

# William Medcalf's Iconic Painting of a Case Steam Engine, Episode 2

By Dale Noel and Robert T. Rhode

This article is a follow-up to Robert T. Rhode's story in the April-May 2015 issue of *E&E*.

Minnesota artist William Edward Medcalf (1920-2005; often called "Bill Medcalf") produced at least one more work of art similar to the iconic painting he did for the J. I. Case Company while working for Brown & Bigelow, the promotional products firm.

Dale Noel bought the painting a dozen years ago from a fellow who received it from his grandparents and who said that it had hung in his grandparents' home for a long time. The seller lived in or near Owatonna, Minnesota.

Dale's painting is oil on board and signed by the artist. The work is reminiscent of the threshing scene commissioned by J. I. Case

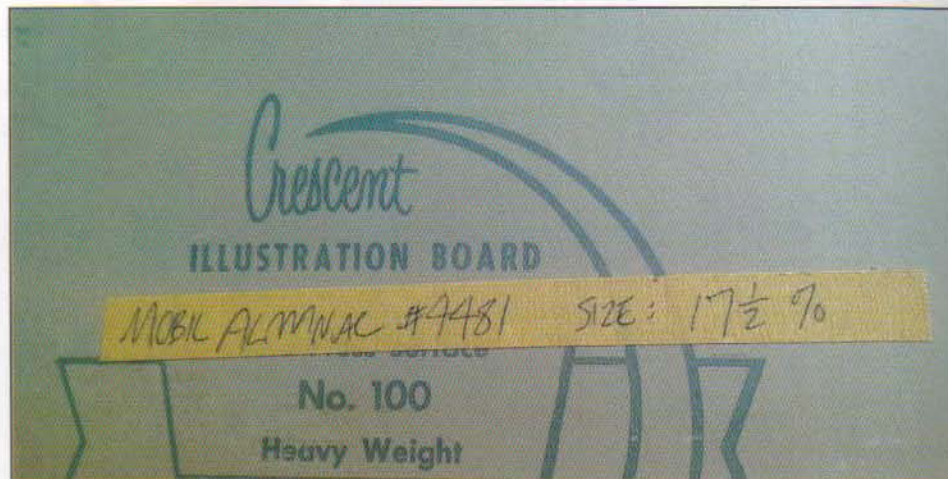
but with obvious differences. The barn is almost an exact match for one on the grounds of the Western Minnesota Steam Threshers Reunion (WMSTR) near Rollag. Long-time WMSTR member Tom Dillon says the barn was built in 1985.

Across the back of Dale's illustration board is a strip of masking tape with the handwritten words "Mobil Almanac #4481 Size: 17½ %." The percent is the editor's instruction to the production camera operator to size a photograph of the painting properly for placement on the cover of the almanac.

Agricultural almanacs from the Lubrite Division of Socony-Vacuum Oil Company (renamed Socony Mobil Oil Company in 1955, with "Socony" omitted in 1966) date



Over a decade ago, Dale Noel purchased this oil painting by William E. Medcalf, who created a similar iconic threshing scene for the J. I. Case Company in 1955.



A notation on the back of Dale's painting proves that the original purpose of the art was to illustrate an annual agricultural almanac published by Mobil.



PAINTING FROM THE RED WING SHOE COMPANY SERIES "AMERICA AT WORK"



Les Kouba produced this painting for Red Wing Shoes. Both he and Medcalf worked for Brown & Bigelow, a promotional products firm.

back to 1938; for that reason, it is tempting to think that the notation "4481" means "Almanac Number 44" published in "1981." For several years, Mobil turned to Brown & Bigelow for nostalgic cover art to illustrate the almanacs. Dale's painting measures 30" x 40" and is the same size as another Medcalf Mobil almanac illustration offered by an online auction service.

While researching this article, Dale ran across an illustration by Minnesota artist Les Kouba. His watercolor titled *Threshing Time*, which was part of his *America at Work* series for Red Wing Shoes, echoes the familiar Case threshing scene. As both Medcalf and Kouba were associated with Brown & Bigelow, it is possible each was aware of the other's paintings and produced comparable works.

The authors invite readers to share information about Dale's Medcalf painting.

Contact steam historian Robert T. Rhode  
at 990 W. Lower Springboro Rd.,  
Springboro, OH 45066;  
e-mail: case65@earthlink.net