Wilson, Gregory C., collector.


Abstract: The Gregory C. Wilson collection of African-American postcards and trade cards comprises 1.3 linear feet of postcards, trade cards, printed ephemera, and letters. The majority of the collection consists of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American postcards and trade cards that feature a diverse array of positive and negative images of African Americans. The collection as a whole documents the history of harmful stereotypes that represented social values and mores across the country. Images include ridicule of black religion, harm to black children, scatological humor, poverty, crime, music, and labor, as well as race relations, military service, domestic scenes, transportation, women, and tribal depictions.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: PPI 107
Creator: Wilson, Gregory C., collector.
Title: Gregory C. Wilson collection of African-American postcards and trade cards
Inclusive Dates: 1871-2002
Extent: 1.3 linear feet and oversize removals (5 boxes)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: PPI 107, Gregory C. Wilson collection of African-American postcards and trade cards, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Boxes 1-4: Shelved in SPEC MSS binder boxes; Box 5: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes (1 inch); Removals: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize boxes (18 inches)

Location: Special Collections, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/


Processing: Processed and encoded by Dustin Frohlich, November 2014.

Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.

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**Biographical Note**

Gregory C. Wilson is a Massachusetts collector and dealer of antiquarian items and an expert appraiser of postcard and trade card collections. He is an alumnus of the University of Delaware (Class of 1960-1961) with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History, and also the University of Pittsburgh (Class of 1963) with a Master of Library Science degree.

**Sources:**


Additional biographical material derived from collection.
Scope and Content Note

The Gregory C. Wilson collection of African-American postcards and trade cards comprises 1.3 linear feet of postcards, trade cards, printed ephemera, and letters. The majority of the collection consists of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American postcards and trade cards that feature a diverse array of positive and negative images of African Americans. The collection as a whole documents the history of harmful stereotypes that represented social values and mores across the country. Images include ridicule of black religion, harm to black children, scatological humor, poverty, crime, music, and labor, as well as race relations, military service, domestic scenes, transportation, women, and tribal depictions.

The collection represents the evolution of depictions of African Americans in the United States over nearly a century—predominately between the Civil War and civil rights movements of the 1960s. As artifacts of burgeoning American tourism and consumer culture, the postcards and trade cards offer examples of racism and stereotyping in advertising. Images reveal prevalent social values particularly toward race, but also gender and class, in their use of denigrating humor and stereotypes. Positive images of black leadership and legacy, representations of place, political activism, and national celebration provide insight into more modern, empowered representations.

Although the postcards are arranged by a general subject, multiple contexts and narratives can be read in each image; for example, depictions of women are not limited to the topical designation for women. The trade cards are arranged by goods or services offered. Multiple representations (that is, women and children or women and domestic space) may be present in individual trade cards as well.

Series I. Postcards, comprises the bulk of the collection with over three hundred postcards arranged into three subseries: I.A. People; I.B. Places; and I.C. Topical.

Subseries I.A. People, consists of twenty jumbo stamp image postcards depicting African-American leaders from the 1700s to the early 1900s, as well as postcards of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., abolitionist and women’s rights activist, Sojourner Truth, Jamaican actress and musician Grace Jones, and poet Allen Ginsberg.

Subseries I.B. Places, consists of postcards intended to send greetings from various landmarks and states. These include places marked by their infamous histories, such as an old slave market in St. Augustine, Florida, and an original whipping post in Dover, Delaware. Other places include landmarks relating to black leadership and history, such as a postcard from the home of Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. As artifacts of early American tourism, postcards in the collection sought to combine representations of specific towns, cities, or states with recreational, domestic, agricultural, and industrial scenes.

Subseries I.C. Topical, consists of cards arranged by their varying representations of African Americans as visual subjects. Topics include children, women, language, "The South," transportation, race relations, military service, religion, music, tribal depictions, and the cotton industry, among others. As pieces of actual correspondence, the writers of some of the postcards further reinforce the inequities and prevalent attitudes of the time.
Many of the postcards in the collection were printed by Curt Teich & Company, developer of the C. T. Art Colortone process. During the 1930s and 1940s, the so-called golden era of postcards, Curt Teich developed and sold linen postcards—those made of inexpensive card stock with a high rag content—which held a vibrancy and color that was unattainable in earlier postcard printing. Other postcard and trade card printers in the collection include Currier & Ives, Dr. J. C. Ayer & Co. and A. Hoen and Co.

Series II. Trade cards, is arranged into categories of advertised products and services. The trade cards in the collection include advertisements for restaurants and hotels; dry goods and groceries; medicines; entertainment and events; toiletries; cleaning products; clothing; sewing, hardware, furniture, and industrial products; and other general merchandise. This form of small, collectible advertisement contributed to the developing consumer culture during the nineteenth century and is also demonstrative of the innovations in color printing and illustration techniques during this time. The Joseph Dixon Crucible Company, which specialized in metallurgy, and J. A. Wright & Company, which specialized in varnishes and metal care, offer two examples within the collection of prominent companies using trade cards for advertising their products.

Series III. Correspondence, ephemera, and other materials, includes items that reflect the collecting and personal interests of Gregory C. Wilson. The material includes wood engravings by American artist and illustrator Michael McCurdy (born 1942) and items of Delawareana, including thirteen Delaware postcards and a clipping from Harper’s Weekly with an engraving of "The Whipping-Post and Pillory in Delaware." Also included is a 1978 letter from educator, activist, and author Kay Boyle (1902-1992) to Gregory Wilson discussing family and asking after Wilson’s involvement with a volunteer prison program. Kay Boyle taught a six-week course on the short story at the University of Delaware for the 1957 summer session. The letter was written during a time when Boyle was teaching creative writing at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University). As a faculty member, Boyle had earlier been involved in the 1968-1969 inter-ethnic student-and-faculty-led protests and strike at the college which culminated in the development of the first institutional Black American Studies program in the United States. Wilson and Boyle became friends around 1967 when he was a librarian at Harvard University.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**

Wilde, Oscar.

Mandela, Nelson, 1918-2013.

**Corporate Names**

Joseph Dixon Crucible Company.

J.A. Wright & Co.

**Topical Terms**

African Americans--History--1877-1964.

African Americans--History--1964-

African Americans--History--20th century--Pictorial works.

Racism--United States--Pictorial works.

Stereotypes (Social psychology) in advertising--United States--History--20th century.

Advertising--History--19th century.

Postcards--History--20th century.

Postcards--Collectors and collecting--United States.

Women--History--Pictorial works.

**Geographic Names**

Delaware--History--20th century.

**Form/Genre Terms**

Trade cards (advertising)

Postcards.

Picture postcards.

Publications.

Correspondence.
Occupation

Collectors.

Personal Contributors


McCurdy, Michael.

Corporate Contributors

Curt Teich & Co.

Currier & Ives.

A. Hoen & Co.

Dr. J.C. Ayer & Co.

Related Materials in this Repository

GRA 124, Gordon A. Pfeiffer nineteenth-century Delaware trade card collection

PPI 106, Gordon A. Pfeiffer Delaware postcard and ephemera card collection

Materials Cataloged Separately

Additional printed material and publications removed for cataloging with imprints in Special Collections.
Arrangement

I. Postcards
   A. People
   B. Places
   C. Topical
II. Trade cards
III. Correspondence, ephemera, and other material
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Postcards, 1905-2002

File I.A.
People, 1998, undated [Box 1 F1]

File I.B.
Places, 1907-1956 [Box 1 F2]

File I.C.
Topical, 1904-2002 [Box 1]

The South, 1906-1973, undated [Box 1 F3]

Transportation, 1904-1938, undated [Box 2 F4]

Cotton and industry, 1906-1947, undated [Box 2 F5]

Race relations, 1907-1908, undated [Box 2 F6]

Language, 1905-1948, undated [Box 2 F7]

Religion, undated [Box 2 F8]

Stereotypes, 1906-1909, undated [Box 2 F9]

Postcards in this folder contain portrayals of African Americans in various stereotypical ways, particularly in regard to physical appearance. The cards paired images of blacks with labels referential to novels, songs, and other works of contemporary white culture such as "Uncle Tom," and "Old Black Joe." Others cards stereotypically paired blacks with various foods, criminal activity, settings, and situations.

Tribal depictions, 2002, undated [Box 3 F10]

Children and babies, 1906-1947, undated [Box 3 F11]

Women, 1908-1993, undated [Box 3 F12]

Holidays, 1906-1944, undated [Box 3 F13]

Music, 1909-1911, undated [Box 3 F14]

Military service, 1944, undated [Box 3 F15]

Historical, 1909-1913, undated [Box 3 F16]
Historical postcards include national events and political movements, including the women's suffrage movement of the early twentieth century. One postcard bears the image of the suffragists of "Ye Votes for Women Pilgrimage from New York City to Washington D.C., 1913" which included suffragette Elisabeth Freeman.

**Series II. Trade cards, 1871-1882, undated**

Restaurants and hotels, undated [Box 4 F17]

Dry goods and groceries, undated [Box 4 F18]

Medicinal, 1880-1881, undated [Box 4 F19]

Entertainment and events, 1882, undated [Box 4 F20]

Toiletries, undated [Box 4 F21]

Cleaning, undated [Box 4 F22]

Clothing, undated [Box 4 F23]

Sewing, hardware, furniture, and industrial, 1871, undated [Box 4 F24]

General and unidentified, 1878, undated [Box 4 F25]

Contains 1878 card by Currier & Ives depicting African Americans as horse trainers.

**Series III. Correspondence, ephemera, and other material, 1863-1979**

*Gleason's Literary Companion* (Boston, Mass. : [Frederick Gleason, editor and publisher])., 1863 January 3 [Box 5 F26]

"The Whipping-Post and Pillory in Delaware", 1876 November 18 [Box 5 F27]

Engraving from a clipping of *Harper's Weekly*.

Advertisement, 1928 [Box 5 F28]

For sale of Miller Brothers Furniture, located at 9th and King Streets in Wilmington, Delaware.

Letter from Kay Boyle to Gregory Wilson, 1978 [Box 5 F29]

Educator, activist, and author Kay Boyle (1902-1992) wrote this letter to Gregory C. Wilson from San Francisco, California. The letter is written on handmade Japanese paper and cardstock.

McCurdy wood engravings, undated [Box 5 F30]
Five original wood engravings by the artist Michael McCurdy, one of which depicts Willow Street on Beacon Hill in Boston, Massachusetts.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, The Love Nut. [Lincoln, Mass.]: Penmaen Press. , 1979 [Box 5 F31]

Poetry broadside with a wood engraving by Michael McCurdy. Item removed for cataloging in Special Collections.