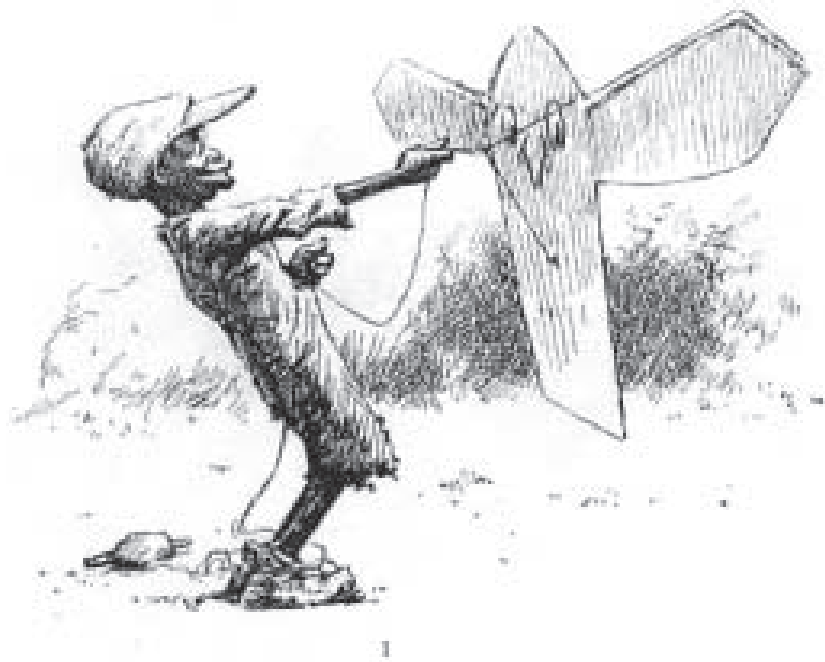


A Segment of American Cultural History

In addition to his large, choice collection of kites from around the world, Scott Skinner, president of the Drachen Foundation, has amassed a comprehensive trove of kite art. Included are prints by Japanese masters Hiroshige and Hokusai, paintings, postage stamps, drawings, cartoons, porcelains, enameled pins, emblazoned clothing, photographs, videos and a vast collection of printed material. He also collects kite flying paraphernalia from around the globe, particularly Asia, such as line, winders, tools, and the raw materials used in kite construction. Some of these objects are works of art in themselves.

Internet auctions have provided Skinner with a new, wonderful source of supply for his kite hoard and one of his recent acquisitions was the set of four drawings from Century magazine reproduced here. They are by illustrator E.W. Kemble and are part of his so-called “comical” images of Southern life. Kemble is perhaps best known for illustrating Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. If the racial stereotyping implied in much of Kemble’s work is now considered inappropriate or even offensive, the drawings are indubitably part of turn-of-the-century American social history. And certainly Kemble’s pen and ink draftsmanship is imaginative, fluid and expert—illustration carried to the edge of fine art.





Although it is his first example, African-American memorabilia it turns out is considered a hot new collectible. PBS's popular "Antiques Road Show" has featured several African-American items and a recent edition even had an expert on the subject who showed slave tags and leg irons and late 19th and early 20th century art work by Kemble and contemporaries.

This was the so-called golden age of American illustration which lasted from about 1880 to 1930. Charles Dana Gibson of Gibson girl fame and Frederick Remington, whose paintings and sculptures romantically mythologized the American West, were Kemble contemporaries and friends. A highly prolific draftsman, Kemble wrote many books, illustrated many more and is avidly collected today.



As Skinner has discovered, collecting for him has become a way of life, a philosophy rather than a mere matter of acquisition. "It is," he says, "a way to fine tune the mind's eye." 🌿