“Subtly and quietly, postcards have shaped Minnesota’s image,” writes Bonnie G. Wilson in *Minnesota in the Mail*. For senders and recipients alike, these vivid little missives condense a state, region, city, or street scene to an indelible image: what we know of a place. But places change in ways both large and small, the changes sometimes unavoidable and other times, unnoticed.

In 1990 the U.S. Bureau of the Census decided, after a long and sometimes contentious interlude, to include coastal waters in the total areas of states bordering the Great Lakes and other bodies of water. Will the distinctive profile of Minnesota’s Arrowhead region eventually vanish from popular culture as a result? Only time will tell. To read about shifts in the state’s size—and see a newer map of its outline—turn to the article beginning on page 306.

**About the Cover**

Ready to fight, men of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry wait in the trenches before Manila in August 1898. Deployed to the Philippine Islands, these enthusiastic Spanish-American War recruits experienced the danger and adrenaline of battle as well as the boredom and discomfort of police duty in an unfamiliar environment. Photos (this one from the Minnesota Historical Society collections), letters, diaries, and newspaper articles provide an intimate portrait of both war service and home-front reactions. For a look at the Stearns County volunteers of Company M and their supporters back home, see the article beginning on page 292.
Showroom Magic

**Is there a Magic Eye** secret lurking in that elaborate wallpaper pattern? If you look at it long enough and cross or blur (I’ve never figured it out) your eyes just right, will it solve the puzzle of that mysterious mirror? The photographer has chosen an angle that offers more questions than answers. The mirror seems to be reflecting another room we can’t see behind our right shoulder or giving us a window into another showroom, a space hinted at by the horizontal lines angling back toward center stage from the picture’s left edge.

There are illusions aplenty onstage in this space, an early example of lifestyle marketing. The hanging price tags, subtle but not invisible, allow you, the aesthete and comfort-seeker, room to sit while reminding you, the consumer, that all of this hedonistic indulgence can be had for mere dollars. Perhaps the mysteries of wallpaper and mirror/window are the product of a merchandising hypnotist: the rhythms of the sofa’s dark-medium-light bands, the faux posies, the identical twin armless chairs (mirrors of each other) with their shimmery, awning-cut skirts, all tumbled together in a designer’s dream of domestic bliss.

But why is just one side-table light on? Is it a magician’s trick to divert attention away from the seam of the illusion? “Pay no attention to that façade, ladies and gentlemen. I am the great and powerful engine of consumerism, and you are witnessing the inevitable explosion of the suburbs!” Or, at least, one living room’s worth.

—George Slade

George Slade is the artistic director at the Minnesota Center for Photography and the editor of Minnesota In Our Time: A Photographic Portrait (2000).
When it opened at the corner of Marquette Avenue and Fifth Street in 1915, the Soo Line-First National Bank Building (now known as the 501 Building) was the tallest skyscraper in Minneapolis and also among the most elegant. It replaced a much smaller building that the bank had constructed just eight years earlier in what cannot be regarded as a brilliant example of planning ahead. Unlike downtown’s dark-toned Victorian-era buildings, the new skyscraper sported a gleaming skin of white terra cotta adorned with balconies, consoles, quoins, pediments, and other Renaissance Revival-style paraphernalia, all crowned by an emphatic cornice. An ornate corner clock (still functioning) completed the composition.

The building’s designer, New York architect Robert W. Gibson, was an old hand at the Beaux-Arts brand of monumental classicism. His surviving work in New York includes Cartier’s lavish Fifth Avenue Boutique, originally built in 1905 as a Vanderbilt family mansion. The Soo Line-First National building isn’t quite up to Cartier’s deluxe standards, but it’s in the same family as many New York skyscrapers of the time.

As designed, the U-shaped, 19-story building included a magnificent second-floor banking hall. Lit by tall arched windows on three sides, the 20-foot-high hall sported plenty of marble and mahogany, leaving little doubt as to who had the money. Today, with ATM machines everywhere, grand banking halls are an all-but-extinct architectural species.

The building’s hegemony atop the Minneapolis skyline lasted until 1929, when the Foshay and Rand towers soared well above it. Still, the building continued to serve its original purpose until about 1960, when the First National Bank (now U.S. Bancorp) moved into a new skyscraper next door. Afterwards, the old building’s lower floors were remodeled, none too delicately, inside and out. The banking hall disappeared, its grand expanse subdivided into offices, while the arched windows gave way to a combination of small square openings and louvers. These changes robbed the building of its most graceful elements. The upper facades, however, are intact, and the building—now designated by the city as a historic site—remains Minneapolis’s best example of a Beaux Arts skyscraper.

—Larry Millett
