

REPRODUCING GENDER IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ILLUSTRATIONS

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In American metropolitan centers from the mid-nineteenth-century onward, inescapable images—in the home, in books, magazines, as daguerreotypes, carte de visits, album cards, prints, and chromos, or on the streets in posters and advertisements—coincided with rising middle-class anxiety about what appearances actually revealed. Was that well-dressed visitor in your parlor the gentleman he claimed to be, or a con man? Was the lady a tramp? How did these proliferating images operate and provide knowledge about the changing city, newly settled regions, and their inhabitants or enable viewers to locate themselves in an unfamiliar landscape?<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the second half of the century improved reproductive and printing technologies dramatically increased the use and types of illustrations in books, periodicals, journals, and advertising.<sup>2</sup> This surge of images prompted calls for greater accuracy and more effective monitoring of the relationship of the image to what it purported to represent. The first area of concern cited by cultural gatekeepers was the accuracy of pictures, their fidelity to the text and, secondarily, the threats the artist's imagination posed to the integrity of the reading experience and the author's intentions. In 1893, as pictures invaded the daily press, E.L. Godwin, a fierce critic of journalistic excess and long time editor of *The Nation*, wrote "No one who has observed New York journalism for the last few years could fail to perceive that pictures had to come sooner or later. The childish view of the world is, so to speak, 'on top.'"<sup>3</sup> Guardians of the word feared the replacement of the relatively more fixed meanings of text with pictures. Pictures threatened to open the field of meaning to a dangerous extent. Words fixed the meaning of events for a diverse, democratic public, creating public order and cultural consensus; pictures had the power to subvert this effort.

Finally, illustration was closely connected to commerce. Visuality and consumption reinforced each other—pictures advertised products and lives that readers wanted to have (or avoid), just as shop window displays enticed spending. Illustrations, frequently used to sell products and generate circulation, occupied minimal ground unable to stand alone as works of art yet displaying evidence of artistic training and aesthetic value. The close connections between illustration and advertising, as well as its character as material intended for reproduction, challenged illustration's status as art. Art for reproduction threatened to strip art of its unique character and idealist intentions.<sup>4</sup>

The rise of illustration created new kinds of employment for women at the interstices of a vibrant, urban, commercial culture. Hundreds of women trained in art gained regular employment as illustrators, engravers, printmakers, book designers, and in the advertising, greeting card and novelty market. These women and their significance in creating these new popular, cultural forms that emerged after mid-century remain largely unstudied.

The paid commercial work of female artists challenges us to rethink normative descriptions of nineteenth-century white, middle-class women as homebound, their class delineated by their distance from the world of work. Ironically, however, the product of their labors—pictures associating white femininity with domesticity and sentimentality—did much to cement the connection to gender as the line dividing the white, middle-class world into a male public and female private.<sup>5</sup> The images they created worked to reproduce gender even as they pictured “real” women.

Their popular illustrations depicting women as mothers, ensconced in cozy parlors or at leisure enjoying the new urban entertainments, are regularly used by cultural critics then and now to indict nineteenth-century visual culture and women artists as passive, commercial and sentimental.<sup>6</sup> Critics regularly praised women artists for subjects—children, home, and garden—that matched their culturally proscribed domestic fate. Publishers and art editors frequently shared these convictions. Illustrator Florence Scovell Shinn recalled that “she did not begin the drawing of children because she had any special aptitude for expressing them, but because, being a woman, it was thought by her publishers that she naturally would do children better than anything else . . .”<sup>7</sup>

Rethinking connections between women as producers of images and women as the primary consumers of images, by looking at the relationship

between illustrators and designers, books and the parlor, forces questions about how the visual culture of the nineteenth-century was gendered. Women as readers, women as shoppers—these images and the way they tied femininity to the expansion of consumption with its attendant fears of luxury and idleness, suggest one vantage point for thinking about how gender informed nineteenth-century visual culture.<sup>8</sup> Printed books, an important commodity since the sixteenth-century, marked a buyer's status indicating both erudition and taste.<sup>9</sup> Women and books however were a volatile combination suggesting the dangers of idleness and women's unpoliced desires. In the engraving "Forbidden Fruit" (figure 4.1) one woman stands guard at the library door as another pulls books from the shelves to toss to the two women who stand below her as they secretly explore the delights of off-limits reading together. When women read, especially in groups, anything could happen!<sup>10</sup> With women frequently pictured and studied as readers and consumers, what did it mean for women to be producers of illustrations? In what forms did gender enter into the complicated nexus of book publishing and marketing and inform the development of new technologies for reproducing illustrations?

Part of this story involves the creation of new art institutions for women by an alliance of manufacturers and wealthy, benevolent women. In the fall of 1858, the New York School of Design for Women (NYSD) took up residence in the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. The NYSD had been founded six years earlier by an elite and benevolent group of New York women interested in art.<sup>11</sup> It was one of four such women's art schools in the U.S. to open in the 1850s (along with schools in Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore), all of them modeled on the famous experiment in female art education in South Kensington, London, begun in 1842. Like the London school, the women who founded the NYSD intended to train women for vocations, "drawing for mechanical purposes and in designing for paper, cotton, and woolen manufactures, both branches being suited to women."<sup>12</sup>

The design school fell outside Peter Cooper's original scheme. An industrialist and civic leader, Cooper had given nearly half his private wealth to build an institution "dedicated to the elevation of the working classes." Any "deserving" man or woman over the age of fourteen and without regard to religious belief could be admitted to free night classes in science and math, to an extensive reading room, to a gallery of fine art, and to free



Figure 4.1 "Forbidden Fruit," 1865 engraving after a painting by August Toulmouche in *Harper's Bazaar*, June 19, 1869



Figure 4.2 Stanley Fox, "Women and Their Work in the Metropolis,"  
*Harper's Bazar*, July 28, 1869

lectures and debates in the Great Hall. What should have been a seamless marriage of convenience between the free night school and the NYSD initially overlooked the different populations each served. Cooper's scheme for free instruction had always included women but only those from the working classes of clerks and mechanics. The design school had identified a different constituency—women interested in or forced to seek “self-support.”

Self-support had come into widespread use in the early 1850s to describe a particular stratum of “respectable” women who, through widowhood, orphan status, unfortunate marriages, or family economic reverses, had to find employment. The range of respectable paid work had always been severely limited for urban women, but opportunities had further narrowed during the 1840s as immigrants crowded into domestic service and the clothing trades. Stanley Fox's two-page engraving “Women and Their Work in the Metropolis” (figure 4.2) appeared in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1868, which presents the range of respectable trades employing women in New York City. Prominently featured in the center is a representative of the century's most common women's trade: the exhausted, ill-paid seamstress. Her figure is surrounded by vignettes of women binding books, making corsets and umbrellas, mounting photographs, and setting type. As the employment of large numbers of immigrant women at mid-century further depressed the status of paid work outside the home for the native born, notions of respectability increasingly required a distance from this kind of routine manual labor.<sup>13</sup>

Besides some general, nationalistic beliefs in the benefits of creating “a class of skilled, artistic labor” to rival European design and manufacture, advocates of design schools gave two reasons for art work's particular suitability for “respectable” women. First (and the argument most often used by men) was that women were naturally better, with their delicate hands, extensive sympathies, and domestic tastes, to beautify the everyday world. Cooper's male trustees quoted with approval an essay that asked, “Should not feminine taste, developed by artistic education, embroider itself upon the shawls, the carpets, the ribbons, and other brilliant fantasies in the world of dry goods?”<sup>14</sup> Secondly, proponents of design schools argued that art offered one of the few avenues of employment combining “labor and feeling, work and Art together to make both compensating to the individual.” Writing, dancing, and acting offered a similar combination, but in those fields women had to “exhibit themselves” rather than their talents. As

“Painter, Engraver or Sculptor, it is her works alone that claim the public eye. Her person is sacred; no one dares lift the veil that conceals her countenance; no one presumes to call her to curtsy to feeble applause.”<sup>15</sup> Art work was ideal in maintaining the privacy of the person and the inviolability of the body—hallmarks of female respectability.

Who were the women who sought out the design schools? Students seeking admission to Cooper Union came from around the nation, making the school more than a regional curiosity. Women aged fourteen to forty from as far away as Indiana and as close as Third Avenue wrote expressing their desire for monetary and professional improvement. A second group can be glimpsed only indirectly, their voices hidden by their male protectors. These younger women were the indigent nieces, sisters, and daughters of failed businessmen, farmers, and professional men with some talent for art and a desperate need to be self-supporting. Their letters announce women well acquainted with the workings of the economy, and the branches of the trade, canny about finances, and realistic about their prospects in a market that favored men. Financial independence rather than immediate destitution provided the common theme. The applicants’ passionate expression of “their unquenchable thirst for knowledge” made them willing to overcome obstacles, financial and familial, to attend design school.<sup>16</sup> A growing demand for wood-engraved illustrations in print culture encouraged women to seek out the school, and a continued shortage of skilled men created a space for women.<sup>17</sup>

When women design students arrived, they were struck by the sheer scale of the experiment. Before the full flowering of private women’s colleges in the late 1870s, the School of Female Design, with more than 250 students, ranked as one of the largest secular institutions for women’s education in the nation. Under the management of important art educators William Rimmer and Susan N. Carter, students were encouraged both to see themselves as cultural missionaries of the “beautiful” for the whole nation as well as to keep a closer, realistic eye on the market worth of their work and long-term prospects for employment.

During the 1870s and 1880s, when this generation of women came into its own as artists, designers, illustrators, and wood engravers, New York City hosted a vital, progressive art scene. Fueled by male artists (and, slightly later, women artists) who returned from Europe to challenge the dominance of the National Academy of Design with aesthetics and techniques learned

in Paris and Düsseldorf, new arts movements emerged. Artists interested in using the arts to reshape American taste enrolled women art students to design and produce commodities for the home.

The development of the decorative arts movement led in New York by painters Louis Tiffany, John La Farge, and Candace Wheeler and sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, found a parallel in the evolution of commercial art, particularly in illustration and wood engraving.<sup>18</sup> Just as ordinary household objects, textiles, and finishings were elevated by artists' attention to design and decoration, new print and processing technologies enabled artists to gain greater control over the reproduction of their work. Students and graduates of Cooper Union quickly found work as illustrators, designers, and engravers for commercial publishers and as designers for the new household art manufacturers. They were prominent in reshaping domestic or parlor periodicals; their illustrations and designs for domestic furnishings were key in establishing the correct look for domestic interiors.

In illustration and engraving, artists and designers struggled throughout the period to keep the status of their work from falling from art to mere reproduction. The technological advances that made it possible to easily reproduce and distribute images to a broad audience threatened their status.<sup>19</sup> No longer unique, tied to text and commerce, how did illustrations fit—how were they part of the world of fine art?<sup>20</sup> A look at the careers of a few of the women trained at Cooper Union suggests how women negotiated their ideological location as keepers of the hearth to create professional opportunities and to establish new boundaries of taste that fused their aesthetic training with commerce. Examining their designs and illustrations indicates some of the effects of the proliferation of images that characterized nineteenth-century culture.

Perhaps the best-known illustrator who trained in this period at Cooper Union was Mary Hallock Foote. A descendant of New York Quaker farmers who found it increasingly difficult to make a living on their worn-out land, Foote intended her artistic training to provide a means of support. While still in school she worked with fellow students for pay on several joint projects, including Albert D. Richardson's popular subscription travel book about the West, *Beyond the Mississippi*, whose elaborate wood engraved title page is pictured in Figure 4.3.<sup>21</sup> The West became Foote's primary subject after her marriage to mining engineer Arthur Foote sent her to frontier regions. While Foote's early illustrations reveal her dependence on other artists' firsthand





Figure 4.3 Title Page, Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond The Mississippi* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1867)

experiences with the West, copying was rapidly replaced with pictures drawn from life as she migrated with her family among remote western mining camps before settling in California. Foote's income, earned from drawing and writing, grew in importance as her husband's speculative ventures stretched their resources.<sup>22</sup>

Before heading west, Foote had made her name designing romantic illustrations for best-selling high-culture gift books. Drawn from life using friends, family, and servants as models, these illustrations established Foote as an important illustrator while still a young woman. No less a critic than William Dean Howells hailed her designs for Longfellow's *The Hanging of the Crane*: "Every picture indeed is suffused with the light of a quick and refined sympathy; and this is reinforced by a skillful pencil which has, so far as we can observe, no unpleasant tricks or mannerisms."<sup>23</sup> These early illustrations, represented here by "She Leaned Against the Door" (figure 4.4), precisely observed Eastern rural life and character and drew directly from her childhood in the Hudson River valley. Stylistically, they also met the romantic expectations of the gift-book genre and audience. Like better-known contemporary works by Winslow Homer, Foote's illustrations reassured native-born white Americans confronting rapid urbanization and immigration by supplying images of wholesome country living suffused with timeless, democratic values.<sup>24</sup>

Although Foote's career remained situated in the province of genteel publishing with most of her illustrations, novels, and stories appearing under Scribner's imprint, her art work cannot be described as merely sentimental or commercial. Her lifelong friendship with fellow art student and painter Helena de Kay and de Kay's husband Scribner editor Richard Watson Gilder ensured a regular outlet for her work. Aware of her financial troubles, the couple encouraged her to transform letters she had written into illustrated travel pieces for Scribner's. Humble, and casting herself initially as a pupil, once she matured (and her financial worries and popularity grew) she asserted more control over the content and pricing of her work.<sup>25</sup> Her realistic portrayals of the West exposed readers to unfamiliar Western landscapes and scenes. In "Looking for Camp" (figure 4.5) a male traveler is pictured tramping over windswept, hilly terrain as the moon rises, accompanied only by his horse, dog and gun.<sup>26</sup> The image conveys the fluidity, emptiness, and beauty of the West without rendering the traveler alien.<sup>27</sup> It invites speculation about regional differences but assigns no fixed meaning or



Figure 4.4 Mary A. Hallock, "She Leaned against the Door," in *Mabel Martin: A Harvest Idyll*, by John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1876) p. 57



Figure 4.5 Mary Hallock Foote, "Looking for Camp," *Century* 37, 1 (December 1888): 108–9

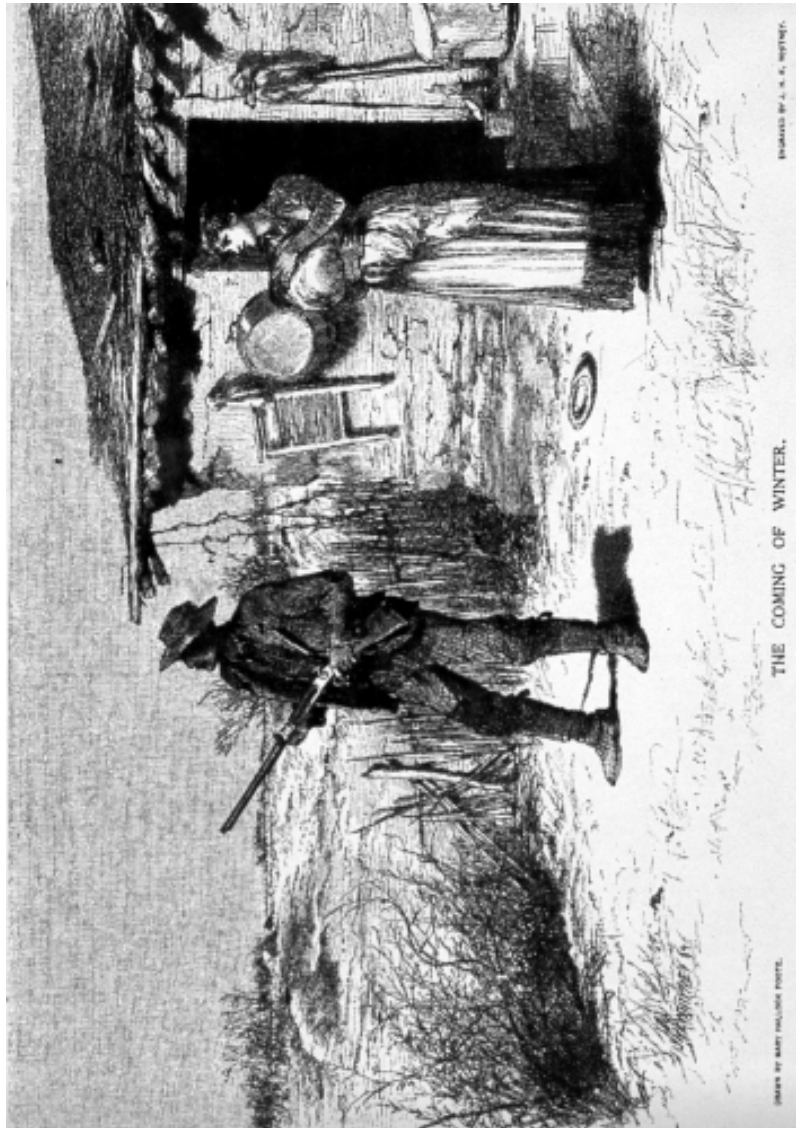


Figure 4.6 Mary Hallock Foote, "Coming of Winter," *Century*, vol. 37, 2 (November 1888): 163-64

hierarchy of value. Focusing on scenes of everyday life, Foote depicted the difficulties of living and working in new settlements without moving into the “Wild West” imagery popularized by contemporaries Frederic Remington, Theodore R. Davis, or Charles Russell. Her pictures and stories appeared alongside these male artists’ and writers’ visions of the West—both deemed necessary by Scribner’s editors to represent the western experience.

As a transplanted Easterner, Foote contrasted the landscape and peoples she encountered in the West with the world of her childhood, where she continued to maintain important familial and cultural ties. As an art student at Cooper Union, she was trained by men and women deeply involved in the Pre-Raphaelite movement who communicated John Ruskin’s deep faith in the artistic and moral value of the artist’s truthful observation and fidelity to nature.<sup>28</sup> She matured as an artist in the West, and her images of the West reveal the differences the region’s terrain and that economic development made in the everyday lives of its inhabitants. This attribute is especially apparent in her images of women. Many of these illustrations dwell on the isolation and hard work confronting women in the West. In “The Coming of Winter” (figure 4.6), a man holds a rifle while a woman grasps a baby, as they stand together in front of a small house scanning a wide expanse of sky. Tacked to the walls of the house, surrounding its dark opening, are reminders of the woman’s work: a washboard, tub and mop. The family’s struggle to sustain domestic life is starkly pictured amidst great natural beauty.<sup>29</sup>

Foote’s talent, training, and early success as an illustrator, aided by her connections to an important editor, helped to ensure that her western material found a national audience. Joshua C. Taylor has suggested that illustration had a more flexible vocabulary than painting or sculpture, making it ideal for recording new experiences. Illustrations formed “the real pictorial galleries for most Americans. The expansion of book illustration and the issuance of popularly priced lithographs and engravings coincided with the growth of the self-consciously American image.”<sup>30</sup> Foote’s western illustrations are an important part of this story. Her pictures helped locate the West as both familiar and unfamiliar, using meticulous observation to construct a sense of place.

More familiar images of white motherhood, its glorification and romanticization, are captured in Jessie Curtis Shepherd’s illustration “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle is the Hand That Rules the World.” (figure 4.7)



Figure 4.7 Mrs. Jessie Curtis Shepherd, "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Rules the World," in *Rock Me to Sleep, Mother* by Elizabeth Akers Allen, (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1883) 29

Her picture, an illustration for a gift book edition of Elizabeth Akers' poem "Rock Me to Sleep, Mother," provides a visual summary of the extensive claims made during the nineteenth-century about women's influence. The tender love of a mother for her child, and her home influence, shaped not only individual character, but world events.<sup>31</sup> Shepherd, a popular illustrator who worked mainly for Harper's publications, specialized in images of mothers, children, and, later, fairies. Her earliest important commission was for Elizabeth S. Phelps' post-Civil War blockbuster novel *The Gates Ajar* which depicted heaven as the ideal Victorian home.<sup>32</sup> Her images evince detailed attention to domestic interiors and suburban yards inhabited by idealized white mothers and children. Occasionally Shepherd drew images of poor, urban children. Characterized by careful, realistic treatment to surrounding details, the central figures remain securely embedded within sentimental conventions of innocence, poverty, and redemption.

In 1889 Shepherd defended both her work as art and the democratic value of reproduction: "I have devoted myself from first and last to telling stories in black and white pictures. I think it is the grandest branch of art, on account of its wide application, to draw for reproduction. A painting is seen by the few who come to it but a reproduction goes to the ends of the earth."<sup>33</sup> When the borders between fine and commercial art were beginning to harden, Shepherd's defense of illustration positioned her somewhat defiantly within the world of commercial art. Unlike her classmate Mary Hallock Foote, who was widely celebrated as an artist and invited to judge at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, Shepherd worked mainly as an illustrator for children's periodicals and books, receiving little critical attention. Without a fresh and compelling subject to capture the attention of editors and critics, her market niche depended on her gender as much as her skill. Her marketability rested on existing definitions of femininity that presumed women's greater affinity for and understanding of children.

Some of Shepherd's and Foote's classmates took a different and notably more commercial route, creating designs not only for book and magazine illustration but for emerging novelty and domestic industries. Their work is central to the post-Civil War emergence of a popular, commodity culture. Lizbeth B. Humphrey, a Boston native, found a place in two new markets—juvenile publishing and greeting card and novelty design. Her illustrations for several children's book series published by Lee & Shepard secured her reputation in the 1870s. Even as she gained success as an illustrator, she



continued to exhibit watercolors and oils at Boston exhibitions. However, more significant to her enduring reputation and more financially lucrative was her association with Prang Publishing Company.

Founded by a German immigrant and lithographer, Louis Prang's company specialized in reproducing original paintings in color. The firm also pioneered the Christmas card in America, and the bulk of its business was in product labels, advertisements, album cards, and posters. The reproduced paintings, called chromolithographs and nicknamed "chromos," disseminated fine art to a broad middle-class audience and resonated with national interest in creating a truly American art. Fed by a growing literature of how-to books, annuals, magazines, and religious tracts (many of them written by women) that educated middle-class women about taste, chromos satisfied the desire to beautify, and through beauty, uplift the home.<sup>34</sup>

Chromos formed part of an aesthetic that favored a densely decorative style fostered by machine production. The chromos on the walls surrounded a parlor stuffed with bric-a-brac, clocks, drapery, pillows, photographic albums, and books. Middle-class taste mixed mass-produced objects with unique objets d'art and family memorabilia in its love of abundance, artifice and replication.<sup>35</sup> Paper flowers were placed next to real flowers; wax fruit nestled in the bowl with real fruit. This aesthetic played with nature and imitation, leading the Beecher sisters, in their best-selling housekeepers' bible, *The American Woman's Home* (1869), to suggest growing German ivy from a bottle hidden behind a picture: "the ivy will seem to come from fairyland, and hang its verdure in all manner of pretty curves around the picture."<sup>36</sup>

Prang's firm brought art and business together, creating opportunities for women artists to gain steady employment and public recognition while fundamentally changing the way art was made. Chromos made paintings a reproducible commodity—a facsimile—helping to usher in commercial popular culture. Their creation, characterized by collaborative mass production rather than the individual crafting of unique objects, helped to redefine art as a business.<sup>37</sup> Chromos shared, along with new trends in wood engraving, a promise to "diffuse not a love of art merely among the people at large, but to disseminate the choicest masterpieces of art itself. It is art republicanized and naturalized in America."<sup>38</sup> Opponents of chromos focused on their inherently deceptive quality—they were not the real thing and deceived viewers into accepting a poor imitation for an original piece of art.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 4.8 Lizbeth B. Humphrey, title page, *Sweet Girl Goldie: A Wonder Story of Butterfly Time* (New York: Spinney & Perkins, 1884)

Prang's expanding business needed artistic talent, and he took some extraordinary steps to identify and recruit designers. He established a relationship with Cooper Union, donating money for teachers and prizes.<sup>40</sup> Beginning in the early 1880s, he held a series of national competitions judged by prominent fine artists and architects and offering prizes of between \$200 and \$1,000 for the best greeting card designs.<sup>41</sup> Humphrey won second and third prize in the Artist's Prizes category in the second contest, in 1882. Employed as a staff artist by the company until her untimely death in 1889, she contributed numerous designs for cards, calendars, satin novelties, and art books.

Her designs for novelty books and Christmas cards were so popular that Prang issued a memorial volume of the public's favorites to commemorate her work.<sup>42</sup> *Sweet Girl Goldie: A Wonder Story of Butterfly Time* (figure 4.8, a child's shape book she designed, exhibits the Pre-Raphaelite fidelity to nature that she practiced as an artist in the service of a cloyingly sentimental text. Together they compose a typical, mass-produced commodity for the children's market. Like the chromos Prang produced, the firm marketed its novelties' artistic appeal to a broad public, promoting the work of artists like Humphrey to sell products. These commodities represented an important route, even if in a much denatured form, for the dissemination of the precepts and training art students received from their Pre-Raphaelite teachers. They also embodied the injunction of the decorative arts movement to use art to beautify everyday objects.

Georgina A. Davis' career as an illustrator for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* and *The Salvation Army War Cry* and as a staff artist for McLoughlin's, a popular children's book and novelty publisher based in New York, further illuminates the circuits of gender, art and commerce present in her Cooper classmates' careers. As a newspaper staff artist, Davis explored a wider range of subjects than the other women. Illustrating assigned stories and able to publish drawings of scenes that interested her, Davis was the only woman staff artist working for a major newspaper in the 1880s.<sup>43</sup> Her illustrations use a kind of pictorial shorthand to convey information and locate diverse experiences and characters for readers outside the metropolis. For a story on a New York police court, Davis produced an image that relied on types recognizable from the emerging "science" of phrenology—contrasting the hardened "Old Offender" with the newer, less degenerate female criminal (figure 4.9). Types surface again in this detail from "Seeing the Old Year



Figure 4.9 Georgina A. Davis, "Sketches of Life and Character in a New York Police Court. Her First Offense. An Old Offender," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 58 (August 2, 1884): 373



Figure 4.10 Georgina A. Davis, "Virginia—'De Lord will take care ob de colored folk"—Seeing the Old Year Out and the New Year In—Scene in the Colored Church at Grafton, near Yorktown, during the Watch Meeting on New Year's Eve" from "Sketches" by Joseph Becker, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* 49, (January 10, 1880) 348–9

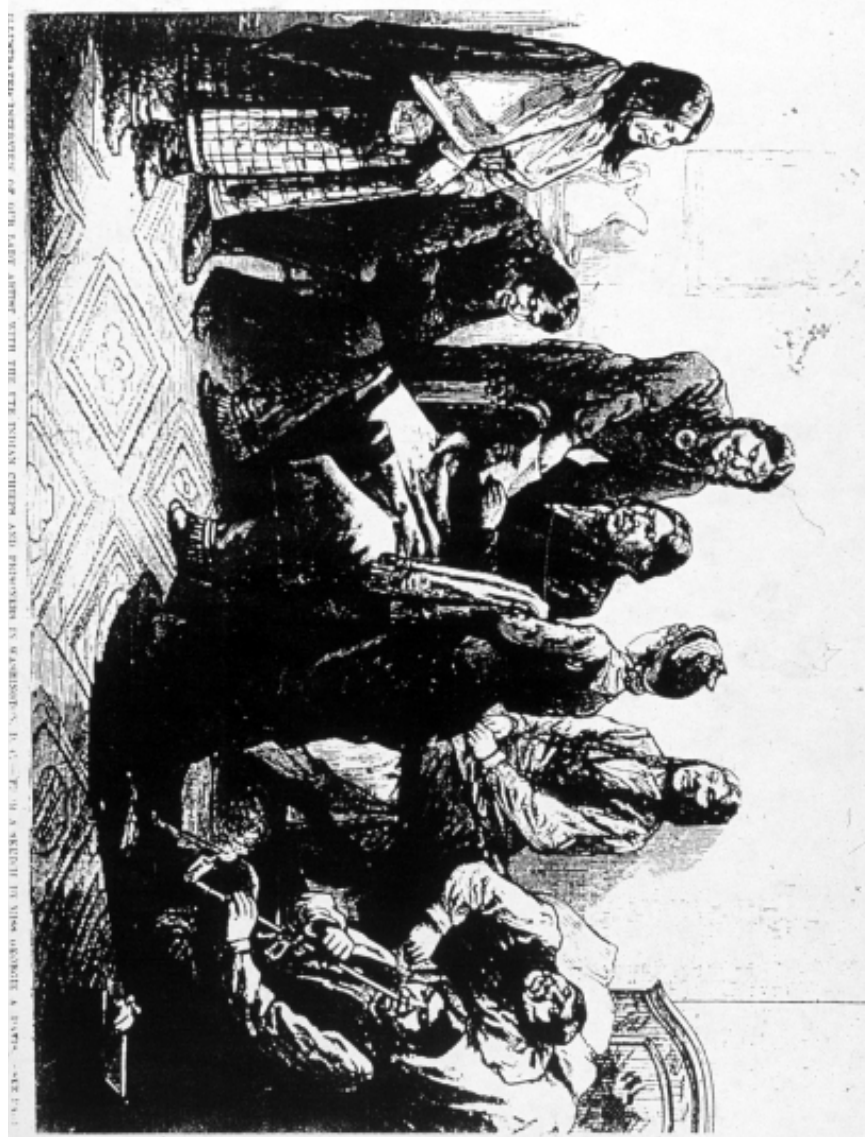


Figure 4.11 Georgina A. Davis, "Illustrated Interview of Our Lady Artist with the Ute Indian Chiefs and Prisoners in Washington, D.C.—From a Sketch by Miss Georgie Davis," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 50 (April 3, 1880) 73

Out and the New Year In,” an illustration of a New Year’s Eve watch meeting in a black church in Virginia (figure 4.10). Here, Davis uses common, racializing tropes to depict some of her black subjects even as others are rendered more realistically. Both images rely on culturally available aesthetic and ethnic typologies to key readers to the image’s meaning. She was also active as a painter and etcher, and these illustrations contrast strongly with the more astute and sympathetic handling evident in Davis’s portraits of “Mary Queen of Scots” and “A Man in Armor.” Her shared vocabulary of types recalls Jessie Curtis Shepherd’s illustrations, particularly her women in the home - they reproduce gender rather than reveal “real” women. Simultaneously categorical and individual, their illustrations serve to reinforce existing conceptions and hierarchies of gender, race, class, and ethnicity.

Women illustrators participated in creating a visual culture that denied the contradictions their own lives presented to the repetitive array of domestic images favored by publishers and consumers. White middle-class women are not culturally legible as both respectable and working. Georgina Davis, who drew an illustration for *Frank Leslie’s* in 1880 for a story on the visit of a group of captured Ute chiefs to Washington, includes herself in the picture but at an angle, apparently in conversation with the captives (figure 4.11). It is not at all clear that she is the producer of the picture. Women illustrators and designers helped to create a visual economy that located white, middle-class women as mothers or idle girls rather than as wage earner or artistic producers. Only rarely do they depict their own activities, as in Alice Barber’s painting of a “Woman’s Life Class” (1879), a view of her life drawing class at the Philadelphia School of Design.

However, to focus on images marked by these absences obscures the role women art professionals played in making nineteenth-century visual culture, a culture driven less by sentiment than the quest to identify new markets and expand circulation. The images themselves raise questions about how the first generation of women artists trained in the schools of design affected the development of the popular visual culture that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth-century. Publishers, ambitious for national audiences and for added prestige for their products, used women artists’ hands, eyes, and experience to make legible and marketable the lives and histories of characters and types both familiar and unfamiliar, drawn from all regions of the country. Women artists trained as close observers contended with their gender, racial, and class location, as well as existing conventions,

for representation as they drew for reproduction. The images they produced had the power to influence contemporaries' conceptions of peoples and places they might never encounter and established images of ideal lives that viewers sought to emulate.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle Class Culture in America, 1830–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility; Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990); pp. 66–111; David M. Henken, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), stress the anxiety that industrialization and urbanization provoked in the new middle class. I favor Joshua Brown's argument that print culture helped readers manage their new environments. Joshua Emmet Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 74–81.
- <sup>2</sup> Rowland Elzea's survey of just thirty-four of the major illustrated periodicals between 1880 and 1914 found more than 100,000 illustrations per year. *Golden Age of Illustration*, (Wilmington: Delaware Art Museum, 1972) p. 9. See also Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, eds., *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995). Isabelle Lehu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) is a fine study of the period before the Golden Age. Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of North and South, 1861–65* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), is on print culture and illustration during the war years. On the technical advances that eventually made it possible to print photographs, replacing earlier technologies that improved the reproduction of artists' images see Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1974); Anthony Dyson, *Pictures to Print: The Nineteenth-Century Engraving Trade* (London: Farrant Press, 1984); and Frank Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912).



- <sup>3</sup> E.L. Godwin, "Newspaper Pictures," *The Nation* 56 (April 27, 1893):1452. Cultural historian Neil Harris analyzes these debates in "Pictorial Perils: The Rise of American Illustration," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 336–45.
- <sup>4</sup> Neil Harris in influential essays has called on cultural historians to examine "'the history of our visual processing' as an opportunity to integrate aspects of commercial, industrial, technological and administrative history with the history of taste, opinion and artistic style." He identified the introduction of the half-tone engraving process in the late 1880s, which initially allowed artistic work to be directly reproduced and eventually led to the replacement of illustrations with photographs as an "iconographic revolution of the first order." For a detailed treatment of cultural anxieties surrounding the mass reproduction of images, see Neil Harris, "Pictorial Perils: The Rise of American Illustration," in *The American Illustrated Book in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Gerald W.R. Ward (Winterthur, Del.: Winterthur Museum, 1987); "Iconography and Intellectual History: The Halftone Effect," in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, edited by John Higham and Paul Conkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 196–211. On the relationship between art, advertising and commerce see Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Border of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). On advertising, Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993); Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996); and Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). On gender, advertising, and print culture see Ellen Garvey, *The Adman and the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the "Ladies Home Journal" and the "Saturday Evening Post": 1880–1910* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); and Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: the "Ladies' Home Journal," Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

- <sup>5</sup> Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75,1 (June 1988): 3–39.
- <sup>6</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977). Several recent books make clear the tightrope that women artists walked in attaining professional status and critical success without falling into the abyss of culturally prescribed femininity. These books deal primarily with fine arts careers rather than with women artists who pursued both fine and commercial art work: Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Kirsten Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Erica E. Hirshler, *A Studio of Her Own: Women Artists in Boston, 1870–1940* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2001); and Gabriel P. Weisberg and Jane R. Becker, *Overcoming All Obstacles: The Women of the Academic Julian* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999)
- <sup>7</sup> Regina Armstrong, "Representative American Women Illustrators: The Child Interpreters," *The Critic* 36 (January–June 1900): 427.
- <sup>8</sup> On the creation of gendered middle-class consumers through a wide range of commodities and practices see Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). On gender, design, and consumption see Victoria de Gratia, ed. *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgwood to Corning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
- <sup>9</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*, p. 137.
- <sup>10</sup> Ronald J. Zboray, "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," *American Quarterly*, 40, 1 (March 1988): 65–82; Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1984).
- <sup>11</sup> Mary Morris Hamilton (later Schuyler) (1818–1877) was the primary mover; other women involved as managers included Julia Burrill Curtis; Anna Shaw Curtis (1843–1905), sculptor Emma Stebbins (1815–1882), and Mary Pemberton Sturges.
- <sup>12</sup> Susan N. Carter, "Recollections of Peter Cooper," *Century* 27, no. 2

(December 1883): 219.

- <sup>13</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), especially chapters 3 and 7.
- <sup>14</sup> Cooper Union Institute for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, *2nd Annual Report, 1861*, p. 27. Cooper Collection, Cooper Union Library.
- <sup>15</sup> “New York School of Design for Women,” *The Crayon* (April 1856): 123.
- <sup>16</sup> Admissions Letters, 1859–60, The Cooper Collection, Cooper Union Library.
- <sup>17</sup> In 1840 the census lists only twenty engravers in the United States, this number would grow to about four hundred by 1870, aided by the immigration of skilled male engravers from England, Scotland, Germany and France. The high status and pay for wood engravers, between 1850 and the 1880s, recognized their importance in translating the artist’s vision for the printing press. They stood between the artist and the highly industrialized world of book and magazine production. All women engravers and designers, unlike their male competition, generally worked outside the shop as freelancers. Women trained at Cooper were unusual in possessing both fine arts training, especially drawing, and specific training as wood engravers.
- <sup>18</sup> Amelia Peck, “Candace Wheeler: A Life in Art and Business,” in *Candace Wheeler: The Art and Enterprise of American Design, 1875–1900*, edited by Amelia Peck and Carol Irish. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 2–86. See also Eileen Boris, *Art and Labor: Ruskin, Morris and the Craftsmen Ideal in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); and Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1967). Several Cooper Union graduates worked for Wheeler’s firm.
- <sup>19</sup> The growing public demand for pictures in newspapers and periodicals fueled by the Civil War had revived interest in designing for wood engraving among artists. With this most common means of providing pictures in books, wood engraving gained new respect and attention as an art form available to the masses. Publishers’ interest in wood engraving centered around its cheaper cost, as electrotyping replaced stereotyping allowing larger print runs and greater economies of scale. This technological advance, along with the introduction of the high-speed

rotary press later in the century, opened a new era in illustration. The use of photography to transfer images to the wood dramatically altered the work of wood engraving and its status. David Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Illustrated Book* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), pp. 6–7.

- <sup>20</sup> Michele H. Bogart, *Artists, Advertising and the Borders of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- <sup>21</sup> Albert D. Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1867).
- <sup>22</sup> In addition to Wallace Stegner's novel *The Angle of Repose* (New York: Doubleday, 1971) based on Foote's life, letters, and reminiscences, useful treatments of Foote include Rodman W. Paul, Introduction, *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West: The Reminiscences of Mary Hallock Foote* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1972) pp. 1–44; Darlis Miller, *Mary Hallock Foote: Author-Illustrator of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); and Lee Ann Johnson, *Mary Hallock Foote* (Boston: Twayne, 1980).
- <sup>23</sup> Reviews of her illustrations underlined her sympathetic appreciation of the works: "It is in the conception as well as the execution of her work that Miss Hallock will delight the appreciative reader. She has exactly expressed in her picture the general and impersonal sense of the poem. . . ." William Dean Howells, "Recent Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 34, (December 1874): 745–46.
- <sup>24</sup> David Tatham, *Winslow Homer and the Illustrated Book*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992): 6–9.
- <sup>25</sup> Redman Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 32–33, 203; Darlis Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 152, 159–60, 184–86, 208–10.
- <sup>26</sup> Mary Hallock Foote, "Pictures of the Far West," *Century* 37 (November 1888–March 1889), 108, 162, 449, 502, 687; 38 (May–August 1889), 2, 299, 342, 502, 872; and 39 (October–November 1889): 57.
- <sup>27</sup> Virginia Scharff speculates on the transformative power of remote western landscapes and women artists' experiences with mobility in "Women Envision the West, 1890–1945," in *Independent Spirits: Women Painters in the American West, 1890–1945*, edited by Patricia Trenton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 5.
- <sup>28</sup> As an art student at Cooper Union (1864–71), Mary Hallock studied wood engraving with William J. Linton, perhaps the leading wood

engraver in America. Linton, an Englishman, was active in Chartist and radical politics and frequented Pre-Raphaelite circles. Painter Thomas Charles Farrer, a student of John Ruskin's and a leader of the American Pre-Raphaelite "New Path," was teaching when she entered Cooper Union and his student Margaret J. McDonald continued to teach after his departure. NYSD teacher Elizabeth C. Field and Cooper students Maria Nims and Sarah Tuthill were at the founding meeting for the American Pre-Raphaelite Association for the Advancement of Truth in Art. Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerds, *The New Path: Ruskin and the America Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), pp. 41–3, 60–61, 154; and Phyllis I. Peet, "The Emergence of Women Printmakers in the Late Nineteenth-Century," part I, pp.149–62.

<sup>29</sup> Janet Floyd, "A Sympathetic Misunderstanding?: Mary Hallock Foote's Mining West," *Frontiers*, 32, no. 3 (2001): 144–67. Floyd's recent work is an important corrective to much of the scholarship on Foote which overstates her attachment to the East and the limitations her gender imposed on her record of the West.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua C. Taylor, *America as Art* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 94–95.

<sup>31</sup> Motherhood and maternal responsibility became a powerful rationale for middle-class women's movement into public life and for the expansion of state welfare policies in the Progressive era. The historical literature on changing role and meaning of motherhood in the nineteenth-century American culture is extensive. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1976): 187–205; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (Boston: 1980); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977): especially chapters 2, 3; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: 1981); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1982), especially chapters 3, 4; Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise & Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford, 1987), especially chapters 1, 2, 3; Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and*

- Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), chapters I, 3, 4; and Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (New York: 1983).
- <sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (Boston: Osgood & Fields, 1870).
- <sup>33</sup> “Mrs. Jessie Curtis Shepherd,” *American Art and Art Collections*, edited by Sylvester Koehler, (Boston: 1889) p. 689.
- <sup>34</sup> Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe promoted chromos heavily: “Surrounded by such suggestions of the beautiful, and such reminders of history and art, children are constantly trained to correctness of taste and refinement of thought, and stimulated—sometimes to efforts at artistic imitation, always to the eager and intelligent inquiry about the scenes, the places, the incidents represented.” Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The New Housekeeper’s Manual (Rev. Title)* (New York: J.B. Ford and Co., 1873) p. 94.
- <sup>35</sup> Lori E. Rotskoff, “Decorating the Dining-Room: Still-Life Chromolithographs and Domestic Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Journal of American Studies*, 31, no. 1 (April 1997), pp. 19–42.
- <sup>36</sup> Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The New Housekeeper’s Manual (Rev. Title)*, p. 98.
- <sup>37</sup> As Michael Clapper has argued, the emergence of this new hybrid of commercial art and popular culture was possible only through the integration of older ideas about art’s educating, refining, uplifting function with industrial capabilities and objectives. Michael Clapper, “Art, Industry and Education in Prang’s Chromolithographic Company,” edited by Georgia Barnhill (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1995), pp. 145–61. Peter C. Marzio’s study, *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Godine, 1979) remains the standard source.
- <sup>38</sup> James Parton considered chromos particularly well suited to “the special work of America at the present money, which is not to create, but to diffuse; not to produce literature, but to distribute the spelling book; not to add to the world’s treasures of art but to educate the mass of mankind to an intelligent enjoyment of those we already possess.” “Popularizing Art,” *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1869): 348–56, quote on 354. The “New School” of wood engraving emphasized the engraver’s ability to exactly reproduce an artist’s work down to the brushwork rather than to provide interpretation. The “New School” innovation

relied on photoxylography, a process that allowed original art to be transferred as a photograph directly to the woodblock, eliminating the need to redraw the original image.

- <sup>39</sup> Timothy Cole (1852–1931), a wood engraver, spent 27 years living abroad engraving (reproducing) European masterpieces for the *Century*, helping to establish the magazine as a connoisseur of the arts. As E.L. Godwin, acerbic editor of *The Nation*, commented in an 1870 editorial the chromo “deludes those who do not know . . . it disappoints even while it deceives . . . it is bad art.” E.L. Godwin, “Autotypes and Oleographs,” *The Nation*, November 10, 1870, pp. 317–18.
- <sup>40</sup> Minutes of Trustee Meetings. Peter Cooper Institute, vol. 2, 1882, 1887. Cooper Collection, Cooper Union Library.
- <sup>41</sup> Prominent fine artists including John La Farge and Samuel Colman and architects Stanford White and Richard Morris Hunt judged the entries. Although the winners included celebrated male artists such as Elihu Vedder, formerly unknown women were also selected. Women who won included Rosina Emmet, Dora Wheeler, and Ida Waugh. Winners received commissions from Prang to design cards and studies for art students.
- <sup>42</sup> *Child Life: A Souvenir of Lizbeth B. Humphrey* (Boston: L. Prang, 1890). Helena Wright, *With Pen & Graver: Women Graphic Artists before 1900* (an exhibition in the Hall of Graphic Arts, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., February 1995–January 1996): 16. Katharine M. McClintock, *The Chromolithographs of Louis Prang* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc, 1973): pp. 81, 82, 84, 118, 176.
- <sup>43</sup> *Leslie’s* was a major weekly with a circulation of more than 150,000 rivaling its major competitor *Harper’s*. Joshua Emmet Brown’s, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) examines the evolution of the illustrated press, its art and artists in detail. I’m indebted to Josh for his insights on the history and evolution of “types” in illustration and for a shared interest in Davis.