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The Poet, the Prophet, and the Publishing House

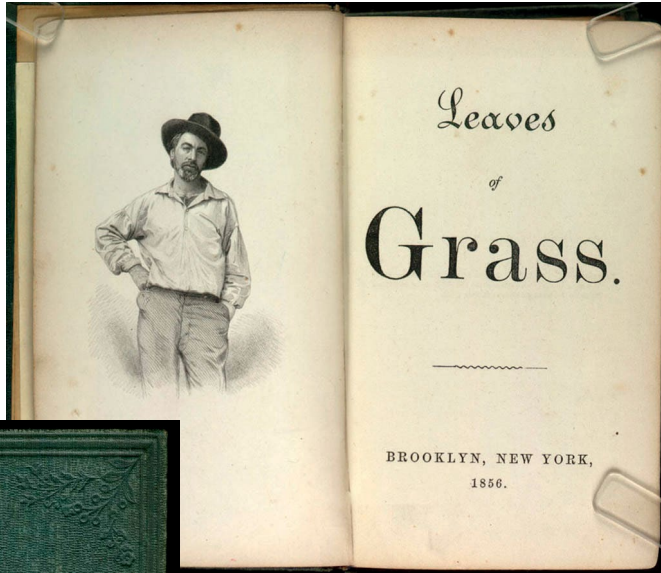
The Puzzling Story Behind One of Walt Whitman's Iconic Texts

Miles Harvey

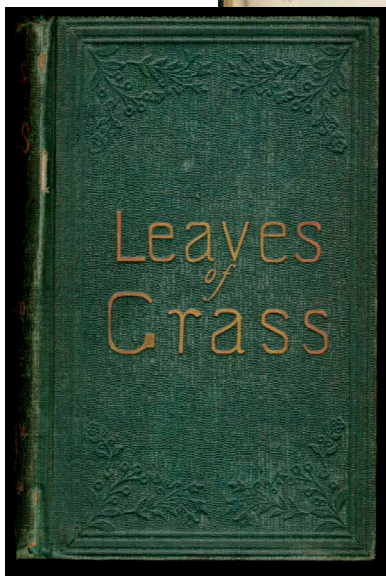
The second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1856, is one of the rarest and most important volumes in Walt Whitman's canon. Expanded by 20 poems from the small, self-published first edition of 1855, the book includes a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Whitman, published without the older writer's consent, containing the now-famous line, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." There were only ever a thousand copies in print, one of which sold in 2011 for \$10,000 at Sotheby's in New York. Another copy is currently being offered online by a Florida book-seller for \$14,000.

I will leave it to collectors of Whitmaniana to elucidate the other qualities of the second edition, a handsome volume bound in olive-green cloth. What interests me about the book is its publisher, the New York firm of Fowler & Wells. As some members of the Caxton Club are no doubt aware, this enterprise was anything but a traditional publishing house. Indeed, Fowler & Wells was renowned for a far different kind of business – one that has fascinated me ever since I stumbled upon references to the company while doing research into [The King of Confidence](#), a biography of the nineteenth-century con man and cult leader, James J. Strang (Little, Brown & Co., 2020).

Messrs. Fowler and Wells were the country's leading practitioners of phrenology (literally "the study of the mind") – a discipline historians variously describe as "the psychology or



Frontispiece and title page of *Leaves of Grass*, 1856. Image courtesy of the [Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia](#).



Leaves of Grass, 1856. Image courtesy of the [Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University](#).

(benevolence, mirthfulness, combativeness, acquisitiveness, etc.). These personality traits – which could be charted, just like countries on a map – directly affected the size and shape of the skull, the theory went. As a result, trained observers were believed to be able to determine someone's mental attributes by measuring, feeling and otherwise examining that person's cranium. Though such notions now sound

absurd, many people of the antebellum period accepted them as fact. Among those who visited the firm for phrenological readings were the abolitionist John Brown, the impresario Phineas T. Barnum, the future president James Garfield, the statesman Daniel Webster, and the women's rights advocate Susan B. Anthony (whose skull revealed she was an "original character ... brave, resolute [and] vigorous"). Ambitious Americans from all regions

and walks of life made pilgrimages to Fowler & Wells, hoping their readings, which they often made public, would prove to the world that they were destined for greatness. Thus it was that the would-be poet Walt Whitman and the would-be prophet James J. Strang each came to Fowler & Wells to have their heads examined.

On September 11, 1846, Strang found himself on a crowded corner in Lower Manhattan. It was a warm Friday, the temperature edging close to 75 degrees, the streets astir with horses, carts, and carriages, the sidewalks full of well-to-do New Yorkers, men wearing frock coats and top hats, women in stylish bell-shaped skirts and bonnets as they promenaded through one of the city's most fashionable neighborhoods.

The self-proclaimed prophet, recently described by the *New York Tribune* as "a diminutive, ill-favored, insignificant-looking

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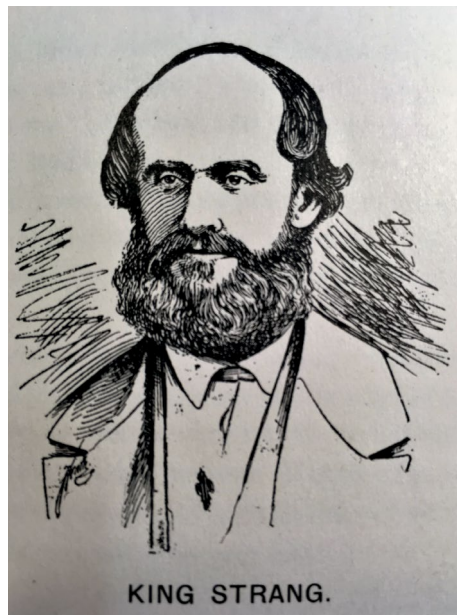
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Portrait of James J. Strang from a nineteenth-century newspaper

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man," had travelled here from the Wisconsin Territory, in which he led a growing utopian colony on the windswept prairie. Long an atheist, the 33-year-old Strang now claimed to be the rightful heir to the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Despite being called a "wicked liar" and a fraud by Brigham Young and other church officials, he had made what one historian would later call "alarming progress" in attracting converts during a recruiting and fundraising tour of the East Coast. Now, having left the wilderness five weeks earlier, he found himself about as close as a person could get to the center of American civilization.

Wall Street, the nation's financial hub, was a few blocks to the south. Astor House, the most exclusive hotel in the United States, was a couple of blocks over on Broadway, next to the historic St. Paul's Chapel. City Hall, the nexus of power for the country's biggest metropolis, was only a few hundred feet from the corner on which the prophet stood, as was the Park Theatre, where, according to an 1846 tourist guidebook, "all the great theatrical stars from Europe make their first appearance." Just around the corner was Phineas T. Barnum's American Museum, an iconic showplace of sensational curiosities, the current batch of which included an orangutan; the "largest living boa constrictor ever seen in America;" two immense children known as the Scottish Mammoth Boys; and a 27-inch tall, 25-pound performer billed "the smallest man ever exhib-

ited in Europe or America."

To advertise such attractions, the self-proclaimed "Prince of Humbugs" regularly hired musicians to play on the street out front. "But," Barnum once explained, "I took pains to select and maintain the poorest band I could find – one whose discordant notes would drive the crowd into the museum." Perhaps James Strang's ears were ringing with that tinny cacophony. If so, it did not drive him into Barnum's legendary establishment. Instead, he made his way toward another popular tourist attraction – "one of the most curious museums in America," in the words of a contemporary journal.

Located in an impressive stone building on the southwest corner of Beekman and Nassau streets, this museum housed nearly 1,000 specimens – nearly all of which had to do with the human head. There were paintings of heads, busts of heads, life masks and death masks of heads. There were heads of presidents and politicians and military leaders, heads of Native Americans and Africans and other "racial types," heads of geniuses and madmen and idiots, heads of pirates and robbers and murderers. There were plaster casts of human and animal skulls; a model brain with removable parts; and an array of other exotic artifacts that pertained to the size, shape, and significance of heads.

The museum of heads – better known as the Phrenological Cabinet – was located in the offices of the famous phrenology firm Fowler & Wells. Operated by siblings Orson and Lorenzo Fowler and their brother-in-law, Samuel R. Wells, the enterprise embodied what one contemporary described as the "Yankee go-ahead principle," part fortune-telling, part practical advice, part social reform, and part snake-oil salesmanship.

Thousands of Americans had passed through these doors, including Brigham Young, who, in the aftermath of the 1844 murder of Joseph Smith, was vying with Strang for control of the Mormon Church. Young had received an encouraging report from Orson Fowler during an 1843 visit: "You sir, have vital force sufficient to live a hundred and fifty years." Not to be outdone, Strang was now here for his own reading. Entering the firm, he was greeted by one of the partners, Samuel R. Wells. Tall and graceful, Wells, as one contemporary put it, "spoke in gentle tones, and was polite and winning in his address. His hair was dark and plentiful; his beard full; his forehead broad and high – in a sentence, he had the look of a refined and cultivated gentleman."

After some obligatory small talk, Wells led

Strang to a chair and asked him to be seated. Taking out a measuring tape, he wrapped it around Strang's head to determine its horizontal circumference. Perhaps he also produced a craniometer – a caliper-like device that provided precise measurements of the skull. Then, with one hand on Strang's forehead, he began to run his fingers over the various organs. For each one of these – benevolence, secretiveness, destructiveness, etc. – he jotted down a number from one (small) to seven (large). Through “the art of character reading,” as Wells called these mappings of the cranium, a picture began to emerge of the stranger's true self.

As Samuel Wells pressed and poked at his head, Strang mentioned none of the extraordinary events of his life over the last few years. He did not describe the angels who had visited him on two separate occasions. He did not mention a letter, supposedly written by the martyred Mormon leader Joseph Smith, that Strang claimed gave him control of the church but which critics called a “base forgery.” He did not explain that his followers had dug up mysterious brass plates out of a hillside in Wisconsin, or that those plates had contained words in an unknown language only one man on earth – a certain James J. Strang – was able to transcribe, or that those words proved this same James J. Strang to be the one and only true prophet. He did not reveal that his followers had secretly pledged to obey him as Sovereign Lord and King on Earth. He did not say whether any of the things he said or the claims he made were true. His silence, he later explained, was due to the fact that he did not wish to prejudice the renowned phrenologist and did not want preconceptions to creep into the report.

“Mr. Wells did not know whom he was exam-

ining until he had completed his work and was not a little surprised on learning the name of his subject,” Strang would boast. Perhaps because of the prophet's notoriety, or perhaps because Wells simply found him to be such an unusual man, the phrenologist decided to run the results past his partners. “The brothers Fowler separately reviewed the examination,” Strang wrote, “and to the credit of the three Professors their results were precisely alike.”

What the contours of Strang's skull revealed to these experts was a man “quite radical in your notions,” a man “fond of variety and change,” a man with a “versatility of talent, which enables you to attend to a variety of things without confusion,” a man with a “fondness for debate,” a man of “energy and perseverance, so long as you are engaged in a cause.” All these characterizations were accurate, as Strang himself might proudly attest. However, the examination also pointed to some possible truths this man of God might be less anxious to acknowledge – most notably, “a want of spirituality of mind and devotional feeling.”

On at least one major aspect of his personality, the report could not have been more mistaken: “Should you undertake to play the hypocrite, lay low and keep dark; you would very soon expose yourself in some way, for you have not tact and cunning enough to enable you to carry it out into any great speculation or enterprise.”

Of his many talents, lying low and keeping dark was, after years of practice, what Strang did best. As his career had shown thus far, the prophet possessed more tact and cunning than perhaps even he had dreamed possible. No part of the Fowler & Wells report, in fact, described him more accurately than this: “You can adapt yourself very well to the manners

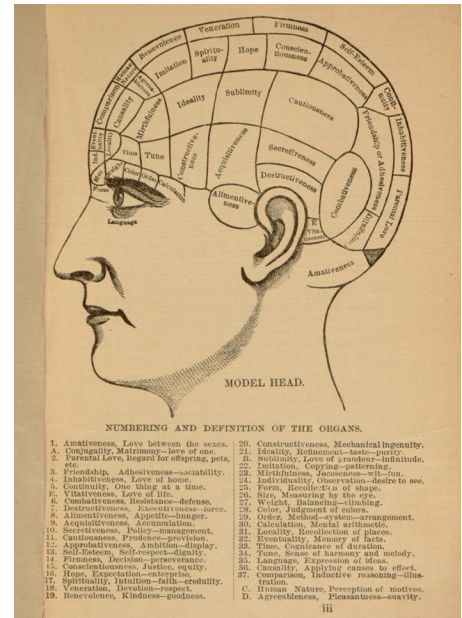


Chart from *The Illustrated Self-Instructor in Phrenology and Physiology* published by Fowler & Wells. Courtesy of the [Digital Library at Villanova University](https://digital.library.villanova.edu/).

and customs of others ... and [have] a faculty to win confidence.”

“Phrenology, it must now be confessed by all men who have open eyes, has at last gained a position, and a firm one, among the sciences,” a young newspaperman for the *Brooklyn Eagle* wrote a couple of months after Strang's visit to Fowler & Wells. The journalist – then calling himself Walter Whitman – would later write of those days that, “one of the choice places of New York for me” was the Phrenological Cabinet, which contained “all the busts, examples, curios and books of that study available.”

Despite his fascination with this emerging field, Whitman did not get his own phrenological reading done until nearly three years later. On July 16, 1849, the future poet was examined by Lorenzo Fowler, who, after a measuring and probing of the subject's skull, determined that he had a “large-sized brain, giving you much mentality as a whole.” The examination also determined Whitman to be “one of the most friendly men in the world,” though perhaps “too open at times” and occasionally lacking “restraint in speech.” The contours of the writer's cranium, moreover, offered evidence of a person more inclined “to fight with the tongue and pen rather than with your fists.” And although he had a “tendency to Voluptuousness ... and a certain reckless swing of animal will,” he was also “very sympathetic” and had “a strong desire to see everything.”

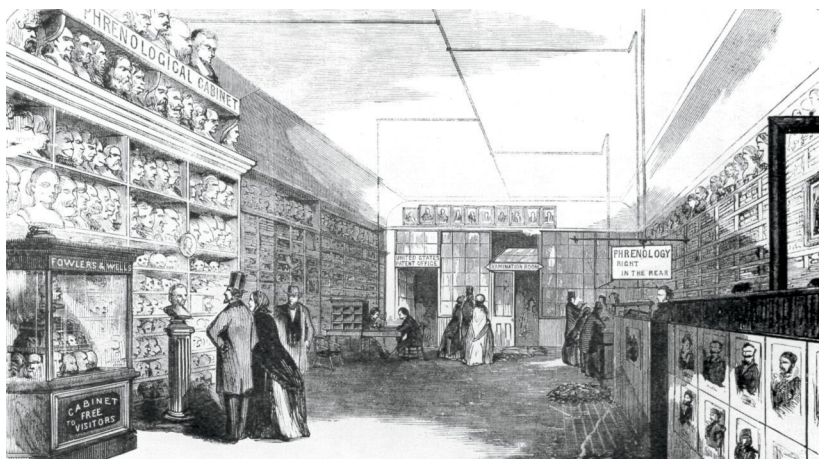


Illustration of the Phrenological Cabinet from an 1860 edition of the *New York Illustrated News*.

Fowler's phrenological chart, in short, affirmed Whitman's own view of himself – a man "of pure American breed, large and lusty ... naïve, masculine, affectionate, contemplative, imperious," as he put it in an anonymous review of his own book. Not only did that review – reprinted in a section of correspondence and criticism at the back of the second edition – refer to the author's "rugged phrenology"; it also included a long footnote that contained much of the information from the report, including Whitman's nearly perfect scores for self-esteem, firmness, benevolence, and sublimity.

A new notion of celebrity was emerging in mid-nineteenth century America, one disconnected from earlier ideas of nobility, inheritance, military valor, and fixed social rank. Phrenology, with its promise that anyone with the right cranial attributes might achieve greatness, reinforced this emerging concept of fame. Like Whitman, James Strang made sure to publish and promote his own phrenological report, which celebrated the prophet's "independence and will, love of liberty, perseverance, sense of moral obligation [and] great kindness and sympathy of feelings." Both men saw their readings as public and professional calling cards, believing that the imprimatur of Fowler & Wells would help them to establish wider legitimacy and name recognition.

Bibliophiles who examine the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* will quickly come upon a mystery. Although scholars, auction houses, and library catalogues regularly list Fowler & Wells as the publisher, the company's name is strangely absent from the title page. It only appears in the end matter in an advertisement for suppliers and retailers of the book.

Fowler & Wells ran a publishing wing that regularly churned out tomes on phrenology and other health-related subjects, as well as on matters of social reform. Its market niche – something akin to what we think of today as self-help, new age, or alternative medicine – did not normally encompass literary works, much less poetry collections. However, by the summer of 1856, Whitman had established a close business relationship with the company as a regular writer for one of its publications, a weekly magazine called *Life Illustrated*. Making use of this connection, the poet convinced Fowler & Wells to publish the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Although the earlier edition – consisting of just 12 self-published poems – had been a commercial failure, he had great hopes for this updated incarnation of

the project. With 20 completely new poems, it would be, as one modern scholar put it, "less a new edition than a new book."

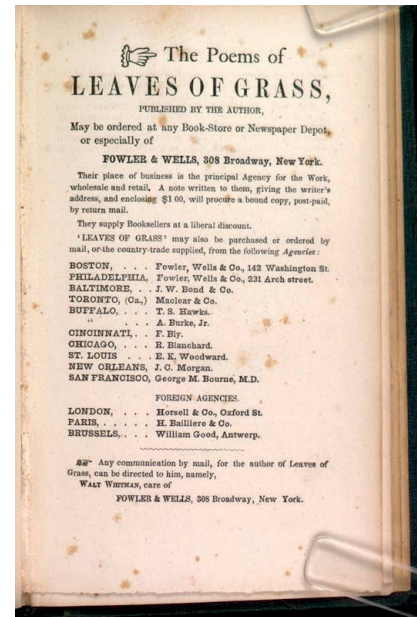
The relationship between poet and publisher, however, proved to be fraught from the start. Apparently alarmed by the sexual nature of some of the poems, Samuel Wells, head of the firm's publishing division, soon had second thoughts. Wells – the same phrenology expert who had many years earlier examined the skull of James J. Strang – wrote Whitman to say that "we have concluded that it is best for us to insist on the omission of certain objectionable passages in *Leaves of Grass*, or decline publishing it." It is unclear whether Whitman agreed to eliminate any of those "objectionable passages," but eventually the two parties did come to a compromise. Fowler & Wells would publish the book – but it would do so anonymously, leaving the firm's name off the title page.

Despite Whitman's great hopes for the undertaking, "the volume was Whitman's greatest publishing failure," according to the Whitman scholar Harold Aspiz. Critics were unimpressed, and sales were even worse than those of the first edition. By 1857, both poet and publisher were exasperated with the partnership. "Fowler and Wells are bad persons for me. They retard my book very much," Whitman complained, noting the company was "very willing to give up the plates – they want the thing off their hands."

Whitman, however, was undeterred. Despite the unmitigated failure of *Leaves of Grass* thus far, he held out hope that his masterwork would not fade into obscurity.

When the second edition was published in the autumn of 1856, James Strang was dead, having been murdered a few months earlier by two of his followers on Beaver Island in northernmost Lake Michigan, where he had moved his sect six years earlier. His assassination made headlines across the country, including on the front page of the *New York Times*. Over time, his many larger-than-life exploits – which I document in *The King of Confidence* – began to fade from the collective memory, as Strang became the stuff of Midwestern lore, like Johnny Appleseed or Paul Bunyan.

Fowler & Wells also slowly disappeared from headlines. Even in its heyday, many were skeptical of phrenology. By the early twentieth century it "had mostly lost its scientific authority and much of its popular appeal," in the words of one expert. Though modern scholars have relegated it to the pseudo-science trash heap, this quirky field of study left a lasting impact on the language. Many



Advertisement mentioning Fowler & Wells, *Leaves of Grass*, 1856. Image courtesy of the [Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia](#).

words still popular in the twenty-first century trace their roots to the craze, including "high-brow," "lowbrow," and "well-rounded."

The same, of course, is true for the phrase "You should have your head examined" – good advice for anyone who might have dared to predict in 1856 that Walt Whitman would someday become the most influential poet in American history. Devastated by the failure of the second edition, a frustrated Whitman continued to search for a publisher for four long years, until one day in 1860 when an unexpected letter from the Boston firm of Thayer and Eldridge arrived at his door. The third edition, to which he added a dizzying total of 146 new poems, marked his first real success.

Each in their own weird way, Whitman, Strang, and Fowler & Wells embodied the antebellum age – a time of delirious religious enthusiasms, feverish social movements, crackpot fads, ecstatic utopian dreams, intense political strife, and daring literary experimentation. Much of that world seems foreign to us now, of course, but Whitman just keeps acclimating himself to each new generation. Through his poetry, he has been able to transcend his own epoch and, to use a line from *Leaves of Grass*, "launch all men and women forward with me into the Unknown." As the poet's own phrenology report put it back in 1849: "You can adapt yourself to time, place and company."

§§

Donald R. Allen – “Mad Man” and Caxtonian: A Remembrance

Donald R. Allen, the devoted husband of Ellen F. Allen and father of Sally Spring Allen, has died at the age of 91. He joined the Caxton Club in 2008. His family asks that donations in his memory be made to the ACLU or the charity of your choice.

Michael Thompson writes:

Don Allen was the Caxton Club's own Mad Man, as advertising men have come to be called after the successful AMC television series *Mad Men*. He embraced the appellation, finding in it both humor and at least a small touch of reality, but both he and I knew that the show was just historical fiction and that both business and advertising have changed a lot for the better since the 1960s. Don never actually worked on Madison Avenue, although he did work, in Chicago, as an account executive for the prominent New York firm Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (now BBDO). His principal client with them was Alberto Culver.

He left that firm in his forties to become an independent consultant specializing in mergers and acquisitions and, after that, a literary agent for new and emerging authors. It was this last vocation that initially led him to the Caxton Club, where my frequent conversations with him quickly turned from business to books, since we shared an interest in the history of economic thought. We compared notes on Malthus, Smith, Ricardo, and even Keynes. Don once told me that his collection was good insofar as its coverage of the subject, but that he felt it could be improved by acquiring better or more important copies of individual books. The Caxton Club, he said, would be a good place to hone his collecting skills.

Don was successful in business and was just as successful in his personal and family life. He grew up in Cleveland where, by his own reckoning, his first achievement was to attain the status of Eagle Scout. Before starting his business career, he served as an infantryman



Donald R. Allen

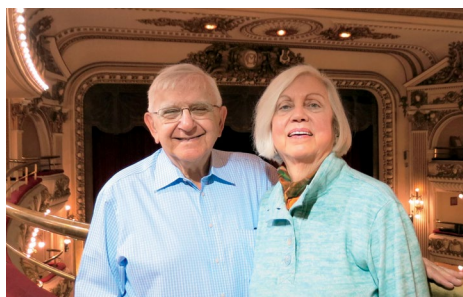
in the U.S. Army. He married his wife, Ellen, in 1951 (almost 70 years ago) and they had a daughter named Sally, both of whom survive him. His jovial presence and warm greetings at our meetings will be missed by all.

§§

Michael S. Huckman, 1936-2021: An Appreciation

Susan F. Rossen

About five thousand books reside in our apartment, accommodated on sturdy, deep shelves in every room; including the top shelves in my closet. The books are not catalogued or arranged in any specific order, but I know where most of them are. Books surround me like old friends, and I engage with them as such, paying attention to each one from time to time and treating them with respect.



Michael and Beverly in El Ateneo Grand Splendid, a celebrated Buenos Aires bookstore located in an old theater.

This description of living with a book collection was written by Dr. Michael S. Huckman a few years ago. Michael died suddenly in his Chicago apartment on January 19, 2021. He was 84.

A Caxtonian since 1986, Michael thought of himself as a book “accumulator” more than as a “collector,” because, as he explained, his interests were eclectic. They ranged from the medical history of Philadelphia, the city in which he interned, to first-edition fiction by women novelists. He was always more interested in a book's content than in its scarcity or condition. Nonetheless, he owned a number of rare items, including important association copies and volumes signed by A. S. Byatt, Kazuo Ishiguro, Nelson Mandela, and Philip Roth (the latter personally to Michael; they attended neighboring New Jersey high schools). Cherished autographs were not limited only to books: he was a big sports fan and proudly owned twin baseballs signed by Jackie Robinson and Joe DiMaggio and teammates. For more about his collection, see

“Caxtonians Collect” in the February 2015 issue of the *Caxtonian*.

Michael joined the radiology faculty of Rush University Medical Center in 1970, retiring in 2012 with the title of emeritus professor. He was Rush's first director of neuroradiology. His research centered on neuroimaging of degenerative brain diseases. Michael was a pioneer in providing opportunities in his field, mentoring international students, women, and professionals from underrepresented communities. He published widely and served as editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*.

Michael often attended Caxton Club events with his wife of 54 years, Beverly, who predeceased him in 2019. She further participated in Michael's “major addiction,” as he described his love affair with books, by celebrating his significant birthdays with volumes she knew he would treasure. His survivors include his sons, Andrew and Robert, and their families.

§§

For the Love of Books: A Restorer Works His Magic

Roxanne Owens

The scene is the sidewalk outside a shopfront on North Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago some little time ago. A university special collections archivist stood outside the opaque window holding a box containing a priceless but heavily damaged fourteenth-century medieval Bible. The Bible needed considerably more than just a bit of TLC. To the amateur the book would have appeared beyond repair – the victim of decades of improper storage. The person who gave it to the university library had said the only thing that could save this book was a touch of magic. The archivist looked at the sign above the doorbell. It read simply, “[Scott Kellar](#), Book Conservation/Book Restoration.” Fortunately for the Bible and for bibliophiles everywhere, the archivist knew the sign could have added, truthfully, “Book Magician.”

Several months later, that university archivist and this author – a children’s literature professor – had a chance conversation at the conclusion of a university committee meeting. The archivist mentioned she was on her way to pick up a fourteenth-century Bible from Scott’s shop in the Portage Park area of Chicago – one block from my home. Imme-

diately afterwards, I arranged an interview to discuss the importance of book restoration with Scott. Which literature professor would skip the opportunity to talk about book conservation with an expert literally a few yards from her own front door?

Twenty-first-century craftsman Scott uses many of the same techniques and tools a monk would have used all those centuries ago when the Bible was originally constructed. Painstakingly he takes apart and resews the binding, repairs the cover, and replaces the gold leaf lettering. It takes the combined skill of an artist and the knowledge of a scientist to restore this book to its glory.

Scott has worked in bookbinding and restoration for over 40 years. He was introduced to bookbinding as one might expect – from a book found on a library shelf – *Basic Bookbinding* by Arthur Lewis (Batsford, 1952). Scott’s parents discouraged television viewing when he was young, and after reading the Lewis book he began to experiment on his own books. He fell in love immediately with the art and science of the craft, finding it something that required skill, talent, and thought. He did his formal training in bookbinding and conservation in 1974 at the Monastery Hill Bindery and the Newberry Library in Chicago, and soon began working on the restoration of collections of books and documents for several university libraries, museums, and newspapers. He notes that the Newberry Library was a pioneer in book conservation in the country and that the Newberry staff developed many of the procedures still used today.

One of his most significant projects was restoring a sixteenth-century Dutch Book of Hours. Books of Hours are beautifully illustrated prayer books of great artistic and monetary value. Today, they often sell for high six figures. Scott told me, “It was the most exquisite book I have ever seen. The spine and the back were glued up tight. Someone had attempted repairs with the wrong glue. I spent a lot of time scraping that glue off. It had some old sewing on it. The cover was missing. The pages were vellum and each one was illuminated with the most striking paintings. I’ve been doing this a long time, but it was the most nervous I have ever been working on a project. The book is priceless. In this world of conservation, we don’t throw that term around loosely.”

Another nerve-wracking but similarly

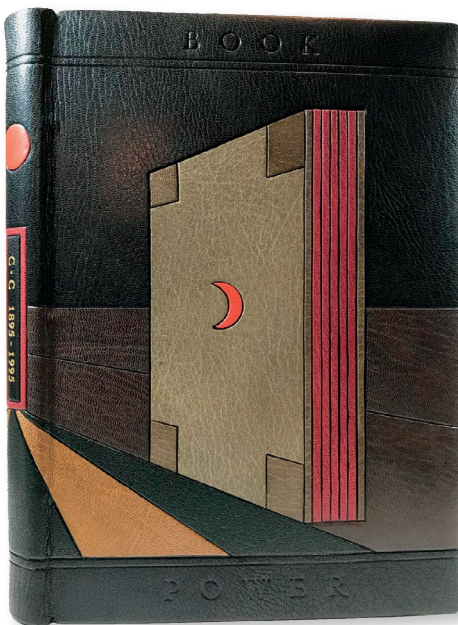
rewarding project was a fifteenth-century French Bible he restored for the Bibliothèque nationale de France. He painstakingly re-created a vellum binding and carefully sewed it together with linen thread. While crumbling acidic paper is one of the greatest problems afflicting nineteenth- and twentieth-century books, the paper of earlier books is more stable since it was often handmade and acid-free. Some papers were made with cotton or linen fibers that were macerated in a gentle way which thus maintained the structural integrity of the fibers used. Paper production changed with the invention of the Fourdrinier machine in 1820, resulting in mass-produced paper that looked brighter and whiter than its handmade forebears, but turned brittle much more quickly.

Scott has also had the opportunity to create some Hollywood magic. He constructed the book Gary Oldman, playing the rabbi, held in *The Unborn* (1991). The producers of *The Green Mile* (1991) wanted a particular set of matching leather books for the shelf in the prison warden’s office which Scott was happy to create for them.

He finds it particularly fulfilling to work on family projects. “People who come into my shop love books. The books they bring in are irreplaceable. I am asked to do a lot of generational cookbooks to preserve great-great-grandma’s recipes, Bibles with family trees inscribed in them, and children’s books that grandparents want to pass down to their grandchildren. They like the illustrations in the older children’s books – they don’t want to buy a new version of the book.”

Scott also uses his skills to restore other cherished heirlooms that have made him a witness to private history. Conserving Civil War letters soldiers wrote home has given him a special window into the lives of individual families. He has been moved while reading excerpts from early twentieth-century diaries of new immigrants to America. He has restored passports of Jewish people who escaped from Nazi Germany during the late 1930s. “It is moving and an honor to be let into those parts of a family’s life,” Scott says.

Restoring books can be an expensive endeavor. People often ask Scott if creating a digitized version would be a sufficient option. Sometimes the answer might be yes, depending on the book. Many times, the answer is no. Books hold historic value beyond their intel-



In celebration of the Caxton Club’s 120th Anniversary the club had three binders develop bindings for our centenary history, The Caxton Club 1895-1995. This is Scott Kellar’s binding.



Scott Kellar showing his cover for *The Journey of Thomas the Rhymer*. Photo by Larry Chase.

lectual content and sentimental impressions. Scott noted, "They hold the stories of the world and our lives. They are heirlooms. Nothing electronic is going to replace that. Their value goes beyond simply the words on the page." Unfortunately, there are times when a book is beyond repair. In those cases, Scott creates a beautiful new cover for the book and a storage box to protect it from further damage.

Scott also uses his talents to design exquisite leather book covers that he submits to juried art shows. He has won many awards for his designs. He has a workroom filled with a variety of tools, thin leather hides, multiple dyes which he creates himself, and sheets of gold leaf. He reads the book and then waits for something to inspire a cover design. For *The Journey of Thomas the Rhymer* (Old Stile Press, 2001) he was inspired to create a series of square and rectangular hand-tooled leather pieces that he dyed in shades of greens and

browns to match the mood of the story.

Scott has a poster in his shop of the book he and almost every book restorer would love to get their hands on – the Holy Grail in book restoration world – a handmade 1911 Omar Khayyam *Rubaiyyat* bound by Sangorski and Sutcliffe. It is one of the finest examples of book binding in history, featuring a Moroccan leather cover with three beautiful peacocks inlaid with gold embroidery and embedded with 1,000-1500 emeralds, rubies, and amethysts. Unfortunately, the book now rests somewhere on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean with other casualties of the *Titanic*. If it is found one day, there is hope that, due to the type of leather of the binding and its protective case, the book may actually have survived in restorable condition.

Scott used to teach a class on book conservation/restoration at a local university. Unfortunately, the university no longer offers the course.

He teaches the course in his shop now and has a few students, though he would always welcome more. He notes, "I feel very privileged to be able to be immersed in this world. To restore, to conserve books, to teach others about it ... I hope that all of the various crafts that have been diminished because of technology will be able to thrive with those who have a heart for it. I feel fortunate that I can do it."

Which three books would someone who spends his days restoring high-priced and priceless books, as well as books that may only have sentimental value to one family, take with him to a deserted island? "Hhhmmmm, I'd take a Bible, a book of poems, and a comprehensive history book." I am sure he would preserve them well for book lovers who happen to land on the island in future generations. Because Scott knows every book is in some way irreplaceable and magical.

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Up From Slavery – A Significant Acquisition

Tad Boehmer

In my role as Curator of Rare Books and Special Collections Cataloger at the Stephen O. Murray and Keelung Hong Special Collections library at Michigan State University, I play a part in our library's commitment to diversify the voices that speak within and through its holdings. MSU has never been afraid to stray outside the path of the typical rare book library – we were among the first to see American popular culture as a worthwhile collecting area, and now proudly boast the largest publicly accessible comic book collection in the world. However, even now many of our shelves contain mostly the works of white, male authors. Last August, as a contribution to making our collections better reflect the world, past and present, we purchased a signed first edition of Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1901) and some ancillary materials from Whitmore Rare Books in Pasadena, California.

The text, which Washington (1856-1915) had originally published in serialized form in the journal *The Outlook*, documents his birth into enslavement in Virginia, his upbringing there and in West Virginia, and his education at Virginia's Hampton Institute. The majority of the volume is taken up with tales of his efforts to improve, expand, and raise money for the

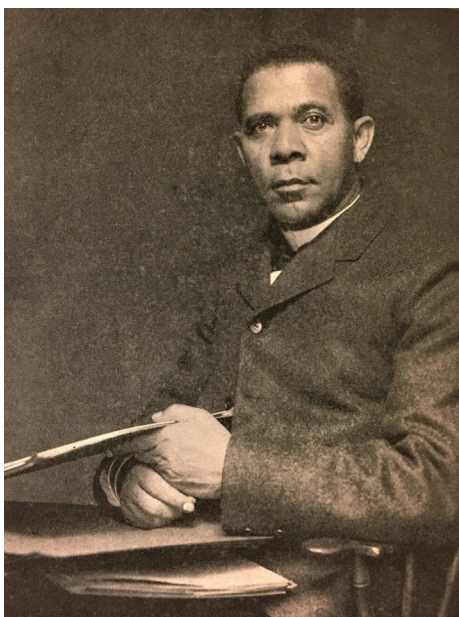
Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a historically Black college that survives to this day as Tuskegee University. He started there in 1881 as instructor and principal, and was almost singlehandedly responsible for turning Tuskegee into one of the most prominent educational institutions for African-Americans. The book is full of the many stark contrasts in Washington's life, from stories of childhood hunger and poverty to his famous 1901 White House dinner invitation from Theodore Roosevelt (paid tribute to in *A Guest of Honor*, a now-lost opera by Scott Joplin). His autobiography contains many anecdotes of his travels and meetings with the notable figures of his day. Washington often reaffirms his philosophy that dedication to hard work and physical labor was the only way for Black Americans to achieve and maintain the respect of the majority population. This central belief put him at odds with many of his contemporaries, most notably W.E.B. Du Bois.

The especially appealing features of this purchase, beyond the inherent significance of the text in American history, are the unique attributes it bears and the materials that accompany it. It was signed by Washington on August 11, 1906 at Tuskegee. In the back of the book, there are handwritten notes bearing the same date that appear to have been taken during a speech by Washington, as they bear the hallmarks of his philosophy: "Brains, Skill,

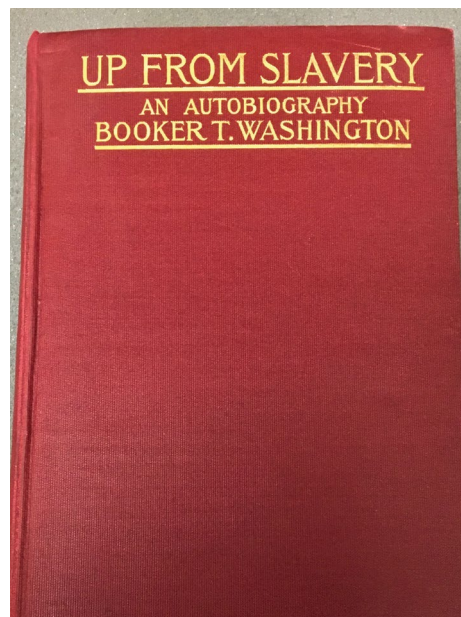
Dignity of Work." The following day marked the beginning of the infamous Brownsville Affair, when a white bartender was killed and a white police officer was wounded. The white townspeople resented the presence of the Black 25th Infantry Regiment at nearby Fort Brown and planted "evidence" aimed at incriminating and punishing the Black troops. Despite pleas from Booker T. Washington, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered 127 Black troops to be dishonorably discharged, a failing that became a blot on both Roosevelt's and Washington's record.

The volume's front paste-down bears the bookplate of Stephen Bromley McCracken (1824-1902), a noted Michigan newspaper publisher, journalist, and author who had been present at what some consider to be the founding of the Republican Party, at the famous "Under the Oaks" meeting in Jackson in 1854. The *ex-libris* label contains a feature I have never before encountered: a space for recording the price of the book (unfortunately left blank here). McCracken also inscribed his name and the date of acquisition – March 20, 1901 – on the fly-leaf.

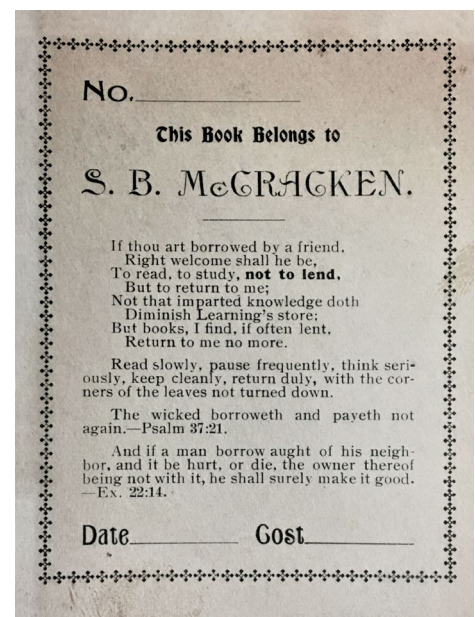
The purchase from Whitmore also included a broadside advertisement for a speech given by Washington on July 18, 1902 in Cassopolis in southwestern Michigan, just over the border from South Bend, Indiana, probably in aid of raising funds for the Tuskegee Institute. The



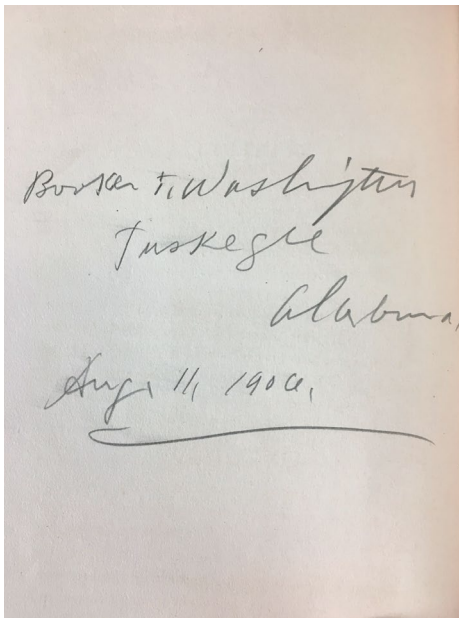
Booker T. Washington



First edition cover



Bookplate of Stephen Bromley McCracken

A photograph of a piece of aged, cream-colored paper with handwritten text in dark ink. The text reads "Booker T. Washington" on the first line, "Tuskegee" on the second line, "Alabama" on the third line, and "Aug 11, 1902," on the fourth line. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Washington's signature



Cass County courthouse, where Washington gave a speech in 1902

poster advertises special excursion rates on the Grand Trunk Railway for trains from a dozen towns, some over 60 miles away. Cassopolis and the area around it had been an important location on the Underground Railroad due to its significant population of abolitionist Quakers. During and after the Civil War, Cass County gained a proportionally large, formerly enslaved population, and became known for the opportunities it provided, especially for Black farmers. This broadside bears McCracken's stamp on the reverse, though he died just two weeks later on August 3 in Pontiac, Michigan. His obituary states that he had been in the hospital from June 5, so he may not have been present at Cassopolis himself.

Along with the poster is a small collection of Washington-related newspaper clippings, the most interesting among them being one from the front page of a Cassopolis newspaper, either the *Vigilant* or the *National Democrat*, dated July 24, 1902. It appears that this article, with its transcription of Washington's speech given the previous week ("we are indebted to Miss Etta E. Slattery, a proficient stenographer and deputy county clerk"), has not yet been studied by Washington scholars. It tells us that, due to inclement weather, Washington delivered his address at the newly completed Cass County courthouse, not at a church as some secondary sources claim. He spoke of how he had followed "with deepest interest and concern the progress of the members of my own race in this county; I have been glad to read from time to time and observe the progress in this county, and the

kindly feeling which they have been receiving in this county."

In a speech occasionally peppered with humorous anecdotes, Washington extolled the virtues of physical labor and promoted his central idea that it is only through such labors that anything like racial harmony could be reached: "Work means civilization and Christianity, and we have for thirty years at Tuskegee been teaching our people the difference between working and being worked." He brought up contemporary proposals for Black Americans to set up a colony in Africa ("You could not keep the white man out of the continent of Africa if you were to build ten walls, as long as the white man thought there was any gold there"), and in somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion answers this with a plea for enfranchisement: "Our race is polite and obliging, and have been your friends. We have put you to so much trouble that it would be unkind not to oblige you by staying. The negro was born here; he helped clear the forests in this country; he has a right here as an American citizen, and as an American citizen he is entitled to remain."

He concluded on an optimistic note – "I do not underestimate the long and hard battle we have to fight, the tremendous sacrifices through which we shall have to go before this problem is settled, but I believe we are beginning to see the light." After his speech, Washington withdrew to a reception, during which he collected \$50 for Tuskegee, spoke on the courthouse steps with people who had been unable to obtain tickets to his speech,

and then caught the train for another speaking engagement in Chautauqua, New York. He was clearly excited to be present in a community where it was possible for Black farmers and businessmen to prosper, mentioning that "In addition to speaking to you here, I have special interest to go into the town of my race and examine for myself the progress that is being made by them in this county, but that I must defer until some future time." It seems that he did indeed return to Cass County later in August. In a 1903 article for *The Outlook* entitled "Two Generations under Freedom," he describes driving through the area outside Cassopolis and meeting some of the prosperous Black farmers there.

Curating the rare book collection at a library like the Murray and Hong is a tremendous privilege and implies a duty to understand and increase the collections in the larger context of history. Collecting decisions made now will echo through the generations – perhaps quietly, perhaps clamorously. Many of the acquisitions made by my predecessors sit silently in our vault, unexamined for years, waiting to be allowed to speak again through exhibitions, instruction, scholarship, or even improved cataloguing. In developing the collection, it is my responsibility to do justice to those who came before, to serve our patrons today, and to leave a diverse and inclusive legacy for students and scholars long after me – a legacy that now includes our acquisition of *Up from Slavery*.

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Caxton Club Awards, 2021

Lisa Pevtzow

Six young book artists have been selected as the recipients of the 2021 Caxton Club grants. The grants committee was particularly impressed by the talent and hard work of this year's applicants, the creativity of their projects, and their perseverance despite the hardships caused by the Covid pandemic. Caxtonians Martha Chiplis and Jackie Vossler worked with faculty members at the School of the Art Institute and the University of Iowa's Center for the Book to identify this year's award recipients.

Since the grant program began in 2002, the club has given out more than \$100,000 in grants awarded to more than 75 researchers, librarians, and book artists in the Midwest to pursue projects in the fields of book arts, bibliography, the history of the book, library studies, and print culture studies.

[Amy Childress](#) (Iowa Center for the Book) will use her grant to complete *Inhabited*, an artist book that re-creates a meditative walk

through the Iowa landscape, while also asking whether reclaimed wilderness should be considered wild space. The organization of the book "mimics the discovery moments that exist while observing and witnessing nature."

Un Libro by [María Carolina Ceballos](#) (Iowa Center for the Book) is a book about the experience of being a woman bookbinder, book conservator, and Colombian in the United States. In her words, the book "has its own language; in the shape of a book; the printed content explains the process of book-making and conservation with words, lines of thread, pieces of paper, and lines of text made with pieces of languages."

IN between by [Robert Henderson](#) (Iowa Center for the Book) is a series of artist books that explores culturally induced trauma within a Korean-American household. The imagery of the book embodies memories of gender conformity, racial exclusion, sexual exploitation, and the violence associated with each.

[Florence Liu](#) (Art Institute) will use her grant to produce an edition of 10 of

Intertwined – a series of artist books that highlight the physical action of reading. "It explores the performative action between the artist, the viewers, and the book as well as honoring the labor and crafts that center around the process of papermaking and bookbinding."

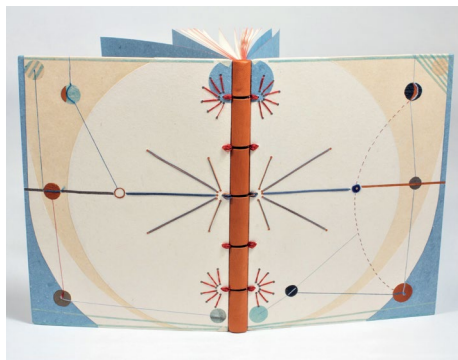
[Riesling Dong](#) (Art Institute) will explore international relationships through family dynamics in *Family are the friends you don't get to choose*. In the course of five generations, Hong Kong has experienced many changes in power and rule. Dong found similarities to the changing roles within a family, drawing parallels to years-long intra-family conflicts.

Can Parakeets Fly Without Their Tailfeathers by the Art Institute's [Sara S. Liu](#) (the recipient of the Colleen Dionne Memorial Grant) memorializes in poetry and imagery a nightmare she had. "The dreams and nightmares I have are vivid and terrifying ... To process these complex emotions, I am compelled to create books about my intense dream experiences."

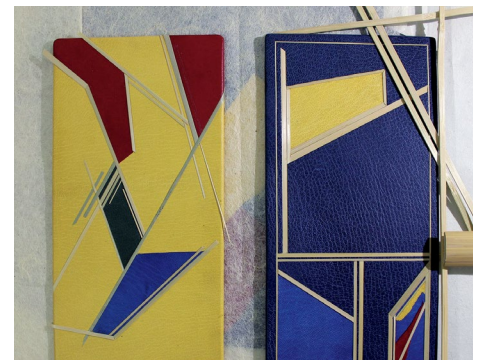
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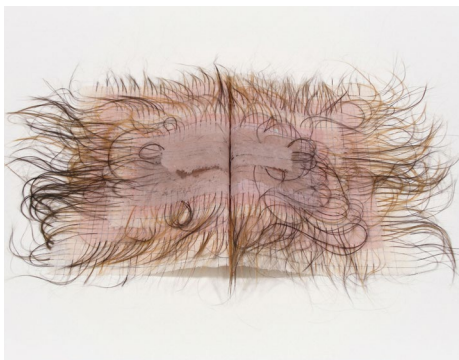
Inhabited by Amy Childress



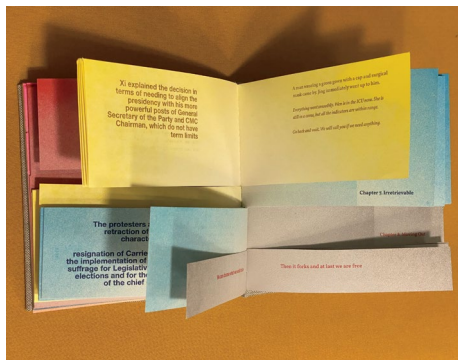
Un Libro by María Carolina Ceballos



IN between by Robert Henderson



Intertwined by Florence Liu



Family are the friends you don't get to choose by Riesling Dong



Can Parakeets Fly Without Their Tailfeathers by Sara S. Liu

Book, Manuscript, etc., exhibitions: a selective list

(Note: A listing of virtual/online exhibitions and websites that you can visit from the comfort and safety of your home.)

Chicago History Museum

chicagohistory.org/exhibition/vivian-maier-in-color/

“Vivian Maier In Color” A multimedia exhibition featuring 65 color images made during her time as a suburban Chicago nanny from the 1950s to 1970s, most of which have never been on display, as well as film clips, quotations, and sound bites. Maier died before her life’s work was shared with the world. She left behind hundreds of prints, 100,000 negatives, and about a thousand rolls of undeveloped film, which were discovered when a collector purchased the contents of her storage lockers. She never made a concerted effort to show her work to any dealers or other artists – leaving us with the mystery of an elusive woman behind the camera. You can also view a video of the making of the exhibition **“Vivian Maier In Color – Behind the Scenes of the Exhibition”** at: youtube.com/watch?v=wIkVP-g-HN8.



Sea of Matrimony map, 1906, Cornell University Library

Cornell University Library

rmc.library.cornell.edu/latitude/

“Latitude: Persuasive Cartography” Presents highlights from the PJ Mode Collection of Persuasive Cartography – maps intended primarily to influence opinions and beliefs, rather than to communicate geographical information. “Persuasive” maps are focused on shaping decisions and desired outcomes. They employ a variety of tools and strategies – unusual projections and coloring, selective inclusion, imaginative illustration, allegory, satire, and even intentional deception – to advance a particular cause or point of view. Created from the seventeenth century to the present, many of the maps on display illuminate historical perspectives on topics that still resonate today, such as immigration policy and political gerrymandering. Others seek to foster social change, promote products and places, or send warnings about imagined futures. *Latitude* helps us understand how ideas and opinions are shaped by data visualization techniques. Mr. Mode has been a student and collector of maps since 1980. The maps on view in this exhibition represent only a fraction of his collection of over a thousand maps.

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England

fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/collections/illuminatedmanuscripts

“Illuminated: Manuscripts in the Making” The Museum’s collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts spans the period from the ninth to the sixteenth century and represents all major schools of European illumination. The vast majority of medieval painting was created on the pages of illuminated manuscripts. Less exposed to the elements and protected between solid covers, manuscripts preserve their original pigments fresh and largely untainted

by later treatment or neglect. They are the richest source of information on all aspects of contemporary life, and double as portable galleries of paintings, the most representative of all surviving media of medieval and early Renaissance art. Viscount Fitzwilliam’s bequest, together with subsequent bequests and donations, notably the over 200 manuscripts left by Frank McClean in 1904, laid the foundations on which the collection continues to grow.



Peterborough Psalter, Fitzwilliam Museum

Frist Art Museum, Nashville, Tennessee

fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/medieval-bologna-art-for-a-university-city/

“Medieval Bologna: Art for a University City” The first museum exhibition in the United States to focus on medieval art made in the northern Italian city of Bologna. Bologna fostered a unique artistic culture at the end of the Middle Ages. With its large population of sophisticated readers, the city became the pre-eminent center of manuscript production south of the Alps, and helped to bring about a revolution in the medieval book trade. The approximately 70 objects in the exhibition date from the mid-1200s to 1400, from the first great flowering of manuscript illumination in Bologna to the beginnings of the construction and decoration of the ambitious Basilica of San Petronio in the city’s Piazza Maggiore.



Marriage contract, Livorno, Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University, New York

braginskycollection.com

The Braginsky Collection René Braginsky has spent more than 40 years collecting Judaica in the form of illuminated manuscripts, printed books, and special documents such as marriage contracts. This exhibition contains a selection of his collection to those interested in Jewish culture, history, and art. Each item in this collection has its own history, and, as such, bears witness to the Jewish past. The three parts of the exhibition are illuminated manuscripts and books; Esther scrolls (megillot); and marriage contracts (ketubbot). All the items were shown in exhibitions in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana in Amsterdam, the Yeshiva University Museum in New York, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Landesmuseum (Swiss National Museum) in Zurich, and the Jewish Museum in Berlin, between 2009 and 2014.

For quick access to the exhibitions, click on the links in the “Current issue” of the online Caxtonian on the club’s website.

Caxtonian's Book of Caxtonian Essays: A Review

Michael Gorman

Meyer, David. *'With All Faults': Essays About Old Books*. Chicago: Waltham Press, 2021.

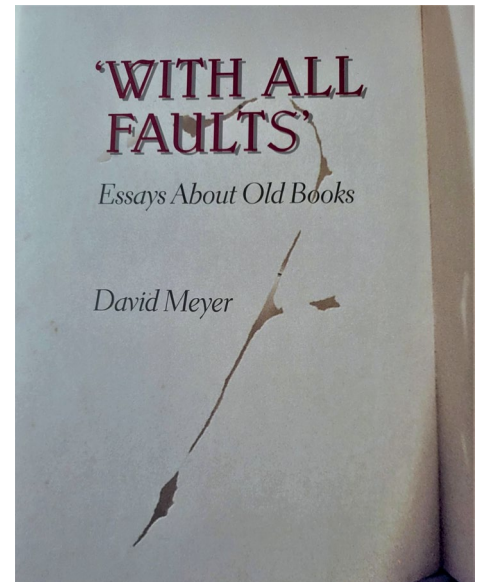
Readers of the *Caxtonian* will be familiar with the writings of David Meyer. No fewer than 28 of his always interesting, always well-written, essays appeared there – the first in 1996 and the latest (I hope not the last) in 2017. The elegantly designed, well-illustrated, and cleanly printed volume under review contains “slightly different” versions of 13 of his *Caxtonian* essays. Of additional Caxton Club interest are the thanks extended to Bob McCamant, the editor of the *Caxtonian* when many of the essays were first published, and the dedication to the late Caxtonian Russell Maylone – “Dedicated & generous friend to those who love books.”

The title is taken from the booksellers' phrase for books suspected or more likely known to be imperfect in some way. This version of *Caveat emptor* should, of course, be the watchword of any bibliophile. It is particularly applicable to the half-century and more of the life of the author as “book scout, collector, dealer, and publisher.” *With All Faults* opens with a touching reminiscence of long-ago trips to book shops with his father and the abiding love of books that engendered – a love

that was initially polyamorous but eventually burned brightest for books on magic and of literature and history, particularly the history of the book.

That love is manifest in the 13 essays in this book. From a deep interest in and knowledge of a form of paratext – signed and inscribed copies – to a romantic teenager's enthusiasms – “Who would collect Richard Le Gallienne?” – to the life and doings of “Nelmar” – bookseller, author, publisher, magician, and world-class fantasist – to the book collecting and bibliophilia of generations of the Meyer family, these essays are cleverly written productions arising from that special love of books that is present to a greater or lesser extent in every Caxtonian.

Every essay in this book is worth reading or re-reading, but I was especially glad to be reacquainted with two. “Private Ballantine's Views of the Great War” tells of three photograph albums purchased in New York in 1919 that are filled with photographs taken or collected in 1918 and 1919 in Europe by Mr. Ballantine, a friend of the author's father. They give a first-hand account of the last year of WWI and the immediate aftermath. The albums were given to the then 16-year-old David Meyer in the last year of Mr. Ballantine's life. “Along Came Lund” is about Robert Lund's collection of manuscripts, publications, etc., of and about



Dust jacket. Image of the damage done by a bookworm.

Aleister Crowley, the “black magic” magus who is considered by some an important artist and thinker, by others a sex-mad fraud on a colossal scale, and by yet others as a potent mixture of all those things.

Lest the potential buyer and reader of this book think the title might be a warning, let me assure that person that there is no reason to beware – not one of these 13 Meyers is a lemon.

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Caxtonians' Collections

Now Open – Extended Deadline for Submissions

Caxtonians' Collections Committee

The *Caxtonians' Collections* online exhibition, featuring descriptive essays and photographs of favorite items from the collections of Caxtonians, is now open and

available for viewing at caxtonclub.omeka.net. Thanks to all club members who have submitted items for the exhibition. We hope these excellent submissions inspire other club members to contribute. The final deadline has been extended to **August 31**. We invite club

members to add their contributions at caxtonclub.omeka.net/contribution accompanied by at least one and up to three photographs. Contact exhibition@caxtonclub.org with any questions.

July and August 2021 club events

Full details and registration can be found on our website, under *Events*. (All events are Central Time.)

July 15, 6:30p.m. Joseph D. Kearney and Thomas W. Merrill on *Lakefront: Public Trust and Private Rights in Chicago*.

August 17, 5:30p.m. The Union League Club of Chicago Library Committee invites Caxton Club members to a LIVE program at ULCC. Blanche Killingsworth, Dr. Robert Marshall, and Mary Lu Seidel on “Conversations on Chicago Neighborhoods: North Lawndale Past, Present & Future.”

August 26, 5:30 to 8:00p.m. Auction preview of “*Chicago by the Book – Reimagined*” bindings and artists books, at Potter & Potter Auctions.

August 28, 10:00a.m. Auction of “*Chicago by the Book – Reimagined*” bindings and artists books, at Potter & Potter Auctions.