

# PHSNE's Second Ten Years, 1983 – 1992

By Ruth Thomasian

## Reaching Out Keeping Photo History Alive

I will remember my first PHSNE meeting back in September 1982. I had recently moved back to the Boston area after being away for 20 years, 12 of which were in New York City, where in 1975 I had founded Project SAVE (now known as Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc.). I was a member of the Photographic Historical Society of New York (later the American Photographic Historical Society) and was looking for a similar membership organization devoted to photo history in the Boston area.

Alan Kattelle was President at the time, and the membership was almost exclusively male. The few women who attended meetings appeared to me to be contented, if not somewhat disinterested, wives. And everywhere—at the mini trade fair, for “Show and Tell,” and the topic of the monthly program—it was all about cameras and equipment, even when it was about images. There was little focus on photographs.

I knew very little about the technical and engineering aspects of cameras that PHSNE members relished. I loved my manual Voigtländer range-finder, but never thought much about its actual workings or design. PHSNE made me realize that I, as an image person, should really understand more about camera technology. On the other hand, I also felt strongly that an organization calling itself a *photographic historical society* should cover all aspects of photography, not just camera technology. So I decided to “hang around” and learn about cameras, and lobby for the representation of images.

Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the 10th Anniversary celebration in October 1983, which coincided with a special event of my own organization—the opening of *A LOOK AT OURSELVES: Armenians Through the Camera's Eye*, Project SAVE's first professional museum exhibit at the Museum of Our National Heritage in Lexington.

As a relatively new member, I was unaware of the management issues that the board was dealing with. But ten years later in the 20th Anniversary *Journal* (Vol. 138 and 139, Issues 1 & 2, 1993, p. 7), Jack Naylor, Secretary of the Board and *Journal* Editor, wrote that the 10th Anniversary Banquet had nearly bankrupted the Society, which did not have the funds necessary to subsidize the event. Under the title “PHSNE Expresses Its Thanks,” he credited many individuals and organizations with helping to pull PHSNE out of debt and setting the stage for a more financially stable organization. Unrestricted gifts were received from Eugene and Bertha Corriher of Landis, North Carolina; the Connecticut Photographic Collectors Club through its custodian Jay O. Tepper; the Polaroid Corporation, and PHSNE Board Members and regular members who still remain anonymous. Jack Naylor also provided financial support. It was his vision



Top: PHSNE Sunday meeting, December 7, 1986; Jack Naylor presents his “Pearl Harbor” talk to an attentive audience; photo by Roland Perry using a Widelux camera. Bottom: “Five Minutes till Show time in Boston.” Sunday, October 21, 1984, member/dealers and Show Manager David Berenson, center isle, front; Armenian Cultural and Educational Center, Watertown, Massachusetts; photo by Harold Lewis using Tri-X film (exposure ½ second at f16) in a 120 roll-film Panon camera (Japanese, 1952) with a curved film plane and swinging lens. First published in *Photographical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Sept/Oct 1984, p. 20.

and know-how that kept PHSNE alive and well into its second decade.

James P. Hopkins, MD, of Kansas City, donated his entire camera and image collections to be auctioned totally for PHSNE's benefit. Jack orchestrated all the arrangements and served as Auction Manager for this, PHSNE's first special estate auction, which was held at the Skinner Gallery in Bolton, Massachusetts, Friday, April 26, 1985 (the night before the Photographica Show). It grossed \$80,000 (\$150,558 in 2006 dollars). This and all of the other generous and thoughtful gifts to the Society provided a solid foundation for the PHSNE Board of Directors to build on, nurture, and protect.

In the 1980s, elections were interesting social events—almost popularity contests—that took place once a year at the Annual Meeting in May. There were always a few more people running for member-at-large than positions available, so choices had to be made. Having a familiar “face” to go with a name really helped in getting elected. Many members became known by participating in “Show and Tell” at Sunday meetings—a great way to introduce yourself and your photo interest to the membership and create name recognition.

I attended monthly meetings on a regular basis, and did a few “Show and Tells.” In 1987 President Wayne Cogan asked me to consider serving on the board. Why not, I thought, here's an opportunity to get more involved, and perhaps attract more women and those solely interested in images. I have been trying to balance the board ever since!

At the next election, I was asked to serve as Vice President with second-term President Henry Weisenburger—he had previously served from 1978-1980. Treasurer David Berenson recruited his stereo friend Ed Shaw to join the board. My main vice presidential responsibilities were to bring “lunch” for the Board Meeting—no more donuts and coffee—and to lead “Show and Tell” at the monthly Sunday meetings. Two years later, in May 1991, I was elected President; Henry accepted the position of Program Chair for Sunday meetings, which he continues to do today.

The original PHSNE Bylaws allowed the president to be reelected for a second consecutive one-year term, and most presidents did serve for two years. In 1991 the Board reviewed the 18-year old Bylaws and revised them: sexist language was removed; the presidential term was extended to two years without reelection; the Annual Meeting and elections were moved from May to November, with terms of office running for the calendar year.

During this second decade as our membership and meeting attendance began to grow, we considered moving our Sunday meeting place from the lovely but small historic Edgell Library to a modern hotel meeting room that had less charm but more space. In September 1991, following extensive research into suitable meeting places within the circumference of Route 128, we began a period of years when our Sunday meetings were held at hotel facilities starting at Framingham's Natick Inn on Rte. 9. We rented space in a Waltham warehouse

to store our meeting equipment and Photographica and auction supplies.

PHSNE grew and developed in response to the vision and expertise of its hard-working and dedicated Board of Directors. Back in the mid 1980s PHSNE Treasurer David Berenson spent huge amounts of time taking care of PHSNE business. In addition to being treasurer, he managed the membership database, produced and mailed meeting notices and membership renewals, orchestrated the yearly board-member elections, and produced the membership directory. He was “advisor” to the president and also Assistant Show



Top: Ready for Auction: Kansas City, Missouri, 1985, l-r: James Hopkins, M.D., Jack Naylor, and Larry Brown take a break from packing the truck. Larry's Brownie camera collection that James had previously purchased, along with the rest of James' collection, are in the truck ready for auction; Jack drove it all back to Massachusetts. PHSNE named Dr. Hopkins Honorary Life Member in thanks for his gift to the Society; photo by James' friend who helped pack truck. First published in *Photographical Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Sept/Oct 1984, p. 5. Bottom: “Show and Tell” participants show off: front l-r: Jack Billington, Bill Nitkin, Fred Hiscock; standing l-r: Jack Naylor, Claire Billington, guest speaker Professor Sakda Siripant of Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, David Berenson, Henry Karsh, Richard Schooler, Susan Bursch, Paul Wing, Lowell Bursch, Dudley Brewster, Paul Nisula, at Edgell Library, Framingham, Massachusetts, April 1988; photographer not identified. First published in *The New England Journal of Photographic History*, No. 119, Spring 1988, p. 20.



Left and right: Jack Naylor hosted PHSNE's December 3, 1989 meeting in his Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts home and museum for the premier showing of *Touring the Naylor Museum of Photography, Part Two*—a four-hour series aired on independent television stations; photographer not identified. Jack Naylor can be seen at center back in the photo on the right. Below: One of the last Photographica Shows at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center, Watertown, Massachusetts, c. 1990; photo by Myron Wolf.

Manager in the spring of 1983 with Manager Harold Lewis. In the fall of 1983 he was Co-Manager with John Kinville, and then served as Manager through spring of 1991.

In the fall of 1991 Jack Naylor began his four-year tenure as Photographica Show Manager with Show 36—the last at the Armenian Cultural and Educational Center (until it returned in the spring of 2005). In need of more space to accommodate the growing number of interested dealers, he relocated the show to Hillcrest Convention Center in Waltham.

Of course, it is very easy to let one or a few persons do all the work, but unwise because in the long run it creates a lack of leadership. So in June 1992, the Board of Directors held a special all-day planning meeting where we discussed our vision for PHSNE's future—out of which developed a Board-Member job description clearly defining the responsibilities of the directors as well as management descriptions of PHSNE activities such as the Photographica Show, auctions, *The Journal*, and Sunday programs. These documents helped in our efforts to reach out to the general membership for their participation as volunteers in our various programs. This proved to be a good way to get to know each other, share photographic interests, and create an active membership.

In 1983 Jack Naylor and Harold Lewis started co-editing the quarterly *New England Journal of Photographic History*. In 1984 they pooled the resources of PHSNE with the American Photographic Historical Society (APHS), New York City, and began sharing the role of editor with George Gilbert, editor of APHS's *Photographica*. They combined the names into *Photographica/Journal* published on a quarterly basis. After three years, the partnership was discontinued, and *The New England Journal of Photographic History* reverted to its original format with Jack as Editor-in-Chief. During this same period Jack also served as Secretary of the Board of Directors. (In 1998 he ended his prolific tenure as Editor-in-Chief, but in actuality he continued rescuing us from publishing crises through 2002.)

Jack's leadership in photographica collecting shaped PHSNE's second decade in immeasurable ways. He collected,

bought and sold, entertained, educated, enjoyed, wrote, and created his home museum, now displaying 32,000 items. He graciously welcomed those interested in photo history, from Photographica Show member/dealers to new FBI agents, and even the group of church ladies that one of my Project SAVE Archives' volunteers took to visit his museum. He has connected PHSNE members with such greats as Dr. Harold Edgerton and Drs. Brad and Barbara Washburn. In 1989, for the 150th anniversary of photography, Jack organized and led a group of 130 PHSNE members and friends to the International Conference on the Evolution of Photography in Thailand where they were to participate in the opening of the new Museum of Imaging Technology at Chulalongkorn University. Thus began PHSNE's international travel programs.

Our monthly programs began to include field trips when in 1991 we did a weekend in Rochester, New York. It was memorable not only for the visits to George Eastman House and the Strong Museum, but also for the camaraderie of traveling in a bus with no heat in the middle of March, meeting Rochester-area PHSNE members in the home of Frank and Shirley Mehlenbacher, and being thankful that the crippling ice storm which hit Rochester arrived several hours after we had departed.

I was president when we celebrated PHSNE's 20th anniversary in September 1993. (Since the membership had voted to change the election cycle to the calendar year, I served



another half-year till the end of 1993.) Following my 2½ year term as president, I continued on the board—not in the usual category of Immediate Past President—but once again as Vice President, serving with President Arnold Greene, who just previously had been my vice president.

By the end of its second decade, PHSNE was an excitingly vibrant historical organization working diligently to attract new members. Our membership had grown to over 500 in 31 states, Canada and twenty other countries. We welcomed members to be actively involved in programs which had now

become well established traditions: monthly Sunday meetings with “Show and Tell”; the February Members Auction; two Photographica Shows per year; field trips in search of New England and international photo history; and our *New England Journal of Photographic History*. We were still working hard to achieve a balance of camera and image topics for our programs and publications, as well as attract more women to our programs and leadership positions.

Stay tuned for the history of PHSNE’s third decade by Past President John Felix—in the next *Journal*. 



Above: Hillcrest Exposition Center, Waltham, Massachusetts, Photographica Show 37, Spring 1992, opens to a long line of photo enthusiasts; photographer not identified. First published in *The New England Journal of Photographic History*, No. 134, Winter 1991-92, p. 3.



#### About the Author

*Honorary Life Member Ruth Thomasian of Watertown, Massachusetts joined PHSNE in 1982 at the end of its first decade and was elected to the Board of Directors in 1989. She has served as President for two terms: 1991-1993 and 2000-2002; and Assistant Show Manager since Show 39 in spring 1993. PHSNE made her an Honorary Life Member in 1998. Ruth is founder and executive director of Project SAVE Armenian Photograph Archives, Inc., Watertown, Massachusetts, and has worked tirelessly for 31 years collecting, documenting, and preserving photographic images that represent the culture of Armenians in the homeland and Diaspora. She can be contacted at 617-923-4542 and at archives@projectsave.org.*

Photo by Betty Kantrowitz

### PHSNE Board of Directors' Officers — The Second Ten Years

PHSNE voted for board members annually until the 1993 elections, when the membership voted to amend the Bylaws regarding the election cycle. Ballots would now go out every two years for elections in November of odd-numbered years, thus avoiding the time-consuming election process every year. The president would now serve one nonrenewable two-year term.

<u>Year</u>	<u>President</u>	<u>Vice President</u>	<u>Secretary</u> *	<u>Treasurer</u> *
1983	Alan Kattelle	Larry Rochette/ Lester Gediman	Lowell Bursch	Jeanne Gorman
1984	Alan Kattelle	Lester Gediman	Lowell Bursch	Jeanne Gorman
1985	Lester Gediman/ Harold Lewis	Carl Chiulli/ Wayne Cogan	Lowell Bursch	Jeanne Gorman/ Paul Nisula
1986	Wayne Cogan	Lowell Bursch	David Berenson	Paul Nisula
1987	Wayne Cogan	Lowell Bursch	David Berenson	Jack Naylor
1988	Lowell Bursch	Henry Weisenburger	David Berenson	Jack Naylor
1989	Henry Weisenburger	Ruth Thomasian	David Berenson	Jack Naylor
1990	Henry Weisenburger	Ruth Thomasian	David Berenson	Jack Naylor
1991-93	Ruth Thomasian	Ed Shaw/Arnold Greene	David Berenson/ Ed Shaw	Jack Naylor

\* The entries in the columns for Secretary and Treasurer were inadvertently transposed.