

described how he was “requested by the Ladies [organizing the fair] about a ten days ago to ‘get up’ a Dutchess County Room a hundred years ago.” Lossing then described the installation, which was outfitted with spinning wheels, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century furniture and paintings, pewter plates, “ancient china,” and a Miss Livingston wearing the “rich silk wedding dress of her great grandmother, Mrs. Schuyler” (though the printed handbill he enclosed with Lossing’s letter described the room as “Completely furnished as in that olden time, and the House-keeping carried on by Ladies in Costume, such as our great-grandmothers wore”). The exhibit netted more than \$200 in admission fees in its first day, and Lossing was so keen to convince McAllister of his tip’s value that he attached a separate note to the top of his letter; on a small square of paper he added: “If you wish a successful feature in your Philadelphia Fair, get up a Pennsylvania Room a 100 years ago.” McAllister responded to Lossing two days later, “Much obliged for the suggestion about the ‘Old Penna Room’ – I have seen the Committee about the matter & will write you what they say” (Lossing Papers (Coll. 1807), HSP). Three months later, Philadelphia’s Great Central Fair featured its highly popular “William Penn Parlor.” The parlor has been cited as the original inspiration for the installation of period rooms in American museums; its own inspiration can now be traced back to Lossing and McAllister.

Some of the folders hold evidence of John A. McAllister’s involvement in local activities during the Civil War. While not serving in the military himself (he was nearly forty when the war began), he was a member of the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments, which is represented by a small group of letters and meeting notices in the files (other material can be found in the Civil War Miscellanies Ephemera Collection, McA 5786.F). A folder for the Great Central Fair has letters and certificates acknowledging his donations of goods to be sold at the event, including autographs, caricatures, and photographs. Series II holds a copy of McAllister’s letter to Isabella James, chair of the Relics, Curiosities, and Autographs committee, which accompanied his loan (for exhibition) of the signal books used by Commodore Joshua Barney (1759-1818) during the War of 1812. McAllister had acquired a group of Barney’s papers (see McAllister Small Manuscript Collections (McA MSS 002) for some of these items). Most of McAllister’s Barney material, including the signal books, is now at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

As Sanitary Fairs were held in many cities in the North, there was a regular exchange of fair ephemera among collectors during the war. McAllister’s accumulation is now in the Sanitary Fairs Collection (McA 5781.F), but one collecting methodology is nicely demonstrated in a letter from Claudius B. Nichols (1823-1893), a Brooklyn banker, who asked McAllister to send him the final financial figures—both gross and net—on the Philadelphia fair so he could write them in under the admission tickets he saved in his collection’s scrapbook.

The exchange of money, however, is rarely mentioned in McAllister’s correspondence, but the few letters that do describe financial transactions illustrate the contemporary value of some of the ephemera on the market. An example is a letter from George Hardwick, a Washington, DC, publisher—and composer—of broadside ballads. McAllister ordered from him six copies each