

A Collection Stamped In Nursing History: A Stamp Is Worth A Thousand Words

The first professor of the UConn School of Nursing, Josephine A. Dolan, donated



her nursing artifact collection to the University in 1996. The Dolan Collection is on display at the School of Nursing and other artifacts may be viewed by appointment, which can be made here: [UConn Dolan](#)

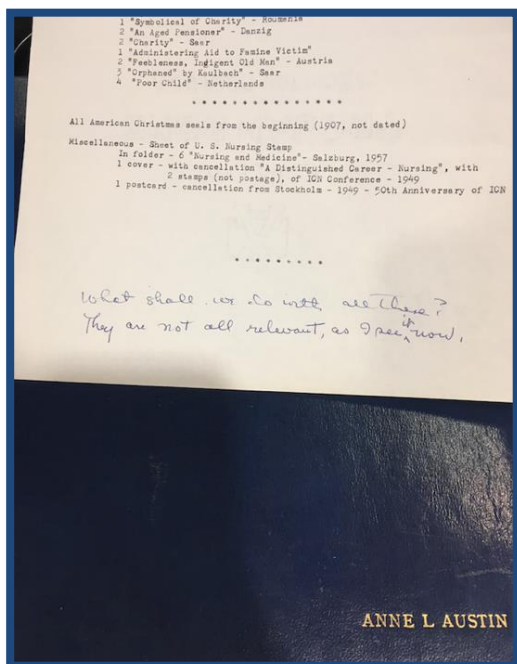
[Collection](#). Along with many unique objects donated by Josephine A. Dolan, there is a one of a kind binder that unfolds a collection of hundreds of stamps. This three-dimensional dark blue leather album

contains stamps showing the many people,

hospitals, eras, countries and organizations that have influenced the evolution of the nursing profession. The collection is in chronological order by date on manila papers that show wear and tear, as well as evidence of natural processes such as the yellowing of the paper, indicating oxidation. This suggests not only is the collection several decades old, but it has also been viewed many times.

This collection is the size of a standard laptop and weighs as much as a full term newborn baby. There are four parts to the collection, and they are all neatly ordered: the album, the brown accordion folder with all the stamps photocopied, the five-page glossary that appears to be printed from a typewriter, and the actual stamps taped onto the manila papers. The musty smell reminds me of a library and takes me back in time.

In addition, it has hand written notes on some pages that show someone has gone through the album at least once.



On the bottom right cover of the album, there is a name, Anne L. Austin, which is stamped in gold American typewriter lettering.

The object appears to have been appreciated by its owner considering it is neatly categorized, organized and well cared-for. Given what we know about its owner, this is unsurprising: Anne L. Austin was a great nurse historian who was born in Ischua, New York on August 7, 1891 and died in 1986. At just 26 years of age, Anne Lucipa

Austin started her nursing career in 1917 when she received her diploma from the Millard Fillmore Hospital School of Nursing. She began in Buffalo as a private duty nurse and later played a vital role during World War I when she joined the Army Nurse Corps. Once she returned to New York in 1919, Austin began a career in teaching at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. She continued to pursue her love for education by earning a Master's of Arts in Sociology. She used her degree to teach students at many universities including UCLA and the University of Pennsylvania. Post-retirement, Austin wrote her best-known work, [*A History of Nursing Sourcebook \(1957\)*](#), which is still in print. Not only did she write this book to educate future nurses on nursing's history, but also she dedicated the rest of her retirement to lectures, articles, and additional books on the subject. In 1967, Austin was one of the first appointed

members to the National League of Nursing's Committee on Historical Source Materials. She worked that position until 1967. The list of achievements goes on for Anne L. Austin, but among the many, she received an award for distinguished achievements in research and scholarship from the Alumnae Association of Teachers College, Columbia University (Myers, 2014).



Of all the incredible accolades Anne L. Austin received for her work on the field of nursing history, the importance of her stamp collection remains unrecognized. The University of Pennsylvania maintains a collection consisting of personal material and manuscripts of Anne Austin's found here: [Anne L. Austin Papers](#), however; her collection of stamp is not found among the collection. Though we know the album of stamps that tell nursing's past was maintained by Anne L. Austin, we have no evidence in regards to how it ended up in the University of Connecticut Dolan collection. However, we can conjecture that it was given as a gift by Austin herself to Josephine A. Dolan.

Dolan pursued her career in history at Uconn, notably teaching the "History of Nursing" course often. Anne L. Austin mentored Dolan and even was a member with Dolan on the National Historical Source Materials Committee. Dolan and Austin knew each other well which inspired Dolan to write a tribute in 1985 (D'Antonio, 2005). This tribute was in the first issue of the first volume of the Journal of Nursing History, established by the National League of Nursing. In this tribute article, Dolan discusses a

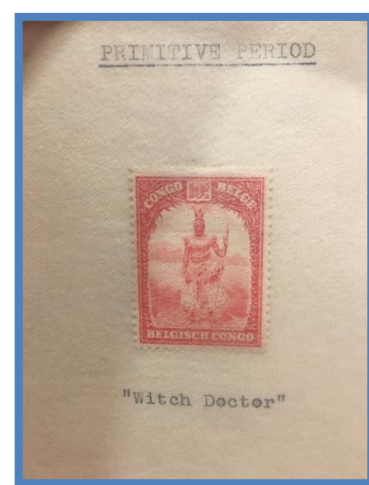
brief overview of Austin's life including her contribution to nursing history. All of her major achievements are considered; however, Dolan fails to include Austin's remarkable collection of stamps (Dolan, 1985). Since the tribute was written in 1985, and Austin died in 1986, I would like to believe that Austin left the collection of stamps as a gift for Dolan after her beautifully written tribute. After reading the tribute, it is clear Dolan thought highly of Austin; and indeed, she was an amazing nurse of whom we should recognize with appreciation.

Philately

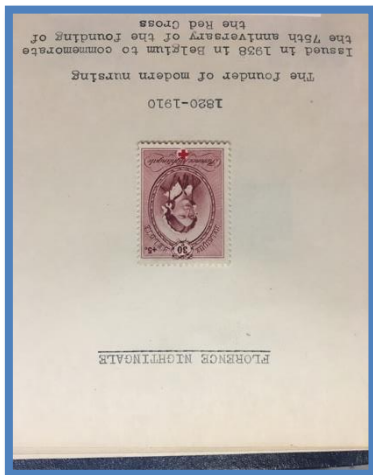
Though Dolan never mentioned Austin's collection of stamps in the tribute, and the University of Pennsylvania never mentioned Austin's collection among their artifacts, stamp collecting to depict nursing history is an important discipline among historians of the profession. Another philatelist, Margaret B. Ritchie, in the introduction to her book titled, "A History of Nursing Through Philately," notes "Every stamp, like a picture, tells a story," (Ritchie, 2007). Going through her book brought the same emotions I experienced when browsing through Anne Austin's collection. It is extremely common to tell history through stories of events. However, I have a newfound appreciation for the story telling that both Austin and Ritchie's collections tell of nursing..

Witch Doctor

The first stamp in the album, and also my favorite, is of a "witch doctor". The stamp suggests a popular depiction of early nursing practices among



traditional societies during the era in which it was manufactured. “Primitive peoples looked to witch doctors and medicine men to banish what they perceived to be the causes of illness: demons, evil sorcery or the malevolent influences of spirits” (Trojanovich, 2016). This is interesting to me because this is one of the first noted times in history where there is a designated person who will cure others in their community. The stamp shows a man dressed in cloth covering only private parts of his body. (Nursing uniforms have definitely come a long way!) The article shows that the illnesses the witch doctors cured were quite different from what nurses and doctors are responsible for today. This stamp is my favorite because it takes us back to the beginnings. It is interesting to compare how far we have come with uniforms, tools, methods, cures, healing places etcetera. The book of stamps portrays nursing history and gives you a visual idea of all the people, places, eras, cultures that have shaped



and influenced what the profession is today.

Significance

Stamps are commonly used to send letters, messages, and packages to friends near and far away. However, one tends to care more about what is in the letter than the actual stamp that sent it. Throughout history, the productions of stamps have been issued to commemorate many different subjects such as national holidays, historical figures and more. What is unique and beautiful about Anne Lucipa Austin’s particular collection is that she has gathered enough of a variety from different eras that tell the history of modern nursing. This is important because we must

appreciate where our profession originated. The stamps take you back in time all the way from when witch doctors healed the sick, to Florence Nightingale, to the beginnings of the American Red Cross. Theodore Roosevelt once said, “The more you know about the past, the better prepared you are for the future”.

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