

## Victorian Trade Cards

Before the days of magazine advertising, German printers brought their expertise to America and gave businesses the advertising medium of trade cards.

BY CYNTHIA ELYCE RUBIN

The trade card, an advertising giveaway that dates from 1876 to 1900, is collected today for its colorful graphics and studied as an historical artifact reflecting America's cultural values. A Victorian collectible with European antecedents, trade cards, widely popular throughout the nation in the 1880s, constituted the first national marketing campaigns in American advertising. However, little known is the fact that the trade card's very existence is a commentary on the continuing vitality of German ingenuity and innovation on American soil.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century following the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution ushered in an unprecedented era of consumerism with America's emerging middle class wanting goods and services on a grand scale. "To fully understand the unique value of trade cards as a reflection of American social history in this period, one must consider the enormous industrial and commercial growth, as well as the sheer increase in population," writes Robert Jay in *The Trade Card in Nineteenth-Century America*. As

an extensive railroad system assured accessibility of goods to western consumers, new and improved products, inventions, and imported goods flooded the frontier marketplace from urban centers such as sewing machines, European laces and notions, patent medicines, soaps, cooking ingredients, furniture, and household appliances. Nothing was immune, but how to publicize a product so as to gain the consumer's attention?

The trade card answered this need by advancing a new advertising medium. At first printed in black and white on lightweight card stock, the trade card's popularity soared when the inexpensive method of color printing called chromolithography replaced earlier, expensive, copper plate, engraving techniques. Print historian, Jay T. Last acknowledges in *The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century Lithography* that the "relatively simple and economical mass-production of image print" was the German invention of lithography in the 1790s by Alois Senefelder.

Last describes a steady advance in German color-printing technol-



This trade card is an advertisement for *Ariosa Coffee* (seen on the backside), but you might think it advertises wurst. The enormous influx of German immigrants in the last years of the nineteenth century was reflected in trade cards in many ways. Here the good-natured parody of the rotund, wurst-loving German butcher with a bit of an accent appears as a central character.

ogy beginning with the example of the serial publication of *Ornamente aller klassische Kunstepochen* (Ornaments of all Classical Periods in Art), produced by C.G. Herwig and C. Hildebrandt in Berlin from 1830 to 1859. A pattern book whose copious six-color plates educated designers in neoclassical, medieval and Renaissance styles, its evolution culminated in mass-production color printing that guaranteed Germany's role as the world's foremost low-cost producer of multi-color lithographs. As nineteenth-century German immigrants adapted to life in America, a large number of talented and skilled lithographers turned entrepreneurs and contributed, Last writes, "a decided German flavor to the American lithographic industry."





**Georg Jos. Scheuer**  
**Fuerth, Germany.**  
 ESTABLISHED 1811.

Trade Mark.

The long existence of the establishment and the increasing demand for its Chicory warrant the superior quality of "Scheuer's celebrated Ritter Coffee".

It has a world renowned reputation. \$ 1000—||—reward to any one who can detect any adulteration in it.

It contains none but wholesome ingredients, and the finest raw material is used for it.

1 Part of genuine Scheuer Coffee and 8 parts of pure coffee will make a delicious beverage, imparts an excellent fragrance to the coffee & gives it a fine rich color.

It will thus be cheaper, finer in taste and yet more wholesome than a larger quantity of pure coffee.

None genuine without above Trade mark and the name "Scheuer".  
 Beware of imitations.  
 Sole agents for the United States and Canada  
 Seggerman Bros, 165 Duane Street, New York.

**Ritter Coffee**

IS THE BEST IN THE MARKET.

Scheuer's genuine imported

Ritter Coffee



**Frau W. Krämer,**  
**Feine Putzwaaren,**  
 427 Cedar Avenue, Scranton, Pa.

**B.** This is a stock trade card that depicts the Christmas holiday tradition German immigrants brought to America—the feather tree. Crafted from a wire frame and dyed goose feathers, feather trees often held faux berries and are popular today as an Old World custom. **C.** Using a play on words to advertise the innovative Princess Plow, was the Crown Princess of Germany identified with the black eagle or Reichsadler, which is the insignia or symbol for Germany and also was used as the Hohenzollern family crest. According to genealogy expert Susan James, this illustration is a good likeness of Augusta Viktoria of Schleswig-Holstein, the wife of Emperor Wilhelm II and the granddaughter of Queen Victoria's half-sister, Feodora. Called "Dona" by the family and married to Wilhelm on 27 February 1881, she was Crown Princess of Germany for a scant three months, from 9 March 1888 to 15 June 1888. Thus, this trade card was probably published in 1888, certainly during the heyday of the trade card's popularity. **D.** Imported by Seggerman Bros. of New York City, "Scheuer's celebrated Ritter Coffee," was produced by Georg Jos. Scheuer, established in 1811, of Fürth, Germany. "It contains none but wholesome ingredients, and the finest raw material is used for it." **E.** Calling cards were also popular. This card announces Mrs. W. Kraemer and her fine millinery in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to a German-speaking clientele. **F.** Merrick's Spool Cotton Thread published a set of sixteen international paper dolls.

One outstanding figure is Louis Prang, born in Breslau in Prussian Silesia. Arriving in America in 1850, he settled in Boston where he found limited opportunities for the expertise he learned in his father's calico printing and dyeing factory. After struggling with a series of odd jobs, he partnered with Julius Mayer in the production of business cards, labels, and posters. By 1866, he produced his first chromolithograph of an artist's work, an instant retail success that led to his publishing a quarterly journal called *Prang's Chromo, A Journal of popular Art* that included articles relating to his novel color prints. In the 1870s, he hit upon the idea of inexpensive, mass-produced, small, single-design, generic "stock" cards that could be adapted to the needs

of individual advertisers who purchased them in bulk and later added their names in a blank space with letterpress or a rubber stamp. Over the years, Prang's modern steam-powered presses produced enormous quantities of an endless variety of prints, sets of small album cards, greeting cards, and trade cards advertising everything from Acme Soap, Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton, Hood's Sarsaparilla, to Rough on Rats, a powder to kill rodents.

Although the development of the American printing industry is inextricably linked with the rise of the trade card phenomenon, not every German printer who made a difference is as well known as Prang. Henry Gugler, an engraver from Stuttgart, immigrated to New York City and



**The Emphatic Method of Cure.**  
A CERTAIN CURE FOR ALL DISEASES.

**Die Emphatische Methode der Heilung.**  
Sicherer Erfolg bei allen Krankheiten.

Attn: Diseases of recent origin, as well as in chronic affections which have defied all other remedies, this method of cure may be confidently resorted to as the best method of relief.

Thousands of Invalids, whom the doctors had given up as hopeless, have saved their lives and been restored to full health by means of this treatment.

An account of the wonderful cures which have been brought about by this treatment, as also the necessary instructions for self-treatment for all diseases, is contained in my Book of Instructions, or Manual, 16th edition, 320 pages.

Illustrative circulars sent to any address, postage free.

**JOHN LINDEN,**  
Special Practitioner of the Emphatic Method of Cure,  
CLEVELAND, OHIO,  
Letter Box W.

Office, 221 Superior St., cor. Bond. Residence, 918 Prospect St.



THE CONValesCENT MOTHER Die Genesende Mutter

**G. Advertising Linden's Improved Oleum Cure, a patented medicine produced by John Linden of Cleveland, Ohio, this trade card has text in both the English and German language to appeal to its German-speaking target audience.**



SCHULTZ'S FATHERLAND SOAP.

**H. Schultz & Co. of Zanesville, Ohio, produced Fatherland Soap. To appeal to German-speaking immigrants, Schultz named this soap in honor of the "old Fatherland for which the Germans naturally have great love...The color of this soap is a nice pink, and it is probably the first Laundry Soap of this color ever offered to the public. The appearance of this article is evidence of its purity, and at the advanced price over ordinary soaps that consumers may have to pay for it, in the end it will be found the cheapest, as it is well known by all intelligent people that first class goods in any line, cannot be furnished as cheap as those of an inferior quality."**

**SCHULTZ'S FATHERLAND SOAP.**

In honor of the old "FATHERLAND," for which the Germans naturally have great love, we name our handsomest piece of Family Soap, and we have as much pride in its success and reputation as the Teutons can have for their "old country." The color of this Soap is a nice Pink, and it is probably the first Laundry Soap of this color ever offered to the public. The appearance of this article is evidence of its purity, and at the advanced price over ordinary soaps that consumers may have to pay for it, in the end it will be found the cheapest, as it is well known by all intelligent people that first class goods in any line, cannot be furnished as cheap as those of an inferior quality. FATHERLAND is sold by us at a small profit, and consumers are warned against inferior imitations that may be offered at a less price.

With our FATHERLAND for general household purposes, and Schultz's Original IRISH for laundry use, families would have all the assortment of soaps they would need. We stake our reputation upon their giving satisfaction, and dealers are authorized to take them back, at our expense, if customers don't like them. Ask your grocer for FATHERLAND SOAP, and if they attempt to put you off with something else, go to some dealer who keeps it or will get it for you, and see that our names are stamped on each bar.

**SCHULTZ & CO.,**  
"THE" SOAP BOILERS,  
Makers of the Best and Most Original Family Soaps on the Market. Zanesville, O.

then to Washington, D.C., where he worked as a currency engraver. Later, he and his son managed the Seifert Company's lithographic department in Milwaukee and were responsible for bringing the first steam press to that city. In 1878, they established H. Gugler & Son, producing advertising posters, sheet music, and trade cards. After Henry Gugler's death in 1883, the firm continued as the Gugler Lithographic Company, expanding the trade card business, which, according to Last, included "fifteen million impressions a year by 1900."

August Hoen arrived in Baltimore as a teenager with his parents and eight siblings and joined fellow German Edward Weber to produce early color work that included lithographed maps for the government.

After Weber's death, Hoen married his widow, renamed the company, A. Hoen & Co. in 1852, and turned it into a large general manufacturer and major supplier of tobacco advertising ephemera.

Vincent Mayer and August Merkel, both German-born, founded Mayer & Merkel in 1869 and later, with Prussian-born Jacob Ottmann, established Mayer, Merkel & Ottmann, specialist in custom-printed trade cards for individual advertisers, that ultimately competed with the Donaldson Brothers of Five Points, New York, for the title of largest trade card producer.

The numbers were staggering! Millions upon millions of trade cards, mainly flat pieces, commonly three inches by five inches in size, adver-

tised every conceivable type of product. Most depicted a full-color image on one side and sales pitch on the back; others were die-cut into shapes of the objects they advertised. Some are called "mechanicals" because they have moving parts. "Metamorphics" have fold-over flaps that reveal images different from those seen when closed. The text often has a humorous or multi-level meaning. Sometimes packaged as premiums, trade cards were published in educational series or sets to encourage collecting by manufacturers of products such as coffee and thread.

One powerful incentive for the general store owner to stock a particular product was the easy availability of free trade cards from the

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## CLARK'S O.N.T SPOOL COTTON

TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN BY RUTH FREIBURGH AUS

### A STORY

What a pity it is when new clothes, worn the for first time, start tearing right away, bottom to top and everywhere.

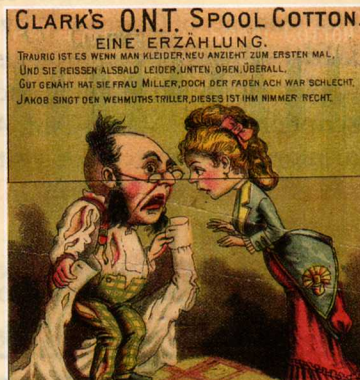
Mrs. Miller made them well enough, but the thread was of bad quality. Jakob sings a sorry song, he is terribly unhappy about this.

His woes dissolve into harmony shortly, though, Jakob Miller embraces his loving wife who told him in confidence that for the repairs she has chosen CLARK'S O.N.T., O.N.T. only she will use henceforth.

### MORAL

Use only CLARK'S O.N.T., and you will never be embarrassed.

**K. This folding-style metamorphic card has a "change your life" message for Clark's O.N.T. Spool Cotton Thread. This "metamorphic" with its short bottom flap folds up to show a "before" narrative scene and down to reveal an "after" improvement. The man's clothes are falling apart but he soon has a smile on his face as he miraculously wears an improved "new" outfit thanks to Clark's O.N.T. Spool Cotton thread, of course.**



## CLARK'S O.N.T. SPOOL COTTON.

### EINE ERZÄHLUNG.

TRAURIG IST ES WENN MAN KLEIDER, NEU ANZIEHT ZUM ERSTEN MAL, UND SIE REISSEN ALSBALD LEIDER, UNTEN, OBEN, ÜBERALL. GUT GENÄHT HAT SIE FRAU MILLER, DOCH DER FADEN ACH WAR SCHLECHT. JAKOB SINGT DEN WEHMUTHSTRILLER, DIESES IST IHM NIMMER RECHT.



DOCH VORBEI SIND ALLE SCHMERZEN, AUFGELÖST IN HARMONIE. JAKOB MILLER RUHT AM HERZEN SEINER LIEBEN GATTIN, SIE HAT VERTRAULICH IHM ERZÄHLT, DASS ZU DER REPARATUR, 'CLARK'S O.N.T.' SIE GEWÄHLT, 'O.N.T.' GEBRAUCHT NUN NUR.

### MORAL.

GEBRAUCHT MAN NUR CLARK'S O.N.T. KOMMT MAN NIE IN VERLEGENHEIT.

## Gallery

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manufacturers. Merchants handed them directly to customers or inserted them in packages. Traveling salesmen distributed them door-to-door. As the forerunner of the direct mail advertising circular, they were also sent via post to the prospective consumer who often collected trade cards in ornate albums, particularly during their heyday in the late 1880s. As production of the trade card increased, so did the public's craze for them.

Offering a view to life in late nineteenth-century America, imagery, such as children, toys, animals, pastoral beauty, patriotic symbols, and architecture, covered a wide range of subject matter, from charming and primitive visual forms to fact and fan-

tasy in content. New products often depicted modern convenience emphasized in illustrations of the hardships of past life without the improved product. As we see in the images that accompany this article, German-related themes on trade cards range from royal figures, regional costume, to educational facts from a trip around the world. Whereas Schultz's Fatherland Soap from Zanesville, Ohio, was produced "in honor of the old 'Fatherland' for which the Germans naturally have a great love," other products, notably Scheuer's Ritter Coffee and Franck Coffee manufactured by Heinrich Franck Söhne (Sons) of Ludwigsburg, Germany, were direct imports. There is also an occasional gentle ribbing with a rotund German holding his knife and having to do with sausages. In addition, in order to attract the German consumer, the printer sometimes used German text.

How better to catch the attention of the German-speaking consumer than with his own mother tongue?

The trade card's rapid demise began in the 1890s as magazines and periodicals offered advertisements that replaced the trade card as a means of advertising products nationwide. Besides, after the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 issued souvenir picture postcards, the postcard began its ascent as America's number one collectible. Nonetheless, trade cards, often preserved in family albums or tucked away as bookmarks in old books, are readily found today wherever paper antiques are sold. Their remarkable variety and quantity offer a unique window into America's colorful past. **GL**

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