

Wikipedia and the Bibliophile

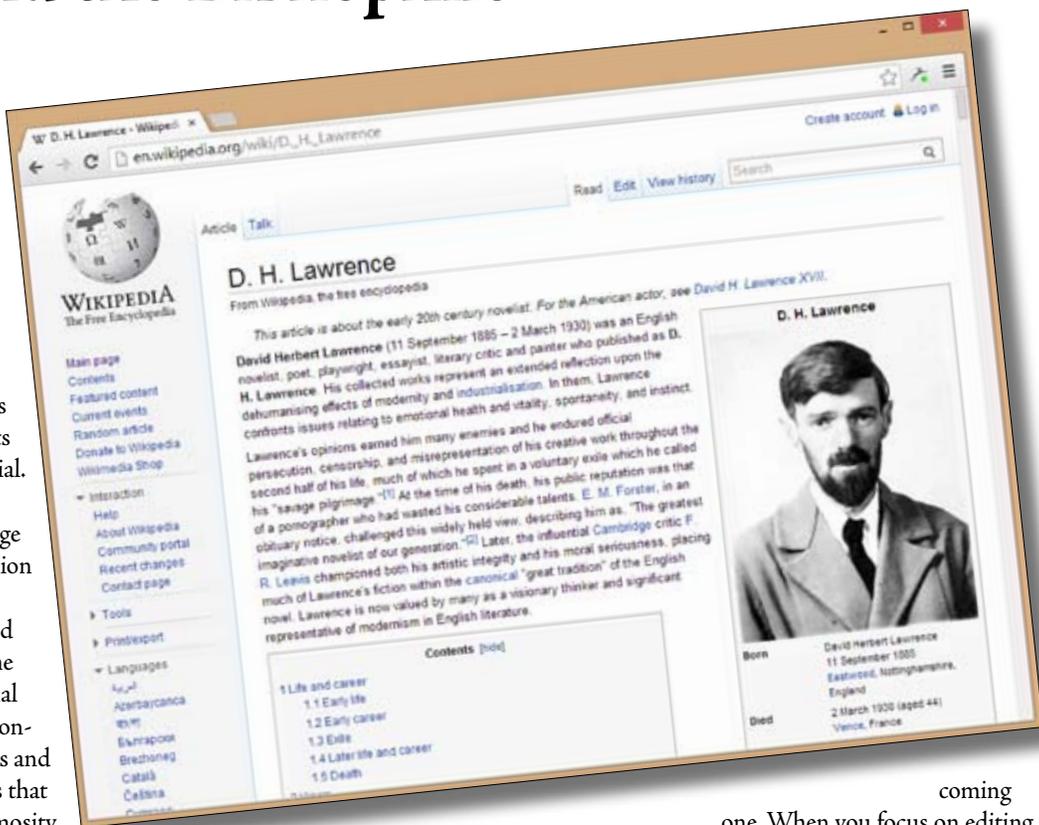
An exhortation

Christopher D. Cook

After its arrival on the scene in 2001, Wikipedia was decried by many bookish types, including some librarians and professors, as unreliable and unworthy of serious attention or use. Only recently, the tide seems to be turning in favor of Wikipedia among this set. I have found that Wikipedia has been a great tool for my bookish pursuits and our relationship is mutually beneficial.

Wikipedia was formally launched on January 15, 2001, and the English-language version has grown to more than 4.4 million articles in the ensuing thirteen years.¹ Early in its existence, Wikipedia gathered a large number of detractors who saw the free encyclopedia as a threat to traditional sources of information, those carefully controlled (and often costly) reference books and peer-reviewed monographs and journals that sit on library shelves. However, this animosity seems to be waning. As the writer Nicholson Baker (author of the controversial 2001 book *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*) notes in his 2008 review of *Wikipedia: The Missing Manual*, “Wikipedia flourished partly because it was a shrine to altruism – a place for shy, learned people to deposit their trawls.”²

In recent years, cultural institutions have become increasingly involved with Wikipedia through the GLAM-Wiki initiative (GLAM being galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) which helps them to “share their resources with the world through high-impact collaboration alongside experienced Wikipedia editors” and to “present their collections to new audiences.”³ An outgrowth of this initiative has involved the placement of editors – Wikipedians in Residence – directly into cultural institutions like the U.S. National Archives, the British Library, and the William Blake Archive where they work with staff on establishing a symbiotic relationship between the institution and Wikipedia.⁴ Library



authority data (for example, controlled name and subject headings), carefully assembled by librarians over the last century, is also being included systematically in Wikipedia articles.⁵ Similarly, some articles are being populated with biographical details compiled by archivists.⁶ All of these are encouraging developments that will make Wikipedia even more useful to us bibliophiles and the general readership.

While cultural institutions can and should be involved with Wikipedia, one of the greatest characteristics of the site is that anyone can edit articles, and that includes you. You already love to read and collect information, and many of you are probably also writers. You also enjoy the company of like-minded folks (you are in the Caxton Club, after all). You are the perfect candidate to be a Wikipedia editor! Almost all of my interactions with fellow editors have been positive and I have found the community to be a wel-

coming one. When you focus on editing only certain topics like I do, you become familiar with users in that area and grow to trust their edits. While I mostly maintain my anonymity on Wikipedia, some editors are much easier to identify. In fact, I have collaborated and corresponded with at least two well-known and highly-regarded figures in the world of rare books on the site although I doubt they had any idea who I was (nor did they need to for the tasks then at hand). The principle that no single editor has any kind of ownership over any article on Wikipedia goes a long way toward fostering a collaborative atmosphere of equality. The bibliophile's predilection toward gathering information, and his or her talent in doing so, lends itself well to participation in the Wikipedia community.

The Wikipedia rabbit hole, or “wiki-hole,” is real and cannot be avoided. Bibliophiles are no strangers to the rabbit hole as they chase elusive bindings, obscure former owners, and unclipped dust jackets across the pages of See *WIKIPEDIA AND THE BIBLIOPHILE*, page 2



CAXTONIAN

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dealer catalogs and myriad websites. The nature of Wikipedia, with links to other articles sprinkled throughout, means that readers will be taken down unpredictable paths, but this is a feature, not a detriment. My own experiences often tend toward the "biblio-wiki-hole" wherein I will read a Wikipedia article and notice some missing piece of information (flagged with a glaring "[citation needed]" tag); then I will purchase a book which might fill that knowledge gap and also enhance my collections; eventually, I get around to reading the book and editing the Wikipedia article with the new information I have gleaned. This synergistic cycle has the potential to repeat indefinitely (barring financial and shelving space challenges).

If you have not already, I would urge you to look up your favorite author, or your favorite printing method, or your favorite library, anything, on Wikipedia. You may be surprised at what you find and what you will learn. If you see errors or omissions, correct them. You can do this anonymously, but I would encourage you to sign up for an account and become a part of the community: it does not take long to learn the basic ins and outs and policy idiosyncrasies. Do not be put off by the few editors who seem to revel in "biting the newcomers." Most importantly, open up the books in your own collections and use them to enhance the content of Wikipedia and use Wikipedia to expand your collecting interests. The key to filling in those ubiquitous "[citation needed]" tags just might be sitting on your bookshelf. Wikipedia can benefit bibliophiles by providing quick access to curated information on millions of topics. Bibliophiles can benefit Wikipedia by helping to curate that information from sources in their own unique collections. Wikipedia and the bibliophile make ideal partners.

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NOTES

¹"History of Wikipedia," Wikipedia, last modified January 5, 2014, accessed January 8, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia.

²Nicholson Baker, "The Charms of Wikipedia," *The New York Review of Books* 55, no. 4 (March 20,

2008), <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/21131>.

³"Wikipedia:GLAM/About," Wikipedia, last modified September 27, 2013, accessed December 20, 2013, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:GLAM/About>.

⁴"Wikipedian in Residence," Wikimedia Outreach, last modified December 16, 2013, accessed December 20, 2013, http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wikipedian_in_Residence.

⁵Maximilian Klein and Alex Kyrios, "VIAFbot and the Integration of Library Data on Wikipedia," *The Code4Lib Journal* 22 (October 14, 2013), <http://journal.code4lib.org/articles/8964>.

⁶Timothy A. Thompson and others, "From Finding Aids to Wiki Pages: Remixing Archival Metadata with RAMP," *The Code4Lib Journal* 22 (October 14, 2013), <http://journal.code4lib.org/articles/8962>.

Have you changed your name, address, cell phone, land phone, or mind recently? If so, please email wendychusser@gmail.com so that updates can be made to the website directory and forthcoming paper directory. – SOON!

Caxton Club Partners with Columbia College and Nicholas Basbanes to Support Student Book Arts

The Grant Committee is pleased to announce that author Nicholas Basbanes will appear on April 1 at Columbia College for a Master Class and tour of the Chicago Papermakers Garden. Mr. Basbanes and his recent book *On Paper* were the subject of the Caxton Club's student-focused November dinner meeting. His return for another Caxton-sponsored event will advance the Club's continuing commitment to support young book artists. The Club gratefully acknowledges Mr. Basbanes' own generous contribution toward making this event possible.

Others may have a differing view of Wikipedia. We encourage your responses to this exhortation. Please send your responses to bmccamant@quarterfold.com

Notes from a Very Big 'Book' Fair

A 'fine' printer visits another branch of the book arts

One of many rooms at the fair.

Robert McCamant

When I stopped at a pack-n-mail place on my way back to my hotel from the Printed Matter fair in Los Angeles, there were a couple of books I had purchased which I didn't want to ship, because I wanted to read them right away.

The next day it hit me: I've been to myriad fine book fairs, and I don't think I ever wanted to immediately read an item I purchased. This represented a 180-degree turn from how I had started my visit, saying to myself that I was looking for interesting craft at the fair, not content. At the fair, I found myself being won over by either or both.

The one that cried out to be read the most was *Printed Web #1*, produced by Paul Soulellis, on newsprint and not terribly design-y – in fact, not a book. The article I had to read was the one whose caption read “A photograph of me crying early in the morning on the beach in the Far Rockaways uploaded to the English Wikipedia page for mood disorder and then used by various websites.” When I was at the stand where this item (I'll call it a zine for want of a more exact term) was being sold, Paul was calling peoples' attention to the article. My hunch is that he discovered it was a good hook.

Reproduced were the initial Wikipedia page, a page from di-ve.com, a page about postpartum depression claiming that men suffered from it too, a Facebook page about mood disorder, an advice page on HubPages titled “How to Survive a Job You Hate,” and a health page from a Japanese-language site. A quick Google search using the unusual photo credit on the photo turns up many more.

So I suppose I was conned into buying the zine by a concept, in much the same way that BuzzFeed (the web site) becomes addictive. But I didn't feel conned. I enjoyed reading or scanning some of the other items in *Printed Web #1*, and I suppose I got my money's worth, though I don't remember how much I paid.



ABOVE: my valise from the Institute for Cultural Inquiry; LEFT: *Printed Web* no. 1.

(Paul threw in a free tote bag.)

I asked Paul whether he was bothered by the cognitive dissonance of capturing these ephemeral items on that most fugitive of substrates, newsprint. I cannot quote exactly what he said, but it was something to the effect that he didn't want to risk being perceived as producing something precious. He wanted to provoke thought, not to capture something for the ages.

A favorite stand was one manned by Billy Ocallaghan, a very small stand in a room full of zines. Everything at his table was full of science, art, wit, and craft. First the science: these were books and pamphlets produced by

ink jet on a paper that responded perfectly. Crayon on notebook paper was reproduced with hyper-realism, and the photos were luscious. The art and wit were intertwined, as they often are these days. I would have laughed out loud if I weren't standing at a table in a public place. The craft was tied up with the science, but also evident in the book-binding. Most of the items were printed on thin, one-sided ink jet paper. To make it into a book (often saddle-stitched), the layers were folded and laminated with very thin adhesive into thickish but still mildly flexible two-sided pages. I wish I could make books “like” Ocallaghan's myself. (I have most of the science, part of the art and craft, but none of the wit.)

Ocallaghan went to art school in the Bay area, achieving an MFA in 2012. I only now noticed on his online resume that he received a law degree back in 1995. He's gotten his toe into the door of the art book world, having sold items to the Victoria and Albert Museum and the New York Public Library. From him I bought four books, some of them two-in-one, where from one side there was one book (for example, *Birds of America Redacted*, which has plates of now-extinct birds with the birds blacked out); when you flip the book, you get another (here *Birds of America 2010 Supplement*, with birds used as corporate symbols, bath toys, and hand gestures). Ecological and homoerotic themes are frequent parts of his work, sometimes even together.

As somebody who never met a printing See *PRINTED MATTER*, page 4

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 technology I didn't find interesting, I noticed a couple of additional stands (beyond Ocallaghan) pursuing unusual methods of making books. One was Issue Press of Grand Rapids, Michigan. There, a self-effacing George Wietor (who doesn't even give his own name on his web site) prints with the Risograph RP 3700 digital Duplicator. I didn't take notes, but I believe he said it was produced in Japan and mainly sold in Russia. It works on principles similar to a mimeograph machine, with liquid ink squeezed through tiny pores onto the paper. He gets quite remarkable results with it. I bought a book of gray-scale drawings by Pat Perry, entitled *Drawings About Black Holes*, which achieves very nice, and appropriate, reproduction. With color, it's more hit-or-miss, since the machine cannot achieve perfect register from one color plate to the next, but the effect is arty and unusual.

I checked out Kayrock Screenprinting as well. They're from Brooklyn. I picked up a book of unique graph paper, printed in a light blue – as graph paper always is. "This can't possibly be screen printing," I said. The lines were fine, perfect. Karl Larocca heard me and jumped into the conversation. "Yes, it is. It's one of my highest achievements. The secret is to use a lot of transparent base in your ink." I was awed.

Another stand had magnificent color printing done with digital processes. Here I was not clear where the publishing and printing separated. They had a "magazine" called *Conveyor*; I bought Issue 2, dated December 2011. Their web site says "Conveyor Arts is a production house specializing in small run editions of artist books, zines, and other printed matter related to photography," and that they are located in New Jersey. But Issue 2 said it was printed by Colpapress, a San Francisco firm. Perhaps they have since gotten their own equipment.

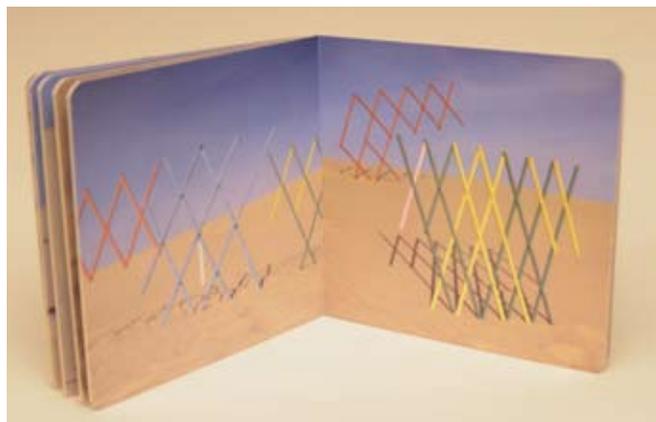
Gallery 16 (of San Francisco) is an art gallery with deep roots in the design community. They produce more or less traditional books for the artists they represent in their gallery. I fell for three photography/poetry/



Spread from Ocallaghan's *Owed to Plants*.



Cropped spread from Issue Press's *Drawings about Black Holes*.



A board book from Soberscove Press of Chicago.

music books by Rudy VanderLans, the Dutch-born graphic designer who is partner with the Czech type designer Zuzana Licko in the typeface design studio Émigré. Each came with a CD, which in some way related to the California town or area represented.

Ironically, I needed to be in LA to discover Chicago's Soberscove Press. It looks to me like they mainly make art books of interest to academics, or as they put it, "art-related materials that fill a gap in the literature, are difficult to access, or are created in collaboration with artists." What caught my eye was their brand-

new board-book series, which uses Chinese fabrication to allow artists to produce jewel-like little books that can sell for \$10. In a sense, this is the polar opposite of the lone artist struggling with a copier or mimeograph machine to self-produce book art. But in another sense, it's the same: it permits a nearly unfunded artist to reach readers with a popularly-priced item.

I chanced to run into Kathleen Walkup, director of the Book Art Program at Mills College. (The name makes a subtle distinction: it's not the Book Arts program, it's "Book Art" with no "s.") She was heading for the stand of Ugly Duckling Presse, which I had just discovered. They're a Brooklyn fixture, started as a zine in 1993 and grown into a center where a democratic (unpaid) editorial board establishes the list of things to be published, and another unpaid group usually makes the books. They have a paid administrative staff of three. My eye had been caught by *Seascope*, a beautiful all-letterpress edition of the English translation of concrete poetry based upon a WWII ship's log covering June 21, 1941, a day when the boat encountered three shipwrecked Norwegian seamen. The ship gave the men some food, pointed them in the direction of the nearest land, and left them un-rescued, though it was extremely unlikely they would reach shore.

Seascope is letterpress-printed by Peter Kruty, and would be right at home in any "fine press" fair. But the vast majority of the copies of books from Ugly Duckling go to the subscribers of the press, who for as little as \$185 a year get a copy of everything the group issues – you are promised at least 24 items. This book is more luxurious than the typical Ugly Duckling

production, but it is typical in that it is carefully thought through, meticulously edited, artful, and means something.

On the mezzanine above Ugly Duckling, I visited photography publisher Nicholas Gottlund, proprietor of Gottlund Verlag. I was sent there by Caxtonian Michael Thompson, who said he was the most serious publisher he had discovered in his first few hours at the fair. In one respect, Gottlund was representative of the art publishers at the fair (as distinguished from the zine publishers), in that he seemed

See PRINTED MATTER, page 6

Act now! Here are the details for the Caxton Club/BSA Spring Symposium April 25 and 26, in Madison, Wisconsin

The symposium at the University of Wisconsin includes all the elements of a perfect Caxtonian weekend: a tour of two wonderful libraries, the unraveling of great book mysteries (one of which was recently on the front page of the *New York Times* and the subject of a lengthy article in the December 16, 2013 *New Yorker*), plus the chance to meet fellow book lovers over good food and drink.

Friday, April 25, 2014

11:30 – 2:30: Kohler Art Library.

DR. LYN KORENIC will be our host for a tour of the Kohler Art Library and its large collection of artists' books. This collection represents a broad range of traditional and non-Western art history materials, including over 1000 handmade artists' books from 175 presses and artists and treasures from: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School; 20th Century German and Austrian Art; and Decorative Arts, especially ceramics and furniture.

Also on display will be the exhibit of artists' books curated by the students in this semester's course on art librarianship.

3:00 – 4:00: Memorial Library Special Collections Tour.

DR. ROBIN RIDER will host our tour which, in keeping with the theme of our symposium, will focus on the Library's holdings in science and natural history. Also on display will be the "Books of Nature" exhibit featuring selections from the Special Collections Department.

(Please note that a photo ID is needed for the special collections tour)

4:30 – 6:30: University Club – Fireside Lounge.

Cocktail and light snack reception for Caxton Club and BSA members and Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries. Cost \$15.00. Reservations are suggested; payment at door. Reservations are for planning purposes.

6:30: Three-course buffet dinner, University Club. Wine or beer (this is Wisconsin with a proud brewing heritage) to accompany dinner is included. Vegetarian option available.

The cost for the dinner is \$56 per person. This event requires a reservation and must be prepaid by no later than noon on April 18.

Saturday, April 26, 2014

Symposium –
BIBLIOGRAPHY, COLLECTIONS, AND THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Free and open to all – no reservation required. Pyle Center, Room 313, 702 Langdon St. (corner Lake and Langdon), Madison.

8:30 – 9:00: Coffee/Juice and Social.

9:00 – 12:45: Morning Session. *Symposium Opening Remarks by Susan Hanes and Marcia Reed; morning session speakers introduced by Michael Thompson:*

PROFESSOR MICHAEL H. SHANK, University of Wisconsin. "Learning from his Mistakes: Regiomontanus as Printer and Correcor of his own Disputationes (Nuremberg, ca 1474)."

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR NICK WILDING, Georgia State University. "Forging the Moon, Or How to Spot a Fake Galileo."

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR FLORENCE C. HSIA, University of Wisconsin. "Unraveling Early Chinese Scientific Materials at Oxford."

12:45 – 2:00. Lunch on your own or a box lunch with the speakers. Box lunch choices include: +curry chicken salad wrap; +breast of turkey on cheese roll; +baked ham and baby swiss on cheese roll +hummus and tabouli wrap. All include pasta salad, kettle chips, freshly baked cookie and a beverage. Cost is \$12.50. Please pre-order and pre-pay.

2:00 – 3:30. Afternoon Session: Moderator, **DR. ROBIN RIDER**, Curator of Special Collections, University of Wisconsin Memorial Library.

Panel discussion on morning speakers by:

DR. DANIEL M. ALBERT, collector of books in the history of science and scientific instruments and Friend of the University of Wisconsin Library.

BRUCE BRADLEY, History of Science Librarian, Linda Hall Library of Science, Technology and Technology Information, Kansas City, Missouri.

RICHARD LAN, Martayan Lan Fine Antique Maps and Rare Books, New York, New York.

DR RONALD SMELTZER, Caxtonian and collector of books in the history of science and scientific books, Princeton, New Jersey.

3:30 - 3:45. Break and refreshments.

3:45 – 5:00. Panel continued; questions and closing.

Optional Housing information

Since many Caxtonians may wish to attend the events on both days we have reserved a block of rooms at:

The Dahlmann Campus Inn
601 Langdon St., Madison, WI 53704

Phone: 800-589-6285

Caxton Club Code: 146055

Rates: +Single: Full-size bed; no closet but hanging space. \$139 per night. +Standard: One queen-size bed. Full closet. \$159 per night. +Parlor Suite: One queen-size bed, trundle bed, and love seat sitting area. Full closet. \$179 per night. +Regent Suite: One king size bed, sofa sitting area, and wet bar. Full closet. \$199 per night. Prices do not include tax but include full breakfast, shuttles, and parking.

Please make your individual arrangements with the hotel for your lodging but use our code number to obtain these rates. **The hotel is very busy for this weekend.** Rooms are being held for our code so mention the code to book your room, but when the hotel is full, it is full and our code will do no good. For those wishing a shuttle to our first Friday library tour, we will be assembling in the hotel lobby beginning at 12:45 and departing at 1:00. The Inn will also provide a return shuttle to the hotel after our Friday dinner, thereby avoiding campus parking and providing the shortest walking distance to the Library.

The hotel shuttle will also provide transportation to and from our Saturday event though you will need to arrange for check-out prior to departing to our symposium on Saturday morning. For those wishing to stay over on Saturday night the Caxton Club rates will apply. All hotel reservations must be guaranteed with member's own credit card.

Food and drink reservations

These events are optional, but if you wish to attend, you must make cocktail reception, dinner, and box lunch reservations by April 18 with:

Jackie Vossler
401 East Ontario #3601

Chicago. IL 60611

Phone: 312-266-8825

Please make checks payable to the Caxton Club.

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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: **"The Czech Avant-Garde Book"** (a look at how the Czech avant-garde sought to completely reimagine book design), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through April 7.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **"Exotic Orchids: Orchestrated in Print,"** through May 11.

Columbia College Center for Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago, 312-269-6630: **"Social Paper"** (charts the evolution of the art of hand papermaking in relation to recent discourse around socially engaged art), through April 5.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: **"Official and Unofficial: Photographs from the World's Columbian Exposition and Century of Progress"** (photographs depicting corporate visions for the fairs and visitors' individual experiences), through March 2. **"Gettysburg Address: A Graphic Adaption"** (illustrations that tell the story of the Civil War by Jonathan Hennessey and Aaron McConnell), through March 2.

Loyola University Museum of Art, 820 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-915-7600: **"Elegant Enigmas: the Art of Edward Gorey"** and **"G is for Gorey - C is for Chicago: The Collection of Thomas Michalak"** (two exhibitions of Gorey's legacy through

hundreds of original drawings, works, and illustrations, and ephemera of popular culture), through June 15.

The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **"Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North"** (major exhibition of more than 100 items that focuses on the enormous, and costly, effect the war had on civilians), through March 24.

Northwestern University Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle, Evanston, 847-491-4000: **"The Left Front: Radical Art in the 'Red Decade,' 1929-1940"** (revisits a moment in U.S. cultural history when visual artists joined forces to form a "left front" to make socially conscious art), through June 22.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive Evanston, 847-491-7658: **"Ancient Monuments of Rome: Reconstructions by the Students of the Académie Française From the Revolution to the 1880's"** (best and most interesting reconstructions published by the French government) through June 14.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **"Homer in Print: The Transmission and Reception**

of Homer's Works" (traces the cultural influence of Homer through a publishing history of important Homer editions and translations), through March 15. **"Imaging/Imagining the Body as Text"** (explores the intersections and contrasts between imaginative artistic depictions of the human body and the more literal imaging of the body or parts of the body created in anatomy and medicine), March 25 through June 20.

Woodson Regional Library, 9525 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, 312-747-6900: **"Faith in the Struggle: Rev. Addie L. Wyatt's Fight for Labor, Civil Rights and Women's Rights"** (traces life of the late Rev. Wyatt, co-pastor of Chicago's Vernon Park Church of God and one of the leading human rights activists in 20th century America), through March 15.

Send your listings to lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net



Columbia College: Social Paper
FROM THE EVENT POSTER

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confident that "curation" was what he brought to the table. The difference here is that my taste is more congruent with his than with many other publishers present. But Gottlund produces his books himself, perhaps because he comes from a long family line of printers.

I have but one more purchase to describe. For it, I paid approximately the sum of what I spent on all the other items discussed. It is part of the tradition of deluxe editions, a technique often mined by fine publishers. In the tradition, you make a sensible book for a sensible price and sell quite a few copies to sensible customers. Then you make a fancy edition of the same book and put it in either a nicer binding or a box that includes related objects, and sell it for a price that makes the economics of the whole project work.

I suppose it was a foolish purchase. It is a

large suitcase full of items related to its book, which comes hidden away in the bottom of the suitcase. The book is an exploration of the visual language of the German author W. G. Sebald (of whom I had never heard before encountering the book). Sebald is a hero in certain circles because of his use of images to punctuate his prose. The images are inserted without caption or comment, and are intended to expand upon the themes he is writing about, but seldom in a literal or specific way.

The whole project was put together through the Institute of Cultural Inquiry, a Los Angeles organization which produces books and art objects on themes that interest them. Officially, it is "a non-profit educational and cultural organization focused on 'visual technologies' and how they are used to document, imagine, remember and conceal the convergence of human activities and capabilities we

call 'culture.'"

I feel a bit like the proverbial blind man trying to describe an elephant, based upon what he can feel at ground level. I'm not a part of either the zine world or the art world, so I don't easily think the way at least some of these creators do. But thousands of people come to LA Printed Matter (and tens of thousands come to its sister New York Printed Matter), and they love what they find. And in almost every case, it's words and/or images on paper, gathered into a folder or codex. Some have more craft than others (I like craft), and some have more interesting ideas than others (I like interesting ideas). Some make beautiful things and others make ugly ones. But if you're concerned with the future of print, it makes sense to look and think.

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Caxtonians Collect: Robert Karrow

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

In retirement, Robert Karrow rises between 7:30 and 8. He reads the *Tribune*, does its crossword, and is ready for something else by 10. The question is, which something? Should he read? He has thousands of wonderful books he has read, but hundreds of others he hasn't made it to. Should he do some work? He still has promised editing to do, on articles for Volume IV of the History of Cartography, from the University of Wisconsin (but published by the University of Chicago). Or maybe some woodworking? Of course, it might be a grandchild-care day, in which case all bets are off.

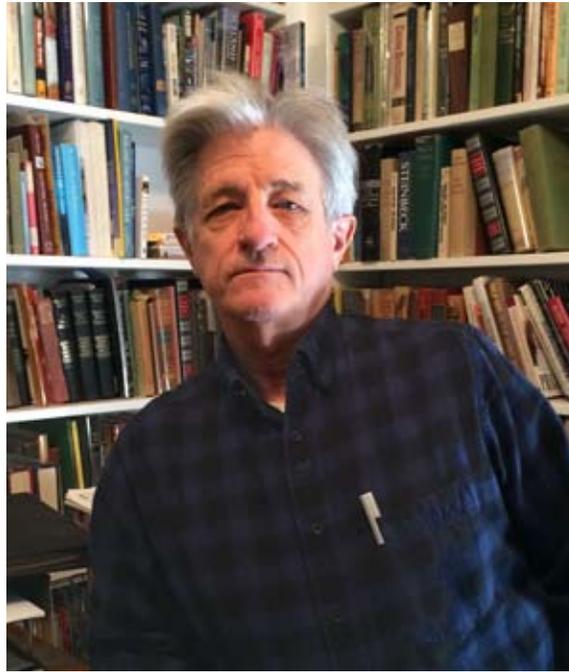
"I never feel bored," he says. "Once in a while, depressed... I think I might have Seasonal Affective Disorder... but never bored." This is the consequence of having one of the widest ranging sets of interests you'll likely ever encounter. He's interested in languages and linguistics, reads German, has taught himself quite a bit of Dutch and enough of other European languages to parse bibliographic entries. "Actually, I just counted 23 books on my shelves to help me learn Latin," he admits. "But I may not get around to it." I was about to tell him there wasn't need to learn Latin these days, since everything has been translated, but he stopped me short: "There's an early text on surveying and mapping in Latin that has never been translated. That would be a good project... teach myself Latin, then translate it."

However, this multi-talented person really only worked one place: the Newberry. After he got his MLS from the University of Wisconsin in June, 1971 he started in July 1971 as the Newberry's Map Cataloger, moving on in 1975 to be Curator of Maps, and, from 1989, also Curator of Special Collections. He retired in 2011. "Beginning in the 70s, the Newberry became a place of great ferment in the world of maps. David Woodward [who subsequently moved on to the University of Wisconsin and the History of Cartography] was the first map curator and head of the Center for the History of Cartography. People like Bill Towner, Hermon Dunlap Smith and Ken Nebenzahl were seeing to it that cartographic activity was supported from the outside; there were regular lectures and exhibits and a constant stream of fellows."

He could see that it would help if he knew a bit more about history, so he proceeded to get

a Ph.D. from Loyola in 1999 with a dissertation on Intellectual Foundations of the Cartographic Revolution. That led eventually to the crowning achievement of his career, the 2007 Festival of Maps, which included exhibits and events at many Chicago cultural institutions.

This column is called "Caxtonians Collect," and the phrase applies to Karrow in spades. He still has his largest book collection, of car-



tography reference books, in a small office in the Newberry. He plans to give a few unusual items from it to the Newberry and sell the rest. "Most of it is duplicated on their shelves, and there simply isn't room for it here at home. If I need to look something up, I can always go to the Newberry," he says.

At home, he has a big group of books about language. Dictionaries, grammars, the "Teach Yourself" series from the UK – about languages he's never even tried to learn, such as Indonesian, Malay, Serbo-Croatian, as well as the ones he has learned. Then he has a couple of shelves of Presidential history, mainly about fairly recent Democratic ones.

Another big category is fiction by some favorite authors. "Of my various categories, this is where I've actually done the deepest reading," he says. He mentioned Chicago authors Floyd Dell (whose work he has in multiple editions, and whose papers the Newberry has), Harry Mark Petrakis, Meyer Levin, Albert Halper. Beyond Chicago, lots more... Icelandic author Halldór Laxness, Thomas Mann, Proust, Raymond Chandler.

"I have Dan Crawford to thank for finding many of my books," Karrow says. "He hears that something interests me. Then a year later when he's sorting books for the book fair he calls me down and says, 'Weren't you looking for some more Icelandic in translation? Do you have this one?'"

He has flirted with e-books. He recently read a new translation of *Kristin Lavransdatter*,

the trilogy by Norwegian Nobel Prize winner Sigrid Undset, on his iPhone. "It was really convenient. I always had it with me, it was easy to hold, and I loved turning pages with just my thumb." But then, when he was done, where was the book? He would have made notes on the free end paper, but there was no end paper. So the verdict is still out.

The book arts also interest him, in the sense of doing as well as appreciating. From time to time he re-binds books he finds inadequately bound, often a paperback to a hardback, or an overly heavy, thick book into more convenient volumes. Back in grad school he letterpress-printed a book, a copy of which sold in the Revels auction a few years ago. (I know I bid on it, but I can't find it, so I must not have won the bidding.) During the interview, he again mentioned a plan he'd told me about before: that of build-

ing a home-made "Vandercook"-type proof press, starting with the cylinder of a defunct mimeograph machine.

Karrow lives in Oak Park with his wife, Lee, whom he married in 1970. She is retired from being a hospital social worker and administrator, and also has "a million" hobbies – recent obsessions are quilting and candle-making. They have two children in the Chicago area: their daughter, Katie, lives nearby in Forest Park with her husband and first child. Karrow has succeeded in recruiting his son, David, to be a Caxton member. David works in Chicago with Ed Quattrocchi's son Mike, and he and his wife are expecting their first child.

Karrow joined the Club twice: he was nominated on February 17, 1978 by Ken Nebenzahl and seconded the same day by Jim Wells. Then he let his membership lapse for two years when he returned to graduate school ("couldn't afford it" he says), resulting in the present membership directory saying he joined in 1988.

§§

Photograph by Lee Karrow



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Bookmarks...

FAT TUESDAY CAXTON SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP KICK OFF March 4: Union League Club, 6-8 PM

We hope to get members with similar collecting interests together

for discussions or activities of mutual interest. Four groups (Americana, Book Arts, Literature, and the Natural and Built World) have been thought of, but what groups form will be the result of membership interest. Wine and snacks will be served.

Luncheon: Friday Mar. 14, 2014, Union League Club

Megan McKinney

"After 100 Years of the Medill-McCormick-Patterson Dynasty, Chicago and America Aren't the Same!"

McKinney is author of the highly acclaimed *The Magnificent Medills*. She portrays the newspaper business in its heyday (1855-1955), from Joseph Medill's purchase of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and continuing with his grandchildren: Col. Robert McCormick, who personified Chicago as well as its newspaper; Joseph Patterson, who started the *New York Daily News*; Cissy Patterson, innovative editor of the *Washington Times Herald* – and great-granddaughter, Alicia Patterson, founder of Long Island's *Newsday*. It's filled with authentic conversation and insights into famous people, including the dark side of this powerful dynasty. March is Int'l Women's Month, so she will also show how five generations of Medill women – including Madeleine Albright – mirrored American women's progress. Books will be for sale.

March 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. Reservations suggested by noon Wednesday for Friday lunch. February dinner: Union League Club,

Dinner: Wednesday, Mar. 19, 2014, Union League Club

Simon Loxley

"A Fine Way: Approaches to the Art of the Book."

Frederic Warde is remembered for his collaboration with Stanley Morison and the design of the Arrighi typeface. Simon Loxley has discovered Warde as a missing piece in the story of design, type, and printing in the interwar years. His short career (he died at 45) spanned England, Europe and America and brought him into contact with the major players of the time: Bruce Rogers, Daniel Berkeley Updike, Hans Mardersteig, Rudolph Ruzicka, Frederic Goudy, George Macy, William Kittredge, Stanley Morison and Ward's own wife Beatrice. Learn of his collaborations and contributions. Copies of Loxley's new book, *Printer's Devil*, will be available for signing following the presentation. Simon Loxley is a graphic designer and writer in London. He has written two books: *Printer's Devil: The Life and Work of Frederic Warde* and *Type: The Secret History of Letters*.

65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. Dinner is \$48, drinks are \$5 to \$9. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org. **Please reserve by noon Friday for Wednesday dinner.**

Beyond March...

APRIL

LUNCHEON
There will be no luncheon meeting in April.

APRIL DINNER

At the Union League Wed. April 16, the famous wood engraver and maker of many private press editions, Richard Wagener, will speak.

MAY LUNCHEON

May 9, at Union League, Tom Staley, recently Director of the Ransom Center, Austin, will speak about his years of adventure tracking books, manuscripts and archives from the greatest writers and artists of our time. Also: Malcolm O'Hagan will speak of his dream becoming reality: an American Writer's Museum in Chicago.

MAY DINNER

Union League, May 21. Paul Needham on a Gutenberg Bible that didn't come to Chicago.

See page 5 for details on the Madison symposium, April 25-26. If you plan to stay overnight, immediate reservations are suggested.