



Caxtonian

A Newsletter of The Caxton Club of Chicago

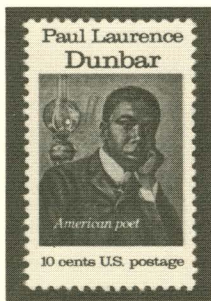
Volume II, No. 2

February 1994

American Poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar: Remembered and Celebrated

Three years before The Caxton Club was founded, a volume of poetry appeared in Dayton, Ohio, that would redefine Negro literature in America -- Paul Laurence Dunbar's *Oak and Ivy*.

Dunbar was the first Negro poet to attain national and international recognition. While acclaimed as a Negro dialect poet, he was a master wordsmith in standard English poems and fiction. In a brief 13 years, he stormed the literary world of America. He was the most popular American poet of his time. Booker T. Washington proclaimed him the "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race."



Dunbar was born on June 27, 1872, in Dayton, to Joshua and Matilda Dunbar, former slaves. His parents told him stories of their slave experiences that he later would use as he composed his dialect fiction.

During high school, Dunbar displayed his literary talents as editor in chief of the *High School Times*, president of the literary club and class poet. His first poems appeared in the *Dayton Herald* as early as 1888. In 1889, he published the *Dayton Tattler*, a Negro newspaper printed by his friend and classmate, Orville Wright -- yes, that Orville Wright.

In 1891, after graduation from high school, Dunbar wanted to attend Harvard and study law; however, his family could not afford the tuition.

He sought employment in Dayton, at law offices, the local newspaper and other businesses only to be denied employment because he was a Negro. He was forced to accept menial employment as an elevator operator. He continued to write poetry, and he began to write his first short story.

In 1892, Dunbar's former English teacher, Helen M. Truesdale, asked him to give the welcoming address at the Western Association of Writers convention held in Dayton that year. Dunbar wrote a 26-line poem for the occasion. The poem was so well received by the audience that he was invited to become a member of the association.

That same year, Orville Wright suggested that Dunbar publish a volume of poems, *Oak and Ivy*. In the fall of 1892, Dunbar delivered the manuscript to William Blacher, the business manager of the United Brethren Publishing House in Dayton, and hoped to have the book printed by early 1893. The publishing house was able to print and bind the book by Christmas. So, on Christmas Eve 1892, Mr. Blacher presented Dunbar with 500 copies of his book. Because of the rush, the volumes were bound in several different colors of cloth. Also, the date of publication in the book is 1893 not 1892. This slender volume of poetry launched the career of one of America's greatest literary figures.

During the next 13 years, Dunbar enriched America's literary landscape with poetry, short stories, magazine articles and novels. Most of his books were produced using standard printing techniques of the time. The book design lacked creativity and imagination. However, in 1899, Dodd, Mead produced a

series of highly decorated books containing Dunbar poems. The first volume, *Poems of Cabin and Field*, contained photographs by the Hampton Institute Camera Club. The volume has foliate borders in light green, some which include such items as ears of corn, opossums, and peanuts. Margaret Armstrong decorated the 1901, *Candle-Lightin' Time* and the 1906, *When Malindy Sings*. The pattern in these books is calligraphic title page, borders throughout and Jenson type. These books incorporated book design principles that William Morris promoted. They are an excellent example of Morris's design philosophy applied to American-made books. They are the only examples of Morris' principles being applied to a book by a Negro author. The series includes *Poems of Cabin and Field* (1899), *Candle-Lightin' Time* (1901), *When Malindy Sings* (1903), *Li'l Gal* (1904), *Howdy, Honey, Howdy* (1905), and *Joggin' Erlong* (1906).

Amos Paul Kennedy

\$5,000 Centennial Donation

A Caxtonian who wishes to remain anonymous has donated \$5,000 to help underwrite the costs of the illustrated catalogue for the *Personal Treasures* exhibit, a major feature of The Caxton Club centennial celebration.

The donor has made the generous contribution "moderated by its serving as a matching fund to primary appropriations from The Caxton Club or the Centennial Funds."

The Caxton Club is a non-profit organization; all contributions are tax deductible -- and development co-chairs Ann Koch and Jud Scruton surely would be pleased to accept them.

Caxtonian

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Founded 1895



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Editor - Michael Braver

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Fine Printers & Lithographers

Musings...

One of the prized items in my book and manuscript collection is a letter to me, dated 5 February 1970, from Fanny Ellison, wife of American novelist Ralph Ellison. She inquired in the two-paragraph letter about the availability in print of a 40-page essay of analysis and interpretation of *Invisible Man* which I had written as part of my doctoral work at the University of Maryland.

I had begun the study initially with a phone conversation with Mrs. Ellison, who confirmed a key aspect of what I had discovered in my own study of the novel. She had asked me to send Mr. Ellison a copy of the completed paper, and her letter was the request from Mr. Ellison for publication information because he "would like so much to refer some of the readers to your essay." The gist of what I had written is this:

Ralph Waldo Ellison is a spiritual and literary descendent of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Integral to his role as Emerson's namesake, Ellison admitted in 1964 -- in a speech at the Library of Congress -- "I cannot escape the obligation of attempting to achieve some of the things [Emerson] asked of the American writer."

In his 1952 masterpiece, *Invisible Man*, a singularly unique novel of this century -- and one of the great ones -- Ellison fulfilled his obligation to Emerson in a significant way. In good transcendental tradition, Ellison created the central character, the unnamed "Invisible Man," who emerges as an Emersonian hero-leader. Through his own distinctive cultural encounters that are prophetic of national events of the 60s' and 70s' -- *Invisible Man* arrives at a state of enlightened renewal which links him to an American heritage that reaches back to the Renaissance. An African-American in culture, he becomes a western intellectual in thought, a splendid fusion of two cultures of this nation -- and a rarity in our literature.

Alfred Kazin called Emerson "a spiritual genius whose role was essentially public." He was, Kazin added, "the appointed leader who comes at the beginning of a new civilization, sounds collective hope and purpose, out of himself passes spiritual strength to the people."

I saw, and yet see, Ellison in a similar role. As a young English professor, I was touched by the spiritual strength of *Invisible Man*. I discovered in Ellison the possibility that Americans of diverse cultures can become one through (often painful) social and philosophic metamorphoses. I learned from Ellison the nature of invisibility, a common reality for many of us in a society that has made a religion of anti-intellectualism.

February brings together much of the greatness of this nation through Washington, Lincoln, and so many great African-American personages. Fanny Ellison's letter is a reminder to me of the profound truths of *Invisible Man*, that remarkable book, which 42 years ago told us something so important -- something we have yet to hear clearly.

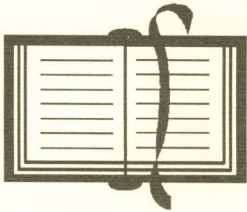
Robert Cotner
President

Preserving Lincoln: The Person and the Collector

The following is an excerpt from The Sixth Annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture delivered by Caxtonian Ralph Geoffrey Newman at the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1983.

For more than fifty years I have been involved in the delightful profession of accumulating and distributing the books, manuscripts, photographs, paintings, and artifacts relating to the life and times of one of the most interesting human beings the world has ever known. When I started my work there were persons around who had been alive when Abraham Lincoln was living. My grandfather was 23 years old when Lincoln died and lived to be 88 in my 19th year; I remember his telling me about Mr. Lincoln and the Civil War. As a boy I can recall going to the Chicago Historical Society to hear Julia Taft Bayne speak. She had been a playmate of Willie and Tad Lincoln in the White House. Her brother had been one of the physicians present at the President's

The Caxton Chronicles



Caxtonians have often chosen historical topics for their publications. Two of

these publications pertain to Abraham Lincoln.

The first was written by John Maxcy Zane, a noted Chicago lawyer, who served as president of The Caxton Club for a record nine-year term, from 1928 to 1937. On February 12, 1932, he addressed the Lincoln Centennial Association in Springfield on "Lincoln the Constitutional Lawyer." His study presented with insight what was then a totally new view of Lincoln as a constitutional lawyer of great acumen.

Three hundred copies of Zane's text were published by The Caxton Club in

death on Saturday morning, April 15, 1865.

Mr. Lincoln is very real to me. He is both an historical personality and someone I seem to know so well that I feel his presence almost constantly -- it's as if he just stepped out of the room but will be returning shortly. Knowing people like Carl Sandburg, Walter S. Holden, F. Lauriston Bullard, James Rosenthal, and Frederick Hill Meserve, who in their youth had known many individuals who had been close friends of Abraham Lincoln, made the great Prairie Lawyer and President seem very close. He was a sort of vicarious contemporary and, for that matter, still is.

When, in July 1947, 82 years after his death, the Lincoln papers were opened to the public, the greatest treasure trove of Lincolniana attested to its creator's or collector's concern with the preservation of the Lincoln story.

1932 as its 34th publication. The 92-page book was designed by Caxtonian William A. Kittredge and printed by R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company at the Lakeside Press. Distributed to members at a subscription price of \$3.50, it now sells for over a hundred dollars.

The second publication resulted from the acquisition of a famous Lincoln letter by Chicago collector and Caxtonian Alfred W. Stern. On November 14, 1941, he purchased the most important of the 30-odd letters written by President Lincoln to General Joseph Hooker -- the letter generally known as "The Hooker Letter." Historian and Lincoln expert Paul M. Angle, another Caxtonian, regarded this letter as "one of the finest Lincoln letters in existence, and one of the world's great masterpieces of letter writing."

Abraham Lincoln certainly wrote like a collector when, in 1848, he penned the words, "In this troublesome world, we are never quite satisfied." Twelve years later, he wrote what is still the best advice for a collector, "Get the books, and read, and study them carefully." On April 10, 1865, speaking to a rejoicing crowd at the White House, he added a song to his collection. "I have always thought 'Dixie' one of the best tunes I have ever heard. Our adversaries over the way attempted to appropriate it, but I insisted ... that we fairly capture it..." A century later, his great-grandson demonstrated that he had inherited some of the collecting instinct when, at a centennial celebration in Springfield, he said, "Please ask the band to play 'Dixie.'"

Ralph Geoffrey Newman

With Stern's gracious permission, The Caxton Club published the letter in facsimile in 1942, before it was donated to the Library of Congress. It was the Club's 44th publication. Two hundred copies of the facsimile were bound in full red cloth with an explanatory text by Paul Angle, and an additional 300 copies were issued in paper wrappers. One copy of the paper-bound issue was distributed free of charge to each Caxtonian. The cloth-bound copies, which originally sold for \$3.50, now bring almost a hundred dollars.

Over the years, The Caxton Club has issued many such publications of quality, not only in the field of Americana, but also in literature and the arts of producing books. Participation in the creation and appreciation of such masterpieces is one of the major benefits from membership in the Club.

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.

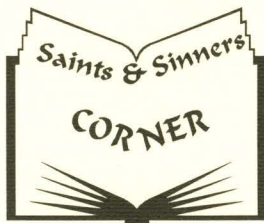
February 4.

Paul Saenger, head of acquisition, The Newberry Library, will talk about "How The Newberry Builds its Collections."

March 4.

Michael Koenig will discuss Theodore Low DeVinne, the most eminent printer of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century.

*Ed Quattrocchi
Leonard Freedman*



A Sinful Error...R. Eden Martin was erroneously listed as a new member in the January *Caxtonian*. Mr. Martin has been a member since 1977. The new member was Charles J. Hansen, nomi-

A Word of Thanks

Editor's Note: November dinner speaker, Gloria Damon-Timmell sent the following note to club president Robert Cotner. We want to share it with you.

"The genuine interest I received in the subject matter and Volland Books was indeed gratifying.

"It is sometimes a dark world out there, and to share some of its light with lovely friends and fellow bibliophiles has brought me great happiness.

"Thank you one and all for such a splendid opportunity to share the subject so dear to my heart with each and every one of you."

Gloria Damon-Timmell

nated by Roger Vree and seconded by R. Eden Martin. Our apologies.

New catalogue...Oak Knoll Publications, New Castle, Delaware, has just issued a new catalogue of their publications on bibliography, bookbinding, book collecting, bookplates, printing, private presses, typography, and related topics. For more information, please call 302/328-7232.

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

February 16.

Wesley B. Tanner & Susan Skarsgard "20 Works from 20 Years: The Books and Printing of Wesley B. Tanner."

March 16.

Sidney Berger presents, "Kim Merker: A Retrospective Look at 35 Years of Fine Printing."

Tom Joyce

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 \$7.00.

THE CAXTON CLUB



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60 West Walton Street
Chicago, IL 60610