

PROVIDENCE PUBLIC LIBRARY
Special Collections
Collection #064-04-01
Tattoo Ephemera Collection
c.1890-1943

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Number: 064-04-01

Title: Tattoo Ephemera Collection

Creator: Providence Public Library, collector

Dates: c.1890-1943

Quantity: ½ container, 0.25 linear feet.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition: Purchased 2018-2021.

Accruals: Accruals are expected.

Custodial history: Materials collected by the Library.

Processed by: The collection was processed by Jessica Rogers-Cerrato in 2022.

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 number], [item title], Tattoo Ephemera Collection, Special Collections,
Providence Public Library.

Property Rights: Providence Public Library owns the property rights to this collection.
Consideration of the copyrights is the responsibility of the researcher.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Separated material Items were split from various accessions and cataloged separately by format. Accession numbers from which materials in this collection derive include: 2018-07-17-002, 2019-07-22-001, 2020-05-003, 2021-11-10-001.

Published description Not applicable.

Location of originals Not applicable.

Location of copies Not applicable.

Publication note Not applicable.

Subject headings LCSH:
 Tattoo artists
 Women tattoo artists
 Tattooed people
 Tattooed women
 Body marking
 Circus performers
 Sideshowes
 Tattoo removal

AAT:
 temporary tattoos
 sales catalogs
 trade catalogs
 mail order catalogs
 advertisements
 fliers (printed matter)

SEE ALSO

- Eddie Pofert Tattoo Collection, Collection #064-02-01, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Jeff Towns Collection on the History of Tattooing, Collection #105, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Tattoo Photograph Collection, Collection #064-03-01, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection, Collection #064-04-03, Special Collections, Providence Public Library.
- Collection of Tattoo Trade Cards & Business Cards, Collection #064-04-02, Special

Collections, Providence Public Library.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Providence Public Library's Tattoo Ephemera Collection incorporates materials from various acquisitions and purchases related to the art, history, and culture of tattooing, as well as materials on the tattoo industry. The Tattoo Ephemera Collection includes materials created to advertise tattoo artists and studios, sell tattooing supplies, or instruct burgeoning tattoo artists on the nature of the craft, in addition to associated memorabilia, such as temporary tattoos and commemorative items. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in North America, it was common for tattoo artists to learn the trade from one another through apprenticeships as well as the circulation of handmade guides and pamphlets, and to purchase supplies to build their own tattoo machines through mail order catalogs. Items of this nature can be found here. Also featured in this collection are materials related to early tattoo removal techniques.

Percy Waters (1888-1952) was first exposed to tattooing in the late 19th century through the sideshows of the traveling circuses that would pass through his hometown of Anniston, Alabama. As a young man, he learned the foundry trade of molder and then, once he was able to acquire some rudimentary tattoo equipment, began tattooing people locally as a hobby. In the late 1910s, after a brief stopover in New York City, he settled in Detroit, Michigan, where he became very successful as both a tattoo artist and through his tattoo supply business. Famed for his skills, as well as his products, Waters worked on many show business and sideshow clients. During his twenty years in Detroit, Waters' supply business grew to be one of the biggest in the world. He advertised in many popular men's magazines of the time as well as the *Police Gazette* and *Billboard*. Waters designed and manufactured many styles of tattoo machines and in 1929 he received a US patent for his machine prototypes. In 1939 Waters finally left Detroit and returned to his home in Anniston, where he ran his supply business until his death in 1952.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The Tattoo Ephemera Collection contains printed materials, including advertisements, promotional fliers, various instructions, and a variety of catalogs, among other items and memorabilia. Items are predominantly from North America, specifically the United States, though there is also material from the historic Fujiya Hotel just outside of Tokyo, Japan, which features an advertisement for the famed tattoo artist Hori Chiyo, retained at the time by the resort. Also of note in this collection is a bundle of temporary tattoos, and their related ephemera, commemorating the American victory in WWII. For postcards and photographs, see the Tattoo Photograph Collection and for tattoo flash or artwork, see the Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

The items in this collection have been organized into two series: General Mixed Media and Percy Waters Materials. All items within the scope of this collection except those associated with Percy

Waters can be found in the first series. Items created by or owned by Mr. Waters appear in series two. Within each series, the items are arranged in chronological order.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Series 1: General Mixed Media

Item	Title	Date	Box	Folder
1	<i>Smith & Howard Tattooers Supplies</i> catalog. Boston, MA. Note: the Howard referred to here is famous 19th century Tattooed Man and sideshow performer, Prof. Frank Howard, who was born in Providence, RI.	c.1890	1	1
2	Fujiya Hotel menu card with advertisement for Hori Chiyo's tattoo studio on the verso. Yokohama, Japan.	1892	1	2
3	<i>Blatz & May Electric Tattooing Machines and Supplies</i> mail order catalog with envelope. Buffalo, NY.	1911	1	3
4	John H. Temke's <i>Catalogue of Tattooing Supplies</i> . Cincinnati, OH.	c. 1919	1	4
5	<i>Victory Tattoos. A Penny a Sheet</i> temporary tattoos. 72 sheets of WWII-themed temporary tattoos, accompanied by additional cardstock advertising, instructional sheet, & original brown paper envelope. New York, NY. NOTE: item housed with the Tattoo Flash & Artwork Collection, Collection #064-04-03.	1943	see note	see note

Series 2: Percy Waters Materials

Item	Title	Date	Box	Folder
1	<i>The Modern Tattooist</i> , by tattooist Louis Morgan, booklet. Stamped on the first page from the collection of Percy Waters. Berkeley, CA.	1912	1	5
2	<i>Tattoo Marks Removed</i> , promotional flier. Detroit, MI.	c.1925	1	6
3	<i>Instructions to be used with Waters' [Tattoo] Remover Solution</i> , one sheet. Detroit, MI.	c.1930	1	6
4	<i>Tattooing: Seven Best Known Tattoo Removal Formulas</i> , one sheet. Detroit, MI.	c.1930	1	6
5	<i>Waters' Needle Gauge For Sodering [sic] Tattooers Needles</i> , one sheet. Detroit, MI.	c.1930	1	6
6	Personal graphic letterhead, one sheet. Detroit, MI.	1932	1	6

7	<i>Professional Tattoo Artist Guide</i> , pamphlet. Detroit, MI.	c.1932	1	6
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