

Remembering Ron Ravneberg

The Aldus Society

Special Memorial Edition



This is a special memorial edition honoring our late friend Ron Ravneberg. His recent passing was a study of poise, grace and dignity. Ron was involved in many organizations and the following articles are but a brief show of how deeply Ron impacted everyone's life, starting with Ron's own words from 2008:

“Normally, Bill Evans would be sharing his thoughts at this point, but October has been an awkward month for old Bill, what with marrying off his daughter and the general financial collapse of the world. Nothing that a professional financial counselor like Bill can't handle, of course, but adding a newsletter column on top of everything else was just a bit too much. So here I am.

As many of you know, in recent months I've had to come to grips with personal health issues that have drastically altered my approach to books and book collecting. Like many of you, for years I have collected in my areas of interest, thinking nothing about the eventual disposition of the items that joined my library. Times have changed, and now where my books end up is very important.

There's the usual debate between donation of intact collections and redistribution of individual volumes through sale or auction, of course. After all, a collection can be an entity in its own, and sometimes it's a shame to break one up. On the other hand, if nobody redistributed his/her books, than the current collector would have nothing available to collect.

I never knew which approach I'd embrace when the time came, but now I do. Donation? Resale? For me, the answer is a qualified “yes” to both. And then some. I've concluded that each book has its own trajectory. Some “need” to be donated, some sold, and others simply handed on to friends.

I have the greatest respect for the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Ohio State and the work being done there by Geoff

Smith and Eric Johnson. For that reason, I've decided to donate the bulk of my Captain Cook collection to OSU. It's an area in which OSU has minimal holdings, yet it relates to several of their other collections. And because I'm not a “high-spot” collector, much of what I have represents perfect background material for a research library like OSU.

Over the years, however, I did manage to acquire three Cook-related publications that appear to be unique. Just dumb luck maybe, but good dumb luck. Are those items going to OSU? Nope. They're very specialized, and contribute little to a general research-based collection. But they can add to major Cook collections around the world. One has been sold to the State Library of New South Wales (the Mecca of Cook researchers), and one to a high-end collector of materials related to Joseph Banks. The other has not yet been offered to the market, but will no doubt follow a similar path.

Then there's the third category, which is the most fun. I've discovered that some of my books belong in the collections of friends. You know ... “Here's a book you need.” In recent weeks I've had multiple occasions where someone has mentioned a book or item that he/she was seeking that I had in my collection and had no clue what its ultimate destination would be (until it was mentioned, that is). And they're varied ... an autobiography of an 18th century bookseller, a collection of essays on amateur astronomy, a facsimile of the German edition of the Nuremberg Chronicle, an 18th century allegorical novel, a hard-to-find edition of a southern hemisphere astronomical observing guide, even a reproduction of a 16th century mariner's astrolabe ... all safely in their new homes.

Which makes me a very happy camper.

A Treasure Trove

Ron Ravneberg

A few years ago, I wrote an article for the newsletter of the Captain Cook Society, *Cook's Log*, entitled *Stories of the Voyages*, in which I discussed the role 18th century books have played in our understanding of Captain Cook. In that article I discussed the official accounts issued by the Admiralty, secondary accounts published by other crew members, and Cook bibliographies. I then went on to say,

So what's a Cook fan to do if he or she is attracted to original and antiquarian books about Cook's voyages; but: (1) is not a diehard book collector; (2) cannot afford original 18th century accounts of the voyages; and (3) gets little thrill out of reading bibliographic descriptions?

There actually is an answer, and it's the one chance those of us with more interest than income have to take advantage of the great collections of Cook material – specialized catalogs produced by auction houses and antiquarian booksellers.

Book collectors come in all types, but there is a very small group that has the means and interest to develop specialized collections of rare and valuable books. When such collections are ultimately passed on to others, it is usually by one of two pathways: (1) donation to or acquisition by libraries; or (2) the sale of individual books to others through auctions or specialized antiquarian book dealers.

While the great research libraries of the world offer amazing resources to those in search of information, they seldom produce non-scholarly listings of their specific collections that can be enjoyed by the casual collector. That's an area where the auction houses and booksellers have an edge.

Those words stand as true today as when I originally wrote them, and bookseller catalogs continue to delight the casual collector of books related to Cook. Without doubt, the finest such catalog to come along in my memory was recently published by Hordern House (<http://www.hordern.com>), a Sydney-based antiquarian bookseller with a long history of handling some of the “best of the best” of the early publications related to Cook. The catalog in question is entitled *Captain James Cook: The Greatest Discoverer*, and describes the collection of Robert and Mary Anne Parks.

About the same time I wrote the article referenced above, I was fortunate enough to spend an evening with Bob Parks in his beautiful home in the suburbs of Detroit, Michigan. Bob and I had previously communicated for several years, but this was the first opportunity we had had to meet.

Bob and I share a common passion for antiquarian books about Cook and my evening in his home was absolutely delightful. As I entered his home, I was immediately struck by the wonderful assortment of familiar images I knew mostly from books – Joseph Banks, the Death of Cook, beautiful aquatints of the South Seas. The difference was, of course, that the images I was seeing were the original prints and

publications, not reproductions from other books. And each item was tastefully and archivally framed, whether it was hanging on a wall or resting on a dedicated easel. The overall effect was stunning.

But the real fun began when we went into his nearby den to see the books. And what books they were!

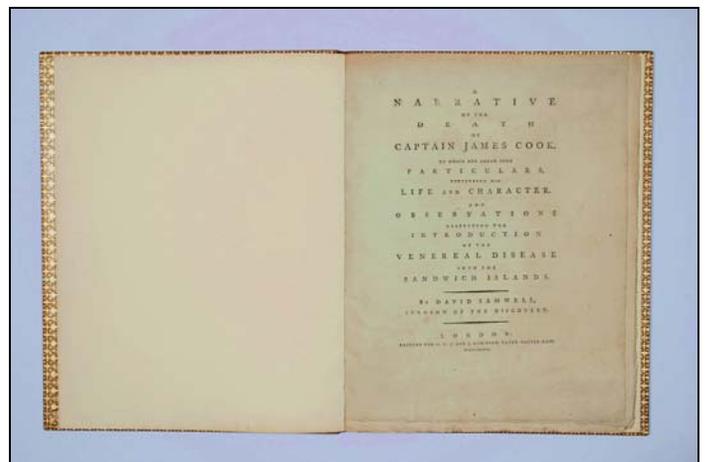
There, lined up in a row, were titles and books I knew from sources like Sir Maurice Holmes' *Captain Cook – A Bibliographical Excursion*, one of the classic bibliographies of works related to Cook. But that was really no surprise, as Bob had previously told me that he used Holmes' work as an informal collecting list. It's one thing to hear, but a completely different thing to actually see!

For the next few hours, Bob and I talked Cook, books and collecting, all the while examining the treasures that small room held. A few stand out in memory ...

The Shaw (Item 83 in the Parks Catalog)



The Samwell (Item 100 in the Parks Catalog)



My evening with Bob Parks and his books was completely amazing. Never before (or since) had I encountered so many significant Cook publications, and certainly not in one place. And to top it off, I was encouraged to explore whatever I chose, to handle the works, and to simply enjoy myself. I'll not forget that evening, and Bob and I have continued to stay in touch ever since.

Few book collectors will be in a position to own such treasures or even to share the kind of experience I had that evening in Detroit. However, interested individuals can acquire the Parks catalog itself, and with that single addition to their libraries they will come as close as they can to enjoying and appreciating the wealth of early published material about Cook I saw that night.

The catalog is stunning and is more likely to end up as a coffee table conversation piece than tucked away on a dusty bookshelf. It is hardbound with a color dust jacket and measures approximately 8.75" by 11.25". Between its covers are detailed 133 items, including full descriptions and color illustrations. And it's all about Cook. With its price of

Captain Cook Comes to OSU: A First Saturday Review

George Cowmeadow Bauman

Twenty booklovers attended Aldus' "First Saturday" program for October, featuring Ron Ravneberg – past president of the Aldus Society.

Ron is very generously donating to OSU many items from his internationally-respected collection of works relating to Captain James Cook. With Ron serving as navigator, we explored the fascinating journals, books, maps and other Cook material which will have a home in the new OSU library next year. Some of the highlights in a collection of highlights:

- A set of the first editions of the official accounts of all three of Cook's voyages (1773, 1777, 1784) plus the first biography of Cook (1788). We marveled that they were all collected by the same person, someone who had the means and access to this marvelous set when the volumes each came out, before second printings were launched soon afterwards.
- G. W. Anderson's folio edition that was issued in 80 parts between 1784 and 1786 which describes Cook's voyages and those of other navigators of the time.
- A 1773 account of Cook's first voyage prepared from the notes of Sydney Parkinson, one of Joseph Banks' artists on the voyage
- Reference works covering the maps, charts, and coastal views prepared during the voyages
- Books describing the artwork prepared on the voyages
- Numerous bibliographies and other supporting research materials covering various aspects of the voyages.

A number of the donated books have been rebound by OSU's book-conserving/rebinding/restoring wizard, Harry Campbell. Ron's and Harry's collaborations have produced magnificent volumes.

Geoff Smith, head of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, stated during his introduction of Ron, "OSU is indeed very fortunate to have such a fine collection of Captain James Cook material donated to us. We owe a great deal of thanks to Ron for this thoughtful gift."

AUD\$45 (US\$30), it's about as inexpensive an introduction to the richness of the Cook literature as one is likely to find.

So if you want to have your own instant collection of the most significant works on Cook without spending many hundreds of thousands of dollars you should certainly consider acquiring a copy of Hordern House's catalog of the Parks collection, *Captain James Cook: The Greatest Discoverer*.

Oh yeah, Bob Parks' collection of Bligh and Bounty material was pretty interesting too. If anybody ever asks you about the only document that contains the signatures of both William Bligh and Fletcher Christian ... I've held it!

But that's another story.



Basbanes Remembers Ron

Ardent writer, bibliophile and Fine Books and Collections columnist Nick Basbanes published the following on his book blog, which can be located at

http://www.finebooksmagazine.com/nicholas_basbanes

The community of bibliophiles lost a wonderful friend over the weekend with the passing in Columbus, Ohio, of Ronald L. "Ron" Ravneberg, 60, one of the founders in 2000 of the [Aldus Society](#), and a past president of the group. Ron was a great champion of books and of promoting contact and communication among book people everywhere. Members of [FABS](#) (Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies) will recall with pleasure Ron's dedication to the group and to its principle of solidarity among book people. I first met Ron in 2004 when he invited the book artist and bookmaker [Barry Moser](#) and myself out to Columbus to participate in the Celebration of the Book, organized by Aldus and held in July of that year at Ohio State University. It was a most memorable event. Ron's enthusiasm and energy as a collector were boundless, as readers of *Fine Books & Collections* know from his splendid essay, "Chasing Captain Cook: A Collector's Quest," published just a year ago in the January/February 2008 issue of the magazine. Ron's dogged determination to establish his hunch that a copy he had acquired in 2001 of a partial set of John Hawkesworth's 1773 edition of *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere and Successively Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret and Captain Cook*—yes that's the title, and that is why we simply refer to the book as Captain Cook's Voyages—was, in fact, the undocumented printer's copy of the book, is a thrilling example of how the

best book collectors are also thorough scholars. “These books,” Ron wrote, “are a window back two centuries in time to the floor of a major London print shop in its prime. One long-ago typesetter even left an ink print so clear that the ridges on his finger are still visible after 234 years.” I had a chance to handle these books a year ago this past December during a trip I made to Cleveland for a talk at Oberlin College, and a drive from there down to Chillicothe some 160 miles away to see the home of the legendary papermaker Dard Hunter. Ron insisted I drop by and visit him in Columbus on the return leg—it’s all pretty much a straight shot back and forth on I-71—and we had a memorable evening enjoying his once-in-a-lifetime find. What has struck me most profoundly about Ron, I must say, was not so much his love of books or his dedication to book people—as deeply sincere and gratifying as both these qualities certainly were—but for the extraordinarily valiant way he accepted the horrifying news this past July that he had been diagnosed with a terminal disease, and how he comported himself for the remainder of his days. The dignified manner in which he lived out those final weeks, together with his family and in constant, reassuring contact with his friends and colleagues, was nothing short of inspirational. He remained totally involved in Aldus affairs, and was a fountain of enthusiasm and good cheer, to the very end. Our deepest condolences go out to Ron’s wife, Janet, and her family, for their loss.

Star Gazing

Astronomy mentor unlocked universe

Tom Burns

Beginning stargazers must ascend a steep learning curve. They not only have to learn the locations of scores of constellations, but also their innumerable stars and telescopic objects. Knowing the significance of a subtle detail enlivens the experience. Incipient stargazers need knowledgeable and patient guides.

Recently, as I looked at M42, Orion’s Great Nebula, I remembered my own mentor, Ron Ravneberg. We stood in his driveway one cold February night long ago. I wanted to observe M42 with my new telescope. “Could you point it out for me?”

“Heavens no,” he said. “Start with what you can see without the ’scope. From the leftmost star of Orion’s belt, look down the line of stars—Orion’s sword—hanging from the belt. What do you see?”

“One of the stars looks fuzzy.”

“Good eye. Now do the same thing with the ’scope.” It took a

while, but Ron waited patiently.

“The Orion Nebula,” I said. “A 120-trillion-mile-wide gas cloud where stars are born.”

“You’re reciting something from a book. What do you see?”

I saw its irregular brightness, its complex swirls. “Ah. It has to be a cloud.”

“Better. What else?”

“Clouds don’t glow on their own. Something inside must make it glow.”

“Like what?”

“Stars! What else is there in the universe but clouds and stars? So the stars ignite—ionize—the cloud?”

“Right. What else do you see?”

“Nothing.”

“Look again.” A long pause ensued.

“It’s glowing green with red fringes.”

“Good.” What else?

“That means hydrogen and plenty of it. And stars are made of mostly hydrogen.” I wasn’t reciting anymore.

As time progressed, I understood Ron’s gift to me. Most people just look at the world. My teacher taught me how to see.

Recently, Ron passed from this world to the next. In later years, he often set up his telescope during our public programs at Perkins Observatory on “Ron’s Spot,” as everyone came to call it. There, we will carve his initials into stone.

And when people ask, we will say, “On this spot stood the best of men. He showed all who passed by the pure and simple beauty of the universe they, and he, lived in.”

Tom Burns directs Ohio Wesleyan University's Perkins Observatory in Delaware. tlburns@owu.edu. This article reprinted with permission and ran in the Columbus Dispatch, February 17, 2009



SALUTE to you RON; we will miss you dearly!!!