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Special Collections
Collection 064-02
Eddie Pofe rl Tattoo Collection
1900-1925

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Number: Collection 064-02

Title: Eddie Pofe rl Tattoo Collection

Creator: Pofe rl, Edward (1879-1943)

Dates: 1900-1925

Quantity: 1 record carton (total 1 linear feet)

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition: Purchased, 2017.

Accruals: No accruals are expected.

Custodial history: The collection was held by the Pofe rl family until 2003 when it was sold to a private collector. In 2015-16, the collection was sold piecemeal to several private collectors and dealers. The collection, as it currently exists at PPL, includes materials that were purchased from the collector as well as the Pofe rl family and sold to PPL in 2017.

Processed by: The collection was processed in 2018 by Kate Wells.

Conservation: Not applicable.

Language: Materials are in English.

RIGHTS AND ACCESS

Access: This collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Providence Public Library, Special Collections department.

Preferred Citation: Researchers are requested to use the following citation format:
[item title], Eddie Pofe rl Tattoo Collection, Special Collections, Providence Public Library

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INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Separated material	None.
Published description	Not applicable.
Location of originals	Not applicable.
Location of copies	Not applicable.
Publication note	Not applicable.
Subject headings	Tattooing--United States--History Tattooed people Tattoo artists--United States Poferl, Edward. Waters, Percy.

SEE ALSO

001-04-02 Tattoo Ephemera Collection

HISTORICAL NOTE

Edward "Eddie" Poferl (1879-1943) was born in Austria-Hungary on 25 April 1879 and emigrated to the United States with his family in 1887 where they settled in St. Paul, Minnesota. He held a number of jobs including prizefighter, printer, police detective and tattooer. He worked sporadically as a printer from the late 1890s until his death, at one point running a print shop behind his residence. He worked as a plainclothes detective for the police department from 1912 through the early years of Prohibition. His print shop was raided for conducting an illegal brewing operation in 1925.

His greatest success came from tattooing. He started tattooing as "Professor Eddie Poferl" in the late 1890s and tattooed at least through the 1920s. The earliest photograph of him as a tattooer was taken at an arcade in Seattle, circa 1898. In 1903 Poferl advertised himself in the Minneapolis Star Tribune as the "Best tattooer in the west" before moving back and working most of his career in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was noted in Albert Parry's "Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art" (1933), the seminal history of American tattooing, listed among tattooers including Charlie Wagner, Harry Lawson and Red Gibbons.

Poferl was married twice. First, to Augusta Schneider with whom he had four children. Upon her death, he married Minnie Schneider Sommer with whom he had one child. He died on 4 June 1943.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The collection includes the tattoo tools, records and tattoo designs related to Poferyl's work as an early 20th century American tattooer. Included are original designs and illustrations by Poferyl, tattoo equipment and ephemera especially related to his collegial relationship with contemporary tattooer Percy Waters.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

The collection is organized into three series. Series 1 included correspondence and ephemera related to Poferyl's work as a tattooer. Specifically of interest are items related to his colleague Percy Waters. Series 2 includes original artwork of "flash" tattoo designs and traced illustrations. Series 3 includes artifacts related to Poferyl's tattoo kit including a machine, engraving tools and a box of inks and pigments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Series 1: Ephemera

Title	Date	Tray	Folder
Photograph mounted under glass. Poferyl tattooing client while another man looks on. Flash designs and sign are mounted on wall above counter. Believed to be cut from his tattoo shop counter.	ca. 1898	1	1
Catalogs for Professor Percy Waters' tattoo supplies (2)	1923 & n.d.	1	2
Business ephemera for Percy Waters, Detroit, Michigan. Includes envelopes (2) from Percy Waters addressed to Poferyl, various advertisements for Percy Waters tattoo supply and tattoo shop and a business card with an ambigram illustration. .	ca. 1925	1	3
Letterhead for Prof. Eddie Poferyl, possibly an example of his own work as a printer.	ca. 1903	1	4
Correspondence from Percy Waters to Poferyl on illustrated Waters letterhead.	1923	1	5
Photographs of Poferyl. Including original portrait of Poferyl in profile and head on, ca. 1925; print of Poferyl as a prizefighter, ca. 1900; reprint of photograph of Poferyl	ca. 1898-1925	1	6

tattooing client, ca. 1898.			
Manuscripts. Reminiscences of Eddie Poferl by family members,	1996	1	7

Series 2: Artworks

Title	Date	Tray	Folder
Loose sheets of stencil rubbings of tattoo designs, 56 pages	n.d.	1	8
Travel book with 67 stencil rubbings and ink drawings by Poferl. Binding is decorated with an illustration and his name on the cover.	n.d.	1	9
Travel book with 24 hand-painted, full color tattoo designs by Poferl.	n.d.	1	10
Travel book with 46 hand-painted, full color tattoo designs by Poferl.	n.d.	1	11

Series 3: Artifacts

Title	Date	Tray	Item
Rubber air bag with mesh. Possibly made by Poferl for home health care use.	n.d.	2	12
Single-coil, frameless tattoo machine with cord, attributed to Poferl. Constructed from doorbell.	n.d.	2	13
Engraving tools with wooden handles (2); possibly adapted for use from his printing business to make tattoo stencils.	n.d.	2	14
Cardboard box labeled "sodium phos. mal." and pieces of unidentified cardboard box.	n.d.	2	15
Engraving stylus' stored in wooden vials	n.d.	2	16

Engraving stylus	n.d.	2	17
2 three way connector tube fittings; possibly used with rubber air bag.	n.d.	2	18
2 cork stoppers with metal handles	n.d.	2	19
Wooden box with paint pigments and ink. Includes 11 small glass jars of ink pigments: flesh, deep green, deep brown, blue, red, light green, deep yellow, light yellow, black, 2 unlabeled blue pigments; 6 glass vials with cork tops with ink remnants: brown, flesh, red, dark green, light green, yellow; 4 glass bottles with metal tops filled with ink pigment: red, yellow, two blue; 1 glass bottle with cotton swabs; 1 glass bottle with wick.	n.d.	3	20