



CCI Notes

15/6

Trade Literature for Industrial Collections

Introduction

Trade literature (or 'trade lit') refers to printed matter such as catalogues, sales brochures, operating manuals, and parts lists. It was (and still is) produced by manufacturers to encourage sales of their goods and to inform and assist their customers.

Trade lit dates back to the 1850s. It flourished along with the introduction of mass-produced goods and the growth of an increasingly educated population with more money to spend. It steadily grew and improved with the arrival of photography, cheaper and better printing technologies, and wider distribution networks.

Most trade lit is *primary* source material, produced at about the same time as the thing it describes or illustrates, and by the same manufacturers. As such, it is judged to be very accurate. By contrast, *secondary* source material analyses and compiles this primary material. Usually written by a private individual at a later date, it is more distant from the original source.

Why Trade Lit is Useful

Trade lit brings a lot of useful information to a restoration project.

It may:

- illustrate the original paint schemes, striping, and decals of machines
- describe the original materials and finishes of an object (paint, varnish, plating, etc.)
- show the correct names for the parts of an object
- indicate which parts may be missing
- explain proper disassembly procedures
- recommend maintenance practices
- provide information about related makes, models, and accessories
- include illustrations that can be used as patterns for making replica parts

Note: Trade lit may not always be 100% accurate. Changes in factory production during or after publication of the printed material could result in an object that differs from the company description. The best approach is to compare the printed information with unrestored objects in museums and private collections.

Trade lit often provides interesting historical information about the object and its manufacturer, e.g. how and where the object was used, how many were made, and in what years. It also describes the steps of the manufacturing processes in great detail.

All in all, trade lit enhances a restoration project because it brings in supporting knowledge. This in turn generates more interest and respect for the objects and encourages historically accurate restoration work. Trade lit also serves as a common bond to bring enthusiasts together, encouraging them to contribute their personal experiences, photographs, and printed material to the shared heritage pool. Everyone benefits from this kind of exchange.

Where to Find Trade Lit

Some trade lit is commercially available in the form of reprints — often of varying quality — but most is held in the vaults of museums, archives, and libraries, as well as private collections (see “Recommended Resources”). Viewing the material usually involves a personal visit to a public institution during business hours. Much of the material may only be available on reels of microfilm or sheets of microfiche. Photocopying of printed material is either forbidden or severely restricted because of its fragile nature. In most cases, enthusiasts and restorers have to settle for low-quality black-and-white photocopies of the real thing. But this situation is rapidly changing.

The digital revolution of the late 1990s has dramatically improved access to trade lit and related archival material.¹ Personal computers, flatbed scanners, digital imaging software, CD-ROMs, and the Internet are making an incredible amount of trade lit and archival material available free (or at a very affordable price) to virtually everyone at any time of day or night. Digitized images encourage generosity; they can be duplicated an infinite number of times and shared with the entire wired world at almost no cost. The end users are free to download and save the items with a simple right-click of a computer mouse. They can then print the documents in whatever quality and number they can afford. Best of all,

the original material escapes damage from careless or repeated handling.

Some of the best resources for electronic trade lit and archival material include:

Government (federal, provincial/state, and municipal) Web sites — These sites often include digital libraries, many of which are extremely generous with their holdings. All are ‘works in progress’ that will become increasingly valuable as sources of material.

Commercial Web sites — Many small businesses have online collections to attract visitors and promote sales of their products and services. The images are advertising ‘giveaways’.

Private Web sites — Many enthusiasts are eager to share their collections and knowledge with like-minded individuals. Almost every kind of antique, collectible, and industrial object has a related electronic community of restorers, collectors, and enthusiasts.

Commercially available CD-Rs — These are usually produced by small businesses in limited numbers for special interest groups. The formats vary among HTML (stand-alone Web pages), JPEG images of pages, and Adobe Acrobat (pdf) files. The average cost is low, about \$25 per disc.

Online auctions — For those interested in buying and selling the real thing and/or reprints, online auctions can be an excellent resource. But be warned: the large number of registered users (about 30 million on eBay alone) can drive prices fairly high. These sites are also a good source for downloading low-resolution images as reference material.

Conclusion

Trade lit and archival material have become more accessible,

more useful, and more relevant for everyone due to digital technology. All heritage-related endeavours will be immensely enriched and more rewarding as a result.

Museum staff and the general public are welcome to contact CCI for free advice on finding, using, and creating online trade lit resources to enhance their restoration or museum projects.

Recommended Resources

Government and university Web sites

American Memory

<http://memory.loc.gov/>

This online resource is run by the Library of Congress, National Digital Library Program in Washington, DC. The site contains more than 7 million digital items from more than 100 historical collections. It is linked to the digital libraries of several American universities and libraries.

Noteworthy content includes: *The Emergence of Advertising in America: 1850–1920*. This collection contains 9000 images of advertising ephemera such as flyers, calendars, trade cards, brochures, and booklets. Subjects include automobiles, carriages, bicycles, guns, and farm machinery. There is a special collection of 554 Kodak camera advertisements from 1886 to 1923.

Making of America (University of Michigan)

<http://moa.umdl.umich.edu/>

This is the digital library of the University of Michigan. It is linked to the American Memory site, but generates better search results when used directly. It contains the complete text of approximately 8500 books and 50 000 journal articles — over 3 million pages, many beautifully illustrated — from 1850 to 1877. All pages can be viewed as images, pdf files, or text files that allow word searches.

Making of America (Cornell University)

<http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/>

This is the digital library of Cornell University. As with the previous site, it is linked to the American Memory site but generates better search results when used directly. It contains 267 monographs and 22 journals (955 volumes) — almost 1 million pages, many with engravings — from 1840 to 1900.

Noteworthy content includes:

Manufacturer and

Builder (1869–1894)

Scientific American (1846–1869)

Core Historical Literature of Agriculture (CHLA)

<http://chla.library.cornell.edu/>

A collection of 815 agricultural texts (302 688 pages) from the early 19th to the late 20th century. Courtesy of the Albert R. Mann Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

Sewing Machines — Historical Trade Literature in Smithsonian Collections

<http://www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/trade-literature/sewing-machines/>

This site is part of the Smithsonian Institution Libraries. It includes 248 complete online items related to sewing machines from 1840 onward, including complete manuals, brochures, and parts lists. It will eventually include about 3000 items.

Trade Catalogues in the University of Delaware Library

<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/tradecat/index.htm>

This site includes scanned covers and select pages of trade lit featured in temporary exhibit; it covers a wide range of topics.

Commercial Web sites

Nostalgic.net

<http://www.nostalgic.net/>

A bicycle restoration site. It includes 27 scanned items; hundreds of images of vintage bicycles, parts, and literature from the 1930s to the 1960s

Private Web sites

Victorian trade cards

<http://www.tradecards.com/scrapbook/scrapbook.html>

Commercial CD-Rs

The Golden Age Archives

<http://www.geocities.com/rombooks/>

Scanned trade lit in HTML format on CD-Rs.

Selected topics include:

1917 McCormick Deering farm equipment catalogue

1920 Motorcycles and Side Cars

1922 Noland Co. Plumbing Supplies

Traditional (non-digital) resources with online catalogues

Detroit Public Library, National Automotive History Collection

5201 Woodward Ave.

Detroit MI 48202-4093

USA

Tel.: (313) 833-1456

<http://www.detroit.lib.mi.us/nahc/>

Hagley Museum and Library

PO Box 3630

Wilmington DE 19807-0630

USA

Tel.: (302) 658-2400

<http://www.hagley.lib.de.us/library.html>

National Air & Space Museum Library

National Air & Space Museum,
Room 3100

6th St. and Independence Ave. SW
Washington DC 20560-0314

USA

Tel.: (202) 357-3133

<http://www.sil.si.edu/Branches/nasm-hp.htm>

Canada Science and Technology Museum

1867 St. Laurent Blvd.

Ottawa ON K1G 5A3

Canada

Tel.: (613) 991-3044

<http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/index.cfm>

Endnotes

1. Archival material is a broad term for historical items such as photographs, postcards, maps, technical journals and books, film clips, commemorative items, and memorabilia — the kind of things that end up being stored and preserved in archives, libraries, and museums. This material was originally produced both privately and commercially for entertainment, education, and documentation purposes. As with trade lit, it provides valuable information for restoration projects or museum displays.

Copies are also available in French.

Le présent texte est également
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