

John Aubrey, Farsighted Steward

Matters of antiquity are like the light after sunset – clear at first – but by and by crepusculum – the twilight comes – then total darkness.

– John Aubrey

Brenda Rossini

For modern antiquarians and lovers of the abstruse and obtuse (and why not?), author Ruth Scurr has conceived the life and violent times of a debt-ridden gentleman collector, antiquarian, illustrator, transcriber, surveyor, and conservationist in *John Aubrey, My Own Life*, interposed with excerpts from Aubrey's publications. It is a delicious and erudite read.

Aubrey's own book *Brief Lives*, a collection of biographical and historical scholarship and "full of drama and poignancy," is the source from which Scurr has cobbled this parfait journal of a 17th-century itinerant bookster. His self-deprecating preface to *Brief Lives* suggests that it be "interposed as a sheet of waste paper only in the binding of a book," which was opposite his life's vocation.

He was born in Dorset in 1626. From childhood, Aubrey was drawn to manuscripts, scrolls, and parchment collected within the hallowed halls of religious libraries – the last hurrah of England's monks. With his father, a sportsman and hunter, Aubrey also indulged in the outdoors. He was a constant traveler, trudging the landscape on his quest to collect. His nature surveys and cataloging included plants, soils, cockleshells, springs, and even cattle. He remarked often on Dorset's precious flowers, particularly the ones that swept its meadows – cowslips, primroses, daffodils, and gorse. Nor were turnips that grew on England's green and pleasant land ignored. For Aubrey's instinct was to salvage – debris, paper, potsherds... whatever.

He recognized that the Sceptred Isle, surrounded by waters and beset with mists and mosses, compelled conservation. He made it his calling, and not just for the protection of manuscripts from nature's elements but from alternative uses such as pastry pan linings or as "toppers for the bungholes of ale barrels." His collection of essays on these archaeological, biological, and naturalist pursuits is contained in *Monumenta Britannica*.

Aubrey never forgets the locale where he was born and where began his explorations –

Shakespeare's education took a permanent pause at this very phase, but that he emerged nonetheless a renowned poet and playwright.) When Aubrey left the countryside for Oxford, he read classics and languages and cultures and religions and was engaged in manuscript research, transcription, and collection at the Bodleian Library.

The book also touches on Aubrey's wealthy contemporaries: for example, Elias Ashmole, who would bequeath his superb collection (some of it grievously misbegotten) to Oxford,



the monuments, historic houses, castles, and personages of Sherborne, Dorset. It is where today stands Sherborne Castle, an eponymous school, and where Thomas Hardy and the Powys brothers wrote of heather, farms, and fallen women in the 19th century.

Aubrey's grammar school education included Latin and Greek, requiring the dreaded memorization and declensions – which is the point. (It has been written that

and now preserved at the museum named for him. Not to mention Thomas Hobbes, Inigo Jones, John Locke, Isaac Newton, and Christopher Wren. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was prolific in all manner of prose, besides Sherlock Holmes and stories of fairies and spiritualism. In his biography of Christopher Wren, Doyle cited Aubrey, a fellow occultist, as a source. Both were tethered to the study of

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CAXTONIAN

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the dark arts, but as Aubrey's friend Hobbes wrote, life was "nasty, brutish, and short."

The age in which Aubrey studied and survived was one of urgency and violence – a legacy left England by unhinged Henry VIII: tumult between Protestants and Catholics; the Civil Wars (1642); the public execution of Charles I (1649); the ascension of the military in the person of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector and *dictator interruptus* until 1658; the restoration of the monarchy (1661) in the person of Charles II; the disinterment of Cromwell's corpse and its grisly, symbolic "execution" on the gallows three years after his death; the brief reign of Catholic James II culminating in the Glorious Revolution (1688-89) and James' overthrow; the final uprooting of Catholicism and William of Orange, foreign but Protestant, assuming the English throne. The revolutions made England what it is today, beginning with a nascent parliamentary democracy and a Bill of Rights accorded to Church of England countrymen.

In this dynamic rose yet another revolution – in print and publishing. London was awash with booksellers and stationers. A paper-products economy surged – pamphlets, religious and political tracts, manuscripts, and books were sold and auctioned at bookstalls, sheds, and shops. They littered the streets around St. Paul's and Paternoster Row, serving the neighboring printer-publishers whose scholars and scribes wrote their limpid prose and then spent their negligible proceeds at local hostelryes. Paper was expensive. (It wasn't manufactured in England until the 18th century, but importation and distribution was feasible thanks to a burgeoning postal service.) Funding could also be found with undertakers who predictably had deep pockets, in the age of the Great Plague and deaths in daily multiples.

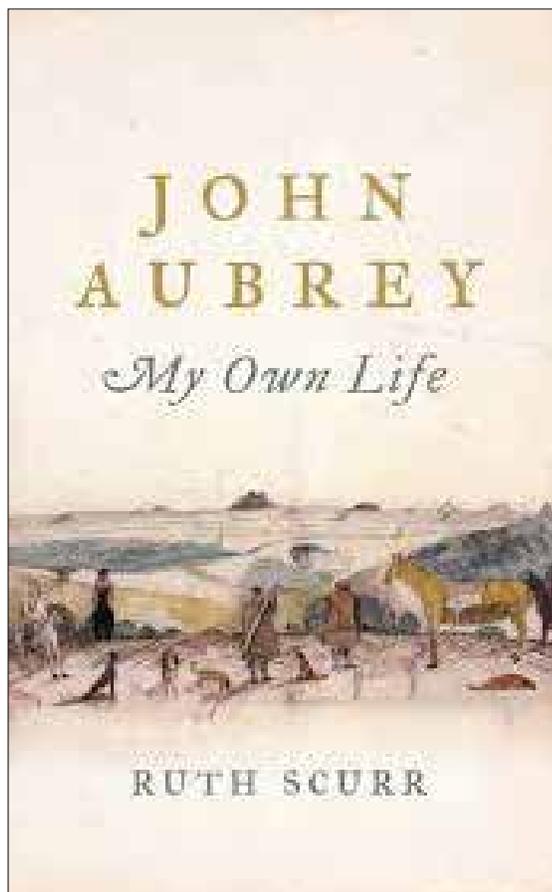
In 1649, Aubrey was in the largely unruly mass who witnessed the spectacle of Charles I's execution. About the King's remarks prior to his beheading, Aubrey reported: "On this day, King Charles was executed. It was bitter cold, so he wore two heavy shirts, lest he should shiver and seem afraid." When his severed head was held up for the crowd, many took bits of his blood as relics or souvenirs. Aubrey made no mention of having added a blood relic to his collection.

His studies at Oxford were interrupted not only by the debts he inherited at his father's death, but by England's Civil Wars. During this time, Parliament also imposed censorship and book burning (including works of famed poet, defender of King Charles's execution, and usurer John Milton) at universities. Aubrey left Oxford and traveled to London for legal studies at the Middle Temple and a wider involvement in antiquities studies and preservation.

He also chronicled the private lives of various and sundry – whether eminent or penurious – in the calamitous years of the Great Plague, the Civil Wars, and the Great Fire. Today's besieged literary societies might commiserate. The literati were among the citizens who fled England, sometimes neglecting to pay their membership dues to the Royal Society, which was left teetering on the brink. Aubrey, despite his own circumstances (he remained penniless) always paid stalwartly.

During the course of his studies and travels, he visited monuments, cathedrals, archaeological sites, battlefields, and campsites. He collected plaques and translated inscriptions. He read manuscripts, filling the margins with queries (often written in Latin) and annotations. He was fascinated with Roman artifacts, so he dug and discovered Roman coins and pottery. Had he not attended to these relics, no vestige of Rome's civilizing role in England's history would have remained. At another obsession of his, Stonehenge, Aubrey's efforts were finally acknowledged in 1920 when a circle of 56 chalk "holes" was named after him.

He wrote *Brief Lives* between 1680 and 1690, including in it the life of Will Shakespeare (1564-1616), but written with such brevity, that one can only guess why he bothered. His claim was that, because "our present writers reflect so much upon particular



persons and coxcombeities, that twenty years hence they will not be understood." Shakespeare was first a butcher, like his father, a country schoolmaster in his younger years, and then an actor and gifted writer of dramatic poems and comedies – only one of which Aubrey cites, the 1597 "Midsomernight Dreame." There is nothing whatever of the First Folio (published in 1623, seven years after the Bard's death) nor the history plays and tragedies.

Apparently, Shakespeare's background was a topic of discussion and inquiry. While at Oxford in 1642, Aubrey learned from a college acquaintance, Josias Howe, details that today would be labeled as "hearsay on hearsay." Howe was from the parish Grendon in Buckinghamshire. It had a road one could take from Stratford-on-Avon to London along with Gypsy travelers in commercial pursuits. Howe was acquainted with a constable in Grendon, and the officer informed him that he was the constable character in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Grendon constable was alive and spinning Shakespeare yarns in 1642. Not surprisingly, there is no mention of a constable in the play. By the time of latter day Wikipedia, it is reported as fact that Shakespeare himself stayed at a Grendon B&B. This data escaped the accounts of Howe, the Grendon constable, and Aubrey.

In the Scurr diary, Aubrey includes brief sketches of Ben Jonson. He does not acknowledge ever having met him. Aubrey's source was Izaak Walton's biography of Ben Jonson. Jonson, when he wasn't writing with distinctive brilliance, was an irascible pub habitu . He found lusty stimulation and wrote the



Ruth Scurr

lyrics to "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes." Aubrey was but ten years old when Ben Jonson died in 1637, but from the recollections of Jonson's friends, Aubrey wrote as a veritable firsthand witness: "He would many times exceede in drink (Canarie was his beloved Liqueur)..." Jonson would also emerge in modern times as a verifiable Shakespeare source.

The diary also centered on women: they were hunters like Aubrey's father, slatterns and wenches, litigious kooks, nurses, algebraists, luminous and fleshy mistresses, murderereses, witches, and great ladies. And then there were drapers, aldermen, and Latin tutors. Marinated corpses. Beheadings aplenty, and burial places designated for fanatics. There is unresolvable sickness: fevers, piles,

scurvy, digestive attacks, hangovers, deafness, and blindness. And there were the stopped clocks – daily deaths from gangrene, venereal disease, gout, stroke, apoplexy, and consumption. It is all a titillating, coarse spectacle of 17th-century life in England.

We learn of the invention of the wind gun, the widespread use of glass in homes, and of curative diets: milk, buttermilk and balsam; white wine with ash, and remedies like boar's fat with a sprinkle of cumin. Some of Aubrey's more eccentric pursuits involved his assistance in the transfer of blood between chickens; remarking as he traveled through Ireland that the "natives scorned both industry and comforts," and preserved superstitions and witches' prognostications.

The law was recorded as a pernicious ass in his studies. Aubrey himself was arrested for debts and plagued with lawsuits, one of which was for breach of promise. (He never did marry, revealing in 1656 that he had venereal disease from perambulations with strumpets. Mercifully, he chose the high ground, fearing to transfer his bed-sickness to a wife. His proclivities thus led to concupiscence in the platonic ideal, as author John Gardner would imaginatively say.

On June 7, 1697, John Aubrey died at Oxford, content that he had "rescued the past from the teeth of time." Oxford buried him in an unmarked plot beside St. Mary Magdalen's church, Aubrey having died a gentleman but a pauper. Discovery of the grave and its contents would be left to a future historical explorer. There is, however, a plaque at the church commemorating the man.

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Caxton Club COUNCIL NOTES

Leora Siegel, Secretary

At the March 21, 2018, meeting of the Caxton Council at the Union League Club, the Membership Committee presented two applications. Terrence M. Deneen (Resident Member) was nominated by Lynne Thomas and seconded by Scott Koeneman. Terry recently retired as a senior advisor at Palisades Capital Advisors, where he handled a wide range of legislative and regulatory issues. As a charter fellow of the American College of Employee Benefits Counsel, he has lectured on employment benefits law at the University of Virginia and Georgetown University law schools. He is a graduate of the College of

Law at the University of Illinois, where he also earned an MA in medieval history. Terry retains an abundant enthusiasm for books and the book arts and remains a strong supporter of the University of Illinois Libraries.

Soma Roy (Resident Member) was nominated by Sarah Alger and seconded by Jackie Vossler. Soma has been described by her nominator as an "enthusiastic book lover with wide-ranging interests who appreciates and is curious about the book arts" and by herself as one who "luxuriates in books." She holds an advanced degree in electrical engineering and works in the energy/sustainability sector of Siemens, where she is deeply

committed to biodiversity conservation. Both candidates were unanimously approved by the Council.

For Caxton's 125 th anniversary, a sub-committee chaired by Paul Gehl with committee members Susan Hanes, Margaret McCamant, and Lou Pitschmann, will conduct research in the Caxton archives regarding the history of the logo. Additionally, an oral history project to interview past presidents is being planned.

In other business, due to the resignation of John Roche, Bill Locke was elected as a new Council member to fill the vacancy.

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Wilbert Hasbrouck, 1924-2018, a Remembrance

Robert McCamant

Wilbert Hasbrouck joined the Caxton Club twice: first in our centennial year, 1995, and then again in 2014. As he told me when I interviewed him for Caxtonians Collect in 2016, “I guess I just got too busy for a while there.” He died on February 10 of this year.

He was a bookman (collector, publisher, bookseller), but also an architect, a family man, clubman, and – fiercely – a preservationist. Very nearly all his enterprises had to do with celebrating architects and builders who had preceded him: saving buildings from demolition, keeping the buildings in order so that new publics could appreciate them, publishing studies of architects who had gone before, selling collections of architectural books others had assembled.

Hasbrouck grew up in Iowa and studied architecture in the School of Engineering at Iowa State College (now University). He loved math and physics, and worked summers as a mason’s tender for a construction company. After graduation he moved to Chicago and went to work for the buildings department of the Illinois Central railroad. He was at the IC for 13 years, with two years out for the army. “The IC had seven or eight thousand buildings all over the Midwest,” he told Susan Benjamin of the Chicago Architects Oral History Project at the Art Institute. “Many of them were extremely well built and designed by fine architects. The Illinois Central was, as far as I know, the only client that ever hired Louis Sullivan three times.”

In 1958, while working for the Illinois Central, he married hometown sweetheart Marilyn Whittlesey. Their union resulted in their two children, John and Charlie. With Marilyn, Wilbert also got a coconspirator in his preservationist tendencies: they were to work hand in hand on many efforts.

Before long, he transformed from corporate architect to preservationist. That story is told well by Harold Henderson in a profile from the April 27, 2000, issue of the *Chicago Reader*.

In the summer of 1959, Wil Hasbrouck was a 27-year-old architect from rural Iowa by way of Iowa State who worked in the building department of the Illinois Central Railroad. Unlike most of his colleagues, he’d taken

a liking to the grandeur of Chicago’s older buildings, and he spent a few lunch hours carrying picket signs at 64 W. Randolph, where Richard Nickel, John Vinci, and others were protesting the demolition of the Garrick Theater. Wil regrets that he never got a look inside.

On a warm Saturday that fall, Wil and Marilyn and baby Charles went to visit Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House in Hyde Park. Marilyn was more than happy to go. “I was a math teacher,” she says in her level, precise tones. “I was interested in geometry,” so learning about architecture “was just a natural.”

Since the public wasn’t allowed inside Robie House, they went on to the Oriental Institute. There they saw a postcard tacked to the bulletin board, inviting all comers to a meeting of the Chicago Heritage Committee to discuss the Garrick Theater. “We went to the meeting,” Marilyn recalls. “They had collected a big box of clippings on the Garrick, and they decided they needed a newsletter to get more people interested. We volunteered to put the clippings in order. Tom Stauffer [the committee’s spark plug] said, ‘If you’re going to do that, you can do the newsletter too.’”

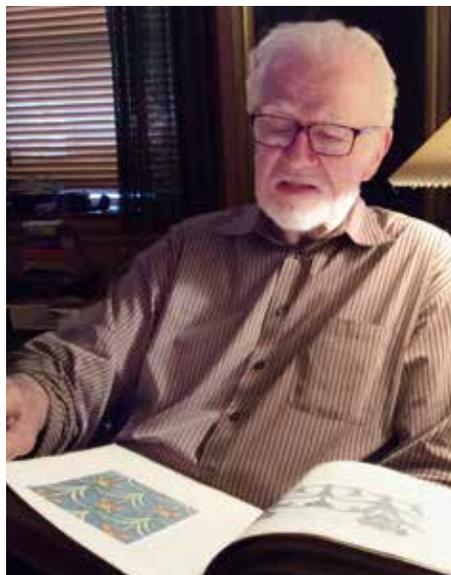
In preparing the newsletter the Hasbroucks learned about offset printing, a new process by which you could print from typewritten sheets of paper rather than having to set type. Soon they got a chance to publish something larger. The activists who wanted to preserve old buildings were also fond of Chicago’s lake-

front, and they questioned Mayor [Richard J.] Daley’s building McCormick Place there. In the spring of 1961 the Hasbroucks published a few hundred copies of a long essay by architect Douglas Schroeder, “The Issue of the Lakefront,” for the Heritage Committee.

Wil had long since been haunting used bookstores and collecting out-of-print architecture books. Difficult as it may be to imagine, 40 years ago the reputations of Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and their Prairie School colleagues were at a low ebb. (The Robie House furniture, for instance, had been stored in an attic at the Chicago Theological Seminary and was almost impossibly dirty when preservationists unearthed it.) Old books and architectural drawings were being sold cheap for the same reason that developers felt free to tear down many of the buildings the publications described. The destruction wouldn’t stop unless people learned to abhor it. Marilyn and Wil decided to expand their learn-as-you-go publishing enterprise and start selling reproductions of out-of-print architectural classics. They chose to publish under the name “Prairie School Press.”

In his “real” job, Hasbrouck moved in 1968 from the Illinois Central to the American Institute of Architects. This was the period of furor over the destruction of the Chicago Stock Exchange, and the organization was a good place to keep in touch. Not to say that he and Marilyn weren’t already in touch: they’d discovered the Chicago Heritage Committee in 1959, in time to picket the demolition of the Garrick; they were also involved in the establishment of the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation, founded largely to save Glessner House.

Then in 1964, he and Marilyn started publishing the *Prairie School Review*. According to the Art Institute’s finding aids for archival collections, it was the earliest scholarly journal to feature illustrated articles on various Prairie School projects, reviews of current publications, and preservation news. (It continued to publish until 1981.) When I interviewed Hasbrouck in 2016 I didn’t capture exactly how Wil described his working relationship with Marilyn while working on the magazine, but it was to the effect that he would stir up contributions, and while she would follow through and be sure



photos/Robert McCamant



the issue came out.

The Newberry Library was an important part of Bill's research. His first book, *The Chicago Architectural Club, Prelude to the Modern* required material that went far beyond the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago. The hundreds of members, both these interested in the modern movements at the turn of the century and those of classical tastes, sometimes became famous for later work, and some faded from any notice at all. The Newberry's records of offices and their staffs were invaluable. His book provided much additional research on the history of otherwise unknown Chicago architects.

Susan Benjamin's 1995 interview, preserved on the website of the Art Institute of Chicago, provides a colorful account of his career to that point. For example, he tells the story of how he and Marilyn came to acquire their house on South Prairie.

My wife and I decided to buy 1900 South Prairie at fifty cents on the dollar because we were looking for a place for a bookshop and an office for me and we were hoping to have a real estate investment. When you're offered a piece of property at fifty cents on the dollar, it's a pretty good deal. So that's what happened. The property was purchased, and Glessner got the property next door and Donnelley owned the property across the street and I ended up with 1900 South Prairie. I had absolutely no money at the time to pay for this.... I was doing some consulting at the time. From time to time I would consult on historic districts or I would look over a historic house and suggest to owners what work might have to be done if they bought the building and things of that nature.... Mr. Haffner went to John Montgomery, who at



that time was president of the Lakeside Bank, and told him the deal and suggested that it would be a good idea if they made a loan to me to buy this building. So they made me a one hundred percent loan. Then something really interesting happened. Before any of the documentation was done, there was a small fire at 1900 South Prairie. It damaged a bathroom and two or three things in there. Of course, I didn't own the building yet. They did, and their insurance covered it. They said, "Well, we'll get the insurance company to fix all of this. In the meantime, would you mind taking care of the building?" Well, I didn't mind. I went out and found some tenants and put tenants in the building, so I had income coming in for about six or eight months before I had to take over and actually buy the building.

How the famous Prairie Avenue Bookshop came about is told in detail in Henderson's 2000 story:

As a storefront, the Prairie Avenue Bookshop dates from 1974, when the grandson of Chicago architect Joseph Llewellyn decided to move out of his grandfather's house in suburban La Grange and sell part of his library. Joseph Llewellyn had opened an architectural office after the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, just as the greatest economic depression in American history up to that time was enveloping the city. His practice – primarily designing schools and banks – survived his bad timing, and in 1899 he became president of the Chicago Architectural Club. In that post he helped organize a group of similar city clubs called the Architectural League of America. The books he accumulated along the way – including a wealth of "catalogs" put out by individual clubs, in which member architects were listed and their projects illustrated – made his library a treasure trove.

The Hasbroucks bought 1,000 books from the grandson, expecting to sell a few items at a time, as usual. The University of Texas offered them \$10,000 for the lot. They picked themselves off the floor and used most of the proceeds to open a store at the once fashionable address of 1900 S. Prairie, next door to H.H. Richardson's Glessner House. The building, which also would accommodate Wil's architecture office, had been standing empty for a year. Says Wil, "Prairie Avenue was at its nadir when we moved in."

"We rode and helped promote the preservation movement," says Marilyn. But by 1974 she was ready to go beyond those roots. "I was adamant that we would have all kinds of architecture, but no castles.... I wanted an architect who might have come in for just one book to be able to see the full range of choices available. You can go into any chain and get the well-known titles, but you can't get the backlist or see the range." The store opened with lofty ambitions and 200 new titles. Marilyn kept track of them on typewritten four-by-six index cards. A Japanese journal, *Global Architecture*, had just started publishing, and Prairie Avenue was the only place in the U.S. where it could be bought. Marilyn put copies in the window, and people came around when the store was closed just to look at them.

By 1978 the neighborhood was seeing a resurgence of activity, so the Hasbroucks put 1900 S. Prairie on the market. It sold quickly. Harry Weese offered them the best spot in the Donohue building, at 711 S. Dearborn – or what might have been the best spot if anyone had ever gone down there in those days. The first factory loft in Chicago to be converted into residential and commercial condominiums, it had been a printing plant around the turn of the century. "We were among the first" on an almost completely vacant block, Wil says. "The only other occupied space at street level was Casey's Bar." Weese asked that the bookstore's front door open off the lobby, not off the street, so that the Hasbroucks could keep an eye on things and provide... security.

His second book, still in progress at the time of his death, examined the social work that led to Dwight Perkin's modernization of schools, and Perkin's founding of the forest preserves of Chicago. His friends and family are developing plans for its eventual completion.

So, books and buildings – or perhaps buildings and books – came to be the story of Wilbert Hasbrouck's life.

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Book- and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Lisa Pevtzow

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

American Writers Museum, 180 N. Michigan Avenue, second floor, Chicago, 312-374-8790: **“Capturing Stories: Photographs of Writers by Art Shay”** (unique angles on the moments and personalities making the news), Meijer Gallery, through spring 2018. **“Laura Ingalls Wilder: From Prairie to Page”** Roberta Rubin Writer’s Room, ongoing.

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: **“The Medieval World at Our Fingertips: Manuscripts from the Collection of Sandra Hindman”** (nearly 30 manuscript illuminations offering a microcosm of medieval life), through May 28.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **“Color My World”** (color taxonomy including color charts and color samples), through July 15.

Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington Street, Chicago, 312-744-6630: **“Keith Haring: The Chicago Mural”** (36 original panels of the murals created in 1989), Sidney Yates Gallery, fourth floor, ongoing.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-266-2077: **“Chicago and the Great War”** (Gold Star memorial portraits, collected 1919-21), through November 12.

Chicago Printmakers Collaborative, 4912 N. Western Avenue, Chicago, 773-293-2070: **“Existential Credit”** (exhibit of prints by CPC interns past and present), through May 6.

DePaul University John T. Richardson Library, 2350 N. Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, 773-325-2167: **“Incarceration: Art Activism & Advocacy”** (prisoners and activists revealed by words and artistic expression), through summer.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **“On Board with Design: Passenger Transportation and Graphic Design in the Mid-20th Century,”** ongoing. **“African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean: Culture, Resistance, and Survival”** (aspects of the history, culture, and religion of people of African ancestry in the subject areas), Herskovits Library of African Studies, ongoing.

Open Books Warehouse and Bookstore, 905 W. 19th Street, Chicago, 312-243-9776: **“Pablo Helguera’s Librería Donceles”** (an installation repurposing used bookshelves from closed CPS facilities and Spanish books from an exhibit at the Chicago Cultural Center), ongoing.

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

Spudnik Press Cooperative, 1821 W. Hubbard Street, suite 302, Chicago, 312-563-0302: **“Entre Rios y Montañas (Between Rivers and Mountains)”** (solo exhibition of collographs by Chicago-based artist Jonathan Herrera

investigating the relationships between collective memory and state-sponsored violence and trauma), through June 9. **University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library**, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **“Well Equipped: Library Technology from Days Past”** (“latest” library technology from years ago), Crerar Library, through June 8. **“War, Trauma and Memory,”** (explores how those involved in modern war or contemporary terrorism represent their experiences), through August 31. **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Rare Book & Manuscript Library**, 1408 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, 217-333-3777: **“The Leveretts’ Alton”**

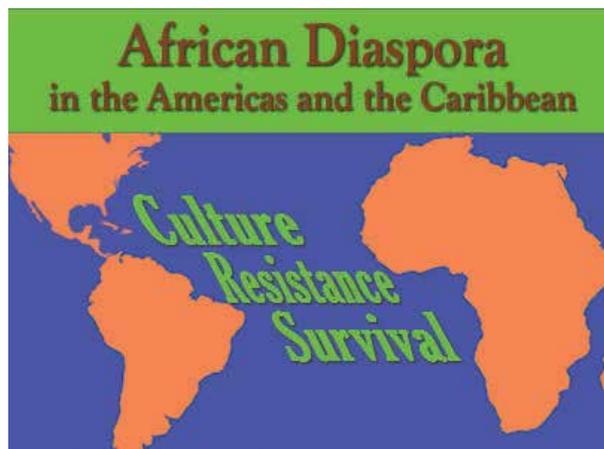


U of I at Urbana-Champaign / Printing in Alton, Illinois

(archival documents from the Leverett family in the 1840s and 1850s, as well as their experiences in the Civil War), through May. **“Designed, Displayed & Discarded: Ephemeral Printing in Alton, Illinois, 1835-1855,”** through May.

Send your listings to Lisa Pevtzow at lisa.pevtzow@sbcglobal.net

American Writers Museum / Laura Ingalls Wilder



Northwestern University Library / African Diaspora in the Americas and Caribbean



Caxtonians Collect: Mary Burns

Interviewed by Robert McCamant

(I decided to put on some early music to write about my conversation with Mary Burns, since it is a shared interest and came up so many times in our conversation.)

Mary joined our Club in 2016, soon after she came to DeKalb to become the special collections catalog librarian at Northern Illinois University. Having moved to DeKalb after 31 years in Cleveland (where the Rowfant, that city's bookish club, does not allow women members), she was happy to be stationed near us and welcomed our invitation when it was extended by Mary Kohnke.

She was raised in rural Michigan in a town where the choices of employment were mainly farming or factory jobs. She knew from the start that she wanted to be a city girl. She got her undergraduate degree from Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. From there she moved to Case Western Reserve (in Cleveland) to pursue studies in early music performance practice. She picked up part-time work shelving LPs and doing shelf reading for the Cleveland Institute of Music. Her career in libraries began in earnest when she took a full time paraprofessional job at the university library in 1985 and she hasn't stopped since. Her Case job helped pay the rent, her student loans, and provided a tuition waiver benefit for finishing her music master's. But she suspected that early music might not provide a reliable living, so she put the waiver to work again on a library degree at Kent State, commuting to its campus and taking classes offered in the Cleveland area. Don't ask her about housekeeping priorities during these years of working full time at the library and doing two master's degrees. She'd rather not share.

Her rare book cataloging career began in 1991 during her paraprofessional stint at Case when she became assistant to the head of the Special Collections Department. She eventually cataloged her way to a professional title in 1998 and more responsibilities, including audiovisual cataloging and metadata work.

Cleveland also had rare botanical books in the Eleanor Squire Library at the Cleveland Botanical Garden, with roughly 1,000 titles including Redouté's *Les Roses*, Robert

Thornton's *The Temple of Flora*, and plenty of 19th-century books on gardening and horticulture. She was recruited to catalog the collection on weekends, so once again the dishes stacked up in the sink. Cleveland also had plenty of early music, although it did not have its own opera company most of the time she was there (and the one it had was disappointing). "But the Cleveland Museum of Art was my home away from home," she explained. "I used it almost as freely as I'd make a cup of tea: I'd go there to pay bills and be able to look up at the medieval art."

By 2014 the rare book and special collections at her Case library were nearly cataloged and she began to suspect her job would eventually be eliminated. She was thrilled to be offered the job at Northern Illinois in April 2014. Though DeKalb puts her back in the



cornfields, she jokes that they're the "expensive cornfields," where land is \$10,000 an acre. And it's only four hours round trip from Chicago by car and convenient trains. She's made many wonderful new friends (often younger than she is) at the NIU library and from the local arts scene. In fact, she very rightly refers to her four years at NIU as a midlife renaissance, even though she continues to be completely dumbfounded by the location. "I killed myself working to get out of the fields," she says, "and now here I am all over again, getting to do things I could never do at my old job in Cleveland." In Aurora she subscribes

to the Fox Valley Orchestra, but for opera she comes to Chicago for her Lyric subscription. (Most recently she enjoyed Mozart's *Così fan tutte*.) And she makes it to quite a few evening Caxton meetings and even the occasional On the Move event.

Because her library position at Northern Illinois is a faculty appointment, she's hard at work at securing tenure through research and writing. She's published one paper, "Printing and Publishing the Illustrated Botanical Book in Nineteenth Century Great Britain" in *Cogent Arts & Humanities*. Her second paper, "RDA and Rare Books Cataloging," is soon to be published in *Library Resources & Technical Services*. She compares the bibliographic records for the same rare book cataloged according to three different standards: *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Material Books*, the *PCC-RDA-Bibliographic Standard Record*, and *Resource Description and Access*.

For leisure, she enjoys luxuriating with her cats (Jonah, Samson, and Artemis) in front of PBS documentaries on topics various and sundry. Her particular favorites however highlight Chicago's rich history and culture. Though she misses the architectural character of her 1920s Cleveland apartment, her cats have come to love the floor vents in what is by comparison "her 1960s glorified cardboard box" DeKalb apartment. And she's become a farmer, growing scarlet cockscomb and petunias on her balcony. "I had great success with houseplants," she explained, "until my current family of cats declared them a delicacy." Now they can only look longingly out the sliding glass door at the plethora of pots. She's been awestruck by the Chicago Botanic Garden Orchid Show and its rose garden in June.

Fairly frequent trips to Chicago by train are also relaxing. She drives part way, then takes the train into town. "I imagine I'm traveling in Europe." The two-step process means she doesn't stay out too late in the city, however.

"But actually the Caxton Club is probably the most important reason I've found moving to DeKalb such an enriching experience," she explains. "As much as my heart belongs to Cleveland and its cultural riches, the libraries and cultural riches of Chicagoland are overwhelmingly vast by comparison. Like many an American, I moved west for a better life."

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Bookmarks...

Luncheon: Friday, May 11, Union League Club
J. Kevin Graffagnino
“The Pioneer Americanists”

One of our most popular speakers is coming back! Kevin Graffagnino, director of the Clements Library at the University of Michigan, will offer a captivating look at the lives and careers of eight generations of outstanding Americanists prior to 1900. His generously illustrated presentation will feature books, manuscripts, and pictorial material about noteworthy specialists who created and nurtured the Americana field from the late-17th through 19th centuries. Drawing on rarities from the remarkable collections of the Clements, Graffagnino will offer a panoramic window on the early story of Americana appreciation, collecting, and description. Graffagnino started an antiquarian book business to help pay his way through college. History degrees in hand, he’s held a variety of curatorial and administrative positions at universities and state historical societies. Make your May luncheon reservation today!

May luncheon: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is \$35. Reservations or cancellations by noon Wednesday for Friday lunch. Call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org .

Beyond May...

JUNE LUNCHEON

Lincoln comes alive as never before. Noted Lincoln scholar and author Michael Burlingame reveals Lincoln’s troubled family life, midlife crisis, and even the temper that underlies his amiable image. June 8 at the Union League.

JUNE DINNER

June 20, Union League Club: Timothy Barrett, director of the Center for the Book at the University of Iowa, recipient of Fulbright and MacArthur awards, and a noted scholar on hand papermaking in the East and the West, will be our speaker.

Dinner: Wednesday, May 16, Union League Club
Kitty Maryatt
“Re-creating a Masterpiece”

In 1913, poet Blaise Cendrars and artist Sonia Delaunay created a milestone of the avant-garde, a bookwork like no other at the time. It unfolded like a Paris map to over six feet long, with the poem in four colors (rendered in pochoir – see below), and changing typefaces repeatedly, meandering down the pages like a twisting, curving train traveling from Moscow to Vladivostok and suddenly back to Paris. Cendrars and Delaunay planned a limited edition of 150 copies, but managed fewer than 80. Maryatt’s talk will explore the creation of this book from a bookmaker’s perspective in order to hypothesize why there was a shortfall.

May dinner: Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Blvd. The evening will follow this order: Social gathering 5-6 pm; program at 6 pm; dinner immediately to follow. Program is free and open to the public. Beverages available for \$6-\$12. Three-course dinner: \$63. Reservations are required for either the program only or the dinner/program combination. Reservations must be received no later than NOON Monday, May 14. Payment will be required for dinner reservations canceled after that time and for no-shows. To reserve call 312-255-3710 or e-mail caxtonclub@newberry.org .

The “map” is illustrated using a technique called pochoir. It is a refined stencil-based technique employed to create prints or add color to preexisting prints. It was most popular from the late 19th century through the 1930s, especially centered in Paris.

Pochoir was primarily used for prints devoted to fashion, patterns, and architectural design and is most often associated with art nouveau and art deco.

