



Motive, Means and Opportunity: Amateur Shutterbugs Shoot the Harvard Shakers

PHSNE Online Presentation by Ned Quist, Sunday, April 4, 2021, 7:30 P.M.

Zoom link will be sent to members a few days prior to the presentation



From the 1880s to World War I, a group of amateur photographers in Ayer, Massachusetts traveled around the area taking pictures of historic buildings, landscapes, train disasters, outdoor recreation, construction projects, their neighbors, and themselves (the “selfie” is not new). Among the thousands of surviving photographs from these amateurs are a group of images visually documenting the last years of the Shaker community in the town of Harvard.

Improved photographic technology in the form of Kodak's gelatin dry plate, and the hand-held camera, made it possible for amateurs such as Charles Kennison (a disabled clock repairman and bicycle mechanic), William Wright (an undertaker and furniture maker), Edward Richardson (a local politician), H. E. Evans (local bookkeeper), and others to take and develop high quality images.



Street View Looking North from Office, Harvard Shaker Village, Courtesy of Hamilton College Special Collections

Their work, possibly inspired by the efforts of the Boston Camera Club to document historic buildings in Boston, did a great deal to capture late 19th and early 20th century Ayer and its surroundings. Additional Boston Camera Club information is available at <https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/collections/commonwealth:vd66w647r>.

Motive, Means and Opportunity: Amateur Shutterbugs Shoot the Harvard Shakers, presented by Ned Quist, will focus on images of the Harvard Shaker



Colorized Post Card, ca. 1915

Village and the Shakers. Some of the images have become well-known after being published either as postcards or appearing in books on the Shakers; others are relatively unknown and expand our understanding of this vital community in its final years.

Ned Quist is a retired academic librarian having served at the Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Institute as the music librarian for 25 years and 15 years at Brown University, where he was music librarian and Associate University Librarian for Research and Outreach Services.

Since retiring he's developed a deep interest in the culture and creativity of the Shakers. Quist makes furniture in both the Shaker and Arts and Craft styles. He has a



*Herb House, Harvard Shaker Village
Courtesy of Hamilton College Special Collections*

B.A. from Colgate University, and Master's Degrees from The Peabody Institute in Music History and from Catholic University in Library Science.

Are These Collectible?

Really old cameras are often works of art worthy of display: wooden treasures with leather bellows, brass lenses, and other aesthetic features. Modern film cameras are also highly collectible; as people moved up to better models, their cameras, especially in good working condition, have considerable resale value.

But what about digital cameras? Will they have any value, and will they be collectible?

One website makes the important point that, “Collecting is different from hoarding junk . . . I’m



sure we all have a few compact digital cameras stored in a drawer somewhere, that we don’t use anymore because, let’s be honest, any decent smartphone will do a much better job at taking, editing and publishing pictures than a dedicated compact digital camera sold 10 years ago. It does not make us digital camera collectors. We’re simply consolidating our inventory of

obsolete electronics before a future trip to the recycling center” (<https://cameragx.com/2017/05/20/should-we-start-collecting-digital-cameras/>).

Collecting is a serious endeavor that “implies an intent” and “tells a story. The collector assembles objects which are significant for him or her, because of their esthetic or sentimental value, or to satisfy some form of intellectual curiosity.” While most collectors hope that the value of the cameras will increase, that isn’t the primary motive to collect; if it is, the individual is a dealer or speculator, but not a true collector. To be collectible, a camera should “represent a significant step in the evolution of digital cameras, and . . . have a few unique characteristics that would differentiate it from the mass of the me-too products of its generation.”

An alternative view was expressed by PHSNE member Ron Polito and echoed by others: “I feel digital cameras can and will be collectible, not only for technological advancements, but often as superb examples of industrial design—while the design of most film cameras is limited by the mechanics.”

A collector in France has more than 650 “old” digital cameras. His website contains “original pictures of each camera as well as downloadable user’s manuals and drivers” (<http://old-digitalcameras.com>).

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 <https://phsne.org/join> or <https://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 <https://phsne.org/application>).

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Minolta 110 Zoom SLR, An “Unconventional” Camera

The first thing you notice about the Minolta 110 Zoom SLR is its very flat body. The Japanese camera was manufactured from 1976-1979, the first SLR to be produced in 110 format. “Other 110 SLRs were shaped like SLRs in larger formats, but the 110 Zoom SLR took the flat format of the typical 110 pocket camera and added a larger lens and prism hump to it. 1979’s replacement, the Minolta 110 Zoom SLR Mark II, had a more conventional shape” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minolta_110_Zoom_SLR).



Featuring a 25-50mm (35mm equivalent of 50-100mm), f4.5-16 manual focus zoom lens, the camera allowed for macro focusing as close as 280mm (approximately 11 inches). The range was similar to that on a typical 35mm format camera. A “pop out” shade protected the lens. The camera has a 40.5mm filter thread.

Calling it “unconventional,” camera-wiki notes that it has “no manual exposure control” and that the “aperture selector was not part of the lens [but] placed around the exposure-meter-eye instead” (http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/Minolta_110_Zoom_SLR).#

“The viewfinder has a central microprism focusing spot. There are left and right indicators in the finder for the exposure meter. For correct exposure, adjust the aperture ring towards the arrows until the indicators do not light. Exposure compensation is available that can be changed up to two EV stops.”

The camera could accommodate shutter speeds of 10 seconds to 1/1000 of a second. There is a lock switch that protects against exposing film unintentionally. The top of the camera has a hot shoe for flash that could sync to speeds to 1/150s. Two silver

oxide batteries power the camera, and there is a red button to check batteries.



Downsizing or Selling?



If you’re looking to downsize or to part with your collection, we’re here to help.

PHSNE will add your items to its auction offerings, passing 80% of the proceeds to you with the balance going

to support our organization. Or you can choose to make a tax-deductable donation to PHSNE.

For more information, email auction@phsne.org.

Century Old Photographic Treasures Discovered in Attic

David Whitcomb, a lawyer seeking to expand his practice, purchased an old building in Geneva, N.Y. for \$100,000. While renovating, he and a friend discovered a hidden room that had been walled in over the years. To their amazement, it turned out to be a photographic portrait studio, complete with equipment, glass negatives, and prints of some well-known and unknown citizens of the early 20th century including a gilded framed photograph of Susan B. Anthony.



Most of the items were covered in soot. After cleaning one of the broken glass negatives, they determined the image was that of Susan B. Anthony, in profile, looking at a book, but not the same as the photograph in the frame (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/12/nyregion/susan-b-anthony-geneva-portraits.html>). Unfortunately, not all the pieces of the glass negative were located. “The photo of Susan B. Anthony in profile, which was how she normally posed to hide a lazy eye, became the ‘official’ suffragist photo of her,” according to an article written by Dr. Daniel Weinstock, former president of the Geneva Historical Society.

It is believed that the studio belonged to James Ellery Hale, “a successful portrait photographer who in the 1880s moved to Seneca Falls, N.Y. where the first women’s rights convention was held in 1848. One photo may be of President Cleveland’s wife

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held on the first Sunday of each month, September to June. Meetings are being held online during the COVID restrictions.

Upcoming meetings:

May 2—Nicole Hudgins, *The Gender of Photography*

June 6—Edith Cuerrier, Gabriel Cromer Collection, George Eastman Museum

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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 *snap shots* issues since 2005.

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Frances, but that has not been confirmed. The antiques found included high quality gold frames, boxes of unused Kodak paper, portrait stools, sodium sulfite, and decorated drop cloths.

Constructed in 1895, the Geneva building housed an assortment of businesses. Hale moved his studio there sometime around 1900. The photograph of Susan B. Anthony was taken in 1905 when she and her sister came to visit other well-known suffragists. In 1920 Hale sold the studio to Frank Gilmore, also a photographer, and left the area.

The value of the find is difficult to determine. Robin Starr, who leads the American and European works of art department at Skinner, an auction house in Boston, noted that, “For better or for worse, historical importance and high market value are two very different things.”

Whitcomb has indicated he will sell some of the items and donate others. He posted pictures online, hoping to help tell the story of the suffragist movement and perhaps to help people identify ancestors whose photographic portraits might have been taken by Hale (<https://m.facebook.com/halecollection/photos>).

Bringing Susan B. Anthony’s Story Up-To-Date

Susan B. Anthony was arrested in 1872 for voting illegally. On the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote, President Trump issued a posthumous pardon—which was rejected by the Susan B. Anthony Museum on the grounds that it trivialized her contribution. Anthony refused an offered pardon in her lifetime, insisting she had committed no crime.