



Caxtonian

A Newsletter of The Caxton Club of Chicago

Volume II, No. 5

May 1994

Thomas More's Printers: John and William Rastell

In December 1516, Thomas More published his *Utopia* in Louvain, Belgium, and it became instantly popular; it was reissued in three editions in the next two years. Although More was a prolific writer in both English and Latin, he wrote his most famous work in Latin, because it was intended for a sophisticated international audience of Christian humanists, who could be expected to understand its ironic social, political and religious reformist commentary on the current issues of the time. It was printed on the continent by Thierry Martens, rather than in England, probably because the Europeans were more advanced in the art of bookmaking, and because More's good friend, Erasmus, could guide it through the press.

But it is curious why More did not have the *Utopia* printed by his brother-in-law, John Rastell. Rastell was well known in London legal circles as a member of Thomas More's family. He had previously printed one of More's earlier works, a loose translation of the *Life of Pico della Mirandola*, an Italian Renaissance humanist, whom More took as his model in life. In subsequent years Rastell emerged as one of the most important printers of law books in England. One of his lasting contributions to legal scholarship was the landmark publication of the first real law dictionary, known popularly as *The Termes of the Law*. And he printed a wide variety of other books, including some of the earliest texts of Tudor drama.

Neither a specialist in publishing nor in any other aspect of life, Rastell was a bold and controversial man of considerable accomplishment. One of his most

intriguing ventures was an aborted voyage to the New World in March of 1517, a year after the publication of More's *Utopia*. Rastell's intended expedition was no doubt influenced by More's fictional account of the philosopher/seacaptain Hythlodæus' travels with Amerigo Vespucci to Utopia. Unfortunately Rastell's ship and crew made it no further than Ireland, owing to a mutiny by the unsavory characters whom he had contracted for the voyage.

What is most interesting about this failed attempt to reach the new found lands is the association it has with Caxtonians and Americans. Is it not wonderful that John Rastell, a successful printer and accomplished lawyer, over 40 years old, set sail for America 25 years after Columbus landed on this continent and some 40 years after Caxton's introduction of printing to England! It is not altogether fanciful to speculate that he had publishing in mind as one of his objectives, for he took with him his servant and printer, Thomas Bercula.

And even if we discount the influence of More's *Utopia* on Rastell's aborted voyage to the New World, it is no small coincidence that the only knowledge on which the Utopians were ignorant, which the Europeans could teach them, was the art and science of printing and paper making. Hythlodæus explains their percipience: "When we showed them the Aldine printing in paper books, we talked about the material of which paper is made and the art of printing without giving a detailed explanation, for none of us was expert in either art. With the greatest acuteness they guessed how it was done."

John Rastell, ironically, came to a tragic end, similar to that of his brother-in-law, for holding different and opposed ideas. More was put to death in 1535 for his opposition to Henry's divorce and for his refusal to sign the act making the King supreme head of the Church of England. A few years before More's problems with Henry, Rastell had been won over to the side of the reformers and had been a member of the Reformation Parliament.

But after More's execution, Rastell himself became ensnarled in the religious turmoil of the time, a victim of his own zeal to end corruption in the Church. Because he pushed reform further than the authorities in Henry's government were willing to go, he was sent to prison, where he died in June of 1536, within a year of More's execution. Sadly he was rejected by his new political allies and alienated from the loyal circle of Thomas More's followers, who continued More's legacy.

Among those loyal followers was William Rastell, John's son and the editor of the 1557 edition of More's *English Works*. Although William Rastell also endured great hardship after More's death, dying in exile in Louvain, he lived to accomplish one of his lifelong ambitions -- the publication of the *English Works*. Of this book, William Rastell's life, the Aldine texts taken to Utopia by Hythlodæus, and Shakespeare's *First Folio*, I will have more to say at the Caxton First Friday luncheon on May 6.

Ed Quattrocchi

Editor's Note: Tooled leather cover of *Il Petrarca* (*Sonnets of Petrarch*), published by Aldine, in 1521. From the collection of Dr. Quattrocchi.

Caxtonian

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Founded 1895



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Caxtonian is published monthly by the Caxton Club of Chicago. The Caxton Club office is located at 60 West Walton Street, Chicago, IL, 60610. Telephone, 312/943-9090, ext. 204. Permission to reprint material from *Caxtonian* is not necessary if copy of reprint is mailed to the Caxton Club of Chicago office and credit is given to *Caxtonian*.

Caxtonian is printed compliments of River Street Press, Aurora, Illinois Fine Printers & Lithographers

Musings...

I have stood on the rock high above the small mountain community of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and looked over the roofs and steeples of the town, across the rugged Appalachian Mountains, upon the rocky river beds of the Shenandoah and Potomac where they merge below. Thomas Jefferson stood on this rock in 1783. He is reported to have said that the view from here is worth a trip across the Atlantic. I agree.

Jefferson once used the metaphor of high vantage point—perhaps he had this very scene in mind — to say that, because a leader assumes a position different from others, he or she sees more broadly and a good deal more detail than others within an organization.

I think of “Jefferson Rock,” the name of that boulder above Harpers Ferry, and of Jefferson’s metaphor as I write. I have seen better than others the efforts of Caxtonian Eugene Hotchkiss and his Constitution & By-Laws Committee as they wrestled through The Caxton Club governing document, lying in bits and pieces here and there -- in minutes, in past records, in the minds of former presidents and memories of older members, and in practice, which often did not coincide with any of the above.

One of the legacies I wanted to leave as your leader was a current, accurate governing document. Dr. Hotchkiss kindly and generously accepted the chair of this committee, knowing that it would be no easy task. He was fortunate in having the assistance of other Caxtonians, Hayward Blake, Gretchen Lagana, Arthur Miller, and Frank Piehl. This group met numerous times, including two special sessions of the Council, and worked through six drafts in coming to the final version, which was approved in an historic and a unanimous vote of the Council in special session, April 20, 1994.

Folded into this month’s *Caxtonian* is the final version. At the Annual Meeting of The Caxton Club, May 18, 1994, we shall begin our new year under this new document. I invite you to read it carefully. And make certain you take time to thank Dr. Hotchkiss and members of the committee for their remarkable work in preserving the tenor of the original Constitution & By-Laws while making the new one a totally accurate and appropriate governing document for the beginning of our second century.

I think our founders would be surprised with what the club has become as represented in this document. And Thomas Jefferson himself might enjoy the view, as well.

Robert Cotner
President

A History, of Sorts, of "First Fridays"

No volunteer job I have ever undertaken has gained me more satisfaction with less effort than scheduling and making arrangements for the Caxton Club Friday luncheons. And in the past year, with Leonard Freedman sharing the chores, it is even easier and more fun. This effortless activity not only has enriched my friendship with numerous members of the Club, but it has also increased my understanding of the disease of bibliomania, to which I have succumbed. After having invited, and in some cases, coerced, members of the Caxton Club to share with other members their stories and knowledge about their collections and special interests for the past four years, I have come to the moment of truth, when I must tell my own story of my love affair with books on May 6, particularly my interest in Thomas More and his works.

Since December 1, 1989, when Gwen

Kolb initiated the first Caxton Club Friday presentation with his stories of collecting eighteenth century literature, particularly almost all editions of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, followed the next month by Ned Rosenheim's vivid recollections of the history and development of *Modern Philology*, the Friday luncheon meetings have attracted an astonishing variety of Caxtonians, who have recounted anecdotes and exhibited their collected treasures. The depth and breath of the collections and the stories associated with them have been a source of entertainment and inspiration to those who have been in regular attendance. Surely few other clubs in Chicago, or elsewhere, include among their members the variegated professional expertise and catholic cultural interests of our members.

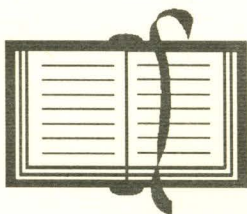
Having heard almost all of the presentations over the past four years, and having been impressed by the special-

ized collections of our members, I have been reluctant to talk about my own books, not only because by collection is eclectic, without a sharp focus, but also because most of my books are duplicates of finer copies in the collections of other Caxtonians who have exhibited their works. Particularly, the story of my friend and patron, Abel Berland, about collecting literature, especially Renaissance literature, left me with the feeling that any remarks I might make about my collection would be redundant.

Because I consider myself an honorable man, I feel it my duty to tell my story, partly because I have shamed others into making presentations with an appeal to duty, but mostly because I have come to realize, after listening to the presentations over the past years, that what is most interesting about a collection is not the books themselves as much as the story behind the quest.

The Caxton Chronicles

Ed Quattrocchi



When the 15 founding fathers created The Caxton Club in 1895, they intended it to

be an elitist organization whose members would be carefully selected from prominent businessmen, the professions, and from the librarians and publishers of the book world. Membership was a privilege reserved only to a select few.

The first Constitution and By-Laws of the club included the stipulation that "candidates for membership must be men of known devotion to the objects of the club," and the founders meant exactly what they said about the candidates being *men*. Women were not considered for membership, nor were they admitted to club rooms as guests for the exhibits and programs, except on very special occasions.

The second annual meeting of the club was held February 6, 1897, at the home of President James W. Ellsworth. The council minutes recorded that, "through the courtesy of Mr. Ellsworth, members had been requested to bring their wives, and there were quite a number of ladies present." Such occasions were rare in the early days of The Caxton Club.

The attitude, common at the time, persisted as late as 1942. When Charles Dennis, editor emeritus of the *Chicago Daily News*, was asked to address the club on his "Recollections of Eugene Field." He replied he "found it rather difficult to address mixed meetings." The Council knuckled under and changed the meeting to an all-male luncheon.

Sue Allen holds the distinction of being the first woman to address the club at a regular dinner meeting when she spoke

on "Victorian Bookbindings" on May 2, 1973. Women were invited as guests on this occasion.

The Council finally took up serious discussion of membership for women in 1974. Action was taken and the club overwhelmingly voted to admit women.

After 81 years, five women were elected to the club on January 21, 1976 --Mary Beth Beal, Suzette Morton Davidson, Frances Hamill, Mary Lynn McCree and Karen Skubish. Mary Beth Beal was elected vice-president in 1983 and became the first woman president of The Caxton Club in 1985.

The influence and number of women in the club has grown steadily in the ensuing years to its present level of 44, which represents 19% of the membership.

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.

May 6.

The final luncheon meeting before the summer break features Ed Quattrocchi on Thomas More's 1557 folio.

May marks our final luncheon for this program year. We will resume our First Friday Luncheons in September.

Ed Quattrocchi
Leonard Freedman

First Annual Meeting Set for May 18, 1994

In keeping with the new Constitution & By-Laws of The Caxton Club, the May meeting will feature as part of the evening program the Annual Meeting of the Club. This will establish a new precedent and provide an even greater democratization of the organization.

Included in this session will be a brief "State of the Club" presentation by President Robert Cotner, a Statement of Finances by Secretary-Treasure Charles Miner, and the election of Council members from a slate proposed by Nominating Chair Robert Brooks and his committee.

We Get a Thoughtful Letter from Tuscon

I must tell you again how much I appreciate the *Caxtonian*. Your "Musings" in the December issue is excellent, and would be even if I didn't agree with your idea. My happiest memory of Christmas past is a visual one--sun pouring in the window on the Christmas tree, ornaments and tinsel glittering, and the smell of pine and my Christmas book, *Richard Carvell*, which was my introduction to 18th century England and Virginia...

We call our house "Wuthering Heights West" because of the very strong winds which buffet it during winter.

Incidentally, the Bronte Society is 100 years old--the oldest literary society in England. Charles Lemon has written an interesting history of the society which includes a list of the illustrious speakers at each yearly meeting...An article about my visits to Haworth from 1964-84 is to be published in the *Bronte Newsletter*.

Suzanne Pruchnicki

Editor's Note: An article, "Reflections of Books and Printing," by Suzanne Pruchnicki will appear in the June *Caxtonian*.

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

May 18.

Ruth Hutchison. "Hunting the Elusive Woolfs, and Other Literary Quests, or, Fifty Years of Selling Rare Books, Notes Toward a Biographical Study of Frances Hamill and Margery Barker."

June Meeting.

Two possible field trips are under consideration. Watch the mail for the announcement of this final event of the year of The Caxton Club.

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, or \$5 if validated at meeting..

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60 West Walton Street
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