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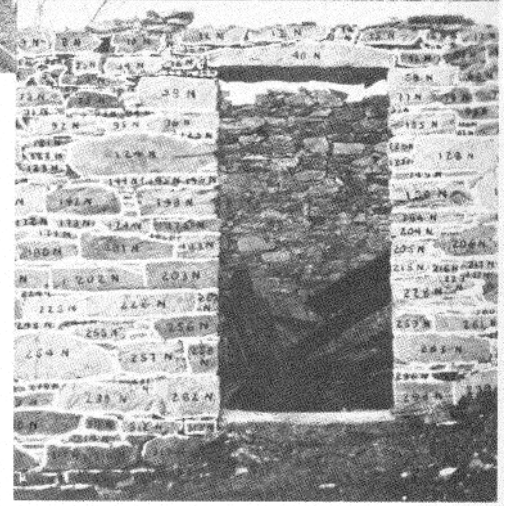


ELECTRA HAVEMEYER WEBB
1889-1960

Electra Havemeyer Webb began collecting American folk art in 1913 with the purchase of a cigar store Indian. She continued to collect everything from decoys to hat boxes before she and her husband shared her treasures with the public and opened the Shelburne Museum in Vermont.

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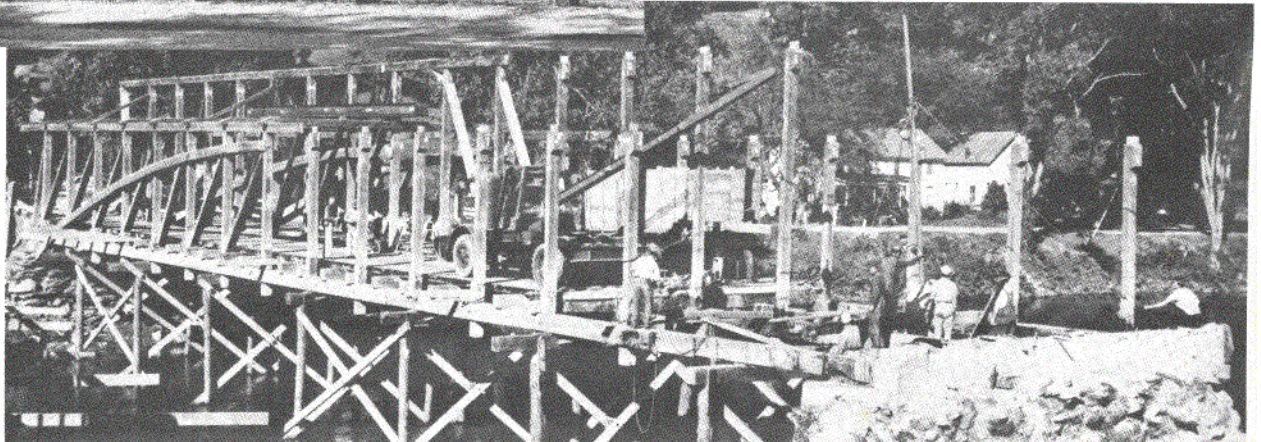




ELECTRA HAVEMEYER WEBB

(1) Electra Havemeyer Webb. Portrait by Elizabeth Shoumatoff (2) James Watson Webb, as he appeared in 1957 (3) Stone Cottage after reassembly at Shelburne (4) building with stones individually marked so after being removed piece by piece they could be reassembled (5) covered bridge which became the entrance to the museum (6) Each beam and brace was pegged in place before being dismantled.

All photos courtesy Shelburne Museum



ELECTRA HAVEMEYER WEBB

by Joyce Gross

Most quilters know of the Shelburne Museum treasury of quilts and probably dream of visiting it. Here is the woman who made it all possible

Electra Havemeyer could scarcely be called an ordinary little girl. She was born on Aug 16, 1889, the youngest of three children in Babylon, Long Island to Henry and Louisine Havemeyer, the multimillionaires with a strong passion for collecting. From the time she was tiny, her parents with their close friend, Mary Cassatt, had taken Electra to Europe to be exposed to art and museums. Mary Cassatt, the world famous painter, had strong influence on the Havemeyers in their collection of paintings, many of which now hang in the Metropolitan Museum of Art collection. To Electra she was "Dear Auntie"*

Her father was President of the Sugar Refining Co and one of America's wealthiest men. Home to Electra was in "uptown" New York in a mansion decorated entirely by Tiffany's with a fountain in the entry hall and a gallery filled with Monet, Degas, Goya and Rembrandts.

Electra Havemeyer studied at Miss Spence's School in New York City and was preparing for college but on the advice of her father took a business course instead.

Apparently her collecting proclivities started at an early age. THE PROUD POSSESSORS notes, "she had not one but seventeen turtles (all of whom traveled with her)" and "from the beginning she preferred possessing ... (dolls) to playing with them." The doll collection at the Shelburne today numbers 1500.

One day at the age of 18, Electra, arrived home with a cigar store wooden Indian. She told the audience at Williamsburg in 1957, "I was driving through the little town of Stamford, Conn and what should I see but a cigar-store Indian... It represented a life-size squaw clutching a bunch of cigars in her hand. I just had to have it." The store keeper was happy to sell her for 15. and Electra went on to collect many more.

When her mother realized her daughter really was going to collect American folk art she was shocked and is said to have asked, "How can you, Electra, you who have been brought up with Rembrandts and Manets live with such American trash?"

* Saarinen, Alice THE PROUD POSSESSORS
Random House, N Y 1958.

Electra grew to know Vermont while she was being courted by J Watson Webb, a handsome young man who was the great grandson of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. He had spent his summers in a 110 room house near Shelburne, VT which had on its grounds one of the first private golf courses in America, a horse barn the size of Madison Square Garden and a coach house that had been described as looking like "a castle on the Rhine."

But there was another side to Mr Webb. He had a strong attachment to early Vermont houses and when he found a small brick house on the southern end of the property, he saved it from the elements by patching the roof and boarding up its openings. He showed it to Electra and years later that same little house became the nucleus of their summer home with numerous wings. Under the new roof was an attic the size of a grand ballroom which Mrs Webb furnished with huge trunks in neat rows filled with her Americana. The trunks were all labeled according to her mother's meticulous house-keeping techniques but in reality Mrs Webb's memory was really the inventory.

On Feb 8, 1910, Electra Webb married James Watson Webb. They spent their first year in England where they devoted much of their time to fox hunting. Mr Webb loved all types of hunting and fishing and Mrs Webb enthusiastically accompanied him on hunting trips to Alaska, Scotland and the South. Between 1931 and 1941 they made seven trips to Alaska and the Canadian Northwest. With her first white tailed deer head trophy she became an ardent collector and set about to collect fine representative specimens of each animal. One brown bear weighed 1400 pounds and when mounted his eight feet one inch dwarfed her.

Electra loved the hunting trips. She had accompanied her father duck hunting and on trips to the West so had learned to love animals, sports and the great outdoors. On the trips with her husband she was frequently the only woman in the party which didn't disturb her in the least. "Once when her jackknife blade was missing, she used the can opener instead, to slit a deer and remove its intestinal organs with surgeon-like precision."** More than anything else

* Karp, Walter, "Electra Webb and her American Past" AMER HERITAGE Apr/May '82.

** Saarinen, Aline THE PROUD POSSESSORS Random House N Y '58 pg 294.

Mr Webb liked to play polo and by the early 1920s he was one of the greatest polo players in the world. (They had an estate at Shelburne, a 17-room apartment on Park Avenue and a large estate at Westbury, Long Island which was considered the polo capital of the world)

The Webbs had five children, Samuel B, J Watson Webb Jr, Harry H, Electra and Lila. When Mrs Webb died Nov 19, 1960, the same year her husband died she had 13 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren and took a personal interest in each one.

During WWI as a member of the Motor Corps, Mrs Webb drove an ambulance and was promoted to assistant director of the Motor Corps while her husband served overseas as a captain in the 311th Field Artillery. During WWII she was director of the Pershing Square Civilian Defense Center in New York. Later she joined the American Red Cross where she was made assistant director at the Blood Bank. "The idea of giving blood was a new and therefore frightening thing for the population to accept. Mrs Webb was in charge of selling the idea to the public which she did by addressing groups of all kinds to tell them of the importance to the Armed Forces. Many times she would lie down on a bed which had been placed on the stage and give blood to show everyone how easy it was." *

The idea of having a museum to put her collection overflow for some sort of public display came to her after her mother's death in 1929 but it was 1946 before she bought the first house. In 1947, her husband's parents had died and her brother-in-law Vanderbilt Webb had inherited their estate which included the very large collection of carriages in the "castle-on-the-Rhine-coach-house". Here was the opportunity! Electra Webb asked if they would consider giving her the collection if she kept it in Shelburne. They agreed and her husband too gave his wholehearted approval. In 1957 she explained to an audience in Williamsburg, "It was the spark that lit the fire and I had my opening. And that was the start of the Shelburne Museum from then on there was no holding me."

The Webbs secured some eight acres of land on Route 7, just south of Shelburne. Mr Webb's weakness for early Vermont buildings encouraged his wife to collect architecture

and two grist mills were being dismantled to supply hand-hewn beams for the framework of a large horseshoe barn. By the time the barn was completed Mrs Webb had added a considerable number of additional carriages, fire equipment, wagons, and sleighs to the original collection.

Old building were easy to find during the 1940s and 50s. Most of the structures had to be carefully dismantled, transported and reassembled at Shelburne. In the case of The Stone Cottage, which was a bare stone shell when it was found in 1947, the walls had to be covered with limestone to keep out the weather before the stones were individually numbered and the building removed piece by piece to the museum grounds.

The entrance to Shelburne Museum is a 168-foot covered wooden bridge which was reportedly the last two-lane wooden bridge in Vermont. It was donated by the Vermont Highway department to Mrs Webb ... the only problem was where to put it since there was no stream or gully to cross at the museum. This was really no problem ... Mrs Webb had a large lily pond dug between Route 7 and the museum property which the bridge now spans. "During the early years of the museum, elected officials put numerous obstacles in Mrs Webb's way. The homecoming WWII veterans were particularly antagonistic... (because they wanted to know) why a rich old lady was buying up old houses instead of building new ones for returning GI's."* When the museum was finally opened to the public in 1952 all antagonism disappeared. "The visitors could see at once that Electra Havemeyer Webb ... had created a place that, above all else, paid a warm and eloquent tribute to the doughty virtues of their own Vermont forebears." *

The Shelburne Museum is frequently referred to a "collection of collections" or a "collection of enthusiasms". It is neither a reconstruction nor a restoration, but rather a reflection of Electra Havemeyer Webb.

NEXT ISSUE: The Shelburne Museum collections and Florence Peto writes to her friend Emma Andres about Mrs Webb.

* Telephone interview with Lilian Carlisle 9/24/84 who was her secretary for many years.

*Karp, Walter, "Electra Webb and her American Past" AMERICAN HERITAGE, Apr! May 1982

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SHELBURNE QUILTS TO TRAVEL

Forty quilts from the Shelburne Museum are returning from a trip to Japan. Beginning in January 1985, the quilts traveled to major cities for a special exhibition entitled, "American Quilts from the Shelburne Collection", sponsored by Takashimaya, Ltd, one of Japan's leading department store chains. Gakken, a Japanese publisher of quality art books, published a bilingual catalogue-book of the show featuring 80 pages of color photographs of the quilts which will soon be available in the U.S. The idea for the exhibition came from Kei Kobayashi a Japanese-born fashion designer, doll and quilt collector and author, who fell in love with the Shelburne after visiting for the first time two years ago.

An exhibition of this magnitude required careful planning and preparation to ensure the safety of the artifacts. Planning for the exhibition began last fall; this spring Ms Kobayashi spent over a week working with the collections and conservation staff to make the difficult final selections for the show. Some quilts proved too fragile to risk the wear and tear of extensive travel: many of the pieces chosen needed cleaning and/or conservation work before they could travel. Takashimaya graciously offered to underwrite the cost of this work and the quilts were sent to the Merrimack Valley Textiles Center in Andover, MA to receive the special attention they required.

Textile Preparator Polly Mitchell and her team of volunteers worked all summer long, mending small tears and ravelled edges and mounting the pieces on the muslin backings from which they were hung. Conservator Rick Kerschner and his staff investigated packing methods and designed special crates which were built and tested. In mid October, the quilts were carefully packed and then flown overseas through the courtesy of Japan Airlines. The quilts have been seen in Yokohama, Kyoto, Sapporo and have one stop in Tamagawa before returning to their accustomed spots in the Hat and Fragrance Unit on opening day 1985.

HENRY & LOUISINE HAVEMEYER

by Joyce Gross



We want to introduce you to Henry Osborne Havemeyer and his wife Louisine Waidron Elder, the parents of Electra Webb, founder of the Shelburne Museum. (See pg 1) Electra inherited their appetite for collecting and their fortune gave her the wherewithall to indulge that appetite. Ultimately her wholesale accumulation of collections led to the establishment of the Shelburne Museum

Henry Osborne Havemeyer was born Oct 18, 1847 in New York city to a family long associated with the sugar industry. The family's involvement with the industry began in 1807, when Frederick Christian, a German immigrant and Henry's grandfather, began refining sugar.

By the time Henry's father died in 1891, the business had grown under his direction so that he left his sons several million dollars and an impressive factory on the East River.* Henry not only inherited wealth but a strong, good sense of business. He and his older brother, Theodore, formed a merger (known as a sugar trust) in 1887 of all the New York and Brooklyn important sugar interests. Henry became President of the "Sugar Refining Company"

Young Henry, called "Harry" by his friends, finished his schooling (barely the equivalent of a high school education) before being apprenticed to the sugar refining business.

*Saarinen, Aline B, THE PROUD POSSESSORS, Random House, N Y @ 1958, pg 145.

In 1891 the company was reorganized as the American Sugar Refining Co "a monopoly that did more to inspire antitrust sentiment in the 1890's than any other company with the possible exception of Standard Oil"*. At Henry's death in 1907, the company, under his direction, manufactured half of the sugar consumed in the

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, introduced Henry Havemeyer and his young, artist friend Samuel Coleman, along with thousands of other Americans, to the splendours of Chinese and Japanese art objects. Henry, having been trained to think in wholesale terms, proceeded to buy in wholesale terms. He purchased dozens of silks, brocades and Japanese lacquer boxes. This was to be his pattern of collecting throughout his life.

Mr Havemeyer was a true competitor and loved the action at auction houses, where he bought under the name "Henry Henry". He didn't care if the price were too high - (his own bidding sometimes drove the price up). His motto seemed to be "get what he wanted, regardless of price and obstacles* This characteristic was to get the Havemeyers many masterpieces that might have been lost by his conservative wife.

Louisine Waldron Elder was born in Philadelphia in 1855. Her father was George W Elder, a sugar refiner who had at one time been in business with Henry Havemeyer's father. As a young girl, she spent the required time being shown through European museums and galleries while she attended Madame de Sartre's socially correct boarding school in Paris.

When the artist, Mary Cassatt, settled in Paris in 1874 she went to see Louisine Elder (the Cassatts and the Elders had belonged to the same social circle in Philadelphia) and found the young woman was interested in learning about modern art. Louisine proved an apt pupil and upon the advice of her new friend she purchased her first piece of art a pastel by Degas. Mary Cassatt continued to advise the Havemeyers on paintings and much of the quality of their collection is due to her.

Louisine's small allowance didn't permit acquiring the modern art she had learned to appreciate but she learned to save and

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* Saarinen, Aline B THE PROUD POSSESSORS, Random House, N Y @1958, pg 145

** DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN BIOGRAPHY, Charles Scribners' Sons, N Y 1928.

budget in order to purchase what she wanted. She remained a frugal woman and even when she was wealthy, she ran her household simply and without waste. One time she authorized the purchase of a \$40,000 painting but insisted she and her sister use public transportation to and from the auction house. In those early days in Paris she purchased many prints, pastels and watercolors.

Louisine Waldron Elder, age 29, and Henry Osborne Havemeyer (she was seven years his junior and the niece of his first wife) were married in 1883. He may have been brisk and abrupt to the business world but he adored his young wife and couldn't resist indulging her.

It was not long after their marriage that a problem arose about what to do with all of Henry's purchases. They were living in a fairly small brownstone so she could only accommodate a small portion of the boxes and boxes her husband sent home. She was forced to pack away those items that couldn't be used in the store room. Later she was fortunate to have a vast storeroom to take care of the hundreds and hundreds of objects collected by her husband but she continued to use the same techniques she invented in the beginning. Fortunately her daughter Electra, inherited this talent.

Mrs Havemeyer was responsible for the packing, labeling, storing and keeping track of her husband's vast collections. She did this with meticulous efficiency. In return for this duty she indulged her hobby of combining treasures from the different collections and arranging them in an artistic and decorative fashion. (Another talent that her daughter Electra was to inherit.)

In 1884 the the Havemeyer's first daughter, Adaline was born. When their son was born in 1886, his father named him Horace. Their third child was born in 1888 and perhaps in an effort to counter Roman with Creek, she was named Electra.

As the children were growing up, the Havemeyer's fortune was also growing. The sugar trust was so successful they decided to build a house "uptown". They hired Charles Haight, an architect who well understood that the Havemeyers had the wealth, position, courage and taste to be "different". The mansion he designed was simple, massive and very different on the outside from the surrounding houses in the fancy neighborhood.

Louis Comfort Tiffany was the son of the famous jeweler who founded Tiffany and Company in 1837 but he was also a prominent painter and well established artist. By 1879, Tiffany was not only painting pictures and making leaded windows, he was head of a decorating firm, Associated Artists,* a firm that only lasted four years. Together Samuel Colman, a painter, Candace Wheeler, a needlework artist, Lockwood de Forest, an Oriental art collector and Louis Tiffany designed and produced furniture, light fixtures, hand-blocked wallpapers and even wove and dyed rugs and other textiles to order. They did interiors for Mark Twain and Cornelius Vanderbilt II (Electra Webb's future father-in-law) before refurbishing most of the public rooms for the White House when Chester A Arthur was president.

What was good enough for the White House was none too good for the Havemeyers. At that time a bit of Tiffany was essential to every home of consequence but the Havemeyers engaged the Tiffany Studios with Samuel Coleman to do the interior of their whole house.

In 1886 the company became "Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company" employing 200 designers and artisans. They were designing grave markers and mausoleums as well as "art for the home: vases, metalware, lamps, pottery, blotters, and buttons." **

The interior is described in some detail in "THE PROUD POSSESSORS" but the following quotations will give the reader an idea of the project's scope and magnitude.

" A narrow balcony with an alcove ran around the second story of the picture gallery. ***The spectacular staircase was suspended, like a necklace, from one side of the balcony to the other. A curved piece of cast iron formed the spine to which, without intermediate supports, the stair treads were attached. The sides of this astonishing construction, as well as the balcony railing, were a spider web of

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* Tiffany Remembered" PORTFOLIO, May/June '81

** Ibid

*** It was not long before the Havemeyer's collection of paintings increased in quantity (and quality) forcing them to build a second skylighted gallery on the first floor which covered the whole back yard.

Havemeyer - cont

gold filigree dotted with small crystal balls. The concept of a construction in space was revolutionary indeed for 1890, and its daring was dramatized by a crystal fringe on the center landing which tinkled from the slight motion when the staircase was used"

"The library ceiling was a sensation... a mosaic design of these multicolored silks* outlined ... with heavy braid and framed... with carved gold moldings... The walls were a pale olive in tone. (Mrs Havemeyer) found the whole rich melange 'modestly submissive' to the eight Rembrandts... that graced the library walls."

Mrs Havemeyer took great pride in her Sunday afternoon concerts. "At exactly three thirty-five... Mr & Mrs Havemeyer parted the heavy curtains leading to the music room and the portly gentlemen led his wife to their seats... the 'A' was sounded on the grand piano, the Queen Anne's lace-inspired chandelier was dimmed and the room hushed to silence." **

Mr Ha Havemeyer, who owned two Stradivarius and a Guarnerius, religiously played his violin every morning before leaving for the office. Occasionally he joined the professional chamber music group which played at the Sunday afternoon musicals. ("with more vigor than virtuosity")**

On Dec 4, 1907, Henry O Havemeyer died of a ruptured pancreas. Mrs Havemeyer continued to collect art, and preside over her Sunday musicals and Tuesdays at home. As the fame of her collection grew, so did the number and fame of her visitors. Soon she added the cause of woman's suffrage to her list of activities.

She joined the National Women's Party and soon began to enjoy success as a speaker. She was the personification of a "lady" - wealthy, respectable, and dignified and a welcome addition to the party.

In Mrs Havemeyer's original will, she left everything to her three children. Before she died on January 6, 1929 she had made three additions. 1) a gift of 113 works of art to go to the Metropolitan

* Mr Havemeyer had purchased stacks of these Japanese textiles thirteen years before at the Philadelphia Centennial and Mrs Havemeyer with her filing system knew just where they were.

** Saarinen, Aline THE PROUD POSSESSORS Random House N Y 1958

Museum 2) 29 additional pictures and 3) the authorization for her son Horace, as executor of her estate, to give to the museum such works of art not mentioned in her will as he chose and directed that the children might select from the remainder.

The children were very generous to the Metropolitan. In keeping with Mrs Havemeyer's teachings that "they should remember how blessed they were and share the sunshine that (they) inherited." they increased the number of paintings from the specified 142 objects to 1972 items and in addition gave many items from their own collections.

Although Henry died in 1907 and the collection was not given to the Museum until after Louisine died in 1929. The collection is entitled "The H O Havemeyer Collection" and surely is a tribute to them both. In addition to the Metropolitan Museum collection, some of the Havemeyer's paintings have gone to the National Gallery and many are on public view at the Shelburne Museum in Vermont.



GLADYS REID HOLTON (1898-1984)

Gladys Reid Holton, founder of the Museum Quilt Study Club in Rochester, NY died in her Oneonta N Y home on July 21, 1984.

During the Depression, Mrs Holton began lecturing on quilts in Munroe County as a fund raiser for different groups. She charged \$5.00 to the group which in turn charged the members \$1.00. One winter she is said to have given 200 lectures.

In 1936 she founded a quilt study club sponsored by the Rochester (N Y) Museum of Art and wrote a monthly column on quilts for the Museum newsletter featuring a different pattern. They are now collector's items.

In 1939 she was presented to the Queen of England as a North American delegate to the Associated Country Women of America.

She joined the staff of the Rochester Museum of Art in 1946 and retired in 1968. After her retirement she worked for the Strong Museum until 1977.

Mrs Holton fell and broke her hip in 1981 and moved to Oneonta with her family.

Her daughter Jane des Grange Mikolaick, sent the following quote which she found in her mother's writings, "To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die."