

## A Magic Collector's Bookplate

Wouldn't you really rather have a Bewick?

Rex Conklin

Two seemingly unrelated events, both occurring in late 2003, kindled my interest in researching the origins of my father's bookplate. The October issue of the *Caxtonian* included a letter from former *Caxtonian* Willam Hesterberg, asking for assistance with a research project documenting the whereabouts of some 1300 Thomas Bewick blocks. That same month, a Swann Galleries auction featured the collection of magic scholar F. William Kuethe, Jr.

Kuethe edited and published a collectors' periodical titled *The Magic Cauldron* from 1962 until 1977. As a young child, I vividly recall my dad's anxiously awaiting each issue and thoroughly savoring its contents. It was replete with scholarly discussions on the history of conjuring and the foibles and triumphs of those equally blessed and cursed by the passion of acquiring the books, apparatus and ephemera that chronicle and celebrate magic's past. This legacy was handed down from father to son as my interest in books and the history of magic blossomed in the years following my father's passing.

In the December 1964 issue of the *Cauldron* Kuethe included supplements consisting of a checklist of magicians' bookplates and examples thereof. In describing the bookplate supplement he wrote: "...The most interesting to me...is Rex Conklin's. He writes: 'enclosed is one of my bookplates, which has been made from an original Bewick (pronounced Buick) woodcut. Bewick was born in the latter



This copper engraving was made from the original Bewick wood engraving; it permitted printing without risk to the original. The quarter is included to establish scale.

part of the 18th century and was noted for his exceptional woodcuts...it depicts a 13th century magician with his bag of tricks loaded on his back and the Devil hanging on behind him on his journey to the next village."

I was in fact aware that my father had used this image on his bookplate, but knew nothing of its history or significance other than being told that the printing block in question was quite valuable. I was admonished, as was often the case in my childhood, not to touch it. As a parent of young children today, I of course well understand his apprehension.

Englishman Thomas Bewick, (1753–1828) elevated the age-old art of engraving on wood, using boxwood cut across the grain, rather than along the grain. Its hard, close-grained wood allows

fine, detailed cutting which can survive many impressions without showing signs of wear. This master demonstrated not only the artistic potential of the medium, but also the commercial viability of producing high-quality illustrated books at relatively low prices.

Bewick's most notable works include: *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1790) and *History of British Birds* in two volumes. The first volume, *Land Birds*, was originally published in 1797. The second, *Water Birds*, in 1804. In these works, Bewick depicted birds and animals in incredible detail and captured the social history of northeast Britain in his vignettes. When famed naturalist John James Audubon (1785-1851) visited England, a highlight of his trip was a visit paid to Bewick in 1827,

See BOOKPLATE, page 10



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# Poetry Magazine:

The Cinderella of the arts

Joseph Like

*"To have great poets/ there must be great audiences too."—Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup>*

As early as 1892, native Chicagoan Harriet Monroe (1860-1936) strove "for a uniquely American character of the poem."<sup>2</sup> As a poet, Monroe made her mark at Chicago's Columbian Exposition when she persuaded officials that they needed an official dedication poem for the opening ceremonies. She further convinced them that she was the only poet who could write it and that they should pay her the unprecedented sum of \$1,000 for her 2,200-line poem, "Columbian Ode."<sup>3</sup> The payment was more remarkable than the poem, whose lines emphasized "the role of America as the custodian of 'the Spirit of Freedom' and 'the purpose of God'" and "consistently used traditional styles and images."<sup>4</sup>

Later, at the age of 50 during a grand world tour, Monroe conceived of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*.<sup>5</sup> After touring European museums and cathedrals, Monroe struck upon the idea of building an audience for contemporary American poetry by printing "the best poetry written today, in whatever style, genre, or approach."<sup>6</sup> Monroe envisioned her magazine as "the place"

where the best in poetic arts could be displayed for the enlightenment of a growing American audience for poetry. As Monroe stated, "The people must grant a hearing to the best poets they have, else they will never have better."<sup>7</sup>

Today, we like to think of Monroe's magazine as doing just that. *Poetry* published some of the first works of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and Carl Sandburg. It launched the careers of many of these poets. On the other hand, Monroe's selection of poets and poems for publication was often unremarkable. A reader can peruse whole stacks of early editions of *Poetry* and find few poets whose names are well

known today. Even during Monroe's lifetime, *Poetry* had a mixed reputation among writers. William Carlos Williams once referred to the publication as Harriet's "folded diaper of a periodical," and went on to say that it was "without any significance except as per cash paid for work."<sup>8</sup>

From its founding in 1912, however, *Poetry* has never missed a monthly printing and bills itself as "the oldest monthly devoted to verse in the English-speaking world."<sup>9</sup> Monroe died in 1936, passing the editorship of the magazine to various editors. In 1941, the Modern Poetry Association was formed as a public charity that supported the publishing of the magazine. The magazine struggled on for years, often with little or no resources. "At one low point during the 1950's the magazine had \$100 in its coffers."<sup>10</sup>

In 1976, a young literature professor, Joseph Parisi, joined *Poetry*. Parisi had been a scholar of the Renaissance and brought his sense of classical literature to the task of publishing contemporary American poetry. In 1983, Parisi became the editor and continued the magazine's tradition of an open door submission policy and published many emerging poets.

Parisi worked hard to keep *Poetry* and its Association going.

He moved their offices into the Newberry Library, where they enjoyed shared, albeit small and inconspicuous, space. Funds, though, were still tight; payments to the printer were often late, and the magazine even held an emergency fund-raiser just to pay its phone bill.<sup>11</sup>

Parisi also brought his understanding of Renaissance patronage to the magazine and cultivated an important relationship with Ruth Lilly, the last surviving great-grandchild of the founder of the Indiana-based Eli Lilly and Co. pharmaceutical firm. In the 1970's, Lilly submitted a few poems to *Poetry* under the name of Mrs. Guernsey Van Riper, Jr. of Indianapolis. Parisi rejected the poems, sending back a per-



*Harriet Monroe, as she appeared in the August, 1920 Vanity Fair, reproduced on the Yale Library Web site.*

# POETRY

DECEMBER 2004

\$3.75  
(\$5.00 in Canada)

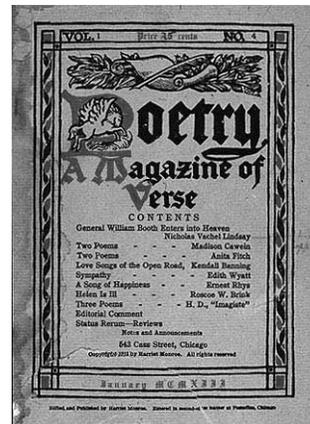


AMY BEEDER, REGINALD GIBBONS, H. L. HIX,  
ROSANNA WARREN, NANCE VAN WINCKEL,  
DEAN YOUNG, and others

MATTHEW DOHERTY: *Poet in Iraq*  
DAVID ORR on GOOD POEMS and BAD MEN  
BRENDA WINEAPPLE on SHARON OLDS  
JON MOOALLEM remembers MICHAEL DONAGHY

Plus, the NEA responds to ELEANOR WILNER

Poetry magazine, now.



Poetry magazine, then (1913 and 1938). Reproduced from the Yale and University of New England web sites, respectively.

sonal letter with handwritten notes.<sup>12</sup>

In 1985, Lilly endowed the Ruth Lilly Professorship in Poetry at Indiana University. Parisi was a regular presenter at Indiana University's summer Writer's Conference and met the Lilly professor there. In 1986, the \$100,000 Lilly Prize was established by Lilly through the Modern Poetry Association to honor a U.S. Poet "whose accomplishments warrant extraordinary recognition."<sup>13</sup> In 1989, Lilly created two more prizes through *Poetry* and the Modern Poetry Association: the Ruth Lilly Fellowships of \$15,000 each for undergraduate and graduate student poets.

Ruth Lilly, a semi-recluse who has spent

most of her life under care for depression, rarely leaves her home. Parisi has never met her in person; he corresponds with her through her attorneys, who "always asked [Parisi] to personally oversee the [award] programs."<sup>14</sup> Lilly does, however, serve on the board of the Modern Poetry Association. More importantly, Parisi made sure she received the stewardship her extraordinary gifts deserved.

"...poetry, 'The Cinderella of the Arts.'" —Harriet Monroe<sup>15</sup>

On a Friday afternoon in November 2001, Parisi received a phone call from Lilly's attorney, who was preparing a new

estate plan for Mrs. Lilly that included the Association as a beneficiary. "He told me I better sit down," Parisi said, "because it was going to be quite a large amount of money."<sup>16</sup> The lawyer estimated the unrestricted gift to be \$100-\$150 million. "You must have the decimal wrong," Parisi said.<sup>17</sup>

In November of 2002, at the magazine's 90th-anniversary dinner, Parisi announced Mrs. Lilly's gift to a stunned audience. The former United States' poet laureate, Billy Collins, summed up the feeling, "*Poetry* has always had the reputation of being the poor little match girl of the arts. Well, the poor little match girl just hit the lottery."<sup>18</sup>

"Ask anyone who has won the lottery, and he will tell you what a mixed blessing it can be." —Joseph Parisi<sup>19</sup>

In June of 2003, after 20 years as the editor of *Poetry*, Parisi hand-picked Christ-

ian Wiman, 38, a writer and former Lilly Fellowship winner, to be his replacement. Wiman has stated that Parisi selected him because *Poetry* "needed a bit of jolt."<sup>20</sup>

Although it has been ranked "number one" by *Writer's Digest* as the journal poets would "most like to see their bylines in," *Poetry* has recently "been criticized for being too conservative and narrow in its selections."<sup>21</sup> Other poets, especially younger poets, "call the magazine, 'OWG' for 'Old White Guys,' and charge it with ignoring the avant-garde and poetry by minorities."<sup>22</sup>

Parisi also turned the reins over to

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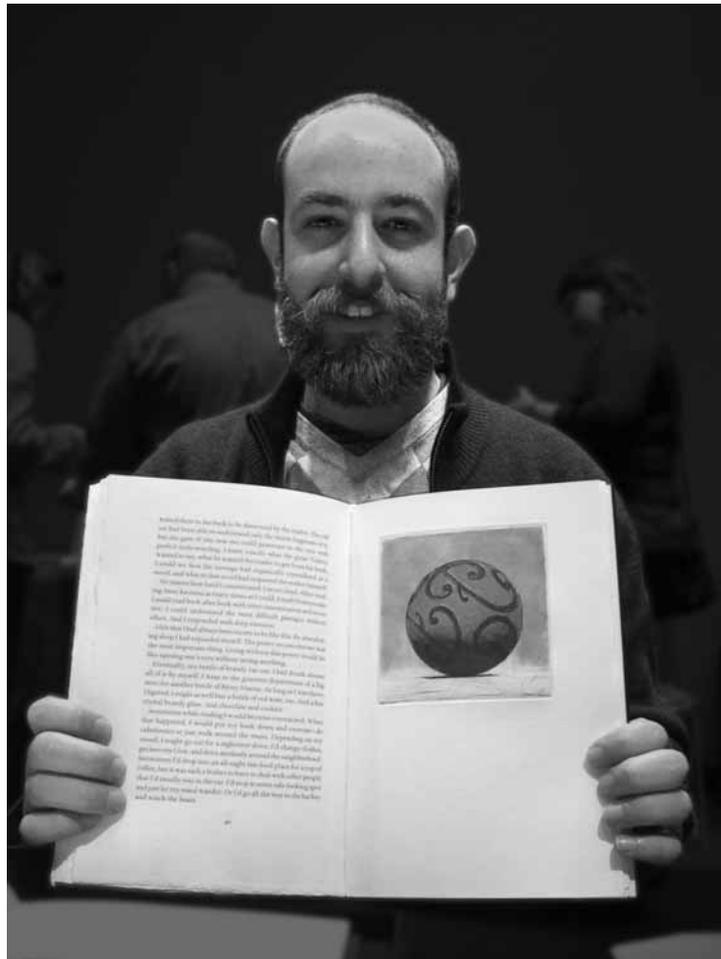
# Report from Silver Spring

The Pyramid Atlantic Book Arts Fair

Robert McCamant

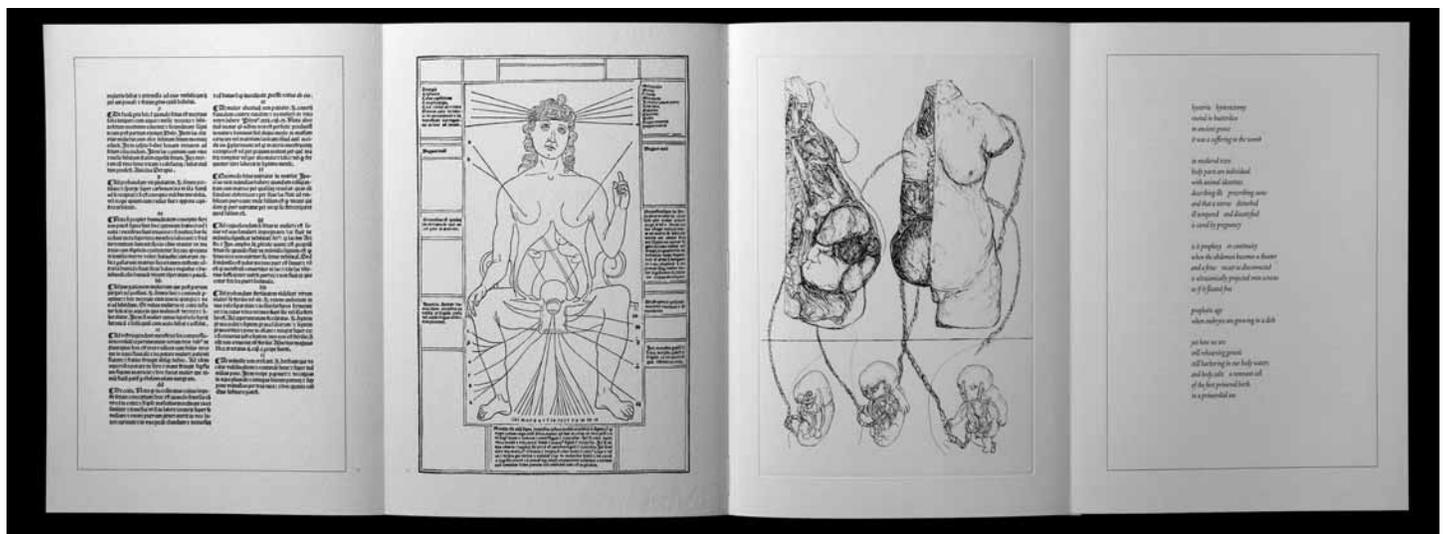
Pyramid Atlantic is a non-profit center for the book and paper arts in Silver Spring, Maryland. It has sponsored a book fair in the fall of alternate years which has become one of the premiere artist-book fairs on the calendar. My own Sherwin Beach Press exhibited there in 2002, and we decided to go again this fall. Two other Chicago-area presses made the same decision: Caxtonian Craig Jobson's Lark Sparrow Press and book artist Karen Hanmer of Glenview.

Jobson had finished copies of his *The Billy Chronicles*, *Republic of Texas Mini Stamp Album*, *I Am Already* and *Totally Legal Abecedarium*. The three-volume *Chronicles* is the most ambitious of these: a set of three different concertina books, each with a CD of the performed story, bound in a box with a set of tournament-quality dominoes. The books were handset and include Jobson's own color illustrations. *I Am Already* was printed from Ludlow type cast on equipment which Caxtonian



Michael Russem with his newest book, *Sleep*.

A spread from *The Anatomy Lesson: Unveiling the Fasciculus Medicinae*. Photo courtesy Robin Price, Publisher

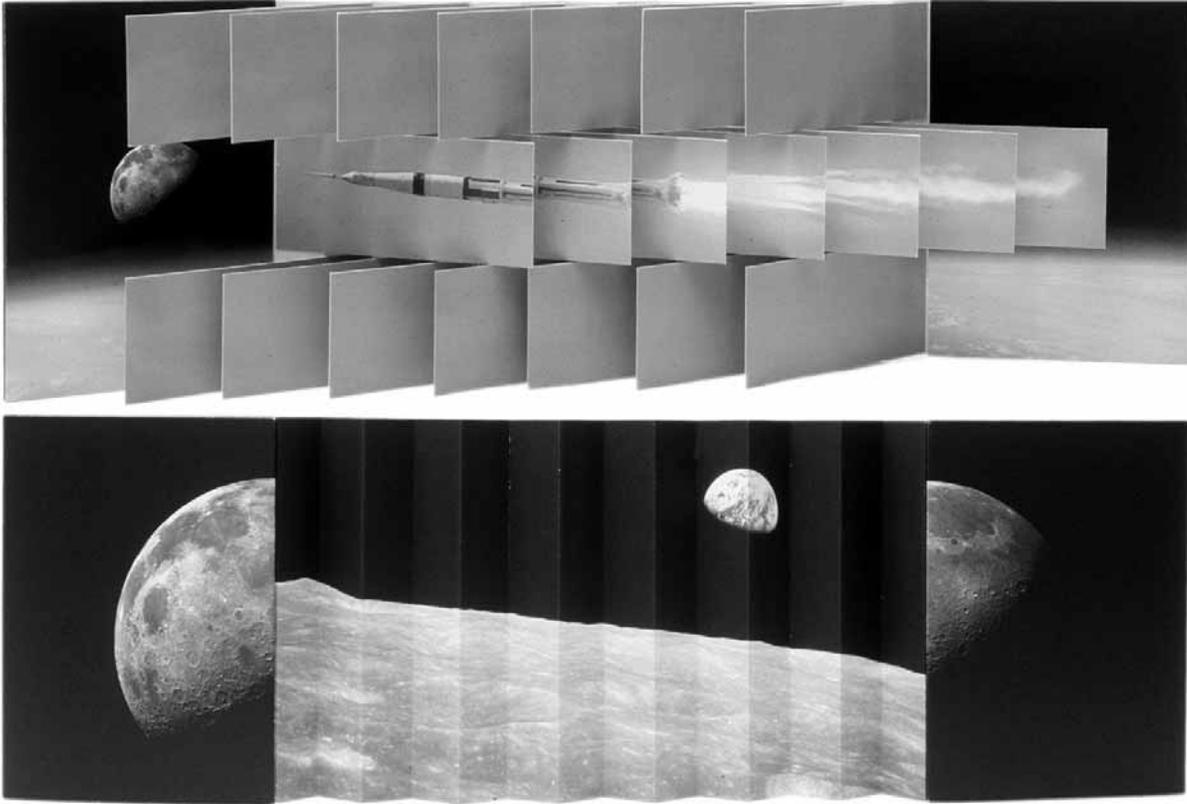


Caryl Seidenberg acquired from Caxtonian Bruce Beck.

Karen Hanmer's books explore the possibilities of the visual. They are printed by pigmented inkjet, and are frequently done in a "flag book" structure developed by Heidi Kyle. The deceptively small and simple books can be manipulated into a variety of images and narratives, and enjoyed in linear fashion, page by page, or opened out to reveal the entire story or image at one time.

Other highlights of the show were books by Julie Chen, Michael Russem, Robin Price, and Chip Schilling.

Julie Chen brought her Flying Fish Press books all the way from Berkeley, California. She had just completed a prototype of *True To Life* in time for the show. This extraordinary object, more like a game than a book, uses unique sliding pages to explore the relationship between memory and reality. Not only do you get specific intentional openings, but you get the marvelous juxtapositions created by the transition between openings, when two



Front and back views of *Destination Moon*, by Karen Hanmer of Glenview (photo courtest Karen Hanmer).

Each volume of Caxtonian Craig Jobson's *The Billy Chronicles* comes complete with a set of tournament-quality dominoes.



are each partially visible. It was named the Best Book of the Fair, winning Chen a \$500 prize.

It's always a pleasure when Northampton-based Michael Russem can spare the time between his contract printing and design work (his principal client is *21st: The Journal of Contemporary Photography*, which publishes photography books with letterpress text and platinum-print photographs) to bring out a new

Kat Ran Press title. At this fair he was showing his just-completed *Sleep*, a short story by Haruki Murakami with multi-color etchings by John Gibson. It is a lavish edition on Twinrocker paper with a leather binding by Claudia Cohen.

I have long admired the work of Robin Price, who prints in Middletown, Connecticut. Her recent *Language of Her Body* is extremely beautiful. But her current book is a truly extraordinary effort. It came about because of the interest of artist Joyce Cutler-Shaw in the 1495 *Fasciculus Medicinae*, one of the earliest manuals of human physiology known. The resulting book is a series of four-page-across spreads. On the left is a pair of pages from the 1495 book. On the right are pages with poems and illustrations by Cutler-Shaw (reproduced by photogravure). Commentary by nine different

See *PYRAMID ATLANTIC*, page 6

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authors appears on the back sides of the pages. And if that were not enough, Price supplies a very medical-looking stainless-steel slipcase for the whole thing.

Chip Schilling's Indulgence Press was new to me at the event, though he has been printing for many years. He works out of Minneapolis. Claire Van Vliet is among his influences. His new book, published this summer, was what caught my eye. It is called *Surplus Value Books #13*. His own description: "Rick Moody's short story is a character study of a particular bookseller. The story is told through the description of books for sale in a bookseller's catalog." You can buy just the book, or you can buy the deluxe edition which comes in a Daniel Kelm box with many appropriate objects, including a straightjacket. (This imaginary bookseller had a few loose screws.)

In addition to the books on display the event included two days of talks on related topics. Although I didn't attend many of them because I was generally at the Sherwin Beach table, one I did attend was the slide-talk of Ruth Laxson, an artist-bookmaker from Atlanta who discovered artist books at the age of 63, in 1980. Some of her books are letterpress (she loves to write while holding a composing stick), while others are collages of handwriting, drawing, and found items, reproduced by offset lithography and printed at Atlanta's Nexus Press. "I try to take the glut of information in the world and make it into something pithy," she declared.

#### BOOK EXHIBITORS MENTIONED:

Craig Jobson  
Lark Sparrow Press  
1726 Ashland, Evanston, IL 60201  
847-869-0085  
craig@larksparrow.press.com  
www.larksparrowpress.com

Karen Hanmer  
709 Rosedale Rd., Glenview, IL 60025  
847-724-6324  
karen@karenhanmer.com  
www.karenhanmer.com



Julie Chen's True To Life, shown halfway between openings 7 and 8.

Julie Chen  
Flying Fish Press  
490 Colusa Ave., Berkeley,  
CA 94707  
510-526-5204  
Jchen@flyingfishpress.com  
www.flyingfishpress.com

Michael Russem  
Kat Ran Press  
221 Pine Street, Florence,  
MA 01062  
413-584-1152  
katran@crocker.com  
www.katranpress.com

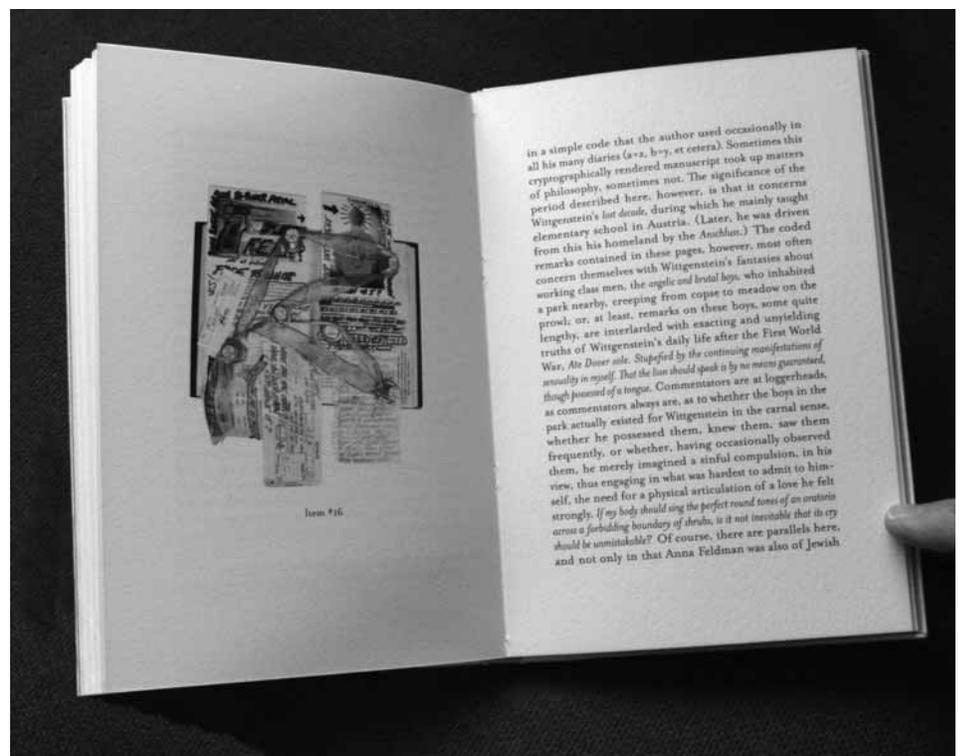
Robin Price, Publisher  
Starr Mill, Beverly Heights,  
Middletown, CT 06457  
860-344-8644  
rprice@wesleyan.edu

Chip Schilling  
Indulgence Press  
1332 Marshall St NE,  
Minneapolis, MN 55413  
612-379-4743  
chip@indulgencepress.com  
www.indulgencepress.com

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Except as noted, photographs  
by Robert McCamant.

A spread from *Surplus Value Books #13*. Indulgence Press.



# The Nobel Prize Committee

Caxton Club bookreaders

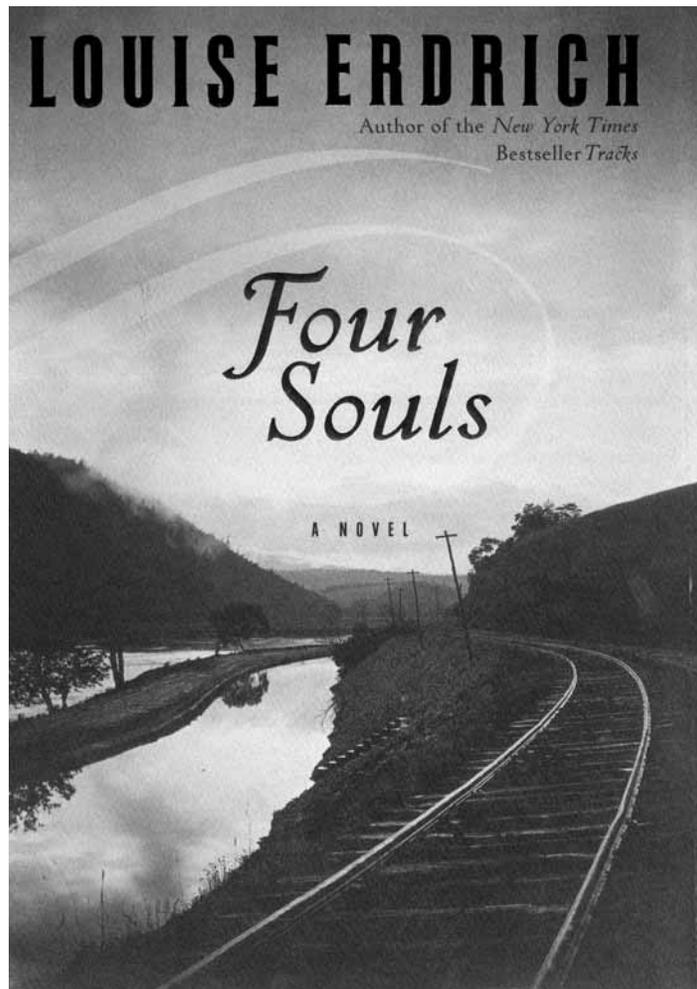
Wendy Cowles Husser

During the last three years, under the leadership of Junie Sinson, with Professor Robin Metz from Knox College nominating the chosen candidate, a group of Caxton reading enthusiasts has been meeting to read, discuss, dissent, consent, and decide on an author to be recommended for nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature. With Professor Metz's concurrence, a nomination is submitted to the Swedish Academy.

It goes without saying that the assembled group was somewhat self-selected, and consisted of serious readers who wanted the challenge of a sometimes ardent dialogue about literature. We talked about the plan for the year ahead, and Junie Sinson described the Swedish Academy's internal workings, detailing what the Academy looks for. From inception the group divided into interest groups to read authors suggested by members and by Professor Metz. Because many nominations

are sent to the Academy and emanate from all over the world, we decided to focus on American authors, and, when possible, even on the Midwest if we could.

Often, committee members had longstanding interests in a particular author, or had read all the works of one playwright, and it naturally fell to those to prepare a report on that author. There was an interesting debate about, for example, John Barth. At one point, only one member could honestly understand the writings, even though most of us were dazzled by Barth's early works. The complicated language in the recent books we read became



The committee selected Louise Erdrich during 2004 for the 2005 nomination.

more universally off-putting and difficult to understand, and in the end Mr. Barth had to float alone with his own opera.

In the final discussion about each book, Junie assigned the responsibility for bringing balance to each author's discussion, and these participants prepared the critical analysis, i.e., what critics had to say, what drawbacks the author's work presented. This was a particularly sticky point during the 2003-04 final decision because we studied two fine Native Americans, both with many literature awards already, and reporting negatives for either one was not easy.

In 2002-03 Professor Metz nominated the environmentalist Wendell Berry. Studied during the year were playwrights Arthur Miller, David Mamet, and Edward Albee; poet Rita Dove; Historian Gary Wills; literature authors Philip Roth, John Barth, and John Updike. Participants in the group that year were Sherman Beverly, Michael Evanoff, Dr. Michael Huckman, Joanne Baumgartner, Edward Quatrocchi, Scott Sinson, Charles Miner, Wendy Husser, Truman Metzger, Thomas Joyce, Bill Locke, Robert Brook, and leader, Junie Sinson. The year proved particularly challenging to reach consensus, and the group lost a member who opposed the choice for nomination.

For 2003-04 the group's list of reading material included that of J.M. Coetzee, and continued with Wendell Berry; the poet again chosen was Rita Dove, literature authors were Joyce Carol Oates,

Norman Mailer, William Kennedy, E.L. Doctorow, and Margaret Atwood; playwright was August Wilson. The core group was again in attendance, with the addition of Peggy Sullivan, Robert Schenck, and Marcie Schenck. The group recommended J.M. Coetzee for the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature; to our great surprise, Coetzee was chosen for the 2003 award by the Swedish Academy before the posting of Professor Metz's recommendation for the 2004 award. As a result, Professor Metz again nominated Wendell Berry, our consensus decision from the previous year. So, See NOBEL NOMINEE, page 8

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Wiman so that he could concentrate on other changes and concerns of the organization. The Modern Poetry Association changed its name to the Poetry Foundation. It also changed its status from a charitable organization to a private operating organization. The change also meant long meetings with lawyers and financial advisors—hardly the stuff of poetry.

Parisi's new concerns also included a lawsuit against National City Bank of Indiana, the bank in charge of managing the transfer of Lilly's gift. The gift is to be given to the Poetry Foundation through a series of trusts funded with greatly appreciated Eli Lilly Stock. *Poetry* and several other beneficiaries of Lilly's largess charge the bank with losing almost 40% of the value of the gift by not selling the stock at the right time.

Shortly after receiving the gift, the Board of the Poetry Foundation and Parisi decided to part ways. While the split was reported to be amiable, there are reports that Parisi and the Board could not agree on the new direction for the Foundation.

Last February, the Poetry Foundation board announced the appointment of John Barr, poet and former Wall Street banker, as president of the Foundation. Barr is an interesting choice given his background in finance and experience with serving on the boards of poetry organizations. Barr has stated that his goal for the Poetry Foundation is to "raise poetry to a more visible and influential position in American culture."<sup>23</sup> How Barr and the Poetry Foundation propose to do that is not well known, but it is interesting to note how things cycle back to their beginnings. Barr's goals are very similar to the goals of Harriet Monroe: to build an enlightened, mass audience for poetry.

(*Editor's note:* Caxtonians have an opportunity to learn the latest about *Poetry* on January 19, when Barr speaks to our monthly dinner meeting. See page 12 for details.)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"The Writer's Almanac, Poetry," 101.1 FM (Champaign-Urbana), Friday, December 23, 1999, 12:50 PM.

<sup>2</sup>"The Literary Reception of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, 1893," Irinia Klein, doctoral dissertation, der Technischen Universität Carolo-Wilhelmina zu Braunschweig, October 8, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>"The Writer's Almanac."

<sup>6</sup> *Poetry* magazine Web site.

<sup>7</sup>"Harriet Monroe," *Famous American Women*, Hope Stoddard, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> William Carlos Williams in a letter to Mitchell Dawson, Mitchell Dawson papers, Newberry Library.

<sup>9</sup> *Poetry* magazine Web site.

<sup>10</sup>"Poetry Commotion: Big Donation Roils A Literary Bastion," Robert Frank, *The Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 2003, page one.

<sup>11</sup> Frank, Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Frank, Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Poetry* Web site.

<sup>14</sup> Frank, Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Stoddard, Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Kinzer, Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Frank, Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>"1 Year (and \$100 million) Later; *Poetry* magazine's remarkable gift proves to be a 'mixed blessing.'" Charles Storch, *Chicago Tribune*, December 2, 2003.

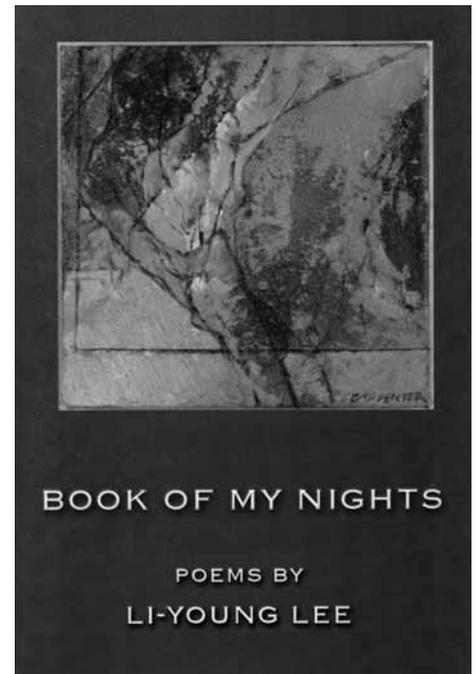
<sup>19</sup> Storch, Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Storch, Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Storch, Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Frank, Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Storch, Ibid.



*Chicago poet Li-Young Lee was considered for nomination.*

NOBEL NOMINEE, from page 5

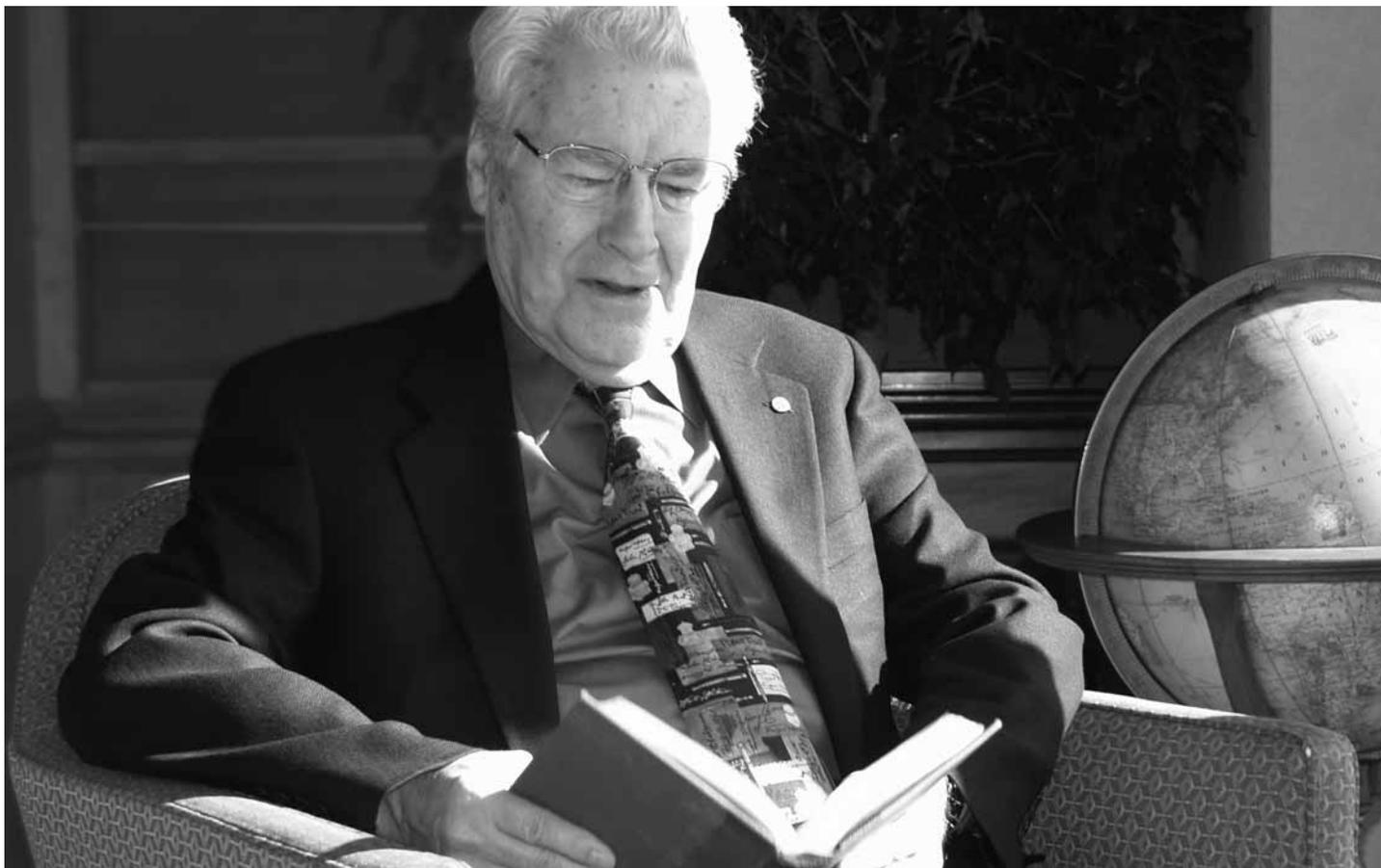
the year's work is referred to as the Coetzee/Berry year.

This last year, ending in October 2004, reading included, for the first time, Native American authors; one, Louise Erdrich, became our nominated choice for the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2005, Sherman Alexie, and Scott Momaday; playwrights read were August Wilson and Neil LaBute; literature authors were Don DeLillo and a revisit to John Updike; poets included an interesting Chicagoan, Li-Young Lee, and the Polish author, Adam Zagajewski. In the case of the poets, the group suggested we return to them another year because we did not all have time to become familiar with these interesting writers. Regulars Sherman Beverly, Wendy Husser, Scott Sinson, Edward Quattrocchi, Bill Locke, Tom Joyce, Junie Sinson, and Professor Metz were joined by newcomers Gerald Bauman, Dwight Eastman, and Carolyn Quattrocchi; and last year's new members, the Schencks.

Plans are being formed by Junie Sinson for the 2004-05 year for the format and schedule, which likely will begin by March 2005; updates to this listing will appear in a small section on the Caxton Website under Book Related issues, soon.

# Caxtonians Collect: Charles Miner

Second in a series of interviews with members



*Interviewed by Kathryn R. J. Tutkus*

The delightful Caxtonian Charles Miner is like most collectors in that he is giddy at the prospect of adding to his collection and gleeful when encountering a “bargain.” As he recollected a visit to a bookstore with no hope for success and by chance came away with a box of valuable books he was astounded at finding in such a ramshackle place, his demeanor took on that electric pitch of someone excited with the adventure that collecting can sometimes be. The bookseller, happy to be relieved of the task of processing the many books that had arrived earlier that day, was pleased to be rid of them at a low price and probably thought he had the better end of the deal, being ignorant of the collector’s market for this particular find. Adding drama to the situation at the bookstore was the arrival of

an astute book dealer Miner recognized seconds after his discovery of the books, which made rushing through the transaction a necessity for success of his purchase. Heart thumping, anxious, what seemed like many minutes later, Miner was out the door without mishap. Years later the telling of the story ends with a mischievous “tee hee.”

Curious about what was in the box? Books by mystery writer (and Caxtonian) Vincent Starrett. Though Vincent Starrett was considered many things (among them: reporter, war correspondent, poet, novelist, short story writer, anthologist, biographer, and literary critic), he thought of himself as a “bookman.” His colleagues held him in great esteem. He was awarded the first Grand Master Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 1958. At that time Ellery Queen was quoted as saying, “...an

essayist and columnist who has made a fine art of writing about books and bookmen; as an explorer in bibliography and a discoverer in book collecting; as a Sherlockophile and connoisseur without peer—as, indeed, the noblest gentleman and scholar in our ranks.”

Miner has four main collections of books and ephemera: George Ade, an American humorist and dramatist whose newspaper sketches and books attracted attention for their racy and slangy idiom and for the shrewd humor with which they portrayed people of the Midwest; Ben Hecht, an American screenwriter, director, producer, playwright, novelist, “the Shakespeare of Hollywood,” who received screen credits, alone or in collaboration, for the stories or screenplays of some 70 films and who—more importantly to Miner—wrote 35

*See CAXTONIANS COLLECT, page 11*



*This photo appeared in The Argus Bookshop, A Memoir, by D. B. Covington, Tarydiddle Press, 1977. It was captioned "The Bewick blocks, in their original cases, built by Thomas Bewick."*

**BOOKPLATE**, from page 1

the year before Bewick's death.

The vignette that my father used for his bookplate first appeared in the 1804 edition of *Water Birds* on page 196. Bewick's vignettes, referred to by him as "tale-pieces," served variously as page ornaments, entertainment, and as didactic devices, intended as subtle moral instruction. Like most works of art, the messages they convey are somewhat subject to interpretation by the viewer.

The Bewick block used for my father's bookplate features a man with a large sack slung over his back; an imp apparently impeding, or perhaps facilitating, his progress under the revealing half-light of the moon. Noted Bewick scholar Iain Bain attributes this particular block to Luke Clennell. Clennell was apprenticed to Bewick during the period of 1797 through 1804 and appears to have been the most prolific of those assigned to produce vignettes under the direction of Bewick.

Bain, in a book he published for Scholar Press in 1979, provided interpretations for some of the vignettes that had been noted

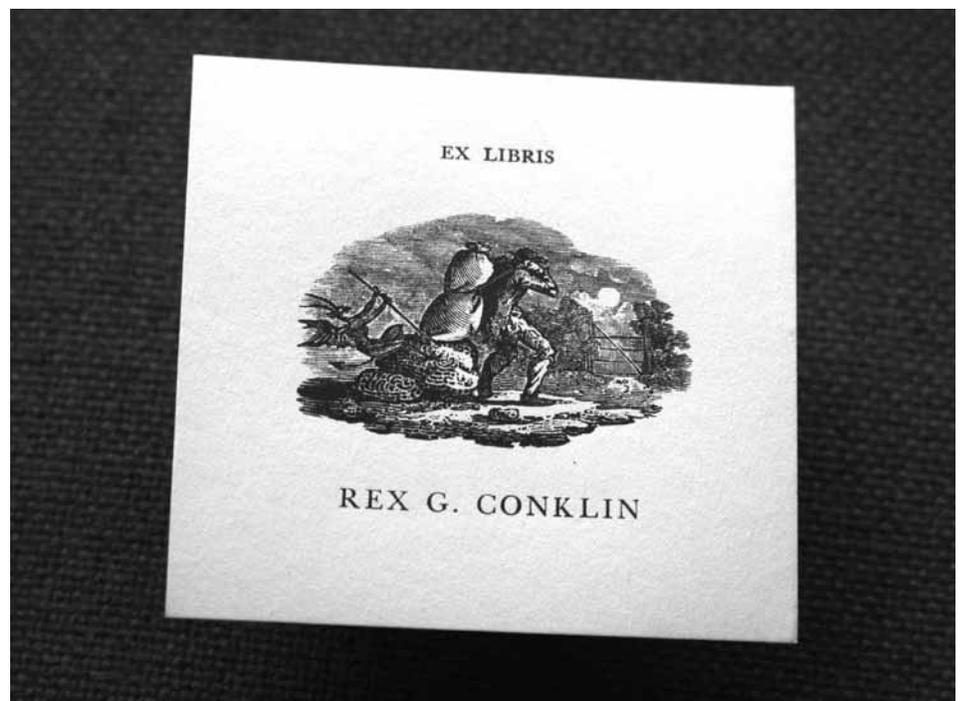
by Jane Bewick, the engraver's eldest daughter. The meaning attributed to the clandestine image on my father's block was "a thief and his load." I personally favor the

romantic interpretation offered by my father: an itinerant conjuror of the middle ages, travelling to the next town in the company of the Devil; one better suited to adorn the bookplate of an amateur magician and magic bibliophile.

How then did this Bewick block find its way to America and into the hands of my father? The tale begins with a former Caxton Club member: legendary Chicago and New York bookseller Ben Abramson (1898-1955), proprietor of the Argus Bookshop. Abramson, along with fellow Caxtonian and Chicago *Tribune* "Books Alive" columnist Vincent Starret, was also an early Sherlockian and first publisher of the "Baker Street Journal," founded in 1946.

While leafing through a Sotheby's auction catalog from London in the early 1940's, Abramson came across a listing for 1,350 of Bewick's wood blocks listed for sale by Irene Ward, a descendent of Thomas Bewick. When the

*The bookplate*



hammer fell on lot #403 around mid-day on March 24, 1942, Abramson became the owner of the blocks, encased in the original wood boxes Bewick had fashioned to house them. His winning bid was £300, approximately \$14,000 at today's prices

After trying to keep most of the collection intact, approaching various institutions like the Chicago Art Institute and Harvard University, Abramson decided to sell it piecemeal. Individual purchasers used them for diverse purposes, including stationary, Christmas cards and, yes, bookplates. Early purchasers included Caxtonians Ernst Deterer, then curator of the John M. Wing Foundation at the Newberry Library and Robert Hunter Middleton, director of typeface design from 1933 to 1971 at Chicago's Ludlow Typeface Company. Middleton was perhaps the most prolific purchaser of the Bewick blocks and produced three exquisite portfolios of Bewick's works under the Cherryburn Press imprint, named after the Bewick family home.

Present day Caxtonians will surely recall the book *RHM/Robert Hunter Middleton/The Man and His Letters*, published by the Caxton Club in 1985 and occasionally presented to our dinner speakers after being signed by all members present.

In 1955, when Abramson's daughter closed the Argus Bookshop following the death of her father, she sold the remaining 500 blocks to the Sander Engraving Company.

My father likely purchased his block from Abramson in the mid-1940's and had a copper engraving made from the image so as to preserve the original wood block when printing his bookplate. I have a number of his bookplates in my possession and would be pleased to make them available to collectors. Those interested should send a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

Rex Conklin  
620 Mullady Parkway,  
Libertyville, IL 60048.

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*Except as noted, photographs by Robert McCamant.*

CAXTONIANS COLLECT, *from page 9*

books; Chicagoana; and books from private presses in Chicago. He also has collections within collections such as the Chicago Renaissance, books owned by famous Chicagoans, Chicago authors, mystery writers and pre-Chicago-Fire books.

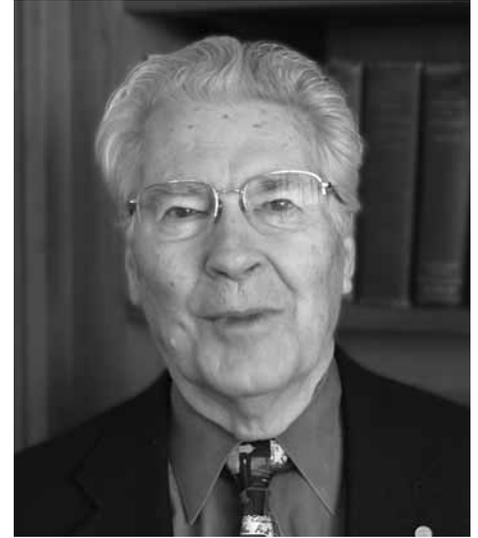
Miner was inspired by his University of Illinois instructor Emerson Cammak. Years later, when Miner was in Baltimore, MD at counter-intelligence school, he purchased the first book, a limited edition copy of *The Old Time Saloon* by George Ade, and thus began his collection. His entire Ade collection is hardbound; he has more Ade ephemera than ephemera in any other category.

Charles Miner reads every book he collects and boasts of only one or two duplicates in his entire collection...maybe you might consider this a small feat, but for someone who keeps his entire collection in storage, I find it a particularly fascinating fact. Miner must have been present on the photographic memory lesson day at counter-intelligence school.

Charles Miner first heard of the Caxton Club in 1941 when he purchased and read the book *Stories of the Street and Town* by George Ade. Years later he met Caxtonian Tom Joyce and later Jay Marshall who also collects George Ade and introduced him to the Caxton Club, and with a interest in magic shared by a group of Caxtonians, an interest Miner has had since grade school "there was much to talk about." Miner was nominated for membership in the Caxton Club by Jay Marshall in 1987. He was seconded by David Meyer.

Miner works at National Benefit Brokers as a District Manager of a marketing program that protects people's mortgages. His wife Jean is not a collector though she reads quite a bit, mostly New Thought books such as those written by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer, one of the most widely known people in the field of self-empowerment and Deepak Chopra, founder and present CEO of the Chopra Center for Well Being in La Jolla, California.

Currently Miner is cataloging his collections for a sale. He would like to sell



everything, intact, as a unit. He and his wife will be relocating to Williamsburg, Virginia. They have purchased a lot but have not yet signed a builder so no firm date has been set. Miner hasn't given up collecting. He is still adding to his current Chicago collections. In fact at the time of interview he had just purchased a first edition book about the history of the Chess brothers and Chess Records to add to the Chicago collection. And he has already started a Virginia collection!

Miner has many book, people, and famous book people stories; most are so interesting my hand forgot to use my pen...luckily for now he will be around for you to ask about them.

When I asked Miner one of the standard questions for "Caxtonians Collect," What are your favorite things to read? If you knew you were going to be stranded on a desert island, what book would you take? he was stumped. His reply, "Kind of hard to say. I have a stack of books waiting for me to read them. Let's come back to that. Why can't I just take everything, my whole collection?" Coming back to the question a few hours later Miner replied that "the last one I bought was my favorite one." Then as I was writing up the interview, Miner called me and said "Ok, I thought about it, *Child of the Century* by Ben Hecht."

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*Photographs by Robert McCamant*

# Bookmarks...

## Luncheon Program

January 14, 2005

Marilyn Sward

“Paper Covers Rock”

To play the children’s game of Rock Paper Scissors, you must pound your fist on the table, open your hand and then look about to see who has won. Paper wins!

And so Marilyn Sward, a founder of the Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, will tell all about this indescribably important material, paper, from its invention in China right up to its emergence as a fine craft. Along the way you will hear fascinating particulars, including Tree Whispers, a collaborative tree-saving project and the newly conceived Hunter Howel National Fellowship for future paper-producing artists.

After graduating with honors from the University of Illinois, Marilyn learned to make paper by hand. Forty years later this is still a most important fact in her life. She has been the long-time Director of the Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, a professor in Fibers at the School of the Art Institute and co-author of *The New Photography*, a book dealing with handmade paper’s use in photography. Marilyn’s own work is in museum collections throughout the world. Currently retired, she will share with us some of her own work and other items from her extensive collection.

The substrate will become more than the vehicle. This talk will forever change the way that you look at a book.

## Beyond January...

### FEBRUARY LUNCHEON:

Adrian Alexander will speak on Matthew Fontaine Maury, a nineteenth-century marine scientist whose work led to the founding of the Naval Observatory.

### FEBRUARY DINNER:

Wednesday, February 16, Audrey Niffenegger, Columbia College Center for the Book faculty member and author of *The Time Traveler’s Wife*, will discuss her book, which is set in the world of books and book collectors.

*All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon: buffet opens at 11:30; program 12:30-1:30. Dinner meetings: spirits at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, lecture at 7:30 pm.*

## Dinner Program

January 19, 2005

John Barr

“Birth of a Foundation”

John Barr has been a remarkable success in remarkably diverse careers as an investment banker, college professor, published poet, and now, as the President of the Poetry Foundation. In 2002 the Foundation was the recipient of a bequest expected to exceed \$100 million from Ruth Lilly. John’s talk will be titled “Birth of a Foundation”, the story of *Poetry* magazine and the Lilly money. He will also include the reading of some of his poems.

John Barr was born in Nebraska but grew up in Lisle, Illinois. After graduating from Harvard with honors, he served five years as a naval officer, including three cruises to Vietnam, before returning to Harvard for an MBA. As a businessman, he was a Managing Director at Morgan Stanley, founder and Chairman of Natural Gas Clearinghouse (now Dynegy Corporation), and co-founder of Barr Devlin, which served as investment banker in many of the largest utility mergers of the 1990s. Barr Devlin is now a part of Societe Generale and Barr is a Managing Director of that firm.

John Barr’s poems have been published in six collections over the past decade. He has served on the board of Yaddo, was President of the Board of Poetry Society of America and was the Chairman of the Board of Bennington College. He currently teaches poetry at the Graduate Writing Program at Sarah Lawrence College. John Barr’s presentation promises to be fascinating on many levels.

### MARCH LUNCHEON:

Friday, March 11, Ed Quattrocchi has been rescheduled to speak on “The Most Important Books Published between 1455 and 1623.”

### MARCH DINNER:

Wednesday, March 16, Eric Holzenberg, Director of the Grolier Club, will speak about Sir Thomas Phillips, an eccentric, contentious and stingy 19th-century Englishman whose Middle Hill Press executed his grandiose printing schemes.

*For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email [caxtonclub@newberry.org](mailto:caxtonclub@newberry.org). Members and guests: Lunch \$25, Dinner \$45. Discount parking available for evening meetings, with a stamped ticket, at Standard Self-Park, 172 W. Madison.*