

William Niblo and his New York Pleasure Garden

BY BENJAMIN FELDMAN



Figure 1. Photograph of a New York society matron posed with some of the Japanese delegation to the United States, honored at Niblo's Garden in June of 1860. Collection of Tom Bennett.

Many American cities boasted pleasure gardens from late colonial times through the first half of the nineteenth century. Though the concept has evolved over 200 years, public enjoyment remains the same: to this day the term “garden” survives in the names of venues of popular entertainment. New York’s Madison Square Garden, once mainly an outdoor venue, is the best example today.

Despite the possibly illicit sexual connotations, pleasure gardens were, in most cases, devoted to genteel amusement and chaste entertainment. Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Boston, and New York City boasted dozens of such spaces, each one modeled, to one extent or another, after their British counterparts. Vauxhall, London’s most famous example, gave its name to many American imitators, among them no fewer than five in New York alone.

The notion of *rus in urbe* (an illusion of countryside in the city), was central to the gardens’ popularity (see Figure 2). Post-colonial America, and New York City in particular, were considered the “new Eden,” and the noise and filth that encroached everywhere in developing metropolises threatened that ideal. Pleasure gardens acted to preserve the urban fable. With their graveled paths, shady bowers, open air theaters, and tranquil saloons serving punches and sherbets as well as alcohol, these facilities multiplied rapidly, opening, closing and

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Dear Members and Friends:

ESA/38, our recent conference in Greenwich, Connecticut, entitled *Let Me Entertain You!*, was a smashing success. You will be able to view the splendid talks via links on our website. I invite you to take a look at our April *e-News* which, thanks to Diane DeBlois, contains a photographic overview of most of the events. At our Saturday evening banquet, we were entertained by Craig Inciardi, Curator and Director of Acquisitions for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. With interstices of music, he showed how, in only a few years, the design of rock posters changed from the rather plain, linear presentation for a Chuck Berry concert to the reimaged Art Nouveau swirls for the bands of the emerging psychedelic era.

On Sunday morning, we were privileged to hear NPR puzzle master and *New York Times* crossword puzzle editor Will Shortz speak about the genesis and development of the crossword puzzle. He illustrated his talk with incredible examples of ephemera from his own collections which depict the first crossword, how crosswords became a craze, and how that craze infused culture (resulting in crossword ephemera of all types—think wallpaper).

More dealers set-up at our show than in previous years and were overflowing into an adjacent room. It is comforting to know, in this apparently digital world, that people are still willing to seek the beauty of printed material. One of the old stomping grounds for ephemera was (and is) the independent bookstore. Amazon opened for business in 1995, and the number of independent bookstores fell 40 percent in five years. We know that, before Amazon, independents suffered mightily from the opening of mall stores such as B. Dalton and Waldenbooks. The big box stores, Barnes & Noble and Borders were also a significant threat. The introduction of Kindle in 2007 caused some to speculate that the end of the printed word was at hand. However, according to an ongoing study by Ryan Rafaelli, a professor at Harvard no less, "the phoenix has risen from the ashes." From 2009 to the present, independent bookstores have seen a 40 percent increase in the number of stores. While independent and antiquarian bookstores still face daunting challenges, one would hope that this emergence signals that print and local curation can more than survive in a world of internet retailing and digital media.

I was somewhat interested to learn that neuroscientists have been probing and comparing the reactions of people to digital vs. print. In one study, subjects were presented with exposure to a number of physical and digital advertisements while eye tracking, skin conductance, and heart rate were recorded. The test group was also asked to respond to a survey. A week later, the group was given a functional MRI to compare the longer-term impact of exposure to digital vs print. Apparently, the printed material caused more activation in the brain—a greater emotional response and deeper memory. The physical ads also caused more activity in the brain areas associated with value and desire. This study has been described in one article as "another emotional win for paper." Those of us who pursue paper already knew that our brain lights up when we come across ephemera long-desired or newly-appreciated.

Despite the foregoing, I'm not one to suggest that the digital and printed worlds are mutually exclusive. In a March 24, 2015 *New Yorker* article entitled *Instagram's Endangered Ephemera*, author Alexandra Lange beautifully describes how tiny "graphic-design" ephemera is shared on this platform: "people, archives and institutions realized that they could add their humble masterpieces into the digital image river that people look at every day." But she also suggest that many forms of tiny graphic design "feel endangered": "A lot of restaurants don't make matchbooks any more, because nobody smokes... Business cards are probably next on the endangered list. In ten years, that drawer full of business cards could be Instagram gold. The Art Nouveau designer Hector Guimard's business card, for example, part of the Cooper-Hewitt collection, is beautifully out of date." This attempt at preservation of ephemera by digital means may not be the end result. Ephemera preserved on such digital platforms may, in turn, inspire the creation of new printed work (e.g. a business card with a script or typeface similar to the one used by Guimard on his card) and otherwise assist in the revival of certain design styles. As I mentioned above, the essence of the Art Nouveau design style was revived for the rock poster. Of course, this was done without the existence of any digital platforms. But wide-spread sharing, on digital media, of design ideas embedded in ephemera enhances the possibility that more people will recognize the importance and uses of what we study and collect.

With the onset of spring, I wish you much success in finding and preserving the beautifully out of date.

Bruce Shyer, President

Society News

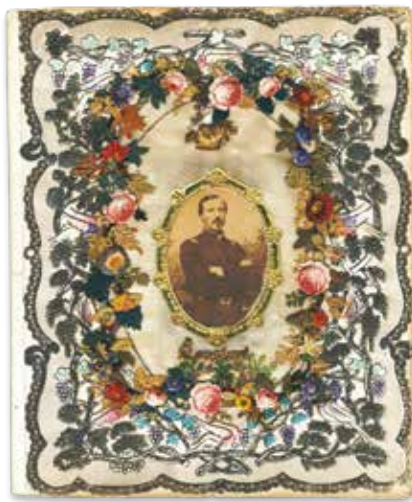
Among the many celebratory events at the Society's 38th annual event in March was the formal announcement of the placement at The Huntington Library of our President Emerita Nancy Rosin's incomparable collection of valentines. The Nancy and Henry Rosin Collection of Valentine, Friendship, and Devotional Ephemera (approximately 12,300 greeting cards, sentimental notes, folk art drawings, and other tokens of affection that trace the evolution of romantic and religious keepsakes made in Europe and North America from 1684 to 1970) was given to the couple's son, Bob, who together with his wife, Belle, donated it to The Huntington.

The Rosin material joins important collections of North American ephemera assembled by five other Maurice Rickards Award-winners: Jay Last (lithography), Barbara Fahs Charles & Robert Staples (advertising prints), Jonathan Bulkley (illustrated billheads), and Jose Rodriguez (cameo advertising stationery). Last's generous support has also created a dedicated collection storage space for ephemera within the library, and an endowed position: the Jay T. Last Curator of Graphic Arts and Social History. David H. Mihaly, the present curator, sees these collection acquisitions as a vote of confidence in The Huntington as a repository of cultural artifacts, and regards the collectors as visionaries in a pioneering field. "My goal is to make this place a center for ephemera studies by building a premier archive of materials, then promote it through exhibits, scholarly conferences, student seminars, and fellowships."

Jay Last, Jose Rodriguez, and Nancy Rosin are former, and Barbara Fahs Charles and David Mihaly present, members of our Board of Directors, while Jonathan Bulkley was a loyal supporter of the Society from the beginning. Their connoisseurship benefited the Society and now their collections form a nexus for sustained ephemera regard. The entire membership can be proud of this accomplishment.



Handmade English Valentine, watercolor on thick paper 12" x 14", Richard Pitt to His Wife, Anne Pitt, Ilfracombe (Devon), with 1805 postal cancellation. "In war I served my King and country, at home I hope to live in peace with thee. The birds that sing shall tune our nuptial joys." For Nancy this stood above all others in the collection, as it embodied Valentine history, artistry and passion, and the imagery and content evoked emotions felt over two centuries ago.



Civil War period, quarto size, a multi-layered Valentine, unsigned, but attributed to Esther Howland (1828-1904) 'mother of the American Valentine.' Incorporated into the design is a photograph of Colonel Robert Cross of Troy N.Y.

In this Issue...

What connects the pieces in this issue are the various unconventional ways that the authors approached their subjects — reminding me of Emily Dickinson's telling it "slant."

Two pieces are based on presentations given at our annual conference in March — **Ben Feldman** spoke about the history of Niblo's Pleasure Garden (subject of his recent book) and here he focuses on how, almost by chance, he discovered a hitherto unappreciated aspect of William Niblo's biography.

Professor Jesse Erickson spoke about his designing a course for undergraduates based on the troublesome politically and emotionally sensitive ephemera of Jim Crow - making it possible to see the trade cards and postcards in context and to provide "safe" ways for the students to interact with the material.

Jeremy Rowe, an expert in the photographic history of stereopticon views, points out that few collectors have paid serious attention to amateur productions. His piece on Helen Keller's little known visit in the California hills is proof of hidden gems.

Russell Johnson is always searching for a way to make the holdings of the Darling Biomedical Library relevant to researchers in various fields. Looking at World War I letters he has found rich documentation of how the flu epidemic affected ordinary Americans, with details about public health protocols and about the emotional impact of the scare.

John Sayers admits that single World War I period postcards with no messages are of little interest, but, using his imagination and deductive reasoning, describes why a particular clutch of cards might have meant something to the nurse who saved them.

Ian Spellerberg approached ephemera through a collection of tools that are designed to help in handling paper. Looking at his examples, many paper cutters and folders could themselves be considered ephemera - printed as they were with souvenir views, calendars, and other information common to almanacs and other giveaways.

—Diane DeBlois, editor



Figure 2. Stereoview of Niblo's Garden as it looked in the 1860s. Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereo-scopic Views, The New York Public Library.

survived for 66 years, through several fires and reconstructions.

Niblo, born in 1790, emigrated to New York from Ireland as a very young man and was employed in David King's porter house on Sloat Lane (now Beaver Street) near Wall Street. King is well documented in the Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York as a provisioner to the Board of Alderman and a sometimes landlord to the grand jury, before construction of an official court house. The dusty ledgers of Calvary Episcopal and Wall Street Presbyterian churches provide ample evidence of Niblo's family and

moving around their host cities to wherever the pressures of real estate development dictated.

In New York, public parks, other than the one immediately south of City Hall, were virtually non-existent in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Pleasure gardens served as substitute public recreation spaces until Union and Tompkins Squares were created in 1833 and 1834, respectively. Bryant Park opened in 1846 and Central Park was developed only after 1857. The opening of public parks and the rise of public mass spectator sports in the later half of the nineteenth century went hand-in-hand with the decrease in the number of pleasure gardens operating in New York. By then the term "garden" was attached to the name of many spectator sport venues, be they indoors or out. The tradition remains to this day.

The most famous pleasure garden of all in New York was founded in 1828 by tavern keep William Niblo, and operated as "Niblo's Garden" until 1894, 33 years after his retirement and 16 years after his death (see Figure 4). Niblo's name rings few bells today but, for most of the nineteenth century, his name was internationally recognized. What William Ziegfeld and Sol Hurok were to the commercial theater production industry of the early and mid-twentieth century, so was Niblo a century before. Niblo's Garden occupied most of the block bounded by Houston and Prince Streets, running from Broadway over to Crosby Street, and was the place to see and be seen among a refined crowd. It

religious life. Niblo became well acquainted with King's daughter, Martha, whom he married in 1819 in the Wall Street Presbyterian Church. Niblo was probably raised as a Presbyterian, and by 1839 became a devout Episcopalian, first at St. Thomas' and then at Calvary Episcopal, both in Manhattan. The multi-talented entrepreneur served for many years as a warden and vestryman of Calvary.

In 1813, Niblo left David King's employ and opened the Bank Coffee House on Pine Street, so named because it stood behind the Bank of New York. Niblo's venture was a great success, for the mild-mannered but friendly tavern keep ingratiated himself to customers from all walks of life. Politicians, theater professionals, traveling businessmen: all drank from Niblo's taps and ate meals provisioned from his legendary larder. Subscription banquets were held,



Figure 3. 1868 print lithographed by L. Geinle, published by Dodworth & Son: an extravaganza typical of entertainment at Niblo's Garden. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.



Figure 4a & b. Photograph of the facade of Niblo's around 1894, the model for a ca1900 cigarette card. Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, The New York Public Library.

two hundred pound green turtles stewed, and bears from Kentucky roasted whole, with the VIP ticket holders having first tastes from the tureens and carving boards. Niblo's spotless personal reputation as well as his honest commercial conduct brought him customers from far and near.

Niblo's Garden, situated on the northern boundaries of the settled City, was, from inception, immensely popular among New York's gentry, who eschewed the raffish resorts of the Bowery for Niblo's "no unaccompanied women" admission policy. Opera singers, acrobats, thespians and circus performers from western Europe as well as the American stage vied for invitations to perform at Niblo's (see Figure 3). Adelina Patti, Charlotte Cushman, The Great Blondin and James Wallack are but a few of the bold-face names of the early and mid-nineteenth century who adorned Niblo's stage. Perhaps his crowning achievement before retirement was Niblo's staging of a grand ball, attended by 12,000 guests, which celebrated the arrival of the first Imperial Japanese delegation to the United States in June, 1860 (see Figure 1).

William Niblo lived a long life, traveling to Europe and engaging in philanthropic Christian work after his retirement. Unfortunately, his full business partner and helpmate, Martha King Niblo, died in 1851, and he remained single for the rest of his days. First interred in an earthen grave at Brooklyn's Green-Wood cemetery,

Martha's remains were transferred in 1854 to an elegant and spacious mausoleum on Crescent Water, where Niblo himself was also laid to rest in 1878. The widower was said to have visited his wife's burial place every day that he was in New York City, devoted to his wife's memory to the end.

The majestic mausoleum has hidden a secret about its builder's supposedly blemish-free personal life for 160 years. Only this past year has the truth emerged. Despite the fact that Green-Wood Cemetery has kept meticulous records of the burials of its 560,000 permanent residents, no one on staff could explain to the author the presence of a lovely sculpture of a recumbent, sleeping boy (figure 5). The other



remains in the mausoleum are well documented: all friends and family of William Niblo. But the files contain nothing about the little boy.

The author's search discovered that the esteemed pleasure garden operator was not as perfect as one might have imagined. In a book about New York City foundlings Julie Miller documents the sad history of infants left by their mothers (in most cases) on doorsteps or taken to the Almshouse.¹ Among the many tales is that of little William Henry Niblo, who was sired illegitimately by the then unmarried owner of the Bank Coffee Shop in 1816. The records of the Almshouse are held at the New York City Municipal Archives at 31 Chambers Street, both in original, albeit crumbling, bound volumes, as well as partially on microfilm. Longhand ledgers documenting wet nurse accounts, censuses and admissions and discharges cover many decades of the nineteenth century.

The entry for October 10, 1818 is perfectly clear (figure 6). Via the check of "N. Jarvis," William Niblo posted a \$300 bastardy bond to defray the expenses of the little boy's



Figure 5. Interior of Niblo mausoleum, Green-Wood Cemetery. Author photograph.

care. Noah Jarvis was a collector of New York City taxes and was most likely acquainted with the father of the little boy, not only through political and social circles that met at the Bank Coffee House but also through their participation in, and separate contributions during the prior year to, the American Bible Society. The mother, Sarah Jane Hannan, left her child at the Almshouse at the age of twenty-three months. Over half of the bastardy bond was paid out over a period of almost two years to various nursemaids who apparently cared for the boy off premises. William Henry Niblo appears in the Almshouse census of 1820 but then disappears from later records.

Young boys and girls who were wards of the Almshouse seldom lived long lives. At age seven, most were sent out to work, with the boys frequently put to grueling labor in unhealthy and dangerous circumstances. The author could not locate a municipal death certificate for William Henry Niblo, and neither could a Federal or New York State census entry for him after 1820 be found. The boy most likely died very young.

One afternoon in early August, 2012, the author, Green-Wood Resident Historian Jeff Richman and Green-Wood volunteer James Lambert hauled the sculpture in the Niblo mausoleum out into the sunshine, and the picture became clearer. On the back of the stone base, the inscription “1855” appears along with the sculptor’s name.

Niblo’s wife died in 1851, childless. She was entombed in 1854. And the devoutly religious William Niblo waited an additional year to memorialize his illegitimate son, whose existence he may well have never disclosed to his wife.

On a hot July day during the last years of his life, Niblo sat in the mausoleum, visiting Martha alone, keeping cool in the shade and reading a novel. A violent storm blew up and a gust of wind slammed the iron door to the mausoleum shut, locking poor Niblo inside with no one the wiser. His cries for help unheard, Niblo spent the night there, while his friends inquired at his lodgings and scoured his customary Manhattan haunts. Arriving at Green-Wood’s gates the next morning, the searchers were told by the watchman that no one had seen Niblo’s well-known figure leaving on the previous day. Rushing to Crescent Water, the door was pried open, and there the mourner sat, perfectly calm. In life as well as close to his own death, Niblo remained a modest man of faith and grace. His name and nearly stain-free reputation deserve to be known.

Endnotes

¹ Miller, Julie, *Abandoned: Foundlings in Nineteenth-Century New York City*, 2008.

Benjamin Feldman

, has lived and worked in New York City for the past 47 years and is the author of three works of non-fiction about 19th and early 20th century New York. His essays and book reviews about New York City and American history and about Yiddish culture have appeared online and in print in CUNY’s *Gotham History Blotter*, *The New Partisan Review*, *Columbia County History & Heritage*, *Ducts Literary Magazine*, *The Forward*, *New York Archives Magazine* and in his blog, *The New York Wanderer*. He is the chair emeritus of the Board of The National Yiddish Theater and currently chairs the Board of the New Yiddish Repertory Theater. Ben maintains a vital relationship with Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, the source of many of his projects and stories.

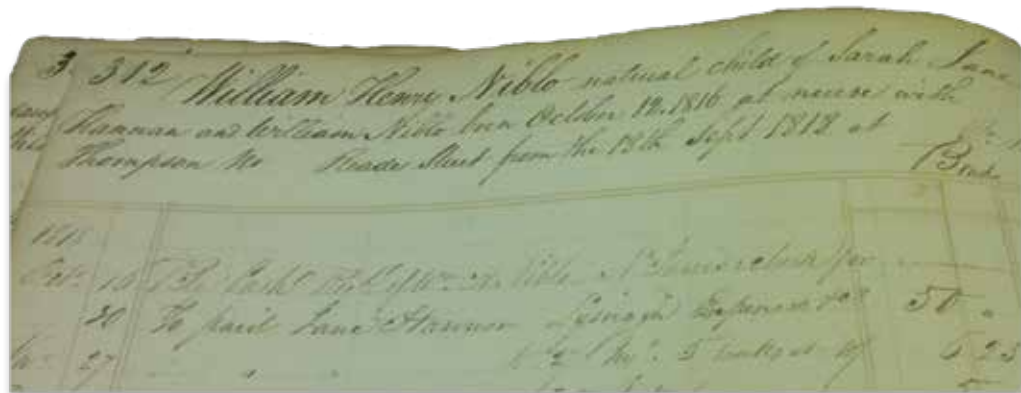


Figure 6. Page of record book for the New York Almshouse for October 10, 1818. New York City Municipal Archives. Author photograph.

Helen Keller through Amateur Stereoviews

BY JEREMY ROWE

Francis (Frank) Byron Nightingale was a talented engineer and amateur photographer who homesteaded in the San Gabriel mountains above Altadena, California. Nightingale produced a set of personal stereoviews of of his life and social circle at “Palawoo” ca1915-1920. Most notable are his views of a relatively unknown visit over Thanksgiving 1918 by Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan Macy and Polly Thompson while they were in Los Angeles filming *Deliverance*, or *The World For Humanity*.

Frank was born in Deerfield, New York on December 26, 1885. As a child, he was fascinated by magic and, by the time he was sixteen, was performing professionally as “Nightingale the Mystifier” in New York City. After college he worked for General Electric in Schenectady, New York. About 1912, GE sent Frank to Los Angeles, where he became fascinated by the foothills of the San Gabriel mountains north east of Pasadena. He built a small cabin in the hills he called “Wa-wan” around 1914, then homesteaded a larger property north of Altadena, California. He called sections of his property “Golden Valley” and “Valley of Voices.”

Frank built a second cabin he named “Palawoo” (Bird’s nest) on the property in 1915 (figure 1). Likely a result of his technical background and position with

GE, he added electricity to the little cabin, installing his own power poles and lines from Pasadena (figure 2). In addition to his engineering expertise, Frank was a talented amateur stereo photographer and he documented life at Palawoo - from the ca1916 view, to visitors at his mountain home, to images of “Whizz,” the custom automobile camper he built (figure 3).

Of particular interest are a group of images Frank made of visitors to “Palawoo” for a celebration of Thanksgiving 1918. The group included: Miss Bertie K. Shipley, a peace activist and performer and cousin of President Abraham Lincoln; Mr. Paul Harrison; Mr. Maybon and Mrs. Mary, Elsa and Myra Kingsley; Miss Polly Thompson; Mrs. Anne Sullivan Macy; and Miss Helen Keller (figure 4).

Helen Adams Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 27, 1880. An illness when she was 19 months old left her deaf and blind. Eventually, Alexander Graham Bell referred the Kellers to the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts where Helen was paired with Anne Sullivan, a 20-year old former student, as her instructor. Anne taught Helen sign language in preparation for her to begin attending the Perkins Institute in 1888. In 1894, Helen and Anne moved from Massachusetts to New York City so Helen



Figure 1. “Palawoo” 1920.

continued on page 8



Figure 2. "Corner of the Dining Room at Palawoo. Electricity & Telephone lines are carried over my own pole line from Pasadena to Palawoo." 1920.

could attend the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf. Mark Twain, an admirer of Helen's, had introduced her to Standard Oil magnate Henry Hutchinson Rogers who, with his wife, offered to pay for her education. Helen eventually graduated from Radcliffe in 1904 - the first deaf-blind person to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree.

While Helen was at Radcliffe, the *Ladies Home Journal* ran a series of articles about her life, published in 1903 as an autobiography, *The Story of My Life*. Helen became a passionate activist for social change and, in addition to her efforts for the disabled, was a pacifist, socialist, suffragette, opponent of child labor,

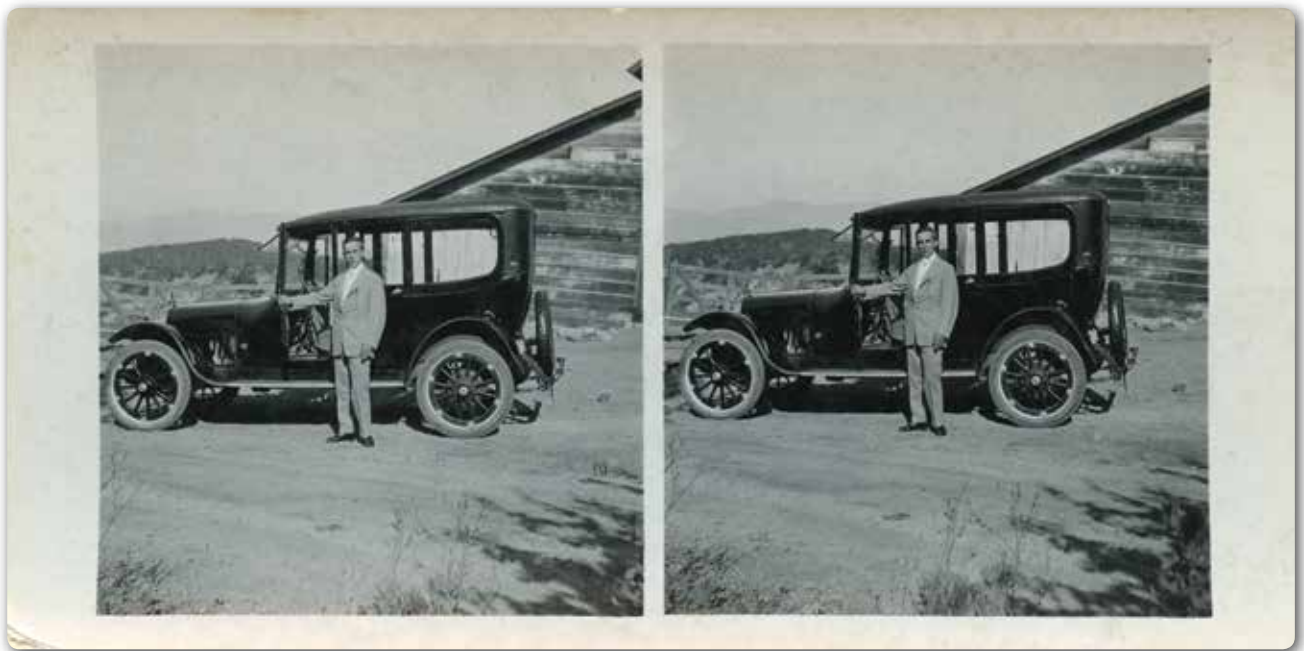


Figure 3. [Frederick Byron Nightingale with] "Whiz - My Traveling Home - All modern comforts - Storage a space contains three double blankets & a pull out - Back of front seat removable to make up a comfortable Pullman berth - Two gallon insulated ice water tank under car with faucet within the car furnishes drinking water, tank is under air pressure to force it up into the car & it keeps cold for 48 hours - Electric extension reading light - Curtains for dressing & camping - Yale lock to keep all secure when leaving car in the open - Special compartment concealed in frame holds toilet articles - Bathing suit - Shirts, collars, etc. etc. Built in wash basin - Small Victrola & records complete the outfit." [No. 23 1920]



Figure 4. "At Palawoo"
 (Identification of individuals left to right)
 Front row - Miss Helen Keller, Mrs. Anne Sullivan Macy (her teacher); Back row - Miss B. K. (Bertie Kate) Shipley (Cousin of A. Lincoln) and Mr. Paul Harrison (friends of Miss Keller) Miss Polly Thompson. [No. 35 1918]

Figure 5. Playing the "One String" for Helen Keller "She Hears tone by Vibration through Her Finger-tips" at Palawoo" [No. 56 1918]



Figure 6. [Half stereoview] Thanksgiving Dinner "At Palawoo" 1918 (Identification of individuals left to right) Elsa Kingsley, Mrs. Mary Kingsley, Polly Thompson, Helen Keller, Myra Kingsley, Maybon Kingsley, Mrs. Anne Sullivan Macy "Teacher" [No. 59 1918]



Figure 7. [Half stereoview] "The Thanksgiving Fire" at Palawoo" 1918 (Identification of individuals left to right) Myra Kingsley, Mrs. Anne Sullivan Macy (her teacher), Mrs. Mary Kingsley, Mr. Paul Harrison, Elsa Kingsley, Polly Thompson, and Miss Helen Keller.

and supporter of birth control. In 1913, she published a collection of socialist writing, *Out of the Dark*, and began an active career on the lecture circuit.

After the success of the film *Birth of a Nation* as a tool of social commentary, Helen was approached about creating a film of her life story. The film project began in earnest with the hiring of historian and writer Francis Trevelyan Miller to produce a screenplay. A script was quickly produced, partly based on Helen's life, and part allegory and social commentary. Miller commented: "Helen Keller, deaf, dumb, blind, the most wonderful girl in the world, in *Deliverance*, or *The World For Humanity*, an inspiring revelation, which brings hope and courage to the people of all nations and races."

The project raised \$250,000 and formal contracts were signed in 1918. Helen was to star, and her companions Polly Thompson and Anne Sullivan Macy were to assist in communicating with Director George Platt during filming. Gaps in the plot were filled with fantasy dream scenes. The film even included a scene with Helen in helmet and goggles as a passenger on a thrilling airplane flight over the Hollywood hills. The original finale of the film had Helen meeting with world leaders to end war and bring peace to earth. Unfortunately, despite national release and some positive reviews, *Deliverance* did not have the social or economic impact for which Helen had hoped.

During the filming, Helen toured Los Angeles and met members of the Hollywood elite, including Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin invited Helen and Polly to tour his studio, posed for photos, and offered a private screening of his latest film. On November 20, 1918, Chaplin hosted a private dinner for Helen and Polly as they prepared to leave Hollywood and return to New York City.

How and where Helen Keller, Anne Sullivan Macy, and Polly Thompson met Frank Nightingale during their visit to Hollywood is not known. However, at some point just over a week after her dinner with Chaplin and before leaving for New York, Helen and her companions met Frank and accepted his invitation to the November 28 Thanksgiving dinner at "Palawoo."

Maybon, Mary, Elsa and Myra Kingsley brought a 14-pound turkey and "fixins" to celebrate both the holiday and the recent end of World War I. Frank produced several images of the 1918 Thanksgiving dinner with Helen, Anne, Polly, and several others as part of his stereograph series (the figure captions include his numbering, if present, and his comments written on the backs of some of the stereoviews). Included are several views of Helen and her companions at "Palawoo."

One view shows Helen and a costumed musician on the porch at "Palawoo" - with her hand resting on the stringed instrument in order to feel the music that she could not hear (figure 5). Another view shows the group seated around the table for Thanksgiving dinner

(figure 6). Yet another view shows a fireside scene with Helen in profile (figure 7).

Apparently, Helen's visit to Palawoo received little public attention. Frank's stereoviews are the only documents of her Thanksgiving visit that have been documented. Though Helen Keller was photographed while in Hollywood during the production of *Deliverance* and with Anne Sullivan Macy and Chaplin at his studio, no images made after her farewell dinner with Chaplin have surfaced to date, other than these stereographs.

After the Thanksgiving visit, Nightingale continued to document his life at Palawoo in stereographs. Dates of the views in the privately published boxed set continue up to 1920, when Frank was hired as lighting and foreign sales engineer for a G. E. affiliate, the Anderson-Meyers company in Shanghai.

Though the set of Frank Nightingale stereoviews of Palawoo includes numbers as high as 76, the box in my collection appears almost full with 48 views.

The set of stereographs produced by Frank Nightingale provide a unique view of life in Southern California in the second decade of the 20th century - and a unique glimpse of Helen Keller's life as a private individual enjoying Thanksgiving with new friends.

Jeremy Rowe, a member of the Board of Directors of the Ephemera Society of America, is very active in the historic photography world, having collected, researched, written about, presented on, and curated exhibits of nineteenth and early twentieth century photographs for more than thirty years. He is emeritus professor at Arizona State University and a senior research scientist at New York University.



Call for Nominations to the Board of Directors

At the end of 2018, the following people will be leaving the Board: Bruce Shyer, David Freund, Sheryl Jaeger, David Mihaly, Jeremy Rowe, and Donald Zaldin.

We are therefore seeking to elect six Directors. A term is three years. Former Directors are eligible for nomination if they have been off the Board for a full election cycle of three years.

As outlined in the by-laws, the duties of the Board are to formulate the general policy of the Society, make recommendations, and perform such duties as necessary for the welfare of the Society. We need active Directors to keep our Society healthy and growing. Send names of nominees to info@ephemerasociety.org.

The Jim Crow Express: *Teaching the History of American Racism with Postcards & Trade Cards*

By JESSE R. ERICKSON

Not long after Thomas Dartmouth Rice's inaugural blackface performance in 1828, the name "Jim Crow" quickly emerged as a signifier for the "plantation negro," projecting a nostalgic fantasy of agrarian tranquility. It was code for a mythic representation of African enslavement—one characterized by harmony rather than discord, munificence rather than cruelty, and liberality rather than tyrannical abuse.

Naturally, then, the name "Jim Crow" has a markedly different resonance for people of color—one far less nostalgic and innocuous. But how does one begin to 'unpack' this complicated set of societal connotations for a generation so far removed from those who actually remember the tumultuous period of the Civil Rights Era? How does one teach this history to a generation so distant from the days of *de jure* segregation and even further removed from the days in which Mark Twain himself heralded the minstrel show as one of America's greatest theatrical accomplishments? How does one provide opportunities for students to learn about this difficult chapter in American history in a way that speaks to the experiences of twenty-first century life? One approach to this challenge requires that we teach this history through the hidden power of ephemera.

The true value of ephemera (and I use the plural form) is that they offer us important insights into the history of everyday life. They serve as a window into the daily lives of the past, providing evidence and traces of our attitudes, anxieties, and reflections. We can read them narratively, as individual texts. When viewed in terms of a collection or in the context of a curated exhibition - in juxtaposition with others - we can look at them as documents that tell unique stories about lived experience.

The idea that race is socially constructed has gained a great deal of traction among the broader scholarly community over the past century. W. E. B. Du Bois early explored the concept in his attempt to challenge the discriminatory practice of dividing people according to their observable, physical characteristics in the service of

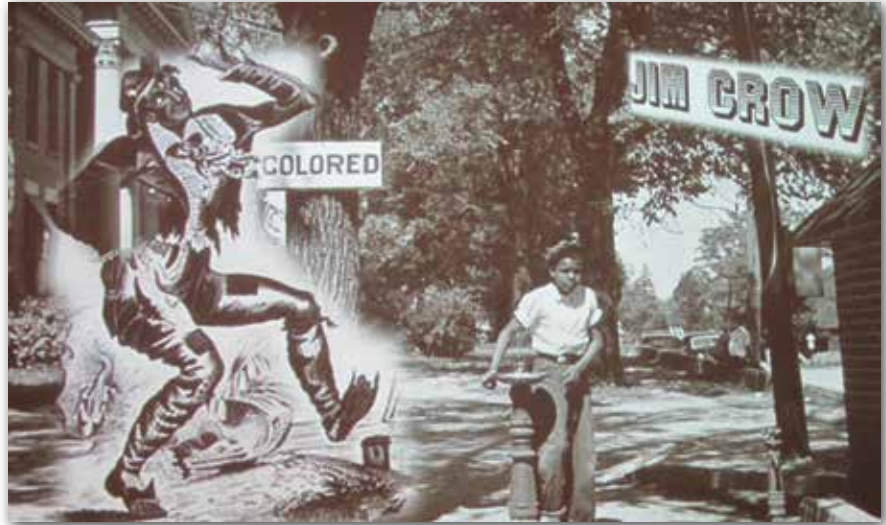


Figure 1. A photo postcard of a young boy drinking from a "colored" fountain, overlaid with a comic image of the theatrical Jim Crow. Sample postcard and trade cards from the Gregory C. Wilson Collection (courtesy of the University of Delaware Special Collections)

reinforcing racial categorization. Nearly a half-century later, Frantz Fanon posited in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) that race as a way of looking at the world is an artificial construct created by conditions and discourses built around notions of racial difference. Likewise, the scientific community has come to a consensus that the concept of race lacks a biological basis when applied to our modern understanding of genetics. Still, as a societal force that has an impact on the lived experience of millions of people across the globe, the idea of race remains as daunting reality. Therefore, the need to deconstruct, to scrutinize, to investigate and, hopefully, to arrive at a better understanding of this concept, grounds itself firmly in "real world" application.

How does ephemera fit into this picture? Here is one way: If materiality and textuality meet at the intersection of race as a social construct, then ephemera constitute objects on the frontline of a strategically targeted critical analysis of race as a "concept." The relationship between these print materials and the social construction of race provides a buttress for the rationale to collect this kind of history. Celebrated scholar and public historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr., for one, understands this rationale. He has grouped objects of race ephemera in a broader genre that he calls "Sambo Art." He describes the rationale behind collecting these objects in the following imperative terms:

continued on page 12

The fears and anxieties of black people from within the white collective unconscious were projected onto a plethora of quotidian, everyday, ordinary consumer objects... including postcards and trade cards... and a veritable deluge of Sambo imagery spread throughout virtually every form of advertisement for a consumer product... We should understand that this Sambo “art” is the way that anti-black racism found its daily existence, drowning out the actual nature and achievements of black people, and it explains why so many black thinkers and artists embarked upon “The New Negro” movement between 1900 and 1925, starting with Du Bois’s exhibition of photographs of middle-class Negroes at the Paris Exposition of 1900.¹

Rejecting the impulse to attempt to erase this history by letting such objects disappear into oblivion through either willful destruction or purposeful neglect, he later concludes, “...we need to study these images in order to deflect the harm that they continue to inflict upon African Americans, at the deepest levels of the American unconscious.” The same sentiment is precisely the premise upon which David Pilgrim, Ferris State University’s Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, founded the nation’s largest, publicly accessible collection of racist objects, now known as the Jim Crow Museum. The desire for social memory and public vindication over any sense of self-deprecation or even a self-imposed psychological masochism could easily account for at least one of the possible reasons why, according to Greg Farr—a white antique dealer in Mesa, Arizona who sells racist memorabilia alongside his other inventory—most of his clientele for these products are African Americans.²

The potential for using these objects as teaching tools, then, sketches out a similar rationale for the existence of the University of Delaware Library’s Gregory C. Wilson Collection of African American Trade Cards and Postcards—the teaching collection at the core of my undergraduate course. Wilson, himself, has been very clear about his desire to have the collection serve a constructive educational purpose. Without a doubt, the majority of the trade cards and postcards in the Gregory C. Wilson Collection are unapologetically racist. These Jim Crow Era postcards feature racial caricatures that were obviously informed by blackface performance, a form of racism that operates through weaponized humor. These postcards are not as overtly appalling as lynching postcards, which for years had served the function of further normalizing white violence against black bodies as a form of entertainment (vaguely reminiscent, I would add, of the current high frequency of sharing videos of police shootings of unarmed black men and women). Instead, the bulk of these Jim Crow Era postcards are somewhat nuanced in their ability to stigmatize the African American community. Judging from the mundane style in the messages one finds written on many of these printed cultural artifacts, it is conceivable that many of the users of these cards considered them to be objects of harmless fun, similar to the kind of humor one would encounter in the nineteenth century minstrel show.



Figure 2. 1880s chromolithographed trade card for Pillsbury’s flour, Minneapolis MN. Designed to appeal to children for a scrapbook keepsake, the ‘humor’ in two hapless youngsters (their complexion and hair type exaggerated in caricature) attempting to sail in a flour barrel with a flour sack attached to a twig perpetuates an assumption of African American ignorance - perhaps also referring to the custom among the poor of reusing flour sacks for clothing.

Humor that seems harmless to some, however, can be utterly humiliating for another. The dehumanization that results can contribute to the further *otherizing* of already marginalized populations. Here, it works to infantilize, to belittle, and to disempower the black community through racial constructions based upon the absurd and the grotesque. Eric Lott, in his seminal book *Love and Theft* states in a rather timely manner that “behind the display of black men for white male consumption, a joking relation in which looking and exposure stand in for desire, one begins to make out the presence of a different (though historically specific) transaction. The joking triangle, in which white men share a dominative relationship to a black man which is above all on looking, seems to me the northern analog of black men on the auction block.”³ Of course, the kind of humor entangled in this tradition is of a complexity that transcends the racial connotations themselves insofar as it deals with class struggle, immigrant assimilation, and even social satire. Nevertheless, it is not too much of a stretch to surmise that it is often difficult for people of color to process such

imagery upon first encountering it. Skimmed from the top at random, one postcard paints black people as ugly, clownish, and absurd. Another says that our children are so worthless that they can be used as alligator bait. Yet another implies that our skin is so dark that when bathing, our wastewater literally becomes ink. And yet another perpetuates the myth of our collective obsession with watermelons, reinforcing the stereotype that African Americans are an uncivilized people prone to eating foods that do not require the use of utensils.

Then again, one can also find later examples of postcards created with the intent of celebrating the black cultural heritage and accomplishment. As such, they are a welcome feature in the Gregory C. Wilson Collection, drifting in like an invigorating spring zephyr in the heavy, choking smog of racist toxicity. These black history-themed postcards represent a counterpoint, as they work to instill a sense of pride in one's heritage and sense of place and belonging within the diverse patchwork of American life. Far from the separatist tenets of Black Nationalism, the spirit of inclusion found in these cultural heritage cards speaks more to the notion of integration than it does to racial segregation or exclusion. Much like those iconic images depicting the death of Crispus Attucks—the apocryphal first martyr in the American Revolutionary War, and, notably, a person of color—postcards that celebrate black history are a symbol of our shared contribution to American history.

Although a compelling argument for collecting racist ephemera has been made by Gates, Pilgrim, and others, actually teaching with these objects, even in a library or a museum setting, often necessitates an approach to dealing with these materials that differs significantly from that of just collecting and preserving them. How does one, for instance, teach this history and still provide a “safe space” where underrepresented minority groups do not feel singled out or humiliated?

In my personal experience, it has proved impossible to design a course around these racist postcards without succumbing to a palpable level of emotional heartache. Upon encountering the many caricatures, slurs, and pejoratives displayed on these objects, I recall the scores of confrontations that I have suffered on the account of my own perceived racial background and cultural heritage. I think of being stopped-and-frisked at gunpoint by the local sheriffs as a

fourteen-year-old when I was just innocently walking back to my suburban home in a predominately-white neighborhood. I think of all the times that I have been accosted and called racial slurs growing up, beginning with my earliest memories as a toddler. I think of being assaulted by white supremacists, the sharp pain I felt as the rock thrown at me hit its mark, the indescribable feeling of dread that I felt when surrounded by a group extremist skinheads that practically made me beg them to not be “curbed” right there on the spot. Even the countless seemingly harmless micro-aggressions that I continue to endure would come to mind. Admittedly, such experiences are intensely personal, but it is likely that the black students in my classroom have suffered through similar incidents.

Consequently, frequent exposure to such images had often left me with a profound feeling of melancholy and gloom. Dealing with this collection on such an intimate level caused me to become aware of the persistence of these images in numerous twenty-first century manifestations. I could not help but to see vestiges of these caricatures wherever I looked. From the persistence of Aunt Jemima syrup labels to the recent controversy over an H&M ad that featured a black juvenile model wearing a sweater boasting the phrase “coolest monkey in the jungle” lettered on its front, instantiations of this cultural legacy seemed omnipresent. Helping students in their ability to discern these vestiges is not necessarily a bad thing because it can empower them to call out such injustices and keep them from participating in their perpetuation. Still, there are certain risks involved; and one must accept that doing so carries with it the potential for having a deleterious impact on the way one might perceive race relations in this country indefinitely.

The rewards of dealing with this history as opposed to



Figure 3. 1905 postcard copyright E. B. & E. [Ely Boynton & Ely was founded in Detroit by George H. Boynton in 1903 and ceased operations in 1908.] The exaggerated facial expression of the performer in black face is a direct reference to the Jim Crow dramatic tradition, though here it is translated to classical music.

simply running away from it, in my experience, has proved to outweigh the challenges associated with the controversial nature of the objects themselves. The key to unlocking the possibilities for learning in this way has involved both a mitigation and a minimization of the potential for psychic trauma within the students—and for students of color, in particular—by allowing for a thorough contextualization of the postcards in individual, group, and class discussions, and in background lectures and assigned readings covering the dynamic history of racial performance and cultural appropriation in American popular culture and its deeply rooted ties to racial discrimination. As Helen Chatterjee elucidated, “Objects can be employed in a variety of ways to enhance and disseminate subject specific knowledge, to facilitate the acquisition of communication, team working, practical, observational and drawing skills, and for inspiration.”⁴ I found Chatterjee’s description to be particularly germane to the manner in which I have chosen to integrate object-based learning as a pedagogical model for this course. Students, for instance, were required to work in groups when completing their postcard processing assignments. The group work was intended for promoting a positive discourse on race among peers. It gave students a chance to formulate and exchange views on race relations away from the spotlight, prior to engaging in class discussions. Fortunately, grant funding from the University of Delaware’s Interdisciplinary Humanities Research Center enabled me to augment the course with a number of other supplementary activities, such as site visits and tours, that also helped in advancing a deeper consideration of this history.

I found that assessment was another effective method of responsibly teaching this material. Therefore, in place of assigning a conventional research paper or administering a facts-based test, I had the students write a reflective essay for the course midterm. I discovered that once students were able to get past their initial sense of shock and repulsion at seeing these racist objects, they could address their impressions of this material on a more personal level. Students were required to detail their experience working with the postcards as they worked towards building an electronic database as a digital archival repository for the collection. It was interesting to see that students of color in particular were able to connect the legacy of discrimination to their own observations and life experiences. White students, too, who made up the majority of both the spring and the fall semester course, learned to recognize the ways in which racism has and continues to operate through vehicles other than overt discrimination and hate crimes. And the content, in some cases, opened up some serious conversations between these students and their family elders, some of whom could recall the pronounced level of saturation with which this kind of racist memorabilia had circulated during their own formative years.

The culminating outcome for the course took the form of a collaborative database created from the collection. Employing the database as a pedagogical instrument allowed students to improve digital skill sets and literacies as well as their understanding of the purpose and meaning of metadata. In addition to looking at these objects in the context of the

history of American racism, I wanted the students to have the chance to learn about how these objects were produced as material ephemera. I devoted a substantial portion of my lectures and course activities to teaching printing and graphic design history so that the students would be able to provide a highly granular amount of material metadata for these postcards. I believe that it is important for students to be able to draw connections between the material production of these objects and their textual and visual content. I wanted them, for example, to be able to comprehend the ways in which the development of chromolithographic and offset printing provided the necessary technological affordances conducive for the proliferation of Jim Crow Era graphic design. The results are as clear as they are captivating. Each of the student groups selected from the collection one racially offensive trade card, one racially offensive postcard, and one postcard that celebrated black cultural heritage, and working together, they provided a wealth of information on the material production and circulation of these ephemera while contextualizing them in a researched descriptive and analytical essay.

Endnotes

- ¹ Gates, Henry Louis Jr. “Should Blacks Collect Racist Memorabilia?” *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, PBS Whyy, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/should-blacks-collect-racist-memorabilia/>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2018.
- ² Cabral, Angelica. “Antique Dealers See Controversial African-American Memorabilia as Part of History.” *Cronkite News, Arizona PBS*, 23 Oct. 2017. <https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2017/10/23/antique-dealers-see-controversial-african-american-memorabilia-part-history/>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2018.
- ³ Lott, Eric, *Love and Theft*, 1993, page 168.
- ⁴ Chatterjee, Helen J. “Object-based Learning in Higher Education: the Pedagogical Power of Museums.” *Putting University Collections to Work in Teaching and Research*. Proceedings of the 9th International Committee of ICOM for University Museums and Collections (UMAC), 10-13 Sept. 2009, Berkeley, CA. pp 179-182.

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An American Nurse in France – 1917

BY JOHN G. SAYERS

A local acquaintance approached me about a batch of postcards that had descended to him from a maiden great aunt whom he had never met. The archive contained nothing of interest to him, but I pointed out that for future family genealogists her 1909 diploma of graduation in Virginia as a Registered Nurse could be of interest. So he kept it.

Among the 50 or so cards was a photographic view from 1917 showing the *SS Finland*, with notation that the aunt had been a passenger in August 1917 en route to St. Nazaire in France as a Nurse with the U.S. Army



Figure 1

(Figure 1). As some readers may know, the bulk of America's military transport in the First World War was 'requisitioned' ocean liners, including several German ones that had originally been detained in American ports on the war's outbreak in August 1914.

A companion to this card is a view of St. Nazaire (Figure 2) as our Nurse would have seen it on arrival, titled in French a General View of the Penhoët Basin, and published as #61 by Artaud and Nozais. This city, at the mouth of the Loire River, was a major shipbuilding center as early as 1861, and one of the arrival ports in France for American troops. In the distance, one can see gantries and what appear to be ships under construction. You can imagine our Nurse looking at this card decades later and reflecting upon the beginning of her assignment in France.

A wonderful card of 'crossover' collecting interest ('Nursing' and 'Military' as well as 'Embroidered' cards) is a charming embroidered card of the Royal Army Medical Corps (R.A.M.C.) (Figure 3). The card was probably made to sell to the British contingent but was pretty enough to attract an American nurse. In the spirit in which the cards were given to me ("find them a good home") it will be handed over to a member of our local Postcard Club who is a keen collector of Nursing and Hospital cards.

Some of the military hospitals in France were operated

jointly by the British, French, and American forces, and a card of the interior of a hospital in which our nurse apparently served (Figure 4) shows the three countries' flags hanging prominently in a nursing hall. Captioned the *Johnstone-Reckitt Military Hospital* at the town of Ris-Orangis (a suburb on the south side of Paris), the card pictures wounded soldiers in a large hall (photo by Dumay, published by A Breger frères in Paris). Think about it – the *third floor* of a building that was probably not designed to cater to large numbers of wounded, in an era where elevators were rare. The non-ambulatory wounded – and all supplies – would have to be carried up two flights of stairs to reach this room!

Another Dumay/Breger card (Figure 5) shows the entrance door on the North Side of the hospital. And yet another card (Figure 6), also Dumay/Breger, shows the South Entrance. Adding to this information is the presence of an Ambulance with the number A-O 2 – a research challenge to the keen military historian. It's probably French because one of the men appears to be in French uniform and the other is possibly an orderly, waiting for the arrival of the next load of casualties.

All the cards are unused, and it's apparent that our Nurse bought and kept them as mementos of her service in France. Two other cards would bring back memories of her time at Ris-Orangis. First is a photo of the hospital from a different angle (Figure 7), and



Figure 2.

the reference number V R 76. I don't think that this is a publisher's reference, since the hospitals also carried military numbering. This is not a Dumay/Breger card, but is published by IPM in Paris.

A final Hospital 'aide memoire' for our Nurse is an image of the Entrance to the Hospital (Figure 8). The building we see in the background is clearly not the main Hospital building, and until I saw further cards I thought that it might be a Nurses' Residence (more about this topic later!) This is another Dumay/Breger card, and the photographic composition is brilliant. On the immediate left of the entrance is a soldier in uniform, but apparently unarmed. On the immediate right is a civilian carrying something, possibly a clipboard. There's an interesting balance of military and civilian activity.

But the story is incomplete until you consider the presence of the child on the far left, and another child inside the grounds and visible through the gate. In the absence of an armed sentry, and with children near the entrance and within the grounds, we can assume that this was a safe locale, well back from the fighting. If I were sending a card to reassure the folks back home that I was safe (whether they were in France, the U.K., or the good old U.S.A.), I couldn't find a more reassuring card. This is a prime example of why a picture (postcard) is worth a proverbial thousand words!

So where did our American Nurse stay? She apparently has that memory preserved, too. A card (#47) published by F. Chapeau in Nantes (Figure 9) shows the Courtyard in front of the Normal School in the town of Savenay. It wouldn't mean much by itself, but she has written on it "Base 8 - Unit 197 Savenay." The image, which could have been taken even prior to the War, shows clusters of civilians and gendarmes or military men, perhaps even before this became a residence.

Why do I think that this was the place where she lived, or at least spent a period of time? First, there's another image of Savenay (Figure 10), a street scene (F. Chapeau #32). Second, there are two other cards, of the



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 6.



Figure 5.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

nearby town of Pontchateau. One, dated March 1, 1905, shows women who worked in a re-enactment of Calvary; another pictures a procession on June 24, 1909 toward the Calvary site at Pontchateau. And the date of June 24? that's the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist, a major religious celebration. Our American Nurse probably watched the 1918 version of the procession, and the only postcard that she could buy was of the 1909 procession (not surprising, if the dealer had overbought in 1909 to get a volume discount!)

One final memory – a piece of ephemera (Figure 11) that adds another dimension to our lonely Nurse in a distant land, caring for our wounded Doughboys. Madame Parant's Trade Card shows that she sold a wide range of clothing and textiles, from table linens to lingerie. Its significance? As with postcards, always look on the back. First, it's dated in pencil "19 June" – near the time of the St. Jean Baptiste Festival. Second, the card was used as an invoice, listing her purchases and the prices on the back. These

include four nightgowns at 18 francs each, a robe for 22 francs, a blouse and some other garments.

Detective work is fun. In this case, we have learned that our Nurse came to France in August 1917, but in June of 1918 she was apparently free to travel to interesting towns to 'see the sights' and to shop and buy clothing. There is no record of the length of her assignment, but this may have been some well-earned



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

leave from her nursing duties. On the other hand, because some of these towns are near St. Nazaire, from which she would embark to return home, she may have stopped in these towns on her journey stateside.

The lesson to collectors: look at a group of material as an archive, whose totality may give you far more information and pleasure than any one of its components. I have seen many of these French First World War era postcards over the decades. I have never bought these images of the small towns and their public buildings, and probably never will. This grouping is the exception. It reminds us that all these images meant something significant to someone, sometime long ago. The people may be gone, but the moments in their memories linger on with us through their ephemera.



John G. Sayers,

is a retired Canadian Chartered Accountant and long-time collector of ocean liner ephemera

- a collection that, thanks to his generous donation, is now part of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, UK. He is photographed here, with his wife Judith, on the roof deck of the Bodleian. John has served several terms on the Board of The Ephemera Society of America and on the Council of The Ephemera Society (U.K.)

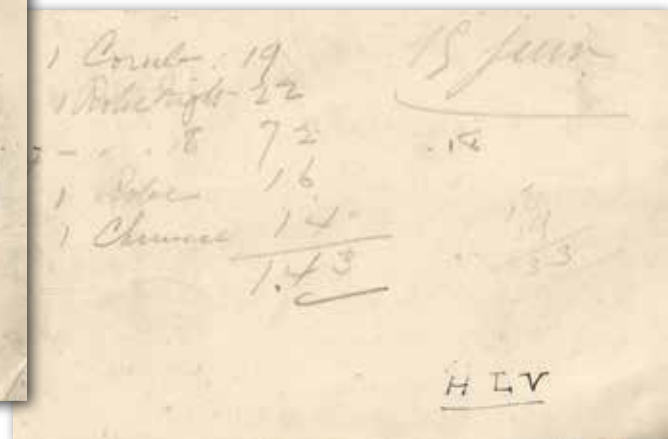


Figure 11.

Flu Narratives

BY RUSSELL JOHNSON

The 2018 centennial of the end of World War I is also a reminder of the scourge of the flu epidemic that cost more lives, worldwide, than did the war. I have been searching through the archives of letters from the period, held at the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library UCLA, to discover reference to the flu. Here are just two examples — that document civilian response to the disease.

Correspondence between Donald M. Butler at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, and Laura Price, Pillsbury Academy, Owatonna, Minnesota, and their relatives and friends, 1917-1921. Biomed Ms. Coll. no. 590.171

Letter 5: Autograph letter signed from May Tuttle Price at Pillsbury Academy, Owatonna, Minnesota and delivered by hand to her daughter, Laura Price at Chamberlain Lodge, Granville, Ohio, 1918 December 15. She reports:

“This has certainly been some day. Friday Miss McDonald was pronounced a flu victim, and sent to the Emergency Hospital; last night about nine o’clock Odegaard was sent. Dad dismissed school at breakfast-time this morning, and this after-noon we had to send Miss Chaney. I’m sending this note by Ernest to tell you to come home. Really, if the flu gets any worse then do not wait until Friday. I never read such a crazy explanation of germ action as that given you by Prexie, and he is a scientist. And then to have all of you swallow it whole is beyond my comprehension. I shall be thankful if you get away at all.”

She directs her daughter how to pay for her travel, and adds: “I’m sending the mask which I insist upon you wearing all the way home. The little black stitch goes at the top. Please pocket your pride and wear it [underlining for emphasis] all the way, never mind the Ku Klux Klan effect: and please take the word of Dr. and use this precaution.”

Mrs. Price signs with emphasis, “Hastily and Lovingly, Mother”.

Collection of letters to Sergeant Kleber W. Hadley, Company K., 336th Infantry, 84th Division and Liaison Section, American Expeditionary Forces in France, 1918-1919. UCLA Biomed Ms. Coll. no. 509.160

(19 September 1918): Hildreth Heiney writes her letter no. “V” from Indianapolis, Indiana: “O, it seems as if you have been gone ages. I would guess that you left camp about nine days ago. Soon we shall hear of your arrival ‘some where.’ Kleber dear, don’t [sic] get Spanish Influenza. It sounds dreadful and it surely isn’t pleasant.”

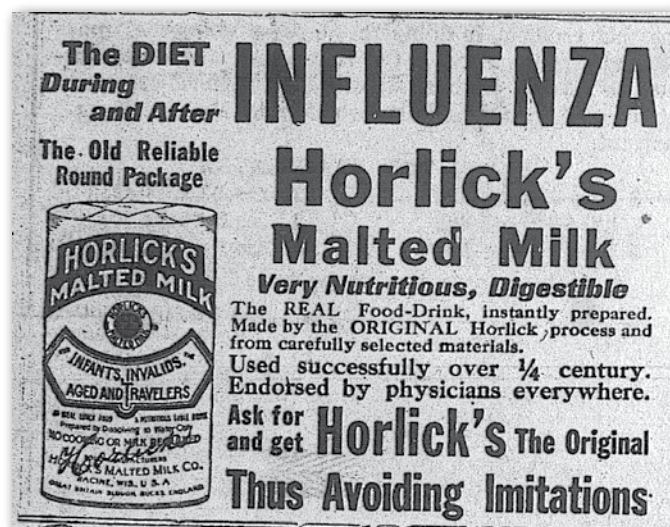


Figure 1. Advertisement from the San Luis Obispo Tribune of November 23, 1918. Many products advertised that they could help flu sufferers.

(1 October 1918): Hildreth Heiney writes her letter no. “X” from Indianapolis, Indiana: “Fourteen cases of Influenza have been reported in the city in the last two days. The situation in the camps is better and much better at the fort. The Theaters now exclude all persons who have cold or sneeze or cough. It must keep them busy. I just read this, ‘Next to murder, nothing is harder to stifle than a sneeze at a picture show.’ I thot you might appreciate it.”

Several letters report that the Indianapolis doctors believe the worst of the flu is over.

(15 October 1918): Hildreth Heiney’s letter no. “XIV” reports: “The theaters, churches, schools, all public gatherings have been forbidden until after the twentieth. The schools closed a week ago last Monday. ... The stores are opening at different hours and closing either earlier or later than usual to avoid congestion in the streetcars. ... There has been a decrease [sic] in the number of cases reported and also in the number of deaths. ... Most of the deaths have been due to pneumonia following influenza.”

Quarantine is lifted; the schools reopen.

(10 and 11 November 1918): Mrs. E.W. Hadley writes to her son from Indianapolis, at 4:45 on the 11th: “Prais [sic] the Lord! ... At 2:45 this morning whistles began to blow. ... No one in this neighborhood has greater cause for thanksgiving than I.” After recounting the family’s relief and celebration, she closes, “We are all very well none of us have any influenza. We all send



Figure 2. "Members of the Red Cross Motor Corps, all wearing masks against the further spread of the influenza epidemic, remove a victim of the Spanish Flu from a house at Etzel and Page Avenues, St. Louis, Missouri." St. Louis Post Dispatch.

very much love — we all talk very much & often about you."

(17 November 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXVI" — "The 'flu' seems to be on the increase again, so I'm not very eager to run chances by going into a crowded theater. However I can't resist something good coming along the line of legitimate theater."

(20 November 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXVII" reports: "The schools were closed again Monday on account of influenza. It seems to have grown steadily worse since our recent celebrations. Now every time one pokes his head out of doors he must wear a mask made of four to six thicknesses of surgeons' cloth — over nose and mouth. The order is to be enforced today. Aunt Florence and Uncle Heiney were out last evening. They said the clerks in the stores and street car conductors all wore them yesterday. Can you imagine how funny it must have been? I know I prefer to stay at home. We are going for a walk — no masks needed then."

(21 November 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXVIII" reports: "The flu situation seems much better today. O, I would love to have had you see Indianapolis today, Kleber. I grinned all the way down town and back behind my mask. Yes. I wore one, and so did everybody else. There were all kinds — large and small — thick and thin, some embroidered and one cat-stitched around the edge. They were adjusted at all angles, tied around the head or hung over ears. Those seen on the street seemed to be taking the place of bibs — resting just under the chin. O, this is a great old world! And

one should surely have a sense of humor."

(26 November 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXX" describes staying with and helping her recently-married sister: "Poor Ruth; she has the flu, Kleber, and they sent for mother or me. ... Before I came down to the house Gwyneth took me to the doctor, and I had the first serum injection for 'flu.' Two hours after I got here and had everything settled, Florence, the nurse appeared. Mother had telephoned her and she said she would come. Ruth is not very ill — she has a little temperature, and with the efficient care Florence gives her, we do not feel concerned. Isn't it dreadful tho, that two weeks after her marriage, she should have this attack?"

(1 December 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXXI" reports: "Ruth was much improved. She expected to

sit up a while today. ... We are so thankful that she escaped pneumonia. Influenza is severe enough without complications." Returning home, "School opens for the third time tomorrow. The influenza situation is better again and I fervently pray that it will remain so, or rather that the dread disease will die out entirely. ... I haven't worried about School, Kleber. We have taught just six weeks out of twelve, I believe."

Ruth is slow to recover from the flu.

(18 December 1918): Hildreth Heiney's letter no. "XXXIV" — "I haven't felt any fear of influenza, but I have taken precautions. Father and Robert are both well now. I am taking a plunge into a tub of cold water every morning and it is so invigorating I don't ever expect to have any ailments. The influenza situation shows improvement just now. But it comes in successive waves ..."

(31 January 1919): Mrs. E.W. Hadley writes an un-numbered letter to her son from Indianapolis, "Just after you left U.S. order came out that all limited service men must go into service, as watchmen in munition plants, machinists, truck drivers, etc." Hagley's brother Joe received no exemption; "When he learned that he wrote to Surgeon General Washington asking for work in water purification or sanitation work in Medical Dept. He received an answer right away assigning him to Camp Dix Sanitary ... Medical Dept & left home Oct. 2, in the midst of worst Flu epidemic at Camp Dix. Of course we were very anxious about him, so many men died there but he has been very well all the time."



Figure 3. U.S. Navy sign reflecting the same concern that Hildreth Heiney expressed in an October 1918 letter - worried that the flu would affect the outcome of the war. Courtesy US Naval Historical Center.

The last letters, until April 1919, continue to express gratitude that the family escaped the flu, except for Ruth who “has not been well a day since before she and Geoff were married” and Kleber’s sister Lucy who “was at death’s door but is making a fine recovery.”



Russell Johnson is a librarian at the Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library at UCLA. He has won awards for building a Baby Books collection, 1880 to 1990, that is recognized internationally as the best in the world and that has opened up a whole new area of childhood studies. He has promoted the value of research in ephemera collections at national historical, archival and medical meetings. Each year he brings both undergraduate and graduate students to the international antiquarian book fair in California, specifically to introduce ephemera as a resource.

Obituaries

The world of ephemera lost two gentle souls earlier this year.

Both David Bruce Belcher and Michael Ernest Mead were longtime dealers in ephemera, each with a strong link to other antiquarian fields. David’s expertise was in antiques, especially in early photography. Although David held a Masters degree in English, and wrote for the local newspaper, the *Orange MA Enterprise and Journal*, he was best known for his quiet expertise in ephemera. He exhibited at the very first Ephemera Society fair and for over two decades thereafter. He died at home at the age of 72 and his family asked that memorial contributions be made in his name to the Orange Historical Society - a town where he spent his whole life.

Mike was an expert philatelist, having begun in 1973 working for H.E. Harris of Boston in lieu of pursuing a law degree. For a decade he was a traveling buyer, appraiser, and manager of collectibles for the company and, when they folded, he went into business as Britannia Enterprises. He always championed the merger of philately and

ephemera - making many passionate presentations to dealer groups to embrace wider interests. For over 30 years he chaired one of the most successful philatelic fairs at Boxborough MA. At the time of his death, at age 67, he was responsible for dealer participation in the 2026 international postal event planned for Boston.

David was a shy man who stayed close to home and Mike loved traveling through all lower 48 states to meet his customers, but both men would give freely of their considerable knowledge, and both were known as men of sterling character.



David Bruce Belcher



Michael Ernest Mead

Page Turners, Paper-Knives, Paper Folders and Bone Folders: *Some tools for restoring and conserving ephemera?*

BY IAN SPELLERBERG

Conservators of ephemera have at their disposal a variety of tools. An excursion into the literature will undoubtedly reveal several ‘blades’ including page turners, paper-knives, paper folders and bone folders (Figure 1). However, recent discussions with some paper conservators and book restorers revealed that there is sometimes doubt as to the names and functions of these tools. The aim of this article is to share some information from a three year study of the history, use and design of these four tools or “blades.”¹

Page Turners. ‘Page Turner’ is a common term for a book that can’t be put down because the reader is so enthralled that he must keep turning the pages. An ‘antique page turner’ is something quite different: a ruler-like blade. An often-used generic but unsubstantiated description is as follows: “In the

Victorian era, writing desks were equipped with a letter opener, a paper-knife, and a page turner. The page turner was used to turn the pages of books so that the paper was not marked by the reader’s fingers. Page turners were also used to turn pages of newspapers so that the reader avoided staining their fingers with ink.”

Research into the history and etymology of a blade for turning pages reveals very little. During some of his public readings, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) would use a large blade to divide the pages of his notes.² That particular blade is referred to by Andrews and other historians as a ‘paper-knife.’

In a Northeast Document Conservation Centre (NDCC) leaflet about storage methods and handling practices there is the following advice: “When special collections volumes are used in a reading room, cradles, snakes, and page-turners (*sic*) should be made available



Figure 1. Reading and writing blades. From top to bottom: an ink eraser, a quill knife, a paper-knife, a paper folder, a letter opener and a ruler.

continued on page 24



Figure 2. Using a bone paper-knife to separate an artwork on paper from a card backing board.

to researchers to support stiff and fragile bindings.”³ The NEDCC have kindly provided the following additional information. “A book snake is a long flexible weight (small metal beads encased in a cloth tube) that is used to hold book pages gently for reading or repair.” A “page-turner” is a tool other than the human hand used to turn pages of a book or document. The tool provides a gentler entry between the pages than a finger, helping prevent tears and other damage, and can provide additional support for the entire leaf as it turns. Examples of page-turners include bone folders, thin teflon folders, micro-spatulas, and stiff cards with rounded edges.

Communications with some major libraries and book conservators around the world yielded no further information about ‘Page Turners.’ Extensive library research found no reference to the term ‘Page Turners’ in English literature amongst patents or in contemporary trade catalogs.

I have to conclude therefore that no ruler-like blade was ever designed and made expressly for turning the pages of books, newspapers or magazines. It appears that specially made ‘Page Turners’ are a myth. This is probably because a paper-knife was

necessary to slit open the uncut pages of books before the pages could be turned.

Paper-knives. Paper-knives were widely advertised and illustrated in old trade catalogs. They were used to cut sheets of paper into smaller pieces. This was done by folding the paper, creasing the fold, then running the paper-knife along the crease. Other terms for this ‘blade’ were ‘paper cutter,’ ‘book knife,’ ‘leaf cutter,’ ‘paper slitter,’ and ‘library knife.’¹ One other function of the paper-knife was to slit open the uncut pages of books, magazines and newspapers.

Uncut pages were a result of the method used for assembling and binding books. One large sheet of paper was folded once, twice, then either three or four times more to

produce a ‘signature’ made up of several leaves. Once bound into a book, the leaves had to be cut open before reading. There is much discussion in the literature about who should take responsibility for the cutting of the pages – the publisher or the reader.

Examples of uncut pages are still found today. Consequently the question is often asked, “what is the best way of cutting uncut pages?” I think that it is unfortunate that index cards, credit cards or even letter openers are often suggested as tools for this purpose. A razor-sharp blade tends to cut away from the fold. Blades that are too blunt leave a frayed edge. A real



Figure 3. Paper folders.

paper-knife is designed expressly for this purpose.

One would expect paper-knives to have had a long history alongside that of paper and books. However early references in English Literature are scarce. One example is a reference to a paper-knife that once belonged to Charles II (1630-1685).⁴ As to their design, the most common length (blade and handle) was about eleven inches (27.9 cm). Some were as small as 3.5 inches (8.9 cm.) and some as long as 21 inches (54 cm). The most common materials for the blades of paper-knives were ivory, silver and wood. A smooth surface combined with a ‘keen,’ but not sharp, edge was essential. The shape of the blade was typically broad with a rounded tip.

By way of contrast, letter openers (better called “envelope openers”) have a narrow blade and are pointed. Paper-knives have been in existence for centuries but letter openers became popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Letter openers could reasonably be called a specialized form of paper-knives. In the late 1800s both paper-knives and letter openers were sometimes illustrated in the same catalogue.

Paper-knives are used by paper conservators for a variety of purposes, including lifting or flattening tears and burnishing repairs, through a secondary support of tissue. Paper-knives made of ivory or bone and about 10¾ inches (25 cm.) long are especially useful for splitting an artwork on paper from a card backboard (Figure 2). This is a task that requires a qualified, professional paper conservator with considerable experience. The blade can be given a good ‘slip’ by wiping it against the skin. This applies a tiny amount of oil that reduces the friction and prevents the knife from sticking between the board and adhesive. Not all works of art on paper can be removed from backing board in this way. However, if correctly carried out, this method can reduced the time that it would otherwise take by using a scalpel.

Paper Folders and Bone Folders. Are paper folders and bone folders the same? That question preoccupied me during my research into these blades. I have in my collection several examples of ‘antique’ paper-folders and at least one is labelled ‘paper folder.’ They are straight blades with rounded ends and most are about 10½ inches (26.5 cm.) in length (Figure 3). Most are



Figure 4. Bone folders.

made from wood but there are examples made from silver, ivory, bone, agate and nephrite. Paper folders are still made today and are used by paper conservators, book conservators, and for paper modeling and paper crafts. Scoring paper against the grain is certainly best done with a paper folder.

Paper folders were used for creasing and burnishing and were sometimes called “paper-creasers.” The low friction surface of paper folders gives a much smoother surface to the paper than that made by the thumb or fingers, resulting in a superior crease.

Paper folders were also used in conjunction with paper-knives. Before a paper-knife was used for cutting paper, the paper was folded, then creased with a paper folder. The resulting scored paper was much easier to cut with a paper-knife.

Recently my wife kindly purchased a modern ‘bone paper folder’ for me (Figure 4). Made by *Viking*, and labeled ‘bone paper folder,’ she found it in a shop selling arts and crafts materials together with some stationery. The blade is certainly made of bone and it fits the description of a paper folder. In modern times, folders have also been made of plastic, teflon and bamboo.⁵

While little is written about paper folders, the history and design of bone folders is well documented from at least the eighteenth century.⁶ Bone folders are used by paper conservators to handle and turn fragile pages. They have many more functions and indeed they have been described by one book conservator as “bone folders: our nearest and dearest friend.”⁵

The following are extracts from a brief list of the functions of a bone folder provided by a senior book and paper conservator at the National Library of New Zealand:¹

1. To assist in the removal of old paper liners and adhesives direct from the spine of a textblock (bone is notably less abrasive compared to the surface of a metal spatula).

2. To assist in the smooth and rapid ‘turning in’ of a newly pasted-out cover material along and over the edges of the boards (covers).

3. To ‘lay down’ the fully pasted-out half of an endsheet onto the inside of the front and back boards.

4. To define the groove in case binding.

5. To assist in the ‘moulding’ or forming of the wet leather, up and over and around raised sewing cords on the spine of an early bonding, so that the leather adheres tightly to the overall shape of the spine of the textblock.

So are paper folders and bone folders the same? The terms are seemingly interchangeable. Bone folders tend to be made of bone whilst other folders are made from any durable, relatively friction-free material.

Misappropriation of terms. The term “page turner” is often used to refer to paper-knives. And paper-knives are frequently referred to as “letter openers.” Paper folders are sometimes described as “tongue depressors,” “letter openers,” or even “beer foam scrapers.” Other blades once found on writing desks are the “quill blade” (for preparing or sharpening quill pens) and “ink eraser” (Figure 1). The latter is frequently misidentified as a letter opener, a scalpel, or a blood-letting instrument. For all these blades there are patents. Some inventive people have patented blades that serve more than one purpose. For example, in 1884, Lyman Stone and Merrill Watson patented the ultimate multi-tool. It was a combined paper folder, paper cutter, letter opener, measure or square and rule (Figure 5). The last word surely must be the ruler as some conservators of ephemera claim that the humble ruler is their favorite tool.

Endnotes

¹ Ian Spellerberg, *Reading & Writing Accessories: A Study of Paper-knives, Paper Folders, Letter Openers and Mythical Page Turners* (Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2016).

² Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³ Northeast Document Conservation Centre (NDCC): 4.1 Storage Methods and Handling Practices. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/4.-storage-and-handling/4>

⁴ Ian Spellerberg, What Ever Happened to the King Charles II Paper-knife? *The Quarterly. The Journal of the British Association of Paper Historians*, 105, 35-36, January 2018.

⁵ Jeff Peachy, Bone Folders. <http://jeffpeachy.com/tag/bone-folders> 2018/1/5

⁶ M. Dudin, *L’Art du Relieur Doreur de Livres* (Paris: Saillant & Nyon, 1772).

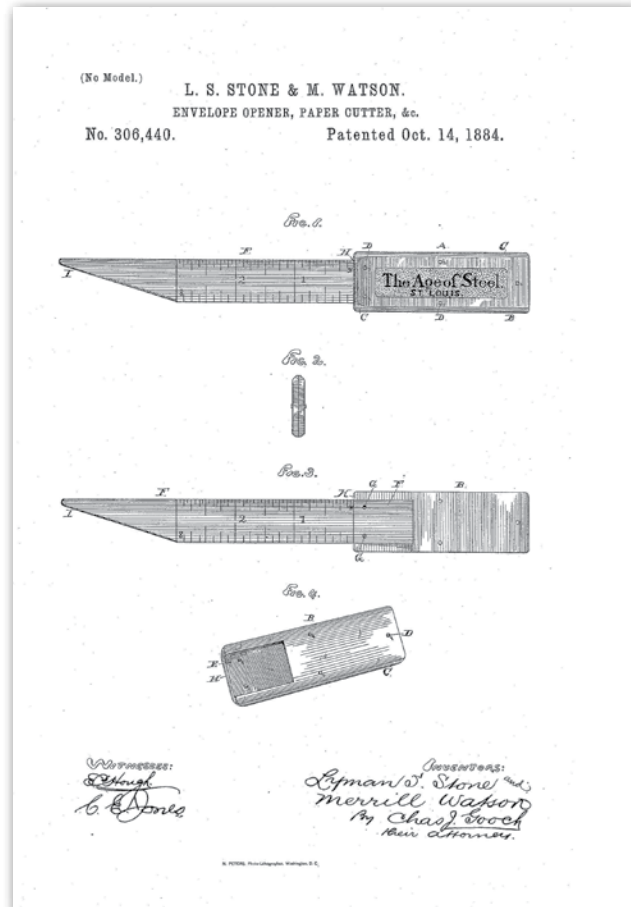


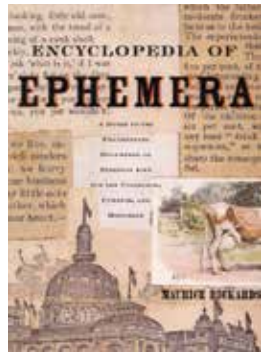
Figure 5. Stone and Watson’s 1884 patent for a combined paper folder, paper cutter, letter opener, measure or square and ruler. In Fig. 1. The handle on the right has a bevelled edge for ruling lines. The blade on the left is pointed for opening letters and the top side is for slitting paper. The same blade may be used as a paper folder.

Ian Spellerberg is

Emeritus Professor of Nature Conservation at Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand. His ‘conservation’ interests extend to antiques and collectibles. He has written three books and published numerous articles about collecting (mainly Victoriana) in a wide variety of journals and magazines.



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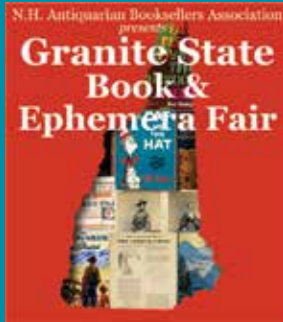
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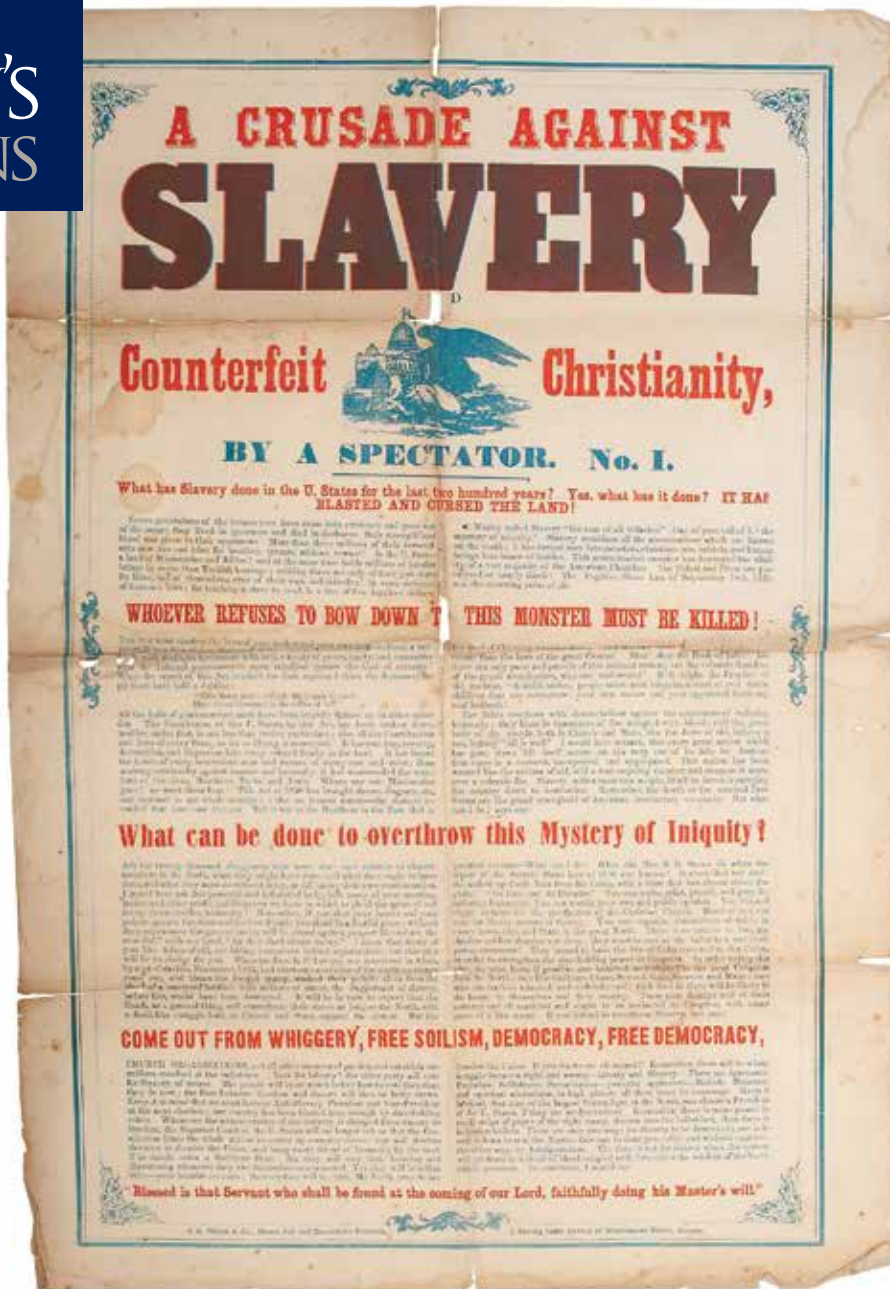
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