

Dealer-Auctioneer Cille Blackwood's Papers Go to Harvard

by Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Richard Saltzberg

"As soon as I could crawl, they were taking me out of trash barrels," Ethel Lucille Thiessen March Blackwood Saltzberg (1929-1981) once told a newspaper reporter. Praised for her sense of humor and for her sense of history, this successful antiques dealer-auctioneer, appraiser, and lecturer, who lived and worked in Essex, Massachusetts, told that same reporter, "I can't even throw away a cigar band."

Because she truly didn't throw many things away, Cille Blackwood (as she was professionally known) left behind a slew of papers documenting her career. Until recently they were stored in the basement of her son Richard Saltzberg's house on Martha's Vineyard. Last summer, I spent a day poring through these press clippings, auction catalogs, show programs, account books, letters, photographs, and more. Within the first few minutes I recognized them as a trove that needed to be preserved for others to see.

I urged Saltzberg to offer the papers to the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. In the

meantime, I told the library about them. I am happy to report that he did make the offer and it was accepted. The papers of Blackwood are now on a shelf at the Schlesinger and accessible without restrictions to researchers.

Blackwood's papers have taken their place alongside those of Susan B. Anthony, Emma Goldman, Julia Child, Helen Keller, Betty Friedan, Amelia Earhart, Shere Hite, important poets, politicians, educators, and the first professionally trained women doctors and lawyers in the nation. The Schlesinger also has such holdings as an audio collection relating to Rosie the Riveter and the records of the National Organization for Women. To be sure, other women in the antiques trade made a much bigger impact than Blackwood.

Mary Allis is among the first names that come to mind, Florene Maine is another, and Elinor Gordon, a third. Few are familiar with Blackwood's reputation outside of a fairly circumscribed geographical region. But I believe she and others like her around the country made their mark historically and culturally, and I was gratified to learn that the Schlesinger agreed.

The one-time owner of Gabriel's Horn Antiques and of Blackwood & Company, Blackwood once described her calling as "part charwoman and part stevedore, lifting and carting, scrubbing and polishing." Everyone in the business knows physical exertion comes with the territory, but this tall (5'10") dark-haired beauty looked less the part of a manual laborer than most. "Shoulders back, head high is what our mother always told us," said Blackwood's sister, Lorraine Salsman (who grew only to 5'2").

Poised, highly intelligent, and (in Lorraine's words) "funny to a fault," Blackwood was also highly energetic and maintained a heavy schedule of lecturing all over Greater Boston for two decades, all the while running her businesses. In 1968 alone, she spoke to 37 historical societies and other groups, bringing home \$2015—in those days, a decent paycheck for anyone. At the time, she was a single mother of two boys, one each from her first two husbands, and there would be one more son, Saltzberg, by her third husband in 1971.

She was "extraordinarily charismatic," Saltzberg told me that day on the Vineyard. "She could get into a room together people that today you would never ever get in the same room." That's a reference to her role in founding the North Shore Antiques Association in 1973. Its inaugural meeting was called together at her place. Just a few months later, the ambitious group had its first annual show and sale. The event was held at Woodman's, a well-known seafood restaurant in Essex (whose owners claim to have invented the fried clam). At least two exhibitors, Lawrence and Alberta Shanks, had taken the popular courses, Antiques I and Antiques II, that Blackwood offered for a number of years at North Shore Community College. Between those courses and her lectures, she is credited with seeding Massachusetts with dozens of dealers and collectors.

Kathryn Allamong Jacob, the Schlesinger's curator of manuscripts, described the scholarly value of Blackwood's papers. "We were delighted when Jeanne Schinto brought Cille Blackwood and her papers to our attention, and we were grateful for her offer to put us in touch with Blackwood's son," she wrote. "The Library's acquisitions committee discusses collections that we might want to pursue. Sometimes these come to our attention, as this one did, through a friend of the Library, as Jeanne has been for more than three decades. Sometimes we will read or hear about someone or some organization whose papers or records we think might be good 'fit' to help us 'document the lives of women in America,' which is the Library's mission. In the case of Blackwood's papers, the committee's decision was

unanimous and enthusiastic: we wanted them."

Blackwood's life and career "dovetail nicely with several of the Schlesinger's well-established collecting strengths as well as with our more recent collecting initiatives," Jacob continued. Beginning when she was still a young woman, Blackwood established a successful business in a trade dominated by men. The Schlesinger has long been a central place for scholars studying the entrepreneurship of women, a tradition that can be traced to Colonial times. In more recent years, researchers have come to the Schlesinger to mine materials for newer topics, such as the origins of vintage consumerism and women who were involved in the decorative arts. "The Blackwood collection speaks to each of these topics, too,"

Jacob said.

While she can accurately guess why certain researchers will be

She was "extraordinarily charismatic."

led to some Schlesinger collections, Jacob is often surprised by what draws others. A scholar interested in the history of orthodontia read girls' diaries from the late 1940s to find out what they thought of their newfangled braces, she told me. Another researcher, interested in how ideas about infant nutrition have changed over time, found relevant information by reading letters from mothers to daughters upon the birth of grandchildren, where lots of advice, welcome or not, about how to feed baby was offered. Undoubtedly, Blackwood's papers will be put to other research uses that no one can yet imagine.

For several years, I have been studying women in the early days of the trade and found fruitful resources at the Schlesinger in sometimes unlikely collections. I stumbled across Blackwood while out in the field researching a subject broader than gender, however—namely, Essex, the little town on Boston's North Shore where Blackwood established herself. Farmed and fished by Native Americans for millennia, this salt marshland was settled by the English in 1634. From the 17th through the 19th centuries, it enjoyed a grand history of building ships, particularly two-masted wooden fishing schooners. The development of its shellfishing industry came next. Then, early in the 20th century, it became known as a destination for seekers of antiques. I was trying to find out exactly how that happened when I learned about Blackwood, who may have been successful anywhere, but, I have concluded, it didn't hurt that she landed in Essex.

Not only in the right place, she arrived there at the right time. A copy of a three-page typed letter she wrote in 1969 to someone named "Mike" contains her fair assessment of the antiques business of the period. "People have more time and money than they have ever had before," she said. "Some are looking for hobbies...Some people are trying to buy a yard of culture to make a more refined background for their new affluence. Whatever the reason, antiques are in—and I have found much success explaining them to people just like you—that don't know much about them but find them interesting anyway."

Michael March, Blackwood's eldest son, followed his mother into the trade in 1970. He is the proprietor of Blackwood/March Fine Art & Antiques Auctioneers, Essex. Of his arrival in town in 1959, when he was age seven, he



Cille Blackwood (1929-1981), when she was Cille March, circa 1950.



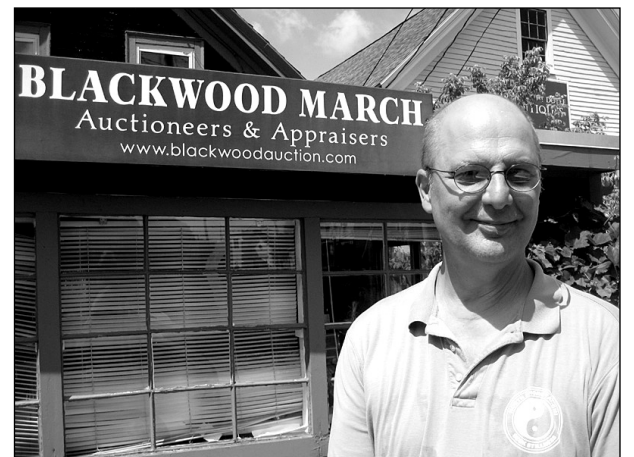
A Blackwood & Company auction. The runner to the right of the desk and about to help hoist it is Cille's second son, Bill Blackwood. Today he is a builder living in Newbury, Massachusetts.



The Essex River estuary provides the town with a grand natural backdrop. As a result, besides antiques seekers, Essex draws boaters, fishing enthusiasts, water sportspeople, as well as filmmakers, who have used it as a location for several movies, including *Grown Ups* and the HBO series *Olive Kitteridge*. In addition, *The Crucible* was filmed in nearby Ipswich and Beverly. "Anytime there's a movie made in the area, we get the notables coming through," said Bob Coviello, proprietor of Main Street Antiques. Schinto photo.



Bob Coviello said of Blackwood, "She was the grande dame of antiques in Essex. She was the person who everybody looked to for guidance." Her sister, Lorraine Salsman, said, "She introduced a 'new' idea to the trade—sharing. She had a huge research library that anyone was welcome to use." Schinto photo.



Michael March lives and works in this former clam monger's shack, which Cille bought in 1959, sold in the early 1960s, then bought back in 1979. It dates from 1830, March said. "And it has had little businesses in it since then—a dry goods store, a gentleman's club, whatever that is, and artist's studio. The place is mixed use, legally. There is no zoning in Essex."

Christopher Gurshin painted reproduction folk art paintings, trade signs, and tavern signs. He called his studio-home The Yankee House, he told me by phone from Glastonbury, Connecticut, where today he restores Rufus Porter murals and paints original murals in the Porter manner. In Essex, he said, he was inspired by the many antiques shops. One afternoon, a man from New York came in and bought two of his paintings for \$35. It was the beginning of his belief that he could make something of this career. Before that, one of those who believed in him was Cille. "She was a great person, always encouraged me," he said. "It was her optimistic nature." Schinto photo.



On the right, the former home of Gabriel's Horn Antiques, where Blackwood lived and had her shop. Next to it, auctioneer L.A. Landry's office. Schinto photo.



The two buildings in the center were the former home of Christian Molly Antiques. It is 165-167 Main Street, at Burnham's Corner. Now owned by Rick Bevilacqua of Essex Antiquarians, the structures were painted a reddish-brown when Ed Saltzberg occupied the property. Bevilacqua painted them their current peach color. Blackwood/March is on the far left. That's the former clam shack that Cille Blackwood bought, sold, then rebought. Schinto photo.

recounted, "My mother was a twice-divorced single mother, who first worked here as a waitress, at the Captain's Table. It burned down long ago." Before coming to Essex, she opened her first antiques shop in Maine, where she, Michael, her second husband, and her second son, William Blackwood III, lived briefly. But it was in Essex where "she made herself into a knowledgeable antiques dealer," March said.

"In those days, as had been previously the case for decades, Essex was a wholesale antiques place," March said. "No one expected to sell to retail people. Dealers would come from Boston and New York." He named George Gravert of Boston's Charles Street as "just one notable person" who visited on a regular basis. "George was an elegant man with fabulous taste who would come here in his Dodge station wagon and buy Continental. There were also the Grossmans, who of course bought Americana. Hymie Grossman was dragging Louis Vuitton trunks out of my auctions when he was ninety-seven—pretty impressive. But long before that, there were really good Massachusetts highboys and lowboys and Hadley chests—really big deal things. There are persistent stories of tall-case clocks going down Route 127 in wagons."

Why Essex became an antiques center in the first place, March said, was because, "There are and were very wealthy people here amongst the peasants," meaning the surrounding, affluent communities of Manchester, Beverly, Marblehead, Gloucester, and Rockport. Their seaside mansions are the source. As Thomas Lang of Alexander Westerhoff Antiques, Essex, put it, "Where there's wealth and decorative arts, there's always resale."

In the 1840s, Bostonians began buying land and building summer



Portrait of Blackwood by Margaret Fitzhugh Browne (1884-1972), who lived and taught art in Gloucester. This oil on canvas painting may have been done for one of her classes. The antiques dealer and the painter met through their mutual love of antiques, said Blackwood's sister.

homes in these communities, which are about 30 miles north of the city. Charles Cushing Paine (1808-1874), a descendant of Declaration of Independence signer Robert Treat Paine, was one; Charles Greely Loring (1794-1867), a prominent lawyer, was another. In the 1870s, publisher James T. Fields of Ticknor & Fields and his wife, Annie Adams Fields, built on a piece of land in Manchester. Known on Beacon Hill for their eccentric preference for old furniture (not yet widely called "antiques"), the couple furnished their summer home the same way. Considering the numbers and kind of people they entertained in Boston and Manchester, their decor must have had much high-level exposure. Yet two more decades would pass before the value of such furniture would be widely understood.

In these towns there was an even bigger building boom in the 1880s. "By the end of the century, the North Shore was Boston's Riviera," wrote Joseph E. Garland in *The North Shore: A Social History of Summers among the Noteworthy, Fashionable, Rich, Eccentric and Ordinary on Boston's Gold Coast, 1823-1929*. A transportation system of railroads and ferries developed simultaneously. So did the settlement of locales where

servants and other help could afford to live. Among those places was Essex, which, for a variety of reasons, did not attract estate builders. One reason was that it affords river front, not ocean front. In any event, what did get established there, besides working-class households, were secondhand shops and "junk" shops. Even something referred to as an "antique shop" was founded in Essex by Maurice R. Stephens in 1895.

Dealer Tom Lang told me about



Blackwood publicity shot. Photo credit: Robert F. Sherman, Rockport, Massachusetts.

another piece of evidence of early antiques dealing activity in Essex. A few years ago, before he and Alexander Westerhoff moved their business to Essex, into what was formerly known as the Methodist Episcopal Church, they researched the structure's history while renovating it. "When we looked at the church's records, there was a mention that the congregation in 1911 'took residence over the antique store on Burnham's Corner' when they added the Gothic aspects—the tower and windows—to the Federal structure," he told me. "So we know the antiques business here goes back at least to that date." Today there are several antiques establishments on Burnham's Corner in addition to Blackwood/March. At the same juncture, along a winding stretch of Main Street where two other streets converge, Blackwood had her Gabriel's Horn.

What Lang called "the big historical fact about Essex being an antiquing destination" happened even earlier, in 1907. That's the date of a photograph, owned by Historic New England, showing Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Davis Sleeper, and two others in a motor car in front of a property in Essex. They were visiting an 18th-century farmhouse because Sleeper, an eminent interior designer, was buying its paneling and shutters for what would become Beauport, his summer home in Gloucester that is now a Historic New England property.

"So we know that at least since the turn of the century people were coming here and using this as a place to find antique material and wonderful interiors, often saving it before it was torn down," said Lang.

Nina Fletcher Little and Bertram K. Little bought a property in Essex to use as a summer retreat in 1937 and named it Cogswell's Grant. It had been in the family of Arthur D. Story (1854-1932), owner of an Essex shipyard, since 1925. That was the year the land was auctioned after an earlier owner lost it through foreclosure. The Storys rented the acreage to farming families. It was in poor shape when the Littles bought it and began to restore the farmhouse, which they filled with their now famous folk art collections. Today, looking much the way it did when the Littles spent their summers there, it is one of Historic New England's most popular sites.

An Essex woman, Mardie Pollys, corresponded with the Littles about her childhood memories of the property. The Historic New England Web site refers to her as an "antiquarian." Pollys wasn't the only one in town



Blackwood is shown dressed for one of her luncheon lectures.

who loved old things by then. In *150 Years a Town: A running account of life in the town of Essex since incorporation in 1819*, Leslie Harris wrote that a group of people interested in organizing a historical society met on April 20, 1937. At the end of their first year, the Essex Historical Society had 142 members. Building on a foundation laid by an earlier, disbanded historical society, they began the task of recording and preserving historical material for future residents. So there already was a core of historically aware people in Essex by the time the Littles got there. In addition, the Essex Early Arts & Crafts Class, a club for women that met monthly, was established in 1939. Decades later, Blackwood would speak at their meetings. At the tail end of the Great Depression, though, she was just a girl growing up in Boston.

Born on December 10, 1929, to Charles L. Thiessen and Clara E. (Richards) Thiessen, Cille had a mischievous streak. "I used to get kicked out of the Copley Square library [i.e., the Boston Public Library] at least once a week," she once said. "Usually it was for riding the lions." Her sister remembered the same scenario—plucky Cille sitting on one of the great twin marble beasts (the work of Louis St. Gaudens, brother of Augustus Saint-Gaudens) in the McKim building.

Cille took her secondary education at the city's High School of Practical Arts. It professed to prepare young women "to meet the problems of life, inside the home and in the business world, in a dignified and intelligent manner" and "to make its graduates the living models of good taste." All girls learned cooking, laundry, sewing, nursing, and home economics, as well as regular academic subjects. Cille, however, "was not too interested in the academic side of life," her sister said with a laugh. She often played hooky. Education happened anyway. She "preferred to educate herself," said Lorraine. "Cille lived at the museums," visiting them alone. "That was her private time."

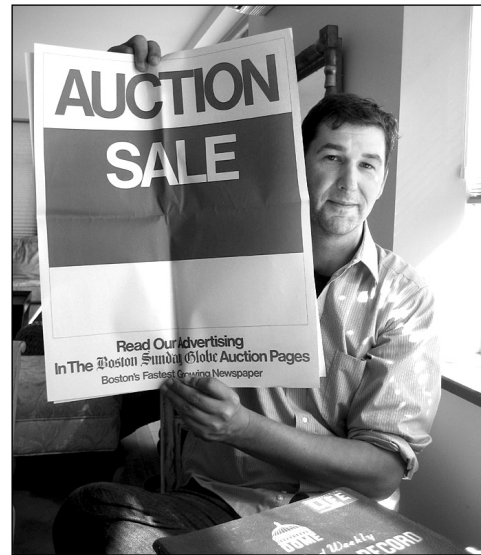
Sometime in the late 1940s, Cille left high school and married Charles March, a singer. They left Boston and went to New York City so he could pursue his music career there. Cille tried modeling and had some success, including being featured on a White Rain shampoo television commercial, said Michael March, who was born in 1952. It wasn't long before Cille and Charles fell out of love, however, and they divorced.



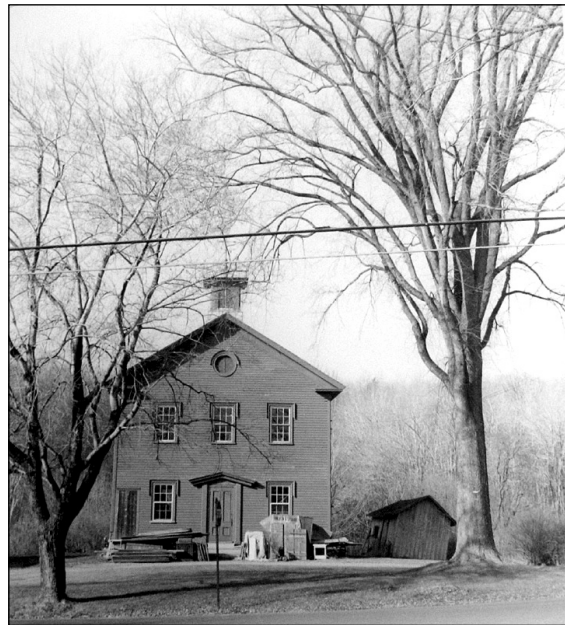
Harold A. Burnham, an 11th-generation shipbuilder, carries on the shipbuilding tradition today, designing and building wooden boats, all by hand, in the gray-shingled boathouse. It's been said that Essex's shipbuilding tradition created an atmosphere of respect for craftsmanship in town, and that could be another reason why the antiques trade flourished here. Schinto photo.



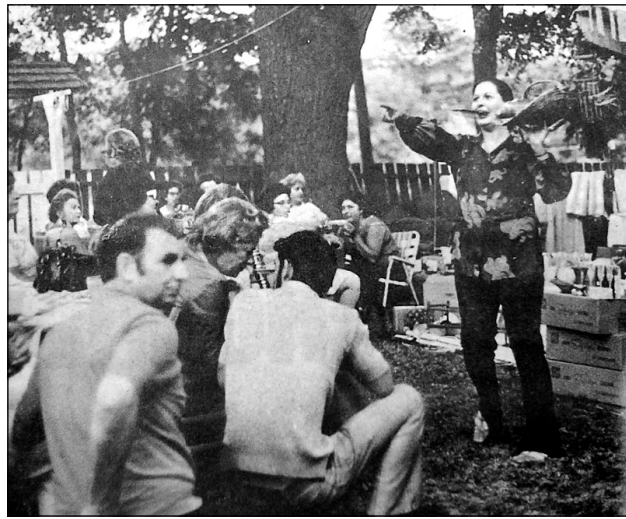
Michael March and Cille Blackwood, auctioneering, circa 1977.



Rich Saltzberg is shown holding up a generic poster given to businesses like Blackwood & Company when they advertised in the *Boston Globe*. "Mother got these posters when she advertised in the classifieds," said Saltzberg. "You wrote what you pleased in the big blank section to promote your sale and hung it where it would serve you best." Schinto photo.



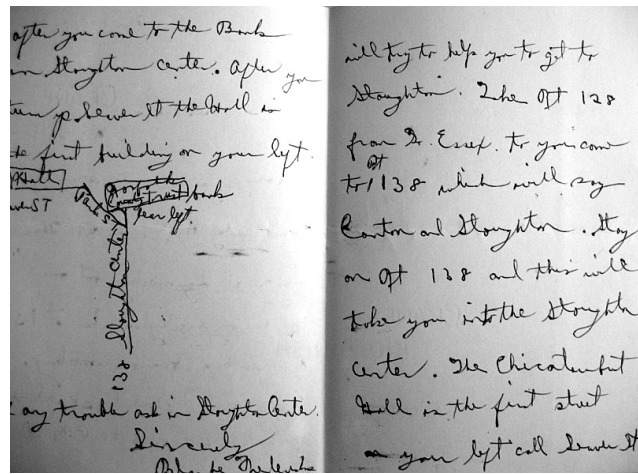
The former Falls School in Essex on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1966. It was owned at the time by Ed Saltzberg, who used it for the repair and restoration of antiques. Today it is a residence. Photo credit: Dana Story. Photo courtesy Essex Historical Society.



Blackwood, auctioneering on the lawn of the former Falls School.



Estate auction at the Essex home of Frederick W. Austin in 1943. The man in the top hat, auctioneer Philip E. Melanson, also worked as a clammer. Photo courtesy Essex Historical Society.



In the days before GPS, Blackwood was often following handwritten directions and hand-drawn maps to her lectures.

In 1954, Cille married William Blackwood, a salesman for Sperry Rand among other companies. Their son, William Blackwood III, was born in 1955. The senior Bill Blackwood's business took the young family to Virginia, Maine, and Illinois. While living in a Chicago suburb, Cille was published in a local newspaper. "Who wants a column on art? My milkman, that's who!" she wrote. "Since the moment he discovered paintings on my living room wall, we've had several early a.m. chats about what people should buy and why. Art is like an avocado; you acquire a taste for it. No one can force you to partake, no one can push it down your throat but if you want to taste color, motion, and excitement—discover art." She was described below her byline as "a painter, sculptress, and writer of poems," but by the time that first (and only) column was published in 1960, Cille's second marriage was failing and she needed to make a real living.

That's when she moved to Essex, led there by happenstance. Her divorced mother had remarried an Essex man, Lemuel Erwin Spinney (1902-1975). Rich Saltzberg told me Spinney came "from a line of Gloucester fishermen and seamen." He did not make his living from the sea, however; he worked as a plumber where Cille's papers now reside—Harvard.

Massachusetts Route 128 was completed in 1954. One of its exits is just three miles from Burnham's Corner. As a result, the town became more accessible to larger numbers of people from greater distances. That was golden to a budding antiques center. Still, it retained its bucolic nature, and real estate remained cheap. As a result Cille was able to buy a building (a former clam monger's shack) at Burnham's Corner. She sold that a couple of years later and moved into a larger, brick building across the street.

Besides waitressing, Cille worked with flowers, commuting to the Rob Roy Florist Shop in Boston's West Roxbury neighborhood. Yet soon enough she was in the antiques business full time, and in 1964 Gabriel's Horn was going strongly enough to attract press. "Perhaps the best source of American primitive paintings is Gabriel's Horn in Essex, the brick house at [Burnham's Corner]," the story in a local newspaper said. "It has no sign outside, but Cille Blackwood runs it and she says some day she will make a sign—a special one." The story was illustrated with a photo of her and a ship's figurehead.

"Parlor dealers" is one term for women who sold antiques from home in that period. They were often elderly, widowed, or both. "The little old ladies were the ones who could deal with the little old ladies who had the stuff," a man whose mother was a

parlor dealer told me. Often the selling of objects would be combined with the running of a tea room. It would not be unusual for someone to offer cakes, pies, sandwiches, and "Colonial furniture." (For more information, see my articles "Miss Edgerton's Ye Colonial Shoppe" or Women in the Trade" part one and part two in *M.A.D.*, June 2008, p. 12-C and August 2010, p. 36-B.)

Cille, young and full of gumption, was not content to sit waiting for or waiting on customers. In her account books one can see she regularly paid people to shop-sit for her, e.g., in 1961-62, "Mrs. Burnham 5 hours \$6.25." Meanwhile, she was spending her time buying andirons, candlesticks, lamps, daybeds, tea sets, paintings, china, wing chairs, Victorian tables, butter churns, sea chests, ship's clocks, jewelry, and glass from other dealers, from estates, and from auctions, including Robert W. Skinner Inc., Bolton, Massachusetts, (now of Marlborough and Boston) and L.A. Landry, Essex (whose son, Robert E. Landry, carries on that business).

By 1964 Cille had begun lecturing, having participated in a ten-week course in Boston on publicity. It's telling that her expenses, besides \$13.40 for a book of train tickets, included the following wardrobe items: a red suit (\$79.95), a yellow two-piece dress (\$24.95), a blue coat (\$19.95), and the services of a seamstress (\$45). To address such groups as the Swampscott Women's Club, the Manchester Historical Society, and the Masons of Boston, she wanted to look her best.

"Trinkets & Treasures" was the name of a lecture she devised in the mid-1960s and was still giving in 1975, when she spoke to the Women's City Club at the Haverhill Public Library, Haverhill, Massachusetts. "Members are asked to bring heirlooms for evaluation and discussion," a newspaper clipping said. Another clipping said she gave the same talk to the Wilbraham [Massachusetts] Women's Club, "following a finger sandwich luncheon."

To someone who requested information about "Pie for

Breakfast," another lecture in her series, she described it this way: "Salem in the early 1800s. Colored slides of mansions, costumes, and furniture; set against the background of superstitious and very moral Salem. Lusty Yankee sea captains who changed the economy of their town with spices, silks and slaves and exploded the customs and laws with wild impiety."

The many thank-you notes Cille saved attest to her audience appeal, most of them mentioning her humor as well as her knowledge. If she found people nodding off, she knew what to do. As Cille told a reporter, "I throw in a little blood, sex, and gore." Her underlying message was serious, however. The reporter capsulized it this way, "Mrs. Blackwood said it is wise to investigate one's own attic for treasures and to teach children about their culture and the place these artifacts earned in family history. 'If not,' she said, 'these treasures could get dumped or end up getting sold in my shop.'"

In the late 1960s, besides keeping a shop, Cille started auctioneering, having founded Blackwood & Company. "She started the auction business partly to get me interested in antiques," said Michael March. "The last thing I wanted to do was sit in that shop and wait for some old lady to buy a silver spoon. To me, that was death." He apprenticed with her as a teen and began working with her full time after he graduated from high school in 1970.

An ad in the *Boston Herald American* announced a Blackwood & Company auction under a tent in Gloucester, where Cille sold the "entire contents of 'Rockholm,'" the estate of Charles F. Strong (1892-1974), a wholesale confectioner. Besides conducting on-site auctions, she held them at rented venues like Woodman's and the Old Red School House in Essex, and the VFW Hall in nearby Ipswich. Other local auctioneers, including Landry, used the VFW too. "There were sometimes three auctions a week there," said March. "It always smelled of stale beer, but the space was nice and big."

A Blackwood & Company auction on the lawn of Essex's former Falls School featured three North Shore estates including that of a former Gloucester mayor, Weston Friend (1887-1972). Perhaps for that reason, the *Gloucester Daily Times* covered it. "Mrs. Blackwood said during the morning the crowd was good and the prices about what she had expected with few surprises," the reporter wrote and noted that a flaming birch and maple desk sold for \$725 and a comb-back Windsor armchair for \$800. "She became riled, however, when someone questioned her being a woman auctioneer. 'Imagine that, I've been in this business for fourteen years, and there's my son out there, his first big auction and no one questions him.'"

March said it wasn't unusual for men to call Blackwood

& Company and refuse to speak to “a woman.”

When she started auctioneering, Cille didn't have too many female colleagues. Among others in Massachusetts was Shirley Sawyer, whose father-in-law's auction business, E. Guy Sawyer & Sons, continues today. There was also Judy Schofield of Wellesley, who was auctioneering at least as early as 1960; I found an ad going back that far in a Wellesley newspaper. Skinner executive vice-president Stephen P. Fletcher, who grew up in Wellesley, recalled that as a junior high school student he bought from Schofield and that she also had a shop.

On June 29, 1973, the *New York Times* ran a story: “Women Auctioneers, Once Unheard Of, Now Are Loud and Clear.” The article by Rita Reif begins, “Auctionitis, a disease that seems to have reached epidemic proportions in recent seasons, is being spread increasingly, under the spell of women's voices.” Several years later, though, there was continuing resistance to the idea of women calling bids.

Skinner CEO Karen Keane started auctioneering sometime in 1980. She got on the catalog's masthead for the first time officially as an auctioneer, for a bottles and flasks sale, on November 11, 1980. She didn't think of herself as being a groundbreaker. “Maybe other women are different, but I was just thinking of it as an interesting challenge,” she told me. The auction house's founder, Robert W. Skinner (1932-1984), thought differently.

“Bob Skinner's famous quote was, ‘Women's voices are grating after a while,’” Keane recalled, “that and ‘The auctioneer's podium is no place for a woman.’” So Keane had a professional recording made of herself auctioneering, with crowd noise added as background, to make it sound even more authentic. She played the tape for Skinner while they were driving to a house call. A captive audience, he was convinced. Today, on the Skinner masthead, more women than men auctioneers are listed.

Keane never saw Cille auctioneering, but Fletcher did. “She was good, a pro,” he said. “She knew her antiques and was a real player in that part of the world.”

In 1971, Cille married another local “player,” Edward H. Saltzberg (1921-1995), whose shop in Essex was called Christian Molly Antiques. Ed was the son of Joseph M. Saltzberg, who was born in Poland in 1888, immigrated to the United States in 1905, and settled in Ipswich. A cabinet-maker and antiques dealer, he had a business card that said: “I RANSACK 1000 ATTICS ANNUALLY.” When Ed returned from World War II, he opened his own antiques business in Ipswich. By the 1960s, he was in Essex, having taken over Christian Molly from its founders, Eugene and Barbara Libby, who may have named the shop for a character in a children's book, *The School of Mother's Knee*. It was directly across the street from Cille's Gabriel's Horn. While Saltzberg may have been considered a more “important” dealer than Cille, her account books show that she and he did much business together. In any case, her importance lies in numbers of people she influenced, not in numbers of zeroes.

Cille and Ed filled a house in Essex top to bottom with antiques. Upstairs was a showcase, said their son, Rich. The basement was another story. “In our cellar was an accumulation of dozens and dozens of other people's cellars. There was no rhyme or reason down there. I grew up with it, and in some ways I knew it very well and in other ways it was a mystery. Much of it wasn't anything and much of it was something.”

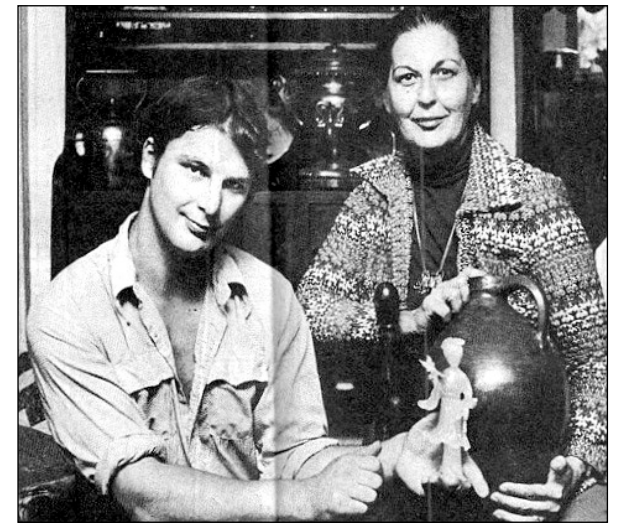
In the 1970s, a boom time for antiques and increasingly collectibles too, there was money to be made by those who knew how to recognize things that were “something.” There was also plenty of opportunity for taking advantage of people. When a man who collected top hats wrote to thank Cille for her generous price on a glass top hat, he added, “I must say: You, Lucille, are one of the few antiques dealers who ‘know where the monkey sleeps’ in this Barnum & Bailey world!”

A student who took one of her community college classes was grateful to Cille for a different reason. “Please know how I've gained from your class,” she wrote. “Sure, I learned a bit about antiques, but more about human nature, fortitude (how awful you must have felt some nights), and life in general if that doesn't sound too dramatic....Maybe it isn't in Webster's but the definition of a lady for me is ‘Lucille Blackwood.’”

Cille felt “awful” because she had the symptoms of lung cancer. “I remember distinctly she was so hooked on cigarettes,” Rich



This photo appeared in a circa 1980 edition of *M.A.D.* with the following caption: “Karen Keane took over part of the duties behind the auction block on Friday and is shown here conducting the sale. Looking over her shoulder at the moment is ‘Big Daddy Skinner.’”



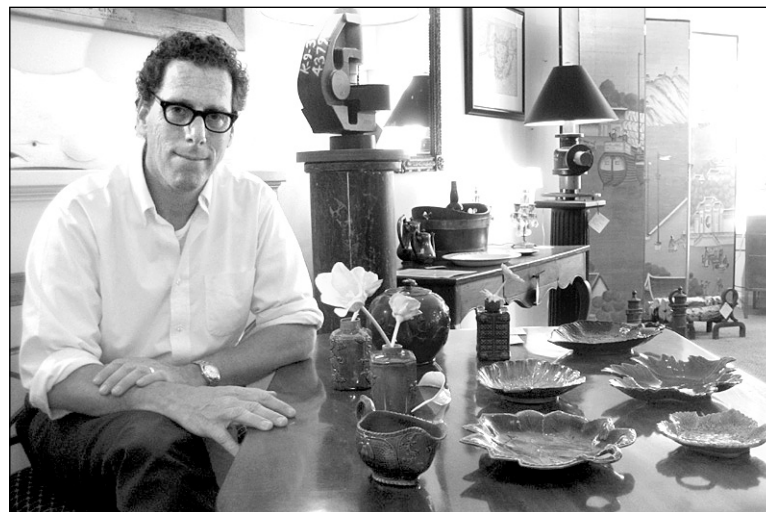
Michael March and his mother, circa 1969.



Tom Lang (right) and Alexander Westerhoff. Schinto photo.



Alexander Westerhoff Antiques occupies the former Methodist Episcopal Church building in Essex. Schinto photo.



Andrew Spindler Antiques & Design is one among 30 or so other antiques shops in Essex today. “There's enormous natural beauty here, which fortunately has not been diminished by overdevelopment,” said Spindler, who has been in Essex since 1998. “It's not a picture-perfect New England town,” he acknowledged, “but I think people view it as an authentic place.” Since so much trade (including Spindler's) now happens on the Internet, a business could locate almost anywhere, so a legitimate question is why he chose Essex. “I wanted to open a shop and I looked in Boston, actually on Charles Street, and didn't think that was necessarily the right solution,” he said. “This is where I live [in nearby Gloucester], and I think the critical mass of shops here has always made Essex a desirable place to be.” Schinto photo.

Saltzberg said. “Her brand was Benson and Hedges. We'd be in the Peabody Essex [Museum], and she'd get the jitters and have to go outside for a smoke.” Diagnosed and undergoing treatment, she soldiered on.

Meanwhile, the upswing in the trade continued, with many good pieces continuing to come out of those estates. In the words of Boston dealer Stephen Score, who had a shop for many years in Essex starting in 1978, “In those days, antiques came directly out of the big houses...right from the families in which they descended. Some antiques dealers had been doing business with the same families for so long, they were like old family retainers...Great objects used to come out of the woodwork with an astonishing frequency.”

Lorraine Salsman, among others, told me she believes her sister was “just on the verge” of becoming even more successful than she already was when she got ill. She died on February 24, 1981, age 51.

Her funeral took place at Essex's First

Congregational Church, at the northern end of Main Street's antiques shops. “There was just a huge traffic jam,” Rich Saltzberg said. “There were tons of people who came from the trade and all the people that she taught. The Essex County Greenbelt, conservation land my mother loved, is where her ashes are spread.”

Over a decade later, on October 28, 1994, a nostalgic “Tribute to Lucille Blackwood Antiques Show and Sale” took place at Woodman's, in the function room where Cille used to auctioneer. It was sponsored by the Essex Historical Society and Shipbuilding Museum. The following year, Ed Saltzberg died. The year after that, the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce characterized Essex in a brochure as “America's Antique Capital.” The phrase has been repeated in print ever since. It's an exaggeration, to be sure, but Essex can lay claim to being one place where scores of antiques have exchanged hands over the years.

Essex is also a place where many people learned, from Cille and others,

to revere antiques for reasons that often transcend their dollar values. Indeed, a reporter who attended one of her lectures in 1974 paraphrased Cille expressing that very sentiment. “Ms. Blackwood said that nowhere is there a price high enough to pay for personal family possessions,” the reporter wrote. “She advised women to treasure and enjoy them and to pass them along to younger appreciative members of the family.”

As I've written in these pages in the past, I would love hearing from anyone with information to share about women active in the early days of the trade, since I'd like to write more about this subject. I would most welcome anyone who has correspondence, diaries, photographs, account books, and other records. You can reach me at 53 Poor Street, Andover MA 01810 or via e-mail <poorstreet@comcast.net>.

For more information about the Schlesinger Library and its research collections, see the Web site (www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library).

