Connecting and collecting in COVID-19

We hope you and your families are safe, in good health, and you’ve had the opportunity to spend time outside in these fleeting summer months. While many of our AHPCS in-person events are postponed to ensure the end of this pandemic, we keep our eyes on a time in the near future when we will be together again doing what we do best—sharing.

Without minimizing the severity of our current state-of-affairs, we can’t help but see the unique opportunities present. Member institutions, naturally, have risen to the occasion and are providing limitless chances to teach and connect to each other and their rich resources. Learned societies and publications are offering free and discounted subscriptions and use of databases so research can be continued remotely. In-person book fairs have become virtual affairs; conferences and symposiums are exercising use of limitless communication technologies such as Zoom and Google Meet. Now with many states in phased re-openings, our favorite open-air museums and places are available to visit and explore with consideration for the safety and health of communities. Dealers and institutions are in the process of discussing what it is like to sell and preserve complicated history and printed objects through blog and social media feeds. Everywhere members are engaging in important conversations.

In the following pages we will offer a snapshot of what collecting is like in the face of COVID-19 for members and member institutions. Please send stories you would like to share to the editor.

We look forward to sharing simple gestures again—a lunch after a regional meeting, an engaging walk through the halls of a museum, a lively conversation after a scholarly talk. These things are not far away. Until then, stay well and keep sharing.


Reality Check
by Nancy Finlay

I decided to become a print curator many years ago after I got a job working in the Graphics Collection in the Firestone Library at Princeton. I was still a graduate student in the Department of Art and Archaeology and had spent years attending slide lectures, looking at shadowy images of works of art projected on a screen. Suddenly I was confronted with the real thing, with ink and watercolor on paper, with objects that you could hold in your hand that provided a direct connection with the past. I was fascinated with their physicality as objects, not just intellectual concepts. I wanted to spend my life working with these wonderful things. As the internet evolved and expanded during the following decades, it became a wonderful tool for research, and

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An unusual but exciting e-mail was sent to the AHPCS website recently by Dr. Werner Kraus, Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Art in Passau, Germany. He wished to contact me about an article I had written for our News Letter in 2018; Diann Benti forwarded his message and I promptly replied.

Werner (we were quickly on a first name basis) explained that for years he has been researching the transition of Southeast Asian art from traditional to modern, particularly in Indonesia, with focus on a Javanese artist named Raden Saleh (1811-1880). A small part of his research dealt with Saleh’s house, still standing in what is now Jakarta. Werner had found a description written by an American traveler from Boston describing two large engravings decorating the walls, both “frequently seen in our land.” One was “of two figures personifying the past and the future.” Further exquisite research led him, step by step, to a British engraving by Francis Holl of Margaret Gillies’ The Past and the Future, published by Fores in London in 1857.

The Past and the Future figured prominently in an article I wrote for the Spring 2018 issue of the AHPCS News Letter titled “The Lost Companion, Searching for a Missing Lithograph Amongst Carte de Visite Photos” (Vol. 42, No. 4, 6-8). Doing an internet search for the engraving of Margaret Gillies painting, Dr. Kraus had found that article, prompting his contact with me, “a little bridge between the East and the West” as he put it. Our interaction was both delightful and mutually helpful. My starting point had been the Currier & Ives lithographed version of The Past and the Future, which had been based on an 1855 painting by British artist Margaret Gillies (1803-1887). I knew that Gillies’ painting had been made into an engraving, and it was likely in that form that the image crossed the Atlantic, where it was copied by Currier & Ives. I did not know the name of the engraver nor the publisher, but thanks to my fortuitous contact with Werner Kraus, I now had that information.

Neither of us has yet located the actual engraving, and Werner was not sure he had ever seen the image, but I believe I have a photograph of it (Figure 1). Works of art were copied onto 4 by 2 ½ inch carte de visite (CDV) photographs beginning in the 1860s, and the same popularity that led this image to circulate as far afield as the United States and Indonesia saw it reproduced on CDVs. These were often pirated without permission and issued anonymously or with only scanty information about the original. Figure 1 has nothing printed or written on the mount, but the title of the print can be easily read on the photograph. I have multiple examples of this image on CDV, and another has printed on the reverse “The Past and the Future, Miss Margaret Gillies” so this is the correct image. I have provided Dr. Kraus with a high-resolution scan of the CDV for his research. We agreed that ours had been a most pleasant and productive collaboration.

I remained curious as to how he had found my article. Searching “Margaret Gillies, The Past and the Future” on Google and looking at images, I found every illustration from my article, and when I opened each not only did that illustration come up but the entire issue did as well! I am electronically naïve, so I inquired among our leadership and learned that Google crawls websites and then indexes the information that it finds—including our PDF News Letters, which we add to our website soon after publication. Apparently Google gets to work soon after. Sure enough, I searched a far more recent News Letter article I had written in our most recent issue before this one (“Inside the Empty Sleeve,” Vol. 24, No. 4 Spring 2020, 3-5). Though it had been published only two months before, every illustration was on view, and when opened, a PDF of the entire issue appeared. I am grateful to those AHPCS leaders who have successfully pushed for a more meaningful and content filled website. It is paying rewards.

Figure 1: The Past and the Future. Anonymous albumen silver carte de visite (CDV) photograph, ca. 1860s. Mount size 4 by 2 1/2 inches. There is nothing written on the mount, but the title is readable as it appeared on the print that was photographically reproduced on this CDV. Any other writing on the print was too small to be legible. I believe the print shown on this CDV is the 1857 engraving by Francis Holl (1815-1884) of the 1855 painting by Margaret Gillies (1803-1887) The Past and the Future. It was published by London art dealer Fores, 41 Piccadilly, Sheet size 65 by 51 cm. (25 1/2 by 20 inches). Courtesy of James Brust.
**Using Online Prowess for Sharing and Collecting during the Coronavirus**

As the summer continues to unfold, AHPCS dealers are hopeful that this difficult time will bring our communities refreshing new finds, and they are utilizing new venues for doing so. Given the disruptions due to Covid-19, many dealers are making unusual arrangements to deliver orders, and sellers are doing all they can to make accommodations. This changing landscape includes things outside of the challenges of delivery, but backs up into the trials of new simulated conditions for book fairs (which are traditionally social affairs). Dealers are rising to the challenges, and remarking on the successes of things like the new International Fine Print Dealers Association (IFPDA) viewing rooms, which are curated online by members. Dealers and museums are also using social media feeds such as Instagram as outreach tools to educate. Some are hashtagged with variants of “Art Word of the Day” and describe different print processes such as “etching,” “monotype,” “wood engraving,” and “mezzotint,” to inform new audiences.

AHPCS board member Michael Buehler has been ever-thoughtful in providing a snapshot of these early attempts, especially those utilizing online interfaces. He states, “quite a few virtual book fairs have taken place in the past two months, all with at least some number of prints on offer. The Independent Online Booksellers Association (IOBA) held one in May, the ABAA held one in June, as did the ABA in the United Kingdom.” Buehler also highlights Marvin Getman of New York, who had his first event in June. He has been so successful that he is now offering a virtual fair the first Tuesday of the month. If you are interested in exploring more, please see Getman’s YouTube video “How to Visit Getman’s Virtual Fair” which is a video navigation guide. The ABAA reported recently that the Boston Book Fair will be held as a virtual event in the fall (with details forthcoming). Please view the ABAA site for recent information: www.abaa.org. Likewise, the Oakland Book Fair is expected to be virtual in 2021. These coast-to-coast events typically draw in Americana print collectors, and improvements are expected to their online platforms until in-person fairs resume; book and print sellers look forward to sharing these advancements with visitors. As always, dealers enjoy connecting people with material, and are planning on new ways to “see” everyone in the months ahead.

**Would You Like to Host a Virtual Regional Meeting?**

Do you have an idea for a regional meeting? Would you consider moving it (with help) to an online model? We can help! Our regional activities chair, Clayton Lewis would love to hear your thoughts for a regional meeting! Please contact him at: clayclem@umich.edu

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**New Book of Note to Members**

*All About Flowers: James Vick’s Nineteenth-Century Seed Company* by Thomas Mickey on sale Fall 2020 from Ohio University Press.

**Delivery of News Letters**

We received word of delays in the spring issue of the News Letter which was mailed in mid-May. Because of carrier delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic, please note that print issues may take longer than usual to arrive. Electronic issues are available shortly after publication at ahpcs.org/newsletters.

**Success of Online Voting**

During this unusual time, web-based ballot voting was done to make the officers and board of directors available to members. Thank you to everyone who voted online through the e-mailed link; eighty-three ballots were submitted and the slate was approved. Although the election of officers traditionally occurs in-person at the annual business meeting, we consider this a successful virtual event. A special thank you to Mike McKenzie and Diann Benti.
I own a business which sells images of the past. Many of them are decorative or interesting in their own right, but to me one of the most important things about the old prints we sell is that they are historic artifacts. That is, they are evidence from our past, bringing their stories to the present. They tell us not only about the things they show, but also about what was of interest to the public at the time—or at least what their publishers thought would be of interest—and they tell us how the public at the time saw its world.

Past public attitudes are not always ones we agree with, nor even condone, but I have long argued that it is a mistake to ignore or trash historic artifacts that reflect beliefs we do not agree with. As George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” That is, it is crucial for us to learn about our past so that we can try to correct where we have gone wrong. For that reason, even abhorrent historic artifacts should be preserved and studied.

Our modus operandi has always been, that even if I did not agree with what a particular print depicted, we would offer it for sale so that someone interested in it—hopefully for historic reasons—could have access to it. On that basis, though I abhor the social implications of the Currier & Ives Darktown prints, I have felt it appropriate to have my shop offer them for sale. I no longer feel that to be the case.

So, what are the Currier & Ives Darktown prints? They are a series of prints which America’s most successful popular printmaker made from the late 1870s into the 1890s, showing supposedly humorous episodes in Darktown, a segregated community of black Americans. Darktown prints showcased a full array of negative stereotypes of the former slaves who moved north after the Civil War. Portrayed as mentally slow, physically grotesque, and morally oblivious, African Americans were shown as comically inept in their attempts to “play-act” at being white.

Horribly, these prints were among the most popular of all Currier & Ives prints, with one image supposedly selling as many as 73,000 copies. Why that was so and what it means are things worth trying to understand, and there have been institutions and scholars who have approached the Darktown series in this way. I think that is important for our understanding of our past and also of our present to look at these issues.

This then raises the question of why I have decided we would no longer sell the Darktown prints. Certainly, to simply sell such a print is not to advocate for its racist message; we have sold them for many years despite the fact that I think what they show is terrible. As it happens, almost all of the Darktown prints we have sold have been to academic institutions or to African American collectors. Still, I now believe we should not be selling them at all.

The current national reexamination of our society’s racial inequities has made me rethink how we should treat these prints. I have come to believe that even if one does not present them as something one believes, racist images like these should not be presented to the public, except in a clearly restricted historic/educational venue. To have images like these out in public—on display in a shop, at a show or on the internet—creates a social environment which is detrimental to universal racial equality.

The point is that it is not what you mean by selling the prints, it is what they show and how that adds to the negative experience that African Americans have in our society. This is very similar to the issue of the display of Confederate statues in the South, and as I believe those statues should be taken out of public spaces, so too I believe the Darktown prints should be removed from public display. Every image that is out in public showing how in the past Blacks were thought of as inferior adds to the background noise insidiously whispering that they are not equal today. Their display, even if not meant this way, reminds both Blacks and Whites that in the not too distant past it was the social norm that the latter considered themselves to be superior to the former. This, in effect, becomes part of the systemic message of racial inequality that still permeates our country.

We need to effect many changes to bring about true racial equality in our country, both as a society and as individuals, and I think no longer selling or displaying the Darktown prints is something we can do to help, albeit in a small way. On that basis, we are donating all of our current inventory of Darktown prints to scholarly institutions, taking the images out of the general public environment and relegating them to the vaults of historic institutions. This is surely just a small step toward racial equality, but hopefully it is one of many such small steps our society will now be making.
As the summer continues to unfold, AHPCS member libraries are hopeful that this difficult time will bring our community closer, and creative solutions will continue to surface. For some institutions, the answering of research questions can be held when libraries and archives are open again and the stacks can be accessed; however, some libraries are offering tele-reference services utilizing what they can remotely. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused all walks of library-life to come to a standstill—and something as seemingly straightforward as a curatorial exchange of purchase and delivery has become riddled with limited options. Yet curators are taking some small control in an otherwise ambiguous time. Now that many states are in various stages of phased re-openings, there are libraries and archives finding themselves with new trials regarding the acquisition of materials. Undeniably, curators have found these are unprecedented times for acquiring prints. Stephanie Delamaire of the Winterthur Museum and Gardens says that during the spring they were not buying historic prints, “we have a freeze on purchases at this time, like many other institutions. But we can accept donations, although the physical conditions of receiving them are challenging.” Online auctions, which have been a source of material for institutions and individuals, are not too different, though the process (and popularity) has changed. Sarah Weatherwax at the Library Company of Philadelphia observes, “navigating the auction world now takes more time and coordination. Prior to placing bids, I need to contact the auction house to see if there is flexibility in their payment and pick up schedule if the Library Company is the successful bidder.” With staff working remotely, the curators, accountant and director have to organize payment at a distance. Weatherwax notes, “The process has worked for us, but it is certainly more cumbersome than in normal times.” Many places have also been faced with delivery challenges as receiving staff have not been in the building until recently. Despite challenges, “Everyone has been very cooperative about accommodating this. We are all trying to figure out how to make what used to be routine, routine in our new reality,” says Weatherwax.

Above right: The days when we could open packages of prints without the social distancing measures. Image courtesy of the Philadelphia Print Shop West.
In Memoriam: Martin Schneider

By Robert K. Newman

Martin Schneider passed away on June 30, 2020, at age 91. He is survived by his three children and his wife, Rona Schneider. Some of the AHPCS members will remember Martin from our annual meetings and others know Rona as a print dealer, editor of Imprint for many years, and historical print expert, especially the American etching movement.

Martin Schneider was himself a force of nature. He is heralded as a Brooklyn historian and a warrior for urban quality of life, a preservationist of his beloved Brooklyn Heights neighborhood where he and Rona moved in the mid-1950s. He played a role in fighting Robert Moses’ plan to condemn large parts of Brooklyn Heights in the name of “slum clearance.” In 1958 he co-chaired an activist group called “Community Conservation and Improvement Council” which was absorbed into the Brooklyn Heights Association.

Martin was a journalist by training, graduating from Iowa State with a BS in journalism; however, in his professional life he was a public relations expert. He used these skills as tools for his passionate advocacy of preservation. He wrote numerous articles and books on Brooklyn and Brooklyn Heights including Battling for Brooklyn Heights, The fight for New York’s First Historic District published in 2010. His books and articles were often illustrated with historic prints of Brooklyn. In 2010 during the 100th anniversary of the Brooklyn Heights Association, Martin spearheaded an exhibition of prints from the nineteenth and twentieth century that were views of Brooklyn or made by contemporary Brooklyn artists. The show was held at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

Notice of AHPCS member deaths in 2018 and 2019

We have been made aware of two AHPCS member deaths which occurred 2018 and 2019. We apologize for the delay in supplying this information. If you would like to include a notice of death in the News Letter, please contact the editor. William Helfand (d. 2018) longtime AHPCS member and collector of medical related prints and ephemera; Jonathan Flaccus (d. 2019) AHPCS member and committee participant who operated Unique Antique and was a photographer. Full obituaries are available at www.legacy.com (Helfand’s is also on the New York Times website).

Apply for a Shadwell Conservation Grant!

We encourage accredited, non-profit institutions with significant print collections to apply for conservation grants for the preservation of American historical prints. An American historical print is defined as an American print over 100-years-old. Applicants must be members of the AHPCS. This program is made possible through bequest funds from Wendy Shadwell, past president of the AHPCS. For more information and applications, as well as for information on joining AHPCS, please refer to the AHPCS website: www.ahpcs.org or contact Roger Genser, Chairperson, Shadwell Print Conservation Subcommittee, PO Box 5133, Santa Monica, CA 90409 (or email genserprints@verizon.net).
New Resource of Note to Members

Recently, AHPCS member Kevin Lynch released a website devoted to sheet music: www.firstepoch.com. The focus is on images, lithographic art and social anthropology. There are two galleries to explore and other images scattered through the site (about 75 in all), each from the Lynch Archives. Kevin has dated the music in the captions and added information for each in addition to the ability to enlarge images, Kevin will offer a walkthrough of the website on September 18 (see below).

The following submission (left) for medical/pandemic images (from the Spring 2020 News Letter) is also from Lynch. The image is a sheet music title page called “Remember the Poor Sufferers in the South.” It was published in 1878 in New York’s “Family Story Paper.” It asks for compassion for the extensive losses from the 1873 and 1878 Yellow Fever (Yellow Jack) epidemics in the Ohio River Valley, Memphis, Tennessee and Louisiana. In 1873, Shreveport, Louisiana lost up to 25% of its population. The lyric states, “See the Ruthless Fever King/With his Flashing Yellow Wing.”

If you would like to submit other medical or pandemic images, please e-mail them to the editor and we will feature them in upcoming issues.

Pack your bags for virtual programming opportunities!

Many of our member institutions are offering online programs through platforms such as YouTube and Zoom. Some examples of institutions we’ve “explored” recently include the National Gallery of Art, the Florence Griswold Museum, the American Antiquarian Society and the “Virtual” Smithsonian site.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Clements Library has been hosting “The Clements Bookworm: Online Event(s) for History Lovers” (available at clements.umich.edu/public-programs/bookworm). Stephanie Delamarie will lead an event on Fanny Palmer on August 7 (look for a recap in the fall News Letter). Please mark your calendars for a Clements Bookworm Zoom session on September 18 at 10:00 a.m. when AHPCS member Kevin Lynch (see article above) will discuss his website www.firstepoch.com. Kevin is known for his emphasis on the illustrated lithograph covers within his collection and his knowledge of the publishers and artists who produced them.

The summer months have seen series of virtual events on photographic history at the Clements, but the fall may include talks in the print-collecting arena. Stay tuned to the website and e-mail updates as we develop these exciting online programs!

We’re changing our address!

We are in the process of moving our headquarters from 94 Marine Street, Farmingdale, NY to 150 Lexington Avenue, New York City. Robert Newman will be taking charge of our inventory and archives along with all of the associated functions that have been handled so ably for so long by John Zak. Vendors and others with official business with the AHPCS should write to: The American Historical Print Collectors Society, 150 Lexington Avenue, New York NY 10016. Thank you, John for all of your labors on behalf of the AHPCS and thank you, Robert, for so generously offering to take on these added responsibilities.
In the past few issues of the News Letter we have looked at prints from both the 1820s and the 1920s; in this issue we consider not a print per se, but a vision of an image. In a potato field in 1920, a farm boy name Philo Farnsworth had a brainstorm—he saw in the parallel rows of overturned earth a way to “make pictures fly through the air.” One hundred years later, Farnsworth’s idea-turned-reality, the television, would offer one way people could view images of the world. Throughout the pandemic, people have been connecting with each other through these refined inventions and screens. Although images today are digital, not made up of lines as in the original, our debt to the inventor remains the same. In the summer News Letter we considered how we have utilized screens to interact in 2020 with some of our favorite things: historic American prints. If you have a print or idea you would like to submit from the 1820s or 1920s, please contact the editor.