

CAXTONIAN

JOURNAL OF THE CAXTON CLUB

VOLUME XVII, NO. 1

JANUARY 2009

A Visit to Archer City

The site of *The Last Picture Show* doubles as a book-collecting Mecca

John C. Roberts

The publication of Larry McMurtry's newest work, *Books*, was not a significant literary event. A breezy, anecdotal account of McMurtry's life as a collector, book scout and antiquarian bookseller, it will not materially affect the literary reputation of the author of novels like *The Last Picture Show*, *Terms of Endearment*, and *Lonesome Dove*, as well as numerous screenplays and essays. Most of McMurtry's loyal readers (Caxtonians excepted, of course) probably have no idea that he has been a serious bookman for as long as he has been writing, and wouldn't find that fact interesting anyway.

For me, however, the publication of *Books* finally motivated me to make a pilgrimage to McMurtry's legendary bookshop in Archer City, Texas. I had read newspaper accounts and references in his essays to his rather curious decision to relocate his bookshop, *Booked Up*, to his hometown, and was dimly aware that this small north Texas village now supposedly housed nearly 400,000 books. Given that it is difficult today to visit any used bookshop at all, let alone one with an enormous general stock, I had long thought that a visit to Archer City would be the ideal bookman's holiday but had never gotten around to doing anything about it. With time to spare this past fall, and energized by McMurtry's memoir, I decided to make concrete plans. Because I have always enjoyed driving long distances by myself, and love everything western, a solo car trip was my obvious choice. What could be better than a fall journey through some of the most interesting



scenery in the country, with the side benefit of adding needed volumes to my collection of modern first editions?

First, a word about collecting modern firsts. Most Caxtonians I meet collect in one or a few specialized areas, like architecture, cooking, travel, Chicago, and the like, or specialize in a few authors, whom they collect in depth. Modern firsts collectors are different. We collect broadly – very broadly – and thus deal in quantity as well as quality. Since I started seriously collecting in the mid-1980s, I have systematically collected the work of several hundred American, Canadian, and British novelists writing after 1945, and have accumulated several thousand modern firsts, many of them signed by the author (a common sub-specialty). I began by collecting the writers I loved as a young man – John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Joseph Heller, Thomas Berger, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Vladimir Nabokov, Bernard Malamud, Robertson Davies, Stanley Elkin, Robert Stone, Reynolds Price, and others. And because they were all living at the time, this meant buying each of their new books

(preferably signed) as it was published and then slowly acquiring their earlier books, some easy to find and inexpensive, and some very expensive and rare. Over the years, it is possible to acquire complete collections of these writers' works, and then occasionally to substitute better copies or signed copies as one's budget allows. As I discovered new novelists, or found out about excellent established ones I had not heard of before, the list expanded greatly. For current writers, collecting entails carefully buying new books to ensure that they are first editions and, of course, setting aside a large space at home for bookshelves. It also involves attending author readings and getting books signed. Early on I found that writers would also willingly sign their earlier works at readings, so I often arrived with an armful of them. More recently, writers have resisted, and I have also noticed a distinct falloff in the number of serious novelists coming to Chicago to read and sign books.

Because I started as a reader and not a collector, I do not

See ARCHER CITY, page 2



A typical '50s tourist stop and souvenir store along Route 66 in Missouri.



CAXTONIAN

The Caxton Club, Founded 1895

C. Steven Tomashefsky, President
Adele Hast, Vice-President
Susan Hanes, Secretary
John C. Roberts, Treasurer
Junie L. Sinson, Past President

Council

Class of 2009

Rob Carlson
Kim Coventry
Ed Hirschland
Wendy Husser
David Mann

Class of 2010

Dorothy Anderson
Don Chatham
Mary Ann Johnson
Philip R. Liebson
J. William Locke

Class of 2011

Martha Chiplis
Jill Gage
Bradley Jonas
Dan "Skip" Landt
Alice D. Schreyer

Appointed Officers

Robert Karrow, Programs
Paul F. Gehl, Archivist
Hayward R. Blake, FABS Representative
Frank J. Piehl, Historian

Committees

Thomas J. Joyce and Dorothy L. Sinson, Audio Visual
Robert Cotner, Development
Kim Coventry, Exhibitions
Adele Hast, Finance
Ed Quattrocchi (Honorary Chair), J. William Locke, Dorothy Sinson (Co-Chairs), Friday Luncheons
Dan "Skip" Landt, Membership
Junie L. Sinson, Nobel Study
Susan Rossen, Publications
Edward C. Bronson, Web Site

Caxton Club Staff

Dan Crawford, General Manager

Caxtonian

Robert McCamant, Editor
Wendy Husser, Copy Editor
Robert Cotner, Founder
Kathryn DeGraff, Matthew J. Doherty, Wendy Husser, Paul Ruxin, Florence Shay, Contributing Editors

©2009, The Caxton Club. The *Caxtonian* is published monthly by The Caxton Club, whose office is in the Newberry Library. Printing: River Street Press, Aurora, IL.

ARCHER CITY, from page 1

buy books that I don't like. Though it may sound quirky, I don't buy books by Phillip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, Joyce Carol Oates, Martin Amis, or the more recent Doris Lessing, to name only a few. Likewise, I don't generally collect mysteries, though I do buy espionage novels. Following my reading preferences, though they are generally quite wide, also helps to cut down the volume of shelf space needed to house my collection. Many modern firsts specialists add foreign first editions of authors they collect, advance review copies, proof copies, and even bound galley proofs, all in the effort to acquire the first state of the text and as many forms of the book as possible. Certain writers publish special limited editions, even several different ones for a single book, which makes putting together "complete" collections of their books a challenge. I generally stick to the "true" first edition – usually but not always the American first edition for American novelists, the British first for British, etc. Though I have some signed limited editions, I consider them designed principally to exploit the fanaticism of collectors, and so usually settle for first trade editions.

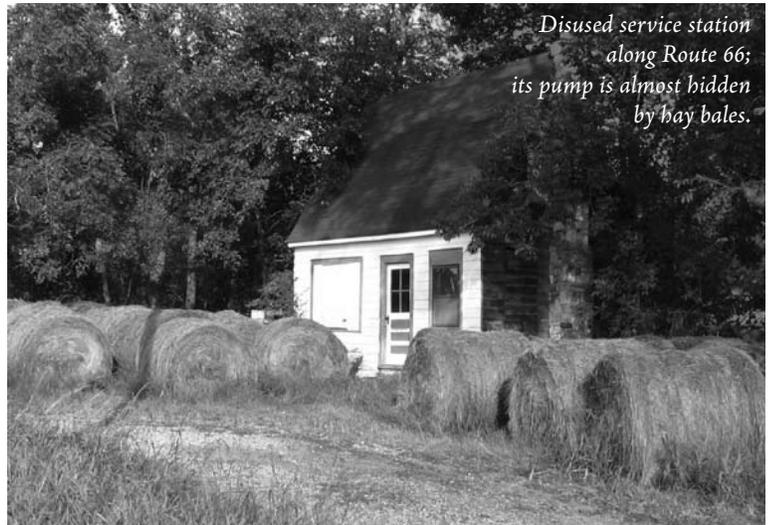
Because my grandfather was a homesteader in southwestern North Dakota during the last phase of settlement in the early 1900s, I have a substantial collection of novels set in the Dakotas and Nebraska during that period, as well as nonfiction homesteader narratives. I am also on the lookout for novels featuring college settings, of which there are a large number. Many of us, of course, have other collecting interests apart from fiction. Larry McMurtry, with a personal library of some 28,000 volumes, has a special collection of more than 2000 travel narratives by women, which he writes about in *Books*.

After twenty years or so of serious collecting, my want list is finally shrinking. There are very expensive books, usually early works by some of my favorites – Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* or John Barth's *The Floating Opera* are examples. And there are obvious twentieth-century "high spots" that are also quite expensive in the first edition, like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* or the early books by William Faulkner. Then there are books by novelists on my list that are simply hard to find in first editions because the printing runs were small, but can usually be purchased for \$100 or so if available. In the '80s, I bought many books from used bookstores, where, with the proper reference tools,

you can identify first editions among the general run of used books on the shelves. For out-of-town dealers, there were periodic catalogues listing first editions that contained many of my missing titles.

Now, of course, there are few general used bookshops left, and even the prominent dealers in modern firsts do not issue many catalogues. As all Caxtonians are aware, the game has now shifted to the internet. For the collector of modern firsts, this development has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because it is possible instantly to assess the availability of a particular book, and a curse because the challenge of the hunt is now a thing of the past. There is very little "finding" involved these days for modern firsts collectors. The only constraint is budgetary. I reluctantly acknowledge, though, that the internet has made the collector's life easier by making the market more transparent and bringing down prices, at least for the general run of first editions.

With this background, then, it is easy to appreciate the irresistible attraction of a concentrated mass of collectible first editions in one place, and thus the lure of a "book town" like Archer City. The prospect before me was dazzling – two days of looking through tens of thousands of first editions with my precious want list and first editions guides



Disused service station along Route 66; its pump is almost hidden by hay bales.

in hand. But first I had to get there.

Archer City, Texas, nearly a thousand miles from Chicago, is located some 20 miles south of Wichita Falls in the cattle and oil country of north Texas. Driving there from Chicago is a quintessential trip through Middle America. The trip includes a variety of landscapes, including the flat cornfields of central and southern Illinois, the lush and hilly Ozarks country of southern Missouri, and the drier red-clay landscape of central Oklahoma. Like the route of the great migration west in the middle of the nineteenth century, it takes the traveler from

the fertile prairie lands of the Midwest to the very edge of the Great Plains. Indeed, Archer City lies at about the same longitude as the towns in South Dakota and Nebraska where I was born and raised. The route includes the cities of St. Louis, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City, along with interesting smaller towns like Springfield, Illinois; Springfield and Joplin, Missouri; Lawton, Oklahoma; and Wichita Falls, Texas. The traveler can see some of the legendary rivers of Western history, including the Cimarron, the Arkansas, the Canadian, the Washita, and the Red. The old Chisholm Trail, which brought hundreds of thousands of Texas longhorns to the railheads of Kansas during the 1870s, passes not far from Archer City on its way north from San Antonio to Abilene. That trail and the cowboys who rode it have been celebrated in such Hollywood movies as *Red River*, and are commemorated in the Chisholm

Trail Historical Museum in the small town of Waurika, Oklahoma. It is one of several notable museums of western history and culture along the way to Archer City.

Of course, getting to Texas along this route in two days is possible only because of modern interstate highways, in this case, I-55 to St. Louis and I-44 from St. Louis to Wichita Falls. In planning my trip, I soon realized that most of the journey would follow the legendary Route 66, one of the first long-distance highways in the country and a road celebrated in American culture and song. Route 66 exists now only in bits and pieces and can be seen alongside I-55 and I-44 in many places between Chicago and Oklahoma City, at which point it turns straight west toward its western terminus in Los Angeles. A brief search on the internet exposed an entire subculture of Route 66 aficionados, collectors, and historians. Perhaps because the highway's golden period spanned the age of family car travel for many of us of a certain age and of course because of the popular TV series in the early 1960s, traveling Route 66 on its original route is still a popular pastime. I learned that driving on short isolated stretches of the original concrete is one of the activities most prized by Route 66 fans. I was able to visit a number of roadside attractions related to the "Mother Road" as an unexpected dividend to

my original book quest plan.

I began my preparations by looking for good books on Route 66 and its history. I was overwhelmed with driving guides and books of photographs of the highway and its roadside architecture. The volume I found most useful, fortuitously just out in a new edition, was *EZ66 Guide for Travelers* by Jerry McClanahan. It is a mile-by-mile guide to the various routes the highway took over its long history. The *EZ Guide* also features a number of interesting buildings from the '20s, '30s, '40s and '50s along Route 66; most that survive are gas stations and motels. From the interstate



In Archer City, Texas, the main street is called Central.

one can frequently see the ruins of buildings that were once in use along Route 66 and a few period roadside signs. I particularly recommend two towns with excellent stretches of highway and restored buildings. In Lebanon, Missouri, I visited the Munger Moss Motel dating from 1946, whose rooms are decorated with period furniture and sport Route 66 themes. There are other classic buildings from the 1940s nearby. In the beautiful little town of Mt. Olive, Illinois, I found the restored Soulsby Station, a classic 1920s gas station along the old Route 66. And I was able to drive nearly 20 miles of a very early section of the highway, with nearly original pavement and even the original curbs, near Marshfield, Missouri. With more time, you could stop at the many local Route 66 diners, museums and souvenir shops, and even collect Route 66 memorabilia.

Larry McMurtry has described Archer City in his memoirs and essays. Fans of the movie versions of *The Last Picture Show* and its sequel *Texasville* saw a Hollywood version of the town, though the real main street was used for shooting the films. I confess to some shock driving into town from Wichita Falls. Archer City has some 1800 residents, but almost none was visible on the Friday afternoon of my arrival. The town has the

ubiquitous American main street, here called Central, and a typical Midwestern town square with a handsome stone courthouse. But Archer City has obviously fallen on hard times; many of the buildings on Central are empty and deteriorating. There are no bars (a surprise and disappointment for a weary traveler) and no drugstores or grocery stores. Two gas stations with convenience stores provide the only retail shopping I could see. There was a quaint café, the Wildcat, which obviously serves as a meeting spot for locals, but it is only open for breakfast and lunch. For dinner, I had to repair to the Sonic drive-in and eat

in the car or order a hamburger in the sit-down half of the local Dairy Queen. This particular DQ, by the way, is the very same one Larry McMurtry writes about so lovingly in *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen*. The most prominent buildings in town are the new court building and police build-

ings near the original courthouse. By far the largest business is McMurtry's book operation, *Booked Up*, which occupies five large one-story buildings scattered around the square.

On the Archer City website, I found two choices for overnight accommodations. One is the Lonesome Dove bed-and-breakfast, and the other is a small hotel near the bookstore buildings, called *The Spur*. I had a nice chat on the telephone with the owner of *The Spur* (which is for sale, by the way) and booked a reservation. When I arrived at the restored hotel, which has about a dozen rooms with a small first floor lounge, I found it unlocked, with my room key on the desk. No one was around. The room was adequate but had no TV or telephone (awkward, since my cell phone didn't work in Archer City). During my two-day stay, I saw the owner only once, late in the evening, and no other guests or employees. The front door was locked during the day, but opened with the key I was given.

Except for the *Booked Up* staff, I did not get an opportunity to talk with many residents of Archer City. The café patrons at breakfast eyed me suspiciously, probably because I was so obviously the only outsider in the place. I did have a fascinating conversation with the two elderly denizens of the Archer County Museum, a quite interesting

See *ARCHER CITY*, page 4

ARCHER CITY, from page 3

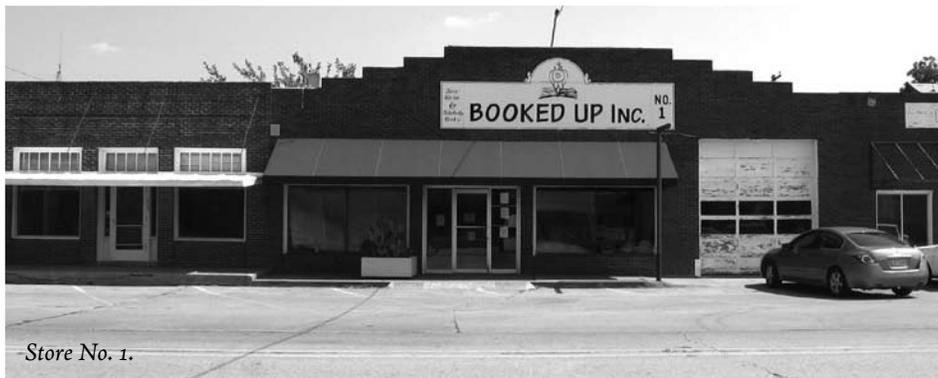
place housed in the old Archer County jail. The building is unchanged from its days as the jail, with dust and rust everywhere, but scattered on tables in the jail cells were a variety of artifacts of nineteenth century Archer County, including clothing, guns, photographs, and the like. The old jailor's living quarters was restored exactly as it would have appeared in 1890. Mr. and Mrs. Loftin, the elderly volunteers, were anxious to show me around. Indeed, I had a hard time making my getaway when ten o'clock came and I wanted to start my book search. They did tell me that Larry McMurtry doesn't spend much time in town; he lives most of the year in Arizona. When I asked what the townspeople thought of him, they said that many locals were annoyed with their portrayal in *The Last Picture Show* but still considered Larry a proud local product. The only thing for sale was a local map with photos and historical notes on Archer County by Mr. Loftin, which I bought.

My only other encounter with an Archer City resident was on my first evening in town. I finished my hamburger at the Sonic and decided to drive around a bit, getting into the spirit of the high-schoolers in *The Last Picture Show*. After dragging Central a few times,

and seeing only a few cars and motorcycles, but no pedestrians, I parked in front of the Spur and sat a moment before going in. As I looked to my left, I was startled to see a large man on an even larger motorcycle parked right next to me. I had not heard him pull up. He was completely bald, dressed in a sleeveless black leather vest with studs and leather pants. With some trepidation (having read *Deliverance*), I rolled down my window. Somewhat sternly, he said, "Lookin' for a place to stay?" I paused to consider that question carefully and must have appeared a bit spooked. But then he smiled and added, "The guy who runs this place is sometimes hard to find, and I wondered if you needed help. He usually keeps the front door locked." I assured him that I had already checked in and had a key. I considered telling him that I had come to town to buy books, but thought better of it. I would leave him to speculate that I might be a cattle buyer or an oil company executive. He turned and burned rubber down the street

without asking more questions, and I went inside to see if the TV set in the hotel lounge worked. It did, sort of.

In his recent memoir, Larry McMurtry gives us, through anecdotes and assorted recollections, an account of his twin evolutions as writer and bookman. It is a journey from Archer City and back to Archer City. His career as a book scout and bookseller began during his graduate student days in Houston, and his first bookstore job was managing The Bookman there. In *Books* he tells a number of stories about booksellers and shops in Texas, San Francisco, and Washington. Most of the sellers and shops are now gone, but they include some of my personal favorites, including Second Story Books in Washington, D.C., Serendipity Books in Berkeley, and Maurice Neville's wonderful shop in Santa Barbara, where I got my start as a first editions collector. Along the way, he recounts his year as a Stegner Fellow at Stanford and his parallel life as a successful writer of novels and



Store No. 1.

screenplays. McMurtry writes that Booked Up began in 1970 when the legendary Loudermilks in Washington, D.C. was liquidating its stock. McMurtry and his partner bought some books, began to collect from other shops and estates, and opened Booked Up in Georgetown in 1971. I remember it well; it was a Washington fixture for 32 years, until rising rents forced it to close. *Books* contains a number of fascinating stories of his dealings with Washington luminaries and his methods of book buying. McMurtry writes at one point that buying books always has interested him more than selling. Over the years, he bought "remnants of the stock of at least twenty-six bookshops." After returning to Archer City to live in 1996, he decided to consolidate his books there and began buying out even more bookstores in other cities, finally creating the gigantic store we see today.

The five buildings that comprise Booked Up are numbered on the front. Building #1 is the main building, the only one that is staffed.

I walked in for my orientation. The single staff member, a young woman, explained that Buildings #1 and #2 hold most of the fiction, with the others specializing in other kinds of books. Customers are allowed to browse in any of the buildings unsupervised and are asked to bring their finds to Building #1 for purchase. The books are not indexed and are not on line, so the staff person could not tell me whether or not they had a particular book. There is some alphabetization, but as McMurtry writes in *Books*, he doesn't believe in too much order. There is a large section of recent acquisitions that mixes fiction, nonfiction and other genres. His aversion to selling on the internet stems, he writes, from his special reverence for the old-fashioned open bookshop as the proper setting for transactions between collector and bookseller. There were two small typed signs near the entrance. One, though not signed, was obviously in McMurtry's voice. It said that while Booked Up had contemplated closing its doors, developments

had reversed that decision and it would stay open. I had read that McMurtry had planned to close his store. He writes in *Books* that sales dropped off significantly starting in 2001, probably because of the bursting of the dot-com bubble, but he apparently is

resolved to keep Booked Up open despite the disadvantages of its location. Indeed, he writes that he is still buying large lots of books. The other sign said that the store was terminating signings of books by the owner, because too many requests had been received. In fact, I was startled to learn that Booked Up had no McMurtry books on its shelves!

Building #1 contained the most valuable books, some in locked cases, and a wonderful mixture of fiction, nonfiction, Americana, and other things. I saw a good deal of ephemera, particularly relating to the West. As in all the buildings, the books were on tall, immaculate, painted shelves. None of the creaky, dusty shelving of the old-fashioned secondhand bookshop. The other striking thing about all of the stock is that, in McMurtry's words, it included very little junk. He writes that to this day he spends long hours when in town purging his shelves to maintain the quality of his stock. I found the general condition of his books to be excellent, far above that of the

usual secondhand shops we remember from our past. I spent most of my time in Building #2, which is mostly fiction. Again, I was struck by how clean and neat the shelves were. There was a "Rare Book Room" containing some of the more valuable first editions (most priced at less than \$200) but not completely alphabetized and then two more rooms of general

fiction. Many, but not all, were first editions. Most of the shelves were full, and a number of books were stacked neatly on the floor. My best guess is that there were 40-50,000 books, mostly first quality. With my

want list and first edition identifier (I use Bill McBride's *A Pocket Guide to the Identification of First Editions*, sixth edition, 2000), I spent six or eight intense hours poring over these shelves. During the entire day and a half, I only saw one or two other customers.

Ultimately, I dragged back to Building #1 fifty or so books I wanted to buy, but on total-

ing the prices decided to reduce the haul to twenty or twenty-five. A few were reading copies of books I had wanted, the kind we all used to buy on casual Saturday jaunts through used bookstores. After some agonizing, I passed on a somewhat ragged first edition of Doris Lessing's *A Proper Marriage*, part of her early feminist *Martha Quest* series. A



Soulsby's service station, Mt. Olive, Illinois.

good find, but in that condition maybe not worth \$300. I ultimately did buy fifteen first editions to fill gaps in my collection, for a total of less than \$1000.

Included were early academic satires by two of my favorite British novelists, Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge. I also found an early novel by one of my favorite Americans, John Knowles, known almost solely for his brilliant coming-of-age novel about the 1940s, *A Separate Peace*. I collect the work of the Minnesota writer Jon Hassler, and was able to complete

my collection of his novels with two scarce early first editions. Then there were books by Steven Millhauser and Norman Rush. Finally, I bought the only novel not yet in my collection by the enigmatic (and recently deceased) William Wharton. "Wharton" is a pseudonym used by an artist who had long lived in France and published a number of very good novels. Most are not well known, except perhaps for *Birdy* and *Dad*. He also wrote one of the very best novels about soldiers in World War II, *A Midnight Clear*. All in all, a very good group of books, well worth the trip.

As all Caxtonians can appreciate, the most satisfying moment of my trip to Archer City came at the end. The landscapes were wonderful, the Route 66 portions were an unexpected bonus, and the romance of an American book town was all that I had hoped for. But the final, best moment was when I sat down in my study with the new books for my collection piled neatly before me, added them to my bibliography, carefully installed the mylar book covers, and put them in their proper places on my crowded shelves.

§§

Photographs by the author.

Club Notes

Membership Report September-November, 2008

I'm pleased to announce the election to membership of the following individuals:

Paul Kobasa is Executive Vice-President, Editorial, and Editor-in-Chief at World Book, Inc. He began his Chicago life at the American Library Association. At World Book, his responsibilities encompass all of World Book's output, from the print encyclopedia to the online reference suite including products in Spanish, French, and most recently, Chinese. His collecting interests are eclectic and passionate; a recent foray into the world of Virginia Woolf sent him in search of first editions of anything having to do with Vita Sackville-West. He also collects black & white photography, ranging from Beaton to Dis-farmer. Nominated by Rob Carlson, seconded by Paul Gehl.

Nancy Lynn is Director of Individual Giving at the Chicago Public Library Foundation. Her fundraising and capital development work has spanned many not-for-profits, including The Art Institute and the Chicago

Botanic Gardens. Nancy began her career at The Newberry Library during the tenure of a well-known Caxtonian, the late Lawrence W. "Bill" Towner, Newberry President and Librarian; she subsequently returned to The Newberry as Planned Giving Officer under Charles Cullen. Now that her children are grown, she has a more time to devote to her personal projects, which often revolve around books. Nominated by Tom Joyce, seconded by Susan Levy.

Chuck Middleton has been both President and Professor of History at Roosevelt University since 2002. He has published widely in scholarly journals, both on history and on higher education, and is the author of many entries in the *Dictionary of American Biography* and the *Biographical Dictionary of American Sports*. His career in higher education has included academic and administrative positions at the University of Colorado, Bowling Green State University, the University of Baltimore, and the University System of Maryland. He serves on numerous boards and advisory committees locally and across the country. Nominated by Ed Hirschland, seconded by Steve Tomashefsky.

Matthew Miner attends the Honor College at the University of Illinois at Chicago, majoring in literature and history. In

April 2008, he testified before the Rockford Board of Education in support of the teaching of Latin, noting that the benefits of Latin far outweigh its cost to the district, making the practical point that it has strengthened his ability and that of other students to score well on the ACT and AP tests. John Chalmers notes that Matthew has the makings of a fine bookman, like his grandfather, Charles Miner ('87). Nominated by Charles Miner, seconded by John Chalmers. (Junior member)

Sarah Boxhorn Potratz, having recently completed her master's degree in Library Science, is currently pursuing a second master's in the History of Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. For the past three years she has worked in special collections on campus, and is currently personal assistant to the Curator. Sarah does copy and original cataloging in Latin and several other European languages, and is developing her background with manuscripts and serials. Sarah is interested in works of pseudoscience and medicine from a research perspective. She collects Agatha Christie mysteries and early 20th century American cookbooks. Nominated by Margaret Oellrich, seconded by Dan "Skip" Landt. (Junior member)

Mary Williams graduated earlier this year
See MEMBERSHIP, page 6

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Bernice E. Gallagher

(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Two exhibitions are offered at The Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S.

Michigan Avenue, Chicago 312-443-3600: "The Beauty of the Beasts: Artists and Their Pets in 20th-Century Art" (a display of books featuring artists and the animals who inspired them, either as beloved friends or convenient models) in the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, January 7 through March 16; "The Bill Peet Storybook Menagerie" (sketches, storyboards, and 34 books by Bill Peet, creator of Dumbo and Cinderella and Walt Disney's principal animator for 27 years) in Galleries 15 and 16, through May 24.

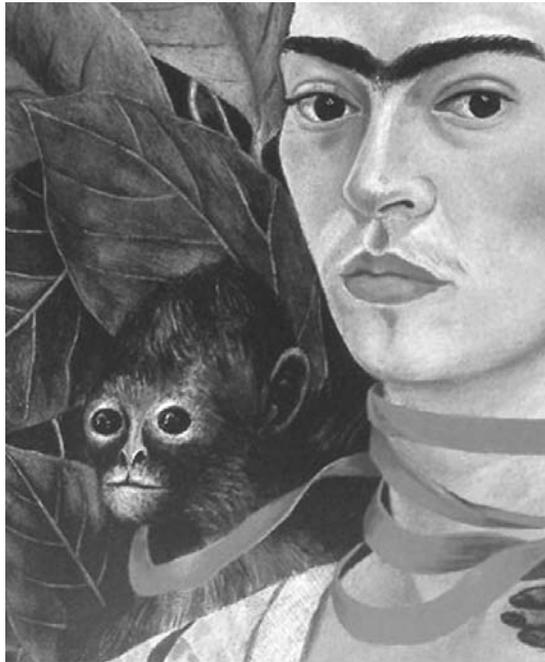
"Shanghai Transforming" (a collection of graphics, photographs, and maps, exploring the city's rapid change, recognizing its past, and speculating about future possibilities) in the John Buck Company Lecture Hall Gallery, Chicago Architecture Foundation, 224 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago 312-922-3432, through January 9.

"A Child's Flora: All About Plants for Younger Readers" (selections from the Rare Book Collection, providing a glimpse into the important role that plants and gardens play in storytelling) in the Lenhardt Library, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe 847-835-8202, through February 1.

"Wisdom of Words: Lerone Bennett Jr., The People's Historian" (copies of Bennett's ten books documenting the historical forces shaping the Black experience in the United States, plus rarely seen vintage copies of *JET* and *Ebony* magazines) at the DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago 773-947-0600, ongoing.

"Artifacts of Childhood: 700 Years of Children's Books" (works by and for children in more than 100 languages from the fifteenth century to the present, including the 1865 first edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and ABCs from 1544 to 1992) at The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago 312-943-9090, through January 17.

Four exhibitions are featured in the Special Collections Research Center, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago 773-702-8075: "Discover Hidden Archives Treasures" (a new installment of recently uncovered treasures from the Special Collections archives and manuscript collections), through January 5; "Our Lincoln: Bicentennial Icons from the Barton Collection of Lincolniana" (items exhibited at the Century of Progress Exposition and acquired by the Library in 1932, including a handwritten page from young Lincoln's "Sum Book" and a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation signed by Lincoln), January 14 through February 22; "Integrating the Life of the Mind: African Americans at The University of Chicago" (manuscripts, rarely seen portraits, photographs and books, with profiles of such notable graduates as attorney/legislator Richard Dawson, zoologist Ernest Everett Just, ethnographer/dancer Katherine Dunham, urban sociologist Charles Johnson), through February 27; "East European Jews in the German-Jewish Imagination From the Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica" (documents tracing the experience of German Jews, from emancipation in the nineteenth century to the eve of World War II), through June 22.



Artists and Their Pets at Art Institute of Chicago
FRIDA KAHLO, SELF-PORTRAIT WITH MONKEY (DETAIL), 1940.

"The 'Writing' of Modern Life: The Etching Revival in France, Britain, and the U.S., 1850-1940" (works by artists including Haden, Meryon and Whistler, showing how printmakers of this period intertwined the arts of etching and writing) at the Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5500 S.

Greenwood, Chicago 773-702-0200, through April 19.

Two exhibitions continue at the Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago 312-747-4300: "State Street: That Great Street" (newspaper clippings, books and memorabilia exploring the history and attractions of State Street over 150 years) in The Chicago Gallery, 3rd Floor, through June 21; "Called to the Challenge: The Legacy of Harold Washington" (items drawn from the Special Collections and Preservation Division of the Chicago Public Library, highlighting Harold Washington's life, image, and work) in the Harold Washington Exhibit Hall, 9th Floor, ongoing.

Bernice Gallagher will be happy to receive your listings at either 847-234-5255 or gallagher@lakeforest.edu.

MEMBERSHIP, from page 5

from the University of Notre Dame where her studies and interests were in classics, especially Greek tragedy; Byzantine theology; illuminated manuscripts; medieval and early modern cartography. She was recently chosen to become the second Department Head for Books and Manuscripts for Leslie Hindman Auctioneers. Nominated by Tom Joyce,

seconded by Harry Stern. (Junior member)

As you will notice from the above list, the Club welcomes younger people who share our interests. If you have a young friend who is fascinated by collecting, writing, editing, designing, illustrating, binding, publishing, curating, stewarding, or any other aspect of the book world – consider inviting that person to a luncheon or dinner meeting. Or, should

you prefer, the Club will invite them, asking only that they pay the cost of their meal. Junior members (under the age of 30) pay half the normal initiation fee and dues. (We continue to welcome other nominations, of course!)

Dan "Skip" Landt
773-604-4115, skiplandt@sbcglobal.net

Caxtonians Collect: Larry Solomon

Forty-ninth in a series of interviews with members

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Larry Solomon says that he started collecting books when he was seven. He has vivid memories of the process, which took place in Montreal, Quebec. "It was the late '30s. Many men had been conscripted for the war effort, so the keepers of most used bookshops were women. Every Saturday I'd set out with four quarters, and would go from store to store 'til I found a book that I wanted. I'd put down a 25-cent deposit, and go back and add to that in following weeks. When I reached the price of the book, often just a dollar or two, the book would be mine. The delayed gratification only made each book seem more special."

Often, the books were mysteries, which he enjoyed then and enjoys today. He likens the way his collection has developed to building a sandcastle. "It's not like you have an architect design a sandcastle. You just start building, adding on where it looks good. It's that way with my books. I started collecting mysteries, but sometimes mysteries lead to something historic or something literary. So now I have quite a few books which aren't mysteries, but which in some way relate to other things in my collection."

Take, for example, the King George twig of the collection: it consists of three books in four volumes, of which only one is a ghost story series. The story goes this way: young Larry was browsing in a bookshop and spied a book with a bookplate that read "G Rex III." Aha, he thought: a book belonging to the King of England who let America get away. But George III wasn't really king for very long; his madness caused his son to be appointed Prince Regent. The son was something of a philanderer. Among his alliances was one to his first cousin, Caroline of Brunswick. He only slept with her three times, and neither party to the marriage much liked the other. But she steadfastly refused to give him a divorce, and a ten-year lawsuit he brought

produced only a two-volume transcript of the proceedings, which Solomon showed me. (The Prince Regent was King George IV from 1820 to 1830.) William, the third son of George III and Queen Charlotte (b. 1765), was a naval career man, and was created Duke of Clarence and Earl of Munster. He had a 20-year affair with the actress Dorothea Bland, producing ten children, all of whom



bore the surname Fitzclarence. One daughter, Wilhelmina (Countess of Munster), who lived to a ripe old age, took up writing books at age 60. Her *Ghostly Tales*, of 1896, made it into Solomon's collection.

Given the rest of Solomon's life, it is a wonder that he has had time to develop such a collection. Much of Dr. Solomon's (he still practices as a pediatric dermatologist) medical education was in Europe. He started in Paris since he already spoke French (because of his Montreal childhood). From there it was a short step to Belgium, where he was soon speaking Flemish. School was fine in Belgium, but the weather was cold and wet. An excursion to Switzerland ended with him settling on Geneva for most of his medical education – though it was interrupted by clerkships in Montreal and Britain. His internship was back in Montreal. Then, in 1961, he moved to Pennsylvania, where he first became interested in dermatology. Eventually, he ended up at the University of Illinois Medical School, where he served as head of dermatology from 1972

until 1995. There he was a pioneer in the subspecialty of pediatric dermatology, a field which developed in Chicago and Mexico City.

In the continuum of book collectors, Solomon is both a "keeper" and a "reader," meaning that he is inclined to hold on to books he acquires (he mentioned giving most of his Stephen King to his daughter, who really cares more about King than he does,

and giving one other book to a friend who he thought would appreciate it more than he did – but these are the exceptions that prove the rule), and that he only buys books that he wants to read (although he admits occasionally to buying a better copy of a book he has already read).

He thinks he has about 5000 books. "That means it sometimes takes me a while to lay my hands on a book I know I have. Sometimes a day!" He counts among his favorite authors Poe (about whom he wrote for the *Caxtonian* in September of 1998), Arthur Conan

Doyle, unrecognized female writers of British country village mysteries, Georges Simenon (whom he sometimes reads in French), and Ann Radcliffe (pioneer of the Gothic novel).

In the past few years, Solomon has developed a new collecting interest: graphic novels. It began with the discovery of Art Spiegelman, who is most famous for his *Maus* series, which tells the story of his parents' survival of the Holocaust. "I had started picking up his magazine, *Raw*, and bound into it were these small booklets which were the first appearances of *Maus*. They were by far the most interesting thing in *Raw*. 'Maus' means mouse. In the series, the mice are the victims and the cats are the Nazis." Eventually, Solomon got to meet Spiegelman and his wife, who is the *New Yorker's* art editor, Françoise Mouly. Of late the graphic novel section of his shelves has grown to include other artists, and now fills its own wide shelf.

§§

Photograph by Robert McCamant

Note new luncheon location!

Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program

Friday January 9, 2009, Union League Club

John Lupton

“Will the Real Abraham Lincoln Please Stand Up?”

About a month before Lincoln's 200th birthday, we welcome John Lupton, Associate Director and Editor of The Papers of Abraham Lincoln, a project of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum and dedicated (since 1985) to finding and scanning ALL documents written or received by Lincoln. After searching 88 Illinois court houses and over 60 repositories nationwide, Phase I of the project was completed with the publication (in March 2008) of the 4-volume, highly-acclaimed *Legal Documents and Cases*. Besides being imaginative, persistent, tireless, and gifted writers, John and his team have had to have the skills of history detectives, attorneys, technocrats, diplomats, researchers, and handwriting experts. John has many stories to tell. He will demonstrate how he authenticates documents and he'll share his opinion on Lincoln as a person, by one who has intimately observed his law practice. Finally, John will tell about the special events planned for Lincoln's Bicentennial Commemoration.

Mark your calendars.

The January luncheon will take place at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (in the main dining room on six) opens at 11:30; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$30. The January dinner will take place at the Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton St. Timing: spirits at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, program at 7:30 pm. Price for dinner is \$48.

Beyond January...

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

Friday, February 13, at the Union League Club, five Caxtonians who collect handmade books will each show four books from their collection, talking a bit about each and then allowing ample time for everyone present to take a closer look. Participating will be Hayward Blake, Rob Carlson, Martha Chiplis, Bill Drendel, and Bob McCamant.

FEBRUARY DINNER

John Solomon, of the University of Illinois, will speak on the popular phenomenon that was *Ben Hur*. It provided a veritable brand name and chariot logo for dozens of fledgling companies at the end of the nineteenth century, making it the prototype of synergy between American consumerism and popular art. February 18 at The Newberry.

Dinner Program

Wednesday, January 21, 2009, Newberry Library

Greg Prickman

“Gutenberg Meets GIS: *The Atlas of Early Printing*”

The spread of printing through Europe following Gutenberg's innovations with type and press has captivated bibliophiles for centuries. A new online resource, *The Atlas of Early Printing*, brings this era to life through an interactive, animated map, allowing us to question how economic and cultural factors may have influenced printing's development. The *Atlas* will be demonstrated, and the history of its development will be traced. The project will also be placed in the larger context of the study of the spread of printing, from the 19th century collecting of Rush Christopher Hawkins, through the development of the British Museum's catalogue of 15th century printing, to the recent online availability of the *Incunabula Short Title Catalog*.

Caxtonian Greg Prickman first began considering a project to depict the spread of printing ten years ago while a student at Indiana University, after he encountered a series of maps in a book entitled *Annals of Printing*. *The Atlas of Early Printing* combines his interests in traditional bibliography and new digital techniques, which he feels are less in conflict than some might think.

For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org; **reservations are needed by noon Tuesday for the Friday luncheon, and by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.** See www.caxtonclub.org for additional parking and transit information.

MARCH LUNCHEON

The luncheon will be held at the Union League Club on Friday, March 13. The speaker will be announced.

MARCH DINNER

In recent years, Caxtonian Paul Saenger of The Newberry Library has become obsessed with the question, “Where and when did the numbered chapters and verses of the Bible originate?” On Wednesday, March 18 he will share with us the fruit of his extensive research on medieval manuscripts and early printed books that tried to answer the question.