

## The State Centennial Stamp

It was on January 7, 1946, that Congressman Henry O. Talle wrote Postmaster General Robert E. Hannegan urging that a three-cent postage stamp be issued to commemorate the centennial of the admission of Iowa into the Union. A fortnight previously Governor Robert D. Blue had appointed the Iowa State Centennial Committee and Congressman Talle suggested that this committee "be given an opportunity to propose a suitable design for the stamp."

The first meeting of the State Centennial Committee was held in Des Moines on January 16, 1946. A number of sub-committees were appointed, including one on a commemorative stamp and coin. Ralph Evans of Davenport was chairman of this sub-committee and Mrs. Mary Humeston of Albia was the other member. William J. Petersen of Iowa City was added later. On January 23 Postmaster General Hannegan wrote Congressman Talle that his department would doubtless recognize Iowa statehood with a "special issue" and that he would be "very glad to have the benefit of the committee's views as to effective subject matter." The Talle-Hannegan letters were printed in the *Congressional Record* on January 24 and



immediately precipitated widespread interest and discussion in Iowa.

At a meeting of the State Centennial Committee on February 27, a motion was made that the Committee adopt the suggestion of Charles M. Fouts, a 14-year-old Albia high school lad, that the Blashfield painting "Westward" in the Capitol at Des Moines be recommended as the design for the Iowa centennial stamp. Various members pointed out that the immense size of the mural, its intricate detail, and the dimness of the painting might make difficult its reproduction on a stamp, but the Committee decided to approve the design and let the Post Office Department determine whether or not it could be used.

Scarcely had this news been released when a chorus of objections arose, and additional suggestions began pouring in. As early as December 20, 1945, the Burlington *Hawkeye-Gazette* had carried a suggestion that a view of Burlington in 1855 would serve well as a design for a commemorative stamp. Newspapers throughout Iowa reproduced designs advocated by local readers. Fully half of those suggesting designs urged that the map of Iowa appear on the new Iowa stamp. Equally popular was the idea of corn panels along both sides of the stamp. The Iowa motto — "Our Liberties We Prize And Our Rights We Will Maintain" — was included in almost half the designs submitted to the Centennial Committee.



Some of the proposed designs symbolized the agricultural interests of the Hawkeye State, usually by pictures of corn, oats, horses, cattle, and pigs, and land under the plow. One of the most artistic of the designs submitted depicted a modern farm with a pioneer farm in the clouds. At least three others showed a farm and tractor, but substituted the eagle and motto in the sky for the pioneer farm. Two of these three contained both the map and cornstalks.

On April 19th the Post Office Department announced that engravers had found the painting "Westward" too detailed for good reproduction and asked the State Centennial Committee to submit a simpler design. This precipitated another barrage of suggestions. Finally, after several personal conferences with post office officials, Ralph Evans, the chairman of the stamp committee, authorized the Post Office Department to designate an artist to prepare a design showing the Iowa flag superimposed on an outline map of the State with cornstalks for panels. Victor S. McCloskey, Jr., of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, prepared a design, using a Rand-McNally map, an Iowa flag copied from the *National Geographic*, and cornstalks furnished by the Department of Agriculture. He did such an excellent job that the sub-committee accepted his design with only minor changes. Matthew D. Fenton engraved the picture and vignette of the Iowa stamp while J. S.



Edmondson engraved the ornamental frame, the lettering, and the numerals.

This beautiful commemorative three-cent stamp was approved by the sub-committee on stamp and coin at a meeting held at Iowa City on May 24, 1946. At this same meeting the sub-committee selected the blue color of the Texas statehood stamp with the green used in the Coast Guard stamp as its second choice. The Post Office Department struck off sheets of both colors and concurred with the sub-committee in its choice of the Texas blue. The issue was to number 125,000,000.

The sub-committee also acted on two other important items — the place and date of the first day of issue for Iowa's commemorative stamp. As early as December 1945, Burlingtonians had bestirred themselves for this honor, mindful of the fact that they had lost out in 1938. Des Moines, however, seemed to hold the inside track, for the Post Office Department had been following the precedent of awarding the honor to the State capital.

The claim of Iowa City was well presented by William J. Petersen. The constitutional conventions of 1844, 1846, and 1857 had been held in the Old Capitol at Iowa City, Iowa's richest historic shrine. The first State government was inaugurated there. The Republican Party was born in the Old Capitol on February 22, 1856. The build-



ing had housed both the Territorial and the State Supreme Courts. After the removal of the capital to Des Moines the Old Capitol had been given to the State University of Iowa for educational purposes. Confronted with such a mass of historical evidence the Iowa Centennial Committee voted that Iowa City be awarded the first day sale and that the sale be held on August 3, 1946.

Joseph J. Lawler, Third Assistant Postmaster General, asked why the First Day of Issue had been moved from December 28 to August 3. There was no precedent for the release of statehood stamps except on anniversaries. The sub-committee explained that it was guided in its recommendation by the wishes of the Iowa Centennial Committee, a majority of whose members felt that the immediate issue of the commemorative stamp would be a potent factor in stimulating centennial celebrations throughout Iowa, as well as serving as one of the most effective mediums for publicizing the occasion. The committee also pointed out that it was on August 3, 1846, that the people of Iowa adopted their first State Constitution.

On June 24, 1946, the following telegram from Congressman Thomas E. Martin was received at Iowa City: "Post Office Department has just announced that original issue of the Iowa Centennial Stamp will be made at Iowa City August 3. It will be a three-cent blue stamp which will have map of State of Iowa and the Iowa Flag and two panels



of corn stalks. The design was submitted by the Iowa Centennial Commission. Congratulations."

The Centennial Committee was naturally hopeful that the Iowa City sale should rank with the best in the nation. The record for State commemorative first day covers was held by Tennessee with 463,512. Texas was second with 397,866. But Texas had  $2\frac{1}{2}$  times Iowa's population and Nashville was ten times as large as Iowa City. To overcome these disadvantages, various agricultural, industrial, commercial, religious, and educational groups were encouraged to get out envelopes with individual designs to tell the history of the organizations and to advertise Iowa. The idea was greeted with enthusiasm. The publishers of the *Des Moines Register*, the Maytag Company, the Rath Packing Company, Sargent & Company, Station WOC, Carr, Adams & Collier, the Torch Press, and other organizations issued such cacheted envelopes. These accounted for approximately one-fifth of the total number of first day covers postmarked at Iowa City.

Formal invitations to the presentation ceremonies were sent out by the Postmaster General to Governor Robert D. Blue and other State officials, to members of the Iowa Centennial Committee, and to other prominent Iowans. Iowa-born Admiral William D. Leahy was named to represent President Truman at the ceremony.

Requests for the Iowa stamp commenced pour-



ing into the Iowa City post office from the forty-eight States and U. S. possessions, from Canada, and from many foreign lands. Ranging in number from one to ten (the limit for personal orders for envelopes to be stamped by a post office) these orders ultimately reached a total of 298,942 covers. Of this number 223,584 requested a single stamp, while 57,474 asked for blocks of four and plate blocks. Postal employees were at first confounded by requests for stamps with "an electric eye," a "guide line," or a "bull's-eye cancellation," but before August 3 arrived they had learned an entirely new vocabulary.

The morning of August 3 was warm and sunny, and a thousand people jammed the west approach of the Old Capitol to witness the impressive ceremony when Joseph E. Lawler, Third Assistant Postmaster General, presented the first sheets of the Iowa Statehood Centennial stamps to Governor Robert D. Blue and Admiral William D. Leahy. Postmaster Walter J. Barrow presided at the ceremony and Mayor Wilber J. Teeters and President Virgil M. Hancher greeted the visitors. Short speeches were made by Governor Blue and Admiral Leahy after they had been presented with their stamps. The ceremony was broadcast over Station WSUI and lined out through stations WHO and WOC.

Following this program Postmaster Barrow gave a luncheon at the Jefferson Hotel honoring



Admiral Leahy, Governor Blue, Third Assistant Postmaster General Lawler, and R. E. Fellers, Superintendent, Division of Stamps. The luncheon was attended by Mayor Teeters representing Iowa City and President Hancher of the State University, by Ralph Evans, Mrs. Mary Humes-ton, and William J. Petersen of the Iowa Centennial Committee, and by D. C. Nolan and Robert Gage of the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce.

While these events were taking place Iowans from near and far jammed the post office and substations to purchase the attractive blue stamps. The first private purchaser was Paul Stoner, a graduate student from Lawrence, Kansas, who bought one hundred and eight stamps. Throughout the day long lines formed at the post office. In the basement a special machine cancelled approximately 120,000 covers while a picked force of ex-servicemen hand-cancelled orders calling for that type of postmark.

Meanwhile the big commercial dealers had a corps of assistants at work in the Community Building and in their rooms at the Hotel Jefferson. Unlike the post office force, these men were not able to start stamping their covers until 7 a. m. on August 3, when the stamps went on sale, so they were allowed to work over Sunday and bring their covers in for cancellation early the next week. The post office itself did not finish its own servicing work until a week later, partly because of the



number of orders on hand, and partly because of delayed requests from foreign countries.

One dealer, V. A. McGrew of Marshalltown, prepared 40,000 covers for mailing and "Capt." Fluegel of Washington, D. C., serviced over 30,000. Fred Spielman, a veteran Fairfield stamp dealer who had attended First Day of Issue sales for years, arrived at Iowa City with two striking picture cachets — one of "Buffalo Bill" and the other showing Mrs. Dixie Gebhardt sewing the Iowa flag. Three of these dealers serviced almost one-sixth of the total first day covers.

It was not until August 13 that Postmaster Barrow made his final report to the Superintendent of Stamps at Washington. Of the allotment of three million stamps sent to Iowa City, a total of 1,067,000 had been sold the first day. The number of first day covers was equally impressive — 435,320 had been cancelled by machine and 82,185 had been cancelled by hand, a total of 517,505. Only the New York World's Fair issue of 585,565 in 1939 eclipsed the Iowa City sale.

The Iowa City stamp sale demonstrated to most Iowans that stamp collecting is a "big business" and not merely a hobby for youngsters. The thirty-five first class post offices in Iowa were allowed to place stamps on sale immediately following August 3. As swiftly as possible the remaining Iowa post offices were supplied with the stamps.