OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Title: John B. Walker Cut-Outs Collection

Date(s): 1815-1908

Extent and Forms of Material: 0.33 cu. foot (1 box)

Creator: Helen Hotchkiss Coats

Abstract: 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.


Collection Number: AC0249

Processing Note: This collection was processed by Barbara Kemp, August 4, 1987.

INFORMATION FOR USERS OF THE COLLECTION

Conditions Governing Access: The collection is open for research use.

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Preferred Citation: Title and date of item, John B. Walker Cut-Outs Collection, 1815-1908, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, box number X, folder number XX, digital file number XXXXXXXX

IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Administrative/Biographical History: 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,
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.

**Scope and Content:** 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 artisanry.

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.


**Acquisition Information:** This collection of 54 cutout love tokens, letters and designs by J.B. Walker was contributed in 1986 by Mrs. Helen H. Coats of Burton, Ohio.

**Access Points:**

**Subject/Topical**
- Folk artists -- United States
- Folk art
- Artisans
- Cutwork

*For more information contact the Archives Center at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270*
Subject/Geographical
Pennsylvania
Ohio
Michigan
Kentucky
Indiana

Form/Genre
Letters (correspondence) -- 1850-1900
Letters (correspondence) -- 1900-1950
Designs
Cutouts
Stencils

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