

## Remembering Florence Shay

Tom Joyce

The rabbi introduced Billy Corgan, the lead singer of Chicago's famed musical group, Smashing Pumpkins. Corgan walked to the lectern and broke into an a cappella version of Gershwin's "Summertime." It was late August. It was summertime. I do not understand why he selected that song, but it was a tribute to his recent friend, Florence Shay ('85), whose book of life had closed at age 90.

Florence Gerson Shay (1922-2012) crammed an amazing amount of life into only ninety years. Brooklyn-born and -raised, she graduated from Brooklyn College with concentrations in psychology and English literature. She became a war bride in 1944 when she married a Bronx bomber navigator, Art Shay. Happily, Art survived his 52 flying missions over Germany, and 68 years of marriage to Florence. I don't know which was more tumultuous. Of his wife, Art said, "She was the most joyous and joy-bringing person I have ever known."

Like nearly every American in the post-war period, the Shays immediately set out to renew the world. Art's work as a photographer for magazines such as *Life*, *Time*, and later, *Sports Illustrated*, took him to Chicago. With their first-born, Jane, the Shays settled in Deerfield to raise four more children. Florence managed the home, and Arthur's career, little suspecting that she would eventually carve out one of her own.

It was the Sixties, and while the children were at school, Florence volunteered to work at the ORT Resale shop in nearby Highland Park. Naturally she gravitated to their used book section. It was there that she got to know another Brooklynite, Sonja Levinger (d. 2012). The two workers noted how some books never sold at all, while others – they learned – had much higher market values than the thrift shop could get for them in that

era. The two of them were fascinated by the lure and lore of old books. They decided that if they were going to spend hours sorting and pricing and arranging mounds of old and used books, then they would rather do it on better merchandise. And so they began to acquire merchandise, inventory, and then found room to shelve it in Sonja's spacious home above some ravines in Highland Park.

At the same time, they reached out for mentoring in this specialized field. They began



visiting other book dealers in the region, such as Richard Leekley in Winthrop Harbor, and Van Allen Bradley of Lake Zurich and Barrington (and the author of *Gold In Your Attic*), and others. Probably instigated by Richard Leekley, these informal get-togethers evolved into a semiformal organization for regular monthly meetings of Chicago-area used booksellers under the name Midwest Book-

hunters, of which Sonja and Florence were key members.

Between the burgeoning piles of books in Sonja's home, and the need for more regularity in the business, the two women decided to open a storefront bookshop, and found quarters on Sheridan Road, a short walk from the commuter train station. Then two things happened. First, Sonja's husband took a new job in sunny California, forcing Sonja to sell Florence her share in the business. Then, Van Allen Bradley, Donald Vento, and others urged Florence to apply to join the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, the national guild organization for rare booksellers, and the only American organization affiliated with the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers. Florence really "arrived" when her application was approved for the ABAA.

The news spread about the nice lady with the bookshop. Inventory filled the shelves. Bibliophiles and readers came in and bought books. Books spread across the floor and up into the display window. One day, somehow, a double-wide type case (sans type) appeared, and became filled with ephemera, maps, oddments, pamphlets, etc., while the top shelf was spacious enough for several shelves of books. Just beyond it, perched at a ladylike desk, just south of the bookshelf of photography books, sat somebody's grandmother – Florence – queen of all she surveyed. But she was a benevolent despot. You could take her "children" home. You could buy her books. But bargainners were not welcome. This was not "Let's Make a Deal" Land.

Sometimes Florence did get a bit mischievous – in a nice way, of course. What Jewish mother doesn't engage in a bit of matchmaking? In one instance, she put together a cute, Swedish brunette, a dedicated antiques dealer  
See FLORENCE SHAY, page 2



# CAXTONIAN

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FLORENCE SHAY, from page 1

who worked several shops away, with a certain antiquarian bookselling colleague from Chicago. No marriage ensued that time, but they were paired for most of a year.

Chicago's first Antiquarian Book Fair was held in July, 1976, at the Prudential Building – that formerly famous building (for a long time Chicago's tallest postwar building). It was in July, because that was when the American Library Association held its annual meeting in Chicago that year. The Fair attracted about a hundred exhibitors, including many from faraway lands. It was a decent fair, as first-time events go, but it disappointed because expectations for it were so high from the out-of-townners. Also, the Publicity Committee failed to get the announcement to the librarians in a timely manner.

The direct result was local enthusiasm for a follow-up fair, but less interest from outside the Midwest. It took half a dozen more years before it would be attempted again, and by a new group of planners. The national and international bookseller organizations would allow the Midwest Chapter to have a book fair only every other year. The other time slots were filled, especially by the biennial Congresses of the International League of Antiquarian Booksellers – somewhere in the world. But Florence was not daunted by the challenges and uphill battles.

For the next dozen years, Florence co-chaired or chaired the book fair planning committees, and managed – the operative word here – to create modest but successful fairs here in fly-over land. The best, I think, were at the Palmer House. Through them all, Florence pulled strings, cajoled free publicity, made appearances, and generally charmed anybody who would listen to her describe the excitement and wonders of collecting old books, manuscripts, maps, and such. She found ways to get television and radio interviews that had stymied the professional PR people. Much of the success of those shows was directly attributable to her and her determination.

Florence did not ignore the other important parts of life. One time she and I traveled to St. Paul to do the Twin Cities Antiquarian Book Fair (me to exhibit, she on a buying trip). En route to the Fair on Saturday morning, we had time to check out a few of the yard sales going on. When there were no books worth looking at, Florence bought clothes and gifts and toys for her grandchildren. Florence also served a three-year term as the Midwest Representative to the ABAA Board of Governors. While attending the Board Meeting, held in conjunction with a book fair in New York City, Florence took the opportunity to stay and visit with her daughter, Lauren, and the grandchildren.

Florence and I had a mutual admiration society,

but the scope of the books we sold was so similar that we could rarely go buying together. But I do recall an occasion when I could not save her from herself. It was an auction at the Hanzel Galleries in the last century. I arrived after the start of the sale, and had been unable to properly view the items in advance. I started to bid, impulsively, on a nice set of the 1840 octavo edition of Audubon's *Birds of America*. It was eight leather-bound volumes, and it opened for bidding at \$200 or \$300. I raised the bid once or twice, and Florence also was among the bidders. She was sitting several rows directly in front of me. Between us sat the famed antiquarian Jimmy Eckerling, who, grinning, turned around and said in my direction, "All the plates have been removed from that set!" I ceased bidding, but Florence continued. She had not looked at the set either, and was hoping to get a "sleeper." I think she paid over a thousand dollars for the lot. They were handsome volumes. I admired them in her shop whenever I dropped in during the following years. Eventually they did disappear – to a buyer, I hope.

Florence enjoyed her membership in the Caxton Club for more than a quarter century. For a number of those years, she was part of a car-pool of Caxtonians who drove in together every third Wednesday.

It will not be the same without Florence. Her shop anchored and influenced the north suburban region as a reliable, knowledgeable place where people could find fine first edition and good books without having to travel to the Loop. She also ran a dedicated book search service for customers, for books she did not have in inventory. She was a senior citizen who faced her fears over computers enough to work them as they became irreplaceable to the antiquarian book business. Although she never mastered the computer enough to be mistaken for a geek, she began blogging years ago and developed a following among customers and colleagues.

Florence announced her farewell to the ABAA via an email, in which she revealed she was 90 years old, and that she had been given five weeks to live. We had all wondered about the former and were saddened by the latter. We all know one another only in limited ways. We never know the fullness of even the people we are closest to. By the time of the memorial service, I had learned how many birthdays Florence had celebrated. But it is always a pleasure, in a memorial service, to learn something about a person that I never suspected or expected. I knew that Florence had been taking Tai Chi for years to maintain her agility. But I never suspected that she had long practiced fencing! Her preference was for the foil, and not the saber. Sabers were for chopping, but foils went for the heart. For Florence that somehow makes all the sense.

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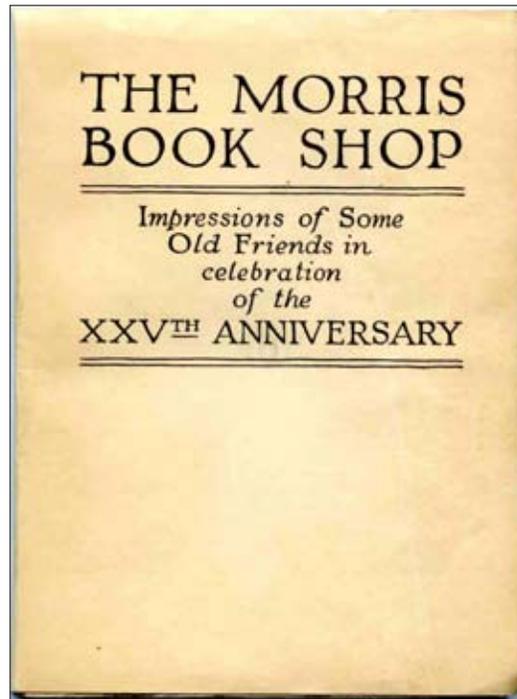
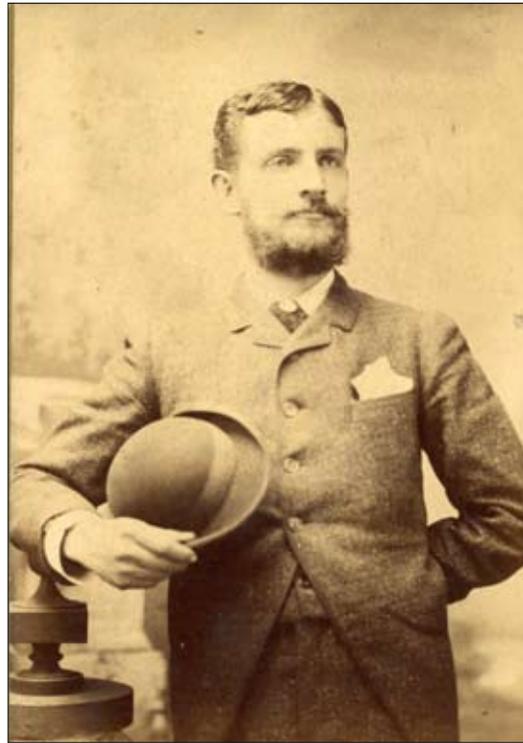
# A Relation in the Trade; or

My Discovery of Frank Morris, Chicago Bookseller

Ted Young

As a boy I learned that my maternal great-grandfather, Frank Morris, had been a bookseller in Chicago in the early part of the 20th century. For many years I knew little more than that. My great-grandfather died when my mother was five years old, and his son, my grandfather, died when I was the same age. There was little in the way of family lore passed down concerning my great-grandfather. He and his wife divorced shortly after their son graduated from college. The stigma surrounding divorce in that era, or my grandfather's reaction to it, may have been the reason behind the silence that surrounded Frank Morris in the family. The few times that I asked his daughter-in-law about him, my proper Victorian grandmother would respond in a voice of disdain and no little embarrassment that my great-grandfather "had travelled in Bohemian circles," as if somehow this was the kiss of death and something not to be repeated outside the family. At age 12 I had no idea what "Bohemian circles" were, but knowing my grandmother and her prudish attitudes, I assumed that it was something terribly exciting. As I entered my teenage years, then college, then career and family, my curiosity fell by the wayside, only to be revived on the occasion of my mother's 90th birthday in 2009.

My brother and sisters and I decided to produce a volume celebrating my mother's life as a present to her. I took on the task of writing my mother's biography. At next to the last minute, one of my sisters asked me to add short biographical essays on my mother's parents. I was fortunate in being the holder of the family archives. A hurried search turned up two items of interest: an article in the September 1922 issue of *The Bookman* titled "Eugene Field's Bookseller," a sketch of my great-grandfather, and a photocopy of a commemorative book, *The Morris Book Shop: Impressions of Some Old Friends in celebration of the XXVth Anniversary*, published in 1912. These were my introduction to my great-grandfather's life as a bookseller. From them, and one or two articles I found in the family papers, I managed to pull together a few paragraphs about my great-grandfather for my mother's biography, though what I wrote gave only the briefest account of his life. This exercise did, however, rekindle my curiosity



Young Morris, TOP; Anniversary booklet.

about him.

Years before, I had become a confirmed bibliophile. Reading Nicholas Basbanes' two books, *A Gentle Madness* and *Patience & Fortitude*, had stimulated an interest in book collecting, book collectors, and booksellers. And I had one in the family that I knew little about. After presenting the book to our mother on

her birthday, I decided to see what I could find about Frank Morris in the hope that I could one day write a fuller account of his career as a bookseller. Much to my surprise, the exploration that followed managed to turn up more information than I thought possible and led me into an entirely new area of book collecting.

The Internet proved to be an invaluable tool on my journey of discovery. Simple Google searches for "Frank Morris" and "The Morris Book Shop" led me to biographical dictionaries that mentioned my great-grandfather. Further research uncovered the *Dictionary of American Antiquarian Booksellers*, by Donald Dickinson, which contained a brief overview of my great-grandfather's career as a bookseller, and more importantly, more sources for this information. One of the books cited was Guido Bruno's *Adventures in American Bookshops, Antique Stores and Auction Rooms*, published in 1922. Through the Internet I also searched the archives of the *Chicago Tribune* where I came across several articles relating to Frank Morris, his bookshop, and book collecting. A further search in the family papers brought out several fading newspaper articles and more on the family genealogy.

The Morris family originated in Wales and came to the American colonies in the late 1600s, settling in New York and New Jersey. Like many other American families they drifted west with the frontier, moving to Pennsylvania, and then in the early 1800s to the territory of Ohio, where Frank Morris was born in 1857. He went to the local public schools, but chose to go to college at Butler University in Indianapolis. After his graduation, Frank Morris entered the world of books, securing a job as a clerk at the publishing firm of Merrill, Meigs and

Company in 1880. (In 1883 the firm changed its name to Bowen-Merrill and Company, and later became Bobbs-Merrill.) What attracted him to pursue a career in the book world and turned him into a life-long bibliophile remains a mystery. Frank Morris spent the next four

See *FRANK MORRIS*, page 4

FRANK MORRIS, *from page 3*

years working in Indianapolis, becoming a member of the Indianapolis Light Infantry, a unit of the Indiana National Guard. He was proud to call himself a "Hoosier" for the rest of his life. In 1884 or early 1885, Frank Morris decided to set up on his own. He moved to Chicago and opened his own book shop on West Madison Street near Fifth Avenue, at first as The Old Book Shop. Around 1887, he apparently changed the name to The Morris Book Shop, running his bookselling business under this name until his retirement in the early 1920s.

The timing of his move to Chicago was fortuitous. In the last two decades of the 19th century, following the great fire of 1871, Chicago went through an unprecedented boom. The population of the city grew from 299,000 in 1870 to 1.7 million by 1900. Chicago became the business, manufacturing, and transportation hub of the Midwest, the center of the meat packing industry, and the busiest railroad center in the nation. America's rapid industrial growth during this period brought with it unparalleled wealth with new industries and railroads creating fortunes and a growing middle class, though all Chicagoans by no means shared in this good fortune. This new wealth did stimulate cultural pursuits and attracted writers, journalists, artists, and poets from all over the Midwest. In the 1890s Chicago underwent a literary renaissance.

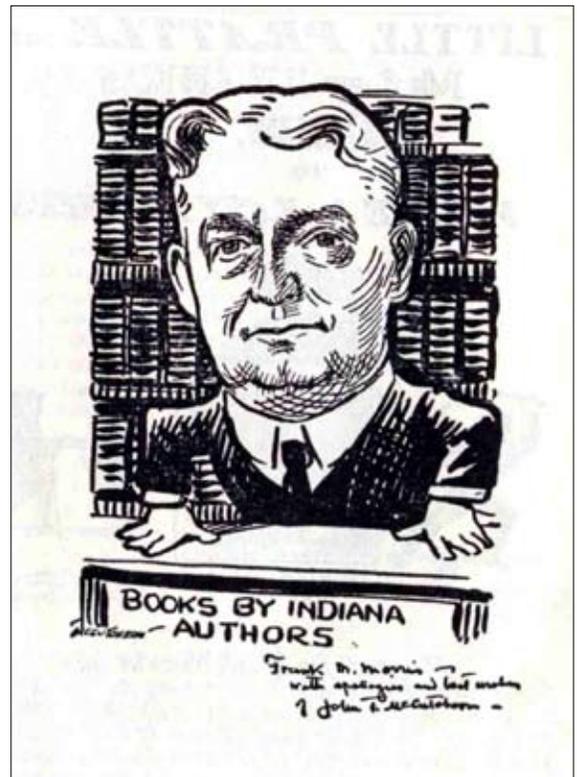
The city was home to a growing number of bibliophiles who had the time and money to pursue their passion. The first book store in Chicago opened its doors in 1834. The number of book dealers steadily expanded as the city grew, despite frequent fires. As one leading dealer of the 1870s described his role, "To be an educated bookseller in these latter days is something to be proud of. We are the almoners to the hungry souls who yearn for literary food." In the last quarter of the 19th century, Chicago became a mecca for rare books and rare book collectors. A contemporary observer noted two distinctive features of the Chicago book business: "1. The relative demand for fine bindings, for full and half calf and morocco editions of all standard works, is apparently greater in Chicago than in any other book market in the world. 2. So is the special demand for old, rare, and choice books. It is not uncommon to have \$30,000 worth on hand – many of them imported directly from Europe..." General Alexander Caldwell McClurg, a book dealer who had become a general in the Civil War, had much to do

with promoting Chicago as a center of rare books. In 1871 McClurg purchased the Griggs & Company book shop, setting up in one corner of the store the Old English book department, which in the early 1880s became a meeting place for bibliophiles, writers, and journalists. This section of the store became known and later famous as the Saints and Sinners Corner. Frank Morris soon became a member of this "set," as it was called at the time.

The Morris Book Shop soon attracted its own devoted clientele and developed its own version of the Saints and Sinners. Over the next 20 years the shop became an institution among Chicago's literati and bibliophiles, the gathering place for Chicago's leading writers, men like George Ade, the humorist; James Whitcomb Riley, the poet; the journalists William Allen White, Charles E. Russell, and Wilbur D. Nesbit; Sherwood Anderson, the playwright; and, until his death in 1895, the writer Eugene Field. These men, and many leading Chicago book collectors, would gather in Frank Morris' shop to converse, trade stories, peruse the books on the many shelves, and occasionally purchase a volume or two. Eugene Field would often hold forth, reading his latest poem, one of which was to Frank Morris:

This is the robber, as sure's you're born,  
Against whose guile I fain would warn. The  
bibliomaniac, tattered and torn,  
Who pauses to look at some second-hand book  
That lies on the shelf all covered with dust  
And is marked "four dollars, for cash – no trust"  
In a gloomy corner that smells of must  
Down in the shop that Morris built!

Frank Morris was congenial and convivial. He was, as Wilbur D. Nesbit described him in a commemorative volume years later, "...himself...a great deal like a book. He is easy to take up, all that he has is yours, you may visit with him today and leave him alone for years if you wish, and when you come back you find him unchanged." He created a warm and welcoming space for men and women who loved good books and good conversation. He never pressed his customers to buy a book, but gave them the freedom to browse at leisure. He even allowed customers to come in and read a book during their lunch hour, thoughtfully providing a bookmark so that the reading could be continued the next day.



Caricature of Morris by John T. McCutcheon.

Although he carried a general stock of older books, Frank Morris was primarily an anti-quarian book dealer. He "typified the collecting passions of the 1890s and early 20th century during which he flourished." His stock of books "...boasted rare tomes bound by Maroli or David or Trautz-Bauzonnet, and thanks to his 'frequent purchases of private libraries' and his 'constant buying at London and Eastern sales' he could offer in his 'catalogues issued at intervals' Americana and Shakespeareana, Autograph Letters and Private Presses, Early Printing and First Editions, Angling and Ornithology, Association Books and Illustrated Books" among many other categories. His shop also sold prints, etchings, and portraits. His advertisements said that Morris "takes particular pleasure in searching for books long out of print." He became a knowledgeable antiquarian and built his own private collection of presentation copies, autographed letters, and manuscripts. Frank Morris was an early member of the Caxton Club, founded in 1895 by 15 Chicago bibliophiles to support the publication of fine books in the spirit of the contemporary arts and crafts movement.

He retained his loyal friends and customers, who followed his moves around the city. In 1912 a group of these men had a small volume privately published to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Morris Book Shop. Some 27 writers, journalists, and poets contributed remembrances in prose and verse.

Frank Morris presented one copy to a friend shortly before his death, inscribing it with the words "While these tributes are embarrassingly gratifying, it is much nicer to have them before than after the funeral." In his later years, Frank Morris was considered the dean of Chicago book dealers.

In the September 1922 edition of *The Bookman*, the writer Earl E. Fisk published a short sketch of Frank Morris titled "Eugene Field's Bookseller." The article draws a picture of Frank Morris as he then was:

From Eugene Field's descriptions and from Fanny Butcher's enthusiastic comments one would expect to find Frank Morris a slim, ascetic, bespectacled, mild-eyed, benign old character who wanders around among musty books on dusty shelves. He should wear shiny, slimsy clothes and his fingers should tremble as he reverently touches a cherished volume that one wishes to buy. But Frank Morris isn't a bit like that. He is a plump, distinguished looking old gentleman who if met on the street or in a club would easily be mistaken for a prominent college president or a well-known business executive. He does, however, smoke long thin stogies constantly and his shop has that delicious odor of tobacco and old books commingled which Field loved so well. But he is far from being a stogy old recluse. He plays golf every Sunday morning in winter as well as summer.... Frank Morris knows and has known more literary celebrities than the editor of any literary magazine or newspaper book supplement. He has seen the passing procession and can relate intimate anecdotes from the days of Eugene Field and James Russell Lowell to those of Sherwood Anderson and John Drinkwater. His clothes are not shiny and slimsy, but when I saw him he wore [sic] a smartly tailored and neatly pressed suit of gray tweed.... Frank Morris is a Chicago institution, just as much as is the University of Chicago or the Art Institute. Tourists in the city usually go to see the packing houses, Michigan Boulevard, and the rest of the sights, but people of a bookish mind should not miss seeing Chicago's best loved bookseller.

My collecting relating to my great-grandfather and his bookshop began by accident.



Morris in advanced years.

**ADVERTISEMENT**

**A FEATURE**

Much favorable comment has been made on the following notice, which, for over twenty years, has hung in the Morris Book Shop,

**TO MAKE YOU FEEL PERFECTLY AT EASE IN EXAMINING OUR STOCK, EMPLOYEES ARE INSTRUCTED NOT TO OFFER ASSISTANCE WITHOUT BEING ASKED. THIS, WE HOPE, WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED AS INATTENTION ON OUR PART. IF YOU SEEK INFORMATION, ASK ALL THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT WITHOUT FEELING UNDER ANY OBLIGATIONS TO PURCHASE**

The list of subjects below gives an idea of the general character of business conducted by THE MORRIS BOOK SHOP. Catalogs are issued at intervals, and will be sent upon request. The frequent purchases of private libraries, and the constant buying at the London and Eastern sales, offers excellent opportunities for collectors in all lines. Mr. Morris takes particular pleasure in searching for books long "out-of-print," and invites inquiries.

Americana	Essays	Miscellaneous Second
Autograph Letters	Exchanges	Hand Books
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"Association" Books	Economics	Ornithology
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Classics	Genealogy	"Remainders"
Courtesans	Geology	Sociology
Cyclopedias	Historical Works	Sports
Dramas	Limited Editions of Standard Sets	Shakespeareans
Early Printing	Translations	Travels

**THE MORRIS BOOK SHOP**  
71 East Adams Street CHICAGO

There was no record in the family that Frank Morris had ever written or published a book himself, so it never occurred to me to look for books under his name. One evening, while I was reading through the commemorative book on the Morris Book Shop, it suddenly occurred to me that it might just be possible to find my own original copy. I went to AbeBooks, typed in the title, and to my astonishment up popped an original copy, signed by my great-grandfather, with the inscription quoted above. While searching for material on his great friend Eugene Field, I stumbled onto *Eugene Field: An Auto-Analysis*, a short autobiography that Field had written, and that

my great-grandfather published in a limited edition of 150 copies with hand-painted illustrations. This led me to see whether he might have written other books. A search in the Library of Congress' catalogue turned up *Morris' Dictionary of Chicago and Vicinity*. My great-grandfather had written and published this guide in 1891, with a new and revised edition in 1898. An online search turned up a copy of the revised edition at a bookseller in Birmingham, England. Out of ignorance, I failed to realize that if my great-grandfather had published one book, he might have published more.

A few weeks before I completed this article, my mother's sister died. Going through her books at the invitation of my cousins, I found a signed edition of a book by W. C. Firebaugh titled *The Inns of Greece and Rome*, published in a limited edition of 600 copies by Frank M. Morris. I immediately went back to AbeBooks and searched for Frank M. Morris as a publisher, not author. I found three more books that my great-grandfather had published between 1906 and 1923. A further search using the Morris Book Shop as publisher turned up an additional two volumes. All appear to be limited editions of works of literary criticism or more obscure texts. In the process I managed to turn up an original catalogue from the Morris Book Shop. Uncovering my great-grandfather's work as a publisher raised more questions about his life.

My initial exploration of the life of Frank Morris has led me to two interconnected paths: Frank Morris the bookseller, and Frank Morris the publisher. I realize now that I have really only begun my research and my collecting effort. I hope, in the years to come, to undertake further study of the Chicago literary renaissance of the 1890s and the Chicago book world in the first decades of the 20th century, and to get to know the writers who were Frank Morris' friends, the clubs and associations he belonged to, and the book journals he would have read. I want to learn more about his field of specialty publishing during his later years. I hope, also, that in the course of this continuing search I can uncover more items directly connected to my great-grandfather.

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*Ted Young retired to Seattle in 2004 after a career in finance. He writes on aviation and military history and is currently working on his 10th book. He is a member of the Book Club of Washington, and this article first appeared in their fall, 2011 Journal.*

# Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Robert McCamant

(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: "Blood, Gold, and Fire: Coloring Early German Woodcuts" (how a largely illiterate public liked their devotional imagery: raw, emotional, and very bloody), Gallery 202A, through February 17. "Film and Photo in New York" (photos and rarely seen films made between the 20s and the 50s offer a glimpse of a pivotal time in New York), Galleries 1-4, through November 25.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "Botanical Art: Expressions of Natural Beauty" (books known today for their magnificent color illustrations were originally created for scientific discovery and research), through November 11. "The Garden Turns 40: Documenting Our Past, Planning for the Future" (traces the garden's roots from 1890, through 1972 when the Glencoe garden opened, to its present state), opens November 16.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: "Vivian Maier's Chicago" (Maier spent her adult life as a nanny but devoted her free time and money to photography), through summer 2013.

Columbia College Center for the Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S. Wabash Ave., 2nd floor, Chicago, 312-344-6630: "Druckworks: 40 Years of Books and Projects by Johanna Drucker" (comprehensive retrospective exhibits her books, graphic art, and visual projects), through December 7.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Choosing to Participate" (multimedia installations about people and communities whose stories illustrate how courage, initiative, and compassion are necessary to protect democracy), Special Collections Exhibit Hall, Ninth Floor, through November 11. "Author, Author" (retrospective by photographer Michael Childers has 50+ intimate portraits of the 20th century's greatest authors), Congress Corridor, Ground Floor, through February 3.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place,

Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner" (rare photographs, recordings, and artifacts collected by Turner from Gullah communities in Africa, South America, and the U.S.), through December 31.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "MCA DNA: William Kentridge" (more than a dozen drawings and two of his best-known films: *Felix in Exile* (1994) and *History of the Main Complaint* (1996)), through March 17.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "The Newberry Quasiquicentennial: 125 Extraordinary Years, 125 Extraordinary Objects" (including the first Bible printed in North America; an aria handwritten and signed by Mozart – when he was 9; a Shakespeare First Folio; original artwork featuring American Indians by American Indians; an original and never-bound manuscript of Voltaire's *Candide*; letters from Thomas Jefferson, Jack Kerouac, and Ernest Hemingway; and rare correspondence between a slave woman and her husband), through December 31.

Northwestern University, Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "De-Natured: German Art from Joseph Beuys to Martin Kippenberger" (varied work of ten German artists from the mid-1960s into the first decade of the 21st century), through December 9.

Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Birds In Ancient Egypt," through July 28.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-467-5918: "Decorative Cloth: Publishers' Trade Bindings, 1820-1920" (examples of bindings from throughout the 19th and early 20th century), through March 25.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "Awash in Color: French and Japanese Prints" (parallel traditions in France and Japan since before 1854 influenced each other), through January 20.

Spertus Center, 610 S. Michigan, Chicago, 312-322-1700: "Uncovered & Rediscovered: Stories of Jewish Chicago" (the work of influential Jewish artists active in Chicago between 1920 and 1945), December 29.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "Swiss Treasures: From Biblical Papyrus and Parchment to Erasmus, Zwingli, Calvin, and Barth" (historical Biblical texts and modern manuscripts in Biblical studies drawn from eight libraries in seven Swiss cities), through December 14.

Until a replacement exhibit editor is found, please send your listings to [bmccamant@quarterfold.com](mailto:bmccamant@quarterfold.com), or call 312-329-1414 x 11.



Chicago History Museum: Vivian Maier  
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# Caxtonians Collect: Steve Woodall

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

I first met Steve Woodall at a book fair in Bethesda, Maryland. We had nearby tables and chatted between customers. He wasn't selling books he'd made himself. He was selling books made by users of the San Francisco Center for the Book, a bookbinding and letterpress studio offering workshops, public events, and exhibitions that promote traditional book arts and experimental book forms. He was its artistic director.

So I guess it shouldn't have come as a surprise to me when he turned up in Chicago as the Director of the Center for Book and Paper Arts at Columbia College. But, frankly, I was. Not many people have a great job in the Bay Area and trade it for one in Chicago. But Steve says, "Columbia is the place to be in the book arts right now. We've got the best facilities, the best staff, and we're doing lots of exciting things all at once."

Perhaps he's happy here because he's very "non-factional." In the book arts, the factions are often the people who are concerned about craft vs. the ones who are concerned about art. Of course that is an oversimplification: you cannot have one without at least some of the other. "But here at Columbia, we seem to have the sides in balance," he says. "Some of us lean a bit one direction, while others lean the other. But we all respect one other and are teaming up for some incredible new programs."

One he cited was a new experimental publishing program funded by a \$50,000 NEA grant. The idea is to create iPad apps that represent existing artists' books, and to commission media artists to create purely digital books – then create physical books from those. "Fine press and artists' books should be much better known," he says. "This is a way of distributing versions of them more widely – and to still keep the focus on the physical book. After all, many younger people don't frequent

special collections libraries, but they're all used to downloading apps!" he concludes.

Woodall grew up near San Diego. "At age 18 I was working as a copy boy for the San Diego *Union*, and managed to talk my way into a plum assignment covering the Monterey Pop Festival. I had a backstage pass, and the story I filed ran in more than 20 newspapers nationwide – the pinnacle of my brief career in journalism!" He moved to San Francisco to go to college, earning a BA in creative



writing from San Francisco State. He was in and out of school a bit, sometimes bartending, but always writing and reading. His literary interests have included Ezra Pound, the Black Mountain poets, and the formal properties of ancient literature.

In the end, he gave up on grad school and was a cab driver in San Francisco for 20 years. As he told a Columbia College interviewer when he took the Director's job, "While driving a cab, I perfected the bohemian, slacker lifestyle, but it never felt like an authentic life choice for me." Sounds fun to me. He had a lot of interesting friends and was involved in the art and poetry scenes.

Type and printing historian Alastair Johnston introduced him to the Pacific Center for the Book Arts where he eventually served as

president. Then, in 1996, Mary Austin and Kathleen Burch launched the San Francisco Center for the Book. "I was parking the cab and helping out wherever I could," he explained. "I began scheduling programs and workshops, and before long I was able to park the cab permanently. I married my wife Lila Crutchfield around that time, and we soon had a wonderful son, David. So in a very short time I became the workaholic family guy I am today. There's been one major downside to my

otherwise amazing time in Chicago, and that is that I've had to leave my family behind in California, and I return there frequently." In Steve's 12 years as the San Francisco Center's education and artistic director, the mailing list grew from a few hundred to more than 15,000. By the time he left, the Center was offering more than 300 workshops annually.

Though Steve denies that he is a serious book collector, he does say "I do identify to a possibly unhealthy extent with my library." He keeps some of the books which have been most formative in his view of print culture right in the office, and pulled a few off the shelf to show me. The first was Massin's (English) edition of Ionesco's "The

Bald Soprano," published in 1961 by Grove Press. "It's a radical book, and as a visual representation of theater I don't think it's ever been matched. Massin assigns each character their own typeface, then goes on to visually capture comedic timing, intonation, and stage direction," he says. He first saw a copy in his college library in 1968. "It made me aware of the expressive possibilities of the book form. If any book has changed my life, that was the one. In 2002, with the help of the Book Club of California, I was able to bring Massin to San Francisco for a career retrospective exhibition. I finally got to meet a personal hero – an unforgettable experience."

Woodall joined the Club in 2009, nominated by Paul Gehl.

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Photograph by Robert McCamant



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## Bookmarks...

**Luncheon: Fri., Nov. 9, 2012, Cliff Dwellers + Tour  
Teri Embry**

**A Giant in our Midst: The Pritzker Military Library**

**T**our the world-renowned Pritzker Military Library (104 S. Michigan) with Chief Librarian (and Caxtonian) Teri Embry. Lunch first at the Cliff Dwellers (200 S. Michigan) **at 11:15. Note early time.** (\$30). The Library features an outstanding new exhibit: "She's a Wow!," posters and photos of women in WWII; the library also contains the Medal of Honor and Citizen Soldier permanent exhibits. Teri will lead us through the collection highlights (40,000 books and 25,000 rotating artifacts) and tell about Hiring our Heroes (Veterans Center), the yearly Military Writing Award (\$100,000) and the myriad of programs offered including lectures, interviews, panel discussions, movie screenings and, also, a surprising gift shop.

The Library was founded in 2003 by Colonel J.N. Pritzker to enhance the awareness of the input of the Citizen Soldier, preserve American military history, and honor the service of military personnel.

*November luncheon: Meet at Cliff Dwellers, 200 S. Michigan, for lunch at 11:15, prior to our tour at the nearby Pritzker Military Library. Luncheon is \$30. November dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. \$48.*

### Beyond November...

#### DECEMBER LUNCHEON

On December 7, member Bob McCamant will lead a group of other members in showing off items from their personal collection: "show 'n' tell" for grownups.

**Note: first Friday!**

#### DECEMBER DINNER

It's Revels time. Participate in our 13th Annual Live and Silent Auction on December 12th at the Newberry Library. Acclaimed storyteller Peggy Sullivan will entertain with some riveting Holiday "gems."

**Note: second Wednesday!**

**Dinner: Wednesday, Nov. 14, Union League Club  
Gordon Turnbull**

**James Boswell's *Life of Johnson: The Director's Cut***

**T**he provocatively aphoristic Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), English essayist, poet, editor, and pioneering lexicographer, holds a permanent place in the currency of shared and recognizable quotation, thanks mostly to the popularity of his biographer James Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). *The Life*, in its time a wholly innovative and pathbreaking literary achievement, pioneered the modern field of the large-scale warts-and-all biography now thoroughly familiar to us. Few knew, however, how much more there was to Boswell (1740–1795) beyond the myth of a life lived in more or less constant stenographic attendance on Johnson, until the sensational series of recoveries of his rich trove of private diaries, letters, and other papers in the early twentieth century, and their publication by the Yale Boswell Editions.

Dr. Gordon Turnbull, General Editor of the Yale Boswell Editions, will speak about the story behind the story of one of English literature's greatest books. **Note second Wednesday!**

*For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email [caxtonclub@newberry.org](mailto:caxtonclub@newberry.org); reservations are needed by noon Friday for the Wednesday dinner.*

#### JANUARY LUNCHEON

On January 11 (at the Union League), David Buisseret, Director of the Newberry's Cartography Center and then Professor at the U of Texas, will explain, in detail, how he recently proved that an important 1673 Jacques Marquette map, (declared a fake by another professor), was indeed authentic!

#### JANUARY DINNER

On January 16, we will meet at the Union League Club. Program to be announced.