
As this handsome volume makes clear in beautifully-designed fashion, Philadelphia in the nineteenth century was the capital of American printmaking. The book is the culmination of the Library Company of Philadelphia’s ambitious three-year-long Philadelphia on Stone project, surveying in eight collections all the images produced in the first fifty years of commercial lithography in the city. (An instructive description of the project is available at the Library’s website, http://www.librarycompany.org/pos/. ) Editor Erika Piola, associate curator of prints and photographs at the Library Company, has assembled an impressive group of experts to write on a variety of topics focusing on these images, beginning with an overview of this fifty-year period by Piola and Jennifer Ambrose. Other chapters include an introduction to lithographic techniques; separate chapters on the two leading figures in the city’s lithographic trade, James Queen and Peter S. Duval; an examination of the role lithographs played in illustrating the era’s books and periodicals; depictions of commercial architecture in these lithographs; a discussion of “news-events” lithographic reportage; and lithographic landscape scenes (this last by Donald H. Cresswell of the Philadelphia Print Shop and a frequent appraiser on Antiques Roadshow).

The great value of the book’s eight chapters lies not only in the amount of well-presented information about the people, organizations and events involved in the making of lithographs, but also in the authors’ consideration of the historical and economic context of the printing trade. Profusely illustrated, including examples of early color printing techniques, as well as photographs and drawings of the period, the images represent the full spectrum of Philadelphia’s lithographic practice. Piola’s essay about news-event lithographs particularly reminds the reader that prints provided the earliest methods of disseminating “news” through the illustrated press of the nineteenth century. The chapter on Peter S. Duval also presents the first extensive, and long overdue, consideration of this giant of American printmaking. Finally, the book provides an admirable bibliography, with reference to further listings available through the Philadelphia on Stone Biographical Dictionary of Lithographers (http://www.lcpdigital.org).

Art and academic libraries with an interest in the history of printmaking, art in Philadelphia, and American cultural history should have Philadelphia on Stone in their collections. The text is accessible to lay readers with an interest in prints, and the illustrations alone are worth the price of the book.

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