

Caxtonian

Journal of The Caxton Club of Chicago

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Caxtonians in Prague Enraptured by History, Sights and Sounds

One of the most surprising and exhilarating aspects of the ambiance of the city of Prague is the casual and unobtrusive culture, especially music, that pervades every aspect of life. Our vacation there this past April gave us renewed hope for the political future of the Czech Republic, as well as a profound respect for its cultural heritage. We spent a week staying at the residence of the U.S. Ambassador, Jenonne Walker, my wife Carolyn's roommate at the University of Oklahoma more than 40 years ago.

To be shown around the captivating city by one who knows it intimately and who had arranged everything in advance at the highest levels was our great delight. The high point of our trip, from the perspective of a bibliophile, was our visit to the Strahov Monastery. The monastery was built in 1143, and its library is the most beautiful we have ever seen. Just standing in this lovely repository of thousands of antiquarian books was a sensual, almost erotic, pleasure.

In this ancient library, which seemed to be the grandfather of the Newberry Library of Chicago, we had a private tour given by the curator of rare manuscripts. He gave us an informative lecture about the history of the library and about the books: the place itself told most of the story. Just looking at all of the rare books on the shelf space was a visual and tactile joy. Four rare Renaissance globe maps adorn one of the two frescoed and richly furnished rooms, the Philosophical Hall and the Theological Room. The work of a student of Thyco Brahe, the rare globes date from 1645. The



Caxtonian Carolyn Quattrocchi (left), enjoys the company of U.S. Ambassador Jenonne Walker and Jane Oman in the library of the Ambassador's residence, Prague.

library has more than 2,500 manuscripts and 1,500 incunabla. The frescoed ceiling of the Theological Room, in the manner of Michelangelo, celebrates the accord of philosophy, science, and religion.

On our last afternoon, we toured the Jewish quarter of Prague, starting with the Old New Synagogue, a beautiful house of

worship begun in 1270 and built by monks, because Jews were not allowed in the building trades. Our next stop was the Jewish museum, which contained artifacts and artworks dating from Medieval times and commemorating the Jewish people's age-old struggle to retain their identity. We were especially interested to learn that two Jewish printing houses in Prague in the early days of printing produced magnificent scholarly works. One of the old, beautiful books on display was printed in 1526 with the inscription on the frontispiece giving permission to Gershen the Jew to print books, as a privilege granted by the Hapsburg emperor, Ferdinand I.

Our final stop of the day, the Old Jewish Cemetery, was the most sobering encounter on our itinerary. Despite the suffering of the Jews invoked by the cemetery, the site exudes a beauty and a tranquility in the middle of a bustling urban landscape not matched by any place in our previous experience. On the way back to the ambassador's residence, we stopped at a bookstore, where we bought an original photograph of Franz Kafka, taken in 1910.

On our final evening in Prague, we moved into a happier venue — a celebration of that romantic, enchanted city. Our hostess, the ambassador, had secured choice seats for a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in the opera house, Strovovskem Divadle. This is the very theater in which *Don Giovanni* was first



Interior of the Theological Room, Strahov Monastery, Prague.

(Continued on Back Page)

Caxtonian

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Musings...

On October 2, 1969, John Slocum came from the Nixon White House to a class in American Studies at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., to discuss "Bicentennial Planning" with a dozen advanced graduate students. I was among them. A part of the consortium of Washington-area graduate schools, the course focused on the 1876 Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia. It was led by Harold Skramstad, who later became President of the Chicago Historical Society and a Caxtonian.

I had just read Gordon S. Wood's, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. Wood had begun his study with a 1792 quotation from Joel Barlow: "what really separated the free from the oppressed of the world was simply a 'habit of thinking.'" In fact, Wood said, Barlow knew that the "mind of man was 'the *only* foundation' for any system of politics."

Why not, I suggested that October day, develop the Bicentennial around this thought: "America — An Idea Yet Becoming"? Such a theme would give allegiance to the concluding idea of Barlow upon which Wood established his study: "it was the Americans' habit of thinking '*that all men are equal in their rights*' which had created their Revolution and sustained their freedom." It would, I argued, place emphasis most appropriately upon the continuing intellectual progress of America rather than on the technological achievements, which are too often misunderstood as the *only* symbols representing who we are and what we've done as a people.

Wilcomb Washburn, director of American Studies at the Smithsonian and Slocum's host that day in 1969, later asked me to develop the theme into a prospectus because it was considered an idea worth pursuing. I did, but, alas, this suggestion and additional good ones offered by others were lost in the turmoil of the anti-war protestation and Watergate, which followed, and the national Bicentennial turned out to be little more than a gigantic display of fireworks on Independence Day.

I've thought much lately about Wood's book, my theme, and that year. Nineteen-sixty-nine was the midpoint in the dozen most tumultuous years in recent American history. It was a time halfway between the assassination of one President and the resignation of another. It marks, it seems to me, the beginning of a retreat from an historic faith in the creative genius that imaginative thinking brings to life, both personal and national. The gradual diminution in the health and vitality of our intellectual life in general since that time seems almost palpable.

But this truth remains: a strong, encompassing life of the mind of the citizenry is an absolute necessity in a democracy. Here is a more subtle truth: a cadre of independent human beings — such as we are — working together in enlightenment within the heart of the nation can offer a "habit of thinking" whose luminosity is integral and encompassing: the personal, creative attention to books in the quiet of home and library realizes a major source of both our strength and grace as a people.

America is an idea yet becoming.

Robert Cotner
Editor

Purloined Books Raise Thorny Ownership Questions for

"Times have changed. Bookselling is not so much fun anymore. I am still interested in provenance, but the nature of my curiosity is different. If an interesting item walks through my door, my speculations about its origins produce more apprehension than pleasure. Most of the time, of course, my concern is with the possibility, very real these days, that the item being offered is stolen." - W. Thomas Taylor. "Provenance and Lore of the Trade," in Forged Documents, Proceedings of the 1989 Houston Conference. New Castle, DE, 1990.

I read Tom Taylor's statement quoted above recently, and it reverberated with me because of recent events in the Chicago area, events that carry a lesson for bibliophiles everywhere.

To summarize: two books recently were offered for sale, but in the process of closing a sale on one of them, a question of title arose. It was established that at least one, and probably both, were purchased by a local collector about 15 years ago. In the interim, the collector had died, having willed his book collection to an institution for safekeeping.

The institution has discovered some 20 titles in all are missing from the bequest, and has sent out a list of the a.w.o.l. books. Meanwhile, the man who purchased the books in a bona fide transaction -- for which he has a receipt -- is engaged in a court battle with the heirs of the deceased collector, with both sides trying to establish their proper title to the volumes.

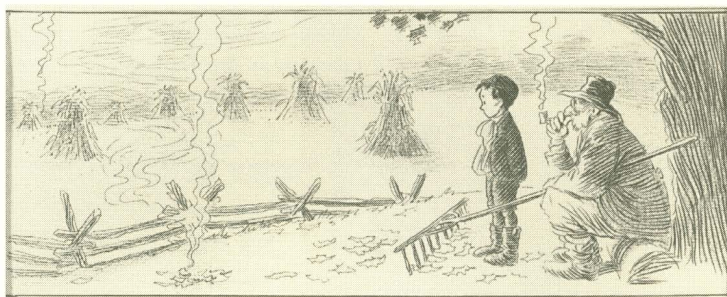
However, the claim by the heirs is hampered by an inadequate description of the books in the collector's catalogue of his library. None of their descriptions of any of the 20 books is sufficient to identify precisely the copies of the missing books as distinct from any other copy or copies of these editions. And yet, both books that have surfaced are readily identifiable as only and uniquely the copies purchased by the decedent years ago. As a consequence, in order to succeed with their claim, the heirs are probably going to have to call in third-party witnesses in an effort to

establish rights to specifically these copies of the titles. In the meantime, the other 18 books that are missing may or may not have surfaced in the last five years or so, but they would not be readily identifiable as his copies.

The point is this: as bibliophiles and collectors, Caxtonians need to be aware of the multiple advantages of adequately cataloguing their collections. Today, in an era of more user-friendly and cheaper computers, using a variety of possible software programs, almost everyone can create a catalogue of one's library that would serve the purposes of the collector, the insurer, and others.

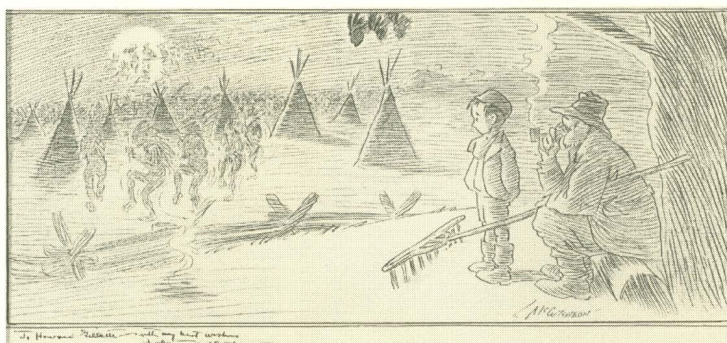
If collectors buy their books from the kind of quality bookdealers who insert an extended description of the item when they purchase it, then most of the work has been done for them. They may add to it or adapt it to their catalogues, always double-checking it for accuracy.

Caxtonian's Classic 'Injun Summer' Heralds Autumnal Miracle



As the Caxtonian does every fall, we offer what was for many years a tradition in Chicago — on page one of the Chicago Tribune — John T. McCutcheon's memorable cartoon, "Injun Summer."

McCutcheon was a Caxton Club member between 1944 until his death in 1948. He is the author of the Caxton Club publication, John McCutcheon's Book (1948), a collection of his art and writing for Chicago newspapers.



In the McCutcheon art at left we are reminded of the glories of autumn and the too often ignored, but rich, legacy of Native Americans of this land, whose dignity and cultures we are now beginning to discover, understand, and appreciate.

(First published, September 29, 1907, in the Chicago Tribune. Used by special arrangement with the Chicago Historical Society [IICHi-11710]).

Dealers, Collectors

Important features to note in describing the unique characteristics of a particular book would be the copy number of the particular limited edition, bookplates, names of previous owners, or names of the binders. (Note: this is easy with the Caxton Club's centennial history (1995) because each copy is numbered and signed by the author.) Of course, many identifying characteristics — such as book plates, call numbers, or perforations — can be removed or altered by a dedicated thief intent on resale.

Aficionados of modern first editions are especially susceptible to identification problems insofar as collectors most often want their books in pristine condition in dust jackets, lacking any wear or ownership marks. In the absence of wear or ownership labels, how is one pristine copy to be distinguished from any other? Must they be stamped with invisible ink that shows up only under a black light?

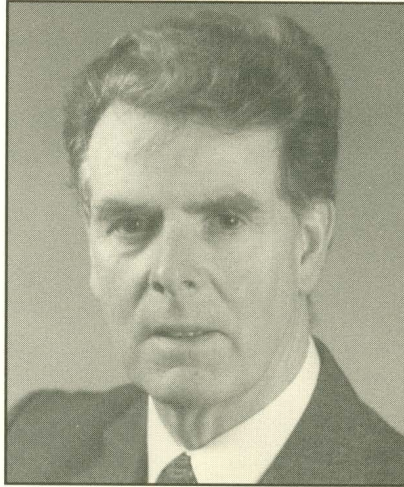
Every honest bookseller and collector wants to avoid the headaches involved in handling or owning stolen properties, not merely for the time involved in sorting it out or the disappointment of not acquiring a desirable book, but also for the probability of being out-of-pocket for the monies expended for such purchases with no hope of reimbursement.

Rights to the two allegedly stolen rarities in Chicago have yet to be determined by a circuit court judge. But it is not too late -- I hope -- for collectors to take persistent steps adequately to record their more precious tomes.

Thomas J. Joyce
President



Swift Is Subject of October Meeting

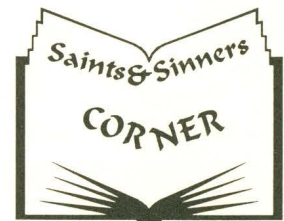


Patrick Reilly, professor of English and head of the department, University of Glasgow, Scotland, will address The Caxton Club, at the dinner meeting, October 16. He will speak on "The Helpless Giant: Swift in Lilliput."

Reilly is no stranger to America, having served as Visiting Professor in English at Iowa State University, Indiana State University, and the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota). He is currently in the U.S. serving as Thomas Bingham Professor at the University of Louisville. He has taught, as well, in Poland, Ireland, and Germany.

He is the author of six books, including *Jonathan Swift: The Brave Desponder* (1982), *George Orwell: The Age's Adversary* (1988), *'Tom Jones': Adventure and Providence* (1990), and *'Lord of the Flies': Fathers and Sons* (1992). He has co-authored three books, and his writings are often excerpted and anthologized.

Born in Glasgow, Reilly was educated at St. Mungo's Academy, University of Glasgow, and Oxford University. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Luke Fellowship to Pembroke College, Oxford University. Caxtonians will have the rare opportunity of hearing one of Scotland's finest scholars at this dinner meeting.



Caxtonian Stuart Murphy, author and creator of the *MathStart* series, recently gave a 40-minute presentation at Anderson's Bookshop, Naperville. *MathStart* is a series of books using visual learning and story-telling to promote math fluency and to help make math more enjoyable for young people.

Caxtonian Ralph Newman was featured in a lengthy illustrated article by Paul Galloway in the *Chicago Tribune* (August 30). Newman, a member of The Caxton Club since 1942, is retiring from his work as a rare and antiquarian book dealer, a profession in which he was known as one of the best in the business. Galloway wrote: "Through passion, study, and brains, [Newman] would transform himself into a respected historian, the author and editor of some 20 books..."

Caxtonian Gwendolyn Brooks wrote "Chicago, 2999" for *Tribune Books* (August 25). The poetess envisioned in the article a Chicago of peace, harmony, and intelligence. She foresaw a day in which "We are not afraid."

Caxtonian Connie Goddard and Caxton President Tom Joyce wrote their usual, informative columns in the fall issue of *Chicago Books in Review*. The issue focuses (as do the columns by Goddard and Joyce) on Chicago, and Illinois, politics. It (and they) are especially interesting, and fellow Caxtonians will want to read the fall issue.

Caxtonian Claire Badaracco has written *Trading Words: Poetry, Typography, and Illustrated Books in the Modern Literary Economy* (Johns Hopkins University Press). *Rare Books & Manuscripts Librarianship* called her book a "strikingly handsome volume..."

Miniature Press Book is Product of Long, Careful Development

The making of a Bronte Press miniature book always begins many years before a book comes into being. It emerges from an interest and is a result of skills

developed earlier in the creator's life. Such was the case with a recent Bronte title, *A Day in the Life of Old Japan*, by Lafcadio Hearn, with its seven original dry-point etchings.

Vera Berdick, etcher and teacher at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, was my etching teacher many years ago. I bought the brightly printed binding paper used for the book on a trip to Japan in 1976. I reserved it for just such a work. I set the text in 10-point Caslon Old Style type (one of the most perfect types ever designed) and printed it on special stock from Twinrocker Handmade Papers in Brookston, Indiana. In their final form, the miniatures measure under three inches and are covered in Japanese stencil printed paper.

The seven tipped-in etchings were executed in dry-point — which simply means that they were incised with a sharp etching needle directly onto the copper plate without any acid biting of the plate. The etchings of Japanese scenes were printed on the etching press.

The process is this: first, the plate is heated so as to become more receptive to the colored inks applied. Then the excess ink is rubbed off with balls of

crumpled tarlatan, a thin, lightly starched open-weave muslin. Q-tips are used for special highlights. The important thing is to leave ink in the lines to



Our most recent book, *St. Petersburg and the Imperial Ballet*, really traces its beginning to 1947, when, as a college freshman, I saw several performances of the *Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo* in Chicago. This company was an offshoot of *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*. My recent acquisition of a collection of letters from famous dancers, choreographers, and stage designers, coupled with my lifelong fascination with writers and composers of *fin de l'empire Russia*, led to this foray into the lives of Ninjinsky, his sister Bronislava, Pavlova, and others, as well as into the magnificent architectural heritage of St. Petersburg.

One could say, I suppose, that it truly does take a world — and a lifetime — to create a miniature book at the Bronte Press.

Suzanne Smith Pruchnicki

Editor's Note: The four etchings, left, are actual size and executed by Pruchnicki. The Bronte Press has produced 40 books since its beginning in 1977. Pruchnicki tries to do two books a summer before she and her husband Paul leave their Kankakee home for winter in Arizona.

be printed. All of our paper is soaked in water and then blotted, because damp paper draws the ink from the lines cut into the plate.

After printing, the etchings are taped onto a board so they will dry flat. The copper plates are cleaned with denatured alcohol, and the process is then begun for the next etching. This procedure is repeated more than 350 times for an edition of 50 copies. (There are always a few prints that are defective and must be discarded.)

A Thought on Books

"If you cannot read all of your books, at any rate handle, or, as it were, fondle them — peer into them, let them fall open where they will, read from the first sentence that arrests the eye, set them back on their shelves with your own hands, arrange them on your own plan so that if you do not know what is in them, you will at least know where they are. Let them be your friends; let them at any rate be your acquaintances...."

Winston S. Churchill
Amid These Storms,
Thoughts and Adventures, 1932

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.

October 18

Author, distinguished attorney, and long-time Caxtonian Elmer Gertz will speak on a topic dear to his heart and of great importance: "My Battle with the Book-Burners."

November 15

Anthony Alofsin, author of *Frank Lloyd Wright: The Lost Years, 1919-1922*, will speak on Wright and his importance to Oak Park and the nation.

*Ed Quattrocchi
Leonard Freedman*

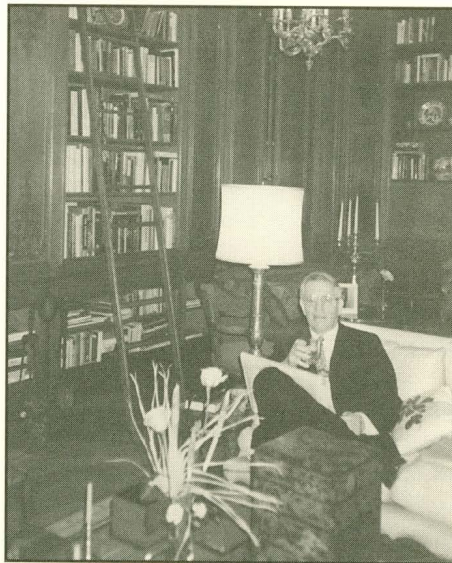
Important Note: Members planning to attend luncheons must make advance reservations by phoning either the Caxton number, 312/255-3710, or Quattrocchi at 708/475-4653. Luncheon for members and guests, \$20.

Caxton Club on the Web

Working with Robert Williams and Frank Piehl, Caxtonian Paul Baker is designing the pages for a Caxton Club website, at the following address: <http://www.caxtonclub.org/>. Until completed, the website must be entered through the user name, *Rogers*, and the password, *Middleton*. Caxtonians' feedback would be much appreciated.

Memories from Prague

(Continued from Page One)



Caxtonian Ed Quattrocchi relaxes in the ambiance of the library at the U.S. Embassy.

performed on October 29, 1787, under the direction of Maestro Mozart himself. The opera house is a precious jewel of a theater, intimate yet magnificent. After the performance, we enjoyed a repast at a nearby restaurant with the conductor, Oliver von Dohnonyi, and his wife Natalie, who had sung the part of Zerlina in the opera.

This wonderful visit to Prague served as an appetizer for the following week in Venice, Florence, and Rome — all well known to us before our trip, but not nearly so well known as afterwards.

Edward Quattrocchi

Dinner Programs

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

October 16

Patrick Reilly, professor of English and head of the English Department, University of Glasgow, Scotland, will lecture on "The Helpless Giant: Swift in Lilliput."

November 20

Richard Wilson, Oxford University, England, will speak on "Words, Words, Words — The Printer's Devil!" Wilson is currently Visiting Professor of English at Northwestern University.

Karen Skubish

Advance reservations, which are absolutely necessary, may be made by phoning the Caxton office at 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