

# Jewellery Studies

The Journal of The Society of Jewellery Historians



2021/3  
ANNAMARIE V. SANDECKI

Published by the Society of Jewellery Historians



*The Society of*  
**JEWELLERY  
HISTORIANS**

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## 2021/3

Editor: Susan La Niece

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# ***American Beauties: Nineteenth Century Jewellery in Currier and Ives Prints***

## KEYWORDS:

America/New York/19th Century/Women/Fashion/Jewelry/Jewellery/  
Middle Class/African American/Lithograph/Currier and Ives/Print

[https://www.societyofjewelleryhistorians.ac.uk/JSO\\_2021\\_3.pdf](https://www.societyofjewelleryhistorians.ac.uk/JSO_2021_3.pdf)

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Her recent publications include 'Women in 19th Century Tiffany & Co. Japanesque-Style Designs'. *Studies in Japonisme. Special Issue 8th Hatakeyama Symposium Acts; Japonisme and Women*, and object essays in the book *Collecting Inspiration, Edward C. Moore at Tiffany & Co.*, Medill Higgins Harvey (ed), Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021. Her other research interests are the history of jewellery etiquette in the United States, the evolution of women's watches and American jewellery exhibited at World's Fairs. Annamarie is a board member of ICOM's International Committee of Museums and Collections of Decorative Arts and Design and sits on the Advisory Board of the *Journal of Dress History*.

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**Front cover:**

Fig. 3. Queen of the Ball

Portraying a dark-haired beauty extravagantly dressed for a ball with an elaborate headdress, pendant earrings, a necklace of gemstones, beads, rosettes and drops, with these jewelled details echoed in the edging of her gown.

Currier and Ives, 1870. Paper, ink; 34 x 23 cm (plate and text). It was also available hand-coloured.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-DIG-pga-09695

# American Beauties: Nineteenth Century Jewellery in Currier and Ives Prints

ANNAMARIE V. SANDECKI

Elongated pendant earrings, delicate lockets suspended from colourful ribbons, necklaces strung with large gold beads, elaborate filigree brooches – this jewellery adorned the young women in nineteenth century lithographs by the New York City firm Currier and Ives.<sup>1</sup> Dating from approximately 1865 to 1877, these prints were made and sold during America's Reconstruction Era, a time when the country was focused on rebuilding the nation after the Civil War. Referred to in the firm's marketing literature as *The Beauties*, these images of young, attractive women were some of Currier and Ives' best-selling images and were the second smallest of the four sizes sold by the firm.<sup>2</sup> In 1871 a writer for *The New York Times* called them 'the great favorites' of the firm's prints.<sup>3</sup> These images served two purposes: they acted as an affordable resource for American women hungry for fashion news (especially notions on how to dress correctly), and they served as suitable decorations for middle class homes.<sup>4</sup> While scholars have discussed Currier and Ives prints of rural scenes, the Civil War, and racial caricatures there has been no scrutiny of

these small sized prints.<sup>5</sup> The research for this article focuses on the jewellery illustrated in them, examining whether it was both realistically portrayed and readily available to newly-immigrant factory girls and wives of small business owners – members of the nascent American middle class.<sup>6</sup> Such an examination provides new insights into how Americans learned about jewellery and the social strictures around wearing it.<sup>7</sup>

Currier and Ives was established in 1857 by Nathaniel Currier (1813-1888) and James Merritt Ives (1824-1895) as 'Publishers of Cheap and Popular Prints'. Currier previously operated his own lithograph business producing job specific commissions, but it was not until he started producing lithographs depicting sensationalized images of New York City events that he experienced success. He quickly expanded to lithographs featuring national happenings. In 1852 James Merritt Ives joined the firm, enabling the company to expand operations. The changes included commissioning a diversified portfolio of freelance artists to draw exclusive images, hiring an assembly line of young women to hand colour them, and employing a fleet of agents to spread across the country taking orders directly from consumers. In New York City, their store on Nassau Street encouraged customers to browse through bins of prints arranged by topic.<sup>8</sup> The prints were heavily marketed both to women interested in decorating their homes with comforting pastoral scenes and immigrant populations looking for pictures of American icons. Under Ives' influence the firm became adept at identifying potential subject matter such as newly elected politicians or popular saints, quickly discarding those designs that sold poorly.

In the mid-nineteenth century almost every home in America owned a Currier and Ives print. Middle class wives were

- 1 Currier and Ives printed black and white lithographs on a single stone which were sold either 'as is' or hand coloured. Chromolithographs are printed in multiple colours. For information on the differences between the two processes see Marzio, Peter C., *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a Nineteenth Century America*. David R. Godine, Boston 1979, pp. 8-9, 64-90.
- 2 John Zak and James Brust, 'Which Currier & Ives Prints were most popular in the nineteenth century?', *Journal of the American Historical Print Collectors Society* vol. 34/2, Autumn 2009, pp. 34-41. Frederic A. Conningham and Mary Barton Conningham, *An Alphabetical List of 5735 Titles of N. Currier and Currier & Ives prints; with dates of publication, sizes and recent auction prices*. New York: privately printed, 1930, Forward. The prints measured around 8 ½ inches to about 12 ½ inches.
- 3 'Prints and Lithographs', *The New York Times* 1871 March 19.
- 4 Linzy Brekke-Aloise, 'Very Pretty Business: Fashion and Consumer Culture in Antebellum American Prints' *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 48, no. 2/3, Summer/Autumn 2014, pp. 191-212. Bernard Reilly, *Currier and Ives. A catalog raisonné*. Ann Arbor, MI: Gale Research 1984, 2 volumes, p. xxv. Reilly's publication includes the most up-to-date listing for all the printmakers' work. However new titles continue to be discovered. The Library of Congress has an extensive collection of digitized prints.

- 5 Morton Cronin, 'Currier and Ives: a content analysis', *American Quarterly*, vol. 4/4, winter 1952, pp. 317-30. Julie Wosk, *Breaking Frame; technology and the visual arts in the nineteenth century*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ 1992, ISBN 0-8135-1924-1, pp. 55-6. Bryan F. Le Beau, *Currier and Ives: America imagined*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C. 2001, ISBN 1-56098-990-4, p. 201. Le Beau's research is the most comprehensive examination of the printmakers.
- 6 Russel Lynes, *The Tastemakers; the shaping of American popular taste*, Dover Publications, New York 1980.
- 7 Martha Gandy Fales, *Jewelry in America; 1600-1900*, Antique Collectors Club, Woodbridge, Suffolk 1995, ISBN 1-85149-223-2 provides an overview of materials, makers and jewellery fashions in the United States.
- 8 Lynes, *op cit.* p. 68.



bombarded with homemaking manuals advising how they should be utilized to create nurturing, morally uplifting domestic environments.<sup>9</sup> One writer stated, 'They not only enliven a room, but they cheer the home and elevate the tastes and educate the minds of its occupants.'<sup>10</sup> At one point 95% of all the lithographs in circulation were by Currier and Ives. Their success was built on their ability to depict nostalgic, sentimental and idealized images of daily American life, not necessarily how it really existed. The printmakers' goals were to create imagery that was instructional while remaining both decorative and inexpensive. To-date over 7000 different images have been identified as Currier and Ives prints, many of them selling over a million copies.<sup>11</sup>

Leading women's magazines may have provided inspiration for the jewellery in these prints. These publications played an important role in educating middle class American women about the appropriate jewellery for various social situations. However, unlike the fashion plates published in *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's*, which were simplified versions of their French originals, images and descriptions of jewellery in Currier and Ives prints appear to have been created especially for American readers making specific references to where items could be purchased.<sup>12</sup> For example in the 1868 and 1869 issues of *Demorest's Monthly* there are illustrations and lengthy descriptions, often with prices, of jewellery credited to the stock of the New York retailer Ball, Black & Co.<sup>13</sup> Magazine editors were focused on providing useful and instructive fashion information that would allow their readers to dress tastefully and not appear impolite or even immoral.<sup>14</sup> An article in the January 1864 issue of *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine* declared, 'elegant and appropriate jewellery [sic] has become so essential a feature of a genteel ensemble'.<sup>15</sup>

Around 1858, mimicking American magazines, Currier and Ives began to produce prints of women engaged in activities deemed socially and morally appropriate, such as playing the piano or letter writing.<sup>16</sup> Published with titles like *Alice* and *The Bridesmaid*, these lithographs depict women drawn to fit



Fig. 1. Take Your Choice.

Currier and Ives, c. 1870. Paper, ink, coloured paint; 31.9 x 22 cm (plate and text).

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-USZC2-3062

the era's stereotype of beauty – fragile, delicate and demure.<sup>17</sup> Their clothing is a template for the later *Beauties* prints of the 1870s – fashionable but modest. Unlike the later series, they are only occasionally adorned with jewellery. Given gold jewellery's popularity and the printer's proximity to the bustling luxury emporiums on Broadway, such as Tiffany & Co., the restrained display is surprising.<sup>18</sup>

Ten years later Currier and Ives replaced these simply dressed girls with prints of young women outfitted in the latest fashion and jewellery trends. The lithograph *Take Your Choice* (fig. 1) illustrates this shift.<sup>19</sup> In it two stylish coquettes, drawn to represent the period ideal of wax-doll prettiness, smile sweetly at the viewer. Their jaunty caps accented with ostrich feathers

9 Le Beau, *op cit.* pp. 181-214.

10 'Chromo-Lithography', *The New York Times*, 1874 October 31.

11 Le Beau, *op cit.* pp. 1-10.

12 Hope Greenberg, 'Godey's Lady's Book: Publication History', in *Lady's Book Website* [www.uvm.edu/~hag/godey/glbpub.html](http://www.uvm.edu/~hag/godey/glbpub.html) [accessed 19 September 2020]. Karin J. Bohleke, 'Americanizing French fashion plates: Godey's and Peterson's cultural and socio-economic translations of Les Modes Parisiennes' *American Periodicals*, 2020 vol. 20/2, special issue: American periodicals and visual culture, 2010, pp. 120-55.

13 *Demorest's Monthly Magazine* 1868, vol. 6, January p. 19, February p. 54, March p. 91, April p. 120, September p. 327, October p. 365, November p. 407, December p. 448; vol. 7 1869, January p. 27-8, March p. 110, April p. 152, May p. 169, June p. 232, July p. 275, August p. 314, September p. 374, November p. 407.

14 Brekke-Aloise, *op cit.* p. 202.

15 'Jewellery from Tiffany & Co., 550 Broadway', *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine and Gazette of Fashion*, vol. 14/1, January 1864, p. 22.

16 Brekke-Aloise, *op cit.* p. 193.

17 Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty; a social history...through two centuries of the American idea, ideal and image of the beautiful woman.* Figueroa Press, Los Angeles 1984, ISBN 1-932800-27-1, p. 69.

18 John Denison Vose, *Fresh Leaves from the Diary of a Broadway Dandy*, Bunnell & Price, New York, 1852, pp. 37-8.

19 Zak, *op cit.* p. 6.

provide a clue to the title's meaning; this informal hat style was meant to be worn during the all-important New York City social ritual of the promenade.<sup>20</sup> Occurring every day in the morning and afternoon, except Sunday when it followed church, this opulent parade of fashionably dressed humanity offered a highly choreographed opportunity for young people to meet and mingle.<sup>21</sup> The ornaments featured in *Take Your Choice* provided a template for jewellery appropriate for the activity. The selection – long ornate earrings, oversized bead necklaces, and a locket – are the most common types of jewels worn in this category of Currier and Ives prints.

The jewellery illustrated in *Take Your Choice* is identical to the readily available inexpensive ornaments commonly called 'rolled gold'.<sup>22</sup> Made by sandwiching a base material between



Fig. 2. Ready For An Offer.  
Currier and Ives, c. 1870. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
33 x 24 cm (plate and text).  
Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art,  
Gift of Mrs. M.S. Cassen, de-accessioned 07-19-2017

20 'Winter Hats', *Demorest's Monthly Magazine*, December 1869, p. 435.

21 David Scobey, 'Anatomy of the promenade: the politics of bourgeois sociability in nineteenth century New York', *Social History* vol. 17 no.2, pp. 203-27.

22 Francesca Carnevali, 'Fashioning luxury for factory girls: American jewelry 1860-1914', *The Business History Review*, vol. 85 no. 2, summer 2011, pp. 295-317.

two sheets of the precious metal, this advance in manufacturing resulted in newly affordable fashion jewellery. A significant number of the jewellery manufacturers producing rolled gold were in Newark, New Jersey – across the Hudson River from Currier and Ives' New York City base.<sup>23</sup> Reasonably priced brooches, necklaces, and bracelets were made with Etruscan or Roman designs in burnished, dead, frosted, or coloured gold. Decorated with twisted wirework or inexpensive stamping mimicking embroidery, the plated pieces were meant to evoke the luxurious solid gold jewellery of the Castellani family.<sup>24</sup> Earrings were long and impressive and described as 'the centre [sic] of fashion'.<sup>25</sup> A variety of necklace styles were prevalent - from simple beads embellished with pendant brooches to sumptuous gold festoons accented with gemstones. In addition, lockets were popular for everyday fashion satisfying Americans' appetite for sentimental gifts. Representing friendship, memory and secrets, they were enormously popular gifts. One women's magazine described them as 'swing[ing] from every piece of jewelry'.<sup>26</sup> The widely read fashion periodical *Demorest's Monthly Magazine* contains numerous illustrations and articles about rolled gold. One describes the work as 'fine' with 'patterns equal to those in real gold.' Appearance and wear were significant concerns. Magazine writers therefore were emphatic in their endorsements stating 'rolled gold has every appearance of genuiness [sic] – to a certain extent indeed, is genuine, and being manufactured by reliable jewelers, who warrant it to last a number of years, [and] may be purchased with entire confidence.'<sup>27</sup> In a hearty endorsement of American industry it was called 'far superior to French gilt.'<sup>28</sup> Appropriately hatted and bejewelled, *Take Your Choice* instructed middle and working class women about how to mimic the fashionable and lavish display of wealth expected by society while engaged in trolling for marriage prospects.<sup>29</sup>

In the lithograph *Ready For an Offer* (fig. 2) Currier and Ives illustrate how well-versed the artists employed by them were in jewellery trends. The print's title references the defining event in every nineteenth century American woman's life - an impending proposal of marriage. The subject is beribboned and bejewelled wearing a decorous blue gown accessorized with an elaborate garland rich with florigraphic meaning. The young woman wears no less than six different pieces of gold jewellery: two beaded necklaces, a pair of elaborately stamped earrings, a velvet ribbon fastened with a small pin, a dove-shaped brooch and what appears to be a bracelet featuring a lover's knot. These last two

23 Clare Phillips, *Jewels and Jewellery*, Victoria & Albert, London 2000, ISBN 1-85177-299-5, pp. 92-3. Ulysses Grant Dietz, ed., *The glitter and the gold; fashioning America's jewelry*, The Newark Museum, Newark, New Jersey 1997, ISBN 0-932828-35-3, pp. 11-18.

24 Fales, *op cit.* pp. 163-4.

25 'Jewellery from Tiffany & Co., 550 Broadway', *Frank Leslie's Lady's Magazine and Gazette of Fashion*, vol. 14/1, January 1864, p. 24.

26 'Holiday Gifts', *Harpers' Bazaar* 1868 December 26, p. 963.

27 'Jewelry' *Demorest's Monthly Magazine*, Volume 12, 1875 December, p. 496.

28 *Ibid.*, 1875 August, p. 306.

29 S. Annie Frost, *The art of dressing well; a complete guide to economy, style and propriety of costume*. Dick & Fitzgerald, New York 1870, pp. 43-6.

jewels – dove brooch and bracelet – are a reference to purity and fidelity. One assumes that this over abundant display of jewellery is meant to represent the result of a blissful courtship. The print therefore can be interpreted as providing a visual checklist of fashionable gifts for suitors to purchase as well as aspirational imagery for the young women yearning to receive them.

Before 1870 the most elaborate displays of jewellery in the prints are reserved for those with titles incorporating the word 'queen'. In the *Queen of Love and Beauty*, *Queen of the West* and *Queen of the Brunettes*, the subjects are shown dressed in elaborate outfits accessorized with rings, tiaras, bodice ornaments, bracelets, oversized earrings and fringe necklaces. One of the most extravagant displays appears in *The Queen of the Ball* (fig. 3) with a dark-haired beauty arrayed in a suite of opulent gold bead and gemstone jewels. She wears a lavishly patterned gown and a lattice-like headdress nets her braided hair. The headband's elaborate triangular centrepiece includes a rondel with drops and a large oval cabochon gemstone. In her ears are over-sized girandole-style earrings, each one composed of several large oval gold drops. Her necklace is made of hefty rhombus-shaped gemstones and gold beads interspersed with rosettes and drops. By far the most lavish element of her costume is the ornament edging the décolleté gown: extending from shoulder-to-shoulder it is festooned with gold drops, rosettes and swags dotted with cabochon and rhombus-cut gemstones. An example of the type of gown worn by wealthy American women attending balls, it is the perfect canvas to showcase these sumptuous jewels.<sup>30</sup> Balls were the zenith of cities' social seasons and, alongside attending the opera, were considered the most formal of occasions in nineteenth century America. In 1867 a writer for *The New York Times* listed the Liederkranz, Purim, Seventh Regiment, Arion and Yellow Plush as amongst the 'chaos of balls' that heralded the opening of New York's season where 'entrancing jewelry' would be on display.<sup>31</sup> Ballrooms were ringed with boxes whose occupants watched and were watched by the dancers. Writing about the display in the boxes at the 1868 Purim Ball, a reporter commented that 'the dresses were superb, their owners beautiful, and the display of jewelry magnificent... Pearls beyond price encircled necks as fair as they. Garnets and rubies seemed to lend their purity and depth of color to the lips above them.'<sup>32</sup> Newspaper journalists routinely provided detailed lists of attendees 'toilettes'.<sup>33</sup> An article describing a ball held in Saratoga Springs, New York provided specifics on the gowns and jewellery of nine different women – 'Miss Peters wore a cherry-colored silk dress, with white velvet trimmings; head and dress set off with gold beads.'<sup>34</sup> The etiquette surrounding proper attire for attendees was extensive, especially regarding appropriate jewellery. One arbitrator of taste, S. Annie Frost the author of *The*



Fig. 3. Queen of the Ball.  
Currier and Ives, 1870. Paper, ink; 34 x 23 cm (plate and text).  
It was also available hand-coloured.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-DIG-pga-09695

*Art of Dressing Well*, counselled that at these public occasions 'splendour of costume is a necessary part of the festival.' She provided guidance on what gemstones would appear best in the warm tones of candlelight (ruby, garnet, sapphire, emerald) vs. gaslight ('the flash and sparkle of the diamond, the pale, iridescent luster of the opal, and the tender glory of the pearl').<sup>35</sup> While the elaborate jewel edging the *Queen of the Ball's* gown may be fantastical, her headdress may have been inspired by press accounts of European hairdressing or by the illustrations of elaborate hairstyles described as 'Marie Antoinette' or 'Sévigéné' found in American women's magazines.<sup>36</sup> In addition to accounts of ball jewellery, inspiration for the jewels may have come from the articles about lavish society weddings that appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Engravings with detailed captions of the elaborate suites of diamond, ruby and pearl jewels presented to brides accompanied these stories.<sup>37</sup>

30 Balls appear to have been sponsored by specific organizations or wealthy individuals with attendees drawn from membership rolls or the organizer's social circle. Politicians and members of the press also were invited.

31 'The Season', *The New York Times* 1867 February 28.

32 'The Purim Ball' *The New York Times*, 1868 March 10.

33 'The Ball at The Academy', *The New York Times* 1866 April 6.

34 'Another pleasant day', *The New York Times* 1865 July 22.

35 Frost, *op cit.* pp. 81-5.

36 'Hair Dressing', *Harper's Bazaar*, 1868 March 7, p. 296;

'High Art in Hairdressing', *The New York Times*, 1874 March 18.

37 Fales *op cit.* pp. 197-201.



Women's magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* also published images of elaborate suites, such as a sumptuous emerald and diamond one illustrated in the May 1868 issue. Manufactured by the New York jeweller Browne & Spaulding, it was composed of a necklace with 22 emeralds and 110 diamonds, a brooch featuring a ten and one-half carat emerald with an additional nine pear-shaped emeralds, a ring composed of a three and one-half carat emerald, a bracelet 'very rich in construction' and earrings. It cost \$50,000 or roughly \$900,000 in today's USD.<sup>38</sup> Ornate necklaces were typically the centrepiece of a suite. The goal was an opulent and luxurious design that could easily be seen from a distance. Given the sumptuous imagery of *The Queen of the Ball* it is difficult to imagine this being an instructive image for the usual middle class female customer of Currier and Ives prints. Rather this print along with its companions may have been merely decorative, meant to decorate a bedroom and 'changed almost as frequently as the wallpaper'.<sup>39</sup> Currier and Ives prints featuring women, which date before 1872, present two different types of jewellery wardrobes. The first group features fashionable rolled-gold jewellery which was both affordable and available for purchase across the United States. The second group of prints illustrates magnificent suites of gem-set jewels inspired by the spectacle of the ballroom. Few American women would own this second type of jewellery or have occasion to wear it. Therefore, unlike the first group of instructional and aspirational prints, this second group may have been intended purely as household decoration.

Between 1872 and 1874 Currier and Ives published two catalogues for retail customers that illustrate the progression in their marketing of female imagery. The first, published in 1872 contains a new category 'Ladies Heads, Gallery of 100 Beauties,' which consists of roughly 13% of the 750 titles offered for sale. Sometime thereafter a second catalogue of 738 small-sized prints was published with about the same number of titles under the category.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the 1870s the small-size 'Beauties' prints sold briskly. Only images of landscapes and children had a greater variety of images.<sup>41</sup> Within this group there are several categories: prints titled with then-popular women's names like Fannie, Ella, and Hattie; prints evoking romantic love, like *The Girl I Love*, *My Favorite*, or *My Sweetheart*; and prints with titles utilizing the word 'Beauty' or 'Belle' in association with a specific geographic location (eg. *The Beauty of the Atlantic*) or immigrant or ethnic group (eg. *The Irish Beauty*, *The Indian Beauty*). Like earlier Currier and Ives prints, the subjects are arrayed in necklaces, earrings and lockets made from a variety of materials.

The jewellery shown in the large number of prints titled with young women's names - ranging from Ada to Virginia - reflect the taste and budget of America's middle- and working-class. In a December 1871 newspaper story devoted to holiday shopping a reporter explained exactly where these earrings, necklaces and lockets could be purchased, contrasting these stores with those of well-known Broadway jewellers. After 'wandering around

Tiffany's superb establishment' and visiting 'the splendid old firm of Ball & Black' the writer next visited George C. Allen's store described in a section headed 'Other Jewelers'. At Mr Allen's, shoppers would find 'moderate prices' and 'bargains in jewelry of various kinds.' His stock included jewellery made using cameos, bloodstone, amethyst, garnet, onyx, jet, coral and lava, as well as gold chains, brooches and bracelets.<sup>42</sup> Diamonds, the gemstone most often mentioned in contemporary accounts of the fashions worn by New York society women, are noticeably absent from this second section. The hand-coloured print *Lottie* (fig. 4) reflects the jewellery that would have been worn by Mr Allen's typical customer. In it a young woman dressed in a modest off-the-shoulder blue-trimmed gown wears what appears to be coral and gold jewellery. A blue satin ribbon pulls back her corkscrew curls so that one can admire a torpedo-shaped coral drop earring, topped with a banded finial-like bead. A locket, whose decoration is more intricate than typical for a Currier and Ives' print, dangles from her necklace made of enormous beads.



Fig. 4. *Lottie*  
Currier and Ives, c. 1872. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
approximately 33 x 24 cm (plate and text).  
Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art,  
Gift of Mrs. M.S. Cassen, de-accessioned 07-19-2017

38 'Diamond and Emerald Jewelry', *Harper's Bazaar*, 1868 May 16, pp. 453-4.

39 Reilly *op cit.* p. xxv.

40 Zak and Brust *op cit.* p. 37.

41 *Ibid.*, pl.34.

42 'More Holiday Goods', *The New York Times* 1871 December 19, p. 2.



Fig.5. Just Married

Currier and Ives, c. 1870. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
35 x 25 cm (plate and text).

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-USCZ2-2727

The locket's decoration is composed of an over-all bright cut pattern into which small unidentifiable gemstones appear to have been set. The jewellery is likely rolled gold with the coral, probably the popular and less-costly man-made type known as 'celluloid coral'.<sup>43</sup> Composed of ingredients such as cellulose nitrate, gum camphor or milk, the material was moulded and coloured in shades imitating coral from bright to dark orange. Originally introduced in 1855 in England, by the 1870s there were several American manufacturers of the material. A writer for *Demorest's Monthly Magazine* endorsed this economical alternative to organic coral stating that 'the imitation is excellent' and 'the finer qualities, cannot be distinguished from the real' going on to recommend that celluloid coral 'while in combination with rolled gold...affords the benefit of variety.'<sup>44</sup> *Lottie* is indicative of the series, aligning with the accepted costume of a modest dress, earrings, multiple necklaces and dangling locket. None of the jewellery is ostentatious and tellingly no diamonds – the singular gemstone mentioned repeatedly in American popular literature – ever appears.

43 Fales *op cit.* p. 239.

44 *Demorest's Monthly Magazine*, December 1875.

These prints of young women, dressed in the clothing and jewellery typically worn by America's new middle class, would have been eminently appealing to the hordes of itinerant male workers now roaming the United States.<sup>45</sup> Working as unskilled day labourers in lumber camps or city factories these men were eager to be reminded of sweethearts they had left behind. With generic titles mimicking popular girls' names, the images were drawn to evoke young women found in any part of the United States. As a reporter observed 'Here you can find the portraiture of your beloved one, and may be able to match the features to the name, as every possible appellation is printed under them, from Hattie down to Evangeline...'.<sup>46</sup> These small-sized prints enabled men who travelled with few possessions to inexpensively decorate the cabins of their mining camps or the walls of their lodging houses.

Exploiting the market for evocative images of young women, Currier and Ives published a series of prints with titles like *My Sweetheart*, *The Girl I Love*, or *My Charming Girl*. They are examples of the gauzy romantic haze surrounding courtship and marriage in late nineteenth century America. Winsome young women are shown modestly but fashionably dressed wearing what appear to be rolled gold necklaces, earrings and lockets. An exception is the print *Just Married* (fig. 5) depicting a young bride with meekly downcast eyes. In a hand-coloured version she is shown blushing, dressed in a light pink gown trimmed with white lace eyelet. In her hair is a long spray of orange blossoms, a custom adopted by American brides in imitation of Queen Victoria's orange blossom bridal crown. The young girl wears an elaborate set of seed pearl and amethyst jewels consisting of drop earrings made of two large rondels of amethysts further surrounded by seed pearls and an ornate necklace constructed of pearl links interspersed with oversize amethyst floral medallions. The necklace's central element is an elaborate confection of seed pearls and pear-shaped pearl drops surrounding a large amethyst. In the United States amethysts were both popular and inexpensive though the practice of combining them with seed pearls had disappeared by the early nineteenth century making this set's design old-fashioned.<sup>47</sup> However, well entwined in the American psyche was the association of pearls and brides. Throughout the 1870s Americans enthusiastically embraced the notion that sets of affordable seed pearls, with their connotation of purity, were suitable bridal gifts best given either by the groom or the parents of the bride.<sup>48</sup> *Godey's Lady's Magazine* stated emphatically that 'they were the only kind of jewelry allowed' for the bride on her wedding day.<sup>49</sup> Given that Currier and Ives prints usually depict fashionable jewellery this one may have been designed to be decorative rather than instructional, with the feminine colouration meant to enhance bedroom décor.

Throughout the nineteenth century, newspapers across America labelled young women who embodied a community's ideals both in appearance and behaviour as a 'beauty' or a 'belle'.

45 Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America; transformations in everyday life; 1876-1915* Harper Perennial, New York 1992, ISBN 0-06-092160-9 p. 17.

46 'Prints and Lithographs,' *The New York Times*, 1871 March 19.

47 Fales *op cit.* p. 210.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 209-13.

49 'Chitchat on Fashions for February', *Godey's Ladies Magazine*, vol 82, 1871 February, p. 205.



Not necessarily wealthy, the most significant criteria for selection were attractiveness and stylish dressing. Journalists considered these women paragons of loveliness and style worthy of emulation.<sup>50</sup> Currier and Ives issued many prints combining these words with vague geographic locations like *The Beauty of the Pacific*, *The New England Beauty* or *The Beauty of the South West*. However, a small group of images were created with titles identifying the subjects as inhabitants of New York City. Two prints commemorate specific neighbourhoods - *A Fifth Avenue Belle* (fig. 6) and *A Broadway Belle* (fig. 7). By the 1870s these labels were well-established American tropes for a certain type of fashion-crazed woman. As early as 1858 the 'Broadway Belle' was already referenced disapprovingly by American women's magazines like *Godey's*.<sup>51</sup> A book of plays for

children described the type as 'saucy-looking ...dressed in the extreme of fashion.'<sup>52</sup> Sometime in the 1850s and again 1868 Currier and Ives printed two fashion caricatures commenting on how New York women dressed. The first titled *The Breadth of Fashion: Fifth Avenue* ridiculed the extreme width of hoop skirts.<sup>53</sup> The other, *The Grecian Bend: Fifth Avenue Style* mocked the fashion for large bustles.<sup>54</sup> In 1871 Barry Gray, a writer for popular publications such as *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, published a collection of his work which included a satirical chapter entitled 'Model Young Ladies.' In it he devoted sections to both the 'Fifth Avenue Beauty' and 'The Broadway Belle.' The former 'is generally an exotic beauty' with 'the jewelry store of Tiffinani [sic]...especially patronized by her. Diamonds are her failing. They sparkle on her fingers, her arms, her brow,



Fig. 6. A Fifth Avenue Belle  
Currier and Ives c. 1870. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
30.48 x 37.46 cm (plate and text).

Image courtesy of Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts, Gift of Lenore B. and Sidney A. Alpert, supplemented with Museum Acquisitions Funds.

Photography by David Stansbury.

Accession number MFA-2004.D03.030



Fig. 7. A Broadway Belle  
Currier and Ives, c. 1870, Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
33.8 x 21.6 cm (plate only).

Courtesy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art.

Gift of Mrs. M.S. Cassen, de-accessioned 07-19-2017

50 Banner *op cit.*, pp. 152-3.

51 'Blanche Brandon', *Godey's Ladies Magazine*, Volume 56, 1858 April, p. 316.

52 Mrs Russell Kavanaugh, *Kavanaugh's juvenile speaker, for very little boys and girls*. Dick and Fitzgerald, New York 1877, p. 15.

53 Reilly *op cit.* pp. 49, 78.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 255, 297.

and amidst her hair; they are pendent from her ears and rise and fall upon her swelling bosom.<sup>55</sup> Currier and Ives' *A Fifth Avenue Belle* published around the same date is a striking contrast to this description. In a hand-coloured version a woman dressed in a plumed 'Central Park' hat - headgear appropriate for young girls out riding - engages the viewer with a pleasant smile.<sup>56</sup> Her only jewel, also dictated by fashion, is a brooch fastening the feather onto the hat. The faceted, red-coloured gemstone set within what appears to be a stamped rolled-gold frame may represent a Bohemian garnet, popular for mass-produced jewellery.<sup>57</sup> Not a single one of the ubiquitous diamonds mentioned by Gray is seen anywhere on her outfit. A similar contrast between contemporary social critique versus the Currier and Ives print is seen in *A Broadway Belle*. Gray describes this woman as 'slightly inclined toward the jewelry department... crowd[ing] her finger with rings which are not always formed of precious stones, while her swelling bosom is weighed down by gold chains and brooches....'<sup>58</sup> In this hand-coloured print a young woman with upswept braided hair wears a soft-crowned Tyrolean-style blue hat, accented with a red feather and two pink roses. Her hair style, hat, and the 'Marie Stuart' frill on her simple red gown are nearly identical to an illustration of a young woman shown shopping for jewellery which appeared in the January 15, 1870 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*.<sup>59</sup> Like the figure in the 'Promenade Toilette', Currier and Ives' *Broadway Belle* wears an earring, a simple chain of gold oval-shaped hoops, less elaborate than the girandole-style earring shown in *Harper's Bazaar*. The print's subject also wears another jewel, a garnet-coloured heart-shaped pendant on a chain composed of similarly coloured carved beads. A few years earlier *Godey's Lady's Magazine* commented that wearing garnets 'on a dress matching in shade have a very charming effect'.<sup>60</sup> By all appearances, the Currier and Ives' 'Belle' is correctly and fashionably attired, ready for a shopping expedition. Unlike prior prints published by the firm referencing New York fashion, these appear to reference New York's acknowledged position as America's fashion capital responsible for establishing jewellery trends that were emulated across the nation.<sup>61</sup>

A small group of prints entitled *The German Beauty*, *The Irish Beauty* and *The Egyptian Beauty* appear to have been designed to appeal to those specific nationalities. Nominally parts of this collection are three prints of African-American women: *The Colored Beauty* of 1872 (fig. 8), *The Colored Beauty* of 1877 (fig. 9) and *The Colored Belle* which is only known by



Fig. 8. The Colored Beauty  
Currier and Ives, 1872. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
35 x 24 cm (plate and text).  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-USCZ2-2118

its title.<sup>62</sup> The first two prints were published concurrent with Currier and Ives' popular *Darktown* series, a group of 100 images mocking African-Americans' behaviour in a number of situations such as firefighting or athletic events.<sup>63</sup> Within the series were many prints ridiculing women's fashion choices such as *Darktown Sociables*, *A Fancy Dress Hoodoo*, *Asking A Hand* and *Darktown Society – On Their Feed*.<sup>64</sup> However neither *Colored Beauty* print is satirical, representing an unusual departure for the firm in the representation of African-American women.<sup>65</sup> The 1872 version of *The Colored Beauty* (fig. 8) depicts a smiling young woman glancing to the left of the viewer, dressed in a two-tone gown accented with a lace neckline and bodice. It does not appear to be work clothing but Sunday or 'best' clothing worn to attend church services or as a wedding

55 Barry Gray, *Castles in the air, and other phantasies; an old man prattling in the sunshine*. Hurd and Houghton, New York 1871, pp. 342-52.

56 'Fall fashions', *The New York Times*, 1863 September 25, p. 2.

57 Fales *op cit.* p. 205.

58 Gray *op cit.* pp. 349-50.

59 'Promenade toilette', *Harper's Bazaar*, 1870 January 15, p. 44.

60 'Chitchat upon New York and Philadelphia fashions for February', *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1867 February, p. 203.

61 Caroline Rennolds Milbank, 'Ahead of the world: New York City fashions', in *Art and the Empire City; New York 1825-1861*, eds. Catherine Hoover Voorsanger and John K. Howat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 2000, pp. 243-57.

62 Reilly *op cit.* p. 136.

63 Le Beau *op cit.* pp. 231-2.

64 Reilly *op cit.* pp. 32, 153.

65 Le Beau *op cit.* p. 231.





Fig. 9. The Colored Beauty  
 Currier and Ives, 1877. Paper, ink, coloured paint;  
 34 x 24 (plate and text).  
 Courtesy of the Library of Congress, PGA, LC-USCZ2-2118

ensemble.<sup>66</sup> This is confirmed by her unbound, naturally curly hair that, in order to minimize grooming time, would have been covered by a *tignon* or head cloth on work days.<sup>67</sup> She wears a number of jewels – an elaborate pair of gold, Renaissance Revival-style die-stamped earrings, two delicate seed pearl chokers, and a gold and pearl chain with an engraved, pearl-set locket – making it an unusually stylish image. White American women preferred to view their African American counterparts as ignorant about how to wear jewellery. In a short story entitled ‘Mrs Daffodil is invited to join a Dorcas society’ published in *Godey’s Lady’s Magazine*, the fashion arbitrator S. Annie Frost describes the introduction of a freed slave woman into the local

community.<sup>68</sup> At one point Miss Annie, the title character’s mentor, is helping her dress ‘for she seemed utterly unable to conquer the intricacies of a fashionable toilet.’<sup>69</sup> Mrs Daffodil complains ‘It’s no sort of use...tryin’ to rememorize all the fixin’s an’ it’s just a mercy any how that I ain’t put my buckle on my collar an’ pinned my belt with a breastpin. I did pretty nigh strangulation myself one night tryin’ to clasp a bracelet round my throat...you don’t wear so many flummeries as we do...the next time you have a spare hour, you must just complain to me all the names of the jewelry we’re a-pilin’ on.’<sup>70</sup> Perhaps like prints meant for middle class white women such as *Take Your Pick*, the 1872 print was designed to instruct African American women in the dress and jewellery suitable for a particular activity. The 1877 version of *The Colored Beauty* (fig. 9) displays an evolution of style in the depiction of African American women. Here the subject also does not wear work clothes but a stylish, modest outfit suitable for a promenade, shopping or visiting with friends. Her hair is parted in the centre emulating Euro-American fashion and her outfit is accented with a small simple earring like the few jewels usually seen in contemporary portrait photography of African Americans.<sup>71</sup> The image is intended to represent the newly emerging African American middle class, illustrating not only appropriate clothing but hairstyles. Both prints present sympathetic images of beauty, purity and prosperity and seem meant to be instructional and aspirational. The intended audience for them must have been limited but, much like their prints of other ethnic beauties, Currier and Ives apparently felt it was sufficient to warrant specially crafted imagery intended for display.

In the 1880s Currier and Ives mass-produced prints were replaced in American homes by mezzotints, etchings and photogravures which imitated fine art works. As home decoration evolved, with heavily carved woodwork, murals, tiles, wall hangings and original paintings becoming more popular, the space available for any type of print disappeared.<sup>72</sup> In 1907 the firm ceased to exist.

Currier and Ives’ prints depicted, with few exceptions, images of America’s new middle class: the wives, sisters and daughters of American factory managers, bank clerks and grocery store owners. The women were dressed in fashionable jewellery appropriate for their lady-like activities and the prints were readily available for purchase. Both inexpensive and portable they served as appropriate instructional imagery suitable for interior decoration and as useful reminders of loved ones. They represent the era’s vision of American beauty.<sup>73</sup>

68 S. Annie Frost, ‘Mrs. Daffodil is invited to Join a Dorcas Society’, *Godey’s Magazine*, vol 76, no 453, 1868 March, p 51-5.

In the United States a Dorcas Society is the women’s charitable group affiliated with a Lutheran church.

69 Ibid p. 255.

70 Ibid

71 Karin J. Bohleke, ‘Assimilation, Amalgamation and Defiance:

The “Admirable Figure of the Negro” and African American dress in daguerreotypes and early images’ *The Daguerrian Annual* 2014, pp. 11-33.

72 Reilly *op cit.* p. xxxii.

73 This article originates from a paper given at the Society of Jewellery Historians conference *Jewels in Portraits: Portraits in Jewels* (June 2019).

66 Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin! African American Expressive Culture*, Cornell University Press, New York 1999, ISBN 0-8014-3179-4. pp. 172-6.

67 Shane White and Graham White, ‘Slave Hair and African American culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,’ *The Journal of Southern History*, vol 61/1 1995 February, p. 69-72.

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