CAXTONIAN

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Traveling the Great Platte River Road

Thoughts on the American experience inspired by the Overland Trails and the myriad books written about them

Scotts Bluff, in Nebraska, was one of many huge rock formations the emigrants passed

John C. Roberts

The 1893 annual meeting of the American Historical Association was held in Chicago in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition. The program committee, chaired by William F. Poole, Librarian of the Newberry Library, selected little-known historian Frederick Jackson Turner to deliver a paper. In his now-famous address to the assembled scholars and teachers, Turner argued that the existence of a continuously advancing frontier – the border between settled areas and open lands available to the west – had played a major role in shaping American character, culture and politics. Turner's "Frontier Thesis," he said, explained America's innovative, independent, and questing spirit and its fundamental commitment to personal freedom and democracy. Although many have criticized Turner's thesis during the ensuing years, it has remained influential in interpreting the American experience. In particular, one element of the westward expansion that came to an end at the close of the 19th century has maintained its grip on the American imagination – the overland journey of some half a million emigrants, by covered wagon, horseback, and on foot, to Oregon, California, and Utah between 1841 to 1866. The indomitable spirit of those who crossed the western half of the United States during this period has been celebrated by historians, novelists, movie-makers, and songwriters, and the covered wagon has become one of the iconic images of American culture.

My own fascination with the Overland Trails and the emigrant experience started in my youth, growing up near the site of Fort Kearny in central Nebraska and hiking and camping on the south bank of the Platte River where 100 years earlier travelers had followed the Oregon Trail west. It continued during my undergraduate years in American history courses at Northwestern University, and later emerged as a major focus for my adult book collecting. For the last twenty years I have been acquiring first editions of the major historic works, novels, and other materials related to the westward expansion of the 19th century, and particularly the Overland Trails (a catchall phrase designed to capture the somewhat different experiences of travelers on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails).

Given my youthful experiences in central Nebraska, it is not surprising that my scholarly and collecting interests have more and more focused on a key part of the Overland Trails, the section beginning at around current Grand Island, Nebraska, and ending at South Pass, Wyoming. Called The Great Platte River Road by historian Merrill Mattes, this portion of the westward journey represents a common experience for nearly all the Overland Trails travelers. Starting at various places in Missouri and Iowa, these travelers came together at the Platte River near the western end of Grand Island. From that point of convergence,

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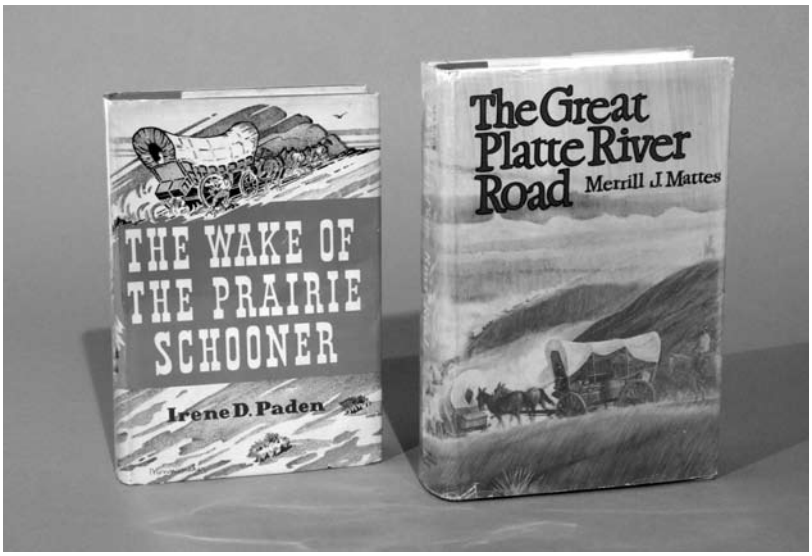
the California, Oregon, and Mormon Trails all followed the Platte River, then the North Platte, and, finally, the Sweetwater west to the key Rocky Mountain crossing at South Pass. After South Pass the trails diverged – Oregon travelers went northwest via the Snake River to the Willamette valley, California travelers took various routes to the San Joaquin valley, and the Mormons headed to Salt Lake. But the Great Platte River Road remained a shared experience for those seeking a better life in the West throughout the period from the first emigrant train in 1841 until the completion of the transcontinental railroad after the Civil War.

For the past two years, I have been re-reading my Overland Trails books and rekindling my interest in the emigrant experience. I have made two summer trips along the Great Platte River Road, aided by the many excellent travel guides available, to visit the major historic sites along the way, and to visualize this remarkable migration as it must have been experienced by the travelers. Because many of them maintained detailed diaries and wrote letters to their friends and relatives back home (many came from Illinois or Missouri), we have a remarkable body of first-hand evidence of life on the Great Platte River Road. Merrill J. Mattes, who was not an academic historian but a National Park Service employee with a passion for the Overland Trails, studied hundreds of these sources in writing his seminal book, *The Great Platte River Road* (1969). He later unearthed many more diaries and letters and published a remarkable bibliographical work, *Platte River Road Narratives* (1988), which catalogs and summarizes some 2000 items in libraries and archives across America.



The pre-eminent travel guide and the seminal analysis of the emigrant experience

The Newberry Library, not surprisingly, has a rich collection of this material. Given the fascination with the emigrant experience among Americans in the 19th century, some of the more interesting and complete journals and letters were published in newspapers at the time. Many eventually appeared in book form, but a large number of new journals and letters were discovered in the course of Mattes's research. He estimates that about one of every 250 travelers left some sort of written record. Taken together, they form a unique account of travel on the Great Platte River Road.

Why so many emigrants, and why then? Historians have studied and debated this question, and there is no single answer. Clearly, the lure of cheap productive land was a major motivation for those first travelers. Some have observed that after the financial crisis of 1837-1840, farmers in Missouri and Illinois could get better prices for their land, which might have made movement west feasible. Many areas of the Midwest were becoming crowded, and good land was hard to find. Promoters from Oregon and California helped set up local emigrant societies, and Midwesterners were bombarded with articles and pamphlets about the riches of Oregon and California. Politicians encouraged emigration to strengthen America's claim to Oregon and California in the 1840s. Later, with the discovery of gold in California in 1848, other motives came into play. Consistent with the Turner's thesis, there was undoubtedly a restless American spirit at work, people anxious to populate the empty lands far beyond the Missouri River boundary of settlement, and to start of new life. And in fact, the influx of new settlers in Oregon and California did play a role in establishing Oregon as a U.S. Territory in 1846 and in adding California in 1848 as a result of the Mexican War.

In the 1820s and 1830s the vast area between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains appeared on many maps as the "Great American Desert." It was Indian country, forbidden to settlement by the federal government and viewed as worthless by Midwestern farmers. The Great Platte River Road and the diverging trails beyond South Pass, however, were known to mountain men, traders, and Army expeditions for some 30 years before the Great Migration began. The first bona fide emigrant train was the Bidwell-Bartleson party

from Missouri in 1841, part of which headed for Oregon and part to California after crossing the Rockies at South Pass. Numbers grew thereafter, with major emigrations in 1843, 1846, and 1849, and large groups of overlanders making the trip in the early 1850s. Travelers started their journey west at several different points along the Missouri River, with Independence being the most popular. They rounded up provisions and organized themselves into groups of varying sizes for actual travel. Often experienced mountain men were hired as guides, but many travelers went alone. After the first year or two, published guides were available, though some were inaccurate or misleading and created problems for travelers.

Emigrants could also refer to Captain John C. Fremont's accounts of his 1842 and 1843 expeditions and the excellent map created by his cartographer, Charles Preuss. Groups traveling together typically operated on a roughly democratic basis, electing a captain from among their number for a month at a time. Disagreements and splits were not uncommon. The journey could be lonely, but in some years traffic was very heavy and hundreds of covered wagons traveled together along the Platte. During those years, crowding created long waits at fords and ferries and depleted precious grass needed for oxen and other stock. Wagon trains were warned to leave by April 15, late enough for grass to have sprouted along the trail, but early enough to ensure that they reached Oregon or California before the snows. A typical pace of 15 miles per day resulted in a journey of four to four-and-a-half months.

Despite legends that grew up later, hostile Indian contact was rare, at least until the early 1860s. Though there was occasional thievery, and fights with small groups of Indians, there is no record of a large Indian attack on circled wagons, a practice intended as much to socialize and to corral livestock as to protect against Indian attack. Far more travelers were killed by accidental discharge of weapons, by drowning, or in wagon accidents (a particular hazard for children). Disease, especially cholera, also wreaked havoc in some years on the trail. By the 1860s there were many grave markers along the route, of which few have survived. Scholars have estimated the mortality rate among all travelers from 1840 to 1870 at about five percent.

My recent travels started near Fort Kearny, just west of the point where the various routes from the Missouri converged to form the Great Platte River Road. A fort was established there by the Army in 1848 to protect and provision the growing number of emigrants using the overland routes. It was abandoned in 1871, and when I was growing up there was nothing at the site except a stone monument, a flag pole, a grove of large old cottonwoods, and some vague overgrown mounds that might once have been the foundations of buildings. On my recent trips, however, I could see the results of a reconstruction that began in the 1960s. There is now a replica stockade, a group of restored buildings, and a handsome parade ground, allowing one to visualize Fort Kearny as it was seen by emigrants. The travelers along the Overland Trails went through rolling country with many small rivers in eastern Kansas and Nebraska; coming into the wide Platte River Valley from the watershed of the Little Blue River they saw what many called "The Coast of Nebraska" – large sand dunes leading down to a wide and shallow river that resembled an ocean from the distance.

Two scenes from present-day Fort Laramie, Wyoming. ABOVE: *cavalry barracks.* BELOW: *the sutler's store*

By Fort Kearny they were emerging from the tall grass prairie onto the short grass of the Great Plains. Small settlements – east of the Fort at Dogtown and west of it at Dobytown – sprang up to serve emigrant needs. Journals and letters all speak of the endless grass and lack of trees along the Platte as they moved west, as well as violent spring thunderstorms that turned the ubiquitous fine dust into mud. I experienced such a storm, with impossibly black clouds and blinding rain, along Highway 30 (the historic Lincoln Highway) in June 2009. Overlanders found the river itself unlike any they had seen – too shallow for boats or ferries, often with a quicksand bottom, and too muddy for good drinking water. In the early years, there were plenty of bison and other wildlife in the area, and occasional curious Indian parties (usually Pawnee near the Platte, Sioux and Cheyenne farther north and west). The trail followed a fairly straight course a mile or so away from the river, and became wide and smooth over the years of travel.

Today, central Nebraska looks nothing like the consistent picture that emerges from travelers' accounts. Nebraska was opened for settlement in 1854 and towns and farms were abundant by the 1870s. Irrigation brought extensive agriculture and settlers planted

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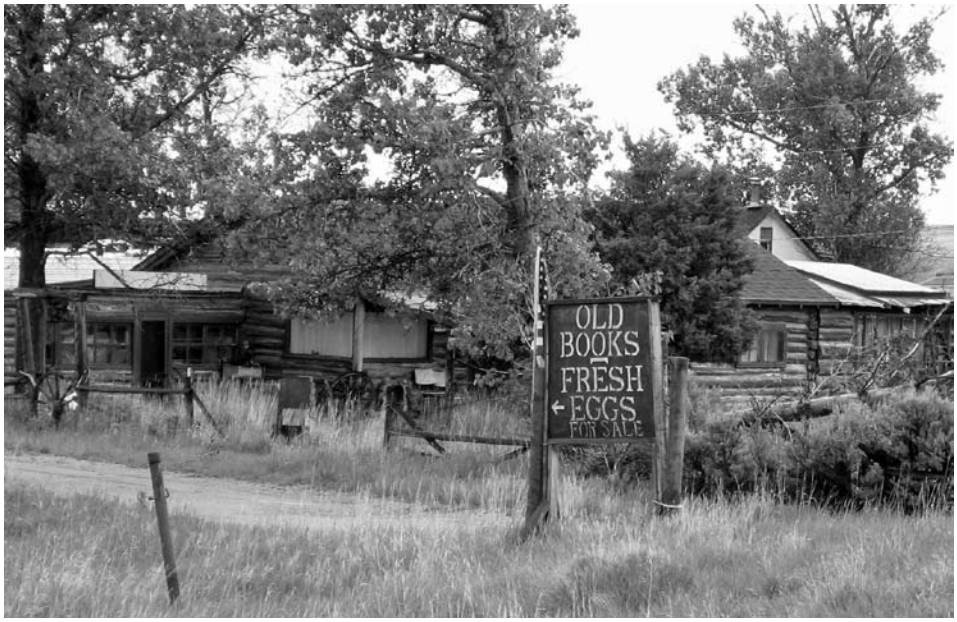
trees. Interstate 80 was built along the route of the Oregon Trail south of the Platte. As a result, the empty vistas recorded by those on the Great Platte River Road are no longer, and few traces of the Overland Trails in central Nebraska remain. Even the river itself is unrecognizable. The Platte River in the 1840s and 50s carried much more water than it has in modern times. Drawings and photographs from the emigrant period show no trees at all except on islands in the river, because seedlings were destroyed by the vast herds of grazing bison and periodic prairie fires. Today massive irrigation projects and dams have reduced the Platte's flow drastically. Now, as then, it meanders over a large area and has many channels. Travelers, however, did not have to cross the Platte until farther along, with Oregon and California travelers staying largely on the south side of the river and Mormon emigrants on the north.

The grassy emptiness of central Nebraska was interrupted by the overlanders' first great challenge, crossing the South Platte after the river forks near the current town of North Platte. The crossing of the South Platte was difficult for wagon trains, and the area between the two branches of the river is very hilly. The country is not heavily populated today, and it is possible to follow along the route taken by the wagons. They usually crossed near present-day Brule, Nebraska, up formidable California Hill (where the trail can still be seen), and then traveled over more rugged terrain before descending into the valley of the North Platte they would follow into what is now Wyoming. Nearly all the diaries and letters relate harrowing experiences in descending into the valley at a beautiful spot named Ash Hollow. Wagons had to be lowered down the trail at Windlass Hill by ropes, with wheels locked. Ruts made by covered wagons were still visible on the hill when I climbed it in 2008, and the surrounding area looks much as it did 100 years ago. When they reached Ash Hollow, most emigrant trains stopped for a time because there was ample shade, lush grass, and sweet springs providing water for stock. Emigrant diaries speak of Ash Hollow as perhaps the most idyllic place on the trip west.

As the overlanders moved up the arid North Platte valley from Ash Hollow, they marveled at the rock formations, which for most Midwesterners resembled nothing they had seen before. Driving through the area today, the scene is almost unchanged, and one can understand the dramatic contrast emigrants experienced from the grassy plains they had traveled over for the previous two weeks. First they encountered four-hundred foot Court House Rock, with its small companion Jail Rock. Numerous emigrant drawings from various angles have survived, a testament to the wonder these formations produced. Next along the trail was Chimney Rock (some 300 feet from base to tip), the most notable landmark along the Overland Trails for many emigrants. Its spire could be seen for 25 miles, so the travelers watched it for one or two days before they actually reached it. Chimney Rock is somewhat diminished now by erosion and lightning strikes, but is still an awe-inspiring sight. Finally, the emigrant trains reached Scotts Bluff, another huge rock formation astride the route. The Overland Trails passed through the narrow defile of Mitchell Pass, where their course is still visible.



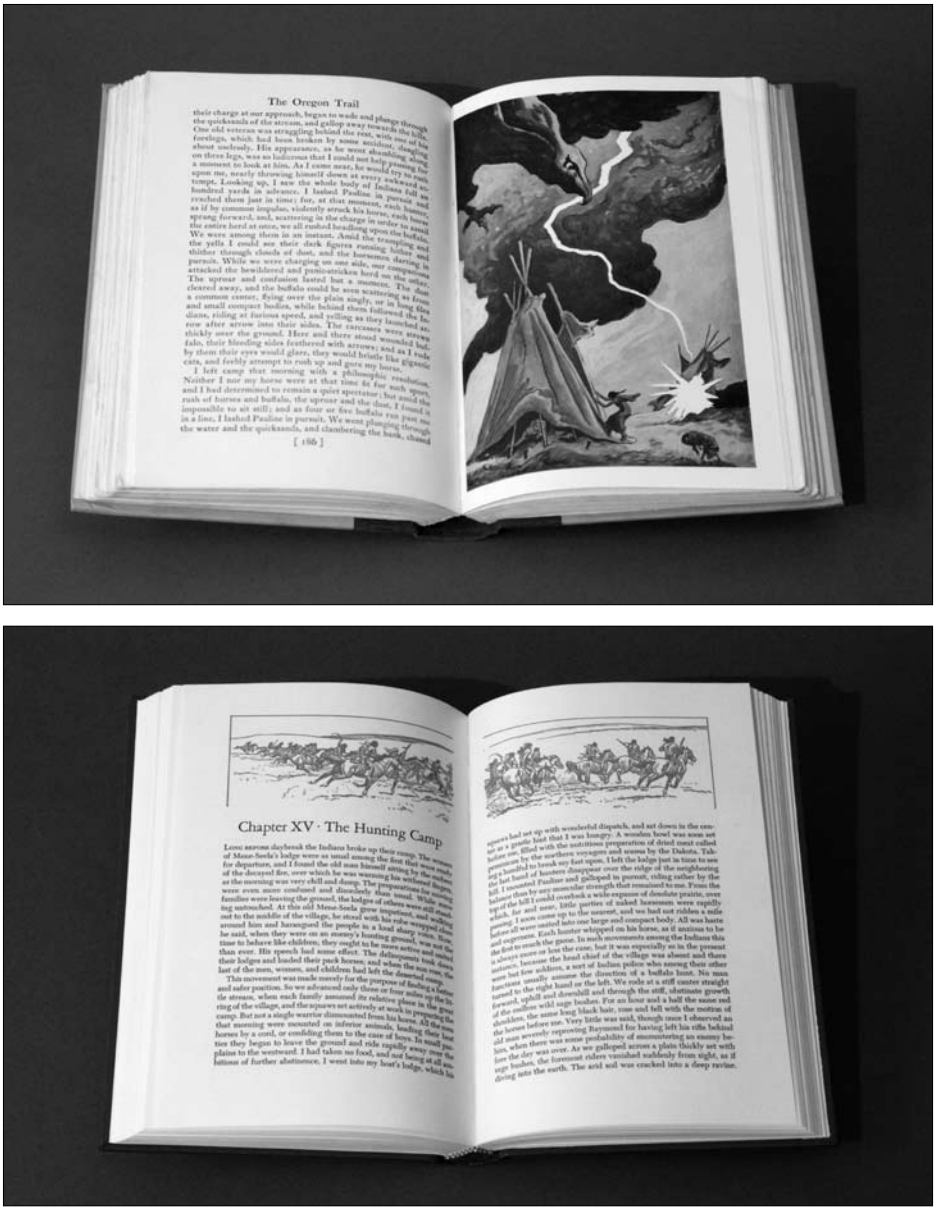
Who says there are no more open shops? This one is in the Sweetwater valley on the way to South Pass, Wyoming

Some 50 miles beyond Scotts Bluff, travelers came to the second major rest and re-supply point on the Great Platte River Road, Fort Laramie. The fort had existed in some form for many years, because it occupied key high ground where the Laramie River meets the North Platte. The existing trading post was purchased by the Army in 1849 and expanded. Reaching the Fort required a dangerous crossing of the Laramie River; many mishaps and drownings are recorded by emigrants at this point. Many of the original old buildings at Fort Laramie have been painstakingly restored in recent years; they give today's visitor a good feeling for what a major frontier fort looked like in the 1800s. It never had a stockade, but included many large houses for officers, barracks, and a busy sutler's store. Travelers considered it the first outpost of civilization they had seen since leaving the Missouri River in April. Once again, though early drawings and photographs show few trees, the river banks are now heavily wooded, obscuring both the Laramie and the North Platte. Fort Laramie provided emigrants with an opportunity to repair damage to wagons, procure provisions (at exorbitant prices), and rest. Most recognized from guidebooks and the reports of previous travelers that it was about one-third of the way from Missouri to Sacramento, and marked the beginning of the mountains. Indeed, starting at Fort Laramie the terrain begins to become much rougher and the altitude slowly rises toward South Pass. Fort Laramie remained the major U.S. Army base in what is now Wyoming, and one of the largest in the West, throughout the Indian Wars. Though it was in Sioux country, it was never attacked by Indians, even during the Sioux wars of the 1870s.

Now following the Sweetwater River instead of the North Platte, travelers moving beyond Fort Laramie next came to the famed Independence Rock, which resembles a large turtle on the plains next to the river. In this area of south-central Wyoming, the terrain is much as it was for Overland Trails emigrants. It is rough, arid country, covered with sagebrush instead of grass. Only wind turbines on the crests of surrounding hills mark the 21st Century. Some trace the name Independence Rock to a rendezvous of mountain men held around July 4th and others to the idea that travelers aimed to reach it before July 4 or risk problems reaching California before winter. In any event, it was a major landmark on the

Overland Trail, and many travelers carved their names in the rock – some can still be seen today. Nearby is the impressive rock feature known as Devil's Gate, again the subject of many sketches and paintings by travelers. Here the Sweetwater River courses between two sheer rock faces, a canyon so narrow that wagons had to go around it to the south.

Wagon trains on the Great Platte River Road struggled gradually upward toward South Pass through broken country that required multiple crossings of the Sweetwater River. South Pass itself is the key to the entire overland migration because it allowed easy crossing of the Continental Divide. This fortuitous gap in the Rockies, though it stands at 7550 feet, relieved the emigrants of the need to climb high mountain passes to reach what is now Idaho and Utah and greatly speeded the journey to the West.



The Oregon Trail *in the Garden City edition, above, with color illustrations by Thomas Hart Benton and the 1971 Heritage Club edition, below, with drawings by western artist Maynard Dixon*

It is difficult today to stand exactly at South Pass, or indeed to see precisely where it is, since the terrain is wide and undulating, with the Wind River Mountains rising to the north and the lower Antelope Hills to the south. Emigrants straining up the gradual slope also found it hard to know when they had crossed the Continental Divide, until they could see water running westward instead of eastward at Pacific Springs. But they knew that they were halfway to their final goal. As noted, beyond South Pass, at a place called Parting of the Ways, the Great Platte River Road ends and branches into several main trails depending on the travelers' final destination.

The literature of westward expansion is vast, posing serious problems for the collector. Some specialize in novels of the West; others collect the published editions of emigrant diaries and letters. My collection contains a little of everything. While notable scholarly works are not always particularly valuable in the first edition, I have collected quite a few, especially those associated with the Turner thesis. I also collect novels dealing with the emigrant experience, reminiscences, maps and other materials.

Many of the general histories of the West, particular those written in the fifty years after 1870, are heavily romanticized. They often present only a stereotyped portrait of the Overland Trails experience drawn from a few well-known journals and from sometimes unreliable recollections written many years after. Modern historians have relied more on larger numbers of primary accounts and on social science methods. Since the 1980s, practitioners of the "New Western History" have tried to bring more balance to the field by emphasizing the role of women and the experiences of blacks and Native Americans. They also counter the romantic story of the solitary emigrant with a more realistic appraisal of America's imperialistic motives. Necessarily, my book collecting has been selective.

Three of my favorite western historians all have their roots in the University of Wisconsin. The first was Frederick Jackson Turner himself, who was a Wisconsin undergraduate and also taught there from 1899 to 1910, when he developed his influential theories about the importance of the frontier in American history. Both at Wisconsin and later at Harvard, where he taught from 1910 to 1924, Turner taught a famous graduate course in western history, and trained many students who later became distinguished academic historians. After his retirement he worked at the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. Although he never published an in-depth defense of his Frontier thesis, he wrote many influential articles, some of which are collected in *The Frontier in American History* (1920).

Frederick Merk studied under Turner as an undergraduate at Wisconsin, and followed him to Harvard to work on his doctorate. Merk was a devout Turnerite in his views of the westward expansion. He taught at Harvard from 1921 to 1957, and like his mentor influenced a large number of young historians in his graduate course "The Westward Movement." His seminal book, *History of the Westward Movement* (1978), was published after his

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death. Ray Allen Billington was also an undergraduate at Wisconsin. Moving to Harvard for his PhD studies, Billington was a student of Frederick Merk. He was a member of the history faculty at Northwestern from 1944 to 1963, and taught a legendary undergraduate course in the Westward Expansion. Though we were both at Northwestern from 1957 to 1961, he was on leave my senior year when I had planned to take his course, a nagging lifelong regret. Billington took it as his mission to flesh out the Turner thesis using modern social science tools, which he did beginning with the influential *Westward Expansion* (1949). In *America's Frontier Heritage* (1966) he attempted a re-appraisal of Turner's work in light of the criticisms leveled against it by later historians. He also published a widely praised biography of Turner, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (1973). Like Turner, Billington spent his later professional years at the Huntington Library, which houses the extensive Turner papers.

I have also collected over the years many significant non-fiction works focusing on the Overland Trails themselves, including three volumes of the American Trails series. David Lavender's *Westward Vision: The Story of the Oregon Trail* (1963) does not focus principally on the experiences of emigrants, and then only for a few selected years. George R. Stewart's *The California Trail: An Epic With Many Heroes* (1962) is excellent and well balanced. Wallace Stegner, perhaps our greatest western writer, contributed the third volume, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (1964). It is brilliantly written and comprehensive. Stegner's novels, many of which deal with the western experience, are a major focus of my collection of modern first editions.

One of the very best studies of the overland emigrants is *The Plains Across* (1979), written by young historian John D.Unruh, Jr. and published after his untimely death. Unruh's book is based on prodigious research and emphasizes the different experiences of travel on the Overland Trails in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. He provides special insight into the manifold interactions between emigrants on the one hand and Indians, traders, and the government on the other. He especially seeks to dispel the common stereotype of the solitary traveler relying on no one on the long trip westward while being menaced by savage Indians. As mentioned above, Merrill Mattes occupies a special place among those who have written about the actual day-to-day experiences of overland travelers. In his monumental book *The Great Platte River Road* (1969) and in his later bibliographic work, he set a new standard for careful and thoughtful use of emigrant narratives to knit together a compelling picture of the Overland Trails experience.

Other histories made special contributions to our understanding of the Great Migration by taking an unusual focus, like Bernard DeVoto's *Year of Decision: 1846* (1943). Mention must also be made of one of America's most illustrious historians, Francis Parkman. Like other famous people, among them Mark Twain and the English adventurer Richard Burton, he was drawn to the Overland Trails (despite his frail health). After his graduation from Harvard Law School in 1846, Parkman began planning for his lifelong historical project, the study of the struggle between England and France in North America. In order to better understand Indian culture, he decided to travel west on the Oregon Trail with a guide in 1846, when he was only 22. He published accounts of his travel in a series of magazine articles, and later in one of his most famous books, *The Oregon Trail* (1849). Parkman's real interest was not in the overlanders, for whom he expressed a patrician disdain, but the Indians. Thus the book adds little to our understanding of the emigrant experience. The book is misnamed, as Parkman only traveled a little way west of Fort Laramie, on a hunting trip with a group of Sioux warriors. Nonetheless the book, and the journals that Parkman kept along the way, are important American documents. My collection includes several of the innumerable editions of *The Oregon Trail* (sometimes titled *The Oregon and California Trails*). My favorites are the 1948 Garden City edition with color illustrations by Thomas Hart Benton, and the 1971 Heritage Club edition with drawings by famed western artist Maynard Dixon. There is also an excellent Library of America edition (1991) combining *The Oregon Trail* with another early Parkman book, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, and including copious notes.

During the years many excellent travel guides have been published, reflecting a continuing interest among Americans in the Overland Trails. Most of these contain little history, simply guide the traveler to places where ruts and markers can be seen, and describe the major sites such as Fort Kearny and Chimney Rock. Many are available, along with other interesting publications, from the Oregon-California Trails Association and its excellent website. One rises far above the genre, however – Irene Paden's unique book *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner* (1943). Over several years, the Paden family traveled every inch of the Overland Trails by car and on foot. Irene Paden's account of those travels draws on emigrant narratives, old maps, and the local lore collected during their explorations, often from farmers whose family stories of the trails were still quite fresh. Importantly, the Padens' travels occurred at a time when conditions were much better than they are today, when the Platte River Road has been paved over by the Interstate. Since the Union Pacific Railroad and the Lincoln Highway both followed the north bank of the river, all of the Nebraska towns along the way are also on the north side, and there were few paved roads along the south bank in the 1940s. In 1943 the Padens were able to literally drive on the Oregon Trail for long stretches, getting permission from farmers to cross their land. Many more trail markers and emigrant graves existed in 1943 also. Irene Paden was a shrewd and careful observer and a lively writer; the book comes as close as possible to recreating the emigrant experience and the exact route of the Overland Trails.

Finally, a number of novels have dealt with the Great Migration, either as a primary or secondary theme. Many, if not most, are marred by romanticism and stereotyping, and are not helpful in understanding the real experience of traveling West during the Overland Trails period. They perpetuate the myth of the solitary group of brave and upright travelers fighting savage Indians at every turn. A conspicuous exception from my collection is A.B. Guthrie's *The Way West* (1949). This Pulitzer Prize-winning novel focuses on the experiences of a group of families moving west in 1845, and actually succeeds better than most historical works in conveying the reality of day-to-day life on the trail. Guthrie, who wrote many books about the west, also served as editor of the American Trails series. His books were always carefully researched and free of the usual western stereotypes.

Because there are so many interesting places to visit, so many more original narratives to discover, and so many more books to collect, I will continue to travel the Great Platte River Road, and I heartily recommend the enterprise to all those interested in the West, its history, and of course, its books.

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Trail photographs by the author. Book photographs by Robert McCamant of books in the author's collection.

English in Print: A Guide to What's to Come

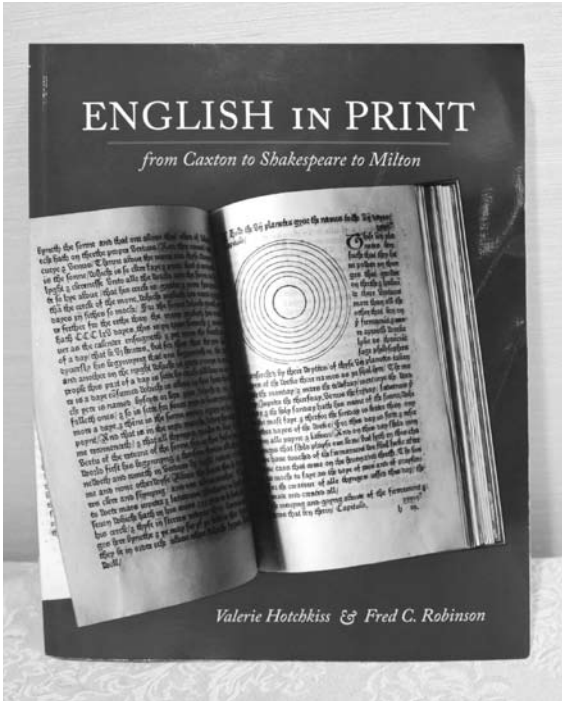
The exhibit comes to Chicago and the book captures it for posterity

Peggy Sullivan

New York City's Grolier Club has rich traditions and resources, and members whose collections often are the basis or the entire source for exhibits in the Club's handsome hall on the upper east side. From May through July, 2008, the Club was the site of an exhibit celebrating two more distant collections, that of the University of Illinois at Urbana and the collection of the Elizabethan Club of Yale University. When Caxtonian Valerie Hotchkiss spoke at a Caxton Club luncheon earlier that year, she exuded an audacious excitement about taking some the Midwest's rich bibliographic resources to the city that prides itself on its culture, its libraries, and its role in American publishing. There were questions from the audience, almost sighs about why that exhibit was not taking place here in Chicago, where University of Illinois alumni would be numerous among those to welcome and to visit it. Now most of the exhibit is being shown at UIC Special Collections, October 2 through November 30. What's more, Chicagoans and others have the benefit of the well-designed catalog that accompanies it.

English in Print: from Caxton to Shakespeare to Milton conveys much of the excitement that Hotchkiss expressed when she spoke to the Caxton Club, as well as extensive notes on almost every item exhibited in New York. Written by Hotchkiss and Fred C. Robinson, a librarian of the Elizabethan Club, the glossy-covered, 234-page paperback (also available as a hardback) includes an introduction that comprises almost one-fourth of the text. The two authors are both scholars, and they hint at the "back story" of the exhibit. "The collaborative nature of this work," they say, "– has allowed us to do more than either institution could have done on its own. Even when both libraries held the same rarity – a First Folio of Shakespeare or Ben Jonson, for example – we gained new insights by getting to know another copy of a great book." [Preface, p. ix.]

The introduction is a historical background of the period that began with William Caxton's beginnings as a printer and concluded with the age of Milton, who, the authors aver, wrote what is still the most stirring defense of freedom of the press, but it reads rather like a series of clusters of history – how England's links with Europe affected its publishing history; how language, education, government and church developed and interacted through these years from the late fifteenth century through the mid-seventeenth century; how printing preserved drama for the future; the significance of translations. Characters like Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton's successor known to Caxtonians as the nom de plume of the Caxtonian who chronicles personal news regularly in our journal, Thomas More, William Lily, John Foxe, Oliver Cromwell, and every English monarch are a part of this history. Illustrations from or about the books from this long era illuminate the story.



A few subheads in the introduction might help the reader keep better track of the many-faceted history that is recounted, but the index helps one to pick up highlights, and dates of birth and death are given for almost every person mentioned. As I read, I thought of the books that were required for History of Books and Printing when I took my first course in that subject almost sixty years ago. Only now do I realize that they were seldom well-designed or well-written – especially ironic, given their subject. I might have learned better and more had the information been packaged in a book like this catalog.

As the reader must realize by now, my essay is not so much a review as an appreciation of this catalog. One can linger over the introduction, refer to it for elusive bits of information, or select one link to follow chronologically. Several pages recount just the history of the printing of bibles and how the controversies of the times led to more and varied publications in the field of religion – and to competitions among the printers of those bibles that were as fierce as the controversies themselves.

Like the exhibit itself, the catalog proper is divided into six parts: Early English Printing, A World of Words, "For the Regulation of Printing," The Place of Translation in Early English Printing, From the Stage to the Page, and Making English Books. Almost every page of this section is illustrated with a cover, a page of text, or an illustration from one of the more than 100 publications included. Almost all are books, but such items as the one-page royal proclamation "For calling in, and suppressing of two Books written by John Milton…" are also here. Some show their age and the wear and tear that mark the life of a book, but the texts are, for the most part, legible, and the notes are extensive, linking the items to the history of the times, reminding the viewer of links among the items.

The catalog was designed by Cope Cumpston and published by the University of Illinois Press. Notes for references, bibliography, and index add value to the book.

When the exhibit opened at the Grolier Club, I attended both the opening reception and the luncheon the following day. The weather was like something from a happy Woody Allen film about New York. I expected to see policemen twirling their billyclubs to music as I walked toward the Grolier Club. An appreciative audience clearly enjoyed the exhibit and the fairly brief introductions that were part of the reception. I brought a friend from New York and another from Pennsylvania to the luncheon and program the next day, and we were among those who enjoyed eating on an upper balcony at the rear of the Club. It was truly celebratory – of Illinois, of Yale, of collecting and publishing, of English in print.

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English in Print: from Caxton to Shakespeare to Milton, by Valerie Hotchkiss and Fred C. Robinson. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

CAXTONIAN FOOTNOTES

Wynken de Worde

'INJUN SUMMER' & OCTOBERFEST

This year along with summer's end is also the end of a wonderful exhibition at Chicago's Cultural Center. The exhibit was created by Chicago's official historian, Tim Samuelson, who wanted to honor the life and work of Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and honorary Caxtonian, **John T. McCutcheon** ('44).

The Caxton Club's 46th publication was *John T. McCutcheon's Book*, a large study of the career of McCutcheon. It covered most of Mac's nearly five decades of work as the chief editorial cartoonist for the *Chicago Tribune*. The book was introduced by honorary Caxtonian **Vincent Starrett** ('42), who was then his colleague at the *Tribune*, and a fellow war correspondent in the Spanish-American War.

Samuelson had the idea of an exhibition in his mind, but it really jelled for him when he discovered that Joyce and Company Rare Books had collected about a hundred original pen-and-ink cartoons, drawings and sketches by Mac.

When McCutcheon's fellow Hoosier, **Tom Joyce** ('82), agreed to lend the originals, the scope of the exhibit expanded to fill three large rooms near the northerly Tiffany glass dome at the Cultural Center. It was a suitable venue to learn about the "Dean of American Cartoonists".

Many Illinoisans beyond a certain age learned to anticipate the annual appearance of McCutcheon's cartoon, "Injun Summer" each fall. Sure enough, the exhibit had one colorful example of a *Trib* front page with the cartoon prominently displayed, much to the pleasure of the steady flow of visitors who viewed and commented on the exhibits.

McCutcheon was often inspired by his small-town Indiana upbringing in various ways. His version of Yoknapatawpha County was known as Bird Center. McCutcheon peopled his drawings about the town with his own cast of characters, each as carefully drawn in ink as in the text. He had gentle fun with the Reverend, the grand dame of society, the newspaper editor, young single men, young single women, the retired U.S. Army Captain, etc. His series of drawings of Bird Center presaged today's graphic novels.

The town developed its own following, and McCutcheon's college friend, George Ade, the famous playwright, created a script of these characters, and Anna Morgan, the foundress of The Little Theater movement, arranged to perform the play back in 1904. In that era, Morgan's Little Theater, McCutcheon's studio, and The Caxton Club were all under one roof at the Fine Arts Building on Michigan Avenue.

It was quite something to see the old photograph, lent by The Newberry Library, which showed the entire cast in full dress for the performance. McCutcheon himself appeared as the town's young swain. Other early Caxtonians too were members of the cast. These included the likes of **Frederick W. Gookin** (1895), **Franklin W. Head** (1898), **John Vance Cheney** (1895), and **Melville E. Stone** (1895). Other literary types in the company were Harriet Monroe, Howard Van Doren Shaw, Eugene's brother, Roswell Martin Field, Clara Louise Burnham, and, of course, Anna Morgan herself. In her memoir, *My Chicago*, Miss Morgan recalled it as, "The most notable performance".

That same photograph captured the fancy, too, of Daniel Tucker, who reviewed the exhibition for *Chicago Journal*. He opined that this "document of their set, the costumes and the evident community built around making culture together will be inspiring to anyone interested in the evolution of cultural forms. First a comic, then a piece of community theater, Bird Center was clearly a predecessor to television dramas we are familiar with today."

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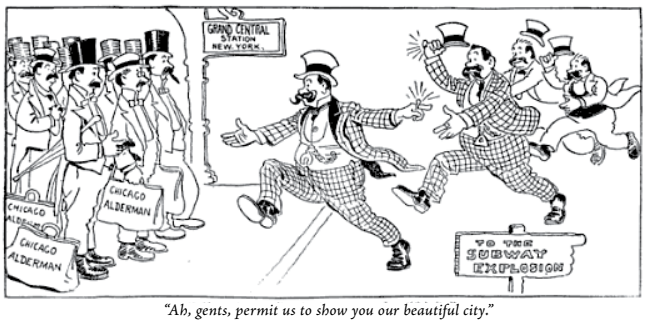
Cartoons from Google Books.

OUR CHICAGO ALDERMEN IN NEW YORK



"Ah, gents, permit us to show you our beautiful city."

"Now, gents, step right up and try to pick out the little joker."

"Great Scott, Shorty, who wass them guys, anyway?"

A BOY IN SPRINGTIME

"Dog gone it! I wish they hadn't found her till after the baseball season."

Caxton Club Dinner Venues, 2009-2010

DATE	LOCATION	ADDRESS	FOOD COST, INCLUSIVE	PARKING	PUBLIC TRANSPORT
Oct. 14 (Note: Second Wednesday)	Petterino's	150 N. Dearborn, enter at Randolph	Dinner $51 Premium liquor $9; std. liquor & wine, $7, beer import., $5, dom. $4	Valet, northbound on Dearborn, $14	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
Nov. 18 (Wed.)	Adler Planetarium Galileo's Cafe	1300 S. Lake Shore Drive	Dinner $51 Cocktails $7; wine $5; beer import. $5, dom. $4	2-hour meters; lot adjacent to Adler $15; or Soldier Field	CTA Bus 146
Dec. 16 (Wed.)	Newberry Library Ruggles Hall Book Auction	60 W. Walton Street	Dinner $48 Drinks, $5	In lot on Oak, free after 5; or validated at garage on Clark & Chestnut	CTA Bus 22 or 36
Jan. 20 (Wed.)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
Feb. 17 (Wed.)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
Mar. 16 (Tuesday)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
Apr. 21 (Wed.)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
May 19 (Wed.)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes
Jun. 15 (Tues.)	The Cliff Dwellers	200 S. Michigan, 22nd Floor; sign in at front desk	Dinner $48 Premium liquor $7; std. liquor, wine & beer import, $6; dom., $5	Grant Park N. $26; Grant Park S. $17 after 4; E. Monroe $14; Millennium Park $19	All downtown bus lines & rail routes

Caxton Club Lunch Venues, 2009

DATE	LOCATION	ADDRESS	FOOD COST, INCLUSIVE	PARKING	PUBLIC TRANSPORT
Oct. 2 (Note: first Friday)	Lunch: Hull House Dining Room; Lecture: UIC Daley Library, Special Collections	Lunch: 800 S. Halsted Lecture: 801 S. Morgan	$30	Deck across from Hull House, enter from east; UIC public lot	Blue Line, exit Halsted for Hull House; exit Western for UIC. Buses 7, 8, 60
Nov. 13	Union League Club	55 W. Jackson	$30	Valet on Federal; Garage on Federal	All downtown bus lines and rail routes
Dec. 11	Union League Club	55 W. Jackson	$30	Valet on Federal; Garage on Federal	All downtown bus lines and rail routes

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.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: "Playing with Pictures: "The Art of Victorian Photocollage" (rarely displayed albums and loose pages from collections across the United States, Europe and Australia), Galleries 1 and 2, October 10 through January 3, 2010; "Picture Perfect: Art from the Caldecott Award Books, 2006-2009" (seventeen books that merited the annual Caldecott Medal, bestowed by the Association for Library Service to Children, and recognizing artists whose work appeared in the most distinguished American picture books for children), Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10, through November 8; "Daniel Burnham's Plan of Chicago" (an exhibition presented in five separate and insightful rotations, including maps, diagrams, perspective drawings and watercolors, historically significant and artistically exceptional, many of them in fragile condition and rarely displayed publicly), Gallery 24, through December 15.

Buddhist Printing from Tibet at Columbia College
P. Dowdey © 2009

Lenhardt Library, Chicago Botanic Garden, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "Kew: 250 Years of Science at the Royal Botanic Gardens" (a selection of publications of the Royal Botanic Gardens, all of which made a significant impact on science over the past 250 years), through November 15.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Inspiring Dreams! Promoting the Burnham Plan" (featuring documents and artifacts used to promote the "selling" of the Burnham plan to the Chicago City Planning Commission and the public as well), Chicago Gallery, 3rd Floor, through February 2010; "Tall Man of Destiny: Images of Abraham Lincoln" (images of the president made during his lifetime, after his death in 1865, and through to today, all from the Chicago Public Library's Grand Army of the Republic and Civil War Collections), Special Collections Exhibition Hall, 9th Floor, through February 2010.

"Chicago Book Festival," information at 312-747-8191 or online at www.chipublib.org (an annual event presented by the Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Public Library Foundation, featuring some of the nation's most accomplished authors in readings, book discussions and events in libraries, bookstores, museums and other local venues), October 1 through 31.

Center for Book and Paper Arts, Columbia College Chicago, 2nd Floor, 1104 S. Wabash Avenue, 312-369-6631: "Pearl of the Snowlands: Buddhist Printing at the Derge Parkhang" (from the collection of the only surviving traditional printing temple in Tibet, a living cultural institution that stores the woodblocks used to publish sutras/holy scriptures, commentaries, and histories of traditional Tibetan Buddhism), through December 5.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "The Soul of Bronzeville: The Regal, Club DeLisa, and the Blues" (original photographs, personal memorabilia, music and concert collectibles, all from the Chicago Blues Museum), through December 13; "Red, White, Blue & Black: A History of Blacks in the Armed Services" (featuring more than 100 artifacts, objects, images and documents, honoring the 14 million black men and women who served in the armed forces of the United States from the Revolutionary War through the Vietnam War), ongoing.

Irish American Heritage Center, 4626 N. Knox Avenue, Chicago, 773-282-7035: "iBAM!: The Irish Book, Art, and Music Festival" (inaugurating a new annual event, featuring more than 100 local, national and international authors of books relating to all things Irish), October 31 and November 1.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition" (a Library of Congress exhibition, featuring books, broadsides, newspapers, prints, photographs, artifacts, maps, manuscript letters, the Bible on which President Lincoln swore the oath of office, his hand-annotated First Inaugural Address, and early copies or facsimiles of the Second Inaugural Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address), Smith and East Galleries, October 10 through December 19; "Honest Abe of the West" (selections from the Newberry's rich collection, including rare copies of printed materials relating to the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates, recently-discovered ephemera from the 1860 presidential election and the Republican Convention held in Chicago, letters received by Lincoln and then annotated in the president's own hand, and items on loan from the Alfred Orendorff Collection of various legal documents written in Lincoln's own hand), Donnelley Gallery, October 10 through February 15, 2010.

University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections Department, 801 S. Morgan, Chicago, 312-996-2742: "English in Print" (see page 7), Room 3-330, October 2 through November 30.

Charles Deering Library, Northwestern University, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Best of Bologna: Edgiest Artists of the 2008 International Children's Book Fair" (featuring 100 cutting-edge artists from Germany, Russia, Iran, Japan, and around the world, whose work breaks new ground in children's book illustration), upper lobby, through October 8; "Burnham at Northwestern" (documents, photographs, blueprints and sketches of Daniel Burnham's 1905 "Plans of Northwestern," a redesign of the University's Evanston campus), Special Collections and Archives, ongoing.

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

Caxtonians Collect: Dan "Skip" Landt

Fifty-eighth in a series of interviews with members

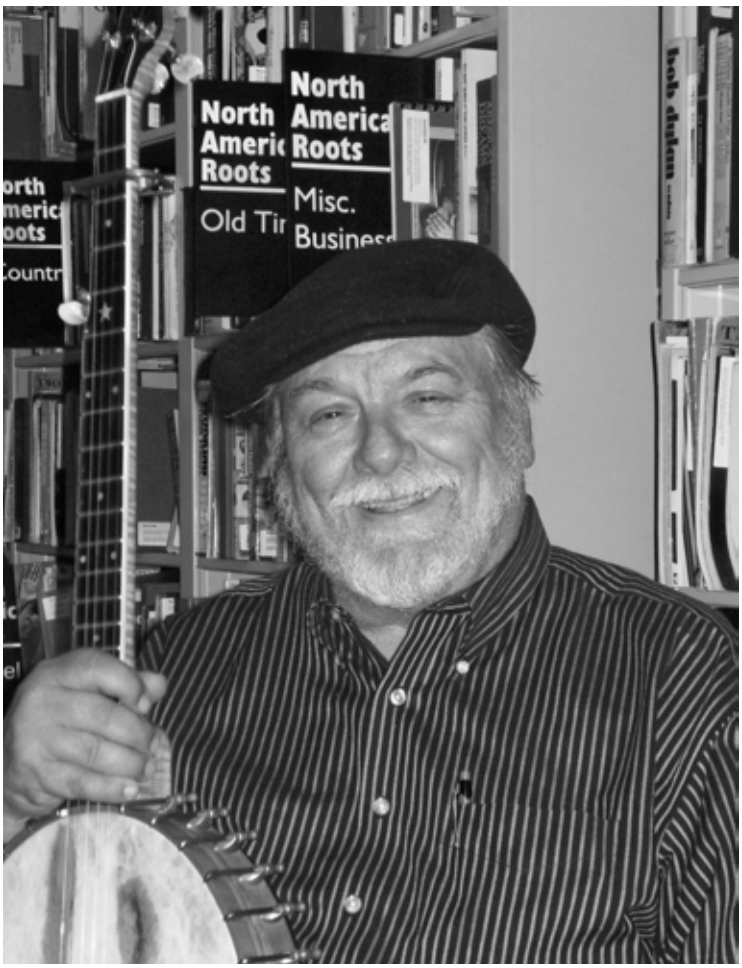
Interviewed by Lise McKean

Skip's story about becoming a member of the Caxton Club intertwines essential elements in his life – a love of reading, ideas, and music, and the vow made as a bored teenager "to live a more interesting life than my parents." Born in Manhattan, Skip and his family moved several times during his childhood. First to Queens, then Long Island, then Westchester County, and later they moved to Pound Ridge, the small town near the New York-Connecticut border, where he made his vow.

After college at Ohio Wesleyan, Skip went to the University of Chicago for graduate study at the Divinity School and subsequently in English. He attained the pinnacle of his scholarly career when he published an article in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* while still in graduate school. He later worked as an administrator at the University of Chicago, the Center for Psychosocial Studies, and for over twenty-five years at the City Colleges of Chicago until his retirement in 2003.

"I am almost evangelical about music," notes Skip on his website (www.skiplandt.org). Skip sings and plays banjo and harmonica; he's partial to folk music because of "its emotional and melodic qualities." He met his wife Fran at a sing-around over twenty years ago and now they have two children in college. They continue to sing and perform together. Currently Skip has a busy teaching schedule at the Old Town School of Folk Music, where he offers classes and private lessons in harmonica. He also has a weekly class in which students sing and play American popular music, circa 1900 to 1945. He asked to be interviewed and photographed at the Old Town School of Folk Music Resource Center, now home to the many books and recordings that he has donated from his related collection. Skip's jug band added to the merriment at the 2008 Caxton Club Revels, and with students and friends, he has been playing over the summer at the Lincoln Square Farmer's Market. He's also playing banjo for tap dancing phenomenon Annie Rudnik and Her Two Foot Theatre. Whether teaching, playing, or listening, for Skip "music is a total joy."

Music connected Skip with the Caxton Club via Caxtonian Charlie Shields, who took harmonica lessons from Skip in the early 1990s. As the two came to know each other better, their shared sense of prankish fun led them to form the James Hogg Society along with another Caxtonian, the magician Jay Marshall, and to organize the Society's Illinois Sheep Walk. Eventually, Charlie invited Skip to a Caxton meeting. Skip said he felt immediately at home among Caxtonians as the club "allowed me to reconnect with my academic past and to meet some of the most intellectually curious people I've ever known." Skip joined in 1994, and now as chair of the membership committee, he is the friendly face of the Caxton Club, welcoming prospective members.



Photograph by Lise McKean

Skip's penchant for reading and books dates back to childhood, and he fondly remembers the vine-covered library he frequented as a boy in Great Neck, Long Island. He also recalls whiling away hours in the "crazy bookstores in Hyde Park in the 1960s," and particularly one eccentric bookseller who distributed a mimeographed flyer listing reasons not to patronize his store – never sure when it's open, can't find anything, and the owner and his wife are crazy. In addition to his music collection, Skip also collects books about Chicago history and has written about Mark Beaubien, a fiddler and Chicago's first inn keeper.

Skip mixes mischief in with his book collecting. At his college fraternity house he came across some books of poems by Harriet Elizabeth Grose Dukes and has since become a collector of her works. If you haven't heard of this 1930s poet, it's probably because according to Skip, "appreciating Harriet requires a complete withholding of judgment." To prove his point, he recited a few of her lines: "When women in the front seat sit/To make the world a place more fit/ They shouldn't sit as they please/ And let their skirts rise above their knees." The challenge of collecting Dukes is that few of her books survive. With an impish grin, Skip says collecting Dukes "allows me to be tongue-in-cheek about book collecting; I still have all the fun but little expense." His Dukes collecting adventures include visiting her grave in Findlay, Ohio, and finding incorrect dates on her headstone and telephoning a Columbus bookstore in search of her works, only to learn that the Lion's Den bookstore deals exclusively in "adult books."

Intrigued by Skip's antics, I asked what motivated him to form prank organizations such as the Natty Bumppo Society at the University of Chicago and the James Hogg Society as well as to collect books by an Ohio poetaster. Skip paused, smiled, and then replied, "It's my small way to make the world a more interesting place. And it sure has made my life more interesting!"

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Bookmarks...

Note! First Friday and Second Wednesday in October!

Luncheon Program
Friday October 2, 2009, Hull House and UIC
Valerie Hotchkiss and Ann Weller
Guided Tour of 'English in Print'
and Hull House luncheon

Caxtonian Valerie Hotchkiss, Director of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at UIUC, will lead tours (at your choice of 10:30 OR 12:30) at the UIC Library of a new 50 item exhibit that she and Fred Robinson have curated, drawing from UIUC's remarkable English Renaissance collections. Among the treasures are a 1570 copy of Euclid's *Elements of Geometrie*, John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644) – an eloquent defense of freedom of the press, the first appearance of a truly English font (1566) and a Lily grammar (1566) which rang in the ears of every school child (including Shakespeare) until the late 19th century.The exhibit includes the earliest printers; the journey of English toward standardization; regulation, the danger of having one's nose slit off for offending the censor; the place of translation; and the technical aspects involved in the making of a book. Copies of the *English in Print* book will be available for purchase.

At 11:30 Caxtonian Ann Weller, Head of Special Collections at UIC's University Library, will host a Luncheon in the Historic Hull House Dining Room (a 5 minute walk).

Luncheon details: Hull House is located at 800 S. Halsted. UIC Library is located two blocks away at 801 S. Morgan. Luncheon is $30. By public transport: exit the Halsted stop on the Blue Line to the east for Hull House, or to the west (Morgan Street) for the library. Parking: in the UIC public lot and deck across the street from Hull House. Details of the October evening event: it will take place at Petterino's, 150 N. Dearborn.

Dinner Program
Wednesday, October 14, 2009, Petterino's
Nicolas Barker
"Some Book Collectors I Have Known"

Nicolas Barker was born in Cambridge, England, where his father was a professor. Professors in those days had their own libraries, so he grew up surrounded by several thousand books. In the town was David's famous book-stall, where collectors gathered weekly. One of the first that he met was Paul Hirsch, the great music collector, followed by Maynard Keynes, and later his brother Geoffrey, surgeon and bibliographer. Over the years since then, first as printer, then publisher and finally head of conservation at the then new British Library, he has met many more. In 1965 he succeeded John Hayward and Ian Fleming, both collectors, as editor and proprietor of *The Book Collector*, which he remains to this day.

Timing: spirits at 5 pm, dinner at 6 pm, program at 7:30 pm. Dinner is $51. 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.*** *Be sure to give your choice of tour time when responding for lunch.*

Beyond October...

NOVEMBER LUNCHEON
On November 13th, Kathleen McCreary, wife of the great-great-grandnephew of the founder of the Newberry library, will present a well-illustrated talk about Walter Loomis Newberry and some of his fascinating relatives, including (most specifically) his daughter, Julia Newberry.

NOVEMBER DINNER
The dinner meeting on November 18 will take place at the Adler Planetarium, where Caxtonian Marvin Bolt will guide us through artifacts and volumes on display in the Adler's new exhibition, "Through the Looking Glass: 400 years of telescopes," which is the nation's (and quite possibly the world's) most complete exhibition on the topic.

DECEMBER LUNCHEON
On December 11, Caxtonian Susan Hanes will take us along on her literary journey which culminated in the publication of her book *Wilke Collins's American Tour 1873-4*, in March of 2008. Included in her illustrated talk will be details of Collins's life, her research (frustrations and triumphs), and what led to her interest in this writer in the first place.

DECEMBER DINNER
December 18 will bring the annual Revels and Auction to Ruggles Hall at the Newberry. Get your items to Dan Crawford at the Newberry for the auction: the sooner, the better!