INKING IDENTITY:
TATTOO DESIGN AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN AMERICAN INDUSTRY, 1875 to 1930

By

Nicholas Schonberger

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considered the role of design in the formation of the American tattoo industry. Tattoo designs, or flash, were based on commonly understood motifs, which were transferred onto the body and sold on sheets and in books as commercial products. From 1875 to the 1930s American tattooists refined their designs and formulated a standardized repertoire, inking a recognizable identity for their art.

Extant design books representing the work of six tattooists operating between 1875 and 1930 provided evidence of the standard design vocabulary. Contemporary periodical and literary sources illuminated the cultural context that fostered public knowledge of the tattoo. Photographs of dime museums and carnivals explained how many Americans experienced the tattoo first hand. Tattoo designs were linked to larger trends in the decorative arts. The conservative nature of the tattoo patterns contrasted with common exotic associations generated around the tattoo. The universal appeal of the designs helped expand the market for tattoos and allowed tattooists to develop a fully commercial enterprise.

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Imposed over the curvilinear body of an oriental dragon, the image of a winged woman infused Charles Gibbon's design for his business card with a sense of movement. The image expressed the expanded design vocabulary American tattooists and their patrons enjoyed by the 1920s and beyond. Gibbons' business card declared his professional capabilities and indicated verbally a range of American and oriental designs his customers could purchase. The image suggested an artist interested in the subtle aesthetics of oriental design; the card itself identified him as an able entrepreneur. Similarly, Charlie Wagner expressed his business savvy on his business card, but chose images more in keeping with traditional American designs. Wagner's card promoted patriotic tattoos, the eagle and shield and Columbia among them. Tattooist's business cards documented the commercial spirit integral to the growth of this marginalized art form, and referenced the range of commercial products available, including machines, designs, and the tattoos themselves (Figs. 1 & 2).

In nineteenth and early twentieth-century America, tattoos were linked with savages, sailors, criminals, freaks and wayward aristocrats.[1] Tattoos and body markings

[1]Nineteenth and early twentieth-century anthropological and ethnographic works on tattooing focused primarily on tattooing in the Pacific. The most important of these was written by W. D. Hambly. Wilfred Dyson Hambly, *The History of Tattooing and its Significance* (London: H.F. & G Witherby, 1925). Criminologists, particularly Italian Lawyer Cesare Lombroso, devoted considerable attention to tattoos during the last

had remained common in a number of Western cultures for centuries, as imperial and commercial expansion into the Pacific reinvigorated interest in the tattoo. After viewing the tattooed populations of the South Seas, sailors, absent from home for considerable stretches, used tattoos to express and memorialize their own culture and social values. Like their "exotic" counterparts', sailors' tattoos employed designs derived from clearly understood motifs of western culture. In this way sailor tattoos differed from, for example, native Tahitians, and became one of the variable marks of tattooing history.[2]

By the fin de siecle, tattooing became a sensation, and although most Americans did not have tattoos, it was a subject too prominent to be ignored.[3] The average American stumbled upon a tattooed person in novels and society pages or viewed them at

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quarter of the nineteenth century, equating marked bodies with anti-social and savage behavior. Jane Caplan has eloquently assessed the importance of Lombroso's work on the documentation of nineteenth-century tattooing. Jane Caplan, "National Tattooing: Traditions of Tattooing in Nineteenth-Century Europe," in *Written on the Body: The Tattoo in European and American History,* ed. Jane Caplan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 156-173. Addressing western tattooing, anthropologist Robert Fletcher's assessment of the tattoo followed Lombroso's mode of thinking, and he suggested that criminals were in the majority of tattooed people in the civilized world. Robert Fletcher, "Tattooing among Civilized People," *Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington,* Vol. 2 (Feb. 7, 1882- May 15, 1883), 40-68.

[2] Juliet Fleming, "The Renaissance Tattoo," in *Written on the Body,* 61-62. Fleming effectively argued against the theory that travel to the South Pacific introduced tattoos to the West. The increase in popularity and public knowledge stemming from discovery of the Pacific Islands, however, does seem to work as a catalyst for the growth of tattooing in the Europe and North America.

[3] The definition of sensation was derived from Matthew Sweet's interpretation of the term. Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 1

dime museums and carnivals. Public and private activities both fueled these interactions, and also clarified the difference between elite and common practice in the art.[4]

Few observers, however, would have realized that the design inspirations of American tattooists were as close as the average Victorian parlor. Tattoo images, popularly called flash, offered access to the tattooists' design vocabulary and customers' values. Early professionals exploited an essentially conservative image base, but engaged in the transgressive act of modifying bodies. Tattoo designs fit into six categories related to other decorative arts: religious, patriotic, political, professional, sentimental and oriental. Tattoo designs responded to the fabric of American daily life, and not just at its fringes. Embracing the exotic and turning ordinary bodies into private exhibitions, it became a business. [5]

Between 1875 and 1930 tattooing in America came of age. Commercially-minded tattooists began by selling designs and progressed to owning and maintaining supply companies.[6] They also exploited new technology. In 1891 New Yorker Samuel

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[4]James Bradley has begun to address this issue from a British perspective. James Bradley, "Body Commodification? Class and Tattoos in Victorian Britain," in *Written on the Body*, 136-155

[5] The notion of tattoo design categories was not new to this study, and, in fact, the categorizing types drove most study of western tattooing from Lombroso onwards. The most important early example of a taxonomic approach to actual tattoo designs was done by anthropologist William C. Sturtevant in his presentation of the drawings of turn-of-the-century tattooist C.H. Fellowes design book. Sturtevant used six categories (America first; Sweethearts and Wicked Women; for those in peril on the sea; heroes and other strangers; over the Bounding Main; and Friendship and the Familiar) which were not mutually exclusive and did not delve beyond thematic make-up. C.H. Fellowes, *The Tattoo Book* (Princeton, New Jersey: Pyne Press, 1971).

O'Reilly was issued the first patent for an electrically driven tattoo needle, a device that ushered tattooing into the modern era. By the 1920s major supply houses began to emerge, selling needles, machines, advice, and above all designs. Throughout this commercial change the six categories of tattoo design remained and provided the base for growth.

At the confluence of travel, technology, ethnography, business and fashion, tattooing attracted historians, folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists. [7] In the American context the meanings of tattooed bodies (particularly sailors and sideshows)

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[6] For the purposes of this study the supply houses owned by Percy Waters of Detroit Michigan and E. Miller of Norfolk, Virginia in the 1920s serve as end points. Percy Waters, *Supply Catalog* (1925; repr., Berkley, California: The Tattoo Archive, 2002); and E.J. Miller, *Supply Catalog* (ca. 1925; repr., Berkley, California: The Tattoo Archive, 2002). I used tattooists to refer to tattoo artists throughout this paper. Tattooer, pricker, jabber and a number of other terms have been applied to ink slingers at different points in time. The term tattooist has generally been applied to artistically minded tattoo artists (often self applied) here the term was employed to provide consistency.

[7] Scholars working on American tattooing are indebted to psychologist Albert Parry, whose *Secrets of a Strange Art* remains the most comprehensive study, useful in assessing early psychological interpretations of the tattoo and also as an encyclopedic account of late nineteenth-century sources. Albert Parry, *Secrets of a Strange Art as Practiced by the Natives of the United States* (1933; repr., New York: Collier's 1971). Three related articles by historians Ira Dye, Simon Newman, and B.R. Burg have addressed the tattoo through documentary evidence. Dye and Newman worked through the Seaman's Protection Act certificates of 1796 and the American Prisoner of War of 1812 records, noting the popularity, placement, and common motifs of tattoos on early American seafarers. Simon Newman, "Reading the Bodies of Early American Seafarers," *The William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd Series, Volume 55, no. 1 (Jan 1998) 59-82; Ira Dye, "The Tattoos of Early American Seafarers, 1796-1818," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* Vol. 33, No. 4 (Dec., 1989), 520-554. Burg looked the diary of Philip C. Van Buskirk a mate on the U.S. *Adams* in the Pacific from 1885-89. All three scholars categorize the tattoos in common themes as a way to understand what early tattoos meant to their wearers. B.R. Burg, "Tattoo Designs and Locations in the Old U.S. Navy," *Journal of American Culture* Vol. 18, spring 1995, No. 1, 69-76.

and the nature of the designs (primarily as folk art) have fueled most major historical inquiry. Sociologists have attempted to understand the interrelations among tattooists and between tattooists and clients, mostly in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[8] Other scholars argued that tattooing in America was distinct from tattooing in foreign cultures, part of a folk system, and responsive to technology.[9] They assessed tattoo

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[8] Clinton Sanders, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (Temple University Press, 1997); and Margo DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000).

[9] The disciplines of folklore and anthropology have contributed significantly to the literature on the story of American tattooing. Fredrick Fried and Mary Fried offered a brief introduction to American tattooing and tattooists in a chapter of *Americas Forgotten Folk Arts*. Fredrick Fried and Mary Fried, *Americas Forgotten Folk Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 157-170. Folklorist Alan Govenar has written prolifically on a variety of tattoo topics, including Christian tattoos, Chicano tattooing, change and continuity within American tattooing, and brief biographies on some early tattooists, publishing in both popular and scholarly presses. From an intellectual standpoint Govenar's dissertation proved most useful. Alan Govenar, *Issues in the Documentation of Tattooing in the Western World* (Ph. D Dissertation, The University of Texas at Dallas, 1984). An oral history of carnival tattooing with Stoney St. Clair stood as the most comprehensive account of tattooing in the second quarter of the twentieth-century. Stoney St. Clair and Alan Govenar, *Stoney Knows How: Life as a Tattoo Artist* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1981). Arnold Rubin suggested that tattooing was part of an international folk system. Arnold Rubin, "Tattoo Renaissance," in *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body,* ed. Rubin (Los Angeles, California: Museum of Cultural History, 1988), 233-264. Michael McCabe has produced an oral history of New York City tattooing outlining the careers of key tattooists working in the 1920s and beyond. McCabe identified the first half of the twentieth century as the period when design and technology merge to form a foundation for tattooing. He mentioned the connection of popular culture to tattoo design, but did not provide a thorough investigation of the various influences in the decorative arts. Michael McCabe *New York City Tattoo: The Oral History of an Urban Art* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Hardy Marks Publications, 1997). For an introduction to tattoo design see, McCabe, "Flash and Flashbacks: The Enduring Art of Tattoo," *Folk Art* Volume 19, Number 2 (Summer 1994), 34-41.

design in magical, sentimental, and devotional terms, connecting the designs to popular culture and common decorative themes, but seldom within a broad context.[10]

The story of American tattooing can be expressed in three intersecting strands. First, there are the designs. For the purpose of this discussion the design vocabulary of the American tattooist are related to broader trends in decorative arts. Most designs reified established social customs, and reflected commonly held beliefs and values. As the tattoo trade grew, so did the design base (incorporating, for example, elements of Japonisme), accommodating new consumers and aesthetic interests at various price points. The second strand encompassed the transfer of the tattoo from sea to land. Urban expansion, novels, dime museums, and carnivals all contributed to American knowledge of the tattoo. These intersecting trends helped create businesses and allowed for stable shop traditions. Simultaneously, carnivals spread the tattoo from the urban port cities to Middle America. The third stand of the story was about the progression from amateur to professional tattooist as tattooists built and exploited their artistic reputation. The three strands combine to form a complex web of design, technology and cultural association within which men like Gibbons and Wagner, could use business cards to express their inked identity.

The designs of six tattooists provided the material evidence driving this study. These artists practiced between roughly 1875 and 1930, and were members of the first

[10] J. Welles Henderson did an admirable job of tracing the sailor's farewell theme through a number of artistic products. His was a rare instance of expanding beyond a simple reference and contextualizing the design motifs in combination with other sailor crafts. J. Welles Henderson and Rodney P. Carlisle, *Maritime Art: Jack Tar a Sailor's Life 1750-1910* (Antique Collector's Club, 1999), 258-262.

wave of true professionals. Each respective artist developed his drawings with a distinct hand, but worked with an increasingly standardized set of forms. Two design books were discovered in the Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection at Winterthur. An anonymous pattern book was produced ca. 1875 and featured 25 images.[11] The other book at Winterthur was created by a Danish tattooist named W. Christiansen, signed and dated 1896. A single book in the American Folk Art Museum signed J. S. Bombay contained turn of the century-images.[12] Mystic Seaport housed the most famous design book in early American tattooing, the work of C. H. Fellowes.[13] Four design books stamped with the name Jack Warren dating from the 1910s, sideshow photographs, machines, stencils, and business cards came from the Maritime Collections at the Smithsonian Institute. Finally, the Gus Wagner Collection at South Street Seaport provided a massive haul of images, hand tools and a one-of-a-kind scrapbook detailing Wagner's career from the 1910s to the 1930s. As a whole the material presented here represents over fifty years of American tattooing. Within this material, six central design categories were developed and shaped, generating a long standing visual vocabulary.

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[11] For cataloging purposes the anonymous tattoo pattern book from the Joseph Downs Manuscript collection was dated ca. 1865. The motifs in the book, however, suggested a slightly later date. Neville Thompson, *The Winterthur Library Revealed: Five Centuries of Design and Inspiration* (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll / Winterthur Museum, 2003), 24.

[12] The Bombay book was previously published in a collection of masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum were it was given the rough dates 1873-1910. Stacey C. Hollander, *American Anthem: Masterworks from the American Folk Art Museum* (New York: American Folk Art Museum, 2001), 357.

[13] As mentioned above, the collection of Fellowes patterns was published as *The Tattoo Book*.

Fixed to American interests and beliefs, each major tattoo design category responded to a distinct aspect of American life. The first category, religious tattoos required little explanation, but (as a caution), explicitly refer to Christianity in this context. Tattoos expressive of patriotic and nationalistic desires formed a second category. These images were primarily generic, without specific ties to time and place. A third, and related, category featured images that were politically charged. Most often, these designs played on war-time events such as the sinking of the Maine at the outset of the Spanish-American War. While designs in this category (particularly those marking loss in battle) have sentimental qualities, they expressed group values. The forth category comprised professional tattoos, related to both a job or to group affiliation. These professional symbols included anchors and Masonic emblems. Sentimental tattoos related directly to interpersonal connection. They expressed grief over a deceased family member, or the memory of a loved one. The sixth, and final, category was the most ambiguous: images related to western interpretation of the Orient. Here a customer found dragons or geisha girls. Understanding these images, or any other aspect of material culture, requires a cultural context. Literary references, geographical location, and technological change bring to life the world the images inhabit. Each component to the story adds a layer to the story of how American tattooists inked a commercial character.

Design Categories

Religious Tattoos

Religious tattooing has a long and turbulent history. Despite perceived bans on tattooing, the New Testament does not, in fact, reaffirm the Old Testament prohibition. Coptic Christians, for example, have tattooed for centuries, and marked the body as a method of connecting with Christ. Englishman William Lithgow made the earliest reference to Coptic tattooing, describing the practice he observed it in the holy land. Designs were pierced into the skin and then dyed with the application of a black powder. The Copts acquired tattoos at Holy feasts (for example, Mulid) or on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These tattoos were often dated, reinforcing the commemorative nature of the image.[14] Religious tattoos made up an important segment of the American tattoo vocabulary. The designs ranged from the basic cross to large more elaborate interpretations of commercially produced lithographs developed in the late nineteenth-century.

The rise of the steam press and mass markets in the nineteenth century supported an unparallel rise in religious imagery. David Morgan argued that looking constituted a major role in religious activity and forms powerful religious practice. He termed visual piety the formation and performance of image-driven belief. In the nineteenth century,

[14] Religious tattooing has been the subject of several studies to date. These included, Alan Govenar, "Christian Tattoos," *Tattoo Time Number 2: Tattoo Magic,* Hardy ed. (Honolulu, Hawaii: Hardy Marks Publications, 1988), 4-11; Charles W. MacQaurrie, "Insular Celtic Tattooing: History, Myth, and Metaphor," in *Written on the Body,* 32-45; and Hamish Maxwell-Stuart and Ian Duffield, "Skin Deep Devotions: Religious Tattooing and Convict Transportation to Australia," in *Written on the Body,* 118-135.

religious images were mass marketed, and cheaply disseminated. Mail order, rapid and reliable transportation, literacy, and uniform currency combined to create a climate amenable to consumption. [15] Religious competition too played a role in the dissemination of religious images.

The cross drove religious themed tattoo designs from 1875 to 1925. Manipulating the cross, tattooists followed the larger incorporation of Catholic symbolism by American Protestant sects. Protestantism faced new competition from the 1830s on with the increased presence of the Catholic Church. Previously adverse to Catholic symbols, Protestant denominations appropriated some images, like the cross, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Ryan Smith wrote, "By appropriating the cross as well as other related implements of Catholic art and worship, Protestant churches fashioned a material response to the Catholic surge while refining their own ability to attract and satisfy members."[16] Though the use of symbols differed and reinforced religious boundaries, the Protestant acceptance of the cross promoted a visual unity among Christians.

Singular depictions of the cross in tattoo design were not overwhelmingly popular in the sampled design books. Bombay's lone interpretation was a three dimensional cross

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[15] See, David Morgan, *Visual Piety A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkley, California: University of California Press: 1998); and David Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Age of American Mass Production* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

[16] Ryan K. Smith, *Protestant Popery: Catholic Art in America's Protestant Churches, 1830-1890* (Ph. D dissertation, University of Delaware: 2002), 76. Smith devoted the third chapter of his dissertation to "The Cross," establishing the trajectory of Protestant reclamation of the symbol through the rise of the Catholic Church in America, the Reformation roots of anti-Popery, and gave specific accounts of the use of the cross in individual protestant sects.

built of brick (Fig. 2). Another simple incarnation, from Jack Warren's designs, had the cross on its side wrapped in a floral wreath, the Latin "INRI" scribed on the horizontal arm (Fig. 3). Crosses were incorporated into a variety of designs that connect to other categories, professional and sentimental, and prove a common Christian thread in much of early tattoo art. Similarly the Cross played a role in other more complicated religious constructions, both Catholic and Protestant.

Distinctly Catholic designs in particular the Crucifixion and depictions of Christ's head were common tattoo fodder. Two Crucifixion designs were available from the anonymous tattooist represented by the Winterthur design book. Both incorporated a stylized Jerusalem as background, with one image differing from the other with the inclusion of a praying woman at the foot of Christ (Figs. 4 & 5). Bombay's book included a simpler depiction of the event; he simply displayed Christ alone on the cross without background (Fig. 6). Gus Wagner's flash books offered several variations of Christ's head crowned in thorns (Fig. 7). The commonality of Catholic images indicated the effect of immigration on the tattooist's client base.

Religious images formed a sizable portion of the tattooists business, and some religious-themed designs took special meaning within the tattoo community. The "Rock of Ages" was developed for use as a large scale back tattoo, and has come to represent classic American tattooing. The root and name of the image comes from a popular Protestant hymn written by Augustus M. Toplady in 1776. It went as follows,

> Rock of ages, cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee;
> Let the water and the blood,
> From Thy riven side which flowed

Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone,
Thou must save, and Thou alone.
Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.
Whilst I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyestrings break in death;
When I soar through tracts unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.[17]

In the nineteenth century Toplady's hymn found visual expression in mottoes and lithographs. Ames discussed the use of mottoes in the home in Chapter three of his book *Death in the Dinning Room.*

> These seemingly limited artifacts turn out to provide eloquent testimony to the contradictory union of visions of progress grounded in technological development and understandings of appropriate beliefs and sentiments grounded in religion and tradition.[18]

During the last third of the nineteenth century mottoes, produced both commercially and in the home, featured prominently in the domestic sphere. Easily and cheaply produced,

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[17] Toplady first published the hymn in 1776 in the British publication *The Gospel Magizine.*

[18] Kenneth Ames, *Death in the Dinning Room* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 4.

mottoes developed from an interaction between enduring statements of cultural beliefs and new technology. By the 1870s perforated cardboard was almost synonymous with mottoes, and provided a perfect base for the needle work designs. In mottoes the connection between tattoos and the home are furthered, with similar phrases and new technologies employed in both decorative products. Many mottoes were driven by religious language, both bible and hymn, "Rock of Ages" being an example.[19]

Several lithographers produced "Rock of Ages" prints during the last third of the nineteenth century and beyond. Currier and Ives included two related prints in their large religious repertoire. "A Christian's Refuge" an 1868 print featured a woman clinging to a wooden cross amidst a rough and open sea with a ship sinking in the background (Fig. 8). The text below the image reads, "A Christian's Refuge: Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. In my hand no price I bring, simply to the cross I cling." Currier and Ives also produced a "Rock of Ages," print in 1873, with Christ serving as rescuer. A depiction of the "Rock of Ages," released in 1873 by Colton, Zahm and Roberts indicates the various visual interpretations of the hymn (Fig. 9). The print shows a young maiden grasping the cross at its arms surrounded by flowers. Separated from raging sea and tangible terror, the woman seeks salvation, though with less urgency. A third lithograph titled "Hope," printed by George Schlegel, c1873, exhibits a similar, yet more turbulent scene (Fig. 10). Here the cross is supported by a rock jutting out from a raging sea. An angel crouched down below the cross, her arms outstretched to save a drowning woman. In the upper right of the image the clouds open, a stream of sunlight

[19] Ames, 97-149

forming a diagonal to the angel connecting the woman's savior to ultimate heavenly salvation.

With shipwrecked maiden, turbulent sea, and sinking ships, the visualization of the "Rock of Ages," found early favor in tattoo design books. Tattooist Don Ed Hardy writes,

> As a tattoo, it had forceful graphic qualities and plenty of drama, with the raging waves, stormy sky, and wrecked ship seen sinking in the distance. The distressed woman in biblical style robes allowed a female element devoid of the overt sexiness of a pinup design, and the entire theme no doubt seemed timeless to tattoo enthusiasts of the day.[20]

Hardy rightfully connects the image to popular lithography though not back as far as 1868. His analysis of the image points to why the "Rock of Ages" was so ubiquitous as a tattoo image while only minor within the larger proliferation of religious images. The inclusion of ship and sea also made the tattoo relevant to mariners irrespective of the strength of their religious faith. The "Rock of Ages" was also easily recognizable even in diverse incarnations.

Just as the prints were variable in the construction of the image, so too were the tattoo designs. The two earliest incarnations in this study, from the Winterthur design book follow the shipwreck and rough seas narrative of the Currier and Ives and George Schelegel examples (Fig. 11). In contrast, Bombay chose to follow the Colton, Zahn, and

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[20] Don Ed Hardy, "Rock of Ages," in. *Tattoo Time Number 3: Music and Sea Tattoos,* Hardy ed. (Honolulu, Hawaii: Hardy Marks Publications, 1988), 29. Hardy also organized an exhibition of "Rock of Ages" designs in 1992. The catalog of the exhibition collected the history of the hymn and its pictorial incarnations on the skin. Don Ed Hardy ed., *The Rock of Ages: Being A Celebration and Manifestations of the Historic & Epidermal Icon As Seen By Various Artists Whose Particular Visions in Skin, Canvas, Wood, Paper, Clay, etc. were solicited by the Author* (Honolulu, Hawaii: Hardy Marks Publications, 1992).

Roberts print. Bombay striped his image of the voluminous foliage of the lithograph, preferring a single strand of ivy crawling up the cross (Fig. 12). As in the print, however, the woman has dropped to her knees and grasps the cross with her back to the viewer. Bombay's version lacked the drama of the more popular images. In Bombay, one clearly sees a direct borrowing from mass culture. A later incarnation of the "Rock of Ages," by Gus Wagner incorporated both the floral decoration and sinking ship (Fig. 13).

Religious images responded to popular products and the faith of customers. As a distinct theme, tattoos with religious overtones vie only with patriotic emblems in commonality within the design books of early professional tattooists. Both types of designs refer explicitly to group identification and could be easily adapted in scale to fit multiple body parts.

Patriotism

Eagles, flags, Columbia, and Lady Liberty frequently appeared in the drawings of early tattooists. In their analysis of documentary records, historians Ira Dye, B.R. Burg and Simon Newman affirm that patriotic emblems were popular among sailors, a notion that corresponded with the abundance of patriotic themes in tattoo designs. These designs followed conventions shaped in the late-eighteenth century and formed a body of understandable symbols of national identity.[21]

Adopted as part of America's national seal in 1782, the bald eagle quickly became a ubiquitous symbol. Modified versions of the seal are rampant in American material culture. Placed on early neoclassical furniture, ceramics, and as Dye and Newman found

[21] For more of their findings see, Burg, Dye and Newman.

on bodies, the eagle and shield marked many an object as American. Not surprisingly the eagle, and the seal itself, took a prominent role in tattoo design. Most commonly the eagle was perched above the shield, as in the national seal. Examples of this conventional design were found in every design book. A notable version comes out of the design book of W. Christiansen, a Danish tattooist working in Copenhagen. Dated 1896 the book's lone Americanized design depicts an eagle with elongated neck with the stars and stripes above and below the bird's body (Fig. 14). The use of this American symbol by a foreign tattooist proved the stability of the eagle as a metonym for the United States, Christiansen hoped to appeal to foreign patrons (or even sympathetic locals) by using the design. The design book of turn of the century tattooist J. Bombay featured several variations on the shield motive. One of the designs has the eagle perched above the shield, a banner reading "Liberty" running diagonally across the face of the shield (Fig. 15). An anchor appears from behind the bottom left of the shield, connecting the national symbol to the maritime world, and Bombay's customer base. In the first quarter of the twentieth century tattooists, like Gus Wagner and Jack Warren created more elaborate eagle based designs. Wagner added multiple flags and Warren employed an image with eagle, flag, and shield that included a curvilinear banner so that personal messages could be included (Fig. 16). In all these images the stars and stripes link the eagle to the nation, the colors serving as a common visual tie for all patriotic images.

The stars and stripes were officially implemented on July 14, 1777, but not immediately put to use as a common symbol of the nation. On April 4, 1818 Congress

officially established the flag with thirteen stripes and stars for each state.[22] Unlike the national seal Americans slowly incorporated into the general fabric of life. In tattoo art the flag primarily existed as supplementary to other national symbols, like the eagle or Columbia. Jack Warren's design repertoire included a basic, (but effective), singular use of the American flag (Fig. 17). Waving in the wind from a half broken pole, the flag is cut at a diagonal with a banner reading "name." Many images used banners, but few included such an overt suggestion of use. This image suggested the customers yearned to align oneself directly with nationalistic desire, not just through symbol, but also by name. Another Warren design included a bust-length portrait of a sailor with the flag as background, again including a banner for personalization (Fig. 18). Though understood as a national symbol by 1875, use of the flag in tattoo stand-alone design was less common than other patriotic constructions.

If the bald eagle stood as the most easily recognizable symbol of nationalism in tattoo design, allegorical interpretations of Columbia and Liberty were not far behind. Attempts to personify the Americas, and eventually the United States, with feminized allegorical images began soon after the first European contact. Over time the image shifted from Indian Queen to Indian Princess, and finally morphed into Greek Goddess. E. McLung Fleming identified five stages in the development of allegorical figures of America. He focused on the third stage, that of the Indian Princess, between 1765 and 1783. This image reflected America as colonial, the princess the daughter of Britannia. With independence the image of the Indian princess was reformed, and direct national

[22] Roy E. Appleman, Milo Q. Quaife, and Melvin J. Weig, *The History of the United States Flag* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961), 70-80

symbols of eagle, liberty cap, and flag are added.[23] Fleming suggested that by 1815 a masculine image of America (Uncle Sam) superceded the feminine allegory, but tattoo designs clung to the early representation.

An image in the Winterthur design book captured the allegorical representation of feminized America (Fig. 19). Clad in short skirt and liberty cap, Columbia held the flag pole above her shoulder in her left hand. She leaned on the shield, grasping it with her right hand an accompanying eagle peered out from behind her left leg. A banner fluttered out from the mouth of the eagle, reading "E. Pluribus Unum." Bombay took this traditional image and symbolically placed her atop a globe (Fig. 20). In later incarnations the traditional figure of allegorical America was granted an element of dynamism. One of Jack Warren's interpretations was more super woman than Liberty. Dressed in short shorts and a revealing top, the woman appeared to ride forward atop the eagle and shield, the flag, held with both hands, fluttering behind (Fig. 21). Free of a constraining cap, the woman's hair flows backward, and amplified the forward trajectory of Liberty, eagle, and nation. The three images indicated some variation in the depiction of Columbia or Liberty, but there was one instance where a formalized construction was unavoidable.

The instillation of the Statue of Liberty at Ellis Island on October 28, 1866 provided a new national symbol for tattooists to incorporate into their designs. As a public monument the Statue of Liberty had universal appeal. Melding old and new world ideals, the classical vocabulary used in the statue helped to promote the virtues of truth,

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[23] E. McClung Fleming, "The American Image as Indian Princess, 1765-1783," *Winterthur Portfolio,* Vol. 2 (1965), 65-81.

justice, and liberty.[24] The Bombay book offered a simple interpretation of the Statue, head on as a national symbol (Fig. 22). Gus Wagner employed the Statue in a larger construction. Placing the Statue of Liberty on the right and the Eiffel Tower on the left, with a tall ship at center, Wagner created an image that celebrated the two nations' union and their respective icons of public art (Fig. 23). Wagner's image exhibits the importance of public art in building easily recognizable symbols of nationhood.

Political

Closely aligned with patriotic images are designs celebrating political alliance. Gus Wagner's Statue of Liberty and Eiffel Tower design presented a common construction for these images, the symbol of America on one side and the allies' symbol on the other. The stars and stripes and the Union Jack are most commonly presented in the books viewed for this study.

Wars were good for tattoo business. High levels of patriotism and increased membership in the armed services supplied tattooists with a new client base. While the patriotic designs described above were certainly popular in war time, specific circumstances supplied new, particularly ephemeral, images. Between 1875 and 1925 the United States engaged in two military campaigns that yielded tangible evidence on the tattooist's drawing board. The Spanish American War and World War I formulated new images: the memory of the Maine and the celebration of the Red Cross nurse, respectively.

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[24] Christian Blanchet, "The Universal Appeal of the Statue of Liberty," in, *The Statue of Liberty Revisited,* ed. Wilton S. Dillon and Neil G. Kotler (Smithsonian Institute: 1994), 27-38. For more on the cultural context of the Statue and its enduring symbolism read the remaining essays in the book.

When the Maine exploded on February 16, 1896 in Havana's harbor, killing 266 American sailors, jingoistic Americans blamed the Spanish. The fallacy of this claim was immediately recognized by the press, but nevertheless the disaster served as a symbol marking the beginning of the Spanish conflict. *Harper's Weekly* reported,

> In the mean time, although, as we have said, some of the Jingoes and the sensational newspapers have done their best to promote ill feeling by spreading abroad every suspicion and every rumor hostile to Spain that springs from the excited imaginations or half-information, there have (check) been much self-restraint and a strong and praiseworthy disposition on the part of the public to wait for an investigation and to hope that the explosion resulted from accident.[25]

Both J. S. Bombay (fig. 24) and C. H. Fellowes (fig. 25) produced images memorializing the Maine. Bombay's design followed the formulation of traditional mourning images (see below), with a sailor leaning against a tombstone with the words "Remember the Maine." At left the Maine stands proudly above the word "Before," on the right the ship has exploded, representing the "After." The stars and stripes fly above the tombstone, reminding that this was a tragedy felt by the American public at large. Fellowes presented several variations of the "Remember the Maine" design. One featured a tombstone with the phrase and another put the phrase in a banner above a depiction of the ship. His design book also included memorial images for other ships (like the Kersage and Alabama) sunk in battle. Shouts of "Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain," rang out in Americas streets and contributed to an American desire to aid Cuba with its

[25] "The Disaster to the Battle-Ship 'Maine'," *Harper's Weekly*, February 26, 1898, 197ad-198ab. For a detailed account of the *Maine* and the subsequent investigation of the explosion refer to Peggy and Harold Samuels, *Remembering the Maine* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

struggle for independence against Spain. Of, course this conflict extended into the Pacific and in tattooing terms helped to extend the design vocabulary of American tattooists. "Remember the Maine" tattoos echoed jingoistic sentiment and mourned national loss during the Spanish-American War.

World War I initiated its own tattoo designs, but induced different feelings. The United States entered World War I in 1917. Conditions on the front were abysmal; resulting in many deaths caused by illness rather than battle. In response to the conditions, the Red Cross experienced phenomenal growth and gave women an opportunity to join the war effort. Propaganda posters utilized the image of the nurse as a woman of noble, Christian, and selfless virtue. Carolyn Kitch noted, "Though nurses and other female war workers were frequent subjects of war posters (including those meant to recruit young women into service), they were usually rendered with visual clues that removed them from the harsh realities of war."[26] For the men tattooed with the "Rose of No Man's Land" tattoo, removal was of utmost importance. The Red Cross nurse stood for a nurturing security outside the trenches.

Like the "Rock of Ages" design, the "Rose of No Man's Land" was also connected to song. Written in 1918 by Jack Caddigan, with music by James A. Brennen, the song celebrated the work of Red Cross nurses during the war.

> I've seen some beautiful flowers
> Grow in my garden fair,
> I've spent some wonderful hours

[26] Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magizine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press: 2001), 112. Kitch argued that images of women in World War I reinforced gender roles and quelled masculine anxieties.

Lost in their fragrance rare.
But I have found another
Wondrous beyond compare.

There's a rose that grows on no-man's land
And it's wonderful to see;
Though its place is there it will live for me
In my garden of memories.

It's the one red rose the soldier knows
It's the work of the Master's hand,
It's the sweet word from the Red Cross nurse,
She's the rose of no-man's land.[27]

Caddigan's lyric captured the desolation of the front and the soldier's gratitude toward the Red Cross's war effort. The tattoo served a mnemonic, as the song suggested, of the lone bright spot in the despair of war. The Red Cross distributed propaganda posters commonly depicting smiling women, hair capped in white with a Red Cross.[28] These images provided a visual base for tattooists. A Gus Wagner design costing seventeen dollars featured a nurse's head, with Red Cross cap, at the center of a rose (Fig. 26). The bulk of the image is superimposed over a cross, and includes a banner containing the message, "Rose of No Man's Land." A cheaper version was also available for five dollars, and depicted the nurse in cap over a cross (Fig. 27). A third variation omitted the cross and placed a woman at center of the rose, a design costing seven dollars.

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[27] Jack Caddigan and James A. Brennen, *Rose of "No Man's Land"* (Leo Fiest, inc., 1918)

[28] Walton Rawls offered an overview of War posters related to the Red Cross. Rawls, *Wake Up, America! World War I and the American Poster* (Abbeville Press Publishers, New York: 1988), 124-129.

"Remember the Maine" and "Rose of No Man's Land" images manifested the incorporation of popular song and print developed through conflict into the tattoo vocabulary. Though ephemeral, political tattoos suggested the connection between the tattoo and other popular forms of art. Coupled with mass culture, political tattoos reflected commonly held beliefs. In contrast, other forms centered on more private group affiliations.

Professional Tattoos

Functionally, the category of professional tattoos was, perhaps, the easiest to comprehend. Like religious and patriotic tattoos, designs that deliberately appealed to specific trades and fraternal orders were tied to group identity. Though professional tattoos made up a small percentage of the total designs, the category required brief mention in the study. As with the other categories, the vocabulary of professional tattoos expanded over time, with Gus Wagner offering the broadest range of designs. Sailors, artists, musicians and lodge members were catered too by turn of the century American tattooists.

Most prominent among the professional tattoos was the anchor, depicted alone or in combination with a cross and heart. Jack Warren included a banner reading "USN" in his anchor drawing. This example was exceptional for differentiating types of sailors. Other professions were also represented in the design books. W. Christiansen presented a design aimed at artists, a paint palette, which was similarly available from C.H. Fellowes (Fig. 28). Fellowes also incorporated designs for musicians (Fig. 29). Gus Wagner

devoted the majority of one design sheet to fraternal orders (Fig. 30). The sheet also pictured an image on luck, a horse and horseshoe below the words "good luck," and one mother design. Expressions of luck, like the professional tattoos, commonly appeared in the design books, and perhaps appealed to men with unconventional professions, like gamblers. Aside from designs related to seafaring, the professional tattoos, and the drawings of luck, were small in scale. Wagner performed professional tattoos for as little as three dollars, based on the pricing on the sheet.

Sentimental Designs

American tattoo designs expressing sentiment split in two distinct functions. The first, particularly relevant for the sailor, reminds of home and lovers. On long voyages where sailors were away from their loved ones for extended periods of time, tattoos acted as permanent reminders. Loss, whether temporary or permanent, figured heavily in sentimental designs. Memorial tattoos formed a second strain of sentimental designs popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These tattoos related directly to notions of family, most commonly expressing the loss of a mother, father, child, or sibling.

Departure from home was a common trope in sailor's art. In painting, ceramics, and tattoo art sailors break away and leave a woman behind. Called "A Sailor's Farewell," these images summarized the experience of many sailors.[29] A version in the Winterthur book reflected the typical arrangement of the "Sailor's Farewell." Sailor and lover embrace at the center of the design. Behind the man a tall ship signals his imminent

[29] Henderson and Carlisle, 155-179

departure, while a small cottage at the lower right of the image references the woman's stay (Fig. 31). The anonymous tattooist also designed a second couple image (Fig. 32). Framed by a wreath, a buxom young lady and sailor again embrace; a supplementary banner expresses the belief in "You and Me."

Clasped hands were another convention of sentimental designs. W. Christian's design book contained two variations of the motif; both times rings are visible on the fingers. The first image shows the hands clasped in front of a heart and anchor, echoing the maritime motifs common in the Sailor's farewell (Fig. 33). The second design omitted the obvious sailor's reference but kept the heart, and placed above the clasped hands. A single page in the Bombay design book included three clasped hand drawings, each without a ring (Fig. 34). At the top of the page, the hands connect above a wreath with a central heart. Above each wrist a sun either sets or rises, and Bombay includes the words "I am here now," as a cap to the design. The central drawing on the page shows a young man and woman with a setting sun in the background. Beneath the two bust length portraits a floral wreath contains clasped hands. Underneath the drawing Bombay wrote, "In God We Trust." The lower portion of the page had the most basic of the clasped hand motif designs, with a radiating heart as the background. Here Bombay wrote, "Good Bye." Two images in the Warren books also incorporated the clasped hands motif. The first showed ringed hands joined with a heart background (Fig. 35), the second featured unadorned hands with an eagle replacing the heart. Geoffrey C. Munn wrote that in the mid-nineteenth century French jewelers revived the Renaissance tradition of clasped hands. Representative of love and eternal devotion the motif was

used in broaches and for clasps. As in the tattoo designs, the gender of each respective hand was differentiated by jewelry and trimmings.[30]

The example of clasped hand designs echoed quite literally James Bradley's assertion that "Tattoos provided a substitute for jewellery, or other material possessions: a means of articulating emotion to, and forging attachments between the body, the self and others."[31] In terming tattooing "working class jewelery," Bradley, discussing tattooing in Britain, referred to the popular designs of D.W. Purdy, and assumed a rather basic aesthetic order. In sentimental designs the literal translation of popular jewelery motifs was clear. The Winterthur design book contained several bracelet designs with either male or female bust length portraits at center (Fig. 36). The variety is important as it suggests a multi-gender client base. Acting much like eighteenth century portrait miniatures the bracelets functioned as personal mementos.[32]

A second function of sentimental tattoo designs reflected permanent loss and again stressed individual experience. The Victorians left many tangible examples of their methods of mourning behind, including posthumous portraits, embroideries, and specific mourning dress made up part of the material culture of death that remained. Tattooists drew from conventional mourning images, and marketed them specifically to memorialize deceased family members. The tattoo designs featured cemetery scenes,

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[30] Geoffrey C. Munn, *The Triumph of Love: Jewelry 1530-1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 70

[31] Bradley, 150-151

[32]Dale T. Johnson, *American Portrait Miniatures in the Manney Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 13-26

typically a single mourner grieving at the tomb of a loved one, the inscription "In memory of mother," carved on the tomb. [33]

A design in the Winterthur design book recreated the typical mourning print, but with an atypical subject. A young sailor stands with cap in hand and weeping willow in the background leaning against his mother's grave (Fig. 37). The image corresponded directly with Bombay's interpretation for the "Remember the Maine" design (Fig. 24). Jack Warren's books also contained a design that mirrors the Winterthur book (Fig. 38). Later mourning images, produced at the end of the study dates, discard the graveyard scene, offering a simplified design, and indicated a change over time in tattoo design. Several pages of Gus Wagner's book dated to the late 1930s featured cross shaped tombstones with memorial inscriptions (Fig. 39). In this case the sentiment remained, but the process of visualizing the feeling shifted away from Victorian conventions to more simplified interpretations.

Wagner's books also featured a mourning tattoo similar to the "Rose of No Man's Land Tattoo." Titled "Flower of the Family," the image depicted a young child's face at the center of a rose with the above phrase written below the drawing (Fig. 40). This design followed the conventions of posthumous mourning portraiture in which a detached portion served as a visual trope for death. Phoebe Lloyd mentioned that in the context of art, "Viewers would have known that roses held downward or dropping from a broken

[33] Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* (Stoney Brook, New York: Museums at Stoney Brook, 1980).

stem symbolized an innocent life cut short." In this case Wagner's drawing referenced passing and not hope.[34]

Oriental Designs

In contrast to the greater Japonisme craze of the Victorian era, oriental, and specifically Japanese images disseminated less quickly into the American tattoo vocabulary. Japan was opened to the West in 1854 by Commander Matthew Perry. By the 1880s interest in Japanese art had encouraged wide-spread imitation. Appropriation of Japanese art proved profitable for hoards of American manufacturers from the high end to the affordable. Tiffany and Company in glass and metal, Herter Brothers in furniture, and Rockwood Pottery in ceramics were among the manufacturers that succeeded in transferring the Japanese idea into all facets of American decorative arts.[35]

Japanese art had a massive influence on middle class home décor. Informed by the aesthetic movement, the 1876 centennial exhibition, and travel accounts, the American homemaker in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century was well aware of Japanese aesthetics. Praised for aesthetic, educational and natural qualities, Japanese design was particularly suited to the home.[36] Objects were purchased from a growing number of stores specializing in Japanese style goods. These stores supplied accessible

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[34] Phoebe Lloyd, "Posthemous Morning Portraiture," in *A Time to Mourn,* 73

[35]William Hosley, *The Japan Idea: Art and Life in Victorian America* (Hartford, Connecticut: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1990), 117-153

[36] For information regarding the incorporation of Japanese and Oriental decorative motifs in the American home refer to Jane Converse Brown, "'Fine Arts and Fine People': The Japanese Taste in the American Home," in *Making the American Home: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Material Culture 1840-1940,* ed. Marilyn Ferris Motz and Pat Browne (Bowling Green State University Popular Press: 1988), 121-139.

exotic experiences at moderate prices. In describing the merchandise at these stores, "The word *Japanese* was used in a generic sense rather than a culturally precise manner," encompassing material from all over the orient.[37] This usage follows Edward Said's notion of Orientalism as a western construction, though here, and in much of tattoo art, the Orient has been appropriated to serve Western purposes.[38]

Charles Longfellow stood as one of the most fascinating tattooed figures of the era and contrasted with the other tattooed Americans of the day. Longfellow, the son of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, first traveled to Japan in 1871, less than twenty years after the ports were opened by Commander Parry. Remaining for twenty months, Longfellow was among the first American globe trotters to visit Japan. These travelers amassed large collections of photographs and artifacts, as did Charles Longfellow, but he returned to the United States bearing a more personal collection. During his first visit Charles had a carp descending a waterfall pricked on his back. A symbol of virility, the carp was a symbol of boy's day in Japan and reflected masculinity. On a second trip to

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[37] Christine Brandimarte, "Japanese Novelty Stores," *Winterthur Portfolio,* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), 1.

[38] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Historian William Cummings suggested that the tattooed bodies of western sailors in combination with the transfer of tattooed body parts from the Pacific to Europe formed a body of evidence for Orientalist discourse. William Cummings, "Orienatlism's Corporeal Dimension" *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4:2 (2003), http://proxy.nss.udel.edu:2139/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v004/4.2cummings.html

Japan in 1885 Longfellow tattooed his chest. For this location he chose the deity Kanno sitting in the mouth of a dragon.[39]

Christine Guth analyzed Longfellow's tattoos in the context of tourism and collecting in Japan. She associated the tattoos with a form of cultural cross dressing. Tattoos in Japan had long tradition among the working class until the Meiji period, when the art essentially became old fashioned. Guth argued that this shift enticed American and European travelers. Along with Longfellow, Guth mentioned two other American aristocrats tattooed on visits to Japan; Charles Goddard Weld and William Henry Furness III. In appropriating a Japanese working class aesthetic, Guth suggested that these men inverted the meaning of tattoos, coloring the leisured rather than the working body.

By the turn of the century the Japanese taste was pervasive and seeped into the American tattoo cannon. Additionally, the American elite fascination with Japanese tattooing, and Charles Longfellow's work in particular were not lost on the American tattoo community; Samuel O'Reilly believed that Longfellow had $1000 worth of tattoos.[40] Never one to miss an opportunity, O'Reilly followed his better known contemporaries, Tiffany and Herter Brothers, and the local Japanese Novelty Shops, by integrating oriental design in his work. He hired a Japanese tattooist named Mituhashi as a partner at his shop at 11 Chatham Square. Credited with the invention of the "Boxer" head (the decapitated head of Chinamen) design, Mituhashi was lauded for his finely outlined work. According to a *New York Times* interviewer Mituhashi was excited by the

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[39] Christine Guth, *Longfellow's Tattoos: Tourism, Collecting, and Japan* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004), 142

[40] "The Gentle Art of Tattooing," *New York Times,* July 21, 1901, SM 3

American enthusiasm for tattoo, but perhaps not so overcome by the American design vocabulary.

> It think it hurts the little fellow downrightly to have to tattoo one of those common designs on sailors," broke in "Prof." O'Reilly, the partner to Mituhashi, "You see, there is other work to do here besides the expensive work demanded by the wealthier classes, and the 'jap' is never more miserable than when he works on one of those fellows whose only aim is to get the marks as good and black or as bright and red as possible – the rough work.[41]

O'Reilly's racially insensitive statement reveals a binary in the tattoo trade between fine and rough work. O'Reilly contrasted the new Japanese designs brought by Mituhashi in opposition to ordinary work (i.e., Sailors' art). He says, "This is the common sort of stuff which the ordinary seafarer wants – the more ink and the blacker, the more he thinks he is getting for his money," pointing to an unrefined consumer. The finer work included images of frogs, dragons, Geisha girls, and butterflies, priced at fifteen dollars each. The latest design from Japan, at the time of the article, was a hooded cobra, priced at twenty-five dollars. A dragon of Mituhashi's design was significantly more expensive, costing one hundred and fifty dollars. Not surprisingly, O'Reilly organized designs into thematic (American and Oriental) books.[42]

The extant designs of Jack Warren replicated the same division of design. Of the four books, all meticulously drawn, one was exclusively decorated with images of dragons, frogs, Geisha girls, snakes, and butterflies corresponding to O'Reilly's notion of finer work. Warren's depicted Kimono clad ladies with parasols comparable to the

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[41] "The Gentle Art of Tattooing," *New York Times,* July 21, 1901, SM 3.

[42] Ibid.

design on Charles Longfellow's arm described by Christine Guth (Fig. 41). A bust length image featured a similarly dressed woman holding a hand fan rather than parasol and was framed on the left side by a set of five flowers (Fig. 42). Warren's dragon, with magnificent spread wings, exhibited a delicate curve of the body (Fig. 43). Another design incorporated a stylized vision of a Phoenix (Fig. 44). The source of Warren's knowledge of these designs remained uncertain; however, he was certainly engaged in correspondence with other tattooists.

Interaction and exchange between tattooists presented a valuable method of expanding and enlarging the design vocabulary. One of the most striking artifacts of Japanese influence on American tattooists was an envelope addressed to Jack Warren from Prof. Charles Gibbons (Fig. 45). The left side of the envelope features a portrait of Gibbons, backed by a dragon with a distinct curvilinear body. A hand written return address located him in Oklahoma. Like his business card, Gibbons letter head separated his work aesthetically from other tattooists and positioned him as an artist geared more toward oriental designs. Most tattooists managed to incorporate both modes of design, but not consistently. Dragons in Gus Wagner's design book lack the detailed wings of Warren's drawings, but nonetheless suggest the scale of the motif. One design priced at one hundred and twenty five dollars illustrated a dragon with twisted body and sharp talons (Fig. 46). A second dragon, again without wings, was created with a more straightforward body (Fig. 47). Wagner incorporated oriental designs in his offerings, but only to supplement the bulk of his images.

The appeal of exotic imagery and aesthetics permeated Victorian tastes from the parlor to the body. Japanese design was the most influential foreign factor in early American professional tattooing. But, it was not the only indication of Victorian tattooist's interest in the Orient. A seated woman smoking a hookah from C. H. Fellows' design book made subtle reference to the Turkish Smoking room, another feature of the eclectic Victorian interior (Fig. 48). As expressed on his business card, Charles Gibbons understood and marketed oriental designs as an alternative to American designs.

Although the conservative design base of tattooists was clear in their books of flash, public opinion of the tattoo was fashioned through two distinct types of exposure to the art: literature and carnival side shows. Through the novel, Americans could experience the tattoos of 'exotic' foreigners and sailors from the comfort of home. By the end of the nineteenth century the growth of dime museums and the carnival circuit exposed the public to tattooed people as exhibitions. These two modes of exposure marginalized the tattoo and masked the conservatism of American tattoo designs.

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Exposing the Tattoo: At Home, In the Shop, and On the Road

Books and exhibitions propelled the tattoo into the American psyche. Literary references helped Americans understand tattoos. Herman Melville, Elizabeth Stoddard, H. Rider Haggard, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle referred to tattoos in their narratives, and their works formed a tight chronology. These four authors explored how tattooing related to the sea, colonialism, travel, and region. The origins and persistence of the cultural

associations of tattooing were made clear through the analysis of tattoo references. Each literary work linked the tattoo to a hand driven craft, and thus builds the cultural context of tattooing to the adoption of the electric machine.

Urban expansion facilitated the transfer of the tattoo from ship to shore. Tattooists established permanent shops around ports and other high-traffic neighborhoods. The contrast between the materials of a sailor amateur with an account of an early visit to a tattoo shop demonstrated the increased sophistication that permanent shops afforded the trade. In permanent establishments tattooists started to expand their economic possibilities. The location of tattoo shops placed tattooists in important proximity to clients, competitors, and related enterprises, like dime museums.

The geographical locations of tattooing are also important in constructing cultural associations. In America, fringe neighborhoods, like the Bowery and Scully Square, adopted professional tattooing contemporaneously with the transient villages of the American carnival. Tattooing was tied both to specific geographic locations and transient communities. Tattoo designs remained the same in both contexts, yet the interactions between tattooist and client differed. The carnival atmosphere created an opportunity where customers could view a "made freak" and then experience their art first hand. In cities, tattooists initially relied on transient communities of sailors for the majority of the work. Eventually, they developed non-maritime clients. The binary of transient versus permanence acted differently in the two tattoo locations and develops two different trajectories for early professionalization

Tattooing in Literature

Tattooing played a large role in Herman Melville's accounts of the Pacific.[43] Melville first introduced his readers to the tattooed inhabitants of the South Pacific in *Typee* (1846). A mixture of autobiography, ethnography, and travel log, *Typee* presented a four week experience among the Typee following the desertion of a whaling vessel. Through the eyes of Tommo, Melville's protagonist, the reader learned of the Typee society, its customs and beliefs, as well as the group's body markings. Bordering on disgust, Tommo viewed the tattoo with suspicion. Even the beautiful young maiden Fayaway, with whom Tommo was infatuated, was blemished by "the practitioners of this barbarous art."[44] While able to overlook the three small markings on Fayaway's lip, Tommo never embraced body marking. Later, Tommo's discovery of an artist at work confirmed his beliefs.

> I beheld a man extended flat upon his back on the ground, and, despite the forced composure of his countenance, it was evident that he was suffering agony. His tormentor bent over him, working away for all the world like a stone-cutter with a mallet and chisel. In one hand he held a short slender stick, pointed with a shark's tooth, on the upright end of which he tapped with a small hammer-like piece of wood, thus puncturing the skin, and charging it with the coloring matter in which the instrument was dipped. A cocoa-nut shell containing this fluid was placed upon the ground. It is prepared by mixing with a vegetable juice the ashes of the 'armor,' or candlenut, always preserved for the purpose. Beside the savage, and spread out upon a piece of soiled tappa, were a great number of curious black-looking little implements of bone and wood, used in the various divisions of his art. A few terminated in a single fine point, and , like very delicate pencils, were

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[43] Tattooing has similarly been a heavy topic of conversation among Melville scholars. See, for example, Larry D. Griffin, "Melville and Tattoos," *Journal of Unconventional History* 2000 11 (3), 42-63*;* Steven Otterman, *Melville's Anatomies* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999), 20-49*;* Leonard Cassuto "'What an object he would have made of me!': Tattooing and the Racial Freak in Melville's *Typee",* in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body,* ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 234-247.

[44] Herman Melville, *Typee* (1846; repr., New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 86

> employed in giving the finishing touches, or in operating upon the more sensitive portions of the body, as was the case in the present instance. Others presented several points distributed in a line, somewhat resembling the teeth of a saw. These were employed in the coarser parts of the work, and particularly in pricking in straight marks. Some presented their points disposed in small figures, and being placed upon the body, were, by a single blow of the hammer, made to leave their indelible impression. I observed a few the handle of which were mysteriously curved, as if intended to be introduced into the orifice of the ear, with a view perhaps of beating the tattoo upon the tympanum. Altogether the sight of these strange instruments recalled to mind that display of cruel-looking mother-of-pearl- handled things which one sees in their velvet-lined cases at the elbow of a dentist.[45]

Melville's description played on the perceived pain of tattooing. *Typee,* taken as a whole, explored the difference between the dyad of Orient and Occident. Tommo spent most of his time exploring the differences of the foreign island culture. While he enjoyed, to an extent, his time on the island, Tommo was reluctant to full-heartedly join the group. Tattooing was an essential element of Typee group identification, one that literary scholar S.X. Goudie related to a species of clothing.

> Goudie suggested,
>
> > Tommo can appreciate tattooed lines that look like bracelets or complement the contours of the back because, I believe, the marks can be 'read' as clothing, a hermeneutic skill that Tommo-as-tailor thinks he possesses. This is why he can consider being tattooed 'from just above the wrist to the shoulder;' tattooed sleeves would be legible as vestmental decoration – an exotic flourish to costume similar to a tribal necklace. [46]

Associating tattooing with a traditionally decorated bodily location allowed the markings to be understood in relation to those conventions. In contrast Goudie believed Tommo's

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[45] Melville, *Typee*, 217-8.

[46] S.X. Goudie, "Fabricating ideology: Clothing, culture, and colonialism in Melville's Typee," *Criticism;* spring 1998 (40:2), 222-223.

anxiety over facial tattoo conferred a fear about not understanding or reading these markings in western culture. The Typee tattoo master, Karky views Tommo as a prize canvas, "The idea of engrafting his tattooing upon my white skin filled him with all a painter's enthusiasm: again and again he gazed into my countenance, and every fresh glimpse seemed to add to the vehemence of his ambition," and eventually Tommo generously offered up an arm. To Tommo's dismay, this generous gesture was not what Karky desired; he wants to tattoo the face. Karky's persistence revealed something to Tommo, "This incident opened my eyes to a new danger; and I now felt convinced that in some luckless hour I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the *face* to return to my countrymen, even should an opportunity offer." In the end Tommo avoided any transformation, but like Goudie years after, he understands that cultural marking was more important than the physical.[47]

Fear of facial tattooing, and more over cultural transformation certainly was not limited to Tommo. The British public was outraged at rumors (in the 1880s) that the Prince of Wales's boys were tattooed on the nose some years later. The *New York Times* printed the inevitable righting of the gossip. The paper reported that the rumors were dismissed as idle by the London *Morning Post.* "By this time it may be hoped, Mr. Childers has fairly recovered from the shock and the British public will perhaps have regained its composure."[48] American Tattooist Louis Morgan was also appalled by

[47] Melville, *Typee,* 219

[48] "The Royal Noses Not Tattooed," *New York Times,* Feb. 4, 1880.

tattooed hands, labeling them an eyesore in 1912.[49] The desecration of the face was the most repulsive act tattooing could propagate against western skin, too savage and too far removed from cultural tradition.

The connection of tattoos and the savage, or foreigner, stressed a common perception of the practice among Victorian westerners. Melville continued to investigate the association in his follow up to *Typee, Omoo* (1847), the story of the South Sea adventure after rescue from Nuhkeva. In this book Melville describes the tattoo practices on La Dominica. Here Melville is informed by a tattooed Englishmen living among the natives. At the port of Hivarhoo local tattooers were highly esteemed in their profession. They worked in studios and were considered more accomplished than lowly itinerant tattooists. Where there was tattooing, it seemed, there was competition. Technically, tattooing on La Dominica was achieved through dipping a sharks tooth in ink and charging it into the skin with the aid of a mallet.[50]

White Jacket (1850), informed readers about tattooing outside of 'savage' constructs. Melville devoted a chapter of the book to the leisure activities of seamen, discussing among them, reading, embroidery, and inevitably tattooing.[51] He found that while some men where talented at decorating shirts with needle work,

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[49] Louis Morgan, *The Modern Tattooist* (1912; repr., Berkley, California: Tattoo Archive, 2002), 33

[50] Herman Melville, *Omoo: A Narrative Adventure of the South Seas* (1847; repr., New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 36-39

[51] Herman Melville, *White Jacket, or The World in A Man-of-War* (1850; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 211-217

> Others excelled in *tattooing,* or *pricking,* as it is called in a man-of-war. Of these prickers, two had long been celebrated, in their, as consummate masters of the art. Each had a small box full of tools and colouring matter; and they charged so much for their services, that at the end of the cruise they were supposed to have cleared upwards of four hundred dollars. They would *prick* you to order a palm-tree, an anchor, a crucifix, a lady, a lion, an eagle, or anything else you might want.[52]

Noting the language of tattooing, Melville draws attention to a necessary fact of western tattoo history. Until 1769, and Captain Cook's travel to Tahiti, the word was not employed in the English language.[53] Though Melville used it, he also made light of the slow acculturation of the word into common usage. His brief description of tattooing aboard ship introduced a basic design vocabulary and the important, though perhaps obvious, fact that a few men were designated as tattooists. The emphasis on choice confirmed tattooing as a collaborative activity. A tattooist may have designs to suggest, but ultimately must respect the desires of the client. Melville offered few comments on the perceived implications of becoming tattooed. He briefly referred to the Roman Catholic interest in tattooed crosses as a method of insuring proper burial on foreign shore. Protestants, too, were eager for crosses, but for protection from sharks rather than internment. Both examples pointed to the superstitious, mystical and magical properties sailors ascribed to the tattoo.

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[52] Melville, *White Jacket*, 211

[53] Harriet Guest, "Curiously Marked: Tattooing and Gender Difference in Eighteenth-century British Perceptions of the South Pacific," in *Written on the Body,* 83-101

Historian James Bradley astutely noted that the association of sailors and tattooing was a minor trope in Victorian literature.[54] An early example in American literature came from Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862). Elizabeth married Richard Henry Stoddard in 1852 and began publishing her poetry with his help two years later. Her first novel, *The Morgesons,* toyed with the Protestant conventions of coastal New England. The heroine of the story, Cassandra Morgeson, based loosely on Stoddard herself, passed from childhood to young adulthood. She fell in love with a married man, and found no shame in her actions. The tattoo made a brief, though poignant appearance in the story. Cassandra's friend, Helen, was decorated on the arm with the inked initials of a loved one.

> She rolled up her sleeve to show us a bracelet, printed in ink on her arm, with the initials, "L.N." Those of her cousin, she said; he was a sailor, and some time, she supposed, they would marry. [55]

Here the lady was tattooed as a symbol of devotion. Tattoos of this type were common to sailors, transient fellows who needed a reminder of things on land, but here Stoddard gave it a twist. Helen, neither transient nor masculine, had decided to ink upon her arm a telling symbol. Jennifer Putzi argued that with an understanding of the history of tattoos, Stoddard's use of the tattoo explored female sexuality, identity, and agency in the mid-nineteenth century. Putzi connected Stoddard's story to the tale of young Olive Oatman, who first brought attention to the marked white body. Oatman and her younger sister

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[54] Bradley, 141. Bradley referred to Rider Haggard's *Mr. Meeson's Will* and Fergus Hume's *Tracked by a Tattoo* as examples of literary conflation of sailor and tattoo.

[55] Elizabeth Stoddard, *The Morgesons* (1862; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 97

were captured by Yavapais Indians in California on February 18, 1851, and sold to the Mohave, who then tattooed her on the chin and arm. The Oatman tattoos were largely understood as marks of savagery, unlike those on Helen's arm.[56] Still, Helen's marks were unconventional, and years earlier than the elite craze among women for similar decoration.

A second and more comical, tattooed female figured centrally in H. Rider Haggard's *Mr. Meeson's Will* (1888).[57] The story of *Mr. Meeson's Will* took place in 1885 and begins with Augusta urging Meeson, her publisher, to grant her greater royalties for her best-selling novel 'Jemima's Will,' for she feared that her young sister will die unless she can pay for a necessary medical treatment. Meeson denied Augusta's request, reminding her of the terms of her contract and sending the young woman crying out to the streets. Meeson's nephew, Eustace, witnessed the cold-hearted act, and, taken by Augusta's beauty, confronted his uncle about her mistreatment. Ever cold, Meeson immediately cut Eustace out of his will. This act set in motion the adventure of the story, with Augusta returning home to find her sister dead. Grief stricken, Augusta decided to flee for New Zealand, and took accommodation on the *Kangaroo.* Low and behold,

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[56] Jennifer Putzi, "Tattooed Still:" The Inscription of Female Agency in Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons"* Legacy, Vol. 17, no. 2, 2000.

[57] Aside from Bradley two other scholars have made brief mention of *Mr. Meeson's Will* in there work. Garrett Stewart focused on the reading of Augusta as text. Stewart, "Reading Figures: The Legible Image of Victorian Textuality," in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Imagination,* ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). Lucy Bending offered a footnote discussing the sexual charge of the tattooing procedure in the book. Bending, *The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 228.

Meeson also joined the ship, on route to the colonies to visit his colonial business interests. Adding to the excitement, the ship sunk, leaving Augusta and Meeson on a deserted island. Meeson, on the verge of dying, realized the error of his ways and wished to rewrite his will. As no writing implements are to be found, the will was tattooed by a sailor (after some debate) on the back of Augusta. Meeson died soon after the operation, and Augusta was rescued and returned to England. United with Eustace, the tattoo became the key evidence in a trial awarding Eustace his inheritance. The two were married and Eustace ceremoniously freed Augusta from her contract to Meeson's publishing, all the while binding her to him.

Haggard's book was serialized in the *New York Times,* during the summer of 1888.[58] In the story, the tattoo represented the 'other,' both foreign and domestic, savage and classed. Haggard played on contemporary understandings of the tattoo, connections to savage and sea. As a piece of Romantic revival fiction *Mr. Meeson's Will* latches on to issues of travel and press that are at the heart of Victorian culture.

In Sherlock Holmes tales, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle proved his knowledge of tattooed sailors through the investigators usual display of perception. One representative moment, in *The Red Headed League,* found Holmes swiftly concluding the occupational history of one Mr. Jabez Wilson.

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[58] *Mr. Meeson's Will* was serialized for four consecutive weeks in the *Sunday Times* from May 31, 1888. An editorial accompanying the first chapters proclaimed "The adventures of the personages of the story are marvelous – prosaic folk may call them impossible." "Editorial Article No. 6," *New York Times,* May 31, 1888, 4

> Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else.[59]

Mr. Wilson, characteristically stunned by Holmes inferences, demanded evidence of his reasoning. Holmes clearly laid down the items that back up his statements, one hand was more muscular than the next, the man wore an arc-and-compass breastpin, and one elbow of his coat was smooth. As to China, Holmes remarked,

> The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China.[60]

Mr. Holmes contributions to tattoo history and the particular coloring applications of Chinese tattooists are not important, but Doyle's story and those that preceded it point to the common associations people made with tattooing. Among these were the savage, the orient, and, of course, the sailor.

From the 'exotic' other to tattooed white bodies, literary references brought the tattoo ever closer to the western imagination. During the time shift from Melville's tattooed Typee to Doyle's tattooed sailor, tattooists transferred their portable materials to permanent locations, finally bringing a rooted design vocabulary to firm ground. An exploration of the anonymous Winterthur design book began to unpack how artists shared designs with their clients.

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[59] Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Red Headed League," in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891; repr., Evanston, Illinois: Harpers Row, 1965), 31

[60] Doyle, 32

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The Material of a Sailor Amateur

Well before the industry developed in earnest, ship tattooists carried designs in small, portable books. An unsigned example in the Downs Manuscript Collection at the Winterthur Museum survives as one of the oldest tattoo pattern books. Within a bright marbled cover, the book contained a collection of twenty five pencil drawings and assorted rough sketches. Dated to circa 1865, the drawings indicated the tattoo designs, or patterns (later called flash), that were then popular among American seamen. Images of patriotism, devotion, belief and life at sea dominated. The book also helped explain how early tattoo clients chose their designs. Leafing through the book, the potential customer learned about the art through a singular, personal act of looking.

A recipe on the first page of the book associates the designs with tattooing. Formed as a list, complete with specific measurement, the recipe is for the ink that forms the tattoo. It reads,

> 2 ½ oz. of blue vitrol
> 200 c.c. measures water
> 1 c.c. measures sweet spirits niter
> 2 oz Pulvire Rosen
> 2 oz beeswax
> 1 pint boiled oil
> Boiled together until desolve[61]

The above ingredients combined to form a workable, if alarming, concoction. Royal Navy dermatologist Ronald Scutt offered a simple explanation of the tattoo. He noted,

[61] Tattoo Pattern Book, doc. 22, Joseph Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Museum.

"A tattoo is literally an indelible mark resulting from the introduction of coloring mater into the dermis (the area which lies immediately under the skin or epidermis) where they will remain more or less indefinitely."[62] While his definition failed to address method, practice or materials, it explained the essential activity of becoming tattooed. Ink, like that produced from the above recipe was inserted by a practitioner into the skin. While Scutt defines the end results, the design book suggested how the process began.

At 8 ½ in. by 6 in, and just a half inch deep, the anonymous design book at Winterthur was highly portable. The tattooist could either transfer the designs to customers while aboard ship, or at any number of on shore locations. The books designs reflected several of the six categories established above. Understanding the object and how the designs are arranged inside suggested that tattooists in the nineteenth century were not concerned with creating cohesive categorized sample books, but did lump some drawings together.

Beginning with an elaborate portrait of 'Young America,' (Fig. 49) the potential client navigated through a series of interspersed patriotic, religious, professional, and sentimental images. Expressions of the national shield and images of Columbia presented a number of options for the client within the patriotic category. Two representations of the crucifixion complete with crude cityscapes, and two versions of the "Rock of Ages" design made up the religious-themed offerings. The professional images pointed directly to the books maritime connection, a drawing of a three mast ship (Fig. 50) indicative of these possibilities. Despite the limited scope of the design vocabulary,

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[62] R.W.B Scutt and Christopher Goth, *Art, Sex, and Symbol: the Mystery of Tattooing* (New York: Cornwall Books, 2nd Edition 1984), 13

the variability of each design granted some degree of personal choice. This notion of choice followed in the designs that were directed toward individual feelings. Images related to sentiment within the Winterthur book followed the duel nature of the category assessed above. Lovers embracing, clasped hands, and portrait bracelets allowed the client several methods of expressing memory of a lover left behind (Figs. 30, 31, & 36). A single memorial design (Fig. 37), a young man at his mother's grave beneath a weeping willow, provided an interchangeable design that could be adapted for several lost family members. Sentimental images allowed the most variability in expressing the same feeling of any of the Winterthur books categories.

In the one small selection provided in the book, the range of drawings developed the categories and variations on which the tattoo trade was based. Patriotism, religion, sentiment, and professional affiliation are connected by images that are primarily linked to the sea, and the book offers a limited suggestion of popular tattoos, based solely on clientele. Despite these restrictions, the early designs in this book form a core design set that remained prominent as tattooing became firmly established on land. The professionalization of tattooing relied on the traditional sailor client base, but also allowed for a proliferation of designs that appealed to a broader range of clients. With established locations, tattooists could build stronger artistic reputations, and as their names spread, they occasionally attracted the interest of the mainstream press.

Early Professionalization

Martin Hildebrandt of New York was widely acknowledged as the first professional tattooist in America.[63] From his "atelier" on Oak Street, between Oliver and Jones, Hildebrandt entertained clients from all walks of life and even the occasional *New York Times* reporter. Tattoo scholars have long used the 1876 article, "Tattooing in New York," as evidence of Hildebrandt's existence.[64] The article provides the most complete contemporary account of early professional shop practice. The anonymous author touches on Hildebrandt's designs, tools and clientele.

> Mr. Hildebrandt, with the true modesty of an artist, exhibited his book of drawings. All you had to do in case you wanted to be marked for life was to select a particular piece, and in a short time, varying from fifteen minutes to and hour and a half, you could, presenting your arm or your chest as an animated canvas to the artist, have transferred on your person picture you wanted at the reasonable price of from fifty cents to $250. The subjects were various. If you were an Englishmen, a Frenchmen, a Swede, or a Dane, there was ready for you a young lady, entwining herself in the banners of her country, ready to leave the book, and stamp herself indelibly on your person for life. There were religious pieces, as the crucifixion, in true ascetic style, or if, on the contrary, you were a reckless sailor, and wanted a ballerina, there was a gay figure, in remarkably short skirts, pirouetting on one toe, which could be worked into your blood and flesh. Masonic emblems, Odd Fellows' signs, the hand of good fellowship, faith, hope, and charity, sailor's rights, anchors,

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[63] George Burchett writes, "It seems the Americans can claim the honor of having produced the first professional in the West and, in view of my own experience it does not surprise me that this tattooist reached the peak of his prosperity during a war. Martin Hildebrandt, an immigrant from Germany, arrived in Boston in 1846 and set himself up as a full-time practitioner soon afterwards. Between 1861 and 1865, according to his own reminiscences published in 1870 in New York, Hildebrandt worked in the thick of the battles between the armies of General Grant and General Lee." This was the lone reference to Hildebrandt's reminiscences. George Burchett, *Memoirs of a Tattooist* (London: Oldourne Book Co., 1958), 26

[64] The article was first quoted in a note by Albert Parry. Parry, *Secrets of a Strange Art,* 44.

> cannons, free trade, all more or less allegorically expressed, were all ready, when called for.[65]

Hildebrandt's images showed a great deal more variety and complexity than those in the Winterthur flash book. He was not alone in these offerings and J. Bombay's book, for example, included two ballerina designs (Figs. 51 & 52). Due to the prevalence of initials on the bodies of seafarers one might expect that there would have been an interest in text, but there was no evidence in either books or the description to support this assumption.

As described in the *Times,* Hildebrandt's drawings contrasted with his British counterpart, D.W. Purdy. Tattoo historian Steve Gilbert noted that Purdy entered the professional ranks when he opened up shop in North London in 1870. Remembered by his publication *Tattooing: how to tattoo, what to use, etc.* (London: Medical Tracts, 1896), Purdy offered ideas about the proper subjects for tattooing. He concluded that portraits of sweethearts, the Tower Bridge, and the Houses of Parliament, the Imperial Institute, and British battle ships were appropriate.[66] While Hildebrandt's designs did not share the larger scale of Purdy's designs, they do offer a sense of the increased complexity that historian B.R. Burg associated with professionalization.[67] Certainly images from the maritime repertoire appear as part of the professional cannon, but

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[65] "Tattooing in New York," *New York Times* January 16, 1876, p. 10.

[66] A portion of Purdy's work was reproduced in Steve Gilbert, *Tattoo History: A Source Book* (New York: Juno Books, 2000), 103

[67] Burg, 72

increasingly tattoo designs meant to attract customers on land began to find a way into design books.

Technically Purdy and Hildebrandt worked in the same manner. Before the era of mechanization, practitioners relied on hand tools to apply their designs to the body. Hildebrandt's tools "consist of some half dozen No. 12 needles bound together in a slanting form, which are dipped as the pricking is made into the best India ink or vermillion."[68] Once the number of needles was chosen, the bundle was created by binding the needles to a flattened portion of a wooden handle. Then, held in the hand like a pencil, Hildebrandt quickly jabbed the hand needle into the skin.

Skin color affected the art and was a key variable. Hildebrandt grew excited when talking about rare opportunities to tattoo men with beautiful white skin. In the tattoo world, skin was the artist's canvas and nature privileged some platforms over others. Because artists needed to establish and keep clientele, they could not be too particular about this issue, for Hildebrandt had competitors.

Hildebrandt professed to be unimpressed by his competition, a common theme among interviewed tattooists. Asked about them, he replied that there were,

> Some few in New York, but not in a regular way, and not being artists or knowing how to draw, they do very bungling work. They come to me for designs, which I furnish them, but I am sorry to state, they cannot carry them out.[69]

His sentiment echoed a common theme in tattooing of this period, and furthers a common assumption. With a limited client base, tattooists were fiercely competitive. Hildebrandt

[68] "Tattooing in New York," *New York Times* January 16, 1876, p. 10.

[69] Ibid.

named tattooers in Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia, but was rather disparaging about their respective talents. As portrayed in the article, Hildebrandt was an artist among a group of hackers and stabbers. He was concerned with the limited color palate, dominated by blue and red. Although he does not say it directly to the reporter, this concern implicated his artistic goals. These clearly included, and are excited by the possibility of appealing to more upscale clients.

> Sometimes I have been sent for to meet a whole company of gentleman- yes Sir, men of style, living in handsome homes- and I have tattooed the whole lot of them- some kind of private mark which I won't mention.[70]

This instance was followed by a similar experience with some 'real ladies,' who came to him looking for permanent blush.

In both cases the artist's language reflected a clear class consciousness. Hildebrandt revealed that while he had upper class clients, they were reluctant to visit the shop. In Europe a craze for tattooing developed among the upper classes by the 1880s. This craze was spurred by travelers, most notably King Edward VII, and hinged on associations with the exotic and the orient. Savvy British tattooists, specifically Southerland MacDonald, organized their shops to provide domesticated Oriental experiences. MacDonald's own shop was located on fashionable Jermyn Street and was part of a Turkish bath complex.[71] In America similar shops do not seem to have developed. Hildebrandt's experiences suggested that connections to the lower class were

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[70] "Tattooing in New York," *New York Times* January 16, 1876, p. 10.

[71] Gambier Bolton described MacDonald as the best tattooist the world had ever seen in an 1897 article in Strand Magizine. Gambier Bolton, "Pictures on the Skin," *Strand* XIII (1897), 431.

not only divorced from elite tattooing, but also avoided. Fringe neighborhoods supported the daily trade of American tattooists, but if artists wanted to expand, they had to be willing to move. Tattooists may have been willing to shift physical locations, but had strong beliefs about particular body locations.

Hildebrandt resisted commissions to do facial tattoos, a point illustrated by a visit to a first class hotel in 1876. There a man who claimed to have spent his whole life among Native Americans demanded to have his face tattooed. Hildebrandt's reluctance was significant. The association of facial tattoos, which were the least favored by sailors, was perceived as transgressive, as something un-American, and perhaps, more strongly, non-White. Moreover, despite the need for clients, the artist remained in control of his work. Hildebrandt declined those commissions that he deemed inappropriate or too difficult. Returning to the ladies, who also wanted a type of facial tattoos, we get another example of refused service. The artist refused the job based on the limitation of color. This drives the question: when are facial tattoos appropriate. Clearly if color allowed, Hildebrandt would have tattooed the ladies' faces, but was disinterested in the emulation of foreign cultural markings. Perhaps Hildebrandt was also afraid of making a mistake, but the examples pointed to conflicting cultural constructions.

Finally, the reporter recorded some key information. Summer was the busiest time for the tattooist. Religious beliefs did not matter, as members of all sects received tattoos. "Having given me in a quiet way all the details of his curious art, restraining the desire on my own part of having a remarkably pretty device entitled 'young America'

tattooed into my arm, I left Mr. Martin Hildebrandt the artist."[72] The reporter paid New York's first professional tattooist a small, but worthy, compliment. This article stood as the best lens through which to view Hildebrandt as a representative early tattoo professional. His tools, design repertoire, and artistic inclination reflected the evolution from amateur to professional.

From Spectacle to Profession: Tattooing in the Carnival

The use of tattooed human sideshows also helped increase the professional ranks of tattooists.[73] At dime museums, carnivals, and even as advertisements, tattooed men and women spread the art throughout the country. Carnivals carried tattooing into the American heartland. Literary accounts of savage tattoo practices wet the American appetite and imparted tactical advice for the emergent side show profession.

The origins of the tattooed western body as spectacle hinge on stories of confinement and assault. In 1828, John Rutherford exploited a fictional story of his capture by the Maori and subsequent suffering at their hands. His story attracted a sympathetic audience and helped him to forge a career as an exhibition.[74] Steven

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[72] "Tattooing in New York," *New York Times* January 16, 1876, p. 10.

[73] The period of 1880-1920 was classified as the Carnival era of tattooing. Michael Atkinson, *Tattooed: The Sociogenesis of a Body Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 33.

[74] Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 242. Rutherford was also one of the few Mokoed Europeans. H.G. Robley offered a good deal of information related to Mokoed Europeans. H.G. Robley, *Moko: The Art and History of Maori Tattooing* (1896; repr., Twickenham, Middlesex, United Kingdom: Senate, 1998), 102-113

Otterman described the sideshow stories as "fantastic biographies," melding tales of adventure with the visual titillation of the tattooed body for maximum effect. Seven years after Rutherford, America received its first tattooed exhibition. James F. O'Connell, following the precedent set by European exhibitors, profited from stories of his stay on the Micronesian island of Ponape. Circus promoter Dan Rice marketed O'Connell in 1835 and O'Connell toured the country for twenty years. Published stories amplified his notoriety. O'Connell owed a great deal to Horace Holden, whose own account of tattooing was published in 1836.[75] During the later part of his career, O'Connell may also have benefited from public knowledge of the Oatman girls. Capitalizing on accounts of foreign cultures and embroidering his experience with tall tales, O'Connell entertained audiences as a living exhibition. His experience helped promote a lucrative sideshow for circuses.

The sensational aspects of forced tattooing stimulated the interest of the medical profession. The *British Medical Journal* published a report from the International Fair in Vienna relating the story of remarkable tattooing over the entire body of a Greek man. The account states, "Seven years ago he and five companions were taken prisoners by one of the wild tribes of Asia," and subsequently tattooed.[76] This man would soon be known as Prince Constantine (spelled in a variety of ways), one of the most successful made freaks, and a product of the P.T. Barnum publicity machine. Constantine appeared

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[75] Stephan Otterman, "On Display: Tattooed Performers in the United States and Germany," in *Written on the Body,* 198-199.

[76] Reproduced in *The London Times,* November 3, 1871, page 3, column A. The account also appeared in the *New York Times* on November 20, 1871, page 3.

in America in 1870, 1876, and 1880, receiving $1,000 a week for his services. Part of his pay went to the hiring of a personal lecturer, who dazzled audiences with stories of arms dealing, treasure hunts, and Constantine's ultimate capture and tattooing at the hands of the Chinese. Constantine's immediate successor with Barnum and Bailey was John Hayes. He took Constantine's method a step further, marketing himself as the product of native, rather than foreign, savagery. Hayes relied on the public knowledge of the Oatman sisters, and capitalized on a story involving capture by Indians and 154 days of subsequent torture. Hayes had falsified his claim and was actually tattooed by Samuel O'Reilly.[77]

Tattooed westerners who exploited their tattoos for commercial gain constructed stories that would ignite viewer compassion for the violation of their bodies. The body narrated a tale of captivity in which the victim, now a spectacle, was always forcibly tattooed by some 'other.' By the 1880s tattooed women were also becoming fixtures on the carnival scene in America, and their stories fed into the same sensational devices, although with a gendered twist. As Christine Braunberger noted,

> Their appeal superseded that of tattooed men for the titillation they engender in their audiences; not only were "Tattooed women" publicly displaying themselves with fewer clothes than women in any other line, but the stories describing how they became tattooed typically consisted of tattoo rape.[78]

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[77] Otterman, 200-202

[78] Christine Braunberger, "Revolting Bodies: The Monstrous Beauty of Tattooed Women," *NWSA Journal* Volume 12, No. 2 (Summer 2000), 9

The display of tattooed women succeeded through the sensational exhibition of the sexualized body, responding to the saturated market of male sideshows.[79] Women, couples, and even tattooed families added new twists to the business, and tattooists worked to find a niche in an expanding market.

Competition and greed prompted ingenuity. Before arriving in New York, and becoming Samuel O'Reilly's foe, 'Electric' Elmer E. Getchell lived in Boston and thought of a novel way to make a few extra bucks. In a letter to tobacconists on February, 16, 1884, Getchell offered unfinished space on current customers for decoration with company logos. He quoted prices of $300 for the upper back and $350 for the lower.[80]

Constantine and other sideshow exhibits grounded the tattoo on American soil and stimulated a generation of young tattooists, including both Gus and Charlie Wagner (unrelated). Despite a common catalyst, the two Wagner's engaged their interest in tattooing in distinct career paths. Charles Wagner remained in New York, working first under Samuel O'Reilly and later taking over his shop. Gus Wagner, more fully inspired by "Fantastic Biography" traveled the world, returning to America as a multifaceted oddities man. Both remained connected to the carnival throughout their respective careers, and traveled different roads.[81]

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[79] For more on the associations of the tattooed female and the prostitute see, Jane Caplan, "Educating the Eye: The Tattooed Prostitute," in *Sexology in Culture,* ed. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 101-115

[80] "Another Burst of Boston Genius," *New York Times,* February 21, 1884, 8

Samuel O'Reilly trained Charles Wagner, who presumably used the electric needle from the outset of his career. Wagner established his first professional shop not far from O'Reilly, at 223½ Bowery in Chatham Square. Wagner received the second patent for the tattoo machine while working at this shop. In 1908, Wagner took over 11 Chatham Square, O'Reilly's former shop, remaining there until his death in the 1950s.[82] Wagner was adept at making money from tattooing. For a time he exhibited himself as a sideshow. He also operated a supply company and dabbled in animal marking, cosmetic tattooing, and removal. He based his supply business on machines built by William Jones, beginning in the 1910s.[83] Credited with creating an estimated 50 tattooed side show workers, perhaps his largest achievement in the business, Wagner surpassed his mentor Samuel O'Reilly. Wagner may have had close ties to side show bosses, facilitating a continual customer base. Many photos of Wagner and his patrons survive, including several tattooed side show workers employed by Barnum and Bailey. In addition to his business activities, Wagner trained several younger tattooists, including Adam Ogent, Lew "the Jew" Alberts, and Joe Van Hunt.[84]

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[81] Alan Govenar figured as the authority of all information regarding Gus Wagner. Alan Govenar, "Introduction," in *Flash from the Past: Classic American Tattoo Designs,* ed. Don Ed Hardy (Honolulu, Hawaii: Hardy Marks Publications/Paul Rogers Tattoo Research Center), 10-13.

[82] Chuck Eldridge, *Archive File no. 6* (Berkley, California: The Tattoo Archive, 1988)

[83] Lyle Tuttle, *Wm. Jones: The man and His Machine* (San Francisco, California: The Tattoo Art Museum, 1990), 3-6.

[84] Chuck Eldridge, *Archive File no. 6* (Berkley, California: The Tattoo Archive, 1988)

Photographs of the young men tattooed for the circus were the best avenues for addressing Wagner's work. The placement of images and the variety pointed to Wagner's shop practices, give a sense of Wagner's visual repertoire, and provided some clues about the designs commonly used for the side show. These photographs were not always clear, but they did show the large scale chest and stomach designs. One young man was tattooed with the Rock of Ages on his stomach and Christ's head on his chest, just in time for the 1905 Barnum and Bailey season. Photographed twice, both times in a studio, the boy, named Andy Stuertz, appears no older than sixteen. In one image he lies on a bear skin rug, with Wagner administering the final touches to his right leg (Fig. 53). Above the boys waist is a sign, reading Tattooing by Prof. Wagner, 223 ½ Bowery, N.Y. City. Wagner, for all his tattoos, was clothed in a work shirt and suspenders, his head topped with a cap. The second image of Andy shows the boy standing, hands clasped at the midsection. This image captures the size of the "Rock of Ages" design, covering the young man's entire belly.

As Wagner had apprentices, he may have administered only part of the total tattooing. Another studio shot showed Wagner at work on a young man alongside Lew Alberts (Figure 54). One man worked on the legs; the other worked the arm. The tattoos were different than those on Andy Stuertz. The chest was filled with a ship, the belly with flags, and the thigh covered with pharos horses. These large scale images were interchangeable. Ed Gilbert was tattooed with pharos horses on the stomach in 1905 (Fig. 55), while Ed Stoltenberg received them on his chest in 1909 (Fig. 56). The variable placement forms the only individualized element of Wagner's body suit. Each

customer is covered with similar imagery, and went on tour as a walking advertisement of Wagner's design repertoire. While Wagner did not travel with the circus or carnival, he certainly left his mark on them. His sideshow performers exhibit American rather than exotic images and received their tattoos in the relative comfort of a Chatham Square studio.

By contrast, Gus Wagner was a multifaceted entertainer. He displayed his body, lectured about his travels, and offered tattoos to any interested observer. What prompted his transformation, physically, and presumably professionally, remained a mystery. He left home in 1896 and returned in 1902 having traveled the world as a merchant seaman. During this time he acquired a full body suit of tattoos and the stories to match. The *Newark Tribune* announced,

> Mr. Gus Wagner, globetrotter and tattoo artist brother of Nick Wagner of Pine Street is in the city and will remain here for a short time. For the present, he will locate at 15 South Side of the Square, where all who desire to see his work and take advantage of this skill can find him. He's an artist in his line and a visit to him will satisfy one that he can do what he claims. Tattooing is quite a fad and many ladies as well as gentleman have adopted it and their persons bear everlasting symbols of the art. Mr. Wagner came here from Marietta where he tattooed 460 persons, giving satisfaction in each case.[85]

The article captures the duality of Gus Wagner's career as a curiosity. He was both globetrotter and tattoo artist. Following Constantine's model, Wagner galvanized spectators with his stories and his body. Throughout his travels he amassed a large collection of ephemera including press clippings, letters, and business cards. He later enclosed them all in a ten inch deep leather bound book embossed, "Souvenirs of the

[85] *Newark Tribune* December 18, 1902. This cutting was in the Souvenir book and was also reproduced in Govenar, "Introduction," *Flash from the Past*, 10

Travels and Experiences of the Original Gus Wagner: Professional Globetrotter, World's Champion Tattoo Artist and Tattooed Man." The title expressed Wagner's chief activities, but not his range as a curiosity enthusiast. Arranged thematically, Wagner's collected ephemera conveyed his various interests and activities. He may have been primarily a traveler, tattooist, and tattooed man, but he also studied (though perhaps casually) other methods of body modification (such as scarification and piercing), taxidermy, and reptiles. As a spectacle Wagner was something of a throwback. His stories were more akin to those of O'Connell, Rutherford, and Constantine than the false biographies of the studio produced freaks. His apparent refusal to adopt the modern, electric tattoo machine further authenticated his story.

As "World's Champion Hand Tattooer," Gus set himself apart from his competition. He offered patrons an exotic experience tied to ancient practices rather than a direct interaction with modern electrical invention. Methods differed, but Gus offered the same array of designs as his competitors. He carried these in books and individual sheets of paper. The individual sheets could be hung quickly in a makeshift studio to attract the attention of customers. The hand tools worked anywhere, not just in a studio with access to electricity.

Just as his body, and the bodies of other exhibitors, elicited excitement, so too did the designs. Borrowing from carnival vernacular these sheets would become known as flash, attracting immediate visual attention.[86] Whereas earlier artists like Hildebrandt and sailor amateurs showcased designs through books and relied on word of mouth for

[86] Flash as a description for tattoo designs derived from the carnival use, meaning "Visually Grabbing to the people." McCabe, "Flash and Flashbacks," 36.

customers, the new tattooists worked in high traffic areas to maximize business. The brightly drawn designs advertised their art.

Assessing who utilized 'flash' first was nearly impossible to answer. Tattoo studios decorated their walls with some images from their beginnings. An image titled, "The Professor of Tattooing at Work," in the May 18, 1888 edition of *Harper's Weekly* depicted a neatly dressed Professor Thomas and his sailor client in a South Street studio. Thomas, according to the reporter, had been in the trade for 37 years (where and how was not revealed). Willingly sharing stories of tattooing merchants and elite ladies, Thomas served as an exemplar of the art. The accompanying drawing showed Thomas working a design into the left forearm of a sailor. The two were seated in Windsor chairs, a bench between supporting two ink pots and a rag. A design book lay open on a table behind the professor and the walls are adorned with six individual drawings. Included are a personification of Liberty, an image of the Statue of Liberty and another featuring a young couple enclosed in a wreath.[87] These drawings correspond to the described designs of Hildebrandt and the books of sailor amateurs. "The Professor of Tattooing at Work," suggested that some tattoo designs were used to decorate the shop, but that the bulk of the images remained in books through which customers leafed.

In contrast to this early shop, later tattooists more aggressively utilized their designs as a means of attracting customers. While contrived, an image of J.J. Garrison (location unknown) sat with his tools against a backdrop of flash sheets (Fig. 57). Flash

[87] David A. Curtis, "A Stroll through South Street," *Harpers Weekly,* May, 18, 1889. As a side note, on May 30, 1890 a Professor Edwin Thomas was sentenced to four years and eight months in prison for shooting Jennie O'Conner. "City and Suburban News," *New York Times,* May, 30, 1890

featuring Christ, snakes, Geisha girls, and photographs of tattooed sideshows peppered the walls. Another sheet at Garrison's knee exhibits anchors, pierced hearts, and compass stars. Garrison's designs reflected the expanding visual vocabulary employed by the tattoo artist from the 1910s and beyond. Drawing in a book, Garrison proved that sheets and books coexist. In contrast to Thomas' shop, the Garrison portrait shows an increased reliance on flash sheets.

By placing more images on the walls, tattooists transformed the entire shop into an active participant in the tattoo experience. Combined with the new electric machine, the designs that covered the walls broadened the sensory environment of modern tattoo parlors. The buzzing of the electric needle added its own note to the growing lo-fi environment of industrial America.[88] By moving images from books to the walls, tattoo artists changed the rhythms of picking a design from a private to a public experience. Flash elicited immediate reaction and helped expand the commercial aspirations of the "Professor's" of the art.

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In the Shop and on the Road

As the two Wagners illustrate, tattooists working in America during the first quarter of the twentieth century had two geographical options. They could work the transient carnival circuit or establish fixed shops in urban areas, confined to societal

[88] "Applied to soundscape studies a lo-fi environment is which signals are overcrowded, resulting in masking or lack of clarity. R. Murray Schaffer, *Soundscapes: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1977), 272.

fringes in both cases. In New York tattooists clustered around Chatham Square, on the southern end of the Bowery, steps away from Hildebrandt's first atelier. Jacob Riis formulated a dark vision of the neighborhood in *How the Other Half Lives,*

> The sites the young stranger sees, and the company he keeps, in the Bowery are not of a kind to strengthen any moral principal he may have brought away from home, and by the time his money is gone, with no work yet in sight, and he goes down a step, a long step, to the fifteen cent lodging house, he is ready for the tempter whom he finds waiting for him there, reinforced by the contingent of ex-convicts returning from the prisons after having served out their sentences for robbery or theft. Then it is that something he has been waiting for turns up. The police returns have a record of it. "In nine cases out of ten," says Inspector Bynes, "he turns out a thief or a burglar, if, indeed he does not sooner or later become a murderer." As a matter of fact, some of the most atrocious of recent murders have been the result of schemes of robbery hatched in these houses, and so frequent and bold have become the depredations of the lodging house thieves, that the authorities have been compelled to make public demand for more effective laws that shall make them subject at all times to police regulation.[89]

Riis' gloomy description denied the vibrant leisure life on view and for sale. The neighborhood teemed with pool halls, theaters, boarding houses, bars, barber shops, tattoo parlors, and dime museums.[90]

> A fat woman was almost a necessity to a museum, too. Why any one should want to look at a mere obscene lump of fat weighing five or six hundred pounds is beyond the comprehension of a balanced mind, as is also the morbid desire to see deformities, monstrosities, and mutilations, human and animal; but it is so. Neither could any museum hope to survive without a giant – or at least, they seemed to think so: and a dwarf was likewise among the commonest attractions, as were the bearded lady, the wild man of Borneo, the armless wonder, the tattooed man, the horse with a snake in his eye, the Circassian beauty with a shock of hair approximately as large as a hayrick, a snake charmer, usually female, and the India rubber or elastic skin man, who with thumb and finger

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[89] Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890; repr., New York: Dover Books, 1971), 57

[90] Reginald Marsh's *Tattoo and a Shave* (1931) captured the Bowery scene, and though outside of the time frame of this study was worth a look.

> pulled the skin of face or body out several inches and let it snap back with a sound that was dreadful to hear.[91]

Like the displayed bodies on the carnival circuit, tattooed men in dime museums captured the attention of passers by and visibility promoted the art. The dime museum and its human displays also underscored the very public atmosphere of neighborhoods that Michael McCabe has defined as "Fun zones."[92] Teeming with people and noise, neighborhoods like the Bowery contrasted with the quiet, private spaces of the genteel classes. Historian Paul E. Johnson reflected on the formation of classed neighborhoods in 1830s Rochester, pointing out that privacy formed a key component of city division.[93]

Some tattooists worked on clients outside of the shop. Tom Berg of San Francisco explicitly mentioned his willingness to do outside work on his business cards (Fig. 58). Berg and partner Hasberg "expert tattooers," worked at number 5 537 Pacific Street included a note reading, "Parties wishing work done privately please drop us a postcard."[94] The method of contact extended the private feel of the transaction and

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[91] Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Bowery Days: The Chronicles of a Famous Street,* (New York: Dr. Appleton and Company, 1931) 474.

[92] McCabe, *New York City Tattoo,* 16.

[93] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 48-55

[94] Burg's business card was one of several cards in Gus Wagner's collected souvenirs. The tattooists also mentioned that they offered American and Oriental designs, sold designs, and worked by both hand and machine.

assured anonymity for the customer. Albert Parry also noted that some society folks in New York sent servants down to the Bowery to arrange home visits.[95]

If their locations did not contribute to a highly diversified shop clientele, tattooists in the Bowery did have varied competition. In the first decade of the twentieth century alone at least four tattooists had shops near Chatham Square. Samuel O'Reilly, Charles Wagner, Lew Alberts, and Elmer Getchell all vied for business.[96] Getchell and O'Reilly were clear rivals. Known as Electric Elmer, Getchell seemed more than happy to disparage other members of the tattoo community as well. A 1902 article from the Sunday supplement of the *New York Tribune* championed Getchell as the inventor of the machine, a consummate artist whose professionalism far outweighed Charles Wagner's operation. Wagner had recently been arrested for tattooing underage youths; a fate that Getchell (spelled Glitchell in the paper) declared "serves them [amateurs] right for practicing on kids." According to the article, Getchell believed that tattooing was an art ranking with music, poetry, and painting. He extolled the artistic work as positive decoration and anesthetized customers by dulling their bodies with cocaine. Description of Getchell's designs, however, did not distinguish his artistic creations from the designs of the other local tattooists.[97]

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[95] Parry, 104

[96] O'Reilly was at no. 11 Chatham Square, Alberts at 5 Chatham Square, Wagner at 23 ½ Bowery, and Getchell also worked at Chatham Square.

[97] *New York Tribune,* Illustrated Supplement, Sunday, October 26, 1902 reproduced by the American Newspaper Repository, www.oldpapers.com

The close quarters of fringe neighborhoods like the Bowery, and in the Carnival circuit helped to standardize popular design conventions via pattern books and flash sheets. Technological shifts spurred the supply trade by expanding the market for a central object in the tattoo business, the electric needle. Extant business cards suggested that designs were part of the competitive process, almost all advertising designs for sale.

* * *

Tools and Techniques

Tattooing techniques figured prominently in the general associations of the art. From a literary standpoint, Melville's accounts highlighted and almost overemphasized the relative pain involved. The notion of pain developed in literature and in connection with the savage helped drive the sensationalism of early tattoo sideshows. By the time of Charles and Gus Wagner the two methods of tattooing – hand and electric - began to work in opposition. Ultimately the electric needle was the keystone of the supply industry, driving the commercialization of the trade.

While the tattoo died with its owner, the artist's tools and designs often survived to document the methods used for tattooing. Dermatologist Ronald Scutt outlined four methods of tattooing used before the standardization of the practice. These techniques are described in descending order of crudeness, ending in the precursor of the methods popular today. The first method involved cutting or pricking the skin followed by rubbing the chosen dye into the wound. This primitive method certainly achieved the goal of marking the body, and accounts report the creation of well developed designs. A second method burned the design into the body. This technique, popular among the Greeks and

Romans, introduced the pigment into the skin via a red hot implement. The natives of Greenland employed a method of drawing soot-covered threads through the skin with needles. Finally, the most common method used sharp-pointed instruments dipped in dye. These needles were struck repeatedly into the skin until the design was complete. Many cultures employed the needle technique, the basis for modern electric tattooing.[98] While the latter technique sums up the methods employed by the artists outlined in this study, it remains important to discuss other procedures. Contrast between Western and well-known "other" methods allowed Western artists to advocate, in the words of the popular press, a gentle or painless art.[99]

Pain remained the primary sensation associated with tattooing, and was prominent in travel accounts. Along with anthropological literature, these accounts introduced Americans to foreign tattoo practices and varied systems of marking. The cutting method described briefly above was one of the most commonly reported techniques. Narratives, like Melville's *Typee,* relating tales of ship wreck, abandonment and foreign encounter provide a valuable resource in establishing the various methods of tattooing.

Published in 1836 Holden's impressively titled, *A Narrative of the Shipwreck, Captivity and Sufferings of Horace Holden and Benj. H. Nute; who were Cast Away in the American Ship Mentor, on the Pelew Islands, in the Year 1832; And for two years Afterwards were Subjected to Unheard of Sufferings among the Barbarous Inhabitants of Lord North's Island,* contained one such account. Among the sufferings Holden was

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[98] Scutt, 14

[99] "The Gentle Art of Tattooing," *New York Times,* July 21, 1901, SM 3

subjected to under the hands of the natives was tattooing. He provided the reader with a lengthy and detailed account of the operation.

> We were in the first place securely bound to the ground, and there held fast by our tormentors. They then proceeded to draw with a sharp stick the figures designed to be imprinted on the skin. This done, the skin was thickly punctured with a little instrument made of sharpened fish bones, and somewhat resembling a carpenter's adz in miniature, but having teeth, instead of a smooth sharp edge. The instrument was held within an inch or two from the flesh, and stuck into it rapidly with a piece of wood, applied to it in such a manner as to cause it to rebound with every stroke. In this way our breasts and arms were prepared; and subsequently the ink, which was made of vegetable found on the Island and called by them the "Savvan," was applied. The operation caused such an inflammation of our bodies, that only a portion could be applied at a time; and as soon as the inflammation was abated another portion was done, as fast as we could bear it, till our bodies were covered. It was effectively done; for to this day the figures remain as distinct as they were when first imprinted, and the marks with be carried to the grave. They were exceedingly anxious to perform the operation upon our faces, but this we would not submit to, telling them that sooner than have it done we would die in resisting them. Among themselves, the oldest people had the greatest quantity of tattooing, and the younger class less.[100]

Holden's experience of the pricking method proved its effectiveness in forming permanent designs. However, his language underscored the torment associated with the operation. Beginning with scratching the image on to the skin with a sharp stick, the entire process revolved around discomfort. The operation and the recovery could cause extreme agony for the patient. The location of Holden's tattoos did not differentiate him from other seamen. He shared a distinct distaste for facial tattoos with other westerners. The ramifications of tattooing white faces were addressed above, but it seemed prudent to consider methods of facial tattooing before exploring methods more typical in the West.

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[100] Horace Holden, *A Narrative of Shipwreck, Captivity and Sufferings of Horace Holden and Benj. H. Nute; Who Were Cast Away in the American Ship Mentor, on the Pelew Islands, in the Year 1832; And for two Years Afterwards Were Subjected to Unheard of Sufferings Among the Barbarous Inhabitants of North's Island* (Cooperstown, New York: H. & E. Phinney, 1841), 102-3.

Maori tattooing has garnered the most attention of any facial tattooing.[101] Captivating both because of the elaborate geometric designs and harsh operation, Maori Moko, provided some of the inspiration for 1856 Owen Jones' treatise "The Ornament of Savage Tribes." Jones praises the naturalness of the "savage" ornament. In a footnote to the text Jones writes, "The tattooing on the head which we introduce from the Museum at Chester is very remarkable, as showing that in this very barbarous practice the principles of the very highest ornamental art are manifest, every line upon the face is the best adapted to develop natural features." Jones drove home two points; first, Moko tattooing was decidedly of aesthetic value, and second, Mokoed heads became popular curiosities in western museums.[102] On the technical side the Maori did little that differed from Holden's captors. Allan Taylor describes the method.

> Applied with a hafted sharp chisel (like a miniature adze) made of albatross bone, incised tattoo consisted of designs deeply grooved into the flesh and colored a deep blue with a pigment of burnt *kauri* tree gum. Restricted to maturity, the incising caused considerable swelling of the lacerated flesh; consequently, only a small amount of tattoo was undertaken at a time.[103]

The similarities between Holden's and Taylor's descriptions were clear, especially in the tools. While Holden did not detail the rubbing of the ink into the skin, there is no doubt

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[101] Steve Gilbert offered a simple introduction to Maori tattooing. Gilbert, 66-75. Peter Cathercole presented a brief introduction to various types of Moko tattoos. Peter Cathercole, "Contexts of Maori Moko," in *Marks of Civilization,* 171. The most comprehensive book on Polynesian tattooing, including Maori, was produced by Alfred Gell. Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

[102] Owen Jones, "Ornament of Savage Tribes" (1856) in *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings: 1750-1940,* ed. Isabelle Frank (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 299.

[103] Alan Taylor, *Polynesian Tattoo* (The institute for Polynesian Studies, 1981) 30.

that this measure was taken. The existence of tattooed heads in collections across Europe expresses the longevity of the Moko process, and the craze for collecting heads spanned into the early twentieth century. [104] By this time professional tattooists were well established in both London and New York, employing a related but altogether different method of imprinting the skin.

Prior to the electrification of the art, American tattoo artists used hand needles to insert ink underneath the skin. These needles were held much like a pencil and driven into taught skin at an angle. The number of needles varied depending on the task, and could be anywhere from one into the twenties. Constructing the hand devices required the flattening of one edge of the handle and lashing on the needles.

Professor Louis Morgan, a San Francisco tattoo artist based at 41 Market Street, devoted a chapter of his 1912 *The Modern Tattooist* to implements. He believed that the Japanese were the first to tattoo with metal needles and that other nations soon followed that practice until it eventually spread to England. According to Morgan, the Japanese constructed their tools with long, carved bone or ivory handles. In contrast the American tools were shorter and resemble a lead pencil. They could be made of wood, bone or

[104] Moko continued to fascinate the British forty years after Jones' work. General Horatio G. Robley published his broad study in 1896, marking the high point of British fervor for the tattooed heads. Interestingly Robley sold his collection of 35 heads to the Natural History Museum in New York. The acquisition gave New York more examples than any other city in the world. "Weird Heads of Mason's Greet New York: Unique Collection from New Zealand Bearing Strange Emblems of Savagery Added to Natural History Museum," *The New York Times,* July 21, 1907, C4

ivory (Fig. 59).[105] A sampling of extant nineteenth and early-twentieth-century needles showed that equipment varied in appearance, but was similarly similar in size.

Gus Wagner's tools exhibited the diversity of decoration and shape possible in tattoo hand tools. Through travel he picked up traditional hand tattooing techniques, and marked himself as a world champion hand tattooist. His extant equipment contained seven distinct sets of hand needles. The first type was the most basic; a set of ten with handles the size of a chop-stick (Fig. 60). Each of these was decorated with red paint and the needles were attached with string to the flattened portion of the top. The butt end of the handles was flat. A second type was also very basic. This variety featured a single needle protruding from a rounded handle with a flat butt end (Fig. 61). Wagner had two of these needles, presumably for very delicate work, of different lengths. One was 5 ¾ inches and the other 4 inches in length.

The remaining five needle types were more elaborate. At 5 ½ inches long, one example had a striking wooden handle with a carved snake wrapped around the handle (Fig. 62). The head of the handle held six or seven needles, again lashed with string to a flattened side. The butt end of the handle tapered slightly, but was flat at the end. Concentric rings embellished the whole handle. Similar rings appear on a second carved wood handle (Fig. 63). Rather than a snake, this example featured a small lizard grasping the handle. It was one inch longer than the previous example and had a more thoroughly defined flat end. This handle has ten needles lashed to a flattened portion of the head. A final wood carved handle had an eagle developed in high relief at the butt end. It was 6

[105] Morgan, 23-4

⅜ inches long and carried six needles. Wider than the others, this handle had an almost anthropomorphic finger piece at the head.

The last type of needle handle in the Wagner collection differs in material and shape (Fig. 64). Unlike the other varieties which have blunt ends, this type had a pointed base. Carved in ivory with pierced circles at the head, the set of four handles are all six inches in length. Here, the method of use was clearer than in the other examples. With no suitable space for hammering the design into the skin, Wagner must have held the handle like a pencil and pricked the design into the dermis. Three four-inch needles of ivory were also in the collection. These were unadorned and finished in a rounded base.

Professor Morgan believed the hand method to be the easiest option for the beginner (and prior to 1891 it was the only option). He assured readers that the best tattooists had learned via this method and progressed to electricity once proficient. Offering simple direction Morgan wrote,

> To tattoo with hand needles, hold the instrument in the right hand like holding a pencil. With the other hand stretch the skin where the tattoo is to be made and rest the little finger of the right hand on the place directly below the place to tattoo. This will give the right position and angle for the needle. Then prick the needle lightly and rapidly into the skin, first making the lines and following up with the shades. Afterward, put in the colors as desired. The needles should penetrate the cuticle and cutis, but not any deeper. It is not necessary to work into the flesh. That would cause unnecessary soreness.[106]

Morgan capably encapsulated the technique. For the outline he suggested using six to eight point needles and for the color ten to twelve point needles. The popularity of this suggestion was difficult to ascertain, but Gus Wagner's remaining needles all fell within the latter range. Based on the needle configuration it would seem that Wagner used

[106] Morgan, 42

fewer needles for the outline than the coloring, as the outline required less accuracy. He was one of the few tattooists that retained traditional hand techniques following the invention of the machine. His technique may be attributed to his training (he claimed to have learned the art in Burma) his marketing strategy, and his attachment to the carnival circuit where electricity was not always available.

The modern tattoo machine traces back to Thomas Edison's patent for the Autograph Printer in 1876. A device designed for making embroidery patterns, Edison's design was a battery powered rotary type machine. The machine punctured holes into paper creating stencils that allowed quick image transfer onto objects. In adapting Edison's machine, tattooist Samuel O'Reilly altered the device's function (Fig. 65). The machine allowed the modification of the body through electric means, an idea certainly not limited to the invention.

During the later part of the nineteenth century many Americans believed that direct interaction with electricity would rapidly modernize the body. Americans began to believe that the body could be altered, and as historian Caroline de la Pena asserts, "By the late nineteenth century, even if one did not agree with phrenology's findings, the idea that the body could be altered by applied energy was an acceptable proposition."[107] Weight machines, electrotherapy, and radio-active elixirs ushered the body into the machine age. Electrotherapy especially promoted new cultural inventions, denying science as people hunted out "cures that could place the body at the center of a dizzying,

[107] Carolyn Thomas de la Peña, *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 3

modernizing electrical age."[108] Driven by electricity O'Reilly's new tattoo needle tied into America's desire to mechanize, and to reiterate de la Pena, move into the modern era through direct interaction with the machine.

Born in Ireland, Samuel O'Reilly was practicing the art of tattooing in New York by 1875, and received patent # 464,801 for his tattoo machine in 1891. Retaining the same rotary device that powered Edison's design, there was scant evidence of O'Reilly's machine in actual use, although he was widely credited with its invention. At first, few practitioners adopted O'Reilly's machine. Perhaps tattooists were wary of electricity, or still had limited access to a source of power. Alternatively, O'Reilly may have wished to keep his innovation under tight control. In 1899, he took rival tattooist Elmer E. Getchell to court, alleging Getchell was illegally using the machine. Getchell argued that O'Reilly had invented nothing, and that credit should go to Edison. Competition at Chatham Square was heating up, a situation O'Reilly contributed to by bringing in apprentices.[109]

Charlie Wagner, O'Reilly's close associate, received the second United States Patent for a tattoo machine in 1904. He also modeled the design on an Edison invention, though not the original rotary device. In 1877, apparently dissatisfied with his original Autograph Printer, Edison designed a second. This received patent number #196,745 and was based on a dual electromagnetic coil device. A flexible band vibrated over the coils forcing the motion that created the stencil. This machine most closely resembled modern tattoo equipment and formed the basis of Charles Wagner's patent. The machine had a

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[108] Thomas de la Peña, 109

[109] "Tattoo Artists at War," *New York Times,* Jan 1, 1900, pg 4.

flexible band, onto which the needles were soldered, to vibrate through a tube featuring an ink chamber. This chamber permitted a greater duration of pricking between dips into the ink. Wagner's invention led to a small business (Fig. 66).[110]

The next tattoo machine patent went to Percy Waters of Detroit. His patent, issued in 1929 (#1,724,812), most closely resembles the machines that are used today. Waters employed the same two coil electromagnetic style as Wagner's invention, but put the coils in line with the frame. He also added a fingertip on and off switch, spark shield, and a needle setting for cutting tattoo stencils out of celluloid. Waters was one of the few tattooists to turn his design into a truly marketable product.[111] He sold machines prior to obtaining his patent, and in his 1925 supply catalogue, offered three models of "Electric Tattooing Machines." Each machine cost five dollars and appeared to offer the same thing. Included were the "Standard," "Special" and "Side Wheeler" models. Advertised as strong (meaning more powerful) and smooth running, the machines were fitted with hand wound magnets and ran on 6 to 8 volt dry cell or storage batteries.[112] The existence of three models in Water's supply catalogue highlighted the difficulty of assessing the technical breakthroughs of tattooing through patent information. Each of the three designs placed the coils in line with the frame, but the frame shapes differed.[113]

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[110] Tuttle, 4

[111] Chuck Eldridge offered the most basic history of the patents and workings of the early American tattoo machines. Eldridge, *The History of the Tattoo Machine* (Berkley, California: Tattoo Archive, 1982).

[112] Waters, 16-17.

[113] Ibid.

Electric tattoo machines were simple devices with multifaceted requirements. In contrast to the almost immediate proficiency allowed by hand tools, effect use of the electric machine was contingent on the successful integration of a complex set of skills. Learning to control the speed of the needles was one of the key components of both efficiency and quality of machine generated tattoos, as was the ability to gage the depth of the needle. Tattooists needed to keep their instruments clean, understand the basic electrical properties, and come to terms with how the machine would react against the skin. Thus, while the machine did speed up the process of tattooing, it also served to differentiate the skill of its users.[114] This was an important development in the history of tattooing, for the machine provided a standard object upon which a hierarchy of talent was established. Professor Morgan wrote, "When once a person has become proficient with the machines it is safe to say that he will cease to use the hand needles, except for occasional work," an observation that explained the existence of fine hand needles in Jack Warren's tool kit.[115]

Another tool of the tattooing trade was the stencil. Although not the exclusive method by which artists transferred a design onto the skin, stencils do comprise a portion of the extant material culture of the early nineteenth-century tattooist. Artists made stencils by tracing the chosen design on a piece of celluloid and, using a needle, created a shallow groove on the surface. Stencils were cut in the reverse of the design. Willow

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[114] For a more detailed account of the variables associated with using the machine refer to chapter 5 of Morgan, titled "Machine Using." Morgan, 45-49. Here Morgan addressed the central variables of using the machine including battery power, needle speed, needle depth, mixing ink and keeping the machine in clean working order.

[115] Morgan, 49

charcoal was used to transfer the image from the stencil to the skin. Applied to the stencil via a sponge the design was then firmly placed on the area receiving the tattoo. The tattooist could then prepare the outline beginning from the point that was most comfortable.[116]

The shift from hand tools to the mechanized needle achieved two important things for American tattooing: speed and commercialization. By reducing the time of transferring a chosen design to the skin, tattoo artists could work on more customers than ever. The higher speed of pricking allowed by the machine shortened working times and reduced pain. Secondly, the tattoo machine standardized the tools artists employed. Within limits, a practitioner could modify the invention to his or her liking, but the machine became a commodity around which supply houses, like Percy Water's formed. Whereas hand needles, especially Gus Wagner's chopstick tools, were simply and cheaply constructed, the electric machine required a degree of expertise for use and construction. Though many tattooists made there own machines, the specialization of tattoo materials facilitated the emergence of tattoo supply companies. These companies served a limited, but growing market of novice tattooists. Supply companies offered a diversified set of goods to secure a profit, and sold designs, ink, and even bandages. Designs made up the bulk of the sold material, and remained the key element of the tattoo trade.

[116] Morgan, 71-72

Conclusion

Bridged by the private moments afforded by literature and the public exhibition of the sideshow, tattooing slowly, but surely, moved into the American psyche. Evoking memory, home and love, tattooists exploited easily recognizable symbols, decorating skins with long understood designs. By the 1920s the tattooing profession had progressed from just pricking skin to supplying new practitioners with the necessary goods to expand the trade. The supply houses, like Percy Waters' in Detroit and E.J. Miller's in Norfolk, Virginia, spread machines, designs, and advice across the country furthering the scope of the tattoo. "Rock of Ages," dragons, and memorial designs visually represented a common notion of the American tattoo style. As an art, tattooing was both old and new, relying on popular Victorian parlor aesthetics and changing technology as hand needles gave way to the electric tattoo needle. This binary aligned tattooing with and against new twentieth-century values, marginalizing a complicated art.

Adolf Loos's diatribe against ornament of 1925, "Ornament and Crime," followed a common conflation of tattoos and criminals. Loos believed that an overabundance of ornament was a strain on cultural resources, and decoration a barbarous primitive activity at odds with functionality and restraint.[117] While the designs American tattooists utilized referred to eclectic Victorian taste, they made no attempt to reformulate the aesthetic based on burgeoning design trends. Indeed, the tattoo and Loos's austere notion of decorative arts stood in stark opposition. From the time of Owen Jones to Adolf Loos,

[117] Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime" (1910), in *The Theory of Decorative Art,* 288-294

tattooing lost its cache among elites, yet became more ingrained in the public imagination than in previous generations.

Carl Van Vechten's playful manipulation of the tattoo in his 1924 novel, *The Tattooed Countess,* captured the complicated associations of tattooing. The tattoo played a minimal role in the story that recounted the return of a hometown girl turned European aristocrat to her Iowa roots, but it accentuated an exotic and locally transgressive femininity complete with cigarettes and make-up. Set in 1898, *The Tattooed Countess,* focused on the difference between narrow minded small town gentility and fashion-driven aristocratic urban lifestyle. Countess Nattatorrini, known to the inhabitants of Maple Valley as Ella, caused a sensation in her home town, exciting questions about the nature of respectability. The lighthearted inclusion of the tattoo in Van Vechten's humorous account reflected public knowledge of the aristocratic craze for the tattoo and reinforced the gap between elite and middle-class sensibility. The Countess as spectacle related to more than just the tattoo, yet she visually represented difference in the context of Maple Valley just as much as the painted men and women of the contemporary circus.[118]

The press remained interested in the tattoo. In 1924 two New York Times articles debated the relative popularity of the art. An article printed on April 24 concluded that

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[118] Carl Van Vechten, *The Tattooed Countess: A Romantic Novel With a Happy Ending* (1924; repr., Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1987). Of the Countesses dress and tattoo Van Vechten wrote, "Her muttonlegged sleeves, which, bulging at the shoulder fitted the arm tightly below, terminated in ruffles of ivory lace, fashioned to fall across her hands, but owing to the excessive heat, she had turned them back, exposing a curious emblem which had been tattooed on her left arm just above the wrist: a skull, pricked in black, on which a blue butterfly perched, while a fluttering phylactery beneath bore the motto: Que sais-je?" Van Vechten, *The Tattooed Countess,* 2.

tattooing was on the rise.[119] Some months later, on September 24, the paper produced an article suggesting a change in the typical sailor. Apparently tattooing had become less prevalent immediately at the ports, the author struggling to find a shop on South Street. The tattooist he interviewed, one Professor Jack, was optimistic about the trade, however, asserting that all sorts of people were tattooed and explained the workings of his mechanical machine.[120] Tattooing as a mechanized process was celebrated in the September 14, 1930 edition of the *New York Times.* The article, "Tattooing Enters the Machine Age," credited O'Reilly with inventing the machine, the side show exhibition as the central force driving the tattoo trend, and explains the difference between skilled artists and "jabbers." The "jabbers" were those who employed purchased designs, and put tattooing in danger of decline. [121] Trade literature altered the way prospective tattooists learned about the art business, and gained access to materials.

The rise of supply catalogs, offering both goods and advice, may have helped birth a generation of "jabbers," but, as previously stated, also promoted the dissemination of quality standardized machines. A platform for selling designs, the supply catalogs offered one stop shopping for seasoned and would-be tattooists alike. Contrary to the *New York Times* beliefs, these companies emerged not from the Big Apple, but from other parts of the country. Martin Hildebrandt set early precedent for selling tattoo

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[119] "Tattooing is on Increase," *New York Times,* April 24, 1924, pg. 2

[120] "Little Tattooing Nowadays; Sailors' Ways Have Changed," *New York Times,* Sept. 28, 1924, pg. 24.

[121] "Tattooing Enters on Machine Age," *New York Times,* September 14, 1930, pg. 118

designs in the 1870s, and Charles Wagner successfully sold machines from New York, but entrepreneurial activity in the tattoo world was most fully developed by the likes of Percy Waters, from Detroit, and E.J. Miller, operating out of Norfolk, Virginia.

In his 1925 supply catalog, Detroit's Percy Water's offered a large array of design sheets in two sizes, 15" by 20" and 18" by 24". Water's advertised that no two of these sheets were alike, covered in dragons, memory pieces, eagles, professional badges, and other popular images. The smaller forty-eight available sheets, were hand colored "display sheets," the larger ones, forty total, sold as printed outlines only. Waters' colored designs were calculated to prompt immediate customer response, a "flash" of interest. Writing, "A neat painted flash is the success of your business," Waters pointed squarely to the centrality of tattoo images to tattooists profit margins. For Waters, the sale of design sheets certainly increased his worth. The "hand colored" sheets sold for three dollars a piece, reduced to two dollars and fifty cents if more than one was ordered at a time. Uncolored larger sheets sold for fifty cents, though the entire set of forty could be procured for a total of ten dollars. Waters was a major machine supplier, but design sheets covered the majority of the supply catalog. Inks, current reducers, springs, and magnets made up the remainder of the stock, allowing Waters' customers access to the most necessary goods for full involvement in the tattoo trade. Waters and his customers relied on designs for success, and the former was not alone when it came to utilizing the designs beyond attracting street customers.[122] Initial attraction to flash might tempt and inspire, but the final usually involved more extended looking. E.J. Miller's design

[122] Waters, 8-9.

offerings differed from the Waters formula, the Norfolk firm sold both display sheets and books.[123] Hand painted at fifteen dollars for two books, Miller provided no indication of the design subjects. For the tattooists buying from Miller, the colored sheets attracted the customers, and the books introduced potential clients to a vast array of choices.

A letter, titled "The Art of Tattooing," from Miller to his potential customer's printed at the end of the catalogue pushed the viability of tattooing as a profession. Miller asserted that demand for tattooing was increasing. Providing basic information needle set up and stencil application, Miller offered some key advice,

> Tattooing is one of the most fascination professions known, and while learning you can make money. If you desire to travel you can join a carnival or circus. They always can use a good tattoo artist. If you desire to travel independently you can do so and travel from town to town. You also can find desirable locations in pool rooms, barber shops, shoe shine parlors, or you can take an empty store temporarily. Always get where the people can see your work; you will get the business. Do advertising with a neat business card; we print same, or sell cuts. After a few weeks you will have plenty of work coming in. People pay well for tattooing, and prices range from $1.00 and up, according to the size of design. After working a short time you will know just what prices to charge. Judge same according to the time it takes to do the work. Expert tattoo artists charge $10 to $15 per hour for their time.[124]

[123] E.J. Miller tattooed in Norfolk, Virginia, and first appeared in city directories in 1922 at 526 East Main Street. In 1924, advertisements for Miller's supply company began to appear in *Billboard Magizine* and *The Police Gazette.* Miller's company followed the precedent set by Percy Waters, and suggesting that the machines sold by Miller were originally purchased from the Detroit supplier. The range of materials offered by Miller made his company an exception among early suppliers. With enameled machines, business card cuts, adhesive tape, and bandages, Miller expanded beyond machines and designs. Chuck Eldridge, "Introduction," E.J. Miller Supply Catalog (Berkley, California: Tattoo Archive, 2002), 1.

[124] E.J. Miller, 30-31

Miller's sentiment reflected the economic possibilities and geographic limitations of the tattoo trade. Hawking supplies, he breezily claimed one only needed to be seen to be successful and, like Waters, understood that designs were integral to a thriving business. Art was now a commodity printed on stock and shipped anywhere in the country.

Charles Gibbons and Charles Wagner both utilized very different business cards in an effort to express identity. The competitive threat of "Jabbers," made the need to establish artistic identity and reputation all the more important. Warren, Wagner, and Tom Berg in San Francisco employed their cards as a method of suggesting the possibilities available to patrons. Based on conservative forms of design, tattoos and business cards communicated simple understandable beliefs and ideas that were clear to both wearer and viewer. As tattooists placed conventional images on unconventional canvases, the art attracted unconventional collectors. Cards helped artists like Warren and Wagner ink their professional identity, and aided collectors in finding the right practitioner.

Stock designs formed a basis for art, business, and industry; and on shop walls, in supply catalogs, and as metonyms in the form of business cards, the designs that were developed from 1875 to 1930 represent an inked identity for the American tattoo industry. At every level of the business, from attracting customers to representing artistic character, the basic visual vocabulary of tattooing permeated all activity. The slow progression of the early tattoo professional from ships and docks to owners of supply companies, proved the importance of commonly understood designs to the commercialization and persistence of a fringe industry.

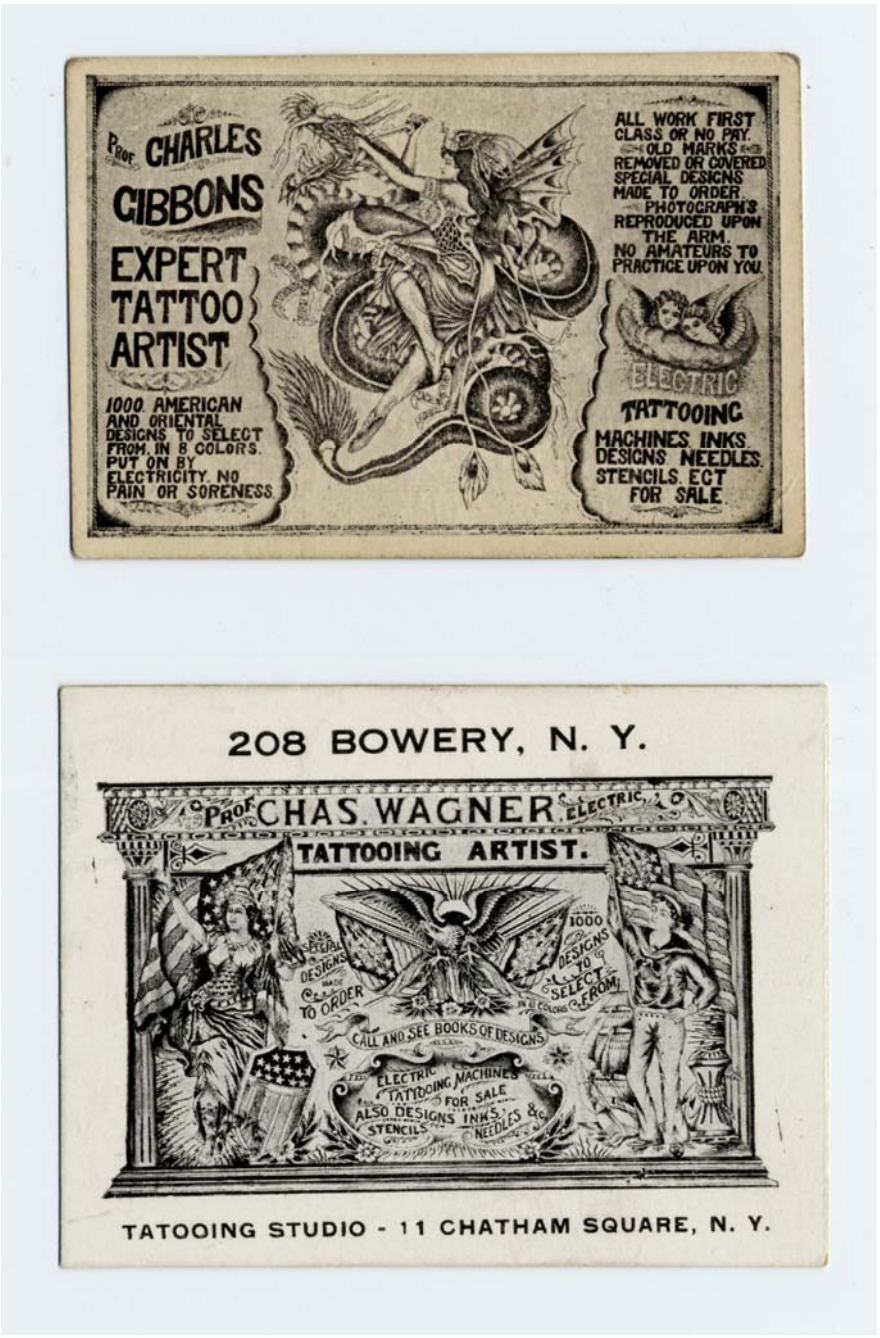


Figure 1: Charles Gibbons and Charles Wagner Business Cards, c. 1920
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 2: J. S. Bombay, Cross, c. 1900
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 3: Jack Warren, Cross, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 4: Anonymous, Crucifixion scenes, ca. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 5: Anonymous, Crucifixion scenes, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 6: J. S. Bombay, Crucifixion, c. 1900
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.

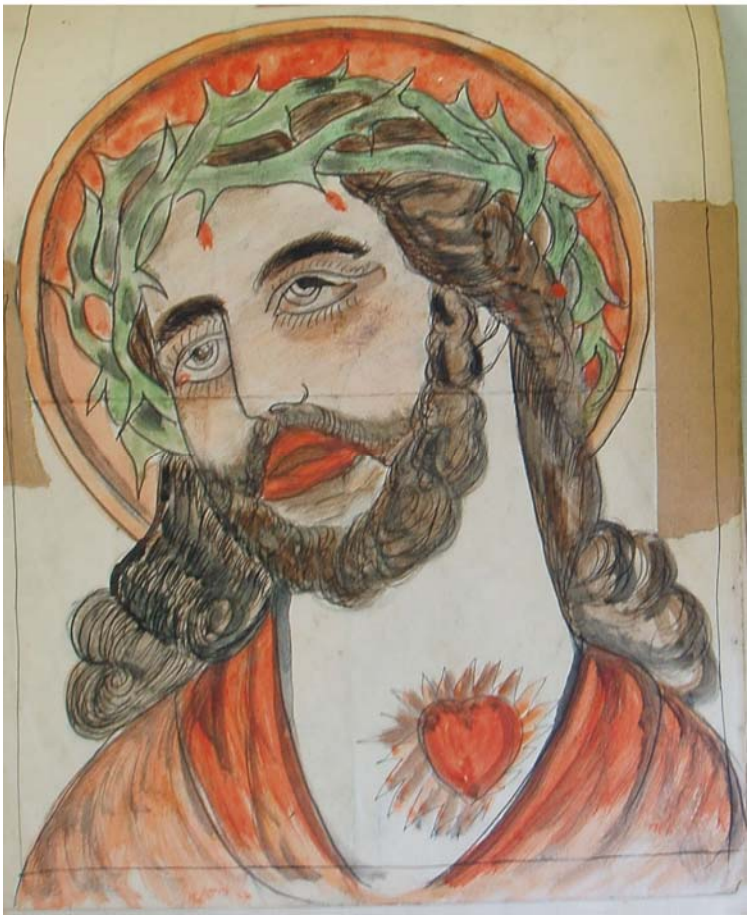


Figure 7: Gus Wagner, Christ's Head, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum

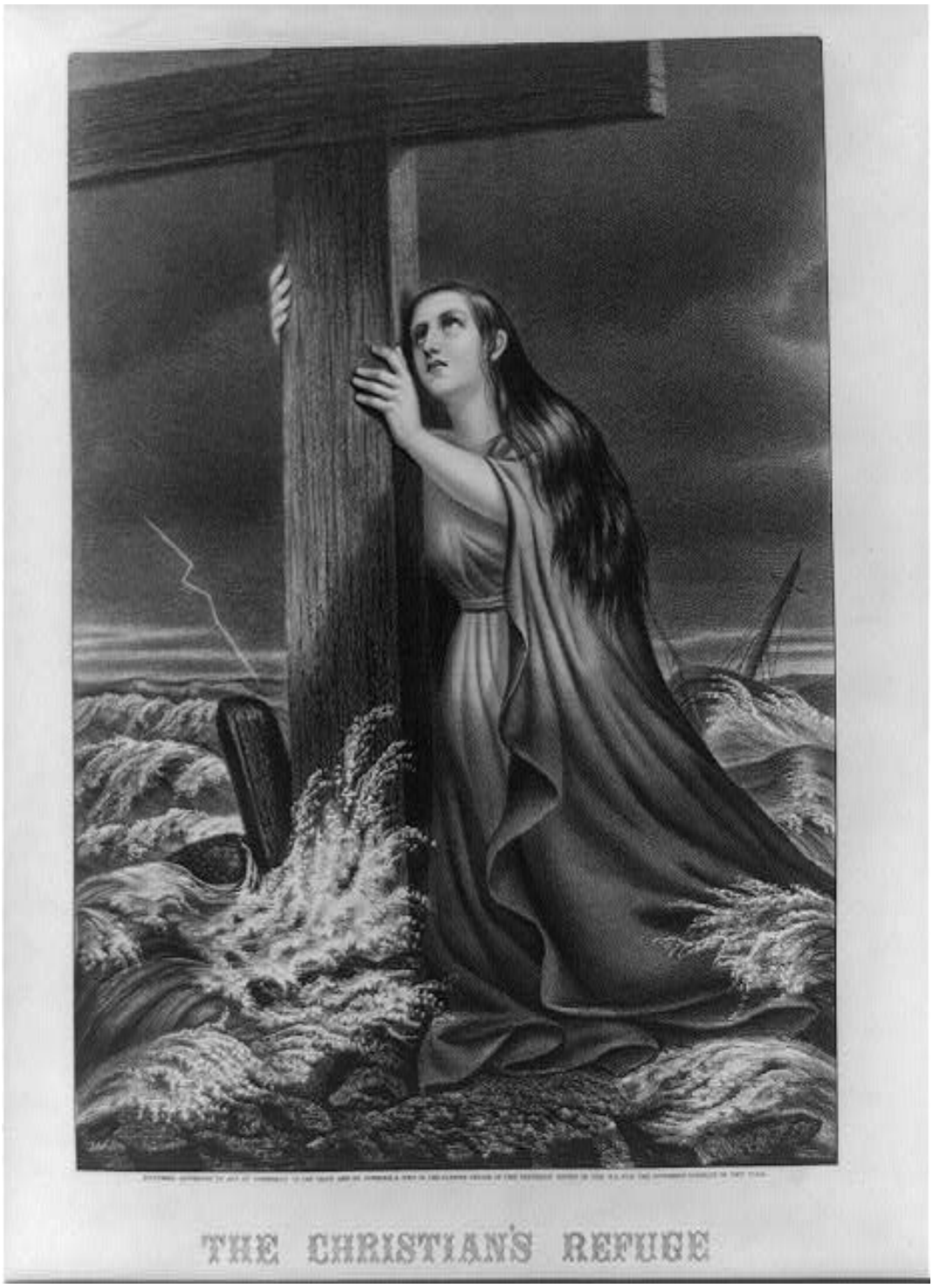


Figure 8: Currier and Ives, “A Christian’s Refuge,” c. 1868



Figure 9: Colton, Zahm, and Roberts, “Rock of Ages,” 1873.

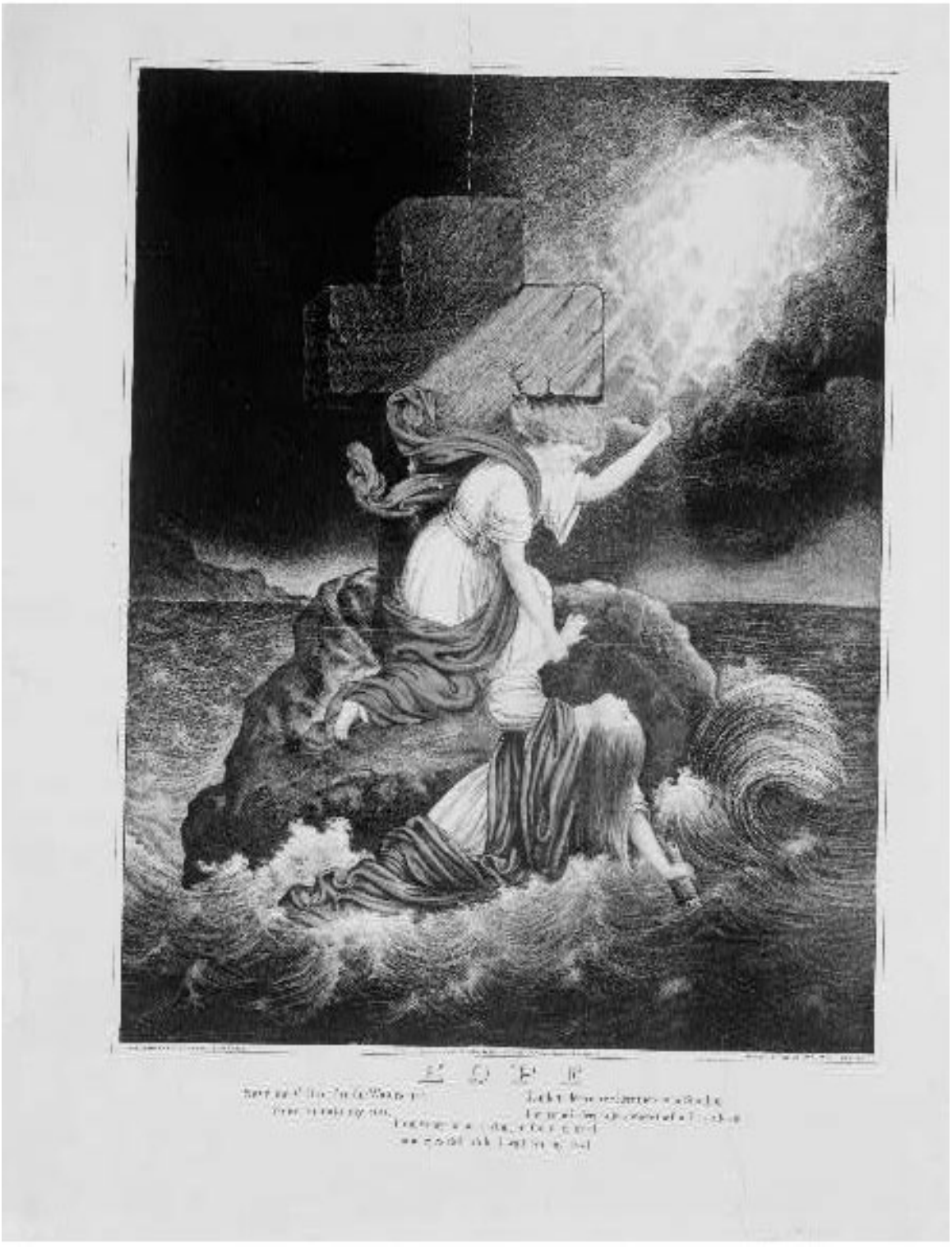


Figure 10: George Schlegel, “Hope,” 1873.



Figure 11: Anonymous, Rock of Ages, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 12: J. S. Bombay, Rock of Ages, c. 1900
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.

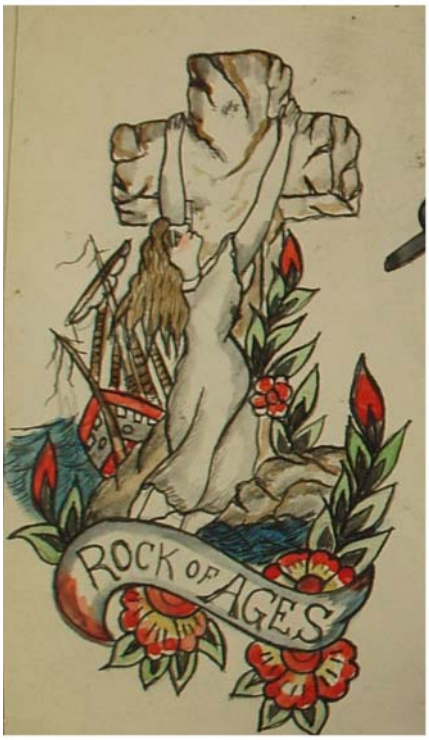


Figure 13: Gus Wagner, Rock of Ages, c. 1930s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum



Figure 14: W. Christiansen, Eagle and Shield Motif, 1896.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera



Figure 15: J. S. Bombay, Eagle and Shield with Liberty Banner, c. 1900. Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 16: Jack Warren, Eagle and Shield, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collection, NAMH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 17: Jack Warren, Flag with Name Banner, 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NAMH, Smithsonian Institute



Figure 18: Jack Warren, Sailor with Flag, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NAMH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 19: Anonymous, Columbia, c. 1875
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

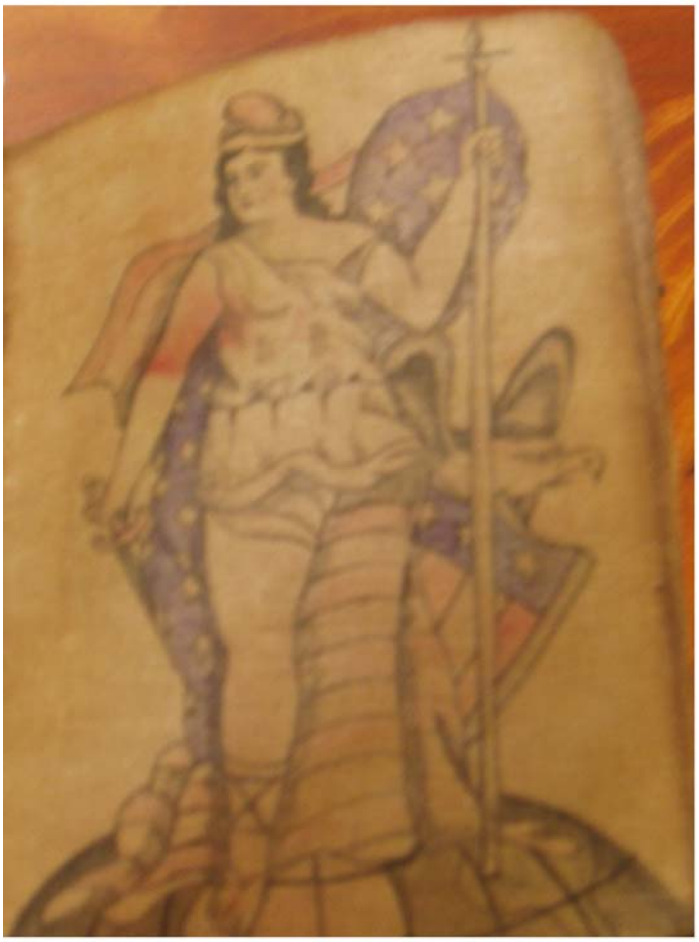


Figure 20: J. S. Bombay, Columbia on Globe, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 21: Jack Warren, Liberty, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 22: J. S. Bombay, Statue of Liberty, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 23: Gus Wagner, Statue of Liberty and Eiffel Tower, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.

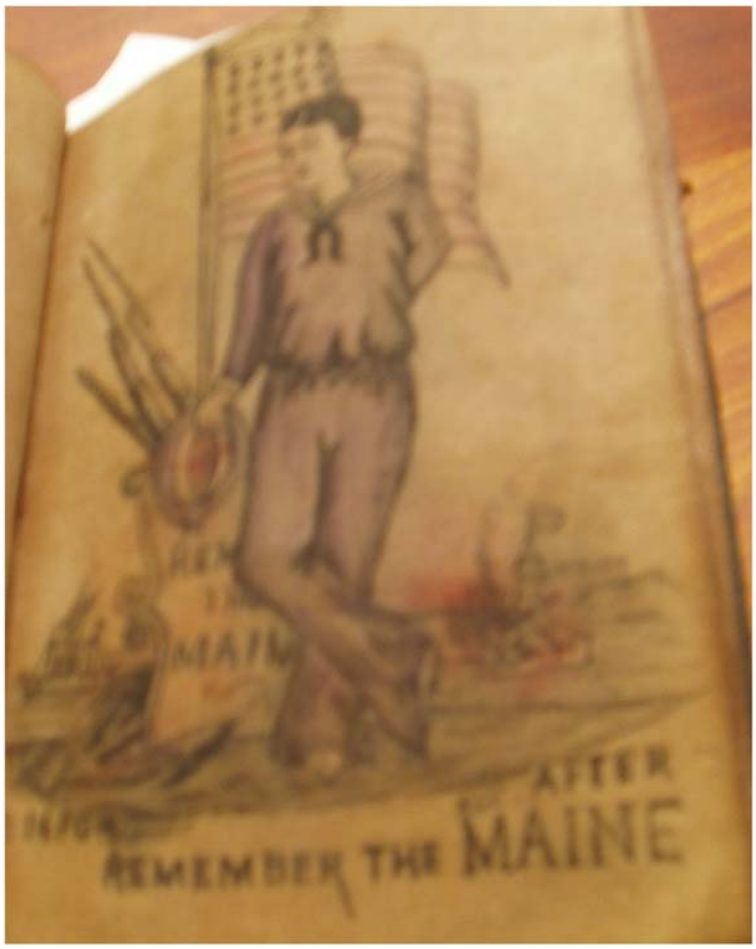
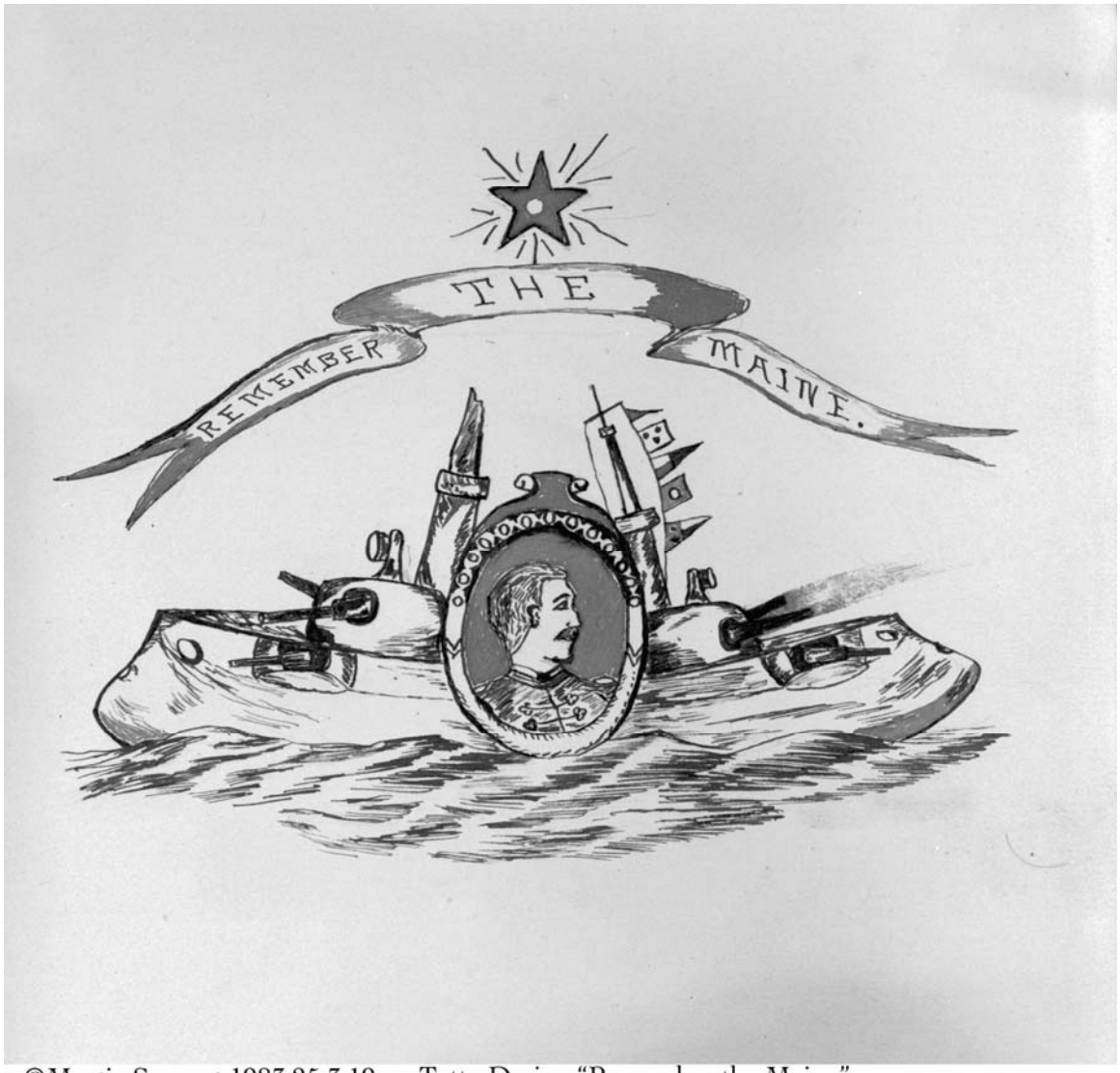


Figure 24: J. S. Bombay, Remember the Maine, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



©Mystic Seaport 1983.25.3.19 Tatto Design "Remember the Maine"

Figure 25: C. H. Fellowes, Remember the Maine, c. 1900.
Courtesy, Mystic Seaport.



Figure 26: Gus Wagner, Rose of No Man's Land, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 27: Gus Wagner, Rose and Cross, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.

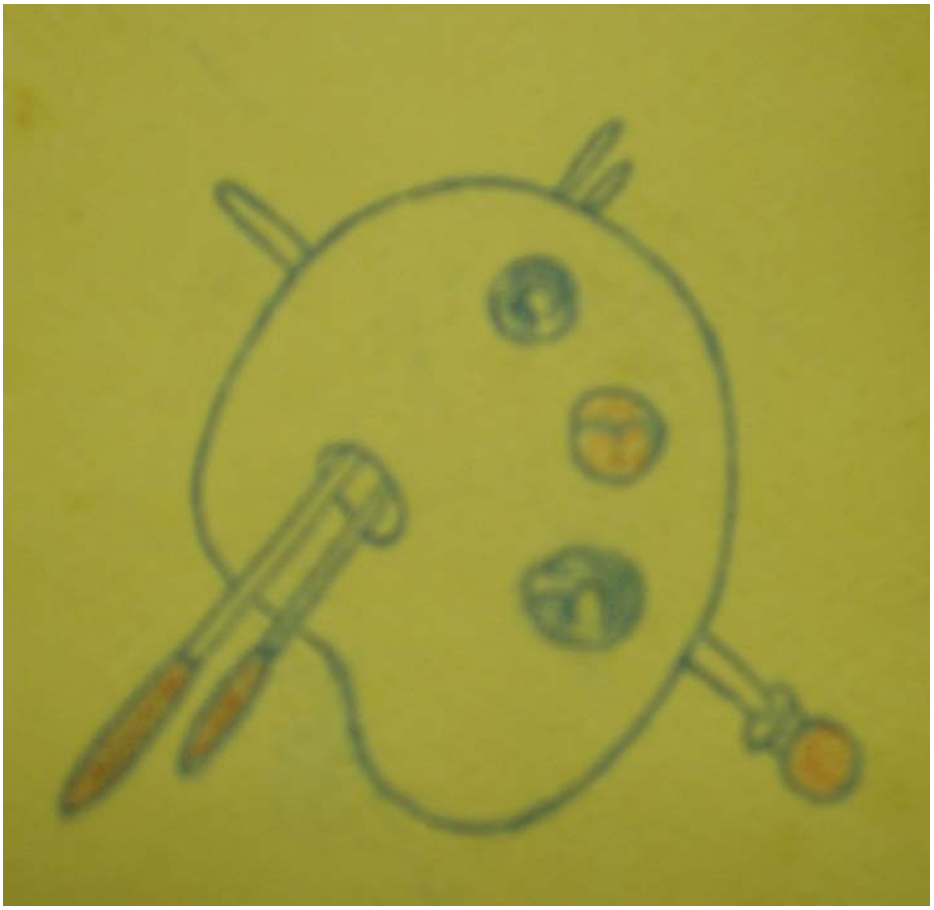


Figure 28: W. Christiansen, Paint Palette, 1896.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

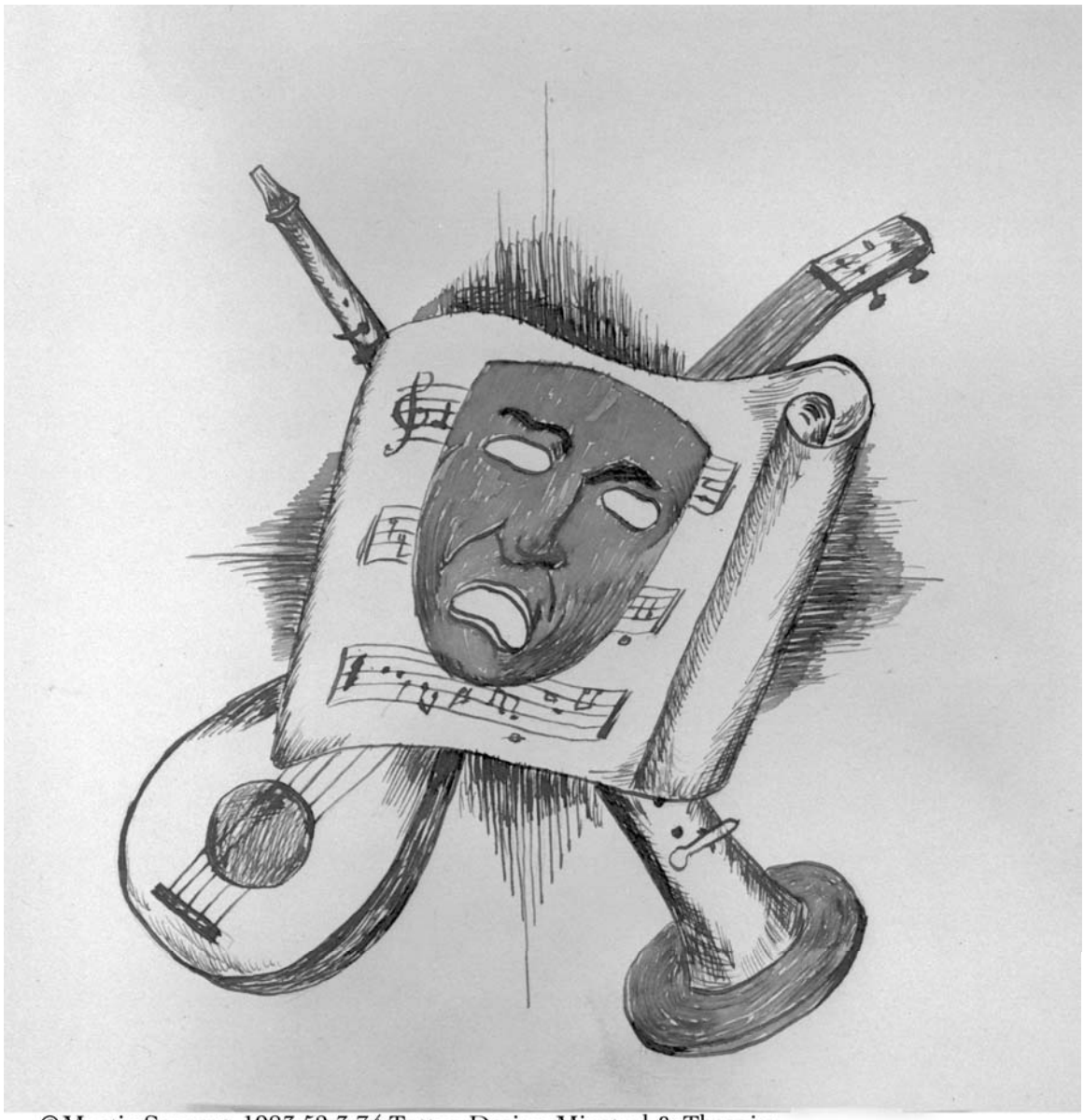


Figure 29: C. H. Fellowes, Musicians Design, c. 1900.
Courtesy, Mystic Seaport.



Figure 30: Gus Wagner, Professional Tattoos, c. 1920.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 31: Anonymous, Sailors Farewell, c. 1875
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 32: Anonymous, You and Me, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

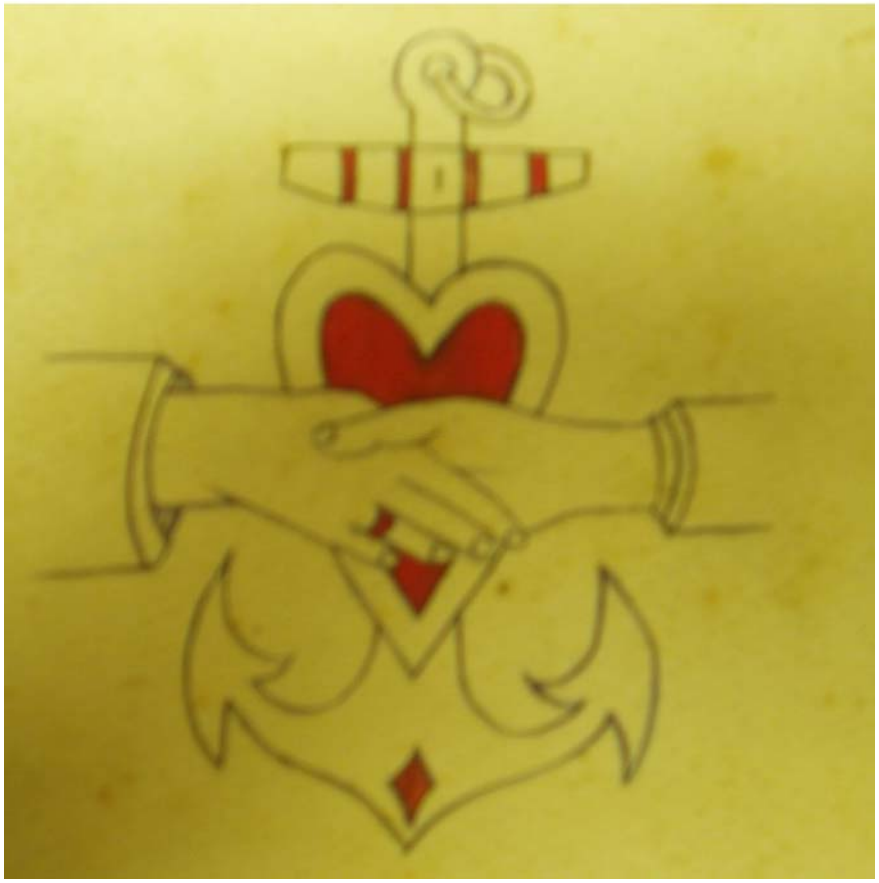


Figure 33: W. Christiansen, Clasped Hands, 1896.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 34: J. S. Bombay, Clasped Hands Designs, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 35: Jack Warren, Clasped Hands, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 36: Anonymous, Bracelet, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.

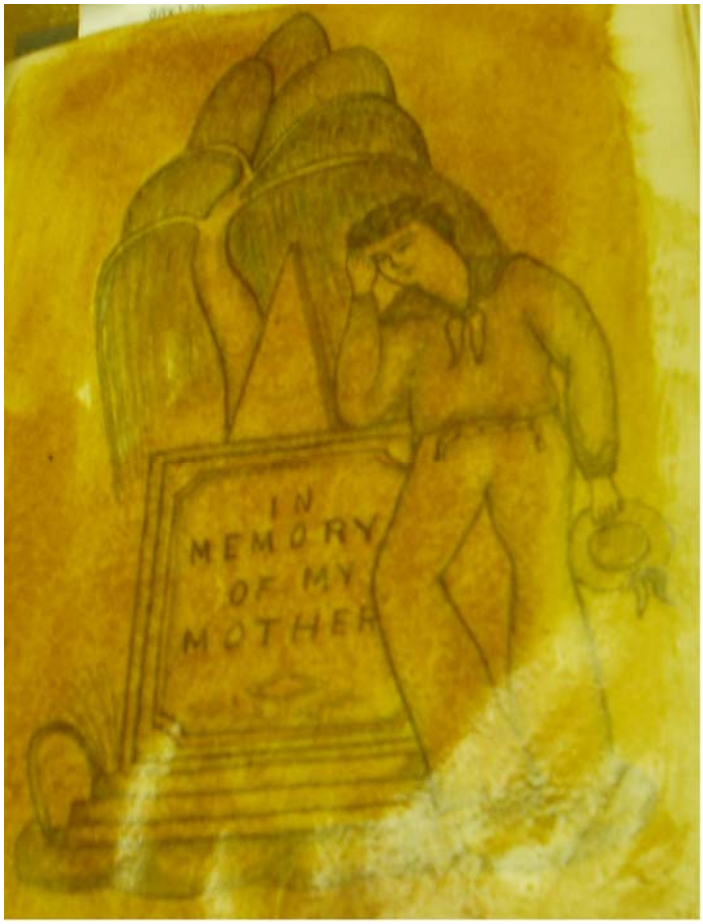


Figure 37: Anonymous, In Memory of Mother, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Museum: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 38: Jack Warren, In Memory of Mother, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 39: Gus Wagner, Mourning Images, c. 1930s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 40: Gus Wagner, Flower of the Family, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 41: Jack Warren, Geisha Girl, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 42: Jack Warren, Geisha Bust, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 43: Jack Warren, Dragon, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 44: Jack Warren, Phoenix, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 45: Charles Gibbons, Envelope, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 46: Gus Wagner, Dragon, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 47: Gus Wagner, Dragon, c. 1920s.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 48: C. H. Fellowes, Turkish Woman, c. 1900.
Courtesy, Mystic Seaport.



Figure 49: Anonymous, Young America, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 50: Anonymous, Ship, c. 1875.
Courtesy, Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera.



Figure 51: J. S. Bombay, Ballerina, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 52: J. S. Bombay, Ballerina, c. 1900.
Courtesy, American Folk Art Museum.



Figure 53: Andy Stuertz and Charles Wagner, Photo, 1915.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 54: Charles Wagner and Lew Alberts, Photograph, 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 55: Ed Gilbert, Photograph, 1905.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.

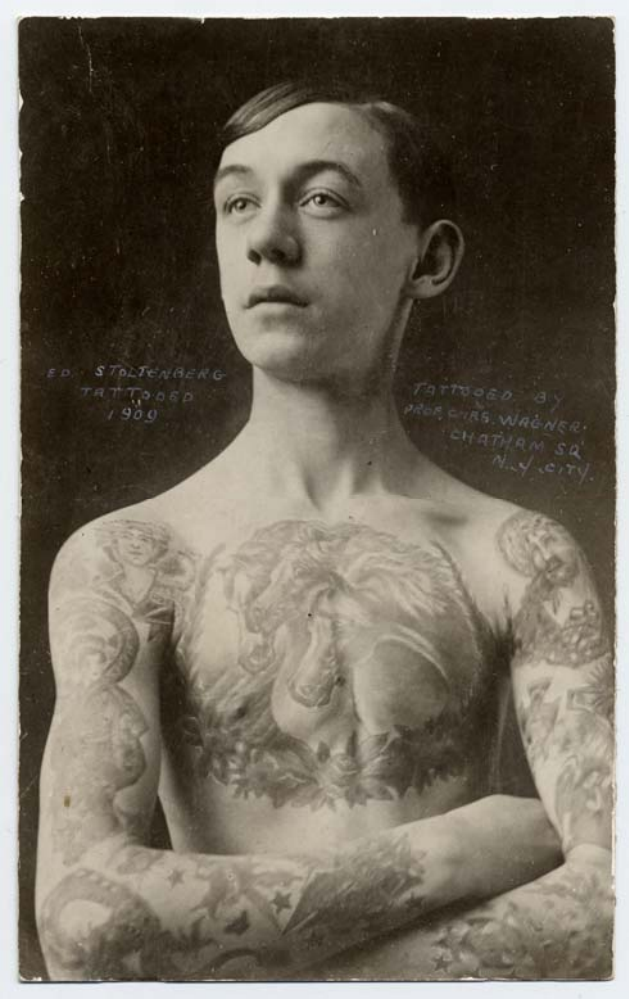


Figure 56: Ed Stoltenberg, Photograph, 1909.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 57: J.J. Garrison, Photograph, c. 1910s.
Courtesy, Maritime Collections, NMAH, Smithsonian Institute.



Figure 58: Tom Berg Business Card, c. 1900.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.

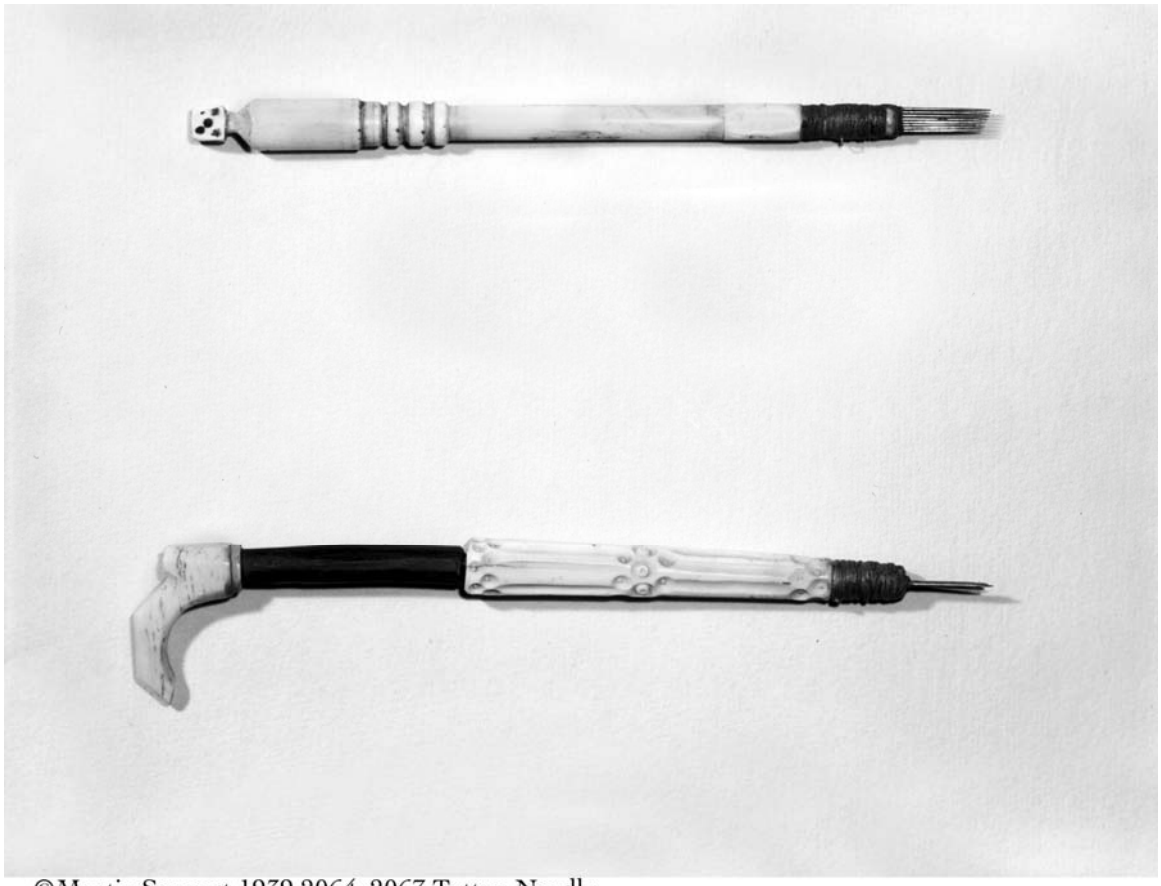


Figure 59: Ivory Hand Needles.
Courtesy, Mystic Seaport.



Figure 60: Wooden Hand Tools.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 61: Ivory Hand Tools.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 62: Wooden Hand Tool with Carved Snake.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 63: Wooden Hand Tool Carved with Lizard.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.



Figure 64: Pointed Ivory Hand Needles.
Courtesy, South Street Seaport Museum.

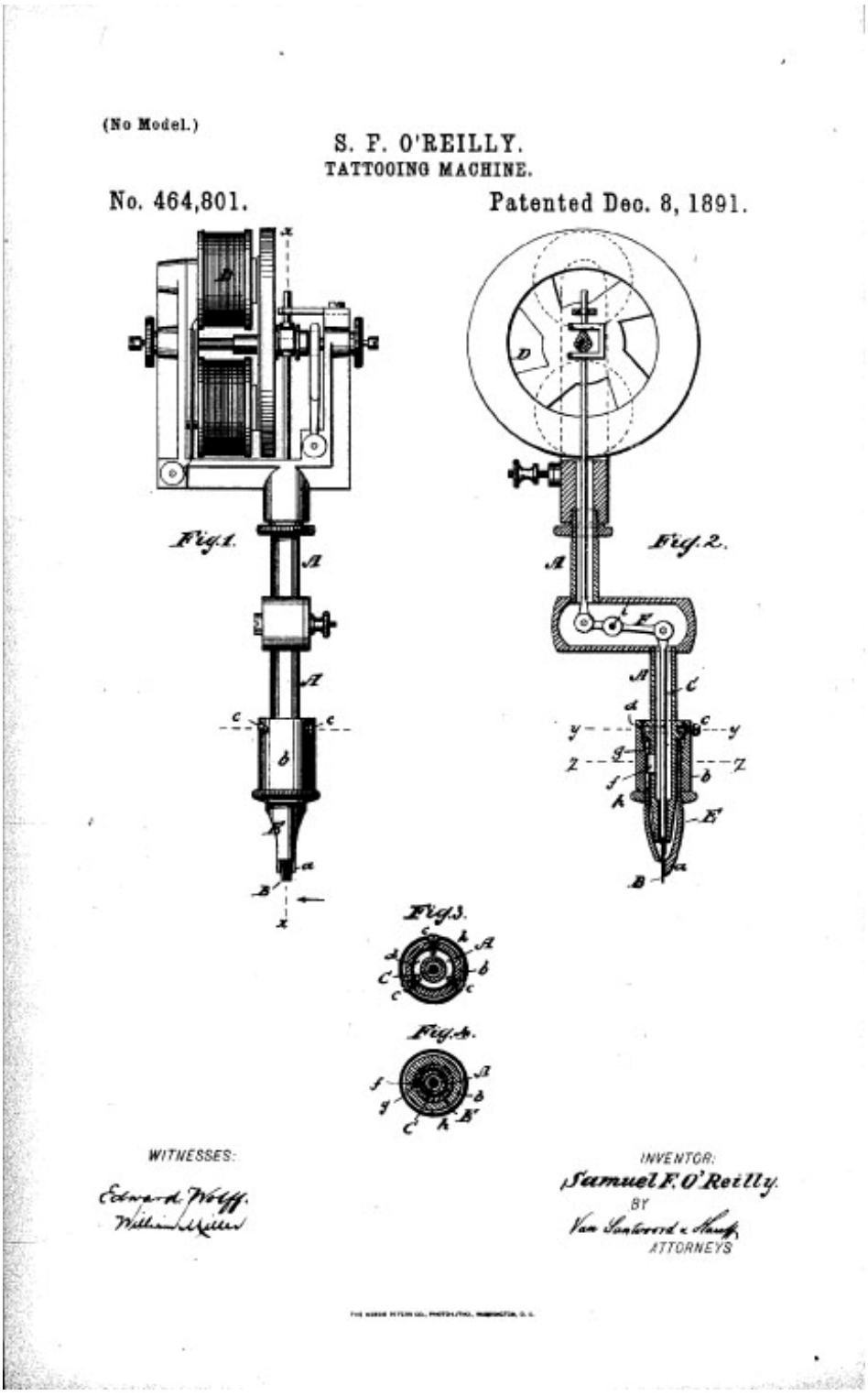


Figure 65: Samuel O'Reilly Patent for Tattoo Machine, 1891.

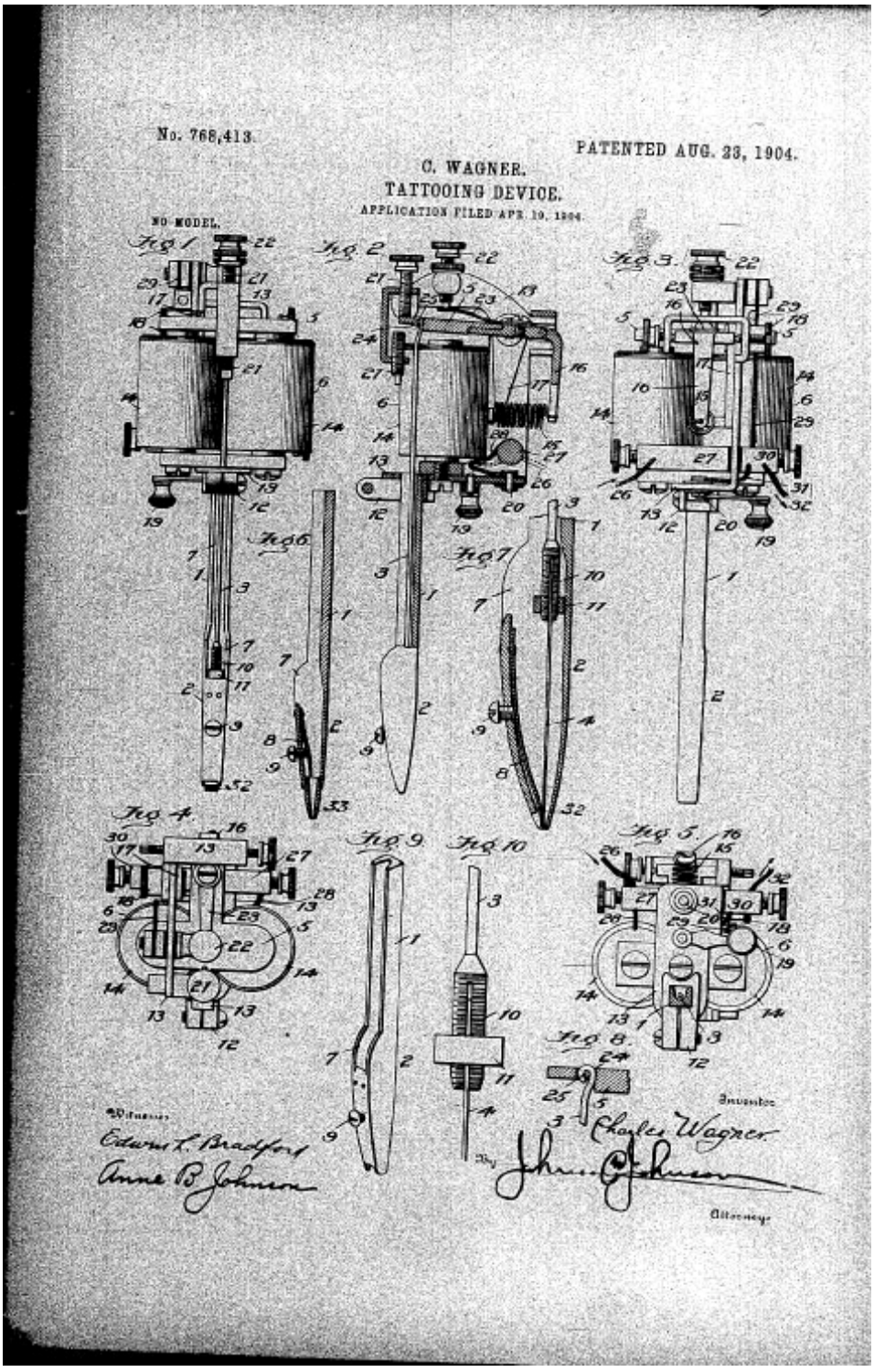


Figure 66: Charles Wagner Patent for Tattoo Machine, 1904.

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