CHILDREN were a favorite theme with advertisers. Trade card designs frequently had no relation to the product promoted.

AMONG PICTURESQUE HOLDINGS of the Minnesota Historical Society's museum that hark back to an earlier era are scores of trade cards. Although such cards in simple form date back to colonial days in America, their "golden age" as a means of advertising lasted only from the late 1800s until just after the turn of the century. But in the relatively quiet days before television, radio, and billboards, and before newspapers and magazines were used widely as major advertising media, cards like the ones shown on these pages were colorful, popular, and effective means of advertising one's business or products. Tradesmen and shopkeepers gave the cards to their customers who in turn frequently made a hobby of collecting the quaint items and pasting them in scrapbooks. Today, after many years of reposing in dusty attics and forgotten trunks, the cards are once again being sought by many kinds of collectors. They range from trivia buffs caught up in the current enthusiasm for Americana to serious students of American history and art.

Until the middle and even the late 1800s, pictures of almost any description were a rarity in the homes of average people. Pictures were a luxury largely limited to the wealthy and well-educated. For centuries, reproduction of pictures was a slow, laborious, costly process. But technological developments in lithography and printing in the 1860s and 1870s made possible the reproduction — cheaply and on a large-scale basis — of pictures in color as well as black and white. Thus it was that in the 1880s trade cards came into their heyday with their often whimsical designs and frequent use of such subjects as animals, birds, floral prints, western scenes, genre settings, and the like. Almost every family had a picture album, and collecting the cards and putting them into books became a nation-wide pastime. Cards advertising both national and local products and businesses became so popular that merchants felt obligated to give them out to customers. The novelty of a plethora of brightly colored pictures, combined with a less frenetic pace and a simpler era with fewer diversions than today, made the hobby almost an epidemic.

Although trade cards are on occasion still used today,
HUBBARD MILLING Company was located in Mankato.
This smile is no con
As my lightning rod was on.

I wrote to
M. Townsley & Sons.
1315-17 4th St. S.E.
Minneapolis, Minn.

SHAPES
SPRING & SUMMER
1881
Segelbaum Brothers,
Minneapolis, Minn.

Where have you been, owl night.

FALL AND WINTER, 1882-3.
Boston One Price Clothing House,
Corner Third and Robert,
St. Paul.
IMPRINTED OVER what was probably a stock design is the name of the firm, H. Clay Scott, and its products, "Choice Confectionery, Fruits, Canned Goods, Oysters, Cigars, &c."

"HOLIDAY GOODS" are advertised on this card from Hofflin's Drug and Paint Store in Minneapolis.
Lift the romanticized picture of two lovers and beneath is a separate card with the real message of the advertisers, Duncan and Barry, "Merchant Tailors" in St. Paul. A white tassel holds the two cards together. Winter scenes were another favorite with Minnesotans.