

snap shots

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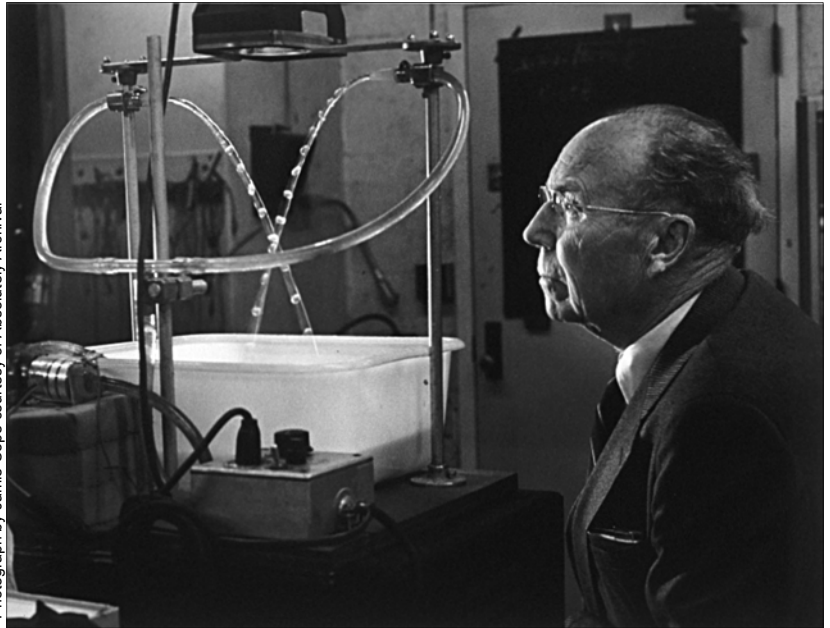
Photographica Show and Sale Replaces May Meeting

May 3-4 event includes program on Harold Edgerton and his stroboscopic photography

Photographica 69 will take the place of PHSNE's May meeting. The photographic show and sale will be open to the public from 9 to 6 on Saturday, May 3, and 10 to 4 on Sunday, May 4, at the Americal Civic Center, 467 Main St. in Wakefield, MA. (For directions and more details see the Web site, www.phsne.org.)

In addition to 100 tables offering cameras and equipment of every conceivable type, format, and vintage, the event will include Discovery Tables hosted by PHSNE members to introduce their special interests. At 11 a.m. Saturday, Dr. James Bales will present a program on the work of Dr. Harold Edgerton, the brilliant inventor who perfected the stroboscopic flash, and was a beloved teacher of generations of MIT students.

Show manager John Dockery is still soliciting the help of PHSNE members on Friday night beginning at 7 p.m. to set up the hall and prepare dealer badges and information packets. (He's sweetening the deal with a thank-you ice cream social afterwards at the Jordan's Furniture IMAX movie complex). He also needs help early Saturday morning to check dealers in, and throughout the show hours to take tickets, count money and guard doors, as



Photograph by Jamie Cope courtesy of Absolutely Archival

Harold Edgerton and a "double piddler," the device that he developed to demonstrate his stroboscopic flash. The streams of water freeze into two columns of bubbles when the flash syncs with the flow.

well as help visitors and dealers alike. You can contact John at 781-592-2553 or by email at john_dockery@hotmail.com.

Dr. James Bales, assistant director of the MIT Edgerton Center, will introduce the inventor and professor who won an Oscar (for a short feature, "Quicker Than A

Continued on Page 2

In June, PHSNE Takes a Field Trip Inside the JFK Library

PHSNE's annual field trip will take the society to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Boston for the monthly meeting on June 1. Members will have the chance to go behind the scenes with the library's chief archivist (and PHSNE board of directors member) Allan Goodrich.

Allan will guide a tour of the archives and its increasingly digital conservation facilities, and show off some of the Library's lesser-known holdings, including its

collection of work done by Boston photographer Josiah Hawes in the years after the end of the Southworth & Hawes partnership.

The arrangements will be informal: travel to the Library is on your own. There is a cafeteria for lunch, and the program will begin at 1:30. Check in at the security desk in the lobby for admission to the archives. Directions to the Library and more information are available on its Web site, www.jfklibrary.org.

Shows and Exhibitions Around New England

“Spiritual Matters” at the **New England School of Photography** through May 2 displays the color photography of Marty Hassell, long-time member of the NESOP faculty (most recently as dean of students) and teacher of the history of photography, as well as a long-time PHSNE member. Her photographs of natural subjects dwell on the transcendence of fleeting moments. (NESOP, 537 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215, 617-437-1868, www.nesop.com.)

“New England Survey” at the **Photographic Resource Center** at Boston University, despite its prosaic title, also explores spiritual matters. The exhibition, curated by the PRC’s Leslie K. Brown, is a meditation on the idea of a “sense of place” unique to our area. The show includes work from an artist or project in each of the six New England states: Barbara Bosworth (Massachusetts), Tanja Alexia Hollander (Maine), Janet L. Pritchard (Connecticut), Thad Russell (Vermont), Jonathan Sharlin (Rhode Island), and Paul Taylor (New Hampshire). On view through May 11. (PRC, 832 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, 617-975-0600, www.prcboston.org.)

“Ascension” (2007) from Marty Hassell’s “Spiritual Matters” exhibition at the New England School of Photography.



PHSNE Membership

PHSNE membership is \$15 for students, \$30 for individuals, \$36 for a family, and \$40 for foreign membership. Please send checks in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar-denominated international money orders for dues payments.

Current members can read their renewal date from the mailing label on snap shots. For example, "2008.12" means your membership expires in December of 2008. Please check your label before sending in your dues.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to: Adrian Levesque, 4 Sugar Hill Drive, Nashua, NH 03063, or e-mail ALevesque2@comcast.net. Be sure to include the word “PHSNE” in the subject line.

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Edgerton Program at Photographica

Continued from Page 1

Wink!", made at MGM in 1940), a Medal of Freedom (awarded by the War Department for his work during World War II), and induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Bales will present many of Edgerton's historic images that froze time to reveal the physics – and the beauty – of hummingbirds' wings, flowing water, and athletes in motion. He'll also chronicle the current state of the art in high-speed imaging, which these days, he says, means things like high-speed video, and Schlieren photography, a technique that shows the variations in temperature or density of clear mediums like water or air.

Dr. Bales, like Edgerton, earned his Ph.D. at MIT, and today teaches the Strobe Project Laboratory class that Edgerton taught for years. Bales became the assistant director of the Edgerton Center in 1998 after working for several years with the MIT Sea Grant Underwater Vehicles Laboratory.

Is This the Earliest Known Photographic Print?

... And if it is, when was it made? And who made it?

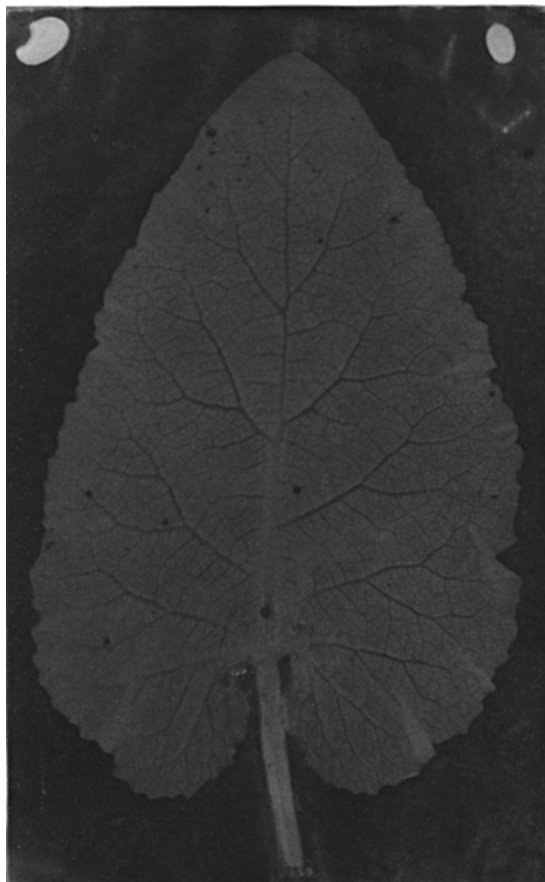
An entry in an auction catalog describing a photogram of a leaf has started a buzz in the photographic history community that led to the sale of the print being postponed while the issues raised in the debate are researched. The wait, which may be several months, according to Sotheby's, the auction house, could be worth it, however, because the print could have claim to be the earliest known photographic print.

"Leaf" is a photogram, a print made by placing an object on sensitized paper and exposing it to light. It had been attributed to the British photographic pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot and dated to *circa* 1839, shortly before Fox Talbot revealed his calotype (paper negative) photographic process to the world (and also the year Louis Daguerre announced the daguerreotype.)

"Leaf" was included in the Quillan Collection of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Photographs, 69 works assembled by dealer Jill Quasha for an investor, the Quillan Company.

The Quillan Collection was consigned for auction by Sotheby's on April 7, but the auction house withdrew "Leaf" when the catalog entry, written by photographic historian Larry J. Schaaf, speculated that the image had been made by Thomas Wedgwood "in 1805 or earlier" – as early, in fact, as the 1790s.

The debate over the attribution quickly spread to the Internet – especially Yahoo!'s PhotoHistory discussion group. Sotheby's decision to postpone the auction of "Leaf" wasn't based on questions of Schaaf's scholarship, according to Denise Bethel, directory of the house's photography department, but was done to allow the process of clarification to work itself out. "There are people who are calling us with little bits of information, and Larry Schaaf himself has opened up some new avenues of re-



Sotheby's / The Quillan Collection of 19th and 20th Century Photographs

"Leaf" was long thought to be the work of photography pioneer William Fox Talbot and date to about 1839, but an expert's evaluation in an auction catalog says it could be as early as the 1790s, which would make it the earliest known photographic print. The attribution is based in part on the faint initial "W" found in the lower right corner of the print, below.



search that were impossible for him to get to before we went to press," Bethel was quoted on the PopPhoto.com Web site.

Schaaf's qualifications to make his startling claim are impeccable. While he lives in the United States, he is Senior Research Fellow and Honorary Professor, University of the Arts, London. His publications in the history of photography include works on Fox Talbot's notebooks and, in 2002, the definitive *The Photographic Art of William Henry Fox Talbot*.

Schaaf bases his attribution of "Leaf" on its provenance, and the detail of a small "W," presumably the photographer's initial in the lower right corner of the print.

"Leaf" is one of six similar anonymous photograms sold at Sotheby's London in 1984. The buyer of "Leaf," the dealer Hans P. Kraus, Jr., attributed the work to William Henry Fox Talbot, *circa* 1839, and the print was sold on that basis to Jill Quasha in 1989.

The album that included "Leaf" was owned by a socially prominent family in Bristol, England, that included enthusiastic amateur scientists. Richard Bright, Sr. (1754 – 1840), was a successful merchant, and also a member of several learned societies.

Bright had two sons, Henry (whose heirs eventually sold the album) and Richard, Jr., and the family circle of acquaintance included Thomas Wedgwood, of the china-making family, and Humphry Davy, the brilliant chemist and inventor. Wedgwood and Davy worked on photographic experiments and in 1802, after Wedgwood's death, Davy published an account of Wedgwood's research. James Watt, the Scottish inventor who commercialized the steam engine, experimented with photography as well, and wrote to Thomas Wedgwood, thanking him "for your direction for the silver pictures, on which when at home I shall try

Continued on Page 4

Earliest Known Photographic Print?

Continued from Page 4

some experiments."

Wedgwood and Davy never discovered a fixer for their images, but could unfixed images from the period of the 1790s or early 1800s still survive? Schaaf believes they could. He wrote, "No examples of Wedgwood's work have yet been identified in any collection, so if these six eventually prove to be by him, they may be the only survivors of this seminal idea." In support of his theory he cited Samuel Highly, a Fellow of the Chemical Society and editor of a photographic journal, who wrote in an 1885 article that he had seen examples of Wedgwood's work.

Schaaf, in his essay for the Quillan Collection catalog, wrote, "Could the 'W' be Wedgwood's identification? Did Richard Bright, the father, produce or collect these long before the 1839 public announcement? Did Richard Bright, Henry's brother, get them from Davy?" Based on Schaaf's catalog essay the print is credited in Sotheby's catalogue as "Photographer Unknown."

According to Bethel, two of the other images from the set of six are owned by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and she said, "We have also asked the Getty Museum if they would consider doing some sort of scientific analysis on the images they have."

Even without "Leaf," the Quillan Collection made auction history: the April 8 sale of 68 images realized \$8.9 million, and one work, "Nude" by Edward Weston, sold for \$1.6 million. The price was a record for the photographer, as were the prices paid for works by 19 other artists in the collection.

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held on the first Sunday of each month, September to June, at 1:30 p.m. at Waltham High School, preceded by a mini trade fair at 12:30 and an open meeting of the PHSNE board at 11:00 a.m. Upcoming meetings and events:

June 1 — Annual Field Trip: JFK Library, Boston
Mark your Calendar: Sept. 27-28 — Photographica 70, Americal Center, Wakefield, MA.

Directions

Waltham High School is at 617 Lexington St., Waltham, MA. The high school is at the top of the hill, behind other school buildings.

From I-95 (Route 128) Northbound: Take Exit 27 and follow Totten Pond Rd. 1.2 miles east until it dead-ends into Lexington St. Turn left and go .5 miles north. Turn right into the school complex.

From I-95 (Route 128) Southbound: Take Exit 28, Trapelo Rd., east 1.3 miles to Lexington St. Turn right and go south .8 miles to school complex on the left.

From Boston/Cambridge: Take Rte. 2 west to Exit 54B, then Lexington St. south 1.7 miles to school complex on the left.

From Lincoln and West: Take Route 2 east to Exit 53, Concord Ave. Go east 1 mile, then right onto Lexington St. and 1.3 miles south to school complex on the left.

PHSNE Online

PHSNE's Web site is online at www.phsne.org. Ralph Johnston is the Webmaster.

Join the PHSNE Forum online discussion: sign up and log in at www.phsne.net/forum, moderated by Joe Walters. For an archive of back issues of *snap shots* and meeting presentations, visit www.phsne.net/pubs.



PHSNE
 P.O. Box 650189
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Photographic Historical Society of New England
 No Meeting in May — Attend Photographica 69
 May 3-4 at the Americal Center, Wakefield, MA

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