

What I Bought When I Was 17

And what happened to it over the next 50-plus years

David Meyer

Magic entered my life through the front door of my family's home when a friend of my father walked in wearing rubber monster feet over his shoes. He gave them to me before he left. As a child I seldom saw him more than once or twice a year, but he always came with a gift – usually funny or surprising – and often gave it to me.

One year he brought two cereal-size china bowls and a package of rice. He filled one of the bowls to the rim with the rice and placed the rim of the empty bowl against the filled one. He tilted the two together several times, and when he removed the top bowl, twice as much rice spilled over from the bottom one. (To my mother's discomfort, much of it spilled onto our living room carpet.) After emptying the remaining rice onto a tray, he asked my mother if he could borrow a dish towel. (What could she say but yes?) He covered a bowl with the towel briefly, pulled it away, and the bowl was filled with water, some of which spilled onto the carpet. With those bowls and the secret, I became a boy magician.

I began acquiring more tricks in Chicago at National Magic Company in the Palmer House hotel, and at Ireland's magic shop on North Clark Street. Ireland's was owned by Frances Ireland, the wife of professional magician Jay Marshall, who later became a member of the Caxton Club. At Ireland's I began to buy more books than tricks. New and old books on magic and allied subjects were displayed along a wall of the shop. Most of the vintage books were duplicate copies that Jay couldn't seem to pass up during purchases for his own collection. One of these was a thin volume in pictorial paper-covered boards,



Polaroid portrait of the author in his best vest, holding "The Mirror of Life" leaf of Houdini's scrapbook.

published in London in 1922, titled *Magical Rope Ties & Escapes* by Houdini. So began my fascination with "The Handcuff King".

Houdini was born Ehrich Weiss in Hungary in 1874, one of five sons of a rabbi who brought his family to America and settled in Appleton, Wisconsin. By the time Ehrich was 19 years old and performing a magic act at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, he had changed his name to Harry Houdini. Having been inspired by the achievements described in the autobiography of the French magician Robert-Houdin (considered the "father of modern magic"), Houdini believed that by adding an *i* to the Frenchman's surname meant "like" Robert-Houdin. Houdini, however, was not the gifted magician Robert-Houdin had been. He and his young wife Bess struggled for seven years performing in dime museums in this country before leaving for Europe in hopes of better engagements.

They arrived in England in June 1900 and

were soon booked at one of the premier variety theaters in London, not as a magician but an escape artist. Handcuffs, leg irons, rope, locks, chains, jail cells, straitjackets, nailed packing cases, nothing concocted held Houdini for very long. He had studied how to accomplish these feats since boyhood; and after escaping from a pair of police handcuffs at Scotland Yard several days after his arrival in London, his fame and theatre appearances as the "King of Handcuffs" quickly captivated Europe.

More challenges and accomplishments followed in succeeding years: manacled bridge jumps and escapes from Houdini-devised contrivances, including an outsized milk can and an upside-down "Chinese Water Torture Cell." He flew the first

airplane over Australia in 1918 and became a star in film serials in the 1920s – based on his daredevil stunts rather than his acting. Always wishing to return to magic, he finally did so with extravagant illusions such as "Walking Through a Brick Wall" (by secretly crawling under it) and "Vanishing an Elephant" (which proved not to be very large on New York City's enormous Hippodrome stage).

After his beloved mother died in 1913, he sought for years to communicate with her through spirit mediums. One of these was the wife of his friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Every attempt to reach his mother over the years was a failure and all the purported messages from her could not convince Houdini that they were anything but false. This led him to the final challenge of his life, a campaign to expose the methods of fraudulent spirit mediums. The results of his investigations into psychic phenomena became a prominent portion of his magic show in the final years of his life.

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In late October 1926, while playing in Montreal, Canada, he was visited one afternoon by several students who had been in the audience for his lecture the previous day at McGill University. One of them, an amateur boxer, asked if it were true that Houdini could take hard punches to the stomach without being hurt. Houdini had always had great strength and even at 52 years old was in good physical condition. He said yes to the student and yes again when the young man asked if he could test Houdini's claim. But before he could brace himself for the blows, the student punched him in the stomach – four times – before Houdini could stop him. The resulting pain intensified as he performed that night and the next day. By the time he reached Detroit for his next appearances he was so ill a physician called by his wife was waiting to meet him at the train station. The doctor diagnosed appendicitis and urged him to go to the hospital. But the evening's show was sold out and despite a 104 temperature Houdini was determined to perform. He died of acute peritonitis from his ruptured appendix on October 31, 1926.¹



William Lindsay Gresham, author of *Houdini: The man who walked through walls*.

In 1959 a new book arrived at Ireland's magic shop titled *Houdini: The man who walked through walls*, by a New York friend of Jay Marshall's named William Lindsay Gresham. Marshall enjoyed telling how Gresham received a \$50,000 advance for his novel *Nightmare Alley*, which was subsequently made into a movie in 1947 starring Tyrone Power and Joan Blondell. Gresham wrote a long letter to Marshall describing how the Houdini book came about. "I sold two novel-length pieces on Houdini . . . [to] *True* magazine." He used them to procure a contract for a full-length biography and was given six months to complete the manuscript. "All in all I researched during February and March [1958] and started writing on or around the first of April. I wrote the book in ten weeks, a first draft, about 160,000 words. . . . This was done without the aid of Benzedrine." His research materials were provided by friends – mystery novelist Clayton Rawson, radio mentalist Joseph Dunninger, and numerous others in magic. "I am only a hack writer living from hand to mouth," Gresham wrote, "and dependent on the aid of people who know more about things than I do." It was the first new book about Houdini in 32 years and only the sixth account of his life or feats since his death.

A page from *Houdini's* haphazardly assembled scrapbook, including a publicity photo, Christmas card, and news clippings dated 1900.



Houdini was written in a dramatic narrative style that did not include all the dry facts and details that more extensive research would have provided. Gresham's fondness for dialogue, supposedly drawn from newspaper interviews and anecdotes long circulated in the magic community, was abundantly evident. The book became a best seller and, like his novel, led to a movie, this one featuring the film stars (and married couple) Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh.

Gresham's book inspired me (and no telling how many other young enthusiasts) to begin collecting everything associated with Houdini's life and career.

My first prized possession was a portrait of Houdini on a pocket mirror. I found it nailed to a wooden post in a carnival showman's warehouse that my father and I visited in Miami. Nails sunk into the post and hammered down around the mirror held it in place. I considered it a great discovery and a bargain for the ten dollars my father paid. I later purchased half a dozen keys and lock picks said to have been owned and used by Houdini. They were authenticated by a retired juggler named Larry Weeks, who also happened to be selling them for a dollar apiece.

In 1959, thanks to Marshall, I began corresponding with Stanley Collins, a retired English society magician who amassed a storied collection of magic books and memorabilia. One of my first purchases from Collins was an autographed photograph of Houdini's 1909 flight in a biplane over a military airfield in Germany. Collins

priced it at \$3.50. This was truly a bargain, but unfortunately it arrived in the mail broken into three pieces.

Knowing I was a young collector, Collins occasionally offered advice, although the first counsel came too late. "I am very doubtful if the various keys that purport to have belonged to Houdini are genuine," he wrote. "Such items are like the Cross of Jesus Christ which the natives sell to credulous believers. If all the pieces thus sold could be pieced together they

would reach across the Atlantic."

Although many of the items I acquired had come to Collins through friendships, he only once directly commented on Houdini: "I was very friendly with Houdini when he was over here and got to like him. He was a weird man in many ways, one facet of his nature being very hard and another extremely sentimental. He had a rather peculiar 'sniff' which I personally found rather irritating."

Collins and I wrote a letter to each other nearly every month for four years. He usually listed four or five items he was willing to sell from his collection; my letter included a bank check purchasing everything he offered. By the time I let our correspondence slip away I had purchased nearly 100 items for less than \$100. All in all, bargains.

The same time I was buying from Stanley Collins I was also running a one-line want ad in a monthly newspaper devoted to news of magic events and magician's activities. The ad eventually brought me my best (and also my final) Houdini acquisition.

In November 1958 a postcard came from a magic dealer in New Jersey named Ken Allen. "I happened to see that you are interested in Houdini material," he wrote. "I am interested in selling the last of the Houdini scrapbooks . . . from 1900 to 1918. I have written to two other people. . . . Let's hear from you." The two other people apparently never responded, for the following August Allen advised that he was headed to a magic convention in Wisconsin

and was willing to drop off the scrapbooks at my family's home in Indiana for me to look over – and pick them up on his way back.

Allen said the scrapbooks were found in an abandoned theater in Cincinnati. This was all he would tell me. I was 17 years old; the idea of Houdini scrapbooks being found in an abandoned theater was the perfect fanciful mystery to convince me that I should own them. I didn't learn until very recently that they had actually been left in a studio in Palisades Park, New Jersey, once owned by Jesse Lasky, the producer of several of Houdini's movies.

I couldn't afford to buy all the scrapbooks so I decided on the earliest one. Houdini had compiled it during the years 1900 to 1905, the period of his initial success as "The King of Handcuffs." It reflects the frenzy of activity and attention that his abilities as an escape artist brought him.

Wherever "my" scrapbook had been over the previous 55 years, it had not been carefully stored. The large (11" x 17") covers, once sturdy, were battered; the leather spine was missing; and the binding had mostly disintegrated. It contains 139 leaves, pasted on both sides of each with news clippings, telegrams, letters, photographs, printed and hand-drawn cartoons, leaflets, and broadsides, theatre programs – and Houdini's sparse notations in sepia ink. The contents remind one of a three-ring circus where you don't know where to look first.

I suspect Houdini bought the scrapbook soon after arriving in England, its size probably dictated by his ambition. The first item pasted inside the front cover is a stencil-printed program for a shipboard "concert" to benefit "The Seamen's Fund," with Houdini performing "Twenty Minutes of Magic." Below it is an illustration cut from a magazine, captioned "Love Laughs at Locks and Bars."

The initial leaves were telegrams of congratulations from fellow variety hall performers. Houdini pasted one on top of another. His name was not yet familiar to the public or

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A dozen men paraded outside the Alhambra Theatre in sandwich boards to promote Houdini's first appearance in London.



PURCHASE AT 17, from page 3

fellow entertainers in Europe. One telegram is addressed to "Handini," another to "Hundini." The topmost telegram refers to Houdini's appearance at Scotland Yard where, in the presence of newspaper reporters, he released himself from a pair of handcuffs a moment after a Scotland Yard detective had cuffed him to a pillar and with handcuffs on his wrists.

His first appearance in England was at London's Alhambra Theatre. A dozen men paraded in front of the building wearing sandwich boards advertising Houdini's appearance. Speculation about who hired the men – the theater manager or the escape artist – is broached in the most thorough of recent Houdini biographies. Two large photos in his scrapbook, one of which shows the men lined up for inspection in an alley next to the theater, suggests that Houdini had paid them. The photograph of the men in front of the theater was included in Houdini's publicity booklets for the next ten years.

"A newcomer to the Alhambra stage is a prestidigitator of average merit," a London newspaper reported; "but in his special business he is absolutely unequaled." That "special business" was the "challenge escape act." Houdini invited anyone with a device or method for restraining him to contact the theater and the proposed contest was planned to take place during one of his performances. Handbills were circulated announcing the event. Handcuffs and leg irons predominated in the first years, but other means of holding him were soon devised. One broadside in the scrapbook for the Brighton People's Palace proclaims "Houdini Nailed and Roped in a Packing Case. Bring your own hammer and nails."

His two-week engagement at the Alhambra in May 1900 was extended through August.² The following month he opened in Dresden and "broke all existing records for paid admissions." In October he opened at Berlin's Wintergarten, a "huge establishment" that had to call in police to prevent riots when no more tickets were available. By that time Houdini had added "jail breaking" to his accomplishments. He pasted in his scrapbook a cartoon from a German publication depicting the "ausbrecher" [escaper] getting out of a jail while a crowd is clamoring to get in to see his show.

Short news reports about his act fill the first



Houdini saved the hand-decorated envelopes received from his fans, but not their letters.



Houdini appeared at the People's Palace in Bradford, England, several times. "Packed them in to suffocation at every performance," his pitch book declared.

leaves of the scrapbook, but as Houdini's fame grew, so did the length of the stories. Some ran several pages, with Houdini scribbling

little finger-pointing hands to indicate that an article was continued on the following page. Not all of the reports were accurate. Next to a clipping from a German newspaper, Houdini wrote: "Notice reads Houdini has to lose his right arm re blood poisoning from cuffs." He disagreed with another report, writing (and misspelling) "A DAM LIE!"

His success fostered blatant imitators who began appearing in theaters

throughout Europe and in America. The scrapbook has a few clippings about these performers, likely sent to Houdini by family and friends. As most of the accounts were about his rivals' failures, it's very likely he relished reading and saving them. He also kept several hand-decorated envelopes mailed to him by enthusiastic admirers. But he did not keep their letters.

One letter he saved came from the sheriff of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, dated December 2, 1905. The sheriff apologized for his deputy, George Anderson, who appeared "without authorization" the day before at a performance of Houdini's at Keith's Theatre in Cleveland. Anderson brought with him a pair of regulation handcuffs from his office that had been "tampered with" so they could not be opened once they were locked. The management of the theater quickly turned this incident into publicity in an open letter to the press and public, stating that in front of "an audience of 1400 people [Anderson] showed his badge, gave his name, and declared that the handcuffs were



Houdini (holding puppy) visiting an unidentified circus in Europe. He performed with several circuses in Germany in 1901 and 1902.

in good working order. Mr. Houdini knew that the handcuffs had been 'fixed,' but the deputy sheriff swore that they were not, and called Mr. Houdini a fakir. To save the show and the act from being ridiculed Mr. Houdini was compelled to allow the deputy sheriff to place these 'fixed' cuffs on him with six other pairs. Mr. Houdini released himself in exactly 13½ minutes and by so doing whipped Mr. George Anderson, deputy sheriff, as a man would whip a cur." The theater manager, in an act of bravado of his own, declared that he had "taken steps to have the deputy sheriff dismissed from office."

Houdini was never known for humor or comedy, but two rare (if not unique) staged photos show him clowning with a raised hammer, and wrestling with a giant wrench, as one cuffed wrist rests on an anvil while he pretends to try to escape using the tools. An uncharacteristically silly grin is on his face in each pose.

Most of the 44 photographs in the scrapbook are original, with the majority showing Houdini or theaters where he was performing, their entrances flanked by stands of posters prominently headed with his name. Two undated, full-length studio portraits of his wife Bess, elegantly dressed in possibly all-new clothing, are pasted at the very bottom of one leaf. Most photos are also casually, even haphazardly, mounted in no particular order. A photo of his mother (looking solemn

on the verge of sour), taken when she visited him in Essen, in the German Ruhr, in 1901, is next to a snapshot of Houdini in a garden in Moscow in May 1903.³ Like typical tourists, mother and son were photographed in front of shop windows in Essen, one prominently displaying shirt fronts, high collars, and bow ties. (Houdini wore high collars in those days; perhaps his mother recommended he get new ones.)

Few of the photos of Houdini I'd seen before acquiring his scrapbook could be called "unplanned." And all the articles and books I'd read implied that there were only two women of interest in Houdini's life: his wife and his mother. This idea was dispelled as soon as I came across a somewhat out-of-focus, hastily shot scene of two young men in a garden. With one hand the man closest to the photographer holds up a risqué photo of a scantily clad model. His other hand is braced against Houdini's chest as he laughs while trying to grab the photo. Houdini, it appears, was caught with a secret and his two friends conspired to reveal it.

Houdini mounted news stories and advertisements featuring copycat escape artists on the final leaves of his scrapbook. His rivals were young and old, male and female. The stage names of a number of them mimic his own. Francois Kerini in Munich and Alfredi Mourdiny in Berlin were two of these. His most successful imitator was his brother The-

odore Weiss, who performed under the name Hardeen. He came to Europe at Houdini's invitation to take on engagements Houdini was too busy to fill.

Not everything in the scrapbook was pasted down. A poem in free verse from a German admirer was attached to a loose fragment of Houdini's earliest stationery. The first lines, translated, read:

During my wanderings I recently came to Essen
Where I found the residents quite in excitement
There was a human being possessed by the devil
And his name was Harry Houdini

In 1968 I received a letter from a prominent Minneapolis magic collector advising that he had purchased the three Houdini scrapbooks I'd been offered ten years before. He wished to purchase mine, but if I was unwilling to sell it, he suggested I mail it to him and he'd have "photographic copies" made of all four scrapbooks for the benefit of both of us. I never replied. I regret this now as we eventually became good friends and also because he recently reminded me of his "unanswered" letter by sending me a carbon copy of it. I was living a busy life in the late 1960s – college, graduate school, military service – with no thought about Houdini or his scrapbooks.

The scrapbooks came into focus again in the mid-1970s when Jay Marshall suggested that they all be photocopied, including one assembled by Houdini in the late 1890s, owned by a collector in Brooklyn, New York. Jay's plan was to construct a time line for every performance Houdini gave during his career and I (for some enthusiastic reason now long forgotten) agreed to do it. It was an ambitious idea that Houdini might have applauded.⁴

Jay found a copier large enough for the scrapbook leaves to be reproduced full-size. As I watched the fragile remains of my scrapbook's binding disintegrate in Jay's hands, I went into silent, heartsick shock.

Copies of all the known scrapbooks came to the upstairs backroom of the Marshalls' magic shop, where I began typing dates and places of their contents on index cards. Feeling that Jay and I had desecrated the wonderful Houdini scrapbook I owned, I placed it in a drawer of my father's fireproof file cabinet.

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PURCHASE AT 17, from page 5

The time line project was abandoned after Jay purchased an early Edison recording of Houdini's voice. He paid \$5,000 for the cylinder and assured his wife Frances that he could recover the investment by commercially issuing a modern recording with a scripted introduction about Houdini's life. Once again he looked to me to research, and this time write, a script. I'd already grown pale from six months of indexing in the Marshalls' backroom and had neither the inclination nor the talent to become a scriptwriter. Before abandoning this project, Jay played a tape recording made from the cylinder for a group of magic collectors, several of whom made recordings on their own devices as Jay played his.

In the mid-1980s Ricky Jay, a prominent magician and author of several best sellers about oddball entertainers, asked to be allowed to study my scrapbook for an intended work about Houdini's many imitators. He spent two days taking notes, but his book has yet to appear. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Kenneth Silverman, author of biographies of Cotton Mather and Edgar Allan Poe, also took two days to study the scrapbook. His book, *Houdini!!! The Career of Ehrich Weiss*, is one of the best of many recent biographies.⁵ Another researcher asked

Front cover of *The Mirror of Life* sporting magazine for April 1904.



to scan the newspaper clippings, including those in German, for a book based on the supposition that Houdini had led a "secret life as a spy." I didn't take to the ideas of scanning or suspected spying and so refused.

In 1900 Houdini was 26 years old: half of his life spent, half yet to go. Beginning in 1928 and increasing in number decade after decade, books about Houdini continue appearing. For this reason I have several times considered writing one of my own, based on the scrapbook's five years of ephemera devoted to his initial and possibly greatest success. But my boyhood enchantment has been an overriding memory that's kept me from pursuing an adult reengagement. That is, until last spring when I took the scrapbook out of my late father's file drawer, prepared a summary outline of its contents, had Catherine Gass at the Newberry shoot photos of selected artifacts, and gave a slide presentation for a collectors' convention at the American Museum of Magic in Michigan. The final slide reproduces the cover of a sporting magazine for April 27, 1904, known as *The Mirror of Life*. It carries a portrait of Houdini looking pensive, his wrists in chains and handcuffs.

Two members of the audience approached me following my presentation. John Cox, a Hollywood screenwriter and producer of a popular Houdini blog called "Wild About Harry," and Arthur Moses, owner of a library of over 2,000 books about Houdini and compiler of a world bibliography of periodical references to him. Both told me they had never seen *The Mirror of Life* portrait of



Advertising on a London omnibus, circa 1900. The restored banner is on display at the Conjuring Arts Research Center in New York City.

"The Handcuff King" – or most of the other photographs in the scrapbook.

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Except for the photo of the author on page one, photographs were taken by Catherine Gass of *The Newberry Library* from the scrapbook in the author's collection.

NOTES

1. Grace Hospital in Detroit, where Houdini died in 1926, was torn down in 1979. Several ardent magic collectors went to the site and carried away bricks as "Houdini souvenirs."
2. A pitch book sold at his performances beginning in 1906 included "an accurate account of every week and month that Houdini has spent abroad from 1900 to his return to America [in] 1906."
3. Houdini captioned the Moscow photo, "I was making a few tricks for my appearance before the Grand Duke Sergius." Sergei Alexandrovich, son of Tzar Alexander II, was the commander-in-chief of the military district of Moscow. He and his wife were assassinated by a bomb in February 1905.
4. Numerous books and articles about Houdini have been appearing in many countries on many aspects of his life. He is also the subject of novels, short stories, poetry, plays, an opera, films, bibliographies, and scholarly monographs. *The Witch of Lime Street: Séance, Seduction, and Houdini in the Spirit World*, published in October 2015, is one of the most recent books.
5. A photograph taken of the author when he was 15 years old and performing as a boy magician appears on the back cover of the book's dust jacket. This was quite possibly a major marketing mistake, for despite the subject and excellence of the book, it did not sell as well as Silverman's previous biographies.

College Book Art Association Conference

Nashville 2016

Martha Chiplis

Just what you need in early January, when winter seems to stretch endlessly ahead: a short trip to Nashville, Tennessee, for a two-day conference about book arts.

On Wednesday evening, January 6, fellow Caxtonian (and my husband) John Dunlevy and I arrived in Nashville for the 2016 conference of the College Book Arts Association. The CBAA is entering its eighth year; this was the third of its conferences I have attended.

This year the Caxton Club was a conference sponsor. The sponsorship gave us a chance to reach the 202 conference attendees through an ad in the conference program, along with a flyer in the conference bag. Additionally, I manned a table during the academic tables event with information about the Club.

On Thursday, having missed guided tours the conference offered (full), we drove over to Isle of Printing, a print shop and more, founded by illustrator and ringleader Bryce McCloud. Dublin, Ireland, native David Meaney gave us a tour of the back room, which included two laser cutters and plenty of letterpress printing equipment.

We were blown away by all the projects that Isle of Printing has undertaken, especially "Our Town," a public art project that invited Nashville residents (including homeless and ones on death row) to create self-portraits. After receiving the lowdown on where we should go for coffee and vegetarian food in Nashville, we made the pilgrimage to Hatch Show Print.

Founded in 1879, Hatch is now housed in the Country Music Hall of Fame. Celene Aubry, letterpress printer and former Chicago-area resident, is now manager at Hatch. She gave us an eye-opening behind-the-scenes tour. A group of dedicated interns and staff worked at designing and printing posters for Hatch clients. Jim Sherraden, Hatch archivist and artist/printer, was printing some of the largest wood type at Hatch, inked by hand with a brayer.

We could happily have stayed at Hatch, but it was time for the conference.

Riyaz Latif, professor at Vanderbilt University and specialist in Middle Eastern art, spoke on "Narrative Worlds of Islam in Ink, Silk and Gold," an exhibit at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts. He talked about the Persian



Jim Sherraden, Hatch Show Print

Shahnameh epic, the subject of a 2014 Caxton dinner talk, and the influence of Chinese painting on the art of the book. In addition to stylistic and thematic influences, Chinese prisoners taught Muslims the art of papermaking in the eighth century. After viewing the exhibits at the Frist, a beautiful repurposed art deco post office, we went for a late dinner.

Friday morning presented a panel on the subject of metal typecasting and letterpress printing. One of the panel speakers was Erin Beckloff, currently of Miami University, and Vermont College of Fine Arts whose talk was titled "A Cast of Characters – Tales of a Letterpress Film."

Erin is the director of *Pressing On*, a film about the survival of letterpress. The film raised \$71,000 as a Kickstarter project in 2015, and will be released in

the spring/summer of 2016. She talked about the people who were interviewed for the film, which began as a study in oral history. When it was suggested that her project would work better as a film, she set out to make that happen.

Simmons College. She discussed archives and altered books, as well as her project with students and the McArthur Public Library Archives in Maine.

Third on this same panel was Shiloh Jines, from Mills College. Jines is a poet and book artist who talked about "Poetics of the Ampersand" and referred to, among other things, the Goudy/Bruce Rogers 1937 *Diggings from Many Ampersand Hogs* chapbook, published in 125 copies by the Typophiles.



Swag and ephemera from CBAA Nashville 2016

The final afternoon panel, highly anticipated by me, was "Artist, Reader, Narrator & Object" with moderator and past grant recipient Matt Runkle. Betty Bright, writer, historian, and curator, gave a concise, poetic talk, "Second Skin: The Inhabited Stories of Amara Hark-Weber." My notes consist of tantalizing snippets: "book & shoe leather is tanned

in the same place, stretching – submersions, muscle memory – a walker's uncertainty, book – body." Hark-Weber was the Jerome Fellow at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts (of which Bright was once the director)

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CAXTONIAN, FEBRUARY 2016

Join the Shakespeare Folio Tour in Wauconda

A February Caxton on the Move event

On February 7 Caxton on the Move will participate in the traveling Shakespeare First Folio Exhibition. The Folger Shakespeare Library, in partnership with the Cincinnati Museum Center and the American Library Association, is sponsoring folios touring all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Wauconda will be the only tour stop in Illinois.

The event will include:

A brief lecture by fellow Caxtonian and Shakespeare expert Jill Gage;

A lecture by John Nygro on "What Shakespeare's First Folio Tells Us About His Plays." He will discuss the sophistication of Elizabethan audiences, their willingness to be immersed in the drama, and



Shakespeare's understanding of how to include music to dramatic effect. The lecturer will include video of modern reconstructions of Elizabethan instruments, their sound quality, and historically informed singing styles.

John Nygro has performed as a

musician, actor, conductor and lecturer for over 30 years. He is the founder and director of the Harwood Early Music Ensemble and has conducted over 175 concerts. His talks have been featured at Northwestern University, the Newberry, on NPR and several classical music stations.

Nygro's lecture is being



presented in support of the First Folio tour.

Location: Lake County Discovery Museum, 27277 N. Forest Preserve Road, Wauconda, Illinois

Schedule: Jill Gage: 1 to 1:15; John Nygro: 1:30 to 2:30. The cost for those arriving by car is FREE.

For those traveling by train and bus from Chicago the cost is not to exceed \$30. Train departs at 10:40am and we would return by 4:30. Twelve seats have been reserved for the Caxton Club, but reservations are essential. Contact Jackie Vossler at 312-266-8825 or jv.everydaydesign@rcn.com.

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First Caxton Club Rare Book School Scholarship Recipient Announced

In 2015, as part of the Club's continuing efforts to support "the book," we sponsored a \$2,500 scholarship to Rare Book School in Virginia to support young book scholars who reside in the Midwest and are not supported by their employment; the recipient is selected by Rare Book School.

Our winner is Sarah Evenson, who will receive a BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in spring 2016. She has received many honors and awards, including three from MCA: the Dean Wilson Art-of-Making Merit Award, Liberal Arts Depart-



ment Merit Award, and an Opportunity Grant. She also received a WorkArt Kunstverein Fellowship from the Kunstverein "Talstrasse" in Germany

She also does work as a translator, and her co-translated book *Incidents in the Night* was a finalist for both the Eisner Award and the LA Times Book Award.

We look forward to meeting her personally at a future Caxton meeting.

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CBA, from page 7

and has a recent MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is a practicing shoemaker in St. Paul. (She was also TA at the SAIC Type Shop, where I teach.) Her art—Hark-Weber calls them "conceptual shoes" is so beautiful and moving and surprising that during the Q&A the audience thanked Bright for introducing them to her work. (Also from the Q&A: Yes, Hark-Weber can make custom shoes for you.) I look forward to reading a print version of Bright's talk on Hark-Weber.

On Saturday at mid-day, my Caxton table could be found sandwiched between Jay Fox from the Penland School of Crafts and the University of Iowa table. This felt comfortable to me as I gave away copies of the *Caxtonian*

and business cards to interested attendees, speaking also about the Caxton Club grants and programs. I predict that a minimum of three new members will result from this event.

It helped that I wasn't the only Caxton Club member at the conference. Steve Woodall and Miriam Schaer were in attendance, as well as past Caxton Club grant recipients Pamela Olson, Anne Covell, Radha Pandey, Candida Pagan, and Matt Runkle, among others.

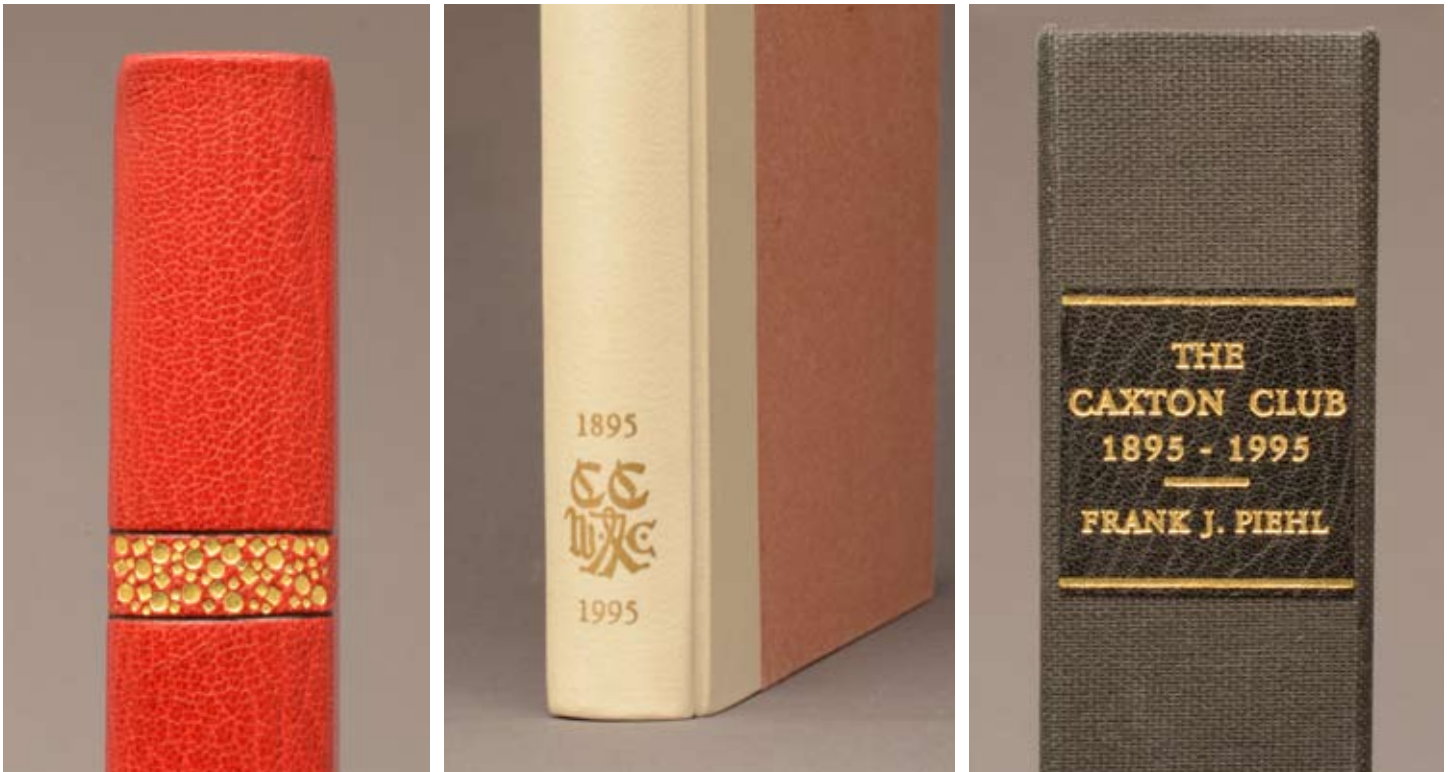
That afternoon student "Lightning Rounds" were held. About ten students spoke for 10-15 minutes each about their work. The works were uniformly intriguing, and I look forward to hearing more from these artists in the future.

Rounding out the conference were a silent

and live auction, cocktail hour, banquet, and dancing. The Caxton Club donated two copies of *Other People's Books* to the silent auction. (A bidding war for them ensued; they sold for more than \$50 each.) Also in the silent auction: a portfolio of prints from the conference show, "Posted Notice." Cathie Ruggie Saunders and I each contributed a print to the exhibit of 30. The prints will become part of the collection of the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University.

Thanks were given to volunteers and organizers, and an Elvis impersonator arrived to sing to CBA President Julie Chen: a fitting end to a Nashville experience. Until we meet again, next year in Tallahassee.

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photographs by Robert McCamant

Time to Say Good-bye...

Three exquisite bindings of the Caxton Club history were created to mark the Club's 120th Anniversary, while celebrating bookbinders and their craft. But now, alas, it's time to say good-bye – or perhaps “good buy” – to these beautifully-crafted volumes, bound by Sam Feinstein, Karen Hanmer, and Scott Kellar.

You can make your bids for these masterpieces at the Great Caxton Bookbinding Auction.

When: March 9, 2016, from 5:30 to 7 pm.

Where: Towner Lounge of the Newberry Library

Admission: \$10 includes one drink coupon. (Additional drink \$5.)

Bar and light hors d'oeuvres.

Lift a toast to these unique and beautiful expressions of art and history.

And feel free to:

Buy a bound volume for your personal collection; or form a team and buy for a special library or club – maybe even the Caxton Club!

RSVP to Dan Crawford at caxtonclub@newberry.org.

Auction Details:

Bindings will be available for preview on March 2 from 2-4 pm at the Newberry Library.

See front desk for room assignment. There is a reserve for each binding of \$750. No bids under the minimum will be accepted. Written bids may be submitted to Dan Crawford. Bids must indicate the bidder's name, contact information, the specific binding being bid upon, and the bid amount. All written bids must be received by Dan Crawford by 5 pm, Tuesday, March 8. Buyer bears all delivery costs. The bindings will not be delivered until full payment is processed.

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: **"Our Most Distinguished Outcast: Frank Lloyd Wright and 'Wendingen'"** (Wright's relationship with and influence on early 20th century Dutch avant-garde architecture), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through February 16.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **"Beatrix Potter: Beloved Children's Author and Naturalist"** (Potter's early life and publishing career, and her love and preservation of the natural environment), through February 7. **"Orchidology: Orchidaceous Investigations"** (rare book exhibition featuring volumes of orchid illustrations), February 12 to May 8.

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, Chicago, 312-744-6630: **"Librería Donceles"** (traveling Spanish language bookstore conceived by artist and educator Pablo Helguera that points out the lack of access to books in Spanish), through April 24.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: **"Chicago Authored"** (works by writers that define the character of Chicago), ongoing.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: **"Called to the Challenge: The Legacy of Harold Washington,"** (an overview of Washington's life and projects as mayor), Harold Washington Exhibit Hall, ninth floor, ongoing.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **"Civil War to Civil Rights: African American Chicago in the Newberry Collection"** (presents stories of African Americans in Chicago reconciling the promise of life in a northern city against experiences of discrimination and prejudice), through April 2.

Northwestern University Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: **"Don't Throw Anything Out: Charlotte Moorman's Archive"** (papers of the performance art pioneer and avant-garde impresario), through July 17.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **"Making Faces: Cartoons and Cartoonists from Northwestern Library Collections"** (history of cartooning and illustration). **"Deconstructing Stereotypes: Top Ten Truths"** (art, images, and testimonials about stereotypes that impact the lives of Native American people), University Library's 1 South study area, through March.



Chicago Botanic Garden / Beatrix Potter
FROM HER PAPER "ON THE GERMINATION OF THE SPORES OF AGARICINEAE"

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

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **"Envisioning South Asia: Texts, Scholarship, Legacies"** (exploring the influential role of University of Chicago scholars in shaping South Asian studies), through March 18.

Send your listings to Lisa Pevtzow at lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net

GIANNONI, from page 11

like changing climate control can put the whole library out of kilter for years at a time.

The Field has had budgetary constraints in the last few years, and the Library has not been able to hire as much staff as it once had. But Giannoni is relieved that because of endowed book acquisition and conservation funds, she is able to continue to keep the holdings both in usable condition and in sync with the needs of the researchers she serves.

The Field is not a part of the Chicago Col-

lections Consortium (the group of Chicago universities and nonprofits that pool their materials electronically), but has chosen instead to be part of the Biodiversity Heritage Library – an international group whose members include such institutions as the American Museum of Natural History, the Harvard botany library, Woods Hole, and the Smithsonian. In the long run, this will provide excellent electronic access for the fields these institutions specialize in.

The BHL has had side benefits: cooperating

with other institutions has brought Giannoni much closer to her peers from other institutions. And the free online access has brought a wider constituency of artists and activists forward to make use of their shared materials.

Giannoni joined the Club in 2011, nominated by Kim Coventry and seconded by Jill Postma. She is married to Gary Giannoni, who "cheerily tolerates my insistence on visiting a library whenever we travel, from Volterra, Italy, to Las Vegas, Nevada!"

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Caxtonians Collect: Christine Giannoni

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Christine Giannoni's history seems to have fated her to become the Museum Librarian at the Field Museum, her current position. She was born on the south side of Chicago, but spent most of her childhood in Forest Park. She came to the Field on school field trips, and felt an instant affinity. When she was in college (studying anthropology at the University of Illinois at Chicago) she volunteered at the museum, spending Saturday afternoons in the Webber Resource Center working with visitors of all ages.

But earning her anthropology degree convinced her that she didn't want to stay in anthropology as a career, so for grad school she decided on the library program at Dominican University. While studying, she had part time jobs in the public libraries of Forest Park and La Grange Park as well as at the DePaul Law Library downtown. But when it was time to look for her first real job, she picked the Field, and the Field picked her.

She started as a reference librarian in 2002, and is currently Museum Librarian. (The former position of Library Director has been modified into this new role. The library is no longer solely a museum service, but is considered on the same tier as the other collections, like anthropological artifacts and botanical specimens. The library still serves the other departments (technically, they are actually other "collections," but they seem a bit like traditional departments), via its collections, of course, but it is also an important steward of the Field's history via the institutional and image archive collections, as well as through programs of its own that serve the Field's larger constituencies.)

She is very glad that she came when she did. Of course, she got to know the last library director, Ben Williams, very well. But Peyton Fawcett, who had retired in 1995 from the director position and passed away in 2011, was often around. And Fawcett had worked

with some of the Field's first librarians, as his tenure began in 1960. So there is a significant chain of institutional memory that goes back to the beginning.

In the pre-Internet age, part of the library's role was educating "people" about "things." It was not unusual for a patron to come in and ask to see books about mummies, say. That sort of use has all but disappeared since you can get pretty deeply into the study of mummies from your computer at home. Now the library's requests are for original material to be used in research. Staff members, both from the Field and other institutions, plus faculty and students at all sorts of academic



institutions, are the largest part of the user constituency.

As a Chicagoan, you can study items from the Field library in person (as do researchers from around the world, who come for several days at a time). But you must first locate the materials you want in their on-line catalog, then request them at least 48 hours before your appointment.

Though still considered an interlibrary loan, if it is a user outside of Chicago, generally a smaller request can be answered with a scan of the required document supplied electronically. Not many books go out on loan – both the costs and the risks are too high. As of two years ago, the Field's book holdings have been included in WorldCat, so researchers can request a specific item. Nowadays, the most frequently requested materials are the various reports generated by expeditions the Field has conducted over the years.

Departments at the Field are a different matter: the major ones have relevant portions of the overall library physically located in their own spaces which are dispersed around the building. No requesting a document and getting a scan a month later for them! These departmental libraries are on the honor system: staff members fill out a card to signify that they have removed a book to their office, and anyone following along can find the book in the electronic catalog, trace it to the departmental library, find the card, and take his or her request up with whoever borrowed it. (Staff are not permitted to remove items from the building, however.)

This can be a challenging system, Giannoni admits. Recently the library decided to do a complete inventory of the books ostensibly under its control and had to spend more than a year tracking items down and giving them bar codes. Some old-timers had literally hundreds of books in their offices. The system works fairly well for books, but less well for journals: whereas a whole book is likely to be about a single topic, bound volumes of journals have articles on a variety of subjects. So if one person keeps a volume out of circulation, others are more likely to need access.

Back when Giannoni was in library school, the topics were the traditional ones. She finds that more of her time now is spent facing problems her schooling didn't anticipate. Computers make many things easy, but often at the cost of headaches in getting a system started. And there was nothing about keeping a physical plant running in school! A project
See GIANNONI, page 10

photograph by Robert McCamant



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**Luncheon: Friday, February 12, Union League Club
Collecting Ghosts: Audrey Niffenegger
in Conversation with Paul Gehl**

It might not be just the cold that could have you shivering this February. Fortunately, the room will be well lit as Paul Gehl interviews fellow Caxtonian Audrey Niffenegger about her newest book, *Ghostly: A Collection of Ghost Stories*, which includes classics by Poe and H.H. Munro, contemporary pieces from authors like Neil Gaiman, a new story of her own, and a spooky jacket she designed. They'll discuss the process of creating the anthology – how she got the idea for the book, found and selected the stories, and what the ghost story means today. During the conversation the author will be invited to tell us about the ghostly presences in her earlier visual works and fiction – all those skeletal hands, winged or spectral figures, and the mirror-image twins in her 2009 novel *Her Fearful Symmetry*. Niffenegger is an acclaimed artist, teacher, and author whose works include *The Time Traveler's Wife* and *The Night Bookmobile*. At the Newberry Library Paul Gehl is responsible for one of North America's largest collections on printing history, calligraphy, and design.

February 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 \$32. **Reservations or cancellations by noon Wednesday for Friday lunch.** Please call 312.255.3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org

Beyond February...

MARCH LUNCHEON

Creative Caxtonians on Friday, March 11, at the Union League Club. Recent works by present Caxtonians will be discussed and on display!

MARCH DINNER

March 16 at the Union League Club, Susan Jaffe Tane, noted Edgar Allan Poe collector, will provide some candid insights into her auction house experiences. This is a unique Caxton "Members Only" event.

**Dinner: Wednesday, February 20, Union League Club
"Caxton Club Book Binders Initiative"**

The Caxton Club Book Binders Initiative celebrates the conclusion of the Club's 120th anniversary with the creation of three unique fine bindings for our Club history, *The Caxton Club 1895-1995*. This meeting will allow the bookbinders – Samuel Feinstein, Karen Hanmer, and Scott Kellar – to introduce their bindings. A detailed account of this project appeared in the January *Caxtonian*. (Information about the binders can be found on their websites: samueleinsteinbookbinding.com, karenhanmer.com, and skkellar.com.) Following their presentations Paul Gehl will host a discussion on their approaches to the task, the choices they made along the way, the challenges posed by the materials they chose, and how they view the "added value" of the binding. Paul is an enthusiastic "devil's advocate," so his questions will probe the art and inspiration of fine binding for this project and generally. The bindings will be on view starting at 4:30. These finely bound copies of our Caxton Club history will be auctioned on March 9 at the Newberry's Towner Lounge (**details of the event are on page 9**). This is the close of our 120th Anniversary, and an Anniversary Bookmark will be given to each attendee.

February Dinner: Union League Club, 65 West Jackson Blvd. The evening will follow this order: Social gathering: 5:00-6:00 pm. Program: 6:00 pm. Three-course dinner to follow the program. Program only: Free. Dinner: \$60. Reservations are essential for either the program only or the program/dinner combination. **Reservations MUST be received no later than NOON Monday, February 15.** Dinner cancellations or no-shows after this deadline will require payment. To reserve call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org.

APRIL LUNCHEON

As is our custom, there will be no luncheon in April. Watch for information about the May and June luncheon programs.

APRIL DINNER

April 20 at the Union League Club, Marvin Taylor, the Director of New York University's Fales Library & Special Collections since 1993. He will speak on "the archive as art."