

Charles Miner, 1928-2011

Remembered by Thomas J. Joyce

I paused in my typing on my IBM Selectric at the sound of the quiet knock upon the pane of glass to the entry door of my office. "Come in," said I. The door opened and an uncommonly well-dressed gentleman entered quietly. I did not know it then, but it was the inauspicious beginning of a friendship to span more than three decades.

If I could find the key to my locked filing cabinet, I could date the event quite precisely. No matter. My visitor introduced himself as Charles Miner. It was always Charles. Never Chuck or any other diminutive. "Do you have any George Ade material?" he asked. "George Ade!" I thought, "This is too good to be true. Who is this guy?"

Charles Miner was born in 1928 in Shelbyville, Illinois, but that did not stop him from being interested in the works of a Hoosier dramatist with a turnpike rest stop named for him in northern Indiana. George Ade was one of a cadre of talented Hoosiers who were drawn like moths to the flames of Chicago late in the 19th

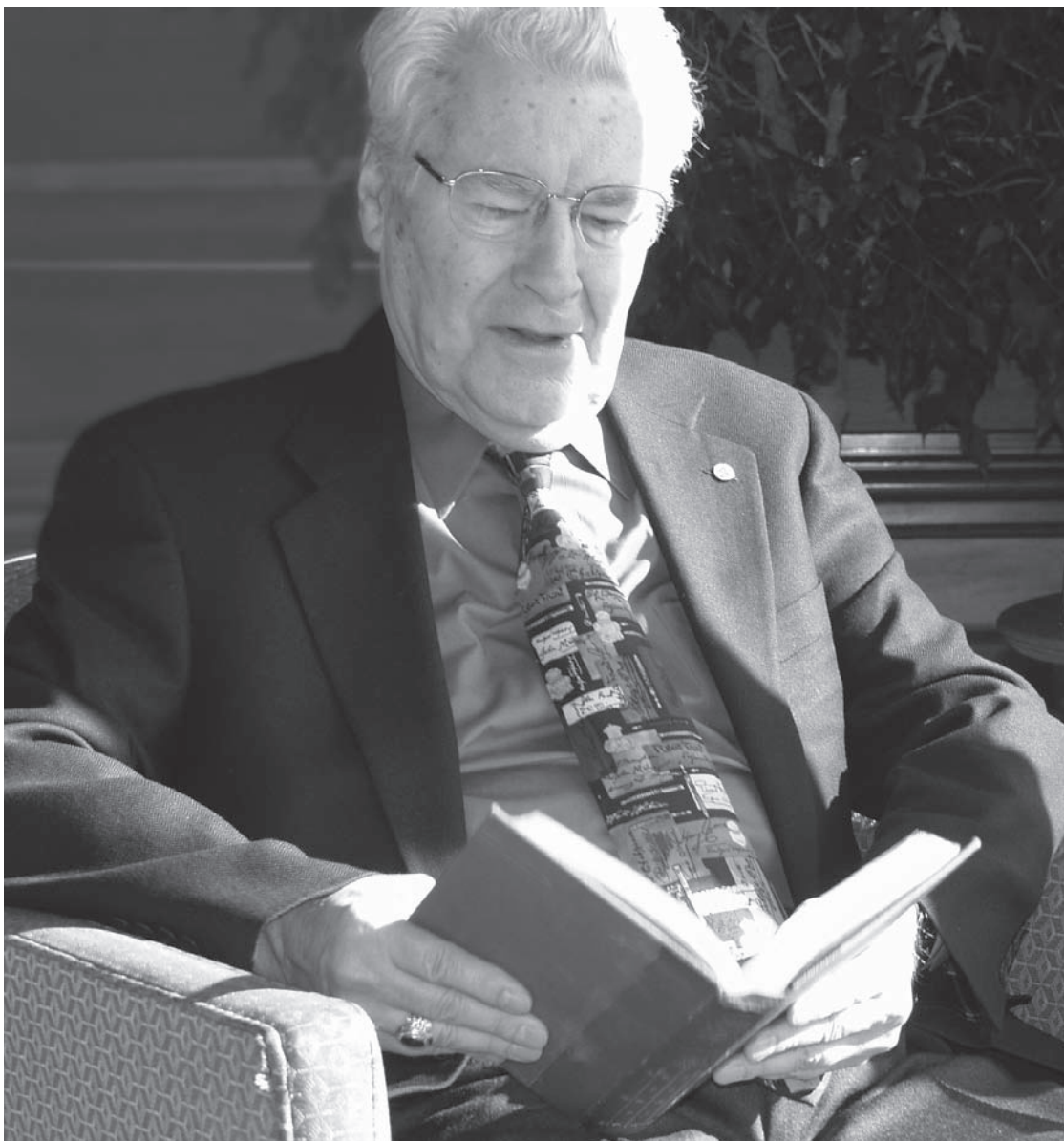
century. Among the others was Ade's Purdue buddy, John T. McCutcheon, McCutcheon's brother, George Barr McCutcheon, jurist and baseball fan Kenesaw Mountain Landis, Ralph Fletcher Seymour, etc. All of them were members of the Indiana Society of Chicago, which frequently held get-togethers on Ade's farm, Hazelden, not far from Lafayette, Indiana.

In the Chicago of 1920, all of those men

would have been household names, and, arguably, foremost among them all was the humorist George Ade, author of *Fables, More Fables, Stories of the Streets and of the Town*, and his satirical Broadway play, "The Sultan of Sulu." Samuel Clemens had been a big fan. But, in Geneva, Illinois in the late 1970s George Ade was unknown to nearly everyone except, possibly, the two rare book dealers in town (and I am not so sure about the other

guy). Just so, anyone who cared about George Ade intrigued me.

At that time Charles travelled through northwestern Illinois from his base in Rockford where he was a manager at Industrial Oil & Chemical Co. Between appointments he often found time to drop in to check out booksellers in DeKalb, Sycamore, Aurora, Naperville etc. Gradually he widened
See CHARLES MINER, page 2



Photographs by Robert McCamant



CAXTONIAN

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CHARLES MINER, from page 1

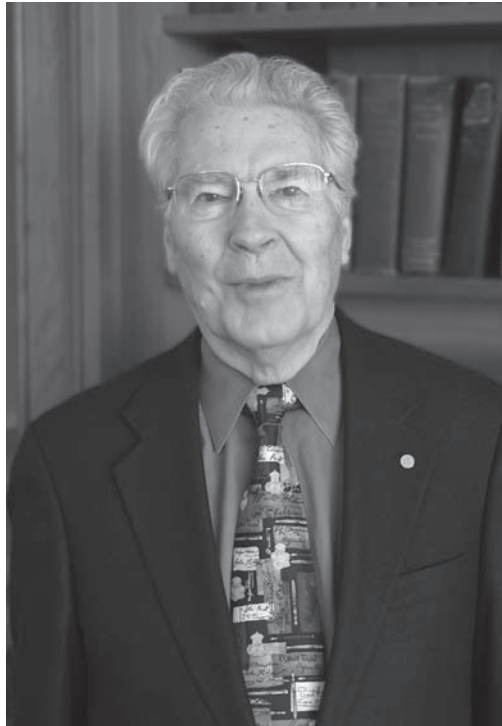
his interests to concentrate on the wider range of Ade's contemporaries in the Chicago Literary Renaissance, especially Ben Hecht, and, later, his own contemporaries such as Studs Terkel, Saul Bellow, and Mike Royko. Later still, after meeting Gwendolyn Brooks through fellow-DOFOB Bob Cotner, at the Caxton Club, he made a point of travelling to places where she would speak, or read her poetry, and he bought her books, and she was gracious enough to inscribe them for him. Charles once spoke about extracting the stone with her name from the facade of the then-new Illinois State Library in Springfield, but the last I knew, that building is still intact. (However, after graduating from the University of Illinois in Urbana, Charles was trained by the military in counter-intelligence work during the Korean Conflict, so I would not underestimate his ability to get that block.)

As a bibliophile, Charles appreciated everything about his quarry. Charles told me how he would consistently meet with one of Ade's nephews, both to learn the family lore about Uncle George, but also, sometimes, to buy or swap Ade memorabilia from the family.

Ben Abramson, proprietor of Chicago's old Argus Book Shop, used to say that the collector nearly always has the advantage over the bookseller because the collector can become a specialist in only one or a few writers, whereas the bookseller could only aspire to be fairly knowledgeable about a much larger number of authors. Perhaps the best example of Charles' Ade expertise, and a tribute to his study of Dorothy Russo's 1947 *Bibliography of George Ade*, was the time he was visiting an antique shop, not a bookshop. It was there that he spotted a set of miniature books, the Little Folks Library. "The set...consists of six tiny books, uniformly bound and issued boxed. Only two are by Ade.... The only complete set located is in the possession of [Caxtonian] Franklin J. Meine, Chicago - Russo p. 16." The set contained the first issue of *Circus Day*, the 1896 miniature book published by the Werner Company of Chicago. It was Ade's first separate book, preceding his first regularly published book, *Artie*, by a month. (Note: Miner-esque Caxtonians

will have already asked themselves, "How can *Artie* be Ade's first regularly published book, if it was preceded by two books by Ade issued in the Little Folks Library?" The bookseller-ish finessed explanation is that Ade's second title in the Little Folks Library was published under the pseudonym of John Hazelden.)

The late 1970s brought a lot of changes into the life of Charles Miner. Although born downstate, Charles had been raised in the far south side of Chicago, in the Beverly Morgan Park neighborhoods. Unbeknownst to me, Charles had been quite the



equestrian in his youth in Morgan Park, and well into his seniority he continued to volunteer time giving riding lessons to youths through the Chicago Park District out south. In 1979, unbeknownst to me, Charles married his second wife, Jean, and moved to a condominium on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago. About that time he changed careers, first into investments and then into life insurance. He became one of the top brokers in his office, frequently winning annual trips given to top producers. The quiet, calm earnestness and

persistence which he brought to his book collecting were the same qualities that brought him success in the insurance field.

Meanwhile, Charles continued collecting more books (and found that a condominium was too restrictive to contain them all). He was a charter member of the west suburban bibliophilic society that was a re-establishment of Roswell Field's DOFOBs (the Damned Old Fools Over Books). Charles rarely missed a meeting and frequently carpooled to meetings in Naperville, or Wheaton, or Sycamore, or Geneva. Often meetings consisted of show-and-tell sessions, and Charles always had some new treasure to share and pass around. By 1987 Charles had become a member of the Caxton Club, as had many of the DOFOBs, but that did not diminish his enthusiasm for either group. He loved to participate and learn.

Charles was a devoted user of the Caxton Club membership directory, but not for contacts to sell insurance. No, he carried it in his coat pocket to

See **CHARLES MINER, page 4**

Remembering Charles Miner

Robert McCamant

Charles Miner may never have been a professional book scout, but there seemed to be nothing he enjoyed more than scouting for books. As his wife Jean told the *Chicago Tribune*, "His greatest thrill was finding that rare treasure of a book that matched the passion of someone he cared about. That's what he'd get people for birthdays, weddings and special occasions."

Kathryn R. J. Tutkus interviewed him for "Caxtonians Collect" in January of 2005:

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 of success and by chance coming 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 collectors 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 Vincent Starrett.

Miner grew up in Chicago, attended Morgan Park High School and was a 1951 graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). His degree was in agriculture. He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War (in a counter-intelligence unit at the University of Chicago), was manager at Industrial Oil & Chemical Co., Rockford, for 23 years, and worked his last 20 years with National Benefit Brokers in Northbrook. He retired two years ago. Jean is his second wife, albeit of 31 years. His two children, Nancy and Bill, are from the first marriage.

According to the 2005 "Caxtonians Collect,"

Miner had four main interests in book collecting: 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, and "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 books; Chicagoana; and books from private presses in Chicago. He also had 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, noted for his contributions to the academic study of insurance. (Jean explained

that Charles studied agriculture in order to be more effective in working on insurance for farmers and farm-related businesses.) Years later, when Miner was in Baltimore, Maryland at counter-intelligence school, he purchased his first collectible book, a limited edition copy of *The Old Time Saloon* by George Ade, and thus began his collection. In addition to many hardbound books, Miner had a large assemblage of Ade ephemera.

Miner also told Tutkus that he read every book he collected and boasted of only one or two duplicates in his entire collection. "Miner

must have been present on the photographic memory lesson day at counter-intelligence school," Tutkus concluded.

He was a man of many skills and interests. He was an avid equestrian in his early years, including a brief stint teaching people to ride. A jolt to his back while riding put an end to that in the early 1980s, but he never lost his love of horses. For a brief period, Miner led tours of the Chicago stockyards. Though it was before she had married him, Jean remem-

bered his amusement with the women who would come on the tour: "They'd be carrying handkerchieves doused in perfume to mask the smell, but many still would faint at the sights." She also mentioned that he did a few magic tricks from time to time. "He had a collection of tricks he stored in the basement, and every once in a while he'd go down and retrieve a few to entertain a visitor."

She also fondly remembers their years living in Chicago, when "All year long, every weekend he'd pick out something to do. Could be a concert, an exhibit, a play, or the opera. And when it snowed, we'd go cross-country skiing!"

Miner first heard of the Caxton Club when he purchased and read the book *Stories of the*

Street and Town by George Ade, which was published by the Club in 1941. Years later he met Caxtonian Tom Joyce and later, Jay Marshall (who also collected Ade), and they introduced him to the Caxton Club. Miner was nominated for membership by Jay Marshall in 1987. He was seconded by David Meyer. He served on the Council starting in 1989. He was the Centennial treasurer with Hayward Blake, Frank Piehl, Karen Skubish, Brother Michael Grace, Tom Joyce, and Bob Cotner as other council members.

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Miner searches for a "find" at the March 2008 Revels

CHARLES MINER, *from page 2*

every meeting, and jotted down in it the interests of other collectors. For several years in the 1990s Charles served very ably as the Treasurer of the Caxton Club, and, at least once – perhaps twice – as the Chair of the Nominating Committee. He was also very dedicated to trying to draw new blood into the Club. If he met someone who had even the hint of being a bibliophile, he would invite them to be his guest for a meeting or two. One of his more notable successes was quite close to home, when his grandson, Matthew, became a junior Caxtonian while still an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The Caxton Club book auctions always provided new stimuli for Charles. He hated to miss any of the action. He arrived as early as he could to see the books that his fellow Caxtonians had donated, who was reading what, and who was bidding against him. Charles showed similar curiosity and stamina when it came to book fairs around the city. He rarely missed one, and usually managed to dig out some nuggets for his collection. After all, he was a Miner. Because of that he felt a certain special kinship with fellow bibliophile and non-resident Caxtonian, Minor Myers, who was President of Illinois Wesleyan University, and who was described in Nicholas Basbanes' second book, of which Charles had an inscribed copy.

From his youth, Charles had always delighted in prestidigitation. He was especially pleased to improve on his acquaintanceship with his fellow Caxtonian bibliomaniac Jay Marshall, the dean of American magicians. Charles was also a frequent customer of Jay's northside emporium, Magic Inc. Charles bought from Jay and mastered little tricks which he would share with his grandchildren, and to the children (and adults) of households when he was discussing insurance policies. It was an excellent icebreaker.

Another of Charles' interests was his family tree. On the Miner side of his family they trace him back to Thomas Minor who emigrated across the ocean to America in 1629. Both Charles and his brother, Thomas, are interested in this ancestor, who reportedly had over 229 great-grandchildren in and around Connecticut. Some of Charles' own children, and grandchildren, too, have seen a lot of water as competitive swimmers, and as a dad and grandfather Charles attended as many of their swim meets as he could.

In the past decade, while Charles valiantly but quietly fought successive battles with

prostate cancer, he continued to pursue new areas of books when he could not sate himself with enough old books. He broadened his reach into different local history – Virginia – after he and Jean bought some property there for a retirement home, and then into DuPage County when they instead settled in Naperville a couple of years ago. He stood in line at Barbara's Bookstore to get two signed copies of President Clinton's memoir: one to keep, and one as a gift to somebody else. Charles loved to give good books as presents to family and friends, and a friend was anybody who liked books.

Before they moved to Naperville, Jean and Charles were regular attendees at a church in Evanston. Charles especially enjoyed driving his Prius up Lake Shore Drive to Evanston

with Jean at his side. He enjoyed driving his Prius to sell insurance policies. Often one could find an old book on the cushion in the back of the car.

Whatever comfort he found at church seemed to work for him. When I visited him at the nursing home in January, before he died, he was quite at peace with the world. He realized that his body was failing him, but his mind was sharp. He was ready to go on. I know he was able to see his loved ones before his final sleep. I know that I left his bedside feeling better than when I went in. That was quite a gift. And while that chapter is closed, the memories of him and the lessons of his life remain.

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Memories of Charles Miner

JoAnn Baumgartner

My recollections of Charles are all happy ones. I used to see him at book events 15 years ago at Northwestern University, at Loyola, at places on the North Shore, and at smaller venues where dealers gathered from throughout the USA. He would describe his recent expeditions to garage sales where he had found a special gem of a book, overlooked by the home owner, and grin at the pleasure of the discovery and its ultimate place on his shelves. In his later years after his move from Chicago, I would often see him at Nichols Library in Naperville. He missed the buzz of the city, which was replaced by the mellowness of the suburbs, and he also missed the proximity to the myriad bookstores and

dealers in antiquarian books in the territory he knew so well. Always a storyteller, his jokes and stories revolved around the ultimate pleasure of "the find" which he knew amused and delighted me every time. Charles loved the idea that the Caxton Club still existed in this electronic age where change meant fewer book stores, where the feel of the book in his hand was satisfaction enough to ignite memories of past purchases, and the examination of a possible purchase was a ritual of time remembered. He would seek Caxtonians at each meeting and cross-examine them on their recent discoveries. Charles represented a part of all of us in his happy pursuit of the book. He will be missed.

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Charles Miner, the DOFOB

Susan Hanes

It was with great sadness that I learned of my friend Charles Miner's recent death. I have such fond memories of Charles, especially during those happy DOFOBs ("Damned Old Fools Over Books") years when our small group of booklovers met in the western suburbs for wine and book talk. Charles would sometimes offer me a ride home, and I always enjoyed our conversations. The consummate book sleuth, he would often

call me with sightings of Wilkie Collins novels or other things that he had come upon that he thought would be of interest to me. I remember when he told me that he had picked up a first edition of a book about a bespectacled young boy and was going to have the author sign it. I had no idea at the time that he was buying to create a signed first of the first *Harry Potter*! A gallant gentleman, delightful friend, and fascinating Caxtonian has slipped away from us.

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New Members Admitted During 2010-2011

September 2010

Doug Fitzgerald is Executive Vice President at Chicago-based RR Donnelley with responsibility for communications. An omnivorous reader, his fascination with corporate history has led him to give witty and knowledgeable tours of Donnelley's historic library. He collects the Lakeside Classics and has read the entire series, which, along with the library, is among his professional responsibilities. A graduate of Northwestern University, Doug nonetheless claims that he was attracted to attend there principally by discounts to football games, "which during the early 80's also conferred the rights to wander during contests in the end zone that Northwestern so seldom used otherwise." Nominated by Susan Levy, seconded by Kim Coventry.

Catherine Uecker is Rare Books Manager at the University of Chicago Library's Special Collections Research Center. Prior to her current position at the University, she served at the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Special Collections Library at the University of Michigan. Catherine has a master's degree in library science and a second master's in museum studies. In addition to working with books, she collects children's classics translated into Latin or French and mid-20th century Everyman's Library editions. Nominated by Margaret Oellrich, seconded by Stuart Miller.

October 2010

Audrey Niffenegger, the noted author, is a discerning collector of artists' books and fine bindings. She has incorporated librarians, the Newberry Library, and book-related obsessions into her writings. A founder of the Columbia College Center for Book and Paper Arts and a member of the Chicago Hand Binders, her books are in the collections of the Newberry Library, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Houghton Library, and the Library of Congress. Nominated by Martha Chiplus, seconded by Rob Carlson.

November 2010

Christina Marusich is a paper conservator who has worked extensively with book and print conservation. She has been employed by the Graphic Conservation Company in Chicago since 1987. A professional associate of

the American Institute for Conservation, she has served as program chair of the Chicago Area Conservation Group, and has taught a workshop for conservators at the Campbell Center for Historic Preservation. She received a B.F.A. in printmaking from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and has studied chemistry at Roosevelt University. Nominated by Michael Thompson and seconded by Alice Schreyer.

Beverly Offen describes herself as "a traditionalist and a feminist, a frugal consumer, an irreligious realistic moralist." She studied history in college and graduate school and first worked as an editor in educational publishing. Subsequently she studied library science and was a community college librarian for many years. She is interested in art and architecture, American history, and the Chicago Cubs when they are winning. "But the focus of my life has always been writing, and today I call myself a writer," she concludes. Her husband, Ron Offen, was a member of the Club, and she joined after his death.

February 2011

Mary Morony is a professional genealogist, preparing books, articles, and "cross-charts" for her clients. A long-time Chicagoan, she is a high-energy, congenial member of the Newberry Book Fair Committee and the Newberry's genealogy group; she is also an avid sailor. While her major activities and collecting interests are in genealogy and family history, she also does work for architectural firms. Nominated by Bill Locke, seconded by Jim Tomes, with a supporting second by Tom Swanstrom.

Robert Wedgeworth was the founding president of ProLiteracy Worldwide, the largest non-governmental adult literacy training organization in the world, serving until his retirement in June 2007. He previously served as university librarian, professor of library administration, and professor of library and information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He also served as the dean of the school of library service at Columbia University, the executive director of the American Library Association, and as president of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. He is a life member of the American Library Association and of the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People. In June 2010, the U.S. Senate confirmed his appointment to the National Board of the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences. Nominated by Peggy Sullivan, seconded by Barbara Lynch, with supporting seconds by Don Chatham and Bill Locke.

Jerome Yanoff is Professor of Special Education at National-Louis University. He has self-published three books on special education. As a collector, he specializes in bookplates, authors' letters, and autographs. His collection now includes 95% of all the federal cabinet members in U.S. history. In his spare time he is an active internet bookseller, and has served for many years as a volunteer with the Newberry Book Fair. Nominated by Tom Swanstrom, seconded by Bob Brooks.

Barbara Jones, former director of Special Collections at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, became a member in 2001. Her membership lapsed when she relocated to Connecticut. She is now back in the city heading the Freedom to Read Foundation at the American Library Association and wishes to reactivate her membership. Recommended for reactivation by Peggy Sullivan.

April 2011

John Noonan is a former investment banker who began his career in New York City and moved to Chicago in 1981, where he now has his own private investment company. He is a trustee of the Newberry Library, Director Emeritus of the Sherwood Conservatory of Music, a member of the Lions Council of the Art Institute of Chicago, and active in many Chicago social and cultural institutions. His collecting interests include military history. Nominated by Paul Ruxin, seconded by David Spadafora.

Richard Nielson, a stay-at-home spouse, heard of the Caxton Club through his collecting activities, and attended a talk last year by Tony Ring. Since then, he has traveled by train to Chicago to attend luncheon meetings as a guest. A member of the Friends of the Milner Library at Illinois State University, Richard collects P.G. Wodehouse, T.S. Eliot, and John Updike, and enjoys bookbinding. Nominated by Dan "Skip" Landt; seconded by Margaret Oellrich for non-resident membership.

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Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Robert McCamant

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

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: "Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life" (this moment in east-central European modernism is explored with nearly 300 works of photography, photomontage, and photographically illustrated posters and books), Galleries 182-184, through October 9. "Artful Alphabets: Five Picture Book Artists" (display of original alphabet drawings, plus a variety of ABC books for you to share with your child) Ryan Education Center, through November 6.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "Treasures of the Lenhardt Library," through August 7. "Genus Rosa" (historic rose illustrations from the collection), opens August 12.

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E.

Washington Street, Chicago, 312-744-6630: "Movie Mojo: Hand-Painted Posters from Ghana" (inspired by movies, created by a wide variety of artists), through September 4.

Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S.

Wabash Avenue, 312-369-6632: "The World as Text" (reading room of contemporary artist's books, zines, exhibition catalogs and alternative publications), 2nd floor gallery, through August 12.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: "Lincoln's Chicago" (portraits of Lincoln's contemporaries paired with lithograph views of Chicago created in the 1860s), Sanger P. Robinson Gallery, ongoing.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Chicago River 1999-2010" (28 black and white photographs taken by Richard Wasserman), Congress Corridor, Ground Floor, through September 2. "Actors, Plays & Stages: Early Theater in Chicago" (memorabilia of the first performance at the Sauganash Hotel, vibrant 19th century theaters and the rise of the Loop's grand auditoriums), Chicago Gallery, Third Floor, into 2012.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Black Wings: American Dreams of Flight" (significant figures, events, and themes associated with African-Americans in aviation and aerospace history), through September 25.

Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society, 361 E. Westminster Avenue, Lake Forest, 847-234-5253: "Uncanny, Unabridged, Unforgettable: 150 Years of Lake Forest" (honors Lake Forest's Sesquicentennial), through December 29.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "Pandora's Box: Joseph Cornell Unlocks the MCA Collection" (Cornell's work in dialogue with objects from the MCA's collection), through October 16.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "Ballistics and Politics: Military Architecture Books at the Newberry" (architectural books from the 16th to the 18th centuries displaying the military and political power of European rulers), opens August 12.

Northwestern University, Charles Deering Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Who is the journalist?" (using books and rare materials from the Library's collections to explore an array of jour-



Art Institute: *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life*

PIET ZWART. COVER FOR J.F. OTTEN, AMERIKAANSCH FILMKUNST (DETAIL), 1931. © 2011 ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY

nalistic identities and incarnations), main library, through September 2. "René Binet and Ernst Haeckel's Collaboration: Magical Naturalism and Architectural Ornament" (Binet had received the prestigious commission to design the principal gateway to the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 – which he did from coral structures as they had been elucidated by the German biologist Ernest Haeckel. Binet's work parallels the Art Nouveau style but is unique in its geometric developments taking off from Haeckel's studies of biological morphology), Special Collections through October 28.

Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Before the Pyramids: the Origins of Egyptian Civilization" (exhibition shows that the most fundamental aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization – architecture, hieroglyphic writing, a belief in the afterlife, and allegiance to a semi-divine king – can be traced to Egypt's Predynastic and Early Dynastic eras), through December 31.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary" (collections of Soviet children's books, posters and other print materials grouped by prominent historical and ideological themes, stylistic features, and the contributions of individual authors or artists), Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, opens August 22.

For complete information on events and exhibits of the Festival of the Architecture Book, see www.1511-2011.org.

Until a replacement exhibit editor is found, please send your listings to bmccamant@quarterfold.com, or call 312-329-1414 x 11.

Caxtonians Collect: Henry Adamson

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Henry Adamson is a second-generation Caxtonian. His father, Gordon Adamson, nominated him for membership in 1984. Was it an inherited collecting gene, or was it childhood environment that caused successive bookmen? We can never be sure.

"Actually, my father put me up for membership when it became clear that I was the likely one to inherit his collection," Adamson explains. But the son was already a book collector, in spades, before he became a Caxtonian. After all, he had grown up in a comfortable Lake Forest household where there was

no need for a television set because there were books in every corner. The son remembers that when he had mastered reading his father said, "Here's the library, go play."

His father collected fine books as they were conceived of in an earlier era. Old, rare, and if there was a story attached, so much the better. There were a few incunables, including a beautiful *Ashdene Morte D'Arthur* and a *Johnson's Dictionary*. Quite a few editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Beautiful prints of Roman buildings. "He was also interested in calligraphy and paleography. He had a passable Italian hand himself," Adamson says.

For the son, the path to collecting was books on cars. "I find all sorts of cars interesting," he admits. "But the ones that have the most interesting stories are the exotic ones, such as Buggatis or Talbots. And some of my favorite books are about Harry A. Miller, an outstanding figure in racecar development during the 1920s and 30s." He laments the sad state of book manufacturing these days,

however. "My father bought books that are hundreds of years old, and they are in perfect condition. But sometimes when I buy a lavish new color book about cars it falls apart after the first reading!"

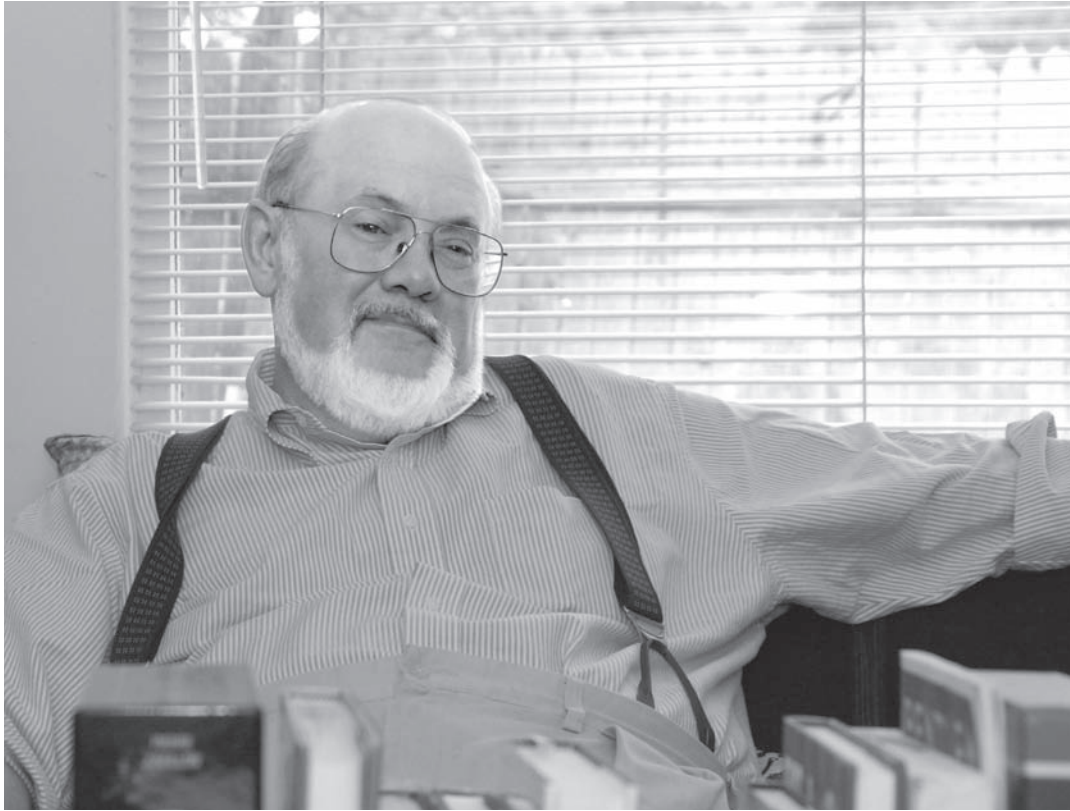
He has another lament about the book industry. "I used to be able to find wonder-

a process for making rubber molds from an intact original. They could then cast thousands of duplicates.

The car insignia company has passed (for one thing, the big companies now insist on a royalty for anything with their logo; for another, his partner died), but the other kinds

of involvement in the world of classic cars have continued. Adamson makes the rounds of vintage car shows, frequently serving as the announcer for competitions.

And though he owns many more books than cars, he does admit to collecting a few of the vehicles themselves. He has a Buggati, a (French) Talbot, and a Porsche – the last because he bought it new



ful books on remainder tables. But now with the publishers moving to electronic editions, there's less occasion to print extra copies. No more \$3.95 copies at Stuart Brent!"

His Lake Forest childhood (paid for by family ownership of the Bowman Dairy) was followed by college in the east: specifically Boston University for a degree in classics. Life in Boston was good, and Adamson stayed through the 70s and into the 80s before returning to Chicago. "I was a bit of a musician, but what I really liked was Cambridge. The bookstores, the culture. They even had a bookstore that carried only review copies sent on by reviewers who had finished reading them!"

When he returned, it was to start a business manufacturing reproductions of classic car insignia to be supplied to people restoring older cars. "The big companies were only interested in selling new cars, so they didn't pay any attention to the restoration market," he explained. He and a partner developed

for his father in 1974. "He wanted one, but couldn't bring himself to buy it," he explains. "A '74 is not officially an antique yet, but it's getting there."

The heyday of fine cars was in the early part of the 20th century. "A man like Buggati thought of himself as an artisan. His father made *objets d'art*. He was constantly thinking of improvements to make his cars more beautiful and functional. But that all ended by World War II. The French started taxing people more if they possessed luxury items, and that spelled the end of creative car making."

I asked what he remembered about the Caxton Club of yore. One remarkable event he recalls is a time when Chef Louis Szathmary of the Bakery supplied the food for a Revels. "In my memory, he cooked an entire steamship roast for the club. You know, that's a quarter of a cow! It seems hard to believe, but I think we ate the whole thing down to the

See HENRY ADAMSON, page 8



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Bookmarks...

SEPTEMBER LUNCHEON

On Friday September 9 at the Union League Club, antiquarian bookseller and Caxtonian Tom Joyce will give up-to-date information on appraising books, manuscripts and maps, punctuated with anecdotes from 35 years in the appraisal trenches.

SEPTEMBER DINNER

September 21, at Cliff Dwellers, Vincent Buonanno will talk about his extensive collection of illustrated books on architecture.

OCTOBER LUNCHEON

We will meet Friday, October 14 at the Union League Club. Speaker to be announced.

OCTOBER DINNER

October 19th, at Cliff Dwellers, Ed Hirschland will talk about his extraordinary Chicagoana collection.

HENRY ADAMSON, *from page 7*
bone.”

Adamson believes that John Henry Wrenn, a first generation Caxtonian, was among the people taken in by the famous bookseller Thomas J. Wise, whose unbound copies of historic poetry were discovered to be of his own manufacture when a librarian at the University of Texas looked at them closely.

The legendary collector Alfred Hamill was an acquaintance of his father’s. “I have no memory of him, though,” Adamson explains.

“He died when I was four.” Much of Hamill’s collection went to the Newberry, but a few items went to the Adamson collection.

It could have been Hamill from whom Gordon Adamson got the idea of building a house with more than a library: both had practical book stacks built into rooms of their houses. Son Henry, who lives in the groom’s quarters of a former stable, is about to carry the plan into the next generation. The stable part of his property is about to be adapted to house his cars and give him stacks for the con-

venient arrangement of his books.

“When we went through my father’s books, we sometimes found three copies of the same book, located in different parts of the house. If you hope to be a serious collector, you need to have the practical setup,” he concludes.

Adamson rarely makes it to Club meetings these days because of vision problems. He remains hopeful that his doctors will find a cure, however, so he can find himself behind the wheel of one of his cars.

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