

THREE YULE 'FIRSTS'



Claims to being "firsts" among Christmas cards are held by these early designs.

"Which came first?" and "who thought of it first?" are the two questions asked since time immemorial. These questions have baffled historians, challenged detectives, caused law students to turn the midnight oil—but most of all—have intrigued the public. For the last few years there's been a big to-do about the "first" Christmas card and the subject has fascinated many greeting card collectors, art dealers, museum curators and a sizable portion of the American and British public.

The earliest Christmas card on record, in the light of recent findings, appears to be that of W. M. Egley, dated 1842. Discovered in a mass of skating prints by the British museum, it is indisputably a Christmas card and seems to have been produced for general use. It resembles the early New Year's cards of German origin with its various scenes enclosed in a half-gothic, half-rustic trelliswork and it depicts the Christmas pantomime "Harlequin and Columbine," a puppet booth, skaters and other scenes relating to the holiday season. Its sentiment reads "A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to You."

Until the Egley card was discovered, the first known Christmas card was, for years, thought to have been the one designed by J. J. Horsley RA for Sir Henry Cole in London in 1846 who wanted a card to send to his friends at Christmas. Horsley's card was lithographed by Jobbins of Warwick Court and a thousand copies struck off. These were colored by hand and featured among other scenes a merry family group holding filled wine glasses aloft.

An eminent American authority on greeting cards and a relentless collector of early creations, E. D. Chase of Boston claims that he has found what he believes to be the "first" Christmas card—but until some scientific corroboration is forthcoming we must consider his discovery a "dark horse" in the running. That it is a very "early" card—there can be no question. Our collector traced R. H. Pease, the lithographer whose name appears at the bottom of the card, down to the year 1839 where the latter was listed in the Albany, N. Y., directory as an engraver. The thing, however, that stumps the experts is the fact that there is no date on the card itself.



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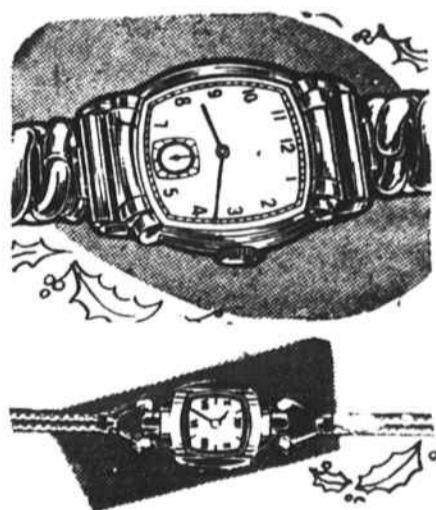
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