

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

Albany Institute of History & Art

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NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 17, 2015

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AMERICA'S FIRST CHRISTMAS CARD ON VIEW AT ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

The card, printed in Albany, New York circa 1850
is part of the exhibition *The Capital Region in 50 Objects*.

ALBANY, NY— This Christmas season, be sure to come to the Albany Institute of History & Art to see America's first commercially printed Christmas card. Printed in Albany around 1850, the card is on loan to the Albany Institute from the Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections in England as part of *The Capital Region in 50 Objects* exhibition. This is the only known copy of the card to survive and this is the first time the card has been on view in the United States.

The modern concept of Santa Claus is a product of the Hudson River Valley. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch brought their *Sinterklaas*, which later merged with Father Christmas and the popular fourth century Saint Nicolas, the Greek Bishop of Myra. In addition, the publication of Clement Clarke Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," published in the *Troy Sentinel* in 1823, the writings of Washington Irving, and illustrations by Thomas Nast further cemented this icon of the holiday season into contemporary culture.



SANTA-CLAUS

In the act of descending a Chimney to fill the Children's Stockings, after supplying himself with FANCY ARTICLES, STATIONERY, CUTLERY, PERFUMERY, GAMES, TOYS, &C. AT PEASE'S GREAT VARIETY STORE, No. 50 Broadway, Albany,

Where can be found an almost endless variety of "Things to use and things for sport," suitable for CHRISTMAS AND NEW-YEAR'S PRESENTS, such as
Work boxes, furnish'd & unfurnish'd; Penknives, inkstands
Dressing cases, toilet cases
Writing desks, paperboxes
Card receivers, portfolios
Card cases, purses
Velvet and silk bags
Rich paper boxes, guard chains
Gold and silver pencils
India's' rattles of gold, silver, ivory
Gold and silver thimbles
Napkin rings, cigar cases
Music boxes, hair brushes
Combs and tooth brushes
Gold and silver toothpicks
Gloves in a nut shell, watch stands
Boonnet holders of silver and gilt
Bread pins, rings, bracelets
Hair pins, shaw pins, cuff pins
Gilt combs, fans, work baskets
Perfumery in great variety
Games and toys
Backgammon boards and men
Billiards, croquet, cups and balls
Snapping ropes, dissected maps
Folding blocks and alphabets
Mosaic puzzles, panoramas
Magic lanterns, wax dolls
Kid and jointed dolls, tea sets
Nurs pins, doll's heads
Rocking horses, whips, swords, guns
Soldiers, pistols, frames and flags
Wasks, accordions, sheep and dogs
Prattling presses, whistles, rattles
Arks, magnetic fuses, livery stables
Hares and carriages, dominos, dice
Wheelbarrows and wagons
Crades, cooking stoves
Kitchens, tea sets
Rocking horses, sofas, tables
& No. &c.
de33

Advertisement for Pease's Great Variety Store from the Albany Argus, Dec 23, 1842, AIHA, Newspaper Collection. The original publication printed one week earlier in the Albany Evening Journal does not exist.

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Little known today, however, is the fact that a merchant from Albany named Richard H. Pease (1813–1891) was the first to use an image of Santa Claus to advertise his gift wares (published in the *Albany Evening Journal* on December 17, 1842) and he was responsible for printing the first Christmas card in America.

Richard H. Pease came to Albany around 1833 and by 1847 had built his general variety store called the Temple of Fancy at 516-518 Broadway. Pease operated his variety store only until 1855 before selling the inventory and turning over the building (still called the Temple of Fancy) to his son, Harry E. Pease.

Pease probably printed this Christmas card for the 1849–1850 holiday season, although it could have been as early as 1847, the year he opened his store.

The Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections are known for their extensive collections of prints, ephemera, and decorated papers. The Albany-printed card was part of a private collection that was donated to MMU Special Collections. Curator Stephanie Boydell traveled more than 3,000 miles to deliver the card to the Albany Institute for The Capital Region in 50 Objects exhibition. In a release from MMU Special Collections, Boydell states: “It’s amazing to think that the only known copy of the very first American Christmas Card is held at our Special Collections. It’s a wonderful illustration of the strange lives that objects lead after they are made. It was a pleasure to take it ‘home’ to Albany and to place such an innocuous little card amongst the other ‘firsts’ that the city claims.”



America’s First Christmas Card, designed by Elisa Forbes, printed and published by Richard H. Pease, Albany, New York, C. 1849-1850, lithograph on paper, courtesy of the Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections

Thomas Nelson, exhibitions designer at the Albany Institute of History & Art and primary researcher of this extraordinary history, is thrilled to be able to display the card as part of The Capital Region in 50 Objects exhibit: “We are excited to finally have the card here at this museum— just a few blocks from where it was printed at 516-518 Broadway.”

The Albany Institute will host **extended hours** during the winter holidays and will be open on Monday, December 28 and Tuesday, December 29 from 10AM—5PM, in addition to the museum’s regularly scheduled hours. More information about hours and admission rates may be found at www.albanyinstitute.org.

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The Capital Region in 50 Objects was made possible through the support of the *Times Union*, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York Council for the Humanities, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, Matthew Bender IV, and Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence R. Marwill.

The Albany Institute of History & Art is located at 125 Washington Avenue in Albany, New York. Free parking is available in the museum's lot at the corner of Elk and Dove Streets. The museum is open Wednesday-Saturday 10AM-5PM, Thursdays until 8PM*, and Sunday Noon-5PM. On Tuesdays, the museum is open to registered groups only. The museum is closed on Mondays and some holidays. Admission is free for Institute members; \$10/adults; \$8/seniors; \$8/students with ID; \$6/children 6-12; FREE/children under 6. *AIHA now offers free admission on Thursdays from 5PM-8PM.

For more information, visit www.albanyinstitute.org or call (518) 463-4478.

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Founded in 1791, the Albany Institute of History & Art is New York's oldest museum. Its collections document the Hudson Valley as a crossroads of culture, influencing the art and history of the region, the state, and the nation. With more than 35,000 objects and one million documents in the library, it is an important resource for the region, giving our community a sense of the part the Hudson Valley played in the American story, and our own place in history. Permanent and temporary exhibitions are open year-round and create a sense of place, allowing visitors to meet the people who helped shape this region. Among the museum's best-known and most-loved collections are the 19th century Hudson River School landscape paintings by artists like Thomas Cole and Frederic Church, the 19th century sculpture collections, and, of course, the famous Albany Mummies that came to the museum in 1909 and have been on view ever since. For more information, please visit www.albanyinstitute.org and be sure to follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/albanyinstitute) and Twitter (@AlbanyInstitute).