

QUARTERLY
NEWS-LETTER

THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

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It's All About Us!
ROBERT J. CHANDLER

IN 1912, the Honorable Edward Robeson Taylor, former mayor of San Francisco; Albert M. Bender, a gentleman of exquisite taste; Alfred Sutro, possessor of his father's incomparable library; and others extended an invitation to prominent San Franciscans: "Whether your enthusiasm takes the form of first editions, association books, private press issues, or *belles lettres* in general, you will find in the Book Club of California a community of interest and kinship of taste."

Responding to the call, the best of San Francisco met for the first time that December.

We convened again a century later, at noon on Wednesday, December 12, 2012 (12.12.12) for a sold-out Centennial Luncheon. Approximately 190 Club members and friends packed the Julia Morgan Ballroom of the Merchants Exchange Building.

Numerous guests came in 1912 dress. Our Executive Director, dressed in period costume, was seen with two flags on her hat urging, "Votes for Women," all the while quoting Susan B. Anthony, "the only fear you need have is the fear of not standing by the thing you believe to be right." Patricia and Larry Morris gained the award for the best costumes. Patricia used to work for the State Library and currently copyedits its *Foundation Bulletin*, so she knows her historical stuff!

Roy Folger, Club member, a Senior Vice President at MacCorkle Insurance Services, and producer of the Bohemian Club's Grove Plays and other productions, was a masterful Master of Ceremonies. All he said and did had just the right touch. Jack Bethards conducted the ephemeral Palm Court Orchestra, brought together for our celebration, playing songs from his extensive collection of early sheet music.

Performing with the Palm Court Orchestra was the marvelous tenor Brian Thorsett, whose booming voice blew all celebrants through the walls. He was magnificent! Why? "Because." (He sang Guy d'Hardelot's 1902 version of that song.) Most impressive was Thorsett's rendition of William Ernest Hensley's 1875 poem *Invictus*, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." We thank the anonymous donor who funded this musical entertainment.

☞ **J. Curtiss Taylor** gave A Sparkling Toast: “To the Book Club of California, and to the founders who formed and nurtured an organization that has lived for a hundred years—dedicated to the creativity, craftsmanship, and collaboration that culminate in finely printed books. And to the subsequent generations of dedicated bibliophiles, who have cherished and fed this dream through good times and bad. Let us raise our glasses to them all, and may long live the finely printed book and its champion, the Book Club of California!”

☞ **Senator Mark Leno** delightfully kicked-off a series of public recognitions (including commemorations from the Assembly and the City of San Francisco) with a proclamation from the state Senate. Fittingly, Leno was once a printer. He began as a sign painter in 1978 and for the next six years handset ½ -6 inch type and printed letterpress.

“Organizations,” the senator observed, “especially non-profits, do not live to be one hundred years old without real devotion. We recognize Lucy Cohen and her very dedicated staff.” The staff spent six hard months coordinating planning meetings, overseeing production of printed materials, raising \$56,000 in donations and another \$2,000 in wine and flowers, and arranging the entertainment.

Senator Leno next quoted novelist Anne Fadiman, “If you truly love a book, you should sleep with it, write in it, read aloud from it, and fill its pages with muffin crumbs.” But not a fine press book, he added.

A second comment paid tribute to all writers and—ahem—Editors: “Today is the birthday of French novelist Gustave Flaubert. He would be 191 today. Flaubert was a great perfectionist. He wrote, ‘I spent the morning adding a comma, and the afternoon removing it.’” (Yes, this quote is attributed to that Wilde man Oscar, but the sentiment fits.)

☞ **Past President John Crichton** masterfully declaimed *The Book Club of California at One Hundred*:

As we look back with the advantage of 100 years perspective to celebrate this remarkable anniversary of this very special institution, one thing is abundantly clear: We are here because of the tremendous dedication of our founders and two generations of their successors. Collectively they gave the Book Club of California the best years of their lives, and the Book Club would not be where it is today were it not for those efforts.

What began in 1912 as a modest idea for a collectors’ exhibition of rare books quickly turned into a small organization with four officers and 58 charter members. Their stated goal was “the study of letters and the promotion of the arts pertaining to the production of books.” It was the first organized effort of its kind on the West Coast. A modest idea with modest goals that these founders were not going to let fail.

The civic-minded poet, politician, and former mayor of San Francisco, Edward Robeson Taylor, helped to get the organization off the ground and served as the Club’s first president.

One of San Francisco’s great cultural benefactors, indeed a San Francisco icon, Albert Bender, was the Club’s first treasurer and the first chair of the Club’s publications committee. He held both positions for almost 30 years, from 1912 until the day he died in 1941. During that time, among the innumerable other things he did for the Club, Bender shepherded into life the first 60 of the Club’s 230 publications, and none was more important than the first one, Robert Ernest Cowan’s *A Bibliography of the History of California and the Pacific West*, a cornerstone of the Book Club’s publications program and a magisterial work of Western Americana scholarship.

W.R.K. Young was the Club’s second president, a post he held for 10 years, and that was only half the term the next president would serve. Alfred Sutro became president in 1925, after having been an officer since 1912, and he was president for the next 20 years, until 1945.

These founders recognized talent and recruited it. A 20 year-old named Oscar Lewis became a member of the young organization and within a few years would become one of the Club’s first paid employees, as its secretary—a position he held for 25 years. After this, he continued to serve the Club as a director, officer, editor, author, advisor, friend, and benefactor for another 45 years, until 1990, when he became too frail to attend meetings. Indeed the names Oscar Lewis and the Book Club of California are almost synonymous.

At about the time Oscar Lewis came on board as the secretary, two young printers from Indianapolis, Edwin and Robert Grabhorn, moved their fine printing business to San Francisco, and in 1921 they printed their first book for the Club.

Thus began a famous relationship that not only would serve the Grabhorns and the Book Club, but also would help put San Francisco on

the map as a center of fine printing in the 20th century. Over the next 45 years, the Grabhorns would print more than 50 books for the Club.

When the Book Club reached its 25th anniversary in 1937, there was modest and deserved celebration and probably also a collective sigh of relief. The organization had struggled through the First World War and the Great Depression and witnessed its membership rolls and finances roller coaster up and down, and there were times when the directors considered suspending publications. Many other now long-forgotten small cultural organizations did not make it through these hard times, but thanks to the determined efforts of Alfred Sutro, Albert Bender, and Oscar Lewis, the Book Club of California did.

On its 25th anniversary the Club had a very respectable membership of 500, and with that growing membership came more printers, collectors, historians, bookbinders, booksellers, librarians, and authors—bibliophiles of all stripes—drawn to the Club because of the growing reputation of its publications and programs. With this added strength, the Book Club firmly established itself in the next decade as a pioneer publisher of original scholarship on the history and literature of California. And it became a focal point for the support of fine press printing in the American West.

By 1947, after surviving more economic difficulties caused by the Second World War, the Club had 600 members. On the roster of directors and officers, new names began to replace the old, and it was clear that the founders and first generation of supporters had left the Book Club in capable hands.

Book men and women—some now legendary—like Carl Wheat, James D. Hart, Morgan Gunst, George Harding, Florence Walter, Joseph Henry Jackson, Theodore Lilienthal, David Magee, Duncan Olmsted, and Albert Sperisen—became stalwart, dedicated members of the Club. And many new printers had or were about to enter the scene, including Ward Ritchie, the Allen Press, Adrian Wilson, the Greenwood Press, the Windsor Press, Mallette Dean, and Lawton and Alfred Kennedy.

A rich history was evolving that had at its core a confluence of scholarship, bibliophilia, and fine printing. The Book Club was at the center of an educational and cultural festival for which there was growing enthusiasm. This was a period that we can now look back on and reasonably describe as the heyday of fine press printing and Western Americana scholarship in California.

The Club was even beginning to develop a social dimension: In 1952, with the cocktail hour becoming popular across America, the Book Club began having an open house on Monday evenings, from 5-7, when members and guests were invited to stop by for a drink. The party was on, and why not? The Club had weathered difficult times and had become confident and increasingly respected. It was making a considerable and lasting contribution to the popular and scholarly intellectual life of its time.

In 1954, with interest in membership expanding, the directors of the Club voted to raise the membership limit from 600 to 750, and within a few years the new positions were filled.

In 1958 the Club celebrated its 100th publication in style with David Magee's bibliography of the Club's first 100 books, one of the more splendid works of its kind, printed, appropriately, by the Grabhorn Press.

When the Book Club reached its 50th anniversary in 1962, it was in full bloom. A gala celebration was held at the Legion of Honor. Laurence Clark Powell was the guest speaker, and the title of his talk was "The Prospect Before Us."

Powell, an erudite librarian from Southern California, did not bother talking about the Club's history—what he called the "first 50 fabulous years"—but, rather, he asked what the organization was going to do in the future with all the success, cachet, and clout it had acquired. Let's not look back, he said, but forward, and take the lead in breaking new ground.

And indeed in its first 50 years the Club had acquired considerable success, cachet, and clout. There was now a waiting list to become a member and soon the directors would increase the limit of the membership yet again, this time to 1000. And even then a waiting list developed. There was an ever-expanding community of fine press printers, any one of whom was eager to work for the Book Club of California—a commission considered a sign of approval and a badge of honor. And there was an abundance of material available for the publications program with widespread interests in Western Americana, books about books, leaf books, and various other bibliophilic subjects. The Book Club of California was envied and emulated by other bookish organizations.

At its 50th anniversary the Club had published 112 books—and in the 50 years since 1962 it has published another 118, for a total of 230. Both the consistency of the rate of publication and the quality of the books themselves are remarkable.

The above record also reflects the fact that in its second 50 years the Book Club continued to do what it had learned to do well in its first 50 years. An institutional memory had developed and taken hold, instilling itself into the culture of the Club. And who, other than Laurence Clark Powell, would argue with success?

As the sixties and seventies unfolded, the guard gradually changed once more, and new individuals began to take over. A few of them are with us today, such as William P. Barlow (I believe Bill was also at the 1962 gala), Barbara Land, George Fox, and Gary Kurutz. But there are others, not here: Albert Shumate, Leila and Harold Wollenberg, Don and Kathy Fleming, Dick Dillon, John Borden, Jerry and Geraldine Cole, Joanne Sconnischen, and D. Steven Corey. And there was another generation of printers as well, anchored by Andrew Hoyem, Wesley Tanner, Peter Koch, the Yolla Bolly Press, Patrick Reagh, Susan Acker, James Whelage, and Jonathan Clark, among others.

These were the members I was introduced to on my first visits to the Club in the late 1970s, and it was a jovial and welcoming crew. They took the mantle handed to them and like the previous generations at the Book Club they managed it well, they managed it with civility, and they delivered the Book Club comfortably and securely into the 21st century—greatly aided, of course, by a handsome and well managed bequest from one Dr. Donovan J. McCune of Vallejo, a bequest that scattered any financial clouds looming on the Book Club's horizon.

There was a special biblio-social-atmosphere about this generation. Even the monthly luncheon board meetings were gay, festive occasions, where good natured flippancy and humor almost always prevailed over stodginess and disagreement. These meetings were anchored firmly in the past with the amazing continued presence of Oscar Lewis, who attended, as I mentioned earlier, as an honorary member until almost 1990.

With this generation it became clear that the success of the Book Club over the years has been due to generation after generation of dedicated members, justly proud of the traditions of the Book Club, which they have worked to protect and carry forward. The roster of such dedicated members, many of whom I've mentioned and some of whom are here, is a long one.

At the Club's 75th anniversary celebration James D. Hart spoke about, reflected on, and applauded the Club's accomplishments and its contributions to the cultural life of its time. The Book Club had done well

at what it had set out to do, he said, and had every reason to be proud of that. But Hart also pointedly echoed what Laurence Clark Powell had said 25 years before: Maybe the Club needed to take a risk or two, branch out; perhaps it had been overly antiquarian in its interests; it tended to play it safe and because of that it had become somewhat conventional. In the next 25 years, he suggested, with its newfound financial freedoms, the Book Club might try to do something a little more—and I use his exact words—"cutting edge."

Indeed a kind of cautiousness had set in at the Book Club, based on decades of success—successes which continue—and understandably few voices that have chosen to argue with this have gotten very far.

But Laurence Clark Powell was correct in 1962, as was James D. Hart in 1987. They were just ahead of their time, and the questions they posed present an interesting, and I think important, starting point for reflection on the Book Club's 100th birthday. These questions include: Can the Book Club of California continue to succeed using the same formula it has used for decades, as the world around it rapidly changes? How can the Book Club foster the next generation of fine press printers? What educational role does the Club play in a world where there is decreasing interest in the "arts pertaining to the production of books"? And how does the Book Club maintain a vibrant publications program when many of the subjects the Book Club has traditionally focused on become less relevant? These are but a few of the challenges the Book Club will face as it goes forward. Indeed, the Book Club is facing them today.

The Book Club of California has now had one hundred fabulous years. Its story is a great one. It has served its time and its place well. It is also an incredible and valuable inheritance, and its current stewards have a lot of responsibility in maintaining it.

Let us celebrate the laurels, and give those who wisely and thoughtfully got us here their deserved credit: We are here to honor them. But the most fitting honor to them will not be in not in celebrating the past, but rather in carrying the success of the Book Club of California forward into its second century.

☞ **President Anne W. Smith** followed John Crichton's talk with her vision for the future, *The Book Club in the 21st Century: More Good with More Style*:

"I don't know of any book club in the world that has done more good, or done it with more style, than the Book Club of California." So wrote our

Symposium keynote speaker Robert Bringhurst in his acceptance letter.

Today, one hundred years and a day from the founding meeting, the Book Club of California concludes a year of activity with a range of programs to affirm Bringhurst's lovely endorsement.

We are amazed to realize the vision of Club members. Since 2010, we have celebrated many accomplishments and presented an array of events honoring the minds, hearts, and spirits of our supporters.

Of Note:

- ⇒ Record breaking attendance at lectures and exhibitions since the 2010 opening of our club rooms in Suite 500 of the World Affairs Council Building. (Thanks to Kerry King and staff of WAC for their patience and compassionate assistance.)
- ⇒ A sold-out *Way Out West* (WOW) Symposium in October, ably chaired by Peter Koch. Beyond the excellent talks and panels, we got out and about to a variety of sites: the Commonwealth Club, the City Club of San Francisco, the SF Public Library, the Center for the Book, California Historical Society, and Mill Valley's Throckmorton Theatre. We also took an unforgettable boat trip from bridge to bridge aboard the USS *Potomac*.
- ⇒ Peter Koch's truly special Centennial Symposium edition of the *QN-L*.
- ⇒ Broadsides and keepsakes, beginning with Barbara and Fred Voltmer's Centennial birthday broadside in 2011.
- ⇒ A Centennial traveling exhibition of Club history, *Pressing Forward*, curated for the Club by member Mary Manning. Since January 2012, the exhibition has traveled around the State, with stops at Santa Clara University, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, the A.K. Smiley Library in Redlands, Claremont Colleges, Azusa Pacific University, and more to come.
- ⇒ Gary Kurutz's 100th Anniversary Keepsake, *The Book Club at One Hundred*.
- ⇒ New publications, William Reagh's *A Long Walk Downtown* and Claudine Chalmers' *Paul Frenzeny's Chinatown Sketches*, which offer ample evidence that the "book beautiful" is alive and flourishing.
- ⇒ And today's sold out Centennial Gala luncheon. Congratulations!

Obviously, the Book Club of California is about more than knowing about and learning from the past and strengthening fine printing.

At our *Way Out West* symposium, three dozen speakers and panelists looked to the future. "The future of the book is now," said Professor Harry

Reese. "But, it's not being equitably distributed," countered Brewster Kahle, Librarian of the Internet Archives.

We also talked about:

- ⇒ The relevance of fine printing and book arts in contemporary culture.
- ⇒ Fine printing, publishing, and collection experiences or trends in California culture and history.
- ⇒ The market place for fine printing in California.
- ⇒ Selling BCC publications to members and outside collectors.

Further discussion will be forthcoming at the 4th CODEX International Book Arts Fair in February, Monday night hospitality discussions, and programs presented by the BCC in the coming months and years. (Wine always helps.)

As your President, I think it is appropriate on this occasion to share potential indicators that will tell the Board of Directors and membership we are achieving "more good with more style" during the next 6 to 12 years:

- ⇒ A new demographic in which 25 percent of Club membership will be under 35, with thriving collectors among them.
- ⇒ BCC advocacy to support maintenance and enhancement of the printed word in tandem with digital offerings. I was very pleased to hear on National Public Radio this week that the Santa Ana *Orange County Register* is expanding its print coverage right now. The headline was: "Presses Hum with Optimism."
- ⇒ A weekly daytime gathering in which member-generated topics are discussed.
- ⇒ Continued generous responses that enable the incorporated Book Club's investments and endowments to provide operating budgets and fund special projects.
- ⇒ Earned revenue from ticketed events, space rentals, publications, and membership dues supports ongoing programs and events.
- ⇒ BCC advocacy of its mission to support fine printing related to California history, letters, and arts demonstrated by bringing together printers, bookbinders, artists, book sellers, and above all, collectors.
- ⇒ Commitment to perpetuating the power of the book and the printed word make it vigilant to battle any legislative action that might impact the industry.
- ⇒ A publishing capability to do letterpress and offset printing.

⇒ An ongoing scholarship program that supports attendance at educational conferences and professional training workshops offered by other organizations.

⇒ BCC member excursions and travel activities, including a California Bullet train from San Francisco to a Los Angeles symposium, or vice versa. Why not?

Individual participation is the most important Book Club of California legacy as we go forward. Members! We need your support and time to assist with activities of Club Committees: Library, Membership, Programs, Oscar Lewis Awards, Publications, *Quarterly News-Letter*, and Scholarships.

Please do open your BCC email notifications for details on how to participate, or go to the website anytime, www.bccbooks.org.

As we take leave from this magnificent space in the Julia Morgan Ballroom on this unique date of 12-12-12, on behalf of the Board of Directors and staff, I would like to thank our brilliant presenters, event chairs, helpful public servants, superb musicians, generous donors, tireless volunteers, gracious venue hosts, expert designers, far-traveled and fully-engaged attendees, stellar committees, and everyone whose energy, hard-work, expertise, and involvement made the Book Club of California's Centennial a great success.

We couldn't have done it without you. A special "shout out" to Barbara Land, who couldn't be here today but has always thoroughly answered my many questions about books and the Book Club history.

There has been lots of good and lots of style!

(Anne's talk was followed by everyone in the room singing "Happy Birthday to Us.")



The Re-materialization of the Book: The Future of the Book in the Age of Electronic Texts

PETER RUTLEDGE KOCH

Presented at the Book Club of California's Centennial Symposium,
Way out West: Fine Printing and the Cultural History of the Book in California,
October 20, 2012, at the Koret Auditorium, San Francisco Public Library

WE have been hearing a lot these days about the future of the book—especially from librarians and scholars whose livelihood depends upon the writing, publishing, and cataloging of books. Much of the talk poses the question of the continuing viability of the printed book in a future dominated by electronic media. Articles appear almost weekly in the reviews.

Time to take a deep breath. The book as it has evolved over the past 2,000 years is as much in need of re-invention as the spoon. It exists, in no danger that I can discern, and it is the perfect reading device. The first codex was probably designed by a reader who preferred the considerable convenience and durability of bound pages to the difficult-to-manipulate scroll format that has now re-emerged in the new clothes of electronic media. Nothing much has changed in the last two millennia except the methods of manufacture.

Now, however, with the ever-increasing presence of electronic media and the digital reproduction and distribution of images, we have opened a virtual (and I mean virtual) Pandora's Box of opinion concerning the future of the printed book in the electronic age.

Naturally, most discussions related to issues surrounding the future of the book focus on the positive advantages of the digital transmission and storage of images—advantages that often refer to the plain fact that books and printed ephemera are now more-or-less free from the burden of being responsible for storing the majority of our cultural, scientific, military, and industrial memory.

Now, massive amounts of information that do not in any way rely on a particular material form of transmission for use or meaning exist electronically. This information includes recorded Bach partitas, the Missoula phone directory, the Oxford English Dictionary, lists and

tables of astronomical observations, and the novels of Charles Dickens. No longer does their transmission and retention require a paper-based medium to fix the message accurately for our cultural memory. Whatever the invention of printing was able to do for the accuracy of fixing the written text or hand-drawn image, the electronic version does even better. That is until the electricity is shut off.

Most discussions, however, do not really address the question of the book. Not that we really can pinpoint what exactly the question is—we just seem to have a lingering unease about the future of the book as we knew it before the internet arrived.

But first, let us quickly establish that personal computers have no bookish qualities—they are not books. The keyword here is quality. Not quality spoken as a judgment of worth or value, but the material and philosophical quality of bookness—a sort of Platonic *ideal* book with real pages. You know a book when you see one and it behaves like a book when you flip through it. Just read the masterfully clever essay by Michael Butor entitled “THE BOOK AS OBJECT” and be done with it. No more confusing books with computers. I will not elaborate further. You have probably made that distinction already.

Leaving behind the world of screen reading devices, we can focus on books themselves.

To get back to quality—we have all acquired “quality paperbacks” and (if you will indulge me) the quality they advertise is not far above the quality of the phone book that landed on your doorstep last month, which you then threw in the paper-recycling bin to save room. All readers and libraries have this same problem—making room for books.

I would like to pose one *small* question: What are the qualities of the book that merit indefinite long-term storage on library shelves and climate controlled archives? This may well become, if it is not already, a *large* problem...I read somewhere recently that nearly a million different titles are printed and bound every year. Think of that!

It is my opinion that a large majority of books, manufactured for mass consumption at low cost—and I am uneasy about using the word “*manufacture*” when referring to products that are more likely “*robofactured*”—are, aside from dust-jacket art, completely disposable once the reader has used them and an electronic version has been stored—all but one master copy in the hands of a big universal book depository... for the record.

There are, of course, exceptions—for instance when a poet modifies a book by inscribing and signing it or a scholar annotates in the margins, making the copy unique.

I am, however, very concerned about what Robert Bringhurst has often referred to as “Real Books”—and this is the right place to have that discussion—here where we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Book Club of California and in a library where upstairs in the rare book division there is a substantial collection of hand-written and printed books, preserved with care and curated with intelligence.

Here, in this library, we can talk about quality. We can study firsthand the qualities of the first printed edition of Euclid’s *Geometry* and we can closely compare the Aldine *Hypnerotomachia* of 1499 to the Jacques Kerver edition of 1546. And what a pleasure *that* is.

Here we can enter the realm of quality *qua* beauty and material excellence. We can drag out the Hinman collator and our magnifying glasses to compare early proofs to later states. We can imagine the compositor’s hands setting the type and the printer grinding the pigments and mixing the ink, the pressman pulling the press closed on the damp paper. We can distinguish an early state from a later state, and discover typographic corrections made in mid-press run. We can identify the paper mill and date the individual sheets of paper by their watermark.

By comparison, what have we got to lose (in terms of analytic bibliography and aesthetic and cultural history) if we stop collecting and storing mass-market books? This may sound a bit drastic, but I am serious about the point I wish to make. Not because I hate mass-market paperbacks, because I do not. I read them every night and I love my Big Little Book edition of *Two Gun Montana*, and besides—the first *X-Man* comic recently sold for just under a half-million dollars.

What I am calling into question here is—just what *is* the information that is carried in the medium of these mass produced books that would render them interesting to scholars and readers 200 or 2,000 years hence? Would it be that billions were printed in giant book-factories in China? That mass marketing and bean-counting demanded sub-standard editing, minimal proof-reading, and low-grade papers?

For the sake of argument I would like to leave these sorts of books behind and not worry my head a bit over *their* future. Instead I propose that we should damn well worry about the fate of the well-made book and the fine press book—if not worry, at least we might pay better attention

to the care and preservation of the exemplary books we already have and support with vigor those yet to be made.

As the de-materialization of public life takes an increasingly firm hold and more and more people glue themselves for even more hours to their pads and pods and devices, there could well be a correction on its way, trust me—and trust your history books too and recollect the reasons why the Arts and Crafts rebellion took place at the end of the 19th century.

We have entered a parallel zone today. All the signs are pointing in the same direction. We are already headed for a revival of quality-driven art and culture. Artisanal approaches to making things and making life-choices about food, clothing, entertainment, and learning based on sustainable ecologically-sound practices are not just already evident they are growing exponentially.

To use a fishing metaphor, some books are keepers and some you just throw back into the stream. As far as keepers are concerned, the list of a book's ingredients, including the methods of composition and printing, papermaking, and bookbinding, will become increasingly important. I continue to be hopeful about consumer education. Authors are becoming more and more conscious of the book as a stage on which their drama unfolds.

The keepers will be re-materialized, re-charged, and re-configured and thereby become an increasingly vibrant symbol and container of our culture and values. A new slogan might be: "Fewer and Better Books". The more-cheaper world will increasingly be covered by the digital production and transmission of texts—cheaper so long as you don't stop to factor in the increasing demand on electrical power generation and the environmental costs of fossil fuel extraction and burning and the inevitable increase in nuclear sources to power and cool massive datacenters.

We can pretty much bet that in the future, librarians and private collectors will become increasingly more exacting in determining which books they will shelve for limited temporary use and which books will be provided storage and continued access over an extended period of years. Curating and preserving books for the use of future generations of scholars and readers is an expensive undertaking and must be carefully thought out and executed.

It is my personal belief, and one upon which I have staked my creative life, that here, in our very special world of bibliophiles, here in the San Francisco Public Library, and in our book clubs, private libraries, and printing houses—we serve a small but ultimately very important purpose

and role in preserving and promoting the sustainable diverse world of the printed book.

Exemplary hand-printed books, well designed and intelligently made, will most certainly deserve a long life both on our bookshelves and in the archives of our great libraries. Eventually, I expect, fine printing practices will even gain a bit in market-share, as discriminating future readers re-evaluate the uses of literature.

Bibliophiles are still being born; books are more plentiful than ever; highly personal and idiosyncratic bookstores are already opening in trendy neighborhoods from Williamsburg to Portland. I will not be at all surprised when a major media group acquires its first boutique letterpress line to polish its image and round out its portfolio. Let us imagine the headline in a future business section of the (electronic) *San Francisco Chronicle*.... "San Francisco's famous Aristo Press acquired by the Bertelsmann Publishing Empire"—and in the design section: "Interior decorators find renewed uses for leather-bound books as bookshelves come back into fashion."

But seriously...

I would like to end with a quote from Daniel Berkeley Updike who wrote this short paragraph nearly a hundred years ago:

The practice of typography, if it be followed faithfully, is hard work—full of detail, full of petty restrictions, full of drudgery, and not greatly rewarded as men now count rewards. There are times when we need to bring to it all the history and art and feeling that we can, to make it bearable. But in the light of history, and of art, and of knowledge and man's achievement, it is as interesting a work as exists—a broad and humanizing employment which can indeed be followed merely as a trade, but which if perfected into an art, or even broadened into a profession, will perpetually open new horizons to our eyes and new opportunities to our hands.

We have a long way to go to catch up with the old guys.



**A Review of *Paul Frenzeny's Chinatown Sketches*
by Claudine Chalmers (BCC Publication #230)**

GORDON CHANG

IN the mid-19th century, tens of thousands of Chinese arrived in California and instantly became objects of fascination and derision. They came mainly as laborers to toil in the mines, railroads, and fields of the new state. Others were merchants, store-keepers, labor contractors, medical practitioners, or home workers. At one point, the Chinese, 100,000 in number, comprised 25% of the total labor force of the state. Feelings about them from whites ran strong: some, such as landowner William Hollister (namesake of the city) and Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific Railroad, welcomed them as an important source of good labor. Others, such as the infamous Denis Kearney, attacked them as threats to white civilization and the white worker in particular. Leland Stanford vacillated between being a Sinophobe and a Sinophile. The “Chinese Question” was one of the central political issues of the day and became a national controversy by the 1880s when anti-Chinese sentiment crested, resulting in a series of federal acts that ended large-scale immigration of Chinese into America until the latter 20th century.

Because they were an usual visual demographic, radically different in appearance and lifestyle than native-born whites and the European immigrants who flocked to the state, the Chinese attracted a great deal of attention from artists and photographers. Their food, work habits, living arrangements, and customs challenged prevailing assumptions about what constituted an American life. Some found the Chinese colorful additions to the booming state; others saw irredeemable paganism and danger. Many of the news articles, books, and ephemera about the Chinese included etchings, sketches, and photographs.

As with the written word, these depictions ran the gamut of presentation, from horrible caricature to respectful representation. Paul Frenzeny, a talented 19th century illustrator from France, departed from the reigning hostile cartoonists and created images of the Chinese that were more sensitive and respectful. Claudine Chalmers has reproduced 19 wood engravings of these in a handsome volume that serves as a thoughtful counterpoint to the negativity. His drawings, she indicates,

“represent the earliest, largest and most complete and detailed artistic vision of San Francisco’s Chinese Quarter ever achieved in the 19th century.” (p.43)

From Chalmers, we learn about the artist and his time and place, all important information that helps us appreciate his unusual work. Frenzeny, a Frenchman of noble birth and elite training, toured America in 1873 for *Harper’s Weekly* and produced a large number of sketches, among them on the Chinese. Notable is the artistic quality of his work as well as his acute eye that helps us recapture a world in California that is long gone. Frenzeny’s work, such as his most impressive sketch, “Theatrical Performances in China-Town, San Francisco,” which accompanied a narrative he wrote after attending an actual event, supplemented reportage about the Chinese. Together, his words and artwork of performers, musicians, and audience provide a rare picture of a central cultural experience in the community. Other depictions include a scene of Chinese immersed in the chilling waters of the Bay, pulling closed a huge fish net, the inner sanctum of a Chinese merchant’s organization, parades, celebrations, funerals, and spiritual practices.

Chalmers is not a historian of Chinese America and so her lively text that accompanies the reproductions provides only a little help in understanding the history of the Chinese, but she is a careful biographer of Frenzeny and offers us insight into his career and friends. She is also a good “reader” of the images, directing our attention to details in his compositions. She draws our eye to what Frenzeny apparently emphasized and his intended messages.

As perceptive an observer as he was, and as capable an illustrator as he clearly could be, Frenzeny still could not escape presenting the Chinese in what can only be called an exotic manner. Often he emphasized the odd and unfamiliar, which is not surprising for one who was working for a commercial periodical. His other work, such as of Native Peoples and the terrain of the Wild West, also depicted scenes that were similarly fascinating for East Coast residents hungry to know about the other side of the country. His depictions of the opium den or of a funeral on Lone Mountain in San Francisco, for example, predictably dwelled on the strange.

This reader found his rendering of the physical features of the Chinese particularly curious. Striking is Frenzeny’s inability to reproduce the facial features of the Chinese with fidelity. He couldn’t draw Chinese eyes or noses! His images of the Chinese also usually lack individuality and expression. One can compare his striking “A Chinese Reception in San

Francisco,” which shows an elaborate Chinatown welcoming for Wong Chin Foo, the leading intellectual in the Chinese community in America, to “A Holiday in Chinatown,” which captures the noise and color of what was probably a New Year’s celebration. Several non-Chinese appear in the latter and are well-rendered. One easily senses their feelings of surprise and disorientation as they view the raucous celebration. They are startled by the fire-crackers and commotion. In contrast, the Chinese in both sketches are ciphers, virtually interchangeable with one another with little facial expression. This was probably not so much intentional as it was a result of Frenzeny’s inexperience in trying to understand a very different people. Artistic ability had little to do with it but rather it stemmed from a perceptual inadequacy rooted in deep cultural and racial difference.

Claudine Chalmers collection of Frenzeny’s Chinatown sketches helps us better understand the perceived world of 19th century Chinese America and her reproduction of his fine art work helps us enter a world where no photographer ever ventured and encourages us today to experience Chinese American history that text alone cannot do.

The volume is handsome, the images well-reproduced, and the text eminently readable. It is a fine addition to the Book Club of California’s series.

Gordon H. Chang is the Oliver H. Palmer Professor in Humanities and a professor in the Department of History at Stanford University. He is interested in American diplomacy with Asia and in Asian American history. His most recent work, American Asian Art, is the first comprehensive study of the lives and artistic production of American Asian artists active in the United States before 1970.



A Year in the Library: 2012 in Retrospect

HENRY SNYDER, CHAIR LIBRARY COMMITTEE

2012 was another good year in the library for acquisitions and gifts, some already reported. First and foremost though, Board director Noel Kirshenbaum and long-time benefactor Barbara Land gave major donations to fund the building out of the east end of our expanding library.

Additionally, the two have been notably generous with books. The prize of the year from Noel, given in memory of his late wife Sandra DeNola Kirshenbaum, is Plato’s *Phaedrus* and its accompanying broadside. Jack Stauffacher designed and printed this edition in 1978 at his Greenwood Press. It is one of the finest books produced in California, even in the whole country, during the last century.

Barbara Land has been so devoted to the Club for so long, it is no surprise to find her name repeatedly in our accession lists. Her best buy, noted previously, was wood engraver Paul Landacre’s *California Hills* (1931). Furthermore, she is always ready to assist if a treasured item exceeds our budget.

Land, assistant librarian John McBride, and I picked up 15 shelf lots at the last PBA auctions containing fine press books from the eastern United States, Great Britain, and Europe. One fun item is an 1853 French novel about two Gold Rush visitors. We also acquired more than a hundred ephemeral items by John Henry Nash, one of our founding printers and subject of a paper at our Centennial Symposium.

Alan Dye gave us 49 Grove plays published by the Bohemian Club. We had only a quarter of them.

Gladys Mahoney, a retired librarian in Phoenix, sent us the final shipment of books from the libraries of Senator James D. Phelan and his nephew, Noel Sullivan. They include many association copies and all have a California focus. Gertrude Atherton is particularly prominent among the included authors.

Carol Cunningham, who gave us her personal collection of miniatures including the archive of her own publications, has made further offerings.

Freddie Postman is another Club member who keeps on giving. She presented us with 28 fine press alphabet books, all delightful, whimsical, and beautiful.

Other contributors have included Philip Heller, Jacqueline Stewart, The Kelley Street Press, and Bo Wreden. Three must be singled out. Jim Lederer gave us the typescript of remarks Albert Sperisen made at the Legion of Honor on "Painters, Sculptors, and Illustrators" in April 1962. The Club library carries his name, making this a noteworthy gift.

Tom Woodhouse has given us a very special book, photographer Paul O'Connor's large, over-sized volume of 50 black-and-white *Taos Portraits* (2012). Its accompanying exhibit became an official event of New Mexico's Centennial. The volume is a nice companion to one of our treasures, *Taos Pueblo* (1930), the first book of photographs by Ansel Adams.

Lastly, we want to recognize another gift notable for its association. Melissa Marshall, daughter of famed San Francisco printer, Adrian Wilson, brought in 4 books and 29 pieces of ephemera printed by Wilson. The occasion was the opening of the exhibition, *And Who Wants Peace?*, curated by John McBride and dedicated to the post war trio of Wilson, Jack Stauffacher, and William Everson.

Our limited acquisitions budget only enables us to acquire a small sampling from the great output of the fine presses active in California and elsewhere. At this year's CODEX International Book Fair, three items stood out as particularly pertinent to the Club and its library. Would any of our members and friends be willing to buy one or more of these for us? They are:

The Persephones, by Nathaniel Tarn, printed by Carolee Campbell at the Ninja Press. A set of long poems in 12 unbound folios held in a goat parchment cover. Campbell used sumi ink and salt to paint them front and back. \$1,700.

COSMOGONIE INTIME An Intimate Cosmogony, printed by Felicia Rice at the Moving Parts Press. Five poems by French poet Yves Peyré, illustrated by Ray Rice with pen-and-ink drawings enriched with multiple colors using the pochoir or stenciling process. This 10 x 15 inch accordion-fold book extends to 18 feet and is housed in a paper slipcase and a cloth-covered box. \$2,200.

Our whole delegation was much taken by the work of printer and typographer of Russell Maret, who is unrepresented in our library. He is offering six fascinating titles in a slip case at discount for \$1,800.

SERENDIPITY

We say, "Oh, Hi!" to Norman Clayton of Ojai as our printer for the next two years and fondly thank Richard Seibert for his creative *Quarterlies* during the past two.

We now catch up. From the Gold Country comes sad news. Larry Cenotto, 80, departed Jackson for the Golden Hills on October 6, 2012, so his son, Lawrence Cenotto V informs us. Cenotto was the stout main stay bracing the mighty mast of Amador County history. He was president of the historical society, ran the archives, and, drawing on his family's deep local roots, wrote five anecdotal, readable volumes of local history titled *Logan's Alley*, named for a small downtown Jackson passageway.

With the Oscars coming up, more honors have come to two of our past awardees, Philip P. Choy and Michael Mathes. On January 10th, 2013, *The San Francisco Chronicle* honored architect and historian Phil Choy, 86, with over a page headlined, "The Real Chinatown." Just out is Choy's *San Francisco Chinatown: A Guide to its History and Architecture* (City Lights Books, 2012; \$15.95). Choy covers Chinatown from the arrival of the Spanish in 1776 to the inauguration of Ed Lee, the city's first Chinese-American mayor, in 2011.

At the University of Southern California, Librarian Barbara Robinson generously put together a fantastic exhibition that honors Michael Mathes in the Friends of the USC Libraries Lecture Hall in the beautiful Doheny Library. Recognizing a member of the faculty and another Oscar Lewis honoree, she declared that Mathes was "the Kevin Starr of Baja California." On display until May is a wide range of Mathes' publications, beginning with his 1962 USC Master's thesis.

Turning to another Southern California institution, antiquarian bookseller Kenneth Karmiole, an authority on books printed before 1800, has done it again. In December 2012, he pledged \$100,000 to the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California Los Angeles. This follows a 2002 scholarship to support a student in the study of rare books and manuscripts, an endowment in 2005 for an annual lecture on "The History of the Book Trade," and another in 2006 to aid the acquisition of rare materials.

“Archival material is going to become more and more significant,” Karmiole stated. “University libraries want to differentiate themselves from one another by the unique material that they have.” Take that, Internet! The reason for his gift? “I would like to see UCLA become a place for people interested in rare books and manuscripts and historical materials.”

For the past two years, taking place in the fall, the Club has hosted UCLA’s California Rare Book School, which numbers notable Club members among its professors. Among them are Susan Allen, William P. Barlow, Gary Kurutz, and Bruce Whiteman.

Regretfully, a tradition has ended. After 90 years, the California Historical Society is quieting its quarterly *California History*. Editor Janet Fireman, who brought many provocative 20th century articles to its pages, is retiring. We know the difficulties of finding editors. Furthermore, *California History’s* expenses kept rising. The quarterly costs vast sums of treasure to produce, and patron members were subsidizing regular ones. In contrast, the society is great at securing exhibition grants.

I See Beauty in this Life: A Photographer Looks at 100 Years of Rural California. This exhibition, the society says, is “the first project in the California Historical Society’s new *Curating California* series, in which we invite remarkable individuals from a range of disciplines to explore and interpret our extensive collections.” The first guest curator is photographer Lisa M. Hamilton. She is a published author on rural California and a self-described “artist and a journalist, and really a storyteller.” “All the photographs in this exhibition were selected, in part,” Hamilton writes, “because they tell stories that are somehow different from what we’d expect—they take our presumed understanding of a place and its people and expand on it, or question it, or turn it on its head.” We were grateful the curator wrote two long statements of purpose to focus our thoughts as we viewed this “series of intimate, personal stories.”

In the first gallery, among photographs of almond hulls, sugar stacks, a flour mill under construction, oil derricks, and bales of wool, we learned the emphasis of the exhibition is on “work”—“sweaty, dangerous, exhausting, manure-encrusted work.” The third gallery, alongside a six-part blue cyanotype panorama of a flume, displays text stating: “Our working definition of ‘rural’ was places where the culture and the economy are defined by people using natural resources directly.”

Photos of livestock, fairs, and rodeos range from older black-and-white images to newer color ones. Captions are basic and groupings somewhat by topic. The photographs are meant to evoke an experience rather than describe it. Hamilton uses many snapshots, as they are “intimate and personal.” Her four large color portraits include long narrative stories of the subjects.

On January 27, San Francisco inaugurated its sixth poet laureate, Alejandro Murguía, 63. Additionally a writer, editor, and professor at San Francisco State University, he specializes in California’s Native American, Californio, and Chicano heritage. Murguía is “an activist with a social conscience and a great voice to express it,” declared Lawrence Ferlinghetti. In 1973, he founded the Third World Communications writers’ collective with its *Tin-Tan Magazine* and became the first director of the Mission Cultural Center in 1976.

Writing in Spanish and English, Murguía’s two American Book Award winning short-story collections include *Southern Front* (1990), which covers the international volunteers who fought in Nicaragua’s Sandinista revolt, and *This War Called Love* (2002), love stories from the Mission District. Murguía has an equal number of poetry collections, *Spare Poems* (2001) and *Native Tongue* (2012), and a memoir, *The Medicine of Memory* (2002). Murguía’s prime goal is appropriately poetic, to return San Francisco to being the City of Poets.

Everyone knows George King Fox, he of ancient New England stock, champion yodeler, trade card collector, past-president of a century-old San Francisco-based Book Club, and a chief Poobah of PBA, or Pacific Book Auction Galleries to you old timers. To digress, on New Year’s Sharon L. Gee of Los Angeles purchased and invigorated this stalwart San Francisco firm, the only West Coast auction house specializing in books and manuscripts, maps and atlases.

Where were we? Ah, we entered the San Francisco Main Library and wandered to the sixth floor. Behold, there was *Educate! Amuse! And in Colors! Selections from the George M. Fox Collection of Early Children’s Books*. This exhibition is testimony to what one collector can do.

Grandfather Fox went to work for Milton Bradley, the game pioneer and children’s book publisher, in 1891. In 1920, the firm purchased

McLaughlin Brothers, a publisher of children's books since 1828, and in 1923, young George Marshall Fox joined the firm.

In 1926, Milton Bradley discarded the McLaughlin archives, which included copies of its books and British books used as examples or outright pirated. Fox got most of the books, while Charles Miller, another Milton Bradley employee, got the original art. Fox went on to collect children's books, while Miller donated his portion to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Rising waters added another chapter. In 1938, the Connecticut River, running through Springfield, Massachusetts, flooded the Milton Bradley basement. Bobbing on rising waters, dovetailed boxes of McLaughlin Brothers woodblocks flowed into the hands of George Fox, awaiting their arrival with a truck.

Fox dispatched the woodblocks to Justin G. Schiller of New York, who matched blocks to books and sold them together. Schiller sent the remainder to famed Southern Californian Muir Dawson, who in turn printed 20 sets from them. The Fox collection contains one set.

California struck gold again 130 years after the strike at Sutter's Mill. George M. Fox donated 2,000 children's books to the San Francisco Public Library on January 24, 1978. The first display was in 1986, the year following his death, and the second, with 80 examples, was on view through March 10 of this year.

Drawn from McLaughlin's own printings and British publishers Thomas Nelson & Sons, the first to open a New York branch; Frederick Warne, Dean & Son; and George Routledge & Sons, the colored wood engravings and chromolithographs were striking.

Wood engraver Edmund Evans hired top artists Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, and Kate Greenway to produce the classic children's books displayed. Besides regular paged books, the exhibition showed off splendid examples of model books, with cut and fold scenes, hinged flaps to mix and match portraits, and accordion folds showing one picture folded one way, and a second alternating.

Tied in with the Fox exhibition, Laura E. Wasowicz, Curator of Children's Literature at the American Antiquarian Society, appeared at the Book Club on January 7, 2013. She emphasized the Society's thorough cataloguing. Beyond the conventional catalog, it tracks printers and publishers, books by women, and special subjects such as diseases.

Isaiah Thomas, author of *History of Printing in America*, (1810), founded the Society in 1812. Naturally, the best edition of his printing history is a leaf book edited by Marcus A. McCorison and published by the American Antiquarian Society in 1970.

Thomas began collecting all American printed imprints and illustrations and the Society cuts off its collection at the 1876 Centennial. It has 60 thousand U.S. books printed before 1821, two-thirds of the total printed in the U.S. before that year. The Society feels rightly that if it has an item, some scholar sometime will find it meaningful. A sampling of its marvelous holdings is included in a catalog for the exhibition, *In Pursuit of a Vision: Two Centuries of Collecting at the American Antiquarian Society* (September 12 -November 17, 2012).

Since the 1940s, the American Antiquarian Society has published a list of Early American Imprints, first on microfiche and now in digital form. An April 2012 conference discussed how to make the Society's collections even more accessible.



Following a marvelous write up in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of February 6, the four-day CODEX International Book Fair opened on February 10 in the Craneway Pavilion on the Richmond waterfront. "The future of the book is assured," Peter Koch promised the *Chronicle*. CODEX grew from 130 entrants worldwide in 2011 to 181 this year. Its former venue at the University of California, Berkeley, is under construction, so this year's fair took place in the 45,000 square-foot harbor side portion of the 1931 Ford assembly plant, the Craneway Pavilion.

Displaying everything from finely printed folios to artistic book sculptures, all the usual suspects were present, including the Club. Viewers admired the Club's newest publications, Claudine Chalmers' *Paul Frenzeny's Chinatown Sketches* and Richard Wagener's *The Sierra Nevada Suite*. Close at hand, Jonathan Clark displayed freshly letterpressed business cards, his color photograph book of Carmine, Texas, and a folio of photographs of Florence in 1993.

At the far end of the aisle stood the Deconstructed Artichoke Press. We assume San Franciscan Nikki Thompson dismantled them leaf by leaf, dipping each in melted butter. She fabricates her artists' books, she says, with outdated technology and affirmed a common sentiment:

"I love to show my books to people, especially those who will buy what I show them."

Richard Wagener, who engraves exquisitely on end-grain boxwood, offered single prints from the Club's newest publication, *The Sierra Nevada Suite*, for \$200 and \$250. He used the same blocks to print the 31 illustrations in the Club's book, but the singles were, he said, previously "printed under less stressful conditions." Peter Koch is a hard taskmaster! At \$450, the Club's book is a bargain. *The Sierra Nevada Suite* is a companion to the Club's 2009 *California in Relief*, which included 30 Wagener prints, also created from the original wood engravings.

Carolee Campbell, whom we see in San Francisco as a Club director, is in real life a Southern California printer and proprietor of Ninja Press. She displayed a magnificent 15 foot project. In 1995, she took a poem by W.S. Merwin, "The Real World of Manual Córdova," detailing a 1907 trip to the headwaters of the Amazon River. Campbell drew a stream flowing through and placed each of 43 stanzas on one fold of the accordion to play a grand typographic melody.

At CODEX, we saw that the 1974 Women's Studio Workshop in Kingston, New York, uses postcards to appeal to the 1 percent, so condemned by the Occupy movement. "Tax me for Art," it proclaims. "Artists are 7 percent of the professional workforce in the U.S.," it explains, adding, and only "cost U.S. Tax payers \$0.7 each per year." The message the Workshop maintains: "I want to see what they are doing. Only public funds bring contemporary art to rural communities." Amen.

Barbara Jane Land

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[Arion Press]. [Barry Moser, illustrator].

Herman Melville. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. San Francisco: The Arion Press, 1979. Limited to 265 copies on Barcham Green handmade paper.

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THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA

is pleased to announce its 3 newest publications:

THE SIERRA NEVADA SUITE

By Richard Wagener

“Wagener’s technical skill is such that the images shimmer, jewel-like, concise renditions in black and white of sunlight and shadow, landscape and sky.” In this companion volume to *California in Relief* (published by the Book Club in 2009), Richard Wagener again proves himself as much a wanderer, explorer, and observer of California as a master wood engraver. The 31 prints were hand-engraved on end-grain boxwood and relief-printed by the artist.

Price: \$450

Members’ Pre-Publication Price: \$405 (*expires June 15, 2013*)

PAUL FRENZENY’S CHINATOWN SKETCHES

An Artist’s Fascination with San Francisco’s Chinese Quarter, 1875–1882

By Claudine Chalmers, with a preface by Philip P. Choy

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