

MISS CARRIE H. LIPPINCOTT



Carrie H. Lippincott, circa 1900

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE SEED EMPIRE AND THE FIGHT FOR HER NAME

Jennifer Huebscher

“I think all women should, when practicable, patronize a woman florist,” reads an 1898 testimonial from Mrs. Edwin B. Murray of Charlton, New York. The praise appears in a stunning scrapbook now in the MNHS collections that was kept by the self-proclaimed Pioneer Seedswoman of America—Carrie H. Lippincott of Minneapolis. As someone who came to the seed business by happenstance, Lippincott mastered entrepreneurial skills and used her position as a woman business owner to appeal to her predominantly female market. Her mail-order advertising techniques built a devoted following of customers.¹

Much has been written about Lippincott’s presence in the floral seed trade, her beautiful catalogs, and her calling out of male competitors who masqueraded as women to sell seeds—all of which are captured in the Miss C. H. Lippincott seed company scrapbook. But the scrapbook also alludes to a legal battle over the company bearing her name. An accusation from her business partner and brother-in-law, Samuel Y. Haines, that Lippincott was unfit to lead her company, along with attempts to discredit her, have not been examined and shed light on how her expertise was perceived. Her ultimate triumph against this threat proved her to be a competent and accomplished businesswoman. Set against the backdrop of a time when women were achieving substantial gains in the workforce, Lippincott’s story fits in with other women who were making their name, and she’s described as an “energetic end-of-the-century feminine, who is ill-content to fold her hands and let others feed and clothe her, or, having a living to make, does not hesitate to go about it.” Lippincott

built her reputation selling flower seeds to beautify the feminine sphere, but she cemented her reputation challenging gender norms by not just running a business, but establishing a lasting flower seed empire.²

BACKGROUND

Carrie H. Lippincott was born in 1860 in New Jersey to Joseph and Martha A. Lippincott. Her father passed away in 1881, leaving Carrie and her mother dependent on family for support. Sometime around 1888, Martha, Carrie, and two of her elder sisters—Rebecca Lippincott Kent and Mary Lippincott Haines—all moved to Minneapolis, likely at the suggestion of Mary's husband, Samuel Y. Haines, who had recently been hired at a local seed company, and who may have felt a responsibility to the unmarried and widowed Lippincott women. A reference in an 1887 issue of the *American Garden* noted, "Mr. S. Y. Haines of the defunct Philadelphia firm of S. Y. Haines & Co., in which we are sorry to say Mr. Haines laid down all of his savings, will enter the employ of Breslau, Northrup & Co., of Minneapolis." Haines, according to census records and newspaper articles, had been in the seed business at least since the mid-1870s, mostly in Philadelphia.³

Accounts vary on when the mail-order seed business began, but Lippincott often references a date of 1891 throughout the scrapbook, and regular, dedicated advertising and a regularly published seed catalog appeared in 1893 for Miss C. H. Lippincott Flower Seeds, located at 319 and 323 Sixth Street South in Minneapolis. Pages from

numerous seed catalogs were pasted into the scrapbook, and Carrie Lippincott was highlighted as integral to the company and its marketing strategies. In the 1896 section of the scrapbook, a clipping provides insight to the seed company's beginnings: "She came to Minneapolis eight years ago from Philadelphia, where she had grown up among flowers and plants, with relatives actively engaged in floriculture. When she came West she had money to invest, and, with friends to back and advise her, she opened a flower seed house, which has been working through the past years in a quiet way, locally hardly known, but widely acquainted outside." Her portrait graced the cover of the 1893 seed catalog, connecting her face with her company, and on the pages inside it, sketches of flowers promised healthy blooms to buyers who followed Lippincott's instructions. Here was a knowledgeable woman guaranteeing beautiful florals. A testimonial pasted in the scrapbook reads, "I intended to answer another advertisement for Flower Seeds, but your 'advt.' caught my eye.

Lippincott built her reputation selling flower seeds to beautify the feminine sphere, but she cemented her reputation challenging gender norms by not just running a business, but establishing a lasting flower seed empire.



Glowing testimonials from customers patronizing a woman-led business, 1893

The first seed house I have seen by a woman, and I made up my mind to patronize you. I wish you success." The fact that a woman was a key figure in the company resonated with customers and attracted business. Lippincott's face, her name, her knowledge of flower cultivation, and her role as a businesswoman were celebrated in these seed catalog pages and other advertising, setting the tone of success. Who better than a woman to sell the flower seeds intended for making a woman's home welcoming and beautiful?

The scrapbook provides numerous references to a spotlight shining on female entrepreneurs in the 1890s, and this should not be surprising. Data compiled by the federal government showed increasing numbers of women working. Carrie Lippincott joined the workforce around the time the US Census started recording the number of women in the labor force. In 1890, the first year the census tracked this data, women made up just under 16 percent of the workforce. By 1910, they represented more than 20 percent of the workforce. In 1897, the US Bureau of Labor also compiled and released data relating to women in the workforce. In the previous decade (1886–96), employment among women over the age of 18 had increased by 183 percent in Minnesota. In comparison, the increase for men during the same period was 56 percent. The report also examined various occupations and compared the percentage of men and women employed in those occupations over time. Between 1870 and 1890, the percentage of bookkeepers, clerks, and salespeople who were women jumped from 3.47 percent to 16.93 percent. Lippincott was joining a segment of the workforce where women were making substantial gains.⁴

Women were not just entering the workforce in larger numbers during this time. They also were establishing themselves as players in the business world and were building momentum for the women's suffrage movement. Women's fight for political equality shared language and characteristics with their demands for economic equality. Women in both camps were advocating for agency over the decisions that affected their well-being. Mary Foot Seymour started publishing the *Business Woman's Journal* in January of 1889. In the very first issue, Seymour stated,

Now we hope to broaden our influence and show that success is possible not in one sphere, but in all. Enough examples of prosperous women can be gathered in every business and profession to prove that success is the birthright of all who take the path which nature points out, and follow it fearlessly, persistently, and in a womanly way.

"She came to Minneapolis eight years ago from Philadelphia, where she had grown up among flowers and plants, with relatives actively engaged in floriculture. When she came West she had money to invest, and, with friends to back and advise her, she opened a flower seed house. . . ."

These bold words encouraged women to prosper beyond the traditional sphere of home. Despite its title, the journal aimed to appeal to a broad cross section of women (and men):

In adopting the name of THE BUSINESS WOMAN'S JOURNAL we do not wish to limit the scope of our work. We propose to devote its columns to the interests of all women, especially those who work. . . . This journal will, therefore, advocate the adoption of some avocation by every woman whose time is not occupied in household duties. It will aim to help all those who are seeking employment to select the most fitting, and will try to stimulate those already employed to do their work in the best possible manner.⁵

Both that first issue in January and a subsequent July issue contained columns titled "What Occupation Shall I Choose?" The strategic wording empowered women to pursue their interests and develop their talents to cultivate an occupation, not merely a job. Further, they were encouraged to continue enhancing their skill set to undertake more challenging work.

[W]omen need . . . to have their eyes opened to the opportunities that are now given to them in various fields. The stagnation of intellect from which a large class of women is suffering through want of suitable employment is almost as pitiable as the physical sufferings of those who are underpaid.

The article highlighted both the disparate employment standards for men and women and the disparate standards between women who wanted to work and women who had to work. The *Business Woman's Journal* encour-



A charming, colorful example of one of Miss C. H. Lippincott's seed catalogs, 1895

aged women not only to have employment, but also to find work that was stimulating and that paid competitively.⁶

THE BIRTH OF C. H. LIPPINCOTT SEEDS

Though Carrie Lippincott may not have considered herself a businesswoman at first, she entered the workforce and managed aspects of the flower seed company at a time when increasing numbers of women were carving out a place in the business world. In 1896, she recounted her entry into the seed business five years prior:

I issued my first circular of flower seeds . . . in 1891. As a result of this first issue I received 6,000 orders. This . . . assured my success. I was delighted. . . All of the work was done that first year by my mother, my brother and sister, and myself. The next year my business was increased to 20,000 orders and my store enlarged to two rooms. As the business increased even more rapidly . . .

I was compelled to secure an adjoining frame building for a store. . . Last year I issued 200,000 catalogues and received 150,000 orders. This year we will issue 250,000 catalogues, and expect an immense gain in business.⁷

The article appeared in "The Woman's Times" section of the *Minneapolis Times*, and, unlike other articles, which quoted both Lippincott and her brother-in-law Sam Haines, she was the only person affiliated with the business who was quoted in it. Speaking at length about various aspects of the business, including its growth, she referenced an increase in hiring during the busy season, the up-front costs of advertising and acquiring the seeds ahead of selling them, and knowledge of the reach of her business, which extended internationally. A 25 percent increase in catalog production also spoke to substantial growth and demonstrated Lippincott's ability to anticipate and adapt to customer needs.

Another interview of Lippincott covering similar topics appeared earlier that year in *Printers' Ink*, a journal for advertisers that regularly highlighted effective advertising in the success of one's business. In particular, the author focused on the entrepreneur's business acumen as Lippincott discussed the facets of her company and shared her strategies to keep the business healthy:

The catalogues [bring in the most business]. . . I send catalogues only to the customers of the previous year, so any former customers who want a catalogue are reminded to send for one when they see the advertisements. This I have found to be cheaper and more effective than to keep a lot of dead names on the list.⁸

Both the *Minneapolis Times* and *Printers' Ink* articles mentioned Haines's role in advertising for C. H. Lippincott. Indeed, he appeared to have a talent for creating striking advertisements and was deliberate about the publications in which they should appear. Their talents complemented each other, and they were sometimes described as working side by side in articles within the scrapbook. Lippincott's relationship with her brother-in-law would become fraught in the near future, however, putting the business in jeopardy.

CONFLICT AT C. H. LIPPINCOTT

Sam Haines was married to Carrie Lippincott's older sister Mary, who died in 1894. Articles in the scrapbook recounted the early years of the business and described the family working together to ensure the seed company's financial success. Initially after Mary's death, Sam, Carrie, and Carrie's mother continued living and working together. That all changed in 1898. An affidavit filed with the courts in July of that year on behalf of Haines asked for the business partnership to be dissolved, but not before he denigrated Lippincott's professional nature and withdrew money from the firm:

[As] affiant verily believes, the said Lippincott had not properly accounted for all of the receipts of such business and has repeatedly intimated to affiant that as the business was conducted in her name that she had the sole right thereto. . . [O]n or about the said 12th day of May, the said Lippincott was owing such co-partnership a large sum of money, and because of her threats and claim that she was the sole owner of the business, and the proceeds there from affiant, for his own protection, drew from their bank account the sum of \$3,000, and duly charged the same to his account.⁹

May 12, 1898, was repeatedly mentioned as the date when their business relationship crumbled. The previous day Samuel Haines had married his second wife, Charlotte M. Richardson Boardman, though this detail was left out of the court documents. According to Haines's telling, however, Lippincott had been pressing for acknowledgment as the sole owner before that date, perhaps when she became aware of Haines and Boardman's courtship.¹⁰

The court documents do not describe Lippincott in favorable terms, which is not surprising since the majority of the material was filed from Haines's point of view. A deposition from James L. Stack, who worked in newspaper advertising, stressed that Lippincott and Haines were partners and that she deferred to him when they disagreed on business matters. This subordinate role contrasts with how she is described in several articles about her quoted herein. Haines attacked her personal character and claimed that she would rather see the business fail than work with him. His language throughout the affidavit gave the impression that Lippincott was incompetent, vengeful, and incapable of running the business on her own. One wonders if a man would have been written about in similar terms.

[F]or about four months prior to the said 12th day of May, 1898, said Lippincott has willfully and maliciously attempted to interfere with the management of said business without any reasonable cause therefor and to the great detriment of said business and to the damage of your petitioner . . . [and he] verily believes that owing to the vindictive disposition of said Lippincott and her manner of conducting the said business, that she would wilfully disobey any restraining order made by this court and that she would be apt to either remove or destroy many of the said original orders, and in such case your petitioner would be without any remedy to protect his rights or receive the value of such property.¹¹

On closer reading of the court case file, however, her next steps read more like those of someone committed to ensuring smooth operation rather than vindictive action. She opened a new bank account, received and filled orders from the stock of seeds, collected money, deposited checks—all actions that needed to be performed to keep the business solvent and functional—without involvement from Haines. In her answer to the court, Lippincott “denies each and every allegation and each and every part thereof, contained in said complaint, except that defendant admits that she discharged the plaintiff from her employment on or about the 12th day of May.” Her entire answer is less

Haines himself is quoted in the *Printers' Ink* article as saying, "Miss Lippincott has more nerve than any *man* I ever saw," and described their accomplishments in terms of "we." This starkly contrasts with how he depicted her in court documents, diminishing her duties to opening the mail and making daily reports. . . .

than a page, a stark contrast to the pages of court documents and lines of text demeaning her character.¹²

Likely, Lippincott was concerned when her brother-in-law married again, especially if she feared changes to the seed company's business model or distribution of profits. The court documents indicated that profits had been split 50–50 between Haines and Lippincott in the past. Given the knowledge Lippincott demonstrated when she spoke about the business to reporters and to her customers via her seed catalog, the business meant a lot to her, and she was capable of being in charge. Haines himself is quoted in the *Printers' Ink* article as saying, "Miss Lippincott has more nerve than any *man* I ever saw," and described their accomplishments in terms of "we." This starkly contrasts with how he depicted her in court documents, diminishing her duties to opening the mail and making daily reports, indicating that he actively downplayed her understanding of the business. Any changes to her earned income or the business model of the company that she was effectively managing surely would have been unsettling and could have spurred her to cement sole control of the company bearing her name. Evidence exists that Haines may have tried to push Lippincott out of the company or into a reduced role. In 1899 he issued his own seed catalog with his new wife's face on the opening page, clearly emulating the style of catalog that had been so successful with Lippincott.¹³

Ultimately, on July 22, 1898, the court ordered Lippincott to put up a \$2,000 bond to be held for Haines's benefit until all the money and property was accounted for. In December of that year, Lippincott and Haines divided their property equally and settled the claim and a stipulation for dismissal was filed. Though it had cost her financially, Lippincott kept the company and location. Meanwhile, Haines started a new, competing seed company with his wife at the Boston Block at Hennepin and Third Street, also in downtown Minneapolis.¹⁴

ANALYZING THE CASE

Given the sparse record, we may never know exactly what transpired between Lippincott and Haines. Elements from both points of view are probably accurate, and both

parties bent the truth to their own advantage, as the court documents don't align with how the business had been written about previously. Haines's attempts to discredit Lippincott may have included downplaying her role in the company and claiming that her contributions were limited to her name and likeness and simple clerical tasks befitting a woman. He also may have underestimated Lippincott's credibility as a businesswoman and may have been unaware of how much she had learned in observing his approach to advertising and the seed trade while she engaged in more clerical tasks in the earliest days of the business. Assuming various roles no doubt expanded her skill set; and having a successful enterprise with her name attached to it probably amplified her drive to be adept in all angles of the business. Indeed, twenty-first-century analysis indicates that women at the turn of the twentieth century needed to take this all-in approach in order to gain entry into the business world:

Ambition, perseverance, and initiative were only some of the qualities making a successful business woman. Success also required aptitude and executive ability. In contrast to male contemporaries who were acquiring aptitude by working their way up the corporate ladder, or jumping onto a midpoint rung after earning a business or engineering degree, women could not rely on formal business training or a university credential. Women acquired business aptitudes while preparing for other tasks (e.g., housekeeping, teaching, or clerical work). Business women distinguished themselves from other women by the imagination and dexterity with which they transferred existing knowledge and skills to new arenas of activity.¹⁵

Lippincott was not the only woman whose familiarity with flowers and acquisition of on-the-job knowledge propelled her to the top. A contemporary of Lippincott, Theodesia Burr Shepherd of California, also built a seed company in her own name, though her focus was on flowers suited specifically to her region of California. As both her business and business acumen grew over time, Shepherd was written about in terms similar to those used to describe Lippincott:

[Shepherd] had no idea in those early days of establishing an industry, . . . when the piece of ground purchased by her husband was turned over to her for her experiments and experiments they were at first as she drifted along. . . . [W]ith no adviser, no knowledge of business, or the work of seed growing, except as an amateur, all had to be learned by experience alone. Endowed with a love of flowers . . . and a strong will, inherited from her talented father, this . . . woman overcame all obstacles and achieved success where others would have failed.¹⁶

In contrast to Carrie Lippincott, evidence does exist that perhaps Samuel Haines was less proficient in business than he portrayed, though he still was able to find work following each setback. In addition to the reference earlier in this article to him losing his savings to his failed Philadelphia seed firm in 1887, the *Christian Union* in 1876 had warned,

We have received the following commercial report of the standing of S. Y. Haines & Co., of Cleveland, Tennessee, who advertise to sell wheat, seeds, &c. We do not know who the Company are. S. Y. Haines is the only person known here, and he is not worthy of credit. Their business is to advertise and sell humbug seeds away from home.

Haines repeated this pattern of mismanaging his business affairs in late 1901. Just a few years after opening another seed company and securing a government contract to distribute seeds, Haines and his new wife filed for bankruptcy.¹⁷

SCRAPBOOK HONORS LIPPINCOTT'S TRIUMPHS

In January 1899, just weeks after the fight over her business ended, Carrie Lippincott penned a letter to the public entitled, "Why I Publish My New Picture." Printed in that year's seed catalog and preserved in the scrapbook that she would receive several months later, the letter was searing and deeply personal. In it, Lippincott condemned her competitors while reflecting on the persistence, strength, and sacrifice required to be successful; and the pride she felt in her achievements. She observed that a woman's identity was intertwined with the home and that running a business was not for everyone in that sphere. She expressed a tinge of melancholy, saying, "a life of business . . . means giving up many of the joys of hearth and home." Without skipping a beat, however, she goes on to affirm, "I love flowers and I know that they make woman and the home (these two words are inseparable) happier and

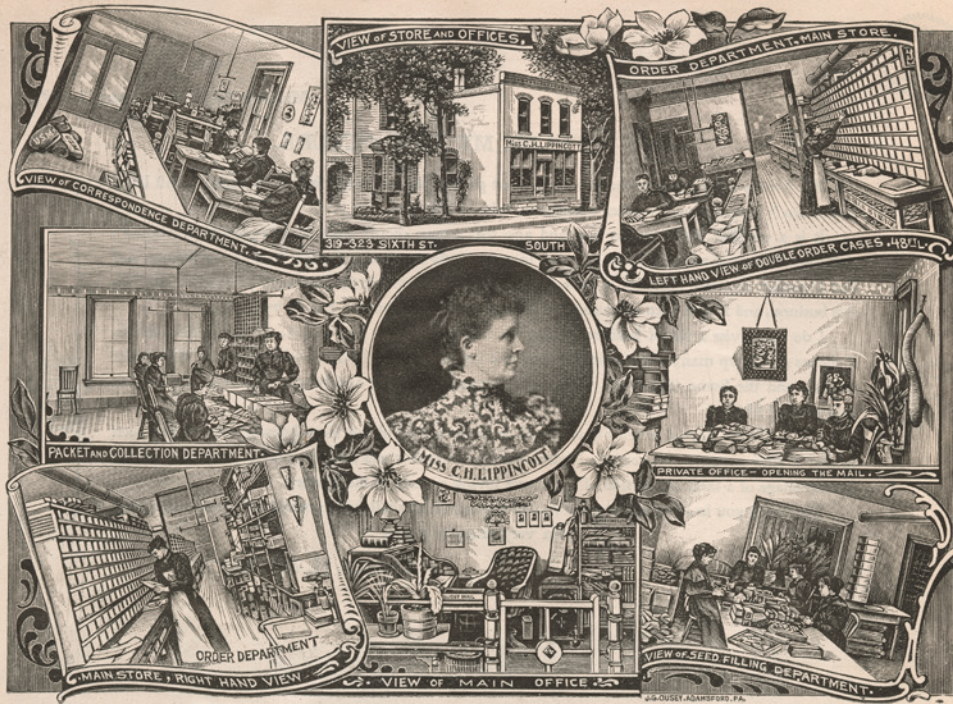
better . . . , and my reward has been the patronage of a large proportion of the flower loving women of the country." Ensuring her customers' satisfaction is paramount to her, and this letter is an opportunity to connect with them personally.

The new picture Lippincott referred to in the letter's heading was printed on the opposite side of the page. It gave the public a glimpse of the successful businesswoman whose flower seed company bore her name and was built by her unceasing dedication, but also reinforces that she was the face of the company. The letter reads, "My friends have urged me to print my latest picture, because a number of seedsmen (shall I call them men?) have assumed women's names in order to sell seeds." This is not the first time her face appeared on the company's materials, but perhaps it was the most important instance, defiant toward any person who attempted to diminish her contributions to the business and toward men elsewhere who were using a woman's name as a facade from which to sell seeds. It has been written elsewhere that this statement was directed at two other Minneapolis women, Jessie R. Prior and Emma V. White, who were also selling flower seeds using similar catalogs. The first catalog for White's seeds read, "We are pleased to announce that our flower seed business has been transferred to Miss Emma V. White . . . but it will be conducted in connection with our house very much as heretofore," and is signed by E. Nagel & Co., another Minneapolis seed company. However, Lippincott wrote her statement in 1899, a few years after Prior and White started selling seeds, and it's likely her jab was directed at Haines. His statements in court hugely downplayed her role in the company named for her, and he took credit for the success of Lippincott's company, saying he was "the originator of the first exclusively Flower Seed house by a woman in America."¹⁸

It's also worth noting that this portrait appeared in the center of the page, surrounded by a sketched montage illustrating the company's professional operation, with views of the storefront, offices, and numerous women working in the various departments. Hiring women was important to Lippincott. Minneapolis city directories published during the 1890s and 1900s listed the many women employed at her company over the years. One of them was Beulah Needham, who gave Lippincott the scrapbook in September of 1899, though it is unclear if she was the compiler. The scrapbook contains an article from the August 19, 1899, issue of *Success* magazine that reads, in part,

[Lippincott's] employees are always women. She has not a man connected with her business. During the four months when her office work is the heaviest . . .

1899



Letter to the Public



Minneapolis, Minn., January 1, 1899.

WHY I PUBLISH MY NEW PICTURE.

My friends have urged me to print my latest picture, because a number of seedsme- (shall I call them men?) have assumed women's names in order to sell seeds.

It is a peculiar thing in this day and age, that a man should want to masquerade in woman's clothing. It has not seemed necessary to me to particularly emphasize the fact that I am a woman and that I conduct my own business. I have devoted my best energies in the past eight years to building up this business, and I have been successful. I have proved that a woman can do business.

I do not advise a life of business for any woman where it can be avoided. It means self-sacrifice. It means giving up many of the joys of heart and home. I love flowers and I know that they make woman and the home (these two words are inseparable) happier and better; they brighten the dark pathways of life.

I have always desired to sell Flower Seeds as cheap as any of the large houses, have always been careful to send out only such seeds as I knew were sure to grow and blossom, and my reward has been the patronage of a large proportion of the flower loving women of the country.

Thanking you in advance for your valued orders, which shall have prompt and careful attention,

I am very sincerely yours,

CARRIE H. LIPPINCOTT.

For 1904 in Edition 100,000

FLORAL CULTURE.

BY

MISS C. H. LIPPINCOTT,

MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

THE PIONEER SEEDSWOMAN OF AMERICA.

JANUARY 1904.



Mrs. L. A. Miller, Wauconia, Iowa, sends this most attractive and home like picture, with the following note;

"View of back yard made beautiful with plants from your seeds, taken in June. Lawn sown in April with your Lawn Grass Seed. Of course does not show the luxuriance that they display later when in full growth and flower, Sweet Peas higher than my head.

This picture has suggested to me the idea of encouraging all of my patrons to improve their back yards as well as their front lawns, and for the season 1904 I will give \$20.00 for the best picture of yard (Front or Back) planted with my seeds, \$15.00 for the second best, \$10.00 for the third best and \$5.00 for the fourth best. All pictures to be in by Oct. 1st, 1904. Pictures will be submitted to three competent judges and prizes awarded November 1st.

she keeps from sixteen to twenty-five clerks in her Minneapolis offices. Her flower seeds are grown in many different parts of the country, and the growers are all women.¹⁹

Interestingly, the only reference in the scrapbook to the entire ordeal in court is a tiny clipping from "Advertising Experience" that reads, "The close proximity of the seed advertisements of Miss C. H. Lippincott and S. Y. Haines & Co., both of Minneapolis, is somewhat amusing in view of the recent 'scrap' which they had when Mr. Haines was advertising manager for Miss Lippincott." It is fitting that the event that could have ended her business is barely a blip in the scrapbook that so carefully documents her successes.

Evidence throughout the scrapbook reveals other ways in which Lippincott used her catalog to engage with customers and cultivate their loyalty. She regularly included in her orders a publication, "Floral Culture," "for the benefit of my patrons," complete with tips and tricks for planning and arranging a garden, growing seeds, and identifying flowers. In freely sharing her horticultural knowledge, Lippincott sought to inspire customers to pur-

chase more seeds, so that they could try her suggestions for planting and pairing flowers in their own gardens.

Another catalog feature preserved in the scrapbook was cash prize contests for Lippincott's seed customers. Eager gardeners could buy her Royal Show Pansy seeds and, after a successful growing season, press the flowers and return them to her in the mail. The flower with the largest diameter would win its grower a prize. Lippincott encouraged participants in her 1894 contest promotion: "Competition is open to all as I wish to see how large a Pansy can be grown." Not only would a handful of winners be chosen for the cash prize (and bragging rights), but also customers believed that these seeds held potential. Lippincott challenged women to use their gardening aptitude as a chance to earn money. For instance, the winner in 1895 cultivated a pansy that was 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches across. These contests helped to retain customers year to year while offering proof of the quality of the seeds.

A decade later, Lippincott took the contest a step further by asking for customers to send in photographs of how they used her seeds to beautify their front and back yards, again appealing to women who were working diligently to showcase their yards, an extension of the home sphere.



Samples of seed bags used to send seeds to customers

Where Orders come from.

SERVICIO POSTAL • **MEXICO**

TARJETA POSTAL - CARTE POSTALE

Miss C.H. Lippincott,
319 South Sixth St.
Minneapolis Minn.
U.S.A.

UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE.
PARA LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS Y CANADA.

UNION POSTAL UNIVERSAL.
PARA LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS Y CANADA.

En este lado sólo debe escribirse la dirección.
Ce côté est réservé exclusivement à l'adresse.



HAWAII

UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

ADDRESS ON THIS SIDE ONLY.

Miss C.H. Lippincott
319 - 6th St.
Minneapolis Minn

AMERICAN BANK NOTE CO. N.Y.

UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION - UNION POSTALE UNIVERSELLE

BRITISH INDIA POST CARD

INDE BRITANNIQUE CARTE POSTALE

THE ADDRESS ONLY TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE.

Miss C.H. Lippincott
319 S. 6th Street.
Minneapolis
Minn
U.S. America

плату за 5 коп.

ИСЬМО

From Russia

Mail from loyal customers demonstrating the global reach of the Miss C. H. Lippincott Seed Company

Some of these photographs were glued into the scrapbook, and some were re-printed in her advertising. Oftentimes, the hometown newspapers of the winners would publish a story celebrating their success.

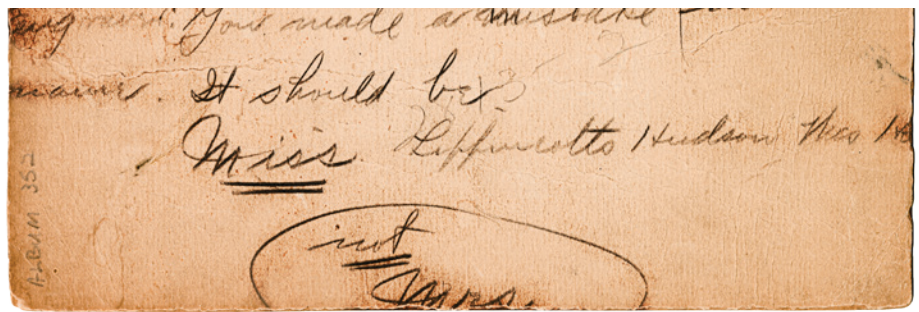
Items that shed light on aspects of Lippincott's business are featured throughout the scrapbook. Tiny seed bags, some plainly stamped, others featuring colorful lithographs, adorn several of the pages. Business cards, order sheets, bill heads, and stationery are also evident, and track changes in design and format through the decades.

Other scrapbook items of note include stamps, currency, and orders from other states and from abroad demonstrating the reach of Lippincott's business. Hawaii, Mexico, Japan, and Russia are just some of the far-flung locations represented in the pages. Documenting the geographic reach of the business must have been a point of pride for Lippincott. While some of this is likely due to well-placed advertising and to the quarter million catalogs she routinely sent out, customer loyalty and word of mouth almost certainly played a role, too, particularly in the instances of gardeners living abroad, who may have had business ties to Minnesota. Minneapolis, as the center of the nation's milling industry, was exporting huge quantities of flour during that time. Many of the mills had divisions focused solely on export with staff and offices abroad.

BUSINESS LONGEVITY AND LEGACY

Carrie Lippincott continued her seed company well into the twentieth century, and on June 1, 1905, she moved to a new location, 602 Tenth Street South, purchasing "one of Minneapolis's finest old-fashioned residences" per the removal notice pasted in the scrapbook, and running her business from there. Within a few years she relocated to Hudson, Wisconsin, a town about 30 miles east of the Twin Cities across the St. Croix River.

A photograph of the building's exterior, located at 208 Locust Street in Hudson, is saved in the scrapbook. On the back side of the photo, Lippincott handwrote a note that reveals the pride she had in the business that bore her name and her exasperation with assumptions made regarding her owning a business. Her note responded to the label at the bottom of the photograph, which referred to her as Mrs. Lippincott. The label was scratched out, and the note on the reverse side reads, "Editor: You made a mistake in the name. It should be Miss Lippincott's, Hud-



Lippincott's emphatic correction of how her name appears in advertising

son, Wis, not Mrs." The word "Miss" is underlined twice, and "not Mrs." is circled, with "not" underlined twice for emphasis. She did not rely on money or name from a marriage to succeed in her business, and she found any assumptions to the contrary offensive.

Lippincott would return to Minneapolis again in 1916, this time at 3010 Hennepin Avenue. Her flower seed company continued for a few more years, until the early 1920s, when she used her expertise to turn her attention to running a flower shop rather than a mail-order business. A 1922 photograph that accompanied the scrapbook shows her in her shop amid plants, flowers, and pots. By this point, no further additions were made to the scrapbook, though she kept the shop until the mid-1930s, shortly before her death in 1941.

Carrie Lippincott's legacy as an entrepreneur has persisted largely through the preservation of her seed catalogs. The colorful catalogs are intriguing keepsakes that have been acquired by numerous institutions, along with issues of *Floral Culture*. In using these publications to engage her customers in a direct and personal manner, Lippincott not only took her business seriously but also affirmed that women were capable of managing a successful enterprise.

The Miss C. H. Lippincott seed company scrapbook donated to MNHS clearly illustrates both the pride Lippincott felt in being the Pioneer Seedswoman of America and the joy she experienced with her success. The case that Samuel Haines presented against her in court adds a more complex layer to her story, particularly the accusations used to discredit her. Despite the financial cost of settling the case with Haines, Lippincott ultimately was victorious in the fight to maintain her reputation and keep control of the company bearing her name. Her determination and aptitude for management and marketing ensured the longevity of her company, placing her solidly in the ranks of a generation of businesswomen establishing themselves ahead of winning the right to vote. Her story resonates today with any woman who has had her accomplishments misrepresented and her intelligence underestimated. ▣



Carrie H. Lippincott in her flower shop, 1922

Notes

1. This article draws heavily from a scrapbook donated in 2023 to the Minnesota Historical Society by a descendant of Carrie H. Lippincott's sister, Rebecca Lippincott Kent. This visually captivating record documents the growth of the seed business through advertising, testimonials, articles, and business ephemera. The author has not cited in the endnotes quoted material from the scrapbook except in the rare instance when the original source could not be found to prove that it appeared where Lippincott said it did. The album has been digitized and cataloged as the Miss C. H. Lippincott seed company scrapbook, MNHS.

2. "Is Room at the Top," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1894, 5.

3. The reported name is likely a misquote as the company was called Northrup, Braslan and Goodwin Company: R. L. Cartwright, "Northrup, King and Company," *MNopedia*, MNHS. "Trade Notes," *American Garden* 12, no. 7 (July 1887): 240.

4. US Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945*, prepared by the Bureau of the Census with the cooperation of the Social Science Research Council, Bureau of the Census (Washington, DC, 1945), 63; US Bureau of Labor, "Work and Wages of Men, Women, and

Children," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor*, Nos. 1-100 (May 1897): 237-56.

5. "Prospectus," *Business Woman's Journal* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1889): 3-4.

6. Mary Foot Seymour, "What Occupation Should I Choose?" *Business Woman's Journal* 1, no. 4 (July 1889): 111-13.

7. "Woman in Business," *Minneapolis Times*, Nov. 10, 1896, 4.

8. John Lee Mahin, "An Advertising Seeds-woman," *Printers' Ink* 16, no. 2 (July 8, 1896): 36-37.

9. S. Y. Haines v. C. H. Lippincott, case file 78309, Hennepin Co. District Court Records, State Archives, MNHS.

10. "Spring Brides," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Part Two, May 15, 1898, 2.

11. *Haines v. Lippincott*.

12. *Haines v. Lippincott*.

13. *Haines v. Lippincott*; Mahin, "An Advertising Seeds-woman," 37; *Flowers from Seed* (Minneapolis: S. Y. Haines & Co., 1899).

14. *Haines v. Lippincott*.

15. Nikki Mandell, "Will the Real Business-woman/Businesswoman Stand Up?: The Historical Implications of Regendering Business Success in the Early Twentieth Century," *Enterprise & Society* 15, no. 3 (2014): 499-533.

16. "A Woman Seed Grower," *Woman's Signal* 6, no. 135 (July 30, 1896): 75.

17. "Caution," *Christian Union* 13, no. 25 (June 26, 1876): 515; "Seeds for the Farmers," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 19, 1899, 10; "Petitions in Bankruptcy," *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 17, 1901, 11.

18. Grace Costantino, "Leading Ladies in the World of Seeds: Part One," Biodiversity Heritage Library Blog, Biodiversity Heritage Library, Mar. 25, 2015, <https://blog.biodiversitylibrary.org/2015/03/leading-ladies-in-world-of-seeds-part.html>; 1896 *Flower Seeds* (Minneapolis: Miss Emma V. White [E. Nagel & Co.], 1896); *Flowers from Seed*.

19. *Davison's Minneapolis City Directory* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Directory Company, 1894-1904). The quoted article and separate clippings for the magazine title and date are pasted into the scrapbook, but the source could not be confirmed. The statement that Lippincott had "not a man connected with her business" is not completely accurate, because her other brother-in-law, Henry Kent, worked for her over the years.

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