

In Search of the Lost Libraries of Arctic Explorers, 1819-2019

Adam V. Doskey

1819: Franklin and Parry Seek the Northwest Passage

Two hundred years ago, in 1819, two of the most important expeditions in search of a Northwest Passage left England and headed into the American arctic. The Coppermine Expedition, led by John Franklin, was an overland expedition charged with mapping the northern coast of Canada from the Coppermine River eastward. George Back and John Richardson served as officers and the three returned to England in 1822 to a heroes' welcome. Though the expedition made significant contributions to the mapping of the arctic coastline of North America, the human loss suffered by the expedition was great. At the time this tragedy was masked in most accounts by assertions that only one English officer had lost his life, when, in fact, 11 of 20 expedition members, primarily voyageurs of Métis descent, had succumbed to starvation or related effects. (No one could know then, but Franklin's final expedition in 1845 would be even more catastrophic, resulting in the death of all 129 expedition members. The search to find survivors as well as the cause of that disaster ironically led to the completion of Franklin's 1819 expedition overland.)

At the same time, William Edward Parry was leading the two ships HMS Hecla and HMS Griper on an expedition westward through the maze of waterways north of the North American continent in an attempt to discover a presumed Northwest Passage. As part of the plan, Parry's would be the first expedition to deliberately spend winter on ships in the arctic. Time spent stuck in the pack ice off of Melville Island in the dark arctic winter was devoted to education and entertainment for the crew



Parry's ships in Winter Harbor, 1819

and create a shipboard newspaper by and for the officers. The expedition would reach the farthest west of any shipboard expedition until three decades later in 1850. It was a great success, especially when marked against John Ross's expedition the previous year, which had ended its search prematurely at Ross's imagined sighting of mountains blocking his way. Parry had served as second-in-command on that 1818 expedition and was both embittered and motivated by its lost potential.

Why did the Royal Navy launch two major voyages of discovery to the arctic in 1819? The wheels were set in motion four years earlier with a warming trend in the region as well as the end of the Napoleonic Wars. As Gillen Wood elucidates in his 2014 book *Tambora*, a volcanic eruption in Indonesia in 1815 disrupted

the world's weather, causing a temporary arctic warming and a melting of sea ice in the area, which people believed might be permanent. Arctic whalers such as William Scoresby had reported on these conditions. The ambitious second secretary to the admiralty, John Barrow, saw an opportunity finally to discover the long-sought passage, something the English had been trying to do for several centuries. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, naval officers had been living on peacetime half-pay, seeking a way to get back to full employment. Therefore, enlisting in a voyage of discovery seemed a lucrative proposition.

Marking 1819 as a watershed year, it is fitting to look back at the last two centuries of arctic exploration, from the geographic discoveries of the British search for the

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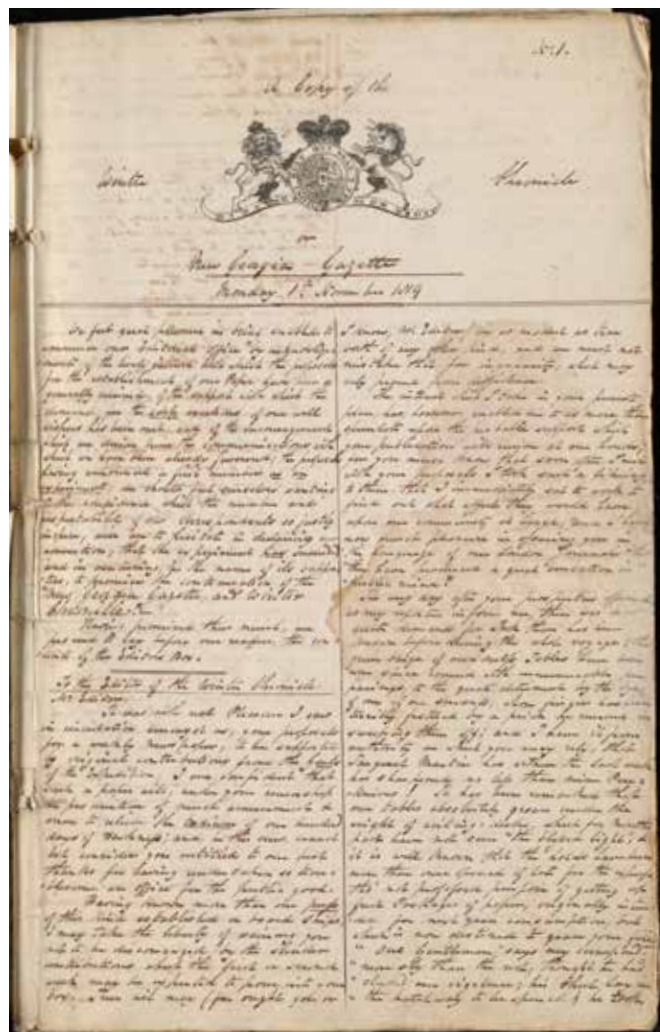
Northwest Passage to later scientific and ethnographic findings of European explorers such as Fridtjof Nansen and Knud Rasmussen who followed in their wake. Today, in 2019, the arctic library of John Richardson, surgeon-naturalist on Franklin's 1819 expedition, and the personal papers of Charles Palmer, midshipman on Parry's, are now a part of the special collections of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

2019: Celebrating Polar Anniversaries

Anniversaries afford libraries and museums the opportunity to examine their collections and dig into their storage spaces, to find objects fallen out of the public eye and invest them with new meaning or recover lost information from them. Many milestones have been recorded in the history of polar exploration, suggesting that the potential for anniversary celebrations on the topic is great.

January 1941 marked the centenary of James Clark Ross's historic landfall on the antarctic continent. The Scott Polar Research Institute intended to commemorate it with a full-length article in its journal *Polar Record*. However, given wartime paper rationing, it was decided to issue a shorter, three-page article by polar historian H.R. Mill. Entitled "A Relic of Ross," the article concerns a book that Ross had inscribed on two separate occasions: his farthest northern expedition in 1827 and then again on his farthest southern expedition, more than a decade later in 1842. This anonymously published book, *The Economy of Human Life*, was given to him by his sister, Isabella Ross and then returned to her and passed on through another generation of the family. Eventually the book entered the book trade, where the article's author found it in a bookseller's catalog and recognized its importance.

Mill's article is the earliest instance I can find where a book-history (or history-of-reading) approach was taken to the story of polar exploration, showing that an inscribed book can tell a nuanced history of polar exploration and that which books are taken on a particular expedition are important and should be engaged with intellectually. It also elucidates that the lending of



Palmer's inscription in *The North Georgia Gazette*, 1821

books was one way in which women participated in polar exploration, a topic that is still not fully acknowledged today.

Either the author or the journal's editors picked the title "A Relic of Ross" for Mill's short article, reinforcing the idea that objects like these were relics of national heroes and not serious research material. Now, more than 75 years later, at the bicentennial of the birth of modern arctic exploration, we must evaluate the role that the study of the book as physical object, and that the tools of the book historian, can play in writing a new history of arctic exploration. Using examples from the collections at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, this article will suggest ways in which personal libraries of arctic explorers – and the individual books of which they are comprised – can be used in such historiographical projects.

Over the past three decades, Caxtonian David Stam has done the most to promote polar libraries as a topic of scholarly inquiry. Caxtonians may know him best from the 2005 Grolier Club

exhibit, curated with his wife Deirdre, entitled “Books on Ice.” The exhibition catalog has become an essential reference to all collectors of polar material. Stam’s numerous articles were first to define what can be considered a polar library. Further essays explore the role of the lending libraries of American Seamen’s Friend Association and the libraries of the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, and the Byrd Antarctic Expedition, among others. Other scholars, most prominently Janice Cavell, Adriana Craciun, and Shane McCorristine, have explored British print culture around the British arctic expeditions of the 19th century. And Hester Blum has written about print and manuscript culture aboard the ships themselves, including American ones. It has been within this context that I have endeavored to shed new light on the polar libraries acquired by the University of Illinois Library and the individual books they contain.

Acquiring a Polar Library for the University of Illinois

The first collection of an arctic explorer came to the University of Illinois Library in 1924, when Ada Schwatka, widow of Illinois-born arctic explorer Frederick Schwatka (1849-1892), wrote to University Librarian Phineas Windsor. She offered to sell the University the remainder of her late husband’s collection, then held in storage at the public library in Rock Island, Illinois. As Mrs. Schwatka’s letters explained, many of her late husband’s books were destroyed in the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, where she had formerly resided. The library purchased the 54 remaining books for just \$50. These books focus on the search for Franklin and other 19th-century Anglo-American arctic expeditions. Schwatka was the leader of the last expedition of the 19th century (1878-1880) to search for the records and remains of Sir John Franklin’s lost expedition.

Already owning the collection of the leader of the last expedition to search for Franklin in the 19th century, it seems only



Sir John Franklin in 1824.

fitting then, that, nearly half a century later (in 1966) the library purchased part of the collection of Sir John Richardson (1787-1865), leader of the first Franklin search expedition in 1848-1849, and previously a surgeon and naturalist on Franklin’s two overland penetrations of the arctic from 1819-1822 and 1825-1827. The collection included the manuscript of Richardson’s unpublished journal of Franklin’s first overland arctic expedition and a dossier of documents related to the search for Franklin, including one of the final letters that Franklin wrote from Greenland in 1845.

Shortly afterward, possibly due to the attention garnered by the library’s acquisition of the sought-after Richardson collection, the family of Paul-Louis Mercanton (1876-1963), a then recently-deceased Swiss glaciologist and arctic scientist, approached the University to sell Mercanton’s library. Mercanton participated in Alfred de Quervain’s second Swiss expedition to Greenland in 1912 and James Mann Wordie’s 1921 expedition to the island of Jan Mayen, and visited again in 1929 with Jean Charcot. The collection included many presentation copies from European arctic explorers, especially Nansen and Charcot.

Then finally, in 1970, a collection of material related to William Edward Parry’s search for the Northwest Passage came up for sale in the catalog of a Los Angeles book dealer. The items were property of a junior officer on two of Parry’s expeditions named Charles Palmer (1792-1861). Most notably, it included one of the two extant manuscripts of the first newspaper written in the arctic regions, *The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle*.

In just four years, in the latter half of the 1960s, the University of Illinois had built a rich collection of manuscript and print materials from some of the most important arctic expeditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was made possible thanks to the faculty-driven collection development policy of the library at the time and the persistence

of a professor of physiology named Robert Eugene Johnson (1911-2002), who was interested in the lives of physicians who were also arctic explorers, mainly Frederick Schwatka and Sir John Richardson. This collection development policy meant that the Richardson collection could be purchased quickly from Dawson’s of Pall Mall using University Research Board funding before the Scott Polar Research Institute or the Stefansson Library of Dartmouth College could act. This was viewed as quite a coup. On the other hand, it meant that many items were earmarked for Professor Johnson’s research and not readily accessible to outside researchers. Johnson published a bibliography of Richardson’s publications and a short biography of Sir John in 1976, neither of which makes much use of the material in the Richardson collection itself. In 1984, Stuart Houston of the University of Saskatchewan edited and published Richardson’s journal from Franklin’s first overland expedition.

By this point in the mid-1980s, the collections had fallen into disuse. This was partially the result of the practice of individually classifying each item in

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the collections by subject and dispersing them throughout the library. In the 1920s, before special collections at Illinois had been established, Frederick Schwatka's books were given an institutional bookplate recording their provenance and added to the general circulation. The Richardson collection was added to special collections but dispersed throughout the general collection with no entries in the catalog for their provenance. The bulk of the Mercanton collection, including many presentation copies, were cataloged for the circulating collection, with a few rarer items housed in special collections. The Palmer collection remained undispersed in an archival collection without any detailed description available in the online catalog. Without proper cataloging or a resident subject specialist, historians of arctic exploration no longer knew about the university library's strong holdings.

In 2010, as a rare book cataloger, I became aware of the Schwatka collection through a brief mention in *Non Solus*, a long-discontinued library friends publication, and I quickly discovered that the list of Schwatka's books had long been missing. But fortunately, this collection had not been lost to time – a single book from the collection had recently been re-cataloged with a mention of its provenance recorded in the online catalog. My colleague Marten Stromberg suggested that we use the accession number stamped in the book to look in the acquisition ledgers to find what other books were processed into the library at the same time. This method worked and I was able to identify all 54 volumes formerly owned by Schwatka.

While retrieving Schwatka's books from the library's circulating collection, I came across the distinctive bookplate of Paul-Louis Mercanton in many of the other books which were shelved nearby. Curious to know more about who Mercanton was and how his books came to the university library, I headed to consult the special collections acquisitions files in the university archives, where I found a complete item list. Later, when all the Schwatka and Mercanton items from the circulating collections were identified and re-cataloged, I began re-assembling the Richardson collection using the correspondence and bookseller's description found in the library's collection files. This all culminated in an exhibition of the materials in the spring of

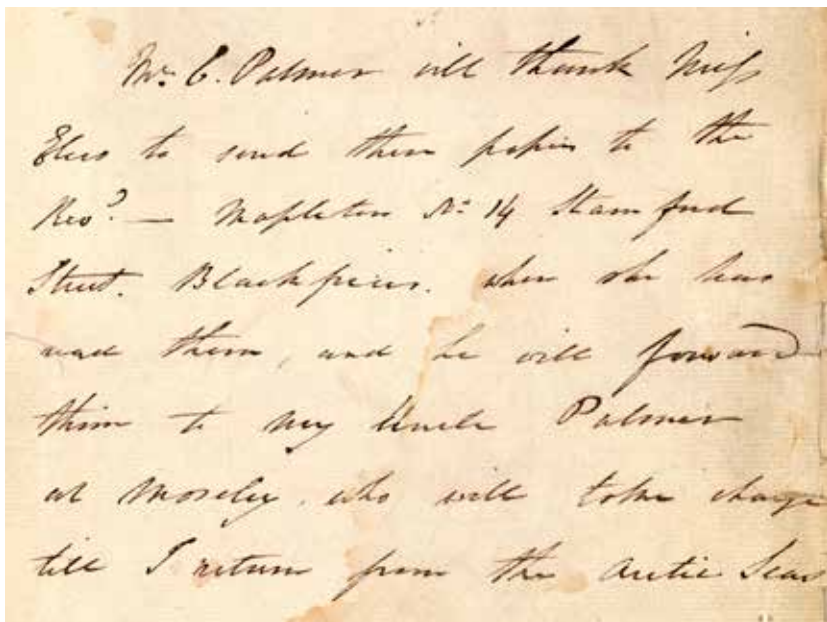
2013, entitled "Names Swallowed by the Cold." Since then, I have been acquiring arctic material to supplement the collections and diversify the voices represented. These new acquisitions include the first newspaper printed in Greenland and other texts in the Greenlandic

language, as well as many individual books owned by arctic explorers, including Sir John Franklin himself.

Now I'd like to talk about some specific items from the arctic collections at Illinois to suggest ways in which book history and the history of reading can be used in the historiography of arctic exploration and science.

Charles Palmer: Midshipman with Parry

The Palmer-Parry Collection contains one of the two surviving manuscript copies of *The North Georgia Gazette and Winter Chronicle*, a newspaper written and distributed among the officers during the first arctic expedition of William Edward Parry in 1819-1820. My first thought was that the Illinois copy was made by or for Charles Palmer on the voyage home, but close examination suggests it is an original copy – there are numerous strike-throughs covering up rejected text, not just the scribal errors you would expect to see in a clean copy. The other extant copy, once belonging to the Parry family, is now housed at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, England. This second manuscript shows less evidence of the editing of the text itself but also contains numerous penciled annotations suggesting it was the copy



Flyleaf inscription discussed in Charles Palmer's manuscript copy of the North Georgia Gazette.

used to print the edition published by John Murray in 1821.

Why would a junior officer such as a midshipman come to own one of two original manuscript copies that circulated on the two ships in that winter of 1819? One explanation could be that the manuscript of the newspaper was systematically circulated according to rank among the family members of the officers on return to England, with the Palmer family being last. Manuscripts, especially ones rendered obsolete by the publication of a printed edition, were not yet held in high esteem for artifactual value at this point in the nineteenth century. Charles Palmer's inscription on the fly-leaf seems to support this hypothesis:

Mr. C. Palmer will thank Miss Elers to send these papers to the Revd. Mapleton when she has read them, and he will forward them to my Uncle Palmer at Moseley, who will take charge till I return from the arctic Seas.

In this short inscription we have a record of the manuscript's transmission once Palmer left for Parry's second expedition in May 1821. Miss Elers was Palmer's sister, but Palmer's relationship to the Reverend Mapleton has not been established. This circulation of the manuscript is corroborating evidence of what was written by the editor, Edward Sabine, in his introduction to the print edition, published in 1821 and quickly reissued in a second edition in 1822:

On the return of the Expedition, the interest which the Public took in all that had passed during the voyage, induced applications for the perusal of the manuscript, which could only be gratified by its publication.

Furthermore, the Palmer collection contains a copy of this printed edition of the newspaper, which Palmer presented to his sister. The library has subsequently purchased another copy of the printed newspaper, owned by Parry's sister-in-law and containing annotations identifying the anonymous authors of 49 of the articles. The Scott Polar Research Institute copy was presented by Parry to her sister and contains an index to the contributors appended to the front of the manuscript. Another annotated copy is known to exist at the US Air Force Geophysics Laboratory, given to one Mrs. Henry Garrett, also by Parry, identifying the authors of 64 of the articles, and was the subject of a 1985 article in the journal *Arctic*. At that time it was thought to be the sole annotated copy, but clearly that is not the case.

Examining the copies at hand, it appears likely that this work had a predominantly female audience of readers, especially among family members of the expedition's officers. It makes sense that the officers' families would want to have an insight into their daily lives, especially since Parry and many of the officers and men left soon after their return to England for a second

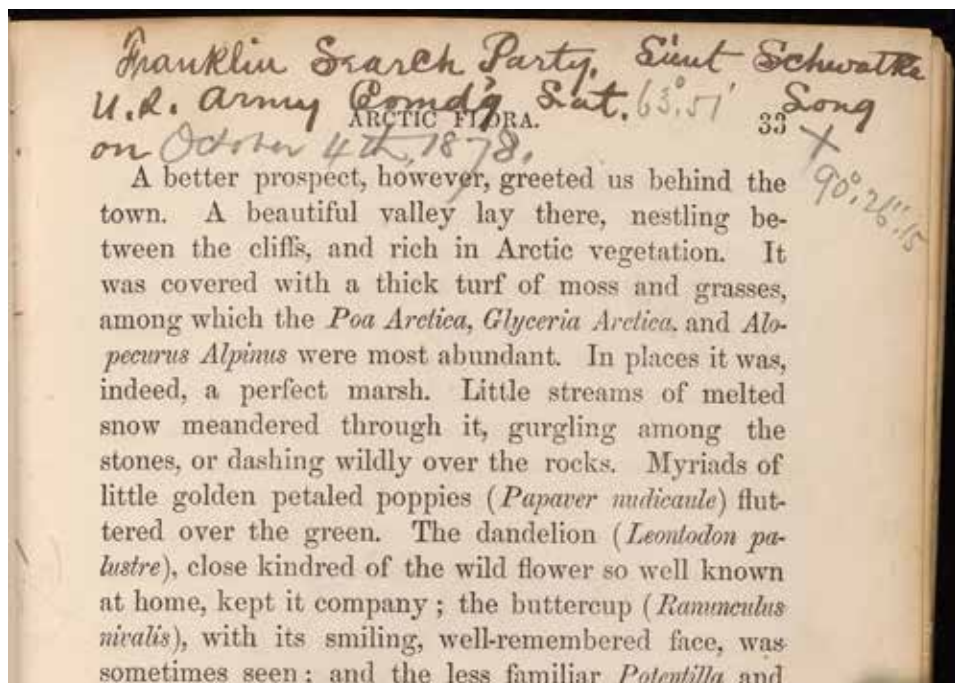
extended search for the Northwest Passage. Another copy of the first print edition of the newspaper recently acquired by the library belonged to Mary Anne Theresa Whitby (1783-1850), an expert on silkworms who corresponded with Charles Darwin.

Frederick Schwatka: Last of the Franklin Searchers

Frederick Schwatka's copy of Isaac Israel Hayes' *The Open Polar Sea* (1869) appears to have been subject to much use and abuse in the more than 80 years it spent in the circulating collection before being moved to special collections: the spine is broken and shelf cocked and the green publisher's cloth is soiled. But if we judged this book only by its cover, we'd be making a mistake. Leafing through the book and turning to page 33, we see this inscription: "Franklin Search Party, Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka Commanding" followed by the latitude, longitude, and date, October 4th, 1878.

The coordinates have nothing to do with the text of the book they appear in. It is not a mark of reading. These coordinates are for the northwest coast of Hudson Bay, the location of Schwatka's winter camp during the first year of his search for the Franklin expedition records. It becomes clear that this book was in the arctic with Schwatka in 1878.

Frederick Schwatka's inscription in Hayes' *The Open Polar Sea*, 1878



The puzzling thing is that the inscription is in both ink and pencil, with coordinates and date penciled in. It suggests that the main body of the inscription was written earlier, with details intended to be filled in later, like a printed record form. What was going on here? Perhaps something to do with the practice of building stone cairns and leaving written records in them, like the famous admiralty record that McClintock's expedition found from Franklin's, which is the only written record to describe the expedition's fate. There is no other inscription like this in the Schwatka collection. It would be interesting to find books owned by other explorers employing a similar inscription, but I have yet to find any.

Paul-Louis Mercanton: Self-Fashioned Arctic Explorer and Scientist

Many of the items in the Mercanton collection, show Mercanton self-fashioning his identity as an important scientist and arctic explorer. The modifications to his books and his very choice of which ones to purchase and preserve are meant to commemorate Mercanton's participation in arctic expeditions, beginning with Alfred de Quervain's second Swiss expedition to Greenland in 1912, continuing with his own ascent of the Beerenberg, the world's northernmost active volcano, located on Jan Mayen Island, in 1921, and culminating in his return to Jan Mayen in 1929 with French polar explorer Jean Charcot to measure the height of the Beerenberg.

Three items from the Mercanton Polar Library especially show this conscious construction of identity, all of them related to commemorating his ascent of the Beerenberg with James Mann Wordie and T.C. Lethbridge in 1921. The first is a copy of William Scoresby's biography, published by his nephew R.E. Scoresby Jackson in 1861. Whaler and scientist William Scoresby (1789-1857) was an early English visitor to Jan Mayen Island. Mercanton's copy has the following inscription on the front free endpaper:

Cambridge, November 4th, 1921, Dear Professor, We think it appropriate to present you with this copy of the life of Dr. Scoresby, for we think we were the

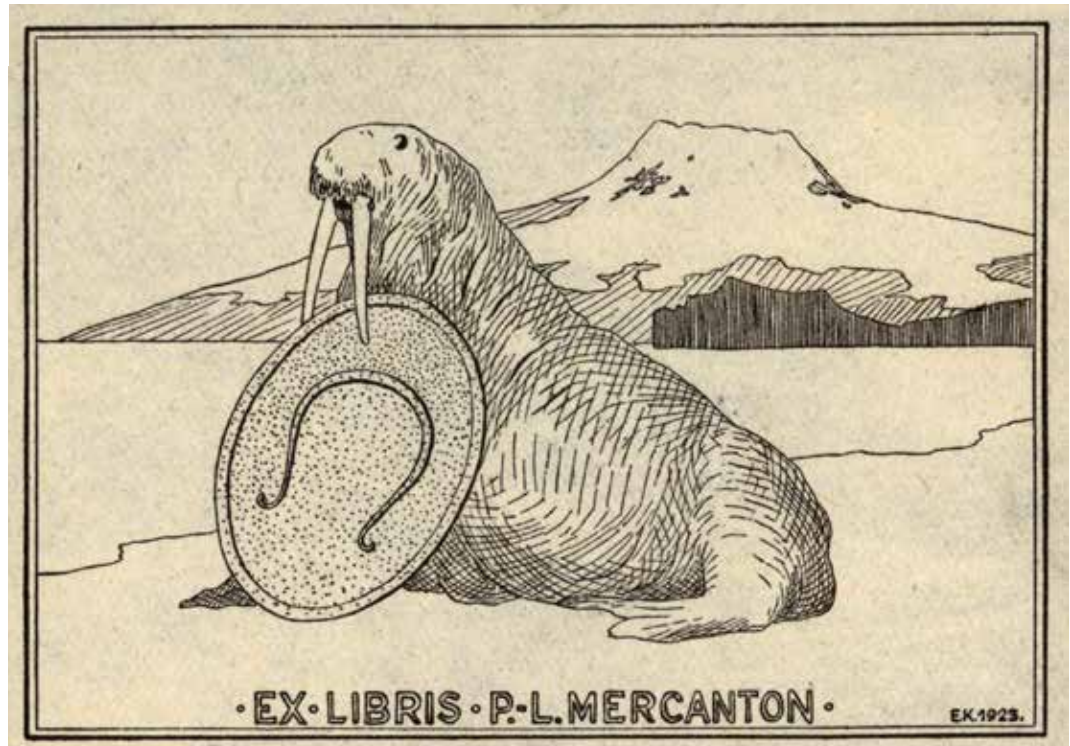
first Englishmen to carry on the work begun by Scoresby in Jan Mayen, but after an interval of nearly a century. J.M. Wordie.

It is an interesting and ultimately deceptive inscription – both Wordie and Lethbridge’s biographies present quotations from their subjects to the effect that both men disliked Mercanton and viewed him as a foreign interloper on a British expedition, anxious to make claims of discovery on behalf of Switzerland. The phrase “we were the first Englishmen” signals that they are claiming the first ascent of the Beerenberg for England. This is just one more reminder to critically evaluate the presentation inscriptions found in books.

Of course Mercanton had no control over this particular inscription, which was a gift, but the following two items were created by him to commemorate the climb and illustrate how he used objects and symbols to create, control, and legitimize his achievements.

Mercanton’s copy of the German translation of Fridtjof Nansen’s 1920 book on Spitsbergen includes a typed letter from Nansen to Mercanton, dated March 27, 1922, tipped in on the front endpapers. In the letter, also in German, Nansen promises to send a copy of his book and he also enquires about Mercanton’s trip to Jan Mayen, explaining that he was too busy to visit Mercanton in (his hometown) of Lausanne while on a recent visit to Geneva. I argue that Mercanton created this assemblage as another memorial to his ascent. Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930) was the foremost arctic explorer of the time and to have a letter from him mentioning Mercanton’s expedition would be a very prized acknowledgement indeed.

The next year, 1923, would find Mercanton creating the ultimate memorial to his arctic achievements, his bespoke bookplate. The bookplate depicts a walrus supporting a shield with an omega on it, lying on a beach on Jan Mayen, with the Beerenberg in the background. The inclusion of the walrus holding the shield with the omega symbol was at first very mysterious to me, until Caxtonian Caroline Szylowicz



Paul-Louis Mercanton’s bookplate

mentioned that the French term for walrus was “morse” – the same as the surname of the inventor of the telegraph, Samuel F.B. Morse. Mercanton began his career studying radio engineering and is known as a pioneer of radio in Switzerland. The omega is the symbol for an ohm, a unit of measurement of electrical resistance, first used in conjunction with telegraphy in the nineteenth century. So the imagery of Mercanton’s bookplate displays his career arc from radio engineer to glaciologist, the pinnacle of which was his ascent of the the Beerenberg in 1921.

Why reconstruct libraries of Arctic Explorers?

To conclude, why reconstruct the libraries of arctic explorers? And why study individual books in the context of their former owners? Traditionally, when lost libraries are discussed, they are the libraries of classical antiquity or of the middle ages, dispersed by natural disasters or social upheavals such as the dissolution of the monasteries in England. But in our everyday experience as collectors, scholars, and librarians, we see the traces of personal collections closer to the contemporary era that have been broken up either by the book trade or the policies of collecting institutions. Collections, such as the libraries of the arctic explorers described in this paper,

have been bought whole by research libraries and then dispersed across their various collections. In the case of the University of Illinois, sometimes the books have an institutional bookplate recording the provenance, sometimes not. Some provenances are unfortunately lost to time.

Similar collections at institutions across the country, which are not necessarily immediate candidates for special collections because the books are not deemed old enough or rare enough, now stand at great risk, because of de-duplication and weeding by libraries, even at large research institutions. This is a trend that Andrew Stauffer is addressing with his Book Traces Project at the University of Virginia, and it is worthwhile to visit the project webpage (<https://booktraces.library.virginia.edu/>). Stauffer’s work also shows us that the marks of reading from individuals not far removed in time from the present can be as important as early modern and romantic period marginalia that typically get the most attention in book history.

So in this anniversary year for arctic exploration, as we invest these objects with new meaning, let us not only acknowledge the potential value of arctic collections for telling new stories, but also keep in mind all special collections and their former owners and their value to our future understanding of the world around us.

§§

W.S. Merwin: Translator Poet

Questions raised by the W.S. Merwin translation papers.

“Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.”
– *Edwin Arlington Robinson*

The prolific, much-honored, influential poet W.S. Merwin died in March 2019 at the age of 91. He published three dozen books of poetry, his own and translations, as well as many essays, fictions, and memoirs. As is apparent from the works, he cared deeply about nature and the planet. He devoted much of his life to a decades-long conservation project on the disused plantation in Hawaii that he made his home. His *New York Times* obituary (by Margalit Fox) contains this: “The themes that preoccupied Mr. Merwin most keenly were those that haunt nearly every poet: the earth, the sea and their myriad creatures; the cycle of the seasons; myth and spirituality (he was a practicing Buddhist); personal history and memory; and, above all, life and its damnable evanescence.” It also quotes the fine Illinois poet Laurence Lieberman on the key to reading Merwin’s poetry: “The poems must be read very slowly, since most of their uncanny power is hidden in overtones that must be listened for in silences between lines, and still stranger silences within lines.”

I had the privilege and the pleasure of meeting a number of times and corresponding quite extensively with Merwin in the 1980s when negotiating the purchase of his papers by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Library. He was a strikingly handsome man (a quality that he retained into old age) with a resonant and beautifully articulated voice, an unusual warmth, and an aura of peace and wisdom. The *Readers’ Digest* used to have a feature on “The most unforgettable person I ever met.” W.S. Merwin was that and more – a great man and a very great poet whose works will endure for as long as there are those who value and love their uncanny power and mysterious silences.

Many of the papers acquired by the UIUC Library concern his translations. As a small tribute, I offer this revised version of a piece I published in the 1980s. It is adapted from an article published in *Translation Review*, 9:1, pages 30-33 (1982.) – *Michael Gorman*

“The whole practice [of translation] is based on paradox: wanting the original leads us to want a translation. And the very notion of making or wanting a translation implies that it will not and cannot be the original.”

–W.S. Merwin. *Selected Translations*, 1968-1978.

Michael Gorman

In the early 1980s, the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign acquired a valuable and extensive collection of manuscripts of, and papers relating to, translations made by the internationally famous and honored American poet W. S. Merwin. The papers cover the period from the late 1940s to the date of acquisition. Related papers were added after the initial acquisition. The papers represent a prodigious creative achievement (both in quantity and quality) in the field of poetic translation. The nub of the questions raised in contemplating such a collection of papers lies in those last two words – “poetic translations.” Other possible terms are: translation of poems; poems in translation; re-creations of poems in another language. In the definition of these terms and the selection of the most apt lies a central interest of the Merwin translation papers to the reader of modern American poetry who is also interested in the translation process. No matter which term one uses, one is faced with deep questions which can never be answered to everyone’s satisfaction but are useful and important. Among them are: What is poetic translation/translation of poems? Is it the rendering of ideas and images (the content of a poem) into another language? Is it also concerned with the form/structure and “sound” and textures of a poem and the reproduction of these (nearly or distantly) in another language?

“Poetry is what gets lost in translation” is a famous dictum attributed to Robert Frost. This can be agreed with (or disagreed with) on at least two levels. Archibald MacLeish wrote: “A poem should not mean / But be” and, if that poem is (i.e., exists) who is to say that it is rendered invalid because its origins lie in another poem in a different language? Ultimately, what does it matter if they are considered two different poems with their own being or one poem in two different languages?

Translation of meaning is considered to be a difficult enough task – how much more daunting is the translation (transmutation) of the “being” of literary expression. The difficulty of poetic translation even at the most basic level, that of the single word, is recognized and brilliantly described by Merwin himself in his foreword to his *Selected Translations*, 1968-1978:

“If we take a single word of any language and try to find an exact equivalent in another, even if the second language is closely akin to the first, we have to admit that it cannot be done. A single primary denotation may be shared; but the constellation of secondary meanings, the moving rings of associations, the etymological echoes, the sound and its own levels of association, do not have an equivalent because they cannot ...”

Even if that Quixotic task can be accomplished, the second attempt to render the unsayable in another language must be the province of the truly daring. Frost and MacLeish may represent the extreme view that would deny the validity of translated poetry. There are many others who would not be so extreme or would simply disagree with their judgment. If it can be done, what is it done for? Surely not to translate the “meaning” or the images of a poem. That can be accomplished in prose. No, what is left is the desire to capture and re-create the elusive essence of a poem or to create a “new” poem in another language based on the “meaning” and/or “sound” of the original. Philip Larkin, the English poet, once was asked what he read in foreign poetry. His answer was simply “Foreign poetry?” Another extreme view, possibly one that is uniquely English. The translation of poetry is clearly of no interest or concern to Larkinians, but despite this and other negativities, it is a labor that has engaged many poets, a labor which they view as at least as important and creative as their “own” poetry. W. S. Merwin’s case in this matter has a special interest, because he has two modes of working on translations. Those from the Romance languages, he translates himself. Those from the non-Romance languages (including languages such as Gaelic, Tzotzil, Vietnamese, and Sanskrit) are translated for him into English, often in the form of prose. He then reworks the material into English

See *TRANSLATING POETRY*, page 8

poetry and, as is documented in his papers, has on occasion corresponded with the initial translator on nuances of language and the “sound” of the English version.

The two basic modes of Merwin’s translation work have variations as, for example, in the case of “The poet tells of his fame” from the 12th century Divan of Abulcasim El Hadrami, which was made into a Spanish poem by Jorge Luis Borges and then translated (transmuted?) by Merwin from Borges’ Spanish. To the complexity of the fundamental question of the nature of poetic translation, we can add the question of whether there is any difference between a poet creating a poem based on his own translation and a poet creating a poem on the basis of a translation made by someone else. Which is “closer” to the original? Which is more likely to be a poem and which a poetic translation? One possible, if paradoxical, answer could be that the language with which the poet is familiar might impose a burden of nuance, “sound,” and form that could inhibit the creative process. Such restrictions might not be present when the poet is dealing with a translation (verse or prose) prepared by someone else. In the latter case he or she could deal with the images and the meaning of the original untrammelled by the need to reproduce the nature of the poem. If that is so, what of Robinson’s “unsayable?” Can any translator, not a native speaker, capture that elusive gleam? It is possible that a native speaker doing a prose translation could render a version that did indeed capture the unsayable in a way in which the fluent translator/poet (not a native speaker) could not.

As a minor but interesting example of Merwin’s creative process, I have chosen an untitled poem (see below) by the Swedish poet, playwright, and novelist Lars Norén (1944-). The poem is elegaic, suffused with a Nordic sadness. Merwin’s “primary translator” – Gunnar Harding – made a line-by-line literal translation (see below) with suggestions on variant words and, most interestingly, a commentary upon the translation. In Harding’s letter we find

“It’s hard to say for me what could be difficult here, den lättare musiken means word by word (the) lighter music. This is a very common term in Swedish, exactly what you call the kind of Melachrino, etc., music the radio usually plays, so the important thing there is just to find the general term in English. Line 7. A very simple phrase complicated only because of the word ju that has no

English equivalent. Without it the phrase means She doesn’t listen. If you translate the ju with as the full stop has to be taken away in English. The word could also be dropped. Bleknande means paling, but I don’t know if you can use that word about cloths. It means losing their color – because of the sun, because of being washed too many times etc.”

See below for a transcription of the Merwin manuscript. In these papers the poet invariably writes in pencil, in a tiny and somewhat crabbed hand, and upon any piece of paper that happens to be handy (typically the backs of envelopes and letters). One can note such changes between the translator’s version and the poet’s as the substitution of “As at the death of a queen” for “As when a queen [dies] ...”

Surely a better line, even though the manuscript flirts with the former version. As for the questions raised by Harding, we can note Merwin is toying with “pop” or “popular music” and “lighter music” before settling for “light music,” and his discarding of the “isn’t she?” in the seventh line. There is also the unexplained substitution in the final printed version of “works” (as suggested by Harding) for “toils” (as in the manuscript) in the eleventh line. Perhaps the change was made at some editorial stage not documented in the papers.

The library of the University of Illinois held an exhibition of some of the Merwin translation papers called “W. S. Merwin – The Creative Process.” It showed the original poems, the primary translator’s texts and comments, the Merwin manuscripts, and the final printed text. Whether the exhibition or, more likely, any subsequent prolonged scholarly examination of the papers could answer any questions about the nature of this special creative process is problematical. Perhaps the best answer has already been provided by Merwin himself (again from the foreword to his *Selected Translations*:

“I wanted the translation to represent, with as much life as possible, some aspect, some quality of the poem which made the translator think it was worth translating in the first place.”

THE NORÉN POEM IN SWEDISH

Idag är allting
allvarligt och nästan tyst.
Som när en drottning går bort
och radion byter ut den lättare musiken
mot Mozart och Bach.
Jag förstår inte varför.
Hon lyssnar ju inte.
Jag kan nästan se
hur människor går ifrån
varandra, hur tystnaden
arbetar i de bleknande kläderna

och hur den ensamma
grå getingen söker sig in
til sin dödssömn
i det torra bergträdet sår.

HARDING TRANSLATION

Today everything is
serious (earnest?) and almost quiet
As when a queen passes away (dies?)
and the radio exchanges the lighter music
(popular music?)
to Mozart or Bach.
I can’t see (understand?) why.
As she isn’t listening. (doesn’t listen?)
(She isn’t listening, is she?)
I can almost see
how people leave
each other, how silence
works in the paling (fading, bleaching)
cloths and how the lonely
grey wasp searches its way (literally: searches
itself into)
into its deathsleep
in the wound of the dry mountain tree

MERWIN MANUSCRIPT: TRANSCRIPTION

Today Everything Today everything
is earnest and [~~unreadable, crossed out~~] almost
still hushed
As when a queen at the death of a queen
when the radio changed from pop
lighter music
to Mozart or Bach.
I don’t know why.
Since S she isn’t listening is she?
I can almost see
how people leave each other, how silence
toils labours (?) in the fading fabrics
and how the lonely
gray wasp gropes its way
into its death sleep
in the wound of the dry mountain
mountain tree

FINAL PRINTED VERSION

Today everything
is earnest and hushed.
As at the death of a queen
when the radio changes from light music
to Mozart or Bach. I don’t know why.
Since she isn’t listening.
I can almost see
how people leave
each other, how silence
works in the fading fabrics
and how the solitary gray wasp gropes its way
into its death sleep
in the wound of the dry mountain tree.

Caxton Club COUNCIL NOTES

Leora Siegel, Secretary

The Caxton Council met on March 20, 2019, at the Union League Club to attend to Council business.

Mary Kohnke, Chair of the Development Committee, reported that contributions are down this year compared to last, and below the projected goal. An appeal to Senior Members will be sent to those who have not made a contribution thus far.

President Arthur Frank appointed a Finance Committee, charged with preparing the budget for the next fiscal year. Vice-President Jackie Vossler is the Chair, with Treas-

urer Jeff Jahns, and Committee members Ethel Kaplan and Kevin Sido. A preliminary budget will be prepared for the June Council meeting, with the final budget presented at the September 2019 meeting.

Susan Hanes, Co-chair of the Membership Committee with Jackie Vossler, presented a candidate for Caxton membership. **Daniel J. Ronchetti** (Resident) is a retired Chicago Public School teacher. He loves to travel and has been to Africa and China among many other places, which has led to his collection of objects and books, from European prints to ancient coins from the Mediterranean. He was nominated by Bob McCamant and seconded

by Margaret McCamant. Susan Hanes moved, John Chalmers seconded the motion, and the nomination was unanimously approved.

Paul Gehl, Caxton Archivist-Historian, reported on the activities of the Keepsake Committee on behalf of committee members Susan Hanes, Margaret McCamant, and Lou Pitschmann. In celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Caxton Club, the committee proposed a softbound, color-printed book on the Club's logotype and graphic history.

Proposed by-law amendments were discussed at length and deliberations will continue at the April Council meeting.

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Program and Book Signing at Union League May 21

Our *Chicago by the Book* profiles 101 landmark publications about Chicago from the past 170 years that have helped define the city and its image. Each title is the focus of an illustrated essay by a leading scholar, writer, or bibliophile. There is a common thread of people and events from the 140 years of Union League history throughout it as well. Our presenters and moderator will be pulling three of those threads.

Kim Coventry, executive director of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation and co-chair of Caxton Club's Publications Committee will compare the selection process for *Chicago by the Book* to the one used for R.R. Donnelley's Lakeside Classics. On display will be the ULCC's complete set of the series.

Carl Smith, professor of English, American Studies, and History at Northwestern University, on "The Plan of Chicago, 1909." On display will be ULCC archival materials related to the Plan and Burnham.

Will Hansen, Curator of Americana at the Newberry Library, on the "Chicago Railroad Fair Official Guide Book and Program" for the Pageant "Wheels a-Rolling" in 1948. On display will be archival materials and artifacts from ULCC member involvement in the railroad industry.

The reception with book sales and signing starts at 5:30 pm followed by the program at 6 pm. We will continue selling books and the authors will be available for signing after the program at 7 pm. The price is \$20 per person for non-members. Reservations and/or tickets are required. Please note that for Library Events, Union League Club of Chicago adheres to a "business casual" dress code which allows dress denim but no t-shirts or athletic wear. **\$20.**

Two Book fairs this year!

A new fair, the Chicago Antiquarian Map, Book & Ephemera Fair, will be held on the first floor of the Newberry Library. The fair will consist of over 30 dealers in antique maps, books, ephemera from all across North America and parts of Europe. Thousands of maps, prints, and books spanning over 500 years of art and history will be on display and available for purchase over this three day event. Evenings, May 3 to 5.

The traditional book fair, held at the Plumber's Hall on West Washington Street, will take place Saturday, June 15. Our Club will exhibit and recruit. Watch for details!

Contact Bob McCamant (bmccamant@earthlink.net) if you'd like to take over the preparation of these listings.

Book- and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

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

American Writers Museum, 180 N. Michigan Avenue, second floor, Chicago, 312-374-8790: **"Frederick Douglass, Agitator"** (exploring the writer and "self-made man"), through May 31.

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: **"Connoisseurship of Japanese Prints"** (comparing multiple editions of works by Hokusai, Utamaro, Sharaku, and other ukiyo-e printmakers to uncover differences), Gallery 107, through June 22. **"Gregg Bordowitz: I Wanna Be Well"** (video, art made for television, published poems, and site-specific installations from the AIDS crisis forward), galleries 182-84 and 186, through July 15.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **"Spice Rack"** (illustrations of plants known for their spices), through June 2.

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, Chicago, 312-744-6630: **"Bronzeville Echoes"** (faces and places of Chicago's African American music), Garland Gallery, first floor south.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: **"Amplified Chicago Blues"** (photography by Raeburn Flerlage captures streets, clubs, homes, and studios), through August 10.

Intuit Museum of Outsider Art, 756 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, 312-243-9088: **"This Stillness"** (assemblage covering the complexities of black girlhood), through May 5.

Museum of Contemporary Art, 220 E. Chicago Avenue, Chicago, 312-280-2660: **"Chicago Works: Jessica Campbell"** (gender politics as seen in carpet murals), through July 7.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **"The Legacy of Chicago Dance"** (surveying the city's vibrant dance community) through July 6.

Northwestern University Transportation Library, 1970 Campus Drive, fifth floor, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **"African Aviation in the 1970s,"** ongoing. E-mail transportationlibrary@northwestern.edu to schedule an appointment.

Pritzker Military Museum and Library, 104 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-374-9333: **"Lest We Forget: Sailors, Sammies, and Doughboys Over There in World War I"** (explores the experiences of those who served in the war), through mid-May.

Smart Museum of Art, 5550 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: **"Smart to the Core: Embodying the Self"** (various artists explore the visual construction of selfhood), through May 19.

Spudnik Press Cooperative, 1821 W. Hubbard Street, suite 302, Chicago, 312-563-0302: **"Eternal Recurrence: New Editions from Spudnik Press Cooperative"** (26 artists), through May 25.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library, Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, second floor, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **"Independent Nations Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania"** (exhibit in conjunction with a Court Theatre production), through June 27.



Smart Museum/Smart to the Core
MIRROR STUDY FOR JOE, 2017, PIGMENT PRINT. SMART MUSEUM

Intuit/This Stillness

VANESSA GERMAN. A LOVE POEM TO NIA WILSON #2, 2018. COURTESY CARL HAMMER GALLERY



Spudnik Press/Eternal Recurrence

Caxtonians Collect: Gabe Fajuri

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

Many of us older members remember Jay Marshall, the magician and avid collector who died in 2005. The Caxtonian I interviewed this month knew him a bit while he was alive but came to know him much more intimately after his death, for he was the person that Jay's friend (and fellow Caxtonian) David Meyer hired to sort the magic items Marshall left at his death.

At the time, our subject, Gabe Fajuri, was a 2001 graduate of the University of Michigan trying to make it as a writer and businessman, writing for Crain Communications in Detroit and as a project manager for the magic-trick-maker Fun Incorporated, then in Chicago. He was a natural for anything having to do with magic, since he had been an amateur magician since boyhood. He told the story of this project, a trial by fire of sorts, in an article called "A Fine Mess" which appeared in the June 2007 issue of *Chicago* magazine (which you can still read on their website). An excerpt gives the picture:

Meyer and I were responsible for the magic-related material only, perhaps 40 percent of Magic, Inc.'s total accumulation (the rest of the stuff, handled by a separate appraiser, was simply the "nonmagic"). Our task was to cull the magic memorabilia from the nonmagic and assess what we found. Some of our charge would be donated to the American Museum of Magic in Marshall, Michigan (no relation), as dictated by Marshall's will. The balance of the collection – magic and nonmagic alike – would be disposed of via auction, private sale, donations, and the garage sale to end all garage sales, eBay.... By the time Meyer and I arrived on the scene in August, the local Salvation Army was refusing further donations from the estate.

Having done this project, a light went on in Fajuri's head. He knew about the auction business because his father had run one selling stamps. So he imported his father to help, and Potter and Potter Auctions ("potter" is the English translation of "fajuri") came to life.

The business has grown organically. "Besides magic, there's a whole big world of other col-

lectibles. Of course, books. But also, posters, toys, travel ephemera, writing manuals, maps(!), bindings, automobiles and their accessories, model ships, guns – who knows, somebody probably collects paper towel holders. Our job is to find a collector with a good collection who wants to convert it into some extra retirement money... or somebody whose parents collected, and left the collection



to their offspring," Fajuri explains.

As I write this, the website features auctions of magic, of posters, of "pop culture," and the one I find the most intriguing, automata – "the automaton collection of Michael Kam. Over 150 vintage and modern mechanical marvels will go on the block, including rare and unusual examples by Vichy, Lambert, Phalbois, and their contemporaries." Mark your calendar for August 24. They also do plenty of books, typically two or three auctions a year, he says.

It takes a variable staff of as many as 20 to develop an auction. At any one time, he may have tens of thousands of items in differing degrees of evaluation, research, or storage, waiting for their hour in the spotlight. He insists on a published catalog for every auction, which means there are writers, researchers, photographers, and even print designers on call. And inventory! It is scattered through available space in a big building on Ravenswood Avenue that includes many other businesses. Luckily all the offices share an interior warren of corridors. (The public entrance

to all the enterprises is from the street. But the inner corridor facilitates his staff in moving from storage space to storage space, no matter what the weather.) He also has a retail space of modest dimensions, open by appointment, but it is not a walk-in business.

He has two auctions in May: online-only for magic, and live for vintage posters.

"I collect association copies in the magic area," he admits. "But no longer do I stash things under the bed. When you are in a business like I am, you come to realize that one cannot just ignore accumulations for very long." Both he and his girlfriend read a lot of books themselves, but they're also big donors to the places that accept books for charity. The most likely books to achieve retention status are truly historic books on magic.

We'll end with another long quote from Fajuri's Marshall story in *Chicago*.

Long ago in Las Vegas, during one of his many appearances there, Marshall was winding up his act just ahead of the headliner, the head Rat Packer himself, when the stage manager signaled: Stretch! Sinatra wasn't ready. Stretch Marshall did and, after six minutes of stalling, he received the high sign. Marshall introduced Sinatra, and the show proceeded as usual. After the curtains fell, Marshall sauntered back to Sinatra's dressing room. What had happened? "I forgot my cuff links," Marshall recalled Sinatra saying, "so they had to send someone out to the front of the hotel to get me a pair from the gift shop." At that, the crooner took off the cuff links and threw them into the wastebasket.

"Are you throwing those away?" Marshall asked.

"Yeah, they're just a cheap set," Sinatra responded, according to Marshall's version of the story.

"Mind if I take them?"

"Go ahead." Forever after, Marshall referred to those cuff links as the "pair that Frank Sinatra gave me."

In the upstairs bedroom at Magic, Inc., we eyed hundreds of sets of old cuff links. None was marked; none seemed more notable than any other. Did we find the Sinatra set? I really don't know.

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photo / Robert McCamant



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Bookmarks...

Luncheon: Friday, May 10, Union League Club
Matthew Short on Preserving the Legacy
or Digitizing Dime Novels

Professor Harold Hill whipped decent Iowans into a frenzy with his warning about wayward youth. One of the telltale signs of corruption? A dime novel hidden in the corn crib. Ooooh, we've got trouble!

Precursors to pulp fiction, dime novels were popular, affordable, sensational, and, sadly, ephemeral reading material for the masses in the later 1800s and early 1900s. Youthful plucky heroes, slit-eyed gunslingers, rugged frontiersmen, and plucky New York girls being pursued by urban wolves crowded the pages of these novels and serial magazines in stories that were almost always double titled. Fred Fearnout's *War Canoe or Beating the Indian Champions* was a typical title that lured buyers and subscribers. Collectible dime novels are hard to find and afford today. You could spend more than \$1,000 for just one installment of *Denver Doll the Detective Queen's* harrowing adventures.

So avoid the uncomfortable corn crib and save a grand by joining Matthew Short, digital collections and metadata librarian at Northern Illinois University, as he reveals the dime novel's history and tells the tale of how NIU's and Villanova's libraries are collaborating to save their content.

May 10 luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Buffet opens at 11:30 am; program 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$35. Program free but please let us know you're coming. Reservations or cancellations for lunch by noon Wednesday the week of the luncheon. Reserve at caxtonclub.org, call 312-255-3710, or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org.

Beyond May...

JUNE LUNCHEON

College football is a morass of corruption with programs trading their academic souls for gridiron success. You know the ones we mean: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the University of Chicago. Big Ten Network lead anchor Dave Revsine, author of *The Opening Kickoff*, takes the field with a fascinating account of the early days of intercollegiate elevens.

Dinner: Wednesday, May 15, Union League Club
Lynne Thomas on Making Mr. Darcy: Cultural Context
for Jane Austen's Gentlemen

So should we regard Mr. Darcy with pride or with prejudice? Caxtonian Lynne Thomas will help us answer that question as she sets the cultural context for one of the central characters of Jane Austen's beloved novel. Today many people first encounter Austen's characters through film or television, where the portrayal of a proper Regency gentleman needs only an actor with good costuming and a posh "received pronunciation" accent. To be a gentleman in Austen's Regency society, however, was a different matter, as shown in the exhibit "Making Mr. Darcy" which Thomas curated at the University of Illinois. The exhibit illuminates how Regency gentlemen were educated, dressed, occupied themselves in work and leisure, participated in politics, and managed their love lives, and it provides us a richer context for appreciating Mr. Darcy and Austen's other gentlemen, both admirable and troublesome. Lynne is the Juanita J. and Robert E. Simpson Rare Book and Manuscript Professor and head of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

This evening will also include the Caxton Club's annual business meeting and election of officers. Please plan to attend.

May Dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. The evening will follow this order: Social gathering 5-6 pm; program at 6 pm; dinner immediately to follow. Program is free and open to the public. Beverages available for \$6-\$12. Three-course dinner: \$63.00. Reservations required for either the program only or the dinner/program combination. They must be received no later than NOON, Monday, May 13. Payment will be required for dinner reservations cancelled after that time and for no-shows. To reserve call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org.

JUNE DINNER

June 19, Union League Club: Bruce Kennett, storyteller, book artist, and Dwiggin's expert on "C.A. Dwiggin's – A Life in Design." This dinner will be held on the anniversary of Dwiggin's birth, so there will be a special surprise, and copies of Kennett's new book on Dwiggin's will be available for sale and signing. This is the last meeting before our summer break.