

Making "Digital Cruikshank"

A Special Collections Collaboration

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Introduction

The Project: In Fall 2022, students in Lindsay DiCuirci's combined undergraduate and graduate English seminar participated in a semester-long collaboration with UMBC Special Collections. This course was supported by a Hrabowski Innovation Grant which allowed us to digitize a collection of donated materials related to George Cruikshank. Working in teams to build a digital resource based on these materials, students produced **"Digital Cruikshank: Etching & Sketching in Nineteenth-Century England"** (<https://specialcollections.umbc.edu/cruikshank>). The resource features over 130 sketches gathered into collections with accompanying explanatory content, all crafted by UMBC students.

Our Collection: Donated by the Merkle family in the 1970s, the collection contains materials related to English graphic satire, especially the works of George Cruikshank, including unbound manuscript materials as well as over 120 printed works in various formats.

The Artist: George Cruikshank (1792–1878) was one of the most prolific caricaturists, etchers, engravers, printmakers and book illustrators of the British Regency and Victorian periods. **He produced over 2,000 individual prints, tens of thousands of sketches and cuts, designs, plates and placards and illustrated over 860 books.** He became a household name after his collaboration with Charles Dickens on *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist*. Midway through his career, he became a rabid temperance man, reflected in his later work.

Digitizing the Collection, or, Battling the Scanner(s)

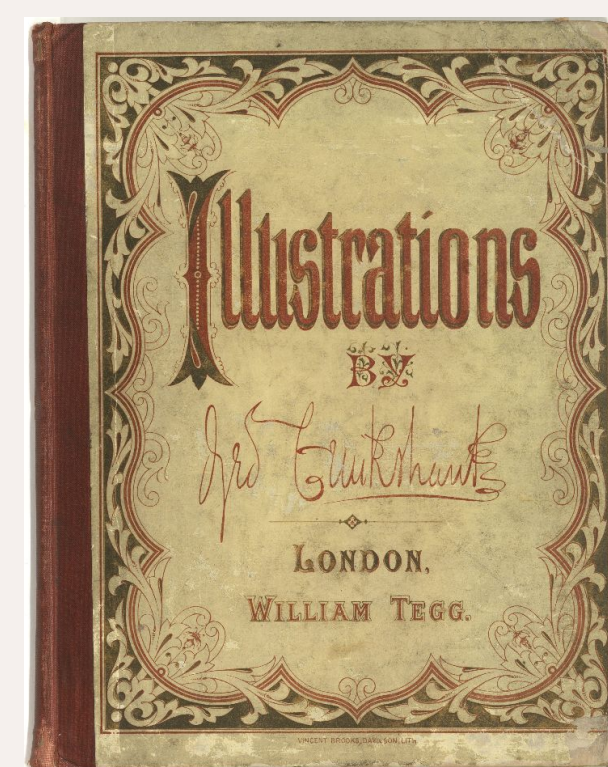
- ❖ Surveyed public repositories (e.g. HathiTrust; Internet Archive) for already digitized Cruikshank texts
- ❖ Hired and trained students Sarah Nove and Gabe Morrison to digitize and create technical metadata for Cruikshank-related materials
- ❖ Digitized manuscript materials (flatbed scanner) & bound materials (overhead scanner)
- ❖ Oversize materials photographed by Melissa Cormier or Susan
- ❖ Susan created digital collection & descriptive metadata

Successes

- ❖ Created digital collection of **448** items, including all manuscript materials and over 40 books with hundreds more pages & multiple illustrations (<https://contentdm.ad.umbc.edu/digital/collection/cruikshank>)
- ❖ Made available previously unpublished works & books not already online
 - Letters, scrapbooks, sketches, sketchbooks, manuscripts, etchings, broadsides, placards, engravings, pamphlets, books, ephemera & watercolors
- ❖ Added content note regarding offensive imagery, language, and ideas

Challenges

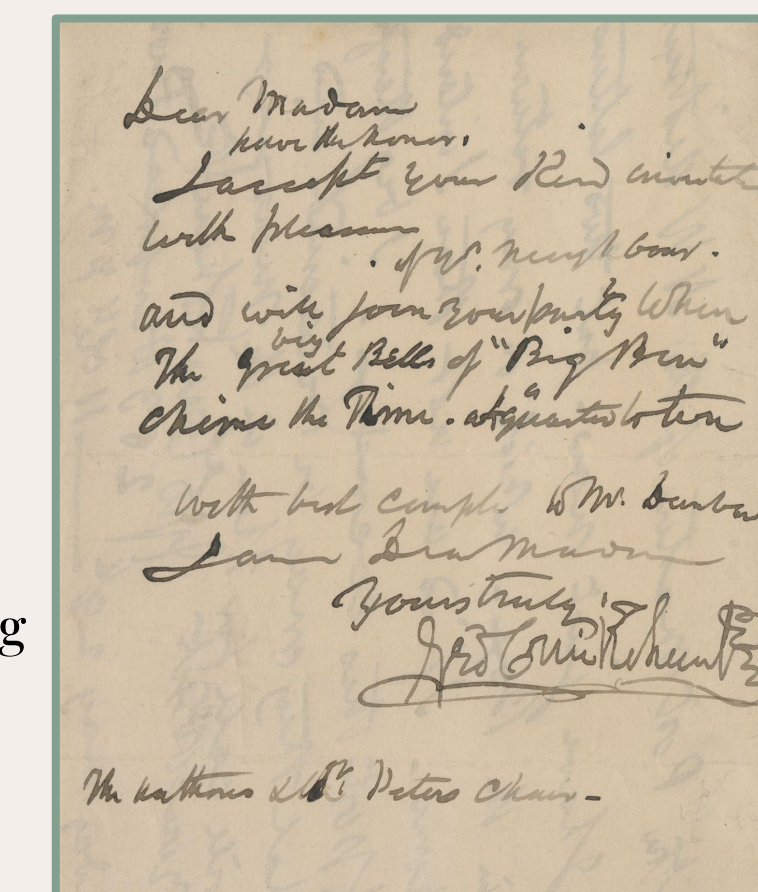
- ❖ Technical difficulties – scanner & software issues
- ❖ Limited staff
- ❖ Discovered uncataloged items needing digitization
- ❖ All of the processes took longer than anticipated



Beginning the Class Project;

Or, Background Reading; or Transcription Practice; or Special Collections Instruction

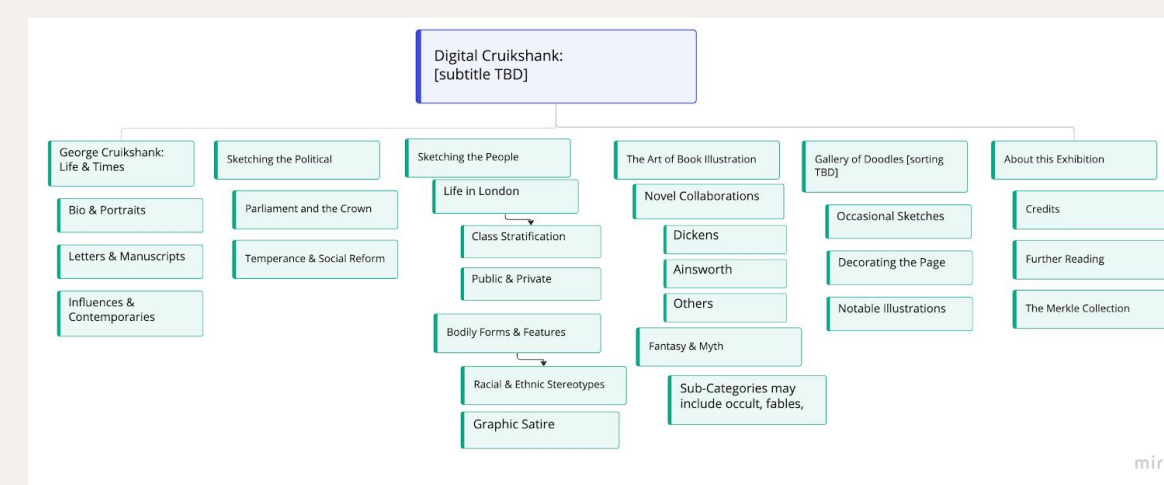
- ❖ **Slack**
 - File sharing, voting, task distribution, messaging, discussion
- ❖ **Background readings**
 - Cruikshank, graphic satire, C19 book illustration, myth of neutrality in archives, race & digital image archives
- ❖ **Social Media**
 - Groups rotated managing our project Instagram, Twitter, TikTok & Snapchat accounts
- ❖ **Content Warnings**
 - Stressed that the objects in our collections include offensive material
 - Creating an exhibition of Cruikshank's work is not the same as endorsing the content of Cruikshank's work or his attitudes
- ❖ **Special Collections instruction**
 - Susan & Lindsey Loeper discussed using archival materials; original prints vs digital surrogates; visual & archival literacy
- ❖ **Transcription**
 - Working in groups with batches, students transcribed Cruikshank's handwritten letters (about 26 in total)
 - Learned best practices in transcription work
- ❖ **Guest Speaker**
 - Professor Paul Fyfe (NC State) encouraged more critical thinking about "illustration, ways of seeing and the digital image" in a Webex lecture and discussion.



Putting the Pieces Together;

Or, Organized Chaos!

- ❖ After midterm self-assessment, the class spent several more sessions in the library with the materials
- ❖ Students organized and laid out the exhibit in a site map
 - Google Jamboard to draft site architecture
 - Used Miro to mock up 3 possible site maps to choose from
 - Winning map became the guide for building the site
- ❖ Students completed survey identifying their research interests & skill strengths
- ❖ Lindsay slotted them into the following groups for the remainder of the semester:
 - Writing Groups (e.g. "Sketching Politics"; "Sketching People")
 - Task Groups (e.g. photo editing, managing social media, presenting at the launch)
- ❖ Students fleshed out the sections with researched-based contextual writing and curated a gallery of Cruikshank images
 - E.g. In the "Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes" section, student Corinne Newsome crafted a critically-engaged series of essays and item descriptions on the dehumanizing imagery that Cruikshank perpetuated in his caricature work



Curation Commences;

Or, WordPress Training & Blogging

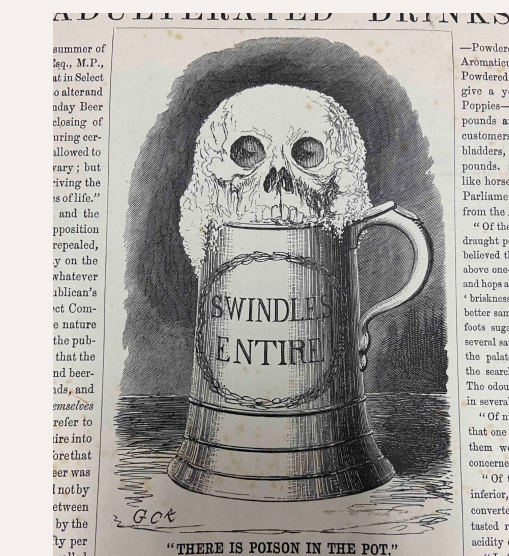
WordPress Chosen for Exhibit Site

- ❖ Purchased Museo WordPress theme & zoom plugin
- ❖ Library Webmaster, Jim Doran, trained students to use WordPress
 - Creating posts using content "blocks"
 - Writing Alt Text descriptions of all images for accessibility

Blogging Begins

- ❖ Lindsay prompted students to create a "Show and Tell" blog post
 - Wrote in batches, workshoping drafts with Course Coach before posting
 - Gained practice in WordPress & learned to write for a general audience
 - MA students helped create guide for the posts
 - Inspired other class-created guides (e.g. "Exhibition Label Writing,")
 - Created uniform look through headlines, feature images & "teaser" content

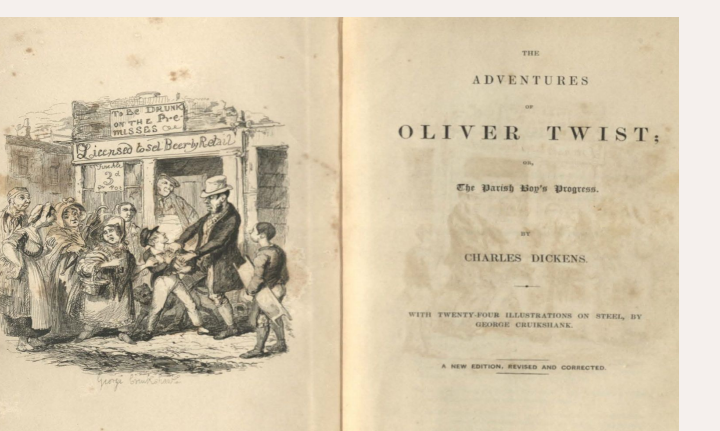
Blog Post Examples



"Teetotalism: George Cruikshank's Anti-Alcohol Advertisements," Megan McIntosh's post on Cruikshank's temperance illustrations.



"Fox, Geese, and Snake Oil Salesmen: George Cruikshank's Critique of Pseudo-Doctors," Emma Jett's post on Cruikshank's send-up of sham doctors peddling their wares to gullible Brits in Victorian London.

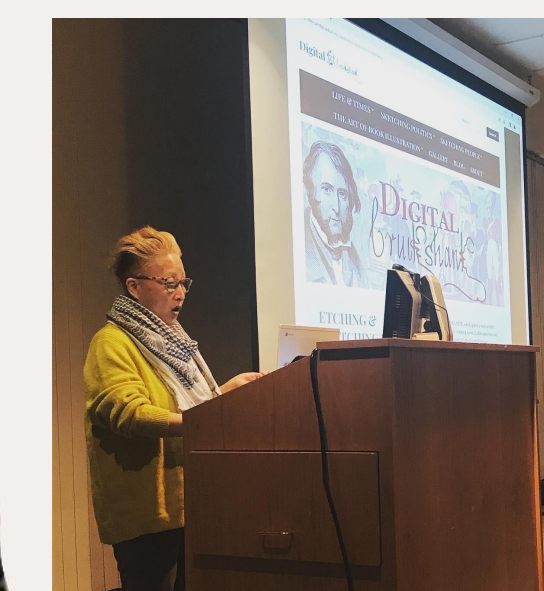


"Collaboration Conflicts: The Drama With Dickens," Amanda Lyons's post detailing the heated debate over Cruikshank's claim that he originated the idea for *Twist* and supplied Dickens with several plot points.

Going Live;

Or, Having our Cake and Eating it, too

The class organized a catered launch event, hosted in the UMBC Library Gallery in December, 2022. A panel of five students gave lightning talks introducing each section of the exhibition and library staff pulled items from the collection for public viewing. We gave away buttons designed and voted on by students and our cake even featured our site banner, designed by MA student Faezeh Pasandi. **What began in the classroom is in the world as a shareable and accessible resource, a testament to what collaborative work between students, instructors and librarians can achieve.**



Acknowledgements

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