

## Chicago's Zine Scene, viewed from Quimby's Bookstore

Liz Mason\*

From its beginning, the Quimby's Bookstore philosophy was to sell printed matter that was hard to find, weird, aberrant, saucy, or lowbrow. To this day, this is an accurate description of most of the merchandise Quimby's sells. The store's founder, Steven Svymbersky, would sell just about any printed thing, but instead of buying zines upfront from the creator, he would do it on consignment, waiting until after they sold to then give a percentage of the retail price. Quimby's still sells many items on consignment, a labor-intensive but fundamentally risk-free business model.\*\* A lot of what arrives is unsolicited and of variable quality, but even after working there for almost 12 years, I still get excited about opening the mail every day.

When Quimby's Bookstore opened in 1991 at Evergreen and Damen (not far from Nelson Algren's last Chicago apartment), Wicker Park was transitioning from an ethnic neighborhood to an artist-populated neighborhood in the early stages of commercial gentrification. It wasn't the Starbucks- and American Apparel-infested neighborhood it is now. It was shady enough that if you walked down the street and looked too square, any number of things might be thrown at you: rocks, dirt, obscenities. After opening Quimby's and running it for four years, Steven sold it to the current owner, Eric Kirsammer. Steven said that he got tired of being held up at gunpoint at the store (which also happened to be in the same building in which he lived). He concluded that the area was not the safest place

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\* manager of Quimby's Bookstore

\*\* Quimby's consignment forms are available on the store's website ([quimbys.com](http://quimbys.com)), which any zine or comics publisher can print, fill out, and send along with their printed matter..

## Confessions of a Zine Collector



photograph by John Dunlevy

John Dunlevy

Since the *Caxton Club Directory 2006 Supplement*, I have been the first and only Caxtonian listing zines as an area of collecting interest. For that directory, I spelled the word hesitantly – and incorrectly – as 'zines'. That leading apostrophe represented a bit of doubt. It was a doubt on the one hand of the legitimacy of *zine* as a real word, independent of the *magazine* for which it was originally – either directly or via the intermediate *fanzine* – an abbreviation,

On April 6, 2013, The Caxton Club/Newberry Library Symposium on the Book will present “**Outsiders: Zines, Samizdat, and Alternative Publishing**,” exploring the world of the alternative press with experts from around the country. Watch the Club web site for details.

but it was also a related doubt and self-consciousness about admitting zines as a field of collecting distinct from some broader category like periodicals or ephemera.

For the earlier, non-supplemental 2006 *Directory*, I had listed

“contemporary music,” thinking of my zines as fitting into some subcategory under that big, vague classification. Since I grew up in the college town of Oxford, Ohio, and went to high school in the late 1980s, it is not surprising that I was fan of what was then called “alternative” or “modern rock,” that is the punk, new wave, post-punk, and related independent rock music of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and its descendants. Listening to that music meant trading cassette tapes with friends, buying albums (then also on cassette!), and listening to the local independent radio station, WOXY 97.7 FM. “97X” used to do an annual Memorial Day weekend count-

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photograph by Robert McCamant



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### QUIMBY'S, from page 1

to raise a family. In fact, Steven had a playpen in the middle of the store for his kids so he could watch them while he worked. (If you look at Chris Ware comics, in one strip about the importance of independent publishing, he included Quimby's and drew in the playpen.) In the late 90s, Quimby's moved a few blocks from its original location to the present location, and over time garnered a reputation for being friendly to zine-selling.

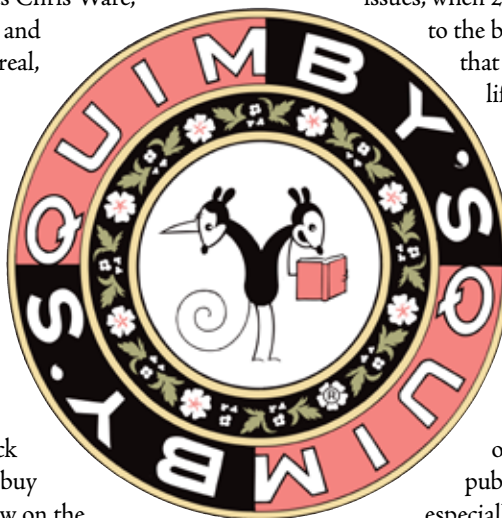
Both then and now, the zines and comics sold at Quimby's were periodicals you didn't find in other bookstores or magazines stands. There were zines with names like *Murder Can Be Fun*, *Cop Porn*, and *Rollerderby*, sexy fetish mags with folks dressed in latex (doing things that would make less adventurous readers blush), and of course, non-superhero style comics (often spelled "comix," or called mini-comics, or sometimes just minis, which I loosely define as the zines of the comics world). These comics were made by artists Chris Ware, Dan Clowes, Stuart Helm, and others. Their work was surreal, artsy and maybe autobiographical, but most importantly, consigned by the artists themselves.

It was (and still is) true that these artists and zine publishers were both the patrons and patron saints of Quimby's; the money they collected, once their items sold, was often recycled back into the store. They would buy the zines and minis they saw on the same shelves alongside their own work, inspired by content reflecting their unique vision of the world. This tradition of the Quimby's consignors recycling their proceeds back into the store continues to this day, with what I jokingly refer to as "Quimby's economy." We pay a few dollars to the zinester and they will unceremoniously hand it back and purchase more zines. This inadvertent practice of recycling money made from DIY (do-it-yourself) items back into the same culture by buying other DIY items is integral in keeping DIY culture thriving, although one would be hard-pressed to find anybody striking it rich from sales in independent publishing. (One of my co-workers wryly jokes "Make zines, get rich!" every time he hands someone \$1.20 for a couple of sold zines.) Zinesters accept this fact with a degree of pride, since the ethos of zine culture is influenced by the ideals of punk rock culture, which preaches other ways of measuring success besides monetary gain: success is measured in how effective rebellious behavior is in bringing

about change, and how inspirational subversive art can be, or most importantly, how people just, you know, *enjoy* it. The big lesson is that nurturing one's cultural understanding by way of art and writing can be actually *better* than financial success.

The artists, shoppers, zine aficionados and literary types who frequented Quimby's when it was at Damen and Evergreen would also go across the street to Myopic Books, then also on Damen, essentially creating a party-like atmosphere. Myopic is another Wicker Park-based bookstore, one that specializes in buying and selling used books, and its doors are still open at the current Milwaukee Avenue location. The people who belonged to this scene were artists, writers, and art school kids from SAIC or Columbia, slam poets, performance artists, and various other weirdos. Quimby's still boasts a colorful clientele I often refer to as *my tribe*.

Due to the ephemeral nature of independent publishing, there can be long pauses between zine issues, when zine publishing gets relegated to the back burner because of the way that life gets in the way of, well, life. At times, someone will publish a zine for a few issues and then never get around to doing more. Or, their creative efforts manifest differently as time goes on – after having done zines, the artistic energy turns to artist books or some other publishing endeavor. New publishers pop up while other ones fold, especially with digital publishing being so popular, and especially during rough financial times. Sometimes a zine or magazine will go under due to a distributor going belly up, so the publication never gets the money the distributors owe. After 80 issues, the beloved Chicago-based *Punk Planet* was unfortunately victim to that scenario – a great loss to Chicago's zine history. Rumors circulated that this was possibly a contributing factor to the demise of another Chicago-based publication called *Venus*, sometimes known as *Venus Zine*. Since most zine publishing is an extracurricular activity outside one's livelihood, many zines are on what I call an "I will publish the next issue when I'm damn good and ready" publishing schedule. These publishers are single individuals or a small group who have other things going on in their lives that prevent them from putting new issues out regularly. If they wanted to make money from zines they would probably be publishing something else and with a more prolific publishing schedule. All this is to say that the nature of independent publishing can make it difficult to believe that there's a true zine "scene" in a traditional







courtesy Liz Mason;  
Zine fest poster by Laura Berger

A prior Chicago Zine Fest; the poster for this year's.

sense.

If we allow that there's a Chicago zine "scene," then it is one which changes from moment to moment. Stereotypically, zine publishing tends to be a youth culture that encompasses folks between 14 and 40 (unscientifically, based on my experience), and as zinesters age, they take on additional or different responsibilities in their lives, which can slow down publishing frequency. There are exceptions, of course, but it seems to be a trend I have seen over time, based on the ages of consignors at Quimby's.

I vacillate back and forth about a zine "scene." Or would that be a comics scene? Or a hip lit scene? Or an independent publishing scene? With all these distinctions of genre, how are we to know exactly what type of scene we're talking about? Many zinesters work in isolation, at least initially, but alliances strike up, sometimes for short periods of time, like one night at an event, or a zine collaboration, or even shorter because of the collaborators' passionate artistic temperaments. People who do zines tend to be angry, lone wolf punk rockers who might also be shy and bookish.

Booky nerdiness, sometimes attributed to zinesters, is epitomized by this anecdote at a recent Zlumber Party at Quimby's (zine slumber party, hang out overnight and work on your zine!): if it wasn't for the music playing on the stereo all night, you could have heard a pin drop! In the middle of a particularly silent moment as people worked, one of my co-workers exclaimed, "Saturday night zinester parTAAAY!!!" So how can a lone wolf be part of a scene? Artists can be lone wolf-y yet still be part of art co-ops, comics collectives, and the like. (Even Andy Warhol had

this Factory of artists, and they definitely had parties.) Maybe when zinesters are in the right setting with people they think of as people of *their* tribe, they feel comfortable letting their freak flag fly. Is that a scene? There might be a zine event where a bunch of zine people gather, but do they hang out and do zine-y things together? Perhaps there's an imaginary community that creates a scene for a few hours at an event. How often does that really happen? Zinesters might correspond with each other but at what point does having some sort of relationship become a "scene"?

I have difficulty in assessing whether there is a zine "scene" because Quimby's exists or if independent publishing is merely correlated with Quimby's existence. Most likely it's a little bit of both causation and correlation. If you make zines, you know you can bring them to Quimby's, and you know you can also find weird stuff there. Sure, there are other ways you can distribute your zine, like give it away, or sell it at punk shows, or place an ad in the back of a zine like *Maximumrocknroll*, or even sell it through a distributor ("distro" in zine parlance, which is just a person distributing other people's zines). But really, how many storefronts offer the option to sell your work (besides a record store you convince to sell your zine, if you get lucky)? If there is a physical venue that exists for the sole purpose of selling stuff like a weirdo zine about dishwashing (*Dishwasher* is an actual zine) and that operates as a breeding ground for artsy types to gather, to sell, but also to purchase, then it would seem inevitable that a "scene" would coalesce.

In the end, I suppose it's not that important whether we affirm, deny, define or classify a



zine "scene." The important thing is that people are publishing ideas and art. Presently in Chicago there is a lot of active zine-esque activity. For example, I myself am part of SPOC (Self-Publishers of Chicago), a group that meets at members' homes on Thursdays (or at other social engagements) to talk about zine publishing and help each other or collaborate on publishing projects. There is the Read/Write Library (formally the Chicago Underground Library) in Humboldt Park that archives Chicago-based zines. There's also the Alternative Press Center in Chicago which provides access to and increases public awareness of alternative press (in the same building as the radical newspaper *In These Times*).

Some publishing discussions may overlap with the zine-related. The mere attempt at agreement on the definition of a zine or independent publishing is often contentious. The annual Printers Ball, founded by the Chicago-based Poetry Foundation (publisher of the literary journal *Poetry Magazine*) celebrates printed material in Chicago and encompasses literary journals, as well as zines, chap books (the zines of the poetry world), artist booklets, some comics, and more. There's Trubble Club, an artist's group that collaborates on comics, composed of, among others, one Quimby's

See *QUIMBY'S*, page 4

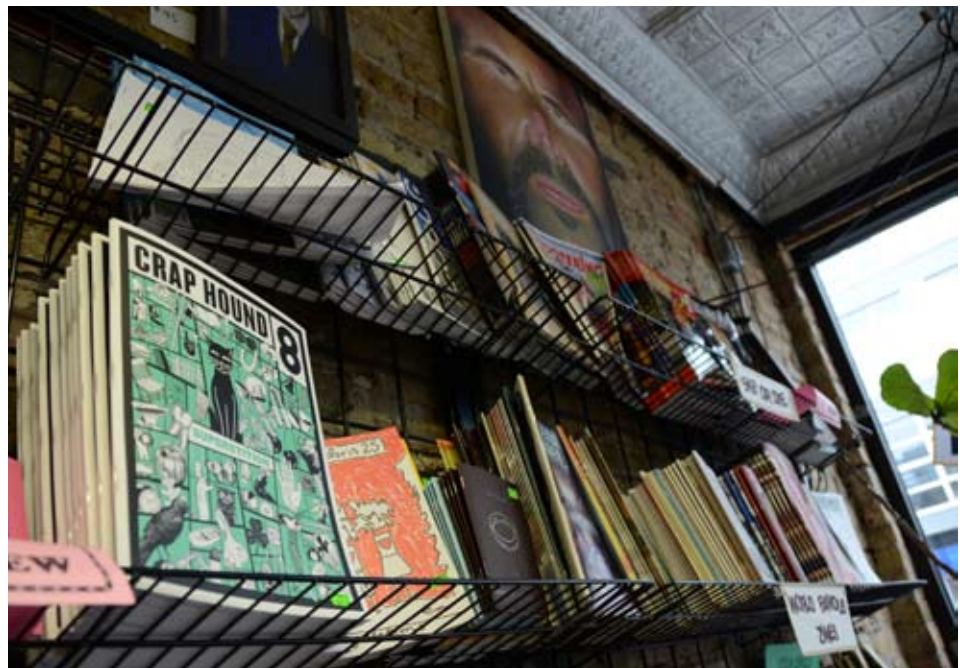


QUIMBY'S, from page 3

employee. There are even crazy metalhead guys who get together and grill meat, then do zines about being into metal and meat (I did NOT make that up. Might I suggest Suuimorb Ecnad's seminal masterpiece *Metal and Meat Within the Chicago Underground*? A representative quote: "Gorick brings the 6.66 lbs of thin 4-Day marinate bag of steak.") There is at least one zine reading club. (I sometimes attend, although we often joke that it should be called zine *skimming* club, depending on how many attenders have actually read all of the assigned zines each month). At least two amazing indie lit fests are alive and kicking in Chicago: The Chicago Zine Fest, now in its fourth year, and CAKE (the Chicago Alternative Comics Expo) in its second year. And, for the first time in 17 years, the radical Chicago-based underground free newspaper *Lumpen* did an all-comics issue, curated and edited by a founding CAKE member. In fact, the last all-comics issue of *Lumpen* was curated by Quimby's founder Steven Svymbersky all those years ago. Some people would say there's an art comics renaissance going on in Chicago, but I feel it never left. I may have a skewed vision of reality because every day I see tons of comics and zines at Quimby's and because I live half a mile from work, so many days pass where I do not go outside that half-mile radius. People who say "print is dead" have never seen the mail arrive on any given day at Quimby's.

The world of independent publishing is fluid, depending on who rotates in or out, or who is re-inspired. Younger zine novices get in on zine action when more experienced, older zinesters grow up and become teachers, like Carrie Colpitts, publisher of *Brilliant Mistake* and *My Aim Is True* zines. [One of Colpitts' zines appeared on the cover of last month's *Caxtonian*.] She teaches zine classes at a Chicago grade school, and in this way she passes on zine publishing as if it were folk tradition. Adorably, the kids she works with make zines and then bring them into Quimby's, and we help them consign their zines. In this way, Quimby's is a training ground for bridging the gap between art and commerce.

In Chicago, there are people who are zine-related instigators and who organize and motivate zine publishing. Nicki Yowell, the main instigator for SPOC, is constantly soliciting contributions for zines and publishing and has her own variety of zines about food, child care, and more. Another zine-y instigator is Chicago art curator Ed "Edmar" Marszewski, who edits such (maga)zines as *Lumpen*,

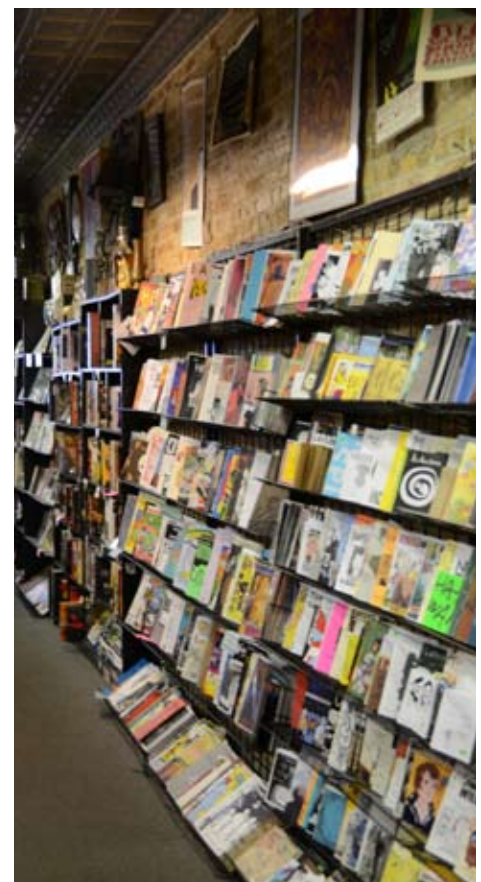


photographs by Robert McCamant

*Proximity*, *Mash Tun: A Craft Beer Journal*, and *Matériel Magazine*. He also manages Bridgeport-based Maria's Packaged Goods and Community Bar and a gallery space down the street called the Co-Prosperity Sphere, in addition to numerous artist projects and festivals like Mash Tun Fest and Version Festival. With a constantly rotating crew of interns, volunteers, employees, loyal fans, collaborators, and art troublemakers, for over 20 years Edmar has been a major contributor to publishing in Chicago. Caroline Picard runs the Green Lantern Gallery and also prints zines, artist booklets, and comics, and teaches a zine-making class at Spudnik Press. Art and publishing organizers like Edmar, Nicki, and Caroline are just some of the many heroes of Chicago independent publishing who gain little compensation but create a space for small-press publishing and art.

Screenprinting collectives Spudnik Press and Screwball Press allow local screenprinters, comics artists, and zinesters to use their facilities to print their zines, prints, comics, artist books, rock show posters, and prints. Popular (at least, in the microcosm of independent publishing) artists like Keith Herzik, Paul Nudd, and Onsmith do limited print-run zines that sell well at Quimby's (by "sell well" I mean a few copies a week are enough to put something on a Quimby's top 10 bestseller list). These types of artists garner a dedicated following and a host of imitators.

The lists of Chicago-based folks with independent publishing ties seem endless and constantly evolving: zine and comics reading and performance series like Two Cookie Minimum, Copy Code, and Brain Frame have



popped up; the defunct free newspaper *The Skeleton* has reemerged in the form of *The Landline*, with contributions from many of the folks listed in this article. DePaul University and the University of Chicago now curate zine collections. The list goes on and on.

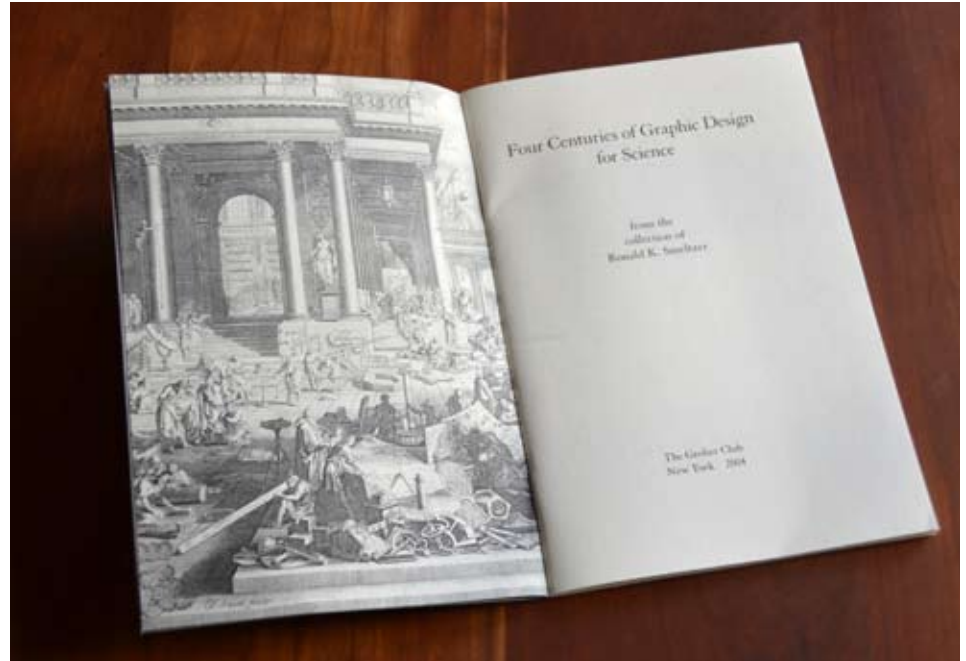
In terms of Chicago's rich zine history, there is so much more. I haven't said much about chapbooks or about publications that aren't zines at all, but would be of interest to those

who enjoy them, such as the resurrected *The Chicagoan*, by former *Stop Smiling* publisher J.C. Gabel, or journals that have left Chicago for greener pastures and bigger distribution (*The Baffler*, moving from Chicago to Cambridge, Massachusetts and getting national distribution through MIT Press), or publishers of artist books which are a few semantic details from being zines, like creations by Sally Alatalo who runs Sara Ranchouse Publishing, doing small-print-run artist books, recycling and reworking pulp novels, commercial products, and advertising ephemera. And let's not forget Chicago-based literary journals like *Make Magazine*, *Mildred Pierce*, or *The Point* or alternative weeklies like *The Reader* and *New City*. Indeed, Chicago has a rich publishing legacy.

Quimby's has become a "tourist destination for cool people." I added the quotation marks with wry self-consciousness. But, using Wicker Park's artistic development as a template for understanding contemporary bohemian culture, I suggest Richard Lloyd's *Neo-Bohemia: Art and Commerce in the Postindustrial City*. He argues that the arty avant garde tastemakers of today are the cultural capital influencers of tomorrow, which bring commerce and money to an area – which is both good and bad, depending on the cynicism of your audience. I'm not saying Quimby's, or zinesters, are going to save the economy, but the fact that zines bring people to the area certainly helps (or, depending on who you ask) hinders the neighborhood's development. Quimby's cultural success is both a result of *and* in spite of the gentrification of Wicker Park. Many Quimby's customers decide to come to the Wicker Park area to do a "Wicker Park day," and there are shops they frequent. If you're a Quimby's type of person, you might also visit Myopic, Reckless Records, 826Chi's Boring Store, one of the many thrift or vintage stores like The Vintage Underground, followed by falafel at Sultan's Market, or a gallery opening. If you're not into the alternative stuff, you go to the many chain or fashion boutiques and then eat at Chipotle. The fact that Quimby's is on North Avenue and not Milwaukee, Damen or Division, makes it ever so slightly further east, which takes it off the main drags of Wicker Park, but not too far. This is symbolic; the world is a bit more open to independent publishing weirdo culture, as evidenced by the variety of resources available to DIY publishers, but there are still oases of counter-cultural weirdness that make the world a more interesting place.

CAXTONIANS COLLECT, from page 15

because of an unusual artistic purpose); the normal pattern is to print the text with letterpress and use engravings for maps, charts, or illustrations. "I'm *not* a completist, generally," Smeltzer says. "But in this case I hoped to be able to figure out why this book was published in such an unusual way, and I hoped that by



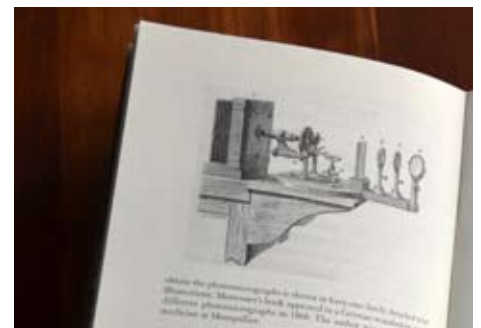
having a copy of every edition, I could find clues."

In fact, he has developed a hypothesis which he is in the process of examining. De Montesson worked for the French military, instructing recruits to be surveyors over twenty years or more. Smeltzer's theory is that he needed a few dozen copies each year, and that he was able to hold on to the plates and get a new edition printed every year. It would not have been economically feasible to have a whole book kept in standing type for letterpress, but copper plates hold up extremely well and can be reprinted at will. Each edition has small changes from the one before (some achieved by scraping off the old words and re-engraving, others by pasting over paper corrections), which suggests that the instructor was intent on his students having the most correct text possible.

Smeltzer contributed a chapter to the Club's recent *Other People's Books*. It is about a 1752 copy of *Nuovi istromenti*, by (and probably published privately for) Giambattista Suardi. Among other things, it features plates of a geometric pen which can draw curves arising from the compound motion of two circles. Smeltzer's copy turns out to be from the library of James Watt, whose steam engine relies upon the conversion of reciprocal motion to rotary

motion. Might the book have been an influence on Watt's thinking? We shall probably never know, but it is interesting to speculate.

Time ran out before we reached the shelves containing early books on optics, electricity, spectroscopy, microscopy, early modern digital computing, radioactivity, and atomic physics. About radioactivity and atomic physics, the



collection, which includes key monographs, single-issue serials in original wrappers, and separata by almost all of the important researchers, begins with original materials associated with the discoveries of x-rays and radioactivity in 1895 and 1896 and extends through the early period of what is sometimes called the atomic age.

Smeltzer and his wife Suzanne live in Princeton, New Jersey, where he came to work at the University but soon moved on to RCA Laboratories, which later became Sarnoff Corporation. But he also spent significant time in the Chicago area, having achieved his MS and PhD in engineering from Northwestern. He joined the Club in 2011, nominated by Michael Thompson and seconded by John Blew.

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down of the 500 best-ever modern rock songs, as voted on by their listeners, and they printed up photocopied lists of the songs, typically two columns on two sides of a light-colored sheet of legal-sized office paper. Off and on, they also distributed *The 97Xtra! Edition*, another two-sided single sheet of paper with Xerox printing on both sides, brief newsletter on one, programming schedule on the other. Not quite zines, but in my own classification system, beginning to be zine-like, more focused on the music I was interested in – and therefore more interesting and useful to me at the time – than “real” music magazines like *Rolling Stone*.

One of the bands I was most into was a gloomy English outfit called The Cure. At some point I sent off to the address given in the fold-out liner notes to their *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss Me* cassette – to the sixteen-year-old in me, still a great album – and received back “cure news #6.” It is seven two-sided A4 sheets of photocopied typewritten interviews, band member profiles, and an angsty teenage pen pals section, all held with a single corner staple to a one-sided cover sheet. An accompanying note’s insistence that there was “no fan club” aside, this was basically a fan club newsletter. Later issues, each obtained by mailing a self-addressed envelope and two international reply coupons to “Janie,” the writer-editor, were more fully designed and, by issue #10 printed on A3 paper folded in half and stapled twice at the spine. #11 added a cover image, moving the introductory words to the first inside page: a proper music *fanzine*.<sup>1</sup>

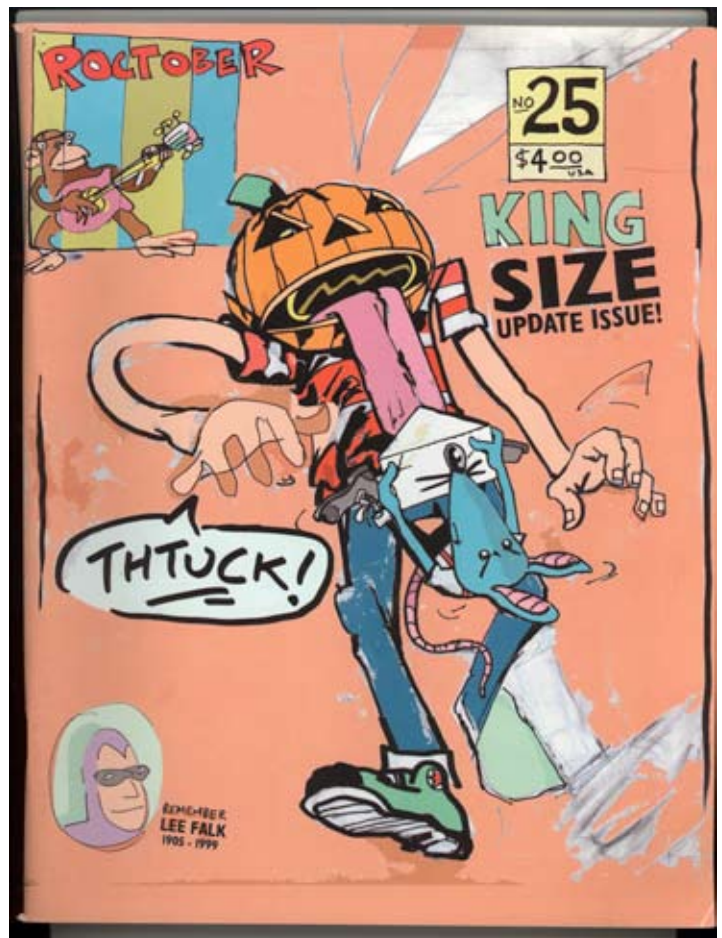
By the time I came to Chicago for college, I was in the early stages of being a record collector. This meant that I was not just buying records, but was also accumulating a lot of related, supporting material on paper: things like independent record catalogs, flyers, posters, and eventually some correspondence with bands. At the University of Chicago, I got involved with the campus radio station, WHPK 88.5 FM. (I would end up sticking around long after college.) I was a DJ and also helped out with a show that brought local and touring bands into the studio to play live on the air. Bands and their friends would bring records along, and they would also bring printed promotional materials like handbills, flyers, posters, and occasionally zines.

Zine distribution is very much about personal interactions. It’s also very much about just getting the zine into a reader’s hands at any opportunity. I remember buying a used

record by mail from a guy in Austin, Texas, and receiving not only what I’d paid for, but also a copy of *Monk Mink Punk*, “a magazine of music and mayhem,” thirty-six Xeroxed pages made from nine 8½ x 11 sheets of office paper cut in half and bound with two staples. My other zines, bought mostly at record stores, take all kinds of forms. Most are photocopied, offset, or web press printed. Some have glossy or heavier paper covers. They are thick, thin, large, small, vertically-, and horizontally-oriented. Bindings are often stapled, but there are many examples of perfect binding, and even an example of

plastic comb binding (*Circumstantial Evidence* Number 2, 1997?). Many are accompanied by flexidiscs, seven-inch records, or CDs.

A zine that really got my attention early on was *Roctober Comics and Music* #13 (Summer 1995, the “Great and Small Issue”) put into my hands by its publisher, Jake Austen. I ended up getting every issue since, all the way up to #50, *Roctober*’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue (Spring 2012). In addition to ongoing and one-off comics, each issue covers multiple subjects but goes into considerable depth on at least one. In issue 13, it was the *Mulqueen’s Kiddie-A-Go-Go* show which, page 6 explains, was a half-hour show that had aired in Chicago “throughout most of the 1960s, and was indeed a Dick Clark for the *Romper Room* set” featuring little kids dancing “awkwardly but enthusiastically ... to the latest releases.” As the result of a single clip viewed “following a video swap” with the editor of another zine, writer Phil X. Milstein had tracked down and interviewed people who remembered the show, the show’s husband/producer and wife/hostess, and a guy who had danced on the show in 1968 as a ten-year-old boy. Going in depth on obscure and unexpectedly fascinating topics is part of what zines do, but, from what I’ve seen, it’s *Roctober* that sets the standard. Perhaps

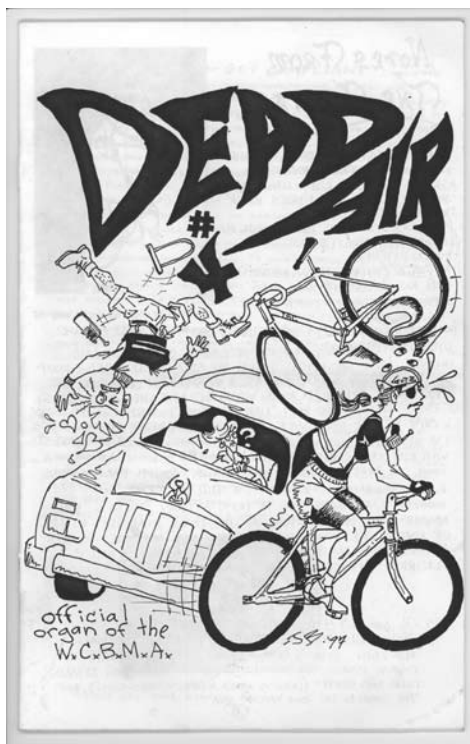


uniquely, *Roctober* is constantly working on its stories, seemingly all of them, even after an issue is published: updates are presented in later issues. Updates on an ever increasing number of past stories – histories of masked rock ‘n’ roll, midget rock ‘n’ roll, monkey rock ‘n’ roll, robot rock ‘n’ roll, one-man bands – are narrative threads that run across issues. (From its earliest days, *Roctober* has also held a special reverence for Sammy Davis, Jr., featuring him on the cover three times.<sup>2</sup>) *Roctober* #25 (Summer 1999) was a “King Size Update Issue!” that mostly gave more details and news on earlier stories, including the one about *Kiddie-A-Go-Go* that had run in 1995.

The introduction to *Roctober* #25 also includes a nice self-reflective statement about what zines are and about *Roctober*’s evolution:

Our first issue was a sloppy, Xeroxed, crayon colored mess! It really looked like a zine, and it also looked like crap. I’m proud that despite top talent, slick color (non-crayon variety) covers and decent printing, a good portion of our magazine still looks like crap! Zines is zines and some aesthetics should never be abandoned. *Roctober Magazine*: Where “Cut” and “Paste” ain’t icons on a computer screen!

To me, the definition of what makes some-



thing a zine comes down to four elements, two that I'm seeing around the internet and two that I'm not finding explicitly stated anywhere but are part of what the *Roctober* statement is getting at. A zine is "an independently- or self-published booklet."<sup>3</sup> It is published by amateurs for reasons other than profit – and usually in small runs.<sup>4</sup> It is *intended* to be published in multiple issues, though likely not on any predetermined schedule (and whether anything beyond the first issue ever actually comes out is irrelevant).<sup>5</sup> Finally, a zine is a zine, because a zine is what it is *intended* to be.

It turned out that WHPK – and Hyde Park generally – was a great place to be for zines. Looking through my zines, I find a number were done by people at one time or another involved in the station, and I have a few issues of *WHPK Magazine*, done for a while in the 80s and revived a few years ago. *The Baffler* Number Five was produced "in November 1993 in the office of WHPK-FM, crammed in the upper reaches of the ersatz-Gothic spire of the University of Chicago Reynolds Clubhouse. The large screen of their computer and access to their gigantic record library made the task much easier than before." The introduction to Number Five goes on to stress, "The Baffler is published by its editors (and no one else)"; it was a journal, but not in the same way as *Critical Inquiry* published by the University of Chicago Press with its office on the other side of the quads from WHPK. As it and its editor, Thomas Frank, became better known voices of the left, *The Baffler*



matured towards being a proper journal more than a zine, but I'd argue it *was* a zine, probably as late as issue 17 in 2006 – and certainly for its earliest issues. In its recent issues, as a journal published by MIT Press, it is no longer independently published and therefore not a zine.<sup>6</sup>

*The Baffler* Number Five ("Accessorize Your Dissent"), with its lead story by Frank, "Alternative to What? Rock 'n' Roll is the Health of the State," about how the "culture industry" had appropriated "alternative" music, is a sort of nexus point in my collection. Not only have I purchased issues going forward and tracked down a very nice copy of 1988's issue number one, but the contents of Number Five relate to other publications. Most famously, Chicago musician and audio engineer Steve Albini's polemic in this issue on "The Problem With Music" (the major label industry) was reprinted in 1994 by the widely distributed and respected punk zine *Maximumrocknroll*. One of my favorite *Roctober* issues (#29, Fall 2000) mimics the design of "MRR" throughout, the whole conceptualized as a *Maximum Sammysoul* zine featuring Sammy Davis Jr. on the cover. *The Baffler* Number Five includes "selections" of "A Nest of Ninnies" record reviews by Seth Sanders, from Hyde Park, but by then a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, and a short story by Robert Nedelkoff, then a law student in California. I have a copy of Sanders's *A Nest of Ninnies* #5 ("The fanzine that stole rock 'n' roll from the oppressed!!!!", 1997), and it devotes 25 of its 64 pages to an interview with Nedelkoff, who, it turns out,

has all kinds of interesting inside knowledge on all kinds of cultural topics, from Thomas Pynchon, to Cleveland and Louisville punk bands, to zines and their history. He talks about having written about musician and cartoonist Peter Blegvad for the Cleveland punk zine *CLE*. I have that in *CLE* #3A (1980?), a great find for design and history that I just stumbled across and bought used somewhere – I think it might have been at an antique mall in Milwaukee.

The same people and zines repeatedly make appearances in other zines that are part of the same scene. As far as my music zines go the level of community really can make it seem like a small (zine) world. One of the things I initially liked about *CLE* #3A was the center-spread photo of early Cleveland punk band The Pagans. The final issue (#9, 1998) of *Steve Albini Thinks We Suck*, signs off with a reprint of an essay by Robert Griffin of Cleveland's Scat Records comparing rock 'n' roll in 1997 ("hobbling on crutches") with the first time he had heard the Pagans twenty years earlier: "Right there I knew my life had been forever changed." Musician (and former booker and sometimes door guy at the now closed legendary Chicago bar Lounge Ax) Mark Greenberg shows up in the all-Ohio issue, *Wind-Up* #5 ("Butter Cow," 1996) and in *Chickfactor* #14 (2001).

My zine collection certainly started out as an accumulation of rock music-related *content*, but the music content got me comfortable with the *form* and *idea* of zines. One of the first non-music zines I got, and still one of my favorites, is *Dead Air* #4 (1997), the "official organ of the W.C.B.M.A." The Windy City Bike Messengers Association "was about building community, getting organized, and helping each other out."<sup>8</sup> Page six lists "Slenderous Nicknames for some of our favorite courier companies." "Tire-raids," begin on page 17 and include an "Open Letter to a Yuppie." The issue is an interesting peek into bike messenger subculture.

These days I tend to pick up zines on a number of non-musical topics. There seem to be more zines now on more topics than ever before. As a craft beer enthusiast and novice home brewer, I've picked up copies of *Mash Tun* (I bought #1 at Brew Camp in the Lincoln Square area and #2 at Quimby's in Wicker Park, both 2012). I've enjoyed reading issue 2 of *Graze*, "A food-oriented lit mag."

As a soccer fan I have "Volume 1, Issue 1" (June 2010, I'm guessing the last issue) of

See *CONFESSIONS*, page 11



# Reflections of Two Craftsmen:

Sam Ellenport and Ron Gordon

Matthew Doherty

*Reflections* is a snapshot of two gentlemen discovered by their respective 19th-century trades who went on to realize fruitful careers as master craftsmen and successful businessmen into the current century. During their careers – hand bookbinding for Sam Ellenport and letterpress printing for Ron Gordon – markets were shrinking and patron profiles changing, but they remained committed to their chosen paths. Those paths intersected on occasion. (Both have been guest speakers at the Caxton Club, introduced on those occasions, and in the book, by Paul Ruxin, who has known them for decades.)

Their impressions convey places you will feel at home, and melancholy, since their shops no longer exist in the same format. (They do continue, relocated, under the care of a new generation.) This slim volume was designed by Ron Gordon and bound by students at the North Bennet Street School in Boston, a beneficiary of Sam Ellenport's equipment donation.

Sam and Ron were mentored and mastered their centuries-old craftsmanship with differing experiences, but one obvious similarity. This was hands-on learning. Ivan Ruzcika, an early "teacher" in Sam's introduction to hand binding, told Sam to "not bother him with questions." Sam "had written some questions to ask but, amazingly, almost all had been answered simply by watching him and thinking about the logic of the process."

Later on, when teaching history was not panning out, Sam "stumbled" onto the Harcourt bindery and the morning chores of managing the double boilers of the glue pots, making and straining the paste, and some sweeping. These tasks not only failed to dissuade Sam from persevering, he ended by buying the business. It's fun to follow him through the story of "why." Again, Sam observes his good fortune "to be learning from a master binder rather than from books, trial and error, or a disjointed series of workshops."

In the early 70s the bindery "helped spark a

boom" in the practice of and interest in hand binding by teaching it in workshop settings. This effort paradoxically insured the craft's survival, if not outright revival, by breaking with the past. Instead of withholding the knowledge of the craft (think guild), it insured those practicing, and interested, would have someone to watch and ask questions of. On occasion, some became fellow craftsmen, col-

an acquisition, and a smaller space precipitated the donation of surplus equipment to the North Bennett Street School, and resulted in the one place students can bench train in fine binding and basic conservation techniques in North America, if not the world.

Without the volume customers of an earlier era, training became an issue. Repetition is necessary to perfect technique. Sam offers

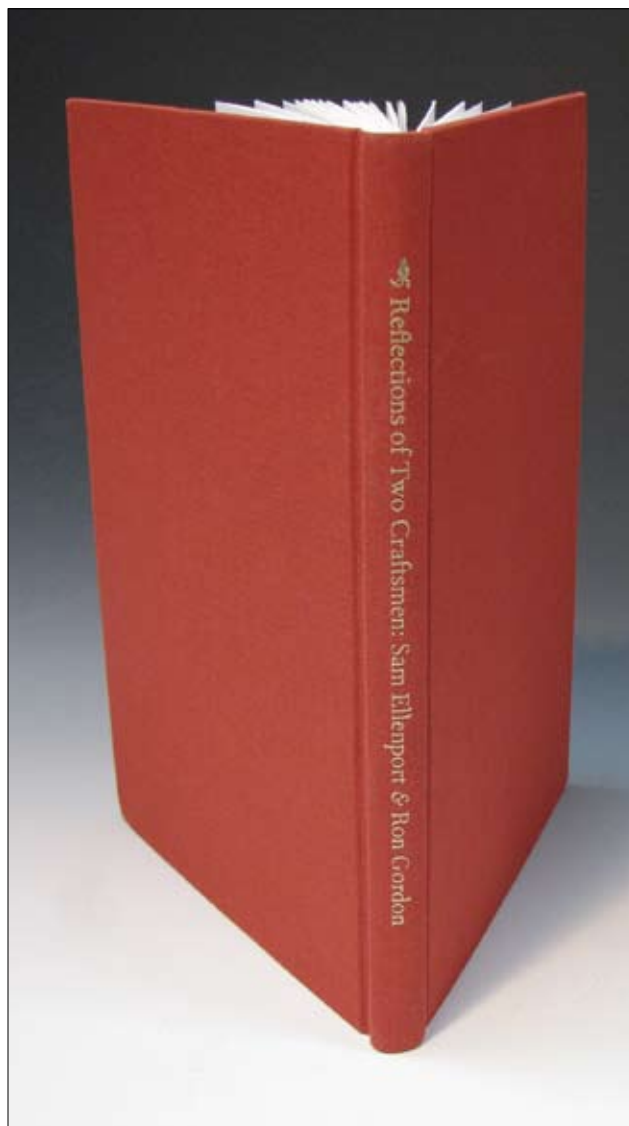
that mastery at this level isn't about getting something right most of the time; with an acquired skill it should be difficult "getting something wrong." He is discussing the risks involved in a labor-intensive, time-consuming craft in an age of accelerating expectations.

The heart of Ellenport's "why" is not the artifact of the book. It's the challenge of sizing up a project and determining how best to approach it. He loves considering material, technique, budget, time, or a challenge never encountered before. Nothing is as satisfying as achieving a result never attempted and being required to devise, invent, or recover a forgotten method.

Sam Ellenport's craft has given him a lifetime to consider and understand what those drawn to books know in our hearts when we hold a rare or dear book. "Physical books create a personal bridge to another world."

Ron Gordon's experience, designing and printing books, is closer to my own. He got the printing bug early, so he had years of experience, from childhood in the 50s on a small cylinder press, at a time "when printing *meant* letterpress," to being editor of the high school literary magazine (doing design and layout and hanging around the print shop), up to the moment in college when he "decided that I wanted to learn to make beautiful books."

The turning point was an encounter with the "exquisite fine press books" of Leonard Baskin from his Gehenna Press. This would eventually lead to two years of study with Baskin and his master letterpress printer Harold McGrath. Gordon recognized "Harold was passing along to me a craft that was passed down to him, all the way back to



leagues, and teachers.

The Harcourt Bindery had relationships with institutions and publishers like Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, the Harvard alumni association, and Pennyroyal Press.

In the 80s the company had to move. At the same time, there were fewer large jobs, and a need to find new sources of income. A move,



Gutenberg.” Which is to say if Gutenberg stepped into the shop – even a decade later when Gordon was collaborating with Baskin on a 19th-century ghost story that included illustrations by Baskin and marbled papers Gordon and his wife Stephanie made for the special edition – he would recognize all that was going on, 500 years later!

Working with Baskin brought an introduction to Joseph Blumenthal and an opportunity to work for him after graduation at his Spiral Press. He admits the relationship was sometimes rocky, but it allowed him to observe the standards and style of the Spiral Press in real time. It furthered his education in “how a printing establishment functioned.” Gordon takes us through the accumulation of equipment, the moves, and the commissions and ephemera that form the history of the Oliphant Press. What passes undiscussed in the chain of possession is the craft itself, from Gutenberg, and Leonard Baskin, and Harold McGrath, and Joseph Blumenthal, to Ron Gordon. Beneficiaries included a long list of prominent clients for the Oliphant Press beginning with its first major institutional client, the Metropolitan Museum.

The library at Gordon’s alma mater, Amherst, supported and collected the work of Oliphant Press, as well as commissioning design and printing. Limited edition printing was particularly enjoyable, especially “books of criticism and fiction by living writers – beautifully printed by letterpress, bound in limited

editions, and signed by the authors,” for Bill Targ. It is an epic understatement to say “He was the dream client” when each book was “individually designed – no two formats were

he helped “to understand how a knowledge of the history of printing and its long tradition of metal typography is the best foundation for good design.” He also admitted the young had

also brought many of the changes that occurred at Oliphant Press.

With an elegant symmetry Ron had the only one of his interns to be from Amherst work on “probably my most impressive book,” the *Poetry of John Chalkhill*. He describes it, alongside a picture that can only hint at the look and feel in person. Special copies of this edition were bound at Harcourt Bindery in Boston by Sam Ellenport.

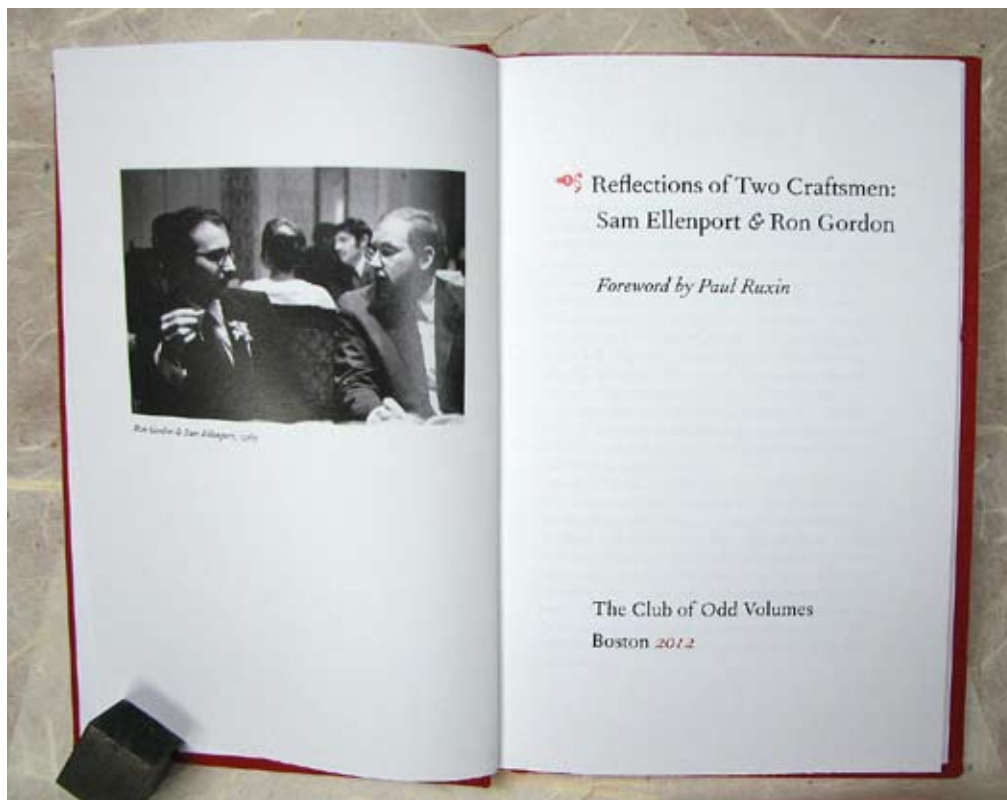
Throughout *Reflections* – the histories, the acquisitions,

financial ups and downs, setbacks and triumphs – you are never in doubt about the subject at hand: the love and knowledge involved in making fine books. The detail, the materials, and the craft that builds and binds them are what matters.

Sam Ellenport and Ron Gordon are two indispensable craftsmen in the chain of possession of their crafts. They serve as mentors to students of centuries-old quality hand bookbinding and fine letterpress printing. Devotion to the best design underlies both crafts. It is reassuring they have seen to it that the next generation, and the next, are “discovered by these trades.” To encourage the ‘discovered,’ Caxtonians, book and book arts lovers, and institutions will need to support the work Sam Ellenport and Ron Gordon foster and speak of in this memoir: the chain of possession of the craft, mentor to student to master.

For details on purchasing the book, e-mail Sam Ellenport at [sam@chagfordinc.com](mailto:sam@chagfordinc.com)

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alike,” and “he never intervened in the design process.” The book has many images of the exquisite work of Oliphant Press that serve more to tease than satisfy the desire to have them available to touch.

When asked about his contribution to “foster good practice and good design” he mentioned the interns, assistants, and students

# New Caxtonians

Elected September 2011 through January 2013

## Susan Amelia Belles

Susan Amelia Belles, a gifted dancer, holds a Phillip and Marsha Dowd Scholarship for study at Ballet Chicago where she is both staff employee and member of the Studio Company. She has performed with Ballet Chicago at the Harris Theater in a production featuring three Balanchine ballets. During the summer of 2012, she was part of the Carolina Ballet Summer Intensive as a trainee, then traveled to Copenhagen as an exchange student representing Ballet Chicago and studied with the Royal Danish Ballet. She is currently enrolled at Harold Washington College, where she is a top student. Nominated by Frank Schier, seconded by John Chalmers and Jan Figa.

## Ronald Corthell

Ronald Corthell, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Purdue University-Calumet, is a distinguished scholar of English Renaissance literature with a specialty in English Catholic writers, recusant spirituality, Joseph Hall, and John Donne. His 1997 book, *Ideology and Desire in Renaissance Poetry*, published by the Wayne State University Press, is a well-regarded study of John Donne from a variety of critical perspectives. During his years as department chair and as professor of English at Kent State University, Ron created a variety of programs for the Newberry Library's Center for Renaissance Studies, including an important conference on English Catholicism that resulted in a book of essays. His principal collecting interest is English poetry of all periods. Nominated by Paul Gehl, seconded by Rob Carlson.

## Jan Figa

Jan Figa is a mathematics instructor and Director of the Library at Rockford College, where he has revived interest in special collections and in the development of college archives. He was introduced to what he refers to as the "mystical and fine art of collecting" at the age of 8, when his father would bring home newspapers, and Jan would clip out articles and cartoons "that would occupy the living room floor" leaving only "a path meant for little feet." In his application for membership, he notes that he continues to "suffer from the need to hunt, collect, and read books," especially those on science and Napoleon

Bonaparte (unrelated, he notes, to his own height). While acknowledging, in the words of mathematician Paul Erdos, that "all possessions are burdens," Jan notes that the effort is more than justified by "the intimacy, honor, and discernment that books provide." Nominated by John Chalmers, seconded by Frank Schier.

## Arthur Frank

Since retiring as an attorney, Arthur Frank has pursued his collecting interests with passion and fervor. He opened Round Table Books LLC in Winnetka when his wife expressed the desire that space in their home be provided for its human inhabitants. Arthur's wide-ranging interests include Roman and British history, Arthuriana, Napoleana, and illustrated copies of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Nominated by Caryl Seidenberg, seconded by Paul Gehl.

## William Friese

Bill Friese has been a member of Chicago's financial community for the past 45 years, currently serving as Executive Director for investments, OMEGA Portfolio Management of Oppenheimer & Co. An avid reader, Bill's den is covered wall to wall with books he has collected over the years. Learning of the Caxton Club from his friend Donald Allen, he looks forward to being a Caxtonian as a way of further widening his reading horizons and meeting others who have broad interests. Nominated by Donald Allen, seconded by Skip Landt.

## C. Richard Johnson

C. Richard Johnson has been interested in the collecting of books especially antiquarian volumes, for most of his adult life. A practicing attorney, he currently focuses mainly on representing developers of affordable housing. Early in his legal career, his work included drafting legislation that created the Regional Transportation Authority, legislation affecting the Chicago Board of Education, and his (then) firm's representation of the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Daily News*, including a defense for the publication of the Pentagon Papers. For more than 40 years, he has been a lead counsel at the trial and appellate levels for plaintiffs in Shakman cases. While preparing a case for the U.S. Supreme Court on the con-

stitutionality of patronage hiring (or firing) in governmental employment, he drew upon his personal collection in American history. He found a letter directly supporting his position in a multi-volume set of the papers and letters of Thomas Jefferson, which he cited with great pleasure. Nominated by Paul Ruxin, seconded by Scott Kellar and John Chalmers.

## Christine D. Giannoni

Christine Giannoni is Museum Librarian at the Field Museum of Natural History. Her responsibilities include the Museum's celebrated rare book collection and archive, as well as coordinating and providing research services for scientific staff, resident students, and visiting associates. In 2006 she was recognized by the Museum with its Award of Excellence. She is the organizer of CAML (Chicago Area Museum Libraries) for the American Library Association. Christine's interests fall into the "books about books" category: bookbinding, bookplates, history of libraries. She is also interested in the history of illustrated natural history books, the processes and their importance to science. Nominated by Kim Coventry, seconded by Jill Postma.

## Valerie Higgins

Valerie Higgins is Assistant Archivist at the Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, and an archives consultant. She has extensive experience in organizing, describing, and developing digital databases for both library and private collections in Bloomington (Indiana) and Chicago. Nominated by Anthony Mourek, seconded by Michael Thompson.

## Lisa Pevtzow

Lisa Pevtzow is a freelance writer and publicist. A former reporter, she now writes for the *Chicago Tribune* and other publications, and has worked as a director of special projects for the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. Lisa has eclectic interests in books, with a special interest in works on paper that intersect art, craftsmanship, and history. She will be exhibiting and lecturing on Japanese design books to the Art Institute's Textile Society in August 2013. Nominated by Tom Joyce, seconded by Dorothy Sinson.



## Stephen Rankin

Chicago architect Steve Rankin has a lifelong fascination in maps, especially urban and “ground figure” representations, an interest he developed during his urban design studies at Cornell. Beginning his career at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, Rankin ultimately established his own firm, Steve Rankin Associates, 25 years ago. A longtime resident of Oak Park and River Forest, he and his wife Shyla recently moved into Chicago to be closer to his architectural business and to enjoy the city they love. Nominated by Nancy Lynn, seconded by Tom Joyce.

## Ronald K. Smeltzer

A contributor to the 2011 Caxton Club publication, *Other People's Books*, Ronald Smeltzer is a long-time, highly dedicated book collector. Ronald is a collector of science books, in particular the historical development of scientific instruments and apparatus since the mid-16th century, the history of physics, generally from the period of Newton, the contributions of women to science, and the history of “modern” physics from circa 1895 (atomic, radioactivity, quantum mechanics, Manhattan Project) through about 1950. He is a member of the Grolier Club, the Delaware Bibliophiles, the Princeton Bibliophiles and Collectors, and

other bibliophilic societies. He is also the Secretary of the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies (FABS). Nominated as a non-resident member by Michael Thompson, seconded by John Blew.

## John L. Ward

John Ward is Clinical Professor of Family Enterprises at Kellogg School of Management (USA), as well as a regular visiting lecturer at IMD (Lausanne, Switzerland), Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, the Indian School of Business (Hyderabad), and IESE (Barcelona, Spain). His several books include *Perpetuating the Family* and *Keeping the Family Business Healthy*. He is co-founder of The Family Business Consulting Group and co-director of The Center for Family Enterprises at Northwestern University. Ward serves on the boards of four companies in North America and Europe and three non-profit boards including The Family Institute of Northwestern University and Aileron, a non-profit organization dedicated to entrepreneurship and small business professionalization. He was founding director of the Justin Wynn Youth Leadership Academy and is president of the board of the Institute of Laryngology and Voice Restoration. Nominated by Jeffrey Jahns, seconded by Bruce Boyer.

## Sheila von Wiese-Mack

From an early age, Sheila von Wiese has had a passion for books and reading. She was editor of her high school newspaper in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and continued her journalism experience in college and graduate school. For nearly ten years, she worked for Studs Terkel, editing interviews for several of his books, including *The Great Divide*. While at the U. of Chicago, she was a student of Saul Bellow and attended his tutorial seminars. Prior to relocating to Chicago, Sheila worked at Doubleday and Company in New York City. She has also done extensive research as an independent consultant studying the letters between Nelson Algren and Simone de Beauvoir. Nominated by Susan Hanes, seconded by Dorothy Sinson.

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## Nominations welcome!

Have a friend who would enjoy our conversations? They will be eligible for nomination after attending two meetings. They may be invited and attend as your guest, or the Membership Committee can invite them, noting that they have been suggested as a possible candidate for membership. Their only cost will be that of the meal. Questions? Contact Dan “Skip” Landt, slandt@oldtownschool.org.

## CONFESSIONS, from page 7

*The Portage* about the most recent World Cup. (“Amaze your friends by reading about soccer on paper!” the online announcement of it declared.) Its publisher has gone on, with initial Kickstarter backing to co-edit and publish XI, a quarterly on North American soccer. It doesn’t call itself a zine, but is independently published in relatively small numbers and seems to be primarily a labor of love, but with aspirations of being subscription supported. It’s not unlike *The Blizzard*, an English soccer quarterly that started a year or so earlier looking to promote quality long-form writing over all else, in – I believe explicit – reaction to the internet.

I think there’s an opportunity now to use the internet to build communities that can then support post-zine niche publications, whereas zines are – or may have been – about publishing and then building a community. At many of the Chicago Fire soccer games I attend, I pick up a free copy of the *Match Book Zine* (volume three this coming season), two-to-four 8 ½ x 10 photocopied sheets of paper

folded in half and stapled twice at the fold. It’s published under the auspices of Section 8, the independent supporters association with writing by fans and is very much distinct from the official game-day programs.

There are even zines I’ve picked up largely for their form rather than their content: most recently *Ker-Bloom! Number 98* (Sept/Oct. 2012) and *Chicago Offline #2* (late 2012?). Both are numbered and editioned and very attractive. *Ker-bloom*, a single personal essay, is a classically folded-and-stapled paper zine, but it is printed letterpress throughout (with a very mimeograph aesthetic inside), and *Chicago Offline* (simply “Offline” on the front cover and “C/O” on the back), on art and design, is beautifully Risograph printed with a nice hand-binding, something I don’t think I’d seen in a zine before.

I hope to see more collectors of zines among us and listed in future years’ editions of *The Caxton Club Directory*.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I didn’t get issues beyond the early 1990s, but did read that the fanzine was replaced in 2000 – by the band’s official web site. “Official Newsletters,” The Cure: Impression of Sounds, a fan site, <http://www.impressionofsounds.com/newsletters.html>

<sup>2</sup> The *Roctober* website provides a gallery of covers including information on how each issue and its cover were printed along with tables of contents: <http://www.roctober.com/roctober/covers1.html>

<sup>3</sup> “Zine,” ZineWiki, <http://www.zinewiki.com/Zine>

<sup>4</sup> “Zine,” Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zine>

<sup>5</sup> I have many examples of issues #1 for which there will never be a #2.

<sup>6</sup> Zines “maturing” into something else is interesting. Early issues of *Tape Op*, a music recording magazine, were Xerox on hand-folded and stapled office paper, but later issues were an advertiser-supported glossy magazine: they went pro. Unfortunately my copies, along with my issues of *Resonance*, the journal of the London Musicians’ Collective, are still in a box somewhere from our last move – more than two years ago!

<sup>7</sup> “CLE Magazine” at [http://www.cleveland.com/music/index\\_story.ssf?/music/more/local/cle/](http://www.cleveland.com/music/index_story.ssf?/music/more/local/cle/)

<sup>8</sup> Scott Eden, “Fresh Air! Speed! Poverty! Servitude!” *Chicago Reader*, June 23, 2006, <http://chicagoreader.com/x/922420>

# Codex, the artist book fair

Four days beside the Bay in Berkeley and Richmond

Robert McCamant

A codex, as most Caxtonians probably know, is the form of book that opens from a spine. It's not a scroll, and it's not a stack of clay tablets.

But a Codex, with a capital letter C, is a book fair. It's been held in California's East Bay region every other year for a while; the fourth one just took place in Berkeley and Richmond over February 10 to 13.

But it is not an antiquarian book fair. A very large one of those started on February 15 across the bay in San Francisco. Most of the books at the San Francisco fair were quite a few years old, while virtually all the books at Codex were looking for their first owner. (If truth be told, quite a few of them were receiving finishing touches a few days before the fair began. Many artist-bookmakers are perfectionists, and it frequently takes a deadline like a book fair to get them to finish anything.)

Codex 2013 was a big affair, as such things go. There were 180 different exhibitors. (Though I know for a fact that not all were there at once: Evanstonian and former Caxtonian Craig Jobson exhibited the first three days of the fair, but had to get back to Columbia College for a meeting, so missed the last day. And Robin Price, who killed three days struggling to get out from under the snow in Connecticut, was only there on the final day.)

And here's another irony: lots of the books at Codex 2013 were not themselves in the form of a codex. There were scrolls, accordions, and tunnels. Some popped up, some were stacks of pages in a box, and a friend told me one was folded into one of those geometric flat-sided spheres (icosahedron, maybe?), but I never



laid my eyes on that one.

People came from all over the world to exhibit. Plenty from the UK, some from Spain, France, Guatemala, the Netherlands, China, Japan, Russia, Ireland, Israel, Australia, and lots from Canada, Germany, and Mexico. (Mexico has even started having its own Codex events, and an Australian Codex has just incorporated.)

In some senses, poet and bookmaker Alan Loney was the largest presence. Not only did



Speakers,  
CLOCKWISE FROM  
FAR LEFT: Russell  
Maret, Timothy  
Barrett, Veronika  
Schäpers, Mark  
Dimunation.  
CENTER: Sandro  
Berra.



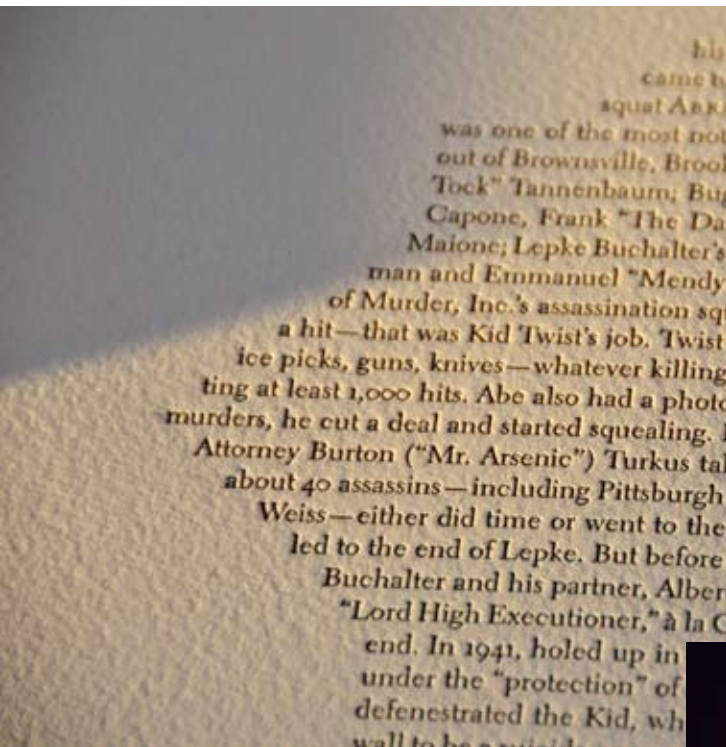
LEFT: poems by Bruce  
Whiteman, printed by Carolee  
Campbell's Ninja Press.

he give a talk in the accompanying symposium and have a table where he sold his own books, but four other presses (two from California, and one each from Oregon and Colorado) were showing books that published his poems. One of the bookmakers told me that he had looked at her books and liked them, so he'd offered her a poem to print.

I found the most remarkable speaker to be Veronika Schäpers, currently in her native Germany, but who had done some of her work







Late afternoon sun catches "Brownsville Boys" published by Two Ponds Press and designed by Russell Maret, ABOVE.

Alan Loney, RIGHT, with his poem, *A Poetics of Silence*, published by the Press at Colorado College, FAR RIGHT.



Veronika Schäpers' *Im Hochhaus*, ABOVE.



while spending 15 years in Japan. Towards the end of her time in Japan, there had been a big stir in the Japanese press about extremely old people who were still collecting their pensions. It turned out that at least some of them were long since dead: their children or companions had wanted to continue receiving the pension, so they had withheld their death from the authorities. So Schäpers made a book, *Im Hochhaus*, about the phenomenon. She also talked about an earlier book on the Japanese

school entrance-exam system. Someone in the audience asked if she would now be able to explore Germans and Germany as an outsider after her years in Japan.

Russell Maret, whom some Caxtonians know because he gave the APHA Lieberman Lecture at the Newberry Library last June, also created quite a stir. He talked about drawing his own typefaces to be printed letterpress. At first he drew them to be printed using photopolymer plates, but now he has

commercialized in the days before the process was mechanized. Business records indicate that a team of three workmen in a mill were producing between 100 and 200 sheets per

hour, vastly more than craft handmade paper-makers are achieving today. He has re-created the process in the facilities at Iowa, and drew gasps from the papermakers in the audience when he showed a video of the process.

And Sandro Berra, of Tipoteca Italiana in Cornuda, Italy, told the audience about the process of developing a new

museum of typography and printing starting in the new millennium. His pictures of the equipment, type collections, and educational programs made me feel as if a trip to Cornuda might be in order.

Mark Dimunation, chief of rare books and special collections at the Library of Congress, concluded the presentations. He talked about the rewards that come to collectors and library patrons who live with and enjoy artist-created books.

But in the end, it was all about the book fair itself. This year it took place in a different venue, the Craneway Pavilion. It was a former Ford assembly plant in Richmond, up at the northern end of San Francisco Bay. The show floor seemed to be about the size of a football field, or perhaps even a bit longer. It overlooked the bay, providing hazy views of San Francisco itself in the distance. Book exhibitors covered about two-thirds of the floor, and for part of the day each day, the aisles between the tables were so crowded that movement was difficult. At the end of Sunday, they announced that more people had attended during that first day than had attended all three days of Codex 2011, all of which had happened on the Berkeley campus.

Codex 2015 is promised.

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Photographs by the author, unless otherwise noted.



# 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: "They Seek a City: Chicago and the Art of Migration, 1910-1950" (more than 80 works, primarily by southern- and foreign-born artists, portray Chicago's transformation to the polyglot, cosmopolitan place that it is today), Galleries 182-184, opens March 3. "The Artist and the Poet" (a collection of works on paper that surveys the ways visual artists have been inspired by poets in the 20th century), Galleries 124-127, through June 2. "Picturing Poetry" (dynamic interpretations of verse by children's picture book artists), Ryan Education Center, through May 12.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, 847-835-8202: "Historic Landscapes: Architectural Design in Print" (rare books with engravings of landscape design from the past four centuries in Europe and America), through May 19.

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.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: "Sweet Home Chicago: The History of America's Candy Capital" (the stories of candy makers through artifacts, photographs and documentary items), Special Collections Exhibit Hall, Ninth Floor, through March 3.

DuSable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: "Geoffrey & Carmen: A Memoir in Four Movements" (more than 90 paintings, sculptures, photographs, costumes, books and designs by Tony Award winning artist Geoffrey Holder and his wife, Carmen DeLavallade), through May 30.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: "Color Bind: The MCA Collection in Black and

White" (artists who significantly limit their palette or produce works of one color in order to explore and emphasize the most basic formal aspects of art making), through April 28.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "Politics, Piety, and Poison: French Pamphlets, 1600-1800" (French pamphlets published during the transitional period from the Ancien Régime to the French Revolution), through April 13.

Northwestern University, Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive,

Evanston, 847-491-4000: "Terry Adkins Recital" (artist and musician Terry Adkins combines sculpture and live performance), through March 24. "Eye Contact: Photographic Portraits from the Collection" (poses questions about the importance of the gaze in portrait photography), through March 24. Northwestern University Library Special Collections, third floor of Deering Library: access through the Main Library entrance at 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-467-5918: "Decorative Cloth: Publishers' Trade Bindings" (case binding made uniform edition bindings possible; they were soon decorating covers and spines as a form of commercial enticement and an expression of house pride), through March 25. Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Raiders of the Lost Journal: The Hunt for the Real Indiana Jones" (explores the possible connections between the characters of Indiana Jones and Ravenwood and two pioneering scholars of the Oriental Institute: James Henry Breasted and Robert Braidwood), through March 31. "Between Heaven & Earth: Birds



Art Institute: *They Seek a City*

WALTER ELLISON: TRAIN STATION, 1935. ARCHIBALD J. MOTLEY, JR: NIGHTLIFE, 1943.

In Ancient Egypt" (explores the impact that birds had on ancient Egyptian religion, design, and the conception of the state), through July 28.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "The Sahmat Collective: Art and Activism in India since 1989" (works in a variety of media from over sixty artists), through June 9.

Spartus 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), extended through April 26.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: "My Life Is an Open Book: D.I.Y. Autobiography" (zines and other self-publishing as a natural fit for personal narratives, such as autobiography, which allow for self-expression as well as self-protection), through April 13.

Send your listings to [bmccamant@quarterfold.com](mailto:bmccamant@quarterfold.com).



# Caxtonians Collect: Ronald Smeltzer

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Nonresident member Ronald Smeltzer collects books about the process of science. Mind you, he knows the science itself, especially physics. But what has interested him lately are the tools, the people, the groupings of people that build up the corpus of science.

He got started collecting when he lived in Dallas and went to an auction that included a microscope that had been given to the Scottish physician (later) Sir William Aitken by his students as he set out for the Crimean War. Having acquired it, Smeltzer found himself compelled to learn more about Aitken, who had gone on to become a friend of Florence Nightingale and an important teaching physician.

I had foolishly only allowed an hour and a half to tour his library in Princeton, New Jersey. As a result, we could only see a few of the highlights in some of the categories he collects. The living room has some of the more general and decorative items. There's the *Lexicon Technicum*, the first English encyclopedia ever published, and Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* of a few years later...not to mention the *Rees's Cyclopaedia*, in a Philadelphia edition, that stretches to 47 volumes.

Also in the living room: a James Watt copying machine, including an instructional pamphlet. It seems that Watt was upset by the wasteful and error-producing recopying of business documents and scientific notes. So he built a machine which allowed a document written with special ink to produce several copies. "The Watt papers in Birmingham," Smeltzer says, "are written with his device."

There are a few more instruments in various rooms, notably a microscope owned by King Edward VIII when he was a student in Edinburgh. The dealer had not known who had

owned it, but Smeltzer discovered a document showing the purchasers of each serial number of the particular microscope. The entry for his serial number read "The Prince of Wales."

Though Smeltzer reads more in the books he owns than many collectors, he also is more interested in their form than some. He had a members' exhibition at the Grolier Club (it opened in 2004) titled "Four Centuries of Graphic Design for Science," which highlighted mounted photographs; scientific texts with color illustration; publications with unusual examples of "graphic invention" such as illustration in three dimensions; and books with interesting and attractive design, typography, and illustration. Several times he pointed out to me hand-colored illustrations in books

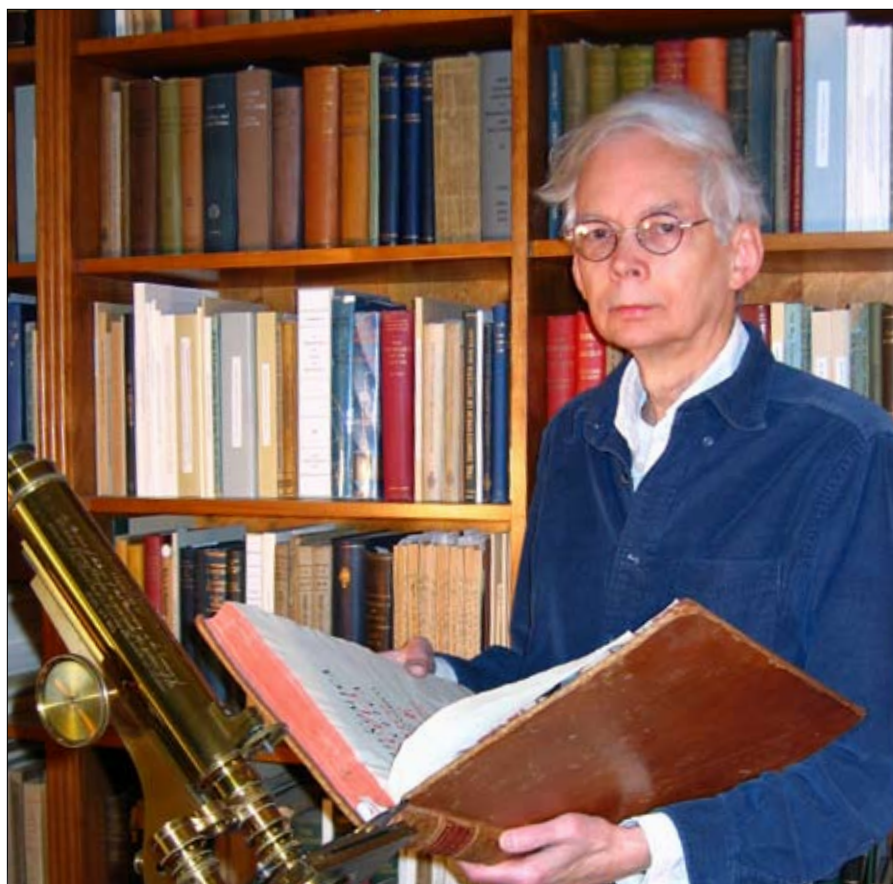
precious collection." It was not the monetary value of the books that brought on the reverence, however. This is his collection of Emilie du Châtelet, companion to Voltaire and one of the greatest scientific minds of the 18th century. At a time when Newton's ideas were barely gaining traction among the scientific minds of the French academy, she and Voltaire were talking up his ideas among the wider chattering classes of French society. She understood Newton's difficult ideas well enough to write the first French translation of his *Principia*, adding to it a second volume that expanded upon and elucidated his thinking, though both volumes were only published after her death. Smeltzer has a nearly complete collection of her work, including various

editions of many. When Judith Zinsser wrote her 2007 book about du Châtelet, Smeltzer supplied many of the illustrations.

Actually, the exploration of the role of women in science and medicine will be the topic of his next Grolier exhibition, which will open next fall. Right now he's hard at work on it. It will have more than 70 books from his own collection, many from Bob Rubin, a Grolier member who collects medical books, as well as books on loan from a dozen libraries. As anyone who has put together a show from a variety of sources will tell you, managing to get the cooperation of a dozen libraries is no mean feat.

We paused in front of another shelf of books, and Smeltzer adopted a confessional tone. The books are not terribly important in the history of science, but he has set himself the goal of getting one copy of every edition of Dupain de Montesson's *Science of Surveying*, a book which has the distinction of being one of the very few scientific books almost entirely printed from copperplate engravings. Engravings have only rarely been used for text (and then typically

See CAXTONIANS COLLECT, page 5



Photograph by Suzanne Smeltzer

on optics with the observation that "there is really no other way to convey the information than to use color."

Another specialty is scientific books illustrated with original photographs, typically albumen-silver prints. He believes he holds the first examples printed in England (they're photo-micrographs), Germany, and France.

We paused below a shelf which included a book with a very obvious "VOLTAIRE" on a spine, and Smeltzer said "This is my most



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## Bookmarks...

Luncheon: March 8, 2013, Union League Club  
Rebecca Sive

A Fascinating Feminist, Rebecca Sive,  
Talks about Chicago's Own Jane Addams

Jane Addams founded Hull House in 1889. But did you know that she was also a philosopher, a sociologist, an author, a leader in women's suffrage, a pacifist (in 1931, she won the Nobel Peace Prize), and an inspiration to many contemporary leaders? For International Women's Day (March 8), the ideas of two fascinating feminists add up to a most special afternoon.

Rebecca Sive is a nationally recognized expert on women in politics and public leadership. She is president of The Sive Group Inc., (a public affairs firm), has received many awards for her civic activity, and appears in *Feminists Who Changed America*, published by the University of Illinois Press. She has been an organizer of women's issues agendas for presidents Carter, Clinton and Obama. Rebecca writes regularly for *The Huffington Post*. Last fall, she taught a course at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy on women and public leadership, which was the first of its kind in that school's curriculum.

March luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard.  
Luncheon buffet (main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$30.  
March dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Timing:

### Beyond March...

#### NO APRIL LUNCHEON!

Because of the multiplicity of events, including dinners and the symposium, in the March-April time frame, the luncheon committee has decided not to meet for lunch in April.

#### APRIL DINNER

Julia Miller, conservator and bookbinding scholar, will speak on "Not Just Another Beautiful Book: American Scaleboard Bindings"

Dinner: Wednesday, Mar. 20, 2013, Union League Club  
Kathryn Gucer

Come slingshooting with me: Pamphlets, Posts,  
and Popular Rebellion in 17th-Century France

In January 1648 angry Parisian mobs threw stones at the windows of the most powerful man in France, Cardinal Jules Mazarin. The hooligans used slingshots, or frondes in French, to protest Mazarin's imposition of steep taxes and his control over the ten-year-old king, Louis XIV. These protests escalated into a five-year rebellion throughout France that has come to be known as the Fronde. Mazarin's opponents, or frondeurs, quickly added the pen and the printing press to their arsenal of weapons, producing an unprecedented explosion of brief political pamphlets called mazarinades. As the rebellion spread from city to city in France, people outside of Paris began to write, read, republish, and re-disseminate these materials. Part literary criticism, part history of the book, and part political history, the talk will explore the Fronde by way of these media and mediators. It will also highlight little known collections at the Newberry Library and other libraries in the United States.

cspirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. \$48. 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.**

### Special Dinner, Friday, March 15, 5:30 PM U. of Chicago Library and the Quadrangle Club

In anticipation of the April 6 symposium, come to a guided tour of the University of Chicago's exhibit *DIY Autobiography: My Life is an Open Book*. The tour will be followed by dinner at the Quadrangle Club across the street from the Library. No charge for tour; dinner is approximately \$38 before wine.