THE EPHEMERA JOURNAL

VOLUME 26, NUMBER 2 JANUARY 2024

Ephemera: Mortar for the Bricks of History

BRUCE SHYER INTERVIEWS JIM HEIMANN

Jim Heimann is a Renaissance man. He has been called an urban anthropologist and a historian of popular culture. He is an author, illustrator, editor, graphic designer, teacher, lecturer, and artist. Bruce Shyer (former Ephemera Society of America President and 2023 Maurice Rickards medalist) interviewed him in the summer of 2023.

I was born in Westchester, California, a little community adjacent to LAX that was really a development for war workers. And that's what my dad did; he worked at North American Aviation, initially as a riveter on the wing assembly line of the B-25.

I was always collecting something, even as a child—typical things like rocks and seashells. When I graduated from high school in 1967, it was a great time to collect ephemera, as there was so much focus on California teenagers—the baby boom generation. I kept the brochure for the first Teen-Age Fair at Pacific Ocean Park and the posters from concerts I attended in the late sixties, which was the beginning of the poster collection I developed over the years. [Figure 1]

Being in California, and certainly Southern California, offered a lot of opportunities not only to collect the ephemera of popular culture, but to focus on the history of a lot of these items. The idea of putting a book together pretty much originated with my parents talking about what they did during the war: going to drive-in restaurants, to the ballrooms for the swing shift dances, roller skating, etc. These conversations really took me to places that had all but evaporated.

Initially, the book I wanted to write once I graduated from college was about nightclubs because that's what my parents talked about, but it became daunting because there was so much material. As I was researching files at the libraries around town, I would find pictures of buildings shaped like objects. I was familiar with The Big Donut because we used to go to the one in Inglewood. I remembered

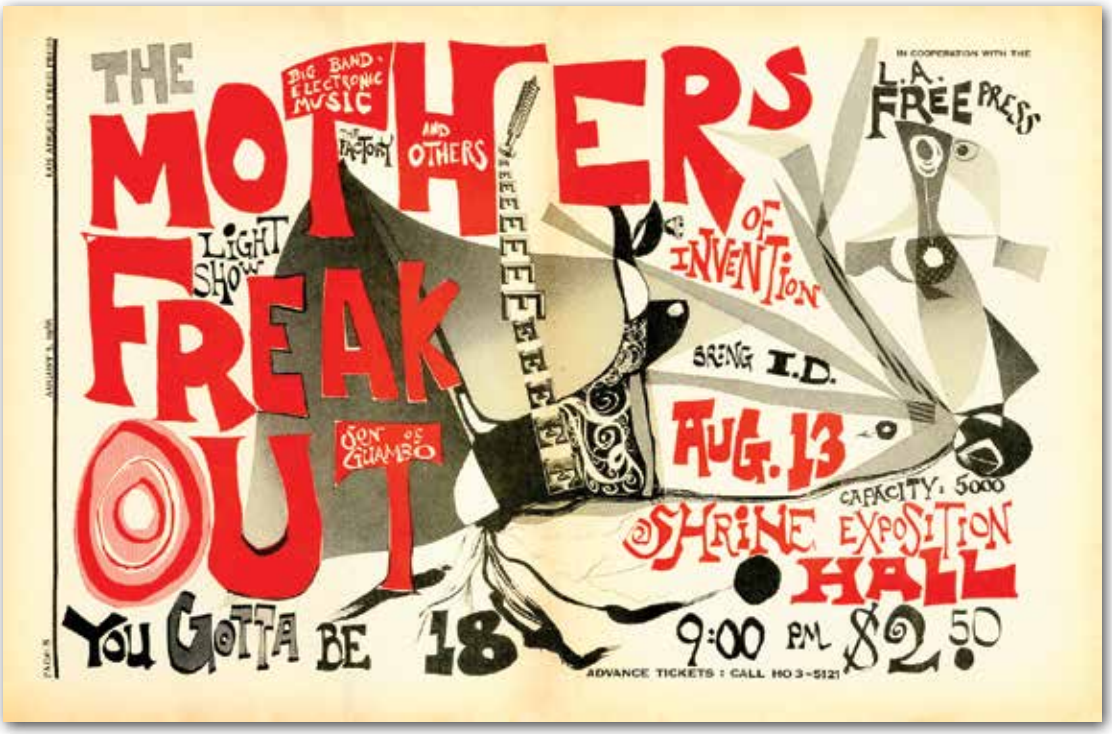

Figure 1. 1966 poster for The Mothers of Invention and Others Freak Out, as reprinted in the August 5 issue of the Los Angeles Free Press.

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The Ephemera Journal

The Ephemera Society of America

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Volume 26, Number 2, January 2024

The Ephemera Journal (ISSN 1543-4990) is published three times a year by The Ephemera Society of America, Inc.

Members and Friends

The festive season is upon us, and the ESA has a lot to celebrate. 2024 is shaping up to be a bumper year. First, our March conference and fair, which runs from March 14-17, is now being promoted by Sanford L. Smith + Associates, long-time promoters of the New York ABAA Armory show. Second, the ESA is proud to be joining with the Clements Library at the University of Michigan in announcing a joint fellowship for the study of ephemera. Third, we have been invited to hold the mid-year meeting next September at the Boscobel Historic House in the heart of the Hudson Valley. Once the details have been finalized, we will notify members.

Sanford L. Smith + Associates have unparalleled experience and history running the NY show, and hence the largest mailing list in the Northeast. Jennifer Stark and Nicky Dessources will lead the team in running and promoting the Fair. The show will run two weeks before the NY ABAA fair. I encourage dealers to sign up quickly as space is likely to sell out.

The Clements Library is known worldwide as a foundational collection of Americana and ephemera. Our collaboration with them aims to fund research in ephemera which will then result in a presentation at one of our conferences by an emerging scholar. We hope this is the beginning of a fruitful partnership with the Clements which will highlight the use of ephemera in building a fuller understanding of history.

Historic Boscobel House and Gardens in Garrison NY is dedicated to engaging diverse audiences in the Hudson Valley's ongoing dynamic exchange between design, history and nature. We have been invited to hold our mid-year meeting there with the possibility of having ephemera exhibit on different subjects displayed and open to the community.

Finally, I want to encourage everyone to remember the ESA in their charitable giving this year. We continue to build our outreach with our online conferences, our partnerships with institutions and our outstanding Journal and eNews. There is much to support, and we so appreciate your membership and contributions.

Hope to see you in 2024,

David

David Lilburne, President

Henry Voigt, 2024 recipient of the Rickards Medal

At our annual banquet in March, Henry Voigt will join the distinguished line-up of ephemerists who have been honored with the Rickards Medal — 27 since Maurice Rickards was himself honored in 1985.

In the July 10 & 17 issue of *The New Yorker*, Henry (dubbed "The Menu Maven") was featured in a Talk of the Town piece, "Squirrelling Dept.," by Zach Helfand. Henry's daughter Emily had written Mr. Helfand to promote Henry's exhibition at the Grolier Club: *A Century of Dining Out: The American Story in Menus, 1841-1941*. Her words are perfect to introduce Henry's remarkable contribution to the appreciation of ephemera.

"Over the last thirty years, my father, Henry Voigt, has collected more than 10,000 historic menus, which will be on exhibit starting next week at the Grolier Club (North America's oldest and largest bibliophilic club, on East 60th Street). I'm writing you as a proud daughter who recognizes the quirky majesty of what my father has accomplished. The opening would make a wonderful Talk of the Town story, not least because of the lost corners of New York's history that menus illuminate.

I've watched my dad go from rummaging through bins at antiquarian book fairs in the 1980s to being able to target his collecting with the dawn of the internet. Each menu tells a forgotten and often unexpected story he's unearthed about the past: the buffet that 4,000 famished revelers stormed at Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural ball, a mysterious Victorian 'love hotel' where upper-crust New Yorkers could carry on double lives, the city's first restaurant where women could dine without male escorts, and the dishes being served as Edgar Allan Poe scrawled 'The Raven' and Walt Whitman produced *Leaves of Grass*.

As a New Yorker myself, I appreciate the irony that this capstone event in my father's life comes at a time when the pandemic might've killed off the American menu for good, thanks to QR codes.

In any case, I can't pretend to know what compels someone to collect 10,000 menus, preserve them against the ravages of time, and perform a near-Biblical exegesis on every word they contain. But I'm certain my father is himself an extraordinary story, and the Grolier opening will provide a nostalgic vision of New York's past, from lavish banquets of the Gilded Age to Great Depression food relief, in a club that hasn't changed much since 1884."

In this Issue...

Bruce Shyer, wanted our members to know about one of the finest (and largest) private collections of ephemera. He interviewed **Jim Heimann** by telephone, and then the editorial team fashioned the result into our lead article. Jim's relationship with the Taschen publishing house has resulted in many books that focus on his material — but, as the interview indicates, there is a lot more to be discovered.

David Bossert also maintains a private collection that has resulted in several books relating to the output of the Walt Disney company, where he has spent his professional life.

In contrast to these longtime collectors who are steeped in ephemera, both **Shane Morrissy** and **Olivia Gilmore** are very young scholars attracted to ephemera for both image and content. They both used postcards as an entry point. **Shane's** doctoral dissertation focuses on the American postcard craze, but, while he was researching in the New York Public Library, he discovered a trove of images of postal carriers that piqued his interest.

Olivia, whose passion is fashion, explored the "Merry Widow" craze in enormous hats in the first decade of the 20th century after finding some comic postcards. She then looked for other ephemeral evidence of hat style changes through the Great War and wrote a Masters thesis on their cultural relevance which serves as the basis for this article.

—Diane DeBlois, editor

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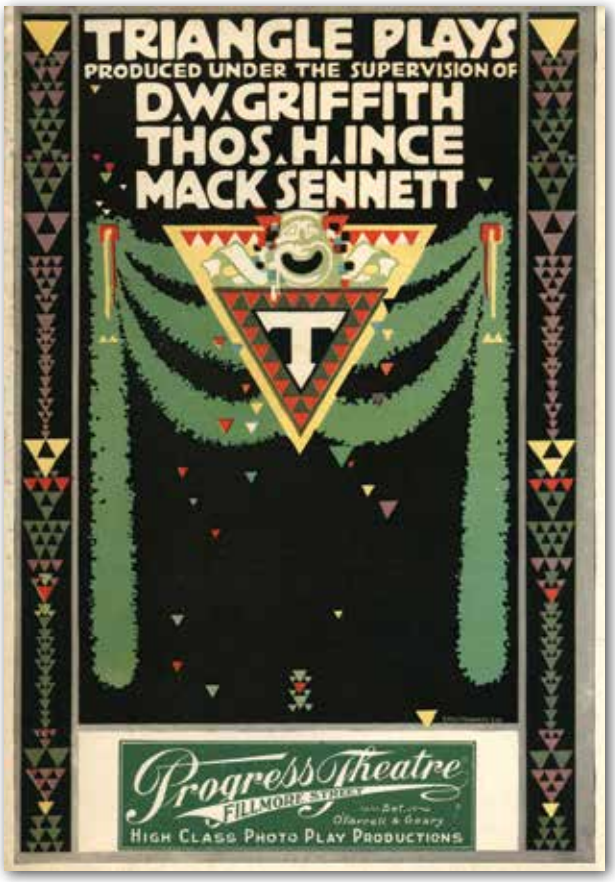

Figure 2. ca 1917 Magazine advertisement for Photo Plays of the Triangle studio (D.W. Griffith, Thomas Ince, and Mack Sennett) at the Progress Theatre, San Francisco.

seeing similar buildings, like the giant "Pup" in Culver City. In doing the research on Hollywood I found that, inevitably, these figural buildings were filed under "Hollywood," so I started siphoning those off. Since many of the buildings had no indication of where they were, I tried to find match covers, postcards, and menus that would at least give me a clue to the time period. That started me collecting on a much more focused basis. I was looking for anything having to do with nightlife and nightclubs, which was difficult to find. But I soon joined the Rathkamp Matchcover Society, and that led to finding out about the postcard clubs around town. Having a background in graphic design, my eyes immediately went to anything that had either type or an image that was really striking.

I discovered the local flea markets in the early '70s. The Rose Bowl had just started up, and that became nirvana for collecting all kinds of stuff. Not only was I looking for things that would work for book projects, but also for the freelance illustrations I was doing. The illustrations focused on found images, so I was making collages, buying stacks of magazines from the teens and '20s and '30s. [Figure 2] When I started working on California Crazy,[1] I had to lean heavily on institutions, not only for the photos but also for information. I contacted a professor at UCSB, David Gebhard, who had written quite a bit about Southern California architecture. I wrote a foreword, but he wrote the classic essay that defined and legitimized the concept of Pop Architecture.

I was a history minor in college so I could do research, and I knew what I was looking for that would support the book projects I had taken on. Whether the research was

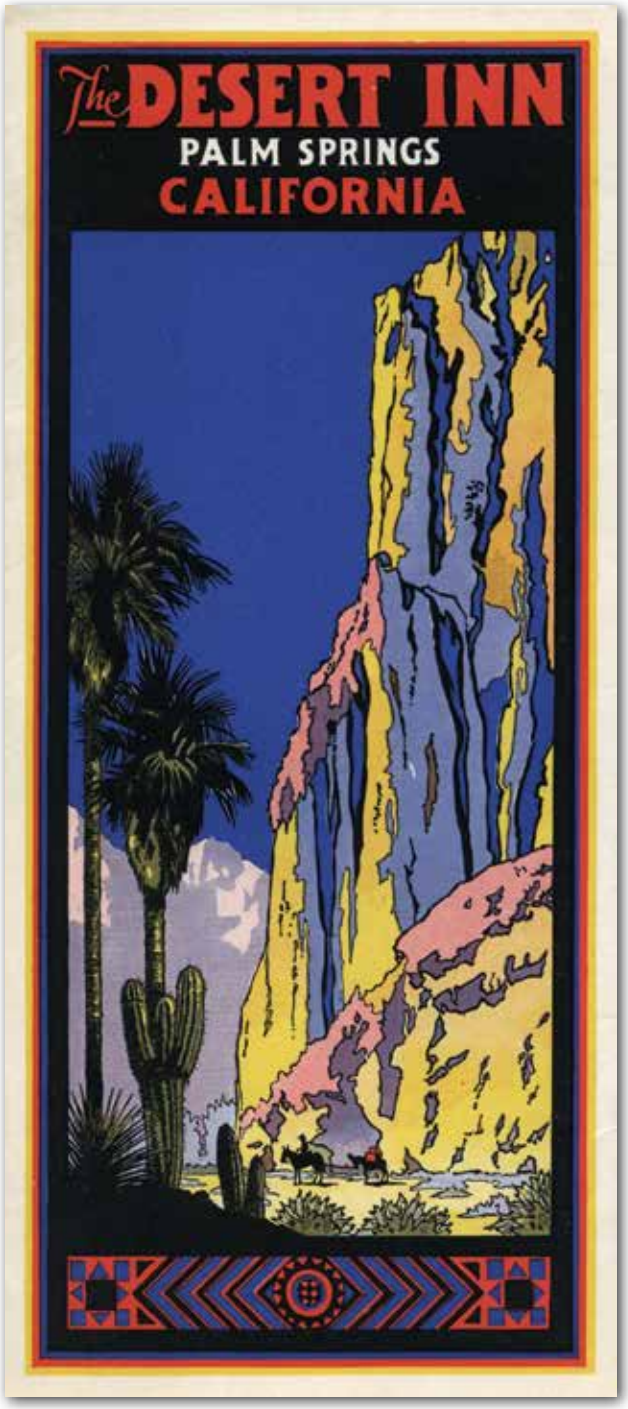

Figure 3. ca 1925 Brochure cover for The Desert Inn, Palm Springs CA - although the Inn dates from 1909, this shows the conversion of the hotel's tents to Spanish style bungalows.

local or at places such as the Library of Congress, the search intensified looking for photographs of roadside architecture. Librarian would suggest, "Oh, you should try the Huntington Library," or, "You should go up to Berkeley and check out their collections" or, "there's a newspaper they have in their morgues, and maybe you should take a look at that." I really got embedded in the history. And that was mandatory because I didn't want these books to come out and be just picture books with fluff; they had to have some substance to them. For *Los Angeles Portrait of a City*,[2] I hired Kevin Star do the main text because he had an authoritative idea of what L.A. was all about.

My own expertise is heavily based on the ephemera I collected; I can substantiate a lot of historical facts that might otherwise be just speculation because I've got the match cover or the brochure or the photograph or the article to prove it. [Figure 3] When I started seriously collecting nightclub ephemera, I set up a filing system with a folder for each nightclub. The artifacts that went into those files included everything that's tangible— photographs, napkins, match covers, toothpick holders, place mats, hat check stubs, menus and, yes, swizzle sticks.

Figure 4. 1940s napkin and matchbook cover advertising Mona's club in San Francisco, "Where Girls Will be Boys" - the first lesbian bar to open in the city.

A natural offshoot of my interest in the nightclubs of Southern California was Tijuana, where the nightlife was basically a byproduct of the U.S. The big resort of Agua Caliente and a lot of the Tijuana nightclubs were pretty much owned by Americans—so my Tijuana collection is also substantial. Agua Caliente was completely supported by Hollywood producers such as Joseph Schenck from 20th Century Fox. These guys were all gamblers. They couldn't gamble in the United States or drink during Prohibition, so they put all their money in Mexico.

For my first book on nightclubs, *Out with the Stars*,[3] I spent an enormous amount of time at the Public Library in downtown Los Angeles and also at UCLA's research library, going through microfilm of newspapers to find the opening dates, the ads, to see who was playing at the Palladium or at La Conga or anywhere else. I would sit for eight hours at a stretch without leaving. Maybe I took a restroom break once or twice, but I didn't eat. All I did was go through every newspaper and find every mention. I would sit there with quarters and I would just pump the copy machine when I found something. When I would find a stack of old newspapers at the flea market, I'd be looking for particular dates, and inevitably I would find the original ads. I would get the opening date of the Palladium, and then I might find a full-page ad for a gambling ship off the coast, and so on.

I still look for those newspapers; the originals are always a goldmine. I've bought bound volumes of *The Sentinel*, which was a Black newspaper, because the two nightclub areas that are the least documented are Black clubs on Central Avenue and gay clubs. The white population didn't go to the Black neighborhoods, so photographers didn't show up at these places, and you don't have a lot of material to support their history. It's a continual hunt.

No one wanted to advertise or draw attention to the gay clubs because that activity was illegal. They didn't distribute much ephemera, but they did have match covers. If you're lucky, you might find a napkin. Rarely, rarely, rarely will you ever find a menu, so that's always been a quest of mine. I do have ads from 1933 for some of the first gay nightclubs in Hollywood. And I've also got a napkin and a match cover from one of the early gay nightclubs in San Francisco. [Figure 4] I have match covers from gay clubs from the '40s - all in purple, which was a code. One

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Figure 5. ca 1990 collage by Jim Heimann.

matchbook just has a purple pansy and the address. You would pass that to someone else, and that basically said this is a place where you're going to find other people like you. I have programs from some of the early drag clubs in L.A. and from Finocchio's in San Francisco.

For about 30 years I was a freelance graphic designer and illustrator, but in 2000 I got a phone call from Benedikt Taschen. He had seen my books and asked to come to my studio. I thought it was a joke, but, sure enough, he showed up 20 minutes later. He was looking for someone to do a book on Los Angeles, and he asked me where all of my material was because my studio was fairly small, so I took him to my home studio and a storage space. When he saw how much material there was, he shifted the idea for a book on L.A. to a book on the history of American magazine advertising. He asked which decade I had the most material and we settled on the 1950s. When he asked, "How fast can you do it?" I told him, "Well, I don't know. For my books, I usually have a two-year contract." He said, "Can you do it in six months?" and I replied, "Yeah, I guess so." That started that whole All American Ads series.

In the process of working with Benedikt, he kept coming to investigate what was in my collections, which led to him suggesting, "Let's do the rest of the 20th century." They're pretty hefty books. I believe they're 600 or 700 pages. He started suggesting other books. Finally, he just said, "Look, I'm tired of you billing me every month for the work that you're doing. Here's an offer." And it was an offer I couldn't refuse. I just closed down my studio and became Taschen's executive editor.

For the first four or five years, of working with Taschen, I did everything from assisting in the creation of the Taschen Store in Beverly Hills to hiring people, supervising the store, and proposing other book projects. Most of the time, Tasch comes up with book ideas based on what he sees in my collection. They've been very successful for him, so we continue to do the same type of books—about 45 so far—all based on ephemera. We're now planning a giant book on my own personal collection, and an update to the 1985 Hollywood nightclub book (to which I have continually added material).

As a graphic designer I was hugely influenced by all of the images I was collecting and it was definitely integrated into my art. [Figure 5] There were specific designers and illustrators that I followed, such as Otis Shepard who was the art director for Wrigley Chewing Gum. In the 1930s when Wrigley bought Catalina Island, 22 miles off the coast of California, he asked Otis and his wife Dorothy to go there and basically brand redesign everything they possibly could. They did the costumes for the people who greeted visitors coming off the boat, they did all the signage for the stores, they did anything that was paper-related. They designed restaurant menus and programs and brochures. [Figure 6] And when the Chicago Cubs would come there for their winter practice, they would design the programs for that event. I really liked Shepard's graphic design style which was heavily influenced by Joseph Binder, a German designer who immigrated to the United States in the '30s. I created advertising campaigns for a German cigarette company that was highly influenced by both Shepard and Bender.

I'm in my 36th year of teaching illustration at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. I'm known as the teacher who brings stuff into class. Other instructors have asked me to put together PowerPoints. One that I did recently was for a fabric design class; I brought in all my World's Fair scarves and handkerchiefs, sheet music, and patterns out of magazines. The students' world today is so digitalized, to actually have something physical throws them for a loop - the actual Leyendecker ads that I shared in class that are over 100 years old amazed them.[4]

When a book comes out, I'll also get calls from museums and other institutions for a lecture on, for instance, *California Crazy* or on programmatic

architecture. When *Dark City* came out, people were calling me up to do something on L.A.'s crime scene.[5]

In 2017, I did an exhibition at the Ampersand Gallery in Portland, Oregon called "The Will to Draw." I was attracted to naive drawings and have long collected what I consider to be outsider art. In conjunction with the gallery show, we did a little book of samples of this naive art.

In terms of great finds, just recently I found a menu from the Vernon Country Club near Hollywood for which I had newspaper ads from 1912 and 1917, but no related paper ephemera. I was at the flea market, and a guy who I regularly buy from had a box of stuff. I started going through it and found a young girl's diary from around 1925. It was filled with the typical stuff that you would find in these high school diaries with ticket stubs and programs, but I turned a page and here was the menu. [Figure 7] And eureka, I just stopped dead and went, "Oh my God, here it is."

I'm pretty organized, but, to be able to share my collection, about 15 years ago I hired Ryan Mungia, a Taschen intern, to create a database and digitize everything. We're maybe a third of the way through, so I don't know if it'll ever get done, it's such a huge job. The menu collection alone is around 10,000 items. Ryan has evolved into being a partner but he also designs books and publishes his own.

The size of my collection? 250,000 items is a rough guess. The material falls into about 30 different categories. Some, like the nightclubs and Tijuana and *California Crazy* have a lot of depth to them, others not so much. I've got a great snapshot collection. I've got a whole section on physical culture. Then there are categories like cult religions with maybe 50, 100 items—still a nice amount of stuff for that particular subject. Consider my books. I have a substantial library that fills all four walls of my studio and several storage units.

Figure 6. 1941 Cocktail Menu for the St. Catherine Hotel on Santa Catalina Island, designed by Dorothy and Otis Shepard.

As far as a filter to my collecting, quality is always primary. If something isn't in mint condition but is informative and looks like it's the only one of its ilk, then I won't hesitate to buy it and add it to the collection. In the case of psychedelic posters, because there were so many of them, I look for first print runs as well as condition. When it comes to menus, I'm not buying everything. When we did the European menu book, I bumped up that part of the collection but also leaned heavily on other collectors. With the menus, I'm really L.A. focused. If it's from Restaurant Row in Hollywood and isn't a great looking menu, I'll still buy it just because it gives a continuum to the history of that particular street. Or if there's something on Sunset Boulevard that might be historically important I will still purchase it even though it doesn't have the great graphics to go with it. But if it was in Kansas and just an average menu, then no, I'm passing those things up for sure.

My favorite projects? I certainly have a lot of affection for my first, *California Crazy*. That book resonated on so many levels. The surfing book is pretty good too.[6] That was the biggest project I've done so far (it took four years) and it's the most comprehensive. Maybe between those two, the first one being more of an emotional attachment, and the surfing one being a highlight of my publishing, because it's doubtful I will do a book that big again.

My 'wish list' of ephemera? Anything from The Colony Club in Hollywood from around 1935; I've been looking for years. It was an illegal club but it was really popular with the top stars in the '30s. It was a gambling place in an old mansion right off Sunset Boulevard. I only know about it because of a mention in a 1930s magazine article and newspaper articles about it being raided.

Present projects? Well, the main one that's fast-tracked is the book about my collection, as I've mentioned. The second is California, Portrait of the Golden State, which is a companion to the Los Angeles book. We're basically done with the layouts. Benedikt just has to approve one final revision, and we should be able to go into production, which is going to conflict with the other book, but somehow we'll get it done. The third book project is a history of Hollywood nightlife, an update of the 1985 book, which will be a comprehensive 1900 to 1970 look at nightclubs and the playgrounds of the stars—resorts, roller skating, everything. We were working exclusively on that during COVID, but now we've had to stop because we have these other two projects.

Then I'm doing a book with a fellow who owns a heritage retro Chinese restaurant called the Formosa

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Figure 7. 1927 Menu cover for "Midnight Suggestions" at the Vernon Country Club, Los Angeles CA.

that's been around since the 1930s. He bought it and restored it, and he wants to do a book, so Ryan and I are working together in the mornings or in our spare time on weekends.

I also have two design projects. A five-star resort in Ojai wanted a blend of early California modernism and Spanish revival style. In preparing a proposal for them, I put together a whole booklet on all the influences that would serve as the inspiration for this particular project. I just delved into all the material, all the ephemera that I had, booklets and photographs of the 1920s hotel they were refurbishing, and it blew them away. I'm currently doing all their branding, stationery, and menus for two restaurants. Then two clients that are in the hospitality business have a large property in Ojai that they're developing and want me to do the branding.

I've never had this much work, ever. It's all about juggling. This morning, I worked on the hotel projects, and then, when Ryan came in, we shifted to the book. And now we're going to shift onto something else this afternoon, and tomorrow we'll try and tackle three more projects in various ways. We just keep chugging along.

The future? Well, the whole collection has to go someplace. This is not a collection just for me, it has to be distributed or somehow be made available to the public for research. Because when I was doing research, when I found all these things, it felt like, "Wow! This is incredible that someone would save this and that it now has historical purpose."

All this ephemera substantiates things for which it's difficult to find any history. I think that regarding ephemera collecting as "second level" is truly tragic because ephemera supports history in such a tremendous way — whether it's a brochure or a photograph or a match cover, these things make the history tangible. I like to think of my ephemera collection as mortar for the bricks of history because it really does hold all of these things together. The whole idea of ephemera becomes even more important in the digital world, especially with all this talk about AI. I would hate to see the collection just broken up and re-sold. I want it to go somewhere where it will be cataloged, exhibited, respected, and put back out into the world so that everybody can have access to it, for whatever their purpose might be.

Endnotes

[1] *California Crazy*, Chronicle Books 1980; *California Crazy and Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture*, Chronicle Books 2001; *California Crazy: American Pop Architecture*, Taschen 2018.

[2] *Sins of the City: The Real Los Angeles Noir*, Chronicle Books 1999.

[3] *Out With the Stars: Hollywood Nightlife in the Golden Era*, Abbeville Promotional 1989.

[4] Joseph Christian Leyendecker (1874-1951) was a successful freelance commercial artist best known for magazine covers and advertisements for menswear.

[5] *Dark City: the Real Los Angeles Noir*, Taschen 2018.

[6] *Surfing: 1778-today,* Taschen 2014. 2016, 2020.

Bruce Shyer

Jim Heimann

Bruce Shyer, a retired San Francisco lawyer, is the longest serving board member and former president of the Ephemera Society of America, who was honored with the Rickards medal in 2023. A voracious collector of visually appealing ephemera, he wanted our members to know more about the man and the huge collection behind the many Chronicle and Taschen books on advertising. Bruce is shown here in front of a display of hundreds of his collection of animal-themed ephemera, meticulously arranged for the society information booth at an Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America international show in California — one of many such displays he has both sponsored and curated over the last decade.

The Monsanto Plastic House of the Future

By David Bossert

In the 1950s, Walt Disney envisioned a new kind of amusement park that would not only entertain visitors, but also educate and inspire them. Disneyland, which opened on July 17, 1955, was the result, and it quickly became a cultural icon, attracting millions of visitors each year. One of the park's most popular attractions was Tomorrowland's "House of the Future," a demonstration of cutting-edge technology and modern design.

From opening day, the Monsanto Chemical Company had been a major sponsor at Disneyland through its Hall of Chemistry exhibit in Tomorrowland [Figure 2]. Monsanto produced a lavish foldout brochure for guests to take as they exited the exhibit. By 1957, they had agreed to build their plastic "House of the Future" at the entrance to Tomorrowland opposite the Hall of Chemistry and proposed a new brochure that showcased both attractions [Figure 1].

The House of the Future was designed by MIT architects in association with Monsanto. The company's goal was to showcase the potential and versatility of plastic materials in modern construction. The structure featured a composite skin made of fiberglass-reinforced polyester and walls insulated with polyurethane foam. The interior of the house featured modern furniture, push-button controls for lighting and climate control, and even a built-in hi-fi system.

To promote the House of the Future, Disney and Monsanto issued a range of promotional materials that captured the spirit of the attraction and offered visitors a souvenir of their experience. Brochures with photos and detailed descriptions were especially popular, designed to be both informative and aspirational, showcasing the House as a model for modern living.

The first piece of printed ephemera for the House of the Future, issued in 1957, was a small folded green brochure with a tear-off portion on the back cover to send "for more information" [Figure 3]. Also on the back was a list of products and partner companies that supplied the materials and products on display. This was a way for Monsanto to acknowledge and promote the partner companies who were involved in the design.

Monsanto must have received so many requests for this information that, in 1958, they issued a new yellow brochure, identical in size, but without the mail-in stub and partner company data [Figure 4]. Instead, the back cover included the following:

The Monsanto 'House of the Future' was designed and built by Monsanto Chemical Company with the architectural firm of Hamilton and Goody and the Department of Civil Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The 'House of the Future' affords an exciting peek into tomorrow and may well be the forerunner of the home which will be standard ten years from now.

Monsanto's 1960 brochure was a more complex foldout with two-color covers and a futurist graphic quality. It was a perfect souvenir of the experience, with photographs that showcased each room of the house (dubbed the "Plastics House of the Future") and detailed descriptions of its modern features [Figure 6]. This attractive take-away was probably shared with friends and loved ones—true marketing genius on the part of Monsanto and Disney.

Other companies used the House of the Future for promotional tie-ins. The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America issued a brochure to showcase the potential of plastics [Figure 5]. The brochure was a two-color foldout that gave a synopsis of the plastic house and the research that went into it. Then the text segued into the cost of college tuition and need for a Guardian "flexible plan" that would be "self-completing if Dad should die or become disabled."

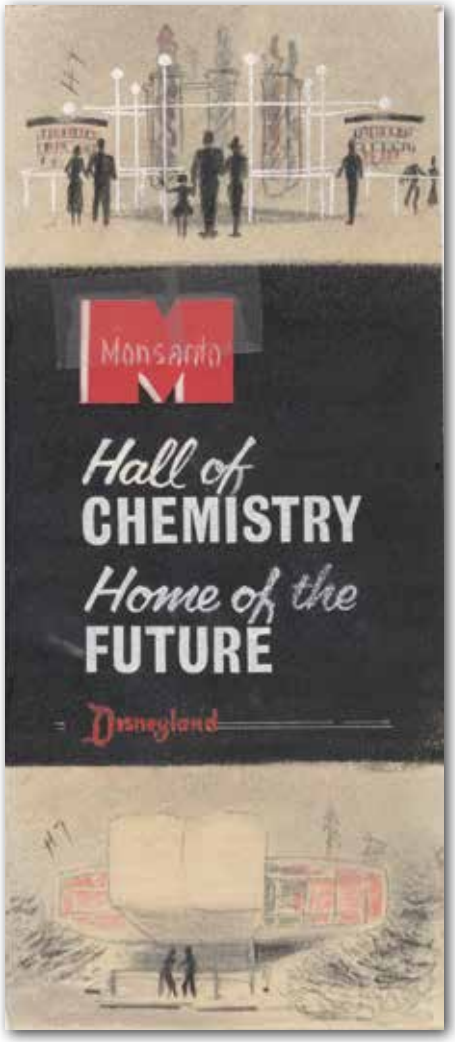

Figure 1: A rough artist sketch of the Hall of Chemistry and the Home of the Future brochure planned for 1957. [private collection]

A small brochure titled, "*7 Reasons Why You'll Fully Enjoy ACRILAN®*" was given out to guests at the attraction [Figure 7]. Acrilan was an acrylonitrile-vinyl acetate copolymer fiber manufactured by Chemstrand, a joint business venture of the Monsanto Chemical Company and American Viscose, which also manufactured nylon yarn.[1] A synthetic fiber more wear-resistant than wool but inferior to nylon, Acrilan was "noted for softness, strength and wrinkle-resistant properties," was used for clothing, carpets, drapes, upholstery and laminates. Acrilan fabric covered the vinyl foam bulk of the throw pillows and cushions throughout the House of the Future and was used in the area rugs in various rooms. The brochure extolled Acrilan's virtues as a carpet fiber, noting that "Years of service in every type of carpet installation (homes, public buildings,

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Figure 2: Quadruple foldout brochure of 1955 for the Hall of Chemistry *at Disneyland. [Courtesy Monsanto Archives, Washington University Library]*

Figure 3a & 3b & 3c: 1957 Monsanto House of the Future brochure, opening to reveal a photograph of the house at Disneyland and its floor plan, with a list of products and manufacturers on the back, along with a tear-off stub to write in for more information. [private collection]

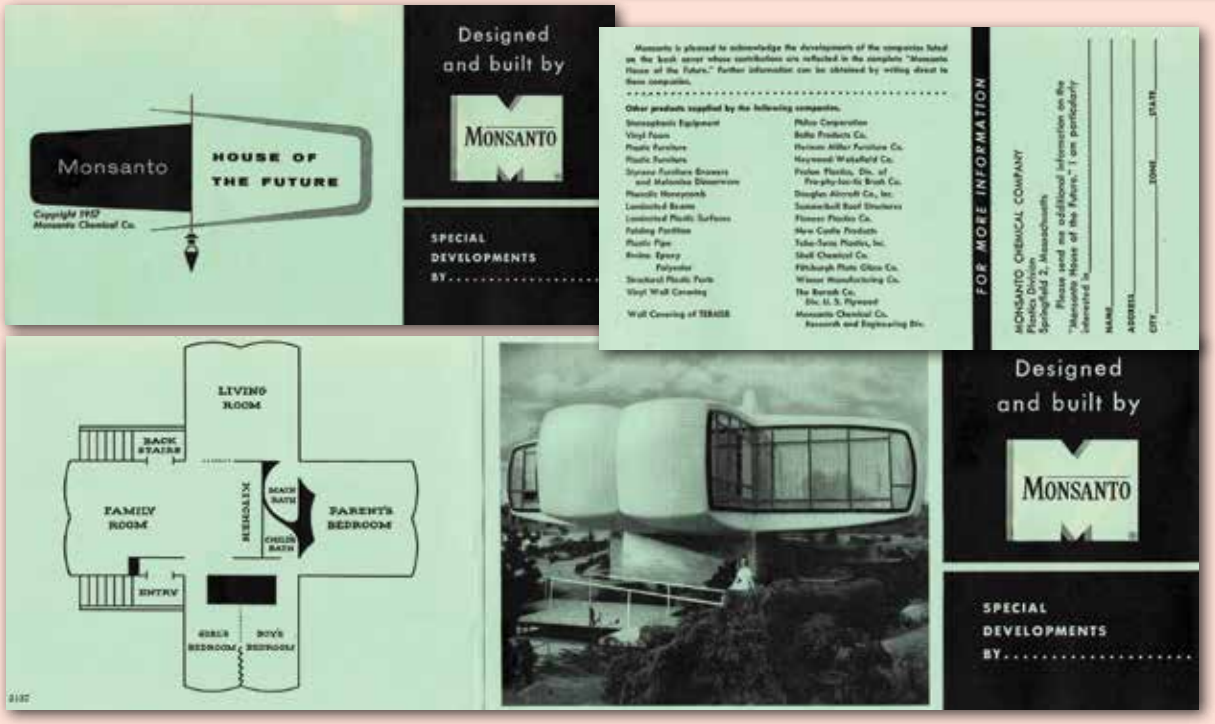
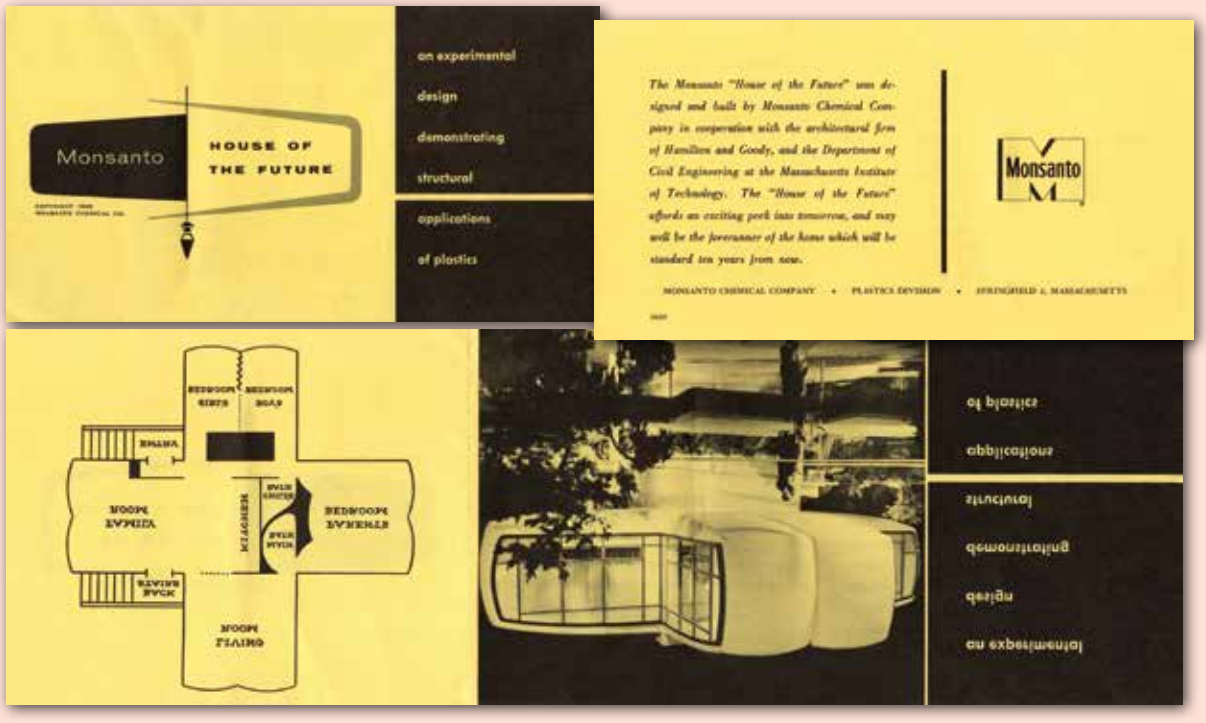


Figure 4a & 4b & 4c: The revised Monsanto House of the Future brochure issued in 1958. [private collection]



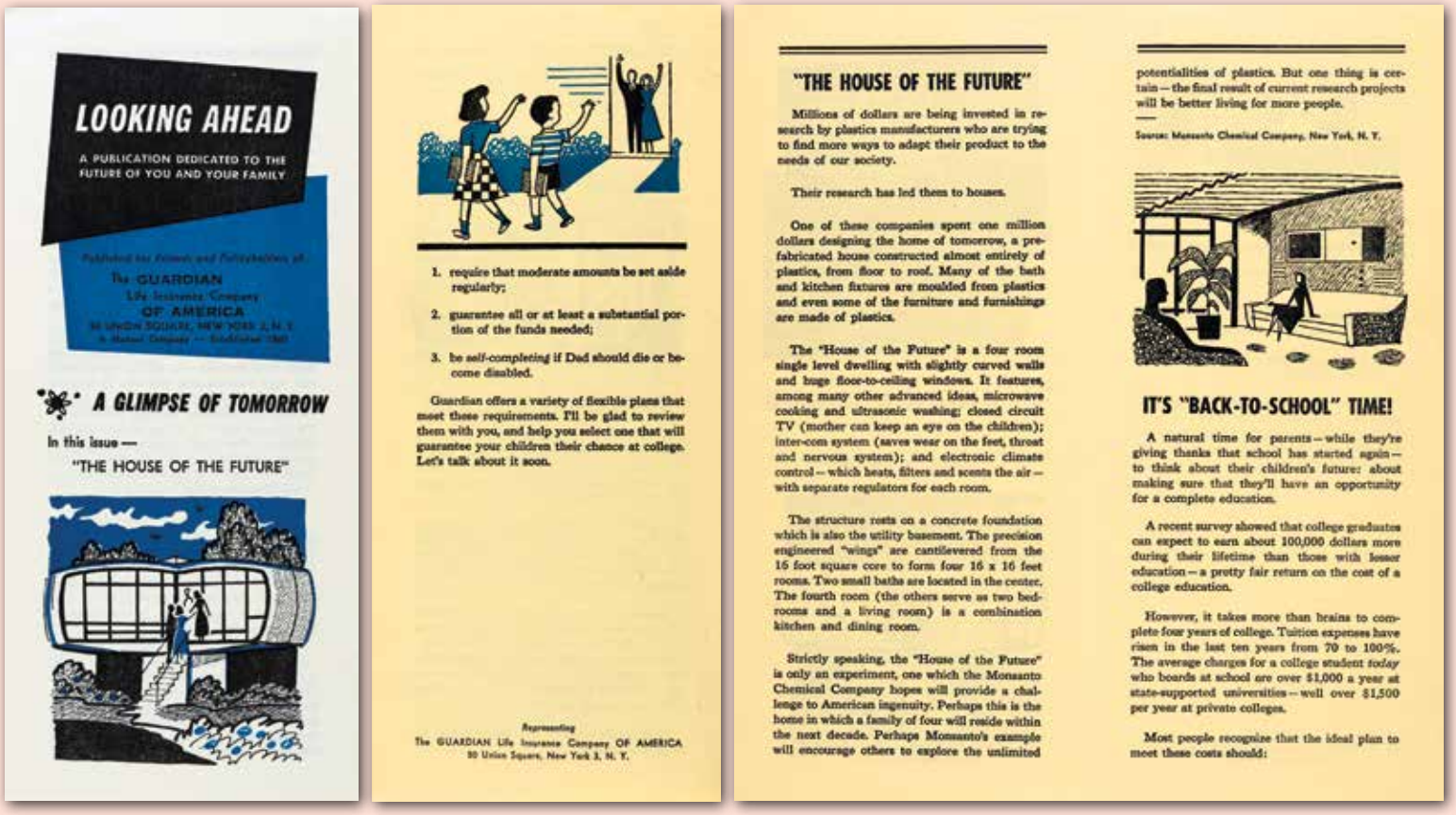
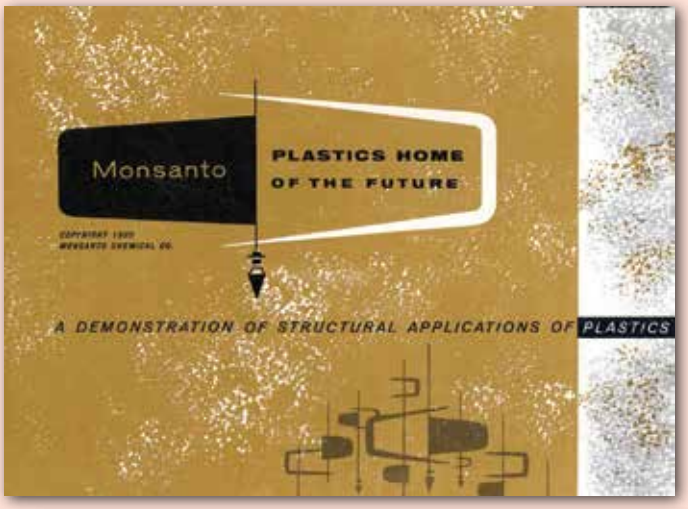


Figure 5a & 5b & 5c: The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America tied together the Monsanto House of the Future and life insurance in one brochure, around 1957. [Courtesy Monsanto Archives, Washington University Library]



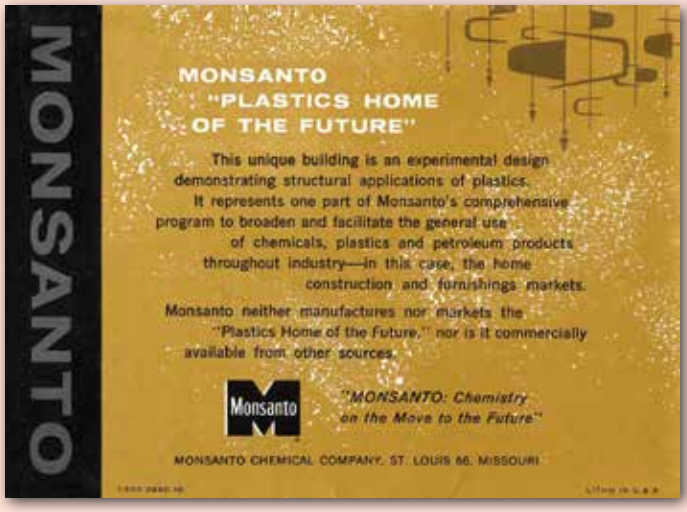


Figure 6a & 6b & 6c: The 1960 fold-out brochure appeared relatively compact but revealed a more complex interior design with text and photographs that showcased the rooms in the Monsanto Plastics House of the Future. [private collection]

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Figure 7: 3.75 x 5.5 inch brochure, 7 Reasons Why You'll Fully Enjoy ACRILAN®, promoting the virtues of this acrylic fiber made by the Chemstrand Company. Shown opened to a full 3.75 x 7.5 inches. [private collection]

airplanes, etc.) have shown that Acrilan can stand up to the most demanding wear conditions."[2] Carpets made of Acrilan, as used in the House of the Future, were a tangible product that consumers could purchase and an excellent opportunity for Monsanto and Chemstrand to market directly to homeowners [Figure 8].

Postcards were another popular take-away that could be purchased in the park's gift shops. Typically featuring a color photograph of the house's exterior, the cards were designed as souvenirs or to be sent to friends and family. The message side included the Disneyland logo. A particularly interesting postcard shows the house lit at night, with Sleeping Beauty's Castle looming in the background – a contrast in styles and a juxtaposition of an idealized "past" and "future" [Figure 9].

A rare oversized postcard shows the built-in ovens and refrigerators of the 1964 kitchen redesign [Figure 10]. The original "Atoms for Living" kitchen had featured a microwave oven and ultrasonic dishwasher, appliances that were out of reach to most consumers in the late 1950s. The 1964 redesign included appliances by Kelvinator that were more accessible to average consumers and ultimately became commonplace by the mid-1960s.

The House of the Future was an attraction that dreams were made of, where you could envision a future that was the inevitable boon of progress.[3] While some innovations featured in the exhibit, like microwave ovens, did become widespread, that future now looks more like the retro-future, a throwback to the age of optimism sprinkled with the wonder of plastics and an unbridled enthusiasm for the fantasy of a perfect tomorrow.

Comedian George Carlin famously said, "The future will soon be a thing of the past." In the summer of 1967, a revamped "new" Tomorrowland made its debut.[4] The Hall of Chemistry, sponsored by Monsanto, was closed and replaced by "Adventure Thru Inner Space," which opened on August 5th[5] [Figure 11]. For a brief time, Monsanto continued to have two sponsored attractions at Disneyland. Then on December 1, 1967, the House of the Future closed permanently.

The legacy of the House of the Future lives on through the memories of those who visited it and the ephemera produced to promote it. These items provide a unique

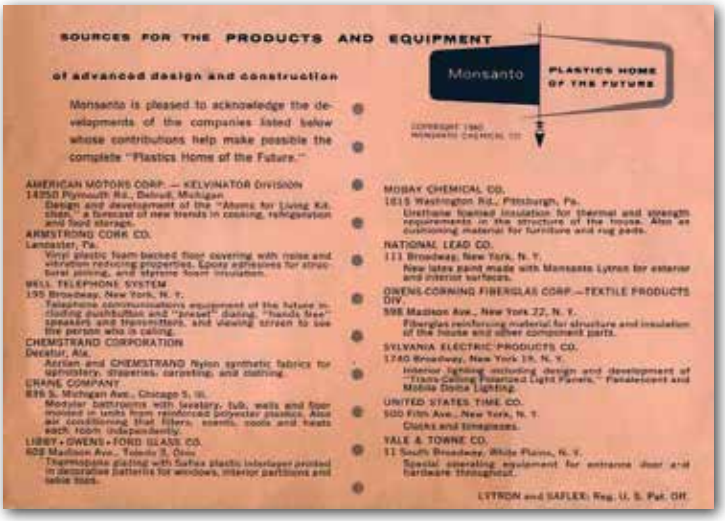

Figure 8a & 8b: Front and back of a 5 x 7 inch card available as a souvenir for guests of the Monsanto Plastics House of the Future after the 1960 remodel. It listed sources for the products and equipment on one side and resources for the new interiors on the other. [private collection]

Figure 9: Postcard of the Monsanto House of the Future, described on the back: "a showcase of future living. Here - in direct contrast with the medieval castle looming in the background - is a fascinating preview of the wonders and conveniences that await you in your home of the future." [private collection]

glimpse into the past and allow us to see how Disney, MIT, and Monsanto imagined the future from the perspective of the 1950s. Today, House of the Future ephemera is collectible — a reminder of a bygone attraction at Disneyland that inspired and sparked the imaginations of more than twenty million visitors.

Endnotes

[1] John Stephen Reese, "Giant of the Pine Forest: A History of the Chemstrand/Monsanto Pensacola Nylon Plant; 1953–1992," The Florida State University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1992, 9303359.

[2] *7 Reasons Why You'll Fully Enjoy ACRILAN®* brochure, Private collection.

[3] *Monsanto Plastics House of the Future: A Demonstration of Structural Applications of Plastics,* foldout brochure, Private collection.

[4] "Adventure Thru Inner Space." Entry in *The Disneyland Encyclopedia* by Chris Strodder, (Santa Monica Press, 2008), pg. 42.

[5] *Monsanto Magazine*, *House With a Bounce*, March 1958, pg.25. Could not find the above but found: "Right to the End, this Plastic Structure Proved that it was a House with a Bounce," Monsanto Magazine, March 1968, pg.25

David A. Bossert is an award-winning artist, filmmaker, and author. He is a 32-year veteran of The Walt Disney Company, where he contributed his talents to *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), *The Lion King* (1994), *Fantasia/2000* (1999) among many others. Bossert is a historian and the author of numerous books and articles on Disney. His latest book is *The House of the Future: Walt Disney, MIT, and Monsanto's Vision of Tomorrow* (October 2023, The Old Mill Press).

Figure 10 (above): Rare oversized postcard, 6 x 9 inches, with a view of the 1964 remodeled kitchen looking into the living room wing of the Monsanto Home of the Future. [private collection]

Figure 11a. & 11b (below): Two postcards showing the 1967 Adventure Thru Inner Space, a graphic illustration of the entrance, and the World Clock inside the exhibit area.

The U.S. Postal System and the New York Public Library Picture Collection

By Shane Morrissy

The Picture Collection at the New York Public Library (NYPL) contains more than 1.5 million individual images—making it the largest circulating collection of its kind in any public library system. I encountered this impressive archive somewhat serendipitously during a research trip to explore the Library's collection of postcards. While the postcard collection was certainly fascinating, I was struck by the unusual structure and encyclopedic coverage of the larger Picture Collection, which offers a unique perspective on virtually every aspect of American life between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. As I conducted my doctoral research on the postcard craze that swept the United States in the early decades of the last century, this archive helped to highlight new and varied aspects of the phenomenon. In particular, it drew my attention to the complex social connotations carried by the mail system during the Progressive era.

Located in Room 119 of the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building (the Main Branch on Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street) the Picture Collection was founded in 1915 and flourished under the guidance of Romana Javitz, who curated it for four decades, from 1928 to 1968 (Figure 1). During this period, it became an important resource for numerous artists, including Art Spiegelman and Andy Warhol (who famously failed to return many of the images he borrowed).

The Picture Collection is distinguished by an unusual and ever-shifting taxonomy. Scraps of ephemera—often individual pages removed from magazines and books—are organized thematically under 12,000 subjects. This system enables visitors to make unanticipated connections across categories and offers the opportunity for contextualization of a wide array of subject matter. In the case of my research, which I offer as a case study, it greatly enhanced my conception of the social role of the mail carrier after the turn of the twentieth century—a perspective that is often lost in the historical narrative of sweeping mechanization.

The decades leading up to World War I were a golden age of sorts for the U.S. Post Office, largely as a result of technological changes in the way the mail was distributed and processed. By 1915, the Post Office had been developing the remarkably efficient Railway Mail Service (RMS) for almost half a century. A mail transportation system that ultimately served the entirety of the contiguous United States, the RMS had witnessed significant expansion after the turn of the century, peaking in the years before World War I. This expansion overlapped the implementation of rural Free Delivery—which had helped bring remote locations into touch with

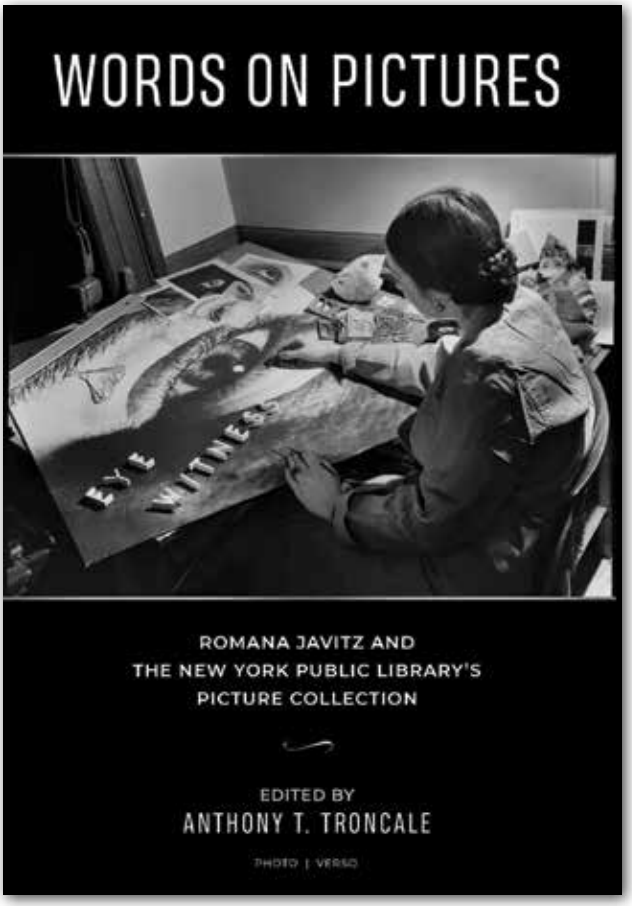

Figure 1a. Cover to a 2020 book honoring Romana Javitz and the Picture Collection. The photograph by Dick Wurts is of Javitz preparing the 1947 exhibit Eye Witness*, about various representations of the eye in illustration and photography.*

the mainstream—and the successful implementation of Parcel Post after 1912. During the same period, the Post Office began experimenting with both airmail and electric automobiles, which were being used to deliver the mail in major cities. New technologies were adopted not only to enhance delivery, but also for sorting the mail—a process increasingly subject to mechanization. At San Francisco's Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915, for instance, the Post Office's most advanced systems of tubes and conveyor belts appeared in a huge exhibit at the Palace of Mines. (Figure 2). The display was one of the most visited attractions at the entire event, surpassing the popularity of Henry Ford's famous on-site automobile assembly line. On the eve of the First World War, the Post Office had a national reputation for being both effective and popular. Mechanization was crucial to the modern Post

Figure 1b. A 1927 postcard of the New York Public Library, copyright American Studio, published by Manhattan Post Card Co., New York City. [Author collection]

Office but, as the Picture Collection makes clear, it was not the whole story.

While browsing through the collection of postcards, which was the initial purpose of my visit, I stumbled across a card that shifted my attention away from the technological and towards the personal. Mailed in 1910, near the height of the American postcard craze, the image shows a confused postal carrier attempting to make delivery to a house with two contradictory addresses. The humor is dated, but the image's self-reflexivity—the idea of a mailman delivering this postcard of a mailman—brought into focus the role of the individual postal worker. (Figure 3). The proximity of the larger Picture Collection provided me with the perfect opportunity to investigate the ways in which the role of mail carrier was constructed and perceived through the mass media of the period. Although some of the portrayals are caricatured or sentimentalized, when approached critically, the archive also reveals a profoundly human counterpoint to the institution's ever-increasing tendency towards mechanization. Many of the images shed light on the demands of a grueling and sometimes lonely profession, highlighting the tension between modern individuals and the larger systems of public and private administration within which they were embedded.

Figure 2. The Model Post Office at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, The Blue Book*, R.A. Reid, San Francisco, 1915, page 85. [Smithsonian Libraries on line]*

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Figure 3. Let me see! Is it 1493 or 3252" *(1910 postcard), Postal service—Postman, New York Public Library Picture Collection, New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, Fifth Avenue & 42nd Street, New York, NY (hereafter cited as NYPL Picture Collection).*

One image in particular—an 1898 photograph of Ishmail Durrand Corning, a mail carrier in Cedar Falls, Iowa—exemplifies the personal importance attached to the job. (Figure 4). A cross between a business card and a carte-de-visite, it shows Corning in full professional attire, including his mailbag which contained his baby son, Dwayne. From one perspective, the image is a late-Victorian pun on the word "delivery." At the same time, it identifies the job as a powerful source of personal identity. Corning's pride as a new father is paired with the pride he takes in his chosen profession. One may speculate that Corning would have been pleased to have Dwayne follow his father into the profession, setting the example of a solid middle-class future for his infant son.

Corning's own awareness of class positioning was likely heightened by the very experience of delivering the mail, which involved interactions with a wide cross-section of society. For example, one image depicts an interaction at the front gate of a comfortable middle-class home surrounded by a picket fence. (Figure 5). The mailman hands a letter to a young girl, under the watchful eye of her hovering mother. Another illustration depicts a mailman delivering letters to three generations of women who crowd the doorway to a much humbler home. (Figure 6). Regardless of their economic circumstances, the women of the house greet the mail carrier personally. Bringing correspondence from loved ones, billets-doux, and both local and national news, the mail carrier played a large role in the habits that structured the rhythms of everyday life in the Progressive era.

Challenging the sometimes sentimental depictions of mail carriers, other images highlight the physical difficulties under which they labored. Mechanization contributed to gains in efficiency, making the mail system more appealing to potential consumers. However, such technologies were rarely applied with the same zeal when it came to reducing the burden on workers. Many images point to the unpredictable, often brutal, weather conditions endured by many postal employees. Numerous others attest to the physical demands of the job. The image of a "heavy laden" postman, for example, reminds us that prior to the end of World War I, postal delivery workers were expected to carry single loads of up to 70 pounds (Figure 7). Other images show mail carriers struggling with such awkward and burdensome loads in torrential rain. The difficulties were not just physical. In contrast to the sociable image of the mail carrier, such jobs could impose extended periods of isolation, especially in remote areas.

Figure 4. Ishmail Durrand Corning *(1898), Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

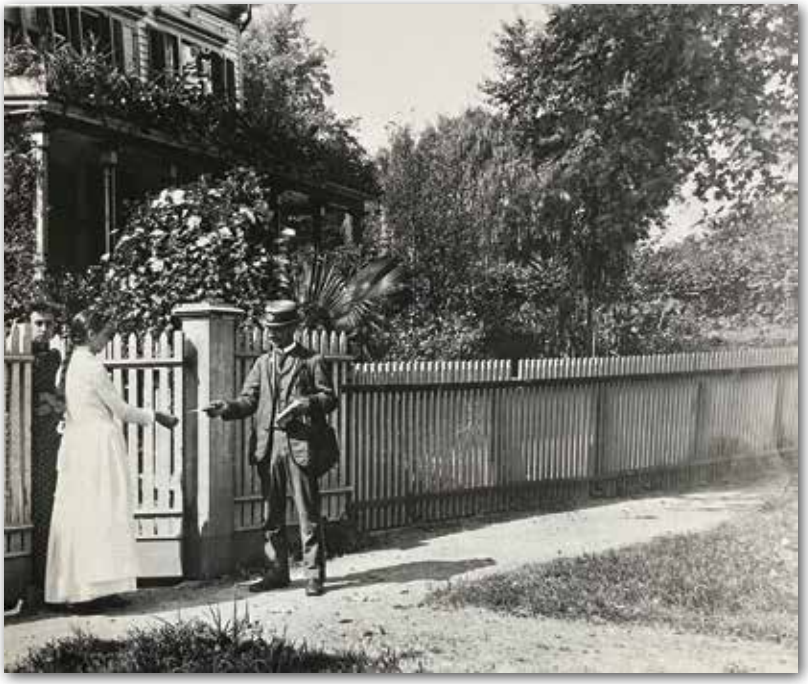

Figure 5. A Dapper Milwaukee Postal Employee *(1907), Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

A photograph depicting Postmaster Needham D. Bartlett outside his ramshackle post office in Searsburg, Vermont, challenges the narrative of uniform technological progress while reminding us that the position could also be marked by physical and psychological hardship. (Figure 8).

Images of haphazard structures such as the Searsburg Post Office demonstrate more than just the isolation of rural postmasters. They also show that the extemporaneous character of the postal network persisted well into the twentieth century. A recent book and website by Cameron Blevins, Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado, Denver, for example, has shown that while ad hoc organization was central to the institution's adaptability, it was also a reflection of rapid expansion into territories acquired through institutionally authorized violence. Blevins shows that the success of the Post Office in the late nineteenth century provided "the underlying spatial circuitry" that enabled America's expansion of its inland empire.[1] Such seemingly benign structures, in short, played a crucial role in westward colonization, with the attendant prejudice and racial violence that enabled that expansion.

Other lacunae in the Picture Collection point towards additional forms of discrimination. The images of male carriers in the collection seem to be exclusively white, despite the fact that up to 4,000 Black postal workers were employed nationwide by 1912. Due to a variety of prejudices that effectively excluded them from other positions, Black employees were disproportionately assigned as mail carriers. A combination of racism in the Oval Office and vigilante violence greatly restricted the number of Black people employed as Postmasters. At the same time, Southern prejudices diminished their prospects as clerks. Booker T. Washington noted a paradox whereby, "in many parts of the South the white people would object seriously to colored people handing them a letter through the post office window, but would make no objection to a colored mail carrier handing them a letter at their door." Yet, in spite of the concentration of Black mail carriers, they are absent from the archive. This may be attributable to structural biases, including choices made by contemporary publications and photographers to control representations of the emerging professional classes. This narrow conception of the mail delivery person as a white man, and the construction of his position within the community, dovetailed with the needs of contemporary advertisers, such as Waterman & Co., who appear to have been happy to propagate this myth. Ads such as The Santa Claus of Today helped to construct the monolithic popular image of these public servants, in the service of profit. (Figure 9).

Images of female mail carriers are also absent from this collection—but for very different reasons. Although a disproportionately small number of images depict women working as clerks, few if any "girl carriers" (as they were referred to) existed prior to the turn of the century. (Figure 10). As late as 1904, there were still fewer than a hundred women delivering mail. This did

Figure 6. Untitled, (detail), Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.

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Figure 7. A Heavy Laden but still cheerful pre-World War I Postman, *Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

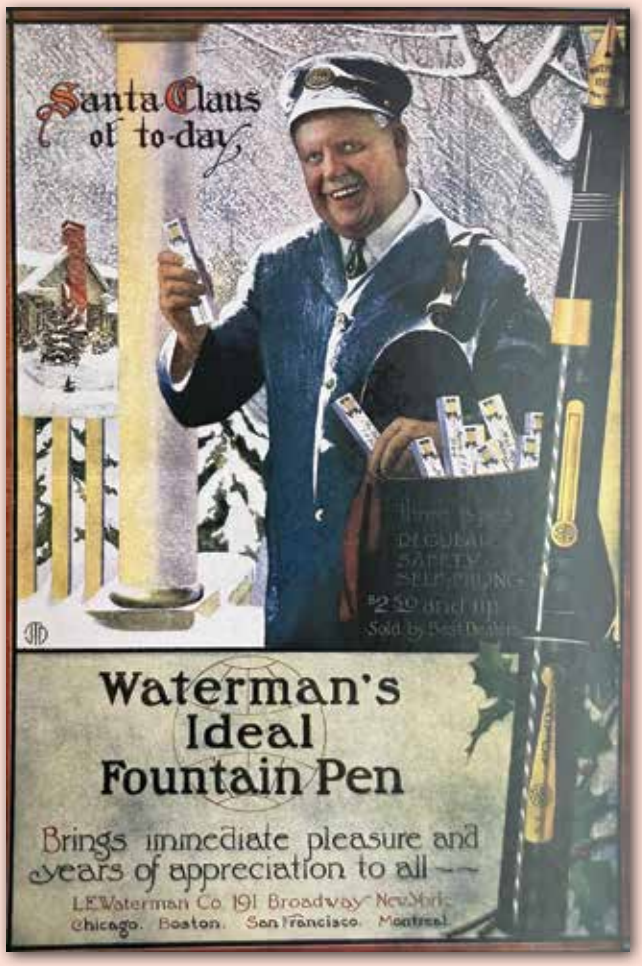

Figure 9. Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen *(1919), Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

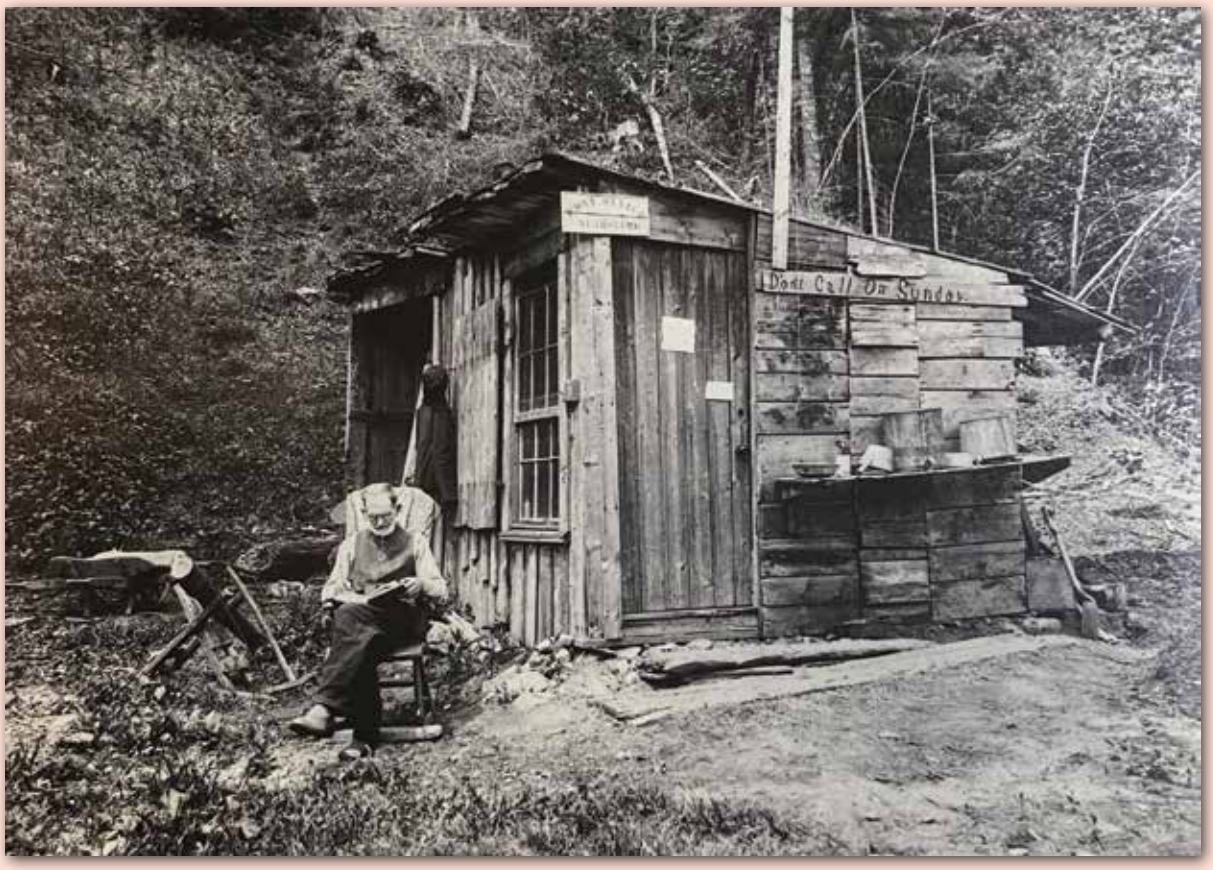

Figure 8. "Don't Call On Sunday," *(1914), Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

Figure 10. Clerk Mary Stevens and Postmaster Edwin Holmes in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota (1900), *Postal service—Postman, NYPL Picture Collection.*

not change in a significant way until it was necessitated by manpower shortages during World War I, when women were finally employed as mail carriers in cities and smaller towns. In short, while the Picture Collection provides a more personalized counterpoint to narratives of technologically driven progress and the social changes it engendered, it also highlights the societal divisions that imposed a hierarchy on the basis of race and gender in particular.

A critical approach to the ephemera contained in the Picture Collection presents the opportunity to develop a more complex understanding of virtually any subject under investigation. The Collection provides a fascinating view of the Post Office as a product of its own history and an emblem of the Progressive era. It was an institution characterized by extremes and contradictions. These images show how shotgun shacks co-existed with electric autos and airplanes, harsh labor conditions intersected with extravagant displays of cutting-edge technology, professional passion sat alongside prejudice and hate, and relative inclusivity went hand-in-hand with discrimination.

The postcard, in many ways, embodied these tensions in microcosm. The image on the recto shows photography and chromolithography merging on a mass scale for the first time, creating an ostensibly "objective" vision of the entire United States. The inscribed message on the verso, by contrast, reflects the subjective and the intimate. These often heartfelt inscriptions addressed to absent loved ones are also the traces of the very people who designed, managed, and operated the systems of technology that were becoming pervasive. Perhaps no figure offered a greater testament to this paradox than the postal worker who delivered these objects to every home in the United States during this crucial period of American history.

Endnotes

[1] Cameron Blevins, *Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

Shane Morrissy is a PhD candidate in the department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University. Focusing on the postcard "craze" that dominated Progressive era America, his dissertation explores the intersection art, politics, and mass media. He was granted a Philip Jones fellowship by the Ephemera Society of America to aid his research.

"Those Awful Hats"

Headwear as a Representation of a Woman's Place in American Society, 1908-1920

By Olivia Gilmer

Fashions in women's headwear in the United States changed dramatically between the turn of the twentieth century and the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Absurdly large Edwardian "Merry Widow" hats adorned with extravagant textiles and exotic feathers gave way with the onset of World War I to smaller, subtler, military-influenced hats with connotations of liberation and revolution. This progression of hat styles mirrored the rapidly evolving position of women in American society.

Hats offer a visual clue to a woman's place in society—perhaps more so than clothing alone—as a hat encompasses the ethos of its era, acting as an "exclamation point" to a woman's costume. Because headwear is the most "vocal" element of dress, it serves as a valuable reference point when attempting to decipher what each changing fashion signified for women's growing autonomy in the United States in the early twentieth century. To

Figure 1: Promotional postcard for The Merry Widow *opera, Lily Elsie debuting the Lucile-designed Merry Widow hat. Rotary Photographic Co.*

Figure 2: Postcard mailed from Yokohama, Japan, March 8, 1911, to a Baltimore address: "Here's where the 'Merry Widow' hats are worn that beat anything in Paris. Do you want one?" The overly large hat had acquired an enduring nickname that invited humor.

Figure 3: Humorous postcards from a series published in 1908 by I. Grollman of Chicago. The Merry Widow hat as a woman's proud choice is shown to be: detested by all men; shockingly expensive; protection from unwanted male attention; and a creator of privacy.

appreciate how the Merry Widow and the military hat embodied and reflected the challenges of their respective eras, we look at how these styles were received in American society.

1908-1911: The Merry Widow Hat Phenomenon

In 1908, a new fashion spectacle fresh from Europe captured the attention of American women, sending much of the style-minded public into a frenzy. The Merry Widow hat draws its name from Franz Lehar's immensely popular 1905 operetta, Die Lustige Witwe (The Merry Widow) which, following its premiere in Austria, quickly became an international success. It was during the show's London premiere that actress Lily Elsie debuted a wide-brimmed hat designed by Lucile, one of Western Europe's foremost fashion designers. (Figure 1). Also known as Lady Duff-Gordon, British-born Lucile's designs were renowned for their taste and elegance as well as for their provocative undertones. Elsie's costume as the Merry Widow communicated an air of sexual awakening. The juxtaposition of her rosy pink satin coat with the black feathers of the hat presented her as not only youthful, feminine, and innocent, but also, paradoxically, mature, sophisticated, and sexually aware.

The sensual qualities of the Merry Widow hat reflected the intentions of the hat's designer. Lucile's notoriety derived in part from her propensity to give her designs suggestive names such as "Passion's Thrall," "Do You Love Me?" and "A Frenzied Song of Amorous Things." Lucile "encouraged women to embrace new forms of self-expression through consumption, designing 'personality dresses' and 'gowns of emotion,' which theoretically revealed each woman's individual idiosyncrasies."[1]

In a 1967 interview discussing his book, *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes claims that clothing is a reflection of its surroundings and cannot be separated from its social and historical context: "It is impossible to consider a cultural object outside the articulated, spoken and written language which surrounds it." By May 1907, Lehar's operetta was bound for Broadway. As was customary, magazines began advertising a range of products associated with the show, from Merry Widow cocktails to Merry Widow corsets.[2] While most were fleeting commodities, the Merry Widow hat would prove to be a longstanding fixture in American society. (Figure 2) With its arrival in America in 1908, the Merry Widow hat brought its intrinsic connotations of sophistication and sexual awareness, transmitting these messages to American women. This may explain why the hat was met with widespread contempt among men, and especially, clergy. According to an article in an April, 1908, issue of the *Appleton Post*, "A Merry Widow hat frightened a horse so badly that the animal tried to jump

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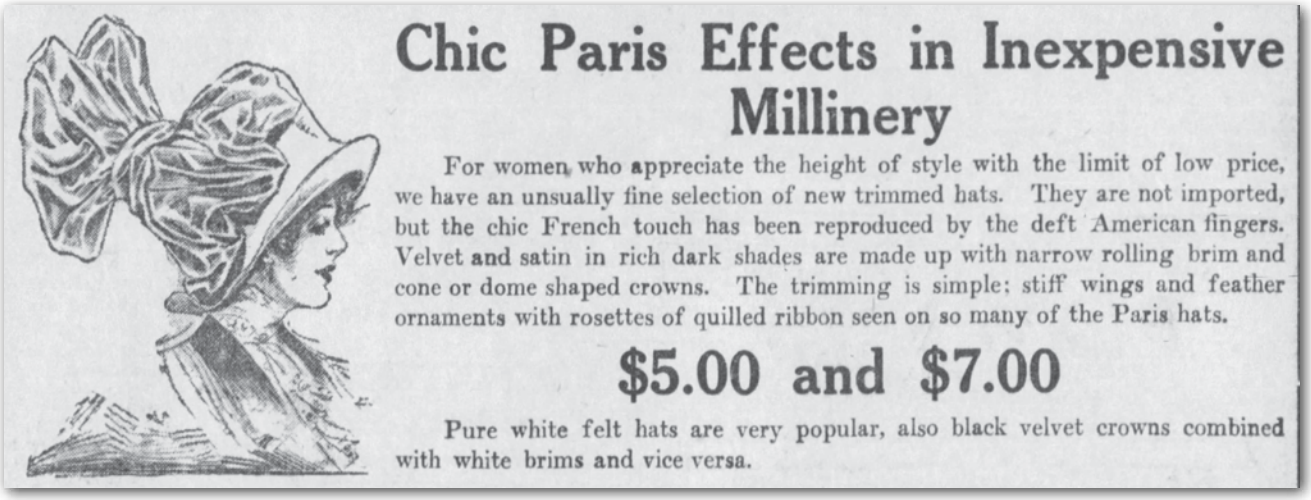

Chic Paris Effects in Inexpensive Millinery

For women who appreciate the height of style with the limit of low price, we have an unsually fine selection of new trimmed hats. They are not imported, but the chic French touch has been reproduced by the deft American fingers. Velvet and satin in rich dark shades are made up with narrow rolling brim and cone or dome shaped crowns. The trimming is simple; stiff wings and feather ornaments with rosettes of quilled ribbon seen on so many of the Paris hats.

$5.00 and $7.00

Pure white felt hats are very popular, also black velvet crowns combined with white brims and vice versa.

Figure 4: 'For the women who appreciate the height of style with the limit of low price (…) the chic French touch has been reproduced by deft American fingers' (Star Tribune, 1911).

in the river. When it will do that to a horse what show has the average man when he takes fright at the creations." Another paper lists a series of disputes caused by the hat, some of which resulted in maiming and even death. A Merry Widow hat gouged the eyes of a traveling man and a minister, causing temporary loss of sight; another encounter skinned a street car conductor's nose so badly that a skin graft was needed to prevent his death from blood-poisoning; and the hat reportedly caused a woman to shoot her husband because he criticized its wide brim (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1908).

Public condemnation of the hats did not deter women from wearing them—on the contrary, many were reluctant to remove them. D.W. Griffiths' short film *Those Awful Hats* (1909) pokes fun at the pride and assertiveness with which the hats were worn. The film begins with a woman in a large hat entering a picture house, followed by a woman wearing an even larger hat. Each woman thereafter enters wearing a progressively more ostentatious hat, shamelessly seating herself in the front row, until the entire stage is obscured. The film ends with a steam shovel physically removing the hats, which causes the men of the audience to stand and cheer. A title card then appears: "Ladies will please remove their hats." The confidence with which women wore this headgear, in spite of male indignation, is evidence of the American woman's increasing autonomy and self-assertiveness.

Meanwhile, the American women's suffrage movement was progressing. In 1908, the first public suffrage march was held in California, where 300 women demonstrated in support of their right to vote. Newspapers reacted to the march in much the same manner as they had to the Merry Widow hat, with the *New York Times* denouncing the parade as "unfeminine and therefore obnoxious and ridiculous." The act of physically taking up public space in the face of widespread animosity was an act of feminine defiance by both the suffragettes and the Merry Widow hat wearers. While male condemnation may have been intended to mock and belittle them, women used the ridiculousness of the hats to mock men and gain physical autonomy over their bodies. A series of Merry Widow postcards used humor to show how the hat gave women an upper hand. The postcard images in Figure 3 testifies to the effect on men - the hat allowed women to take up more physical space (symbolic of their increasing presence in society) and could even be used as a weapon to ward off unwanted male attention.

After the Merry Widow, 1911-15: The Allure of the Parisian Hat

In the years leading up to World War I, the number of women in the workforce was gradually increasing. According to census reports, it is estimated that 23.4% of women were employed outside the home by 1910, up from 20.6% the previous decade. As more women entered the workforce, hats began to shrink.

Perhaps not surprisingly, smaller hats were met with relief, as indicated by a report in the *Independent Record* (1912): "there was general rejoicing among men when Fashion announced smaller hats for the present season… feminine headwear has been aggressive for a long, long period." In another newspaper report titled "Smaller Hats, Better Women," a Boston doctor claims that the reduction of hat size has "resulted in a distinct improvement in the condition of the sex," allowing women to move more freely and partake in activities which "a few years ago they would not have dreamed of attempting" (*Warren Times Mirror*, 1911). Despite the patronizing tone of his claim, there is truth in this observation—hats now reflected women's desire to work and move freely. The Merry Widow hat phenomenon had made a statement about female autonomy; once this point had been made, preferences shifted toward a more practical and sustainable style. The smaller hat was not a sign of defeat; to the contrary, women were increasingly aware of how a hat could be used to elevate their status, express their individuality, and signal their increasing financial independence.

The enigmatic allure of the foreign hat continued to captivate American women. The "uncontested center of fashion inspiration in the early twentieth century" was undoubtably Paris. With the rise of mass production and ready-to-wear, the luxurious Parisian hat was more attainable to the average American woman than ever before. A female factory worker in 1911 would not have been able to afford a real Parisian hat, but she could afford a copy that claimed to be indistinguishable from the original. The advertisement in Figure 4 illustrates the way cut-price, ready-to-wear "Parisian" hats were marketed. Simply by its connection to a French design, even a copy of a Parisian hat had the ability to transform the working-class woman, allowing her to experience the same degree of sophistication as those in the upper class who wore the real thing. The way the "counterfeit" Parisian could blur borders between class, race, and nationality is illustrated in the film *Her Exclusive Hat* (1911). According to its synopsis in *Moving Picture World* (1911), a milliner convinces Mrs. Aitkens to purchase an exclusive, one-of-a-kind creation, designed by "the most fashionable designer of the Rue de la Paix or the Place Vendome or some other swell Parisian millinery shop." Mrs. Aitkens proudly parades the hat around town, until she spots the same hat being worn by a poor Ethiopian woman. "Both women eyed each other with the greatest haughtiness as they passed.… Mr. Aitkens beheld his wife tearing the $40 bonnet to shreds." Her Exclusive Hat shows how a woman of a lower class (and marginalized race) could afford to buy into the notion of the "exclusive"' Parisian hat worn by those of higher social status. The film also shows how American women of all classes were seduced by the appeal of the foreign hat. A postcard sent from Nebraska in 1915 (Figure 5) shows another humorous example of the American woman's fascination with the enigmatic Parisian hat.

The tension between what Joanne Entwistle calls "artifice and authenticity" is perfectly embodied in the psychology of the Parisian hat. Whether genuine or fake, it signaled the American woman's increasing financial autonomy. In the eyes of the consumer, the hat was a transformative piece of costume—a disguise which could elevate the working-class woman and imply that she was an individual of means and good taste.

1915-1920: The Language of the Military Hat

With the onset of World War I came the popularity of a new, more practical style of hat— the military hat. A 1915 newspaper article announcing its arrival from Paris captures the total rejection of large, cumbersome hats in favor of a hat suitable for the active town and city dweller:

"Evidently the American woman is learning that the hat with a sweeping brim is not exactly her type …for everyday usage she wants a small hat that does not act as a sail for the wind. She is a creature who dwells among high buildings and who must walk through city canyons to take her chances turning hurricane corners, facing subway breezes, and make herself ready for leaping on and off

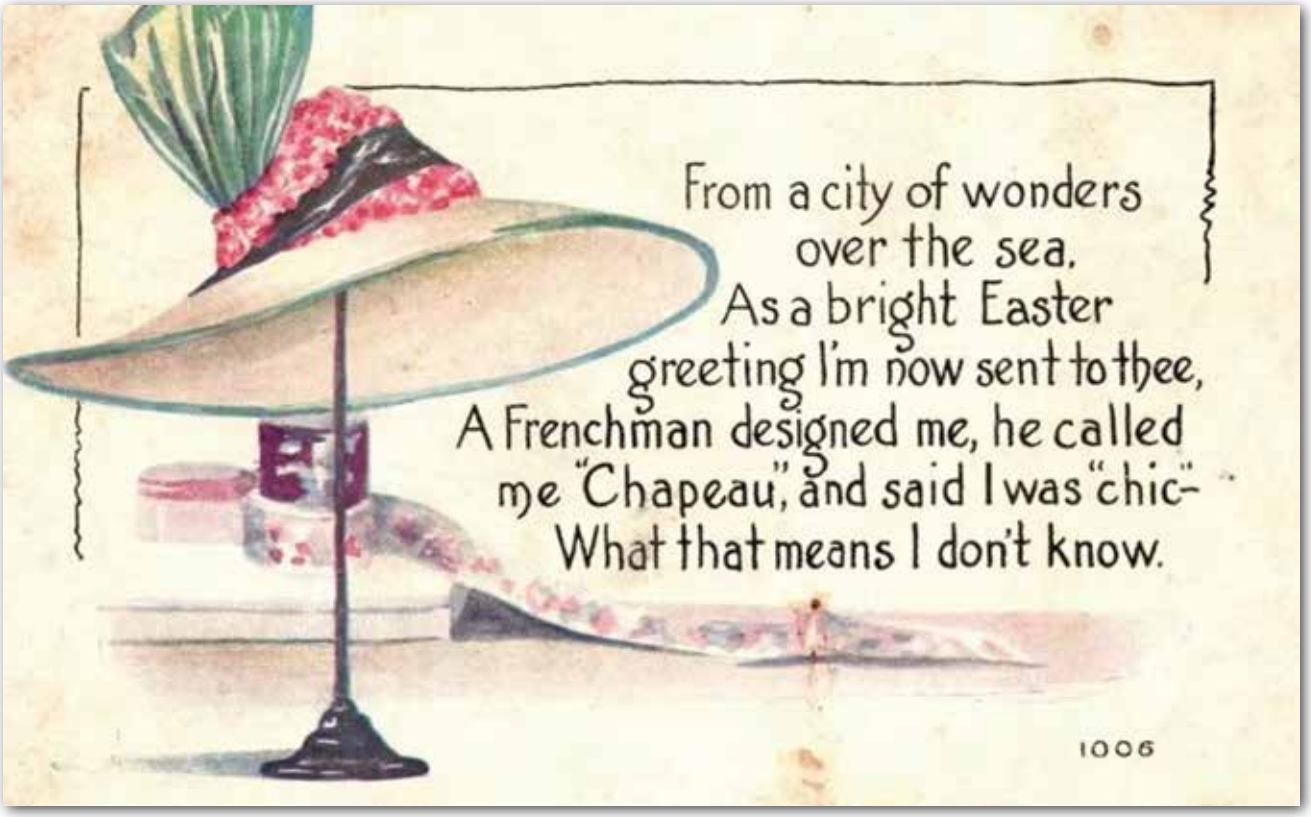

Figure 5: A humorous postcard mailed from Nebraska in 1915.

continued on page 24

continued from page 23

street cars…. There are occasions that call for a hat that does not impede progress." (Rittenhouse 1915).

By 1917, as the realities of wartime economy hit home, demand for both the imported and ready-made hat decreased. Instead, American women were encouraged to fulfill their patriotic duty and make their own hats. A wartime issue of *Ladies Home Journal* (1917) declares, "As the call for recruits arouses the fighting spirit of men, it also stirs in the inherent thriftiness of the American girl." The article asserts that an elegant and practical hat can be made at home for as little as 10 cents by using inexpensive, locally available materials such as straw and buckram. Figure 6 shows a plumed military-style hat made from the remnants of a feed sack.

American women were encouraged to use this period of self-sufficiency as an opportunity to express their patriotic duty while retaining their individuality and remaining "chic." The necessity of thrift meant that women of varying classes and backgrounds were united under one cause. Military hat styles were promoted in another issue of *Ladies Home Journal* (1917): a shako, a hat adopted primarily by European soldiers, and a bicorne, a style of military hat associated with Napoleon Bonaparte. Both of these military styles had political roots. Noting the fundamental role that dress played during the French Revolution, Mary Louise Roberts claims that clothing is inherently political. For example, civilians indicated their allegiance to revolutionary change by wearing a cockade, or symbolic rosette, on their hat. Once clothing was commercialized into fashion, according to Roberts, the political language of signs remained embedded, albeit more subtly: "women who put on the new fashions interpreted them as affording physical mobility and freedom, in short, as a visual analogue of female liberation." In the wartime years preceding women's obtainment of the vote, the military hat transmitted an air of rebellion and change among American women. Figure 7 illustrates a 1921 bicorne adorned with a notable motif—the revolutionary cockade. The undeniable Napoleonic flair surely resonated with the American woman who had just won the long fight for emancipation.

Conclusion

The evolution of fashion preferences, from the extravagant Merry Widow to the valorous military bicorne, parallels the advancing position of women in American society—not just philosophically, but physically. As an extension of the female body, "the broad Merry Widow hat bestowed upon American women a kind of physical size they otherwise lacked and allowed them to take greater control of their bodies."[3] Once women had asserted themselves in the public sphere (prompted in part by the suffrage movement), the transition to smaller hats signaled a greater need for physical freedom. A steady rise in female employment alongside the rise of the homemade or cut-price Parisian hat, demonstrates how women's increased financial autonomy allowed all classes to

Figure 6: Stenciled heading beginning 1843 in the account book of the New York State Chamberlain. [from the Albany County Hall of Records]

display symbols of wealth, good taste, and independence. Having made a defiant statement by publicly parading the infamously large Merry Widow hat in the face of masculine disdain, women then adopted the smaller hat, marking their readiness to enjoy a male-dominated society with greater ease and comfort.

The hat during this period was more than a fashion accessory; it was a symbolic tool that allowed women to express their inherent ambitions. Upon its initial debut in London, Lucile's Merry Widow hat acknowledged feminine desires and, as such, was perceived as a threat by certain men. From the onset of World War I, the French cockade-adorned military hat carried with it the spirit of revolution and an ensuing sense of feminine alliance. The military hat exuded the American women's fighting spirit. While men were fighting in the trenches, the American woman was fighting her own battle—the battle for autonomy.

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Figure 7: "Original Style Creation ...An Admirable Napoleon Development." Page 69, The Millinery Trade Review, October 1921.

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Endnotes

[1] Schweitzer, M. (2008) 'Patriotic Acts of Consumption: Lucile (Lady Duff Gordon) and the Vaudeville Fashion Show Craze.' *Theatre Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, page 599.

[2] Among the persistent Merry Widow products was a small aluminum tin with "3 Merry Widows" rubber condoms that sold from 1910 through the 1930s; and a Special Delivery postage stamp of 1908 that was nicknamed the Merry Widow because of the design that incorporated an overly large petasus of Hermes.

[3] Schweitzer, M. (2009) '"Darn that Merry Widow Hat": The On and Offstage Life of a Theatrical Commodity,Circa 1907-1908.' *Theatre Survey*, vol. 50, no. 2, page 221.

Olivia Gilmer born in Northern Ireland, grew up with an appreciation of social history as well as an unwavering fascination with early to mid 20th century culture. She collects things which reflect a more aesthetically beautiful time—from Edwardian advertising postcards to 1920s opera coats. Since graduating with a degree from Royal Holloway, University of London in Comparative Literature and Culture alongside French language, she has moved to New York City to be with her fiancée Charles Epting, and spends most of her time sewing historically-styled clothing. She is photographed wearing an 1870s hat (Olivia and Charles were married December 11).

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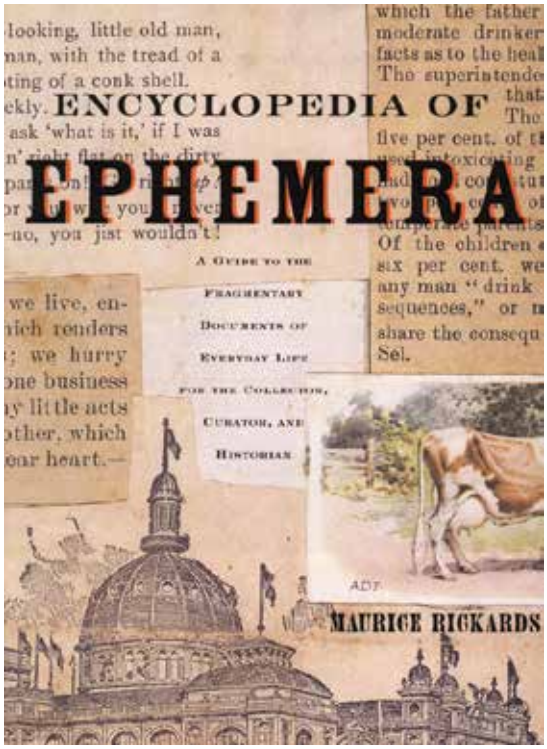

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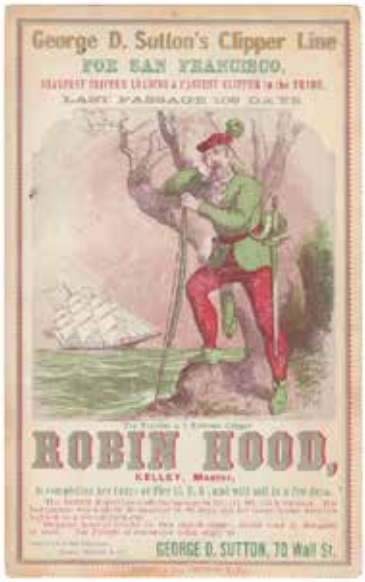

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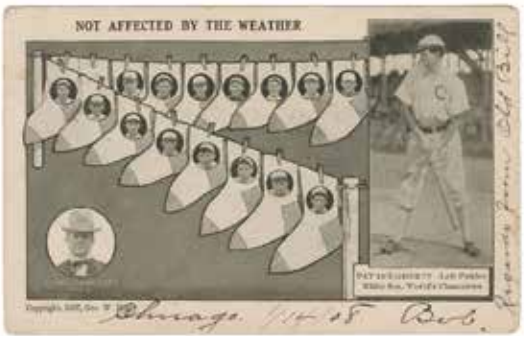

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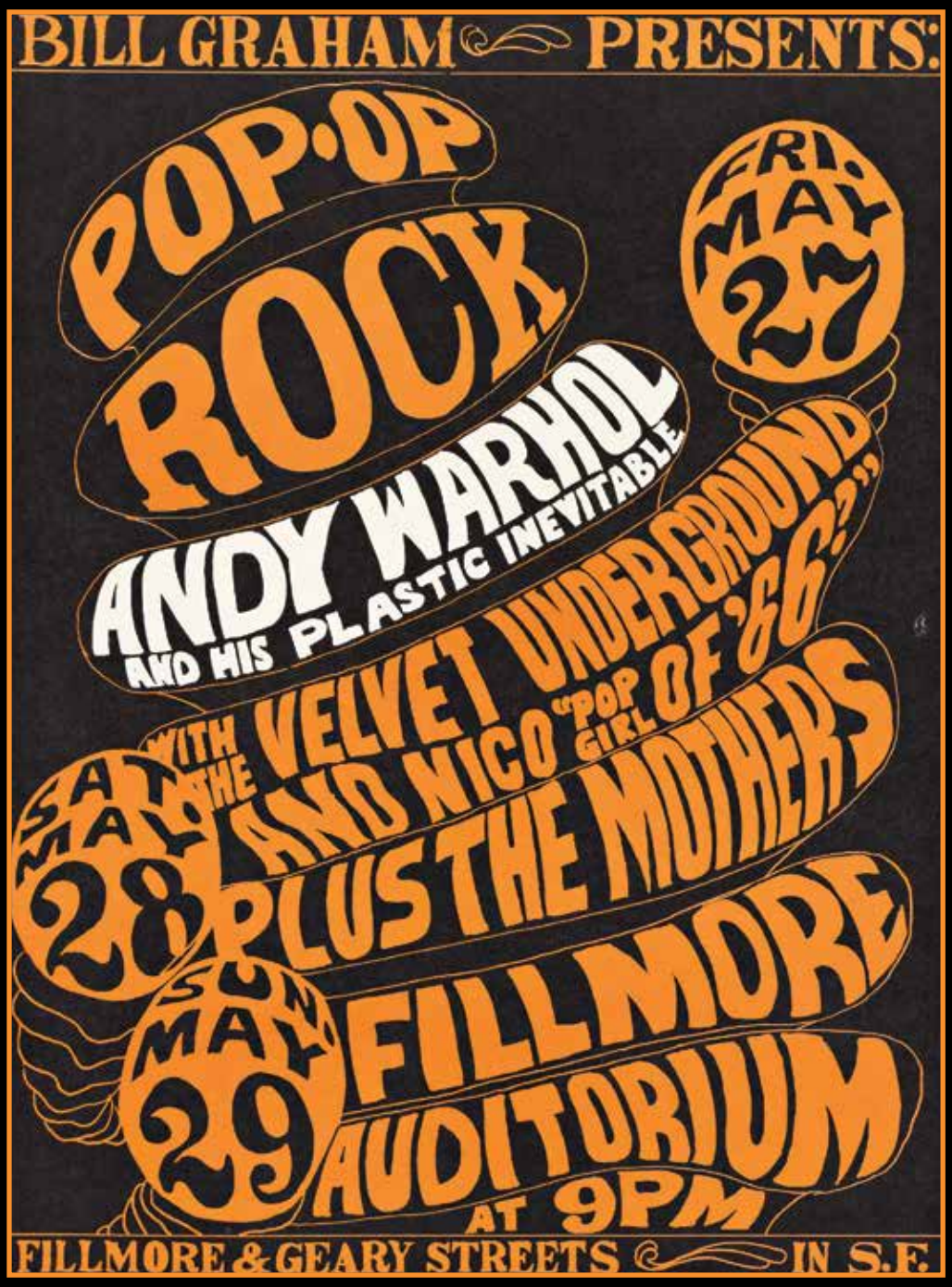

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