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## ONE OF AMERICA'S GREATEST ANIMAL ILLUSTRATORS **ALBERT STAEHLE, LIVED IN NORTH MIAMI, AND CREATED "SMOKEY BEAR"**

Few people know of the street named for artist Albert Staehle and his creation, but many people remember him as the creator of "Smokey Bear", protector of our nation's forests. His fame far surpasses the naming of a street in North Miami. In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century he received accolades that compared with Douglass Crockwell and Norman Rockwell. Both Albert Staehle's and Norman Rockwell's painted illustrations appeared on numerous covers of the Saturday Evening Post in the 1940's. Albert Staehle had become a premier illustrator of animals and was sought by American companies for his talent of drawing animals expressing behavior that delighted the massive American public. In the 1930's he received numerous awards for his artistic abilities. In 1937 his illustrations precipitated the "Elsie the Cow" campaign for the Borden Milk Company. Later, it was Esso Oil's famous "Tiger in the Tank". He designed the poster that was used to publicize the New York World's Fair in 1939.

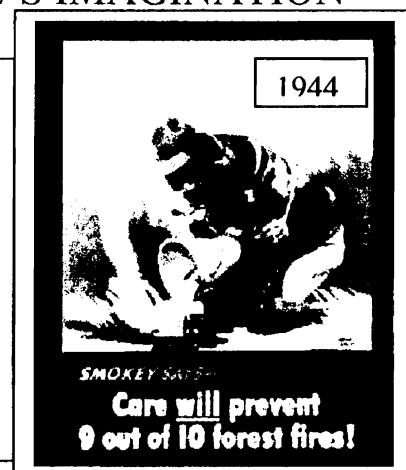
And then, on August 9, 1944 the renowned Albert Staehle was commissioned to create an original mascot for the U.S. government's wartime campaign on forest fire prevention. The World War II campaign was already underway, but the military bore the burden on the homefront of protecting our forest natural resources. Early in WWII there was a report that Japanese submarines on the Pacific Coast shoreline planned to set fire to western forests through the use of incendiary balloons. It was time for civilian actions to replace our stretched military. The government responded with a uniquely American weapon: marketing. It empowered the War Advertising Council to assist the United States Department of Agriculture's Forestry Service to market the campaign. Staehle had already used his professional talent creating posters in the "campaigns to buy war bonds". Now he met with Chuck Davis, head of the Forest Fire Prevention Department. Mr. Davis indicated they needed a spokes-animal. Among those considered were: raccoon, woodpecker, squirrel, and woodchuck. "Bambi" was also considered, but was copyrighted, and negotiations with Disney broke down. After considering these other animals, Staehle settled on a bear; his choice as keeper of the forests.

## THE FOREST SERVICE MASCOT BORN OF STAEHLE'S IMAGINATION

The fact remains that Albert Staehle originated the concept which became "Smokey Bear" (popularly referred to as "Smokey the Bear"). In a 4 year period (1944-1947) he designed the first three original posters for the Forest Service as part of the war effort to prevent forest fires. His original poster drawn in 1944 shows a bear dressed in blue jeans and a ranger's hat, pouring a bucket of water over a smoldering campfire. The name "Smokey" was in honor of a New York City firefighter.

LEFT PHOTO: Military guarding our forests.

RIGHT PHOTO: "Smokey Bear" campaign starts.



With the Smokey campaign successfully started, he painted a second poster in 1946 with the Bear dressed in the recognizable blue jeans and now familiar forest ranger's hat. Notice that the hat is secured with a chin strap in this 2<sup>nd</sup> poster. The poster views "Smokey" as a teacher showing the way to insure a burned match is safe. One more "Smokey" poster by Staehle followed the next year (1947) and stirred our imaginations nationwide. That was the year when the words -----  
"ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES" ---was added to the campaign!



In an interview with the Greater North Miami Historical Society in 2004, his widow Marjory Houston Staehle said: "Albert's creation was a donation from her husband to the war effort. He received only expenses. To him it was a labor of love".

Staehle had done his job. He created and introduced the mascot for the Forestry Service Fire Prevention Program. Now it was up to the marketing genius of the body known as the Advertising Council to promote "Smokey". They did so in a continuous campaign that produces wealth for the U.S. Government's Forestry Services to this day.

## FAMILY TIME IN NORTH MIAMI

Albert Staehle came to live part of the year in North Miami with his wife and children about 1957. Shortly after, they bought a house in North Miami at 145 St. and NE 7 Ave. They have 6 children: Franklin, Michelle, Anna Linda, Marjory, and Selene. In 1968 they purchased their present home at 1511 NE 132<sup>nd</sup> Road. Marjory Houston Staehle, his wife, opened her photography shop on 123<sup>rd</sup> Street just east of N.E. 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was located just a shop away from Ruth Foreman's theatre location. Husband Albert worked in the back of the shop with his special talent as one of America's proven top artist and illustrator.

Marjory was especially adept with portrait photography and weddings. The name of her business was called "Studio Des Artists" (pronounced "Arteests"). Even their North Miami home had a special section where Albert continued to produce award winning illustrations for clients.

The Staehle children were introduced to the violin, ballet, art, modeling, and stage productions. Linda participated in the Miss North Miami Contest at the North Miami Armory in 1972 and the Westside C. Center in 1973. When Burt Parker was in charge of the local Studio "M", Linda, and several of the other Staehle girls, appeared in a number of his productions. The Staehle daughters also appeared in productions at Barry College.

Michelle (also known as Shelly) taught ballet for the North Miami Recreation Department. Shelly is now deep into the "Arts" in New Jersey.

Daughter Marjory was born in North Miami General Hospital. She and Selene are the youngest. Selene was born in Jackson Memorial Hospital. Both attended schools for visual impairment. Marjory went to the first grade at Wm. J. Bryan Elementary School, and then she was transferred to a special class for the sight impaired at Biscayne Gardens Elementary School. Selene went to a school for the sight impaired in St. Augustine, Florida. Both daughters overcame this problem with determination. Selene lives in Kendall and works for the Dade County Public Schools in the Internet Technology Department. Marjory lives in Texas and operates a website ([www.backyardfoodproductions.com](http://www.backyardfoodproductions.com)) that gives instructions on organic farming.

While he lived in North Miami, Albert Staehle was a director of a Lincoln Road Advertising Firm. He focused on murals and portraits in the North Miami Studio (Studio Des Artists). He gave a lecture to Allied Arts of North Miami in October 1968. He held memberships in the Miami Art League and the Miami Museum of Modern Art. Both he and his wife, Marjory, judged children's Summer Art Contests at Crandon Park Zoo.

After a brief illness Albert Staehle died in Miami at Parkway Hospital on April 5, 1974. Newspapers throughout the world (via United Press International, and Reuters) reported his death, giving highlights of his life, the following day. His legacy of a bear ("SMOKEY"), and a dog ("BUTCH") reached several generations. Awards and recognition continued to follow this artist and his contributions to the American scene.



Elected Officials named the N.E. 132<sup>nd</sup> Road as Staehle's Smokey the Bear Road in the spring of 2002.

## STAEHLE'S NORTH MIAMI HOME & THE "SATURDAY EVENING POST"

The artist's career changed dramatically when the Saturday Evening Post asked Staehle to illustrate a dog cover for the February 19, 1944 issue. That magazine sold out quickly and mail poured in seeking to know more about the puppy. Another 25 Saturday Evening Post covers followed in the next 5 years featuring "BUTCH, STAEHLE'S REAL- LIFE BLACK AND WHITE COCKER SPANIEL". Each cover issue showed the family dog in "canine cut-ups". Americans from coast to coast fell in love with "BUTCH" and the stories that described his antics. He also appeared on 30 American Weekly Magazine covers during the decade of the 1950's (1952-1958). Staehle's dog "Butch" was America's Cover Dog during the 1940's and 1950's. He and Albert Staehle raised a lot of money for charities. According to Selene, when Butch became completely blind at age 12, his canine son, "Butchito" led often led him around on a leash when out walking in the New York area with his master in the early 50's. Butch lived to be 17 years of age and died in North Miami. According to the Miami Herald of 3-25-63 Butch was buried in the family yard in our town.

When interviewed this year, daughter Linda reported that "Butch" was so famous that before he died, skilled experts from Germany made ceramic Hummel figurines of "Cover Boy Butch". They are molded casts or statues. These famed figurines formed an exact likeness of Butch. Staehle's artistic illustrations made his dog vastly popular. Staehle was always grateful to Butch for bringing him his greatest success as an artist.



ABOVE: Inside the Staehle home. Marjory Houston Staehle with Selene (L) and Linda (R), two of her six children. In this photo you can notice the great number of magazine covers that featured their dog, "Butch". On the right column on this page, notice 2 enlargements of the more than 50 covers displayed in this home. There are also many visuals of Smokey Bear to be seen. Somewhere in the display above is a poster of Butch when he became an official mascot of the United States Navy in 1956.

In a taped 2004 interview in North Miami with Jacki Biggane of the Greater North Miami Historical Society, Marjory said: "We think of our house as a museum" You can see the many "covers" of Butch displayed. He was America's Cover Dog during the 1940's and 1950's. She added: "Butch did no tricks; he simply personified the love animal owners feel for their pets".

Marjory Houston Staehle is the author of "The True Story Behind Smokey Bear". An associate of hers, Sharon Damkaer, wrote the collectible book "Albert Staehle and Cover Boy Butch".

## STAEHLE'S EARLY TRAINING AND ROAD TO SUCCESS

When he was 16 he was working as a commercial artist. He had the family background of artists. His father, Albert Franklin Staehle, was an American artist who once worked for "Currier and Ives". The father traveled to Germany to further his study of art, and Albert was born there in 1899. His maternal grandfather, Anton Fries, had been the court artist for King Ludwig III of Bavaria. Upon the move back to America at age 14, art school was expected for young Albert. So he studied at the Wicker School of Art in Detroit and then at the New York School of Art under Hans Hoffmann. He opened his Art Studio in 1932 in New York.

He became one of America's most popular illustrators in the late 1930's. Staehle was eagerly sought by advertisers for his billboard artwork. He earned the prestigious Kerwin H. Fulton medal for Achievement of Art in Outdoor Advertising in 1938, 1939, and 1940

The artist's animal illustrations began to appear in the leading magazines of the day. Before he became the front cover prized illustrator of the "Saturday Evening Post" and the "American Weekly" he produced illustrations for Life, Redbook, Look, Colliers, Time, and Ladies Home Journal. His animal illustrations found in prominent magazines were for products of the day: Postum, Gulfpride Oil, Fleetwood Cigarettes, Chrysler, and Railway Express Agency. He produced Billboard illustrations with his endearing animal sketches for Cellophane Tape, Sylvania Light Bulbs, Morton Salt, Ford Motor Company, Bendix Washers, and Atlas Tires.

### LIVE ANIMAL MODELS.

Staehle sketched or painted every conceivable animal for dozens of major American companies from 1929-1959. He always used live animals as models and captured their eyes and facial expressions and blended those expressions with near-human attributes. His name was well known for his commercial illustrations for Carter's Ink and Swan Soap. He also worked from photographs of expressive animals after he hired Marjory in 1950 to photograph his animal models.

Right: Albert Staehle at work. Photograph taken by his wife, Marjory Houston Staehle. She is a professional photographer.



### NOTABLES RECOGNIZE ALBERT STAEHLE'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Following Albert's demise in 1974 his wife found it necessary to obtain work teaching photography classes at Miami-Dade Junior College. There she became friends with Carrie Meek who was in charge of the "Outreach Programs". Marjory and all of her young children helped Carrie in her political campaigns. Often the Staehle family "baby-sat" Kendrick Meek at their house while Carrie Meek campaigned. When Carrie Meek was a U.S. Congresswoman in the 90's she thought it necessary to publicize Albert Staehle's contributions to this country.

According to the "Congressional Record", dated August 10, 1994, U.S. Congresswoman Carrie Meek of Florida provided these comments: "Mr. Speaker, this year we are celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Smokey Bear." She added: "Mr. Speaker, until this year, Mr. Staehle has not been given the recognition he deserves for his contribution to the Smokey Bear campaign against forest fires. The American public was unaware and the United States Government has overlooked Albert Staehle's contribution. Mr. Speaker, I applaud the Department of Agriculture Forest Service decision to recognize Albert Staehle for the significant contribution he made to our national heritage. As a result of the weight of the comments of Congresswoman Carrie Meek, the Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Espry, recognized posthumously Staehle's contribution in the creation of Smokey Bear during a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ceremony. Also, a permanent plaque was put on display at the Forestry Service headquarters.

When he was Vice President of the United States in the 1980's George Bush recommended a commemorative stamp to honor Albert Staehle. Smokey Bear's creator is worthy of a postal stamp recognizing his contribution.

# THE POPULARITY OF STAEHLE'S "SMOKEY BEAR" CREATION OVER THE YEARS

At first he was called "Smokey". In 1944 he was created in the Kent Studios, owned by Albert Staehle and Albert Dorne, one of the most successful art studios in New York City at the time. By 1947, the catchy phrase "ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES" came along with another of Staehle's nation-grabbing posters depicting the new mascot of the United States Forestry Service campaign with the hope of reducing the number of forest fires. Then in 1950 a bear cub was saved from a forest wildfire in New Mexico and brought to the Washington, D.C. National Zoo to reside as the embodiment of our forest fire prevention bear. This live bear was also given the name "Smokey". Forward to 1951: songwriters Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins wrote the song "Smokey the Bear". It was sung by Gene Autry, the cowboy movie star, and took the country by storm with its popularity. Children began singing the "Smokey the Bear" song.

To hear Gene Autry sing the "Smokey the Bear" song. <http://www.vom.com/wesford>

This song would actually cause confusion about "Smokey's" actual name. Heavily involved in the background all of these years was an organization known as the "Advertising Council" who had been marketing "Smokey" since his inception. Profits earned through marketing policies of this shadow group went to the coffers of the Forestry Service, a branch of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The Advertising Council marketed under the name "Smokey Bear". For several years they had already marketed Smokey Bear in Hollywood, print media, books and ads. About "Smokey", the question arose: which should be his official name?

It took an Act of Congress in 1952 to determine that the U.S. Government's official name for him would be SMOKEY BEAR. The same Act took him out of the public domain. He was further protected by federal law as an advertising symbol. And lastly, the Act provides for the continuous use of collected fees and royalties for forest fire prevention.

Shortly after, that same year, America's children were invited to write to Smokey Bear in Washington, D.C. All who wrote received a reply which included visuals, a letter from Smokey Bear, and information on preventing forest fires. The number of children who wrote greatly increased each year. In 1962 a Junior Forest Ranger Program was started by the Forest Service. Upon requesting to join the youngsters received in the mail a letter and photograph from Smokey Bear, membership card, pledge card, badge, -----and a song sheet of "Smokey the Bear"!!!

In 1965 over 200,000 applications were received for the Jr. Ranger Program and Smokey Bear. In 1965 the Post Office gave him his own zip code, 20252, at Smokey Bear Headquarters, Wash., D.C. Three years later the number of Junior Forest Rangers reached two million American youth. It is said that children at that time knew more about fire prevention than many adults.

RIGHT: Smokey Bear answering the mail in 1968 at zip code 20252. Today he has his own email address.



**ACCOMPANING VISUAL:** Smokey Bear receives fan mail in this painting by Ralph Wendelin.

Artist Albert Staehle had created a "National Treasure" for us. "Smokey's" image has changed little over the years. Since "Smokey's" inception in 1944, the forest fire campaign has reduced the number of acres lost annually from 22 million to 4 million. On August 9, 2009 Smokey Bear celebrated his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. He is an American Icon and is the longest running public service advertisement in United States history.