



Profile

Janice Schimmelman

It would not be fair to say that Jan Schimmelman is retired. Although she no longer teaches classes and attends meetings at Oakland University as Professor of Art History, she is fully self-employed as owner/founder, researcher, writer, typist, editor, proof-reader, layout artist and publisher of Collodion Press, which specializes in books on 19th Century photography. “A truly one-woman operation,” she admits.

Jan’s first Collodion Press book, *Warren Avenue & West Side Industries*, was published in 2010. It reproduced a promotional photo album that was made in 1920 to encourage the growth of business along Warren Avenue from Detroit to Dearborn.

In addition to her new life as an on-demand publisher, Jan is also a scholar of 18th and 19th Century American art and has had her work on art and architectural imprints published by the American Antiquarian Society, the Winterthur Portfolio, G.K. Hall, and Oak Knoll Press. For nine years she was editor of the *Photogram*, the newsletter of the Michigan Photographic Historical Society.

Jan was a student at Oakland from 1967-71, received her PhD from University of Michigan in 1980, began teaching at Oakland in 1976 and retired in 2011. During her 35-year tenure at Oakland she met and married Professor John Cameron, and together they traveled and collected. Yearly visits to Paris produced a collection of over 3,000 glass stereoviews dating from 1852 to 1908, which were the pride of John’s extensive photographic collection. After John’s death in 2008, Jan established the Cameron Endowment in Art History at OU and then went on to publish *The Glass Stereoviews of Ferrier and Soulier*, a book featuring his collection from the work of the French firm, Ferrier and Soulier. This book is the seventh Collodion Press publication, with three having been offered to and accepted by the Library of Congress, and five more in the planning stage. Her books are available through Blurb.com.



The Glass Stereoviews of Ferrier and Soulier, shown with a stereoscope and a glass stereoview.

In addition to glass stereoviews, Jan and John collected American tin-types and daguerreotypes, 19th Century drawings, ancient Roman glass, medieval thimbles, cast iron windmill counterweights and many other things, always keeping aesthetic and historic value in mind.

One of her favorite collections consists of mahjong sets from the 1920s and 30s. She can trace the history of mahjong tiles from bone and bamboo to celluloid and then to Bakelite. Although she uses them when family and OU friends get together, she fiercely protects one rare bone and bamboo set from the 1920s that depicts Chinese soldiers engaged in war. Since she researches everything she collects, it is not unusual for her to publish her research and illustrate it with examples from her collection. Her first such combined interest resulted in her book, *The Tintype in America 1856-80*, was published in 2007 by the American Philosophical Society. She has collected tintypes since 1992, and has one of the finest individually owned collections.



Isabeau, Jan’s parrot, perched on a windmill weight ca 1910.



A mahjong set manufactured by the Pung Chow Company, 1923.

Asked for advice for novice collectors, Jan replied, "Collecting is a knowledge game. You need to know what you are looking for, then do the research and determine its market value." She then cited her early mistake when buying a little orange plastic hen that laid an "egg" (actually a white marble) when pushed. It reminded her of a similar tin toy that was once owned by her great aunt. She bought it on impulse, later finding that she had greatly overpaid. She now buys them when she sees them and keeps the row of little hens on display as a reminder.

What does Jan wish for the future of the items in her collections? "I hope that someday someone else will buy them. I consider myself a preserver of these memories of the past so that someone from a future generation will find them and get joy from them, just as I have."

Spoken like a true art historian.