

Tamarac, Florida 33319
March, 1975

This account of the life and works of Charles W. Kahles will supplement your file and collection of his comics. The corrected information in it supersedes that of the biographical sketch written in 1969, which should no longer be used. Will you kindly make the replacement? Thank you.

CHARLES WILLIAM KAHLES

** C. W. KAHLES **

January 12, 1878, Lengfurt, Bavaria, Germany
January 21, 1931, Great Neck, Long Island, New York

"All of C. W. Kahles's various comics besides HAIRBREADTH HARRY were more than good, they were masterpieces of comic art. He was a GENIUS says Ernest McGee, himself a cartoonist and authority on early comics, who owns probably the world's completest collection. "C. W. Kahles was one of the most important pioneers in the development of Sunday comics. He experimented with many different series to find out for himself just what kinds of comics were liked best by the readers of the newly invented addition to newspapers, the Sunday color comic section. All of Kahles' comics were well received and some became famous, lasting for many years... His drawing style was all his own, instantly recognizable by anyone who knew good pen and ink work. He was a truly great man in the comics profession--and an individual book about him and his fine comics should definitely be published. Readers of comics today should have an opportunity to rediscover him."

In similar recognition, another veteran artist-collector-exhibitor-author, Gordon Campbell, writes, "Mr. Kahles was the real genius of the pioneer cartoonists. He had that great and rare talent of story telling and the draughtmanship to portray his ideas. Charles W. Kahles had the keen insight to detail in his drawings without cluttering them with unnecessary lines. He showed his versatility with many cartoon features while doing several successful strips over a period of years. Promotion and publicity on many inferior strips have pushed the great ones into oblivion. I think only the few, like myself, that have made complete studies of the overall comics industry could ever understand or appreciate Charles Kahles' contribution to comic art."

McGee, delving into his boxes and portfolios, confirms his belief that C. W. Kahles was the "hardest working cartoonist in history, having as many as eight Sunday comics running at one time (1905-06) with no assistants to help him." According to a Brooklyn Daily Eagle interview given in 1924, my father, C. W. Kahles (pronounced Kah'-less) said there were seven of his weekly strips running simultaneously (when he was 27 and 28.) As some were dropped and others begun during this period, the confusion may have mixed up the reporter or C. W. K.'s own memory as to which ones they were. McGee's simultaneous eight for 1905 were: BILLY BRAG, CLARENCE THE COP, BILLY BOUNCE, PRETENDING PERCY, THE TEASERS, MR. BUTTIN, THE TERRIBLE TWINS, DOUBTING THOMAS, and FUN IN THE ZOO. In 1906 there were still 8, with 4 new ones: OUR HERO'S HAIRBREADTH ESCAPES, THE FUNNY SIDE GANG, THE MERRY NOBLES THREE THEY NEVER CAN AGREE; continuing with BILLY BOUNCE, PRETENDING PERCY, THE TEASERS, and CLARENCE THE COP.

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In all, the prodigious output of C. W. Kahles from 1898 to 1931 numbered 25 regular comic strips (listed below) plus uncoated miscellaneous cartoons, magazine panels in Life, Judge, Puck, Browning's Magazine, the Pleiades Club Year Book, book illustrations, commercial advertisements, and stand-in work for other comic artists, as when he drew show-posters for MUTT & JEFF, and in 1915, fifteen full pages of SLIM JIM AND THE FORCE (signed with the house ghost-name "Sterling.") These substitutes passed well, yet nobody has successfully imitated C.W. Kahles!

In whatever time he could find, he painted -- landscapes, portraits, still lives -- mainly for the joy of it, although he sold a few. His original intention was to be a serious artist. From boyhood, art was his consuming pursuit. He wanted to paint "big" pictures. Though he relished his newspaper work, being a cartoonist permanently was not his goal. How he came to be one, he told, was through the illness of the editorial cartoonist on the New York World, where Kahles was an assignment artist. In an era before the extensive use of photography, he sketched news events--all sorts of places, people, and animals, filling his mind with the floods of ideas for his comic creations to come. He had begun to draw funny spot panels as well. One day when the regular editorial artist didn't show up, Charlie Kahles volunteered to do the daily cartoon. From then on, as he put it, his "doom was sealed, Nobody ever took me seriously".

Charles Kahles came to the New World from a village in Bavaria in 1884 as a boy of six, with his parents, two brothers, and a sister. They settled in the then semi-rural Windsor Terrace section of Brooklyn, New York. He studied art at Pratt Institute and the Brooklyn Art School, sometimes getting up before dawn to have time to paint. His first art job as a young boy was in the stained glass shop of Joseph Hausleiter in Brooklyn, with his also talented brother Fred, who later

spent two decades in the art department of King Features. C. W. Kahles's career in Journalism began at the age of sixteen, when he journeyed to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, to become staff artist on the family newspaper, Grit, followed by a brief time on the New York Recorder. In 1897-98, he worked for the New York Journal as assignment artist, also contributing cartoons (see list below.) In 1898, at 20, he joined The World as a regular assignment artist.

While his news drawings showed skill and careful detail, his earliest caricatures were cruder than the handsome satires that came to be so well known. Wit the big newspapers rivalling each other, Kahles found himself creating more and more comics. He worked for a number of different companies, not having a contract with one only, as most comic artists have today. He remained associated with The World for several years while doing syndicated work for The Philadelphia Press, the Philadelphia North American, the Philadelphia Inquirer, The Boston Post, and the syndicates of T. S. McClure, T. C. McClure, C. J. Hirt, Otis F. Wood, Keystone, and the World Color Printing Company. Such gregarious activity gave him wide popularity at the time, but has ironically worked out to is undoing in the histories of comic art, for all these newspapers and syndicates have since gone out of business or changed hands, leaving no promoter or visible works to speak up for him. Collectors say it is strange that the old Kahles supplements in particular seem to be so scarce.

C. W. Kahles finally settled down to a single contract with the Philadelphia Public Ledger in 1922, starting daily strips of HAIRBREADTH HARRY besides the Sunday page. He gave up his one remaining page, THE KELLY KIDS, and most of his

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magazine work, to put full time on HARRY. By now he was living in Queens Village, Long Island, Nev York, married to his second wife. We moved to Great Neck in 1927. It is sad that his marriages were less successful than his comics. The first, in 1910, was to Julia Estelle Phelps, a beautiful and charming school teacher, my mother. Though he was good, kind, attractive -- and convivial, despite his pressure of work, their views and backgrounds were at odds; his devotion was not returned, and within a year they were living apart. The second marriage, in 1917 to twicemmarried Helen Harrison Sturtevant, did not live up to the hopes for it, either.

Yet my father - greatly appreciated every good thing that life brought him. The National Cyclopecia of American Biography (Vo . 23, page 272) says of him, in part , "He had a genial and affable personality, was home loving and simple in his tastes, always courteous and considerate of others." As a young man he belonged to the Pleiades Club in New York, a group of celebrities sharing a love of the arts. Long afterwards, my mother and stepmother recalled vividly those festive gatherings. A bit older, as a suburbanite, he enjoyed weekly nights in town at the Brooklyn Chess Club and poker' at the New York Newspaper Club. He loved books, The theater, the movies, all of which fed him ideas, and he found relaxation in the Stadium concerts and jaunts to Long Island's then-urcrowded beaches. He played the piano sometimes--Chopin, Beethoven, and he whistled Schubert's "Marche Militaire" when he went for walks. By pressing with his production, he was able to get ahead on enough material to take us on three summer long vacations in Europe, besides frequent auto trips around Long Island and the Northeast. He dreamed of a retirement where he could paint, travel, play the piano, have a plantation in Florida, and "be a gentleman loafer."

In the early 'twenties my father began to suffer with a bad heart condition resulting from inflammatory rheumatism in youth. After a ten-year struggle, still working single-handedly, like his famous hero, Harry, Charles W. Kahles died at only 53. In spite of his illness, he left behind him three months' advance drawings of HAIRBREADTH HARRY. I remember him as a serious man with a whimsical humor -- a loving friend who opened a world of wonders to me.

COMIC STRIPS BY C. W. KAHLES:

1. THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE, N.Y. July 1898. The World, 9-15-01 to 11-3-01. Among very early experiments with sequence panels, these classroom antics were started in the New York Journal, The Journal's comic section carried various other Kahles cartoons with no regular characters.

2. BUTCH THE BUTCHER'S BOY, 1900, The World; title changed to BUTCH THE BULLY, 1903. A though, pauchy kid who didn't get away with his bullying.

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3. CLARENCE THE COP, 1900-09, the New York World, syndicated. Clarence's well-meaning fumbles kept getting him "Transferr'd again!" out to some place like Staten Island or Gowanus Canal. The helmeted Irish cop would say, "Now, Oi

wonder what they sint me way out here fer?" The readers liked him better than the police, who evnetually succeeded in stopping him. CLARENCE THE COP was the first policeman adventure series in comics.

4. MR. SUBURB, 1901-02, The Philadelphia Press. The troubles and triumphs of a be-whiskered man in the suburbs.

(Note by the transcriber: Numbers 4 and 5 were added by Jessie after she had finished the script, so points 7. onwards were in the original numbered 5. onwards)

5. MRS. BIGGERHALF AN MR. SMALLER HALF began in The World 5-18-02 and ran to 10-19-02. Mrs. B. made her last appearance in CLARENCE THE COP, 11-09-02.

6. BURGLAR BILL, The World, 1-12-02 to 2-23-02

7. CHARLEY HARDUPPE, 1902, The World, The Boston Post. Schemes of a man striving to overcome poverty. In one example, "Dr. Harduppe's Cunning Saved Him From The Poorhouse," the drawing shows how Kahles created eye expressions -- despair, discovery, achievement-- with telling effect.

8. A FAIRY TALE, 1902, Rowdy, far-fetched episodes, tried for the Phila. Inquirer.

9. SANDY HIGHFLYER THE AIRSHIP MAN, 1902-03, syndicated by the the Philadelphia North American. The first comic strip about flying in a machine. Sandy sailed about in a kind or motorboat held aloft by a sausage-shaped balloon. He bumped into steeples and got tangled in telephone wires. His aerial mishaps were forerunners of similar stunts in HAIRBREADTH HARRY.

10. BILLY BOUNCE, 1902-08, reprints to 1912, Philadelphia Press, syndicated by T. C. McClure. BILLY BOUNCE was originated in 1901 by W. W. Denslow ("Wizard of Oz" artist) and carried the following year by C. W. Kahles, who established it as a favourite. Billy was a messenger boy wearing an inflated rubber suit that enabled him to bound and fly--the first comic character to do so without a machine. Unlike unluckier Kahles rascals, Billy's trickeries usually ended up with his smiling success.

11. THE TEASERS, 1902-08, Philadelphia Press; syndicated by 1903. Bobby played pranks on his little sisters, but wound up having the joke played on him. As with other Kahles comics, the drawings became increasingly attractive over the years.

12. PRETENDING PERCY, 1903-09, syndicated by C. J. Hirt; in the Wichita, Kansas Daily Eagle. A scheming, angelic-faced sissy, invariably punished for his lying and stealing.

13. MR. BUTTIN, 10-18-03 to 12-24-05, appeared in The World's Sunday color supplement, The Funny Side, as well as in a couple of movie comedy Shorts based on the strip. Thin, energetic Mr. Buttin enthusiastically got himself into the middle of things and botched them up. His hefty, bossy wife tried to stop him. In the film, he was portrayed as a somewhat obnoxious interferer, but the Kahles characterization sympathized with his zeal to set things right.

14. THE TERRIBLE TWINS, 4-2-05 to 2-18-06, The World. Tim and Tom were experts among the early Kahles mischief-makers, with their capers and inevitable spankings. By this time, "The Katzenjammers" were "in," and as the newspaper comics competition waxed vigorously, artists borrowed freely from each other. Nevertheless, Kahles put his own imaginative stamp on everything he created.

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15. FUN IN THE ZOO, 1905, The World, New York. Begun by Gus Hutaf 11-13-04 to 12-25-04; carried by Kahles 2-26-05 to 7-23-05. Dressed like human beings, the animals made sport. One of them--often the hippo--won the day in a grand finale. Kahles left a few partially completed pages, on which he had collaborated with the prominent illustrator of animals, Dan Smith. The story-layouts appeared to be pencilled by C. W. K. and inked in Smith's heavier style, but I know of none that were published. They seem to have been Kahles's only collaborative drawings. One is in the Graham Gallery, New York.

16. DOUBTING THOMAS, syndicated all of 1905 and into 1906. This boy, venturing to find things out for himself, took his constant downfalls with good humor. (Phila. Press)

17. THE FUNNY SIDE GANG, 2-4-06 to 4-7-07 in the Funny Side of The World; also known as FATTY, who tried to get in with the gang, often gaining the best of it.

18. THE MARRY NOBLES THREE THEY NEVER CAN AGREE, 1906, The Philadelphia Press. A delightful series, too short-lived for the possibilities it contained. Three companions, Sir Lion of England, count de Bric of France, and Herr Schweitzer of Germany, endlessly argued the merits of their ovm countries and beliefs,

ending in a fracas, and frequently, Jail.

19. HAIRBREADTH HARRY, 1906-39, first drawn for The Philadelphia Press, in which it ran until that newspaper closed in 1920; syndicated by The Press until 1915, then by T. C. McClure, finally by the Philadelphia Public Ledger, 1922-39. One newspaper featuring H(airbreadth) H(arry) continuously from 1915 to 1937 was The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. The Trade Mark is owned by Mrs. Jessie Kahles Straut. The new features title was OUR HERO'S HAIRBREADTH ESCAPES, changing in a few months to HAIRBREADTH HARRY, THE BOY HERO., and by 1910 to HAIRBREADTH HARRY. Of all Kahles's comics, this achieved the widest fame. It burlesqued the dime novels, boy adventure stories, Wild West thrillers, and later the movie melodramas. Our Hero, Harry, encountered fearsome dangers, rescued Melinda (and assorted heroines the beginning) from the clutches of the villain, Relentless Rudolph Rassendale, who pursued her for his bride. Belinda Blinks, the Beautiful Boilermaker, first appeared bound to a buzz-saw by her pursuer September 22, 1907. She was then taller and older than her boy champion, and NO 'creature of dazzling loveliness," as billed by the fun-making author in his thrilling narrative below the pictures. Though HARRY constantly saved the ever-grateful Belinda, their romance as true sweethearts evolved slowly while he grew older and better looking each year, and she at last grew prettier, about 1915. Harry (Harold Hollingsworth) the all-around hero, became a poor but honest man of many careers, fearless, inspired--and lucky!--in the face of peril. Rudolph got to be known and copied all over the world, for his black top hat and tails, bony nose flashing teeth, and curling moustache. A hilarious movie comedy series filmed in 1924 is still available, in 8 and 16 mm. two-reelers, from Glenn Photo, Enoino, Calif. 91316.

With HAIRBREADTH HARRY, C. W. Kahles established the suspense serial in comics, carrying over the hair-raising and hair's breadth escapes from week to week, and years afterwards from day to day. While other cartoonists have later claimed "first serial," "Tirsl superman," first adventure series," these innovations rightfully belong to C. W. Kahles. After his untimely death in 1931, the page and daily strip were carried on by E. O. Alexander of Philadelphia, who kept them lively for 8 years with his own brand of humor and good will. Comics editors remember HAIRBREADTH HARRY as a terrific circulation builder, and inquiries still come from fans, wishing to see their old favorite again. There is dispute as to who launched adventure in comics. The record shows it. H(airbreadth) H(arry) of 1906 jubilantly all-out adventure, and other Kahles characters engaged in wild adventures 1902 (transcriber: badly readable at bottom of page)

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20. TATTERS AND TURK, 1907, The Philadelphia Press, synd. by T. C. McClure; originated 1902 by Robert Carter, picked up by C. W. Kahles. He changed the homely orphan Tatters into an appealing boy, who had run away from a Home and found a dog friend -- the same theme as used later in "Little Orphan Annie."

21. BILLY BRAGG, 1907-1909, a phony show-off, in The World's Funny Side section.

22. THE YARNS OF CAPTAIN FIBB, c. 1908-10, were drawn for Judge Magazine, also appearing elsewhere, including the Swedish magazine Veckan. A loquacious sea captain told fanciful, grog-warmed tales, the yarns running in print underneath the illustrations. The captain's preposterous adventures so intrigued a Swedish artist, Bergdahl, that he borrowed them, creating in 1916-22 thirteen animated cartoons shorts called "Kapten Groggs Aventyr" that were hits in Europe.

23. CLUMSY CLAUDE, 1909-15, The Philadelphia Press, syndicated. These blunders of a good-natured fat boy won an excellent following, and according to editor Philip H. Love, "every awkward boy was called Clumsy Claude."

24. OPTIMISTIC OSWALD, 1912 The World. With his wide smile, this man remained inextinguishably cheerful, seeing the best side of every calamity. His tonic attitude deserved a longer run, I thought, and perhaps his creator felt so too, because he left some undated pages in pencil of a "Mr. Brightside," an even jollier looking character. This feature appeared in the news section.

25. THE KELLY KIDS, 1919-23, World Color Printing Company, St. Louis. Another Tim and Tom, the last of the Kahles rascals, perpetrated ingenious devilry on their elders, in beautifully drawn pages, printed in a special color process.

The comics of Charles W. Kahles may be seen on newspaper microfilm in the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library Newspaper Division, the Brooklyn Library, the Philadelphia Free Library, as well as in cities too numerous to list. In some, the old vound newspapers may still be available. Two original comic pages, c. 1905, are at the Graham Gallery, New York.

Collections of Kahles works have been established at the following institutions: The Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington,

and drawings with the Archives of American Art, Washington D. C. ; Plus the Museum of Cartoon Art, Greenwich, Conn. and the Cartoon Museum Winter Park, Fla.

Among comic art collectors and organizations that have helped me to assemble material and information, and in other ways. I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Marge Dev(...) and Sam (... - The transcriber: Names have been cut off in my copy) of

National Cartoonists' Society. The Newspaper Comics Council, Gordon Campbell, L. C. Dobbins, David Folkman, Ulysses (Jim) Walsh, Murray A. Harris, Michael

Patrick Hearn, Kenneth Barker, Frank J. Brueckel, Torsten ungstedt of the Swedish Film Institute,

Philip Falco of the New York Public Library's Newspaper Division, the Philadelphia

Free Library, and cartoonists Ernest E. McGee and F. O. Alexander, Jim Ivory, Bob Dunn, Joe Petrovich,

(The Transcriber: Some more names are missing as they were cut off on my copy)...

Jessie Kahles Straut