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Pease's Great Variety Store and America's First Christmas Card

BY THOMAS NELSON

The Pease family was a veritable dynasty in the mid-nineteenth-century world of New England and New York publishing, with brothers, uncles, fathers and sons participating in publishing and illustrating (on copper and the lithograph stone). But Richard H. Pease (1813-1891), is striking for his rise from a penniless boarder at his aunt's house in Albany, New York, to amassing a business empire that included: publishing "toy books" and other books for children, commissioning a modern state-of-the-art retail store from Albany's leading architect (the so-called "Temple of Fancy"), and purchasing one of the largest agricultural supply houses in upstate New York. His genius for retail also recognized that many people seemed to be in the buying mood around the winter holidays, especially for non-essential "fancy" goods.

Early Pease Enterprise

Child's Albany City Directory for 1834 lists Richard H. Pease as a "wood engraver," and his first cousin, Erastus H. Pease (1807-?) as an "accountant." Erastus opened the Sunday School Depository and Theological Bookstore at 82 State Street by 1835, and Richard opened Pease's Circulating Library at 291 North Market Street. For the next three decades, the two businesses dealt in similar printing products and other goods supplying the rapidly growing urban populace of Albany. Albany City directories of the 1830s and 1840s, as well as newspaper advertisements, indicate that although they owned similar businesses - engraving, library services, or book selling - the Pease cousins were apparently not in competition. Erastus concentrated principally on printing and publishing school books and religious titles, while Richard limited himself to wood engraving and publishing books of general interest.

In 1839 Richard moved to 307 North Market Street, and by 1840 the address, due to a street name change, is listed as 50 Broadway (figure 2). In 1843 he changed the name of his business to (rented) Pease's Great Variety Store (occasionally Leviathan Variety Store), and began to sell all manner of



Figure 1. *Lithographic Establishment of Harry E. Pease. Advertisement from The Albany City Directory for the Year 1859. This is one of the last prints showing the Temple of Fancy at 516 & 518 Broadway in 1859, four years after R. H. Pease closed his "Great Variety Store." Note that the address is 518. The building had two entrances; 516 used for the store and 518 for the lithography business upstairs. To this day the two entrances can still be seen, although only the address 518 is used. The attic floor and the arched windows above the 4th floor were removed. [Albany Institute of History & Art, 1984.15.4]*

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Dear Members and Friends:

This last year has gone by all too fast, but we enjoyed so many wonderful moments, culminating with our exceptional September meeting in Washington, DC. As we enter a New Year, I invite you all to become more involved and reap the many benefits we offer. From the joys of meeting people with mutual interests, to the unique experiences we offer, and the numerous connections related to research and collecting, the Ephemera Society of America should be your home base! You will find that our website is a formidable asset, and the Facebook page provides a dynamic resource for news, events, great links, and friendship. Keep us on your phone, on your computer, and in your hearts, and let us be your essential guide.

Ephemera is now widely recognized as complementary to numerous areas of study, and is respected for being essential primary resource material. We appreciate members' contributions to our Journal, our exhibits, and our programs, which have greatly enhanced our visibility, and help us fulfill our educational mission.

In October, I attended the National Colloquium on Special Library Collections, in Cleveland, Ohio. *Acknowledging the Past—Forging the Future*, proved to be a most rewarding opportunity to network with an important community dedicated to the material we cherish, and the digital future.

The Boston Antiquarian Book Fair provided another awesome opportunity to spread our message and encourage membership. The Ticknor Society Collectors' Roundtable focused on *Ephemera!* so we had starring roles at a book fair! Our table was active, and many who were unfamiliar with us, came to realize that they were actually ephemera collectors!

Another wonderful season of ephemera is now presented before you, as two major events are designed to appeal to all. *First*, March 20-22, 2015, is *Ephemera 35 – Conference and Fair – The Sporting Life*; details may be found on our website. Our famed scholarly Conference includes incomparable speakers, and the stellar Fair is always the best in the country. A banquet, an auction, a book signing, and such camaraderie! Speakers and attendees come from far and wide—so please put Old Greenwich, CT into your navigation device, and accept this invitation to our popular welcoming cocktail party on Thursday evening.

Secondly, May is the ideal time to time be in London! The Ephemera Society (UK) has created a special anniversary tour for us, in honor of their 40th and our 35th anniversaries. Two weeks of astounding, exclusive events, starting May 18, and culminating with the Olympia Book Fair, will tempt and excite, but you need not stay the entire time, if that is impossible. There will, however, be an exceptional award banquet on Thursday, May 21, and we definitely hope to see you there. The reservation form is on our website.

Sincerely,



Nancy Rosin, President

ESA Members

Notify us if you are not receiving the monthly eNews:

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The British are Excited!

The Americans are Coming! (shouldn't you be one?)

Ephemerists across the Atlantic have put an enormous effort into organizing special events for us – “back stage” tours available to no one else of The Bodleian Library, The Wimbledon collection, The Victoria and Albert Museum, the Museum of London; elegant receptions at Armourer’s Hall and the College of Arms; a banquet at the National Liberal Club to celebrate their 40th anniversary and our 35th, where we, as a Society, will be honored with their highest award. Not to mention free entrance to two book fairs and two ephemera fairs, and the chance to attend other events – and opportunities to shop ... even at Selfridges!

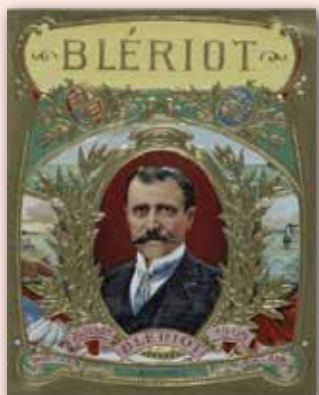


Figure 1: Louis Charles Blériot made the first flight across the English Channel in a heavier than air aircraft, winning a thousand pound prize offered by the Daily Mail – which was criticized for just garnering cheap publicity (as was the fictional Selfridge in exhibiting Blériot and his plane in Episode 2) [cigar box label].

Figure 2: Ernest Shackleton would have just returned from his second expedition to the Antarctic in 1909, having missed the South Pole by just 97 geographical miles. He was lionized by the press and would produce a documentary film with early Edison equipment – making his illustrated lecture at Selfridges for Episode 9 believable [cigarette card].



Figure 3: King Edward VII was crowned in 1901, and he and Queen Alexandra would have been familiar to British shoppers from ephemera as humble as matchboxes – though his appearance at Selfridges would have been as exotic (both to him and the staff) as the drama interpreted in Episode 10. [matchbox label]

In this Issue...

Where we buy goods, and how, is the theme of this issue – inspired by the 2013 Masterpiece television drama *Mr. Selfridge*, based on the life of Harry Gordon Selfridge, who brought American-style merchandising to London. The drama’s first season was designed to resemble life in 1909 England – with Selfridges department store mounting elaborate window decoration much as Selfridge had done at Chicago’s Marshall Field’s. The focus for many of the first episodes was on events in the forefront of the news, and subjects of contemporary ephemera.

Tom Nelson’s article on Pease’s Great Variety Store introduces the mid-19th century retail store stocked with a mixture of goods – successful largely because of the entrepreneurial promotion of its founder. Emily Orr takes up the theme of modernization of American shopping with her piece on merchandise display in department stores (such as Marshall Field’s where Selfridge trained). Bringing the ‘classic’ American department store into the late 20th century is Florence Jumonville’s overview of the arc of three mercantiles in New Orleans. Amy Sopcak-Joseph’s dissertation-in-progress piece on *Godey’s Lady’s Book* illuminates one way in which Americans without access to a store like Pease’s were encouraged to shop by mail, even before the huge ‘catalog’ stores such as Montgomery Ward and Sears.

—Diane DeBlois, editor



Figure 2. Advertisement from Munsell's Albany Directory and City Register From 1852-53, Albany, J. Munsell 58 State Street, 1852. A full-page, illustrating the showroom interior of the Temple of Fancy as it looked in 1852, and listing the types of items offered. The Great Variety Store occupied the street level space while the upper floors contained the printing shop. [Albany Institute of History & Art Library]

household goods, as well as children's books and games. The Pease businesses thrived in Albany during the middle

years of the nineteenth century, with Richard's expanding into massive publications such as the *Natural History of the State of New York* (1842-66), which has hundreds of engravings, *The Agriculture of New York State* (1848), and *The Documentary History of the State of New York* (1852). Richard sought the assistance of his brother Joseph Ives Pease (1809-1883) for the hand-coloring of the delicately rendered lithographs in *The Agriculture of New York State*, written by Ebenezer Emmons (1799-1863). There was also a ready American market at this time for picturesque views of all types, as well as portraits, genre scenes, and other subjects which people could display in their homes. Richard Pease is well known today for his large and detailed lithographs of urban views (figure 3).

Printing for Children

Before the Civil War, a 'cult of domesticity' helped shaped life in the American home, and likewise the lives of women.¹ Increasingly, men worked in shops, offices, and factories, removing more from the home, leaving women in charge of maintaining domestic affairs, and rearing and instructing



Figure 3. Albany Exchange and Museum. Drawn by Benjamin Smith (1830-1927), lithograph on paper by Richard H. Pease, 1846. This view, printed by Pease during the year his lithographic shop was at 510 Broadway, offers a glimpse into everyday life in downtown Albany at mid-nineteenth century. Pease engraved and printed his own books and prints, as well as providing printing services for other artists, such as Benjamin Smith in this example. One year later Pease moved his Great Variety Store to 516-518 Broadway, one and a half blocks north of this intersection of State Street and Broadway. [Albany Institute of History & Art, bequest of Ledyard Cogswell, Jr., 1954.59.199]

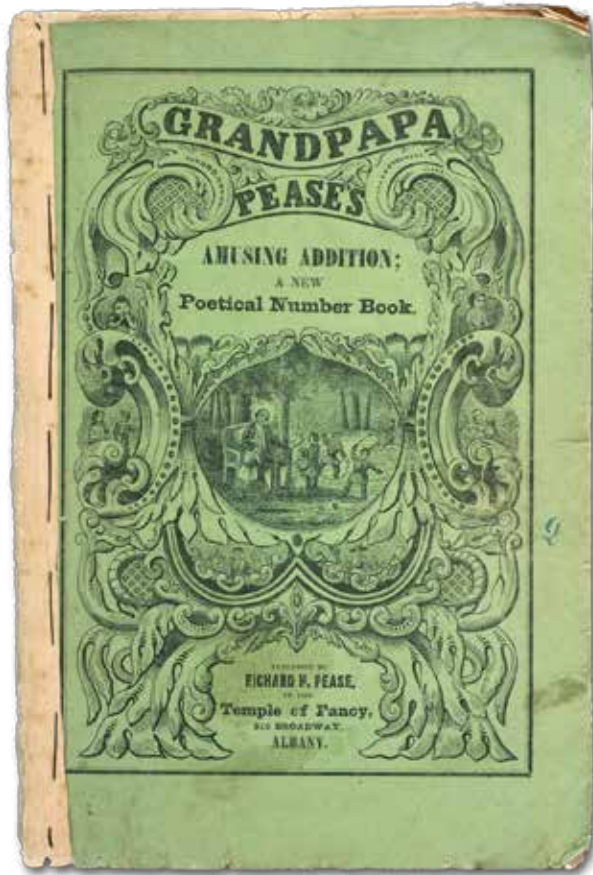


Figure 4. Grandpapa Pease's Amusing Addition. Printed booklet, published by Richard H. Pease, ca.1850. [Albany Institute of History & Art Library]

the children. Retail stores, like Pease's, catered to this feminine market, providing educational toys and books as well as other domestic goods.

In the list of books and games for the young on the back cover of *Grandpapa Pease's Amusing Addition*, Richard lists 53 titles, almost all fit within traditional children's literary genre (figure 4). In *The History of Goody Two-Shoes*, for example, published by Richard around 1845, a poor orphan girl named Margery Meanwell goes through life with only one shoe. When she is given a complete pair by a rich gentleman, she happily tells everyone that she at last has "two shoes." The girl grows up to become a teacher and marries a rich widower. It is a variation of the Cinderella story where virtue is rewarded (figure 5). *The Ladder to Learning* (1852, figure 6), is intended to help teach the basic phonetics of the alphabet, while *Amusing Additions* (ca.1850), uses clever rhymes to teach math. Erastus, not to be outdone by Richard, also published illustrated juvenile books under the banner, also sometimes under the title, of "Grandpapa Pease's."

Pease's Great Variety Store

The 1844 edition of *Wilson's Albany City Guide* describes Pease's Great Variety Store in abundant detail: "For richness and extensive variety of novelties, combining

the beautiful, the useful and the ornamental, this establishment excels any in town. Mr. P. has many fancy articles which are surpassingly rich; exceeding anything in elegance, that we have ever thought, dreamed or read of. All the powers of the Parisian artist seem to have been brought into requisition to cater for the establishment. Ladies' rich portable writing desks, gentlemen and ladies' toilet cases, gentlemen's walking sticks with an umbrella folded inside, so as to answer for the purpose of a walking stick and umbrella, and every variety of walking canes. The ladies will find every thing pertaining to their toilets, with rich bead purses, work bags, etc. to the rich Berlin iron goods we would cite their special notice. His perfumeries exceed any assortment in the city, having over 100 varieties of different extracts. The Odd Fellows will find every variety of the different emblematic devices used at their lodges, with tassels, fringes, stars, etc. A rich assortment of French jewelry and steel ornaments. Gentlemen will find every variety of soaps, etc. for their toilets, such as dressing combs, brushes, tooth brushes, curling tongs, tweezers, etc. toilet

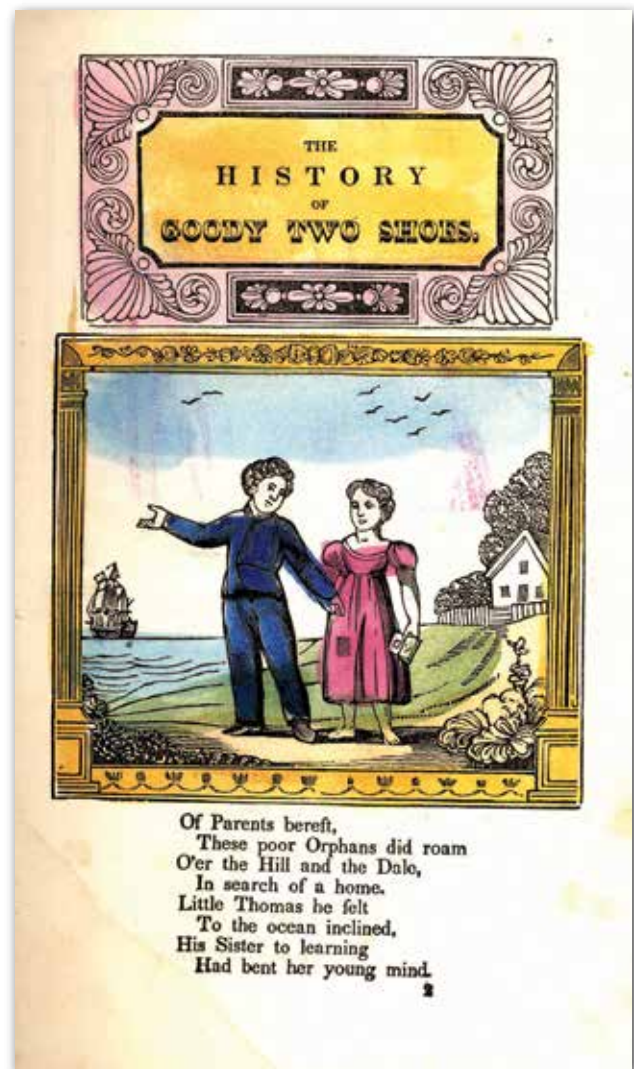


Figure 5. Page from *The History of Goody Two-Shoes*, published by R. H. Pease, ca.1840-47. [Albany Institute of History & Art Library]

mirrors in great variety. His assortment never has been so rich and desirable as at the present time, and the facilities he is able at all times to command, enable him to put them to his customers at much less than former prices, at wholesale and retail." The guide goes on to say that "Mr. Pease also executes wood engraving in a superior style; specimens may be seen all over this city, as well as some of his work."

In 1847, Richard opened the Great Variety Store at 516 Broadway, in a building that he commissioned and called the Temple of Fancy (perhaps inspired by the well-known London retail store of the same name). Richard engaged William L. Wollett (1815-1874),² a leading Albany architect, to design the edifice, still distinguished by four colossal pilasters, ample windows, and space on the upper three floors for, originally, his, and later his son's, lithography and engraving business. The Great Variety Store occupied the entire ground floor (figure 1). Of all the commercial buildings once associated with Richard H. Pease, 516 Broadway is the only one still standing. This fashionable location close to State Street—the cultural center of Albany of the time—allowed Richard to take advantage of Albany's burgeoning carriage trade.

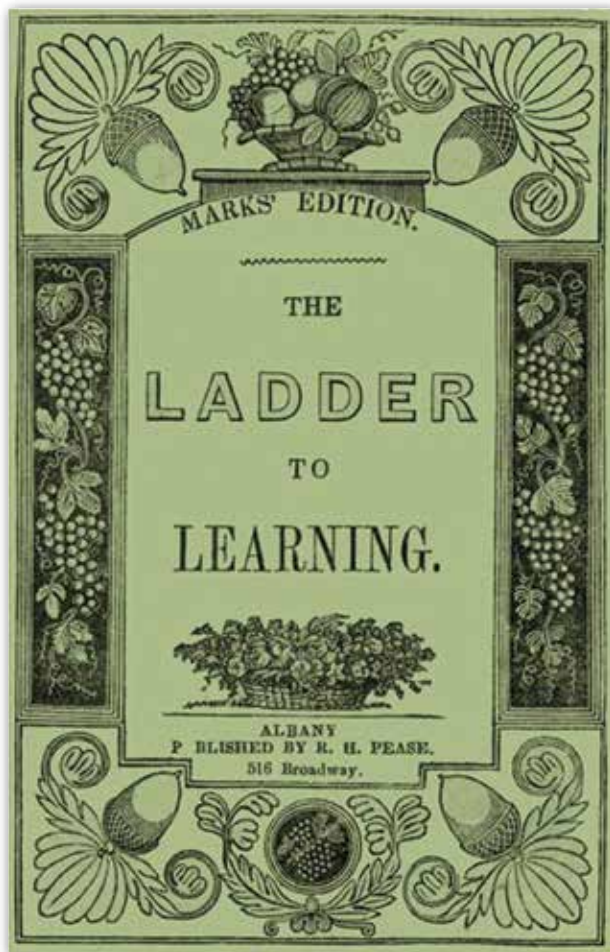


Figure 6. The Ladder to Learning, Mark's Edition, published by R. H. Pease, 1852. By "Miss. Lovechild," possibly a pseudonym of R. H. Pease. [Image courtesy of the Library of the University of Florida]

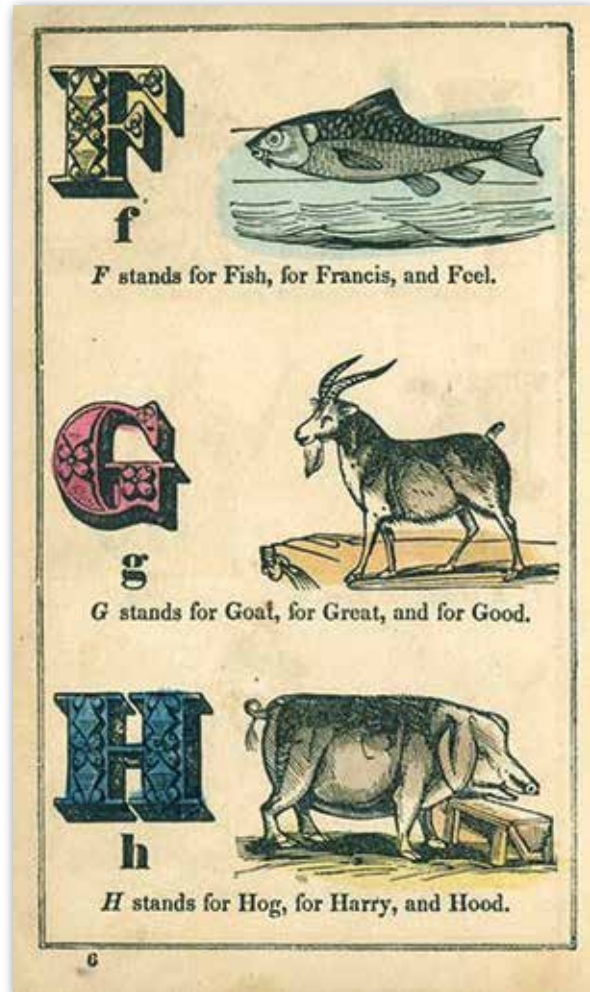


Figure 7. Page from The Ladder to Learning, Albany Edition, ca. 1860. W. B. Sprague, Jr., 51 Broadway, Albany, NY. Published after the closing of R. H. Pease's establishment, when many of the children's books he printed were continued by other publishers. [Albany Institute of History & Art Library]

America's First Christmas Card

In 1842, two years after he opened his store at 50 Broadway, Richard ran a large advertisement in the *Albany Evening Journal*, showing Santa Claus with a pack of toys on his back (figure 8). The pack is inscribed "From Pease's / 50 Broadway." According to the text below the image, Santa Claus is "in the act of descending a chimney to fill the children's stockings, after supplying himself with fancy articles, stationary, cutlery, perfumery, games, toys, etc. at Pease's Great Variety Store, No. 50 Broadway ..." This Dutch-looking, early Santa was taken from a wood block print that had appeared one year earlier in the weekly New York newspapers *Brother Jonathan* and *The New-York Mirror*, drawn by R. Roberts (d. 1850).³ Roberts's original illustration of Santa was created without commercial intent, but Richard usurped it and used the image to endorse his business. Apparently Richard purchased the original printing block and altered it by carving the

name of his store on Santa's pack. This advertisement is acknowledged today as the first use of an image of Santa Claus for commercial purposes.

Meanwhile, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843 (and available in America shortly thereafter in several bootlegged editions), significantly redefined the importance of Christmas on both sides of the Atlantic, and instilled in it a spirit of charity and good will.⁴ While Dickens's book popularized Christmas, it also set the stage for the commercialization of the holiday in combining the sacred and the secular. Pease was among the earliest, if not the first, merchant in America to use the Christmas holiday to market his business. In 1851 (possibly 1850), Pease added another first to his list by publishing what is today acknowledged as the first commercially-printed Christmas card in America. The idea was most likely inspired by the card designed by John Callcott Horsley (1817-1903) and printed in London in 1843 (the card acknowledged to be the very first, of which 18 copies are known to exist, verses only one copy of the Pease card to survive).⁵

Pease's card (figure 10) has a holly-decorated banner surrounding the words "Pease's Great Varetly [sic] Store in the Temple of Fancy." An image of this building shares space with a small Santa, a ballroom with dancers, and an array of Christmas presents, tablewares, and appropriate libation. In the center a young couple celebrates with their three children. Below the greeting, "A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year," appear the words "To" and "From" with spaces to be



Figure 8. Advertisement from the Albany Evening Journal, December 17, 1842. Richard Pease most likely purchased the original wood block, and reduced it to the figure of Santa. He added "From Pease's/50 Broadway" on Santa's pack. [Image courtesy of FultonHistory.com c1991-2011]

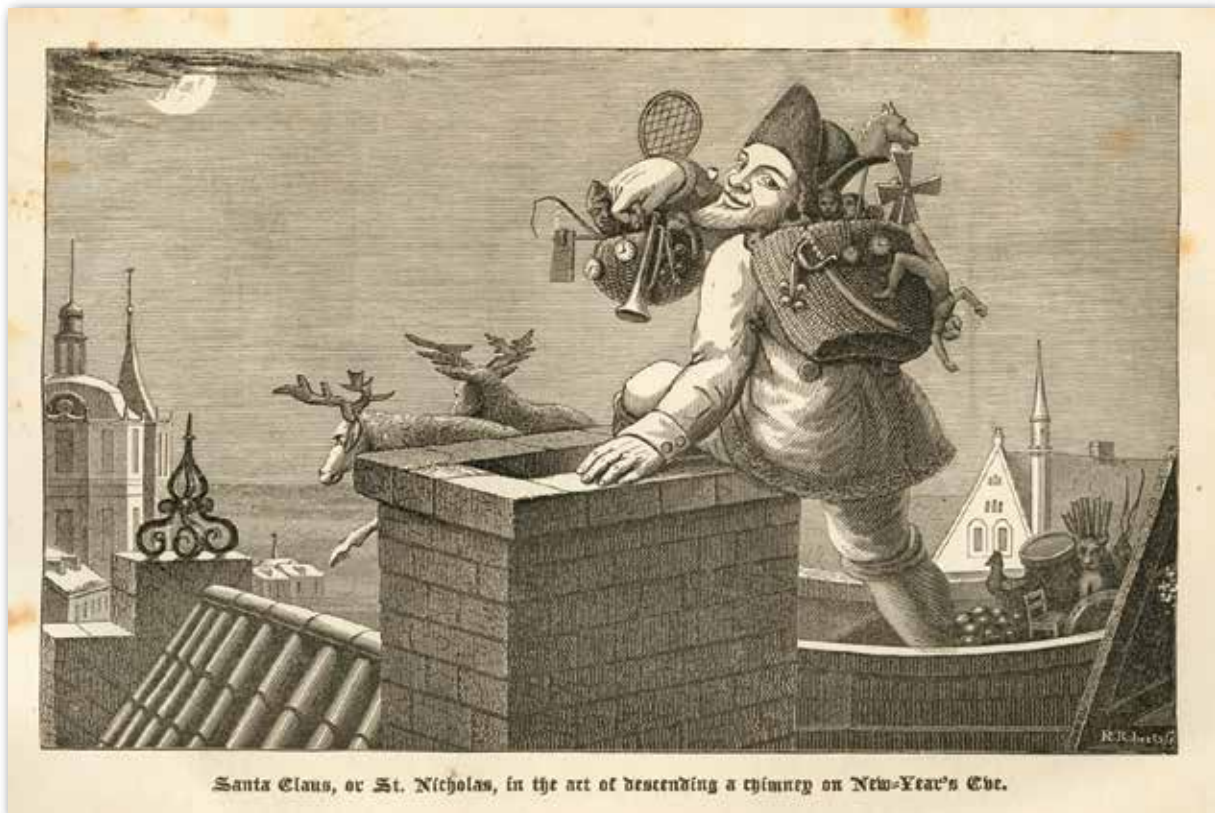


Figure 9. Wood engraving, by "R. Roberts," The New-York Mirror, 1841.

personalized by the sender. The card is printed on high quality, white pigment-coated glossy paper.⁶ The delineator of this card, Elisha Forbes, collaborated with Richard on several prints—scenes, illustrations and advertisements, and is listed as an engraver in the Albany Directories from 1842 until 1852. What part he played in the actual design of the Albany card is speculative.

Waning of the Pease Empire

Richard's final business effort in Albany was his purchase of the stock of farm implements, machinery, and seeds from the Albany Agricultural Warehouse in February 1855, when he closed his Great Variety Store and sold the remaining stock. Harry E. Pease took over his father's printing business around that time. The books and games were acquired by Hoffman, Knickerbocker & Co., who continued manufacturing, publishing, and vending the games, alphabets, and "toy books" under a new name (figure 7). Richard's son Harry was at first a partner in this concern, but by 1857, he established his own printing business in the Temple of Fancy. Numerous high quality prints bearing his name point to his success. By 1860 the agricultural works was transferred to Richard's son Charles E. Pease (1838-1886). Both the Pease family businesses in Albany—farm machinery and printing—came to a close around 1861 when Charles and his brother Harry closed their respective concerns, and went to war. Richard's cousin Erastus Pease continued his book-selling business (also paper supply business after 1855) until 1872.

Records for the activities of Richard and his son Harry are scarce after 1863. There is evidence that they moved to New York City where they worked in a printing shop at 87 Liberty Street in 1869 (apparently not their own shop). Other than a mention in a published genealogy of that year, and a New York City directory for 1872, which lists Richard as an engraver on wood and Harry as a printer, both living at 137 East 49th Street—nothing bearing their names is known from this period.⁷ Suffice it to say, for a time, father and son were at work again as printers.

Richard Pease's children's books were produced and remembered long after he left the city; for many years, other publishers used his banner title "Grandpapa Pease's," thus helping to perpetuate an Albany tradition.

Endnotes

¹ Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977).

² Walter Richard Wheeler, (author) Diana S. Waite (editor)



Figure 10. America's First Christmas Card. This card is believed to have been printed for the 1850-51 Christmas season, two years after Pease moved his store into the Temple of Fancy. It is an original design and predates the printed 1875 Christmas card produced in Boston (by Louis Prang 1824-1909), by some twenty-five years. The fact that it has space for "to" and "from" means this card was to be used by the consumer. Whether it was sold or given out by the store is a matter of conjecture. Prior to this card (and possibly another, slightly later, one from Philadelphia), anyone wishing to send a Christmas greeting would make a card by hand. [Courtesy of Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections, Manchester, England]

Architects in Albany, Mount Ida Press and Historic Albany Foundation, 2009.

³ John Grossman, *Curiosities, Odd, Dark, and Forgotten Christmas* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2008).

⁴ Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Vintage Press, 1997)

⁵ George Buday, *The History of the Christmas Card*, (London: Spring Books, 1954).

⁶ Laura Seddon, *A Gallery of Greetings: a guide to the Seddon Collection of Greeting Cards in Manchester Polytechnic Library* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Metropolitan University Library, 1990).

⁷ *Trow's New York City Directory* (New York: John F. Trow, Publisher, 1872).



Tom Nelson is an Exhibitions/Graphics Designer at the Albany Institute of History and Art, and, under contract, has designed exhibits throughout the Capitol District of New York (for instance, at the Pruyn House, Olana, NYS Thruway rest stops). He is also a landscape painter, exhibiting with, for instance, the Gerald Peters Gallery in New York. This article was, in part, prepared in conjunction with a 2011-2012 exhibit at the Albany Institute, the preparation for which included help from two Society members, Dennis Holzman (for Pease ephemera) and Anne O'Donnell (for Christmas card interpretation).

Designing “A Show-Place for Visitors” *Merchandise Display in the Early American Department Store*

BY EMILY M. ORR

Sophisticated visual merchandising tactics propelled the American department store’s rise beginning in the late nineteenth century. Investment in thoughtfully designed casework, lighting, and flexible fixtures as well as the application of a clever layout of merchandise modernized the appearance and optimized the experience of shopping on a grand scale. The work of display professionals including window dressers, shopfitters, and interior decorators guided visitors’ movement and vision through the department store. This article will explore how displays alternately focused and expanded consumers’ attention on wares in order to create a dynamic and variable shopping experience that marked the department store as modern. As consumers became increasingly attuned to not only what the stores were selling but also how they were selling it, display design constituted a key point of competition among businesses.

Promotional material produced by department stores as well as catalogues printed by shopfitters importantly documented the material culture of display at the turn of the twentieth century. Through word and image this ephemera demonstrated the favorable commercial impact of good display design. Leading stores described and pictured their signature settings in advertising materials that drew consumer attention to the details of the staging and context for goods on offer. For instance Marshall Field’s produced a series of color postcards that offered enticing interior views of departmental layouts (figure 1). A pamphlet distributed by Field’s in the 1920s described how the store’s emphasis on an appealing environment turned the “merchandising house” into “a world of romance – a permanent yet ever-changing exposition, a show-place for visitors...”¹ Field’s sophisticated setting therefore elevated their interior beyond just a mundane place of business to a “show-place” worthy of close observation. Field’s publicized their interior design as “one of the marvels of the merchandising world.”²

Manufacturers advertised the shopfittings, new technologies, and business strategies that produced these new interior designs. They presented these tools as effective in economizing space and facilitating better business. Pittsburgh-based W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co. advised that their “unit system” guaranteed an “orderliness in planning or the correct placing of departments” that was the “secret of dispatch and quick handling in retail business.”³ Successful visual merchandising therefore accomplished both artistic and



Figure 1. Postcard, “A Portion of the Rug Department, Marshall Field & Co, Retail, Chicago.” Printed by V.O. Hammon Publishing Co., Chicago, ca.1908. [Courtesy Illinois Digital Archives]

commercial goals for the department store by attracting and impressing visitors as well as directly enabling sales.

Professional Development

George S. Cole’s *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods* (1892), one of the first American texts with guidelines on window display, advised, “To clerks seeking advancement in mercantile life, no surer passport to success is to be formed than to be able to appropriately trim windows.”⁴ Cole rightly identified window dressing as a promising and maturing profession at the end of the nineteenth century. Window dressing quickly earned recognition as a creative vocation with a literature of its own and an education system, both in-store as well as through courses offered at commercial art schools and correspondence schools. In 1897 author L. Frank Baum launched *The Show Window*, the first American magazine entirely devoted to merchandise display, and a year later he founded the National Association of Window Trimmers. The organization’s first annual meeting was held in Chicago in August 1898 and by 1900 the organization had members in almost every state.⁵ In 1902, one American newspaper identified the window dressing field as “one of the few occupations that are not overcrowded,” encouraging ambitious young men to consider giving it a try.⁶

In the early twentieth century as the public’s expectation for dramatic presentation grew and retail manuals and trade periodicals encouraged a theatrical setup of wares beyond the window space, the window dressers’ role expanded accordingly to encompass

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Figure 2. Model of Abraham & Straus Department Store, ca.1894. [Hagley Museum and Library 1996.205]

the interior. The window dressers' influence over more territory in the department store bolstered their professional development and spoke to the growing importance of display in the stores' business model. Small-scale displays on top of casework or shelving on the sales floor borrowed layouts directly from the window and provided visual continuity. Skills such as the mastery of color theory and knowledge of textile properties applied in both the window and the interior. In 1914 the National Association of Window Trimmers

changed their name to the International Association of Displaymen thus indicating the trade's technical and global expansion. Years later in 1927, the International Association of Display Men's yearbook identified four major aims that solidified the role: "To Advance the Art of Artistic Displays of Merchandise; Modern and Convenient Arrangement of Stores and Show Windows; Economical and Effective Ways of Lighting; Attractive Signs and Show Cards."⁷ From the small-scale show card and contained arrangement of the show window to large-scale effects of lighting and overall concerns of convenience, the display man's responsibilities developed to encompass a diverse scope of tasks.

The Show Window

The show window was the primary medium through which the department store first reached out to the public and as such the window display was valued as a stylistic statement that could be read by consumers for evidence of the quality and personality of the business that it advertised. Beginning in the nineteenth century plate glass was synonymous with progress. Large windows became a recognizable element of the city experience, a priority in the building program of the department store, and set up a new public exhibition space for the viewing of material goods. On the exterior continuous show windows



Figure 3. Window Display Fixtures That Are Dependable (Chicago: Artistic Wood Turning Works, ca.1915), 11.

communicated order through their linear placement and variety through their colorful displays, as seen in the cast-iron façade of the Brooklyn department store Abraham and Straus (figure 2). This frontal view illustrated the cover of an elaborate mailing sent out by the store at Christmastime in about 1894. Consumers became acquainted with the scale and appearance of the storefront through such publicity. Then the display dressed the façade and further helped the consumer to identify one store from the next.

George Rooney, Display Manager at Abraham and Straus in the 1920s, timed the unveiling of new show windows with the concentration of sidewalk traffic in the evening when the public was out enjoying other city amusements. As author William Nelson Taft described in *The Handbook of Window Display* (1926):

“Mr. Rooney and his staff begin to change their windows about 4:30 in the afternoon, an hour before the store closes. The work continued until possibly 6 or 6:30 PM. In this way, Mr. Rooney believes that, while the changes are being made, he strikes the masses as they are hurrying home with little thought of a window display on their mind and, later in the evening when the change has been completed, the crowds leaving their homes to go to the theatres, moving pictures or other amusements are attracted to the beautiful and fresh window settings.”⁸

Frequent alteration and well-timed reconfiguration of the window’s contents built a continually responsive consumer market that was alert to the method of presentation as well as to the new merchandise on offer. The changeable work of the window dressers’ conditioned the public’s curiosity for new display and set up the show window as an area of focused merchandise presentation.

A department store display director might have browsed through a shopfitting catalogue for fixtures to update his windows just as a customer might have examined a department store catalogue for new merchandise; each publication was divided by object type. Shopfitters aided the department store to encourage customers to think

categorically about the merchandise by manufacturing particular forms to suit the wares. For instance, the shopfitting manufacturer Artistic Wood Turning Works, based in Chicago, produced a series of stands for shirts, collars, and canes to make up the ideal menswear window (figure 3). These forms arranged the merchandise for close consumer examination in the window or atop casework on the salesfloor.

Guidebooks and manufacturers continuously proclaimed that the proper use of these fixtures could significantly amplify the selling power of display. As Artistic Wood Turning Works’s slogan promised, “The Clever Window Catches the Nimble Dollar.” The introductory page to their catalogue attested that “The value of appropriate, magnetic windows is recognized by merchants whose annual turnover runs into millions. They itemize their display space as a ‘selling force.’”⁹ Manufacturers championed the integral role of their products in the completion of sales and in the visual upkeep of the store. As the Chicago-based manufacturer A.W. Shaw asserted, “The tendency towards better equipment was never more marked than it is today. Most merchants consider expenditures for better equipment as investments that are sure to bring returns.”¹⁰

Modern lighting effects were also essential in attracting passersby towards the window and facilitating accurate viewing of the goods for sale. In 1914 the journal *The Grand Rapids Furniture Record* published a compilation on window displays for furniture that answered appeals from “merchants who were building new stores, rebuilding old ones, or were beginning to realize how important a factor good lighting is in the success of any store.”¹¹ Room displays such as those included in *The Furniture Show Window* presented a professional vision of the domestic interior and signaled the window as a site of design education. One guidebook encouraged as early as 1891 that “There is no doubt that taste in dress and decoration has been freely cultivated by good

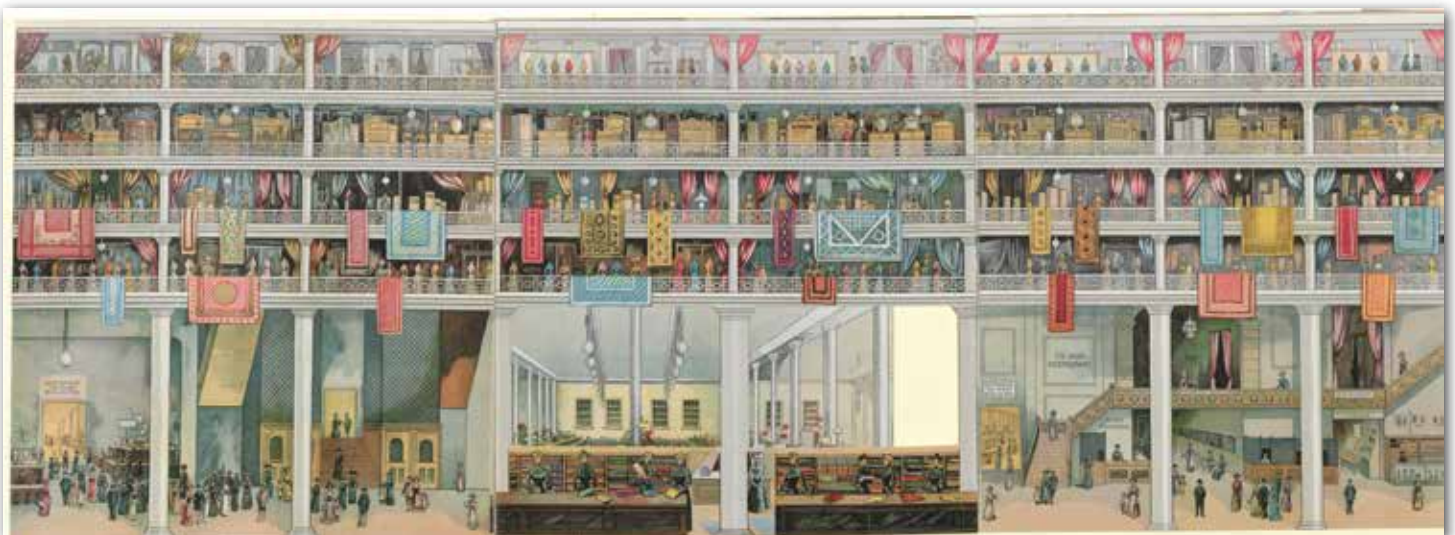


Figure 4. Model in Figure 2, opened.



Figure 5. Postcard, "Marshall Field & Company, Retail Store. State Street Aisle. 358 Feet Long." Printed by V. O. Hammon Publishing Company, Chicago, ca.1908. [Courtesy Illinois Digital Archives]

window dressing... Windows permit persons who are unfamiliar with prevailing fashion to learn what articles are being used without exposing their ignorance of styles to the salesmen. These persons become easier buyers."¹² Therefore the window dressers fashioned displays complete with up-to-date fixtures and lighting that had the power to not only advertise new merchandise but also to turn passersby into educated consumers.

The Sales Floor

When the visitor stepped off of the sidewalk and onto the ground floor of the department store, their attention shifted from close looking at individual items in the window to a vast panoramic view of a great range of well organized and artfully presented goods. Abraham and Straus's "Model Department Store" mailing, with its façade on the cover, unfolded to reveal an impressive vista (figure 4). Although captured here as a flat image, the model can stand open and upright to show layers of seemingly endless aisles that extended back from the front set of casework while three bays of merchandise wrapped around each side to form a trapezoidal sales floor. In the foreground, salesgirls unrolled textiles at the haberdashery counter and to the left and right handkerchiefs and gloves hung from case-top fixtures. The eye could travel upwards to catch glimpses of the departments of women's fashions, rugs, upholstery, and furniture, with carpets spilling over the railings to add color and imply profusion of stock. The model was accompanied by cut-out components of salesgirl paper dolls, a fountain, a clock, and shoppers that the recipient could affix according to numbered markings on the floor. As such, this "model department store" recreated the power of visual merchandising to organize consumer vision and entice the public to explore the store.

The department store sales floor embodied the expansiveness of modern urban space. Marshall Field's advertised that their departments were characterized

by a "liberality in the use of space."¹³ The store offered a view "one block long" - or 358 feet, as calculated on an early twentieth-century postcard - that was punctuated by classical columns (figure 5). Cast iron columns eliminated the need for weight bearing masonry walls that broke up the view. Instead, columns provided a stately magnificence and allowed for the maximum flow of light through the interior and open areas for the display of wares. In this Field's postcard, one's eye is drawn to the inviting curves of the casework and their warm wooden surfaces, the shining marble floor, and the flower garlands rather than the merchandise. By selecting such a view for this postcard, Marshall Field's prioritized the interior appearance of the store, defined largely by fittings and decorations, over the specifics of the

stock. Promotional material such as this postcard evinced that visual merchandising was a source of great pride for stores such as Marshall Field.

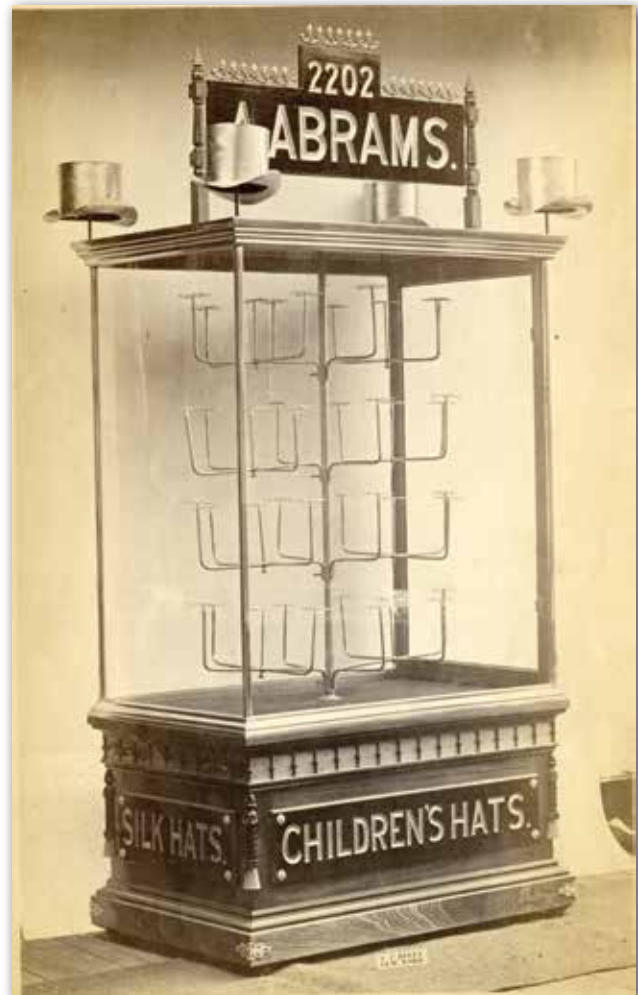


Figure 6. Case for A. Abrams, C.F. Biele Trade Catalogue, 1882-84. [Hagley Museum and Library 92.246]



Figure 7. Case for LBJ Co. in the Abrams Catalogue.

On the interior, casework concentrated the vision of the visitor as they entered an overwhelming space. Casework marked contents as worthy of close looking, directed vision and reinforced systematic thinking about the department store's products. McLean Manufacturing Co. advertised a system of casework "units" that reflected a "natural, logical sequence of order and system." The catalogue went on to explain that "each department is made to stand or fall by itself, just as each 'Good Fixture' Unit is an individual piece of furniture with a purpose of its own and a definite work to perform."¹⁴ Customers judged the department store interior not only on its beauty but also on its orderliness that communicated efficiency and strength in business.

The public grew accustomed to viewing objects through glass as visitors to trade exhibitions and museums, where glass was used in casework and vitrines that designated objects as exemplary in terms of their history, style, or manufacture. Just as in the façade, the glass medium itself was an integral marker of modern construction. Shopfitters served the museum and the store with analogous products. For example, Charles F. Biele & Sons Co., "artisans in metal, glass and wood," were a leading maker of showcases and vitrines for merchants and museums "from Massachusetts to California."¹⁵ The family business was first established in 1867 and Charles F. Biele took over from his father in New York City in 1875. During the late 1880s, he and his brother Emil expanded the company and established operations in

downtown New York. From the early nineteenth century, Beile made cases for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Morgan Library. The *New York Sun* reported "dealers in paintings, sculpture and antiques bring their special show-case problems to the old firm."¹⁶ A photographic trade catalogue of the company's products survives in the collection of the Hagley Library and includes glass fronted or glass topped showcases, mirrors, and stools. Some cases, customized with a merchant's name and specialty, such as a case made for a hat maker A. Abrams (figure 6), suggest their use in a trade fair. Meanwhile other ornamental cases, such as the one for the jeweler LBJ Co. (figure 7) resemble the counter-top cases used in department stores that afforded close inspection of notions or jewelry. The ornamental cornice would have added a stylistic note and signaled the department store's fashionability.

In both the window and the interior, modern lighting gave impressions of honest dealing as well as encouraged consumers' marveling at the store's technological superiority over their competition. The guidebook *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores* declared, "without artificial lighting the modern large store would not be an economic possibility."¹⁷ The guidebook identified that "there is the psychological effect of good lighting" since "if there are two stores handling the same grade merchandise, one brilliantly illuminated, the other dull and unattractive, there is no question which one you would patronize."¹⁸

Effective lighting enlivened the interior with theatrical effects as well as provided precision for the viewing of merchandise. On a large scale, lighting expert Matthew Luckiesh advised that lighting could "do much to make it [display] dynamic or to give it apparent life."¹⁹ On a smaller scale, a guidebook recommended "accurate color identification units" at "strategic points, such as ribbon counters, triplicate mirrors in the clothing department, piece goods department, etc." where lighting "permits accuracy in the selection of material resulting in satisfied customers" and "provides a pleasing appearance in the store proper."²⁰ Whether the wash of light was large or small, display staff capitalized on illumination's ability to coax browsers into buyers. As Luckiesh explained "Just as stage-lighting helps the 'tired business man' to relax, so can display-lighting do something toward relaxing the ever-strained condition of the average purse."²¹

Electric light reflected brilliantly off the plate glass of windows and glittering surfaces of casework as well as off of the mirror glass that covered walls and columns in the interior. The mirror (figure 8) was a favorite prop of the display staff and epitomized their dual goals of focus and expansion of consumer attention. As the copy in *Triplicate Mirrors and Store Fixture Essentials* (ca. 1899) indicated, this "Triplicate mirror and screen" could be used in "the fitting room, where privacy is sought" as the mirror helped to concentrate light and allow the consumer to judge the fit of a garment in detail. In this way, triplicate mirrors drew on tradition of nineteenth-century fashion



Figure 8. “No. 7 Improved Patented Triplicate Mirror and Screen,” *Triplicate Mirrors and Store Fixture Essentials* New York: H.B. Claflin Company, ca.1899, 11. [Hagley Museum and Library Trade Cat.C583 1899]

illustration that showed three views of the same dress.²² However, taken out onto the sales floor, the mirror had the capacity to multiply and even obscure a shopper’s attention across the sales floor. In addition when the consumer stood in front of the mirror with the backdrop of the department store display behind them, the consumer’s internal and external perception merged and they saw themselves as completing the overall merchandise picture. Display staff’s clever arrangements and use of fixtures, lighting, and mirrors, ultimately succeeded when they lured the consumers inside to animate and interact with the display and invest in the store with a purchase.

Archive Connection:

The majority of the ephemera referenced and illustrated in this article is housed at the Hagley Library in Wilmington Delaware where I held an Exploratory Research Grant in July 2014. The Hagley’s collection covers the history of American business, technology and innovation. The library is open to the public (Monday-Friday 8:30 to 4:30 and the second Saturday of every month 9 to 4:30). It is encouraged that researchers contact the library before visiting via email at askhagley@hagley.org

Endnotes

- ¹ *The Store of Service* (Chicago: Marshall Field & Co., 192?), 4.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Business Building Units: Goods Fixtures* (Pittsburgh: W.B. McLean Manufacturing Co., 1918), 3.
- ⁴ George S. Cole, *A Complete Dictionary of Dry Goods and History of Silk, Cotton, Linen, Wool and Other Fibrous Substances...* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Co, 1892), 470.
- ⁵ Sidney A. Sherman, “Advertising in the United States,” *Publications of the American Statistical Association*, December 1900, 10.
- ⁶ “Art of Window Dressing,” *Saint Paul Globe*, May 12, 1902.
- ⁷ *Display Men’s Yearbook and Buyers Guide* (Chicago: Merchant Record and Buyer’s Guide, 1927), 7.

⁸ William Nelson Taft, *The Handbook of Window Display* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1926), 39.

⁹ *Window Display Fixtures That Are Dependable* (Chicago: Artistic Wood Turning Works, ca. 1915), 1.

¹⁰ *Making Your Store Work for You* (Chicago: A.W. Shaw Co., 1917), 44.

¹¹ *The Furniture Show Window: The Construction of the Show Window, The Lighting of the Show Window and The Store Examples of Window Displays* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Periodical Publishing, 1915), 44.

¹² *Show Windows and How to Dress Them* (Manchester: Outfitter Pub. Co., 1891), 4.

¹³ “State Street Store Grand Opening,” *Apparel Gazette* October 1902; Marshall Field Archive, Chicago History Museum, 03052 (21).

¹⁴ *Business Building Units: Goods Fixtures*, 3.

¹⁵ “Cases are a Special Problem,” *New York Sun*, December 31, 1938.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ A. L. Powell, *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores* (Harrison, N.J.: Edison Lamp Works of General Electric Co., 1921), 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Matthew Luckiesh, *Light and Color in Advertising and Merchandising* (New York: D. Nostrnad Company, 1923), 194.

²⁰ Powell, *The Lighting of Large Dry Goods and Department Stores*, 7.

²¹ Luckiesh, *Light and Color in Advertising and Merchandising*, 194.

²² Caroline Evans, *The Mechanical Smile: Modernism and the First Fashion Shows in France and America, 1900-1929* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 47.



In January 2015 **Emily Orr** will begin as the Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary American Design at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York. Emily is a PhD Candidate in the History of Design at the Royal College of Art/Victoria & Albert Museum. Her dissertation, “Dressing a New Interior: The Development of Department Store Display, 1880–1920” explores how visual merchandising advanced as a design profession in department stores in London, New York, and Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century.

Going Shopping: *Ephemera from Classic Department Stores of New Orleans*

BY FLORENCE M. JUMONVILLE

Until mid-nineteenth century, city shops specialized in a narrow range of merchandise, such as dry goods, fabrics, hats, furniture, books, musical instruments, or bird cages (available with or without a bird). In New Orleans, by 1840 the fourth largest port in the world and within another twelve years the nation's third largest city, those shops clustered in the French Quarter, mainly on Royal Street and Chartres Street, then overflowing across Canal Street.

Around 1850, merchants nationwide began implementing new practices to attract and keep customers that included setting fixed prices and refunding the cost of unsatisfactory purchases or replacing them. Another groundbreaking step involved diversifying the merchandise: a single store stocked a variety of goods, giving shoppers the convenience of making all of their purchases under a single roof. With the leadership of Marshall Field in Chicago, Rowland H. Macy in New York, John Wanamaker in Philadelphia, and Daniel Henry Holmes in New Orleans, these innovations significantly advanced the evolution of the modern department store.¹

Fortuitously, the advances coincided with increased production of goods for department stores to sell. Merchants turned increasingly to advertising to create demand for their expanded offerings and to inform the public of the arrival of new stock. Businessmen lost no opportunity to place their stores' names before the public, featuring them prominently on billheads, letterheads, packaging, giveaways—anything that reminded shoppers to return. This simple marketing technique contributed to the steady flow of ephemera that department stores generated. Although promoting sales generated the greatest quantity, additional ephemera resulted from the normal course of business, such as interaction with employees (figure 1). Examples from three defunct but well-remembered New Orleans stores—D. H. Holmes (1842-1989), Maison Blanche (1897-1998), and Krauss (1903-1997)—have been selected to illustrate how they entwined with the stores' history and reflected changing times.²

There's no place like Holmes

Daniel Henry Holmes (1816-1898), born in Ohio, went to New York as a young man and found employment as a clerk at Lord & Taylor. By 1841 he had relocated to New Orleans, where he opened a dry goods shop

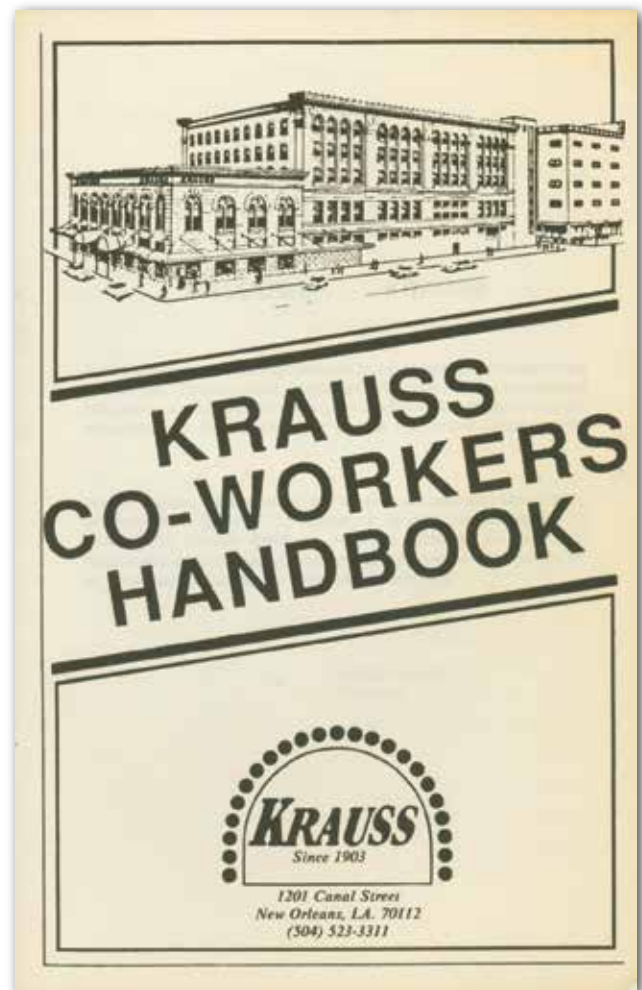


Figure 1. Krauss Co-Workers Handbook. With large workforces by the twentieth century, department stores issued staff manuals and other ephemeral publications to communicate policies, benefits, and other information to their employees.

on Chartres Street a year later (figure 2). In October 1849 he moved into larger, newly constructed quarters on Canal Street, establishing the city's first dry goods emporium, additionally selling fabrics and "notions." This new store was more commodious and more brightly lighted, thanks to numerous skylights, than the typical shop in the crowded French Quarter. Attractive displays, both inside the store and in glass show windows along the sidewalk, encouraged browsing that well might lead to buying.³

continued on page 16

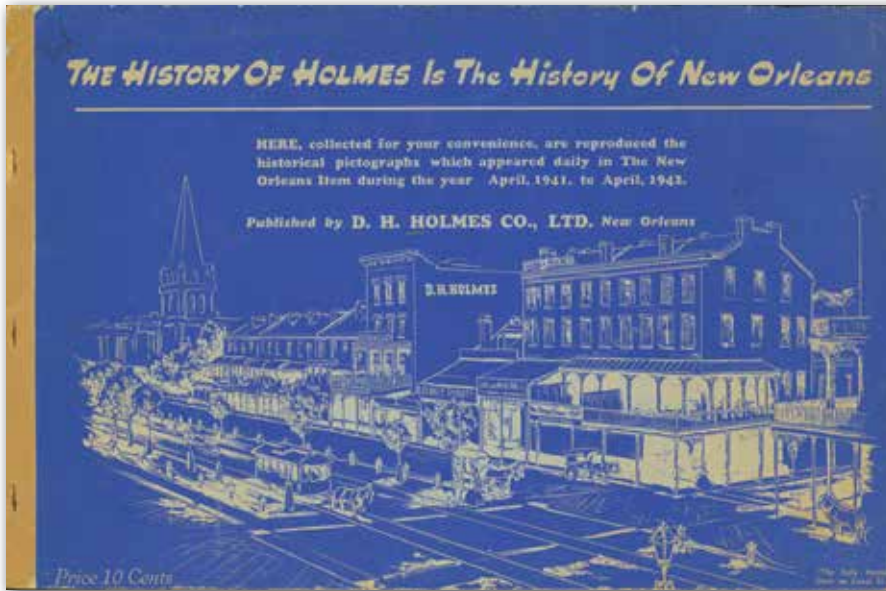


Figure 2. Holmes capitalized on its lengthy service to shoppers to connect its history to that of New Orleans. To celebrate the store's centennial in 1942, comic strips ran in the daily newspaper for a year. Eventually they were collected in a booklet that sold for a dime.

Holmes led a procession of merchants who, in short order, converted a boulevard of elegant residences to a bustling retail district. “The street is improving very rapidly,” *The Daily Picayune* reported in 1850, “and is fast filling up with dry goods stores. The ceilings of the five large stories of Mr. D. H. Holmes’ splendid establishment have just been finished in fresco, and it is now the most magnificent store in the city.” (Figure 3.) In 1872 *The Picayune* attributed Canal Street’s “career as a great business centre and boulevard of fashion” to Holmes’s “enterprising initiative.”

His success resulted also from his emphasis on customer service (figure 4). Holmes began in 1846 to import goods from Europe to provide a wider selection, and his fluency in French (as well as Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Hebrew) certainly would have attracted the large French-speaking segment of the local population. Holmes adopted a “no questions asked” return policy and, on nights when the nearby Grand Opera House staged performances, kept his doors open late for opera-goers who wished to stop by. In 1867 Holmes announced in *The Daily Picayune* that “in consequence of the great fall in the prices of the raw material, he will hereafter offer his entire stock of domestic manufactured cotton goods at greatly reduced prices.” Such was his reputation for fairness and honesty that the newspaper added, “A notice of this kind from Holmes means just what it says, and persons may rely upon the promise being carried out to the letter.”

Holmes is said to have initiated the nation’s first delivery service in 1848 to accommodate the wives of army officers stationed in the area. Upon learning that robberies along their route home from the store made them fearful of carrying their purchases with them, Holmes indulged the ladies by sending their packages

in his personal carriage. This amenity proved to be so popular that Holmes delivery wagons soon dotted New Orleans streets. During the Civil War, the store made history by hiring women, both because it became impossible to employ male clerks—enlistment in the Confederate army had depleted the supply of available young men—and to provide a livelihood to the destitute wives and widows of soldiers. To improve working conditions for his clerks, especially the females, Holmes closed the store early on Saturdays during the summer to afford opportunity for “outings” and encouraged the public to pressure other merchants to do likewise by not patronizing them after 2:00.

By its fiftieth anniversary in 1892, the store had grown to forty departments, eventually expanding to more than twice that number and moving far beyond the original specialty in dry goods to

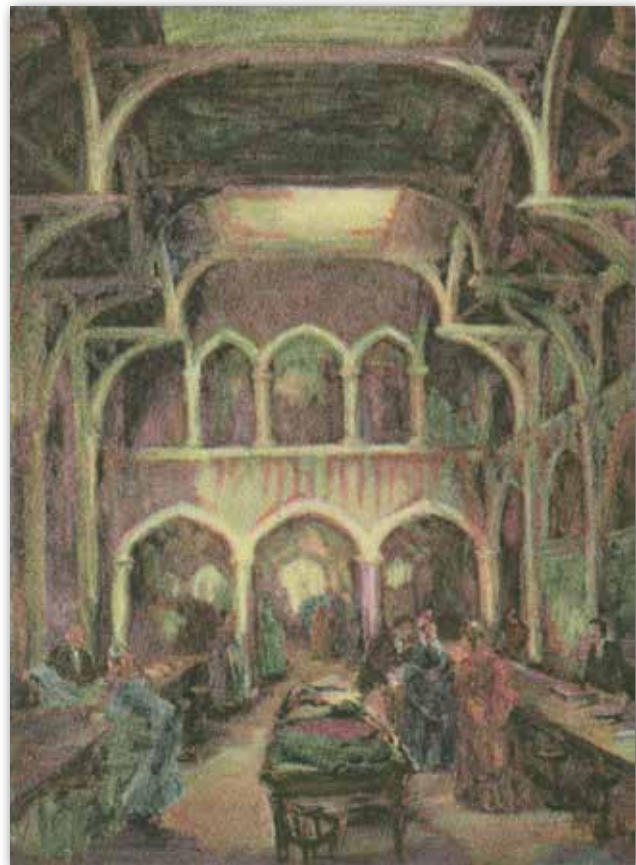


Figure 3. A tiny pamphlet first issued in 1937 reproduced the artwork on the walls of Holmes’s restaurant, providing rare views of Holmes’s interior as it appeared in the nineteenth century—shown here, the silks aisle in the popular fabrics department.



Figure 4. Department stores lost no opportunity to place their names before the buying public. Holmes, for example, provided a calendar of parades and balls associated with the 1917 Carnival season, subtly reminding the ladies who consulted it where they should shop for fashionable parade-going attire and ball gowns.

include jewelry, furs, luggage, furniture, draperies, appliances, cameras, toys, books, Holmes-made candy, cosmetics, greeting cards, bridal attire, china and glassware, automobile tires, a bakery, and a restaurant, to name but a few. The absorption of adjacent properties through the years had increased the store's footprint and created space for the widening array of merchandise. In the early 1890s, Holmes relinquished control to two associates. Under their management, the business continued to flourish after its founder's death in 1898.

Extensive renovations in 1913 added the signature clock, and a facelift in 1964

-1965 remodeled the façade, giving it a new clock, a wrought iron balcony, and an "air curtain." Also called a "doorless door," it produced a current of recirculated air that issued vertically from a grille in the floor, invisibly separating outdoors from indoors and permitting customers to walk through, presumably laden with purchases, without the added burden of opening the door. As shoppers congregated outside before the store opened, a waitress from the restaurant served complimentary coffee and Coca-Cola to the waiting crowd from behind the air curtain.

In 1955 Holmes opened a branch in Baton Rouge, thus becoming the first New Orleans department store to expand beyond the city. From 1960 through 1988, thirteen more Holmes stores spread throughout South Louisiana, as well as two in Mississippi and one each in Alabama and Florida, plus ten car care centers and eleven shoe stores (figure 5). But this rapid growth, combined with an economic recession and new competition from local branches of Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, and Lord & Taylor, jeopardized the company's future, and in May 1989 the company was sold to the Dillard's chain. It converted some stores into Dillard's branches and sold others, including the venerable flagship store on Canal Street. With its 1913 façade restored, it is today the Chateau Sonesta Hotel. A statue of Ignatius J. Reilly stands under the clock, which remains a popular meeting-place.

Greatest Store South

Despite its ultimate failure to fend off the incursions of other stores, competition was nothing new to D. H. Holmes; it had existed for decades, right down the street—behind the wide doors and lively show windows of Maison Blanche, widely called MB. "A fairy tale of commerce," *The Daily Picayune* called it the day after it

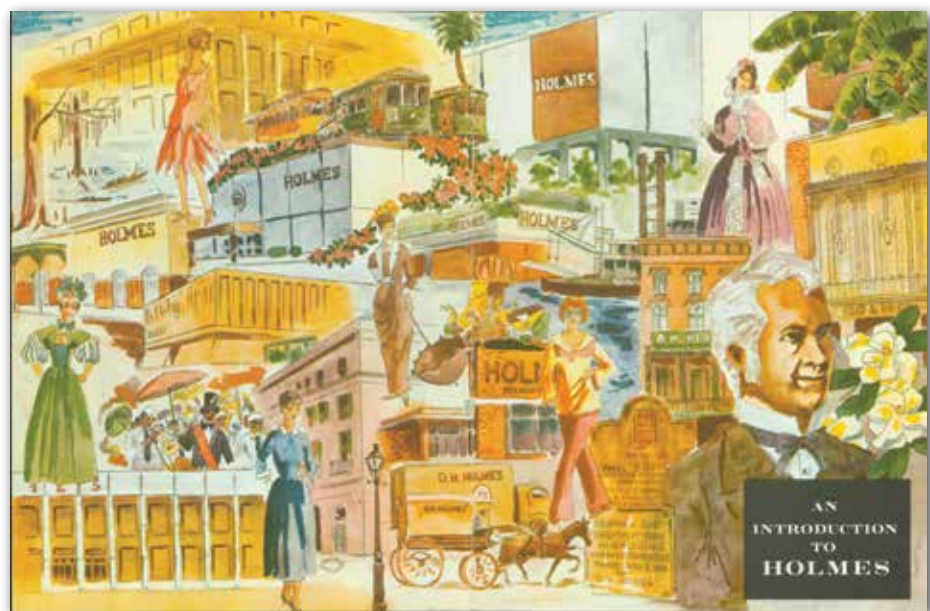


Figure 5. Issued in 1977 on the occasion of the opening of a Holmes store in Hammond, Louisiana, this ephemeral brochure is itself illustrated with early examples of Holmes ephemera.



Figure 6. Special promotions beginning in the 1960s lured suburbanites back to the Canal Street stores. Both Holmes and Maison Blanche sponsored annual festivals that featured foreign countries, a different one each year, such as the Festival Della Piazza at Holmes in 1975. The festivals featured an array of imported merchandise and special menus in the stores' restaurants.

opened in 1897, “a dream of business beauty, a tribute to the enterprise of the youngest firm and to the people who have made the greatest department store of the south a possibility.” Like D. H. Holmes, Maison Blanche grew from a dry goods store—that of Simon J. Shwartz. With partners Gus Schulhoefer and Hartwig D. Newman, all three of them “local boys” not yet thirty years old. With the financial backing of banker Isidore Newman, Simon’s father-in-law and Hartwig’s brother-in-law, Shwartz established the first department store that opened its doors as such in New Orleans. It aspired to offer “a complete line of the finest wares to be found ... in the country, and altogether almost everything that man, woman or child might want.”

Less than four years later, Hart Newman retired from the business. Schulhoefer had died, and Shwartz acquired a new partner,

well-known businessman Marks Isaacs. They promised that “the building will be extended, the store improved, and perhaps enlarged, and many new and novel and up-to-date features added.” In 1905, plans for a new building on the same site were announced. Maison Blanche continued to function while another structure went up behind it; then, operations shifted to the rear building while the original one was demolished. When completed, Maison Blanche boasted five floors of retail space with two adjacent towers, each offering eight additional stories of office space occupied mainly by doctors and other professionals. The new building, the tallest in the city, dominated the Canal Street skyline. Beginning in 1921, customers could reach the store’s upper floors via the first escalator in New Orleans.⁴

In 1920, two of Isidore Newman’s sons incorporated Maison Blanche and two other stores as City Stores, subsequently adding prominent emporiums across the northeast. Although Maison Blanche became northern-owned within its first twenty-five years in business, few shoppers realized it because MB remained so closely associated with New Orleans. In addition to stressing promptness, courtesy, shoppers’ comfort, and quality merchandise, MB supported community activities such as the sale of war bonds during World War II and the annual carnival season. In addition, it drew public interest and participation by sponsoring special promotions, such as fashion shows, art exhibitions, and festivals focusing on the products and cuisine of other nations (figure 6). Holmes and Krauss offered its own version of these undertakings, competing with Maison Blanche not only for its customers’ dollars but for their hearts. In the latter contest, Mr. Bingle gave MB an advantage.

Inspired by the Marshall Field’s character called Uncle Mistletoe, Mr. Bingle debuted in 1947 as the store’s Christmas ambassador (it was not coincidental that both had the initials MB). A “snowdoll” with wings of holly, he wore an upside-down ice-cream cone as a hat, peppermint-striped mittens, and a Christmas



Figure 7. Likenesses of Mr. Bingle, Maison Blanche’s Christmas ambassador, were ubiquitous during the holiday season, appearing, for example, on packaging such as this folder for gloves. He was so popular that youngsters on a children’s television show sponsored by a rival store frequently asked Santa for Bingle dolls.

ornament as a button, and carried a candy cane (figure 7). Brought to “life” in 1948 as a marionette, Mr. Bingle performed daily during the holiday season in the Canal Street show window and in a children’s program on television. His likeness appeared in *papier maché* on the store’s façade and in print in newspaper advertisements and on packaging, silently endorsing MB merchandise. Mr. Bingle also emerged as jewelry and as stuffed toys that today are popular collectibles.



Figure 8. Stores sought to promote customer loyalty with rewards, such as a free pair of hosiery for every ten pairs purchased. Customers received folded cards that salesladies initialed to verify purchases until the requisite number was reached. This card was halfway to a free pair when Maison Blanche closed.

By 1949, Maison Blanche had established branch stores in several suburban shopping centers. In 1956 a major expansion of the Canal Street store, followed in 1961 by the construction of a budget annex across the street, continued to attract a loyal clientele (figure 8). Financial reverses impelled City Stores to sell the six remaining Maison Blanche stores to the Sternberg family, proprietors of the Goudchaux stores in other parts of Louisiana, in 1982. Three of them, including the downtown flagship, were closed, but after a costly renovation, the Canal Street store reopened two years later. After changing hands several times, Maison Blanche was sold in 1998 to Dillard’s, which closed the last department store on Canal Street. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel now occupies the building, and Mr. Bingle lives on in suburban Dillard stores.

Discover Krauss

D. H. Holmes and Maison Blanche stood less than a block apart—their side doors faced each other across Bourbon Street, facilitating comparison shopping by jaywalking customers—and they shared similar policies, merchandise lines, and types of events. Krauss Co., Ltd., however, stood apart, both literally and figuratively. Though it wasn’t far from Maison Blanche, two wide thoroughfares—Rampart Street and Basin Street, which ran alongside Krauss—came between them, and marketers used the slogan “Discover Krauss” to encourage shoppers to walk the three extra

blocks. Moreover, Rampart Street had traditionally demarcated the outer boundary of the dry goods district. By venturing across it, Krauss extended the shopping district and established itself in a prime location at a crossroads of transit lines. The ornate façade belied a utilitarian interior that presented a bargain atmosphere.

Leon Feldman and his nephews, the four Krauss brothers, established the store in 1903. It quickly built a large and faithful clientele by stocking hard-to-find goods that other stores disdained and by offering “selection, service, and value.” Located at the edge of the red-light district known as Storyville, Krauss sold laces and satins to the denizens of the District from its extensive fabrics department that remained active long after most stores had closed theirs (figure 9), and ladies—especially those who required queen-size lingerie—frequented the “foundations” department. Unlike its competitors, Krauss never branched out to shopping malls or other cities, expanding only within and adjacent to its block. It was the first Canal Street



Figure 9. Krauss used its packaging to emphasize its association with New Orleans, emblazoning boxes and bags with local views. This gift box, which probably dates from the mid-twentieth century, depicts a carnival scene, Jackson Square, and a historical view of the French Quarter. More modern pictures appeared on the 1990s shopping bag, including an image of the large Krauss store and the Louisiana Superdome.



Figure 10. Shoppers made special trips to Krauss just to buy fabrics, where they were sure to find a generous selection and reasonable prices. Flyers in various eye-catching colors announced upcoming sales.

store to install air conditioning, to provide free parking, and, more significantly, to employ and to seek the patronage of African Americans, allowing a privilege denied them by other stores: trying on clothes. Other innovations notwithstanding, the original pneumatic tubes that carried payments from the sales floors remained in operation to the end.

For Krauss, the end came in 1997. Thought to be the last family-owned major department store in the nation, it had been losing money for several years, but when small losses suddenly turned into large ones, the Heymann family—descendants of one of the Krauss brothers—closed the business. They still own the building, which is now occupied by an upscale apartment complex. Maison Blanche, the last survivor, lasted just a year longer.⁵

Though the stores ceased to operate, they live on in the hearts of loyal customers who continue to treasure their ephemera. Elmo Spellman, for example, lived close enough to Canal Street to walk. At his suburban Spellman Optical Center, he displays his collection of memorabilia, consisting largely of shopping bags and other packaging (figure 10). “Back when we shopped on Canal Street and used those bags,” he recalled, “I never would have thought it possible that one day it would all

be gone. Nothing lasts forever. But at least I have my bags.”⁶ And we have our ephemera.

Illustration credits: Krauss materials from the Krauss Department Store Collection; other ephemera from the Louisiana Collection and Rare Books Collection, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans.

Endnotes

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- ² Pamela Walker Lurito, “The Heritage of Victorian Progress: American Advertising Ephemera in Historical Perspective,” *Ephemera Journal* 1 (1987): 15.
- ³ Peggy Scott Laborde and John Magill, *Canal Street: New Orleans' Great Wide Way* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 2006), 31-33.
- ⁴ Edward J. Branley, *Maison Blanche Department Stores* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2011). Shwartz, an avid collector of rare books and manuscripts about Louisiana, housed his collection in rooms adjacent to his private office on the fourth floor of the Maison Blanche Building. For two years it was open to the public. When he retired from MB in 1926 and no longer had appropriate space for his collection, Shwartz sold it at auction. Florence M. Jumonville, “Acquiring Minds: The Early Collectors of Louisiana Books,” *LLA Bulletin* 55 (Spring 1993), 183.
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- ⁶ George Gurtner, “Bags Full of Memories,” *New Orleans Advocate*, November 27, 2014.

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materials for over 35 years, first at The Historic New Orleans Collection and, since 1997, at the Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans. She holds a Ph.D. in education and history, as well as master's degrees in those fields and in library science, and is the author or editor of three books and more than fifty articles, book chapters, and papers. Her research interests include the history of ephemera, printing, publishing, and reading in New Orleans and the development of libraries in Louisiana. [In the 1952 photograph top left she wears a Mr. Bingle lapel pin!]



Turning Readers into Purchasers: *Reconstructing Louis Godey's Business Strategies through Ephemera*

BY JULIE STIRES

Godey's Lady's Book, an antebellum American periodical, could be found in the parlor of just about any respectable middle-class woman. Louis A. Godey founded the monthly magazine in 1830, but after 1837 turned over the editorial operation to Sarah Josepha Hale and concentrated on the business of publishing. Together, Godey and Hale produced *Godey's Lady's Book* in Philadelphia until Godey sold it in 1877. The periodical is largely remembered by historians for its monthly hand-colored fashion plates. In the 1840s, the magazine pioneered in publishing original work by prominent American writers and in copyrighting its contents. During the 1850s, *Godey's Lady's Book* was one of the first American periodicals to achieve a mass



Figure 1. Front wrapper for December 1841: the same general information - the title, the date and volume number, the editors - appeared on the front cover of the periodical for many decades.

circulation. According to Godey, subscribers jumped from 40,000 in 1849 to 62,500 just a year later, and had reached 100,000 in 1856 and 150,000 by 1860. The periodical transformed its identity from a regional publication for readers in the mid-Atlantic into a national magazine for a continental audience.

My project, “The Lives and Times of *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1877,” provides a biography of the magazine and its producers and readers, exploring the range of factors that contributed to its success. Scholars have not provided satisfactory answers as to why and how *Godey's Lady's Book* gained such popularity, particularly in quadrupling subscribers from 1849 to 1860. As a publishing success story, the magazine stands out in two ways. First, it defied the fate of most magazines founded in the period, which on average folded within two years. Second, it reached more subscribers in its heyday than its closest monthly competitors, such as *Graham's Magazine* and *Peterson's Magazine*. While the story of the magazine and of editor Hale has long been credited with propagating the idea of the ‘cult of true womanhood,’ the turn to the ideal of domesticity began earlier in the nineteenth century and cannot explain the sudden burst in circulation during the 1850s.

I have not located a manuscript archive of Godey's and Hale's business correspondence, but the periodical itself provides evidence of a rich story that historians have ignored: how Godey encouraged his readers to turn into purchasers – of both his magazine and items advertised in it. Extant wrappers of the magazine are difficult, but not impossible, to locate, and they contain a wealth of information. The front wrapper included a standard cover illustration on the outside (figures 1 and 2) and, on the reverse as well as on both sides of the back wrapper: publisher's notices, editorial commentary, advertisements, a short table of contents and messages to the postmaster (figure 3). Wrappers featured subscription information and testimonials from readers and newspaper editors that demonstrate how Godey wanted readers to perceive his publication (figure 4). Godey broadened the pool of advertisements over time from those of upcoming publications from fellow publishers (figure 5) to advertisements from neighboring Philadelphia merchants for items such as pianofortes. By the late 1850s and early 1860s – the same period when the magazine reached 150,000

continued on page 22

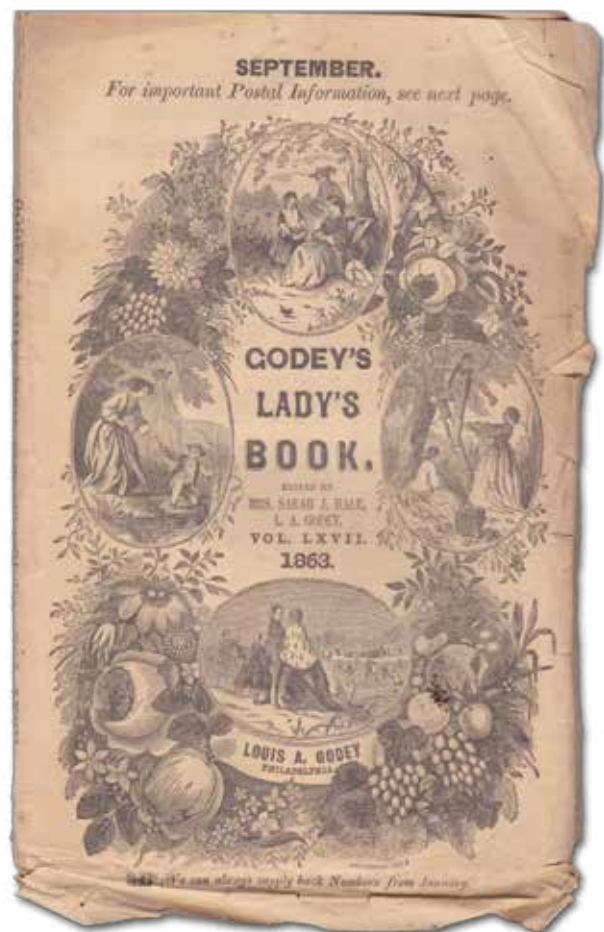


Figure 2. Front wrapper for September 1863; however, the cover design changed a number of times throughout Godey's Lady's Book's lifespan. Issues from the 1850s and 1860s include this general design, although the vignettes changed in 1860 or 1861.

subscribers - Godey catered to far-flung readers who could not purchase items in the city in person. They could send money directly to Godey in Philadelphia to obtain his publications, such as *Godey's Pattern Book of Embroideries*, *Every Lady Her Own Shoemaker*, and *Mrs. Hale's Cook Book*; books described in the monthly "Literary Notices" column (though this practice stopped during the Civil War); "good" sewing needles imported from England (figure 6); *cartes de visite* of notable people and works of art; or fashionable items chosen by the "Fashion Editor," such as bonnets, jewelry (figure 7), material for dresses, and children's clothing. During the 1860s, readers even saw advertisements for "the finest farming lands, equal to any in the world," sold by the Illinois Central Railroad Company (figure 8). While Godey did not subsidize the production of his magazine through advertisements, as *Ladies' Home Journal* did later in the century, the relationship between the circulation figures and the advertising content suggest that women's periodicals and consumerist messages were linked decades earlier than scholars have argued. It also suggests that Godey's business was so prosperous because of diverse income

streams, not necessarily because of high circulation rates.

Ephemera plays a vital role in this analysis, because scholars have focused on the bound issues found in archives to the exclusion of the wrappers that readers saw every month. Locating wrappers, particularly early ones, presents a significant challenge. The wrappers were considered more ephemeral than the contents of the issue, and thus were often detached and thrown away when an owner had a volume of issues bound together. Archives have primarily collected a set of bound volumes and a smattering of individual issues. Nineteenth-century practice also means that online databases such as *Accessible Archives* and the American Antiquarian Society's *Historical Periodicals Collection* allow me to read *Godey's Lady's Book* on my laptop, but the availability of digitized wrappers is constrained to only those in collections that have funding and connections to digitization companies. I have found a smattering of 1840s and 1850s wrappers, a larger number of 1860s wrappers, but none from earlier than 1840. Even more elusive are two of Godey's other publishing ventures: the *Lady's Dollar*

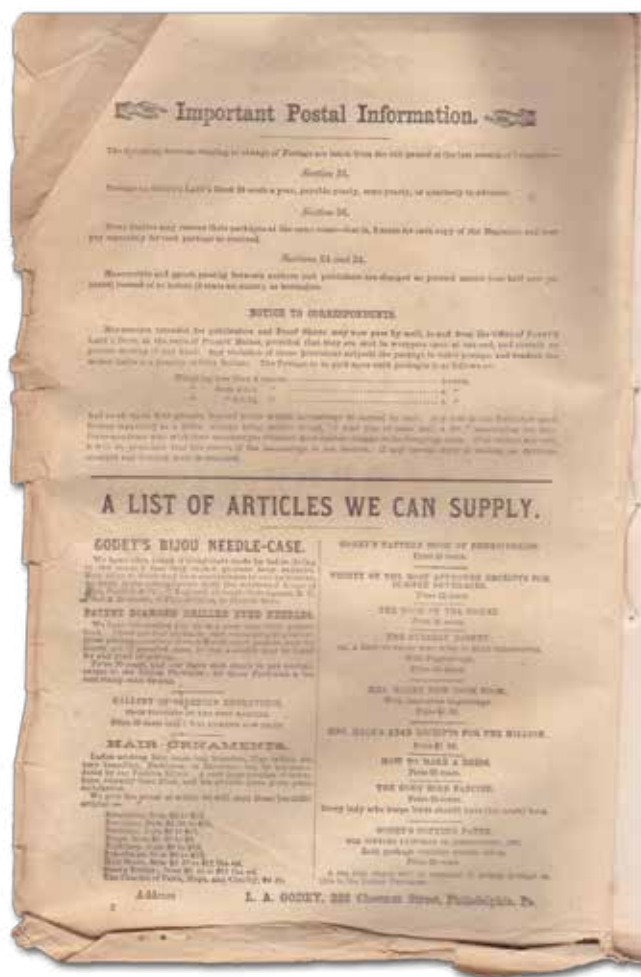


Figure 3. Godey's Lady's Book inside front wrapper for September 1863: Godey used the covers to convey important postal regulations to subscribers as well as to advertise items that his readers in the south and west could purchase from him.

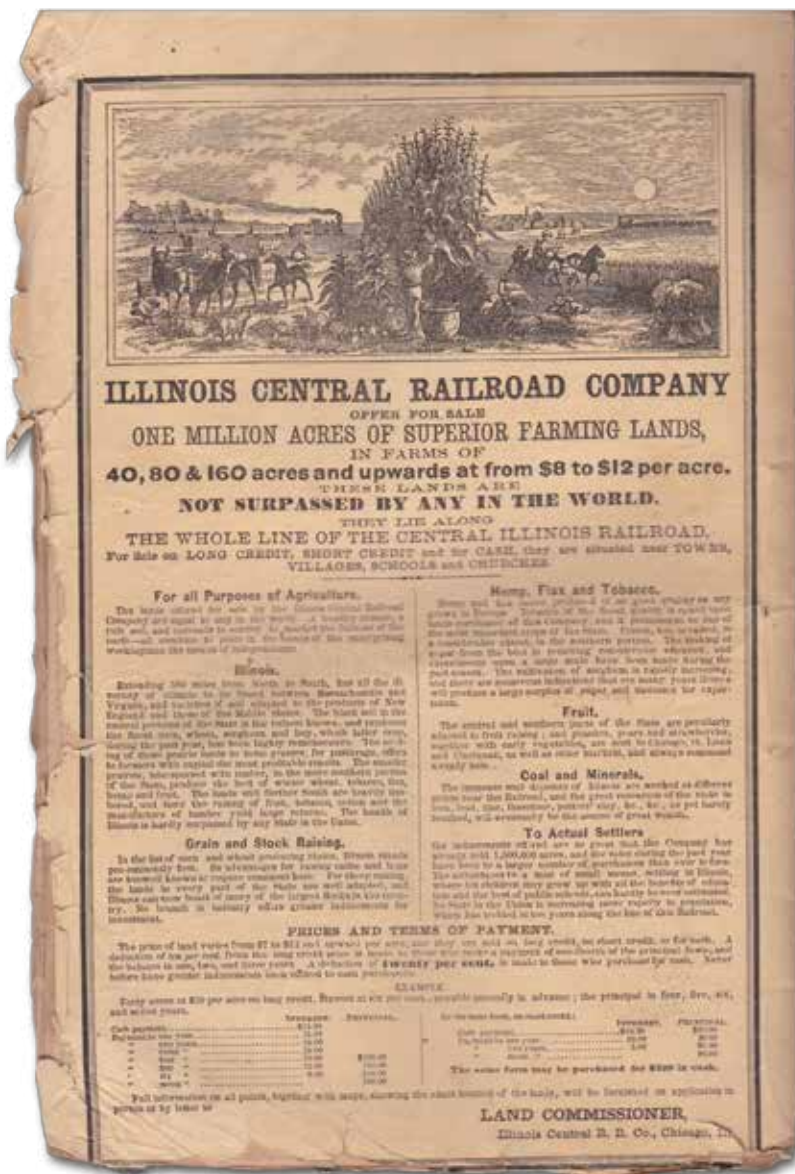
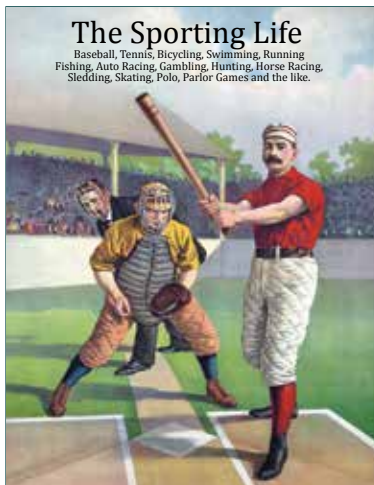


Figure 8. Back wrapper for August 1864: many 1860s issues included this advertisement for the Illinois Central Railroad Company, enticing eastern readers to move west.

Newspaper and Godey's Reprint of Blackwood's Magazine. Both seem to have appeared in the late 1840s, but their duration is unclear. While the reprint of Blackwood's Magazine is exactly what it sounds like, the Lady's Dollar Newspaper was not edited by Hale and included content and advertisements different from those in Godey's Lady's Book.

Godey's Lady's Book's wrappers provide a window into how Godey worked to turn his readers into purchasers. Scholarship on periodicals has focused on the magazine's promotion of idealized middle-class womanhood while also arguing that the Ladies' Home Journal was the key publication that turned female readers into consumers. The important content included on the magazine's wrappers has gone unnoticed because common nineteenth-century binding practices did not see fit to preserve them, but this project seeks to bring Godey's Lady's Book's wrappers out of obscurity and to better understand its role in selling a middle-class lifestyle to readers.

Amy Sopcak-Joseph, received her Master of Arts in History in 2010 from the University of Connecticut. She welcomes comments on this Ph.D. in History Dissertation in Progress: amy.sopcak@uconn.edu.



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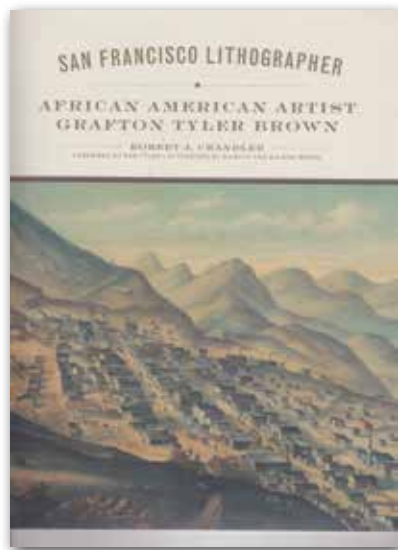
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Interesting Books

San Francisco Lithographer: African American Artist Grafton Tyler Brown by Robert J. Chandler, The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West, University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 246 pages, hardbound, \$36., 2800 Venture Drive, Norman OK 73069-8216.

Bob Chandler, a longtime member of The Ephemera Society and former senior research historian at Wells Fargo, has spent his first retirement years intensifying an investigation into the life and work of the extraordinary Grafton Tyler Brown, who passed as white in mid-nineteenth century San Francisco, and created a huge body of job as well as artistic printing. Among Chandler's acknowledgments are many other Society members whose collections, both personal and institutional, provided material – and included in the book is a long checklist of all the works known to be Tyler Brown's.

Chandler begins with a thoughtful essay on the history and cultural impact of chromolithography, and a review of the slow recognition of Brown as a major Western artist and artisan. He goes on to write a biography of Brown that includes an overview of California's treatment – social and legal – of African Americans. A separate chapter covers



the mid-century concept of 'passing' and Brown's history of doing so: in 1867, he became California's first known black voter – a daring illegal move. A chapter on lithography summarizes the process and charts Brown's progress in artistry. Chandler describes Brown's business practice growth as well, with particular attention to his self-promotion. A whole chapter is devoted to the progression of lithographic styles for letterheads, and a consideration of Brown's San Francisco competitors (such as A.L. Bancroft & Co., or Britton & Rey).

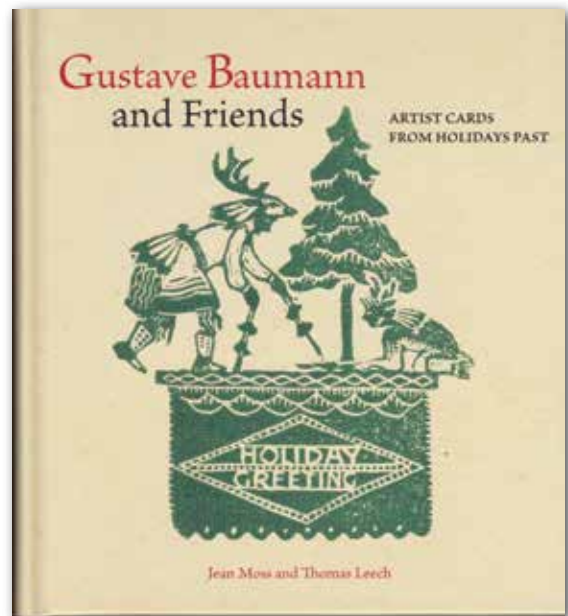
Then Chandler turns to the impressive color work, such as labels and real estate maps, before Brown's 1882 move to the Pacific Northwest and a new career as a landscape painter (in 1886, to sell a series of Yellowstone paintings he produced a promotional lithograph).

Captions to the wealth of illustration are particularly noteworthy in interpreting the image (for example, in describing an 1870 billhead for Levi Strauss: "Perhaps Brown drew inspiration from 1860s U.S. revenue laws that induced printers to place an ornate box on the left-hand side of checks, receipts, and stocks for tax stamps. He specialized in curved and shaded cartouches and elaborately twisted strings of letters, such as on this billhead for the iconic jeans maker.") Paired images of job printing show evolution in Brown designs, or compare Brown's to a competitor's for the same client.

This is a handsomely-produced book, and a thoughtful, thorough, revelation of an important producer of Western ephemera.

Gustave Baumann and Friends: Artist Cards from Holidays Past, by Jean Moss and Thomas Leech, Museum of New Mexico Press, 2014. 112 pages, hardcover, \$25., PO Box 2087, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504.

Jean Moss, a founding member of The Ephemera Society, lives in Santa



Fe where the printmaker Gustave Baumann cultivated friendships with other artists for nearly five decades beginning in 1918. This delightful book of images (to accompany an exhibition at the New Mexico Museum of History curated by the authors) describes greeting cards designed by Baumann and, among others, B.J.O. Nordfeldt, Ernest Blumenschein, Will Shuster, Doel Reed, Willard Nash, and John Sloan.

Endpapers reproduce a spread of envelopes addressed to the Baumanns in the handwriting of the artists – palpable evidence of the passing of holidays and the intimate nature of the collection. Chapter facing-pages are given blown-up details of one of the cards, and 77 cards from the decades of the 1920s to the 1970s are reproduced on heavy matte paper. Woodcuts, photo-engraving, lithography, etching—the hand-drawn, hand-printed and hand-colored “small edition” cards capture the personal lives and preoccupations of six decades and encapsulate the memories and spirit of the times.

The interpretive text, via introduction and captions, invokes the personal histories of the artists, possible inspiration for the image, as well as the holiday traditions of the Southwest. This is a fine contribution to the acceptance of the ephemeral greeting card as a cultural as well as artistic document – give yourself a New Year's gift!

New Members

We welcome the following new members who have joined the Society since publication of our September issue.

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Erin Campbell

Lloyd Library and Museum
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Tom Congalton

Between the Covers Rare Books
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Michael De Blasio

PO Box 1121, 409 King Street
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Michael Leverett Dorn

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Pamela Elder

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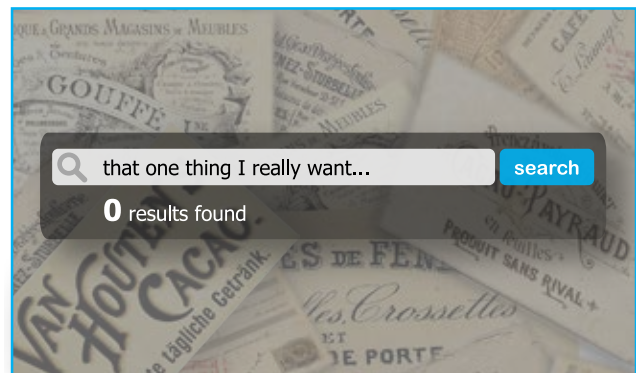
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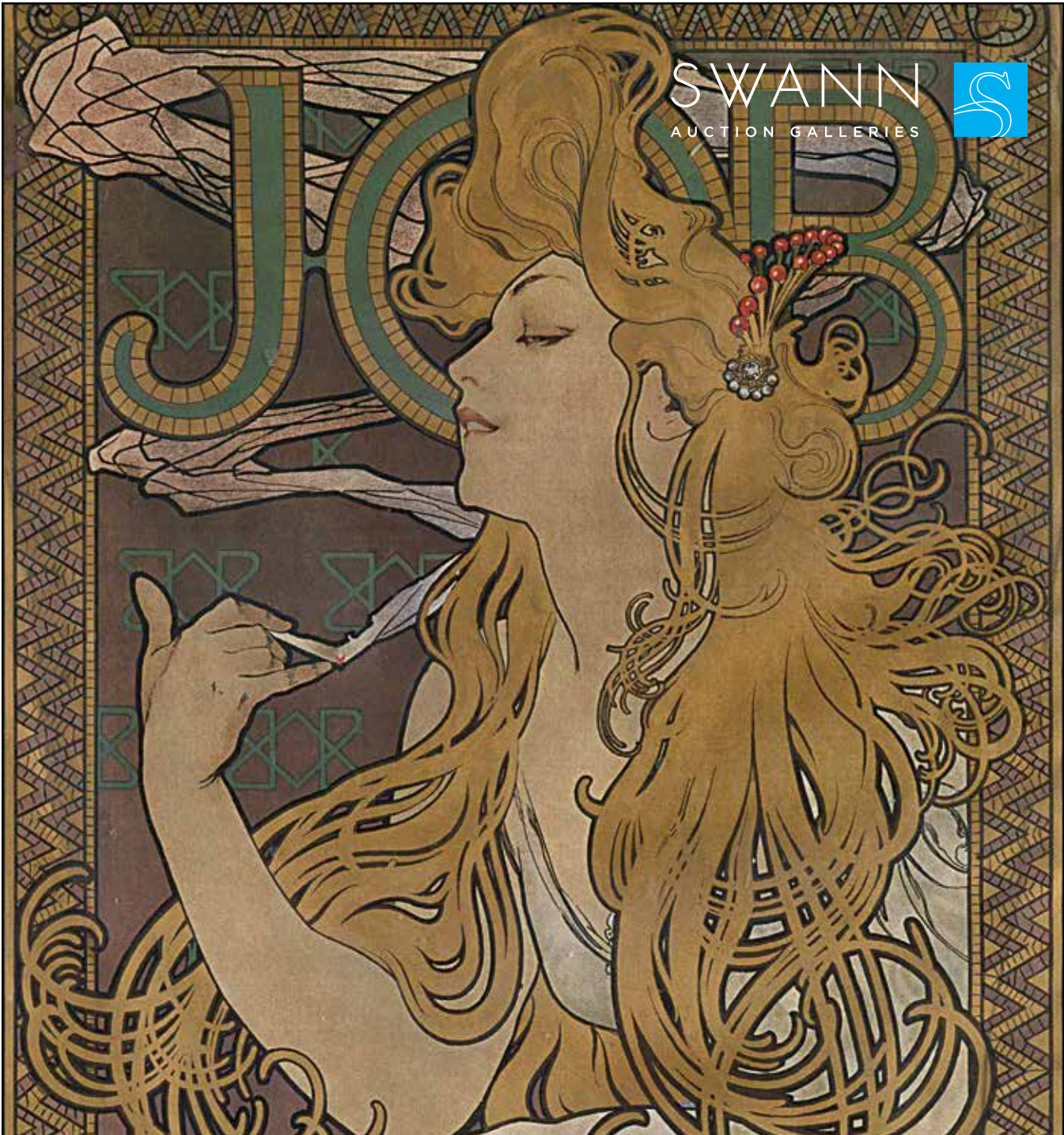


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