

Poster Collection transferred by Princeton to the Smithsonian in 1963.

Text following consists of 1) the Smithsonian Libraries online catalogue record, 2) the Smithsonian's finding aid for this collection and 2) and email about the collection to S. Ferguson on 16 December 2005

1) Online catalogue record

Creator: Princeton University (collector).

Title: Princeton University Poster Collection, 1863-1948.

See Others in: Princeton University Poster Collection, 1863-1948

Phy. Description: 135 cu. ft.: 10,690 items.

Scope and Content: Primarily war-related posters.

Organization: 1 series.

Finding aids: Partial item-level database online in SIRIS (several thousand records). Complete set of item-level catalog worksheets available in repository.

Cite as: Princeton University Posters Collection, 1863-1948, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions: Access restrictions. Currently stored off site. Special appointment and directions required.

Reproduction fees for commercial use. Copyright status of items varies.

Subject-Topical: World War, 1939-1945 -- Posters -- United States World War, 1914-1918 -- Posters War Form / Genre: Posters -- 1860-1950

Repository Loc: Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History : Archives Center. P.O. Box 37012, Suite 1100, MRC 601, Constitution Ave., between 12th and 14th Sts., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20013-7012. Call 202-633-3270 for appointment. Fax: 202-786-2453.

Local Number: 1990.3118 (NMAH Acc.)

Copy/Holding information

Archives Center at American History ACNMAH 0433

Smithsonian finding aid

[1463]

THIS COLLECTION IS UNPROCESSED.

QUESTIONS REGARDING
ITS USE SHOULD BE ADDRESSED ONLY TO
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Princeton University Poster Collection,
ca. 1906 - 1950

History:

The Princeton University Library donated this extensive collection of World War I and World War II materials to the Smithsonian Institution in 1963 and 1967. The bulk of the 1963 donation, stored in six large wooden crates, was sent to an off-site storage location. Other posters donated in 1963, primarily World War II British in origin, were stored in the Division of Political History; they were later transferred to the Division of Armed Forces History. In 1967, Princeton donated an additional five albums of posters that had been overlooked in 1963; these albums were also stored in the Division of Armed Forces History.

In 1990 and again in 1991, the NMAH Division of Conservation was awarded Smithsonian Research Resources grants to conserve and catalog the collection. The posters in the crates were in extremely precarious condition, evidencing extensive tears, water damage, dirt, mold, and insect damage. Their condition was so extreme that handling, cataloging, or mere counting was not deemed possible outside of a major rehousing project. In 1992, the NMAH Archives Center assumed curatorial responsibility for the collection and took over direction of the project. At that point, all of the disparate parts of the collection were reunited at the NMAH off-site storage location in Suitland, Maryland.

The collection remains inaccessible for research as of this date. Access will not be available until after the completion of the cataloging project, estimated for January 1994.

Scope and Content:

The Princeton University Poster Collection is one of the most outstanding collections of World War I posters and related ephemera in the United States. In addition, it contains a good selection of World War II materials, especially British. In addition to its strength as an extensive body of individual images, this collection also has great strength derived from the fact that it was assembled with considerable care and expertise.

[over....]

There are between 9,400 and 10,000 items in the collection. Although it consists primarily of posters and broadsides, it also includes transit car cards, window displays, pamphlets, handbills, advertisements, maps, newspaper supplement sheets, broadsides, and various other types of ephemera. These items range in date from approximately 1906 to 1950, but the bulk of the collection dates from World War I and World War II.

The World War I materials were donated to Princeton by a number of individuals who had acquired them from various public and charitable agencies, including the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and U.S. Marine Corps; the First through Fourth Liberty Loans; wartime agencies such as the U.S. Food Administration, the Fuel Administration, the Motor Corps, and the Employment Service; the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the United War Work Campaign, the YMCA and the YWCA. Other posters in the collection include those produced and distributed by or for the Knights of Columbus, the Red Star Animal Relief, the American Library Association, and others.

The bulk of the World War II materials in this collection are British or British Commonwealth in origin. Items of interest include gummed stickers or stamps with photoprints of Allied equipment, troops, and personalities, as well as numerous British-issued foreign language posters. Almost all are stamped, in ink, "Specimen of British War Literature Supplied for Record Purposes Only." Some bear markings that indicate that they were obtained from the British liaison office at Rockefeller Center in New York City during the war, while others are marked as being provided by the Information Service of the British Embassy. We speculate that Princeton or one of its donors received copies of most official British posters as a matter of course during the war.

From: Christine Windheuser [<mailto:windheuserc@nmaah.si.edu>]
Sent: Friday, December 16, 2005 1:42 PM
To: ferguson@Princeton.EDU
Cc: Archives Center Archives
Subject: RE: Princeton University Poster Collection 1863-1948

Dear Mr Ferguson

At the request of the archivists at the NMAH Archives Center, I have copied for you and am mailing some of the control files for the "Princeton University Poster Collection 1863-1948" so you can get a better idea how the material came to be here at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. (Although the material is actually stored off site at the Garber Facility in Silver Hill, Maryland.) Apparently, they came to the Smithsonian originally in 1963 but were "lost" in storage until 1990. The donation to the Smithsonian was in the name of Benjamin Strong. Many of them now have item level records in Siris

<http://siris-archives.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=all#focus>

I also attach the Finding Aid for this unprocessed collection.

Best Regards
Chris Windheuser
NMAH Archives Center Volunteer Reference Assistant

Original Question:

>>> Stephen Ferguson <ferguson@Princeton.EDU> 11/22/05 06:48PM >>>
Dear Mr Rubenstein,

I am writing to you because I am aware that you have recently published on this subject and are conversant with the war poster collections at the Smithsonian.

I am Curator of Rare Books at Princeton and have been recently working on the collecting history of the Library.

I have long known about the efforts of libraries to collect war posters, especially during World War I, and I've been long aware of the great collection Princeton built up and documented in a 1920 publication.

But I was surprised to read in S. Lubar and K. Kendrick, /Legacies: Collecting America's History at the Smithsonian/ [Washington, D.C., 2001] the following sentence on p. 166:

"In the 1960s it [the Smithsonian Institution] acquired some ten thousand World War I and II posters from Princeton University Library."

No staff currently at Princeton recall this transfer and, as far as I have determined, curatorial records at most document that the

collection went to the Smithsonian. What surprised me in particular was the date ('1960s') and scale ('ten thousand') of the transfer.

Might your office have documentation of this transfer? If so, I would be most grateful to obtain copies of any letters, memoranda, etc. relating to it. In particular, I am curious to learn why Princeton made this transfer, after husbanding the collection for many decades.

Regards,

Steve Ferguson
Curator of Rare Books
Princeton University Library

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