

McLean County Museum of History

Smith, R. Sidney Collection

Processed by
JoAnna Mink
Autumn 2020

Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1898-2018
RESTRICTIONS:	None
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	

Brief History

Robert Sidney "Sid" Smith (1873-1935) was born in Bloomington, Illinois, on February 13, 1873. His father Thomas H. Smith was one of the city's earliest and most successful dentists, as well as operating a lumber mill outside the city limits. His father wanted him to be a dentist; however, Sid attended but never graduated from Bloomington High School. He recalled, "But to be a dentist I had to study, and school and I never agreed. ... I was about 17, I think, when I saw a schoolroom for the last time."

Sid Smith's artistic talent was recognized early, and around age 18, he began contributing sketches and cartoons to *The Sunday Eye*, an illustrated newspaper in Bloomington. Unable to obtain a regular job, he went on the "lecture circuit," traveling from town to town giving chalk talks, riding freight trains when he had no money for transportation. He finally obtained a regular job with the *Indianapolis News* and worked for newspapers in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Toledo before working in Chicago for the *Examiner*. In 1911, he joined the art staff of *The Chicago Tribune*. He drew many cartoon strips in the early years, including "The Bunk of a Busy Brain," "Self Made Heroes," "Light Occupations," and "Old Doc Yak."

In 1917 he began drawing "The Gumps" as a strip to portray everyday life of the American family. The

creation of the chinless patriarch Andy Gump assured Sidney Smith's fame as a cartoonist. Andy's family was comprised of his wife Minerva ("Min"), their son Chester, and a cast of lovingly rendered supporting characters, including Tilda the maid and wealthy Uncle Bim. Andy Gump received Old Doc Yak's racing car, no. 348. Smith's license plate number was 348, one of Illinois' first vanity plates. "The Gumps" was the first major strip to move from the joke-a-day format toward one with a narrative flow; thus Smith fashioned a comedic soap opera of domestic life.

Financially, "The Gumps" was highly successful. In the spring of 1922, Smith signed a \$1 million contract (\$100,000 for 10 years guaranteed) with the *Tribune*. (Calculated in 2019 dollars, his contract was \$15.5 million for \$1,550,534 per annum.) By comparison, the highest paid comic strip artist, Bud Fisher for "Mutt and Jeff," was paid \$50,000 a year. As a bonus, Smith received a Rolls-Royce. Sid Smith divided his time between a Gold Coast residence in Chicago; an estate on the south shore of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin; a smaller place "Forty Acres" near Genoa City, Wisconsin; and a 2,200-acre farm in the northern Illinois community of Shirland.

A popular favorite, "The Gumps" broke new ground by inspiring the first comic-related radio show in 1931. It was the first comic strip to introduce continuity into the formula, allowing for more involved plotlines, and a string of romances for Uncle Bim. It also seemed to work marvels for reader loyalty, pausing trading on the Minneapolis Board of Trade in 1923 while fans awaited news on whether or not Uncle Bim had been trapped into marriage by a greedy widow. (quoted from <http://atomicavenue.com/title/7769/Gumps-The>)

To make him more interesting, Smith never revealed Andy Gump's occupation. When Smith killed off supporting character Mary Gold in 1929, it caused a huge uproar. Now this death is regarded as a seminal event in the maturation of the comic strip as a popular art form. Smith's life, too, was cut short on October 20, 1935, when he died in an early-morning head-on car crash when he was driving to his farm in Shirland. He is buried in Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago. *Tribune* cartoonist Gus Edson continued "The Gumps" strip, until 1959, but its popularity never reached the heights under Smith's pen. (information above from Bill Kemp's article in Folder 1, item 23)

Scope

This collection includes newspaper clippings about Sidney Smith's life and career, examples of his artwork and his comic strip "The Gumps."

Folder Inventory

Folder 1: Newspaper Articles (*The Pantagraph*, unless noted)

- 1.1 "A Rising Young Artist," *Sunday Eye*, undated.
- 1.2 Notice, *Daily Bulletin*, November 18, 1898, p. 5.
- 1.3 "Sidney Smith Cartoonist," *Daily Bulletin*, November 20, 1904, p. 7.
- 1.4 "Dr. T.H. Smith Dies At 76 Years" (Sidney Smith's brother), June 9, 1920, p. 5.
- 1.5 "Sid Smith Wants Old '348' Again," November 29, 1920, p. 8.
- 1.6 "'Sid' Smith In Town; Gets a Cool Million," May 29, 1922.
- 1.7 "Sidney Smith and Old '348' Arrived Here Last Evening," December 21, 1923, p. 10.
- 1.8 "'Sid' Smith Is Santa To Police Department," December 22, 1923, p. 6.

- 1.9 "Unveil Statue of 'Andy Gump,'" September 8, 1924, p. 3.
- 1.10 "New Yorker Sues 'Sid' Smith, Says Artist Has Violated Facial Copyright," May 19, 1928, p. 5-A.
- 1.11 "\$1,000,000 Face," May 26, 1928, p. 8-B.
- 1.12 "Sid Smith to Speak at A. of C. Banquet," January 20, 1933, p. 3.
- 1.13 "Sid Smith a Drummer Boy Before He Created the Gumps," February 5, 1933, p. 5.
- 1.14 Fatal auto accident and obituary, October 21, 1935, pp. 3 and 5.
- 1.15 "Crash Kills Cartoonist Sidney Smith. Noted 'Gumps' Creator Dies in Auto Collision," *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1935, pgs. 1 and 6.
- 1.16 "The Story of Cartoonist Sidney Smith's Career," *Chicago Tribune*, October 21, 1935, p. 6.
- 1.17 "Some of the Mourners" (cartoon tribute to Smith), *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1935, p. 1.
- 1.18 "Early Cartoon by Sidney Smith Depicts Scene in Adam's Ark" (includes cartoon), April 11, 1937, p. 3.
- 1.19 "Dr. T.H. Smith Dies at His Home Here" (Sidney Smith's brother), June 6, 1938, p. 3.
- 1.20 Obituary for Mrs. Maude Harwood, who was once married to Smith, ca. January 21, 1969.
- 1.21 "McLean Co. scene adorns Edgar office," February 7, 1991, p. A4.
- 1.22 "Worsley's stout body belied skill that led to four cups" (Hall of Fame hockey goalie nicknamed for Andy Gump), January 29, 2006, p. B3.
- 1.23 "'The Gumps' cartoonist got start in Bloomington" ("Page from Our Past" column), Bill Kemp, June 14, 2009, p. B5.
- 1.24 "Old Doc Yak is 'Pinched,'" May 2, 1917: 8.

Folder 2: Miscellaneous

- 2.1 Biographical sketch, 2 pgs., anon, undated.
- 2.2 Two advertisements from the Bloomington *Daily Bulletin*, November 12 and November 14, 1919, for the theatrical production "The Gumps," playing at the Chatterton, Bloomington.
- 2.3 Advertisement from *The Pantagraph*, April 15, 1920, for "The Gumps," playing at the Colonial Theatre in Colfax.
- 2.4 Advertisement for Federal School of Applied Cartooning, *Popular Mechanics*, December 1920 (photocopy).
- 2.5 Advertisement from *Pantagraph*, November 1, 1924, for Rialto double bill of *The Wagon Trail* with Tom Mix and the Sid Smith comedy *Some Nurse*.
- 2.6 Sheet music (Andy Gump novelty song, fox trot, words and music by Harold Dixon, 1923), reduced photocopy of cover, original in the Sheet Music Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.
- 2.7 Postcard (color), Andy Gump statue, Lake Geneva, titled "'Andy Gump' on top of the world, Sidney Smith estate, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin," undated.
- 2.8 Poem, "Roger Powell: The Talk at Rukenbrod's," from *Alliance, Illinois* by Dave Etter (Spoon River Poetry Press, 1983). Poem references Andy Gump.
- 2.9 Death of Mary Gold (The Gumps), in "12 Memorable newspaper comic-strip deaths," from the A.V. Club, the entertainment section of the Onion, a satirical online newspaper. Posted August 6, 2007.
- 2.10 Email from Roger Hughes with some details about Smith's wives and daughter plus lineage from his parents through his daughter, August 14, 2018.
- 2.11 Books in McLean County Museum of History Library, September 28, 2020.

Folder 3: Artwork

- 3.1 Sketch of Miller Park ice skating, undated from the Bloomington *Sunday Eye* (see accompanying article).
- 3.2 "Harness Race at the County Fair," 1893, oil on linen canvas, photocopy of print, original at the

- Illinois State Museum, Springfield. Includes ISM letter on painting.
- 3.3 Partial, front page of *The Sunday Eye* (Bloomington newspaper), December 19, 1897 (photocopy).
 - 3.4 Old Doc Yak strip, full page, *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1915 (copy).
 - 3.5 "Ah! Them Wuz Th' Good Old Days," cartoon drawn by R. Sidney Smith, Toledo, OH, for the Bloomington High School Alumni Aegis (1957 reprint).
 - 3.6 "Political Gossip In Adam Guthrie's Ark," *Pantagraph*, July 27, 1922.
 - 3.7 "The Gumps—And No Foolin,'" daily strip from *Chicago Tribune* appearing the day Smith's obituary ran in *Tribune*, October 21, 1935, p. 21.
 - 3.8 Cartoon, "Ah! Them wuz th' good old days," 1907; reprint, 1957, for Bloomington Public School Centennial.
 - 3.9 Ten (10) 4x6 color photographs of Sid Smith artwork in hallway wall of 311 N. Main St. Taken by Museum Archivist George Perkins July 2009.
 - 3.10 Cartoon, "Seven Ages of an Oratorical Alumnus," 1908, for BHS Alumni Association Seventh Annual Banquet program.
 - 3.11 Two Sidney Smith holiday cards to Otto Beich, donated by David Beich, June 2022. Originals in Beich Collection.

Folder 4: "The Gumps" - Souvenir

- 4.1 Strips from "The Gumps" by Sidney Smith as appearing in *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, no date. Souvenir from The Morrison Hotel, Chicago, published by Landfield-Kupfer Printing, Chicago. Bound, 5.5 x 14.25".
- 4.2 Strips from "The Gumps" by Sidney Smith as appearing in *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, no date. Souvenir from The Morrison Hotel, Chicago, published by Landfield-Kupfer Printing, Chicago. Bound, 5.5 x 14.25".

Folder 5: "The Gumps" - Austin-American

- 5.1 Original strip from "The Gumps" by Sidney Smith as appearing in *Austin-American* in Austin, Texas, April 1930. 25 loose leaves cut from newspaper, each 3.75 x 13". Very fragile condition.

Folder 6: "The Gumps" - Gus Edson

After R. Sidney Smith's death in 1935, *Tribune* sports cartoonist Gus Edson continued "The Gumps" until 1959.

- 6.1 *The Gumps*, by Gus Edson, Vol 1, No. 1 (March, April 1947), published by Bridgport Herald Corp. In magazine format, 10.5 x 7.25".

Folder 7: Sherlock Jr.

"Sherlock Holmes Jr." was a half-page strip that began prior to World War I and appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, thus pre-dating "The Gumps." The strip was canceled in January 1914 after Conan Doyle's representatives threatened litigation. "Sherlock Holmes Jr" is collected in these three comic-book sized volumes.

- 7.1 *Sherlock Jr.* Number One contains "Sherlock Holmes Jr, The Amateur Detective" and 21 subsequent strips. Published by Eternity Comics, 1990. 6.34 x 10.25".
- 7.2 *Sherlock Jr.* Number Two contains strips 23-44. Published by Eternity Comics, 1990. 6.34 x 10.25".
- 7.3 *Sherlock Jr.* Number Three contains strips 45-66. Published by Eternity Comics, 1990. 6.34 x 10.25".

Folder 8: Materials in Objects Archives

- 8.1 "Daniel in the Lion's Den," Oil painting by Sidney Smith, c. 1895. 720.33
- 8.2 "They Swallow Everything," Original cartoon ink drawing by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.5
- 8.3 "The Holdout," Original cartoon ink drawing by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.6
- 8.4 "Johnny Coulon," Original cartoon ink drawing by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.7
- 8.5 "Old Doc Yak and The Big Red Apple, Original and printed version of a color and ink cartoon by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.8.a-b
- 8.6 "Old Doc Yak takes a little snooze," Original watercolor and ink cartoon by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.9
- 8.7 "Old Doc Yak," 5 (a-e) original pen and watercolor images of comic strip by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.10.a-e
- 8.8 "Back on the Job," Original cartoon ink drawing by Sidney Smith, 1913. 95.8.99.3

See also

"Old Doc Yak," photocopy of cartoon from *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, October 17, 1915. R-023 Vault.

4-Scene Boxing Cartoon, 1 large cartoon of Johnny Coulon (Bantam Weight Champion of the World), Cartoon with watercolors by Sidney Smith. MC4-CARTOON-42.

"Old Doc Yak and the Big Red Apple," Cartoon with watercolors by Sidney Smith. MC4-CARTOON-46.