



U.S. Philatelic Classics Society

Volume: 40 Number: 4 Year: 1988 Chronicle: 140

Article: Henry G. Lapham: United States Primitives Extraordinaire
Author(s): Stanley M. Bierman M.D.

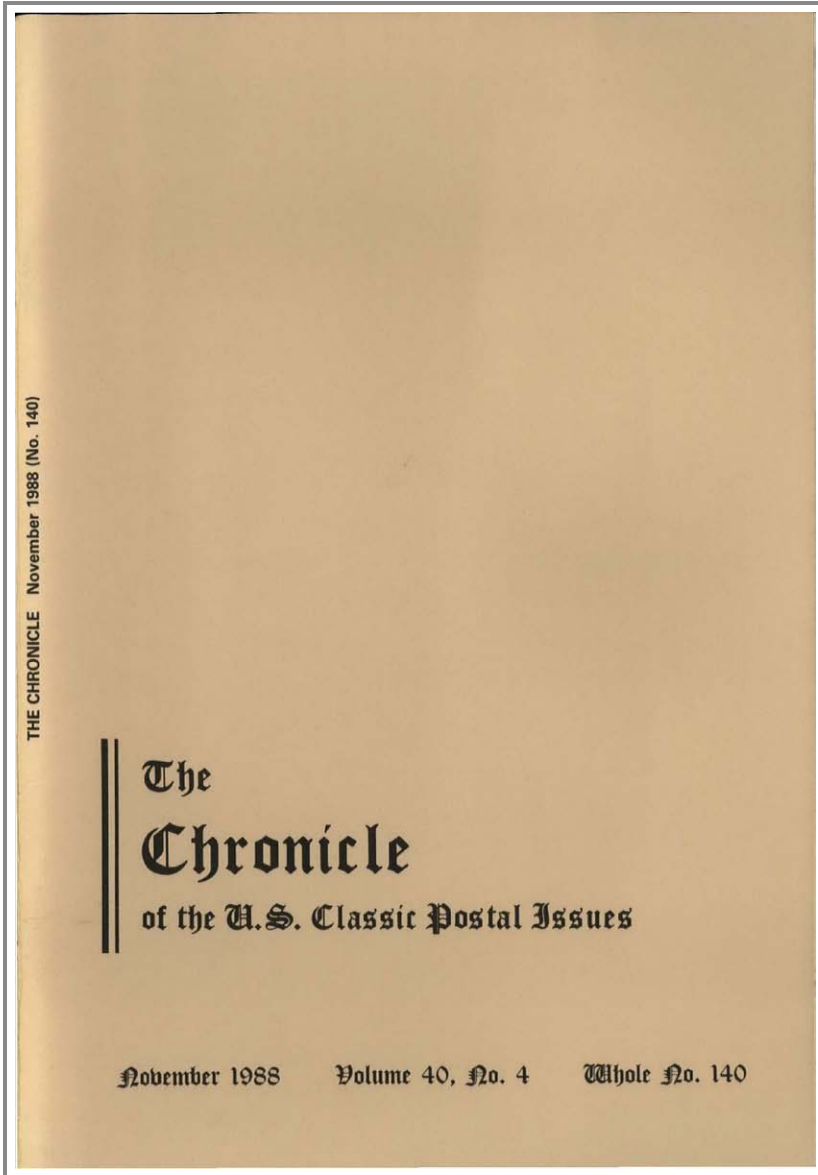


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HENRY G. LAPHAM: UNITED STATES PRIMITIVES EXTRAORDINAIRE**STANLEY M. BIERMAN, M.D.**

Ferrary, Worthington, Hind, Green, Caspary, Lilly, and Boker are among the well-known but few select names in a pantheon of collectors of United States Postmaster Provisionals. The name of Henry G. Lapham is less well recognized by most modern day philatelists, notwithstanding the fact that he won a Gold Medal at the 1926 New York International Philatelic Exhibition for his quintessential collection of New York Postmaster Provisionals, and a Grand Award at the 1936 Third International Philatelic Exhibition (TIPEX) for his remarkable collection of U.S. Postmasters' Provisionals. While unattractive in both design and engraving, postmasters' provisional issues hold a special fascination that transcends their undistinguished appearance. A thread common to all parties who desire to possess these so-called "United States primitives" is the requirement of extraordinary wealth and Henry G. Lapham, a successful Boston investment banker, oilman, philanthropist, and sportsman was well endowed to this end. Charles J. Phillips noted that, "after the death of Arthur Hind, Henry Lapham ranked as the third greatest stamp collector in the United States" (behind Caspary and Gibson).¹

Henry G. Lapham was born in Brooklyn in 1874 to John and Mary Elizabeth Walker Lapham. His father was a New York leather merchant and tanner, and owner of a firm which had been established by his grandfather and namesake, Henry George Lapham. With the assistance of his brother, Lewis Henry Lapham, John Lapham merged several small companies and helped create the Central Leather Co. of Pennsylvania. Lapham's parents moved to Boston, and from this base their fortune grew and the family prospered. In time the Lapham financial empire extended from involvement with the American-Hawaiian Steamship Co. to ownership in Texas and California oil fields. The family's financial base was rooted in the Texas Corporation of which his father and uncle were early directors. The Texas Corporation, forerunner of the modern day Texaco, was founded in 1902 by Joseph Cullinan and Arnold Schlaet.²

Henry G. Lapham graduated from Yale in 1897 where he was an outstanding scholar and developed a keen affection for all aspects of sports and athletics; in 1917 he contributed \$350,000 to erect an athletic clubhouse at his Alma Mater, which acknowledged his beneficence by naming the structure after him. Shortly after his graduation from college, Lapham married Rebecca Lounsbery of New York from which union two children were born: Raymond W. Lapham of Brookline, and a daughter Mrs. Charles Honeywell of Honolulu.³

Lapham's business affiliations were broad and included directorates in the Ventura Consolidated Oil Fields, Essex Aniline Works, Inc., National Rockland Bank of Boston, Pollack Pen Co., Petroleum Heat and Power Company, Commonwealth Trust Co., and American-Hawaiian Steamship Company. In 1933 Lapham was involved in a legal scandal when the Texas Corporation was sued by eight independent oil companies on monopolistic charges of cutting retail gasoline prices and conspiring to put them out of business.⁴ Oil at that time was selling for 10 cents a barrel in comparison to today's price of \$15 per barrel. Lapham was forced to resign in September 1933 as executive director of the Texas Corporation in the aftermath of the legal battle that ensued. Thereafter he entered investment banking in Boston

1. Charles J. Phillips, "Death of H.G. Lapham," *Stamps* 30:9 (Jan 6) 1940.

2. Marquis James, *The Texas Story, The First Fifty Years 1902-1952*, Texas Co., 1953.

3. Phillips, *loc. cit.*

4. Anon., "Lapham," *New York Times*, Jan. 15, II, 14:8, 1933.

Henry G. Lapham



and was head of Lapham, Davis & Bianchi, a Federal Street banking firm, as well as treasurer and director of B.A. Corbin & Sons and vice president of the Franklin Shoe Co.

In 1917, Lapham and Henry G. Powning acquired B.A. Corbin, a shoe manufacturing firm, and the partners foreclosed and later re-incorporated with the Koehler Manufacturing Co., producers of miner's safety lamps.

Throughout his busy and eventful life Lapham took a keen interest in all forms of athletics, and was himself an avid sportsman belonging to no fewer than 36 different clubs. He was elected President of the Boston Athletic Association in 1920 and two years later was appointed a member of the American Olympics Association. Later in life he helped develop and became President of the Boston Gardens Arena Corporation. He was President of the International Billiards Association and Director of the Boys Club of Boston where he anonymously established scholarships for deserving young men.

Henry G. Lapham's involvement in stamp collecting can be circuitously traced by reconstructing transfer of philatelic properties known to be in the possession of certain parties. Philip Ward's column "Chronicle of New Issues" appearing in the January 15, 1921, issue of *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* refers to a wonderful assemblage of postmasters' provisionals belonging to an unnamed client (Henry Gibson) in which were to be found two Alexandrias on cover including a unique [*sic*] blue paper copy, a ten cent Baltimore, unique pair of five cent Baltimores on cover, a Millbury, two Brattleboros, one of which was mint and the other on cover, reconstructed sheets of the three states of the plate of the St. Louis Bears (ex-Deats), three copies of the Providence PMP on cover, scores of New York PMPs including a reconstructed plate composed entirely of horizontal and vertical pairs. It is clear that Gibson did not keep this incredible collection of postmasters' provisionals and sold most of these rarities in early 1922 by private treaty through the Boston stamp dealer Warren Colson to Arthur Hind, Alfred Caspary, and Henry Lapham.⁵ The sale and transfer of property took place prior to the third Ferrary auction of U.S. material which suggests that these two parties (Gibson and Ferrary) controlled the bulk of the world's postmasters'

5. Fred J. Melville, "Ferrary and His Wonderful Stamps," *The Stamp Lover* XV: 61-66 (September) 1922.

provisional rarities. Philip Ward claimed that Arthur Hind had the pick of the Gibson Collection of Baltimore issues and acquired the buff Alexandria cover while passing up the Blue Boy which was to go into the Caspary Collection.⁶ While comparisons of quality and desirability for rarities amongst postmasters' provisionals may be odious, it appears that the finest of the Gibson PMPs went to Henry Lapham who acquired the reconstructed plates of St. Louis Bears (ex-Deats), numerous New York PMPs, and pair of five cent Baltimores on cover along with additional rarities (to be described).

At the third Ferrary sale of April 5-7, 1922, Warren Colson acted as agent for both Henry Lapham and Alfred Caspary. In competition with Arthur Hind who was represented by Hugo Griebert, the two dealers divided most of the postmaster rarities between themselves for their clients. The Boston dealer purchased for Lapham the Ferrary Alexandria cut square on buff (lot 536), Annapolis cover (lot 539), Brattleboros (lots 557-559), unique mint Millbury cut square (lot 563), and many of the St. Louis Bears (lots 521-535). One wonders whether Lapham had "deeper pockets" than Caspary at this time. In later years Caspary was to recapture by private treaty many postmaster gems lost to his friendly competitor in the Ferrary sale.

When the Leon Adutt Collection came to market in October 1922 it is believed that Lapham was a major buyer of the New York PMPs. Adutt was a prominent British collector from Margate and President of the Thanet Philatelic Society. He assembled an exceptional collection of U.S. and C.S.A. contained in 13 large albums and estimated to be worth \$30,000.⁷ Additional New York PMP material is known to have come to Lapham through the 1924 Nicholas Waterhouse sale by Puttick & Simpson held in London, where Edward Stern of the Economist Stamp Co. was the major buyer of 31 lots of New Yorks.⁸ Included in the Waterhouse sale was a complete reconstructed plate of 40 NYPMPs which sold for 350 pounds sterling and was to go to its new American owner. Prior to that time John Luff and O.S. Hart had pioneered the plating of the New York stamp. With material belonging to Hiram Deats at their disposal, they erroneously reached the conclusion that the plate consisted of five vertical rows of ten. It remained for A. Hatfield to demonstrate in 1921 that the plate consisted of five vertical rows of eight. He accomplished this task by employing the collections of Henry Needham, Senator Ernest Ackerman and Alfred Caspary which were at his disposal.⁹ A. Nicholas Reggio, Lapham's philatelic secretary, also proved and confirmed the forty plate positions of the New York Postmaster Provisionals.

The origin of the stamps in the Lapham's reconstructed Brattleboro plate can be traced, in part, to E. Harrison Sanford, a New York collector who in the 1880s succeeded in acquiring six copies of the rare postmaster provisional.¹⁰ It is not known in what year Lapham acquired or completed his unique reconstructed plate of Brattleboros but Warren Colson did make the separate stamp acquisitions and left it for Reggio to prove the positions.¹¹ The accuracy of Reggio's plating was subsequently challenged. This fabulous Brattleboro plate first appeared at auction in the 1966 Siegel Rarities of the World sale where it realized \$32,500, and last was offered at the 1986 Siegel Rarities where in combination with the "Mystery" Position 11 it was sold for \$57,500 plus commission.

6. Philip Ward, "The Ferrari of America," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* XXXVI: 469-470 (Sept. 30) 1922.

7. Douglas Armstrong, "The 'Adutt' Collection of U.S.," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* XXXVI:486 (Oct. 7) 1922.

8. Philip Ward, "To London and Waterhouse Sale," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* XXXVIII:617 (Dec. 1) 1924.

9. A. Hatfield, Jr., *The New York Postmaster's Stamp*, Scott Stamp & Coin, New York, 1921.

10. Edward Knapp, "Stamp Collecting and Collectors, Years Ago and Today," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* XXXVII:311-13 (June 16) 1923.

11. Elliott Perry, "Brattleboro's Mystery Stamp," *American Philatelic Congress* 15:18-29, 1949.

One of Lapham's most important and ambitious acquisitions came through the purchase of the G.W. Armitage Collection of United States for \$100,000¹² which had been acquired by Frank Godden, a London stamp dealer, some time in 1930.¹³ The collection had won the Grand Gold Medal at the 1923 London International Exhibition and the Tilleard Medal from the Royal Philatelic Society. Little was described about the collection in the 1923 London International Exhibition catalogue aside from its concentration on U.S. classic stamps of the 1847-1860 period. Godden's 1930 announcement in the pages of *Stamp Lovers* proclaimed the Armitage Collection to be the finest in all Europe.

One of the gems of the collection was a cover bearing a 90¢ U.S. 1860, 30¢ U.S. 1860 and 12¢ U.S. 1857, tied with a New York red grid cancellation, addressed to Calcutta, India. The 90¢ U.S. 1860 "Armitage" cover was acquired by Warren Colson who received a Philatelic Foundation certificate prior to sale to Lapham. Stanley Ashbrook challenged the \$1.32 rate to India in his *Special Service* believing a 42¢ carriage appropriate. Ashbrook claimed that the cover was manufactured by removing the 12¢ issue, which was repositioned in the lower left corner, and a 90¢ U.S. applied in its place. Also included in the Armitage Collection was a block of thirty 3¢ U.S. 1857 issues and a unique block of six New York postmaster provisionals on cover that added to Lapham's already superb collection. This particular cover, which is pictured in Philip Wall's series on New York postmasters in the August 1981 issue of the *Chronicle*, has not resurfaced since Lapham's death. Armitage had been an important buyer at the 1924 Waterhouse sale.

Lapham showed his specialized collection of New York Postmaster Provisionals at the 1926 New York International Philatelic Exhibition where he won a large gold medal for his entry. Lapham's collection of NYPMPs was the largest and finest ever assembled to that time. He possessed at least 700 examples of the stamp including a half dozen examples of the rare "R.H.M." signature. Among the items displayed were a complete plate in single specimens exhibiting the 40 plate positions, and a reconstructed plate with vertical and horizontal pairs. The collection was mounted on 125 Oriel album pages of which only half were shown in the frames. This observation is difficult to reconcile with the fact that Lapham showed in two frames.

It is not clear why Lapham did not enter his entire postmasters' provisionals in the 1926 New York International Philatelic Exhibition given that his splendid collection was complete, less only the Alexandria Blue Boy, Boscawen, and Lockport. Alfred Caspary showed in the postmasters division of the 1926 Exhibition in one frame displaying the Alexandria Blue Boy along with a ten cent Baltimore, a Millbury, Brattleboro, and cut square New Haven; Hon. J. S. Frelinghuysen entered a modest postmaster collection of NYPMPs and Baltimores, and Warren Colson displayed (though not in competition) examples of Brattleboros, Millbury, New Haven, St. Louis Bears, and also the unique block of 20 of the one cent 1901 Pan American invert.

Henry Lapham did finally show his collection of postmasters' provisionals for Boston Night presentation which was held on April 4, 1928, at the Collectors Club of New York.¹⁴ Included in the exhibit were the following items: (1) an unused copy of the Alexandria PMP on buff with 40 stars and a used copy on cover with 39 stars; (2) an Annapolis cover stamped on back in red; (3) 14 examples of Baltimore five cent PMPs all on covers including six on blue paper, six on white and the unique pair; (4) a ten cent Baltimore issue on white and the other on bluish paper (ex-Duveen); (5) the unique reconstructed plate of the ten [sic] varieties of Brattleboro PMPs including one with the engraver's imprint; (6) a superb unused copy of the Millbury PMP with full gum and a used copy on cover; (7) New Haven envelope blue on

12. Charles J. Phillips, "Frank Godden," *Stamps* 15:189 (May 9) 1936.

13. Announcement, *Stamp Lovers* XXIII:23 (June) 1930.

14. Anon., "Boston Night, April 4, 1928," *Collectors Club Philatelist* VII:190-191 (July) 1928.

buff and red on white; (8) three plate reconstructions of the St. Louis Bears (ex-Deats and ex-Ayers) consisting of the printing on greenish paper, second state on gray lilac, and final state after the two 20¢ were erased and replaced, being plated on rare pelure paper; (9) seven examples of reconstructed plates of New York PMPs including exclusive red cancellations, another of mixed cancellations, another mostly consisting of unused examples, and a plate made from overlapping pairs. Included was the unique block of six on cover and eleven copies with the "R.H.M." signature.

Altogether Lapham displayed 850 copies of New York postmaster provisionals. There is no indication that he showed a Providence R.I. postmaster cover, and it is a curious observation that Lapham rejected a 1927 offer by Daniel F. Kelleher of the Clapp Find of Providence covers, which were subsequently to go to A.B. Slater (as noted in *The Stamps of the Providence, R.I. Postmaster 1846-1847*, p. 66). He did finally acquire a name-erased Providence cover that had circuitious philatelic provenance from F.W. Hunter (1900) to Dr. William C. Bowers to Hiram Deats to Dr. Carroll Chase to Henry C. Gibson to Warren Colson, thence to Lapham, and recently to appear in the John D. Pope III sale (John Fox 1984). Lapham also showed an interesting collection of British Guiana to the appreciative crowd that met that memorable night at the Collectors Club of New York. The following year his magnificent German States were shown at a Collectors Club of New York meeting.

Lapham's interests extended beyond collecting U.S. and he sent his philatelic secretary, A. Nicholas Reggio, to exhibit his collection of Tasmania and New Zealand at the Collectors Club of New York show in February 1930. This Australian collection had been purchased from Dudley L. Pickman through Warren Colson and included Sydney Views and plated Laureated Heads. Perhaps Lapham's most outstanding foreign collection was his Spanish stamps on cover which received honors at the August 1930 American Philatelic Association convention held that year in Boston.

Given the vastness and dimensions of Henry Lapham's Collection of Postmasters' Provisionals, it is curious that he did not acquire the few missing pieces (Lockport and Boscawen) when the Arthur Hind Collection was offered by Charles J. Phillips on November 20-24, 1933. Hind's Boscawen with catalogue estimates of \$15,000 went for a modest \$5,000 to Frank Marquis; the cover was subsequently sold at Hugh Barr sale #37 of February 6, 1937, to Roy Fitzgerald of Dayton, Ohio, for \$5,100. Warren Colson's personal auction catalogue of the Hind U.S. sale (courtesy of Philip Wall) is present in the Bierman Philatelic Library along with Colson's bid sheets for four parties which are initialed as "RCB" (Roscoe C. Burleigh), "HMS" (Hugh M. Southgate), "JWD" and "BOO." Colson did acquire the Alexandria black on buff envelope @\$4,000, Annapolis envelope @\$2,600, ten cent Baltimore on bluish @\$10,500, New Haven envelope @\$2,250 and unique Lockport for \$2,500. These select items were to subsequently appear in the Caspary Collection despite the fact that Colson's own bid sheet did not include an initial for "AHC." Given Lapham's obvious desire for completeness in the area of postmasters' provisionals, it must be presumed that he and Colson were not on good terms, otherwise it would seem reasonable that the elusive rarities (Lockport and Boscawen) would have been acquired at the Hind sale. Notwithstanding the presumed dubious authenticity of the Boscawen, this is not an unreasonable conclusion given Colson's fiery temper and penchant for controversy.

It was at the 1936 TIPEX that Henry G. Lapham reached his philatelic zenith winning the Grand Award of the Exhibition, albeit his collection was entered in the name of his son Raymond W. Lapham. Shown in five frames, the collection was described in the philatelic press as containing all examples of postmasters' provisional stamps as previously displayed at the 1928 Collectors Club.¹⁵ Unbowed by his apparent disaffection by Lapham, Warren

15. Philip Ward, "The U.S. Exhibits at TIPEX (continued)," *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* L:298 (June 6) 1936.

Colson was quoted in the contemporary press as saying, "The most important deduction to be drawn from the Third International Philatelic Exhibition recently held in New York is the position given by the jury to the most interesting of all phases of stamp collecting — the Postmasters' Issues of the United States. These are our primitives and when a jury composed of non-dealers and headed by the foremost philatelist of the old world — Sir John Wilson, President of the Royal Society, London — places the highest possible award of the entire show on the Lapham Collection of U.S. Postmasters' Stamps, it leaves nothing further to be said. Those who have studied and understood the stamps of this fascinating period feel the jury honored its own wisdom in making this decision even more than the stamps themselves, as this is a collection beyond reproach and magnificent in every way."¹⁶

Lapham's 19th century United States (ex-Armitage) was described only briefly as containing an immaculate complete set of August 1861 issues, and an irregular unused block of the 1¢ U.S. 1851, including a type I 7RIe. Lapham's U.S. general issues collection was shown by Reggio on October 6, 1937, at the Collectors Club of New York and was highlighted by used and unused blocks of four of the 5¢ U.S. 1847, a corner block of six of type II 1¢ U.S. 1851 (which Lapham had exchanged with Caspary), blocks of all the U.S. 1857-1860 issues, the first and second printings of U.S. 1861, as well as most of the U.S. 1869 pictorial issues in blocks and strips.¹⁷ Lapham's reconstructed plate of Brattleboro stamps which was then in the possession of his son Raymond, was displayed by A. Nicholas Reggio at the September 16, 1938, Brattleboro Stamp Exhibition. The complex and confusing matters relating to the plating positions of the Brattleboro stamp in the Colson-Lapham reconstruction, are covered in exhaustive detail in Calvet Hahn's authoritative review on the subject.¹⁸

Henry G. Lapham died on December 13, 1939, at age 65 in Brookline, Mass., following a long illness. His stamp collection was acquired in greater part by his son, but little philatelic information of consequence was ever written about Raymond Lapham, who died on July 11, 1976, in Scarborough, Maine. The Philatelic Foundation is believed to have a letter from Stanley Ashbrook in which Raymond Lapham claims that upon his death his collection would never be sold, given the family's controlling interest in Texas Gulf Sulfur which was worth \$100,000,000.¹⁹ However in personal communication with Henry G. Lapham II of Manchester, Mass., that grandson has said he is unaware of any remaining portions of the stamp collection. Most of Henry G. Lapham's postmaster's provisionals were to find their way by private treaty into the Alfred Caspary and Josiah K. Lilly collections. Lapham's reconstructed plate of unused New York postmaster provisional (ex-Gibson), believed the finest extant, was acquired by John Boker, and after minor modification of some plate positions appeared at the October 6, 1987, Christie's Robson Lowe sale. As noted previously, Lapham's Brattleboro plate was first offered at the 1966 Siegel Rarities. In personal communication Ezra Cole, Robert Siegel, Bernard Harmer, and Raymond Weill, all denied knowledge as to the means whereby components of the Lapham collection entered into the philatelic mainstream. It is believed that John Boker acquired most of Lapham's postmaster's provisionals and much of his U.S. material by private treaty.

The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Stafford Archer, Historian of Texaco, Inc., and Judith Ann Schiff of the Yale University Library.

16. George Sloane, "The Lapham Postmasters' Stamps," *Stamps* 15-437 (June 13) 1936.

17. Charles Phillips, "Evening at the Collectors Club," *Collectors Club Philatelist* XVII: 68-69 (Jan.) 1938.

18. Calvet Hahn, "The Plating of the Brattleboro," *Collectors Club Philatelist* 67: 17-24, 85-108, 1988.

19. Philip Wall, personal communication, January 1988.