

GAAR WILLIAMS


1880 - 1935

A Checklist of the Blanche Stillson Collection
in the Irwin Library of Butler University

1981



Pencil drawing of Gaar Williams
by Levon West (1900-1968), also known as Ivan Dmitri.



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THE
ARTIST

- GAAR
WILLIAMS -

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GAAR WILLIAMS

THE MAN AND HIS WORK (1880-1935)

When Gaar Williams died in 1935, his popular cartoons were syndicated in thirty-nine newspapers and he was regarded by millions of fans as a skilled artist and whimsical social historian. This collection of his personal memorabilia and artwork includes not only a representative survey of his professional career—commercial illustrator, political cartoonist and human interest artist—but an extraordinary review of his life. The bulk of this collection which was donated to the Butler University Library in 1964 by Blanche Stillson, an Indianapolis artist and friend of the Williams family, has been enhanced by subsequent contributions from other donors.

The comfortable genteel life which Gaar Williams experienced provided him with an untroubled and pleasant outlook. Born into Richmond, Indiana's prominent Gaar family which encouraged his talents, the young artist sketched freely at home and on vacations (see item 2). He imitated the leading illustrators of the day such as Charles Dana Gibson (see item 4), and pursued professional training in Cincinnati during his high school years. From 1900 to 1909 he studied at the Chicago Art Institute, did commercial illustration, and worked as a staff artist for the *Chicago Daily News*. Returning to his home state in 1909, he became political cartoonist for the *Indianapolis News* where he shared an office with humorist Kin Hubbard and writer Bill Herschell. His career reached its peak during the years 1921 to 1935 when he drew human interest cartoons for the *Chicago Tribune*. At this time he filled his home with amusing antiques which he and his wife collected, and became friends with another Hoosier artist, John McCutcheon. His interest in antiquing, hunting, fishing and "road riding" remained constant throughout his life and appeared frequently in his cartoons. Thoroughly midwestern and eminently respectable, Williams associated with like-minded friends of means and influence.

Williams' commercial work was supplementary to his newspaper career, and his skill and humor kept him in constant demand. Personalized bookplates for relatives and bibliophiles were intricate miniatures, distinct from his usual spare style (see item 118). Sketches for Armour's 1929

Farmer's Almanac offered an annual outlet for rural wit (see item 124). Philanthropic and personal causes also tapped his talent: Rotary Club publications made good use of his membership (see items 113 and 125), and French Relief Fund portfolios raised funds during the first World War by displaying his work and that of his Indiana associates, Hubbard, Herschell, McCutcheon and George Ade (see item 122). Williams occasionally accepted commissions from magazine and book publishers. Although some of his work for *Collier's Weekly* demonstrated an uncharacteristic use of shading and realism (see item 13), most of his commercial illustration retained the familiar cartoon quality as seen in the portraits in *The Young Immigrants* by Ring Lardner, Jr.

Twelve years of political cartooning with the *Indianapolis News* developed Williams' skill at meeting daily deadlines, but did not make the best use of his talent. A letter to a friend in 1909 not only reveals a pertinent concern about being "weak in the matter of charicature [sic]," but his creative spelling as well (see item 92). Hubbard would sometimes help with a quick facial sketch of Woodrow Wilson or, at other times, Williams would compensate for this weakness by avoiding frontal depictions of recognizable politicians such as Warren G. Harding (ILLUSTRATION item 24.) His most obvious technique was the use of impersonal "types" to convey messages with which the common man could relate. For example, in the much reprinted 1918 cartoon of an American doughboy, he captured the unique combination of heroic individualism and home-grown idealism which characterized the American experience in the Great War (ILLUSTRATION, item 135). At the *News*, Williams also devoted considerable time to publicizing a favorite cause, the development of the state park system. His friend in the Indiana Department of Conservation, Richard Lieber, acknowledged this aid with a certificate designating Williams the department's "official cartoonist" (see item 107).

After he left Indianapolis in 1921 for Chicago, Williams correctly evaluated the reasons for his greater success there. "It is a lot more fun to make a fellow laugh than to make him angry. I enjoyed political cartooning, but I am having a lot more fun now." (Quoted in *Chicago Tribune*, June 16, 1936). His emotional makeup contained greater amounts of kindly tolerance than crusading zeal, apparently the wrong ratio for political journalism in Indiana.

The work best suited to Williams' personality was the human interest cartooning which he produced for the *Chicago Tribune* until his untimely death in 1935. This won him wide popularity and constant comparison with Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley. The parallel was apt because neither man lingered over unpleasant events of the day and both seemed nostalgic for an idyllic past. Williams generally did not comment on the contemporary issues of prohibition, the depression and New Deal programs. His cartoons chronicled, instead, the fads, fashions and foibles of everyday life as seen through the eyes of long-suffering Mort Green, Zipper, the personable dog, and other ingratiating characters. These daily offerings, usually in a single panel, appeared under recurring titles such as "Wotta Life," "Something Ought to be Done About This," "Our Secret Ambition," and "Static" (ILLUSTRATION, item 54).

His favorite series, and the one for which he is most remembered, was "Among the Folks in History," an affectionate visual valentine to his Richmond childhood. Memories of his 19th-century hometown, romanticized and then rendered with incredible exactitude of detail for architecture, furniture, and man-made paraphernalia, struck a similar nostalgic nerve in many Americans who wanted to remember the same rose-tinted past. A vaudeville theater stage, which could have been anywhere, was, in fact, the Phillips Opera House whose curtain bore advertisements for Richmond businesses of the 1890's (ILLUSTRATION, item 80). Or the young artist being praised by doting adults in a Victorian parlor could have been anyone; it was, autobiographically, Gaar himself (ILLUSTRATION item 131, 8th cartoon in unpagged book). Appropriately enough, Williams was preparing a book of these favorite cartoons at the time of his death. It appeared posthumously, bound in velvet, a tribute to his genteel vision of America (see item 130).

George T. Blakey
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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Gaar Williams, *Among the Folks in History*, Book and Print Guild, Winnetka, Illinois, 1935, Introduction by John McCutcheon.

Gaar Williams, *Among the Folks in History*, Rand McNally, 1947, Introduction by Delos Avery.

Gaar Williams, *How to Keep from Growing Old*, Rand McNally, 1948, Introduction by Franklin P. Adams.

Irving Dillard, "Gaar Williams," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XI, Supplement 1, p. 707-708.

Margaret Doherty, "Three Indiana Cartoonists, Then and Now," *Mirages of Memory, 200 Years of Indiana Art*, University of Notre Dame, 1977.

Chicago Tribune, June 16, 1935.

Indianapolis News, June 17, 1935.

(Richmond, Ind.) *Palladium*, June 15, 1935, and January 27, 1936.

OTHER COLLECTIONS

Wayne County Historical Museum, Richmond, Indiana
Eighty original cartoons, scrapbooks, photographs, personal memorabilia and furniture, hundreds of cartoon reprints.

Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
Nine cartoons from the *Indianapolis News* and *Chicago Tribune*; one commercial illustration.

Art Association of Richmond, Indiana
Six cartoons; one letter.

Indianapolis Museum of Art
Three cartoons.

Portfolio Club, Indianapolis, Indiana
Eleven cartoons in the Japanese Style.



No. 24: "How to fix things with the cook"



THE END OF A PERFECT DAY

No. 135: *Indianapolis News*, July 1918.



- GAR WILLIAMS -

REG. U. S. Pat. Off. Copyright, 1928, by The Chicago Tribune.

No. 54: "Static"

WHEN THE VARIOUS FORMS OF TAP
DANCING CAME BACK TO LIFE RECENTLY,
WE MISSED TH' LITTLE LAD WHO USED
TO COME OUT WITH A BROOM AND
SWEEP THE SAND OFF THE STAGE

THE
RAILROAD
STORE

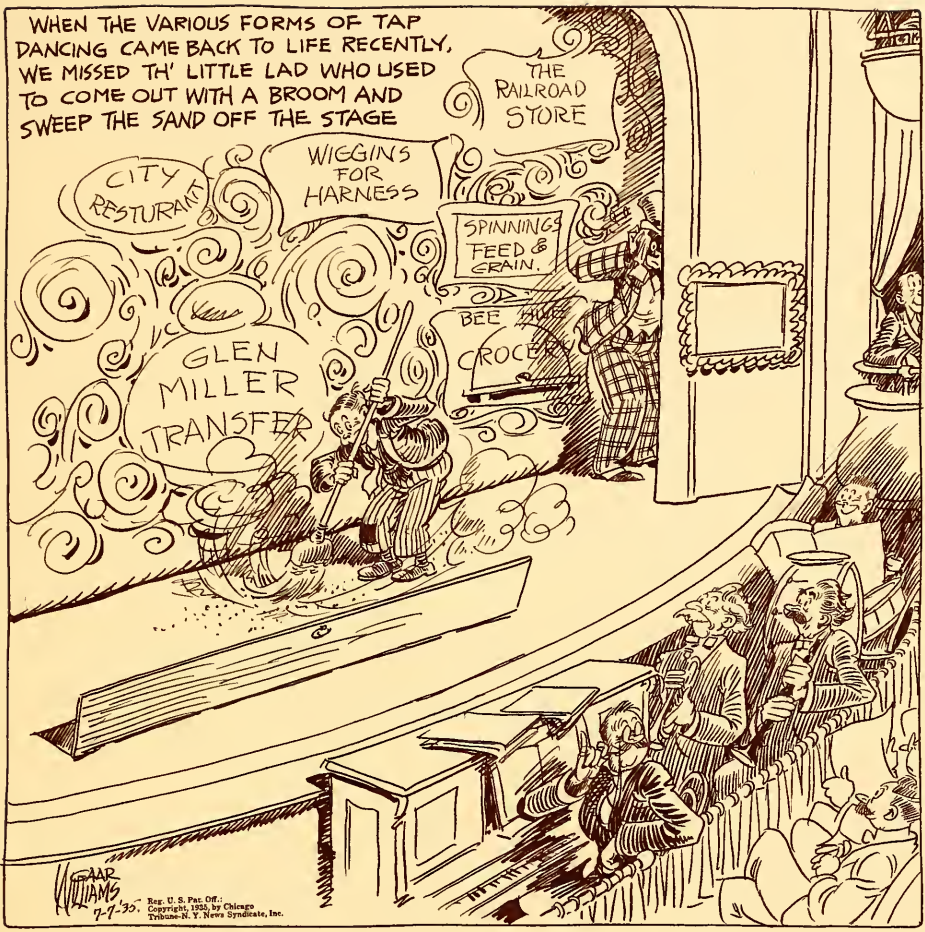
CITY
RESTAURANT

WIGGINS
FOR
HARNESS

SPINNING
FEED &
GRAIN.

BEE
CROCKERY

GLEN
MILLER
TRANSFER



GAAR
WILLIAMS
7-7-30

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Copyright, 1935, by Chicago
Tribune-N. Y. News Syndicate, Inc.

No. 80: "Among the Folks in History"

CHECKLIST OF THE GAAR WILLIAMS COLLECTION
IN THE HUGH THOMAS MILLER RARE BOOK ROOM
GIFT OF BLANCHE STILLSON, 1964

ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

A. JUVENILIA

1. "Sketches"
Sketchbook containing 16 sketches in pencil,
colored pencil, and ink.
8½ x 11"
2. "Drawing Book"
Sketchbook containing 15 sketches in pencil.
8⅝ x 11¼"
3. ["Sketch Book"]
Sketchbook containing 14 sketches in charcoal,
pencil, and watercolor.
5¼ x 8"
4. ["Gibson Girl"]
Ink and wash drawing on illustration board.
Signed and dated [19] 05.
14 x 11" (Oval)

B. EARLY PROFESSIONAL WORK

5. "And he's the war secretary, too!! !!!"
Ink on illustration board (*Chicago Daily News*,
circa 1907).
15¾ x 14"
See: *Review of Reviews*, October 1907.
6. "Then-Now"
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14"
7. "Glidden Tour"
Ink on illustration board.
14 x 14"
8. "The Author"
Ink on illustration board.
17 x 11¾"
[Illustration for Ring Lardner's *The Young
Immigrants*, 1920]
9. "Uncle Bill"
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 11½"
[Illustration for Ring Lardner's *The Young
Immigrants*, 1920]

10. "The Dirty Mechanic"
 Ink on illustration board.
 [Illustration for Ring Lardner's *The Young Immigrants*, 1920]
 14 x 12"
11. "Forget 'at Stuff," snapped Jones, disturbed by ghastly recollection.
 Pencil heightened with white, on cardboard.
 15 x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
 [Illustration for a magazine]
12. "Our boys made the Irish"
 Pencil and ink wash heightened with white, on board.
 15 x 18"
 [Illustration for a story by Jonathon Brooks, Oct. 1, 1921]
13. "The checkers with which they play"
 Ink, pencil and wash on board.
 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 20"
 [Illustration for "Your move, Mr. Harding" by Lowell Mellett for *Colliers Weekly*]

C. INDIANAPOLIS NEWS CARTOONS 1909-1921

14. "Well she was a great old gun for squirrels - but we ain't huntin squirrels"
 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
15. "Just the fella I wanta see"
 Ink on illustration board.
 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
16. "'Now then!' Resolved - we are out of the mud."
 Ink on illustration board.
 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
17. "When Foch comes to town"
 Ink on illustration board.
 20 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
18. "Some Fourth"
 Ink on illustration board.
 19 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
19. "Pshaw, we know how its done--"
 Ink on illustration board.
 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
20. "Not greatly excited"
 Ink on illustration board.
 18 x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

21. "Explaining the expense account"
April 15, 1918.
Ink on illustration board.
17½ x 16¾"
22. "Let every man do his duty"
Ink on illustration board, 1921.
19 x 14"
23. "Word from the sick room (?)"
Ink on illustration board.
20 x 14½"
24. "How to fix things with the cook"
Ink on illustration board.
19¼ x 14¼"
25. "Keeping up with William"
Ink on illustration board.
18 x 15"
26. "After all - somehow we had a hunch it would be there"
Ink on illustration board.
19½ x 14½"
27. "Everything said to be quiet"
Ink on illustration board.
19 x 14½"
28. "We have everything but the outlet - What's the answer?"
Ink on illustration board.
18½ x 14¼"
29. "Cheer up! Think what a time Cap Kidd would have figuring out his income tax."
Ink on illustration board.
18 x 14¾".
30. "Lets give a thought to our family portrait and what it stands for."
Ink on illustration board.
17 x 14"
31. "A little something with a kick"
Ink on illustration board.
19 x 14½"
32. "Now for a much needed rest"
Ink on illustration board.
19 x 14"
33. "We heartily favor fire prevention"
Ink on illustration board.
19¼ x 14¼"

34. "Yes indeed"
Ink on illustration board.
19 x 14½"
35. "The unemployment problem is taken up locally"
Ink on illustration board.
18½ x 14"
36. "No way to spend a hot weekend"
Ink on illustration board.
19 x 14½"
37. "Somebody's been tagging around all day"
Ink on illustration board.
20 x 14"
38. "Gee how the year rolls around"
Ink on illustration board.
19½ x 14¼"
39. "And furthermore"
Ink on illustration board.
19½ x 14½"
40. "The usual greeting from the husband"
Ink on illustration board.
19¼ x 14¼"
41. "The other pole"
Ink on illustration board.
17¾ x 16"
42. "An Impression" [Indianapolis 500]
Ink on illustration board.
17½ x 17"

D. CHICAGO TRIBUNE 1921-1935

43. "Bothering Uncle with our affairs"
March 15, 1922.
Ink on illustration board.
18 x 15"
44. "The Nice Boy" (Among the Folks in History)
March 25, 1923.
Ink on illustration board.
14⅝ x 11⅞"
45. "A Strain on the Family Tie"
Ink on illustration board, 1924.
11⅞ x 10"
46. "How to keep from growing Old"
November 28, 1924.
Ink on illustration board.
14⅞ x 11½"

47. "A Strain on the Family tie"
March 3, 1925.
Ink on illustration board.
14½ x 14½"
48. "Static"
May 5, 1927.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14"
49. "Armistice Day"
November 11, 1927.
Ink on illustration board.
15¼ x 14½"
50. "Wotta Life, Wotta Life"
July 18, 1928.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14½"
51. "Wotta Life, Wotta Life"
September 26, 1928
Ink on illustration board.
14¾ x 14"
52. "Our Secret Ambition-"
October 1, 1928.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14½"
53. "Wotta Life, Wotta Life-"
October 10, 1928.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14½"
54. "Static"
November 8, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
15¼ x 14½"
55. "When Words fail Yuh-"
December 7, 1928.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14½"
56. 'Wotta Life, Wotta Life-"
January 9, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14½"
57. "Our Secret Ambition"
February 18, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
14¾ x 14½"

58. "Our Secret Ambition"
February 25, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
14⁷/₈ x 14¹/₂"
59. "Static"
February 28, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
14¹/₂ x 14¹/₂"
60. "How to keep from Growing Old"
August 9, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
14¹/₂ x 14¹/₂"
61. "Our Secret Ambition"
September 16, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
15¹/₄ x 14¹/₂"
62. "Static"
November 7, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
15¹/₄ x 14¹/₂"
63. "Something ought to be done about this—"
November 16, 1929.
Ink on illustration board.
15¹/₄ x 14¹/₂"
64. "Among the Folks in History"
March 16, 1930.
Ink on illustration board.
15 x 14¹/₂"
65. "Our Secret Ambition"
September 8, 1930.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14¹/₂"
66. "A Strain on the Family Tie"
October 21, 1930.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14¹/₂"
67. "Static"
October 30, 1930.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14¹/₂"
68. "A Happy Note"
May 1, 1931.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14¹/₂"

69. "A Strain on the Family Tie"
March 22, 1932.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
70. "Static"
August 18, 1932.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
71. "Something ought to be done about this"
September 3, 1932.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
72. [From "Zipper the dog" series]
September 27, 1932.
Ink on illustration board.
14 x 14"
73. "A Strain on the Family Tie"
May 22, 1934.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
74. [Family Auto Outing]
May 23, 1934.
Ink on illustration board.
14½ x 14"
75. "Strain on the Family Tie-"
June 19, 1934.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
76. "Our Secret Ambition"
July 1, 1935.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
77. "A Strain on the Family Tie"
July 2, 1935.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
78. "Wotta Life, Wotta Life"
July 3, 1935.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"
79. "Something ought to be done about this-"
July 5, 1935.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"

80. "Among the Folks in History"
July 7, 1935.
Ink on illustration board.
16 x 14½"

PORTRAITS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

81. **Portrait** of Gaar Williams by Levon West [pseud. Ivan Dmitri] (1900-1968)
Pencil drawing on charcoal paper.
18 x 22"
82. **Photograph** of Williams at the Drawing Board.
7¼ x 5"
83. **Photograph** of Williams reading Abe Martin's Almanac.
84. **Photograph** of Williams in cadet uniform, 1898.
(Williams center)
5 x 5¼"
85. **Photograph** of Williams wearing large hat, 1902.
6 x 5"
86. **Photograph** of Williams with dog [1933 or 1934]
6 x 5"
87. **Photograph** of Williams and F. B. Johnson in hunting clothes.
November 1934.
5½ x 3½"
88. **Photocopy** of Williams' self caricature. N.D.
9½ x 8½"
89. **Silhouette** of Williams by Kin Hubbard.
Black paper pasted on cardboard.
9½ x 6½"
90. **Silhouette** of Williams by Frank King, 1924.
Black paper pasted on cardboard.
8½ x 7"

LETTERS

91. Gaar Williams to Hilton U. Brown, April 6, 1909.
One sheet, one side.
8½ x 11"
92. Gaar Williams to Bates [Johnson, April 1909] N.D.
Two sheets, two sides.
6¾ x 10½"

93. Williams to Harriot. N.D.
Typescript with ink and crayon sketch of Florida beach.
One sheet, two sides.
7½ x 6"
94. Williams to Curtis. N.D.
Brief message and pencil sketch.
One side.
9½ x 6"

MISCELLANEOUS DRAWINGS AND SKETCHES

95. "The Gnaw Bone Hunt & Kennel Club"
Ink on illustration board, 1932.
14¼ x 14"
96. [Moving Day]
Pencil sketch on card.
5½ x 3½"
97. [Auto in mud]
Postcard, August 8, 1923.
5½ x 3½"
98. [Banjo Player]
Ink sketch on stationery with letterhead.
7 x 6"
99. [Apartment building]
Pencil sketch on card.
5½ x 3½"
100. [Christmas Greeting] on card to Sue, 1934.
Colored pencil.
3½ x 5½"
101. [Christmas Greeting] on card to Brooks, 1934.
Colored pencil.
3½ x 5½"
102. [Christmas Greeting] on card to John and Harriet, 1934.
Colored pencil.
3½ x 5½"
103. [July Fourth greeting] to Harriet, July 5, 1934.
Ink and colored pencil.
7¼ x 8½"
104. [Sketch of Fred Wellman]
Pencil on paper pasted to cardboard.
See: letter 104a
7¼ x 4¼"
- 104a. Letter from Fred Wellman to Blanche Stillson.
December 6, 1964.

MEMORABILIA

105. Williams' signature.
Brush and india ink on illustration board.
3 x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
106. Williams' calling card [prior to 1909?]
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 2"
107. Certificate to Williams from Richard Lieber,
appointing him official cartoonist of the Indiana
Department of Conservation.
November 17, 1921.
Typescript, ink, and embossed seal.
12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9"
108. Cale Fluhart on Williams [a biography of Williams
by Kin Hubbard]
Typescript, two pages.
12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 8"
109. "La Grondeuse/or/Aw Hell!"
Self portrait of Blanche Stillson, 1921.
Linoleum cut.
9 x 7"
110. Newspaper and magazine clippings
 - a. Relating to Williams' death in 1935. Ten clippings.
 - b. Republished cartoons. Eight clippings.
 - c. Relating to Hoosier Salon show, 1936. One clipping.
 - d. Reprint of *Tribune* photo of Williams receiving a contract.
 - e. Reprint from *American Business*, N.D.
 - f. Five Sunday color continuity comic strips.
111. Material assembled for the *Dictionary of American Biography*
entry on Gaar Williams.
All dated 1942.

COMMERCIAL ART

A. PROGRAMS

112. St. Benno Fest program 1914.
Four-page illustrated brochure (Indianapolis)
9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
113. Rotary Romp, Indianapolis, 1919.
Three-fold brochure.
3 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
114. Birthday dinner, 1920 for E.M.T.H.S. (Indianapolis)
Three-fold brochure.
3 x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

B. CHRISTMAS CARDS

115. Christmas 1915.

Printed and hand-colored on deckle edged card stock.

5½ x 3½"

116. Christmas 1916.

Printed and hand-colored on card stock.

5½ x 3½"

117. Christmas card on note paper, N.D.

Printed in brown on brown paper.

6¾ x 5½"

C. BOOKPLATES

118. Eighteen Bookplates.

D. WORLD WAR I

119. Books for Seamen. Poster.

Inscribed to Blanche Stillson.

38 x 25"

120. Long Boy. Sheet music.

Words by William Herschell, music by Barclay Walker,
scenery by Gaar Williams.

13½ x 10½"

121. Broadside for War Savings Stamps, 1918.

9½ x 6"

122. Comic Valentines for the French Relief Fund.

Four by Williams, others by Hubbard and McCutcheon.

Twelve in portfolio.

14⅛ x 8½" in blue.

E. MAGAZINES

123. *Farm Life Magazine* 1920-1927.

61 issues containing miscellaneous illustrations.

Also contains illustrations by Hubbard and McCutcheon.

12 x 8¼"

124. *Armour's Farmers' Almanac* 1929-1932.

F. BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS

125. *Gems from Indiana-Rotary's Literary Belt*, N.D.

Contains one cartoon by Williams; one portrait of
Williams.

7¼ x 4¾"

126. *Keeping up with William*, by Irving Bacheller.

Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1918.

With eight illustrations by Williams.

7½ x 5"

127. *Days Gone Dry*, by Frederick Landis.
Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1919.
With 29 illustrations plus cover by Williams.
With an original watercolor on the fly-leaf inscribed in
pencil "To Blanche" from Spin and Lena.
7½ x 4½"
128. *The Young Immigrants*, by Ring Lardner, Jr.
Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1920.
With fourteen illustrations by Williams.

BOOKS PUBLISHED

129. *Among the Folks in History*, by Gaar Williams.
The Book and Print Guild, Winnetka, Illinois, 1935.
A collection of his cartoons. This is copy Number 1 of an
edition limited to 500.
Bound in leather.
130. *Among the Folks in History...*
Another copy, Number 40.
Bound in red velvet.
131. *Among the Folks in History...*
A copy of the trade edition, bound in cloth.
[Illustration: The Artist, *Chicago Tribune*, 1930.]
132. *Among the Folks in History...*
Rand McNally, New York, 1947.
133. *How to keep from Growing Old* by Gaar Williams.
Rand McNally, 1948.

REPRINTS

134. "Cartoons of Gaar Williams"
Reprinted from the *Chicago Tribune*.
Thirteen fascicles in three folios with ties.
135. Reprint of "End of a Perfect Day", *Indianapolis News*,
July 20, 1918.
Two copies.

IRWIN LIBRARY
BUTLER UNIVERSITY
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INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46208