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# 60th Papermania Plus Show: Collecting Fine Print

by Jeanne Schinto

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Hartford, Connecticut

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Some collector clubs are exclusive. They claim to want new blood, and virtually all truly need it, but don't always act as welcoming as they should to would-be recruits. The opposite is true of the loyal base of dealers and serious collectors from New England, New York, and beyond who meet twice a year for Papermania Plus, held each January and August at the XL Center in Hartford, Connecticut. Maybe it's because they like words in all their forms—written, printed, spoken. Whatever the reason, it's easy to engage these people in conversation about the things they love.

The book-and-paper people have a couple of other advantages too. First, the objects of their affection offer more accessible entry points to newcomers than, say, decoys or delft. There's always to be spied a children's book remembered from childhood; the poster from a loved movie; a bit of humor in a vintage advertisement; or a political message from the distant past that still resonates today. A second thing in their favor is their price tags. At the show I saw a number of items that cost thousands of dollars, but also plenty priced at \$25 or below.

Cofounded by Arlene Shea and her husband, Paul Gipstein (1930-2002), in the late 1970's, the show is carried on by Shea and her son, Gary Gipstein, of Hillcrest Promotions, based in Wethersfield, Connecticut. On the weekend of August 20 and 21 they passed a milestone. It was their 60th show.

Traditionally, August's Papermania Plus is a smaller event than January's. This time it was slightly smaller still, with approximately 100 dealers, some sharing booths. One reason for dealer absenteeism was the show's date, a week earlier than usual. That created a conflict for those who annually do shows in Maine and New York state on that weekend. Notably, DeWolfe & Wood Rare Books, Alfred, Maine, was at the Ellsworth Antiques Show at Woodlawn in their home state.

With dealer attendance down, buying was necessarily down too, since there is a significant amount of dealer-to-dealer action at book-and-paper shows generally. The items are so specific, and customer interests are so precise, the trade heavily depends on knowing the perfect person to offer something.

In any case, although it was certainly quieter than the 160-dealer Papermania Plus I attended a few Januarys ago, it was still a stimulating way to spend a Saturday, looking at the tiny print of historical documents, gazing at some of the great eye-catchers of advertising ages past, and sifting through bins of vernacular photographs, trade catalogs, and the like. I defy anyone to walk into the show and fail to be amazed at humankind and what it has produced, sometimes in its finest hours, sometimes in its weirdest.

One of the best items I saw at the show belonged to James Arsenault of Arrowsic, Maine. He had bought it at one of the New Hampshire shows of the previous week and had yet to price it. ("Put P.O.R.—price on reflection," he quipped.) Executed by David Davidson, it was a Civil War commemorative in preternaturally minuscule colored-ink writing—letters smaller than poppy seeds—that was copied from the *Boston Journal* of May 27, 1861, and "Respectfully Dedicated" to its editor, James A. Dix.

Its design incorporates the "Address to the Troops at Fort Warren, by Rev. G.H. Hepworth" as well as a "Touching Tribute to Col. Ellsworth by W.R. Alger." A very strong magnifying glass would be needed to decipher the rest—after figuring out where the text begins, since it wraps around itself. But the words themselves may be beside the point, said Arsenault, who has owned only one other piece of virtuosic calligraphy. As he wrote me in an e-mail after the show, "Of course, it's more about the astonishing nature of the art, and the historical moment—the commemoration of the onset of the Civil War in the city that served as the seat of the abolitionist movement."

One of the earliest pieces I saw was in the booth of Stephen P. Hanly of Bickerstaff's Books, Maps, &c., Scarborough, Maine. It was the first printed map of Washington, D.C., from the March 1792 issue of *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*. Engraved by Thackara & Vallance, it shows Pierre Charles L'Enfant's ingenious design—a series of circles and diagonal streets, along with the usual grids—as revised by Andrew Ellicott.

Hanly, who had the map priced at \$9500, wrote in a post-show e-mail that he'd had a "decent" show, "both buying and selling, despite the continuing economic uncertainty." He "picked up a very nice small wall map of Cape Arundel, Maine, as well as a few eighteenth-century magazines," he said.

In a similar vein, Peter Masi of Montague, Massachusetts, who has been exhibiting at Papermania Plus since "about the second show," told me he made about 20 sales, "all modest, half to other dealers, although that half accounted for more of the dollars." He also bought, spending "as much as I sold, and enjoyed the shopping."

My husband, Bob Frishman, a clock dealer and collector of clock-related ephemera, enjoyed the shopping too. A patient bin sifter, Frishman picked up from Masi two Seth Thomas clock catalogs from 1955 and 1957. Showing the firm's mid-century timepieces, including windup banjos and electric alarm clocks, they were \$15 each (Masi gave them to Bob for \$20 total) and came with their price lists.

Frishman also paid \$20 for an early cookbook, a gift for me. He found it in the booth of Joe Maynard of Brooklyn. *French Dishes for American Tables* by Pierre Caron, published in 1886 by D. Appleton in New York, proves that there were attempts to teach French cooking to Americans well before Julia Child.

Asked if he had made any significant sales, Maynard told me he had sold *A Descriptive Catalogue of the William S. Burroughs Archon*, one of 26 lettered copies with a full leather binding stamped with a Brion Gysin design. It was signed by Burroughs, Gysin, and Barry Miles, Burroughs' biographer.

Maynard said, "Gysin was the 'artist' wing of the Beats, and although Burroughs is more well known for it, is often credited with being the first in the group to employ the 'cut-up' technique of writing poems"—i.e., cutting up text and rearranging it, the way people do with their Magnetic Poetry kits on their refrigerator doors.

Elizabeth Baird of Falmouth, Maine, sold Frishman his best purchase of the day, an Ansonia Sunwatch—a pocket sundial for hikers. It was \$125. In the mid-1990's he and I bought one at Brimfield for \$50. Unlike that one, this was in fine condition, with its original box and owner's manual.

Baird specializes in early valentines and love tokens, watercolors, schoolgirl art, botanicals, prints, and books related to her specialties, as well as toys and textiles. The Sunwatch sale happened because, hearing of Frishman's horological interests, she dug the item out of one of her boxes. "It's always interesting to talk to people about what they collect," she said. "You learn by talking to your customers."

Baird was one dealer who had an unqualified "very good" show. "I was busy all day Saturday, and it continued on Sunday," she said, offering this positive spin on the diminished dealer population: "I think when there are few dealers, the ones who are there get more business. Plus, I have so many little things."

Indeed, Baird sold several 1940's valentines for just \$2 or \$3, along with about \$400 worth of 19th-century Christmas cards to a collector. She also sold such things as a scrapbook of mostly trade cards for \$200 and a number of toys to a couple from Maine intending to use them to decorate the bedrooms that their grandchildren stay in when they visit.

It's impossible for most dealers to bring even a fraction of their inventory to every show. "So I think a good suggestion for dealers is to do follow-up," said Baird. "I've done it a little bit, but not as much as I should." She laughed. "There was a couple looking for McLoughlin children's books of a certain size. I need to go through my McLoughlins and see what I've got."

A handful of Papermania Plus dealers have had regular dealings with one major collector who did not attend the show this time, Barry Landau of New York City. The subject of many overheard conversations on the floor, he wasn't on vacation. Rather, in July he was arrested at the Maryland Historical Society and charged with theft. Landau and his assistant, Jason Savedoff, were indicted by a federal grand jury later that month, accused of stealing and selling historical documents worth millions of dollars.

The two men were arrested after a Maryland Historical Society employee reported that Savedoff purloined a document from the society's Baltimore library. When police arrived, investigators found not only that document but 59 others inside a locker that Savedoff was using. Reportedly among the items were papers signed by President Abraham Lincoln worth \$300,000 and presidential inaugural ball invitations and programs valued at \$500,000.

Significantly, Landau is the author of *The President's Table: Two Hundred Years of Dining and Diplomacy*. You can see him in a 43-minute video from his 2008 book tour, in which he speaks openly and without notes about his collecting origins and habits. He also name drops everyone from Mamie Eisenhower to Bill Clinton. It's on the Web site for the University of Arkansas's speakers series ([www.clintonchoolspeakers.com/lecture/view/presidents-table-200-years-dining-and-diplomacy](http://www.clintonchoolspeakers.com/lecture/view/presidents-table-200-years-dining-and-diplomacy)).

Federal prosecutors said the pair is also accused of stealing and selling documents from the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum and the New-York Historical Society, both in New York City. If the charges are true, this adds a new twist to the idea of older collectors encouraging younger ones. Landau is 63; Savedoff, 24. (For further details, see "Major Figure in Historic Document Field Charged with \$6 Million Theft," *M.A.D.*, September 2011, p. 10-A.)

The next Papermania Plus is scheduled for the weekend of January 7 and 8, 2012. For more information, contact Hillcrest Promotions at (860) 563-9975 or (860) 529-2234, or see the Web site ([www.papermaniaplus.com](http://www.papermaniaplus.com)).

Apparently it was not considered a bad idea in the 19th century to be portrayed as a pig on St. Valentine's Day. The greeting card was \$35 from Gary Welker of Waterloo, Ontario.

This Ansonia Sunwatch—a pocket sundial for hikers—in the original box with owner's manual, was \$125 from Elizabeth Baird of Falmouth, Maine. It sold to my husband.

The first printed map of Washington, D.C., from the March 1792 issue of *The Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*, was \$9500 from Bickerstaff's Books, Maps &c., Scarborough, Maine.

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Here's an inspiring story about one collector making a new one. When I walked into the booth of Eric C. Caren of Lincolndale, New York, he introduced me to Philip Mead. "We met at the Hartford military show"—i.e., the show sponsored by the New England Antique Arms Society, said Caren. "Phil was eleven or twelve. I always give kids something free to encourage them to collect. I gave Phil a piece of paper from the eighteenth century. He became a collector. He has even sold me things." The dealer laughed. Mead, who is now 34, has gone so far as to make a career of studying the past. He has recently earned his doctorate in history at Harvard University and is now teaching there.

Show promoters Gary Gipstein and Arlene Shea at the 60th anniversary of Papermania Plus.

Rex Stark of Gardner, Massachusetts, brought this 1889 "No Smoking Allowed" sign, with the word smoking spelled out in images of pipes and cigars. The price was \$975.

Southpaw Books' scarce first edition of *A Way of Seeing: Photographs of New York* by Helen Levitt was \$850. The book, including an essay by James Agee, was published by Viking in 1965.

Steven Schuyler of North Reading, Massachusetts, asked \$300 for two early 20th-century color charts from Prince Paint Company of Boston. Great visually, they are also a wealth of cultural information. For example, the names of the paint colors from that period—Edelweiss White, Scotch Gray, Maple Leaf Red—are a sharp contrast to contemporary paint color choices, such as Valspar's Blue Whisper, Hello Dolly, and Daydream Haze.

Resser-Thorner Antiques, Manchester, New Hampshire, asked \$5500 for a two-page letter by Winslow Homer on August 26, 1904, from Scarborough ("Scarboro") Beach, Maine, in which he discussed plans for future projects and sketched a sketchbook to make his point. The ALS (autograph letter signed) was addressed to his gallery, Doll and Richards of Boston.

Cheryl Needle of Pepperell, Massachusetts, asked \$1500 for the archives of the textile firm C.G. Sargent Company of Graniteville (Westford), Massachusetts, including architectural plans and photographs for its factory and machinery.