



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of American History*  
*Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the John B. Walker Cut-Outs Collection

NMAH.AC.0249

Barbara Kemp

1987

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	John B. Walker Cut-Outs Collection
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0249
<b>Date:</b>	1815-1908
<b>Extent:</b>	0.33 Cubic feet (1 Box)
<b>Creator:</b>	Walker, John Brown, 1815-1908 Coats, Helen Hotchkiss
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Summary:</b>	John B. Walker was an itinerant artist who made paper cut-out designs that he sent to his friends as presents, decorations, and commemorations. His collection did not come to light until the early 1960s in Geauga County, Ohio.
<b>Container:</b>	Box 1

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Mrs. Helen H. Coats, 1986, December 2.

### Processing Information

Collection processed by Barbara Kemp, 1987

### Preferred Citation

John B. Walker Cut-Outs Collection, 1815-1908, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

### Restrictions

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## Biographical / Historical

A collection of the cutwork of itinerant John Brown Walker came to light in Geauga County, Ohio in the early 1960s. Walker had been making his living cutting fancy paper designs in rural areas of Pennsylvania, northeastern Ohio, Indiana and Michigan in the last decades of the 19th century.

Except for the record in Mason, Michigan, of his death on November 12, 1908 in the Ingham County Poor House, all information now known about Walker comes from his designs and his words in greetings he sent to friends in Geauga County, Ohio. In his last written letter of December 24, 1907, he said he was born in Washington County, Pennsylvania on March 25, 1815.

Helen Hotchkiss Coats and her sister, Hilda Hotchkiss Hosmer, preserved more than 100 pieces of his work. These items were created for three generations of the Phillips Hotchkiss family of Burton Township in the years from 1880 1907. His letters indicated that, although an itinerant, Walker was a participant in the life of the areas where he worked by his inquiries about the community, crops, and individuals.

During his last 20 25 years, he traveled through Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Indiana making and selling family records.

Eighty years after he had cut a greeting and written a verse for her, Nettie Shanower remembered Walker as "a medium large man with a long white beard" the only description of his appearance.

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## Scope and Contents

John Brown Walker made paper cut out designs for friends and acquaintances and perhaps for some profit. These cut outs were used for presentation, decoration, and commemoration and can best be characterized as folk artistry.

Walker's work includes graceful scrolls, birds, leaves, rimes and hearts all reflecting a Pennsylvania Dutch influence. He was a highly skilled craftsman a warm, friendly person with a sense of humor and a strong religious faith which are reflected in his cut outs and stencils.

The personalized cut outs and rimes were created for Helen Hotchkiss and members of her family. There is no indication for whom the general works were done.

Much of this information comes from: "Your Wellwisher, J.B. Walker"; a Midwestern Paper Cut Out Artist an exhibition of his work at the Museum, Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, 1979. Catalog of 57 pages.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Artisans  
Cutwork  
Folk art  
Folk artists -- United States

Types of Materials:

Cutouts  
Designs  
Letters (correspondence) -- 1850-1900  
Letters (correspondence) -- 1900-1950  
Stencils

Geographic Names:

Indiana  
Kentucky  
Michigan  
Ohio  
Pennsylvania