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Deconstructing a Scrapbook House

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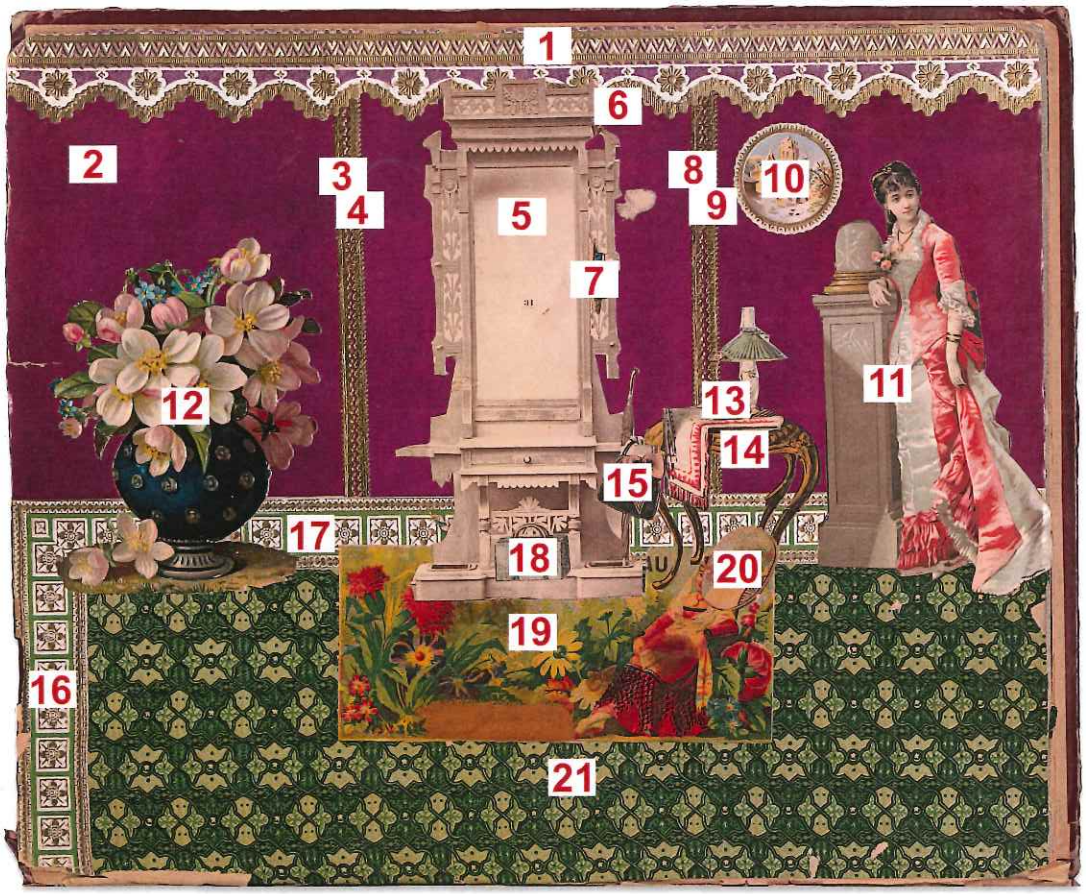
"Materials Required: A large blank book with a stiff cover, and preferably with unruled pages, A number of old magazines, Some pieces of wall paper the size of the book's pages, Several pieces of lace or other fancy paper, A tube of paste, Scissors."[1]

With such common, everyday materials, and a healthy dose of imagination, children created book houses for their delicate paper dolls who were "always floating about the nursery in the most lonesome sort of way, and getting under people's feet and having their clothes torn."[2] Book houses or paper doll houses, a subgenre of scrapbooking that rose in popularity in the last decades of the 19th century, were designed by arranging scraps into domestic interior scenes. Touted as an antidote for ennui during inclement weather, this activity occupied children for seemingly endless stretches of time. [Figure 1]

Basic instruction on structure and assemblage that still allowed much autonomy in the design process was provided in books and articles in contemporaneous women's newspapers and magazines such as *Godey's Lady Book* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Cost and availability of materials were first considered by encouraging children to use and re-use items on hand. If a new scrapbook proved too expensive or difficult to obtain, an old ledger, phone book, or city directory could easily double as a foundation. Children scoured available magazines, newspapers, books, and store catalogs chock-full of illustrations for appropriate pieces, and after exhausting these could request more catalogs from department stores. Once materials were assembled, children then constructed room settings by positioning pieces before adhering them to the page. Directions sometimes called for an exterior or doorway as the first page; otherwise a hall followed by a parlor, a dining room, a kitchen, and bedrooms to simulate one's experience of moving through a house, and gardens and outdoor spaces at the end if desired. Double page spreads designed as one room added more dimensionality to albums when propped open for



A collaged room setting with 21 items identified and analyzed. (Technical Study of a Victorian Scrapbook House)

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Figure 1. Photograph of girls "planning a book house." The Child's Rainy Day Book *by Mary White 1905 (Winterthur Library, Printed Book and Periodical Collection)*

play. Paper dolls could be glued onto pages, inserted into slits cut into scraps, or kept loose inside for greater mobility among rooms.

Besides curing idleness, crafting these houses offered numerous benefits. Children learned principles of interior design, most notably in perspective and proportion, practiced patience and persistence, and honed their creativity. However, the pastime was a victim of its own success. Publishers cashed in on the craze in the early 1900s with activity books like "The House That Glue Built".[3] These books featured pre-made room settings with uncut sheets of figures and furnishings, the latter numbered to correspond to a diagram for perfect placement. [Figure 2] The finished pages undoubtedly produced a much more polished effect over handmade albums, but certainly robbed children of the thrill of the hunt and the freedom of choice.

Approximately a dozen scrapbook houses, also cataloged as "collage albums," are in the Winterthur Library's Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera. Designed for play rather than posterity, they rarely include information on provenance or production dates. Only two albums have full names inscribed inside the covers. Whether these are the names of the owner or the creator of the collaged pages is unknown. For example, May Durgin, who marked her volume with a date of 1887, may have only *owned* the 1875 geography textbook that features one collaged dining room scene. As Durgin's book illustrates, dates are extremely tricky to assign; these scrapbooks may have been created well after the production of their gently used elements. Repurposed published or secondhand materials, like an 1894 calendar pasted on a volume's cover, recognizable pieces of commercially available merchandise or illustrations of 1876 Centennial Exhibition buildings can supply a "circa" date for some albums. Instructional articles published between 1880 and 1910,[4] establish a range of roughly three decades for the activity, with a 1906 author already lamenting that her childhood pastime was "rather old,

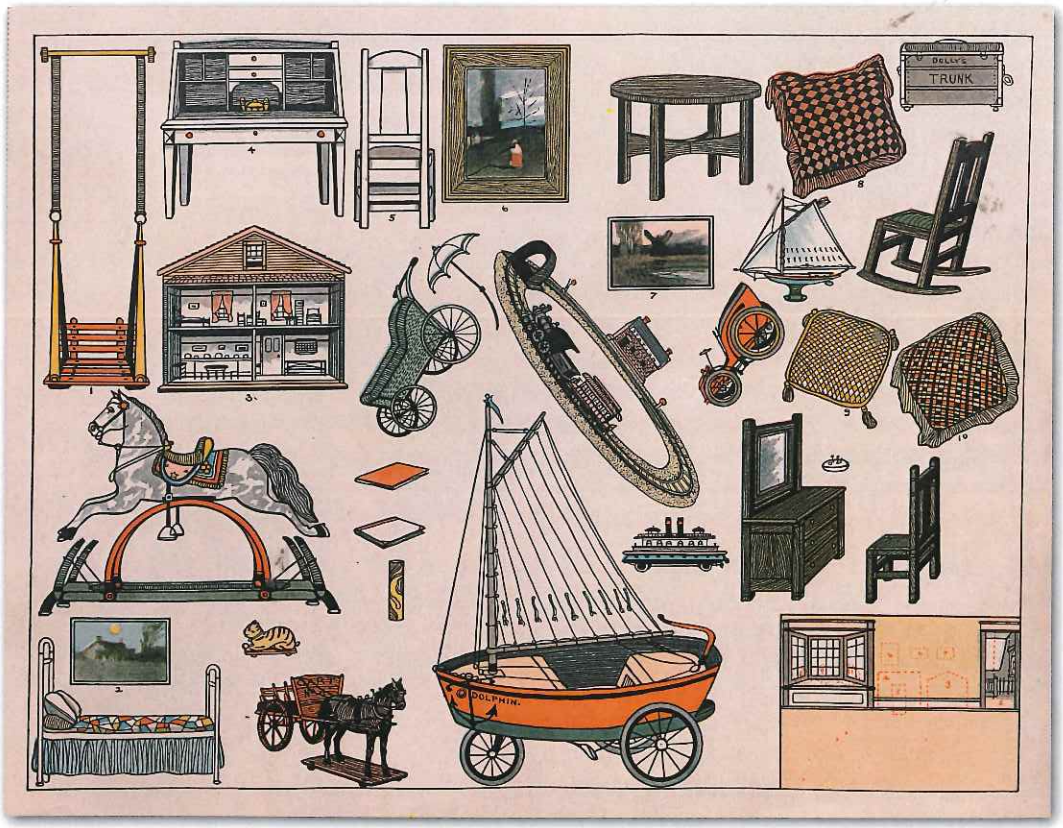

Figure 2. Page of nursery furnishings, some with numbers. Note the room diagram in the lower right corner. The House That Glue Built *(Winterthur Library, Printed Book and Periodical Collection)*

perhaps out of fashion among the little girls. It may be the mothers have forgotten to tell the modern children about them!"[5]

The Winterthur albums have been examined by scholars researching children's amusements, amateur interior decorating and the private spaces of Victorian homes such as bedrooms, nurseries, and servants' quarters, which were rarely photographed. Although they do provide context for several research topics, the lack of creator identifications and definitive dates have hindered further scholarship.

In the spring of 2019, the Winterthur Library became the setting for a fortuitous collaboration. Research fellow Christina Michelon returned to work on a book evolving from her dissertation on "printcraft," her term for the 19th century practice of repurposing mass-produced images from printed sources into artistic collages, decoupages, and scrapbooks.[6] She had studied the library's most elaborately decorated scrapbook house in the John and Carolyn Grossman Collection. Hoping to discover more about its contents, I had proposed the same album earlier that year for a technical study by Yan Ling Choi, a library and archives major in the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC). The three of us gathered together to share current findings and discuss further avenues of research. This combination of visual and technical analysis proved most effective in deconstructing the album.

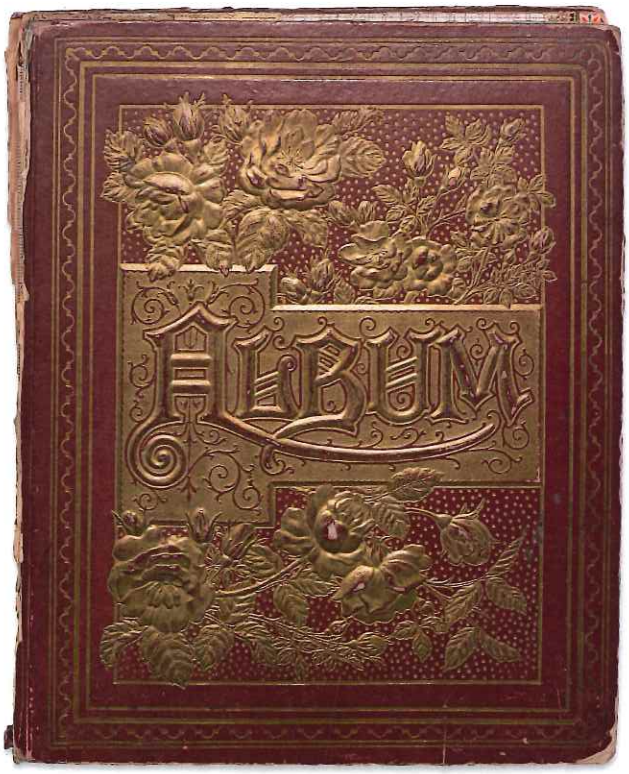

Figure 3. Front cover of Helen's scrapbook house. (Winterthur Library, John and Carolyn Grossman Collection)

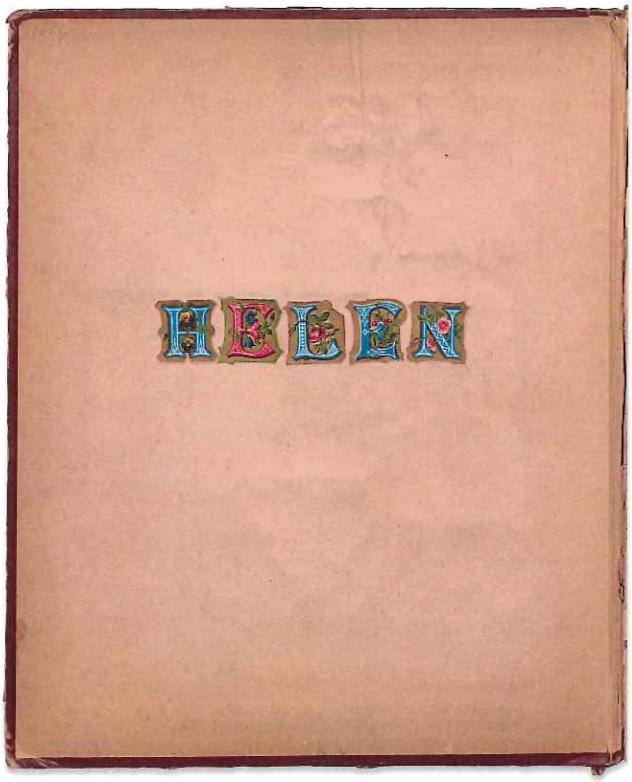

Figure 4. Inside front cover of Helen's scrapbook house. (Winterthur Library, John and Carolyn Grossman Collection)

Helen's Scrapbook House

The exterior architecture of the scrapbook house consists of an album measuring 15 inches high by 12 inches wide with red covers and 12 leaves. A pattern of roses nearly encompassing the entire front cover surrounds the word "Album" embossed in large gilt letters. [Figure 3] Inside the front cover colorful letters spell "HELEN," the name of its likely creator or owner; for the purpose of this article, Helen will be referred to as the album's creator. [Figure 4]

While Helen could have repurposed an old volume as many articles suggest, she chose to purchase a new album to create her fancy scrapbook house. Searching dozens of stationers' trade catalogs in the Winterthur Library's collection, I found a similar album in an 1891 catalog retailing for $7.00 per dozen, or approximately 58 cents each.[7] This album was sold in black with a slightly different floral pattern, but the lettering of the title "Album," its overall measurements, and the number of leaves are the same. The close comparison to Helen's album helped to identify its production date.

Upon opening the album, one is immediately struck by how completely the pages are covered with meticulous, artistic arrangements of chromolithographed scraps. The first two pages show exterior scenes with many illustrations of imposing structures, one fortress-like and European in nature, that symbolize the aspirational quality of these albums. Birds, most likely sourced from natural history textbooks, appear on both pages and

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Figure 5. Collaged page of Helen's scrapbook house with two scraps from Peter Henderson & Co.'s seed catalogs. (Winterthur Library, John and Carolyn Grossman Collection)

several figures enjoy the lush lawns and gardens in the second scene. While researching her dissertation chapter on scrapbook houses, Christina identified the image of a young girl mowing a lawn near a cluster of giant flowers [Figure 5] as the cover of Peter Henderson and Co.'s 1889 seed catalog.[8] [Figure 6] With this as a starting point, I searched several dozen seed catalogs in the library's collection and the Biodiversity Heritage Library's digital collections for matches of other floral scraps. Between the years 1887 and 1895, colorful chromolithographed illustrations were featured prominently on the covers and interior pages of trade catalogues until they were replaced by photomechanical images near the end of the century. Fortuitously, an image of a seated child and dog adjacent to the previously identified one appeared on the cover of an 1890 catalog from the same firm. [Figure 7] A page titled "Henderson's Garden Gems" from the same catalog supplied five other floral pieces in two bedroom scenes.[9] [Figures 8, 9, 10] Although scraps of large hyacinths, tulips, and irises in the same two scenes most likely also originated in seed catalogs, I was unable to identify them from this search. Can these two Peter Henderson catalogs provide a clue to where Helen lived? Peter Henderson and Co. of New York City began operation in the 1840s, continuing beyond its founder's death in 1890. As the firm managed a huge mail order business for many decades, it is impossible to tell whether Helen lived nearby in the greater New York City area or simply received her seed catalogues in the mail.

Helen next guides us through a progression of rooms, bypassing a front doorway as recommended, and dutifully moving from public to private spaces by first presenting a reception area with a hall tree and mirror, then living areas, a dining room, bedrooms, and a kitchen. Several rooms seem to serve similar purposes, but she failed to identify them as did some creators with an inscription on the back of the page. Helen carefully arranged the scraps before fixing them to the pages, another suggestion found in how-to articles. Furnishings in rooms appear to be taken from the same trade catalogs. Plain and decorative papers and needlework patterns act as wall and floor coverings with Dresden trim for valances, frames, wall decorations, and curtain trimmings. Curtains of tissue paper edged with lace are placed at an angle to suggest a slight breeze coming through the window. Seated and standing figures, mostly women and children, at play or at rest populate several rooms. One woman cans fruit in the kitchen. A lone boy playing with a cat suggests that Helen may have had a young brother in real life as in her imaginary one. Most of the figures are glued into place with three inserted behind beds and a bassinet. With some rooms devoid of figures, Helen may have also played with loose paper dolls that were moved between rooms.

Despite all materials except for tissue paper being printed, no visible brand names offer further clues to sources or dates. However, several intriguing pieces warrant further investigations. Two pages have framed portrait photos on the walls. Were these cut from printed materials or could these have been personal photos glued

into the album? One set of window curtains is constructed from tissue paper with Chinese characters and colorful patterns reminiscent of ads for the Asian importing company, A.A. Vantine, based in New York City. While the material does not match two ads found in Winterthur Library's collection, additional research into advertising ephemera for Vantine and similar importing firms may pin down its source.

With the exception of a few oversize pieces and some mounted askew, the young album creator demonstrates that she had gained an awareness of proportion. As Marion Dudley Richards, writes in her 1902 article, "Fun with Paper Dolls," "the training in perspective is excellent...sense of proportion is developed by constant handling of the paper furnishings and people."[10] The rooms are thoughtfully decorated, with artwork on the walls, figurines and vases deliberately placed on tables, mantels, and étagères, and identical wall and floor coverings linking rooms in double page spreads. Overall, one is left with the distinct impression the album was expressly purchased for a scrapbook house and methodically planned and curated.

Technical Analysis

For her semester-long independent study, Yan used instrumental techniques to reveal information about this album and its contents.[11] Since the art conservation graduate program is an interdisciplinary one, Yan first undertook a literature review and a visual analysis before selecting two pages for testing. She consulted both contemporaneous and secondary sources on scrapbook houses for

Figure 6. Cover of Peter Henderson & Co.'s Manual of Everything for the Garden, *1889 used for the scrapbook house. (Biodiversity Heritage Library Digital Collections)*

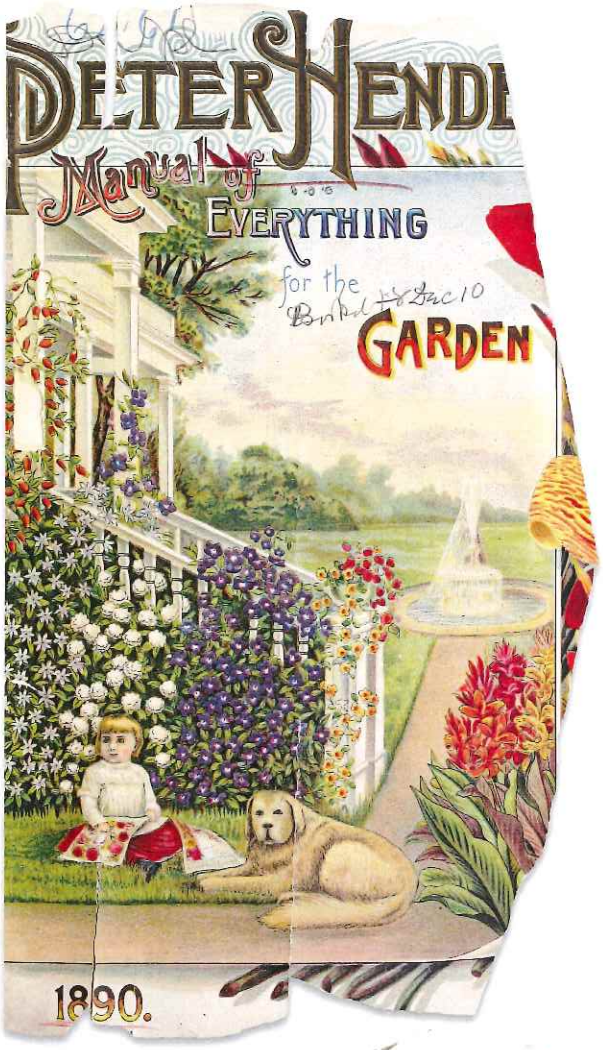

Figure 7. Cover of Peter Henderson & Co.'s Manual of Everything for the Garden, *1890 used for the scrapbook house. (Biodiversity Heritage Library Digital Collections)*

historical context, and scientific and conservation literature on chromolithography, coated papers, and pigment analysis for a materiality foundation. An article discussing pigment-coated papers yielded one notable fact about titanium dioxide which was first introduced as a material for coating paper in 1906 that could potentially assist with an end date.[12]

Yan's visual analysis began with the album itself and an embossed stamp reading "PAT. MARCH 1876" on the back cover. Research led to Patent No. 175,327 issued to Bernard J. Beck of Brooklyn, New York on March 28, 1876 for an "Improvement in Scrap-books" that led to more efficient manufacture and stronger bindings.[13] Unfortunately, the album is missing its spine and sewing structure so no evidence of Beck's innovative concertina guards remains. But the 1876 date serves as a more definitive beginning date, placing this volume before the discovery of the similar 1891 scrapbook. Inside the album, Yan chose one scrap of a woman wearing a two-piece pink and white dress with a matching bodice and bustle skirt for more

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Figure 8. Page 85 showing "Henderson's Garden Gems" from Peter Henderson & Co.'s Manual of Everything for the Garden, *1890. Several flower were cut out and glued into collaged pages of Helen's album. (Biodiversity Heritage Library Digital Collections)*

evaluation. She consulted with Winterthur's Associate Conservator of Textiles and Head of Textile Lab Laura Mina, who supplied a date range of 1870-1890 for the dress style and details, noting they were characteristic of a reception dress for a woman of a higher social class. This type of dress is appropriate for the reception area setting in which the scrap is found.

Two adjacent pages early in the album, depicting a reception area and a library or office, were chosen for scientific testing for their variety of materials and colorants. [Cover illustration & Figure 12] Several instruments were utilized in this study: ultraviolet light illumination for characterization of possible organic coatings and dyes; x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) for elemental composition on selected colorants; Raman spectroscopy for compound identification of colorants; Fourier-transform infrared (FT-IR) spectroscopy for organic material classification; and scanning electron microscopy with energy dispersive x-ray spectroscopy (SEM-EDS) for elemental analysis of cross-sections. In summary, the 57 items tested on the two pages show a mix of lithographs and chromolithographs on pigment-coated or uncoated papers, photographic prints, intaglio prints, and embossed and die-cut papers. Dates of production could not be established for items since all were likely mass-produced and widely available for several decades in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Further testing focused on three specific items and uncovered useful information on molecular and elemental compositions. XRF, SEM-EDS, and cross-section analysis on several pieces of gold Dresden trim used as wall accents revealed its three layers of a paper substrate, a warm color ground of iron, aluminum, and silicon in between, and a top metallic surface. Due to the thinness of this top surface, even high magnification examination could not determine if the metal, composed of zinc and copper and not gold, was a foil or a powder. The green, white, and gold embossed trim found on both pages underwent Raman spectroscopy, cross-section analysis, and SEM-EDS testing that also revealed three layers of a paper base topped with a white ground layer and partially covered by a metal with green paint on top forming a geometric and embossed pattern. The metal composition of zinc and copper is similar to that of the Dresden trim. As confirmed with Raman spectroscopy, the green colorant was made from a mixture of Prussian blue, first synthesized in 1704, and chrome yellow, first available in the early 1800s. The third piece tested was the green patterned paper used as a floor covering in the hall setting. FTIR testing could not determine the coating on the paper; however, XRF analysis showed copper, lead and arsenic, with minor peaks for chromium, manganese, and iron. Lead detected in this area and many others on the two pages is likely present as lead white pigment.

The combined detection of copper and arsenic in the green paper suggests the presence of a toxic emerald green, later confirmed by compound identification with Raman spectroscopy. [Figure 13] Detection of this pigment is not surprising given its ubiquitous use in many 19th century wallpapers, paints, fabrics, and other common items. XRF analysis was also able to exclude the presence of titanium white, the synthetic white pigment first introduced in 1906. Therefore, while technical analysis could not verify more definitive dates, manufacture of the album scraps, at least, could be assumed to be before that date.

Figure 9. Collaged bedroom scene with cut "Henderson's Garden Gems" of Ipomoea Limbata, Calliopsis, and Poppy Shirley in bottom right. Scrap of girl inserted behind bassinet. (Winterthur Library, John and Carolyn Grossman Collection)

Figure 10. Collaged bedroom scene with cut "Henderson's Garden Gems" of Poppy Mikado and Dianthus Laciniatus on bottom left. (Winterthur Library, John and Carolyn Grossman Collection)

Conclusions

While Yan's visual and technical analysis provided an approximate date range of 1876-1906, the new working date range has been narrowed to the early 1890s, predicated on the comparable 1891 album and the two identified scraps from 1889 and 1890 seed catalogs. This is also supported by the furnishing styles and the general popularity of the activity.

In comparison with more scrapbook houses in the Winterthur Library, it is evident that Helen had access to more high-end source material than did other creators. With the pieces all originating in printed sources, with a noticeable lack of handmade material, and with a commercially made album bought solely for this activity, she was most likely from the upper middle class.

Recommendations for Further Research

Analyzing the materials in other pages of the album may uncover more data on the papers, processes, and pigments used. A note of caution: the pigments chrome yellow, emerald green and, likely, lead white, present in the scrapbook are known to be harmful if ingested in dry powder form. What is less understood is their toxicity when bound within paper, paints and coatings. Until more is known about the danger of these materials in these forms, it is strongly recommended that researchers avoid contact with suspect areas by wearing gloves and washing hands after handling. Fully encapsulate any loose items in mylar. Do not place any food or drink nearby when handling to eliminate the chance of cross-contamination.[14]

Continuing the search for source materials will also help with dating the album. With the overwhelming number of items, a pragmatic approach would be to focus first on analyzing the dress styles of the remaining figures. Second, one can search published trade catalogs for dates on the furniture scraps.

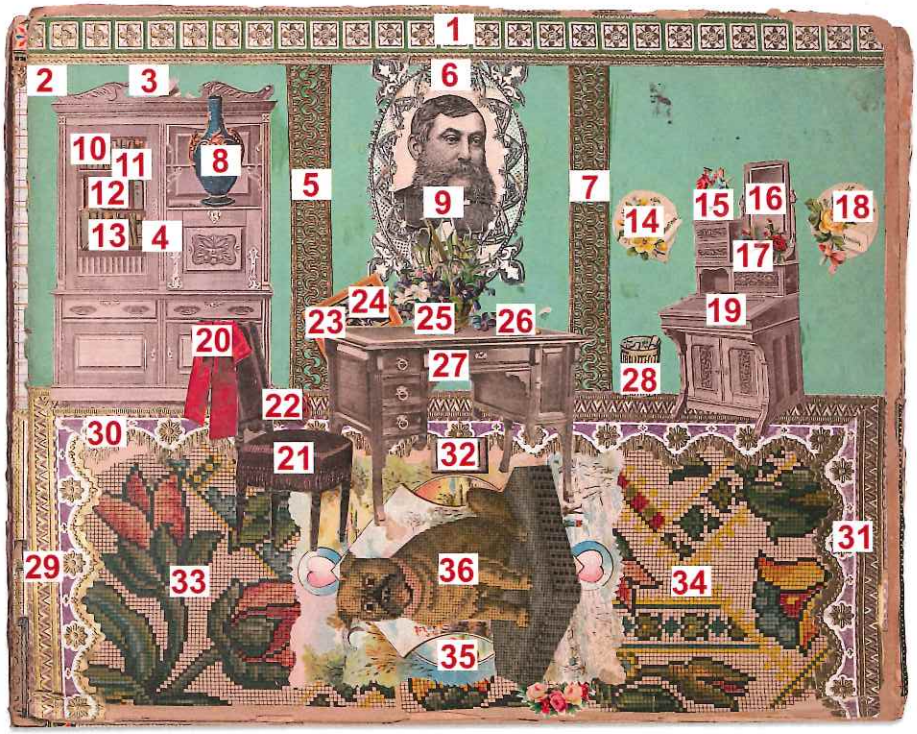

Figure 12. Second collage room setting with identification of 36 analyzed items. (Technical Study of a Victorian Scrapbook House)

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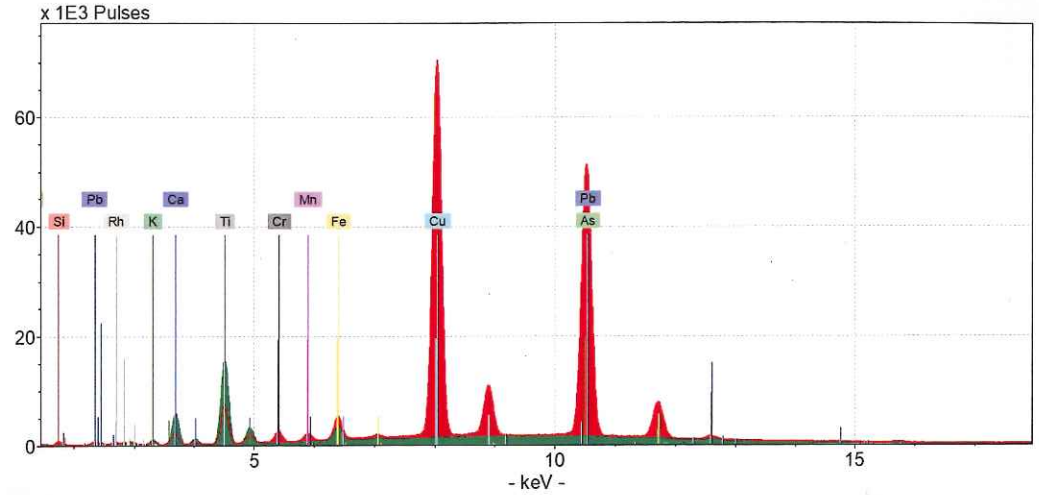

Figure 13. XRF analysis spectrum showing strong peaks at copper, lead, and arsenic and small peaks at chromium, manganese, and iron. (Technical Study of a Victorian Scrapbook House)

With its dialogue between librarians, researchers, conservators, and interested parties from other disciplines, this productive collaboration serves as an excellent model for future research.

View Helen's scrapbook house and others in the Winterthur Library's collection at: http://contentdm.winterthur.org/digital/collection/collage

Further Reading

E. Richard McKinstry, "Papered Dream Houses Offer Clues to Imagined Lives," *Ephemera News* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 1, 13-16.

Beverly Gordon, "The Paper Doll House," in *The Saturated World; Aesthetic Meaning, Intimate Objects, Women's Lives, 1890-1940* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2006): 37-61.

Rodris Roth, "Scrapbook Houses: A Late Nineteenth-Century Children's View of the American Home," in *The American Home: Material Culture, Domestic Space, and Family Life* (Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1998): 301-323.

Endnotes

1. Mary White, *The Child's Rainy Day Book* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905), 10.
2. Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, "A Doll's House," *Harper's Bazaar* 44, no. 7 (July 1910): 474.
3. Clara Andrew Williams, *The House that Glue Built* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, ca. 1905).
4. In addition to the aforementioned publications, several others were consulted. In chronological order: Jessie E. Ringwalt, "The Paper-doll's House-No. 20," *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, 101, no. 602 (August 1880): 160-162; "A Scrap-Book House," *New York Evangelist*, 68: no. 46 (November 18, 1897): 29; Carolyn Wells, "A Paper Doll's House," *The Puritan,* 9, no. 2 (November 1900): 273-275; Marion Dudley Richards, "Fun with Paper Dolls." *Ladies' Home Journal*, 19, no. 10 (September 1902): 41; Emily Hoffman, "Homes for Paper Dolls," *Harper's Bazaar*, 38, no. 1 (January 1904): 84-87; *The Good Housekeeping Discovery Book no. 1* (Springfield, Mass.; New York: The Phelps Pub. Co., 1905), 78-79; and "A Paper Doll House, " *The Modern Priscilla* 19, no. 1 (January 1906): 20.
5. "A Paper Doll House," 20.
6. Christina Michelon, "Interior Impressions: Printed Material in the Nineteenth-Century American Home" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2018). I thank Christina for several observations used in this article.
7. John L. Boland Book & Stationery Company, *Trade Catalogue of Miscellaneous Publications, Juvenile Books, Bibles, Testaments, Albums and Stationers' Fancy Goods* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Company, 1891), 90.
8. Peter Henderson & Co., *Manual of Everything for the Garden: 1889* (New York: The Company, 1889), accessed summer 2019 on the Biodiversity Heritage Library's website, *https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/67018#/summary*.
9. Peter Henderson & Co., *Manual of Everything for the Garden: 1890* (New York: The Company, 1890), accessed summer 2019 on the Biodiversity Heritage Library's website, *https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/129477#/summary*.
10. Richards, "Fun with Paper Dolls," 41.
11. Yan Ling Choi, "Technical Study of a Victorian Scrapbook House," May 2019, on deposit in the Winterthur Library. I thank scientist Catherine Matsen for her assistance in summarizing Yan's report.
12. Dianne L. van der Reyden, Erika M. Mosier, and Mary T. Baker, "Pigment-Coated Papers I: History and Technology," *Preprints for the ICOM Committee for Conservation, 10th Triennial Meeting, Washington, DC, 22-27 August 1993, 2 (August 1993): 491-498.*
13. United States Patent and Trademark Office, "Patent No. 175,327," Issue date March 28, 1876, accessed spring 2019, *https://www.uspto.gov/patent*.
14. Recent research and analytical testing by Dr. Melissa Tedone, Winterthur's Associate Conservator/Lab Head for Books & Library Materials have focused on emerald green bookcloth in mid 19th century bindings. Handling recommendations for this project, developed in consultations with University of Delaware's Department of Environmental Health & Safety have informed the ones stated here for ephemera. To read more on the Poison Book Project, see: *http://wiki.winterthur.org/wiki/Poison_Book_Project*.

Jeanne Solensky is the Andrew W. Mellon Librarian for the Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera at the Winterthur Library. She incorporates ephemera into teaching sessions with students and visitors groups to demonstrate the research value of every piece.