

Ken Nebenzahl at the Crossroads

Looking back on 55 years of selling books and maps



Robert McCamant

At age eleven, Kenneth Nebenzahl completed his first map collection, composed of state maps given by filling stations across the country. The map that completed the collection, his 48th, was Idaho; it was thanks to an uncle who visited there and brought it back. Ken was home on Long Island, where he was born and raised. He taped the 48 maps together along their left edge, making a bulky, odd-looking atlas with each page a different size and shape. And he still laments its disappearance during the ensuing seven decades.

Not surprising then, that when he became a grown-up and could decorate a house just as he wanted, he installed an 8' x 10' National Geographic map of the world on the ceiling above their bed, so that he and his wife could plan their travels in comfort. Fortunately the paperhanger did a good job: it still adheres

smoothly to the ceiling, more than 50 years later.

But it was not exactly a straight path between that first collection and Nebenzahl's role as prominent Chicago bookseller. After high school, the first step was the Marines, which he joined at age 17 during the waning days of World War II. After that, he billeted with other mustered-out servicemen in then-tenemented Chelsea, far downtown in Manhattan, and attended two years of college at Columbia at the opposite end of the island, doubling as an office boy in Wall Street offices for money to buy food and pay the rent. They named their English basement the "22nd Street Rod and Gun Club." His roommates joked that he was a swell, since he was the only employed person and often paid for their board.

Somewhere in New York he made the acquaintance of the owners of the Paul

Masson winery, who suggested he might like to wholesale wine as a career. They had a nice territory in Ohio for him: basically the entire state, except Cleveland and Cincinnati, but which cities accounted for most of the sales. Nebenzahl took it anyway, and promptly set sales records. Then he was offered a choice of two better territories: Wisconsin-Minnesota-North Dakota (which they told him would be very profitable because of high brandy sales) or New Orleans. Without hesitation, Nebenzahl picked New Orleans.

As it happened, New Orleans was also the home of a young woman named Jossy Spitz who

attended Newcomb College, then the women's college associated with Tulane. A relative suggested Nebenzahl give her a call. He did, and asked her out to dinner. "The odd thing was, she asked me if she could wear high heels," he remembers. It turns out that she is 5' 2", but wasn't going to take the chance of being taller than her date – Ken is 6' 3". They've been married almost 60 years.

It was Ken's father-in-law, Joel Spitz, who reignited his interest in collecting. Spitz – a clothing impresario connected with the "Cricketeer" label and also a director of Hart Schaffner & Marx – was a collector of illustrated books, a member of the Grolier Club, Fellow of the Morgan Library, and a Caxtonian starting in 1941. Around 1950 the Caxton Club came up to Glencoe to see his father-in-law's collection of Regency period color-plate books and medieval manuscripts.

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CAXTONIAN

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NEBENZAHL, from page 1

Ken joined the Club in 1955, nominated by his father-in-law. He had quickly figured out that what interested him was the intersection of cartography, American history, and the history of travel. He made the acquaintance of Wright Howes, the first edition of whose *U.S.iana* had appeared in 1954.

By 1957, Nebenzahl had decided that he should become a bookseller himself. He confessed it to Howes. He purchased two copies of *U.S.iana*, which Howes inscribed individually to Ken and Jossy. Then he proceeded to wish Ken luck and to start giving him advice. First, Nebenzahl had to take a tour of East Coast competitors. On the trip, don't buy stock, Howes emphasized. Make connections and build a reference library so that when presented with an item he could make sense of it.

Nebenzahl went to see G. S. MacManus, an Americana specialist outside of Philadelphia. In New York City, he went to seek out Roland Tree, who ran the American branch of the London bookseller Henry Stevens in space he rented from H. P. Kraus. After a long and productive conversation, Tree asked Nebenzahl if he would like to meet the legendary Kraus.

Ushered in, Nebenzahl explained that he was starting business as a bookseller. "Come in and sit down, my boy," Kraus said. He proceeded to give him three pieces of advice. "First: always be sure your passport is valid, with at least a year on it, and keep it right in your pencil drawer. If you hear a collection is up for sale in another country, you don't want to lose precious time getting ready to depart." The second advice was what Wright had said: build a reference collection first, before buying stock from other booksellers. The third piece of advice was the one Nebenzahl ignored: Kraus told him to move immediately to New York City.

There was never any thought of moving to New York, but Nebenzahl still thinks about the question from time to time. "True, Chicago never developed enough of an antiquarian bookseller culture to be a big draw for collectors all over the world, such as there is in New York and to a lesser extent in Los Angeles. But Chicago had great collectors. Louis Silver and Rudy Ruggles – to name only two – were amassing their collections when I was starting out as a dealer."

Despite ignoring Kraus's third instruction, Kenneth Nebenzahl, Inc. managed to do quite well. They issued a total of 118 catalogs in separate series: "The Compass for Map Collectors," "Rare Books," and "The Print Collector," as well as smaller interim catalogs. Ken wrote virtually all of the descriptions with the help of successive assistants such as Caxtonians Harry Stern and Terry Tanner. Jossy did the copyediting.

For 33 years, they had a store on a high floor of 333 North Michigan above the Tavern Club. A series of European au pairs allowed Jossy to share duties with her husband. But gradually, they came to doubt the value of having a store. "When we began, we often had books in the \$50 to \$500 range, things you might walk in off the street and buy. But as our books became more expensive (due to scarcity, as libraries began to snap them up), it was not very often that someone was going to walk in and prove to be a customer. When we were starting out in 1957 it was good to have a base downtown, but by 1989 we weren't working that hard at finding new customers, so we decided to move the books to our home in Glencoe."

Somehow, in between catalogs and buying trips and volunteer activities, Nebenzahl managed to write five books. The most recent is *Mapping the Silk Road and Beyond*, which came out in 2004, but was recently reissued in paperback – not to mention translated into French and Japanese. But there were also: *Atlas of the American Revolution* (1974), *Bibliography of Printed Battle Plans of the American Revolution* (1975), *Maps of the Holy Lands: Images of Terra Sancta Through Two Millennia* (1990), and *Maps from the Age of Discovery: Columbus to Mercator* (1990).

The Caxton Club and the Newberry Library have been important factors in Nebenzahl's business and personal life over the years. Sometimes it is hard to sort out the business from the personal, not to mention the Caxton from the Newberry! Over time friends became customers or customers became friends, and when you see many of the same people at both Caxton and Newberry events, it's often hard to remember where you first met them.

When I asked who and what Ken remembered from Caxton, the first name he mentioned was Stanley Pargellis, the legendary head of the Newberry from 1942 to 1962. "From the moment I opened my doors, he started sending me customers. He even mentioned me at Grolier Club meetings in New York! He'd always introduce me to visiting experts and collectors. It was really the Pargellis influence that got Jossy and me to start the cartography lecture series, even though the first one didn't occur until 1964."

According to a talk Nebenzahl gave in 2007, "In 1960, [Pargellis] introduced me to Joseph Deering of Saco, Maine, who was the steward of his deceased father's library of narratives of European contact with Native Americans. Frank Cutter Deering's collection, rich in early New England rarities and particularly Indian captivity literature, perfectly meshed with the Ayer Collection at the Newberry.... There were stumbling blocks to this acquisition: For instance, John Carter, head of Sotheby's book department, hoping to give Sotheby's an inside track,

rented his house in Eton Square, Belgravia, to the Deerings during the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Then there were other minor competitors such as Yale, with Jim Babb, the library's director, attempting the purchase, and Harry Ransom, the high priest of acquisitions at the University of Texas. But after many winter trips to Maine and eight years of negotiations, the Deering collection was acquired in a joint venture of the Newberry and our firm – thus avoiding the impediment of duplication that had prevented Pargellis from purchasing it to begin with.”

This was a landmark deal for both library and firm. The Newberry already had many of the high spots in the collection, which meant prime books for Nebenzahl to sell. The additional editions and supplementary material were just what the library needed for its scholars.

The second Caxton connection he mentioned was Jim Wells (formerly head of the Wing Collection at the Newberry). “Jim and Stanley were co-conspirators in all the projects at the Newberry,” Nebenzahl explained. “Pargellis – and later Bill Towner

– would cook up the idea for an acquisition, and it would be up to Jim to pull it off. Probably his biggest coup was when he and Bill managed to steal the Lou Silver collection away from the Ransom Center at the University of Texas when their offer became bogged down in red tape. It was always stimulating to talk to Bill Towner and Jim Wells.”

The third Caxton connection Nebenzahl brought up was of a different kind: Harold Tribolet, who was first a great help, but soon became a great friend. He was the head of the extra-bindery at R. R. Donnelley. “When I was putting together my first catalog, I realized that I didn’t know enough about bindings to write correct descriptions for the catalog. So one afternoon, I set out all the items to be included and invited Harold over to look at them. He patiently took me through them, giving me the right names and saving me from many a gaffe. He taught me how to tell sheepskin from goatskin with a magnifying glass, the difference between a book’s back, its backstrip, and its spine.”

The fourth Caxton connection Nebenzahl mentioned was Andrew McNally III. They worked together on a variety of publishing projects over the years. “Any time a project



Jossy examines a map with Ken.

came up that involved the history of cartography, they’d get me involved. It was often great fun.” Nebenzahl also came up with the items pictured on Rand McNally holiday greetings for 35 years. These reproduced a monument in the history of cartography accompanied by a KN essay.

Having seen many references to Nebenzahl in connection with Hermon Dunlap Smith, I asked about that friendship. “Dutch, as he was known, was one of my informal mentors as I was getting started,” he said. “He was not so old as my parents – maybe half a generation older than I. There was an interesting coincidence from our childhoods: when I was young I had put together a U.S. atlas from giveaway service station state maps. When Dutch was young, he did the same thing, but assembling the complete Hudson River from a variety of maps. So I guess we were destined to be friends.”

Smith was a Caxtonian and had been active with the Newberry Library when they first met, but he had not yet given the Newberry his tremendous map collection. “I take some of the credit for that donation,” Nebenzahl says. “In 1966, Jim Wells had talked me into

starting the lecture series on the history of cartography. When Smith gave his collection in 1971, he mentioned the lecture series as being one of the reasons it made sense to choose the Newberry. He also endowed the Hermon Dunlap Smith Center of Cartography at the Newberry, the first such institute in the U.S.

The first two lecture series featured a single speaker giving several related talks: R. A. Skelton in 1966 and William P. Cumming in 1970. Thereafter there have been various speakers on a single topic. Most recently, in 2010, the topic was “Mapping the Transition from Colony to Nation.” The University of Chicago Press regularly publishes the lectures in an illustrated volume.

Charlie Haffner, who passed away just recently, and Ken go back a long way as Caxtonians and friends. They both joined the club in 1955 and later Haffner became Secretary-Treasurer and Ken President. Also Charlie was to become Chairman, and Ken Vice Chairman of the Newberry. They hunted ducks together on the Illinois River near Henry for over 40 years.

It was Bill Towner, President and Librarian of the Newberry who proposed Ken for the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree he received in 1983. Ken’s common interests and friendships in the Caxton-Newberry orbit have been a primary source of pleasure during his 60 years in Chicago.

I got Nebenzahl to talk about the antiquarian book trade today. “These days there are two distinct tiers. If you are selling to the 1%, business is strong: plenty of money chasing books, manuscripts, maps, or prints that are important, attractive, rare, and in fine condition. Those prices are setting records. For these high spots, extra efforts by Christie’s – for example – with lavish catalogues and pre-sale exhibitions and receptions are successful. The institutional trade, research libraries (except for endowed funds specifically earmarked for retrospective purchasing) have very little funding for buying in the rare book market. And for items below the top tier, the market has yet to recover from the aftermath of the recession beginning in ’07-’08. Furthermore the number of books available on-line include many offered by sellers with little expertise who offer books ‘as is,’ which can mean much emphasis on caveat

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emtor. Today the specialist finds it difficult to compete with people selling on the internet, often via auctions. Buyers are sometimes disappointed, but it doesn't seem to matter. There are more where they came from."

Ken's home office includes much of the reference collection he has amassed over the years. "I'm never going to part with it," he says. On the wall is a unique sign that once marked Wright Howes' bookstore. "When the Howes were getting ready to move to Georgia, Jim Wells was helping them to pack. Wright said, 'I want Ken to have this.'" (The sign was loaned to the Newberry for the recent "Collecting America" exhibit.)

He and Jossy sold their personal collection through an auction at Christie's on April 10 this spring. "We have three daughters, you see," he explains. "One lives in Paris, one in Hawaii, and one in Port Townsend, Washington. There's no space in their lives to drop everything and sell our library when we are gone. We might as well make our estate more liquid and let new book collectors enjoy our books. I'll continue consulting, appraising, writing and occasional bookselling."

The sale did well. The total (including buyer's premium) was a cool \$11,663,937. "They handled it very professionally. We got excellent advance publicity. The catalogue illustrating the items was beautiful, with fold-out photos of several items. There was give-and-take over the copy, but Jossy and I had the final word." The foreword was written by no less a book celebrity than Nicolas Barker, editor of *The Book Collector*.

And it worked out just as Nebenzahl had predicted before the sale: the high spots went for well above their forecast minimums, while the less valuable items often went for barely their estimates. "Someone got a steal on *Chicago Illustrated*. It went for exactly the low estimate," he said. The complete set of the Lakeside Classics didn't even make its reserve. The highest price was for Edward Curtis' *North American Indian*, a set of 20 volumes plus 20 portfolios which went for \$2,882,500, close to double the high estimate.

I asked him about the perennial question facing dealers who are also collectors: when to buy for stock and when to buy to keep. "We tend

not to decide in advance which we're buying for. Once we have it, sometimes a passion rears its head and the decision is easy. The Curtis was an example where it was hard to decide. We don't really collect photographs, and twenty books plus twenty portfolios is quite a bit to store. But then you look at the photogravures, and you realize you don't want to part with them."

Barker's foreword makes a cryptic reference to "Kraus and Nebenzahl, 'Chicago Branch,'" so I asked about the story behind it. "The story begins with a 'the one that got away' pre-story," Nebenzahl explained. In 1968, one of the small number of the first edition, first state copies of the Declaration of Independence was discovered in Philadelphia. (These were copies produced for distribution on July 4, 1776. Most were sent out to the 13 colonies and posted, where they presumably disintegrated in the weather. A print-shop mishap taking place around midnight caused the last line of the text to shift location, which distinguishes the first from the second state.) It was put up for auction in the late 1960s and attracted wide attention. At the sale, the price rose rapidly, led by two bidders who seemed equally determined: the famous New York book dealer Hans P. Kraus, and a Dallas businessman named Ira G. Corn. "I later learned that as Kraus was leaving home for the auction, he told his wife he was going to purchase the

Declaration," Nebenzahl says. "But when Corn topped Kraus' bid of \$403,000 with one for \$404,000, Kraus lost his resolve. It went to Corn." Corn proceeded to copy it and sell facsimiles for a time, and gave the original to the city of Dallas.

A few years later, another first edition, first state Declaration surfaced. It was offered at auction in the New York, but due to poor publicity or other factors, didn't meet its reserve. Then in 1975, its owners decided to try Christie's, which at the time only had facilities in London. Nebenzahl had become interested in it, and began checking around with Chicagoans who might be purchasers. Though there was lots of interest, nothing was concluded in advance of the sale.

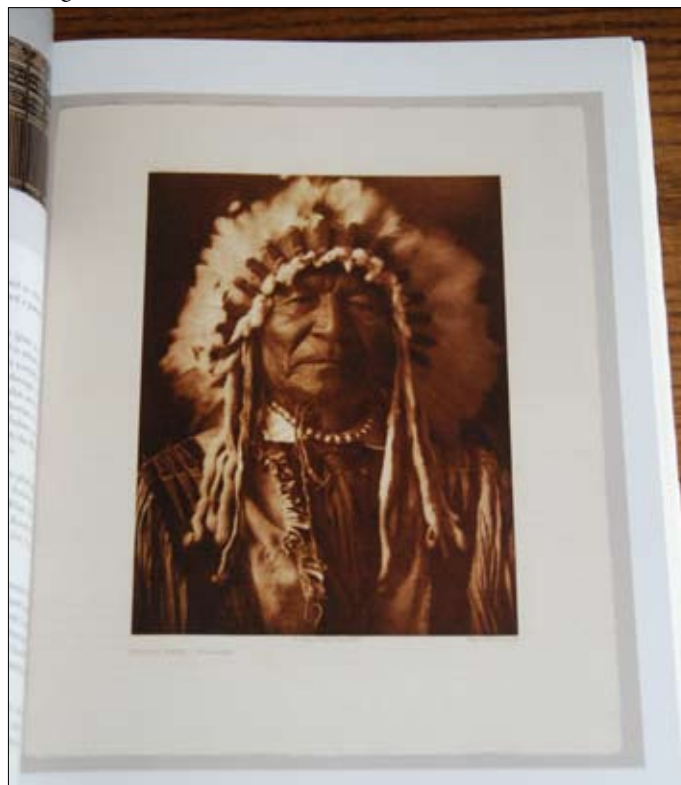
"You have to understand the country was working up a frenzy," Nebenzahl explained. "The Bicentennial was only a year away. I decided it was worth taking the risk and going to London. When I arrived at Christie's that day, my heart sunk. There was a huge crowd milling around. But then I began to notice that there weren't many Americana dealers or collectors among them. It turned out most people were there for an unrelated prints-and-drawings auction taking place in another room. So I took a deep breath, and went into the room where the Declaration was to be auctioned. There was almost nobody there. But then, as the start was just a few minutes

away, who should walk in but Hans P. Kraus."

"At first my heart sank a second time," Nebenzahl continued. "But then I realized there was one other possibility. 'How about we buy it together,' I suggested to Kraus. 'Almost nobody knows who I am, so I should do the bidding.' Kraus certainly didn't want a repeat of the previous runaway bidding, so he agreed. He only stipulated that when the gavel came down, I had to announce that we had purchased it jointly. Sure enough, I managed to get it for £90,000, and I made the announcement. It was entered into the record as Kraus and Nebenzahl, Chicago Office." A Chicago purchaser was promptly discovered: the Wood Prince Foundation bought it and donated it to the Chicago History Museum.

Nebenzahl also recounted another big-ticket auction purchase with a Chicago institution involved. This one starts with a sad

A Curtis photogravure of *Sitting Bear*, as reproduced in the auction catalog.



story. It came to light in the 1960s that the Field Museum's complete copy of Audubon's double elephant folio *Birds of America* had been systematically pilfered, one page at a time, by a trusted reader and scholar, who had frequently visited the library carrying a large portfolio case. Almost half of the plates were found to be missing. It was clear to everyone that the Museum needed a new copy.

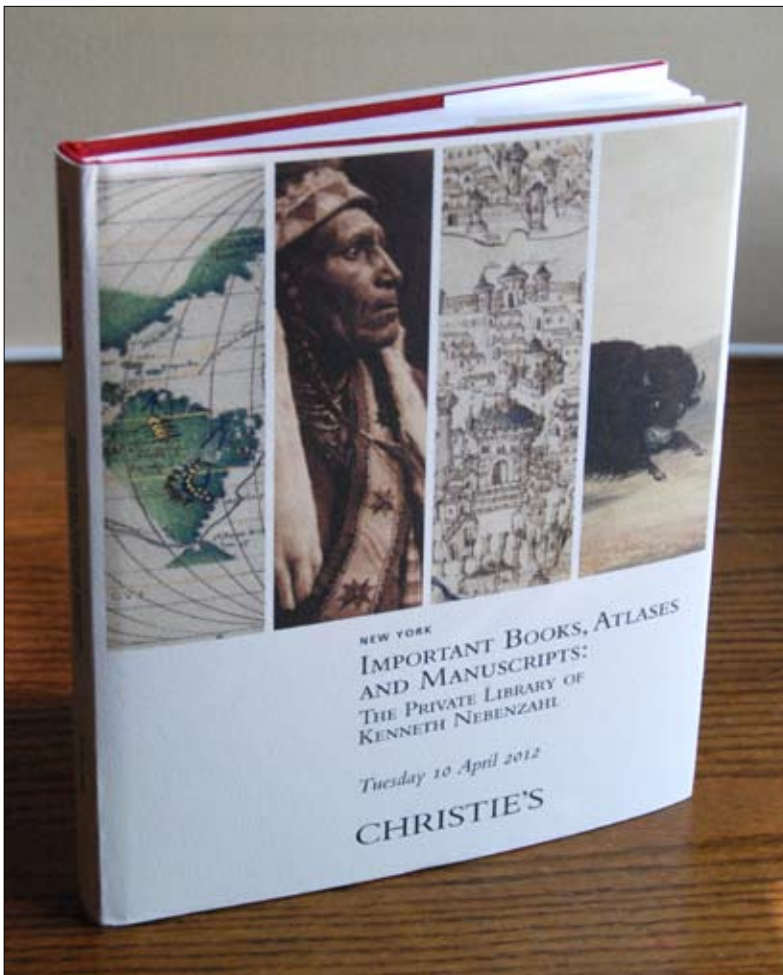
Nebenzahl had his eye on a very special copy, but he had another keenly interested party in mind to purchase it. This copy was one of two which included 13 extra plates. Audubon had identified plates that needed correction, most of which involved different species on the same plates and had the engraver do a complex process of cutting up the original plate and substituting a new image for one or more birds. There were to have been six of these extra sets, but only two are known to exist. Most were probably

broken up and sold in sheets; one is in the possession of a museum in Texas, and this perfect set was the one for sale in London.

Nebenzahl made arrangements to attend the sale, but then learned that his eager customer had changed his mind. "It's too big a book for a private home," was the collector's (perhaps reasonable) explanation. Nebenzahl went through with his plan anyway, and came home with the prize. He had been able to deduce the provenance of the copy, which he confirmed when he could examine it at the sale. Though the consigner was present at the sale, she wanted to remain anonymous. Nebenzahl winked at her, and she winked back when the hammer fell. The price went into the Guinness Book of World Records.

Ultimately, the Field Museum received the book. Mary W. Runnells purchased it from Nebenzahl and gave it to the Museum in 1969. It is the crown jewel in the Field's resource collection.

What will Ken and Jossy do now that they're out of the fray of business? Remember back to what's on the ceiling of their bedroom? I bet they will continue to



The Christie's catalog.

travel. Of course there are grandchildren to see (the first marriage in that generation has already taken place). But also to travel more of the world. After all, Jossy had climbed the Matterhorn before they were married.

"For quite a few years we would take trips to interesting places right after my European buying trips. I liked to go book purchasing earlier than some of my competitors, who would wait for warmer weather to visit their sources. When that was over it was a perfect time to visit, say, Morocco." But you should not picture the two of them sitting by a pool, sipping aperitifs – though I'm not aware that they have an aversion to aperitifs.

"My friend Derek J. de Solla Price, of Yale, told me about an amazing library beyond Fez that we needed to see. In Casablanca, we stopped to get a letter of introduction from the head librarian of the public library. Then we drove along the frontier in our VW Beetle on an unpaved road between Morocco and Algeria, looking for a small village with a large adobe building with no windows. Eventually, we found it and rousted out the librarian. (He had an easy job, since practically nobody in the region was literate.)

"The thick walls kept it cool and dark inside, which was good for the books. Many of them were manuscripts, from before the invention of printing. De Solla Price had been interested in the collection because so much of ancient science was preserved by Arabic cultures during the dark ages, as Europeans struggled merely to stay alive. It was exciting to see, but neither of us could study anything, since we knew no Arabic. But they did let us carry a few books outside so we could take a photo. We have seen exotic libraries in remote parts of the world but none more so than this."

Actually, Ken and Jossy have reveled in travel to remote areas and primitive environments. Some in Central and South America, but mostly Asia. "Give us Nepal (where we went on numerous month-long treks in the Himalaya) Tibet, Bhutan, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, the Vietnams, Oman (where we spent a week in the Empty Quarter desert with

our Bedouin guide), and New Guinea (where we motored in a 52' dug-out canoe 300 miles up the Sepik River.) We love to go exploring." They took a long trek in the Altai Mountains, a range located where Russia, China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan come together. "Our guides were a local Mongol family. We shared their yurt for a week," Jossy explained, "sleeping with the 10 family members, in the place of honor, in the middle of the yurt on a felted wool carpet, on the ground."

Let me return to Nicolas Barker's foreword to the Christie's catalog: "Librarians, collectors and other booksellers alike have discovered, sometimes too late, that an apparently casual manner, a simple question and a leisurely approach conceal a breadth and depth of knowledge, a quick appreciation of the key factor and quicker speed to settle a deal, that leaves competitors and customers alike breathless and behind." My experience with Nebenzahl is more limited than Barker's, but I got the same impression. He is warm, forthright, and interested, but no grass grows beneath his feet.

§§

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: "Capturing the Sublime: Italian Drawings of the Renaissance and Baroque" (197 Italian works on paper from the late 15th to the cusp of the 19th century assembled by Chicago collector Anne Searle Bent), Galleries 124-127 through July 8. "In Suc-

cession: Contemporary Artists' Periodicals" (magazines produced from the 1960s to the present that often seek to function as art rather than scholarship or art history), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, weekdays only, through July 16.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "Rare Seeds, Creative Harvest" (artist books inspired by the rare book collection), through August 12.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: "Magic" (a collection of artifacts from across the country that have returned home to Chicago, plus demonstrations and performances), opens June 9.

Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, "Material Assumptions: Paper as Dialogue" (new work created using abaca and cotton paper handmade at the Center), opens June 15.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Teenie Harris, Photographer: An American Story" (the everyday lives of the residents of Pittsburgh's African American neighborhoods), Congress Corridor, through June 4.

A *Barbara Lazarus Metz scholarship* has been established at Columbia College Center for Book and Paper Arts. To contribute, mail your donation to: Nancy Rampson, Institutional Advancement, Columbia College Chicago, 600 S. Michigan Ave., 4th Floor, Chicago, IL 60605. Make checks payable to Columbia College and mention "Barbara Lazarus Metz Scholarship."

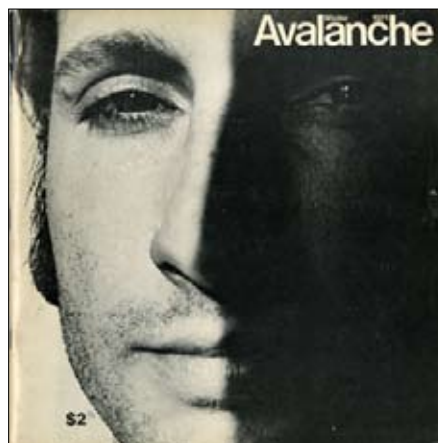


NU Block Gallery: *Art on Paper*

ED PASCHKE, FLAMENCO, 1991
(EIGHT-COLOR SCREENPRINT)

Art Institute: *Artist Periodicals*

AVALANCHE NO. 2 (WINTER 1971)



DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Spread the Word! The Evolution of Gospel" (great Gospel singers including Mahalia Jackson and Albertina Walker), through June 24.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "First Fifty" (a narrative of the first fifty objects that entered the MCA Collection), through August 19.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "Exploration 2012: The 26th Annual Juried Exhibition of the Chicago Calligraphy Collective," through June 8. "Collecting America: How a Friendship Enriched Our Understanding of American Culture," (materials relating to Wright Howes and Everett Graff), Dunlap Smith Gallery, through July 7.

Northwestern University, Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "Art on Paper: Prints, Drawings and Photographs from the Block Museum" (works by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, Mary Cassatt, Ed Paschke, and others), through August 26.

Northwestern University, Charles Deering Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Papering Over Tough Times: Soviet Propaganda Posters of the 1930s," Special Collections, through June 15.

Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Picturing the Past: Imaging and Imagining the Ancient Middle East" (paintings, facsimiles, casts, models, and photographs show how the ancient Middle East has been documented), through September 2.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "Uppers and Downers" (reworks the familiar kitchen setup of cabinetry, countertop, and sink into an abstracted version of a massive rainbow arching over a waterfall), through December 16.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "Medieval Margins and the Margins of Academic Life" (marginalia in illuminated manuscripts from Special Collections paired with photographs of life at the University of Chicago), Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, through August 10.

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

Caxtonians Collect: Kim Coventry

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Think of Kim Coventry as a shepherd. Her work is taking the germ of an idea – somebody else's, or her own – and shepherding it into a finished product. More often than not, the product is a book, but sometimes it's an exhibit or an event. The Club is extraordinarily lucky to have her as a member, because four of our most recent public productions (*Other People's Books*, *Disbound and Dispersed* and its attendant traveling exhibit, plus *Inland Printers*, and *Chicago Under Wraps* – both local exhibits plus catalogs) have come to fruition because of her efforts. In between her efforts for us, she manages to do the same sort of work for individuals, institutions, and companies.

The exhibit part of her work is what she trained for. She earned a MA degree with specializations in museum administration and Ancient Art from the University of Southern California. Part of her graduation requirement was a one-year curatorial internship at the Toledo Museum of Art (as an undergraduate she had internships at the Getty Museum and the LA County Art Museum). Her first job, however, was back in her hometown at the Monterey Peninsula Museum of Art. Nine months later she took a position at the Oriental Institute Museum here in Chicago, serving as museum administrator and assistant curator. "I admit, I came with the impression that Chicago was a bit rough around the edges," she says, "but the city embraced me and I found it full of opportunity." However, the Oriental Institute went into a brief fallow period between directors, and there wasn't much to do.

Even while at the Oriental Institute, Coventry had been briefly exposed to the Department of Special Collections at Regenstein Library, and to its director, Bob Rosenthal. He was known for liking a mix of backgrounds among the staff around him, so it was not remarkable that he mentioned a job opening in Special Collections to Coventry. "I guess it could be considered what we call a 'swerve' these days," she explains. "I happily went to work at the library and it opened exciting new

worlds." And one of those was the Caxton Club, which Rosenthal insisted she visit.

In Special Collections, she was put in charge of conservation and exhibitions, which together led to an amazing new assignment. She was "detailed" off to help R. R. Donnelley & Sons with its archive and library problems. (Here we must stop to realize the long-term closeness between the University of Chicago and the Donnelley family. Someone from the family had always served on the board of the University, and the family had been the source of enormous generosity.) When the company couldn't figure out what to do with



their collections, they looked to acting curator of Special Collections Dan Meyer (Rosenthal had died in 1989) for advice, and he decided to loan them the department's bright new hire.

When the situation had been assessed, it seemed clear that Donnelley needed full-time help, and Coventry was the logical selection. She was a full-time consultant for two years in anticipation of the relocation of the corporate headquarters from the South Side to Wacker Drive, organizing the archive and the writing of a history of the company (unpublished) and served as managing editor for a book on the Crawfordsville, Indiana, printing plant (which was). "Donnelley was a client for 16 years," she

explained. She enjoyed the work but more importantly, she got an inside look at the corporate world.

Meanwhile, she was still in touch with a friend from Toledo, who happened to have a friend at the Art Institute of Chicago. "I met Susan Rossen on the steps of the Art Institute. How appropriate!" she says. This was 1993, and Rossen was deeply involved in the editing of Frank Piehl's centennial book for the Club. Rossen nominated Coventry for membership and got Bob Cotner to second it. "In the end, I didn't have any specific responsibilities for Frank's book, but I did serve as a reader. It was an exciting time to become a member, leading up to and celebrating the centennial."

While working with Donnelley Coventry decided to hang out her own shingle, as The Coventry Group, a publication planning and curatorial consultancy. About three-fourths of her work is for businesses and institutions, while a quarter is for private individuals. Coventry helps the client conceptualize the project, then hires the appropriate writers, designers, photographers, and other creative professionals to produce the book or exhibit.

I asked her to give an example of each, and the private one that came to mind was for Newton and Josephine Minow (Newton of "vast wasteland" fame) in 1999, her first family history project. "They had been interviewing each other for a couple of years about their respective backgrounds and their life together. There were many tapes

and maybe 50 scrapbooks of photographs. We transcribed the tapes and I worked closely with Jo editing the text and selecting the photographs. It is a beautiful book, and they've kept me as a friend all the years since."

One of her early institutional clients was Lake Forest College. "My first project at the college was to produce *30 Miles North*, a history written by Franz Schultz, Art Miller, and the late Rosemary Cowler. "What became so interesting about Lake Forest is that it was founded by Chicago's Presbyterian industrialists. They also established the college to educate their children. The history of the

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Photograph by Robert McCamant



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Luncheon: Friday, June 8, 2012, Union League Club

Jerry Meyer

Juncture of the Sacred and Profane: Eric Gill and British Wood-Engraved Illustration Between the Wars

In this well-illustrated lecture Caxtonian Jerry Meyer will talk about an important, multi-talented English artist who, besides his brilliant wood-engraved illustrations, produced one of the 20th century's greatest book designs, invented innovative type faces including Gill Sans, beautifully carved the Stations of the Cross in London's Westminster Cathedral, and generally contributed outstandingly to 20th century art and design. Yet, Eric Gill was a man with a bizarre view of sexual morality who, today, could be incarcerated because of his reprehensible private life. Fiona MacCarthy, his most recent biographer (who adores his work), had this to say, "In few other artists of this century are images of the erotic and the domestic, the sexual and devotional so closely and disconcertingly related." Jerry will focus on a selection of Gill's wood-engraved illustrations reflecting his religious and his erotic disposition in the context of what he wrote about the relationship of spirituality to sexuality. Jerry is currently Professor Emeritus at Northern Illinois University where he was Professor of Art History from 1968 to 2001.

June luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard Luncheon buffet (main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$30. June dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Timing: spirits at

Dinner: Wednesday, June 20, 2012, Union League Club

Andrew Hoyem

**The Making of the Arion Press Folio Bible
Note Union League!**

Andrew Hoyem is a typographer, letterpress printer, publisher, poet, and preservationist. He trained under Robert Grabhorn and then founded the Arion Press in San Francisco. Since 1974, it has produced limited edition books of notable literature illustrated with original prints from prominent artists, including Jim Dine, Robert Motherwell, Jasper Johns, John Baldessari, Richard Diebenkorn, and Kiki Smith. Hoyem has published such contemporary writers as Seamus Heaney, Robert Alter, Tom Stoppard, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, David Mamet, and Helen Vendler. In 1989, Hoyem purchased Mackenzie & Harris, the oldest surviving typefoundry in America, employing its typesetters as part of his staff of ten. He will talk about his most ambitious project, the Folio Bible. The artisans at Arion Press have created an oversize, Folio edition using traditional letterpress techniques and the finest materials. The Arion Press Bible is the first large folio presentation of a contemporary translation – and it could be the last Bible to be printed letterpress from metal type.

5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. Dinner is \$48 and drinks are \$5 to \$12. 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.

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town and gown are deeply intertwined. Its rich tradition of important architectural commissions and landscape design make it even more fascinating". It was also a big photo-editing project, looking at huge amounts of mate-

rial. It proved to be a springboard for many other book projects in Lake Forest." Among them is a new book, *The History of Crab Tree Farm*, and another she coauthored with Daniel Meyer and Arthur H. Miller: *Classic Country Estates of Lake Forest 1856-1940*. It was pub-

lished by W. W. Norton in 2003, and you could have gotten a copy the day the authors talked to the Caxton Club at lunch. If you want to buy one today, they begin at \$178.82 on Abebooks and go on up to \$300!

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