

Forward

As his 2010 book, *The New Nation of Goods*, clearly shows, no one has a more thorough, intimate, and nuanced knowledge of the development of consumer culture in the early Republic than David Jaffee. *Visualizing 19th-Century New York* is part of a larger project, a study of how a new middle-class culture emerged with the domestic interior at its center. Someone—many people—had to conceive, design, make, and sell all those things that Americans acquired for their parlors in the young nation.

For this project, Professor Jaffee chose to focus on Broadway as a concentrated locus of such commerce. He and his students selected a wide range of consumer goods and explored the circumstances of their production and initial consumption as the city grew and its inhabitants vied for its recognition on the world stage. In this unique publication, we see New York City come of age.

It is only appropriate that the project should have flourished at the Bard Graduate Center. Professor Jaffee brings an historian's acumen to the detailed examination of a plethora of material-culture traces of commercial endeavor and domesticity. He led his enthusiastic students and collaborators through firsthand encounters with a wealth of material in matchless local collections, for these things—many of them, at least—are close at hand and could be studied in all their actuality. The digital format of the publication enables anyone with access to the Internet to gain a clear idea, through detailed reproduction and commentary, of the character of these objects and their historical significance.

It is the particular role of the Bard Graduate Center to foster transdisciplinary attention to such things and to the people who made and used them, for it draws on skills developed in the context of decorative arts and design history, without which any historical claims would remain shallow or unsubstantiated. These skills the graduate students at the center of this endeavor were able to acquire from the faculty and staff of the BGC to use in producing both the exhibition and the digital publication under Professor Jaffee's guidance. This project, in turn, takes its place within his larger undertaking, as he develops his book-in-progress on the emergence of New York as the cultural capital of the United States of America. All of us—faculty and staff colleagues, exhibition visitors, readers, and students—are the beneficiaries.

—Ivan Gaskell

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