

Cigar Box Lithographs: Volume V

Charles J. Humber

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Cigar Box Lithographs: Volume V extols the unique, functional beauty of antique cigar labels and their boxes.

Charles J. Humber's *Cigar Box Lithographs: Volume V* continues a series featuring the colorful and varied inner labels affixed to vintage cigar boxes.

The book features over one hundred cigar box labels reproduced in sharp, appealing color, with accompanying text that is both factual and conversational. While informative, the book is not a technical survey or a valuation of cigar box labels, but rather a personal, engaging, and knowledgeable collector's compendium. The labels are not in a fixed chronological order; thus, there is a detailed index that includes categories for both people and places to help with locating topics of specific interest.

Most of the labels included in this volume are from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, when cigar smoking was at its height of popularity. The book includes trivia such as that, while the enjoyment of "stogies" was for the most part restricted to men, the wooden cigar boxes were often produced by factory-employed women. And the boxes, it notes, were assembled from six basic pieces, which would then be decorated with the particular brand label. Though some of these treasured items have survived, a greater number were discarded or used for firewood when empty—rendering those that remain collectibles. Indeed, Humber says, even imperfect or damaged wooden cigar boxes are coveted items, with values that continue to increase.

The featured labels in this volume of the series picture numerous historical figures, including Ludwig van Beethoven, Sir Walter Raleigh, Mark Twain, American abolitionist John Brown, and heavyweight boxer John L. Sullivan. Curious facts are noted about such subjects, such as that Colonel George E. Waring created a sanitary and efficient urban sewer design in New York City, preventing the spread of disease and establishing "the foundation for modern recycling, street sweeping and garbage collection."

Historical information is also preserved herein: the Confederation label commemorated the 1867 establishment of the Dominion of Canada, while the Committee of Five label depicts four founding fathers listening to Thomas Jefferson read his draft of the Declaration of Independence. While some dignified portraits of First Nations and Native American tribal chiefs graced various cigar boxes, including of Iroquois and Mohawk leaders, the book ponders racist and stereotypical labels as well, like the Three Black Kids label with its trio of barefoot, banjo-playing Black children. It also notes that cigar manufacturers used their labels to target specific ethnic groups, as with the Irish Lad brand, the King Oscar cigar box for Scandinavian Americans, and the St. Andrew label for Canada's many Scottish descendants. And Marca Gallo produced long, thin cigars in "the Italian way," which could then be cut in half to give the smoker two cigars at one price.

The volume also chronicles the progress of capitalism, showing how, as many Americans became wealthier, cigar boxes displayed elegant illustrations of country clubs and luxury vehicles. Appealing scenes of recreation and leisure were also included, with depictions of bicycling, railway travel, tourism, and camping. And "Honest Labor" was

promoted and portrayed as the energy behind the American economy.

Cigar Box Lithographs: Volume V extols the unique, functional beauty of antique cigar labels and their boxes, represented here as objects of living history.

MEG NOLA (September 22, 2023)

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