



Prang's Civil War Pictures: The Complete Battle Chromos of Louis Prang (The North's Civil War)

Harold Holzer

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During the 1880s, a German-born, Boston-based picture publisher successfully commissioned the most ambitious series of battle prints ever published. Louis Prang, best known as the father of the Christmas card, hired noted military and marine artists to create original scenes of combat, and then reproduced their works in a wildly popular portfolio of chromolithographs. He called the set Prang's War Pictures. They were offered to an eager public accompanied by descriptive texts that told the story of each engagement through eyewitness recollection by the heroes of each action. The set proved both appealing and influential, selling vigorously in various editions for a generation, and elevating the stature of military illustration in America. For 20 years, Civil War prints for the masses had featured uninspired, one-dimensional views of armies in hand-to-hand combat. Prang and his artists demonstrated genuine skill and imaginative perspective. They showed both real carnage and important technological advances, revealing both the broad sweep of panoramic battlefields and the intimate action of individual combatants. These famously sepia-toned chromos went on to become familiar illustrations in books and magazines—often offered as definitive examples of Civil War art. But until now, the complete set of 18 chromos has never been collected in a single volume. And the original Descriptive Texts first offered Prang's customers as marketing brochures to boost sales—a priceless historical archive in and of themselves—have never been published since, anywhere. Holzer reunites pictures and texts in an authoritative, milestone volume orchestrating prints and descriptions that resurrect Prang's original conception of battle art for the masses for a new generation. The book also features reproductions of the original works of art that inspired the prints, created on commission by battle painter Thure de Thulstrup and naval specialist Julian Oliver Davidson—now housed in art collections around the country—but seldom seen since they were commissioned by Prang as models for his ambitious chromolithographs. This long-needed complete Prang portfolio will undoubtedly become an essential collectible for Civil War aficionados in the country, as well as for libraries and university collections increasingly aware of the importance of art and iconography in defining the Civil War experience and the impact of Civil War memory.

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