



Affiliate 133

PHILATELI-GRAPHICS

QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE
GRAPHICS PHILATELY ASSOCIATION ISSN 9739-6198
Volume 27, Number 4 • Whole Number 109 • October 2005



Study Unit

Children's Books and Stamps: Studies in Design

Leonard Everett Fisher

By Phyllis Van Orden

Leonard Everett Fisher was born on 24 June 1924 and grew up in the Bronx and Brooklyn, where he took advantage of any available opportunity to visit local museums and attend art classes. His interest in art stimulated a fascination with painting at an early age, and recognition of his talent by others soon followed. When his father, who was a draftsman by trade, but also a frustrated artist, saw his two-year-old son pick up a paintbrush and scrawl on one of his father's paintings, he quickly converted a closet into a studio to encourage the budding young artist.¹ As a school boy Fisher had his drawings exhibited alongside those of older students; he even won a float design competition sponsored by Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

During World War II, Fisher served in the U.S. Army. He became a topographic specialist with the Operations Section of the 30th Topographic Engineers, a unit attached at home and abroad to the staff of the U.S. Army's chief-of-staff, General George C. Marshall. Here Fisher participated in mapping many major invasions and military campaigns in both the European and the Pacific theaters.

In 1949 and 1950 Fisher earned B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees from Yale University. His matriculation was followed by a European tour supported by a Joseph Pulitzer Painting Fellowship and a William Wirt Winchester Traveling Fellowship. He later taught art history, painting, life drawing, and book illustration at several institutions and, from 1950 to 1953, served as dean of the Whitney School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut.

In addition to his teaching and administrative duties Fisher wrote and/or illustrated more than 300 books for children and young adults. He began this phase of his career in 1954 when he illustrated his first children's book, *The Exploits of Xenophon*. In the early 1960s, he became an author as well as an illustrator, begin-

ning a long career as creator of literature for children. He summarized his children's book work when he observed that, even though "form rhythm, color, and light—words, too—serve my artistic passion, the immediate focus of my work in books for young readers is on who we are, where we originated, and what we have done for each other."

Fisher has received numerous awards and honors from art and library groups. In 1979, for



Leonard Everett Fisher

example, he received the Medallion Award at the University of Southern Mississippi, where he gave a lecture, and to which he donated many of his papers and stamps to form part of the deGrummond Children's Literature Collection. Other major archives of his papers, art, and manuscripts are housed at the Universities of Connecticut, Oregon, and Minnesota. The Association of Library Service for Children, a division of the American Library Association, chose him for the Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Award in

1994 in recognition of his distinguished career as a writer and illustrator. Peter Sieruta sums up his contributions by noting that “Fisher writes across several different genres, and his artwork encompasses a wide variety of styles, making him one of the most multifaceted creators in the field of children’s literature.”³

Fisher’s interest in history is readily apparent in the U.S. postage stamps he has designed. His first ones were the Colonial American Craftsmen series (Scott 1456-1459) in the American Bicentennial Issue. On 4 July 1972, the date of their issue, Fisher delivered a speech entitled “Colonial Craftsmen: the Age of Pride” at the Smithsonian Institution’s first Philatelic Dedicatory Lecture Series. The subjects portrayed on his craftsmen stamps reflect the subjects he considered earlier in *The Colonial Americans*, a 19-volume series published between 1964 and 1976 by Franklin Watts, which are still valuable as a resource for their striking white-on-black etchings that illustrate nearly every facet of colonial life.

When creating illustrations for both the books and later the stamps, Fisher used clay-coated scratchboards, a process also known as soft engraving. Among the staggeringly wide range of pigments that media artists can employ on scratchboards, including graphite, colored pencils, charcoal, watercolor, acrylic, gouache, oil, etc., Fisher chose India ink. The technique involves “scratching drawings out of India-ink-coated clay boards made in England.”⁴ He recommended this approach for earlier historical works because he “thought the engraved effect would complement a history book and would reproduce well.”⁵

Fisher’s wide range of interests, including folklore, is evident in his Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp, part of the American Folklore Issue (Scott 1548), and his illustrations published by Franklin Watts in 1966 in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The book uses the typical black and white of that era. On the stamp Fisher captures the action similar to that found on a double-page spread in the book.

Fisher’s Skilled Hands for Independence stamps (Scott 1717-1720) were issued featuring a Seamstress, a Blacksmith, a Wheelwright, and a Leatherworker. The Wheelwright stamp drew attention in the October 2004 “To Err is Divine” column by David Lodge in *Scott Stamp*

Monthly. Lodge observes “The stamp errs with with a revolutionary-era image that depicts a wagon wheel with more than the maximum 16 spokes used by the colonists, and three felly-mortised wooden arches on the rim, that, in one instance, span three spokes and two others where seven spokes are crossed, contradicting the limit of two spokes per felly during the colonial period.”⁶

Another Fisher contribution to the philatelic world is his design for the Liberty Tree embossed envelope (Scott U576) issued in two sizes on 8 November 1975.

Fortunately for those of us interested in children’s books, Fisher continues to create as an author and as an illustrator. Two fairly recent publications are his writing and illustrating *Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Maya* (Holiday House, 1999) and his illustrations for Eric Kimmel’s *The Two Mountains: an Aztec Legend* (Holiday House 2000).⁷ With the latter publication, Fisher reiterated that we can expect more of the same from his pen and brush, and that what seems to have been fundamental to him all of his life was a hunger to express the inexpressible, to make visible the invisible.

Endnotes

1. Peter D. Sieruta, “Fisher, Leonard Everett,” in *Children’s Books and Their Creators*, edited by Anita Silvey (Boston: Houghton, 1995), page 242.
2. The Children’s Book Council, Accessed 29 September 2005.
<http://www.cbcbooks.org/cbcmagazine/meet/lefisher.html>
3. Sieruta, p 243.
4. Leonard Everett Fisher, *Leonard Everett Fisher: A Life of Art*. With an Introduction by Norman D. Stevens (Storrs, Conn.: University of Connecticut, 1997), page 15.
5. Ibid.
6. David Lodge, “To Err is Divine,” in *Scott Stamp Monthly*, Volume 22, No. 9 (October 2004), page 101.
7. Fisher, p. 3

Children’s Books Mentioned

Fisher, Leonard Everett. Colonial Americans Series. Titles include *The Architects*, *The Blacksmiths*, *The Cabinetmakers*, *The Doctors*, *The Glassmakers*, *The Hatters*, *The Homemakers*, *The Limners*, *The Papermakers*, *The Peddlers*, *The Potters*, *The Printers*, *The Schoolmasters*, *The Shipbuilders*, *The Shoe-*



Fisher's two-page illustration for *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1966), by Washington Irving. Compare to Scott 1548, illustrated on next page.

makers, *The Silversmiths, The Tanners, The Weavers, The Wigmakers*. Franklin Watts, 1964-1976. Reprinted, Marshall Cavendish, 2005.

_____. *Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Maya*. Holiday House, 1999.

_____. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Franklin Watts, 1966.

Kimmel, Eric. *The Two Mountains: An Aztec Legend*. Holiday House, 2000.

Bibliography

Children's Book Council web site.
<http://www.cbcbooks.org/cbcmagazine/meet/lefisher.html>. Accessed 29 September 2005.

Cianciolo, Patricia J. "Fisher, Leonard Everett," pages 285-86 in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, edited by Bernice E. Cullinan and Diane G. Person. New York: Continuum, 2003.

Fisher, Leonard Everett. *Colonial Craftsmen: The Age of Pride*. Washington, D.C.: Natural Museum of History and Technology, 4 July 1972.

Leonard Everett Fisher: *A Life of Art*. With an introduction by Norman D. Stevens. Storrs, Conn.: University of Connecticut, 1997.

"Leonard Everett Fisher Papers." University of Connecticut. <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/online/research/speclib/ASC/findaids/FisherLE/MSS19980064>. Accessed 3/23/2004.

"Leonard Everett Fisher Papers." University of Southern Mississippi's de Grummond Collection. <http://www.lib.usm.edu/~degrum/html/research/findaids/disherlet.htm>. Accessed 3/5/2004.

Lodge, David. "To Err is Divine." *Scott Stamp Monthly* 22, no. 9 (Oct. 2004):101.

Sieruta, Peter D. "Fisher, Leonard Everett." Pages 242-43 in *Children's Books and Their Creators* edited by Anita Silvey. Boston: Houghton, 1995.

Stamps and Envelopes by Leonard Everett Fisher



Scott 1456-1459 (4 July 1972), American Bicentennial: Colonial Craftsmen issue, depicting a Glassmaker, a Silversmith, a Wigmaker, and a Hatter.



Scott 1717-1720 (4 July 1977), Skilled Hands for Independence issue, showing a Seamstress. A Blacksmith, a Wheelwright, and a Leatherworker.



Scott U576 (8 November 1975), Stamped Envelopes depicting the Liberty Tree, Boston. Envelopes loaned by Tom Ward, Washington State Philatelic Society.



Scott 1548 (10 October 1974), American Folklore: Legend of Sleepy Hollow issue, with Fisher's design featuring the Headless Horseman pursuing Ichabod Crane.