



Caxtonian

A Newsletter of The Caxton Club of Chicago

Volume I, No. 4

December 1993

Christmas, Dickens and "The Carol"

Charles Dickens and Christmas are synonymous to millions.

"Bah! Humbug!" and "God bless us everyone!" are expressions from the best-known and most widely printed book about the season, with the exception of the wonderful account from the New Testament.

Dickens wrote, "There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas ..."

Like his father John, young Charles loved to entertain. Parties for friends and their children, along with his own large family included games, theatricals pertinent to the season, usually

written and staged by family and guests, charades, story-telling, displays of magic, music, singing and dancing. What better time than Christmas to put all these ingredients together! Dickens would be delirious with anticipation and activity and almost mad with excitement no child could equal.

Pickwick Papers made the young author England's literary lion in his early 20s. They were a five-star smash -- the *Gone with the Wind* of the 1800s. Issued serially, the chapters on "Christmas at Dingely Dell" are almost equal to "The Carol" in portraying the very soul of Christmas.

A Christmas Carol, in prose, being *A Ghost Story of Christmas*, published by Chapman and Hall in December 1843, was an instant success artistically but not financially. Under heavy pressure because of his own expensive lifestyle and demands from his family, Dickens needed money. He had hoped to clear a thousand pounds, but his insistence upon the book's quality of appearance

and illustration increased the production costs, and profits suffered.

Heart and soul went into the writing. Like most of his work, it became a part of him. As the story progressed he would laugh and cry, live and die, with his characters; his emotional involvement was intense.

Most know the story: The regeneration of a miserly, greedy, money-loving wretch into a human, charitable, generous soul who starts to care for those about him.

To get into the real spirit of Christmas, Caxtonians are invited to read--or re-read--"The Carol." It takes but a short time. It might be especially meaningful to examine John Leech's drawing of "Mr. Fezzwig's Ball." It is a perfect combination of author and illustrator. If this does not make the reader chuckle, smile, and feel Christmasy -- nothing will!

Herbert Furse

Editor's Note - Photo by Kenneth Cain, The Newberry Library, of rare, leather-bound Dickens volume, from the collection of Robert Cotner.



Special Newberry Exhibitions Slated for Holiday Season

This December, Caxton Club members have the rare opportunity to view two major exhibitions of fine printing and hand bookbinding. The Guild of Book Worker's exhibit, *Fine Printers Finely Bound Too* and Chicago Hand Bookbinders' *Fine Printers Finely Bound Too* will be on display at The Newberry Library beginning December 4.

In the past, Guild of Book Workers exhibits have focused almost exclusively on binding. The current exhibit's focus has been widened to emphasize the

theme of recent books, printed with skill, care and artistry, which display the work of North American fine presses. The books (49 in the Guild show, 33 in the Bookbinders') are superb examples of the successful marriage between the distinctive crafts of printing and bookbinding.

Three Caxtonians' works are in both shows: Scott Kellar, Barbara Lazarus Metz, and William Minter. Other Chicago-area binders in the Guild show are Robin Howell and Julie Naggs.

This year's Christmas Revels, set for December 8 at the Newberry, give Caxtonians a chance to view the exhibits and to enjoy a special presentation by Chicago Hand Bookbinders. Chicago actress, Meighan Gerachis, will read from *Dora's Book*. Members also are invited to attend the opening reception for the exhibit on Saturday, December 11, 1pm - 4pm at the Newberry.

Bill Minter

Editor's Note - Please see Page 4 for reservation information about the Holiday Revels.

Caxtonian

The Caxton Club of Chicago
Founded 1895



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First Fridays Program

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Musings...

"Robert Frost hated Christmas. He disliked the tinsel, the noise, the extraordinary superficiality of the season. And he came here to escape it the last dozen holidays of his life -- except the final year, when he was hospitalized."

The speaker was Hyde Cox, long-time friend of Robert Frost. On a brilliant October afternoon in 1984, we sat in 18th century surroundings (Mr. Cox considered himself an 18th century man), the elegant library and music room of his 1840 home on Crow Island, north of Boston. On a shelf across from me was a complete collection of inscribed and slip-cased first editions of Mr. Frost's writings. I would peruse these beautiful books before I left his home.

I think about that conversation every year about this time, and I find, as I get older, that I too would like a place where I could slip away from the Holiday Season, when society reduces itself to quantitative rather than qualitative considerations.

Since many feel as I do but since it is not possible for most of us to escape to a place like Crow Island, I have -- to be thoroughly literary, in good Caxtonian tradition -- an immodest proposal to make. I propose we create among book lovers across the country, a wholly new season to nestle within the commercial ephemera of the holidays. I'd call my new season . . .

But first let me tell you about it. The chief visual symbol of this new season would be light -- a diffused, pervasive, radiant luminescence, as in an early winter sunset on the prairie. The auditory accompaniment would be -- indeed, a rarest of qualities these days -- silence, as in the silence of reading to one's self Homer, Blake or (who better for these days, as Herbert Furse reminds us) Charles Dickens.

You will understand by now, of course, that what I am attempting to do -- if I may borrow a phrase from Bruce Chatwin -- is "resurrect the clarity of [our] intellect." Thus, my new season -- and here I lean heavily upon the inspired language of Dietrich Bonhoeffer -- would mean "a return from the newspaper and the radio [and the television] to the book, from feverish activity to unhurried leisure, from dispersion to concentration, from sensationalism to reflection, from virtuosity to art, from snobbery to modesty, from extravagance to moderation."

In short, my new season will be a celebration, within our diversities, of the important universals of the human spirit. What do I call my new season? you ask. Let me tell you by wishing you a delightful *Season of Luminosity* . . .

Who knows -- Robert Frost, were he disappointed with where he's gone, might even join us in our celebration.

Best of the season -- our *new* season -- to you and yours . . .

Robert Cotner
President

Book Societies Hold National Meeting

In the pleasant surroundings of the Grolier Club library and conference room in New York City, representatives of six book clubs from across the nation gathered informally on Friday, November 5, to form an alliance to share information and to review and restate their individual and collective commitment to the book.

Larry Siegler of the Rowfant Club (Cleveland) opened the session with a description of the genesis of the idea for the meeting. He also offered to prepare and produce a directory of all the book clubs. Other items on the agenda that were discussed (in the spirit of sharing), were the mailing to each club of: copies of announcements, newsletters and schedules, copies of bylaws and other protocol, such as information about honorariums, visitation opportunities to club meeting and club activities. There also was some discussion about possible joint activities and the concern

expressed (and agreed to by all) for maintaining individual club identities and unique differences.

Jack McClatchey of the Rowfant Club, acted as secretary and will send notes to everyone present. The working title agreed for the organization is Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies (FABS). Bob Jackson, also of the Rowfant Club, will develop an idea for a two-day symposium and book fair in New York in the spring of 1996. Martin Antonetti of The Grolier Club offered their facilities for the event.

Clubs attending were the Philobiblon (Philadelphia); Rowfant; California (San Francisco); Grolier; Baxter (Portland, Maine); Odd Volumes (Boston); and, Caxton. The attendees then broke for lunch after agreeing to continue the formative process by reporting back to their respective councils and then meeting again soon.

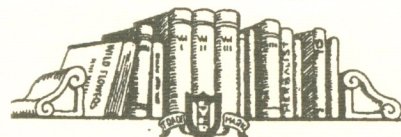
Hayward Blake

Saints & Sinners Corner

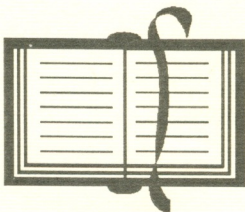
Several Caxton Club publications were to be found at the recent Midwest Bookhunters fair at Northwestern. A copy of the scarce and beautiful *The Frankfort Book Fair* (1911) was purchased by a fellow Caxtonian for \$325, as was a copy of *A Day with the Cow Column* (1934), for \$85. A very nice copy of the hard-to-find Caxton Club edition of *Wau-Bun* was left begging for a home on a Caxtonian book shelf.

A little bit late...In 1956, someone turned in an overdue book to a library in England. How overdue was it? It had been borrowed in 1667!

A call for logos...Any Caxton member who has a book-related logo may send it to the editor for future publication in the *Caxtonian*.



The Caxton Chronicles



The Caxton Club produced many outstanding publications in its 99-year history. Sixty were sold to the members, and 56 other items -- year-books, catalogues, keepsakes, etc -- were printed for gratuitous distribution to members. In 1993, the club also began issuing a monthly newsletter, the *Caxtonian*. The 60 publications of the club constitute an impressive and diverse library in themselves.

The content of the books is significant. Over the years, the Publications Committee commissioned leading scholars to translate, edit, and/or write them. Nineteen are important historical works, most of which are listed in Howe's *U.S. IANA*. Sixteen are major publications in the history of printing and bookbinding,

and seven relate to bibliophiles and book collecting. The remaining 18 comprise a fascinating miscellany of poetry, literary works, two plays, an opera, a broadside, and reprints of presentations at dinner meetings.

The club chose leading designers to produce the books and the best printers to print them. Quality hand-made paper and attractive type fonts always were used.

The early publications were produced in limited number and soon sold out, causing anguish to new Caxtonians who couldn't buy them at the publication price. The Caxton Club publications have become collectable because of their unique content and design. *The French Bookbinders of the Eighteenth Century* was sold by subscription to members in

1904 for \$18, and now commands a price of \$500-\$800 in the used book market. The first 145 of 252 copies of *William Caxton* by E. Gordon Duff, were sold by subscription in 1905 for \$25 with a leaf from an imperfect copy of the first edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, printed by Caxton himself in 1478. A copy of this treasure was sold in 1993 for \$3,500 by a Boston antiquarian book dealer.

Caxtonians should not be scared off by these prices. Many of the older publications can be found at affordable prices if one is diligent. They're worth owning and reading. For those not familiar with them, the out-of-print books will be on display at The Newberry Library during The Caxton Club Centennial Celebration.

Frank J. Piehl

Book Marks

Luncheon Programs

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of the First National Bank of Chicago, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30pm.

December 3.

Caxtonian John McKinven, professional magician and collector of books on magic and allied arts, will talk on "Magic from a 1584 Book."

January 7.

Theresa Quattrocchi, daughter of Caxtonian Ed Quattrocchi, will speak about a rare 17th century manuscript entitled "Jeptha's Daughter."

*Ed Quattrocchi
Leonard Freedman*

Rosenheim Featured

Former Caxton Club president, Ned Rosenheim, was featured in James Warren's "Sunday Watch" column of the *Chicago Tribune*, November 7, 1993. Warren described Rosenheim as "one of the wonderful souls in our midst who exist without attracting the interest of Larry King, Oprah Winfrey or other arbiters of societal worthiness." All Caxtonians would agree!

Appleman Honored

Poet Philip Appleman, who addressed The Caxton Club, October 21, 1992, on "Science, Belief and Poetry," has been selected by the American Humanist Association for the 1994 Humanist Arts Award, the first poet so honored.

Dinner Programs

All meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of the First National Bank of Chicago, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Spirits-5pm; Dinner-6pm; Lecture-7pm.

December 8.

The Holiday Revels At The Newberry Library for a major exhibit of modern bookbindings. Dinner, music, and a reading by Meighan Gerachis. Note: Meal price: Members, \$30, all others, \$35.

January 19.

Wesley Tanner, co-owner of Passim Editions, Ann Arbor, Michigan, will speak on "History of Typographic Ornaments."

Tom Joyce

A Reminder from the Centennial Exhibitions Committee

The Caxton Club Centennial Exhibitions Committee wishes to remind all members to submit their suggestions of books and other objects for possible inclusion in centennial exhibit, "Personal Treasures - Favorite Books from the Collections of Caxton Club Members."

The exhibition will take place at The Newberry Library from January 25 through April 30, 1995.

The deadline for submissions is February 1, 1994, but members are urged to respond earlier. Please use the form included in the September *Caxtonian*. Additional forms are available from Kathleen Lamb, at 312/761-7626.

"Personal Treasures" promises to be a most important aspect of the centennial and all members are encouraged to participate.

Kathleen Lamb

Reservations for luncheon programs are requested. Reservations for dinner programs are required. Please make them by calling 312/943-9090, ext. 204, no later than 24 hours prior to the event.

The First National Bank of Chicago's parking garage, 40 South Clark Street, offers a special parking rate after 5pm to guests of the Mid-Day Club. When you leave, please tell the parking attendant you were at the Mid-Day Club and your parking fee will be \$6.50.



The Caxton Club of Chicago
60 West Walton Street
Chicago, IL 60610

