



## LOUIS PRANG, THE "FATHER OF THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS CARD"

*By: Aviculture Europe*

While in London, UK, the first commercial Christmas cards were commissioned in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole, it was Louis Prang who became the first printer in America to offer Christmas cards in 1874. Louis Prang (1824 – 1909), known as the "father of the American Christmas card", was born in Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland) and emigrated to the United States in 1850. By 1864 he set up his own lithographic business in Boston, that utilised a method of colour printing with a series of metal plates rather than lithographic stone. The result was a richly hued image that far surpassed the hand tinted black and white engravings and lithographs

produced by other companies.

His Christmas cards were very popular, including silken fringe, silken cord, tassels or even rich layers of mellowed gold ink. They were expensive to buy, but Prang never forgot that the market included those with slim wallets. There were also lovely cards on an affordable level, identified at the bottom as a product of the L. Prang Company and the date.

However, by 1890 the market was flooded with cheap imitations of his fine Christmas cards, which eventually drove him from the market.

Apart from the Christmas cards Louis Prang manufactured a wide range of pictorial products, ranging from maps and fashion plates to advertisements, and also supplied the plates for several notable publications, e.g. "Prang's Natural History Series," published in 1873. He set high standards for his reproductions, insisting on colour and textural quality that duplicated the original image.

In the next page is one of Prang's works, titled:

### **The Poultry of the World.**

**Portraits of all known valuable breeds of fowl. Thirty types of identified chickens (fifty-two individuals, male and female). Chromolithograph by L. Prang & Co., Boston, 1868.**





# THE POULTRY OF THE WORLD



- 1. 2 Spanish
- 2. 4 Partridge Game
- 3. 6 Black-breasted Red Game
- 7. 8 Grey Shamo
- 9. 10 Houdans
- 11. 12 Silver-spangled Hamburgs
- 13. Malay Cuck
- 14. 15 Dorking Fowls
- 16. 17 La Fleche
- 18. 19 Silver-faced Bantams
- 20. 21 Light Bracon
- 22. Orpington Cuckoo Hen
- 23. Game Bantam
- 24. Indian Fowl
- 25. 26 Dark Bracon

- 27. White Dorking
- 28. Columbian Fowl
- 29. 30 Buff Game
- 31. 32 Silver Polish
- 33. 34 Sultan Fowls
- 35. 36 White Game
- 37. 38 Black-winged Game
- 39. 40 Dalmatian
- 41. 42 Frizzled Fowls
- 43. 44 Golden-spangled Polish
- 45. 46 Sultan Fowls
- 47. 48 Grey Game
- 49. 50 White Bantams
- 51. 52 Coloured Dorkings
- 53. 54 White Crested Black Polish

Portraits of all known valuable breeds of fowls





1. 2. Spanish. [The same fowls but white are called Leghorns.]
3. 4. Partridge Cochins.
5. 6. Black-Breasted Red Game.
7. 8. Grey Shangae.
9. 10. Houdans.
11. 12. Silver-spangled Hamburgs.
13. Malay Cock.
14. 15. Dorking Fowls.
16. 17. La Fleche.
18. 19. Silver-laced Bantams.
20. 21. Light Brahmas.
22. Cinnamon Cochin Hen.
23. Game Bantam.
24. Indian Fowl.
25. 26. Dark Brahmas.

27. White Dorking.
28. Columbian Fowl.
29. 30. Buff Cochin.
31. 32. Silver Polish.
33. Guinea Fowl.
34. White Cochin.
35. 36. Duck-winged Game.
37. 38. Dominiques.
39. 40. Frizzled Fowls.
41. 42. Golden-spangled Polish.
43. 44. Sultan Fowls.
45. 46. Creve-Coeurs.
47. 48. White Bantams.
49. 50. Coloured Dorkings.
51. 52. White-Crested Black Polish.

L. Prang & Co. Boston.



Prang's chromolithographic process—reproduction in oil colors—brought color-printed advertising into common use. He went on to publish album cards, greeting cards, games, series on birds and flowers, and toy books, in addition to fulfilling his dream of fine-art publishing. The quality of print was always sheer perfection, also in the Christmas cards. The designs were exquisite portrayals of flora and fauna, children, angels, fruit and other symbols of the season. Year after year Louis Prang produced Christmas cards at his lithograph shop in Boston. He can thus be blamed for the fact that each Christmas we have the tedious job of writing hundreds of Christmas greetings to our relatives and friends.