

Book Bills

Perusing a file of old invoices and finding memories attached

David Meyer

What's more forgettable than a paid bill? Save it in case your purchase might be disappointing or an outright mistake and needs to be returned for a refund. Save a receipt for a long time if the item carries a warranty; or forever if you follow your insurance agent's advice to keep proof of purchase (and value) in the event of a disaster. Otherwise shove the bill in a drawer already stuffed with old bills or just throw it away.

My father's practice was to save bills for the antiquarian books he bought from dealers in Europe. (He even saved invoices for books his father purchased from a Munich book dealer in 1932. I have the bills but not the books.) I followed my father's lead, only lately realizing that book bills provide a history of the building of my collection. And from this cache of typed and handwritten bills of sale I've found I'm able to extract certain memories.

The letterhead of the Export Book Company near Liverpool, England, shows a steamship in heavy seas, listing a bit to port, with a winding trail of vapor blown about from its smokestack. A rough voyage, it would appear, and perhaps not the best advertisement for selling books that had to travel overseas. But this is an invoice, not an ad, for books already sold. My father received many relating to his purchases of early herbals, medical manuals, and recipe books. He used them when compiling an annual almanac for our family's mail-order herb business.

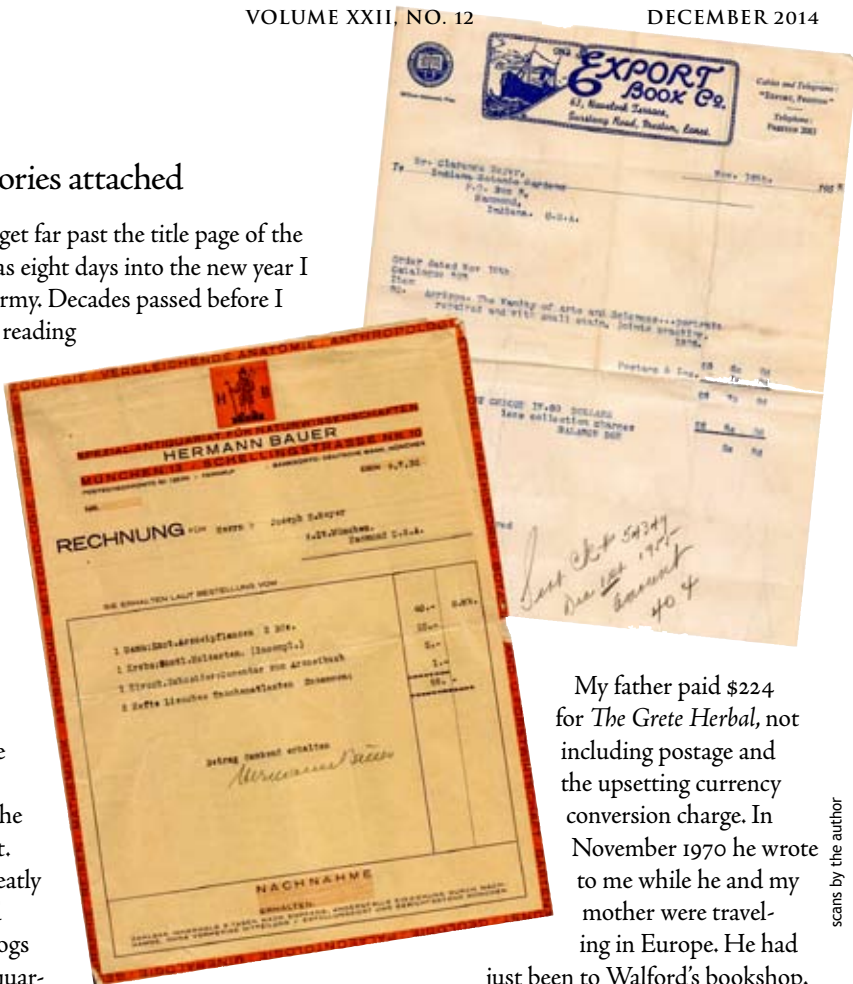
In October 1968 he ordered from Export a six-volume set, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, published in 1955 by Oxford University Press. The books took three weeks to arrive from England, postage costing only one pound one shilling. Unfortunately, my father must have been appalled by the \$12.04 charge for converting U.S. dollars to pounds sterling because he noted the fee, in red ink, on his canceled check. He gave me the set for Christ-

mas. I didn't get far past the title page of the first volume as eight days into the new year I entered the army. Decades passed before I finally began reading Evelyn's diary.

Most of my father's more substantial overseas purchases came from the London book dealer George W. Walford. The books were substantial; the prices weren't. Unlike the neatly designed and printed catalogs of most antiquarian booksellers, Walford's catalogs were typewritten on stencils and mimeographed on gray, grainy paper. Walford's principal specialties included English history and topography, science and natural history, gardening and herbals. His early books on plants would not qualify as "collector copies" because the bindings were often in bad condition and the texts sometimes incomplete. But they were scarce or rare and good enough for the research my father needed to write articles about the long history of botanicals used for medicinal purposes.

Here is a portion of Walford's description of *The Grete Herbal*, published in 1526:

Folio. Disbound. . . . 121 leaves are present, of 172 called for. . . . Most leaves lightly water-stained. Extremely rare – STC [Short Title Catalog] lists only the Cambridge, British Museum and Bodleian copies – and of these the Bodleian is imperfect. No copy in America.



My father paid \$224 for *The Grete Herbal*, not including postage and the upsetting currency conversion charge. In November 1970 he wrote to me while he and my mother were traveling in Europe. He had

just been to Walford's bookshop. "His business is in a shabby neighborhood and reminded me of [Chicago book dealer] Bill Newman's stores. Geo. Walford is a little fellow and a perfect gent. Here's the way he looked," he wrote, providing a penciled portrait.

Under the heading of "Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics & Astronomy," Walford's catalogs occasionally offered books on conjuring, which was my subject of interest. I had been performing magic for family and friends since my early teens, buying tricks and books in Chicago; but it was Walford who brought on my collecting of antiquarian magic books. Oddly enough, in the 1960s, when I began buying from him, his conjuring books were often similarly priced. A copy of the highly collectible *Whole Art of Legerdemain* (1781), Decrep's three-volume set *La magie blanche Dévoilée* (1789), and the two volume *Conjuror's Magazine, or, Magical & Physiognomical*

See BOOK BILLS, page 2

scans by the author



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BOOK BILLS, from page 1

Mirror (1792-94) – lacking the famous plates of Lavater’s Physiognomy – were each priced at only \$26.60.

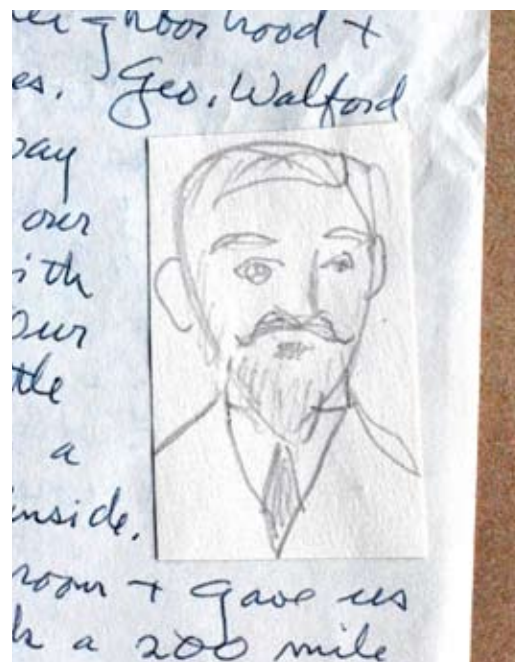
In April 1973 I received a letter from him offering a first edition of Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* published in London in 1584. “Discoverie” meant “explanation” in the language of the time, and it was Scot’s aim to give a rational explanation for everything reputed to have an occult origin. The book covers so many subjects – witchcraft, astrology, alchemy, and related practices – it has served as an important source for more than 400 years. Twelve chapters are devoted to “the deceitfull art of juggling” or legerdemain, commonly called conjuring in modern times. Because of this, Scot’s book is considered the cornerstone of every serious magic collector’s library. It is the first book in the English language to explain the techniques of the magician’s art.

Walford described his first edition copy as “rubbed,” “worn,” and missing three lines of text on the final leaf. His price was 260 pounds. With the currency conversion fee, this came to \$650; more money than I had ever previously paid for a book, and definitely more money than I thought I could afford at the time. I didn’t answer Walford’s letter, and the book subsequently appeared in his catalog. By its third catalog appearance the price had been upped by ten pounds.

That fall, after traveling with my parents, I parted from them in London, phoned Walford, and asked if I could visit his shop. Everything he offered was listed in his catalogs, he said, but if I wanted to come and “browse in the dark,” I was welcome to. He had not exaggerated: his books were not arranged for viewing and the light was so dim I was amazed he hadn’t gone blind. (This may have explained his exceptionally thick-lensed glasses.) I sensed immediately that there was nothing I could find without his help. I asked if he had any conjuring books like those I’d previously bought from him – and did he still have the first edition of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*? He brought it out and laid it in my hands. The moment he did so, I knew I had to have it. (After all, a copy of this book was believed to have been consulted by Shakespeare for witch and wizard lore when he was writing his plays.) I told Walford I didn’t carry a credit card or have enough money in hand to buy the book, but if he’d hold it for me until I returned to the States, I’d pay for it then and he could send the book.

“Just take it along,” he said; “I’ll send a bill.”

My visit to Francis Edwards Ltd., “Antiquarian Booksellers since 1855,” a day before or after visiting Walford, was a different kind of experience. It was an elegant shop in which display cases and



Penciled portrait of London bookseller George W. Walford by Clarence Meyer.

clerks in jackets prevailed. I was not wearing a jacket and I noticed immediately that there were no open book shelves to browse. A clerk behind a counter asked me (elegantly) what I might be seeking. No, they did not have any books on conjuring, and a minute later I was back on the street. Yet for years afterward I acquired from their catalogs books of collected secrets and inventions that inevitably included sections devoted to amusements by deception. And at least one clerk working the catalog desk (she signed her name “Miss D. Boscawen for Francis Edwards Ltd.”) clearly wished to please.

23 April 1979

Dear Mr. Meyer,

Referring to your recent unsuccessful order from our Catalogue 1017 for item 313 . . . another copy of this book has just come into stock. Our description follows in case you should still be interested in a copy:

Plat (Sir Hugh) THE JEWEL HOUSE OF ART AND NATURE: Containing Divers Rare and Profitable Inventions . . . 1653.

A good copy of the second edition . . .

We are reserving the book for you for one month.

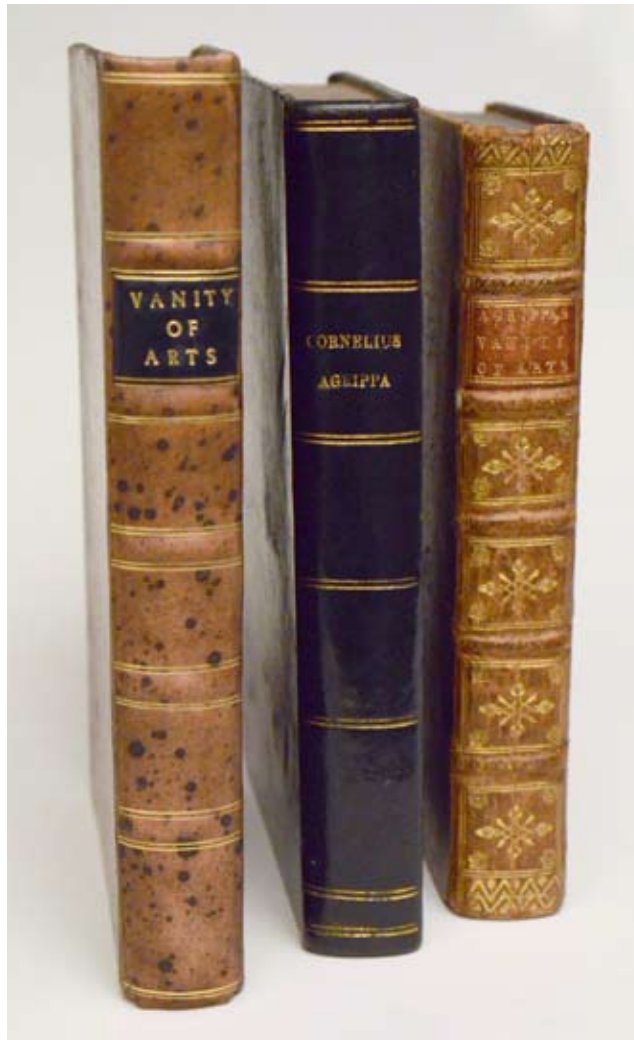
I bought it. A year later I bought Malcolm MacGreggor’s *Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck, Upon his newly invented Patent Candle-Snuffers*. This was the fifth edition, published in 1776, priced at 28 pounds, and an exceptionally stupid purchase. The reason I went for it was the author’s last name. Had I known Pinchbeck’s first and middle names, which I failed to

research at the time, I would not have bought this book. William Frederick Pinchbeck, the author of the books I was eagerly seeking, had written *The Expositor; or, Many Mysteries Unravell'd* and *Witchcraft or The Art of Fortune Telling Unveiled*. Both were published by their author in Boston in 1805 and are reputed to be the second and third books on conjuring published in the United States. They are scarce, the second one extremely so, and, consequently, they are avidly sought by magic collectors. What was the chance that the Pinchbeck who had invented the candle snuffer in England about 1776 was the same Pinchbeck who published two books on magic in the United States 29 years later? Never mind the improbability. This was clearly a case of buying one thing when I really wanted to buy another. Surely other collectors have stumbled in this way. In my instance it was *two* books I was after and it took me 30 years to finally acquire them – both, as it happened, in a single purchase.

An especially accommodating British dealer was George's ("William George's Sons Ltd., Booksellers since 1847") in Bristol. I'd apparently written the firm asking if they had any magic books in stock. The reply, which I still have, came from an industrious employee who diligently listed – by author, title, publication date, price, and condition – 25 books, the majority priced about two pounds, the cheapest for 50 pence. Had I bought them all – and, of course, *now* I wish I had – the total price would have come to 110 pounds. I bought only five for 22 pounds. It's no wonder they didn't care to bother with me after that. Six years later I tried the "what do you have?" inquiry again and received a terse "Regret no conjuring books in stock."

Book bills have revealed a number of mistakes I've made in my collecting life, but I'll reveal only two.

My father purchased a copy of Agrippa's *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences* published in London in 1676. "Joints cracking," the invoice states and the book confirms it. The price in 1955 was \$17.60. I probably didn't see this copy until after my father's death as he kept many of his earliest books in his father's old Railway Express trunk; not only to be out of reach of the curious hands of his children but because there was more trunk space than shelf space



Same book, different bindings: Agrippa's *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences*, 1676.

in his basement workroom. I purchased a 1684 edition of Agrippa in 1981 for \$76 and, forgetting this, purchased another 1676 edition for \$200 from the late husband of Caxtonian Patricia Barnes. How many Agrippas does one need? Except for the dates on the title pages, the three different bindings, and the books' conditions, mine are otherwise identical. This calls for a decision that I have yet to face: which two of the three should go?

For a number of years in the 1990s I was finding titles of conjuring interest offered in the catalogs of Hobbyhorse Books, an antiquarian children's book dealer located in a New Jersey city with the childish name of Hohokus. The hunt among this dealer's catalog entries was a challenge because the titles never alluded to magic. I would not have bought anything if I didn't possess a long-honed intuition as a collector and a well-used, two-volume bibliography of conjuring books. How else would I know to buy *City Sights for Little Folks* published in Philadelphia in the 1850s? This miniature book about the size of a

child's fist provides short descriptions and full-page illustrations of "a coal wharf," "the horse auction," "sailors singing," "the fish market," and, among many other locations and subjects, the one I was after: "The juggler." The anonymous author cautioned his young readers that "The tricks of these persons with cards, dice, peas, and thimbles, have more roguery in them than of skill or anything else."

Nineteenth century chapbooks, being small (usually 2½ x 4 inches) and brief (32 pages or less), are often sold on the antiquarian market in groups. This proved perplexing when Hobbyhorse offered "a collection of nineteen . . . chapbooks printed and sold by F. Houlston and Son, (circa 1815-1825)" for \$1,400. I wanted only one of the lot, *The Wisdom of Crop the Conjurer*. Wisdom did not prevail and I bought them all. And of course I immediately wished to sell the remaining 18 to recoup my investment but considered it a crime of sorts to do so. Fifteen years after this overenthusiastic purchase the publication of *Small Books for the Common Man: A Descriptive Bibliography* showed that I'd not be breaking up what I'd assumed to be a *complete* collection. F. Houlston & Son had printed and sold, at various times and prices, at least 170 chapbooks.

Streaks of luck come in every field of endeavor and sometimes in collecting, although as many collectors might agree, not often enough. My best experience followed the sale of the famed Roland Winder collection of conjuring books that took place in 1974 at Sotheby & Company's auction rooms in London. Since that time successive auctions of magic books have eclipsed both the fame and the prices attained at the Winder sale, but this auction established a worldwide recognition of magic books that had never previously existed. Two bidders, one a general antiquarian book dealer and the other an individual not previously known as a buyer of magic books, helped drive up the prices while the two acquired over 35 percent of the collection.

My fascination with the results of this auction began in my friend Jay Marshall's kitchen in Chicago. Jay had recently returned from a trip to England, cleverly timed to coincide with the Winder sale. He had not

See *BOOK BILLS*, page 4

only been in the auction room, he had tape-recorded portions of the proceedings and opened the bidding on several lots. I still recall hearing the voice of the auctioneer saying, "We begin the bidding at... Mr. Marshall bids..." Of the 230 lots offered, Jay was chagrined at having successfully purchased only four. As I listened, with excitement and envy, I felt Jay had been fortunate nonetheless, for I had not even had the chance to bid at one of the great sales of conjuring literature of the 20th century.

In 1976, however, two years to the very month of the auction, some incredibly surprising luck began coming my way – initially in the form of a crudely typed and printed catalog from a New England dealer named Whitlock Farm Booksellers. Gilbert and Everett Whitlock's catalogs routinely listed a hodgepodge of material, from 17th century books in poor condition to modern works at cheap prices, with an occasional engraving, a handwritten farmer's ledger, or other odd item in the mix. The gem (at least for me) in this particular catalog was a copy of *Domestic Amusements, or Philosophical Recreations* by John Badcock, published in London about 1825. As the catalog description did not mention the book having come from the Roland Winder collection, finding his bookplate inside the front cover was a joyful surprise.

Within months, I acquired all four of the Badcock books that had been offered in the Winder sale. By this time I also owned a copy of the auction catalog. My hopes were so high that my luck would continue I kept perusing it, wondering what would turn up next, as if this was a certainty.

What came next was a book titled *Endless Amusement* – which my pursuit of Winder titles had seemed to become – but it turned out to be my last Winder purchase for many years. My streak of luck also ended on a surprising note. I found *Endless Amusement* in the antiquarian book department of the former Marshall Field's department store in the Loop.

Being a dealer's sole customer for a certain subject, as I believe I'd once been with Walford, occurred again in the late 1980s. This came about from finding a dealer at the Washington, D.C., Antiquarian Book Fair who specialized in printed ephemera. My interest was 19th-century sheet music with portraits of popular magicians on the front covers. Apparently the celebrity of a performer helped sell sheet music whether or not the

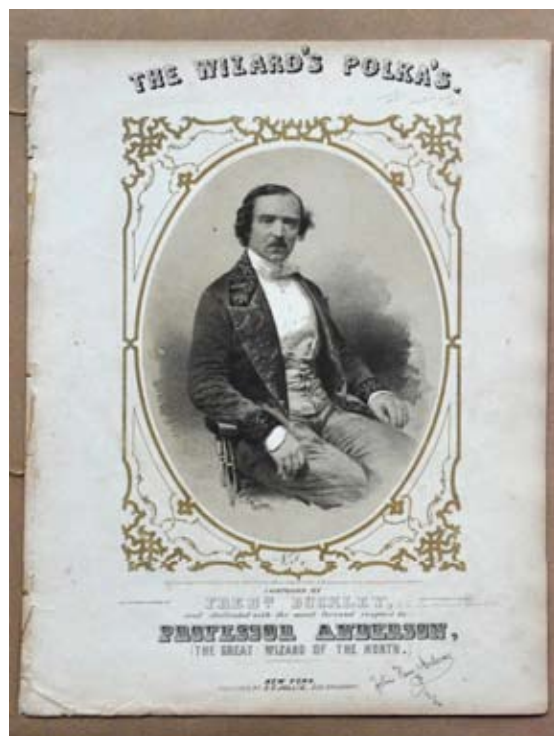


All for one: The Wisdom of Crop the Conjuror next to 18 unwanted chapbooks that came with its purchase.

musical score was used during the magician's performance. Evidence of this is "The Wizard's Polka, composed by Frederick Buckley, and dedicated with the most fervent respect to Professor Anderson, The Great Wizard of the North." Buckley was a member of a group known as "The New Orleans Serenaders." "The Wizard's Polka" was published in New York in 1851 when John Henry Anderson, the Scottish-born illusionist, came to America to tour his show. According to one historian, Anderson's "great contribution to magic was to demonstrate the value of publicity."

Sheet music of magic interest may have been printed in large quantities, but somber portraits of magicians must have held little long-term appeal because they are quite scarce today. Yet the dealer I met in Washington invariably had something to offer me every year I visited her booth at the book fair. That is, until another magic collector appeared.

He was known for avidly collecting magic posters, which are colorful and fanciful and, unless they are rare, can sometimes be found in multiple copies. My fellow collector liked to buy duplicates so he could trade them for other posters. He called himself "The Sultan of Swap." Inevitably, as with most collectors, the Sultan's interest expanded: it came to include *all* graphics relating to magic. The moment I caught sight of him in an aisle at the Washington Book Fair, I knew my source



Lively polka, somber sheet music cover, circa 1851.

for sheet music was no longer mine alone. I managed to avoid him and hoped, if he saw me, not to lead him to "my" dealer. But the Sultan of Swap found his own way there, and the woman I'd been buying from for eight years never had anything to offer me after that.

The dealer James O'Donoghue Fenning of Dublin brings me to the conclusion of this account. His book bills over the years were both disappointing and amusing. This was because of my not only buying from him but also, in later years, occasionally trying to sell to him.



James O'Donoghue Fenning, Dublin antiquarian bookseller.

I first encountered his catalogs in the 1970s when I worked in an old book shop in Florida. Among the many received there, Fenning's from Dublin were especially intriguing. As soon as I bought my first book from him, I was on his list to receive future catalogs. He had a clever habit of including with his orders a copy of a previous catalog on the off chance the customer might find something in it that was still in stock.

Most of his titles were of Irish interest, but there were always enough London imprints on obscure subjects to capture my attention. Grey's *Memoria Technica or a new method of artificial memory* (1778); Pepper's *The Boy's Playbook of Science* (ca. 1870) – these were the kinds of books I bought from him. Each had enough conjuring in them to warrant owning, yet like most of my purchases from Fenning, they were somewhat peripheral to what I wanted most.

When he finally hit the target, however, it was a bull's-eye.

In September 2000 I received a letter from him:

On July 2, 1981 you wrote expressing an interest in any edition of Dean's *Art of Legerdemain*. Well, one has just come to hand. This is the first time we have had any edition of this title in forty-two years in the business.

It was an eighth edition of *The Whole Art of Legerdemain; or Hocus Pocus in Perfection*, published in London in 1781. This is a book that all collectors of conjuring pursue. By the time Fenning offered me this copy, I already

owned two. The first had come from Walford in the 1960s for \$26.60. Fenning wanted several thousand dollars for his and he got it. Here's why: All editions of Dean published in the 18th century are relatively scarce. Those that have survived are usually well-worn or in worse condition. Fenning described his copy as "nice, unmarked, well-margined, unused." Pristine is how I describe it. When I called him to order the book, Fenning told me that he had recently purchased it at a Dublin book fair, but that's all he could tell me about it. Where the Dean lay or on what bookshelf it stood untouched for more than 200 years I wish I knew.

My early efforts to sell to Fenning now seem foolish. Had I anything equal to what he routinely listed in his catalogs I might have succeeded, but my thinking at those times must have been governed by a single idea: If it was Irish, Fenning might want it. Although nothing was good enough to bring even a polite letter of refusal, he'd remember to add a line at the bottom of the invoices he sent me:

Sorry we must pass on the Jerome book. I have always found him almost impossible to sell – mind you, your offer is nonetheless much appreciated.

Thanks for the note regarding the two maps. Not too thrilling from my point of view, but if you can advise cost in dollars I may be able to shift them.

After having spent heavily on the Dean, two years later I tried again to sell to him. I offered two 18th-century Dublin imprints, this time cannily asking for credit rather than outright payment. He took the books, giving me 80 pounds credit toward a future purchase. When that eventually occurred, I had to remind him of my credit and he apologized for "being slow to remember."

His catalogs kept coming, his prices kept climbing, and I wasn't finding anything I cared to buy. I finally wrote to say he should drop me from his mailing list and send his catalogs to a younger collector. He replied that as he'd been sending them to me for so long he was going to continue doing so, and he did.

I never enjoyed parting with books from my father's library, but those I thought might appeal to Fenning I didn't hesitate offering to him. I never priced these books and always accepted what he was willing to pay. Thus began our reversal of roles.

In the summer of 2012, however, I offered

him a book I had recently purchased at an estate sale. This was *The Charwoman's Daughter*, the first novel by the Irish writer James Stephens, which appeared in 1912. (His prose fantasy, *The Crock of Gold*, published that same year, is still in print.) I e-mailed a photograph of the book and the attractive half-leather slipcase that held it. I felt confident that Fenning would want it.

The day following my e-mail, he replied. "Thanks, David. I appreciate your offering this. Looks like a nice copy. Inscribed by the author . . . ? Please let me know."

"Jim – No inscription, sorry to say."

"Thanks. Would 200 USD secure it? Hopefully including postage?"

The cost of postage effectively reduced his offer as well as eliminating my initial enthusiasm. I waited several days, trying to think what words might coax him into paying the postage. I knew him well enough to realize that he was unlikely to budge. Still I tried.

"Jim – How about we split the cost of postage?"

He didn't answer. Weeks passed before I reluctantly decided to pay the postage. Just to be sure he hadn't changed his mind by then, I e-mailed that I'd send the book as soon as I heard from him. He never replied. For months, every time I happened to come across the box holding the Stephens book (labeled and ready to mail) I regretted this unpleasant lapse in our long relationship.

Not until that fall, when I received a catalog from a Dublin auction company for "The James Fenning Sale of Antiquarian Books," did I realize he had died. The introductory page included his own brief account of his career as a bookseller, following in the path of his grandfather and father who had also been in the book trade. "I never worked with my father," Fenning wrote, "our temperaments were far too close for that." By 2012 he had been a book dealer for 50 years.

Ian Whyte, the auctioneer and a friend for 30 years, helped Fenning produce the catalog "despite his illness," which must have come on during the summer. Whyte wrote that Fenning's "sense of humor stayed with him and he was a delight to be with."

Fenning's insistence on keeping me on his mailing list explained why I'd received the auction catalog. Its 208 pages liquidated his inventory of 3,500 volumes in 1,423 lots. My copy of the catalog arrived a day after the sale ended.

§§

Book- and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Lisa Pevtzow

(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: “**Ghosts and Demons in Japanese Prints**,” Gallery 107 through December 10. “**Comic Art and Architecture of Chris Ware**” (architectural photographs and artifacts that Ware has looked to for inspiration, alongside drawings from his comics), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries (weekdays only), through January 19, 2015.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: “**Succulents: Featuring Redoute’s Masterpieces**,” through February 8, 2015.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: “**Railroaders: Jack Delano’s Homefront Photography**” (the federal Office of War Information assigned photographer Jack Delano to take pictures of the nation’s railways during World War II), through June 10, 2015.

City of Chicago Expo 72, 72 E. Randolph Street, Chicago: “**Rolled, Stoned & Inked: 25 years of the Chicago Printmakers Collaborative**” (exhibit by Chicago’s oldest printers collaborative), through February 28, 2015.

DePaul University Museum, 935 W. Fullerton, Chicago, 773-325-7506: “**Ink, Paper, Politics: WPA-era Printmaking From the Needles Collection**” (Depression-era prints of city life, labor, and social injustice created with support from the Works Progress Administration – Federal Arts Project), through December 21.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: “**Love Me Forever! Oh! Oh! Oh!**” (cartoonist Jeremy Sorese explores the idea of getting married, both gay and straight), through March 8, 2015.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: “**Chicago, Europe, and the Great War**” (materials that tell the story of Chicago’s many and varied connections to the conflict), through

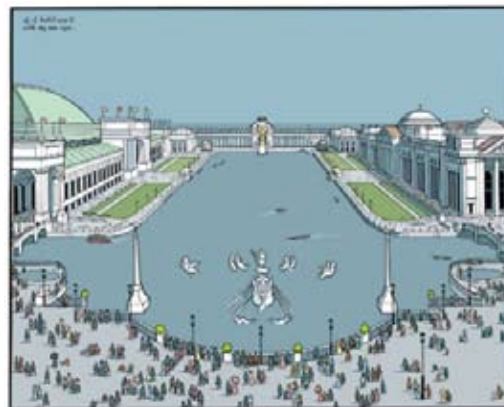


Art Institute / Ghosts and Demons
KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI. KOHADA KOHEIJI, c. 1831.
CLARENCE BUCKINGHAM COLLECTION.

January 3, 2015. “**American Women Rebuilding France, 1917-1924**” (documents the work of hundreds of American women who volunteered in France during and after the war), through January 3, 2015.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: “**William Hogarth’s Modern Moral Subjects: A Harlot’s Progress and A Rake’s Progress**” (prints from an 1822 edition of Hogarth’s works), ongoing.

Pritzker Military Museum and Library, 104 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-374-9333: “**SEAL The Unspoken Sacrifice**” (features photographs from Stephanie Freid-Perenchio’s and Jennifer Walton’s 2009 book and artifacts on loan from the Navy SEAL Museum), ongoing.



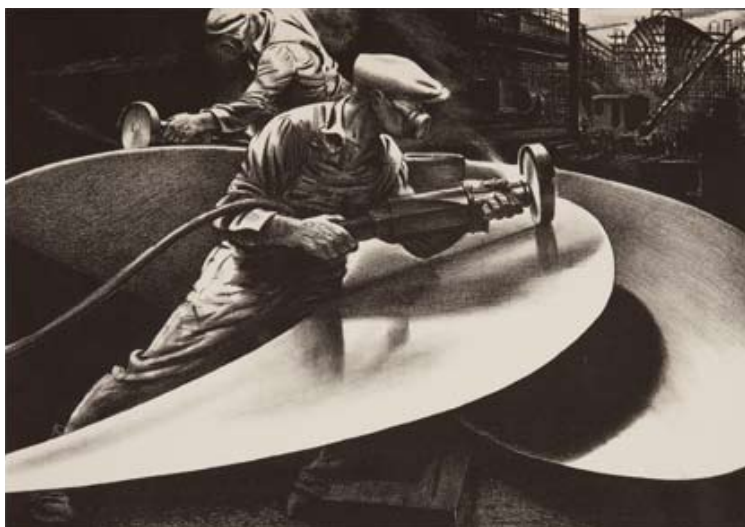
Art Institute / Papercuts
CHRIS WARE. FROM JIMMY CORRIGAN: THE SMARTEST KID ON EARTH, 2000.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition

Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: “**En Guerre: French Illustrators and World War I**” (an examination of World War I through the lens of French illustrated books, journals, and prints, many of which are drawn from the collection of exhibition curators Professor Neil Harris and Teri J. Edelstein and materials donated by them; both are longtime Caxton Club members), through January 2, 2015.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Richard J. Daley Library Special Collections, 801 S. Morgan, Chicago, 312-996-2742: “**Visualizing Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Pictorial Interpretations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Novel**” (examining how the characters and events have been represented through the years in various editions of the book, film stills and posters, and other popular culture artifacts), through April 30, 2015.

Send your listings to lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net



DePaul University Museum: Ink, Paper, Politics
EDWARD ARTHUR WILSON, SANDING THE PROPELLER, LITHOGRAPH, 1941

Caxtonians Collect: Bill North

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Bill North divides the history of his working life into three periods. First was the “library” period, which lasted from about 1960 to 1980. Next came the “real estate” period, from about 1980 to the middle 1990s. The most recent period, from which he is gradually retiring, is his “medical” period. There were two unifying themes in the three periods, however: he was practicing law in all three, and all have mostly been working with associations in the three fields.

As might be expected, the Caxton Club came into his life in the first period. He was general counsel to the American Library Association (ALA), and as a result he encountered Gordon Williams, a Caxton member. Williams nominated him in 1970. (Williams was the director of the Center for Research Libraries; he became the head of the National Union Catalog project of the Library of Congress and the ALA.) According to Club records, R. Hunter Middleton seconded his nomination; North remembered it was Abel Berland, but whoever it was, he joined in 1970.

North was born in Oregon, and spent his early childhood in Montana. By the time he was in high school, the family had moved to Chicago. He thrived. He sang in his church choir, which led to singing and acting lessons, and to radio parts, including on the Chicago Theater of the Air. Perhaps this training aided him in his winning the Illinois American Legion Oratorical Contest. The prize? A four-year tuition scholarship at the University of Illinois.

“Actually, all of that taught me many good lessons,” North says. “I was basically a shy fellow, so the performing and competing helped me learn to get up in front of others. And I also learned that I was good at getting other people to work together. It’s important to know your own strengths and weaknesses.”

After the U of I, he went to Harvard Law School. But that was interrupted by time in the Navy – or, more exactly, the Office of Naval Intelligence, during the Korean War.

Therein hangs a telling story. Back in high school, he had studied Latin. He had not done well. In fact, he did so poorly that he was on the verge of flunking his second term. The teacher, one Mrs. Snyder, took him aside and said: “I’ll give you a passing grade if you will promise never to attempt to study any more languages.” He accepted the deal, but it

ranked.

In college, he was doing well. So well, that he thought he would risk studying a foreign language again. He picked what was reputed to be the hardest language offered at the U of I: Russian. And did well; so well that he was recruited for work by an intelligence agency and given a security clearance.

He went on to Harvard Law, but felt the call of combat, so he got the promise he could come back to Harvard after serving, and enlisted in the Navy.

Once in the Navy his security clearance and Russian language training resulted in his assignment to the Office of Naval Intelligence where he served four years. “I wanted to be fighting,” he says. “It was a fascinating assignment, and it was all because, in studying Russian, I had been trying to prove my high school Latin teacher wrong about my language ability!”

There was a secondary benefit to delaying the finish of his law degree. It meant that he was in Boston at the same time as Carol, who was to become his wife. She had been recruited in a Harvard Business School experiment to determine if women could make it as executives in business. A mutual acquaintance thought the two of them might hit it off, and arranged a blind date. North was smitten immediately. He asked her to marry him on the second date. That was too fast for Carol, who wanted to see how she would do in business, so she didn’t accept for a year and a half. She finished, and moved back to Chicago to work for the Northern Trust.

When North finished Harvard Law School, they were married and started their dual careers. But they wanted children, and it immediately became clear that it would be very hard to raise children if both were in the workplace, so Carol gave up her job.

“I have her to thank for whatever I have been able to accomplish in my work,” he says.

“She loved mothering. But beyond that, she was a great support in my career. I always found it hard to socialize, but Carol’s interest in learning about others was a wonderful balance in my professional life.”

With Carol at his side, North had a remarkable legal and business career. He was a partner at both Reuben and Proctor and Kirkland and Ellis during his library period, working for clients that included the American Library Association, the Center for Research

Libraries, and the Freedom to Read Foundation, a group he became especially involved with. In between the library associations, he worked for such other associations as the Corrugated Steel Pipe Association and the American Loudspeaker Association (another ALA!).

In 1980 he became the general counsel for the National Association of Realtors during a particularly litigious period

of the association’s history. Ultimately, North was named CEO of the association.

He stepped down to be a consultant to the Realtors in 1992, and started collecting a large variety of medical groups as clients: the obstetricians, the foreign medical graduates, the preventive medicine and family practice specialists, and even the specialists in nuclear medicine.

All the while, he has managed to write poetry and read a lot of books. “I love Western stories because of my childhood, and I’m a devotee of Dorothy Sayers, Ross McDonald, and Agatha Christie’s Poirot stories.” He denies that he is a collector. “I have many, many books. But they’re not very precious.”

He regrets that he and Carol cannot make it downtown from their home in Arlington Heights more frequently, and hence his Caxton attendance has fallen off. “But I always try to make it to the Revels,” he says.

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photograph by Robert McCamant



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Bookmarks...

**Luncheon: Friday, Dec. 12, 2014, Union League Club
Doug Fitzgerald
“You’re Invited: A Party Celebrating RR Donnelley’s
150th Birthday. Yes, There Will Be Cake!”**

After ten years at RR Donnelley, mostly as Executive Vice-President for Communications, Caxtonian Doug Fitzgerald knows what he’s talking about as he draws on his collection of company-related materials to highlight exciting moments from the organization’s illustrious past. Using meticulous research, Doug will illuminate this great Canadian/American success story. You will learn why RR’s in-laws did not want their daughter to marry him, which political convention was influenced by Donnelley’s printing, how many goat skins it took to produce 30,000 sets of reference books, what the Donnelley Comfort Club was – and much more. There will be a “pass-the-100-year-old-stuff-around-the-room” fun fest not to miss. Doug will also chronicle the advantageous Caxton/Donnelley Connection, started in 1895, the year of our founding and not yet finished with 3 Donnelleys and company employees as Caxtonians today.

December luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (room 700) opens at 11:30 am; program (room 700) 12:30-1:30. Lunch is \$32. Please reserve or cancel by Wednesday for Friday lunch. Reserved non-attendees will be billed.

Beyond December...

JANUARY LUNCHEON

Take a person with a private press, a papermaking enterprise, a body of great book design, and a devilish wit. Add a speaker named Dempsey to tell his story, and you’ve got a knockout January luncheon. You’ll want to be ringside January 9 for this lavishly illustrated talk about the versatile Walter Hamady!

JANUARY DINNER

We’ll meet January 21 at the Union League Club for Paul Gehl of the Newberry Library on “Collecting Type on the Page: Americans Collect Printing History 1900-1950.” Changed order: drinks at 5, talk at 6, with dinner to follow.

FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

On Friday, February 13, Arthur Frank, Caxtonian and proprietor of Round Table Books (Winnetka), will send us an early valentine by describing and illustrating three loves of his life: Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam*, and the world’s first book using the nature-printing process, *Ferns of Great Britain and Ireland*.

FEBRUARY DINNER

Join us on Wednesday, February 18, at the Union League Club. Speaker and topic to be announced.

**Dinner: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2014, Newberry Library
Our Annual Holiday Revels including
a Fund-raising Auction of Things Bookish**

Join our festive holiday Revels with song, the camaraderie of your fellow booklovers, libations, and our own Tom Joyce as our live auction host. The evening will feature drinks, dinner, music and the chance to find out what Caxtonians have had on their shelves as we bid for silent and live auction items. Bring a guest and you will be entered in a drawing for a free Caxton dinner.

Contact Dan Crawford at the Newberry to make arrangements to drop off your auction items. Early submissions allow Dan the best chance to list your item in the Revels catalog, but items are accepted until December 18.

Join us at our annual Revels. Reservations required. Don’t miss the fun.

*December dinner: Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton. Timing: spirits and silent auction at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, followed by live auction and entertainment. Dinner, which includes wine, is \$50, pre-dinner drinks are \$5. For reservations, **which are required**, call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxton-club@newberry.org. Please reserve by noon Friday for Wednesday. Because we will be using pre-ordered catering, cancellations not received before 5 pm December 12 may require payment.*