

For All,

The story can now be told. Below is the press release I wrote (released today) concerning the sale of Matthew Isenburg's entire collection.

Just released information discloses that the Matthew R. Isenburg Collection of early photography has sold to the Archive of Modern Conflict (AMC) for a record \$15 million, and has now been moved to its new home in Toronto, Canada where a new museum facility is being designed for its future display. This is the most significant, and historically important, sale of photographic material of the last 50 years; a deal that was conceived and brokered by vintage photography dealer, Greg French, of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

In the quiet town of Hadlyme, Connecticut, the largest single private purchase of vintage photographs, and early photographic equipment and ephemera, was consummated with the simple shake of the hand this past April. No paperwork, no written agreement, no lawyers present - just a handshake between like-minded people who understood the importance of keeping a historical collection together, and not splitting it up. They met for the first time at two o'clock in the afternoon, and by 2 a.m. the next morning "they had a deal," Isenburg said. "There was an instant trust between all of us." Weeks later, papers were officially signed to legalize the deal, but it was the handshake that sealed the deal for Isenburg, and what he put his trust in.

\$15 million is the largest amount ever paid for a single 19th century photographic collection, and far surpasses the combined total of \$8 million paid in 1994 and 2007 for two separate photographic collections assembled by the late, Jack Naylor, of Chestnut Hill, MA. Even the \$250,000.00 paid in 1963 by the Harry Ransom Center in Texas for Helmut Gernsheim's historically important photography collection (it contained the world's first photograph), would only translate into less than \$2 million in today's dollars, although the collection is undoubtedly worth much more in today's market.

Isenburg's collection is significant to the history of photography because it contains so many early and important daguerreotypes (the first practical photographic process), created by the earliest and best photographers in America - when photography was in its infancy in the 1840s and 1850s. Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, 1787-1851, the inventor of the daguerreotype, announced his new process to the world on August 19, 1839 in France.

The collection also contains the largest number of early American daguerreian cameras (more than two dozen) ever assembled by anyone. The George Eastman House in Rochester, NY has only eight American daguerreian cameras in their collection.

To characterize Isenburg's collection in a few words, it's the best of the best; an unparalleled assemblage of over 20,000 individual items, focused mainly on the early years, that together chronicle photography's humble beginnings - through not only important images and cameras, but through all the various accoutrements of the trade - also including advertisements, diaries, books, journals and all manner of photographic ephemera imaginable. Isenburg has often said, "I paid premium prices for best of breed, best in class."

The 85-year-old Isenburg has owned numerous Ford auto dealerships in the past, whose success afforded him the opportunity to collect. He isn't just a collector though; he's a photo historian who's always been more interested in piecing together the story behind an object or image, than he is about just owning something. He's a photographic compendium who's spent the last fifty years seeking out history through photography.

In the third floor museum (now empty) in his home, a priceless daguerreotype would be displayed next to a tattered receipt and a handwritten letter or diary because they relate to one another and tell a compelling story. He owned the posing chair from America's premier daguerreotypists, Southworth and Hawes of Boston, in addition to the largest collection of Southworth and Hawes

full-plate daguerreotypes (over 40) in private hands. Along with the chair, many other Southworth and Hawes items - from family photos and letters, to paintings, bills of sale, a partnership agreement, advertisements and ephemera, help to reveal the story of what it was like to be a photographer in the 1850s.

Highlights of Isenburg's vast collection include one of the earliest surviving daguerreotypes (there are only two others known) showing the US Capitol in 1846, by daguerreotypist John Plumbe Jr., along with the two earliest daguerreotypes depicting New York City. He also owned the earliest extant, and complete, example of an American daguerreotype camera outfit - built by William H. Butler in 1841, and containing its original sensitizing and developing equipment, all housed together in a single wooden box. His collection of California Gold Rush daguerreotypes, with related letters and ephemera, is unparalleled, and his photographic library was probably the most comprehensive in private hands. Another unique item was Isenburg's one-of-a-kind c. 1855 exquisitely hand-carved-and-painted American eagle with a greater than eight-foot wing span which is sitting atop the carving's framed centerpiece - a full-plate outdoor daguerreotype depicting a Massachusetts military company in full dress uniforms. The daguerreotype is surrounded by additional military-themed-carvings depicting an American flag, sword, cannon, cannon balls and a drum.

The packing and shipping of the collection took a crew of anywhere from five to nine people - five full weeks to complete over the past two months (all paid for by AMC), and a cherry picker had to be rented in order to remove the over eight-foot-wide carved American eagle and other objects from the third floor museum.

The task of unpacking, cataloging and photographing every item has begun in Toronto, and is being carried out by AMC's newly-appointed curators of the collection, Jill Offenbeck and Amanda Shear, both of Toronto. The AMC's chief photography buyer in North America, Neil MacDonald, also from Toronto, was instrumental in convincing AMC that the Isenburg Collection was essential to their vision. Toronto native and Daguerreian Society President Mike Robinson has been recently appointed as AMC's Director of Education and Research Programs and will oversee the organization and cataloging of the collection.

With offices in both London, England and Toronto, AMC's collection of well over three million images contains primarily vernacular photographs that tell mankind's forgotten stories through the personal photographic albums and images created and preserved by the common man; an un-bandaged reality, rarely seen, and too often discarded by ensuing generations. Images of 20th century conflict, war, political unrest, social revolution, cultural traditions, etc. were AMC's primary focus when they began collecting in the 1990s, but that soon expanded to include 19th century images as well as manuscripts and objects. The addition of the Isenburg Collection, adds a formidable dimension to AMC's holdings, much as the Gernsheim Collection added early photo-history to the Harry Ransom Center in Texas.

Cheers,  
Rob McElroy  
Buffalo, NY