

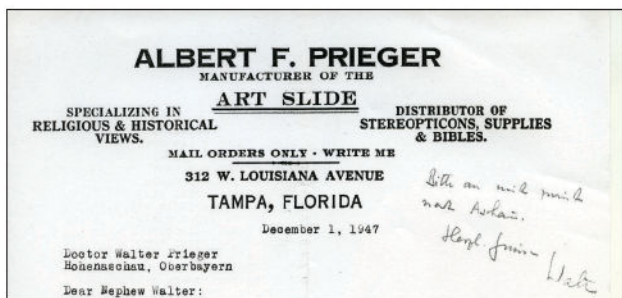
# ALBERT FRANKLIN PRIEGER – MANUFACTURER OF THE ART SLIDE AND DISTRIBUTOR OF STEREOPTICONS

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What luck when two hobbies coincide. This happened with my two main interests – genealogy and magic lanterns – and I believe it is a story worth telling.

First, a quick summary of the genealogy part. My mother-in-law's family name is 'Prieger'. One day her sister moved into a retirement home and gave me a box full of old family letters and documents. This turned out to be a wonderful gift. When I began to sort through this family archive I suddenly read the words 'Art Slide' and 'Stereopticons' – and was more than astonished. With increasing excitement I read on. What I had found was an old copy of a letter from a manufacturer of slides in the USA and two images of him. One of my wife's uncles, Walter Prieger, had written to his American relative, Albert Franklin Prieger, in 1947 and had received a response in a detailed letter giving his life history and displaying the words that caught my eye in the letterhead. This letter is of interest to the magic lantern world. Albert F. Prieger is probably better known for his slides in the USA, where he had lived, than in Europe and beyond. In fact there is no entry for him in the *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*.<sup>1</sup>

To establish the relationship between the American and German Priegers we need to go back to Ernst Ludwig Prieger who was born in Germany in 1824 (and died in 1877). He married twice, both wives being born in Germany too. With his first wife, he went to America at some point before 1849 and the second of seven children born there was Franklin. Franklin's eldest child was Albert Franklin Prieger – the later manufacturer of lantern slides. However back to grandfather Ernst Ludwig who divorced his first wife and returned to Germany, married again and had another five children. My wife is a great-granddaughter via this line. With my known interest in magic lanterns the letter from the slide manufacturer was passed on to me by her family.



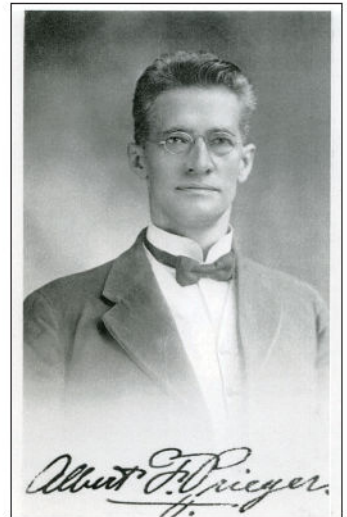
1. Dr Albert F. Prieger's letterhead

Albert F. Prieger's letter was not intended for publication so I am reproducing in full only the parts that concern himself and his slides with a brief summary of other parts in parentheses. The letterhead is shown in Fig. 1. The letter then starts:

December 1, 1947  
 Doctor Walter Prieger  
 Hohenaschau, Oberbayern  
 Dear Nephew Walter:

*It has been a great pleasure to hear from you. I had a brother [he writes about his brothers, sisters and relatives, and has some questions for Walter before returning to himself]. I was born in Logan, Kansas, January 25, 1875. From there we moved to Van Dyne, Wisconsin, then to Auburndale, Wisconsin, during this time I attended school in Auburndale and Milwaukee where I entered high school at twelve and one half years when we went to Germany because of Father's asthma. He was a very heavy smoker. He was cured of this disease in Hanover. And there I attended the Royal Academy of Art and*

*learned my lithographic trade for four years. I also studied art in the Welfenschloss in Hanover where I received the first prize in art. We left in the fall of 1891 and went to Milwaukee again and then to Denver, Colorado. In 1892 I left Denver for Chicago and got into the gas stove business and lectured also in the World's Fair in 1893 in Chicago on exhibition of gas stoves and heaters.*



2. A young Albert F. Prieger

[He now describes the move to Auburndale, where he is converted, and then left for southern Alabama near the Gulf of Mexico. He talks about the family and missionary work.]

*In Alabama Oscar and I did missionary work for eleven years and I was then called to preach for the Alabama conference and went through some very trying experiences in Dothan, Alabama, etc. After raising up a fine church there I was called to Hayti, the black man's republic and labored there for six years and thereafter to Jamaica, Cathagena, and Barranquilla, Columbia, spent some time in Cuba from Habana to Santiago.*

*From there I came back to the USA, received my degree and also labored in Iowa and got into the slide business making stereopticon slides in 1920 at which business I am still in.*

*From there I moved to Florida where I continued in this line until today. My slides have been sold in every country of the world. But it is impossible to get the help necessary. If one does, they want such high salary that missionary workers cannot afford to pay, so I work at it the best way possible ... I am much interested to know your line of work, what you intend to do in the future. I shall be glad to hear from you where I could send some of my work to you so that you could see just what I make.*

Your Uncle, [Albert F. Prieger]

With the letter he sent a photograph of himself in younger days (Fig. 2) along with a partial copy of his composition The Great Three-Fold Message for which he wrote both words and music (Fig. 3). The title

3. Dr Prieger's composition 'The Great Three-Fold Message' (partial)



pages shows a photograph of him in later years. Judging by the date of copyright (1937) he is probably about 62 years-old here. I have included this mainly to show the broad spectrum of his talents.

Dr Albert F. Prieger appears to have been married twice – first to Anni Steffan in November 1904 and then to Lois Logan sometime after 1910. The second marriage produced two daughters, Mary and Virginia. His death is recorded in 1958 (Hillsborough, Florida).

It is difficult to trace his stereopticon distributing activity – a stereopticon is “a generic name used in the United States for a magic lantern, often a biennial or triennial”<sup>2</sup>. He does not comment on this in the letter. However, there is a great deal on the production of slides. One internet source describes Dr Prieger as “the leading artist of the whole Seventh-day Adventist” movement. He and his staff of artists made most of the slides in the “big old-fashioned 3-by-4-inch” format for their shows, “probably later ... small slides ... . That was before the day of colour photography ... so that he had to colour them and paint them by hand. Imagine, he painted most of those slides himself by hand! He was a master German artist of the old classical school, classical realism, so he had only the best pictures ... .” Dr Prieger had “nearly ... 20,000 slides”<sup>3</sup>.

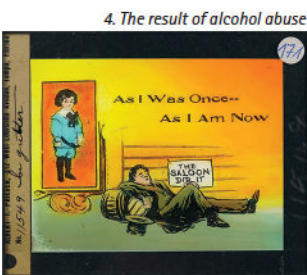
From 1940, Dr Albert F. Prieger advertised his ‘Stereopticon Slides’ in *The Ministry* – the international journal for pastors in the Seventh-day Adventist church – describing the slides as “Not made by students”<sup>4</sup>. As the letter tells us, he began manufacturing slides in 1920 and continued after 1947. His adverts are in issues of *The Ministry* from July 1953 and even October 1955. He offers to send on demand “stereopticon slides on songs, history, Bible and texts” and adds “Write your needs and terms desired”<sup>5</sup>. Similar adverts appear in *The Ministry* from April 1944<sup>6</sup> and *Cumberland Echoes* for 1955 and 1956<sup>7</sup>. Both adverts are for stereopticon slides with the latter offering images of gospel songs, history, Bible subjects, maps and quotations.

Not often do we find lantern slides being produced after 1920, with the exception of advertising slides. However, Albert F. Prieger was still producing slides in 1947, although, as we see in the letter, finding it very difficult to find the right help. General comment on the use of magic lanterns and glass slides from 1920 onwards is rare and looking at use by an individual can be more informative. In the case of Dr Prieger we have the contemporary remarks of David Berg<sup>8</sup> from the 1940s. Berg was born in 1919 and obtained his slides from Dr Prieger when he was 26 years old, making it 1945. Furthermore he writes that both Dr Prieger and his own grandfather used ‘old’ slide projectors, rather than the easier-to-handle ‘modern’ ones, and comments: “the old stereopticons, as they called them, were getting scarce”. David Berg saw the slides first in a show and was deeply impressed by the dissolving sets – the operator “had two projectors which he operated so that one slide would fade out while the other faded in. Then he would change the slide in the one that was off, and when he was ready for that picture, he’d slide the switch over again the other way.” In answer to his question Berg was told that most of the slides were made by Dr Prieger who had “got a collection of over 20,000 colour slides on every conceivable subject, of course mostly on the Bible and Bible prophecy”<sup>8</sup>. We can surmise that all Albert Prieger’s products were made for old magic lantern techniques which he himself used at least until 1945. Why he referred to ‘art slides’ in his 1947 letterhead we can only guess – possibly as a marketing ploy for customers with modern projectors although in later advertising he still used the term ‘stereopticon slides’.

Sadly I have only a few of his slides (see Figs 4–7) but these show his dedication to promoting a good, devout and healthy way of life with a strong temperance message. Fig. 4 demonstrates the result of alcohol abuse using the popular device of ‘before’ and ‘after’. The three slides in Fig. 5 show the effects of nicotine poisoning in dramatic style. This was one of his great themes – in the ‘Homer and Betty Peabody Magic Lantern Collection’ there are several of his anti-tobacco slides (Temperance c.1880–1920, Box 1, Folders 1–3). The pair of slides in Fig. 6 contrasts good and evil with ‘murder in movies’ as the bad example and crowned citizens representing the good. The first two slides in Fig. 7 show pictures of the first ever test of an atomic bomb. This took place on 16 July 1945 (the so-called ‘Trinity Test’) in New Mexico USA. The third slide shows the potential effect of an atomic bomb on New York.

The slides are not in particularly good condition but are a record of Albert F. Prieger as a manufacturer of slides and contributor to the history of the magic lantern.

The slides were kindly photographed by Helmut Wälde who also helped with the online research.



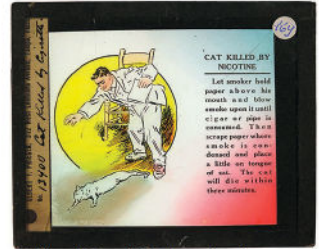
4. The result of alcohol abuse

REFERENCES

1. David Robinson, Stephen Herbert, Richard Crangle (eds), *Encyclopaedia of the Magic Lantern*, the Magic Lantern Society, 2001, London
2. Ibid., Erkki Huhtamo 'Stereopticon lantern', p.292
3. David Berg, *Dad's Show Biz*, <http://pubs.xfamily.org/text.php?t=1359> (for all quotations except the first in this paragraph)
4. *The Ministry*, Vol.13, No.1, January 1940, p.41
5. Ibid., Vol. 26, No.7, July 1953, p.39 and *ibid.*, Vol. 28, No.10, October 1955, p.47
6. Ibid., Vol. 17, No.4, April 1944, p.30
7. *Cumberland Echoes* is an annual publication by Seventh-day Adventist Institutions at Madison, Tennessee
8. See 3 (for all quotations in this paragraph)



5. The effects of nicotine poisoning



6. Examples of 'bad' and 'good'



7. The first atomic bomb test and potential effect on New York

