

The Cover Story

Knapp on Fire by Newton Kulp

In a previous volume of this publication, I wrote an article comparing first day cover cachet makers to cars. I compared the best to the Bentley, the better ones to a Cadillac, and the common, run of the mill, readily available ones to a Chevy. In this article I am going to highlight one of the Bentley class cachet makers – Dorothy Knapp. She would produce a few (up to about 20) of the same cachet but each slightly different, maybe several different cachets for the same issue and unique covers for special collectors that subscribed to her subscription service. I'll expand each in this article. As most of you know, one of my collecting interests is fire related items on stamps. To illustrate this article, I am going to use the 300th Anniversary of Volunteer Fire Companies in the United States issued in 1948 (Scott number 971).

First, let's look at a cachet of which she produced a few of the same design yet each one is slightly different. This cachet shows a steam pumper being pulled by three horses [Figure A1 on front cover]. One version has the three horses white, another version the three horses black, other versions various variations of the horses' colors. My version has one brown and two white. One of my covers also is franked with a plate block instead of a single (only four covers are known to exist with plate blocks and were made specifically for the addressee).



Figure A3

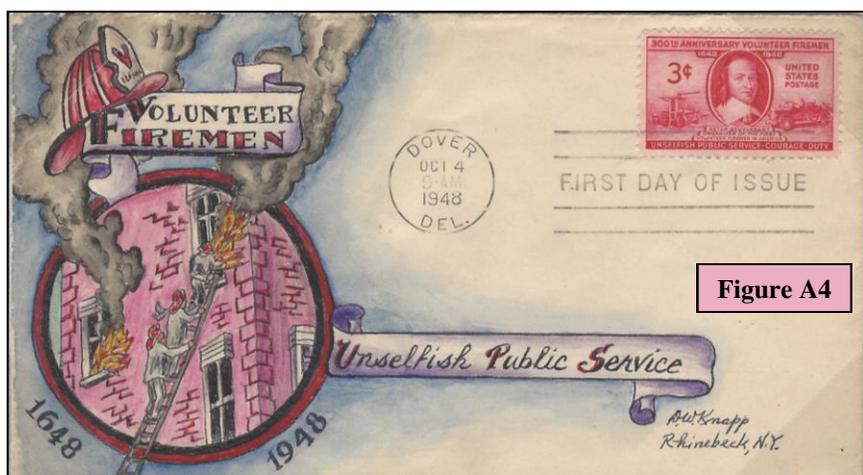


Figure A4

On many issues she would create several different cachets. This issue is no exception. She made two distinct versions with three variations of one of them. The first cachet was the steam pumper being pulled by the three horses [Figure A2 on front cover]. The second main theme was firemen on a ladder rescuing victims from a fire. At least three different versions are known. The first [Figure A3] has the scene in a circle with no additional embellishments. The second [Figure A4] has the same basic scene with a scroll to the right making it look almost like a magnifying glass. The third version [Figure A5] has the same basic design with an end of a paper scroll to the right. A side note here is if you look very closely at the men on the ladder, each cover is slightly different.

The third category is custom produced cachets for collectors who paid for a subscription of every issue for which she produced a cachet. They may be either regular envelopes or post cards. She

would produce a one-of-a-kind cover with the subscriber's name and address typed on it. Figure A6 is an example of one of these in post card format. A special notice on the back (not shown) prevented a person from producing counterfeits from regular covers.

Add-on covers of some of Mrs. Knapp's work exist. (Add-on covers are ones produced well after the stamp was issued to sell to the public. One modern example found on eBay is Jerry's Covers). When Dorothy found out how much her covers were selling for in the late 70s, she decided that she would start painting covers again. She took a few of the un-cacheted covers she had left from previous issues and created additional copies of the original cachets. Also, her son Walley started going to stamp shows and purchasing un-cacheted covers to which she added the cachet. Since she still had some of the original artwork, she used them to trace the design on the cover, modified them slightly and sold them. **Figure A5** is one of them. Very few of the 1970s & 1980s add-ons of the 1940s issues exist since she did not keep her early artwork masters.

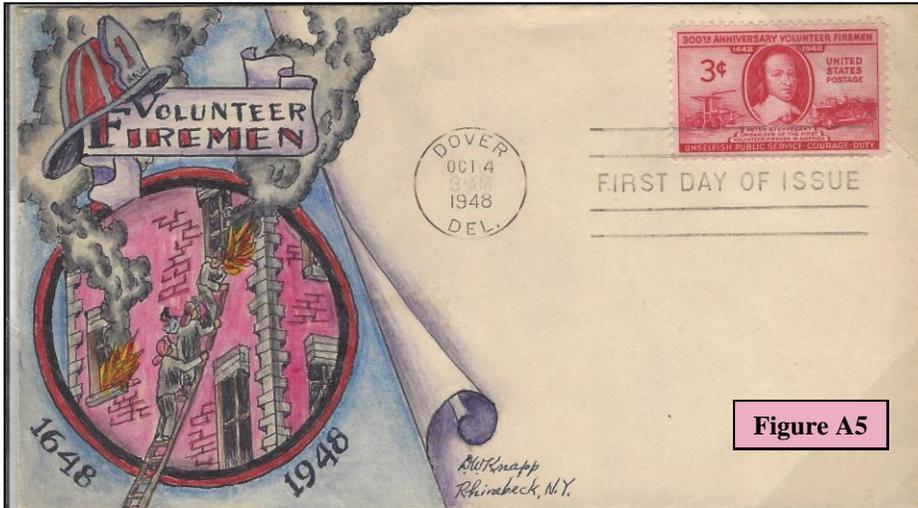
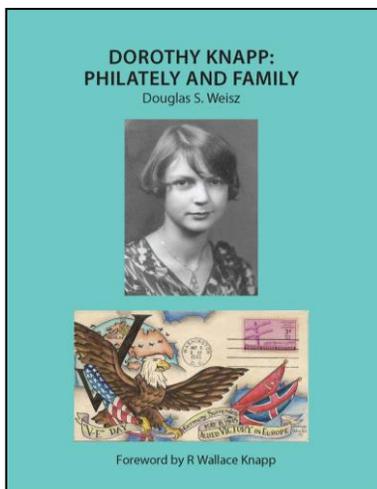


Figure A5

As a final note, covers associated with the Knapp name are not scarce. A recent search of eBay for Knapp covers resulted in 947 entries. Upon closer examination many were selling for less than \$10.00. Not only did she design and produce her own covers, but she also designed many for Fleetwood. So, if you wish to purchase original Dorothy Knapp designed covers for her own line, make sure that the word Fleetwood does not appear on the cover. These were mass produced and are numerous. Like my article which compared first day covers to car makes, these are the Chevy variety. To find the real McCoy add an additional search criterion of selling for more than \$100. The number found dropped to less than half. Examining these covers really highlights the quality and beauty of a Knapp cover.



Figure A6



Editor's note: The beauty of Knapp covers is beyond words. The works that she left are a monument to a wonderful artist who created outstanding philatelic treasures for the enjoyment of future generations. The book pictured to the left is the definitive reference book that captures the essence of her work. If you have any interest in FDCs – sooner or later, you will run into a Knapp cover that will mesmerize you! It happened to me....