

Civil War Envelope Collection

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

Civil War Envelope Collection

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

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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

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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
- Stars
- 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 on-line 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

Civil War Envelope Collection

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.