



Henry L. Sheldon painting his music business sign, by O.C. Barnes, 1877. Collection of the Henry Sheldon Museum

Dear Stewart-Swift Research Center friends and supporters,

This summer we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of our Museum's founder, Henry L. Sheldon. Next year we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Research Center, established in 1972. Both occasions will be accompanied by multiple exhibits and programming.

We are excited to share with you that we received a Vermont Humanities grant of \$5,000 for a Fall/Spring speaker series, "Elephant in the Room: Exploring the Future of Museums." The online presentations by national museum professionals, scholars and cultural visionaries will examine the past, present and future of museums and archives. Stay tuned for more details.

Our archival collections are sought by museums nationwide. Three spirit drawings by Wella P. Anderson are part of a major travelling show, "[Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art](#)," organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art. In addition, our unique *Double Silhouette of Sylvia Drake and Charity Bryant* is on view this summer as part of the Bennington Museum show, "Love, Marriage and Divorce."

Also check out an exciting website that resulted from the Middlebury College course, "[Material Culture in Focus: Hair & Hairwork](#)," taught by Professor Ellery Foutch using Sheldon Museum collections. In this class, students explored the meaning of hair in 19th-century American culture.

The Research Center will reopen in mid-July after over 18 months of the Museum's closure. Please, note new public hours: Thursday and Friday 1-4pm by appointment.

Thank you for your support of our collections, their preservation, and our efforts to make them available to us all.

With best wishes,
—Eva



Eva Garcelon-Hart
Archivist

Henry at 200: Collector, Museum Founder & More

July 13 - December 31, 2021

"... I have spent all my leisure the past year trying to benefit future generations by preserving the handiwork of the articles representing all the different occupations of the early pioneers which I have called a Museum. May those who many years hence look at these articles take as much pleasure in doing so as I have in collecting them."

— from Henry Sheldon's diary, 1881

Birthday party time is almost here and to celebrate the Sheldon Museum's namesake and founder's 200th birthday, a special exhibit will reveal some rarely-seen materials from the Stewart-Swift Research Center's collections. *Henry at 200: Collector, Museum Founder & More* celebrates Henry L. Sheldon's collecting pursuits, his many accomplishments, and the establishment of the Sheldon Museum. See the beginnings of one of the oldest community-based museums in the nation, and how Henry L. Sheldon assembled one of the richest historical collections in New England, making Middlebury perhaps one of the best documented towns in the entire region. On view will be a variety of



historical documents, photographs, scrapbooks, autographs, Middlebury imprints, diaries, music ephemera, relics, a lock of Napoleon's hair, and more! We are also celebrating with special lectures, music, and an exciting community birthday party.

Mark your calendars for these upcoming events:

Tuesday, July 20: 5:30pm

"History Happens Here"

Talk by Glenn Andres

Tuesday, August 10: 5:30pm

"The Birth and Re-Birth of the Sheldon Museum"

Talk by David Stameshkin

Sunday, August 15: 11:00am - 2:00pm

Henry's 200th Birthday Bash!

Join us for a fun-filled celebration of art-making, exhibit-experiencing, music-enjoying, game-playing, history-marveling celebration to our community's past and future cultural legacy! (Henry Sheldon might even make an appearance!)



Lucinda Cockrell

Research Center Committee Chair

Pride in the Archives

In March, we shared the stories of two extraordinary women who chafed against the status quo of 19th-century America: Sophonisba Breckinridge, an impressive social reformer, and Madeline Pollard, an equally accomplished woman of letters whose decades-long affair with a congressman left her in the annals of notoriety. Our interest in these two women began in the summer of 2020 when Eva and I discovered two portraits drawings in the SSRC collection of "Miss Nisba Breckinridge" and her father "Colonel Breckinridge." Subsequent research revealed a fascinating tale of ambition, adultery, and public scandal, which you can explore in our History Makers series ([Part I: The Statesman's Daughter](#) and [Part II: The Congressman's Mistress](#)).

One of the many striking parallels between Sophonisba and Madeline's lives is the fact that both women found long-term companionship with female partners. As noted in our March articles, Pollard resurfaced in London following the trial, where she began a lifelong relationship with an Irish woman named Violet Hassard.

Likewise, recent research by Anna Jabour has uncovered Sophonisba Breckinridge's entanglement in a decades-long love triangle with two influential women at the University of Chicago: Marion Talbot and Edith Abbott. It was shortly after her father's infamous trial that Talbot first met the shell-shocked Sophonisba, whom she convinced to pursue graduate studies at the University of Chicago. The pair became so close that Talbot's parents deeded a vacation house to both women in 1912.



Marion Talbot and Sophonisba Breckinridge on the steps of Green Hall following the convocation ceremony in June 1909. University of Chicago Photographic Archive.

In 1905, Sophonisba met a student in her women's studies class, Edith Abbott, and the pair would eventually become as inseparable as Sophonisba and Talbot had once been. Students referred to them affectionately as "A" and "B." In 1933, as Sophonisba was traveling to South America for the seventh Pan-American Conference, she wrote to Abbott: "I feel dreadfully. I have never before been so helpless before space and time. I think of you all the time. I get little sleep, and I long for the sight of you. I am really not fit any more to do things alone. It is so long, and so far." Despite Talbot's jealousy and an increasingly contentious relationship between her two companions, Sophonisba maintained a close companionship with both women until her death.

One of the highlights of the SSRC collection is a double silhouette of Sylvia Drake and Charity Bryant, considered to be one of the earliest representations of a same-sex couple in the United States. At age twenty-nine, still defiantly single, Charity visited friends in Weybridge, Vermont, where she met Sylvia Drake, with whom she would enjoy a forty-four year union that lasted until Charity's death. In advance of one of few periods of separation, Charity wrote an acrostic to Sylvia by firelight.

Sweet girl, my heart is yours by every tie,
Yours in the hour of sorrow and of joy.
Loaded with grief it still would on you rest,
Vent all its sorrows on your friendly breast.
In all our cares O might we still unite,
And spend our days in Peace and calm delight...
(in the Collection of the Henry Sheldon Museum)

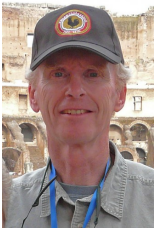
For so long, queer history was recorded haltingly and painfully across a mosaic of legal and bureaucratic documents, only visible through a lens of criminality and subversion. Searching for LGBTQ+ individuals and experiences in history can at times feel like a form of excavation, but the purpose of queer history is not simply to add more people of one identity or another to the historical record. It is a reminder to question entrenched narratives and prioritize individual lives over assumed

homogeneity of experience. And it is truly a pleasure when we as archivists and custodians of history have the opportunity to add joyful, loving artifacts of queer history—like Sophonisba’s tender letters or Charity’s affectionate poetry—to the historical record.



Taylor Rossini
Archives Assistant

“Dr. Virgil W. Blanchard: The ‘Multifarious’ Physician”



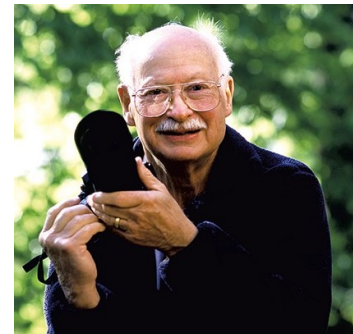
Gary S. Shattuck

Read an unpublished paper – now part of our archival collections – by Gary S. Shattuck about an extraordinary 19th-century inventor, entrepreneur, and colorful personality with ties to Middlebury, VT. Shattuck is a retired federal prosecutor and the author of several books on Vermont history, including most recently *By the Wand of Some Magician: Embracing Modernity in Mid-Nineteenth Century Vermont* (2020).

[Read article](#)

In Memoriam – James P. Blair (1931-2021)

We mourn the recent passing of James P. Blair, extraordinary photographer, friend, generous contributor to the Sheldon Museum, and admirer of its historic photographic collections. Jim spent 35 years on the staff of *National Geographic* photographing pivotal moments of world history with a keen eye towards the ordinary human condition. After retiring to Middlebury, he became a frequent visitor to the Research Center.



In 2018 Jim curated the exhibit “Our Town: Love, Joy, Sadness, And Baseball — 100 Years Of Photography From The Sheldon Museum,” devoting endless hours selecting, scanning and printing the most consequential photographs about Middlebury from our collections. These limited-edition prints are now available for purchase through the Sheldon Museum’s store. We will truly miss this great, generous, and warm man, who was endlessly enthusiastic about embarking on new projects. Thank you, Jim, for all your friendship and interest.



Lake Dunmore, stereograph. Collection of the Henry Sheldon Museum.

Thank you to the Stewart-Swift Research Center's donors and supporters!

Your continued support will help preserve our collections, and to implement public programming and a special exhibit celebrating the 200th anniversary of Henry Sheldon's birth and highlighting Research Center collections.

[**Learn more about giving opportunities here**](#)

[View in browser](#)



Henry Sheldon Museum
of Vermont History