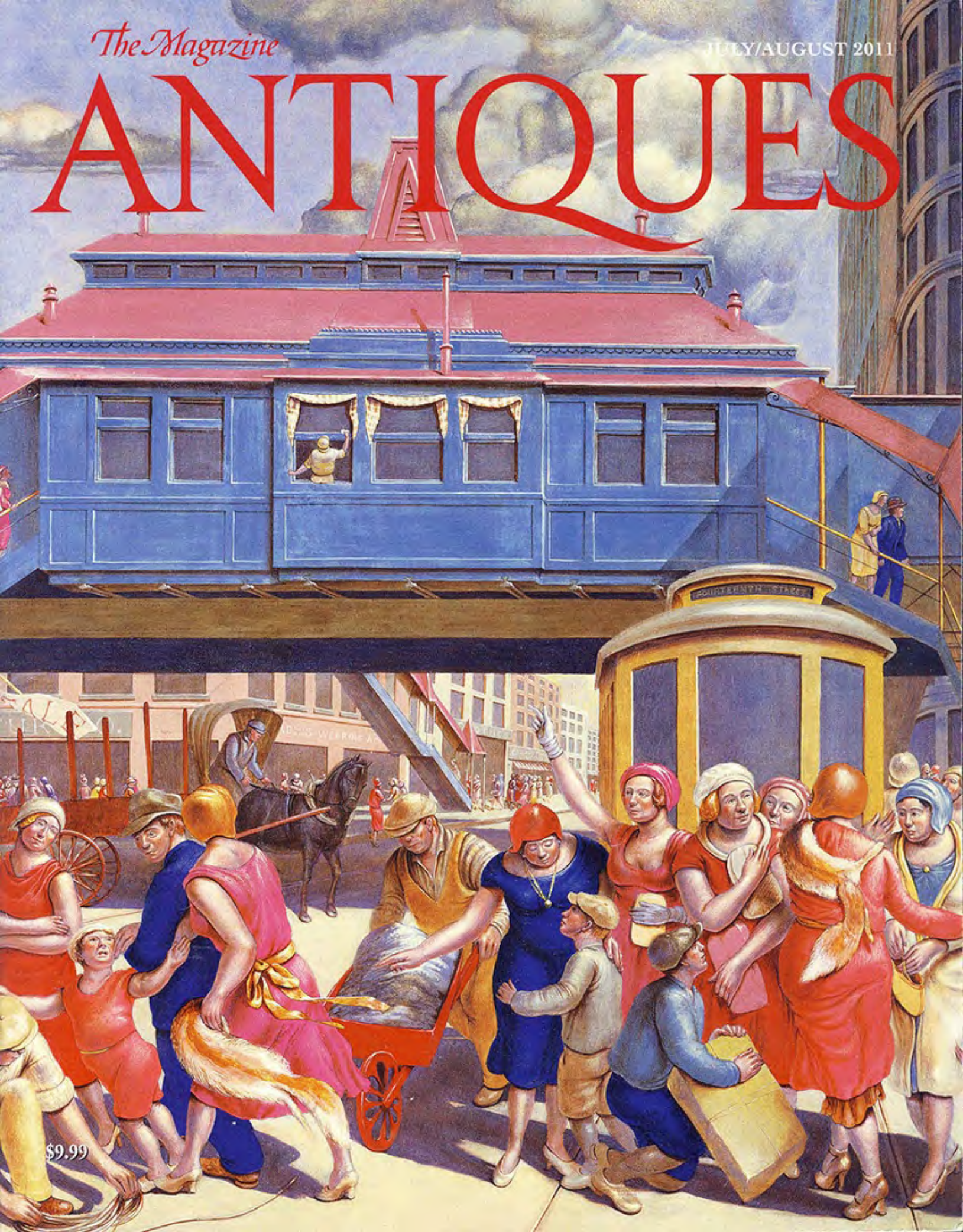


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# ANTIQUES



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## American patriots and English printmakers: The Edenton Tea Party

mer capital on October 24, 1774, to sign a proclamation in which they vowed to boycott British products.

The print, which measures a standard ten by fourteen inches in the plate and cost one shilling when it was issued, is among a handful of known copies in public collections in the United States. It depicts the Carolinians, including a child and an enslaved African, as unmannered zealots whose women are unfit mothers and housekeepers.

"Hundreds of political prints were published at this time. What makes this one so special is that few depict events specific to the southern colonies," says Margaret B. Pritchard, curator of prints, maps, and wallpaper at Colonial Williamsburg, whose extensive prints collection includes the five Sayer and Bennett views.

North Carolina collector Thomas A. Gray had been looking for a copy of *A Society of Patriotic Ladies* for several decades when John and Virginia Duncan, Georgia dealers in antique maps, prints, and books, advertised one in the February 2011 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*. The Duncans operate a shop on Savannah's Monterey Square, home to the Mercer-Williams house, made famous by John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, *A Savannah Story*.

John Duncan learned of the print's existence a decade ago but it was only last fall, while house-sitting for Berendt in New York, that its owner quietly agreed to sell it. The Duncans advertised it after an anticipated deal with an institution fell through.

"Eighteenth-century engravings of North Carolina subjects are quite rare and they were almost exclusively printed in London," says David Stroud, a Cornelius, North Carolina,

**T**he first depiction of organized political action by women in the American colonies may be a rare mezzotint printed in London in 1775. Called *A Society of Patriotic Ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina*, the engraving is from a group of five satirical images of American subjects published by the Fleet Street firm of Robert Sayer and John Bennett in 1774 and 1775.

The first four prints mock the citizens of Boston, New York and Williamsburg, Virginia. The fifth heaps scorn on the coastal town of Edenton, whose female citizens were outspoken critics of the crown's tax on tea and other imported items. Responding to the Tea Act of 1773, fifty-one women gathered in North Carolina's for-

*A Society of Patriotic Ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina* attributed to Philip Dawe (c. 1750–c. 1785), published by R. Sayer and J. Bennett, London, March 25, 1775. Mezzotint engraving, 10 by 14 inches (plate size). *Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Old Salem Museums and Gardens, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.*



*The Bostonian's Paying the Exise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering* attributed to Dawe, published by Sayer and Bennett, October 31, 1774. Hand-colored mezzotint engraving. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.



*The Bostonian's Paying the Exise-Man, or Tarring & Feathering*  
 Plate I.

*The Alternative of Williamsburg* attributed to Dawe, published by Sayer and Bennett, February 16, 1775. Mezzotint engraving. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



*The Bostonians in Distress* engraved by Johann Martin Will (1727–1806), possibly after Dawe, published by R. Sayer and J. Bennett, London, November 19, 1774. Mezzotint engraving. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.



*The Patriotic Barber of New York*  
 Plate II.

*The Patriotic Barber of New York* attributed to Dawe, published by Sayer and Bennett, February 12, 1775. Mezzotint engraving. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

enthusiast of historical Americana who assisted the Duncans. From sources in England, Stroud, an avid researcher who works with private collectors to locate rare objects, procured an eighteenth-century Hogarth frame, complete with a gilt inner-slip and sanded frieze, to house the print.

In March, Gray, who in April moved full-time to Carolina Beach, North Carolina, presented *A Society of Patriotic Ladies* to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He made the gift in memory of his friend, R. Philip Hanes Jr., a North Carolina collector and philanthropist. Last year, Hanes and his wife, Charlotte, gave the institution two eighteenth-century chests of drawers attributed to Amos Alexander of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, in Gray's name (see *The Magazine ANTIQUES*, November/December, 2010, p. 26). Gray, a longtime benefactor of the museum, is also providing funds for the new Anne P. and Thomas

A. Gray Library and MESDA Research Center.

The print recently took its place in the Edenton Passage, one of three architectural interiors at MESDA that were salvaged from Edenton's Blair house, built for the Scottish-born merchant George Blair and his wife, Jean Johnston Blair, a participant in the Edenton Tea Party.

"*A Society of Patriotic Ladies* is a great piece of social and cultural history. It depicts North Carolina history, a domestic interior, the African-American presence, and women's involvement all at once," says Robert A. Leath, vice president of collections and research at Old Salem Museums and Gardens, which incorporates the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

"These ladies represented Edenton's power structure. The Boston Tea Party is looked upon as an important event in the American Revolution but it was entirely male. The Edenton Tea Party is the female counterpoint," Leath adds.