

Way We Were
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Tramp Art
By Colleen Allen, Collections Move Intern

Tramp Art

Quite a bit has been said about Parkites' seedier pastimes during its mining days, but what might be less well known is Park City's long artistic heritage. A wonderful example is this elaborate picture frame that I have gotten the opportunity to re-house during the move of the Park City Museum's collections. This picture frame is an example of a type of folk art called "tramp art" with a unique Park City twist. "Tramp art" has been practiced around the globe though its heyday was in America from the end of the Civil War through the 1930's. The use of the word tramp comes from the German word "trampen" referring to the itinerant stage of craft apprenticeship. "Tramp art" was most likely introduced to America by German and Scandinavian Wanderbuersons, or wandering apprentices, in the 1860's. The trademarks of tramp art lie in the material used and the techniques used to craft it.

Cigar boxes were the most common material used in tramp art. The boxes were manipulated using simple tools such as pocket knives, and techniques such as chip carving, layering, and inlaid and applied decorating. Cigar boxes came into use in the 1850's, but they couldn't be recycled due to the revenue laws of the time. This meant that they were plentiful, non-expensive, and easy to carve. This elaborate star picture frame is made of cigar boxes, but also includes dynamite boxes, one of which can be seen in image two. The inclusion of dynamite boxes makes this piece a uniquely mining, and therefore Park City, version of tramp art. Another piece of this frame that ties the object to Park City is the use of pyrite ore from the Park City Mines in the six triangular points of the star, which can be seen in image one. As George Bernard Shaw said, "Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable." This picture frame was one man's way of making the hard times of Park City bearable, and he has left a beautiful legacy for future generations of Parkites to enjoy and appreciate.

To find out more about this unique form of folk art check out [Tramp Art One Notch at a Time](#), [Tramp Art Another Notch, Folk Art from the Heart](#), (both authored by Clifford Wallach), or [Hobo and Tramp Art Carving: An Authentic American Folk Tradition](#) by Adolph Vandertie and Patrick Spielman (from which much information from this article was taken).



Img 1: The elaborate star shaped picture frame made in the tramp art style for the Fontana family by John Louise.



Img 2: A detail of one of the explosive boxes that was used to construct 1990.15.1