Library Company of Philadelphia

1540.F; 5781.F; 5785.F; 5792.F-5795.F

CIVIL WAR ENVELOPE COLLECTION

1861-1865

circa 7,000 items

January 2007
Descriptive Summary

Repository
Library Company of Philadelphia
1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698

Call Number
1540.F; 5781.F; 5785.F; 5792.F-5795.F

Creator
McAllister, John A. (John Allister), 1822-1896.

Title
Civil War Envelope Collection

Inclusive Dates
1861-1865

Quantity
Circa 7,000 items

Abstract
The collection holds 7,000 envelopes published during the Civil War. The majority of the envelopes contain patriotic designs and slogans to promote support for the war. Both Union and Confederate imprints are represented in the collection and publishers include King & Baird, James L. Magee, Charles Magnus, and S. C. Upham.
Administrative Information

Restrictions to Access
The collection is open to researchers.

Acquisition Information
Gift of John A. McAllister; forms part of the McAllister Collection.

Processing Information
The Civil War Envelope Collection material was formerly housed within several folio albums that had been created after the McAllister Collection arrived at the Library Company. The material was removed from the albums, arranged, described, and catalogued under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the William Penn Foundation. The collection was processed by Erika Piola. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Preferred Citation
This collection should be cited as: [indicate specific item or series here], McAllister Graphics Collection, McAllister Collection, The Library Company of Philadelphia. For permission to publish materials or images in this collection, contact the Coordinator of Rights and Reproductions, Library Company of Philadelphia, 1314 Locust St., Philadelphia, PA 19107-5698. Please include complete citation(s) when making a request. See the Library Company’s website, http://www.librarycompany.org/, for further information.

Online Catalog Headings

Associated Names
Davis, Jefferson, (1808-1889) - Caricatures and cartoons
Ellsworth, E. E. (Elmer Ephraim) (1837-1861) - Portraits
Gutekunst, Frederick, (1831-1917)
Harbach & Bro.
King & Baird
Lincoln, Abraham (1809-1865) - Portraits
McAllister, John A. (John Allister) (1822-1896)
McClellan, George Brinton, (1826-1885) - Portraits
Magee, John L.
Magnus, Charles
Scott, Winfield (1786-1866) - Portraits
Upham, Samuel C. (Samuel Curtis) (1818-1885)
Washington, George (1732-1799) - Portraits
Civil War Envelope Collection

Subjects
African Americans - Caricatures and cartoons
Bible - Quotations
Animals
Bells
Confederate States of America
Eagles
Executions
Flags
Liberty
Patent medicines
Patriotism
Secession
Southern states
Shields
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Campaign & battles
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Military life
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Military personnel
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Social aspects
United States - History - Civil War, 1861-1865 - Women

Format and Genre
Advertisements
Caricatures
Cartoons
Embossed works
Ephemera
Lithographs
Lithographs - Color
Patriotic envelopes
Tax stamps
Wood engravings
Wood engravings - Color

Related Collections
The Civil War Stationery Collection contains about 350 pieces of stationery containing patriotic designs often used on patriotic envelopes. A majority of the letter sheets also contain a title, slogan, or verse. The collection is arranged in the same system as the Civil War Envelope Collection and is described in a collection-level record on the library’s online catalog, WolfPAC.
Collection Overview
The Civil War Envelope Collection contains about 7,000 Civil War envelopes collected by John A. McAllister. Issued by stationers, printers, and publishers, the envelopes contain patriotic designs and slogans to promote support for the war. Early in the conflict, a collecting mania for the wrappers occurred that spurred production of over 6,000 envelope designs in total by a recent scholar’s estimate. Predominately issued in the Northern states between 1861 and 1862, a small number of envelopes with anti-Union designs published in the Confederate states circulated as well. Printed in relief and as lithographs, as well as embossed, the designs were sometimes co-opted from other print sources such as song sheets or newspapers. In addition, publishers frequently issued variants of the same designs and slogans on the envelopes. Although often a vignette design, many illustrations, usually thematic series, covered the entire front of the wrapper. The large designs rendered an envelope unusable for circulation and strictly a collector’s item. These pieces of ephemera provide valuable information about the politics and culture of a society at war and about mid-19th century consumer and visual culture.

The McAllister Civil War Envelope Collection contains a large number of the designs listed in the authoritative sources William Weiss’s The Catalog of Union Civil War Patriotic Covers (1995) and Robert Laurence’s George Walcott Collection of Used Civil War Patriotic Covers (1934). The collection also includes hundreds of variant and original designs not referenced in either catalog. Philadelphia publishers King & Baird, John Magee, S. C. Upham, Harbach & Bro., and New York publisher Charles Magnus are well represented in the collection in addition to publishers from Buffalo, Hartford, Cincinnati, and Lancaster, Pa. The majority of the envelopes are organized after the classification system used in Weiss. Designs not referenced in Weiss have been organized by Weiss categories and assigned LCP numbers. A small number listed in Walcott that were not included in Weiss have been assigned Walcott numbers and are filed after the LCP numbers. The collection is catalogued as a collection-level record on the library’s on-line catalog, WolfPAC, and a sampling of images of the envelopes is included in the library’s digital assets management system, ImPAC.

The tone of the designs ranges from solemn to patriotic to satiric to racist. Portraiture of prominent military and historic figures, including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Winfield Scott, George McClellan, and Elmer Ellsworth comprise a significant segment of the collection. Military subjects form another large segment and include corps designs; views of military forts, regiments, camps, and battles; and images of soldiers portrayed at the home front, in battle, and at camp. Allegorical female imagery, predominately Liberty and Columbia, complement patriotic designs that depict flags, eagles, bells, shields, and stars. Satiric designs utilize military themes; patent medicine themes; execution themes; racist themes; animal caricatures; and include vignettes
promoting the North, and mocking Jefferson Davis, Southern life, the Confederate military, secession, slavery, and African Americans.

Confederate designs predominately depict the Confederate flag, Jefferson Davis, and C.S.A state flags and emblems. Several are variants of Union designs and contain anti-Union mottoes about death to invaders and the eradication of the threat of tyranny.

The collection also contains Civil War-era envelopes without designs; colored envelopes; envelopes with basic designs, including stripes, colored edges, and lined borders; and the rose-shaped die cut illustrated envelope insert “Rose of Philadelphia.” Other wrappers of note include advertisement envelopes for Philadelphia businesses; envelopes pre-printed with the addresses of women "desirous" of correspondence with soldiers; envelopes published by the Philadelphia Tract House printed with a design and scriptural quotation on recto and verso; and hand-crafted envelopes recycled from printed and scrap ledger paper. Several novelty stationery packages printed with content lists that include stationery, pens, and portrait prints comprise the subject matter as well. Envelopes with foreign flag designs; stamp holders; four stamps, including the "Constitution Stamp," and the scrap containing the binding instructions for the original scrapbook are also housed with the collection.