



The John and Carolyn Grossman Collection

by E. Richard McKinstry

In 1974, John Grossman visited an antiques shop filled with memorabilia and printed ephemera—items intended for a short lifespan—such as postcards, labels, and trade cards. He purchased several items and a few weeks later returned to buy more. Fast forward thirty-five years and those first few purchases have grown to number roughly 250,000 items.

The Grossman Collection is one of the most comprehensive archives of graphic ephemera. It documents lithography, chromolithography, and all they represented visually from approximately 1820 to 1920. The finest examples of ephemera are represented:

Lithography: Invented in Germany in 1796, the process involves the creation of a picture using greasy ink on a smooth surface, typically limestone, which is then printed onto paper.

Chromolithography: Includes all types of lithography printed in color. The desired effect is obtained by positioning successive plates of different colors onto a piece of paper to create an illustration. Patented in France in 1837, chromolithography became popular in the United States after the Civil War.

calendars, greeting cards, trade cards, product labels, paper dolls, tickets, postcards, scrapbooks, sheet music, and more. Visuals capture the customs, attitudes, and ideals of Victorian and Edwardian life, including images of high society, innocent children, garden-fresh flowers, romantic couples, holiday traditions, anthropomorphic animals, fashionable women, and cigar-smoking gentlemen.

Among the treasures of the collection is an album celebrating the fiftieth year of Queen Victoria's reign, in 1887. It weighs in at forty-one pounds and contains thousands of chromolithographs picturing English life. Its colorful scraps record dress of the day, public

PREVIOUS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT:

"Social Smoke" cigar box label, published by O.L. Schwencke Lithographic Company, New York, circa 1895.

Miniature watercolor by Henry Maier, circa 1910. Lithographs were inspired by watercolors, which were typically discarded after use; fortunately, many survive in the Grossman Collection.

THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM:

"Honus Wagner" cigar box label, published in New York by the George Schlegel Lithographic Company, circa 1910.

The first printed Christmas card, issued in England in 1843 and published at Summerly's Home Treasury Office, London.

spectacles, pets in the household, leisure time pursuits, and many other themes.

Also featured is the first commercially produced Christmas card commissioned in 1843 by English artist, designer, and author Sir Henry Cole (1808–1882). The collection also contains its accompanying printer's proof in red ink. The material also includes the archive of the George Schlegel Lithographic Company, a nineteenth- and twentieth-century New York City business that specialized in cigar box label printing.

Grossman's background is in commercial art. In 1967, Governor Ronald Reagan appointed him to the California Arts Commission, where he served as vice chairman and then chairman from 1969 until 1972. In 1985, Grossman and his wife, Carolyn, founded The Gifted Line, a giftware and licensing company, which they operated until 1998. They used a wide variety of imagery from their collection to decorate their products. Grossman has also shared his interest in the material as the author of several books, including *A Victorian Scrapbook* (1989) and, most recently, *Christmas Curiosities: Odd, Dark, and Forgotten Christmas* (2008). In addition, he has designed stamps for the U.S. Postal Service.

Since its loan last September, the Grossman Collection has been highlighted in four exhibitions at Winterthur, with a fifth on chromolithography to open October 20th. For Yuletide 2009, which runs from November 21 through January 3 at the museum, there will be an extensive exhibit in the Society of Winterthur Fellows Gallery, spotlighting the



collection's Christmas illustrations.

The Grossman Collection is available to the general public for research. An electronic index of 135 pages is online at www.winterthur.org, where users can follow the links to WinterCat, Winterthur library's online catalogue, and the finding aid.

The Grossman Collection will be at Winterthur for at least four years and, it is hoped, for far longer. The Grossmans have agreed to lend the materials for that length of

time so funds can be raised by the museum for its acquisition. While the effort to secure the necessary support continues, Winterthur staff looks forward to sharing this extraordinary resource with the general public and researchers near and far. [AFN](#)

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