

## Our History... by Alan Mueller

### Christmas Greetings Cards 1875-1900

Greeting cards for the Christmas season were very slow to gather popularity in the United States prior to the Civil War (1861-1865). The first commercial Christmas card was introduced for the season of 1843 in London, England. It wasn't a success for several reasons. In the early 1870s a German immigrant by the name of Louis Prang opened a color print shop in a suburb of Boston, MA. Prang could turn out prints using twenty some varied color plates to produce a stunning product not seen before in the United States. By the mid-1880s other print shops started using the same process and the appeal of the holiday greeting card grew each year. In the earlier years the subjects followed the English style of subjects: flowers, elegant ladies, children, animals and birds of every description, all posed with a bower of varied blossoms. The Christmas greeting was often in a small, simple line near the top or bottom. The fringed, embossed and beribboned era was the fashion, with larger print styles from 1886 into the 1890s. Santa had appeared and was mentioned before the Civil War, but seldom appeared until the last years of the 19th century. The Christmas tree would also make its appearance then, but the Poinsettia was unknown until about 1901.

The cards of that early period were relatively expensive, depending on the size and extra "added fluff". It might seem odd that most holiday cards were not mailed, but hand carried to the recipient's door with a calling card attached. Only the out of town card with an added note would be mailed to *Uncle Bert* and *Aunt Minnie* who had moved to Michigan or cousin *Bertha* now living in Auburn, near her daughter, *Theodora*. The 20th century and the coming of the colored post card and penny postage brought the steady growth of the entire greeting card industry into almost the present day. Cards with envelopes again became the norm just before 1920. We now have greeting cards of all types offered on-line via computer. But why rely on just on-line card companies offers when you can create your own greetings and send them via computer using email, Facebook, and Twitter to your on-line "friends" that reach around the world. From hand delivering your Christmas greeting cards to relatives, friends and neighbors in the 19th century to electronic delivery in seconds (well, sometimes a bit longer) in the 21st.....to the "friends" you might never meet!

