

ARLIS/NA

ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY of NORTH AMERICA

2014: 42nd Annual Conference
Washington, D.C. | May 1-5

Trade Catalogs: Opportunities and Challenges [Session]

May 2, 2014

Submitted by Moderator: Linda Seckelson

Introduction

Linda Seckelson

When I started to write this brief introduction I suddenly realized how very “retro” this topic may seem, in the light of so many of our professional concerns today – changing research behaviors, mobile devices and social media, visual and information literacy, libraries’ role in MOOCs and other kinds of distance learning, physical versus virtual access to information, and on and on.

But a focus on trade catalogs is really not “retro” in any sense – the body of trade catalog literature is voluminous and is still growing. And libraries - still the stockpilers and organizers of cultural capital – continue to accumulate these valuable manifestations of our material world. Trade catalogs have been around since the early 1700s – depending on one’s definition, of course - having evolved from pattern books, as commercial or advertising tools for the distribution of goods. Most importantly, they have become primary sources for the documentation of cultural history, taste, design, and use of technology in material culture, not limited to architecture, decorative arts and art supplies, but encompassing anything and everything that is manufactured, made or available for sale.

Our panel today is drawn from five institutions with important collections of art, decorative arts, architecture or building-related trade catalogs. Each speaker has been charged with illuminating a specific aspect of the collection, and with articulating challenges, from cataloging conundrums and access issues to libraries’ roles in harvesting “born digital” trade catalogs, as is more and more the case. Before introducing the first speaker, I want to thank the Washington Art Library Resources Committee for their generous sponsorship of this program – they are “Platinum” sponsors of ARLIS/NA, which is about as good as it gets.

Each of our speakers will give a 15-minute presentation and we’ll follow those, if there’s time, with an opportunity for questions and comments from you.

Mary Augusta Thomas is the Deputy Director of the Smithsonian’s 20 libraries. She is a graduate of Mt. Holyoke and the Catholic University of America. Her many professional activities include active involvement in ALA, IFLA and in local, Washington-based library organizations. She is published and has won a number of awards for distinguished service.

Stephen Van Dyk is head of Art Department Smithsonian Libraries, and is also the director of the library at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum. Degrees in Architecture History and Library Science are from Rutgers and UNC at Chapel Hill, respectively. He has curated several shows, including Christopher Dresser – The Shock of the Old, and Paper Engineering- Fold Pull Pop and Turn at the Smithsonian, and has authored several articles and books on design and architecture, and on rare books.

Mary Augusta and Stephen will talk about Trade Catalogs as invaluable resources.

Gail Bardhan is here from the Rakow Library at the Corning Museum of Glass. A “glass librarian” since the late seventies, Gail has been involved in all aspects of the library’s operations at one time or another. She has spoken at specialized conferences and symposia, and edited the GK Hall 2-volume bibliography of periodical literature on glass. Her special research interests include the Carder-Steuben archive and trade catalogs. Gail has degrees from Denison and the University of Illinois.

Gail’s talk is “Through the Looking Glass: A Medium –specific Collection.”

Emily Guthrie comes to us from Winterthur. She graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design, and has a library degree also from UNC. Her responsibilities as the NEH Librarian of the Printed Book and Periodical Collection include teaching design sources and book connoisseurship to graduate students in Winterthur’s academic programs.

“From Stickley to Sears: Material Culture and Trade Catalogs”

Carolyn Yerkes is the Curator of Rare Books at the Avery Library. Her research interests center on Renaissance and Baroque architecture, as well as on twentieth –century architecture and design. She has a Master’s in Architecture from Princeton and her PhD is from Columbia.

“Projects and Products: Building History in Architectural Trade Catalogs”

Jared Ash is Special Collections Librarian at the Watson Library, the Met, with responsibility for collection development and cataloging of Russian, Eastern European and rare materials. In former lives, he was curator and librarian of Special Collections at the Newark Public Library, and curator of the Judith Rothschild Foundation collection. He hold degrees from Brown, NYU and Rutgers.

“Trade Catalogs as Objects of Fine Printing and Design”