



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Louis Prang Papers,
1848-1932, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

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provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Louis Prang papers
Identifier:	AAA.pranloui
Date:	1848-1932
Extent:	1.2 Linear feet
Creator:	Prang, Louis, 1824-1909
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of lithographer Louis Prang date from 1848 to 1932 and measure 1.2 linear feet. Found within the papers are biographical material, writings, art work, card samples, printed material, and photographs.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Louis Prang papers were donated in 1989 by Thomas West Christopher, M.D., son of E. Wrightson Christopher who compiled the papers while he was a publisher of greeting cards. A photocopied letter and a sales book of samples were donated separately and have unknown provenances.

Related Material

Also found in the Archives of American Art is the Mary Margaret Sittig research material on Louis Prang.

Available Formats

This collection was digitized in its entirety in 2014 and is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Processing Information

Three collections previously cataloged separately were merged and processed by Jean Fitzgerald in January 2011. The collection was prepared for digitization by Judy Ng and digitized in 2015 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Louis Prang, 1848-1932. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

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Biographical Note

Louis Prang (1824-1909) of Boston, Massachusetts, was a lithographer and wood engraver, famous for his chromolithographic reproductions of major works of art as well as for a series of publications used for art education in public schools. Because his company was first to make commercially printed greeting cards available to the public, Prang is often referred to as the "father of the American Christmas Card."

Louis Prang was born on March 12, 1824 in Breslau in what is now Poland. He was the only son among the seven children of a French Huguenot father Jonas Louis Prang and a German mother, Rosina Silverman. Louis Prang learned to dye and print calico as an apprentice in his father's shop. After traveling as a journeyman in Europe, he became involved in revolutionary activity against the Prussian government in 1848. Prang went to Switzerland, emigrated to the United States and settled in Boston in 1850, marrying Rosa Gerber in the following year.

Between 1848 and 1856, Prang supported himself by making wood engravings to illustrate various publications. In 1856, he joined with Julius Mayer and formed the partnership of Prang and Mayer, lithographic and copper plate manufacturers. The business continued until 1860 when Prang became sole owner, changing the name to L. Prang and Co. The firm printed business cards, announcements and other forms of ephemera and soon branched into the production of maps of Civil War sites and novelty items including albums and sets of picture cards decorated with a wide variety of images that became popular collectibles.

In 1864, Prang visited Europe to study the latest techniques in German lithography. He returned to Boston to create high quality reproductions of major works of art using a lithographic process he called "chromos." In 1874, he began producing greeting cards for the popular market in England and began selling the Christmas card in the United States the next year, resulting in his being called the "father of the American Christmas card." Also in 1874, Prang began publishing books for drawing and elementary art study for public schools. This latter activity proved so successful that he formed the Prang Educational Company in 1882. During this time, Prang shared his residence and his work with the family of his son-in-law, lithographer Karl K. Heinzen, who married Prang's daughter Rosa.

Through a merger in 1897, L. Prang and Co. became the Taber-Prang Company and moved from Boston to Springfield, Massachusetts. Two years following the death of his first wife in 1898, Prang married Mary Dana Hicks, an art teacher and author associated with the Prang Educational Company. Prang had retired from active business in 1899 and traveled extensively for the next decade. He became ill and died while en route to view an Exposition in Los Angeles in 1909.

Louis Prang died on June 14, 1909, in Los Angeles, California.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of lithographer Louis Prang date from 1848 to 1932 and measure 1.2 linear feet. Found within the papers are biographical material, writings, art work, card samples, printed material, and photographs.

Biographical material includes a Prussian arrest warrant for Prang, a passport, a receipt for household purchases, patent and membership certificates, and a photocopy of a letter from John Greenleaf Whittier.

Writings are primarily typescripts of lectures by Prang and a typescript "Lithographic Process Used by Louis Prang" by the donor, E. Wrightson Christopher, and a hand-written page concerning a card design competition by Clarence Cook.

Art work consists of a pencil drawing executed by Prang, possibly as a school assignment. Printed material consists of a book of color separation proofs, a sales book of samples of Prang's products, and catalogs for Easter and Valentine cards. Photographs are of Prang, family members, his residence, events, and colleagues.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 5 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1852-1906 (Box 1-2, OV 5; 8 folders)
- Series 2: Writings, 1880-1898 (Box 1; 5 folders)
- Series 3: Art Work, circa 1848 (Box 2; 1 folder)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1873-1889 (Box 1-4; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1874-1932 (Box 1-2, OV 5; 8 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Chromolithography
Greeting cards
Greeting cards industry
Lithographers
Lithography

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Lectures
Photographs
Typescripts

Names:

Christopher, E. Wrightson, 1894-
Cook, Clarence, 1828-1900
L. Prang & Co.

Prang & Meyer
Whittier, John Greenleaf, 1807-1892

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1852-1906

8 Folders (Box 1-2, OV 5)

Biographical materials include a copy of a Prussian arrest warrant for Prang when he was involved in revolutionary activities in Europe, a passport, a receipt for household purchases, patent certificates for improvements in printing silks and other fabrics and for improvements in envelopes for rolled prints, certificates of membership in various historical and educational organizations, acknowledgment certificates for gifts to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to the Smithsonian Institution, and a photocopy of a typescript of an 1873 letter from John Greenleaf Whittier calling Prang's attention to an attempted imitation of his chromolithograph of Eastman Johnson's illustration of Whittier's poem *The Barefoot Boy*.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 1	Photocopy of 1848 Prussian Arrest Warrant for Louis Prang, undated Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 2	Receipt for Household Purchases, 1852 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 3	Patent Certificates, 1871-1880 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 4	Membership Certificates, 1884-1906 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 5	Gift Acknowledgment Certificates, 1887-1889 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 6	Photocopy of Letter from John Greenleaf Whittier, 1873 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 1	Oversized Membership Certificate and Passport, 1884, 1903 Image(s)
Box OV 5, Folder 1	Oversized Membership Certificate, 1893 Image(s)

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Series 2: Writings, 1880-1898

5 Folders (Box 1)

Writings are primarily typescripts of lectures by Prang, a typescript by the donor, E. Wrightson Christopher, and a page concerning a card design competition by Clarence Cook.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Typescript of Lecture at the Boston Women's Club by Louis Prang, 1897
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Typescript of Lecture at the Grolier Club by Louis Prang, 1897
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Typescript of Lecture "Women's Suffrage and Imperialism," Presented at the Roxbury Women's Suffrage Club by Louis Prang, 1898
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Typescript "Lithographic Process Used by Louis Prang" by E. Wrightson Christopher, circa 1853-1927
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Hand-written Page Concerning a Card Design Competition by Clarence Cook, 1880
Image(s) |

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Series 3: Art Work, circa 1848

1 Folder (Box 2)

Art work consists of a pencil drawing by Prang of a female head wearing a French Revolution liberty cap.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 2, Folder 2

Oversized Drawing by Louis Prang, circa 1848

[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1873-1889

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1-4)

Printed material consists of catalogs for Easter and Valentine cards, a book of color separation proofs for an image of a ceramic vase, and a sales book containing loose pages displaying samples of chromolithographed greeting cards and reproductions of art work offered by L. Prang and Company.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 12	Catalog of Easter Cards; Catalog of Valentine Cards, 1885-1889 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 3	Oversized Book of Color Separation Proofs for Image of a Ceramic Vase, circa 1853-1927 Image(s)
Box 3, Folder 1-4	Oversized Sales Book of Samples, Part 1 of 2, 1873-1888 Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)
Box 4, Folder 1-4	Oversized Sales Book of Samples, Part 2 of 2, 1873-1888 Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)

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Series 5: Photographs, 1874-1932

8 Folders (Box 1-2, OV 5)

Photographs are of Prang, family members, his residence, events, and colleagues. the Prang Mutual Aid Society Picnic, the L. Prang and Company building, Prang with his colleagues including son-in-law Karl F. Heinzen, and a portrait painting of Prang.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 13	Photographs of Louis Prang and Family Members, circa 1853-1927 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 14	Photographs of Prang's Residence, 1874-1932 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 15-16	Photographs of the Prang Mutual Aid Society Picnic, 1886-1896 Image(s) Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 17	Photographs of the L. Prang and Company Building, circa 1853-1927 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 18	Photograph of Portrait Painting of Louis Prang, circa 1853-1927 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 4	Oversized Photographs of Louis Prang and Family Members Outside Their Residence, circa 1853-1927 Image(s)
Box OV 5, Folder 2	Oversized Photograph of Louis Prang and Colleagues, 1897 Image(s)

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