

CAXTONIAN

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Northampton, MA – New England's center of the book arts

Robert McCamant
Contributing Editor
Printing and Papermaking

In the second week of April 2002, I had the pleasure to visit the area around Northampton, MA, to learn about book arts activity in the area and report on it for the *Caxtonian*.

Variouly known as “western Massachusetts” or the “Pioneer Valley,” the area is as much a state of mind as it is a place. It is an excellent place to attend school. In the immediate Northampton-Amherst-Hadley area, you will find Amherst, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Hampshire, and the University of Massachusetts. The region has a very high per-capita concentration of authors and turns up as a backdrop or subject of many books, notably Tracy Kidder's *Home Town*. There are plenty of tourists, but they are well-distributed throughout the year and only reach an uncomfortable level during autumn, when the area makes an excellent home base for tours of fall foliage in the nearby Berkshires.

So it was with great anticipation that I flew into Hartford airport and drove the hour or so up to Northampton. My first engagement was a poetry reading at the Smith College library on a Sunday afternoon. I stayed through Friday morning of that week, and managed to interview 11 book artists, a librarian, and a bookseller. But in so doing, I only scratched the surface of the activity in the area.

One of the most interesting questions I tried to answer was how such a concentration of the book arts turned up in one place. There are, of course, many answers. Rents on studio space are reasonable in the area, due to numerous mills and factories, which are no longer used for their original purposes. Having all those authors around means that manuscripts are not hard to locate. But the most important reason is the presence over time of some of the country's best book-arts teachers, who, of course, created books of their own. Among these:

—*Harry Duncan*, whose Cummington Press was located in Cummington from 1939 through 1956, when it moved to Iowa City.

—*Leonard Baskin* and the Gehenna Press,

which started in 1942 and is still going. (At Baskin's death in 2000, he left several completely planned books, which are being gradually produced.)

—*Harold McGrath*, Baskin's printer, who also died in 2000, was a mentor in his own right for a large number of craftspeople in the area.

—*Arno Werner*, a bookbinder who taught many of the myriad practicing binders in the area, and who died in 1995.

Many of the book artists I interviewed also teach, have apprentices, or have taught.

One of the interesting consequences of this concentration is that people are more specialized. In other parts of the country, many a private press believes that it has to do everything from make the paper to bind the book, but in the Pioneer Valley, with so many superb craftspeople around, it hardly seems sensible to do something yourself that someone else could do better.

My interviews appear chronologically, in the order I was able to arrange them. ►



All photos by and from the collection of Robert McCamant.

Carol J. Blinn – designer, printer

Like most people who find the book arts a rewarding profession, Carol J. Blinn of Warwick Press in Easthampton happened into it as a career almost by accident. She had been working for Barre Publishers and Imprint Society. The future seemed shaky at best, so she set out on her own and ended up in Northampton, where she remembered the name of Leonard Baskin and went in search of the Gehenna Press. She ran into Harold McGrath, Baskin's printer. What he was doing looked interesting, so she asked for a job. Nothing for pay was the answer, but she was welcome to intern.

Two years later, in 1975, it seemed time for her own press, so she found a space in Easthampton and started to assemble equipment. “I was 27 when I started here,” she says, “but I had no idea at the time that I would still have a press 27 years later. It was like most things in life, putting one foot in front of another until, when you look around, you see you've gone somewhere.”

Blinn has done just about every facet of book production at one time or another. She



Musings...

CAXTONIAN

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In 1986, I was traveling in the American West, lecturing on "Auburns, Cords, and Duesenbergs: The Classic Automobile as Art." I spoke in Portland, OR, and Bellingham, WA, and then I flew to Phoenix, AZ, for a lecture. I had heard about an Arizona State University publication, which contained an essay on ACD cars by a professor in the College of Engineering; so I drove to Tempe to see if I could find him, get a copy of the publication, and talk with him about his article.

Entering the atrium of the College of Engineering, I was confronted with an engraved quotation from Confucius. It froze me in my tracks. I had had nothing in my own cultural experience that came close to its profundity. I wrote it down and have carried it in my mind since that day. It embodies a domain of wisdom I hold dear and would have my grandchildren learn very early and hold long in their minds:

The Ancients who wished to clearly exemplify virtue throughout the world would first set up good government in their states. Wishing to govern well their states, they would first regulate their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they would first cultivate their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they would first rectify their minds. Wishing to rectify their minds, they would first seek sincerity in their thoughts. Wishing for sincerity in thoughts, they would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. For only when things are investigated is knowledge extended; only when knowledge is extended are thoughts sincere; only when thoughts are sincere are minds rectified; only when minds are rectified are our persons cultivated; only when our persons are cultivated are our families regulated; only when families are regulated are our states well governed; and only when our states are well governed is there peace in the world.

I am reminded that the word *craft* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *cræfte*, meaning *strength, power*. And I am aware of the enclaves of crafts people I have known, who exhibit in and through the community of their craft-performance the elemental unity of strength, which has made America the vital power of the world it has become and is today. It is the fusion

of the endeavors of the mind and the efforts of the hand, in harmony with family and community, working toward the commonweal — the common good — of all, which brings peace in the wider purview.

I think of the Amish community in Shipshewana, IN, a few miles from where I grew up, in which spiritual strength and social empowerment, emanating from crafts of all sorts, a natural part of daily life, propel people in a remarkably unique direction. The Amish may be our finest example of the fulfillment of the Buddhist ideal expressed in Confucius' statement — there is great irony in that thought.

I think of the knife-making community in Ellenville, NY, which I came to know when I was director of the National Knife Museum in Chattanooga and editor of *The National Knife Collector* magazine in the early 1980s. Under the leadership of the Baer family, the craftsmen of the Shrade Cutlery forge strength through the commonality of their efforts.

The book-arts community in and around Northampton, MA, stands, it seems to me, as another contemporary enclave, which, in its own remarkable way, demonstrates the dual power of *cræfte* and *guild*. No wonder this is known as the "happy" valley!

We, as book collectors, in significant ways, share in and extend the communal power of such communities. We take *things* — such as William Caxton's 1477 *Canterbury Tales*, Shakespeare's 1623 *First Folio*, Dr. Johnson's 1755 *Dictionary*, a 1962 signed copy of Robert Frost, or an edition from Double Elephant Press — and allow the investigation of them to permeate and penetrate our being, our society, our world.

There is a potential here hinting at perspicacity beyond what is immediately obvious. We would do well to remember this.

Robert Cotner
Editor

Editor's Note: This issue of the Caxtonian has been conceived and assembled by Robert McCamant, Contributing Editor of Printing and Papermaking. The Editor expresses his appreciation for the excellent work rendered to The Caxton Club.

Book Arts

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sometimes makes decorative paste-paper for the binding, nearly always illustrates the books herself, writes and edits when required, generally does the binding, always runs the printing press. "But working with type — there's nothing else like it. You get to use your heart, your hands, and your brain all at the same time."

She does not always get to print books, however. Though she loves them, they are frequently a financial strain. Paper and type must be paid for long before there is anything to be sold. Job printing fills the gaps and pays the bills. The only rule she follows is that if she is going to print it, she should be the one to design it.

The books in her backlist reflect her wide-ranging interests. There is poetry, prose, and even children's stories. Frequently the subjects are nature or the rural life. Ducks, birds, and geese are often the subjects of her illustrations, as in the *Once Upon a Time* series (now including seven volumes). In fact, it is from the town of Warwick, MA, that the press gets its name; her fondest memory of her time there was of raising ducks and geese. Blinn is also interested in polar exploration (but has not yet come up with a manuscript) and food (about which she has been collecting short pieces for a possible collection).

Right now she is working on *The Writer, The Madman & the Printer*, which is an essay by Simon Winchester, author of *The Professor and The Madman*. Winchester mentions Blinn in the book, but not by name, so she talked him into writing an addendum that explains the real story of their acquaintance. She is adding an introduction and illustrating it with ornaments, and it may well be finished by the time this article sees print. It's a pleasant project coming off of a difficult year, which saw the death of her mother.

In the end, Blinn can't help herself. She knows there are much better ways to make money, but she has always been able to make ends meet. As long as that continues, she will too. Speaking of making books, she says, "I love it and can't imagine doing anything else."

Warwick Press, One Cottage St., #36, Easthampton, MA 01027; 413/527-5456.

Martin Antonetti – librarian, curator, teacher

For an area to sustain an active book arts scene, a library with an active special collections department is very important. I learned that Caxtonian Martin Antonetti, Curator of Rare Books at the Smith College Neilson Library, takes that responsibility seriously.

"I followed a strong curator, Ruth Mortimer, who in 20 years had strengthened the collection and built a program of outreach from the Rare Book Room into both the school and the community," Antonetti explains. Not only is there a History of the Book course, taught by the Curator, but, in an average year, 100 other courses have involvement with the collection. Typically a professor will contact Antonetti, saying he or she wants to bring a class to look at, for example, 18th Century French poetry books. Antonetti locates the applicable material and, when he can, explains something of the book-making context. Beyond the student body, kindergarten through nursing home groups have visited the collection. But in Antonetti's five years at Smith, he has decided to move the library in the direction of another kind of community outreach: he has started the Harold P. McGrath Collection of book arts produced in western Massachusetts.

Harold McGrath was for many years a central, if unsung, figure in the book arts here. He worked with Leonard Baskin, masterminding the production (and actual printing) of the extraordinary Gehenna Press books. Later, he worked with a panoply of local printing figures in the Hampshire Typothetae. He died in 2000, and this collection is intended to maintain his memory.

The collection begins with Harry Duncan and his Cummington Press (which was active in the area starting in 1939) and extends through the present and into the future. Local presses (from Robin Price's in Connecticut on the south, to Dan Carr's in New Hampshire to the

north) will be completely represented. And Antonetti asks each press to maintain a "Harold McGrath box," kept in a corner to receive ephemera and correspondence as it develops.

In between, there is space on the shelves and in the budget to collect the output of the many book artists who have worked in the area over the years. Recently, for example, the complete archives of the Hampshire Typothetae became available; they were purchased by a college benefactor, who gave them to the library; they are now being examined and catalogued. On my last night in Northampton, I returned to the Rare Book Room for a presentation by Lisa Van Pelt on a private press she had visited in Cuba. Forty people turned out. "Forty people! Can you believe it?" muses Antonetti. He was clearly proud of the role the library is able to play in this epicenter of the book arts.

Rare Book Room, Neilson Library, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063.

Daniel E. Kelm – bookbinder



Daniel Kelm grew up in St. Paul, MN, with a photographer for a father. He was mesmerized by the combination of chemistry and art it represented. At first, Kelm thought it

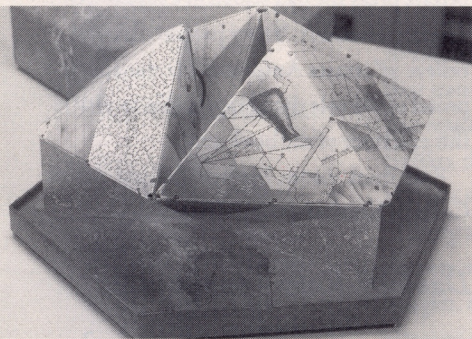
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Book Arts

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was the chemistry part that was interesting. He still remembers his glee at releasing a cloud of chlorine gas in his family's basement using common household chemicals. (Luckily nobody was hurt.)

Although he majored in chemistry for the first four years in college, after more than nine years as an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota he eventually graduated with a degree in philosophy. For a five-year period during his undergraduate work, he held various teaching and research positions in the Department of Chemistry. But then, in 1978, he discovered bookbinding. His first job was in the library bindery at the University of Minnesota. In 1979, he took a job at the Harcourt Bindery in Boston, where he spent three years doing production binding. He specialized in tradi-



Dan Kelm's *Terra Incognita*, a collaboration with Timothy C. Ely, stretches the definition of "book."

tional edge gilding and gold tooling techniques. In 1982, he came to Easthampton to work with David Bourbeau, at his Thistle Bindery. In 1983, he set out on his own, calling his enterprise the Wide Awake Garage, later augmenting it with a school called the Garage Annex School.

At first he specialized in what he called "interpretive fine binding." A typical project would be the 15 to 35 deluxe copies in an edition by a local publisher, often Alan James Robinson's Press of the Sea Turtle, then known as Cheloniidae Press. Soon he moved on to artist books in even smaller editions. Today he tries to divide his time between his own projects, collaborations, and teaching. He teaches about half the courses at his Garage Annex School, and manages to travel extensively in Europe

and the United States giving lectures and workshops.

Among the book objects he showed me were traditional codex forms, non-traditional codex forms, and books that tugged at the definition of book: they conveyed information, they folded, they could be handled, but the man in the street would not call them books.

One of Kelm's specialties is bindings involving metal. One style, called a wire edge album, involves a thin metal wire embedded along the spine edge of each page. The paper is cut away at intervals and the thread tied around the wire, producing a book which opens exceptionally well, yet can accommodate very heavy pages. Other styles involve hinged metal pieces, which allow the binding to flex, not unlike the hinged exoskeletons of insects.

So in the end, bookbinding is an ideal realm for Kelm. It allows him to be intimate with his materials. The chemistry he learned comes in handy when it is time to figure out ways to make books durable but unique. Kelm wrote a piece for the book journal *Abracadabra* in 1994 that sums it all up: "I think it is a mistake to elevate text above the physical book. Modern paperbacks are a good example of this pitfall . . . A badly-made volume diminishes the potency of the physical intimacy between reader and book."

Wide Awake Garage and Garage Annex School, One Cottage St., #5, Easthampton, MA.01027; 413/527-8044.

Bob and Lynne Veatch – booksellers in books on books

Bob and Lynne Veatch came to Northampton in 1996. They had been gradually building the reputation of their book dealership, the Veatchs Arts of the Book, while living on Long Island and pursuing other occupations. But it seemed time to "retire" — if working full-time at selling books can be called retiring. They had always loved New England, and Northampton's reputation as a center for the book arts made it a natural choice. As Lynne puts it, "There is a wonderful synergy here between book arts people, librarians, and booksellers."



I ask, "Did you say booksellers, plural?" They proceeded to rattle off a list that included Hosea Baskin (specialist in very early books), *Periodyssey* (periodicals of the 19th Century), Ken Lopez (modern first editions), Whately Antiquarian (a shop with multiple dealers), and Troubadour. So even if you discount the every-other-week-in-season auctions conducted by New England Book Auction (which draws mainly booksellers from all over New England) and the 30-odd "Book Dealers—Used and Rare" listed in the yellow pages, but not mentioned by the Veatchs, the region is a good place to shop for older, better books.

The Veatchs specialize in the arts of the book. That means three things: 1) books about books and bookmaking; 2) early and modern fine printing; and 3) current private press productions, especially from the western Massachusetts area they have adopted.

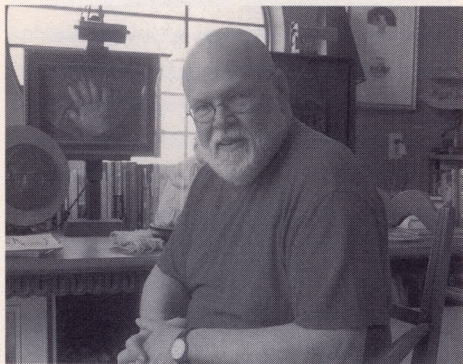
The benefit this provides to the local private presses and their customers is tremendous. For publishers, it is publicity to all the right people. For customers, it means that with one stop, a purchaser can see works by most local presses. Beyond this, the Veatchs have a collection of their own, and everyone I spoke to about them counted them as friends.

I ask them about the impact of the Internet on their business. "As we acquire new material," Bob explains, "we catalog it for our customers first. Only when they have had a chance at the material do we put the remainder on the Internet. It's true that competition drives down the price of common items, but scarce material holds its own."

"It makes this a 24-hour business," jokes Lynne. "If I can't sleep at night I can always come downstairs and process a few orders!"

The Veatchs Arts of the Book, P.O. Box 328, Northampton, MA 01061; 413/584-1867.

Barry Moser – engraver, bookman



Ask a knowledgeable person about book artists in the United States, and Barry Moser is sure to be mentioned. His wood engravings are immediately recognizable, and his *Frankenstein*, his *Alice in Wonderland*, his *Moby-Dick*— and most recently his *Bible*— are among the monumental achievements of the American private press movement.

But when he arrived in Easthampton in 1967 to be art teacher at the Williston Academy, Moser had never made a book and never succeeded in making a wood engraving. (He confesses that his first attempt was cut in a slab of redwood with an Xacto knife, and not a success.) But in nearby Northampton he found proper wood blocks and engraving tools, and he made progress. An early patron suggested that his engravings would be better if better printed, and named Harold McGrath as a good teacher. So Moser sought him out at the Gehenna Press, and, from the moment he walked into that environment, he knew that he had found his own natural and comfortable medium of expression.

I ask Moser to tell me about Harold McGrath. McGrath had been a Military Policeman in WWII, and came back to his home to work at the Pro Brush factory in Florence, outside Northampton. One day the press in the factory broke down, and though Harold had never used a printing press, he was

the only person who was able to fix it; the management decided to move him to the printing department. From that he went on to a job shop in Northampton, where he eventually crossed paths with Leonard Baskin.

It was a superb partnership: Baskin supplied the design skills and McGrath the craftsmanship. “Harold printed the tickets and invitations for his MP reunions,” Moser remembers. “They were incredibly ugly, but boy were they beautifully printed!” The things he printed for Baskin’s Gehenna Press were both beautiful and beautifully printed.

But in 1976, Baskin decamped with his publishing operation to England, leaving the printing equipment — but no work — in the hands of McGrath. At that point Moser, Jeff Dwyer, John Locke, Ruth Mortimer, and John Lancaster formed the Hampshire Typothetae as a letterpress printing company, with Harold McGrath as its sole employee.

By 1980, Moser was ready to embark on serious book production. He moved equipment to a garage near his house and started on a five-year production spree that included *Alice, Through the Looking-Glass, Frankenstein, Huck Finn, Bestiary D’Amour*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. “We made a mistake,” Moser admits. “The marketplace would not support five big books in five years, and we nearly went bankrupt.”

There followed a period of smaller projects, commissions, and teaching. But Moser knew that he had at least one more enormous project to accomplish: a *Bible*. He began *The Pennyroyal Caxton Bible* in 1994, and it was finished in 1999. It involved the investment of more than a million dollars, supplied by a New York investor. Two years later, enough copies have been sold that it is approaching break-even, and he and his partner are considering raising the price.

But after the *Bible*, what? “I’ve made a strategic retreat into academia,” Moser confesses. He’s teaching typography and relief printmaking at Smith College. If somebody came along with \$3 million to produce a complete Shakespeare, he wouldn’t say no, but he’s not holding his breath either.

I asked Moser about why western Massachusetts is such a fruitful area for the book arts.

“People joke that it’s the water,” he says. “But it is a combination of factors. We have one of the world’s highest densities of wonderful authors around here. And we had Leonard Baskin as an example of what could be achieved, with Harold McGrath at his side to translate and make Baskin approachable.”

Pennyroyal Caxton Press, P.O. Box 81, North Hatfield, MA 01066.

Dan Carr and Julia Ferrari – type maker, print maker

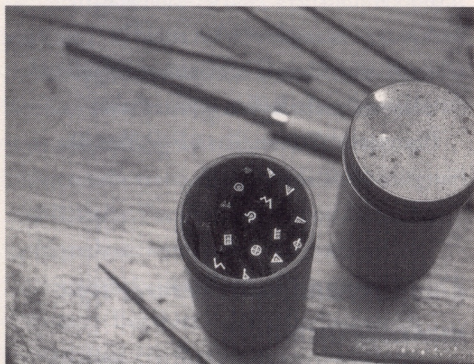


Like many people in the book arts, Dan Carr and Julia Ferrari started making books because they wanted to express themselves: Dan as a poet, and Julia as an artist and printmaker. But somewhere along the way, reality intervened, and, although they still print their own books of illustrated poetry when they can, it often seems that they spend more time working for others than on their books.

They started in Boston, where they crossed paths in Dan’s print shop when she came to apprentice and learn to print letterpress. Soon they were a couple, and soon thereafter the Boston real estate market forced them out of the city. In 1982 they settled in a town with the difficult name of Ashuelot, NH. [The word is Native American, and pronounced something like *ash-wee-lot*.] It’s just over the hill from the Pioneer Valley, and picturesque beyond

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imagination. Now real estate in town is getting pricey, but then they were able to get a large



Some of the punches for Dan Carr's Diogenes Greek type, used in the creation of the Parmenides project.

building, which serves downstairs as their type foundry and print shop and upstairs as their home.

Just before moving to Ashuelot, they had hit upon the idea of setting type to supplement their incomes while producing the books they loved. They acquired a Monotype casting machine and matrices, and started to make type for others. A few years later, they spent time at the factory in England to learn in greater detail about the machines. Dan learned the science of the casters and Julia that of the keyboard. "We know how to take them apart, adjust them, and put them back together from scratch," explained Julia. In their heyday as type-casters they were shipping as much as three tons of metal type to clients every year. That's down to a ton or so in recent years, but they are still keeping very busy with other projects.

For one thing, Dan is one of a handful of hand-cutters of type punches in the United States. He had the opportunity to apprentice with Christian Paput and Nelly Gable in Paris, and took it. The eventual result was the proprietary typeface of their press, called Regulus. And more recently, it has resulted in their involvement with the Parmenides project, an ambitious production of the one extant poem by Parmenides of Elea, involving the reprinting of the Greek text in a new font of Greek type called Diogenes — cut by Carr — as well as a new translation by Robert Bringhurst. Peter Koch of Berkeley is printing the whole thing from their type.

Another major client is the Limited Editions Club of New York. I was able to see a work in progress, a new poem by Maya Angelou, which they are designing and printing. And I was able to drool over *The Heights of Machu Picchu*, another Limited Editions Club project featuring beautiful gravure photographs by Edward Ranney with the poetry of Pablo Naruda. This was another translation project, involving parallel Spanish and English texts; by fiddling with the design, Carr was able to make the two poem blocks even in impact on each page, a remarkable achievement given the difference in actual space occupied by expression in the two languages.

When they get the chance, Dan and Julia still make their own books. I was shown the recent book *Gifts of the Leaves*, which combines Dan's poetry with Julia's etchings, and comes in a box with a letter struck in copper on the cover. It is printed in the Regulus type. [Stanford library named it one of the ten best acquisitions of the last ten years.] As Dan says, "When I set a poem in my own type, it's in my own voice."

"What we've done has been a path," Julia says. "By finding other ways to contribute to the book arts, we have grown and learned, thereby enriching our own work." And if appearances can be trusted, made themselves very happy in the process: a couple more relaxed and cheerful would be hard to imagine.

Golgonooza Letter Foundry and Trois Fontaines Press, 30 Main St., Ashuelot, NH 03441; 603/239-6830.

Lisa Unger Baskin – living link to Leonard Baskin

Looming large over the book arts in the Pioneer Valley is the figure of Leonard Baskin, who died in 2000. He was a teacher, patron of, or influence on, just about everyone to whom I spoke. And his Gehenna Press is still going, producing final books he had designed and illustrated before his death.

I had arranged to meet his wife, Lisa Unger Baskin, late on Wednesday afternoon, but she

reached me several hours early and suggested that I meet her at Dan Keleher's Wild Carrot Letterpress, where the final pages of *Orestia* were coming off the press. When I arrived, they were in fact printing the second color on the colophon page — literally the end of a very large print job. It was running on Dan's enormous Heidelberg, which he has geared down to run at a speed appropriate for the limited editions he prints (in this case, 60).

Later that afternoon, I enjoy tea with Baskin in the library of the house she had



shared with her husband. "Leonard thought of himself as primarily a sculptor," she explains. "He always said that printing was a peripheral activity. He was extremely focused, always productive. Whenever, wherever he was, he was writing, making designs on endless bits and scraps of paper, thinking of images, books; he was never idle. The Gehenna Press was one of the outlets for all that expression."

The Gehenna imprint first appeared in 1942, when Baskin was a student at the Yale School of Art. Four more books appeared while he was teaching at Worcester Museum School in Worcester, MA. Then, in 1953, Baskin got an appointment to the art department at Smith College, moved to the Northampton area, and began the tremendous output, which even now continues.

Prior to this trip, I had thought stereotypically of Gehenna books: I thought they were always large, always featured monumental typography, and generally used bold Baskin woodcuts. That afternoon, I learn how wrong my stereotype was. One after

another, Baskin brought out books for me to look at: little books, big books, typographic books, etching books, poetry books, fanciful books. Since type is my first interest, three typographic books — *Flosculi Sententiarum* [1967], *Icones Librorum Artifices* [1988], and *Icones Librorum Artifices*, 2nd series [2000] — totally bowled me over. The first is a series of aphorisms joined to arrangements of fleurons formerly belonging to Bruce Rogers. The other two feature Baskin's own short essays on bookworkers set in fanciful geometric text blocks and accompanied by Baskin etchings printed in color.

Altogether, there have been more than a hundred Gehenna books, and there are three more forthcoming, including the previously mentioned *Oresteia*, *A Book of Skulls*, and *Disconnected Sodality*. The *Oresteia* is a three-volume edition of Aeschylus' plays "Agamemnon," "Choephoroi," and "The Eumenides," a new version by the English poet Ted Hughes, including 47 woodcuts by Baskin. Since 1983 and Baskin's return to Massachusetts, the production has been done in the press room at Leeds and in the area: the type is set at Golgonooza, the letterpress printing is by Art Larson and Dan Keleher, the etchings are printed by Michael Kuch, the binding by Claudia Cohen, Gray Parrot, or Daniel Gehrich.

Early in Colin Franklin's 1992 essay "Fifty Years of the Gehenna Press" (an introduction to the exhibition catalog *The Gehenna Press: The Work of Fifty Years*), Franklin says "Nobody can tell whether he [Leonard Baskin] will be remembered a century hence as a sculptor, printmaker, draughtsman, illustrator, author, or creator of the Gehenna Press." As he concludes the essay, however, Franklin seems to answer his own question: "A private press whose long history includes exquisite small etchings, wild monotypes, and expressionist woodcuts, delicate experiments with fleurons and shaped typography, colour-printing, art history, social conscience and an impressive list of new poetry, all in a context of scholarly recollection, must one day be seen to rest near the summit of them all."

Gehenna Press, Box 687, Rockport, ME 04856; 207/236-8665.

Michael Kuch – poet, artist, printer



Michael Kuch came to the book arts in much the same way that Leonard Baskin did. First he was an artist and printmaker, and then he learned about books and found himself increasingly drawn to them as an artistic medium. "The art world is enormous," Kuch says. "It is easy to get lost in it, but the book world is more intimate and it is possible to find one's place. Even content is sometimes appreciated." The fact that Kuch is also a poet completes the logic. Until recently, his Double Elephant Press printed only his own poems.

Kuch was a student of Baskin in the post-England, Hampshire College era. He went on to edition Baskin's etchings for almost 10 years; in fact, he will be printing the etchings in one of the few remaining Gehenna books. But starting in 1994, he has moved out of the shadow of the master and is making books of his own.

I saw two: *Seance for a Minyan*, a collaboration with former Poet Laureate Anthony Hecht, which resurrected original Biblical figures to let them speak to modern times. And then, my favorite, *Apocalypse Clocks*, a millennial retrospective of the end of time featuring Kuch's own poems and etchings.

Kuch divides his time between lower Manhattan and Northampton, which explains the subject of his current project, called *Falling to Earth*. It has 14 poems and 21 etchings dealing with September 11 and the subsequent warlike

response of the United States. "Falling" refers both to the victims who chose to end their lives by jumping from the World Trade Center, as well as to the bombs, which fell over Afghanistan. But it also uses biblical and mythological references to give perspective to the recent events.

Kuch is pleased at the way in which this newest project also has led him into additional collaboration. "I'm learning more about typography for this book," he says. The typeface he's using is Emerson, designed by New Yorker Joseph Blumenthal. It is being cast by David Wolfe in New Hampshire. "And I discovered a paper mill in Brooklyn, which is making the paper," he says. It's called Carriage House Paper, and they've done a special making (cotton and abaca) for the book. "What is finally so compelling and fulfilling about collaboration in the art of making books is that it is a humbling experience. The sum of the book is invariably greater than any one person can achieve."

"I like to divide my time between New York and Northampton," Kuch says. "In New York you have the influence of the larger art world, and the incredible excitement that such a dense place to live can produce. But in Northampton I have space and quiet for creating my art." And a studio with beautiful light in a renovated felt mill, I can add.

Double Elephant Press, 136 West St., Northampton, MA 01060; 413/586-3456.

Art Larson – printer

Art Larson's Horton Tank Graphics is a beautiful space located on the top floor of a former tobacco warehouse in Hadley. Light floods in from three sides. "It's a great space to work in. It's like the shop that captivated me 23 years ago," he says. Like Art's work, it is crisp, clean, and controlled.

See BOOK ARTS, page 8

"I'm a printer," he says modestly. But not just any sort of printer: a letterpress printer who does a lot of hand composition, who prints damp whenever it's appropriate, and who has worked on some of the best printing produced in North America in the last 20 years. As the evolution of the printing process has made things faster and more regular, Larson has specialized in the part of the process that is slow and unpredictable.

Like so many in the valley, Larson came because of Leonard Baskin. He had seen a copy of *Gaudette*, a book of Ted Hughes' poetry with a Baskin cover, and something about it captured his attention. He was working for a commercial printer in Connecticut, and Northampton wasn't that far away, so he decided to come and try to find Baskin's Gehenna Press. What he didn't know was that Baskin had decamped to England two years earlier.

What Larson found instead was Harold McGrath, Baskin's former pressman, Barry Moser and all the Gehenna Press equipment at the Hampshire Typothetae. "I was enchanted by the Typothetae — the old machinery and cabinets of type, the artwork on the walls, and the generous and dedicated folks there. I was prepared to do whatever it took to become a part of this world of artisans." He kept his job in Connecticut, but started volunteering 20 to 30 hours a week at the Typothetae to learn letterpress printing from McGrath. Finally in 1981 Larson moved to Northampton and began working full-time at the Typothetae with Moser and McGrath.

In 1984, Larson moved on to Dan Keleher's Wild Carrot Letterpress shop, where he worked on books for the Limited Editions Club, Cheloniidae Press, and also for the Gehenna Press. Baskin had returned to the area in 1985.

Finally in 1987, Larson set up his own shop, Horton Tank Graphics, where I saw him. "The first book I printed in my new shop was the Gehenna Press *Icons*. What a trial by fire!" he says. Each page includes an etching and block of type set in a shape: diamond, goblet, circle, whatever. "Baskin would write out the text in the shape he wanted and I would compose the type as closely to his design as I could." This book was printed damp on a variety of hand-

made papers and required close registration in the printing—an effort made more taxing as this was the first book Larson had printed damp and it was the first book he had printed for Baskin.

Larson is an example of the cooperative spirit and ensemble work that can be found among the area's book workers. On the Gehenna *Oresteia*, for example, he printed the woodcuts, but the type was cast by the Golgonooza Letter Foundry, the type was printed by Dan Keleher at Wild Carrot Letterpress, and the book was bound by Claudia Cohen.

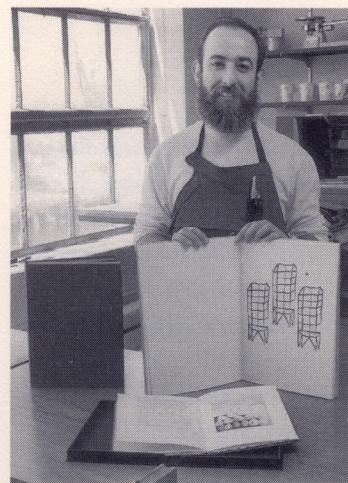
Having worked steadily on many books for the Gehenna Press since 1987, Larson found Baskin's death in June of 2000 has had a profound effect on him as it has on all who knew him. For Larson there is still a bit of Gehenna work to finish up, but he looks forward to new work with old friends, to meeting new clients, and to learning from Michael Kuch new skills as an intaglio printer.

Horton Tank Graphics, 47 East St., Hadley, MA 01035 413/584-0783.

Michael Russem – publisher, printer

I should have confessed up front that the reason I picked Northampton to visit was because of Michael Russem, whose Kat Ran Press is the brightest new star to hit the private press world in the last few years. Russem is only 26 years old, but he's already produced a widely envied breakthrough book and four other solid ones. I also count him a good friend, having had a booth next to his at an Oak Knoll book fair and gotten to appreciate his wicked wit and lack of pretense.

These achievements are all the more remarkable given the shoestring on which he has operated. At first, he worked full-time for Winifred and Michael Bixler, the Monotype typesetters of Skaneateles, NY. Since having his own shop, he has done exhausting print jobs on his Vandercook for other presses, and even



stamped 20 aphorisms in six-point type on the outside of 24 metal boxes — one letter at a time with a steel punch!

Russem's press is in Florence, once a town of its own and now a neighborhood of Northampton. His dog Katherine (a corruption of whose name supplies the name of the press) is always at his side, and has been named in every colophon. "I should be so lucky," jokes his girlfriend, Corinne Gill. "He hasn't put me in anything yet."

Russem's first book, *Match in a Bottle*, sold out in a heartbeat. It includes poems by Tracey Knapp, printed in Centaur type. Each poem faces one of more than 800 original "smoke drawings" made by Kurt Gohde using a variety of combustible media, including matches, cigarette lighters, gun powder, and kerosene lamps.

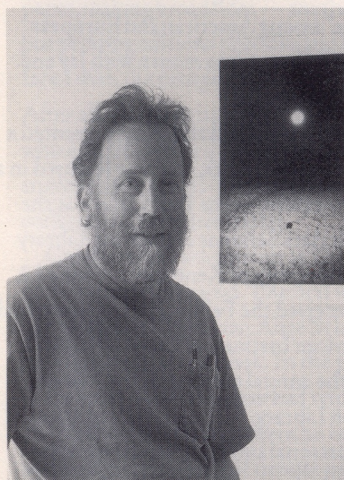
Russem has the goal of original art in every book. But it has proven difficult to find artists who are willing and able to produce it. His second book uses lithographs; his third has more Gohde smoke drawings. For his fourth book, *Overpass*, he commissioned drawings, which were reproduced from photopolymer plates and then augmented individually by pencil. His most recent, *Crow Calls*, uses pencil drawings reproduced by photogravure. A book now in preparation will have original drawings made on paint chips.

Russem is very happy to have settled in what he calls the "happy" valley. The building where he works has a variety of craftspeople, including Jon Goodman and David Bourbeau, who have contributed to his projects. He is also pleased to be able to work on projects for other presses.

The only risk, as he sees it, is pigeonholing. "While the Gehenna Press is a tremendous source of inspiration for me, I don't think of myself as being a continuation of the Gehenna tradition, so I hope that people won't perceive me in that way because of where I come from."

Kat Ran Press, 221 Pine St., #1G5,
Florence, MA 01062; 413/584-1152.

Jon Goodman – photogravure printer



I've been seeing Jon Goodman's work for a long time, so it was a great pleasure to meet the man who has almost single-handedly brought photogravure back to life as a printing process. He has printed photographs for *Aperture* and more recently for 21st Century Photography, a publisher of photographic monographs. And he demonstrated his flexibility by using the process to reproduce the pencil drawings in Kat Ran's most recent book.

Photogravure, like etching, is an intaglio process. That means that the ink is put into recessed areas on the plate and then lifted off by extreme pressure on the plate and paper. (This contrasts with letterpress, where the ink is only on raised areas of the plate, and lithography, where the plate is flat and the antipathy of oil and water is used to generate the image.) What makes a gravure reproduction of a photograph so rich is that the recessed areas on the plate can vary in depth; once printed, in light areas there is a thin coating of ink, and dark areas a heavy

one. The result is at once more subtle and more striking.

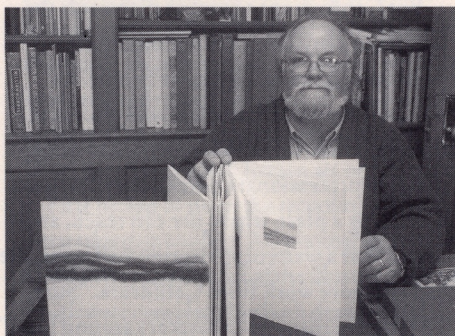
Back in New York in 1978, he made contact with Michael Hoffman at the Aperture Foundation, which led to many years of fruitful collaboration on works by Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, and other photographers, mostly done in Millerton, NY.

Then in 1984, Goodman moved to Hadley, MA, and more recently to the Florence studio, where I saw him. He is proud to be part of the community of craftspeople in the area. "Publishers and projects come through here, and we introduce each other's clients around. It's also nice to be in a place where other people can appreciate what it is that you do."

Goodman does his own photography when he gets the chance. He favors natural subjects and uses a 4x5 camera. But mainly he takes the work that comes. "Historical or contemporary, it's always a challenge. I can't imagine doing anything else."

Jon Goodman Photogravure, 221 Pine St., #2F1, Florence, MA 01062; 413/586-9650.

David Bourbeau – bookbinder



David Bourbeau moved to Northampton from Provincetown, MA, where he had been studying art with Hans Hoffman. His plan was to study drawing with Leonard Baskin at Smith. In fact, he did study drawing, but that pursuit was soon eclipsed by commerce. While in Provincetown, Bourbeau had learned to make sandals, and he decided to make a few in Northampton to help with expenses. They were an immediate hit. He soon had employees, and within a few years had a flourishing business

selling all kinds of leather apparel, as well as supplies for many kinds of craft.

From that it was a short step to running a successful art gallery. But it all ended when he was divorced; he gave the enterprises to his wife and decided to try a new career. Baskin encouraged him to take up bookbinding, and urged him to go to England to study with Roger Powell in many ways the progenitor of modern conservation binding. But Bourbeau realized he was not ready for Powell, and decided to work closer to home with the late Arno Werner in Pittsfield. Altogether he spent four years with Werner, working as a restaurant headwaiter to cover expenses. Eventually he opened his own shop, the Thistle Bindery, in Easthampton.

Bourbeau's shop often had as many as four or five people working on editions, conservation, and individual books. Some were employees and some were students. "My general rule was a year of instruction, in which the student worked on his or her own projects. Then if they wanted, they stayed on for a year working on my projects."

He did work for his old friend Baskin, as well as for other publishers. "What's most challenging is material that flows. Bindings by their nature have to be mechanical and rigid. So making a book that flows, but at the same time lies open comfortably for reading and study, is the greatest achievement."

Bourbeau's current studio space in Florence (now a neighborhood of Northampton) is in the same building as Michael Russem and John Goodman. But Bourbeau somehow managed to get the corner office, where the company executives must have worked. It is richly paneled and makes a wonderful counterpoint to the leather and gilding he sometimes uses in his bindings. And it is a smaller space, reflecting Bourbeau's scaled-back phase of life. He no longer employs full-time assistants and takes only the occasional apprentice. These days he's always eager to have a cup of coffee with a friend.

Bourbeau has earned the luxury of picking his projects. "I love making small editions of books.

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Book Arts

Continued from page 9

What makes me happiest is when I can bind an edition where the book and the binding share a sensibility."

Thistle Bindery, 221 Pine St., Northampton, MA 01060; 413/586-4117.

Claudia Cohen – bookbinder



Claudia Cohen came to Northampton because of Leonard Baskin. But in Cohen's case, it was because Baskin was a friend of the family, not because she was an aspiring artist. She spent a couple of springs and summers doing letterpress with Harold McGrath because school hadn't been going well, and she needed something to do.

But eventually she went back to school and got her degree in history. But what to do with a degree in history? Being a painting conservator sounded good, but there was too much chemistry involved. But being a bookbinder sounded just right, so she tried working in the conservation studio at Yale. Edition binding also sounded interesting, so she spent several years with Gray Parrot in Maine. Next, she studied with Hugo Peller in Escona, Switzerland. A stint at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, followed. And then, in 1982, she started her own bindery in Easthampton.

She strives to do a little of everything. She has bound most of the recent Gehenna books, and was in the middle of binding the *Oresteia*

when I visited. Barry Moser's *Bible* took three years out of her life. But she also does one-of-a-kind bindings, and in fact loves to make boxes for libraries. "For one thing, I love going to the libraries to measure for the boxes. In the process I get to see some of the most interesting historical material," she confesses.

On a recent trip to Europe, she visited the Klingspor typographic museum in Offenbach, Germany, where many of the archives of Rudolf Koch had settled. On a whim, she asked in the bookshop if they had any books still in sheets. When the clerk came back she could not believe her good fortune: they had 200 or more! Among the items she settled upon were 20 copies of the famous Koch silhouette book. So far she has bound ten of them in an appropriate but luxurious brown leather, and settled them at places like the New York Public Library. The remaining ten are not only unbound but also uncut, and she is trying to decide what to do with them.

She also is working on a series of books of her own. They're actually sample books; the one that's complete shows dozens of her own paste-paper designs. She envisions ones on other kinds of decorated paper and collections of her bookbinding scraps.

But Cohen drops a bombshell towards the end of our discussion: she is planning, for personal reasons, to decamp to Seattle. As presently envisioned, this will take place in the summer of 2004. She looks forward to being the only professional edition binder in town, to finding a place where she can teach, and hopes that a westcoast location will mean she can get more work from California. "Sure, I'll miss the many collaborators around here," she says. "But I trust that it will turn out to be an opportunity."

Claudia Cohen, Binder, One Cottage St., #304, Easthampton MA 01027; 413/527-6007. ❖

Saints & Sinners Corner



Frances Ireland Marshall, wife of Caxtonian Jay Marshall, died on May 27. Mrs. Marshall was a magician, writer, and small-business owner. She and Jay were known as leaders in the field of magic and considered "institutions" among American and European magicians. All Caxtonians mourn with Jay and send their condolences.

Caxtonian Susan Jackson Keig presented a lecture on her design work, and was featured in a retrospective exhibit in the Peel Gallery at the Spring Book Arts Seminar at the King Library Press, the University of Kentucky, on June 12, 2002. She received the Fellow Award, presented by the American Institute of Graphic Arts on June 13, at the annual meeting in the Harold Washington Library, Chicago, in recognition of significant personal and professional contributions to raising the standards of excellence within the design community.

Caxtonian Sherman Beverly gave a lecture, "Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.," featuring the spiritual brotherhood of two men who used peaceful means to overcome oppression, at the Bluestem Festival of Arts and Humanities, June 3, 2002.

Caxtonian Ed Quattrocchi will teach a course at the Newberry Library on the "Concept of Time in the Works of Dante, Michelangelo, and Shakespeare." It will be a Thursday evening course, at 5:45, and will run from September 19 through November 21. For registration and further information, please telephone 312/255-3700.

The Marion E. Wade Center of Wheaton College announces the publication of Volume 18 of *SEVEN: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, featuring pieces on T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and others. For information, telephone 630/752-5908.

Craig Jobson and the Lark Sparrow Press

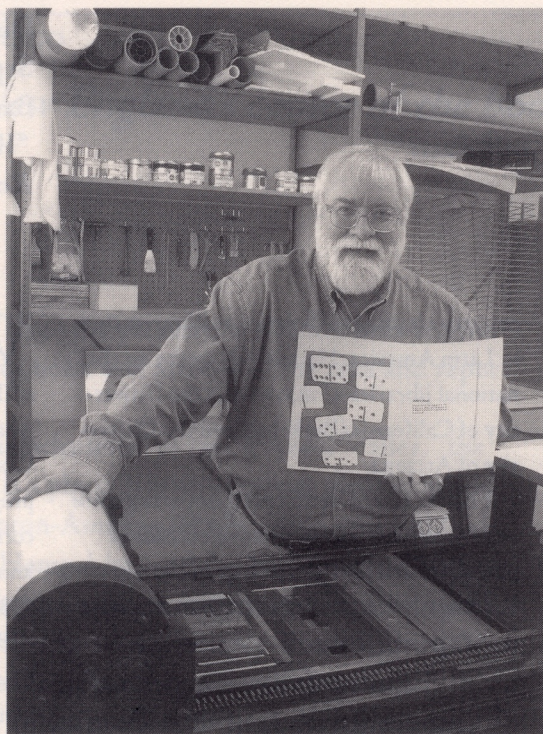
Robert McCamant

If you had told Craig Jobson in 1998 that by 2001 he would be the proprietor of a private press, he would have told you that you didn't know him very well. True, he was at the time embarking on an MFA program at the Center for Book and Paper Arts at Columbia College, but Jobson pictured himself making artist books, making paper, making broadsides — anything but printing editions of books and being faced with the prospect of selling them. After all, this was the same Craig Jobson who had worked in a library while a student and shelved “books on books” without cracking them open.

Craig credits two courses at Columbia with changing his mind. The first was one taught by Caxtonian Alice Schreyer on the history of the book. In the process of studying for it, the class had trips to the Newberry Library, where he was able to see and hold the products of private presses from Cobden-Sanderson through Andrew Hoyem. And then Jobson took the demanding editioning class taught by Audrey Niffenegger, and realized that having a press was something he could accomplish.

But it's 2002 now, and Jobson has completed his MFA and is proprietor of the Lark Sparrow Press in Evanston. Its first project is an ambitious three-volume undertaking that he wrote himself. Taken together, it's called *The Billy Chronicles*, subtitled “Texas Tales of Transgression, Retribution, Reconciliation, and Dominoes.” The fictional work concerns a once-and-future Texas domino champion named Big Billy, whom Jobson admits is a composite of a former boss, a former brother-in-law, and a close relative. [Texas dominoes is played with a set of 56 pieces, and the rules are more like that of a card game than traditional dominoes.]

Jobson's process in developing the books went this way: first (partly as a result of another Columbia class, this one in writing, taught by Steve Tomasula), the text came to life. Next



came the plan for the books: each has a CD of Jobson telling the story, in character, with sound effects and a musical score; a CD booklet with the text of the CD; a 14-foot-long accordion folded book, lavishly illustrated with eight pieces of original art in two colors; a domino set of the kind required to play the game of Texas dominoes; and a box to keep the whole thing in. With the plan in hand, Jobson set out to realize it. First he had to make the recordings. Next came taking upwards of 300 photographs, which formed the raw material of the illustrations and which were completed by both drawing and computer manipulation. As if he didn't already have enough to do, Jobson decided to make the paper for the accordion book, and that process took a month. He set the type for it by hand and turned Photoshop files into engraved magnesium plates, printed it, and then assembled a set. He was dismayed to discover that the assembly process alone for one copy of one book took him about 14 hours.

So far, he has editioned the first book, “DB and the Double Five” but not finished assembling all the copies. Volume 2, “Lizard and Julio

Go Nel-o” and Volume 3, “The Colonel's Chicanery,” are in various stages. He's working diligently, but not quite so hard as he was back when he was working on his MFA, when he was trying to be both a full-time student and was also teaching full-time in the design department at Columbia. He jokes that in those days he had to “make a date” to manage to fit in time with his wife.

How did he pick the name “Lark Sparrow” for his press? It makes sense if you know his personal history. He's a native Midwesterner, who attended the University of Texas and ended up spending the early part of his working life as a designer in various cities of Texas. He actually had two bachelor's degrees: one in literature and another a BFA in studio art with a combined specialty in graphic design and printmaking. But he happily returned to the Midwest to work for McDougal Littell. There followed a few years as head of design for the ABA Press, the job he quit to join the Columbia College faculty. So Jobson believes that the Lark Sparrow, which stops in Texas on its way to Mexico for the winter, and then in Chicago on its way to Canada for the summer, makes an appropriate name.

Jobson thinks this is an excellent time to be starting a private press. He sees the intersection of new and old technologies as opening up new realms for exploration. He points out the two modern technologies in his domino books: the audio, contained on the CD, and the computer photography techniques used in creating the illustrations. “The audio makes this a richer, more interesting object than it would be without it,” he says, “and the computer techniques made creating the 24 illustrations for the three books humanly possible.”

Although his first project is still in process, Jobson is still looking forward to the next one. He has in mind editioning a series of illustrated short stories by local writers. ❖

Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program

September 13, 2002

William V. Jackson

"A Tale of Two Libraries: London and Paris"

By the 1980s the need for space at the British Library and the French National Library had become critical. The solution proposed in each case was the construction of a very large building on a new site. By the turn of the century each institution was operating in its new quarters.

Caxtonian William V. Jackson, Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas and Senior Fellow at the Library School of Dominican University, looks not only at the resulting buildings but also at the processes through which they came to be. He has personally followed these developments through many on-site visits and discussions over the past two decades. In his luncheon lecture, which will launch the 2002-03 Caxton season, he will point out a number of comparisons and contrasts and accompany his talk with a videotape showing.

Jackson has, most recently, written four articles for the recently published *International Dictionary of Library Histories* (2001), a project which provides a "broad selection of institutional histories for many of the world's principal libraries," according to editor David H. Stam. Jackson's contributions all relate to national libraries, particularly in Central and Latin America. He is considered one of the

country's leading authorities on librarianship in Latin America. He recently spoke on the national libraries of that area at the University of California (Berkeley) and the University of Arizona.

This is a luncheon that promises to begin our year in splendid fashion. Join your friends to hear about and see video footage of the new buildings that house the holdings of two of the world's greatest libraries.

*Edward Quattrocchi & Leonard Freedman
Co-Chairs*

Parking Note: *Since parking is no longer available in the BankOne garage, you may use the valet parking service at Nick's Fish Market, Clark and Monroe, for \$10 (after 5pm). Or you may take advantage of special arrangements made with the Standard Parking self-park lot at 172 W. Madison (Madison at Wells) for Caxtonians to park for \$5.25, from 3:30 to 9:30pm. Identify yourself as a Caxtonian for the special rate at this lot.*

All luncheon and dinner meetings, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Mid-Day Club, 56th floor of BankOne, BankOne Plaza, Madison & Clark, Chicago. Luncheon and discussion, 12:30pm. Dinner meetings begin with spirits at 5pm, dinner at 6pm, lecture at 7:30pm. Members planning to attend luncheons or dinners must make advance reservations by phoning the Caxton number, 312•255•3710.

Luncheon for members and guests, \$25. Dinner, for members and guests, \$45.

Dinner Program

September 18, 2002

Barbara Jones

*"William Maxwell — Illinois
Roots"*

W'e've got mail!" says Barbara Jones, Head of Special Collections at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library. And what mail it is! Barbara, a nonresident Caxtonian from Urbana, who attends Caxton programs several times a year, will highlight the correspondence of William Maxwell, best known as an editor at *The New Yorker* from 1936 to 1976.

His correspondence with John Updike, John Cheever, Eudora Welty, and other notables casts an interesting light on American literature in the 20th Century. An Illinois native, Maxwell attended Chicago's Senn High School as well as the University of Illinois. His own novels and short stories usually had Illinois settings. His links with Illinois led to his making a gift of his correspondence to the Special Collections of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Barbara will also refer to the contemporary problems of access, privacy, and organization of materials in a collection of this kind.

In the exhibit catalog, *From the Illinois Prairie to The New Yorker: The Life And Work of William Maxwell*, Barbara Burkhardt has written: "The collection is notable among the Library's holdings in that while its scope is far-reaching, its roots are found in Illinois, particularly in the experience of Maxwell as a student at the University of Illinois."

This program marks the beginning of the Caxton season for dinner meetings. Join your Caxton friends and guests for this program on an important and interesting Illinois native.

*Peggy Sullivan
Vice President and Program Chair*