

Advertising Posters

By Jeremy Blum

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Background

Posters are one of the earliest forms of advertising. While some posters were done for art, such as those done by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, the majority were made to advertise anything you can think of. Advertising posters is a very broad category made up of many subcategories such as movies, theater, products, music, wanted, sports, events, circus and traveling show, and propaganda. Each of these categories have many subcategories themselves. Many collectors collect not by the categories listed above, but by artist or country.

Posters, showing pictures instead of just words were made possible by the advent of stone lithography in 1796 in Germany. However, the process was time consuming. Currier and Ives were one of the earliest printers mass producing color prints. These were mostly smaller than modern posters. They set up shop in 1835 initially printing in black and white and then hand coloring. Some advertising posters were using color by the 1840s. Improvements in this process in the 1870s made it possible to more inexpensively mass-produce posters in color. For posters from the late 1800s and early 1900s, the color is a big draw as the chromolithography process provided a purer and sharper color than today's color printing. The printing process was still time consuming. Each color used in the image was separately drawn onto a stone or plate and applied to the paper one at a time. Those with more colors were more expensive to produce, but are generally more desirable today. Stone lithography came to an end around World War II.

Posters are often artist signed, dated and list the printer. Most posters if not dated on the paper can be dated by the design. Designs included art Nouveau in the 1890s and 1900s, art deco 1920s and 1930s, midcentury in the 1950s and early 1960s and many lesser known forms such as Cubism, Dada, Expressionism and Futurism. Also hair styles, vehicle and other product styles, and building styles can be used to ballpark date a poster.

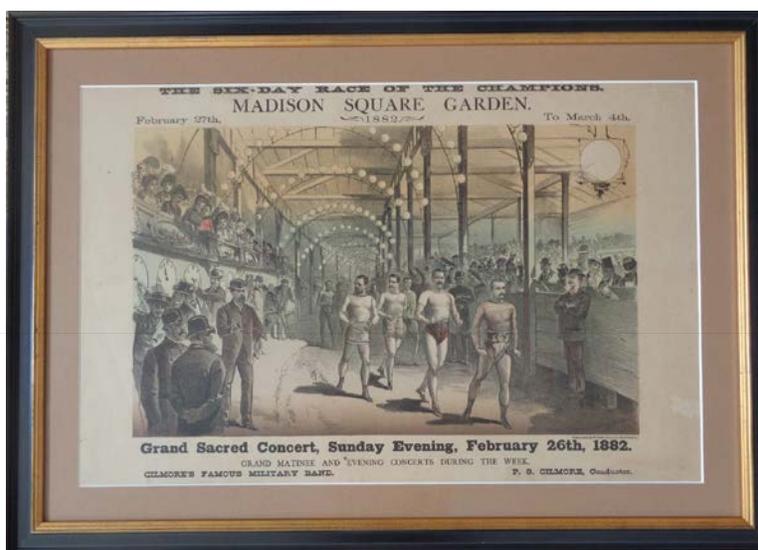
Posters for travel, events, products, and theater were a major type of advertising in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The advent of radio, billboards and later TV and the internet significantly reduced their use in the second half of the 20th century. However other posters such as those for propaganda, concerts and movies continued to flourish much longer.

Collecting posters requires a willingness to use wall space. Large collections are difficult for this reason. Most vintage poster owners use them for décor, or because they go with other things they collect. Posters are one of the best antiques or collectibles for décor as they were made to catch the eye and are often pretty, striking or capture a mood. They also make great cross collectibles.

Each of the categories briefly touched on below is vast enough to have books on them, and many do. The posters shown below in frames plus the TWA are from my collection.

19th Century

Nineteenth century posters encompass many of the other categories but have a unique Victorian look that is often elaborate, colorful and very well designed. If you have not seen one, think Victorian trade card only much bigger. If you collect trade cards consider the posters. Some are the same as the trade card only bigger. Some of the posters can bring thousands of dollars while many sell for less than \$500. The color is best on those from the 1880s and 1890s as color printing techniques had significantly improved by then. Note the improvement in color and the additional amount of colors between the first and second poster below. The first is dated 1882. The second is only a few years later. However, color is not the only determinant of value or interest. The first poster is a very early view of the first Madison Square Garden which was built in 1879 and would probably appeal to more people.



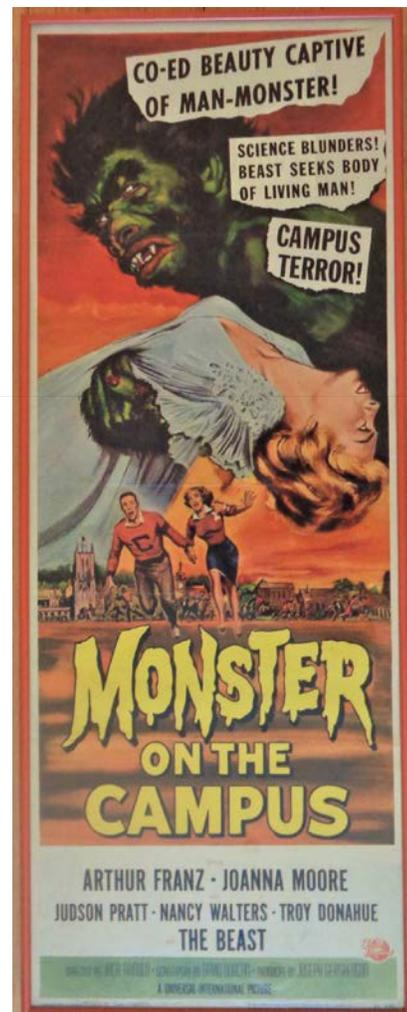


Movies

Movie posters are a form of advertising still used today. Unlike other posters that were often used outside, movie posters were primarily displayed inside or on the inside of windows. Because they were mostly inside, and there were so many movie theaters, many survived in excellent condition. Movie poster collecting is a huge category with a wide range of prices. Collectors collect individual movies or genres. More than a few have reached six figure prices making certain movie posters the most valuable posters. But many

post World War II movie posters are worth under \$100. Particularly popular are major films, monster movie posters or those with a famous actor such as Audrey Hepburn. Movie posters come in many standard sizes, some of which are listed below;

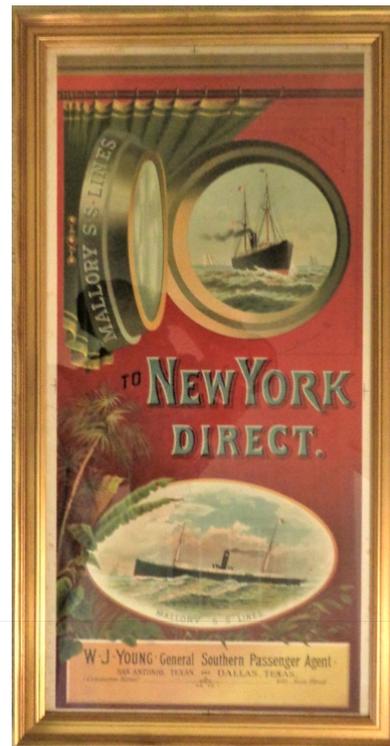
- Lobby Card - 11 x 14", usually came in sets of 8
- Jumbo Lobby Card – 14 x 17", prior to 1940, for higher profile movies, rare
- Window Card – 14 x 22", had a blank white window for the theater name and date of showing
- Insert - 14 x 36"
- Half Sheet - 22 x 28"
- One Sheet - 27 x 41", usually created by artists instead of photos
- Three Sheet – 81 x 41", usually placed outside the theater, not many survived
- Other sizes found are mini window card 8 x 14", jumbo window card 22 x 28", 30 x 40", door panel 20 x 60", subway 41 x 54", 40 x 60", billboard 81 x 81", and banner 24 x 30 to 84 to 120".



Travel

The methods of travel have changed over the years. By the late 1800s the age of the stagecoach was mostly over. Paid travel was primarily railroads and steamships. In the

1900s busses and later airplanes became popular. Travel posters often emphasized the destination instead of the trip itself. Posters were also put out by the destinations such as hotels and resorts. Many of the locations were exotic. Air travel during the midcentury was considered a technological marvel. The twentieth century airline posters from the 1950s and 1960s are particularly bright and cheerful. Travel for leisure before World War II was done more by the wealthy and upper middle class. Therefore, train and steamship posters from that age often emphasized luxury. Both the pre-war and 1950s and 1960s travel posters emphasized the romanticism of travel.



Government/Propaganda

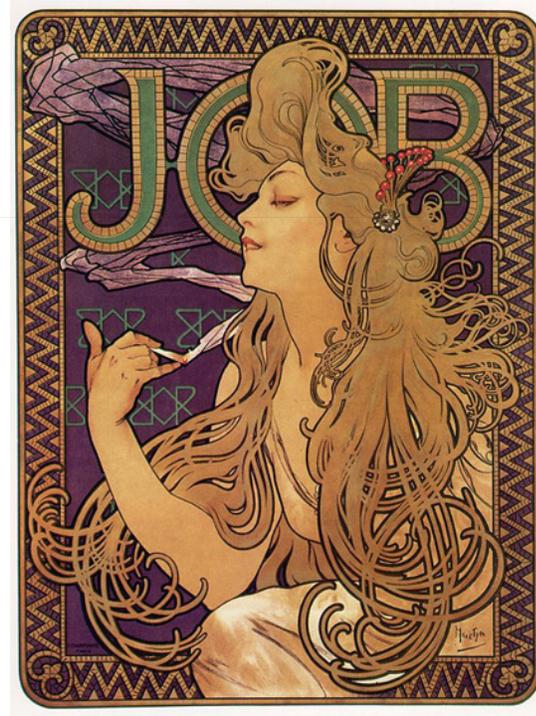
The best known government posters are war recruiting or war bond posters from World War I and II. But many others exist such as the WPA posters of the 1930s, public service announcements and Smokey Bear. Many of the best propaganda posters are overseas. The Soviet posters, though not in English, can be particularly interesting.



French

There is a consensus that the best posters ever made were made in France in the 1890s and first part of the 20th century. Most of these posters were created by artists many who were household names such as Alphonse Mucha and Henri De Toulouse Lautrec. The era was kicked off in 1891 by Toulouse Lautrec with his first poster, Moulin Rouge which elevated poster making to a fine art. This touched off a poster craze bringing in many artists who were also successful painters. Many of these posters were collected during the time they were in use and thus saved. There were poster exhibitions, magazines and dealers. The graphics were unlike anything before or since. Due to their popularity, many have been reproduced in various sizes. The originals tended to be relatively large. Alphonse Mucha worked in a style best described as Art Nouveau on steroids. His posters are unmistakable. The second one shown below is his. Most of these posters are valued in the four figure range with some into the five figures. The graphics were often bright, whimsical and very stylish. In France, the posters often advertised cafés, entertainment, alcohol and other products.

During this period there were also very interesting posters in other European countries such as Italy, Spain, Holland, and Germany. Spanish bullfight posters are still common.



Product Advertising

This is a very wide category as thousands of products have been advertised on posters throughout the history of posters. Quite often the product itself is shown surrounded by happy users. The bottom poster is 3' wide and from the 1880s and illustrates how wild some of the early advertising posters were.





Music

While there have been posters for musical acts dating from the minstrel shows of the mid-1800s, most concert posters collected today are from the early and mid-rock n roll era. They date to the 1950s through the 1970s, though interesting ones are still being produced today. The earliest rock posters were relatively simple and in the form of a boxing poster. Those posters displayed the names of the performers often with a photograph. Sometimes stars, music notes or guitar silhouettes were added as a flourish. As rock became more serious, the musical artists became aware of a simultaneous proliferation of pop art and psychedelic art.

In the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s these styles were heavily used in concert posters. Sometimes they were so stylized that it was hard to read the name of the musical artists. Psychedelic art in particular was used by musical acts that experimented or regularly used mind altering drugs. The posters were extremely different than any before in part because of the anti-establishment feeling of the musical artists and their fans and the fact that their music was unlike anything before. Many of the poster artists became well known themselves. Some of the artists were previously comic book artists. Comic art was often mixed with art nouveau in various wild ways.

Some rock posters can sell for four figure amounts. Value depends on the musical artist(s) and the quality of the art. Many have been reproduced, and since the new and original use a similar printing style the repros can sometimes be hard to determine. Other music has also been put on posters. Popular today are also country music, jazz, rhythm and blues and minstrel shows.

AUDITORIUM THEATRE
 875 E. MAIN ST. - ROCHESTER
SUNDAY JANUARY 19
 2 SHOWS 3:30 and 8:30 P. M.
 PRICES: \$2.00 - \$2.50 - \$3.00 - \$3.50 Incl. Tax
 AUDITORIUM BOX OFFICE OPENS JAN. 18

AMERICA'S GREATEST TEEN-AGE RECORDING STARS
ALL IN PERSON
EVERLY BROS.
 "WAKE UP LITTLE SUSIE"

MARGIE RAYBURN
 "I'm Available"

JIMMIE RODGERS
 "HONEYCOMB"

SHEPHERD SISTERS
 "ALONE"

DANNY AND THE JUNIORS
 "All the Way"

The RAYS
 "SILHOUETTES"

The TUNE WEAVERS
 "SWEET LITTLE BIRD"

Buddy Holly and the CRICKETS
 "RIPPLE BEEZ BEEZ"

PAUL ANKA
 "My Lonely Heart"

THE HOLLYWOOD FLAMES
 "BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ"

AL JONES
 "Rock Me"

the MELLO-KINGS
 "Rock Me"

JIMMY EDWARDS
 "Rock Me"

Eddie COCHRAN
 "Rock Me"

BILLY BROWN
 "Rock Me"

SAM DONAHUE and his ORCHESTRA



GRAND OLE OPRY

A FUN-PACKED 2-HOUR Country & Western SHOW!
 DIRECT FROM MUSIC CITY U.S.A.
 NASHVILLE, TENN.

LONZO & OSCAR
 "The Grand Old Opry"

JIMMY WESTERN
 "The Grand Old Opry"

ALICE HOOVER & LINDY
 "The Grand Old Opry"

LOYCE ALLISON
 "The Grand Old Opry"

LARRY GOOD
 "The Grand Old Opry"

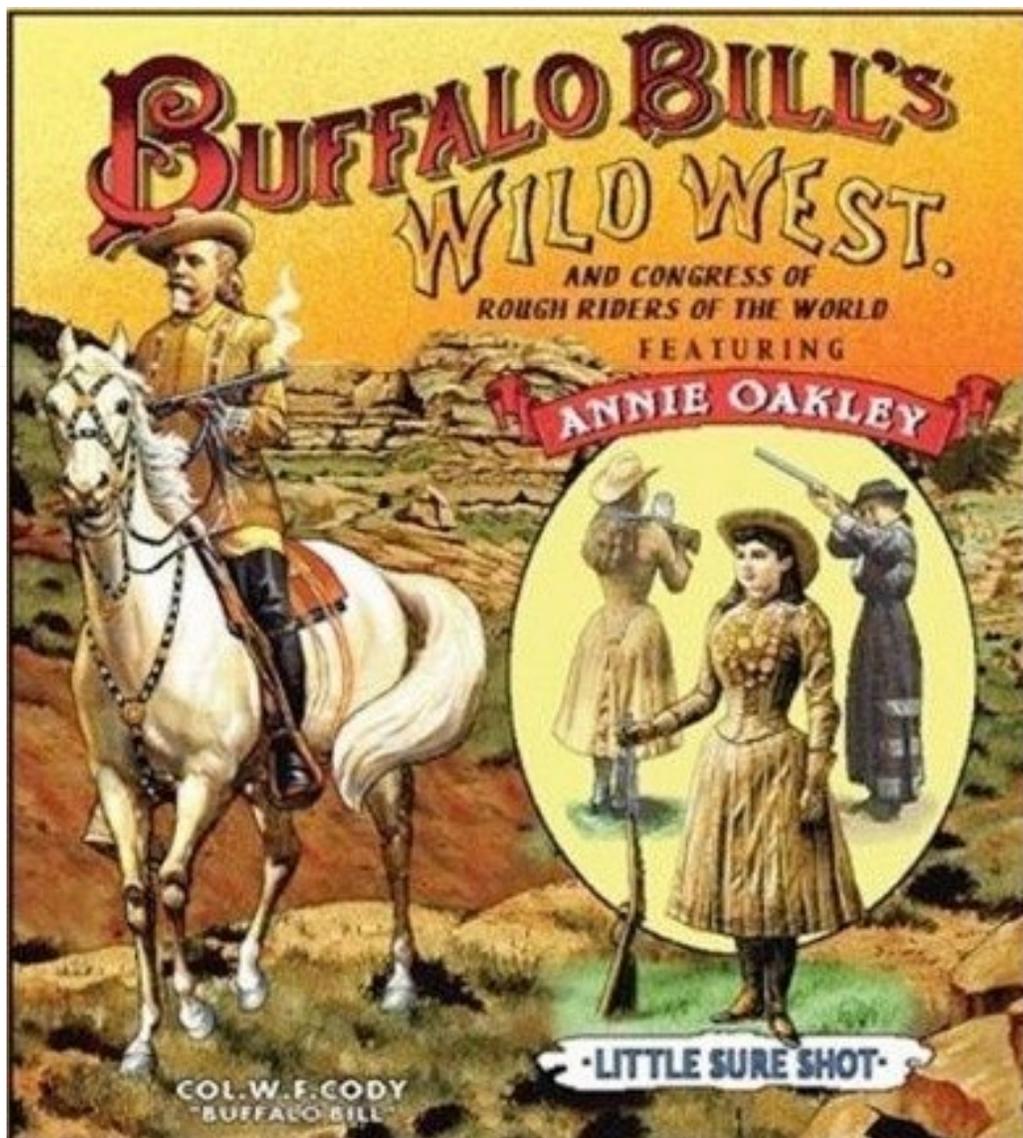
THE COUNTRY MEN
 "The Grand Old Opry"

RICHARDS & PRINGLE'S FAMOUS MINSTRELS

BILLY KING

Traveling Show/Circus

When they hear traveling show, most people think circus. However, the best posters in this genre in my opinion are the wild west traveling shows of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In particular, the posters of Buffalo Bill's shows are very well done and most are worth in the four figure range. Buffalo Bill, born William Cody, was a colorful photogenic character who helped pioneer the American entertainment industry. He put together a large show of cowboys, Indians, military, Turks, Mongols, marksmen, and much more to give people a taste of the disappearing wild west they had read about. The show traveled constantly for several decades going all over the world. His colorful posters from that period are among the best American posters. Circus posters are much more common, especially those since World War II. The circus genre is not very popular right now, in part due to many people today seeing clowns as creepy. Those posters can often be found for under \$100. They are very colorful compared to most other posters. Also interesting are pre-World War II posters by magicians.

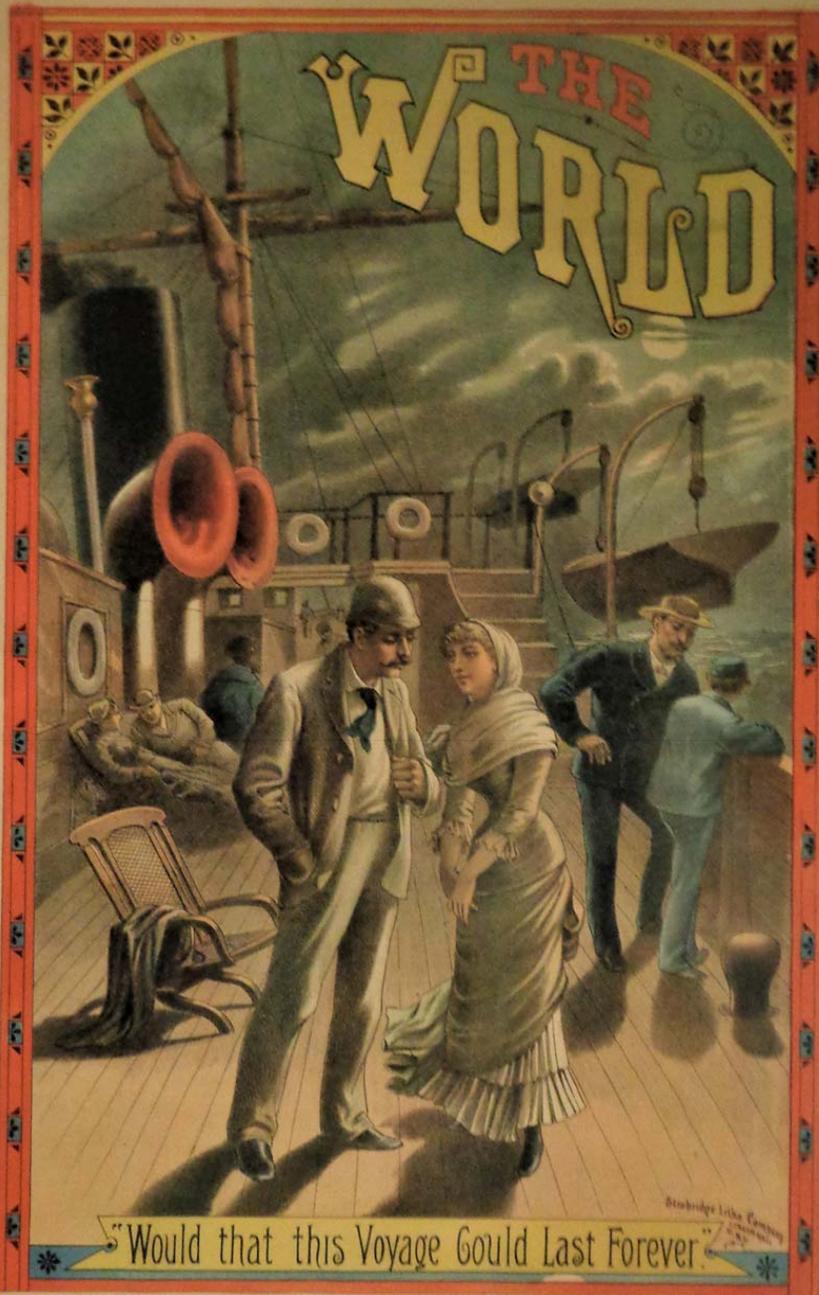




Theater Posters

By theater I mean live non-sports entertainment including plays and variety shows. This was one of the most common types of entertainment in the 19th century. Radio, TV, records, gaming and the internet did not exist. Many acts went from city to city and were not known locally. They needed to get the word out when they came to town. Posters were one of the most effective way. Non-musical entertainment in theaters declined in the early 1900s due to the popularity of movies. By the 1930s it was limited to Broadway in New York and a just a few theaters in most cities.

Theater posters in the U.S. are some of the most affordable pre-World War II posters available. Even those from the 1800s rarely bring more than a few hundred dollars, though the one shown below is an exception. If you like colorful early posters, this is an affordable, category to collect that is often quite good.



WORCESTER THEATRE, **WEDNESDAY, NOV. 14.**

Sports

Sporting events have often been advertised using posters. These tend to be one of a kind events, such as a boxing or professional wrestling match, automobile race or Olympics, and much less so regular season games.



Preservation

Posters can be protected, preserved and restored. For protection, there are various types of glass and plastic available to cover the poster. Basic glass prevents dust and scratching but doesn't protect against UV rays which can fade the image. Basic glass also comes in a non-glare form to prevent glare and reflections but also doesn't protect against UV rays. Styrene is a plastic that does what basic glass does but is lighter weight and more difficult to shatter. This material should not be cleaned with household cleaners, just wipe it clean with a soft damp cloth. Conservation Clear glass prevents 99% of UV rays. This should be used if the poster will receive direct sunlight. It is significantly more expensive than the prior mentioned glass and styrene. The best protection comes from Museum glass, which is very expensive. It also blocks 99% of UV rays, is clearer than Conservation Clear and significantly reduces reflections. It should be considered only for valuable posters.

Preservation also involves removing contact with any acidic material such as wood and some types of cardboard.

Restoration services can bring back lost parts of the paper, hide tears, remove wrinkles, deacidify, strengthen weak paper, clean, remove tape and reduce stains. Restoring portions of the poster lost involves painting in the lost image. Strengthening the paper often involves the use of lining on the back of the poster. Even those in excellent shape can be considered for a fabric lining with an acid free paper between the poster and the fabric. This will both protect from tears and from waving.