

The PHSC E-MAIL

Volume 12-5, Supplement to Photographic Canadiana, July 2012

The Photographic Historical Society of Canada

Sunday, July 8th, 2012, 8:00 AM - 1:00PM

A REMINDER THIS SUNDAY is the trunk sale



NOT A MEMBER OF THE PHSC? THEN JOIN CANADA'S BEST PHOTO HISTORY SOCIETY. A GREAT BARGAIN FOR MEETINGS, AUCTIONS, FAIRS, AND PUBLICATIONS – ONLY \$35.00.

PHSC Monthly Meetings

are held on the third Wednesday from September to June in the Gold Room, of Memorial Hall in the basement of the North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge St., North York, Ontario. The meeting officially begins at 8:00 p.m. but is preceded by a Buy & Sell and social gathering from 7:00 p.m. onwards. For information contact the PHSC or Program Chairman Scott Rickard at srickard@persona.ca

Programming Schedule:

Sunday, July 8th, 2012, 8:00 AM
-The Larry Boccioletti Memorial Photographic Trunk Sale at the Soccer Centre, Woodbridge. This is something different with fun for all as we load up our cars with photographica big and small. A tailgate flea market that's sure to provide bargains and odd items too.

We'll take the summer off for two months while we prepare the roster of fall programs.

September 19th, 2012
-To begin our Fall series of lectures Daniel Renaud will be our guest speaker.

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Robert A. Carter – Webmaster

**IN LANEWAY NORTH OF THE CENTRE
STARTS AT 8:00 AM TIL 1:00 PM
The Soccer Centre, 7601 Martin Grove Rd.
Woodbridge, ONT., south of HWY 7.**

\$15 MILLION DOLLAR COLLECTION COMES TO TORONTO

Matt Isenburg is seen with a small part of his collection in his attic museum before it was moved to Toronto. He is seen with visiting Christopher Lansdale

Its finally been disclosed that the Matthew R. Isenburg Collection of early photography was sold to the Archive of Modern Conflict (AMC) for a record \$15 million and has been moved to its new home in Toronto where a museum facility is being designed for future display. This is the most significant and historically important sale of photographic material of the last 50 years; a deal that was conceived and brokered by vintage photography dealer, Greg French, of Jamaica Plain, Mass.

In the quiet town of Hadlyme, Connecticut, the largest single private purchase of vintage photographs, and early photographic equipment was consummated with the simple hand shake this past April. No paperwork, no written agreement, no lawyers present - just a handshake between like-minded people who understood the importance of keeping a historical collection together. They met for the first time at two o'clock in the afternoon and by 2 am "they had a deal. Isenburg said: "There was an instant trust between all of us". Weeks later, papers were signed to legalize the deal. But it was the handshake that sealed the deal for Isenburg and what he put his trust in.

\$15 million is the largest amount



ever paid for a single 19th century photographic collection and far surpasses the combined total of \$8 million paid in 1994 and 2007 for two separate photographic collections assembled by the late Jack Naylor, of Chestnut Hill, MA. Even the \$250,000.00 paid in 1963 by the Harry Ransom Center in Texas for Helmut Gernsheim's historically important photography collection (it contained the world's first photograph), would only translate into less than \$2 million in today's dollars, although the collection is undoubtedly worth much more in today's market.

Isenburg's collection is significant to the history of photography because it contains so many early and important daguerreotypes created by the earliest and best photographers in America - when photography was in its infancy in the 1840s and 1850s. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, 1787-1851, the inventor of the daguerreotype, announced his new process to the world on August 19, 1839 in France.

The collection also contains the largest number of early American daguerreian cameras

(more than two dozen) ever assembled by anyone. The George Eastman House in Rochester, NY has only eight American daguerreian cameras in their collection.

To characterize Isenburg's collection in a few words - it's the best of the best; an unparalleled assemblage of over 20,000 individual items, focused mainly on the early years, that together chronicle photography's humble beginnings - through not only important images and cameras, but through all the various accoutrements of the trade. Also included are advertisements, diaries, books, journals and all manner of photographic ephemera imaginable. Isenburg has often said, "I paid premium prices for best of breed, best in class."

The 85-year-old Isenburg has owned numerous Ford auto dealerships in the past, whose success afforded him the opportunity to collect. He isn't just a collector though; he's a photo historian who's always been more interested in piecing together the story behind an object or image, than he is about just owning something. He's a photographic compendium who's spent

the last fifty years seeking out history through photography.

In the third floor museum (now empty) in his home, a priceless daguerreotype would be displayed next to a tattered receipt and a handwritten letter or diary because they relate to one another and tell a compelling story. He owned the posing chair from America's premier daguerreotypists, Southworth and Hawes of Boston, in addition to the largest collection of Southworth and Hawes full-plate daguerreotypes (over 40) in private hands. Along with the chair, many other Southworth and Hawes items - from family photos and letters, to paintings, bills of sale, a partnership agreement, advertisements and ephemera, help to reveal the story of what it was like to be a photographer in the 1850s.

Highlights of Isenburg's vast collection include one of the earliest surviving daguerreotypes (there are only two others known) showing the US Capitol in 1846 by daguerreotypist John Plumbe Jr., along with the two earliest daguerreotypes depicting New York City. He also owned the earliest extant, and complete, example of an American daguerreotype camera outfit - built by William H. Butler in 1841, and containing its original sensitizing and developing equipment, all housed together in a single wooden box. His collection of California Gold Rush daguerreotypes, with related letters and ephemera, is unparalleled, and his photographic library was probably the most comprehensive in private hands. Another unique item was Isenburg's one-of-a-kind ca 1855 exquisitely hand-carved-and-painted American eagle with a greater than eight-foot wing span which is sitting atop the carving's framed centerpiece - a full-plate outdoor daguerreotype depicting a Massachusetts military company in full dress uniforms. The daguerreotype is surrounded by additional military-themed-carvings depicting an American flag, sword, cannon, cannon balls and a drum.

The packing and shipping of the collection took a crew of from five to nine people - five full weeks to complete over the past two months, and a cherry picker had to be rented in order to remove the eight-foot carved American eagle and other objects from the third floor museum.

The task of unpacking, cataloging and photographing every item has begun in Toronto, and is being carried out by AMC's newly-appointed curators of the collection, Jill Offenbeck and Amanda Shear, both of Toronto. The AMC's chief photography buyer in North America, Neil MacDonald, also from Toronto, was instrumental in convincing AMC that the Isenburg Collection was essential to their vision. Toronto native and Daguerreian Society President Mike Robinson has been recently appointed as AMC's Director of Education and Research Programs and will oversee the organization and cataloging of the collection.

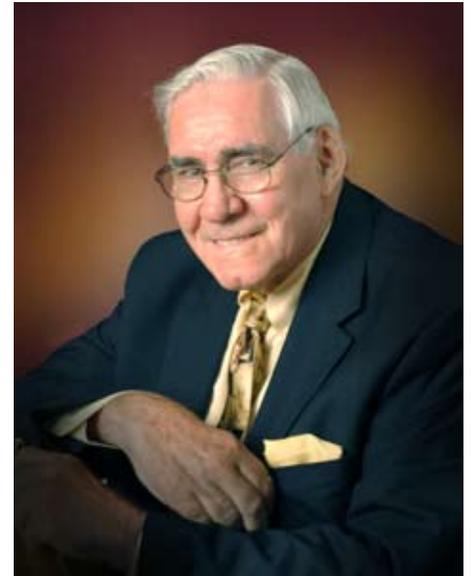
With offices in both London, England and Toronto, AMC's collection of well over three million images contains primarily vernacular photographs that tell mankind's forgotten stories through the personal photographic albums and images created and preserved by the common man; an un-banded reality, rarely seen, and too often discarded by ensuing generations. Images of 20th century conflict, war, political unrest, social revolution, cultural traditions, etc. were AMC's primary focus when they began collecting in the 1990s, but that soon expanded to include 19th century images as well as manuscripts and objects. The addition of the Isenburg Collection, adds a formidable dimension to AMC's holdings, much as the Gernsheim Collection added early photo-history to the Harry Ransom Center in Texas.

/Rob McElroy

AMC is owned and funded by a Canadian.

Matt Isenburg

Matt Isenburg was a guest speaker to our PHSC group in 2005. We offer the full report of his talk that evening.



MATTHEW ISENBURG

US Navy WW2 veteran Matt Isenburg developed a life-long interest in History while earning a Bachelor's degree at Northwestern University. He has written many articles and co-authored one of the first books about collecting photographica (1978). In 1989, some 200 daguerreotypes from his collection were exhibited at the Yale Art Gallery. The hard-cover catalog for this exhibition totalled 127 pages. The same year, he co-founded the well respected Daguerreian Society with John Wood.

Selections from his collection have been displayed at numerous American museums and galleries, including the recent Young America exhibit at George Eastman House. A guest lecturer at many well known institutions, Isenburg was nominated and accepted in 2005 as a member of the prestigious invitation-only American Antiquarian Society. His collection includes images, many rare and unequalled anywhere, Daguerreian and Wet-plate cameras, thousands of books on photography and a like number of manuscripts. Some

of his collecting stories and experiences are the basis of his talk this evening. He is joined by his lovely wife Elizabeth who shares his enthusiasm for photographica.



The very presentation medium Matt chose speaks volumes. He made an animated power point show using images already tuned with Photoshop and stored on his lap-top. He mentioned to the audience that he completely rewrote his talk in 12 hours after arriving in Toronto, and did a dry run with Mike Robinson the afternoon before our meeting. An amazing testament to virtues of keeping up with technology and making good use of the capabilities of this digital era.

Each of Matt's nine stories have enough plot and suspense for a TV program or short story. Together, they give an insight into the art of collecting rare antiquities. The first seven tell a tale of acquiring rare images and artefacts. The eighth illustrates how a love of history, photography and technology can be combined to bring local history alive. The final story, which belongs to wife Elizabeth, demonstrates how perseverance and a willingness to search in depth can unearth amazing finds.

It Only Took 25 Years. Matt began with a story of Ambrotypes sold as "cased" - the case turns out to be a cardboard box. This introduces us to the marketing used by 19th century photogra-

phers and in particular the ads photographers place on the back of images. Showing a variety of these ads, including one Canadian, he focussed in on one with a wood-cut of a two lens daguerreotype camera.

At a 1980 meeting in Boston, Matt was approached by a collector who showed him a daguerreotype of a daguerreotype camera. Such images are very rare. The owner held it so only Matt could

see the picture. Matt offered to buy the image if it was ever for sale. Next meeting, Matt noticed the image owner showing his daguerreotype to someone else in the same secretive manner. Matt wrote him off as wanting attention, not a sale.

25 years later, a Boston dealer familiar with Matt's collecting interests, insisted on dropping in to show him an unusual daguerreotype. It was an image of a two lens camera - the same image Matt last saw in 1980! Sold.

Matt noted that the fantasy wheels in the woodcut were likely added by the engraver to make the camera look more interesting. There was such a wheel in the daguerreotype image -- it was to adjust the tripod height.

The Case of the Missing Case. In this story, Matt introduced us to the world of union case collectors. Union cases are moulded thermo-plastic holders of daguerreotypes

and ambrotypes. Various designs and silhouettes were displayed on the cases, including numerous short runs depicting special events or famous individuals. Case collectors are like stamp collectors -- checking one another out on rare holdings in a round of one-upmanship. This set the punch-line.

Specially engraved cases were made to celebrate events. One of rarest cases shows the silhouette of US senator Henry Clay (1777 - 1852). One day Matt was called by a coin collector who had picked up a case mould which he wished to sell. Matt recognized it as the mould used to make one of the two versions of the Henry Clay case (they differ only in the addition of a dotted outline). Matt decided to follow-up on an old lead for a Clay case. The collector, now in his 80s was selling his collection through his daughter. Remembering after the purchase that there were two versions of the case, Matt had to wait delivery to see if he bought the one to match his mould. Luckily he did. So now, if any case collector should ask Matt if he has a Clay case, Matt can respond, "Yes, and I even have the mould?"



Junk in the Attic. Forbes Magazine wrote up Matt and his collection a few years ago in an article called "America in Amber". The morning the magazine hit the newsstands, Matt received a call from a lady claiming to own some of "those valuable pictures." He

was concerned that it was a trick until an elderly lady and her husband showed up with a small box of daguerreotypes.

The images showed a wealthy young New Englander, Moses Warren, and his trip to the California gold rush in 1850. Valuable indeed! It was the old story of descendants clearing out a house and throwing out the junk in the attic. The cleaning lady was told she could keep or toss the unwanted goods. She took the images to a vintage clothing store. There she was told such images were of little or no value and she sold them to an acquaintance. A few years later, the Forbes article came out and the couple who bought the images contacted Matt.



The daguerreotypes are a rare record of the California gold rush. They are so sharp that in one outdoors scene you can not only read the sign over a restaurant window, but with a magnifying glass you can read the names of the sign painters in the lower corner of the sign.

Hey, you forgot the enlarger. Matt collects Southworth of Southworth and Hawes fame. One Friday, an engineer friend over in New Haven called. The engineer's neighbour was loading his station wagon to head off to the Brimfield Flea Market - a huge outdoor facility in Massachusetts. One item was a camera marked Southworth pat. 1855, Simon Wing pat. 1860. The owner planned to ask \$300 for it.

Matt arrived at the address 38 minutes later as the dealer packed the last box in his old Plymouth wagon. No, he didn't want to unpack down to the camera. Matt could see the name through the side window and showed the dealer he was willing to pay the \$300 in cash.

As Matt talked, he slowly unpacked the vehicle in front of the owner. Finally, he was within one chair of his prize and ready to buy the chair too if he had to break it to move it. He wiggled into the restrictive tunnel to just reach the prize. He pulled out the Southworth camera, paid the owner, and got into his car to leave before dealer had a chance for second thoughts. As he started to move, the dealer

came running after him holding up another camera on its end, shouting, "Hey mister, you forgot the enlarger". That "enlarger" turned out to be an even rarer full plate daguerreotype camera with its lens!

An eBay Incident. The last story was a tale of success

on eBay as told by Matt and Elizabeth. For years, Matt has searched for a 19th century outdoor studio sign with no success. Elizabeth helps Matt search the web for various images and artifacts of photography's early days. When she searches, she reads every page of links returned by Google. This particular search was for CDV cards. On the 67th page of returns one item listed an outdoor sign. The fine detail in the extract included the letters CDV.

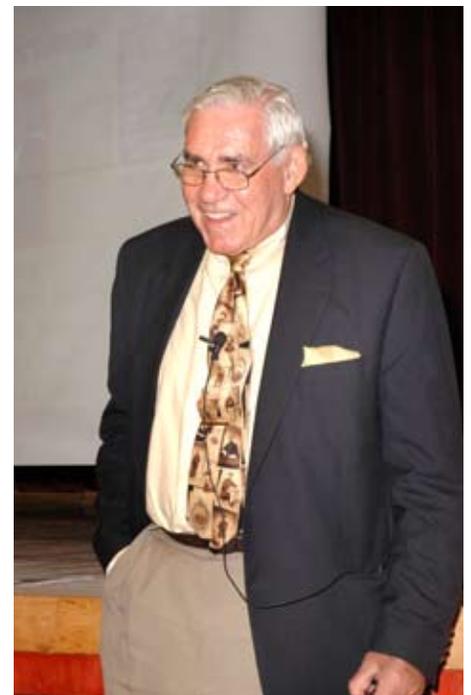
She showed the item to Matt. Intrigued, he successfully bid for it. The sign was for Weitfle's Photograph Gallery in Dover, NJ, and was decorated with CDVs. Interestingly, Matt was contacted later by the grandson of Weitfle who wanted to purchase the sign.

Matt offered to swap for a similar sign from another gallery if the grandson ever finds one.

Matt's stories are not only entertaining, but educational as well. They offer the listener valuable advice on how to succeed in finding and acquiring interesting pieces: Develop a good network of pickers; become known for your area of interest; know the value of an item and when to withdraw from bidding against competition with deep pockets; and finally work with your spouse to help in sourcing things.

If you bump into Matt, ask him how he managed to get rare images of the original US Capitol building and White House; or how being a resident of Connecticut helped him win an unusual daguerreotype cabinet in an auction of whaling and ivory articles; or how he managed to get three different sizes of postage stamp cameras used to make multiple tintype images in one sitting; or how he teaches local history using the computer to cleverly match "then and now" images of landmarks and buildings.

The full report with illustrations is available at:
<http://phsc.ca/Matt-2005.html>



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT LANSDALE