

Abstracts for Maine Bicentennial Conference Paper on Panel #3:
Circulating Images: The Production, Distribution & Reception of
Visual Culture During the Statehood Era
Friday, May 31, 2019, 10:30 am - noon

**Visualizing Historic Maine:
19th Century Maine Life in Stereophotography (presented in actual 3D)**

Bernard Fishman
Museum Director, Maine State Museum

A just-completed four-year cataloguing and digitization project between the Maine State Museum (MSM) and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) has resulted in the complete documentation of 19,000 stereoview photographs, the largest historic archive in this medium in the possession of any state governmental organization in the US. Each of these images has been thoroughly researched and placed in its historical context, providing the raw material for a cultural survey of Maine stereophotography. This collection contains an unparalleled visual record of Maine in the second half of the 19th century.

Maine stereoviews are the most comprehensive and complete source for presenting the visual appearance of Maine in the period from roughly 1860 through 1900. These images, often produced by town and itinerant photographers for limited local sales, record almost every aspect of Maine: the landscape and wildlife, architecture, every kind of industry, economic occupation and business, domestic life, city, town and settlement patterns, people (including tribal groups), public and private events, disasters, and much more. Visually they offer the first essentially complete record of Maine life.

This proposal intends to present a select group of about 70 of these images, organized topically in order to survey essential categories of human existence in Maine, with cultural and historical commentary and some examination of the work of key photographers and the evolution of related photographic techniques and technology. A special feature of this session will be that the images will be presented in actual 3D, more or less as they were meant to be viewed 150 years ago, through analoglyph projection (using 3D glasses provided by the presenter). This will make use of the resources of Photoarchive3D (www.Photoarchive3D.org), a small organization set up by the presenter and Dr. George Mutter, a professor at Harvard Medical School, to use historic stereophotographs for educational purposes.

The result will be a novel and visually engaging presentation with a content that few will have previously encountered. The examination of the photographs will have historical scope and merit appropriate for a Bicentennial activity and introduce attendees to this valuable kind of

historical documentation. What better way could there be to sample Maine history than by diving into the ancient images that record it?

Tovookan's Narrative: Depicting Freedom in Maine During the Statehood Era

Martha J. McNamara

Director, New England Arts and Architecture Program

Department of Art, Wellesley College

Almost six feet long and only eighteen inches high, the watercolor landscape was clearly meant to tell a story. And a harrowing story it was. On the glazed cotton canvas, Pedro Tovookan Parris recorded his experiences in three vignettes: an image of Rio de Janeiro where ten-year-old Tovookan was brought from Africa to be sold into slavery in 1843; another of an American ship – one that perhaps escorted him to New England to testify in a trial against the Maine captain who had carried him to South America; and, finally, a view of Boston, Massachusetts coupled with an image of the western Maine farmstead where he lived out the rest of his short life. Although we may never fully understand what compelled Tovookan to record his story pictorially, his autobiographical landscape presents a rare opportunity for us to interrogate the intersection of visual images and cultural landscapes in the life of an ordinary person facing extraordinary circumstances.

The term “landscape” has a long history of association with the complex interaction between the physical environment and its visual representations, but only recently have scholars interested in cultural landscape studies turned to exploring how images themselves can structure perceptions of place for both creator and viewer. Tovookan's autobiographical landscape reveals not only his perceptions of Rio de Janeiro and western Maine – places as foreign to him as they were disparate from each other – but, simultaneously, his experience of slavery and freedom. As viewers, our inclination is to read his images (from left to right) as a straightforward tale of a narrow escape from captivity. But, Tovookan's subsequent life in Maine was tightly proscribed. Taken in by the Parris family as a “boy of all work,” Tovookan never established an independent subsistence, though the documentary trail hints at his efforts to do so. While legally free (a crucially important distinction, then as now) his opportunities and his choices were narrowly constricted by his race, age, and status as a casualty of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Instead of framing Tovookan's story with the easy binary of slavery versus freedom – as the watercolor can tempt us to do – it is more useful to see his experience as encountering degrees of relative freedom or unfreedom whether in Rio, on shipboard, or living in Maine.

Equal parts personal memory, political polemic, and faithful depiction of place, Tovookan's drawing records the importance of landscape representation in the construction of his narrative of enslavement and freedom. Tovookan's imagery, though, should also prompt us to recognize both the enormous complexity and traumatic legacy of slavery. For a young African man living in Maine in the years following statehood, slavery and freedom were inextricably tied to depictions of place, but his lived experience was never quite so categorical nor was it geographically determined.

Popular Print and Visual Culture in Statehood Period Maine

Kevin D. Murphy

Andrew W. Mellon Chair in the Humanities,

Professor and Chair, Dept. of History of Art, Vanderbilt University

The many fine artists who have come to Maine to depict its storied landscape since the mid-nineteenth century have been duly recognized. The ubiquity of painted landscapes and seascapes is, however, a relatively recent phenomenon. From the statehood period we have only a handful of landscape images of Maine, notably, the Paris Hill Overmantel (Hamlin Memorial Library and Paris Hill Historical Society) and Jonathan Fisher's "Morning View of Blue Hill Village" (1825, Farnsworth Museum). This is not to say that visual images were entirely absent from Maine's public and private spaces prior to the 1830s. Indeed, painted portraits abounded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and some of the images produced by the state's itinerant artists have become canonical examples of "folk" art, notably those by John Brewster, Jr.

Yet, even Brewster's portraits were typically done for the coastal elite. So, what elements of visual culture did the non-elite encounter on a regular basis? We know that the rich owned many prints. Probate inventories document large collections of printed images of political leaders, classical themes, the seasons, and other subjects in the homes of the wealthy around the time of statehood. Less well documented are the elements of popular visual culture which the non-elite would have encountered on a regular basis. This paper will examine the place of popular imagery in Maine from around 1780 to 1820 and argue that cheap print constituted most people's visual culture in the period, and transformed public and private spaces into venues for debate on the major issues of the day.

The production of cheap print boomed in Great Britain, Europe, and North America in the eighteenth century. Broadside, pamphlets, chapbooks, and other inexpensive printed works could be

quickly authored, illustrated, produced, and distributed. Such ephemera was churned out in bulk, but survived relatively rarely. The few surviving examples must stand for the many—thousands—more that existed.

For Maine in the statehood period there are some important examples of printed ephemera that suggest its visual and political functions. This paper will take as its starting point the broadsides produced by Jonathan Fisher in Blue Hill in conjunction with the public executions of convicted criminals in nearby Castine. From Fisher's detailed autobiography, we know a great deal about his production and distribution of his broadsides on the Blue Hill peninsula. The gallows broadside had been a popular species of cheap print since the seventeenth century, as had been the broadside ballad. In Maine, the ballad continued to play the role it had since the early modern period as a medium for negotiating political debate. The broadside ballad "The Squatters of Maine" (c. 1810-14, American Antiquarian Society), for example, commented on the epic battles over land that took place in the Early National Period, exhorting its listeners to: "Join as one with heart and hand,/ 'Exterminate' this faction/ And save this hap'less sinking land,/ By such a noble action."

Rufus Porter in Maine: Art, Spatial Thinking, and the Curious Mind

Justin Wolff

Associate Professor, Art History, University of Maine

A genuine polymath, Rufus Porter (1792-1884) was once known as the "Yankee Da Vinci"—a New England son of the American Enlightenment who lived a life of progress and innovation. He worked as an itinerant portrait painter and muralist; an author, publisher, and founding editor of *Scientific American*; an inventor who patented mechanical devices for the improvement of steamships and railroads; an entrepreneur and stock speculator; and an impresario who engineered and promoted an airship—or "travelling balloon"—which he boasted could fly Gold Rush prospectors from Boston to California in three days. His obsession with disseminating "useful knowledge" and promotion of the mechanical arts typifies the spirit of early capitalist America. Along with other artist-inventors, such as Samuel F. B. Morse and Robert Fulton, Porter participated in America's transformation from an agrarian republic to a connected, participatory democracy.

Porter was born in 1792 in Boxford, Massachusetts, but grew up in the rapidly expanding District of Maine. In 1800 his family acquired land at Moose Pond in Pleasant Mountain Gore, northwest of Portland and Sebago Lake, and then purchased a sawmill on Peabody Pond and helped incorporate the

North West River Canal Corporation, which improved the transportation of lumber and other goods to Sebago Lake. With its views of the White Mountains and Mount Washington, western Maine's dramatic landscape offered scenery that Porter later represented in his murals. Moreover, as Porter explained in an autobiographical essay, growing up on farms in western Maine imprinted him with the practical knowledge about rivers, boats, and tools that he would call on throughout his career as a mechanical inventor. And, he recalled, it was by observing barn swallows that he developed "a vehement desire to move above the earth" and catch a bird's-eye view of his family's farm, which was "beautifully variegated with woodlands, high and steep hills, miry grass-marshes, level plains, sand banks, running brooks, and a small pond." Flight, for Porter, was not only about inventing a flying machine, it was also an intellectual and emotional mechanism, a means to survey the landscape of his personal memories and the geography of future networks.

Porter struck out on his own in 1810, when he moved to Portland. There he served in the military during the War of 1812 and began working as an ornamental painter and mechanical engineer. In 1820, shortly after Maine statehood, Porter moved back to Massachusetts to commence his storied career. But as this paper will demonstrate, Porter's visual memory, sense of national space, and curiosity about canals and locomotion were shaped by the District of Maine just when it, too, sought its own place on the national map.