

Intelligence inscribed before the printed word in North America

James Marshall

Caxtonian James Marshall is a civil engineer, who has spent almost four decades studying, surveying, and mapping the Hopewell Mounds of North America. From his detailed studies, he has developed a unique understanding of American Indians and their early civilization, which, for the first time, we're just learning to appreciate. We welcome this important essay by Mr. Marshall. The Chicago Art Institute will mount an exhibition in November 2004 that will include Mr. Marshall's dramatic and pioneering studies.

Prehistoric lines, geometric figures, and animal effigies in the Nazca Desert and mountains of Peru are well known due to extensive publicity over the past several decades. Familiar to Thomas Jefferson, but still not well known to the American public today, is the fact that there are similar long lines, geometric figures, large effigies, and some rare hilltop forts in Ohio, Kentucky, Florida, Mississippi, and other states. In many cases, these are still visible in the field and/or on aerial photographs. Authors for centuries have been using old maps of one or a few of these sites to develop all kinds of theories about them: that they were the work of extra-terrestrial creatures, or a lost civilization of white people, or that there were astronomical alignments of various points, and so on. On the contrary, these works of earth, sand, or marine shells are now understood to have been built between 300 BC and 400 AD by the Hopewell people, who were ancestors of today's American Indians.

In mid-1965, I resolved that I would develop no theories under any circumstances about these works: my surveys and maps would be a factual presentation free from the bias of any theory. Since then, I have surveyed and mapped more than 230 of these sites in order

Sonnet 5

Across the empty fields winter retreats,
Releasing his high mortgage on the weather —
Then wary Spring trips back on airy feet
And buds and grass and wind all laugh together:
"Where is the winter desolate and gray?
Gone — Gone — and gone we hope forever,"
The wind-flowers nod: 'Yes, gone forever,
And gone we hope forever and a day —'
And that is all the white wind-flowers said,
Standing by last year's stems so cold and dead.
The land is left a scroll for winds to read —
The gray-starved land is used to birth and growth.
The gray-starved land is left to Spring and youth.

Jesse Stuart
From *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* (1934).

Poem used with cooperation of the Jesse Stuart
Foundation, Ashland, KY, James M. Gifford, CEO.

to develop a large database from which to draw conclusions. This work has been done in accordance with standard engineering and land surveying procedures. I have produced a map to scale of 50-feet- or 100-feet-per square inch for each site. At least 160 sites contain one or more huge geometric figures: circles, squares, octagons, ellipses, rectangles, spirals, and parallel lines. These I have found to be precise. Some are 1000 feet or more across. Groups of such works often stretch for a mile or more from end to end. My further purpose in surveying and mapping the sites has been to determine the specific minimum knowledge of mathematics, land surveying techniques, and astronomy required to have been understood by these prehistoric people to locate an appropriate site, lay out the work, and build the works as accurately as they did. I intend to publish all

these primary source materials in an *Atlas of American Indian Geometry*, which will be the largest, most comprehensive inventory of these geometric works ever attempted. In 1966, Rene Millon published an article in *Scientific American* indicating that he had found that prehistoric Teotihuacan near Mexico City was laid out on a grid of 57 meters or 187 feet. I have looked for indications of use of this grid on these other works.

I

The invention of writing was a crucial step in the development of civilization at various centers around the world. Writing was not a sudden or spontaneous invention, but it was instead an outgrowth of many thousands of years of experience at manipulating symbols, such as counting and weighing trade goods and measuring land. Writing did not develop in the Pre-Columbian New World north of the Rio Grande. Instead written communication here seems to have stabilized at understanding geometric concepts, production of plan drawings based on such, and then laying out and building what we know as the Hopewell earthworks of North America.

II

Of these 230 sites, we shall examine drawings of two such earthworks, each one partially surveyed and mapped by the Smithsonian Institution in the 1880s. Figure 1 (page 4) is an octagon and connecting circle more than 2800 feet long, formed of linear mounds four to six feet high, and three feet wide on the top. Preserved in a golf course in Newark, OH, and open to the public, it has the dimensions shown on a 1000-foot grid. On



Musings...

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Caxtonian Neil Harris began his fine book, *The Artist in American Society – The Formative Years, 1790-1860* (1982), with these words: "Before Americans made pictures, they used words." These words became the alpha and omega for the success of the new form of government, forged in splendid prose, which came into being in 1776 and has endured into our own time. And it is in the continual use of words that we are bound together over the years as a nation, as a people.

Through our language, from the elegant 17th Century version to the sound bites of the 21st Century, we have been forged as a people. We agreed to certain fundamental principles through this language. When we disagreed, we disputed through this language. We fashioned a way of life in which, indeed, the word was more powerful than the sword. Revolutions in America are born and bred through the skilled discourse of gifted leaders. We have dialogued, discussed, debated, and decided every important societal change over the last 200 years through the American language, our adaptation of the "Mother Tongue," unique to this continent.

The ringing prose of Henry David Thoreau, from "Civil Disobedience," still strikes a vibrant chord in the heart of every thoughtful American: "I heartily accept the motto. — 'That government is best which governs least;' and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe, — 'That government is best which governs not at all;' and when [people] are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have." Until we are prepared, we must talk — boldly, clearly, and toward the end best for a majority of the people. That's the American way.

I just read a new and marvelous book, *Lincoln and Whitman*, by Daniel Mark Epstein. Epstein gives life to the "friendship" between, as he calls them, "Two visionaries....[who] dominated the American scene from 1855 until 1865 in their respective fields of politics and literature." They never shook hands; they never even met. They were linked by their words and by eye contact as Lincoln passed the distinguished poet on the street as he traveled from the White House to the Soldiers home, where the Lincoln family summered.

Lincoln first read *Leaves of Grass* in 1857, when his law partner "Billy" Herndon brought the book to his office and left it on a table for Lincoln to discover. Epstein says that Whitman's influence on Lincoln caused him to turn a "corner back in 1857.

He had developed the power to raise his oratory to the level of dramatic poetry whenever the occasion called for it."

Whitman began dreaming about the President-Elect in 1860, and he saw him when Lincoln first arrived in Washington to assume leadership of the government. He jotted in his notebook, "Two characters as of a dialogue between A. L. _____ and W. Whitman — as in a dream / or better? Lessons for a President elect / Dialogue between WW and 'President elect.'" He imagined the man from Illinois talking back to him.

Both Lincoln's and Whitman's written legacies are among the most cherished texts of American letters. And while the two men never had (or took) occasion to meet face-to-face, they shared the vital camaraderie of the written word, composed in noble language now a treasured national inheritance. And we live with that legacy of language — it is the blessed birthright of all Americans. And it continues to this day.

No one better understood the trans-generational dialogue conducted on this continent over the years than Vernon Louis Parrington (1871-1929), whose *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927) gave us the first comprehensive view of this national conversation from 1620 forward. Parrington said of his work: "I have undertaken to give some account of the genesis and development in American letters of certain germinal ideas that have come to be reckoned traditionally American — ..."

If we're wise, we will extend and expand this birthright of language from our time forward with gifts of thought composed in words of beauty and acumen through which we continue to forge the public debate of a people of intelligence, good will, and hope. Nothing defines Democracy better than this public debate relating to the broad spectrum of hopes, dreams, and plans touching the lives of all of the people of the Republic.

I am a citizen of America. I participate in the ongoing dialogue through thoughtful language about magnanimous issues, as we continue to define *America* — to ourselves and to the world.

Robert Cotner
Editor

One of Abraham Lincoln's great gifts to his nation

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as the final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

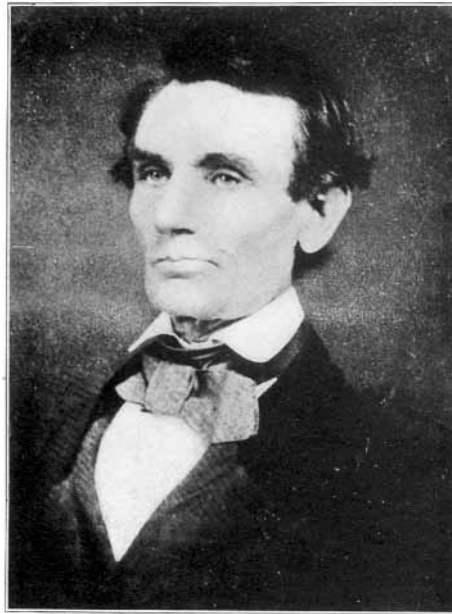
Abraham Lincoln
Gettysburg, PA
November 19, 1863

One of Walt Whitman's great gifts to his nation

O Captain! my Captain! Our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;

But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up — for you the flag is flung — for you the bugle trills,



Abraham Lincoln in 1857, the year he discovered Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths — for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;

Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse or will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;

Exult O shires, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Walt Whitman
1865

Lincoln and Whitman, united in words

Madison Square Theatre, New York
April 14, 1887

In an audience that included John Hay, Mark Twain, William T. Sherman and his wife, James Russell Lowell, John Burroughs, and a theatre-full of other dignitaries and common folk, Walt Whitman gave in his last

public appearance a tribute to Abraham Lincoln.

As he closed with the recitation of "O Captain! My Captain!" Epstein writes:

The voice faltered... now the poet was not singing so much as weeping. Tears flowed down his red cheeks and glistened on his beard, and it did not seem as if he could continue. Now it was time for Laura Stedman to make her appearance.

As the basket of lilacs appeared from the wings, with the child beaming behind it, the crowd broke in to the loudest ovation of the day, drowning out the verses of Whitman's well-known poem and cracked voice that was too overcome with emotion to finish it. Laura moved into the spotlight.

"She walked to where he sat and held out her gift without a word," recalled the reporter from the [New York] Times. The old man's sadness had almost made her cry. "He stared, took them, and then took her. It was December frost and Maytime blossom at their prettiest contrast as the pink cheeks shone against the snow-white beard, for the old man told his appreciation mutely by kissing her and kissing her again."

Many in the audience were weeping, and the tears that were shed in that space the poet had hallowed with his words were as much for the fallen President as for the grieving poet. In that moment the men were united.

Daniel Mark Epstein
From *Lincoln and Whitman*, p. 339.



"Belated Tribute to a Troubled Artist," Walt Whitman in 1887 in his Camden, NJ home, by artist Thomas Eakins (1844-1916).

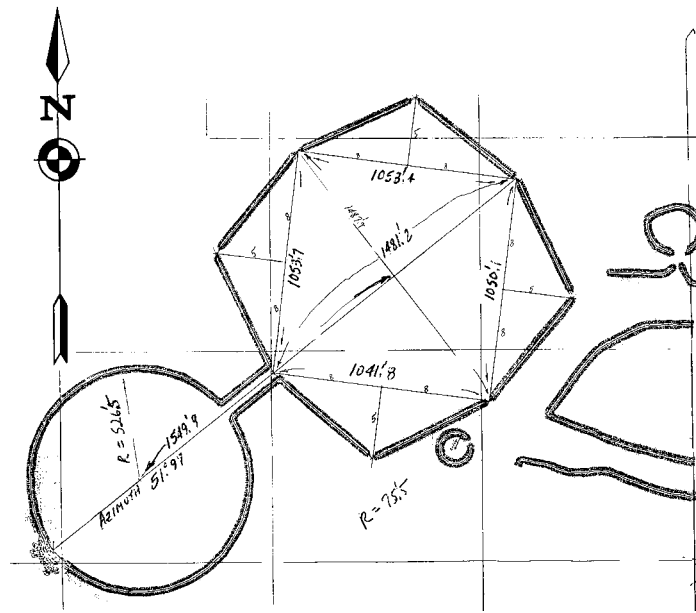


Figure 1

an interior square, Hopewell people erected base 8, altitude 5 right triangles to lay out the Octagon. Note that the interior square is almost exactly the size to circumscribe the Circle, which has a radius of 526.5 feet. Note also that the Octagon, the Circle, and connecting neck are very regular and that the diagonals of the Square within the Octagon are within one-percent of eight times 187 feet.

The radius of the Circle is also within one-percent of two times the diagonal of a Square

187 feet on a side (which equals 528.9 feet). The main axis of the work forms a Golden Triangle with the true north-south and true east-west lines. To the southeast are shown circular and linear mounds leading to other prehistoric constructions, most of which have been destroyed by urbanization. An 1837-1847 map, Figure 2, shows these works. The work

at E, the center of which is about 6200 feet from the center of the Octagon, is called *Moundbuilders* and is preserved in Heath, OH, and is also open to the public. It is a circular work about six feet high, three feet wide on top, with an interior ditch, and is about 597 feet in radius, very nearly equal in area to the square within the Octagon as shown in Figure 1. The four-sided work to the northeast is called the Square. It was surveyed and mapped by the Smithsonian, and it is nearly five times 187 feet on a side. It has long since been destroyed.

Figure 3 (See page 8) is a view of the Observatory at the southwest end of Figure 1, from the interior. Figure 4 (See page 8) is a gateway of the Octagon looking inward.

III

In 1994, in his book *Hidden Cities: The Discovery and Loss of Ancient North American Civilization*, Dr. Roger G. Kennedy, retired Director of the National Park Service and former director of the American History Museum at the Smithsonian Institution, advanced the theory that several of these geometric works are the remnants of a Native American religious practice resembling the Roman Catholic practice of Stations of the Cross. Referring to Figure 2, it appears that a procession from the south between the parallel walls shown paused for ceremonies at the Octagon and Golf Course Circle and then proceeded east, going between one or the other set of parallel walls and, possibly, stopping at the Moundbuilders Circle, the square and other walled enclosures shown, returning to the Octagon and Circle by the other parallel wall route.

IV

Figure 5 (See page 8) is the High Bank work. It exists in eroded condition south of Chillicothe, OH, and is about 65 miles from the site of Figures 1 and 2. The site is not presently open to the public. Through the efforts of the late Alva McGraw, the Archeological Conservancy, and me, the site is being acquired by the National Park Service to become a part of Hopewell Culture National Monument. Again, a 1000-foot grid is shown. The overall length of the work is about 2650 feet. Note that the Circle radius is 528.1 feet, within one-half of one percent of that at the Newark site.

The axis of the work forms a three-four-five right triangle with the true north-south and the true east-west lines. The Octagon was formed by an interior square on which were built — again — three-four-five right triangles. These triangles form what is

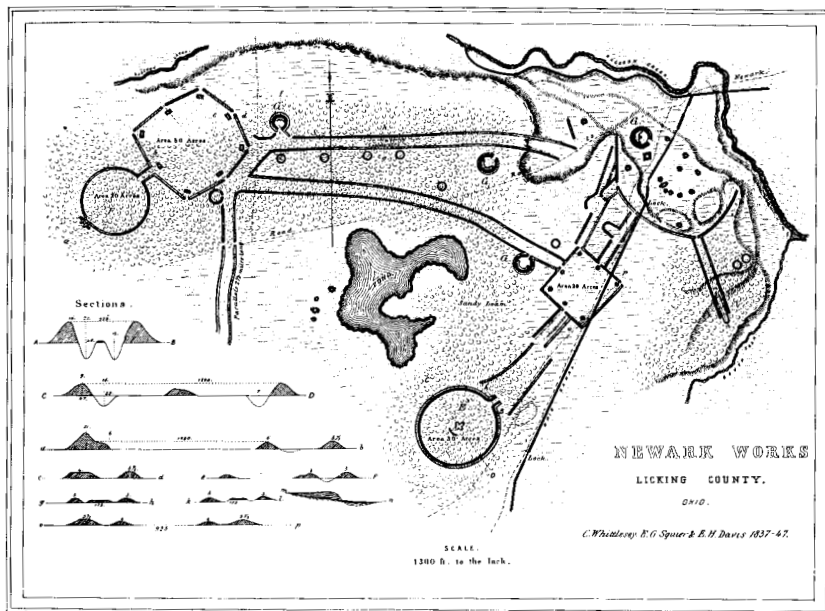


Figure 2

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mounded except at the southernmost corner. The octagon has an area within about one-percent that of the circle. The axis of the work, if extended northwest, passes very near the center of a large circle about three miles away; if extended about four miles to the southeast, it passes near the center of another large half-circle.

V

From these and the many other drawings of works in this collection, publication of which is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that the Hopewell people had a concept of the right triangle, some notion of the Pythagorean Theorem, could calculate areas of these figures, and had a concept of π , the proportion of the circumference to the diameter of a circle, or about 3.1416. Also beyond the scope of this paper, is any demonstration of the several patterns formed by placing a transparent drawing of one of these geometric works over a drawing to the same scale of another such work: key points of one work coincide with key points of the other work, indicating that each of many of these works must have been built from drawings that originated on the same drafting board.

What I have learned in my years of research is that the Hopewell people had considerable knowledge of land surveying and geometry, having achieved a precision and regularity in measuring angles and length and extending straight lines over distances of a mile or more. They were, as well, able to determine true north by circumpolar stars. I found indications that large numbers of the Hopewell works were necessarily designed on a drafting board or sand table, as these facilities must have existed in those ancient times. The drawings were then laid out consistently, using a 57-meter module. These facts are profoundly at odds with historic understandings of Native Americans and demonstrate that they had a great cultural heritage of mathematics and earth measure previously unrecognized. The *Atlas of American Indian Geometry* will be what the books of Euclid and Archimedes have long been to the Greeks — a national or ethnic book of their mathematics. ❖

Priceless Caxton book goes on exhibition

A priceless medieval history book, printed and signed by William Caxton, is to be made available to the public after being locked in a town council's safe for 83 years.

The *Polychronicon*, one of the first books to be printed in England and in mint condition, is being given to the Canterbury Cathedral Library on permanent loan by Tenterden council, Kent, which was given the book in 1921. It means that the work — written in Latin by Ranulph Hugden, a Benedictine monk, in 1360 and translated into Middle English by John of Trevisa, chaplain to Lord Thomas of Berkeley, in 1387 — will be available to historians and put on display at exhibitions for the first time. The book contains a detailed history from the arrival of man through to the Black Death and is renowned for its description of the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

Caxton updated it with details of world history up to 1482, when the book was printed. Colin Saunders, Tenterden's town clerk, said the council was given the book as a farewell gift from an American businessman returning home after making his fortune in Britain. "It has been kept in a safe ever since and has not been on display," said Mr. Saunders. "Apart from the odd trusted person we could show it to, nobody could come in and see it as we do not have the facilities for viewings. There is only me and two clerical staff in this small town council building."

The loan of the book was partially prompted by fears that a growing damp problem in the offices could damage it. "A book like that needs to be preserved rather than just kept on a shelf," said Mr. Saunders. "The staff at the library understand better than us how to look after rare old books, so that its condition will not deteriorate."

Caxton was born in Tenterden in 1422. About 30 copies of the *Polychronicon* survive, but the Tenterden edition is believed to be the original and has handwritten annotations in its margins as well as being signed by the printer. As it is beyond value it is impossible to insure, says Sarah Gray, the cathedral's assistant librarian.

"We are very excited about having it. We have a tremendous collection of rare books, but not having a Caxton has always been a big regret. People always ask us if we have one, so this is a real coup and will fill a major gap in our collec-

tion. This is a beautiful example of Caxton's work and looks almost brand new." ❖

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Submitted by Caxtonian Frank J. Piehl

A Sandburg first edition, with a spin

Dan Crawford

In 1920, the major players in the American recording industry got together to discuss on the sly how to deal with a new technological breakthrough. When the next major change came, in 1948, there was no such cooperation. So the public had to contend with the 12-inch LP, the 10-inch EP, the 10-inch single, the 7-inch EP, and the 7-inch single until the different formats worked out the market. (For those who aren't old enough to remember, the 12-inch LP and 7-inch single won the battle.)

None of which matters much except to help explain why there's a Carl Sandburg first edition ten inches in diameter with a hole in the center.

Decca Records produced a number of Carl Sandburg's records, in both the 12-inch LP and 10-inch EP formats: "Sandburg Reads Sandburg," "The American Songbag," etc. But "The Five Marvelous Pretzels/The Three Nice Mice Brothers" was a throwback to a 10-inch single played at 78 rpm. Among the rest of the confusion among phonograph records, the 78 rpm speed was kept up as a format for children for many years after other genres abandoned it. (There were still 7-inch 78s during my childhood, which was only about seven years ago, Daylight Savings Time.)

The two stories on the record, related to the *Rootabaga Stories* by Sandburg but not quite of them, were copyrighted in 1953 by Harcourt Brace, Sandburg's print publisher. They seem, however, not to have appeared in print; Sandburg produced them for this record, and there they have stayed.

As with other Decca releases, Sandburg performs his own material, sounding for all the world like a Golden Age radio announcer. (During the Golden Age of radio, a Midwestern accent was the goal of all announcers; sponsors felt it offended the fewest listeners.) In both the writing and the reading of the stories, Sandburg enjoyed playing his words, rolling out the names of the three nice mice brothers (anaxAGoras, alciBIades, and NONymous) and, on the other side, adding the brass of a carnival barker as he described the circus dreams of the five marrrrrrvellous pretzels.

The tale of mice is a courtly tale, as the mice pay housecalls on Mr. and Mrs. Cat, who greet each mouse politely, if inaccurately. (They have understandable difficulty in telling alciBIades from anaxAGoras.) The story of the pretzels is not quite a Christmas tale, since it takes place December 20, in the window of a bakery where the five pretzels iron out the details of their upcoming career in show business. There may be a moral to each of these stories, but Sandburg was really producing shaggy dog stories that might entertain the listener. Both use the repetition method, in which the teller repeats key phrases until the child hearing the story is ready and waiting for them, joining in on the chorus. Sardonic humor is to be found in each — the finish of the pretzel story might seem a bit twisted to some sensitive listeners — but there is also a belief that children can learn to enjoy, rather than fear, long words like anonymous or anaxAGoras. It may even be that Sandburg felt a child could enjoy the roll of words and a good laugh without necessarily having to learn anything else by it.

Carl Sandburg is said to have produced a number of children's stories that never appeared on disc or page. Publishers apparently found the tales too wild and uncontrolled for children. These two, at least, had their day, though it seems to have done them little good on the first-edition market. (The record would seem to be a prime example of the article that is rare but not particularly valuable.) But an admirer of the *Rootabaga Stories*, more poetic in their prose than some of the later poems, might well seek out Decca Record X-109.

Because otherwise (unless some sneak decides to print the stories), you'll never know which of the five marrrrrrvellous pretzels was chosen to ride the elephant. ❖

Achille J. St. Onge, miniaturist in books

Suzanne J. Pruchnicki

Most miniature book collectors know of Achille J. St. Onge from the finely printed books he created, but few know about his early life or his life outside of his published books.

It is said the child is father of the man, and the seeds of our interests are surely sown early in life. According to Achille's son David St. Onge, Achille was born January 18, 1913, somewhere in Canada. Since he spoke French in his youth, he very likely was born in Quebec. His mother's maiden name was Maxfield, and his father, Ernest St. Onge, was a barber. Ernest suffered the loss of his first two wives and married a third time. When Achille's mother died young, he and his brother Lionel were sent to St. Ann's orphanage in Worcester, MA. David is not certain but he thinks his father may have spent 12 years there.

Each Sunday, Achille's father came to visit, bringing a box of chocolates as a treat. It seems the boys were not allowed to keep chocolates for themselves and, consequently, Achille always had a fondness for chocolates. Orphanage food was not home-cooking or gourmet cuisine. In later life, Achille never again ate porridge as it reminded him of orphanage fare. He attended North High School in Worcester, where he served on the yearbook and the school newspaper staffs and belonged to the French Club. Because he was an avid reader, he became interested in books. Perhaps books furnished a pleasure and an escape from the structured institutional life of the orphanage.

In 1935, he published a book of poetry, *Outside the Garden Gate*, and a practical book, *How to Drive a Car*, for a driving school. Achille engaged in a variety of employments, none of which had to do with literature or fine printing. David remembered his father had worked for the Wyman Garden Company, a firm which forged and cast airplane parts during World War II. At various times, he operated a variety store, ran a gas station, and worked at Crompton and Kroll, commercial loom makers. Later, he worked for the U.S. Envelope Company and Colonial Press.

On October 8, 1935, Achille married Margaret Backie of Kingstone, NH. She was a home economics teacher. Achille could now enjoy the home and family life he had missed as a

child. The couple had three children, Elizabeth Ann, David, and Daniel.

Achille's first miniature book, *Noel, Christmas Echoes Down the Ages*, was published in 1935. In 1939, 1940, and 1943, Daniel B. Updike had letter-press printed three miniatures for Achille. By 1950, Achille was arranging to have his books letter-press printed by the well-known Chiswick Press of England. The books were bound in leathers by Sangorski and Sutcliffe. It seems his fourth book, *Jefferson's Inaugural Address*, was done by Stobbs Press. The quality of the book was criticized, and Achille destroyed most of the copies. Never again would "poor quality" be said of his books.

Achille had a strong interest in American history, particularly Abraham Lincoln. He joined the Lincoln Society of Boston, a society of several hundred members, which engaged speakers such as former President Herbert Hoover and Senator Hubert Humphrey. Achille developed a lifelong friendship with a judge who was an important member of the group, and Achille himself acted as treasurer. According to David and Bob Massman, who enjoyed a 20-year friendship with Achille, he was charming, generous, and sociable. He liked people and took pleasure in talking about his interests and miniature books. He liked sharing with people of all walks of life.

David does not know exactly when his father became interested in the sea and ships, but after his first voyage, he booked passage on the maiden voyages of the *Queen Elizabeth II*, the *United States*, and the *France*. David chuckled, remembering that the informal race between the *United States* and *Queen Elizabeth II* (which the American ship won) caused Achille to miss two of the scheduled meals on board, as the *United States* arrived in port earlier than expected.

Editions of St. Onge ranged from several hundred to 10,000, for the *John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address*. Though his publishing of books was called a hobby, he brought to miniature book production the standards and quality of an expert. His books are a pleasure to read in their leather, gold-stamped covers of red, emerald, turquoise, and tan — pleasant to touch and admire.

The achievements of Achille J. St. Onge remind us that books to be treasured are not only for those born to a privileged class, but to those intensely interested in the printed word and in the manner with which books are presented and preserved. His interest in beauty of form and content of substance is apparent in his books, treasured today by hundreds of collectors. ❖

Bookmarks...

Luncheon and dinner meetings resume in September



Figure 3



Figure 4

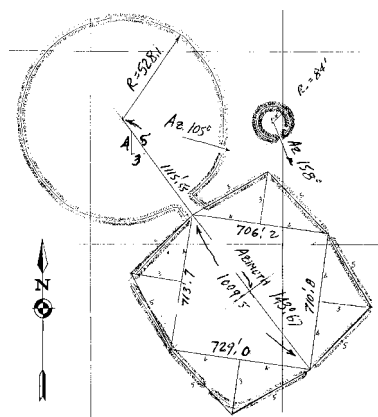


Figure 5

What effigies these,
lying in morning sun of autumn,
dew-covered grasses giving
texture, feather-like, to shapes
of earth mimicking those of heaven?
Is it image of duck, like those,
which break the silence overhead
as they lift from river westward?
Is it horned owl, lying like
a child's giant sculpting in sea sand?

"You have kinship with us," a voice,
soft as autumn breeze and wafting
from where, I cannot say, speaks.
I listen. Was it the wind only?
Or imagination activated by my solitude
in this forlorn place of remembrance?

"It is kinship of blood and spirit,"
it seems to say. I nod in silence
of cornfield, cemetery, and stream below,
neither frightened nor surprised
to be addressed in this manner,
on this hill, on this day.

"The farmer plows and sows and reaps
these fields and never knows his lurching tractor
shakes the remnants of our people
here below."

"I know," I whisper,
neither knowing absolutely nor fully
the thrust of the indictment.

Robert Cotner

From "Lines Composed on Native American Effigy
Mounds Near Aurora, Illinois," Columbus Day,
1992.