



TRADE CATALOGS AND AMERICAN ADVERTISING

The 19th century was the year of trade catalogs. This era saw a revolution in the business and industrial history as reflected in these trade catalogs. The Industrial Revolution evident in this century was a major force in the modernization of the business industry. Aside from new methods of producing goods that brought down its prices, even making luxury items available to ordinary people, this period as evident in the catalogs began offering goods and services to customers in addition to traders. The growth of trade catalogs in this period has provided a distinct way of life for all people both at home and at work. These catalogs even brought traces of development that changed the life of all Americans and brought in a modern lifestyle.

But what are these trade catalogs? Trade catalogs are generally similar to the retail catalogs existing today. They describe and illustrate business products and services. With trade catalogs, it is possible to understand clearly the market for goods and what is actually available for sale at a given period. But just like the catalogs that are produced today, trade catalogs were also intended to be used and thrown out eventually. But some businesses and manufacturers produce catalogs with hard covers so customers can keep them for a long time. And if ever there are price changes and additional products, they just send out an updated price lists for the items in the catalog rather than printing and issuing a new catalog.

Trade catalogs were also a major force in advances in printing technology. Advances in machine presses and lithography significantly reduced the cost of producing informative and captivating catalogs and enhanced the quality of printed marketing materials. Recently though researchers have used trade catalogs as a tool for historical research. These catalogs used for research covers a wide range of subject areas such as manufacturing, textile, household and consumer products and leisure goods among others. Hence, trade catalogs have certainly illustrated a broader context of the 19th century American advertising history. They have chronicled the development of different styles and tastes of the people and have been a valuable and useful source of information for those interested in trends in the business industry.

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