

From the Stamp Specialist: **Designs for U.S. Stamps**

Paul F. Berdanier

*Opinions by 12 of the Country's Leading Design Authorities
(From The Stamp Specialist Orange Book, published in 1941)*



The stamps of the United States should rank in beauty with the best in the world. In the unanimous opinion of all the artists I have talked with, our postage design leaves much to be desired. True, a number of our stamps have been excellent, such as the White Plains Commemorative, the Massachusetts Bay Colony Commemorative, etc., etc. Our present regular series of postage stamps are good, but on the whole the standard of design is rather poor.

The artists of the United States have created a standard of design in industry which is the equal, if not the superior of any other country. These men are available to the Government. Why shouldn't the Post Office Department, therefore, utilize this talent in the creation of its postal design?

Many people do not differentiate between designing and engraving. The \$1.00 Trans-Mississippi Commemorative "Cattle in the Storm" is a good example of this confusion. This stamp has many times been voted the most beautiful U.S. stamp ever issued. The illustration used for the vignette was a very interesting subject to start with, and the translation of this illustration was superbly executed. The stamp as a whole was not well designed. The illustration plus the craftsmanship by which it was translated made it an outstanding stamp.

Many other stamps have been just as superbly engraved but have not inspired the same feeling in the public as the \$1.00 Trans-Mississippi because the subject matter and the design were uninspiring. A good design in these instances could have saved the uninteresting subject matter.

Engraving is the art of arranging lines: cut in steel, in such a manner that the effect of tone and form is achieved—an art that is being carried on in an excellent tradition by the engravers of the Bureau. Our stamps are admittedly well engraved. But designing is the art of arranging the “voids and masses”—of finding out the right positions of things and establishing the right intervals of emptiness between them. When this simple rightness of form is determined it gives you pleasure and you call it beauty. It is this kind of “beauty” that our stamps lack.

Now how can the government complement its engraving ability with a design ability? Well, there are several methods:

1) Open Competition. This method was tried when a design for the Presidential series was being sought. But the designers who should have turned up helpful schemes didn't submit a thing because they did not choose to work on speculation. Their time was fully occupied with the execution of definite commissions. Therefore this is not a good method.

2) Closed Competition. The Bureau itself could invite two or more designers to submit sketches for a stamp which the government intended to issue. The designer whose sketch was accepted would make the finished drawings for the stamp and would work closely with the engravers in reproducing the design.

3) Federal Art Director. A competent, experienced and well informed Federal Art Director (F.A.D.) who knows the capabilities and shortcomings of all the designers in the country, all the mechanical and production requirements of the Bureau, and the basic idea for the stamp to be designed, could commission the designer who was, in his judgement, best qualified to do the work in hand. The F.A.D. would require the confidence of those in the government who are responsible for stamps, and would, in addition, need the confidence of the artists and designers with whom he worked. The F.A.D. would be a liaison officer between the administrative and creative groups, and would have to have qualifications of both groups himself.

His would be an accepted function in the manufacture of many products of which art is a part.

4) Advisory Board. This board would be composed of a designer, an illustrator, a photographer, a painter, an official of the post office department, the Director of the Bureau, and an engraver of the Bureau. The Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General would be an excellent choice as the official of the post office department. Stamp problems would be turned over to the board for its suggestions. The board would pass on the idea for the stamp—and if necessary, would commission a designer to make the plan.

And I am sure that there are still other methods of procedure which I have not thought of. In any event some way should be found to put the talents of the designers to work so that our stamps would be beautiful from the standpoint of idea, design and execution. Our stamps should be expressions of our national genius and character. There should be a gallery of American Art. They should represent the United States and what it stands for to the other nations of the earth.

Some months ago I discussed all this with Harry L. Lindquist. He was very much interested and agreed to get a list from the government for future postage stamps, if I would get a representative group of designers together. Mr. Lindquist wrote to the Post Office about the idea and promptly received their hearty cooperation. In the meantime I wrote to W. A. Dwiggins and got just as prompt a reply.

Then in quick succession came acceptances by Lucian Bernhard, Warren Chappell, Fred G. Cooper, Stanley Crane, Robert Fawcett, Gordon Grant, Clarence P. Hornung, Gustav Jensen, Sam Marsh and Walter Dorwin Teague.

The list of stamps to be worked on was sent to the whole group and each man selected the problem he felt most interested in solving (of course the stamped envelope and air mail series, being the most urgent, were selected by most of the men).

The list contained the following:

I. STAMPED ENVELOPES

- 1 cent—Head of Franklin
- 1 1/2 cent—View of Capitol
- 2 cent—Head of Washington
- 3 cent—Head of Jefferson
- 4 cent—Head of Lincoln
- 5 cent—Statue of Liberty
- 6 cent—Airplane

II. A SET OF AIR MAIL STAMPS Here are the probable values:

6¢, 10¢, 12¢, 15¢, 20¢, 25¢, 30¢, 50¢ and \$1.00

III. STAMPS COMMEMORATING:

The Pharmaceutical Industry in America
The Boy Scouts of America
Francis Scott Key
Edgar Allan Poe
Will Rogers
Anniversary of Indiana
The Indian Tribes of America
(probably more than one stamp)

IV. POSTAGE DUE STAMPS

V. REVENUES, Etc.

On January 4, 1941, on the Third Anniversary of the “Calling All Stamp Collectors” radio program, Mr. Lindquist, chairman of the National Federation of Stamp Clubs, told Postmaster General Frank C. Walker that “you no doubt know, we have already instituted a campaign to secure designs from some of the best artists in America for the contemplated series of new stamped envelopes, as well as a possible new air mail series, and other commemoratives that have been suggested. Our only object is to assist in producing stamps that will compare favorably with the finest in the world”.

Paul Hollister, a well known writer, who numbers among his close friends several of the men who had already been contacted, heard this program. A crusade of this kind struck a responsive chord in him, and shortly we happily found him aligned with us in our venture.

Upon the release of the Vermont Centennial, the Post Office Department sent four representatives to officiate at the ceremonies—Mr. Roy M. North, Deputy Third Assistant Postmaster General; R. E. Fellers, Superintendent of Stamps; W. A. Roach, designer, Bureau of Engraving and Printing and J. C. Bensing, head engraver, Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The following day the four visited with W. A. Dwiggins at Hingham, Mass. and the next day the four met with the rest of us in New York. Harry L. Lindquist was host to the group at the New York Athletic Club. All of the designs that were completed up to that time were shown and discussed. Mr. North expressed the hope that the group would act as an advisory board to the department;—to criticize suggestions from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing;—to submit suggestions of their own;—to more or less be a “college” that would watch the workout of any sketched ideas and to have a chance to comment in rebuttal if things went wrong.

Each one of us has donated his time and service to the crusade with the hope that some plan will be evolved which will improve our postal paper. Each stamp of the stamps, reproduced on the following pages, is its originator’s personal conception of what a postage stamp should look like, Mr. Dwiggins has been unable to finish his designs in time for publication because of an unusual pressure of work, but has shown all of us his roughs. The finished designs will be reproduced at a later date. Clayton Knight, noted art authority on aviation, joined our group just recently and has submitted his suggestion for an Airmail Stamp.

And now let’s look at the designs and judge for ourselves how well they have been done...



PAUL F. BERDANIER—Born 1903 at St. Louis, Mo. His business life began at New York in 1925 after receiving his education in Paris where he studied art. For the past 10 years, he has been engaged in creating advertising layouts and package designs for the J. Walter Thompson Company, international advertising agency. His responsibilities in this endeavor have given him a particularly keen insight into the physical visualization of advertising ideas and he has created and contributed many new original methods for accomplishing this purpose that have proved immensely successful. Mr. Berdanier is well known for his knowledge of philately. His collection is unique in that the specimens it contains are historical documents in themselves—each one an individually significant phenomenon.



Paul F. Bridance



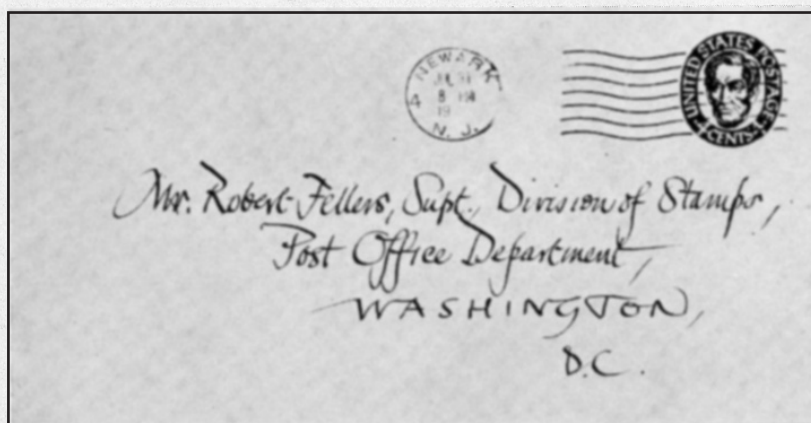
LUCIAN BERNHARD—Born in Zurich, Switzerland, he moved to Germany while still a young boy in the early nineteen hundreds. The winning of a prize for an advertising poster turned him definitely toward an art career and for many years he did everything from designing type, furniture, homes and factories to posters for which he is internationally known. He first came to America in 1923 and liked it so well he came back to live here permanently, and has since designed everything from a matchbox to a mausoleum—but is probably still best known for his posters and type faces.



Lucian Bernhard



WARREN CHAPPELL—Born in Richmond, Virginia and educated at the University of Richmond, Va. Studied at The Art Students League of New York and was associated with the Offenbacher Werkstatt of Rudolf Koch as a typecut-ter. He also taught at the Art Students League, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and the New York University. Mr. Chappell is an illustrator of many books—among which are—“Don Quixote,” “Dr. Dogbody’s Leg,” “Peter and the Wolf,” “The Pleasant Pirate,” etc. He is the designer of “Lydian” and other type faces.





Warren Chappell.



FRED C. COOPER—Born in McMinnville, in the Willamette Valley, Western Oregon. For twenty-five years he was a contributor and for a time art editor of the old Life Magazine. For a number of years he has done cartoons, cartoon illustrations, and occasional covers for Collier's and various other magazines. Also, many posters. Mr. Cooper has a widely-inclusive liking for fine craftsmanship—for anything that is well done. He is gadget minded and loves good tools and their use. Wrote the technical text and made the illustrations for the current Munsell Book of Color.



Fred Cooper



STANLEY W. CRANE—Born in La Porte, Indiana, in 1905. At the age of nine he started drawing and painting, being tutored by his father. Spent three and one-half years in France studying and at the age of eighteen two of his paintings were accepted at an exhibition in Indiana. Since then Stanley Crane has exhibited in many important shows and has won numerous prizes in many exhibitions. One outstanding piece of work which he has accomplished is the designing and building of a beautiful house in Woodstock—doing all the work himself.



Preliminary Sketches for other
stamps not finished.





A. W. Crane



ROBERT FAWCETT—Born in London, England. Studied art at the Slade School and University of London. Painted seriously until 1928 when he began to do designing and illustrating. Came to this country in 1919 but returned to England to study. In 1924 he returned to America and has lived in Connecticut most of the time since. Five years ago he became a citizen of the United States. Robert Fawcett's hobby is music—and golf and skiing his sports.



Rough preliminary sketches from which the design was modeled.





Phil Saurth



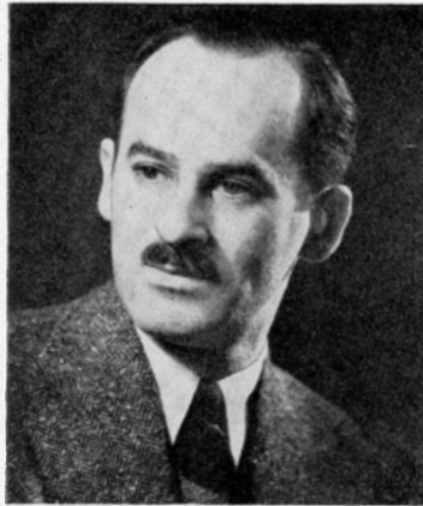
GORDON GRANT—Born of Scottish parents in San Francisco. His father had many friends among the deep sea skippers and at the age of three he found himself aboard a ship bound for school in Scotland. Four months at sea made a deep impression on him and ships and sailors never ceased to be his chief interest in life and art. Studied three years in London art schools. Most of his time since has been devoted to painting and etching. He painted the portrait of the U.S.S. “Constitution” for the Navy Department—original of this painting hangs in the White House, Washington. Gordon Grant is a member of many important societies and is the author and illustrator of a number of books.



The rough preliminary sketch from which the stamp was modeled.



Donna Hunt



CLARENCE PEARSON HORNUNG—Internationally known not only as a designer of note, but as a special writer on subjects of graphic arts interest. He has created and drawn over 300 trademarks for a great variety of American advertisers and enterprises. He has acted as consultant in typographic arrangement, book and type design, and has functioned as designer of products, packages, maps, covers and advertising matter. He is the author of "Trade-marks" and "Handbook of Design and Devices" and has contributed many trademark articles to the technical press.

A handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name 'Clarence' and the last name 'Hornung' clearly visible. The signature is written on a light-colored background.





GUSTAV JENSEN—Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, April 8, 1898, he brings to his work a heritage of Danish culture which is evident in everything he creates. His designs cover a multitude of products as diversified as radios, kitchen sinks, telephones, cosmetic packages, silverware, books and clothes. He designed some of the outstanding exhibits at the World's Fairs in both Chicago and New York. His prophecy, made years ago, that the automobile of the future would be made of plastics, is about to be realized and perhaps will soon be followed by his further prediction that gas and gas stations will disappear and power supplied by electricity sent by radio.



Rough sketches for other designs.



Samuel Johnson



CLAYTON KNIGHT—termed by Floyd Gibbons as “the greatest artist of the air.” Served as a flyer in the World War where he was shot down in Belgium and spent months in the hospitals. Acquired his reputation as the foremost illustrator in the aeronautical world by illustrating many of Elliott White Spring’s articles in *LIBERTY* and other magazines. In addition to illustrating books and magazine articles for many other writers he has written and illustrated his own books including “Pilot’s Luck,” “The Non-Stop Stowaway,” and “Ships Aloft.” On a four months flying trip around South America he made nearly 200 drawings.

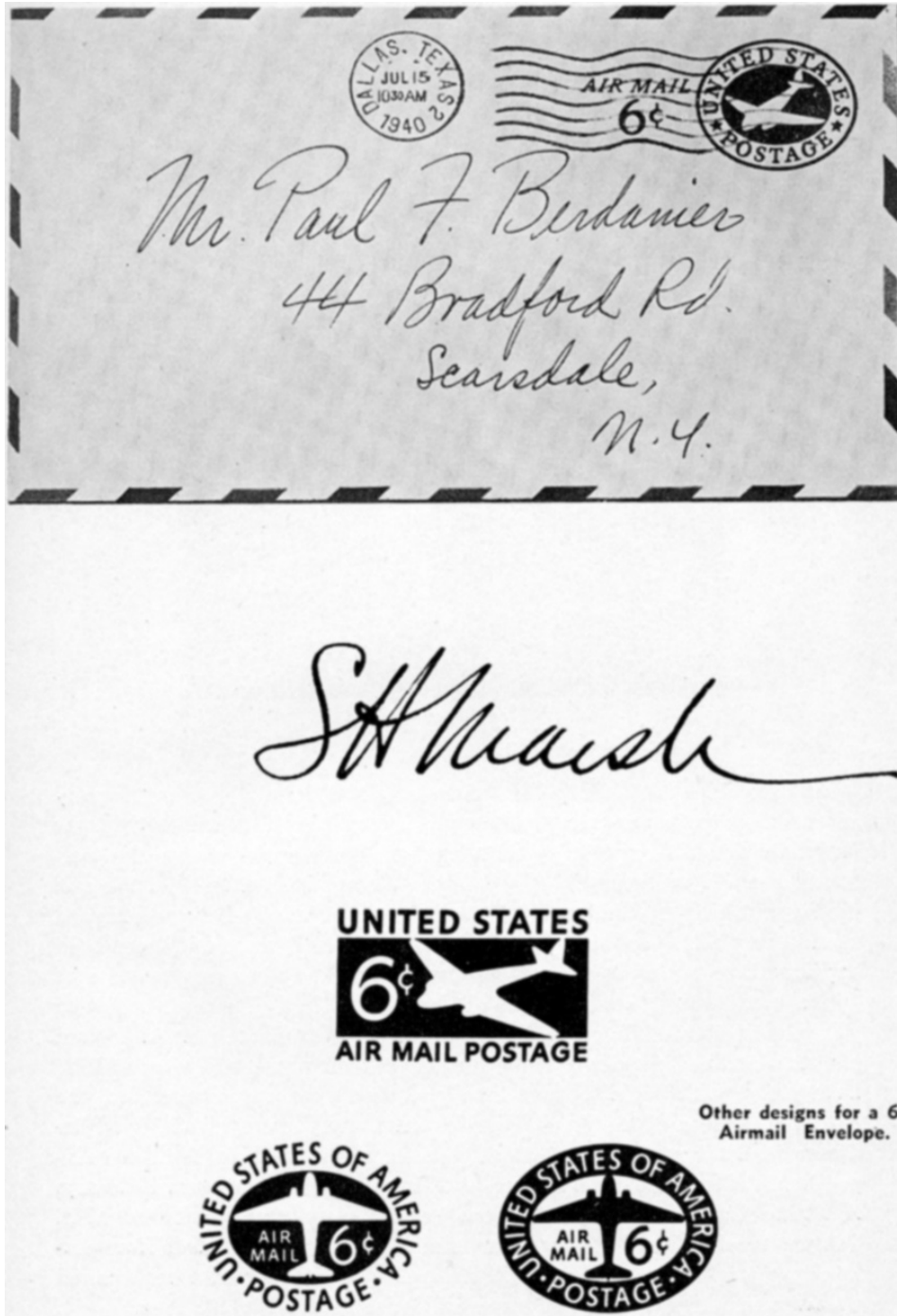


CLAYTON
KNIGHT



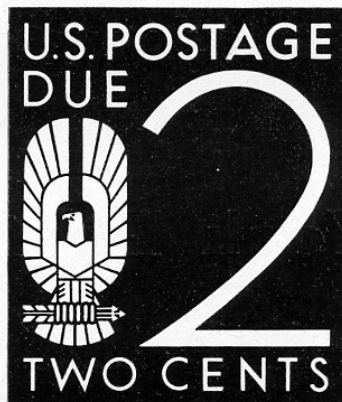
SAMUEL H. MARSH—Born in 1899 and educated in the public and High Schools of New York. After service in the U.S. Navy, was employed by J. & R. Lamb, ecclesiastical art workers. Received first training in lettering and designing tombstones and procession crosses! Studied at the New York Evening School of Industrial Design and the Art Students League for five years. During that time, worked for the MacFadden Publications, Robert Gare, packaging, and the Harry Marx Advertising Art Service. Became free lance in 1926 and has since done work for all the leading advertising agencies as well as a number of industrial organizations. At present, his studio is in the Graybar Building where he works with his staff of specialists.







WALTER DORWIN TEAGUE—Serves as Industrial Designer to many of the most important corporations of America. Is now serving the Eastman Kodak Company as consultant on product design for the thirteenth consecutive year, the Ford Motor Company, the A. B. Dick and the Bryant Heater Company for the past seven years. He has designed a wide range of products, from cameras, machine tools and household appliances to automobiles, railway trains and gasoline service stations—two outstanding accomplishments are the deluxe Pullman coach of which more than 200 are in operation on the New Haven Railroad and his standardized service station for Texaco of which more than 1200 have been built. Mr. Teague was one of the seven members of the Board of Design of the N. Y. World's Fair and the only Industrial Designer on the Board. In addition, he designed at the Fair the Ford Exposition, the exhibits of U. S. Steel, Eastman Kodak, Petroleum Industry, National Cash Register, du Pont, and Consolidated Edison. Mr. Teague received one of the four American Design Awards for outstanding work in the year 1938. He is also the author of a book called "Design This Day: The Technique of Order in the Modern Age."



Walter Reague