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HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE:
A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE 1890's

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**THE POSTERS OF EDWARD PENFIELD FOR
HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE:
A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE 1890'S**

By

Susan A. Wilczak

A THESIS

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE POSTERS OF EDWARD PENFIELD FOR *HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE*: A REFLECTION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE 1890'S

By

Susan A. Wilczak

The following narrative traces the development of the poster in American just before the turn of the century, particularly the posters created by Edward Penfield. Using the posters created by Penfield, primarily during the later part of the 1890's, I point out connections and differences between the images Penfield has provided and their relation to American society at the time.

Penfield takes the viewpoint as an observer of modern city and leisure activity. Within the social context of late-nineteenth-century America, Penfield provides us with images that reflect the rise of the leisure time and activity of the audience he was addressing.

TO BOO

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to be able to thank the many people who have assisted me over the years in the writing of this thesis, directly and indirectly. My greatest and most treasured debt goes to Dr. Phylis Floyd, my thesis advisor, and Chris Swenson, from the Detroit Institute of Arts. It was through their recommendation that I pursued this topic, and with their guidance and inspiration that it was brought to finish as a thesis.

I would like to recognize my professors at Michigan State University, Dr. Susan Bandes and Dr. Eldon VanLiere, who read my thesis, offering insightful comments on it, as well as my previous work in their respective classes.

I owe a special debt of thanks to my parents for their advice and support. I reserve my final thanks for my sister Cheryl, who through patience has taught me how to write and use the computer. It is with pleasure that I dedicate this thesis to her.

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"They cover the walls that flank our streets, they are part of the landscape of our cities, and if suddenly it was decreed they must disappear, we would have the impression that all color had disappeared from the urban landscape."¹

¹Max Gallo, *The Poster in History* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., 1974), p. 9.

INTRODUCTION

Chris Swenson, Assistant Curator of Graphic Arts at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), assisted my examination of their poster collection during the summer of 1990. In the process, the works created by artist Edward Penfield emerged, in my view, uniquely different from the other American poster artists during the 1890's.

The spirit of Penfield's images was captivating. Penfield's posters were interesting in that they portrayed an unique relationship between art and audience. In addition, his posters signified a more artful and formalist style than his American contemporaries. The clear and bold colors, along with a strong poster format, created striking compositions. These posters were not just another means of advertisement, but were in fact, works of art.

American graphic art has been neglected in scholarly research. There has been a shortage of articles and books that focus exclusively on the subject matter incorporated by American poster artists during the 1890's. Upon evaluating the scarce published material, I discovered that Penfield had been overlooked by scholars in terms of his contribution to American poster art. Penfield was disregarded due to the fact that his estate had yet to provide assistance pertaining to his graphic technique.² While Penfield is mentioned in general surveys of American graphic art, no author has given a thorough investigation to his work, even though *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* provided numerous

²Letters of this correspondence between the Penfield estate and Chris Swenson are located in the Department of Graphic Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

publications.³

Several catalogs containing a representation of American poster art of the nineteenth century are available to the public. The exhibition catalog, *Designed to Persuade: The Graphic Art of Edward Penfield* by David Gibson, discussed Penfield's posters as instruments for advertising.⁴ Other exhibition catalogs focused primarily on American poster art, including Penfield's works: *Posters of the Gay 90's* by Chris Swenson and *American Art Posters of the 1890's* by David Kiehl.⁵

The limited published material on American poster art and Edward Penfield predominates any research on the topic. Taking this into consideration, the main focus of this thesis will be the connections between American society of the 1890's and Penfield's reflection of this culture in American poster art. By using the Detroit Institute of Arts collection of posters by Edward Penfield as a primary source of material, a socio-historical approach to these works will be taken in regards to subject matter rather than artistry.

³ Victor Margolin, *American Poster Renaissance* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1975), p. 18. Edward Penfield held position of Art Director at *Harper's* from 1891-1901.

⁴David Gibson, *Designed to Persuade: The Graphic Art of Edward Penfield* (New York: Hudson River Museum, 1984), p. 7.

⁵Chris Swenson, *American Posters of the Gay Nineties* (Detroit: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 1988).

David Kiehl, *American Posters of the 1890's In the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987).

Chapter One:

Brave Beginnings

When the Columbian Exposition opened in Chicago in 1893, the planners intended to call attention to Progress, to define and celebrate it. They had many accomplishments to point to.¹

Some of the accomplishments were technological, like the steam engine, Eli Whitney's cotton gin, complex mechanical farm equipment, aniline dyes, municipal sanitation and chlorination of waste, and color lithography.

And some of the accomplishments were social. Chattal slavery was legally extinct in North America. Improved hygiene, prompted by a wider understanding of the work of Lister, Jenner, and Pasteur among the medical fraternity, and even more by the rise of a medical sorority, and, more still, a widespread understanding of germ theory among people in general, and certainly aseptic childbed practices, made life for many less short and brutal, and disease something to be overcome rather than succumbed to. Hygiene in food preparation and elimination of lead from food storage erased famine from most ordinary Americans' annual cycle of feasts, and also dispensed with the need for the preponderance of the population to be engaged in food-getting six days out of seven.

¹James Kirby Martin, et al, *America and Its People* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), pp.516-523.

They could leave the farm. They could gather in cities. Some of them would even see Paris.

Notions of freedom were loose in America, indeed all over the planet, and continue to sprout and ramify through our own time and, we can expect, well beyond. The fairgoers in Chicago would meditate, pray about and feel a duty to act on their own visions of freedom.²

The century preceeding the Columbian Exposition had also witnessed the world becoming rounder. As regrettable as some of the means and motives had been, China and Japan were no longer the closed and isolated spheres they had been. Curiosity for its own sake was seen as worthwhile, and exploration was its own reward. Jefferson and Bolivar and all who followed them had warned would-be emperors and enslavers that the Western Hemisphere was not an easy arena in which to work out their ambitions. And Europe was enveloped in more types of ferment than can be easily summarized. The Exposition was something thoroughly American that America was giving the world.

However ambitious and optimistic the organizers of the Exposition were, the following century was to bristle with change, with even more progress.

And working out of an office in New York, one young artist would straddle the progress of the past century and one evolving popular conception of the progress to come.

Edward Penfield, a twenty-four-year-old American artist, was summoned back from Paris to New York to be Director of the Art Department for the House of Harper. It

²Martin, p. 218.

was to be a fortuitous collaboration.³

It is difficult today to realize that, for most of America's first century of nationhood, New York was not *New York*: Charleston was finer, Boston was richer, Philadelphia was better in every way, and the elected ones in Washington, DC, could mint currency, levy taxes and dispatch armies -- and the disastrous potential of these powers would shape much of America's history around the turn of the century. But New Yorkers were sanguine with the first flush of recognition that New York had become *New York*; that thought colored every social contact and policy decision. They, and it, were ready to try almost anything.

From our own vantage point in time, *Harper's* looks as permanent as Gibraltar, but it was still just the sort of novel enterprise the Columbian Exposition would celebrate, and that New Yorkers [which came in a sense to include anyone who read their magazines] would take to their hearts.⁴

The House of Harper began in New York City, which then had a population of 12,000, in 1817.⁵ John and James Harper were experienced printers and skillful workmen. Although they had commissioned jobs of printing at first, they were ambitious, and became printers and publishers of books; at the time there were thirty-three booksellers in New York. Business was slow, and it was not until mid-summer that they produced the first order from a bookseller named Evert Duyckinck. It was for two

³Eugene Exman, *The House Of Harper* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 48.

⁴Martin, p.76.

⁵Exman, p. 28.

thousand copies of an English translation of *Seneca's Morals*⁶.

Business continued at a slow pace through 1818. Soon they were being congratulated for doing the best bookwork in town, and were receiving large commissions. As their business expanded, they made three moves: to Fulton Street, to 230 Pearl Street, and to 82 Cliff Street in 1825.

In 1833, they issued their earliest existing catalogue, consisting of 234 titles, of which 90% were English reprints. At this time, advertising helped sell their books and brought them new business. During the 1830's, *Harper's* advertisements boasted that "several gentlemen of high literacy acquirements and correct taste" were reading all new works. *Harper's* gave literate Americans, a surprisingly large percentage in the total population, first-rate books at modest prices. It was often said that *Harper's* was doing more than any single university to raise the intellectual level of the nation. During the 1830's, bright and ambitious college graduates who majored in English were the majority of the readers.⁷

Though fires and thefts caused setbacks in the 1840's, *Harper's* occupied seven five-story buildings and were printing about two million volumes a year. They had an establishment that in numerical strength of its operation outranked any other publishing house in the world. By 1861, roads and railroads and, thus, delivery services had been expanded far past the Mississippi. A tremendous cultural development followed, for people could obtain books and periodicals faster than they previously could, and at a

⁶Exman, p.19.

⁷Exman, pp 48-81. The details that follow are based on this history.

cheaper price. Many of them were reading *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, which, beginning in June 1850, was sent out monthly across the nation.

In 1869, Henry Alden became editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, a title he carried for 50 years. In his lifetime, he saw and corresponded with nearly every important writer in the United States and abroad. His early guiding principle was to publish what would be intelligent, interesting and useful to the average American.

Under Alden's guidance, the magazine in 1885 had a circulation of 200,000 in America and 35,000 in Great Britain, the widest readership of any magazine of its kind. During the mid-nineteenth century, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* had circulated over 200,000 magazines, and had reached a readership that went into the millions. Due to this high volume, *Harper's* was by far the most popular general magazine in the mid- to late-eighteen hundreds.

In an attempt to avoid controversy, the magazine concentrated on turning conventional attitudes into narratives -- fiction and cultural and scientific reports. Its prevailing domestic rhetoric uniformly structured these narratives along sexually-coded lines, often with surprising results. These sexually-coded spheres were frequently set at odds, despite the publisher's original intentions.⁸

That rhetoric proved remarkably resourceful in accommodating the demands for equal rights: both woman suffrage and the plea for equal pay were vigorously advocated in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. As early as 1871, *Harper's Weekly* promoted what came to be called progressive values, like conservation, hygiene and universal fairness, in

⁸See Exman, Chapter 6.

essays and engravings;⁹ and it was happy to continue doing so in four-color illustrations. Such original thinkers as Samuel Gompers, Amelia Bloomer and Margaret Sanger frequently received notice in its pages,¹⁰ while ideas were presented and discussed in such a way that *Harper's* could be read aloud in mixed company without offending anyone's sense of propriety, however the listeners might respond politically or literarily.

By doing this, the magazine strengthened its alliance with the ideology of work which kept a vision of America alive and fostered the ways it would change. The magazine editors and staff were aware of this new audience and identified strongly with them, and wanted to create a poster that would attract attention and so obtain a substantial advantage over their competitors. *Harper's* chose not to commission well-known French artists, such as Toulouse-Lautrec to create their covers, because they feared the exuberant young ladies, so frequently found in French posters, might be offensive to the young American women. The Americans thought that it was not proper etiquette to see women in such clothing or scenes; using such illustrations would decrease their potential readership.¹¹ The editors' decision, that an American approach would make mercantile sense, opened an avenue for a dialogue that, month by month, charted the evolution of American women's sense of themselves.

⁹See Terry Morton's "Preservation Cartoons Observed," *"I Feel I Should Warn You . . .": Historic Preservation Cartoons* (The Preservation Press: Washington, DC, 1975), p. ix, and Draper Hill's essay, "Forward March?", p. xiii of the same volume.

¹⁰Jennifer Bieder, *The Woman Rebel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979), p. 18 ff.

¹¹Margolin, p. 14.

Chapter Two:

The Poster Emigrates to America and Prospers

During the 1890's, Europe and America exclaimed over a fresh concept of advertising that came to be considered a new form of art. All of this heightened excitement centered on the color advertising poster. These posters were an emerging, thoroughly modern form of advertising that embodied a new visual discourse for mass consumption. The boulevards of Paris and the shop windows of America were decorated with colorful images created by some of the most talented artists of the time.¹

The first lithographic posters were produced in France.² This process of lithography requires the artist or assistant to draw the proposed image onto a slab of limestone plates using a grease crayon. Once the drawing is completed, nitric acid is then washed over the surface. The imaged exterior of the semi-absorbent stone would then be receptive to carry the printer's ink.³ The ink adheres only to the grease, not the clean part of the stone. Paper is then placed over the drawing and is processed through a press producing the mirror images from stone to paper. This versatile method of printing

¹Several of these poster artists include the French artists: Pierre Bonnard. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Jules Cheret, Theophile-Alexandre Steinlen, George de Feure and Joseph J. Gould, Joseph Christian Leyendecker, and Edward Penfield. (Kiehl, *American Posters* . . . , p. 63)

²Phillip Denis Cate, ed., *The Graphic Arts and French Society 1871-1914* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988). p. 85.

³Peter C. Marzio, *The Democratic Art: Chromolithography 1840-1900* (Boston: David Godine Publishing, Inc., 1979).

enabled the artist to achieve multiple printed effects.⁴

Chromolithography (or lithographs printed in multiple colors) presented a technical achievement that evolved in Europe, but was transmitted to America while in its early development. In 1840, William Shayer of Boston created Chromatones.⁵ Shayer, an artist in his own right, achieved this method by using separate stones for each colored image. Creating the prints was quite complex, because it required perfect registration.

In fusing its two main functions -- advertising and art reproduction -- chromolithography evolved into the basis for modern-day commercial art. Eventually, chromolithography was the principle color medium for advertising.⁶

The French artist Jules Cheret mastered and refined the process of color lithography in 1859 with his poster creation of *Orphée aux Enfers*.⁷ Cheret's example led to the explosion of lithographically printed posters. He is credited with taking the poster from a form of advertising into a realm of art. Cheret discovered that the use of simple and flat shapes found in Japanese prints, which were attaining popularity in artistic circles, could be employed in a poster with strong effect.⁸

⁴Paul Sachs, *Modern Prints and Drawings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954). Commercial artists and avant-garde printmakers were fascinated with woodblocks, stippling, spatter, brush and finger painting, incisions, and all the various effects can be achieved by this short list of techniques.

⁵Sachs, p.112.

⁶Allan Fern, *Off the Wall* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1985), p. 10.

⁷John Barnicoat, *A Concise History of Posters: 1870-1970* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1972), p. 7.

⁸Wilhelm Weber, *A History of Lithography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), p. 97.

Due to Cheret's rethinking of the use of color lithography, he became the "Father of the Poster."⁹ He used color lithography to create posters as advertisements, but his artistry and skill in the medium elevated the creations in later years to the stature of art. Cheret's pioneering work in color lithography opened the way for a younger generation of graphic artists, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Pierre Bonnard and Edward Penfield.¹⁰

Toulouse-Lautrec, through exaggeration, enriched Cheret's style by the use of dramatization, caricature, brilliant color, energetic line and a willingness to accent the flatness found in Japanese prints. He was more highly esteemed by succeeding generations than by the one preceding his own, principally for his originality, as the following suggests: "M. de Toulouse-Lautrec is less widely known than Cheret, yet he deserves better. His dominant characteristic is boldness...He goes on his own way and finds approaches to the public by unexpected means."¹¹

Cheret and Toulouse-Lautrec were just two of an array of artists who produced such images for the "salons of the streets." The cities of France became overrun with posters as "millions of gallons of colored inks were consumed to quench the public's hunger for images in color . . . [I]t was an era marked by a belief in fine art."¹² Americans studying in Europe, and Americans wishing to borrow the status that anything European

⁹Cate, p. 4.

¹⁰Jean Adhemar, *Toulouse-Lautrec: His Complete Lithographs and Drypoints* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.) p. XXVI.

¹¹It is interesting to note because now, Toulouse-Lautrec is generally more well-known than Cheret. Adhemar, p. 40.

¹²Marzio, p. xi.

still had in many minds, brought home a taste for prints produced in this technique.

Technological advances in the printing industry, and the surge of magazines, newspapers and posters, led to a mercantile emphasis on images that were quick and easy to comprehend visually. Due to the clear, simple content and expression, " . . . the poster, deliberately brutal and simplified, in which everything is stripped to essentials, caused an immediate sensation."¹³

¹³Frank Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 21.

Chapter Three:

Posters in Public Places

Late nineteenth-century American artists attended schools and traveled throughout France to familiarize themselves with great art at first hand.¹ These students were the first native-born, self-identified Americans to travel to Europe to enrich themselves in non-monetary ways who were not already wealthy.

Europe had become accustomed to the sons of wealthy American families -- and, just occasionally, their daughters -- improving their accents, manners and worldly comprehension by “touring,” traveling from museum to cathedral to ruin, being tutored in languages and introduced to friendly natives, for six months, or a year, or a bit more. A certain American caste even deposited their predebutante daughters in European convents to acquire polish.²

Such junkets were well beyond the means of most Americans, in any time, but rugged pioneer-stock students learned, from teachers or by word of mouth, that one could rent a portion of a garret, eat frugally, and spend years in the Louvre copying the masters.

Such artists had a familiar, day-to-day exposure to the new-fangled color-lithograph commercial posters, commissioned from artists of the first rank, since they were widely displayed on street kiosks, arcade and alley walls, and the sides of buildings; some prints were more than five feet tall. Subsequently, these posters were available for

¹Adhemar, p. XXXV. Large posters were made for display on the city streets, while smaller posters were made in order to fit the inside of shop windows.

²Martin, pp. 332-9.

artistic education in America through exhibitions and lectures, and young artists obtained a glimpse of what transpired abroad.³ American artists discovered this new provocative approach not only by going abroad, where they could see the posters, but they also read various articles about posters and attended poster exhibitions, which were popular in Europe and America.⁴ The artists transformed the poster while still in its infancy into a clearly American art form. In general, graphic art in America during the 1890's was quite conventional, relying on the earlier forms of American technology.⁵ After the introduction of the French "Style Moderne," artists were able to expand artistically into the medium of Chromolithography that had originally been foreign to them.⁶ "Until the winter of 1894, the artistic poster was practically unknown in the United States."⁷

Posters became a popular topic of discussion and criticism during the late 1880's in Europe, and in that stratum of American society that still looked to Europe for intellectual and aesthetic stimulation. In 1884, the first poster exhibition was held in Paris.⁸ This display of posters provided works shown from floor to ceiling in a fashion

³At the end of the 19th century it was quite chic to go abroad and study as there was a fascination with French art.

⁴Barnicoat, p.11.

⁵Margolian, p. 16.

⁶Marzio, p.10.

⁷Barnicoat, p. 42.

⁸Kiehl, p. 57. This article was located in *Les Affiches Illustrées*. Credit should be given to Gustave Fustier as the author of the first article on the poster in his submission in 1884, "La Literature Murale."

similar to the way they appeared on the streets.⁹ In 1890, the Grolier Club of New York held the first exhibition of European posters in the United States.¹⁰ The works of Toulouse-Lautrec and Cheret were placed on exhibit, and were well received by the American public. Six years later, the *Salon des cent* was established in Paris, and held an “International Poster Exhibition” in which Toulouse-Lautrec was the featured artist.¹¹ Also of great importance to the poster boom was the continuing fascination with Japanese color prints; their flattened depiction of space and strong use of flat areas of color had inspired poster artists. In 1896, the first complete historical exhibition of Japanese color prints was held in New York. Patrons were enchanted through the effects of their displays.¹²

Posters moved from being merely a form of cheap advertisement to becoming a highly collected object. A poster collecting “craze” predominated the late 1880's to the early 1900's in Paris and New York. This new and exciting advertising medium of pictorial posters quickly captured collectors and enthusiasts.¹³

This new phenomenon's appeal was so great that posters were being taken off the walls, and were occasionally vandalized. In Paris, avid collectors obtained posters by removing them from the walls during the night with damp sponges.¹⁴ It then became

⁹Kiehl, p. 58.

¹⁰Margolian, p. 19.

¹¹Kiehl, p. 61.

¹²Barnicoat, p. 35.

¹³Barnicoat, p. 36.

¹⁴Barnicoat, p. 42.

necessary to draft a law in order to prevent this from recurring. In 1881, legislation was passed stating that merchants and businessmen were free to commission talented artists to provide advertising through this new poster medium. Signs were to be posted in areas designated for the hanging of posters, which in turn protected posters from destruction.¹⁵

The popularity of the medium supported the mounting of various poster shows, which thousands of people attended.¹⁶ Poster contests were held to discover new talent; and the winning artists were given monetary prizes and much acclaim.¹⁷ Print dealers and publishers, such as Editions Sagot in Paris, began selling posters, including *Jane Avril*, 1893 by Toulouse-Lautrec.¹⁸ Soon thereafter, poster clubs and societies were established throughout Europe and the United States.¹⁹

In the United States, the poster fad was in full swing by 1895, with many American publishers printing extra copies of their monthly placards to sell on the burgeoning collector's market.²⁰ The philosophical use of artistic posters fell in squarely with their commercial aim to sell magazines, and quickly became the primary means of advertising in an increasingly competitive market.²¹ An offshoot of this poster craze

¹⁵Kiehl, p. 64.

¹⁶Cate, p. 67.

¹⁷Kiehl, p. 20.

¹⁸Barnicoat, p. 19. See illustration 2. Tony Fusco, *Posters* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990) p. 53. According to Fusco, this may bring \$50,000 in today's market.

¹⁹Mott, p. 18.

²⁰Mott, p. 19.

²¹Gallo, p. 75.

brought about the Poster Party. At one of these gatherings, the women guests were invited to come dressed as illustrated figures from different magazine posters.²² As a portion of the entertainment, each woman posed while the others guessed which poster she represented, rather like charades.²³

²²Margolian, p. 21.

²³Margolian, p. 21.

Chapter Four:

The Rise of *Harper's* and Edward Penfield

“A design that needs study is not a poster no matter how well it is executed.”¹

Radical improvements in technology and the radical American notion of free universal education spawned a rapid increase in literacy among the entire population of the United States, and an enormous increase in the proportion of society with the skill, leisure and taste for recreational reading. Posters became increasingly prominent in the popular culture of the day: they eased the eye in the mushrooming, crowded, smoky, filthy, ugly, dull cities to which many who were no longer needed for agricultural work flocked, or drifted to as a last resort. And of all the vehicles of popular information, none experienced a more spectacular increase in respectability or public impact than magazines.²

News dealers, once devoted primarily to the sale of newspapers, reached out more and more to emphasize magazines just before and at the turn of the century. By the end of the 1890's, there were approximately four thousand news dealers throughout the country that carried magazines.³

¹"Odds and Ends from Edward Penfield's Studio," *The International Studio* (Vol. 26) 1905, p. viii.

²Mott, p. 13.

³Mott, p. 20. "The little man who talked to me said yes, he had a few posters that he received occasionally from the American News Company in bundles with his papers

The intended readership for these periodicals was primarily the well-educated and the wealthy, although the actual readership spread far beyond the publishers' expectations. For instance, the target market for posters included those patrons who could afford the *Harper's Monthly Magazine* subscription rate of 35 cents per month or \$4.00 per year.⁴ In comparison, a loaf of bakery bread cost four or five cents, an expensive necessity for factory and shop girls who rented rooms where cooking was not allowed -- but even they would pool their pennies, saved from wages which might be as little as 70 cents a week, to buy shared reading material.⁵

The practice of purchasing a monthly magazine grew among the urban populations as literacy increased.⁶ Although men would find interest in some magazines, such as *Recreation*, which focused on outdoor sports, the contents were directed primarily toward women of the upper class.⁷ Articles on fashion, romance and short or serial fiction were the major offerings written to attract a female readership, as they tended to avoid the daily political controversies and social apprehensions of the time.

The commercial success of artistic posters in France convinced several American publishers to add an appealing placard to their bundled magazines before they were

and periodicals, and from eastern publishers. He had no use for them, but thinking them too pretty to throw away, he put them as they came into a large drawer under the counter."

⁴*Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, (New York: Harper & Brothers) November 1897 - Index.

⁵Martin, p. 596.

⁶Gallo, p. 75.

⁷See, for example, essays in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, (November 1897).

delivered to news stands and book stores, attracting the eyes of new potential readers.

These posters were prominently displayed in the booksellers' windows and on the wall to increase sales.⁸

While advertising was not a new invention, the American elaboration and diffusion of advertising, and its central place in the consciousness of the community, were new phenomena.⁹ One publisher who took into consideration all these factors was Harper and Brothers.¹⁰

And thus, wisely, *Harper's* selected a very young Edward Penfield as the Director of their Art Department. He was born June 2, 1866, in Brooklyn, N.Y., just after the close of the Civil War to Josiah and Ellen Penfield. He was a pupil at the Art Students League in New York. He was only twenty-four when he became art editor of *Harper's Magazine* and, shortly thereafter, art editor of *Harper's Weekly* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Penfield discovered and befriended many talented artists and artisans, and contributed to the burgeoning cultural scene by encouraging and directing them. He married Jennie Walker in April 1897; with her, he had one son, Walker Penfield, and a second son who died in infancy. He lived most of life in Pelham Manor, N.Y. and died in Beacon, N.Y., February 8, 1925.¹¹

⁸Barnicoat, p. 42.

⁹Kiehl, p. 52.

¹⁰David Woodward, *Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Journal of the Printing Historical Society, No. 10. 1974), p. 75. Due to the economy, poor investments, and the growing of an another powerful publishing house, in 1902 the House of Harper collapsed and was bought out. See also Exman, Chapter 1.

¹¹*Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.)

During his art editorship at *Harper's*, Penfield was always on hand to supervise the mixing of inks while his poster creations were on the press. Penfield's hands-on approach led the noted art critic Royal Cortissoz to comment in the *New York Herald-Tribune* of May 28, 1926, "He took his job seriously, but never took himself seriously."

When his editorship at *Harper's* came to an end, Penfield was free to concentrate on other interests, including travel to Holland, from which came the inspiration for his *Holland Sketches*, published by *Scribner's* in 1907.

Affiliated with many of the prominent organizations of his day, Penfield served as president of the Society of Illustrators and belonged to the American Watercolor Society, the Guild of Freelance Artists and the Salmagundi Club. In his later years, he served as Commission of streets of Pelham Manor, New York, in which his neighbor and fellow artist Frederic Remington referred to him as being a "perfectionist."¹²

Although his work is most often associated with the monthly posters he created for *Harper's Monthly*, Penfield also illustrated covers and interiors for other prominent publications including, *Collier's*, *Life*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's* and *Metropolitan Magazine*. While enrolled at the Art Students League of New York from 1884-1895, he was a student of George de Forest Brush. Brush was an American art teacher who encouraged the spread of Impressionism in America during the last decade of the nineteenth century.¹³

As a student, Penfield went to Paris, where he came into contact with

¹²Frederic Taraba, *Methods of the Masters: Edward Penfield, The Power of Simplicity* (New York: Step by Step Graphics, 1993), p.19.

¹³*Dictionary of American Biography*.

Impressionism. While in Paris, he was summoned back to New York to be appointed *Harper's* editor in 1891, where he remained for ten years. Penfield supervised the various *Harper's* magazines, including the areas of fiction, reviews, travel and current affairs. He also supervised the publishing layout. In addition, part of his job was to create a series of monthly poster advertisements.

As early as 1894, his work was heralded by *Publishers Weekly*. "The advertising poster has within recent years actually soared into the regions of art."¹⁴

He was among the first wave of American commercial designers to form independent studios.¹⁵ As one of his duties at Harper's, he supervised the various illustrations for all its many publications. He was responsible for approving the layouts of its publications, and personally created a poster advertisement two feet in height for each edition to fit into a bookshop window.¹⁶ It was during the early months of 1893 which marked Harper's decision to issue the monthly poster.¹⁷

The posters created by Penfield reflected a period in which the most experimental marketing technique and the main force of advertising were the artistic presentation of the commercial message.¹⁸ Penfield understood that simplicity and composition were the key

¹⁴Barnicoat, p.18.

¹⁵*Who Was Who In America 1897-1942* (Chicago: The A.N. Malguis Company, vol. 1 1943), p. 956, and Taraba, p. 19, *passim*. For a further account of Penfield's life, see Gibson, 1984.

¹⁶Exman, p. 94. Harper's was specific as to where they were to be placed.

¹⁷Swenson, p. 4.

¹⁸John DeLemo, *Planning & Producing Posters* (Worcester, MA: The Davis Press Inc., 1943), p. 7.

components of an effective poster. He believed that this simplicity and design should be symbiotic and one should enrich the other. Since too much lettering, hard-to-read letters, and fancy words kill a poster's simplicity, Penfield further showed that flat areas were best enhanced by rich color schemes.

A poster must also leave a definite message to "sell an idea". A poem by an unknown author in the February 1895 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, focused on the poster issue. "You must draw a dame with awful angularity. In a landscape of geometry run mad. Give her frock a sweep with long particularity, and a pattern that no raiment ever had. Oh, the sky! It must be green, and the tree, it must be blue! And the foreground must be found that can be a far background, but a fashionable poster is worth the trouble!"¹⁹

Penfield was fortunate to have started his career at a time that encouraged new ideas and techniques. This young dedicated poster artist had an interest in the development of his own personal style. Bold graphic statements were characteristic of his poster, which were often created with brush strokes and stippling on the zinc plates to create wonderful textural effects.²⁰ During the last ten years of the 19th century, a group of artist designers transformed the look of the advertisement pages. Using a new visual vocabulary, they created works that are among the earliest use of abstraction in commercial art.

An example of this is Penfield's *Poster Calendar 1897* (Figure. 1). In this work,

¹⁹Margolin, p. 28.

²⁰Gibson, p. 12.

the bold flat tones of solid color, bounded by strongly accented black lines and simplicity of design, were similar in style to that of the typical Japanese print. His clear vocabulary showed not only his quality of draftsmanship but his keen observation of detail.

By this technique, he takes the style of Beardsley, Steinlen, Cheret and Toulouse-Lautrec's one step further, indulging a taste for graphic exploration. He adopted the French convention of signing his work, a distinction not given to earlier American poster artists.²¹ His work supports the conclusion that not only were these posters a means of advertising, but they were also works of art in their own right. "The man who on his trade relies must either bust or advertise."²² Penfield felt justified in promoting his own artwork at the same time he promoted his employer's product.

It is clear that Harper's chose Penfield because of the "look" of his graphics. His strong French training made his style more formalist than that of his American contemporaries, and his use of clear, bold colors formed strong compositions. And his "look," fresh and chic, attracted the audience Harper's sought.

²¹Chris Swenson, Lecture: *Posters of the Gay 90's* (East Lansing: Kresge Art Museum, Fall 1990).

²²Jacob Morton Braude, "Rhyme & Verse to Help Make a Point" *Complete Speakers & Toastmaster Library* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 3.



Figure 1. Edward Penfield, *Poster Calendar*, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 35.6cm X 26cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Chapter Five:

American Popular Culture and Poster Subjects

The last decade of the nineteenth century was, predictably, among the best and worst of times, and presented protean challenges to poster artists. They faced the demanding task of illustrating a world where technological novelty strutted in the foreground and complex social issues clamoured for attention on every hand. “. . . [Expansion of the] economy and population during this period made possible construction and urban growth on an unparalleled scale.”¹

The “American Look,” as it grew easily to be distinguished from its European predecessors, became established in the way in which a poster was produced and marketed in the United States, which differed sharply from its French ancestor. Characteristic of this “look” is the typography; American graphic artists worked with their publishers to determine the text, whereas the French artists did their own text.² Nonetheless, American graphic art was used to promote attention to the habits and activities of the upper class for mercantile motives, which purpose maintained its link with printing and posters made across the Atlantic. And the same technological

¹Malcolm Robinson, *The American Vision* (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1988), p. 79. Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1990), p. 238. The following information provides a sense of background. Even though the United States was troubled with financial difficulties, the World’s Columbian Exposition opened in Chicago in May of 1893.

²Kiehl, p. 61.

developments that permitted Harper's to spread its circulation across the land also promoted commercial and artistic exchange among the continents.

Penfield's presentation of East Coast high society, the chic and the athletic, begins with conventional models of composition, wrapped in customary late-Victorian garments and virtues, and then records a curious evolution. At first glance, this leisured class of American society appears stiff and emotionless, much as they might have in *Godey's Ladies' Book* of the preceeding three or four years; but upon closer examination, they are full of subtle touches of humor.³ In the preface to *Posters in Miniature*, Penfield states "we are a bit tired of the very serious nowadays and a little frivolity is refreshing."⁴

The subjects Penfield selected for *Harper's Monthly* posters corresponded primarily with monthly and seasonal themes. In *Harper's April 1896* (Figure 2), a lady appears wearing a bright blue skirt and a white blouse adorned with blue and gray polka dots. Since she was preparing for the rainy season, she holds an umbrella, but the significance is that her apparel is appropriate to a bright but changeable day, "and today has been so crisp and bright."⁵ This suggested that a new season was approaching, and new articles on fashion and fiction awaited readers in the upcoming issues of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*.

³Penfield rarely departed from his portrayals of the rather bored genteel class. See Kiehl plate #198.

⁴Taraba, p. 114.

⁵John Bangs, "The Golfacs" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (New York: Harper and Brothers, June, vol. 95, 1897), p. 151.



Figure 2. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, April, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 46.5cm X 32.6cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

1. *What is the main purpose of the passage?*
 2. *Which of the following best describes the author's attitude toward the subject?*
 3. *According to the passage, what is the primary reason for the observed trend?*
 4. *Which of the following is mentioned as a contributing factor to the situation?*
 5. *What does the author suggest as a potential solution to the problem?*

Another significant aspect of this particular poster is that there is no list of contents, no real link to a story. All that it says is *April*, a month which Penfield has focused on in a manner calculated to seize the reader's attention: Young ladies in the social whirl had to attend to keeping their hairdos and fashions dry. This monthly focus on the daily preoccupations of thoroughly modern women, heightened by artistic sensibilities, became characteristic of Penfield.

In another example, a familiar setting was associated with a seasonal event. In *Harper's Christmas 1896* (Figure 3), a lady strolls past a store window, "window-shopping", which had become a new and popular pastime.⁶ The poster is evidence of the commercialization of Christmas, and takes to itself the sentimental associations of the buying of gifts. It also speaks to the newly-independent working women of the respectable sort, who would have disposable income to buy gifts rather than make them, and the leisure to stroll down streets instead of laboring in the mill. Gradually, this type of advertising found its place among newly emerging consumers. Another significant aspect of this work is that less than three-fourths of the figure is shown, whereas the majority of previous posters provided a larger image of the figure.⁷ This poster was created a decade before Christmas advertisements had a place in American society, which gradually

⁶Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*. (New York: Random House Inc., 1973), p. 104.

⁷Margolin, p. 191. This is characteristic of the style used by the Japanese particularly in their woodblock prints. It is interesting to note that this was done just one month prior to the Japanese color print exhibition in New York.

1. The first step is to identify the problem.
2. Next, we need to gather information about the problem.
3. Then, we should analyze the information and determine the cause of the problem.
4. After that, we can develop a plan to solve the problem.
5. Finally, we should implement the plan and evaluate the results.

reached out to its new consumer public.⁸

Harper's October 1895, (Kiehl, plate #170) depicts a hunter reading *Harper's* while next to him lies his gun.⁹ Though it was not uncommon to use hunters as subjects for posters, Penfield makes special use of the image by incorporating subtle humor in the smiling rabbits. The figure is absorbed in reading the interesting articles throughout the magazine's pages, thus suggesting that reading *Harper's* was more engrossing than hunting. In this issue, there were various articles on world news pertaining to archaeology, an interest of the stylish male population during this time. Also, the use of the male figure was to increase the male readership of *Harper's* by extending its identification with a powerful group, for whom hunting was linked to autumn, freedom from drudgery and routine, and sentimental associations with their childhood, their fathers and grandfathers. Hunting was, perhaps, the one rite of passage to manhood that one might speak of to general acquaintances and in mixed company.

Animals in artwork were nothing new, but the way they were presented and their iconographic import changed substantially in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Where Breughel or Millais might have painted cows near a group of human figures in an outdoor scene to indicate that they were peasants rather than rollicking aristocrats, or Reynolds or Gainsborough tucked a pug or an angora in a patrician lap as an indicator of the means to indulge in conspicuous consumption,¹⁰ modern artists felt

⁸Boorstin, p. 158.

⁹Kiehl, p. 1-16.

¹⁰Maurice Rickards, *The Rise and Fall of the Poster* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), pp 13-19.

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permitted to include portraits of actual animals, including a class of animals that the emerging middle class took, quite literally, to their hearts: the companion animal, pets. Chickens round the dooryard have an entirely different affective association from terriers wearing sweaters and strolling city boulevards on leashes.

Developments in science, as well as shifts in social possibilities, made the maintenance of house pets, even apartment pets, possible. Pasteurization of milk and door-to-door milk delivery meant one did not have to keep a cow, or clean up after it; the time devoted to these chores was freed for walking, grooming, training, even decorating dogs and cats, or even **teaching birds to talk**.¹¹ The widespread establishment of municipal sanitation, waste-water treatment, paving of streets and sidewalks, and chlorination of drinking water all helped provide an environment in which pets could be kept without imperiling the neighborhood. And animals in the home whom one could love took much misery and anxiety out of urban life, where single people and small families might be separated by hundreds of miles from loved ones on whom they could lavish attention.

Like his colleagues, Penfield used pets as elements in his illustrations. As he was mildly fanatical in his fondness for them,¹² he included them often in the posters he designed for Harper's. *Harper's May 1897* (Figure 4) shows a well-dressed lady with her greyhound walking down the street. Potential readers were expected to identify with the lady, and purchase the magazine to cement their identification with her, although she might only resemble a figure they had seen in passing and admired. Outdoor scenes and

¹¹Gallo, p. 72.

¹²Taraba, p. 117.



Figure 3. Edward Penfield, *Harper's, Christmas*, 1896. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 43.9cm X 32.7cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

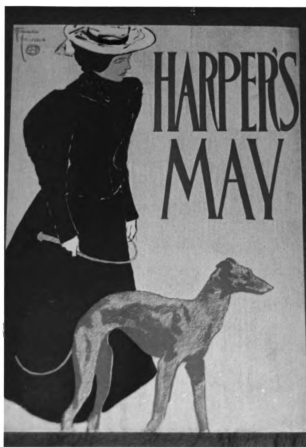


Figure 4. Edward Penfield, *Harper's, May*, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 47.1cm X 33.7cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

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1. The first step is to identify the problem.

2. The second step is to define the problem.

3. The third step is to analyze the problem.

4. The fourth step is to develop a solution.

5. The fifth step is to implement the solution.

6.

7.

8. The final step is to evaluate the solution.

9. The final step is to evaluate the solution.

figures engaged in activities with animals were not unique to Penfield,¹³ figure in the bulk of his commercial work, which reflected the changing daily activities of the leisure class of American society.¹⁴ “It is so exhilarating walking and climbing over the country.”¹⁵ Additional examples include *Harper’s Poster Calendar 1897* (Figure 1) with a cat in the foreground, and the poster for *Harper’s May 1896* (Figure 5), in which a woman holding two cats provides a wonderful opportunity for graphic exploration in “color” and texture.¹⁶ By manipulating his plates with great finesse, Penfield distinguishes between the shorter fur and marmalade coloration of the cat on the left from the longer, shaggier, darker fur of the cat on the right; he even defines their toes, and contrasts the self-satisfied smirk of the cat on the left with the flattened-ear, ready-to-squirm expression of the cat on the right. His loving attention to their depiction is markedly different from his more stereotypical treatment of the human who holds them.

“Mr. Penfield is much attended to the study of animals in form and color, but not inclined to use much elaboration. Animals, he says, are too much in motion: views are

¹³A few other American graphic artists used domestic animals (See Kiehl, plate #102 by Oliver Hereford.), but I believe it is unique of Penfield to be consistent in incorporating animals in his graphics; a substantial portion of his work for *Harper’s* includes them.

¹⁴By including pets, Penfield addressed an urban audience by reminding them of their rural American heritage.

¹⁵Bangs, p. 151.

¹⁶*International Studio*, p. viii. According to Swenson, there is only speculation as to how Penfield achieved this variety of textures. After viewing the underside of the posters there is a clear incised outline. How Penfield achieved this and the other textures is uncertain. Swenson does suggest however that this is a commercial relief process. Nancy Findly (see Kiehl) supports this process that Swenson has proposed.

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constantly changing to make careful drawing possible” (see Figure 1).¹⁷ The poster for *Harper's June 1897* (Figure 6), also depicts a lady with her dog. Subtle humor is suggested in the way the dog stares out at the observer while the lady is engrossed in reading *Harper's*, unaware of the object of her dog's attention. Such posters in which women are portrayed with a pet dog or cat convey the character of articles found inside the magazine. A stress on women becoming more physically active can be surmised, again to emphasize that their readership was drawn from women who had the leisure time to devote to such activities.

Penfield's images of lively, affluent, affectionate models would naturally draw readers to *Harper's* who wished to see themselves in the same circumstances, and in the same light, as the attractive characters he portrayed on the covers and in the posters. *Harper's* would reap the benefits, in increased readership and subscribers, of Penfield's appealing “look.”

Fashion played an important role in the evolution of the American commercial poster, and of *Harper's* posters specifically. The costumes worn by the main figures in these posters reflected the times and activities of the era, and denoted the type of chic readership the magazine sought to attract. *Harper's* wanted the characters of their poster's to reflect the “self image” of the wealthy readers who purchased their magazines. The selected subjects were a reflection of an American leisured society, whose privilege was advanced by technical achievements.¹⁸

¹⁷*International Studio*, p. 1viii.

¹⁸Banta, p. 357.



Figure 5. Edward Penfield, *Harper's, May*, 1896. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 45.1cm X 30.2cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 6. Edward Penfield, *Harper's, June*, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 36.2cm X 47.7cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

Penfield appears to have carefully selected those modes of fashion he would portray. "His maidens are adorably conscious of their power to charm and are fully alive to the fact that their towns are the smartest."¹⁹ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the United States experienced a clothing revolution more far reaching than any that had occurred since the birth of modern textile technology.²⁰ In the book *American Beauty*, Lois Banner quotes various reformers who despised the current fashions and who wrote about the evil effects of corsets and cosmetics. Banner further noted that widely circulated periodicals, such as *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, went so far as to warn young women of the health dangers of cosmetics because of their lead and mercury components.²¹ An example of this concern about faddish, hazardous fashion phenomena can be found in Penfield's depiction of women in the garb of the Gay 90's. Penfield's subjects were slender but apparently uncorsetted, although his vague depiction of their figures might make this point hard to prove; he did not stress the newest hairstyles or complicated garments, and his depiction of the appearance of cosmetics was minimal at most; this promoted the progressive position of the magazine on matters of health and hygiene.²² It is interesting that Harper's appears not to have solicited or accepted

¹⁹Charles Hiatt, *Picture Poster* (West Yorkshire: EP Publishing Limited, 1976), p. 288.

²⁰Mila Contini, *Fashion* (New York: Crescent Books, 1965), p. 262.

²¹Frances Cogan, *All American Girl* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 6. Cogan refers to Lois Banner's book *American Beauty*, 1983.

²²Due to the broad quality of depiction in posters, unless Penfield were to emphasize the effects of cosmetics flamboyantly, they would be largely invisible; therefore, by choosing not to stress them, he eliminates them by default.

advertisements of cosmetics.

Other fashion posters became popular objects elsewhere, indeed were preserved and collected for home decoration,²³ and were particularly prized for the vibrant colors made possible only by the advent of aniline dyes.²⁴ The Liberty styles were launched by Arthur Lasenby Liberty, an English dealer in Oriental *objets d'art*, whose *chinoiseries* created a new fashion, especially in oriental-inspired fabrics with bright colors and flat-styled patterns.²⁵ Penfield appears to have favored this fashion trend, as it is found among many of his poster designs (Figure 2). High fashion prevailed in numerous works by Penfield for *Harper's Magazine*. He drew upon hats, coats, suits, bathing suits, dresses, and parasols to signify all of the latest fashion trends. This was done to signify the editors' understanding of the varied interests and activities of the magazine's readers. Penfield was trying to promote an active lifestyle; and *Harper's April 1896* (Figure 2) is just one example in which a woman's hair is carefully, but not elaborately, arranged, while she wears an every-day dress; the result of the combination is respectable, but not fussy, appearance.²⁶

The fashions depicted on these posters reflected what the *Harper's* readers were wearing, or suggested to them a new style that they might hope to wear. They wanted to

²³Banta, p. 31.

²⁴Martin, p. 481.

²⁵Contini, p. 262, offers documentation on accessories as well as garments.

²⁶Modest clothing in these posters by Penfield contrasts greatly with the exuberant clothes incorporated by Toulouse-Lautrec. However, Penfield uses his predecessor's pictorial vocabulary when it fulfills a different, American need; see the discussion on facial expressions below.

read the magazine and re-create the new dresses found on the pages of *Harper's*; conversely, Penfield and other artists kept a keen eye on the clothing that fashionable young women they encountered actually wore, and passed those visions along to the rest of their readers, as well as those who merely looked at the posters. However, more important to the upsurge in fashion pictorials was a growing understanding among advertiser of the power of image in the market place. America's relatively new and burgeoning economy, and the growing possibility of the influence of fashion, made women the new-found focus of publicity campaigns.²⁷ Depicting these striking women in advertisements was an effective way to sell a product, in this case, the *Harper's Magazine*, not just the advertisers' products.

In order to mirror the face of America, Penfield also addressed the shift in population from rural to urban. He captured on paper the sense of isolation that prevails within the modern city. The expressionless features often found on the people in Penfield's posters: an expression of a commercialized society.²⁸ An example can be found in the poster for *Harper's February 1897* (Figure 7). Though the figures sit stoically isolated in a hip-to-hip crowd and do not react to those seated beside them, ironically, Penfield suggests a congenial mood as they all enjoy reading the articles found in *Harper's*. They have found community in a common activity. An additional point of

²⁷Mott, p.245.

²⁸ Francis M. Abbott, "Have American Have Any Social Standards?" *The Forum* (New York: The Forum Publishing Co., 1897), p. 609. Abbott suggests that since there was such a surge in industry at the time, and rapid advances in technology in the cities, those from the urban areas were just faces in the crowds. This is significant to Penfield's work because the expressionless features of an uncaring society permit dispensing with detail so that the overall image could be read from afar. See earlier quote by Penfield.

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significance would be that this is a wonderful example of “found” subject matter.

Penfield borrowed freely from a pictorial iconography already established,²⁹ and contributed to it original scenes and additudes that he observed in a swiftly-changing world. Some visions could be shared, but even a century later, the American look which Penfield help establish remains distinctive. All of the distinctive poster styles we are accustomed to, from Ben Shahn to Robert Indiana to Milt Glaser’s rainbow-coiffed *Bob Dylan*, are readily identified visually with America -- and can trace some debt of influence to Edward Penfield.³⁰

The reason Penfield chose the subjects of fashion and leisure was his observation of and insight into stylish, young, elite women, the audience Harper’s chose to address.

²⁹It is not unique to Penfield to draw upon subjects created earlier in France by the French graphic artists such as Toulouse-Lautrec and Mary Cassatt (This work has striking similarities to her work *Omnibus*.); and other American graphic artists incorporated the concepts set forth by the French. One such artist was J.J. Gould, who designed the posters of *Lippincott’s*. Kiehl, p. 124.

As Penfield observed: “My first decorative poster was done for Harper & Brothers for their April Magazine, 1893. It was only an experiment and was done long before I ever heard of Lautrec as a poster designer. Later on, Richard Harding Davis...showed me about a dozen French posters which were the first I had seen.” It is hard to believe that Penfield had never seen these posters. I propose that he may have seen works by Toulouse-Lautrec without associating them with the artist or being familiar with his name. The dates between Penfield’s designs and the poster movement in France are so close that, without knowing exactly what he saw in regards to exhibits or reproductions, questions of influence would need to be extensively researched. This, I believe, would clear up questions as to who was learning from whom.

³⁰*Images of an Era: the American Poster 1945-75* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1975), foreword and pp. 10-19.



Figure 7. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, February, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 48.6cm X 35.7cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has declined from 1.1 billion to 800 million. The number of people who are malnourished has declined from 1.5 billion to 1 billion. The number of people who are obese has increased from 100 million to 300 million. The number of people who are overweight has increased from 100 million to 300 million. The number of people who are overweight and obese has increased from 100 million to 300 million. The number of people who are overweight and obese has increased from 100 million to 300 million.

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Chapter Six:

Female Emancipation and the Cover Girl

The New Woman

She stands beside her mate, companion-wise,
Erect and posied, with clear, straight forward eyes,
For what she knows here she holds him dear,
And not for what she fancies him-with fear.

Emancipated on firm feet she stands,
And all that men exacts her demands:
The new morality, the art of life...¹

Young women in the 1890's had many ideals to emulate; some were being dreamed up as they went, intoxicated with freedom and modernity.² The following discussion of Penfield's posters corresponds with research from Martha Banta, author of *Imaging American Women*, on the female types of the nineteenth century. Banta does not use Penfield's posters as her source of illustrations, but she does use a variety of images from many posters and illustrators of the late 1800's to interpret her types. Female images created by Penfield support a handful of the types set forth by Banta.

Harper's sought at the turn of the century to reach and influence this "new woman" described by Miles Dawson in 1897. These women were literate, shared political interests, and were of good taste and high fashion, thereby making them the target of *Harper's* wishful influence. There is an uneasy sorority between the New

¹Miles Dawson, "Plaza of Poets," *The Arena* (Boston: The Arena Company, Vol. XVII, 1897). P. 265.

²Bieden, p. 34-60 and following, *passim*.

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1725-1726

1727-1728

1729-1730

Woman and Emma Lazarus's Mother of Exiles,³ lifting her lamp beside the golden door, and the thoughtful editor and publisher were compelled to keep them both in mind as they aimed to satisfy the taste and sensibility of their readers.

Female sexuality became a tinderbox topic in the last decade of the nineteenth century, enthusiastically whispered about *entre nous* and censoriously shouted down in public. The presence of women as spectators/consumers were linked to changes in the status of women in American society during the second half of the nineteenth century. Debates arose in regards to their rights to areas such as divorce, secondary and higher education, access to professions, work, better wages, and, toward the end of the century, the vote. As several competing images of femininity leapt into motion, the issues raised were complex and bore important implications in the analysis of American culture during the 1890's.⁴ One issue which had already tackled and laid to rest was female education; two generations of wealthy women and a smattering of scholarship girls had already graduated from the likes of Vassar, Wellesley and Bryn Mawr,⁵ and still managed to marry and perpetuate the race. What we have come to call sex education was still incendiary, though; the Comstock Act was still in effect, and women were still dying from the side-effects of perpetual childbearing: the topic still had a deadly sting.

Banta masterfully analyzed the role that women held in American during the nineteenth century. This scholarly research provides a comprehensive group of types that

³Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," *Visions* (New York: Reed and Sons, 1888)

⁴Cogan, p. 4.

⁵Boorstin, p. 487.

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she has visually and verbally identified as: The Charmer and The Pal.⁶

The posters for *Harper's November 1894* (Figure 8), reflected the surge of individual identification with American education.⁷ Here, a man sports a sweater with the varsity letter "Y" for Yale, while the woman wears a crimson bow on her dress, signifying her support for Harvard; they are clearly supporting rival schools, and the reader is supposed to see a juxtaposition of great irony. In this poster, a man and a woman stand together as Pals, representing the distinct gender types that Banta's research outlined.⁸ They appeared preoccupied in their own separate worlds, unaware of the other's presence.

An *Atlantic Monthly* article of 1901, written by Caroline Tickim, suggests that "the new woman had gone too far in her insistence on only one human sphere rather than clearly separate ones from men and women."⁹ Penfield illustrates that point in his poster for *Harper's August 1896* (Figure 9), where the female figure does not appear aware of the man beside her; the categorization of Pal holds true for the figures here.

One of the various female types Banta describes in *Imaging American Women* was the Charmer. She was said to be uninterested in sex and denotes the type that ravishingly allures men because she possesses the attractive force of her own self-interested will:

⁶Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁷Boorstin, p. 70.

⁸Banta, p. 258.

⁹Cogan, p. 259.



Figure 8. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, November, 1894. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. Measurements unavailable. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 9. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, August, 1896. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 47.7cm X 34.8cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 10. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, July/August/September, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in four colors. 35.6cm X 25.9cm. Department of Graphic Arts.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of a 12-week training program on the physical fitness of sedentary individuals. The subjects were 20 males, aged 20-30, who had no previous experience with exercise. They were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The control group continued their sedentary lifestyle, while the experimental group participated in a supervised exercise program consisting of three sessions per week. The program included cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises. Data were collected at the beginning and end of the 12-week period, and the results were compared between the two groups. The experimental group showed significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness, muscle strength, and flexibility compared to the control group.

“... his maidens are adorably conscious of their power to charm.”¹⁰ Many of Penfield’s Pal depiction’s are wonderful graphic illustrations of these types. The presentation of women in this fashion was not unique to Penfield.¹¹ The “new woman” is shown in many posters with bold expression by other artists.¹² Other examples can be found in *Harper’s July/August/September 1897* (Figure 10), where the man and woman pose insouciantly in their highly tailored costumes, he wearing a cardigan, and she, a sailor blouse. According to Rosalind Rosenberg in *All American Girl*, the new woman preferred more sensible (less feminine) clothing, and signaled a desire for “fellowship” with men¹³.

Penfield’s poster for *Harper’s August 1896* (Figure 9), offers yet another illustration of the type. Here, the new woman had the right to exercise her talents and the right to fulfill and obtain challenging work, even if that work existed in a man’s sphere. This is illustrated by the cosmopolitan gesture of smoking a cigarette. Cigarette smoking found general acceptance among the men of the day, but was still thought scandalous and ill-bred for women.¹⁴ The setting of these chic figures on a beach is not unique to Penfield or other artists in American and Europe. It would appear he had taken this

¹⁰Hiatt, p. 280.

¹¹Other artists such as J. Gould made also frequent use of the “pal” association. After close examination of this comprehensive catalog on American poster art along with examining the other materials expressed in this thesis, it appears that this “pal” association is consistently expressed between these two artists throughout their years in publications.

¹²Gallo, p. 155.

¹³See Frances Cogan, *All American Girl* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), p. 211.

¹⁴Banta, p. 39.

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composition from a pictorial iconography already established in France.¹⁵ Figure nine is significant also as an example of the Charmer type described by Banta. The female figure appears to be happy doing nothing except gathering an admiring glance from the companion she is ignoring. In all of these illustrative examples, the female figure appeared to have taken a dominant or at least equal role to her male companion. This is evident in the way she looked out at her audience with a sense of confidence and independence. To enhance the sense of dominion, Penfield places the female figure to the front of the pictorial plane.

In this period, women, and in particular the new woman, insisted on her right to a career even if her family was not desperately needy.¹⁶ Distinguishing characteristics of this type include an independent spirit and a commitment to a lifelong career. She did not need to rely on anyone but herself.¹⁷ The poster for *Harper's September 1897* (Figure 11), depicts a strong willful female figure driving a carriage, reflecting the independence of American women during that time. Horses and carriages were a favorite subject of Penfield's; he was happy to ally the horse, ever a symbol of willful power, and the modern woman.

¹⁵Gerald Needham, *19th Century Realist Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). This is another area of shared iconography in posters on both sides of the Atlantic, as scenes on the beach were abundant in France, especially in works by the Impressionists.

¹⁶Cogan, p. 258 It is interesting to note here that she contradicts Banta, p. 478. "The female form conveyed the sense of permanence, unity, and perfection. The female was elected the mainstay of the American home." The debate on who women are, and what they ought to do and be, continues.

¹⁷Cogan, p. 4.



Figure 11. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, September, 1897. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in five colors. 36cm X 49.1cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

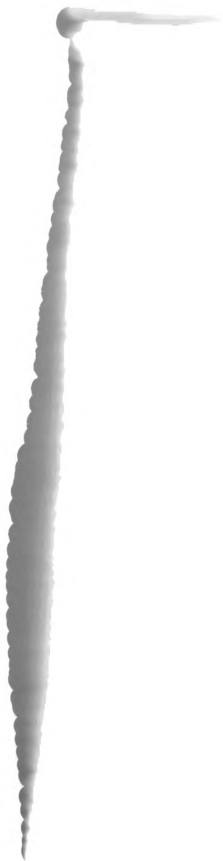




Figure 12. Edward Penfield, *Harper's*, June, 1896. Commercial lithograph and relief process printed in five colors. 47.5cm X 35.1cm. Department of Graphic Arts. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

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Here, he has made use of an established iconography,¹⁸ modified by adding to it one who was rapidly coming to be known as a character in her own right.

Another subject raised in the depiction of women in the posters of this period is that of women reading, which, in the idiom of the age, was a sure road to freedom.¹⁹ Art catalogues at the turn of the century and collections of commercial posters and magazine illustrations reveal numerous examples of women reading: women caught reading, staring into the middle distance or pondering vacant space, were thought exemplars of the upper class women who were sealed off from the everyday world, as well as an indication of the power of reading to transport any of us *elsewhere*. These images were proof that women of the leisure class had the time to read.²⁰ Women pictured reading upheld the belief that women who wanted to read did not have to work, which contrasted with the stark realities of the work place and the aspirations of literate women who had to work.²¹

Penfield's poster for *Harper's June 1896* (Figure 12), shows the female subject in a confined space with only a book in hand; it had captivated her to the point that she is

¹⁸Jean Boggs, *Degas* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989). See the following on the representations of horses by Degas. Toulouse-Lautrec also frequently used the horse in terms of subject matter. (See Adhemar)

Of special significance to this particular work is the following. In 1879, Mary Cassatt painted *Woman and Child Driving*. As with Penfield, the landscape is rarely a prominent feature. The composition is compressed, cropped and in is an attempt to convey the impression of a fleeting scene. The groom also has been given "the backseat". In comparison, both show similar composition particularly in the fact that it is the woman who is holding the reins. It wonderfully illustrates the quote by Cogan on page 4, "Holding the reins of influence inside the family".

¹⁹Bieden, p.85.

²⁰Banta, p. 363. "Women forced by economic necessity to work in factories and sweatshops had no time to read. Parasitic women of the leisure class did".

²¹Cogan, p. 3.

unaware of any outside observer.²² The rocking chair suggested returning to tranquil times, thoughts of youth or motherhood, or just a vestige of traditional American insistence on practicality and comfort. This item of furniture continues to be used and produced for presidents and the rest of society, with no regard to one's social or economic status. Therefore, this appeals to a diverse and large audience.

Within this work, one can see that the rapture of reading was a continuing inspiration to Penfield, as it was in Figure 7. And eager readers were what Harper's sought; Penfield's covers and posters for Harper's reflected the rapidly changing roles of affluent, urban American women in the 1890's, and invited them to continue their search for independence within its pages..

²²During the 18th or early 19th century, rocking chairs were not to be found in any formal rooms. The history of the first rocking chair is blurred in the pages of time; however, the account book of Eliakim Smith of Hadley, Massachusetts, mentions the adding of rockers in 1762. Rockers had been used on cradles for 3 or 4 centuries before the thought occurred to put a rocker on a chair. Historians believe that the rocking chair was an American idea, thus making it a true piece of American country furniture. It has been rumored that Benjamin Franklin was the inventor since he did own a rocking chair in 1787, but rockers were available prior to that date, thus never been proven. See Ralph and Terry Kovel's *American Country Furniture 1790 - 1875*, 1976, p.176.

CONCLUSION

Considering the social, technological, and mercantile uproar in America, and particularly in New York, at the end of the nineteenth century, Harper's selection of Edward Penfield for Art Director was well-considered and far-sighted. His work helped position them, commercially and artistically, among the leadership of a burgeoning new industry.

Growing affluence and mobility for Americans meant much improved education. Penfield took advantage of his opportunities to learn in both New York and Paris. He also took advantage of the possibilities of the new medium of lithography, extending its potential by exercising his creativity at the time that innovations in printing and transportation put magazines into the hands of a much larger, more prosperous American public.

Penfield's subjects and technique referred quite directly to the French "style moderne," which was much in vogue at the time in America. His depiction of elite, "modern" women not only reflected a way of life that was evolving rapidly, but sold copies of Harper's not only to those who might be models for its cover, but to all those who wished to emulate them. His work was not only a personal artistic success, but contributed to the success of Harper's as well.

Penfield's pictorial descriptions are a record of the changing roles and newly important leisure activities of an increasingly self-confident class of women as they move independently, whether alone or in company, in a culture that became faster, in several

senses, and more urban with each issue of Harper's.

Harper's wisdom in selecting an unproven American artist rather than an acclaimed French master was underscored by Penfield's understanding of American rituals, like hunting in the fall, and new crazes, like window-shopping while walking the dog in one's leisure time. Penfield's clear content and bold simplicity sold magazines, and shaped Americans by letting them reflect on their own lives.

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