

Minnesota Trade Cards



Nathan Ford Music Co.

412 E. Third Street St. Paul.



CHILDREN were a favorite theme with advertisers. Trade card designs frequently had no relation to the product promoted.

AMONG PICTURESQUE HOLDINGS of the Minnesota Historical Society's museum that hark back to an earlier era are scores of trade cards. Although such cards in simple form date back to colonial days in America, their "golden age" as a means of advertising lasted only from the late 1800s until just after the turn of the century. But in the relatively quiet days before television, radio, and billboards, and before newspapers and magazines were used widely as major advertising media, cards like the ones shown on these pages were colorful, popular, and effective means of advertising one's business or products. Tradesmen and shopkeepers gave the cards to their customers who in turn frequently made a hobby of collecting the quaint items and pasting them in scrapbooks. Today, after many years of reposing in dusty attics and forgotten trunks, the cards are once again being sought by many kinds of collectors. They range from trivia buffs caught up in the current enthusiasm for Americana to serious students of American history and art.

Until the middle and even the late 1800s, pictures

of almost any description were a rarity in the homes of average people. Pictures were a luxury largely limited to the wealthy and well-educated. For centuries, reproduction of pictures was a slow, laborious, costly process. But technological developments in lithography and printing in the 1860s and 1870s made possible the reproduction — cheaply and on a large-scale basis — of pictures in color as well as black and white. Thus it was that in the 1880s trade cards came into their heyday with their often whimsical designs and frequent use of such subjects as animals, birds, floral prints, western scenes, genre settings, and the like. Almost every family had a picture album, and collecting the cards and putting them into books became a nation-wide pastime. Cards advertising both national and local products and businesses became so popular that merchants felt obligated to give them out to customers. The novelty of a plethora of brightly colored pictures, combined with a less frenetic pace and a simpler era with fewer diversions than today, made the hobby almost an epidemic.

Although trade cards are on occasion still used today,



HUBBARD MILLING Company was located in Mankato.



TURN PAGE for view from the other side.



NATIONAL PRODUCTS were distributed by local dealers in Minnesota and elsewhere.

they began to give way to other methods of advertising by the mid-1890s. Eventually the novelty of the pictures wore off, the sentimental appeal of the albums dimmed, and in most households the albums and boxes of pictures were tossed out as trash, often during annual spring cleaning rites. Many of the cards were saved, however, and contemporary collectors seek them for a variety of reasons. For one thing, they like the cards' art work (many of them are fine examples of folk art, and some were designed by such notables as Louis Prang and Currier and Ives). The cards are also sought for their depiction of details of everyday life (as it may have been or as romanticized by the Victorians), for their pictorial insights into popular concepts, ideals, and prejudices, for their nostalgic value, and just for fun. Cards command varying prices, depending upon scarcity and

demand. This makes trade card collecting much more expensive now than in Victorian times when the cards were free.¹

On these pages are good examples of the diversity of trade cards. All are from the society's museum collection, and all are from Minnesota — primarily Minneapolis and St. Paul but also including other cities like Owatonna and Mankato. In the society's collection, too, are cards advertising national products as well as businesses in eastern and even Canadian cities. Perhaps some families had the cards tucked among their possessions when they moved to Minnesota. Many of the society's trade cards are about three by five inches in size, but others are smaller and still others larger. Some are of odd shapes, are three-dimensional and in low relief, "mechanical" with moving parts, and in the form of little booklets containing jokes and items of interest not related to any product or business. In addition to loose cards, the society's museum has numerous albums filled with trade cards and pictures of a wide range of subjects — charming, old-fashioned reminders of a past era.

¹J. R. Burdick, ed., *The American Card Catalog: The Standard Guide on All Collected Cards and Their Values*, 7, 8, 13, 19 (Franklin Square, New York, 1967); Clarence P. Hornung, *Handbook of Early Advertising Art, Mainly From American Sources*, xxi, xlv (New York, 1956).



1315-17 4th St. S. E. MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

M. TOWNSLEY & SONS.

I HAD NOT WRITTEN TO

"THIS FROWN I CANNOT DOFF
AS MY LIGHTNING ROD WAS OFF."



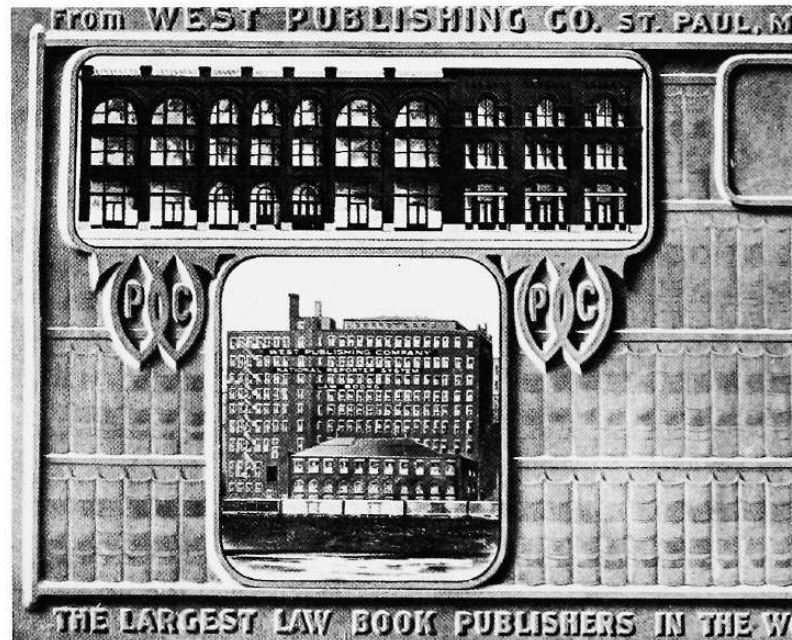
"THIS SMILE IS NO CON
AS MY LIGHTNING ROD WAS ON."

I WROTE TO

M. TOWNSLEY & SONS.

1315-17 4th St. S. E.

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.



WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN OWL NIGHT.



FALL AND WINTER, 1882-3.

Boston One Price Clothing House,

CORNER THIRD AND ROBERT,
ST. PAUL.

THE DONALDSON & CO.



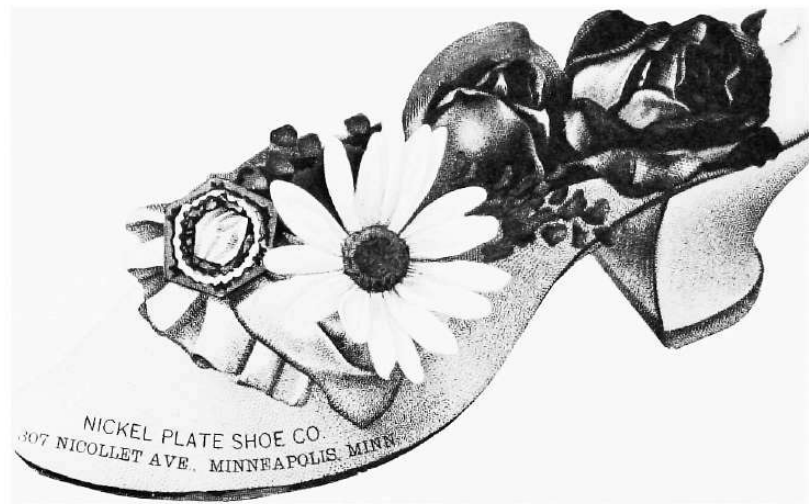
GLASS BLOCK STORE

Cor. Nicollet Ave. and Sixth St.

IMPRINTED OVER what was probably a stock design is the name of the firm, H. Clay Scott, and its products, "Choice Confectionery, Fruits, Canned Goods, Oysters, Cigars, &c."



H. CLAY SCOTT
Choice Confectionery, Fruits, Canned Goods,
Oysters, Cigars &c.
418 Nicollet Ave., MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.



NICKEL PLATE SHOE CO
307 NICOLLET AVE. MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.



Remember

P. J. Dahlquist

Fashionable
Tailor

Cleaning, Pressing and Repairing Suits, Hats

825 Washington Ave., S. E.
MINNEAPOLIS



"HOLIDAY GOODS" are
advertised on this card from
Hofflin's Drug and Paint
Store in Minneapolis.



FRANK W. PINSKA,
Fancy Dry Goods and Notions,
16 E. Third Street,
ST. PAUL.



LIFT THE ROMANTICIZED picture of two lovers and beneath is a separate card with the real message of the advertisers, Duncan and Barry, "Merchant Tailors" in St. Paul. A white tassel holds the two cards together. Winter scenes were another favorite with Minnesotans.

The Arctic Manufacturing Co.,



17 FOURTH STREET, SOUTH,
Minneapolis, Minn.

Barbour's Flavoring Ext.
Dr. Dunlap's Anchor B.
Silver Spoon Baking
"Arctic" Self-Raising G.
and Buckwheat Flour
"Arctic" Pure Snice



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