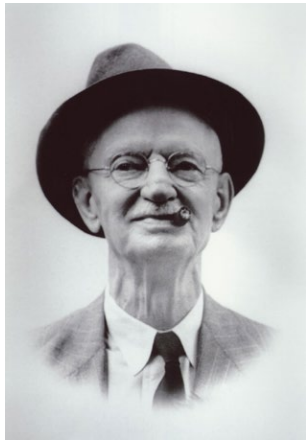


# GO-WITHS: STONEHOUSE SIGNS

BY CHRISTIAN WILLIS ✿ NIA #5185

A couple of years after I started collecting insulators at the age of 9, I also started noticing and collecting danger signs — after all, I would typically see these go-withs at almost every insulator show I attended, and even antique shops. Specifically, the “danger in a red oval” drew my interest. Even more specifically, danger signs with a certain font were my favorite. It wasn’t until the late 1990s and the Internet that I learned more about who was behind these cool signs with the distinct font: Stonehouse Signs of Colorado. Much like collecting insulators, little did I know at the time how little of the surface I had scratched...



J.W. STONEHOUSE

James Wesley (J.W.) Stonehouse was born in 1869. Like his father William, J.W. was a sign painter by trade—he got his start painting signs in the late 1890s to help fund his search for gold in the Victor, Colorado region. Around 1903, he made his way down to Douglas in the Arizona Territory to work his trade there, and also began on investing more in mining operations. During this period, he quickly recognized the need for standardized bell signals within the mines, and his signs were almost universally adopted.



THE STONEHOUSE STEEL SIGN CO. AT 9TH AND LARIMER, DENVER, CO

Around 1910, he moved back to Colorado, and in 1914, J.W. formed the Stonehouse Steel Sign Company and moved to Denver. Seeing opportunity beyond mine safety, he was a founding member of the National Safety Council; his designs for the Danger, Caution, Notice, Think, and Safety First header panels are the basis for the ones we still see and recognize to this day. His signs were sold all over North America to electric companies, mines, railroads, hospitals, factories, government, and countless other industries. In 1926, the company was renamed to Stonehouse Signs, Inc., and in 1968 the company moved to Arvada, where it operated continuously by the same family until 2020, when the company was sold to ACP International ([acpinternational.com](http://acpinternational.com)).

For the insulator hobby specifically, the most common Stonehouse signs that one typically encounters are related to electrical hazards. In the early days of high voltage electricity, deaths were unfortunately all too common, and Stonehouse’s easily recognizable danger signs helped warn engineers and linemen, undoubtedly saving many lives in the process. These signs can still be found on fences surrounding substations, inside and outside powerhouses, and even posted on the power poles and transmission towers themselves.

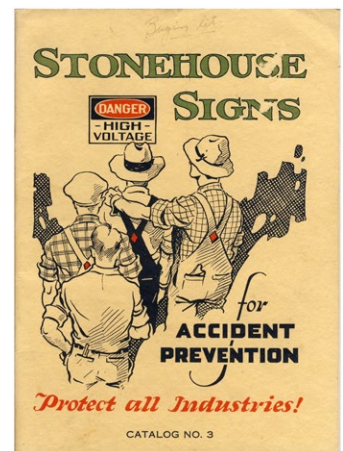
Like insulators, there are many variations to be aware of when collecting Stonehouse signs: dimensions, material & gauge thickness, grommets, manufacturer’s markings, and font styles. Many of these factors can help determine the sign’s age and rarity. Many Stonehouse signs are not marked, but if they are, the manufacturer’s mark is typically in the lower right corner. If you’re lucky, you may even encounter a Stonehouse sign that mentions our favorite subject—*insulators!* To date, I have 3 such signs in my collection (pictured on the next page), though there were many more produced. The hunt continues...

Once I got ahold of several Stonehouse Sign catalogs dating from the 1920s-1950s, my eyes were opened to just how prolific the company’s signs were, and I truly got the collecting bug! I own about 180 signs now. But, since Stonehouse made hundreds of stock wording signs and countless “specials” (custom worded signs), I’ve made peace with the fact that I will simply never have a complete collection. However, it’s not so much about having “one of everything”, but the thrill of discovering new signs. I’ve learned to apply that same principle to collecting insulators and it’s taken a lot of the stress out of collecting—simply collect what you love, and you will have years and years of enjoyment ahead of you.

Now, to solve the issue of having enough wall space for all these signs...



AN EARLY AD FROM C.1912 FEATURING J.W. STONEHOUSE'S "UNIVERSAL DANGER SIGNAL"



CATALOG NO. 3, DATED 1928



# GO-WITHS: STONEHOUSE SIGNS

(CONTINUED)



THE EARLIEST SIGN IN MY COLLECTION, C.1912 (PRE-COPYRIGHT) IN A NON-STANDARD SIZE (9" X 16")

UNIVERSAL DANGER SIGNAL SIGN  
Design Patent Applied For  
J. W. Stonehouse - - - Denver, Colo.

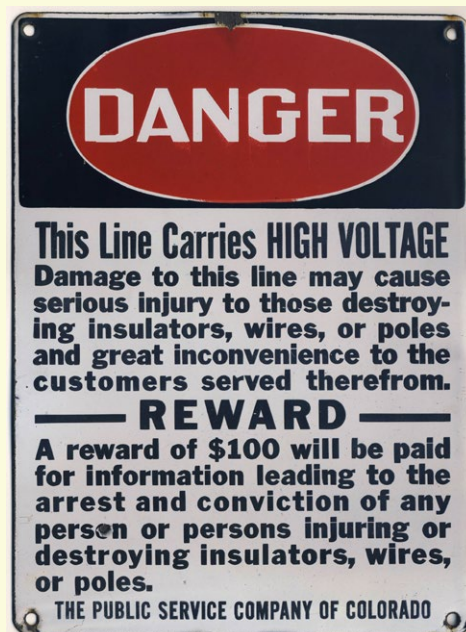


THE SKULL AND CROSSBONES AND FIST OF ZEUS VISUALS APPEARED ON SEVERAL STONEHOUSE SIGNS, AND REMAIN POPULAR WITH COLLECTORS.



## PROTECT THOSE INSULATORS!

AS WE ALL KNOW, INSULATORS WERE CRUCIAL TO THE PROPER OPERATION OF POWER LINES. THESE THREE SIGNS ARE MY CLOSEST INSULATOR "GO-WITHS" TO DATE. THE SIGNS TO THE LEFT AND RIGHT ARE VERTICAL 10" X 14" AND LIKELY DATE TO THE C.1920S, WHILE THE SIGN BELOW IS A MORE MODERN 7" X 10".



VARIOUS 7" X 10" SIGNS MADE BY STONEHOUSE. NOTE THE DESIGN & FONT TRANSITION FROM THE 1920S-30S (LEFT & CENTER) TO THE 1940S-50S (RIGHT).



# GO-WITHS: STONEHOUSE SIGNS

(CONTINUED)



LEFT: THE ELECTRICAL HAZARD SIGNS PAGE FROM THE 1928 CATALOG NO. 3. SEVERAL SIGNS HAVE LITTLE TO DO WITH ELECTRICAL HAZARDS, BUT CLEARLY THEY WERE TRYING TO FIT IN AS MANY SIGNS AS POSSIBLE. I WOULD JUST LOVE TO GET MY HANDS ON SOME OF THESE, INCLUDING: "THINK: USE THE INSULATED STOOL" AND THE MULTILINGUAL "DANGER: ELEKTRIKA"!



CUSTOM FOR NORTHERN STATES POWER CO, 10" X 14", C.1920S



18,000 VOLTS, 14" X 20", C.1930S



CATALOG # 144, 10" X 14", C.1940S



4600 VOLTS, 10" X 14", C.1920S



6900 VOLTS, 10" X 14", C.1940S



# GO-WITHS: STONEHOUSE SIGNS

(CONTINUED)



LEFT: PAGE EXCERPTS FROM THE 1949 CATALOG NO. 9, FEATURING ELECTRIC HAZARD AND POLE SIGNS. NOTE THE UPDATED HEADERS AND THE MODERN J.W. STONEHOUSE FONT.



ABOVE: MY FIRST STONEHOUSE SIGN, WHICH I PURCHASED AS A KID AT AN INSULATOR SHOW. THIS IS A CUSTOM, DOUBLE-SIDED 10" X 14" MADE FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON. THESE WERE MOUNTED ON TRANSMISSION TOWERS ALL OVER SOUTHERN CA. BELOW: A MORE MODERN STONEHOUSE SIGN MADE OF ALUMINUM.



I could write page after page on other categories of Stonehouse Signs, but this is an insulator magazine after all! I know many insulator collectors, like myself, have these types of signs adorning their walls, displays and sales tables. Hopefully I have given just a taste of the wide range one can find, and some history on the pioneer of safety signage, Mr. J.W. Stonehouse.

Special thanks to Jeff Stone and Becky Roche of the Stonehouse family for permission to use these photos. For more information about J.W. Stonehouse and Stonehouse Signs, visit [jwstonehouse.com](http://jwstonehouse.com) and [stonehousesigns.com](http://stonehousesigns.com). 🇺🇸

296	295	296-8	296-9	296-11
296-14	296-16	296-18	296-7-A	299

**DESCRIPTION**

**PRICES**

Size: 9x10-inch. Made of 26-gauge, rust-resisting galvanized steel, baked flexible enamel finish. These signs have rounded corners, with a hole in each corner for tacking to poles, and will bend easily to fit poles.

1 Sign .....	\$1.76
6 Signs of the same wording, each .....	1.21
12 Signs of the same wording, each .....	.88
25 Signs of the same wording, each .....	.71
50 Signs of the same wording, each .....	.55
100 Signs of the same wording, each .....	.49

Your Company Name can be placed on any stock worded Pole sign at an extra cost of \$2.20 for any quantity up to 24. When 25 or more are ordered there is no charge for adding the Company Name.