



Aldus Society Notes

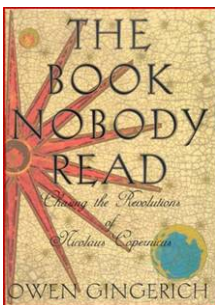
Spring 2006

Volume 6, No. 3

The Book Nobody Read

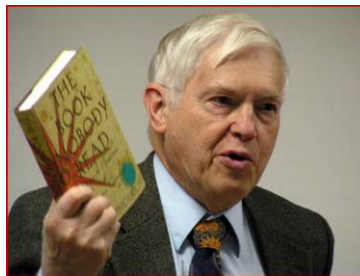
There's a reason we call major social upheavals "revolutions" – a reason that dates back to the year Nicholas Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* was published, wherein he outlined his theories and observations in support of the sun-centered universe.

According to *Printing and the Mind of Man*, "The publication of 'On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres' in 1543 was a landmark in human thought. It challenged the authority of antiquity and set the course for the modern world by its effective destruction of the anthropocentric view of the universe." Yet Arthur Koestler said the book "was and is an all-time worst seller." Koestler called it the book that nobody read.

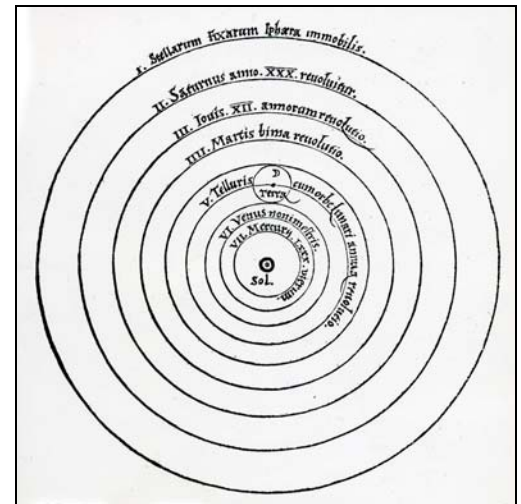


April's meeting will feature a special visit by Owen Gingerich, senior astronomer emeritus at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and research professor of astronomy and of the history of science at Harvard University, who will tell his saga of *The Book Nobody Read*, his 30-year search to record all the first and second editions of Nicholas Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*. Dr. Gingerich's experiences included finding books owned and annotated

by Galileo, Kepler and other astronomers of the time, and which illuminate the long, reluctant process of accepting the sun-centered cosmos and highlight the historic tensions between science and the Catholic Church. In his travels, Gingerich traced the ownership of individual copies through the hands of saints, heretics, scalawags, and bibliomaniacs. He was called as an expert witness in the theft of one copy, attended the dramatic auction of another, and helped establish that Copernicus' work was not only read, but was as inspirational as it was revolutionary.



Join us for this evening of history, biography, scientific exploration, bibliographic detective work, and just plain fun. Following his presentation, Dr. Gingerich will be signing copies of his book (which will also be available for purchase at a 20% discount thanks to Paul Watkins).



For more information about Owen Gingerich and his book, listen to an interview with NPR's Robert Siegel at:

www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1746110



Aldus Calendar

April

13 (Regular Meeting) — Owen Gingerich, senior astronomer emeritus at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory and research professor of astronomy and of the history of science at Harvard University, will tell his saga of *The Book Nobody Read*, his 30-year search to record all the first and second editions of Nicholas Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*.

May

11 (Regular Meeting) — Fred Pfening will share his long-time passion for circus collectibles. Fred is a past President (1986-89) of the Circus Historical Society, current President of the Friends of the Ohio State University Libraries. In his real life, he is CEO of the Columbus-based Fred D. Pfening Company, manufacturers of bakery and allied machinery.



Regular meetings of the Aldus Society are held at 7:30 PM on the second Thursday of the month at The Thurber Center, 91 Jefferson Avenue, Columbus, Ohio
☞ Socializing Begins One-Half Hour Before ☞

The Aldus Society

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Aldus Society Notes is published quarterly by the Communications Committee of The Aldus Society. If you have submissions or ideas for articles, please contact Ron Ravneberg at (614) 457-1153 or AldusSociety@aol.com.

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Why Is This Man Smiling?

Ron Ravneberg

The picture below (courtesy of George Cowmeadow Bauman) documents a little-observed ceremony that occurred at last month's Aldus Society meeting — Bill Evans officially accepting his role as incoming Aldus Society President from now Past President Ron Ravneberg. Evans is the guy with the tie.



Notice that the guy on the right (i.e., me) is smiling. That's because the changeover is going to be good for the Aldus Society and, as those of you who read this part of the newsletter each month know, I'm a big fan of the Aldus Society. As was the case when I became President three years ago, Bill inherits a healthy, vibrant and stimulating organization. The one thing that's different in my mind from when I took over, is that I'm completely confident that when the time comes for the incoming President to turn over the reins to another, the Aldus Society will be healthier, more vibrant and more stimulating.

Why am I so sure? Because Bill is the right person to keep us moving forward. He's the quintessential book person, in the Aldus Society meaning of the word. Is he a collector? Yes, but not of expensive antiquarian tomes. Bill likes books and adds them to his fold more because of their content than their sense of artifact. But he's hooked as an attendee of the New York Antiquarian Book Fair because that's where you can see the best of the best when it comes to books. (Notice that I said "see" instead of "buy.")

What about program diversity? Bill's the guy. His appreciation for books and the printed arts extends far beyond book collecting. He can be found at regular meetings, specialty programs, field trips and almost every other Aldus Society function. When he misses one, it's usually because he's off attending a competing author presentation or other book- or arts-related event in town.

Is Bill interested in book people and organizations? Yep. He's attended past meetings of the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies (FABS) not because he was supposed to, but because he wanted to. He seeks out the people, the interests, and the stories of others who share what Nick Basbanes dubbed this "gentle madness."

I could continue to ramble on, but this is intended neither to be a paean about Bill, nor to create unreasonable expectations about what one person can achieve. (But the right person backed by an active group of Trustees ... now that's another matter altogether.) In any event, I'm confident that our new President and the Board of Trustees can and will do what's necessary to expand the activities of the Aldus Society as we move into our seventh year. New activities, broader appeal, more varied programs, more field trips ... the list goes on.

Is Bill Evans the right person to take the lead in that effort? No doubt about it. That's why the guy on the right is smiling.

As for why the guy on the left is smiling ... nobody knows.



Visit the Aldus Society web site for up-to-date information about our programs and activities, in-depth articles about many of our speakers, and links to other book related organizations.

www.AldusSociety.com

“Bookstore-ies”

George Cowmeadow Bauman
Co-owner, The Acorn Bookshop

Books That Sing To You

A short, 30-something guy came to the counter and said, "I found something I just couldn't live without."

Finishing up some research on the computer, and not seeing the book he'd selected, I replied, "Found one that just sang to you, did you?"

He looked a little surprised, so I stood up and looked down at the book he wanted.

The title was...THE ART OF SINGING.

An Andre Norton Book or a New Aquarium Filter?

Two elderly women came to the counter and laid several inexpensive paperbacks down. One commented that she couldn't find any Andre Norton books that she didn't already have.

I had just finished researching and pricing a scarce Norton book, so I handed it to her with a flourish.

She got excited and said, 'If that's not taken, it's mine!'

'You may want to take a look at the price first,' I advised her, sure that she was not the kind to buy collectibles. And I was right.

She pulled the cover open and exclaimed, 'One hundred and twenty-five dollars?! I could buy a new filter for my aquarium for that!'

Good Dogs, Weird Chimps

A woman had come in after I called her to let her know that books she had requested on our Want List had arrived. They were three of Alexandra Day books, GOOD DOG, CARL, CARL'S AFTERNOON, and CARL GOES SHOPPING. They're popular beginner's children books with board pages that feature a beautiful dog named Carl.

The customer was very excited, and said that she was looking forward to showing them to her chimps.

Her chimps?

Her chimps.

'I look after three chimps, who are two, three, and four, and are the lights of my life! But they tend to wreck things, especially pictures of dogs in magazines.'

How could I not ask? 'What will they do with these books with pictures of Carl in them?'

'Breakfast, lunch, and dinner!' she quipped.

Purina Book Chow

A guy buying a half dozen paperbacks from us asked about the possibility of selling them back to us when he finished them.

I explained our process, and concluded with a comment about them needing to be in good shape for us to buy them.

He replied, "Oh, I treat my books with lots of care. I do beat the kids with them once in a while, and occasionally I'll throw one at the dog when it starts chewing on the other books, but otherwise they'll be in fine shape for you."

I knew he was kidding... probably.

And shortly after that conversation, a woman phoned asking for a GOOD HOUSEKEEPING COOKBOOK, "But it has to be the one published between 1945 and 1950."

As I walked to the Cookbook section, she continued, "You'll think this the strangest thing in the world, but I need that cookbook because my dog ate mine."

I assured her that we heard that story frequently.

"No, no!" she exclaimed. "I'm not talking about chewing on the book; she ate it! All I had left was four pages and half of the back cover!"

"And of all my cookbooks, it was the one that my mother took up housekeeping with after the war when she was first married."

I suggested that perhaps the dog ate that one because it may have had some food residue on the pages.

"That's what everyone thinks, but my JOY OF COOKING had lots more food on its pages, and my BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS COOKBOOK was full of food!"

"But she ate only the one that can't be replaced," the woman ended in a mournful howl.

'This Is What It's All About'

When a semi-regular customer was looking at an Easton Press edition of Milton's PARADISE LOST, I mentioned that we had a special copy of PARADISE LOST enhanced with Doré engravings.

I brought it out from the back, and handed it to him. He gently opened the quarto-sized volume out on the counter — being careful to protect the old binding by propping up the front cover on a stack of nearby books.

After browsing through it for a few minutes, he asked for a piece of paper and a pencil, saying that he wanted to make a note about the book for his wife, because he wanted it for Christmas.

Turning from illustration to illustration, he finally looked up, gestured to the Doré Milton and said with a little awe, "Now this is what it's all about."



The Royal Irish Academy Library: A Scholarly and Rewarding Place to Work

Laura Masonbrink

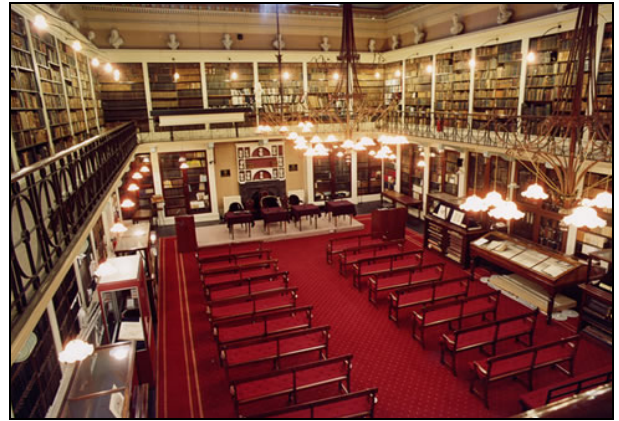
Throughout November 2005, I had the honor and privilege to work as a part time exchange staffer in the library of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) in Dublin, Ireland.



Main entrance to the RIA.

Since its founding in 1785, the primary mission of the RIA has been to promote, support, and recognize excellence in scholarship as well as conduct research on topics particularly relating to Irish heritage. Other purposes include reflecting upon and contributing to public policy on issues of science and culture; publishing research; and representing Irish learning internationally.

The library of the RIA holds approximately 2,000 manuscripts, including the oldest known surviving Irish manuscript called the *Cathach* dating back to the early 7th century A.D. The library also owns and preserves printed books, pamphlets, drawings, and maps relevant to the history, literature, geography, and genealogy of Ireland. In the interest of sharing information more widely, the RIA library collaborates with union catalogs, participates in digitization projects, and prepares exhibitions throughout the year. For more information about the Royal Irish Academy and the library, please access their web site at www.ria.ie.



The beautiful RIA Meeting Room houses some of the library collections.

My experience at the RIA library was educational and pleasurable from the start. The members of the library staff were welcoming and helpful. The projects I worked on involved verification of a set of broadside holdings in an online catalog, and cataloging a group of 18th and 19th century auction and bookseller title listings. Although the library uses a unique classification system, they have adopted the standards of the Library of Congress Subject Headings. My library skills were put to good use.



Not only was my experience at the Royal Irish Academy professionally rewarding, but it also presented me with the extraordinary opportunity to meet the President of Ireland, the gracious Mary McAleese, who visited the RIA for an awards ceremony.



Guilt by Association

Samuel Pepys (1633-1703)

Away to the Strand to my bookseller's and there staid an hour, and bought the idle, rogueish book, "L'escolle des filles," which I have bought in plain binding, avoiding the buying of it better bound, because I resolved, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in the list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found.

February 8, 1668



In Praise of Books

From *The Book of Animals [Kitāb al-Hayawān]* by al-Jāhiz Abu Uthmān Amr ibn Bahr al-Baṣrī (ca. 777-869)

The following was part of the handout Michael Zwettler provided at his recent presentation to the Aldus Society. It is worth reading again.

A book is a receptacle filled with knowledge, a container crammed with good sense, a vessel full of jesting and earnestness.... It will amuse you with anecdotes, inform you on all manner of astonishing marvels, entertain you with jokes or move you with homilies, just as you please. You are free to find in it an entertaining adviser, an encouraging critic, a villainous ascetic, a silent talker or hot coldness. ...

... Moreover, have you ever seen a garden that will go into a man's sleeve, an orchard you can take on your lap, a speaker who can speak of the dead and yet be the interpreter of the living? Where else will you find a companion who sleeps only when you are asleep and speaks only when you wish him to? ... There is no pleasanter neighbor, no more fair-minded friend, no more amenable companion, no more dutiful teacher, no comrade more perfect and less prone to error, less annoying or importunate, of a sweeter disposition, less inclined to contradiction or accusation, less disposed to slander or backbiting, more marvelous, cleverer, less given to flattery or affectation, less demanding or quarrelsome, less prone to argument or more opposed to strife, than a book.

I know no companion more prompt to hand, more rewarding, more helpful or less burdensome, and no tree that lives longer, bears more abundantly or yields more delicious fruit that is handier, easier to pick or more perfectly ripened at all times of the year, than a book.

I know no animal product that, despite its youth, the short time that has elapsed since its birth, its modest price and its ready availability, brings together so much excellent advice, so much rare knowledge, so many works by great minds and keen brains, so many lofty thoughts and sound doctrines, so much wise experience or so much information about bygone ages, distant lands, everyday sayings and demolished empires, as a book....

... For all its smallness and lightness, a book is the medium through which men receive the Scriptures, and also government accounts. Silent when silence is called for, it is eloquent when asked to speak. It is a bedside companion that does not interrupt when you are busy but welcomes you when you have a mind to it, and does not demand forced politeness or compel you to avoid its company. It is a visitor whose visits may be rare, or frequent, or so continual that it follows you like your shadow and becomes a part of you. ...

A book is a companion that does not flatter you, a friend that does not irritate you, a crony that does not weary you, a petitioner that does not wax importunate, a protégé that does not find you slow, and a friend that does not seek to exploit you by flattery, artfully wheedle you, cheat you with hypocrisy or deceive you with lies.

A book, if you consider, is something that prolongs your pleasure, sharpens your mind, loosens your tongue, lends agility to your fingers and emphasis to your words, gladdens your mind, fills your heart and enables you to win the respect of the lowly and the friendship of the mighty. You will get more knowledge out of one in a month than you could acquire from men's mouths in five years — and that at a saving in expense, in arduous research by qualified persons, in standing on the doorsteps of hack teachers, in resorting to individuals inferior to you in moral qualities and nobility of birth, and in associating with odious and stupid people.

A book obeys you by night and by day, abroad and at home; it has no need of sleep, and does not grow weary with sitting up. It is a master that does not fail you when you need him and does not stop teaching you when you stop paying him. If you fall from grace it continues to obey you, and if the wind sets fair for your enemies it does not turn against you. Form any kind of bond or attachment with it, and you will be able to do without everything else; you will not be driven into bad company by boredom or loneliness.

Even if its kindness to you and its benevolence towards you consisted merely in saving you from the tedium of sitting on your doorstep watching the passers-by — with all the aggravations that posture entails: civilities to be paid, other people's indiscretions, the tendency to meddle in things that do not concern you, the proximity of the common people, the need to listen to their bad Arabic and their mistaken ideas and put up with their low behavior and their shocking ignorance — even if a book conferred no other advantage but this, it would be both salutary and profitable for its owner.

[Ch. Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz* (trans. D.M. Hawke; London, Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1969), pp. 130-32]



Sure, I use Google. Almost everybody does. Just go to www.google.com, type in a word or two and *voilà!* Thousands of references you never knew existed.

But have you explored Google? Have you ever looked to see what lurks behind the little “More »” option in the menu below the logo? Click it and you’ll find a list of the Google searches available. One special option is their Book Search.

Select it and enter a phrase you’d like to research. Almost instantaneously you’ll be presented with numerous books that contain the terms you entered. Not just a link to the book, but the actual text references, citations, and other details about the work.

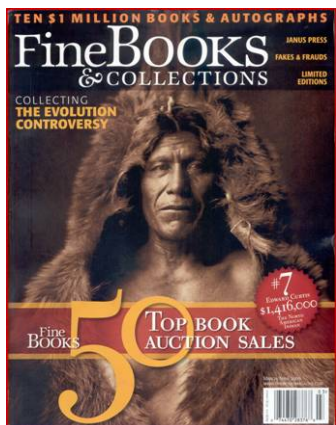
Try it. Like the other Google features, it’s amazing! (Then just for fun, try the Image search if you haven’t used it before.)



Fine Books & Collections

Ron Ravneberg

If you're looking for a magazine that caters to your interest in books, you might want to check out *Fine Books & Collections* (FB&C), a bi-monthly magazine dedicated to the many facets of the fine book trade. The magazine also includes other book news, auction reports, and catalog reviews. Regular columns include *Fine Maps*, *Fine Presses*, *Beyond the Basics*, and *How I Got Started*.



Among its other features, FB&C also features regular columns by Nicholas Basbanes and Joel Silver, both Aldus Society friends and previous guest speakers at Aldus Society functions.

There are other Aldus Society connections too. The January/February issue featured a profile on Robert Jackson, an Aldus Society member from the Cleveland area. Even the California-based editor of FB&C, P. Scott Brown, is a member of our organization.

For more information about FB&C, visit their website at:

<http://www.finebooksmagazine.com/>

FB&C is available on the newsstands at Borders and Barnes & Noble, but if you'd like to check out the magazine for free, Scott Brown has extended an invitation to check out their special, introductory offer of a free issue at:

www.finebooksmagazine.com/freeissue



A Thurber Word?

Contributed by Harry Campbell

Merriam Webster's Word of the Day for February 10th was:

catbird seat \KAT-berd-SEET\ noun:
a position of great prominence or advantage

Example sentence:

Nate and Brett want to buy a house but are waiting to see if the real estate market will change soon and put buyers back in the catbird seat.

Did you know that "in the catbird seat" was among the numerous, folksy expressions with which the legendary baseball broadcaster Red Barber delighted listeners? Some say he invented the expression; others say that he dug it up from his Southern origins. But the facts may actually have an odd twist. In a 1942 short story titled *The Catbird Seat*, James Thurber featured a character, Mrs. Barrows, who liked to use the phrase. Another character, Joey Hart, explained that

Mrs. Barrows must have picked up the expression from Red Barber. To Red, according to Joey, "sitting in the catbird seat" meant "sitting pretty," like a batter with three balls and no strikes on him." But, according to Barber's daughter, it was only after Barber read Thurber's story that he started using "in the catbird seat" himself!



Akron Antiquarian Book Fair

April 7th and 8th are the dates for the 24th Akron Antiquarian Book Fair, sponsored by the Northern Ohio Bibliophilic Society (NOBS). The event will be held at a new venue this year, the John S. Knight Center in Downtown Akron (77 East Mill Street) and will bring together more than 60 dealers of old and rare, readable and collectible books, maps and prints.

Books shown at the Akron show generally run the gamut from the mediocre (only a few) to the relatively high-end (also only a few). Most of the dealers displayed the kinds of books that the casual collector wants and can afford, but can seldom seem to find. That makes it a good book fair.

Usually well-represented areas include Ohioana and Civil War materials, but bibliophiles whose interests run to topics like Samuel Johnson, the history of science, children's books or modern firsts should have little trouble finding books and materials of interest.

Friday hours are from 3:00PM to 8:30PM and Saturday hours are from 10:00AM to 4:00PM. A donation of \$4.00 is collected at the door.

More information about NOBS and its programming (to which Aldus Society members are always welcome) can be found on their website:

www.nobsweb.org/



The History of Text & Image

The Aldus Society History of Text & Image series is available for viewing on DVD by Aldus Society members. The series includes the following chapters:

1. The Classical Age: Latin Epigraphy (Charles Babcock)
2. Medieval Latin Manuscripts (Frank Coulson)
3. Medieval Slavic Manuscripts (Predrag Matejic)
4. The St. Gall School and Scriptorium in the Early Middle Ages (Anna Grotans)
5. Anglo-Saxon Manuscript Tradition (Drew Jones)
6. Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts and Their History (Daniel Frank)
7. Foxe's Book of Martyrs: The History of a Book and the History of the Book (John King)
8. From Alexandria, Arabia and China to Baghdad: The Arabic Book to ca. 1000 CE (Michael Zwettler)

Contact Geoff Smith at (614) 292-5938 if you'd like to borrow one or more of the presentations.



Why First Editions?

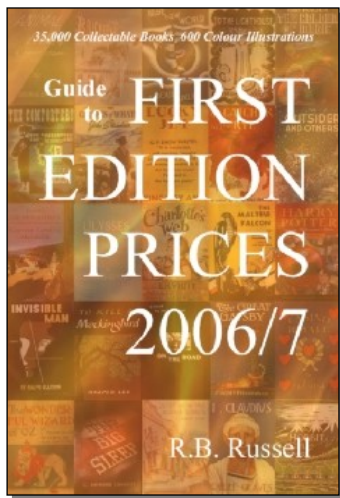
Harry B. Smith

Aldus Society Notes periodically includes items about books that are no longer under copyright, but have moved to the public domain.

There are some benighted beings so wandering in darkness that unto them the ways of the book-collector are past finding out. Several genial writers have shown a certain weakness, a deference to the spirit of vandalism, by striving to answer the question, "Why first editions?" Why seek to convert the Philistine? He may be above you, or he may be below you, but surely he is not of your kind; and you and he are destined to a permanently happy misunderstanding. Should any worthy troglodyte try to hold

you with his skinny hand and his glittering eye to ask you, "Why first editions?" do not rage against him nor despitefully use him, but with a superior smile pass on, pitying rather than scorning. Who knows but he may be one of those who subscribe for "limited editions" illustrated with photogravures? If a man's mind can be so uncouthly practical that he can think of asking, "Why first editions?" he is beyond reach of sentimental argument. He is one of Dr. Johnson's "prosaic rascals," and the wells of poetry and romance are dry within him. Do not tell such a man that a first edition brings you nearer to the author. He will ask, "Why nearer to the author?" and will be lured into a maze of subtleties. Do not use Eugene Field's pleasant fancy: a collector prefers a first edition even as a man would rather marry a maid than a widow. The parable is pleasing but such refinements are thrown away upon one who can ask, "Why first editions?"

Strangely enough, men of apparent intelligence sometimes ask this amazing question. A very clever man — a doctor — once looked at my books and said, "I suppose collecting books is the most interesting pursuit in the world?" I was about to extend the hand of fellowship, when he added, "*Next to collecting china.*" I could refrain from asking him if he had ever collected buttons. This same doctor (and he really is a clever man) once put to me the ridiculous query, "Why first editions?" It appeared that he liked to read *recent* editions of the poets. I fancied that he preferred these on sanitary grounds. New books are cleaner, and he is always on the lookout for germs. Eventually I learned that he was wont to tear a book to pieces and carry a few leaves in his pocket to be read at odd times. Although a doctor, he was a fervent admirer of Wordsworth. Once I was with him on a



yacht, and some of his despoiled leaves of a blasted Wordsworth blew over the deck. Another of the party, a theatrical manager (a clever man, too, who says he collects dramatic literature), picked up a page and began to read derisively the poem beginning:

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways."

He ridiculed Wordsworth unmercifully. And my heart was glad, for oh, it is a joyous thing to hear a doctor and a theatrical manager dispute about Wordsworth, especially when both have asked you, "Why first editions?"

The collecting of books is inspired by a sentiment founded on reverence and hero-worship. It would seem to follow that the more interesting the history of a particular copy of a book, the greater the appeal to the collector and the lover of literature. If, as Byron says, "a book's a book although there's nothing in it," surely a book is more than a book when the extra something in it takes the form of a presentation inscription by its author, or notes in the handwriting of a famous man who once owned and read it.

It is intended to include in this catalogue only books which are interesting on account of their associations and books which have been made unique by the addition of letters or manuscripts. Few have been included merely as rarities or first editions. The overworked words "rare" and "scarce" have not been employed, except in cases where they give information about little-known volumes. The autographs have not been catalogued separately, the description of each appearing in connection with the book with which its interest is associated.

In the preface to his catalogue, Frederick Locker-Lampson apologized for having so many books. I cannot conscientiously apologize for having so few; yet, when I think of the wonderful things that have been offered to me which I perforce declined to buy, a feeling of sadness comes over me that is decidedly akin to pain. Time was when I might have bought nearly all of Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne at a price that now seems trivial. Once I was offered a pathetic scrap of paper which was the only will and testament of Adonais. In it he expressed the hope that the sale of his books would be enough to pay his tailor a small balance due. And there was the mildewed sheet of paper with manuscript verses which Trelawney found in Shelley's pocket—the last verses written by Shelley. "Budge," said the fiend. "Budge not," said my conscience. It is not the yielding to temptation that oppresses me; but oh, the remorse for the times I yielded not!

H. B. S.

From: A Sentimental Library: Comprising Books Formerly Owned by Famous Writers, Presentation Copies, Manuscripts, and Drawings, collected and described by Harry B. Smith. [New York]: Privately Printed [at the De Vinne Press], 1914.





The Aldus Society

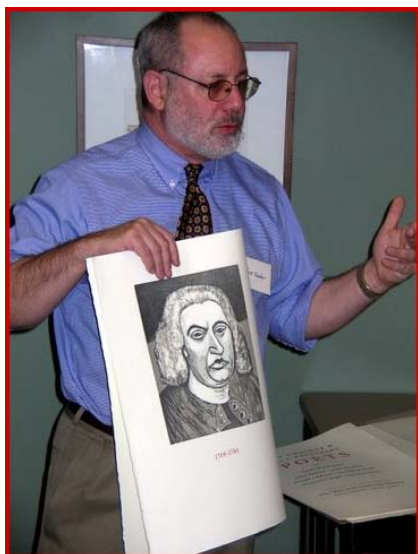
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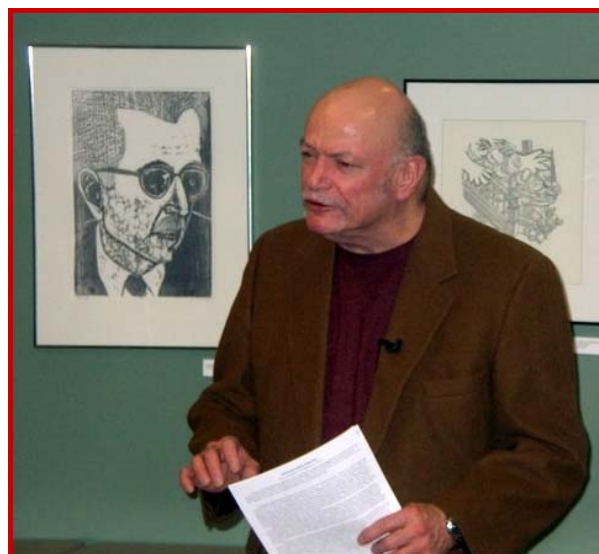
WWW.ALDUSOCIETY.COM

Recent Aldus Society Images

Courtesy of George Cowmeadow Bauman



February – Bob Tauber discussing his experiences reviving the Logan Elm Press at the Ohio State University. The Logan Elm Press imprint flourished at OSU for almost fifteen years, but was closed in 1995 as a result of program reductions at the University. Its revival is now on track and several fine press offerings have been issued or are in the planning stage.



March – Michael Zwettler, Associate Professor of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at the Ohio State University, presenting the eighth chapter of the Aldus Society History of Text & Image series when he spoke on early Arabic manuscripts in a presentation entitled *From Alexandria, Arabia and China to Baghdad: The Arabic Book to ca. 1000 CE.*

