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Little is known about the history of women's curatorial work in museums, particularly the work of deaf women. The contributions of Archer M. Huntington, founder of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library (HSM&L) in New York City and the women to whom he entrusted library and museum work deserve to be better known. Some of these women were deaf, and two of them, Eleanor Sherman Font and Margaret Sherman, were great-granddaughters of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, founder of the first public school for the deaf in the United States. These women not only worked as curators but also led overseas research expeditions. Information about the deaf women who worked at HSM&L and an examination of the philosophy of the HSM&L founder provide insight into how deaf women succeeded in this unique work, and how their contributions were crucial to consolidation of the HSM&L collections.

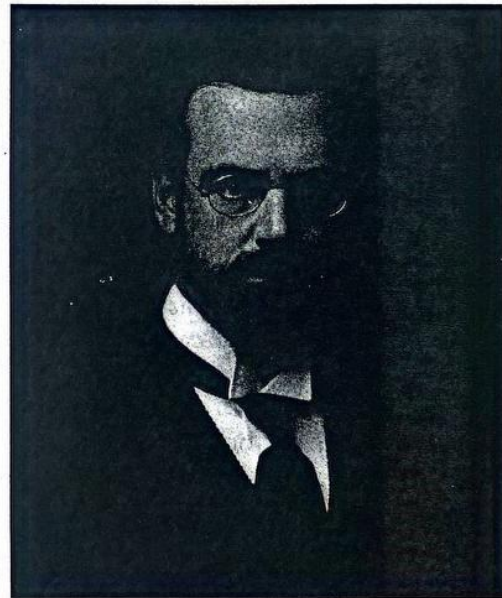
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HUNTINGTON'S VISION, AND HIS TRIBUTE TO THE HISPANIC WORLD

The American scholar and philanthropist Archer M. Huntington (1870–1955, see Figure 1) was the son of one of the richest men in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, Collis Porter Huntington, one of the principal investors in the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad and the development of the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. In 1904, Archer Huntington founded the Hispanic Society of America, located on Audubon Terrace in Upper Manhattan, New York City.

As has been shown in a biography of Archer Huntington (Coddington, 2002) and a history of the Hispanic Society of America (Hispanic Society of America, 1954), now called the Hispanic Society Museum and Library (HSM&L),

Figure 1. Archer M. Huntington, 1920.



Note: From the archive of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library. Courtesy of the HSM&L.

Huntington's initial intention was that the HSM&L serve primarily as a free public library and secondarily as a museum. This library/museum was to promote the study of letters and arts from the Iberian Peninsula, addressing nearly every aspect of culture "through works of the hand and the spirit" (HSM&L, 2018) in Spain, as well as much of Portugal, Latin America, and the Philippines, into the 20th century.

Women, including deaf women, played a valuable role in the HSM&L from its inception, and even before it. There were many women from a wide range of disciplines, but mainly from academia and the arts. Many women enjoyed the benefit of receiving the financial support of the HSM&L and having at their disposal the extraordinary resources in its library. They also had the opportunity to correspond and work with academics and other experts in their respective fields and to visit the most important museums and collections, both private and public. They enjoyed study expeditions commissioned by Huntington, during which they were able to do fieldwork and study the subjects of their research in situ. This support was in some cases essential to advancing their professional careers, and in the cases of the women who worked as permanent staff, it meant, in many ways, a changing of professions and expectations. Most of those women began their careers as librarians and later became experts in art, literature, and a culture that was initially unfamiliar to them. They even translated poetry at some point. Their work was difficult and arduous, an "experiment" (Newman, 1954, p. 6), but their commitment to Huntington's vision pushed them to go further, and to develop professional aspirations hard to imagine at the time, particularly for deaf women.

THE HEART AND SOUL OF A COLLECTION

Before beginning to organize his art collection, Huntington devoted all his efforts to cataloging his vast collection of books. Huntington created the HSM&L as a study center, with a big library at its heart open to everyone—not only scholars but also members of the general public interested in the Hispanic world. Books were the germ of his collection and his ultimate passion from an early age. When he was only 12 years old, besides coins and stamps, he began collecting books, buying them anywhere he went, and expanding his collection by buying entire libraries from other bibliophiles. His early love for the Hispanic world grew from his exposure to its letters and poetry, but was also stimulated in his childhood, while he was in Mexico, by listening to the Spanish language. Huntington's notes from one of his visits to Mexico reveal his inspiration. This visit, he said, was

my first encounter with something which was to fill my whole life, and all at once I felt a curious, feverish eagerness. In all the years to come I would be forever looking back at these days of discovery, short as they were, and quite aware that here I took my first step toward unguessed goals quite hidden from me but toward which I was instinctively drawn.... And my museum dreaming became clear and took on new form. (HSM&L AMH, 1889 letters)

As the result, the HSM&L is today considered the most important institution for the study of the Hispanic world outside the Iberian Peninsula. But with a library that came to number over 250,000 manuscripts, 35,000 rare books, and 300,000 modern books, Huntington needed as

much help as he could get. In 1919, driven by his urge to make his whole collection accessible, he started hiring librarians who could take over the great task of cataloging. What is more, he decided to hire librarians as museum curators as well, training them in the history, arts, and culture of the Hispanic world even as he benefited from their library science training.

In entrusting the work of cataloging his collection to women, Huntington made many of his initial hires from Simmons College in Boston, in addition to various schools for the deaf such as the New York School for the Deaf (Fanwood School) and Gallaudet College, now Gallaudet University, in Washington, DC. One might think that hiring women from a traditional field such as library science may have been effortless, but Huntington also decided to seek deaf women as workers. Huntington apparently believed that in the silence of a library, deaf workers could perhaps concentrate better than their hearing colleagues. As recounted 35 years later in *The Silent Worker*,

it all started back in 1919 with a phone call from Mr. Archer M. Huntington, founder of the [Hispanic Society of America], to the Fanwood School. He had an idea—wouldn't deaf people work with unusual concentration? Didn't they have all the capabilities of hearing persons? Why not experiment? He would like to see how just one would respond to training in library and museum work. (Newman, 1954, p. 6)

Huntington's view toward deaf people was shared by Beatrice G. Proske, a hearing curator of sculpture. Proske (1995, p. 49) stated in an interview that Huntington felt that deaf people did not need to be excluded because of their deafness, so

several young women on the staff were deaf.

As noted, once Huntington felt that the Society's book cataloging was progressing well, he allowed those same librarians to become curators, researchers, and cataloguers of art—to be specialists of the museum. They were asked to take charge of one specific section of his art and archaeological collection, to manage it, study it, and write scholarly works on it. This is confirmed by the testimony of three of the women who worked at the Society from the beginning, Ruth M. Anderson, Eleanor Sherman Font, and Beatrice G. Proske. Anderson was a professional photographer who became curator of customs and manners, an expert in Spanish traditional dress who was also the first to write about the history of costume in Spain. She wrote that Huntington encouraged these early women hires, despite their inexperience, to study and write immediately, beginning with short monographs published in photostat, in which evaluations and criticisms were quoted from established authorities (Anderson, 1969). Eleanor Sherman Font, the first deaf woman hired at the Society, commented that

all of us learned how to do everything in the library and museum, whether or not we had college degrees. In addition, each of us was assigned a subject such as painting, sculpture, ceramics, gold and silver work, old books (incunabula), textiles, etc., following Mr. Huntington's ideas and system. At one time we all dropped everything else to forage through books to make cards for a portrait reference file listing the portraits of royal families and famous people of Spain and Portugal. We were encouraged, too, to establish reference

files and notebooks for our own use and research. (Brown, 1976, pp. 7–10)

During a talk given to the National Sculpture Society in 1984, Beatrice G. Proske recounted how Huntington worked with the staff:

By the time I arrived the collections had been greatly enlarged and a series of publications inaugurated, but there was not yet a permanent staff to care for the objects in the museum. To remedy this omission Mr. Huntington decided to draw upon the existing library staff. He had long thought that women would make good museum curators and he was now ready to see what they could do.

One day he gathered us all together and announced his plan. The response was enthusiastic. He then distributed the subjects for which each person was to be responsible. Paintings were quickly appropriated by a girl who had lived in Europe. Ceramics, textiles and metal-work followed. When it came my turn I was at a loss what to say. My only exposure to any form of art had been a one-term course in art appreciation taught by an interior decorator. Mr. Huntington came to my rescue by asking if I would like to study the polychrome wood-carvings that are so characteristic of Spanish sculpture. I agreed at once, and then my real education began. (Proske, 1984)

Like Proske, most of the other women felt that their “real education began” with their work at the HSM&L. The learning process was based on daily work focused on a specific part of the collection that became the object of their specialization. The research methodology was pretty much an original idea, a sort of experiment. They enjoyed a vast and accredited

bibliographic repertoire that was already a privilege, a crucial tool for their “new” assignments. The power machine was Huntington himself, his vision and recommendations. The women would use the tools, a wealth of knowledge the founder provided to them, in order to reach a point where they achieved their own connoisseurship.

This was such an innovative approach to museology that it is hard to find other examples to compare it to, at least not at that time in history. Needless to say, Huntington never envisioned that those deaf librarian-curators would be limited in their work. One of his great convictions, the master key of his plan, was to prepare his collaborators with the resources at the HSM&L. They would study the collection and generate works of research, small monographs at the beginning, which would be reviewed and criticized by experts in the field, and also by their coworkers at the museum. Huntington encouraged them to learn and write about their assigned subject. With time and experience they could face doing larger works of research.

Those practices helped them also to understand the functioning of the institution itself. The HSM&L collaborators formed an atypical group—librarians turned into specialists in Spanish art under the supervision of Huntington. They occupied the most important positions in the museum’s organizational chart; thus, the HSM&L became a “second” university.

Following Huntington’s call to the New York State School for the Deaf (Fanwood), as mentioned, he went on to hire deaf women from Gallaudet College. Newman (1954) notes that at one time almost half of the women on staff were deaf (see Table 1). The HSM&L was an exceptional place where a variety of cultures and languages were part of the work culture. In fact, one

Table 1. Deaf Women at the Hispanic Society Museum and Library HSM&L

The following list shows the names of the deaf women who worked at the Hispanic Society Museum and Library from 1919 to 1973. The year following some of their names indicates, for those who attended Gallaudet College, the year they graduated. Most of them worked at the museum for their whole professional lives. Even after retirement, they continued coming to the museum as emeritus curators.

Beatrice Chandler Allegaert	Marion Thompson Hoag
Renate Kugel Alpert, 1955	Margaret E. Jackson, 1925
Emily L. Andem	Mabel Johns
Alice D. Atkinson	Cynthia Kochlin Kotchin
Sara Tuck Austin, 1922	Florence Armstrong Lux
Virginia Rost Barlow, 1965	Florence Lewis May, 1921
Estelle Maxwell Braddock, 1921	Maureen McLaughlin
Nancy Tyree Breunig	Alice J. McVan, 1921
Marybelle Minetree Brubaker	Nettie Miller
Delia Kittleson Catuna, 1929	Doris Balance Orman, 1925
Ellen M. Cobb	Elizabeth Moss Osborne, 1921
Mabel Armstrong Conklin, 1928	Ophelia Osborne
Florence B. Crammatte, 1935	Alice Studt Palazzi
Ione C. Dibble, 1925	Jane Palmer
Sophie Boatwright Dobbins, 1921	Elizabeth McLeod Pinckney
Joan Dochtermann, 1967	Sara Tredwell Ragna, 1918
Helen E. Fish, 1909	Lillian Gourley Rakow, 1928
Eleanor E. Sherman Font	Anderson Yeager Rogers, 1936
Margaret Sherman Gillen, 1913	Annabel Eberhardt Sharr
Mabel Hall	Ann Lister Siebert, 1955
	Ruth R. Yeager

of the requirements to work there was the ability to speak or understand Spanish and Portuguese. This likely made it easier for deaf women to be included. Eleanor Sherman Font stated, "There are quite a few languages floating around, counting our own of signs" (Newman, 1954, p. 7). At Christmas, she was traditionally asked to sign "Holy Night" while the hearing women sang.

Not only that, it was not surprising for some of the HSM&L hearing women to attend services at St. Ann's Church for the Deaf, an Episcopal church in Manhattan. Some of these women could understand sign language, as is confirmed by the testimony of Dr. Pricilla Muller, curator emeritus of the HSM&L, and the only living person who knew them all. Dr. Muller says that among others, one of the hearing curators, Frances Spalding, was

perfectly able to communicate in sign language.

Eleanor Sherman Font's depiction of how the institution accepted deaf women was further described in Ruth Brown's 1976 article in *The Deaf American*:

The Society treated deaf people well, Eleanor stated, and except for our inability to use the telephone, we had equal opportunities for learning and recognition. In those lovely years we all studied and pioneered together. (pp. 7-10)

These deaf women's work was remembered and honored in an exhibition organized by the HSM&L at Gallaudet University that was open from October 16 to December 31, 1973. In the exhibition were included photographs of the deaf women in groups

through the decades, letters, examples of their academic work published in books and journals, and a selection of medals designed by Anna Hyatt Huntington, given by the HSM&L in recognition of their work and long careers.

In the present article I focus on four of these women: Eleanor Sherman Font, her sister Margaret Sherman, Florence Lewis May, and Alice Davenport Atkinson. But first it is very important to mention the study trips by staff commissioned by the HSM&L, because, among other things, one of the most important was taken by two deaf women traveling on their own, Florence Lewis May, as curator of textiles, and Alice Davenport Atkinson, as a photographer.

ELEANOR E. SHERMAN FONT AND MARGARET SHERMAN

In 1919, Eleanor E. Sherman (1897–1982, see Figure 2) became the first deaf woman to be hired by the HSM&L; she worked there for over 54 years. She entered as a librarian, but became curator of iconography and studied and wrote about the print collection. She was joined later by her sister Margaret (1894–1973), who, like Eleanor, was a Gallaudet College graduate. Margaret Sherman was also the first deaf person to work at the Newark Museum, in New Jersey. Margaret graduated from Gallaudet in 1913.

Eleanor and Margaret Sherman grew up in a family of both deaf and hearing members in which they easily navigated between deaf and hearing cultures. Their parents were hearing but their grandmother and great-grandmothers were deaf, and their grandfather (Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet's son) was the founder of St. Ann's, the Manhattan church that was the first church for the deaf in the United States. Brown's 1976 *Deaf American* article

Figure 2. Eleanor E. Sherman on the Terrace of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library, 1920.



Note: From the archive of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library. Courtesy of the HSM&L.

informs us that Eleanor and Margaret went to Wright Oral School in New York City and were also homeschooled by their mother when their father became a minister in a more rural setting.

At the Newark Museum, Margaret devoted herself, among other tasks, to cataloging the Disbrow Collection of natural sciences (a collection of conchology, mineralogy, and botany specimens). But in 1919 Eleanor convinced Margaret to join her at the HSM&L. Little is known about Margaret Sherman's work at the HSM&L, but she was primarily a book cataloger before leaving when she married. Eleanor provided a few more facts about her sister's personal life and convictions (Brown, 1976). Like Eleanor, she was a woman of determination and purpose. In support of the US effort in World War I,

Margaret worked in farm fields in Long Island as a member of the Women's Land Army of America before coming to the museum. She was also a fearless advocate of women's suffrage, participating in public demonstrations for the cause.

Eleanor Sherman came to New York City with the intention of studying at Barnard College, but it was not possible, probably for financial reasons. In any case, the city would offer greater job opportunities. Although at first she got jobs for which, because she held a degree in education from Gallaudet, she was over-qualified, such as clerical work, she soon got a position in the public library and found enough time to alternate it with her Spanish classes. Eleanor's aunt, Virginia B. Gallaudet, inquired at the New York School for the Deaf (Fanwood) if it had a position in the school library for her niece (Brown, 1976). Around the same time, the Fanwood principal received a call from Archer Huntington, and Virginia Gallaudet followed up with this letter dated February 1919:

My dear Dr. Huntington

I have just heard from Mr. Isaac B. Gardner principal of the NY Institution for Deaf Mutes saying that you would like to try some of them in the various departments with which you are connected. My father was Rev. Thomas Gallaudet and my niece Miss Eleanor Sherman a deaf-mute but a good oralist as well, is very anxious for a position.

She gave great satisfaction for three months at the 42nd St. Library and only left because they had not the funds to carry such a large force. She is a good typist and has had experience in cataloging and filing besides being very bright and reads the lips readily. I will call you on the telephone tomorrow morning at about 9:30 if I may

and ask for an appointment when I will bring my niece to see you. She is very anxious for a position.

Sincerely Yours

(Miss) Virginia B. Gallaudet
(HSM&L AMH letters, 1919)

While there is little information on Eleanor Sherman's involvement with her sister's suffragist cause, she did demonstrate a feminist awareness, since in one of her first allusions to Huntington she refers to his custom of hiring only women, whom he sought out in educational institutions that were dedicated to or supported female academic training. This practice merits consideration along with Huntington's advanced thinking in hiring nonhearing people to work in a museum, let alone with the kind of responsibilities and work they would pursue upon entering the HSM&L. After 1915, only one man with curatorial/museum responsibilities, a Dr. Savage, was hired. He worked as a librarian from 1915 to 1935. Savage, as Eleanor recounted, stayed out of their work, "letting us women run the establishment" (Brown, 1976, pp. 7-10). Huntington's norm was to only hire women; furthermore, up to the mid-1960s, and even after the appointment of Dr. Theodore Breadsley as a director in 1965, the institution was managed by a group of five women known as the "General Staff Committee." Established in 1922, the committee was divided into five departments (Library, Museum, Iconography, Publications, and Documentation) lead by the chief curator. They met periodically with Huntington.

Eleanor Sherman began working in 1919 as a library assistant, then became a researcher cataloger, then was put in charge of the collection of silver and gold artifacts, as well as globes. Later she accepted the position of curator of iconography, being put in charge of the immense

collection of photographs, as well as the engravings, on which she published several articles. Like the other women in the Society, she went on several sponsored study trips to Europe and Latin America as an essential part of her training. Starting in 1922, Eleanor visited Europe on several occasions, and in 1938 she toured South America for 5 months.

Her lifelong interest in art and the work of deaf artists led her to organize the First International Exhibition of Fine and Applied Arts by Deaf Artists in 1934, with the help of the National Association of the Deaf. The exhibition was held at the Roerich Museum in New York City.

Eleanor was awarded the Mitre Medal in 1952. This medal was given to recognize achievements "in the field of arts and letters related Hispanic America" (Hispanic Society of America, 1954, p. 547), and in February 1969 the HSM&L celebrated her 50 years as curator by organizing an exhibition featuring various articles written by her.

FLORENCE LEWIS MAY AND ALICE DAVENPORT ATKINSON

A photograph of Florence Lewis (1899–1988) from 1922 (see Figure 3), around the time she joined the HSM&L, shows her smiling proudly, wrapped in a spectacular Manila shawl from the collection. She is portrayed as in an old painting, posing with the tools of her trade, because she was the curator of textiles. Florence was born in Fairfield, CT; she became deaf at the age of 5 years from meningitis. She studied in various special schools for the deaf, such as the American School for the Deaf (1915), and graduated with a degree in library science from Gallaudet College (1921). Interestingly enough, Florence Lewis was involved in theater at Gallaudet, participating in several amateur plays. In

Figure 3. Florence Lewis May Wearing a Mantón de Manila, 1922.



Note: From the archive of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library. Courtesy of the HSM&L.

fact, the producers of the 1940 Broadway play *Johnny Belinda* were interested in casting her. According to Newman (1954), she would not consider it due to her commitment to the HSM&L. After her marriage, she was known as Florence Lewis May.

Having entered the HSM&L as a librarian, Florence Lewis became the specialist on textiles. Her daily job was to study and catalog the collection. She worked almost 60 years at the HSM&L, and her books and scholarly papers are testimony to that long career recognized by specialists in America and beyond. The textile collection includes over 3,000 items from Spain, Latin America, and the Philippines. Florence knew and managed them all: fragments of fabrics, large rugs,

tunics, chasubles, and other objects from the 13th to the 20th centuries, besides more than 800 lace and embroidery samples purchased or commissioned by Huntington. To this day, the thoroughness of her research, her numerous manuscripts, and her detailed descriptions of fabrics and types of clothing are all very impressive. She was also interested in the people who created those items, and so she asked them about their daily lives and how the items were used. In the case of clothing worn for special occasions, she studied what these clothes symbolized. Florence's goal was not simply to document these "living objects" but to learn and understand the culture that created them. Her working method, like that of the rest of her colleagues at the HSM&L, was based in studying the sources directly, starting with the HSM&L's collection, but the study expeditions were crucial for completing that work. Those trips took her to little towns and remote villages where she was able to go around, invited mainly by the women to enter their houses, their domestic, private spaces, where they keep their precious embroidery crafts. She also visited family-run workshops. At the same time, she got access to private collections from wealthy collectors. From the treasures of everyday people to specialized and museum collections, she studied them all.

The expedition experience provided her with a specialized knowledge that enabled her to make connections between different parts of the HSM&L textile collection as well as between textiles and ceramics or silverwork. The filigree of goldsmiths or decorative patterns found in ceramic work are similarly represented in textiles. Those textile crafts, such as the ones in Sorolla Murals, were also reproduced in paintings, and in the thousands of photographs in the archive. To be aware of those connections was one of Huntington's ultimate

goals, and Florence Lewis May, among others, was able to advance a comprehensive, interconnected narrative of the HSM&L collection.

The "Lace and Embroidery" collection was largely the result of one of the most remarkable of Florence Lewis May's expeditions, to Spain and Portugal in 1930. It was her third expedition, and lasted seven months, from January to July. She and her traveling companion, the deaf photographer Alice Atkinson, gathered all the information they possibly could on lace and embroidery and took numerous photographs. It was an incredible trip not only because of the subject to be studied but because both women were traveling all around the Iberian Peninsula in 1930 without any male companion—not to mention that both of them were deaf.

While not much information is available about Alice Davenport Atkinson, it is known that she was born in Richmond, VA, in 1896 to John Wilder Atkinson Jr. and Elise William Davenport Atkinson. The earliest information on her can be found in archives such as the American Genealogical-Biographical Index and records at the New York Public Library, as well as archival material in Virginia at the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society, Charlottesville, VA.

Alice Davenport Atkinson (1896–1986) entered the Photography Department at the HSM&L in 1920 (see Figure 4). According to a letter sent to the HSM&L Iconography Department by her niece, Alice Shisler, though Atkinson was deaf, she used speech to communicate with her. Atkinson did not attend any school or program for deaf students and came to the HSM&L directly from the historic and prestigious Clarence H. White School of Photography. White (1871–1925) was a significant individual in the history of photography in the United States. He was very interested in women

Figure 4. Deaf Staff Members of the Hispanic Library Museum and Library, 1939.



Note: Top row: Ophelia Osborne, Helen E. Fish, Florence Lewis May, Ione C. Dibble, Alice D. Atkinson, Alice McVan, Mabel Armstrong Conklin. Lower row: Eleanor E. Sherman, Emily L. Andem, Margaret E. Jackson, Florence Armstrong Lux, Ruth R. Yeager. Members not shown in the photos are Delia Kittleson Catuna and E. M. Cobb. From the archive of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library. Courtesy of the HSM&L.

practicing photography as a professional career, to provide them with a way of earning a living, but also as a medium to enable them to express their artistic abilities. Atkinson graduated from the White School in 1915, and prolonged her formative time by attending the school intermittently until 1925. In 1923 she attended the summer courses the school organized in Maine.

Alice Atkinson's first years at the HSM&L were her most productive and professionally interesting. During her first year, she applied for a passport, as her job primarily took her overseas. During her first trip to Europe, in 1920, she planned to visit not only Spain or Portugal but also Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland. While working at the HSM&L she traveled with the Clarence H. White School to Mexico and Cuba, and she furnished the HSM&L archives with photographs of those countries.

Further information about Atkinson is mentioned in a brief article in *The Silent Worker* (1925) titled "A Promising Photographer":

This deaf girl photographs for the society's museum and library its possessions ranging from large Arabic rugs and original paintings by Velázquez, to old maps and ancient coins. She developed negatives using a big Photostat machine, makes prints, enlarges them if necessary, and retouches them. At home she studies and experiments, seeking to improve her work and to increase her knowledge of the subject.... This summer is she is going with a class from the same school to Mexico, where they will photograph architecture, landscapes and natives. We hope to see in *The Silent Worker*, in the fall, samples of her Mexican work and also some traveling notes from her pen. (p. 486)

In 1928, together with Catherine M. Allyn of the Publications Department, Atkinson traveled to Panama, then Chile, then Peru, touring various cities on the Peruvian coast (Talara, Salaverry, Callao, and Lima). They traveled from August to November, with the intention to study and gather images of customs and costume. Atkinson made 1,700 negatives, and bought 808 photographs.

In 1929 Atkinson was named assistant curator of photography, but she was also entrusted with the care and study of the philatelic collection. This was a common practice at the HSM&L, where, in addition to their assigned duties, the women were supposed to conduct research on some other part of the collection. She was asked to write various essays about the philatelic collection. In the HSM&L annual reports it is mentioned that she wrote two articles (unpublished) on the history of the postal service in the Iberian Peninsula titled *The Earliest Known Chapel for Couriers in Europe* and *The Tassis in Spain, 16th to 18th centuries*. Atkinson apparently made other journeys apart from those with the HSM&L.

During the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Atkinson ended up at the US consulate in Madrid seeking to get back to the United States. She arrived in August 1936. She likely had been gathering more photographs of laces and embroideries in Spain. The HSM&L annual report for 1932 informs us that Atkinson kept working on the collection of stamps and experimenting with radiography of paintings, as well as experimenting with new photographic techniques that involved taking images of old manuscripts using ultraviolet rays. (HSM&L annual report, 1932).

Unfortunately, starting in the early 1930s Atkinson began to experience health issues that eventually caused her to be assigned to the Iconography Department.

By 1944, her health had deteriorated to the point that she had to resign. In a letter to Huntington explaining the reasons for her departure, she expressed her gratitude to the founder and her appreciation of the opportunity given to her as well as the training, study, and encouragement (HSM&L archives, 1944).

HUNTINGTON LEARNING METHODOLOGY: THE STUDY EXPEDITIONS

As will be clear from the biographies already presented, the Hispanic Society curators were expected to become familiar with Spain and Portugal directly through travel experiences. As part of the learning process, the study expeditions were as important as the written sources. The research expeditions were irreplaceable in terms of increasing the knowledge of the curators as well as collecting photographs and other material for the HSM&L. The trips were very important for collecting valuable ethnographic evidence of costumes and customs such as those related to civil and religious celebrations, traditional arts and crafts, local industries, and aspects of life that were starting to be abandoned because of the changes brought by industrialization.

Huntington had experienced the thrill of travelling from a very young age. As a privileged child, he spent long periods in Europe in the company of his mother visiting museums, admiring art galleries, and buying books. Later he started a series of peregrinations on the Iberian Peninsula (1892, 1896, and 1898) that became prototypes of the kind of trips his staff would take (see Figure 5). Who could imagine that one of the wealthiest men in America could be found on the dusty roads of Castile taking notes and shooting photographs? But that was how he wanted to

travel, because he believed that in that fashion he could get to know the Spain he so admired. He was not afraid to face the uncomfortable journeys if he could deal directly with the local people, share their food, and live their traditions. He wanted to learn another kind of wisdom. And this was part the plan for his staff to follow. Proske described Huntington's expectations about what would be required of HSM&L staff while they were traveling:

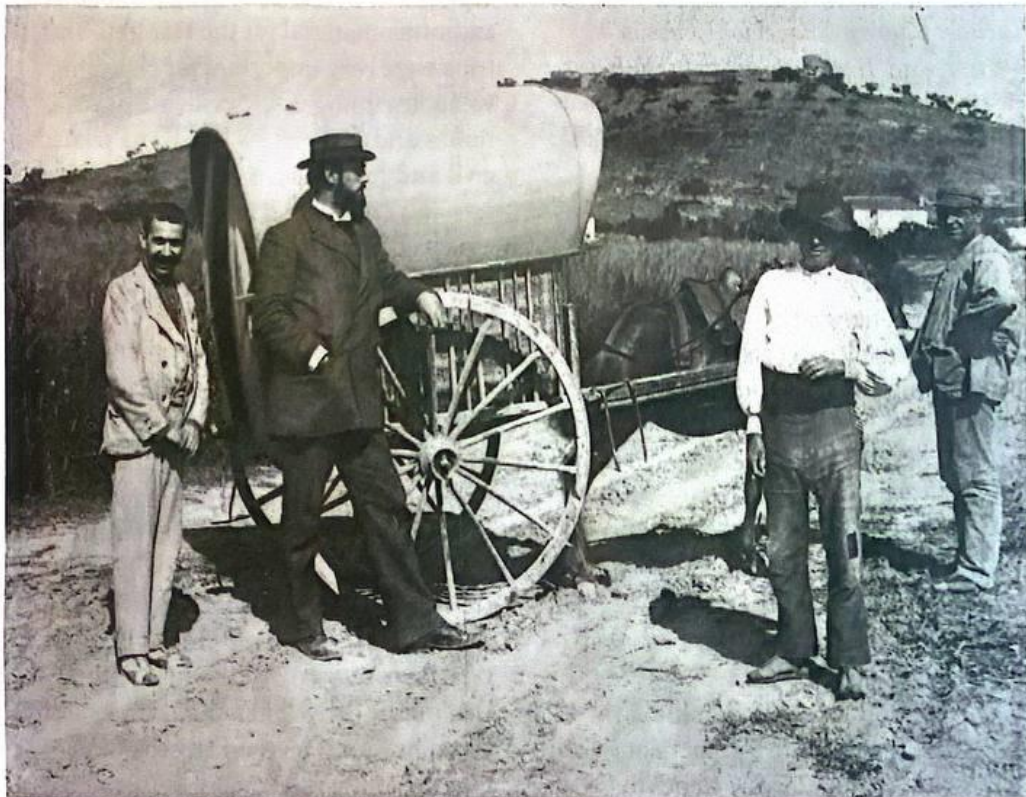
The staff shall know words and "refrains" and shall have met native creatures near to men—from mule to bed-bug. They shall pursue a word in its feathery meanings as an Englishman seeks the brush of a fox. They must block the burrows of escape and ride off with the trophy. They may write about their

Spain. I think women should do it.
(HSM&L BGP paper, 1963)

MAY AND ATKINSON'S LACE AND EMBROIDERY EXPEDITION OF 1930

May and Atkinson's 1930 expedition was notable not just for its length (7 months, from January to July), but for its purpose: to take as many photographs and gather as much information as possible on the lace and embroidery work on the Iberian Peninsula. In this context, it is very important to mention the extraordinary circumstance of two deaf women, curator of textiles and photographer, traveling unaccompanied in 1930s Spain, much less doing highly important art historical research. Florence Lewis May was able to demonstrate that lace and embroidery

Figure 5. Archer M. Huntington (Center) Traveling in Spain, 1892.



Note: From the archive of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library. Courtesy of the HSM&L.

work had been in existence on the Iberian Peninsula for centuries, being put to practical, everyday use as well as decorative purposes. Huntington possessed a treasured collection of embroidery and lace, including very important elements of regional costume. The variety of styles of embroidery served as signs of identity to differentiate communities. The high esteem in which this part of the textile collection is held expresses appreciation not only of the desire to create a background of lace and embroidery and enrich it with hundreds of photographs, but of May and Atkinson's pioneering contribution to the knowledge of this little-known and valued craft.

In August 1930, May sent a report to Archer Huntington summarizing the trip and its findings. This letter provides rich detail concerning the vital contribution of the expeditions to the HSM&L's work and to the lives of the deaf women who were involved:

My dear Mr. Huntington:

It is with pleasure that I submit herewith my report for the trip to Spain, January-July 1930, together with a list of the places visited. We experienced no trouble in travelling, meeting everywhere with the characteristic courtesy of the Spaniard. Altogether, the finding of material more than fulfilled my expectations. Cataluña goes in more extensively for lace making than any other province. In Barcelona I took lessons in lace making which have proved to be of incalculable help to me. The pillows which I used are now on their way to be included in the collection of the Society. Castilla specializes in forms of embroidery as well as in lace making. Through the kind offices of Señor Ramón de Zubiaurre, I was able to obtain excellent

material in Lagartera where he once worked on his *Las encajeras de Lagartera*, which painting is still hung in his home.¹ If I may venture to say so, it would add to the collection in the Society of portraiture of costume in Spain. Since there were no opportunities to visit the remote districts of Andalucía, the churches in various pueblos near Sevilla amply repaid us in so far as examples of lace similar to the ones in the collection of the Society are concerned. Galicia uses many patterns like the ones at Almagro but, whereas the Almagro laces are sold all over Spain, those of Galicia are sent to Cuba or South America. Valencia makes a great deal of knotted nets. We were told that Luanco in the Asturias does the similar work.

We photographed for the most part in museums and in churches. There were fine old mantillas in the exposition at Sevilla and we found much information in the exhibits held at the little Spanish houses.... There were good laces in the museum of the Marquis of Cerralbo. Since Juan Lafora is preparing a catalogue of his art objects, he would only allow us to examine a few laces....

After ascertaining at the Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, Paris, that they would complete in December the publication of two volumes concerning the international congress held at Prague in 1928, I arranged to have sent to me in September the galley proofs of several articles on Spanish lace which would aid me greatly in my work. This combined with further research and the material already collected in Spain will, I hope, enable me to finish the book in December.

Thank you very much for this my third trip to Spain. To express my appreciation adequately is difficult but I hope that more than an echo of my

enthusiastic interest will show in the work which I am privileged to do. (HSM&L FLM papers, 1930)

As a result of this trip, Florence Lewis May wrote the book *Hispanic Lace and Lace Making*, published in 1939. This book has become an indispensable study manual on the subject. Many of the photographs collected in this volume are the only known samples of certain works and designs. They are visual documents of historical value about a tradition that has died out in many localities, or that remains alive only as a relic of a bygone time. May's other books include *Catalogue of Laces and Embroideries in the Collection of the Hispanic Society of America* (1936), *Silk Textiles of Spain: Eighth to Fifteenth Century* (1957), and *The Textile Collection* (1972).

CONCLUSION

The Hispanic Society Museum and Library was established with the unique vision of Archer M. Huntington, who provided women with extraordinary opportunities in museum studies in the early 1900s. Furthermore, his vision included deaf women, who were rarely provided access to such esteemed careers at this time—careers in which they traveled, did original research, and worked with other deaf women.

Huntington's "dream team" of deaf and hearing women became experts—acquiring, organizing, and researching almost every aspect of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries. The HSM&L collection offers a unique vision of the history and culture of Iberia and the Americas. These women became pioneers in that field, making lasting contributions to the HSM&L legacy in ways that can still be seen today.

NOTE

1. The Basque painters Ramón and Valentín de Zubiaurre y Aguirrezábal (1882–1969 and 1879–1963, respectively) were brothers from an artistic family. Both men were deaf—ironically, given that their sister was a well-known pianist. They had a close relationship with the Hispanic Society and with its nonhearing curators, and their works were both collected and promoted in the United States by Archer Huntington—for example, at the Carnegie Institute (now Carnegie Museum of Art) national exhibitions at Pittsburgh. A matching pair of portraits from 1930 are held by the Society, A2134 and A2135. See <http://hispanicsociety.emuseum.com/search/zubiaurre>. See also Lenaghan (2017), pp. 416–418, no. 216 (A2134) and no. 217 (A2135).

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I would like to dedicate this article to two persons in particular. They are the inspiration for this article, and I couldn't have written it without their assistance, and their generosity in sharing with me their knowledge and experiences: Karen Christie, PhD, Professor Emerita, Rochester Institute of Technology, and Priscilla Müller, PhD, Curator Emerita of the Hispanic Society Museum and Library.

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