CAXTONIAN

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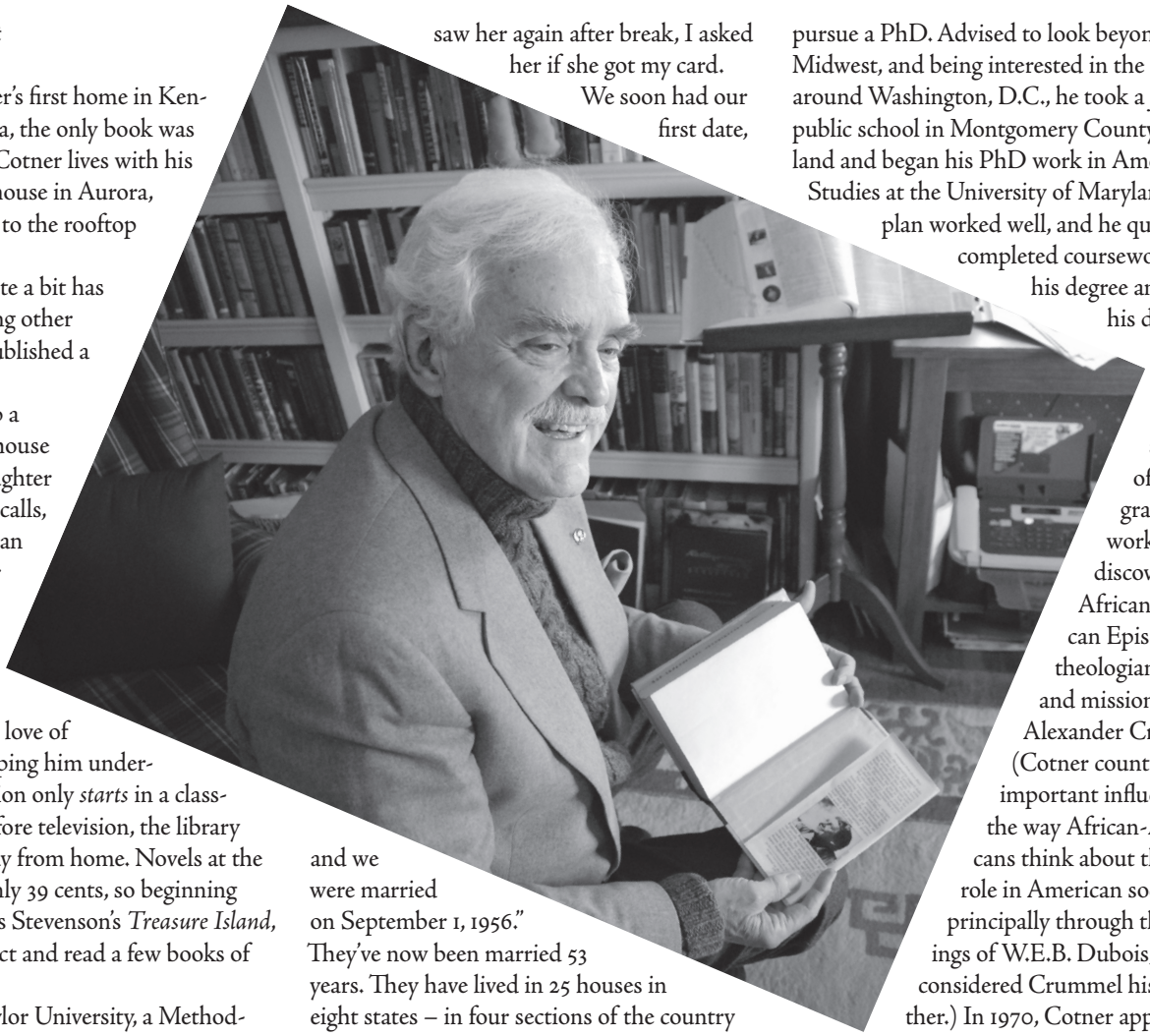
The Books in Robert Cotner's Life

Robert McCamant



In Robert Cotner's first home in Kendallville, Indiana, the only book was the Bible. Today, Cotner lives with his wife Norma in a house in Aurora, Illinois, crammed to the rooftop with books.

In between, quite a bit has happened. (Among other things, he's just published a book.)

Cotner grew up a Baptist, "but our house was filled with laughter – not books," he recalls, "and though I was an only child, I never felt lonely." He credits excellent teachers in the local schools with inspiring in him a love of learning, with helping him understand that education only *starts* in a classroom. In years before television, the library was his home away from home. Novels at the dime store cost only 39 cents, so beginning with Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, he started to collect and read a few books of his own.

He went to Taylor University, a Methodist college in Upland, Indiana, when they recruited him to play basketball and compete on the track team. "We won the college's first Hoosier College Conference track championship," he says, and I was Hoosier college high hurdle champion in 1956," he admits.

At Taylor he met Norma Jean Walker. "Actually, the first time I saw her (just before Christmas break), I didn't speak to her. I was waiting in line at a phone booth in a dorm, and she was using the phone. When she came out, I asked my friends, 'what's that girl's name?' One guy knew her, and said "That's Norma Walker;" because I worked in the Alumni Office, I looked up her home address. I sent her a Christmas card in 1955. When I saw her again after break, I asked her if she got my card. We soon had our first date, and we were married on September 1, 1956." They've now been married 53 years. They have lived in 25 houses in eight states – in four sections of the country and West Africa. They have two children and five grandchildren.

The most formative academic force in his early collegiate life was Vida Wood. ("Can you imagine a better-named botany professor than 'Vida Wood'?" he exclaims in his book.) He ended up majoring in biology under Miss Wood's influence. But he betrayed his real interest by minoring in English.

When it came time to look for a job, he found one teaching high school English – not Biology – in Fort Recovery, Ohio. He simultaneously worked on a master's degree in English at Ball State University during summers. He parlayed his degree there into a teaching job, but before long decided to pursue a PhD. Advised to look beyond the Midwest, and being interested in the area around Washington, D.C., he took a job in a public school in Montgomery County, Maryland and began his PhD work in American Studies at the University of Maryland. The plan worked well, and he quickly completed coursework for his degree and began his dissertation. In 1969 as a part of his graduate work, Cotner discovered the African-American Episcopal theologian, teacher, and missionary Alexander Crummel. (Cotner counts him an important influence on the way African-Americans think about their role in American society, principally through the writings of W.E.B. Dubois, who considered Crummel his godfather.) In 1970, Cotner applied for and was granted a Senior Fulbright Lectureship in English at the University of Liberia, where Crummel had also taught. Bob and Norma packed up their 4-year-old daughter Erin, their 12-year-old son Jon, and their Siamese cat Natasha and moved to Monrovia for the 1971-2 school year. But Cotner's hope of doing research was thwarted by a combination of bureaucracy and little interest from other faculty in the topic. He never even succeeded in determining if the university archives contained any information on Crummel.

The PhD dissertation went unfinished after Liberia because he was elected chair of the

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CAXTONIAN

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BOB COTNER, *from page 1*

English/Philosophy Department at Montgomery College, where he had taught since 1968. He was soon swept into departmental and college politics, financial turmoil, and general campus ferment. By 1977, he left teaching, becoming a fundraising executive back at his alma mater. Since that time, he has worked in fundraising administration, for academic institutions, charitable organizations, and – since 2004 – for the Shriners Hospitals for Children-Chicago. He has been asked to give the hospital another five years, but he's bargaining for less. He and Norma would like to build a smaller house in Marseilles, Illinois, to be nearer their daughter and her family.

Since 1962, Cotner has been collecting books, so it was natural that when he was invited to join the Caxton Club in 1990 by Abel Berland, he accepted. He quickly threw himself into Club activities, most notably founding the *Caxtonian* in 1993 and serving as its editor for 11 years. At the invitation of Ned Rosenheim and the Club Council, he served as President from 1993 through our Centennial year of 1995. In 1998 he was elected an honorary member and was presented with a set of *Caxtonians* in a handmade box.

Cotner's array of jobs and various venues has been accompanied by an intellectual and religious searching – a journey – as well. He is no longer the all-accepting Baptist he had been in his early years. He and Norma were pleased with the election of Barack Obama. "He represents all that is the best in the thinking of Alexander Crummel," Cotner explains. "By giving the best possible education to the brightest African-Americans, we have fulfilled the vision of both Crummel and DuBois – and we have come a long way in recovering from the problems of race that have beset our country." The same journey resulted in his new book.

Bob Cotner traces the origin of his book, *Pilgriming – A Journey Into the Faith of Age* (reviewed by Sherman Beverly on page 4), to a meal he and Norma had at the Little Owl, a pub in Geneva, Illinois. The tables were close together, so it was hard to avoid falling into conversation with another couple at the next table. The two couples talked about the weather, local politics – the usual noncommittal topics. But then the man at the other table asked, "Where do you go to church?"

"We haven't gone to church for 20 years," Bob began. "We haven't found a church around here with good music *and* intelligent preaching."

The man proposed that they visit Fox Valley Presbyterian. The next Sunday, they did, and found that he had not misrepresented the church; they started to attend regularly. About a year later, the assistant minister was looking for someone to teach a Wednesday night adult-education class. Bob decided he wanted to do it.

He harkened back to some advice that Dr. Elton Trueblood, a friend and mentor back in the 60s and 70s, had given him: before you publish a book, *teach* it. Cotner had been trying to make sense of his own religious beliefs ever since he stopped attending church regularly, and here was a wonderful opportunity: he could think through his beliefs, try to explain them to others, and in the process finish a book he had begun in 1978. So for seven weeks, he stayed one week ahead of his class. He would write a chapter, pass it out a week ahead of time, and discuss it the following week. "The group was an excellent mix of many viewpoints," Cotner says, "both liberals and conservatives. Class members pointed out many things that I said which were too strong, as well as other things that were unclear," he recalls.

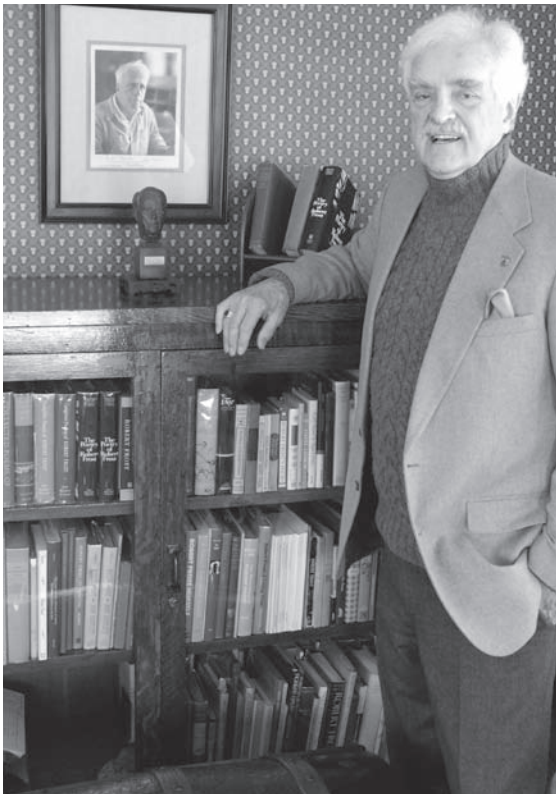
After a period of editing and sharing the book with friends – including some Caxton members – Cotner decided it was time to look for a publisher. He tried a Presbyterian publisher, and they turned it down. He tried two Baptist firms, and they said no. Ones associated with other denominations were no more accepting. So then he did something he thought he would never do: he looked around on the Internet for publishers he didn't know about. He found Tate Publishing, an Oklahoma company specializing in beginning authors. He sent off his manuscript. Within a few weeks he had a favorable letter back from the daughter of the founder. They wanted to publish his book.

"And it turned out that they are wonderful to work with," Bob says. "They did a nice job on the design and edited intelligently. It turned out well." Even his 15-year-old grandson says he's read and liked it, but says he "doesn't understand it all."

I asked Cotner to take me on a tour of his bookshelves.

He began with Vernon Lewis Parrington, whose *Main Currents in American Thought* had been much on his mind in working on his book. "He was America's most influential intellectual from 1929 to 1940," he says. "Every place I studied English, professors directed me to read him." Cotner has Parrington's main work in a variety of editions, including the first (in wrappers). He also has his monograph on Sinclair Lewis, also in a first edition.

Parrington's life intersects with Cotner's, not chronologically (he died in 1929) but intellectually and geographically. Parrington is an important part of his chapter called "On Becoming a Radical Moderate." Cotner attributes to Parrington the notion of three important resistances forming the backbone of American thought: resistance to a single church, resistance to the [English] Crown, and resistance to slavery. These three essentially liberal ideas have



Cotner at the "shrine" to Frost (left), and with his wife, Norma Jean.

made our country what it is.

Parrington intersects with Cotner geographically because Parrington's life began in Aurora in 1871. In fact, tracing Parrington's origins, life, and travels has become something of a preoccupation with Cotner. He has visited and photographed most of the Parrington family homes, traced his ancestry, and met his descendants. But the ultimate achievement of his Parrington efforts was having a street in Aurora (not surprisingly, near Cotner's house) named "Vernon L. Parrington Drive."

He moved on next to the shelf of novels by Eugenia Price. Cotner knew her and took her picture several times for various book jackets. How did he meet her? "In 1974 I visited a book dealer in Brunswick, Georgia. I happened to mention that I had photographed Robert Frost. She said, 'We have a local author who needs to have her picture taken. Why don't you talk to her?' So I met Eugenia at a restaurant in St. Simons, the town in which she lived from 1961 until her death in 1996, and about which she wrote in one of her trilogies set in the Golden Isles of Georgia. We visited her every year thereafter."

Eugenia Price also appears in his book, and was the inspiration for defining himself as a Radical Moderate. "You can't be that – that's an oxymoron," she told him. "'You call yourself born again,' I countered, 'and that's an oxymoron too!' We all laughed."

There was a shelf of books by Caxtonians: Elmer Gertz, Harrison Hayford, Frank Piehl, and other Caxtonians are part of his collection. Next was a bookcase of nature books – Cotner still considers himself a practicing biologist. Then his Abraham Lincoln collection. Many of the books in the Sandburg group are signed. Then there was a group of Hawthornes, and a whole bookcase of the Transcendentalists: Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. Cotner sighed when he came to the Philip Appleman collection. "He's a serious athiest. He does not like my new book. But he remains a dear friend with whom I communicate regularly," Cotner adds.

On the way downstairs, we passed a framed painting by Don Lindstrom. There were several around the house, both watercolors and oils. One of his watercolors, of a man walking through a foggy scene, appears on the cover of Cotner's book. The original hangs above a bookcase in their living room. Cotner and Lindstrom formed a bond during the many years when they collaborated on an annual Salvation Army Christmas card for the Chicago area, featuring a Lindstrom painting and a Cotner poem.

In the living room there is a shelf of Studs Terkel books, each inscribed in Terkel's effusive hand. The Cotners have an apartment not far from Terkel's home in Chicago.

But the real collecting highlight on the first floor of the house is what has been nicknamed the "Frost Shrine." Both Bob and Norma are lovers of Robert Frost, and both have participated in building this collection. There is an unusual photographic portrait of Frost – purchased from Florence Shay many years ago, various Frost memorabilia, and signed copies of every book Frost published (except two, which Bob confidently says they will soon find). Bob and Norma and their then-4-year-old son spent two hours with Frost in 1962 at the Homer Noble Farm, Ripton, Vermont, his summer home near the Breadloaf Writers Conference at Middlebury College. Cotner wanted to take his picture, to which Frost assented on the condition that he not be photographed in front of a stone wall or birch tree.

Cotner succeeded in photographing Frost, and displays the prized photograph in his Shriners hospital office. "I was casting about for ways to relax him for the picture," he explains, "and I remembered his affinity with John Kennedy, at whose Inaugural he had read a poem just 18 months earlier. So I asked him what he thought of Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*. He loved the book and became remarkably stern as he discussed its importance as an American literary icon. I caught that facial sternness, that firmness, that strength, in my photograph," Cotner says.

All in all, the journey for Cotner has been life-fulfilling. He credits his membership in the Caxton Club and his long association with Club members as highlights of his years in Chicago. "The creation and editing of the *Caxtonian*," he says, "provided the sort of intellectual stimulation I needed to create *Pilgriming*. In fact, many portions of the book are passages from my *Caxtonian* essays." One of his regrets – and he says he really has few regrets – is that his travel schedule at the hospital precludes his attending Club meetings regularly.

"That will change when we get in our new house – and I retire – someday," he says with a smile.

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Photographs by Robert McCamant.

An Uplifting Experience: Pilgriming *by Robert Cotner*

Reviewed by Sherman Beverly, Jr.

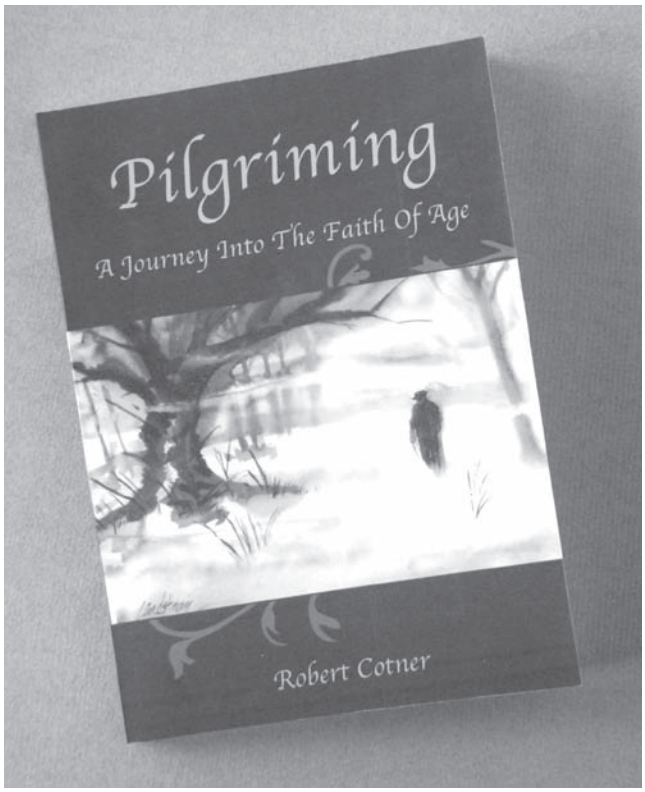
Some books make us laugh; many cause us to cry; others make us think; still others make us laugh, cry, think, *and* examine our personal lives. Whereas I don't remember laughing much while reading *Pilgriming*, the book takes its readers through a wide range of emotions. It is a serious book that forces us to think and earnestly examine our personal values and principles.

Suddenly, while working on the third attempt at this review, I realized that any effort to discover multiple faiths in Robert Cotner is futile. His faith never swerved. The longer he lived and the more of life he experienced, the more he came to realize who and what he has always been. He didn't suddenly become a 'Pyramid Dweller' when he encountered the term in Frederick Turner's article, "Designs for a New Academy" in *Harper's Magazine*. Rather, he simply discovered a term which identified him. He didn't need the article to tell him that the academy's approach to education is flawed. He already knew that everything that exists is, like a pyramid, grounded in something that has existed before. He didn't need Turner to tell him that

> [T]he error of the academy has been to deny, by means of its metaphors of demarcation between fields, the intimate connections, the continuous and omnipresent relevance of other fields at every stage of investigation. (p. 116)

But Turner's sentence, "For those *at home in the pyramid*, nothing human is alien; indeed, nothing is alien," was insightful. Suddenly Cotner rejoiced that he finally had a name for himself. He is a 'Pyramid Dweller.' And so are we all, whether we realize it or not. As we recognize this and behave as fellow dwellers should, the world will become a better place for all of us.

Cotner had already understood the nexus that binds everything together. An examination of his academic studies reveals how truly he believes this. Many in education would consider him clueless in his approach to his studies. He chooses to study what interests him without regard to discipline. He takes us along as he explores discipline after discipline, not as separate entities, but as a way to understand the whole. Ms. Wood, his college botany teacher, regretted that he became an English, rather than a biology, teacher. The connection between the two was quite clear to Cotner, who wrote, "But I found in the study of



American literature a rich reference of thinking and writing regarding nature." He does not spend his time with the 'walls' we build; rather, his effort is directed toward building bridges. He firmly believes that the mathematician, the poet, the priest, the politician, the naturalist, the teacher, the artist, the physician – you name it – are connected to one another. Discovering the things that connect us is a worthy endeavor. His study of Greek Civilization helps him understand the principles on which Western Civilization is built. He believes in nurturing the intellect. He worries, however, that our strong belief in equality actually impedes our fuller understanding of all peoples. He states that, "We have given equality, I am sorry to say, to ignorance *and* intelligence, and much of what passes as public opinion in our day derives from the lowest levels of intelligence." (p. 76)

Cotner takes us with him as he explores the mental and spiritual road he traveled from what he calls his "Faith of Youth" to his "Faith of Age." His early life offers evidence that who he is now is very similar to who he was. He liked people then. He learned early in his youth that everyone enters his life for a purpose. Others do not "intrude" in Cotner's space. He welcomes fellow human beings to join him in his journey. He uses his intellect and love of people to assist him in understanding why their paths intersect. More importantly, he reaches into the deepest recesses of his mind to make sense of encounters with others. In fact, the word "others" may be out of context here since Cotner thinks in terms of "we, us, and our." "The call of faith," he writes, "…is not singular but plural of plurals. And in plurality we find common consent to sing, to weep, to laugh, to celebrate in diversity the universal heritage of the human soul." (p. 36) He once told his students that his business card simply reads "H.B." "Human Being," he responded when asked what it means. "We've got to learn to see each other, simply, as human beings, and nothing else." (p. 51)

He was still young when he learned to accept friends as they are. He learned early that one does not expect friends to reinvent themselves to fit neatly into one's personal behavior and thought patterns. His best friend during his youth was Jewish. Chapter 5, entitled "Growing up in a Jewish Home," helps us understand this. Cotner's respect of people unlike himself prevented him from subjecting his friend to his church's intense efforts to convert the friend, a Jew, into a Christian. Thus, he never invited him to visit his Baptist church. Doing that would have embarrassed both his friend and himself. He believed then and now that "…true maturity, comes…as we learn to understand and accept at least one other culture, including another religion, as equal to our own." (p. 47) Cotner stopped short of including all religions.

The fact that Cotner considers himself both "conservative and liberal" offers insight into his being. "This both-and may, indeed, be the most significant both-and dimension of my life," he writes. Conservative and liberal, he continues, is the "contraction and expansion of

a healthy society, both necessary for the well-being of a living, dynamic human organism in its beneficent relationship with itself and with governments." (pp. 79-80) He says liberals are tolerant. He often reminds one of his most conservative friends that, "if I were as conservative as you, we couldn't be friends…." It's his liberalism, he reminds his friend, that brought and binds the two of them together as friends. If we think clearly about ourselves, we may soon discover many contradictions existing side by side within each of each of us.

Cotner credits his deep love and respect of the mind for his present mature faith. Very few pages do not offer evidence of the author's desire and commitment to learning and, through it, to understanding. He does not casually mention those who influenced his development. He pinpoints specific instances and circumstances. He relates how they helped him on the journey; the never-ending relationships he continues to nurture; the books he has read and those who directed him to them; and the ways they continue to impact his life. The pages are generously sprinkled with names of notable people – Cotner has indeed rubbed shoulders with famous and important people. A perusal of the index and reference sections is impressive. But they are not listed for show – read the book and learn how one man learns from practically everyone he encounters.

We meet his wife, Norma, in a loving and passionate way. This "story for the ages in its history," as the author describes it, illustrates the fact that we never know what will result from encounters with fellow human beings. The announcement of the young couple's engagement in a local newspaper set in motion a series of events that are stranger than fiction. I don't dare tell the story here, but it does suggest that we must take care, as Cotner does, in our responses to those who enter our life.

We are also introduced to some brave young people struggling with crippling physical problems, and the caring people who labor to help them. He summed up his visit to a Shriners Hospital for Children in the following words:

> True faith is best fulfilled in what I call 'sacred humanism.' It means wrapping your arms around another person until she can walk on her own, until he has real ears, or until his wounds are thoroughly healed. It is the ultimate concern by people who love people. (p. 61)

Readers of *Pilgriming* will be moved by the compassion displayed by the stars in these narratives.

Cotner is a poet. The children he saw at the hospital one day and the stories he heard the Shriners tell about their work motivated Cotner, the poet, to write a heartfelt poem. (See it for yourself on pages 62-63.) I must emphasize again that the book is not about what and whom the man knows. It is about how he uses what and whom he knows to help him in his self-discovery.

The author decries the anti-intellectualism of the 21st century. He writes:

> We are the inheritors of the accumulated anti-intellectualism, past and present, and every aspect of our society has been seriously impacted by it: the spirit of anti-intellectualism negatively impacts our government, our universities, and our families – even our judiciary. I offer *Pilgriming* as a beginning, initial step, toward living up to the rigorous standard of intellectual life that are our legacy as 21st-century Americans. (p. 77)

Cotner did not suddenly "more than twenty years ago" give up his faith. His intellect led him to discern that "concern for the 'things of faith' are less important than the concern for "inner dimensions, deeper personal relationships, and sounder linkages with those elements bearing marks of the eternal on them…." It was his intellect, his observation of deep relationships in action, and his thirst for something more eternal that finally led him to redirect his faith. So, in spite of his deep ties to evangelicalism, one day while worshiping in a small Methodist church, he suddenly decided that he had had enough. His inner voice said to him, "You don't belong here, Cotner." It reminded him that, unlike them, "…you think in a both-and manner." His faith remained, but his response to it changed. (p. 30)

Finally, Cotner proposed twelve new Theses he has chosen to shape his spiritual life as an aging, but engaged, citizen and Christian. (pp. 93-96) He urges readers to examine them. He encourages each person to develop his/her own set by which to "shape and invigorate the individual spiritual life."

Pilgriming is the story of Cotner's journey, one that has produced a good man. But, it is still his journey. Good people, including non-believers, have always resided in our midst. Most of us want to be good. We all have the capacity to become good. We all make this same journey, but each journey is unique. Though we are very much alike, we, too, are unique. Though no two people make the same journey, nothing need stand in our way of becoming who we wish to be. My journey, and Cotner's, have led us both to many/most of the same conclusions, but by different routes. I understand the valuable lessons Cotner learned through his study of the Greeks. Those same lessons came my way via study of ancient African and Native American cultures. Cotner understands that and, I believe, advises each of us to travel through life with an open mind, open arms, and a thirst for knowledge. Hopefully such attention to life will lead us to understand that we most assuredly do need each other.

I highly recommend *Pilgriming*.

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Sherman Beverly, Jr., Ph.D. ('96), is Professor Emeritus, Social Studies Education, at Northeastern Illinois University.

Nominating Committee Report

The 2009 committee, which consists of Jill Gage, Dorothy Sinson, and Karen Skubish (with C. Steven Tomashefsky serving ex-officio) announces their candidates for election:

for President: David S. Mann
for Vice President: Wendy Cowles Husser
for Treasurer: Thomas E. Swanstrom
for Secretary: Bruce H. Boyer
for Council class of 2012: Susan Hanes, Jon Lellenberg, Margaret Oellrich, Morrell McKenzie Shoemaker Jr, and Mary S. Williams

This slate will be presented at the Annual Meeting of the Club, to be held at the Newberry Library on Wednesday, May 20.

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Bernice E. Gallagher
(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Four exhibitions are offered at the Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: "Modern and Contemporary Works on Paper" (heralding the opening of the Modern Wing, an exhibition of modern and contemporary works rarely exhibited, including ephemera and artists' books from the Ryerson Library's prized Mary Reynolds Collection), Department of Prints and Drawings, ongoing; "Multiples, Parts, and Pieces" (focusing primarily on late twentieth century artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Jenny Holzer, Dieter Roth, and Ed Ruscha, whose work shows how artistic concepts are employed in books and serial publications), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through May 18; "The Bill Peet Storybook Menagerie" (sketches, storyboards, and thirty-four books by Bill Peet, Walt Disney's principal animator for twenty-seven years), Galleries 15 and 16, through May 24; "Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago" (part of a citywide celebration of the Burnham Plan Centennial, including maps, diagrams, perspective drawings, and watercolors, historically significant and artistically exceptional, many of them in fragile condition and rarely displayed), Gallery 24, through December 15.

Science Fiction Illustration at Northwestern
Book cover design from Frank Kelly Freas *As He Sees It*.

Two exhibitions in the Lenhardt Library at the Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "A Host of Golden Daffodils: Selections from the Rare Book Collection" (examples of daffodils in botanical illustration, from woodcuts to color engraving), through May 10; "Fruitful Abundance: Pomologies from the Rare Book Collection" (examples of botanical illustrations of fruits and herbs found in books from the Lenhardt's Rare Book Collection), May 15 through August 9.

"Lincoln Treasures" (a year-long centennial celebration exhibiting many prized Lincoln artifacts and documents), Chicago History Museum, 1501 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-642-4600, ongoing.

"Lincolniana" (fifty books, pamphlets, graphic works and maps relating to Lincoln, including limited editions of his speeches and poetry, accounts of his stories and jokes, biographical materials, book presentations written by Carl Sandburg and Paul Angle, artifacts from the 1909 commemorative events, and additional materials from the collections of Brunson MacChesney, son of General Nathan MacChesney, head of Illinois's 1909 Lincoln Centennial Celebration, and the estates of James R. and Betsy Needham Getz), Archives and Special Collections, Lower Level, Donnelly and Lee Library, Lake Forest College, 555 N. Sheridan Road, Lake Forest, 847-735-5064, through May 31.

"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe" (an exhibition of Fuller's extraordinary body of work, from his geodesic domes to books popularizing the terms "spaceship earth" and "synergetics," organized by the Whitney Museum of Art in association with the Department of Special Collections at the Stanford University Libraries), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 220 E. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660, through June 21.

"Book Crimes" (an exhibition of books organized according to intriguing categories: Murder and the Book Trade; Lost Libraries; Violence Against Books; Falsification), Spotlight Exhibition Series, The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090, through May 22.

"The Artist's Telescope: Science Fiction and Illustration" (a selection of books and magazines displaying artists' perspectives on science fiction, from its beginnings to the mid-1970s), Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, 3rd Floor, Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658, through June 30.

Three exhibitions continue in the Special Collections Research Center, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "East European Jews in the German-Jewish Imagination from the Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica" (documents tracing the experience of German Jews, from emancipation in the nineteenth century to the eve of World War II), Rosenberger Library of Judaica Gallery, through June 22; "On Equal Terms: Educating Women at the University of Chicago" (archival material relating to women at the University as members of an intellectual community, one that provided opportunities for political activism and community involvement, for friendship, romance, and sexual experimentation), Main Gallery, through July 14; "Our Lincoln: Bicentennial Icons from the Barton Collection of Lincolniana" (documents and artifacts that include a handwritten page from the young Lincoln's "Sum Book" and one of the few surviving letters written by Lincoln to his wife Mary Todd Lincoln), through June 26.

"Your Pal, Cliff: Selections from the H. C. Westermann Study Collection" (art work, sketchbooks, printing blocks, personal papers, and correspondence by Westermann, a central figure in post-World War II American art and known to the art world as "Cliff"), Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5500 S. Greenwood, Chicago, 773-702-0200, through September 6.

"To See Reality in a New Light: The Art and Activism of Marion Perkins" (includes art work as well as original correspondence, rare photographs and memorabilia relating to Chicago Renaissance artist and social activist Marion Perkins) from the Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection, Exhibit Gallery, Woodson Regional Library, 9515 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, 312-747-6900, through December 31.

Bernice Gallagher will be happy to receive your listings at either 847-234-5255 or gallagher@lakeforest.edu.

Caxtonians Collect: Wilbert Seidel

Fifty-third in a series of interviews with members

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Wilbert Seidel joined the Caxton Club in 1964, nominated by Jim Hayes. We have several living members who joined before he did, so that in itself is not remarkable. But when you realize that Seidel was 55 years old when he joined, it becomes more unusual. This September, he will be a hundred years old.

In fact, Seidel came late to the Caxton Club. He had joined the Society of Typographic Arts in 1939, when he was a mere 30. But he had known many Caxtonians long before he joined; in those days there was a great deal of overlap between the groups.

Seidel spent most of his working life as a professor of art at Northwestern University. Here was how it came about: After growing up as the son of a Lutheran minister in Freeport, Illinois, he came to Chicago to study at the School of the Art Institute, where he got a degree in 1931. But in those days, the Art Institute didn't offer the full range of courses for a liberal arts degree, and there were not a lot of jobs for new Art Institute graduates, so he decided to go to Northwestern to get a broader degree, one that might permit him to teach high school. He got his BA, but while he was working on a master's, he was offered a job in the art department of the Jewel Tea Company. He accepted, and spent four years there.

But eventually he started feeling that Jewel, in Barrington, was too far away from what was happening in the world of art and design, so he resigned from Jewel. Seidel had no idea what he would do next, but he thought he should let the people in the art department at Northwestern know that there was a job opportunity for a recent graduate at Jewel. In the process of providing that tip, he was also inadvertently telling Northwestern that he was available, and to his surprise, they offered him a job. True, it was only a part-time assistantship, but it was better than being stuck out in Barrington.

Thinking he needed career advice, he made an appointment to see William Kittredge, then head of the design department at R. R. Donnelly. As a result of the interview, two life-changing events took place: Kittredge nominated him to join the Society of Typographic Arts (which led to his taking the calligraphy class taught by Ernst Detterer of the Newberry Library); Kittredge also called his friend Leland Case, head of Rotary International, and suggested Seidel to redesign The *Rotarian*. So, late in the Depression, having quit a job in industry, he found himself with two jobs far closer to the center of things: teaching art at Northwestern and designing a monthly magazine.

Seidel displays his S.T.A. membership certificate, which has calligraphy by Ray DaBoll and bears the signature of R. Hunter Middleton.

Photograph by Robert McCamant

The calligraphy class taught by Detterer was extremely important to him. "There were two main ways it affected the rest of my life," he explains. "First of all, the information was fascinating. I've been interested in the history of letterforms and writing ever since. But besides that, I was introduced to so many interesting people! There was Detterer himself, Bob Middleton, Jim Hayes, Ray DaBoll. They were tremendous influences."

While working his two jobs, Seidel managed to finish his master's classwork in Art History, but didn't take his oral exams. Soon World War II loomed, and he planned to enlist in the Navy. But the faculty urged him to finish his degree before he left. "They had me in for my orals, but I guess they didn't take them very seriously, because they only talked with me for about 10 minutes, and then announced I had passed." He figures that since he was already on the faculty they could hardly fail him.

His wartime stint was served at Great Lakes in North Chicago. Shortly after enlisting he married Winifred Case, a woman he had met at Northwestern. They had many happy years together, and produced two children. She worked for many years in the design department at Marshall Fields, and was responsible for the design of the Walnut Room Christmas tree at least one year during the war.

In 1945, Seidel returned to Northwestern's art department. He was delighted to discover a lithography press in the hall of the music building, where the art department was then situated. "I was excited, because I had been very interested in printmaking at the Art Institute." He vividly recalls scrounging for stones to use on the press, and having to crowbar some he was offered at $1 apiece from a Chicago printer's frozen back yard.

In the late 40s, the NU administration decided the art department deserved a building of its own, and he was chosen to work with the architects on planning the facilities. Not surprisingly, there was a printmaking studio in the new building, complete with lithography, letterpress, etching, and silkscreen equipment. He taught there happily for many years.

Another high point was receiving a Ford Foundation grant to develop the department's

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Bookmarks...

Luncheon Program
Friday May 8, 2009, Union League Club
Paul Gehl and Jenny Schwartzberg
"Behind the Scenes of a Recent Popular Newberry Exhibit"

Caxtonian Paul Gehl, custodian of the John M. Wing Foundation and Jenny Schwartzberg, collection development assistant (both at the Newberry Library), will entertain with a startling look into the lives of Newberry scholars, centering primarily on their recent co-curated show: "Artifacts of Childhood: 700 Years of Children's Books." Paul and Jenny will tell about "the process of making our exhibit," including identifying themes, choosing items (65 out of 10,000!) and communicating just how strongly children's literature reflects the culture. Paul will speak about Chicago's importance as a children's book publishing center. Added to this mix will be Jenny's inspiring story: born deaf, but with a creative, persistent and tireless mother, who (with the help of her hand-made books) taught her daughter to read, and eventually to speak a language she could not hear.

Note: attendees are invited to bring along a favorite children's book(s) for display. Do attend.

Dinner Program
Wednesday May 20, 2009, Newberry Library
Nancy H. Ramage
"Literary Circles in Baltimore and Paris: The Cone Sisters and Gertrude Stein"

Claribel Cone and Gertrude Stein used to ride the streetcar together in the 1890s, when Claribel was teaching medicine at Johns Hopkins and Gertrude was a medical student there. The Cone and Stein families were in the same circle of immigrant German Jewish families in Baltimore. Claribel and her younger sister, Etta, traveled with Gertrude and her brother Leo Stein in Italy, and Etta crossed the ocean with Gertrude, becoming her intimate friend. In 1905 Etta typed Gertrude's first novel, *Three Lives*, from her manuscript.

When Alice B. Toklas moved in with Gertrude, a rivalry that was to last for decades erupted between Alice and Etta. Nonetheless, the Cone sisters regularly attended the Saturday evening salons at the Stein household, and bought pictures and furniture from Gertrude over many years. Indeed, many of the paintings in the Cone collection, bequeathed to the Baltimore Museum of Art, had originally belonged to Gertrude or Leo Stein. This lecture, with many previously unknown stories, is based on a new book by Nancy Ramage and her mother, Ellen B. Hirschland (sister and mother, respectively, of Caxtonian Ed Hirschland). Claribel and Etta Cone were Nancy's and Ed's great-great aunts. The book, *The Cone Sisters of Baltimore: Collecting at Full Tilt*, is published by Northwestern University Press and copies will be available for purchase.

The May luncheon will take place at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (in the main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30 pm. Luncheon is $30. Details of the May dinner: it will take place at The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton St. Timing: spirits at 5 pm, refreshments at 6 pm, program at 7:30 pm. Price: $55. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org; ***reservations are needed by noon Tuesday for the Friday luncheon, and by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.*** *See www.caxtonclub.org for parking and transit information.*

Beyond May...

JUNE LUNCHEON

On June 12, 2009, Caxtonian Jim Tomes returns to talk about his remarkable family of writers (works housed in the Newberry Library), and especially about his new book, *Dear Mother*, letters Jim's father wrote to his own mother from age 6 (re: Santa Claus) until his death in 1975, including significantly his years as a soldier in WWI.

JUNE DINNER

Wednesday, June 17, Travis McDade (Curator of Law Rare Books at the University of Illinois College of Law) will speak about book thieves and how for a time they were regarded as "lunatics." He has a tale of a Chicago thief who seems to have fit the profile. McDade is author of a recent book, *The Book Thief: The True Crimes of Daniel Spiegelman.*

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curriculum. During a year, he visited many art schools across the country. The highlight was three months spent with Josef Albers at Yale. "I attended all his classes, did the assignments. Since he had been at the Bauhaus, it was a much more theoretical approach to art than I had previously experienced. I especially learned a lot about color," he said.

One upheaval did take place, however. To this point, NU's art department had included both art history and studio art as one department. But suddenly, about 1970, the art historians demanded to be their own department. In the end, Hannah Gray (dean there for a brief period) let the separation take place, and Seidel was named the chair of the new studio art department.

When asked what he remembered from his early days as a Caxtonian, Seidel replied that the club had a lot of magicians. "There must have been 15 magicians in the Club at the time. For special occasions they would get together and take turns performing."

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