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Tangible Things: Making History through Objects

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ivan Gaskell, Sara Schechner, Sarah Anne Carter, Samantha van Gerbig
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Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ivan Gaskell, Sara Schechner, Sarah Anne Carter, Samantha van Gerbig : Tangible Things: Making History through Objects before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tangible Things: Making History through Objects:

5 of 10 people found the following review helpful. This book is defective - repeat pages AND missing pages.By Gretchen WoodmanI am very excited to have this book, but the copy I received is defective. The pages in the book are in the following order: 1-22, 15-22, 39-46, 39-216. PAGES 22-38 are completely missing! Very bizarre defect! I wrote to the publisher yesterday and got an automated message that I would hear back from them in 24 hours. I have not heard yet, buy I may..... I do not mind keeping the book, but I would like to get the missing pages.I am afraid that the whole print run may be defective, so I am hesitant to order another copy right now.

In a world obsessed with the virtual, tangible things are once again making history. *Tangible Things* invites readers to look closely at the things around them, ordinary things like the food on their plate and extraordinary things like the transit of planets across the sky. It argues that almost any material thing, when examined closely, can be a link between present and past. The authors of this book pulled an astonishing array of materials out of storage--from a pencil manufactured by Henry David Thoreau to a bracelet made from iridescent beetles--in a wide range of Harvard University collections to mount an innovative exhibition alongside a new general education course. The exhibition challenged the rigid distinctions between history, anthropology, science, and the arts. It showed that object-centered inquiry inevitably leads to a questioning of categories within and beyond history. *Tangible Things* is both an introduction to the range and scope of Harvard's remarkable collections and an invitation to reassess collections of all sorts, including those that reside in the bottom drawers or attics of people's houses. It interrogates the nineteenth-century categories that still divide art museums from science museums and historical collections from anthropological displays and that assume history is made only from written documents. Although it builds on a larger discussion among specialists, it makes its arguments through case studies, hoping to simultaneously entertain and inspire. The twenty case studies take us from the Galapagos Islands to India and from a third-century Egyptian papyrus fragment to a board game based on the twentieth-century comic strip "Dagwood and Blondie." A companion website catalogs the more than two hundred objects in the original exhibition and suggests ways in which the principles outlined in the book might change the way people understand the tangible things that surround them.

"*Tangible Things* is a creative book and an experiment that will surely inspire students and colleagues to reflect not just on 'things' per se but also on the clusters, the assemblages, and the heavy editing that they have been subjected to."--Giorgio Riello, *American Historical* "When placed in time and combined with a range of written materials from a variety of disciplines, 'tangible things' help illuminate and sometimes add an affective dimension to contextual understandings. Exhibitions that incorporate this broader view, the authors persuasively argue, can educate viewers in a more nuanced way."--CHOICE "The book ultimately makes it tantalizingly clear that the material world is now, more than ever, in need of analysis."--Stephanie Foote, *Journal of American History* "A highly successful synthesis of interdisciplinary scholarship about museums and knowledge, this book provides a methodological approach that, if adopted by museum professionals and scholars, would revitalize the use of museum collections in exhibition practices."--Helen Sheumaker, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* "I would recommend this book for courses in public history with an emphasis on material culture, as well as for related courses in museum studies, art history, anthropology, and the history of science."--Samuel J. Redman, *The Public Historian*

About the Author
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich taught for fifteen years at University of New Hampshire before moving to Harvard in 1995. She is the author of many books and articles on early American history including *A Midwife's Tale*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for history in 1991, and *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*.
Ivan Gaskell held positions at the Warburg Institute, Cambridge University, and Harvard before moving to the Bard Graduate Center in 2012. His work on material culture addresses intersections among history, art history, anthropology, and philosophy. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of eleven books, and has contributed to numerous journals and edited volumes in history, art history, and philosophy.
Sara J. Schechner is the David P. Wheatland Curator of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments at Harvard University, where she is part of the history of science department and has taught museum studies. She recently received the Joseph H. Hazen Education Prize (2008) of the History of Science Society for a career of innovative and diverse object-based teaching. She lives in a historic house on the National Register and has an archaeological site in her back yard.
Sarah Anne Carter is the curator of the Chipstone Foundation and the Chipstone Fellow in Material Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was previously a lecturer on history and literature at Harvard University. Her research has been supported by several grants, and she has published essays in *The History of Photography*, *The History of Childhood and Youth*, and *The Museum History Journal*.
Samantha van Gerbig is curatorial technician of the Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments at Harvard University.