



Cooper Hewitt

Smithsonian Design Museum

Caldwell & Company collection, 1894-[circa 1944]

2011

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Biographical/Historical note.....	2
Arrangement note.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Libraries
Title:	Caldwell & Company collection
Date:	1894-[circa 1944]
Identifier:	SIL-CH.1995-79-1
Creator:	Caldwell & Company.
Extent:	56,000 Photographs (Black and white photographs in albums)
Language:	Undetermined .
Summary:	This collection spans the years 1894-circa 1944 and contains approximately 56,000 black and white photographs. The photographs are mounted in 148 large (22"x18") and 93 small (12"x14") albums. About 5,000 are mounted individually. The images depict the full repertoire of Caldwell products. Since all of Caldwell's designs were custom made for each project, these photographs were used to illustrate all of the many designs for lighting they produced.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The entire collection of Caldwell & Company business records, including client lists, photographs, and drawings, was given to the University Research Library at UCLA in 1974 by a former employee of the company. In 1993, UCLA divided the collection and gave the textual material to the New York Public Library and the visual material to Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Drawings and Prints Department. Approximately 5,000 presentation drawings in pencil and watercolor of proposed and realized designs for custom made lamps, chandeliers, and wall brackets for installation in the 1902 White House, the Frick Collection Library Building, and the Cleveland Public Library, among other buildings. Again, since all of the company's projects were done to the specifications of the individual client, these drawings were an essential part of the communication between lighting designer and architect.

Location of Other Archival Materials Note

The New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archive Section. The business records of E.T. Caldwell Lighting Company of New York City, and its predecessor Edward F. Caldwell & Co., including letters, draughtman's sketches, group schedule of designs, design records, invoice books, ledgers, and records of the firm's subsidiary, the Plastic Illuminating Company. Covers the period, 1909-1959.

Other Finding Aids

No finding aid.

Restrictions

Unprocessed; access in limited. Permission of Library Director required for use.

Biographical Note

Edward F. Caldwell and Victor F. von Lossberg founded Edward F. Caldwell & Company in 1894 in New York City. They became the most prominent manufacturers of custom lighting fixtures and metalwork in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Their success was due to their ability to incorporate popular and eclectic styles from French Neoclassical to Art Deco into their designs for electric lighting fixtures.

Since they worked with the leading architects of the day, Caldwell lighting fixtures and decorative metalwork appeared in many major building projects, including the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Andrew Carnegie's mansion (now home to Cooper Hewitt), and the 1902 renovation of the White House. For these projects, architectural plans would be brought in and drawings and occasionally models would be created. By the 1920s, Caldwell & Company had one of the largest foundries in New York City. They were one of the few American firms that mastered the techniques for applying enamel decorations to metalwork and were renowned for their casting and gilding of bronze. They produced fine metalwork objects such as tables, lamps, clocks, desk sets, fire screens, and statues.

All items were custom made with few exceptions. Due to the Depression, the firm was forced to scale down their operation. The company was liquidated by the Internal Revenue Service in 1956, but reorganized and reemerged that same year as E.T. Caldwell Lighting Company. The Plastic Illuminating Company was a subsidiary of the Caldwell Lighting Company. The company eventually went out of business entirely in 1959.

Arrangement

Unprocessed.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Chandeliers
- Lamps -- Design
- Lighting -- Design -- United States
- Lighting, Architectural and decorative -- Design
- Metal-work -- United States
- Wall sconces

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white photographs

Names:

- Caldwell, Edward F.
- Cooper-Hewitt Design Archive
- E.T. Caldwell Lighting Company
- Edward F. Caldwell & Company
- Frick Collection

Plastic Illuminating Company
St. Patrick's Cathedral (New York, N.Y.)
Von Lossberg, Victor F.
Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (New York, N.Y.)
White House (Washington, D.C.)

Occupations:

Lighting designers