and again through life to the mind of the collector.” Referencing the rapidly changing political landscape in south and central Africa amidst the “scramble” by colonizing European empires, philatelists saw themselves as more involved than the average person in current events because they followed international political developments in newspapers. Newly-issued stamps revealed who governed previously sovereign territories. In those cases, imperial governments not only constructed and enforced new territorial boundaries with infrastructure and military posts, but also through printing postage stamps that constructed new identities for people living in regions that weren’t necessarily culturally connected.<sup>26</sup> These colonial identities circulated on stamps and became the identity by which collectors and stamp spectators believed was shared by all living in those territories.

Collecting during this period of intense competition for power and sovereignty in Africa and Asia was exciting for philatelists because it meant new foreign stamps were regularly available for purchase or exchange. Simultaneously as numbers of

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<sup>26</sup> Article reprinted from December 1888: J.W. Scott, “Stamps of the United States Sanitary Fairs,” *American Philatelist* 32, no. 3 (December 1918): 61-3; “History in Stamps,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 21, 1894; Crawford Capen, “Stamp-Collecting: How and What We Learn From It,” *St. Nicholas, An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, January 1894; and Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man’s Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912*, 1st ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1992).

people immigrating to the U.S., particularly from Eastern and Southern Europe, grew, so did the animosity towards those foreigners seeking passage into the country. The mainstream and philatelic press constantly informed readers about newly-issued stamp and emphasized the educational role that stamps played in teaching all people about other countries, and this knowledge was shaped by political geography only. Even as stamp collecting activities thrived in large and small American cities some groups could have seen the increased immigrant population as a great opportunity for cultural exchanges, say, to learn about Italy from a native-born Italian. Collecting was about the stamps, and not necessarily about engaging individuals from that country to learn about their individual experiences. A collector seeking Chinese stamps in the 1880s might also fully support the Chinese Exclusionary Act. Collectors enjoyed gleaning small tidbits of information about a country from a stamp, which was just another product—or souvenir—from nations, empires, and colonies.

Despite fears and debates over immigrants to the U.S., exposing adults and children to foreign lands and cultures through stamps frequently framed the discourse. In 1910, one Washington and Lee professor described how stamp collecting taught geography, the reach of the British colonial government and other of European colonizers, and leaders, industries and natural histories of foreign lands, and the “multifarious systems of money.”<sup>27</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor*, which took an early interest in stamp collecting by sponsoring regular columns, consistently extolled the

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<sup>27</sup> Jas Lewis Howe, “Postage Stamp Collecting,” *Christian Observer*, March 30, 1910, 19.

values of learning with stamps, particularly for keeping children in touch with events around the world and “political and social history.”<sup>28</sup> Parents and children might examine a series of stamps that traced changes in governance, which contributed to the popular belief that stamp collecting taught geography, politics, and history. Collapsing empires, “belligerent nations” occupying territory, and newly independent states all represented the changing geo-political landscape during and following World War I.

For others the experience of viewing stamps was like being transported virtually to another nation. Images of foreign rulers, holidays, and landscapes carried one teenage girl to that country in her mind. She learned “everything that you would like to know about in any country” from its stamps. Anne Zulioff imagined the journey her stamps took from a printing press onto a precious letter, and then to land into her stamp album.<sup>29</sup> Here we see small colored bits of paper acting as an agent that activated the imagination in some. As described, the history and geography learned was imagined. But these individuals believed they truly knew something about countries from information gleaned from the stamp.

Re-imagining the world also took different forms. Philatelists organized stamps according to a world order as prescribed by stamp-producing powers, but in one case the world’s stamps symbolized a gateway to spiritual duty and fulfillment. The Women’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention encouraged stamp

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<sup>28</sup> “A Young Collector,” photograph, 6.

<sup>29</sup> H.R. Habicht, “The Enjoyment of Stamp Collecting,” *American Philatelist* 36, no. 4 (January 1922): 159-161; and Anne Zulioff, “Stamps,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 1934, sec. JP.

collecting as a means to inspire young people to become missionaries. Their publication for children, *World Comrades*, started a stamp column written by “Bob the Stamper.” He introduced readers to foreign stamps so that those nations would “become a call to the heralds of the Great Commission.” One column told the story of a man who linked his Bible studies with the family’s stamp album by writing a scriptural passage “to fit the stamps” on each page of the album. Each time anyone flipped through the album, the marginalia reminded them about the Bible and their faith. One reviewer praised the magazine for capitalizing on the collecting instincts of children “in the interest of Bible study and the spread of Christ’s Kingdom throughout the earth.”<sup>30</sup> The Women’s Missionary Union believed that stamps possessed power to motivate young people to volunteer for Christianizing missions across the globe. If the stamps of each nation represented a path for pursuing the “Great Commission,” then an album represented work to be done and the hope of salvation. Identifying nations, territories, or colonies imposed a different order on the world, helped Southern Baptists visualize the scope of their missionary work. Southern Baptists, like other groups, found meaning in stamps beyond their face value. Bob the Stamper used stamps to teach young people about the potential for uniting the world in the name of Christianity, and the album provided motivation and a path for accomplishing this goal.

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<sup>30</sup>A review of the *World Comrades* column appears in “Stamp Collecting as a Method,” *Missionary Review of the World* 57 (August 1934): 367. Founder and editor, Juliette Mather of the Women’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention, first created *World Comrades* in 1922 because no Southern Baptist missionary publications existed for children.

## Collecting in Schools

If stamp collecting was indeed educational, however vaguely defined, then it was an appropriate classroom activity. Some philatelists worried at the turn of the century that their hobby might decline in popularity and believed they needed to encourage stamp collecting in schools. In 1898, R.L. Payne lamented to readers of *Philatelic West* that young people showed less interest in stamp collecting than they once had. *St. Nicholas*, of course, observed the opposite four years earlier and started a regular stamp column for children. However, Payne targeted teachers, believing that if they encouraged the hobby, philately might attract more collectors over time. To accomplish this, Payne encouraged his fellow collectors to write and circulate pamphlets to teachers explaining the educational value inherent to the hobby, particularly in geography and history.<sup>31</sup>

This type of outreach into local schools and communities began as club members evangelized their hobby by teaching students and teachers to look at stamp imagery and encouraged further investigation of events and figures represented on them. Most philatelists viewed foreign stamps as visual press releases of changes in governance and believed in the power of a stamp to relay that information: “Upon the simple postage stamp can be studied the rise, decline, and fall of empires, kingdoms, and republics.”<sup>32</sup> Stamps taught political history and represented authoritative national

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<sup>31</sup> R.L. Payne, “How Shall We Keep the Young People Interested in Philately?,” *The Philatelic West* 7, no. 2 (August 1898): 27-8.

<sup>32</sup> “Taught by a Stamp,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 26, 1894.

narratives. Stamps did not necessarily challenge readers to investigate complicated stories behind the changes in empires, kingdoms, and republics, or how and why empires expanded.

Mary Branch's poem offered anecdotal evidence that stamp collecting also taught children world geography.

Three months ago he did not know  
His lesson in geography;  
Though he could spell and read quite well,  
And cipher, too, he could not tell  
The least thing in topography.

But what a change! How passing strange!  
This stamp-collecting passion  
Has roused his zeal, for woe or weal,  
And lists of names he now can reel  
Off in amazing fashion.

...And now he longs for more Hong Kongs,  
A Rampour, a Mauritius,  
Greece, Borneo, Fernando Po,--  
And how much else no one can know;  
But be, kind fates, propitious.<sup>33</sup>

The type of knowledge gleaned from stamps reflected a style of history and geography commonly taught in schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that rewarded rote memorization of "facts" such as political leaders or world capitals. According to philatelists, "in order to understand and classify his stamps properly," a collector learned "where each stamp-issuing country is located, and by what

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<sup>33</sup> Mary L.B. Branch, "The Little Stamp-Collector," poem, *St. Nicholas, An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, August 1885, 732. This poem was reprinted in *Washington Post*, November 11, 1888.

government it is ruled.”<sup>34</sup> In teaching philatelic methods for organizing and classifying stamps by country, some argued that learning geography followed naturally. Mary and other students learned basic information about a country, including location, type of governance, and possibly native languages, but most likely did not carefully analyze all of the signs embedded in the stamps. Students did, however, learn to see that stamps represented geo-political differences in the form of international postage.

Stamps appealed to educators, perhaps because of their color and imagery, and many integrated stamps into their classrooms. Teachers in New York public schools encouraged their students to collect stamps in 1885 because, teachers remarked, they learned facts about foreign countries as easily as they learned the rules of marbles. A principal in Chicago observed that all of his best students collected stamps and believed stamp collecting led to improved academic achievement in high school. Teaching geography with stamp aides continued even fifty years later. When discussing how students memorized the location of countries on a map with assistance from a stamp collection, one article jokingly proclaimed, “Hobbies Solve Teachers’ Problems Nowadays.”<sup>35</sup> Far from solving problems teachers faced in their classrooms, stamp collecting was adopted as an avenue to help students learn about geo-political boundaries from the 1880s through the 1930s.

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<sup>34</sup> “Taught by a Stamp,” 27; and Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> “The Public-School Museums of Belgium,” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 13, 1881, 558; “A Royal Road to Learning,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 9, 1885; and “School Stamp Exhibit Shown,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1932, sec. A.

At the turn of the century, some educators integrated stamp collecting practices into their classrooms because child psychologists urged them to take advantage of a child's instinct to collect. Granville Stanley Hall and colleague Caroline Burk pioneered studies that determined nearly 90 percent of American children surveyed collected at least one type of object.<sup>36</sup> This study, and others like it, was quite influential. Normal school psychology textbooks included sections on understanding the collecting instinct in children, citing Burk's findings. Textbook authors, psychologists themselves, championed collecting in classrooms because they believed channeling this instinct for "intellectual" pursuits, like stamp collecting, fostered organizational skills in children and encouraged the study of historical events and national heroes that ultimately stimulated "higher forms of intellect."<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to understand how studying stamps stimulated "higher forms of intellect," but we can see that students like Mary in the poem learned to locate a foreign country on a map when encountering a new stamp, and then memorized that location and perhaps even the nation's capital. By the late 1920s, psychologists battled amongst themselves over

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<sup>36</sup> G.S. Hall is probably most notable for his recognition of the need to define the period between childhood and adulthood as distinctive developmentally and called it "adolescence." Caroline F. Burk, "The Collecting Instinct," *Pedagogical Seminary* 7 (1900): 179-207.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.; Elizabeth Howe, "Can the Collecting Instinct be Utilized in Teaching?," *The Elementary School Teacher* 6, no. 9 (May 1906): 466-71; Lawrence Augustus Averill, *Psychology for Normal Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 51-7; and William D. Johnston, "The Acquisitive Instinct in Children as an Educational Stimulus," *Science, New Series* 54, no. 1409 (December 30, 1921): 662-63. Other studies of collecting habits in youth include: E. Leigh Mudge, "Girls' Collections," *Pedagogical Seminary* 25 (1918): 319; and William Estabrook Chancellor, *Our Schools, Their Administration and Supervision* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1904), 189.

survey methodology and whether an instinct to collect truly existed, but did not attempt to measure what students actually learned from their stamp collections.<sup>38</sup>

### Collecting as an After-School Activity

As its popularity as a hobby grew, some groups encouraged stamp collecting as an after-school activity. Adult Progressive reformers developed a variety of programs to keep idle children busy with proper recreational activities in the early twentieth century and taught playground coordinators that collecting stamps qualified as healthy play and discouraged delinquency.<sup>39</sup> The After School Club embodied many of those sentiments. Much like the Boy Scouts of America, also founded in the 1910s, the American Institute of Child Life's (AICL) After School Club sought to fill all non-school hours with wholesome activities and acted as a "correspondence recreation center." The After School Club's handbook recommended collecting stamps and other types of objects for seven to fourteen year-olds. Each young collector worked toward earning "degrees" after studying about and learning from their objects. The Club also

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<sup>38</sup> M.T. Whitley, "Children's Interest in Collecting," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 20 (1929): 249-61; Paul A. and Harvey C. Lehman Witty, "Further Studies of Children's Interest in Collecting," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 21 (1930): 112-127; Paul A. and Harvey C. Lehman Witty, "Sex Differences: Collecting Interests," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 22 (1931): 221-28; And Paul A. and Harvey C. Lehman Witty, "The Collecting Interests of Town Children and Country Children," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 24 (1933): 170-184. Here we read in Witty and Lehmann's prose an unease with perceived differences between rural and urban life, and in their use of the term "American farmer," we do not hear an understanding of how rural African American children collect. Rather, their concern is based on a construction of the "frontiersman," an individualist, of European descent, who would not be well socialized for the modern world. Cooperation is valued in the Witty and Lehmann paradigm, and yet there is no understanding of farmer cooperatives.

<sup>39</sup> "Lecturers Tell Teachers How To Teach Play," *Washington Post*, July 15, 1934, sec. R.

offered traveling collections of minerals, fossils, and stamps. Ultimately, the objective of this club was to make “young people wholesomely happy and to help build them into efficient and useful citizens.”<sup>40</sup> Here, the AICL considered stamp collecting to be a wholesome activity that would shape young collectors into better citizens, but it is unclear how the process of collecting produced these results.

Upon further investigation, we see that the AICL’s mission to nurture young citizens may have been intertwined with an emerging eugenics movement in the U.S. In the 1910s, the AICL proclaimed their concern with the welfare of children and affiliated and consulted with many organizations “concerned with childhood.” Mothers who joined the AICL received complimentary memberships to all of these affiliated groups, including the new Eugenics Record Office in Cold Spring Harbor, New York. Other organizations, including the YMCA, the U.S. Children’s Bureau, and the Audobon Society, appeared in the long list of affiliates, but curiously the Eugenics Record Office received a prominent position at the top of the list.<sup>41</sup> Stamp collecting represents an ordering of the world that relies on the understanding of nation, defining people by politically-determined geographic borders that erase cultural differences in the name of nation. Stamps are tools that unify a nation or empire

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<sup>40</sup> American institute of Child Life and After School Club of America, *Young Folk’s Handbook* (American institute of Child Life, 1913), 3-4, 73-74; and American Institute of Child Life and William Byron Forbus, *Guide Book to Childhood: A Hand Book for Members of the American Institute* (American institute of Child Life, 1913). While the After School Club was established for boys and girls, the AICL’s president authored studies on the “boy problem.” Stamp collecting was a recommended winter indoor activity for boys as early as 1901. See William Byron Forbush, *The Boy Problem* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1901).

<sup>41</sup> American Institute of Child Life and Forbus, *Guide Book to Childhood*.

through postal infrastructure and visual imagery printed on stamps. By comparing stamps generated from different nations, one is encouraged to notice differences that are enforced in albums that can lead to emphasizing cultural and genetic differences among people. Eugenics, in its broadest sense, sought to purify or retain racial components of specific groups of people, which required scientific studies of difference. I am not implying that all stamp collectors supported eugenics. But one can see how an organization affiliated with a eugenics society might be attracted to stamp collecting. Viewing visual representations of nations in stamps offered an opportunity to teach young people about the perceived scientific differences and racial hierarchies among peoples of the world. Stamp albums provided spaces to order the world that also respected and enforced boundaries. According to strict philatelic practice, stamps fit exactly into a space designated for it and did not belong anywhere else.

The AICL's mission to create wholesome afterschool activities meshed well with the goals of other organizations that viewed philately as a wholesome form of recreation. Progressive reformers and educators preoccupied themselves with preventing idleness in children because, in their minds, idleness led to delinquency and vice.<sup>42</sup> Stamp collecting was "something to do" and kept youths "out of all sorts of mischief and very often bad company." This sentiment could have motivated numerous philatelists to work with young people by starting clubs in YMCAs and even at the Boys Hotel for homeless boys in Kansas City, Missouri. Some saw this as

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<sup>42</sup> David Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

“missionary work for the hobby,” knowing that “every new collector adds to the stability of stamp collecting.” Often, as in the case of the Boys Hotel club, philatelists called on fellow collectors to donate old stamps, albums, and literature.<sup>43</sup> Dealers also prepared stamp packets that contained a variety of common and inexpensive stamps for beginning collectors, sometimes referred to as the “boy trade” even though boys and girls received these packs. Dealers, particularly in the late 1920s and 1930s, took it upon themselves to engage in the “missionary work” of grooming new collectors. If a young person’s interest was piqued by receiving free stamps at school or at a department store, they in turn, might also make collectors out of their parents.<sup>44</sup> Philatelists believed that by teaching young people to collect, they might improve their lives.

Concerned with building character in young men, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) adopted stamp collecting as an activity worthy of a merit badge. Prior to making the badge official, stamp collecting and Scouts already enjoyed a close relationship. In 1926, the “Lone Scout” program, which provided boys living in rural areas—too sparse for troops—an opportunity to participate in Scouting, through organized stamp collecting clubs. The new badge required assistance from members of

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<sup>43</sup> No title, *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 75, no. 1 (October-November, 1918): 31; “Education from Stamp Collecting,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 74, no. 1 (May 1, 1918): 44; “Collectors of Dallas,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 79, no. 2 (September 1922): n.p.; “Boys Start Stamp Club,” *The Philatelic West and Collectors World* 78, no. 3 (March 31, 1922): n.p.; and “Lincoln Y.M.C.A., Lusty Yearling, Will Celebrate,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 6, 1929.

<sup>44</sup> Washington Grant, Willard O. Wylie, and Thorn Smith, *How to Deal in Stamps: A Booklet Designed for Those Who Would Like to Engage in a Lucrative and Clean Business* (Portland, ME: Severn-Wylie-Jewett Co, 1931); and Jacques Minkus, “Merchandising of Postage Stamps,” *Journal of Retailing* 21, no. 2 (April 1945): 66-71.

the American Philatelic Society (APS) to craft the requirements and to act as “Expert Examiners.” Scoutmaster and APS member William Hoffman asked fellow members to offer their expertise to local Scout councils across the U.S. and to assist budding philatelists. The BSA printed a philately guidebook for those pursuing this merit badge.<sup>45</sup> To earn a stamp collecting merit badge, a Scout had to do the following:

1. Own and exhibit a collection of 500 or more well-conditioned stamps, collected by the Scout;
2. Exhibit 10 varieties of stamps, including air mail, envelope, surcharged imperforate, perforate, postage due, pre-cancelled, flat plate, rotary press, telegraph, revenue and registration;
3. Exhibit and explain the following classes and stamps and names one country of issue: postage, commemorative, special delivery, postal packet, express, split or bisected, postmasters’ provisionals, and private proprietary;
4. Exhibit and explain cancellations and their relation to the value of a stamp;
5. Explain the principal characteristics of stamps viz: class of paper, watermarks, separations, impressions.

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<sup>45</sup>“Lone Scouts,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1926. According to this article, registration for the Lone Scout program was over 100,000 participants.

William Hoffman, “Merit Badge for Stamp Collecting Available to Boy Scouts,” *American Philatelist* 44, no. 10 (July 1931): 466; and Prescott Holden Thorp, *Stamp Collecting*, merit badge series (New York, Boy Scouts of America, 1931).

6. Exhibit the following issues of U.S. stamps: 10 different commemorative, present postage, present envelope; 2 different memorial, 1 flat plate, 1 rotary press, 10 different official or departmental and 4 different air mail stamps;

7. Demonstrate ability to “catalog” accurately 5 stamps provided by the Examiner;

8. Explain in full the “condition” of a stamp, and how the exact value of a stamp is determined.<sup>46</sup>

Establishing a stamp collecting badge for more experienced scouts expressed confidence that the BSA believed stamp collecting helped boys as they matured into young men and related to a “boy’s vocational outlook.” By the 1930s, some badges related less with achievement in outdoor pursuits and shifted more to experiencing and experimenting with different vocations, such as blacksmithing, carpentry, cotton farming, or salesmanship.<sup>47</sup> With the exception of a few novelty shop owners, stamp collecting generally was a hobby, but was categorized with these vocational badges. As an avocation, a collection might earn an individual extra money if they cared for and amassed a variety of stamps. With the guidance from a local philatelist, a scout could begin selling and trading their stamps. APS influence is evident in these requirements

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<sup>46</sup> Thorp, *Stamp Collecting*; Hoffman, “Merit Badge for Stamp Collecting Available to Boy Scouts.”

<sup>47</sup> Boy Scouts of America, *Handbook for Scoutmasters, A Manual of Leadership* (Boy Scouts of America, 1932), 175-183.

that emphasize strict philatelic club practices for organizing collections for the purpose of reselling or trading stamps. Steven Gelber argues that boys were socialized into stamp collecting because these activities mirrored the marketplace. Following this market model could make collecting profitable, and Scouts were required to discuss how a stamp was revalued in the philatelic market to earn their badge.<sup>48</sup> Collecting stamps for their aesthetic value or for the stories behind the images was not valued for this badge, and clearly mirrored practices normalized by philatelic clubs. Troop leaders saw value in scouts selling and exchanging stamps, thinking the practice might serve one well, “as the boy grows to manhood.”<sup>49</sup> Also, scout masters no doubt saw stamp collecting as an activity practiced predominantly by males who generally identified themselves as middle class. Stamp collecting forced an ordered classification of stamps and taught these boys that stamps could be worth an amount of money different from the value printed on the stamp.

Young people did not have to be Boy Scouts to benefit from the voluntarism offered by philatelic club members. In 1929, one philatelist reported that 10,000 new stamp collecting clubs had formed that year in American schools—many with the help of club members. The Oakland Philatelic Society organized 50 school stamp clubs from 1931 to 1932, and playground clubs in Los Angeles numbered fourteen by 1933.

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<sup>48</sup> Steven M. Gelber, “Free Market Metaphor: The Historical Dynamics of Stamp Collecting,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 4 (October 1992): 742-769.

<sup>49</sup> “Scouts Have Good Stamp Collections,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 1934, sec. A. Stamp collecting was so popular and enjoyed such favor with practicing philatelists that the BSA created a Boy Scout Stamp Club that met in Washington, D.C. It was run by philatelist who belonged to several societies and who guided them through the stages of earning their badge and in general collecting practices. This article estimated that in 1934, nearly 25 percent of D.C.-area Scouts, approximately 750 boys, collected stamps.

Both in Oakland and Los Angeles, clubs sponsored competitive exhibitions where adult club philatelists judged and awarded ribbons to the winning students.<sup>50</sup> By the 1930s, teachers enrolled in philately classes at the University of Minnesota, Temple University, and Harvard's School of Education and Social Service, and students organized philatelic clubs. These universities hired APS members as their instructors, further extending the reach and influence of philatelic clubs on the diffusion of philatelic knowledge to children and adults.<sup>51</sup> These examples typify the connections philatelic clubs made between the non-philatelists and how philatelists worked to increase the general public's exposure to stamp collecting. Stamps contained attractive imagery and held various meanings depending on the interpreter.

## Stamp Exhibitions

Another tactic stamp collectors employed to show off their specialized knowledge and to encourage adults and youngsters to take up the hobby was through

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<sup>50</sup> "J.R. Stout Heads Rotary," *New York Times*, April 3, 1929; Harry E. Gray, "Building Future Collectors," *American Philatelist* 46, no. 3 (December 1932): 165; "Stamp Exhibition Nearing, Boys to Display Washington Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1932, sec. A; "City to Sponsor Stamp Exhibit," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1933, sec. A; and "Playgrounds Foster Hobby," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1933, sec. A.

<sup>51</sup> One member of the book selection board, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, suggested in her 1907 book, *What Shall We Do Now*, that children could spend their free time collecting and trading stamps or by creating paper snakes using old stamps. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *What Shall We Do Now?: Five Hundred Games and Pastimes* (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1907), 278; Earl N. Harbert, "Review of Dorothy Canfield Fisher: A Biography by Ida H. Washington," *New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (June 1983): 309-11; Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-improvement to Adult* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1994); Janice A Radway, *A Feeling for Books the Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), available online at [netlibrary.org](http://netlibrary.org); and E.F. Sellmansberger, "Philately's Place in American Education," *American Philatelist* 50, no. 12 (September 1937): 674-5.

public exhibitions. Americans of all classes were becoming accustomed to public exhibition as a form of amusement as a way to learn about faraway places from midways at World's Fairs, oddities at dime museums in downtown districts, and art and natural history at new museums opening in cities across the U.S. Advertisements for large stamp exhibitions were placed in the entertainment sections of newspapers so that in New York one found the International Stamp Exhibition among listings for musical performances at Carnegie Hall, motion pictures starring Adolph Menjou or Harold Lloyd, operatic productions by Gilbert and Sullivan, and a play by Theodore Dreiser. Museums, in particular, offered a model for viewing and revering objects within an ordered context—and in the case of stamps, the album often served as a display case in public spaces.<sup>52</sup> Sharing and discussing a collection during a philatelic society meeting was common, and public exhibits provided a physical venue to show off collections, conquests, and investments to a broader audience and to impress fellow philatelists.

One of the first large exhibitions held in the U.S. was the New York International Stamp Exhibition held in 1913, which attracted thousands of visitors. Articles touted that the stamps exhibited were worth over two million dollars combined. British philatelic writer Fred J. Melville contributed a guest column to the *New York Times* praising the quality of exhibits, joking that they justified his long trip

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<sup>52</sup> David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); "These Swift Messengers," advertisement, *New York Times*, October 15, 1926; and "Give Your Boy a Chance to Learn," advertisement; *New York Times*, October 16, 1926.

to the U.S. to view the show. He remarked how glad he was to see that Americans were beginning to appreciate the cult of the stamp as much as the British and European collectors. Melville's article offered some reassurance to American club collectors looking for approval of their big brothers in philately—the British and Europeans—for this exhibition.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, a *New York Times* reporter covering the exhibition noticed a “democratic character,” which he attributed to the popularity of stamp collecting. Anyone, a “humble artisan” or a monarch, could collect stamps.<sup>54</sup> Contrasting with the exclusive nature of philatelic club memberships, this opinion of collecting from an outsider framed stamp collecting as very open to non-collectors. Describing collecting as “democratic” made the hobby seem to fit appropriately with American ideals, even when philately originated in Europe and stamps themselves arose from needs of the British Empire.

Articles discussing the exhibition also emphasized that stamp collecting was not only about classifying stamps but also about accumulating value. Non-collectors learned that while stamps represented postage of a certain dollar amount, collectors created their own market in which they assigned different values for certain stamps for specific reasons. Often articles in the mainstream press did not elaborate on how philatelists determined the value of a stamp or an entire collection. Visitors to an exhibition only saw that rare collections amassed by people like George Worthington

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<sup>53</sup> “Stamp Show Drew Him Back,” *New York Times*, October 30, 1913; and Fred J. Melville, “Expert Praises Stamp Exhibition,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1913.

<sup>54</sup> “Stamp Show Drew Him Back.”

were worth tens of thousands of dollars. One article described the rarities of Worthington's stamps, including a Cape of Good Hope stamp with a woodblock error.<sup>55</sup> To non-collectors the world of stamp collecting was a bit mysterious because it valued errors in printings making a stamp that originally cost two cents worth ten thousand dollars. Without knowing the whys of the stamp market, stamp collecting sometimes appeared to possess a lottery-like quality that attracted some non-collectors. At a time when no legal lotteries operated in the U.S., a person might dream of stumbling upon a valuable old stamp in a trunk and selling it for thousands of dollars. In that scenario, luck trumped philatelic expertise, making the discovery of riches in stamps accessible to all. Exhibitions exposed a tension within the philatelic community that wanted to appear open and accessible and simultaneously emphasized that collectors needed to follow specific conventions for caring for and finding stamps.

Clubs also sponsored smaller, local exhibitions to re-invigorate dormant collectors' interest and attract new ones. The Stamp Collectors' Club of Hartford hosted a World War I-themed exhibition not only to display rare varieties from their members' collections, but to increase collecting activities in Hartford. Sponsoring an exhibition from the United States Postal Service, the Boston Philatelic Society used almost exactly the same words to describe why they pulled together this public event—to interest “our non-collecting citizens,” to bring back one-time collectors, and to offer unaffiliated “worthy collectors” an opportunity to associate with the club members to

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<sup>55</sup> “Postage Stamps Worth \$2,000,000 To Be Shown Here,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1913, sec. SM.

encourage them to join.<sup>56</sup> The press gave collecting clubs mainstream media coverage of their events and helped to spread the word about stamp collecting.

Organizers staged stamp exhibits in or near cultural centers in big cities to associate stamp collecting as a high brow activity. As shown in the last chapter, cultural hierarchies divided public events into high and low categories to distinguish behavior and restrict audiences.<sup>57</sup> Philatelists clearly desired to associate its activities with institutions of learning and culture. The Art Institute of Chicago hosted an exhibition celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the American Philatelic Society in 1911, and the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, sponsored an exhibit on war issues in 1921. The 1913 New York International Stamp Exhibition was held at the Engineering Societies Building in Manhattan, located within one block of the New York Public Library and near the shopping district on Fifth Avenue. The exhibition opened near the central cultural and commercial district in the city, and was located in the same building as a scientific association.<sup>58</sup> Locating a stamp exhibition in such spaces not only helped to legitimize the hobby, but also physically connected collectors with institutions commonly associated with learning. Not only did philatelists desire to connect their practices with places of learning, but also may have

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<sup>56</sup> “Boston Exhibition to Contain Stamps Valued at \$100,000,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 1923; “Rare Stamps in Morgan Memorial Exhibit,” *Hartford Courant*, March 20, 1921.

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> “Solemn, Sad, Sober Stamp Men; Philately is Such a Science,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 13, 1911; and “Rare Stamps in Morgan Memorial Exhibit.” J.P. Morgan built and donated the Morgan Memorial building to the Athenaeum, which according to the *Christian Science Monitor* would eventually make Hartford one of the greatest art centers in the world. “Boston Exhibition to Contain Stamps Valued at \$100,000.”

wanted to attract people who thought of themselves as middle class who valued cultural institutions.

Organizers of the 1926 International Stamp Exhibition targeted parents in advertisements, urging them to “give your boy a chance to learn” about “mysterious peoples” and “unusual customs.” Encouraging a boy—only boys were mentioned and illustrated in this ad—to collect stamps increased their knowledge of geography and history. Looking together at a stamp album, a father pointed to stamps and talked to his son while the mother looked on in the background.<sup>59</sup> In this traditional family unit, the father figure, wearing a blazer and white-collar attire, pointed to the stamps and discussed them with his son. Here, knowledge was transferred from stamp to adult to the child. By giving a boy a chance to learn, philatelists argued, “the postage stamp” became the “common bond,” getting him “in touch with the rest of the world,” including countries “most of us never heard of.” Missing from the image are reference books and maps that might help a young collector to contextualize imagery on a stamp alone. Here, boys and their fathers learn together, as the ad instructs the reader, that stamps teach geography, history, and zoology, implying that some of this knowledge was inherent directly on the stamp without needing any outside literature.

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<sup>59</sup> “Give Your Boy a Chance to Learn,” advertisement.



## Give Your Boy a Chance to Learn

In the hinterlands of the earth are strange places, mysterious peoples, unusual customs, queer animals and antiquated types of ships. There are countries most of us never heard of—Hejaz, Sarawak, Jhalawar, Chala—obscure rulers whose word is law over millions of subjects. They are in touch with the rest of the world through one common bond—the postage stamp.

Stamp collecting implies a wide knowledge of the world and its progress. It teaches geography, history, zoology—requires painstaking attention to detail, so important to instill in the young mind. Encourage your boy to

take up this fascinating hobby, and watch his knowledge increase. A most satisfactory start can be made with a small outlay. See the million U. S. and foreign varieties—See the U. S. Post Office press printing the new White Plains Stamp—at the great

## INTERNATIONAL STAMP EXHIBITION

47th Street Entrance

GRAND CENTRAL PALACE—OCT. 16th-23rd

OPENS TODAY at 2:30 P. M., closing at 10:30  
P. M. Tomorrow (Sunday) 2:30 to 6 P. M. Daily  
thereafter 11:30 A. M. to 10:30 P. M. Admission 50c.  
(Children, 25c)

Figure 11: advertisement, *New York Times*, October 16, 1926

This learning process appears to be very masculine. In addition to the subjects listed in the ad, sons learn of the subtleties that connect Gelber's male-centered market model of collecting to Hoganson's ideas about masculinity and empire. The ad's imagery depicts a stereotypical middle-class household scene in the 1920s that combines with the copy to argue that this indoor and non-athletic activity was indeed masculine. Opting for a language that infuses an Orientalist tone with an exoticism in "mysterious peoples" and "unusual customs" represented in stamps gave the collector a

power over stamps and the countries that produced those stamps. Presenting collecting activities in this way reinforced the notion that while real government agencies produced stamps, the places represented on stamps are almost imaginary. If stamp collecting “implies a wide knowledge of the world,” the type of knowledge may not be that wide but instead rather narrow. Foreign stamps functioned as a type of souvenir from a country most collectors never visited, forcing both the collector and other spectators to view the stamp in uncritical ways. Stamp exhibitions perpetuated this idea, but it was not an unfamiliar concept to most Americans already used to reading cultural objects from a tourist perspective. Collectors knew that stamps carried different messages, and the non-collecting public increasingly learned to see stamps as complicated pieces of paper.

### **Philately as Self-Improvement during the Great Depression**

For adults, adopting a hobby such as stamp collecting was often seen as an exercise in self-improvement. The self-improvement movement arose in the antebellum era but extended into the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with efforts to bring culture to those who might not have access to it through university life. Lyceum’s, women’s clubs, and chautauquas organized lecturers around the country to discuss art, literature, and history. Visiting a museum exposed visitors to

great works of art while belonging to the Book-of-the-Month Club in the mid-1920s offered participants a chance to read great literature at home.<sup>60</sup>

Unemployed adult learners could also learn about stamp collecting during the Great Depression. During a time when many American had less money to spend on non-essential items, stamp collecting continued to grow as a hobby prompting one observer to note that philatelic advertisement pages thrived in stamp papers. To his surprise, people continued to spend money on things they could not eat.<sup>61</sup> To help manage the numbers of unemployed, some municipalities and civic groups offered adult education classes in the arts and in hobbies in the spirit of self-improvement. In New York City, the Emergency Relief Bureau organized and sponsored free classes for residents and in turn employed artists, musicians, and other unemployed people to teach a variety of classes at city recreation centers, parks, and playgrounds beginning in 1932. While classes were open to all residents they were “designed especially for the unemployed,” and over 19,000 adult students enrolled within the first six months. Classes in hobbies such as stamp collecting, photography, and home mechanics were available in these free institutes held across the city. Due to the city’s success, other

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<sup>60</sup> Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties*; and Radway, *A Feeling for Books the Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. One member of the book selection board, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, suggested in her 1907 book, *What Shall We Do Now*, that children could spend their free time collecting and trading stamps or by creating paper snakes using old stamps. Fisher, *What Shall We Do Now?*, 278.

<sup>61</sup> Wilds Dubose, “Stamp as a Hobby,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1932, sec. F.

municipalities in the state emulated those public education programs.<sup>62</sup> Here local authorities tapped into the network of an established hobby to instruct their citizens who had unexpected free time on their hands and deemed stamp collecting a worthy activity of everyone's time.

Gelber proposed that having an avocation in the form of an enjoyable hobby during the Depression was particularly important because a hobby maintained a work ethic for those who did not go to work each day. Often contradictory to the term leisure, many hobbies practiced during non-work hours actually emulated work. Some recreation advocates suggested that hobbies actually made people better workers.<sup>63</sup> Adult education programs formally taught philately and other pursuits to keep unemployed workers primed and ready for their next job. If this was true for adults, then teaching philately to children might be preparing them to enter the work world as an adult.

During the Depression, stamp collecting was promoted by the conservative Leisure League of America (LLA) that published literature, sponsored hobby shows, and embarked on a public relations blitz to encourage citizens to adopt a hobby. After its founding in 1934, president and founder James S. Stanley went on a campaign to promote 700 different recreational activities published in *The Care and Feeding of Hobby Horses* for the purpose of saving "the nation from boredom." Stanley

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<sup>62</sup> Eunice Fuller Barnard, "New York Sets Out to Capture Culture," *New York Times*, September 23, 1934, sec. SM; and "Jobless Teaching Jobless Who Seek Added Learning," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 17, 1933.

<sup>63</sup> Gelber, *Hobbies : Leisure and the Culture of Work in America*.

complained that too many Americans were willing to sit and watch others play rather than doing it for themselves. Philately appeared among the 700, and it also garnered its own monograph. Some newspaper editors found this hobby movement a bit comical and joked that the LLA was “wasting time busily.”<sup>64</sup>

A rise in mass cultural offerings—movies, sporting events, amusement parks—troubled Stanley because he saw participants in those activities as being passive: watching rather than playing. Stanley, however, also appeared to be quite conservative politically and worried about the bonds formed in these public cultural venues when he declared during the first Hobby Round-Up on May 1, 1935, that “May Day is play day” and not a time for “radical demonstrations.”<sup>65</sup> Stanley’s statement shifted the focus from offering leisure time activities merely to “cure boredom” to speaking out against radicalism in the name of hobbies. The Hobby Round-Up was Stanley’s way of taking back May Day from the Communists. He clearly thought he spoke to a white collar audience and appeared to offer hobbies as a solution to mollifying increased union activity and New Deal policies that supported workers’ rights. Factory workers and union members did bond through mass culture participation in cities like Chicago in 1930s, which worked to unite previously divided workers in pursuit of common

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<sup>64</sup> “Americans Spend 4 Billion on Play,” *New York Times*, July 29, 1934, sec. N; Earnest Elmo Calkins and Hugh Brotherton, *Care and Feeding of Hobby Horses* (New York: Leisure League of America, 1934); Henry Renouf, *Stamp Collecting* (New York: Leisure League of America, 1934); R.H.L., “A Very Open-Faced Letter to the President of the Leisure League,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 11, 1934; “Designs for Loafing,” *New York Times*, June 3, 1934, sec. BR; and “Wasting Time Busily,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (reprint from *Detroit News*), May 2, 1934.

<sup>65</sup> “Hobby King Wars on Boredom,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1934; and “Leisure Exhibit, May 1,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1935, sec. N.

economic and production goals.<sup>66</sup> Stanley may have viewed hobbies as individualist pursuits and also did not see that mass cultural offerings appealed to wide, diverse audiences.

Meant for general audiences, the LLA published and distributed books teaching different hobbies, including stamp collecting. The stamp collecting book offered a guide for novices introducing them to collecting practices, philatelic clubs and papers, a brief history of the postal system, and the idea that stamp collecting was “purely educational” and had a “beneficial effect upon character.” One example used was that Chase National Bank organized a stamp collecting club for its employees. According to the author, stamp collectors “must have an orderly mind” because they must be “neat, accurate, conscientious, observant, and honest.” He then admitted that it was difficult to ascertain whether these skills were developed or accentuated by stamp collecting, but that they were positive characteristics for all people, nonetheless.<sup>67</sup> A publication such as this summarized many of the feelings developed about the worthiness of stamp collecting as a practice and why it should be taught to children and adults alike.

By the 1930s, purchasing stamps was easy and Americans understood that stamps functioned in many ways outside of their official role as postage. Americans found philatelic information published in newspaper columns or learned about

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<sup>66</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making the New Deal, Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Renouf, *Stamp Collecting*.

philately at the YMCA or at a local university. Stamp collecting continued to grow in popularity as a hobby because club philatelists, educators, parents, missionaries, and merchant capitalists contributed to a public dialogue in the mainstream media that framed stamp collecting as educational. By constructing stamps as educational, these groups taught others how to look for what they wanted them to see in stamps and the order placed on them through philatelic practices. Teachers wanted students to memorize geographic locations and world leaders; recreation leaders wanted students to stay out of trouble; cities wanted to keep the minds of unemployed adults active and ready for their next job; missionaries showed young people a path for doing God's work; and merchant capitalists demonstrated that stamps were consumer collectibles. Club philatelists participated in this mass pedagogical movement to bring stamp collecting to all Americans through a type of voluntarism that spread the word about their favorite hobby. Overall, collectors and non-collectors saw the world as an ordered place that could be controlled in the pages of a stamp album, and these processes emulated, in a small way, an imperialist impulse to gather and control territories for one's own gain. This process also opened the door to viewing the U.S. as different and exceptional when compared to other countries. Americans learned to view stamps as culturally encoded texts bearing images and phrases constructed by a government agency.

### Chapter 3: Federal Encouragement of Philately

After Omaha's triumph is properly won,  
Other towns, not forgetting our own,  
Will be fully entitled to do as she's done;  
In this thing she must not stand alone.  
And if some day the crush  
Of the jubilee rush  
Uncle Sam and his factory swamps,  
Then old Sammy will moan,  
"Ah, had I only known  
I'd have sat on those Omaha stamps."

unknown, 1898<sup>1</sup>

Philatelists fiercely debated whether the U.S. Post Office Department (USPOD) should issue a special commemorative stamp promoting Omaha's Trans-Mississippi Exposition held in 1898, five years after it printed the first commemorative stamp series celebrating the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The "Columbians," as they became known, were extremely popular and interested many Americans in collecting them and other colorful stamps. After experiencing such a successful run, the post office wanted to promote and support the next American

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<sup>1</sup> "Untitled poem," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* (reprinted from the *Pittsburg Leader*) 11, no. 7 (February 17, 1898): 78.

World's Fair, the Trans-Mississippi. Until the Columbians, the USPOD was nominally involved in the business of philately and did not cater to the needs of collectors. An unknown philatelic poet predicted that the USPOD would be crushed by the "jubilee rush" because every town would want a stamp celebrating their place in American history, making postal officials regret printing the Trans-Mississippi. Some serious collectors presciently saw that governments might want to capitalize on their interest in philately to make money from collectors' attraction to new stamps. This is why many philatelists vociferously protested the printing of that stamp and debated the value of printing future commemoratives. They worried about the breadth of involvement of the US postal service and other stamp-issuing agencies, in their leisure time activity. Starting with the Columbians, the USPOD began promoting American World's Fairs with commemoratives that presented scenes from the American past. The last decade of the nineteenth century marks a turning point in the relationship among the USPOD, philatelists, and non-collectors as the post office and other government entities began influencing a leisure time activity that the agency previously ignored.

No federal agency was more closely tied to the daily lives of the American public than the USPOD. From the early days of the republic, the USPOD helped to nationalize American culture by making information, communications, and consumer goods accessible through federal subsidies of mail. As the main agency that facilitated communications and commerce across long distances, it often was stuck in the middle

of debates among various interest groups and politicians. From the 1820s through the 1960s, the Postmaster General was a cabinet-level political appointment, and the Department's budget, postal rates, and other postal-related activities were determined by a congressional committee. This meant among other things that the postal service retained no control over postal rates. Rates, particularly for second-class periodicals, were contested in committee as periodicals expanded in the late nineteenth century to include consumer catalogs and magazines filled with advertising. Local businesses questioned whether the Department should subsidize nation-wide publications paid for with advertising, and Progressive politicians sought, unsuccessfully, to reel in postal deficits by raising rates on second-class postage. Additionally, because the post was integrally involved in the daily lives of most Americans, the Department was drawn into cultural debates including challenges brought forth by Sabbatarians in the early and mid-nineteenth century who wanted post offices to close on Sundays. When self-appointed postal agent and cultural warrior Anthony Comstock scoured the mails looking to define and remove obscene materials from circulation—enforcing legislation passed in his name in 1873—he demonstrated again the significance of the postal service in American culture. Other policies such as Rural Free Delivery and Parcel Post, implemented in the early twentieth century, lessened the financial burden on consumers buying from mail order catalogs by making package delivery to remote areas inexpensive but small-town merchants objected, fearing lost revenues.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois

In David Henkin's words, the postal service fostered an "interconnectedness" among Americans during what he saw as a distinct postal age in the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Even as Henkin interpreted this age to be in decline by the late nineteenth century due to developments in communication technologies and speed of mail delivery, I see the beginning of a new age of interconnectedness through the ways the USPOD created meaning through issuing stamps and in the way that US government entered into a consumer relationship with its citizens when it began selling commemorative stamps for collectors. The turn of the century marks a transition for the USPOD from an organization indifferent to collecting to one that becomes an active participant in collecting culture. Under the leadership of merchant-turned-bureaucrat John Wannamaker, the USPOD first recognized philatelists as consumers and tapped into an established network of stamp collectors eager to buy stamps for their albums rather than exchanging them for postage delivery. At this time, consumption was becoming more closely associated with responsibilities of citizenship as constructed by newly-formed advertising agencies. Wanamaker wanted citizens to purchase this first set of American commemorative stamps that celebrated the 1893

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Press, 2003); Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006); and Richard B. Kielbowicz, "Postal Subsidies for the Press and the Business of Mass Culture, 1880-1920," *The Business History Review* 64, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 451-488.

<sup>3</sup> Henkin, *The Postal Age*.

World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and America's past.<sup>4</sup> By linking stamp consumption to patriotism, Wannamaker hoped to attract future collectors/consumers through this set of stamps while also increasing public support for the Department.

Starting with Chicago and continuing through the early twentieth century, the Department issued commemoratives series for all American World's Fairs. These series reinforced the themes of each exposition, typically celebrating American achievements in technology and the conquest of other lands and peoples. These fairs, and often the stamps, inevitably reinforced white dominated racial hierarchies through imagery from America's past. With these commemoratives, the USPOD began to spread miniature narratives of the past meant to tell pieces of the American story. Because of the geographical reach of stamps and their accessibility—low cost and availability through post offices—the USPOD became a major producer and distributor of historical interpretation.

The USPOD was not the only federal entity involved with philately. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the USPOD and the Smithsonian Institution established philatelic collections and mounted exhibitions that promoted the study of philately. Making collections of stamps available for the public not only encouraged collecting but also demonstrated that the government approved of stamp collecting and provided the means for building collections. In 1921, the USPOD unequivocally demonstrated

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<sup>4</sup> Charles McGovern, *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

its support of philately when it established the Philatelic Agency specifically to handle requests from collectors. This type of enthusiasm went unmatched, for example, by the Treasury Department, which occasionally produced commemorative coins but never offered the same support for coin collectors. Although postal officials had recognized collectors for years, the Philatelic Agency became the government's commemorative stamp store, officially acknowledging collectors as consumers. Regular postage stamps bought at a local post office would be used on a letter or package for services rendered, while collectors wrote or visited the Philatelic Agency to buy limited-issue commemorative stamps for saving. As the USPOD solidified its role as a producer of collectibles, it created an infrastructure to support the consumption of stamps, particularly current-event driven stamps promoted by philatelist Franklin Delano Roosevelt during his presidency. Leading by example, the USPOD encouraged Americans to buy and save stamps that celebrated a triumphant vision of the American past and present. These stamps reached millions of people in the U.S. and around the world as the federal government interpreted and re-presented American history and promoted contemporary events and government-sponsored programs.

### **Wanamaker and the Columbians**

Until the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1892-93, nineteenth-century philatelists and societies functioned in a world almost completely removed

from the producer of American stamps, the USPOD. Prior to the 1890s, the USPOD maintained limited contact with stamp collectors and produced a limited number of stamps. From 1847 to 1894, the USPOD contracted with five private firms that designed and printed all American stamps. The images on this early postage were most often the heads of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, with occasional appearances by Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, or other prominent white American politicians or military officers. Printing companies experimented with different aspects of the production process that led to pre-gummed paper, making it easier to affix one to a letter, and perforations between each stamp, making it easier to separate one from a sheet. Portraits of figures from the American past were the staple design genre of definitive stamp imagery. American stamps, unlike British one, never represented a living head of state. Meanwhile, postmaster generals were busy with balancing the duties of the Department with business interests of the press and big business and with morality crusades. Official records of USPOD reveal little contact with collectors.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, philatelic journals did not discuss the USPOD much in their pages. Philatelic societies and journals functioned

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander T. Haimann and Wade Saadi, "Philately, United States, Classic Period," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027496>; and Peter T. Rohrbach and Lowell S. Newman, *American Issue: The U.S. Postage Stamp, 1842-1869* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984). Overall, the USPOD records are very spotty in the late nineteenth century. Archivists from the National Archives told me that federal records often are missing significant amounts of paperwork because there were no requirements to keep files indefinitely. Historians at the U.S. Postal Service concur that few stamp-related records exist from that era. Often records were legally destroyed.

independently from the federal government. Publishing news releases regarding new issues of stamps was the only role the USPOD played in the philatelic press until the Columbian Exposition.

One factor that muddied the relationship between collectors and producers was professional intermediaries who facilitated a philatelic economy outside of the government producing these stamps. Stamp dealers emerged in banking and business districts of major northern American cities during and after the Civil War particularly because Union stamps could be used as currency. Stamps could be an investment and liquidated if necessary, as happened during the War. Recognizing the commercial potential for selling and valuing stamps, the number of dealers grew and expanded into the southern cities of New Orleans and Atlanta. Private entities could trade in stamps that changed in value, but postal authorities could never sell stamps for anything greater than their face value. Postmasters could, however, sell stamps and stamped envelopes at a discount to certain “designated agents” who then had to agree to sell them at face value.<sup>6</sup> While I will not address the particulars of the stamp market in this study, it is important to note how this private network formed outside of the

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<sup>6</sup> Henkin, *The Postal Age*. Mary H. Lawson, “Philately in the United States,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&emd=1&mode=1&tid=2035125>. *Act of June 8, 1872*, ch. 335, 17 Stat L. 305, reproduced in William Mark McKinney, Harold Norton Eldridge, and Edward Thompson Company, *Federal Statutes Annotated* (Northport, New York: Edward Thompson Company, 1918), 132.

government's purview and flourished before postal agencies understood the breadth of stamp collecting's popularity.

Retailer John Wanamaker, however, recognized these networks and forever changed the relationship between collectors and the USPOD during his tenure as Postmaster General (1889-1893) because he saw collectors as consumers of stamps. His administration is remembered mostly for the Rural Free Delivery and postal savings plans, but Wanamaker also increased the visibility of the USPOD in the philatelic world. Known more as the creator of the modern department store than a Washington bureaucrat, Wanamaker brought his business acumen and understanding of customer relations to the Department. Additionally, Wanamaker was heavily influenced by the spectacle of the era's world fairs, making it possible for him to see great potential in promoting the USPOD through a carefully designed exhibit at the Columbian Exposition that he envisioned would become part of a future postal museum.<sup>7</sup>

From the early planning stages of the World's Fair, Wanamaker envisioned heightening the postal service's visibility by involving philatelic organizations to assist

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Stockwell Hatcher, "United States Postal Notes," *American Philatelist* 6, no. 11 (November 10, 1892): 185. John Wanamaker began and operated one of the first department stores in the U.S., Wanamaker's, in Philadelphia. He forever transformed the retail business and was referred to as the "greatest merchant in America." As Postmaster General, he spearheaded postal reform such as the Rural Free Delivery experiment, which some progressive reformers supported because of its capacity to unify the nation. William Leach argues that Wanamaker's goal was to increase the public's access to goods, subsidized by the government. Since he was a department store merchant, he favored other large-scale retailers, like Sears, Roebuck, and Company's mail order business. See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 32-5, 182-84. For Wanamaker's fascination with World Fairs, see Herbert Adams Gibbons, *John Wanamaker* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 153-180; and United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1892* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892), 74.

in staging an exhibit and by issuing the first series of commemorative postage stamps. Immediately after securing funding from Congress, the USPOD solicited the assistance of philatelists who eagerly cooperated soon after the announcement of the Exposition.<sup>8</sup> Seeing great potential to highlight philately at the Columbian Exposition, the APA encouraged wide participation among its members, emphasizing the great “impetus this exhibition will give stamp collecting!”<sup>9</sup> The fact that postal officials did not save a complete set of all American stamps ever printed demonstrated that philatelists, as a group, valued stamps in a way that the USPOD did not yet understand.

Wanamaker recognized a stamp collecting “mania” and wanted the USPOD to capitalize on philatelists’ desire to acquire new stamps and perhaps attract new collectors amazed by a beautifully-designed set of Columbians. Estimating that millions of collectors, from the “school boy and girl to the monarch and the millionaire,” kept stamps in collections “never (to) be drawn upon to pay postage,” Wanamaker saw great potential for profit. He designed the Columbians as limited

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<sup>8</sup> Mekeel was interviewed in “Postage-Stamp Collectors,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1890. The government’s exhibit included stamped paper, models of postal coaches and mail equipment, photographs, maps, and examples from the Dead Letter Office. USPOD also operated a working post office where Columbians could be purchased at the Fair. United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report ... June 30, 1892*, 74. Congress appropriated \$40,000 for the postal station and an additional \$23,000 for transporting the mail to and from the fairgrounds over the course of the Exposition.

<sup>9</sup> American Philatelic Association, *Catalogue of the American Philatelic Association’s Loan Exhibit of Postage Stamps to the United States Post Office Department at the World’s Columbian Exposition Chicago, 1893* (Birmingham, CT: D.H. Bacon and Company, 1893), 3; Albert R. Rogers, “American Philatelic Association’s Exhibit of Postage Stamps at the World’s Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893,” *American Philatelist* 7, no 3 (March 10, 1893): 33-5; Memo, “Inventory of Articles turned over to Mr. Tyler,” Albert H. Hall, “Letter to Hon. Wilson S. Bissell,” in *RG 28, Records of the Post Office Department, Office of the Third Assistant Postmaster General (Stamps and Stamped Envelopes) Correspondence, 1847-1907* (Washington, DC: March 2, 1894).

issues, combined with a larger size and elaborate designs, many based on historical paintings to attract international dealers and collectors. Not just for collecting, Columbians held real postal value as pre-paid postage and did not replace the contemporary issue of stamps from that year. “Though not designed primarily for that object,” Wanamaker emphasized the profit-making potential of these commemoratives, which was “of highest importance to the public service.” He estimated that these stamps would bring in revenues to the federal government of 2.5 million dollars.<sup>10</sup> He also saw that this practice was “in the line of a custom connected with national jubilees.” To justify the upfront expenditure on extra stamps, Wanamaker noted that the Treasury Department issued a souvenir coin of Columbus for this occasion—another way that government engaged with collectors of a federal commodity. In 1890 and 1891, USPOD deficits exceeded 5 million dollars annually, so Wanamaker’s estimation of Columbian sales would reduce those budget deficiencies.<sup>11</sup>

A.D. Hazen, Third Assistant Postmaster General under Wanamaker, reiterated the importance of this special issue to encourage collecting and generate revenues for the USPOD. Referring to a past success when the Department issued commemorative envelopes for the Centennial Exhibition in 1876, he also saw revenue potential for the

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<sup>10</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report for 1892*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1892* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1892), 75-7. For a comparison of budget deficits from 1890-1894, see United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1894* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894), 3.

Columbians in dormant collections “without ever being presented in payment for postage,” which “prove[s] a clear gain to the Department.” Encouraging stamp collecting through the commemoratives not only cultivated “artistic tastes and the study of history and geography,” but led to a “more accurate knowledge of their postal system.”<sup>12</sup> Although it is unclear how citizens learned more about the postal system through these stamps, Hazen incorporated language already used by philatelists in promoting their hobby to outsiders, claiming an educational value of the stamps. Messages embedded in the stamp’s imagery were as important as selling those stamps. Wanamaker’s business acumen and zeal for increasing American’s access to goods logically led him, and the Department, to seek out new customers by experimenting with new products. He wanted the general public to voluntarily walk into post offices in their towns to purchase stamps, because of their design and stories told on stamps, when not mailing a letter.

Drawing heavily from historical paintings and sculptures, the Columbians demonstrated in their imagery that while the Exposition did not directly have much to do with Columbus, he symbolized utopian ideals of progress put forth in the construction of the White City and the Midway that celebrated empire and anthropologically-based racial hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> The stamp series offered an extensive visual narrative tracing Columbus’s life, beginning with his journeys to the Americas

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 910-11.

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 38-71.

and his relationship with the Spanish Crown, told over sixteen stamps. Printed across the top of each stamps were the years 1492-1892, with the words “United States of America” appearing immediately below. Americans were used to their stamps carrying the identifier, “United States Postage,” but adding the anniversary years to the stamp connects Columbus with the founding of the United States. In the series, while the United States of America may have been emphasized in print, only two of the sixteen stamps actually represented scenes in the Americas. Nine treated Columbus’s life in Spain and his relationship to the Spanish Crown, while three represented the journey across the Atlantic. Queen Isabella appeared in seven of the sixteen stamps, leading Americans to believe that Isabella’s influence on Columbus journeys could not be overstated. Additionally, Isabella and an unnamed American Indian became the first women represented on American stamps.<sup>14</sup> That the USPOD’s stamp choices reflected themes of empire and conquest should come as no surprise, given that United States foreign policy was already embarking on what would become a sustained imperial endeavor.

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<sup>14</sup> Alexander T. Haimann, “Columbian Exposition Issues,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027851>. To see the entire series of Columbians on one page, see <http://1847usa.com/identify/19th/1893.htm>.



Figure 12: Columbian Series, 1-cent to 5-dollar issues. (courtesy of 1847 USA and National Postal Museum Collection)

For the first time, the USPOD released a large limited-issue commemorative series, drawing considerable attention in the philatelic and popular press. Immediately after the Columbians' release, philatelic journalist Joseph F. Courtney commented that the stamps were "the most magnificent pieces of workmanship" and very artistic. J.P. Glass wrote that collectors were "indebted for the handsomest, most interesting and most talked about series of stamps ever issued." Philatelist and editor, Harry Kantner, delighted in the Columbian stamps, noting that they were "the cause of our progress" in lifting philately to "a higher point of popularity than it ever yet has attained."<sup>15</sup> This heightened popularity was also due to increased press coverage highlighting the practice of stamp collecting. The *New York Times* featured an article on philately claiming that the new stamps gave "extra temporary impetus to the regular trade in stamps which has grown to proportions entirely amazing to persons not informed of its extent and diffusion." This journalist also recognized a profit-making potential of the Columbians that proved "a lucky speculation on the part of the Government." They brought "clean profit," because the stamps would "be locked up in albums and never put upon letters for the Government to carry."<sup>16</sup> E.S. Martin wrote in his *Harper's Weekly* column how the success of the Columbian stamps "called attention to the very lively status of the stamp-collecting mania." So lively, that he noticed the

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph F. Courtney, "Our Columbian Issue," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 3, No. 2 (January 1893): 33; Glass, "The Effect of the World's Fair on Philately," 9; and Harry F. Kantner, "Philately's Progress," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 5, no. 1 (December 1893): 71.

<sup>16</sup> "Good as Chest Protectors," *New York Times*, January 23, 1893.

presence of collected stamps in many homes was as prevalent as soap.<sup>17</sup> Most collectors would not have purchased the entire series but their presence—in post offices and in the press—heightened awareness of philately as a leisure time activity and no doubt encouraged more people to purchase a Columbian even if they had no intention of starting their own collections.

Americans—collectors and non-collectors—were most likely to buy and see 1- and 2-cent issues from the series, because those denominations paid for post cards and first-class mail, respectively. Though the series was large in quantity and contained a variety of issues, seventy-two percent of those printed were 2-centers. The first two stamps treated Columbus's initial journey and landing. Based on a painting by William H. Powell, the 1-cent represented Columbus looking out to sea and sighting land from a circular vignette in the center for the stamp.<sup>18</sup> The circle around Columbus may represent a round world—something he is most often credited with declaring—and offers the viewer a peak at Columbus as if we are looking at him through a ship's spy glass telescope.

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<sup>17</sup> E.S. Martin, "This Busy World," *Harper's Weekly*, April 14, 1894.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander T. Haimann, "2-cent Landing of Columbus," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027853>; and Alexander T. Haimann, "1-cent Columbus in Sight of Land," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&tid=2027852>. Powell was known for his historical paintings in the nineteenth century. Two paintings hang in the U.S. Capitol, *Discovery of the Mississippi*, and *Battle of Lake Erie*.



Figure 13: Columbus in Sight of Land, 1-cent, 1892-93 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

On the exterior of the vignette sat three Native Americans, almost docile, already in a defeated position looking away from the viewer, wrapping their arms around their bodies as if in an effort to protect themselves and their families. The images of Columbus and others traveling on board ship with him were heavily robed and clothed, contrasting greatly with the natives awaiting their arrival. The woman and child were lightly covered with a single cloth draped over the mother's legs. The man wore a smaller cloth covering his lower body and wore a headdress that appears to be more evocative of an American Plains Indian than of a Taino or other Caribbean native. These images visually foreshadowed and justified the conquest that followed

Columbus's arrival. This stamp's representation of native peoples was not dissimilar to how American Indians and other non-whites were represented on the Midway Plaisance as savages and ethnologically inferior to those with Anglo-Saxon blood roaming the fairgrounds.<sup>19</sup> Here, the stamp staged Columbus as the coming civilizer to a savage land.



Figure 14: Landing of Columbus, 2-cent, 1892-1893 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

The 2-cent stamp, the most widely disseminated of all in the series, also was based on a historical painting that maintained Columbus as a founding father. John Vanderlyn painted the *Landing of Columbus*, which hangs in the Capitol Rotunda. It

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<sup>19</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 55-65.

represents Columbus's party landing, but unlike Powell's imagery, this one did not include any native peoples.<sup>20</sup> Their presence is erased as if they did not exist or were not important enough to be depicted in this painting-turned-stamp. Columbus touches the ground with his sword while he raises a Spanish flag and looks to the sky, claiming the lands in the name of Spain and perhaps invoking the will of God. Interestingly, the flags on the stamp appear intentionally blurry as if to obfuscate that they represented the Inquisition and the Catholic monarchs of Ferdinand and Isabella. The 2-cent celebrates Columbus's "discovery" of seemingly unpopulated lands in the Americas, and does not attempt to connect how Columbus actually related to the founding of the United States as a nation—a connection that is implied with "1492-1892, United States of America" title printed across all of the stamps in the series. Instead, Columbus is a Christian civilizer.

Drawing upon the themes of triumphant human progress at the Exposition, the Columbians offered a post-Civil War story of American unity by representing Columbus's journeys as America's origins. Columbus did not land in territories that would become identified as the South or the North—Jamestown versus Plymouth. Unknown at the time, Columbus landed in Caribbean islands that would become part of the United States following the 1898 war with Spain. Columbus's imperialistic endeavors in the 1490s matched with the U.S.'s own actions in the 1890s. The stories, as retold in the stamps, obscured more complicated questions about conquest and

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<sup>20</sup> Haimann, "2-cent Landing of Columbus."

slavery that followed Columbus's landing and served to celebrate the conquest. As the struggles over who participated in and attended the Exposition demonstrated, the Exposition and the stamps commemorating the fair were meant for racially-white audiences.<sup>21</sup> Some of those citizens felt uneasy about their futures and took comfort in the utopian vision of the White City, while the stamps provided others with a positive outlook on the American past during a time of economic crisis, Populist political debates, labor unrest, rapidly-expanding industry, Jim Crow laws, and rapid immigration. For newly-arrived immigrants, Columbus's story as represented in stamps provided them with a visual national narrative of their adopted country.

While attracting praises from collectors and non-collectors alike, others heavily criticized the release of the Columbians for the size of the series and size of the stamps. Senator Wolcott (R-CO) called for a joint Congressional resolution to discontinue the Columbian stamps, exclaiming that he did not want a "cruel and unusual stamp" unloaded on collectors. Wolcott criticized Wanamaker for acting in a mercantile manner by trying to profit from philatelists.<sup>22</sup> Correct about Wanamaker's retailing instinct, Wolcott's assumptions were slightly flawed because Wanamaker would not profit personally—only the government reaped those monetary benefits. If fiscally successful, the USPOD would better manage their finances and require less in appropriations from Congress.

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<sup>21</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>22</sup> "The New Stamps Ridiculed," *New York Times*, January 22, 1893.

One major critique related to the stamps high monetary denominations. The one dollar issue, for instance, represented Queen Isabella selling her jewels to finance Columbus's journeys, was never meant to pay for actual postage as the highest domestic rate in 1893 equaled ninety cents. This was true for each of the highest denominations in the series (\$1-\$5 issues). A *Chicago Tribune* story critiqued "Uncle Sam" for playing "a confidence game on confiding nephews and nieces" with the Columbians. Large denominations, such as the four- and five-dollar, would never be used for sending mail, but would be "hidden between red leather covers in stamp albums." If a collector wanted to purchase the entire series, they paid \$16.34, which in today's dollars is roughly \$300.<sup>23</sup> While higher denominations might mail a heavy package overseas, these stamps essentially were designed specifically for collectors to buy and save. Dealers placed them on envelopes to create commemorative covers purchased by collectors, even though the dollar amounts far out-priced the cost of mailing a letter.<sup>24</sup> These critics saw stamp collectors as vulnerable individuals falling prey to John Wanamaker and the USPOD who wanted to milk stamp collectors by issuing this special postage. Concurrent concern over new department store-style

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<sup>23</sup> "The New Stamps Ridiculed;" "Good as Chest Protectors," *New York Times*, January 23, 1893; from *Chicago Tribune*, re-printed, "The Big Columbian Stamps," *New York Times*, January 14, 1893; Haimann, "Columbian Exposition Issues."

<sup>24</sup> Alexander T. Haimann, "1-dollar Queen Isabella Pledging Her Jewels," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027864>; Alexander T. Haimann, "4-dollar Queen Isabella & Columbus," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027866>.

consumerism that tempted customers into buying products they did not need may have colored the critiques.

Less concerned with being taken advantage of by the post office, some philatelists simply did not like the appearance and size of the stamps. One collector joked that he used Columbians for “sticking plaster” inside his house because the stamps were so large. This journalist noted that their “office boy” upon seeing the stamps exclaimed “what wrong have I committed that I should suffer this unjust punishment” for needing to lick multiple larger-than-normal stamp at one sitting which proved “doubly tiresome and detestful.” This tongue-in-cheek article was not nearly as biting as the other critiques of the commemorative issues, but the author admitted that merely one month after the release he was already tired of them.<sup>25</sup> Wanamaker’s stamp series definitely generated discussion about the stamps themselves, and he attempted to address the concerns of his critics.

Wanamaker defended his actions by asserting that his position as Postmaster General gave him the authority to make such decisions. He found printing the commemoratives was in line with the financial investments the federal government contributed to mounting the Columbian Exposition. This included “the issue of five million silver souvenir coins” minted by the U.S. Treasury Department. Wanamaker asserted he received many letters from private citizens and philatelists “warmly

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<sup>25</sup> Col. U.M. Bus, “The Columbian Issue Criticised,” *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 3, no. 3 (February 1893): 53-4.

approving the new stamps.” He also emphasized that the Post Office Department had the ability to educate “the people with the story of Columbus” through stamps because of their wide distribution across the U.S. and the world. More important, Wanamaker asserted that through stamps, the USPOD, “more than any other branch of the Government, comes into familiar contact with all of the people.”<sup>26</sup> Wanamaker knew of the strong relationship the USPOD traditionally shared with Americans and also knew of the strong networks of philatelists across the country. By releasing a large series of commemorative stamps, he tried to tap into the good feelings of citizens while earning revenue for the Department.

Efforts to stop circulation of the commemoratives from circulation were unsuccessful, but Wanamaker’s successor, W.S. Bissel, curtailed the total number of pieces printed. Bissel found that the previous administration optimistically placed an order for three billion Columbian stamps to be sold over one year. He renegotiated the remaining contract down to two billion stamps and saved the Department nearly \$100,000 in manufacturing costs. The cost for printing an equal number of smaller-sized ordinary stamps was nearly half that for printing the Columbians. According to Department figures, the rate of purchase for the commemoratives fell by mid-1893, and Bissel felt the collectors’ purchasing power was not as great as Wanamaker predicted. At the time, sales of stamped matter provided 95 percent of the USPOD

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<sup>26</sup> John Wanamaker to Honorable Philetus Sawyer, February 13, 1893, reprinted as “Of Interest to Postmasters in Relation to Columbian Postage Stamps—Answer to the Senate Resolution” in *American Journal of Philately* 6, 2nd series (March 31, 1893): 189-93.

total revenues. For fiscal year 1893, total postal revenues jumped by nearly five million dollars compared with 1892, but declined again by almost two million the following year. Increased expenses for printing the Columbians and the manufacture of a variety of new postal cards, in addition to escalating transportation costs, never allowed the Columbian sales to translate into postal profits.<sup>27</sup>

Despite not earning a profit for the Department, Wanamaker started a trend and the government continued to experiment with limited-issue stamps celebrating other expositions. The Columbians were notable not only as the first series of commemoratives, but also as a turning point for the Department to actively encourage stamp collecting as a hobby. Philatelists speculated about their positive influence on the hobby while others pointed directly to the Columbian issues as the reason they started collecting.<sup>28</sup> Following the precedent started with Chicago, other World's Fairs earned commemoratives series, including the Trans-Mississippi Exposition (1898), Pan-American Exposition (1901), Louisiana Purchase Centennial (1904), Jamestown Tercentenary (1907), et al. After projected revenues from the Columbians fell short of Wanamaker's 2.5 million dollar estimate, postal officials commissioned more conservative numbers of commemoratives and shortened the period of availability for

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<sup>27</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1892* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1893), xxvi-xxx, 463-73; and United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1894*, 479-490. The decline in postal revenues for fiscal year 1894 was mostly attributed to economic depression.

<sup>28</sup> "Philately's Progress," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 5, no. 1 (December 1893): 71; A. Pilley, "My Collecting," *Philatelic West* 1 (June 1896): 1.

future series from a year to a few months. Though not attracting nearly as much publicity, these stamps were collected and considered successful endeavors.<sup>29</sup> The next set of commemoratives attracted extremely strong opposition to the USPOD's effort to issue another World's Fair series in 1898.

### **Trans-Mississippi Controversy**

Following the Columbian issues, the USPOD began engaging philatelists in unprecedented ways and some philatelists, particularly dealers, felt uncomfortable with the new role that the U.S. and other governments played in the stamp market by printing limited-issue commemoratives. This discomfort exploded into a philatelic controversy at the end of the nineteenth century. American Columbians were among an early group of commemoratives printed by various nations to celebrate "jubilees" or significant anniversaries and events in Portugal, Greece, San Marino, and Hungary. This small flurry of limited-issues angered some philatelists worldwide who deemed them unnecessary and believed that these nations printed the stamps solely to collect revenue from gullible collectors. To protest and dissuade collectors from purchasing such stamps, philatelists in London formed the Society for the Suppression of

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<sup>29</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1901* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901); United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1904* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904); and Kenneth A. Wood, *Post Dates: A Chronology of Intriguing Events in the Mails and Philately* (Albany, OR: Van Dahl Publications, 1985).

Speculative Stamps (SSSS). Worried about how a flood of commemoratives would affect stamp prices, the SSSS participated in letter-writing campaigns using the philatelic press to encourage others around the world to ignore those stamps.<sup>30</sup>

Two years later, in the U.S., outrage and protest came from philatelists who tried to stop the USPOD from printing a stamp commemorating the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha (1898). Released to promote the fair, the series was comprised of nine stamps celebrating the conquest of western lands and peoples through imagery of agriculture, such as on the 2-cent, and through technological developments, as found on the 2-dollar. Each stamp carried identifying images of wheat stalks across the top and partially-peeled ears of corn in each bottom corner, both major cash crops farmed in Nebraska and in territories across the Midwest. To safely migrate to new farming lands, federal troops were depicted as protectors of American pioneers from Indian attacks on the 8-cent stamp. America's imperialistic foreign policy and military aggression was portrayed as a natural outgrowth of westward expansion which was celebrated at the Exposition.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "Revolt of Philatelists," *New York Times*, March 8, 1896; "The SSSS is Correct," *The Philatelic West* 2, no. 3 (September 1896): 12; J.A. Jamesell, "Commemorative Issues," *The Philatelic West* 2, no. 3 (September 1896): 11-12; and "Another Scheme," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 6, no. 6 (November 1894): 484. For the San Marino, some philatelists were angered because the republic seemed to favor those ordering large numbers of stamps by sending the stamps in commemorative envelopes (covers) that would be canceled in San Marino.

<sup>31</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 105-125.



Figure 15: Farming in the West, 2-cent, 1898 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 16: Mississippi River Bridge, 2-dollar, 1898 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 17: Troops Guarding Train, 8-cent, 1898 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Spurring much discussion in the philatelic press, *Mekeel's* likened the Trans-Mississippi stamps controversy (for the stamp papers) to what "the Maine incident has been to the wider field of American journalism." Philatelic editors voiced opinions and collectors responded, meanwhile the press printed articles composed by the newly-formed Stamp Dealers' Protective Association (SDPA), SSSS, and Scott Stamp and Coin Company who encouraged all philatelists to write in protest to the Postmaster General. They claimed that the proposed commemoratives provided free advertising for the exposition and therefore were not a legitimate use of the postal service. The Columbians, they claimed, "should not be considered a precedent for future issues," and lamented that philatelists would endure "a sad blow to (their) hobby if the

government of the United States should lend itself to so reprehensible a scheme.”

Celebrating the founding of the U.S. was an occasion “of such surpassing importance” that the Columbian Exposition was not just about commemorating the fair but also represented an important anniversary for the nation. According to some protestors, commemorating American settlement of the land west of the Mississippi was only of “passing interest.” Of course, the overall theme of the Exposition and the stamps celebrated the federal government’s role in settling the “west” just as the U.S. military was occupying Cuba and the Philippines. To prevent philatelists from properly saving such unnecessary stamps, Scott Stamp and Coin, one of the largest publishers of international stamp albums, refused to print spaces in their albums for collectors to save “speculative” commemorative stamps from 1897 to 1899.<sup>32</sup>

While the SDPA claimed that all collectors viewed the Trans-Mississippi issues as speculative and unnecessary, collectors themselves were conflicted. One individual wrote to the *Philatelic West* describing his or her joy in collecting commemorative stamps as soon as they were issued. Editors of the *Virginian Philatelist* endorsed the Omaha Exposition stamp and revealed that they had received only one negative

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<sup>32</sup> “The S.S.S.S. and the Omaha Stamps,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 11, no. 13 (March 31, 1898): 148; *American Journal of Philately* 9 (January 1898): opening page; “Omaha Exposition Stamps—Protest of San Francisco Collectors” *American Journal of Philately* (March 1898): 132; “Omaha Stamps at the S.S.S.S.” *American Journal of Philately* (May 1898): 209; reprinted memo from John A. Merritt, Third Assistant Postmaster General *American Journal of Philately* (September 1898): 374-75; and “Protest of the Postage Stamp Collectors,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 11, no. 7 (February 17, 1898): 78. Letters issued by the Stamp Dealers’ Protective Association were also printed in the mainstream press, such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. “Trans-Mississippi Stamps Issued in Spite of Criticism,” *Washington Post*, August 12, 1934; and “This Busy World,” *Harper’s Weekly* (January 22, 1898): 79.

response from a collector.<sup>33</sup> These conflicts reflect some growing pains appearing in the philatelic world as it expanded. Philatelic clubs like the American Philatelic Association tried to grow their membership and attract new collectors to the hobby even as members rejected new commemoratives that drew more attention to philately. As the popularity of philately increased, hundreds of philatelic journals circulated around the world, a trend that disturbed some collectors and philatelic journalists.<sup>34</sup> The once small intimate community of collectors had grown and those collectors were challenged by how to deal with its growth and the interest shown by USPOD.

Another reason some collectors hesitated to accept what they viewed as an excessive number of commemorative stamps related to an incident resulting in a stamp market flooded with reprints from Nicaragua, Salvador, Honduras, and Ecuador. This flood resulted from a deal made by Charles Seebeck, an officer of the Hamilton Bank Note Company, who offered to print stamps for no charge to the afore mentioned countries. These stamps, however, actually expired, which was an uncommon practice. A U.S. two-cent stamp issued in 1898, for example, may be affixed to a letter today and combined with other stamps to mail a first-class letter. A Seebeck print, however, was invalid a few years after issued. After the expiration date, Seebeck received permission

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<sup>33</sup> "Revolt of Philatelists," *New York Times*, March 8, 1896; "The SSSS is Correct," *The Philatelic West* 2, no. 3 (September 1896): 12; J.A. Jamesell, "Commemorative Issues," *The Philatelic West* 2, no. 3 (September 1896): 11-12; and *The Virginian Philatelist* 1, no. 7 (March 1898): 127.

<sup>34</sup> H. Franklin Kantner, "Philatelic Journalism," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 3, no. 3 (February 1893): 49-52; H. Frank Kantner, "The Philatelic Writer," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 2, no. 1 (June 1892): 3; H. Frank Kantner, "The Philatelic Publisher's Soliloquy," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 2, no. 1 (June 1892): 3; and H. Franklin Kantner, "Philatelic Journalism," *The Pennsylvania Philatelist* 3, no. 3 (February 1893): 49-52.

to reprint that same stamp using the original engraving plates. He sold those issues to collectors, speculating that those sales reimbursed his costs. Seebeck's plan resulted in thousands of Latin American stamps entering the stamp market between 1890 and 1898. After Seebeck's death in 1899, a speculator bought the remaining unused reprints—all ninety million of them—and sold, traded, and gave them away. Many of those reprints landed in starter stamp packets geared to generating interest in young collectors.<sup>35</sup> Concerns over the Seebeck issues certainly colored philatelists' opinions about new commemorative stamps.

Dealers in particular charged all governments with trying to fleece collectors by printing stamps with “fancy designs” that they saw as unnecessary for regular postage. The SSSS and SDPA did not discriminate in their criticism of stamp issuing-nations like others did, because they seemed to be motivated mostly by economic factors and a desire to keep the stamp market controlled by dealers. Oddly, many dealers lacked enthusiasm for commemoratives that drew more people into the hobby of collecting and even argued that jubilees turned people away. One philatelic editorial illuminated this hypocrisy by criticizing dealers for giving away stamps in chewing gum and cigarette packages one minute, while protesting commemorative issues that might more easily attract more collectors another. It was said that limiting the issues of U.S. commemorative stamps, such as for the Pan-American Exposition and Louisiana

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<sup>35</sup> Jack Child, *Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 45-7.

Purchase, drew enough attention to stamp collecting and would not “fail to be of material value in advancing the collecting hobby, and one which could hardly be termed speculative.”<sup>36</sup> In theory, the injection of stamps into the market that brought new collectors would have given dealers a larger pool of people from which to do business—in person or via the post. Instead, they resisted an expansion and fought the producers of stamps by attempting to maintain their stronghold on the stamp market.

As philatelists argued among themselves over the appropriateness of the USPOD’s Trans-Mississippi commemorative, a discussion about the status of the U.S. emerged in their rhetoric. The timing of this particular protest is quite striking. This series specifically commemorated an Exposition that celebrated European migration to and conquest of territories across the middle section of the continent home to many Native Americans. Concurrently, the U.S. and its military reached beyond the continental borders to invade and occupy sovereign nations and former European colonies in the Caribbean and Pacific. In defending the USPOD’s production of American commemoratives, stamp columnists and editors stated that the U.S.’s large

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<sup>36</sup> “Another Protest,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 11, no. 7 (February 17, 1898): 78; and “Editorial,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 11, no. 7 (February 17, 1898): 78. See Chapter 2 on the relationship between Scott Stamp and Coin and Duke Cigarette company. L. G. Dorpat, “A Year of Philately,” *The Philatelic West and Camera News* 18, no. 1 (January, 1902); and E. R. Aldrich, “Notes for U.S. Collectors,” *The Philatelic West and Camera News* 17, no. 9 (December, 1901). This period of World’s Fair promotions after 1894 also marked the beginning of what has been categorized as the “Bureau Period” in philately because it marks the time when the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP), the agency responsible for designing the dies for all American money, took on the contract for designing and printing U.S. stamps exclusively through 1940. For more information on the BEP’s involvement in stamp production, see United States, *History of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, 1862-1962*, 2nd ed. (New York: Sanford J. Durst, 1978).

population necessitated postal services “greater than any other nation on earth” and was “privileged to some philatelic things without censure.” But, “petty states of Asia and Africa,” or “some little bankrupt country” should be rebuked for issuing non-essential postage for the purpose of bringing in revenues.<sup>37</sup> The Seebeck issues were no doubt in the minds of some philatelists who held that the United States was unique and should be able to produce postage stamps for whatever purpose postal officials saw as necessary.

This exceptionalist argument did not merely apply to international philatelic matters but was another extension of the constructed racial and economic privilege imagined especially by architects of American foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> Stamps commemorating American world’s fairs celebrated empire and conquest and promoted scientifically-based racial hierarchies leaving “petty states of Asia and Africa” at the bottom, while white America and western Europe rested at the top. Prevailing attitudes towards other nations’ racial composition affected how stamp collectors viewed a state’s ability, or right, to print commemoratives.

We hear in this rhetoric that collectors believed they influenced the production of stamps and decisions made by governments about their postage. *Mekeel’s* thought it

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<sup>37</sup> Missouriiness, “The Proposed Omaha Exposition Stamps,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* 11, no. 4 (January 27, 1898): 41-2; “Editorial,” 78; “Protest of the Postage Stamp Collectors,” 78; and N.A. Crawford, “The Progress of Philately,” *Philatelic West and Camera News* 32, no. 2 (March 1906): n.p.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

was absurd of the SSSS and the SDPA to think that the postal service would pay attention to protests or think to print a stamp specifically for collectors, because it has “almost invariably snubbed collectors wherever possible and given us plainly to understand that it looked upon us with suspicion.”<sup>39</sup> This commentary demonstrates how disconnected—true or not—one philatelic journalist felt the USPOD was from their pursuit, yet others felt like they could change minds. These events are significant because it demonstrates how philatelists experienced growing pains with the USPOD and other national postal departments that noticed collectors and printed stamps with them in mind. Prior to the Columbians, the USPOD was not concerned with attracting collectors but began to influence the stamp market gently by throwing additional stamps in the global collection. Philatelists were aware that postage production carried broader implications beyond saving a stamp for an album. Governments noticed collectors and dealers of stamps and began targeting them for sales. Some philatelists resisted this push towards being viewed as consumers but ultimately could not prevent governments from printing more commemorative stamps.

### **Uncle Sam’s Collections**

As the USPOD developed their relationship with collectors and non-collectors, the federal government began encouraging collecting by establishing a museum and

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<sup>39</sup> “The S.S.S.S. and the Omaha Stamps,” 148-49.

national collections. In 1894, the USPOD opened a small museum that highlighted the accomplishments of the US postal service as well as other nations. The Smithsonian Institution had already established a philatelic collection in 1886, but the Institution did not hold a large postal-related collection until the Department officially transferred all of its holdings to the Institution in 1913.<sup>40</sup> Through collecting and exhibiting stamps, stamped matter, and other postal-related articles, the federal government demonstrated to its citizens that these objects possessed national significance.

Once again John Wanamaker played a leading role in opening the USPOD's doors to philatelists and non-collectors. Wanamaker was not the first Postmaster General to suggest a museum, but he took the idea and provided the means and support for creating one. Philatelists noticed that he suggested establishing a museum in the annual report from 1890 and overwhelmingly supported the idea. One philatelic journalist wrote that other stamp-producing nations had opened museums and hoped "that our own country may soon take a leading place among them." Not asking philatelists for assistance, however, Wanamaker rather looked to local and international postal officials for their help in collecting articles that represented "the progress of our postal system from its inception, and should illustrate the work of the United States postal service, as well as that of foreign countries." Stamps would be among many other items on display, including postmarking instruments, mail bags,

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<sup>40</sup> Herbert R. Collins, *Postal Museums and Collection*, (Washington, DC: National Philatelic Collection, 1986), National Philatelic Collection, ca. 1915-1991, RG 580, Box 9, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

illustrations of post offices and postal transportation, and various objects from other postal services.<sup>41</sup> Not only would this museum be a place of great interest for Americans, but for philatelists from around the world who might visit Washington, D.C.

The Department benefitted from experiences staging philatelic exhibitions at the Centennial and Columbian Expositions and began their museum collection with saved pieces from the Chicago exhibit. Staged in a renovated storage room in the main USPOD building in Washington, Postmaster General Bissell bragged at its opening that this formed a “credible nucleus around which a great national postal museum” would be formed for the “benefit and interest of this and future generations.” Not only speaking to collectors, this museum highlighted developments in all aspects of postal history, including a catalog of all stamps printed in the United States (1847-1893). Philatelists noted that the Department had begun collecting stamps from other countries, causing *Mekeel’s Weekly* to comment that even “Uncle Sam cannot resist the pleasures of philately.”<sup>42</sup>

As one might imagine, some philatelists were not satisfied with the state of the USPOD’s stamp collection. They thought postal officials should have attempted to

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<sup>41</sup> Postmaster General William Vilas suggested the establishment of a postal museum in 1887, two years before Wanamaker mentioned the idea. *Ibid.*; Guy W Green, “A Postal Museum,” *Nebraska Philatelist* (March 1890): 3-4; Lawton, “A Postal Service Museum,” *Southern Philatelist* 1, no. 9 (June 1890): 95-6; and United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1890* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890), 43.

<sup>42</sup> “Post Office Museum,” *Washington Philatelist* 6, no. 2 (October 1894): 1-2; United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1894*, 46-7; and “Uncle Sam Cannot Resist,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* (January 31, 1895): 1.

keep a complete set of U.S. stamps ever printed and wanted the USPOD to hire a philatelist to curate the collection. When the museum opened, the Department hired Ira Slack, a curator, to manage their collection. Not a philatelist himself, Slack looked to the expertise of dealers for advice on mounting stamps and in some instances secured stamps for displays at World's Fair postal exhibits and at the museum.

Philatelists saw great value in a government saving its postage history but criticized the Department for not employing a philatelist or even a "stamp man of medium experience" to manage their holdings in a systematic, "philatelic way." For the Department, the museum's mission told the entire story of the post office, and was not solely a philatelic collection. Despite collectors' concerns, this postal museum attracted many visitors and was a popular tourist destination in Washington.<sup>43</sup>

Other philatelists prodded the Smithsonian to collect and display stamps in the National Museum alongside "Indian relics, curios," coins, and other specimens. The National Philatelic Collection, as it would later be named, at this time was distinct from the USPOD's collection and began modestly in 1886 with the donation of a few Confederate stamps. Organized with other Civil War-era artifacts, the stamps hardly stood out among the other objects displayed in the museum as philatelists desired.

Spencer Baird, a former Smithsonian Secretary, willed his stamp collection to the

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<sup>43</sup> "The Government's Stamp Collection," *Mekeel's Stamp Collector* 1 (July 4, 1904): n.p.; Collins, *Postal Museums and Collection*; A Collector, "Uncle Sam's Collection of Stamps," *Southern Philatelist* (November 1911): 95; and "Many Interesting Exhibits in the P.O. Dept. Museum," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 27, 1910. An estimated number of 75,000-100,000 people visited the museum annually in 1910.

institution in 1888, but it was not available for public viewing. Collector Frank Moore felt that philatelists and stamps were “completely left out in the cold by the respected managers of this great institution.” To rectify this hole, he suggested in 1893 that all collectors send “good stamps” to the museum to build up the national collection.<sup>44</sup> Even with these donations, stamp presence at the Smithsonian remained small until the two national collections merged.

Despite its high visibility and robust visitation numbers, Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock decided in 1911 to close the USPOD’s museum and transfer its holdings to the Smithsonian. Crowding in the main post office building forced Hitchcock to evict the museum, since the USPOD needed the office space. Hitchcock wanted the objects to remain accessible to the public, and so he turned to the Smithsonian. After two years, the collection finally transferred.<sup>45</sup> Recognizing that the Department could not properly care for stamps with long-term preservation, Hitchcock forfeited the collection in favor of an institution that could. As non-collectors, postal officials did not quite understand the specific philatelic practices of caring for and displaying stamps. As an institution, the USPOD still grappled with their role in collecting and if and how it should support this leisure time activity. Hitchcock, like Wanamaker, believed that the government played a significant role in saving its philatelic and postal history but transferred the duties of preserving stamps as

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<sup>44</sup> Frank Moore, “Not In It,” *Golden Star* 4, no. 4 (April 1893): n.p.; Collins, *Postal Museums and Collection*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

artifacts to the National Museum. Uncle Sam continued to collect but it would occur under the auspices of the Smithsonian and not the USPOD—at least for the coming two decades.

Club philatelists also believed that the government had a duty, not only to collect stamps, but also to recognize the study of philately through proper care and exhibition in a federal venue. Soon after this transfer, the Smithsonian hired Joseph Leavy in the position of “Philatelist,” not merely as a curator of postal matter. Philatelic papers covered the news of Leavy’s hiring and praised him for his philatelic skills of mounting and organizing stamps in a “tabulated and orderly form.” For the first time, according to one philatelic writer, “we now have a stamp exhibit that may be considered a credit to us all.” Housed in mahogany cabinets and mounted under glass frames in the Arts and Industries building, *Mekeel’s* boasted that not even the British Museum had as “modern and up-to-date an abode” to house its philatelic collection. Even with this praise, members of the American Philatelic Society (APS) were extremely concerned, and a little confused, that the National Philatelic Collection might be abandoned and that the Philatelist in charge of it might be fired. In response to a frantic resolution passed by the APS at their 1916 annual meeting, the Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian assured APS members that the philatelic collection was “as permanent as the life of the nation and has never been regarded in

any other light.”<sup>46</sup> In his statement, the physical permanence of that collection equated to the strength and permanence of the U.S., together with all objects held by in the History Division of the National Museum that, in theory, collectively illustrated the history of the U.S.

This transfer from the Department, or the producers of stamps, to a federal entity charged with preservation and diffusion of knowledge, signified a shift in how philatelists and citizens would view stamps once printed. Stamps were not merely physical representations of prepaid postage, but they also contained historical significance once printed and saved. Philatelists, of course, understood this from the earliest days of collecting. Even John Wanamaker saw value in establishing a public exhibition space for displaying stamps and postal-related objects in federal buildings as the Department had begun—after the Columbians—printing stamps that represented selected scenes from the American past. The physical construction of stamp displays—whether at the Smithsonian or in other public exhibition spaces—encouraged viewing of stamps as individual snapshots of stories or scenes. Lacking contextual information about the subjects represented on stamps encouraged viewers to look at the stamps as products of their design—printing techniques, colors, grills, perforations—and not for the circumstances which produced those illustrated stories. This type of museum

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<sup>46</sup> “The Government Collection,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* (March 27, 1915); “Joseph B. Leavy, The Govt Philatelist Who has Achieved Great Success,” *Mekeel’s Weekly Stamp News* (March 27, 1915): 1; and R. Rathburn to Dr. H.A. Davis, April 16, 1917, in “U.S. Government Collection,” *American Philatelist* 30, no. 17 (June 1, 1917): 233-34.

presentation was not uncommon in early twentieth century museums, where objects stood in cases lacking explanation. Curators working in the early twentieth century did not create thematic narratives that placed objects within a rich historical and cultural context. Rather, the object's significance was understood to be inherent and obvious to observers, and so often a short label identified only the title of an object.<sup>47</sup> This type of display encouraged an uncritical assessment of the stories told on stamps and also what the stories or images did not show. Hiring a philatelist, not just a curator trained in museum practice or in history, signified that the federal institution of national memory formally acknowledged that philately was a distinct and valued practice.

Maintaining a philatelist on staff to replace Mr. Leavy in 1921 was important for the Smithsonian when they announced the position upon his retirement. In addition to taking the Civil Service exam, the government required applicants to have a high school diploma and philatelic experience, though "work as an amateur collector" would not be considered. The government formally drew distinctions among collectors, something that we know philatelists had done for years. Just as Leavy's personal and professional life revolved around stamps, so would his successor's. Catherine L. Manning earned the position and became known as "Uncle Sam's First Lady of Philately." She began collecting when she was a girl and then

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<sup>47</sup> Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

worked for stamp dealers, including the well-known stamp dealer, J.M. Bartels. Manning's selection also highlighted that while most philatelic clubs banned female membership, many women still collected stamps. By the 1930s, the Philately section of the History Division became well established at the Smithsonian.<sup>48</sup> As both the Smithsonian and the USPOD saw value in saving stamps as part of the national story in the 1910s and 1920s, the Department saw the popularity of collecting rise, and they recognized the need for a better way to handle requests from collectors.

### **The Philatelic Agency: Seeing Collectors as Consumers**

The rising popularity of stamp collecting, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, motivated the USPOD to create a separate office to handle stamp requests from domestic and international collectors. Although not separately quantified, the Department's *Annual Reports* generally reported revenue sent directly to the Department requesting stamps or stamped envelopes for the purpose of collecting as part of their "miscellaneous funds," which included money collected from dead letters

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<sup>48</sup> Leavy served as editor of *American Philatelist* for one year and published articles on stamps from Holland and Belgium. According to *A. C. Roessler's*, before he was hired as Philatelist, he was a brewer in Brooklyn "before the anti-hootch amendment became law, but the Government does not hold that against him now." "The U.S. Stamp Section at Museum," *A. C. Roessler's Stamp News* (May 1921): n.p.; "Know Your Fellow Members," *Washington Philatelic Society Newsletter* (October 27, 1940): 27; and Catherine L. Manning, "Philately in the National Museum," *National Philatelic News* (October 15, 1930): 6.

and from auctioning unclaimed items in post offices.<sup>49</sup> It is possible that the Department wanted a separate office to start handling these requests. Also such an office could provide the infrastructure for expanding the stamp program. Surprisingly, sixty-four years after the introduction of the postage stamp in the United States, the Department still defended using a postage-based system to collect revenues. Citizens continued to suggest alternatives, but postal officials noted in the Department's *Annual Report* of 1911 that the USPOD would expand rather than contract or replace the current stamp system.<sup>50</sup> The Department did expand the stamp system and while it considered ways to handle philatelic requests from a separate office in Washington as early as 1917, the Philatelic Agency did not open until 1921.

Postal officials and legislators understood that the revenue collected from sales for philatelic purposes could provide steady income for the USPOD, while also supporting collecting. According to the Postmaster General's *Annual Report*, the Philately Agency (PA) gave formal recognition to "the growing importance of stamp collecting" and the agency provided a better way to handle the needs of collectors and dealers. Prior to the PA, collectors and dealers bought American stamps directly from their local post office or from other collectors and dealers, while others wrote the

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<sup>49</sup> Most of the Annual Reports bury this in their "miscellaneous fund" tables, such as shown in this report: United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1912* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 267. It would be helpful if these numbers were broken down.

<sup>50</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1911* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 272-73; and "A U.S. Service for Philatelists," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 31, no. 6 (February 10, 1917): 51.

USPOD directly. That there was a means to buy directly and easily from Washington, where stamps were printed, delighted collectors and the philatelic press. Convinced that that the Agency's establishment was a direct result of their requests, editors of *Mekeel's Weekly* declared that Postmaster General Will Hays was truly "humanizing the department."<sup>51</sup> This was a giant leap forward for collectors in the eyes of *Mekeel's* who, twenty years earlier, believed that the USPOD looked upon all collectors with suspicion.

To encourage use of the PA, the philatelic press helped the Agency and their readers by instructing them on the new agency's policies and procedures. Stamp requests had to include cash or a money order (another postal product) to pay for stamps, and enough return postage for it to be mailed back to the collector. Unlike individuals or dealers, the Agency would not trade in stamps, accept payment in stamps, or issue stamps "on approval"—meaning that the buyer had to accept the stamps mailed to her or him and did not have the option to change her or his mind upon seeing the stamps in person. Additionally, no discrimination would be permitted to "any class of collector or dealer," perhaps to distinguish government service as

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<sup>51</sup> "A U.S. Service for Philatelists," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 31, no. 6 (February 10, 1917): 51; Editorial, "Celebrate," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 35, no. 52 (December 24, 1921): 718; "Philatelic Stamp Agency," *Collectors Club Philatelist* 1, no. 1 (January 1922): 17-18; Guy U. Hardy, "Confessions of a Stamp Collector," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 36, no. 6 (February 11, 1922): 73; and United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1922* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), 10. Hays soon left the Harding administration to become the first president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, where he established the first set of self-regulatory guidelines for the motion picture industry in an effort to fight censorship that morphed into the Production Code in the 1930s.

distinct from an exclusive philatelic society or dealer. Most philatelists wanted this new system to succeed and were delighted to learn that the person in charge of overseeing the new Agency had a connection to philately, as Third Assistant Postmaster General W. Irving Glover's wife collected stamps.<sup>52</sup>

The United States was not alone in focusing attention and resources on philatelists. By the mid-1930s, over one hundred postal agencies worldwide served the needs of collectors. Colonial governments such as France and Portugal offered collectors the opportunity to purchase stamps from any of their territories in one centralized office. Philatelic publications provided contact information for these agencies, making it easier for casual collectors to broaden their holdings without traveling abroad or spending time and money with a dealer.<sup>53</sup> Collectors could create global collections by contacting a postal agency directly. This practice of sending away for postage was well established in the club philatelic culture, where publications facilitated exchanges among fellow members and dealers advertised in those pages. These exchanges occurred among private citizens and did not involve government officials.

That the Agency sold all stamps at face value was highlighted in the public and philatelic press when describing the activities of this new office. Knowing that older

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<sup>52</sup> "Philatelic Stamp Agency," 18. This is an example of what appeared in many philatelic publications. "Philatelic Agency Reports a Profit," *New York Times*, December 17, 1922.

<sup>53</sup> One example of such a publication is Frank L. Wilson, *The Philatelic Almanac: The Stamp Collector's Handbook* (New York: H.L. Lindquist, 1936).

and sometimes rare issues remained in smaller post offices across the U.S., the Philatelic Agency asked local postmasters to return that postage so that those stamps could be available for collectors through one main distribution center.<sup>54</sup> Acting as official dealers, the postal service would only sell stamps at the printed value regardless of any alternative value assessed the stamp market. In the spirit of the civil service system in the government, the Agency would not favor some collectors over others nor dealers over casual collectors. Everyone had an equal opportunity to buy stamps, new and old, from the original producer. Regular issues of stamps and some commemoratives would still be available through local post offices, but by making all commemoratives available through the Agency, local postmasters and their clerks focused on selling postage for the purpose of mail delivery and fulfilling other needs of their customers.

Not all philatelists, however, were pleased with the opening of the PA. Editors of *American Philatelist* disagreed with the benefits associated with the U.S. and other national governments operating philatelic bureaus to handle collectors' requests. They believed that the challenge of pursuing an elusive stamp was eliminated. For instance, writing to the French postal agency gave one access to all of the stamps of its colonial territories, making the practice of collecting stamps too easy.<sup>55</sup> These comments

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<sup>54</sup> "Stamp Collectors Buy Now from U.S.," *Philatelic West and Collectors World* 79, no. 2 (September 1922): n.p.; Hardy, "Confessions of a Stamp Collector," 73; "Stamp Collectors Now Making Big Purchases," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 1922; and "Philatelic Agency Reports a Profit," 29.

<sup>55</sup> "Editor's Column," *American Philatelist* 37, no. 5 (February 1924): 271-2.

alluded to how some philatelists struggled with the growing popularity of their pursuit as they clung to the idea that the practice was exclusive and should be limited to those few with means to travel abroad or regularly visit dealers. The PA was doing its part to democratize stamp collecting for those who enjoyed stamps. As some had objected to the USPOD's insistence on issuing commemorative stamps series for World's Fairs in the 1890s, others still did not appreciate the growing involvement of the USPOD in their hobby in the 1920s.

During its early years, the PA struggled with efficiency as it juggled a high volume of stamp requests. Some collectors demanded prompt service and were impatient when their requests were not filled quickly. Collectors were reminded that all orders were numbered upon receipt and then filled in order. They were asked to understand that some patrons requested large numbers of stamps and philatelic information that required considerable labor from the staff clerks. Clerks at the Agency were overwhelmed with work, and officials reorganized and expanded it to handle the demand for stamps in 1924.<sup>56</sup>

This work did not go unnoticed, as Congressman Ernest R. Ackerman, a devoted and award-winning philatelist, became one of the Agency's most ardent supporters and defenders. He remarked that governments could do no better than to support and assist those who wanted to collect stamps. According to Ackerman, philately had "no deleterious effects" and was democratic in practice because it was

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<sup>56</sup> Philip H. Ward, Jr, "The Philatelic Stamp Agency," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 4 (October 4, 1926).

pursued by people of all ages, classes, and gender. Ackerman optimistically opined that stamps sales might be so high as to finance ventures far outside of the purview of regular postal activities.<sup>57</sup> The idea that stamp sales could produce enough revenue, not only to finance the stamp program but for additional programs came perhaps from Ackerman's zealous enthusiasm for philately.

Within the first seven months of operation, Department officials seemed pleased that the Agency took in more than \$20,000 in stamp sales and those revenues continued to increase substantially. By the following year the annual receipts increased to over \$105,000. Sales continued to climb nearly every year so that by the mid-1930s, the receipts were counted in millions rather than thousands of dollars, which is astounding considering the most remarkable growth occurred in 1935 deep amidst the Great Depression.<sup>58</sup> Revenues from all stamped matter consistently brought in a majority of the USPOD's revenue, receipts which continued to rise along with overall Department expenses. The PA's success, however, was less about stamp sales and more about fostering good relationships with collectors and promoted stamp collecting. For instance, in fiscal year 1924, revenues from all stamped matter totaled over 483 million dollars, representing eighty-eight percent of the total departmental income, while sales

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<sup>57</sup> Ackerman's comments and a letter from the USPOD are found in *Congressional Record*, House, 68<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, LXV, part 6, (April 3, 1924) 5530-31; and Ernest R. Ackerman, "In Defense of the Agency," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 38, no. 8 (May 5, 1924): 251-52. Ackerman wrote that sales could be so high as to fund commercial attaches to promote international trade.

<sup>58</sup> The Annual Reports are useful for gathering numbers of stamp sales conducted through the Philatelic Agency. See The United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), annual reports from 1922-1940; and "Philatelic Agency Reports a Profit," 29.

at the PA equaled 129,646 dollars.<sup>59</sup> Increased popularity of collecting U.S. stamps kept the PA busy filling orders, even if the agency did not erase departmental deficits. By establishing the Agency, the USPOD gave itself a central office to handle the forthcoming expansion of the commemorative stamp program in the early 1920s.

Centralizing stamp sales for the purpose of serving collectors is a turning point in the relationship between the USPOD and stamp collectors, but is in keeping with how the federal government began supporting consumer capitalism following World War I. While it took a retailer to point the Department in this direction, the USPOD would take thirty-seven more years before officially sanctioning and encouraging collecting in such a direct way through the PA. Following World War I, the government expanded and decisively promoted a consumer-based economy by supporting business industry, not only through Herbert Hoover's Department of Commerce, but also with subsidies coming at the hands of the postal service.<sup>60</sup>

Capitalizing on the success of the PA, the USPOD opened a stamp exhibition room across the hall from the Agency in 1935. Having transferred a majority of its collection to the Smithsonian more than twenty years earlier, the USPOD did not completely relinquish its desire to maintain its own postal museum. Again asking for

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<sup>59</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1924* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1924), 6-9. Interestingly, sales from the Philatelic Agency are reported together with "other funds" deposited to the Treasury and not included in the totals of stamp revenues. Other stamped matter included stamped envelopes, postal cards, and newspaper wrappers.

<sup>60</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of A New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 351; and Carroll Hill Woody, *The Growth of the Federal Government, 1915-1932* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934), 261-76, 549.

assistance from local postmasters and requesting foreign stamps to be donated by international governments, the USPOD went about crafting their own museum. Although not meant to compete with the philatelic collection at the Smithsonian, the opening of this “postal museum” seemed a bit odd, if not repetitive, of efforts at the National Museum. Within their own space, the USPOD highlighted collections of US and foreign stamps and exhibited other philatelic matter (including postcards, covers, commemorative envelopes) and stamp production machinery. According to Postmaster General Farley, this exhibit room served as an “important research center for collectors.”<sup>61</sup>

By establishing a museum outside the doors of the PA, the USPOD made visiting the PA more than just a trip to buy stamps by offering an opportunity to learn more about stamps and stamp production. Certainly not a museum store as we understand the development and trend in the late twentieth century, the PA may have appeared to play a similar role as the retail outlet that supported the museum. The genesis of this particular museum or exhibit hall seemed to be directly reflective of the Agency’s success. Many collectors and visitors may have planned a trip to the Agency while visiting Washington and visited the USPOD museum as well. Both entities

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<sup>61</sup> “Postal Museum Work Is Pushed By Officials,” *The Washington Post*, May 26, 1935; “Postal Officials Guests at Banquet of Collectors Club,” *The Washington Post*, June 9, 1935; “New Postal Museum Opened for Shriners,” *The Washington Post*, June 16, 1935; “A Place in the Sun (Editorial),” *Marconi’s Monthly Stamp News*, June 1935; and United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1937* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1937), 56.

worked together in promoting philately and provided the means for easily purchasing American stamps. That the Department opened this exhibit hall in the mid-1930s is not surprising since the PA was pulling in record dollar amounts and the Department was producing large varieties of commemorative stamps. Stamp collecting was extremely popular, and having the President of the United States as a philatelic role model did not hurt, either.

### **FDR's Stamps of Current Events**

As we saw in the last chapter, collecting appealed to many different people for different reasons in the early twentieth century, and when Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office in 1933 he not only encouraged others to collect, but he influenced stamp production as well. Throughout FDR's administration, he contributed ideas and occasionally sketches of stamp designs to his appointed Postmaster General, James Farley.<sup>62</sup> As you will read in the next chapter, the USPOD printed more special commemoratives in the Roosevelt years than it had in previous administrations. Many of these stamps resulted from petitions from the general public to commemorate a special anniversary, but additionally FDR submitted ideas of his own. Some have suggested that his stamp ideas of subject matter with designs in light, soothing, colors reflected a sense of optimism. Some of these subjects were less about historical

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas J. Alexander, "Farley's Follies," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=4&cmd=2&eid=8&slide=toc>.

remembrance and more about supporting current government and quasi-federal programs to suggest that economic recovery lay ahead for the struggling nation.<sup>63</sup>

One such stamp supported an expedition to the Antarctic by Richard E. Byrd, who was FDR's close friend. Byrd served as a naval (reservist) officer and scientist and had explored regions near the North and South Poles. He secured private financing for most of his journeys, and this expedition was no different. While FDR did not divert federal dollars towards Byrd's second Antarctic exploration (1933-34), FDR did facilitate a path allowing the proceeds from a limited issue commemorative stamp to go towards the expedition expenses. FDR even sketched out the stamp's design and encouraged others to help this expedition by doing their part and buying the stamps. Byrd's expedition team carried letters with a special 3-cent stamp to the Little America camp, where each piece of mail would be canceled with a seal from Antarctica by a newly appointed postmaster for the outpost. Collectors sent an envelope covers inside another envelope containing a postal mail order for fifty-three cents to the expedition's headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, or to the PA to be gathered and sent down to the "most southerly" post office. Because of the distance carried, a fifty-cent transportation fee was imposed. This fee went to finance the expedition's expenses. The Department received many negative responses from philatelists who did not approve of this type of promotional stamp that targeted collectors. Unlike other limited-issue

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<sup>63</sup> "Delivering Hope: FDR & Stamps of the Great Depression," exhibition, National Postal Museum, Washington, DC (June 9-June 6, 2010).

commemoratives, these stamps could not be redeemed for actual postage to mail a letter; the USPOD designed the 3-cent Antartics to be for philatelic purposes only. This issue directly targeted philatelists and clearly was not commemorative and yet interestingly it did not spawn a protest of the likes seen in 1898 over the Trans-Mississippi issues. While some complained, no one began a massive letter-writing campaign or mobilized global protests. In fact, many Americans thought this was a worthy cause because during the year when they were available, the Philatelic Agency sold over six million Little America stamps. Admiral Byrd wrote to FDR expressing his gratitude, saying that the stamp “helped us immeasurably in a number of ways,” and he was pleased with the success of the stamp sales. Over 150,000 envelopes made their way to Little America and overwhelmed the crew. The stamp offered a new way to publicize the Antarctic expedition and Byrd welcomed the increased exposure.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Clinton B. Eilenberger, “Speech delivered to American Philatelic Society,” *Proceeding of the 49th Annual Convention of the American Philatelic Society held August 27-31, 1934, Atlantic City* 48, no. 1 (October 1934): 5; “Byrd Stamps Explained,” *New York Times*, September 27, 1933; “The Stamp Album,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 1933, sec. For the Washington Post Boys and Girls; “Philatelic Notes,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1934, sec. ST; and Mary H. Lawson, “Byrd Antarctic Issue,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=2&tid=2033020>.



Figure 18: Little America post office overrun with covers awaiting cancelation. (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Byrd's Antarctic stamp was one way the Department reached out to collectors and non-collectors alike through the PA that it had not in years prior. Farley and his staff wanted "to keep the faith of the collectors of stamps" because the Post Office and collectors were "one family."<sup>65</sup> Even so, occasionally the Department pushed collectors on political issues during FDR's early years in office. Speaking to the annual meeting of the American Philatelic Society in 1934, Third Assistant Postmaster General Eilenberger spent more than half of his speech promoting the New Deal and

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<sup>65</sup> Eilenberger, "Speech delivered to American Philatelic Society," 4-6.

referenced a newly-printed NRA stamp that symbolized the efforts of the administration to enlist cooperation from all Americans. The stamp depicted “a farmer, a business man, an industrial worker, and a woman worker united in a common effort to banish unemployment and distress from the land.” If the same “courage and perseverance” depicted in historical commemoratives, as cited by Eilenberger, could be shown by the American people during the economic depression, then “the National Recovery Stamp will indeed be a memorial of victory.”<sup>66</sup> Created to support a New Deal program, postal officials tried to sell the stamp as a potential commemorative if all Americans cooperated to conquer economic hardships.

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<sup>66</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1933* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 50; Eilenberger, “Speech delivered to American Philatelic Society,” 424; Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989); and Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).



Figure 19: National Recovery Act issue (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

These two examples show how the USPOD became proactive during FDR's administration in its efforts to sell limited-issue stamps to collectors and non-collectors alike that supported federal and quasi-federal programs with an optimistic vision for a struggling nation. Other direct promotional efforts on behalf of the Department were evident in 1939, when the Philatelic Agency authorized the outfitting of a special truck that toured the country filled with exhibits containing all U.S. issued stamps and explained the processes behind stamp design and production. This touring philatelic truck was extremely popular, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each of the three years it traveled to small towns and cities across the U.S. USPOD officials

believed that the effects of this traveling exhibit stimulated philately and gave the public a better understanding of the history of American stamps for those who could not travel to Washington to view the Smithsonian or USPOD's collections.<sup>67</sup>

A retailer pointed the Department in the direction of serving collectors as consumers—consumers of products and of imagery from the American past—from which the USPOD would not return. Even when met with strong opposition from collectors, the U.S. federal government did not back down from its desire to issue commemoratives. Without nineteenth-century philatelists and the then-growing community of collectors, the USPOD would not have begun printing commemoratives celebrating American World's Fairs in the 1890s. Those stamps promoted current events and circulated images celebrating American exceptionalism that contributed to a larger national narrative. By issuing commemoratives, the government encouraged collectors and non-collectors to buy stamps for albums, not just as postage. With the PA firmly established by the early 1920s, the Department created an infrastructure to better handle increased production of commemoratives and to court a growing body of collectors. By the 1920s and 1930s, non-collecting

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<sup>67</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1939* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1939), 58; United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1940* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 53; United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1942* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 21; and "Philatelic Truck Starts Nation-Wide Tour," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* 53, no. 20 (May 15, 1939): 240. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the USPOD retired the philatelic truck from service.

citizens and collectors understood that the narratives on stamps carried legitimacy unmatched by other historical narratives, simply because a federal entity produced them. The next chapter will show that this legitimacy would motivate many different groups to petition the USPOD to represent their stories on stamps.

#### Chapter 4: Shaping National Identity with Commemoratives, 1920s-30s

My stamps tell wondrous stories  
In their own mysterious way;  
Weaving a quaint fascination  
That holds me in its sway.

They illustrate man's achievements,  
And his victory over things;  
His many modes of travel,  
On water, rails and wings.

They show our nation's heroes,  
Men who helped to free  
Our great and might country,  
Dearest land of liberty.

Thomas Kildride, "My Stamps," 1936<sup>1</sup>

When Thomas Killride looked at the stamps he collected, he read "wondrous stories." He felt patriotic about American achievements and proud of heroes who helped to "free Our great and mighty country." Stories leaping out from American commemorative stamps, like the ones Killride alluded to, were shaped by decisions made by the Postmaster General and his assistants and influenced by elected officials and the general public. Starting in 1892, the USPOD printed commemorative series advertising the U.S. world's fairs with imagery that revered American achievements in technology and American and European conquest of lands and peoples. History as

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas G. Killride, "My Stamps," in Charles J. Phillips, *Stamp Collecting, the King of Hobbies and the Hobby of Kings* (New York.: H. L. Lindquist, 1936), 407-08.

depicted on ordinary definitive postage represented a top-down approach by honoring American political and military history showing the faces of former presidents and military leaders. Commemorative stamps in particular offered a government-sanctioned version of American history that both collectors and non-collectors noticed. By the 1920s, Americans petitioned the government and asked the USPOD to print a stamp that commemorated their local anniversary or honored their favorite hero. By doing so, petitioners sought the legitimacy of the USPOD to broaden the American national narrative as distributed and presented on commemorative, limited-issue stamps. Individuals and special interest groups framed their petitions by arguing that their anniversary or hero exemplified American values, contributed to founding of the nation or winning independence, or fought to achieve equality promised by the Revolutionary War. Most petitioners did not collect stamps as a hobby, yet they saw how stamps held power to tell stories and naturalize them through imagery that circulated widely throughout the U.S. and the world.

Early American commemoratives taught stamp consumers to read the stories embedded in images, which served as a powerful tool for disseminating federally-sanctioned versions of American history. This strategy proved successful for the USPOD as it became more interested in fostering philately as a consumer practice and hobby. After finding that commemorative world's fair stamps would indeed sell, the Department looked beyond national expositions and began to honor regional commemorations and individuals and significantly increased the number of

commemoratives printed in the early twentieth century. From 1892 to 1919, the USPOD printed forty-seven different commemorative stamps, almost exclusively printed to celebrate world's fairs or regional expositions. Limited-issue production tripled between 1920 and 1940, when the USPOD printed and released 150 different commemoratives (See Appendix A for a full list of U.S. commemoratives, 1892-1940). With the Philatelic Agency established in 1921, the Department was better equipped to handle the distribution of additional issues and requests from collectors. While the U.S. led the way in the production of limited-issue stamps, it was not the only country producing commemoratives. Latin American nations celebrated centennials of independence between 1910 and 1924 with stamps. Sixty-two countries comprising the British Empire celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of George V's reign by printing a stamp to commemorate this event, offering quite a catalog for the collector. Although originating the postal revolution, Great Britain did not issue its first commemorative until 1924, so this "Jubilee" set pleased collectors of British and British colonial stamps. While other nations printed commemoratives, the USPOD was printing a greater variety of limited-issues. Global production increased greatly, so that all postal agencies printed more commemoratives during 1930-1934 than had been printed in the previous decade (1920-29), or any time prior.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Child, *Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 47-8. The following articles all appear in Frank L. Wilson, *The Philatelic Almanac: The Stamp Collector's Handbook* (New York: H.L. Lindquist, 1936): George B. Sloane, "A Review of the 1935 Auction Season," 27-8; C.I. Cromwell, "British Colonials in 1935," 31; and Kent B. Stiles, "Major and Minor Varieties of Postage Stamps Issued 1840-1934," 58-60.

In the U.S., patriotic commemorations flowered following WWI. Commemorative committees, business leaders, and politicians actively pursued federal postage stamps celebrating regional anniversaries held at Plymouth Rock, Mayport, Minneapolis, Lexington and Concord, and Valley Forge. Others fought for stamps honoring military, cultural, and political heroes, such as Casimir Pulaski, Theodore Kosciuszko, Susan B. Anthony, and Booker T. Washington. Knowing of the postal service's power to sell an idealized and patriotic vision of the American past, some sought commemoratives as part of grander strategies fighting for social and political equality while others perpetuated a romanticized, white-washed, view of colonial America. The battle for recognition on a federal stamp also reflected contemporary struggles over the construction of race and definitions of citizenship in the U.S. Residents and citizens with southern and eastern European ancestry, for instance, strove to be accepted as racially white, and that worked to further the chasm between whites and blacks who still struggled as second-class citizens for political power and representation on postage.<sup>3</sup>

In the early twentieth century, vernacular interests in stamps may have emerged from the growth of local historical societies that promoted genealogical

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<sup>3</sup>Roger Brody, "Pilgrim Tercentenary Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033807>; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: BasicBooks, 2005).

research and historic site preservation. State and privately-funded societies, from libraries and archives to patriotic-hereditary groups, encouraged Americans to research the history of their families and save family heirlooms. Hereditary group members took pride in tracing their roots back to pioneering families who established communities in Pennsylvania, for example, before the American Revolution. These practices helped to build regional and state pride that connected small towns and counties to broader national narratives. Encouraging family history research also created dividing lines among old and new immigrant groups, as many older immigrants grasped onto their colonial lineage while ignoring the challenges faced by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century groups with similar European origins.<sup>4</sup> Regional preservation groups such as the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) erected memorials and preserved sites tied to Virginia's founding families that recalled pleasing myths about Jamestown and Williamsburg that supported traditional, hegemonic, white elitism. For elite Virginian members of the APVA, post-Civil War political and cultural upheaval left them reaching backwards so as to rebuild a better future which meant returning to a time when white elites commanded power that demanded deference from blacks and poor whites.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will reveal how other groups reached backward to use images and individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Katharina Hering, "'We Are All Makers of History': People and Publics in the Practice of Pennsylvania-German Family History, 1891-1966" (PhD dissertation, George Mason University, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> James M. Lindgren, "'Virginia Needs Living Heroes': Historic Preservation in the Progressive Era," *The Public Historian* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 9-24.

from America's past to represent their desires to influence who was entitled to the rights of citizenship through the medium of a commemorative stamp.

Through the mid-twentieth century, the USPOD became a powerful institution for legitimizing certain interpretations of the past through the commemorative stamp program. Since the mid-nineteenth century, federal statutes restricted the USPOD from printing the portrait of any living person on stamps making all stamps—definitive and commemorative—snapshots from the past.<sup>6</sup> The postal service did not accept all stamp requests and carefully chose subjects for commemorative printing, this authority elevated any story or individual into a broader official American narrative that told consumers that this person or event was nationally-significant and worthy of honor. These carefully chosen and constructed stamps were then collected and saved by philatelists, some who saw American stamps not only as “wondrous stories” but as “stepping stones of history” that traced, from beginning to end, the “Alpha and Omega” of America's story.<sup>7</sup> Viewing the corpus of commemoratives in this way indicated that many collectors—and most likely many non-collectors—believed that scenes printed on stamps told accurate stories from the past and that individuals were chosen because of their significant contributions to American history. These stories became memorialized as collectors saved stamps.

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<sup>6</sup> 31 USC, Section 5114, RS 3576.

<sup>7</sup> William J. Reed, “The Sun Never Sets in Philately Land,” *Philatelic West* 85, no. 2 (February 1927): n.p.; and Killride, “My Stamps.”

Postmaster General, James Farley, appointed by “First Philatelist” Franklin Delano Roosevelt, recognized that these commemorative stamps also acted as “permanent memorials.” Much like structural memorials built in public spaces, one vision of the past dominates the stamp’s imagery, which often screens out other perspectives. Stamps were small in size, but their availability made them more accessible than memory sites such as museums, archives, and monuments. These sites have the power, according to Pierre Nora, to be nation-building tools that erase a personal, experiential memory of the past.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, it is important to examine limited-issue commemoratives and their impact as if they are miniature memorials. I will explore how citizens, collectors, and the USPOD engaged in conversations related to commemorative stamp selection from 1920-1940. I will also analyze the images printed on selected stamps that treat colonial origins, war heroes and battles, and the struggle over racial and gender equality. As the USPOD worked to present a united vision of the past, stamp scenes showed a decisively white and Protestant pluralistic vision of America that obscured more complicated stories of slavery and oppression. Conversations revolving around these stamps demonstrate how the USPOD became a powerful institution that legitimized and distributed historical narratives, and one that allowed ordinary citizens to engage with its government. Americans always

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<sup>8</sup> United States Post Office Department, *Annual Report of the Postmaster-General of the United States for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1936* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936), 47; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7-25.

maintained a close relationship with the postal service, and when successfully petitioning for a stamp on behalf of their cause some citizens actually influenced postal decisions and public memory.

### **Pilgrims, Colonial Revivals, and Origins**

As Americans were confronted with political radicalism, labor unrest, changing roles of women, Jim Crow laws, African American urban migration, and international immigration in the interwar period, some found comfort in celebrating a nostalgic, homogenous fiction of the American colonial past. Public celebrations of historic anniversaries were filled with patriotic sentiment weaving together local, vernacular, events, and people into official national narratives, as was the case with commemorative stamps printed in this era.<sup>9</sup> Negotiations of public memory occurred when commemorative or memorial committees, comprised of community, business, and cultural leaders, campaigned for a limited-issue federal postage stamp. Beginning in 1920 with the Pilgrim Tercentenary issue, commemorative stamp subjects were moving away from solely advertising world's fairs as the Department began celebrating battles, anniversaries, and individuals that were part of greater cultural trends that sought to define Americanness in post-War America. Like most memorials and

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<sup>9</sup> John E Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13-20, 169-185. Bodnar defines official culture as presenting the past in a patriotic ways that emphasize ideals rather than complex realities. Vernacular culture represents many interests of diverse groups that reflect personal experiences in smaller communities.

commemorations at the time, stamps projected a nostalgic vision of America's past and ignored the more complicated stories of slavery, oppression, and conquest.

Americanization efforts attacked customs and practices of new and first-generation immigrants thought to be racially and socially inferior by patriotic-hereditary organizations. Historic preservation and colonial revival movements grew in popularity because those preserving and reproducing iconography from the colonial period believed this style was uniquely American. Preserved homes and historic sites were constructed to be places that taught immigrants about America's past, while "patriotic Americans" were urged to buy and display colonial-era reproductions in their homes.<sup>10</sup>

Colonial-themed stamps from the 1920s and 1930s coincided with growing interest in the physical evidence, or material culture, from colonial and early Republic eras. Wealthy businessmen and heiresses of industrial fortunes donated money to finance wings in museums and historic preservation. The American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened in 1924 to exhibit early American decorative arts and furnishings of "our ancestors." Philadelphia's Sesquicentennial Exposition boasted "High Street," an attraction that featured rebuilt "colonial" structures of Philadelphia in 1776. Inspired by Henry Mercer's collections of tools, Henry Ford began voraciously collecting a host of buildings and objects in 1919—anything from

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<sup>10</sup> William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 35, no. 4 (December 1976): 239-254; Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1999); and Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*.

agricultural machinery to household and kitchen implements—that he would eventually display in Greenfield Village, Michigan. Uninterested in financing an established historic site like John D. Rockefeller, Ford created his own emulation of an “Early American Village” that opened to the public in 1931. And the physical restorations and quests for “authenticity” at Colonial Williamsburg in the late 1920s and early 1930s encouraged some Americans to purchase antiques and replicas to decorate their homes.<sup>11</sup> Calling upon the designs of the late colonial and early Republic periods during a time of American post-World War I conservatism in foreign policy, some Americans focused on building the image of United States as an exceptional place with a unique history.

Attempts to craft the unique history of America’s origins, particularly in nostalgic ways, appeared in many regional and local settlement-related anniversaries during the 1920s and 1930s; some even appeared on commemoratives. These stamps were not the first attempts at shaping America’s founding mythologies. We saw in the last chapter that the Columbian (1892-93) and the Jamestown Tercentennial

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<sup>11</sup> William B. Rhoads, “The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 35, no. 4 (December 1976): 239-254; West, *Domesticating History*; Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*; Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Richard Townley Haines Halsey and Elizabeth Tower, *The Homes of Our Ancestors* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1925); Thomas J. Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982); Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Hamilton J.G. de Roulhac, “The Ford Museum,” *American Historical Review* 36, no. 4 (July 1931): 772-775; Walter Karp, “Greenfield Village,” *American Heritage Magazine* 32, no. 1 (December 1980); Walter Karp, “Electra Webb and her American Past,” *American Heritage Magazine* 33, no. 3 (May 1982); Edward Park, “My Dream and My Hope,” *Colonial Williamsburg History*, available online at <http://www.history.org/Foundation/general/introhis.cfm>.

Expositions (1907) celebrated discoveries and settlements of lands that would become the United States.<sup>12</sup> For the Pilgrim Tercentennial celebration in 1920, poems and speeches glorified the legacy of the Massachusetts pilgrims as nation builders and model immigrants. Plymouth was proclaimed to be the “corner stone of the Nation,” and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, a Mayflower descendent, detailed how the pilgrims’ success against adversity allowed for America to grow into a great nation.<sup>13</sup> Vice President Thomas Marshall also touted the achievements of the “pilgrim fathers” who “prepared the way” for “the birth of a new and mighty world.” He used the opportunity to argue for immigration restrictions advocating that immigrants needed to follow the example set by pilgrims and commit to staying in US rather than merely coming to work and returning home. According to Marshall, the pilgrims came to America “to worship God and to make homes, determined never to return to Europe.”<sup>14</sup> Politicians and patriotic-hereditary groups used a perceived legacy of the Plymouth pilgrims in the early twentieth century not only to assert the primacy of Plymouth as America’s birth place, but also to speak to local and national concerns over immigration and labor.

The tercentenary committee promoted the pilgrims’ legacy as first founders, evident in the stamps chosen to commemorate the celebration. Interestingly, the

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander T. Haimann, “Columbian Exposition Issues,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2027851>.

<sup>13</sup> Charles A. Merrill, “Urges Revival of Pilgrims’ Faith,” *Boston Daily Globe*, December 22, 1920.

<sup>14</sup> “Urges Bar on Aliens,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 1920.

USPOD seemed so convinced that the world associated the story of the pilgrims' landing at Plymouth as quintessentially American that none of the three postage stamps printed in the series contained the identifying words, "U.S. Postage," which all other stamps prior and since carried. Even the U.S. Mint's commemorative anniversary coin imprinted the words "United States of America" on the front of the half-dollar coin.<sup>15</sup>

Mayflowers, fittingly, flanked each stamp's scene, and like the Columbians, the Pilgrim Tercentenary series formed a short narrative. The story began on the 1-cent stamp with the *Mayflower* sailing west across the ocean on its journey with no land in sight—origin or destination. Similar to the Columbians, the landing occurs in the 2-cent stamp, which was the most commonly used since it was the standard rate of first-class postage from 1883 to 1932.<sup>16</sup> This stamp's engraving makes the landing look harsh, unexpected, and jolting for the party at Plymouth Rock. Although this image suggests that struggles lie ahead for the settlers, the rock is what grounded the travelers, and is the object that grounded those celebrating the anniversary in the past. Plymouth was the ceremonial ground in 1920 and provided the physical connection to the past events. The journey's symbolic end revealed itself in the 5-cent where the Mayflower Compact was signed indicating political agreement, permanence, and Divine right and

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<sup>15</sup> Brody, "Pilgrim Tercentenary Issue." To view an image of the commemorative coin, see <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pilgrim\\_tercentenary\\_half\\_dollar\\_commemorative\\_obverse.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pilgrim_tercentenary_half_dollar_commemorative_obverse.jpg)>

<sup>16</sup> Jane Kennedy, "Development of Postal Rates: 1845-1955," *Land Economics* 33, no. 2 (May 1957): 96; and Andrew K. Dart, "The History of Postage Rates in the United States since 1863," September 26, 2008, available online at (<http://www.akdart.com/postrate.html>). First-class postage temporarily increased to 3-cents from 1917-1918 during American involvement in World War I.

blessing of their settlement as the central figure pointed towards the light illuminating the signing. Based on a painting by Edwin White, the signing image illustrates families migrating together even though only men signed the document.<sup>17</sup> The scene emphasizes that a community comprised of family units crafted the Mayflower Compact and pledged to work together. New England preservationists and genealogists argued that the pilgrims were the true first Americans because family units arrived together to form a permanent settlement, unlike the commercially-minded immigrants to Jamestown. By representing this scene, the Tercentennial committee reiterated their argument and wanted all Americans to distinguish Plymouth as the birthplace of the America.

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<sup>17</sup> Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 233-38. The 5-cent, "Signing of the Compact" stamp, is a miniature engraving based on an Edwin White painting from 1858. William Bradford may have been the main figure in this painting, since he is pictured in the U.S. Mint's half-dollar commemorative coin also issued for this anniversary. White specialized in American historical painting, including *Washington Resigning His Commission* which was commissioned to hang in the Maryland State House. To see a copy of *Washington Resigning his Commission*, see [http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/speccol/sc1500/sc1545/e\\_catalog\\_2002/white.html](http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/speccol/sc1500/sc1545/e_catalog_2002/white.html).



Figure 20: Pilgrim Tercentenary, 1-cent, 1920 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 21: Pilgrim Tercentenary, 2-cent, 1920 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 22: Pilgrim Tercentenary, 5-cent, 1920 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Placing Plymouth Rock at the center of the national American narrative was attacked by historians and angered heritage and preservation groups who desperately wanted to pull the pilgrims down from their pedestal to broaden the story of European settlement in the New World. For many years, Virginians and New Englanders argued over the primacy of Plymouth versus Jamestown that also carried

with it strong regional pride leftover from the Civil War.<sup>18</sup> No one, of course, at this time argued on behalf of the original residents of “America”—the native peoples who were displaced, attacked, manipulated, and feared by European colonizers.

When celebrating the founding of New York in 1924, the Huguenot-Walloon New Netherland Commission wanted the entire country to know the story of their ancestors just as others knew about the Plymouth pilgrims, and they pursued a stamp to recognize their ancestors’ settlements. The Commission wrote that the Walloons were pilgrims too and their story was “wonderful and romantic, and all Americans should know it.” The colony of Plymouth was not the only one founded by God-fearing exiles, a point that the commission—formed by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America—declared. Settlements in New York were the “fulfillment of their fondest dreams and their advent marks a new epoch in the history of both Church and State.” Apparently the Commission understood what they were up against in trying to educate Americans about their history, because a few collectors wrote to the Postmaster General puzzled by the printing of that series and inquired

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<sup>18</sup>The following *William and Mary Quarterly* article provides an example of the type of arguments that ensued between Virginians and New Englanders. The article offers a point-by-point refutation of claims made at a meeting of the New England Historic Genealogical Society explaining why New Englanders were better than Virginians. Even though the Jamestown settlement pre-dated Plymouth, New England colonists immigrated in family groups and only criminals and “the most objectionable part of its feminine population” were sent to Jamestown to mother generations of Americans. Their objectionable backgrounds did not have the same positive, feminine influence on the populace as the women who settled in New England as part of family units. Plymouth “subordinated the commercial spirit (of Jamestown) to that of securing ecclesiastical and political freedom for themselves.” *WMQ* responded that those charges were “so gross, so unprovoked, so untrue,” that they replied in the “interest of truth.” There is no doubt that sectional pride was vibrant in 1909, even among historians and genealogists. “Jamestown and Plymouth,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (April 1909): 305-311.

about the significance of those events. One collector begged for a short bibliography, because “all of the histories I have at hand seem to be a bit deficient in matters relating to the events these stamps commemorate.”<sup>19</sup>



Figure 23: Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary, 1-cent, 1924 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

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<sup>19</sup> The design files kept in the National Postal Museum provide the official records kept by the USPOD regarding stamp requests, including correspondence, designs, and related press. These files are organized by the Scott International Catalog number. The following sources came from the Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary stamp design files (#614-616): Huguenot-Walloon New Netherland Commission, *Huguenot-Walloon New Netherland Commission, 1624-1924, Program* (New York, 1924); Ruth Hawes to Post Office Department, August 25, 1924; J.D. Riker to Post-Master General of the United States, June 18, 1924; and Lois D. Williams to Post Office Department, July 21, 1924. Framing the founding of New York as the “Huguenot-Walloon” achievement was contested at the time of the anniversary. The Commission justified the joining of both groups because the Walloons, although mostly Belgian, were French-speaking and many had French ancestry, never mind that many of those initial immigrants were officially Dutch citizens. The discussion of founding was not just about sharing the spotlight with the Pilgrims in Massachusetts, but of stealing some of the glory from the Dutch who claimed and purchased Manhattan Island. For some discussion of these varying interpretations as they relate to the “founding” of New York, see “Says French Came Here Before Dutch,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1923; Sam Roberts, “New York’s Birth Date: Don’t Go by City’s Seal,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2008, sec. New York Region, available online at [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/nyregion/14seal.html?\\_](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/nyregion/14seal.html?_).



Figure 24: Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary, 2-cent, 1924 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 25: Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary, 5-cent, 1924 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

National significance was often cited as the criteria for printing a commemorative stamp, yet irked collectors and citizens occasionally questioned the standard. In the case of the Huguenot-Walloon issues, the series contained no readily-identifiable images and none of them were labeled on the stamp itself, which may have contributed to the confusion. The *Nieu Nederland* sailed in 1624 east towards America in the 1-cent issue, while families landed in what became New York in the 2-cent. And the last stamp in the series is even more cryptic with an unnamed monument facing a rising sun with palm trees and plants surrounding it that are not similar to the landscape pictured in the 2-cent settlement stamp. The 5-cent denomination actually represents a stone monument erected by Jean Ribault who explored the area near Mayport, Florida, in the 1560s to establish a refuge colony for French Huguenots. Before returning to France to pick up passengers for the sail back to Florida, Ribault erected a stone column festooned with the French King's coat of arms to claim Florida in the name of France. As part of the Huguenot-Walloon anniversary in 1924, the Florida Daughters of the American Revolution chapters financed the building of a similarly-shaped monument to honor Ribault and the "first landing of Protestants on American soil."<sup>20</sup> This series is a good example of how the stamps alone cannot teach anyone about a subject if there is not enough information to inform the reader. The

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<sup>20</sup> Roger Brody, "Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033829&>. For plaque text see photo of the monument Shannon McCann, "Brown on White on Flickr - Photo Sharing!," *When Lost in...*, March 19, 2008, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/whenlostin/2743408241/in/photostream/>.

main idea behind the Huguenot-Walloon series was to challenge the idea that pilgrims of Plymouth were the only Protestants to sail to America in search of religious freedom who endured hardships and helped to build a nation.

The Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary committee very specifically wanted the memorial commemorating Jean Ribaud's settlement to be pictured on a stamp, to depict the first Protestant settlement in America. Celebrating white Protestant beliefs of early settlers on stamps may not have just been for pride in religious freedom, but may have been yet another way that native-born Protestants clung to an idealized vision of a harmonious and homogenous American past. This vision saw immigrant radicals, Jews, and Catholics as threats to Protestant mainstream culture. Battles over immigration, public education, and prohibition, for example, often divided the population along religious lines.<sup>21</sup> Defining the United States as a Christian Protestant nation helped those remembering these early settlements to deal with an uncomfortably heterogeneous population of the 1920s. Ancestors of Huguenots and Walloons desired stamps to commemorate their contributions to early America stemming from regional, religious, and ethnic-racial pride as they staked their ground in New York City as the region's original immigrants. By earning a series of stamps, the federal government appeared to endorse this interpretation.

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<sup>21</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Douglas J. Slawson, *The Department Of Education Battle, 1918-1932: Public Schools, Catholic Schools, And The Social Order* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); and Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White, The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*.

The Norse-American Centenary stamp series provides another example of how the government endorsed a narrative of ethnic-racial pride proposed by a regional commemorative committee. Much like the Huguenot-Walloon celebration, which was “of more than ordinary interest particularly in those sections of the country where these colonists originally settled,” this regional celebration in Minneapolis honored the first Norwegian immigrants. A Congressional Joint resolution commended Norwegian immigrants who contributed to the “moral and material welfare of our Nation.” The “Norse element” in America was credited with settling the “great Midwest,” rather than piling into cities like contemporary immigrants.<sup>22</sup> Like other celebrations, petitioning for a commemorative was one piece of a larger physical festival. Imagery and narratives presented by the Centennial committee sought to unite Norwegians in America to a heroic past, one that could be traced to Vikings such as Leif Erikson, whose arrival in the New World predated Columbus and the Pilgrims. The Pilgrim Tercentennial influenced how the Norse-American Centennial Committee shaped their message and why the committee rooted the message in celebrating pioneer fathers. The Committee balanced asserting their differences as Norwegians while also

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<sup>22</sup> Irwin Glover to James R. Fraser, January 9, 1925; Gisle Bothne to Postmaster General Harry S. New, December 10, 1924; Carl G. O. Hansen to Mr. Harry S. New, December 10, 1924; all in Design Files, #620-621, National Postal Museum. *Joint Resolution Authorizing Stamps to Commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Landing of the First Norse Immigrants, 1924.*

claiming their rights to be a part of the dominant official narrative of the American past.<sup>23</sup>

Again, this series of stamps emphasized immigration and a journey across the Atlantic that asserted that all of these groups were early immigrants and distinguished their stories of migration from those of new immigrants arriving in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. The 2-cent, Restaurationen, shows the ship carrying the first Norwegian immigrants, sailing west without land in sight toward the United States in 1825. The second stamp does not represent the landing but rather, the 5-cent issue featured an engraving of a Viking ship built for the Columbian Exposition. That ship sailed from Norway to Chicago to remind fairgoers and stamp consumers in the 1920s that Norwegian explorers had visited America long before Columbus, the English-Dutch Pilgrims, the Huguenots, or the Walloons. This particular image, interestingly, pointed the ship's bow toward the east, or toward the homeland, yet on the stamp itself the Viking ship sails from a banner or shield of Norway towards one of the United States. The Norse-American Viking ship is flying colors similar to an American flag. These stamps were in high demand from collectors because of the design and

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<sup>23</sup> April Schultz, "The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched': The 1925 Norse-American Immigration Centennial and Ethnic Identity," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (March 1991): 1265-1295. Whether the Norse sloop carried religious refugees or not was under some debate. One article in the *New York Times* spread those claims in the popular media: E. Armitage McCann, "Uncle Sam Honors His Norse Family," *New York Times*, October 11, 1925. A scholarly article published the same year argued against the assertion that Quakers on the sloop fled Norway because of persecution. As Henry Cadbury argued, the Norwegian government exaggerated the story of fleeing Quakers to slow the rate of Norwegian immigration to the United States in the 1840s. Norwegian officials passed a law granting religious tolerance to all of its residents in 1845. See Henry J. Cadbury, "The Norwegian Quakers of 1825," *The Harvard Theological Review* 18, no. 4 (October 1925): 293-319.

intensity of the ink colors. The USPOD received letters requesting the issues be reprinted. Postal officials regretted that they had to treat all commemoratives consistently and could not reprint this series alone because they would hear protests from other groups claiming the Norwegians received preferential treatment.<sup>24</sup> In this case, the USPOD understood that the subject matter represented on the stamp held great meaning for petitioners—past and future—and citizens. Postal officials were careful to balance the sensitivities of commemorative scenes chosen with interests of some collectors who focused more on the attractiveness and particulars of stamps' designs.

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<sup>24</sup> Norse-American Centenary stamp (#621) design folder, NPM.



Figure 26: Norse-American Centennial, 2-cent, 1925 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 27: Norse-American Centennial, 5 cent, 1925 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Descendants of these early European settlers wanted to demonstrate that their immigrant ancestors were good immigrant-citizens and worked to transform the U.S. into a great and prosperous nation. Difficult to read in the stamps' images, these feelings were expressed by the Norwegian-American commemorative committee who wanted to celebrate ethnic pride, but designed the celebrations to focus on messages of good citizenship and patriotism. Even the planning committee and other Norwegian Americans involved with the Centennial felt conflicted over the messages of the celebration. Many Norwegians opposed American involvement in World War I and faced nativistic attacks. By 1925, the Norwegian communities in the northern Midwest still debated the value of Americanization and of supporting ethnically-constructed heritage activities.<sup>25</sup> Through public commemoration, the Norwegian-Americans of the Midwest declared that they were nation builders like the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. And with their heritage represented on commemorative stamps, the reach of their story stretched far beyond Minnesota.

Regional anniversary committees took advantage of the opportunities available from the USPOD's commemorative stamp program to legitimize their interpretation of the past and to insure that the founding stories of their ancestors were included in the broader story of America's origins. Stamps represented European settlements and trans-Atlantic journeys with images of ships and of white settlers. The timing of these stamps also spoke to the contemporary fights over immigration. Legislation in 1921

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<sup>25</sup> Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 55-61; and Schultz, "The Pride of the Race Had Been Touched."

and 1924 established eugenically-minded quotas. Congress developed these quotas to shape the racial biology of future American citizens. Johnson-Reed (1924) drastically reduced the number of southern and eastern Europeans entering the United States, and completely eliminated immigration from Asia.<sup>26</sup> By the 1930s, regional celebrations continued as states celebrated anniversaries and successfully petitioned for commemorative stamps that educated fellow citizens of local founding stories from around the nation. Together these regional anniversary stamps also reinforced the idea that the United States was founded by white Western Europeans and that the future national racial and ethnic salad bowl should aspire to achieve that ideal from the past.

The Sesquicentennial celebrations of Revolutionary War battles moved discussions of colonial origins into dialogues about the formation of the United States as a nation.

### **Humble Heroes of the Revolution**

Persevering pilgrims gave birth, figuratively, to Revolutionary War heroes who fought for freedom against British oppressors as represented in stamps. Starting in 1925, a flurry of activity surrounded the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution, including many local commemorations across the United States. The national Sesquicentennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1926 encouraged a colonial revival, not

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<sup>26</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 91-117. Asians were not legally eligible for citizenship because the federal court system did not define any Asian as white, making them ineligible for naturalization.

only of design and style, but in storytelling through stamps. Surprisingly, while the pilgrim anniversaries yielded small stamp series each, the “Sesqui” exposition did not. No narrative was told across three issues, leaving the Liberty Bell—the iconic symbol of the fair—to stand in as the only symbol of independence. Beginning in 1925, the USPOD released fourteen stamps, or stamp series, related to Revolutionary commemorations.<sup>27</sup>

Images from the Revolutionary War issues often represented portraits of victorious generals and elite soldiers or engravings of battle scenes. This was certainly the case for the Lexington and Concord stamp series printed in 1925 that ushered in the anniversary celebrations. The Department released the stamps on April 4 to long lines of interested collectors and citizens waiting to purchase these stamps in Massachusetts. Ceremonies commemorating the skirmish were celebrated in and around Boston in April where salutes were fired and Paul Revere’s ride into Boston was re-enacted on April 19 and 20<sup>th</sup> during Patriot’s Day festivities.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike other series, the Lexington and Concord commemoratives did not necessarily proceed chronologically by denomination. The 1-cent represented

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<sup>27</sup> A large replica of the bell adorned with electric lights was built near the entrance to the exposition and considered a highlight for visitors. The bell appeared on the stamp and on a commemorative coin. Erastus Long Austin, *The Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition: A Record Based on Official Data and Departmental Reports* (Philadelphia: Current Publications, 1929); and Gordon Trotter, “Sesquicentennial Exposition Issue,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2032940>. See Appendix A for full list of commemorative stamps.

<sup>28</sup> “New Postage Sale Starts Saturday,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 31, 1925; “Throngs at Post Office for Lexington Stamps,” *Boston Daily Globe*, April 4, 1925; and “Elaborate Program Arranged for Lexington’s Celebration,” April 9, 1925.

Washington assuming command of the Continental Army in Cambridge months after the initial skirmish. It was followed by a 2-cent depicting the actual confrontation, and the 5-cent completed the series with a memorial to the minuteman soldier.<sup>29</sup> The image of Washington taking command of the continental army in Cambridge may have been a conglomerate of nineteenth-century prints depicting this scene. Those prints, however, chose to represent Washington on horseback, while on the stamp Washington stands among his soldiers.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps this interpretation saw Washington as a man equal to his soldiers, a fellow citizen, even as he is set apart because he was not equal in rank or status. Ready for war, the collected armies are dressed uniformly while one company marches in the right of the scene and another, larger company stands at attention in the background. The viewer is led to believe that the Continental Army organized soon after the first confrontation and was prepared for combat.

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Brody, "Lexington-Concord Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033846>.

<sup>30</sup> See these two examples of prints: Michael Angelo Wageman (artist) and John Rogers (engraver), *Washington Taking Command of the Army at Cambridge 1775*, print, New York Public Library, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection, available online at <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?808530>; and Charles Stanley Reinhart, *Washington at Cambridge, Taking Command of the Army*, print, 25 x 36 cm, 1875, New York Public Library, Mid-Manhattan Picture Collection, available online at <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?808520>.



Figure 28: Washington at Cambridge, 1-cent, 1925 (photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Based on a painting by Henry Sandham, the 2-cent issue borrowed this victorious vision of the battle.<sup>31</sup> Sandham painted the minutemen as a disadvantaged band of soldiers on foot who engaged the British in battle who charged on horseback. The minutemen appear larger in size but smaller in number in the foreground, standing victoriously with their arms in the air, shaking fists at the enemy who appears smaller in size and larger in number to be retreating in the background. This painting contrasts drastically with the vision etched by contemporary artist, Amos Doolittle, in May 1775. Doolittle represented the small band of minutemen in disarray after the first shot was fired as they scattered across the green in retreat. From other sources

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<sup>31</sup> *Proceedings of Lexington Historical Society and Papers Relating to the History of the Town* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Historical Society, 1890), xi-xii, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/proceedingsoflex05lexi>. The stamp mislabels the painting as “The Birth of Liberty,” while it is titled “The Dawn of Liberty.”

available, this representation seems to more accurately describe the events at Lexington. While the British eventually retreated to Boston after a standoff in Concord, the colonist did not defeat the British. Both sides exchanged fire and lost lives in this brief skirmish. Accuracy, however, was irrelevant to local history enthusiasts and residents who believed in the town's centrality to the Revolution's narrative. The Lexington Historical Society purchased Sandham's painting in 1886 to hang in their town hall, and this scene was an integral part of their local history.<sup>32</sup> Embedded in the residents' memory was that their fictive ancestors were a victorious band of volunteer soldiers who held off the well-trained British and forced a retreat. This image of local importance that circulated across the country and the world confirmed what most schoolchildren learned as part of the War for Independence narrative.

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<sup>32</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Amos Doolittle, *The Battle of Lexington, April 19th 1775*, colored etching and engraving, 1775, New York Public Library, Print Collection, available online at <http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/art/print/exhibits/revolution/captions/54426.html>. For an excellent close reading of the 2-cent stamp with the Amos Doolittle print, see "Why Historical Thinking Matters," interactive presentation, Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, and School of Education, Stanford University, *Historical Thinking Matters*, available online at <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/why/>.



Figure 29: Birth of Liberty, 2-cent, 1925 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Prior to the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, poems written by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow cemented this mythical interpretation of Lexington and Concord in American memory during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. An engraving of Daniel Chester French's "The Minute Man" statue, dedicated in 1875, appeared on the 5-cent stamp that also included the first stanza of Emerson's 1837 poem, "The Concord Hymn." Emerson wrote that poem for one commemoration ceremony and later, it was engraved at the base of French's statue commemorating the battle's centennial. Most stamps did not include words other than "U.S. postage" or a brief identifying label, relying on the picture to illustrate the stamp's theme. By reprinting the first stanza of Emerson's poem, readers of the stamp, most of whom would never see the statue in person, understood the symbol. Emerson's words would

have been very familiar to many Americans because “A Concord Hymn” often appeared in textbooks and school readers. The government endorsed this vision celebrating humble, inexperienced, and “embattled farmers” who “fired the shot heard around the world.”<sup>33</sup>

French’s monument was similar in design to that of the common-soldier Civil War memorials erected in municipalities across the country in the late nineteenth century. Civil War memorials crafted as standing soldiers holding a rifle, not embattled, remembered those who fought and died and served as a place to honor all veterans. In the case of the “Minute Man,” though the physical statue stood in Massachusetts, once on a stamp, its representation became a national symbol of the earliest citizen soldiers who fought for independence. It was the stories of these men “who helped free our great and mighty country” as represented on postage that Thomas Killride spoke of in his poem, “My Stamps.”<sup>34</sup> Civil War monuments acted in ways to unify the country by focusing on the individuals who fought rather than the reasons for fighting. During the Revolutionary War, northern and southern colonies fought together, even if it was for a loosely-knit union. In 1925, the Massachusetts

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<sup>33</sup> Brody, “Lexington-Concord Issue;” Steven Gould Axelrod, et al., eds., *The New Anthology of American Poetry* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 185. Emerson’s poem was sung at the dedication of another battle monument on July 4, 1837. These words were thought so moving that they were included in *The Minute Man* statue by French. Bessie Louise Pierce, *Civic Attitudes in American School Textbooks* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1930), 204, available online at <http://www.archive.org/details/civicattitudesin00pierarch>.

<sup>34</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 162-208; and Killride, in Phillips, *Stamp Collecting, the King of Hobbies and the Hobby of Kings*, 407-08. Interestingly, Daniel Chester French earned a commemorative stamp of his own when he was included in the Famous American series’ artists grouping issued in 1940.

Minute Man acted as a unifying figure for celebrating white male citizenship throughout the U.S.

Consumers of the Minute Man commemorative saw in the stamp design that this figure was to be remembered as a heroic freedom fighter. All commemorative stamps, I argue, become miniature memorials once saved by collectors, but this particular stamp was designed to look like a memorial. The stamp represents the original sculpture and then frames it as if French's piece is part of a large Neo-Classical memorial. Unlike the statue that stands in a field in Concord, the Minute Man on the stamp is flanked by two Doric order columns and two tablets bearing verses from Emerson's hymn as if the verses are commandments, giving the statue the appearance of standing in an architectural niche. A niche highlights the figure inside it, and very often the figure is one to be worshipped or revered. Reverence of the Minute Man is reinforced with lighter shading behind the statue's head on the stamp that draws the eye in to focus on an archetypal American hero. Like physical memorials, commemoratives do not allow space for questioning of the subject's interpretation. In this case, the white citizen-farmer-soldier stands as the archetypal American hero.



Figure 30: The Minute Man, 5-cent, 1925 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

In contrast to the Lexington and Concord series which elevated the white citizen-farmer-soldier to the status of national hero, the Valley Forge anniversary stamp represented a mythical story about General George Washington that made him seem more like a common man. In the 1920s, Washington lived prominently in popular and political cultural as his name and face were used to market dishes, sell movies, and to justify immigration restrictions. Even prior to the Sesqui, mail order catalogs sold colonial-themed, mass-produced knickknacks containing George's image. One familiar scene was Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. A nineteenth-century print of this vignette, based on a painting by Henry Brueckner, circulated widely after the Civil War and again following World War I. A bas-relief of a similar image was installed at the YMCA West Side Branch in New York in 1904, and replicas

were created and installed in churches, schools, and historical societies. Many viewed this print as visual evidence of Washington's true piety, even though the image was completely contrived. Imagery that illustrated how a military leader turned to God for help in hard times was powerful. The scene was based on a tale first recanted by Parson Mason Weems in 1804. Weems perpetuated a cult of Washington through many stories he published about Washington including the myth about chopping down the cherry tree.<sup>35</sup>

Supporters of the anniversary encampment at Valley Forge wanted to incorporate this familiar image on a stamp and began petitioning the USPOD in the mid-1920s. Malcolm H. Ganser asked in a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* for other readers to write to a very reluctant Postmaster General to sway him into printing a stamp commemorating this event. Requests were honored and the image of Washington kneeling in prayer would represent the anniversary at the encampment even as some historians began questioning the accuracy of that scene. One newspaper columnist wrote, "there was no good reason to doubt it," and another posited that neither the stamp engraver nor the outspoken historian Rupert Hughes was at Valley

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<sup>35</sup> For an excellent examination of the culture of Washington's image, see Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*. Weems's claims have never been proven and attempts to debunk this particular myth were published in 1926 during the Sesquicentennial. Mason Locke Weems, *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington*, Mt Vernon ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott Company, 1918), 234; and James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 340. Some critiques of Washington myths were published by C.W. Woodward, *George Washington, the Image and the Man* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926); reviewed by James A. Woodburn in *The American Historical Review* 32, no. 3 (April 1927): 611-614. Lorette Treese, *Valley Forge: Making and Remaking a National Symbol* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

Forge with Washington, so why should Hughes and other historians contest Washington's actions?<sup>36</sup>

Hughes was a biographer of Washington and was extremely critical of those wishing to mythologize Washington. Hughes and others criticized the stamp because they recognized that the government held immense power by endorsing images that stamp consumers might assume to convey historical fact. Interestingly, while Hughes was concerned about representations of the general and president, others were thankful that remembrances of the Revolution were not solely militaristic. Other anniversary stamps, such as Lexington-Concord (1925), the Battle of White Plains (1926), or the Burgoyne Campaign (1927) depicted battle scenes and images of soldiers, cannon, rifles, and powder horns. Postal officials approved of Washington kneeling as a way to please those seeking representations of the "spiritual" side of war.<sup>37</sup>

The stamp engraving is a voyeuristic view of Washington kneeling in prayer in the woods surrounding the Valley Forge encampment as if from the perspective of Issac Potts, who was shown hiding behind a large tree. According to Weems's tale, Potts was delighted when he came upon Washington praying in the woods. Potts decided at that moment that he could support the Revolution because Washington

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<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Ganser, "A Valley Forge Postage Stamp," *New York Times*, January 20, 1928; "To Issue Valley Forge Stamp of Washington at Prayer," *New York Times*, May 4, 1928; Harry Carr, "The Lancer," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1928; and "Valley Forge Stamp," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1928.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes writes about the struggles he encountered as Washington's biographer to discover Washington's human and more complex self that often conflicted with myths of his infallibility. Rupert Hughes, "Pitfalls of the Biographer," *The Pacific Historical Review* 2, no. 1 (March 1933): 1-33; and "Stamp News: About Our Commemoratives," *The Youth's Companion* 102, no. 8 (August 1928): 418.

demonstrated that one could be a Christian and a soldier without moral conflict.<sup>38</sup>

This image provided a comforting message for some, particularly for those still reeling from the brutal effects from war. Washington kneeling at Valley Forge also spoke powerfully to those who believed that the United States was not only a Christian nation, but one that benefitted from the Grace of God during hard times.

Four words solidified the notion that the entire nation believed in God: “In God We Trust.” These four words distinguished this stamp from any others printed at the time. This phrase appeared on contemporary U.S. coins, but never on stamps. It would not be until another Red Scare in the 1950s when a stamp, this time a definitive, carried the motto.<sup>39</sup> On the Valley Forge stamp, however, the phrase acts as a label interpreting the scene telling consumers that this is why we trust in God, because Washington trusted in God and the U.S. reaped the blessings of freedom. Any debates over Washington’s religious beliefs or his aversion to prayer were settled in the minds of some Americans because the USPOD printed and circulated this interpretation of Washington’s private life.

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<sup>38</sup> Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, 1-8. In 1955, a stained glass window with Washington kneeling was donated anonymously and installed in the Prayer Room next to the rotunda as a reminder of the religious faith of the nation during the Cold War.

<sup>39</sup> In 1954, a definitive issue of the Statue of Liberty carried the phrase, “In God We Trust” two years before it was adopted as the official motto of the United States. See Steven J. Rod, “8-cent Statue of Liberty,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&tid=2028969>.

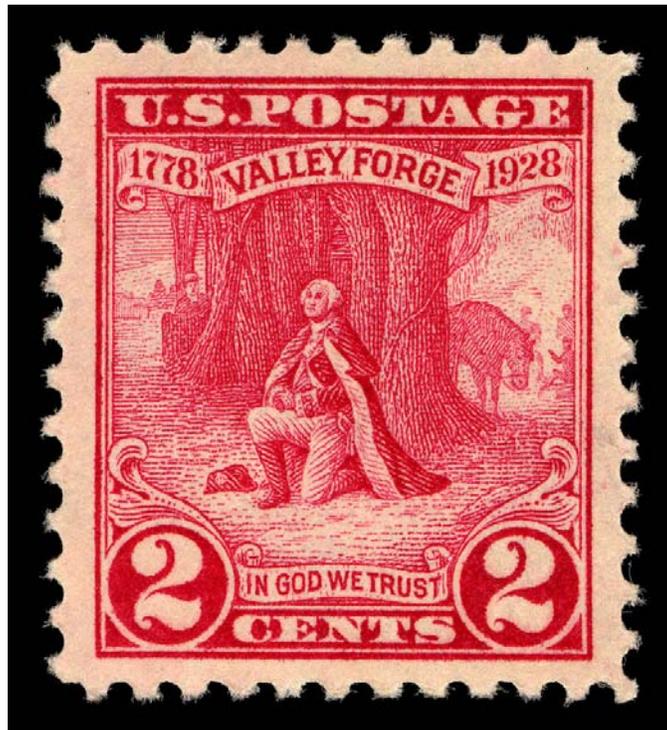


Figure 31: Valley Forge Issue, 2-cent, 1928 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

This stamp held great meaning for some, particularly the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). They included the Valley Forge stamp together with a collection of papers and objects in a copper box buried in the cornerstone of Constitution Hall in November 1928.<sup>40</sup> That this stamp was included in this time capsule further illustrates how powerful, and sometimes transitive, stamp messages could be. The representation of Washington as a pious man held value for the DAR because they believed they were upholding ideals held by descendants of

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<sup>40</sup> “Mrs. Coolidge Lays D.A.R. Stone with Old Washington Trowel,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 25, 1928. Also included in the box was a Bible, a copy of the U.S. Constitution, various DAR founding documents and publications, including their immigrant handbooks, and signed cards by President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge.

Revolutionary War heroes. Washington's actions and values were therefore theirs because their ancestors served under Washington. One could argue that a stamp was chosen to represent these connections to Washington because of its small size making it fit neatly inside a capsule. If true, the DAR easily could have purchased a definitive 2-cent stamp used every day by millions of Americans to send first-class letters with Washington's portrait that had been a mainstay of U.S. definitives since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Instead, they chose the Weems-inspired image of Washington in prayer.



Figure 32: Washington, 2-cent, definitive (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

<sup>41</sup> Rod Juell, "2-cent Washington," in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033917>.

We can see from the Revolutionary War Sesquicentennial commemoratives that the UPSOD glorified individuals and selective battles to instruct Americans and immigrants as to what and who was important to remember from the War for Independence. Other stamps reflected similar patterns in design and message, including the Battle of White Plains (1926), Vermont Sesquicentennial (1927), and the Burgoyne Campaign (1927).<sup>42</sup> Common white common men were the heroes, and leaders were not elites but rather strong men who walked among their soldiers, and sometimes prayed. Seeing these stamps representing Revolutionary War men motivated other heritage and hereditary-based groups to pursue commemoratives for their heroes.

### **Heroes from Poland**

Polish Americans and immigrants fought for the U.S. government to honor two Polish Revolutionary War heroes on stamps as part of a larger strategy to portray Polish Americans as good Americans with ancestral ties to the birth of the United States as a nation. Efforts began in the early twentieth century to recognize the contributions of Count Casimir Pulaski and General Thaddeus Kosciuszko with statues and postage memorials. In 1910, monuments honoring both men were

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<sup>42</sup> Gordon T. Trotter, "Battle of White Plains Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2032942>; Gordon T. Trotter, "Vermont Sesquicentennial Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2032943>; and Gordon T. Trotter, "Burgoyne Campaign Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&img=&mode=1&pg=1&tid=2032944>.

dedicated in Washington; Pulaski's financed by Congress and Kosciuszko's donated to "the people" by the Polish American Alliance.<sup>43</sup> Pulaski was a Polish nobleman who volunteered to fight for the colonies and has been called the Father of the American Calvary. He fought and died at the Battle of Savannah in 1779 and the city honored him as a local hero. To further extend Pulaski's reputation as a national hero, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution spearheaded a stamp campaign in 1929. They co-sponsored an anniversary commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of Count Pulaski at the battle of Savannah, Georgia. Supporting the DAR's efforts to secure a stamp was Georgia Congressman Charles Edwards, who petitioned the Postmaster General to support a Pulaski commemorative and commented that "the Daughters of the American Revolution would not sponsor anything that is not real meritorious and entirely worthy." According to Edwards, the DAR properly vetted the stamps' subject matter and passed their patriotic test and possibly upheld Pulaski as an early model Polish immigrant. Honoring Pulaski as a war hero was not in question when President Herbert Hoover declared October 11, 1929 as "Pulaski Day," yet no

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<sup>43</sup> "Monuments of Two Polish Heroes to be Unveiled in Washington May 12," *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 11, 1910; and "Nation to Honor Polish Patriots," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 9, 1910. For stamps that were eventually approved, such as those honoring Thaddeus Kosciuszko (# 734), see rejection letters for why petitions were denied for specific years in the stamp's design file, NPM.

stamp came.<sup>44</sup> Hoover and Congress acknowledged Pulaski as a national hero, but earning a commemorative stamp proved more difficult.

Surprisingly, strong rebukes came from a Polish newspaper the following year that may have influenced the government's decision to print a Pulaski commemorative. The paper accused U.S. postal authorities of using a "double standard" when choosing whom to honor on stamps with the headline, "Polish Proposition Refused—Germans Favored." According to this paper's editor, the USPOD honored a German Revolutionary War hero, Baron Frederic Wilhelm von Steuben, on a stamp but refused to reciprocate for a Polish Pulaski.<sup>45</sup> French newspaper editors even decried the choice of a von Steuben stamp. They did not seek a Pulaski stamp, but rather sought recognition for French military officers who fought for independence, such as Lafayette and Rochambeau. Missing from the correspondence file were panicky or angry letters from government officials strongly urging the Postmaster General announce a Pulaski stamp quickly.<sup>46</sup> The world noticed when a government printed new stamps, making choosing and issuing commemorative stamps a challenging cultural and political task for postal officials. A few months later,

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<sup>44</sup> "Savannah Exalts Pulaski's Memory," *New York Times*, October 6, 1929; Telamon Culyer, "Sesqui-Centennial of Georgia's First Clash of Armies," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 6, 1929. "Notable Fete Is Planned to Honor Pulaski," *Washington Post*, October 6, 1929. Bernice E. Smith to Congressman Charles G. Edwards," April 5, 1929; Charles G. Edwards to Honorable Walter F. Brown, April 6, 1929; and American Consul Central to Honorable Secretary of State, September 23, 1930, from Design Files, stamp #690, National Postal Museum.

<sup>45</sup> Bernice E. Smith, "Letter to Congressman Charles G. Edwards," letter, April 5, 1929; Charles G. Edwards, "Letter to Honorable Walter F. Brown," April 6, 1929; American Consul Central, "Letter to Honorable Secretary of State," September 23, 1930. Design Files, stamp #690, National Postal Museum.

<sup>46</sup> Design Files, stamp #690, National Postal Museum.

nearly fifteen months after the Savannah anniversary celebration, a Pulaski issue was announced.

Even non-collecting Americans noticed new stamps and questioned the reasoning behind postal decisions. Present in the files was an angry letter from an American who asked why the USPOD honored Pulaski with a stamp and did not chose an American soldier. She spoke of her fears surrounding immigration held by many fellow citizens. Mrs. M.A. Van Wagner criticized Polish immigrants for coming to the U.S. only to “get employment here and take our American dollars back to Poland” while others remained unemployed (presumably she meant native-borns) in the early years of the Depression. For Van Wagner, the Pulaski stamp signified another way that America had been “forgnised” similar to the “gang(s) of forgners” who were responsible for importing “poison” liquor during Prohibition.<sup>47</sup> Her letter stands alone in the Pulaski file as one of protest, but her emotional reaction to this stamp reflects real sentiments felt by some Americans in the interwar period not only towards eastern European immigrants, but also in the power she felt stamps possessed in representing, or perhaps misrepresenting in this case, an official narrative of the U.S. Stamps may have been small, but their images were powerful.

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<sup>47</sup> M.A. Van Wagner to Postmaster General, January 2, 1931, Design Files, stamp #690, National Postal Museum.

The Johnson-Reed Act in 1924 drastically reduced the number of immigrating Poles, together with Greeks, Italians, and Russians.<sup>48</sup> Many Americans supported such restrictions, so viewing an eastern European, Pulaski, on a stamp may have angered them. How could the government limit immigration of certain groups because they were not considered fit for citizenship, and then a few years later honor one of those groups, via an individual, on a federal stamp? Certainly this was not the first instance of the government recognizing the achievements of Pulaski, but the accessibility of a commemorative stamp meant that more people—across the United States and around the world—saw evidence first-hand of federal recognition of a Polish hero as an American one.

Concurrent to the Pulaski stamp campaign, petitions arrived at the USPOD seeking a stamp to honor another Polish Revolutionary War hero, Thaddeus Kosciuszko. At the time of his death in 1817, Poles and Americans mourned his legacy as a war hero and his commitment to fighting for liberty worldwide. His legacy continued on in the form of monuments and celebrations dedicated in his honor.<sup>49</sup> Among those commemorative efforts was one to immortalize his legacy on a postage stamp that would reach across the U.S. and abroad to his homeland Poland. The Kosciuszko Foundation first petitioned the Postmaster General in 1926, by way of

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<sup>48</sup> During a Kosciuszko Day celebration in New York City, the mayor referred to Poles as a separate “race.” See “5,000 Hear Mayor Praise Kosciuszko,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1933; and Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

<sup>49</sup> Gary B. Nash, *Friends of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, and Agrippa Hull: A Tale of Three Patriots, Two Revolutions, and a Tragic Betrayal of Freedom in the New Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 207-213.

New York Senator Royal S. Copeland to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the general's "coming" to the colonies.<sup>50</sup> After those attempts failed, queries were reshaped and the Foundation asked for a stamp that would instead honor the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his "naturalization as an American citizen." From 1931 to 1933, hundreds of endorsement letters arrived in the office of the Postmaster General supporting this stamp, accumulating a greater volume than supported Pulaski's stamp just a few years earlier. Seven years after the first requests, Postmaster Farley fittingly chose to announce the Kosciuszko issue on Polish Day at the Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago. Farley claimed that he was "happy to convey (his) highest regard for the American citizens of Polish extraction" and declared that Kosciuszko's name would be "forever perpetuated in the hearts of American people."<sup>51</sup>

Citizenship was a key element in pitching the stamp, which then was reflected in the announcements printed in newspapers. Kosciuszko's "admission to American citizenship" and the "privilege of becoming a citizen" were celebrated alongside his military service. Much like Farley, who paid homage to Polish citizens, other reactions to the issue emphasized that the General's legacy on a stamp "honors not only the man himself, but his countrymen who have come by the hundreds of thousands to the

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<sup>50</sup> Senator Royal S. Copeland to Postmaster General Harry S. New, April 29, 1926, Design Files, stamp #734, National Postal Museum.

<sup>51</sup> Copeland to Postmaster General Harry S. New; James Couzens, *S.J. RES 248*, 1931. The design file is filled with letters of support coming from individuals, politicians, businessmen, and fraternal organizations. Information Office, Post Office Department, press release, July 22, 1933.

country he helped to establish as a land of liberty for all men.”<sup>52</sup> Whether Kosciuszko actually became an American citizen was not questioned at the time, but the stamp offered a strong symbolic gesture and honor for all people with Polish heritage as bestowed upon them by the government. They were nation builders, too.

Choosing to honor Kosciuszko’s “naturalization” proves to be a curious claim made by the Foundation. There appears to be no documentary evidence to support the claim that he became an American citizen, even though he was held in high regard and called a friend by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other Revolutionary War-era notable figures. After the War, Kosciuszko haggled with the new Congress, like other soldiers, to be paid back wages for his service in the Continental Army. He earned membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, which was limited to military officers who served during the Revolution. Kosciuszko returned to his native Poland to fight, unsuccessfully, against Russian occupation and oppression. On a trip back to the United States, Kosciuszko hoped to lobby support for Polish independence from American and French governments but found himself politically opposed to John Adams’s anti-France policies. In light of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, Thomas Jefferson urged Kosciuszko to leave the country to avoid imprisonment. If Kosciuszko had been naturalized, he would not have needed to flee the country. According to Congressional records in 1976, Representative John H. Dent tried to rectify that by

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<sup>52</sup> “Stamp to Honor Kosciuszko,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1933; Richard McPCabeen, “The Stamp Collector,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 13, 1933; “The Stamp Album,” *Washington Post*, August 20, 1933; and editorial, “Honoring Kosciuszko,” *Hartford Courant*, July 27, 1933.

submitting a resolution to confer citizenship upon Kosciuszko, perhaps in the spirit of the Bicentennial celebrations.<sup>53</sup> Kosciuszko's actual status was less important than the way that Polish-American cultural groups constructed his historical identity to be an American citizen. These groups believed there was a lot at stake by representing Kosciuszko as a citizen as well as a military hero. Polish immigrants and Polish Americans were conflicted, much like immigrants and citizens of Norwegian descent earlier in the chapter, about how best to balance their cultural and political identities as Poles and as Americans.

Unlike the Norse-American stamps which depicted ships, the Pulaski and Kosciuszko stamps depicted each man, but in very different ways. Pulaski visually is associated with Poland with his portrait flanked by the modern flags of Poland and the United States. Generally, other commemoratives did not print the U.S. flag. Pulaski's portrait appears in the center where he casts his glance to his left, to the side where the Polish flag appears from behind his portrait. In contrast, the Kosciuszko stamp did not feature either flag. Perhaps because the stamp commemorated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

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<sup>53</sup> Kosciuszko returned to Poland, where after years of struggling he became the leader of the resistance against Russian occupation. He published the "Act of Insurrection," similar to the Declaration of Independence, and also freed the serfs in Poland in 1794. After some initial victories, Kosciuszko's resistance was crushed by the Russian forces and he was taken prisoner and held in Russia. A few years later he returned to the United States, always interested in freeing his homeland. An excellent telling of Kosciuszko's travails and travels can be found in Nash, *Friends of Liberty*. Regarding the stamp, I found some correspondence from 1986 in the design file that asked then-curator of the National Postal Museum where they could find documentary evidence of Kosciuszko's naturalization. The curator said there was no documentary evidence and attached a letter written in 1953 to the Director of the Public Library of Newark stating that there was no official "naturalization, but that through his deeds and actions he became an 'American'." See also John H. Dent, *Joint Resolution to Confer U.S. Citizenship Upon Thaddeus Kosciuszko*, 1976.

his “naturalization” as an American citizen, flags were not necessary for indicating his nation of origin; Kosciuszko was American, Pulaski was Polish. On his stamp, Kosciuszko stands in his uniform which is a reproduction of a full-bodied statue of that sits in Lafayette Park across from the White House in Washington. Kosciuszko appears larger than life as he looks down upon the stamp reader from his pedestal. Like many other Revolutionary War officers represented on stamps, he is standing, not on horseback, and with sword drawn, appears ready to lead a battle. Pulaski, who was a royal Count, looks out from his portrait wearing a dress military uniform. Oddly, he is not on horseback although he is credited as founding the American Calvary. No identifying language tells a stamp consumer that Pulaski died at the Battle of Savannah. And unless one read the newspaper announcements discussing the stamp, the average American probably did not understand that the dates printed on the Kosciuszko, 1783-1933, celebrated his fictional naturalization.



Figure 33: General Pulaski, 2-cent, 1931 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)



Figure 34: Kosciuszko, 5-cent, 1933 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

Obtaining these commemoratives were great achievements for the fraternal and Polish heritage organizations that fought for these stamps to demonstrate ethnic pride but also another way to claim their status as racially white. Their members experienced discrimination and understood that Poles and other eastern European immigrants were defined as racially different from old stock immigrants hailing from western Europe, even as cultural and legal definitions of whiteness were changing in the United States. Celebrating Kosciuszko's naturalization suggests that it was important for the Polish National Alliance, Polish Roman Catholic Union, and other organizations to tie their heritage with American citizenship. Since only a "free white person" was eligible for naturalization, Kosciuszko qualified as white. Poles were inching their way out of an in-between status, racially, in the early twentieth century, a position also faced by other immigrants. The difference was that these organizations could flaunt the accomplishments of two Polish military men on federal stamps who volunteered (and died, in Pulaski's case) for the American cause during Revolutionary War—the origin of the republic.<sup>54</sup> Polish-American groups received help from the USPOD in proving themselves as being fit for American citizenship since their ancestors helped to found the country. The legal and cultural murkiness of racial classification in the early twentieth century made it more imperative for first and second generation immigrants to be able to stake their claim to whiteness, and in the case of Polish immigrants, earning two stamps helped.

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<sup>54</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*.

## **Beyond the Revolution: Equality Heroes**

Polish Americans were not the only groups seeking to assert their rights as citizens on the public medium of a stamp; women and African Americans simultaneously campaigned for commemoratives to make their political achievements visible to collectors and non-collectors alike. Until the late 1930s, U.S. commemorative stamps almost exclusively honored the achievements of white men. According to the corpus of commemoratives, women and all people of color played almost no role in the founding of colonial America or in fighting and winning the Revolutionary War. As a result, racial and gender politics were more blatantly addressed through the stamp battles for Susan B. Anthony and Booker T. Washington. Petitioners were astute observers of USPOD stamp production and understood that the government almost exclusively honored white male contributions in the commemoratives. The stakes were higher for these stamp supporters. As a result, they positioned the achievements of Anthony and Washington in the context of other commemorative issues and hoped that federal approval was a step toward full political equality.

Earning federal commemoration of suffrage activists through a postage stamp was a key piece of the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Committee's agenda. Ethel Adamson, the Committee's Chair, noticed great public honors were bestowed on men "for much smaller achievements" than Anthony's and believed that her suffrage legacy, in comparison, should earn her greater public recognition. Some of the neglect could be repaired by the issue of a stamp honoring Anthony. Groups of women met with

Third Assistant Postmaster General Eilenberger in 1934 and in 1935 to persuade him to accept their petitions for an Anthony or suffrage stamp. He did not support the stamp and claimed that from his discussions with stamp collectors, they showed no interest either. Speaking to philatelists at the American Philatelic Society's annual convention in 1934, he maintained that the USPOD wanted to "revive the memories of historic events" with the commemoratives when he dismissed rumors that his department might print a stamp with actress Mae West's picture.<sup>55</sup> While laughing at the idea of a Mae West stamp, Eilenberger seemed to reassure the overwhelmingly male audience that his idea of what qualified as "historic" most likely did not include a woman.

Before the fight over an Anthony issue, collectors of American stamps most likely held a few images of women in their albums. In the Columbian commemoratives, Queen Isabella of Spain appeared on six stamps and one unidentified native Caribbean woman sat on the 1-cent. A portrait of Pocahontas dressed in English clothing was printed on the 5-cent issue in the Jamestown Exposition series (1907). In 1922, when the USPOD released a new series of definitive stamps, they chose Martha Washington's face to grace the 4-cent issues. Persons and places represented in these

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<sup>55</sup> Ethel McClintock Adamson, "Letter to James Farley, Postmaster General," June 22, 1934; Edith H. Hooker, "Letter to the Post Master General," February 6, 1935; Clinton B. Eilenberger, "Memorandum," June 12, 1934, Design Files; all in Design Files, stamp #784, National Postal Museum Clinton B. Eilenberger, "Speech delivered to American Philatelic Society," *Proceeding of the 49th Annual Convention of the American Philatelic Society held August 27-31, 1934, Atlantic City* 48, no. 1 (October 1934): 4-6. Some Mae West fans are still petitioning the postal service to honor her with a stamp. See Mae West NYC, "Mae West: A Stamp Vamp," blog, *Mae West*, May 11, 2007, <http://maewest.blogspot.com/2007/05/mae-west-stamp-with-mae.html>.

everyday stamps were selected to “stand for America as it might be viewed by a newly arrived immigrant.” According to Third-Assistant Postmaster General Glover, the Department chose Washington over other suggested women, including Anthony and Clara Barton, because she “more nearly typified the women who were closely identified with the ground-work of American national life in its first phases.”<sup>56</sup>

Washington was known as a wife and mother, not as a nurse and organizer or political activist like Barton or Anthony. Selecting Washington as the first woman on an everyday definitive stamp freed the USPOD from any controversy, because who would argue against choosing the country’s original First Lady?

Still fighting for a stamp in 1936, women campaigning for an Anthony were outraged when they heard that the Department planned to print a series of stamps honoring U.S. Army and Navy commanders that included Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Former president Theodore Roosevelt initiated the idea for a stamp series honoring American military heroes during World War I, but it was not until his cousin Franklin pushed for it that the series was approved. Although neither the Department nor Roosevelt announced the proposed list of military men suggested by Secretary of War George H. Dern in February 1936, word leaked that such a series was in the planning stages. Letters began flooding the Department and the White House mainly from Southerners who supported a stamp honoring Robert E. Lee. Other letters, such as one from New York Congresswoman Caroline O’Day, remarked that

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<sup>56</sup> “Nation’s History in New Stamps,” *New York Times*, February 18, 1923.

Republican women of her state would not like seeing a Lee stamp as the first in the series, but, added there would be even greater protest from southerners were there no stamp for Lee.<sup>57</sup>

The Lee-Jackson stamp, to some, signified a necessary demonstration of national unity of the New Deal. By printing their images on U.S. stamps, the Confederate generals were no longer traitors but American war heroes who looked out from postage equally alongside the portraits of George Washington, William Sherman, and Ulysses S. Grant. Protectors of Anthony's legacy were disturbed. "Why should such men, fighting for the principle contrary to our present standard of life and liberty, be given honors in advance of an individual who gave her services freely for the cause of freedom for all of the people—men and women alike?" According to the Chair of the National Women's Party (NWP), the Department was not impressing women voters and beseeched Postmaster General Farley "to be fair with your women constituents and glorify some of our outstanding women with Susan B. Anthony leading them all."<sup>58</sup> These women could not reconcile the contradictions of the federal government that honored men who led a secessionist fight against the Union and fought for oppression and slavery. While the NWP often ignored voices and concerns from African American women, the party leader's rhetoric indicated that they and

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<sup>57</sup>Marszalek, "Philatelic Pugilists," 127-138.

<sup>58</sup>John Marszalek provides excellent detail surrounding the debates of the Army-Navy series in "Philatelic Pugilists," *The Ongoing Civil War New Versions of Old Stories*, ed. Herman Hattaway and Ethan Sepp Rafuse (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 127-138. See Sue Brobst to Honorable James A. Farley, June 1, 1936; and Olive E. Hurlburt to Honorable James Farley, June 9, 1936, Design Files, Stamp #784, National Postal Museum.

Anthony fought for equality for all persons. The timing of the Army-Navy series' release coupled with indecision by Farley further annoyed Anthony's Memorial Committee. They believed Farley kept "giving the women the run-around" by misleading them as to when the USPOD might issue an Anthony stamp: "First, we are too early, now we are too late."<sup>59</sup>

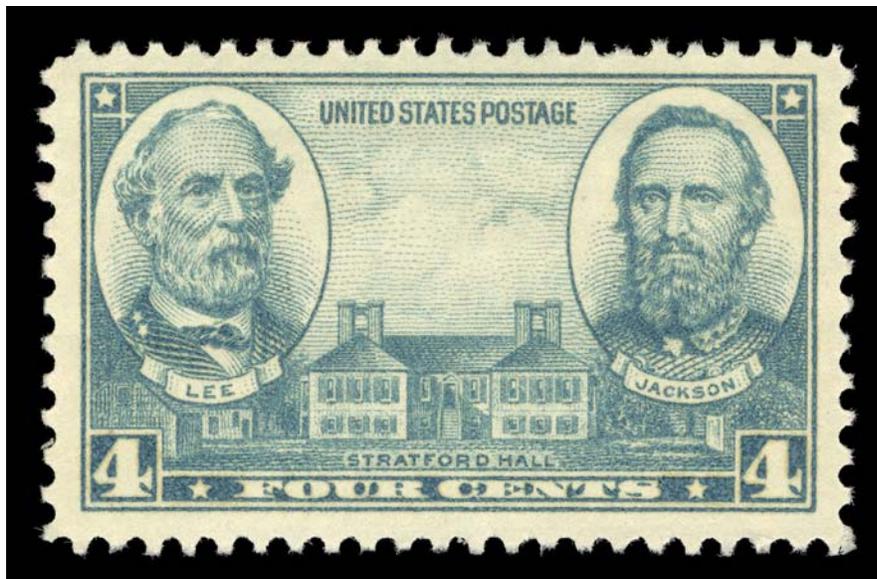


Figure 35: Lee-Jackson, 4-cent, Army-Navy Series, 1936 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

A longer fight over the Army-Navy issues soon ensued. Images of military leaders from the Army and Navy were printed in a ten-stamp series that were released in small sets during 1936 and 1937, giving each service a set containing 1- through 5-cent denominations. Proceeding somewhat chronologically, the 1-cents honored

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<sup>59</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); and Alma Whitaker, "Sugar and Spice," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1936.

Generals Washington and Greene and Captains Barry and Jones and continued through the War of 1812, Civil War, and Spanish-American War. While the series was planned in advance, the release of the Grant-Sherman-Sheridan in February 1937 and the Lee-Jackson in March drew the biggest public responses once the stamps were printed. Southern Congressmen, collectors, and interested citizens decried Sherman as a “common murderer” and defended Lee as a wronged hero who was unintentionally demoted by the Post Office because in the stamp’s engraving, his uniform’s shoulder boards carried two stars instead of three. Protests against the Confederate generals became battle cries for the Anthony committee and African American newspapers, calling for a stamp honoring Booker T. Washington because “he has surely done more for American Democracy than Gen. Lee or Stonew(a)ll Jackson.”<sup>60</sup> The USPOD stood squarely amidst a cultural debate over political equality and the legacy of the Civil War as interpreted in the 1930s.

When the Post Office Department announced it would print a Susan B. Anthony stamp in August 1936, the decision also drew substantial criticism. Since the stamp commemorated the sixteenth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, some believed honoring an oddly-numbered anniversary should not be eligible for

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon Trotter, “Army and Navy Issue,” in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033175>. Interestingly, the 3-cent denominations pictured Union Civil War Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan and Admirals Porter and Farragut. Confederate Generals Lee and Jackson appeared on the 4-cent Army stamp while its naval counterpart featured Admirals Dewey, Sampson, and Schley, who commanded fleets during Spanish-American War battles. The 5-cents represented the service academies at Annapolis and West Point. “Write Mr. Farley and Ask Him About the Stamp Issue,” *The Chicago Defender* (National edition), April 10, 1937. I will deal with the Booker T. Washington stamp later in this chapter.

recognition, unlike a twenty-fifth, fiftieth, or one hundredth. Some collectors questioned Farley's rationale for printing an excessive number of commemoratives throughout this tenure, and specifically questioned his choice of Susan B. Anthony. One *Washington Post* reader warned of an "epidemic" brought on by the Anthony stamp that would open the door to the printing of stamps honoring Booker T. Washington, Esperanto, Babe Ruth, Al Capone, and sinking down the scale to Eleanor Holm Jarrett.<sup>61</sup> Wood expressed his displeasure that the Post Office went far beyond honoring white, native-born men in a traditional patriarchal sense of history. His sense of who and what deserved stamps did not include women, African Americans, Eastern and Southern Europeans, never mind athletes and gangsters. Wood marginalized the accomplishments of Anthony and Washington in particular. John Pollock, then Chair of the Democratic Party, wrote to Farley indicating that some of his members might even leave the party in protest over the Anthony stamp. He warned Farley that if he did not suppress the Anthony stamp, Pollock guaranteed "it will be prove a political

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<sup>61</sup> "Women Honor Susan Anthony At District Fete," *Washington Post*, August 27, 1936; Millicent Taylor, "For Our 'Furtherance'," *Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 1936; "Women Join to Hail Susan B. Anthony," *New York Times*, August 27, 1936; "Is Anthony Stamp a Commemorative? Philatelists Call NRA Sticker 'Orphan'," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 15, 1936; C.N. Wood, "Farley Stamps," *Washington Post*, August 9, 1936. In addition to Booker T. Washington, this string of unacceptable candidates for stamps included Ruth, a Catholic baseball player; Capone, an Italian gangster, and Eleanor Holm Jarrett, an Olympic swimmer who was kicked off the team before the 1936 Berlin games for excessive drinking—the worst offender according to Wood. Jarrett was married to a band leader and danced on stage with the band, occasionally in her bathing suit. Later she appeared in a few films in the late 1930s.

boomerang.”<sup>62</sup> Despite these warnings, the stamp did not damage Roosevelt’s chances of winning re-election, and Farley kept his job as Postmaster General.

This debate among citizen groups further illustrates that citizens believed stamps held real meanings because of their power to reach millions of people and to carry a government endorsement of a particular narrative represented on that stamp. Women and African Americans understood that they needed representation of their stories on stamps as they pushed for political equality. Who and what was not pictured on a stamp was as important to recognize as what was represented. The USPOD positioned themselves as creators of historically-accurate snippets commemorating the American past but laid a foundation that privileged elite white men. Slowly, petitioners worked to break that foundation. From their sense of urgency, we see that petitioners wanted their interpretations relayed on a stamp because they understood that the USPOD held power to spread historical information to the masses. As a handful of commemorative subjects slowly interjected stories outside of that privileged perspective, some rejected the stamps as unhistorical. Collectors and citizens understood that the USPOD played a pivotal role in negotiating meaning of contemporary cultural and political debates.

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<sup>62</sup> John Pollock to James A. Farley, Postmaster General, July 21, 1936, Design Files, stamp #784, National Postal Museum. A W. Bloss, “The Stamp Album,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1940.

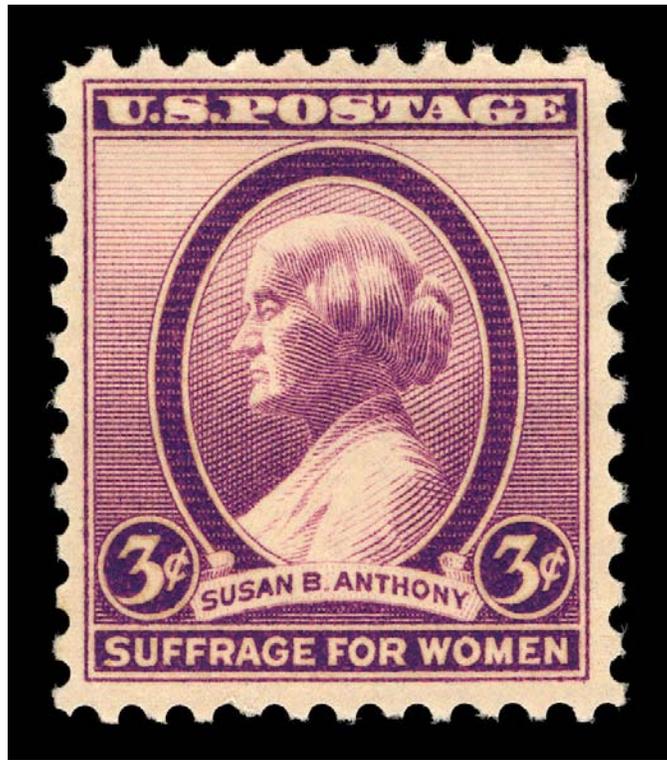


Figure 36: Susan B. Anthony, 3-cent, 1936 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

The suffrage anniversary stamp's image drew from a bust sculpted by Adelaide Johnson that may have functioned to depict her as a classically-inspired figure. Johnson described her sculpture as "expressing the entire life of Miss Anthony" by emphasizing her strength and spirituality. The stamp engraving depicts Anthony's left profile with her hair wrapped into a bun in the center of the stamp. A wide oval frame encases her portrait making the vignette look like a cameo. Wearing cameo brooches became popular in the Victorian age, recalling the classical Greek art form of carving figures in stone relief. Many female cameo figures created for brooches were dressed in flowing

robes with their curly hair pulled back from their faces.<sup>63</sup> Anthony's clothing was not necessarily flowing and her hair was not curly, yet her image alludes to the form of a cameo that presents an idealized female figure inside representing virtue. Perhaps in this image she represents democracy. Anthony's Memorial Committee, and possibly the NWP, idealized Anthony for her contributions to the fight toward female suffrage and equality. It is possible that they wanted others to view Anthony not as an annoying agitator, but rather as non-threatening, admirable citizen. The stamp's purple ink aided in the stamp appearing like a cameo brooch, even though all 3-cent stamps were tinted purple. For example, in the Army-Navy series Admirals David Farragut and David Porter appeared on a purple 3-cent stamp. In contrast, however, the stamps of military heroes represented their bodies mostly looking outward from the stamps. Unlike other 3-cent single issues from the 1930s, the Anthony was cut to a size more similar to a definitive stamp. Other single-issue commemoratives, such as the Texas Centennial (March 1936), Rhode Island Tercentennial (May 1936), Ordinance of 1787 Sesquicentennial (July 1937), and the Constitution's Sesquicentennial (September 1937) were rectangular in shape and distinctive as a commemorative. While a

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<sup>63</sup> Monica Lynn Clements and Patricia Rosser Clements, *Cameos: Classical to Costume* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1998); and James David Draper, *Cameo Appearances* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

commemorative, the Anthony stamp actually appeared in size to be that of a definitive.<sup>64</sup> This was as close to a regular issue stamp as possible.

In stark contrast to its critics, the NWP saw this stamp as a victory for their greater cause. Using it as a rallying cry, the NWP asked their members and all women to “finish the job” in the fight for the passage of an equal rights amendment.<sup>65</sup> It is possible that they hoped this stamp would act as a bridge to reach those who supported women’s suffrage but then opposed the NWP and the equal rights amendment. Clearly, the NWP and other supporters of the Anthony stamp believed that the stamp was an accomplishment itself. Securing a federal stamp that looked back to Anthony was important to those looking ahead for full political equality. Working for this stamp mirrored many other political battles these women and African Americans, in particular, continued to wage in early twentieth century.

Anthony was not the first woman engraved on a stamp, but perhaps it could be said that she was the first politically-active woman chosen. Another would not be chosen until the 1940 Famous American series when Jane Addams and Frances Willard were honored with stamps together with thirty-five Americans honored for their

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<sup>64</sup> A series of definitives that would be printed in 1938 featured profiles of presidents whose images were almost all drawn from busts. “Stamp May Bear Anthony Bust By Artist Here,” *Washington Post*, July 15, 1936; Gordon T. Trotter, “Susan B. Anthony Issue,” in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC National Postal Museum, 2007), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033174>; Encyclopedia of United States Stamps and Stamp Collecting, “Presidential Series (1938),” in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2033221>.

<sup>65</sup> “Women Honor Susan Anthony At District Fete”; Millicent Taylor, “For Our ‘Furtherance’; “Women Join to Hail Susan B. Anthony;” and Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*.

achievements in the fields of literature, music, education, and technology.<sup>66</sup> Among those honored in this series was Booker T. Washington, the first African American pictured on a U.S. stamp. The USPOD understood that issuing commemorative stamps carried great joy for petitioners but that not all Americans, non-collectors and collectors, approved of the USPOD's choices. This may be why the USPOD slipped Washington into a larger series of stamps comprising men and women famous for diverse accomplishments to avoid backlash and make Washington more acceptable to white Americans.

During the struggle over the Anthony stamp, the *Chicago Defender* asked, "How About Us?" Acknowledging that women rightly ought to be represented on stamps, the paper pressed, "there should be some stamps bearing black faces." As the USPOD expanded its commemorative program in the 1920s, the *Defender* and many individuals began calling for stamps to celebrate the heroism and achievements of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, or Crispus Attucks. Bostonians hailed Attucks as a martyr who was remembered as the first casualty of the Revolution, so why wouldn't he qualify as an American hero equal in valor to Nathan Hale, whose

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<sup>66</sup> Alexander T. Haimann, "Famous Americans Issue," in *Arago: People. Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://www.arago.si.edu/index.asp?con=1&cmd=1&mode=1&tid=2028610>.

likeness appeared on a stamp in 1925?<sup>67</sup> Many African Americans were frustrated that the postal service continued to ignore the achievements of people of color.

The most ardent supporter of a Washington stamp was Major Robert Wright, an accomplished former slave who fought in the Spanish-American War and founded the Citizens and Southern Bank and Trust Company in Philadelphia. With a seemingly sympathetic administration in office, Wright began petitioning President Roosevelt and Postmaster General Farley in 1933 and wrote scores of letters through 1939. By the mid-1930s, as the number of commemoratives grew at a rapid rate, African American newspapers again called on the government to choose Washington, Attucks, or Douglass for a stamp. The *Defender* asked fellow “Race citizens” across the country to write personal letters to Farley requesting a Washington stamp. Momentum also was building for a Frederick Douglass stamp, pushed by another commemorative committee that also waited and waited for the Department to choose their African American hero. The secretary of the Dunbar High School’s stamp club in Washington, DC also wrote President Roosevelt asking for a stamp honoring “members of the Negro race” because “we are loyal citizens and always answer when

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<sup>67</sup> “By Way of Suggestion,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition), May 9, 1925; “How About Us?,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition), June 7, 1930; and Rod Juell, “1/2-cent Hale,” in *Arago: People, Postage and the Post* (Washington, DC: National Postal Museum, 2006), available online at <http://arago.si.edu/flash/?s1=5|sq=nathan%20hale|sf=0>. For other petitions, see Design Files, stamps # 873 and #902, National Postal Museum.

our country calls, regardless of the discriminations we are forced to suffer.”<sup>68</sup>

Constantly reminded of their status as second-class citizens, some African Americans fought for a stamp as a step towards achieving full political equality. Achievements made by African Americans would gain legitimacy possible when an image of one of their own appeared on an American stamp.

After seven years of petitioning, the USPOD announced in July 1939 that Washington’s image would appear as part of the series honoring thirty-five “Famous Americans.” Though not honored separately like Anthony, the Washington’s stamp was lauded as a “victory” by African American leaders because it finally broke the color barrier imposed on postage designs. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Washington was the most widely recognized African American, so it comes as no surprise that he was the first black person to earn a stamp. Washington’s persona as an accommodationist came forward in his speeches and memoirs, which would be highlighted in the press coverage of the stamp’s release. Washington’s philosophy paved a way for achieving economic equality first through mastery of trades and skills before agitating for full political and social rights, making him more acceptable for white Americans who believed in racial segregation and genetic inferiority of African Americans. His approach, thought to be very practical, was

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<sup>68</sup> N.S. Noble, “The Constitution’s Stamp Corner,” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 10, 1935; “Write Mr. Farley and Ask Him about the Stamp Issue”; Arthur Whaley, “What About a Stamp?,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition), December 25, 1937; and Herbert A. Trenchard, “The Booker T. Washington Famous American Stamp (Scott No. 873): The Events and Ceremonies Surrounding Its Issue,” *Ceremonial*, no. 4: 8-11. Wright’s efforts to publically celebrate African American freedom did not end with this stamp but included conceptualizing National Freedom Day. Ethel Valentine to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 25, 1938, Design File, stamp #902, National Postal Museum.

acceptable to many southern African Americans. Conveniently, Washington's philosophy was also acceptable by the federal government who would soon ask African Americans to fight another world war for a country that did not allow them full rights as citizens.<sup>69</sup>

Three months after this announcement, a celebration of this stamp was woven into the Diamond Jubilee of the Emancipation Proclamation event in Philadelphia. Postal officials attended this "grand" celebration, and Major Wright and Mary McLeod Bethune were on hand to distribute busts of Washington to white and black children who represented over five hundred public schools in the Philadelphia area.<sup>70</sup> These busts would be physical reminders of Booker T. Washington's self-declared legacy as one who raised himself "up from slavery" and would not agitate for social equality. Celebrating these two events together with a mixed race audience gestured to Washington's autobiography where he recalled that newly-freed slaves felt no bitterness towards their white masters upon hearing the Proclamation read. Whites and blacks came together in another symbolic gesture during the ceremony as four girls—two black, two white—marched on stage in military costumes, carrying an American flag that they then draped across the shoulders of Major White "in token of

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<sup>69</sup> Louis Harlan, "Booker T. Washington and the Politics of Accommodation," in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 1-18.

<sup>70</sup> Kent B. Stiles, "Releases Honor 35," *New York Times*, July 23, 1939; "Stamp Victory," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), September 16, 1939; and "7,000 Celebrate Issuance of Booker T. Washington Postage Stamp in Philly," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), October 7, 1939.

his victory in securing” the Washington stamp.<sup>71</sup> The multi-racial audience and participants appeared to “cast down” their buckets in a joint celebration of Washington’s work. His achievement of becoming the first African American represented on U.S. postage could open the door to other black heroes and earn a place in the “official” American narrative as told through commemoratives.



Figure 37: Booker T. Washington 10-cent, Famous American series, 1940 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

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<sup>71</sup> Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery, An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1919), 21; Louis R. Harlan, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 3 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 538-87; and “7,000 Celebrate Issuance of Booker T. Washington Postage Stamp in Philly.”

Washington's stamp looked similar to the other Famous American Educators, with only the specific portrait and ink color distinguishing each issue. Washington's engraving came from a familiar photograph where he looks outward from the stamp. While the Washington was colored brown, it was in keeping with the colors established for other 10-cent stamps in this commemorative series. Washington's 10-cent issue was the highest priced stamp in the group of five educators honored in the series, and Major Wright and others worried that the price might ward off African Americans from purchasing the stamp. Despite his concerns over the higher price, the Washington was one of the most widely-sold (twenty-three million dollars worth) stamp in the Famous Americans series.<sup>72</sup>

The Washington stamp was first released and sold at the Tuskegee Institute's Founder's Day celebration on April 7, 1940, attracting federal officials in addition to the Tuskegee community. At the celebration, Postmaster General Farley was on hand to sell the first Washington stamp in coordination with the Tuskegee Philatelic Club and to speak at the ceremony. In his speech, Farley hailed Washington's legacy as a "pioneer educator" and spokesman of his race. The *Defender* devoted tremendous amounts of copy to the events at Tuskegee by publishing photographs and large portions of the speeches. According to Farley, "Negro progress" could be traced directly to Washington's "humanitarian work, noble ideals, and practical teachings"

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<sup>72</sup> "Farley At Tuskegee Same Day 'Booker T.' Stamp Goes On Sale," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), January 6, 1940; "Stamps in Educators Group of Famous American Series," *New York Times*, February 8, 1940; and Trenchard, "The Booker T. Washington Famous American Stamp (Scott No. 873): The Events and Ceremonies Surrounding Its Issue."

that he put into place at Tuskegee. Importantly, according to Farley, Washington taught that “merit, no matter under what skin was in the long run recognized and rewarded.” His other greatest achievement was in “his interpretation of his people to the white men,” or as what some of his fellow “Race citizens” saw as his accommodationist approach to the fight for political equality. To compliment Washington’s dedication to training young people of the south, Farley, drew a parallel between Washington’s “refusal to accept personal gain with that of Robert E. Lee.” Farley furthered the comparison by weaving into his speech a statement by Lee about his strong obligation to train young men of the south after the Civil War. According to Farley not “one word of that declaration need be changed were the speaker Booker T. Washington.” Not surprisingly, the *Defender* reports omitted this portion of the speech.<sup>73</sup>

Farley cleverly connected Washington’s work with that of Robert E. Lee during this first day ceremony for an audience of Americans not attending the Tuskegee events. One can imagine that a few gasps were heard in the audience upon Farley drawing such a comparison. Perhaps anticipating angry letters from white southern citizens, Farley explained that Washington was another southern leader who devoted himself to bettering the lives of young people. To make the Washington stamp acceptable to white southerners, the hero of the “Lost Cause,” Lee (also recently

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<sup>73</sup> “3,500 Hear Postmaster Farley At Tuskegee,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition), April 13, 1940; “Farley Praises ‘Mr. B. T.’ As ‘Negoro Moses’,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 8, 1940; “Farley Opens ‘Booker T.’ Stamp at Tuskegee,” *Chicago Defender* (National edition), April 13, 1940; “He Couldn’t Hate,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 19, 1940.

honored on postage) was called upon to make Washington's achievements also appear equally heroic.

Washington stood equally distinguished alongside fellow Famous Americans, however, the stamp commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Thirteenth Amendment issued the same year looked backwards. News of this stamp came as a surprise to many as the USPOD announced the printing only one week before it was available for sale during the last week of the New York World's Fair in October 1940. Generally, the Department announced commemorative stamps at least a few months before their printing to allow for first day ceremonies to be planned and to build anticipation from collectors and the petitioning communities or commissions.<sup>74</sup> While debuting at the larger New York Fair, the USPOD missed an opportunity sell and promote it at the American Negro Exposition in Chicago, celebrating seventy-five years of freedom. Black achievements were celebrated while federal agencies and private corporations demonstrated concern for African American welfare through agricultural, housing, and employment exhibits. The USPOD was one of the agencies that staged a small exhibit to sell the Washington stamps—and easily could have sold the Thirteenth Amendment issue.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> W. Bloss, "The Stamp Album"; "13th Amendment Stamp to be Issued," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), October 12, 1940; "President Praises Negroes at Fair," *New York Times*, October 21, 1940; and "Emancipation Stamps Are Result Of A Long Fight," *Chicago Defender* (National edition), October 26, 1940.

<sup>75</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 157-192.

Labeled as a “New Deal masterpiece,” the stamp was released just prior to the presidential election of 1940. While all commemoratives seemed to represent someone’s agenda, this one in particular appeared to be politically motivated. Major Wright, however, was not surprised but delighted because he had been working simultaneously to see an African American face and a commemoration of emancipation in postage. Wright wanted a 3-cent stamp specifically, because it could be used to mail a first-class letter, which happened to be the same denomination as the Anthony and other single commemoratives issued during the Farley administration. While various ceremonies celebrated this diamond jubilee of the Emancipation Proclamation, the true anniversary was of the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.<sup>76</sup> Wright’s vision for celebrating emancipation as an uplifting and powerful moment in American history was not realized in the imagery chosen for this anniversary.

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<sup>76</sup> W. Bloss, “The Stamp Album,” “13th Amendment Stamp to be Issued;” “President Praises Negroes at Fair;”; “Emancipation Stamps Are Result Of A Long Fight.”



Figure38: Thirteenth Amendment, 3-cent, 1940 (Photo, National Postal Museum Collection)

During the stamps' first day release ceremony, President Roosevelt used the stamp as a vehicle to praise African Americans' achievements after slavery even when the image chosen to represent emancipation was actually one of subservience. The stamp featured an engraving of the Freedmen's Memorial depicting Lincoln standing over a kneeling slave, bowing at Lincoln's feet, struggling to break the chains of bondage. Although financed partially by freed slaves, a white commission controlled the sculpture's construction and chose a design representing emancipation as a generous act of moral leadership by Lincoln and enfranchised whites. Supposedly honoring freedom from bondage, the sculpture as composed by artist Thomas Ball did

not represent a newly-freed slave figure on equal ground with Lincoln. The slave figure was still breaking away from slavery with no symbols of hope designed into the memorial to indicate that freedmen could ascend to a position of equality promised by emancipation. Given to the city of Washington in 1876 by the “colored citizens of the United States,” the memorial reasserted racial hierarchy in which descendants of slaves would always be inferior to white men.<sup>77</sup> In choosing this image to commemorate emancipation with the Freedmen’s Memorial, the USPOD celebrated Lincoln and not freedom and equality, but instead a racial order in which descendants of slaves could never realize full equality in the U.S.

Choosing to commemorate the Thirteenth—and not the Fourteenth Amendment, that gave all adult males full rights of citizenship—focused attention on the abolition of slavery and not on citizenship equality. Similar to the choice of Washington, the USPOD chose Lincoln to represent black freedom by printing a non-threatening stamp that also did not challenge the authority of state laws that legalized segregation.<sup>78</sup> Complicating the matter was FDR’s speech read at the Fair. In addition to lauding achievements of African Americans who had “enriched and enlarged and ennobled American life,” his language emphasized the need for American unity as he gestured toward the war in Europe. Liberty was “under brutal attack” and peaceful

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<sup>77</sup> Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. Additionally, the first day issue of the emancipation stamp occurred during the World’s Fair in New York in October 1940, a fair rife with racial tensions and protests over lack of African American representation in the fair’s planning, management, and exhibits at the Fair’s opening in 1939. Rydell, *World of Fairs*, 157-90.

<sup>78</sup> Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 89-128.

lives were challenged by “brute force” that would “return the human family to that state of slavery from which emancipation came through the Thirteenth Amendment.” Through this celebration, he called Americans to “unite in a solemn determination to defend and maintain and transmit to those who shall follow us the rich heritage of freedom which is ours today.”<sup>79</sup> FDR rhetorically ignored the fact that the entire “human family” was not enslaved until 1865, but it was very specifically reserved for those of African descent. For FDR, the emancipation stamp was not a celebration of freedom for African Americans, much like the statue representing emancipation, but rather a call for unity under the false pretense that all Americans were created equal.

Prior to these stamps, the absence of African Americans symbolized their lack of political power, and their publication signified a slow shift in nationalized political and cultural agitation. This shift, of course, was not without many contradictions in implementation. During FDR’s administration, African Americans did not benefit equally from New Deal-funded programs as whites because of the ways federal programs were constructed and then implemented at a local level. At the same time, civil rights groups began publicizing their agendas more loudly and making their fight more visible to federal officials and the general public. They laid groundwork for legislation and executive orders to come that slowly removed federal segregation,

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<sup>79</sup> “President Praises Negroes at Fair.”

including the executive order banning racial discrimination in the defense industry in June 1941.<sup>80</sup> And yet FDR did not desegregate the military.

Both stamps printed in 1940 illustrated the contradictions in which the U.S. government treated African Americans. As the individual achievement of Booker T. Washington—as an educator and not as a political figure—was revered in April, African Americans as a race were reminded in October that their freedom and equality still depended on whites. The Washington issue directly honored the achievements of one man and gestured toward millions of people defined and segregated by their race, yet the emancipation stamp reinforced racial hierarchies that prevented former slaves from achieving equality. The Thirteenth Amendment stamp, coupled with Washington's, sent a message that the federal government approved of individual but not racial group achievement. Even so, FDR deftly combined Washington's and Lincoln's images as symbols of American progress to pave the way toward asking African Americans to work hard for a greater cause, and he alluded that their skills, labor, and duty would be rewarded with full equality under the law.

The USPOD sold a vision of the American past through its commemorative stamp program and also participated in the political and cultural debates of the 1920s

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<sup>80</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and *Executive Order 8802*, available online at <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/index.html?template=print&dod-date=625>.

and 1930s. Citizens and philatelists debated over whose interpretation of the American past deserved recognition on a commemorative stamp. As a result, the USPOD became a major negotiator in the culture wars of the early twentieth century. Visual messages of commemoratives promoting the U.S. World's Fairs prior to World War I looked to the past to justify American imperialism and formations of empire. After the fall of empires following the War, U.S. commemorations and stamps focused on American exceptionalism remembering the humble beginnings of pilgrims seeking religious freedom, and honoring the story of how untrained men and a pious military leader defeated the British Empire. Generally, all stamps valued the contributions and stories of white males. Commemoratives in particular were designed to evoke feelings of patriotism by emphasizing a progressive interpretation of the American past that avoided complicated and unpleasant narratives of conquest, slavery, and oppression.

This period also demonstrates that the Post Office had become both a powerful producer of interpretations of American history and a shaper of public memory because stamp images helped to popularize and naturalize select stories. Citizens and politicians understood this power and sought federal approval of their interpretation of the past so that those events and people might become integrated into an official national narrative as told through its stamps. For those fighting for full recognition of their citizenship rights, such as Poles, women, and African Americans, the legitimacy afforded by the presence of their heroes on a stamp was a small victory in a much larger struggle. By 1940, the subjects of commemorative stamps diversified slightly as

the Department opened the door to honoring the achievements of Americans outside of the traditional political and military leader mold set earlier in the century. While far from relinquishing its decision-making power, the USPOD did allow for and accept citizen suggestions of commemorative stamps and stamp designs. More than mere postage, stamps sat at an intersection of vernacular and official interests, making them important cultural artifacts that could carry grand political messages and simultaneously be meaningful on a personal level for individuals or small communities.

The selection process for commemoratives became more democratic in 1957 when the USPOD established the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC), officially recognizing that citizens played an important role in choosing commemorative stamps. In creating the Committee, the postal service formalized procedures for accepting stamp petitions and established specific criteria for choosing commemoratives. After years of managing petitions and making difficult decisions, postal officials were no longer directly responsible for selecting commemoratives and began to separate themselves from cultural debates that arose from stamp petitions. Some stamps studied in this chapter would not be chosen using today's criteria. For instance, historic anniversaries will only be considered in multiples of fifty years. Limiting anniversaries to increments of fifty years certainly reduces the number of eligible requests, but the Committee has also determined that fifty years must pass before an event becomes historical and worthy of recognition. Were these rules in

place during FDR's administration, many commemoratives would not have been printed, including the Susan B. Anthony stamp, commemorating the sixteenth anniversary of suffrage. Also, the Committee will only consider commemorative subjects with "national significance," specifically restricting local and regional anniversary commemorations to cancelations administered by local postmasters.<sup>81</sup> Civic and cultural committees could no longer expect that their regional interests might be elevated to national status through representation on a stamp, as happened in the 1920s and 1930s. Local history would remain local as the Committee decides what qualifies as nationally-significant and worthy to represent the U.S. on commemoratives in a given year.

By creating an appointed body of stamp enthusiasts who weighed proposals and made recommendations to the Postmaster General, postal officials demonstrated to collectors that the government was interested in direct input from citizens. Officially, stamps were no longer the sole production of the postal service, but a joint venture between the people and the government. Citizens had influenced commemorative choices since the 1920s, but the CSAC formalized this relationship. Citizens and postal officials understood that a commemorative's subject long outlived its limited issuance because of the large community of stamp collectors.

Today, stamps do not serve the same cultural role as they did in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century because the post office's influence on our daily

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<sup>81</sup> Child, *Miniature Messages*, 30-35; and "USPS - Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee," available online at <http://www.usps.com/communications/organization/csac.htm>.

lives has diminished. Through the Cold War period, the USPOD (now the United States Postal Service, USPS) remained central for personal and business-related communications delivering mail, magazines, and packages, while also providing money orders that allowed individuals to pay their bills without needing a checking account. Today, fewer letters are mailed requiring fewer stamps, and more bills are paid online than through paper remittance. Even with this reduction in mail volume, the USPS prints nearly twenty-five commemorative stamps each year.<sup>82</sup> Other than holiday-themed stamps affixed to holiday cards, most Americans no longer see stamp imagery of new commemoratives or even on definitive stamps. Collectors and citizens interested in a specific subject might buy commemorative stamps, but stamps' power to naturalize narratives for the general American public has been greatly reduced by electronic communications, and most mail delivered contains indicia and not colorful stamps. Stamps' accessibility and ubiquity from the nineteenth and early twentieth century cannot be replicated in the early twenty-first century.

Stamps today do not shape public memory in the same ways they have in the past, which is why they are important cultural artifacts to examine. This study demonstrates that stamps and the postal service occupied a more central, yet understudied, role in the creation and circulation of historical narratives about the American past during the early twentieth century. In highlighting this particular

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<sup>82</sup> Joe Burris, "Age in Which Letters are Old-fashioned Takes Toll on Postal Service," *Baltimore Sun*, August 7, 2009, available at <http://www.baltimoresun.com/features/bal-md.pa.lettersaug07,0,5960461.story>; "USPS - Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee;" and James H. Bruns, "Stamps and Coins," *Washington Post*, August 15, 1982.

practice and the often understated role of postal service, I hope other historians will look to collectors and collecting practices to discover how they contributed to discussions of local and national life. As we begin to uncover the stories of hobbyists from the past, we will gain a greater appreciation of the history work performed by them, particularly through the act of collecting and saving objects that now sit in museum collections. Collectors have often been looked upon as quirky individuals obsessed with the minutiae of the things they collect. Curators are beginning to embrace collectors, and other hobbyists, as valuable experts with specialized knowledge who can help interpret the material culture found in artifact rooms. The digital age has also encouraged some professional historians and curators to invite others to share in the processes of saving and interpreting their own history. Other professionals are reluctant to allow amateurs the ability to share in content creation. If historians and museum professionals can see collectors as history workers in their own right, then this type of collaboration ushered in by the web will seem less radical and studies like this dissertation will be less rare.

## Appendix A: American Commemorative Stamps Issued, 1892-1940<sup>1</sup>

1892-93	World's Columbian Exposition (16 stamps)
1898	Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition (9 stamps)
1901	Pan-American Exposition (6 stamps)
1904	Louisiana Purchase Exposition (5 stamps)
1907	Jamestown Exposition (3 stamps)
1908	Lincoln Centenary of Birth
1909	Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition
1910	Hudson-Fulton Celebration
1915	Panama-Pacific Exposition (4 stamps)
1919	Victory Stamp
1920	Pilgrim Tercentenary series (3 stamps)
1923	Harding Memorial (issued following President Harding's death)
1924	Huguenot-Walloon Tercentenary series (3 stamps)
1925	Lexington Concord Sesquicentennial series (3 stamps)
	Norse American Centennial (2 stamps)
1926	Sesquicentennial Exposition (Philadelphia)
	Ericsson Memorial
1926	Battle of White Plains Sesquicentennial

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<sup>1</sup> List created from the online philately collection at the National Postal Museum, *Arago: People. Postage and the Post*, <http://arago.si.edu>.

- 1927 Vermont Sesquicentennial (Green Mountain Boy)  
Burgoyne Campaign Sesquicentennial (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battles of Bennington, Oriskany, Fort Stanwix, and Saratoga)
- 1928 Valley Forge, Sesquicentennial of Washington's Encampment  
International Civil Aeronautics Exhibition series  
Battle of Monmouth, Sesquicentennial (Molly Pitcher Overprint)  
Hawaii Sesquicentennial Overprint
- 1929 George Rogers Clark (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the surrender by the British of Fort Sackville at Vincennes, Indiana)  
Electric Light's Golden Jubilee  
Sullivan Expedition (Major General John Sullivan's expedition against the Iroquois)  
Battle of Fallen Timbers (135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Fallen Timbers, which occurred near the Maumee River, Ohio)  
Ohio River Canalization (1875-1928)
- 1930 Massachusetts Bay Colony (300<sup>th</sup> anniversary)  
Carolina-Charleston (260<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Carolina Province and the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the city of Charleston, South Carolina)  
Braddock's Field (175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Braddock's Field, Pennsylvania, 1755)  
Von Steuben (200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Baron Frederick Wilhelm von Steuben)
- 1931 Pulaski (Anniversary of General Casmir Pulaski's death at the Battle of Savannah, Georgia, 1779)
- 1931 Red Cross (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding of organization)

- Yorktown (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Yorktown)
- 1932** Washington Bicentennial Issue (12 stamps)
- Olympic Winter Games (Lake Placid, New York)
- Arbor Day (60<sup>th</sup> anniversary)
- Olympic Games (Los Angeles, California) (2 stamps)
- 3-cent Washington
- William Penn (250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Penn's 1682 landing)
- Daniel Webster (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth)
- 1933** Peace of 1783 (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Washington's proclamation of peace ending the Revolutionary War)
- Century of Progress World's Fair (2 stamps)
- National Recovery Act
- Byrd Antarctic Expedition
- Kosciuszko (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary Kosciuszko's naturalization as an American citizen)
- 1934** Maryland Tercentenary (anniversary of establishment of the colony of Maryland)
- Mothers of America
- Wisconsin Tercentenary (anniversary of explorer Jean Nicolet's 'discovery' of Wisconsin)
- National Parks Year (10 stamps celebrating national parks)
- 1935** Connecticut Tercentenary (anniversary of charter granted by Charles II)
- California Pacific International Exposition

- Boulder Dam (marked the completion of Boulder, now Hoover, Dam)
- Michigan Centenary (anniversary of statehood)
- Baseball Centennial
- 1936** Texas Centennial (anniversary of Texas Declaration of Independence)
- Rhode Island Tercentenary (anniversary of the first settlement)
- Arkansas Centennial (anniversary of Arkansas statehood)
- Oregon Territory (anniversary of the establishment)
- Susan B. Anthony (16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment)
- 1936-37** Army and Navy Issue (10 stamps honoring military men)
- 1937** Ordinance of 1787 Sesquicentennial
- Virginia Dare (350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Virginia Dare)
- Constitution Sesquicentennial
- Territorial Issues (tributes to territories of Hawaii, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) (4 stamps)
- 1938** Constitution Ratification
- Sweden-Finnish Tercentenary (anniversary of founding of New Sweden, Delaware)
- Northwest Territory Sesquicentennial
- Iowa Territory Centennial
- 1939** Golden Gate International Exposition
- New York World's Fair Issue

Washington Inauguration  
(150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's inauguration)

Panama Canal (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Panama Canal)

Printing Tercentenary anniversary of printing in colonial America

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Statehood (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana,  
and Washington)

1940 Famous Americans (Series of 35 stamps honoring American artists,  
scientists, educators, authors, poets, composers, and inventors.)

80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pony Express

Pan American Union (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Pan-  
American Union)

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Idaho Statehood

Anniversary of Wyoming Statehood

400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Coronado Expedition

National Defense (coincided with the first day of registration for  
America's first peacetime draft)

Thirteenth Amendment (75<sup>th</sup> anniversary)

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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