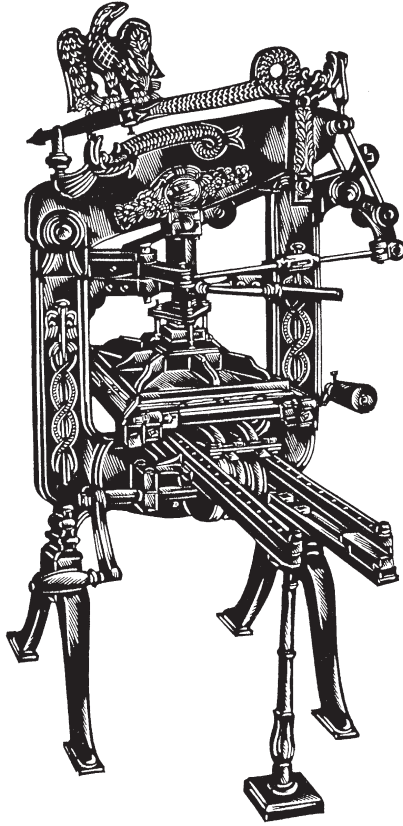


QUARTERLY

NEWS-LETTER

THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA



THE COLUMBIAN HANDPRESS, INVENTED IN 1813

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CHARLES A. FRACCHIA: *Off to New York to Buy a Few Books*

RANDALL TARPEY-SCHWED: *Heather's Mommies and Tango's Daddies:
Children's Books as Agents of Radical Social Change*

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Off to New York to Buy a Few Books

CHARLES A. FRACCHIA

I started collecting rare books in the late 1950s, when I was beginning law school at the University of San Francisco. It was the purchase of a book published in 1565—the first English translation of the venerable Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of England*—that began my collecting English Catholic recusant books, a collection that became an important part of my life during the 1960s.

The period that I collected was from 1558 to 1640, and the term “recusant” referred to those who refused to conform to the Elizabethan settlement of the Church of England.

Books of devotion, history, polemical works, and translations of the Bible were published surreptitiously both in England and in Europe, in English, Latin, and various European languages. The books printed abroad were smuggled into England. The penalty for any association with these books—owning, reading, printing, distributing, or smuggling them—was death.

This risky, romantic publishing consumed my imagination, and by the late 1960s my collection had grown and was probably the largest such collection in private hands. I had purchased the recusant holdings of Quarr Abbey and the Diocese of Portsmouth (both institutions in England) and had had excellent good fortune in buying these scarce books from dealers in both the United States and England.

In the mid- and late-1960s, I began to go to New York almost every month as part of my investment business and because of my role as board member, financier, and treasurer of Straight Arrow Publishers (corporate owner of *Rolling Stone* magazine). At one point I decided to call on two New York-based book dealers with the idea of possibly adding to my collection.

The first of my calls was on John Fleming. Several years before my trip, I had read the biography of Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach, the legendary rare book dealer, written by Edwin Wolf II and John Fleming. Fleming had worked as a “go-fer” for Rosenbach after graduating from high school, but he later became Rosenbach’s principal associate and, upon Rosenbach’s retirement, his successor in business (purchasing Dr. R’s stock but operating under his own name).

Fleming kept Rosenbach's shop at 322 East 57th Street in New York, and it was with great trepidation and nervousness that I rang the bell for admittance to the baronial splendor of this bookshop. I was admitted by an affable John Fleming into the temple of wall-to-wall rare books, with its magnificent antique refectory table and baroque-carved desk.

Fleming soon put me at ease, served me coffee, and encouraged me to speak about my collecting interests. After he had discerned what kind of books I was collecting, he led me to a section in his shop that held sixteenth- and seventeenth-century books in English and instructed me to look over the shelves to determine if there were any books that might fit my collecting interests.

Slowly, I perused the books on the shelves; and, then, there it was: the *Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, published in Antwerp in 1565. I trembled with delight, but I also trembled at what the price might be. I finished my perusal of the shelves and then brought my find to Fleming, who examined the pencil-written code on the inside of the front binding. "My goodness," he said, "this hasn't been re-priced since 1928."

I swayed with anticipation, while he looked through the book. Finally, he said, "Well, I think the price should be as it was." He proceeded to name a very reasonable price; I could hardly restrain myself from jumping up with joy. I have forgotten what the price was, and I have forgotten how I paid for it, but I have not forgotten how happily I fondled the book as I walked toward Fifth Avenue.

On this same trip to New York, I had planned a visit to two additional book dealers: Leona Rosenberg and Madeleine Stern. I had written to them and they had responded that I would be welcome at their place of business on a certain date and at a certain time. Their note said, "Come for tea."

On the indicated date and time, I got off the subway and began my search for 152 E. 179th Street, located in the Bronx. Once on the street I was shocked and, I must admit, frightened. What had once been an upper-middle-class Jewish enclave was now a ghetto area that did not seem too safe to me. I could not believe that the two women book dealers would live in such an unsafe area.

I soldiered on with great trepidation and found the address—a large, late-nineteenth-century house of three floors (plus basement) that had been, as I later discovered, the family home of one of the two women. Here they both now lived and had their book business.

Two bright-eyed women answered the door, welcoming me most effusively and inviting me into the house. Every room of the house was lined with books. I settled down in one of the chairs; Leona and Madeleine sat next to each other across from me. I felt as if I had been ushered into some nineteenth-century, New England scenario: the young man visiting spinster aunts in the historic family manse.

Rarely have I ever had a more pleasant afternoon as I did that day in the Bronx. Madeleine was the taller of the two women and had dark hair; Leona was short and had light hair. And, while each of them had a fluttering, bird-like appearance as she spoke, I already knew that they were both scholarly booksellers, each of them having written scholarly books on a variety of subjects.

Leona had been a doctoral student at Columbia University and had gone to Strasburg to do research on the early printers of that city for her dissertation, but her academic progress was aborted by the shortsightedness of her advisor, Lynn Thorndike, who rejected her thesis. (Many years later Columbia would grant Leona a Ph.D., using the books she had written in lieu of the dissertation she had worked on decades before.)

A lively conversation ensued. We spoke of our lives, and during the conversation the two women said to me that they were not lesbians but had been intimate friends since their late teens. They spoke about their love of the rare book business and related some of their adventures as dealers.

Tea was served, and we got down to business. Leona and Madeleine quizzed me about my area of collecting—English recusant books from 1558 to 1640. I had brought along the Allison and Rogers bibliography of these books in English, and they perused this. I further explained to them that I was interested in recusant books from the same period that had been written in Latin, French, German, and Italian.

We were then set to prowl along the shelves of books that dominated the house. All three of us eagerly eyed the titles. The two women continued a delightful chatter as we strolled along. Then, one of them yelled out, "I think I know of a couple titles!" We went into another room and there they were: three books that were in my collecting area. The three of us whooped as if we had just won the lottery. We found one other book later, after which we went back to sitting and conversing. Leona and Madeleine agreed to send the books to my home in San Francisco and to invoice me for them.

I never again saw Leona and Madeleine. As of 1970, I no longer frequented New York for business; and in the same year a financial crisis ended my recusant collecting. I did buy several items from the women after my visit, when they would send me descriptions of books that they had found in Europe. In 1969, they moved their home and bookshop to Manhattan, but I never saw the new premises.

All three of these booksellers are now dead, though Leona and Madeleine lived to be almost a hundred years old. I had only one face-to-face encounter with them, but I will always remember how they enhanced my collection; and I will always remember their generous, warm, and gracious reception of this young man of not yet thirty from California.



CHARLES A. FRACCHIA helped found San Francisco's *Rolling Stone Magazine* in 1967 and then, in 1980, wrote in *Second Spring* about growing up in the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church. An investment banker by profession, this native San Franciscan is famously a historian of the City by the Bay. Roxburghers often had to move to a less desirable floor in the University Club while Fracchia passionately enthralled another gathering. In 1988, this longtime Book Club member founded the San Francisco Historical Society and served as president until 2005. A graduate of the University of San Francisco, he is a favorite teacher there and at the City College of San Francisco. The latest of Charles Fracchia's fourteen books is *When the Water Came Up to Montgomery Street: San Francisco During the Gold Rush* (2009).

Heather's Mommies and Tango's Daddies: Children's Books as Agents of Radical Social Change

RANDALL TARPEY-SCHWED

IN 1978, gay and lesbian San Franciscans were celebrating the election of Harvey Milk as the first openly gay supervisor. But that aura of excitement was quickly replaced by anxiety as California voters were presented with "The Briggs Initiative" which, if passed, would have had the effect of banning gays and lesbians and theoretically anyone who supported gay rights from working in California's public schools. The language of the initiative indicated that this proscription was essential to "the state's interest in preserving and protecting the conjugal family unit." The implication was that gays and lesbians were a danger not only to children but also to the very notion of family.

The opposition to Proposition 6 was led by a thirty-four year-old, openly gay San Francisco schoolteacher named Tom Ammiano. Polls initially indicated that Briggs was likely to pass by a wide margin, but some surprising high profile opposition, including from former Governor Ronald Reagan, boosted the grass-roots opposition, and in the end Briggs failed by 58% to 42%. Three weeks later, Harvey Milk was assassinated.

Across the country in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, however, a very different sort of activism was taking place. The women of Lollipop Power Press, a feminist publishing cooperative, had chosen children's books as their vehicle for breaking down gender stereotypes and thereby working to advance the cause of women's equality. They had been publishing attractive, small, hand-drawn books for most of the 1970s. On the back of each book was imprinted the statement that "Lollipop Power is a feminist collective that ... publishes books to counteract sex-stereotyped behavior and role models presented by society to young children." Their stories often portrayed girls or boys using their imaginations to picture themselves doing non-gender-typical activities, like a girl flying a plane or a boy cooking a stew, as in Paula Goldsmd's 1973 *Did You Ever*.

But Lollipop Power truly broke new ground in 1979 when they published Jane Severance's *When Megan Went Away*. This book tells the story of Shannon, who is sad because her mother and her mother's gay partner Megan have broken up. It's astounding that this first of its kind title portrayed not just a gay parental relationship, which was an enormous taboo at the time, but also a "divorce" of sorts, another non-typical topic for a

children's book. And it's equally remarkable that such a book would have been published at a time when homosexuality was a crime in most states, when there was no legal provision for two same-gender adults to be co-parents, and when gay people were at risk of having their children forcibly removed by the state just by virtue of their being gay. This was a full ten years before the appearance of Lesléa Newman's notorious *Heather Has Two Mommies*, which Jesse Helms called "the most dangerous book in America." The women of Lollipop Power Press understood that children's books could be powerful tools for social change, and while their goal was the breakdown of traditional gender stereotypes, they accidentally became pioneers in portraying the radical notion of children being raised in households headed by two same gender parents.

Although *Megan* was the first children's book to address a lesbian or gay family situation, the family unit is not a happy one. Shannon is angry and is acting out because she misses Megan, but Megan is gone for good, and Shannon and her mother are alone. Ironically, it seems that even for a "radical feminist" publishing collective, a truly functional same gender family relationship was a relationship "that dare not picture itself."

The honor of first portraying a "fully functional" same gender parent arrangement went to Joan Drescher's *Your Family My Family*, published in 1980, which is one of a class of "many different kinds of families" stories. These books fill an important role in introducing young children to the concept of differences generally, and the notion that society should embrace all kinds of families. We read that "Margo and Rita are Peggy's family. Although Margo is her real mother, Peggy feels as if she has two mothers. That's twice as nice, except when they are both angry at her." This title also portrays a number of other family structures, and it ends with the sentiment, "People in a family care for one another." In Meredith Tax's *Families*, however, the second parent is disguised. Susie is described as living with her mother and her "godmother," but it is clear from the iconography showing two butch-looking women with short hair, as well as the implausibility of a girl living with her mother and her godmother, that this is an effort to portray a lesbian-led family while winking at the reader with a rather feeble attempt at a disguise.

Lesbian-led families were not the first groundbreaking family structures to appear in children's books in the '70s. In 1973, Arnold Adoff's *Black is Brown is Tan* became the first children's book published in the U.S. to portray a multi-racial family. This was six years after the Supreme Court

put an end to race-based restrictions on marriage in its landmark *Loving v. Virginia* case of 1967, at a time when 80% of Americans still disapproved of inter-racial marriages. Adoff's book is another example of a children's book being a leading indicator of coming social change. Unfortunately for children from inter-racial families, they had to wait until 1973 to see "their kind of family" portrayed in a children's book, even though such families had existed in this country since before the founding of the republic.

The next same-gender parenting taboo to be broken by a children's book was the first portrayal of a gay male couple raising a child, in 1983's *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*. But *Jenny* wasn't put out by an American publisher. In fact, it wasn't even written in English. Susanne Bosche was a Dane whose story was translated into English and published in the U.K. by the Gay Men's Press. The story found its way to the U.S. because a small Boston-based publisher called Alyson Press agreed to distribute it here. Alyson would eventually become a leader in this genre and had a huge impact on "normalizing" the portrayal of lesbian and gay parents in children's books.

In *Jenny*, we learn that Martin is Jenny's dad, while Eric "lives with Jenny's dad." Jenny's mum Karen lives nearby and visits them often. The two men are Jenny's primary caregivers and seem to both be equally involved in raising Jenny. The book appears to portray a real family, and it is illustrated with black and white photos of Eric, Martin, Jenny, and Karen engaged in ordinary day-to-day activities. As the story progresses, we find the men taking Jenny out for a fast ride in her wagon, nearly running over their neighbor, Mrs. Andrews, as she walks out her door. She is furious and angry, and exclaims, "You gays! Why don't you stay at home so the rest of us don't have to see you? Ugh!" Of course, Martin and Eric instinctively pick up Jenny and attempt to protect and comfort her. This portrayal of prejudice towards gay people was common in early examples of the genre and had the unfortunate effect of turning otherwise comforting portrayals into somewhat scary stories. Although the parents always came to the rescue in these stories, they nonetheless showed (somewhat truthfully) that society was not accepting of them or their families, and that the world was an unpredictable and unfriendly place for such children and their families.

Undoubtedly, however, the book that is most closely associated with this genre is Lesléa Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies*. At the end of the '80s, Newman, then a young poet living in Massachusetts, became a

lightning bolt for controversy. She set out to “... create a book that would help children with lesbian mothers feel good about themselves and their families,” and sent her manuscript to over fifty publishers, none of whom was willing to take a chance on it. She was ultimately forced to self-publish, promising a copy of the book to any family who wanted one in exchange for a donation of \$10 or more. In December 1989, the first copies of *Heather* rolled off the press, and copies of those first self-published editions, identifiable by the “In Other Words” logo on the back cover, are quite scarce.

Heather, the namesake of the story, has a cat named Gingersnap, a dog named Midnight, and two mommies. One day at preschool, Heather’s classmates start talking about what each of their fathers does for a living. Heather, concluding that she is the only child in class without a dad and that something must be wrong, begins to cry. But her teacher immediately picks up Heather to comfort her and explains that not everybody has a dad. That develops into an extended conversation with all the children wherein they begin to understand that there are many different kinds of families. If *Heather* has a flaw it’s that it spends its first eight pages explaining how Heather came into the world. There are descriptions of sperm and eggs, artificial insemination, and a midwife. Of course Newman meant to be helpful and sensitive, but the result was a book that (similar to *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*) was not entirely age appropriate for its intended audience. But to her credit, Newman listened to the feedback from parents and educators, and she modified the story in 1999 for the tenth anniversary edition by eliminating the references to insemination and simplifying the story. She has since gone on to publish dozens of children’s books and has won multiple literary awards.

At first, *Heather Has Two Mommies* didn’t attract a lot of attention. But in 1992, a man named Lon Mabon launched an anti-gay ballot initiative in Oregon called Measure 9, and he used copies of *Heather* as evidence of the so-called “militant homosexual agenda.” Soon after Mabon began his crusade, copies of *Heather* started disappearing from library shelves, and when the book was included in New York City’s “Rainbow Curriculum,” which was designed to teach respect for family differences, a full blown controversy erupted. The schools chancellor Joseph Fernandez was forced to remove it from the curriculum. Portions of *Heather* were read aloud on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1993, and Senator Jesse Helms said, in

reference to *Heather*, that “nothing positive happened to Sodom and Gomorrah, and nothing positive is likely to happen to America if our people succumb to the drumbeats of support for the homosexual lifestyle.”

But largely thanks to the initiative of Sasha Alyson, *Heather Has Two Mommies* would not be the last children’s book in America to portray families led by same gender couples. In 1980, Alyson had formed his own publishing firm in Boston focusing on titles of interest to an LGBT audience, and in 1990 he not only bought the rights to *Heather*, but he also started a brand new imprint called “Alyson Wonderland” whose mission was to “focus on books for and about the children of lesbian or gay parents.” These books are identifiable by the rabbit holding the Alyson Wonderland logo, and many of the early titles are rather scarce. Between 1990 and 1998, Alyson Wonderland published nineteen books whose audience was the children of families with gay or lesbian parents. This full-on commitment to publishing books supporting such families resulted in the creation of a body of work that became the corpus of an entirely new genre of children’s literature.

Alyson’s pioneering titles included Michael Willhoite’s *Daddy’s Wedding*, which is notable for including the first portrayal of a same-gender wedding in a children’s book, and which appeared eight years before the first such *legally recognized* weddings actually occurred in Massachusetts in 2004. This title has been out of print for many years and is highly collectible. Another of Michael Willhoite’s books, *Daddy’s Roommate* (an amusing euphemism for a gay partner), joined *Heather Has Two Mommies* in becoming one of the most challenged books of the last twenty-five years. The American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom tracks reports of attempts to remove or restrict books from libraries and schools, and such attempts are referred to as “challenges.” Children’s books featuring gay or lesbian parents are among the most frequently challenged books, and they are in seemingly good literary company, joining such controversial classics as Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, and Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*.

The reasons typically cited for banning or restricting access to children’s books like *Heather* and *Daddy’s Roommate* include that they are “inappropriate” for the age group, that they present topics that shouldn’t be “taught” in schools, or that such books will “promote the homosexual

lifestyle.” But what gets lost in such discussions is that children with same-gender parents *do* exist, and they and their classmates want and need access to positive, affirming, age-appropriate books that portray these families. Those who are so uncomfortable with the notion of such books that they would try to ban or restrict access to them typically either harbor a moral opposition to homosexuality or, more benignly, simply don’t want to have what they fear will be an awkward discussion with their children about how their child’s classmate could have two mommies or two daddies. But eliminating such books from schools and libraries is in effect a form of cultural genocide. If gay people can’t be prevented from having families of their own, then some people feel that at a minimum all positive images of them and their families should disappear from children’s books.

Ironically, however, the opponents’ attempts to ban these books or use them as political props for anti-gay measures has had the effect of broadly publicizing both the existence of the books and, more importantly, by implication, the existence of children in same-gender parent households. As Oscar Wilde famously said, “the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about,” and from the courthouse and the halls of congress, to the ballot box and prime time television, the country has been talking about gays and lesbians and the families they form, and rather surprisingly talking about the books they want to read their children.

In the twenty-three years since *Heather Has Two Mommies* was published, approximately 150 English-language books geared to a pre-teen audience and portraying same gender parents have been published. A few mainstream publishers like Simon & Schuster, MacMillan, and Penguin have put out the occasional title, but it’s still largely up to boutique publishers and self-publishing amateur writers to add to the genre, and less than a dozen new titles appear each year. The genre is evolving, and in books where same-gender parents are central to the story, it is much less common to see portrayals of prejudice. Importantly, moreover, fully-evolved children’s stories are appearing in which one of the characters just happens to have gay or lesbian parents, but the existence of same gender parents is not central to the story and is treated as being “no big deal.” In this way, these more recently published books are reflections of the evolution of the country on the issue of same-gender parenting. And while 150 books in this genre in total is infinitesimal compared to the estimated

20,000 children's books published each year in the U.S., these small numbers bely the books' disproportionate impact on our national dialogue and their importance as agents of radical social change.



Club member RANDALL TARPEY-SCHWED's simple search for books to read to his children that portray "his kind" of family revealed a fascinating thirty-five year history of publishers' cowardice, political grandstanding, and censorship. In addition to his interest in children's books, Randy is an expert on the life and works of M.F.K. Fisher. He curated the Club's 2008 Fisher exhibition, *A Delicious Obsession*, and is the editor of *M.F.K. Fisher: An Annotated Bibliography*.

Randall's exhibition, *From Heather's Mommies to Tango's Daddies: The Evolution of Family Affirming Children's Literature*, will be on view at the Gay and Lesbian Center Exhibit Space at the San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin Street, third floor, through August 1st. Randall will speak at the Book Club on Monday, September 30th, about his collection of children's books.



Barbara Jane Land

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SERENDIPITY

We sit here waiting for the new Bay Bridge to collapse before it opens after Caltrans used 2,300 steel rods too hard to meet government and professional bridge requirements. The Federal Highway Administration, the American Society for Testing and Materials, and even Caltrans' own standards condemned the rods, while the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials outright banned their use. His Majesty, Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, who proposed the bridge, was a better civil engineer and yet some said he was nuts. We ought to keep the old eastern span.

Do any of our members have any money remaining after CODEX and the San Francisco and Los Angeles antiquarian book fairs? Just checking. Booksellers, please note any respondents.

Club Centennial Celebrations Continue: In August, Fred and Barbara Voltmer, who put our Clubrooms' press into production, will celebrate the bi-centennial of George Clymer's Columbian press with a broadside signed and numbered by member Alan Dye. This iron press is recognizable at work by its bobbing eagle. Announcements will come on how you may be broadsided as you bob the eagle.

Bodoni's My Type

Excited guests packed the Clubrooms on February 25th to hear Valerie Browne Lester speak on *Bodoni: Faces & Places*. Lester has great poise, undoubtedly gained from her work as a Pan American Airlines stewardess in 1962, an experience she describes in *Fasten Your Seat Belts! History and Heroism in the Pan Am Cabin* (1995). Her literary ability is an inheritance. Charles Dickens chose her great-great grandfather, Hablot Knight Browne, to illustrate his books. Read all about it in Lester's *Phiz: The Man Who Drew Dickens* (2004).

Lester's website pointedly notes that she "makes sure ... the subjects she chooses take her to interesting places." Her presence in warm California rather than home, cold in "the land of the bean and the cod," is proof. In 2007, while she was seeking a writing project, mutual friends arranged a

dinner with Valerie and the Voltmers. Conversation turned to Bodoni and, from his magnificent printing library, Fred appeared with the Italian's *Manuale Tipografico* (1818), a two volume folio type specimen book. Lester was off to Italy. Now, back with a manuscript, she has a publisher.

Giambattista Bodoni (1740-1813), the best known European printer during his lifetime and the developer of a distinctive type face, is a timely subject. The bicentennial of his death occurs on November 30th of this year. Born into a printing family in Northern Italy, the accomplished and ambitious lad gained knowledge of type punches and wood engraving before departing to Rome in 1758.

When Bodoni showed up at the Propaganda Fide Press, Cardinal Spinelli hired the precocious would-be printer on the spot and set him to cleaning and organizing 200 years' worth of type punches. The printing house propagated the faith and soon Bodoni set texts in Arabic, Coptic, and Tibetan. Impressed with his ability, the press asked him to sign his work. Lester noted Bodoni lived by Trajan's Column, finished in 113, and its lettering sublimely influenced him. Meantime, his printing resembled that of Frenchman Pierre Simon Fournier (1712-1768). It displayed ornament and heaviness, but Bodoni determined to lighten up.

In 1766, Bodoni left Rome to travel to England. He hoped to meet John Baskerville (1706-1775), whose specimen sheets he admired, and which captured the attention of Club member Bill Barlow years ago. Instead, Bodoni came down with malaria. While recuperating, the Duke of Parma invited him to that city.

Prime Minister Guillaume Du Tillot determined to and did make Parma a center of culture. He Frenchified it. The eighteen-year-old Duke was "highly educated, but rather dim. It is possible to be both." [Laughter] In 1768, the Duke's librarian remembered his young friend in Rome and Bodoni became the ducal printer. They got along well and it was not their relationship that poisoned the duke thirty-four years later in 1802.

In 1788, Bodoni published his first book of type specimens and, after setting up his own shop in 1791, rapidly developed his distinctive book design. He eschewed ornamentation and illustration. Bodoni's huge folio presentation books shone from the purity of the paper, the sharp lines of graceful thick and thin letters, and, above all, from an exquisite sense of spacing.

The gift of a Bodoni book soothed relations between nations and calmed feuding nobles. The Emperor Napoleon admired him greatly. Following

the printer's death in 1813 and five years of labor, his widow published his masterpiece specimen book and ran the press until 1834.

Of course, midway through Lester's stimulating talk, ignored type lice jinxed the Powerpoint. Naturally, she kept calm and carried on. The learned lawyer next to us looked at the black screen and quipped, "This is the great value of the Book." Books do not go suddenly blank. A half-dozen people swarmed around the recalcitrant machine. When it returned to life, pictures appeared squashed and elongated horizontally. "The Revenge of the Print Makers," came the comment from beside us. The Printed Book *will* triumph!

The evening closed when Kathleen Burch and John McBride presented a keepsake from the Northern California Chapter of the American Printing History Association. Printed at the San Francisco Center for the Book in Sumner Stone's artistic rendering of Bodoni's type, it is Benjamin Franklin's 1787 letter to the Italian printer shortly before Bodoni's first specimen book appeared.

Franklin (1706-1790) wrote from his hometown, Philadelphia, where he had been attending the Constitutional Convention. There he had told delegates, "We indeed seem to feel our want of political wisdom, since we have been running about in search of it."

Yet, on October 14, 1787, Franklin had no doubts about his own printing wisdom. While praising Bodoni's types, he criticized ten italic capitals. Lester terms this letter "rude," not only for content. The elderly Franklin, well known in the salons of Paris, wrote to Bodoni in English. Poor Richard should have followed the maxims in his almanacs.

Oscar Lewis Award

On March 25th, Roberto Trujillo, Head of Stanford's Special Collections and Chair of the Publication and Oscar Lewis Award Committees at the Book Club, explained that Stanford first learned of book arts awardee Carolee Campbell in 1984, when she visited the university to show work from her new Ninja Press. They now have everything she has produced.

Carolee Campbell's Ninja Press has been unswervingly dedicated to contemporary poetry since the inception of the press in 1984. Each time Carolee sets a poem in type, letter by letter, she embarks on what

she calls “an excavation of the poetic experience,” achieving a depth of understanding she never experienced as a reader. That experience becomes visibly manifest through her mastery of printing and design. Focus and discipline are constant and her aesthetics shine. In selecting her, the committee had its “Pope Moment.” She was the unanimous choice on the first ballot for the 19th annual Oscar Lewis Awards and the white smoke went up.

At the Award ceremony, Carolee appreciatively and lightheartedly remarked:

I won an Emmy in 1976. And now, all these years later, I have an Oscar. Back then, I didn't attend the awards ceremony because I was rowing my raft through the rapids of the Grand Canyon. For this ceremony, I decided to show up. It was back then that I made a conscious decision to leave the acting profession. I wanted to leave the party before it peaked. And aside from marrying my husband, Hector Elizondo, it was the best decision I ever made. Because since then, and for all these years, I've been in the thrall of books and poetry; in making books that are steeped in poetry. Bookmaking for me is like being in the embrace of a demon lover—with lots of heavy breathing. And so far—I haven't even tried to get away. Thank you so much for this recognition.

Campbell then passed out a keepsake revealing her sense of fun and pun.



In April 2013, the *California Farmer*, alas, ceased publication. Founded January 4, 1855, by Colonel James Lloyd Lafayette Warren, it was the voice of the farmers, and the oldest agricultural journal in the nation. In the 1850s, its editor founded the California State Fair, praised and promoted California's unparalleled farm land, and saved all of his correspondence to the delight of philatelists collecting express and postal markings on envelopes.

Beginning in 1981, editor Len Richardson took on bureaucrats, lambasted the Bank of America as family farms folded, fought in the water wars, and detailed the state's largest cash crop, grass, and we do not mean the asparagus grown so well in the Delta. In 2007, the State Fair named Richardson Agriculturist of the Year, the first journalist to be so honored.

We treasure our bound 1855 volume. Luckily, Henry Snyder's California Digital Newspaper Collection has the weekly *California Farmer* through 1880 online.

Also in April, Anthea Hartig, Director of the California Historical Society, rejoiced twice. First, the Historical Society arranged with the University of California Press to take over the editing and publishing of *California History* beginning in the fall. CHS will print its last issue of the ninety-year old quarterly this spring.

Well-Centered

The San Francisco Center for the Book, founded by Club members Mary Austin and Kathleen Burch in 1996, attracts Club presidents—past Presidents Burch, John Crichton, and Curtiss Taylor and President Anne Smith among them. They are just a sample of the talent that allowed the Center for the Book to open on January 15, 2013, in its new digs at 375 Rhode Island Street. More than 600 bookish aficionados attended its gala open house on April 26.

Though on that street, the Center emulates pugnacious Rhode Island in ability but not size. Modeled on two similar organizations in New York and Minneapolis, it opens Dorrs. [Blame this obscure pun on our library, which contains a book on the Dorr Rebellion of 1841-42 that greatly broadened suffrage.] This West Coast pioneer has 1,400 people taking its more than 300 workshops offered yearly and also offers numerous events. Its annual *Roadworks: A Steamroller Printing Festival* crushes any competition by three tons. The tenth rolling is scheduled for September 29, 2013, at the Center's Potrero Hill site. Join this jollification as printmakers ink their blocks, paper them, and admire the impression made by tons of rolling iron.

Co-founder Burch writes, as a prelude to a longer piece to be featured in the next issue:

Our little Rhode Island facility is twice the size of our old facility, yet half the price with room to grow, right around the corner but on a nicer street (complete with a birch garden across from us [hereby rendered Burch garden in her honor]), plus parking (not necessary during weekends or evenings, but awfully nice during weekdays), and the perfect backyard for barbeques ... We're having a blast & then some....



Nearby, the American Bookbinders Museum at 1962 Harrison Street at 16th Street did not fare well. On Lincoln's Birthday, President Tim James of the round-the-corner Taurus Bindery dispatched, "Mayday! Mayday!" and abandoned ship. Twice in the first week of February water rushed from an "aged rat's nest of poorly planned and amateurishly installed piping," in the plumber's words, to flood displays and library.

James needs a secure, dry, temperature-controlled space to store 3,000 imprints, nine file cabinets, and numerous boxes, as well as 750 square feet for the heavy binding equipment. Those wishing to donate, send checks to Bookbinders Museum Relief, c/o Taurus Bookbindery, 2736 16th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

Student Affairs

BCC Programs Manager Georgie Devereux reports:

On Wednesday, April 17, the Club hosted a Book Arts Student Showcase. The idea for the event first emerged in a conversation between Kathy Walkup, Book Art Program Head at Mills College, and Lucy Cohen, former BCC Executive Director, over lunch at the Club last summer. The Bay Area is a hub for book art programs, Kathy and Lucy noted, and yet there isn't really a venue where students enrolled in these programs can meet one another and engage on common ground. It is the Club's hope that it can become that venue—and that the showcase on the 17th was the first of what will be many similar events.

The attendees were five emerging book artists from Mills, five from San Francisco Art Institute, and one from California College of the Arts (there had been four others but finals-period took its last-minute toll), along with their professors and administrators (Julie Chen and Lara Durback from Mills, Charles Hobson and Macy Chadwick from SFAI, and Alisa Golden from CCA).

The evening began quietly, the students arriving shyly, somewhat nervously, like any first-time participants about to engage in something new. They dutifully signed the guest book, expressed newcomers' awe at the beauty of the Clubrooms, and stole first glances (there would be time for deeper looking later) at the Center for Book Arts exhibition.

But soon the books themselves seemed to melt the ice. The students laid their projects out on tables, and as they walked around, looking with their hands as well as their eyes—opening accordion books, flipping through a story in the form of a deck of cards, passing tomes of various sizes and textures back and forth—the room quickly warmed with questions, praise, knowing comments.

The initial period of looking was followed by about thirty minutes of informal presentations, in which each participant spoke briefly and eloquently about his or her work. Daniel Gonzalez-Fernandez showed off his miniature book inspired by *The Voyager's* Golden Record. Margaret Seelie, obsessed with mermaids, humorously described the process of running broadsides through a press set with inked fish scales (she had scaled the fish herself in the studio, much to her studio-mates' alarm). John Steck elaborated on his collection of photographs, an elegy, each image developed in a substance that would, like the memory it sought to capture, change over time and eventually disappear.

The limits of my own book art vocabulary prevent me from going into too much technical detail, but it was obvious even to my outsider's eyes that these projects were extraordinarily executed—as thoroughly developed in concept as in craft. And clearly I was not alone in feeling impressed. There were five professors in the audience, and from the looks on their faces during and their comments after the presentations, it was obvious that they too were wowed, proud to see this younger generation take the floor.

After, the Club served supper provided by E&O, and it was fun to watch groups as they ate clustered around the bar and squeezed together on the couches, talking away in the Club that was, I like to imagine, one hundred years ago, and in former locations, filled with the similarly vibrant buzz of its founding members.

In the future, the Club hopes to host similar events with an expanded audience, but this event was strictly and intentionally for the students. From their comments that evening and feedback in emails after, they liked it that way. They exchanged contact info and ideas. They chatted like friends in a new yet familiar haven, of things that only book artists might understand, in a special language all their own.



The student showcase has received much glowing feedback, including the following from Mills student Faith Hale:

THANK YOU for organizing this event! It was a really valuable experience and everyone I talked to who participated was really happy to have done it. We had a program reviewer come to Mills to talk to the students about the strengths and weaknesses of our program... and I totally bragged about this event, saying that we were really lucky to live in an area with a community of bookmakers and long-standing institutions such as BCC and how we all got together and had delicious salad and networked....

Fine Binding at the Club and Elsewhere

On April 29, the Club witnessed a packed turnout for the opening of *The Legacy of Florence Walter: Celebrating a Century at The Book Club of California*, curated by Kathleen Burch and John McBride and scheduled to run through August. Walter (1884-1972) joined the Club in 1913 and became its first woman president, serving from 1952-1955. Few families may claim such a long-standing Club connection!

Other Walter-Club connections abound. In February 1907, brothers Edgar, twenty-nine, and John Walter, twenty-seven, took out licenses to marry Florence, twenty-two, and Pearl Schwartz, nineteen. In about 1920, Edgar Walter, a prominent, nationally known sculptor, cast a small bronze plaque—such is outside the Clubrooms in larger format—for life members of the Club. The indomitable Barbara Land—"Lioness of the Library," in the words John McBride—graciously donated one to the Club's collection and passed it around.

However, the focus of the evening was on Florence Walter's superb bookbinding. The exhibition features forty-five of them, including a unique binding of James Joyce's *Ulysses* illustrated by Henri Matisse and another of Henry Miller's *Into the Night Life*, personally inscribed by the author to Walter.

Beginning in 1936, Walter averaged four exquisite bindings a year for the next twenty years, plus some later. Of the seventy-five she estimated she had produced as of 1954, fifty are known, and due to the generosity

of her large family, forty-five are on display. Of these, in 2012 the three children of Marjorie Walter Bissinger (1912-2003), Paul, Peggy, and Thomas, generously donated seventeen to the Library's collection. Walter did French style avant-garde bindings for avant-garde books and they reflect the era.

At the event, Library Chair Henry Snyder stunned the audience with two more examples of the community and public spirit of the extended Walter family, who donated to the library: (1) \$15,000 to install three bookcases on the east or hall side of the library to house the "Florence Walter Collection." (2) The best private collection of Grabhorn Press production.

Florence, and to a lesser extent her husband John Walter (1877-1930), who ran the San Francisco Art Association and a furniture business, admired, collected, and commissioned special printings from Edwin and Robert Grabhorn. The Grabhorn books passed to daughter Eleanor (Nell) Walter Stinton (1910-1997), a prominent abstract expressionist in the 1950s and 1960s and a feminist constructionist of the 1970s. Appropriately, Mills College, home of the Florence S. Walter Studio of Hand Bookbinding, hosted a retrospective exhibition of Sinton's art in 1981. Sinton's daughter, Margot Sinton Biestman, became custodian of the collection, and knowing the long connection between the club and the Grabhorns, she decided to give it to The Book Club of California.

After Henry's introduction, five of eight grandchildren descended from Nell, Marjorie, and the third daughter, Carol Walter Sinton (1917-2002), and one great grandchild recounted memories of Florence Walter in her bindery and elsewhere. The 1951 studio at 2745 Larkin—complete with an attached bomb shelter—is the only survivor. The huge house at 2299 Clay Street was razed and the Ramparts Lodge at Lake Tahoe, where the family gathered for alternate Sunday meals, burnt down.

"Gaggy," as her family knew Florence, dominated the lively sessions at Tahoe, which one family member remembered as "Sunday Night at the Fights." Gaggy permitted stories and politics, gossip and sex, but never business! The family recalled her fondly as disciplined, elegant, poised, and above all, mysterious. Yet, she exuded an air of sorrow brought on by the early deaths of her parents, sister, son, and husband. Walter found solace in art.



While being all bound up, we have late news. Actually, very tardy news. In June 2012, fabulous book binder Eleanore Ramsey, the Club's 2004 Book Arts Oscar Lewis Award winner, won the Sixth Helen Warren DeGolyer Triennial Competition for American Bookbinding Award for Excellence in Fine Binding.

The J. S. Bridwell Library at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, sponsors this binding competition every three years. Contestants submit a recent example of their work and propose a binding for a book in the library. The subject in 2012 was Pierre-Francois Didot's widely read *The Imitation of Christ* (1788). The winner binds the book and it joins the library's holdings, as stated in its 2006 exhibition, *Six Centuries of Master Bookbinding*.

Ramsey has been a binder since 1970, and her best training came from her twelve-year studio partner Barbara Fallon Hiller (1927-1989). Her design in red of a combination of French Gothic spires and windows drew on the name of an 1840s romantic cover style to echo Didot's inspirational work. Ramsey proposed a cardinal "cathedral binding." The Bridwell's Didot will be magnificent!

What won the jury was her sample. With Ramsey in Sausalito, the unbound pages of her example entry arrived over the Chrysopylae. Blame that name on John C. Fremont. The Chrysopolis, or Golden City of San Francisco, dispatched a 1930 Grabhorn Press production to her across the Golden Gate. Ramsey drew from the narrative of Virginia Woolf's *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* to depict a bouquet of gray and white flowers with three interspersed yellow pencils. Woolf's protagonist walks at night past flower shops to buy pencils and discover self.

This is not Ramsey's first entry in this prestigious competition. In 2003, she took a giant leap of twelve feet, or "By the mark twain!" as steamboat leadsmen used to sing out. She tied for the Jury Prize for Design to bind the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. A 2007 *San Francisco Chronicle* article remarked that Ramsey thoroughly reads the subject to be bound, "I try to learn everything I can about a book before I design the binding." Her empathy shows!



At a Club event we met Laurelle Swan, a most unusual lady, for she has opened, not closed, a fine book store! On the first of May she celebrated the

day making Walnut Creek the place to seek. Swan's Fine Books is at 1381 Locust Street, set back a few spaces. Luckily Peet's Coffee is nearby.

Swan's books, "used, collectible, rare, & out of the ordinary," are nicely arranged alphabetically, in good condition, with decorative bindings, and reasonably priced. Check out laurelle@swansfinebooks.com at (925) 956-7926. It is a significant shop.

Let's hope the Sign of the Swan becomes a bibliophilic gathering place. While there, we met ABAA member, James M. Dourgarian—not a daguerrean who takes Gold Rush style photographs, but a specialist in Wallace Stegner and John Steinbeck. He may be reached at bookman@jimbooks.com, 1595-B Third Avenue, Walnut Creek, (925) 935-5033.



Since we are wearing out this issue of *Fine Books*, the gently mad Nicolas Basbanes writes about our famous San Francisco-based Arion Press, or "Andrew Hoyem on printing, binding, and selling fine press books in the digital age." Hoyem emphasized the importance of book dealers when his antecedent Grabhorn Press flourished. The Grabhorns sold direct to fine bookstores, which then retailed them.

The succumbing of such shops shoved Hoyem into selling to standing order subscribers, who receive a thirty-percent discount. After thirty-eight years, his printing production is comparable to the Club's—he publishes two or three works a year. The ninety-sixth book of the Arion Press appeared in November 2012. It is Irish Nobel Prize winner Seamus Hearney's poem *Stone from Delphi* with sixteen watercolors by Wendy Artin. The 1984 title poem refers to the navel of the earth and the volume includes Hearney's other poems with classical references.

On April 24, the Grabhorn Institute raised \$100,000 for its preservation and printing apprenticeships, quoth the *San Francisco Chronicle* evermore, and all had fun doing it. Grabhorn Chair Philip Bowles quipped, "Arion Press is like Knott's Berry Farm for highbrows."

Master of the press Andrew Hoyem appeared in a brilliant red jacket for this cardinal effort, and why not? University of Southern California poetic professor Dana Gioia, Ex-chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, praised what Hoyem and the Arion Press does with classic books that

have been in print forever: “Andrew understands the relationship between artistry and art, because you don’t print works like *The Moonstone*, *Moby Dick*, and the Holy Bible unless you have a vision.”



CHANGE OF EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

On behalf of the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee of The Book Club of California regrettably announces the resignation of longtime Executive Director Lucy Rodgers Cohen. Lucy departed in mid-June to pursue new interests and opportunities.

Speaking for all of us, I am grateful for Lucy’s many achievements and dedicated service to the Book Club. Since joining as Executive Director in 2006, Lucy modernized our accounting systems; hired our excellent office staff; supervised the development of our online presence; managed our move into elegant, expanded quarters; materially aided the Publications Committee; and led the Club’s superb 2012 Centennial celebration. That year-long event included a traveling exhibition of the Club’s publication history, a three-day symposium on the cultural history of the book in California, and a gala luncheon honoring the Club’s birthday.

Additionally, Lucy managed the expansion of the Club’s public profile. She developed donors and sponsors, rented the Club’s rooms, encouraged membership, and helped to introduce new programs that entertained and informed more members and guests than ever before. Lucy’s vision, energy, experience, and love of the book and the book world invigorated the Club. We will miss her.

The Executive Committee of the Book Club will act as a transition team in the coming months. It will work with its dedicated staff to smoothly install the next chapter in the Club’s leadership.

We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions via president@bccbooks.org

— DR. ANNE W. SMITH, *President*



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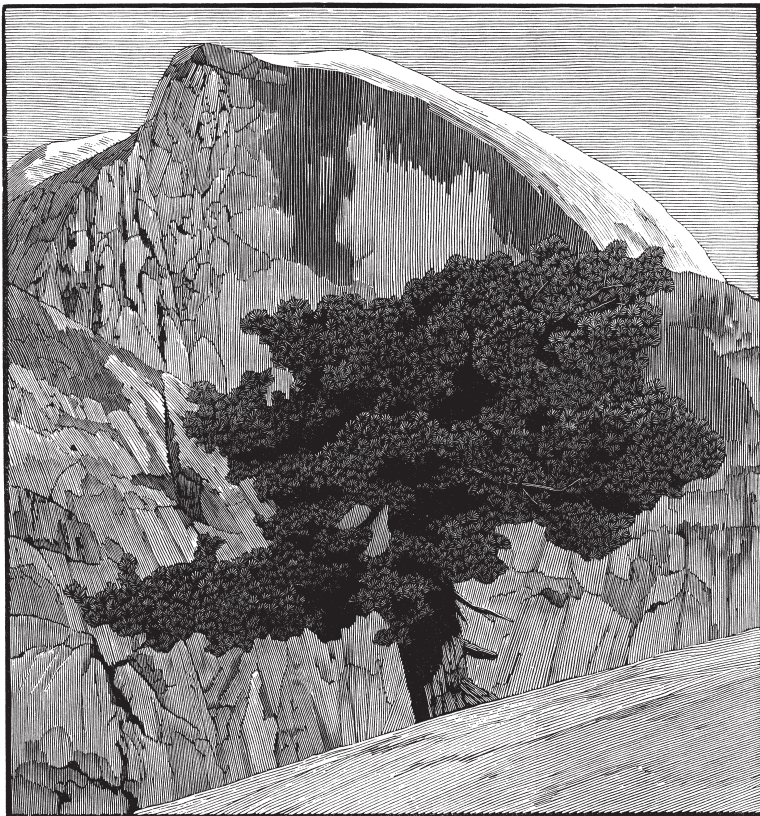
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