



# Caxtonian

A Newsletter of The Caxton Club of Chicago

Volume IV, No. 4

April 1996

## William Caxton and the Two Ends of the Book Trade

Part One of a Three-Part Series

Knowing the future of the new invention, virtually any modern person transported back to mid-15th-Century Germany would have jumped at the chance to invest or otherwise take part in an early printshop. Yet, as Curt Bühler pointed out, "The roll of the names of those Germans who, sooner or later, suffered serious financial setbacks or finally had to admit total defeat reads like the roster of the typographers' Hall of Fame:

Johann Gutenberg; Johann Neumeister, unsuccessful in three countries; Ulrich Zell, the first printer in Cologne; Johann Zainer, Konrad Dinckmut, and Lienhart Holle, the first three printers in Ulm; and all of the Brandis boys of Lübeck and Leipzig...." (*The Fifteenth Century Book*, p. 56).

If the printers were doing so badly because of this glut of books, what about the scribes, "condemned" as they were to producing a single book through slow weeks and months of copying by hand? Bühler drew a contrast between the monetary troubles of the first printers and the general financial well-being of the scribes: "On the other hand, Heinrich Molitor seems to have been one of the very few scribes who, we know for certain, died without wealth or property" (p. 57).

Rather than competition in the book trade as a whole, as Bühler seems to suggest ("A flood of books suddenly hit the market"), only a very sharp



*William Caxton reading the first proof sheet from his printing press in the Almonry, Westminster (From a painting by E. H. Wenbert). From The Bibliophile Library of Literature, Art, and Rare Manuscripts, Volume 6, 1904. Submitted by Non-Resident Caxtonian Bob Kantor, Bellevue, WA.*

distinction drawn by potential customers between printed books and handwritten ones — with all the preference on the side of the handwritten ones — can explain such a contrast.

In other words, those with the means to choose (those who constituted the potential "higher end" of the book trade) preferred and very often insisted upon books made by hand — so much so that there are extant vellum manuscripts that study has shown were copied from printed books (there may, of course, be others whose printed exemplars have disappeared).

William Caxton, a member of a guild more sensitive than most to such differences (the Mercers, for instance, dealers in cloth, wool and other goods), could hardly have missed as virtually his first lesson about printing that it was the printers who were

producing very quickly large numbers of books yet having financial difficulties, and that it was the scribes who were very slowly copying out one book at a time yet doing very well: the handwritten manuscript, copied on parchment or much more often on vellum, still dominated the upper end of the book trade.

In view of the distinction made between printed and hand-copied books by the wealthiest potential customers, the printers were doing more than simply trying to make their books look familiar when they used type fonts that closely imitated the hands of professional scribes. Some early books were printed on vellum, the favored material of scribes, and in any case the use of paper for handwritten books became increasingly common in the 15th Century as demand outstripped the supply of vellum and as the quality of available paper improved.

Thus, the customers would be buying the books unbound and on the same materials used by the scribes, they would be having them bound to match the manuscripts on their shelves, and they could at least hope to have the printed books pass muster as manuscripts also. For example, Bühler cites two examples where the closeness of the printed copies to

(Continued on Page Four)



# Caxtonian

The Caxton Club  
Founded 1895



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# Musings...

I grew up in a Jewish home. Now don't misunderstand me — I was *reared* a Baptist, but as a neighborhood urchin with no brothers or sisters, I was, until 16 years of age, a part of the household of a neighborhood friend David, and he was Jewish.

David and I were the best of friends when friendship was the coin of the realm. As the only kids in the neighborhood our age, we played two-man football — I was Glenn Davis and he, "Doc" Blanchard (or was it the other way around?) — and two-man baseball. In the winter we sledged, had snowball fights, and then went indoors to play caroms or Monopoly when we got cold.

David was in my wedding in 1956, and we attended his at Chicago's Blackstone Hotel in 1957. During his 60th birthday dinner at the Columbia Club, Indianapolis, a couple of years ago, I was proud to have him introduce me as his "oldest friend" — though "friend of longest standing" might have been just a tad better!

David's father, Isadore, who had come from Chicago to our town in the 1920s to open a junk yard, was the first reader of books I knew. Evenings, I'd always see him stretched out in a living room chair, feet on a hassock, reading. I picked up the habit of reading very early in life in great measure because of Isadore.

Abraham Wicoff, David's grandfather, who was co-owner of a dairy in Chicago, drove the 150 miles to our town occasionally. Seeing his battered, '38 Buick sedan in front of David's house always pleased me because I enjoyed "Grandpa," and he had taken a liking to me as well. A diminutive man with a broad smile, he spoke an English I could never fully understand. David's mother, Pearl, a lovely, graceful woman, always served as interpreter on my behalf.

I remember Grandpa's one visit in particular, when I was about 10 years old. Greeting me in the living room, he excused himself and came back shortly carrying a small box. Pearl came into the room as if prearranged, and Grandpa handed me the box, which I immediately opened. Inside was a scroll of the *Torah* in a pink silk cover. "Grandpa brought this special gift to you from Chicago," Pearl interpreted. I ran home to show my mother, aproned in the kitchen. I have kept the *Torah* for 50 years in a dresser drawer reserved for very special items. As I think of it now, this *Torah* is my first collectible "book" and remains one of my most cherished.

On December 30, 1986, my mother called to tell me Isadore had died, and his funeral was to be in Chicago that day. I canceled my schedule and went to the funeral. Even in that solemn setting, there was much joy as dear friends met after 30 years. We then went to Waldheim cemetery, where I saw the family burial plot, including the grave of Abraham Wicoff.

All this is to say that real growing up, true maturity, comes, it seems to me, as we learn to understand and accept at least one other culture, including another religion, as equal to our own. Perhaps only as we find cultural equality can we achieve equality of the individual. These were my thoughts as I returned to Isadore's grave the day following his funeral and wrote an elegy (see opposite page) in his memory, for his family, and for myself. It became my gift, an exchange for the miniature *Torah* and the blessed bond of friendship it represents — across years, miles, and cultures.

Robert Cotner  
Editor



## *In a Jewish Cemetery Near Chicago*

*In Memory of Isadore Kleiman*

*A rabbit, startled by my step, darts from cover to cover,  
across the cluttered landscape and disappears between leaning stones.  
Overhead, a single squirrel performs winter ritual on black branches;  
a broken twig falls, marking the snowy mound of turned sod,  
where yesterday we planted memory—as crows circled in the south,  
their plaintive calls mingled with the gloom and quiet grieving here.  
“The heart of the wise dwells in the house of mourning,” I thought.*

*This is an ancient place—once remote from city noise and soil;  
it lies along hissing streets that glisten toward the lake—  
as far from New Year’s Day as psalms and prayers.  
Above the ashen clouds today, jetliners settle into laser lanes  
and make their whistling ways from sun through cloud  
to earth, dispatching harried souls along their paths,  
from cover to cover. Only death gives pause for contemplation.*

*You, Old Friend, now settle into the shape of eternity,  
fashioned these four-score years far from here among folks  
whose names ring foreign to this place. You are home now,  
among Bonners, Cohens, Ecksteins, Mendelsohns, Wikoffs.  
Stranger in this land, you lived apart and knew the solemn  
satisfaction of solitude among noisy people. You found the Law  
a river nourishing mind toward deeds of private grace.*

*They are scattered now — the children and grandchildren; the wife,  
who left remembering, “Two are better than one;...” the friends,  
who stood impatient and cold to hear the final prayer,  
to watch family spade dirt on vault. So I returned, to praise  
the dead who are already dead more than the living are alive.  
There is kinship beyond reticence and ritual. Sojourners find  
one another pleasant company here. How strange it seems.*

*Robert Cotner*

*New Year’s Day, 1987*

## **FABS Report Cites Caxtons and Caxtonian**

Larry N. Siegler of Cleveland’s Rowfant Club, a key force in the creation of the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies, recently reported to the Cleveland club on the work of the national organization created four years ago to bring together, as he stated it, “kindred spirits, learn from them, and enjoy them. These associations are not in lieu of the [local club] but as a supplement to it elsewhere in the world.”

He mentioned Caxtonians Frank Piehl, Bruce McKittrick, Martin Antonetti, and Hayward Blake. In addition Siegler noted, “We became aware of Chicago’s Caxton Club’s superb newsletter, admirably edited by Robert Cotner. It is a standard to which we should aspire. From Caxton alone, we have seen provocative articles on dues and initiation policies, an important concern of most clubs. Recently there was a clear and reasonable set of procedures on publications. Our Publication Committee now has the benefit of this data.”

Hayward Blake has been the Caxton representative to FABS since its founding and continues in that role. Societies, in addition to Caxton and Rowfant clubs, participating in FABS are: Grolier Club (New York), Philobiblon (Philadelphia), Book Club of California and Roxburghe (San Francisco), Baxter (Portland), and Club of Odd Volumes (Boston).

*Haywood Blake*

# 1900

Books from the Collection of  
Robert Rosenthal



# William Caxton and the Book Trade

(Continued from Page One)

manuscript exemplars extended to the reproduction of the colophon (scribal note) at the end: a text of Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo* has at the end in Latin, "Master John Petri of Mainz wrote this work (opus) in Florence," followed by a date that corresponds to November 22, 1472, and a copy of Petrarch's *Trionfi* reads in translation, "Master Hans Petri of Mainz wrote this book on February 22nd" (p. 40). Anyone who looks casually at such copies will in fact be hard put to distinguish such copies from handwritten ones of the same time and place because the casters of the type fonts took as their models the handwriting of professional scribes, including their Latin breviscripts and even their various ways of writing the same letter.

For example, the man who designed and cast all three of Caxton's typefaces changed from the kind he had been designing in Cologne to imitations of the handwriting of professional scribes in Bruges, where Caxton first printed, and he cast two different forms of lower case *a*. The printers' best efforts cannot fool the careful student, though, primarily because of two tell-tale signs: in printing the press makes an indentation in the paper that often cannot be seen but which always can be felt, and the printed characters are regular in height and invariable in shape and size, much more so than even the most careful scribe could manage.

In the mid- to late-15th-Century book trade, then, the advantages that printers had over the scribes were more than counterbalanced for most of them by their disadvantages: (1) their great advantage in speed of reproduction quickly turned to a disadvantage as the number of printers — and thus the number of printed books — rapidly increased; (2) almost all of their books were produced "on spec," and their investment in a press run of hundreds of copies to be produced by several

workers was far greater than a scriptorium's investment in the single manuscript to be copied by two or three scribes; and (3) above all they had to find their customers for those hundreds of copies of a book only among those whose prejudices against printed books could be overcome by the appeal of a much lower price.

Clearly, then, at the beginning of printing, there was an "upper end" of the book trade that the printers could sell only to in exceptional circumstances, and thus their best bet was primarily to print books for the "lower end" of the trade. This is 20-20 hindsight on the part of a modern, of course, but at least one printer of the 15th Century read the market quite clearly, William Caxton. In this he differed from the inventor of printing, Johann Gutenberg, and most other early printers.

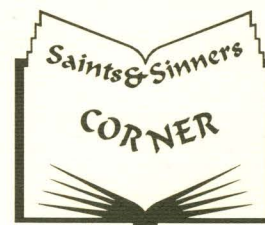
Roy Vance Ramsey  
Ohio University

## Appreciation For a 'Quiet Island of Great Reverence for the Book'

Dear Bob:

Many thanks for your kind response to my Caxton Club appearance. It was a delight to be there and the audience of sharp-eyed Caxtonians were highly receptive. I am enjoying the Caxton Club's Centennial History, rich in further Chicago lore and literary elegance. It is comforting to know that in the vast reaches of the city there is a quiet island of great reverence for the book.

Edward M. Burke  
Alderman  
City of Chicago



**Caxton Club Historian** Frank Piehl is initiating a new service to members. He will serve as a communications link between those offering Caxton Club publications for sale and persons wishing to acquire them. Anyone with information about copies that are offered for sale is asked to forward that information to him, and anyone interested in acquiring copies of publications may contact him at 708/357-0844.

On January 12, Oak Knoll Books, agent handling Caxton publications, turned on its Web site at [www.oakknoll.com](http://www.oakknoll.com). The site currently lists a calendar with related events, 72 magazines and periodicals, 37 organizations, nine museums related to book history and the book arts, access to book and book arts-related newsgroups and electronic mailing lists, links to libraries all around the world, contacts for workshops and classes, plus many other features, such as online book searching, author features, book reviews and excerpts. Other addresses on the Web include the Center for Book Arts (<http://www.avsi.com/minsky/cba.html>) the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artist Guild ([http://knet.flemingc.on.ca/~miller/cbbag/CBBA\\_Ghome.html](http://knet.flemingc.on.ca/~miller/cbbag/CBBA_Ghome.html)), the Book Arts Press (<http://poe.acc.virginia.edu/~oldbooks/bap.html>), the Guild of Bookworkers (<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/gbw/gbw/html>), and the American Museum of Papermaking (<http://www.ipst.edu>). For more information, contact Esther C. Fan at [Esther.Fan@oakknoll.com](mailto:Esther.Fan@oakknoll.com).

**Caxtonians** Gwendolyn Brooks, Connie Goddard, President Tom Joyce, and Bob Karrow are featured in the second issue of *Chicago Books in Review*, which was distributed to members and guests at the March dinner meeting.

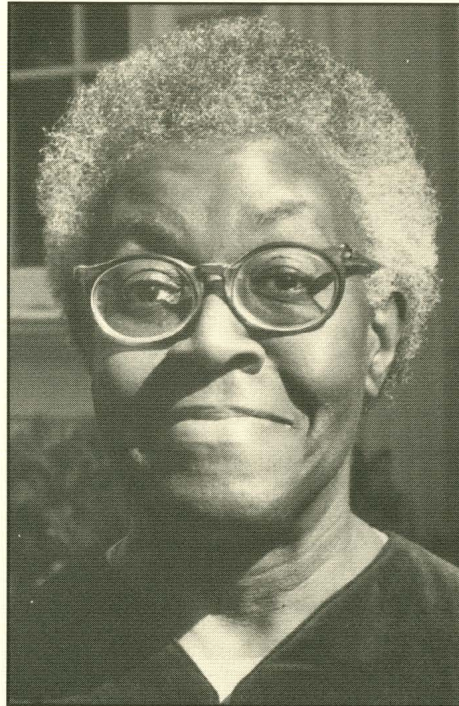


## Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks To Be Inducted Into Caxton Club

Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks will become The Caxton Club's first African American and first woman Honorary Member at the April 20 dinner meeting. After her induction into the club, Miss Brooks will read from her poetry and other writings.

The author of 25 books since her first in 1945, Miss Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize for her 1949 book, *Annie Allen*. She is the 38th person chosen to Honorary Membership in The Caxton Club since its founding in 1895.

Her most recent book, *Report From Part Two*, is the second half of her autobiography. She gives details of her travels, her work with children, and her continuing love of books. "Home and library," she writes, "taught me that books are bandages and voyages. Links



Poet Gwendolyn Brooks (Photo by Bill Tague)

to light. Keys and hammers. Ripe redeemers. Dials and bells and healing hallelujah."

Copies of *Report From Part Two* and other of Miss Brooks' books will be available for purchase and for signing at the April dinner meeting. Caxtonians will not want to miss this important occasion in the life and history of The Caxton Club.

A chronology of Miss Brooks' publications, four articles on her, and two photographs of Miss Brooks appeared in the *Caxtonian* (July 1995), copies of which will be available at the dinner meeting.

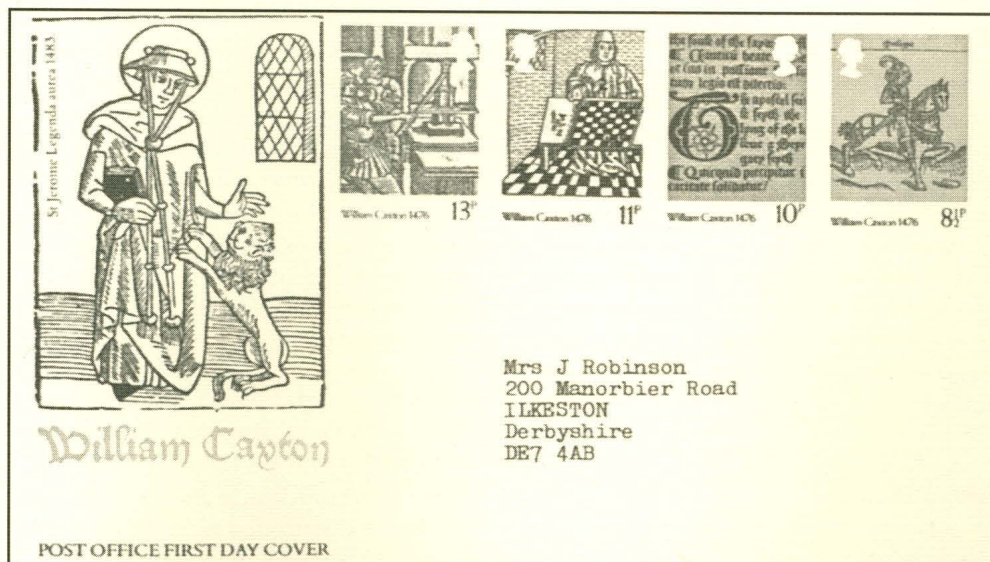
## Four English Postage Stamps Celebrate Caxton's Achievements

To commemorate the 500th anniversary of the first printing in Britain by The Caxton Club's namesake, William Caxton, The Royal Society of Arts held a competition for postage stamp designs

that was won in 1974 by Richard Gay, a graphics design student at the Southend School of Art and Design.

Four postage stamps were issued

subsequently in Great Britain on September 29, 1976. The 8½p stamp is a woodcut from Caxton's *The Canterbury Tales* depicting a squire, printed in light new blue, indigo, and gold. The 10p stamp shows a decorative initial and type, designed by William Caxton, from his *Tretyse of Love*, printed in light olive green, blackish olive, and gold. The 11p stamp displays a woodcut from *The Game of Chesse*, printed in light brownish grey, black, and gold. And the 13p stamp depicts an early hand press and printers, from an early 16th century woodcut, in light buff and reddish brown gold. The stamps are available from dealers at a modest cost.



Mrs J Robinson  
200 Manorbier Road  
ILKESTON  
Derbyshire  
DE7 4AB

Frank J. Piehl

*Editor's Note: Post Office First Day Cover commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the First Printing in Britain, Special Stamp Issue, 29 September 1976. From Philatelic Bulletin, Vol 14, September 1976, p. 8.*



# Book Marks

## Luncheon Programs

All luncheon 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, 12:30 p.m.

### April 12

Caxtonian Elmer Gertz will speak on "Clarence Darrow — the Man and the Legal Legend." The talk will focus on Gertz's recollections and personal friendship with the famous attorney.

### May 10

Caxtonian and Council member Jane Rosenthal will discuss the exhibition, "1900: Books from the Collection of Robert Rosenthal," currently on display at the Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. **This luncheon meeting will be held at the Quadrangle Club, 57th St. and University Ave.**

*Ed Quattrocchi  
Leonard Freedman*

## Portrait Given to Library

A unique mosaic portrait of African American historian Carter G. Woodson by Chicago artist Seymour Adelman is currently on display in the Chicago Public Library's Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, 9525 S. Halsted St.

The Adelman portrait was acquired by the library's Special Collections & Preservation Division in 1994. The division gave the portrait to the Woodson library as part of its observation of the library's African American History month.

Adelman produced mosaic portraits of famous Americans, and these are on display in several area schools and universities. The Chicago Public Library acquired in 1978 Adelman mosaics of Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas.

Adelman, who began making mosaic works of art 20 years ago, depicts almost photographic images in his art through the interplay of tiny pieces of colored glass, ceramic, and porcelain set in mortar. His portraits include life-sized images of Golda Meir and Ernie Banks. For additional information, telephone Caxtonian J. Ingrid Lesley, Special Collections & Preservation Division, Harold Washington Library Center, at 312/747-4740.

## Dinner Programs

All dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th Floor of the First National Bank, Madison and Clark streets, Chicago. Spirits, 5 p.m., dinner, 6 p.m., lecture, 7 p.m.

### April 17

Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks will become The Caxton Club's first female and first African-American Honorary Member at this meeting. She will read from her poetry following her induction.

### May 15

Nicholas A. Basbanes, author of the acclaimed *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books*, will share from his vast experiences in the world of American books and book collecting. He is calling his talk, "Among the Gently Mad" — a most suitable title for Caxtonians.

*Karen Skubish*

*Advance reservations, which are absolutely necessary, may be made by calling the Caxton office, 312/255-3710. Any special meal requirements (such as vegetarian) need to be made in advance. Members and guests, \$35.*

*The First National Bank of Chicago's parking garage, 40 S. Clark Street, offers a special parking rate after 5 p.m. 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 \$5.25*



The Caxton Club  
60 West Walton Street  
Chicago, IL 60610