In the past few weeks, I have heard many commentators say that combatting the COVID-19 virus is “like a war.” In fact, it IS a war, a fight against an invisible enemy that has done its damage by the point in time we become aware we have been “hit.” How to defeat it short of a vaccine? That’s the easy part: starve it of new victims through isolation and social distancing. Executing that guaranteed-result plan: very difficult, especially in a democracy that protects our personal freedoms. Our nation and the world will survive this disease. What is unknowable presently is the cost — in lives, in jobs, in dollars. What we do know is that a bet against the United States has historically been a losing bet. Someday, we will emerge from this global nightmare. The lasting challenge will be to learn from this event and be far better prepared in the future.

Foundation staff is taking advantage of the travel restrictions to work through the hundreds of leads, and furthering research on several recent yet-to-be-announced discoveries. As you will see in reading this newsletter, Anna Bottinelli and her team have been hard at work implementing new ideas and advancing various projects. Since her appointment as president late last year, Anna’s steady leadership continues to illuminate a new and more lasting path for the Foundation and its future.

Wishing you health, safety and calm,

Robert M. Edsel

From the MMF Team

Due to the ramifications of COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of our community, the Monuments Men Foundation has postponed all public engagements, including ceremonies returning missing works of art. Our team will be working from home to practice social distancing. We encourage members of our community to do the same. We wish you good health and calm as we navigate these uncertain times together.
Earlier this year, the Foundation received a compelling message from an individual with an inspiring hobby—seeking out lost postcards and letters sent by soldiers writing home during World War II and returning them to their families. Our generous friend was writing to see if we would like to add a unique postcard to our archives written by Monuments Man Sgt. Lorin Keith Johnson, who, according to this gentleman’s research, has no known living relatives.

A Utah-native, Sgt. Johnson was transferred to the MFAA in July 1945 as a clerk-typist. He meticulously typed reports and managed files for the Monuments Men in Germany at the MFAA Branch of the U.S. Group Control Council for Germany (USGCC). After being civilianized in February 1946 to continue his work at the MFAA Branch of the Office of the Military Government, U.S. Zone, before returning home to Utah in September 1946.

Written on August 13, 1945, Sgt. Johnson addresses the German postcard with a front illustration of springtime to a Harry Materne, noting his change of address in Germany and his upcoming travel plans. His is a simple message that reminds us of the antiquated process required to correspond with loved ones across an ocean.

Purchased on eBay, its existence serves as proof that these historical gems are regularly floating around waiting to be discovered and researched. The postcard was graciously donated to the Monuments Men Foundation, along with additional news clippings that allowed us to update Sgt. Johnson’s biography.
Ghent’s Coveted Masterpiece
FROM THE RENAISSANCE TO WW II: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GHENT ALTARPIECE

Genesis and Early History

The monumental polyptych The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, or more famously referred to as the Ghent Altarpiece, by Flemish painters – and brothers – Hubert and Jan van Eyck, has a storied history of multiple dismantlement, sales, thefts, and recoveries.

Completed in 1432 as the International Gothic movement gave way to the humanist aesthetics of the Early Northern Renaissance in the Low Countries, it was commissioned by influential merchant Joos Vijd and his wife for St. Bavo’s Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium.

The altarpiece, a stunning work of Christian iconography in the Catholic tradition, was first endangered during the Reformation Era in 1566, when iconoclasts sought to burn it, only to discover that it had been dismantled and hidden. Portions of the Ghent Altarpiece would leave Belgium over the next several centuries in phases, with panels appearing in Paris during the French Revolution and shortly after in Berlin when they were purchased by King Frederick William III of Prussia. The work survived WWI and the entire altarpiece was reunited in Belgium as a condition of the Treaty of Versailles.

In April 1934, two panels were stolen from the altarpiece, John the Baptist and The Just Judges. The former was returned, but the latter remains missing to this day, replaced by a replica in the altarpiece’s framework.

Nazi Looting and Recovery

During WWII, the altarpiece was coveted by Adolf Hitler. Dismantled and secretly moved out of the cathedral in May 1940 and into France for its protection, the Nazis eventually discovered its hiding location in a château in Pau under the care of the Musées Nationaux. Hitler demanded the altarpiece on August 3, 1942 and the Vichy government complied. The panels were removed from the château shortly after and trucked across the border into Bavaria to Neuschwanstein Castle, where they remained until the autumn of 1944, when the Nazis no longer deemed their storage in the castle safe due to enemy bombing.

To protect them from aerial raids, the panels were moved into a salt mine in Altaussee, Austria, where they were discovered by Monuments Men Capt. Robert K. Posey and Pfc. Lincoln E. Kirstein of the U.S. Third Army in May 1945.

Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.
Monuments Man John Nicholas Brown II, Adviser on Cultural Matters to the Commanding General, Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, of the U.S. Group Control Commission for Germany, wrote in his final report of August 16, 1945, that: “It has always seemed to this Branch that the first work of art to be returned should be the world-famous altarpiece called The Adoration of the Lamb…” He elaborates further that, “The great importance of the Ghent Altarpiece, [is] not only because of its artistic value but also because in a sense it is the symbol of all those things of the spirit which have been crushed and perverted by the Nazis, would seem to indicate that a special occasion be made of its return.”

By the date of Brown’s report, the altarpiece was safely resting in the Munich Central Collecting Point in preparation for its return to Belgium. It had been removed from the salt mine by the most capable Monuments Man for the job, Lt. Cdr. George L. Stout, USNR, a pioneering figure in modern art conservation. Stout arrived at Altaussee on May 21, 1945.

By July 11, he and his team, which included fellow Monuments Men Lt. Thomas Carr Howe, Jr., USNR, and 2nd Lt. Lamont Moore, had packed and evacuated the panels and were now on their way to the collecting pointing. They safely arrived only after a minor incident – the truck carrying the altarpiece threw a rod between Salzburg and Munich but still managed to complete its journey with its contents unharmed.

Paul B. Coremans

Paul B. Coremans (1908-1965), was the renowned Belgian art conservator who founded the Royal Institute for the Study and Conservation of Belgium’s Artistic Heritage (Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique de Belgique). Coremans served as director of the institute for many years.

Following the Allied victory, Coremans worked with the U.S. Forces European Theater (USFET) Mission to Belgium and Luxembourg. As Chief of Laboratories of the Belgian Directory of Museums, he was integral to the restitution of art looted from Belgium. In November 1945 he undertook a month-long trip to numerous salt mines and collecting points in Germany and Austria to inspect the methods used to protect paintings and other works of art against physicochemical changes. While at the Munich Central Collecting Point, he assisted fellow Belgian Monuments Man Lt. Raymond Lemaire with his work identifying and conserving looted works of art.

As a result of his service as a Monuments Man, Coremans published a handbook entitled, La protection scientifique des œuvres d’art en temps de guerre; l’expérience européenne pendant les années 1939 à 1945 (1946). Also in 1946, Coremans joined a group later dubbed the Coremans Commission, which was established by the government of the Netherlands to scientifically determine the legitimacy of a group of paintings suspected of being forgeries. Coremans served as expert witness to the prosecution during the trial of Hans van Meegeren, who was convicted of forging Old Master paintings (most notoriously Christ with the Woman Taken in Adultery, supposedly painted by Johannes Vermeer, which belonged to Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring). Coremans documented his experiences in the book entitled Van Meegeren’s Faked Vermeers and De Hooghs: A Scientific Examination, published in 1949.
containing useful contact information for local experts in the field. This information was transmitted to the MFAA and subsequently used by active Monuments Men which greatly expedited their recovery of Belgian works of art.

The dramatic discovery of Jan van Eyck’s *Ghent Altarpiece*, Belgium’s greatest artistic treasure, deep inside a salt mine in Altaussee, Austria, spurred Van Puyvelde into action. However, by the time he and Emile Langui, his assistant and former pupil, reached Altaussee, preparations to transport the priceless work of art to the Munich Central Collecting Point were near completion. So tenacious was Van Puyvelde’s eagerness, that he arrived at the mine with a convoy of twenty-five trucks without prior authorization. After being initially turned away, Van Puyvelde pleaded with American officials and was allowed to view a portion of the altarpiece in one of the mine chambers. Although unsuccessful, his actions created wide publicity that spurred other nations into requesting involvement in their restitutions.

Léo van Puyvelde

Léo van Puyvelde (1882-1965), was regarded as one of Belgium’s foremost art experts of his time.

In April 1944, the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education in London established the Inter-Allied Commission for the Protection and Restitution of Cultural Materials, better known as the Vaucher Commission. As Belgium’s Director General of the Administration des Beaux-Arts, Van Puyvelde was chosen to lead the Belgian committee. He compiled lists of artworks looted from Belgium, as well as lists

On orders of U.S. Forces European Theater (USFET) and its commander, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the panels were flown to Brussels on August 21, accompanied by Capt. Posey. The next day the panels were transferred to the Royal Palace where Monuments Men Maj. L. Bancel LaFarge, Chief of the MFAA Branch, USFET, Lt. Paul Coremans, respected Belgian art conservator, John Nicholas Brown, and Posey were present to witness the Belgian officials assume custody of the work from the U.S. Army. The altarpiece was displayed in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels. Belgian Monuments Men Léo van Puyvelde, a head curator of the museum and Belgium’s former Director General of the Administration des Beaux-Arts, along with his assistant, Emile Langui, proudly welcomed the altarpiece for display prior to its return to St. Bavo’s Cathedral. To celebrate the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Belgium, the Belgian Prince Regent hosted a formal return ceremony held at the Royal Palace on September 3. Maj. LaFarge returned for the ceremony accompanied by fellow Monuments Men Lt. Col. Mason Hammond, Chief of MFAA Branch USGCC, and Capt. Calvin Hathaway, Hammond’s Deputy Chief.

Paul Coremans, the Belgian Monuments Man who first welcomed the altarpiece upon its arrival home, later became the first director of the Central Laboratory of the Museums of Belgium, and beginning in 1950, oversaw the restoration of the altarpiece. His writing on the subject, *L’Agneau Mystique au Laboratoire*, published in 1953, was ground-breaking in its research and examination of the masterpiece.
‘OMG! Van Eyck was Here’

“For a whole year, everything in the city will bask in the glow of Van Eyck and his impressive masterpiece,” reads the website for the exhibition Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution. The exhibition is currently on display at the Museum of Fine Arts (MSK) Ghent. 2020 is the year of Jan van Eyck in Ghent as the city and its institutions celebrate the works and genius of the Flemish painter.

Beginning in 2012 until this past year, the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA) has executed the restoration of the altarpiece’s panels in stages inside a conservation studio at the MSK Ghent in full view of its visitors. Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution is a culmination of those efforts; the largest exhibition of Jan van Eyck’s known, surviving works – approximately half – with the centerpiece being the Ghent Altarpiece’s exterior panels and the interior Adam and Eve panels. The masterpieces are exhibited with replicas, additional works from Van Eyck’s workshop, and works from his contemporaries, all featured throughout thirteen galleries in the MSK Ghent. The panels will return to St. Bavo’s Cathedral indefinitely after the exhibition (currently closed due to the pandemic), where they will join the remaining interior panels.

‘OMG! Van Eyck was Here,’ is the city’s motto this year and the celebration of the Flemish master and his masterpiece extends beyond the walls of the MSK Ghent. St. Bavo’s Cathedral will welcome patrons in October to their new visitors’ center which will house the restored panels. All of this a testament to the lasting legacy and works of the Flemish master.
What's in Your Attic?

Do you have a cultural object in your attic with a WWII connection that you think should be returned?

Please call
1-866-WWII-ART
(1-866-994-4278)

Please email
wwiiart@monumentsmenfoundation.org

Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.
Concealed Histories
UNCOVERING THE STORY OF NAZI LOOTED ART
AT THE V & A, LONDON

A Foundation team member had the distinct opportunity to visit London’s prestigious Victoria and Albert Museum to examine their pioneering exhibition, Concealed Histories: Uncovering the Story of Nazi Looting. With this advent of this particular exhibition, it’s clear that the museum is aiming to establishing itself as a leader in proactive provenance research. Following the appointment of a Provenance Curator, dedicated explicitly to the Gilbert Collection, the V&A uncovered eight stories of Jewish collectors persecuted by the Nazis with direct links to objects collected by Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert around which the exhibition centers. Like so much of the art looted in Nazi-occupied Europe between 1933 and 1945, it’s often unclear who owned the pieces before the Gilberts acquired them.

Interestingly, the pieces are not displayed all together in one case or even in adjoining cases. Rather, they remain in their original displays scattered throughout gallery rooms and are made identifiable by plaques marked with a letter that corresponds to an explanation in the pamphlet—a scavenger-hunt for the truth. It is to the museum’s credit, that the exhibition pamphlet takes great care to explain the provenance of the pieces succinctly; focusing on their explicit connection to Nazi looting and complete with images of the Jewish collectors the works were taken from.

Since the Gilbert collection is primarily comprised of petite glittering gold, silver, and enameled objects, it’s perhaps unsurprising that its contents appear as innocuous family heirlooms and are, therefore, easily portable. The eight objects in question are three sumptuously decorated snuffboxes, two miniature portraits in gilded frames, a gold plated beaker, an elaborate table clock, and a massive set of gates once belonging to a Kyiv monastery. Objects vastly different in appearance to the Ghent Altarpiece or the Bruges Madonna, famous treasures that often serve as the quintessential image of Nazi-looted art in the public psyche. Except for the gates, it’s easy to suppose how these treasures could readily be slipped into a pocket or hidden in a modestly sized carrying case.

The exhibition—the first of its kind in the UK—does not sanitize the history of these treasures, but instead honors their original Jewish owners and boldly sheds much-needed light on the troubling provenance that accompanies many pieces now housed in public collections. Our hope is that other notable institutions will follow suit and reveal their concealed histories.
Capt. Walter J. Huchthausen was the prototypical Monuments Man. Having studied in Germany while on a fellowship from Harvard, he was fluent in the language and familiar with the country’s museums. His career as an architect was filled with accomplishment including his work as teacher at several universities. In 1942, at thirty-eight years of age, he walked away from having life made to volunteer for military service in the U.S. Army Air Force.

“Hutch,” as he was affectionately known to his comrades, might have started his career as a Monuments Officer following the Normandy landings, alongside Monuments Men George Stout, Jim Rorimer, and a handful of others. However, he suffered a debilitating wound in June 1944, during a V-1 rocket attack of London, that sidelined Huchthausen until the fall. In early December 1944, he reported for duty as the Monuments Officer for U.S. Ninth Army. His first assignment began in the German city of Aachen, where he worked tirelessly to preserve that city’s magnificent medieval cathedral. When a reporter asked why he cared so much about a church in Nazi Germany, he replied with his characteristic magnanimity: “Aachen Cathedral belongs to the world, and if we can prevent it from falling in ruins…we are doing a service to the world.”

During the spring of 1945, Huchthausen made trips into the cities surrounding Aachen, and into the Netherlands, to inspect reports of looted works of art, assess damage to historic buildings, and note those monuments in need of repair. On April 2, slightly more than a month before Germany’s unconditional surrender, Huchthausen and his driver veered into an enemy-controlled area and came under gunfire. Hutch was killed immediately. His slumping body shielded his driver and probably saved his life.

Many tributes to this fine man followed, but none more admiringly than that of his fellow officer (and artist), Monuments Man Capt. Walker Hancock. “The buildings that Hutch hoped, as a young architect, to build will never exist…but the few people who saw him at his job – friend and enemy – must think more of the human race because of him.”

Certainly, one of the most memorable experiences of my life took place in 2012 when, together with the late Monuments Man Harry Ettlinger, I paid my respects to Walter at the site of his burial, the Netherlands American Cemetery in Margraten, Holland. Long may the accomplishments and sacrifice of this fine man live in our memory.
Passing the Baton
THE FAMILY OF MAJOR RONALD E. BALFOUR
ENTRUSTS THE NEXT GENERATION WITH HIS LEGACY

Major Ronald E. Balfour was the first Monuments Man to die during active service on March 10, 1945. On that day, Balfour was accompanying four locals to retrieve and relocate an altarpiece from the nearby Christ the King Church in Cleve, Germany. While en route to the church, incoming artillery struck the street they were walking on, sparing the four local workers, but killing Balfour at just forty years of age.

To this day, a memorial plaque remains mounted to the City Archives Building in Cleve that reads: “Major Ronald E. Balfour, Lector in King’s College of the University of Cambridge, died in action March 1945 near Kloster Spyck. This gentleman saved as British Monuments Officer precious medieval archives and items of lower Rhine towns. Honor to his memory.”

On the evening of the 75th anniversary of his death in central London, the relatives of Maj. Balfour and two members of the United Kingdom’s Cultural Property Protection Unit (CPPU) – a modern successor of the British Monuments Men – gathered to honor his legacy. During their meeting, Delphie Stockwell and Clemancy Gordon-Martin, Balfour’s nieces, along with their husbands, presented to Professor Adrian Parker and Lt. Col. Tim Purbrick of the CPPU, Maj. Balfour’s ‘swagger stick’ in honor of his service and sacrifice and also as a symbolical passing of the responsibility of cultural preservation during armed conflict to this generation. Following their gathering, Lt. Col. Purbrick made the following remarks: “It’s a huge privilege to have such a personal connection to one of the individuals who made it happen. As I walked home with Maj. Balfour’s swagger stick in my hand and as I wrote this with his stick on the desk in front of me, that responsibility to live up to his and the MFAA’s work and sacrifice weighs heavily.”

The Foundation had the honor of viewing Maj. Balfour’s ‘swagger stick’ when it accompanied the Balfour Family to the UK premiere of The Monuments Men film in 2014.
Introducing the Editor

OUR TEAM WELCOMES THE ADDITION OF OUR NEW EDITOR MAYA ASHA MCDONALD

The Monuments Men Foundation is pleased to introduce our loyal readership to our new editor Maya Asha McDonald. A graduate of The University of St Andrews and The Courtauld Institute of Art (similarly to our President Anna Bottinelli), Maya brings a fresh approach to growing our mission and expanding our existing global reach. Increasing awareness across all major social media platforms and diversifying the demographics of our supporters are key elements of this strategy; designed with longevity in mind.

As the editor of the MMF quarterly newsletter, Maya has worked closely with the team to create a graphic language reflective of the Foundation’s aesthetic and content that aligns with our brand values. We hope our readers enjoy this elevated level of engagement and take the time to follow our social media platforms for regular posts from our extensive archives, as well as updates on ongoing projects.

Maya Asha McDonald, portrait by Joalika Funk.

Since we find ourselves self-isolating, it’s an ideal time to do some reading...

Enjoy these titles selected by our team!

**THE MMF BOOKCLUB**

Ghent Altarpiece: Art, History, Science and Religion by Danny Praet and Maximiliaan P.J. Marten, published in 2019, is a dynamic read with a comprehensive focus on the restoration of the altarpiece.

Hitler’s Art Thief: Hildebrand Gurlitt, the Nazis, and the Looting of Europe’s Treasures by Susan Ronald, published in 2015, focuses on the 2013 discovery of over 1,400 artworks valued at around $1.35 billion.

L’Agneau Mystique au Laboratoire by Monuments Men Paul Coremans, published in 1953, still stands as a ground-breaking piece of research and critical examination of the Ghent Altarpiece beloved by academics.
For Immediate Release
November 21, 2019

Dallas, TX...Robert M. Edsel, Founder and Chairman of the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art, today announced the appointment of Anna Bottinelli as President, effective immediately. Ms. Bottinelli joined the Foundation in 2014, advancing to the position of Director of Research in 2017. She was also elected a Foundation trustee later that year.

Under Ms. Bottinelli’s leadership, the Foundation will continue its work locating and returning works of art and other cultural treasures missing since the end of World War II to their rightful owners. It will expand its educational mission by utilizing the legacy of the Monuments Men to engage younger audiences about contemporary threats to the preservation of cultural heritage globally. The Foundation will also capitalize on its visibility to be an impartial but passionate voice on the protection of cultural treasures, and in select art restitution cases.

Mr. Edsel commented, “It has been the privilege of a lifetime to build this great organization and witness many of the Monuments Men and Women honored for their service to civilization during their lifetimes. Much has been accomplished. It is now time for new leadership. Anna will bring a fresh perspective and new ideas to resonate with younger audiences and leverage the broad visibility George Clooney’s 2014 film brought to these heroes. I look forward to continuing to serve the Foundation as a trustee and spokesperson.”

“I am very excited about the opportunity to lead the Monuments Men Foundation into the future,” said Ms. Bottinelli. “With hundreds of tips on missing works of art and cultural objects, 2020 promises to be a very busy year. I also look forward to building on the Foundation’s relationships with leading organizations in the cultural property arena, here and abroad. We are particularly excited about our longstanding relationships with the National Archives, the Italian Carabinieri Cultural Heritage Protection Unit, and the National World War II Museum, home to the Monuments Men Foundation Collection and site of the permanent Monuments Men Gallery, currently under construction. One of my goals is to develop new programs that will capture the imaginations of young people as a way of cultivating the Monuments Men and Women of tomorrow.”

Born and raised in Florence, Italy, Ms. Bottinelli received her B.A. in History of Art graduating magna cum laude from John Cabot University in Rome. In 2011, she received her M.A. in Art History at The Courtauld Institute of Art in London. Following graduation, Ms. Bottinelli served as lead Italian researcher to Mr. Edsel on his New York Times bestseller, Saving Italy: The Race to Rescue a Nation’s Treasures from the Nazis (2013). During her tenure at the Foundation, Ms. Bottinelli has overseen numerous restitutions of cultural objects to individuals and museums in Europe. She has also served as a consultant for Hunting Nazi Treasure, an eight-part investigative documentary series produced by Saloon Media in 2017.
The Monuments Men Foundation has received a major gift from Mr. and Mrs. Randy Best. Anna Bottinelli, President of the Monuments Men Foundation, expressed her gratitude saying, “Randy and Nancy have enthusiastically embraced the mission of the Monuments Men Foundation. Their long-established commitment to education is a natural connection to the Foundation’s developing programs that will bring these heroes’ legacy to young audiences everywhere. The Monuments Men Foundation is deeply appreciative of their generosity and shared vision for preserving and utilizing the Monuments Men and Women’s rich legacy to the fullest extent possible.” If you are interested in becoming a major supporter of the Foundation, please contact Ms. Anna Bottinelli at donate@monumentsmenfoundation.org.

FROM OUR SUPPORTERS

“Your amazing website has been a great help for the college work my daughter has done on the Monuments Men. Besides, your work is so great that we want to support it!”
(Catherine V., Switzerland)

“There is no other foundation more trustworthy or capable of preserving art.”
(Cheryl K., USA)

“Everyone associated with the Monuments Men Foundation [has] left their mark on the world by reminding people about the horror of tyranny.”
(Bob E., USA)

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Thank you for supporting the Foundation’s general programming, research and operations

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Donations may also be made via PayPal to donate@monumentsmenfoundation.org

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