

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection (circa 1830-1980)
Wellesley Historical Society

Repository Identifier

mawelhs

Local Identifier

2017.32

Name and Location of Repository

The Wellesley Historical Society

229 Washington Street

Wellesley, MA 02481

(781) 235-6690

www.wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

Title

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection

Date

circa 1830-1980, bulk 1870-1914

Extent

3 boxes of greeting cards, 1.25 linear feet

Name of Creator

Repository collection

Historical Note

The Wellesley Historical Society Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection reflects the history of greeting card manufacture from the mid nineteenth century through the twentieth century.

Greeting cards have been popular for centuries, particularly in Europe, where handmade cards were popular by the fifteenth century. The introduction of the postage stamp in the 1840s, almost simultaneously in Britain and the United States, made the exchange of greeting cards a fashionable social activity. Most of the cards of the 1840s were handmade, particularly in the United States. As printing technology advanced, mechanized printing of cards became possible by the 1850s.

A pioneer in the history of greeting cards was Esther Howland, a Massachusetts native who had a booming business in the mid nineteenth century making handmade Valentine's Day cards. The Woodward family donated several handmade Valentine's Day cards to the Wellesley Historical Society dating from this era that are evocative of Howland's signature style. The cards feature complex layers of lace paper and include embossed ornamentation.

Louis C. Prang, a Boston chromolithographer, is often hailed as the "father" of the American Christmas card. In the 1870s deluxe Christmas cards were his specialty, and he had a full line of

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection (circa 1830-1980) Wellesley Historical Society

cards by the mid-1870s. He dominated the American greeting card market through the 1880s, and his focus was on the artistic value of the card, not the sentiment being expressed. The Wellesley Historical Society collection contains several Prang cards.

By the 1890s, imported greeting cards, mostly printed in Germany, became popular. The introduction of inexpensive, lower quality imports coincided with an overall decline in greeting card popularity through the 1890s in the United States.

Until 1907 the U.S. Postal Service allowed postcards to be mailed in a strict format: the stamped side could only contain the address, while the front could contain a picture or a message. In March 1907 the U.S. Congress passed a law mandating postcards feature a “divided back,” allowing the postage side of the card to contain the address on the right side, and a message on the left. Cards from this period feature “instructions” printed on the card on how to properly use them. Cards with printed illustrations on the front are known as Picture Postcards, while cards with photographic images are known as Real Photo Postcards.

The divided back innovation led to what has become known as the “Golden Age of Postcards.” After the introduction of the divided back, the industry expanded rapidly, with many new companies designing cards for many occasions. Both imported and domestic post cards were popular, and the quality was high. The time period from 1908 to 1915 saw the industry expand from almost exclusively Christmas and Valentine’s Day cards to include cards for Halloween, Easter, Thanksgiving, birth announcements, weddings, anniversaries, and other occasions. Many of the cards manufactured during this period were imported from Germany. The start of World War I led to a decline in imports, and the Golden Age of the picture postcard came to an end. Most of the postcards donated by the Goddard family date from this Golden Age.

The advent of larger manufacturers following World War I led to a reintroduction of greeting cards in envelopes, and a closer connection between the sentiment expressed and the artwork. It was a very successful industry, and U.S. makers were once again at the forefront. Some of the most important names in the industry date from the period just before World War I into the 1920s—Hallmark, Norcross, Rust Craft, and Gibson Art Company, just to name a few. Many of the greeting cards from the MacFadyen and Fleming family collections date from this period.

Scope and Content

This collection contains over 350 greeting cards and illustrated picture postcards from several Wellesley family sources, including the Aiken family, Fleming family, Marie A. Goddard family, MacFadyen family, and the Woodward family. The cards recognize holidays, birthdays as well as other occasions and sentiments.

The collection includes greeting cards originally distributed in envelopes, as well as cards distributed as picture postcards; numerous cards have their original envelopes with cancelled stamps affixed, and postcards have affixed stamps as well as personal correspondence.

The collection contains many highlights. The Woodward cards are early Valentine cards from the mid-nineteenth century, many handmade and unique. The Aiken cards date from the 1880s

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection (circa 1830-1980) Wellesley Historical Society

into the 1920s. The Goddard picture postcards date from 1905 to 1913, and are a fine examples of from the “Golden Age” of picture postcards; some of the first Thanksgiving postcards manufactured can be found here. The Fleming cards contain over twenty “new baby congratulations” cards dating from the mid twentieth century. The MacFadyen cards carry a wide variety of topical sentiments, and date mostly post World War II.

Regional manufacturers in the collection include Louis C. Prang & Co. (Boston), A.M. Davis Quality Cards (Boston), McNicol (Boston), E.D. Parker (Boston), and Whitney-Made (Worcester).

Other American makers represented include Hall Bros., Hallmark, The Rotograph Co., Gibson Art Co., H.L. Weehler Co., Gold Medal Art, and Rust Craft. Many of these American companies imported printed cards from Germany. International manufacturers and designers represented include Raphael Tuck & Sons, Hildesheimer & Faulkner, Hildesheimer & Co., Marcus Ward & Co, Ernest Nister Co., M.M. Vienne Co., and Davidson Brothers.

System of Arrangement

Each of the family collections has been divided by subject and arranged alphabetically. Cards that are not part of a family collection are also divided by subject.

Generally, the subject division is by holiday. In some instances cards with general sentiments have been grouped into folders marked “Other.” The majority of the cards cover these subject/occasions: Christmas, Easter, New Year, Valentine’s Day, Thanksgiving, and birthdays.

Six Valentine’s Day cards addressed to Marie A. Goddard were found with the Woodward collection and carry the Woodward accession number (1986.14). These cards retain the original accession numbers, but have been placed with the Goddard cards (which carry the accession number 1985.132). Our records do not offer any explanation as to why cards addressed to Marie A. Goddard were donated by the Woodwards.

Conditions Governing Access

The cards are available for research purposes by appointment only. Please contact the Wellesley Historical Society for more information.

info@wellesleyhistoricalsociety.org

(781) 235-6690

Physical Access

Some of the materials are fragile, particularly the handmade Valentine cards donated by the Woodward family.

Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

Copyright restrictions may apply.

Languages and Scripts of the Material

English

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection (circa 1830-1980)
Wellesley Historical Society

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Charles Aiken Papers, accession 1986.256

Fleming Collection, accession 1996.33

Marie A. Goddard Collection, accession 1985.132

MacFadyen Family Greeting Card Collection, accessions 2015.08, 2015.24

Woodward cards, accession 1986.14

Other sources/donations, including accession numbers O.2, 1985.133, 1985.134, 1989.25, 1995.02, 1999.21, 2000.07, 2003.01, 2003.16, 2004.17, 2005.8, 2012.01, and 2015.25

Accruals

The Historical Society may add materials to the Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection in the future.

Existence and Location of Originals

Wellesley Historical Society Archives

Related Materials

Wellesley Historical Society Photo Postcard Collection

Description

DACS-compliant Finding Aid created November 2015 by Alden R. Ludlow.

Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection (circa 1830-1980)
Wellesley Historical Society

Appendix: Box and Folder List

Box 1: Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection: Families: A-F

Folder 1: Aiken Family Cards: Birthday
Folder 2: Aiken Family Cards: Christmas
Folder 3: Aiken Family Cards: Easter
Folder 4: Aiken Family Cards: New Year
Folder 5: Aiken Family Cards: Other
Folder 6: Aiken Family Cards: Religious sentiments
Folder 7: Fleming Family Cards: Baby cards
Folder 8: Fleming Family Cards: Christmas
Folder 9: Fleming Family Cards: Christmas/New Year
Folder 10: Fleming Family Cards: Other
Folder 11: Fleming Family Cards: Valentine's Day

Box 2: Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection: Families: Goddard

Folder 1: Goddard Family Cards: Birthday
Folder 2: Goddard Family Cards: Christmas
Folder 3: Goddard Family Cards: Christmas/New Year
Folder 4: Goddard Family Cards: Easter
Folder 5: Goddard Family Cards: New Year
Folder 6: Goddard Family Cards: Other
Folder 7: Goddard Family Cards: Sentimental
Folder 8: Goddard Family Cards: Thanksgiving
Folder 9: Goddard Family Cards: Valentine's Day

Box 3: Greeting Card and Picture Postcard Collection: Families H-Z and General Subjects

Folder 1: MacFadyen Family Cards: Birthday
Folder 2: MacFadyen Family Cards: Christmas
Folder 3: MacFadyen Family Cards: Other
Folder 4: MacFadyen Family Cards: Valentine's Day
Folder 5: Woodward Family Cards: Valentine's Day
Folder 6: Subjects: Birthday
Folder 7: Subjects: Christmas
Folder 8: Subjects: Christmas/New Year
Folder 9: Subjects: Easter
Folder 10: Subjects: New Year
Folder 11: Subjects: Other
Folder 12: Subjects: Valentine's Day