



Letter from the President of PHSNE



To the PHSNE Membership -

The past few months have seen dramatic changes in how organizations function and communicate. A variety of questions are coming to the Board of Directors which I would like to address.

With the disruption caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020 Photographica and monthly meetings were canceled. The next Photographica is slated for the spring of 2021, but no date or venue is firm at this point due to ongoing uncertainty about the lifecycle of the coronavirus and availability of sites.

Interest persists in alternative events and/or auction activity in the near term. To attempt an auction presents various challenges including, but not limited to, rolling out a workable web based software platform, staging items to be auctioned in a way that is safe for the auction crew, and coming up with a way to distribute/mail items to the buyers that is safe and secure.

In the near term, I have scheduled a PHSNE Board of Directors meeting on Sunday June 7th. This will be conducted on an open web platform such as Zoom and will allow the Board to complete important business before the start of the summer season. Among issues they will consider:

- Assessing the impact of Internet hosting of PHSNE activities and events and whether we can effectively adapt new technologies
- Assess the resources we have available to pursue these initiatives
- At the same time, should we consider returning to “business as usual,” depending on face-to-face meetings, when the virus subsides?

I believe some level of change will be imposed on us as an organization. There are more questions than answers and we need feedback from the membership. Please see box at right and provide feedback.

Over the last few weeks many PHSNE members have asked what they can do to help, which is a credit to our organization. Monetary and equipment donations are always welcome, though at present the Waltham warehouse is full and closed. It will remain closed until the spread of COVID-19 has subsided which could be in a few to many months. The warehouse crew has been stretched thin, so if any members have the ability to contribute time and effort to help us organize and free up space, that would be most welcome once social distancing guidelines are lifted.

We hope all members and their families are safe and healthy.

Sincerely,
Joel Moses
President

PHSNE Needs Member Feedback

Given the current health crisis, it is impossible to know when normal meetings might resume. It would be most helpful to know how PHSNE can best meet your needs and what interest there would be in virtual meetings— for programs or sharing favorite pieces of equipment. One benefit is that members outside the New England area could participate in such meetings.

Please email snapshots@phsne.org with your suggestions and to indicate if you would participate in online activities. Also, indicate if you are able to host a meeting and/or willing to share one or more items from your collection or expertise on a particular topic.

Snap shots is not published in July and August, but we will keep members informed about plans for the fall via email and website. If you are not on our email list, go to <https://phsne.org/emails> to join.

A Nostalgic Tour Across Route 66 in the 1950s

In the early 1950s photographers Charles and Irene Custer set off on an extended working honeymoon with the goal of documenting life across the well-travelled route 66 and the towns and cities along it. In recent years boxes of negatives from this trip were found in a barn and digitized by family friends who are asking for help identifying people or places in the numbered online photos (<https://www.okmorephotos.com/backtothepast>). The friends, Oscar Larrauri Elías and Khela de Freslon (operators of OK More Photography in Cozumel, Mexico) restored and digitally converted nearly 150 images and dream of retracing the trip



PHSNE Membership

New members are invited to join for half the rates for the first year. Regular PHSNE membership (U.S. and Canada) is \$20 for students, \$40 for individuals and institutions, and \$45 for a family; foreign membership is \$50. Join or renew online at www.phsne.org/join or www.phsne.org/renew, or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order. Please check the expiration date on the *snap shots* mailing label before sending in dues.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to Joe Walters Jr, PHSNE Membership Chair, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453. (Call: 617-826-9294; email: membership-chair@phsne.org; or use the Web form at phsne.org/application).

snap shots, edited by Beverly Regelman, is published monthly, September through June, by the Photographic Historical Society of New England, Inc., 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453. It is available at <https://snapshots.phsne.org> within a few days of mailing. Articles and exhibition/book reviews are always welcome. Send to snapshots@phsne.org. Authors retain copyright to their original articles; however upon written application to the *snap shots* editor, PHSNE may grant non-profit societies with similar aims and interests a one-time right to reproduce a *snap shots* article as long as the author and source are credited and a complimentary copy of the publication is sent to PHSNE.

someday. Freslon said, “The quality of the negatives was so good that we printed one at 16 feet-by-nine feet and wallpapered a wall with it. It was a picture of a barbershop that we chose because it tells a story.”



Charles Custer died in April 2020 at the age of 91. In the *Chicago Sun Times* obituary, Maureen O’Donnell writes, “The photos shot by Charles and Irene Custer might be the closest many of us will ever get to time travel. Developed again for the first time in almost 70 years, they capture images of small town stores, diners, barbershops and beauty parlors on historic Route 66 and other roads” (<https://tinyurl.com/yb7xqpha>). The trip lasted several years, until Irene Custer became pregnant.

The images “are dioramic, so detailed that even the linoleum floors reveal secrets. You can see dusty bootprints, each discarded straw at the soda fountain, the individual hairs on barbershop floors.” They use “one-point perspective: the composition that makes faraway objects appear to recede.”

The Custers developed the prints in the sinks of motel rooms and sold many to the people portrayed. “The surviving pictures — all appear to be from the Southwest — portray a bygone America, capturing a time when women lipsticked and dressed up to go to town, and men wore hats and suspenders.”

Unfortunately Custer’s life celebration was postponed due to the social distancing guidelines.

Have a look at the Custer photos online. Many have a mix of existing day and artificial light, but the strongest source of light is near the camera. The online “selfie” of Custer and his wife shows him holding what looks like an old fashion flash powder tray - did he use only one flash or a second for fill light? Please send your thoughts to snapshots@phsne.org.

Nikon N4004, aka Nikon F-401



A PHSNE member's collection boasts a Nikon N4004, the North American version of the Nikon F-401. Introduced in 1987, it was one of Nikon's earliest models designed for novices. Its autofocus feature was modeled after their 1986 model, oddly numbered the F-501 (or N2020 in North America).

This 35mm SLR “lacked many of the advanced features that more seasoned amateurs and professionals required, but it was a harbinger of the future as it included a pronounced, built-in grip as well as an integrated TTL Flash that is now commonplace on all but the most high-end SLR cameras” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikon_F-401).

Now routine, the F-401 introduced a thumbwheel to adjust the aperture, replacing a lens aperture ring.



“Furthermore, the camera's lack of support for AI lenses meant that while all previous Nikon lenses

could be mounted to the camera, none supported automatic exposure TTL metering.”



The numbering of the series is perplexing. As noted, the F-501 was introduced in 1986 and the F-401 in 1987; later models were the F-801 introduced in 1988 and the F-601 introduced in 1991.

Remedy for Cabin Fever?

Looking for something worthwhile to do during this extraordinary period of social distancing? The headline of an April 7th posting announced promised “Ways to Help Librarians and Archivists From Home” and offered “six digital projects that could use your curiosity” (<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/transcribe-archives-at-home>).

One of the six is Harvard's PHaEDRA project (Preserving Harvard's Early Data and Research in Astronomy). This is a successor to the earlier DASCH project in which PHSNE member George Champine helped digitize about half a million images. The other projects involve New England whaling logs, science fiction fanzines, Alabama history, public radio and TV broadcast transcripts, and American prison writing archives.

And here's a photo project inspired by the pandemic, designed to bring people together. Check out <https://tinyurl.com/y6u5fj5g>.

Bertha: A Large Format Camera

Her name is Bertha, and she's massive. Built mostly by the Branco Ottico crew, and supported by a large metal frame designed by crew member Donato Rizzo, the camera has a "sensitive area of 1.10×1.10 meters, a bellows draft of about 4 meters and a 1000mm f6.3 lens, [and] is capable of taking portrait photographs in macro mode" (<https://www.diyphotography.net/how-we-built-bertha-a-large-format-camera-that-will-shoot-1-1x1-1-metre-slides/>).



Italian photographer and author Davide Rossi writes that Bertha was "built out of a desire to find out what photography can reveal beyond certain limits." The maximum magnification permits images three times greater than the size of the original.

"The main idea is to use the gigantic camera to create unique works with the chemical process we have developed, the ROBA APPOSTA inversion kit, which is able to positively reverse all photographic papers and black and white films." Images will be created using photographic paper or one meter wide roll film. A mobile darkroom will allow Bertha to photograph major outdoor events.

The December 2019 blog post noted that "first tests are scheduled for the next few days and we will perform them with a 50x60cm back reduction. We will program the photographic shot on a slide of over one square meter for the first months of 2020, then we will take a tour to portray subjects 'on the road' on direct photographic paper and mobile darkroom." In view of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, this timetable was undoubtedly put on hold. *Snap shots* will be looking out for updates.

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held on the first Sunday of each month, September to June, at 1:30 p.m. preceded by an open meeting of the PHSNE Board at 11:00 a.m.

Upcoming meetings:

PHSNE does not meet during the summer months. Due to current social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unable to anticipate when regular meetings will resume. Members will be informed via emails and web postings.

Connect to PHSNE Online and by email:

PHSNE's Web site is online at <https://phsne.org>. See <https://www.facebook.com/PHSNE/> for items of PHSNE interest. Comments are welcome, so join the discussion of photo history. Visit <https://snapshots.phsne.org> for back issues of *snap shots* since 2005. Scheduling changes due to weather conditions or other factors will be posted on this website.

Stay connected to PHSNE via our emails: a *snap shots* e-copy, and *Photographa* show announcements. Sign up at <https://phsne.org/emails>.



Happy Birthday Ruud Hoff

While we are socially distancing and isolated, this cheery message came from the Netherlands from long-time PHSNE member—and Kodak collector—Ruud Hoff. Excellent timing!



"I recently turned 80, and my daughter Hannah surprised me with one of the most wonderful birthday presents ever. Enclosed are some pictures of the 3 layer birthday cake she made for me, resembling a pink Kodak beau brownie, one of many collectors' favorites."