Pen to Press to Paper:
McCutcheon's Political Cartoons and How They Were Printed

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The Process

1. Drawing: The artist created a black and white drawing either using ink on a smooth paper or a combination of ink and dry media on a rough or textured paper. India ink was recommended along with either Conté crayon or litho crayon for the dry media.

2. Photographing: A negative of the drawing was created. The size of the image was often reduced at this point to 1/4 the size of the original.

3. Exposing: A zinc plate with a photosensitive emulsion was exposed through the negative. If Ben-Day tints were to be used they were usually added at this stage. Areas meant to remain blank were stopped out and protected as the Ben-Day tint was applied overtop.

4. Etching: The areas hardened by exposure or where a pattern was applied in the previous step were protected as the plate was etched multiple times in an acid bath. This would leave the design in relief.
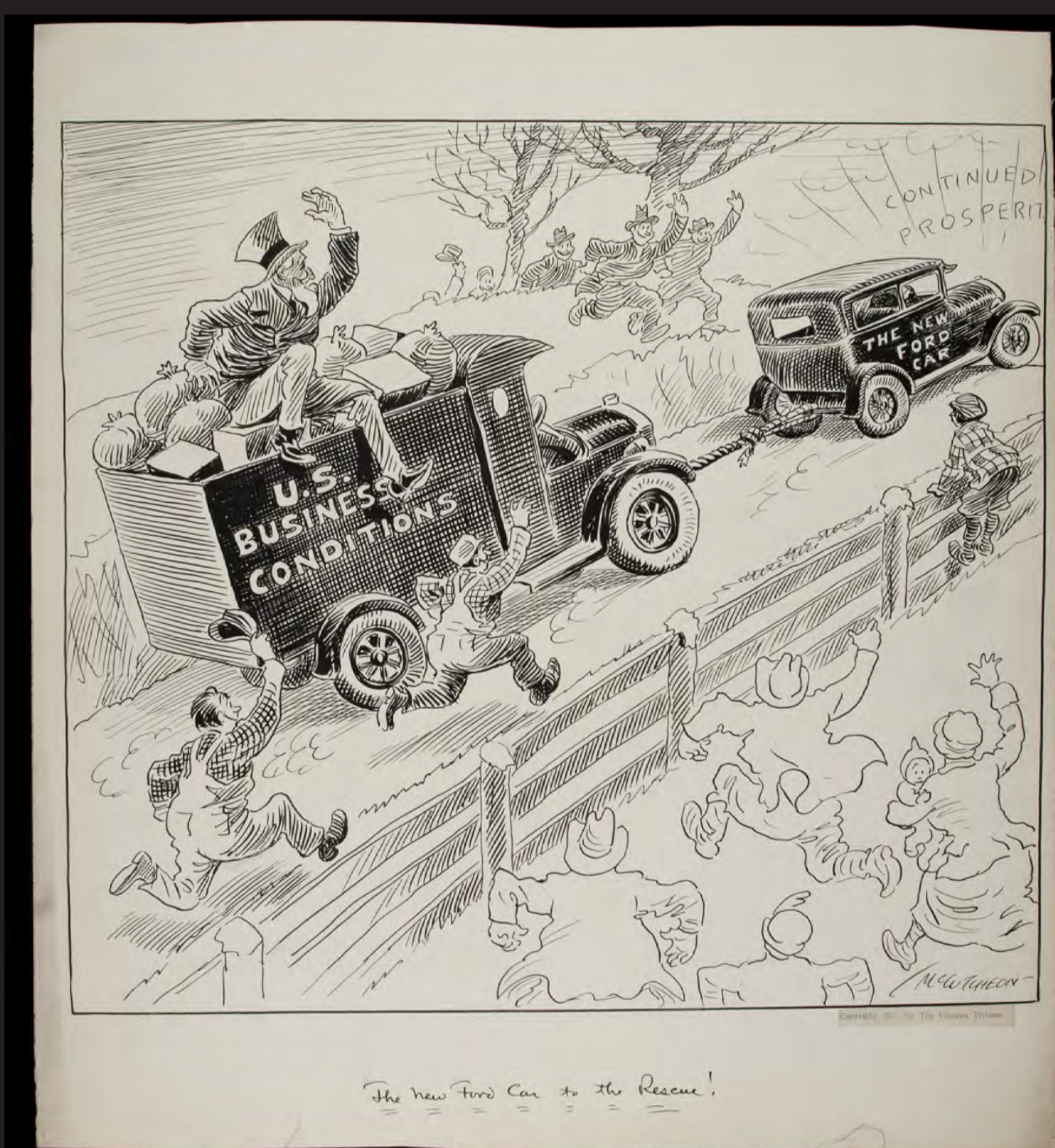
5. Mounting: Large areas designed to print blank would be routed or cut away. The zinc plate would be mounted to a wooden block, making it the same height as the type set around it.

6. Stereotyping: Because the *Tribune* was printed quickly and distributed widely, duplication of the plate was an essential part of the process. A paper mold was made of the image and type surrounding it. This formed the stereotype matrix or "mat."

7. Casting: The paper mat was bent to create a curve and used as mold as molten type metal was cast in it. This formed a new plate with the same design in relief, which fit on the *Tribune's* high-speed cylinder presses.

8. Printing: The *Tribune* printed on several presses simultaneously from the stereotype plates.

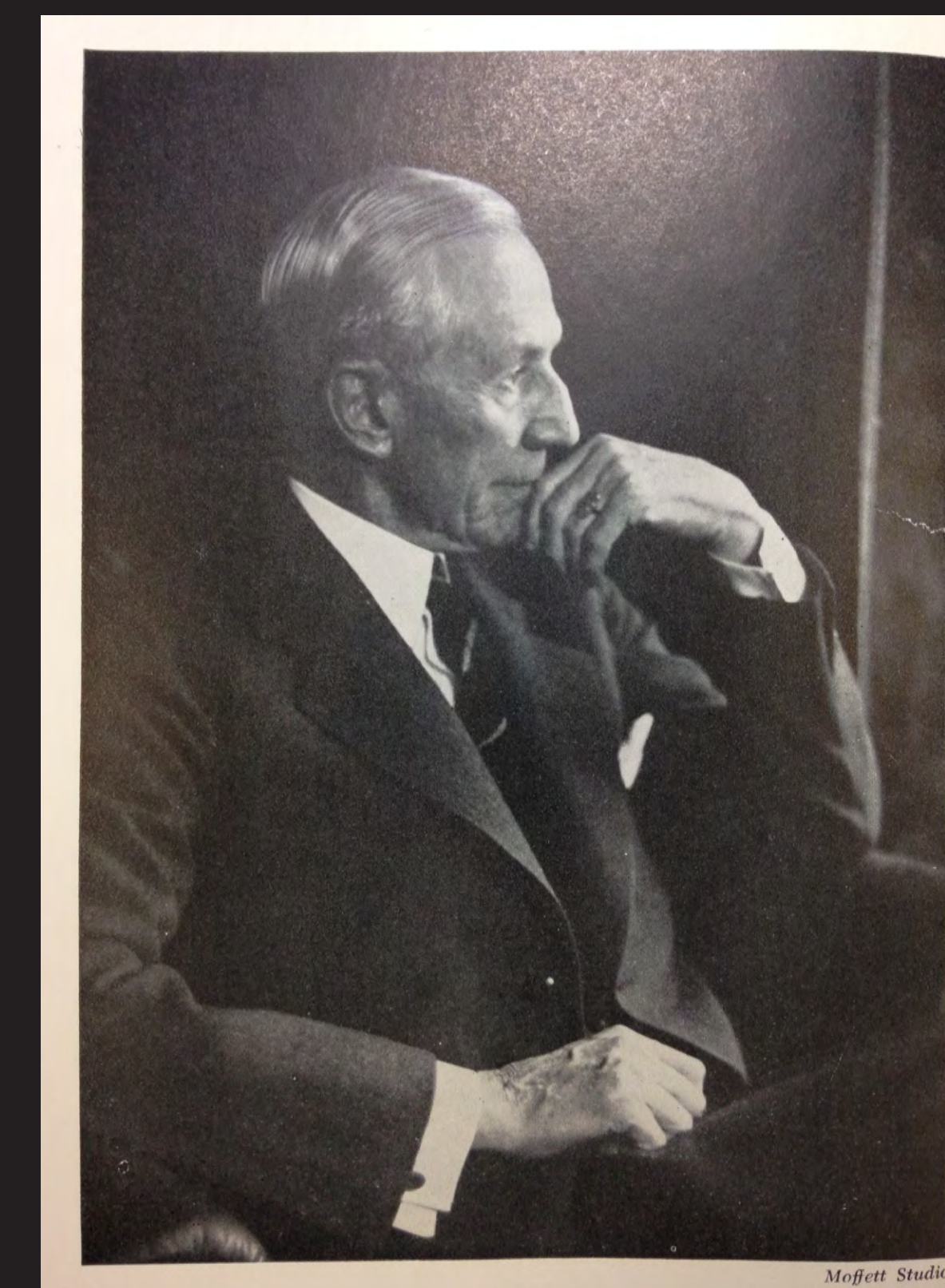Many thanks to Susan Russick, Scott Devine, Joe Barabe, the Northwestern University Library Preservation Department, the staff of the McCormick Library of Special Collections, The Newberry Library, Princeton University Library, and Ryerson Library at the Art Institue of Chicago.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century relief printing had evolved past wood engraving. It was still the easiest and most popular form for illustration, but now incorporated photography to get from the original drawing to the final printed image. The illustration could take the form of a halftone, but more often basic black and white line drawings were the source. Though similar processes were used, halftone plates were much more expensive to create and duplicate than line drawings.

To get around this artists and cartoonists such as John T. McCutcheon adopted a few techniques to give the effect of tone without using the halftone process. While most of McCutcheon's works are plain line drawings, like *The New Ford Car* (left), over the course of his career he integrated the use of Ben-Day dot patterns, and later textured paper creating more possibilities for tone and varying effects in his work.

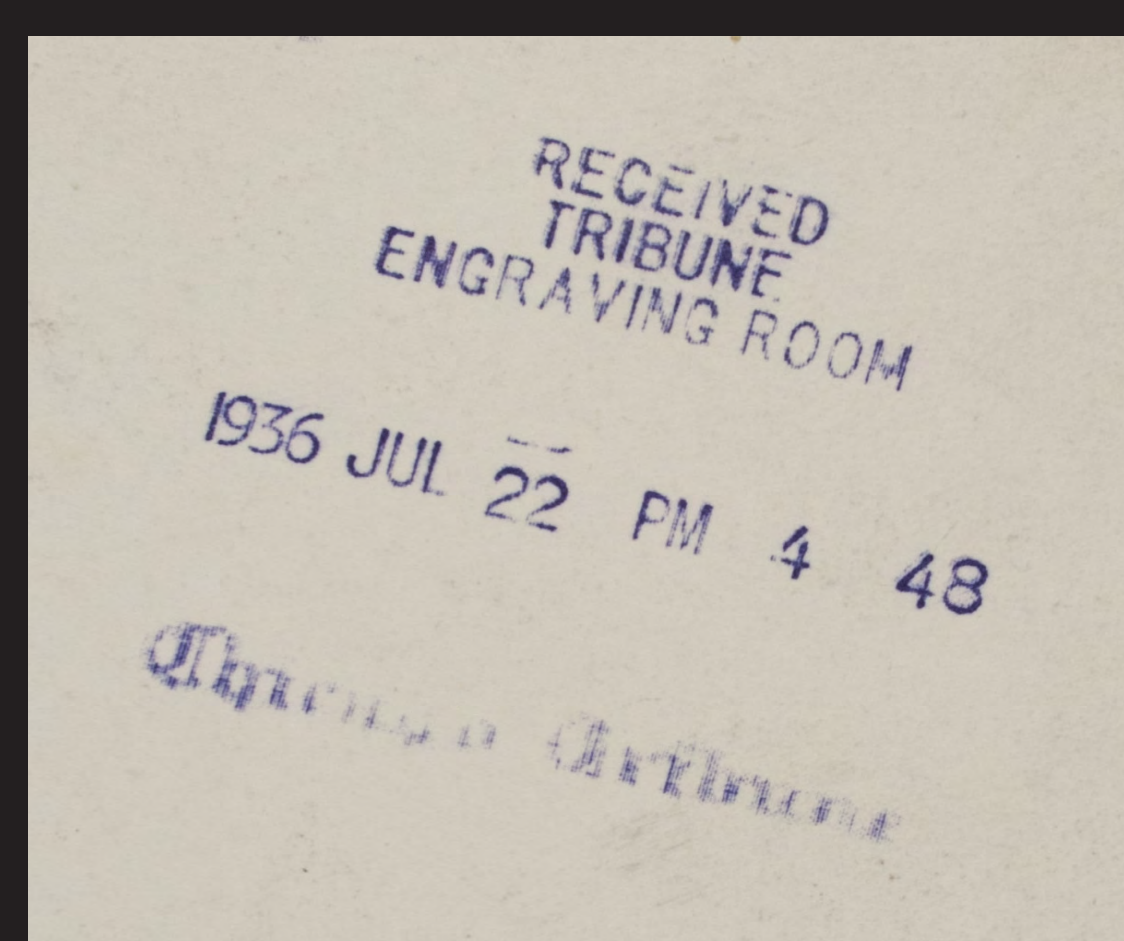*The New Ford Car to the Rescue* - March 12, 1927

John Tinney McCutcheon

John Tinney McCutcheon (1870-1949) was a well-known and widely respected Chicago area political cartoonist. After graduating from Perdue University he began work in Chicago, first working for the *Chicago Morning News* and in 1903 settling in at the *Chicago Tribune*, where he would remain for the rest of his cartooning career until 1943. During the height of his career in the 1920s and 1930s his work was published in the Tribune nearly every day at the top of the front page just under the headline.

Northwestern's McCormick Library of Special Collections is home to more than 450 of McCutcheon's original drawings. The cartoons were given to the university by McCutcheon's widow and the collection spans the whole course of his career offering a representative sampling of his materials, methods, and the nature of reproductive printing processes at the time.

Halftone Image of John Tinney McCutcheon out of *Drawn From Memory*
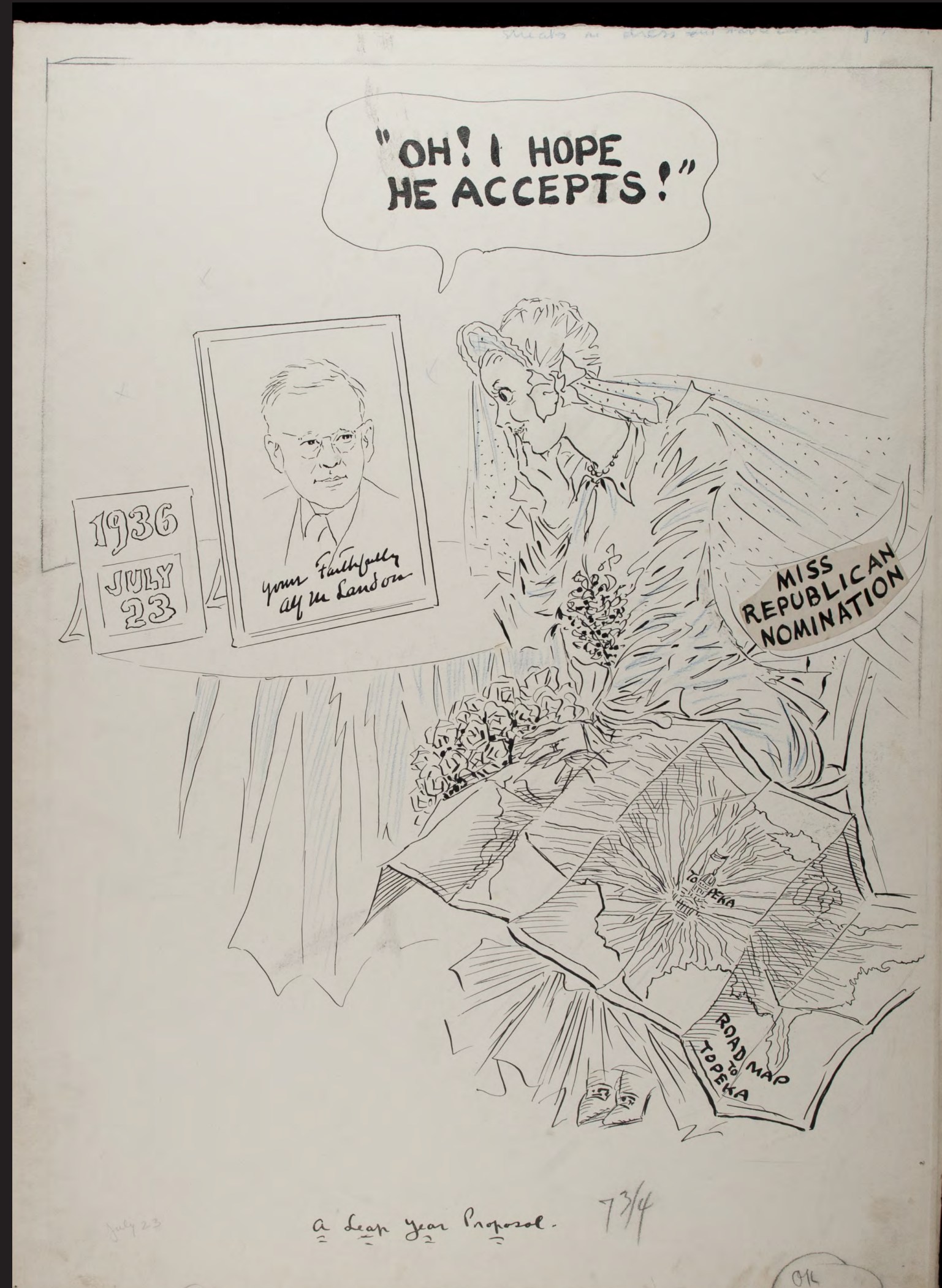
Marks and Notations

On all of the drawings there are many marks from both McCutcheon and the *Tribune*. In *A Leap Year Proposal* McCutcheon's graphite underdrawing is faintly visible along with corrections made by scraping and adhereing paper overtop of the drawing. (See detail images under Ben-Day).

From the *Tribune* there is the editor's "OK" at the bottom right, a note that it should be reduced to 7 3/4" high, and a stamp on the reverse showing when it was received in the engraving room.

"OH! I HOPE HE ACCEPTS!"

RECEIVED TRIBUNE ENGRAVING ROOM
1936 JUL 22 PM 4 48

Verso of Original Drawing (Detail)

Original Drawing

Ben-Day Tints

Ben-Day tints were invented by Benjamin Henry Day in 1879. The basic tones are widely recognized from their use in comic books and being mimicked in the pop-art of Roy Lichtenstein. A large variety of patterns beyond the basic grid of dots were available, including an aquatint pattern.

McCutcheon incorporated the tints in his work from the early 1900s. He would indicate either with blue pencil marks or with a note in the margins which areas he hoped to have shaded and the type of tint. The tint would then by added by workers in the *Tribune's* engraving room.

A Leap Year Proposal (July 23, 1936) is a good example. McCutcheon's blue pencil marks are evident in the original. In the printed image two types of tones are visible--in the background and in the figure. The artist could never be sure of the result though. Here a tint was added in the face even though it was not indicated in the original.

Two of McCutcheon's frequent corrections are here as well - a patch applied overtop and an area scraped and re-drawn just to its left.
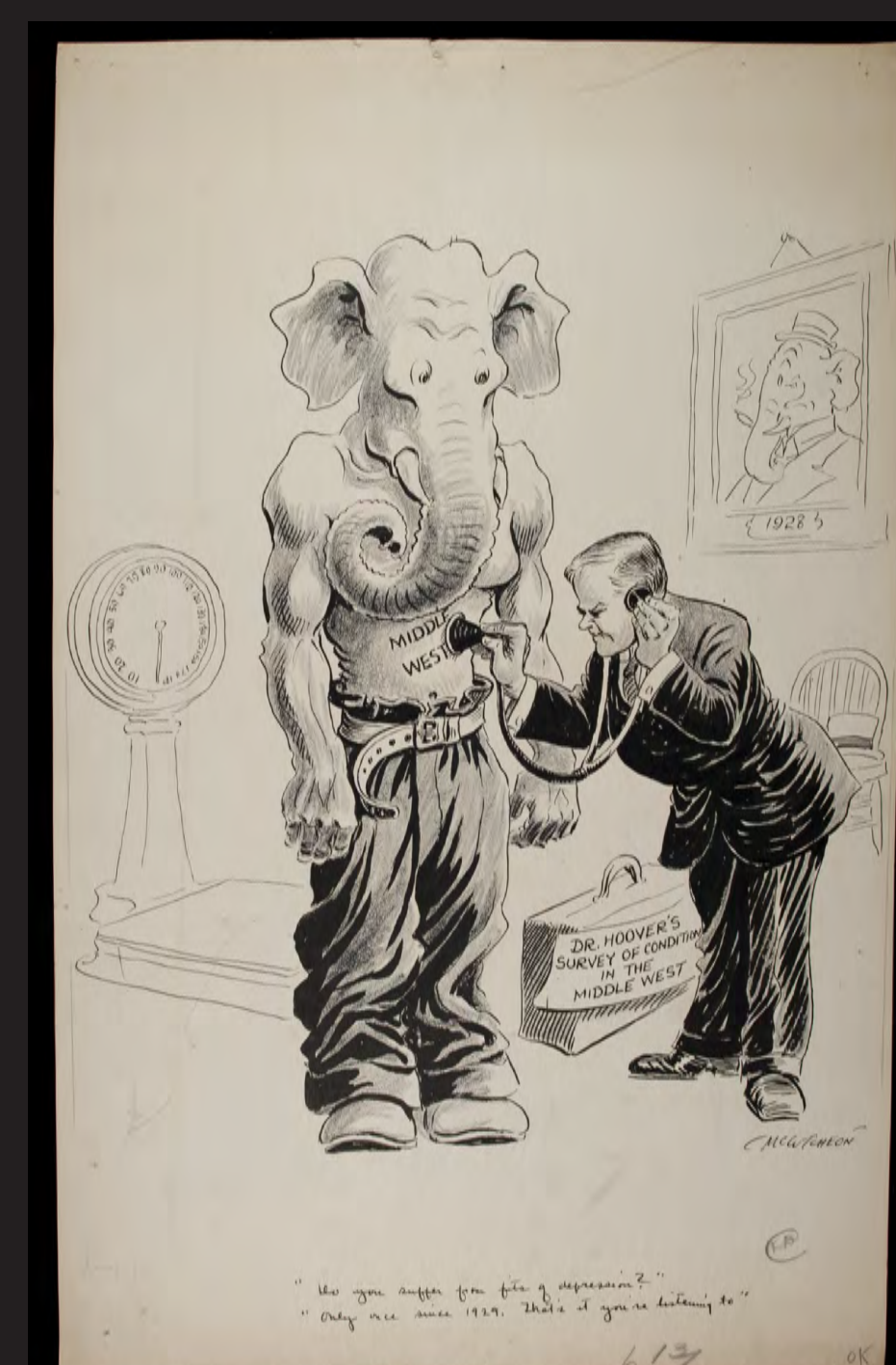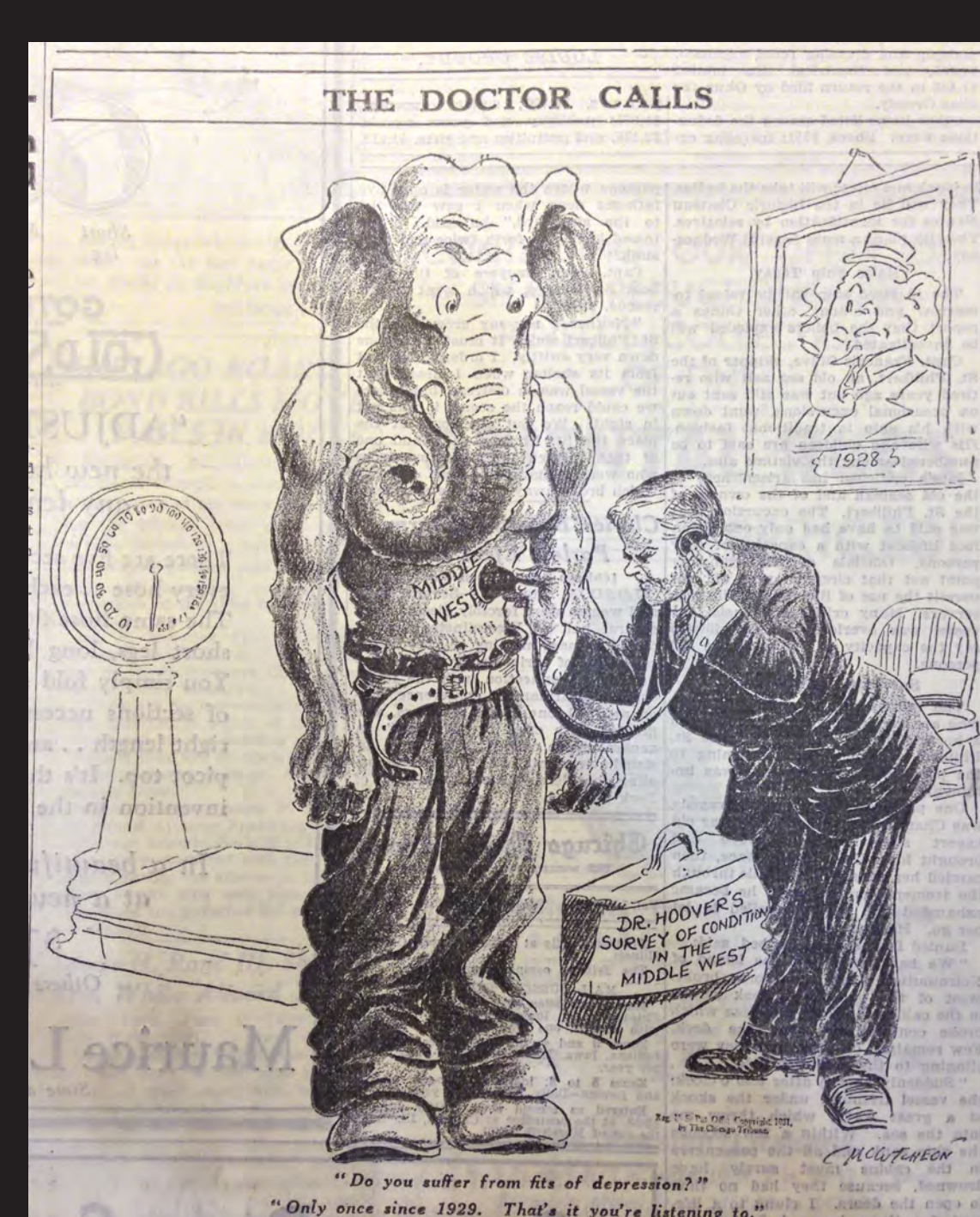
MISS REPUBLICAN NOMINATION

Original Drawing (Detail)

MISS REPUBLICAN NOMINATION

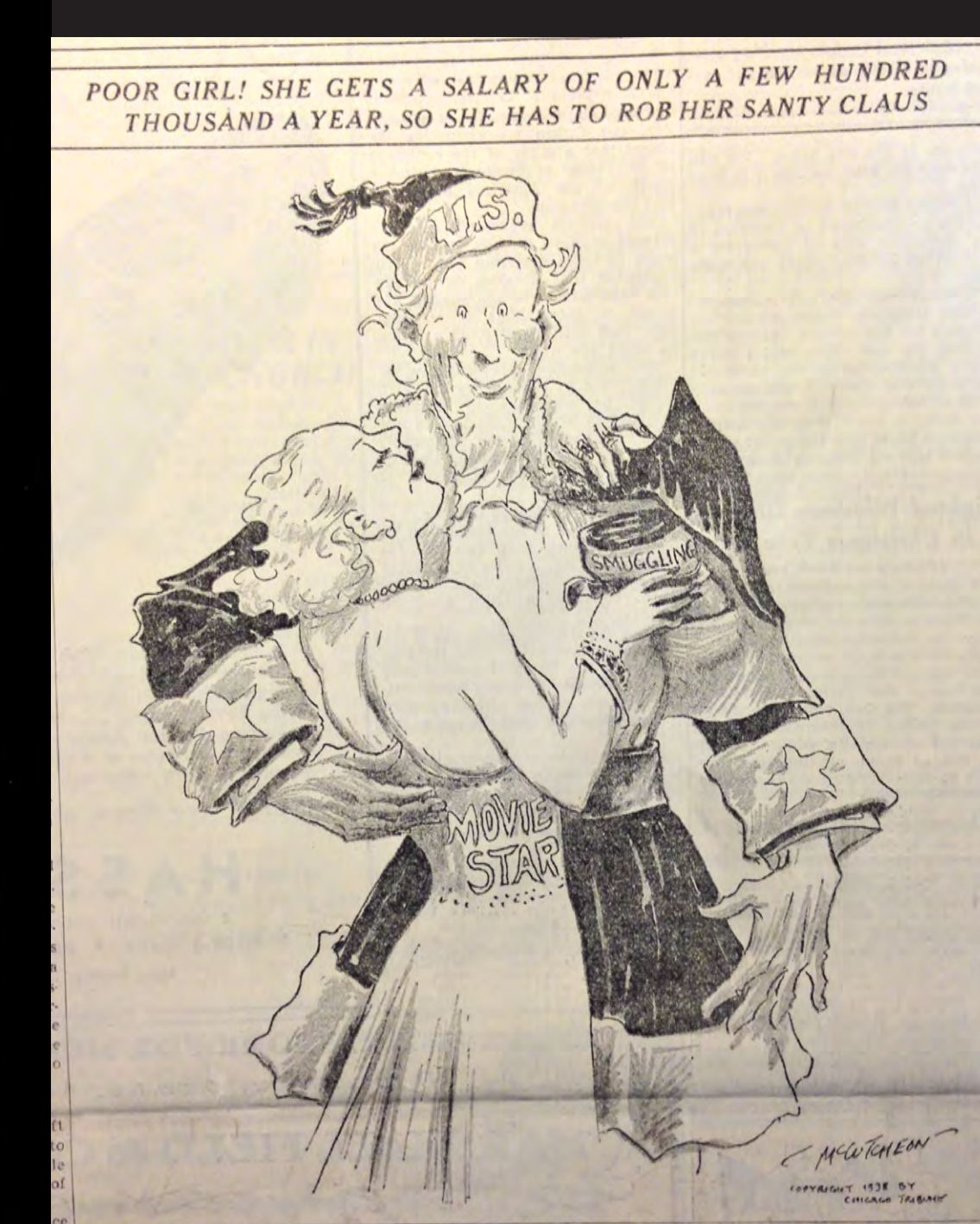Printed Image (Detail)

Textured Paper

Though drawing on textured paper was proposed and published as early as the 1890s, McCutcheon did not adopt it frequently until the 1920s. Using a highly textured paper with a Conté crayon or litho crayon could produce black marks of varying size depending on how hard the artist pressed on the paper. The result in the printed image was shades of gray, as if chalk had been used.

The effect in the final printed image depended greatly on the type of paper used for the drawing. Paper with a strong laid texture was the first to be incorporated into McCutcheons work in the 1910s, followed by paper with an aquatint grain texture in the late 1920s and finally a paper with grid texture in the 1930s.
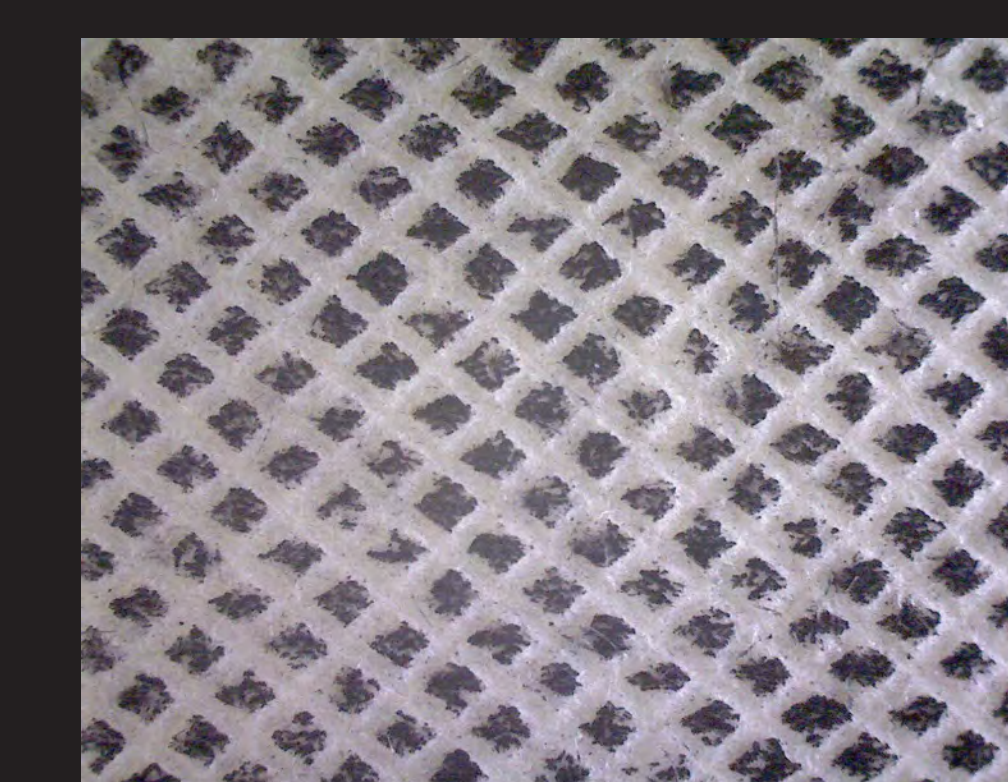
The Doctor Calls (left - June 16, 1931) shows how the aquatint grain was employed and *Poor Girl!* (right - December 15, 1938) shows the effect of using the grid textured paper.
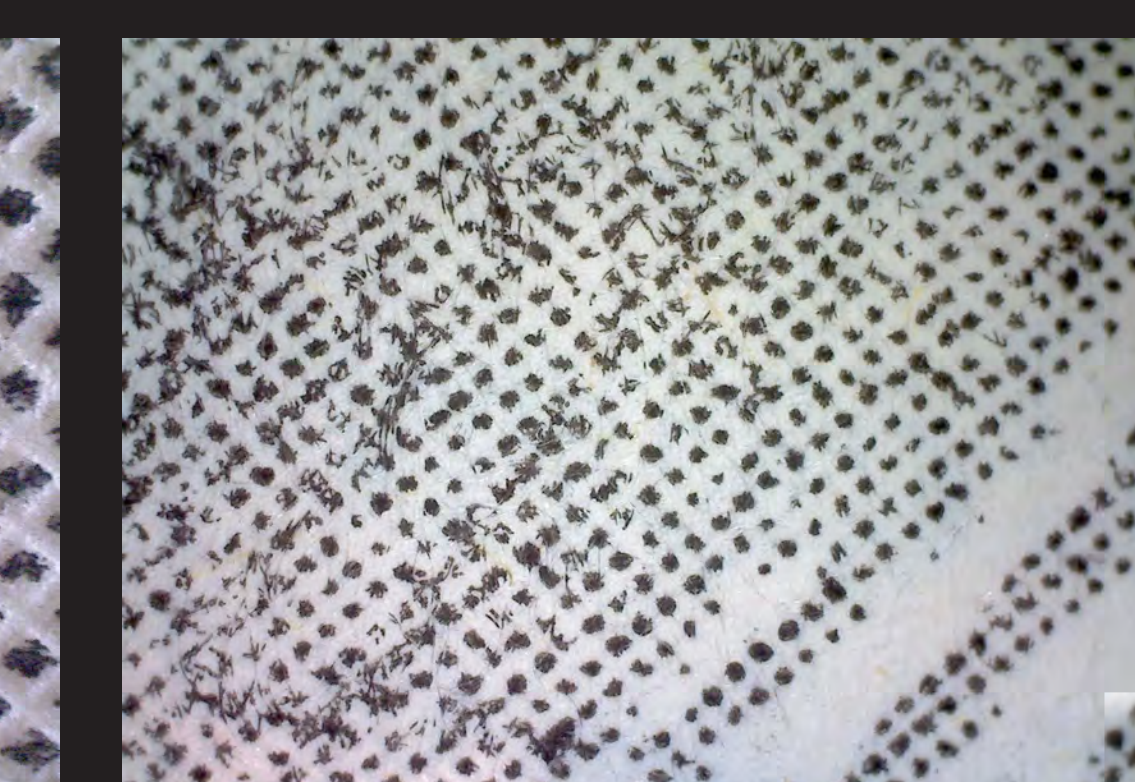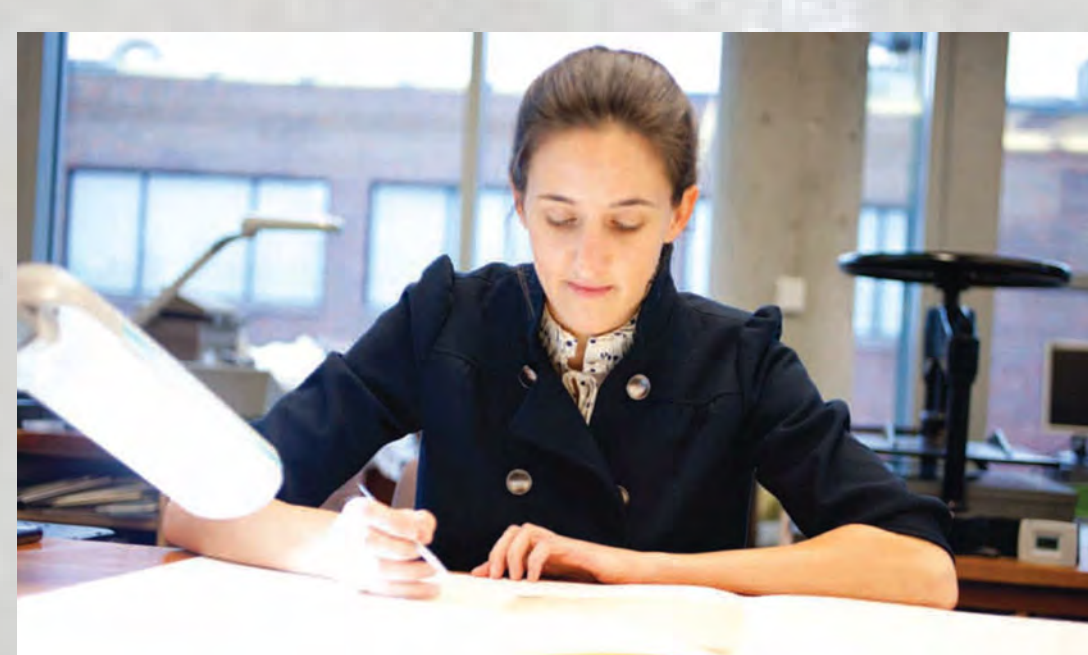
THE DOCTOR CALLS

Original Drawing

Printed Image

POOR GIRL! SHE GETS A SALARY OF ONLY A FEW HUNDRED THOUSAND A YEAR, SO SHE HAS TO ROB HER SANTY CLAUS

Original Drawing

Printed Image

Original Drawing - 40x

Printed Image - 40x

Original Drawing - 40x

Printed Image - 40x