

Verified Reception Stamps,

a book by

James N. Drummond

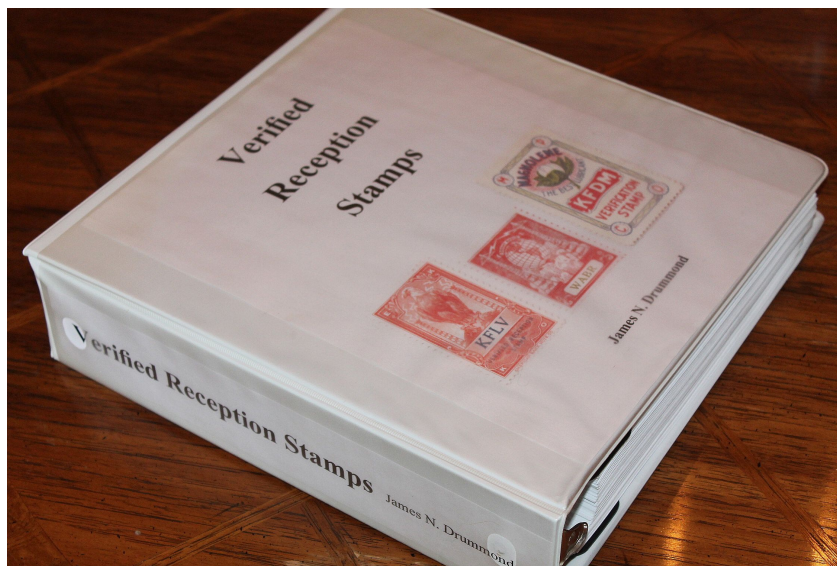
Reviewed by Jerry Berg,

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“Comprehensive” is really not an adequate description of *Verified Reception Stamps*. “Encyclopedic” better captures the scope and detail of this definitive work on Ekko stamps and their progeny. There have been many articles on the subject, and at least one book that I know of, but none has covered the topic with the breadth and depth found here. Drummond is a well-known authority on other kinds of stamps (revenue stamps, school stamps, savings stamps, etc.). His status as a licensed ham (from around age 13) no doubt provided some extra motivation to delve into this particular subject; that, plus several decades as a collector of these stamps.

Although the 635-page book, which I believe was first published in 2011, is mainly about Ekko stamps, it covers Bryant stamps and AFKO stamps as well, plus the various stamps issued by



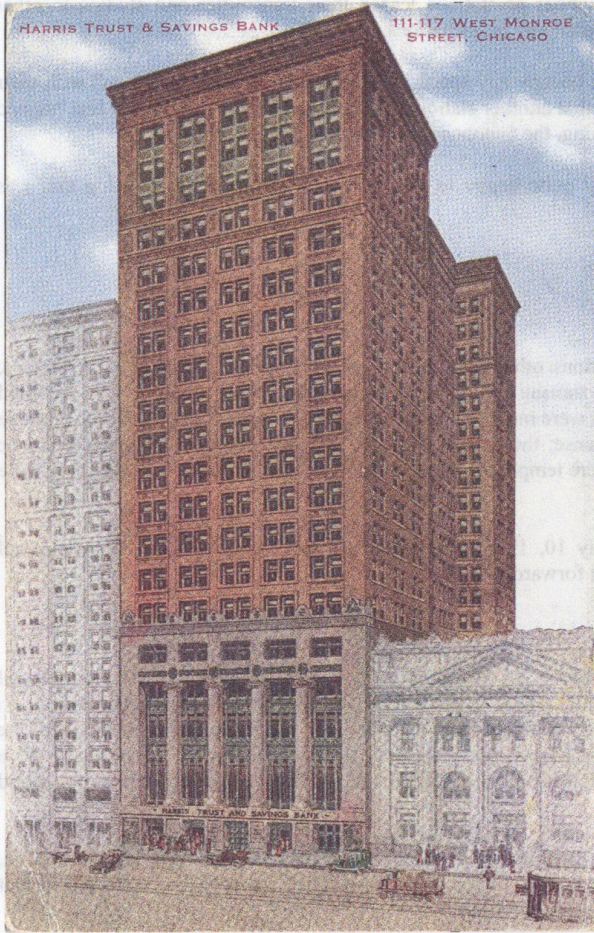
individual stations over the years (including the AWR stamps that are well known to shortwave listeners). Following a detailed table of contents there is an 85-page introductory essay where the author discusses the history of Ekko stamps et al. This is followed by what he calls a catalog, consisting of text and graphics covering the stamps of nearly 1,400 individually-listed stations. The book is in looseleaf format, three-hole drilled. You supply the binder.

The essay.

I don't believe there has ever been a more detailed treatment of this subject. To ensure that the discussion would be meaningful to non-radio types, Drummond begins by describing the birth of broadcasting—the equipment, the call letters, the Department of Commerce Radio Service Bulletins, first stations, the inception of “DX,” etc., plus the purpose the stamps serve, namely, to verify a listener's reception. From there he launches into coverage of the Ekko stamps themselves, starting with the company's beginnings (see pg. 2; pages from the book are presented with the author's permission) and moving on to the two basic designs of Ekkos—the eagle for U.S. stations, the beaver for Canadians. Both were printed by the American Bank Note Company and later overprinted with the station's call letters and the words “Verified Reception Stamp.”

Ekko Verified Reception Stamps

The Beginning



The Harris Bank Complex
East Building, today.

Towner Keeney Webster was born in Evanston, Illinois on July 31, 1849. He owned a sheet metal fabrication concern in Chicago called the Webster Manufacturing Company. His son, Towner Keeney Webster, Junior, was born on May 28, 1881. Mr. Webster, Junior worked for his father at the factory for a time, and then he worked for various other manufacturing businesses, primarily as an engineer.

In 1922, the same year that his father passed away, Towner Keeney Webster, Junior started the Ekko Company.

The Ekko Company was located in suite number 911 of the Harris Trust and Savings Bank Building in Chicago, Illinois. The address was 111 West Monroe Street. The Harris bank began in May, 1882. The postcard to the left above shows what the building looked like in the early years of the twentieth century. In 1957 the building was torn down, and a 23-storey skyscraper was erected in its place. The Harris Bank continues to occupy the same site.⁵

⁵ More information can be found at: www4.harrisbank.com/secure.

The author describes how the program worked. You sent a reception report to the station, on an Ekko “Proof of Reception Card” or other card or letter, together with a dime, and if your report was correct, and if the station was a participant in the Ekko program (which means they would have

bought a stock of stamps imprinted with the station's call letters), they sent you the stamp, typically along with the station's QSL letter or card. If the station did not participate in the program, you could send the QSL to the Ekko Company and they would send you a properly-imprinted stamp (and return your QSL). If you had an Ekko stamp album, you could place the stamp in its proper place. Or you could attach the stamp to the station's card or letter, which is what many listeners did.

Pane Format

In any group or collection of Ekko stamps, there is always a significant number of the stamps that have straight edges, far more than there should be if the stamps were issued in a sheet size of say ten columns by ten rows or larger, and that had imperforate edges on all four sides.

Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that the stamps were issued in smaller panes, perhaps just five columns by five rows, with the stamps in each outside position having a straight edge. This 5 by 5 format would easily produce the large percentage of stamps that have straight edges on their left, right, bottom, top, or a combination of these sides (at the left **and** at the bottom, etcetera). However, the author is unaware of any full panes of Ekko stamps, so the exact pane or sheet format will continue to be a mystery. The 5 by 5 size is just an educated guess.¹³

There is no reason to place a lower value on a straight edge copy, as is the custom with collectors regarding postage stamps. In fact, some of the combinations of straight edges can be considered "collectible," in their own right.

The examples with a straight edge at the left or at the bottom, or at the left **and** at the bottom, are the most common. Examples with a straight edge at the top are found infrequently. And in the author's opinion, an Ekko stamp with a straight edge at the top and at the right, like the one shown to the right, is outright scarce.

The reason why this format is so scarce will be explained shortly.



Interestingly, many of the stamps that were apparently in the top row of the pane seem to have been primarily separated from what was presumably the top margin by a paper trimmer, or maybe even scissors. There is a significant number of stamps in the author's collection for example that either have obviously-trimmed perforations at the top (such as the stamp on the left, above), or that still have a small strip of paper attached to the top edge (as with the example on the right, above).

On some other copies however, a full straight edge is present on the top edge.

¹³ Some correspondence between the author and an Ekko stamp seller on eBay revealed that he had once seen a horizontal strip of five stamps, with imperforate margins at the left and at the right. Unfortunately he did not make a photocopy or scan of the strip.

Why verify reports with a stamp at all? Drummond makes the point that both QSLing and postage stamp collecting were popular hobbies in the early and mid-1920s, and that combining the two was a logical step. The heyday of the Ekko stamp was 1924 to the early 1930s, by which time the program was largely in the rear-view mirror (although some stations with stocks of stamps on hand continued to use them). Its demise was probably, in part, a result of the increased meaning of a dime during the Depression, together with the penchant of collectors to trade stamps among themselves, thus eliminating the stamp's value as a bona fide certification of a person's reception.

The essay is extensively illustrated—there is hardly a page without a graphic of some kind. They are large and readable, and include advertisements, QSLs, pictures of Ekko albums and reception report cards, lists and communications from the company, and many pictures of stamps, used to illustrate particular points. The graphics add authenticity to a story whose finer points must of necessity, after the passage of nearly a century, rely to a considerable extent on interpretations of, and interpolations from, the documented record. They are necessary to a full understanding of the narrative, and they leaven a story whose details might otherwise get lost in the telling.

Drummond's treatment of the stamps themselves is near forensic (see the previous page, for example). He carefully analyzes the combinations of paper, colors and ink that were used, the perforations and edges, fonts, etc. in order to squeeze out as much information as possible about the back-office side of the Ekko program. He also examines various Ekko stamp anomalies, errors, proofs and specimens that have surfaced from time to time.

At some point, the company began issuing stamps with call-letter imprints added not through typesetting but by the use of a common, multiple-wheeled rubber stamp applied to a "blank" Ekko stamp. Drummond is cautious about these, given their potential for abuse.

The discussion of Bryant stamps is less detailed, but still quite thorough. They operated under the name of the Ideal Company. Bryant stamps were issued under a completely different, one-transaction model. You paid a dollar, received a complete set of stamps for all stations, and then counted them as verifications as your conscience permitted. Drummond takes a close look at these stamps, and the design of the perforated sheets on which they were printed.

The author's treatment of the Adventist World Radio stamps is less complete than the other sections. They came into use in 1977, and, while they are no longer issued, they are often seen on AWR QSLs. The stamps were the creation of well-known AWR elder and shortwave historian Adrian M. Peterson. The original design (right) was used until 1985, and was replaced by a second one in 1996. Several AWR promotional stickers have also made an appearance.



AFCO stamps are the least well known of all. Dating back to the mid-1930s, they were the creation of NNRC vice-president Art Foerster of Indianapolis. He got the idea after serving as a third-party verifier for a couple of Alabama broadcast band stations of that era. Drummond shows a QSL and AFCO stamp from WIRE of Indianapolis. Many more were issued, but the AFCOs never caught on.

Drummond does a nice job of picturing many of the privately-issued stamps and advertising labels used by individual stations. These are surely the best looking of all, given their variety and station-specific designs. He includes as well some of the many stamps issued in connection with commercial radio expositions of the 20s and 30s, plus some related items, including stamps used by amateur radio QSL bureaus throughout the world.

The essay concludes with some comments on the rarity of the various stamps, a few thoughts on present-day prices, and an analysis of just how many Ekko stamps were issued.

The catalog (see left).

The bulk of the book, some 512 pages, is a station-by-station listing of the stamps of all kinds pertaining to individual stations, listed in order of call letters. For each station there are a few sentences about its origins, ownership, location, frequency and wavelength, the stamps' relative rarity, and a code indicating the source of the author's information. The entry is accompanied by color pictures of the various stamps that were issued by or on behalf of the station. They are overwhelmingly from American stations, but there are also dozens of Canadians, plus a small number from England, Cuba, Mexico and a few other countries.

WCBA - WCBC

<p>WCBA Allentown Pennsylvania USA</p>	<p>Call sign City State Country</p>	<p>254 or 280 Meters Charles W. Heimbach</p>	<p>Wavelength Station owner Call sign meaning</p>
	<p>Country Data source</p>	<p>b, e, f, g, r, si</p>	<p>c Rarity</p>
<p><u>Notes:</u> WCBA had 5 watts of power in May 1923 when they started; 10 watts in 1925; and 15 watts in 1926. Their slogan was "The Voice of the Lehigh Valley." The Allentown poster stamp exists with and without various "WCBA" overprints, as shown. WCBA was still broadcasting as of April, 1935.</p>			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p><i>This EKKO stamp should exist but it has not yet been seen.</i></p> </div>			
<p>WCBC Ann Arbor Michigan USA</p>	<p>Call sign City State Country</p>	<p>229 or 280 Meters University of Michigan</p>	<p>Wavelength Station owner Call sign meaning</p>
	<p>Country Data source</p>	<p>e, f, g</p>	<p>c Rarity</p>
<p><u>Notes:</u> WCBC was licensed in January, 1924. They had a 200 watt system and operated out of the basement of the engineering department. They went off the air in late-1925. Later, the school started stations WCBN (FM) and WJXX (AM). Their website is www.wcbs.org.</p>			

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Reflecting the author's aforementioned caution about the possible inauthenticity of stamps that were finalized with rubber stamp imprints, the catalog contains only Ekko stamps that were typeset.

The book concludes with a long list of references, including books, articles and websites (some of the latter are surely out-of-date now). The purchaser is encouraged to sign up for updated pages, but I don't believe any have been issued.



Verified Reception Stamps is available from Eric Jackson Revenue Stamps, P.O. Box 728, Leesport, PA 19533 www.ericjackson.com and is often for sale on eBay. Although at \$89 plus shipping it is likely to be of interest mainly to collectors and researchers, the author deserves great thanks for his thorough treatment of this interesting corner of radio history.

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