HUNTINGTON FRONTIERS

FALL/WINTER 2010

Jack London's Photographs

A PASSION FOR ORCHIDS

THE JAPANESE GARDEN APPROACHES ITS CENTENNIAL

The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

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On the Cover

Jack London (1876–1916) was a prolific writer—of novels, short stories, essays, and political tracts. He was also an international journalist, reporting on the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, the homeless of London's East End, the Russo-Japanese War (front cover), and the cruise of the *Snark* (left), among other assignments. Few of his readers today know that he was an accomplished photographer as well, producing nearly 12,000 photographs during his lifetime. In an excerpt from *Jack London, Photographer*, Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Sara S. Hodson highlight some of the more than 200 photos that appear in their new book, which includes images from The Huntington as well as from the California State Parks, Jack London State Historic Park Collection.

Front cover: Girls at Antung Harbor, Manchuria, 1904. *California State Parks Collection*. **Left:** Jack London photographing the hull of the *Snark*. Shipyard of H. P. Anderson, Hunters Point, San Francisco Bay, 1906. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.*

HUNTINGTON
FRONTIERS
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

Huntington Frontiers is published semiannually by the Office of Communications. It strives to connect readers more firmly with the rich intellectual life of The Huntington, capturing in news and features the work of researchers, educators, curators, and others across a range of disciplines.

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The magazine is funded by charitable gifts and advertising revenues. For information about how to support this publication, please contact Randy Shulman, Assistant Vice President for Advancement, 626-405-2293 or rshulman@huntington.org.

Unless otherwise acknowledged, photography provided by The Huntington's Department of Photographic Services.

Printed by Pace Lithographers, Inc.
City of Industry, Calif.

FROM THE EDITOR

HEEDING THE CALL

JACK LONDON IS BEST KNOWN FOR WRITING *THE CALL OF THE WILD*, the story of a domesticated dog from the Santa Clara Valley that ends up leading a sled in the Yukon before ultimately joining a pack of wolves in the wild. In 2008, the book was the focus of The Huntington's Big Read, a series of programs sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and organized by Sara S. "Sue" Hodson, curator of literary manuscripts at The Huntington.

While many readers may know that London heeded his own call to adventure, few are likely aware that he took thousands of photographs of those experiences—from documenting war zones and the aftermath of natural disasters to taking candid shots of the working crews of sailing vessels and the inhabitants of the Solomon Islands. Many of those images have been gathered into a new book, *Jack London, Photographer*, which includes photographs from The Huntington's own voluminous London archive as well as from the California State Parks, Jack London State Historic Park Collection. In this issue of *Huntington Frontiers*, Hodson and co-author Jeanne Campbell Reesman explain how London's insatiable appetite to follow the action is conveyed in the immediacy of his writing and photography (page 16).

Botanist Lance Birk has long felt the pull of nature, although for him the focus has been on the singular quest for orchids. He has trekked through Mexico, Indonesia, China, and the Philippines, developing a specialty in paphiopedilums (or "lady slipper" orchids) along the way. Although international regulations have long restricted the collecting of species from the wild, Birk encourages young enthusiasts such as Brandon Tam to get out into the world to observe orchids in their native habitats. The two are helping to care for 6,000 orchids donated by the family of the late collector and grower S. Robert Weltz (page 11), a gift that will help The Huntington become a center for orchid conservation.

By all accounts, Weltz threw himself into a hobby that became his life's work, hybridizing countless award-winning orchids. What passes as orchid fever is really no different from Jack London fever. A passion takes hold in a collector who someday becomes a donor. It then spreads to curators, volunteers, interns, and researchers. Appropriately, *Jack London, Photographer* is dedicated to two people who epitomize the untold ways various vocations often converge around a particular collection. Milo Shepard, who died recently at the age of 84, was the literary executor of the London estate and donated many items to The Huntington over the years. Earle Labor is a scholar who has used the archive for decades and will soon publish a new London biography. "To Milo Shepard and Earle Labor," the dedication page reads, "for their vision."

MATT STEVENS

Opposite page, upper left: A Japanese teahouse, called the Arbor of Pure Breeze, was given to The Huntington this year by the Pasadena Buddhist Church. *Photo by Andrew Mitchell*. **Bottom:** Cossack officer on horse, Seoul, Korea, 1904. *Photo by Jack London. Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*. **Right:** The award-winning *Paphiopedilum dollgoldi* 'Laurie Susan Weltz,' from the recently donated orchid collection of S. Robert Weltz. *Photo by Heidi Kirkpatrick*.

[VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2]

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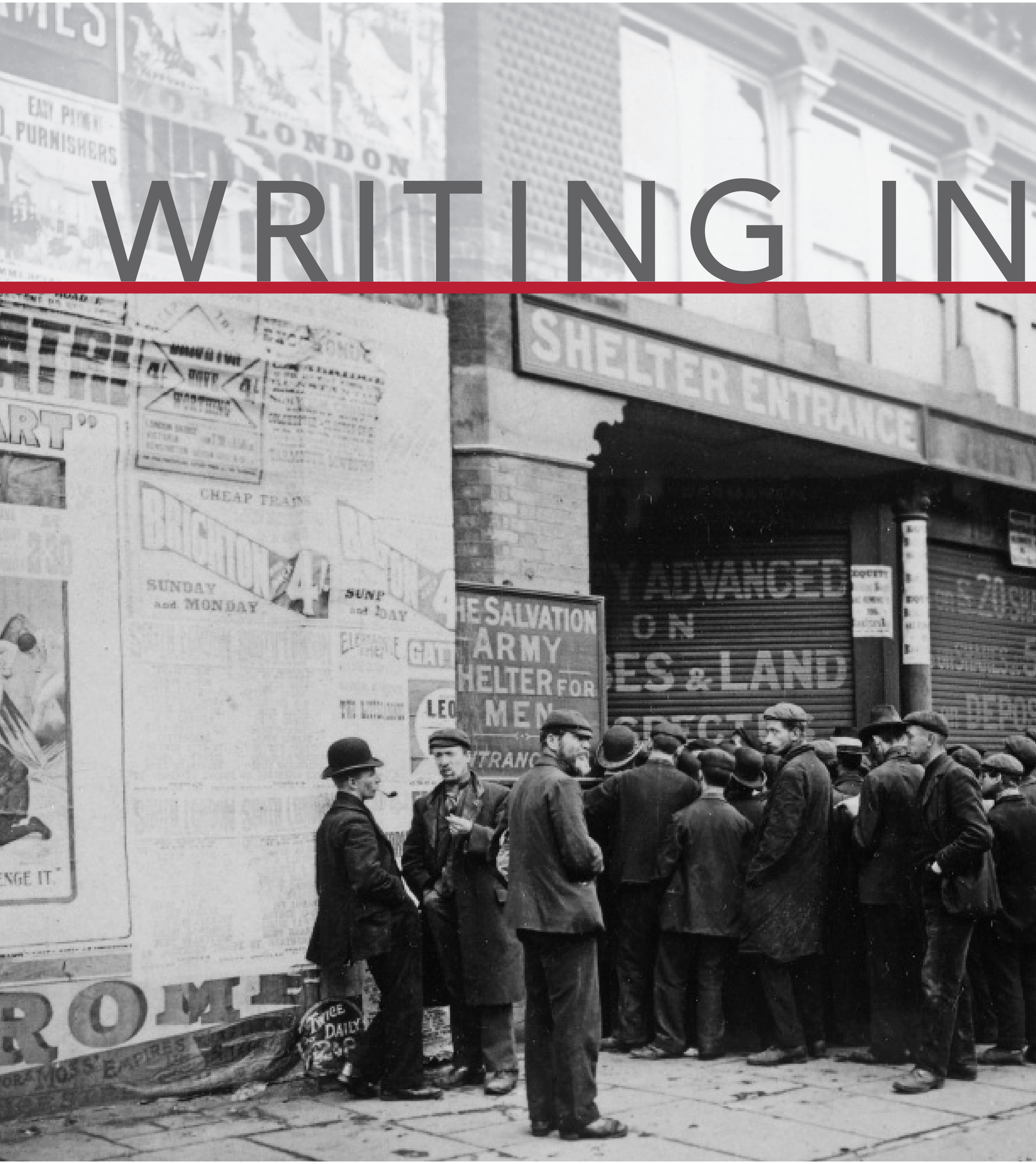
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LIGHT

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JACK LONDON

By Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Sara S. Hodson

The Huntington is home to the largest archive of Jack London materials in the world, spanning some 50,000 items and following the great California writer from Alaska to Hawaii to Asia and beyond. London may be known best for his iconic novel, *The Call of the Wild*, but, in fact, he had a colorful stint as a photojournalist, chronicling current events at the turn of the 20th century. A new book examines London's eye for adventure and reproduces, for the first time, his remarkable photographs of key moments in history. It showcases photos from The Huntington and the California State Parks, Jack London State Historic Park Collection.

When new war correspondent Jack London arrived in Moji, Japan, to cover the Russo-Japanese War for the Hearst newspapers, he was arrested by military police. The Japanese authorities suspected London of being a Russian spy. But, as he relates in one of his earliest newspaper dispatches in February 1904, "How Jack London Got in and out of Jail in Japan," a Japanese journalist succeeded in securing the return of his camera. London recalls his meeting with a reporter for the *Osaka Asahi Shimbun*: "I could have thrown my arms around him then and there—not for the camera, but for brotherhood, as he himself expressed it the next moment, because we were brothers in craft. Then we had tea together and talked over the prospects of war."

London (1876–1916) went on to cover the war in Korea as one of the first and only correspondents to reach the front lines, though he was repeatedly arrested and returned to Seoul. (The land battles of the war were fought mainly in Korea and Manchuria.) He sent regular dispatches on battles largely unseen by anyone but the participants, and he made dramatic photographs, mostly behind the lines. These images and accounts, along with his few actual battle photographs, ran across the front pages of the *San Francisco Examiner* and in syndicated papers worldwide. London's hundreds of photographs capturing military scenes and the daily lives of Korean refugees and Japanese foot soldiers form an extraordinary record of what he called the "human documents" of the war. This period of his development as a photographer coincided with his first worldwide acclaim as a writer, especially for his novels *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904).

The term *photographie*, coined by French explorer Hércules Florence, means "writing in light." As a writer who was also a practicing photographer, London was not unique, though few so excelled in both roles. Artists contemporary with London who were interested in both photography and literature included the writers Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Stephen Crane as well as the photographers Edward Steichen, Walker Evans, and Alfred Stieglitz.

Of course, London was not primarily a photographer who had adventures but rather an adventurer and writer who

made photographs. Yet he thought of himself as a professional: he expected to sell his photographic output just as he did his writing. The subject matter—the English poor, Korean refugees, Japanese soldiers, tent cities in the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, prisoners of war in Veracruz, a sailing crew rounding the Horn, fieldworkers in Hawaii, and the disappearing societies of the Marquesas and other South Seas islands—also makes his photographs of value to military historians, cultural geographers, and anthropologists.

This period of his development as a photographer coincided with his first worldwide acclaim as a writer.

The sense of realism—"writing in light"—that pervades London's fiction also informs his photography. His writings have been described as both realistic and romantic, but most often they are termed naturalistic. Influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin, and using the techniques of the French novelist Émile Zola, American naturalistic writers such as London, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser depicted the lives of the poor as struggles against the pitiless and illimitable forces of biology and society. Though many of their protagonists are heroic, they are not usually able to overcome the forces arrayed against them. These writers employed a documentary, photographic use of detail that contrasted strongly with the leisurely accumulation of details in realist novels.

In his photographs as in his fiction, London most often sought to capture the common emotional life of his subjects. Even in his photographs of the many buildings destroyed by the San Francisco earthquake, his compositions evoke the human toll of the cataclysm, sometimes by contrasting the size of human subjects with the massive ruins around them. London sought to depict the potential for human drama. He was drawn to any subject—even a ruined city hall that would later be rebuilt—that indicated something of the struggle to survive. ❧

Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Sara S. Hodson, together with Philip Adam, are the co-authors of Jack London, Photographer, *published by the University of Georgia Press. This article has been adapted from the book, with permission of the publisher. Reesman is the Ashbel Smith Professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio; Hodson is the curator of literary manuscripts at The Huntington.*

Opposite: London had his camera confiscated in Japan and was often detained by Japanese officials when he got too close to the front lines, especially as the war spread to the Yalu River, the boundary between Korea and Manchuria. Korea, 1904. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*. **Page 16:** Weary and hungry men line up outside the entrance to Salvation Army shelter, London, 1902. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*. **Above:** While his dispatches were published on the front page of the *San Francisco Examiner* and syndicated in other newspapers, London also became the subject of interest in his own right. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*. **Below:** Assessing the damage, San Francisco, 1906. *California State Parks Collection*.

"Small Doss House." A lodging house, London, 1902. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*.

"And I thought of my own spacious West, with room under its sky and unlimited air for a thousand Londons; and here was this man, a steady and reliable man, never missing a night's work, frugal and honest, lodging in one room with two other men, paying two dollars and a half per month for it, and out of his experience adjudging it to be the best he could do! And here was I, on the strength of the ten shillings in my pocket, able to enter in with my rags and take up my bed with him. The human soul is a lonely thing, but it must be very lonely sometimes when there are three beds to a room, and casuals with ten shillings are admitted."

From *The People of the Abyss*

"Feng Wang Chen," Korea, 1904. *California State Parks*.

"At 10 o'clock the Japanese battery on the right fired the first gun. Following the report was a sound as of the violent ripping of a vast sheet of cloth, as the shell tore through the atmosphere and sighed away in the distance. Two miles away, across the river and to the right of Tiger Hill, there was a bright flash, a puff of smoke and a dust-cloud rose where the flying shrapnel tore the earth."

From "Give Battle to Retard Enemy," Antung [Manchuria], in *Jack London Reports*

City Hall ruins from City Hall Avenue near Larkin Street, San Francisco, 1906. The rails and ties in the foreground were placed on top of the pavement for debris removal. *California State Parks*.

"An hour later I was creeping past the shattered dome of the City Hall. Than it there was no better exhibit of the destructive force of the earthquake. Most of the stone had been shaken from the great dome, leaving standing the naked framework of steel. Market Street was piled high with the wreckage, and across the wreckage lay the overthrown pillars of the City Hall shattered into short cross-wire sections."

From "The Story of an Eye-Witness," in *Jack London Reports*

"Some of the King's Household," Samoa, 1908. *California State Parks.*

The *Dirigo*'s sails and deck, 1912. *California State Parks*.

"Day had come, and the sun should have been up an hour, yet the best it could produce was a somber semi-twilight. The ocean was a stately procession of moving mountains. A third of a mile across yawned the valleys between the great waves. Their long slopes, shielded somewhat from the full fury of the wind, were broken by systems of smaller whitecapping waves, but from the high crests of the big waves themselves the wind tore the whitecaps in the forming. This spume drove masthead high, and higher, horizontally, above the surface of the sea."

From "A Little Account with Swithin Hall"

Three Constitutionialist officers, Veracruz, Mexico, 1914. *Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*.